

This Quarterly Mixed Migration Update (QMMU) covers the Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region. The core countries of focus for this region are the countries currently affected by the Venezuelan crisis, including Colombia, Brazil, Peru, and Ecuador, in addition to the Caribbean islands. Concerning northern movements to the United States, this QMMU covers Mexico and Central American countries. Depending on the quarterly trends and migration-related updates, more attention may be given to some of the countries over the rest.

The QMMUs offer a quarterly update on new trends and dynamics related to mixed migration and relevant policy developments in the region. These updates are based on a compilation of a wide range of secondary (data) sources, brought together within a regional framework and applying a mixed migration analytical lens. Similar QMMUs are available for all MMC regions.

The Mixed Migration Centre is a global network consisting of six regional hubs and a central unit in Geneva engaged in data collection, research, analysis, and policy development on mixed migration. For more information on the MMC, the QMMUs from other regions and contact details of regional MMC teams, visit mixedmigration.org and follow us at [@Mixed_Migration](https://twitter.com/Mixed_Migration)

MMC's understanding of mixed migration

"Mixed migration" refers to cross-border movements of people, including refugees fleeing persecution and conflict, victims of trafficking, and people seeking better lives and opportunities. Motivated to move by a multiplicity of factors, people in mixed flows have a range of legal statuses as well as a variety of vulnerabilities. Although entitled to protection under international human rights law, they are exposed to multiple rights violations along their journey. Those in mixed migration flows travel along similar routes, using similar means of travel - often travelling irregularly, and wholly, or partially, assisted by migrant smugglers.

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Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: Latin America and the Caribbean

Quarter 4 - 2020

Key Updates

- **In October, Colombian authorities pushed 5,000 Venezuelans back into Venezuelan territory at the Colombia-Venezuela border.** The increased inflow of refugees and migrants following the reactivation of economic activities in Colombia led the Government to increase controls at the border, specifically at 17 irregular border crossings – commonly known as “trochas”.
- **Across the region, criminalization of irregular border crossings and of failure to adhere to COVID-19-related travel requirements is being embraced by countries of transit and destination** of mixed migration movements. As a response to the latest migrant caravans, Guatemala implemented decisions to criminalize irregular border crossings, to ensure controlled and regular entry. Mexico announced that people on the move taking part in the migrant caravan must comply with COVID-19 regulations upon entry or face arrest and prosecution.
- **Hurricanes ETA and IOTA impacted over 9 million people in the region and triggered migration flows out of Honduras.** 3.9 million Hondurans were affected by the hurricanes and 15,000 were left without shelter. The impact of the storms was the main driver behind the migrant caravan that departed from the Honduran city of San Pedro Sula on December 1st, heading towards North America.
- **Migrant caravans from Central towards North America resumed in October.** In the last quarter of 2020, a total of three migrant caravans departed from San Pedro Sula, Honduras, with the aim of reaching the U.S., but were dissolved at the border between Honduras and Guatemala.
- **The proposals for immigration reform made by the U.S. president elect during his campaign created strong expectations for change,** as they would mark a stark departure from the policies enacted by the previous U.S. administration. The legacy of the outgoing government included end of year policy changes to the U.S. asylum process, making it more difficult for asylum seekers to apply for and receive protection.
- On December 4th, **a boat with a seating capacity of 8 passengers carrying 41 Venezuelans bound to Trinidad and Tobago sank off the coast of Güiría, Venezuela.** So far, only 33 bodies have been recovered.
- **Colombia’s president announced in mid-December that irregular migrants in the country would not be eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine.** After widespread criticism, the government explained the decision was taken to prevent more irregular border crossings.

Regional Overview*



The Caribbean



*Information on the map relates to selected updates and does not represent all mixed migration flows within and out of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Mixed Migration Regional Updates

Venezuelan mixed migration flows

As of November 5th, the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants – R4V – reported that the number of Venezuelans that had left their country of origin had surpassed [5.4 million](#). Colombia continues to lead the list of host countries, with more than 1.7 million Venezuelans who settled in its territory, followed by Perú and Chile. The [Caribbean region](#) hosts 194,669 Venezuelans, according to the latest available data, and the number was expected to increase to 195,500 [by December 2020](#).

In late October, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFCR), in its first [information bulletin for the Americas](#), reported new inflows of Venezuelans in the region, including the arrival of more than 300 Venezuelans in Panamá in one week.

At the same time, R4V reported the arrival of 54,000 Venezuelans in Ecuador and 213,700 in Perú during the last week of October. This is however due to a [change in the methodology](#) used by the governments of both countries to report population data, as they started including estimates of Venezuelans crossing borders irregularly. During the same timeframe, 5,147 Venezuelans were reported to have [entered Chile through informal pathways](#). Additionally, 500 Venezuelans were reported homeless and living on the streets at the Chilean border. At the Colchane crossing point, officials announced that approximately 100 people on the move were crossing daily, of which 30 percent were children. Although Bolivia has also reported a surge in Venezuelans entering the country, the total amount is unknown.

In mid-December, a ship carrying more than 40 Venezuelans, on its way to Trinidad and Tobago, sank and everyone on board [drowned or is currently missing](#). [33 bodies have been recovered](#), 2 of them minors.

A recent study published by [Arcane Research](#) – a cryptocurrency analysis firm – revealed that Venezuelan refugees and migrants are using cryptocurrencies as an alternative to sending and receiving remittances: “Venezuela accounts for 42% of the Latin American P2P volume”. The platforms most used by Venezuelans are [LocalBitcoins](#) and [Valiu](#); there is also a [state-run platform](#). [OAS](#) recently reported that, by 2021, Venezuelans leaving their country could reach 7 million.

Movements towards South America

With most countries resuming economic activities and easing COVID-related restrictions during the last trimester of 2020, many Venezuelans have decided to continue or commence their migration journey towards other countries in the region, despite closed borders. Some South American countries, such as Colombia, Chile, and Ecuador, approved long-debated immigration laws or amended existing ones. During this same interval, Colombia, Chile, and Peru opened new regularization programs for migrants. In light of the COVID-19 vaccine, there has been concern over whether or not migrants will be included as priority groups in the national vaccination plans.

Colombia

Migration flows

According to immigration authorities, about 80 percent of Venezuelan refugees or migrants who had returned home due to the pandemic – approximately 140,000 between March and September – would later re-enter Colombia, accompanied by one or two family members.

In mid-October, [around 600 Venezuelans](#) were entering Colombia daily through irregular pathways, and many got stranded in Pamplona, a municipality in the Santander North department. At the end of October, approximately [5,000 Venezuelans had been expelled](#) from Colombia after they entered the country irregularly, and inflows decreased to an estimated 350 people per day: 300 through Norte de Santander and 50 through La Guajira and Arauca, respectively. Although land borders between Colombia and Venezuela were set to open [on November 1st](#), Colombia's immigration authority initially [extended the border closure](#) until December 1st and then until [January 16th, 2021](#).

The impact of the Colombian armed conflict for Venezuelan refugees and migrants became more visible. At the end of November, the National Liberation Army (ELN, for its Spanish acronym) was responsible for the [internal displacement](#) of 278 people from Argelia, Cauca – about 85 families – of which most were Venezuelan refugees and migrants. A [pamphlet was distributed](#) door to door and throughout the village of El Plateado, warning people who had lived there for less than a month to move out. The situation forced both Colombians and Venezuelans to move to urban areas. Additionally, on November 26th, an [early warning](#) from the Office of the Ombudsman declared people on the move, among other vulnerable populations, at risk of attack by non-state armed groups and FARC dissident factions in the municipality of Tibú, located in the Santander North department, near the Venezuelan border.

At the beginning of December, a network dedicated to recruiting migrant women and girls for sexual exploitation was captured. With them, [15 Venezuelan women](#) – included 4 girls – were rescued in Yopal, Casanare. In the last quarter of 2020, [Colombia's Observatory on Human Trafficking](#) revealed 31 cases of human trafficking. Data disaggregated by nationality is only available for the entire year: in 2020, out of 104 detected cases of human trafficking, 40 percent of the victims were Venezuelan nationals.

In mid-December, [18 buses](#) carrying [600 Venezuelans](#) were stopped on their way to Barrancabermeja, Colombia, from Cúcuta. Their intended final destination was Ecuador, but Colombia's National Police sent them back to Cúcuta and later repatriated them to Venezuela – the justification for their forced return being the border closures between Ecuador and Colombia, which would not have allowed them to continue their journey.

Policy updates

In mid-October, the Government announced a [new regularization round](#) for Venezuelans who entered the country before August 31st, 2020 and had their passport stamped. As a result, Venezuelans can apply for a Special Stay Permit (PEP, for its Spanish acronym) between October 15th, 2020, and February 15th, 2021.

On October 27th, the Senate, during its second session of deliberation, approved the Immigration Draft Bill– after 27 [amendments](#) were proposed by relevant stakeholders such as public officials, organizations and subject-matter experts. Further discussion is still pending before final approval.

At the beginning of November, the national government launched a [pilot program](#), called ProMiLab, to regularize the immigration status of 100 Venezuelan entrepreneurs in the Santander North department.

Needs assessment

According to the [fifth round of needs assessment](#) conducted by the Mixed Migration Flows Interagency Group (GIFMM) carried out with people on the move on October 19th – 24th in different cities of the country, 85 percent of the interviewees did not have the required documentation and only 4 percent mentioned having a PEP. Most respondents were traveling on foot (52 percent) and public transportation (21 percent), and 41 percent of them were living on the street at the time of the interview. Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, in March 2020, 8 percent of participants in the assessment were having just 1 meal per day, while in October this percentage rose to 35 percent. The needs assessment also interviewed Venezuelans heading back to their country of origin, of which 52 percent reported they were returning home because of loss of income and family reunification, respectively.

COVID-19 response

On December 21st, the Colombian Government announced that irregular migrants will [not be administered the COVID-19 vaccine](#) – an announcement that caused outrage among human rights organizations, the academia, and health experts. This means that approximately 765,000 Venezuelans will be excluded from the government's COVID-19 vaccination program. Colombia was the only country to [explicitly exclude irregular migrants](#) from its vaccination plan, although the Director of the Colombian immigration authority stated that the exclusion "[has nothing to do with nationality but with order](#)".

Ecuador

The Refugee and Migrant Working Group (GTRM for its Spanish acronym) reported that, in November, between [15 and 20 Venezuelans were leaving Ecuador](#) towards Colombia daily, while 300 Venezuelans were entering Ecuador through the northeastern border, mainly aiming to continue their journey toward Perú.

The same report mentions the identification of 235 separated and unaccompanied children and the daily arrival of about 300 Venezuelans at Ecuador's northeastern border, mainly aiming to continue their journey toward Perú.

On December 3rd, 2020, amendments to the Organic Law on Human Mobility were debated and approved by the Parliament. Amendments to the law include the introduction of new [grounds for deportation](#), including disorderly misconduct in public places and disturbing the peace, and irregular entry into the country. People on the move would [not be allowed](#) to enter the country for three years after their deportation. The law is pending review and approval from the President.

Perú

A [R4V situation report](#) from November reported between 250 and 300 Venezuelans entering Peru daily through the northern border of Ecuador. According to the [Regional Governor of Tumbes](#), by December, approximately 200 Venezuelans were entering daily.

In mid-October, the Government issued a special decree to [regularize](#) within 180 days [all foreign nationals](#) that currently reside in the country – regardless of immigration status, with the exception of those with past criminal convictions. According to a media outlet, this is the first measure in the country that allows Venezuelans with an irregular immigration status to regularize their situation. According to the [Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan 2021](#), Perú was expected to host a total of 1.05 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants by the end of December 2020.

Chile

In October, the media reported the capture of 3 [migrant smugglers](#) in the Arica region, at the border between Peru and Chile. The smugglers were caught accompanying 10 people on the move – including one pregnant woman and 2 children – who entered the country irregularly.

In December, the Migration Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) 2020 defined Chile's approach to refugees' and migrants' integration as "[equality on paper](#) [...] [which] means that immigrants do not enjoy equal opportunities [...] it goes only halfway towards providing immigrants with basic rights and a secure future".

On December 3rd, Congress [fast-tracked the new Immigration Law](#), which was approved [after 8 years of debate](#). Although it promotes a regularization program, it only applies to people who entered the country regularly with a tourist visa prior to March 18th, 2020, but did not renew it. The Minister of the Interior announced that only [5,000 people were eligible](#) to be considered for regularization. This law also creates 13 [new visa categories](#), such as work, family reunification, temporary work and a humanitarian visa. Furthermore, the children of irregular migrants born in the country will not become Chilean citizens automatically, but will be eligible to apply for citizenship. The [Immigration Law was criticized](#) by NGOs, human rights activists, and migration experts as some provisions are considered [incompatible with the country's constitution and international law](#).

Argentina

A study conducted by the National University of Río Negro revealed that [migrants represent 11 percent of COVID-19-related deaths](#) in the country. Migrants will be among the [priority groups for the COVID-19 vaccine](#), according to the national vaccination plan announced in late-December.

Uruguay

At the end of December, a media outlet reported increased arrivals of refugees and migrants to the country, specifically in [Rivera](#). In the city's migrant shelters, there were a total of 28 migrants – 23 Cuban nationals and 5 Venezuelans.

Movements towards Caribbean countries

Trinidad and Tobago

The flow of Venezuelans trying to reach the neighboring Caribbean nation continues, in parallel with their deportation to their country of origin, despite border closures and the ongoing crisis in Venezuela.

At the end of October, the police apprehended [21 Venezuelans](#) who entered the country irregularly – of which 4 were children. In mid-November, [despite habeas corpus petitions](#), Trinidad & Tobago continued deportation proceedings for Venezuelans, including [16 children](#). The country's Attorney General later [challenged](#) this decision. At the end of November, the Organization of American States (OAS) [condemned the deportation](#) of 160 Venezuelans from Trinidad & Tobago. During the same month, a High Court judge in the country ordered the [release of Venezuelan children](#) from migrant detention centers. On December 17th, 2020, a group of at least [60 Venezuelans were deported](#) from Trinidad and Tobago. On December 31st, nine out of the 16 children were released to their fathers, but their [mothers remained in detention](#).

At the beginning of December, the country's Prime Minister stated that, despite the ongoing crisis in Venezuela, he would not tolerate the irregular entry of Venezuelans and, as a result, they would be [deported back](#) to their country upon detection. Currently, the Immigration Act is being revised. At the end of December, the legal situation of [16,523 Venezuelans](#) registered in the country became uncertain, as the special stay permit granting them the right to work on the island expired on December 31st.

Mixed migration flows in Central America

In the last quarter of 2020, migrant caravans from Central America resumed as three of them departed from San Pedro Sula, Honduras, after the Northern Triangle countries reopened land borders. In reaction to this, the Guatemalan and Mexican governments decided to criminalize irregular entries and agreed that a coordinated plan to respond to future migrant caravans is necessary. In addition to social and political unrest, economic hardship and gang violence – main drivers behind mixed migration movements in the region – migration experts predict climate to become an additional driver for migration flows in the region.

Costa Rica

In mid-November, the Costa Rican government announced the creation of a [new complementary protection status](#) for people on the move from Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela – whose asylum application had been initially denied and who do not have a previous [criminal track record](#). This new permit is valid for two years with the possibility of renewal and allows them to work in the country. According to UNHCR, there were approximately [81,000 Nicaraguans](#) in Costa Rica, as of October 2020, seeking international protection

Northern Triangle countries

On September 31st, a [migrant caravan of more than 3,500 Hondurans](#) – organized through [WhatsApp and Facebook](#) – departed San Pedro Sula heading towards the U.S., two weeks after Guatemala re-opened

its borders that had been closed for months due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Days before the caravan was set to depart, [a state of exception was declared](#) in those Guatemalan municipalities along the border with Honduras, and Hondurans who entered Guatemala irregularly could face up to three years in prison. The Mexican government, on its part, [militarized its border](#). The migrant caravan, however, was disbanded at the Guatemalan southern border and never reached Mexican territory. The media reported [4 deaths](#) among the people participating in the migrant caravan, at different locations en route to the U.S. – including Guatemala, the town of Corinto, and in the Sonora desert. 4 Hondurans were also reported missing, [after suddenly losing contact with family members](#). As of mid-October, the Guatemalan Migration Institute reported that 30 Hondurans, who were part of the caravan, had [applied for asylum](#) in the country. At the end of October, the governments of Guatemala and Honduras started to draft a plan to attend and respond to future migrant caravans.

On December 10th, a migrant caravan of [100 Hondurans](#) – dubbed “[End of Year Caravan 2020](#)” – departed San Pedro Sula, Honduras, headed towards the U.S. According to a media outlet, the main driver leading this group to migrate were [climate-related events](#) (the impact of hurricanes ETA and IOTA), in addition to social unrest. The [Permanent Contingency Commission of Honduras](#) (COPECO, for its Spanish acronym) reported that approximately 3.9 million Hondurans were affected by the two hurricanes, leaving 154,000 people without shelter. Honduran [authorities dissolved](#) the migrant caravan before it could reach Guatemala. For those who tried to enter irregularly into the country, at least [67 Hondurans](#) – of which 21 were children – were apprehended and deported back to their country by Guatemalan authorities. The few people who did reach Guatemala were [stranded at the border between Guatemala and Mexico for two weeks](#), due to enforced border restrictions and a lack of personnel at Talisman, Chiapas, and El Carmen border crossings between the two countries.

Mixed migration flows in Mexico

Migration flows

Between the end of October and the beginning of November, the Secretary of Public Security in the state of Veracruz discovered 372 [refugees and migrants in cargo trucks](#), mostly from Central American countries - Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua. Furthermore, the Mexican government revealed that almost 1,000 [refugees and migrants disappear](#) in the country every month – 30 people on the move disappear daily.

While the arrival of refugees and migrants into the country continues, however, the Government allocated no budget for the response to mixed migration flows for 2021, according to the [former Commissioner](#) of the National Institute of Migration.

Policy updates

On December 3rd, Mexico's Chamber of Deputies approved a reform of the Migration Law, aimed at ensuring a [regular and orderly migration](#) within the country. The reform favors the economic inclusion of migrants in Mexico and their contribution to the national economy. [Changes brought by this reform](#) include a prohibition of detaining migrant children and the obligation to provide alternative care services for unaccompanied children, instead of placing them in detention centres. The reform also includes provisions to grant migrant children temporary status and avoid their immediate repatriation.

Asylum seekers

The Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance (COMAR, for its Spanish acronym) disclosed that [13,758 asylum applications](#) were filed in the country in the last quarter of 2020, which corresponds to 33 percent of the applications filed this year. Hondurans, Venezuelans and Salvadorians are at the top of the list of the nationalities of those who were granted refugee status. Most asylum applications were filed in Tapachula, followed by Mexico City.

On December 2nd, UNHCR and a local civil society organization opened the [first shelter in Tapachula](#) targeted specifically at refugees and asylum seekers, with a capacity of 300 beds. The city already counted with two shelters receiving people on the move in general, regardless of their legal status.

The involuntary immobility of asylum seekers and migrants trying to reach the U.S. is causing increasing concerns in Mexico. In October, media outlets reported a [rise in protests](#) from people on the move stranded on the Mexican side of the U.S. southern border, asking the Mexican Government for better conditions – mainly access to electricity, water, and sanitation. A media outlet reported [between 600 and 800 asylum seekers in Matamoros](#) waiting for their asylum decision in the U.S., compared to the 1,500 of the previous month.

COVID-19 response

In October, Mexico's Secretary of Health announced its Attention Plan for the Migrant Population amid the COVID-19 pandemic. It also announced that, as of October 2020, 1,999 [people on the move in Mexico had been tested for COVID-19](#) – of which 574 tested positive. Officials also reported 35 migrant deaths due to COVID-19. Also in October, 23 people held in an immigration detention facility in Tapachula – mostly from Honduras and Guatemala – [tested positive for COVID-19](#), according to a human rights organization. These findings were however [contradicted by government officials](#). The organization also reported that this group of people on the move was transferred to another facility without upholding biosafety measures. In a recent report, civil society organizations noted that only two immigration detention facilities in Mexico – out of a total of 35 – conduct [temperature checks to detect COVID-19](#) infections.

Situation at the U.S. border

17 [deceased migrants](#) were found at the U.S. southwestern border, half of them in the San Miguel migrant corridor, between October and December. In 2020, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported [381 migrant deaths](#) at the U.S. border, while Mexican officials [recovered 53 migrant bodies](#) – from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Haiti, and Mexico.

The U.S. Senate approved in mid-November a bipartisan draft bill – [the Missing Persons and Unidentified Remains Act](#) - which will provide funding to public agencies and humanitarian organizations to process, report, and identify missing persons and unidentified remains and aims at [preventing further migrant deaths](#) by setting up 170 “rescue beacons” in border areas.

U.S. president elect Joe Biden promised during his campaign to speed up the processing of asylum applications presented by refugees and migrants stranded at the U.S. southern border and to end the MPP, among other reforms. It will be interesting to see whether the new administration will give signals of being serious about adopting a different approach to immigration during its first 100 days. Available information calls for caution, as the president elect also clarifies that such [changes cannot be made overnight](#) and will take time.

Apprehensions and detentions

In the last quarter of 2020, [216,701 refugees and migrants](#) were apprehended at different entry points on the U.S. border with Mexico, of which 7 percent were unaccompanied minors, 87 percent single adults, and 6 percent family units. 96 percent of these people were later expelled – to the last country of transit or their home country – under [Title 42 or based on public health-related concerns](#), while the remaining percentage was apprehended or denied entry under Title 8. Although the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) order to suspend entry to the U.S. through its land borders was temporary, it was repeatedly renewed during 2020, for the last time [in mid-October](#).

According to U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), between October and December, [60 percent of people on the move intercepted at the southwestern border were Mexicans](#), followed by Guatemalans (15 percent) and Honduras (12 percent). At the beginning of October, for instance, Border Patrol detained [83 irregular migrants](#) of Guatemalan and Mexican nationality in one incident, near the city of Laredo.

In October, 20,000 refugees and migrants were being held in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention centers and were reportedly spending [more time in detention – three times more](#) than last year’s average. The media also reported cases of transfer between detention centers which [increases the risk](#) of COVID-19 transmission. In mid-October, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was [ordered](#) to reduce the number of refugees and migrants in their centers by 38 percent. For the first time in history, the U.S. government appointed an [Ombudsman for Immigration Detention](#), after 21 migrant deaths while in ICE custody were reported in 2019. As of December, the media reported more than 8,415 confirmed cases of [migrants with COVID-19](#) in 99 ICE detention centers. At the end of December, hundreds of detained refugees and migrants went on a [hunger strike](#) asking for better living conditions.

Expulsions and deportations

In October, the U.S. Government confirmed that it is enforcing a [new – unwritten – policy](#) at the southwestern border, swiftly expelling people on the move into Mexico within two hours following their entry into U.S. territory. At the end of the month, a media outlet reported the expulsion of 14 migrants at the Arizona border by Border Patrol. It also mentioned that they were being [dropped off](#) in remote and unpopulated towns, such as Sasabe, which lack the necessary resources and capacity to attend to their needs. According to the local population, up to 150 refugees and migrants were dropped off daily. In addition, people on the move are being [expelled into Mexico](#). These actions are allegedly meant, among other things, at reducing the [recidivism rate](#), which is up to 37 percent from [7 percent in 2019](#).

There is also another [policy in the works](#) that would allow to deport foreigners with less than 2 years of living in the U.S. and who have not lodged an asylum claim in a U.S. court.

Children

About [1,000 unaccompanied children](#) were apprehended within a 6-day period, between November 18th and 23rd. According to CBP, the border crossing of unaccompanied minors is set to increase two-fold in the next 4 months. A [Court of Appeals](#) questioned, at the beginning of October, the U.S. government's decision not to allow migrant children to have access to counsel and to asylum procedures. Additionally, it forbade the Government to use hotel rooms to detain migrant children. On December 30th, a Federal Court Judge ratified that [migrant children cannot be held in detention centers](#).

Asylum seekers

In October, [2,000 asylum seekers](#) in Tijuana protested against the U.S. backlog in asylum decisions, asking the U.S. government to resume court hearings.

Between October and November, [4,380 asylum applications](#) were decided over in the U.S., of which 70 percent were denied; 29 percent were granted, and 1 percent of applicants was granted another type of relief. Asylum seekers from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico are reportedly the [least successful in receiving](#) protection.

The U.S. government announced in mid-October [new regulations](#) to limit access to asylum. The new provisions were set to be enforced on November 20th and allow judges to deny asylum without a previous hearing. Additionally, factors that would hinder chances of a positive outcome include not paying taxes and driving under the influence. Other recent changes implemented by the U.S. government included reducing the time to prepare the asylum case, from 1 year to [15 days](#). This implies that asylum seekers must hire an attorney, gather all the necessary requirements, and present their case within 15 days of lodging their application. Additionally, they will not be provided a list of [pro bono attorneys](#) or provided one in case they cannot afford one.

[2,780 people applied for immigration relief under the Migration Protection Protocols \(MPP\)](#) between October and December. Of these, approximately 35 percent were filed by Cuban nationals, 19 percent by Nicaraguans, 18 percent by Ecuadorians, followed by Venezuelans and Brazilians. According to a [research center at the University of Texas](#), since March 2020, asylum seekers from Central America are being directly expelled back into Mexico or deported to their home countries without even being included in the MPP, while asylum seekers from Cuba, Ecuador and Brazil are being enrolled into the program and sent back to Mexico to wait for their hearing. TRAC reported that less than 0.8 percent of asylum seekers had legal representation at the start of their asylum process.

On November 19th, the [Hurricane ETA Relief Act](#) was introduced, to grant Temporary Protection Status (TPS) to nationals of certain countries – Nicaragua, Honduras, and Guatemala – affected by the hurricanes. Finally, on December 29th, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) issued a press release, announcing that Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala had all started implementing the [Asylum Cooperation Agreements](#) (ACA) which they signed with the U.S. in September 2019. Under these agreements, third country nationals who lodge their asylum claim at the U.S. southwestern border may be transferred to one of the three Central American countries to seek international protection there. In December, DHS also announced a [change in its MPP protocol](#), where asylum seekers will be provided with legal representation and the information provided will be translated into their native language.

Return flows to Mexico and Central America

The COVID-19 pandemic has not stopped the deportation of people on the move from North America. According to Witness at the Border, a migrants rights organization, between October and November, ICE sanctioned 292 [deportation flights](#), primarily to Guatemala City (19 percent), San Pedro Sula (8 percent), San Salvador (11 percent), Mexico City and Guadalajara (9 percent respectively). Also, during the same timeframe, COMAR reported [34.257 deportations](#) from the U.S. – 91 percent were male and 93 percent adults.

Mexico also [resumed deportations to Honduras](#) by land as of October 19th and 5 flights per week have been landing in Honduras with deportees from Mexico.

Likewise, during the first week of October, Guatemalan immigration authorities [deported 1,495 Honduran nationals](#) – of which 39 were unaccompanied minors. According to Guatemalan government officials, 3,500 Hondurans who were part of the migrant caravan [returned to their country of origin](#), although facing some difficulties in re-entry.

Extra-regional mixed migration flows

The flow of extra-regional refugees and migrants trying to reach the U.S. continued during the last quarter of 2020, although [the proportion of people on the move from Asia and Africa seemed to decrease](#) compared to Caribbean nationals. Haitians, in particular, have been leaving their country in high numbers as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to negatively impact the economy of their country of origin. According to the UN, as of November, [4.4 million Haitians were in need of humanitarian assistance](#) – 39 percent of the total estimated population in the country.

These flows use different routes towards the U.S. In the case of those traveling by land through South and Central America, at the beginning of October a media outlet reported the [death of two migrants](#) – from Mauritania and Haiti - who entered irregularly into Panama through the Darien Gap between the 1st and 2nd of October. One of them died of COVID-19, according to Panamanian authorities. The following month, media outlets also reported the apprehension of 38 people on the move – most of them Haitian nationals – in Paso Canoas, at the border between [Costa Rica and Panama](#) as well as 16 people from Ghana at La Palma de Golfito, and 9 [Bangladeshi migrants](#) in the Chepo District (Panama).

According to a press release issued by the [Panamanian Ombudsman](#) in November, during September and October 1,016 refugees and migrants entered the country from Colombia and found themselves stranded near the border. Most of them were people on the move from Asian, African and Caribbean countries – including Haiti, India, Ecuador, Guinea, Pakistan, Angola, Sri Lanka, among others – all with the declared intention to continue with their migration journey towards the U.S.

As transit through Central America by land became more difficult during the COVID-19 pandemic, more Caribbean nationals seemed to opt for trying to reach the U.S. by sea. In mid-October, [36 people](#) from the Dominican Republic were intercepted at sea near Puerto Rico and deported, while an additional 43 Dominican Republic nationals were deported to their country of origin from the U.S. During the same month, according to the U.S. Coast Guard, [23 Haitians](#) were intercepted off the coast of Florida. In mid-November,

a group of [15 Haitians](#) was detained at the shore in Palm Beach, Florida, after their boat capsized. In the group there were 8 women, 6 men, and a 3-year-old boy. Finally, in the last week of December, an overloaded boat with [110 Haitian nationals](#) on board was intercepted by the U.S Coast Guard and all its passengers were deported back to Haiti.

Thematic Focus: Cuban migration towards North America

Although other mixed migration movements received more attention in the last few years, migration out of Cuba and towards North America continues unabated, often crossing portions of South and Central America before being able to reach their intended destination. Cubans leave their country of origin for several reasons, which include economic hardship as well as political persecution. During the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, the Cuban government has used COVID-19-related norms to intensify repression, as reported by [Human Rights Watch](#).

The U.S. have been the preferred destination of Cuban refugees and migrants since the end of the 1960s when, in response to the Cuban Revolution and political repression in the country, the Cuban Adjustment Act was passed, allowing Cuban nationals to become permanent U.S. residents after being in the country for a year. Another policy that favored Cuban migration toward the U.S. was the “wet foot, dry foot” policy, adopted in 1995, which allowed Cubans without a visa to become legal residents just by touching U.S. soil.

Between October 2012 and January 2017, [118,000 Cubans](#) had presented themselves at one of the U.S. ports of entry at the border with Mexico. In January 2017, however, former President Obama repealed the “wet foot, dry foot” policy, ending a longstanding preferential treatment toward Cuban refugees and migrants.

Since 2019, Cuban migrants and asylum seekers faced increasing difficulties in being allowed into U.S. territory [due to the MPP](#). The pandemic worsened their situation: as of October 2020, there were approximately [10,000 Cubans](#) stranded at Mexico’s northern border awaiting their asylum hearing in the U.S., out of [68,000 people on the move](#) waiting in Mexican territory under the MPP.

As entering the U.S. by land seems to have become increasingly difficult, some Cubans resort to traveling – irregularly and dangerously - by sea. In mid-October, the Coast Guard apprehended two makeshift boats on their way to Florida, with [13 Cubans](#) on board. At the beginning of November, the U.S. Coast Guard intercepted a boat with [33 Cubans](#) on board at Cay Sal Bank, Bahamas, also on their way to the U.S.. At the end of November, [6 Cuban](#) nationals were apprehended after coming ashore on Florida. Those who did manage to reach U.S. soil however did not necessarily face brighter prospects: during the fiscal year of 2020, 60 percent of Cubans who sought asylum in the U.S. received [a negative decision](#) (2,264), according to a report published by TRAC in October: only [1,477](#) asylum applications were approved.

During his campaign, U.S. president-elect Joe Biden promised to speed up asylum proceedings for asylum seekers stranded at the U.S. Southwestern border, within the framework of a more lenient approach to immigration. Time will tell whether the new administration will bring about real change for Cubans, alongside other refugees and migrants.

In parallel, although the U.S. continue to be the intended final destination for many Cuban refugees and migrants, others seem to be leaning towards Mexico as a host country. According to [media sources](#), from the

beginning of 2020 until October of the same year, more than 4,500 Cuban nationals had lodged an asylum application in Mexico: Cubans represented the third most common nationality among asylum seekers in the country, following Honduras and Haiti, most of these applications being filed in [Tapachula and Mexico City](#). According to a recent publication by COMAR, 11,148 Cubans were either granted some type of [residence permit in the country or renewed their permit between January and November 2020](#): new permits included 2,590 temporary and 4,144 permanent residencies; permit renewals included 4,317 temporary and 97 permanent permits. Data from the 4Mi¹ project likewise revealed that 10 out of 30 Cuban interviewed in Tapachula in the second half of 2020 indicated Mexico as their final destination. Mexico is however not necessarily so much of a welcoming country for Cuban asylum seekers: since 2013, just 1,082 have been granted asylum.

People on the move from Cuba also face obstacles in previous parts of their migration journey, in various parts of South and Central America. A group of about [490 Cubans](#) en route to the U.S. has been stranded at the Courantyne river since late November, since the [ferry service between Guyana and Suriname was shut down](#) due to COVID-19. By mid-December, the [group had grown to 1,000](#) people. Meanwhile, on December 21st, a group of 21 Cubans managed to continue their journey [from Colombia to Panamá](#) through the Darien Gap after suffering a shipwreck near Capurganá, Colombia.

1 The Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism (4Mi) is an initiative to collect and analyze data on mixed migration flows, including individual profiles, migration drivers, conditions and means of travel, smuggling dynamics, among other topics. Data was collected from July 3rd to November 21st 2020.

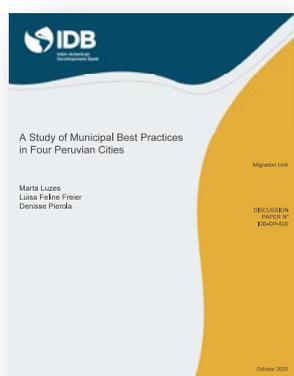
Highlighted New Research and Reports



Sectores económicos con potencial para la inclusión laboral de migrantes y refugiados venezolanos en Quito y Guayaquil

Organización Internacional para el Trabajo, COVID-19 Respuesta y USAID | Octubre 2020

This mixed-methods research report published by the International Labour Organization (ILO) outlines the demographic and socioeconomic profile of Venezuelans in two cities of Ecuador (Quito and Guayaquil). The study identified seven prospective economic sectors in which Venezuelan refugees and migrants can be included: e-commerce, software development, Internet of Things (IoT), basic education, sustainable and green transportation, healthcare and medical assistance, and agriculture (coffee and cocoa crops). The results are based on 2,151 surveys, seven focus groups, and several interviews with key informants. Data was later validated by subject-matter experts.



A Study of Municipal Best Practices in Four Peruvian Cities

IDB | October 2020

This recent qualitative research report, published by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), highlights some good practices regarding Venezuelan migration and inclusion of this population in Cusco, Lima, Trujillo, and Tumbes – during a 7-month period (between August 2019 and February 2020). It also examines challenges faced at the local level when addressing the inflow of Venezuelan refugees and migrants. Some best practices identified are: active participation of Venezuelans in inter-sectorial working groups, creation of migrant organizations, local awareness raising activities (such as anti-discrimination and anti-xenophobia campaigns), and solidarity fairs.



[“En la boca del lobo”: contexto de riesgo y violaciones a los derechos humanos de personas sujetas al programa Quedate en México](#)

Fundación para la Justicia, Asylum Access México, 1mums and WOLA | November 2020

Refugees and migrants face protection risks along their migration journey towards the U.S. but face even more dangers and human rights violations within the framework of the Migration Protection Protocol (MPP), commonly known as the “Stay in Mexico” program. According to this study, up until November 2020, more than 68,000 asylum seekers have been sent back to

Mexico and abandoned in high-risk zones, subject to a disproportionate use of force by the National Guard and violence by criminal gangs. This paper analyzes the multiple human rights violations asylum seekers are subject to while they await their asylum hearing, magnified during the COVID-19 pandemic.

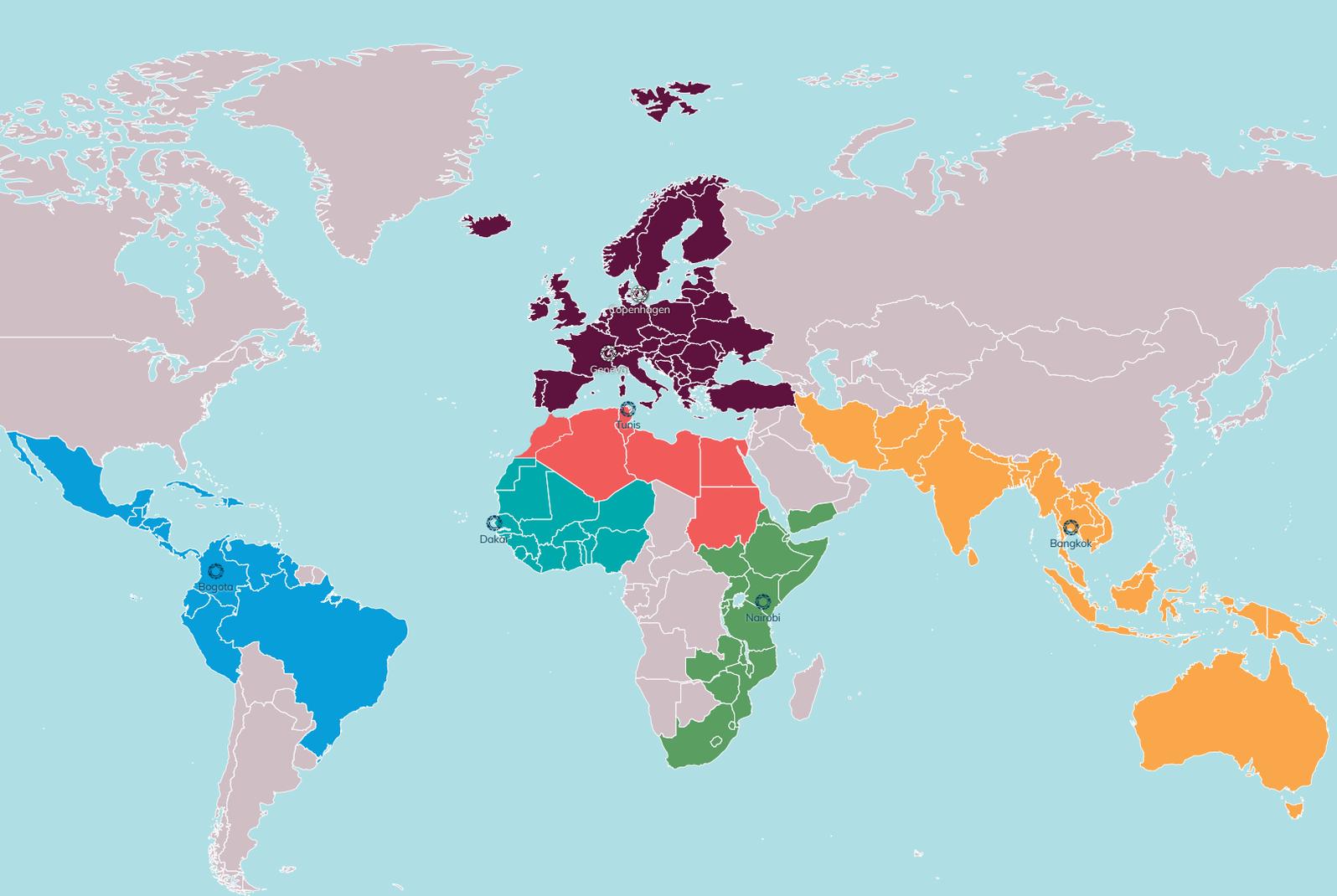


[Faces of Nicaraguan Exile: Expelled and Vulnerable](#)

Arias Foundation for Peace and Human Progress | November 2020.

This qualitative study conducted between March and August 2020 – amid the COVID-19 pandemic – describes the protection risks faced by Nicaraguan migrants during their migration journey towards Costa Rica and specifically through Los Chiles, Upala, and the Cruz border crossings. The report reveals 51 irregular pathways used by Nicaraguan refugees and migrants and the protection risks they faced during their migration journey, which took place

between April 2018 and February 2020. It delves into the smuggling dynamics connected to this migration flow and portrays the poor living conditions of Nicaraguans once they reach Costa Rica: homelessness, insufficient food, overcrowding, and labour exploitation.



The MMC is a global network consisting of six regional hubs and a central unit in Geneva engaged in data collection, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration. The MMC is a leading source for independent and high-quality data, research, analysis and expertise on mixed migration. The MMC aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based protection responses for people on the move and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. The MMC's overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move.

The MMC is part of and governed by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). Global and regional MMC teams are based in Copenhagen, Dakar, Geneva, Nairobi, Tunis, Bogota and Bangkok.

For more information visit:

mixedmigration.org and follow us at [@Mixed_Migration](https://twitter.com/Mixed_Migration)

