

Central America & Cuba

Bi-weekly Operational Update

Operations: Regional context

In Central America, despite movement restrictions and borders continuing to be closed, violence and persecution continue to heighten risks for people who are unable to receive protection. In northern Central America, displaced people and community leaders report criminal groups are using confinement to strengthen their control over neighbourhoods, intensifying extortion, drug trafficking, and sexual and gender-based violence.

Health and physical distancing measures to avoid the spread of COVID-19 continue to hamper economic activity, causing high levels of unemployment, particularly affecting refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced people and host communities, and increasing their vulnerabilities and their dependence on humanitarian assistance. The pandemic is also putting national and local health systems in Central America and Cuba under significant strain while tropical storms and hurricanes continue to threaten the region.

The rates of domestic violence, femicide, and sexual and gender-based violence are increasing during lockdown in the region, notably in El Salvador, where 1,158 women were assisted by ISDEMU, the majority between the ages of 26 and 59. The violent [murder of a transgender asylum seeker in Guatemala](#) highlights the urgent need for states to guarantee effective protection of all LGBTI

people in the region. The asylum seeker had fled gender-based violence and persecution by gangs in El Salvador, and UNHCR has called upon Guatemalan authorities to investigate the case and ensure justice. In El Salvador, three policemen were sentenced to 20 years in prison last week for the murder of a transgender person, Camila Díaz Córdova. This is the first ever conviction in El Salvador in a homicide of a transgender person.

In collaboration with local authorities in the region, UNHCR continues advocating for the enforcement of public policies that protect displaced persons, building the capacity of public officials, and strengthening case management of forcibly displaced persons. Mechanisms for case management of internally displaced children and LGBTI persons are being reinforced for the effective protection from abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation in Central America.

To strengthen the role of non-governmental organizations in the MIRPS process, a regional consultation took place between UNHCR, NRC and civil society representatives from regional States where perspectives on the national rollout of protection and solutions were shared and areas for increased coordination and collaboration were defined.

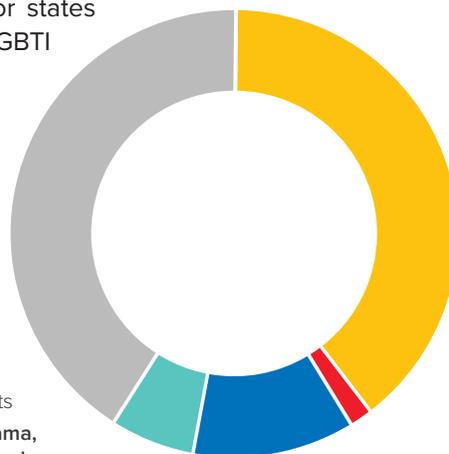
Regional funding overview

as of 4 August 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



59% funded

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

Update on country activities

GUATEMALA

33 CBI cards for refugees have been distributed (141 since CBI assistance began in early May)
45 frontline workers received training on the mental health and psychosocial needs of people on the move during COVID-19
12 RHUs were installed by the Jacaltenango Municipality, with the remote support of UNHCR

BELIZE

10 persons are currently receiving psychosocial counseling with the assistance of Humana People to People in Bella Vista Village
The Community Based Protection Network Volunteers of Bella Vista Village are distributing information about the asylum process and distributing facemasks

CUBA

CBI has been provided to the 153 POCs

NICARAGUA

Partner CEPAD continues to provide assistance to refugees and asylum seekers via phone and email

EL SALVADOR

120 persons were trained on child protection and the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence Usulután and San Miguel through the "Super Pilas" project
500 hygiene kits were delivered to Plan Trifinio and 700 hygiene kits to the Ministry of Culture to support vulnerable persons during the COVID-19 pandemic

HONDURAS

492 humanitarian assistance kits were delivered to the San Pedro Sula Municipality, benefiting 1,132 persons with physical and chronic health conditions from high-risk urban areas
A new psychologist was hired to apply psychological interviews and identify returnees with protection needs in a centre for deported children and family units

COSTA RICA

171 prepaid cards were delivered through the National Postal Service to refugees and asylum seekers
55 food kits and 36 cleaning kits were delivered house-to-house reaching 36 families

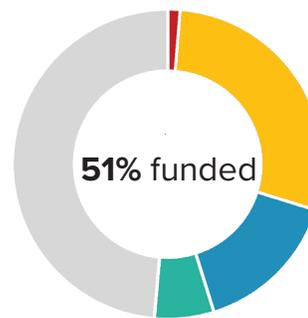
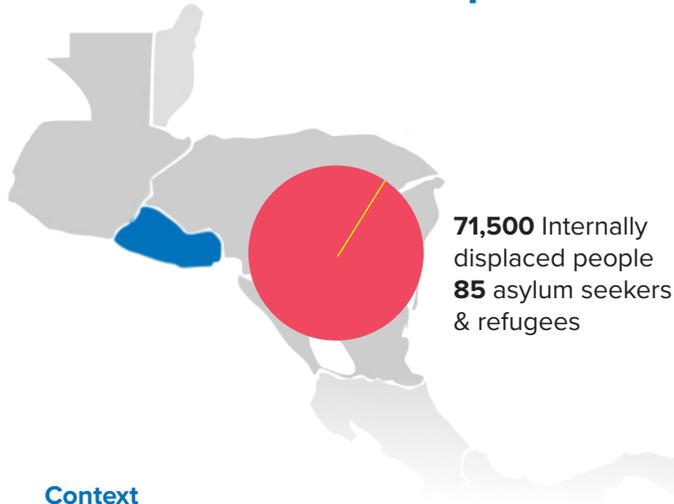
PANAMA

440 persons received information, orientation and legal assistance, and 123 persons were supported with rent payment to avoid evictions during the pandemic, in collaboration with partners
37 families representing 125 persons were provided CBI and 18 refugees received psychosocial assistance



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

UNHCR Response in El Salvador



43M

financial requirements for MCO Panama in 2020
Including requirements for the operation's regular programmes in Panama, Belize, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Cuba, Coronavirus Emergency, New Or Additional Activities, North of Central America Situation and the Venezuela Situation.

Context

The Global Peace Index has ranked El Salvador as 113th on a list of 163 countries. While there has been a decline in homicide rates, the National Civil Police has provided a preliminary figure of 2,374 murders in 2019. In addition, violence and persecution of LGBTI people in El Salvador has continued unabated, with at least 14 transgender people killed in 2018. UNHCR's partner COMCAVIS TRANS registered 84 cases of internal displacement, is illustrative of the violence that forces people to flee within and from El Salvador, with criminal gangs as one of the main perpetrators and limited state protection measures available. This is in addition to the 71,500 people estimated to have been internally displaced between 2006 and 2016.

Internal displacement often precedes flight across international borders, particularly when people are forced to flee internally on numerous occasions. 54,300 Salvadorans applied for refugee status in 2019 worldwide, an increase of 16% compared to 2018, and placing El Salvador as one of the top ten countries of origin for asylum seekers that year. At the end of 2019, 41,850 Salvadoran people were recognized as refugees (a 28.5% increase as compared to 2018) while 136,292 applications remained pending.

Ruling 411/2017 of the Supreme Court of Justice officially recognized internal forced displacement, which led to the passage of a special Law to protect, aid and offer durable solutions to people internally displaced early this year. This regulation, developed with UNHCR's support, describes the rights of internally displaced persons, including the right to humanitarian assistance, the protection of the family unity, an adequate standard of living, and durable solutions. It also establishes mechanisms to allow those affected by internal displacement to protect and reclaim property.

In 2019, El Salvador joined the Regional Comprehensive Protection and Solutions Framework (MIRPS), and participatory consultations were held with populations affected by violence, state institutions and other relevant actors to inform the development of a National Action Plan to oversee the implementation of national commitments.

UNHCR response and needs

With a presence in 38 prioritized communities, UNHCR's community-based interventions seek to mitigate protection risks, particularly impacting girls and boys, youth, SGBV survivors, LGBTI persons, among others affected by forced displacement. Through a protection-by-presence approach, UNHCR and partners implement concrete and visible projects that strengthens leaderships, dialogue with national institutions and develops resilience. The Agency also supports small-scale entrepreneurship initiatives to support, IDPs, deportees with protection needs and their hosts in becoming self-reliant, currently benefiting around 70 people.

Additionally, UNHCR works with faith-based organizations and other partners to provide safe spaces, shelter and basic humanitarian assistance to persons in need of protection. A network of 16 parishes and seven LGBTI community groups is also supported. Alongside the Ombudsperson's Office, the Agency provides a comprehensive protection response to internally displaced persons through the identification of cases and the provision of humanitarian assistance. Technical and financial assistance is also rendered to relevant institutions to strengthen the attention to IDPs and identify deportees with protection needs.

In response to the COVID-19 emergency, UNHCR has distributed 2,212 hygiene kits through local municipalities to support displaced persons, 1,800 hygiene and 2,000 food kits through government institutions to benefit vulnerable women, youth and children. The Agency has also provided humanitarian assistance to 319 families in nearly 80 communities in prioritized departments impacted by violence.

The funding gap is affecting UNHCR's capacity to enhance protection on issues related to housing, land and property. It also impacts the ability to provide adequate legal, psychological and material support to survivors of SGBV, women and girls, LGBTI people, children and elderly persons. Additional funding will help increase humanitarian assistance and cash support to displaced families who cannot meet their basic needs, particularly in the context of COVID-19, while strengthening support to SGBV survivors in reception centers, including legal and psychosocial assistance.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD



After fleeing violence, Salvadoran asylum seeker wins art contest in Europe

Having fled violence in San Salvador, Julio finally feels safe in Belgium. Drawing has helped him overcome the memories of danger that haunted him and his family in El Salvador. He described the drawing that turned him into the regional winner of UNHCR’s art contest for Europe as a moment of rebirth, after the challenges he had previously faced.

In February 2020, Julio and his wife sought asylum in Belgium, where his small daughter and sister can grow up in safety. “We had to leave our country because we were being threatened,” Julio mentioned, knowing that they probably would not have survived if they did not flee.

Like Julio and his family, nearly 250,000 Salvadorans have been displaced by violence, within the country or across borders. In 2019, El Salvador was among the top ten countries of origin of asylum seekers in the world. They are among some 790,000 people from northern Central America who have had no other choice but to flee brutal gang violence in their home countries.



To discover more about Julio’s drawing, visit our site.



In the next issue, a focus on the operation in Guatemala.

We thank the contributions of our donors

updated to 4 August 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.



UN COVID-19 MPTF

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