

NGO Statement on the Americas

This statement is delivered on behalf of a variety of NGOs.

Dear Chair,

The Americas face an unparalleled displacement crisis, putting displaced people in heightened risk situations, further exacerbated by COVID-19. The already grave situation requires coordinated efforts from all stakeholders to reduce suffering and regain regional stability. Climate change impacts are also alarming. Governments' recognition of these crises is key to ensuring timely and effective humanitarian response.

With over one million deaths and 52 million infected, COVID-19 brought a multidimensional crisis, ravaging public health systems, deteriorating social protection, and diluting economies. Hardest hit by the sanitary crisis, the Americas will become the world's most indebted region.

COVID-related border closures and movement restrictions have had severe protection impacts on displaced populations. The growing militarization of borders and intolerable securitization approaches pose additional concerns about Governments management of large population flows and result into smuggling, human trafficking and deaths at borders.

Job and income losses due to COVID-19 aggravate protection risks. The majority of official economic assistance only targeted host populations. Refugees now suffer from job insecurity and risk labour exploitation. COVID-19 has also negatively affected their mental health, with potential long-term consequences.

Most States leave displaced populations behind in vaccination plans. This is unacceptable. We urge States to include refugees and migrants within vaccination plans and campaigns, whatever their status and without fearing deportation, return or *refoulement*.

Despite efforts to guarantee the right to nationality and prevent statelessness, access to birth registration and identity documentation is a problem for many migrants' children. All children must be immediately registered and obtain a birth certificate.

We remind States of their crucial commitments made with the **Global Compact on Refugees** and regional agreements such as the Brazil Plan of Action and the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework.

Regarding specific displacement crises, we highlight the following:

- **Venezuelans continue to leave their country** in record numbers, facing dire conditions especially in transit. The lack of adequate funds to respond is alarming, stretching Governments' capacities. The 2020 Response Plan was only 48.5% funded, mostly affecting NGOs' limited funding, a trend likely to worsen in 2021. **Venezuelans** in irregular status face restrictions in host countries on livelihood, healthcare, education. They face discrimination and xenophobia, fueled by hate speech. Despite efforts to

facilitate processes for refugees and waive administrative fees, access to documentation, including birth certificates, and temporary permits is still an issue.

- **In Northern Central America, displacement is increasing due to violence, poverty, and climate change.** Recent caravans have again highlighted the multiple risks, including States denying access to territory and protection. Developing a Humanitarian Response Plan remains urgent.
- **In Colombia,** the conflict continues despite the pandemic, leading to new displacements. Disasters, climate change and Venezuelan cases further increased humanitarian needs. Criminal and non-state armed groups have committed killings and abuses while enforcing their own anti-COVID-19 measures. Vulnerable Venezuelans are also targeted and forcibly recruited. In this context, we welcome the new Temporary Protection Status to Venezuelans, hoping this will not reduce the space for international protection.
- Troubled about serious restrictions on public liberties and human rights in their country, **100,000 Nicaraguans sought asylum, mainly in Central America and Mexico.** Underfunded responses in host countries, principally Costa Rica, limit the provision of humanitarian assistance.
- **Collective detentions, expulsions and pushbacks by Caribbean authorities are seriously concerning,** along with, limitations to the right to seek asylum or file legal remedies, particularly for children. Human rights-based alternatives to detention must be adopted.
- The US Migrant Protection Protocols forced thousands of asylum seekers to wait in dangerous areas in Mexico, while the former administration's Asylum Cooperative Agreements diverted individuals seeking asylum to El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala. We welcome the Biden administration's decisions to suspend those policies and initiate a review of refugee resettlement from this region. Prospects for further policy changes depend on the review results, and actions by the administration.
- Lastly, **Mexico** received over 41,000 new asylum applications in 2020. **NGOs call on Mexico to address the serious delays in processing and boost changes on detention, family reunification and search for missing migrants.** Attention must also focus on growing asylum requests by children in the country, strengthen their safeguards, considering the recent entry into force of the new refugee law.

We urge States and the international community to:

1. Open and strengthen safe and regular channels into countries both for those in need of international protection and for migrants, including through humanitarian admission and family reunification.
2. Work to regularize the situation of refugees and migrants or grant permanent residence documentation. New regulations or law reforms are often needed as most of them are outdated and not specific to managing large population flows.
3. Adopt effective measures to condemn xenophobia and intolerance against refugees and migrants and recognize their significant contributions to development and local economies. More efforts are needed to promote inclusion into national systems.
4. Deepen cooperation with humanitarians, including NGOs, to facilitate access to populations and delivery of life-saving aid.
5. Include refugees and migrants in vaccination plans and campaigns under the same conditions as nationals, irrespective of their status and ensuring protection from *refoulement*. We call for increased international cooperation to respond to COVID-19.
6. Ensure border management is firmly based on human rights principles and standards.
7. The international community must step up multi-year humanitarian and development funding to support host countries, particularly those facing large population flows.
8. An articulated UN-led humanitarian response in the region is paramount. The UN needs to uphold its partnerships and work with a variety of actors, including NGOs, civil society and the private sector.

9. We urge Governments, and the UN to develop and support a HRP for Northern Central America to address the devastating effects of violence, poverty and climate change.

For NGOs to continue working, adequate funding is necessary. We also need ensured access to affected populations.

Further details are available at icvanetwork.org

Thank you.