

Central America and Mexico

Operational Update

January 2021

Regional context

As countries in the region begin the national rollouts of the COVID-19 vaccines, UNHCR is advocating for the inclusion of refugees, asylum seekers and other displaced persons in inoculation campaigns, regardless of their migratory status.

The impact of COVID-19 and the aftermath of the destructive Eta and Iota storms has exacerbated the already difficult situation of chronic violence and poverty in the region. On January 15 an estimated 8,000 persons, mostly Honduran nationals, set out in the year's first large northbound mixed movement. Although the "caravan" was dissolved in **Guatemala**, further such mass movements can be expected as the drivers of forced displacement continue unabated.

Violence in the north of Central America persists. According to the Salvadoran Ombudsperson's Office, 75 cases of forced displacement were registered in **El Salvador** from January to November 2020. The National Civil Police recorded 78 violent deaths in the first 20 days of January and informed that 77 of them were committed by gangs. In **Honduras**, despite a drop in homicides, the security situation remains volatile with 3,482 reported murders and 98,000 incidents of gender-based violence.

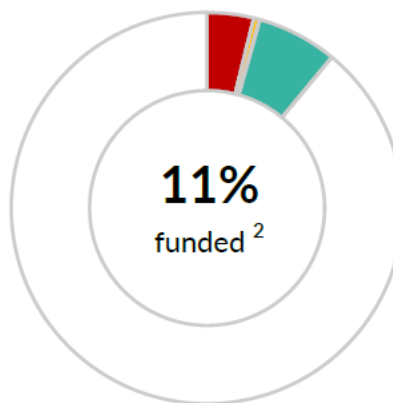
By the end of January 2021, 6,506 people applied for asylum in **Mexico**, two thirds of them in southern Chiapas state. The number of people approaching the national refugee commission or COMAR in Tapachula in the third week of January was roughly 50 percent higher than the previous week, likely including people who had broken off from the *caravan*.

FUNDING (AS OF 15 FEBRUARY)

USD 170.9 M

requested for North of Central America situation in 2021

- Tightly earmarked
- Earmarked
- Softly earmarked (indicative allocation)
- Unearmarked (indicative allocation)
- Funding gap (indicative)



Don't miss...



As part of UNHCR cooperation with the Organization of American States (OAS) Universal Civil Identity Program in the Americas (**OAS/PUICA**) and the Latin American and Caribbean Council Civil Registration, Identity and Vital Statistics (**CLARCIEV**) in UNHCR has produced the **Regional Study on Late Birth Registration, Issuance of Nationality Documentation and Statelessness**.

The study includes a comprehensive overview of the region: standards, best practices, barriers and challenges identified Costa Rica, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, among other Latin American countries.

Updates from the field

COMPREHENSIVE REGIONAL PROTECTION AND SOLUTIONS FRAMEWORK (MIRPS)

- As the new MIRPS Pro-tempore Presidency, the Government of **Guatemala** is leading the development of the MIRPS regional annual plan for 2021, integrating new strategic lines to respond to the situation of forced displacement amid the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters and economic challenges.
- The plan foresees the creation of new working groups in reception and local governance, economic inclusion, and admission to the territory of people with international protection needs. It also follows up on the working group on internal displacement.
- In **El Salvador**, UNHCR is supporting the government in the definition of its MIRPS priorities for 2021, which will include collaboration with key actors, and efforts to progress on protection response and livelihoods.

COORDINATION WITH LOCAL & NATIONAL GOVERNMENT/ STRENGTHENING CENTRAL & LOCAL GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS

- In **Costa Rica**, UNHCR is following up on discussions with the National Technical Team to encourage the government to extend Costa Rica's Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework or CRRF National Chapter (called MINARE) beyond its pilot phase (2018-2020) and consider alternatives for its institutionalization.
- In the north of Costa Rica UNHCR conducted capacity building sessions for border migration officials on International Protection Principles and identification and referral of persons of concern to UNHCR to the asylum system.

PROTECTION (INCLUDING CBP & SGBV)

- As part of efforts to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse by staff members of organizations serving the population of concern to UNHCR, the Office in **El Salvador**, together with Caritas, Save the Children and Idhuca developed a rapid assessment tool to analyse organizational capacity to address these issues.
- To understand the specific impact that hurricanes Eta and Iota had on the LGBTIQ+ community, UNHCR in San Pedro Sula (**Honduras**), met the local group

Diamantes Limeños as part of a broader effort to address and respond to their needs.

- In northern **Costa Rica**, UNHCR held two information sessions for 54 asylum seekers and other population of concern on refugee status determination procedures, access to basic rights and recognition of asylum seekers' documentation by institutions.
- As reported by the **Panamanian National Asylum Office**, or ONPAR, the number of asylum claims dropped significantly in 2020 following the declaration of the worldwide pandemic in March. Between January and March there were 458 claims of asylum; from March to December only 197 claims were received.

CHILD PROTECTION

- In the context of the response to the situation of people travelling as part of the large mixed movement in **Guatemala**, UNHCR identified seventeen unaccompanied children, who were referred for further follow up to the police.
- In **Honduras** three offices of the child protection agency DINAF were inaugurated in Agua Caliente, Corinto, and San Pedro Sula with UNHCR support.

INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION

- In **Guatemala**, UNHCR along with IOM and UNICEF met with the Government and other cooperation actors to discuss the response to the large mixed movements. A governmental contingency plan by national entities in charge of migration was presented. Following a request by the Government of assistance for 1,000 people, UNHCR together with partners provided primary health care, food, water and information about their rights and asylum system in Guatemala.
- UNHCR in **Honduras** participated in the Humanitarian Group meeting to discuss and update on the fallout from Iota and Eta and planning of future actions. UNHCR led the protection cluster coordination meeting to work on a strategic plan of action, including response to future "caravans".

DELIVERY OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE & CASH (CBI)

- UNHCR's partner in **Belize**, Help for Progress, provided food, rent, medicine to 20 persons from El

Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. Two families with no access to potable water were supported with water vats in Belmopan.

- In **Costa Rica**, 2,313 individuals were registered by UNHCR and referred for further assistance since the beginning of 2021.
- In **El Salvador**, some 320 cases in January are receiving cash assistance, to help them meet basic needs. Considering the exacerbated economic challenges caused by the pandemic, support has been extended from three to six months.
- In **Guatemala**, assistance has been provided to 6,366 people, including 131 individuals who received financial aid. Additionally, the office provided four

community health centres with medical and hygiene supplies.

- In the aftermath of the tropical storms that affected **Honduras**, UNHCR partner Casa Migrante provided some 960 returnees meals and hydration kits. In addition, around 6,300 people benefited from food, hygiene and biosecurity kits provided through shelters.

DURABLE SOLUTIONS & LIVELIHOODS

- In **Panama**, 40 asylum seekers and refugees received support to access EdX, an online platform for higher education.

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 Americas** 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

