

UNHCR PRESENCE IN MEXICO



All UNHCR activities have been aligned with the status of the epidemiological traffic light in each state and have complied with health protocols.

COVID RESPONSE – HIGHLIGHTS



16,231 persons have been registered since mid March and had a remote protection interview with UNHCR to identify specific needs and provide individualized protection counselling



6,396 children and adolescents were registered and assisted by UNHCR since the beginning of the pandemic



3,600 sleeping mats and food packages for 1000 families were provided to communities affected by hurricane ETA in Chiapas and Tabasco



5,000 copies of new magazine on prevention and response to sexual abuse were distributed to UNHCR Field Offices for the use of asylum-seekers and refugees

OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

Mexico exceeded one million confirmed COVID-19 cases. While some regions of the country are facing a new wave of infections, which pushed them back in the traffic lights system, three states have been able to advance to the green. All UNHCR activities have been aligned to the traffic light status of each state and comply with sanitary protocols. The National Asylum Commission (COMAR) has continued registering new asylum applications in its offices, while the subsequent processing has been carried out both in person and remotely.

With 38,6488 new claims as of 11 of December 2020, UNHCR expects to close the year with approximately 40,000 asylum application. Nevertheless, UNHCR stays attentive to the possible increase in the last days of December due to the deepening negative impact of recent hurricanes and COVID-19 related economic slowdown in North Central America, as well as perceived opening after the U.S. presidential elections.

CHILD PROTECTION

On 11 November, the Mexican Government published in the Federal Official Gazette a reform to bring the Refugee and Migration Laws into alignment with the General Law on the Rights of Children. This represents a major achievement in ensuring the full protection of migrant, asylum-seeking and refugee children in the country.

The reform follows years of advocacy efforts from local NGOs, UNHCR and other UN agencies, who have worked on this since 2015, when the General Law on the Rights of Children was approved. The most important legislative changes include:

- the prohibition of child detention (including families with children);
- the best interest of the child at the center of every decision involving children on the move,
- the extension of protection to all children in situation of mobility, not only to the unaccompanied;
- the access to a temporary immigration status (on humanitarian grounds) for every child, in order to prevent expedite deportation and to guarantee

the protection of basic rights, including access to international protection.

The UNHCR and other UN agencies have been developing a joint proposal to support the Mexican government in the implementation of the reform. The intervention will include strengthening state and local Child Protection Authorities; enhancing procedures of the best interest of the child in situations of mobility, including for those with international protection needs; improving reception conditions for families and expanding alternative care options for unaccompanied children; as well as offering technical assistance for implementation of the reform.

The European Union funded project “EU Global promotion of best practices for children in migration” will play an important role in supporting that process. UNHCR and UNICEF presented it to federal authorities on 18 December, within the framework of the Third Ordinary Session of the Commission for the Comprehensive Protection of Migrant Children, Children and Adolescents and Refugee Applicants, of the National Protection System of Girls, Children and Adolescents (SIPINNA).



16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women celebrated every year on 25 November marked the start of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, a campaign which run until Human Rights Day on 10 December. The objective of the 16 Days of Activism was to increase awareness of the devastating impacts of gender-based violence (GBV), advocate for action and

renew the commitment to prevent and respond to these violations. This year the UN Secretary-General's UNiTE Campaign "Orange the World: Fund, Respond, Prevent, Collect!" focused on the informal women workers whose lives and livelihoods have been gravely impacted by COVID-19 pandemic.

In Mexico, in the framework of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, UNHCR published new informative materials about preventing and responding to abuse and harassment, provided specialised GBV training for authorities and organised several other initiatives in places with a high concentration of asylum seekers and refugees, including:

- A round table discussion regarding violence against displaced, refugee and asylum seeking women and girls, between the 2020 Nansen



Award winner, Colombian activist Mayerlin Vergara Pérez, the director of CAFEMIN shelter in Mexico City, Sister María Magdalena Silva Rentería, and the head of the Mexican National Protection System for Children (SIPINNA), Ricardo Bucio;

- A Facebook Live session for persons of concern to UNHCR on gender-based violence and the 16 Days of Activism through the El Jaguar platform;
- Discussions coordinated with the Municipal Instance for the Development and Empowerment of Women (Municipal DIF) in Palenque;
- Workshops using theatre techniques to raise awareness and provide information on the rights of women, girls and adolescents and webinars on violence against LBT women set jointly with NGO Una Mano Amiga in Tapachula; and
- Creation of a collective mural by Mexican and refugee women in Puebla.





The governments of Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Panama met to review the progress of the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solution Framework (MIRPS).

THIRD ANNUAL MEETING OF COMPREHENSIVE REGIONAL PROTECTION AND SOLUTIONS FRAMEWORK

On the 7 and 8 December, the governments of Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Panama met for the third time to review the advancements of the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solution Framework (MIRPS), the local implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees in the region. In October 2017, they adopted the San Pedro Sula Declaration, to strengthen protection and promote solutions for displaced persons, as well as to address the underlining causes of forced displacement by promoting an environment that ensures safety, economic development and prosperity. In 2019, under the pro-tempore Presidency of Mexico, El Salvador was able to join these efforts. During 2020, with El Salvador as pro-tempore Presidency, technical capacities of the participating

countries were further enhanced thanks to working groups set, among others, on internal displacement, the platform to support the MIRPS was consolidated, and ties with civil society were strengthened in the region.

At the III annual meeting, Mexico, through Undersecretary of SEGOB Alejandro Encinas, reaffirmed its commitment to the MIRPS, emphasising its importance for addressing the increased number of asylum seekers in the context of COVID-19 pandemic, and for providing access to COMAR procedures and public health services. The ACNUR's local integration program in Saltillo was also presented as an example of "Solidarity Cities". More details are available in the regional report. [Ver \(+\)](#)



NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Hurricane Storm Eta

Since the hurricane Eta hit Central America and Mexico on 3 November, strong winds and rains have caused serious damage to houses, roads, energy infrastructure and health centres. It was considered one of the worst climate disasters in the region in the last two decades. The impact of the storm comes amid an already critical economic contraction in the region as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, causing further hardship for both forcibly displaced persons and host communities.

In Mexico, at least 27 people have died and an estimated 180,000 have been severely affected by flooding. The states of Chiapas and Tabasco, which host large number of asylum seekers and refugees, have been particularly hard-hit by the storm. UNHCR teams coordinated with local authorities in Chiapas and Tabasco to provide affected communities with 3,300 sleeping mats that were installed in shelters in the municipalities of Chilón and Salto de Agua, and food assistance for 700 families: 400 in Salto de Agua and 300 in Frontera Corozal. In Tabasco, UNHCR delivered 300 sleeping mats destined for the town of Jonuta that were distributed by state Civil Protection, and food packages to 300 families living in that municipality.



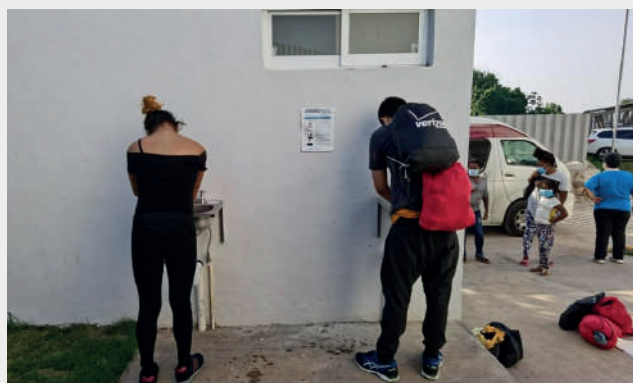
Reforestation in Matamoros

UNHCR, the Secretariat of the Matamoros City Council, the Esencia Urbana Community in Matamoros, migrants and asylum seekers who remain in the informal camp located on the banks of the Rio Grande, joined efforts to reforest the Dr. Emilio Martínez Sports Unit Manautou. The project arose as a part of UNHCR's peaceful coexistence initiatives that being developed jointly with local actors seek to enhance integration and harmonious relations between displaced populations and host communities. The reforestation works of this sports unit will reduce the environmental impact derived from the informal felling of trees in the area and the presence of a plague that reduced the natural reserve in the complex by 40%. 25 persons, mostly migrants, refugees and asylum seekers participated in the project. They made a selection of more than 200 native plants and trees, prepared the seeds for planting and adapted the land for reforestation.

New shelter for refugees and asylum seekers in Tapachula

On 2 December, UNHCR and Hospitalidad y Solidaridad A.C. inaugurated in Tapachula (Chiapas), the first shelter in the country opened exclusively to refugees and asylum seekers. The shelter, whose construction was financed entirely by UNHCR, has the capacity of up to 300 persons. Thanks to the cooperation with other UN agencies, civil society and other organizations, it will offer a wide range of specialized services, such as legal aid, psychological and medical counselling, labour market orientation and recreational activities. The construction of the shelter and the organisation of the facilities followed the UN sustainability criteria: solar panels and a rainwater collection system were installed, and the materials used allow air to flow to have natural ventilation of the indoor spaces. The shelter has also a garden to produce food for the residents' own consumption, which also aims at stimulating their awareness of environmental issues.

On the same day, the representatives of the Tapachula City Council and UNHCR signed an agreement by which they reaffirmed their collaboration to promote the protection and integration of refugees and asylum seekers, as well as to continue implementation of projects benefiting the local and refugee populations. According to COMAR, more than 60% of the 36,000 asylum applications received in Mexico in 2020 were registered in Tapachula.



Renovation of shelter Hermanos en el Camino in Oaxaca

On 13 November, UNHCR opened the Plazoleta de la Hermandad and new facilities in the Hermanos en el Camino Shelter in Ixtepec, Oaxaca. The refurbishing project included building a soccer and basketball court with a dome and an outdoor gym, rebuilding of bathrooms, as well as installations of ventilation system and new windows in the men's area. As a part of the project, the REDODEM installed the rainwater collection system.



Art Workshops for children in Saltillo

UNHCR, in collaboration with the Secretary of Culture of the State of Coahuila, and as a part of UNHCR relocation program, realised art workshops targeted at refugee children and adolescents. The project sought to give children the possibility to express themselves through creative activities, as well as release tension and relax, while developing other than artistic skills.

Different art and cultural activities were carried out, such as storytelling and drawing workshops, also making use of interactive material online. The project referred to local legends, for instance the famous in the region “La Cueva de todo o nada”, children’s stories and tales characterised by human rights and social perspective, such as the Story of “Eloísa y Los Bichos” or the story “El Perrito that did not believe in COVID”. Individual kits were distributed to all participants containing a notebook, colouring books, crayons and pencils. 33 boys and girls, between

5 and 12 years old, of Honduran and Salvadoran nationalities participated in the first two workshops after relaunching this activity in the context of COVID-19 pandemic.





Wilmer and his best friend traveled for several days, taking the bus, the train, and walking alone.

UNHCR HUMAN STORIES

Wilmer left El Salvador in July 2019, when he was just 12 years old after being approached by one of the gangs in the neighbourhood where he lived. Johan, who at the age of 13 left Honduras, knew that he could lose his life by refusing to be recruited. He flew together with his best friend, who sadly lost on the route. Both travelled for several days alone, by bus, by train and walking. They arrived in Veracruz at different times, but they had something in common: they were identified by UNHCR Acayucan team. The two boys feared returning to their country, so after learning about the right for protection in Mexico, they began the procedure with COMAR. They were taken to a Social Assistance Centre (CAS) of the State DIF in Veracruz, where they met and went through the process together. They finally felt safe, but it was hard for them, because like many other spaces in Mexico, this centre had a closed-door scheme. The few activities organised outside the centre to mitigate the anxiety of the children were suspended when the COVID-19 pandemic started. Due to the confinement, Wilmer and Johan showed suicidal feelings on several occasions and were depressed. UNHCR accompanied both cases: visited them, and when it became impossible, had weekly calls by Teams so that boys could be kept informed about their asylum

procedure, although, in fact, those calls became more an excuse for a honest conversation about their lives and feelings than anything else.

The same year that they arrived in Mexico, UNHCR strengthened its collaboration with JUCONI, a foundation specialized in developing, applying, and sharing solutions for Children, Adolescents and their families who have been affected by violence. JUCONI implements a project that is broken down into 3 axes: residential care with a community focus for adolescents at the JUCONI Youth House in Puebla, a pilot of host families and, finally, communities of practice for psychologists and social workers aiming at strengthening their skills in handling cases that involve girls, boys and adolescents and their families, promoting recovery from violence, positive parenting methods and family unity.

In May 2020, COMAR recognized Wilmer and Johan as refugees, confirming the new life opportunity they had in Mexico. UNHCR and JUCONI worked together and finally, after living in the CAS for about a year and a half, in October, they were accepted into the JUCONI Project. Today, Wilmer and Johan live happily in the open-door centre in Puebla, where they can develop, study, acquire new skills and dream of the life that awaits them.

UNHCR Operation in Mexico and its partners 2020



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