



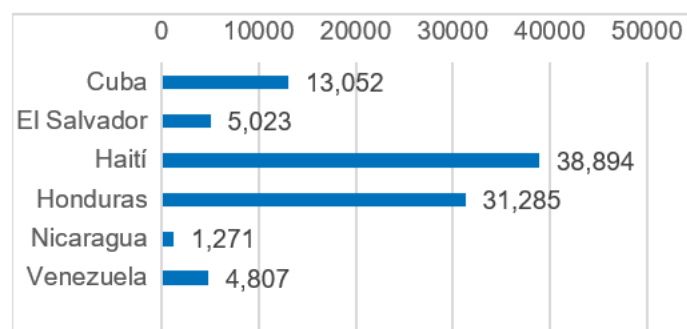
# Southern Mexico

November 2023

As of recent years, Mexico is not only a country of origin and transit but also a country of destination for an increasing number of asylum-seekers and persons in need of international protection. This development, coupled with growing mixed and onward movements in the Americas, has led **Mexico to rank among the top 5 countries in the world for individual registration of new asylum claims in 2021 and 2022**. Most people enter Mexico through the southern border, resulting in a significant concentration of people with acute humanitarian and protection needs in southern Mexico. **In 2022, 82% of applications for refugee status in Mexico were filed in Chiapas, Veracruz, and Tabasco. From January to 10 November 2023, Mexico received over 130,000 asylum applications. This is the highest number of asylum claims ever received in this time frame. The Southern states of Chiapas, Tabasco and Veracruz accounted for 72% of all claims processed in the country.**

## ASYLUM APPLICATIONS 2023

# TOP NATIONALITIES



*\* Data available as of 20 October 2023. Due to the migration of data onto a new registration system, these figures may be subject to variation and may not therefore be considered final.*

## Operational Context and Response

The southern border of Mexico, which spans 871 km, is highly porous, allowing for frequent irregular movements of people and goods. In recent years, an increasing number of individuals with international protection needs have arrived in southern Mexico through both formal and informal border crossings. Already the state with the lowest levels of socio-economic development, most asylum-seekers register their claims in Chiapas where resources are scarce, and services are overstretched. In addition, Mexico is experiencing an increase in internal displacement, caused by a rise in violence and land disputes, perpetrated by criminal and drug-trafficking groups. The complex nature of mixed movements in the region, coupled with the absence of migratory alternatives or legal stay arrangements, puts pressure on COMAR.

To address these challenges, UNHCR has expanded its response capacity in various areas. This includes monitoring the border, supporting shelters, offering protection services, granting cash assistance, providing legal and psychosocial interventions, training civil servants, supporting COMAR, and creating community protection networks along the main routes used by refugees, asylum-seekers, and internally displaced persons. Efforts are also being made to support host communities through interventions in education, health, and the development of safe spaces for communities.

## Key Priorities

### Access to Asylum via Support to the Mexican Refugee Commission

Since 2018, the Mexican Refugee Commission (COMAR) has increased its response capacity to register and process asylum claims almost four-fold, with support from UNHCR. Nonetheless, the annual budget of COMAR has not kept up with the rise in asylum-seekers. **In 2022, UNHCR funded over two-thirds of COMAR's personnel and helped improve its operations and infrastructure across the country.** COMAR, in coordination with UNHCR and local authorities, is also going through a digital transformation that paved the way for a new digital archive system that enables more efficient document management and a new version of their Case Management and Database System (SIRE).

**The state government of Chiapas also donated a piece of land for COMAR's operation in Tapachula.** UNHCR is actively working with the government to find funds to build a multi-purpose center that will centralize all processes, from initial registration to Refugee Status Determination and local integration initiatives. The center will make case processing more efficient, improve coordination between different service providers, and help ease tensions with the host community. The construction of the first part of the center will start at the beginning of 2024.



**19 staff members** were trained on the File Tracking System in **4 COMAR offices** in southern Mexico in June 2023



As of July 2023, **309,846** COMAR files were processed through the digitization and data verification project nationally, including **191,569** files in Tapachula, leading to more efficient processing times

### Access to Information and Communication with Communities

UNHCR and its partners ensure access to information on asylum policies and procedures in Mexico through “know your rights” sessions. They distribute informational materials in various languages, including Spanish, Creole, and English to shelters and community centers. To improve access to information for people on the move, UNHCR utilizes innovative channels, like the Help Desk and *Confía en El Jaguar* Facebook page.

UNHCR's objective is to provide individuals with reliable information and tools to make well-informed decisions and mitigate risks associated with perilous journeys, smuggling, or human trafficking.



From January to May 2023, **10,986 queries** were resolved nationally through the Help Desk. **60% of these queries were submitted from Chiapas.**

### Access to Legal Assistance

UNHCR works with partners, civil society organizations, pro bono allies, university legal clinics, and others to establish its robust network of lawyers, paralegals, and public defenders that provide legal representation, orientation, and advice for people in need of international protection.



From January to June 2023, **96,425 persons** have benefited from **legal assistance** (orientation, advice, and representation) nationally – including **37,749 persons** in southern Mexico



**5,298 persons** – including refugees and asylum-seekers – have received **legal representation** for procedures in southern Mexico, from January 2022 to June 2023

## Support to Shelters

Shelters play a central role in the humanitarian response for people who have been forced to flee and in the delivery of protection services. UNHCR provides shelters with technical and material assistance to improve reception conditions and access to services.



**15 shelters** in 4 states in southern Mexico were supported with the donation of **21,456 non-food items (NFIs)** from January 2022 to June 2023



**13 shelters** in southern Mexico were supported with **31 infrastructure improvement projects** between January 2022 and June 2023

## Protection Assistance and Attention to Persons with Specific Needs

UNHCR supports capacity building for civil society organizations and government counterparts to enhance protection responses for high-risk populations and coordinates with local institutions to refer those in need to specialized services.



**3,088 persons** have benefited from psychosocial support in Chiapas, Tabasco, and Veracruz, from January to June 2023



**320 survivors of gender-based violence** have received assistance in Chiapas and Tabasco from January to June 2023



**580 child protection cases** have been supported in Chiapas, Tabasco, and Veracruz, from January to June 2023

## Peaceful Coexistence Between Host Communities and Refugees

UNHCR supports refugee-led initiatives to raise awareness about the conditions that force people to flee their homes and to promote dialogue and understanding between host communities, refugees, and asylum-seekers.



Collaborate with refugees and locals to transform walls into **community murals** that promote peaceful coexistence, **in close partnership with the municipality of Tapachula**



Classroom and washroom construction and donation of school supplies and computers at an **elementary school in Suchiate**, which serves local and refugee children



Support the **Territorio Joven initiative** with refurbishments and equipment, e.g. a multipurpose community movie theatre, to create an inclusive spaces for dialogue, sports, and leisure activities

## Resettlement and Local Integration of Refugees

From 2016 to October 2023, UNHCR supported the local integration process of over 35,000 recognized refugees through their relocation from southern Mexico to 10 cities across central and northern Mexico, where there are increased prospects of employment. Once relocated, UNHCR facilitates access to employment, housing, education and health services for participants in the Local Integration Program, which helps to alleviate pressure on overstretched services in the poorest regions of the country. In addition, UNHCR has supported *in-situ* integration for over 80,000 individuals who wish to remain in the area where they initiated their asylum procedures with COMAR.



Through the Tapachula Integration Module, **4,388 asylum-seekers and refugees** have received orientation and been referred to education services, the formal job market, healthcare, and the UNHCR Local Integration Program



**500 private sector companies** partner with UNHCR to employ refugees nationwide.

## Tapachula Area-Based Approach (ABA)

ABA Tapachula is a comprehensive solutions strategy that addresses the humanitarian and development needs of the refugee, migrant, and local populations, considering long-term impact of interventions to support local systems and build their resilience and ability to manage the growing population in the South. An interagency working group bringing together 11 UN Agencies under the coordination of the Office of the Resident Coordinator was established in April 2022 to develop this initiative. UNHCR holds the technical secretariate of the initiative. In October 2022, the municipality of Tapachula hosted a workshop with the participation of NGOs, UN agencies, and government representatives to decide on joint project proposals.



**Five priority areas were defined:** improving reception conditions; supporting health, education, and labor inclusion; and fostering social cohesion.



**13 project proposals have been developed jointly** by the municipality of Tapachula and the interagency working group to generate increased donor interest.

## Needs



**Shelters:** Increased reception capacity, management support, and resources to provide basic humanitarian assistance.



**Information** on asylum and alternative pathways to regularization.



**Legal aid:** Protection counseling, orientation, and legal assistance for people in need of international protection.



**Mental health and psychosocial support services:** Available and aligned to the specific needs of men, women, girls, and boys of all ages and backgrounds.



**Risk monitoring and protection services** for GBV survivors, children, and other persons with specific needs, including protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA).



**Improved access to public services,** including the national health system and enrolling more refugee and asylum-seeker children in quality education.

## UNHCR Sub-Offices, Field Units and Presence in Southern Mexico



### Partners

#### Veracruz

- HyS - Movilidad Humana Coatzacoalcos
- SEPAMIRE
- REDODEM – Albergue Ranzahuer
- COMAR

#### Oaxaca

- REDODEM – COMI
- HyS – Alb. Hermanos en el Camino

#### Tabasco

- Asylum Access
- A.A. – Albergue Colibrí

#### Tabasco

- HyS – Albergue Amparito
- HyS – Albergue La 72
- IRC
- Médicos del Mundo
- Save the Children
- COMAR

#### Chiapas

- Albergue Belén
- Asylum Access
- J'Tatic
- Fray Matías
- Save the Children
- JRS
- UMA
- Aldeas SOS
- Médicos del Mundo
- IRC

- Hospitalidad y Solidaridad
- SEPAMI
- COMAR
- SEPAMI – Albergue Tzome Ixuk
- SEPAMI – Una Ayuda para Tí Mujer Migrante
- HyS – Capilla Sta Martha Bethania