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Risk. Resistance.
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Rights Literacy in Indigenous Migrant Communities: Priorities and New Frontiers in Guatemala, Mexico and the United States

A virtual workshop to develop a new engagement and
research agenda for indigenous people on the move

Thursday, 18 November 2021

12.00 pm – 4.30 pm EST / 5.00 pm – 9.30 pm BST

Background

More than 82.4 million people worldwide – one percent of the global population – are forcibly [displaced](#). Conflict, food insecurity, poverty, lack of access to land and other resources, the impacts of climate change, and persecution are just some of the factors that drive migration of people both inside countries and across borders – and back again. Frequently, displaced populations move through and into geographic spaces in which their rights are not recognized and they experience reduced access to goods, services, and justice. This increases their exposure to predatory actors who prey on and exacerbate these vulnerabilities.

Indigenous populations in Central America are at risk of displacement owing to a range of factors, including climate change and environmental degradation. In Guatemala and Mexico, specifically, catastrophic events, such as natural disasters – mudslides, hurricanes, and flooding – as well as more gradual changes in ecosystems pose a threat to traditional livelihoods. Displaced by extreme poverty, lack of socioeconomic opportunity, violence, and climate stressors, thousands of indigenous Mexican and Guatemalan citizens migrate every year in the hope of finding a better future. In 2018, there were [83,000](#) international indigenous migrants in Central American countries, most of whom were women. Many [more](#) families and individuals were displaced within their countries of origin.

Indigenous migrants face a range of specific vulnerabilities. Despite the heterogeneity of indigenous populations in terms of language, culture, age, gender and family make-up, they often face very similar obstacles. The challenges they meet, both on their journey and once they settle, are significant. They include gender-based violence, human trafficking, racism and language barriers that [undermine](#) their rights and due process.

The last decade has seen growing attention in the international system to the rights of indigenous migrants ([see](#) 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples [UNDRIP]) and a new global agenda to support people on the move ([see](#) 2018 Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and 2019 Global [Compact](#) on Refugees). But rarely are these two policy agendas discussed together, as identified by the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in a 2019 [report](#). Indeed, the United Nations Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights has [observed](#) that there continues to be a dearth of appropriate data on indigenous peoples who are migrants.

Meanwhile, the rapidly shifting immigration and asylum policy landscape in the Americas at the local and national level means that it can be difficult to stay up to date with policies and practices, for migrants and service providers alike. Often lacking reliable access to context-appropriate and reliable forms of learning about their rights – including learning in their own language – many indigenous migrants rely on support in non-formal settings to better understand and exercise their rights on their migratory journeys. Little is known of what works most effectively to improve rights literacy among indigenous migrants and their families and how best to create enabling environments for the realization of rights at different stages of their migratory journeys. This workshop seeks to critically assess the current situation and develop a policy-oriented research agenda to address these gaps.

This virtual event, co-organized by the United Nations University Centre for Policy Research and members of the UK Research and Innovation-funded [Life Facing Deportation Project](#),¹ will examine what is known about existing practices that foster rights literacy among and within indigenous populations and consider ways that capacity-building in non-formal settings can be created, strengthened, and made more accessible. It will focus on the cases of Mexico and Guatemala and their respective indigenous diasporas in Central and North America. The workshop will bring together UN Member States, UN agencies and programmes, civil society, indigenous populations, and academia to exchange experiences, review emerging good practices and challenges, and identify key areas for practice, research, and policy development. It will take the form of an opening session and two interactive panel discussions: the first focusing on the background context of indigenous migration, and the second on critical rights literacy in this context. The panels will be followed by contributions from participants. Together, opportunities and challenges relating to indigenous migration and rights literacy will be identified. Consideration will be given to how the development of best practices, advocacy and new research might strengthen programming and improve both the knowledge of rights by these populations and their ability to exercise them. A research agenda and compendium of best practice case studies will be published based on the event.

This event will be held in English and Spanish with simultaneous interpretation.

¹ Centro de Estudios para la Equidad y Gobernanza en los Sistemas de Salud de Guatemala (CEGSS), Centro de Investigación y de Estudios Avanzados (Cinvestav), University of Birmingham Institute for Research into SuperDiversity (IRiS) and University College London Institute for Education.

Programme

Opening Session: 12.00 pm – 1.00 pm EST

A New Inter-Sectoral Research Agenda on Rights and Indigenous Migration in the Americas

Dr. David Passarelli, Executive Director, UNU Centre for Policy Research (UNU-CPR)
Jorge Peraza, Chief of Mission in Guatemala, International Organization for Migration
Ariana Sawyer, US Border Researcher, Human Rights Watch
Leticia Teleguario, of the Mayan Kaqchikel community and UN Women Acting Representative in Guatemala
Prof. Valentina Glockner, Researcher, Center for Research and Advanced Studies (CINESTAV)

Testimony of Epifanio Moreno, Na Savi migrant and researcher for National Geographic Society

PART 1: 1.00 pm – 2.30 pm EST

Frameworks, Policies and Trends for Indigenous Migrants in Guatemala, Mexico and the United States

The first session will discuss the recent trends in indigenous migration through and within Central America. The panel and ensuing discussion will also consider what we know about the intersecting reasons why indigenous people choose to move or stay in different contexts; what is specific about the indigenous migrant experience; and why this group requires specific attention in protection responses.

We will review the international protection framework for indigenous populations and how this intersects with that of migration, as well as address local and national government efforts to meet the needs of this population, and consider the relationship between internal displacement and international migration of indigenous people. New and changing rights frameworks will be explored. For instance, indigenous community interventions to reintegrate deported migrants and prevent stigma in the context of COVID-19.

Each panelist will speak for 10 minutes followed by an interactive discussion with participants.

Framing remarks: **Dr. David Passarelli**, Executive Director, UNU-CPR

Panelists:

- **Melissa Vega**, Communication Officer & **Antonio Meoño**, Information Management Officer, International Organization for Migration (IOM)
- **Martin Oelz**, Senior Specialist on Equality and Non-discrimination, International Labor Organization (ILO)
- **Prof. Dulce María Mejía Cortés**, General Director, Legal Representation and Restitution of Rights of Children and Adolescents, Government of Mexico
- **Lesly Ramirez**, Citizen participation adviser, Center for the Study of Equity and Governance in Health Systems Guatemala (CEGSS)
- **Salvador Loarca**, Municipal Assistant to the Human Rights Ombudsman, Santiago Atitlán Office, Sololá, Guatemala
- **Soo-Young Hwang**, Legal Officer, UN Environment Programme (UNEP)

Respondent: **Dr. Gaspar Rivera-Salgado**, Project Director at UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education

Discussion moderator: **Sophie Buddenhorn**, Carlo Schmid Fellow, UNU-CPR

PART 2: 2.30 pm – 4.00 pm EST

Improving Critical Rights Literacy among Indigenous Migrants and their Communities

This second session will consider what we know about how current legal frameworks are being *communicated* and *applied in practice* to and with indigenous migrants as they navigate different stages of migration, including (i) Prior to migration; (ii) During migration; (iii) After migration; and (iv) After return.

Evidence pertaining to the challenges and opportunities indigenous migrants and the diaspora face in learning about and accessing their rights will be presented. Practical approaches to improve rights literacy will be discussed for individuals at all stages of the migratory journey. We will consider the role of technology, formal educational institutions as well as informal educational institutions including places of worship and community spaces. Panelists will consider what might be done to strengthen regional and international collaboration in this area and also across rural and urban areas, as well as how networks can be strengthened between sending and receiving communities, and how the topics of migration and human rights are approached in formal and non-formal learning spaces. Finally, we will consider, how can indigenous individuals and families be co-creators of rights-based knowledge across research, policy and protection dimensions.

Each panelist will speak for 10 minutes followed by an interactive discussion with participants.

Framing remarks: **Prof. Elaine Chase**, Institute of Education, University College London

Panelists:

- **Odilia Romero**, Executive Director & co-founder of Comunidades Indígenas en Liderazgo (Indigenous Communities in Leadership), Community organizer and Zapotec translator
- **Clara Benilda Batzin Churunel**, Executive Director, CEGSS & **Juana Navichoc Culum**, Community leader from San Pablo la Laguna, Sololá
- **Ana Gomez**, Founder and coordinator, Promotores de la Liberación Migrante
- **Rosalba Rivera Zúñiga**, Child Rights Coordinator, Institute for Women in Migration (IMUMI)
- **Luis Ángel Gallegos Rodríguez**, Lead Organizer, Transnational Village Network & **Yoloxochitl Marcelino Cano**, Member of the Indigenous Immigrant Council of New York

Respondent: **Dr. Giovanni Batz**, Researcher, Department of Native American Studies, University of California, Davis

Discussion moderator: **Sophie Buddenhorn**, Carlo Schmid Fellow, UNU-CPR

Closing: 4.00 pm – 4.30 pm EST

Reflections and next steps

- **Dr. Walter Flores**, Principal Advisor, CEGSS
- **Dr. Jennifer Allsopp**, Birmingham Fellow & UNU-CPR Senior Fellow
- **Dr. David Passarelli**, Executive Director, UNU-CPR

Post-conference screening of a short [film](#) by Epifanio Moreno, Na Savi migrant and researcher for National Geographic Society and **Prof. Valentina Glockner**, CINESTAV.