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CONCEPT PAPER

THEMATIC MEETING: “MIGRATION IN SOUTH AMERICA   
AND MIGRATION IN THE CARIBBEAN”

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

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), over the past 15 years, the number of international migrants in Latin America and the Caribbean has risen from seven million to 15 million[[1]](#footnote-1), making it the region with the highest international migration growth rate and the destination of 5.3% of all international migrants.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Both regional and subregional perspectives facilitate understanding of the diversity of migration patterns and their recent changes, trends, and challenges. Particularly in South America and the Caribbean, the IOM presents three main findings as of October 2021[[3]](#footnote-3). Firstly, flows of at-risk migrants are patently heterogeneous in terms of gender, age, and origin, with nationals of Venezuela, Haiti, Cuba, other Caribbean nations, Asia, and Africa standing out. Secondly, recent years have shown evidence of migrants settling regularly in South American countries, especially Chile and Brazil, and cases of South American nationals whose mothers and fathers are of Caribbean origin. Thirdly, natural disasters and political instability in countries of origin, coupled with socioeconomic crisis stemming from COVID-19, have increased migration flows from South America to North America.

* South America

Migration in South America remains predominantly intraregional, due in large part to massive flows of Venezuelan migrants and refugees over the past five years. This is evidenced in statistical data from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) covering the period from 1990 to 2020[[4]](#footnote-4):

* Of the nearly 18 million migrants from South America, 8,557,503 landed in other countries of the same region, such as Argentina, Brazil, and Chile. That is, around half of South American migrants move to other countries in the same region.

This has led to the conclusion of regional agreements that facilitate regular movement within the region and seek to reduce the dangers posed to irregular migrants, such as exploitation, violence, extortion, human trafficking, sexual violence, kidnapping, forced recruitment by organized crime groups, disappearance, and loss of life[[5]](#footnote-5).

However, there are still unsafe routes where the human rights of migrants are violated. Addressing the main characteristics and developments in migration requires attention to both intraregional and interregional migration routes, where safeguarding the lives and well-being of migrants is a challenge. The IOM's Missing Migrants Project (MMP) presents observations on the following highlights[[6]](#footnote-6):

1. Venezuela-Colombia: Dangers are posed not only by geographical features and natural barriers but also by the presence of organized crime and guerrilla groups.
2. Darien Gap (Colombia-Panama): Migration to North America from South America, which crosses the Darien Gap, originates essentially in Chile, Ecuador, Guyana, and Brazil. This flow also includes an increase in migrants from the Caribbean and from outside the Americas, mainly from Asia and Africa.
3. Venezuela-Caribbean: Since the beginning of the sociopolitical crisis in Venezuela, around 2013, a maritime migration route has developed from the Venezuelan Caribbean coast to several Caribbean islands, such as Aruba, Curaçao, Bonaire, and especially Trinidad and Tobago. People traveling this route face risks from unsafe boat travel, shipwrecks, and crime, including human trafficking. In 2019, human migration increased along this route, mainly used by Venezuelan migrants and refugees.

The IOM also reports cases of migrants who go missing or die on such routes (including refugees and asylum seekers) from 2014 to date. In the Darien Gap, it found 171 such incidents, of which 51 occurred in 2021. On the Venezuela-Caribbean route, 187 such cases were identified, with a peak of 53 migrants dying in December 2020. Speaking of these figures, the MMP emphasizes that data collection on migrants who disappear or die on Caribbean Sea routes is highly complicated by several factors: the remote nature of maritime routes, the secrecy under which boats are launched, and a lack of information on routes pursued. Many shipwrecks involving migrants are never reported and the exact number of people aboard and their identities are rarely determined.[[7]](#footnote-7)

As the region faces one of its largest humanitarian crises in recent history, the main challenges facing migrants involve access to status-regularization programs, recognition of refugee status, and the integration of Venezuelans[[8]](#footnote-8). Intraregional migration has also grown quickly, with women contributing significantly to this increase[[9]](#footnote-9).

* The Caribbean

Turning to the Caribbean region, the history to date shows two characteristic migration patterns. One is extraregional migration, primarily to North America, specifically the United States. The other is intraregional migration, both temporary and permanent, mostly of Haitians to the Dominican Republic, and of Haitians and Dominicans to other islands, i.e., The Bahamas and Saint Kitts and Nevis[[10]](#footnote-10). Such intraregional migration of nationals of member countries of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) has grown more prominent in recent years.

As in South America, migration routes within and among regions are very busy and extremely dangerous. The IOM's MMP points to the following unsafe routes, mainly maritime, with remarks for 2020 and on cases of missing and deceased migrants from 2014 to date[[11]](#footnote-11):

* 1. Mona Passage or *Canal de la Mona* (Dominican Republic-Puerto Rico): This route is often taken by Dominican migrants, but also by Venezuelans, Cubans, and Haitians. People traveling this route risk death if boarding unseaworthy watercraft, which can sink or capsize. On this route in the aforementioned period, there were 184 reports of missing and deceased migrants, with a spike of 65 in 2021.
  2. The Caribbean-United States: A well-known Caribbean route runs from Cuba to the State of Florida in the United States. While this route is used less than in previous decades, migrants continue to risk their lives on it, with 127 incidents of missing and deceased migrants recorded and a substantial increase to 67 in 2021.
  3. Haiti-Dominican Republic: On this route, 40 incidents of missing and deceased migrants have been recorded since 2014, of which 26 correspond to 2017.

In short, we must highlight current migration trends related to climate change, COVID-19, and other factors if we are to comprehend the panorama in a more timely manner:

1. Many Caribbean countries are increasingly susceptible to slow-onset climate and environmental changes and these phenomena are expected to play an increasingly prominent role in driving migration in the region[[12]](#footnote-12).
2. At the end of 2020, there were more than 187,320 refugees and asylum seekers in the world from Caribbean countries, the vast majority from Haiti (104,991) and Cuba (69,349), with the United States as their main country of destination[[13]](#footnote-13).
3. The Caribbean region is highly prone to emigration. As of 2019, 10 of the world’s top 20 countries and territories of emigration (by proportion of total population) are located in the Caribbean[[14]](#footnote-14).
4. The number of intraregional migrants has grown annually and nearly doubled over the past 30 years.[[15]](#footnote-15)
5. Return migration is a key component of overall migration in the Caribbean. This includes the voluntary return of economically active young people, persons deported by authorities in destination countries, the voluntary return of older retirees who had emigrated from the Caribbean in the 1960s, and migrants returning to pay for education and raise their children.[[16]](#footnote-16)

* Recommendations

Actions that respond to the new migration dynamics, substantially impacted by COVID-19 and climate change, not only will require observation of key migration components, such as labor migration, international remittances, irregular migration, human trafficking, and both internal and international displacements, but also will require a clear understanding that responses must be organized around respect for human rights, scientific evidence on COVID-19, and policies to ensure that economies have the capacity to sustain national, community, and individual well-being, and must involve these populations in sustainable recovery. [[17]](#footnote-17) These are the main policy lines:

1. Right to health, medical care, and access to vaccines;
2. Nondiscrimination, inclusion, equal treatment;
3. Fostering of host communities;
4. Immigration, border crossing, *non-refoulement*;
5. Protection of migrant workers and refugees;
6. Social protection, access to schooling and education;
7. Specific measures for refugees, asylum-seekers, stateless persons, internally displaced persons;
8. Gender-specific considerations;
9. Policies based on accurate and reliable data, information, and knowledge;
10. Inclusion of the migrant population in post-pandemic recovery;
11. Multilateral approach to the issue of migration in specialized forums.

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1. . UNDESA uses six regional divisions established by the United Nations to conduct its analyses, these being Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, North America, and Oceania. South America and the Caribbean region are considered subregions of Latin America and the Caribbean. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. . IOM, [World Migration Report 2022](https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/wmr-2022-interactive/), December 1, 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. . IOM, [Large Movements of Highly Vulnerable Migrants in the Americas from the Caribbean, Latin America and other Regions](https://publications.iom.int/books/grandes-movimientos-de-migrantes-altamente-vulnerables-en-las-americas-provenientes-del), November 26, 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. . UNDESA, [International Migrant Stock 2020](https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/international-migrant-stock), 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. . IOM, [Missing Migrants Project (MPP),](https://missingmigrants.iom.int/region/americas) undated. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. . Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. . Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. . Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V), [Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (January–December 2021)](https://reliefweb.int/report/colombia/rmrp-2021-regional-refugee-and-migrant-response-plan-refugees-and-migrants-venezuela), 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. . Cerrutti, M, [5 salient facts about intra-regional migration in South America.](https://migrationdataportal.org/blog/5-salient-facts-about-intra-regional-migration-south-america#:~:text=Nowadays%20in%20South%20America%2C%20the,residing%20elsewhere%20in%20the%20world.&text=Annual%20South%20American%20inflows%20to,2015%20to%20256%2C210%20in%202018)  [Immigration & Emigration Statistics Blog, Migration Data Portal](https://migrationdataportal.org/blog/5-salient-facts-about-intra-regional-migration-south-america#:~:text=Nowadays%20in%20South%20America%2C%20the,residing%20elsewhere%20in%20the%20world.&text=Annual%20South%20American%20inflows%20to,2015%20to%20256%2C210%20in%202018), March 13, 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. . IOM, 2018 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. . Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. . IOM, [Migration governance: An adaptation strategy to Climate Change](https://rosanjose.iom.int/en/blogs/migration-governance-adaptation-strategy-climate-change), February 14, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. . UNHCR[, Population figures](https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/), n.d. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. . UNDESA, [International Migrant Stock](https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/international-migrant-stock), 2020; IOM, 2020 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. . Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. . IOM, [Migration In the Caribbean: Current Trends, Opportunities and Challenges](https://reliefweb.int/report/haiti/migration-caribbean-current-trends-opportunities-and-challenges), September 25, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. . Patrick Taran and Olga Kadysheva, [COVID-19, Migrants, Refugees, Mobile Workers: Global Assessment and Action Agenda](https://doi.org/10.37815/rte.v34n1.889), 15 March 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)