

## Foreword: Regional solidarity and commitment to protection in Latin America and the Caribbean

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**At a time when over 65 million people are forcibly displaced worldwide, Latin America and the Caribbean offer examples of good practices from a region which continues to uphold a long-standing commitment to protect those in need.**

As we observe the global picture of both protracted and newly developing displacement situations, Latin America and the Caribbean may look like a haven of relative safety, spared from recent massive displacements caused by persecution, conflict and violence. Regrettably, and as I personally witnessed in recent visits to the region, this is not the case.

In Northern Central America (NCA)<sup>1</sup>, transnational organised criminal gangs are perpetrating appalling levels of violence; in Venezuela, its population is affected by social and political unrest and severe limitations in access to basic services; and in some areas of Colombia, certain armed groups continue to operate with impunity, despite the recent peace agreement. These circumstances are driving people to relocate within their country or to undertake perilous journeys towards neighbouring countries and beyond, often resorting to the services of unscrupulous smugglers as they move in search of safety. Asylum seekers from Haiti and Cuba, and an increasing number of refugees arriving from outside the region, including from countries in Asia and Africa, complete this picture.

The number of asylum applications made in the Latin American and Caribbean region is accelerating, and almost 100,000 people are currently awaiting a decision on their asylum claim. This has been a consistent trend in recent years, placing a strain on asylum systems and adding urgency to the search for appropriate protection and solutions responses.

Aside from the personal tragedies that many have experienced, people on the move face a number of challenges. These relate primarily to: the adequate

identification of their protection needs; access to information on secure relocation alternatives and asylum procedures; access to adequate physical protection in shelters and other safe spaces; effective access to asylum or other forms of complementary protection; access to registration; enjoyment of freedom of movement and of alternatives to detention; and issues related to documentation.

### Continuing a tradition of protection

A profound commitment to providing protection to those fleeing in search of safety is embedded in the values of Latin America and the Caribbean. There is a strong and great tradition of openness, solidarity and humanitarianism. History pays witness to



UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi visits the La 72 'Home and Refuge for Migrant People' shelter, Mexico, 2017. [www.la72.org](http://www.la72.org)

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many examples in this regard, including towards refugees fleeing the Spanish Civil War and Portuguese dictatorships of the 1930s, the Jewish community escaping war and genocide in Europe before and during World War II, Palestinian refugees, those fleeing persecution under repressive governments in South America in the 1970s, and those affected by civil wars in Central America in the 1980s.

This tradition continues to this day.

Concerted efforts are being made to strengthen protection response through improvements to asylum systems throughout the region by reinforcing child protection mechanisms, by fostering gender-sensitive protection interventions and by a strong focus on diversity. The States of Latin America and the Caribbean have also committed to eradicating statelessness by 2024 by establishing fair and efficient procedures for statelessness status determination, adopting internal rules to guarantee the rights of stateless persons and providing adequate solutions to those who do not have a nationality. The region has also been a laboratory for innovative solutions, such as the humanitarian visas granted to

Syrian refugees, the adoption of alternative protection schemes through regional cooperation agreements (such as MERCOSUR and UNASUR visas) and the exploration of the possibility to relocate refugees using protection-sensitive migratory frameworks.

The region has also made unprecedented strides on responsibility sharing and cooperation mechanisms, drawing on its strong tradition of solidarity. Almost all States in the region have committed to a comprehensive approach to mixed migratory movements

and forced displacement through the adoption of the Brazil Declaration and Plan of Action in 2014. This ambitious plan aims to foster access to justice and asylum, strengthen protection, and devise solutions to the plight of all those in need, and will be reviewed in late 2017. This is an important model of honest, transparent and dedicated regional cooperation for the world.

The States of Latin America and the Caribbean are also collectively engaged in responding to the worrying situation in NCA, through a series of coordinated measures in line with the 2016 San José Action Statement. They are also currently establishing a Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (CRPSF) that will deepen their interventions and make them more sustainable, addressing the root causes of displacement in NCA and strengthening protection and solutions for those affected. So far, Honduras, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Mexico, Panama and El Salvador have joined the CRPSF initiative. The CRPSF will contribute to the preparation of the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees, working with UNHCR to respond to the call made in the 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants for enhanced, comprehensive and predictable responses to large-scale displacement.

Addressing forced displacement in the Latin America and Caribbean region is a highly complex challenge, to which States have responded with principled and innovative approaches that can help inform broader responses globally. The articles in this issue will help provide insights into the evolving situation there, and offer insights into good practices that can help strengthen protection and intensify progress towards solutions within the region and beyond.

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1. Northern Central American countries comprise El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras.



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