

Mexico Operation COVID-19 RESPONSE



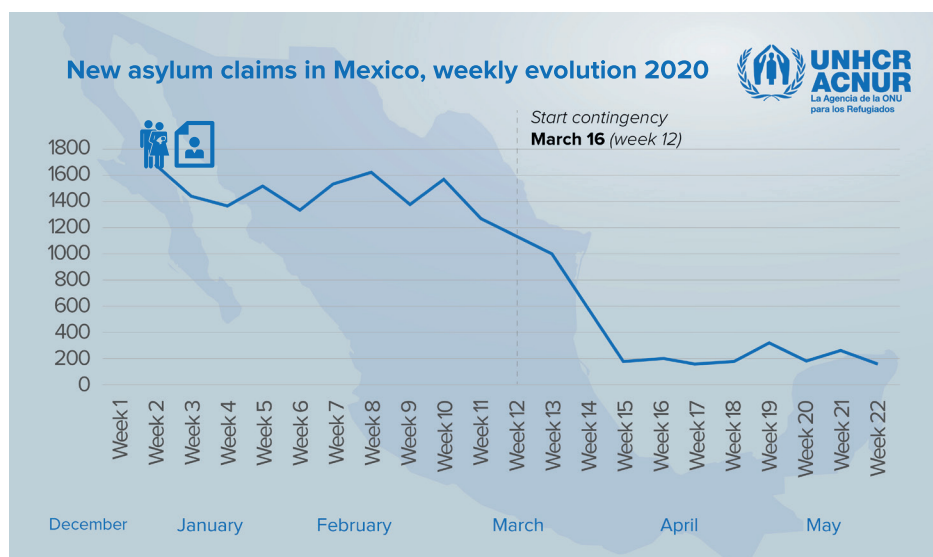
Delivery of dignity kits at the shelter “Santa Martha Betania”, in Salto de Agua, Chiapas.

OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

On 30 March Mexico declared a state of national health emergency, which included suspension of non-essential activities in the public, private and social sectors and encouraged the population in Mexico to voluntarily limit mobility and to follow the “stay at home recommendation”. Access to asylum and migratory enforcement were both considered essential, thus National Asylum Commission (COMAR) has continued registering asylum applications and National Migration Institute (INM) has continued implementing migratory enforcement and detention. On 21 May, the suspension of COMAR processing deadlines and some procedures was extended until further notice for reasons of public health.

After the 34% increase of asylum application in the first quarter of 2020 as compared to 2019, the number of asylum seekers dropped by 85% as a result of closing of the borders

across the North of Central America. COMAR received 977 new asylum applications in April and 891 in May, bringing the total number of claims in 2020 to 19,147, compared to 24,557 in the same period of 2019, thus representing a 22% decrease. Nonetheless, the causes of forced displacement remain in place and it is expected that the flows will return to the previously observed levels as soon as the movement restrictions are lifted in Mexico and NCA countries.



UNHCR'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19

UNHCR Mexico identified four priorities to tackle main protection risks faced by the persons of concern and to support an adequate response to COVID-19, ensuring that all measures taken in this context are aligned with the rights and needs of refugees and host communities:

1. strengthening the protection space, including access to the asylum system and community engagement,
2. scaling up cash assistance programmes for the most vulnerable refugee families experiencing economic shocks and special protection needs,
3. improving shelter preparedness to prevent human-to-human transmission by supporting them with additional staff and provision of multiple months' supplies of hygiene and sanitation items,
4. supporting municipal hospitals with personal protective and medical equipment to ensure that health attention continues benefiting not only UNHCR persons of concern but also local communities.

To achieve these objectives, UNHCR has worked with 27 partners and, indirectly, with 80 more local organisations in 52 locations in 18 states. UNHCR has also closely collaborated with other UN agencies and international organisations (IOM, UNICEF, ICRC, MSF, WHO, among others).



UNHCR field office in Monterrey reaches out to asylum seekers and refugees in a large area, including the arid zone located at the limit between the State of Nuevo León and the State of Coahuila.

Strengthen protection space and community engagement

UNHCR has continuously monitored access to the territory and to asylum processes and supported COMAR in establishing procedures for the remote registration and documentation of asylum seekers. In early April, a remote Training Plan has been established for COMAR eligibility officials who participated in 7 training sessions.



120,000 ecological soaps donated by Soapbox were distributed by UNHCR in 23 shelters in Tijuana, Mexicali and San Luis Río Colorado.

Since the contingency began, UNHCR's partner HIAS has carried out remote workshops on international protection and asylum procedures in Mexico and the U.S. as well as individual counselling for persons of concern staying in shelters along the northern border. In partnership with Alternativas Pacificas UNHCR has also provided awareness-raising sessions on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) for NGOs and shelters in the North and reinforced the referral pathways, especially for women and children SGBV survivors, applicable during COVID-19 contingency measures.

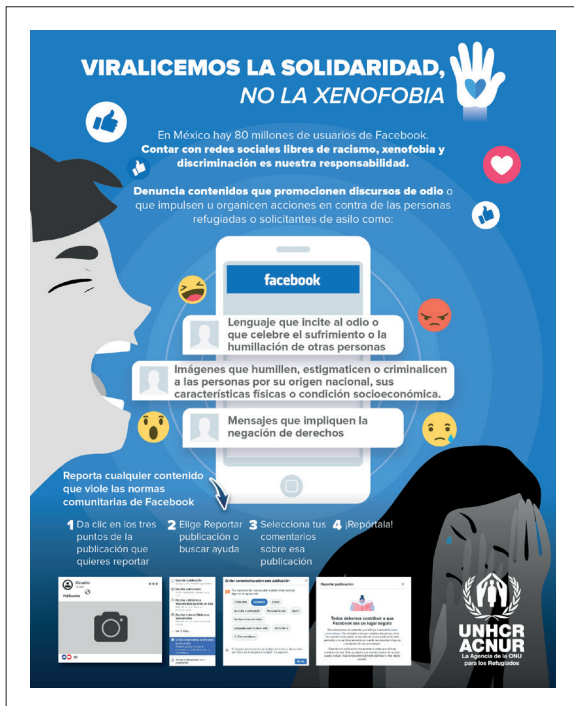
To ensure continued communication and engagement with communities, UNHCR activated a dedicated coronavirus page of [UNHCR Mexico](#), which has been updated daily and has received over **5,300** unique visits. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 emergency, the UNHCR Help desk carried out over **4250** consultations and provided orientation on COVID-19 prevention measures, rights, regularization procedures and access to services. Facebook El Jaguar publications reached over **2M** users in the main areas of presence of refugees, out of which **19,000** have engaged in conversation.



The Facebook page Confía en El Jaguar has been a useful tool to communicate important messages to PoCs during the pandemic.

In order to raise awareness about COVID-19 and prevent xenophobic, anti-migrant narratives and potential discriminatory behaviour, UNHCR has prepared specific infographics and audio spots that are being transmitted through local and national radio stations, Twitter and Facebook.

As UNHCR is adapting to rapidly changing dynamics in the field, it is also moving forward with creative and flexible approaches to communication with communities.



During the COVID-19 pandemic, UNHCR has launched messages in social media to raise awareness about refugees and to fight xenophobia

Ramped up cash assistance for refugees and asylum seekers

UNHCR has expanded existing cash assistance and introduced additional top ups to meet the increased protection needs and deliver rapid assistance to mitigate some of the negative socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 and help families to meet their basic needs. Since the beginning of emergency, UNHCR has delivered:

- **1,999** Cash Assistance top-ups
- **3,457** new emergency multi-purpose cash grants (MPG)
- **239** Cash Assistance contingency top-ups for refugees and asylum seekers who have lost employment
- In total, **5,695** persons received support.



Hygiene supplies are delivered at the shelter "Movimiento Juventud 2000" in Tijuana, Baja California.

Reinforced shelters

As a part of an interagency effort and in coordination with WHO, UNICEF, IOM and ICRC, UNHCR has supported a network of 102 shelters run by civil society and the Catholic Church in 52 locations across Mexico with information on Covid-19 prevention, personal hygiene and protection items, sanitary products and food. Some 4550 persons remain in the 90 shelters still operational in Mexico. Only 24 shelters continue accepting new arrivals. To address this limitation, UNHCR has increased temporary shelter and isolation space for persons at particular risk in case of contracting the virus through delivery of 22 Refugee Housing Units (RHUs) and renting of 1,023 hotels rooms and 8 houses.

Additional hand washing facilities were installed and, together with UNHCR partners, spaces in 30 shelters were adapted to maintain a healthy distance. UNHCR has also provided information related to mental health and gender violence in confinement situations and for children, educational material, handwashing instruction – in alliance with IOM, UNICEF, OPS and Sesame Street, and a short story “Bolay.

Since the beginning of emergency UNHCR delivered:

- Information on COVID-19 prevention in 5 languages
- **3,334** bottles 500ml of antibacterial gel and **120,000** soaps
- **39,090** PPE items, including **25,050** facial masks
- **3,090** dignity kits for woman
- **22** bunk beds and mats to shelters in Tijuana
- **23** portable handwashing stations in 16 shelters benefiting over **2000** persons

Strengthen and support health care and WASH services

UNHCR has coordinated with PAHO/WHO and Mexican health authorities to conduct initial mapping of the health sector and subsequent donations of sanitary materials, personal protective and medical equipment to support COVID-19 emergency response in localities with a large asylum-seeking and refugee population.

Through its peaceful coexistence initiatives, UNHCR prioritised addressing structural needs in health centers and hospitals in the South (Tapachula, Palenque, Tenosique, Oluta) to guarantee the continuity of access and quality of health services for refugees, asylum seekers and local populations in these sensitive moments, including services for the care of pregnant women. UNHCR is also planning support to the health sector in the North using funding provided by the European Union.

Since the beginning of emergency, UNHCR has provided or is in the process of delivering:

- Personal protective equipment: A delivery of PPE was made in April to the Sanitary District VII in Tapachula. Further supply of disposable safety suits, personal protection items PPE and ventilators to public hospitals is being processed.
- **19 Refuge Housing Units (RHUs)** to establish observation and isolation spaces in public hospitals of Chiapas, Tabasco and Tamaulipas.
- **450 bunk beds and mats** to health authorities in Tijuana
- UNHCR installed **15 handwashing stations in 6 municipalities for public spaces** such as markets, parks, hospitals.
- UNHCR provided **cots and a large tent for 10**

patients and **7 RHUs** for the GRM mobile hospital in Matamoros makeshift camp.



Handwashing installation at DIF facilities, San Luis Potosí, San Luis Potosí.



Handwashing installation at DIF facilities, León, Guanajuato.



Iriam, a Venezuelan refugee surgeon, joins the Mexican health response against COVID-19 at a public hospital in Ciudad de México.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD

Refugee health professionals join the response to COVID-19

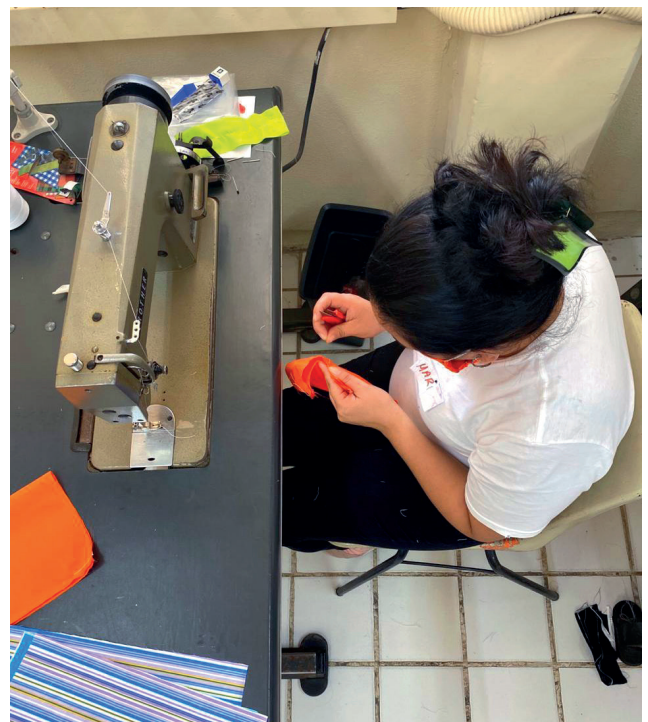
UNHCR has worked with federal authorities to establish an expedited mechanism for the recognition of qualified and experienced refugee and asylum seeker former health professionals to join the country's COVID-19 emergency recruitment pool. 10 Venezuelan and Cuban refugees and asylum seekers have been successfully hired by public and private hospitals in Mexico City, Tapachula and Aguascalientes. Another 19 health care workers, out of a total of 100 identified, are undergoing evaluation of their credentials.

Refugees producing masks

On 27 April, UNHCR's partner, Casa Monarca, in partnership with Nuevo Leon State Government, UNHCR Monterrey and Training Centre for Industrial Employment (Centros de Capacitación para el Trabajo Industrial - CECATI) launched a project for the sewing of protection masks, as part of COVID-19 prevention measures. The project involved on-the-job training for 19 refugees (13 women and 6 men) at the CECATI in Apodaca Municipality. Participants manufactured 2,500 masks, which will be distributed by the State Government to the local host communities.

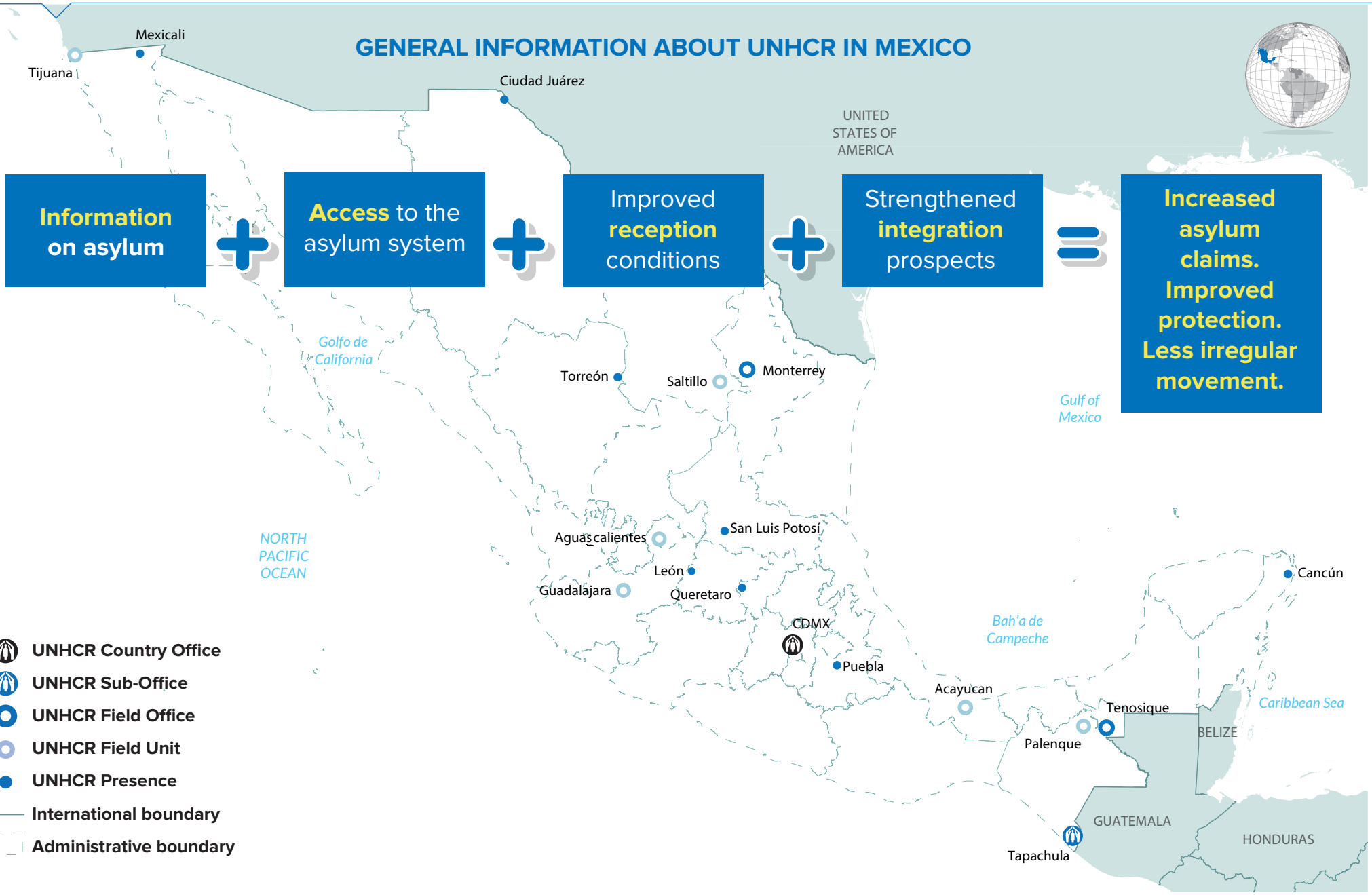
On 15 May, the Nuevo Leon State Government hosted a ceremony in recognition of the project. The event was attended by various governmental institutions, Casa Monarca and UNHCR.








The project provided valuable skills to refugees increasing their employment opportunities and promoting self-employment in a period where formal jobs are scarce. It has also helped to counter xenophobic attitudes in the host community and contributed to furthering peaceful coexistence objectives. The sewing project is being expanded to the production of bags for groceries and other uses.



Refugee women are trained in manufacturing protection masks in Monterrey, Nuevo León. Joint collaboration between Casa Monarca, UNHCR and the Government of the State of Nuevo León.

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT UNHCR IN MEXICO



-  UNHCR Country Office
-  UNHCR Sub-Office
-  UNHCR Field Office
-  UNHCR Field Unit
-  UNHCR Presence
-  International boundary
-  Administrative boundary

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

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