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Regional Migration Governance in the Americas: The Los Angeles Declaration on Protection and Migration's Challenges and Opportunities

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REGIONAL MIGRATION GOVERNANCE IN THE AMERICAS:

THE LOS ANGELES DECLARATION
ON PROTECTION AND MIGRATION'S
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CARICOM	The Caribbean Community
CSM	South American Conference on Migration
CRM	Regional Conference on Migration
GS/OAS	General Secretariat of the Organization of American States
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
ILO	International Labor Organization
IFRC	International Federation of the Red Cross
IOM	International Organization for Migration
MIRPS	Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework
OAS	Organization of American States
R4V	Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants
SICA	Central American Integration System
UNHCR	U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drug and Crime
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WB	World Bank
WFP	World Food Program

TABLE OF CONTENTS

6	Executive Summary
6	1. Regional Migration Governance in the Americas: An Introduction
9	2. The LA Declaration on Migration and Protection: Literature Review
11	3. An Overview of Regional Migration Governance Mechanisms in the Americas
20	4. The LA Declaration: Assessing Challenges
24	5. Capitalizing Opportunities: Key Policy Recommendations
28	End Notes
30	References
32	About the Authors



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In response to the significant displacement in the region since 2015, Latin American and Caribbean governments face the task of addressing evolving patterns of human mobility on a continent that hosts 16.3 million migrants. While subregional initiatives have been the primary focus of migration responses, a comprehensive institutional framework at the hemispheric level has been lacking until recently.

The adoption of the Los Angeles Declaration on Protection and Migration in 2022 on the margins of the 2022 Summit of the Americas held in Los Angeles, marked a notable shift from *ad hoc* and subregional responses in three key dimensions: recognizing the interconnectedness of migration flows within the region, acknowledging the need for collective action in managing migration, and emphasizing the importance of enhanced regional coordination to address evolving challenges. One year after its adoption, evaluating progress and determining the most effective strategies for its continued and more impactful implementation is crucial.

This paper conducts a thorough analysis of the region's dynamic migration landscape, assessing the strengths and weaknesses of existing subregional initiatives and the implementation of the declaration itself. It provides valuable insights to strengthen the institutional architecture and enhance coordination among governments. The paper offers key recommendations for the effective implementation of the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection in several areas:

- Formalizing processes, methodologies, and follow-up mechanisms.
- Achieving inclusionary membership by involving all countries in the region, relevant international organizations, and other stakeholders such as civil society, the private sector, philanthropy, and academia;
- Ensuring comprehensive coverage of migration themes;
- Enhancing conceptual clarity, particularly regarding consent and actionable strategies related to the declaration's four pillars: stability and assistance for communities, expansion of legal pathways, humane

migration management, and coordinated emergency response.

- Devising a robust operational plan;
- Promoting enhanced complementarity with other subregional and regional efforts; and
- Effectively addressing the discrepancy between regional commitments and observed national and local responses.

As the LA Declaration enters a new phase of maturation, it is imperative for the hemisphere to intensify efforts to overcome coordination and communication challenges among countries and levels of government. Addressing existing barriers, such as securing sustainable funding among others, is essential for countries and agencies to tackle specific migration challenges effectively. Additionally, regional policymakers must prioritize investments in migration to achieve broader societal objectives in the medium and long term.

1. REGIONAL MIGRATION GOVERNANCE IN THE AMERICAS: AN INTRODUCTION

Leaders from 23 countries across the Western Hemisphere gathered for the Ninth Summit of the Americas in Los Angeles, California on June 6-10, 2022. This U.S.-led summit focused on the theme “Building a Sustainable, Resilient, and Equitable Future.”³ While migration and forced displacement were not directly addressed within Summit negotiations and documents, as the event concluded, a group of 21 countries⁴ collectively endorsed the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection.⁵ This declaration committed their respective governments to enhance regional migration and protection cooperation as a new and revived mechanism that could better structure the coordination efforts already happening and encourage new ones. Although the declaration is not in itself legally binding⁶, it represents a notable advancement in establishing shared principles and a unified approach toward managing migration flows in the Americas—a region recently witnessing substantial mobility.

Since 2010, the Americas have seen a remarkable upswing in international migration, surpassing any other region worldwide regarding relative growth. The number of migrants residing in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) nearly doubled from 8.3 million in 2010 to 16.3 million in 2022.⁷ Since 2015, approximately 7.4 million Venezuelans have been displaced, with around 6.4 million relocating within LAC. Additionally, Haiti experienced a devastating earthquake in 2010, displacing thousands of Haitians to other countries in the region; today, Haitian citizens are still leaving the country as a result of the ongoing political and security crisis in the country. Initially, many settled in the Dominican Republic, Chile, and Brazil, but some later moved to other parts of Latin America and to the United States. Moreover, 222,000 Cubans left their country in 2021⁸ due to political and economic challenges, using their diaspora networks primarily in the United States to settle in this country. Following the political crackdown by Daniel Ortega's regime in Nicaragua in 2018, roughly 200,000 Nicaraguans sought asylum in Costa Rica, while others fled to Panama. U.S. authorities have also encountered approximately 300,000 Nicaraguans at the U.S.-Mexico border in the past two years alone.⁹

Since 2021, a significant number of these migrants have head northward, aiming to reach the United States. Notably, in fiscal year 2022, there was a record number of 2.4 million encounters between unauthorized migrants and U.S. authorities at the U.S.-Mexico border.¹⁰ Many migrants undertake the perilous journey through the Darién Gap, a rainforest region between Colombia and Panama infested with criminal actors, armed gangs and hazardous conditions, leading to numerous fatalities and injuries. While between 2014 and 2020, 110,000 migrants crossed the Darién Gap, the numbers escalated significantly, reaching an unprecedented 134,000 in 2021 and nearly doubling to 248,000 in 2022.¹¹ Although Latin America and the Caribbean migrants still make up the majority of crossings, African and Asian migrants also constituted 10 percent of migrants in 2022.¹²

Notably, most migration has taken place *among* countries *within* the region, especially in South and Central America. This intraregional migration marks a rupture from previous years when the focus was mainly on individuals leaving, often with aspirations of reaching destinations like

the United States, Canada, or Spain. While outward migration persists, Latin America and the Caribbean have transformed into a vibrant hub for intraregional migration and, in certain instances, the return of migrants.

Latin American and Caribbean countries have also had a strong history of collaboration in migration and protection. This includes various mobility agreements that facilitate movement within specific subregions, such as the Andean Community, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Central American Integration System or SICA, and Mercosur. Furthermore, efforts have been made to align humanitarian protection policies, as demonstrated by the 1984 Cartagena Declaration and the recent Quito Process.

In this scenario, the proposal to agree on a Declaration on Migration and Protection at the 2022 Summit of the Americas was viable and relevant to the new and evolving context. While recognizing the truly hemispheric nature of the phenomenon, the declaration also sought to align countries on practical priorities regarding the promotion of legal channels for migration, facilitating the integration of immigrants, allocating resources to improve migration management, and establishing coordinated strategies to address mass migration movements and displacement crises.

Entering the second year of implementation begins, there are promising indications of success and a series of important questions regarding the declaration's progress and potential. Countries have displayed their commitment by establishing working groups to translate the commitments outlined in the document into actionable steps. However, at the regional level, it is essential to examine the developments in migration governance that have transpired since the document's signing. How much headway has been made in implementing the contents of the document? What existing gaps still need to be addressed, and what untapped opportunities lie ahead? Additionally, it is crucial to explore how this new era of cooperation can be optimized to address the challenges arising from the increased inflow of intra-regional migration. These are the key considerations that will shape the ongoing implementation of the declaration and pave the way for further advancements in the future.

This report addresses these questions by analyzing the content and process surrounding the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection. It specifically focuses on the fundamental principles outlined in the declaration and examines the challenges and opportunities it presents for regional cooperation on migration. The paper emphasizes the regional and interconnected nature of migration and forced displacement, underscoring the pressing need for enhanced cooperation to address the humanitarian and security challenges associated with these issues. While acknowledging that the signing of the declaration is in itself a recognition of the hemispheric scale of migration movements, the paper also evaluates areas that should be incorporated into the framework to facilitate effective and productive cooperation.

This analysis argues that the Los Angeles Declaration should be viewed as a stepping stone rather than a final resolution to migration cooperation in the Americas. It is intended to ignite further efforts and initiatives in the future. With this perspective in mind, this paper explores potential avenues for enhancing regional migration governance, encompassing the four cooperation components outlined in the declaration. Furthermore, it proposes a series of policy recommendations that leverage the diverse strengths to foster productive regional cooperation on migration.

The objective of this paper is to provide analysis and recommendations that foster innovation in migration policy to effectively address the evolving challenges in the region. This involves improving cross-national dialogues among policymakers and engaging stakeholders in developing and endorsing innovative approaches to migration management and integration. It emphasizes prioritizing legal status, addressing integration challenges, promoting social integration, responding to humanitarian needs, and safeguarding migrants' rights. The report also emphasizes the importance of optimizing cooperation, ensuring complementarity of efforts, and avoiding duplication. Despite acknowledging existing political and practical barriers, the paper offers support and ideas to influential policymakers and a growing network of regional stakeholders to advance well-grounded migration and protection policies and cooperation.

The methodology employed includes desk research of available publications, and data regarding regional cooperation on migration and forced displacement. It also relies on findings of a series of virtual interviews with key actors involved in the migration and forced displacement agenda in the Americas, and those participation in the declaration process as well as those within the regional migration ecosystem who observe or contribute to its implementation. By gathering information, data, and practical perspectives, the paper aims to shed light on effective practices and facilitate informed decision-making in migration management.

The paper is divided into five sections. This introduction provides background information on the Los Angeles Declaration and outlines the main contents of the paper. The second section offers a comprehensive review of existing literature on the declaration, placing the analysis in a comparative perspective.

The third section conducts an in-depth analysis of the declaration based on more than 10 interviews with government representatives, international organizations, and civil society organizations from around the region. It assesses previous and existing mechanisms of regional migration governance in the Americas and identifies their connections to the LA Declaration. This section maps out how subregional mechanisms can contribute to the declaration's objectives, identify potential areas of duplication, and highlights opportunities for cooperation.

The fourth section addresses crucial aspects of implementing the declaration to provide a framework for the policy recommendations. It specifically focuses on key areas such as establishing institutional frameworks for progress monitoring, ensuring inclusive participation in the process, and effectively engaging international and national actors, among other issues. The fifth and final section presents a series of policy recommendations to enhance the impact and effectiveness of cooperation efforts surrounding the declaration, thereby advancing regional migration governance across its four cooperation components.

2. THE LA DECLARATION ON MIGRATION AND PROTECTION: LITERATURE REVIEW

Although there is prolific work on migration and forced displacement in the Americas, a review of current academic literature reveals the need for more rigorous analytical pieces explicitly focusing on the Declaration of Los Angeles, the most recent and relevant cooperation mechanism established in the region. Indeed, the literature so far ranges from a predominant number of texts focused on describing the declaration, how it happened, and what it says to a less dominant number of analytical texts trying to explain why the declaration happened and its implications for migration on the continent.

However, it is important to acknowledge that there are two main variants of these analytical and opinion pieces. On the one hand, some view the declaration as a positive step forward, highlighting its potential and merits. On the other hand, others criticize it, pointing out its weaknesses and raising concerns. Both perspectives offer valuable insights and suggest ways forward. The existing body of work primarily consists of opinion pieces and position papers authored by think tanks, international organizations, and other research and policy institutions specializing in supporting or criticizing the declaration.

Before the signing of the document, Muñoz-Pogossian (2022) made a case for the usefulness of the LA Declaration based on three gaps it could potentially fill in terms of regional migration cooperation: (a) the fact that cooperation on migration still happens in a disperse and fragmented manner, (b) the need to map out current regularization schemes, covering legal pathways for migration and access to refugee status as well as complementary protection programs; and finally, (c) the importance for countries to agree on some standard definitions. The author proposed that the declaration could be an opportunity to overcome these gaps in regional cooperation on migration (Muñoz-Pogossian 2022). Similarly, Selee (2022) suggested that the declaration represented a crucial progressive step toward creating a common language and coherent set of ideas to manage migratory flows in the Americas

cooperatively. The author summarized the critical contributions of the instrument, including the agreement by countries to stabilize migratory flows, expand legal channels of mobility as an alternative to irregular migration, improve their migration management capacities and increase information exchange and coordination at borders, and produce an early warning system to alert each other of large cross-border flows (Selee 2022). In sum, these authors delved into the instrument's relevance before or during its early adoption showing signs of optimism should its contents be implemented.

Based on the content of the declaration and its scope, several organizations declared their support and highlighted the main points in their public statements, signaling how it could be vital to improving migration management in the region.

These views were also supported by key international institutions that produced position papers regarding the instrument. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) recognized the importance of regional initiatives that address the root causes of migration and forced displacement and encouraged states and other stakeholders, including multilateral development banks, international financial institutions, and other donors, to expand their efforts to improve conditions and opportunities to prevent forced displacement (UNHCR 2022). The International Labor Organization (ILO) also recognized the importance of the declaration and highlighted one of its fundamental aspects is recognizing the importance of labor markets and their linkages with migration. The ILO proposed the declaration could represent a positive step to reinforce good labor migration governance, as this migration and development approach takes full advantage of migrants' skills and the opportunity it entails to fill critical and needed work spots in host countries (ILO, 2022).

Nevertheless, the declaration has not been immune to criticism and skepticism, as echoed in the broader literature encompassing various migration stakeholders, public opinion leaders, civil society, think tanks, and organizations. Notably, much of this critical discourse has originated from the United States, indicating that the declaration may have garnered more attention and resonance in the United States compared to the rest of the region during its initial year.

These authors have put forth critical perspectives on the effort. Tyler (2022) characterizes the declaration as a significant undertaking by the United States and other governments to establish a hemispheric approach to migration in the Americas. However, the author highlights areas where the declaration requires revision, particularly concerning border management (Tyler, 2022). Former Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos expressed a similar viewpoint in a recent opinion piece. While critiquing specific political decisions, such as the limitations on asylum at the US-Mexican border, Santos still recommends embracing the Declaration as a valuable model to improve migration management in the Americas (Santos, 2023).

Other scholars, including Testa & Forin (2022) from the Mixed Migration Centre, have shed light on the declaration's gaps, outlining what is absent in the initial proposal. According to the authors, the declaration focuses, as has generally been the case, on deportations and the fight against smuggling. At the same time, a more humane approach to border management is needed (Testa & Forin, 2022). In their view, post-regularization initiatives should not be considered an ideal alternative to legal channels, and they also contend that regular migration channels other than labor migration—such as family reunification and student visas—should have received more attention.

On that same note, Ortiz (2023) at the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) recognized the need to increase legal avenues for migration and improve cooperation to address current migration flows at the regional level, as stated in the declaration. However, the author argues that further restricting access to asylum at the U.S. border and what the author calls the outsourcing of migration and protection-related functions to Mexico and elsewhere suggests that rather than working to create a rights-respecting border reception system, the US administration continues to prioritize enforcement and deterrence at the expense of the safety and well-being of vulnerable migrants seeking protection. Essentially, Ortiz (2023) questions the Declaration's real intentions and usefulness. The International Rescue Committee (IRC) offers a distinct critique of the Declaration from a different standpoint. They express their apprehension regarding the declaration's

implementation especially in terms of protecting the most vulnerable, despite acknowledging the positive commitments it presents. In its position paper, the IRC emphasizes that the effectiveness of the declaration hinges on the collective efforts of governments to implement comprehensive protections throughout the region. These measures must prioritize the needs of the most vulnerable populations, including women, children, indigenous groups, and members of the LGBTQ+ community (IRC, 2022).

From a partisan perspective, notable criticism of the declaration emerged primarily from within the United States. Hankinson (2022) highlights the inherent tension between ensuring national security and guaranteeing rights, particularly at the border. The author argues that the Declaration has provided an opportunity for the US administration to establish additional "legal avenues" for people to enter and stay in the country while maintaining an open border for illegal entry under the guise of the declaration (Hankinson, 2022).

Following another line of criticism, Cabieses (2022) warns about some of the challenges impeding the effectiveness of the LA Declaration. She points to the need, on the one hand, to strengthen trust among countries and, on the other, to ensure alignment between the adequate representation of negotiation processes at the regional level and those defining internal migration policy. The author also makes the case not just to address the more operative issues contained in the declaration but to devise ways for countries to resolve the growing tension and polarization in political and migratory matters, the marked distrust toward human migration as a social process, and the lack of trust that, in her view, still prevails amongst countries in the region (Cabieses 2022). Finally, although addressing the intersection between health and migration, Cabieses (2022) references the declaration to assert that the absence of several countries marred it and showed some pending challenges of regional cooperative work.

More recently, Muñoz-Pogossian (2023) points to the missing parts of the implementation of the instrument. The author contends that for the declaration to be effective in improving regional cooperation, it must include all the region's countries, considering there are still 13

countries that have not signed onto it. Similarly, Muñoz-Pogossian (2023) emphasizes the need for an accountability mechanism over time. She commends that the countries have established working groups but points to the need to keep track of this collaboration and its results and to communicate progress as widely as possible. Finally, the author also points to the need to define a role for multilateral partners and other actors to fully realize the *whole-of-society approach* necessary to achieve the highest effectiveness in addressing migration and forced displacement (Muñoz-Pogossian 2023).

In summary, this literature review reveals the presence of opinion articles and position papers that discuss the potential and weaknesses of the declaration. However, there remains a need for more rigorous and comprehensive assessments that delve into its content, challenges, and opportunities. To address this gap, the following sections present the analysis from interviews conducted with key stakeholders in the field of migration, exploring potential approaches to address the identified gaps within the declaration. Additionally, the subsequent analysis examines the interconnections with other subregional bodies and highlights the importance of strategic planning, actionable commitments, and collaboration among various actors for the declaration to succeed. Through these efforts, the study aims to provide a thorough assessment of the declaration's potential and propose strategies to enhance cooperation in migration and protection throughout the region in the future.

3. AN OVERVIEW OF REGIONAL MIGRATION GOVERNANCE MECHANISMS IN THE AMERICAS

With the aim of assessing the potential and gaps of the LA Declaration, this section examines existing subregional migration cooperation mechanisms vis-à-vis the LA Declaration considering two key dimensions: membership and regional thematic synergy. The first analysis provides an overview of how signatory countries engage with the LA Declaration in terms of their involvement in different working groups and main topics. The second identifies the points of convergence between the main themes of the declaration

and existing regional migration governance mechanisms established over the years.

As previously mentioned, Latin American and Caribbean countries have a long history of cooperation on migration and protection through regional and subregional mechanisms. These mechanisms facilitate information exchange, sharing of good practices, and coordinated responses. To understand the context in which the declaration was approved, it is essential to note the regional and subregional mechanisms range from those uniting South American countries through the South American Conference on Migration (CSM), to those involving Central American nations and North America, such as the Regional Conference on Migration (CRM) and the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (MIRPS). Other mechanisms with more diverse memberships have been established to foster broad cooperation in a political and policy forum or to specifically address the Venezuelan migrant and refugee crisis. These include the Committee on Migratory Affairs (CAM) at the Organization of American States (OAS), the Quito Process, and the Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants (R4V). Against this backdrop, it is crucial to understand how the LA Declaration fits into this landscape and how best to capitalize on ongoing efforts.

An important point to note regarding these subregional cooperation schemes is that countries participate voluntarily. However, due to their interest in learning and coordinating efforts, countries actively responding to migration trends tend to join. As shown in Figure 1, these regional mechanisms operate through *Pro Tempore* Presidencies. In other words, participating countries take turns leading the agenda of cooperation, defining work plans, and prioritizing topics relevant to all. This rotation is typically based on alphabetical order and is supported by countries serving in a vice-presidency role.

Until now, no regional mechanism has been the preferred or most influential space for conducting cooperation among countries, emphasizing the importance of reaching an agreement on the LA Declaration. However, the OAS Committee of Migratory Affairs remains the only platform where all countries convene, and it has also brought together all subregional mechanisms in thematic sessions to further explore coordination.¹³

Figure 1. Comparative Table of the most relevant Regional Migration Governance Mechanisms in the Americas

Mechanism	Participating Countries	Objective	Type of Presidency	Technical Secretariat	Organization	Working Groups	WGs
Committee on Migratory Affairs (CAM)	Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba*, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, the United States, Uruguay, and Venezuela.	To serve as the principal forum in the OAS responsible for migration issues. To promote dialogue, cooperation, and exchanges of experience, lessons learned, and best practices in migration matters. Finally, to review, implement, and monitor such migration mandates.	Annual – Rotating	Yes	OAS Department of Social Inclusion	No	None
Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (MIRPS)	Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Panama	Promotes responsibility-sharing mechanisms, strengthens protection, and enhances solutions for refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons, and returnees with international protection needs	Rotating by alphabetical order every year	Yes	OAS Department of Social Inclusion and UNHCR.	Yes	1) Strengthening Asylum Systems 2) Internal Displacement 3) Jobs and Livelihoods 4) Local Governance
Regional Conference on Migration (CRM, for its Spanish acronym)	Belize, Canada, Costa Rica, El Salvador, the United States, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, and the Dominican Republic.	To exchange information, experiences and best practices, and promote regional cooperation on migration.	The Presidency Pro-Tempore (PPT) is designated by consensus of the Member Countries during the Vice-Ministerial Meeting. If a country is interested in chairing, they must declare interest at least one year in advance.	Yes	International Organization for Migration (IOM)	Yes	1) Irregular and Massive Migration 2) Protection 3) Border Management 4) Labor Migration
South American Conference on Migration (CSM, for its Spanish acronym)	Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay, Venezuela (Mexico as an observer)	To provide a platform for consultations for South American countries in the primary areas of development; diasporas; rights of migrants; integration; information exchange; migration statistics; climate change; counter-trafficking and counter-smuggling.	Rotating every year	Yes	International Organization for Migration (IOM)	Yes	1) Migration and development 2) Diasporas 3) Migrant rights 4) Migrant integration
The Quito Process	Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guyana, Mexico Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay	To exchange information on the situation in each country and, incidentally, articulate a regional strategy to address the crisis of Venezuelan refugees and migrants.	Rotating every year	Yes	International Organization for Migration (IOM) & United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	Yes	1) Asylum 2) Guidance centers 3) Covid-19 4) Education 5) Socio-Economic Insertion 5) Protection of Children and Adolescents 6) Family Reunification 7) Human Trafficking HIV AIDS

<p>The Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants (R4V)</p>	<p>Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, Paraguay, Bolivia, Brazil, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Guyana, Trinidad & Tobago, Aruba, Curacao, Dominican Republic, Panama, Costa Rica, Mexico,</p>	<p>To coordinate efforts under Venezuela's Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP) in 17 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.</p>	<p>No presidency</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>International Organization for Migration (IOM) & United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>1) Support Spaces 2) Regional Cash Working Group 3) Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) & Communication with Communities (CwC) 4) Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)</p>
<p>Declaration of Los Angeles on Migration and Protection</p>	<p>Argentina, Barbados, Belize, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the United States of America, and Uruguay.</p>	<p>To strengthen national, regional, and hemispheric efforts to create the conditions for safe, orderly, humane, and regular migration and to strengthen frameworks for international protection and cooperation.</p>	<p>No presidency</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>No Technical Secretariat</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>1) Stability and Assistance to Communities a) Integration and support for host communities b) Temporary protection and regularization c) International financing for host countries 2) Regular Pathways for Migration and International Protection a) Labor Mobility b) Investing in asylum c) Refugee resettlement d) Family reunification and alternative migratory routes 3) Humanitarian Migration Management a) Fight against human trafficking and trafficking b) Return and Reintegration c) Aligning visa and travel standards d) Fighting Xenophobia</p>

Source: Prepared by the authors with information from the 2023 OAS "Technical Note: Regional Migration Governance in the Americas" with additional desk research.

All signatory countries are part of at least one regional mechanism and have previously worked on one of the topics covered by the pillars of the LA Declaration. Consequently, there are numerous spaces where not only the topics coincide but also the countries involved. Apart from the CAM, whose participants are all member states of the OAS, thus aligning with all LA Declaration signatory countries, there are other regional mechanisms composed of the same countries that are part of the declaration. The Quito Process and R4V share the highest number of countries with the declaration, with a total of 12 countries in common. The MIRPS and CRM overlap with seven countries, while the CSM coincides with 9 countries

Therefore, the topics that regional mechanisms have previously worked on, many of which are now covered by the LA Declaration, could potentially be led by the same actors within the declaration's framework. Alternatively, those leading the thematic areas could benefit from cooperation and exchange with countries that have experience through the regional mechanisms. Furthermore, if there are open channels of communication with the various existing working groups of different regional instruments, the actors working with the LA Declaration will have the opportunity to establish coordination systems with countries that did not sign it. For instance, although the Dominican Republic—a major destination for Haitian migration—did not sign the Declaration, it is part of the CAM, CRM, Quito Process, and R4V.

An assessment of the objectives and priorities of various regional and subregional migration and protection cooperation mechanisms reveals a certain level of duplication. As depicted in Figure 2, each instrument exhibits a unique composition in terms of country participation, with some overlap in the countries involved. Central American countries actively participate in the MIRPS process and the CRM. However, the MIRPS focuses on cooperation around forced displacement, while the CRM centers around migration. Concerning the participation of Central American countries in other sub-regional processes, all of them are active in the OAS CAM. Only Panama and Costa Rica participate in the R4V, while Costa Rica is the sole Central American country involved in the Quito Process. All Central American countries, except Nicaragua, have joined the LA Declaration.

Similarly, South American countries cooperate actively on migration issues through the CSM, although they currently require additional space to address forced displacement challenges and opportunities. As illustrated in Figure 1, the same South American countries participating in the Quito Process and the R4V also take part in the LA Declaration process. However, three countries, —Bolivia, Suriname, and Venezuela,¹⁴ are still active in the CRM but did not subscribe to the LA Declaration. Nevertheless, they participate in the OAS CAM along with other South American countries.

This analysis reveals that the LA Declaration may serve as a practical means to bring together all countries already cooperating in subregional processes that may not necessarily collaborate through existing agreements. However, it also indicates that other mechanisms have an advantage over the Declaration process because they include countries that did not sign it. For example, the comparison presented in Figure 2 shows the advantage of mechanisms such as the OAS CAM over the LA Declaration because they can facilitate dialogue and promote cooperation among all 35 nations of the Hemisphere. Likewise, an initiative like the CRM engages with South American countries that are facing migration and protection challenges, but not participating in other regional or subregional processes.

Figure 2. Country Membership of the Most Relevant Regional Migration Governance Mechanisms in the Americas

Country	CAM	MIRPS	CRM	CSM	QP	R4V	DLA
Aruba						Yes	
Antigua y Barbuda	Yes						
Argentina	Yes			Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bahamas	Yes						
Barbados	Yes						Yes
Belize	Yes	Yes	Yes				Yes
Bolivia	Yes			Yes		Yes	
Brazil	Yes			Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Canada	Yes		Yes				Yes
Chile	Yes			Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Colombia	Yes			Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Costa Rica	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes
Cuba	Yes						
Curacao						Yes	
Dominica	Yes						
Dominican Republic	Yes		Yes		Yes	Yes	

Ecuador	Yes			Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
El Salvador	Yes	Yes	Yes				Yes
Grenada	Yes						
Guatemala	Yes	Yes	Yes				Yes
Guyana	Yes			Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Haiti	Yes						Yes
Honduras	Yes	Yes	Yes				Yes
Jamaica	Yes						Yes
Mexico	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes
Nicaragua	Yes		Yes				
Panama	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes
Paraguay	Yes			Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Peru	Yes			Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Saint Kitts and Nevis	Yes						
Saint Lucia	Yes						
Vincent and the Grenadines	Yes						
Suriname	Yes			Yes			
Trinidad and Tobago	Yes					Yes	
United States	Yes						Yes
Uruguay	Yes			Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Venezuela	Yes			Yes			
Coinciding with DLA	All	7	7	9	12	12	

Source: Prepared by the authors with information from the 2023 OAS "Technical Note: Regional Migration Governance in the Americas" with additional desk research.

Examining the thematic alignment between the LA Declaration and the six subregional initiatives forms the second dimension of this analysis. A crucial aspect to consider is the prioritization established within each subregional mechanism. This involves identifying potential areas of duplication or opportunities for synergistic collaboration.

The Los Angeles Declaration encompasses several key workstreams organized under three pillars. In pursuit of the declaration's goals, leading countries within each pillar play a vital role in coordinating and driving the respective workstreams. Participating countries, on the other hand, also contribute their expertise and engage in collaboration to accomplish the objectives outlined in the LA Declaration. The distribution process for country participation in these working groups occurred during the

October 6, 2023 Lima Ministerial on the margins of the OAS General Assembly.¹⁵ In this meeting, endorsing countries identified priority areas and established key workstreams under each pillar of the declaration.

This next section explores the alignment between those working groups, themes prioritized via the LA Declaration and those existing in other subregional mechanisms. This section will examine how these mechanisms relate to the declaration and highlights shared goals and complementary efforts.

Pillar 1: Stability and Assistance for Communities

Pillar 1 of the Los Angeles Declaration focuses on promoting stability and providing assistance to communities affected by irregular migration. Endorsing countries have identified priority areas within this pillar to address the unique challenges faced by these communities.

The objectives outlined in Pillar 1 could align with the MIRPS (Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework) and the CSM (Comprehensive Sustainable Migration). Each has established working groups that address these overarching goals. The MIRPS has a working group specifically dedicated to local governance, aiming to strengthen local institutions and governance structures to better address the needs of communities affected by irregular migration. Similarly, the CSM has a working group focused on migration and development, seeking to promote sustainable development strategies that harness the potential benefits of migration. The participating countries under Pillar 1 and their respective roles are as follows:

- *Integration and Support for Host Communities:* This workstream aims to foster social and economic inclusion, ensuring that migrants and host communities can contribute productively to society. Leading this effort is Chile, working closely with El Salvador, Honduras, Ecuador, and Guyana. Together, they strive to create an enabling environment that benefits migrants and the communities that welcome them.

In this respect, the following working groups could offer synergy with this thematic area of the LA Declaration: The MIRPS has a working group led by Panama on Jobs and Livelihoods. The key activities developed by this group

consist of identifying opportunities to coordinate approaches to recognizing labor competencies and establishing a joint process between MIRPS members to facilitate labor market entry in host communities (MIRPS, 2021). On the other hand, Argentina is leading a working group on Social and Labor Integration: Work and Education under the CSM. This working group focuses on identifying the barriers that affect migrants' access to basic services, including health and education (in light of COVID-19), sharing good practices on how countries in the region have managed to incorporate the migrant population in response to the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic, and exploring the possibilities of capitalizing on the experiences of migrants during the pandemic to put them at the service of societies during the economic recovery phase at the regional and national levels.¹⁶

Finally, Colombia leads the Socio-Economic Inclusion working group within the Quito Process where discussions include member countries face in the process of promoting the socioeconomic integration of Venezuelan refugees and migrants, and how the exchange of good practices can provide a valuable contribution toward the socioeconomic inclusion of this population.¹⁷

– *Temporary Protection and Regularization:* Recognizing the need for expedited legal processes and access to essential services, Colombia takes the lead in this area. Collaborating with Ecuador, El Salvador, and Haiti, this working group seeks to establish pathways that grant large displaced populations legal status, work authorization, and the necessary support to rebuild their lives in a dignified and secure manner.

The CRM presents an opportunity for alignment with this topic, as Panama currently holds the presidency and hosts a working group dedicated to Irregular and Massive Migration. This working group serves as a platform for member countries to engage in regional and international discussions on migration, fostering enhanced coordination, transparency, and cooperation. The group's focus encompasses various critical aspects, such as protecting the human rights of migrants, particularly those in vulnerable situations; promoting the integration of migration and sustainable development; identifying strategic priorities, and addressing key migration-related challenges faced by the region.¹⁸

– *International Financing for Migrant Hosting Countries:* The influx of refugees and migrants often places a significant burden on middle-income countries. To address this challenge, Ecuador has taken the lead in securing concessional international financing for countries hosting migrants. Chile, Colombia, Honduras, Guyana, Peru, and the United States actively participate in this workstream. Through financial support and resource mobilization, these countries aim to alleviate the strain on host nations and ensure that adequate services and infrastructure are available to support both migrants and the communities hosting them.

The R4V platform incorporates a regional appeal mechanism known as the Refugee and Migrant Response Plan, which provides guidance for donor responses on an annual or biannual basis. These response plans are increasingly aligned with the specific needs of governments, as they collaborate with different countries to assess requirements for humanitarian assistance and address integration challenges for the benefit of migrants, refugees, and host communities.

From an implementation standpoint, R4V also houses a Regional Cash Working Group, which offers a valuable tool for addressing the topic of the LA Declaration through technical assistance. Led by Save the Children and UNICEF, this working group responds to humanitarian needs while supporting local, national, and regional stakeholders in identifying durable solutions for refugees, migrants, and affected host communities. It serves as a platform to facilitate coordination and collaboration among various actors involved in the response, ensuring an effective and efficient approach to addressing the challenges at hand.¹⁹ No other subregional mechanism has incorporated International Financing for Migrant Hosting Countries as a priority within their working groups.

– *Combating Xenophobia:* Peru is leading efforts to combat xenophobia that include reducing discrimination against refugees, migrants, asylum seekers, returnees, and stateless individuals. Argentina and Mexico actively participate in this workstream, joining forces to promote tolerance, understanding, and respect for the rights of all individuals regardless of their migration status. By addressing xenophobia, these countries aim to foster inclusive

societies that value diversity and provide a safe and welcoming environment for all. While Xenophobia is a cross-cutting theme addressed by many regional mechanisms, it is not the exclusive focus of any dedicated working group.

Pillar 2: Regular Pathways for Migration and International Protection

Pillar 2 of the Los Angeles Declaration emphasizes establishing regular pathways for migration and enhancing international protection. This pillar recognizes the importance of creating safe and legal avenues for migration while ensuring the well-being and rights of migrants. The participating countries and their roles in this pillar are as follows:

The objectives outlined in Pillar 2 could align with the CRM and the Quito Process. Each has established working groups that address these adjacent goals. The CRM has a working group dedicated to *Protection*, seeking to highlight the importance of migrant rights. Similarly, the Quito Process has a *Protection of Children and Adolescents* working group seeking coordination mechanisms due to the lack of harmonized guidelines to respond to the protection needs of refugee and migrant children and adolescents in the LAC countries. Colombia leads this group.²⁰

– *Labor Mobility*: Mexico leads the workstream on labor mobility, actively collaborating with El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, and the United States. Together, they work toward facilitating safe and regulated labor migration, promoting fair employment practices, and safeguarding the rights and welfare of migrant workers. This collaborative effort aims to foster economic growth and prosperity while protecting the rights of individuals seeking employment opportunities across borders.

Panama's presidency of the CRM presents a significant opportunity to enhance the synergy between the regional mechanism and the LA Declaration on this topic. The CRM benefits from a Labor Migration working group, which can complement and strengthen the efforts of both initiatives. This working group plays a crucial role in facilitating intersectoral dialogue and addressing the diverse challenges associated with labor migration management, as highlighted by the Migration Network Hub (2020). By leveraging this platform, Panama's presidency can foster effective collaboration and enrich the

exchange of ideas and best practices related to regional labor migration.

– *Investing in Asylum*: Canada assumes a leadership role in this area, working in close collaboration with Costa Rica and Haiti. This partnership focuses on investing in asylum systems, strengthening capacity, and enhancing resources to ensure timely and fair asylum procedures. By providing support and expertise, these countries strive to improve access to international protection for individuals fleeing persecution, violence, or other forms of harm.

When it comes to the topic of asylum, both MIRPS and the Quito Process have dedicated working groups. MIRPS has the Strengthening Asylum Systems working group, led by Mexico, while the Quito Process has the Asylum working group, led by Brazil. In the case of MIRPS, the focus is on sharing best practices and establishing partnerships to address the immediate and long-term asylum needs of member countries. These include the need for training to teams considering asylum applications and evaluating supporting documentation, for tools for identifying individuals in need of protection, to resolve backlogs in processing asylum applications, and the need for adequate technology for handling high volumes of refugee claims efficiently and fairly. The Quito Process's working group concentrates on enhancing member states' asylum systems within the framework of the Global Compact on Refugees.²¹

– *Refugee Resettlement*: Canada and Guyana jointly lead the efforts in refugee resettlement are jointly, with active participation from Mexico, Uruguay, and the United States. This workstream aims to provide durable solutions for refugees by facilitating their safe and voluntary resettlement in host countries.

Through comprehensive support systems and collaborative frameworks, these countries seek to ensure the successful integration and well-being of refugees in their new communities. Unlike other regional mechanisms, this issue has not been prioritized as a primary thematic area within the existing regional spaces.

– *Family Reunification and Alternative Migration Pathways*: El Salvador takes the lead in the workstream dedicated to family reunification and alternative migration pathways. Haiti,

Mexico, and Guatemala actively participate in this collaborative effort. The focus here is on facilitating the reunification of families separated by migration, promoting safe and orderly migration processes, and exploring alternative pathways for individuals to migrate legally and securely.

The Quito Process established a dedicated Family Reunification working group to foster discussions among member states and stakeholders on initiatives and measures that enhance access and facilitate the effective impact of reunification in the region. This working group has the potential to complement existing discussions and mechanisms within the declaration by leveraging the knowledge and insights gained to explore strategies for promoting and supporting family reunification.²²

Pillar 3: Humane Migration Management

Pillar 3 of the Los Angeles Declaration focuses on ensuring humane migration management and addressing the challenges related to human smuggling and trafficking. This pillar recognizes the need to protect the rights and well-being of migrants while combating criminal networks involved in these illicit activities. A notable example of this is the recent joint decision by the United States, Panama, and Colombia to address irregular migration along the Darien Gap.²³ Additionally, countries can prioritize the establishment of a comprehensive Early Warning Systems. This system would enable the sharing of real-time information across the hemisphere, allowing for better preparedness and response during crisis situations.

The objectives outlined in Pillar 3 are aligned with the CRM, which has established a working group dedicated to addressing them. Specifically, the CRM's working group on Border Management focuses on strengthening, modernizing, and effectively managing borders in the context of migration.²⁴

– *Countering Human Smuggling and Trafficking:* The United States assumes a leadership role in countering human smuggling and trafficking, actively collaborating with Argentina, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Panama and Paraguay. These countries work together to establish better ways to strengthen border controls, enhance law enforcement cooperation, and dismantle criminal networks

involved in these illegal practices. Through joint efforts, they aim to protect vulnerable migrants, disrupt smuggling and trafficking operations, and bring perpetrators to justice.

Multiple regional mechanisms play a role in countering human smuggling and trafficking through their respective working groups. For instance, within the CSM, Argentina leads the efforts in Combating Human Trafficking and Countering Migrant Smuggling. This working group focuses on addressing the new challenges faced by migrant victims of trafficking, distinguishing between labor and sex trafficking. It aims to enhance prevention, assistance, and prosecution measures in the post COVID-19 context. Additionally, the group facilitates the sharing of successful practices adopted by countries in the region to mitigate the adverse impacts of these crimes.

Likewise, the Human Trafficking working group of the Quito Process is actively engaged in developing technical recommendations to *combat human trafficking*. Their focus is on prevention, protecting victims, and prosecuting perpetrators. Notably, they have been working on establishing a regional common response mechanism to address this issue. On the other hand, the R4V initiative strives to ensure that Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse is integrated coherently and systematically within the implementation of regional responses.²⁶

– *Return and Reintegration:* Guatemala leads in facilitating the return and reintegration of migrants, with active participation from Haiti and El Salvador. This workstream focuses on developing comprehensive and sustainable mechanisms for the voluntary return of migrants to their countries of origin.

By providing governmental support services and resources, these countries aim to ensure the smooth and dignified reintegration of returning migrants into their communities by addressing their needs and promoting social and economic stability.

– *Aligning Visa and Travel Standards:* Paraguay and Peru collaborate to align visa and travel standards with the active participation of the United States. This cooperative effort aims to establish harmonized visa regulations and travel standards that facilitate safe and regulated migration.

By streamlining procedures and ensuring consistent standards, these countries strive to enhance the efficiency and security of travel while promoting the rights and protection of migrants.

Figure 3. Putting the Lens on Priorities: Working Groups in Regional Migration Mechanisms

	Regional Conference on Migration (CRM)	Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (MIRPS)	South American Conference on Migration (CSM)	Quito Process	R4V
Pillar One: Stability and Assistance for Communities		4) Local Governance (Lead: Panama)		1) Migration and Development (Lead: Argentina)	
1. Integration and Support for Host Communities (Lead: Chile)		3) Jobs and Livelihoods (Lead: Costa Rica)	Social and Labor Integration: Work and Education (Lead: Argentina)	5) Socio-Economic Insertion (Lead: Colombia)	
2. Temporary Protection and Regularization (Lead: Colombia)	1) Irregular and Massive Migration (Lead: Panama)				
3. International Finance for Migrant-hosting Countries (Lead: Ecuador)					Regional Cash Working Group (Lead: UNICEF & Save the Children)
4. Combating Xenophobia (Lead: Peru)					
Pillar Two: Regular Pathways for Migration and International Protection		2) Protection (Lead: Panama)		5) Protection of Children and Adolescents	
5. Labor Mobility (Lead: Mexico)	4) Labor Migration (Lead: Panama)				
6. Investing in Asylum (Lead: Canada)		1) Strengthening Asylum Systems (Lead: Mexico)		1) Asylum (Lead: Brazil)	
7. Refugee Resettlement and Complementary Pathways (Co-Leads: Canada and Guyana)					
8. Family Reunification and Alternative Migration Pathways (Lead: El Salvador)				6) Family Reunification (Lead: Chile)	
Pillar Three: Humane Migration Management		3) Border Management (Lead: Panama)			
9. Countering human Smuggling and Trafficking (Lead: United States)			6) Combating Human Trafficking and 7) Counter Migrant Smuggling (Lead: Argentina)	7) Human Trafficking (Co-Leads: Chile and Ecuador)	Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
10. Return and Reintegration (Lead: Guatemala)					
11. Aligning Visa and Travel Standards (Co-Leads: Paraguay and Peru)					
Topics that are not in the LA DECLARATION					
		2) Internal Displacement (Lead: Honduras)	2) Diasporas	2) Guidance Centers	Support Spaces
			5) Migration Data and Statistics	3) COVID-19	Accountability to Affected Population (AAP) & Communication with Communities
				4) Education	

Source: Prepared by the authors with information from the 2023 OAS "Technical Note: Regional Migration Governance in the Americas".

Figure 3 illustrates that the LA Declaration places significant emphasis on a wide range of priorities, including international financing for host countries, refugee resettlement, family reunification, alternative migratory routes, aligning visa and travel standards, and combating xenophobia. These priorities are distinct because they are not explicitly covered or addressed to the same extent within other subregional mechanisms.

The other regional mechanisms address specific thematic areas that the declaration may not explicitly cover, which may not be explicitly covered in the Declaration. One such mechanism is R4V, which focuses on operational cooperation. The R4V mechanism brings together several countries in the region to implement and provide assistance at varying levels for Venezuelan migrants. The main areas of focus for R4V include food security, nutrition, WASH (water, sanitation, and hygiene), health, shelter, human transportation, protection, and education. The R4V has four main working groups: the Cash and Regional Working Group and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, which coincide with the thematic areas of the LA Declaration. However, the LA Declaration does not cover two other topics: Support Spaces and Accountability to Affected Populations and Communication with Communities.²⁷

On that same note, the other regional mechanisms have also addressed thematic areas the LA declaration may lack. For instance, the MIRPS, led by Honduras, has focused on internal displacement, offering a framework for addressing this issue. In addition, the CSM has working groups on Diasporas and Migration as well as Statistics, which could provide valuable insights and complement the declaration's thematic areas. Similarly, the Quito Process has established working groups on Guidance Centers, COVID-19, and Education, which are not included in the thematic areas of the LA Declaration. These mechanisms demonstrate the importance of considering the broader landscape of regional initiatives and their contributions to addressing various migration-related challenges. More importantly, the need to seek complementarity efforts in a truly hemispheric approach to migration and forced displacement management.

4. THE LA DECLARATION: ASSESSING CHALLENGES

While member countries of the region have received praise for approving the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection, consultations via interviews with critical actors have confirmed a series of challenges related to the declaration's content and process. These include concerns about the need for (a) formality, (b) inclusionary membership, (c) comprehensive theme coverage, (d) enhanced conceptual clarity, (e) a robust operational plan, and (f) enhanced complementarity. Another significant issue identified is the (g) need to effectively address the paradox between the regional commitments made and the national and local responses observed.

Figure 4. Los Angeles Declaration: Identifying Key Challenges

Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection Key Challenges	Need for Formality
	Need for Inclusionary Membership
	Need for Comprehensive Theme Coverage
	Need for Enhanced Conceptual Clarity
	Need for a Robust Operational Plan - Catalyzing Action and Accountability
	Need for Enhanced Complementarity: Building upon Sub-Regional Cooperation Efforts
	Need to effectively address the paradox between regional commitments and national and local responses

Source: Prepared by the authors for this paper.

– **Need for Formality:** One of the primary challenges identified in implementing the Los Angeles Declaration is the need for a more formalized process. It is important to note informality itself does not have to be a hindrance; in fact, it can promote agile cooperation and result-oriented discussions.²⁸ However, to ensure effective implementation, there should be a dedicated follow-up mechanism to assess progress and identify and reduce any duplications or redundancies. Moreover, a formalized process is necessary for countries to accede to or denounce the declaration. Other processes should help

establish precise dates for meetings, define procedures for convening them, and establish mechanisms for tracking progress and ensuring accountability.²⁹ A significant challenge lies in avoiding paradoxes often observed in regional contexts, where a country's broader regional narrative may contradict its internal policy decisions regarding migration. Given the region's history of political fluctuations and anticipated leadership changes, these agreements must possess the resilience to withstand shifts in political landscapes.³⁰ The lack of formality indeed may expose the declaration to vulnerabilities associated with changing political dynamics.

- **Need for Inclusionary Membership:** As previously mentioned, the Los Angeles Declaration has been signed by 21 countries, with Guyana joining after the June Summit of the Americas. A second challenge identified relates to the exclusion of the 10 countries that participate in the inter-American community that also face migration and protection situations that merit regional cooperation. While the participation of Haiti in such a process is noteworthy, the non-participation of most CARICOM nations is particularly significant. One interviewee mentioned that these countries are often marginalized in crucial policy discussions on migration and protection, except for their limited involvement in the OAS Committee on Migratory Affairs. They seem to be excluded not only in terms of process but also in terms of topics relevant to their agendas such as the intersection between climate change and migration or the challenges of brain drain. Their inclusion in these topics can contribute to a more comprehensive conversation connecting migration with other hemispheric challenges faced in the region.

Why the Caribbean region membership is relevant to have a true hemispheric discussion

A Case Study

A recent joint MPI IADB recent report³¹ confirms that migration has long been an integral part of Caribbean nations' fabric. While Caribbean migration often centers on the outward movement of individuals to the United States, Canada, and European countries, it is equally important to recognize

the significant migration occurring within the Caribbean region itself. According to MPI, over the past few decades, the Caribbean's migration landscape has experienced substantial changes, primarily driven by climate change, natural disasters, and evolving patterns of global mobility.

In 2020, MPI data reveals that approximately 859,400 immigrants migrated within the Caribbean region, accompanied by 745,700 immigrants from outside the region. This highlights the crucial role played by both intraregional and extra regional migration in the Caribbean in recent times.

Regional agreements and other forms of cooperation have emerged as key features of mobility. The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), established in 1973 and 1981 respectively, have created vital pathways for intraregional migration. Notably, CARICOM's Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME) and the OECS' Eastern Caribbean Economic Union (ECEU) have facilitated enhanced mobility and integration. Under the CSME, nationals of member states can stay for up to six months in other Community countries without a visa, although work authorization is not granted.

While the region's unique free mobility regimes have, to some extent, facilitated the movement of displaced individuals and response workers during environmental crises, these regimes are, for the most part, outdated. This limitation hampers the regions' capacity to manage migration and successfully integrate new immigrants. Notably, the region lacks institutions and regulatory frameworks for asylum and refugee protection mainly because this had not been part of the migration landscape. In response to massive movements of people, Caribbean countries have often resorted to ad hoc approaches, such as implementing temporary measures and regularization plans for specific groups, including Haitians after the 2010 earthquake, nationals of Dominica following Hurricane Maria in 2017, and Venezuelans fleeing political and economic turmoil in recent years.

The recent establishment of UNHCR and IOM offices in the Caribbean brings promising prospects for addressing migration challenges. However, it is important to highlight that Caribbean states' involvement in regional migration discussions has predominantly taken place within the Organization of American States (OAS)'s Committee of Migratory Affairs. This disconnect emphasizes the need to bridge the gap and bring the Caribbean region closer to achieving a more hemispheric approach to address the various dimensions of human mobility. By actively engaging with the Caribbean in broader regional dialogues, a comprehensive and inclusive framework can be developed to effectively tackle the complexities of migration and ensure a harmonious approach across the hemisphere.

As expressed by many of the experts consulted, the absence of over 10 countries of the region as members diminishes the declaration's potential impact. However, the direct involvement of the United States and Canada in these agreements holds significant importance, as they have not been as actively engaged in sub-regional cooperation efforts in the past. In addition to country membership, the process has not formally or explicitly included—or at least this is not clear—a role for international organizations also working on migration and forced displacement, although sources indicate the participation of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UNHCR thus far. However, as the range of migration and protection challenges continues to evolve, so will the involvement of various actors in this agenda. Institutions such as the OAS, which houses the Summit of the Americas process, and as the ILO, other international financial institutions, the philanthropic sector, and civil society organizations, have not been formally or explicitly included or acknowledged.

Another actor that can ensure a more inclusive LA Declaration process subnational governments, which play a key role in responding to migration and forced displacement. Frequently, these authorities provide essential support to ensure the well-being, safety, and respect for the rights of migrants and refugees, and they also

work to design and implement public policies to make the most of migrants and refugees' contributions. More importantly, they also are the key articulators and promoters of cooperation mechanisms with other national government agencies, in fostering integration with host communities and in giving assistance programs for the populations who stay in their localities.

Enhancing Regional Cooperation on Migration Governance

A Case Study on the 2023 I Cities Summit of the Americas

In April 2023, the inaugural Cities Summit held in Denver, Colorado, introduced a significant element to the Summit of the Americas process: subnational governments as key players in addressing the plethora of challenges countries face. One of the key takeaways from this forum was the recognition by local governments of the importance of introducing technology in migration governance. Local government representatives emphasized that leveraging technological advancements can greatly improve data collection, information sharing, and coordination, thereby enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of migration management processes on the ground.

Furthermore, the Denver City Summit highlighted the vital role of the local voice in shaping migration policies and strategies. Mayors and local government representatives, being at the forefront of responding to migrants and refugees, provided valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities faced in their respective communities. Their input can help central governments to better understand the realities and nuances of migration issues at the local level, enabling them to develop more comprehensive and effective policies.

Following this theme, during the Cities Summit, the OAS and PADF along with IOM, UNHCR and PADF an event to support discussions on the migration track that highlighted the Role of Local Governments in the Reception and Integration of Migrants, Refugees and Other Displaced Persons in Cities across the Americas. The organizations also launched a report produced with over 200 interviews of

local actors in 109 localities in 25 countries in the Americas to map out experiences on the “Reception and Integration of Migrants and Refugees in Cities of the Americas” that was developed by the 4 organizations and other partners including the Latin American Initiative for Open Data (ILDA), the Toronto Metropolitan University with the support of the governments of The United States, Sweden and Canada. The report confirms that local actors are at the epicenter of the human mobility dynamics in the Americas and play a critical role in receiving and integrating migrants and refugees within their communities. They are usually on the front line in responding to their needs and those of the host communities in places as diverse as isolated municipalities, border towns, large cities and capital cities.

The integration of technology and the active involvement of local actors in migration governance are critical elements that emerged from the Denver City Summit. By embracing technology, central governments can improve data-driven decision-making and enhance coordination among stakeholders. Simultaneously, by incorporating the input of local actors, policies can be tailored to address the specific needs and contexts of different communities, ensuring a more inclusive and people-centered approach to migration governance.

- **Need for Comprehensive Theme Coverage:** Interviews with key experts highlight the various aspects essential to the discussions surrounding the declaration. These include border management, family reunification, and student visas as alternative legal pathways for migration or asylum access. Moreover, one interviewee highlighted that the declaration would benefit from a more comprehensive thematic approach that encompasses financial instruments and mechanisms, the involvement of the private sector and civil society, the significance of addressing labor migration—including the underlying reasons for irregular migration, and the region's development challenges that could be tackled through migration. There is also a need to address the intersection of climate change and migration, which emerged as a crucial concern in all

conversations. Furthermore, one interviewee also mentioned that the declaration should protect vulnerable groups, such as women, children, Afro-descendants and indigenous people, and individuals with disabilities who are on the move. Respondents believe that while some of these themes may warrant a dedicated subcommittee, others should be mainstreamed across different pillars. There is consensus among interviewees that the formalization of the structure of the LA Declaration should consider incorporating dialogue among member states that ensure comprehensive and effective incorporation of these themes.

- **Need for Enhanced Conceptual Clarity:** According to the consensus among the experts consulted, the declaration presents an opportunity to enhance conceptual clarity and establish a shared understanding of key terms such as migrants and refugees and the standards of protection, among other key issues. However, they note that the language used in the declaration could be more specific in addressing the structural drivers of people's movements. The LA Declaration is structured around four pillars: (1) stability and assistance for communities, (2) expansion of legal pathways, (3) humane migration management, and (4) coordinated emergency response. There is a need to further develop a common understanding of the objectives associated with each pillar and, more importantly, to identify actionable strategies to achieve these goals. To this date, there is nothing in writing or public declarations about how signatory countries understand each of them..
- **Need for a Robust Operational Plan-Catalysing Action and Accountability:** Some interviewees³² pointed to the importance of an operative plan, especially when coupled with a positive and results-driven approach. In addition to addressing the lack of conceptual clarity, developing a well-defined operative plan with short, medium and long-term indicators to measure progress is key to unlocking the declaration's full potential. It is crucial to clearly articulate the purpose, outcomes, and measurable indicators of each working group, to ensure proper accountability at every stage to high-level authorities, other actors in the migration

and forced displacement ecosystem, and especially the public. This policy-oriented and results-based approach will not only prevent duplication of existing instruments but will also foster regional political dialogue and the exchange of lessons learned and valuable experiences. One interviewee also suggested having an external assessment of the operationalization, which would provide valuable insights to transform the current disjointed and uncoordinated actions into a cohesive and impactful endeavor.

- **Need for Enhanced Complementarity: Building upon Sub-Regional Cooperation Efforts:** The region’s rich history of sub-regional cooperation on migration has paved the way for the ambitious goals set forth in the Los Angeles Declaration. Unlike previous agreements, the Declaration aspires to engage a comprehensive group of countries spanning the entire hemisphere. While this endeavor holds great potential, it also presents an opportunity to optimize existing sub-regional mechanisms by addressing areas of duplication. As the assessment of the various sub-regional mechanisms reveals (see Part 3 of this paper), a clear and deliberate plan is necessary to ensure complementarity among these initiatives and streamline their collective impact. However, the challenge lies in effectively integrating the established collaboration agreements into the framework of the Los Angeles Declaration, forging a path towards enhanced cooperation and synergy.
- **Need to effectively address the paradox between regional commitments and national and local responses:** According to experts interviewed, a significant observation emerged that highlights a paradox between regional commitments and national and local responses at the country level. One respondent pointed out that although countries lead certain committees within the LA Declaration, their national responses often contradict the direction they are expected to lead. This raises the fundamental question of how to reconcile the national narrative with the regional commitments made. Experts suggest that while the declaration may not carry legal obligations, it is important to establish a mechanism that can hold countries accountable for their actions at the national

level and assess whether they align with their regional commitments. Such a mechanism would draw attention to any inconsistencies and ensure that countries are responsive to their commitments at the regional level.

5. CAPITALIZING OPPORTUNITIES: KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The following policy recommendations are proposed to capitalize on the diverse strengths of stakeholders committed to fostering productive regional migration cooperation, to provide a blueprint for improving cross-national dialogues among policymakers, and to promote innovation in migration policy to tackle evolving challenges in the region:

1. Formalizing a Follow-up Mechanism,

- **Establish a formal follow-up mechanism to assess progress and identify and address duplications or redundancies:** This mechanism could take the form of a technical secretariat housed in an institution or group of institutions outside the realm of government to provide advisory support for follow-up actions, gap identification, and implementing recommendations. The technical secretariat should consist of a dedicated body responsible for monitoring various activities, providing regular updates to member countries, and supporting the implementation of a comprehensive set of goals. This body should foster an inclusive space for dialogue aligned with the principles and goals of the declaration to facilitate ongoing discussions and collaboration among member states.
- **Reviewing Working Group Methodology:** Review the existing working group methodology to identify best practices and lessons learned from the experiences countries have in managing migration and forced displacement challenges and opportunities. This authentic learning process will enable countries to benefit from the knowledge and experiences of others.

- **Institutionalizing Meeting Procedures:** Institutionalize procedures that identify precise meeting dates and how they are convened. This will prevent subregional meetings from coinciding with those of the LA Declaration and provide certainty in the meeting scheduling process.

2. Achieving inclusionary membership,

To achieve inclusionary membership and ensure broad participation in the efforts around the LA Declaration, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **Collective Procedure for Adherence:** Collaboratively define a procedure or protocol for countries interested in adhering to the contents and cooperation efforts of the LA Declaration to join. This protocol should outline the process for active participation in working groups, the establishment of new working groups upon countries' requests, and the roles and responsibilities assumed by governments upon adherence to the declaration and joining a working group.
- **Process for External Country Adherence:** Disclose and formalize the process for countries outside the region to adhere to the declaration. For instance, Spain joined as an observer state with committed to expanding labor pathways for Hondurans in Spain's circular migration programs.³³ It is crucial to establish and disclose a clear process for other interested countries to follow in the future, which could include initial participation as observers in meetings.
- **Inclusion of CARICOM Countries:** Develop a strategy to facilitate the participation of the remaining CARICOM countries in the LA Declaration discussions. Create avenues for these countries to propose migration and forced displacement topics relevant to their unique island-state realities, such as the intersection between climate change and migration, climate financing, and brain drain. Broadening the scope and inclusivity of the declaration will foster greater regional engagement, leverage diverse expertise, and advance shared goals in migration and protection.
- **Inclusion of Additional International Organizations:** Consider including other international organizations working on migration and forced displacement, in addition

to IOM and UNHCR. The OAS, ILO, international financial institutions, and the philanthropic sector should be formally acknowledged and invited to participate or provide support.

- **Mechanism for Civil Society Engagement:** Establish a permanent mechanism to liaise and coordinate with civil society organizations that address gaps in the state response on the ground. This will ensure the active involvement of civil society in migration and protection efforts and enhance the declaration's overall effectiveness.
- **Include the voices of Subnational governments:** Finally, a recent development associated with the Summit of the Americas process was the Cities Summit that took place for the first time in Denver, Colorado in April 2023. Should it repeated by future host countries of the Summit of the Americas, it would be important to devise a process to identify ideas and proposals coming from mayors and local government representatives, who after all are in the first line of response to the arrival of migrants and refugees, and scale them up at the regional level.

3. Comprehensively Covering Themes,

To ensure a more comprehensive coverage of themes and enhance conceptual clarity within the LA Declaration, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **Comprehensive Theme Coverage:** Consider reviewing the topics covered by working groups to include important themes not initially included. This can be achieved by establishing new working groups or sub-committees within existing working groups. Suggested themes include border management, family reunification, student visas as alternative legal pathways for migration or asylum access, labor migration, financing mechanisms, protection of vulnerable groups, and the intersection of migration and climate change.
- **Enhanced Conceptual Clarity:** Facilitate regional discussions to collectively agree on basic concepts and operationalize how countries understand protection and integration. It is essential to establish a shared understanding and concrete actionable strategies. Countries should also agree on measurable indicators to track progress in key areas, such as (1) stability and assistance for

communities, (2) expansion of legal pathways, (3) humane migration management, and (4) coordinated emergency response. These discussions could be conducted in forums like the OAS CAM, which brings together a comprehensive group of countries.

4. Devising a Robust Operational Plan,

- Appointing a group of experienced officials involved in the LA Declaration process from the beginning to develop a comprehensive operational plan. This plan should include short, medium, and long-term indicators to measure progress and should incorporate input from the Working Groups. Standardizing a format for organizing and monitoring the purpose, outcomes, and measurable indicators of each working group. Additionally, establishing a strategy for effectively communicating progress to the general public.
- Finally, allocate funds to support think tanks and academic institutions to conduct research, collect data, and gain a comprehensive understanding of how the LA Declaration interacts with other subregional bodies and initiatives. This investment in knowledge and expertise will contribute to informed decision-making and enhance the implementation of the declaration's goals and objectives.

5. Enhancing Complementarity,

- Several interconnected actions can be taken to enhance complementarity and ensure the effective implementation of the LA Declaration. First, conducting an analysis to identify opportunities for avoiding duplication and fostering complementarity among subregional and regional efforts is crucial. This analysis should include a focus on strengthening coordination with initiatives such as the MIRPS, Quito Process, and other platforms and subregional discussion forums within the hemisphere.
- Considering the implementation of an external assessment of the operationalization of the LA Declaration is essential. This assessment would provide valuable insights and recommendations to transform the current fragmented actions into a cohesive and impactful endeavor, enhancing the declaration's overall effectiveness.

- To facilitate coordination and collaboration, it is recommended to promote regular meetings of the presidency representatives from the various hemispheric migration initiatives at least twice a year. These meetings would serve as a platform to coordinate the continental agenda of priorities, align strategies, and foster cooperation among member countries. A precedent, and good practice led by the OAS' CAM has been to dedicate a thematic session of the Committee to promote collaboration and include reports by leaders of all subregional migration and forced displacement governance mechanisms.
- Establishing a technical secretariat could be considered as a way to support this coordination effort and elevate discussions to a higher level. Drawing inspiration from the existing technical secretariat provided by the OAS to the CAM, or by UNHCR and OAS to the MIRPS process, this dedicated body would provide the necessary support and expertise to facilitate coordination, enable information sharing, and help elevate discussions to the level of foreign ministers.

6. On the need to effectively address the paradox between the regional commitments made and the national and local responses observed,

- At a strategic level, the Declaration of Los Angeles plays a crucial role in prioritizing the addressing of the root causes of displacement and migration within political and policy discussions. It provides a comprehensive approach that considers the economic, security, social, political, and security drivers of migration. As the implementation of the declaration progresses into its second year, countries should leverage this platform to create conducive conditions for integrating individuals into their destination countries. Furthermore, the declaration should serve as a space to enhance the recognition of the significant role played by host communities and emphasize their inclusion as beneficiaries. By connecting migration with key development objectives for the region, the declaration can facilitate governments' alignment of migration policies with broader societal goals.
- Consider establishing a mechanism that can hold countries accountable for their actions

at the national level and assess whether they align with their regional commitments. Such a mechanism would draw attention to any inconsistencies and ensure that countries are responsive to their commitments at the regional level.

- To support operationalizing commitments, the United States and other donors could offer additional financial support by devising more attractive financial packages to support efforts in other countries to manage migration and forced displacement.

Countries of the region took a positive step by adopting the Los Angeles Declaration on Protection and Migration on the margins of the 2022 Summit of the Americas held in Los Angeles. However, there is an expectation that this new regional cooperation mechanism on migration governance to deliver new and/or better results, and add value to previously established sub regional cooperation. This paper assessed deficit areas, but also potential opportunities to increase the impact of the LA Declaration process.

As the LA Declaration enters its second year of implementation, it is crucial to prioritize the recommendations stemming from the local level. The Denver City Summit served as an important example of how experts on the ground recognized the significance of incorporating technology and valuing the insights of local actors. By embracing these principles, the region can reinforce its commitment to effectively protect and manage migration. This comprehensive and inclusive approach will foster closer collaboration between central and local governments, resulting in more informed and responsive policies that address the intricate realities of migration on the ground.

END NOTES

1. Opinions are personal. They do not represent those of the Organization of American States.
2. Opinions are personal. They do not represent those of the World Bank Group or the Migration Policy Institute.
3. These countries include El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, the United States, and Uruguay. For further information, see “2022 Summit of the Americas,” Congressional Research Service Insight, updated June 24, 2022, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IN/IN11934>
4. The countries that have so far signed onto the document include: Argentina, Barbados, Belize, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the United States of America, and Uruguay.
5. For the full contents of the declaration, see Government of the United States, “Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection,” The White House, June 10, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/06/10/los-angeles-declaration-on-migration-and-protection/>
6. As defined by the UN Glossary of terms relating to treaty actions, a declaration merely clarifies states' positions on certain matters and does not purport to exclude or modify the legal effect of a treaty; they are not always legally binding but merely declare certain aspirations shared by states. For more, see “United Nations Treaty Collection,” United Nations, accessed June 1, 2023, https://treaties.un.org/pages/overview.aspx?path=overview/glossary/page1_en.xml#declarations
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13. For more on this, see CIDI/CAM/doc.132/23: Summary of speeches and recommendations - Annual Session on Migration Governance and International and Regional Migration Mechanisms and Processes. Towards the Development of a Comprehensive and Hemispheric Approach: Strengthening Regional Cooperation to Improve Migration Governance and International Protection in the Americas (May 9, 2023), available at: https://www.oas.org/en/cidi/cidi_cam_docs_23.asp.
14. Please note that Venezuela has suspended participation in the Organization of American States, does not participate in the Quito Process nor the R4V, but does participate in the South American Migration Conference (CSM), an atypical arrangement that is important to keep in mind for the analysis.

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