
MIRPS Support Platform High-Level Meeting

Statement by Filippo Grandi,
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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Distinguished delegates,

I wish to thank Spain for generously stepping up to assume the leadership of the MIRPS Support Platform. The MIRPS – or the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework, to give it its full name – is a concrete application of the Global Compact on Refugees, and draws on a strong tradition of regional cooperation in responding to refugee flows in Latin America.

The MIRPS Support Platform also has its origins in the Compact. The Compact provided for the creation of country or situation-specific support arrangements as a means to galvanize political, financial and material commitments in support of countries impacted by refugee flows or by forced displacement.

To this end, we launched the Platform at the Global Refugee Forum last December. The aim is to help strengthen protection in Central America and Mexico, and support progress towards solutions to displacement across the region. This calls for investments to help build the resilience of displaced people and their host communities, and ease pressure on national systems - including through partnerships with development actors, financial institutions, private sector, and non-traditional donors.

As members of the MIRPS Support Platform, your Governments (Governments represented here) and agencies will play a leading role in generating political will and convening a diverse range of stakeholders in support of the MIRPS. I hope that the Platform will help bring more visibility to the plight of the forcibly displaced, including the need for much greater responsibility-sharing with the principal host countries represented here by El Salvador, the Chair of the MIRPS. I hope, too that it will help galvanise a comprehensive, multi-actor response that tackles the root causes of violence and instability and I am very happy that Mr Almagro is with us today also for this particular purpose and as a main actor in the establishment and the running of the MIRPS.

The COVID-19 pandemic has compounded the challenges faced by Central America and Mexico, and by those seeking refuge. The region has been hard hit, with the number of cases continuing to rise, despite early mitigation measures. And yet, even as life comes to a standstill in many respects, in the countries of origin, gang violence, persecution, gender-based violence and human rights abuses have not stopped.

In Honduras, for example, homicides and massacres have continued. Extortion remains rife, with gangs taking away what ever little money families have left. In many communities, people feel increasingly vulnerable, as they are unable to leave their homes and therefore be more easily identified and located. Some gangs have taken to controlling the distribution of food and medicines. Reports of domestic violence have by risen 70% in the past two months.

For now, curfews and border closures, related to COVID-19, have slowed the rate of displacement. But when these measures will be eased, we can expect population flows to

accelerate once more, placing increasing pressure on the northern countries of asylum in the MIRPS area, especially Mexico.

In Nicaragua, the medium-term scenario is even more stark, as new forms of persecution and socio-political tension are emerging in relation to the government's management of the pandemic. As a result, we can anticipate growing pressure on the southern countries of asylum in the MIRPS area, most notably Costa Rica and Panama.

For now, access to asylum has dramatically narrowed. Like most States around the world, Central American countries have limited cross-border movements, as a means of preventing virus transmission. But without practical measures to ensure continued access to protection, such as quarantine and screening, many people in danger have been unable to reach safety. Costa Rica, for example, was receiving an average of 3,000 asylum seekers from Nicaragua before the pandemic hit. And that figure now, per month, stands at just 30.

Here, the MIRPS Support Platform can help – by helping realise the commitments made by host countries to strengthen their asylum systems.

The pandemic is also impacting those who have already fled, and the communities where they have sought refuge. Hundreds of thousands of refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced people across the region find themselves struggling to access essential health services. Asylum seekers, for example, generally only have access to emergency health care, and are not able to benefit from primary health care services.

Here again, the MIRPS Platform provides a mechanism that can help host countries realise commitments to broaden access to health care and expand social insurance coverage for asylum seekers.

The socio-economic consequences of the pandemic are also already grave, and worsening. Across the region, hundreds of thousands of displaced people are struggling to avoid plunging deeper into poverty, as informal work opportunities vanish, and sources of external support disappear.

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean forecasts an average regional contraction of 5.3% in 2020. More specifically Central America's economy is projected to shrink by 3.6% this year, according to the World Bank. Remittances to the region, a vital life line for many, are expected to fall by 20% over the course of the year. This will inevitably compound (complicate) the 'push' factors, and impact the ability of MIRPS countries to ensure the social and economic inclusion of forcibly displaced people, in line with their National Action Plans.

In this difficult context, the MIRPS provides a number of important tools - even more important perhaps now with COVID – 19- that can help States across the region meet new challenges. The Support Platform of the MIRPS, working together with the Presidency of the MIRPS, with El Salvador, can play a key role in this regard. The Presidency's 2020 work plan contains a number of relevant initiatives.

First, the Asylum Capacity Support Group established under the Global Compact on Refugees can bring much needed bilateral expertise and assistance, in key technical areas that are acquiring new importance in the context of the pandemic. Like remote registration and video interviewing, and group processing mechanisms.

The initiative called Cities of Solidarity also offers an important channel through which partners at the local level can be identified and supported, and municipalities in MIRPS and Platform countries can come together (can twin together) to help strengthen local responses, including safety nets for displaced people.

— The Platform can also help facilitate the engagement of development actors. MIRPS countries — continue to quantify the gaps they face in key sectors, and the Platform could play a key role in trying to match the most affected sectors – the gaps essentially - with funding opportunities. UNHCR will work with both MIRPS countries and the Platform to develop country-level project proposals to present to development partners, to development institutions and we will also continue to support government commitments through our own programmes, of course.

Thanks to the commitment and creativity of governments, civil society and other entities across the region, the MIRPS has emerged as an innovative and valuable tool in helping shape and strengthen the response to population flows. As the impact of COVID-19 is felt, the MIRPS provides an important means to ensure that forcibly displaced people are not left behind in the response to the pandemic.

In closing, I wish to thank you all for becoming part of the MIRPS Support Platform, and trust that together, we can build an example that can help shape responses in other regions of the world.

Thank you.