

A Call to Action

Protection Needs in the Northern Triangle of Central America

- Proposal for a regional response -

Concept Paper

I. Introduction

Recent years have seen a sharp escalation in the number of people fleeing persecution and insecurity in the Northern Triangle of Central America. This is largely the result of growing levels of violence caused by non-state actors, many linked to criminal activity (mainly *maras*, *pandillas* and drug cartels), in addition to economic hardship. In 2014 and 2015, tens of thousands of women, men and children from the Northern Triangle sought asylum in the United States of America, while thousands more have fled to Mexico, Canada, Belize, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama. It is now clear that the regional migration narrative has changed. Movements that were once considered purely socioeconomic now include growing numbers of people affected by forced displacement. While poverty, social exclusion and family reunification remain contributing factors leading to migration, all stakeholders in the region increasingly acknowledge persecution, insecurity and violence as root causes of movement.

Children and youth are particularly affected as they escape forced recruitment and situations of extreme insecurity. Women are also increasingly targeted and unable to find adequate protection, often suffering multiple traumas, including sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). LGBTI Persons are frequent victims of severe discrimination, harassment, SGBV and extortion. Unaccompanied children, women, men, families and LGBTI persons seek protection elsewhere in their own countries, seek asylum beyond their own borders or attempt to join their family members abroad. With few avenues for safe passage, they find themselves victims of human smugglers and human traffickers, leaving them exposed to abuses and exploitation during their flight. All too often, their specific protection needs are left without adequate response along the route. The result is a growing protection crisis that requires broader regional coordination to ensure timely and solutions-oriented responses.

To assist Governments in addressing the challenges posed by this growing crisis, UNHCR proposes to convene a High-Level Roundtable titled, “**Call to Action: Protection Needs in the Northern Triangle of Central America**” that will explore opportunities to address this crisis more strategically, collaboratively and systematically among all concerned countries. The “Call to Action” Roundtable will gather a range of relevant stakeholders to agree on a series of responses to address the most urgent needs of refugees and displaced people from the Northern Triangle in countries of origin, transit and asylum. While acknowledging multiple causes of displacement in and from the Northern Triangle of Central America, the Roundtable will focus on forced displacement rooted in the human rights, social and political impact of the increasing power, violence and control of organized criminal groups in those countries. Particular attention will be paid to specific protection challenges faced by concerned States and the support and contribution to be provided by the international community.

The Roundtable is timely and will contribute to a **High-Level Plenary Meeting on Addressing Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants** during the 71st Session of the U.N. General Assembly in September 2016. The purpose of this High-Level Meeting will be to secure global commitments to address the humanitarian needs of refugees and migrants and to concretize opportunities for responsibility sharing arrangements for refugees.

The Roundtable is also inspired and guided by the **Brazil Declaration and Plan of Action (BPA)**, which was adopted in December 2014 by 28 countries and three territories of Latin America and the Caribbean. The BPA builds on the importance of international cooperation and responsibility sharing arrangements to find regional solutions to the protection crisis in the Northern Triangle of Central America. In particular, Chapter Four is an expression of international solidarity with the countries of the Northern Triangle of Central America in seeking and implementing durable solutions.

II. Objectives of the Roundtable

The overall **objective** of the Roundtable is to foster the implementation of regional responses, building upon a common appreciation of the opportunities and challenges of this protection crisis, along the following lines of action:

- Address the protection needs of populations at risk of and during displacement, taking into account the magnitude and patterns of forced displacement and the numbers and profiles of displaced persons;
- Reinforce existing prevention and national response mechanisms in countries of origin, including the strengthening of child and women's welfare institutions to mitigate the effects of internal displacement and to respond to increasing numbers of deportees with international protection needs;
- Ensure the implementation of identification and referral mechanisms, better reception arrangements, alternatives to detention, and access to refugee status determination procedures in countries of asylum for those in need of international protection;
- Respond to the specific protection needs of children, women and LGTBI persons arriving in countries of asylum;
- Reinforce partnerships across all stakeholders to address this protection crisis more strategically, collaboratively and systematically; and
- Improve regional cooperation to implement responsibility-sharing arrangements to address the humanitarian impact of displacement and provide effective responses to those with protection needs.

III. Expected outcomes of the Roundtable

The Roundtable is expected to garner support for the following **outcomes**:

- Identification of the existing protection gaps and the responses needed to address the protection crisis currently affecting the Northern Triangle;
- Recognition of the necessary responses to the protection crisis that require implementation in countries of transit and asylum;
- Common understanding of the support that the international community can provide to respond to the protection needs of persons affected by forced displacement in countries of origin, transit and asylum;

- Increased visibility of the humanitarian needs of persons affected by forced displacement in the region; and
- Common agreement on the regional actions required to form a strategic framework focusing on the solution responses, the contributions of the relevant stakeholders (roles and responsibilities) and necessary follow-up mechanisms (including the creation of thematic working groups).

IV. Timing / Venue, Convener, and Participation

- Timing: 06 and 07 July, 2016 (1 and a half day)
- Venue (tentative): Real Inter-Continental, San Jose, Costa Rica
- Host: Government of Costa Rica
- Organizers: OAS and UNHCR
- Sponsor: SICA
- Secretariat: UNHCR Costa Rica (Regional Coordinator)
- Language: English/Spanish (interpretation provided)
- PI: Press conference/press release
- Funding: UNHCR will cover the expenses related to the event
- Participants (approximately 90 participants)
 - Governments/States (approximately 35 persons)
 - 2 senior government officials at a decision-making level (including migration/asylum/development) from the following countries: Belize, Canada, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, and the United States of America
 - Ombudsman's Offices
 - One to two senior government officials from other countries in the region and other regions
 - UN / OAS/ SICA/ International Organizations (approximately 25 persons)
 - Other Intergovernmental Organizations (approximately 10 persons)
 - Civil society and Academia (approximately 20 persons)

V. METHODOLOGY

The Government of Costa Rica will host the “Call to Action” Roundtable which is co-organized by UNHCR and OAS, and it is sponsored by SICA. Following consultations with concerned States during the next 3-4 weeks, UNHCR will draft a discussion paper to inform the discussions at the Roundtable, which will focus on three thematic issues: 1) Responses needed in countries of origin, 2) Responses to be implemented in countries of asylum, and 3) Regional cooperation and responsibility sharing mechanisms.

The draft discussion paper will reflect the regional state of affairs in terms of the magnitude and severity of the protection crisis, number of persons affected and their profiles. The paper will examine existing mechanisms in countries of origin and countries of asylum to respond to the crisis, and identify actions necessary to reinforce those mechanisms, as well as new mechanisms to be implemented. It will also examine how regional cooperation would foster responsibility sharing arrangements with support from the international community, as an expression of international cooperation and regional solidarity. The draft discussion paper will be shared with all participants one month in advance of the Roundtable to allow for domestic senior technical-level expert discussions.

Government delegations should include high-ranking officials at the Vice-ministerial level, including representatives from both the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Interior, assisted by technical staff. In the case of countries of origin, Government/State delegations should include national representatives of the institutions dealing with forced displacement and the Ombudsman Office. For countries of asylum, the active participation of the authorities in charge of refugee/asylum issues, including the adjudication authorities, is also contemplated and encouraged.

International organizations and civil society will also participate in the Roundtable and shall contribute to the discussions, based on their respective expertise and complementarity mandates.

To promote active participation and a fluid exchange of ideas and proposals, all discussions will occur in plenary over the course of a day-and-a-half. The discussions will follow the 3 thematic issues of the draft discussion paper, which will also include guiding questions for all participants.

Based on the discussions among all stakeholders, the Secretariat of the Roundtable will elaborate a summary of conclusions and recommendations that will become the strategic regional response framework, indicating the way forward, the different roles and responsibilities, the necessary follow-up mechanisms and the expression of initial intention of contributions/commitments by relevant stakeholders.