

Central America and Mexico

Operational Update | April 2021

Regional context

The heightened risks faced by members of the LGBTIQ+ communities in **El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras** were tragically underscored by the killing of an internally displaced trans woman who fled her community in El Salvador after receiving threats by gangs. According to the National Civil Police, six people were reported missing daily in **El Salvador** from January to April 2021. A Salvadoran government study on homicides and femicides showed that 1,324 women were murdered in the country in 2020.

As of April 2021, **Honduras** had registered an average of nine homicides per day. In total, 1,135 cases of homicides registered, 68 more cases compared to the same period in 2020. Eighty-two cases of violent deaths of women were also documented by the Centre of Women’s Rights Observatory.

United States announced it will support **El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras** to address the root causes of human mobility, as well as strengthening the democracy and the rule of law by providing an aid package of US\$310 million.

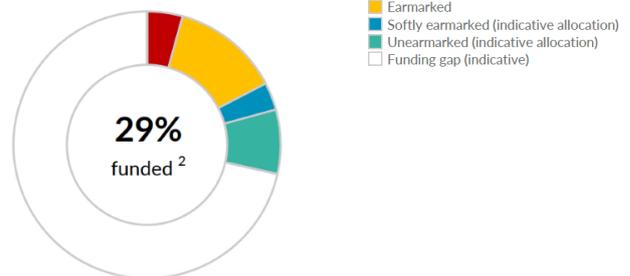
In **Mexico**, 31,845 people applied for asylum so far 2021. An increased number of people at risk from Haiti and other non-Spanish speaking countries have been identified by the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance and UNHCR in the southern city of Tapachula. On the northern border, 9,501 asylum-seekers had been assisted as of end April by UNHCR and sister UN agencies to re-enter the United States under an operation to end the Migrant Protection Protocol – MPP (or “Remain in Mexico”).

Arrivals in **Panama** of people in mixed movements intensified after the opening of the border with Colombia, where thousands had been stranded after borders closed. According to the Panamanian government, 11,370 people -mostly families from Haiti, Cuba and countries in Asia and Africa- have entered Panama irregularly during the first months of 2021, 5,818 in the month of April alone.

FUNDING (as of 25 May)

USD 173.5 M

requested for **North of Central America** situation in 2021



DON'T MISS...



UN Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees Kelly T. Clements, on a visit to Honduras, Guatemala and Mexico, **reiterated the commitment of UNHCR**, to these countries’ efforts to address the situation of forced displacement due to violence and persecution that has affected thousands of people in the Central American region. “Up to a million people in Central America have been forcibly displaced. It is the responsibility of the world community and of all of us to help those people rebuild their lives,” **she said**. “The first step for all countries is to guarantee access to asylum for the people whose lives depend on it.”

Updates from the field

(MIRPS) COMPREHENSIVE REGIONAL PROTECTION AND SOLUTIONS FRAMEWORK

- The **MIRPS Support Platform** organized the first roundtable sessions on Strengthening Asylum Systems with the member countries and UNHCR. Representatives of more than 50 countries participated, including Brazil, Canada, Colombia and the European Union as members of the platform.
- The Organization of American States and UNHCR led a Virtual Business Roundtable with business leaders from the region to discuss opportunities and the positive impact of the economic inclusion of internally displaced persons, asylum-seekers, refugees and returnees in Central America and Mexico.
- The working group on internal displacement held its first session of 2021 with the participation of El Salvador, Honduras and Mexico, and decided that their focus for this year will be prevention and community-based interventions, differentiated responses and solutions, and information systems.
- In **El Salvador**, UNHCR and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs discussed reinforcement of the national legal framework for refugees and the technical capacity of the Refugee Status Determination National Commission (CODER).
- In **Honduras**, UNHCR is working with the Human Rights Secretariat (SEDH) on a pilot program to provide humanitarian assistance to IDP, by starting off with 30 households (approximately 150 people). The program will help improve procedures and tools part of the Manual for the Humanitarian Assistance Mechanism.
 - [READ](#) the private sector in **Mexico** and **Central America** supports the MIRPS countries.

COORDINATION WITH LOCAL & NATIONAL GOVERNMENT / STRENGTHENING INSTITUTIONS

- In **Costa Rica**, nine refugee housing units (RHUs) donated to the Social Security agency (CASS) were installed in four regions as COVID-19 triage centres.
- In **Guatemala**, 323 local authorities and 156 staff members of the Ministry of Health were trained on international protection standards and national referral mechanisms of identified cases. With UNHCR's support, the Secretariat Against Sexual Violence, Exploitation and Trafficking in Persons and Refugio de la Niñez will expand the presence of mobile units that deliver information and provide a rapid response to refugee and local survivors of gender-based violence and sexual exploitation.
- In **Honduras**, the Municipality of San Pedro Sula participated in a national high-level panel on internal displacement and highlighted the emergency humanitarian assistance mechanism and the community art strategy implemented with UNHCR's support as examples of good practices.

- In **Belize**, asylum-seekers, refugees, and migrants are eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. So far, 5 asylum-seekers over 60 years old have been inoculated. UNHCR and sister UN agencies are supporting the government in the COVID-19 vaccination plan.
 - [READ](#) about how they promote inclusion through videos in **Belize**.

PROTECTION (INCL. CBP AND SGBV)

- The **Guatemalan** municipality of Camotan, along with UNHCR, conducted an activity to identify people with protection needs among 144 foreigner nationals residing in the area. A total of eight cases were identified and referred to the National Protection Network.
- As part of the Protection Cluster in **Honduras**, visits were carried out to four shelters in the communities affected by Eta/lota to identify the principal needs such as relocation plans, food, medical assistance, and hygiene kits.
- The LGBTIQ+ population in **El Salvador** faces discrimination and harassment when searching for employment, while persons with disabilities face exclusion from the job market, according to a study commissioned by UNHCR. Also, recruiters from HR departments highlighted lack of educational qualifications and several companies expressed an interest and openness to offer more opportunities for displaced persons.
- With UNHCR support, an inter-institutional team in **Panama** helped some 100 refugees and asylum seekers in Darien province with refugee card renewals, applications for refugee status, work and residence permits and legal advice.

CHILD PROTECTION

- In **Honduras**, the Directorate of Children, Adolescents and Family, World Vision and UNHCR launched a campaign to raise awareness of protection needs of forcibly displaced children and the risks they experience.

- UNHCR in **Mexico, El Salvador**, South Africa and Zambia participated in an inception workshop within the framework of the joint UNICEF-UNHCR program "Global Promotion of the Best Practices for Children in Migration".

INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION

- UNHCR, IOM, the school of political science of the public university in **Guatemala** and civil society organizations is offering a specialization course on Migration, which will help participants develop capacities on mobility issues. With support from UNHCR and partner, the governor's office in Izabal is establishing a Departmental Migration Board.
- UNHCR in **Honduras**, OCHA and the Camp Coordination and Camp Management Cluster launched an intention survey for people affected by Eta/lota in 51 shelters to identify current needs and ensure a voluntary and safe return process.

DELIVERY OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE & CASH

- In **Belize**, 95 refugees and asylum seekers received food, medical attention, and rental subsidies.
- During April, assistance in cash was provided in **Costa Rica** to 609 individuals; **Guatemala**, to 748 beneficiaries; and 4,909 in **Mexico**.
- In **Panama**, 367 people were assisted with counselling, legal services and rent payments.
- In **Honduras**, 816 rebuilding kits with tools for reconstruction including drills and screwdrivers were delivered to prioritized communities impacted by Eta/Iota. As of April, 559 individuals received food and rental support within the PTA Program.

DURABLE SOLUTIONS & LIVELIHOODS

- In **Belize**, refugee and asylum-seeking women participated in restaurant table setting courses and cooking classes including a section on proper nutrition. 17 refugees and asylum seekers started English classes, level A2, and three students

received their graduation certificates from Cayo's Center for Employment and Training.

- In **Guatemala**, 72 asylum-seekers and refugees participated in livelihoods and economic inclusion promotion activities such as training for employment and self-employment, access to work permits and start-up of small businesses.
- In **El Salvador**, 150 potential beneficiaries have been identified to be included in entrepreneurship, vocational training, and job placement initiatives.
- In **Mexico**, 57 asylum-seekers and refugees from Haiti, Sierra Leone and Democratic Republic of the Congo have benefitted from Spanish classes to enhance their integration in Tapachula. Also, seven computers were delivered to the Multiple Labour Attention Centre to promote job inclusion of people with disabilities. So far in 2021, 1,172 people relocated to eight cities in Mexico within the relocation, job placement and local integration program.

The importance of flexible funding for UNHCR's situations

Flexible financial support allows UNHCR to place funds 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 refuge. Flexible funding needs to be timely for UNHCR to plan in the most efficient manner, allocating to priorities first.

UNHCR's humanitarian response in **Central America and Mexico** is made possible thanks to the generous support of major donors who have contributed unrestricted funding to UNHCR's global operations, and to donors who have generously contributed directly to **UNHCR Americas operations**.

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CENTRAL AMERICA and MEXICO

PERSONS OF CONCERN as of Mid Year Statistics

