COMMITTEE ON MIGRATION ISSUES OEA/Ser.W

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CONCEPT NOTE

THEMATIC SESSION:

THEME SESSION: "THE IMPACT OF MIGRATION ON SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES (SIDS) AND SPECIFIC CHALLENGES WITH RESPECT TO THEIR PHYSICAL AND FINANCIAL CAPACITY"

(June 2021)

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

International migration brings with it multiple benefits, while posing challenges to countries of origin, transit, destination and return. Among the main challenges identified are those related to access to livelihoods, work, housing, health and education, among others. In the case of Small Island Developing States (SIDS), these challenges take on different dimensions, due to their physical and financial capacities.

According to the United Nations, 52 countries in the world are part of the SIDS group, 10 of which are countries with low economic development. In its report "Economic Outlook for Latin America in 2019", the OECD held that "although with different characteristics all SIDS (small islands or archipelagoes with less than 1.5 million inhabitants) as island territories, with a small territorial and population dimension, have limitations and higher costs linked to the small market, geographical isolation and vulnerability to natural disasters".[[1]](#footnote-1)

Although SIDS have extensive territorial waters and a high degree of openness to international trade, they also have a large dependence on imports, are threatened to a greater extent by natural disasters and extreme weather events, as well as by the effects of climate change, in particular by rising sea levels. Indeed, its increased environmental fragility has given special attention by the United Nations, which recognized the need to ensure the mobilization of capital, private and public as an essential element for the sustainability of its development.

In addition to the above, the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic brought with it new challenges for SIDS. According to Paul Akiwumi, Director for Africa and Least Developed Countries at UNCTAD, "with the pandemic, fragile tourism-dependent economies, which have collapsed in most SIDS, threaten to set them up, having no resources for disaster recovery, and, moreover, also not to serve their external debts." In this regard, the International Monetary Fund established that the gross domestic product of SIDS decreased by nine per cent on average.

Regarding physical capacity, it should be noted that, despite its low contribution to climate change, rising sea levels can lead to land loss along the coast in low-altitude SIDS, which can affect the economy and livelihoods of its population. For example, "a 50-centimeter increase in sea level would result in Granada losing 60% of its beaches, while a 1-meter increase would flood the Maldives," the UN stressed.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Within the framework of the International Year of Small Island Developing States, the UN established "while literacy rates are generally high among small island developing States, this is not yet a widespread feature: Haiti, Papua New Guinea and Belize are the most worrying States in this regard." In the same sense, he added that another obstacle to social development has been limited human resources capacity, due to high levels of emigration among the most educated population.[[3]](#footnote-3)

The Caribbean SIDS have a wide variety of migration movements for work, education or accompaniment. In addition, there is a serious problem of lack of information on international migration in this subregion. [[4]](#footnote-4)

Migration and displacement within and from island states are not new phenomena. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), these movements have occurred for multiple reasons and may continue due to an equally complex combination of factors that may include, but are not limited to, the consequences of climate change. Indeed, as a result of external phenomena, hurricanes, landslides and storms, as well as transformations such as sea level rise, forced displacements occur from SIDS. [[5]](#footnote-5)

Also, some SIDS have shown the growing arrival of asylum seekers, mainly from Cuba, Venezuela, Syria, Bangladesh, Jamaica, Colombia and Nigeria.

Undoubtedly, migration can become an opportunity for small island developing States. The existence of capacities and the formulation of coherent policies of the states of origin and recipients, aimed at achieving the integration of migrants, is proposed as one of the key elements for migration to become an opportunity and overcome the challenges that currently make it perceived as a threat.

Examining the impact of migration on SIDS and the challenges regarding their physical and financial capacity is of interest to the Committee on Migration Affairs. This session hopes to address these issues and open up a space for member states' interventions in order to share information.

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1. **OECD.** *Latin America Economic Outlook in 2019*

<https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/03386318-es.pdf?expires=1619281177&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=B122861A245263D3AFF8E10E10B7380> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. O**Right away.** International Year of Small Island Developing States. <https://www.un.org/es/events/islands2014/didyouknow.shtml> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. **UN**. International Year of Small Island Developing States. <https://www.un.org/es/events/islands2014/didyouknow.shtml> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. **ECLAC**. Latin America and the Caribbean: Migration human rights and development.

<https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/2535/S2008126_es.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. **UNHCR.** ClimateChange and the risk of statelessness: slow island states situation

 <https://www.acnur.org/5d546a124.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)