

Central America and Mexico

Operational Update | August 2021

Regional context

Ongoing multidimensional crises affecting **El Salvador**, **Guatemala** and **Honduras** coupled with a significant increase in humanitarian needs amid complex socio-economic situation has led to the development of Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs) for each of the countries. Almost 8.3 million people across the three countries are in need of humanitarian assistance (25% of the total population). Violence and displacement are outlined as relevant dimensions of the crises in these Central American countries, as well as food insecurity and climate related shocks.

The region is facing rising political instability. In **Honduras**, distrust towards the electoral process was reflected during the final registration of candidates, which ended in security incidents. So far, at least 12 homicides are linked to the electoral process, in addition to cases of threats and coercion, according to the [National Observatory of Violence](#). In **El Salvador**, constitutional reforms promoted by the government and the use of Bitcoin as legal tender have received mixed reactions.

In **Costa Rica**, the Directorate of Migration reports increasing numbers of new appointments to file asylum claims by Nicaraguans. Between January and August 2021, a total of 44,445 Nicaraguan asylum-seekers had expressed their intention to seek asylum in Costa Rica while 23,183 have already formalized their claims in 2021.

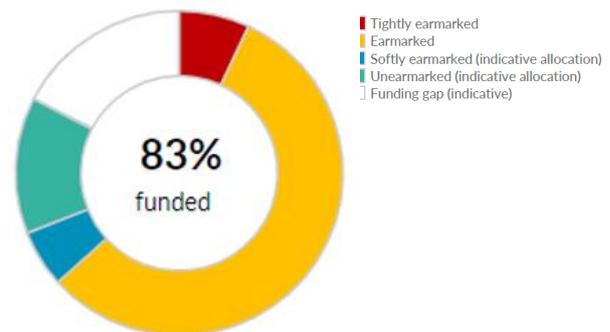
The operation to end the MPP ("Remain in **Mexico**") programme was brought to a halt following a ruling from the U.S. Supreme Court requiring the U.S. government to "implement the Migrant Protection Protocols policy in good faith". In **Mexico**, August has seen a dramatic rise in asylum claims by nationals from Haiti, surpassing Honduras as the country with most asylum claims. Between January and August, 77,321 people have applied for asylum in the country. Nearly 83% of all asylum-seekers stranded in the Mexican states bordering the United States reported that they had been the victim of violence or threats, according to a report compiled by [Human Rights First](#). Most Haitians arriving in Mexico are part of onward movements from Chile and Brazil.

In **Panama**, according to migratory authorities, 70,376 people have crossed the Darien Gap so far this year (25,361 during August alone) mostly Haitians, followed by an increasing presence of Venezuelans, Cubans, and people from Asian and African countries. According to the Commission for Women, Children, Youth, and the Family of the National Assembly, they have been victims of robberies, assaults, and rapes in at least 170 cases currently under investigation by the Public Ministry.

FUNDING (as of 5 October)

USD 174.7 M

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



DON'T MISS...



Guatemala. Assistant High Commissioner Gillian Triggs' visit. UNHCR, with the Secretariat Against Sexual Violence, Exploitation and Trafficking in Persons (SVET), inaugurated a project to address these crimes through six "UNIVET" mobile units that will be operating in different parts of the country. The UNIVETs will promote prevention of sexual and gender-based violence, exploitation, and human trafficking, and will provide information, counselling and referral services for survivors and persons at risk of gender-based violence. © UNHCR/Tito Herrera

- **READ** the press release: [With mobile units, the aim is to prevent sexual violence, exploitation and human trafficking](#)

(MIRPS) COMPREHENSIVE REGIONAL PROTECTION AND SOLUTIONS FRAMEWORK

- During the **IV MIRPS virtual meeting**, states discussed the recommendations of the Working Group on Access to Labour and Professional Training, which include the development of a regional guide on hiring displaced persons to facilitate the economic inclusion of refugees and asylum-seekers. Advocacy with the private sector and other stakeholders to join this initiative has begun, following examples of national guides developed in Mexico and Colombia, which is a member of the MIRPS Support Platform.
- The **Working Group on Internal Displacement** focused on the promotion of participation of displaced women and girls to guarantee gender equality through a multi-stakeholder approach.
- The Secretariat of Foreign Affairs informed UNHCR that **Honduras** is prepared to take up the next MIRPS Pro Tempore Presidency in 2022.

COORDINATION WITH LOCAL & NATIONAL GOVERNMENT / STRENGTHENING INSTITUTIONS

- In **Belize**, UNHCR trained 224 police recruits on human rights, police ethics and use of force, rights of refugees and non-nationals, and domestic violence. In **Panama**, training on statelessness and international protection was delivered to 35 instructors from the academies and teaching directorates of local authorities, including public security forces and the National Migration Service.
- The Refugee Unit of the Migration Directorate in **Costa Rica** started a campaign with UNHCR support to call asylum-seekers with a previous appointment (more than 500 calls per day) speeding up the processes related to asylum requests, renewal of asylum-seeker documentation, and work permits.
- Furniture and recreational materials were donated to three youth community centres in **El Salvador**, called CUBOs, to support community-based protection mechanisms being implemented by the Ministry of Justice and Security.
- In **Honduras**, migration authorities, jointly with the government agency for disaster preparedness and response (COPECO) installed two Refugee Housing Units (RHU) donated by UNHCR for reception, registration, and identification of needs of people forming part of mixed movements.
- The first community centre dedicated to peaceful coexistence in Tijuana (**Mexico**) was inaugurated by municipal authorities and UNHCR to provide information on the right to seek asylum and support refugees and asylum-seekers with psychosocial services and assistance in using online tools to request

identity documents, pre-register for asylum applications or to apply for jobs.

- [READ](#) the story of Venezuelan refugee mothers starting over in northern Mexico.

PROTECTION (INCL. CBP AND SGBV)

- To strengthen health outreach activities in refugee hosting areas of southern **Belize**, UNHCR donated 13 bicycles to facilitate the transport of community healthcare workers to remote areas and supplies for COVID-19 related information dissemination (a projector, a tent, television screens, etc.).
- The Inter-Institutional Commission on Statelessness in **Costa Rica** launched the "You are not invisible" awareness campaign supported by UNHCR, including a [specific section on statelessness on the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#).
- In Izabal (**Guatemala**), UNHCR and partners carried out two "Welcome to Izabal" workshops with 27 newly arrived asylum-seekers to provide information on legal procedures, case management and services available in the department, including psychosocial support.
- In **Panama**, UNHCR's protection monitoring confirms that access to basic needs as well as to documentation and regularization programmes are the main priorities for asylum-seekers and refugees.
 - [READ](#) the press release: [Unprecedented displacement in Central America and Mexico calls for urgent regional responsibility sharing](#)

CHILD PROTECTION

- In **Costa Rica**, UNHCR launched [the call for proposals "Somos una comunidad"](#) regarding cultural or sporting activities contributing with integration of refugees and asylum-seeker children in their communities. The best proposal will receive support from UNHCR to cover the costs of the activity (transportation, food, rent, materials, etc.).
- In **El Salvador**, 91 unaccompanied children and 81 children with their families were provided food and psychosocial support during reception processes.
- In **Guatemala**, refugees, asylum seeker children and schoolteachers received 258 tablets to support remote access to education and vocational training for adults. All people were trained on the usage of the tablets.
- In response to the needs identified by the community, a soccer field and basketball court were inaugurated in **Panama's** Colon Province, where there is a significant presence of asylum-seekers and refugees.
 - [WINNERS: 2021 youth with refugees art contest. Together through sport.](#)

INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION

- HRPs were launched in **El Salvador, Guatemala** and **Honduras**. UNHCR, as Protection Cluster lead, assured the inclusion of protection-oriented and Age Gender and Diversity approaches in projects. To support the implementation of the HRPs, UNHCR requires US\$33 million for El Salvador, US\$45 million for Guatemala and US\$36 million for Honduras.
- The UN Development Cooperation Frameworks were signed in **Guatemala** and **Honduras** for the next four years, including asylum-seekers and refugees among the prioritized population.
- UNHCR and IOM's campaigns "Respiramos Miskitu" (**Honduras**) and "Somos Lo Mismo" (**Panama**) promote peaceful coexistence in host communities. A [video](#) released in Panama surpassed 57,300 views during the first month.
- In Baja California and Sonora (**Mexico**), UNHCR coordinates an interagency response to support authorities and civil society to improve reception arrangements and provide humanitarian assistance and information on asylum to people in mixed movements.

DELIVERY OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE & CASH

- In **Belize**, 199 individuals with protection needs have received food assistance, documentation, education, health, and psychosocial support.
- The Upala municipality in **Costa Rica** welcomed a donation of 800 bars of soaps and 120 jerry cans, while three development associations in the north of Costa Rica received 300 mattresses and 212 blankets.
- In **El Salvador**, 1,397 individuals obtained humanitarian assistance through unconditional cash transfers to meet basic needs.

- In El Ceibo and other locations in the department of Peten (**Guatemala**), over 5,100 people received basic healthcare, information, shelter, water, psychological assistance and personal protective equipment (PPE).
- UNHCR distributed hygiene and PPE to 300 families in three communities at high risk of displacement in Tegucigalpa (**Honduras**).

DURABLE SOLUTIONS & LIVELIHOODS

- In **Belize**, 71 people of concern to UNHCR improved livelihoods opportunities due to their participation in courses on woodwork, music and entrepreneurship. A summer program with activities on environmental protection and drug and alcohol abuse was delivered to 39 young people in host communities.
- In **El Salvador**, the program 'My First Job' finished the hiring phase with a total of 349 internally displaced persons and at-risk youth hired as apprentices by businesses for a six-month period.
- In the Rivera Hernández sector, a prioritized area in San Pedro Sula (**Honduras**) with high rates of violence, 25 young people and adult community leaders started a 'soft skills' training to improve the access to livelihoods opportunities.
- As of 3 September, 4,118 people have been relocated in **Mexico** as part of the relocation program in 2021.
- In **Panama**, 10 refugee and local entrepreneurs showcased their projects to potential sponsors and buyers during a "Demo Day".
- In **Guatemala**, a letter of understanding was signed with the Labour Ministry to contribute to the inclusion of refugees and facilitate their access to services.
 - [VIDEO: how to obtain a work permit in Guatemala](#)

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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CENTRAL AMERICA and MEXICO
 PERSONS OF CONCERN as of End 2020
