

Thematic Report – July 2017

## AMERICAS: POPULATION MOVEMENT



### Crisis overview

#### Table of content

Crisis overview.....	1
Contextual information.....	2
Migration routes in February 2017 .....	4
Crisis impact.....	5
Most reported needs per country .....	8
Aggravating factors.....	9
Response capacity .....	11
Information gaps and needs.....	11

#### Limitations

Information gaps on migration and needs of migrants and other displaced populations in the Americas are vast. Migration and displacement is a particularly sensitive topic in the Northern Triangle and information is limited. Information on needs along migrant routes is irregular and inconsistent, limiting needs analysis. Sectoral information beyond protection is an especially significant information gap. This report was widely based on anecdotal evidence and examples of needs reported in countries along the migration routes, relying heavily on media reports and the experience of other countries with displaced populations and migration.

ACAPS welcomes all information that could complement this report. For additional comments or questions please contact Caroline Draveny at [cd@acaps.org](mailto:cd@acaps.org).

### Overview

Northward population movement to Mexico and the US through South and Central America has steadily increased, with high numbers of migrants and asylum seekers registered across South and Central American countries in 2016. The increase in movement is driven by different phenomena, most prominently, the effects of gang violence in the Northern Triangle countries of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala. Large numbers of migrants from Haiti and Cuba have also been observed, along with a smaller, yet significant number of displaced people from overseas countries such as Syria, Bangladesh, and Somalia.

Overall, migrants and displaced persons in the Americas face similar needs of protection, shelter, health, and WASH. According to factors such as area of origin, length of journey or health conditions prior to the journey, the acuteness or extent of needs may vary. They often lack access to services, both due to government policies and fear of deportation. Repressive migration policies along the route and border closures have resulted in people stranded, which further exacerbates needs such as shelter and WASH.

### Priority needs

**Protection** needs are high for migrants due to abuse by gangs, smugglers, and authorities. Violence, SGBV, bribery, human trafficking, and deportations are common.

**Shelter** needs are high due to a lack of shelter and overcrowding due to limited capacity and a high rate of migrants.

**Health** needs along the migrant route are high, especially in remote areas such as the Darien Gap on the Colombia-Panama border. Migrants are increasingly taking remote routes to avoid detection, increasing health risks.

**WASH** is a priority and restricted access may contribute to disease spread. Needs are particularly high in border closure episodes and in overcrowded shelters.

### Humanitarian constraints

Many migrant policies, particularly in Central American countries, disregard the humanitarian needs of migrants and refugees and limit the access of international organisations to people in need of aid. In parallel, restrictive migration policies and surveillance on key migrant routes have caused people on the move to resort to alternative routes that are often unknown or dangerous. Where services are available many migrants do not access them due to fear of deportation.

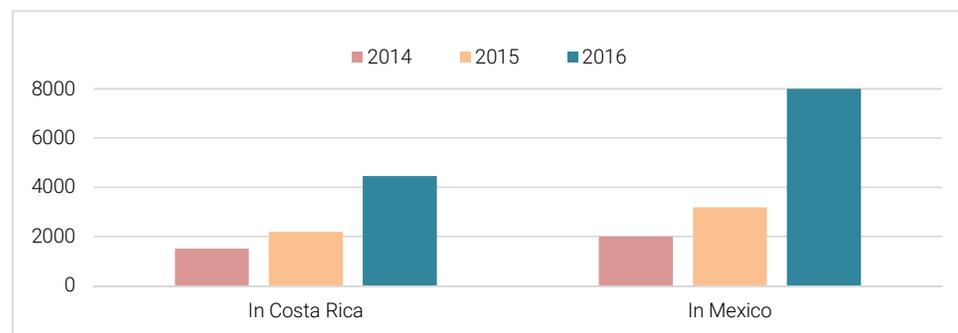
## Contextual information

### Drivers of migration

Migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers from all over the world, including Africa and East Asia, pass through the Americas yearly. Information is limited, but an estimated 400,000 irregular migrants cross from Central America into Mexico each year (Amnesty International 22/02/2017). While most people on the move in South and Central America are headed towards the Mexico-US border, other countries along migration routes in the region have recorded increasing numbers of migrants and asylum seekers. Between 2008 and 2014 UNHCR registered an increase of over 1000% in new asylum claims in Mexico, Panama, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Belize. A large number of the new asylum claims have been submitted by citizens of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala (The Guardian 06/09/2016; UNHCR 12/04/2014). Although numbers and distribution of people using migration routes through the Americas is unclear, evidence suggests that the majority of migrants and asylum-seekers in the region are from Central America itself, particularly El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. In 2016, 97% of migrants deported from Mexico were from Central America (Amnesty International 22/02/2017).

In recent years, displacement has experienced an upward trend across the Americas. Mexico received over 8,000 new asylum applications in 2016, an increase of 150% from claims filed in the previous year. Preliminary information in the first quarter of 2017 indicates a continued upward trend in applications (UNHCR 15/06/2017). In Costa Rica 4,460 asylum claims were filed in 2016, showing a 100% increase from numbers in 2015, and 200% from 2014 (UNHCR 15/06/2017).

### Examples of upward trend in asylum applications in recent years



Based on Animal Politico 19/06/2015; UNHCR 15/06/2017.

Likewise, an upward trend in migration has also been observed: in 2016, 34,000 migrants were recorded crossing through Colombia - four times the number of 2015. Panama received 27,000 migrants in 2016 up from 21,000 in 2015 (Prensa Latina 22/12/2016; La Prensa 19/11/2015; El Tiempo 19/01/2017).

**Insecurity and violence:** In the north of Central America high levels of gang-violence are a central driver of displacement. Between January and March 2017 the number of refugees and asylum-seekers originating from the north of Central America detained in Mexico reached 190,000, amounting to a tenfold increase over the past five years (UNHCR 15/06/2017). Despite this continued increase, displaced persons from Central America are often not recognised as such, and frequently face deportation to situations of insecurity or restricted access to basic services (Amnesty International 14/10/2016).

Population movement triggered by violence and crime, including internal displacement, is extremely concerning. This is especially relevant in the Northern Triangle, where homicide rates are among the highest worldwide, and torture, extortion and gang violence are widely reported. The most common forms of gang violence include forced recruitment, intra-gang conflict, and violence against non-gang members within a particular community (The Guardian 13/10/2016; Council of Foreign Relations 19/01/2016). Although exact numbers remain unclear, estimates of 2016 indicate that at least 190,000 people are internally displaced in Honduras, 257,000 in Guatemala and 220,000 in El Salvador due to violence (IDMC 2016 – Accessed on 16/06/2017).

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is also of concern, with women particularly vulnerable. Of the 25 countries worldwide with the highest rates of femicide, 14 are located in Latin America and the Caribbean, with El Salvador ranking first, Guatemala third and Honduras seventh (OCHA 07/01/2016).

In Mexico, harassment of human rights activists and journalists, torture and ill-treatment during police operations, gang and drug-related violence, enforced disappearances with the involvement of the state and disappearances committed by non-state actors are widespread (Amnesty International 22/02/2017). Roughly 311,000 people are estimated to be displaced in Mexico due to conflict and violence, with at least 23,000 newly displaced in 2016 (IDMC 2016 – Accessed on 26/06/2017).

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is of concern, with women particularly vulnerable. Of the 25 countries worldwide with the highest rates of femicide, 14 are located in Latin America and the Caribbean.

**Economic crises, political crises, and natural disasters:** In addition to violence, economic crisis, severely constrained access to basic services, political instability and natural disasters, particularly drought, may also drive population movement. In recent years, an increasing number of Haitian, Cuban, and Venezuelan migrants and asylum seekers across the Americas has been recorded (The Guardian 06/09/2016).

In Venezuela, estimates between November 2015 and October 2016 indicated an inflation of 552% for food items, which has severely restricted access to food. Severe health needs are also reported in the country, with a shortage of 90% of essential medicines. Need are aggravated by the government's refusal to allow international aid into the country. The economic and social crisis has progressively worsened throughout the years, particularly in 2016, driving displacement of Venezuelans into neighbouring countries (Amnesty International 22/02/2017). According to Brazilian Federal Police data, nine asylum applications were submitted by Venezuelans in 2014. In 2015 this number increased significantly, to 230, and again in 2016 to 2,230 (G1 13/03/2017). In 2017, media reported on 20 March that 1,000 Venezuelans had applied for asylum, while HRW reported in April that more than 4,000 were waiting for an appointment to submit their application (HRW 18/04/2017; O Globo 20/03/2017).

Population movement from non-Latin American countries has also experienced an upward trend in the last years, with violence, political instability and economic factors among the most prominent drivers.

In Haiti, Hurricane Matthew caused the country's largest humanitarian emergency since the 2010 earthquake, with 1.4 million left in need of urgent humanitarian assistance. Political instability throughout 2016 and dire humanitarian conditions, including poor health infrastructure and lack of access to livelihoods, are likely to have driven an increase in displacement to neighbouring countries. In addition, a significant spike in internal rural-urban migration was also reported (Amnesty International 22/02/2017).

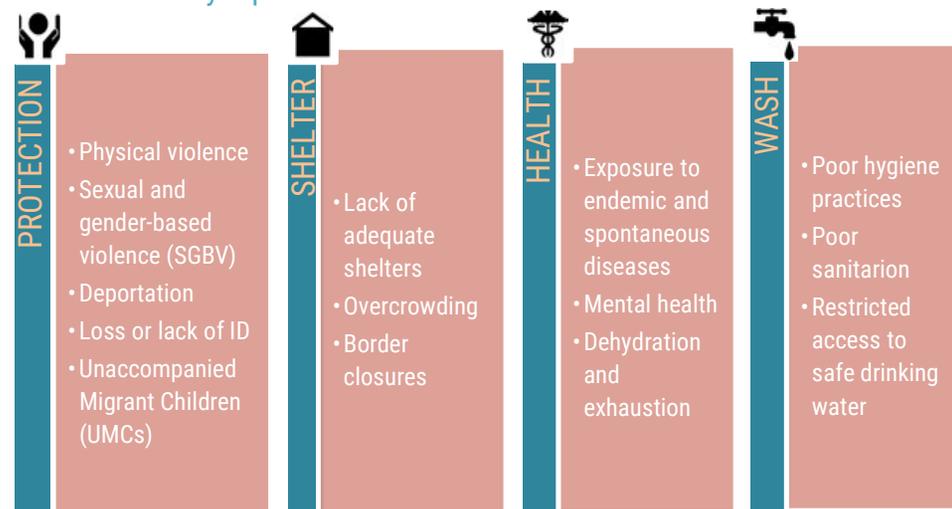
Population movement from non-Latin American countries has also experienced an upward trend in the last years, with violence, political instability and economic factors among the most prominent drivers. In Mexico, 15,000 migrants from outside Latin America passed through Baja California in 2016, a near fivefold increase from 2015 (LA Times 22/12/2016). These included nearly 8,000 displaced persons from African and Asian countries registered between January and September 2016, an 86% increase from 2015 (The Guardian 06/09/2016).



## Crisis impact

People on the move through the Americas face different obstacles, depending on routes travelled and countries' policies towards migrants and displaced populations, as well as their capacity and willingness to accommodate them.

### Most commonly reported issues



Shelter is among the most prominent needs, as several countries do not have mechanisms to host migrants and displaced persons, and those that do often cannot prevent overcrowding. Inadequate or overcrowded shelters often result in strained WASH facilities, which may contribute to disease spread. Health problems are common due to endemic diseases along the route and limited access to proper medical care, with health risks compounded by long periods of time on the move and harsh living conditions.

People on the move through the Americas face numerous protection risks, such as physical violence, exploitation, detention, and deportation. Gang activity accounts for the majority of protection threats and is of particular concern as displaced persons often refrain from seeking aid due to fear of gang-related reprisals. In El Salvador people fleeing tend to go into hiding rather than to seek refuge in camps or shelters in order to avoid detection from armed groups (IDMC 2017 – accessed on 27/06/2017). Due to similar drivers of displacement throughout the Northern Triangle, it is likely that migrants and asylum seekers from Guatemala and Honduras also use the same strategy.

Refusal to register with aid agencies or authorities, as well as lack of identification papers may also be applied as a strategy to avoid deportation. People traffickers often advise illegal migrants and asylum seekers to destroy their IDs in order to delay immigration processes. Lack of formal identification also makes it more difficult for authorities to assess age - an advantage in countries where detention and deportation policies are more lenient towards minors (Express 02/01/2017).

## Protection

**Physical violence:** Migrants suffer violence from gangs and smugglers, as well as security and border forces (MSF 11/05/2017). A report by MSF released in May 2017 revealed that approximately 68% of surveyed migrant and refugee populations entering Mexico had claimed being victims of violence along the route (MSF 11/05/2017).

In Mexico, an increase in reports of physical assaults and violation of migrant rights has been reported since monitoring of borders was increased in 2014 (El Imparcial Oaxaca 01/06/2017).

**Sexual and gender based violence (SGBV):** It is estimated that six out of ten women who pass through Mexico experience some form of sexual violence (OCHA 07/01/2016). Sexual violence, unwanted sex, and transactional sex in exchange for money, protection or shelter has been reported among male and female migrants in Mexico (MSF 11/05/2017).

**Smugglers:** known as *coyotes*, smugglers are increasingly being used for border-crossings as stricter immigration policies are being applied across the region (Deutsche Welle 01/03/2017). There are regular reports of smugglers misleading and abusing migrants (LA Times 22/12/2016). This is most acute in areas with challenging terrain, such as the jungle known as the Darien Gap between Colombia and Panama, which is highly dangerous to cross alone because of armed groups' presence, as well as areas where borders are closed, such as that of Costa Rica and Nicaragua (LA Times 22/12/2016. Confidencial 26/12/2016). Migrants are often taken hostage for a ransom, trafficked or forced into prostitution (Reuters 04/03/2017; Reuters 11/01/2017).

**Deportation:** Migrants and displaced persons often face the risk of deportation, particularly those that have illegally entered a country. Bribes are paid to security forces along migration routes to avoid detention and deportation (Deutsche Welle 06/04/2017; ADN Sureste 12/05/2017).

As violence drives much of the displacement, particularly from the Northern Triangle, deportation poses a severe risk to the safety of those forcibly returned to their countries of origin. A survey conducted by the Center for Migration Studies indicates that many deportees remain displaced after returning, due to fear of reprisals from those they had fled from (Center for Migration Studies 06/2017).

Where governments do not ensure protection to returnees and deportees, reintegration is likely to be more difficult and personal freedoms restricted. Persistent threats and persecution may trigger subsequent attempts to flee irregularly, repeatedly exposing migrants and displaced persons to an array of protection, shelter, WASH, and health risks (ICG 28/07/2017; Center for Migration Studies 06/2017).

**Loss or lack of ID:** Population movement may result in loss of documentation along the route due to hasty departures, inadequate shelters or lack of storage alternatives for belongings, among other factors. Lack of ID is likely to negatively impact on access to assistance and services, as well as restrict freedom of movement. For migrants and refugees in the Americas, documentation is particularly relevant for border crossings. In this context, the loss or lack of ID is likely to encourage people on the move to recur to more remote routes, where there are limited or no official border proceedings. The use of more remote and isolated routes increases risks in a number of sectors, such as protection, shelter, and WASH (UNHCR 2010. Accessed on 15/06/2017).

Lack of documentation may also expose migrants and refugees to harassment or arbitrary detention as well as aggravate the risk of statelessness (UNHCR 2010. Accessed on 15/06/2017). In 2016, the Dominican Republic deported 40,000 people of Haitian descent between January and September. A number of deportees however had been born in the Dominican Republic and were then effectively rendered stateless (Amnesty International 22/02/2017).

**Unaccompanied migrant children (UMC):** A sharp increase in the number of unaccompanied underage migrants attempting to cross the US-Mexico border was reported in 2016. Typically, most UMCs apprehended at the US-Mexico border are nationals of Mexico or Northern Triangle countries, where recruitment by gangs is a particular concern (Deutsche Welle 06/04/2017; HRW 31/03/2017). In 2016, some 60,000 unaccompanied children from Northern Triangle were apprehended attempting to reach the US (UNHCR 15/06/2017). Less than 1% of children detained by Mexican immigration authorities are recognised as refugees.

Restricted asylum grants to children occur due to a number of reasons including lack of mechanisms to properly screen children and process their grounds for an asylum claim, or absence of legal assistance for children who do formally apply for refuge (HRW 31/03/2017).

An additional protection concern is the confinement of UMCs in prison-like conditions, such as in immigration detention centres or specialised shelters, where movement is restricted and adequate infrastructure is lacking. Children applying for asylum or

Most UMCs apprehended at the US-Mexico border are nationals of Mexico or Northern Triangle countries, where recruitment by gangs is a particular concern.

appealing the decision on their applications in Mexico have reported protracted periods of detention, aggravating protection risks (HRW 31/03/2017).

## Shelter

**Lack of adequate shelters:** Absence of shelters is a significant issue for migrants throughout all migration routes, as some countries, such as Colombia and Nicaragua, are not prepared to receive migrants. This results in people staying in host communities or in abandoned buildings. Lack of shelter is particularly reported in the Darien gap on the Colombia-Panama border.

**Overcrowding:** is particularly reported in Mexico, and in Deldu camp in northern Costa Rica. In January 2017, there were reports of 3,200 people sharing 28 shelters in Tijuana, with hundreds sleeping in hallways (Catholic News Agency 12/01/2017; NY Times 27/01/2017). As of May 2017, the closure of a migrant centre in Chahuities in southern Mexico due to violence resulted in people being grouped in one centre. Severe overcrowding has since been reported (NVI Noticias 09/05/2017). Regular protests due to lack of adequate shelter occur in Tapachula immigration centre in southern Mexico, which is the largest in Latin America (CBC News 22/02/2017).

**Border closures:** aggravate shelter needs, as people often become stranded. This results in people sleeping out in the open, make-shift camps or in private accommodation within local communities. In countries where migrants are allocated to specific camps such as Panama, Costa Rica, and Mexico, overcrowding often occurs and results in dire living conditions. At the peak of the migrant crisis in June-July 2016 when several countries closed their borders, Panama's border closure resulted in 1,300 people sheltering in one warehouse in Turbo, Antioquia, in Colombia (Colombia Reports 25/06/2016). In Deldu informal camp in Costa Rica, border closures in June 2016 led to 800 people sleeping in the open. (Monumental 06/10/2016).

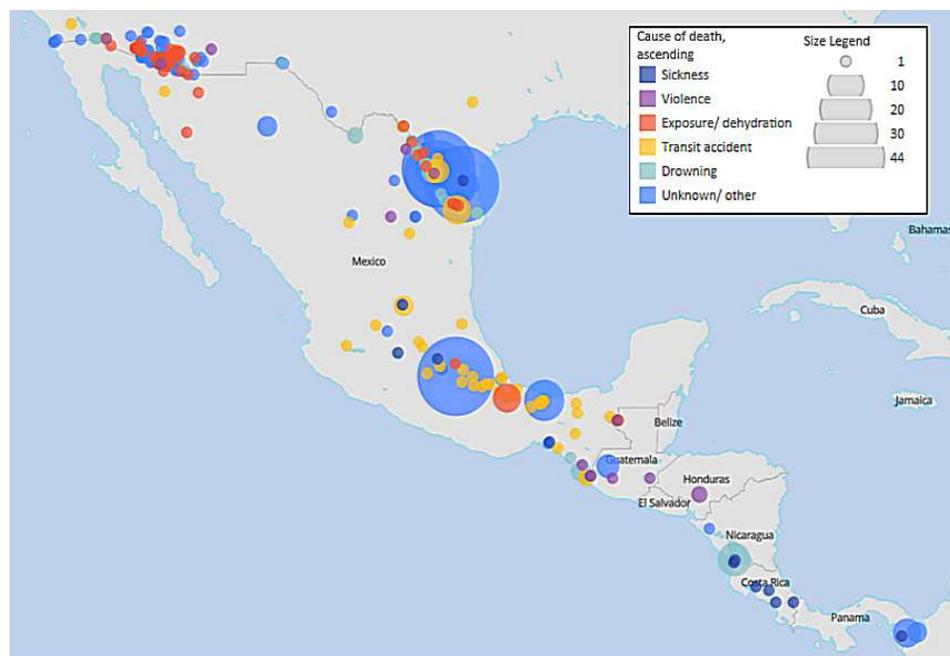
## Health

On the route, migrants and refugees are likely to be exposed to disease, as they cross areas with endemic diseases and as well as spontaneous outbreaks. Population movement is likely to facilitate disease outbreaks or elevate incidence levels, as people transit from endemic to non-endemic areas. This is particularly relevant for communicable diseases or where vector-borne diseases are common. For example, transiting from jungle to urban areas may facilitate the transmission of yellow fever. Similarly, movement of people from high transmission areas may result in imported cases or contribute to the re-introduction of malaria into low-transmission or disease-free zones. Malaria was reported at the beginning of February among Cuban migrants in

Ancón, central Panama, an area considered absent of malaria transmission risk (TVN 07/02/2017, Ciber Cuba 09/02/2017; Red Planet- accessed on 22/06/2017).

In addition to sickness, vulnerabilities accumulated along their journey, such as exhaustion or dehydration, are likely to aggravate health conditions and may have fatal consequences.

## Main cause of migrant deaths in 2016



Source: IOM 08/03/2017.

Health response is limited or non-existent in most shelters types, and access to medical facilities varies depending on people's financial means. In January 2017, there were reports of migrants arriving in Chiapas on the southern border of Mexico with respiratory infections they had developed during their journey (Quadratin Oaxaca 27/01/2017). Health issues such as diarrhoea and acute respiratory infections are aggravated by overcrowded or inadequate shelter and WASH-related issues, such as poor sanitation and restricted access to safe drinking water (WHO – accessed on 27/06/2017; UNHCR 1995 – accessed on 27/06/2017).

**Mental health issues:** need for psychosocial support is commonly identified among displaced populations, including migrants and people on the move. In Mexico, over 68% of immigrants have stated they have been victims of violence, with one-third of women reporting sexual abuse. Among migrants reporting instances of physical violence, approximately 90% have shown symptoms of mental health problems (MSF 11/05/2017).

Family separations, disruption of social networks, and sexual exploitation are among a number of triggers for psychosocial trauma likely to occur across all displacement contexts, including migration in the Americas. Overcrowding in camps or lack of privacy, particularly for migrants sleeping in open spaces, are likely to trigger mental health issues. For those originating from areas in extreme poverty or affected by gang or drug-related violence, insecurity, physical injuries, loss of livelihoods or property are also likely to cause trauma (WHO 07/2013).

## WASH

Although largely underreported, WASH needs are expected to be high. Hazardous and isolated migrant routes contribute to poor hygiene practices along with limited access to safe drinking water and proper sanitation facilities (Outside Online 19/06/2017).

### Overcrowding in shelters is likely to strain WASH services, such as water provision, sanitation, and waste management.

Spontaneous gatherings of stranded migrants along closed borders have overwhelmed hygiene services (Vice 13/01/2017). Similarly, overcrowding in shelters is likely to strain WASH services, such as water provision, sanitation, and waste management. Limited access to drinking water is likely to prompt people to resort to alternative water sources of poorer quality. Since March 2016, a lack of access to drinking water and poor sanitation conditions have been reported among migrants stranded along the Costa Rica-Nicaragua border as well as in Deldu, an overcrowded make-shift camp in Costa Rica (IFRC 28/09/2017; La Prensa 06/01/2017; Confidencial 26/12/2016). In Mexico, media has reported the absence of connection to the local water supply system in one shelter setting in Tijuana (New York times 30/01/2017). The situation is likely to be the same for many more shelters in the city and across the country.

## Most reported needs per country



Source: Acaps 06/07/2017.

## Aggravating factors

### Natural disasters

Migrants face various adverse weather conditions depending on the time of year. Particularly dry conditions, low temperatures or flooding are likely to create additional challenges for people on the move and weaken response capacity in their host countries.

In southern Mexico, Central America, and northern South America the hurricane season runs roughly from June to November (Conred – accessed on 19/06/2017). During this period, areas affected experience elevated risks of strong winds, excessive rainfall, flooding, and land and mudslides. Severe weather is likely to result in damage to shelter infrastructure and aggravate needs, particularly for migrants and refugees sheltering in substandard shelter types or open spaces.

Drought is also a recurrent issue in South and Central America and has predominantly affected Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador since 2014. At the beginning of 2016, more than 3.5 million people were estimated food insecure and in need of assistance in these countries (OCHA 07/01/2016). Dry conditions are likely to restrict water availability, aggravating WASH needs and exacerbating migration from hard-hit to less affected areas, particularly for households dependent on agriculture for livelihoods and food access (Stratfor 02/09/2015; Climate & Development Knowledge Network 01/01/2013).

### Dry corridor – Regions that typically face particularly dry conditions



Source: OCHA 07/01/2016.

## Host community tensions

Increased migration into an area may significantly impact on the local communities in a number of ways and, in some instances, cause tension between the displaced and host-communities (Strategic Migration Partnership 06/2015 - accessed on 15/06/2017). For displaced groups with access to the local job market, legally or illegally, competition for jobs is a potential source of tension. Increased pressure on health and education services, often already overstretched, may also trigger tensions among displaced groups as well as between them and host communities (ERC/ESO/UNHCR/JIPS 04/2016; REACH 09/2014).

In Mexico, local community members in Chiapas have complained that migrants *en route* to the US are illegally crossing the river along the border with Guatemala, and increasingly stopping and settling in the region. The growing presence of migrants, predominantly from El Salvador and Guatemala, has reportedly driven down wages and strained local services. Whether the migrants plan to stay in Mexico or resume their movement towards the US remains unclear (Texas Tribune 25/10/2016).

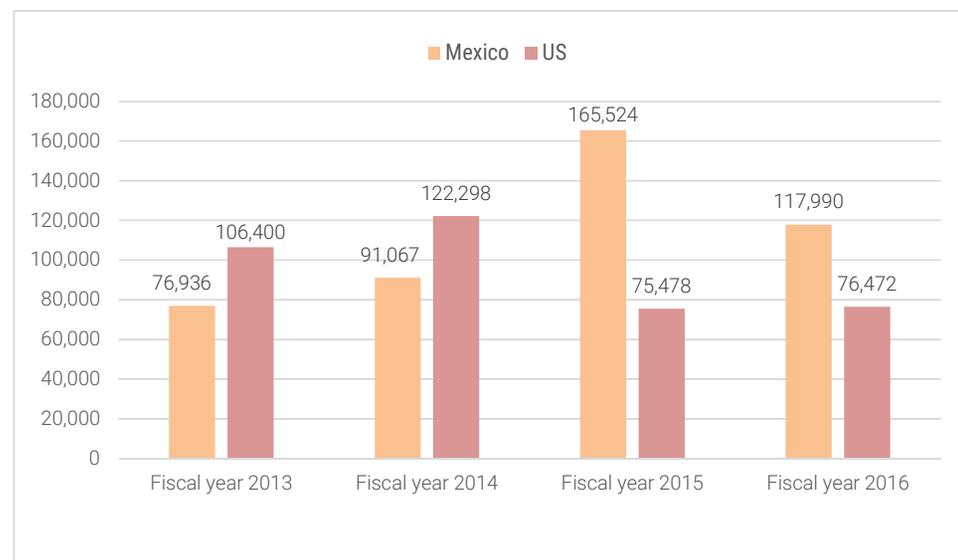
Lack of housing where public shelters are unavailable and private accommodations unaffordable may also drive tensions, particularly in areas where migrants and displaced personas are stranded. In such situations, they are likely to seek shelter in open public spaces. This may contribute to a perception of insecurity or increased poverty among host community members and lead to hostilities. In Brazil, over 500 indigenous Venezuelan refugees were deported from the state of Roraima between 2014 and 2016, following a request by the local community (Amazonia Real 08/03/2017).

## Tightened policies against migration

In addition to longstanding hazardous migrant routes, such as the Darien Gap, displacement routes are changing constantly and vary widely. These changes are due to attempts to avoid tightened surveillance along well known routes, following the implementation of stricter immigration policies by countries in Latin America (Deutsche Welle 06/04/2017).

In 2014, the Mexican government launched an effort to increase and improve surveillance over the country's ports of entry known as the Frontera Sur programme. This initiative has resulted in an increasing number of deportations from Mexico and heightened difficulties for those trying to reach the Mexico-US border. Citizens of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala have been particularly impacted by Frontera Sur, as they represent the majority of migrants and displaced moving towards Mexico and the US (Wilson Center 11/07/2014; ICG 28/07/21016; El Heraldo 11/12/2016).

## Deportations of Northern Triangle citizens from US and Mexico



Source: ICG 28/07/2016; El Heraldo 11/12/2016; US Immigration and Customs Enforcement 30/12/2016.

In 2016, the Public Security Ministry in Costa Rica vowed to increase surveillance along its porous border with Panama and deport illegal migrants and people who infringe the terms of their temporary humanitarian status in the country. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the majority of migrants transiting through Costa Rica originate from Haiti (Tico Times 03/08/2016). Similarly, Panama has increased deportations, with Cuban migrants particularly impacted. In January 2017, the US revoked the 'dry foot wet foot policy', which gave all Cubans fleeing to the US the right to pursue residency for a year (El Nuevo Herald 09/02/2017).

In order to avoid detention and deportation, people on the move have increasingly taken more dangerous routes (The Guardian 12/10/2017). One alternative route includes the sea crossing from Ocos, in northern Guatemala, to Mexico, where several migrants have drowned (Quartz 27/03/2017). In 2016, 10 people drowned on Lake Nicaragua after using a smuggler to avoid border security between Costa Rica and Nicaragua (Tico Times 03/08/2016). Another dangerous alternative route in use is the Sonora desert, located between Mexico and the US, where snakebites, starvation, and dehydration pose severe risks (The Guardian 01/03/2017).

Border closures also severely impact people on the move, leaving many stranded. In November 2015, Nicaragua closed its border, which prompted a similar reaction from Costa Rica in April 2016, closely followed by Panama in May 2016 (The Guardian 27/05/2016). This resulted in migrants gathering on border crossings, where acute needs, such as shelter and protection, have been reported.

## Impact of US policies on migration

Increasingly restrictive policies from the US since early 2017 have affected irregular migration throughout Central America. The end of the "wet foot, dry foot" policy resulted in thousands of Cubans being stranded in Mexico, and impacted on other countries' policies towards Cuban migrants transiting northward (Reuters 20/01/2017; NY Times 22/01/2017).

Since the start of the Trump administration, the US has increased border patrols and suspended procedures that facilitated regular migration to the country, such as the Central American Minors in-country refugee processing. This procedure was used to allow minors to apply for refugee status and reunite with a parent in the US (The Guardian 02/02/2017).

As push factors for migration and displacement remain in many countries, people on the move are likely to increasingly resort to smugglers and more isolated or hostile routes.

As push factors for migration and displacement remain in many countries, people on the move are likely to increasingly resort to smugglers and more isolated or hostile routes to enter the US.

## Language barriers

Non Spanish speaking migrants and refugees are more vulnerable to extortion by immigration agents as well as being easy targets for smugglers (CBC News 22/02/2017). Language barriers also complicate the process of applying for asylum or obtaining legal assistance (Huffington Post 09/01/2016).

For those who are able to obtain asylum or a visa in countries along the route, language is likely to impose a barrier to integration efforts, such as entering the job market or accessing education. Language may also be a barrier to understanding and complying with a country's rules and bureaucratic processes (BBC 01/12/2015; La Prensa de Colorado 20/03/2015;

## Response capacity

### Local and national response capacity

Response varies widely between countries. While governments and civil society organisations in Costa Rica, Panama, and Mexico have responded to accommodate people in different centres and provide services, other countries such as Nicaragua and countries of the Northern Triangle do not acknowledge needs or arrest and detain migrants in detention centres (Reuters 11/01/2017, International Crisis Group 28/07/2016).

Local Red Cross organisations in Costa Rica and Panama provide healthcare at border points, food assistance, and WASH assistance. The Costa Rican Red Cross also runs two migrant centres. These organisations work with governments to provide support for protection and processing of refugees (IFRC 28/09/2017)

Where response is ongoing, local NGOs and faith-based organizations perform much of the work, with some receiving funding from international organisations (Centre for Migrant Studies 09/2016; ADN Sureste 12/05/2017; Congressional Research Service 11/04/2016).

### International response capacity

Various Red Cross appeals have assisted in specific areas along migrant routes. In Honduras, IFRC has supported health and WASH assistance of national immigration authorities to people passing through Choluteca, although the operation ended in March (IFRC 17/01/2017). Some shelters in Mexico have been supported by UNHCR (UNHCR 02/2017).

### Humanitarian and operational constraints

- **Security issues:** gangs operate across the region, resulting in high crime levels and mobility constraints. This is of particular concern in the Northern Triangle. This limits both aid delivery and the ability of humanitarians to access affected communities and identify their needs (ODI 06/2017).
- **Fear of reprisals:** In the Northern Triangle, affected communities do not report to authorities for fear of reprisals by gangs, which impedes on humanitarians' capacity to respond to their needs. This is likely to also be the case for people on the move (ODI 06/2017).
- **Lack of recognition:** Government policies towards migrants and displaced persons in South and Central America often do not acknowledge their humanitarian needs, limiting the manoeuvrability of international response persons (MSF 11/05/2017,

ODI 06/2017). Denial from local authorities that violence and insecurity may trigger displacement further impacts provision of aid particularly in the Northern Triangle (Amnesty International 15/10/2016; UNHCR 2017 – accessed on 21/06/2017; UNHCR 03/2017).

- **Lack of awareness:** Not being aware that help is available, of one's right to obtain it or how to obtain it restricts beneficiaries' access to aid. Of the 400,000 irregular migrants estimated to cross Mexico each year, at least half could qualify for asylum, but are largely uninformed about their right to apply (HRW 31/03/2017).
- **Funding:** As of 15 June, UNHCR has indicated that the funding gap for programmes focusing on displacement due to violence and insecurity in the north of Central America amount to USD 25 million. So far, USD 4 million of the original appeal has been made available (UNHCR 15/06/2017). Similarly, the UNHCR funding appeal of USD 18 million made in 2016 for programmes in the region was significantly underfunded with a funding gap of over 50% reported on September 2016 (UNHCR 09/2016).

## Information gaps and needs

- Information on migrants and refugees' needs while moving along migration routes is largely irregular, inconsistent, anecdotal or unavailable. Quantitatively, there is little accuracy on the number of people in need, while qualitatively, there is limited understanding about what sectoral needs are most pressing.
- Conflicting numbers of people travelling through a particular country in a given time makes comparisons across years and countries difficult.
- Information about the country of origin of migrants crossing through a given country is limited.
- There is little information and understanding about refugees and migrants from overseas and their needs.
- The breakdown of people on the move (asylum seekers, economic migrants, refugees) remains largely unclear in most contexts.
- It is unclear where displaced groups within the Northern Triangle are located and what their needs are.
- Information on response in the Northern Triangle and Nicaragua is severely limited. Similarly, information on where authorities take people on the move after they have been detained in these regions is lacking.