

San Salvador city Declaration: Answers to the needs of international protection for refugees, asylum seekers and displaced persons in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in MIRPS member States

San Salvador, December 8th, 2020

The Member States of the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (known as MIRPS in Spanish) Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Panama, *gathered* under the Pro Tempore Presidency of El Salvador in the Third Annual Meeting, with the purpose of reviewing the progress and national and regional challenges, coordinating in solidarity a regional response to the difficult tasks posed by movements of people seeking international protection in MIRPS countries.

Recalling the commitments established in the “Mexico City Declaration on international protection, shared responsibility and regional action in solidarity in the MIRPS countries” adopted in the Second Annual Meeting on November 8th, 2019 and in the Omnibus Resolution on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, particularly in the sections “i. Protecting human rights in the context of COVID-19 pandemic” and “xviii. Protection of asylum seekers and refugees in the Americas”;

Taking into account that, in March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) determined that COVID-19 could be characterized as a pandemic and a health emergency that, due to its devastating consequences, has become the most important crisis that the world has faced in recent times;

Recognizing that the severe consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic have tested all governments and revealed new challenges for public health, emergency and disaster response, and social protection systems;

Deeply concerned that the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted populations in vulnerable situations, such as asylum seekers, refugees, returnees and displaced persons in need of protection and their families, unaccompanied and separated children and adolescents, family groups, victims of sexual and gender violence, LGBTI persons, victims of human trafficking, women, indigenous people, migrants, afro-descendants, persons with disabilities, older persons and stateless persons, among others, further aggravating their particular situation and limiting access to the exercise of their human rights;

Taking into account that the MIRPS member States have adopted policies and measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and that this context represents a major challenge to our States to adequately address the specific and differentiated needs of these populations including asylum seekers, refugees, returnees and displaced persons in need of protection;

Concerned about the serious socio-economic impact that the COVID-19 pandemic continues to cause globally, coupled with the impacts of natural disasters and climate change that have particularly affected MIRPS member countries, with serious repercussions on increased poverty, social conflict, inequality, unemployment, hunger and food and nutrition insecurity, loss of income and livelihoods, situations that could be triggers for new mixed migratory movements and people seeking international protection in MIRPS member countries;

Seeing with concern the social impact of the pandemic, revealed in the increasing number of cases of domestic and gender-based violence, child violence, the impact on mental health and the appearance of racist and xenophobic incidents, in particular towards asylum seekers, refugees, returnees and displaced persons in need of protection;

Reaffirming our will to continue our national and regional actions to address the root causes of international protection needs, as well as to increase efforts to address those needs in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic and in a spirit of shared responsibility, with the support of the international community.

WE AGREE TO:

1. Work in a coordinated manner in the design of comprehensive public actions and policies so that the MIRPS member States can respond to the direct and indirect impacts that COVID-19 has caused and will continue to cause on asylum seekers, refugees, returnees and displaced persons in need of protection and their host communities, following the national regulations of each country and international and Inter-American standards for the protection of human rights.
2. Continue to strengthen the national institutions responsible for refugee status determination by improving their technical capabilities and increasing financial resources, in accordance with the capacity of each member country in the particular context of the COVID-19 pandemic with the support of international cooperation.
3. Continue working on actions and initiatives to exchange knowledge, experiences, lessons learned and good practices among the MIRPS member States, as well as with the support of countries of the Support Platform, UNHCR, and the OAS through the creation of thematic working groups aimed at responding to the needs of refugees, asylum seekers, returnees and displaced persons in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the search for durable solutions for these populations.
4. Promote, within the economic recovery measures that each country decides to adopt to face the COVID-19 pandemic and recent natural disasters, national plans, policies, or programs aimed at adopting mechanisms to include and integrate asylum seekers, refugees, returnees and displaced persons in need of protection in such a way as to provide them with protection, humanitarian assistance, access to social benefits or economic assistance, inclusion into the labor market, and recognition of skills for employment or occupation, within the limits of the capabilities of the States and their domestic legislation, in conjunction with the host communities.
5. Adopt measures and mechanisms to prevent and combat manifestations of violence and xenophobia and stigmatization, aimed at associating COVID-19 with to asylum seekers, refugees, returnees and displaced persons in need of protection.
6. Call on the international community including the MIRPS Support Platform member countries, the international and regional financial institutions, as well as existing bilateral and multilateral support mechanisms, civil society and the private sector to protect and assist refugees and support host countries and communities, as well as to contribute with the countries of origin and destination to address jointly, in accordance with the principles of burden-sharing and shared responsibility, the structural causes of displacement and the search for alternatives for the integration and inclusion of the populations of interest in this particular context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

7. Thank the UNHCR and the OAS for their role as Technical Secretariat of the MIRPS, under the leadership of the Pro Tempore Presidency, by generating a regional space for joint work that strengthens regional cooperation; also to request their continued support and monitoring of the implementation of national and regional responses, as well as the exchange of good practices and lessons learned.

8. Thank the leadership of the second Pro Tempore Presidency of the MIRPS by the government of El Salvador and the guidance exercised to carry out the work even in the context of the pandemic. Likewise, to welcome Guatemala as the new Pro Tempore Presidency of the MIRPS, and to thank Spain for holding the first Pro Tempore Presidency of the MIRPS Support Platform.