UNHCR ACNUR
La Agencia de la ONU para los Refugiados

Protection and solutions in the pandemic

2021 Highlights UNHCR Mexico

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2021
Highlights
UNHCR Mexico

Foreword

What a year it has been. In 2021, Mexico became the third top country worldwide in the number of new asylum applications. Nationals from various countries, mainly Haiti, North Central America, Venezuela, Cuba, among others, filed asylum claims throughout the year. The persistent effects of COVID-19 on health and movements, continued instability across several countries in the region, the rise of secondary and mixed movements arriving at Mexico's southern border and the growing numbers of internally displaced people are only a few of the trends which have characterized this past year.

As the year ends, I am left with images of my numerous visits to UNHCR's field locations, from Tapachula in the south and where Mexico begins, to the northernmost desert stretches near Tijuana, passing through the historical old towns of Mexico's Bajío region, among others. In these images I see the expressions of people forced to flee – expressions of relief for finally having found safety and shelter, of relief for their families reunited, of hope for better days to come. I also met with many people who shared their sadness for having lost their homes, melancholy for loved ones left behinf, and concern for what their future holds. For thousands of asylum-seekers, refugees, and internally displaced persons in Mexico, the reality is that the next few weeks and months of their lives are full of a feeling of uncertainty, mixed with hope for a better future. Will I be able to stay in Mexico? Will my spouse be able to work? Will my children go back to school? – are just some of the questions they asked me. I saw women, men, children, and teenagers whose rights and dignity have been violated multiple times. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated their vulnerabilities. Yet in all my visits, their resolve and resilience are clear: they are in search of a better, safer future. Here is where I am convinced that UNHCR can contribute- in providing the tools to rebuild lives.

Looking back also at the achievements of UNHCR's teams across the country, I can say with confidence that we provided tens of thousands of people of concern with humanitarian support and legal assistance. For thousands, we found solutions to their plight, helping them to relocate and settle down with a new home and employment, becoming an active part of their new communities. Together with our many partners, we offered protection, counselling, assistance, material support, and at times, comfort. In a remarkably turbulent and challenging year, I am proud of the progress we have achieved, made possible only thanks to the sustained generous support of donors and through UNHCR's close relationship and coordination with federal, state and municipal authorities, civil society organisations and the church, UN agencies and international organisations - and, critically - with refugees and internally displaced persons themselves.

As we prepare for another challenging year ahead, we thank you for your continued support to UNHCR and the people we strive to support and protect.

Giovanni Lepri
Representative
March 2022

©UNHCR/Pierre-Marc René

UNHCR Mexico´s Representative, Giovanni Lepri, talks to a haitian asylum seeker boy while staff from COMAR revises his family´s documentation in Tapachula.

CHAPTER **1**

2021 operational context and UNHCR response

2021 saw a record number of asylum applications in Mexico. More than 131,000 new asylum applications were registered, compared to 41,000 in 2020, representing an increase of 220%. In addition to the above, restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic continued in 2021, with intermittent limitations of mobility of persons in several states, closure of schools during the first semester of the year, and the suspension of non-essential administrative procedures affecting the ability for refugees to integrate in the country.

In 2021, Mexico experienced three different pressures simultaneously in terms of population movements: in the south, in the North and internal displacement.

From March onwards, the sudden and sharp increase in arrivals of high numbers of persons considered under “mixed and secondary movements”, primarily of Haitian nationals, and the absence of legal alternatives to regularize the stay of those not in need of international protection, overwhelmed the capacity of the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance (COMAR). Most of the Haitians who entered Mexico had lived in other countries in the Americas, in particular in Chile and Brazil, for a number of years. They travelled to Mexico together with their children, some of whom had acquired Chilean or Brazilian nationality at birth. With most asylum-seekers and migrants entering Mexico through the southern border, the state of Chiapas, and to

Manuel Nucamendi, head of field office in Tapachula, talks to asylum seekers at the olympic stadium where UNHCR and COMAR revised documentation.

a lesser extent the neighbouring state of Tabasco, was faced with sizeable groups of population with very acute humanitarian and protection needs. Owing to the number of vulnerable asylum-seekers who requested support through UNHCR, the assistance programme increased at a scale which surpassed UN Refugee Agency's capacity to register and assess these cases in a timely manner. Growing frustration among asylum-seekers and the saturation of public services presented challenges for the reception capacity in host communities.
In the north, border restrictions and expulsions to Mexico and to countries of origin from the United States under the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention public health order (referred to as Title 42) persisted throughout 2021. Direct expulsion flights from southern United States to the states of Chiapas and Tabasco and subsequent direct transportation from southern Mexico to Honduras and Guatemala were identified between August and November 2021, affecting some tens of thousands of individuals. Following a decision by President Joe Biden, from February to August 2021 the winding down of the Migrant

©UNHCR/Monica Vasquez

UNHCR staff places a poster with MPP information in a shelter in Ciudad Juarez

Protection Protocols (MPP) - or "Remain in Mexico" programme - supported over 13,000 persons to be readmitted to the United States as they await their court hearings. The policy decision by the Biden Administration was welcome, enabling thousands of asylum-seekers to stay in the country where they sought asylum pending the outcome of the process, in line with international refugee law standards. Subsequently, in December 2021, the implementation of the MPP resumed following a U.S. Federal District Court order. Throughout the year, border encounters at the U.S. – Mexican border, including Mexicans seeking asylum in the United States, also increased.

Finally, almost 29,000 people in 10 states were displaced in massive events caused by violence in 2021, according to the Mexican NGO Commission for the Defence and Promotion of Human Rights (CMDPDH)- the highest number reported since 2016. Despite the Mexican Government's recognition of the occurrence of internal displacement, the development of legal instruments underway and the consequent

Josep Herreros, Protection Assistant Representative, listens the demands of a group of displaced people during a visit to Sinaloa with local authorities.

©UNHCR/Stephanie Rea

operational response, these have proven to be insufficient, and internally displaced persons continued to face challenges in accessing protection, assistance, and solutions.

The above challenges notwithstanding, 2021 was also marked by significant achievements in relation to solutions for refugees and asylum-seekers in Mexico. The relocation and job placement programme (more commonly known by its Spanish acronym "PIL", for *Programa de Integración Local*) supported the highest number of refugees so far in one year, with over 7,700 people relocated to the industrial corridors in the centre and north of Mexico. In addition, over 35,500 asylum-seekers and refugees benefitted from *in situ* local integration support in the states where they arrive and register. This success is all the more significant considering the numerous constraints faced by teams implementing the Programme, such as the recurring postponement of relocations owing to COVID-19 limitations on movements, and the temporary restrictions on the relocation of refugees without residency permits.

To advance our protection and solutions agenda, high-level events were organized in the context of the Comprehensive Regional Framework on Protection and Solutions (commonly known by its Spanish acronym MIRPS, for *Marco Integral Regional para la Protección y Soluciones*). COMAR led the organization of roundtables on strengthening asylum systems, registration and documentation; labour inclusion and collaboration with private sector; and education and health, amongst others. Other inter-agency collaboration platforms were established or strengthened in 2021, as for example within the UN's Inter-agency

Group on Migration and Asylum (GIMA), co-led by UNHCR and IOM.

While UNHCR's operational context in 2021 continued to be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, business continuity was nevertheless ensured by maintaining essential staff, activities and services in the field and throughout its offices. In February 2021, a Level 1 emergency was declared, boosting our workforce across key locations and enhancing our operational capacity to support the wind-down of the MPP programme. UNHCR's office structure was also revised, resulting in the creation of two new Sub-Offices to cover the north and south of the country, in Monterrey (Nuevo León) and Tuxtla Gutiérrez (Chiapas), respectively. Three field units were also opened in the cities of Irapuato and Silao (Guanajuato) and in Torreón (Coahuila). With 21 offices actively working throughout the country by the end of the year, UNHCR- had expanded to meet the needs of the fast-growing

©UNHCR/Miguel Gaxiola

A haitian family poses in front of their new house in San Luis Potosi. Access to housing is a priority under the Local Integration Program.

UNHCR MEXICO PRESENCE

UNHCR Country Office:
1. Mexico City

UNHCR Sub-Office:
2. Monterrey
3. Tuxtla Gutiérrez

UNHCR Field Office:
4. Tapachula
5. Ciudad Juárez
6. Tijuana

UNHCR Field Unit:
7. Tenosique
8. Palenque
9. Acayucan
10. Guadalajara
11. Aguascalientes
12. Saltillo

UNHCR Presence:
13. Cancún
14. Puebla
15. Querétaro
16. León
17. San Luis Potosí
18. Mexicali
19. Torreón
20. Irapuato
21. Guanajuato

number of refugees and asylum-seekers in Mexico and support the government's capacity to assist them.

UNHCR's evidence-based approach has been substantially strengthened throughout 2021 to better inform its protection and solutions programmes and activities. Beyond multiple internal analyses, we supported the publication of two important studies that shed light on the magnitude of the phenomenon of forced displacement in the region : "Forced displacement to Mexico from Central America, 2014-2019" and the study of the Colegio de la Frontera Norte: "Profiles, dynamics and perspectives regarding the situation of refugees in Mexico"

Forced displacement to Mexico from Central America, 2014-2019

©UNHCR/Silvia Garduño

June, 2021. Clely and her son Efren play a little at the "Leona Vicario" shelter before continuing the process to readmit the United States in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua.

The end of MPP allowed thousands to restart their lives

The wait was over for 36 year-old Honduran Clely* and her 13-year-old son Efrén. They had applied for asylum in the United States in September 2019 but for nearly two years, were made to remain in Mexico while their case was making its way through U.S. courts. After the long wait, mother and son were part of a group of people who re-entered the United States through Ciudad Juarez to continue their asylum process there.

"They were moments of anguish, tears, helplessness, desperation, because it has been very difficult to stay in Juarez. I have had a hard time. Today I can't believe we are here," said Clely, at the Leona Vicario Migrant Integration Centre, a Mexican Government shelter in Ciudad Juarez where people gather before the longed-for crossing.

From February to August 2021, when the U.S. Government suspended the MPP wind-down process, more than 13,000 people were re-admitted to the United States. Through a collaborative engagement with both governments, UNHCR worked in close coordination with IOM, UNICEF and the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) to assist eligible persons to have their cases processed. UNHCR and its partners provided information and legal counselling and conducted a screening to identify those returned under MPP that should be fast-tracked due to risks or vulnerabilities.

The Honduran women Sonia, Silvia and Karla, all of them mothers, met in Matamoros, where they lived until the MPP was lifted. In Honduras, ten members of Sonia's family had been killed. Returning was never an option. In the Matamoros camp, despite challenges, they formed a community: they cooked together, took care of each other's children, gave each other support when they had to call their families and tell them they were well, even though they were not. "For many of us, this has been a life lesson. It is something that no one will ever forget, not even the children, I don't think they can forget this.," Sara said.

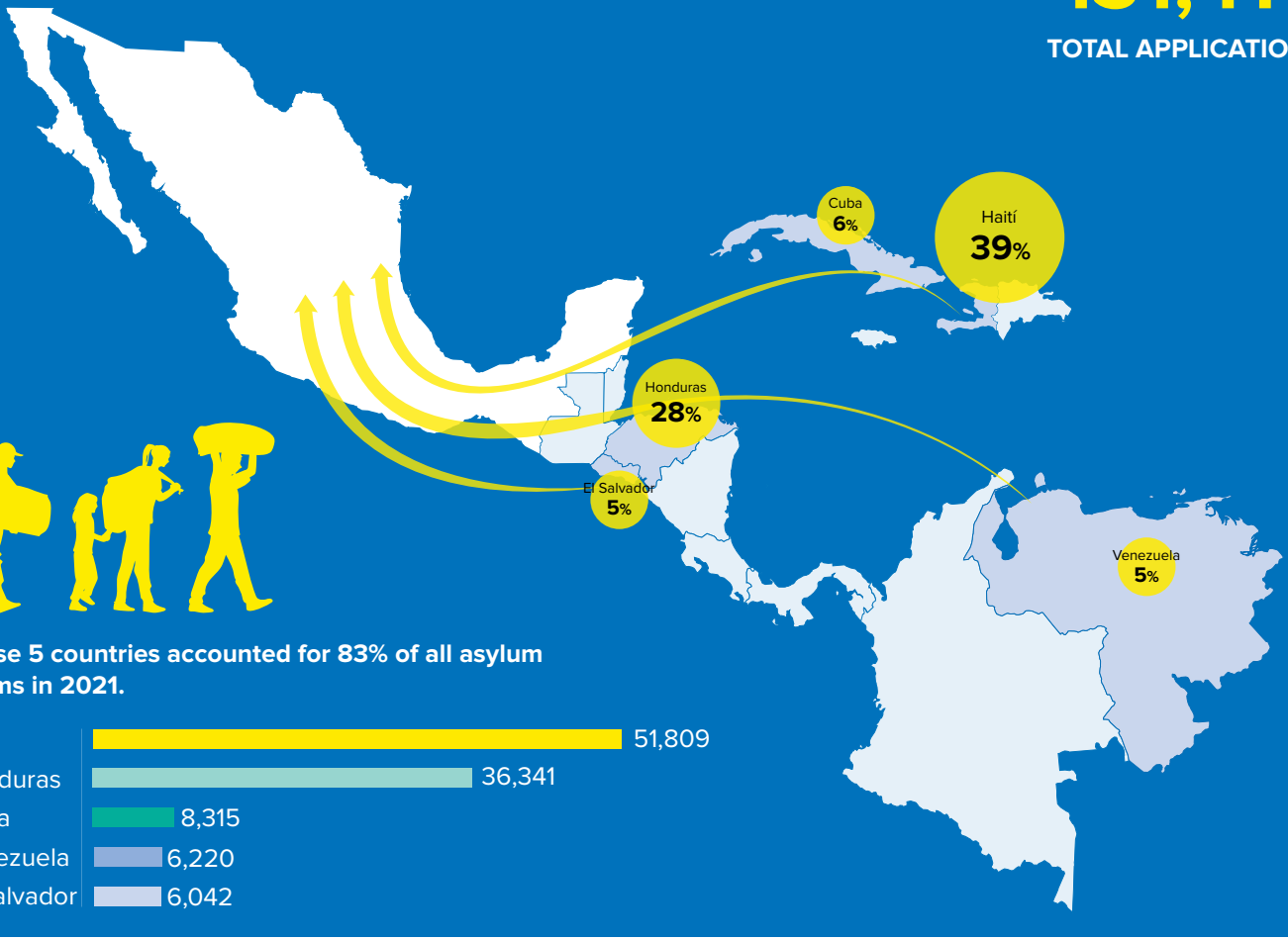
It was an arduous and long wait for people forced to stay in Mexico during the first phase of MPP, especially those who spent more than a year and a half in an informal camp of tents and latrines set up in Matamoros in early 2019. The Matamoros camp was emptied and closed in February 2021.

CHAPTER **2**

UNHCR Mexico at a glance

NEW ASYLUM APPLICATIONS IN 2021

131,414
TOTAL APPLICATIONS



These 5 countries accounted for 83% of all asylum claims in 2021.

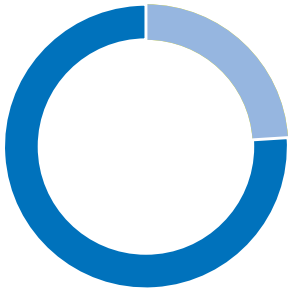
POPULATION DISTRIBUTION:

FEMALE **41%**

MALE **59%**

24%
CHILDREN & ADOLESCENTS

76%
ADULTS



COMAR

215
ADDITIONAL STAFF
provided to COMAR to increase its registration and processing capacity

58,000+
INDIVIDUAL RESOLUTIONS
by COMAR

MPP WIND DOWN

13,256
ASYLUM-SEEKERS
with an active MPP case supported to be readmitted to the United States

LEGAL AID

59,861
ASYLUM-SEEKERS
received legal assistance

9,984
ASYLUM-SEEKERS
received legal representation for procedures in Mexico

575
PEOPLE IN DETENTION
received legal aid

76 AND **32**
LAWYERS **PARALEGALS**
provided legal aid

UNHCR REGISTRATION AND ASSISTANCE

CONECTA

133,417
VISITS
to the CONECTA Portal established to support the MPP wind down

256,000
INQUIRIES
responded through UNHCR Helpdesk

CONFÍA EN EL JAGUAR

623,000
AVERAGE MONTHLY USERS
of Confía en El Jaguar Facebook page for people on the move

239,252
VISITS
to the UNHCR Mexico Help page

74,881
ASYLUM-SEEKERS AND REFUGEE REGISTERED WITH UNHCR
received individualised protection and assistance

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

85,651
ASYLUM-SEEKERS AND REFUGEES
benefited from one or more forms of humanitarian assistance

47,221
INDIVIDUALS

24,243
HOUSEHOLDS
received humanitarian assistance

SHELTERS

148 **SHELTERS** in **44** **CITIES**
supported by UNHCR

300 **SHELTER STAFF** in **26** **TRAINING COURSES**
participated — delivered by UNHCR

PREVENTION AND RESPONSE TO GENDER BASED VIOLENCE (GBV) AND PROTECTION FROM SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE (PSEA)

849
SURVIVORS OF GBV
identified and assisted

1,770
GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, UNHCR STAFF AND PARTNERS
trained on GBV and PSEA

PERSONS WITH SPECIFIC NEEDS

5,465
ASYLUM SEEKERS
benefited from mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS)

287
UNHCR AND PARTNER STAFF
trained on protection responses for Persons with Specific Needs (PwSPNs)

1,905
ASYLUM-SEEKERS AND REFUGEES WITH SPECIFIC NEEDS
benefited from protection cash assistance

RELEASE FROM IMMIGRATION DETENTION

1,413
ASYLUM-SEEKERS
were released from detention and received assistance from UNHCR

EDUCATION

28,000
KITS OF SCHOOL SUPPLIES
donated to families in 116 public schools in Chiapas, Tabasco, Veracruz and Oaxaca

in **116** public schools in southern Mexico

3,647
ASYLUM-SEEKERS AND REFUGEE CHILDREN
supported with school enrolment

748
REFUGEES
enrolled in vocational training

250
REFUGEE STUDENTS
received UNHCR scholarships to continue with higher education

CHILD PROTECTION

36,000
CHILDREN BENEFITED
from psychosocial, recreational, and educational activities in child friendly spaces established in shelters

947
CHILDREN AT RISK
provided with specialized case management

85
CHILDREN
supported with alternative care arrangements

761
CHILD PROTECTION AUTHORITIES
and other government officials, UNHCR staff and partners trained in child protection

ECONOMIC INCLUSION

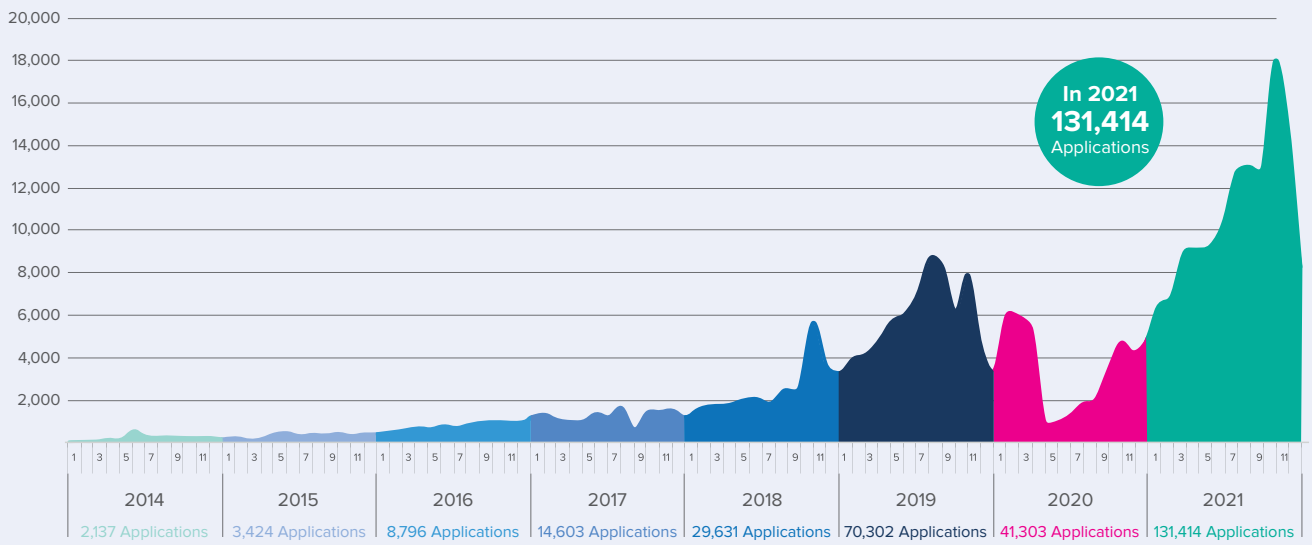
7,703
REFUGEES
relocated from the south to the north of Mexico

35,831
PERSONS
benefitted from *in situ* local integration support

3
NEW CITIES
included in the local integration programme (Irapuato, Silao & Torreon)

250+
PRIVATE SECTOR COMPANIES
recruit refugees and asylum-seekers

New Asylum Applications in Mexico
Monthly Evolution I 2014 - 2021



Source: COMAR 2014-18, SIRE 2019-2020

UNHCR and COMAR provide information on asylum procedure in Palenque.

© COMAR/Juan Girón Irizin

Working with others

Throughout 2021, UNHCR Mexico partnered with a growing number of public institutions at the federal, state, and municipal levels. Our office also strengthened relationships with other UN Agencies and international organisations, academia, private sector, civil society and faith-based organizations.

UNHCR cooperates closely with authorities and public institutions, including the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance, the National Migration Institute, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National System for Integral Family Development, the Public Defender's Office, Child Protection Authorities, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Social Welfare, the Population Registry, the National Population Council, the Migration Policy Unit, the Supreme Court, the Congress and the Senate, and the Taxpayers Registry. At field level where UNHCR's presence is strong, we have established effective communication and collaboration mechanisms with local government at state and municipality level. The inter-ministerial roundtable on inclusion and integration of refugees chaired by undersecretary Alejandro Encinas to implement MIRPS continued to be an important platform for coordination between government entities, UN agencies, and development actors.

As part of the second year of implementation of Mexico's United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSCDF), UNHCR actively engaged within the strategic, technical,

and thematic groups established at the UN level to enhance the visibility and - where possible - the inclusion of asylum-seekers and refugees within the UN's response and programmes. UNHCR, together with IOM, established the structure and objectives of the interagency Group on Migration and Asylum (GIMA), which became the main forum for UNHCR and IOM to share information, trends and developments in real time as regards forced displacement in the country. The GIMA is also a platform for the UN Country Team to discuss and design protection and solutions programmes in the context of Mexico's complex mixed movements. In 2021, a new Working Group on Internal Displacement was established under the GIMA.

The Protection Working Group and seven technical working groups focusing on different topics convened on a regular basis throughout 2021 under UNHCR's leadership or co-leadership. Among them are groups focused on Gender-Based Violence, Child Protection and Shelter. These fora enabled regular sharing of information and a more coordinated response among UN agencies and NGOs.

By the end of 2021, UNHCR Mexico had entered into 38 partnership agreements with different organisations across Mexico, including seven international and 31 local organisations. We also signed 13 memoranda of understanding with authorities of federal and local governments, academic institutions and private sector organisations. These partnerships have contributed to the enhanced implementation of protection and integration activities and strengthened our capacity to better respond to the needs of asylum-seekers and refugees.

Head of field unit in Tenosique, Marika Armento, has a conversation with Club Amazonas representative, Alan Contreras, during an event on HIV.

Funding

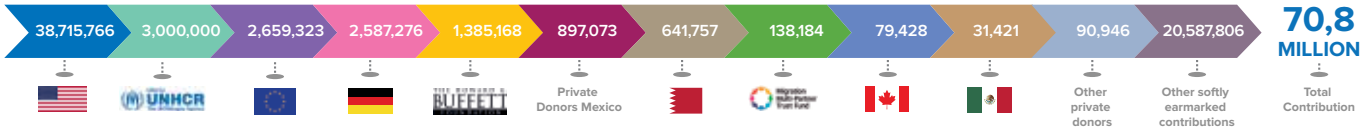
UNHCR's budget increased considerably in 2021 compared to previous years, amounting to a total of US$70,814,148. With an implementation rate of 100 per cent, Mexico positioned itself within the top three UNHCR operations with the highest implementation rates in the Latin America Region.

Our operation was grateful to benefit from several contributions from governments and private donors. Funds received from the United States accounted for 77 per cent of our overall Mexico's earmarked contributions. It supported the development of our programmes and the expansion of our presence to 21 locations across the country, while also bringing funding for the wind-down of the MPP programme and for the facilitation of the entry to the United States of vulnerable asylum-seekers exempted from the application of Title 42.

Important multiannual contributions received from the European Union, Germany, Canada and Qatar continued supporting UNHCR's coordination and operational efforts to address critical protection issues and provide solutions for forcibly displaced populations in Mexico, and to pursue our support and strengthening of Mexico's asylum system.

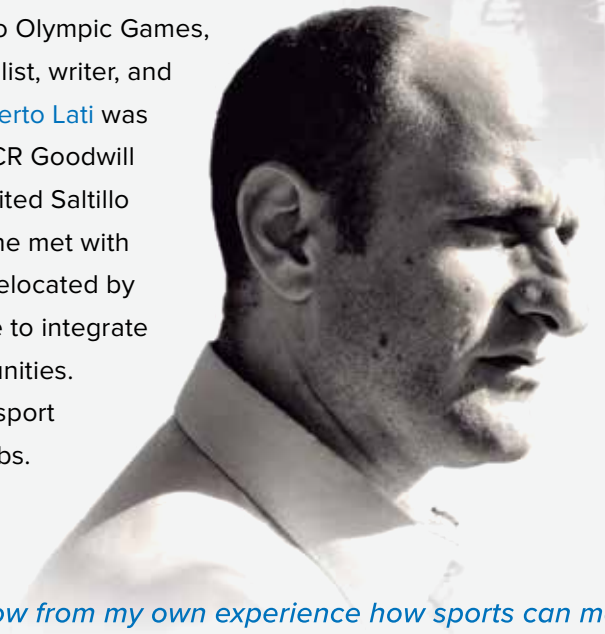
In addition, contributions from private donors increased considerably in 2021, accounting for 14 per cent of our total budget. This was possible thanks to an important multiannual funding received from the USA for UNHCR and Howard Buffet Foundation for UNHCR's Local Integration Programme, and as a result of enhanced and dedicated fundraising efforts through the Private Partnership and Philanthropy (PPH) sector. 87 per cent of PPH fundraising came from individual donors and 13 per cent from foundations and corporations based in Mexico. We also succeeded in the engagement of new donors such as *Fondo Semillas* and *Grupo AlEn* and renewed our partnership with *Fondo Unido*, which became the largest Mexican contributor to our operation.

Contributions to UNHCR Mexico in 2021



New UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador and high-profile supporters

Days before the Tokyo Olympic Games, Mexican polyglot journalist, writer, and sports commentator Alberto Lati was appointed as a UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador. Alberto visited Saltillo and Monterrey, where he met with refugees who were relocated by UNHCR and were able to integrate in their new host communities. He spoke with local sport journalists and soccer clubs.



Alberto Lati
@albertolati
journalist and writer

> *I know from my own experience how sports can make a positive difference in the lives of people who have been forced to flee their homes and sport will be one of the tools I use to promote refugee rights*
>
> Alberto Lati

UNHCR also received support from three famous Mexican actors: Gael Garcia Bernal recorded informative videos for the Facebook Confía en el Jaguar, while Luis Gerardo Méndez and Johanna Murillo collaborated in the dissemination of messages through social media and fundraising videos.

Gael García Bernal

Luis Gerardo Méndez

Johanna Murillo

2021 – A Year of high-level visits to Mexico

©UNHCR/Jeoffrey Guillemard

Kelly T. Clements

High level visits during 2021 were strategic to strengthen Mexico´s operation in a moment when flows of displaced people raised significantly.

Gillian Triggs

After the suspension of field visits in 2020 owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, in coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, UNHCR leaders visited Mexico in 2021 to witness the surge of emerging flows of mixed movements across the region and towards Mexico and lend support to our operations.

In May, as a part of her trip to the wider region, UN Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees Kelly T. Clements spent six days in Mexico, visiting Tapachula, on the border with Guatemala, and Ciudad Juárez in the north. On her brief stop in Mexico City, the Deputy High Commissioner met with senior government officials, civil society partners, business leaders, and donors. She also visited shelters, was able to spend time with refugee families in their homes, learned about the Local Integration Programme in Guanajuato, interacted with employers from the private sector who have recruited refugees, and met refugee students at the University of Guanajuato.

©UNHCR/ Tito Herrera

In the last week of August, Assistant High Commissioner for Protection Gillian Triggs visited Mexico City, Ciudad Juárez, and Tapachula, where she witnessed first-hand the protection challenges faced by asylum-seekers, many of whom undertake long journeys before arriving to Mexico. The Assistant High Commissioner acknowledged efforts made by the Mexican authorities and civil society in the face of the unprecedented rise in mixed population flows. Her visit allowed for greater visibility to the broader displacement situation in the Central America region and the complex protection challenges that characterise it.

Filippo Grandi

©UNHCR/Santiago Escobar-Jaramillo

During his last visit to Mexico United Nations High Comissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, promoted the importance of developing legal alternatives for those who deserve consideration as vulnerable groups of people on the move and who may not return to their country of origin.

©UNHCR/Santiago Escobar-Jaramillo

Two years after his last visit to Mexico, UNHCR Mexico hosted High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi in November. In Tijuana, he was accompanied by U.S. Ambassador Ken Salazar, on a visit to the Scalabrini's Training Centre for Migrants (CESFOM), established with the support of the U.S. Government. While in Tijuana, High Commissioner Grandi and EU Ambassador Gautier Mignot jointly inaugurated the newly-refurbished COMAR facilities, a project funded by the European Union. Among his key messages, High Commissioner Grandi highlighted the importance of safeguarding the asylum system in Mexico to guarantee its access to those who are in need of international protection. Connected to this, he emphasised the importance of developing legal alternatives for those who deserve consideration as vulnerable groups of people on the move and who may not return to their country of origin. He also conveyed the importance of stepping-up the prevention and response to internal displacement in the country. The UN Resident Coordinator in Mexico, Peter Grohmann, accompanied High Commissioner Grandi on part of his visit.

CHAPTER **3**

Ensuring access to protection and protection responses

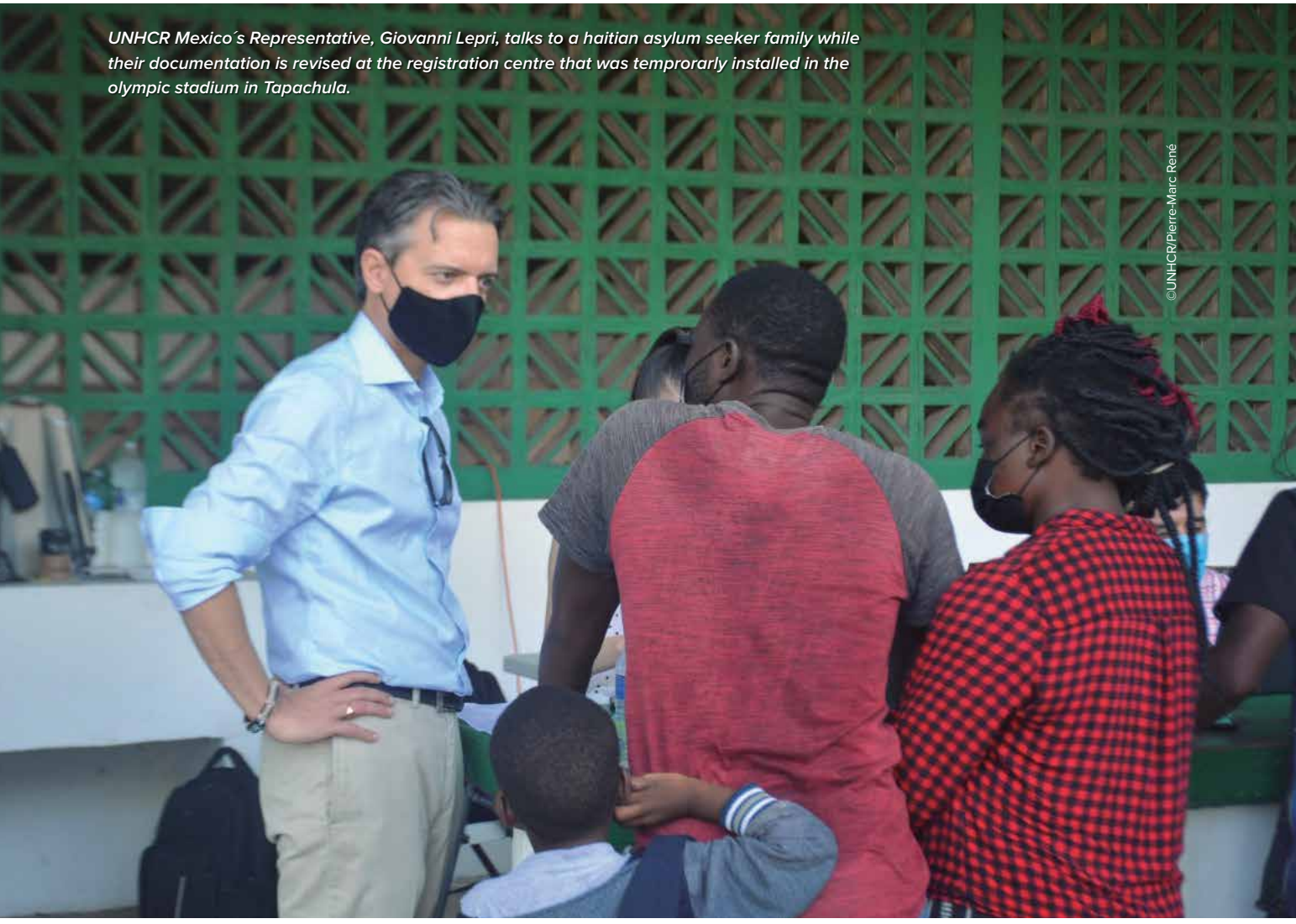
A Salvadoran refugee taxi driver talks to a UNHCR staff member outside his workplace in the city of Saltillo, Coahuila, Mexico. Business is brisk in the city where factories and assembly plants make everything from trucks, cars and auto parts to home appliances and furniture.

UNHCR / 2021

In response to the growing number of asylum-seekers arriving in southern Mexico and the changing dynamics along the northern border, UNHCR scaled-up its protection response activities in 2021; more than ever, we focused on enhancing COMAR's capacity in the processing of asylum claims, offering legal counselling and psychosocial care to asylum-seekers and refugees. Furthermore, as outlined in the next chapter, we focused on ensuring adequate reception conditions for new arrivals, stepping up humanitarian assistance and supporting the establishment of community protection networks along the main reception areas. Coupled with a substantial increase in UNHCR staff and the deployment of roving teams, these efforts were established in cooperation with our partners along Mexico's southern and northern borders.

Access to asylum

The unprecedented arrival of mixed and secondary movements into the country from March onwards and the absence of alternative migratory pathways generated overwhelming pressure on the asylum system. To manage the arrivals and guarantee access to asylum, COMAR organized a large-scale appointments issuance exercise at the Estadio Olímpico in Tapachula, attending approximately 55,000 persons. In November 2021, the National Institute for Migration (INM) initiated a relocation exercise aimed at redistributing the workload for regularisation throughout INM offices across the country. INM transported over 37,000 people to 17 cities in the centre and north of the country and provided a pre-registration document to other 12,000 who travelled by their own means.



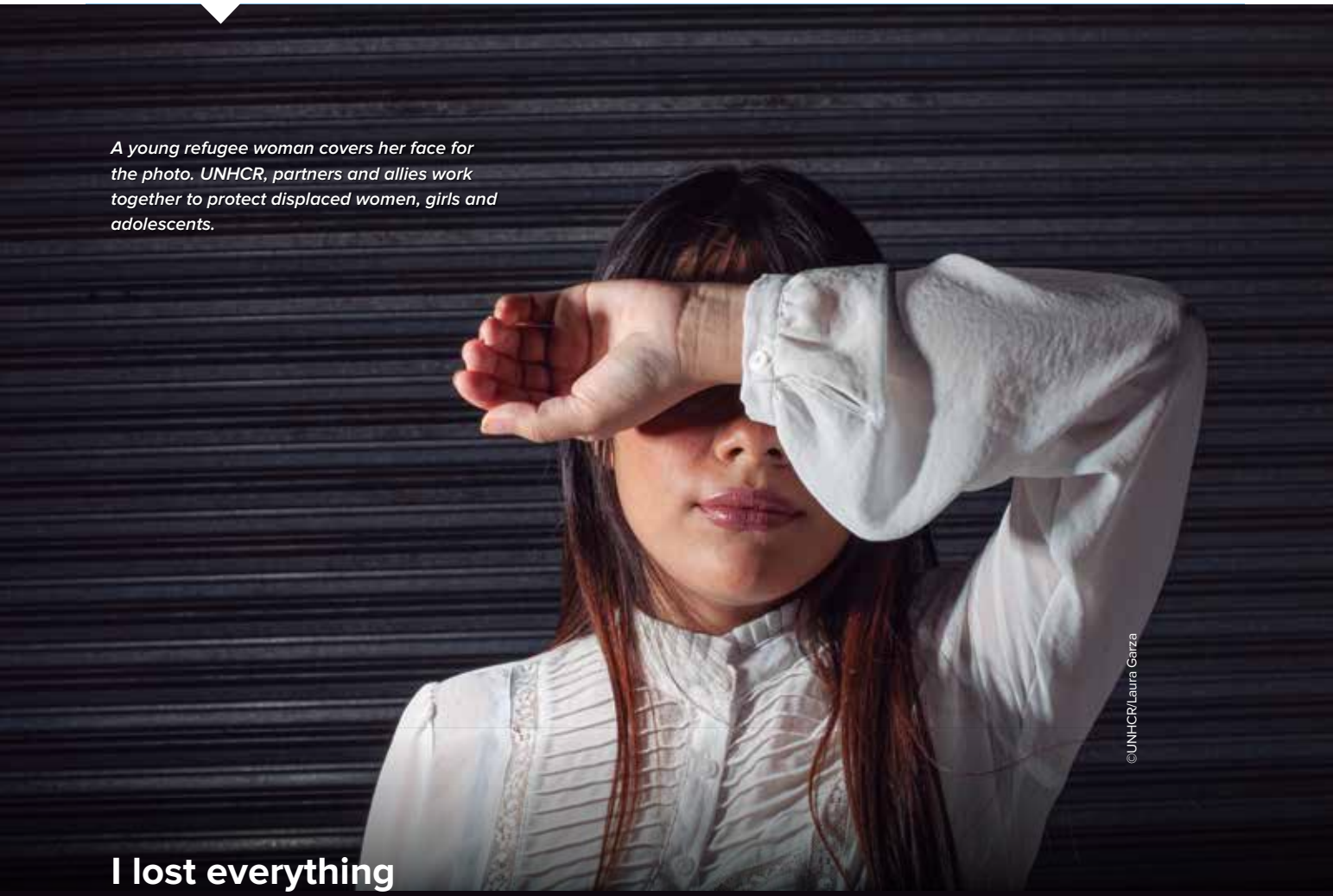
UNHCR Mexico´s Representative, Giovanni Lepri, talks to a haitian asylum seeker family while their documentation is revised at the registration centre that was temprorarly installed in the olympic stadium in Tapachula.

©UNHCR/Pierre-Marc René

©UNHCR/Pierre-Marc René

Staff from CAR provide information about humanitarian assistance for asylum seekers.

Since its opening in March 2021, UNHCR's Refugee Service Centre (CAR by its Spanish acronym) in Tapachula has registered over 48,500 persons. The registration process included evaluations, in-person and remote verifications for assistance, and protection interviews. The new space for the CAR, located next to COMAR's registration centre, allowed for a more organic attention circuit and more efficient referral pathway between COMAR and UNHCR.



A young refugee woman covers her face for the photo. UNHCR, partners and allies work together to protect displaced women, girls and adolescents.

©UNHCR/Laura Garza

I lost everything

Ingrid has suffered enough. In 2019, criminal gangs violently emptied her house in Honduras after she refused to pay the monthly fee of 3,000 lempiras (about US$125) so her eldest son won´t be recruited.

In November 2020, hurricanes Eta and Iota hit her hometown, destroying everything she had. Ingrid and her four children were left with nothing. She fled Honduras at the beginning of 2021 and claimed asylum in Mexico.

“The gangs always asked for rent (extorsion). They threatened me: ‘if you don’t pay the rent, you could pay with the life of one of your children or with something you have in your house’”, she explained.

Like many of her neighbours, Ingrid decided to leave. Before she went to Mexico, she left her children with a friend. After a long journey between buses and car rides, she arrived at Tecún Umán on the Guatemala-Mexico border. She then crossed the Suchiate River and headed for Tapachula.

Along the way, she was informed of the existence of the COMAR, where she could apply for asylum.

Meanwhile, the maras found out that the family left the town and they called Ingrid´s son to ask for more money. With these new threats, she asked her friend to help her children make their way to Mexico. Fortunately, the four arrived a month later and the family is now waiting for the response to their asylum claim.

Ingrid´s future looks brighter now. Her dream is to find a job, feel safe and support her parents back home in Honduras.

Working with the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance (COMAR)

Despite challenges related to the pandemic and the unprecedented number of new arrivals in Mexico, COMAR's processing capacity in 2021 increased by 116 per cent compared to 2020. This was possible thanks to the technical and financial support provided by UNHCR in the past years, such as additional staff, material resources, and technical assistance, through the Quality Asylum Initiative (QAI) programme.

To enhance COMAR's presence across the country, strengthen its technical capacities and the efficiency of asylum processes, in 2021 UNHCR supported:

The contracting of 215 additional staff for COMAR and the purchase of computer equipment and licenses for new personnel;

The refurbishment and furnishing of COMAR offices in Guadalajara, Mexico City, Saltillo, Tapachula Registration Centre (ISMAN), Tenosique and Tijuana;

The rental of mobile offices for COMAR Tapachula, providing additional interviews areas to increase efficiency of processing;

Operating expenses such as telecommunications (60 cell phones and fixed telephone and internet lines) and their maintenance in several COMAR offices;

The purchase of printing equipment and toners for COMAR in Monterrey, Palenque, Tapachula and Tijuana;

The costs of approximately 435 missions for COMAR staff to follow up on asylum cases in locations that do not benefit from a fixed COMAR presence; and

interpretation services for interviews in languages such as German, Pulaar, Farsi, Swahili, Russian, Hindi, Creole and Urdu.

Moreover, at national level, with the support of the QAI programme, COMAR and UNHCR have been developing several digital transformation projects which are expected to further simplify procedures, generate significant efficiency benefits and increase overall fairness and accountability of asylum procedure. The full implementation of the digital transformation is scheduled for 2022, and foresees close collaboration with governmental institutions such as COMAR, SRE, RENAPO and INM.

Access to information

In 2021, UNHCR responded to over a quarter of a million inquiries received through the UNHCR-Mexico's helpdesk, providing information and orientation to refugees and asylum-seekers from across the region. Helpdesk users were mostly male adults from Cuba, Honduras, El Salvador, Haiti, and Venezuela. The web platform CONECTA - established to support the wind down of MPP - received over 130,000 visits. Moreover, the UNHCR portal *Confía en el Jaguar* became the most followed Facebook page for people on the move who are in need of international protection, with a monthly average of 623,000 users.

CONFÍA EN EL JAGUAR

Comunication materials on asylum procedures are posted in shelters and other public spaces in south Mexico. In the photo, UNHCR staff posting a banner in Ciudad Hidalgo.

©UNHCR/Diana Romero

©Liliana Fraga Izaguirre

Around 4,000 people attended the theater play "Los sueños de Manuel". In a creative way the presentation provided information on asylum procedure.

©UNHCR/Juan Andrés Sotomayor

©Víctor Vargas

Theatre - a way to inform on asylum procedures

UNHCR Mexico and its partner *La Casa del Teatro* staged two theatre plays aimed at providing information on the asylum system and explaining rights and obligations of refugees in Mexico.

"Tu casa, tu corazón" was premiered by the CEDRAM theatre group with the financial support of the European Union. The play tells the story of two brothers and their grandmother who had to leave their country because of violence and insecurity. Upon their arrival in Mexico, they must make a difficult decision: whether to pursue the American dream and move further north or seek protection in Mexico. Eventually, the family requests asylum in Mexico and remains united.

The second play, *"Los sueños de Manuel"*, presented by the Ráfaga theatre group, tells the story of Manuel´s journey through Mexico after he was forced to leave his country of origin, his home and his family. On his way, he encounters difficulties but also people who provide aid and information, including on how to apply for asylum.

Between September and November, the two performances were staged in shelters, schools, universities, and community centres across 17 cities through a total of 49 presentations, reaching almost 4,000 spectators.

©UNHCR/Jesús Centeno

Several strategic collaborations in 2021 were officialized by UNHCR with relevant stakeholders to promote the human rights of refugees.

Strengthened relationships with academia

In 2021 an historic agreement was signed with the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), covering multiple angles of collaboration with UNHCR. These included the provision of Spanish courses for refugees, recognition of their diplomas, and the strengthening of the legal clinic of the UNAM. A special degree (*Diplomado*) on migration and asylum was also developed: with the curriculum for the degree now complete, the first generation of students will begin in the first semester of 2022.

UNHCR's pursued new collaboration with academia through the establishment of three new legal clinics at the Autonomous University of Aguascalientes, the University of Guadalajara, and the Tecnológico de Monterrey (campus Guadalajara). UNHCR has also been working with the Autonomous University of Ciudad Juarez, the Autonomous University of Saltillo, and the Autonomous University of San Luis Potosí, where similar projects are already being implemented.

Santiago Escobar-Jaramillo

Above: *UNHCR High Commissioner, Filippo Grandi, and Mexico´s Representative, Giovanni Lepri show the signed agreement with the University of Guadalajara.*
Below: *Giovanni Lepri, Mexico´s Representative participates of the closure of the human trafficking course at the UNAM, as part of the activities for the Regional Conference on Migration.*

©UNHCR/Uriel Salas

Legal aid

Throughout 2021, UNHCR and its legal partners assisted nearly 60,000 asylum-seekers and refugees, of whom some 10,000 received legal representation from UNHCR's network of 76 lawyers and 32 paralegals for procedures in Mexico. Over 3,000 individuals benefited from legal assistance in the course of their refugee status determination process.

UNHCR also actively supported the consolidation of a network of legal advisors through the organization of two national workshops and 26 training sessions for lawyers and paralegals. The objective of these events was to develop a strategy and strengthen a common approach in the provision of information and assistance to asylum-seekers and refugees. Moreover, a *memorandum of understanding* was signed with a network of private lawyers for pro bono assistance to asylum-seekers and refugees.

During 2021, under the Alternative to Detention Program (ATD), in coordination with INM and COMAR, UNHCR supported the release of 631 asylum-seekers from detention. An additional 782 asylum-seekers were assisted to leave detention within the framework of local agreements with Detention Centres.

@UNHCR/Ricardo Gutiérrez

UNHCR staff provides training on legal assistance to the State Commission of Searching Missing Persons in Xalapa, Veracruz.

A group of asylum seekers and refugees arrive to Hospitalidad and Solidaridad shelter in Tapachula after receiving support from UNHCR.

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CHAPTER **4**

Reception conditions and access to services with attention to specific needs

One of the key areas of humanitarian assistance most affected by the exponential growth of mixed and secondary movements to Mexico in 2021 was that of shelter. Shelters are critical points for refugees and asylum-seekers, providing safety and accommodation, information on the right to asylum and targeted assistance. With the significant increase of new arrivals in 2021, shelters were often overcrowded. To address this, UNHCR provided additional material support and capacity-building of shelters. We also supported the consolidation of referral pathways for the prevention and response to gender-based violence and attention to persons with specific needs, such as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer (LGBTIQ+) people, children, women at risk, older adults, and people with disabilities.

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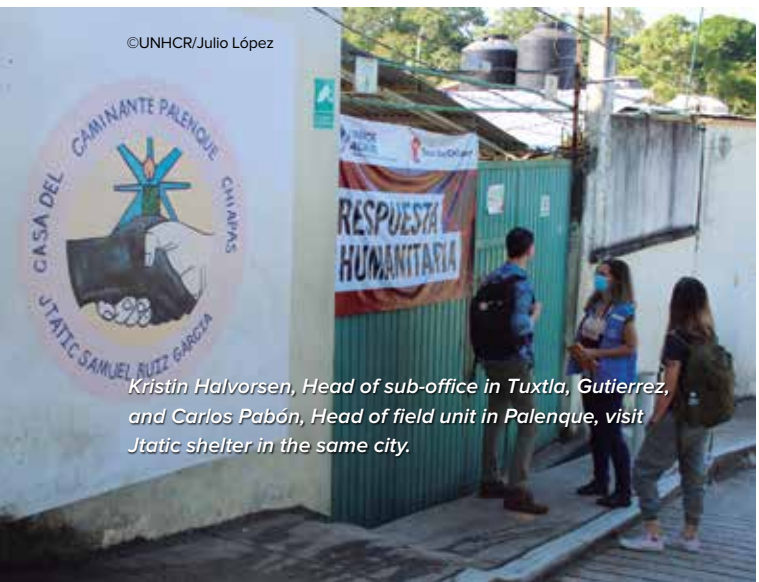
Personal protection equipment, cleaning items, kitchen sets, hygiene kits and other donations were made to shelters to improve reception conditions. In the photo, rooms remodeled at the Hospitalidad and Solidaridad shelter in Tapachula.



©UNHCR/Julio López

Kristin Halvorsen, Head of sub-office in Tuxtla, Gutierrez, and Carlos Pabón, Head of field unit in Palenque, visit Jtatic shelter in the same city.

Shelters

In 2021 UNHCR stepped up its efforts to monitor the needs and enhance reception conditions in the shelters located along main migratory routes in Mexico.

UNHCR supported 148 shelters, mainly run by civil society organizations, in 44 cities, distributing:

406,037 cleaning materials and personal protective equipment (PPE) items so that they could continue to operate while observing sanitary protocols,

730 food packages,

56,602 hygiene items (including personal hygiene kits, diapers, and first aid items),

200 appliances,

50 kitchen appliances,

1,215 furniture items for offices,

and 37 computers and printing kits.

By the end of the year, UNHCR had signed 20 formal partnership agreements, covering 32 shelters nationwide, through which we facilitated the implementation of protection activities and supported the recruitment of additional specialised staff such as lawyers, paralegals, psychologists, social workers, psychiatrists, nurses, doctors and registration officials. 16 child-friendly spaces were created in shelters with the support of our partner Save the Children, providing psychosocial and educational activities for children on the move. Eight shelters received additional support from 22 volunteers trained within a new UNHCR volunteer programme.

In parallel, UNHCR made significant investments in the infrastructure of 15 shelters to increase their accommodation capacities and improve conditions. Four other projects were initiated and are expected to be completed by 2022, including the construction of two new shelters in San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas, and in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon. Additionally, UNHCR in cooperation with the Mexican Coalition for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (COAMEX) and the NGO *Libre Acceso* carried out an accessibility assessment in four shelters and recommended three infrastructure interventions to be launched in 2022 with a view to improve safety and inclusiveness for persons with disabilities. UNHCR also promoted the use of clean energies: photovoltaic systems were installed in seven shelters.

Furthermore, UNHCR sought to guarantee critical protection standards by providing training to more than 300 employees of shelter, covering specific topics such as the prevention of and response to GBV, and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), child protection, and the mainstreaming of the age, gender and diversity in the assistance provided in the shelters.

UNHCR continued to facilitate the Interagency Working Group on Shelters through which UNHCR, IOM, UNICEF and ICRC coordinated support and donations provided to shelters. In 2021, the group began to roll out a dedicated interagency coordination online platform.

27-year-old Max has found shelter at UNHCR funded Belen Shelter in southern Mexico after fleeing his home in Honduras.

Humanitarian Assistance Programme

In 2021 UNHCR provided humanitarian assistance through multi-purpose cash grants (MPGs) to over 47,000 asylum-seekers (24,000 households), covering 35 per cent of all new asylum claims lodged last year. The MPGs were intended to provide the most vulnerable asylum-seekers with greater dignity in meeting their basic needs. Humanitarian assistance also reduces protection risks - mitigating their recourse to negative coping mechanisms.

Throughout 2021, changes were made to the programme to ensure its sustainability, efficiency and to prevent abuses. Firstly, UNHCR expanded the programme to Tijuana and Mexicali, increasing the number of UNHCR offices providing humanitarian assistance to nine (in addition to the seven offices who already used cash as assistance: Acayucan, Mexico City, Monterrey, Palenque, Saltillo, Tapachula and Tenosique). Secondly, necessary adjustments were made in the targeting process and eligibility criteria to respond to the needs of asylum-seekers within a context of rapidly growing numbers and increased vulnerabilities. Thirdly, an additional filter was added to the targeting process to mitigate risks of misuse of assistance by analysing individual's intentions and previous secondary movements.

Accountablity and impact of the UNHCR Humanitarian Assistance Programme

The UNHCR Humanitarian Assistance Programme in Mexico has had a structured evaluation scheme in place since 2020: spot-checking calls for a limited sample of 50 cases are conducted twice a year and combined with a Post Distribution Monitoring (PDM).

In 2021 the PDM was carried out in March and August. The results of the two PDM were similar and confirmed that over 70 per cent of beneficiaries of humanitarian assistance were able to cover all or most of their basic needs, with over 90 per cent who could access the required goods and services. Some 80 per cent found themselves "very satisfied" with the attention received from the Programme and confirmed they would opt for the same assistance modality which, in this instance, was MPG distributed through prepaid cards from SiVale.

UNHCR also carried out a market assessment that confirmed the availability of affordable housing for the beneficiaries of humanitarian assistance. Following the recommendations of the study, we designed short guidelines for each location where the Programme is implemented summarizing rental options, price ranges and recommended locations to help asylum-seekers make informed decisions when looking for accommodation.

In November, UNHCR successfully piloted ‘transition workshops’ in Palenque for those who had received their first month of humanitarian assistance, aimed at enhancing individual self-reliance once the support provided would come to an end. The workshops focused on labour rights, available vocational trainings and the relocation programme, financial education, use of prepaid cards and associated risks. The project will likely be rolled out across other locations in 2022.

Lastly, following the joint mapping of financial service providers, the interagency working group dedicated to cash-based interventions (CBI) co-led by UNHCR, launched a process to establish a common framework agreement for services under CBI, increasing efficiency, and levelling the playing field for two modalities: prepaid cards and bank accounts.

During 2021, haitians represented near 40% of new asylum claims.

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During the participative assessment developed in Tapachula, last september 2021 Alejandro Escobar and Liliana Lopez from UNHCR listen to the testimonial of an asylum seeker.

Participatory Assessments

Between 18 September and 11 October, together with partners, UNHCR carried out participatory assessments in 21 cities where UNHCR had established presence. The following eight priority and four optional topics were addressed in the discussions: the impact of the pandemic on the asylum procedure and integration opportunities access to public services; access to specialized services and to information for people with specific needs; the role of shelters in protection and integration; feedback on UNHCR's labour insertion programme and community initiatives; and on their perception of discrimination and xenophobia. A specific questionnaire was also designed to engage with local host communities.

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A total of 919 people from Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, Colombia, Cuba, Haiti, Venezuela and Nicaragua took part in the initiative:

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

Participative assessment

Community-based protection

Supporting empowered, participative, informed, and organised refugee communities in Mexico continued to be our priority in 2021. From the local level, UNHCR worked with refugees communities to improve their autonomy and develop their leadership skills to design and lead projects that in turn would foster their protection and integration, in the host communities. For instance, in partnership with NGO *Via Educación* UNHCR promoted community structures and leadership in Monterrey, while in Aguascalientes, we supported Venezuelan refugees who lead a psychosocial support group, reaching some 190 refugees and asylum-seekers.

In 2021, UNHCR worked on enhancing our communication with asylum-seekers and refugees to better respond to their needs, particularly those emerging during the COVID-19 pandemic. Several initiatives were implemented with specific population groups: youth, women at risk and LGBTQI+ persons, persons with mental health needs, and groups with multiple vulnerabilities, such as women with disabilities. We also encouraged the identification of leaders within their own communities.

Importantly, UNHCR boosted accountability towards communities we work with through the Community-based Complaint Mechanism (CBCM). Through our services, the CBCM provided affected population groups with access to a safe and confidential means of voicing complaints or providing feedback on their experiences. Up until mid-December, 3,836 reports had been channelled through the mechanism, including requests for assistance.

A refugee taxi driver greets UNHCR staff members outside his workplace in the city of Saltillo, Coahuila, Mexico.

A Refugee woman who lives in Monterrey, has a talk with an UNHCR member at the Lab CONARTE cultural center.

A lesbian couple from Honduras enjoy a calm moment at their house in south Mexico.

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‘I’m not going to hide what I am anymore’

When the criminal gang targeted Ana and Paula’s* teenage daughter and son, the family ran for their lives. Paula lived with her partner, Ana, when the gang turned its attention to Ana’s son, Oscar, almost 13. Ana would never give her son to the gangs, but she knew what that refusal would mean for her and Paula. “They would kill us both”.

Paula and Ana were trapped in deadly violence in their home country and faced difficulties both at home and after they fled due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. Their journey to safety was dangerous. In Guatemala, their family was robbed. Without money to pay for the bus fare, they walked for 3 days, finally reaching southern Mexico.

Mexico recognizes persecution based on gender as a stand-alone reason to grant asylum. COMAR often recognizes those who have fled because of their sexual orientation or gender identity and they a high chance of receiving protection.

Ana and Paula lodged a claim for asylum in Mexico. UNHCR has supported them, explaining their rights to them under international law and helping to determine what they will need should they stay in Mexico. Ana and Paula hope to get married in Mexico City. Now they are hopeful for the future.

Child Protection

The legal reforms aligning the Refugee and Migration Laws with the General Law on the Rights of Children, which prohibited child immigration detention and placed the best interest of the child at the centre of every decision involving children on the move, came into force in January 2021. The full implementation of the reforms, however, proved challenging owing to limited resources.

To this end, UNHCR, and IOM implemented joint actions to support the government in the implementation of these reforms. UNHCR funded 10 positions within Child Protection Authorities (CPA) composed of lawyers, psychologists, and social workers in the cities of Acayucan, Matamoros, Palenque, Tapachula, Tenosique, and Villahermosa. In the fourth quarter of 2021, they assessed cases of over 500 children, referring approximately half of them to asylum procedures and/or temporary immigration status to prevent refoulement. Over 700 representatives of CPA and other government institutions, civil society

Children show their drawings after receiving psychological support.

©UNHCR/Sebastian Rich

Asylum seekers and refugees play "futbolito" in FM4 Paso Libre shelter, supported by UNHCR that offers a variety of services, including legal and psychological assistance, as well as a shelter and care centre.

organizations, UNHCR field offices, and partners were trained on child protection, focusing on the identification of children in need of international protection, access to asylum, best interest determination, alternative care arrangements, family reunification, and case management. UNHCR also supported government efforts to implement the Comprehensive Protection Protocol for Children on the Move. Finally, together with UNICEF we identified 16 public and private shelters across 10 municipalities who had expressed interest in receiving technical support to shift towards a community-based attention model. We further offered financial support to equip and rehabilitate these spaces.

In 2021, UNHCR partnered with *Fundación Casa Alianza Mexico,* SOS Children's Villages and *Fundación JUCONI* to implement a foster care programme and provide residential care for 85 asylum-seeking and refugee children in cases where family reunification was not possible.

Furthermore, together with Save the Children we promoted school enrolment, conducted case management for children at risk, and implemented recreational, psychosocial, emergency education and sports activities for over 36,000 children in the states of Baja California, Chiapas, Chihuahua, Tabasco, Tamaulipas, and Veracruz.

In coordination with UNICEF, UNHCR led the interagency working group on Child Protection, engaging other actors on issues related to the protection of children in situation of forced displacement, and facilitating joint efforts to find concrete solutions.

UNHCR focuses on visibilising and eliminating gender violence and expanding support to woman, girls and adolescents who have been vulnerated in their transit.

©UNHCR/Laura Garza

Preventing and responding Gender Based Violence (GBV)

UNHCR undertook several activities to advance the prevention, mitigation, and response to GBV in the course of 2021. Firstly, under prevention measures, UNHCR led the interagency sub-working group on GBV, updated the referral pathways for GBV services, and trained on remote service provision and psychological first aid - issues that became particularly relevant as the pandemic continued. The GBV sub-group also held a training with a specialized local NGO on positive masculinities.

In terms of response to GBV, the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) on GBV Response were updated, in line with UNHCR's new Policy on GBV Prevention, Mitigation, and Response (2020). 849 survivors of gender-based violence were assisted in cooperation with our specialized partners – HIAS, *Alternativas Pacificas* (ALPAZ) and *Médicos del Mundo*. Moreover, given the additional risk of violence faced by LGBTIQ+ people, SOPs on Attention for LGBTIQ+ refugee and asylum-seeking populations were created and implemented across our offices.

Throughout 2021, UNHCR provided training on GBV prevention and response and on the prevention of SEA to 1,770 government officials, our own staff and partner organisations. UNHCR produced creative communication materials and placed them in spaces such as bathrooms in shelters, with a view to ensure asylum-seekers and refugees, GBV survivors or victims of SEA could see them without risk.

*Juan in La 72 migrant shelter in Tenosique, Tabasco. Juan fled gang violence in Honduras after being threaten by recruiters and is now seeking international protection in Mexico. *name changed for protection reasons. **

Working with persons with specific needs

Out of almost 80,000 asylum-seekers and refugees that UNHCR registered for assistance in 2021, two thirds were identified as having at least one specific need, and one third had two; among them the fact that there are children, women and older women at risk, persons with serious medical conditions, LGBTIQ+, children, survivors of GBV and persons with disabilities.

UNHCR registration data shows that asylum-seekers with the most severe vulnerabilities were of Honduran nationality. 56 per cent of the children at risk (mostly those who did not go to school), and 79 per cent of all unaccompanied children came from Honduras. Moreover, of some 4,000 single-parent families, 85.5 per cent were headed by a woman, and the vast majority came from Honduras. In the category of people with legal and physical protection needs, 41 per cent were homeless or beneficiaries of humanitarian assistance and 32 per cent did not have any form of documentation. Within these two groups, asylum-seekers of Haitian nationality accounted for 34 per cent and 39 per cent, respectively.

UNHCR provided support to those most vulnerable groups of asylum-seekers, channelling 54 per cent of them to protection services, granting cash-based assistance to 14 per cent, and referring 8 per cent to education services and 5 per cent to medical care facilities. Almost 5,500 asylum-seekers and refugees benefited from mental health and psychosocial interventions implemented by our 23 partners across the country. Finally, 287 UNHCR and partner staff were trained on protection responses for people with specific needs.

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CHAPTER **5**

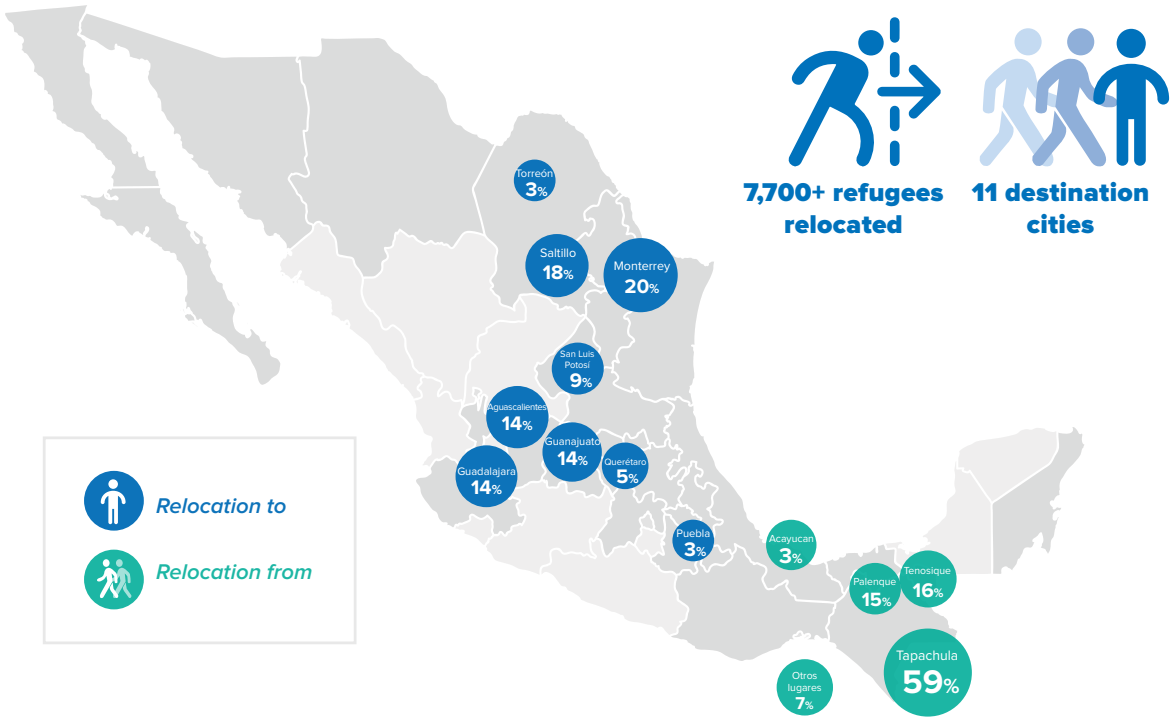
Sustainable solutions for refugees

Jorge González, salvadoran refugee, talks to UNHCR staff at te Greenpaper offices in Monterrey where he works as an operator.

In 2021 UNHCR continued its advocacy efforts to eliminate barriers to refugees' integration, including in relation to financial inclusion, access to documentation, hiring procedures, and access to national education and health systems. Following the progressive reactivation of the economy and the increasing demand for labour force, UNHCR focused on creating bridges between the refugee population and the gaps in the Mexican labour market, thus supporting the needs of national industries and enabling refugees to contribute to the economy at the same time. As asylum applications increased, emphasis was placed on ensuring that our programmes became increasingly flexible to process larger numbers and diverse profiles, especially the most vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers such as survivors of gender-based violence, non-Spanish speaking refugees, single-headed households, and persons with disabilities, among others.

Relocation and integration *in situ*

With over 7,700 refugees having benefited from relocation and job placement under UNHCR's Local Integration Programme (PIL), 2021 was the year with the highest number of relocations-since the start of the programme. Launched for the first time in Saltillo in 2016, the programme has been since extended to 11 locations across the country, including to Irapuato, Silao, and Torreón in 2021. Cumulatively, as of the end of December, over 16,000 refugees have been successfully relocated from cities in southern Mexico where integration opportunities are scarce, to municipalities located the industrial corridor in the centre and north of the country, known for its demands for workforce and its absorption capacity in the education and health sectors. Data collected through a new monitoring system shows that within the first six months of their integration process, refugee families became independent from assistance. 87 per cent of beneficiaries of working age had found a job, reducing the number of unemployed refugees by 60 per cent compared to their situation before relocation. The percentage of refugee children not enrolled in school decreased from 82 per cent to 10 per cent. Refugees' access to a bank account doubled, from 29 per cent to 59 per cent. The percentage of cases with income below the Income Poverty Line was reduced from 54 per cent prior to relocation, to 12 per cent six months into the programme.



In situ integration mechanism complemented the relocation programme. Since the beginning of 2021, UNHCR's partner International Rescue Committee (IRC) has been responsible for implementing specific integration support, referred as EAPI (*Equipos de Acompañamiento para la Protección e Integración*), which provides individualized follow-up (home visits) and assistance to asylum-seekers and refugees in the following cities: Acayucan, Mexico City, Palenque, Tapachula, Tenosique, Tijuana and Villahermosa. From May to December 2021, the EAPIs supported almost 19,000 people and referred a third of them to specialised services.

To support integration, collaboration with key federal and state level actors, in particular National Employment Service (SNE), was further strengthened in 2021. Three secondments funded by UNHCR allowed SNE to train employees across the country and streamline the inclusion of refugees and asylum-seekers into information materials and programs at national level. 2021 was also a year of success in terms of expanding UNHCR's network of private sector companies that offer employment opportunities to refugees and asylum-seekers. 110 new companies started hiring refugees in 2021, summing up to a total of 260 companies cooperating with the programme. Some companies proactively approached UNHCR, indicating that they increasingly see benefits of contributing to the efforts conducted alongside UNHCR. They further highlight that their refugee employees bring strong motivation and dedication, and, for some, a decrease in turnover figures within their companies.

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Refugees from Central America and other countries are getting a chance to start over in Mexico under an innovative relocation and integration programme started by UNHCR in 2016.

©UNHCR/ Gabriela Pérez-Montiel

Video: Local Integration Program in Guadalajara

As the Local Integration Programme rolled-out throughout the year, UNHCR launched new initiatives to reach out to more vulnerable populations. Progress was made towards the identification and inclusion in early-care programs of children in single-parent households, so as to facilitate parents' employment. In response to the barriers faced by LGBTIQ+ refugees, four relocation cities identified opportunities for the inclusion and availability of additional services through specialized organizations. Furthermore, UNHCR created specialized services for people with physical disabilities. Efforts were also made to promote shelters as spaces for integration, and to strengthen referral pathways to the Local Integration Programme.

Finally, in response to the sudden large-scale arrival of Haitians from March onwards, integration support for this group became a priority. This resulted in innovative initiatives set up to facilitate local integration of non-Spanish speaking refugees and asylum-seekers through dedicated Spanish-language classes. Among others, it is worth noting the new relocation and inclusion pilot project, undertaken jointly with IOM, and in coordination with the Mexican Government, for Haitian nationals who have not applied for asylum.

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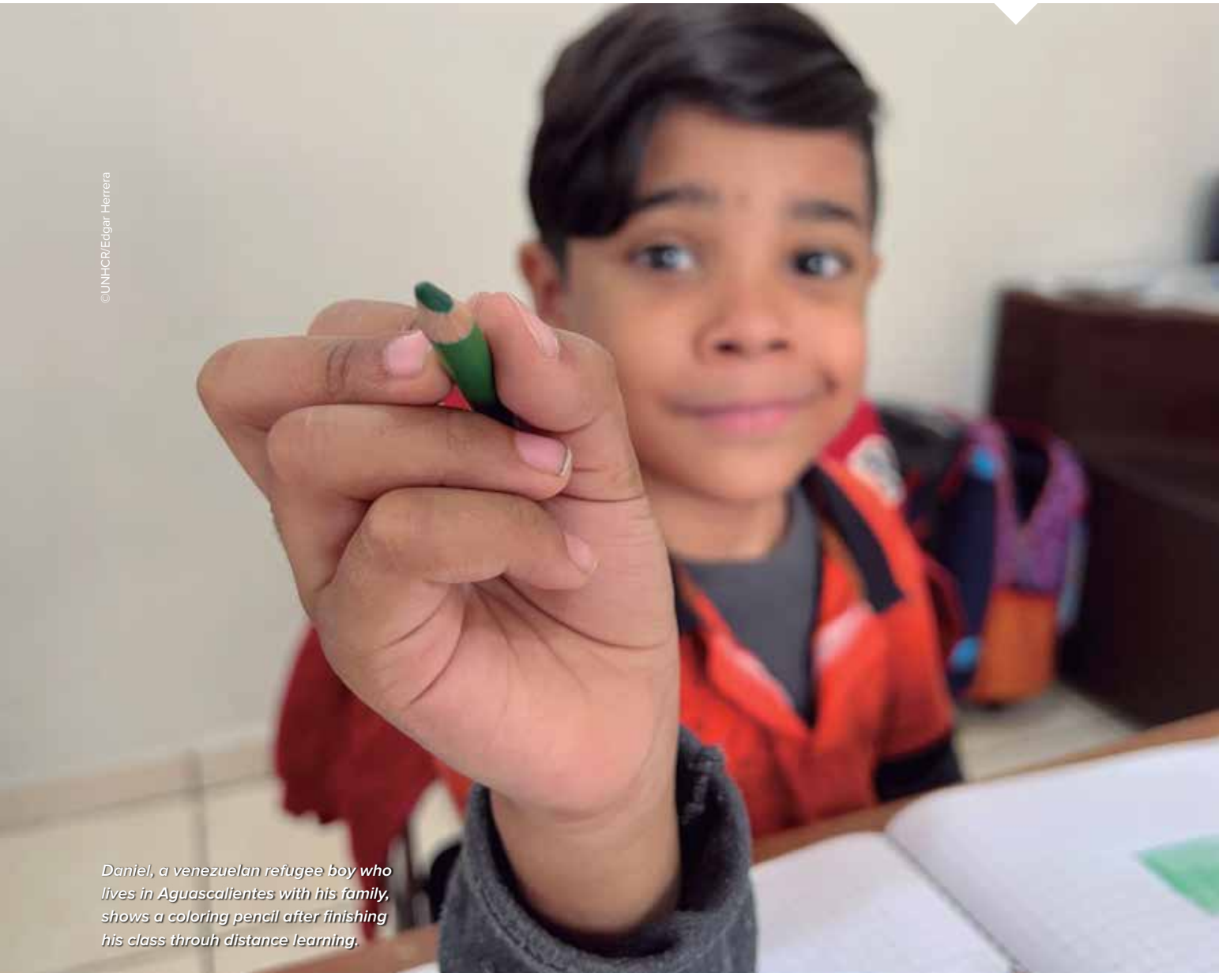
Simplifying financial inclusion of refugees

Despite a favourable legal framework for financial inclusion, some banks continued to question migratory documents issued to refugees by INM as valid documents for the opening of bank accounts. This resulted in difficulties for refugees to access financial services and affected their employability. To address this problem, in 2021 UNHCR created a specific working group, held regular bilateral meetings with different management levels and technical areas within financial institutions and supported the organization of a MIRPS technical table on financial inclusion, led by COMAR and the National Employment Service. As a result, several major banks in Mexico are now favourable to expanding their services to refugees and asylum-seekers. Banorte already accepts immigration documents to open bank accounts online.



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Daniel, a venezuelan refugee boy who lives in Aguascalientes with his family, shows a coloring pencil after finishing his class throuh distance learning.

Access to education

Owing to COVID-19 pandemic, schools in Mexico were closed from March 2020 to August 2021, limiting learning opportunities at all levels. Nevertheless, UNHCR led a series of initiatives that sought to promote access to education for the children of asylum-seekers and refugees within the government's "Back to School" strategy. Information campaigns to promote the return to school of asylum-seeking and refugee children were carried out in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, COMAR and our partner *Programa Casa Refugiados* (PCR), with messages emphasizing that their enrollment can be done at any moment of the year and without identity documents or academic certificates. Cash assistance programs were also scaled-up for the

most vulnerable families to support their children's school attendance.

In the framework of the project supported by Educate a Child, 162 out-of-school children and adolescents were newly enrolled in the accelerated education program for over-aged learners at primary education levels. Additionally, 424 teachers from primary schools in the southern states of Mexico were trained to facilitate the enrollment of asylum-seeking and refugee children in schools and to recognize their diplomas.

Throughout the year, UNHCR continued its support for young refugees to pursue their studies beyond compulsory schooling levels. To date, more than 250 refugee students received UNHCR scholarships to pursue higher education, of which 177 students came from Venezuela. In 2021, 35 new Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (DAFI) scholarships were allocated to refugee students, amounting to 58 young refugees having benefited from the DAFI programme in Mexico.

The recognition of foreign diplomas was resumed in February 2021, after almost a year, through an online procedure. UNHCR supported 181 people to obtain the recognition of their diplomas to increase their job placement opportunities.

Moreover, an innovative tertiary education alternative pathway was formalized during the visit of High Commissioner Filippo Grandi in November 2021. The programme, co-signed by SRE, SEGOB and our partner Proyecto Habesha, will provide 100 refugees and asylum-seekers residing outside the country with complementary pathways to access higher education in Mexico. Upon arrival, refugee students will receive refugee status, and asylum-seekers will have the opportunity to apply for asylum in Mexico, granting them access to permanent legal status in the country.

Tatiana Ramirez, colombian refugee, after receiving DAFI scholarship can continue her studies in Psychical Education at the Escuela Superior de Educacion Fisica in Mexico City.

©UNHCR/Ivan Stephens

As a part of their social service, students from Universidad Autonoma de Chiapas, teach Spanish to asylum seekers. Classes take place in Territorio Joven in Tapachula, renovation of which was supported by UNHCR.

©UNHCR/Pierre-Marc René

Spanish classes for asylum-seekers in Tapachula

Jasmine and Baptiste* fled Haiti a year ago because their family was at risk. Jasmine left her three children to begin a long journey to Mexico, where she claimed asylum. Upon her arrival, Jasmine suffered from not understanding Spanish and not being understood. “I need to speak more Spanish. I have three children in Haiti. I need to find a job to bring my family here”, she said. Baptiste experienced something similar. He spoke a little Spanish before coming to Mexico, but wasn´t fluent enough.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Spanish classes taught at the Autonomous University of Chiapas (UNACH) to non-Spanish-speaking asylum-seekers and refugees were suspended. UNHCR and the community centre known as *Territorio Joven* - managed by the Secretary of Youth and Sports of Tapachula - started a new programme where young university volunteers teach Spanish to asylum-seekers. The project began on 1 March of 2021. In its first phase, 131 people signed up. They were mainly from Haiti, but also Cameroon, Guinea, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Sierra Leone. During the second phase of the pilot, an additional 191 asylum-seekers took the classes and became more proficient in Spanish.

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Guillermo, venezuelan refugee, studies mechanic engineering at UNAM, in Mexico City, thanks to the DAFI scholarship.

Education opportunities for young refugees in México

"I always knew I wanted to be an engineer. Someday I would like to work in aeronautics. Now I am a student of Electrical Mechanical Engineering at UNAM, Mexico's biggest public university. I wasn't planning to come to study in Mexico, but once I had to flee my country, I had no choice".

20 year-old Guillermo and his family left Venezuela in 2018, shortly after the 2017 protests began. "Mérida, the city where we lived is full of students; many engaged in the riots. The repression was very harsh. My siblings are asthmatic, it was really tough to be locked up all day, hiding from tear gas".

After seeking asylum, his mother started the enrolment process for Guillermo to study at UNAM. After two years of trying and preparing to be accepted, he received the good news: "As soon as I saw my name on the paper, *Guillermo Andrés Barrios Rojas*, I called my mum to share the news: "I am accepted in university!". We were all very happy and excited, this is the largest university in Latin America, Mexico's "maxima house of studies". Thanks to the DAFI scholarship, an initiative implemented by UNHCR in Mexico, private and governmental donors, Guillermo was given the chance to study and make a change for himself and his family. "I am thankful to the donors because they are investing in education, and this is a bet for the future that benefits us all. I often tell other young refugees: don't ever stop trying. As for myself, my dream is someday to be involved in the process of building airplanes".

Additional efforts were also made in primary education, despite the pandemic. This is the case of 8 year-old Javier, who sits at an improvised desk in his home,

as he finishes one of his distance learning classes. Javier uses a laptop to connect to online classes. He and his classmates attend in-person school three days a week and connect from home on the two other days. Javier's family also arrived in Mexico in 2018, after having fled the precarious situation in Venezuela. They made great efforts to survive in their home country, but they lacked basic services such as food, water, health and education.

Javier is part of some 1,200 refugee children in Mexico who are now enrolled in primary school, thanks to the support of local authorities, UNHCR and the Educate A Child (EAC) Programme. The programme is in its first year of implementation in Mexico and is seeing considerable success.

"I like to study again because I learn new things, and I can achieve my dreams and have a house. I want to become a car mechanic", says Javier.

©UNHCR/Ivan Stephens

©UNHCR/Laura Garza

Zoyla, salvadoran refugee, has rebuilt her life with the support of UNHCR. During her path she has met people who open their house´s doors to create stronger communities.

Naturalization

As confirmed by participatory assessments undertaken with different population groups, most refugees consider naturalization as key to their long-term integration. Nevertheless, the naturalization procedure has been suspended since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. UNHCR has identified approximately 500 refugees who are eligible and aspire to become Mexican citizens. In collaboration with our NGO partner Sin Fronteras, we have been working towards establishing a pilot project that would receive requests from refugees through an ad-hoc procedure of verification, starting early 2022.

©UNHCR/Cathelen Trejos

The first Haitian Family relocated thanks to the joint UNHCR and IOM labour insertion and integration project

IOM and UNHCR join efforts as part of a labour insertion and integration project to support Haitian nationals

In the context of the increased mixed and secondary movements and the arrival of persons from Haiti in 2021, UNHCR set up several initiatives to assist this specific group. A profiling exercise was conducted in various cities across Mexico including Tapachula, Monterrey and Mexico City. Results of the exercise indicated that 80 per cent of participants wanted to be employed and 90 per cent were interested in integrating in Mexico. 80 per cent of those taking part in the survey indicated to have at least one family member who spoke Spanish and 87 per cent of participants indicated having a family member who reads and writes in Spanish.

However, the impossibility to return to Haiti together with the lack of legal alternatives to remain in the country has resulted in thousands of individuals filing for applications for asylum. As a direct consequence, the asylum system in Mexico became overloaded and frictions with the first communities of reception in Chiapas and Tabasco

exacerbated. To tackle these difficulties, UNHCR and IOM presented a pilot project with the aim of generating viable legal protection alternatives for Haitian nationals who have evident humanitarian needs owing to the current situation in their country of origin or the countries of previous residence. Approved by the Intersecretarial Commission for Comprehensive Care in Migratory Matters (CIAIMM), the project will begin in 2022 with the following mechanisms:

1. Inclusion of Haitians already present in Mexico in the UNHCR Local Integration Programme

The first mechanism consists of identifying eligible Haitian families with at least one Spanish-speaking member of working age (25-49 years old) in Tapachula, with skills to enter the formal labour market, and willing to be relocated within the framework of the Local Integration Programme to Puebla or San Luis Potosí.

IOM, the Agency responsible for identifying the profiles of participants, is in charge of Spanish language courses and of the preparation workshops for job orientation and facilitates the issuance of Humanitarian permits (Tarjeta de Visitante por Razones Humanitarias) in coordination with INM.

UNHCR provides transportation to the cities of destination and support through its network of private sector allies in the job placement and, when relevant, insertion in schools for those Haitian families with school-age children.

The project is coordinated closely with government institutions: the SRE, the INM, the SNE, and RENAPO, with private sector partners, and with the Haitian Consulate in Mexico. In its pilot phase, it seeks to relocate 200 Haitians in 2022, with the aim to expand at the national level in 2023.

2. Inclusion of people in the existing Local Integration Programme from the country of origin

The second mechanism seeks to create migratory regularization channels for people who have humanitarian needs and relevant profiles that labour markets demands to obtain the necessary documents from their country of origin to access the employment programme in Puebla and San Luis Potosí. IOM and UNHCR will hold wide consultations before proposing a pilot to operate within the existing regulatory (visas) and institutional (consulates) framework, thus limiting irregular migration. The consultation process is to start in 2022.

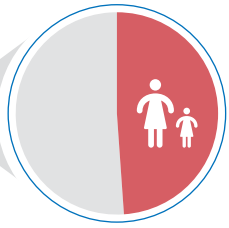
Resettlement

Resettlement quotas increased fourfold in 2021, compared with 2020, however departures of refugees to their countries of resettlement were largely delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Contrary to the past years when resettlement was only possible to Canada and Australia, for the first time since a small pilot scheme in 2016, Mexico also received a quota for resettlement to the United States in 2021. This allowed for more cases to be processed under the normal submission priority (82 per cent of cases) rather than the previous focus on emergency and urgent cases. In total, 163 individuals were submitted for resettlement to the United States, and 57 individuals to Canada. Half of all persons submitted for resettlement were children and 54 per cent were women and girls.

76 **CASES**
submitted for resettlement to third countries

COMPRISING
220
PEOPLE

49%

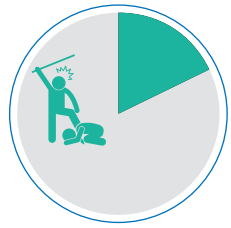


cases involved women and Girls at Risk
108 PEOPLE

33%

legal and/or physical protection needs
73 PEOPLE

18%



survivors of violence and/or torture
39 PEOPLE

20
PEOPLE
were submitted under emergency priority
9%

20
PEOPLE
were submitted under urgent priority
9%

180
PEOPLE
were submitted under normal priority
82%

To meet the needs of the increasing caseload, UNHCR implemented a plan to assist resettlement cases in finding and accessing - albeit temporarily - protection or integration in Mexico, specifically by relocating them from southern states to Puebla and Guadalajara as part of the Local Integration Programme. Cases that required further psychosocial support and/or sheltered care continued to be relocated to Mexico City.

©UNHCR/Ruben Salgado Escudero

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An Haitian asylum seeker girl, paints a message of peace, union and non-discrimination at the main entrance of the Casa Nicolás shelter in Nuevo León. She is being supported by a UNHCR and Vía Educación colleagues.

CHAPTER **6**

Peaceful coexistence

Promoting peaceful coexistence that contributes to the social development of the entire community where both local and displaced populations interact was one of the key objectives of UNHCR-Mexico's work in 2021. These projects aimed at fostering ownership of community-based projects and inclusive initiatives related to sport, culture, or education, and to improve infrastructure where those activities could take place. In parallel, UNHCR continued to advocate for the increased engagement of development actors in southern Mexico, the region with the lowest socioeconomic development indicators in the country and the one that in 2021 received more than 72 per cent of all asylum claims, with resulting pressures on services and host communities.

UNHCR supported the remodeling of a new classroom, restroom repairs, lighting and other facilities at Fernando Montes de Oca school in Tapachula.

Humanitarian and development Nexus

Despite its advanced level of development, Mexico presents the greatest socioeconomic disparities among the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries.* In particular, the states along the southern border make up part of the regions with the lowest results in socioeconomic indicators, such as GDP per capita, health, services, housing, educational deficit, poverty, and extreme poverty. Chiapas, for example, has a GDP per capita three times lower than the Mexico national average and almost seven times lower than that of Mexico City. Comparatively speaking, it is also lower than the national average in Guatemala and El Salvador, and only moderately higher than that of Honduras.** Since under Mexican law asylum-seekers must remain in the state where they filed their application for asylum until a decision has been reached on the merit of their claim, the high number of asylum applications in Chiapas and Tabasco resulted in lengthened waiting times. The prolonged presence of asylum-seekers inevitably placed additional pressures on already fragile public services in these regions.

In view of the above, and additionally confronted with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, UNHCR made significant investments in improving access and strengthening capacities of public health and education services in the states of Chiapas and Tabasco.

UNHCR, in collaboration with the national Health Institute for Well-being (INSABI), the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the World Health

* OCDE, Regions and Cities at a Glance 2018 – MEXICO
** Observatorio Económico México Cómo Vamos, A.C. (2020) / OCDE 2018

Solar public lighting in the South

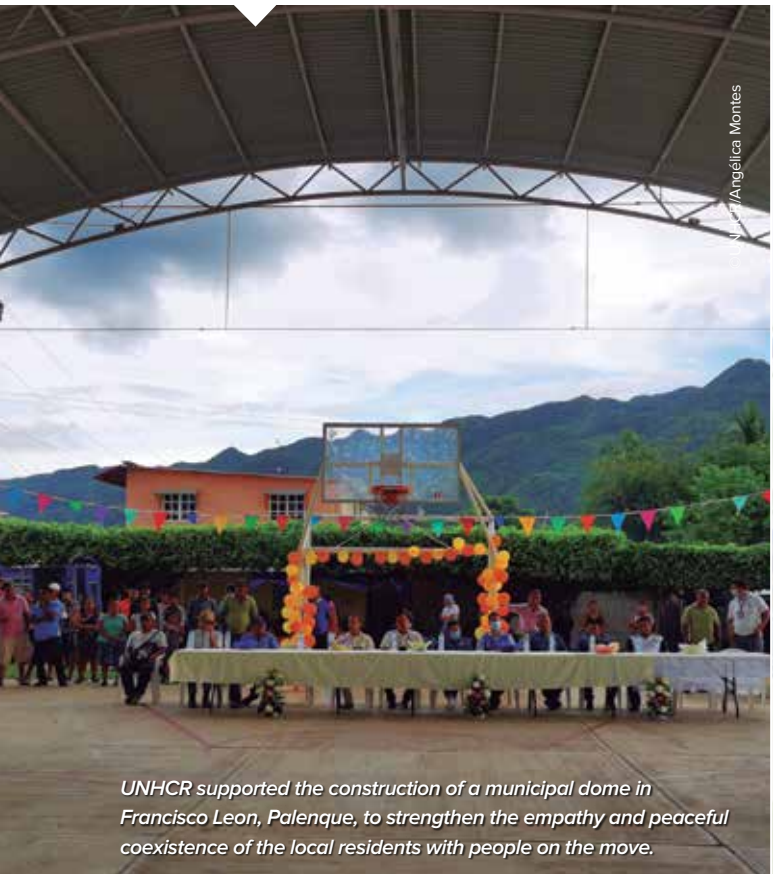
Donations of solar public lighting have been made in different areas of the city of Tapachula to generate safer spaces in the city. UNHCR and the Municipal Department of Urban Development have worked together to identify areas with lighting needs and areas with a greater presence of the refugee population in the city. In 2020, 131 solar lights were placed in different neighborhoods of the city. In 2021, another 130 were installed to improve the safety of the population. UNHCR also installed 70 solar streetlights in 2021 in the park sector of the Pakal-Na neighborhood, in Palenque, and around the train tracks.

©UNHCR/ Pierre-Marc René

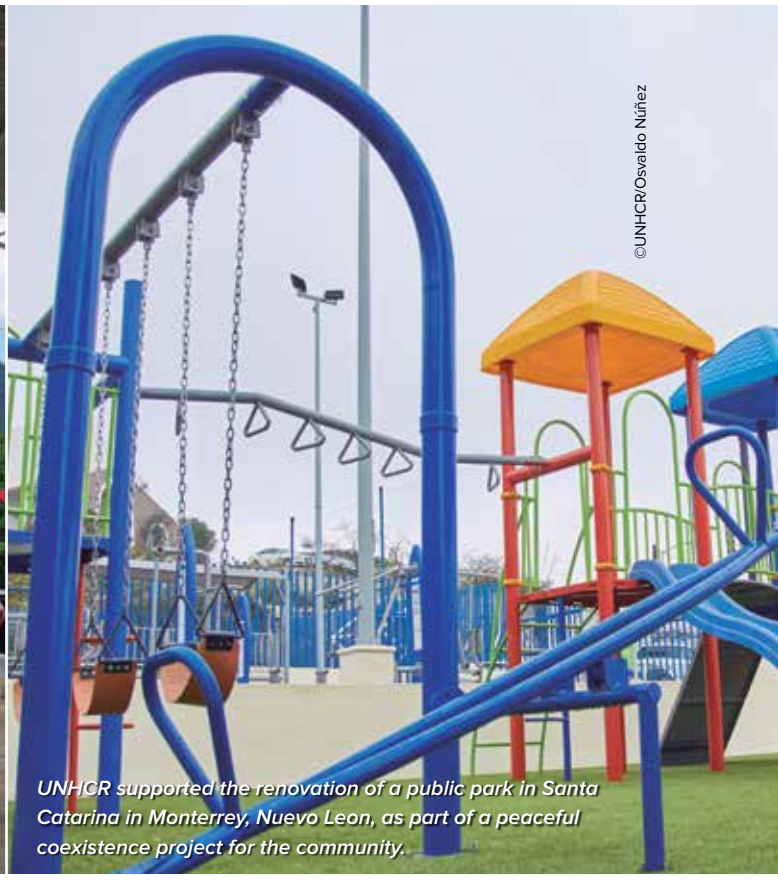
Solar public lighting donated by UNHCR was installed in Tenosique, Tabasco, to improve the security in this city.

Organisation (WHO), donated medical equipment such as ambulances (6), emergency stretcher trolleys (6), maternal and foetal monitors (2), beds and clinical desks (45 each), mattresses for clinical beds (60), and COVID-19 prevention and mitigation material to municipal hospitals.

UNHCR also opened an opportunity to support public educational sectors in the south through donations of education materials , computers and infrastructure improvements . Priority was given to primary and secondary schools that had a significant presence of refugee and migrant children. Additionally, UNHCR donated 28,000 kits of school supplies to 116 public schools in Chiapas, Tabasco, Veracruz and Oaxaca.



UNHCR supported the construction of a municipal dome in Francisco Leon, Palenque, to strengthen the empathy and peaceful coexistence of the local residents with people on the move.



UNHCR supported the renovation of a public park in Santa Catarina in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, as part of a peaceful coexistence project for the community.

Supporting host communities

Building on efforts from previous years, UNHCR prioritized support to local communities that host the highest numbers of refugees and asylum-seekers. To this end, the office set up an internal multifunctional team dedicated to providing guidance to field offices on community-based initiatives and promote peaceful coexistence with the host population

During 2021, 18 peaceful coexistence projects were developed and implemented across the country. Among them, several involved infrastructure interventions:

- improvement of a school, a library and a nursery in Saltillo;
- renovation and adaptation work to establish a community centre in Tijuana;
- renovation of a public park of Santa Catarina in the Metropolitan area of Monterrey;
- improvements of a sewage network in a street leading to the La 72 shelter in Tenosique;
- installation of 11 public drinking fountains in Tapachula;
- installation of free public WIFI antennas in the communities of Frontera Corozal, Francisco León and Emiliano Zapata in Chiapas, benefiting some 10,000 people; and
- the construction of a dome over a central square in Francisco León community, one and half hour from Frontera Corozal, which is used for community activities.

Moreover, UNHCR donated IT equipment and furniture to community centres in Tijuana and Aguascalientes to expand the scope of activities available for locals. In Tijuana, a growing Haitian population can now learn Spanish, which is key for their successful integration, while locals are also provided with Haitian Creole lessons. In the Pakal-Na neighborhood of Palenque where most asylum-seekers and refugees find a temporary home, UNHCR donated furniture, books and teaching materials to the community library, and sport equipment for the community gym.

The other initiatives included donation of musical instruments to a children's orchestra in Aguascalientes, and painting of murals in San Luis Potosí and Aguascalientes with messages of union and cohesion among peoples. UNHCR also organized two culinary events, where refugees and locals came together to cook and showcase the specialties of their countries. The event brought communities together and demonstrated unity in diversity.

One team: the "Union Club" together with refugees

As part of World Refugee Day celebrations, (June 20), the sports clubs of Nuevo León - Fuerza Regia, Rayados, Tigres and Sultanes - joined UNHCR to announce an extraordinary campaign: a single team - the "Union Club", together with refugees.

As has been demonstrated the world over, sport offers the perfect platform to promote empathy with refugees. It opens a wide range of possibilities for inclusion where, no matter where you come from, you are part of the same team. Sport triggers cultural exchanges and has a positive impact on individuals' psycho-emotional health and on promotes social cohesion within the community.

CLUB DE UNIÓN
Club de Nuevo León
UN SOLO EQUIPO

Angela, from Jesus María in Aguascalientes shares the stage with refugees during the first concert of the Symphonic Orchestra.

Cecilia, honduran refugee, plays the bass as a member of the Symphonic Orchestra of Jesus María in Aguascalientes.

Symphonic Orchestra contributes to integration of refugee children in Aguascalientes

At the age of 15, Luis, his younger sister and his mother left Honduras after a cousin was killed by gangs. When the family became victims of extortion in southern Mexico, they relocated to Aguascalientes, in the centre of the country. Today, Luis is one of the 15 refugee children who are part the municipal Jesús María Symphonic Orchestra.

People here are very friendly, they have received me very well, I have made new friends and I have learned a lot at the Music House," said Luis.

In the course of 2021, over 25,000 children claimed asylum in Mexico. At the local level, some municipalities included refugees and asylum-seekers in cultural and social projects such as this orchestra, a space shared by local children and refugees. These initiatives promote peaceful coexistence and support for host communities, which are pillars of MIRPS and the Mexico Action Plan.

Cecilia, 17, arrived in Mexico together with her siblings, fleeing threats in their home country of Honduras. She had never played an instrument before but as the daughter of a musician and the sister of a rapper, she quickly learned to play the double bass. "I was not so attracted to the double bass at the start. But now I like it very much! It's amazing to be able to share with other refugees as well, and I've also made a lot of friends from different countries and parts of Mexico", she said.

The inclusion of refugee children benefits the Orchestra, too. "I feel totally enriched with all that refugee children have brought to us. The language of music is universal, and melodies unite us all", commented Ana María Luna Reyes, music teacher at the Jesús María Children's Orchestra that specialized in percussion. UNHCR contributed to the initiative by donating 43 musical instruments.

Tackling xenophobia

In the course of participatory assessments undertaken with various refugee population groups in 2021, many respondents expressed having suffered from discrimination in the south of the country. Generally, people stated enjoying better relationships with local communities in cities in the north and centre of the country. In all locations, they reported some form of discrimination from employers, typically lower wages and higher workloads. Likewise, they stated having faced institutional discrimination in access to public services.

In response, an internal multifunctional team on Racism and Xenophobia was created in 2021 with a view to enhance internal coordination for the design and implementation of communication products and activities to combat discrimination. The team monitored acts of discrimination to detect tensions and identify relevant solutions at the community level. Moreover, we conducted a qualitative study to measure perceptions towards refugees in six cities, which became the basis for an anti-xenophobia campaign to be rolled out in 2022.

In 2021, UNHCR and the National Council to Prevent Discrimination (CONAPRED) jointly facilitated a series of workshops for legal service providers, COMAR officials and the staff of UNHCR partners on prevention of xenophobia and discrimination against migrants and refugees. Additionally, approximately 60 journalists participated in dedicated workshops for media professionals in Ciudad Juarez, Monterrey, Palenque, Saltillo, Tapachula and Tijuana, where they were sensitised on the use of appropriate language in their media coverage of refugees and migrants.

©UNHCR/Osvaldo Núñez

As part of the antixenophobic activities for World Refugee Day in 2021, locals and refugees share a pacific moment in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon.

REFUGIO SONORO

PALOMAZO
por los Refugiados

Palomazo for Refugees 2021, Refugio Sonoro

For the second year in a row, as part of World Refugee Day (WRD) celebrations, UNHCR Mexico organised the *Palomazo por los Refugiados* initiative The initiative was part of a larger festival in the Americas, the JAM Festival , which included different cultural activities to celebrate WRD in different countries. In Mexico's popular culture, a "palomazo" happens when a group of friends or musicians come together to play songs - roughly equivalent to a jam session. In Mexico, UNHCR launched "Refugio Sonoro", a 60-minute audiovisual piece that brought together the talent of six artists - Tania Libertad, Yayo González, Roco Pachukote, José Manuel Aguilera, Vivir Quintana and Irina Índigo- all of whom come from different countries in the region. Led by Colombian artist Andrea Echeverri, they performed powerful and popular Latin American songs that were related to exile, spreading messages of empathy and hope.

Palomazo for Refugees was disseminated through UNHCR's social media (Twitter, Facebook and YouTube) and through W Radio, one of the most important radio stations in Mexico, with whom we partnered on the project.

REFUGIO
SONORO
PALOMAZO
por los Refugiados

CHAPTER **7**

Internal Displacement

©UNHCR/Ginnette Riquelme

During 2021, at least 29,000 people were displaced, exceeding three times the aproximate number of 2020.

Sfarch

Violence is one of the main causes for internal displacement in Mexico. In 2019, this situation was recognized as a public human right issue.

Internal displacement represents a multidimensional situation of violation of human rights which leaves those who are forced to flee their home and stay in their country in a situation of extreme vulnerability. Although there is no official data available, according to the last annual report of the Mexican Commission for the Defense and Promotion of Human Rights (CMDPDH), some 346,945 people were internally displaced between 2006 and 2019 in massive events caused by violence. CMDPDH monthly media monitoring reports, show that from January to December 2021, at least 29,000 people were displaced, a threefold increase increase compared to 2020. The main causes of displacement were violence and organized

crime in states such as Chihuahua, Michoacán, Guerrero and Sinaloa, and intercommunity conflicts in Chiapas and Oaxaca.

Since 2019, when the Mexican Government recognized internal forced displacement as a public and human rights problem, UNHCR has been providing support to the government through technical assistance on legal and institutional framework. A draft law on the protection of IDPs was unanimously approved by the Chamber of Deputies in September 2020 and awaits further discussion and approval in the Senate. Throughout 2021, the first profiling exercise was launched in Chihuahua state and UNHCR supported the analytical work of an inter-institutional Working

Hundreds of people are forcibly displaced from their origin communities fleeing from violence and intercommunal conflicts. UNHCR works to strengthen United Nations response to internal displacement.

©UNHCR/Ginnette Riquelme

Group composed of authorities, civil society organizations, and the Joint IDP Profiling Service (JIPS) to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon. In August, UNHCR participated in the Seminar on Forced Internal Displacement, organized by the Migration Policy, Registration and Identity of Persons Unit of the SEGOB.

At the request of authorities, UNHCR also worked on the implementation of pilot projects for the inclusion of vulnerable displaced Mexican nationals within the UNHCR Local Integration Programme. In 2021, 65 persons were identified and referred to UNHCR by the General Directorate for Welfare (former INDESOL), and 26 individuals affected by forced displacement in Guerrero were referred by SEGOB. It is expected that these pilots can provide a basis for development of public policy in this area.

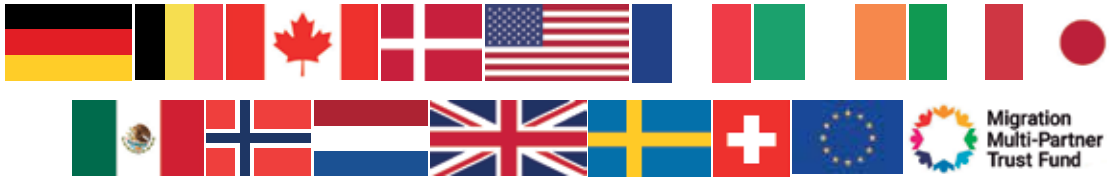
In 2021, UNHCR contributed to capacity-building of authorities on the subject of protection of internally displaced persons. In September, 43 officials of the Attorney General's Office of Chihuahua state completed a full-fledged training on internal displacement. In December, a group of 15 representatives of authorities at federal and state level and civil society leaders took part in the sixth edition of the Internal Displacement course provided by the International Institute of Humanitarian Law in San Remo, based in Italy.

Throughout the year, UNHCR undertook advocacy initiatives to highlight the importance of establishing a regulatory framework on IDPs. In parallel developments, a dedicated Working Group on Forced Internal Displacement was established under the UN Inter-agency group on Migration and Asylum (GIMA) with the aim to strengthen an UN-wide response to internal displacement, capitalizing on the expertise of different agencies. UNHCR leads the working group on IDPs and has secured the co-leadership of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in line with both Agencies' mandates.

Margarita, 72, receives a visit from UNHCR field officers at her home. The Salvadoran refugee has found a new life in southern Mexico.

©UNHCR/Daniele Volpe

UNHCR is grateful for the generous support provided by donors globally, as well as those who contributed with earmarked and unearmarked funds to Mexico Operation and its programs in 2021



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2021 Highlights UNHCR Mexico

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A girl plays at the Matamoros informal camp. This girl was one of more than 13,000 people who in 2021 succeeded in reentering the United States during the winddown of the MPP Program.