ANNUAL REPORT 2024

EL SALVADOR

UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

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INTRODUCTION

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, works in El Salvador in close coordination with communities, public institutions, civil society organizations, the private sector, and society at large. Our mission is to protect, respond to needs, empower, and seek durable solutions for refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons or those at risk, and returnees with protection needs.

In line with the United Nations Cooperation Framework for El Salvador 2022–2026, UNHCR and its partner organizations work to foster an adequate protection environment and pursue solutions to forced displacement.

Among its priority actions, UNHCR focuses on strengthening national systems, providing humanitarian assistance, promoting the participation of individuals and their communities, and fostering self-reliance, resilience, integration, and peace.

This report outlines key achievements of UNHCR's Multi-Year Strategy 2023–2026 in El Salvador.

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is grateful for the support in 2024 of:

Australian Aid · Belgium partner in development · KOICA Korea International Cooperation Agency · Irish Aid An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha Department of Foreign Affairs · Cooperación Española · Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft Confédération suisse Confederazione Svizzera Confederaziun svizra Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC · UKaid from the British people · PEACEBUILDING FUND · UN HABITAT FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

Private donors: España con ACNUR

CONTEXT

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In 2024, the shift in El Salvador's security landscape favoured an expanded humanitarian access to communities previously inaccessible due to the territorial control of gangs. UNHCR's presence in the field, particularly in these communities allowed the identification of vulnerabilities and humanitarian needs previously overlooked. In this context, UNHCR identifies a notable will among communities to participate in planning processes to engage directly in the decisions that affect their lives.

Internal displacement dynamics have evolved, with increased reports of cases of violence against women and girls and driven by extreme weather-related disasters, which disproportionately affect historically stigmatized communities. Decades of violence and displacement have profoundly affected the population, and UNHCR has identified an urgent need to expand mental health services and support.

This evolving context poses opportunities to support people affected by historical violence and displacement, returnees with protection needs, and asylum-seekers and refugees, through localized and coordinated responses.

In response, UNHCR has strengthened its presence and engagement across the country, working closely with communities and national authorities to promote peaceful coexistence, reintegration, and resilience. Through strategic partnerships and community-based initiatives, UNHCR has supported livelihoods, access to services, and prevent further displacement.

Despite the progress, challenges persist, particularly for those affected by violence against women and girls, and disasters caused by extreme-weather events. UNHCR continues to address these needs by expanding protection mechanisms and reinforcing its commitment to engaging, community-driven responses.

UNHCR EL SALVADOR
2024 IN FIGURES

Population Statistics and people assisted

71,500 internally displaced people in El Salvador. → **5,152** assistances provided.

403 refugees and asylum-seekers hosted in El Salvador → **1,071** attentions provided.

15,003 returnees in 2024, (12.3% increase from the previous year) → **627** returnees with protection needs assisted.

*One person could have received more than one assistance.

In total: 268,500 people from host communities, those forcibly displaced or at risk of displacement, refugees, asylum-seekers, and returnees with protection needs participated in activities as information sessions, participatory assessments, peaceful coexistence projects, and cultural, sports, and recreational activities.

In-depth figures:

Access to Services

90% of refugees accessed health services.

5,400 survivors of violence against women and girls accessed specialized services.

618 returnee women received orientation and services at the GAMI.

3,641 women received remote emergency assistance through ISDEMU's call centre.

6,245 received direct support to cover immediate needs, such as food, shelter, and hygiene items or documents.

Community Engagement

43 communities across **13 municipalities** engaged in local actions.

17,000 people reached UNHCR through the "A Tu Lado en Línea" ChatBot and feedback mechanisms.

90 volunteers participated in outreach programmes.

56 community-led participatory initiatives.

Access to dignified livelihood opportunities

958 people advanced toward self-reliance through tailored livelihoods and economic integration programmes.

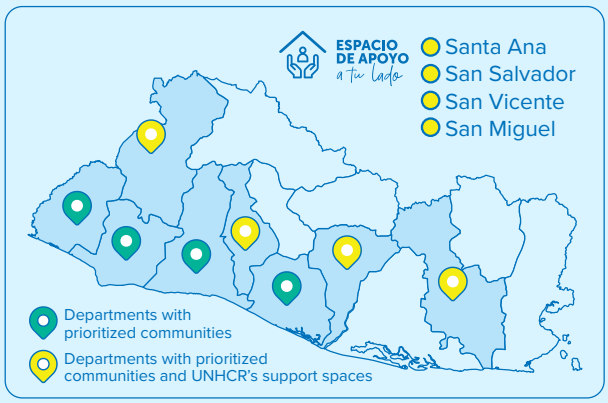
363 people received training in soft and employment skills, leading to **139 formal apprenticeship contracts**.

379 people received training in entrepreneurial skills, with **173 receiving seed capital** to kickstart their businesses.

67 adults supported with educational tutorship to certify school grades.

Territorial prioritization

53 communities and inter-community groups prioritized
55 other communities reached



*The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Photo: © UNHCR / Franklyn Ruiz

Solutions

10 refugees
supported to obtain Salvadoran citizenship.

2,800 individuals
submitted for resettlement consideration, with **1,030 departing** to resettlement countries.

Child Protection

1,075 children
and **72 families** received psychosocial support.

4 projects
of psychosocial support spaces initiated.

Emergency Response

1,799 people
people assisted with core relief items.

1,757 people
people received hygiene and dignity kits.

120 emergency tents
donated to the General Directorate of Civil Protection and the Ministry of Housing.

Community Infrastructure

65,000 residents
benefited by **20 community infrastructure projects.**

35 solar lamps
installed in community-prioritized areas.

15 murals
created to resignify community spaces in neighbourhoods historically affected by violence.

PROGRESS AGAINST THE DESIRED IMPACT

Photo: © UNHCR / Markel Redondo

958 people
advanced toward self-reliance through tailored livelihoods and economic integration programmess.

65,000 people
benefited through community infrastructure projects.

2,800 people
submitted for resettlement consideration

ATTAINING FAVOURABLE PROTECTION ENVIRONMENTS

In 2024, UNHCR made meaningful progress in advancing the rights and protection of forcibly displaced people in El Salvador. Through closer collaboration with government institutions, civil society, UN agencies, and academic actors, UNHCR fostered more participatory environments that enabled asylum-seekers, refugees, internally displaced persons, returnees with protection needs, and individuals at risk of displacement to access essential services and protection mechanisms. Continued efforts to strengthen the national asylum system, particularly through specialized training for frontline border officials, improved access to territory through strengthened capacity to identify and refer individuals in need of international protection.

Photo: © UNHCR / Franklyn Ruiz

REALIZING RIGHTS IN SAFE ENVIRONMENTS

UNHCR focused on enhancing the safety and well-being of forcibly displaced populations in El Salvador. More than 90% of refugees accessed health services, while expanded outreach efforts ensured individuals received accurate information about available support. As part of a coordinated response led by the Humanitarian Country Team, UNHCR helped deliver timely assistance to those affected by disasters and prolonged displacement. Strong partnerships with local authorities were essential in integrating forcibly displaced people into national protection systems.

EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES

Around 268,500 people, including communities historically affected by violence, forcibly displaced individuals, asylum-seekers, refugees, returnees, and those at risk, participated in information sessions, coexistence projects, and cultural and recreational activities supported by UNHCR.

Communities in 43 locations across 13 municipalities and 6 departments led local actions that fostered dialogue, strengthened protection networks, and improved access to rights and services. More than 17,000 people shared feedback with UNHCR, helping to guide community-based responses.

Also, 56 community-led initiatives implemented with UNHCR support, engaged local leaders and contributed to more inclusive and resilient spaces.

SECURING SOLUTIONS

Collaborations with national institutions, partners, and private sector actors enabled forcibly displaced individuals to access the formal labour market and benefit from tailored livelihoods programmes. In 2024, 958 people advanced toward self-reliance, while revamped spaces in four communities benefited over 65,000 residents. Improved access to formal education for vulnerable adults further strengthened prospects for long-term self-sufficiency.

UNHCR promoted local integration through initiatives like ReVive Tu Espacio, which transformed public areas once controlled by gangs and benefited over 65,000 residents. Ten refugees received support to access nationality and 2,800 individuals at heightened risk were submitted for resettlement.

Click or scan to read more: UNHCR supported the rehabilitation of a soccer court in the Colonia IVU, a space which used to be under gang control.

PROGRESS AGAINST THE DESIRED OUTCOME

Photo: © UNHCR / Markel Redondo

81,666 people across the country received information on available services through mobile units.

120 emergency tents donated by UNHCR to offer temporary shelter to people during emergencies.

4,000 people forced to flee were supported with specialized services including psychosocial support, shelter, and legal assistance.

REFUGEE STATUS DETERMINATION

Collaboration with national institutions and partners bolstered protection efforts in the country. With support from UNHCR, the Commission for Refugee Status Determination (CODER) designed a new registration system to streamline processes and ensure compliance with data protection standards. Its implementation will represent a step toward improving case admission and adjudication. Civil servants, academics, and civil society staff enhanced their knowledge and technical expertise on asylum-related matters through tailored training programmes. Together with UNICEF and WFP, UNHCR joined the regional strategy to monitor mixed movements trends and inform comprehensive and coordinated responses.

Click and scan to read more: With UNHCR's support, CODER inaugurated its premises to assist refugees and asylum seekers in El Salvador.

Photo: © UNHCR / Jacqueline Henríquez

PROTECTION POLICY AND LAW

Key national institutions, including the Attorney General's Office (PGR), the Institute for Women's Development (ISDEMU), the Ombudsperson's Office (PDDH), and the Ministry of Justice and Public Security, strengthened their protection response for people in need of international protection and returnees, with support from UNHCR. These institutions improved coordination and service delivery at the Reception Centre for Returnees and through UNHCR's "By Your Side" Support Spaces. Authorities adopted the Comprehensive Policy on Migration, incorporating specific measures to address the rights and needs of returnees and displaced populations. PGR enhanced protection for displaced children and their families by implementing a new attention protocol developed with UNHCR's technical support.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

More than 5,400 survivors of violence accessed specialized services through UNHCR and its partners, expanding their access to protection and support. ISDEMU reached 3,641 women with remote emergency assistance via the UNHCR-supported 24/7 helpline "123 Te Orienta." At the Reception Centre for Returnees, 618 returnee women received orientation and were referred to services. Women-led grassroots organizations, working in partnership with UNHCR, delivered immediate psychosocial support and legal assistance to 1,776 survivors of intimate partner and other forms of violence. Community outreach strengthened early identification and response mechanisms, helping reduce the risks of violence against women and girls. According to UNHCR's feedback survey, 99% of beneficiaries expressed satisfaction with the specialized services they received.

CHILD PROTECTION

UNHCR prioritized mental health support for children and families in communities historically affected by violence and displacement, such as La Campanera, Las Margaritas, and Tutunichapa I and II. In partnership with the Council on Childhood and Adolescence (CONAPINA), UNHCR rehabilitated and equipped four community spaces and trained psychologists who supported 1,075 children at heightened risk and 72 families. To strengthen child protection systems, UNHCR trained 379 officials from the Migration Directorate and PGR. The General Prosecutor's Office (FGR) in Santa Tecla opened a special care room for adolescent victims with UNHCR's support to offer a child-focused approach in their interventions.

Click or scan to read more: Many refugees and displaced people received psychological support through the Comprehensive Centre for Emotional Intelligence CIIE, a joint initiative by UNHCR and the Directorate for the Reconstruction of the Social Cohesion.

Photo: © UNHCR / Jacqueline Henríquez

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Through participatory processes, UNHCR contributed to strengthen and enhance protection and community engagement. Outreach initiatives reached 13,082 individuals, including community leaders, groups, and volunteers. Participatory assessments with forcibly displaced individuals, those at risk of displacement and from communities historically affected by violence, helped identify key priorities and informed community-driven solutions. This engagement contributed to enhancing social cohesion and fostered a stronger sense of belonging and shared responsibility. UNHCR-supported initiatives like the Graffitour, the Urban Centres for Welfare and Opportunities (CUBO) and the Community Integration Centres (CIC) promoted local integration and strengthened community resilience. In partnership with the General Directorate for Civil Protection and with UNHCR support, 14 community commissions enhanced their capacity to prevent and respond to extreme weather-related disasters.

WELL-BEING AND BASIC NEEDS

UNHCR supported public institutions to expand access to essential services for forcibly displaced people, those at risk of displacement and to offer solutions to people from communities historically affected by violence. As leader of the Protection Sector, and co-leader of the Shelter and CCCM Sectors, UNHCR helped coordinate joint training, intersectoral assessments, and guideline reviews that strengthened the delivery of services and urgent assistance. As a result, UNHCR and its partners provided core relief items to 1,800 people and distributed dignity and hygiene kits to 1,757 individuals. Civil Protection used 120 emergency tents donated by UNHCR to respond quickly to emergencies and offer temporary shelter to people during emergencies. Under the “By Your Side” strategy, UNHCR and the Directorate for Attention of Victims provided specialized services to 4,000 people who fled their homes including psychosocial support, shelter, and legal assistance. Roving teams and mobile units shared information on rights and services with 81,666 people across the country.

Click or scan to read more: Supported by Civil Protection and UNHCR, the community commissions develop early warning mechanisms to reduce vulnerabilities to disasters.

Click or scan to read more: Family tents delivered by UNHCR allowed Civil Protection to provide emergency shelter to people affected by disasters.

Youths leading the transformation of their communities

Joana, once forced to flee, now coordinates a community center (CUBO) in Mejicanos, creating safe, inclusive spaces through recreational and educational activities. Bryan, a member of the Red Juvenil Sin Fronteras in Soyapango, works with youth across formerly divided neighborhoods breaking down invisible barriers through cultural exchange and community events. Alejandra, a mother and leader in the IVU community, runs literacy workshops and artistic activities for children and older persons, promoting hope and opportunities.

Supported by UNHCR and partners, these young leaders are strengthening social cohesion, engaging their communities, and driving change.

Click or scan to read more

SELF RELIANCE, ECONOMIC INCLUSION AND LIVELIHOODS

In 2024, UNHCR helped 958 displaced individuals and those at risk improve their self-reliance through livelihood programmes focused on employment, entrepreneurship, education, and skills development. Through the My First Job programme, 363 people received training, leading to 139 formal apprenticeships supported by the Ministry of Labour and UNHCR. The Súper Pilas programme strengthened entrepreneurial skills for 379 people from which 173 received seed capital to launch small businesses. UNHCR and ISDEMU trained 80 women, resulting in 55 business plans and 25 funded livelihood initiatives. Under the Creating Opportunities initiative along partner Fe y Alegría, 149 youth completed certified vocational and technical trainings, and 67 adults received tutoring and support to resume formal education.

RESETTLEMENT AND COMPLEMENTARY PATHWAYS

In 2024, UNHCR facilitated the resettlement and complementary pathways for people with international protection needs. This resulted in 2,800 people submitted for consideration by resettlement countries. Throughout the year, 1,033 people departed and found durable and dignified solutions in resettlement countries.

LOCAL INTEGRATION AND OTHER LOCAL SOLUTIONS

UNHCR advanced local solutions by expanding access to nationality for refugees and promoting community-based integration in areas previously under gang control. Ten refugees obtained Salvadoran nationality through coordinated efforts with national institutions. Also, the UNHCR “ReVive Tu Espacio” initiative helped communities to transform areas marked by violence and displacement into safe public spaces, benefiting 65,000 residents through 20 infrastructure projects, including sports facilities, recreational areas, solar lighting, and mural painting. Seven local committees, mainly led by women and youth, guided interventions, strengthened local governance and increased trust among residents. In La Campanera, a strategic alliance with the Ministry of Justice and Public Security and UN-Habitat resulted in the façades improvement of 100 damaged houses. Also, UNHCR identified families in need of relocation or reintegration in coordination with the Ministry of Housing. Under an intersectoral needs mapping exercise, these efforts are part of a model to drive social cohesion, resilience and stability, with the potential for replication in other communities.

Photo: © UNHCR / Jacqueline Henríquez

Click and scan to read more:
Through joint efforts by UNHCR, World Vision, and the Ministry of Labour, displaced people accessed livelihood opportunities through the Súper Pilas and Mi Primer Trabajo programmes.

Photo: © UNHCR / Jacqueline Henríquez

“For me, the spaces that have been rehabilitated have a new meaning.

They are symbols of hope and a sign that positive changes can be achieved in our community.”

Angie, Youth Committee, La Campanera

Click and scan to read more:
With support from UNHCR, La Campanera, in El Salvador, inaugurated its community house, a space to promote community strengthening.

ALLIANCES

- In 2024, the increased humanitarian access to territories previously inaccessible in El Salvador presented opportunities for UNHCR to promote local solutions. Increased public trust in institutions collaborating with UNHCR created a solid foundation for deeper engagement and cooperation.

- The number of asylum seekers tripled compared to 2022, underscoring the urgent need for strengthened protection mechanisms. In this context, UNHCR worked closely with CODER, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the General Directorate for Migration and Foreigners, and the Ministry of Justice and Public Security to reinforce the national asylum system in alignment with the GRF and MIRPS Plan. Government officials received training on international protection through partnerships with key institutions.

- To enhance protection responses, UNHCR partnered with ISDEMU, CONAPINA, the Directorate for the Attention to Victims, the Attorney General's Office, and the Ombudsperson's Office. Collaborations with 11 national and international partners and active engagement with civil society expanded assistance coverage.

- UNHCR promoted opportunities for youth in coordination with the Ministries of Labour and Education. Through the "De Una, Transforming My Community" project funded by the UN Peacebulding Fund, implemented with ILO and UNDP, young leaders enhanced their skills, including through support from academia.

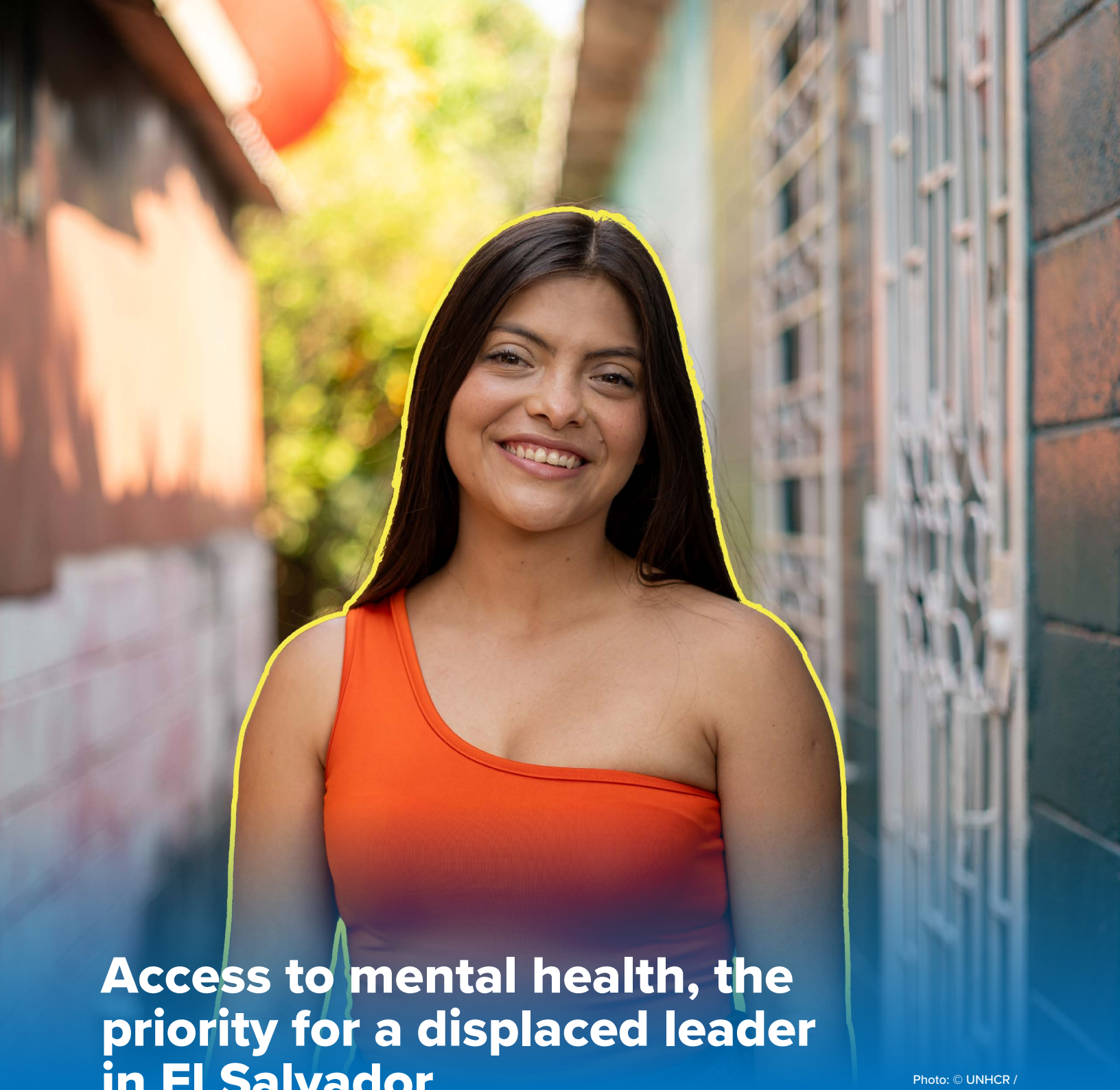
- UNHCR collaborated with the UNCT and HCT to respond to emergencies caused by heavy rains and earthquakes, under its leadership and co-leadership of the Protection, CCCM, and Shelter Sectors alongside Civil Protection, the National Directorate for Shelter, and IOM. The Global Shelter Sector supported the development of an intersectorial needs mapping exercise to coordinate response.

- Together with the Ministry of Housing and the Ministry of Justice and Public Security, UNHCR supported the transformation of public spaces in communities historically affected by gang control. Joint actions with UN-Habitat allowed to strengthen local governance, improve community infrastructure, and enhance housing conditions. Academic institutions also played a role in raising awareness about displacement and durable solutions.

KEY ASPECTS

Photo: © UNHCR / Jacqueline Henríquez

- In 2024, UNHCR adapted to a shifting context by placing communities at the centre of its work. Needs-based planning and community feedback helped shape responsive strategies, while participatory decision-making opened space for local solutions and innovation. Strengthening community structures and grassroots organizations improved early identification of at-risk individuals and led to more inclusive support.
- Collaboration with public institutions contributed to stronger local protection systems and with some increasing their ownership. These steps laid the foundation for long-term, sustainable responses and connected humanitarian action with development and peacebuilding efforts.
- Community outreach and structured participation boosted trust, inclusion and social cohesion. As local actors gained ownership, UNHCR responsibly scaled back in some areas, allowing a shift of focus to new locations in need.
- Piloting alliances with communities, government, civil society, development actors, academia, the UN and the private sector, opened new pathways to achieve results, even in times of limited resources. Trust-building and strong collaboration remain essential to scale and sustain impact.
- UNHCR's communications helped raise awareness of available services and supported community engagement. Digital campaigns also helped counter disinformation, and insights gained will guide future efforts. In case of major funding gaps, experience from 2024 shows that partnerships can play a key role in extending outreach and sustaining support.



Access to mental health, the priority for a displaced leader in El Salvador

Photo: © UNHCR / Markel Redondo

Saraí, a young community leader from El Salvador, was forced to flee her home and lived through severe emotional distress. She found support at the Comprehensive Centre of Emotional Intelligence (CIIE), where she learned to manage her emotions and began to heal.

After returning to her community, she joined the local youth committee and now actively works to create safe spaces and improve her neighborhood through activities that foster participation. She also contributes to the community centre CUBO , where workshops on emotional wellness are helping restore hope among residents.

Click or scan to read more

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