

Central America and Mexico

Operational Update | March 2021

Regional context

Population movements within and from **El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras** intensified in March, mostly comprising children and families travelling in small groups towards **Mexico and the United States of America (USA)**. Although a new large group movement, commonly referred to as a caravan, was called through social media, no massive movements were reported in March.

In **Mexico**, 22,637 people applied for asylum so far 2021 (6,533 in January, 7,028 in February, 9,079 in March). Claims registered in March represent the highest monthly number ever recorded. Honduran nationals have made 51% of the asylum claims.

The camp in Matamoros (**Mexico**) closed after UNHCR and partners facilitated registration and referral for entry to the USA of more than 600 people who were residing there. As of the end of March, 5,346 asylum seekers had been assisted by UNHCR and sister UN agencies to enter the USA under the **Migrant Protection Protocol - MPP** (or “Remain in Mexico”) at the USA-Mexico border.

Authorities reported 3,400 people in mixed movements are currently in migration reception centres in **Panama**. In the first three months of 2021, some 7,000 people have entered Panama across the jungle area in Darien.

For the first time since the pandemic was declared, **Mexico** announced to the closure of its border with **Belize and Guatemala** for all non-essential activities although cross-border flows persisted.

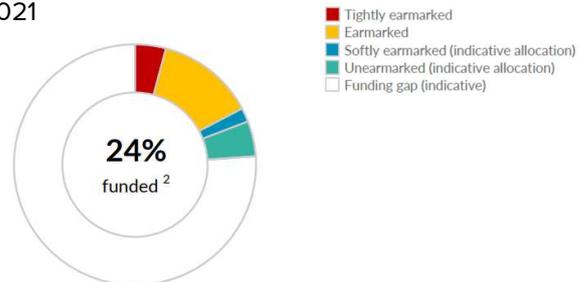
In **El Salvador**, six out of ten women have suffered sexual violence according to the first survey on sexual violence conducted by the General Directorate for Statistics and Censuses. Human rights defenders and leaders of Garifuna communities in **Honduras** have reportedly been arbitrarily detained, leading to demonstrations.

Almost four months after hurricanes Eta and Iota, about 500,000 people are still affected by limited access to water, hygiene and sanitation facilities in **Nicaragua**. In **Honduras**, some shelters remain active near San Pedro Sula for families unable to return to their homes.

FUNDING (as of 20 April)

USD 170.9 M

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



DON'T MISS...



Honduran IDP-led organization **Jovenes Contra la Violencia (Youth Against Violence)** won the **UNHCR NGO Innovation Award** in recognition of their response to COVID-19 at national and local level. The organization was established by young leaders from communities affected by violence and forced displacement. During COVID-19, the organization developed a survey to identify vulnerable individuals within these communities and provided them with support and information.

Updates from the field

(MIRPS) COMPREHENSIVE REGIONAL PROTECTION AND SOLUTIONS FRAMEWORK

- The rotating presidency held by **Guatemala** convened the first regional meeting of the MIRPS process in 2021. A plan of action and participation in working groups was discussed.
- **Guatemala** as the MIRPS Presidency and **Spain**, as the Support Platform's Presidency, discussed next steps on their joint work within the 2021 workplan. They agreed to strengthen efforts to engage and leverage support from interested states, regional institutions, and other stakeholders.
- **MIRPS Working Groups** planned their sessions for the first week of April, along with the Roundtables on Asylum Systems organized by AECID and the Support Platform.
- UNHCR met with technical teams from **El Salvador's** Ministry of Labour and Social Security and the Ministry for Development to identify opportunities to collaborate on expanding access to livelihoods and vocational training for people of concern, as part of the country's MIRPS work plan.
- In **Honduras**, the Human Rights Secretariat, the National Migration Institute and the Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Secretariat are designing a joint work plan together with civil society organizations to advance the completion of MIRPS commitments and enable the participation of the population of concern.
- A roundtable on labour inclusion for the population of concern to UNHCR in **Mexico** was presided by the federal Ministry of Labour and COMAR, to follow up on the national MIRPS commitments. ILO and UNHCR presented a joint project aim to strengthen the facilities of the National Employment Service.

COORDINATION WITH LOCAL & NATIONAL GOVERNMENT / STRENGTHENING INSTITUTIONS

- To strengthen capacities of local institutions on international protection standards and national referral mechanisms of identified cases, the Office in **Guatemala** trained 191 municipal staff, 40 staff members of the Ministry of Health, 23 police officers and 38 members of community groups.
- In **Honduras**, together with the Property Institute and civil society organizations, completed the design of a data collecting tool to identify abandoned houses and land related to incidents of violence occurrences and internal displacement. The identified cases are being cross-referenced with the Unified System of Property Registries.
 - **READ** about [how the asylum system is reinforced in El Salvador](#).

PROTECTION (INCL. CBP AND SGBV)

- The investigation [Sexual violence and femicides as a cause of forced displacement](#) was presented in **Honduras** together with local NGO Grupo Sociedad

Civil. This investigation is key in understanding the causes and consequences of forced displacement for women and gives clear recommendations to government institutions and other organizations.

- UNHCR's new registration centre in Tapachula began operations in response to increasing asylum claims in **Mexico**. Some 360 people a day can receive services such as registration, humanitarian assistance, and protection interventions.
- UNHCR **Guatemala** and partners conducted a participatory assessment with 230 asylum-seekers, refugees, and people in need of protection in five departments: Chiquimula, Guatemala, Izabal, Petén and San Marcos. Participants identified lack of documentation, isolation due to the pandemic and gaps to access services such as health, education and housing.
- With UNHCR support, an inter-institutional government team in **Panama** helped refugees and asylum seekers in Darien province with refugee card renewals, applications for refugee status, work and residence permits and legal advice.

CHILD PROTECTION

- UNHCR, UNICEF, and IOM issued a joint letter offering support to the Child Protection Authorities (DIF) in the state of Chiapas, **Mexico**, to increase their shelter capacity for refugee, asylum-seeking and migrant children to successfully implement the recent reform within its Migration Law and Refugee Law, to protect the rights of refugee children.
- In **El Salvador**, UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM, the National Council for Children and Adolescents (CONNA), and the Salvadoran Institute for the Comprehensive Development of Children and Adolescents (ISNA) made commitments together with the Office of the First Lady to design an action plan for deported children and adolescents during 2021.
- At reception centres in **Honduras**, UNHCR provided assistance to identify children travelling alone, at risk and with protection needs for referral to specialized services, including in case of gender-based violence. As reported by national childhood protection authority, DINAF, 1,266 children had been deported to Honduras in the first quarter of 2021.

INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION

- UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, and IOM Mobile Centres in **Belize** for asylum seekers and migrant families operate in Benque Viejo Del Carmen providing birth registration, legal, health, psychosocial and immigration information services. A total of 472 services were provided in March.
- In **Guatemala**, UNHCR and partners participated in the first official meeting of the Protection and Migration Roundtable of Huehuetenango. The Roundtable is led by the Governor's Office and co- led by the National Council for Migrants (CONAMIGUA), with support from UNHCR and relevant government institutions and civil society.
- As Protection Cluster lead, UNHCR in **Honduras** provided a two-day training session on protection mainstreaming for 54 participants. In addition, two

task forces were established to respond to the protection needs of people within in mixed movements. In response to caravans, a contingency plan was developed to coordinate monitoring activities during exit and re-entry to the country. On the southern border, a needs evaluation was conducted in coordination with local authorities.

- With UNICEF, launched a multiannual project in **Mexico** which will support implementation of the recent reform of the country's Migration Law and Refugee Law, to protect the rights of refugee children.
- The interagency working group on shelters met in **Mexico** to coordinate the support of UNHCR, IOM, ICRC and UNICEF to shelters, particularly to those at the northern border, where an increasing number of new arrivals is being reported.

DELIVERY OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE & CASH

- Partner Help for Progress in **Belize** assisted 168 cases with food, medical attention, rent, gas, and with documentation processes.
- In **Costa Rica**, 622 individuals benefited from cash support in March. Also, the Office provided basic household items and food were distributed with the Cantonal Emergency Committee to 230 families in dire need in northern areas of the country.
- UNHCR and WFP extended the agreement for the provision of cash assistance in **El Salvador**. The agreement, which already benefited 353 households, aims to reach 420 families in 2021.
- In **Panama**, 186 households (521 people) were assisted by partner Red Cross with rent payments, food, medicines, and education support. Also, 71 people received psycho-social support.

- In **Guatemala**, a total of 692 beneficiaries in 265 households received cash assistance in March.
- From January to March 2021, a total of 7,901 asylum-seekers have benefitted from UNHCR's cash assistance in **Mexico** to meet their basic needs such as: food, household and domestic products, and a contribution towards housing and utility bills.

DURABLE SOLUTIONS & LIVELIHOODS

- To improve opportunities for better livelihoods in southern **Belize**, some 30 people benefited from furniture-making classes, cosmetology courses, music classes and electrical training.
 - **READ** the story of an [asylum-seeker florist who helps other women bloom in Belize](#).
- The **Guatemalan** Association of Exporters signed an agreement with UNHCR to promote the employability, vocational training and entrepreneurship of asylum seekers, refugees, and other people in need of protection. An agreement was also signed between UNHCR and the National Network of Manager Groups to include refugees and asylum seekers in local and territorial economic development initiatives.
- So far 2021, 810 people relocated to eight cities in **Mexico** thanks to UNHCR's relocation, job placement and local integration program. Also, UNHCR set up an information stand for the local integration program at COMAR's registration centre in Tapachula.
- An additional 19 refugee students benefited from the higher education program, reaching a total of 164 students in cities in **Mexico**.

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** 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 Mid Year Statistics
