UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

GUATEMALA

Operational Update

October - December 2025

Refugee entrepreneur building their food venture and creating new opportunities. ©UNHCR

CONTEXT

Guatemala, a multiethnic and multilingual nation, plays a strategic role in regional mobility. In recent years, it has become an increasingly important destination for asylum-seekers, particularly from Honduras, El Salvador, Venezuela, and Nicaragua, with applications continuing to rise throughout the second half of 2025.

Its geographic position places Guatemala at the center of complex displacement dynamics, generating significant challenges and critical opportunities for national institutions and humanitarian actors.

This evolving context calls for stronger protection systems, broader access to essential services, and durable solutions that allow asylum-seekers, refugees, returnees, and internally displaced people (IDPs), stateless individuals, and others with protection needs to access their rights and fully integrate into society.

As a country of origin and return, Guatemala faces significant reintegration challenges, risks of re-displacement, and persistent structural drivers of mobility, including violence, poverty, inequality, and limited access to services.

Guatemala is hosting 7,990 refugees and asylum-seekers. By December, more than 55,276 returnees arrived from the United States and Mexico, many requiring urgent protection. Asylum claims rose by more than 120 percent between January and September 2025, and in 2024 tripled compared to 2021, confirming Guatemala's growing role as a place of refuge.

Most asylum-seekers are under 30 years old and arrive alone or with their families, while Indigenous communities continue to experience disproportionate impacts from internal displacement. Host communities struggle to meet rising demand for healthcare, education, shelter, and documentation.

Despite these challenges, Guatemala advances inclusive development, disaster preparedness, and regional solidarity. The government, with support from UNHCR and partners, strengthens asylum systems, decentralizes services, and expands protection mechanisms.

UNHCR supports these efforts by improving access to the asylum procedures, promoting local integration, and providing technical expertise on displacement and statelessness.

KEY FIGURES

8,251
Number of refugees and asylum seekers[1].

55,276
Returnees from the U.S. and Mexico From January - December 2025[2].

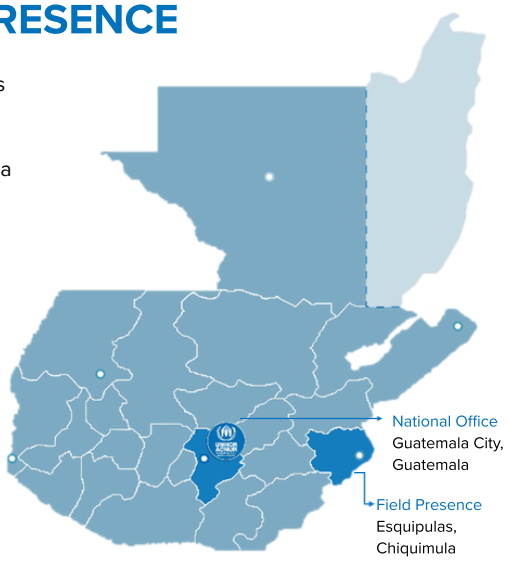
120%
Increase of asylum claims in 2025 compared to 2021.

573,000
Internally displaced people (IDPs) due to violence[3].

685,000
Internally displaced people (IDPs) due to weather-related disasters[3].

UNHCR PRESENCE

UNHCR maintains its presence through a national office in Guatemala City and a field unit in Esquipulas, Chiquimula.

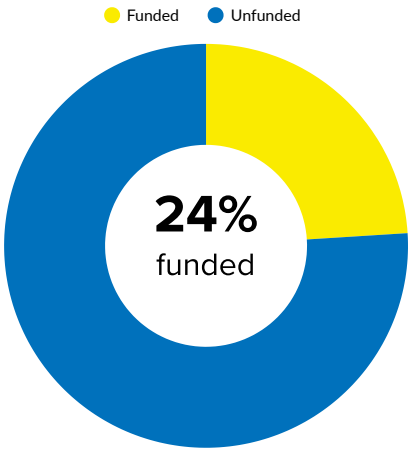


*The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

2025 FINANCIAL REQUIREMENTS

UNHCR requested USD 37.9 million for its 2025 programme, as of December 2025 only USD 8.9 million (24%) has been funded so far.

An additional USD 29 million is still needed to continue supporting people who are forcibly displaced, at risk of displacement, returnees with protection needs, asylum-seekers, and refugees. Our latest funding update is available here.



[1]Source: Figures as of December 2025 from the National Institute of Migration. Figures include historical recognitions | Applications registered between 2021 and 2025.
[2]Source: UNHCR Response Monitoring, Guatemala Data. Figures as of December 2025 from the National Institute of Migration.
[3]Source: UNHCR Response Monitoring, Guatemala Data. Figures as of December 2025 from the National Institute of Statistics

PROTECT

CAPACITY STRENGTHENING ACTIVITIES

UNHCR delivered targeted workshops and procedural trainings for technical staff, analysts, interviewers, and registration personnel of the Refugee Status Determination Department (DRER), as well as representatives of the National Refugee Commission (CONARE). The sessions covered key areas like the Cartagena Declaration, interview methodologies, and the application of exclusion clauses, enhancing the quality and consistency of refugee status determination decision-making and reinforcing institutional capacities to protect asylum seekers and refugees more effectively.

In parallel, UNHCR strengthened the capacities of five Casa Joven centers of the Secretariat of Social Welfare (SBS) by delivering training on violence against women and girls to over 48 youth civic volunteers and 11 educators. These young leaders serve as community focal points and will replicate their knowledge, expanding youth networks that promote safe environments and drive social transformation.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

37 officials received training in **asylum procedures** and regulatory frameworks.

48 young people trained and will now share what they learned within their **communities.**

11 educators from Casa Joven were trained in violence prevention and protection.

SUPPORT FOR THE DRER DECENTRALIZATION PROCESS

UNHCR provided technical and operational support for the rollout of DRER Service Decentralization Days in the departments of Izabal, Peten, and Chiquimula. These efforts enabled local governments, including Cities of Solidarity and refugee-led organizations are to engage in the process actively. The initiative strengthened the institutional presence of the asylum system in strategic regions, improving access to procedures for individuals seeking international protection.

Decentralization Mission in Izabal with the DRER and ASOREFI ©UNHCR/IGM

The Izabal Refugee Association (ASOREFI) played a critical role by identifying and accompanying individuals with protection needs, contributing to referrals and community engagement in a more timely manner.

Working groups from the Protection Departmental Spaces collaborated with civil society actors and local authorities to coordinate logistics and provide venues for activities, thereby enhancing inter-institutional cooperation and fostering local ownership of decentralization efforts.

Decentralization Mission in Izabal with the Departmental Roundtable on Protection and Migration and ASOREFI ©UNHCR/Departmental Governor's Office of Izabal

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

THREE DEPARTMENTS carried out DRER decentralization missions.

120 INDIVIDUALS benefited from the decentralization missions.

SIX ORGANIZATIONS carried out DRER decentralization missions.

FIRST REFUGEE-LED ORGANIZATION GAINS LEGAL STATUS IN GUATEMALA | ASOREFI

Asociación de Refugiados in Izabal. ©UNHCR

UNHCR supported the legal establishment of the Izabal Refugee Association (ASOREFI), composed of five refugee and asylum-seeker members, and the Municipality of Puerto Barrios formally recognized the organization with backing from the Departmental Governor's Office and the institutions participating in the Izabal Migration and Protection Roundtable.

This milestone strengthens community-based protection and refugee leadership, enabling ASOREFI to engage in advocacy, contribute to local protection mechanisms, and participate in coordination and decision-making spaces in the department, thereby reinforcing the role and agency of refugee communities within the broader protection response.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

FIRST legal refugee association in Guatemala

FIVE legal representatives in the refugee association ASOREFI.

FIFTY individuals were identified by ASOREFI and referred to the asylum process.

[1]Source: UNHCR Response Monitoring, Guatemala Data. Figures as of December 2025 from the National Institute of Migration.

PROTECT

INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT DATA FOR INFORMED AND COORDINATED PROTECTION RESPONSES.

The National Institute of Statistics (INE), with technical support from UNHCR, presented the official figures on internal displacement in Guatemala. This joint effort strengthened national protection systems by validating and disseminating evidence-based displacement data.

Following the presentation, INE and UNHCR shared the information with the National Protection Network, the Protection Sector, and the Humanitarian Country Team. This engagement increased the visibility of internal displacement within the national humanitarian agenda and provided evidence to inform decision-making and response planning for internally displaced people (IDPs).

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

400 officials received training
in the protection of internally displaced people

THIRTY organizations
benefitted from training on internal displacement and regulatory frameworks

HIGHLIGHTS

UNHCR collaborates with national institutions to protect and integrate displaced populations through improved response mechanisms, human rights advocacy, and violence prevention initiatives.

Partnerships with the Ombudsperson's Office (PDH) and Secretariat for Prevention of Violence, Sexual Exploitation, and Human Trafficking (SVET) have expanded outreach via mobile units, **PDH mobiles**, and **UNIVETs**, serving remote and marginalized areas. These mobile initiatives, strongly supported by the Vice President of Guatemala, are now central to the national response to sexual violence and human trafficking.

UNHCR builds strong local partnerships with local communities, welcoming commitments from **15 municipalities and 4 departmental governorates** through the **Cities of Solidarity initiative**. This collaboration brings together national and local governments, with support from UNHCR and civil society, to protect displaced populations and foster inclusive communities.

UNIVET Mobile Unit in Cobán, Alta Verapaz. ©UNHCR

UNHCR and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MINEX) reviewed progress in Guatemala's national asylum system and updated the 13 pledges made at the 2023 Global Refugee Forum. This strengthened collaboration ahead of the **2025 GRF Progress Review in Geneva**, where Guatemala reaffirmed its commitment to responsibility-sharing under the **Global Compact on Refugees**.

In November 2025, UNHCR participated in the **Second Inter-American Congress on Human Trafficking** in Antigua Guatemala, organized by the Secretariat against Sexual Violence, Exploitation and Human Trafficking (SVET), contributing to regional dialogue and cooperation on trafficking prevention and response.

In partnership with SVET, UNHCR continues to deploy nine UNIVET mobile units. **In 2025, these units have reached 151,757 individuals** across urban and rural areas nationwide, providing vital information and guidance to prevent violence against women and girls.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

34,297
People trained in prevention, risk mitigation and response
to gender-based violence between October and November 2025.

NINE
mobile units deployed
by UNHCR providing information and case management on Violence, Sexual Exploitation and Human Trafficking

EIGHT
PDH mobile units and one speedboat
supported by UNHCR, fostering human rights by providing case management for human rights denunciations.

[1]Source: UNHCR Response Monitoring, Guatemala Data. Figures as of December 2025 from the National Institute of Migration.

SOLVE

STRENGTHENING SYSTEMS AND STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

UNHCR guides its efforts toward sustainable and effective integration for refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons, and returnees by ensuring access to legal documentation, including work permits, essential services, and protection mechanisms. These efforts are reinforced through strategic collaboration with donors, development banks, international cooperation agencies, private sector partners, and civil society organizations, all committed to fostering inclusive development and advancing durable solutions.

HIGHLIGHTS

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Refugee participation in the Christmas Market in the French Alliance, Guatemala City. ©UNHCR

10 refugees and asylum seekers presented their business pitches at the closing of the **Inclusive Finance training** delivered with Swisscontact and COSAMI, showcasing their business models after completing an education programme on financial inclusion.

2 refugee-founded enterprises participated in the Christmas Market, generating income and expanding their customer base.

With UNHCR's support, Esquipulas' Municipal Women's Directorate launched the **"I Take Care of Myself" programme**, benefiting 800+ women, including 20 refugees, through self-care workshops that fostered well-being, economic opportunities, and women's participation.

EMPLOYABILITY

UNHCR supported a forklift operator training to meet market demands. ©UNHCR

With UNHCR's support, the Ministry of Labor issued **work permits to 667 refugees and asylum-seekers**, enhancing legal access to formal employment and reinforces long-term integration efforts across Guatemala.

Implementing **market-responsive training programmes**, UNHCR aligned vocational programs with labor market needs by facilitating the **training of 11 young people as forklift operators**.

40 female refugees and asylum seekers in Petén will benefit from the **MoU signed on December 2, 2025, between Sagrada Tierra and UNHCR**, which includes training, support for micro-enterprise development, and collaboration with public and private actors to facilitate market access and improve the visibility of their products.

ON THE FIELD

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Strengthening community structures in Peten. ©UNHCR / Marvin M.

[1]Source: UNHCR Response Monitoring, Guatemala Data. Figures as of December 2025 from the National Institute of Migration.

ESQUIPULAS

- **The Community Development and Innovation Center (CEDEI)**, inaugurated in September 2025 with support from UNHCR and the Embassy of Korea, has hosted 22 workshops benefiting 557 people, mostly women, refugees, and asylum seekers, as part of the Solidary Cities initiative.
- UNHCR provided equipment to the **Esquipulas Health Center**, enabling 23 campaigns that benefited over 5,000 people. In partnership with the Municipality and other organizations, border-area campaigns improved access to health services, while more than 1,500 people received information on international protection.

Humanitarian Service Day in Las Canoas, Esquipulas, UNHCR with different partners. ©UNHCR/Nery J.

PETEN

- UNHCR promoted **peaceful coexistence and civic participation** in Flores and San Benito through inclusive initiatives tied to international awareness days. Coordinated with municipalities and local organizations, these activities benefited 613 people, facilitating access to services, promoting rights, and encouraging **youth and female leadership and participation** amongst refugees and host communities.

Community integration sports activity on International Youth Day, San Benito, Petén. ©UNHCR/Rocío G.

UNHCR is grateful for the contributions of donor countries that contribute to our operation in Guatemala and to global programmes with flexible funding:

Australian Aid · Belgium partner in development · In partnership with Canada · German humanitarian assistance DEUTSCHE HUMANITÄRE HILFE · Irish Aid An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha Department of Foreign Affairs · KOREA Sharing Hope Sharing Future · Cooperación Española · From the People of Japan · Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft Confédération suisse Confederazione Svizzera Confederaziun svizra Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC · UKaid from the British people · United Nations CERF Central Emergency Response Fund · Internal Displacement Solutions Fund · PEACEBUILDING FUND

Also, we thank the contributions of our global private donors in Australia, Canada, China, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, the Republic of Korea, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

**As of 30 December 2025*

For more information about this update, please contact:
Marzia Dalto, Protection Officer | Email: dalto@unhcr.org
Jennifer Hamm, External Relations Associate | Email: hammlou@unhcr.org

Stayed infomed about UNHCR Guatemala:
ACNURGuatemala · @ACNURGuate
www.unhcr.org/guatemala