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CONCEPT PAPER

THEMATIC MEETING: “MIGRATION IN THE AMERICAS:   
PRINCIPAL MIGRATORY DYNAMICS AND STATISTICS”

(March 15, 2022)

(Prepared by the Chair of the CAM with support from the Technical Secretariat)

According to figures from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), across the world there were around 281 million international migrants worldwide in 2020, a number equal to 3.6% of the global population.[[1]](#footnote-1)

* **Northern America**[[2]](#footnote-2)

This part of the world has historically stood at the forefront among the main destination regions for global migratory movements. The IOM’s World Migration Data Analysis Centre estimates that in 2020 there were 58,682,179 immigrants living in the Northern American nations (the United States and Canada) and that there were 4,288,552 emigrants from this subregion living in other countries.

The United States has been and remains the world’s leading destination: in 2020 it was home to more than 50,632,836 international migrants. Canada, in turn, had 8,049,323 immigrants.[[3]](#footnote-3) Northern America also receives significant mixed migratory flows, including asylum seekers and refugees. In recent years, these mixed migratory movements have primarily been made up of migrants and refugees from the Northern Triangle of Central America (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras), Mexico, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Haiti, and Cuba.

* **Central America and Mexico**

Central America and Mexico’s main migration patterns are as follows: (1) population movements to Northern American countries, especially the United States, (2) intraregional migratory movements, where the main destinations are Mexico, Costa Rica, and Panama, (3) migrants mainly from the Caribbean, South America, Asia, and Africa, who transit through the region’s countries with the intention of moving northward, and (4) major returning migration flows from the United States and Mexico to countries in northern Central America (Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador), as well as to Mexico and Nicaragua. In recent years, this subregion’s countries—most notably Mexico, Costa Rica, and Panama—have also become destination and transit countries for Venezuelan migrants and refugees.

The IOM World Migration Data Analysis Centre estimates that in 2020 there were 16,198,974 emigrants from Central America and Mexico living in other countries and 2,302,001 immigrants living in the subregion’s countries. The 2020 figures for Central America and Mexico were as follows:

1. Mexico: 11,185,737 emigrants and 1,197,624 immigrants
2. El Salvador: 1,599,058 emigrants and 42,767 immigrants
3. Guatemala: 1,368,431 emigrants and 84,311 immigrants
4. Honduras: 985,077 emigrants and 39,195 immigrants
5. Nicaragua: 718,154 emigrants and 42,167 immigrants
6. Costa Rica: 150,241 emigrants and 520,729 immigrants
7. Panama: 139,520 emigrants and 313,165 immigrants
8. Belize: 52,756 emigrants and 62,043 immigrants

* **South America**

Three major migration patterns can be identified in South America: (1) foreign immigration, (2) intraregional migration, and (3) emigration of South Americans to developed countries. In recent years, intraregional migration has become an option for millions of South Americans. Several regional agreements, adopted within the framework of regional integration processes, contributed to promoting migration within the subregion and afforded migrants access to social rights. According to the IOM Global Migration Data Analysis Centre and based on figures from UN DESA and the R4V Platform, it is estimated that in 2020 there were 10,887,474 migrants living in South American countries and 17,612,735 emigrants from South American nations living elsewhere in the world. In 2020, the five South American countries with the highest numbers of emigrants and immigrants were:

1. Venezuela: 5,100,000 emigrants and 1,324,193 immigrants
2. Colombia: 3,024,273 emigrants and 1,905,393 immigrants
3. Brazil: 1,897,128 emigrants and 1,079,708 immigrants
4. Peru: 1,519,635 emigrants and 1,224,519 immigrants
5. Ecuador 1,127,891 emigrants and 784,787 immigrants

* **The Caribbean**

The Caribbean’s main migratory patterns throughout history have been: (1) outward emigration from the subregion, mainly to the United States, and (2) intraregional migratory movements, mainly the migration of Haitian nationals to the Dominican Republic, and migration from the Dominican Republic and Haiti to high-income countries with better employment opportunities, such as the Bahamas and Saint Kitts and Nevis.[[4]](#footnote-4) In 2020 the Caribbean countries had a total of 7,122,385 emigrants and the subregion’s countries had received 892,316 immigrants. The Caribbean nations with the largest numbers of emigrants and immigrants in 2020 were:

1. Haiti: 1,769,671 emigrants and 18,884 immigrants
2. Cuba: 1,757,399 emigrants and 3,024 immigrants
3. Dominican Republic: 1,608,567 emigrants and 603,794 immigrants
4. Jamaica: 1,118,931 emigrants and 23,629 immigrants
5. Trinidad and Tobago 330,519 emigrants and 78,849 immigrants

The IOM reports that between 2010 and 2020, emigration from Caribbean countries—primarily Haiti, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic—increased by 436%.[[5]](#footnote-5) At the same time, the subregion is receiving a significant influx of migrants from Africa and Asia.

Intraregional migration and free mobility—both permanent and temporary—of nationals from the member countries of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) has grown in importance in recent years. More recently, the arrival in the subregion of Venezuelan migrants and refugees in the past years has added to its complex migration dynamics, particularly between islands and countries in the southern Caribbean where proximity to Venezuela facilitates mobility (as is the case with Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, and Curaçao) but also in the Dominican Republic.

* **Forced displacement and mixed migratory movements**

According to UNHCR, more than 82.4 million people affected by war, violence, conflict, and persecution have been forced to leave their countries of origin.[[6]](#footnote-6) According to the *Global Trends in Forced Displacement* report, at the end of 2020 there were 650,932 refugees, 2,112,469 asylum seekers, and 8,571,378 internally displaced persons in the countries of the Americas.[[7]](#footnote-7)

The region faces pressures from significant forced displacement within northern Central America and in countries such as Venezuela and Nicaragua. According to UNHCR figures, as of February 2022, more than 6 million Venezuelans have left their country, of whom around 4.9 million are living in other Latin American and Caribbean countries.[[8]](#footnote-8) This situation is compounded by more than one million people who have been forced to flee their homes in Central America and Mexico.[[9]](#footnote-9)

* **The COVID-19 pandemic**

As a consequence of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the region has experienced changes in the dynamics of human mobility in general. The main factor has been the imposition of multiple entry restrictions on migratory movements. Similarly, the issuing of visas and stay permits has been affected. Finally, measures such as land border closures, sanitary requirements, and temporary entry restrictions for certain nationalities were features of the region’s strategy to contain the virus.

* **Natural disasters and climate change**

In recent years, the region’s countries have suffered the impact of natural disasters and climate change with increasing frequency and intensity. This has become a factor in both internal and cross border population displacements.

* **Migration data collection and management**

The main national and regional information sources, such as population censuses, countries’ national statistical institutes (NSIs) and migration institutions, and the OAS Continuous Reporting System on International Migration in the Americas (SICREMI), compile migration data and analyze trends. Recently, most countries in the region have invested in migration management, laying the groundwork for securing better data on migration. The region also has research centers and academic institutions that publish analyses and studies of migration dynamics.

SICREMI, created in response to a mandate from the OAS member states, has the main objective of generating and systematizing accurate and reliable data on international migration in the region to serve as a tool for the design and implementation of policies. To date, it has published four reports (2011, 2012, 2015, and 2017). The most recent edition of the report, presented in December 2017, collected information up to 2015. Unfortunately, due to a lack of financial resources, it has not been possible to continue with the production of SICREMI reports since then. Funding is therefore urgently needed in order for the undertaking to continue.

After the presentations by the invited specialists, the floor will be opened for interventions by the member states on the issues at hand. In particular, states are requested to share the best practices they are implementing at the national and regional levels with respect to this meeting’s topics.

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1. . International Organization for Migration (IOM), [*World Migration Report*](https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2022), December 1, 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. . This concept paper uses the IOM Global Migration Data Analysis Centre’s categorization of regions, where “Northern America” covers only the United States and Canada. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. . United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. . IOM, 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. . IOM, [*Large Movements of Highly Vulnerable Migrants in the Americas from the Caribbean, Latin America and other Regions. Destinations in Transit*](https://publications.iom.int/books/large-movements-highly-vulnerable-migrants-americas-caribbean-latin-america-and-other-regions), October 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. . UN News, [2021 Year in Review: Refugee, migrant numbers rise, despite travel curbs](https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/12/1108472), December 29, 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. . UNHCR, [*Global Trends in Forced Displacement*](https://www.unhcr.org/flagship-reports/globaltrends/), June 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. . UNHCR/IOM, [Regional Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela](https://www.r4v.info/en/refugeeandmigrants), February 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. . MIRPS, [*2021 Annual Report*](https://reliefweb.int/report/mexico/informe-anual-del-marco-integral-regional-para-la-protecci-n-y-soluciones-mirps-2021), December 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)