

# Guatemala

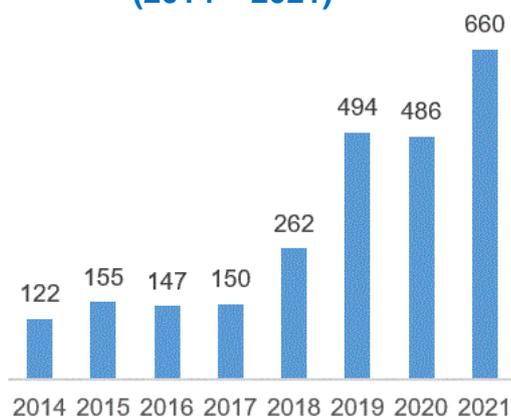
August 2021

The number of persons returned from the US and Mexico to Guatemala, has increased. This also includes Guatemalans in need of protection.

While Guatemala is still primarily a country of transit, it is increasingly also perceived as a country of destination for refugees fleeing violence and persecution in neighbouring countries.

COVID-19 has exacerbated the needs of asylum-seekers, refugees, their host communities and Guatemalans at risk of displacement by impacting their access to protection and livelihood.

## Asylum Applications per Year (2014 – 2021)



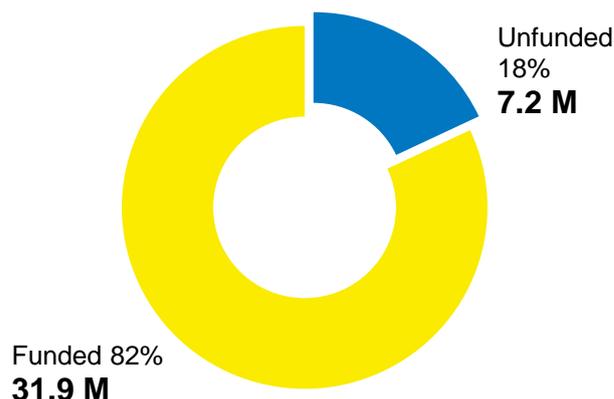
**152%** increase in new applications between 2018 and 2021 (up to August)

Source: Guatemalan Migration Institute

## FUNDING (AS OF 7 SEPTEMBER 2021)

**USD 39.1 M**

UNHCR financial requirements for Guatemala's operation



## CURRENT CONTEXT OVERVIEW

Based on monitoring by UNHCR's partners, as well as statistics received by State institutions, UNHCR estimates that since the beginning of August 2021, over 10,000 persons, have been expelled to Guatemala through the border crossing points at El Ceibo and El Carmen; most of them transported by plane from the US to the southeast of Mexico under Title 42 and from there by bus to the Guatemalan border. UNHCR's partners have increased their presence providing information and humanitarian assistance. Four percent of assisted persons were identified with international protection need; mostly from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, but also from other South American, Caribbean and African countries.

Additionally, in Tecun Uman on the border with Mexico, large movements of persons from Haiti, mostly travelling with smugglers, have been reported by partners.



Assistance provided by UNHCR's partners to persons in El Ceibo, Peten. ©Refugio de la Niñez/Jorge Betancourt/2021

## Working with Partners

- At local levels, through established **Working Groups on Migration and Protection**, UNHCR coordinates with institutions and organisations to respond and adapt their interventions according to the developments of the mixed movements. As part of the local initiatives of the Working Group in Peten, an information and orientation centre was built at a key transit point by the municipality of Flores with the support of UNHCR where multisectoral humanitarian actors provide information and services to people in transit.
- On a national level, further organisations joined the **National Protection Network** that is now comprised of 13 organisations, covering primarily border and main transit areas along the migration routes. The strengthened network identifies and supports the needs of asylum-seekers, refugees and other persons at risk, as part of the joint protection interventions led by UNHCR in coordination with local authorities. Organizations present along the migration routes, refer cases to authorities and complement the interventions already in place/implemented.
- UNHCR **signed new partnership agreements** with Association La Alianza, Action against Hunger, World Vision and UN Women to expand the protection response through the Protection Network. The new partners are joining UNHCR's efforts to prevent, mitigate and respond to gender-based violence (GBV), women empowerment as well as to create livelihood opportunities for asylum-seekers, refugees, returnees in need of protection and persons at risk of displacement.

## Main Activities

### Response to Basic Needs

- In 2021, UNHCR and its partners have provided information, legal counselling, shelter, food, basic medical care, psychological first aid, hygiene kits, anti-COVID PPEs, telephone calls and access to Wi-Fi **to a total of 31,256 individuals in transit**, among them persons in need of international protection.
- Guatemala is currently heavily affected by the **COVID-19 pandemic**, registering increasing numbers of newly infected persons and deaths. UNHCR has been successfully advocating at local levels to guarantee that asylum-seekers and refugees are included in the Ministry of Health's vaccination plan. As a result, several persons have already been enrolled in the vaccination scheme.
- Community and protection outreach activities have been further strengthened with four organisations and institutions now equipped with innovative mobile units seeking to improve access to information, counselling and orientation on rights and services for persons in transit, asylum-seekers, refugees and members of the host communities.
  - [READ the Factsheet on UNHCR's mobile community and protection outreach activities](#)
- UNHCR provides financial assistance through **cash-based interventions (CBI)** together with partners, to enable asylum-seekers, refugees and Guatemalans in need of protection, to fulfil their basic needs and contribute to the local economy. In 2021, UNHCR has distributed over 800,000 USD benefitting approximately 2,000 individuals.

## Governance, Prevention and Protection

- A government-led project with the support of UNHCR, called UNIVETs (Unidades Móviles contra la Violencia Sexual y Trata de Personas in Spanish), was officially launched in August 2021. The initiative is aimed at **strengthening the Office against Sexual Violence, Exploitation and Trafficking in Persons** (SVET in Spanish), especially their response capacity and territorial outreach. The event took place with participation of UNHCR's Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, Ms. Gillian Triggs, Guatemala's Vice President and the Executive Secretary of the SVET. The six mobile units will support the response mechanisms to sexual and gender-based violence and SEA in different departments of Guatemala and enhance the provision of information and referrals to appropriate services. Likewise, the intervention entails a prevention component, as it aims at engaging local actors and community leaders in assisting with the implementation of the program.



Launch of the mobile units UNIVETs.  
 ©UNHCR/Tito Herrera/2021

- [READ UNHCR's press release on the launch of the UNIVETs](#)
- As of August 2021, the total **number of asylum seekers in Guatemala increased** to 1,258 while the total number of refugees is 479. According to official figures, from the Guatemalan Migration Institute, most of the current population of asylum-seekers in the country are Hondurans (38%), Salvadorians (34%) and Nicaraguans (14%). UNHCR has been providing technical as well as financial support to strengthen Guatemala's national asylum system and to ensure claims are adjudicated fairly and efficiently, in line with international protection standards.
- The National Technical Team of the **MIRPS presented good practices** implemented during Guatemala's Pro-Tempore Presidency. Developments include: the acceleration of the issuance of work permits for asylum-seekers and refugees and the establishment of an online tracking system, as well as a communication campaign aimed at businesses on the inclusion of refugees. In addition, the Social Welfare Secretariat has strengthened its assistance to unaccompanied children on the move, including those in need of international protection, and launched a specific Protocol for their assistance. Furthermore, the Guatemalan Migration Institute has conducted trainings for the police on the documents issued to asylum-seekers and refugees and coordinated child protection cases with the Attorney General's Office and the judicial system.
- In 2021, UNHCR has carried out over **100 protection monitoring missions** across different locations and border areas to guarantee persons in need of international protection have access to the Guatemalan territory and its asylum system.
- UNHCR provides **capacity building** to partners, educational institutions and authorities, strengthening local networks to adequately respond to the needs of asylum-seekers, refugees and persons in need of international protection. In 2021, around 3,000 persons have been trained on UNHCR's mandate, international refugee law, referral pathways of identified cases and services available to asylum-seekers, refugees and persons in transit.
- Through the implementation of **Quick Impact Projects** in coordination with local authorities and community leaders, UNHCR seeks to foster local integration conditions for asylum-seekers and refugees while at the same time contribute to the development of host communities. In Peten, solar street lighting systems started to be installed in key transit areas to prevent security incidents and SGBV.

## Enhanced community-based protection in communities affected by or at risk of displacement

- The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated livelihood opportunities for asylum-seekers, refugees, their host communities, returnees with protection needs and Guatemalans affected by or at risk of displacement. UNHCR through its partners conducts socioeconomic profiling of identified persons and defines a **livelihoods road map for employment or self-employment**. Those eligible for employment participate in market-based trainings (through cash for training and scholarships) and have the opportunity to be considered for vacancies offered by private businesses (through cash for internships and public/private sector partnerships). Those eligible for self-employment participate in entrepreneurship trainings and receive seed capital and technical assistance to establish or strengthen their businesses.

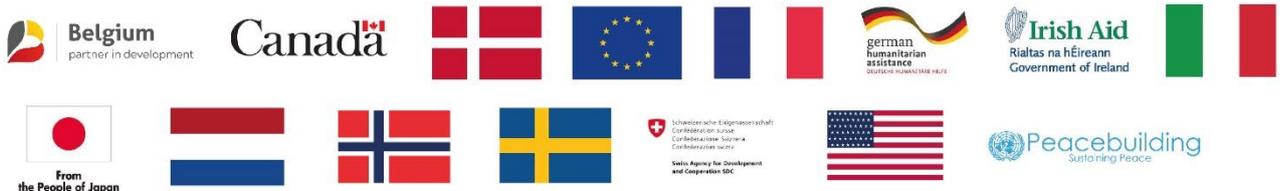
## Durable Solutions

- The Ministry of Work published a **new video** informing asylum-seekers and refugees about their right to work in Guatemala and the procedure on how to obtain a work permit.
  - **VIDEO:** [How to obtain a Guatemalan work permit](#)
- To **guarantee access to virtual education**, UNHCR provided tablets to refugee and asylum-seeking children, as well as teachers to ensure effective quality teaching and learning in the departments of Izabal, Peten, Jutiapa, San Marcos, Huehuetenango, and Quetzaltenango. All persons were trained on the usage of the tablets.
- In Izabal, **local integration workshops** were carried out for newly arrived asylum-seekers and provided them with information on the Guatemalan asylum system and services available in the department, as well as psychosocial support and resilience-building activities offered by UNHCR's partners.
- In Peten, refugee children and adolescents participated in celebrations of the International Youth Day on 12 August, organized by the Municipality and Solidarity City of Flores, which promotes local integration.
- UNHCR keeps offering durable solutions for Guatemalans at risk as well as persons of other nationalities at risk in Guatemala, through its **Resettlement and Complementary Pathways program**.



Distribution of tablets to refugee children in Izabal in order to guarantee access to virtual education. ©Refugio de la Niñez/Jaqueline Recinos/2021

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



| Private donors Australia | Private donors Italy | Private donors Japan | Private donors Republic of Korea | Private donors Spain | Private donors Sweden

### Contacts:

Besem Obenson, Representative UNHCR Guatemala, [obenson@unhcr.org](mailto:obenson@unhcr.org),  
 Marco Baumgartner, Associate Reporting Officer, [baumgarm@unhcr.org](mailto:baumgarm@unhcr.org)