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## **SUMMARY**

This document collects the public communication and advocacy messages of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in the Americas and the Caribbean.

### Introduction

As part of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's efforts to speak with one voice on behalf of migrants, and as a follow-up to the Movement's plan of action in the Americas and the agreements signed by National Societies at the Inter-American Conference held in May 2019 in Argentina, the updating of this document was considered to be a priority.

This document serves as a guideline for any National Society who wants to engage in communication or dialogue on migration in the Americas region. The document summarizes messages from the IFRC global strategy on Migration, as well as the ICRC strategic axes on migration. It also intends to adapt to the new circumstances linked to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### How to use this document

- This is an internal document. It doesn't contain anything classified as confidential but should not be shared publicly.
- However, it is important that National Societies are well informed of its existence and know where to find it, so they can easily refer to it.
- This is a guidance document; however, because of the many sensitivities around migration, it is recommended to use the key messages as they are currently written.
- This document serves as a tool for any Red Cross Red Crescent staff who needs to understand how we, as a Movement, talk about migration in the Americas. It can serve for preparation of internal and external meetings as well as for any public communication need (media interview, social media...).
- If your National Society has an assistance and/or protection programme for migrants, it is important that your programme team, including volunteers, is aware of this document and familiar with its content.
- While this document can be used for most contexts, some of the content will need to be contextualized to fit each National Society's specific challenges.

### If you need help or further information:

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- See also the ICRC (public) *Note on the Protection of migrants in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic*, 8 April 2020, available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#)

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#### General approach

- Red Cross and Red Crescent's actions are focused on addressing the **humanitarian needs** of migrants and protecting them during their journey to ensure that they are treated with dignity, both in their countries of origin, transit and destination.
- It is essential to prevent the loss of lives and to promote a humanitarian approach based on addressing the vulnerabilities of migrants as well as strengthening their resilience.
- Providing protection and assistance to migrants and **mitigating the risks they face** on during their journey is a priority for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.
- **Addressing the needs of this vulnerable population is a shared responsibility, of the authorities in the countries of origin, transit and destination, and of the international community.** Likewise, the protection of the rights of migrants must be guaranteed, regardless of their immigration status.
- In their auxiliary role to the public authorities in the humanitarian field and based on the Red Cross and Red Crescent Fundamental Principles, the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies "make no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. Its endeavours is to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress".
- **It is necessary to guarantee the access of migrants to humanitarian assistance;** therefore, the International Movement of the Red Cross **advocates** for them to have access to basic services and essential procedures in respect of their fundamental rights.
- Individually and jointly with the IFRC and the ICRC, the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies' action in the field of migration seeks to respond to the humanitarian needs of migrants along their migration route, as well as in the communities of destination.
- The National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies **strive to provide assistance and protection to migrants, to defend their rights and dignity, improve their ability to seek opportunities and sustainable solutions and promote their social integration, as well as their interaction in the host communities.**
- **The Movement's approach to migrants is strictly humanitarian and is based on the recognition of the individuality and aspirations of every migrant.** It is focused on the needs, vulnerability factors and potential of migrants, regardless of their legal status. Moreover, the Movement seeks to ensure that all individuals receive the protection they are entitled to under international and domestic law, including the special protection afforded to certain categories such as refugees, asylum seekers and stateless persons.
- Some groups such as elderly, women, children, indigenous populations, people with disabilities and LGBTI population (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people) are particularly vulnerable when migrating.

- A special attention should be given to the risks faced by women and girls (gender-based violence and human trafficking) and vulnerable migrant children, particularly **unaccompanied and separated children**.
- Children and adolescents are exposed to several risks that are not always taken into account: children are out of school while on the move, but also often when reaching their community of destination; physical vulnerabilities could make them more sensitive to environmental factors and diseases; and the fact that in some cases they make the route unaccompanied, increases the risk of violence and sexual abuse.
- Migration is a positive force, as well as an impulse and an opportunity for the development of society, be it in the countries of origin, transit or destination. We need to put more emphasis on the multiple opportunities that migration can create, both for migrants and host communities.
- The skills, experience, capacity and resilience of migrants can be a valuable contribution to their host societies.
- Migrant people often fill the shortage of critical labour, create jobs, and contribute in terms of taxes and social security. Additionally, they enrich their host communities by promoting cultural diversity.
- The Americas region faces great challenges due to the amount of people returned to their countries of origin, the increasing hardening of migration policies, the massive outflow of groups of people which generates various situations that put migrants at risk, such as the repetition of the cycle by taking migration routes (and the potential dangers) or returning to their communities of origin to face again the causes that gave rise to migration (poverty, violence, exclusion).
- A new challenge for the region is the increasing flow of people from other continents who also face cultural and language barriers.

### Challenges of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in the Americas

- **In the Americas (including the Caribbean):** around 26% of the world migrants and internally displaced persons (69.7 million people) live in the Americas. Often, migrants and internally displaced people who try to settle are subject to discrimination, violence and lack of access to social services.
- Regional dynamics and changes in social and political structures and processes demand a strong response from the Movement to alleviate the suffering of migrants and improve their living conditions during the different phases of migration (origin, transit, destination and/or return).

### The Red Cross Red Crescent management model

- Migration is a complex phenomenon that is not isolated; it is linked to a crisis, the non-respect of human rights, insecurity and poverty. These situations have forced millions of people to leave their homes throughout history, in search of safety, opportunities and dignity.

- Our action won't be sustainable without a comprehensive risk management approach. This comprehensive management approach involves a permanent process that seeks to: avoid generating new risks; understand, mitigate and reduce existing risks; be prepared to respond to emergencies and crises; respond effectively to, rebuild and transform, the development model.

Our management model is based on 4 approaches:

#### I. Protection and “do no harm”

- Assistance to migrants must be accompanied by efforts to provide protection against abuse, exploitation and denial of their rights. Protection is, above all, the responsibility of the authorities to defend the rights of all individuals within their jurisdiction based on a broad legal framework that includes international and regional treaties, bilateral agreements and national laws.
- National Societies participate in activities to promote the protection of migrants. These activities include working with migrants deprived of their liberty, restoring family links and prevention of migrants going missing (RFL), social inclusion, legal support, and information activities and advocacy.
- The ICRC has a specific mandate focused on humanitarian protection and assistance. The ICRC offers a framework for National Societies to work on Restoring Family Links (RFL) and detention situations, protection activities aiming at upholding migrants' rights and addressing the humanitarian consequence of migration policies, and direct support and leadership if it is deemed necessary.
- Our approach as a Movement is focused on trying to understand and respond to the threats and violations of their rights faced by different groups of migrants and respond with actions that uphold their rights and don't expose them to further harm.

#### II. Advocacy and humanitarian diplomacy

- As a Movement we work to ensure that migrants receive the protection to which they are entitled under international and national law, including special protection granted to certain categories of migrants, such as **refugees and asylum seekers**.
- Our advocacy focuses on the protection needs of people who migrate, at all points of their journey, regardless of their legal status. This includes advocating for policies that support social inclusion and non-discrimination.
- We also advocate for policies that support social inclusion and non-discrimination, addressing **xenophobia** and stigma.
- The detention of migrants should be avoided – liberty should be the norm; if there are grounds for deprivation of liberty, alternatives to detention should be considered first. **No child or adolescent should be deprived of their freedom** and family separation should be avoided.
- As a Movement we advocate to ensure that national laws and policies support migrants' effective access to essential services, including food, shelter, health care,

access to justice, psychosocial support, information about relevant rights, entitlements and processes in host countries, and support in restoring family links

### III. Core Principles and migration

- Our priority is to provide support to the most vulnerable, regardless of their legal status or reason for migration, putting our principles of humanity and impartiality into action. Undocumented migrants, who are often among those most vulnerable enter in this category and should receive special attention.
- While we refrain from entering the political debate, applying our principle of Neutrality, this does not mean that we are silent. As a Movement we raise situations of concern directly with the authorities, or more broadly and publicly when appropriate.
- Our principle of **independence** is key as it ensures that we work autonomously, focusing where the needs are the greatest, even under challenging situations.
- **Movement's programs are contributing to the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (2030 Agenda)** through: a comprehensive response; full respect on human rights and the humane treatment of migrants regardless of their legal status and strengthening the resilience of the host communities.

### IV. Inclusion of migrant population in humanitarian programs

- In our strategies we go beyond designing specific programs for migrants, including refugees. We have incorporated the migration approach into our emergency preparedness and response programs and plans, as well as in those addressing situations of violence or conflict.
- This has allowed us to broaden our scope of action and increase our impact. Through a constant process of community communication and participation. We came to understand the needs of migrants through a constant process of community communication and participation. We pay special attention to those migrants who have already integrated into host communities but remain marginalized, whether it is due to the lack of access to basic health services and education, or because they are immersed in processes of exclusion or stigmatization by their status of migrants.
- Our programs are intended to help and protect the most vulnerable migrants, whether they are in transit, newcomers to a country, adjusting to a new society or returning to their community of origin. Many migrants, including refugees, benefit from the services provided by National Societies in more than one country.
- To ensure accountability to the affected population we work on information provision and community engagement. Migrants are systematically included in all services to ensure that information is communicated effectively. We also implement feedback/complain mechanisms in order to establish a continuing dialogue with the communities.

- **In the specific circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, the inclusion of migrants, irrespective of legal status**, in preparedness and response plans is not only essential to reduce the impact of the pandemic on migrants themselves but is also core to public health management.
- As a matter of urgency, **access to emergency shelter/housing** suitable for the implementation of COVID-19 infection prevention and control measures should be offered, without barriers related to immigration status, to those who are homeless, in transit, released from detention and do not have alternative accommodation options in the community.
- For migrants dependent on social services and humanitarian aid to survive, **continuity of services and humanitarian assistance should be ensured**, in a way that protects the safety of both migrants and staff<sup>1</sup>.
- Furthermore, against a backdrop of already prevalent discrimination, migrants are at risk of being blamed for the propagation of the pandemic, exacerbating the risk of violence by communities or xenophobic groups.

### Detention of migrants

- Detention of migrants should be a measure of last resort. Liberty should be the norm. If there are grounds for deprivation of liberty, alternatives to detention should be considered first.
- **No child or adolescent should be deprived of their freedom** and family separation should be avoided
- The systematic detention of migrants should not be used as a means of deterrence or punishment for irregular entry and/or stay in the country. If there are grounds for detention, it should be limited in time.
- Humanitarian considerations and respect for the rights of migrants do not contradict the legitimate national security concerns of the States.
- For those migrants who are detained, detention centres must provide the following: medical, psychological and legal assistance; adequate nutrition; separation by gender; preservation of the family unit; respect for the human rights foreigners (especially the right to a dignified treatment); adequate facilities to avoid overcrowding; spaces for sports and cultural recreation; access to legal representatives or people they trust; and consular assistance for those who wish so, among others.
- **In the specific circumstances of COVID-19 pandemic, comprehensive contingency plans that follow public health guidance are urgently required for immigration detention facilities.**

### Deportation, return and respect for the principle of non-refoulement

- It is within the sovereign prerogative of States to regulate the presence of foreigners in their country and to decide on the criteria for admission and expulsion of non-

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<sup>1</sup> The protection of staff and volunteers, particularly health care workers, is indeed critical to the response.



nationals, including those with an irregular status. That prerogative is not absolute and international law contains a number of limits to it, as preventing people from accessing a territory or returning them to another country can have grave or fatal consequences. This recognition underpins the principle of non-refoulement.

- The principle of **non-refoulement** must be respected, including necessary procedural safeguards. In particular, States must assess carefully and in good faith whether there are substantial grounds for believing that a person runs the risk of being subjected to a violation of certain fundamental rights upon his or her return, e.g. risk of persecution on grounds of race, religion, nationality, belonging to a certain social group or political opinions, or risk of being subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment (Convention against Torture) or arbitrary deprivation of life.
- Since the Declaration of Cartagena, Latin American countries have broadened their definition of refugee (to which the **principle of non-refoulement** applies), including also the cases in which a person has fled his/her country of origin because their life, security or freedom have been threatened by generalized violence, foreign aggression, internal conflict, massive violation of human rights or other circumstances that have seriously disturbed public order.
- In all circumstances, including during deportation, the dignity and rights of migrants must be respected. Particular attention should be paid to ensure respect for the right to family unity. Governments should also be aware of the humanitarian consequences of their policies and practices, and deal with them responsibly.
- **In the specific circumstances of COVID-19 pandemic**, forced returns and returns which are not of a strictly voluntary nature should be suspended, with a view to preventing the spread of the virus.

### Access to asylum and humanitarian exceptions to travel restrictions

- States are entitled to take measures to ascertain and manage public health risks associated to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, including those that could arise in connection with non-nationals arriving at their border. **Restrictions of movement and emergency border measures must comply with international law.** They must be non-discriminatory, as well as necessary, proportionate and reasonable to the aim of protecting public health.
- When protection is not available in-country, cross-border displacement is often the only available option for people to avoid violations of fundamental rights, notably in situations of armed conflict and other situations of violence. Therefore, **avenues for asylum seekers to access international protection should be maintained.**
- **Humanitarian exceptions to COVID-19 related travel restrictions should be maintained**, for instance to allow access to life-saving or otherwise critical medical care or family reunifications when a person is highly dependent and requires help to conduct daily activities. Resettlement procedures of a life-saving or otherwise critical character should resume without further delay.
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### Movement's programs and actions

- **Humanitarian assistance:** We provide humanitarian assistance to migrants in order to meet their most urgent needs, **including information and referrals to other services at key points on migration routes or in areas with large populations of migrants.**
- **Basic health services, including first aid and psychosocial support:** We offer basic medical assistance to migrants, with services ranging from community health and first aid and assistance, to assisting migrants with disabilities, and providing psychosocial support and other health services according to the needs.
- **Restoring family links:** The loss of contact with the family is a common consequence of migration. The Family Links Network, integrated by the ICRC and 192 National Societies, helps to prevent people from disappearing or separating, and works to restore and maintain contact between family members.
- **Activities in favour of detained migrants:** The aim is to ensure that detained migrants, both in prisons and in immigration detention centres, have access to due process, humane treatment, and decent conditions while they are deprived of freedom.
- **Forensic support:** In humanitarian action, forensic technical assistance is promoted to improve the practices and standards for handling human remains in an appropriate and dignified manner, which includes documenting death, identification of the person if possible, repatriation of human remains, the carrying out of appropriate burials, notification of families and the issuance of death certificates.
- **Protection activities:** We engage States in a bilateral and confidential dialogue on migrants' rights and the humanitarian consequences of migration policies.

### Shared responsibility of the States

- When we speak of **shared responsibility**, we mean working under a collaborative approach between States, directed towards the welfare, protection and assistance of migrants. Such shared responsibility does not replace the individual responsibilities of the States of origin, transit and destination.
- States must redouble their coordination efforts and strengthen their exchange with humanitarian and assistance organizations to understand, extend and improve migrants' access to basic assistance and protection services.
- The severe restrictions imposed on the entry of migrants have eliminated their ability to escape from their respective crises. States are prohibited from returning, expelling, deporting, rejecting at the border or not admitting a migrant person when his/her life, security and/or freedom are at risk.
- An increasing number of migrants are unaccompanied children and adolescents who embark on the migration route facing greater risks of violations of their rights and psychological affectation, which may affect their future. Therefore, it is necessary that they are treated as a priority during all stages of the migration process, and that their best interests prevail at all times.

- States must identify the specific vulnerabilities and risks of displaced people and migrants, including refugees, in accordance with the relevant legal frameworks.
- States have the primary responsibility for addressing the immediate needs of migrants, including refugees, emphasizing assistance to communities at risk, restoring essential services and promoting community resilience building.
- States have the responsibility to provide special attention to those persons who may be in a situation of vulnerability, evaluating the most favourable measures on a case-by-case basis, and inform people about their rights, the procedures and requirements to be followed, in a language they understand.

### The Movement after the adoption of the Global Compacts

- The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement welcomes the adoption of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees as an important step towards improving protection and assistance to migrants, including refugees.
- We are ready to:
  - Support States in implementing the Global Compacts in the **humanitarian field**. We encourage States to partner with their National Societies as their auxiliaries in the humanitarian field, to address the protection and assistance needs of migrants, including refugees, in accordance with the Fundamental Principles of the Movement.
  - Work with States to fulfil their commitments to protect migrants from death, disappearance, family separation, violence, abuse and violations of their rights. This includes providing migrants with information to safeguard their lives as well as to re-establish family ties.
  - Cooperate with States to ensure migrants' access to essential services. This may include establishing humanitarian assistance points where National Societies and other humanitarian organizations can provide information and services.
  - Assist states in fulfilling their commitments and ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable migrants are adequately assessed and addressed through public services.

States committed to using migration detention only as a measure of last resort. We stand ready to support them in meeting their obligations under relevant and applicable international law, accompanying their efforts to limit the use of migrant and to end the detention of children and, where necessary, to assist them in identifying alternatives to detention, including non-custodial measures.

- The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has recommended commitment and collective action in the following four areas:
  1. **Don't forget the basics: Save lives and meet basic needs**
  2. **Engage and support refugees' self-reliance and contributions**

- 3. Share responsibility to invest in making the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) work**
- 4. Support the role and capacities of refugees and local humanitarian actors in implementing the GCR and in service delivery**

## **Annex 1: Venezuela: Humanitarian response Key Messages**

**Background – NOT FOR PUBLIC USE –**

Venezuela continues to face a complex situation in which access to basic services, including health (promotion and prevention of diseases, diagnosis and treatment), water, sanitation and hygiene conditions remain critical.

This situation, aggravated since the Covid-19 pandemic started, has affected all health services, public and private, including the hospital network of the Venezuelan Red Cross (VRC) (8 hospitals and 34 Red Cross ambulatories which continue to make important efforts on behalf of the Venezuelan population).

As a consequence of the deterioration of the country's infrastructure, national power cuts have directly impacted the national health system since the beginning of 2019, along with the emergency services, and the nonfunctioning of medical equipment such as dialysis machines, refrigeration, ventilators, etc.

Fuel shortages and power outages also affect the water supply as it depends entirely on pumps that cannot operate without power. Access to water is one of the greatest challenges, it is common for communities to receive water only once a week, which entails an increase in the risks faced by the most vulnerable populations such as children and adolescents, pregnant and lactating women, and the elderly. To date, the electricity service remains fluctuating, especially in states outside the capital.

This situation is compounded by fuel shortages, which have been aggravated by reduced imports and insufficient local production. This has hindered access to essential services and people's livelihoods, including the transport sector, which adds to the population's challenges in accessing health services and water resources.

Remote communities, including those in border areas and indigenous communities, do not receive assistance as needed. Continued action is needed to address disease outbreaks and increase comprehensive care of priority conditions, physical and mental health.

As of January 2020, more than 5.1 million people have left Venezuela to other countries by air, land or sea; with approximately 4.3 million Venezuelans being hosted by countries in Latin America and the Caribbean<sup>2</sup>. This is the largest migration from a single country in the region in recent history.

The IFRC Appeal continues to support the VRC in facilitating access to health for the Venezuelan population by fulfilling its mandate and ensuring that all actors understand the Fundamental Principles of the Movement, especially those of impartiality, neutrality and independence, and seeks to continue to obtain financial assistance for the purchase and distribution of medicines and medical supplies, and thus ensure the availability of services at primary and specialized levels. The appeal seeks to raise 50 million Swiss francs in order to

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<sup>2</sup> ["Latin America and the Caribbean, Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants in the Region"](#). R4V, 7 February 2020.

reach 650,000 people in one year with a series of health services. Specifically, the expanded operation will focus on supporting Venezuelan health centers, including the health network of the Venezuelan Red Cross, with medical supplies and equipment.

The ICRC has scaled up its activities since 2019 to respond to the Venezuelan population urgent needs, in complementarity and support to the VRC efforts and with a focus on the areas of health, water and sanitation, detention, support to vulnerable displaced people, as well as attention to communities affected by violence in the priority states of Caracas, Zulia, Apure, Táchira and Bolívar. Focus of the health assistance are the emergency departments of main public Hospitals, and supporting primary healthcare structures for the delivery of basic first level curative and preventive care (capacity building and accompaniment/coaching, medical supplies and equipment assistance, hygiene promotion and materials, health education, structure rehabilitations) for a total of 36 hospitals, 9 primary health care centers, 5 malaria fix diagnostic and treatment centers and other 15 malaria diagnostic and treatment antennas, reached). 23 pre-hospital care actors providing First Aid and stabilizing emergency patients have been supported (capacity building, maintenance/repair of vehicles-ambulances, medical supplies and equipment, hygiene materials). The ICRC supported 4 prison clinics to contribute to access to primary healthcare for over 6'000 detainees' population. In 2020, the overall budget appeal is of 30.6 million swiss francs which includes support to the VRC and increased assistance to the most vulnerable groups: detainees, wounded and sick and victims of violence, and returnees with specific activities aimed at the prevention and containment of the Coronavirus epidemic.

### Key messages

- We need to continue advocating to support the Venezuelan population that is still in extreme conditions of vulnerability
- Economic and social conditions are increasingly complex, since the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis and resources are required to reach more people throughout the country.
- The needs in the health sector are overwhelming so we still require resources to cover the areas planned in IFRC and ICRC appeals that seek to decrease the pressure on the national health system.
- Despite of the difficulties, the VRC, through its volunteers, has been able to operate in a large part of the territory Venezuela with community health actions.
- Given the complexity of the situation in Venezuela, the VRC has been deepening its action throughout the country, supported by the international components of the International Red Cross Movement, the ICRC and the IFRC.
- The work of the Red Cross has not stopped and through the comprehensive programmes developed by the VRC, IFRC and ICRC, the Red Cross has continued to support the Venezuelan population.
- Although the international IFRC appeal has only covered 14%, the VRC with the support of the IFRC and the ICRC, as well other partners of the RCRC Movement has managed to address the needs of a large number of people through risk reduction, health and livelihood projects.

- The VRC is **assisting people in vulnerable conditions**, focusing on providing medical care that includes medicines, disposable medical supplies, and power generators.
- **The Red Cross conducts its own assessments of the needs of the population.** We have continued the process of evaluating humanitarian needs in the country and as we do throughout the world, we provide assistance based solely on the outcome of these assessments. Our work is guided by the need and only by the need of the most vulnerable.
- **The humanitarian needs in Venezuela are increasing.** The health system has been drastically weakened: the shortage of medicines and medical supplies, and the lack of health workers have resulted in people not being able to access the medical care they need.
- **Health is a priority for the Red Cross.** The Venezuelan Red Cross has a network of eight hospitals and 34 outpatient clinics, as well as community-based health-focused actions that are being carried out in vulnerable areas of the country.
- **The Red Cross throughout the world and in Venezuela operates under the principles of neutrality, independence, and impartiality.** Its work around the world is guided by the sole motivation to help those most in need, regardless of race, nationality, gender, creed or political affiliation.
- **The volunteers of the Venezuelan Red Cross are active throughout the country.** In addition to routine medical services and other types of assistance to vulnerable communities, volunteers have provided first aid in demonstrations of various political sectors, helping anyone in need of care. Volunteers and staff have continued to conduct medical examinations and consultations in the communities, facilitating their access to health care.
- The distribution and execution of humanitarian work is carried out by our volunteers throughout the country, in the same way, the Venezuelan Red Cross is open so that other humanitarian agencies and the community can join in this process, provided they adhere to our Fundamental Principles.
- The RFL services remain relevant in a context where restoring and maintaining family links is very important to **prevent family separation and disappearances** (i.e. families who stayed in VEN are anxious to know of news/whereabouts/fate of their family members in other countries)".
- People leaving the country and the displaced may be at an **increased risk** from the current **COVID-19** outbreak (i.e. facing stigma for the spread of the COVID19, quarantined without possibility to contact family, border closure may thwart their plans to return home, etc.). The VRC needs support in providing the **safe delivery of RFL services** and support to families".

## Annex 2: Migration Venezuela Key Messages

### Background – NOT FOR PUBLIC USE-

In early 2015, the Americas region began to experience a surge in migration flows due in large part to the rise of people emigrating from Venezuela. This swell in migration continued in the years following, as the number of Venezuelans living in Latin American countries rose from an estimated 700,000 in 2015 to over 5.1 million by early 2020.

Because migrants, including refugees, are travelling through or entering countries without the necessary authorization or documents, they face journeys full of danger and struggle, most taking weeks or months. Their irregular status limits their access to essential services (especially health services).

As of April 2020, more than 5.1 million people have left Venezuela to other countries by air, land or sea; with approximately 4.3 million Venezuelans being hosted by countries in Latin America and the Caribbean<sup>3</sup>. This is the largest migration from a single country in the region in recent history. As the numbers continue to rise, so do the needs of migrants, including refugees and host communities.

The increased restrictions and burdensome visa requirements adopted by some countries had a significant impact on the numbers of Venezuelans entering the countries, causing sharp increases in the migratory flows in the days leading up to the changes. In turn, as most Venezuelans are unable to comply with these measures, many are forced to enter through irregular channels, and exposing themselves with the associated risks or seek alternative destinations leaving many families separated.

### Key messages

It is likely that because of the economic scenarios for 2020, which will be aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic, Venezuelans will continue to leave their country at a sustained rate and the numbers of Venezuelan migrants, including refugees in the region will continue to rise. At the same time, we observe significant return movements to Venezuela.

- The political and legal context of transit and destination countries leads to rapidly changing scenarios, meaning that humanitarian actors must have the capacity to adapt their interventions accordingly. Likewise, the raising restrictions on movement due to COVID-19 make this capacity of adaptation even more difficult.
- These variations in scenarios result in constantly changing migration flows and shifting needs and risks, which makes the intervention of humanitarian actors involved in the response even more complex.
- A very concerning consequence is the loss of the family contact or family separation. Family unity needs to be maintained and, if not possible, contacts between family members need to be facilitated. States and other relevant stakeholders are called to

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<sup>3</sup> [“Latin America and the Caribbean. Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants in the Region”](#). R4V, 7 February 2020.



take measures to preserve family unity and, as long as not in contradiction with the health safety of the family members, ensure that family separation is prevented.

- The Movement plays a key role in restoring the family links and facilitating family reunifications, whenever is possible and feasible, especially when involving unaccompanied minors and / or vulnerable adults.
- Another key role of the Movement is in advocating for the respect of the principle of non-refoulement. With the new movement restrictions due to COVID-19 it becomes more relevant now that Venezuelan migrants, including refugees, have this principle fully respected.
- The social tensions experienced by the different countries in the region put migrants at risk due to the increased movement via irregular entry points (trochas) and the increasing difficulties in regularizing their migratory status. It is not only the social tensions but also the sheer numbers of migrants in a context where states are already facing challenges in addressing the needs of their own population.
- The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies launched in 2018 two emergency appeals, a regional one for almost 12.5 million dollars and another one for Colombia for 6.6 million dollars.
- In 2018, the ICRC started a response to the needs of Venezuelan migrants in Colombia, Ecuador, Brazil, Aruba, Curaçao and Trinidad and Tobago. In April 2019, it launched a budget extension appeal, including activities directed at migrants and vulnerable residents in Colombia for 6,6 million CHF. In 2020, the overall budget devoted to the Venezuelan migrants, including refugees, is 17.5 million CHF. Activities focus on protection and emergency assistance needs, in conflict and violence affected border areas.
- These appeals and the assistance provided based around the dignified and safe treatment of the migrants, including refugees at all the stages of the migratory cycle, independent of their legal status and under the Humanitarian Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the International Strategy of the International Federation on Migration 2018-2022, and the ICRC's Global and Regional Strategies on Migration, all of them including actions aimed at advocating policies that favor social inclusion and non-discrimination.
- Some National Societies from the Americas, together with the IFRC and ICRC have been providing health, water, sanitation and hygiene services, protection, food safety, shelter and economic integration to people on the move. The continuous circulation of people requires the strengthening of a comprehensive response that provides the relief of basic needs through complementary support actions.
- The National Societies of the region together with their States are making great efforts to meet the growing needs not only of migrants, including refugees, but also of host communities. However, after the COVID-19 crisis structural solutions will be needed to insert these people into the labour markets of the host countries so that they can rebuild their lives.

- For the next few years, political will and funds will be required to ensure the social inclusion/integration of migrants, including refugees, to protect their rights and to ensure that they can lead a dignified life outside their country of origin.
- No organization, agency or government can address this issue alone. Authorities must work closely with humanitarian actors like the UN system and other partners to coordinate and strengthen the humanitarian assistance available to people in need, and ensure they are treated with dignity and respect.
- The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is coordinating with other humanitarian actors and government authorities to ensure the complementarity of the response.

## Annex 3: COVID-19 Key messages

### Background

The COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented crisis in recent history and is spreading rapidly. It is both a public health crisis and a humanitarian crisis that is affecting the health and everyday lives of people around the world.

While it is already a global phenomenon, it is still possible to reduce its spread and the number of lives lost through community interventions, including engagement and risk communications with people, and the provision of preventive services as well as care and support to individuals, families and communities affected by COVID-19.

The impact of the pandemic will be felt everywhere. People living in countries with under-resourced health and social welfare systems, recovering from recent large-scale disasters, and those in conflict and other complex settings are least likely to receive the support they need from their authorities.

In all countries, the most vulnerable people, including those living at the margins of society, are at high risk. Migrants, including refugees, and displaced people, those living in areas controlled by non-state actors, people who are homeless or in detention or have no regular status, are among those most exposed to infection, least able to access health care, and most affected by loss of income.

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is uniquely placed to respond to this global emergency. With a local presence and domestic response in more than 165,000 offices in 192 countries, the Red Cross and Red Crescent is collectively scaling up its COVID-19 global response network to protect vulnerable communities ahead of this worsening crisis.

### Key messages

**The Red Cross Red Crescent continues to focus on the most vulnerable populations around the world, and that includes migrants, including refugees.** *Many of these people may be at greater risk of contracting diseases such as COVID-19 because of language barriers, irregular status, limited access to critical health care and poor living and working conditions. They may be at an increased risk from the current COVID-19 outbreak (i.e. facing stigma for the spread of the COVID-19, quarantined without possibility to contact family, border closure may thwart their plans to return home or the possibility for them to access asylum when at risk of violations of their fundamental rights, etc.) Red Cross and Red Crescent societies are carrying out a range of activities to help those most at risk stay safe during the outbreak of COVID-19. In many areas, Red Cross Red Crescent volunteers are taking temperatures and conducting health checks, providing first aid, disseminating hygiene and preparedness messages in multiple languages and visual aids, and organizing information workshops and connecting people to basic health services along migration routes and helping to refer serious health cases to medical facilities, regardless of people's legal or citizenship status. We continue to monitor the rapidly changing situation and adjust our services to better reach those in need.*

**Our global humanitarian network is comprised of 14 million volunteers in 192 countries across the world, many of whom are now responding to the COVID-19 outbreak.** *Our volunteers assist everyone classified as vulnerable – including the elderly,*

*those with health conditions, internally displaced people and migrants, including refugees. Migrants and internally displaced people who are in vulnerable situations may suffer from poor health already due to exhaustion, lack of nutrition and overcrowded or unhealthy conditions. Our volunteers are disseminating reliable and accessible information on COVID-19 to people in their own languages to help keep them informed. Many Red Cross and Red Crescent teams are also providing psychosocial support and health guidance.*

**Red Cross and Red Crescent societies around the globe have been helping migrants and internally displaced people for years under the most pressing circumstances, and we continue to work with the most vulnerable during the COVID-19 outbreak. Here are a few ways Red Cross and Red Crescent teams are helping migrants specifically:**

*Brazil Red Cross and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) are distributing hygiene kits for the migrant population at risk of COVID-19 at two facilities assisting migrants in the northern part of the country: a transit shelter in Manaus, Amazonas state, where the migrants receive a medical check-up and a field hospital in Roraima state.*

- *Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru Red Cross are sharing information on prevention measures at border crossings, shelter centres and communities where there is a high presence of migrants. In Mexico and Central America, similar preventive actions are carried out.*

**We ask that all countries consider the needs of migrants, regardless of status, when developing or implementing national strategies.** *They need equal access to testing and ongoing medical care, as well as to the minimum basic services that will help them prevent the spread of this disease.*

**Migrants are one of the most vulnerable populations because they often do not have access to health systems or basic services.** *In addition, many live from informal employment, so quarantine measures leave them without the possibility of earning their daily bread. States must ensure access to treatment for COVID-19.*