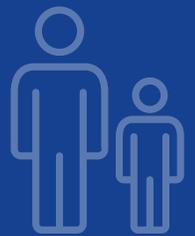


# MIGRANTS

IN RISK REDUCTION AND  
EMERGENCY RESPONSE IN  
CENTRAL AMERICA



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Regardless of their status or the duration or reason for their stay, migrants can be a vulnerable group in emergency situations caused by natural disasters. While migrants contribute to the economic, cultural, and social development of receiving, transit, and origin countries (through remittances, for example), and demonstrate a capacity for resilience when faced with emergency situations, they may also present a series of vulnerabilities that should be addressed by national and local governments. Some vulnerabilities are associated with natural disasters and others are caused by human activity.

The risk disasters present depends not only on the threat or phenomenon affecting a given population, but also on the population's vulnerability and situation in terms of physical factors, such as population concentration in at-risk locations and accessibility or inaccessibility of basic services, socioeconomic factors, and environmental factors that decrease the resilience of the community to the impacts of the threats, whether natural or man-made. Considering this, public and private actors should manage disaster risk with the goal of preventing the potential losses and damages an event may cause in a community or in society. This includes migrants in Central American countries, who are more vulnerable to the various threats this region presents, such as hurricanes from its two oceans, geomorphology, convergence of active tectonic plates, volcanic eruptions, hydrometeorological threats, and others caused by climate change.

Recent global and regional agreements show that migrants are beginning to be considered in comprehensive risk management agendas. Specifically, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, the global agreement on disaster risk reduction, incorporates clear references to migration and displacement for the first time. It not only recognizes displacement in the context of disaster risk reduction, but also clearly recognizes the role of migrants in supporting prevention, preparation, response, and recovery, and promoting resilience. Likewise, the need to include migrants in the approach to disaster risk reduction has been considered in international agreements on migration. For example, in the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, the States recognized the need to help migrants

affected by disasters. In response to these international agreements, efforts to ensure the protection of migrants in disasters have become increasingly important in recent years, especially with the development of the Guidelines to Protect Migrants in Countries Experiencing Conflict or Natural Disaster of Migrants in Countries in Crisis (MICIC) Initiative. These consist of 15 Guidelines whose purpose is to provide techniques for protecting and integrating migrants in emergency contexts and conflicts in the preparation, response, and recovery phases. Guideline 4, in light of which this study on the case of Central America is being conducted, specifically proposes the incorporation of migrants in prevention, preparedness, and emergency response systems.

In this context, in order to deepen understanding and improve the incorporation of migrants in disaster risk reduction systems, IOM is performing the present study, "Migrants in risk reduction and emergency response in Central America."

The study is focused on the member countries of the Coordination Center for the Prevention of Natural Disasters in Central America (CEPREDENAC), a specialized institution of the Central American Integration System (SICA), formed by Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, and the Dominican Republic. The objective of CEPREDENAC is to contribute to reducing vulnerability to and impact of disasters through the promotion, support, and development of policies and measures to prevent, mitigate, prepare for, and manage emergencies, in accordance with global frameworks on the issue and the challenges of the region.

The study is being performed as part of IOM's Mesoamerica Program, which provides technical support to SICA and CEPREDENAC for revising the existing institutional disaster response framework of the member States of CEPREDENAC, whose leaders in risk management are the National Civil Defense Entities which also make up the Representative Council of CEPREDENAC.

The general objective of the study is to identify the extent to which migrants are being incorporated in the legal and institutional frameworks of the National Risk Reduction and Emergency Response Systems of the member countries of

CEPREDENAC, as established by the principle normative instruments on the matter. Additionally, it seeks to offer practical recommendations to improve this incorporation, such that public policies and operational frameworks on the issue consider migrants and their needs for protection during the preparation for and response to a disaster. The study provides an in-depth analysis of the countries' disaster risk reduction instruments, classified as laws, regulations and degrees (of a binding nature), policies and plans (of a programmatic and strategic nature), and finally, manuals, guides, and protocols (of an operative nature), on the basis of publicly available information, in order to determine the extent to which migrants are being included in these national agendas.

The study includes a first chapter describing the migration dynamics in the Central American region and presenting a general overview of natural disasters recorded in the region in recent years. Additionally, it presents conceptual and operative links between migration and disaster prevention and emergency response processes. In this section, the principal characteristics of the migration dynamic in Central America are described. The Mesoamerican region (including Central America and Mexico) forms one of the primary migration corridors in the world. As a whole, it only contains 2.36% of the global population as of 2017, but 7% of total international migrants. From the perspective of disaster risk management, it is essential to consider, on one hand, the high probability that migrants in transit will be present in a given country affected by a disaster, and on the other hand, the presence of an important community of nationals abroad who can play a decisive role in disaster response. Additionally, although it is of lesser numerical significance, Mesoamerica can also be considered a destination. Important intra-regional migratory movements have been recorded traditionally and have continued in recent years, mainly associated with the search for economic opportunities, and in certain cases, with the search for protection. This intra-regional mobility is particularly marked by seasonal labor migration, for example, to harvest agricultural products, as well as by the migration (likewise seasonal to a degree) of indigenous populations. Mesoamerica recorded over two million immigrants in 2017. This section also presents a general overview of natural disasters recorded in the region in recent years. The Mesoamerican region is also a zone in which natural phenomena frequently cause disasters. Among the ten

countries worldwide most affected by extreme weather events between 1996 and 2015, three (Honduras, Nicaragua, and Guatemala) are in Central America. In fact, during this period, Honduras overtook Myanmar as the country most affected by disasters related to meteorological events.

To consider another example, it is estimated that 95% of the population of El Salvador lives in areas exposed to disaster risk. Between 1990 and 2011, El Salvador was the country with the highest total losses caused by major disasters with over 6.5 billion dollars, while Honduras was the country most affected by percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), with total damages and losses equivalent to almost 80% of its GDP. After southeast Asia, Central America is the most vulnerable region to climatological risks, with poverty, poor infrastructure, a lack of land management, and excessive and inappropriate usage of natural resources as the underlying risk factors that increase the vulnerability of the population and its livelihood, and particularly of people and communities with limited resources. From 2000 to 2018, 261 natural disasters were recorded in Central American countries, including volcanic activity, floods, landslides, earthquakes, epidemics, storms, droughts, forest fires, and extreme temperatures. Floods and storms are the most frequent events by far.

During this period, over 20 million people affected by these disasters and 6,351 resulting deaths were recorded. In the second section, the study analyzes the legal and institutional framework for disaster risk reduction in global, regional, and national contexts, in order to determine how and to what extent migrants are participating in civil defense processes.

Notably, no international legal instrument explicitly and thoroughly covers the rights of people affected by a crisis while living, working, residing, or transiting in a foreign country. However, a series of instruments and international legal frameworks enumerate the obligations of States to protect the rights of people who live, work, or reside outside their country of nationality. Current global frameworks related to disaster risk reduction, migration, development, and the approach of these to the inclusion of migrants in preparation, response, and recovery in emergency situations include the following:

- The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030
- The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
- The Paris Agreement: Approved in December 2015, at the Paris Conference of the Parties on Climate Change (COP21)
- Migrants in Countries in Crisis Initiative (MICIC)
- The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration, approved, respectively, at the United Nations Summit in September 2016 and in an intergovernmental conference on migration in December 2018.
- The Migration Governance Framework: Approved by the Council of Member States of IOM. This is the first and only agreed-upon international framework for the governance of all aspects of migration. “Good migration governance is based on effective responses to the mobility dimensions of crises.” With this Objective 2, the Member States of IOM advocate for considering the needs of migrants and their communities in crisis situations, from preparation to recovery, in view of the responsibility of the affected State to protect and provide assistance to residents in their territory. This is in accordance with IOM’s Migration Crisis Operational Framework (MCOF).
- IOM Strategic Work Plan on Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience 2017-2020. IOM Strategic Work Plan on Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience 2017-2020 outlines IOM’s strategic approach to DRR and resilience within the broader frame of the Organization’s global mobility mandate.

This section also highlights various regional instruments and agreements, including:

- The Central American Policy on Internal Disaster Risk Management (PCGIR): The PCGIR was approved by the Heads of State and Government of the SICA countries in June 2010 as part of their 35th Summit

Meeting, held in the Republic of Panama. It is the guiding instrument on Disaster Risk Management, responding to the vulnerability of the Central American region to threats and disasters, as well as to the effects of climate change. The Policy responds to the need to update regional commitments related to disaster risk reduction and prevention, contributing to a vision of safe, comprehensive development in Central America. The study highlights to what extent the PCGIR harmonizes with the Sendai Framework 2015-2030; for the first time, it includes specific lines of action for integrating the variable of migration.

- Regional Disaster Risk Reduction Plan 2014-2019: This instrument was developed in accordance with the 5 Organizing Principles of the PCGIR 2010 with the objective of following up on the concrete implementation of the PCGIR. It addresses migrants from two perspectives.

Finally, this section of the study describes the instruments (laws and regulations, plans and policies, guides and manuals) and resources the National Risk Reduction and Emergency Response Systems have for including migrants in the preparation for, response to, and recovery from natural disasters, at the level of the member countries of CEPREDENAC. From this analysis, it is clear that the management of human displacement and the wellbeing of migrants should be fundamental parts of global, regional, and national policies and strategies.

The third chapter presents an analysis of opportunities to develop a regional disaster risk reduction agenda which includes migrants, while the fourth chapter focuses on the potential of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Response Systems. The capacities, opportunities, and challenges for developing a regional disaster risk reduction agenda including migrants within the framework of the Central American Integration System (SICA) were determined through an analysis of the institutionalism of SICA and of the potential for a common agenda between OCAM and CEPREDENAC in order to meet this objective. The Central American Integration System (SICA) is the institutional framework for Central American Regional Integration, created by the States of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama.

Later Belize (2000) and the Dominican Republic (2013) were admitted as full members. Both the Coordination Center for the Prevention of Natural Disasters in Central America (CEPREDENAC) and the Central American Commission of Directors of Migration (OCAM) are included in SICA's 26 specialized regional institutions. As such, they already operate under the framework of Central American institutionalism, and have an Executive or Technical Secretariat which advises and cooperates with member countries in the development of the regional agenda and the facilitation of processes to fulfill regional agreements signed by their representatives, the Directors of Civil Defense Entities and the Directors of Migration.

Additionally, the member countries of SICA are part of the Regional Conference on Migration (CRM), an intergovernmental forum established to support dialogue and exchange of ideas and experiences for joint reflection and cooperation on migration issues of common interest for the participating countries. CRM includes 11 countries, of which 7 are members of CEPREDENAC, and thus it would be possible to establish a coordinated work mechanism with this multilateral regional forum focused on international migration, in which the topic of including migrants in disaster risk reduction processes could be introduced and shared, representing an opportunity to bolster the institutional agenda created within the framework of SICA. In this section, the study identifies a series of challenges that may affect the development of a regional disaster risk reduction agenda within the framework of SICA which would include migrants; the most relevant being:

- The need to improve education on specialized treatment for migrants in natural disaster situations, including not only migrants displaced by disasters, but also migrants in communities affected by disasters and the diversity this population presents in terms of motives, time, and other characteristics of their migration.
- Promoting the inclusion of protection for migrants in the context of disaster risk, principally in regional emergency response instruments, such as the specific protocols identified in this study which focus on help and humanitarian assistance.

- Improving regional frameworks with concepts, ideas, and focuses from global and regional migration instruments, especially those indicated in MICIC Guideline 4, "Incorporate migrants in prevention, preparedness, and emergency response systems," and its recommendations and practices.
- Encouraging exchanges between OCAM and CEPREDENAC in order to address the issue jointly, within the framework of an agreement originating from SICA, given that the vulnerability of migrants in disaster situations is an issue needing attention, and a priority from the perspective of human rights and preservation of life.
- Understanding that this joint work focus would cover migrants in crises caused by natural disasters, as CEPREDENAC directly addresses the issue of disaster risk reduction.
- Building a comprehensive vision: Coordinating the efforts of the two SICA agencies, OCAM and CEPREDENAC, with other political and technical spaces in which the issue of migration is addressed, such as the Regional Conference on Migration.

Finally, the study establishes recommendations at the regional and national levels for improving the inclusion of migrants in national civil defense agendas. At the regional level, the recommendations are focused on raising awareness of migration in contexts of natural disasters, establishing commitments to a joint work agenda, developing a mechanism to record and exchange information on vulnerable migrants in the region, involving migrants in the regional migration and disaster risk reduction agenda, and working for the financial sustainability of the shared regional agenda.

**The full publication is available only in Spanish**