

Central America & Cuba

Bi-weekly Operational Update

Operations: Regional context

Measures to curb the spread of COVID-19 in Central America and Cuba continue affecting refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced people, most notably reflected in a sharp decrease in asylum claims across the region, difficulties in accessing health care and education, and an overall limitation in the ability to generate income. As infections continue to rise, the reactivation of national economies continues to be delayed, exacerbating the social and economic impact on asylum seekers and other people of concern, who are increasingly unable to afford rent payments or medicines. Some asylum seekers and refugees have expressed they feel compelled to return home as a mechanism to cope with their difficult economic situation. In Cuba, the situation is alarming due to the scarcity of medicines affecting the whole population. In coordination with UNHCR, the Cuban Red Cross is making efforts to trace medicines needed or to identify alternative treatments to address the patients' needs.

In order to prevent evictions, UNHCR

has reinforced mediation with landlords, and increased cash-based interventions across the region to help meet immediate needs. Thanks to UNHCR's advocacy, countries announced the extension of expired documentation related to asylum seekers for several months as a means to prevent refoulement.

UNHCR continues providing humanitarian assistance, including food, registration and medical care, and is proactively seeking partnerships with the private sector, as part of a collaboration with the MIRPS Support Platform and the OAS, to address the needs of refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons, returnees and other persons of concern in Central America.

The MIRPS working group on Internal Displacement has been established to provide a platform for government officials in the region to discuss and learn from experts on preventing and responding to internal displacement in line with international standards.

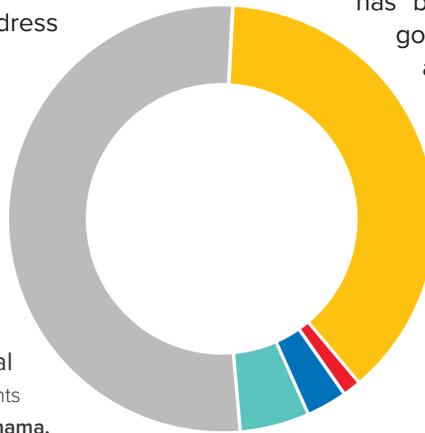
Regional funding overview as of 9 July 2020

127.1M

financial requirements for Central America for 2020 including requirements

for the operations and activities in **Panama, Belize, El Salvador, Cuba, Nicaragua, Honduras, Costa Rica, and Guatemala.**

For further details consult reporting.unhcr.org



47% funded

- Tightly earmarked
- Earmarked
- Softly earmarked (indicative allocation)
- Unearmarked (indicative allocation)
- Funding gap (indicative)

Thematic updates

UNHCR's partner COMCAVIS TRANS shared the results of the [report on internal displacement of LGBTI persons](#) in El Salvador, which measures the impact of internal displacement in 2019. The report indicates that 90% of 84 cases assisted by the organization were internally displaced persons, while 10% were deportees with protection needs. 45% were transgender women, followed by homosexual men (31%) and women (11%), and transgender men (6%). Only 50% presented an official complaint, mostly before the Attorney General of the Republic. Fear of reprisals against them or their family as well as a lack of trust in the authorities are the main reasons complaints or reports were not filed following incidents. Main agents responsible of the displacement were

identified to be gangs (62%) and civil national police (21%, increasing 4% in comparison to 2018). 37% of the victims were directly threatened, 18% suffered an injury and were victims of extortion, while the rest indicated attempted murders, attempted kidnappings, rapes, as well as arbitrary detention by security forces. In many cases, a combination of various acts of violence was reported as the cause of forced displacement. [See more](#). When presenting the findings, Elisa Carlaccini, Head of Office in UNHCR El Salvador, outlined that 54,300 people from El Salvador applied for refugee status in 2019 worldwide, showing an increase of 16% in relation to 2018. At the end of 2019, 41,850 Salvadoran people were recognized as refugees (accounting for a 28.5% increase as compared to 2018) while 136,292 applications remained pending. [See more](#).

Update on country activities

GUATEMALA

32 social workers, psychologists and coordinators from UNHCR partners participated in a training session on IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support and UNHCR policies about working with persons with disabilities.

26 CBI cards were distributed in Guatemala as follows: 14 cards in Guatemala City, 1 in Huehuetenango, 9 in Izabal, and 2 in Quetzaltenango

UNHCR delivered a training on the protection of LGBTI persons to over 70 participants, including new staff from UNHCR's field offices and

partners in the field.

BELIZE

13 community leaders from Bella Vista and San Isidro in the south of the country learned about the asylum process and current refugee situation to facilitate referrals of newly arrived asylum seekers.

CUBA

As part of UNHCR advocacy efforts, 153 PoCs received ration cards and already started buying rationed goods, food and non-food items on the same basis as nationals and permanent residents.

NICARAGUA

Staff of UNHCR's partner CEPAD have returned to the office three times a week and assistance delivery continues on a bi-monthly basis.

EL SALVADOR

A sports field refurbishment in the community "Barrio Honduras" is ongoing to create and strengthen peaceful coexistence and friendly spaces for children, youth and families.

320 food kits were delivered to FUNDASAL and COMCAVIS TRANS to be distributed to internally displaced persons and individuals in at-risk communities affected by tropical storm Amanda and COVID-19.

HONDURAS

UNHCR hosted a training session on the installation of RHUs with 10 COPECO staff members who will lead the on-site installation efforts.

Mariposas Libres, a community-based women's organization, jointly with UNHCR partners Foro de Mujeres por la Vida and the Honduran Red Cross, distributed humanitarian assistance to 300 families from the garifuna (afro-descendant) community of Tornabe in Tela, carried out 20 outpatient medical consultations and 2 mental health and psychosocial support group sessions targeting 16 leaders.

COSTA RICA

40 hygiene kits were distributed during an outreach activity to provide food and health checkup to homeless persons in Upala. 68 CBI cards were delivered (61 of them through the Costa Rican Postal services) and 32 health insurance cards, food and hygiene kits were distributed to 18 families.

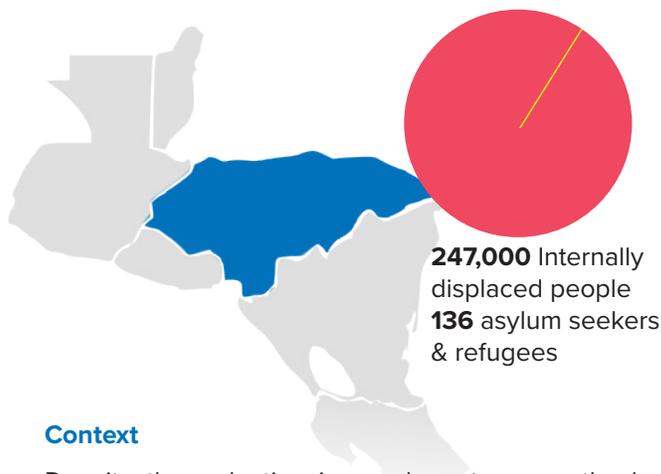
PANAMA

402 refugees and asylum seekers from Colombia, Nicaragua, Venezuela or El Salvador received information, orientation, and legal assistance services, including supporting 34 families with rent payments, and 424 CBI for food, health and medicine. Through partners, UNHCR provided psychosocial assistance to 52 refugees and asylum seekers and eviction-mediation for 9 families.



Check out testimonios.acnur.org to find out more about how displaced communities in the Americas are coping with the pandemic.

UNHCR Response in Honduras



Context

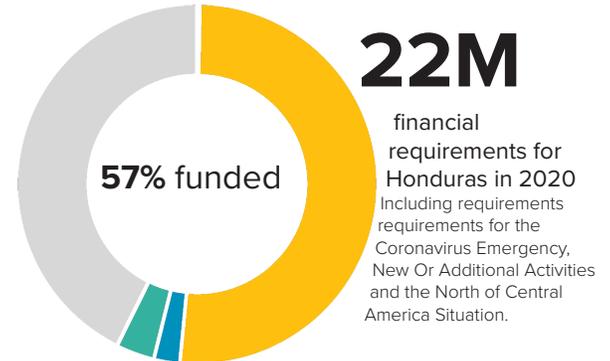
Despite the reduction in murder rates over the last three years, Honduras continues to experience serious security restrictions especially in areas under gang control. In 2019 there were 44.7 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants. Daily threats to life and limitations on freedoms are rampant. Killings and extortion are everyday occurrences for member of the general public, transport businesses and law enforcement officials. In this context, young men, women and teenagers are particularly vulnerable. Defying the gangs is extremely dangerous, often resulting in more violence or death.

This situation has left around 247,000 people internally displaced, many of whom have been forcibly displaced more than once. Following displacement, the economic, psychological and security situation of individuals and their families is likely to deteriorate. Access to education is largely disrupted by violence, with 46% of IDPs facing difficulties to continue their studies. Adult men and women are routinely forced to leave their jobs or sources of livelihoods, and experience reduced access to essential services.

Strengthened protection and referral mechanisms in communities at high risk is a priority, along with increased resilience, and a robust government through developing appropriate laws and policies on internal displacement. UNHCR is currently supporting the Government of Honduras (GoH) in the design and implementation of sectoral public policies (social inclusion, education, protection of children) to prevent and respond to internal displacement.

In 2017, Honduras was the first country in the Americas to pilot the CRRF, which later became the Regional Comprehensive Protection and Solutions Framework, MIRPS. This reflected the commitment of the GoH to strengthen their national protection systems through an integrated approach, as both a country of origin and refugee hosting nation, and a committed to responding to the protection needs of returning Hondurans, and those of internal displaced persons.

The draft law on the 'Prevention, Attention, and Protection of Internally Displaced People' has been under review by the Justice and Human Rights Commission within Congress since March 2019.



Despite COVID-related lockdowns, internally displaced people (IDPs) and community leaders report that criminal groups use the confinement to strengthen their control over communities. This includes the diversification of extortion strategies and related violence, drug trafficking and sexual and gender-based violence, forced disappearances, murders, and death threats against those that do not comply. Restrictions on movement limit the access of protection services, and those that need to flee to save their lives are facing increased hurdles to find safety.

UNHCR response and needs

UNHCR works with the Honduran government, partner organisations, civil society and community leaderships to strengthen protection and provide humanitarian assistance to the country's internally displaced people. This includes supporting the creation of conditions for the implementation of the draft law on IDPs, the establishment of a national registry of abandoned property as a result of forced displacement, implementing a comprehensive community-based protection strategy and providing training to hundreds of judges, amongst others. With protection concerns on the rise during the pandemic, UNHCR also provides remote counselling, and works with shelters for particularly high-risk cases. To help mitigate the impact of loss of income, UNHCR has scaled-up its cash assistance programmes to help IDPs meet basic needs such as food, medicines and housing.

Nevertheless, the funding gap is affecting UNHCR's capacity to address the growing protection and humanitarian needs of internally displaced people and those at risk of displacement, as well as returnees with protection needs. The impact of COVID-19 has compounded the humanitarian needs of all people of concern. Limited access to livelihoods has increased the needs for additional assistance. Current needs have surpassed the government's capacity in reception and shelter response, particularly amidst ongoing deportations. The prevention measures to curb the spread of COVID-19 has required the extensive provision of hygiene kits and personal protection equipment (PPE) for persons of concern (particularly returnees, people at heightened risk who require relocation, and those among mixed movements), for partners and UNHCR staff, as well as mobile/remote work equipment to adapt to the new operational context to stay and deliver in a safe manner.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD



Refugees and asylum seekers sew facemasks to help prevent a second wave of COVID-19 infections in Belize.

Coronavirus prevention measures are keeping Karla Hernandez* at home, but the restrictions have not kept her from giving back to her host country. The 31-year-old Honduran asylum seeker is putting her free time to use to sew potentially life-saving face masks, as part of a group of volunteers that's churning out over 100 masks daily.

"I am grateful to this country, it has given me a home after having fled my home," she said, adding, "I have a feeling of satisfaction knowing that my contribution will help to keep others safe from the pandemic."

With Latin America having emerged in recent days as the current global hotspot for COVID-19, the Belizean government left contagion-prevention measures in place. Those measures include a nation-wide curfew and the mandatory use of facemasks in public. With personal protective gear, including facemasks becoming increasingly hard to find across the country, Belizeans and refugees and asylum seekers are making the gear themselves.



[Read the full story](#)



In the next issue, a focus on the operation in El Salvador.

We thank the contributions of our donors

updated to 9 July 2020

UNHCR is grateful for the critical support provided by donors who have provided generous and timely support to the Coronavirus Emergency Situation globally, and countries in Central America, as well as those who have contributed to UNHCR programmes with unearmarked funding.



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UN COVID-19 MPTF

For more information, contact Gavin David White, Senior CRR Officer, at whiteg@unhcr.org