

Response to arrivals of asylum-seekers from the North of Central America

14 November 2018 12h00

Since mid-October several **organized groups of people from the North of Central America region**, Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador, have been traveling north in hope of reaching Mexico and the United States. In Mexico, there are approximately 7,000-9,000 people in these groups, currently spread out between Veracruz and Baja California. Among them are people **fleeing persecution and violence** and in need of **international protection**. Many are vulnerable and in need of **humanitarian assistance**, including women and around 2,300 children. Newborn babies, pregnant women, elderly people and people with disabilities have also been identified. Most are exhausted, many are suffering foot injuries. The groups, widely referred to as “caravans”, can be divided into three main and various smaller groups. **UNHCR supports national and local authorities; provides information and supports facilitation of access to the Mexican asylum system; and provides humanitarian assistance to those who sought asylum. Additional resources and staff are being mobilized** along the routes. The situation and the size of the various “caravans”, evolves daily. As of 13 November 2018, the situation is as follows:

The “**first caravan**” arrived in Mexico on 18 October and is currently moving, spread out in groups of 500-2,000 people, moving north, mainly towards Tijuana, crossing the states of Jalisco, Nayarit, and Sinaloa. The groups consist of nationals mainly from **Honduras** but also **El Salvador and Guatemala**. Federal authorities estimate the total size of these groups around **4,600 people**, amongst them many **young families** and over 400 children.

The “**second caravan**”, according to the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH), also consists of all **three NCA nationalities**, with a majority being **Honduran** and is estimated at **1,050 people** with approximately 95% of them being young men. The group, fleeing violence and poverty, has arrived in **Mexico City**.

The “**third caravan**” is, according to the CNDH, estimated at approximately **1,500 people**, mainly young men, with a majority of people from **El Salvador**. The “third caravan” began to arrive in **Mexico City**, where it merges with the “second caravan” joined by yet another group of approximately **400 people**, whose composition is currently being identified.

HIGHLIGHTS

3,331 people from the “caravans” have sought asylum in Mexico.

An additional **105** people have been pre-registered for asylum in Mexico City.

533 asylum-seekers have withdrawn their applications (this leads to return to their country of origin).

36 contractors have been trained and deployed to COMAR to support with asylum registration.

UNHCR and partners **doubled its shelter capacity** for asylum seekers by **448** spaces and are currently developing a contingency plan to further increase the capacity by around 1,500 spaces in strategic locations across Mexico.



UNHCR staff informs people in need of International Protection about the Mexican asylum system, Mexico City, 08 Nov 2018.

UNHCR Presence

Offices, Mexico

- Mexico City
- Tapachula
- Tenosique
- Acayucan
- Saltillo

ADDITIONAL STAFF

International emergency response team mobilized

5 additional international and **7** national staff deployed in **Tapachula**

6 staff roving from field unit in **Acayucan**.

7 additional international staff deployed in **Mexico City**

4 additional staff in **Guadalajara**

2 additional staff in Tijuana

Main Activities

- On 18 October 2018, the arrival day of the first “caravan”, the **Government of Mexico requested UNHCR support** in particular to **address the situation of asylum-seekers**, in coordination with relevant authorities. UNHCR agreed to assist in responding to the situation by providing information to people in the “caravans” on access to asylum procedures; enhancing COMAR capacity, in particular for registration; providing assistance to asylum seekers through shelters and cash-based humanitarian assistance; and providing support for durable solutions. **UNHCR Mexico scaled up operations** in Chiapas, Oaxaca, Veracruz and Mexico City and is now also present in Guadalajara and Tijuana.



Locations of migrants and asylum-seekers of the “caravans” and UNHCR offices

Protection

Measures undertaken by UNHCR aim at identifying, processing and assisting people in need of international protection. This includes, *inter alia*:

- **Increasing capacity of COMAR** to register and process claims. 36 contractors have been seconded to COMAR in order to support registration in Tapachula. Additional secondees are being deployed to support COMAR in Mexico City, Acayucan and Tenosique. UNHCR held a training in Mexico City for COMAR staff to scale up their capacity to process asylum claims.
- **Strengthening UNHCR protection response capacity**, including through more concerted coordination with legal aid partners along the “caravan” routes in Chiapas, Oaxaca, Veracruz and Mexico City and Guadalajara.
- **Identifying specific needs** through protection desks at strategic points on the routes and referral to specialised services, including for children and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. UNHCR has interviewed over 450 cases of persons with specific needs and **referred them to the appropriate service providers** in Chiapas, Oaxaca, Veracruz and Mexico City.
- **Disseminating information on seeking asylum in Mexico** to persons in need of international protection at strategic points along the routes. Over 6,000 people have been informed on the asylum procedures verbally and through dissemination of information materials. UNHCR’s efforts have complemented those undertaken by the National Human Rights Commission and civil society partners. Individual counselling is being provided on an *ad hoc* basis.
- **Providing a Facebook page (www.facebook.com/ConfiaEnElJaguar)** for people in search of **international protection** jointly with the National Human Rights Commission, COMAR, IOM, UNODC and UNICEF.
- **Distributing stickers** with information about the Facebook page. Over 800 stickers have been given out and are widely seen on clothes and bags of the asylum-seekers and migrants.
- **Providing connectivity** by exploring with local governments the possibility of installing free mobile WIFI points at the main shelters on the route. The Facebook help-page will be installed as the default landing page. Providing connectivity is a key protection tool, as it allows people on the move to contact family and friends and access information. It also provides a platform for the government, UNHCR and partners to share information on protection issues.
- **Providing a free telephone helpline** where people can seek support and information on international protection in Mexico: **Tel. 01800 226 8769**.
- **Distributing a step-by-step guide on claiming asylum in Mexico** that is widely distributed amongst government officials, partners and people on the move. The guide was jointly produced with COMAR and the National Human Rights Commission.



Shelter & cash-based assistance

- People traveling with the “caravans” are, once registered for asylum, transferred to specific shelters where they are being provided with orientation and assistance.
- UNHCR and its partners in Tapachula **doubled its shelter capacity to 962 shelter spaces**. 460 of these spaces are for most vulnerable cases such as pregnant women, survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and members of the LGBTI community.
- **2,040** asylum-seekers have received **Cash-Based Assistance** by UNHCR with a total amount of **3,8m MXN**, including for people who were released from detention, thereby enabling them to rent their own accommodation. This will gradually free up additional shelter space for new arrivals.
- **Structured referral mechanisms** developed by UNHCR registration staff are being implemented in various locations. These referral mechanisms are meant to meet specific needs of asylum-seekers with increased **protection needs**, such as SGBV survivors.

Durable Solutions

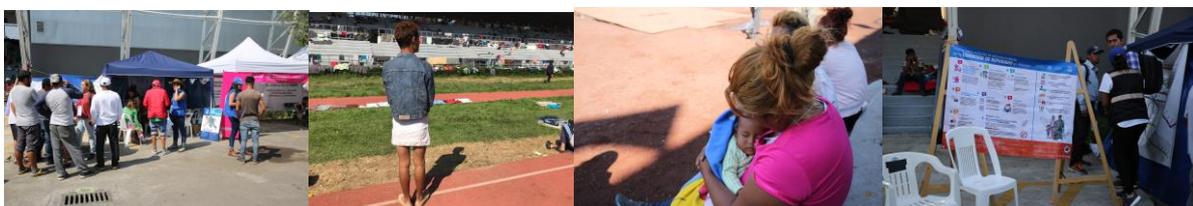
- UNHCR has the capacity to support **integration in the labor market through already existing integration programs**. This requires authorization by COMAR for each case and issuance of a provisional CURP. UNHCR is therefore **advocating for the Government of Mexico to expedite processing of documentation for refugees and asylum-seekers**, to **allow for relocation and local integration** within Mexico and ease pressure on services particularly in Chiapas State.
- UNHCR and the Ministry of Health are also joining efforts to **ensure inclusion of asylum-seekers and refugees to the Public Health Insurance**.



Working with partners and coordination

Given the mixed nature of these movements and the complexity of the situation, UNHCR coordinates its activities together with the relevant government entities, the International Organization for Migration, other agencies inside and outside the UN system, including ICRC, the civil society, faith-based organizations, the private sectors and others as relevant. This collaboration aims at a **whole of government and whole of society response**, achieved in line with the Regional Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (**MIRPS**).

- Providing **support to COMAR and the National Population Registry (RENAPO) with registration of asylum-seekers**, including emergency equipment and supporting deployments of staff to Tapachula and Mexico City. UNHCR has seconded an additional **11 contractors to COMAR in Mexico City, increasing the total number to 36**.
- Participating in **daily coordination meetings held by the Government** regarding the reception of the “caravans” in Mexico City. UNHCR provided authorities and participants in the meeting with information material on the Mexican asylum system.
- UNHCR convenes a **working group on international protection in Tapachula** that brings together UNICEF, IOM and civil society organisations present in the area. The working group regularly identifies and assesses protection concerns and develops plans to overcome them, together with authorities, including e.g. around child protection, detention, SGBV.
- UNHCR continues to work with INM and ICRC to identify individuals who have been separated from their families and seek **family reunification**.
- On 8 November, **IOM, OHCHR and the UNHCR** issued a **joint statement on the mandates and role of engagement with the “caravans”**: <http://mexico.iom.int/publicaciones>, following a demonstration by members of the “caravan”, requesting the UN agencies to provide busses. This request was rejected by the UN agencies, pursuant to their respective mandates.



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