

North of Central America Situation

Mid-year 2018

The countries of the North of Central America continue suffering high levels of **violence** stemming from gangs and other organized criminal groups.

This insecurity is compelling an ever increasing number of persons – often entire families – to **flee** their homes, within their countries or to nearby countries.

All countries in the region are affected by these movements and a **regional response** is therefore of paramount importance.

KEY POPULATION FIGURES

307,900

Refugees and asylum-seekers from the NCA by Mid-2018. A **54 per cent increase** compared to Mid-2017.

245,500

Internally displaced persons in Honduras (2004-2014) and El Salvador (2006-2016) due to **violence and crime**.

96,200

Deportees to the NCA countries from the USA and Mexico btw. Jan-Jun 2018, a **43 per cent increase** compared to Jan-Jun 2017.

KEY ASSISTANCE FIGURES

15,500

Refugees and asylum-seekers from the NCA assisted in Mexico and Central America between Jan-Jun 2018.

33,800

Internally displaced persons assisted in Honduras and El Salvador between Jan-Jun 2018.

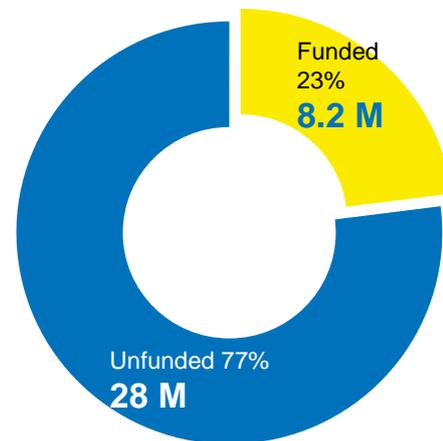
68,600

Deportees and persons in transit with possible **protection needs** assisted in Mexico and Central America between Jan-Jun 2018.

FUNDING

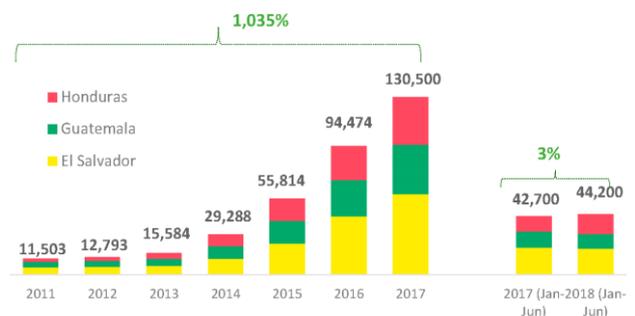
USD 36.2 M

requested for the NCA situation in 2018



394,200

Asylum-applications from NCA nationals worldwide between 2011 and 2018



Source: Data provided by Governments to UNHCR as of 31-Aug-2018. Figures for mid-2018 can be subject to changes. Mid-2017 data represented for the same period as available data on 2018, and might defer from previously published data.

Progress at the regional level

Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework

In a whole-of-society approach, the MIRPS was developed through government-led consultations with persons of concern, UN country teams, civil society, the private sector and academia. Regional networks and organizations complement countries' national action plans and foster regional and global responsibility-sharing mechanisms. As a direct result of the MIRPS:

- In Belize an initial group of 20 persons with international protection needs have undergone English classes aimed at facilitating their local integration within social and economic spheres.
- In Costa Rica, refugees have been included as a category in the national registry system, which will allow for an improved development of national plans and the response to large influxes.
- In Guatemala refugees with official documentation can now access work permits within a week, making it possible for them to legally access employment.
- Honduras has led a process to raise awareness and develop the capacity of public officials to develop actions that would encourage a greater participation of municipalities within the response to forced displacement.
- Mexico has incorporated refugees and asylum-seekers within its programme of Unique Population Registry Password (CURP for its acronym in Spanish) which facilitates the issuance of documentation.
- In Panama a letter of understanding was signed with a private company to facilitate training and job placement services for an initial group of 90 refugees in Panama City.

MIRPS partnerships

- The General Assembly of the Organization of American States (OAS) adopted a resolution making specific reference to the MIRPS as a regional cooperation model. Therein, the OAS instructs the Committee on Juridical and Political Affairs to organise annual follow-up meetings to monitor the MIRPS.
- The cooperation agreement between UNHCR and the Central American Integration System was renewed through the design of a work plan that prioritises capacity-building of national institutions, support for regional policies and greater operational cooperation.
- The Inter-American Development Bank is providing technical assistance towards the quantification of MIRPS National Action Plans and their inclusion in national budgets.

- The Central American Council of Ombudspersons agreed on a concrete programme of action to support the MIRPS for 2018-2020, including joint border monitoring and advocacy campaigns for forcibly displaced persons.
- The UN Development System (UNSDG-LAC) has continued to address the violence as the root cause of forced displacement in the North of Central America, through a comprehensive Joint Initiative endorsed by the UNSG as an innovative application of the New Way of Working.
- Australia, Canada and Uruguay have recently joined the United States in resettling high risk cases through the Protection Transfer Agreement (PTA).
- The CLAMOR Network, a composite of churches with presence from Honduras to Mexico, has been essential in facilitating immediate assistance to persons in need of protection through its shelters along the region.
- A portfolio of 30 priority projects that dovetail with a longer-term operationalization of the three year national plans into joint programming and projects, engaging development partners and other key stakeholders has been developed and implementation has started.

Achievements



PROTECTION

EL SALVADOR

Achievements and Impact

- The publication in March by the Ministry of Justice of the profiling on internal displacement due to violence and of the Inter-Institutional Roadmap for the Comprehensive Attention and Protection to Victims of Violence represented a substantial progress towards the formal recognition of the phenomenon of internal displacement in the country, and the design of a coordinated response to it.
- Response capacity of the Local Offices for Attention to Victims' (OLAV) staff has been strengthened through periodical trainings on the Roadmap, IDP Guiding Principles, case management and interview techniques.
- Two senior jurists have been contracted as consultants to develop reports on the compatibility between the Salvadorian Constitution and the 1961 UN Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. Their reports have been shared with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for further processing.
- The Ombudsperson's Office, with the support of UNHCR, has developed standard operating procedures (SOPs) for the attention of IDPs in order to provide quality assistance to people of concern (PoC). UNHCR also continues to support psychologists and lawyers to attend victims.

- In 2018 so far, 21 individuals have been resettled to the United States through the Protection Transfer Agreement (PTA) programme. Entering its third year of implementation in El Salvador, the PTA is considered by partners and governmental institutions as an effective protection mechanism for cases at heightened risk. In order to complement it, and develop a tailored response to different protection cases, UNHCR has identified additional protection mechanisms, such as internal relocation, humanitarian evacuation, accompanied return, all in coordination with partners.
- UNHCR's protection work in El Salvador focuses on broadening the territorial presence, identifying PoC, delivering adequate assistance to persons at risk and supporting the national institutions to activate a technical and coordinated protection response. UNHCR's presence in 2018 reached 8 Departments and 18 communities so far.
- Aiming at continuous capacity building of authorities, UNHCR supported the Ombudsperson's Office through workshops about working with LGBTI persons and protection monitoring. Also, the Salvadoran Institute for Childhood and Adolescence (ISNA), the National Council for Childhood and Adolescence (CONNA) and the Attorney General's Office (PGR) were trained on child protection and LGBTI identities, and were technically advised for updating the Humanitarian Assistance Guide directed to children at risk.
- Throughout 2018, as part of its national community-based protection work, the operation has strengthened the identification of PoC and the referral of cases through protection networks. The process of building trust allowed UNHCR and its partners to work with LGBTI community groups. Also, Community protection models and mechanisms are being implemented, aiming to bring specific protection responses to children and youth at high risk in the Salvadoran context.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Despite the efforts of National Directorate of Human Rights of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a national plan for refugees' integration has not been built yet. This is mostly due to lack of material resources to invest in human rights policies.
- Despite the presentation of the IDP profiling exercise, there have so far been no government actions addressing protection gaps.
- Adherence to the 1961 United Nations Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness is pending. Two reports on compatibility between the national constitution and the 1961 Convention were handed in to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Currently, the documents are in the President's Office to be revised in order to be delivered to the National Parliament.
- The challenges related to strengthening the attention to victims of violence by the OLAVs include: unawareness of the actors at the local level to coordinate the response case by case, little specialized knowledge to assist victims of internal

forced displacement, lack of equipment to carry out their work (telephone lines, internet, computers, spaces for interviews), absence of state shelters for the physical protection of cases, and lack of knowledge of protection-mainstreaming principles.

- Despite the efforts to highlight international protection principles in the Draft Migration Law, the Legislative Assembly did not include sufficient provisions on the matter.
- Due processing of all high-risk cases remains a challenge, considering the restrictive criteria which condition the integration of individual cases both in the PTA and humanitarian evacuation programmes. Lack of suitable durable solutions for cases who do not comply with said criteria remains worrying.
- It is necessary to improve follow-up activities to guarantee an adequate response to cases of deported children with protection needs in San Salvador, Santa Ana and Ahuachapán, since reports from CONNA state that these departments have the highest concentration of cases of children with protection needs.
- The staff of the Salvadoran Institute for Women's Development (ISDEMU) needs training on self-support techniques, in order to be able to properly manage the emotional burden provoked by assisting SGBV survivors' cases.

GUATEMALA

Achievements and Impact

- The MIRPS in Guatemala has been further consolidated with the development of a monitoring mechanism, which will allow for effective tracking of progress and results achieved. In addition to technical advice and ongoing support, UNHCR is providing direct assistance to Government institutions for the advancement of MIRPS' objectives. For example, UNHCR is assisting the General Directorate of Migration with the design and development of a data base to improve registration of refugees and asylum seekers and for the compilation of statistics.
- With the addition of a new partner, Tierra Nueva, the National Safe Spaces Network (NSSN) is now comprised of 7 partners, 9 safe spaces, including one for Unaccompanied Children (UAC), one for LGBTI, one safe house, and 10 attention points located at strategic areas. The NSSN provides vital humanitarian assistance and information on protection mechanisms for persons in need of international protection. Through the efforts of the NSSN, 18,476 persons have been assisted so far in 2018.
- Border monitoring and protection by presence was strengthened in the departments of Petén and Izabal through joint missions of the Migration and Protection Working Group. The group is comprised of governmental organizations, NGOs and UNHCR. To strengthen the protection of children in Petén, UNHCR supported the opening of a partner's office (*Refugio de la Niñez*) in Petén, which

is expected to enhance individual case follow-up and support for child protection interventions.

- UNHCR has strengthened the capacity of governmental institutions in identifying persons in need of international protection and ensuring access to the asylum system. UNHCR has helped increase the Attorney General's Office's (AGO) capacity to protect children through training and funding of three child protection officers who will be absorbed by the AGO after a nine month period. A total of 1,575 children have been assisted by these three officers during the first half of the year.
- As leader of the Protection Cluster, UNHCR has spearheaded the protection response to the "Volcano of Fire" eruption in June. The main activities of the cluster include: promotion of protection mainstreaming in the temporary shelters through preparation and dissemination of guidelines; and immediate assistance, including for vulnerable populations including women, children, older and disabled persons. UNHCR's CERF proposal was accepted, allowing the distribution of kits to the most vulnerable populations affected by the Volcano, including those whose homes and sources of livelihood have been completely destroyed. In total, 850 protection kits are being provided to 850 families to help mitigate protection risks and address immediate needs.
- UNHCR continues with the implementation of the PTA in coordination with NGO partners (consortium), facilitating solutions for Guatemalans at high risk of persecution. As of June, 63 new cases have been referred by the consortium.
- After signing a Letter of Understanding with the Guatemalan Ombudsperson Office in December 2017, a mobile unit pilot project was developed in 2018 for border monitoring and reception of complaints. This mechanism will increase access to reporting mechanisms for human rights violations.
- Thirty-three children received scholarships through one of UNHCR's partners for their integration into the education system of Guatemala and to continue their formal education. These scholarships are comprised of tuition, uniforms, backpacks and books.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Concerning asylum management, the Regulations of the new Guatemalan Migration Code have not yet been issued, thus the provisions of the new law are yet to be applied. Thus, it is unclear at this moment whether the gaps concerning the Migration Code (refoulement, no-sanction for irregular entry, refugee definition) have been duly addressed in the Regulations.

HONDURAS

Achievements and Impact

- UNHCR assisted 796 people (214 cases) between January and June 2018, a 53% increase compared to the same period last year. Of them, 37% were minors. A total of 86% of cases believed that leaving the country is their only protection alternative. Last year, most identified internal relocation as a measure to reduce risk factors. Out of the 214 cases, 15 cases were deemed in need of evacuation (10 evacuated, while 5 await due to the situation in Nicaragua). Another 13 cases were internally relocated, 45 were submitted to the PTA programme, and 2 were moved to the transit country.
- Deportations have increased by 55 % in relation to the same period last year. Through partners, over 600 persons with protection needs have been identified and assisted.
- UNHCR, in coordination with partner human rights NGO CIPRODEH and the National Migration Institute, assisted 11 asylum requests (from El Salvador and Cuba). During the first semester of the year, the Eligibility Commission recognized two refugee claims from Venezuela.
- UNHCR and the National Commissioner for Human Rights (CONADEH) launched the first special report on internal displacement with data on profiles, trends, risk areas, impacts and causes of persecution.
- The profiling qualitative component ended, and the quantitative one is ongoing. A partnership agreement was signed with the National Statistics Institute to ensure government ownership. Preliminary findings are expected by October 2018.
- A partnership agreement signed with the Association of Municipalities (AMHON) strengthens cadastral systems in 10 key municipalities and another partnership agreement is in the works with the Property Institute (IP) to systematize existing information on abandoned property and strengthen its technical capacities.
- Achievements to improve existing legal and institutional frameworks include the signature of a partnership agreement with the Secretary of Human Rights to support the functioning of the newly-established Directorate for the Articulation of the Response to Internal Displacement (DARDI) with technical and financial assistance.
- In San Pedro Sula, a technical committee was appointed at the municipality to formulate an attention route for IDPs. El Progreso Municipality designated a focal point to provide guidance and orientation to IDPs on available protection services. These were achieved as part of local plans drafted with the support of the Honduran IDP Commission (CIPPDV), partner NRC and UNHCR.
- With UNHCR's technical assistance and support, the Culture Directorate of the San Pedro Sula Municipality strengthened their capacities to access high-risk areas by implementing and following up art-oriented projects to mitigate and prevent protection risks faced by youth, and promoting youth participation and empowerment. The intervention has reached 120 youth at risk and aims to be a

first step to formulate a local public policy to tackle youth inclusion issues and promotion of culture.

- UNHCR trained members of the San Pedro Sula Child Protection Roundtable on protection principles and security protocols to access and work in high-risk communities.
- Technical assistance was provided to the San Pedro Sula Municipal Office for Women in order to map out SGBV and protection services at municipal level so as to ensure a more comprehensive response to the victims.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- The Government of Honduras is yet to submit the law on forced displacement to the National Congress. The lack of a specific legal framework affects the allocation of resources, the establishment of roles and responsibilities and the effective setup of protection and assistance mechanisms.
- Local authorities face difficulties to allocate resources to respond to forced displacement at the local level due to the lack of a specific legal framework.
- The technical capacity of local authorities to understand and respond to forced displacement has improved. However, more regular accompaniment, technical and financial support is needed from the CIPPDV to operationalize local plans and ensure further progress on the response to forced displacement at field level.
- More technical capacity and resources are needed at field level to ensure presence of State institutions in high-risk zones and the design and implementation of sustainable, participatory, rights-based programmes able to mitigate risks and protect people and communities in need of protection.
- The relation between SGBV and displacement needs to be further documented.

BELIZE

Achievements and Impact

- In early 2018, Belize announced the recognition of the first new refugees in nearly 20 years. A total of 28 persons were since then granted refugee status.
- The MIRPS process has advanced significantly and has started to catalyze more comprehensive Government ownership of refugee protection and solutions. In June 2018, a multi-stakeholder ministerial workshop was held, where three technical working groups (TWGs) were initiated. The TWGs will focus on achieving key objectives for the rest of 2018: (1) profiling and data collection, (2) creation of SOPs for asylum referrals, and (3) sustainable solutions, focusing on education in 2018.
- An attorney hired through UNHCR's partner Help for Progress filed the first appeals case of a substantive denial of refugee status. Additional legal aid and litigation is expected prior to the end of the year.

- UNHCR continued supporting capacity-building initiatives for Government authorities, including the Supreme Court, the Refugee Eligibility Committee (REC) and the Refugees Department. UNHCR further sponsored the attendance of two Belize Supreme Court Justices and the CEO of Immigration at the International Association of Refugee and Migration Judges (IARMJ) Americas Chapter training and conference in Washington DC. UNHCR believes that these opportunities will make a contribution to allow further improvements in the protection situation for people of concern in Belize.
- Within the context of the MIRPS, UNHCR hired a Senior Consultant to engage the refugee adjudication bodies in an asylum-strengthening process. While official Quality of Asylum Initiative (QAI) membership remains pending, steps were taken to observe and identify issues in need of rectification. The agreement on recommendations for asylum strengthening is expected later in 2018.
- UNHCR is planning the construction of a welcome center in Benque Viejo del Carmen, on the Western Border with Guatemala. The objective of the establishment of the center is to provide information on asylum applications and appropriate referrals for further assistance.
- The MIRPS priority exercise of carrying out profiling/data collection of PoCs is currently underway. UNHCR and the Belize Red Cross agreed to finalize Phase One (community profiling) of the exercise and then move on with Phase Two (surveying). New profiling staff will be hired to ensure timely completion of the project.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- The strict implementation of the 14-day deadline for asylum applications continues, restricting access to asylum for PoCs. Persons who miss the 14-day deadline continue to be at risk of detention and eventual deportation, despite potentially meeting the refugee definition. Legal assistance in these individuals' cases needs to be prioritized, as is continued advocacy and legal work to change the 14-day deadline itself.
- In spite of the recognition of 28 refugees early in the year, there are still more than 400 individuals whose cases have been recommended for refugee recognition by the REC since November 2015. There is no indication that the Minister with responsibility for refugees will endorse all these positive decisions. Instead, cases already recommended by the REC before the strict implementation of the 14-day deadline have since been rejected from the asylum process.
- Recently, UNHCR has learned that the Refugees Department has started to carry out a pre-screening procedure for asylum applicants – even those who attempt to apply within 14 days – without adhering to any procedural due process protections. UNHCR continues to advocate for an end to this process.

- The lack of work authorization for asylum seekers remains a concern, affecting the ability of asylum seekers to acquire means to fully access other rights, including education, health, and personal security.

COSTA RICA

Achievements and Impact

- UNHCR has scaled up its activities in the country to respond to the emergency situation of Nicaraguans leaving their country. A new UNHCR office is about to be opened in Upala to respond to the influx. UNHCR is providing both legal and material support to national authorities in order to alleviate the additional strain caused by the recent arrivals. Activities carried out include legal assistance and profiling in order to identify vulnerable cases and provide them with protection interventions accordingly. Of the 367 persons registered, 72% have specific needs, and over 700 cases are waiting for assistance. Regarding child protection, 102 separated and 21 unaccompanied children have been identified between June and August and their cases are being addressed in coordination with the PANI (Child protection authority) with several best interest determination (BID) assessments ongoing.
- In Costa Rica, asylum seekers can register their claim at border posts. Asylum claimants are now issued their provisional ID upon filing an asylum application, which allows them to access governmental social programmes.
- In line with commitments made under the CRRF, locally known as the MINARE, UNHCR advanced the signing of a Letter of Understanding between the Administrative Migration Authority (TAM) and the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board to implement a twinning project to enhance capacity building, information and best-practice sharing.
- Several trainings on international refugee protection and other refugee related matters were conducted with 60 staff members of the Refugee Unit and the TAM.
- UNHCR also facilitated the fourth cohort of the Post Graduate Studies on Refugee and Statelessness Law in partnership with the University of De La Salle.
- Legal clinics for refugees and asylum seekers have been established with local universities in alliance with the local Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of St Charles Borromeo Scalabrinian. Since its creation in September 2017, 830 people of concern were legally assisted.
- A Memorandum of Understanding was also signed between UNHCR and the Costa Rican Bar Association to further advance free legal assistance and aid for refugees and asylum seekers in effectively accessing rights and entitlements.
- UNHCR, in coordination with the UN Country Team, has supported the Government of Costa Rica in the establishment of the Centres for Migrant's Care in a bid to avoid administrative detention.

- Costa Rica is a Safe Space country in line with the Regional Safe Space Network. UNHCR leads the Multi-Functional Team on SGBV prevention and response, with the active participation of partner agencies, the National Children's Institute (PANI), the National Women's Institute (INAMU), the National Coalition against smuggling of irregular migrants and human trafficking (CONATT). National Protocols for the women and children's assistance have been revised and updated during the first half of the year.
- UNHCR has supported the establishment and maintenance of two shelters for SGBV survivors in the capital San Jose and in the Northern areas in partnership with partner NGO CENDEROS.
- UNHCR has provided regular capacity-building activities for PANI, INAMU and partner agencies' staff members nationwide.
- UNHCR successfully advocated before the National Civil Registry Office on a Directive allowing the right to identification for Trans refugees.
- Together with the Civil Registry Office, UNHCR has also advanced the Chiriticos' Model to allow late-birth registration and the eradication of risk of statelessness among indigenous children and children to transnational workers.
- UNHCR's partner Women's Foundation has worked in job-placement assessments with PoC through livelihood participatory assessments. So far in 2018, a total of 229 PoC from the NCA have benefitted from such livelihood initiatives. Of those, 187 were from El Salvador, 38 from Honduras, and four from Guatemala.
- Thanks to fruitful collaboration between the Ministry of Labour, UNHCR and Women's Foundation, some 427 persons from the NCA have benefitted from the government's job-placement initiative locally known as "Get employed, living integration". Of those, 315 are from El Salvador, 107 from Honduras and five from Guatemala.
- On the entrepreneurship front, UNHCR and partner Women's Foundation have worked in support of nine PoC from El Salvador and two from Honduras within the framework of the initiative locally known as "The dream factory". Additionally, six persons from the NCA have benefitted from the private sector within the Corporate Social Responsibility scheme known as 'I the Entrepreneur'.

MEXICO

Achievements and Impact

- On 20 June, in the context of World Refugee Day, Mexico's Secretary of Interior made a series of long-awaited announcements including the issuance of a provisional National Population Registration Number (CURP) to asylum-seekers, the increase of the Mexican Refugee Commission (COMAR) budget by 150 per cent and its staffing by 84 per cent. Although further details are yet to be clarified, the issuance of a provisional CURP to asylum claimants is of the utmost

significance because it will widen the access to opportunities for formal employment, access to health care, education and other public programmes.

- From January to June, 878 asylum-seekers from the NCA were released from detention and accommodated in UNHCR-supported shelters (645 from Honduras; 213 from El Salvador, and 20 from Guatemala), representing 90 per cent of all the persons released during the first semester of 2018 (972) and 82 per cent of the total number of persons from NCA released in all of 2017 (1,068). The month of July 2018 marked the second anniversary of the start of the releases from detention centers which have benefited 2,577 persons from the NCA of a total of 3,000 persons (all nationalities included).
- UNHCR continued to receive complaints about refoulement, including return of asylum-seekers from Mexico's international airport. The Office intervened in individual cases to prevent refoulement, followed up on alleged cases and provided training to migration officials, including training sessions at the airports in Mexico City and Cancun.
- From January to June, UNHCR conducted three participatory assessments in Acayucan, Tenosique and Palenque with men, women, adolescents and LGBTI persons to understand challenges and areas of opportunity regarding detention and legal representation. UNHCR is strengthening legal networks in southern Mexico so that PoC receive legal aid and asylum procedures are fair and efficient.
- Collaboration with legal partners, including the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), the Instituto Federal de Defensoría Pública (IFDP) and pro-bono ally Greenberg Traurig, has continued in order to ensure that a higher number of PoCs receive legal assistance and representation. So far, UNHCR financed 28 lawyers to work in NGOs and civil society shelters. This has resulted in at least 535 persons from the NCA receiving legal advice on how to access the asylum-procedure and 418 persons receiving psycho-legal assistance.
- The design of the community-based complaint mechanism in a participatory manner was the result of a nationwide consultation with PoC. Standard operating procedures (SOPs) for the complaint and feedback mechanism were created in April with five channels to receive complaints: verbal, email, hotline, complaint box, and the Facebook page El Jaguar. The monitoring of the pilot phase of the feedback and complaint mechanism of the first semester of 2018 was completed, with complaints related to protection, sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), and programme issues recorded across the operation. Six complaints were filed against UNHCR, eight against partners, seven against government actors and four against other organizations. Measures to strengthen the mechanism are underway, including placing awareness-raising materials for PoC, SEA sessions to all partners (which 75 per cent completed), and providing complaint boxes to partners.

- In the first semester of 2018, 248 government officials, UNHCR and partner staff were trained and 258 PoC informed on SGBV prevention and response. Furthermore, 168 persons were trained on reproductive health and HIV.
- UNHCR facilitated trainings to civil society and government actors on prevention and response of SGBV in Acayucan, Tenosique and Palenque. The training focused on a multi-sectoral response, and a main result of the session was the creation of referral pathways for SGBV survivors in these localities.
- A total of 696 BIA procedures were conducted by Mexican authorities so as to ensure identification of protection needs or access to the asylum procedure. In addition, 136 UAC had access to the asylum procedure during the reporting period (18 from Guatemala; 25 from El Salvador, and 93 from Honduras).

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Although the number of asylum applications submitted by unaccompanied children (UAC) has increased in recent years – 140 applications submitted up to June 2018, compared to 78 in all of 2014 –, it remains low compared to the number of UAC detained by immigration authorities: 4,372 UAC up to May 2018, of which 98 per cent are from the NCA. Further capacity-building efforts are needed to conduct best interest determinations and to promote the use of COMAR's identification protocol, in order to ensure access to the asylum system.
- The need to expand the protection network of support services for women, girls and LGBTI persons in the southern Border States, including cases involving security incidents for which survivors of SGBV require internal relocation, remains a priority.
- Further strengthening of partner and staff capacity is needed for prevention and response to SGBV concerns and incidents, including case management.

PANAMA

Achievements and Impact

- In January 2018, a new Executive Decree to regulate the asylum system in Panama was approved. Although the instrument did not include the refugee definition of Cartagena Declaration or the issuance of work permits for applicants, it does constitute an important step forward since it incorporates measures that will expedite the process of recognizing refugee status, such as increasing the frequency with which the National Commission for the Protection of Refugees (CONARE) meets.
- UNHCR continued to support the Government's refugee status determination body (ONPAR) through the hiring of additional personnel to assist applicants and reduce the back log, as well as the donation of technological equipment for the use of ONPAR personnel and asylum seekers. During the first six months of the year 2018, UNHCR hired 5 lawyers and 2 social workers for ONPAR.

- UNHCR has continued to advocate for the improvement of conditions for its population of concern with local authorities. From January to June of this year, the Office held meetings with senior officials of the Ministry of Government, Ministry of Public Security, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Director of the National Migration Service. As a result, cooperation and communication with these authorities have been strengthened through the designation of focal points with whom constant contact is maintained.
- From January to June 2018, the National Refugee Protection Commission met three times. During these sessions, 35 new refugees were recognized. The nationality with the highest recognition rate continues to be Colombians, followed by Salvadorans and a few cases of Hondurans, Guatemalans and Cubans.
- The drafting process of the protocol for the proper identification and referral of cases among ONPAR and SENNIAF, the national child protection institution, ended in June. UNHCR has been informed that the final document would be signed shortly. With the adoption of this document, the establishment of joint best interest procedures is ensured.
- UNHCR was invited by the National Immigration Service to participate in a training programme for a group of officials, mainly from the airports and the main office. During the process, 100 officials of the National Immigration Service were instructed about the definition of refugees, other persons of interest to UNHCR, their duties and rights, as well as techniques for the identification of people with international protection needs.
- UNHCR and the Ombudsman's Office signed an extension of the existing MoU in order to continue working in favour of refugees and asylum seekers. The actions to be implemented include capacity-building sessions and joint missions for border monitoring.
- UNHCR conducted three visits to the temporary station of humanitarian assistance located in Peñitas, in the Darién Province, to monitor the condition of the population that was kept in this station and identify individuals with international protection needs. Hygiene kits and mattresses were also distributed. UNHCR also made a donation of hygiene kits, diapers and blankets to the local Ombudsman's Office in Metetí (Darién province) for them to distribute during their monitoring visits to remote locations at the collection points along the migratory route.
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs invited UNHCR to participate in the drafting of the Executive Decree that will regulate the recognition process of stateless people in Panama. Meetings were held once a week in June with the participation of representatives of the Civil Registry, the National Immigration Service, the National Office for the Refugee Assistance, the Ombudsman Office, the Ministry of labour, the Ministry of Social Development and UNHCR. The Draft is pending approval by the Foreign Affairs Minister in order to be presented before the President.

- In terms of implementation of the MIRPS, continuous coordination has been maintained with relevant authorities as well as with the coordination body (Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UNHCR). As part of the regional monitoring and evaluation system being developed, joint indicators were agreed upon for further reporting.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- With some cases of refoulement being reported, UNHCR has advocated for the presence of ONPAR in the different international airports.
- No progress has been achieved yet with the quantification and analysis of public resources for the implementation of MIRPS commitments.

UNITED STATES

Achievements and Impact

- UNHCR continued to work closely with the US Government to identify ways to support the implementation of the MIRPS, especially through the building of institutional capacity in Mexico and other asylum countries in the region who continue to receive large numbers of asylum claims from NCA nationals.
- UNHCR also facilitated a private-sector mission to Mexico to strengthen their engagement in the MIRPS and identify areas that could be funded and supported through private-sector investment.
- UNHCR continued to play an important role in training and capacity-building of US government officials, delivering training to almost 1,000 US immigration judges, refugee/asylum officers and other civilian and military officials engaged in making or implementing protection policy.
- Individuals and families fleeing violence in the NCA region continued to represent the largest asylum seeking population arriving to the US southern border. In response, UNHCR scaled up support to 9 southern border shelters which provide first reception and humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable asylum-seekers. UNHCR also hosted a second convening of the shelters to support their establishment as a network, and began collaborating with an NGO partner to develop a shelter volunteer deployment scheme.
- Lack of access to legal representation remained a principal impediment to many NCA nationals' ability to access asylum, and in response UNHCR convened 30 legal service providers to participate in a roundtable to strengthen strategic collaboration on access to legal representation in the US. UNHCR also trained 40 law firm partners with a view to engaging their support with pro bono representation.
- UNHCR's new US case management and detention hotline system was consolidated, serving 1,836 persons of concern. These individuals were assisted with information about the US asylum system.

**EDUCATION****HONDURAS****Achievements and Impact**

- It has been agreed with the CIPPDV and the Education Secretary to establish an international forum to identify good practices and lessons learned from teachers and institutional entities in the region with similar challenges. These activities will improve sensitivity and awareness from governmental entities and allow the identification of specific protection mechanisms for teachers.
- 10 teachers from Tegucigalpa, San Pedro Sula, Choloma and El Progreso were delegated to lead the advocacy strategy that includes effective dialogue with the Institutional Displacement Commission (CIPPDV) and the Education Secretary; coordinated work with UNHCR and Save the Children to prepare strategic meetings and effectively report to the rest of the group, and represent the group in strategic meetings with key messages from the results of the consultation.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- The institutional response to guarantee the safeguard of schools in high-risk areas continues to be focused on security without addressing protection issues that affect students, teachers and families. The Security Secretary, in coordination with the Education and Human Rights Secretary, decided to militarize 53 educative centers in Tegucigalpa to address the killings, threats and shut down of schools due to lack of security conditions. Protection needs and gaps remain regarding risk factors, absence of adequate protocols and routes, lack of effective and sustainable protection mechanisms, etc.

BELIZE**Achievements and Impact**

- UNHCR continued to support English as a Second Language (ESL) classes in Belmopan and Valley of Peace, and is in the process of scaling up ESL in Armenia and Bella Vista.
- UNHCR, through its partner Help for Progress, supports access to education for PoC children by providing material assistance to cover the costs of uniforms, books and annual school fees for primary and secondary schools. UNHCR also built 2 classrooms in Armenia community, one to replace a dilapidated classroom and the other to provide space for at least 22 new students that had been rejected due to lack of space.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- In some refugee hosting communities, refugee children do not have access to primary education since Belizean children are prioritized. There is also a language barrier, especially for children aged 10-14 since there are no ESL classes for these age ranges. Children aged 14-17 are not accepted in primary school because of age and they therefore cannot take the Primary School Examination (PSE) to enter high school. Furthermore, public high schools require social security cards to register students, which most PoC children do not have due to their lack of access to the asylum process or the delays in RSD adjudications.

MEXICO

Achievements and Impact

- In Mexico City, mechanisms have been established to coordinate the referral of asylum-seekers and refugees to education services provided by the local Ministry of Education (SEDU). The Ministry will make academic advisors available for civil society organizations through “The school in your house” scheme. These advisors will visit UNHCR’s project partners in Mexico City to guide adolescents and adults who plan to revalidate their primary and secondary education in Mexico. To implement this initiative, a tripartite scheme is being established involving the National Institute for Adult Education (INEA), SEDU, and civil society organizations funded by UNHCR. Additionally, SEDU committed to facilitate the incorporation of PoC in its online high school education programme.
- In Chiapas, UNHCR has established a coordination mechanism with the regional, local, and municipal education authorities to facilitate the incorporation of asylum-seekers and refugees into the Mexican education system, as well as to improve the recognition of diplomas from countries of origin by the Mexican Ministry of Education.
- In April, as part of the joint programme of the Ministry of Public Education and the State Family Welfare Agency, 14 asylum-seekers and refugees graduated from the second generation of elementary and junior high school level courses. This educational model targets over-aged learners who do not have their original diplomas, or that were not able to complete their education in their countries of origin, and who now have the opportunity to complete each level through an accelerated 6-month programme.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Although education is a universal right in the Mexican legislation, in practice, administrative obstacles continue to hinder access to education, mainly for asylum-seekers. Without proper documentation, children and adolescents can attend school but are not formally enrolled. The recent announcement on the issuance of the CURP for asylum-seekers is expected to eliminate most of the practical barriers faced when trying to enroll children into public schools.

**SHELTER AND NFIS****EL SALVADOR****Achievements and Impact**

- UNCHR's partner CARITAS has provided emergency shelter for 9 deported persons with protection needs (2 children, 5 men and 2 women) who cannot safely go back to their homes or habitual places of residence due to the fear of persecution. They have received humanitarian assistance, as well as legal and psychological support. The coordination mechanism with other organizations in Guatemala and Mexico was built during the past year and has allowed to provide comprehensive care to deportees with protection needs.
- The Ombudsperson's Office has provided psychosocial support to a total of 161 persons, and legal assistance to 139 IDPs and 19 deportees with protection needs at the reception centre.
- With UNHCR's support, Local Offices for the Attention to Victims (OLAVs) have provided legal, psychological and social attention to 3,126 victims of violence in 19 shelters.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- The lack of government shelters managed by institutions responsible for providing attention to deportees in need of protection remains a major gap.
- OLAVs are not able to provide humanitarian assistance to PoCs, and, in terms of physical protection, there are no shelters administrated by the Ministry of Justice and Public Safety.
- Governmental and State institutions including the National Council for Children and Adolescents (CONNA), the Ombudsman's Office (PDDH) and the Local Offices for the Assistance of Victims (OLAVs) require additional material and technical support to deliver adequate humanitarian assistance to persons of concern.
- The security situation of some shelters remains worrying as signs of gang presence in the area have been identified. Also, the security situation led partners to regularly relocate safe houses, sometimes leading to a sharp decrease of availability of safe spaces.

HONDURAS**Achievements and Impact**

- Six shelters have been identified with capacity to accommodate approximately 96 people. These houses require improvements and provisioning, which will be

carried out in the second half of the year to ensure that the spaces are available to receive people with protection needs.

- UNHCR held a dialogue with the Episcopal Conference of Honduras and the signature of an MoU was approved by all 10 bishops in the country. Within the framework of this MoU, the Dioceses will identify shelter alternatives in their parishes and UNHCR will provide resources to support them in assisting IDPs requiring any of UNHCR protection alternatives in Honduras (internal relocation, humanitarian evacuation and PTA).

BELIZE

Achievements and Impact

- During the first six months of 2018, a total of 172 families (454 individuals), mainly those that arrived within the past 12 months, were assisted with material support. Total disbursements for the period is estimated at 503 as follows: 292 (food), 57 (housing) 53 (basic needs – stoves, mattresses), 36 (health), 34 (education), 17 (LPG tanks for cooking), and documentation (14).
- In addition, the welcome centre that UNHCR is planning to build at Benque will also have a small shelter space, with room for PoCs to stay overnight if needed.

MEXICO

Achievements and Impact

- As of 30 June, 3,868 persons (1,668 households) received cash-based assistance through direct cash payments. Compared to the same period of time in 2017 (3,276 persons), this represent an increase of 18 per cent which can be explained not only by the increase in the number of asylum claims but also by the prioritization undertaken by UNHCR on families and certain vulnerable groups. In April, UNHCR introduced a more efficient distribution mechanism through pre-paid cards.
- As of 30 June, over 50,000 persons (asylum-seekers and migrants combined) have been accommodated in 28 different UNHCR-supported shelters along the migratory route. For the first half of the year, UNHCR partner shelters supported over 3,000 individuals with international protection needs with accommodation, food, legal and psychosocial support.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Funds available will be insufficient to cover at least 50 per cent of the total population considering the projected 22,000 to 28,000 claimants for 2018. UNHCR estimates that at least additional 9,560 individuals (4,000 households) will be in need of cash assistance.



COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT AND SELF RELIANCE

EL SALVADOR

Achievements and Impact

- UNHCR has initiated the implementation of a national community strategy which aims to extend its outreach, build capacities, identify persons of concern, assess risks, and strengthen protection networks. This work has been carried out with partners such as Save The Children, World Vision International, Plan International, COMCAVIS TRANS and CRISTOSAL, as well as NGOs like Terra Nova and the National Federation of LGBTI organizations, key State entities such as the Ombudsman's Office, the Attorney District's Office and local governments, and United Nations agencies such as WFP and UNICEF.
- UNHCR has extended its territorial outreach to 18 communities nationwide located in 8 Departments. This allowed 189 community leaders and members, including 60 women in leadership positions, to be trained on the identification of persons of concern at heightened risk, particularly children and their families, youth and LGBTI persons.
- UNHCR's community work developed 9 participatory assessments which revealed protection gaps and risks community groups are facing. Also, 3 communities reached agreements and collaborated on the creation of community plans of action which aim to address protection gaps identified through participatory assessments with government and State institutions competent to deliver an adequate psychosocial, legal and material protection response.
- UNHCR has been strengthening the capacities of the National Ombudsman Office (PDDH) on protection monitoring, as well as identification and protection mechanisms for cases of forcibly displaced people at heightened risk, particularly LGBTI persons.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Through community-based work, UNHCR identified persons at heightened risk due to gang-related persecution manifested through forced recruitment, extortion, sexual and gender-based violence, and killings.
- UNHCR developed participatory assessments in 9 community groups and identified protection gaps due to i) lack of territorial presence of competent authorities, which affects access to rights, humanitarian assistance and services including security provided by State institutions; ii) lack of access to work and livelihoods due to risks associated to forced displacement; and, iii) sexual and gender violence particularly against girls and women. Regarding LGBTI persons, social and institutional discrimination and exclusion from participation and decision-making spaces are transversal throughout their lives. Also, youth lacks job opportunities and recreational activities such as sports and arts within their

communities because of territorial control by gangs, insecurity and scarcity of resources; these factors put them at risk of recruitment by gangs.

HONDURAS

Achievements and Impact

- Plans to mitigate specific risks in communities were developed in Tegucigalpa (12 youth groups) and the update of protection plans for 8 communities of Rivera Hernandez in San Pedro Sula took place. Over 200 community leaders, including youth, took part in the process.
- In Tegucigalpa, 12 Community Centers have enhanced their capacity to offer safe alternatives to children and youth through the implementation of socio-cultural and artistic activities. Sports and influencers activities have strengthened Youth groups and Youth Committees in 4 high-risk communities.
- The construction of a medical dispensary in Chamelecon was finalized and operations began, providing medical services for 150 people between May and June. A community-protection plan was developed with over 20 leaders which includes risk mitigation/prevention initiatives, actions to consolidate the protection space of the dispensary and alternative registration of abandoned houses and land.
- Findings of a participatory assessment carried out in El Progreso and El Negrito (Yoro) was jointly published and presented by UNHCR and partner World Vision to local authorities of the Municipality. Recommendations aim to reinforce community-based strategy targeting areas highly affected by violence within this Municipality, located in the Northern zone of the country.
- Field Office San Pedro Sula carried out protection monitoring missions to the Municipalities of Villanueva and La Lima and has carried out trainings on forced displacement and SGBV with the teams (25 people) of 6 medical dispensaries located in high-risk zones of Villanueva, La Lima, Choloma and San Pedro Sula. These are part of the UNHCR's strategy to access high-risk areas and communities affected by forced displacement in the metropolitan zone of the Valle de Sula (northern part of the country, with almost 2,5 million inhabitants), and to support affected communities in strengthening their community protection strategies.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Limited operational capacity (UNHCR and partners) to support the high number of communities affected by violence and at risk of forced displacement.

MEXICO

Achievements and Impact

- Half a dozen refugee adolescents participated in the World Vision "Youth Career Initiative" through which they are enrolled in a six-month training sessions at five-

star hotels in Mexico City. By the end of the on-the-job training course, they will have job placement opportunities in the same hotels where they have been trained.

PANAMA

Achievements and Impact

- Through its partner NRC, UNHCR is carrying out a community-monitoring exercise. The process will be implemented in coordination with local authorities, community leaders and persons of concern and consists of five phases (identification and mapping of areas with highest concentration of PoCs, establishment of relationship with local authorities in these areas, identification and prioritization of problems in order to define concrete activities and strategies, implementation of different activities in which the different community actors are involved, and monitoring of all interventions in order to make the necessary adjustments and reporting). Currently, the process is in its second phase of establishing relationships with local authorities.
- A priority initiative has been the design and implementation of a data collection exercise, in order to obtain reliable data on the profiles, socio-economic situation, vulnerabilities, protection needs and intentions of Venezuelans in Panama. The exercise has been jointly led and funded by UNHCR and IOM, combining the methodologies and tools of profiling and DTM approaches. UNICEF and WHO, as well as the OAS, have also joined as partners for the exercise.
- The exercise involves both quantitative (household survey) and qualitative (focus groups and semi-structured interviews) components. Data collection started and a joint analytical report is expected to be ready in September. The results will be discussed with relevant stakeholders in order to identify appropriate recommendations to address the main needs identified and to support legal, social and economic integration of the population.



DURABLE SOLUTIONS

EL SALVADOR

Achievements and Impact

- Between January and June, 421 persons received legal and humanitarian assistance, as their cases were reviewed by UNHCR's partners and referred to the PTA. Of those, 123 cases were approved for initiating the PTA process.

HONDURAS

Achievements and Impact

- As of June of 2018, the PTA has engaged a total of 99 cases (369 individuals), out of which 79 cases (285 individuals) are currently in the processing phase by UNHCR and partner NGOs. A total of 70 of these cases (242 individuals) have received assistance during the first semester of the year.
- A BID panel has been activated with the participation of the governmental entity (DINAF) and an NGO with expertise in child protection issues (Casa Alianza). Three cases have been presented to the panel during the first semester that lead to the signature of authorization to leave the country by the requested parent as part of the required documentation for the PTA processing.
- Thirteen cases (65 individuals) have been referred to partner Scalabrinian Sisters for humanitarian evacuation. Ten have already reached the asylum country and have had access to asylum procedures, assistance and legal support. Exit procedures have also been coordinated with Caritas and UNHCR offices in the region.
- A total of 169 abandoned properties have been identified and registered in UNHCR and Caritas alternative registration system. Data collection started in 4 departments of the country and will continue to guarantee effective identification/registration in the application developed by UNHCR. Collected information will be presented to the Cadastral Committee during the second semester of the year.
- A consolidated strategy for the protection of abandoned property has been developed in coordination with all 5 competent entities at the national level. 10 municipalities have been prioritized to improve their technical capacity on cadastral-related issues and to participate in the development of protocols and specific tools for the registration process.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Absence of protocols, TORs and other specific tools added to existing legal gaps to resolve custody-related issues constitute a challenge to guarantee effective resolution of the cases and functioning of the BID panel, not only for the PTA but also for humanitarian evacuation.
- Key entities linked to the protection of abandoned land and housing are willing to work along with UNHCR to develop the required tools and mechanisms to register abandoned property, in spite of the law on forced displacement not being approved yet.
- There are few government and international cooperation programmes that aim to achieve durable solutions for displaced people. Interventions on livelihoods for IDPs should be strengthened.
- The vocational training offer for IDP, at-risk or deportee youth with protection needs is not very pertinent. Employment and educational opportunities are limited.

BELIZE

Achievements and Impact

- Local integration is currently the only durable solution for PoCs in Belize. UNHCR is hopeful that the Sustainable Solutions MIRPS Working Group will take a lead on ensuring that PoCs are able to integrate effectively in Belizean society.

MEXICO

Achievements and Impact

- During the reporting period, 10 PoC (4 from Honduras; 4 from El Salvador, and 2 from Guatemala) were resettled from Mexico to Canada (9 persons) and Sweden (1).
- In 2018, UNHCR started a second local integration programme in Mexico's second largest city, Guadalajara (Jalisco State) in addition to the programme established in Saltillo in mid-2016. While the Saltillo programme targets mainly refugee families, the programme in Guadalajara is currently focusing on providing integration opportunities for single adults, based on the job offers identified by UNHCR's local partner, FM4.
- During the first semester of 2018, 141 persons from the NCA were relocated to Saltillo, while 11 persons were relocated to Guadalajara.

PANAMA

Achievements and Impact

- UNHCR carried out a socio-economic assessment on PoC in Panama. To this effect, a local consultant was hired who conducted individual interviews with PoC on their socio-economic situation. The exercise was supported by UNHCR's partners and a total of 250 interviews were held. Results are currently being systematized and will be used as supporting material for livelihood interventions and the further definition of a local integration strategy.
- An agreement was reached with INADEH (professional training institute) for the inclusion of refugees in the vocational training programmes offered by this state entity in different provinces and areas of the country. A draft of the local Letter of Understanding between UNHCR and INADEH is in process, formalizing this collaboration.
- A pilot programme with Manpower Group and NGO HIAS is being prioritized to strengthen the capacities of refugees for inclusion in the labour market. The project contemplates the reinforcement of their skills for a better professional development through a capacity-building programme that will provide the refugees and asylum seekers with the 'MANPOWER certification', which would make it easier for recognized refugees to enter formal employment. Furthermore, the sessions will include training for recruitment interviews, aiming to increase the opportunity of

successful labour-market insertion. Also, a specific programme to insert refugees in the services sector is being established.

UNITED STATES

Achievements and Impact

- In the United States, UNHCR worked closely with an NGO partner to build out a comprehensive online “map” to enable refugees and asylum seekers to find native-language resources and connect with integration services in their city.

Financial Information

UNHCR is very grateful for the financial support provided by donors who have contributed to their activities with unearmarked and broadly earmarked funds as well as for those who have contributed directly to the NCA Situation.

Broadly earmarked contributions to the region:

United States of America | Private donors Australia | Canada | Norway | Spain | Sweden | Other private donors

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USD 268,891	USD 248,897
■ CERF	■ Helen G. Morres
USD 192,601	USD 103,998
■ Denmark	■ UN Peacebuilding Fund
USD 120,000	USD 676,536

Funding (in million USD)

A total of **USD 8.2 million** has been funded.

The funding gap amounts to **USD 36.2 million**

External / Donors Relations

Special thanks to the major donors of unrestricted funds in 2018

Sweden 98.2 million | Private donors Spain 52.8 million | Norway 42.5 million | Netherlands 39.1 million | United Kingdom 31.7 million | Denmark 25.5 million | Private donors Republic of Korea 25.4 million | Switzerland 15.2 million | France 14 million | Germany 13.7 million | Private donors Italy 13.5 million | Private donors Japan 13 million | Italy 11.2 million | Private donors Sweden 10.2 million

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