



CENTRAL AMERICA AND MEXICO

UNHCR OPERATIONAL UPDATE

31 August 2016

KEY FIGURES

32,179

New asylum applications from the Northern Triangle of Central America (NTCA) citizens in North and Central America countries in 2016 (Jan-Jun).

99,522

Deportations of NTCA citizens from the USA and Mexico in 2016 (Jan-Jun).

565%

Increase in asylum applications in Belize, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama from NTCA citizens in 2016 (Jan-Jun) compared to the same period in 2015.

152%

Increase in asylum applications in Mexico from NTCA citizens in 2016 (Jan-Jun) compared to the same period in 2015.

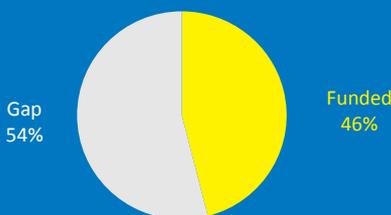
2,480

Asylum seekers housed in 8 shelters supported by UNHCR in 2016 (Jan-Aug) in the States of Tabasco, Chiapas and Mexico City.

FUNDING

USD 18.1 Million

Requested for the NTCA Situation



PRIORITIES

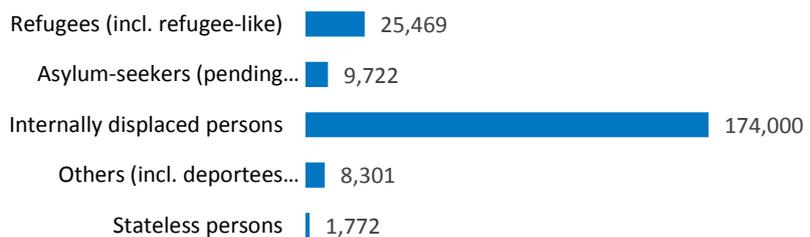
- Strengthen asylum and international protection systems in countries of asylum and transit.
- Reinforce the protection of internally displaced persons.
- Strengthen the protection of unaccompanied children in line with best interest principles and practices.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The high-level roundtable on the plight of people fleeing growing violence in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras held in San José, Costa Rica, on 6-7 July concluded with the issuance of the San Jose Action Statement, a series of commitments from countries in response to the protection situation in Central America.
- UNHCR and the Government of Honduras signed the *Accord de siège* on 21 June, which formally allows UNHCR to engage in its work in Honduras. UNHCR is strengthening its office in Tegucigalpa and opening a new office in San Pedro Sula.
- UNHCR is also strengthening its operations in Guatemala and has recently opened an office in Peten. The Protection and Monitoring Network has substantially increased its capacity to identify persons with protection needs. As Chair of the UNCT's Migration Task Force, UNHCR is also contributing to ensure that the new Migration Code incorporates international refugee law principles and standards.
- In El Salvador, UNHCR is working with the Ombudsman's office and partners to set up mechanisms for the identification and referral of high risk protection cases, as well as in the design and implementation of an internal displacement profiling exercise.
- Thirty partnership agreements were signed to develop protection mechanisms and provide support to the persons of concern in the region.
- Inter-Agency cooperation was strengthened. In Honduras, the Protection Working Group (PWG) is working in Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula with the participation of 7 UN Agencies and 13 INGOs. PWGs were also established in Guatemala and El Salvador. Within the framework of UNDG-LAC, the Regional PWG was re-activated to articulate regional initiatives and support UNCTs in the NTCA.
- The Mexican Congress approved a reform of the Constitution, guaranteeing the right to seek and obtain asylum as set out in the American Convention on Human Rights.
- UNHCR expanded its presence in Mexico by establishing a presence in Saltillo to promote local integration, and in Acayucan to focus on the dissemination of information on access to asylum and on the improvement of reception conditions.
- COMAR and the Mexican Migration Institute released approximately 280 asylum-seekers, mostly women and children, from a number of migration detention centres. UNHCR liaised with civil society shelters to ensure spaces were available and that follow-up was provided, including psychological counselling and legal aid.
- New stateless status determination regulations were enacted in Costa Rica as defined in the 2010 Migration Act (Law 8764).
- In response to hurricane Earl passed through Belize on 4 August, UNHCR, through its partner, assisted affected families with humanitarian aid.

Population of concern

A total of **219,264** people of concern in Mexico and Central America by end-June 2016¹



¹ The number of internally displaced persons reported is an estimate of displaced in 20 municipalities of Honduras between 2004 and 2014 according to a Government-led profiling study supported by UNHCR.

UPDATE ON ACHIEVEMENTS

San Jose Action Statement

UNHCR welcomed the San Jose Action Statement released on 4 August where nine countries from North and Central America vowed to work together to strengthen the protection of people forcibly displaced by violence in the NTCA, a positive sign ahead of UN and US summits held in New York in September on refugees and migrants. “It is vital and immensely gratifying to see the countries of the Americas coming together in a regional approach to devise humane, collaborative solutions for people in desperate need of life-saving help,” said UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi.



In the joint [statement](#), the governments of Belize, Canada, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama and the United States acknowledged the need for stronger protection of asylum seekers, refugees and internally displaced people in the region. The statement, an outcome of an unprecedented gathering of concerned governments organized by UNHCR and the Organization of American States (OAS) in Costa Rica, noted that the swelling flow of refugees and migrants in the region was due to a variety of factors with violence being one central reason. It also stressed the importance of timely identification and documentation of people in need of protection, of unhindered access to fair and efficient procedures for protection, of finding alternatives to detention for asylum seekers and of ensuring their access to legal aid.

The San Jose meeting was also attended by four countries of South America as well as representatives of UN agencies and international institutions including the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), national human rights institutions, national and regional NGOs, civil society and academia. In an individual declaration accompanying the San Jose Action Statement, Costa Rica said it was committed to addressing, with the help of UNHCR and “as a matter of urgency,” the backlog in asylum applications and supporting the local integration of refugees. In its accompanying declaration, Mexico said it was committed to building refugee protection capacity and implementing alternatives to detention for asylum-seekers, while the United States said it would work with UNHCR to expand its Refugee Admissions Program in order to help vulnerable people fleeing the Northern Triangle countries. Honduras acknowledged the problem of forced displacement within and across its own borders, pledging to allocate the resources needed to expand protection and emergency assistance for persons displaced by violence including through new laws, emergency shelters and public awareness-raising efforts.

Northern Triangle of Central America

Latest developments

- UNHCR field offices are being established in Petén, Guatemala, and in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, in order to reinforce border monitoring, legal advice and protection networks.
- With additional resources, offices entered into strategic alliances and agreements with new partners and reinforced the capacity of the existing ones. This requires an intensive and ongoing process of capacity building. So far some 14 new agreements have been signed. This has ensured an increase in operational activities, jointly with partners, in the areas of child protection, community-based protection, protection networks and border monitoring, strengthening of reception centres, protection responses for cases at heightened risks (through the Protection Transfer Arrangement), as well as the reinforcement of national human rights entities (ombudsperson offices) in the three countries.
- The Protection Transfer Arrangement (PTA) is in its initial pilot phase in El Salvador. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the PTA process were developed and a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between UNHCR and the Government of Costa Rica was signed.
- A total of 12 cases were identified and fully documented for the PTA process, and six cases were cleared by the United States to continue their process with IOM in El Salvador. The first cases could potentially be transferred to Costa Rica at the end of September. The PTA will gradually be expanded to other NTCA countries as countries of origin, starting with cases in Honduras in 2017.

Needs and challenges

- The growing demand for collaboration with UNHCR from the various actors in the NTCA countries, as well as new cooperation programmes such as the PTA, have highlighted the need for additional resources.

Achievements by sector

Protection

HONDURAS

Achievements and impact

- In the first half of 2016, UNHCR signed 12 new agreements with partners for UNHCR's technical support in the improvement of local capacities including emergency psychosocial response, the establishment of reference mechanisms for high-risk cases, as well as the design and adjustment of protection mechanisms at the community-level. UNHCR will be able to monitor, impact and support communities in 10 departments.
- In order to improve technical capacity and effective protection response UNHCR activated two Protection Working Groups, one in Tegucigalpa and one in San Pedro Sula with the participation of 7 UN Agencies and 13 INGO. The terms of reference, strategic objectives and a work plan for 2016 and 2017 have been developed within the Global Protection Cluster strategic objectives. To strengthen UNHCR's capability to protect affected communities in the most violent municipalities a new office was opened in the municipality of San Pedro Sula, department of Cortés.

Identified needs and gaps

- Due to the lack of a legal framework on forced displacement and of an entity responsible for the protection of IDPs, protection needs are severe and remain undocumented. Communities and individuals forced to leave are not recognized by local authorities or provided with any kind of support, not even for basic needs such as food, shelter or clothing. Military operations, in the absence of an integrated approach, have increased the vulnerability of communities affected by the presence of criminal organizations.
- UNHCR, together with World Vision, is currently conducting a participatory assessment in two municipalities in the department of Yoro to better understand and document remaining gaps. A similar exercise was documented with Save the Children in Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula to identify gaps and define a response strategy.
- In the past two years deportation figures from the United States and Mexico have doubled. Despite UNHCR's efforts, in coordination with the Government and NGOs, to establish guidelines for the identification of persons with protection needs upon arrival, the absence of sufficient and effective protection mechanisms remains a major problem. Secondary movements within national boundaries increase the difficulty to monitor the situation and identify effective protection alternatives.



Teenage girls have been forced to quit school because of threats by gang members in San Pedro Sula, Honduras. © UNHCR/Tito Herrera

EL SALVADOR

Achievements and impact

- In the first half of 2016, UNHCR signed agreements with four implementing partners (Save the Children, World Vision, Cristosal and IDHUCA) that will positively impact the protection strategy for deported Salvadorians with protection needs and for other forcibly displaced people.
- UNHCR continued providing technical support to the Directorate for Victims' Assistance of the Ministry of Justice and Public Security, which is leading the design of an internal displacement profiling exercise in the country. After a roadmap was agreed upon, planning activities in the first semester of 2016 focused on: i) drafting a concept note and terms of reference (ToRs) for the implementation of the exercise; ii) initiating discussions with the National Statistical Office of El Salvador (DIGESTYC), who confirmed its interest in supporting the quantitative components of the exercise; iii) launching a call for expressions of interest from implementing partners that could lead the qualitative components; iv) compiling and analyzing secondary data sources; and v) confirming the support from the Joint IDP Profiling Service (JIPS) for the implementation of the exercise.
- UNHCR is working with partners that provide legal assistance, orientation and psychosocial support, as well as with the national Ombudsman Office (PDDH), to set up identification and protection mechanisms, particularly for high-risk cases.

- UNHCR provided general trainings on child protection and children's rights to some 172 staff from Government and partner organizations. Eight working sessions for the revision of the National Refugee Law were held; some 29 Government, partner and UNHCR staff were trained on SGBV prevention and response; seven refugees obtained their naturalization and five refugees renovated their IDs. Moreover, seven training sessions on Refugee Status Determination were conducted for partner Caritas and one SOP was developed for the management of asylum-seeker cases and approved by the national commission for refugee status determination (CODER) with UNHCR's assistance.
- In order to provide an interagency response to the phenomenon of internal displacement due to violence by transnational organized crime and gangs (maras), as well as other situations of violence, UNHCR is chairing an interagency Protection Group. The TORs were drafted by UNHCR and were shared with various actors who provided concrete recommendations. UNHCR had a dialogue with a variety of civil society and institutional actors in the country, as well as with members of the affected population in San Salvador, Usulután and Santa Ana.

Identified needs and gaps

- In partnership with local authorities and the civil society, UNHCR needs to continue working at the operational level with reception centres (for land and air at the airport) and all actors of the national protection system in order to document and develop data collection mechanisms of deportees with protection needs. Relations with key partners and stakeholders such as the Ombudsman Office (PDDH) and the Central American University's Human Rights Institute (IDHUCA) are key for UNHCR's work in the country.
- As part of the joint action plan between UNHCR and the Governments of Canada, Mexico and United States on capacity-building in Mexico, a five-day fact-finding mission to El Salvador was undertaken to analyze and corroborate country of origin information (COI). Participants included COI experts from the Canadian Immigration Refugee Board and the US Citizenship and Immigration Services, the Mexican Refugee Commission (COMAR), representatives of the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UNHCR staff from Mexico City and San Salvador. Eighteen meetings were carried out with Government authorities and civil society organizations.

GUATEMALA

Achievements and impact

- UNHCR continued strengthening the capacities of Government institutions on child protection and international protection in the first semester of 2016.
- Seven workshops on identifying protection needs were delivered to the National Police, the Welfare Secretariat, the Attorney General's Office, the Judicial Body, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as to the managers of shelters in charge of receiving deported children.
- UNHCR participated in a Commission for the Refugee Status Determination meeting, where 13 people were recognized as refugees, and provided individual counselling to 15 people who contacted the Office.
- UNHCR and the Rafael Landívar University met in order to establish final agreements regarding an academic study about different forms of displacement (*Estudio diagnóstico sobre desplazamiento interno en Guatemala*) to be conducted by the university in coordination with relevant authorities. The agreement was signed in July and the main objectives of the study are to better estimate the extent of internal displacement in Guatemala during the last five years and to identify different types of movement, their causes, their geographical dispersion and their impact on the population.
- UNHCR conducted a border monitoring mission to Frontera Corozal (Mexico) and La Técnica (Guatemala), one of the key border crossings used by asylum seekers and migrants. On the Guatemalan side, the mission team visited the mobile units installed by ICRC, confirming that between 250 and 300 Central American asylum seekers and migrants are crossing daily into Mexico; of which approximately 10 to 15 unaccompanied minors. The rainy season makes the border crossing especially dangerous. UNHCR will follow up on the strengthening of the border protection and monitoring network in coordination with its counterpart in Petén. The mission concluded that UNHCR's direct presence in the area is critical and essential. Different options to reinforce UNHCR's operational presence are now being discussed with partners.



A family that fled street gangs in El Salvador seeks asylum in Guatemala. Since a truce broke down in 2014 between the Salvadoran Government and the "maras," as the street gangs are known, violence has exploded, driving the national murder rate up to 104 per 100,000 people – the highest since the country's bloody civil war came to an end in 1992.
UNHCR/Daniele Volpe

- UNHCR set up a Protection Group in the country. All participants agreed on its establishment and on the need to include international NGOs and the Ombudsman’s Office. In the frame of the Protection Group, the first interagency mission to the border in the department of Petén was in May.
- LAMBDA, Save the Children, World Vision and Refugio de la Niñez are now implementing project partnership agreements with UNHCR in Guatemala in 2016. The new partners were trained on the basic principles of international protection, as well as UNHCR’s age, gender and diversity policy.

Identified needs and gaps

- UNHCR needs to provide support and guide its partner, the NGO *Pastoral de Movilidad Humana*, in the opening of the transit centre in Petén, as well as to define how to establish a coordination and experience-sharing network among all the transit centres in Guatemala and shelters in Mexico. Technical expertise to the Petén Human Mobility Steering Group should also be provided.
- Collaboration with the Red Cross needs to be strengthened. The organization is providing basic humanitarian assistance to migrants and refugees at key points while collecting valuable information.
- UNHCR will continue to support volunteers from the protection monitoring network at the borders and to build their capacities of identification of persons with specific needs.

MEXICO

Achievements and impact

- The Ministers of Interior and of Social Development signed a collaboration agreement to allow refugees to benefit from existing social programmes addressed to Mexican population living in poverty or vulnerable conditions.
- UNHCR’s presence was established in Saltillo, Coahuila State, to promote local integration, and in Acayucan, Veracruz State, to focus on the dissemination of information on access to asylum and on the improvement of reception conditions.
- UNHCR increased the total number of legal aid staff available to asylum seekers to 14, of which 7 are located in shelters. This was possible thanks to: a) the establishment of a legal clinic at the *Universidad Iberoamericana*. This legal clinic is the first of its kind in Mexico, and will work closely with a country-wide network of refugee lawyers and other legal practitioners in shelters and with civil society agencies; b) continuing agreements with the *Comisión Mexicana para la Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos* and NGO *Sin Fronteras* and expanded agreements with the NGO Asylum Access in Chiapas and Tabasco States, *Hermanos en el Camino* in Oaxaca, *Belen* shelter in Tapachula and *La 72* shelter in Tenosique; c) an agreement with the Center for the Attention of Migrants and Refugees in Tapachula, where a lawyer provides pro bono legal services to asylum-seekers, so to increase access of people in need of international protection to the asylum system and improve the quality of asylum claims. Finally, an agreement was also reached with the *Defensoría Pública* in Villahermosa to support appeals by asylum-seekers in Tabasco State. Overall, up to August 2016, 797 asylum seekers benefitted from legal aid.
- According to COMAR, out of the 58 asylum-seeking unaccompanied children registered up to April, some 40 were identified in detention and 37 were transferred to the Family Welfare Agency (DIF) or privately administered shelters, continuing their asylum procedures outside of detention. With the support of UNHCR, since February 2016, COMAR conducted 9 missions to Tenosique and Tabasco, personally interviewing a total of 219 asylum-seekers.
- UNHCR took part in 8 distance-learning webinars organized by COMAR for some 398 immigration and DIF officials across the country, who are implementing a protocol (SOPs) jointly developed by COMAR, UNHCR and UNICEF for the identification of asylum-seeking Unaccompanied and Separated Children.
- UNHCR increased the use of videos, posters and banners in detention centres (16 out of 58), shelters, and other strategic locations to inform people of their right to seek asylum and of the asylum system in Mexico.
- From February to August, COMAR and the Mexican Migration Institute (INM) released 209 asylum-seekers from the migration detention centres in Tapachula and Palenque (Chiapas State), Tenosique and Villahermosa (Tabasco State), and Mexico City, with the support of UNHCR. Most of the released asylum-seekers are families headed by women with children. UNHCR liaised with



UNHCR staff in Mexico provide information and advice to people fleeing violence in Central America. UNHCR also provides food and mattresses at this shelter for people on the move in Southern Mexico. UNHCR/Laura Padoan

civil society shelters to ensure spaces were available and that follow-up was provided, including psychological counselling and legal aid.

Monitoring missions

- UNHCR increased its capacity to visit migration detention centres in Mexico in a total of 17 states. Up to August 2016, UNHCR staff carried out 202 visits to 28 different detention centres across Mexico. Visits to Mexico's largest detention centre in Tapachula were increased to 3 per week. During these visits, UNHCR staff informed a total of 3,610 potential asylum seekers on their right to claim asylum and on the asylum procedure in Mexico. Of these, 1,357 requested individual counselling.
- UNHCR also carried out 8 border monitoring visits in Chiapas State (Ciudad Hidalgo, Talismán, Ciudad Cuauhtémoc, Frontera Corozal) and 5 border monitoring visits in Tabasco State (El Pedregal and El Ceibo). Nine missions were also undertaken to monitor the work of shelters in Oaxaca, Chiapas, and Veracruz. A mission was undertaken to the Central Corridor of Chiapas State, to monitor new routes used by migrants and asylum seekers.

COSTA RICA

Achievements and impacts

- The Quality Asylum Initiative (QAI) continues bearing positive results with 26 per cent recognition rate (35 per cent for persons from the NTCA) and fairer decisions, including three refugee recognitions based on LGBTI-related grounds of persecution during the reporting period.
- A series of MoUs were signed to address effective access of refugees and asylum-seekers to justice, including with the Judiciary and the National Commission on Access to Justice for Migrants and Refugees, the Office of the Ombudsperson, and La Salle University. As a result, over 150 judges and judiciary personnel nationwide were trained on refugee and statelessness issues. Negotiations with the Bar Association are underway to facilitate pro-bono work for refugees.
- In order to eradicate the risk of statelessness among indigenous populations and children born in Costa Rica to Panamanian and Nicaraguan parents, UNHCR has continued to support the Government of Costa Rica's efforts to address the lack of birth registration by expanding their joint work plan for the verification of nationality, late birth registration and effective access to documentation. Within this context, awareness campaigns were conducted among the Ngöbe community.
- The Multi-Functional Team for SGBV/HIV, which is chaired by UNHCR and comprises key governmental and civil society stakeholders, is fully operational. The NGO CENDEROS has recently been selected to establish a shelter for female SGBV survivors and their children, as well as LGBTI individuals, from the NTCA.
- Negotiations at Presidential level have taken place to establish Protection Transit Arrangements (PTA) for NTCA refugees at heightened risk. The first transfers are scheduled to take place in September.



"I never had an ID card", says Nazario who was born in Costa Rica. "Now that I have one, things are a bit different. We feel we belong to this country, with equal rights." The indigenous Ngöbe Bugle people live a cross border life in their ancestral territories straddling Costa Rica and Panama. UNHCR helps them in accessing documentation. UNHCR/Lucas Iturriza

PANAMA

- Panama witnesses complex migration movements, mainly coming from Brazil, and composed of mostly Haitians. The Government has allowed this movement through its territory for the moment, and has provided basic humanitarian assistance. Following the visit of the President to the border with Colombia, a new shelter for 1,000 persons has been set up in Peñitas, which adds up to the shelter for 150 persons in Metetí and the one for 200 persons in Nicanor. The Government is providing shelter for approximately 1,500 persons coming mainly from Haiti, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Pakistan, among other nationalities.
- Asylum applications are up by a third as compared to the previous quarter this year, with a strong increase in Venezuelan and Salvadorian asylum seekers. This is putting increased pressure on an asylum system that is already straining to deal with a substantial backlog.

Achievements and impacts

- In terms of livelihoods, UNHCR supported its governmental counterpart to ensure refugees' access to banking services. A local micro-credit institution, Microserfin, recently signed a MoU with UNHCR and the Red Cross to establish a minimum interest rate programme for refugees, aiming to enhance refugees' business projects.
- In light of the governmental local integration strategy, UNHCR and its partners followed up on a proposal paper between the Ministry of Interior and the Mayor's Office of Panama City, which aims to allow asylum-seekers to work as street vendors, an occupation reserved for nationals according to the current Panamanian laws.
- UNHCR continued to provide technical support to the NGOs RET International and HIAS regarding the survey that aims to clarify the approximate number of persons in a refugee-like situation in Panama. The survey is an important tool for the identification of those in need of international protection as well as for their referral by providing information on the national asylum system.
- UNHCR and its governmental counterpart, the National Office for the Attention to Refugees (ONPAR), conducted a joint mission in June to assess the respect of the principle of *non-refoulement* with regards to the measure announced by the Government of Panama to close its border with the Republic of Colombia, as well as a border mission later in August with some of its partners to monitor the new wave of arrival, mainly Haitians.

Identified needs and gaps

- Border police and migration authorities, including the international airport police, need stronger systems for the identification and referral of asylum-seekers to the national refugee office (ONPAR). As part of the QAI recommendations, UNHCR has been working on two protocols for the identification and referral of cases between ONPAR, on the one hand, and the border police and the Immigration Office, on the other.
- Delays in the processing of asylum claims are steadily growing, due to case management problems at ONPAR, as well as resource issues in the face of increasing demands. This requires the strengthening of ONPAR both at central level, for the resolution of asylum requests, as well as at entry points for the reception of new asylum requests.
- Pursuing strong livelihoods opportunities remains a challenge for asylum-seekers and refugees. The absence of a provisional work permit for asylum-seekers jeopardizes their security and self-reliance while waiting two or three years for a final decision on their asylum claim. Also, refugees must wait long periods for the renewal of their work permits, thus negatively affecting their job search and employment stability.
- Police and Immigrations officers are not always familiar with refugee documentation, therefore increasing the risk of provisional detentions. In light of this situation, a new certificate for asylum-seekers is in place since July 2016 upon the submission of an asylum application. UNHCR and partners will monitor the effectiveness of the new certificate for asylum-seekers.
- Very high figures of asylum claims were reported by the governmental counterpart during the first half of the year, thus stressing the need to enhance the reception conditions and case management process. The increase of asylum-seekers also becomes a challenge in terms of assistance (food and accommodation).

BELIZE

Latest developments

- On 14 July the Refugee Eligibility Committee (REC) met to discuss the application of the 14-day deadline within which asylum-seekers need to submit their asylum application upon arrival in the country in order to be admitted to the RSD procedure. This provision is contained in Article 8 of the 1991 Belize Refugee Act (revised in 2000), but it had so far not been strictly enforced. The REC expressed concern about the intention of the Government to apply this deadline systematically, irrespective of the particular circumstances of each case, and as a bar to the asylum system. The REC submitted a memorandum requesting the Government to clarify its position with respect to the 14-day deadline and assess the implications of it. The REC will only resume the review of asylum claims, once the issue surrounding the application of the 14-day deadline is resolved. In the meantime, the Head of the Refugee Department acknowledged that a reform of the Refugee Act would be required in the medium/long term.
- On 4 August, hurricane Earl passed through Belize with winds at 75mph, disproportionately affecting persons living in extreme poverty or in extremely vulnerable conditions. UNHCR and its partner Help for Progress carried out assessment visits in various communities relevant to UNHCR's mandate in areas surrounding Belmopan. UNHCR noted that affected families lack basic



Asylum-seekers lives devastated by Hurricane Earl in Belize. From his hammock, six-year-old Edgar gazes out of the window of his family's thatched-roof hut at the mess left behind by the hurricane. UNHCR/Brooke Del Greco

provisions, shelter, beds and proper sanitation. In collaboration with UNDP, UNHCR requested emergency humanitarian assistance to support their populations of concern through this crisis. OCHA responded with a grant of 25,000\$ to aid in the sustenance and recovery of distressed refugee families in Belize. By the end of August, UNHCR plans to distribute supplies among the refugee settlements as they continue to observe and report on the status of post-Earl recuperation. Humanitarian supplies will be delivered to 70 large and vulnerable families affected by the hurricane and located in the settlements of Armenia and Valley of Peace.

Needs and challenges

- According to UNHCR’s registration data, there are approximately 3,000 persons of concern in Belize. However, the Office is not currently carrying out registration and estimates that the actual number of persons of concern in the country is significantly higher. A participatory assessment will be conducted soon with the participation of the Government and diverse civil society actors.
- Given the serious resource constraints in the country and the considerable burden that Belize is already facing, financial support is urgently needed to sustain the political will, strengthen the capacity of the asylum system (to avoid significant backlogs but also as a preventive measure considering risks of infiltration of former gang members or other persons that could pose a security threat), as well as strengthen the “absorption” capacity of the host communities and the generosity of the Belizean society more widely.
- Currently, asylum-seekers are not receiving work permits. UNHCR will engage in a dialogue with the Government advocating for the regularization of asylum-seekers’ working conditions, as this is a primary necessity for the population of concern in Belize. The lack of authorization also called the attention of several NGOs from El Salvador, which advocate for labour rights.
- UNHCR does not have regular access to the prison in the country. The Government of Belize considers irregular status in its territory a criminal offence; therefore many detainees are in fact asylum-seekers. Since 2015, UNHCR conducted two ad hoc visits to the local prison and several detainees were assessed to be people of concerns. UNHCR will have to formalize a procedure which, primarily, prevents the detention of migrants and asylum-seekers, and that foresees the possibility for detainees to submit applications for refugee status from detention, establishing UNHCR access to persons of concern in prison.

NICARAGUA

Latest developments

- Since June 2015, the Nicaraguan National Commission for Refugees (CONAR) has not been meeting, and the migration authorities have generally refused to register any new asylum applications. Although 64 applications were admitted between February and June 2016, they have not been considered. UNHCR has sought the reactivation of the refugee commission, as well as of the issuance of documentation to asylum-seekers during the latest visit to the country. UNHCR continued to work with its partner CEPAD in providing basic reception conditions and humanitarian assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers. The number of new arrivals has been constantly increasing since 2013. As per available resources, priority was given to supporting the most vulnerable cases and for a limited period of time.

Education

Achievements and impact

HONDURAS

- In light of the increased level of risk for children and adolescents in Honduras, the protection working group, led by UNHCR, is producing a document on risks in the education environment and the impact of forced displacement. Key interviews as well as focus groups will be conducted in October and November and a document with strategic recommendations will be presented to governmental entities, international community and donors.

EL SALVADOR

- The proposal “Enhance rights of the child, protection and access to education for children and adolescents displaced in Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador”, was finalized and shared with the EU delegation in Honduras.

PANAMA

- In light of the Executive Decree that allows refugees to have access to education, the *Comisión Nacional de Convalidación y Reválida* gathered for the very first time since the law came into force in October 2015. This special Commission will lead the process for the elaboration of an internal standard operating procedure to define the criteria and steps to ensure the implementation of the Executive Decree.



Durable Solutions

Achievements and impact

COSTA RICA

- In 2016, some 131 persons of concern (including a total of 62 persons from the NTCA) and 42 women from the host community of Desamparados were selected as participants of the “Graduation Model”, which aims at bringing people out of poverty and pursuing their local integration. This livelihoods programme takes a comprehensive approach, including social assistance, psycho-social support, support for the creation of self-employment opportunities, training and access to microcredit, as well as promoting savings habits.
- “Living Integration” is a corporate social responsibility scheme, created from a public-private partnership between UNHCR, the Migration Authority, the Chamber of Commerce of Costa Rica, the Business Association for Development, and the NGO ACAI. The aim of the programme is for companies to develop actions that promote equal access of refugees to the labour market. From January until July 2016, some 254 persons of concern were registered in the programme, some 137 people were trained on employability soft-skills and 110 on technical skills, and 62 (27 persons from the NTCA) were hired by partner companies.
- In the framework of the MoU with the Ministry of Education, in 2016, a total of 117 persons of concern have validated their high-school diploma through a facilitated mechanism where no legal documents from the country of origin are required.
- Regarding the legal integration component of the protection and solutions strategy, UNHCR offered legal advice on the permanent residence and citizenship procedure to some 96 individuals, out of which 31 started the naturalization process, and 11 requested a change of migratory status to permanent residence.
- The office expanded the information mechanisms to persons of concern using new technologies: the online platform for refugees (ayuda.acnur.org) has reached over 3,200 individual users; UNHCR and the Public University TEC jointly launched an App (ACNUR CR); and in partnership with the Migration Authority, some 10 digital informative stands were installed in border crossing points and strategic institutions.



MEXICO

- With the support of the municipality of Saltillo, Coahuila State (northern Mexico), UNHCR started a pilot programme to promote the local integration of 6 refugee families. A total of 21 people — 12 adults, 5 men and 7 women (including two single heads of household), 5 children and 4 adolescent — were relocated from Tenosique and Tapachula to benefit from this programme. All the adults were inserted in the labour market with social security, and 11 children received scholarships from a private school (Colegio de México), which includes tuition fees, books and uniforms (at no cost to UNHCR). All families will have access to medical attention at the General Hospital and dental services. The city of Saltillo has agreed to receive up to 10 people a month during the pilot programme (August-December).



Shelter and NFIs

Achievements and impact

MEXICO

- To improve reception conditions for the increasing number of new asylum-seekers and refugees in Mexico, UNHCR started several infrastructure projects. 13 shelters have carried out, or are in the process of carrying out, infrastructure improvements. New shelter capacity has been developed: there are 514 new spaces, including 133 spaces for families, 24 spaces for LGBTI, 92 spaces for women with children, and 28 spaces for unaccompanied children. Projects include the construction of a shelter exclusively for asylum-seekers in Frontera Comalapa (Chiapas State) to lodge 68 persons; the construction of a new shelter for 106 persons in Guadalajara (Jalisco State); the construction of dormitories for asylum-seeking families and UASC in Hermanos en el Camino shelter in Ixtepec (Oaxaca State), with an additional capacity for 36 people; the improvement of a public gym in

Tenosique (Tabasco State); the extension of a dormitory in J'tatic shelter in Palenque (Chiapas State) with a total capacity for 70 persons (15 spaces for women, 5 for women and children and 50 for men); the creation of new spaces in Jesús el Buen Pastor shelter (for 48 people), Tres Ángeles shelter (for 54 people), CAFEMIN shelter (for 40 people), La 72 shelter in Tenosique (for 111 people, including a LGBTI module for 14 persons, an extension of a dormitory for women and children for an additional 15 persons, 20 spaces for families, 50 for women and 12 for UASC). These projects will add to the increased capacity created in the past 12 months.

- In order to respond to increased arrivals in Palenque, Chiapas State, UNHCR has promoted comprehensive solutions to strengthen the capacity of the J'tatic Samuel Ruiz shelter. These include access to legal assistance, emergency humanitarian assistance and programmes covering basic needs of asylum-seekers during their procedure. UNHCR strengthened the reception capacities of the shelter by 50 per cent to address the needs of asylum-seekers who stay for longer periods. UNHCR incorporated a comprehensive and multidimensional approach to the actions implemented, reducing the most pressing risks faced by people of concern, and improving the conditions to have access to their rights as refugees.
- The growing numbers of asylum-seekers have also impacted the humanitarian assistance programme. In Tapachula, the number of persons receiving humanitarian assistance from UNHCR during the first semester was six times higher (1,064 persons) than the assistance provided over the same period in 2015 (288 persons). In Mexico City, UNHCR's partner *Casa Refugiados* registered a 211 per cent increase in the number of cases receiving humanitarian assistance in comparison with the first semester of 2015. UNHCR's interventions to support and strengthen the capacities of the civil society shelters also included an increased presence and more frequent monitoring, as well as the provision of humanitarian assistance to asylum-seekers, which has an impact on preventing the withdrawal of asylum applications.

HONDURAS

- In order to strengthen protection mechanisms and alternatives, UNHCR is working to improve a shelter for women at risk or victims of sexual violence and the reception conditions for irregular migrants and asylum seekers.
- In response to forced displacement during the emergency phase, UNHCR worked with key partners such as Casa Alianza, the Scalabrinians Sisters, Caritas and NRC in 10 parishes.
- Together with Save the Children and Children International, UNHCR will be improving 9 community centers in Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula with a special focus on high risk areas.

Working in partnership

Northern Triangle of Central America

Latest developments

- In the three offices of the NTCA countries, as well as at the regional level, interagency protection working groups were set up or reinforced. All of them have in place ToRs and have been officially approved by the UNCT. Regular meetings are scheduled to analyze the situation, discuss protection concerns, and look for complementary support through interagency coordination and response mechanisms. There were two interagency missions to the Guatemala-Mexico border.
- The so-called Cuban migrant crisis, which has now turned into the extra continental migrant crisis, was creating regional tensions and straining normal cooperation dynamics. SICA suffered the impact of this strain in regional cooperation. On the positive side, the United States announced the expansion of the US Refugee Admission Program to help vulnerable families from the NTCA countries, as well as moving forward with the analysis of a number of cases in the Protection Transfer Arrangement which can now be operationalized, with Costa Rica acting as the temporary host country.
- In Costa Rica, UNHCR started implementing the multi-year, multi-partner comprehensive protection and solutions strategy in alliance with the Government, local embassies, international organizations, civil society organizations, universities and the private sector.

Needs and challenges

- In the context of complex regional dynamics, the implementation of UNHCR's joint work plan with the SICA secretariat has had some setbacks, including those aspects related to the development of an Observatory on Human Rights for Forced Displacement in Central America, as called for in the Brazil Plan of Action.
- UNHCR held a number of meetings with IOM to discuss activities on data gathering related to deportees and IDPs in the region. IOM shared an update regarding the new project for the NTCA funded by USAID (2016-17). The main component of this project will be the implementation of the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) in the NTCA region, collecting data on migration/displacement flows in most of the municipalities of the three countries through key informant interviews. The goal is to produce regular reports based on data collected, including population estimates for different migration flows at the municipal

level (internal and external migration and displacement, including returns). The other main component of the project focuses on the integration of information/data systems for deportees in support of national authorities. UNHCR is following-up the developments around this topic to ensure an appropriate identification of protection needs is accounted for in the design of the systems. The DTM was further discussed in country level meetings in El Salvador and Guatemala, where concerns about the methodology were expressed by a number of key participants (i.e. representatives of government institutions as well as WFP, FLACSO, CONAMIGUA, UNFPA and various universities). In Guatemala, and in light of the study on internal displacement that the Landivar University is conducting in 2016 with UNHCR's support, UNHCR-IOM-Landivar University agreed to meet in order to guarantee that both initiatives will complement each other.

- UNHCR worked on strengthening of protection networks at the Guatemala-Mexico border area, and most specifically in the municipality of Suchiate, Ciudad Hidalgo. In May, a new Assistance Center for Migrants and Refugees was inaugurated. With funds from IOM and support from UNHCR, the Centre is located in Motozintla, Chiapas, 25 km from the Niquivil border point. The Centre is contributing to the dissemination of information on the right to seek asylum and the referral of cases to the asylum system.

External relations

PANAMA

- In Panama, the National Office for the Attention of Refugees (ONPAR), HIAS, RET and UNHCR conducted two awareness-raising sessions at public schools with high records of refugee population. The sessions aimed at helping high school students understand the reasons why refugees flee their homes, the challenges faced with local integration and to help end discrimination and xenophobia among students. The activities were part of a project carried out by ONPAR with the support of civil society to end discrimination and help local integration of refugee children and adolescent in Panama.

MEXICO

- Within the framework of the celebration of national Children's Day, UNHCR launched the digital awareness-raising campaign #RefugeeChildren (#NiñezRefugiada) to explain the reasons behind the exodus of unaccompanied and separated children from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. The materials of the campaign are available at www.acnur.org/ninezrefugiada. The campaign was financed by ECHO's Children of Peace project.
- With the aim of promoting a peaceful coexistence between young asylum-seekers/refugees and the local youth of Tenosique, UNHCR and La 72 shelter organized the painting of a mural. This activity was a first step and an opportunity to create a sense of solidarity and build bonds between young refugees and the local community. The mural was unveiled in a public event in the central plaza of Tenosique, with artistic performances of refugees and Mexicans. Both events were attended by hundreds of persons, including representatives of government institutions, non-governmental organizations, civil society, and refugees.
- A training session for journalists on international protection was carried out in Villahermosa, the capital of Tabasco State, with the attendance of 25 participants from 16 different media outlets. The training aimed to raise the awareness and understanding of the public regarding the plight of refugees in Tabasco, a state that has seen a significant increase in the presence of asylum-seekers and refugees.

COSTA RICA

- Following the MoU that UNHCR signed with the University of La Salle, the first 72-hour post-graduate programme on International Refugee Law was completed during the first quarter of 2016, with an attendance of 24 participants. The programme is aimed at government officials, members of the judiciary, and civil society members working in migration and refugee-related matters. Given its success, a second cohort is planned for the second semester.
- UNHCR and the Costa Rican Supreme Electoral Tribunal/Registry Office participated in a bi-national meeting that was organized by the Panamanian Electoral Tribunal within the framework of their bilateral agreements. The meeting was an opportunity to introduce the 'Chiriticos' Project to the electoral tribunal magistrates. It was presented as a regional model that could be replicated with their Colombian counterparts to address the lack of birth registration in the Darien region. Also, a joint work plan establishing two bi-national registration and documentation brigades in Costa Rica, one in Sixaola during the first semester, and a second one in the region of Los Santos in late July, was formulated. During the Sixaola bi-national exercise, both Costa Rican and Panamanian registry officers reached out to some 2,675 Ngöbe Buglé individuals and assisted them with their registration/documentation needs (document rectifications, double nationality filing procedures, etc.).

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

In June 2016, UNHCR released a supplementary budget appeal for the situation in the Northern Triangle of Central America (NTCA), which reflects needs and activities in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Belize, Costa Rica and Mexico, as well as the coordination activities carried out by UNHCR’s regional office in Panama. UNHCR’s total financial requirements for the NTCA situation currently amount to USD 23.7 million. UNHCR is very grateful for the financial support provided by donors, particularly those who have contributed to its activities with unearmarked or broadly earmarked funds, as well as for those who have already contributed to the NTCA situation. The additional requirements for the situation, as presented in the appeal (USD 18.1 million), are currently funded at 46 per cent.

Northern Triangle of Central America (NTCA) Situation:

Key Population Figures and Trends in North and Central America



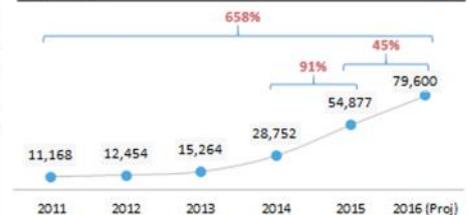
Regional Overview of Population of Concern from NTCA in 2015 and Projections for 2016*



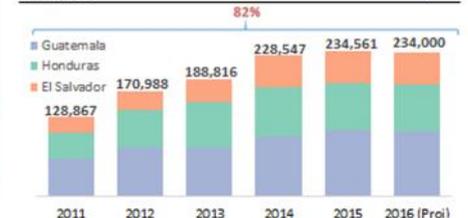
Population of Concern from NTCA Countries *

Refugees + asylum seekers (pending) (cumulative)	108,262	end-2015	146,000	end-2016 (proj.)
IDPs in Honduras (Government estimate for 20 municipalities)	174,000	2004-2014	190,000	2004-2016 (proj.)
Returned population from USA & MEX to NTCA (mix-migration)	234,561	2015	234,000	2016 (proj.)

New Annual Asylum Applications from NTCA Countries *



Annual Returns from USA and MEX to NTCA Countries*



* 2016 figures correspond to UNHCR projections. For refugees / asylum seekers, the estimates are based on new asylum claims observed during the first months of 2016. For IDPs in Honduras, the increase is based on average annual number of IDPs between 2004-14. For returned population, 2016 figures are assumed to be the same as in 2015, given the observed trends in returns from USA (increasing) and from Mexico (decreasing) during the first months of 2016.

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