



As sea level rises, the area of the village of returnees bordering Cité Soleil in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, is often flooded, and people are forced to live under sea water. © IOM 2015 (Photo: Alessandro Grassani)

Central and North America: Migration and displacement in the context of disasters and environmental change

Ileana-Sînziana Pușcaș, IOM

1. Introduction

Migration and displacement in the context of disasters is recognized as a significant trend in Central and North America. Disasters have prompted millions in recent years to flee internally, as well as to other countries in search of protection and assistance. As a response, both humanitarian measures and disaster risk management

policies have been developed at the regional and national levels in Central and North America. National and regional migration policies have also been enhanced to account for such movements, for example, through the Regional Conference on Migration for Central and North America (RCM).



International Organization for Migration (IOM)

The UN Migration Agency

Contributing to broader environmental change, climate change is also acknowledged as increasingly affecting the region, visibly seen through the heightened frequency and intensity of hydro-meteorological storms and reduced accumulated precipitation in the Dry Corridor in Central America (Nansen Initiative, 2013b). Such adverse effects can sometimes prompt people to move. Regional policies to address climate change have also been developed and call for enhanced national strategies related to population movements in the context of increased and recurrent extreme events.

This paper aims to brief policymakers on the nexus of migration, displacement, disasters and environmental change in Central and North America, specifically focusing on cross-border movements within this region. It starts with an overview of the existing trends of migration and displacement in the context of disasters and environmental change, before analysing some of the responses to such movements and the regional fora and policies that contribute to these responses. Looking forward, the policy brief concludes by recommending several pathways to advance on addressing these types of population movements in Central and North America.

Examples of major disasters in Central and North America

- 2017 Hurricane Maria, regional
- 2017 Hurricane Irma, regional
- 2017 Hurricane Harvey, regional
- 2016 Hurricane Otto, regional
- 2016 Hurricane Matthew, regional
- 2016 Hurricane Earl, Belize
- 2015 Wildfires, Canada
- 2015 Volcano eruption, Mexico
- 2015 Tropical Storm Erika, Dominica
- 2015 Hurricane Patricia, Mexico
- 2014 Soliette river flooding, Dominican Republic
- 2012 Hurricane Sandy, regional
- 2011 Heavy rains, El Salvador
- 2010 Earthquake, Haiti
- 2005 Hurricane Stan, regional
- 2005 Hurricane Katrina, regional
- 2000 Earthquake, El Salvador
- 1998 Hurricane Mitch, Central America
- 1996 Floods, Canada
- 1995 Montserrat volcanic eruption, United Kingdom
- 1992 Hurricane Andrew, regional
- 1988 Hurricane Juana, Costa Rica
- 1985 Earthquake, Mexico
- 1976 Earthquake, Guatemala
- 1974 Hurricane Fifi-Orlene, regional
- 1973 Los Amantes earthquake, Guatemala
- 1972 Managua earthquake, Nicaragua

Source: EM-DAT, 2017.

2. Trends of migration and displacement in Central and North America

2.1. Migration and displacement in the context of disasters

2016 disaster displacements in RCM Member Countries

- Belize: 3,500
- Canada: 93,000
- Costa Rica: 5,800
- Dominican Republic: 52,000
- El Salvador: 480
- Guatemala: 1,700
- Honduras: 890
- Mexico: 12,000
- Nicaragua: 18,000
- Panama: 1,100
- United States: 1,107,000

Source: IDMC, 2017.

Central and North America is exposed to a wide range of natural hazards, including hurricanes, volcanic eruptions, floods, drought, earthquakes, tornadoes, forest fires, landslides and storm surges (Ionesco, Mokhnacheva and Gemenne, 2017). Population movements in response to sudden-onset disasters caused by such hazards have been well-documented in this region. Natural hazards turn into disasters when individuals and communities lack the resilience to withstand the specific impacts of the various hazards.

Therefore, while certainly important, natural hazards are not the only drivers of such movements. Migration and displacement in the context of disasters and climate change are always multi-causal (Ionesco, Mokhnacheva and Gemenne, 2017; Nansen Initiative, 2015a; IOM, 2014c). Population growth, underdevelopment, weak governance, armed conflict and generalized violence, as well as poor urban planning in rapidly expanding cities are further weakening the resilience of people and exacerbating vulnerable situations, pushing people to move (Ionesco, Mokhnacheva and Gemenne, 2017; Nansen Initiative, 2015a; IOM, 2014c).

In line with global trends, most disaster displacement and migration in Central and North America happen within the borders of sovereign countries. A recent report shows that in 2016, new internal displacements related to sudden-onset disasters in 10 of the 11 countries that are members of the RCM amounted to 188,470, and to almost 1.3 million when taking into account the effects of Hurricane Matthew in the United States of America, the eleventh RCM country (Internal Displacement

Monitoring Centre (IDMC), 2017). This adds to the thousands of other persons forced to move before 2016 in the context of disasters and climate change, who remain displaced in some countries (ibid.).

However, such estimates shed light only on a portion of the total number of people moving in the context of disasters and the adverse effects of climate change. They do not account for persons moving as a response to slow-onset events and processes, and do not capture the destination, trajectories and duration of the movements, thus masking or even missing those repeatedly displaced (Ionesco, Mokhnacheva and Gemenne, 2017; Laczko and Aghazarm, 2009).

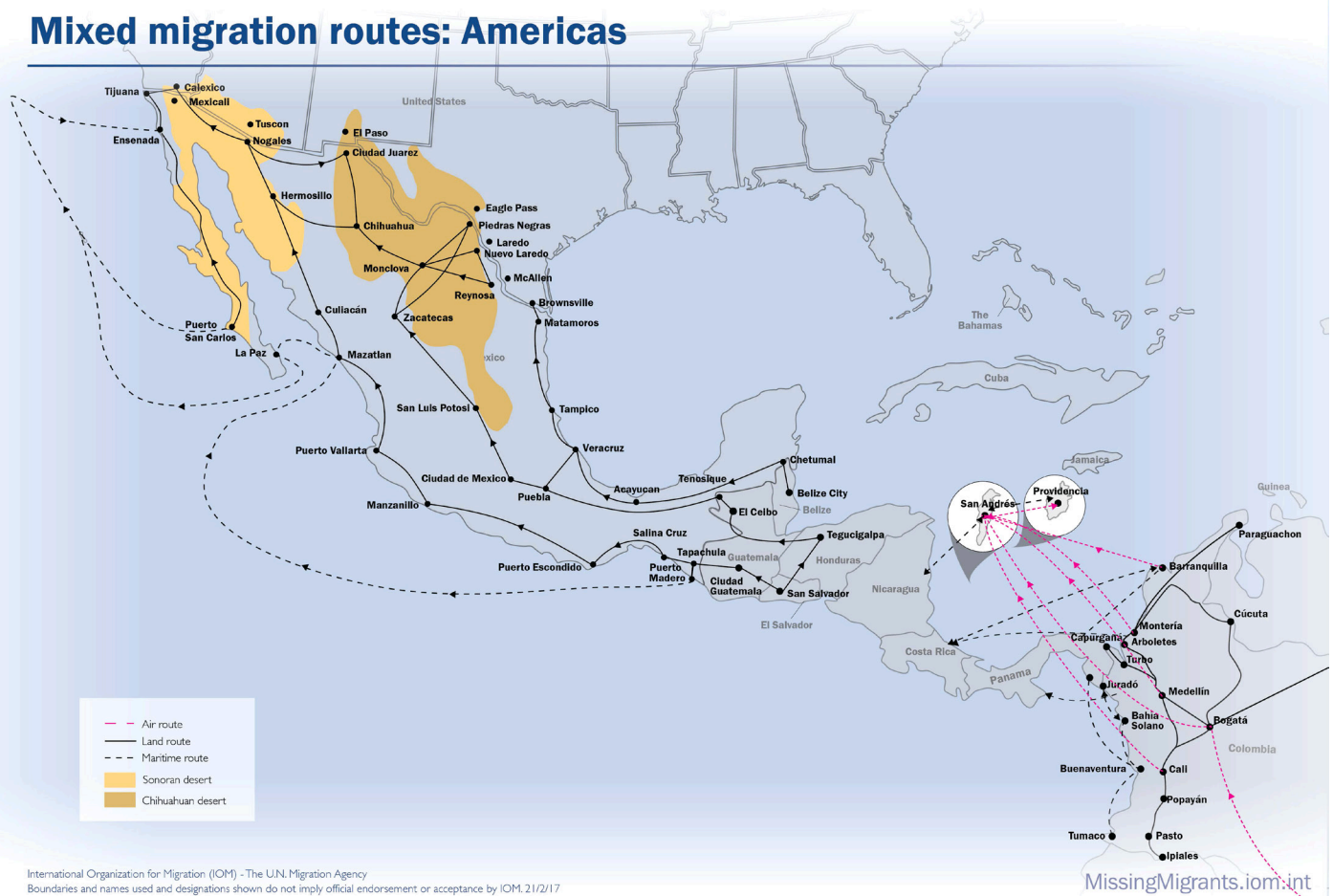
In some situations, people in Central and North America are also forced to cross borders as a response to a disaster. For example, in the aftermath of the 2010 Haiti earthquake, over 200,000 disaster-displaced Haitians were admitted by the Dominican Republic (Nansen Initiative, 2015c), some 48,000 benefited from the extraregional admission granted by Brazil (IOM, 2017b), and the United States granted Haitians Temporary Protected Status (TPS), allowing them to stay in the United States. Hurricane Mitch in 1998 also resulted in people moving across borders, when 300 Guatemalans crossed into Mexico and thousands of others from El Salvador and Honduras fled their homes mainly for Mexico, the United States and Canada. Going back even

more, in 1972, some 10,000 Nicaraguans entered Costa Rica to escape the vast infrastructure damage produced by a major earthquake and the aftershocks in Managua (Nansen Initiative, 2015c).

International movements resulting from sudden-onset disasters in Central and North America do not appear to be limited to rural areas, as it is sometimes the case in areas severely affected by the adverse effects of climate change (Cantor, 2015a). Depending on the type of the hazard, both rural and urban communities are vulnerable to and affected by varying degrees. The geography of people's locations, such as living close to a volcano, seems to be a more important determinant as it generates higher level of exposure to hazards. Therefore, the demography of those moving is quite diverse (ibid.), which means that any assistance system needs to be sensitive to different needs and vulnerabilities.

Moreover, international movements in the context of disasters are usually undertaken on well-established regular and irregular migration pathways, drawn by wider economic and political situations in the region. Two broad types of international movements are identified in Central and North America, either: (a) to a neighbouring country with a contiguous land border, usually for short periods of time; or (b) to more distant destinations for longer periods of time (Cantor, 2015a). Sometimes both types can occur.

Mixed migration routes: Americas



Hurricane Matthew was the most powerful storm of 2016. It made landfall in October and indirectly impacted several countries. While Haiti was the hardest hit, other countries, such as the Bahamas, Cuba, the Dominican Republic and the United States were also affected. Floods and landslides were brought by the storm in the Dominican Republic. A red alert was declared in 19 provinces, and approximately 19,000 persons were evacuated out of a total of 41,500 displaced. Mass evacuations also took place in the United States, with several states being affected by heavy rainfall and floods. Between 875,000 and 1.25 million people complied with the evacuation order.

Source: IDMC, 2017.



Over 175,000 people have been displaced from their homes since the passage of Hurricane Matthew in Haiti on 4 October 2016. © IOM 2016 (Photo: Hajer Naili)

Regarding the first type, the decision to move seems to be influenced by the perception of stronger temporary protection and assistance on the other side of the border, and also by broader regular migration patterns over those borders (Cantor, 2015a). Sometimes, crossing a neighbouring border is also the simplest and fastest or the only way for people to put distance between themselves and the anticipated disaster. One example of these border crossings is in Northern Guatemala to Mexico, where people use the “frontier worker visitor card”, held by many Guatemalans along the northern frontier, to cross over when a disaster hits (ibid.). These movements usually happen ad hoc and thus, governments and border authorities need to be prepared to identify and support those in need of assistance.

In the latter case of moving to more distant destinations, broader economic and political migration patterns in the country play an important role. Distant international movements occur predominantly from low-income and more vulnerable countries, such as El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras and Nicaragua through both regular and irregular routes to countries that are perceived to be more stable and prosperous, including to the United States, Canada and Costa Rica (Cantor, 2015a). Movements may occur up to several months after a disaster hits, especially if international aid is in place, which can cover initial life-saving needs. Such patterns create a growing need of complementary migration pathways to the existing ones in the region in order to

ensure safe, orderly and regular mobility in cases of disasters as well.

A certain number of cross-border evacuations have also taken place in Central and North America in cases of disasters (Nansen Initiative, 2015c; Cantor, 2015a). Evacuations are life-saving measures, but if not well-managed can have displacement-like implications and consequences (Global CCCM Cluster, 2014). As a result, policies and practices for the admission, stay and assistance of persons evacuated to a foreign country are also needed and some RCM countries have developed them. Following the 1995 volcano eruption in Montserrat, a British territory in the Caribbean, a majority of the population was evacuated, some of which to Cuba. Likewise, some Haitians were evacuated to Canada, the United States and Mexico in the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake.

2.2. Migration and displacement in the context of environmental change

Central and North America is experiencing environmental change linked to slow-onset processes, such as: drought, coastal erosion, land degradation, rising temperatures and changing rainfall patterns (Ionesco, Mokhnacheva and Gemenne, 2017). The adverse effects of climate change are exacerbating environmental change by altering the frequency and intensity of certain processes, as well as by increasing the vulnerability of

individuals and communities. These changes affect people's way of living, their resilience, livelihoods and food security, among others, sometimes to the level of seeking better conditions somewhere else. El Niño and La Niña phenomena, usually affecting the region every four to seven years, have also caused a rise in ocean temperatures, severe rains, flooding, forest fires and droughts (Delavelle, 2013), contributing to the drivers of migration and displacement.

Environmental change, including climate change, is nevertheless rarely the sole or direct cause of population movements from affected communities. Economic, social, cultural, political and demographic factors usually play an important role as well (Laczko and Aghazarm, 2009). Disentangling pre-existing vulnerabilities triggered by rural underdevelopment, conflict and violence or poor agricultural practices from the impacts of slow-onset processes proves difficult in Central and North America. Furthermore, clearly distinguishing between movements in the context of environmental change as compared to sudden-onset disasters may also not be desirable or even possible. International population movements are sometimes a result of the combined impacts of both environmental change and sudden-onset disasters (Cantor, 2015a). For instance, in Haiti, Panama and Honduras, it is the effects of both tropical storms and environmental degradation processes due to aridity and coastal erosion that contribute to weakening the resilience of rural communities (ibid.) and eventually prompting them to move.

In El Salvador, in November 2009, the combined effects of Hurricane Ida and a low-pressure system from the Pacific causing heavy rains, resulted in massive flooding and landslides across 7 of the country's 14 departments. Over 120,000 people were affected and about 15,000 sought refuge in emergency shelters. Another tropical storm and unprecedented heavy rains that lasted over 10 days in 2011 again caused massive flooding and landslides in 181 of 262 municipalities (69%). Over 500,000 people were affected, with some 60,000 people requiring evacuation and over 55,000 staying in emergency shelter.

Source: IOM, 2017e.

Rural communities are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of environmental and climate change,

in particular, those participating in subsistence activities linked to agriculture. Due to their high exposure and vulnerability to natural hazards, dependence on natural resources, and limited capacity to cope with and manage risks, rural populations become vulnerable and might decide to move in search of better opportunities (FAO and IOM, 2017). For example, when coffee production – which is significant in Central America and also highly susceptible to climate variability – is not enough to provide a livelihood, farmers are either forced to grow illegal drugs or to migrate (Delavelle, 2013).

In addition, international as well as internal population movements from rural communities in the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Honduras and Mexico are partially driven by slow-onset processes, such as desertification and drought caused by changing weather and rainfall patterns, soil erosion and other forms of environmental degradation (Cantor, 2015a). Furthermore, in the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Mexico contemporary migration pathways usually stretch from affected rural areas to the main cities of these countries or abroad (ibid.).

Even though slow-onset processes and the adverse effects of climate change continue to contribute to mobility in Central and North America, it is unknown how many people are actually affected. These mobility patterns are challenging to identify, and there is a lack of uniform data collection and analysis standards, as well as a lack of data sharing across relevant sectors (Ionesco, Mokhnacheva and Gemenne, 2017), thereby making people moving in the context of environmental change almost invisible on data grids.

As the foregoing analysis showed, migration and displacement in Central and North America occurs to a significant degree both in the context of disasters and environmental change. In addition to the intraregional mobility trends presented above, there are also extraregional movements in the context of disasters and environmental change, to a different scale however. An analysis of these movements goes beyond the scope of this brief, but suffice it to mention that there is a significant trend towards South America from Central America, particularly from the Caribbean countries (IOM, 2017b; IOM, 2017c).

All these mobility trends highlight a significant need for policies, regulations and laws that States can use to manage migration flows prompted by disasters and environmental change. Investigating some of the existing practices is the object of the next section.

3. Responding to protection and assistance needs

Although there are no legal provisions under international law giving people a right to cross an international border in response to disasters or environmental change in their home countries (IOM, 2014c), in Central and North America, States have found solutions to allow affected foreigners to enter and stay (Nansen Initiative, 2015c). The normative and policy solutions in this region are some of the most advanced in the world. States have employed a number of measures for admission, stay and assistance, many of which are included in the Guide to Effective Practices for RCM Member Countries (RCM, 2016a), adopted in November 2016.

In Central and North America, States usually rely on domestic immigration law and policy to manage the admission and stay of persons affected by disasters. The approach is to either use regular migration categories or to invoke provisions for exceptional migration categories (Cantor, 2015a). Canada, for instance, has used regular migration categories in light of serious disasters abroad and adopted several measures applicable to cases where individuals have self-identified themselves as 'directly and significantly affected'. One of such measures is to expedite applications for sponsorship or permanent residence under the Family Class (Cantor, 2016). In other cases, free movement agreements are applied to facilitate mobility in cases of sudden-onset disasters. They could be multilateral, such as the 1997 CA-4 free movement accord that allows for entry without a passport or visa between El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua, or bilateral such as Costa Rica's agreements with almost all States in the region, which allow entry without a visa (Cantor, 2015a).

Hurricane Otto landed in Panama, Costa Rica and Nicaragua on 24 November 2016 displacing 15,000 people. Costa Rican authorities evacuated 5,500 people from the Caribbean communities in the north of the country, while in Nicaragua more than 10,000 people were evacuated from the southern coastal communities. More than 150 Nicaraguans crossed the border to Costa Rica to seek humanitarian protection and assistance in anticipation of Otto's approach. Humanitarian aid was coordinated between the two governments along the border and the affected people received food, shelter and medical assistance from the Costa Rican authorities.

Source: Méndez, 2016.

Measures in using exceptional migration categories include suspending the deportation of disaster-affected foreigners and granting visas on humanitarian grounds. In Mexico, for example, qualifying for the humanitarian visa requires that the person's life is in danger owing to a disaster or that they are a victim of a disaster. The visa is applicable in cases of distant relatives overseas and a Mexican resident has to solicit it (Cantor, 2016). Another noteworthy example is in the context of extraregional mobility. Haitians have been benefiting from Brazil's advanced immigration law, allowing them entry and stay on humanitarian grounds, with over 48,361 humanitarian visas granted to Haitians since 2012, following the 2010 earthquake (IOM, 2017b).

Regarding measures in non-return cases, the United States legislation, for example, provides for TPS as an exceptional migratory category for foreigners affected by a disaster in their country of origin and already on the territory of the United States. This measure, although currently being re-examined, was enacted for several major disasters, such as the regional Hurricane Mitch in 1998, and the earthquakes in Haiti, 2010 and Nepal, 2015 (Cantor, 2016). Caribbean countries, including the Bahamas, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica and the Turks and Caicos Islands, also had announced non-return policies for Haitians already on their territories (Nansen Initiative, 2015c).



In Honduras, young victims of Hurricane Mitch wait for IOM relocation assistance. A series of temporary shelters have been set up to house those who have lost their homes. © IOM 1998 (Photo: Charles Porcel)

Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria wreaked havoc across Central and North America between August and September 2017. Harvey brought massive flooding, Irma deadly storm surges, and Maria catastrophic high winds. Only in the United States, the total damage was estimated around USD 365 billion. Harvey displaced more than a million people and damaged some 200,000 houses in the United States. Irma damaged 90 per cent of the buildings on Barbuda, leaving 60 per cent of the population homeless. The Government evacuated 300 citizens to Antigua. In Florida, officials ordered 6.5 million people to evacuate, with 77,000 people in 450 shelters. In light of Maria weakening a dam, United States authorities evacuated 70,000 people, with some 15,000 people being into government shelters. In Dominica, at least 459 people were displaced due to Maria's effects.

Source: Amadeo, 2018; IOM, 2017d.

The most widely used measure in Central and North America, is, however, the broad discretion which immigration officials can exercise in exceptional humanitarian circumstances that fall outside regular categories. This is common in Canada, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Guatemala (Cantor, 2015a). The United States also uses Temporary Relief Measures to encourage officials to use their discretion to facilitate the rapid resolve of applications under regular migration categories, through for example, expedited processing and fee waivers (Nansen Initiative, 2015c).

On the other hand, State practice and policy regarding protection and assistance of persons moving in the context of environmental change is limited in Central and North America. Missing data and knowledge on such movements, as explained above, and also the complex links between the adverse effects of climate change, and migration and displacement, might render protection and assistance needs in these cases less evident.

There are, nevertheless, numerous cases of internal planned relocation practices in light of slow-onset processes in Central and North America. For example, in the case of the community of Boca de Cachón in the Dominican Republic in 2014, which had been facing a continuous rise of the level of Lake Enriquillo since 2004, the Government had no other option but to relocate the community in order to protect them (Ulate and Lathrop, 2016). As a measure of last resort, planned relocation can indeed be used as a mean to reduce disaster risks

or adapt to climate change, but it still carries risks for those having to move, including the disruption of livelihoods and loss of socioeconomic networks and cultural heritage, making this practice highly contested (Georgetown University, UNHCR and IOM, 2017).

The policies and practices described here, while very encouraging, are nevertheless the exception rather than the rule, when it comes to ensuring safe, orderly and regular movements in the context of disasters and environmental change. Besides developing new instruments, harmonization of existing ones at the regional level could be enhanced, as well as integration of human mobility concerns in relevant disaster risk reduction, climate action and development policies. The next section will go through some of the main regional fora where advances could be made and also through some of the existing policies that could be better employed.

4. Regional fora and policies

There are regional and subregional fora in Central and North America that actively seek ways to address the risks and drivers of migration and displacement in the context of disasters and environmental change, as well as the protection and assistance needs of individuals in such situations. In these fora, policies, agreements and declarations proposing measures for strengthening protection and assistance, as well as for managing displacement risks have been developed.

Key regional fora

- Cartagena +30
- Central American Integration System (SICA)
- Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC)
- Coordination Centre for the Prevention of Natural Disasters in Central America (CEPRENAC) – part of SICA
- Regional Conference on Migration (RCM)
- South American Conference on Migration (SACM)
- Caribbean Migration Consultations (CMC)
- International Humanitarian Assistance Mechanism (MIAH)
- Organization for American States (OAS)
- Union for South American Nations (UNASUR)

The Central American Integration System (SICA) is the economic and political organization of States in Central America and has other observers, including Mexico and the United States. The SICA has developed the 2010 Central American Regional Strategy on Climate Change (RSCC), which recognizes that climate change can lead to population movements and, as a result, aims to develop national strategies to address these movements.

One of the SICA specialized institutions is the Coordination Centre for the Prevention of Natural Disasters in Central America (CEPREDENAC), with the status of a regional intergovernmental organization. CEPREDENAC has developed the 2014–2019 Regional Plan for Disaster Risk Reduction (PRRD) to implement the 2010 SICA Central American Policy on Comprehensive Disaster Risk Management (PCGIR), the only one of its kind in the subregion. The PRRD includes, among others, activities to promote mechanisms for migrants' protection in cases of disasters.

Furthermore, the 2001 Central American Regional Mechanism for Mutual Assistance and Coordination (MecReg) is a system and an instrument designed to respond quickly to an emergency or a disaster occurring in an affected country that requires assistance of other countries, in line with the PCGIR. The MecReg has been revised several times and is implemented through the close work of the six national Coordination Centres for Humanitarian Assistance and the Foreign Ministries of CEPREDENAC Member Countries.

Another relevant forum is RCM. The RCM brings together representatives of States, international organizations and non-governmental organizations to address migration in a consultative, informal and non-standard-setting environment. The issue of migration and displacement in the context of disasters came up on RCM's agenda several times, including after Hurricane Mitch in 1998, and more recently in 2015 and in 2016 to develop and adopt the Guide to Effective Practices for RCM Member Countries (RCM, 2016a).

Key regional policies

- 2016 Guide to Effective Practices for Regional Conference on Migration (RCM) Member Countries: protection for persons moving across borders in the context of disasters
- 2015 International Humanitarian Assistance Mechanism (MIAH)
- 2014–2019 Regional Plan for Disaster Risk Reduction (PRRD)
- 2014 Brazil Declaration and Plan of Action
- 2010 Central American Regional Strategy on Climate Change (RSCC)
- 2010 Central American Policy on Comprehensive Disaster Risk Management (PCGIR)
- 2001 Central American Regional Mechanism for Mutual Assistance and Coordination (MecReg)
- 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees

The RCM Guide is a unique policy undertaking, addressing specifically the admission, stay and assistance of persons moving across borders in the context of disasters (Kálin and Cantor, 2017). As a non-binding instrument, the

RCM Guide provides recommendations of measures that States can take to address the needs of disaster-displaced persons by using already existing law, policies and practices. The RCM Guide has been disseminated and rolled-out through capacity-building for representatives of RCM Member Countries (IOM, 2017f).

As human mobility and environmental phenomena are not geographically confined, policies and practices are influenced by and expanding across the Americas region at large. A significant number of other regional and subregional fora in the Americas have taken an interest in addressing migration and displacement in the context of disasters and environmental change from various angles (IOM, 2017g; ECLAC et al., 2015).

Notably, the South American Conference on Migration (SACM) (2017), as well as the Caribbean Migration Consultations (CMC) (2017) are taking a similar approach to the RCM, having held initial discussions on the topic. In addition, both the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) and International Humanitarian Assistance Mechanism (MIAH) – formed of States across Latin America and the Caribbean – contributed to the Nansen Initiative for disaster-induced cross-border displacement and its Protection Agenda (Nansen Initiative, 2015a) and included the topic in respective recent plans of action (Nansen Initiative, 2015c). The Organization for American States (OAS) (2017) and the Union for South American Nations (UNASUR) (UNASUR, 2015) have also seized themselves of the matter, having held discussions on potential solutions.

Finally and more broadly, pursuant to the regional 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, grounds on which refugee status can be granted include the “serious disruption of public order”, which can be applied in cross-border disaster-displacement situations. For example, following the 2010 Haiti earthquake, the Declaration's broader refugee definition was invoked by Ecuador and Mexico to admit affected Haitians on their territories (PDD, 2018). However, during the Cartagena +30 meeting in 2014, commemorating the Declaration's thirtieth anniversary, there was no agreement to expand the scope of its application to consider disaster displacement (ibid.). The 2014 Brazil Declaration and Plan of Action (Cartagena +30, 2014) adopted at this meeting recognized, nevertheless the phenomenon and called for more knowledge to be generated.

The increased attention given to migration and displacement in the context of disasters and environmental change through these fora and policies in Central and North America, and also the Americas region at large, is encouraging. Much still remains to be accomplished though, if we are to see safe, orderly

and regular migration in the context of disasters and environmental change. Some examples of main pathways forward are recommended in the next and final section.

5. Way forward

Looking to the future, there are several ways in which the Central and North American countries can further advance on addressing migration and displacement in the context of disasters and environmental change. A key pathway is to continue to enhance regional cooperation and dialogue. Possible actions would be to raise the issue of migration and displacement in RCM meetings when a disaster directly or indirectly affects an RCM Member Country (RCM, 2016a), as well as in other regional consultative processes. Discussions could focus on exchanging effective practices of implementing humanitarian measures in cases of cross-border displacement, as well as national or regional measures to reduce the risk of displacement.

Another avenue to explore would be developing policies for cases of migration and displacement in the context of environmental change. Ways to promote migration as an adaptation strategy in the face of slow-onset events and processes, including those associated with the adverse effects of climate change, could be discussed in the suggested RCM meetings above. States could also go further and build on existing regional migration agreements to promote migration as an adaptation measure, and implement displacement preventing measures when a tipping point is reached. Mechanisms could include national quotas or seasonal workers programmes and building capacity of potential migrants (Kálin and Cantor, 2017).

States in the region could also consider more long-term measures, as well as durable solutions for the protection and assistance of disaster-displaced and environmental migrants as the ultimate goal of displacement management and in line with the RCM Guide (RCM, 2016). Facilitating and developing return programmes, and providing the possibility to apply for regular migration categories are potential options. Local integration or sustainable relocation with a human rights-based approach could also ensure persons have their protection and assistance needs met (Ionesco, Mokhnacheva and Gemenne, 2017). Other possible efforts are identifying and addressing the drivers of displacement, strengthening coping capacities and strategies, and promoting self-reliance approaches (IOM, 2016a).

Central and North American countries should also consider implementing and integrating existing international and regional agreements and strategies within their domestic frameworks. International policies, such as the Paris Climate Agreement, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the New Urban Agenda, the Agenda for Humanity, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, to name a few, if fully implemented, could significantly strengthen the protection and assistance for persons moving in the context of disasters and environmental change. In the same way, the regional policies mentioned in the previous section could bring an important advantage in tackling the issue at hand if fully integrated within relevant national plans and strategies.

Finally, the process leading to the adoption of a global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration offers a unique opportunity to bring the environmental and climate factors in the migration management policy. If States choose to design an implementation and monitoring mechanism for the compact at the regional level, disaster displacement and environmental migration will stand a better chance to be addressed. Most of these movements happen among countries within a region, and thus experiences of governments with such movements are often similar. Regional organizations are also often more coherent in terms of interests of Member States and thus, their agendas more straightforward to set (PDD, 2018).



Pre-positioning of emergency kits in strategic points of the border as part of IOM's Emergency Assistance Programme in Panama.
© IOM 2006 (Photo: Jean-Philippe Antolin)

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Cartagena +30

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About the author



Ms Ileana-Sînziana Pușcaș
International Organization for Migration (IOM)¹

Sînziana is a Research Officer in the Migration, Environment and Climate Change Division at the International Organization for Migration (IOM). She is supporting the work related to the implementation of the State-led Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD) – the follow-up to the Nansen Initiative – including carrying out research for policy development and assisting in contributions to policy processes, with a focus on human rights and humanitarian action. Prior to joining IOM, Sînziana worked for the PDD based at the United Nations Office for Project Services in Geneva, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs’ evaluation team in New York and other establishments in the United Kingdom, Romania and France. A Romanian national, Sînziana has a Bachelor in Political Science from the University of Essex, United Kingdom and University of Konstanz, Germany, and graduated with a Masters in Human Rights and Humanitarian Action from Sciences Po Paris, France.

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To discuss any aspect of the *Migration, Environment and Climate Change: Policy Brief Series*, or to submit an article, please contact:

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Website

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Note: This paper has been initially prepared as a background note for the Regional Conference on Migration (RCM) capacity-building workshop on disaster displacement, migration and climate change organized by the RCM Technical Secretariat, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD), which took place in San José, Costa Rica on 8–9 August 2017. The current policy brief draws on some of the recommendations that came out of the meeting. RCM Member Countries are Belize, Canada, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama and the United States. RCM Observer countries are Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, Jamaica and Peru. More at www.environmentalmigration.iom.int/rcm-capacity-building-workshop-displacement-context-disasters-and-climate-change



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