

Protection and Solutions Strategy for the Northern Triangle of Central America

2016 – 2018

PROTECTION AND SOLUTIONS STRATEGY



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CONTENTS

MAP3

CONTEXT4

UNHCR’S RESPONSE6

Regional strategy..... 6

Operational response..... 7

Regional partnerships and coordination..... 8

FINANCIAL SUMMARY.....9

Cover photograph:

Andrés hides his identity with a wall clock. His family fled gang violence in El Salvador to Guatemala.

UNHCR / S. Escobar-Jaramillo

MAP

Northern Triangle of Central America

Main displacement patterns



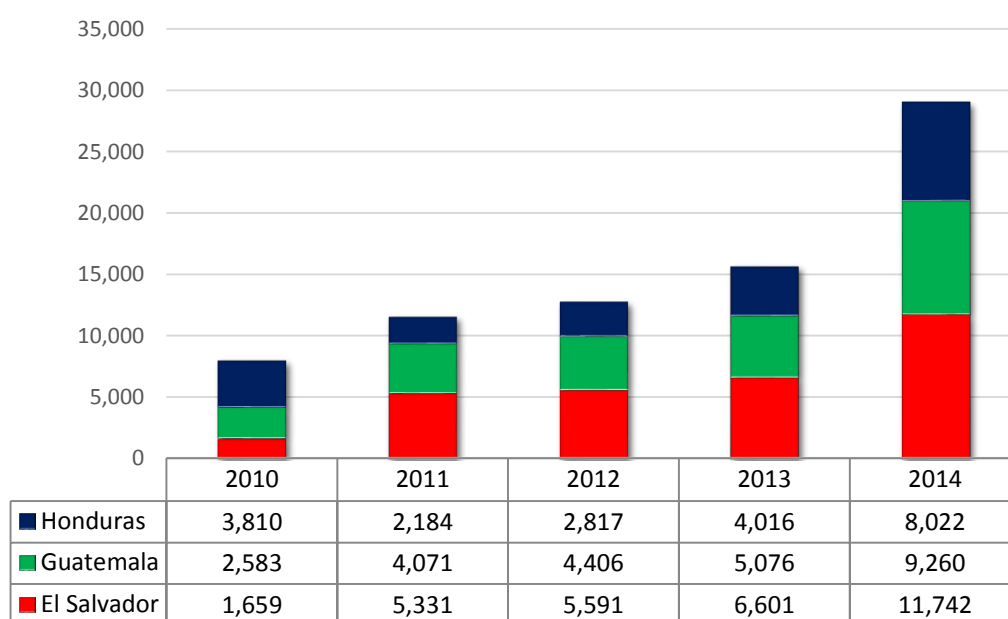
CONTEXT

The three countries comprising the so-called Northern Triangle of Central America (NTCA) - El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras - are facing many of the same challenges. These include widespread criminal activity (including organized crime, extortion, forced recruitment into criminal groups, sexual and gender-based violence, and violence against children), as well as economic hardship.

While such problems have existed for decades, conditions have worsened in recent years. Violence has escalated, leading to an increase in displacement. The transnational character of the criminal activity that afflicts these countries, and the resulting deteriorating conditions and displacement, require a collective response in this sub region of Central America.

In line with the above, bordering and nearby countries are receiving an increasingly high number of NTCA citizens seeking international protection (see Figure 1). Among those fleeing are growing numbers of women and girls, and unaccompanied and separated children (UASC). These groups are particularly vulnerable to sexual assault, human trafficking and other risks both in countries of origin and during displacement.

Figure 1 - Asylum claims from nationals of the NTCA countries | 2010-2014 worldwide



Source: UNHCR Statistical Online Population Database

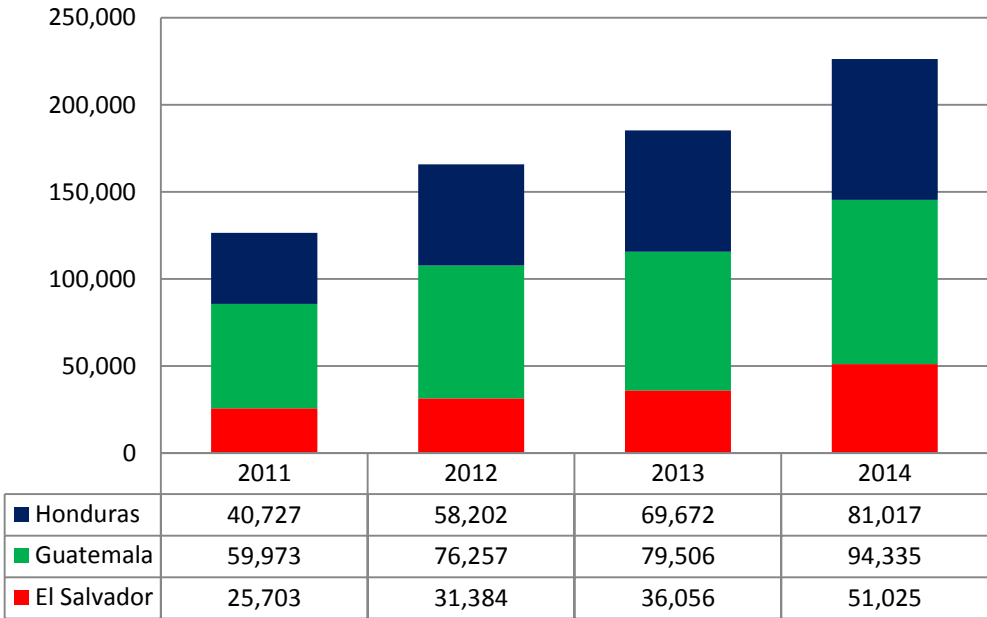
As an example, the total number of asylum claims in the United States of America made by nationals of NTCA countries increased by nearly 50 per cent between 2005 (3,947) and 2010 (5,886) and then more than quadrupled in 2014 (25,989).¹ In Mexico, the number of asylum-seekers from the NTCA tripled between 2011 and 2014.

¹ UNHCR, UNHCR Statistical Online Population Database, <http://popstats.unhcr.org/en/overview>

In addition, there has also been an increase in the number of people from El Salvador and Honduras seeking asylum in Guatemala,² as well as in Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Panama.³ This trend is expected to continue in 2016-17, given tighter migratory controls in countries to the north and increasing risks of exposure to extreme violence for those seeking to move onwards.

A large number of those seeking to enter Mexico or the United States of America are apprehended by the authorities and subsequently are returned to the NTCA. In 2014, more than 226,000 people were deported to the NTCA, according to available government sources (see Figure 2), reportedly mainly from Mexico and the United States of America. This is nearly a twofold increase compared to 2011 figures. Conversely, in response to the escalating numbers of UASC fleeing the NCTA, children have been provided access to basic services by the authorities in several countries of asylum, and the vast majority of UASC pass the “credible fear” test applied in the United States of America and therefore are granted access to the asylum procedure.

Figure 2 – Number of people returned to the NTCA countries from abroad | 2011-2014



Sources: Dirección General de Migración y Extranjería (El Salvador); Dirección General de Migración (Guatemala); Centro de Atención al Migrante Retornado (Honduras)

Even though all three NTCA countries acknowledge that some of their nationals are fleeing abroad to seek international protection, there is no available information on the situation of those who flee internally within their own countries, including on whether they are able to find lasting safety.

To date, only Honduras has taken specific measures to respond to internal displacement occurring on its territory as a result of violence, and established an Inter-Institutional Commission for the Protection

² See, e.g., *Se duplican solicitudes de refugiados hondureños y salvadoreños en Guatemala*, La Prensa Gráfica (20 June 2015), <http://www.laprensa grafica.com/2015/06/20/se-duplican-solicitudes-de-refugiados-hondurenos-y-salvadorenos-en-guatemala#sthash.8RrnZtg7>

³ While the United States of America is receiving the majority of the new asylum claims made by NTCA nationals, UNHCR has documented over twelve-fold increase in the number of asylum applications made by citizens of the NTCA countries in Belize, Costa Rica Mexico, Nicaragua and Panama between 2008 (155) and 2014 (1983).

of Persons Displaced by Violence (CIPPDV, Spanish acronym) in November 2013. In November 2015, the Government of Honduras presented its *Report on the Characterization of Internal Displacement in Honduras*, which was carried out by CIPPDV. According to the Report, “between 2004 and 2014, close to 41,000 households in Honduras were affected by internal displacement for reasons of violence and insecurity; this represents 174,000 displaced persons”.

The *Plan El Salvador Seguro*, an El Salvador Government policy document outlining steps to be taken to improve security in El Salvador, includes a chapter on the protection of victims of internal displacement. The El Salvador authorities recently requested UNHCR’s technical support to better understand the scope of displacement on its territory.

Further monitoring and research are required to help define a durable solutions strategy for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in these countries, particularly as IDPs reportedly often experience multiple displacements.

UNHCR’s assessment is that a significant percentage of those fleeing from the NTCA countries may be in need of international protection, in line with the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, as well as the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, and are of concern to the Agency. Those who do not cross international borders become internally displaced and are also of concern to UNHCR as part of its responsibilities under the inter-agency “cluster” approach. This clear protection crisis requires coordinated, timely and solutions-oriented responses.

UNHCR’S RESPONSE

Regional strategy

The purpose of this protection and solutions strategy for the NTCA, which has been developed by UNHCR in the context of the 2014 Brazil Declaration and Plan of Action,⁴ is to enable UNHCR to support authorities in countries of origin, transit and asylum to create robust protection systems, preserve asylum space, and strengthen frameworks and policies on asylum, internal displacement and solutions. In addition to the NTCA countries and Mexico, the strategy also encompasses activities in Belize, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Panama, and the United States of America to ensure a comprehensive and harmonized regional approach.

The strategy incorporates interventions by UNHCR to protect and assist three main groups: a) asylum-seekers and refugees, including those in transit; b) deported persons with specific needs and vulnerabilities; and c) internally displaced persons. Measures will include the provision of individual documentation to asylum-seekers, awareness-raising on protection needs, institution building, and the establishment/strengthening of protection responses for persons of concern to UNHCR.

The objectives of UNHCR interventions under the strategy will include:

- Supporting the establishment of regional and national legal frameworks and policies in line with applicable international standards, and that promote opportunities for solutions;
- Ensuring access to basic reception standards and fair and efficient asylum systems for persons of concern;

⁴ Regional Refugee Instruments & Related, *Brazil Declaration and Plan of Action*, 3 December 2014, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/5487065b4.html>

- Identifying and addressing the basic protection needs of children and others of concern with specific needs and vulnerabilities;
- Increasing awareness of protection risks in the region;
- Facilitating durable solutions for refugees and other persons of concern in the region.

UNHCR will contribute to the realization of these objectives through direct interventions, advocacy, and expanded field presence, in particular along the Guatemala-Mexico border. Strengthening the capacity of relevant stakeholders, including government authorities and civil society, and the timely provision of technical support will be priorities. UNHCR will aim to support the development of protection networks to better identify, refer, document and respond to specific needs of persons of concern in countries of origin, transit and destination, including regular monitoring and evaluation, in particular to prevent and respond to instances of *refoulement*.

Build Asylum Systems

- In countries of transit and asylum;
- Ensure access to fair and efficient asylum procedures;
- Reduce risk of *refoulement*;
- Improve conditions of reception.

Protection during displacement

- Establish a “safety net” system to ensure that persons at heightened risk in countries of origin and transit are identified and assisted as appropriate.
- Facilitate resettlement and humanitarian evacuation options, where appropriate.

Solutions

- Support local integration capacity in countries of transit and asylum;
- Strengthen livelihoods and urban refugee programming;
- Facilitate humanitarian evacuation options.

Operational response

In 2015, UNHCR strengthened its operational presence in the three countries of the NTCA to better respond to emerging protection needs. The Office continues to undertake capacity building and provide technical advice to authorities in Mexico, in particular on child protection and refugee status determination. Over the next three years, UNHCR is aiming to progressively reinforce its presence in the NTCA countries and Mexico, including in areas of return, and to broaden its presence in Belize, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Panama, and the United States of America.

Through this protection and solutions strategy, UNHCR will support States to develop legal frameworks and policies that improve protection standards and safeguards, and strengthen refugee status determination systems. The Office will also work to improve country of origin information and produce guidance to assist decision makers in determining whether asylum claims from nationals of the NTCA countries are well founded.

UNHCR will seek to ensure that those who may be in need of international protection have informed access to fair and efficient asylum systems that are in line with international standards, and that they are protected from *refoulement*. Once recognized, UNHCR will advocate ensuring that the rights of refugees are respected, in accordance with the relevant regional and international law.

UNHCR will support efforts to strengthen mechanisms to identify and assist persons with specific needs, in particular children, but also other groups at risk (including: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people; survivors of sexual and gender-based violence; victims of trafficking; indigenous people; and people of African descent) in all countries, and to improve reception conditions for asylum-seekers and deportees. A regular monitoring and evaluation mechanism will be established to support efforts to prevent and respond to *refoulement*.

UNHCR will establish an information gathering and profiling system to collect and analyse data on displacement trends and the groups at risk, with a view to refining strategies for addressing root causes of displacement and improving responses.

The Office will continue to work closely with relevant line ministries and immigration authorities in the region. Government institutions responsible for child protection will also be key partners because of the heightened vulnerability of displaced children and the high numbers of UASCs travelling through the region in an irregular manner.

Persons who have been returned to their countries of origin from abroad may become internally displaced or seek to depart again, creating a pattern of multiple displacement. In countries of origin, UNHCR will seek to establish mechanisms to prevent and address situations of internal displacement in a solutions-oriented manner, and to assist States to address the root causes of flight in cooperation with development and institution building actors.

Regional partnerships and coordination

UNHCR will seek to strengthen the inter-agency response to displacement in the region and to ensure cooperation and coordination with governments, civil society, UN agencies, regional bodies, and persons of concern.

The Office entered into a cooperation agreement in 2014 with the Central American Integration System (SICA), the institutional framework of regional integration in Central America based in El Salvador and funded by Central American States, to facilitate the implementation of various programmes under the Brazil Plan of Action. UNHCR will continue to participate in the Regional Conference on Migration (Puebla Process), a multilateral regional forum on international migration, to advocate for refugee protection, provide technical advice, and support the implementation of projects to address displacement and protection challenges.

UNHCR also works closely with the United Nations Development Group in Latin America and the Caribbean, alongside UN Resident Coordinators, to ensure UN coordination on protection issues in the region. Inter-agency Protection Task Forces and Protection Groups have been established in El Salvador and Honduras to coordinate the efforts of UN and other international organizations, including UNICEF, UNFPA, ICRC and IOM, to respond to protection and humanitarian needs in the region.

FINANCIAL SUMMARY

A total of **USD 23.5 million** is requested for the Protection and Solutions Strategy for the Northern Triangle of Central America in 2016, including USD 4.9 million in additional requirements above the already-approved 2016 ExCom Budget related to the Strategy.

Operation	2016 ExCom Budget related to the Strategy (USD)	Additional requirements (USD)	Total requirements (USD)
Costa Rica	3,137,115	277,300	3,414,415
Mexico	5,328,026	1,846,720	7,174,746
Panama*	9,980,684	2,225,252	12,205,936
United States of America	162,083**	549,890	711,973
TOTAL	18,607,908	4,899,162	23,507,070

* Includes activities in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama.

** ExCom Budget; includes activities in Belize only.

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