

Central America and Mexico

Operational Update | September 2021

Regional context

Economic, social and environmental factors compounded with unabated violence are behind the increasing flows of refugees and migrants from/through **Central America** and **Mexico**. Increasing mixed and onward movements across the region have intensified during the period. In **Panama**, according to migration authorities, 91,305 people have crossed the Darien Gap so far this year (20,944 during September alone). Routes are increasingly risky and since May, 180 cases of rape have been documented according to [Doctors Without Borders](#) reports. At least 50 bodies have been recovered in Darien in 2021, based on reports from forensic and investigative authorities.

More than 15,000 people, mostly from Haiti, but also from Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua, congregated at a makeshift camp under the Del Rio International Bridge in Texas (**United States**). UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, warned that mass expulsions without proper screening of individuals for protection needs may [contravene international law](#) and constitute forced returns.

As of the end of September, almost 19,000 people, mainly Haitians, were stuck in Necoclí, on the north coast of Colombia, waiting to board boats to **Panama**. Governments of **Costa Rica**, **Panama** and the Dominican Republic [called for a joint solution for Haiti](#) and requested the international community to support their efforts to urgently adopt comprehensive solutions, within a framework of respect for dignity and human rights.

Between January and September 2021, 91,765 people applied for asylum in **Mexico**. Only in September, 12,994 asylum claims were filed, 4,688 of which were filed in Chiapas alone (72% correspond to Haitian nationals). As shelter capacity at Mexico's northern border exceeds its limit, homelessness is becoming an increasing issue for new asylum-seekers in Mexico. Some of these individuals are forced to sleep on the floor and without access to showers or toilets.

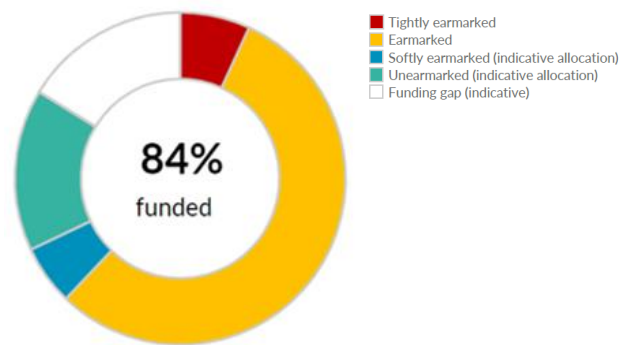
As presidential elections approach in **Nicaragua**, the number of people fleeing the country increases, both to **Costa Rica** and through **Honduras**. In Costa Rica, the number of appointments to formalize asylum claims that have gone from 7,000 in July to over 13,000 in September. The electoral process continues to be under scrutiny from both national and international critics, who report human rights and civil liberties abuses, and socio-political instability.

UNHCR [welcomed](#) United States President Biden's proposal to raise the target for refugee resettlement in the coming fiscal year to 125,000 people, including beneficiaries from **Central America**.

FUNDING (as of 19 October)

USD 178.1 M

requested for **North of Central America** situation in 2021



DON'T MISS...



Honduras. Social worker wins UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award regional prize for the Americas.

Santiago Ávila, Director of *Jóvenes Contra la Violencia (JCV)*, is pictured at a safe space in Choloma, a city near San Pedro Sula. "I felt it was cowardly to just leave without trying to do something for others," said Santiago, who added he was driven by a need to "try to save the lives of young people". Since 2020, the group *Jóvenes contra la Violencia* has been a UNHCR partner, spearheading youth programmes in schools and communities across Honduras. © UNHCR/Nicolo Filippo Rosso

- o [VIDEO: Honduran man devotes life to rescuing young people from deadly gangs](#)

(MIRPS) COMPREHENSIVE REGIONAL PROTECTION AND SOLUTIONS FRAMEWORK

- Honduras' National Technical Team and the Technical Secretariat of the **MIRPS** -UNHCR and the Organization of American States- prepared the work plan for the takeover of the pro tempore presidency to be held by Honduras in 2022.

COORDINATION WITH LOCAL & NATIONAL GOVERNMENT / STRENGTHENING INSTITUTIONS

- In coordination with the Ministry of Health and the Migration Authority of **Costa Rica**, UNHCR is issuing a certificate so asylum-seekers awaiting provisional documents can access COVID-19 vaccination. UNHCR published a guide on how to obtain this certificate.
- In **Panama**, UNHCR trained 25 human rights officers of the Ombudsman's Office and 30 instructors from different academies or teaching directorates of public security institutions (including SENAFRONT, SENAN, National Police, and the National Migration Service) on international protection. UNHCR also participated in the second CONARE meeting of 2021, where refugee status was granted to six Venezuelans on the basis of family reunification.
- UNHCR finished the renovation of three premises of the Prosecutor's Office in La Libertad, San Miguel and Ahuachapán (**El Salvador**). Improvements in audience rooms, restrooms and waiting areas are part of UNHCR's efforts to support the government in providing confidential and safe spaces for children who require legal services.
 - **READ:** [Municipal policy for the comprehensive protection of children and adolescents in El Salvador](#)
- As a result of a joint exercise with UNCHR to identify abandoned properties in urban areas, the Property Institute registered 20 abandoned properties in Tegucigalpa (**Honduras**).
- UNHCR took part in the development of the 2030 state plan for Nuevo León (**Mexico**) in collaboration with the *Consejo Nuevo León para la Planeación Estratégica* where for the first time, refugees and asylum seekers were included as part of strategic actions and monitoring activities under the social development chapter. This development plan is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals and the state government is bound to implement programs that address this plan and the needs of persons of concern in the state.

PROTECTION (INCL. CBP AND SGBV)

- In **Belize**, UNHCR provides legal assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers through a mobile legal clinic. Gender-based violence survivors, including sexual violence and victims of xenophobia were legally supported.

- In Peten (**Guatemala**) at the border with Mexico, 48 solar lamps were installed along the main transit routes to increase security and prevent incidents of gender-based violence against people in transit and members of the host community. Forty-two local residents were trained on the maintenance of the lamps.
- In **Honduras**, UNHCR disseminated videos and graphic materials to raise awareness on disability, protection and forced displacement, and also adapted audiobooks and classes with audio equipment to promote inclusion of people with visual disabilities.
 - **RESEARCH:** [Gender-based violence generates forced displacement in Honduras](#)
- With the support of UNHCR, 16 additional spaces to be used as interview rooms were created in Tapachula (**Mexico**) and COMAR was able to start accelerated RSD procedures for nationals of Haiti and Cuba. The accelerated RSD process reduces to five hours the time between registration and the RSD interview.
- In **Panama**, UNHCR delivered a training on human rights, gender-based violence prevention, community-based conflict resolution, and leadership skills to 22 asylum-seekers and refugees.

CHILD PROTECTION

- Forcibly displaced people and community organizations strengthen their relationships through peaceful coexistence initiatives for the integration of refugees and asylum-seeker children in nine communities at Los Chiles canton (**Costa Rica**).
- In **El Salvador**, UNHCR renovated two child friendly spaces in Sensuntepeque and San Salvador to provide legal, psychological, and humanitarian assistance to children displaced by violence or in danger of being displaced. Also, UNHCR finished the renovation of three schools in San Miguel and La Unión departments.
- In **Honduras**, UNHCR completed a one-week mission with the Coalition Against the Involvement of Children and Young People in Armed Conflict in Colombia (COALICO) to provide technical assistance and strengthen the response on child recruitment and use in contexts of generalized violence.
- With the participation of COMAR, Public Education Secretary, Save the Children and UNHCR, [Justicia TV focused its weekly broadcast](#) on "Education on the integration process of refugees in **Mexico**".
- In **Panama**, UNHCR trained 16 public-school teachers on forced displacement, human rights, basic principles of protection and timely referral mechanisms for asylum-seekers, aimed at building safer, more inclusive and peaceful schools.
 - **READ** [the press release: Critical gaps in refugee education: two thirds of refugee youth might never get to secondary school](#)

INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION

- **El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and México** welcomed the [Comprehensive Development Plan](#), prepared by the UN and presented by ECLAC, to address the structural causes of irregular migration with a development and integration perspective. UNHCR participated in its preparation to include a broad vision of human mobility in the subregion.
- The UN Country Team signed the [Cooperation Framework with the Government of El Salvador](#) for the period 2022-2026, which includes among its priorities and outcomes the protection of refugees, internally displaced persons, and other people of concern to UNHCR. Reference is made to the MIRPS and the Global Compact on Refugees.
- IOM, UNICEF and UNHCR organized an interagency mission in Ciudad Acuña (**Mexico**) to assess the situation of the Haitian population part of mixed movements.
 - [READ](#) the joint statement by UNHCR, IOM, UNICEF, OHCHR calling for protection measures and a comprehensive regional approach for Haitians on the move

DELIVERY OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE & CASH

- In **Belize**, 113 people received food, documentation, education, health, and psychosocial support.
- In **El Salvador**, the UNHCR-led Protection Cluster discussed the coordination of cash assistance by different actors to ensure efficiency. In September, 1,397 individuals obtained humanitarian assistance through unconditional cash transfers to meet basic needs.
- In **Guatemala**, 610 individuals part of mixed movements received basic health care and reproductive health kits at the information and orientation centre in Santa Elena, Peten. In El Ceibo, basic health services, shelter, psychological first aid or hygiene kits are provided to people crossing from Mexico. In addition, 1,127 refugees and Guatemalans at risk received cash assistance in September.
 - [READ](#) the fact sheet on cash assistance in Guatemala

- UNHCR distributed water tanks in communities of Tegucigalpa (**Honduras**) as part of the strategy to strengthen humanitarian access while contributing to COVID-19 related needs. Some 225 families living in Nueva Capital, San Buena Ventura and Pedregal, among Tegucigalpa's most violent areas, benefited from 225 water tanks of 250 litres capacity each.
- UNHCR donated 5,000 blankets to the Migratory Reception Centre in Chiriquí (**Panama**) to support people at heightened risk who must stay in the shelter for a longer time due to illnesses or lack of resources to continue their transit.

DURABLE SOLUTIONS & LIVELIHOODS

- In **Costa Rica**, the first group of 20 refugees and asylum-seekers from the *Empléate* program obtained a certified training diploma for work on Cable and Satellite TV installation; seven of them have been hired by the company SETEO. Walmart, in coordination with UNHCR, launched a campaign for refugees and asylum-seekers to apply for job openings online.
- In **El Salvador**, 65 IDPs and young people at risk began vocational training courses certified by the Salvadoran Institute for Professional Training (INSAFORP), that adds to the 360 people who have already received financial support for skills training to improve their prospects of obtaining formal employment.
- In **Guatemala**, as part of its livelihood strategy, UNHCR reached an agreement with online training site CREHANA to provide 100 scholarships for asylum-seekers and refugees in Guatemala and their host communities, who received tablets to ensure access to the courses.
- Twenty-two delegates from the American Chamber of Commerce in **Panama** led a forum on the socio-economic inclusion of refugees and migrants, which may inform future awareness-raising initiatives for their staff.
 - [VIDEO](#): Challenges and opportunities for the private sector regarding the integration of refugees and migrants in Panama

The importance of flexible funding for UNHCR's situations

Flexible financial support allows UNHCR to place funds anywhere within a given situation, in line with the office's priorities, from where people in need are forced to flee, to where they find refuge. Flexible funding needs to be timely for UNHCR to plan in the most efficient manner, allocating to priorities first.

UNHCR's humanitarian response in **Central America and Mexico** is made possible thanks to the generous support of major donors who have contributed unrestricted funding to UNHCR's global operations, and to donors who have generously contributed directly to **UNHCR Americas operations**.

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CONTACTS: **Sonia Giannone**, Senior Donor Relations Officer, giannone@unhcr.org | **Sibylla Brodzinsky**, Communications Officer, brodzins@unhcr.org | **Vanessa Villalibre**, Associate Reporting Officer, villalib@unhcr.org

CENTRAL AMERICA and MEXICO
 PERSONS OF CONCERN as of End 2020
