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CONCEPT PAPER

THEMATIC SESSION: “MIGRATION IN NORTH AMERICA” AND

“MIGRATION IN CENTRAL AMERICA AND MEXICO”

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

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) notes that, despite increasing globalization, geography continues to be one of the most significant factors shaping migration and displacement patterns. Many people who migrate across borders do so within their immediate regions according to specific criteria. For example, they migrate to nearby countries that can be reached more easily, more familiar, and from which it may be easier to return. In the case of displaced persons, finding safety quickly is a major factor. For this reason, people in this situation tend to settle in safer areas nearby, whether within their countries of origin or by crossing international borders.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Based on the above, the principal migration dynamics, trends, and data are addressed below from a geographical rather than thematic perspective.

* North America[[2]](#footnote-2)/

The predominant migration dynamic in North America is migration toward the region. In this regard, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) indicates that during the last 30 years, i.e., from 1990 to 2020, North America received close to 59 million migrants, primarily from Latin America and the Caribbean, with about 26 million. More recent figures indicate that between 2015 and 2020 the number of migrants to the region has increased by about three million.[[3]](#footnote-3)

According to the IOM, the nature of migratory flows in the Americas is increasingly more mixed, dynamic, and complex, on both an intra-regional and extra-regional level. These flows include economic migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, short-term visitors, and others whose primary destination, as indicated above, is North America. In addition, the factors that promote migration and displacement are multi-dimensional and involve structural violence, natural disasters, poverty, and inequality. In this sense, it is important to address the situation of irregular migration and its impact on the human rights of the migrant population.

Those who travel irregularly through the region are exposed to exploitation, violence, extortion, human trafficking, sexual violence, abduction, and forced recruitment into organized crime groups.[[4]](#footnote-4) It is also essential to consider another consequence of this situation: increased numbers of migrants missing and dead in the region. According to the IOM, from 2014 to date, there have been a reported 6,090 incidents in the Americas, including refugees and asylum seekers, in which people have died or disappeared in the process of migrating toward an international destination. North America, as the principal destination for the migrant population, has the largest number of recorded cases, followed by Central America.[[5]](#footnote-5) Specifically, at the border crossing between the United States and Mexico, 3,689 incidents have been identified in that period, with a significant and historic increase in 2021, with 728 cases.

In this context, it is imperative to address the rights of migrant workers and their families as one of the many development-related aspects of migration. The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families[[6]](#footnote-6) guarantees the States’ commitment to respect the rights provided in that instrument. Thus, it is essential for OAS member states that have not yet ratified the Convention[[7]](#footnote-7) to consider doing so, as this would also entail: (1) reaffirming the rights of migration workers in irregular situations, who are generally exploited and endure serious violations of their human rights, and (2) promoting the adoption of adequate measures to prevent and eliminate clandestine movement and trafficking of migrant workers while guaranteeing the protection of their human rights.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Another point that should be emphasized regarding North America is the combination of new internal displacements and the situation of refugees and asylum seekers in the region. The U.N.-DESA Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) and the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) show the following figures for 2020:

1. New internal displacements in North America were caused by natural disasters. The United States holds first place among the countries in the Americas and the Caribbean, with more than 1.7 million new displacements caused by floods and forest fires. The forest fire season in Canada also caused 26,000 new displacements.[[9]](#footnote-9)
2. The United States welcomed nearly 341,000 refugees and close to a million asylum seekers. Most asylum seekers came from Latin American countries such as Venezuela, Mexico, and northern Central American countries, including Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. Meanwhile, Canada welcomed nearly 110,000 refugees and more than 85,000 asylum seekers.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Finally, recent migration characteristics and key developments in North America should be highlighted, as detailed in the IOM’s World Migration Report 2022: (1) despite the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on migration and movement in North America, migrants in the region have played a key role in the socio-economic response; (2) the United States and Canada continue to be important destinations for migrants, with increasingly diverse countries of origin; (3) with an aging populations, Canada continues to increase immigration targets; (4) although immigration policies in the United States tended to harden in recent years, recent political changes are reshaping the immigration system; and (5) the number of migrants in an irregular situation is decreasing in the United States, due in part to migration returning to Mexico, although[[11]](#footnote-11) it should be noted that there has recently been an increase in undocumented populations native to Asia, Venezuela, and Central America (basically El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras).[[12]](#footnote-12)

* Central America and Mexico

Central America and Mexico have historically been territories of origin and transit countries for migrants essentially headed to the United States and Canada. However, this region has recently also become a final destination for an increasingly larger flow of intra-regional and extra-regional migrants, a large portion of whom enter irregularly.[[13]](#footnote-13)

The situation of new internal displacements in Central America and Mexico caused by two phenomena, disasters, and conflicts that generate violence, should be highlighted. For 2020, according to the IDMC (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre), the region reported the highest number since 2008 for internal displacements caused by disasters, i.e., a total of 1.64 million: Mexico (101,000), Belize (6,300), Guatemala (339,000), Honduras (937,000), Nicaragua (232,000), Costa Rica (4,200), and Panama (3,700). Recorded internal displacements caused by conflicts and violence amount to 124,000, and are concentrated in Mexico (9,740) and El Salvador (114,000).[[14]](#footnote-14)

At the same time, the UNHCR figures for June 2021 on refugees and asylum seekers native to northern Central America; refugees and asylum seekers entering Central America and Mexico; persons of interest from Nicaragua; and the number of refugees and migrants from Venezuela welcomed in the region should be noted:

1. 597,608 refugees and asylum seekers from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras in the world: 457,769 in the United States, 104,254 in Mexico, 22,993 in Europe, 2,202 in Belize, 2,675 in Costa Rica, and 1,429 in Panama.
2. 296,493 refugees and asylum seekers in Central America and Mexico: 172,586 in Mexico, 2,222 in Belize, 1,540 in Guatemala, 182 in Honduras, 99 in El Salvador, 437 in Nicaragua, 105,253 in Costa Rica, and 14,172 in Panama.
3. 121,338 persons of interest from Nicaragua.
4. Refugees and migrants from Venezuela in the region: 82,976 in Mexico, 29,906 in Costa Rica and 121,598 in Panama.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Regarding the region’s migrant regularization programs in 2021, we note that there are 57 regularization programs and processes in Mexico, Central America, and the Dominican Republic. Of these, 33 were pre-existing policies that were expanded to include migrants and the remaining 24 were designed specifically to regularize migrants. The high costs of the procedures are the main problem facing irregular migrants. A major challenge for this subregion is working on an international level to establish clear guidelines and international standards for structuring migrant regularization programs and processes. In addition, some countries need to update and centralize their information and make it accessible to the migrant population, which includes making it available in several languages.

Finally, we highlight the most recent migration characteristics and key developments in Central America and Mexico, which have been detailed in the IOM’s World Migration Report 2022: (1) the COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on migration and movement in the region while at the same time it has exacerbated existing vulnerabilities among migrants, including those in transit; (2) migration northward continues to be a significant trend, with mixed migration from northern Central America, in particular, which proves to be challenging and dynamic due to increased immigration controls; and (3) environmental changes and disasters are influencing human movements and displacements in the region.

* Recommendations

Although the factors that promote migration and displacement are multidimensional and their management varies in each country, there are common actions that should be considered in each region in the Americas: (1) address the effects of natural disasters and climate change on migration; (2) combat gender violence; (3) strengthen existing institutions; (4) improve budgetary formulation, execution, and expansion; (5) establish policies allowing migrant populations to be decision-making agents in national economic policy; and (6) ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families.

In addition, it is important to take actions related to the monitoring of migratory flows in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of those flows: (1) have a common repository of information from the Americas to gain a shared understanding of actions being taken in each country; (2) use a written protocol of the Americas, i.e., a document unifying the monitoring methodology, detailing the responsibilities of each of the parties involved in the original, transit, destination, and return countries, and include terminological clarifications and focal points; (3) avoid duplication of data; and (4) update data monthly.

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1. . OIM, [World Migration Report 2022](https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2022), 1 December 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. . This concept paper uses the regional classifications of the Global Migration Data Analysis Centre of the International Organization for Migration (IOM); in the case of North America, this includes only the United States and Canada. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. . U.N. DESA, [International Migrant Stock 2020](https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/international-migrant-stock), 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. . IOM, [Missing Migrants Project: Americas](https://missingmigrants.iom.int/region/americas), undated. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. . Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. . Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), [International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families](https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-convention-protection-rights-all-migrant-workers), 1990. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. . List of States that have signed, ratified, or have acceded to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families. U.N., [United Nations Treaty Collection](https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=IV-13&chapter=4&clang=_en), undated. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. . OHCHR, [The International Convention on Migrant Workers and Its Committee](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/FactSheet24rev.1sp.pdf), undated [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. . IDMC, [Global Internal Displacement Database](https://www.internal-displacement.org/database/displacement-data), undated.; U.N. DESA, [International Migrant Stock 2020](https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/international-migrant-stock), 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. . UNHCR, [Population Statistics](https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics-uat/), undated. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. . Warren, R., [In 2019, the US undocumented population continued a decade-long decline and the foreign-born population neared zero growth](https://doi.org/10.1177/2331502421993746). *Journal on Migration and Human Security*, 9(1)., 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. . Passel, J.S. and D. Cohn, [Mexicans decline to less than half the U.S. unauthorized immigrant population for the first time. Pew Research Center](https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/06/12/us-unauthorized-immigrant-population-2017/), 12 de junio de 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. . IOM, [Regional study: Migratory Regularization Programmes and Processes](https://www.crmsv.org/sites/default/files/publicaciones/estudioregionalweb_ligero.pdf), 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. . IDMC, [Conflict/violence – disasters 2008-2020 per year](https://www.internal-displacement.org/database/displacement-data), undated. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. . R4V, [Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela](https://www.r4v.info/), undated. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)