



Regional Cooperation and Co-responsibility

Interim Report and Recommendations

**North and Central American
Task Force on Migration**

November 2021



The **North and Central American Task Force on Migration** is a non-governmental forum of academics, civil society and business leaders, and former policymakers in dialogue with current government officials created to facilitate a broadly driven solution dialogue among the countries involved in the crisis of migration and forced displacement in the region. Initiated by the World Refugee & Migration Council with the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, El Colegio de México, the Migration Policy Institute and the Inter-American Dialogue, the task force will issue concrete recommendations for collective, regional action based on evidentiary research to promote responsibility sharing across North and Central America.

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This is the Task Force's second report. Subsequent recommendations will focus on the following:

- Institutional frameworks and domestic political considerations, including rule of law, governance, corruption and accountability.
- Investment in long-term development to address violence and gangs, poverty and inequality, and the impacts of climate change.
- Strengthening regular pathways for migration as an alternative to irregular migration, including private sponsorship, family reunification and labor migration.
- Integration of refugees and migrants into receiving countries.

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Interim Report on Regional Cooperation and Co-responsibility ¹

From Canada to Panama, waves of unilateral and bilateral attempts to address increasing Central American migration have been characterized by their reactive nature, limited reach, and narrow focus on reducing irregular migration. Policy responses prioritizing control and enforcement may have temporarily stymied spikes in migration levels – primarily to the United States and more recently also to Mexico – but have lacked a proactive strategic approach to migration management and have failed to address the root causes of migration. As a result, Central Americans who do not have accessible regular alternatives continue to make the increasingly dangerous journey through irregular channels.

Central to the vision of the Task Force’s work is a belief that migration issues in Central and North America require a comprehensive regional approach. The issues are simply too complex to be dealt with by any one country acting independently. Countries throughout Central and North America, all of whom are impacted by multidirectional migration flows, have essential roles to play in addressing the causes of migration and formulating appropriate response policies. It is time to build the foundations for a regional migration system based on co-responsibility to foster the common goal of safer, more orderly, regular migration and to address the causes that have forced so many to seek protection and economic security in other countries. Countries in the region are interdependent; for example, Canada, the United States and Mexico all have aging populations and immigration is needed to grow – and even maintain – economies. Establishing a strong regional migration initiative can reduce mounting pressures on governments while providing regular and safer channels for migrant populations.

In the spirit of the global compacts on migration and refugees, we believe that migration is a shared responsibility. Strengthening regional co-responsibility mechanisms in Central America for migrants and refugees not only offers a new lens for responding to migration in the region but will also contribute to enhanced responsibility-sharing at the global level as called for in the Global Compacts on Refugees and on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

And it’s not just up to governments to propose creative approaches. As the World Refugee & Migration Council recommended in its 2019 report, *A Call to Action: Transforming the Global Refugee System*, we need to build a constellation of international players working in networks to identify solutions and promote their adoption. One of the strategies to counter the increasingly frequent and unilateral “might-is-right” behaviour is to reconfigure global migration governance to enable more flexible arrangements, coalitions, and networks that draw together the constructive actors in our global community.

We are encouraged by the Biden administration’s development of both a Collaborative Migration Management Strategy that emphasizes cooperation with countries in the region to address migration – a first in US history – and by a Root Causes Strategy to tackle the long-standing systemic drivers of migration (NSA 2021a, 2021b).

We also recognize that we are not starting from scratch.

The Americas have a long history of regional cooperation embodied in organizations, such as the Organization of American States and the Central American Integration System (SICA). In the 1980s, the US-Mexico Binational Commission strengthened dialogue between cabinet officials of the two countries, including on migration. In the 1990s, a collaborative process known as CIREFCA (see box) was successful in supporting solutions for almost 2 million people displaced by the civil wars in El Salvador and Guatemala. And today there are many regional initiatives to respond to migration – from the regional consultative process known

¹ This report is informed by the research papers prepared on regional cooperation by María Eugenia

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as the Puebla process to the more recent Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (MIRPS). We are encouraged by SICA's adoption of the Comprehensive Regional Social Policy 2020-2040, given its regional scope and high-level governmental engagement and urge support for its implementation. These are all important initiatives, and we commend their efforts to bring the governments of the region together with other actors to respond to migration.

However, for the most part, these institutions were established decades ago to meet the needs at the time. A more recent and useful cooperative framework is the MIRPS, which is a

major intergovernmental initiative in the application of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) and a concrete contribution to the Global Compact on Refugees that aims to encourage "regional cooperation between countries of origin, transit and destination, to foster responsibility-sharing on matters related to prevention, protection and durable solutions." However, MIRPS has a limited mandate and does not address the broader, complex challenges and needs posed by migration. Even though the plethora of organizations has created a certain institutional fatigue in the region, the reality is that the current institutions are not meeting the need for a strong regional approach to migration.

International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA)

The International Conference on Central American Refugees (known by its Spanish acronym CIREFCA) was convened in May 1989 and included representatives from Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and Nicaragua. The Conference was convened largely to address displacement and insecurity caused by civil wars in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua in the 1980s – conflicts which displaced an estimated 2 million people (Redmond 1995).

At this meeting, the participating countries agreed to a Concerted Plan of Action (CPA) including 36 projects with an estimated cost of \$375 million (Betts 2006). Initially intended for 3 years, CIREFCA was eventually extended to 5 years. There have been difficulties tracking the funding associated CIREFCA, but "a total of US\$422.3 million was recorded by the CIREFCA Joint Support Unit (JSU) by 1994" (Betts 2006). This funding was contributed through international pledges at two International Follow-Up Meetings in 1990 and 1992. Most of the funding was contributed by European countries, including a \$115 million pledge from the Italian government (Betts 2006).

The CPA included protection principles that contributed to the voluntary repatriation of "27,000 Salvadorians, 62,000 Nicaraguans and the return of 45,000 Guatemalans from Mexico" (Betts 2006). In addition to refugee protection and repatriation, CIREFCA projects also focused on economic development to help address some causes of displacement. Such projects, including the Valley of Peace project in Belize, helped families who were resettled to gain economic opportunities and better integrate into their new communities (Betts 2006).

A North and Central American Migration Council: Engaging Governments, Migrant Communities and Civil Society

If there is ever a time to work toward a new, comprehensive regional framework, that time is now.

- There are two recently agreed international compacts on which to build.
- Unilateral policies have thus far proved ineffective and have caused tremendous human suffering.
- Population trends indicate a need to incorporate immigration if economies are to be sustainable.
- There is widespread recognition that we need to get serious about expanding alternative regular migration pathways as well as addressing root causes.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has brought home the need to develop strong cooperative mechanisms to manage global phenomena such as health and migration.

We need to get ahead of events and stop acting reactively. Furthermore, we are encouraged by the expressed interest of the Biden administration to support stronger regional engagement on migration issues and a more equitable basis.

Countries in the region can find common cause on a range of other issues, such as protection mechanisms, and development investments that can channel people into regular migration pathways, ensure security for those under threat, and provide alternatives to irregular migration. At the same time, we acknowledge that many countries in the region suffer from institutional weakness and that some of their governments are being challenged because of the prevailing corruption, impunity and absence of both the rule of law and respect for human rights. We believe these issues, which are major root

causes of migration, must be dealt with unequivocally through institutional channels, in ways that depersonalize sensitive concerns, but also have real teeth. We hope that strengthening co-responsibility for migration will lead to greater regional commitment to tackle underlying systemic issues that drive migration.

We thus propose a two-track approach. First, we should build on the North American Leaders' Summit to strengthen cooperation at the ministerial and technical levels on specific migration issues to prepare the ground for a comprehensive region-wide approach, including Central and North American countries. Such an approach would culminate in a new intergovernmental cooperative arrangement with broad civil society engagement, private sector collaboration and ample representation of migrant populations and would aim at generating region-wide migration policy grounded in respect for human rights, the states' demographic and economic priorities and the principles of cooperation and multilateralism. As an example of such an approach, the Arctic Council – an intergovernmental body with broad civil society engagement that promotes cooperation among the countries of the Arctic Circle – could be considered. The Arctic Council is not a traditional regional organization: it has a light structure with a rotating chair, focuses its efforts on specific issues, and provides a space at the table for indigenous organizations.

We suggest that a newly constituted North and Central American Council on Migration, with a rotating chair, include representatives of migrant communities, civil society organizations, academics and the private sector as full participants and that it focus its efforts on concrete actions.

Secondly, we recommend that the 2022 OAS Summit of the Americas incorporate a focus on human mobility in its agenda, particularly as the current agenda items are all directly related to migration. While this Task Force is focusing on migration from Central America and Mexico, we note that growing numbers of migrants from South America and the Caribbean – as well as from outside the continent – are using the same migration routes and hence a continent-wide

discussion is opportune (Giorguli-Saucedo 2016).

We recognize that much greater high-level political engagement and accountability is needed to transform the dynamic of large-scale migration in the region. Political will by all governments in the region is needed to address the insecurity and exclusion that leads people to leave their communities as well as the consequences of migration for those who leave,

those who receive them and the communities they leave behind. In calling for more co-responsibility, we also direct attention to the responsibility of receiving countries to combat unscrupulous recruiting practices and exploitation of migrant workers. More engagement is needed from international financial institutions, but governments also need to demonstrate that they are willing to devote the necessary political capital to implement needed changes. A later report by the Task Force

The Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indochinese Refugees

The Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indochinese Refugees (CPA) was an agreement reached in 1989 in response to the ongoing migration crisis in Vietnam. Prior to the implementation of the CPA, Vietnamese migrants fleeing the country were automatically recognized as refugees. The CPA implemented an asylum screening process to determine if a person qualified for refugee status. Those who did not qualify were repatriated under a UNHCR-monitored amnesty program, intended to ensure that individuals would not be prosecuted for leaving the country illegally (Betts 2006). Countries around the world agreed to share responsibility for refugees, resettling refugees from the region and hence reducing the pressures on countries of first asylum.

Initial discussions on the drafting of the CPA included representatives from the U.S., Australia, Thailand, and UNHCR. After several meetings, the group expanded to include representatives from Canada, France, the European Union, and eventually Vietnam itself (Betts 2006). This group drafted the CPA, and the International Conference on Indo-Chinese Refugees was convened in June 1989 at the behest of ASEAN. 75 states attended the Conference in Geneva, and the CPA was adopted by acclamation (UNHCR 1989). A Steering Committee was also created at the Conference to oversee the implementation of the CPA.

In 1996, the Steering Committee of the International Conference on Indo-Chinese Refugees agreed that the CPA should come to an end (UNHCR 1996). Overall, the cost of the CPA exceeded \$500 million over 7 years, and successfully provided refuge for hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese and Lao people (Robinson 2004).

According to UNHCR, the CPA:

...provided temporary refuge for some 112,000 asylum-seekers from Viet Nam and the Lao People's Democratic Republic, reduced clandestine departures, expanded legal departure possibilities and introduced region-wide refugee status determination procedures which helped stem the flow of asylum-seekers. The CPA facilitated the recognition and subsequent resettlement of over 74,000 Vietnamese refugees, and supported the repatriation to their country of origin and subsequent reintegration of over 88,000 Vietnamese who did not fulfil internationally recognized refugee criteria. The CPA also facilitated the resettlement of some 51,000 Lao and supported the voluntary repatriation and reintegration in their country of origin of some 22,400 Lao, most of whom were recognized as prima facie refugees (UNHCR 1996).

will explore ways that the international community can be supportive of needed changes in the region.

Although the Task Force will later develop recommendations for responding to both institutional and economic drivers of migration, here we emphasize that political will is key. One way of strengthening political will – of changing the political incentives – is for governments in the region to take concrete steps on specific issues – such as developing alternative migration pathways or strengthening protection of migrant children in transit – which will build confidence to enable development of a more ambitious regional cooperative system.

In the longer term, we suggest that drawing on the legal and administrative foundations of the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) for Indochinese refugees (see box) could inform future approaches to strengthen cooperation in Central America. Although the CPA was an ad hoc mechanism to respond to one particular situation (while migration between North and Central America has become a permanent reality) and despite its imperfections, the CPA represented a successful international

origin countries to implement strategy and reach most vulnerable populations (Casella 2016; Betts 2006). At the same time, institutionalizing regional cooperation on migration in a body modelled along the lines of the Arctic Council would allow the governments of the region to work on a wide range of issues, including climate change, public health, corruption, and other deep-rooted causes of migration and the forcible displacement of persons both within states and across state boundaries. Such a forum would also allow for the critical engagement of civil society and other key nongovernmental bodies much as the Arctic Council does today (see box).

Today, governments in the region, from Canada to Panama, face a unique and timely opportunity to shift from an enforcement-centered strategy to a comprehensive protection-focused system by leveraging growing interest in cooperation. The Biden administration’s recent proposal to devise a “collaborative management strategy” in the region may be the most concrete and influential example, but is it not the only one (Biden, 2021). We are encouraged by the recently released Collaborative Migration Management Strategy and the US Strategy to Address the Root Causes of Central American Migration

The Arctic Council: A Model for Regional Cooperation and Civil Society Engagement

“The Arctic Council is the leading intergovernmental forum promoting cooperation, coordination and interaction among the Arctic States, Arctic Indigenous peoples and other Arctic inhabitants on common Arctic issues, in particular on issues of sustainable development and environmental protection in the Arctic. It was formally established in 1996,” according to the Arctic Council website.

The Arctic Council is composed of the Arctic States, Permanent Participants, Working Groups and Accredited Observers. Its meetings and program of work is supported by an Arctic Council Secretariat, and Indigenous Peoples’ Secretariat and Task Forces and Expert Groups. It meets regularly and has a revolving chair among the different Arctic states.

collaborative effort to resolve the increasingly protracted nature of displacement in Indochina. Four mutually supportive components of the Plan’s success could apply in the Central American context: guaranteed access to seek protection, a streamlined and orderly process for regular migration, clear guidelines and consequences to discourage abuse of protection or orderly pathways, and political buy-in from

(NSC, 2021a, 2021b) which include strategies to address the underlying insecurity and the urgent protection needs in the region. We are also encouraged by the repeated references to the need to strengthen regional cooperation on a range of issues – from combatting corruption to border management – and the assertion that the US “cannot do this work alone.”

The governments of Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras have previously called for the region to address migration based on a principle of co-responsibility (Mexican Foreign Ministry, 2021). More recently, Canada's immigration department expressed interest in increasing its capacity to resettle more Central American refugees and in advance of World Refugee Day announced three new initiatives to increase refugee arrivals, including through the expansion of the Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot (EMPP) for certain high-skilled refugees (Mehler Paperny, 2021; Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2021). Other examples include a request by Panama's Foreign Minister for regional cooperation and responsibility to address migration flows from Central America and Venezuela (EFE, 2021).

In recent decades border enforcement agencies and military forces have played the central role in migration management in the region. The securitization of migration is a global phenomenon (Bello 2020; Colomé-Menéndez et al 2021; Mixed Migration Centre 2019) which is increasingly evident in discussions about Central American migration. Regional cooperation in the region on security issues – which now often include migration as well as drug trafficking and climate change – has been dominated by the United States. Although the US government has provided significant aid to Central America to “deter migration, advance US national security interests, implement the Asylum Cooperative Agreements, respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and address other health and humanitarian needs,” the U.S. Government Accountability Office notes that “limited information is available about how US assistance [has] improved prosperity, governance and security in the Northern Triangle” (Meyer 2021). And while US efforts to address security concerns in the region have largely involved providing more funding to Central American security forces, there are also persistent complaints that those security forces are responsible for at least some of the violence in the region – violence which leads many to leave their countries. It is essential to strengthen the role of human rights institutions in the region and to advocate for their independence.)

While governments have a clear and legitimate interest in keeping out terrorists and criminal elements, the reality is that people are leaving their homes in Central America because of insecurity – physical, economic, social and environmental insecurity. In order to address the causes of Central American migration, the focus needs to shift from deterrence and enforcement to addressing the widespread insecurity that is driving migration. The Task Force will later formulate specific recommendations to address the political, economic and environmental factors that make it difficult – or impossible – for people to live lives of dignity in their community.

While governments have the sovereign right to control their borders, other actors, particularly civil society, including both faith-based organizations and the private sector, are essential to both addressing the causes and ensuring the protection and assistance to migrants as well as to host communities and those who remain behind. Developing comprehensive policies on migration means engaging a wide range of civil society actors – doctors and teachers, municipal authorities, academics and lawyers. Most of all, migrants themselves have much to contribute to policy-making and have generally been ignored or sidelined by policy-makers in all countries. Similarly international organizations have a role to play in supporting these initiatives. We encourage the strengthening of civil society networks at the regional level and suggest that a meeting of civil society, including refugee- and migrant-led organizations and private sector representatives be organized to offer concrete recommendations on enhancing a collaborative regional approach to bring individual projects and initiatives to scale. Such a meeting could also develop a civil society monitoring system to assess progress in meeting the commitments.

Regional Council on Migration: A Distinct Value Proposition

To summarize, the advantages of creating an Arctic-like Council on Migration and related issues for North American and Northern Triangle countries are as follows:

- 1) The proposed Council would be political but not partisan and serve as a consultative forum to engage on a wide range of issues that go beyond the humanitarian to include addressing the deep-rooted causes of migration and forcible displacement.
- 2) The proposed Council would include representatives from Indigenous communities, the private sector, and civil society and give voice to these groups through membership in its various working groups and related activities, much as the Arctic Council operates, and would serve as a forum for constructive dialogue and the exchange of ideas and proposals for cooperation. As in the Arctic Council, Indigenous and other civil society groups would be founding members with all the prerogatives of involvement except a vote.
- 3) The proposed Council would not be a mechanism to disburse funds but would serve as a forum for donors (perhaps through a donors Working Group) to assess new and emerging needs in the Central American region, secure and monitor pledges, and provide a platform to promote greater levels of donor engagement and support on an ongoing basis.
- 4) The proposed Council would serve to promote functional cooperation in areas that affect – and will in the future affect – migration and displacement patterns in the region, including *inter alia*:
 - promoting research on climate change and its differential impact on local communities and appropriate mitigation and sustainable development measures and responses;
 - promoting the development of the rule of law and gender/LGBTQ+ equality as it affects migrants and marginalized groups in the region with the active engagement of representatives of these communities;
 - promoting the development and implementation of legal pathways for migration;
 - identifying ways to promote entrepreneurship and economic development in those communities and areas which traditionally have been the major sources of migrants from the region; and
 - strengthening public health access and service delivery to affected communities, etc.
- 5) The proposed Council would have a flexible structure in terms of the composition of its various working groups and would bring in new voices as key interests are affected by new challenges as in the case of public health during a pandemic.
- 6) The proposed Council would serve as a mechanism to reduce political tensions prior to a crisis and/or as new issues as arise.
- 7) Like the Arctic Council, the proposed Council would have a rotating chair among its member countries.
- 8) The proposed Council would be staffed by a small secretariat financially supported by one of its members (e.g., Canada) much as the Arctic Council does today and would maintain a “light” administrative footprint.
- 9) Government membership in the proposed Council would be at the foreign ministerial level though other senior officials, including Heads of Government, could also attend meetings of the Council, as required.

Existing Regional Mechanisms’ Engagement with Migration

Regional governance in Latin America generally, and in Central America specifically, faces many challenges. As Merke et al (2021) note:

Latin American governments urgently need to work together to address the manifold challenges they face. Yet, despite the high

stakes, traditional regional governance mechanisms seem paralyzed, lacking even the capacity to discuss the current untenable situation, let alone address it. The conventional wisdom is that regional cooperation across Latin America is practically nonexistent because its heads of state have insurmountable ideological differences and because the region's dominant diplomatic institutions have failed to fulfill their purpose.

And yet, Latin America has been in the forefront in developing normative frameworks for the movement of people – notably the 1984 Cartagena Declaration, the 1994 San José Declaration on Refugees and Displaced Persons, and the 2014 Brazil Plan of Action. CIREFCA, a comprehensive collective response to displacement in the 1990s, is evidence that Central American governments can work together in addressing issues of mobility within the region. The following section provides a brief overview of existing regional organizations and initiatives.

SICA, the Central American Integration System, was established in 1991 through the Protocolo de Tegucigalpa, bringing together Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama with the Dominican Republic as an associated state. In 2006, SICA established the C-A4 Group as “a first partial step toward the free movement of persons” which permitted non-labor mobility between Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua but which excluded Belize, Costa Rica and Panama (Heredia 2016: 12). In 2014 an Agreement of Collaboration between the General Secretary of SICA and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees was signed, and later ratified in 2018, with the goal of developing joint strategies relating to forced displacement and human rights protection. The agreement promoted cooperation to implement the Action Plan 2018-2019 around 5 aspects: 1) regional coordination and cooperation, 2) institutional strengthening, 3) information management, 4) harmonization and promotion of legal frameworks and public policies, 5) formulation and implementation of assistance and protection projects.

In June 2018, the Summit of Presidents of SICA, endorsed “the necessity of establishing a regional instrument to confront regional challenges” on migration and forced displacement, evaluating its causes and consequences with the aim of developing a Comprehensive Plan of Action (PAIM-SICA). In July 2019, with the collaboration of SICA, IOM and UNHCR, a regional report – “Findings of the base line study on migration and displacement in the SICA region” – was published in which action lines and national and regional strategies were proposed around the issues of migration policy, economic cooperation, social aspects (including refugee protection and human trafficking and smuggling) and international cooperation (including comprehensive management of migratory policies). In early 2020, however, the emergence of COVID-19 meant that the attention of Central American governments – like governments everywhere – shifted and these plans on migration were put on a back burner.

SICA has also supported projects on the integration and reintegration of children and youth at risk of irregular migration (2017) with German government support and developed initiatives for comprehensive assistance in health to migrants in transit, returnees and separated families in the SICA region. SICA continues to work to raise awareness and build capacity to promote the respect of the rights of migrants and refugees, particularly between governmental authorities and law enforcement agencies who are responsible for managing migration.

CEPREDENAC (Centro de Coordinación para la Prevención de Desastres en Centroamérica y la Republica Dominicana) is a 27-year-old organization under SICA which brings together disaster management agencies from throughout the region to share information and best practices in all aspects of disaster management from prevention to response to recovery. It is considered to be one of the strongest regional disaster networks in the world.

These initiatives are important – and it is impressive that SICA has managed to survive 30+ years of political change and various crises in the region. But, like all regional and international organizations, SICA can only do as

much as its members support and, so far, SICA's work on migration has been primarily as a place for dialogue.

Puebla Process/Regional Conference on Migration (CRM)

The Regional Conference on Migration (CRM), also known as the Puebla Process, was created in February 1996 as a forum for discussion on regional migration issues with the objective of coordinating policies, improving migration management and promoting cooperation to respond to the growing movement of persons in the Central and North American regions. Currently including Canada, the United States, Mexico, Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama and the Dominican Republic, the Puebla Process engages national vice-ministers or under-secretaries directly involved in migration management and assistance. The United States provides 50 percent of the total CRM budget, followed by Canada (24 percent), Mexico (11 percent), and the rest of the countries with 1.77 percent each. A host of international organizations and five other countries participate as observers in the process. Although civil society is not formally included in the CRM, since 1998 the Regional Network of Civil Organizations for Migration (RROCM) has represented NGOs who work on migration issues with the CRM although little information is available about this network.

As a regional consultative process on international migration, CRM promotes the exchange of information and experiences for coordination and cooperation on a range of migration-related issues, including studies, capacity-building, and developing guidelines. In June 2021, in collaboration with IOM, the CRM launched a program of regional training focused on protection and assistance to vulnerable migrants for front-line personnel and policymakers.

The Puebla Process has provided an important forum for discussion on migration issues in the region and has enabled national policymakers to become familiar with migration issues in other countries in the region. Although the process is sometimes seen as dominated by US interests,

these dialogue efforts have undoubtedly built confidence in regional approaches to migration – often sensitive and controversial issues. As we have seen in other contexts, these initiatives can serve as confidence-building measures for broader cooperative efforts.

Committee on Migration Issues (Comisión de Asuntos Migratorios) – Organization of American States

In July 2012, the General Assembly of the Organization of American States established the Committee on Migration Issues (CAM) as a forum charged with recognizing and analyzing the contributions and challenges of migration in countries of origin, transit, destination and/or return, including a gender perspective and within a human rights framework. This follows the work of the Comisión Especial de Asuntos Migratorios (CEAM) which operated between April 2008 and June 2012.

CAM promotes dialogue, cooperation, and sharing of experiences, lessons learned and best practices at the international, regional, subregional and bilateral levels with respect to migration as well as with regional consultative processes, such as the CRM and international organizations such as IOM. The Committee also considers migration-related issues referred to it by the OAS General Assembly or the Inter-American Council for Integral Development (CIDI).

Among CAM's activities it is worth highlighting its 2017 campaign 'Migrants count in the Americas' which focused on recognizing the contributions of migrants to their countries of origin and destination and hence the importance of their inclusion in the communities where they reside.

Marco Integral Regional para Protección y Soluciones (MIRPS) Comprehensive Regional Framework for Protection and Solutions

Even before the 2016 UN Summit on Refugees and Migrants, governments in the region recognized the need for a comprehensive regional approach to forced displacement in northern Central America that would simultaneously address needs in the countries of origin, transit and destination. With the support

of UNHCR and the OAS, in 2017, Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica, Mexico and Panama agreed to work together in establishing a regional framework known as MIRPS, with El Salvador joining in 2019. A MIRPS Support Platform, now chaired by Canada, was established with the participation of Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Spain, France, Italy, Sweden, Switzerland, the United States and the European Union, SICA, the InterAmerican-human rights system and the UN Development Group have also participated in MIRPS activities.

MIRPS, based on a whole of society approach to displacement in the region, can point to a number of achievements in recent years – supporting legislation in Mexico for protection of displaced persons, training programs throughout the region, promoting access to labor support services for refugees, construction of shelters for migrants and expanding access to health for migrants. MIRPS has developed a portfolio of 30 priority projects involving development actors and other key stakeholders. In the MIRPS Solidarity event celebrated on 10 June 2021, governments, international organizations, agencies and other actors, announced US\$110 million in contributions to MIRPs.

MIRPS has set up a number of working groups which have formulated detailed recommendations on specific displacement issues, including internal displacement. Its annual reports include progress made by each of its member countries as well as an assessment of progress at the regional level on protection, solutions and strategic partnerships (MIRPS 2020).

MIRPS is a promising initiative – certainly one of the strongest regional initiatives to implement the intentions of the Global Compact on Refugees at the regional level. However, its exclusive focus is those who are forcibly displaced rather than on (voluntary) migration.

MIRPS (largely supported by UNHCR) and the Puebla Process (largely supported by IOM) have provided regional forums for discussions among national ministries and agencies working on migration and displacement. Relationships have been established between stakeholders and international organizations have provided important support, including information on

good practices from other regions. And both MIRPS and the Puebla process can be useful sounding boards to discuss implementation of regional cooperation strategies to address Central American migration. And as discussed in the first interim report of the Task Force – on Humanitarian Protection in the Region – MIRPS is playing an important role in building asylum capacity in the region (WRMC 2021). But more is needed – specifically greater high-level political commitment and more regional forums for strengthening civil society's role in migration.

There are many other regional organizations, such as the Sistema Económico Latinoamericano y del Caribe (SELA) that also organize meetings on migration as well as meetings organized by individual countries on specific migration-related issues, such as the recent high-level meeting organized by Panama on irregular migration (Panama 2021).

Civil Society and Regional Organizations

There are a number of innovative ways that civil society organizations have worked across borders. For example, Jóvenes Promesas is a regional initiative on education targeting at-risk Central American youth. As a multi-level and multi-stakeholder project, it involves governmental and educational institutions, NGOs, international actors, academia and host families. As noted in our interim report on humanitarian protection in the region, regional networks of women's organizations are particularly well-placed to advocate for initiatives to protect people at risk in the region.

We are particularly encouraged by the networks of faith-based organizations which are often on the front lines of supporting migrants, refugees, and internally displaced persons as well as efforts to address the causes which compel people to move. Faith in action, a coalition of local Central American civil society organizations together with their North American counterparts, has launched *Iniciativa Causas Raíz* (root causes) as a basis for joint action to address the causes of migration – primarily economic causes and the need for jobs. The initiative, under the leadership of faith-based organizations, has called for more support to local organizations, finding that less than 4 percent of the millions of dollars in USAID funds

for the region has gone to local organizations (Faith in Action 2020). The US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) is committed to working with Central American Catholic institutions to address the causes of migration from the region – providing important insights from grassroots experiences to mobilize political action (USCCB 2021). The Scalabrini International Migration Network not only provides direct services to migrants at every step of their journeys but also advocates for ethical approaches to migration governance. Faith-based NGOs such as World Vision, Church World Service, and Mennonite Central Committee are also important actors as are the many religious orders working at borders and with communities.

The private sector also plays an important role – particularly in supporting access to services and developing livelihood opportunities in the region. We are encouraged by the efforts of Partnership for Central America, a coalition of private sector organizations working to support long-term development in the region.

Recommendations:

1. We suggest that the next North American Leaders' Summit between the heads of state of Canada, Mexico and the United States issue a joint declaration on the urgent need for a North and Central American regional approach to address migration. We also ask the leaders to intensify their diplomatic efforts to work together on specific migration issues. We call on the Summit to work towards the establishment of a new joint regional body, charged with strengthening regional co-responsibility for migration and which brings in representation from both governments and civil society representation – including migrant communities and the private sector – based on the model of the Arctic Council.
2. We also suggest that the Summit take the lead in establishing several ad hoc, time-urgent working groups with governmental and civil society representation from throughout the region to:
 - Develop a comprehensive immediate action plan to ensure that both migrants and receiving communities have access to the COVID-19 vaccine. It is in the interests of all actors that migrants are protected from the virus and that resources are made available to limit the spread of the virus.
 - Move toward a comprehensive strategy in the region for reducing COVID-19-related border restrictions for asylum-seekers and unlawful returns of migrant populations.
 - Develop an immediate action plan to protect migrant children and women and prevent family separation.
 - Develop a regional strategy for enhancing protection of Central American children and women in the region as called for in our [report on humanitarian protection in the region with an emphasis on engaging grassroots youth and women's organizations](#).
 - Work with Central American civil society, including representatives of Indigenous groups, internally displaced populations, and governments to strengthen protection of internally displaced persons.
3. We recommend that existing regional organizations and civil society networks – including migrant-and refugee-led organizations as well as private sector coalitions – share their recommendations for enhanced regional coordination with the organizers of the North American Leaders' Summit and the Summit of the Americas. Monitoring mechanisms to measure progress toward meeting new goals on migration and human security should also be developed.
4. Since migration is increasingly one of the most important issues for all countries in the Americas – not just in North and Central America but also in South America and the Caribbean – we recommend that the 2022 OAS Summit of the Americas include a

focus on migration in order to address the important Americas-wide migration issues.

There is much to be done to address the causes and consequences of migration in the region. It is time to get started with a renewed comprehensive and regional response with a collaborative strategy and cooperative action.

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Regional Cooperation and Co-responsibility

North and Central American Task Force on Migration

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