

# UNHCR PRESENCE IN MEXICO



Newsletter | December 2021

The increase in the number of asylum applications from Haitians **put enormous pressure on Mexico's asylum system.**

## UNHCR AT A GLANCE



**51,287**  
of asylum seekers registered and assisted by UNHCR in 2021



**78,127**  
of asylum seekers benefiting with cash assistance in 2021



**52,533**  
asylum seekers received legal assistance in 2021



**759**  
of survivors of Gender Based Violence provided with support in 2021



**7,652**  
of refugees relocated and integrated in Mexico in 2021

New Asylum Applications in Mexico Monthly Evolution | 2014-2021\*



**OPERATIONAL CONTEXT**



The sudden sharp increase in the number of Haitian nationals arriving to Mexico from mid-2021 -part of a wave of secondary movements primarily from Brazil and Chile- combined with the lack of alternative migratory options, has placed an enormous strain on Mexico’s asylum system. Hopelessly waiting their asylum case resolution and as a result their migratory documentation two groups of more than 2,000 people each departed Tapachula (Chiapas) forming new caravans. On 12 December, some 300 people from the 1st group reached Mexico City, while the 2nd was dissolved still in the South, following an agreement with INM to be relocated to the Center and North of the country to continue their migration process.

**A total of 127,569 claims for asylum was filled in until 10 December 2021. Haiti now represents 44% of all claims filed**, surpassing Honduras, top nationality throughout recent years. These numbers have placed Mexico as the 3rd top country worldwide for new asylum claims in 2021.

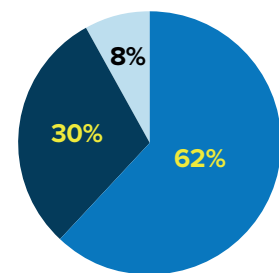
**THIS NEWSLETTER FEATURES:**

**HOW DOES UNHCR EMPOWER COMMUNITIES?**

Supporting empowered, participative, informed and organised refugee communities in Mexico is one of the four pillars of the UNHCR Multi-Year Strategy 2022-2024. We believe it is of utmost importance to support communities so that they regain autonomy and develop leadership skills for designing and leading projects that foster their protection and integration and that impacts positively on their communities and host communities. To this end, UNHCR has been driving initiatives with and for specific groups of beneficiaries, some of them, youth, woman at risk

and LGBTQI+ persons, persons with psychosocial support needs and groups with intersected characteristics, such as woman with disabilities, as well as identifying community leaders.

As a part of these efforts, between 18 September and 11 October, we carried out, together with our partners, participatory assessments in 22 cities where UNHCR has presence. A total of 919 individuals from Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, Colombia, Cuba, Haiti, Venezuela and Nicaragua took part, among them:



■ Refugees  
■ Asylum seekers  
■ Other persons with protection needs

**226** children and adolescents  
**279** adult women **245** adult men **76** older adults mayores  
**24** people with disabilities  
**38** LGBTQI+ persons **31** non-Spanish-speaking people  
Also, **54** adult women and men belonging to host communities were consulted.



The Haitian population learns Spanish at the community center in Tijuana.

We have also enhanced communication with asylum seekers and refugees to better respond to their needs, among those raised during the COVID-19 emergency, and to endorse accountability through the Community-based Complaint Mechanism (CBCM). Up to mid-December, 3,836 reports have been channelled through the mechanism, including requests for assistance. Men accounted for 71%,

while women for 29%, and those between 25 and 49 years old represented 79% of the users. Finally, UNHCR has been promoting peaceful coexistence projects that contribute to the local and social development to the entire community where both local and displaced populations interact. Our objective is to foster ownership of community-based and inclusive initiatives related to sport, culture or education, as well

as to improve infrastructure where those activities can take place. In the recently opened community centre in Tijuana, a growing Haitian population can learn Spanish, which is key for their successful local integration, while locals are also provided with Haitian Creole lessons. In the Metropolitan area of Monterrey, thanks to another project, the community can enjoy a renovated public park in the Santa Catalina municipality.

## WHAT DID THE ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES TOLD US DURING THE PARTICIPATORY EVALUATIONS?



**About their intentions:** the majority wants to rebuild their lives in Mexico and recognise opportunities for development in the country; however, many remain interested in moving to central and northern Mexico as they face difficult living conditions or discrimination in border towns such as Palenque, Tenosique and Tapachula.





**About their integration:** the vast majority of refugees hopes for naturalization to become Mexicans and explained that their residence documents were not enough for local integration in Mexico, being rarely accepted by employers, banks, schools and public institutions due to lack of knowledge about their existence and the entailed rights.



**About discrimination:** they reported suffering more discrimination in the South; many also faced discrimination from employers, who offered lower wages and higher workloads.



**About shelters:** these were perceived as places of support to alleviate immediate needs such as housing, food and basic medicines, however, they prefer to receive direct humanitarian cash support to rent, due to cases of violence by others sheltered or by shelter staff.



**About access to information:** their connectivity has improved; however, there is much information in social media groups and the general perception is that the information is not reliable.



**About access to specialized services:** a lack of financial resources is a barrier to meet their specific needs, they also face obstacles with local health and education authorities to access services. The impact of the pandemic on mental health was raised by all.



## OTHER TOPICS:

### THE VISIT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES, FILIPPO GRANDI









During the three-day visit to Mexico, between 22 and 25 November, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, met government, civil society organizations, diplomatic and academic community in Mexico City, Tijuana and Guadalajara, and listened to concerns directly from asylum seekers. In Tijuana, accompanied by the US Ambassador, Ken Salazar, visited the Training Center for Migrants and Refugees, a space run by the

Scalabrinian Missionaries and funded by the United States. Together with the Ambassador of the European Union, Gautier Mignot, he inaugurated COMAR facilities remodeled thanks to the European funding. The High Commissioner conveyed key messages highlighting the importance of safeguarding the asylum system in Mexico through the consideration of alternative migration options, the importance of guaranteeing access to asylum for those in need of international protection, and his concern for restrictive policies and practices applied both by Mexico and the United States. He also indicated the importance of progressing in the response to internal displacement in Mexico.



## DONORS AND DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY VIRTUAL AND FIELD VISITS

Following the 3 days virtual mission between 21 and 23 September, that brought together 15 key global UNHCR donors, we hosted several field visits from diplomatic community in Mexico:

<p><b>11 October - Saltillo</b> Focus: integration</p> 		<p><b>9 November - Tapachula</b> Focus: access to asylum, COMAR</p> 	<p><b>13 November - Tapachula</b> Focus: launching remodeling of the National Employment Service office to improve access to labor integration, as a part of the UNHCR-ILO project "Promotion of Employment and Social Protection in the Comprehensive Framework of Response to Refugees in Central America and Mexico" financed by the European Union</p> 
<p><b>22 November - Tijuana</b> Focus: protection (together with IOM, UNICEF and NGOs)</p> 	<p><b>23 November - Tijuana</b> Focus: protection and access to asylum</p> 	<p><b>24 November - Tijuana</b> Focus: protection</p> 	

We hope these visits allowed to get inside of the challenges, but also of the multiple interventions UNHCR has been implementing across the country to enhance protection and livelihood options for people in need of international protection in Mexico.

## PILOT INTEGRATION PROGRAM FOR HAITIAN POPULATION

In mid-September, approximately 15,000 people of Haitian origin arrived in Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila state, having crossed Mexico from the southern border. Coming mostly from Chile and Brazil, where some of them had resided for several years, they embarked on this journey due to a lack of opportunities and access to regular stays in those countries. While most of the Haitians managed to enter the United States, about 300 to 400 people remained in Ciudad Acuña.

At the end of November, a joint mission was carried out to Ciudad Acuña by COMAR, Casa Migrante de Saltillo (CMS) and UNHCR. In collaboration with local authorities and the INM, it was then possible to support those who expressed their intention to remain in Mexico, with starting their asylum procedures. A roadmap was also designed and implemented to: (1) streamline migration documentation and (2) relocate of 305 people to Torreón, Coahuila for labor inclusion. Channeled through the UNHCR's Local Integration Program (PIL), 77% of them (237 people, of which 46% are women and 54% are men) are being considered



by companies for the job placement. 30 have already been hired by companies allied to UNHCR. The initiative is a first step of the joint UNHCR and IOM pilot to be implemented in January 2022, that paves the way towards alternative migration regularization process for those vulnerable migrants who would not be recognized as refugees but cannot be returned to their countries or origin, and want to stay in Mexico.

## UNHCR'S COMMITMENT TO PROTECTION AGAINST SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE

Sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) refers to any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability or differential power for sexual purposes and represents a serious violation of trust and the right to protection, safety and dignity of refugees and asylum seekers. Sexual harassment undermines the right of staff to be safe and to be treated with dignity and respect in the workplace and in relation to work.

UNHCR is committed to making all efforts to prevent and respond to SEA and established a dedicated protocol on sexual misconduct, which defines the actions and responsibilities of the agency in the matter. In terms of prevention, in 2021, a series of training sessions were carried out for 770 staff, including our partners. UNHCR follows a strict protocol to channel victims to relevant services (health, psychosocial,

legal, security) as needed and desired, in accordance with the survivor-centered approach and the internal protocols on prevention from gender-based violence. In 2020, UNHCR activated a working group with other United Nations agencies and some NGOs to ensure better coordination of prevention and response to SEA.

**NOTES FROM THE FIELD**

## REFUGEES AND UNHCR CELEBRATE THE TRADITIONS OF DÍA DE MUERTOS

*Colors, tradition, flowers, candles and the memory of our loved ones were appreciated in the Altar de Muertos Monumental de la Escalinata de Santa Anita, a neighborhood located in the heart of Saltillo.*

Carolina University, a strategic ally of UNHCR, encourages this type of cultural activities in the district, where the most emblematic traditions of Mexican culture are shared and lived. This year, the Monumental Altar had 150 steps, almost 100 monarch butterflies, 100 meters of giant confetti and approximately 300 photos of relatives of neighbors who wanted to honor their loved ones. Some 150 neighbors, local artists and students participated in the project, preparing, for months, paper flowers and cardboard dead bread.

On the other side of the country - in Puebla, UNHCR, in coordination with the National Museum of Mexican Railways, mounted an Altar dedicated to asylum seekers, refugees and migrants who have lost their lives in Mexico. Asylum seekers and refugees from: Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Mexicans collaborated in the activity, sharing and exposing elements and symbolisms from their countries of origin. Offering refugees who come to live in Mexico these cultural experiences pays off and can generate links with the local community and stimulate their integration.





“Tu casa, tu corazón” and “Los sueños de Manuel”, works dedicated to refugees and migrants with the aim of making them recognize their rights.

## UNHCR INFORMATIVE THEATER PROJECT

UNHCR Mexico and its partner La Casa del Teatro staged two theater plays to provide information on how to apply for asylum in Mexico, the institutions involved in the process and the rights and obligations that come with being a refugee in the country. The first one “Tu casa, tu corazón”, premiered production by CEDRAM theater group with the financial support of the European Union, is a story of two brothers and their grandmother who leave their country of origin due to violence and security. Upon arriving in Mexico, the three characters are faced with the difficult decision where to seek protection: whether to pursue the American dream - with the dangers that this implies - or to stay in Mexico. Eventually, the family

requests refugee status in the country, and stays to live in Mexico united and calm.

The second play, “Los sueños de Manuel”, presented by Ráfaga theater group, tells Manuel’s story and his journey through Mexico, after he was forced to leave his country of origin, his home and family. On his way, he encounters difficulties but also people who provide aid and information, including on who refugee is and how to apply for asylum. Starting in Tapachula in September and finishing in Matamoros in November, the two plays were shown in shelters, schools, universities, and community centers in 17 cities across the country, with a total of 49 performances and 3,846 spectators.

## 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN BAJA CALIFORNIA

UNHCR, together with HIAS and other partners, organized a series of initiatives to commemorate the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence. Among the activities carried out in Monterrey, Ciudad Juarez and Tijuana were: “Tree of Wishes” held in the shelter for LGBTQI+ persons Jardín de las Mariposas to reflect on flourishing in adversity; virtual panel “Challenges and Perspectives on Violence against Women in Mobility”; “Gallery of survivors” a self-portrait activity of migrant and refugee women survivors of violence in Casa Arcoiris in Tijuana; projection of the documentary “Batallas Íntimas” and an informative talk at Carita’s soup kitchen on gender-based violence and the Mexican asylum procedure.





## REFUGEES' ENTREPRENEURS

A family of Venezuelan refugees residing in Cuautlancingo was among the few selected by the Puebla Ministry of Labor to participate in the “Proyectos Productivos” program within the state’s Agenda 2030. The winning family, who produces gourmet conserves and natural cosmetics, received in-kind support to start its own business in sustainable, innovative food production project.

## UNHCR HUMAN STORIES

### COMMUNITY INITIATIVES PROMOTED BY THE REFUGEES IN AGUASCALIENTES

#### Legal support collective

Celina, Fausto, Ariel, and José, one from Honduras, the others from Venezuela, form a group of young lawyers whose main objective is, based on their own experiences, to guide and accompany refugees with their immigration administrative procedures in Aguascalientes. The group has been also very active in sensitize the institutions and the local community on refugee rights and is now giving talks and orientation at the Hotel Real Plaza, to newly arrived refugees through the UNHCR Labor Integration Program.

#### University students supporting education of young boys and girls

Natalie and Scarlet are from Nicaragua and study Chemical Engineering and Bachelor of Business Administration degrees, respectively, at the Technological Institute of Aguascalientes. Zakarias is from Syria and studies Bioelectronic Engineering at the Universidad Panamericana. They were interested in contributing to the host community and approached UNHCR with an initiative of educational counseling for young people. In 2021, together with the Adolescent House that belongs to the State System for

the Comprehensive Protection of the Rights of Girls, Boys and Adolescents (SIPINNA), they began to support young high school students in regularization classes of English, Chemistry and Math.



Natalie and Scarlet from Nicaragua benefited from the Local Integration Program.

## Mental Health community volunteers

Francisco is from Venezuela, where he and his wife studied Psychology. He mentions that when they arrived in Mexico, adapting and understanding their new life in a different country took time. Being a mental health professional, Francisco realized the need to create safe accompaniment and listening spaces accessible to refugees and asylum seekers where they can share their experiences and concerns. Since 2020, he proposed to UNHCR to offer group talks for

assertive emotion management, conflict management and resilience. In 2021 the project was consolidated and Francisco together with Max, also a Venezuelan psychologist and refugee, offer 4 monthly talks both virtually and in person. As of November, approximately 100 people have benefited from these psychosocial support spaces. “My goal is to help in what I know, my remuneration is not financial, but to help others who have gone through various emotional situations due to mobility as I have already experienced them.”



## Art education for girls, boys and adolescents in a situation of mobility

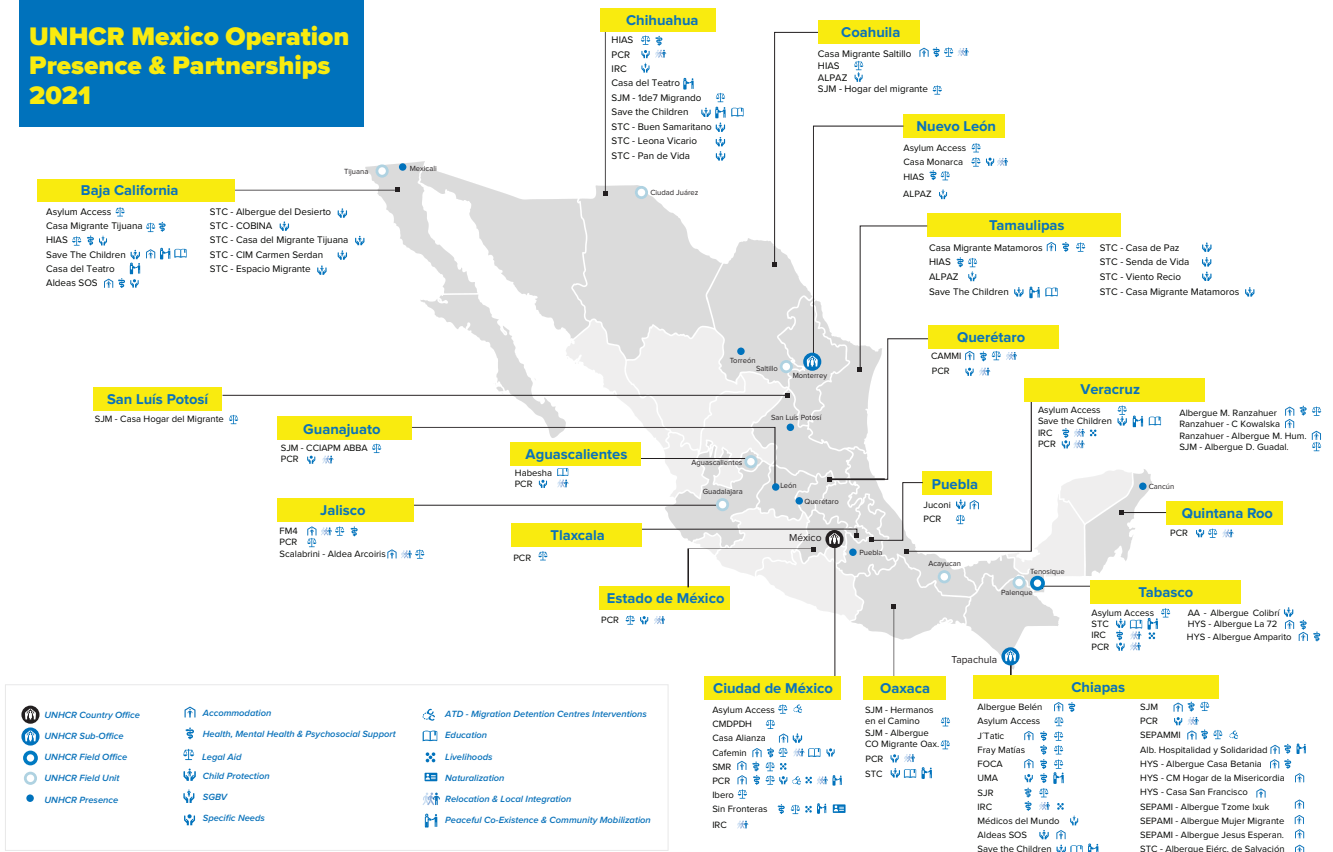
Robert is 23 years old and studied high school in his native Venezuela. His own experience of displacement and the interaction with other people in mobility at the shelter in Mexico City, inspired him and gave him the idea of art course for girls, boys and adolescents in a situation of mobility, which he called “Rediscovering our Creativity”. The objective of his course is to provide playful and

cognitive tools for expressing themselves assertively and developing their creativity. Robert believes that “creativity is essential and we all have it, it is only knowing how to rediscover it”. Upon being relocated to Aguascalientes, Robert began his Bachelor of Visual Arts studies at the University of the Arts and presented his project to the institution. In November 2021, Robert began to volunteer classes for girls, boys and adolescents from refugee families and soon it will be extended to the local population.

## MEET OUR PARTNERS

**Asylum Access Mexico** was established in 2015 and is dedicated to helping refugees as they rebuild their lives through a human rights-based approach. To achieve this, the organization uses combined efforts in legal empowerment, government capacity building, and partnerships in the private and social sectors. Asylum Access became a UNHCR partner in 2016. Currently it provides legal assistance and representation to asylum seekers and refugees in 6 states along the Northern and Southern border of Mexico.

**UNHCR Mexico Operation Presence & Partnerships 2021**



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