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International Migration in the geographical middle of the Americas
A perspective analysis of international migration in Panama

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■ The Isthmus of Panama is the linking landmass between South and North America. Since the 16th century transit and migration are inherent characteristics of this region. Within the framework of increasing global interdependencies, Panama became a central global actor in the field of logistic. The increasing global complexities are also related to the increasing mobility of people. Panama's self-perception of being the 'global Hub of the Americas' also reveals the need to develop more progressive tools for the challenges of international migration.

■ As a consequence, single nation state such as Panama cannot handle global issues such as international migration alone. Therefore, a need for structural development in the field of international migration becomes evident. Information exchange mechanisms and cooperative alliances of progressive actors need to be developed and strengthened. Thus, profound communication and cooperation among national, regional, international and supranational actors is of upmost importance.

■ However, increasing xenophobic attitudes and repressive policies against migrants are a sobering reality in the contemporary global discourse on international migration. The Panamanian government is also responding to international migration with increasing anachronistic policies.

■ In addition to Panamas unique geographical position, high level of annual asylum requests and multiple other forms of immigration revealing a necessity to act. In the field of progressive migration management, Panama has to become a regional leader. Based on a provided historical standpoint and a clear formulation of the core challenges, this paper aims to provide recommendation for action addressed to progressive actors in Panama and the region.

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Introduction

International migration is not a new phenomenon per se. However, what is new is the increase in complexity of international migration. The expansion and acceleration of global mobility and the interconnections with e.g. human rights of asylum seeker, increasing nationalism, border controls and the integration and securitization policies in the global north are variables which have intensified the discourse on international migration in the recent time. As a consequence, the individual nation state is not able anymore to deal alone with this highly complex global issue of international migration. Thus, by definition, international migration has to become "a priority for the international community" (UN DESA, 2013). The need for supranational cooperation in the field of international migration is consequently becoming increasingly important. However, rising populistic movements around the world are reacting to these challenges with an anachronistic return to state centrism, stronger border controls and xenophobic attitudes. By referring to the current refugee crisis in Europe, it becomes visible that the challenges of international migration have not been evaluated appropriately in the years before the crisis. The EU was not able to develop their resilience by strengthening its often proclaimed values of solidarity and mutual support.

Thus, this paper argues that the understanding of international migration is still strongly national and /or regional centric. As a consequence, the 'international community' lacks a truly global understanding of migration. International migration is only in its definition international, but misses in reality an appropriate theoretical and practical knowledge foundation and a system of international exchange. In the context of global interdependencies, it is therefore of the upmost importance to increase awareness, sensibility and solidarity on the same level where international migration takes place - namely globally. As a consequence, the development of better deliberative information exchange mechanisms between different nations, organizations, NGOs and other types of actors are essential. Thus, this exchange would increase awareness on a global issue. In this regard, this paper aims to contribute to the global discourse on migration by providing a Latin American perspective to the discourse.

Therefore, this paper uses a case centric approach of Panama. The relevance of this case selection is based on Panamas unique geographical position which is also of relevance to the issue of migration. Besides being the connecting landmass between South and North America, the Panama Canal is also the only direct 'horizontal' connection between the Atlantic and the Pacific Ocean. The characteristic of being a truly 'global hub' will consequently be analyzed from a historical standpoint in connection to the issue of international migration. This historical anchoring should help to build a more profound analytical foundation for the analysis of the current situation and perceptions of migration. As a consequence, the core challenges of increasing xenophobic and repressive policies, lack of cooperation among the Latin American countries, lack of cooperation within the international community and a lack of a necessary migration management will be presented. Based on the analyzed situation of international migration in Panama, the final part of this paper provides a recommendation for action addressed to progressive actors in Panama and the region.

International migration to Panama in a historical context

The fight over the unique position of the isthmus is a very important element in the history of the Panamanian nation. The need for labor in the process of developing the isthmus in geopolitical and economical terms played therefore a central role. The aspects of transit and migration are therefore strongly connected to the history of the Panamanian nation (Davies, 2008, p. 744). During the early stages of Spanish colonialization in the 16th century, slaves were brought in from West Africa to work in the Panamanian mining industry (2008, p. 744). From 1821 onwards, Panama gained independence from Spain and became in advance part of the Gran Colombia. Within the 19th century Caribbean workers increasingly immigrated to Panama to work in the northern part of the country. The construction of the Panama Railway was another

important event within the historical context of Black West Indian immigration to Panama. As a result, at the end of the 19th century, Panama faced the second mass influx of Black West Indian workers. In addition, also workers from "New Grenada, Jamaica, England, France, Germany, India, Austria, and China" were hired to work in the construction of the trans-isthmus Railroad (Davies, 2008, p. 745). When the French started the first attempt to build the canal between 1880 and 1890, another approximately 50,000 West Indian workers (mainly from the Antillean) immigrated to the Isthmus of Panama (O'Reggio, 2006, p. 36). At that time, the Panama Canal Administration was controlled by white western authorities. Thus, even when Panama officially abolished slavery in 1852, the Black West Indian workers continued to be exploited until the 20th century. After the French project failed, many of the migrated workers stayed in Panama. The third historical relevant wave of immigration to Panama took place between 1904 and 1914 when the US "took charge of the construction of the Panama Canal" (Davies, 2008, p. 746). As table 1 indicates, the majority of the immigrating workers during the construction period of the canal came from West Indies.

Table 1: Recruitment of foreign canal workers during 1904 and 1914

Country	1904	1905	1906	1907	1908	1909	1910	1911	1912	1913	Total to 1914
Spain			1174	5293	1831						8298
Cuba**			500								500
Italy			909	1032							1941
Grecce				1101							1101
France			19								19
Armenia			14								14
Total from Europe			2616	7426	1831						**11873**
Isla Fortuna			361								361
Barbados	404	3019	6510	3242	2592	3605				528	19900
Guadalupe				2039					14		2053
Martinique		2733	585	2224							5542
Jamaica		47									47
Trinidad			1079				205		143		1427
Curacao			23								23
St. Kitts			933						9		942
St Lucia									55		55
St. Vincent									296		296
Grenada									93		93
British Guiana									332		332
Total from West Indies	404	5799	9491	7505	2592	3605	205		942	528	**31071**
Costa Rica	244										244
Colombia	1077	461									1493
Panama	344	10									357
Sin Clasificar		69									69
Total from this Group	1655	495	13								**2163**
Grand Total	404	7454	12602	14944	4423	3605	205		942	528	**45107**

Adapted from the Canal Register, October 28, 1914
**Spanish Workers recruited in Cuba.

Source: O'Reggio, 2006, p. 41

Within this diverse group the majority originated from Barbados (19,900 workers between 1904 and 1914). As already indicated, the recruitment of the Black West Indian workers took place in a context of post-slavery in which bad working conditions were combined with unfair payment, racism and general exploitation of the non-European workforce. It becomes evident that from the early 16th century to the construction of the trans-isthmus Railroad and the finalization of the canal in 1914, immigration to Panama has been based on the colonial interests to expand the isthmus and use it as a geopolitical connecting point and strategic base. As a result of the different immigration waves and the long lasting colonial dominance of the Spaniards, French and the North Americans, the topic

of Panamanian identity formation became a highly complex and tense topic. Race and ethnicity are still dominating factors which are used to define the 'Panamanian identity'[1].

Among other important immigration streams (e.g. Jews in the 1930s and Chinese in the 1980s), it is undeniable that the contemporary Panamanian identity is strongly shaped by West African slaves who were brought in to the Isthmus in the 16th century and the Black West Indian workers who immigrated to Panama during the construction of the canal. Nevertheless, "even today Afro-Antilleans (and Indigenous people) are ignored by the Panamanian government" (Guerrón-Montero, 2006, p. 222)[2]. This is related to the argument that the nation "tried to maintain a Latino heritage in response to the threat of US domination" (Niemeier, 1968, p. 256). Based on the provided short historical extract, the following part of this paper provides a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the contemporary situation of immigration in Panama.

Current situation of 'authorized' immigration to Panama

The Panamanian declaration of independence in 1903, the completion of the canal in 1914, the end of US occupation of the Canal Zone in 1979, the US invasion in 1989 and the final Panamanian sovereignty over the Canal Zone were formative events in the 20th century.

As previously demonstrated, migration in Panama has always been closely interrelated with the economic and sociopolitical situation of the country. Therefore, the growth of the global markets and the increasing interdependencies between the countries had an influence on international migration in Panama as well.

Table 2: Countries of origin of registered permanent/ temporary immigrants and immigrants with permanent status

País	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
TOTAL	9,870	10,023	12,419	10,074	13,792
Colombia	2,683	4,072	4,012	2,227	2,25
Venezuela	1,247	1,239	1,71	1,306	2,794
España	240	221	629	1,164	1,624
Estados Unidos	874	887	833	805	1,201
República Dominicana	493	354	677	505	524
Italia	199	282	567	374	825
Nicaragua	265	204	430	344	368
Argentina	146	139	214	247	289
Costa Rica	231	238	352	232	351
Canadá	171	116	165	222	268
México	246	187	295	209	195
China	699	275	134	195	271
Francia	101	61	122	138	234
Perú	265	161	258	137	135
Brasil	190	138	123	135	162
Guatemala	92	93	137	135	154
Otros	1,728	1,356	1,761	1,699	2,147

Source: SNM, 2014

Based on the Reporting System on International Migration in the Americas (SICREMI acronym in Spanish), authorized legal immigration (permanent and temporary migration)[3] increased relatively constant from 5,600 (in 2010) to 7,500 (in 2014) (SICREMI, 2015, p. 116). In other words, the amount of permanent migration (residence permit up to two years) has increased by over 60 percent between 2010 and 2014 (2015, p. 114). In addition, the National Migration Service of Panama (SNM acronym in Spanish) states that the amount of people who received a permanent status also increased from 3,360 (2010) up to 5,492 (2014) (SNM, 2014). As table 2 shows, between 2010 and 2014 the majority of the registered migrants ('permanent/temporary' and 'permanent status') came from Colombia (15,244), Venezuela (8,296),

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1 For more information http://cidempanama. org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/4-06-Race-Ethnicity_Marixa_Lasso.pdf

2 "The current Panamanian Constitution of 2002 does not designate Panama as a multi-ethnic or multicultural nation" (Guerrón-Montero, 2006, p. 223)

3 "Permanent immigrants are persons who receive a provisional residence permit of two years, granted to persons who wish to settle in Panama. After this period, they can request permanent status. Temporary migrants are persons granted a temporary residence permit ("permiso residente temporal") as well as persons under the protection of the Republic of Panama." (SICREMI, 2015, p. 141)

USA (4,600) and the Dominican Republic (1,725).

The migration flows from Colombia to Panama are multifaceted and have multiple causes. The aspect of seeking for a more secure and socioeconomic stable environment can be named as essential points. As well as the increasing numbers of Venezuelans who migrated to Panama is related to the political and economic instabilities which lately has deteriorated even further. The relatively high amount of US citizens who officially migrated to Panama is part of a large and complex sociopolitical immigration flow which will be shortly analyzed [4].

Thus, the neo-liberal Panamanian economy has opened up a market for retirement and property investments (FDI) in the past decade (Benson, 2015, p. 24). In addition, this development is connected with a special Visa which has been "designed by the Panamanian government (…)" (2013, p. 24). This visa provides its holder "with property and import tax exemptions, and a range of significant discounts on the costs of travel, healthcare, and everyday expenses (2013, p. 24). In this regard, the monthly pension has to exceed significantly the average income of the region. With $1,000 or $750 (in case the applicant owns property worth of minimum $100,000) the application conditions for a permanent visa are fulfilled (2013, p. 24). The North American immigration flow to Panama already shows significant effects. Thus, one of the most preferred destinations is Boquete, a small city in the Panamanian highlands. According to the census data between 2000 and 2010 a significant increase in population of 26 percent in Boquete can be observed (2013, p. 319).

The majorities of all the granted permissions in Panama are based on marriage, employment (within the 10 percent quota for foreign workers), 'Friendly Nation Visa', or dependency of the applicant on another resident (SNM, 2014). As an example, around 25 percent of all the approved migrants in 2010 received their visa based on the factor 'marriage' (SNM, 2014). However, the mentioned types

4 For additional information, the academic research paper with the title: "Class, Race, Privilege: Structuring the Lifestyle Migrant Experience in Boquete, Panama" by Benson examines this "north to south migration" phenomenon by referring to the concept of lifestyle migration.

of permitted residence also shown a high level of denied residence authorization. More than 50 percent of all applications which were based on 'marriage' have been denied in 2010. The same applies for the factor of 'employment'. As a consequence, the mechanisms behind the application process are not fully transparent. A tendency of providing preferred treatments to certain groups becomes visible. Thus, under the Executive Decree 343 from 2012, which was updated in 2013 under the Executive Decree 1174, fifty countries were defined as 'Friends of Panama' which received special 'liberal fast track' conditions to apply for permanent residence. From all Latin American and Caribbean countries only Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Mexico, Paraguay and Uruguay were named under this decree (Ministry of Public Security, 2014). To a certain extent, this demonstrates the separated relations among the Latin American countries in the context of cooperating in the field of international migration. Panama is literally in the middle of the discourse, but is lacking sufficient capacities to occupy a central mediating role among the countries of the Americas.

Current situation of asylum seekers, refugees, transit migrants and 'unauthorized migrants' in Panama

Panama is facing an immense challenge to grasp international migration in its complexity and develop the right tools for action. Migrants who receive legal status by the described application processes are only one part of the complex framework. In addition to this, the aspect of transit migration from the global south to the global north, asylum seekers who are applying for a refugee status and migrants without (legal) documents are another important part which has to be examined.

In 2013, Panama received 214 asylum requests per million inhabitants (SICREMI, 2015, p. 17). Due to its relatively small population size, this was the highest ratio among all Latin American countries in 2013. Table 3 indicates the amount of documented Asylum Seekers who entered Panama between 2004 and 2013. It becomes evident that the number of asylum seekers increased within the years of 2010 and 2013 by around 40 percent. Thus, in

2013 Panama had 827 asylum requests which was around 25 percent of all asylum requests in Central America in that year (SICREMI, 2015, p. 17). According to the UNHCR the majority of the asylum seekers came from Colombia, Cuba and Ghana. Furthermore, the case of asylum seekers who officially were recognized as permanent refugees (leads to a permanent residence permit) is according to the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) extremely low. As an example, in 2010 only 8 out of 400 refugees were recognized (MPI, 2011). By referring to Article 65 of the Executive Decree 23 from 1998, the applicant has to wait (minimum) one year until the local integration office can permit an official refugee status which permits entrance to the naturalization program (Ministry of the Presidency, 1998, p. 42). According to an observer report by UNHCR from 2007, many refugees are living more than ten years in Panama without permanent residence permit (p. 2).

With regards to Colombia, the civil war of the past 60 years affected the entire region. The aspect of migration is essential in this context. According to the numbers of the Colombian government, more that 6.1 million people were displaced since the beginning of the war in the 1950s (UNHCR, 2014, p. 212). In the words of many observers, this development is a humanitarian crisis which should be elevated to the highest level of the international community. Unfortunately, the international engagement remained relatively low in the past decades. As a consequence, the issues that internally displaced people from Colombia are seeking for asylum in neighboring countries remained to a large extent at regional level. As a direct neighbor, Colombian migration to Panama has played a central part in the entire discourse on international migration in Panama. Due to its multifaceted character, different highly sensible issues such as organized crime and drug smuggling in specific are constantly blurring the lines for a progressive discourse on migration policies. In this highly complex field of interdependent tensions, Panama is not able to adjust this problem alone.

The mentioned relevant amount of Cuban Asylum Seekers in Panama is another part of the debate. Thus, the 'Cuban Adjustment Act' from 1966 allowing Cubans to receive legal permanent residence in the US when they enter the country by land ('Wet Foot-Dry Foot Policy'). Until December 2015, Cubans could enter Ecuadorian territory without a visa. By foot, buses, boats and airplanes thousands of Cubans became transit migrants with the goal to reach the US over the Mexican border. As the only connecting landmass between the Americas, Panama became an important transit land for many Cubans and other migrants from e.g. Ghana, Somalia and West African.

Table 3: Inflows of Asylum Seekers

Country of asylum	Average 2001-2005	Average 2006-2010	2010	2011	2012	2013	% change 2013/2010	Number per million population (2013)	Principal countries of origin
Belize	21	12	25	32	58	52	108	157	El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras
Costa Rica	2,437	961	991	964	1,17	954	-4	196	Colombia, El Salvador, Cuba
El Salvador	10	37	55	15	4	7	-87	1	Honduras, Various
Guatemala	33	30	15	21	18	48	220	3	El Salvador, India, Bangladesh
Honduras	75	41	68	9	9	57	-16	7	Nicaragua
Mexico	408	578	1,039	753	811	1,296	25	11	Honduras, El Salvador, Cuba
Nicaragua	15	113	120	39	69	105	-13	17	El Salvador, Honduras, Pakistan
Panama	203	388	601	1,396	756	827	38	214	Colombia, Cuba, Ghana
Central America	**3,201**	**2,16**	**2,914**	**3,229**	**2,895**	**3,346**	**15**	**20**	**Colombia, Honduras, El Salvador**

Source: SICREMI, 2015, p. 17

Crisol de Razas

In 2008, the government of Martin Torrijos created the National Migration Service as an essential body of a new migration approach. It was seen as a starting point to create a more transparent migration system in which the area of competences is clearly defined. Before 2008, migration processes

have not been clearly regulated by the state. Private law firms and corruption dominated the field of migration for a long time. In July 2010, under the new Martinelli administration, the Panamanian government started migratory registration fairs in public locations. In addition, the Executive Decree 547 from 2012 officially introduced procedures and requirements of the program '*Crisol de Razas*' ("Melting Pot of Races"). This program aimed to legalize authorized immigrants who already lived for minimum a year in Panama or legalize immigrants who overstayed their permitted entry. Thus, between 2010 and 2014 the program carried out 14 registration fairs and granted permanent residence to nearly 58,000 migrants (MIDES, 2016, p. 38). Table 4 demonstrates that the majority of the immigrants who received permanent residence came from Colombia (27, 541), Nicaragua (11,745), Dominican Republic (6,434) and Venezuela (5,148) (SNM, 2014).

strengthening the power of private law firms again. Furthermore, Article 1 of the Decree formulates an annual repressive ceiling for migrants. Among the new aspects that worsen the situation of migrants in Panama, the Decree 167 also repeats the errors of the past. Furthermore, the discriminatory fee scale will continue. Thus, the nationality of the applicant determines the amount of the fee. Nationalities who are exempt from the visa obligation (like the US) had to pay $500, whereby nationalities who are not exempt are obliged to pay $1,000 (Ministry of Public Security, 2016, p. 2). The connected Executive Decree 168 from 2016 defines separate requirements for immigrants from China. Among other rules and regulations, the fee for Chinese immigrants amounts to $2,000. On the political level the 'new' migration regulations were accompanied by violently xenophobic statements. This xenophobic outcry was initiated by Zulay Rodríguez, a deputy from the centre-left (!) Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD). Her claims are related to increasing rates of crime, based on the portrayed increasing immigration in the recent years (El Tiempo, 2015).

The major challenges ahead

In many respects, the new Decree 167 and the connected political discourse mirrors the analyzed challenges of international migration in Panama. **Firstly,** there is an urgent need for developing a collaborative system between diverse actors on national, regional, international and supranational level. The 'new' Decree does not provide sufficient new mechanisms. Instead, it is following the footsteps of the program '*Crisol de Razas*' in a more repressive and discriminatory fashion.

Table 4: Legalization process between 2010 and 2014

País de procedencia	Total	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
TOTAL	**57,652**	**11,044**	**6,520**	**7,643**	**15,374**	**17,071**
Colombia	27,541	5,861	3,315	4,139	7,436	6,790
Nicaragua	11,745	2,281	1,735	1,499	2,781	3,449
Rep. Dominicana	6,434	629	276	455	1,892	3,182
Venezuela	5,148	164	463	650	1,778	2,093
Perú	985	349	125	167	184	160
China	882	474	36	45	164	163
El salvador	682	182	60	62	141	237
Ecuador	543	104	51	79	159	150
India	441	34	21	244	112	30
Costa rica	423	205	38	33	69	78
Estados unidos	378	119	66	16	66	111
Honduras	374	90	28	33	100	123
Cuba	270	51	38	41	60	80
España	206	33	41	13	51	68
Guatemala	206	26	16	20	68	76
México	166	45	12	19	45	45
Jamaica	134	56	11	11	20	36
Argentina	127	26	33	9	37	22
Haití	100	42	5	14	22	17

Source: SNM, 2014

In 2010, the program '*Crisol de Razas*' was abolished. The newly introduced Executive Decree 167 established a more restrictive regulation procedure for migrants. Moreover, the application processes are no longer taking part in the context of public registration fairs. This change is consequently

Secondly, xenophobia and nationalism are dominating the limited public and political discourse on international migration. As indicated above, xenophobia and nationalism are encapsulated long lasting challenges of Panama. Thus, raising awareness and understanding of international migration is still a relatively underdeveloped subject in the young Panamanian democracy.

Thirdly, rising inequalities are contributing towards a tensioned climate which is interrelated with the other challenges of international migration. Thus, the sociopolitical and cultural effects of the long lasting US occupation and the illusion of nation-wide economic prosperity in the age of neoliberalism are unsolved problems which are contributing towards a breeding ground for current political tensions. According to the 'Panama Poverty Assessment' by the World Bank from 2011, Panamas economic growth between 1997 and 2008 could not respond adequately to reduce poverty and extreme poverty (World Bank, 2011, p. 6). In comparison to other Central American countries, "Panama has the second worst income distribution in Latin America" (Country Reports - Panama, 2016, p. 70). As a consequence, the GINI coefficient remained broadly unchanged between 1997 (Gini coefficient 0.49) and 2008 (Gini coefficient 0.48) (World Bank, 2011, p. 81). These facts are revealing a reality in which the often proclaimed trickledown effect of liberal economic development is not yet visible in Panama.

Recommendation

Based on the defined three core challenges, the following part provides possible recommendation for action addressed to the relevant progressive actors in Panama and the region.

Firstly, the need for developing a better information network for the public should be directly related to the local media. In this regard, local media have an important role in informing the public. Thus, to work against populistic and xenophobic simplifications, a progressive and free media landscape is fundamental. The significant 'knowledge producing' actors should work together to increase awareness for the complexity and the different dynamics of international migration. Thus, the need for a common approach should be a stimulus for establishing a progressive **alliance which focuses on the 'Communication on Migration'**. The participating actors could initiate workshops at the University of Panama and the National College of Journalists to train future journalists and create awareness for migration as a global issue with relevance to Panama. Furthermore, the alliance could foster the link between local radio stations and progressive actors from e.g. the University, NGOs or students. This approach would lead to a better availability of information which also contributes to increase the common awareness on international migration in the public sphere. In terms of increasing the quantity and quality of information on international migration, this recommendation for action could also fulfill certain points of the Brazil declaration from 2014. Thus, the Declaration mentions the need to "recognize the positive contribution that refugees can make to their (…) host communities by becoming promotors of local development" (Brazil Declaration and Plan of Action, 2014, p. 3).

Secondly, in a cooperative fashion relevant actors should use their networks to develop a **stronger regional approach of cooperation**. In Latin-America and the Caribbean the regional wide connectivity is very limited and mainly related to the field of security and economics. Moreover, internal destabilizing conflicts such as gang violence in the northern triangle are obstacles in a progressive development of regional cooperation. When it comes to international challenges such as refugee seekers or transit migration, individual national governments and NGOs are facing strong structural limitations to act. Thus, the development of an extensive multilayered regional approach of linking the different singular systems and actors must be strengthened in the following years. When it comes to Central America, it finally becomes evident that the development of a regional conglomerate of progressive actors is a fundamental enabler to deal with international migration in the region.

Thirdly, the progressive actors in Panama should increase their **participation on the political level**. Thus, it is important to strengthen the discourse on

international migration and support necessary measures to foster new political responses. Currently, migration as a relevant policy field is nearly non-existent in Panama. Therefore, one step could be the initiation of activities in the **national parliament**. Thus, this approach aims to strengthen the debate on how to improve the situation of international migration on the political level in Panama. Moreover, the **party-political level** plays also a relevant role in this regard. Therefore, the non-governmental actors could improve their communication with the political parties. In terms of the methodological approach, the progressive actors could initiate round table debates with political representatives and the leading progressive actors to **increase political activity in the field of international migration**.

Fourthly, the field of international migration in Panama requires the creation of alliances and **cooperation among different actors**. The idea of "Local integration" was already stated in chapter three of the 'Brazil Plan of Action' from 2014 (Brazil Declaration and Plan of Action, 2014, p. 12). Thus, among the "central role of the State" the "fundamental role of local municipal authorities (…), the private sector, civil society, and international cooperation through UNHCR" were named as necessary actors in the process of fostering cooperation (2014, p. 12). In addition, the relevance for "strengthening the coordination of relevant governmental and non-governmental institutions" (2014, p. 12) should be related to the already existing experiences of the progressive actor in the region. In September 2016, several non-governmental actors such as the FES and the Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT) joined a round table debate initiated by the regional representative of the OHCHR. The idea was to strengthen the aspect of cooperation among different actors who are involved in the protection of human rights in Central America. The NGOs who are active in Panama and other Latin American countries could take this idea as a starting point to implement a system of cooperation among each other in the field of international migration.

Fifthly, the defined need to elevate the issue of international migration on the **highest international level** requires the involvement of the representative bodies of the international community. Panama City has more than 50 Embassies which is a great possibility to find new actors on national level to work with. Thus, cooperation could take place in the context of including national representatives in the context of panel discussion on international migration. The task of the progressive actors could be to increase common awareness for characterizing migration as an issue of global concern. Intercultural exchange, sensitization and accepting international migration as a global responsibility could be strengthened by different national representatives who are interacting with each other.

In this regard, the formulated recommendations should not be kept separated from each other. Thus, the aspect of understanding the interconnectivity of all these areas is of upmost importance.

Conclusion

Panamas historical past of being dominated by western colonies is a *lieu de mémoire* and consequently of importance for the development of the contemporary national identity. Transit and migration as constant characteristics are consequently deeply rooted in the Panamanian history. Nonetheless, unlike many other countries that are facing challenges of international migration, Panama is a country which is literally in the middle of a global discourse. The need for an epistemic deliberation process which increases understanding and exchange of information is becoming urgent. Panama's central position creates a necessity to increase a system which is able to deal with international migration on different levels. Thus, the self-conception of being a regional leader cannot be based solely on a geographical position. Therefore, this paper demonstrates the importance to understand Panamas past of migration to gain a better understanding of the challenges ahead. Throughout the analysis, increasing xenophobic and repressive policies, lack of cooperation among the Latin American countries, lack of cooperation within the international community and a lack of a necessary migration management were verified as the core challenges. The recommendations for action address the deficits and offers improved responses. Thus, the mul-

tiple experiences of the progressive actors in Latin America and the Caribbean should be linked to develop response mechanism for global issues. A core aspect for the progressive actors is to improve the regional cooperation in the field of international migration. Panama has the possibility to become a truly connecting point of information, cooperation and mutual support. The aspect of examining international migration in the context of Panama is consequently a key issue in the regional, but also in the global discourse. The recommendations for action addressed to the leading progressive forces of Panama can be seen as a starting point which should be further examined in a deliberative way with other relevant actors.

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FES Panamá

La oficina de la Fundación Friedrich Ebert en Panamá es instalada en el año 1999, teniendo como pilares principales la cooperación para el fortalecimiento sindical, la equidad de género y la formación de nuevos liderazgos políticos.

Las necesidades de cooperación en Panamá están determinadas por los desafíos comunes de los países centroamericanos, así como la situación particular de este país de un altísimo crecimiento económico pero severos déficits de distribución de riquezas; inequidad que se despliega entre capas sociales, género y la brecha ciudad campo. Estas relaciones se expresan a su vez en una inequitativa distribución del poder político, siendo que la democracia panameña todavía restringida al mecanismo formal, enfrenta grandes retos en la representación del poder público y la participación democrática.

Por ello, el trabajo FES en Panamá ha evolucionado a una cooperación orientada a contribuir con la construcción de agendas estratégicas por parte de las fuerzas progresistas,a través del diálogo político, la asesoría, la investigación y la formación; teniendo como principales contrapartes a las corrientes progresistas de partidos, sindicatos, organizaciones sociales e instituciones académicas.

En consecuencia, nuestros principales temas de apoyo a la construcción de propuestas y un discurso alternativo son: política económica, derechos laborales, sistema público de salud, agenda ambiental y del cambio climático, seguridad ciudadana y ampliación de los derechos políticos.