

Intersections

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When I was asked to compile this issue of *Intersections* on migration and advocacy, I imagined it would be relatively straightforward. As MCC's context analyst and advocacy coordinator for Latin America and the Caribbean, I think about migration and advocacy, and the connection between them, on a regular basis.

However, as I started reaching out to people, it became clear to me that the topic was not nearly as straightforward as I had imagined. What exactly counts as migration? my colleagues asked. And what, especially, is advocacy?

Thanks to sustained staff discernment over the years, MCC has developed a robust and nuanced understanding of migration that encompasses the many ways people move within and across borders: from refugees and internally displaced people fleeing disaster and conflict, to those seeking better economic opportunities, to the many MCC workers who live and work outside of our home countries. Thanks to the work of the churches and community-based organizations with which we partner, MCC has a solid understanding of how complicated migration is and how porous the borders between the categories used by multilateral organizations to talk about different kinds of migration can be.

Advocacy is a little trickier. For many, the word "advocacy" evokes images of lobbyists meeting with policymakers, getting bills introduced, amended and maybe even passed, using legal channels to push for more just policies and laws. On the other hand, it might conjure up images of large crowds of activists carrying signs and shouting slogans or carrying out symbolic protest actions. Some MCC partners don't want to be associated with either type of advocacy: it's simply too dangerous. As a humanitarian relief, development and peacebuilding organization, MCC, together with its partners, operates in contexts of conflict, violence and political instability, contexts in which groups and individuals with substantial money invest heavily in maintaining the status quo. Within the Latin American context, MCC has learned much over decades from churches and other partners about what advocating for migrating peoples entails, coming to define advocacy as "a set of organized actions aimed at influencing and/or changing the behaviors, policies, and resource allocation of individuals or institutions that hold power, for the betterment of people affected by an issue."

“Advocacy is a set of organized actions aimed at influencing and/or changing the behaviors, policies, and resource allocation of individuals or institutions that hold power, for the betterment of people affected by an issue.”

—MCC advocacy paradigm for Latin America and the Caribbean



The Mexican side of the pedestrian border wall between Mexico and the United States in Agua Prieta, Sonora features artistic displays that emphasize love, brother- and sisterhood and the hope of finding a better life through migration. Often, migratory species such as birds and monarch butterflies are depicted on the fence, signifying freedom of movement despite the physical barrier. (MCC photo/Laura Pauls Thomas)

The articles in this issue of *Intersections* examine a wide variety of initiatives undertaken by community-based organizations to improve conditions for migrants. These initiatives represent practical forms of advocacy. Some MCC partners engage directly with policymakers to improve national policy around migration, as is the case for Voces Mesoamericanas, which works with national and international coalitions and directly with Mexican government agencies to improve policies for the protection of migrant minors in southern Mexico. For the Khmer Vulnerability Aid Organization (KVAO) in Cambodia, advocacy involves engaging with local policymakers to allow more efficient access to essential documentation for deportees returned to Cambodia from the United States. In the United States, meanwhile, MCC advocacy to U.S. government officials includes making the best use of digital tools to advocate for better U.S. migration policy during a global pandemic.

For other MCC partners, such as the Asociación Nuevo Amanecer de El Salvador (ANADES) and IDare in Jordan, it means involving youth in the advocacy process. Practical advocacy calls MCC to support partners working with vulnerable groups, such as displaced communities in the Democratic Republic of Congo, to establish policies and procedures that prevent sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), ensuring that humanitarian actors are held accountable to the populations they serve. Finally, MCC and partners play a key role in changing behaviors by deepening and complicating our understanding of what migration is and how it works—advocating for the “right to stay” and the “right to go” and reflecting theologically on displacement and conflict.

Migration takes many shapes depending on the context and circumstances, and the same goes for advocacy. The approaches MCC and our partners take in improving conditions for people on the move, then, encompass a wide variety of tools and approaches—deciding which approach to take in any given circumstance requires discernment of the issues at hand in that context.

Annalee Giesbrecht is context analyst and advocacy and communications coordinator for MCC in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Migration: the right stay and the right to go

Over the past several years, MCC has sought to develop a more common understanding and strategy on how we think and communicate about our work with migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. These efforts received an added push when MCC’s national boards prioritized work around migration in MCC’s current strategic plan, calling on MCC to “Increase the capacity of the church and other partners as they support and equip vulnerable people, especially people who have been uprooted and displaced.” Responding to this strategic direction, MCC staff have collaborated to capture and share learnings from programs across MCC about what makes for strong initiatives that accompany and support migrating populations. Through this exchange of program learnings, MCC staff have come to understand that that accompaniment of vulnerable communities facing displacement and the push-and-pull of migration dynamics calls MCC to support these communities in exercising both the *right to stay* and the *right to go*.

All of MCC’s work, including its efforts connected to migration, is rooted in biblical understandings that shape what we do and how we do it.

As MCC staff from multiple global contexts have reflected together on MCC's migration work, we began by articulating a biblical and theological framework to inform our work on migration, organizing that framework into six primary points:

1. MCC believes that God created humankind "in our image, according to our likeness" (Gen 1:26, NRSV). Migrants bear God's image: we encounter God in the face of refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants.
2. The incarnation of Christ brings dignity and solidarity to the migrant and displaced. Jesus himself was a migrant in a not only a physical but also theological sense.
3. We are all temporary residents. We learn about the nature of God and about ourselves in the migrant experience.
4. We are called to welcome the stranger among us by demonstrating love and empathy and practicing hospitality.
5. God's special concern for the poor and oppressed calls MCC to see, serve alongside and advocate with the most vulnerable people who face disproportionate risk due to their forced migration and displacement journeys.
6. We are called to confess and to be renewed concerning ways we have unfairly benefited from and contributed to systems that bring about displacement and oppress the migrant.

Our work on migration issues comes down to two foci that can appear to be in opposition to other, but in fact help us concentrate on giving control to those most impacted by migration, namely, affirming the *right to go* alongside the *right to stay*.

First, we strive to support those who feel compelled to flee their homes. Migration and displacement occur for many reasons. A variety of "push" factors lead people to migrate (such as violence, political persecution and food insecurity), as do multiple "pull" factors (like family connections, employment opportunities and ethnic networks). MCC focuses on accompanying the most vulnerable migrants and displaced persons. While international migration across national political borders is the type of migration that comes most readily to mind, migration and displacement also occur within national borders, including rural-to-urban migration, forced expulsion and internal displacement as people flee fighting and disaster. MCC works to support the agency and dignity of people on the move regardless of the type of migration or displacement they experience.

At the same time, MCC supports all who freely choose to stay, seeking to flourish in the places and communities that have nurtured and sustained them for generations. As a worldwide ministry of Anabaptist churches, MCC takes seriously the biblical vision of the peaceable Kingdom of God where all are "able to sit under their own vine and fig tree" (Micah 4:4, NRSV), living their collective vision of human flourishing sustained by their ancestral land. MCC joins local partners who work to create the social, economic and political conditions in these places that help people who wish to stay make the free choice to do so.

MCC and its partners also increasingly act to address intra- or intercommunal conflict, corruption, impunity and communal or state violence through peacebuilding initiatives, especially among youth. MCC advocates for the



MCC. "Six Migration Stories from Haiti." Available at: <http://www.mcclaca.org/six-migration-stories-from-haiti/>.

MCC. "Moving Together." Available at: <http://www.mcclaca.org/moving-together/>.

EL PAIS y El Faro. "Frontera Sur." 2019. Available at: <https://elpais.com/especiales/2019/frontera-sur/>.

Tearfund. "Como nacido entre nosotros: una campaña sobre migración." <https://www.comonacidoentrenosotros.org/>.

 **We are all temporary residents. We learn about the nature of God and about ourselves in the migrant experience."**

 **MCC works to support the agency and dignity of people on the move regardless of the type of migration or displacement they experience."**



MCC advocates for the elimination of policy-based drivers of migration and displacement such as forced repatriation or land seizures for large infrastructure or economic development projects.”

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Affirming the rights of vulnerable communities to stay as well as to go shapes MCC’s program with migrating peoples. In collaboration with churches and community-based partners, MCC works to mitigate the factors that compel people to migrate when they would rather not and to support communities that welcome those that do move.

Brian Dyck is national migration and resettlement program coordinator for MCC Canada. Saulo Padilla is immigration education coordinator for MCC U.S.

Root-level responses to root-level causes of migration in El Salvador

Many segments of El Salvador’s population are excluded from the benefits of development, including most young people. In 2019, youth between the ages of 15 and 29 made up 27.6% of the population. These young people disproportionately bear the impact of systemic violence, living in contexts in which violent acts are so routine that opportunities for positive formative development are inhibited. In 2018, El Salvador recorded 52 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants, the highest current recorded rate globally outside a conflict zone. With ongoing gender-based violence and criminal activity a daily part of their lives, young people are surrounded by models of violent behaviour.

Young people experience this violence physically: they are often themselves the targets of violence on the part of gangs. They also experience this violence socio-culturally: government authorities and community members profile youth as potential gang members rather than supporting them as a force for positive social change. Understandably, this violent environment provokes fear among youth, while societal exclusion and stigmatization also impact their emotional well-being. Alongside other constraints on formative development, education, employment and societal participation in El Salvador, systemic violence is one of multiple factors driving Salvadoran youth to migrate from their home communities to other regions or countries.

MCC partner Asociación Nuevo Amanecer de El Salvador (ANADES: the New Dawn Association of El Salvador) recognizes the complex causes of systemic violence in El Salvador and its consequences for youth. Furthermore, ANADES understands that many youth want to contribute positively to their communities but struggle to find spaces where they can do so. In response, ANADES has implemented youth-centered peace-building programming in rural and urban communities with support from MCC since 2017.

Through this programming, ANADES fosters participatory spaces in which youth are organized into “collectives.” These collectives work together on community development initiatives, building healthy relationships within their teams, with other youth collectives and with community members in the process. Members also learn about their rights and are trained to advocate for the proper implementation of laws that are intended to protect and support them. With support from ANADES, collectives have organized community events—such as music festivals, art installations and movie/discussion nights—

Learn more

American Friends Service Committee video on the Sol Mayor Collective of ANADES’ youth project. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_lCrwf19NNA.

World Bank: Intentional Homicides per 100,000 People. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/VC.IHR.PSRC.P5>

that promote human rights, community peacebuilding, and political advocacy. One collective conducted a community clean-up campaign to address environmental contamination; another held a press conference on the rights of children and youth, with particular focus on the situation for Salvadoran girls. Various youth collective members have joined municipal or national networks that advocate for the rights of children and youth in El Salvador. Others have received support to establish social initiatives that build the social fabric within their communities and economic enterprises that offer local employment options. These collectives are formative spaces where youth are nurtured by caring adults in which they gain skills and knowledge not offered in schools.

Notably, the youth collectives organized by ANADES open spaces in which youth can mobilize for change. Forming young people into advocates for human rights and equitable development gives youth greater agency and voice in their future. This sense of agency and voice fosters hope by showing youth that they can take action to counter systemic violence in their country and can contribute to a culture of peace. As youth work toward positive social change in their communities, ANADES anticipates that individuals who, all things being equal, would prefer to stay in their home communities rather than migrating would begin to see remaining in El Salvador as a reasonable option for leading a dignified life.

Through narrative reports shared with MCC, youth collective members have highlighted various positive impacts that they associate with participation in the ANADES youth collectives. Some youth described feeling more capable and resilient, such as Sofía Rubenia Pintín Hernández, who started a jewellery-making business in her home community with support from ANADES. Others highlighted the critical thinking skills they have gained by participating in ANADES youth collectives, such as Ana Sofia Cuestas Blanco, who contrasted the power dynamics of oppressive institutions with organizations like ANADES that empower people to speak truth and raise awareness. Youth like Gilma Yohana Hernández Rivera and Alejandra Beatriz Saavedra Romero talked about ways in which ANADES' programming has created space for youth to have a voice, while also expanding confidence and self-esteem among youth to share their ideas with the broader community. One young adult, Luis Enrique Vasquez, captured the impact of ANADES youth collectives on young adults' confidence, positive self-image and solidarity when he shared: "I consider myself a leader because other young people view me as one. Before participating in the project, I didn't imagine that they would see me that way."

ANADES is responding to the drivers of migration among youth in El Salvador by investing in the formative development of young people and supporting them in community development efforts. Rather than simply accepting the narrative that youth are "problems" for development in El Salvador, ANADES helps youth redefine themselves as leaders and advocates who contribute positively toward social change. Rather than accepting the systemic violence around them, young El Salvadorans reimagine their communities as spaces of peace through participation in ANADES collectives. We at MCC are encouraged by the outcomes that ANADES has already seen in this work and are honoured to be part of their story.

Sara Wyngaarden, MCC Guatemala and El Salvador planning, monitoring and evaluation coordinator, in collaboration with ANADES youth peacebuilding staff, including Beatriz Martínez and Nery Rivas.

“ I consider myself a leader because other young people view me as one. Before participating in the project, I didn't imagine that they would see me that way.”

—Luis Enrique Vasquez



Leticia Yacir Pérez Hernández, 18 years old, is active in the Tular youth collective organized by ANADES in El Tular, Cuisnahuat, El Salvador. When the Tular collective organizes peacebuilding events in the community, Yacir serves as spokesperson. (ANADES)



MCC’s advocacy work around migration, like its humanitarian relief and development initiatives, should be partner- and community-focused, with the people whose lives are most directly affected by migration dynamics driving the process and playing the lead role in making decisions about what advocacy tactics to undertake.”

Learn more

Choong Weng Wai. “The Dangers of ‘Policy-sising’ Social Change.” From Poverty to Power (FP2P) website. January 19, 2021. Available at <https://oxfamapps.org/fp2p/the-dangers-of-policy-sising-social-change/>.

Challenges and successes of MCC virtual migration advocacy with U.S. officials during the pandemic

In March 2020, when the United States issued its first COVID-19 stay at home order, U.S. government officials scrambled to adapt to working virtually. In a matter of weeks, the use of videoconference platforms—once deemed unacceptable for government meetings—became common practice. Advocacy communities adapted alongside them. Lobby visits that had once been marked by handshakes and the exchange of business cards were now held virtually, allowing participants to log in from anywhere.

A year and a half later, these changes seem unlikely to go away. Federal and elected officials have perhaps never been so accessible, bringing new questions for MCC’s advocacy offices. How can MCC help partners around the world discern opportunities to meet with or otherwise engage political authorities in the United States? What are the opportunities and risks that these meetings bring?

New options for virtually engaging U.S. government officials bring undeniable benefits for MCC’s migration advocacy work. As MCC advocates for improved U.S. government response at every stage of a migrant’s journey, virtual advocacy meetings offer more opportunities for MCC to bring voices from migrants and community-based organizations providing support to migrants directly into spheres of influence. Itineration that used to require plane tickets now requires only an internet connection. USAID, for example, has held civil society Zoom consultations on how the global climate crisis contributes to migration. Despite these advantages, MCC staff have identified the following cautions when considering when and how to support these virtual advocacy engagements.

Overvaluing U.S. connections: The first caution we have noted is against conflating access with influence, in turn overvaluing newly accessible U.S. policymakers in our strategic planning for change. The United States has an outsized influence on root causes of migration and migration policy in many countries where we work, but an emphasis on international engagement can reinforce traditional power structures, as well as the idea that solutions to local issues come from outside the country. Local partners should not be encouraged to redirect time and energy away from local advocacy toward international efforts, while MCC should avoid evaluating success by metrics such as how frequently MCC or its partners meet with U.S. officials.

Underestimating cost or risk: While connections to U.S. policymakers carry some benefits, they also carry risks. Local partners who participate in U.S.-led consultations or direct advocacy meetings face at least three potential costs: first, the opportunity cost of the time spent preparing for and participating in these meetings; second, the reputational cost of being seen as overly friendly with the U.S. government in environments where there is significant distrust of international assistance; and third, security costs if sensitive information (for example, instances of corruption or the location of migrant groups) is shared outside the context of the meeting. Risk assessments should be carried out before undertaking any significant international advocacy engagement to avoid potential damage to MCC’s partners and the migrant communities with which they work.

Facilitating extraction: Historically, the relationship between the United States and Latin America has been marked by the extraction of wealth and resources. Virtual advocacy can function as a different type of extraction—the mining of stories, narratives or endorsements from partners, particularly in cases where there is not informed consent or compensation. While MCC can facilitate access for partners to reach out to U.S. policymakers, MCC cannot control what policymakers do with that information. In some cases, the act of U.S. government officials consulting with civil society groups could lend a veneer of legitimacy to otherwise flawed or harmful U.S. policies.

Recommendations: As MCC staff in Latin America have worked with MCC advocacy staff in the United States and Canada, we have agreed that MCC’s advocacy work around migration, like its humanitarian relief and development initiatives, should be partner- and community-focused, with the people whose lives are most directly affected by migration dynamics driving the process and playing the lead role in making decisions about what advocacy tactics to undertake.

To maximize the benefit of virtual advocacy and avoid risks, MCC must trust partners to make informed decisions about the degree to which they want to participate in or refrain from undertaking direct advocacy to the U.S. government (through virtual or other means). U.S.-based advocacy staff can play a role in sharing opportunities and providing context, helping partners discern whether engagement in international policy advocacy, including through new virtual mechanisms, is worth their time and the potential risks.

International policy advocacy is one tool in MCC’s broader toolkit for social change. As MCC accompanies churches and community-based organizations to assist and protect migrants at every stage of their journey, a clear understanding of the virtual advocacy environment will allow MCC to better support these partners in their efforts.

Based in Washington, D.C., Kate Parsons is legislative associate for international affairs focused on Latin America and Asia for MCC U.S. National Peace and Justice Ministries.

Working in networks to influence migration policy in Mexico

Since 2019, Mexico has seen increased militarization of its southern border in the state of Chiapas bordering Guatemala, leading to an increase in violations of the human rights of migrants crossing this border. MCC has partnered with Voces Mesoamericanas, Acción con Pueblos Migrantes (Mesoamerican Voices: Action with Migrant Peoples, or VM-APM), a Mexican civil society organization based in the city of San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas, since 2015, and supports VM-APM’s work with these migrants.

VM-APM’s advocacy for migrants’ rights involves human rights training, observation and documentation in detention centers, accompanying migrants as they seek refugee status in Mexico and psychosocial programming in Indigenous and migrant communities. From 2018 to 2021, MCC supported a VM-APM project monitoring migrant detention centers in Chiapas, through which VM-APM staff provided legal assistance to detained migrants and documented abuses within the detention system.

 **MCC must trust partners to make informed decisions about the degree to which they want to participate in or refrain from undertaking direct advocacy to the U.S. government (through virtual or other means)."**



Learn
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MCC. “How Border Militarization in Southern Mexico is Putting Central American Migrants at Risk.” May 7, 2021. Available at: <http://www.mcclaca.org/how-border-militarization-in-southern-mexico-is-putting-central-american-migrants-at-risk/>.

Coalition report, “Implementación de las reformas mexicanas que prohíben la detención de niñas, niños y adolescentes migrantes acompañados y no acompañados.” (Implementation of reforms in Mexico preventing the detention of accompanied and non-accompanied migrant minors). March 2021. Available at: <https://imumi.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Reformas-en-materia-de-ninez-y-familias-migrantes-en-Mexico.pdf>.

Jimenez, Nestor. “Ante la reducción de presupuesto la COMAR hará lo que se pueda” (Faced with Budget Cuts, COMAR Will Do What it Can). *La Jornada*. November 22, 2021. Available at: <https://www.jornada.com.mx/notas/2021/11/22/politica/ante-la-reduccion-de-presupuesto-la-comar-hara-lo-que-se-pueda/>

Miller, Todd. *Empire of Borders*. London: Verso Books, 2019.

In 2019, Mexico received 70,400 applications for asylum and refugee status. In 2021, the number of applications jumped to over 120,000. Despite this spike in migration, support for migrants’ human rights in Mexico has not improved. Meanwhile, the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance (COMAR) has seen its budget cut despite these record numbers of people petitioning for asylum and refugee status. Observers expect the number of people seeking asylum and refugee status in Mexico to continue to increase in 2022, given the fact the United States has effectively closed its border to asylum applications.

These existing challenges to Mexico’s asylum and refugee system have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in longer delays and increased bureaucracy under the pretext of “sanitation measures.” At the same time, organizations like VM-APM consistently find migrant detention centers to be overcrowded, with little to no COVID-19 protection measures in place for the detained migrant population.

Faced with this situation, reporting to and dialogue with authorities about mistreatment of migrants have become key parts of VM-APM’s work. Although this reporting and dialogue do not always receive a response from authorities, these initiatives generate documentation that attests to the serious human rights violations experienced by migrants today, documentation that in turn can help inform broader advocacy efforts.

Advocacy work: Local, state and national-level advocacy play key roles in VM-APM’s work on behalf of migrants in southern Mexico. Local advocacy includes awareness-raising activities that work on a social level to confront growing xenophobia, discrimination and violence towards migrants in and around San Cristobal de las Casas. At the state and national levels, Voces participates in a variety of working groups and coalitions. These networks can bring many organizations together to more effectively pressure state organs like COMAR, the National Migration Institute and the National System for Integral Family Development (the government agency responsible for migrant minors) to improve their policies and practices.

Monitoring detention centers during the pandemic: Before the pandemic began, VM-APM staff made weekly visits to four detention centers managed by the National Migration Institute in Chiapas. During these visits, they met with migrants to document the conditions in the centers and provided legal assistance to migrants in the process of applying for asylum or refugee status. Each visit generated a report of observations and recommendations which VM-APM would give to the personnel of the detention center to be signed and stamped. This created a record demonstrating that detention center staff had received VM-APM’ observations about the living conditions and treatment of migrants.

When the pandemic arrived in Mexico in 2020, the Mexican government closed its detention centers to visitors. Concern started to grow that closure to outside observation was leading to increased violation of human rights, especially in an infamous temporary center known as La Mosca, where the National Guard, rather than civilian officials, had been put in charge of guarding migrants. In 2021, thanks to the advocacy efforts of one of the migration networks active in the region, VM-APM staff were able to begin making monthly visits again to detention centers.

The response time for grievances filed with the Human Rights Commission in Chiapas has been frequently delayed, often by several weeks. Despite this,

VM-APM staff have continued to file reports about the conditions of the centers—by doing so, they have built a relationships with first the director and then staff at the Commission. VM-APM staff persistence has paid off: through continued advocacy and relationship-building, the response time from the Commission went from several weeks to 24 hours, and in some instances even less.

Working in networks to protect migrant minors: Human rights documentation and working through networks of civil society organizations are key to creating change. Consider Mexico’s laws regarding migrant minors. In 2014, Mexico passed the General Law on the Rights of Children and Adolescents (LGDNNA), which prohibited the detention of migrant minors. However, because Mexico’s general migration law, which predated the LGDNNA, did allow migrant minors to be detained, the practice continued. Through their regular visits to migrant detention centers, VM-APM staff documented that migrant youth were continuing to be detained in contradiction to the LGDNNA. VM-APM staff brought the information to the migration and human rights networks they participate in, including the Migration Policy Working Group, which is based in the nation’s capital and has a close relationship with national legislative bodies.

The Working Group was able to use that information as they pushed for policymakers to close loopholes allowing minors to be detained. Reforms to the Migration Law and to the Refugees, Complementary Protection, and Political Asylum Law prohibiting the detention of minors went into effect in January 2021. VM-APM is now working with local branches of the relevant government agencies to educate staff on what rights and protections minors are guaranteed under Mexican law.

Persistent efforts to document the treatment of migrants, coupled with relationship building with government officials and active participation in civil society coalitions, have thus been essential to effective advocacy within Mexico for the rights of migrants seeking asylum and refugee status.

Staff from Voces Mesoamericanas, Acción con Pueblos Migrantes A.C., with Emily Miller, MCC Mexico coordinator of projects and relationships for northern Mexico.

Protection against sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) and safeguarding the rights of displaced people in DR Congo

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is a country shaped by various overlapping crises, conflicts and wars. These crises displace millions of people who flee to save their lives. Today, DR Congo has over five million internally displaced people (IDPs) within its borders.

IDPs are vulnerable to a variety of human rights abuses, both while they travel and after they settle in a new location. This vulnerability might be the result of material circumstances (having left everything behind) or because of age or gender (women and children are particularly vulnerable to the use of rape as a weapon of war, although men also suffer sexual violence).



In 2021, Francisca Hernandez Maradiaga, originally from Honduras, wears a face mask printed with the Honduran flag at a migrant shelter in Chiapas, Mexico, where she met with MCC partner Voces Mesoamericanas (Mesoamerican Voices). (MCC/Annalee Giesbrecht)

Learn
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Sphere Handbook: Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response. Fourth edition. 2018. Available at: <http://www.spherestandards.org>.

Flummerfelt, Robert and Peyton, Nelly. "More than 50 Women Accuse Aid Workers of Sex Abuse in Congo Ebola Crisis." *The New Humanitarian* September 29, 2020. Available at: <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/2020/09/29/exclusive-more-50-women-accuse-aid-workers-sex-abuse-congo-ebola-crisis>.

Inter-Agency Standing Committee Resource Portal: Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. <https://psea.interagencystandingcommittee.org>

 **MCC and its Congolese partners work to make sure that IDPs' fundamental human rights and dignity are protected through adherence to international human rights norms, including the development and implementation of safeguarding policies and codes of conduct."**

As MCC and its Congolese partners respond to IDPs' basic needs of food, shelter, health and education, we also work to make sure that IDPs' fundamental human rights and dignity are protected through adherence to international human rights norms, including the development and implementation of safeguarding policies and codes of conduct.

MCC's Congolese partners support IDPs through humanitarian assistance (food, primary care, shelter, psychosocial support, income generating activities and agriculture as a means of livelihood) as well as peacebuilding work to ensure harmony in local communities. While almost all MCC's partners interact with either IDPs or returnees (refugees from DR Congo who have returned to the country), two MCC partners work exclusively with IDPs: Church of Christ in Congo Refugee and Emergency Ministry/North Kivu (ECC MERU NK) and OASIS de la Culture. MCC collaborates closely with these organizations to ensure the effective protection of displaced persons.

Because they interact directly with displaced people, MCC's Congolese partners are the primary actors in protecting and safeguarding the rights and dignity of uprooted people. These organizations must therefore have a clear understanding of the importance of protecting the rights and dignity of displaced people. Such understanding must include familiarity with the relevant international legislation, especially because humanitarian actors have themselves been perpetrators of abuse in DR Congo. MCC's Congolese partners have made implementing international protection standards a key part of their work with displaced peoples, with a particular emphasis on implementing procedures to ensure protection against sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA).

Over the past few years, MCC has organized trainings to support partners to integrate PSEA and codes of conduct into their policy frameworks, strengthening their effectiveness in their work with IDPs. In 2019, MCC organized a training for its Congolese partners on the protection of children and vulnerable people in Kinshasa, in which MCC staff supported those partners in starting to develop child protection policies. A follow-up training took place in Goma in 2021 during an all-partners gathering, emphasizing the need for partners who did not yet have PSEA policies to work on them. That training invited Congolese partners who already had such policies in place to highlight how valuable those policies were in their work with uprooted people. ECC MERU NK staff shared that they had noticed a clear improvement in the climate of trust between the staff and project participants since they began implementing their PSEA policy: project participants had become more forthcoming about sharing a variety of questions, concerns and complaints about the project after accessible complaints mechanisms were introduced.

In addition to trainings, MCC staff also provide individualized support for MCC's partners as they design and draft policies to ensure that they comply with international standards and principles. MCC's own staff are also trained in international safeguarding standards so that they can provide support to Congolese partner staff as they develop and implement safeguarding policies. Even for partners like OASIS and ECC MERU NK that already have safeguarding policies, MCC staff continue to work with them to make needed adjustments and updates.

MCC staff conduct regular visits to project sites to evaluate the effective implementation of safeguarding policies. For example, MCC staff recently participated in several food distribution sessions carried out by both ECC MERU NK and OASIS de la Culture, allowing us to get first-hand information

from participants. Participants in an ECC MERU NK project in an IDP camp in Minova shared with MCC how ECC MERU NK staff had explained to them the standards of behavior that ECC MERU NK staff were expected to exemplify and had detailed how to report any concerns and complaints they might have about the humanitarian assistance project.

Internally displaced persons all over the world, especially in DR Congo, live in acute vulnerability and are at heightened risk of experiencing different types of abuse. Protecting IDPs' rights and preserving their dignity are paramount responsibilities of humanitarian relief organizations like MCC and our Congolese partners. In collaboration with these partners, MCC strives to ensure that IDPs' fundamental rights are respected and the dignity of each person is preserved at all costs. Displaced or not, we are first and foremost human beings, and we all have the right to protection in all its forms.

Jacob Sankara is the peace coordinator for MCC in DR Congo.

Deportation and documentation: the experience of the Khmer Vulnerability Aid Organization (KVAO)

Each deportation of an individual from one country to another is unique. That said, deportation experiences are filled with heartache and the anguish of separation. Deportations also often reflect failed immigration policy. Khmer Vulnerability Aid Organization (KVAO), an MCC partner organization, is a locally registered Cambodian non-profit that supports Cambodians who have been deported from the United States. The mandate of the organization is to support those who have experienced the trauma of deportation in establishing community, livelihoods, and relationships in Cambodia.

Migration from and deportation back to Cambodia is directly linked to U.S. intervention during the Cold War Era, the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime and domestic policies in the U.S. that fail to provide refugees with the support they need, which frequently results in economic and mental health challenges. KVAO's clients were deported to Cambodia because they were convicted of a crime, in many cases minor, and stripped of their status as U.S. "permanent residents." Becoming a U.S. citizen is a confusing process, especially for those who don't speak English, and many refugees never completed the process. Many weren't even aware that citizenship was different than the status they had as "permanent residents."

KVAO provides a range of services to support deportees, including initial orientation and housing services when they arrive in Cambodia to ongoing psychosocial services. From an advocacy perspective, one of the most important services KVAO provides is in acquiring documentation for their clients. This process allows clients to survive, integrate and succeed in a country many of them left as children (or, in the case of those born in refugee camps in Thailand, a country in which they are arriving for the very first time).

During the deportation process, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials strip individuals of all U.S. documentation, such as driver's licenses and social security cards. When these individuals arrive in Cambodia, they have no identification beyond deportation documents provided by U.S. authorities. Without these proper identification, individuals find themselves in a state of limbo, unable to rent or own homes, gain employment, rent



Solange Bahati (right) is assisted by family member Esther Bakalanya and volunteer Salomon Ciderwa (left) at the MCC-supported June 2021 distribution of emergency relief items to families in the Buhene and Bugeregere communities in Goma, DR Congo, whose homes were destroyed by volcanic lava. The distribution was organized by ECC MERU North Kivu—the food packages included maize flour, beans, vegetable oil, salt, blankets, pots, plates and cups. (ECC MERU North Kivu)

“ The staff at KVAO include members who have themselves experienced the trauma of deportation and know what it's like to be removed from their communities and arrive in an unknown land.”

“ KVAO accompanies its clients through the process of acquiring essential documents such as national identification cards, family books (a critical Cambodian identification) and driver's licenses.”



Learn
more

Khmer Vulnerability Aid Organization (KVAO) website. Available at: <https://www.kvao.org>.

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or buy vehicles, open bank accounts, or many other basic tasks essential for +developing a new life in Cambodia. These deportees are in turn vulnerable to different forms of exploitation, including being driven to take dangerous and low-paying employment, having limited access to government services and experiencing significant challenges in obtaining adequate housing.

KVAO accompanies its clients through the process of acquiring essential documents such as national identification cards, family books (a critical Cambodian identification) and driver’s licenses. In KVAO’s early days, this process was laborious, but over the years they have learned some key lessons that have enabled them to better assist their clients with these crucial documentation steps in the long process of establishing lives in a country that for many holds painful memories.

The importance of a team that understands the experiences of clients: The staff at KVAO includes members who have themselves experienced the trauma of deportation and know what it’s like to be removed from their communities and arrive in an unknown land. The passion, care and dedication of the KVAO team is in part formed by the lived experience of staff who have first-hand knowledge of the challenges of adjusting to life in Cambodia.

Long-term relationships and diplomacy with local government

departments: KVAO has been able to simplify the process of obtaining client documentation because KVAO staff have a positive working relationship with the Cambodian government, specifically the Department of Immigration and the Department of Identification and Documentation. Building these positive relationships took over fifteen years of tireless advocacy, championing the rights of clients to obtain documentation immediately upon arrival in Cambodia at no cost. KVAO remained committed to clients through advocating for changes to legal processes that now require the Cambodian government to provide documentation quickly and at no cost. This work with government officials was largely behind the scenes, sensitive to the complexity of advocating for legal change in Cambodia. In addition to advocacy to government officials for documentation support for deportees, KVAO has also organized counseling services for clients and seeks to challenge stereotypes held by deportees’ relatives and neighbors in Cambodia about who deportees are.

KVAO clients share a range of success stories, remarkable given the trauma that these individuals have experienced. One of the most telling indications of success is the number of clients who have become English teachers, something which would not have been possible without KVAO’s support. Despite the significant barriers to success, clients have found gainful employment, developed new communities and started the process of adapting to life in Cambodia.

Advocating for those who have experienced the trauma of deportation is critical work. Advocacy around deportation must take place both in the United States and Cambodia. In the Cambodian context, KVAO is the only organization providing this kind of support to deportees. Without KVAO’s efforts in providing direct support services to deportees and advocating to local and national government for their rights, deportees would face even steeper challenges in adapting to the Cambodian context.

Tyler Loewen is project and partner support officer for MCC in Asia. Sonec Tan is the executive director of KVAO.

Creative advocacy approaches with migrant youth in Jordan

IDare for Sustainable Development (an MCC partner) works with migrant youth in Jordan to help them express their feelings and perspectives through artistic means. Through IDare's art-based method, migrants from Syria, Iraq and elsewhere use music, theatre, comics, visual art and creative writing to advocate for change.

Since 2013, IDare has engaged Jordanian and migrant youth through a program called "Articipate." Over these past nine years, IDare has refined this program that engages young adults (ages 18 to 30) through the arts to become active around issues in their communities. Creative projects designed by IDare participants have spawned what we at IDare refer to as "advocacy tools," artistic actions that address the issues and causes that matter to the youth, including social cohesion, peace and resilience within the Jordanian context in which migrants and refugees from different national, social and ethnic backgrounds live alongside one another.

Although Jordan does not suffer directly from military conflicts or host violent extremist groups, the country has welcomed many waves of refugees over the decades, refugees with different national identities (Palestinian, Syrian and Iraqi) and religious affiliations (Islam, Christianity, Druze and Baha'i). Recent refugee waves related to wars in Iraq and Syria have generated social and economic strain between refugees and Jordanian host communities. Unequal power distribution between refugee groups and between refugee and host communities also generates social tensions. Through our programs, IDare mobilizes migrant youth through the arts to think through some of these stress points.

One of the most important aspects of the IDare approach is the process by which young migrants group themselves and manage the creation and implementation of the idea they are working on. First, youth actively group themselves; they then choose an issue that is important to them and communicate about it in a dynamic way that resonates with them. This methodology requires the participants to research the issue or problem they are working on as well as potential solutions, developing their understanding through teamwork, discussions and research. The end result of this research is a creative product.

One example of a creative IDare initiative involved four-month internships in which young adults wrote longform articles in Arabic for IDare's blog that addressed "digital resilience," that is, fostering the capacity among youth and young adults to assess digital information critically, in turn reducing the vulnerability of young people to potentially harmful content. Participants not only spent time researching an important topic for migrant youth, who could be vulnerable to malicious digital misinformation, but also gave them experience with digital content creation.

IDare's Tabir project, meanwhile, aims to strengthen youth agency by enabling young people living in Jordan's Ajloun governate to create short videos about problems within their communities. The project helps participants develop storytelling skills, while also strengthening participants' leadership skills by giving them the opportunity to build channels of dialogue within their communities.



Group of young people mobilized by IDare undertaking street theater in Amman, Jordan, to promote social cohesion. (IDare)

ff Through IDare's art-based method, migrants from Syria, Iraq, and elsewhere use music, theatre, comics, visual art and creative writing to advocate for change."

ff Tackling sensitive issues like gender-based violence or tensions between refugees and host communities should not be left up solely to government agencies and credentialed experts: there's a pressing need for young migrants to bring their creativity to bear in raising awareness around such social problems and in mobilizing to take positive action to address such issues."

IDare youth participants have also worked to produce five comic magazines under the title Yani (Arabic for "I mean") on topics such as peace, social justice, resilience and intercommunal solidarity. The youth participants published these comic magazines online and in print. Comic magazines have been very rare in Jordan: these IDare-produced magazines offered youth the chance to be part of an innovative venture, while also honing their art skills and developing a portfolio to use when looking for employment.

The core ideas behind all these IDare ventures include promoting youth agency, making sure each voice matters and creating safe spaces for youth to express themselves, their ideas and opinions. Mutual respect and acceptance are the order of the day. The youth who participate in IDare's projects come from different backgrounds, nationalities and ethnicities, as well as various beliefs and religious groups. A large portion of these youth are migrants, leaving behind their homes and countries due to wars, persecution and economic hardship.

Too often, advocacy is reduced to the production of policy briefs and position papers by outside experts, but we also need advocacy tools created by actors within the development sector, including migrant youth. Tackling sensitive issues like gender-based violence or tensions between refugees and host communities should not be left up solely to government agencies and credentialed experts: there's a pressing need for young migrants to bring their creativity to bear in raising awareness around such social problems and in mobilizing to take positive action to address such issues.

Suha Ayyash lives in Amman, Jordan, where she works as social marketer and program director for IDare for Sustainable Development.

Living the signs of the times: a theological approach to displacement in Colombia

"You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times" (Matthew 16:3, NRSV).

The smartphone and the face mask are not the only signs of these times, but also the mass migration of peoples from one place to another: people on the move within and outside countries, people on the move due to war, hunger, a global climate crisis and economic desperation.

Mass migration has significant consequences both for the people who move as well as for the communities that receive them. Although human beings have always migrated from one region to another, the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have witnessed accelerated mass migration both within and across national borders, due mainly to war and more recently to intensified climate change. As churches, we are called to interpret these signs of the times, to understand the impact of migration and to seek ways to respond to migration: doing so is a missionary mandate.

In these brief reflections, I will focus on how the organization I lead, Sembrando Semillas de Paz, or Sembrandopaz for short, discerns the signs of the times in working with people displaced within Colombia. Sembrandopaz operates in the Caribbean region of Colombia, in an area made of up 15 municipalities called the Montes de María. Over 25 years, Sembrandopaz has

worked here to accompany internally displaced communities uprooted by war within Colombia, communities that later returned to their territory.

Over more than two decades of walking alongside uprooted peoples, Sembrandopaz has learned that the wounds caused by war and displacement are so strong that they must be treated from the beginning. As the German author Heinrich Böll observed, so long as there are open wounds from a war that have not healed, that war is not over.

Displaced peoples have had all rights taken from them—not legally, because in principle they continue to have rights, but in practice. For most migrants and displaced people, their fundamental human rights are never respected—and so they call out for help. Many people see migrants coming into their communities as potential sources of danger. Being viewed as dangerous deeply affects migrants politically and psychologically, degrading them and compounding their physical vulnerability.

Our objective at Sembrandopaz is to accompany, train and empower people who are victims of displacement in the process of moving from vulnerability to sustainability, a movement from third-class to full citizenship, a movement to full and informed participation within their communities. In this process of citizen empowerment, we at Sembrandopaz remind ourselves that we are not working with redeemed angels, but with human beings scarred by affliction, injury and confusion who see threats everywhere. Sembrandopaz staff work with displaced peoples to help them begin to trust each other so that they can work together. For this purpose, we organize safe and creative spaces that generate trust through art and dialogue. Trust is key to opening the dialogue between displaced people, because they have many hidden hurts, resentments and pains. As Scripture teaches, “An ally offended is stronger than a city; such quarreling is like the bars of a castle” (Proverbs 18:19, NRSV). Fostering a dialogue of re-encounter between equals in disagreement is essential to address the trauma displaced peoples have lived through.

Over the course of Sembrandopaz’s accompaniment of migrating and displaced peoples, we have learned that these efforts move through the following stages:

1. Providing humanitarian aid.
2. Using art to foster dialogue—creating spaces in which people can encounter one another as equals, even when disagreeing with one another.
3. Addressing trauma.
4. Encouraging sustainability, understood as the ability of people to achieve sustained economic prosperity over time while protecting the natural systems of the planet and providing a high quality of life for people.
5. Confronting the socio-political situation: in the case of Sembrandopaz, this happens through trainings to strengthen grassroots organizations and coordinating with local, regional and national entities to advocate on behalf of displaced peoples.

Sembrandopaz’s work with internally displaced individuals and communities within Colombia is thus holistic, multi-dimensional and dynamic, adapting to meet uprooted people where they are at in processing their particular migrant journeys.

Ricardo Esquivia is the director of Sembrandopaz in Colombia.

“ Being viewed as dangerous deeply affects migrants politically and psychologically, degrading them and compounding their physical vulnerability.”

“ At Sembrandopaz we remind ourselves that we are not working with redeemed angels, but with human beings scarred by affliction, injury, and confusion who see threats everywhere.”

Learn more

Sembrandopaz website.
Available at: <http://sembrandopaz.org>.

Rutas del Conflicto: Mapa de Masacres (explore the departments of Sucre and Bolivar to see where Sembrandopaz works). See <https://rutasdelconflicto.com/masacres#>.

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre: Colombia.
Available at: <https://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/colombia>.



Narciso Díaz is part of the team at Sembrandopaz's experimental farm just outside of Sincelejo, Colombia. Rural communities in the Montes de María region of Colombia are on the front lines of climate change—droughts are growing longer and harsher, and water is becoming scarce. The impact of climate change is especially strong in communities, like the ones in the Montes de María region, that have been displaced by conflict and violence. Part of Sembrandopaz's work rebuilding lives and livelihoods in these communities is promoting the cultivation and use of fruits and vegetables adapted to the extreme conditions of the Colombian Caribbean coast. At the experimental farm, Sembrandopaz staff work on developing strategies to support sustainable agroecological practices, including adapting traditional farming practices to a changing climate. (MCC photo/Annalee Giesbrecht)

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