



**MMC Latin America
and the Caribbean**

QUARTER 4 2019



Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: Latin America and the Caribbean

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 seven 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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Key Updates

- **Record numbers for the Venezuelan displacement crisis:** From October to December, an estimated [300,000](#) new refugees and migrants left Venezuela. The total number of Venezuelans who have fled their country since the beginning of the current crisis has now reached [4.8 million](#). Official estimates for Venezuelans on the move in Colombia alone rose to [1.6 million in December 2019](#), including more than 900,000 with an irregular status.
- **Decreasing chances of Central American refugees and migrants reaching the US:** mixed migration movements in this part of the continent have been deeply affected by US [immigration policy](#). The number of people detained while crossing the southwest border of the US from October to December 2019 dropped to [101,000](#), from more than 153,000 over the same period in [2018](#). More than [70,000](#) people applied for asylum in Mexico in 2019, while an estimated [56,000](#) asylum seekers are currently awaiting in dangerous border towns in Mexico for their US court hearings .
- **African nationals receive permanent residency in Mexico:** in mid-December 2019, [African refugees and migrants took down the campsite](#) they had installed in the vicinity of the immigration center “Siglo XXI”, in the city of Tapachula, after receiving permanent residency cards. The Mexican immigration authorities [started granting permanent residency to ‘extracontinental’ people on the move](#) in November, as a solution to their situation. These refugees and migrants had found themselves stranded in southern Mexico in their attempt to reach the US.
- **Prima facie refugee status was granted to more than [21,000 Venezuelans](#) residing in Brazil** in early December 2019, through an accelerated asylum procedure.

Regional Overview*



The Caribbean



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

Mixed Migration Regional Updates

Venezuelan mixed migration flows

The Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela reported that, since [October 2019](#), the number of Venezuelans who fled their home country as a result of “one of [the largest and most underfunded crisis](#) in modern history” has climbed from 4.5 to some 4.8 million. [300,000](#) Venezuelans left their country in the last three months of 2019 in search of protection and assistance. Numbers are expected to reach 5.5 million by the end of 2020, according to the Refugee and Migrant Response Plan [\(RMRP\) 2020 report](#). Around [80%](#) of this mixed migration movement is hosted in Latin American or Caribbean countries.

In October 2019, 120 delegations representing host countries, donor countries, NGOs and UN agencies attended the [international solidarity conference co-led by UNHCR, IOM and the EU](#). Through this conference, the international community acknowledged severity of the ongoing displacement crisis caused by Venezuela’s economic and political collapse. Host countries’ capacities and resources are reaching their limits, making additional financial and technical support more needed than ever. UN agencies appealed for [\\$1.35 billion](#) to respond to the growing humanitarian needs and provide appropriate assistance to Venezuelans on the move in host countries.

In December 2019, the Dominican Republic joined the group of countries currently restricting access to their territory for Venezuelan nationals by imposing visa requirements. With these immigration restrictions, more Venezuelans face irregular migration as the only option to leave their country. This situation increases their vulnerability and puts them at greater risk on the journey. As the crisis continues, refugees and migrants face growing manifestations of [xenophobia and racism](#), which go hand in hand with [politicised debates](#) on migration.

Movements towards South America

Colombia

Over the last quarter, an estimated [183,000](#) Venezuelans have been newly identified in Colombia. On average, between [3,000 to 5,000](#) leave their country on foot every day by crossing one of the main border points - the Puente Internacional Simon Bolivar that leads to Cúcuta, Colombia. Colombia ranks as the top receiving country for this mixed migration movement, currently hosting around [1.6 million](#) Venezuelan nationals. After crossing the border, they mostly head towards Bogota, Barranquilla or other secondary cities in the country.

As of November 2019, of the 676,093 Venezuelans who had regular status in Colombia, 88% held a [Special Stay Permit \(PEP\)](#), which is supposed to provide access to [health care, education and employment](#). Only Venezuelan refugees and migrants who have [registered](#) through the Venezuelan Migrants Administrative Registry (RAMV in its Spanish acronym) and/or entered the country regularly prior to December 2018 are [eligible](#) for this permit. [More than 900,000 Venezuelan nationals](#) in Colombia have been recorded as having irregular status.

Ecuador

As of December 2019, an estimated [385,000](#) Venezuelans were living in Ecuador. Venezuelan refugees and migrants are now facing the consequences of Ecuador's recent immigration policy shift: since 26 July 2019, Venezuelans must obtain a visa to enter Ecuador. The demand for a visa and the difficulties faced by Venezuelans on the move in meeting the requirements necessary to obtain the visa have led to a steep decrease in the average number of regular crossings at Ecuador's main [points of entry \(20 daily crossings in December 2019 against 2,000 until August\)](#). These measures put people on the move at risk as [irregular entries](#) at informal border crossings are very likely to increase. For Venezuelans in Ecuador, Ecuadorian authorities have regularized the situation of around [9,000](#) Venezuelans since mid-October, granting them humanitarian visas. They expect to grant such visas to several [thousand more Venezuelans](#) currently living in the country.

Peru

As of 29 October 2019, Peru ranked as the second host country with an estimated [863,600](#) Venezuelans within its borders. Peru has the largest share of Venezuelan refugees and migrants with regular status ([568,973](#), as of October 2019) compared to the total Venezuelan population in the country. However, recent immigration restrictions and the implementation of new visa requirements have jeopardised Venezuelans' hopes to enter the country regularly, pushing many into the informal economy, where they will [lose protection, assistance, and government services](#). In early September, nearly [1,000 Venezuelans were deported](#) after they entered Peru irregularly.

Brazil

As of 30 September 2019, an estimated [224,000 Venezuelans](#) lived in Brazil, according to the national authorities. Refugees and migrants mostly enter the country from the north, [through the state of Roraima](#).

On 5 December, in a decision that received praise by humanitarian organizations, the National Committee for Refugees (CONARE) granted asylum to [21,432 Venezuelans](#), raising hopes for the [98,000](#) Venezuelan asylum seekers waiting for a positive outcome to their pending application.

Movements towards Caribbean countries

As of December 2019, around [100,000 refugees and migrants](#) from Venezuela were hosted in five countries of the Caribbean region, namely Aruba, Curaçao, the Dominican Republic, Guyana, and Trinidad and Tobago. While lower than the number of Venezuelans in Latin American countries, the capacity and resources of these states is also generally more limited, meaning that pressure on them is high. Some governments started implementing [restrictive immigration procedures](#) in order to limit their arrivals.

On 16 December, the government of the [Dominican Republic](#) – a country with an estimated presence of about [30,000 Venezuelans](#) – became the latest Caribbean state to impose visas on incoming refugees and migrants from Venezuela. This follows a similar approach by Trinidad and Tobago where, after the last [wide registration process](#), which took place last in June 2019, new arrivals from Venezuela need a visa to enter the country.

Movements towards Central and North America

Since early December 2019, [Panama's authorities](#) have been accepting expired passports held by Venezuelan people on the move. Venezuelans who had not been able to renew their passport can thus now regularize their immigration status.

Movements toward Europe

As of December 2019, Spain recorded [58,587](#) Venezuelans asylum seekers on its territory. Asylum claims filed by Venezuelans represent the largest share (more than [35 percent](#)) of the asylum applications submitted in Spain in 2019.

Mixed migration flows towards the USA

The US has long been the intended final destination of refugees and migrants from different countries and regions. Nationals from the Northern Triangle of Central America (NTCA) are particularly numerous among these mixed migration flows, followed by people from the Caribbean, Africa and Asia. In most cases, people have to cross Central America and Mexico in their attempt to reach the US border. Over the last few years, the US government has adopted several measures to try and prevent people on the move from reaching its soil.

Mixed migration flows in Mexico

Between October and December 2019, [101,000](#) people were detained at the US border area, a fall from more than 153,000 over the corresponding period in [2018](#). [For the US authorities](#), this decrease confirms the first 'successful' deterrent effects of the Migrant Protection Protocol (MPP). The MPP - also known as the "Remain in Mexico" policy - came into effect in January 2019 in the US, leaving thousands of [asylum seekers stranded](#) on the southern side of the US–Mexico border. It is estimated that around [56,000](#) asylum seekers are currently awaiting their US court hearings in dangerous border towns in Mexico. The human cost of this policy was highlighted by [Human Rights First](#) in early December: the organization published a list of "636 publicly reported cases of rape, torture, kidnapping, and other violent assaults against asylum seekers and migrants forced to return to Mexico".

A year after the first caravans of people on the move started crossing Central America heading up to the Mexico–US border, this unique migration dynamic has not entirely disappeared. A caravan of nearly [3,000 migrants and refugees](#) from Central America, the Caribbean and Africa was [stopped](#) on 12 October 2019 by the Mexican police in the southern city of Tapachula, not long after it departed. Moving in groups by forming caravans has been considered a safer option for refugees and migrants willing to travel through Central America.

Containing migration flows from and through the NTCA countries

In November 2019, asylum seekers started [being transferred back](#) from the US to Guatemala under the Asylum Cooperative Agreement (ACA). The US authorities signed agreements with the governments of [Guatemala](#) (July 2019), [Honduras](#) and [El Salvador](#) (September 2019), with the aim of containing mixed migration flows from and through the NTCA. Under these agreements, people on the move are expected to apply for asylum in the first safe country they encounter in their migration route, instead of doing so upon reaching the US border. The ACA agreement with Guatemala is the only one that started being implemented before the end of 2019. As of 20 December 2019, [40 asylum seekers](#) had reportedly been transferred back to the country.

[Human rights NGOs](#) cast doubt on the NTCA countries' ability to provide protection to the asylum seekers, pointing out that the recent agreements signed by the US with these countries [violate international law](#) and, in particular, the right to seek asylum.

Extracontinental mixed migration flows

African migration

Since [August 2019](#), African refugees and migrants can no longer obtain the transit visa ("salvoconducto") that Mexico previously granted them in order to transit the country regularly and reach the US. Groups of African people were stranded in Tapachula, in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas.

In the last months of 2019, the immigration centre "Siglo XXI" in Tapachula witnessed repeated [protests](#) by African refugees and migrants requesting a [temporary visa or regular immigration status](#) that would allow them to transit through Mexico. African nationals reportedly suffer racial [discrimination](#), and lack access to basic services and to translation of official information into languages that they understand.

After [979](#) of these people did not receive any response from their respective embassies, they requested recognition by the Mexican government as [stateless](#) and, as such, to be granted residency. In November, Mexican immigration authorities [started granting them permanent residency](#). As a result, in mid-December 2019, [African refugees and migrants took down the campsite](#) they had installed in the vicinity of the immigration center "Siglo XXI" and most left the city.

Refugees and migrants from other countries

In mid-October 2019, the Mexican authorities carried out an "[unprecedented](#) mass deportation" of Asian nationals, sending [310 Indian citizens](#) back to New Delhi. Nationals from several Asian countries such as India, Bangladesh, Nepal and China who have been using the Central American migration route in an attempt to reach the US arrive by [air](#) in South America and, like African people on the move, they head to Mexico, traveling through Colombia and Central America. The restrictive immigration measures introduced in Mexico last June has also started impacting them.

Thematic focus: Access to livelihoods and local integration for Venezuelan refugees and migrants

By now, many Venezuelans have been outside of Venezuela for years. They thus need to move from receiving emergency humanitarian support in a moment of crisis to successfully integrating in their country of destination and re-establishing a normal life, including supporting themselves through work. This seems even more urgent considering that there is no indication that the situation in Venezuela will drastically change soon, and allow for large-scale returns. Yet, throughout the LAC region, Venezuelan refugees and migrants face great challenges related to local integration. NGOs have [reported](#) a worrying level of job insecurity and informal employment, and highlighted that access to formal employment remains a key step for the local integration of Venezuelan refugees and migrants.

The [RMRP 2020](#) pointed out that, throughout the region, nearly 3.88 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants need integration support and that around 3.52 million have unmet health-related needs. A [large-scale survey](#) conducted by UNHCR throughout the region showed that “[50.2 percent](#) of the families interviewed had at least one member who were or are at risk due to their specific demographic profile or because they had to resort to serious negative coping mechanisms, including survival sex, begging or sending children under 15 to work.”

Access to employment: a priority need

A 2019 FUPAD [study](#) on the possibilities of integration of Venezuelans through employment opportunities examines the multiple barriers these refugees and migrants have to overcome in Colombia. Irregular status or lack of legal identity documents that would allow Venezuelans to gain access to formal work are the main obstacles they encounter. Indeed, despite the Colombian government's efforts to regularize the situation of Venezuelan refugees and migrants through the implementation of the PEP and the RAMV, more than [730,000](#) Venezuelans could not legally access work as of November 2019. A national survey conducted in Colombia reported that, on average, [94 percent](#) of Venezuelans were not working under a written employment contract. Moreover, around [44 percent](#) of the participants in the FUPAD study reported that, even if they have a right to work in Colombia, they often struggle to obtain recognition of their qualifications. Venezuelan refugees and migrants also find it problematic to obtain recognition of their professional experience and often lack the necessary documents required to formalize their work-related administrative arrangements (pension fund registration, bank account and so forth). Lack of knowledge of contract conditions and immigration procedures are additional obstacles preventing many Venezuelans from regularizing their situation and accessing employment opportunities in Colombia.

In Ecuador, the current socio-economic context is affecting Venezuelan refugees and migrants, resulting in high unemployment rates among this population (nearly [20 percent](#)). Discrimination, lack of qualifications or recognition of qualifications, as well as lack of formal employment opportunities (88% of those employed work in the informal sector) leave many refugees and migrants in precarious conditions, with [only 5%](#) of the respondents in a survey having signed a formal job contract.

Venezuelans in Peru mostly suffer from lack of information on national legal and fiscal regulation. Their very limited [knowledge](#) of their rights is preventing access to formal work opportunities and healthcare. In the [Caribbean](#), the main obstacles met by Venezuelans are their irregular status and lack of knowledge of official languages.

Labour exploitation and perilous coping strategies

These obstacles have led many Venezuelans into the informal sector in most host countries of the LAC [region](#), including Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Chile and Brazil. Informal employment exposes them to greater risks of labour [exploitation](#), working longer hours than host country nationals and for lower [wages](#). A [UNHCR survey](#) conducted among Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Peru highlighted that, of the 544 survey participants, 93% were currently working without a legal contract and 47% usually worked more than 60 hours a week. A [study](#) in Colombia found that 15% of the Venezuelans interviewed reported working more than 10 hours a day. [Caritas](#) research reported that 51% of Venezuelan workers in Peru declared having been a victim of labour exploitation. In [Brazil](#), federal police forces have arrested a Brazilian employer, who is accused of practices of slavery and human trafficking of Venezuelan refugees and migrants.

Many female refugees and migrants have engaged in negative coping strategies such as survival sex. The latest [RMRP](#) highlights the issue: 20% of women interviewed in a survey conducted in north Ecuador “had been forced to engage in sex work and 33.9 percent [...] had done it out of necessity”. In Cucuta, local sex workers [estimated](#) that around 80% of the sex workers in the city were Venezuelan nationals.

Resorting to sex work increases women’s vulnerability in terms of health risks and [gender-based violence](#). Some women who first engaged in survival sex on a voluntary basis may at a later stage become victim of [traffickers](#) who take advantage of their vulnerability. As well as other reasons, many of these women fear deportation due to their irregular status, or just because they are not aware of their rights, and therefore only a limited number file a complaint. This makes the phenomenon difficult to assess. A [Refugees International report](#) on sexual exploitation and trafficking of Venezuelan women strongly recommended to strengthen existing protection mechanisms in the region. The report highlights the need to guarantee access to legal assistance and the possibility for any victim of trafficking to file a complaint.

Venezuelans' fragmented journeys in the LAC region

Obstacles to local integration and lack of access to basic services such as health care and education have had an impact on the mobility of Venezuelan refugees and migrants in the region. Pressure on health services in Ecuador - which were already limited prior to the migration crisis - is growing with the arrival of a high number of people on the move. A [Refugees International report](#) noted that there are only two hospitals in Guayaquil for 2.6 million inhabitants, and both Ecuadorian and Venezuelan nationals suffer from limited access to healthcare. Difficulties in gaining access to services and formal employment are compounded by [increasing discrimination and rising xenophobia](#) in Ecuador, which have pushed Venezuelan refugees and migrants to leave.

Venezuelans who were considering settling in Chile are also returning to Peru or Colombia because they could not enter Chile regularly. In addition, despite greater access to legal work for Venezuelan refugees and migrants in [Chile](#), the recent [crisis has affected many](#). A recent study exploring the living conditions and local integration of Venezuelans in Chile shows that the current socio-economic crisis may have an impact on Venezuelans' living conditions and migration [plans](#).

In general, obstacles to local integration in the region have forced some Venezuelan refugees and migrants to [reconsider](#) their initial plans and find new places to settle, or move back to countries they had previously transited. [Return](#) movements to Venezuela have even been observed in some cases.

Highlighted new research and reports



[As More Migrants from Africa and Asia Arrive in Latin America, Governments Seek Orderly and Controlled Pathways](#)

Migration Policy Institute | October 2019

This article draws on fieldwork observations and interviews conducted with extra-continental refugees and migrants throughout South and Central America. Caitlyn Yate examines the impact of regional immigration policy on extra-continental migration patterns. The author accurately describes the hectic journeys on which refugees and migrants from Africa and other continents have decided to embark in order to reach Central America and the

US-Mexican border. In particular, she provides a description of people on the move's unique and sometimes deadly experiences of the Darien Gap. Through these accounts, ones better grasp the risks refugees and migrants face and the obstacles they have to overcome.



[Situación de los migrantes y refugiados venezolanos en Brasil](#)

Organización de los Estados Americanos | November 2019

This report looks at the situation of Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Brazil and provides key figures on their origin, needs, profiles and geographic distribution in this host country. Through this report, we find out more about the implementation of Brazil's programme "Operación Acolhida" which aims to facilitate Venezuelans' reception and integration throughout the country. Authors provides details on the different development phases of the programme, highlighting that for example, as of November 2019, around 18,000 refugees and migrants from Venezuela benefited from its socio-economic integration component.



[A Protection Crisis: Testimonies from Children, Adolescents and Young Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela](#)

Plan International | October 2019

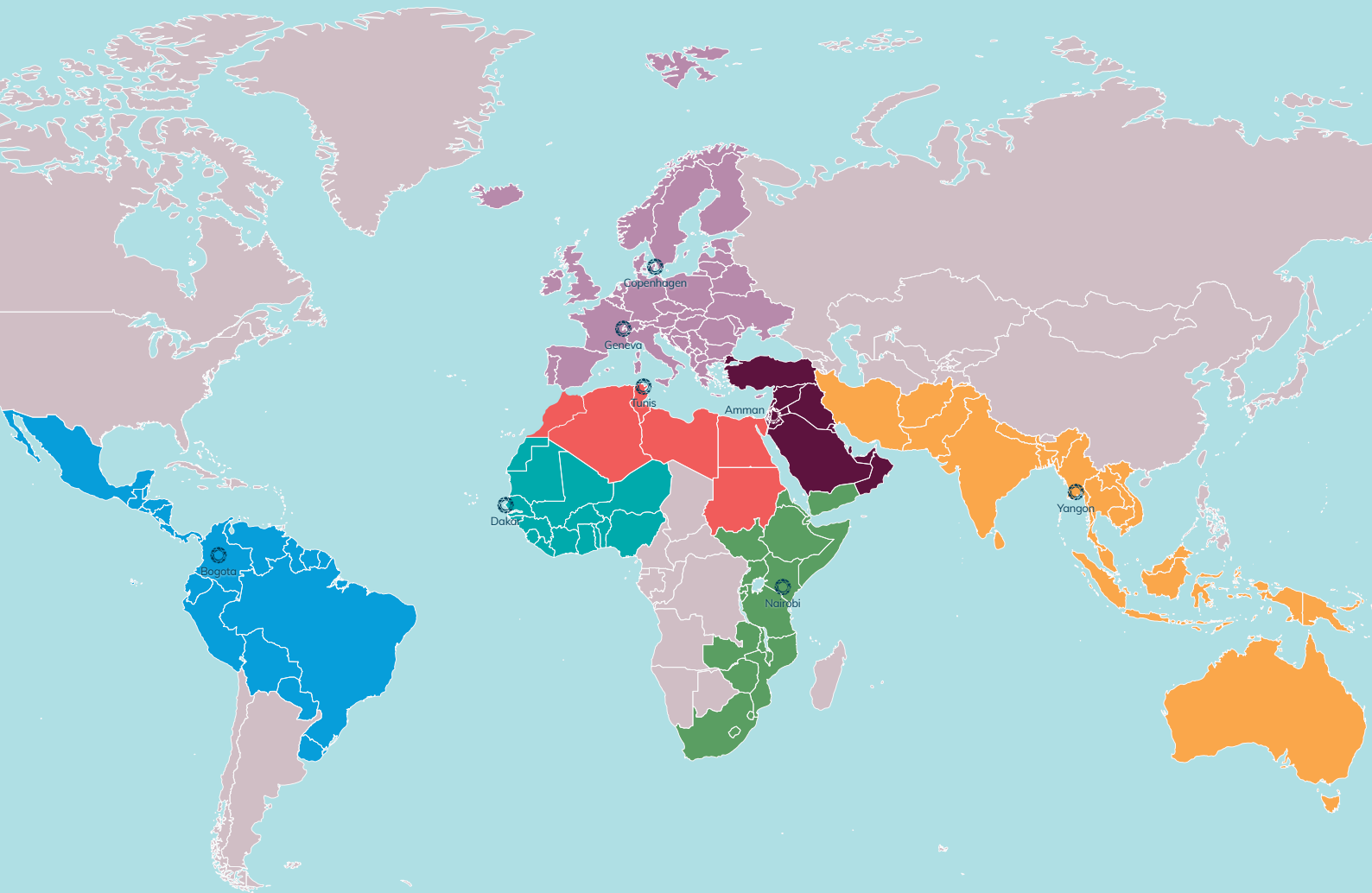
Young refugees and migrants fleeing Venezuela face many risks throughout their journey. When reading these 17 stories, we follow the paths of many Venezuelans who left their home country in order to look for a better and safer life abroad. Through these stories, we learn about the multiple faces of migration and find out that refugees’ and migrants’ age, social background, gender as well as migrating routes and status, greatly vary from one another. Through these various narratives, the report addresses the many protection concerns that these vulnerable populations on the move face everyday.



[“De la Teoría a la Práctica”: Un informe de 61 organizaciones de sociedad civil de Belice, Guatemala, Honduras, México y Panamá sobre el Marco Integral Regional de Protección y Soluciones](#)

61 civil society organizations from MIRPS countries | November 2019

Through the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (MIRPS in its Spanish acronym), six states from Central and North America - namely Belize, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Panama – have been working together since 2017 on strengthening durable solutions and protection mechanisms for internally displaced persons, asylum seekers, refugees and returnees. In this report, sixty-one civil society organizations from MIRPS signatory countries evaluate the achievements and impacts of this framework on the current situation of IDPs, migrants and refugees in the region. Authors highlight that MIRPS first results are limited and provide recommendations on how to further strengthen protection mechanisms for people on the move in the region.



The MMC is a global network consisting of seven 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) and global and regional MMC teams are hosted by the DRC offices in Amman, Copenhagen, Dakar, Geneva, Nairobi, Tunis, Bogota and Yangon.

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

