

NGO Statement on the Americas

This statement is delivered on behalf of a wide range of NGOs.

During **the pandemic**, NGOs witnessed a **striking deterioration of the rights of displaced people in the Americas**, millions being forced into dangerous irregular routes, into the hands of criminal networks, exposed to serious human rights violations. **Humanitarian access has significantly worsened**, with adverse consequences for the populations we serve.

Over 18 million people are forcibly displaced in the region, mainly from Venezuela and Central America. There are also 8 million IDPs in Colombia, El Salvador, and Honduras.

The pandemic and recurrent weather events continue to impact the region, **exacerbating extreme poverty and income inequality**, while displacing more people. Added pressure on host communities and local authorities have aggravated xenophobia and discrimination. Meanwhile, governments have increased border militarization, limited access to safe and legal protection pathways, and used detention and expulsion as deterrent.

NGOs also acknowledge the inclusion of displaced populations in national COVID-19 vaccination plans. NGOs have often been key players in the roll-out of vaccination programs. However, lack of access to healthcare, water, sanitation, and hygiene services remains particularly acute.

NGOs draw attention to the following:

- **Mixed flows in the Colombian-Panamanian border** involve serious protection risks, such as GBV and human trafficking. Humanitarian coordination gaps also complicate life-saving assistance.
- **Haiti has experienced profound instability, due to the President assassination, the earthquake, and rampant insecurity.** Last year, thousands of Haitians risked their lives trying to reach Mexico and the U.S., seeking protection and a better life.
- **Continued U.S. expulsions at the Mexican border, under Title 42, disrespect the right to claim asylum**, with few exemptions for unaccompanied children and vulnerable asylum seekers. While enforced as a public health measure, many medical experts refute this policy's public health rationale.
- **Despite the U.S. government's attempt to end the so-called "Remain in Mexico", Migrant Protection Protocols were reinstated by federal court ruling and expanded to additional nationalities.**
- **The situation in North and Central America remains neglected** and compounded by increasing internal displacement. Hopefully, the launch of the HRP in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras will help address root causes in a coordinated, strategic, and efficient manner.
- **While further mixed movements are expected, so far 6 million Venezuelans have sought safety from violence and insecurity, mainly within the region.** NGOs welcome government measures to facilitate Venezuelans' access to migratory alternatives in many host countries. However, Venezuelans also require long-term

solutions and often face xenophobia and obstacles to access information on basic services, connectivity, and administrative requirements.

- **The humanitarian situation inside Colombia has worsened despite “undeniable achievements.”** New displacements were recorded last year. Thousands have also suffered confinement and mobility restrictions from armed groups and face massacres, targeted killings, child recruitment, anti-personal mines and IEDs. While Colombia is a model to the world for its Temporary Protection Status benefiting 1.8 million Venezuelans, administrative improvements and international support are needed to speed up access to documentation.
- **Over 110,000 Nicaraguans have fled since 2018**, particularly stretching asylum processing capacities in Costa Rica. As Nicaraguans often face difficulties in accessing employment and meeting basic needs, the international community should increase its support for Nicaraguans and host countries.
- **Conditions for Venezuelans in the Caribbean are also worrying** with increased detention, deportation and family separation. Populations have few prospects for reception and integration and become more vulnerable due the authorities’ lack of capacity and political will.

As a result, NGOs call to:

1. Ensure that governments do not instrumentalize the pandemic to normalize border closures, renege their international commitments or deny the right to seek asylum. Host countries need support, especially those disproportionately affected by COVID-19.
2. Ensure irregular entry and stay is not criminalized. Any related administrative or civil penalty should be proportional and reasonable. Alternatives to detention and best interest of the child should be prioritized, while access to documentation for people in an irregular status should be facilitated considering their specific circumstances.
3. Implement urgent policies to prevent and respond to xenophobia and discrimination against refugees and migrants.
4. Guarantee humanitarian reception centers, mainly at borders include safe spaces for children, people with disabilities, women and LGBTIQ+, in line with human rights standards.
5. Guarantee that deportations, removals, and readmissions are executed after exhausting all administrative and judicial options with fair procedural safeguards and access to justice, legal remedies and counsel.
6. Adopt long-term policies guarantying economic and social rights, with a strong emphasis on the right to work, and independence from future administration changes.
7. Enhance adequate adaptation and resilience with frontline communities facing changing and complex humanitarian situations related to climate change, forced displacement, public health emergencies, economic instability. Increase multi-year, collaborative and flexible planning and funding mechanisms, guaranteeing accountability.
8. Given its key protection role on internal displacement, UNHCR should expand its operational presence and financial resources in affected countries, in line with the Cartagena Declaration and Brazil Plan of Action.
9. Stronger action from UNHCR is needed to prioritize the region and secure funding to address humanitarian crises.
10. We strongly support UNHCR emphasis on local partnerships in refugee and stateless protection, as recommended at the 2021 UNHCR-NGO Regional Consultations.

Promoting partnerships between local NGOs, PoC-led organizations and host communities is paramount and answers the need to adopt new, localized, modes of operation to reach the most vulnerable.

11. Ensure the response to Venezuelan displacements addresses needs in Venezuela as well as host countries. Support for host countries in the region should not affect funding needed to respond to humanitarian needs within Venezuela.
12. Finally, we call on the U.S. to terminate Remain in Mexico and Title 42 immediately and to adopt evidence-based measures to safely resume asylum processing.

UNHCR's presence in the region remains critical; we also look forward to continuing partnering with governments and other stakeholders.

Further details are available on icvanetwork.org

Thank you.