



# 20 YEARS

## Regional Conference on Migration

Fostering and strengthening regional dialogue and cooperation





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# **20 Years Report OF THE RCM**





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## Regional Conference on Migration – 20 Years

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# Introduction

## 20 Years of the RCM Fostering Regional Dialogue and Cooperation on Migration

The Regional Conference on Migration (RCM) was created 20 years ago to foster and strengthen regional dialogue and cooperation on migration. Comprised of eleven countries from the Americas, the RCM was established in February 1996 as a result of the Tuxtla II Presidential Summit. The RCM is a multilateral mechanism for exchange of information and best practices as well as regional dialogue and cooperation on policies and actions relating to migration that are implemented in the eleven Member Countries: Belize, Canada, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama and the United States.

These countries currently make up a well-established migration system of increasing historical, economic, social and cultural significance.

Historically, various political, economic, social, cultural and environmental factors, which date back as far as the colonial period, have determined migration in the region.

During the conquest and colonization, the region was a highly important destination for migrants from overseas – Europeans, Asians, Africans and Afro-Caribbeans – and in addition, it was characterized by significant intraregional migration flows. In the twentieth century, particularly Central America and Mexico became a region of origin and transit of migrants, while the United States and Canada essentially became countries of destination for migrants. The Dominican

Republic, for its part, was characterized by significant emigration and immigration flows.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, migration occurs between all Member Countries of the Regional Conference on Migration (RCM) for various purposes: work, education, opportunities, tourism, investment, trade, asylum and protection, among many others.

The governments of the countries in the region have recognized the importance of addressing migration with a regional approach, promoting solidarity and an open and honest dialogue and generating spaces for convergence and cooperation, with the active participation of countries of origin, transit and destination.

### Objectives of the RCM

The specific objectives of the RCM are as follows:

- To provide a forum for a frank and open dialogue on regional migration with the aim of fostering and strengthening regional coordination and cooperation;
- To implement regional-level efforts aimed at protecting the human rights of migrants;
- To strengthen the integrity of migration legislation, borders and national security in each Member Country;
- To reinforce the links between migration and development.

In addition to providing a space for dialogue and information exchange among governments, the RCM also carries out multiple activities such as the following: cooperation initiatives; assistance to migrant women and boys, girls and adolescents; training workshops and seminars on migration; and technical and institutional assistance for immigration authorities of RCM Member Countries.

Furthermore, the RCM conducts comparative analyses with the objective of generating input for policymaking and for improving regulations on migration matters. Moreover, the RCM develops regional guidelines and manuals as guiding tools for the development and implementation of policies on specialized topics such as the return of migrants, assistance to migrant women and boys, girls and adolescents, and repatriation of victims of trafficking, among others.

The challenges relating to migration management that are currently faced by the region need to be addressed carefully. Challenges include the high level of irregular and disorganized migration in inhumane conditions; the increasing flows of migrants in vulnerable situations, including boys, girls, and adolescents; the growing level of crime, abuse, intolerance and xenophobia against migrants; and the difficulty to achieve the effective integration of migrant populations in countries of destination or the reintegration of migrants who have returned to their countries of origin.

In addition, migration involves tremendous opportunities that need to be harnessed effectively by countries in the region in order to better contribute to their development. For example, labour migration; global competitiveness; demographic renewal; productive investment of remittances; tourism; promotion and strengthening of a global human rights culture; cultural diversity; knowledge and technology transfer; fostering intercultural dialogue and cooperation; etc.

In light of the magnitude of the opportunities and challenges posed by migration in the region, the RCM gains greater importance and

relevance as a consolidated and effective forum for dialogue, cooperation and convergence around the topic of migration, one of the most relevant topics for the future of the region in the coming decades.

## Objective of the Publication

This document presents the main actions and achievements of the RCM during its first twenty years of operation.

Sections 1, 2 and 3 list the Member Countries and organizations involved in the RCM. In addition, the central themes addressed by the Presidency pro tempore (PPT) each year are highlighted and the structure, characteristics and operative mechanisms of the RCM are described.

Section 4 sets forth the topics that have been addressed by the RCM since its inception. The topics are classified under the three central themes of action of the RCM:

1. **MIGRATION POLICY AND MANAGEMENT:** Includes the topics of policy and migration management, and migrant smuggling and trafficking.
2. **HUMAN RIGHTS:** Includes the topics of consular protection, and women, boys, girls and adolescents and persons in vulnerable situations in the context of migration.
3. **MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT:** Includes the topics of remittances, temporary migrant workers, and the private sector.

Sections 5 and 6 describe the cooperation efforts implemented within the framework of the RCM; agreed guidelines and declarations; and the links that the RCM has established with other organizations and institutions.

Finally, Section 7 includes reflections on the achievements as well as the main present and future challenges of the RCM.

# I – MEMBERS OF THE RCM

## MEMBER COUNTRIES

The Member Countries of the RCM are 11 nations from Central America and North America and the Dominican Republic:



Belize



Canada



Costa Rica



El Salvador



Dominican Republic



Guatemala



Honduras



Mexico



Nicaragua



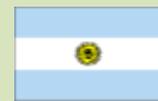
Panama



United States

## OBSERVER COUNTRIES

Furthermore, the RCM includes 5 additional countries with observer status: Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, Jamaica and Peru. Observer States participate in the open discussions of Vice-Ministers held as part of the different activities of the RCM. However, they do not intervene in the agenda, in decision-making processes or in the development of documents containing recommendations or commitments without prior authorization from the President pro tempore.



Argentina



Colombia



Ecuador



Jamaica



Peru



## ORGANIZATIONS WITH OBSERVER STATUS

The RCM includes 10 regional or international organizations with observer status. The role of these organizations is to support projects identified by each government, share information about topics of interest, provide technical assistance and formulate recommendations in specific cases. The President pro tempore and the Technical Secretariat (TS) of the RCM determine the slots on the agendas of the meetings of the RCM that are allocated to observer organizations for their participation. The observer organizations include the following (by order of incorporation into the RCM):



International Organization for Migration – IOM (since 1996)



United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean/Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Centre – ECLAC/CELADE (since 1996)



United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees – UNHCR (since 1997)



Inter-American Commission on Human Rights – IACHR (since 2000)



United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants (since 2003)



Central American Integration System – SICA (since 2003)



United Nations Population Fund – UNFPA (since 2006)



Ibero-American General Secretariat – SEGIB (since 2007)



International Committee of the Red Cross – ICRC (since 2014)



United Nations Children's Fund – UNICEF (since 2015)



In addition, the Regional Network for Civil Organizations on Migration (RNCOM – <http://www.rrocm.com>), comprised of various non-governmental organizations (NGOs), is actively involved in the RCM since 1998 with the objective of strengthening the dialogue on migration with civil society. RNCOM participates in the seminars and workshops of the RCM, with spaces for participation in groups such as the Regional Consultation Group on Migration (RCGM) and the Vice-Ministerial Meeting.



## MEMBERSHIP AND CRITERIA FOR GRANTING OBSERVER STATUS<sup>1</sup>

A country must commit to the following to be able to be a RCM Member Country:

1. The principles of the Joint Communiqué issued in Puebla;
2. The orderly movement of persons and respect for the human rights of migrants;
3. Addressing issues relating to international migration in a multilateral context within the framework of the RCM;
4. Exchanging information about policies or practices relating to international migration.

For a country to be granted observer country, it should:

- Be geographically located on the American continent;
- Express in written from its adhesion to the commitments of the Puebla Joint Communiqué;
- Have a significant movement of migrants with at least one RCM Member Country;
- Accept addressing the phenomenon of migration in a multilateral context within the RCM;
- Accept the commitment to ensure the orderly movement of persons and respect for the human rights of migrants;
- Have policy, legislation and practices in place that are oriented towards addressing international migration;
- Commit to designating officers from institutions addressing the phenomenon of international migration to attend the Vice-Ministerial meetings of the RCM;

- Submit a written declaration to Vice-Ministers stating the interest in and commitment with the above-mentioned principles;
- Recognize that the decision to accept or reject a new application for observer status is made by the Vice-Ministers from the RCM Member Countries in a private meeting.

For an international organization to be granted observer status by the RCM, it should:

- Commit to promote the principles of the Puebla Joint Communiqué;
- Have a mandate related to at least one of the central themes of the Plan of Action of the RCM;
- Submit a written application to the Vice-Ministers of the RCM Member Countries to support their request for observer status.

Observers:

- May be invited to make declarations at the meetings of the RCM, but may not participate in the discussions or the development of documents on recommendations and decisions emanated from the meetings of the RCM;
- Will accept that the RCM Member Countries reserve the right to hold meetings or specific parts of meetings exclusively for Member Countries.

1. Criteria approved at the IV Regional Conference on Migration, held in San Salvador, El Salvador on January 28-29, 1999 according to Item 5 of the Joint Communiqué.



## II – The Presidency of the CRM and its Central Themes

Each year, a RCM Member Country volunteers to take on the Presidency pro tempore (PPT) of the RCM. Since 1999, the country acting as PPT selects a central theme for the discussions and actions of the RCM during that term, in accordance with national and regional interests and migration realities. The table below includes a list of countries and the central theme of each PPT for its term of office throughout the 20 years of existence of the RCM:



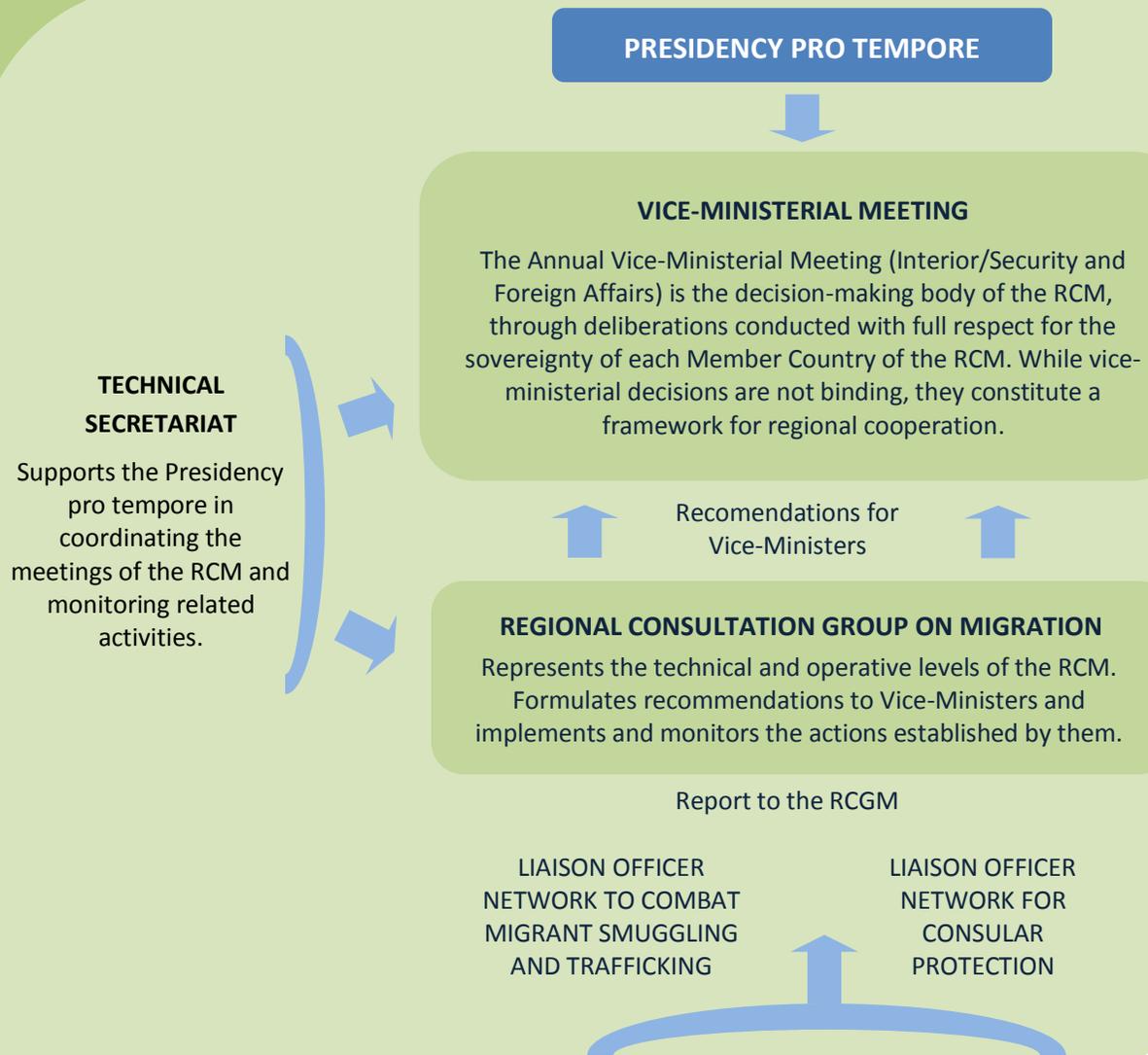
YEAR	PRESIDENT	CENTRAL THEME
1996	Mexico	Establishing the RCM as a Consultative Process
1997	Panama	Adopting a Plan of Action for the RCM
1998	Canada	Implementing the Plan of Action of the RCM
1999	El Salvador	Modernizing Immigration Services
2000	United States	Consolidating a Sustainable Vision Regarding the Future of the RCM
2001	Costa Rica	Modernizing Migration Management and Cross-Border Cooperation
2002	Guatemala	Towards Regional Solidarity for Security and Migration
2003	Mexico	Consolidating Regional Security through Modern Migration Management
2004	Panama	Plan of Action of the RCM and Convergence with other Processes and International Organizations in Migration Matters
2005	Canada	Integration and Citizenship
2006	El Salvador	Linking Communities
2007	United States	Effective Cooperation in Combating Trafficking in Persons
2008	Honduras	Migration and Human Rights
2009	Guatemala	Migration and Development
2010	Mexico	Migration and Family
2011	Dominican Republic	Migration and Labour: A Shared Responsibility of States
2012	Panama	Security in the Framework of Human Rights and Mixed Migration Flows
2013	Costa Rica	Migration and Social Integration: Migration with a Human Face
2014	Nicaragua	For a Region Free of Trafficking in Persons
2015	Mexico	Integration, Return and Social and Productive Reintegration of Migrants
2016	Honduras	Migration, a Shared and Differentiated Responsibility

# III- Operative Structure of the RCM

## COORDINATION MECHANISMS OF THE RCM

In a hierarchical order, the main mechanisms of the Puebla Process include the following: the Vice-Ministerial Meeting, the Regional Consultation Group on Migration (RCGM), the Liaison Officer Network to Combat Migrant Smuggling and Trafficking and the Liaison Officer Network for Consular Protection. The latter two work in a parallel manner. In addition, Vice-Ministers established the Technical Secretariat (TS) of the RCM in 2001 to support the work of the RCM and follow up

on the agreements emanated from each meeting. To define its lines of work, the RCM developed a Plan of Action, which summarizes the commitments for regional actions and a basic framework for the direction and coordination of actions. The RCM structures its agenda and Plan of Action around three central themes: Migration Policy and Management, Human Rights, and Migration and Development.



## OPERATING MECHANISM OF THE RCM

### A. VICE-MINISTERIAL MEETING

The Vice-Ministerial Meeting is the executive decision-making body of the RCM. Until 2014, the meeting was held in the first half of each year in a Member Country that volunteered to take on the Presidency pro tempore. Since 2015, the meeting is held in the second half of each year. The Vice-Ministerial Meetings are divided into two parts:

- A plenary session with participation of observer States and organizations. The agenda should include the following topics, as a minimum: the report of the PPT, the opening statements from the delegations of RCM Member Countries and the dialogue with civil society organizations, represented by the Regional Network for Civil Organizations on Migration (RNCOM). Furthermore, additional topics of interest are included which have previously been identified by the PPT and the RCM Member Countries.
- A closed-door meeting with exclusive participation of Vice-Ministers or Undersecretaries, each of whom is accompanied by two high-ranking officials, as considered appropriate. At the closed-door meeting sensitive decisions of a political nature are made, as well as decisions on administrative and financial matters relating to the Technical Secretariat of the RCM as well as future actions and activities of the RCM. In addition, conditions for new members and criteria for the participation of observers are established.

The agendas of the Vice-Ministerial meetings are developed considering the issues from previous meetings that require follow-up actions and topics of interest proposed by the PPT or the RCM Member Countries. A preliminary version of the agenda is shared with all Member Countries and international observer organizations, with the aim of

receiving their input. The agenda is structured around the three central themes of the Plan of Action of the RCM.

Decisions – consensual and non-binding – are recorded in the declaration formulated at the end of each annual meeting.

### Decision-Making Mechanisms

Whenever a consultation among RCM Member Countries is required between Vice-Ministerial meetings, the President pro tempore (PPT) will activate a consultation process in order to promptly propose a course of action. This procedure is used to address substantive issues requiring an agreed position of the RCM.

1. The PPT activates the procedure by submitting the course of action in writing to the Troika (comprised of the current, former and upcoming PPT) in order to receive preliminary feedback.
2. Once the consensus of the Troika has been obtained, the text is shared with the RCM Member Countries and a term of 5 working days is established for Member Countries to submit their input.
3. Once the input from the Member Countries has been received, the proposed changes – if any – are made to the text, and the document is shared with all Member Countries again in order to receive their comments within a term of 5 working days.
4. Once this period has ended, and with the consensus of the RCM, the PPT is responsible for implementing the agreed action and informing the RCM Member Countries about the results.

Member Countries are responsible for providing updated contact information of their respective focal points in order to enable consultations.

## B. PRESIDENCY PRO-TEMPORE (PPT)

The PPT was established to facilitate the coordination of the RCM between meetings. The PPT is appointed by consensus between the RCM Member Countries under an annual rotation scheme. Countries interested in taking on the role of PPT are required to announce this during the Vice-Ministerial Plenary Session.

The PPT is responsible for the establishment of mechanisms to convene and send out the corresponding invitations for the events of the RCM. In addition, the PPT is in charge of the coordination and general management of the meetings and actions of the RCM that are implemented during its term of office,<sup>2</sup> as well as the meetings and actions of the Regional Consultation Group on Migration (RCGM) and the Liaison Officer Networks. A Drafting Committee led by the PPT is established at the beginning of each meeting – one for each Network and one for the RCGM and the Vice-Ministerial Meeting. These groups prepare the reports of the Networks, a conclusions and recommendations document for the RCGM and a draft document of the declarations and decisions of Vice-Ministers, in accordance with the agreements reached during the plenary session.

The PPT establishes – in consultation with the RCM Member Countries – the priority actions identified in the Plan of Action that are pending and that require follow-up.

The work of the PPT entails expenses associated to the activities carried out within the framework of the RCM.

- 
2. The host country and/or co-sponsor is responsible for convening seminars, workshops, training sessions and other commitments taken on by the Member Countries, in coordination with the RCM Technical Secretariat (TS). The PPT participates in the opening sessions of the events.

### Functions of the President Pro-Tempore

1. Convene events of the RCM and issue the corresponding invitations;
2. Coordinate and lead the meetings and activities of the RCM, including those related to the Vice-Ministerial Meeting, the Regional Consultation Group on Migration and the Liaison Officer Networks;
3. Lead the drafting groups and prepare the reports of the Networks, the recommendation and conclusion documents and the draft declarations and decisions;
4. Monitor pending tasks;
5. Consult with the RCM Member Countries when deemed necessary;
6. Represent the RCM in different forums, present the agreements and decisions adopted within the framework of the RCM and subsequently, submit a report and recommend follow-up actions as appropriate;
7. Sign documents with third parties on administrative matters requiring a formal commitment, with prior approval from the Vice-Ministers;
8. Activate the five-day consultation procedure as required; and
9. Other tasks assigned by the RCM.



### C. REGIONAL CONSULTATION GROUP ON MIGRATION (RCGM)

The RCGM was established as a result of the first meeting of the RCM with the aim of implementing and following up on political agreements. It represents the technical and operative level of the RCM and meets the need of the countries in the region to foster cooperation and information exchange on topics specifically relating to migration. The RCGM is comprised of Immigration Directors and Directors or Heads of Consular Affairs from RCM Member Countries or relevant offices, according to the structure of the involved institutions. Observer organizations participate in the technical meetings of the RCGM, but observer countries do not.

In addition, the RCGM is in charge of formulating recommendations for Vice-Ministers and implementing and monitoring the actions agreed by the Vice-Ministers, which are reflected in the conclusions document. The RCGM meets twice a year, and the first meeting is held in conjunction with the Vice-Ministerial Meeting.

The roles of the RCGM include the following:

- Review the updating process of the Plan of Action of the RCM, including information exchange, workshops, seminars, training efforts and projects under the three central themes;

- Review and approve – together with the TS – the work plans of the Liaison Officer Networks. The work plans are the tools to monitor the actions of the Networks; and
- Address administrative and budgetary matters concerning the TS.

Spaces are also provided in the sessions to enable the participation of civil society, represented by the Regional Network for Civil Organizations on Migration (RNCOM).

### D. LIAISON OFFICER NETWORK TO COMBAT MIGRANT SMUGGLING AND TRAFFICKING AND LIAISON OFFICER NETWORK FOR CONSULAR PROTECTION

The Networks were established to exchange information and coordinate actions concerning issues within their competence. The Networks meet immediately prior to the meetings of the RCGM and are in charge of developing and implementing their respective works plans, once they have been approved by the RCGM, and preparing reports that are submitted at the meetings of the RCGM. The Networks may hold a joint meeting to discuss topics of common interest when required.

Observer States and organizations do not participate in the meetings of the Networks unless they are explicitly invited. In addition, the agenda of each Network includes a space for the participation of RNCOM.

During the XVI RCM, the Vice-Ministers decided to integrate the National Coalitions Against Trafficking in Persons into the RCM through the Regional Coalition Against Trafficking in Persons.



## E. THE RCM TECHNICAL SECRETARIAT

The Technical Secretariat (TS) was initially conceived as the Technical Support Unit (TSU), which would perform the tasks that the International Organization for Migration (IOM) had been formally requested to take on as the provider of secretarial and technical support for the RCM. Based on this request, IOM established the TSU in March 2001 to meet the needs of the PPT in particular and the RCM in general. The following year, the TSU was renamed Technical Secretariat (TS) of the RCM at the VII Regional Conference on Migration held in Antigua Guatemala. Since the establishment of the TS, IOM provides technical cooperation and administrative support to the TS, although they are independent of each other in terms of policy and management. The TS is financed through the annual contributions of the RCM Member Countries. One of its primary tasks is to support the PPT in organizing and following up on the actions and initiatives of the RCM.

In addition, the PPT in office provides general guidelines and supervises the TS, with the aim of following up on the mandates and actions emanated from each meeting. Furthermore, the TS is in charge of supporting the PPT in the management of the process, including the coordination of meetings and information exchange. The TS is comprised of a Coordinator, an Information Technology Specialist and an Assistant and operates as an autonomous unit within the IOM Regional Office for Central America, North America and the Caribbean, located in San José, Costa Rica. In addition to providing office space, IOM facilitates resource management and procurement and provides other types of technical support.

The TS maintains close contact with the focal points<sup>3</sup> of each country in order to cooperate with the PPT in the general coordination of the RCM, including event logistics. In addition, the TS regularly updates the public website of the RCM ([www.crmsv.org](http://www.crmsv.org)) which is a portal to disseminate the public documents of the RCM, and a private website ([intranet.crmsv.org](http://intranet.crmsv.org)) used to collect internal documents to facilitate the coordination of actions. Furthermore, it is directly involved, together with the institutions or governments that sponsor activities within the framework of the RCM, in the subcontracting of logistics services and coordinating agendas and invitations as required.

### Functions of the Technical Secretariat

1. Advise Member Countries on migration matters;
  2. Regularly inform the focal points on the progress of the RCM;
  3. Inform new authorities of RCM Member Countries about the RCM;
  4. Coordinate actions with international organizations and civil society that contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the RCM;
  5. Inform other bodies about the work of the RCM;
  6. Manage resources from international cooperation agencies to help address the topics of interest of the RCM;
  7. Sign documents with third parties on administrative matters requiring a formal commitment, with prior approval from the Vice-Ministers. At the request of the interested countries, sign the documents required for the payment of the respective contributions; and
  8. Other tasks assigned by the RCM.
- 
3. The focal point is the individual/individuals from the involved institutions of the government of each RCM Member Country who has/have been appointed as a link and contact point for matters relating to the RCM. Focal points play a key role in receiving and transmitting the information obtained from the PPT and the TS or other colleagues interested or involved in the process, and ensuring the effective dissemination of information to all relevant institutions and ministries of each government.

## FINANCING OF THE RCM

The annual administrative and operating budget of the Technical Secretariat (TS) is financed through the annual contributions of the RCM Member Countries. The contributions are based on a scale of percentages of the total amount, in accordance with the contribution of each Member Country approved by Vice-Ministers at the VI RCM held in San José, Costa Rica in 2001. Table 1 shows the current scale of contributions, which has remained unchanged since 2005.

The annual budget of the TS is disaggregated as follows:

- Support staff;
- Support for seminars and meetings;
- Equipment and access to computer networks;
- Studies and research;
- Document development and translation;
- Other operating and unforeseen expenses.

Table 1  
Annual Contributions by RCM  
Member Countries

Country	Percentage	Contribution in US\$
Belize	1.77%	\$5,000
Canada	24.05%	\$68,000
Costa Rica	1.77%	\$5,000
El Salvador	1.77%	\$5,000
United States	50.00%	\$141,360
Guatemala	1.77%	\$5,000
Honduras	1.77%	\$5,000
Mexico	11.80%	\$33,364
Nicaragua	1.77%	\$5,000
Panama	1.77%	\$5,000
Dominican Republic	1.77%	\$5,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>\$282,724</b>



## IV- Implementing the Plan of Action of the RCM

During its 20 years of existence, the Regional Conference on Migration has focused its efforts on three central themes: Migration Policy and Management, Human Rights, and Migration and Development.



### MIGRATION POLICY AND MANAGEMENT

#### Migration Management

Coordination efforts have been implemented within the framework of the Liaison Officer Network to Combat Migrant Smuggling and Trafficking. Subtopics of great importance have been addressed and highly relevant regional documents have been developed. In addition, numerous awareness-raising, training and coordination actions have been carried out.

Under the central theme of Migration Policy and Management, the RCM and its Member Countries have addressed the following topics in recent years:

- Dignified, orderly, expedited and safe repatriation of Central American migrants by land;
- Management and assisted return of extraregional migrants;
- Issuance of visas and travel documents;
- Granting of asylum;
- Migration legislation; and
- Global security.

## Migrant Smuggling and Trafficking

The issue of migrant smuggling and trafficking has been a fundamental topic for the RCM since its inception. Migrant smuggling and trafficking is one of the greatest challenges for migration policy and management in the region and is the cause of serious violations of the human rights of migrants in the region.

This issue has been addressed since the first meeting of the RCM and has remained on the work agendas of the RCM on a constant basis. In light of the significance and complexity of the issue of migrant smuggling and trafficking, the Liaison Officer Network to Combat Migrant Smuggling and Trafficking was established at the VI Meeting of the RCM, held in San José, Costa Rica in 2001, with the aim of strengthening regional coordination on this matter.

Since then, the Liaison Officer Network meets twice a year during the meetings of the RCM and the RCGM. The primary subtopics in the sphere of migrant smuggling and trafficking that have been addressed within the framework of the RCM are:

- Risks associated to migrant smuggling;
- Criminal proceedings and punishment of migrant smugglers and traffickers;
- International cooperation to combat migrant smuggling and trafficking;
- Functional link on migrant smuggling;
- Disseminating information about migrant smuggling;
- Legislation on preventing and combating migrant smuggling and trafficking;
- Orderly return of victims of trafficking in persons; and
- Assistance and reintegration of victims of trafficking in persons and vulnerable groups affected by illegal activities.

## HUMAN RIGHTS

### Consular Protection

The topic of consular protection has been one of the cornerstones of the work of the RCM practically from its inception. In order to address this topic with sufficient depth and breath and intensify regional coordination on the matter, the Liaison Officer Network for Consular Protection was established in 2001 at the VI Meeting of the RCM held in San José, Costa Rica. Since then, this Network meets twice a year prior to the mid-year and end-of-year meetings of the RCGM.

The efforts of the RCM concerning consular protection have been aimed at promoting communication and the development and strengthening of a regional network for cooperation between RCM Member Countries, international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In addition, consular protection has been strengthened in border communities.

In the sphere of consular protection, the following subtopics have been addressed within the framework of the RCM:

- Consular protection of migrants in case of death;
- Public awareness-raising;
- Migration and health;
- Natural disasters;
- Protection of nationals abroad; and
- Migration and human rights.

### Boys, Girls and Adolescents, Women and other Groups in Vulnerable Situations in the Context of Migration

This topic was consolidated as part of the Plan of Action of the RCM under the theme of Human Rights at the VIII Meeting of the RCM held in May 2003 in Mexico. Trafficking of migrant boys, girls and adolescents for sexual

exploitation purposes, the rights of refugees, family reunification, and repatriation of groups in vulnerable situations have been some of the subtopics addressed at the meetings of the RCM. Documents have been produced on these issues and numerous activities have been carried out. In addition, during the meeting of the RCGM held in Tegucigalpa, Honduras in June 2016 the RCM Member Countries agreed to establish a Liaison Officer Network for the Protection of Migrant Boys, Girls and Adolescents as part of the work structure of the RCM.

The subtopics addressed under this topic are as follows:

- Smuggling of boys, girls and adolescents;
- Legal family reunification;
- Human rights of refugees;
- Repatriation of groups in vulnerable situations;
- Trafficking of boys, girls, adolescents and women for sexual exploitation purposes;
- Protection for boys, girls and adolescents who have suffered injuries, accidents or amputations during the migration process;
- Protection for migrant boys, girls and adolescents in highly vulnerable situations;
- Best practices on effective documentation relating to the migration control of exits of boys, girls and adolescents;
- Gender and migration and its link with boys, girls and adolescents; and
- Migration and family and its link with boys, girls and adolescents.

## MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

### The Sphere of Migration and Development

The link between migration and development was identified as a topic of interest at the first technical meeting of the RCM in Mexico in 1996. Subsequently, it was discussed at the Panama Conference in 1997 as a central theme of the RCM, and later on it was officially established as one of the three central themes of the Plan of Action of the RCM. Various topics that are of interest to the RCM have been addressed within the framework of is general acknowledgment of the link between migration and development.

The subtopics addressed in the sphere of migration and development include the following:

- Private sector and migration;
- Programmes for temporary migrant workers;
- Remittances;
- Return and economic integration and reintegration of migrants;
- Migration and tourism;
- Border cooperation;
- Bi- and multilateral cooperation;
- Free trade and migration; and
- Linking migrants to the development of their communities of origin.



# V- Progress, Evolution and Growth of the RCM



## ESTABLISHMENT OF AD HOC GROUPS

Throughout the history of the RCM, its Member Countries have agreed on the need to respond more effectively and in a more targeted manner to various migration or contextual realities that have shaped the history of migration in the region. This required more specific and continuous efforts by RCM Member Countries. Precisely for this purpose, ad hoc groups have been established within the framework of the RCM to focus on addressing, discussing and promoting cooperation on these matters.

The following ad hoc groups have been established by the RCM since its inception:

### 1. Ad Hoc Group on Extraregional Migration Flows

The specific working group on

extraregional migrants was created in 2012 to address the increasing flows of migrants from countries outside the region. Since its establishment, the Group has met three times: twice with representatives from some of the countries of origin of extraregional migrants, and once with the Troika of the South American Conference on Migration (SACM) to discuss cooperation options to respond to extraregional migration flows. Difficulties relating to the nature of these migration flows were discussed at the meetings, as well as specific options to improve their management based on best practices developed in other regions.

In addition, information was exchanged on the characteristics and scope of these migration flows and on the policies established in each country to address them.

## 2. RCM/RNCOM Ad Hoc Group

The working group of the RCM and the Regional Network for Civil Organizations on Migration (RNCOM) was established in 2013 with the objective of defining a common agenda and a mechanism for coordination between both actors. Fundamental topics were addressed at the two meetings held by this Group, such as trafficking in persons, integration and reintegration of migrant populations, and assistance to migrants in vulnerable situations, identifying the main challenges relating to these issues and the capacities and mechanisms for cooperation between civil society and the governments of the countries in the region, which need to be strengthened.

## 3. Ad Hoc Group on Migrant Boys, Girls and Adolescents

This Group was established in 2014 to respond to the increasing number and level of vulnerability of accompanied and unaccompanied migrant boys, girls and adolescents in the region recorded since 2012. Within this framework, concepts have been discussed that are essential in providing protection and assistance to these children and adolescents, such as a regional mechanism for the comprehensive protection of migrant boys, girls and adolescents and the principle of the best interests of the child. In addition, the phases of the migration process of boys, girls and adolescents have been analysed, as well as their specific needs during each phase. Furthermore, actions have been identified that are necessary to ensure their integrity, well-being and rights. The work of the Ad Hoc Group has been accompanied by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The Group is expected to become the Liaison Officer Network for the Protection of Migrant

Boys, Girls and Adolescents as of 2016 and thus, become part of the formal and permanent work structure of the RCM.

## DECLARATIONS AND GUIDELINES

To enable the RCM to address different migration situations throughout its 20 years of existence, the agreements and advances made within the framework of the RCM have been reflected in declarations and guidelines, agreed on by RCM Member Countries, on various topics concerning migration that have been particularly relevant in the region. The most important declarations and guidelines include the following:

- Publication of the presentations from the Seminar on Migrant Women and Migrant Children (2000);
- Declaration against terrorism (2002);
- Guidelines for the Signing of Multi- and/or Bilateral Agreements Between Member Countries of the Regional Conference on Migration (RCM) Regarding the Repatriation of Regional Migrants by Land (2004);
- General Framework for the Execution of the Multilateral Cooperation Program for the Assisted Return of Extra-Regional Migrants Stranded Within Member Countries of the Regional Conference on Migration (RCM), or Puebla Process (2004);
- Proceedings of the workshop/forum on private sector and migration (2006) (Spanish only);
- Proceedings of the seminar on migration legislation (2007) (Spanish only);
- Regional Guidelines for Special Protection in Cases of the Repatriation of Child Victims of Trafficking (2007);
- Regional Guidelines for the Assistance to Unaccompanied Children in Cases of Repatriation (2009);

- Proceedings of the Workshop on Temporary Migrant Workers Programs (2009);
- Comparative Matrix of Legislation on Trafficking in Persons and Migrant Smuggling in RCM Member States (2011);
- The Regional Conference on Migration: 15 Years (2011);
- Seminar-Workshop: Capacity Building for Consular Officials on the Protection of the Labour Rights of Migrant Workers (2012);
- Proceedings of the Regional Seminar on Integration Policies for Immigrants, Refugees and Returned Migrants (2012);
- Regional Guidelines for the Preliminary Identification and Referral Mechanisms for Migrant Populations in Vulnerable Situations (2014);
- Managua Extraordinary Declaration on Migrant Boys, Girls and Adolescents (2014).

### RESERVE FUND FOR THE ASSISTED VOLUNTARY RETURN OF MIGRANTS IN HIGHLY VULNERABLE SITUATIONS

The number of migrants in vulnerable situations who travel through and settle in any of the Member Countries of the Regional Conference on Migration (RCM) reaches several tens of thousands each year.

In many situations, the capacities and resources of the relevant authorities and civil society are insufficient for providing appropriate protection and assistance to the thousands of vulnerable migrants in need. Given the current context of insecurity and impunity in countries of transit in the region, the level of vulnerability of migrants in

general and those in the most vulnerable situations in particular increases each year, as crime and abuse against them escalate and worsen.

In light of this reality, the RCM has established a reserve fund known as the Reserve Fund for Assistance to Regional Migrants in Highly Vulnerable Situations. This is a regional mechanism to provide financial and operational support for the voluntary return of migrants in vulnerable situations and for persons requiring assistance beyond the support provided through existing programmes in each RCM Member Country.

A vulnerable situation is determined by the physical, social, economic, cultural or other conditions of a migrant which render him or her vulnerable to suffering serious harm, abuse or damage. The return of migrants in some of the following situations is financed through the Reserve Fund:

- Unaccompanied migrant boys, girls and adolescents;
- Persons with disabilities;
- Adults 70 years of age and older; and
- Persons with physical or mental diseases or injured persons.

In special circumstances, migrants in vulnerable situations associated to domestic violence, sexual abuse and trafficking in persons may also benefit from resources of the Fund, with the prior joint approval from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the RCM Technical Secretariat.

The Fund is administrated by IOM, and a maximum amount of US\$1,000 is granted for each case where assistance is provided.

## VI- Links between the RCM and other Organizations and Regional Consultative Processes on Migration

The RCM has entered into alliances with international organizations with the purpose of establishing synergies, and has continuously worked to foster international cooperation on migration matters. In this regard, the RCM has implemented actions and initiatives together with more than 20 organizations or bodies that have supported its work.

### Experience Sharing of the RCM

The RCM regularly shares its experiences with other forums, countries, regional processes and international organizations with the aim of exchanging and applying best practices. In 2007, the Regional Consultation Group on Migration (RCGM) requested that all RCM Member Countries provide information about the actions concerning migration that involve other international organizations working in each country, with the aim of facilitating the exchange of effective practices and useful instruments. This cooperation and communication not only helps avoid duplication of efforts but in addition, promotes convergence to improve migration management.

The list below includes the main organizations that have collaborated with the RCM through information exchange, training efforts, workshops, the development of documents and studies and various types of contributions at a regional and global level:

- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
- International Organization for Migration (IOM)
- United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)
- Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Centre (CELADE)
- Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights
- Ibero-American General Secretariat (SEGIB)
- United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
- Regional Network for Civil Organizations on Migration (RNCOM) / non-governmental organizations
- Central American Commission of Migration Directors (OCAM)
- Representatives from the private sector
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
- European Committee on Migration
- Inter-American Development Bank (IADB)
- United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
- Organization of American States (OAS)
- International Labour Organisation (ILO)
- International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)
- International Centre for the Human Rights of Migrants (CIDEHUM)
- Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM)
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)
- Central American Parliament (PARLACEN)
- Save the Children
- PANIAMOR Foundation
- Casa Alianza

## VII- Achievements and challenges of the CRM



The most important achievement of the RCM continues to be the successful, permanent and sustained commitment for constructive, frank and open dialogue between countries characterized by different economic, socio-cultural and migration realities. As a regional consultative process on migration, the RCM constitutes an appropriate space for the participation of representatives from governments and civil society of the RCM Member Countries, facilitating the identification of matters of common interest, needs, goals and spheres of action requiring cooperation.

In addition, the RCM has contributed to the strengthening of bi- and multilateral cooperation between RCM Member

Countries, international organizations and civil society.

Furthermore, the RCM has proven to be an ideal platform for advancing very specific initiatives, such as comparative analyses of the legislation on trafficking in persons and migrant smuggling of each Member Country, leading to the progressive advancement and harmonization of the legislation at a regional level.

The RCM has organized approximately 120 activities on various topics relating to migration, with participation of more than 6,000 delegates, and has implemented multiple projects on migration, human rights and development (see the table).

Type of Activity	Number
Regional Conference on Migration	21
Regional Consultation Group on Migration	42
Meetings of Ad Hoc Groups	6
Workshops, seminars and training sessions	38
Regional and online meetings	15
<b>Total number of activities</b>	<b>122</b>

Various types of guidelines have been developed and actions aimed at modernizing border management systems have been implemented within the framework of this regional process.

In addition, numerous studies and documents have been produced and the proceedings of the most relevant seminars have been published. These contain important elements followed up on as part of the Plan of Action. Furthermore, a fund has been established to assist migrants in highly vulnerable situations. More than 1,100 migrants in the region have benefited from the Fund.

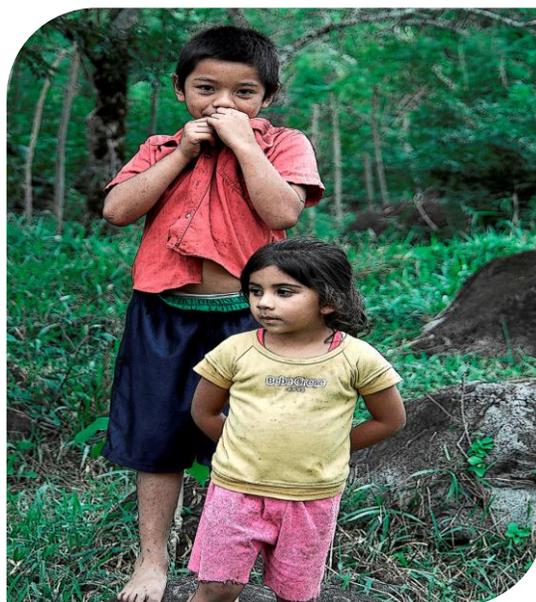
Clearly, much remains to be done to ensure the orderly, safe, regular and responsible movement of migrants in the region. In seeking to achieve this objective, the RCM and its Member Countries face various complex challenges. One of them is to ensure that the efforts of the RCM continue to be relevant in addressing migration in a context of highly dynamic migration realities. To this end, the discussions of the RCM should explore the complex links between migration and other factors, such as national policies, socio-economic development, climate change and labour markets.

While migration continues to be addressed at a local, national, subregional, regional, inter-regional and global level, it is important to ensure that the actions of the RCM are not

implemented in isolation and that they are adequately coordinated and harmonized with the efforts implemented at each level in order to prevent contradictions and duplication of efforts. In particular, it is important to adequately coordinate and harmonize the work of the RCM with actions aimed at achieving the Sustainable Development Goals that are directly linked to migration.

Undoubtedly, the achievements of the RCM constitute a step forward towards improving migration management in the region. It should be recognized that the RCM has become an example for other regional processes at the global level.

The commitment of the RCM Member Countries in addressing current and potential challenges will determine the sustainability of the RCM and its relevance as an important actor in migration management in the region. It is up to the Member Countries to make the decision to harness the opportunities and overcome the challenges relating to migration in the region, with a regional and shared responsibility approach, and to reinforce their commitment to ensuring the rights, well-being and dignity of migrants.





**20  
YEARS**

**Regional Conference on Migration**

Fostering and strengthening regional dialogue and cooperation

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