

PREFACE

Welcome to the *2026 AILA/GMS Annual Global Migration Forum Conference Handbook*, prepared as a supplement to this year's Forum in San Diego, California.

Hosting the Global Migration Forum in San Diego carries special meaning. As one of the most dynamic border cities in North America, San Diego stands at the intersection of law, policy, commerce, humanitarian protection, and cross-cultural exchange. Its proximity to the United States-Mexico border makes it more than a venue; it is a living case study in the realities that global migration practitioners confront every day. The region has long demonstrated the benefits of migration through economic vitality, cultural diversity, binational cooperation, and the resilience of immigrant and refugee communities. At the same time, San Diego has also experienced the very real pressures that arise when local governments, nonprofit organizations, legal service providers, faith-based groups, and communities are called upon to receive and assist hundreds, and—at times—thousands, of migrants seeking safety, opportunity, and due process.

This setting reminds us that migration is never merely a legal issue. It is shaped by conflict, political change, labor needs, family unity, public opinion, technological transformation, humanitarian obligations, and the capacity of institutions to respond with fairness and dignity. San Diego's experience underscores both the promise and the complexity of migration: the extraordinary contributions migrants make to receiving communities, and the operational, legal, and moral challenges that arise when systems are strained.

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