

# El Salvador

**71,500 internally displaced people** between 2006 and 2016 according to a profiling exercise led by the Government.

**51,437** confirmed cases and **1,509** deaths due to **COVID-19** by 18 January 2021 (**4,705** active cases).<sup>1</sup>

UNHCR is appealing for **USD 19 million** to **support vulnerable people** in need of protection in El Salvador.



## Operational Context

Communities in El Salvador are severely affected by gang violence, extortion, threats to life and sexual violence, as well as other serious human rights violations. This violence has led to the forced displacement of persons seeking protection and access to basic services and livelihood opportunities. According to a profiling exercise on forced internal displacement led by the Ministry of Justice and Public Security, 71,500 individuals were displaced throughout the country between 2006 and 2016. In January 2020, El Salvador passed legislation to protect, aid and offer durable solutions to people internally displaced due to violence as well as those who may be at risk of displacement.

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are increasing gaps and inequalities in El Salvador, deepening structural weaknesses such as chronic violence and affecting the economy. The health crisis will have a greater impact on vulnerable and low-income households, people with disabilities, children, elderly, indigenous, women, LGBTI population, and displaced or at-risk population. The country is also highly vulnerable to climate risks, threatening food security, water, livelihoods, agricultural production, accentuating the lack of work and resources.

El Salvador is one of the countries with the highest rate of violence in the world, being the youth, women and LGBTI persons the ones who more frequently experience serious human rights violations. Threats, enforced disappearances, extortions, homicides and violence against women continue to hinder the enjoyment of civil and social rights.

<sup>1</sup> Source: Government of El Salvador



UNHCR and the Ministry of Culture delivered hygiene kits to indigenous communities in Nahuizalco in response to COVID-19.

Photo: UNHCR/Oscar Ramírez

## UNHCR Response

In El Salvador, UNHCR seeks to promote that all displaced persons can find protection from harm, live peacefully and flourish as contributing members of their communities, and find long term solutions to build their future. UNHCR has placed protection and solutions at the center of all community interventions through direct engagement with communities and internally displaced persons. To achieve this, UNHCR has prioritized community-based interventions in 45 communities to mitigate protection risks, particularly impacting girls and boys, youth, GBV survivors, LGBTI persons, among others affected by forced displacement. Through a protection-by-presence approach, UNHCR and partners implement programmes that strengthen leaderships, dialogue with national institutions and develop resilience. The Agency also supports small-scale entrepreneurship initiatives to support IDPs, deportees with protection needs and their hosts in becoming self-reliant.

Furthermore, UNHCR participates in the Humanitarian Country Team and contributes to UN System-wide and government led prevention and response to emergencies. In response to the COVID-19 emergency and tropical storms, in 2020 UNHCR distributed 4,072 hygiene kits through local municipalities to support displaced persons; of them 2,050 to vulnerable women. In addition, 892 food baskets; 2,000 refreshments, 16,800 masks; 200 boxes of gloves; 1,070 gallons of sanitizer; 2,000 protective goggles; 2,412 disinfecting kits; and 7,484 NFIs were distributed through the Civil defence and 15,700 items of personal protective equipment were donated to the Hospital of El Salvador. The Agency has also provided multi-purpose cash grants to 960 families in prioritized communities impacted by violence.

### Protection

- Psychological pressure and isolation during the COVID-19 confinement has resulted in increased domestic and sexual violence. UNHCR supports the Regional Safe Spaces Network (RSSN) at a country level which provides coordinated services and assistance to survivors.
- As response to the COVID-19 emergency, UNHCR leads the Protection Cluster, where 28 organizations converge to coordinate the response to vulnerable people affected by different risks including forced displacement.
- UNHCR supports the development and implementation of border protocols for the identification and referral of people with international protection needs.
- The Agency advocates for the development of prevention and community reintegration programmes for children and adolescents recruited by criminal groups as tool to identify cases of forced displacement of families with children and adolescents and to strengthen youth community leadership.
- UNHCR supports the Salvadoran Institute for the Comprehensive Development of Children and Adolescents (ISNA) in the creation of protocols and public policies on community and family-based alternative care for unaccompanied

minors, capacity building, identification of cases and implementation in infrastructure of safe spaces. The Office also strengthens educational programmes by supporting the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MINEDUCYT) and its accelerated education programmes to prevent and respond to school drop-out due to forced displacement and recruitment by criminal groups.

- UNHCR supports the National Institute for the Development of Women (ISDEMU) through the equipment and infrastructure of a shelter for internally displaced women and capacity building sessions on GBV and gender equality for government officials. The Agency supports psychological care for GBV survivors that are deported to the country.
- UNHCR supports the provision of services and raises awareness on the protection needs of LGBTI people.

### Community engagement

- UNHCR seeks to ensure that communities are engaged to prevent, respond and mitigate the most urgent protection risks of persons of concern. Ensuring equal participation of women, men, children, persons with special needs and persons who are potentially discriminated is a priority when working with partners. Furthermore, UNHCR continues to support several processes at local level to strengthen the capacity and self-protection mechanisms of communities affected by displacement.
- UNHCR is developing a comprehensive community strategy to identify and prioritize the communities most affected by forced displacement, and those that host high numbers of displaced people. The identification of specific protection needs for indigenous communities is also a priority.
- UNHCR conducts participatory assessments with IDPs and host communities to identify protection needs and risks. UNHCR expanded its presence to 45 prioritized communities in 2020 to strengthen leadership processes and the development of protection networks and solutions. The Office strengthens community structures and promotes dialogue between communities and government as well as state institutions. UNHCR currently provides support to a network of 16 parishes, seven LGBTI community groups and more than 80 families in eight communities. Alongside the Ombudsperson's Office and the Office of Attention to Victims, the Agency provides a comprehensive protection response to internally displaced persons through the identification of cases and the provision of humanitarian assistance.



### Law and policy development

- In January 2020, the Legislative Assembly of El Salvador approved the Special Law for the Care and Integral Protection of Victims of Violence in Conditions of Forced Displacement. The law, which was drafted with the technical support of UNHCR, provides for the establishment of a comprehensive national system that brings together a variety of state institutions to collaborate in the response to and prevention of forced displacement. UNHCR is strengthening the Directorate of Attention to Victims and Forced Migration (DNAVMF) and its Local Offices for Attention to Victims (OLAV) as the governing body responsible for the protection and assistance to IDPs and persons at risk of displacement.
- UNHCR works with prioritized municipalities by strengthening referral pathways for persons at risk of displacement and displaced persons to ensure they have access to protection and services. Similarly, UNHCR supports efforts of the Office of the Prosecutor (PGR) to assess the best interest of children affected by forced displacement. UNHCR developed a Protection Module for the Directorate for the Attention to Migrants (GAMI) for the identification and documentation of deported persons with protection needs.

### Durable solutions and livelihoods

- Access to basic needs represents a major challenge for persons of concern to UNHCR in El Salvador. The pandemic has resulted in increased levels of vulnerability as well as use of negative coping mechanisms. UNHCR provides humanitarian assistance through cash transfers and in-kind support, in terms of food and hygiene, as part of the emergency response in coordination with the efforts of the Government and other UN agencies. UNHCR supports the most vulnerable households through the provision of multipurpose grants (MPG) to respond to the immediate needs caused by displacement and to mitigate the likelihood of the family adopting negative coping strategies.

- UNHCR supports small-scale entrepreneurship initiatives to support IDPs, deportees with protection needs and their hosts in becoming self-reliant.
- Through formal vocational education strategies focused on access to employability and self-employability, UNHCR works with partners in rural and urban areas to guarantee that persons of concern can participate in livelihood initiatives.

### Safe spaces and shelter

- As part of the Regional Safe Spaces Network, temporary and permanent shelters, information spaces and safe houses allow persons of concern to access case management and specialized services. Services at the shelters include GBV/child protection case management; mental health and psychosocial support; health services, including sexual and reproductive health services and clinical management of rape; and legal assistance and representation.
- UNHCR is developing targeted interventions to ensure access to shelters for cases with protection needs. UNHCR promotes access to education for children and adolescents with the cooperation of strategic partners in this field, systematic implementation of diversion and self-care activities, and promotion of the development of skills and abilities for the individuals to promote their reintegration to normal life outside the shelter.
- UNHCR has also supported safe spaces in coordination with ISDEMU for GBV survivors and displaced women.

## Working with Partners and other Institutions

UNHCR contributes to a whole-of society approach to internal displacement through a wide range of partnerships with national authorities, local organizations, UN agencies and international organisations.

### State Institutions

In the framework of Global Compact on Refugees and the Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (MIRPS), UNHCR supports the development of the national action plan that includes the government, civil society, UN agencies and displaced communities in the country. The Agency supports key government and state institutions such as the DNAVMMF, General Directorate for Migration and Foreigners (DGME), Refugee Status Determination National Commission (CODER), PGR, National Council for Children and Adolescents (CONNA), Salvadoran Institute for the Comprehensive Development of Children and Adolescents (ISNA), Ombudsperson's Office (PDDH), and ISDEMU by strengthening their technical and operational capacities.

### MIRPS

In line with the MIRPS, UNHCR supports government's efforts to address forced displacement. The Agency promotes stabilization of displaced populations through enhancing community protection mechanisms, resilience and self-reliance initiatives. Moreover, UNHCR supports institutional capacities at local and central level and partnerships with key actors to enhance access of displaced persons to health services, education and jobs/livelihoods opportunities.

### Other partners

UNHCR works with faith-based organizations, community leaders and other partners from civil society to support safe spaces, shelter and basic humanitarian assistance to persons with protection needs. A network of 16 parishes and seven LGBTI community groups are also supported. Nine project partnership agreements were signed in 2020, including partnerships with national and international NGOs as well as UN agencies. New partnerships are being developed to expand interventions targeting alternative care mechanisms for unaccompanied and separated children (UASC), psychosocial and material support for GBV survivors and the promotion of livelihoods and self-reliance for forcibly displaced persons.

## Funding UNHCR's Response

UNHCR is appealing for USD 19 million to support vulnerable people in need of protection in El Salvador. The best way to support UNHCR's appeal is through unearmarked contributions. Such flexible funding at global level will be key in allowing a timely response to the evolving needs wherever required.