

North of Central America Situation

March 2020

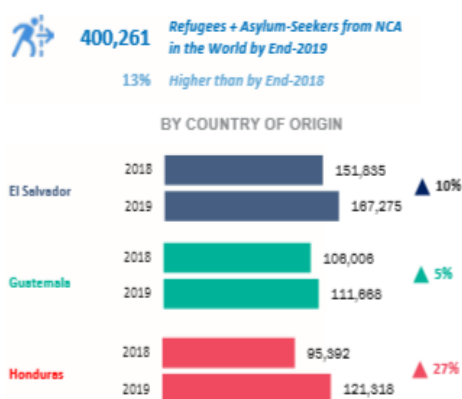
400,261 refugees and asylum-seekers from the North of Central America in the world and **318,590** internally displaced people in Honduras and El Salvador have been forced to flee violence.

Although the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 infection in this region remains low, there is serious concern of the virus spreading rapidly across host communities in the region.

Alongside sister UN agencies and partner organizations, UNHCR advocates for the inclusion of refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced people within national preparedness and response plans and activities.

POPULATION OF CONCERN

By country of origin

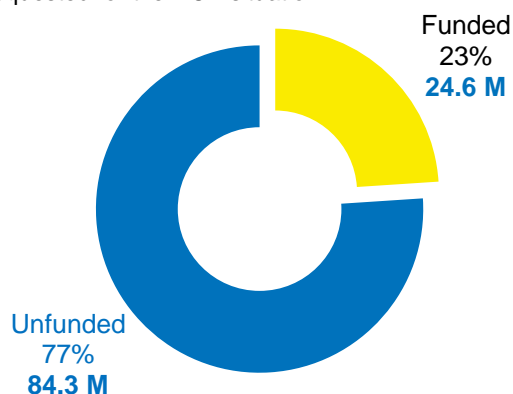


Source: Based on data provided by governments to UNHCR as of Dec-19. Figures for 2019 are partial and preliminary and can be subject to changes

FUNDING (AS OF 6 APRIL 2020)

US\$ 108.9 M

requested for the NCA situation



The financial requirements of the North of Central America Situation include requirements in Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Panama RO.

Overview

COVID-19 has had an impact in the North of Central America (NCA), where tens of thousands of people have been forced to flee an escalating situation of chronic violence and insecurity. With the virus spreading across the Americas, in March, countries in the region adopted mobility restrictions and most official borders were closed to prevent the spread of the virus. Nevertheless, violence and persecution are ongoing, and so is UNHCR's support.

People continue to be displaced internally within their own countries and externally across international borders, with limited means of supporting themselves. At the same time, xenophobia is on the rise among local populations against people of other nationalities, especially those in transit.

UNHCR is strengthening its overall operations to continue to provide support to refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced people in the context of COVID-19. UNHCR in NCA is focusing on offering guidance on prevention

measures, distributing core relief items, and providing cash-based assistance as an efficient means to mitigate the negative socio-economic impacts of COVID-19. Protection and counselling activities have been reinforced via phone calls and emails.



UNHCR has adapted to new security measures and keep delivering support to people forced to flee violence and persecution, even during the quarantine, via phone, e-mail and chat ©UNHCR El Salvador

UNHCR Response and Strategy

UNHCR has joined seven countries, over 70 partners and 10 supporting states to implement the Regional Comprehensive Protection and Solutions Framework (MIRPS), which is a pioneering application of the Global Compact on Refugees, bridging the gap between humanitarian and development actions to provide protection and solutions to those forced to flee across borders, and to address the root causes of displacement in countries of origin. In the XI Virtual Meeting on the MIRPS, countries agreed to review the implementation of National Plans in the context of the global emergency and to adjust outcomes as part of the regional agenda.

Main Activities

Alongside host governments, partner organizations, civil society, faith-based organizations, development actors and UN Agencies, UNHCR undertakes several activities, including:



Safe reception and admission

UNHCR supports countries in infection prevention, following PAHO/WHO's guidance in order to identify priority prevention and response activities in situations of displacement. UNHCR in Guatemala donated sanitation and personal protective gear to municipalities and authorities across the border. In Izabal, UNHCR and its partners worked with local authorities to adopt prevention measures, such as mapping possible cases and placing them in quarantine. In Honduras, UNHCR has presence at airports and in reception centres to identify protection needs among returnees. In Panama, UNHCR provided sanitation kits for the hundreds of refugees and migrants currently sheltered in Las Peñitas, Darien.



Law and Policy Development

The Government of Panama agreed to include 20,000 asylum seekers and refugees as potential beneficiaries in the Panama Solidario Plan aimed at mitigating the economic impact of COVID-19, subject to vulnerability criteria. As part of the strategic partnership between UNHCR and the Costa Rican Social Security entity (CCSS) to provide 6,000 asylum seekers with health insurance in 2020, more than 4,000 PoC have met the criteria for insurance coverage. In Mexico, the government agreed that access to asylum remains an essential service, thus asylum applications will be received.



Providing safe spaces and shelter

In Honduras, UNHCR is working with national authorities to help in the identification of protection needs among people in quarantine, while partners provide psychosocial assistance through collective and individual sessions. In Mexico, UNHCR distributed WHO/PAHO information material, antibacterial gel and soap for 100 shelters.



Community-based protection interventions

UNHCR Honduras works with the communities and their leaders to monitor protection risks for women, men, children and youth, and trends in risk, abuse, violence and insecurity that could arise from the current situation of confinement. In El Salvador UNHCR coordinates with LGBTI community leaders to monitor risks that could lead to forced displacement. Any indication of such movements is relayed to the relevant authorities to coordinate a response. Partner Humana worked with refugees and asylum seekers to produce their own sanitizing gel from scratch.



Durable solutions and livelihoods

In Panama, new and safer cash-based intervention modalities were identified through electronic transfer cards for ensuring the continuity of assistance in coordination with relevant partners. About 350 multipurpose cash grants have been provided for a total of 400 cases assisted, including new cases enrolled due to the COVID-19 situation. Microserfin, a financial institution with which UNHCR Panama has an agreement to loan microcredits for refugees and asylum-seekers, provided an exemption of 90 days during which no penalties or interest will be applied. In Honduras, UNHCR works with NRC to provide mobile cash that people of concern can collect in special locations nearest to them to purchase groceries, medicine or others.



Working with partners

Partners continue to assist refugees and asylum-seekers, and internally displaced people, despite mobility restrictions. In Guatemala, UNHCR and partners have started distributing prevention kits to persons of concern, including face masks, sanitary items and information produced by PAHO/WHO. UNHCR's partners in Panama have provide support to people of concern to avoid evictions and detention by the authorities. Meanwhile, UNHCR in El Salvador is supporting the response through the Protection Cluster, including with the identification needs within reception centres and communities in quarantine.

Donors

In 2020, UNHCR operations in Central America received earmarked funding from the United States of America, Canada, private donors Australia, Morocco, Slovakia, and various private donors.

In 2020, UNHCR received unearmarked funding from:

Sweden 76.4 million | **Norway** 41.4 million | **Netherlands** 36.1 million | **Denmark** 34.6 million | **United Kingdom** 31.7 million | **Germany** 25.9 million | **Private donors Spain** 20 million | **Switzerland** 16.4 million | **Private donors Republic of Korea** 10.5 million

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North of Central America (NCA) Situation:

UNHCR Presence

