

# Participatory Assessments by UNHCR in El Salvador in 2022

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, together with partner organizations in El Salvador, conducts participatory assessments every year with the aim of ensuring the active participation of displaced people or those at risk of displacement, refugees, asylum-seekers, and returnees in need of protection in all its programmes through structured dialogue.

These consultations with women, men, children, and individuals of diverse ages, genders, and backgrounds provide relevant

information to understand their protection situation, the risks they face, the underlying causes, community needs, as well as their capacities, resources, and prioritized solutions.

The findings contribute to planning and implementing actions and programmes, and they are an integral part of being accountable to the beneficiaries.

 **1,047**  
people

**102**  
focal  
groups

**57%**   
women

**32%**   
men

**25%**   
children and  
adolescents

**11%**   
LGBTIQ+  
people



**36** semi-structured  
interviews with key  
stakeholders



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Scan to learn on UNHCR's tool for Participatory Assessment in Operations  
<https://www.unhcr.org/media/unhcr-tool-participatory-assessment-operations-part-i-introduction>



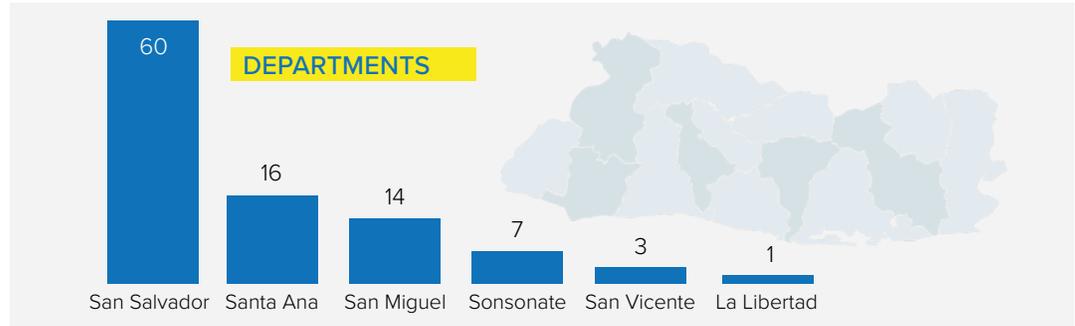
Between May and August 2022, UNHCR, in partnership with FUNDASAL, World Vision, and COMCAVIS Trans, conducted consultations with 102 focus groups in six departments of El Salvador, which involved 1,047 people, including internally displaced persons or those at risk of forced displacement, asylum-seekers, refugees, and returnees, of different ages, genders, and diversities. Additionally, 36 semi-structured

interviews were conducted with key stakeholders in these departments.

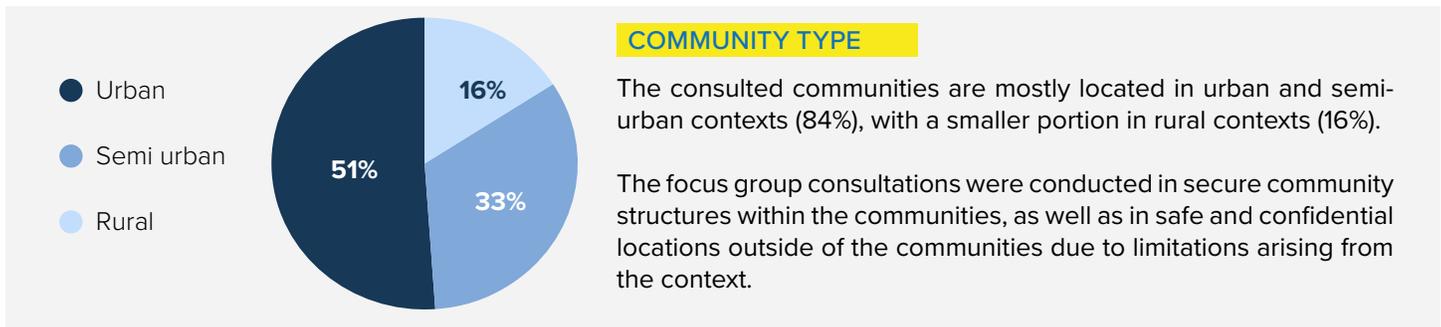
The results provide findings on the perception of access to rights and services, security, forced displacement, discrimination, communication with communities, the impact of the context on mental health and individuals' lives, among other relevant topics.

## Geographical Distribution

- 46 communities
- 13 municipalities
- 6 departments



The consultations with focus groups were conducted in 46 communities, from thirteen municipalities in six departments of the country. These municipalities include the majority of the 40 communities prioritized by UNHCR, as well as others identified in 2022 where UNHCR has activities or has engaged with communities. These interventions are related to a prioritization based on protection needs identified in communities with high levels of vulnerability, historically isolated, and in many cases, previously under the territorial control of criminal groups. These communities were selected through a prioritization process carried out by UNHCR due to their historical rates of crimes against life, personal integrity, property, among others.



During the exercise, UNHCR and its partners presented a list of topics, from which each discussion group prioritized three, which were thoroughly addressed in subgroups. From August to October 2022, the results of the analysis were shared with the communities, a process that served to receive feedback and validation of the identified data.

## Key findings\*

\*The described percentages refer to the responses of the individuals participating in the focus group discussions.

### ACCESS TO SERVICES

- Communities identify that barriers to access basic services within their communities, including access to healthcare, education, livelihoods, food, adequate housing, freedom of movement, and participation, among others. Approximately 7 out of 10 of the consulted groups mention that access to services in their communities is **poor, average, or**

- 67% of the communities consider that the **drinking water** service is either average or non-existent. There is distrust towards service providers, which causes people to be reluctant to demand the fulfilment of the right to access water.
- Over 60% of the consulted groups indicate that the quality and availability of public **transportation** service are inadequate. The routes have limited schedules, and most places are inaccessible for people with disabilities.

- Half of the surveyed communities affirm that **public lighting** lacks maintenance, and in some areas it is non-existent. All of this poses a risk when moving around the communities during nighttime.
- **Emergency health services**, such as ambulances, are non-existent in over half of the communities. This is often due to difficulties in accessing the communities, whether due to infrastructure challenges, social dynamics or stigmatization.
- 70% of the surveyed individuals consider **recreational spaces** to be inadequate or non-existent. In communities where outreach centres, sports fields, or parks exist, they are often in poor condition or lack resources for activities,



## VIOLENCE AND SECURITY

- Different population groups **normalize situations of violence**.
- People explain situations of discrimination and stigmatization, as their communities have historically been labelled as “red zones” and violent.
- **The population claims to feel safer** in recent months. The community occasionally mentions ongoing crimes such as extortion and control by criminal groups, although the dynamics are changing. At the same time, the population reports new instances of intimidation due to living in stigmatized areas. Over 90% of the consulted groups mention feeling unsafe when making complaints.

### Gender-based violence

The consulted groups perceive a high likelihood of gender-based violence occurring in their communities.

People report cases of gender-based violence, along with the lack of women’s participation in decision-making processes, lack of knowledge about specialized attention routes, absence of community protection networks, and increased violation of rights of transgender women.

**50%**  
of the focal groups  
report having  
received information  
about gender-based  
violence.

### Children at risk

**Children and adolescents suffer from abuse, neglect, and physical and psychological violence, as reported by the assessed communities.**

- There are numerous broken families due to violence and displacement, with separated children and adolescents living with grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other relatives. There is a **normalization of violence and atypical situations such as child labour, abuse, or teenage pregnancies**.
- 82% of the consulted groups indicate that there are **adolescents under the age of 14 working** in their communities.
- 79% of the consulted groups mention that there are children and adolescents who do not attend school.
- 45% of the consulted groups indicate that children and adolescents have had **to drop out of school** due to violence, insecurity, threats, lack of financial resources, and teenage pregnancies, among other reasons.
- 88% mention that there are cases of **pregnancies among adolescents** aged 12 to 17 in their communities.
- 82% of the consulted groups indicate that there are children and adolescents **under the care of others** because their parents left the country.
- More than half of the surveyed individuals **have not received information about the rights of children and adolescents**.



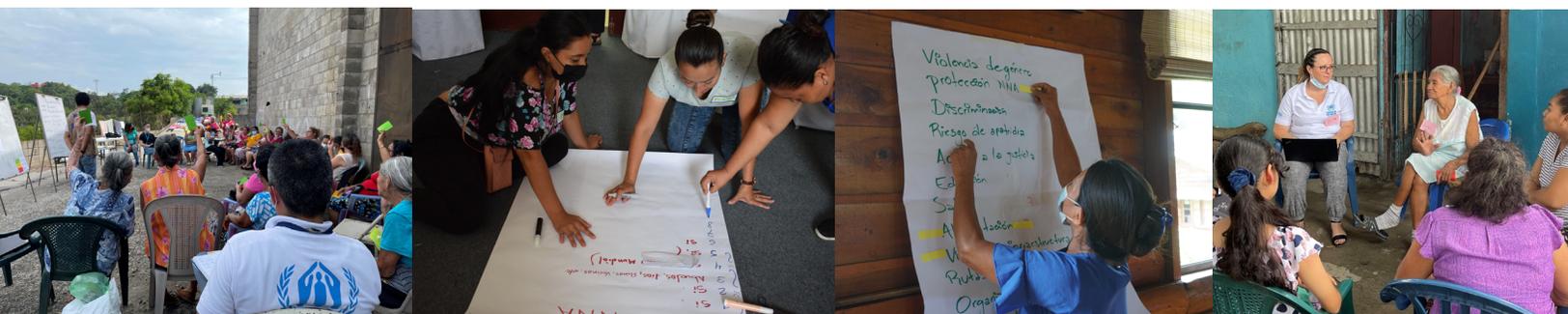
INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT

- **51% of the assessed communities mention a lack of information about forced displacement.** Once the concept is explained, communities recognize the violation of rights and situations that fall under forced displacement. The normalization of violence often distorts the perception and relevance of the issue.
- The assessed communities believe that women, young people, and LGBTIQ+ individuals are at higher risk of displacement, although they emphasize that the impact affects the entire family.
- **Forced displacement causes various negative impacts:** economic and job loss (77%), loss of dwelling (68%), psychosocial deterioration (68%), disruption of community networks and family disintegration (65%), social impact (54%), school dropout (39%), and negative impact on physical and emotional health (30%).



DISCRIMINATION

- **Young people** indicate that they are unable to **continue their studies due to lack of opportunities, stigmatization, discrimination, and violence.**
- 70% of the consulted communities indicate a **lack of accessible spaces for people with disabilities**, and **63% of them report discrimination based on some form of disability.**
- Cases are reported of **elderly people in situations of neglect**, abuse, abandonment, while others experience employment discrimination. Individuals lacking identification documents face greater difficulty in accessing services and rights.
- The **consulted indigenous peoples feel discriminated against, historically suppressed, and excluded.** They believe that there are gaps at different levels compared to other population groups. They report having lost their traditions, language, and customs.
- **LGBTIQ+ individuals feel invisible, suppressed, and fear** filing complaints about the violations of their rights. They share experiences of violence, discrimination, and stigmatization within their families, communities, by authorities, and society in general. According to their accounts, individuals face difficulties accessing education, housing, healthcare, and employment opportunities. The lack of specific protection frameworks, they point out, limits the development of a fulfilling, dignified, and secure life. People indicate that, at times, their only option is internal displacement or fleeing the country.
- **Asylum-seekers state that the lack of knowledge** about the provisional residence document leads to denial of access to services. This makes them feel excluded and discriminated against in the country.





MENTAL HEALTH

- In 2022, the respondents expressed a deterioration in their mental health. Over 90% of the surveyed communities mentioned feeling afraid, while others reported changes in mood, isolation, sadness, depression, fatigue, and suicidal thoughts, among others. The consulted groups including young people, children, adolescents, women, older adults, and men demonstrate a need for mental health care. Over 60% lack information about mental health.
- Stigma surrounding **the need for mental health support** is common in daily life. Many participants in the assessments mentioned fearing comments or judgment if they discuss their feelings or seek help from a psychologist.



COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

- **There are different types of community structures in the majority of the surveyed communities.** Community mobilization and levels of coordination vary, and some structures are more strengthened than others. They recognize the importance of organizing and working for their community. In 67% of the communities, they have organized themselves to address situations that affect them.
- Participants report a lack of dignified public spaces for recreational, playful, cultural, or educational activities.
- Communities have **coping mechanisms** to respond to tense, insecure, and violent contexts. They expect that UNHCR and partner organizations complement these capacities, support them in their community strengthening processes, and facilitate the search for solutions.



COMMUNICATION

- 80% of the consulted groups mention that they have contact with UNHCR and partner organizations.
- **The communication channels they mostly use are Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram.** They consider that digital platforms have a wider reach, but they also rely on word of mouth, public announcements, printed materials, and visiting organizations in person to seek information.



ENVIRONMENT

- **Communities point out the impacts of climate change,** such as increased risks of floods, landslides, sinkholes, and river swelling. The most severe damages occur in precarious structures located in high-risk areas. Of the consulted groups, 80% consider that there are risks in their communities during the rainy season.
- **Surveyed people mentioned the need to expand institutional** response or support in temporary emergency situations.

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is grateful for the support in 2022 of:



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