



**UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency



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## NORTH OF CENTRAL AMERICA SITUATION

The number of people forced to flee from the North of Central America in search for protection — either internally or across international borders — has soared over the past years. Violence, persecution and insecurity compounded by deteriorating socioeconomic conditions has especially targeted children and women and LGBTIQI people. Those who flee see no choice but to undertake dangerous journeys that expose them to smugglers, traffickers and other risks of exploitation and abuse.



**386,480** ASYLUM-SEEKERS & REFUGEES FROM NORTH OF CENTRAL AMERICA WORLDWIDE (to mid-2019)

**318,590** INTERNALLY DISPLACED IN HONDURAS AND EL SALVADOR



**53,810** new asylum claims 2019 (January - June)



**86%** increase as compared to same period in 2018

**247,090** in Honduras (2004 - 2018)  
**71,500** in El Salvador (2006 - 2016)

Working with States and other partners, UNHCR will enhance regional coordination and responsibility-sharing. It will prioritise the delivery of emergency humanitarian assistance and access to comprehensive protection and durable solutions for refugees and other victims of forced displacement.

Given the growing needs of the forcibly displaced, regional cooperation and responsibility-sharing is essential. UNHCR and the Organization of American States (OAS) support the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (MIRPS for its acronym in Spanish), led by seven States - Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Panama – who have made significant commitments to strengthen regional and national responses to forced displacement.

## Key UNHCR achievements 2019

### Safeguarding fundamental rights

UNHCR supported the safe spaces network, which was critical in providing immediate assistance and protection for people on the move and in identifying those with international protection needs. In 2019, thanks to UNHCR's support, 65,788 people were assisted in 10 safe spaces and 16 information points in Guatemala. Across Mexico, UNHCR assisted 50 shelters, and three new shelters were constructed. Thanks to the reception capacity of shelters operated by civil society, 8,277 asylum-seekers initially detained in Mexico were released, a practical demonstration of alternatives to detention.

In order to facilitate timely access to status determination procedures, UNHCR hired and trained over 1,300 lawyers, immigration officials and eligibility officers across the region. In Mexico, UNHCR has also supported the establishment of a protection registry area and permanent offices for the Mexican Refugee Commission (COMAR), thus facilitating and accelerating the asylum procedure.

### Responding with lifesaving support

During 2019, UNHCR and its partners provided lifesaving assistance to displaced people, expanding its presence and reception capacity at border entry points. As an example, UNHCR established a presence in critical areas along the Mexico-Guatemala and Guatemala-Honduras border region.

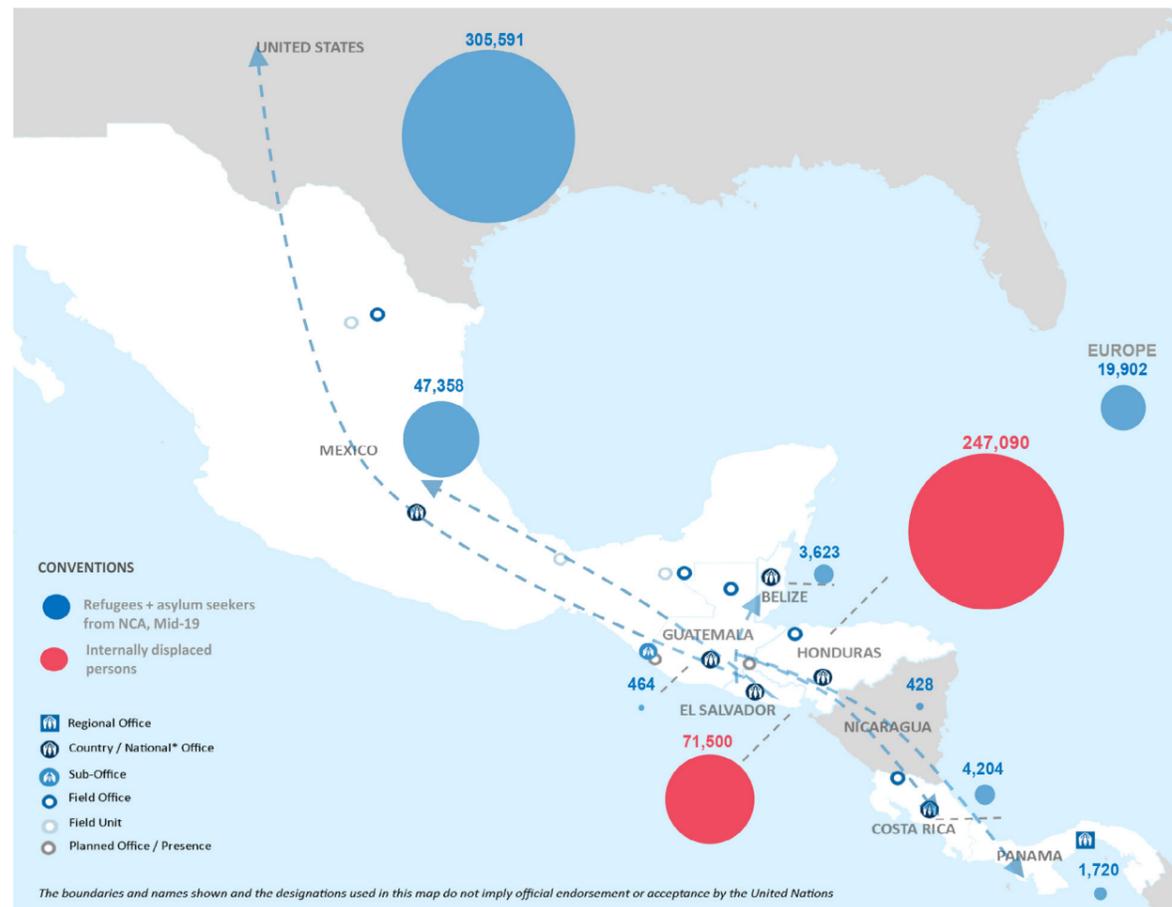
To support refugees and asylum-seekers meeting their basic needs across the region, UNHCR has increased targeted and multi-purpose cash-based interventions. During 2019 cash assistance was an essential part of the emergency responses in southern Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Costa Rica and Panama.

### Building better futures

UNHCR works to achieve legal, economic and cultural integration for refugees and asylum-seekers in their host communities. In Mexico, close to 4,000 asylum-seekers and refugees got access to documents, relocation and formal employment. In Panama, UNHCR, in collaboration with the Manpower Group and civil society partner HIAS, has implemented a programme that allows people of concern to access job training facilitating their entry into the labour market. In Guatemala, UNHCR collaborates with the Ministry of Labour and the Tourism Institute to provide refugees, asylum seekers and members of the host community with employment opportunities.

In addition to this, UNHCR has also strengthened assistance to internally displaced people by reinforcing the protection capacity of host governments. For instance, in Honduras and El Salvador, UNHCR provides technical assistance and support to government institutions on how to respond to internal displacement and work with communities at high risk.

## Regional Overview of Population of Concern from NCA Countries\*



\* Data for 2019 is preliminary and can be subject to changes. For USA, pending defensive applications are only available for end-18.

Sources: UNHCR, UNCS Author: UNHCR - HQ Geneva Feedback: mapping@unhcr.org Filename: ven\_sit\_A4P

## UNHCR response in 2020

Under the MIRPS, UNHCR will expand its presence and operations in 2020 in the North of Central America to strengthen protection capacities in countries of origin, assist with immediate humanitarian needs, enhance asylum systems, and promote integration and durable solutions across the region.

### Safeguarding fundamental rights

UNHCR will strengthen reception and admission conditions for people in need of international protection by supporting shelters run by civil society and religious organizations. UNHCR will also work closely with civil society to identify people of concern, transfer them to specialized services and provide legal assistance throughout the asylum process. UNHCR will provide technical assistance and human resources to strengthen the asylum institutions of Mexico, Guatemala, Costa Rica and Panama and therefore reduce the existing backlog of asylum claims.

### Responding with lifesaving support

UNHCR will provide emergency humanitarian assistance through the safe spaces network across the sub region, including food, legal aid, shelter, medical care and psychological support and will expand multipurpose cash-based interventions for the most vulnerable people of concern.

### Building better futures

UNHCR will also support host communities in providing a lifeline to people on the run and improving the living conditions for displaced people and local communities while combating xenophobia. In line with the Global Compact for Refugees, MIRPS and the Comprehensive Development Plan for Mexico and Central America (CDP), UNHCR aims to support host communities through projects that promote peaceful coexistence and by strengthening the capacity of public services in the health and education sectors.

To enhance local integration, UNHCR will expand its collaboration with the private sector and government institutions, to foster local integration programmes in Mexico, and provide access to education, financial services, housing, health and employment support programs in Costa Rica.

In order to address continued internal displacement, UNHCR will enhance community-based protection initiatives within host communities in Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador, to empower their leadership and augment their capacity to integrate internally displaced people.



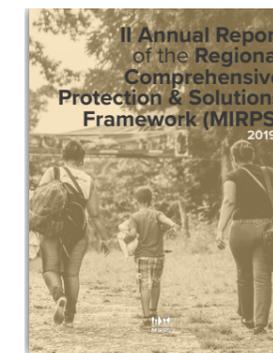
## ENHANCING REGIONAL COOPERATION AND RESPONSIBILITY SHARING

The MIRPS represents a concrete regional commitment to the Global Compact for Refugees, to strengthen the regional and national response to forced displacement, work towards addressing the root causes, and increase durable solutions through responsibility-sharing and regional cooperation.

Through the MIRPS, States have put together National Plans that identify specific programmes and prioritized actions, as well as the corresponding resources needed to strengthen the national and international protection systems and promote comprehensive and sustainable solutions.

In addition to providing support and assistance to the concerned Governments in implementing MIRPS, UNHCR carries out key activities directly and through partners to ensure a stronger regional approach to protection and solutions for asylum-seekers, refugees and internally displaced people.

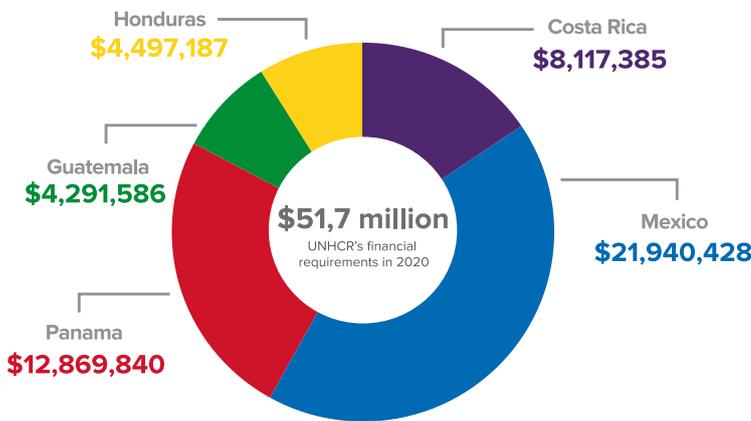
Read the report here



## IMPLICATIONS OF UNDERFUNDING

The stark choice that thousands of families and young men and women in the North of Central America face is to leave their homes or stay and risk death or exploitation. Despite the evident human drama of the situation, and despite the efforts States are making to provide asylum and host communities to welcome displaced people, funding for the North of Central America Situation lags far behind the scale of the crisis. In the last three years, the situation has consistently received less than 30% of what was required to meet the dire needs of those who flee.

### UNHCR's financial requirements 2020 for the NORTH OF CENTRAL AMERICA Situation (December 2019)



Limited funding prevents UNHCR and its partners from addressing the root causes of forced displacement in countries of origin; from strengthening mechanisms for reception and admission; from responding to immediate humanitarian needs; supporting host countries and communities; and working towards durable solutions. It drastically reduces the number of people to whom UNHCR can provide assistance through cash, or sustainable livelihoods, health and education. Underfunding undermines efforts to foster durable solutions. For example, reducing opportunities for local integration may, when coupled with an already competitive but limited job market and a fragile security situation, create a hostile environment for people in need of international protection.

Leading by example through the MIRPS, countries in the region are showing commendable solidarity, strengthening regional cooperation and establishing responsibility-sharing measures to address forced displacement in the region. Early achievements suggest that the benefit reaches both the forcibly displaced and their host communities - these countries need more support.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF FLEXIBLE FUNDING FOR UNHCR'S SITUATIONS

Flexible financial support allows UNHCR to place resources anywhere within a given situation, in line with the Office's priorities, from where people in need are forced to flee, to where they find safety and protection. Importantly, it needs to come as early as possible for UNHCR to plan in the most efficient manner, allocating to priorities first.

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UNHCR is grateful to the following donors which have provided unearmarked and softly earmarked contributions:



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