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Safe, orderly, regular migration

Alicia Bárcena

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Wandering abroad: in 2014, four million emigrants from the Caribbean resided in the United States



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The member states of the United Nations are preparing to adopt in Marrakesh the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, which has received broad support from the region of Latin America and the Caribbean. This instrument arises as the international community's response to the challenges and opportunities that migration poses on a global agenda. It is an historic instrument that constitutes an example of renewed multilateral interest.

Today we are witnessing the population's heightened international mobility. Although this reality has been replicated at other stages in our history, this time the phenomenon involves the largest number of migrants on record — 258 million in the world, 30 million in Latin America and the Caribbean — and its diverse expressions have placed the migration issue on the global agenda, which is illustrated by its explicit

inclusion among the 2030 Agenda's sustainable development goals.

Although intraregional migration in Latin America and the Caribbean has been increasing significantly, the majority of migrants still set their sights outside the region. The United States is the main destination for Central American emigration: as of 2015, 78 per cent of Central American emigrants resided in that country, a trend that was intensified in the cases of El Salvador (89 per cent), Guatemala (87 per cent) and Honduras (82 per cent).



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It must be emphasised that migrant persons make positive contributions to the economy, society and culture in all countries. Their contributions are of such a magnitude that they should encourage a positive image of migration, casting aside the prejudices, risks and vulnerabilities that hamper it: in the US, for example, the population of Latino origin has played a key role in demographic reproduction and in the labour market. Calculations indicate that 38 per cent of its workforce shortage between 2000 and 2015 was covered by Latin American immigrants, among whom Mexicans and Central Americans contributed more than 80 per cent.

The complexity of migration in the region has been increasing, as revealed by the movements in Central America and the insufficient responses to so-called mixed flows, including unaccompanied migrant girls and boys; the emigration from Venezuela and the new realities that receiving countries face; the emigration from Haiti and the discrimination suffered by its emigrants; and, as a corollary, the scene of contrasting realities expressed in the myriad adversities that many migrant people face on their journeys.

The region's countries have also supported initiatives in favour of facilitating migration, as seen in the residence agreements of Mercosur, the Southern Common Market, which also seek to reduce migratory irregularity, and the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development of 2013, which defines a strategy for migratory governance founded on the protection of all migrant persons and includes concrete proposals for actions and indicators.

In response to problems of vulnerability in emigration, transit and return, Central American countries and Mexico are defining a comprehensive development plan that will aim to offer more opportunities to inhabitants in their communities of origin. This is about creating policies that seek to reduce production and salary gaps, and to generate development possibilities that will encourage informed, and not forced, migratory decisions.

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean recognises the full validity of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration for the interests of Latin American and Caribbean countries. Both because of its principles as well as its goals and action proposals, this compact will contribute with responses and by creating the capacity to anticipate when facing this complex migratory reality. Among its principles, it is relevant to the region that the matters of sustainable development, due process, social inclusion, the child's best interest, and gender and rights-based approaches are taken into account.

The organisation also commends the significant work carried out by diverse entities of the United Nations System, especially the International Organisation for Migration, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, in their contributions to moving towards this global agreement and for their actions on the ground in the region of Latin America and the Caribbean.

The ECLAC has supported the process of consultations and negotiations on the compact and it firmly believes in the genuine aspiration to realise its goals, putting whatever collaboration is needed at countries' disposal. Latin American and Caribbean countries should take advantage of the great opportunity that this instrument represents for the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, from a human rights perspective and with the goal of overcoming inequality.

• Alicia Bárcena is executive secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean



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