

Central America

Bi-weekly Operational Update

Operations: Regional context

NCA countries are ranked among the most violent nations in the world, according to the [National Centre for Health Statistics](#). Due to violence, food insecurity, impacts of climate change and limited access to social and economic development, the number of people fleeing is progressively increasing. In El Salvador, criminal gangs have taken advantage of the COVID-19 context to reorganize and increase their control over territory in the country. After the partial reactivation of the economy on 24 August, extortions have reportedly increased considerably. In Honduras, due to the impact of recent natural disasters and the pandemic, at least two million Hondurans are now at high risk of food insecurity. Connections between food insecurity and violence is one of the main drivers for people to flee. In Guatemala, the Public Prosecutor's Office and the National Civil Police carried out 20 raids in different parts of the country in relation to feminicides allegedly carried out by members of the Barrio 18 gang.

Socio-economic impacts of the pandemic are disproportionately affecting people in low- and middle income, whom, in addition, suffered more severely the consequences of recent tropical storms Eta and Iota. In Honduras, 94,000 persons remain hosted in official shelters, while increasing numbers of population are turning to makeshift settlements. Authorities expect a large part of the population to continue displaced for at least the next three months, due to persistent high levels of water, landslides and as well as poor WASH, security and protection measures in communities of origin. In El Salvador, social welfare suffered a 37-year setback, with poverty levels rising from 31 to 41% of the population and the loss of 177,000 formal and informal jobs in the context of the pandemic. In Guatemala, labour informality could rise from 70% to 75%, leaving seven people out of ten without access to a formal job or social security.

In Panama, it can take up to eight years to recover the 400,000 jobs that have been lost during 2020, especially affecting young people under 30 years old and women. Furthermore, asylum seekers and refugees have increased their dependence on humanitarian assistance mainly to cover rent payments, food, and medicines. In Costa Rica, due to unemployment and lack of job opportunities, the number of refugees and asylum seekers asking for economic assistance has increased. The inquiries come mainly from households with children who are unable to fulfill their basic needs, while fear of being evicted is more frequent for those with more than two months of rent due.

In this context, a new caravan of around 400 people, including unaccompanied children, departed from San Pedro Sula to the border of Agua Caliente. UNHCR and partners monitor this situation while a contingency plan is being discussed under the umbrella of the Protection Group including UNHCR, IOM, OHCHR and NRC. While this mixed movement was quickly dissolved, the dire conditions in northern Central America is likely to continue prompting people to move across borders.

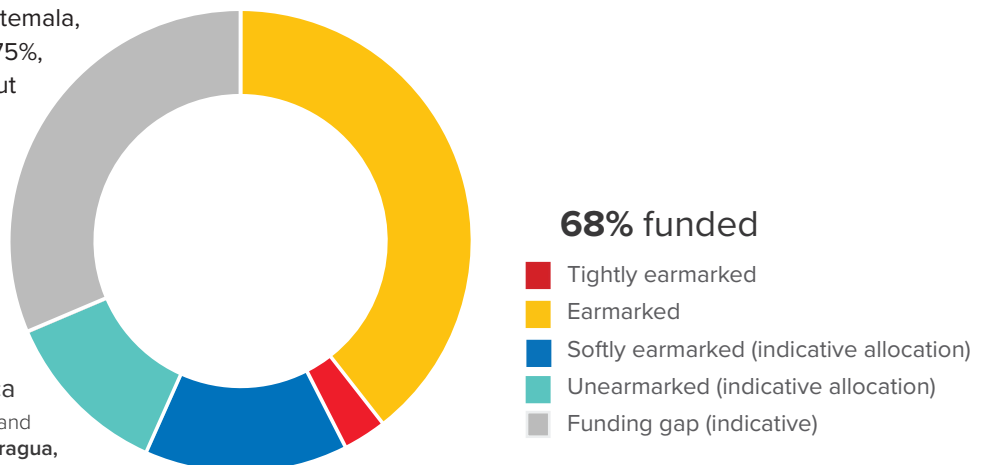
Due to protection risks identified in high-risk communities, UNHCR continues to focus on the response in main areas affected by the storms and where high protection risks have been identified. Thus, UNHCR provided supplies to temporary shelters including kitchen kits, mosquito nets, jerry cans and plastic sheeting as part of the response to help the victims of hurricanes Eta and Iota. In addition, UNHCR maintains activities to improve RSD processes and strengthen capacities to identify cases of persons at risk in Central America.

Regional funding overview as of 8 December 2020

127.1M

financial requirements for Central America
for 2020 including requirements for the operations and
activities in **Panama, Belize, El Salvador, Cuba, Nicaragua,
Honduras, Costa Rica, and Guatemala.**

For further details consult reporting.unhcr.org



Update on country activities

COMPREHENSIVE REGIONAL PROTECTION AND SOLUTIONS FRAMEWORK (MIRPS)

- A year after the first Global Refugee Forum, on 7 and 8 December, Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Panama [held the third annual MIRPS meeting](#), the pioneering regional initiative that implements the Global Compact on Refugees in Central America and Mexico. For the first time, the annual meeting was held virtually. The two days included a technical and high-level session respectively. The fora provided an opportunity to reflect on progress made during the year, challenges posed by the current COVID-19 context and announce priorities for 2021 to galvanize opportunities for further collaboration with the Support Platform and other stakeholders. The annual meeting was also an occasion to formally announce the next Pro-tempore Presidency of Guatemala for 2021, as well as the adoption of a [political San Salvador Declaration](#).

COORDINATION WITH LOCAL & NATIONAL GOVERNMENT/ STRENGTHENING CENTRAL & LOCAL GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS

- In **El Salvador**, UNHCR supported local institutions with setting up referral pathways for victims of forced displacement, as established in the law providing protection for IDPs passed earlier this year. 49 representatives from the Office of the Prosecutor (PGR), Ombudsperson's Office (PDDH), Salvadoran Red Cross, and the Local Offices for the Attention to Victims (OLAV) participated in the working sessions in the municipalities of Usulután, Santa Ana, San Vicente and San Miguel.
- In **Panama**, as part of the SGBV Working Group activities, co-led by UNHCR and HIAS, to commemorate the 16 Days of Activism, representatives of the National Office for the Attention of Refugees, National Institute for Women, Ministry of Health, and National Office for Children, Adolescents and Family, participated in a virtual panel which presented to 66 asylum seekers and refugees the services and programmes available to prevent and respond SGBV.
- In **Cuba**, the Ministry of Foreign Trade approved the distribution of assistance to 63 refugee students who live outside of Havana. Further arrangements are being made for direct distribution by UNHCR Cuba to 20 refugee students who live in Havana.

- UNHCR participated at the Mesoamerican CONARE workshop, which included officials from Belize, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and Panama in order to share experiences, good practices and RSD processes among participants.

- In **Belize**, psycho-social support has been expanded due to the high demand. A total of 12 persons of concern have received counselling via phone and in-person. The increased demand of the service is mostly due to the pandemic and traumatic experiences in countries of origin.
- In **Costa Rica**, information on rescheduling appointments and the validity of asylum seeker documentation continues to be the most frequent concern among protection related inquiries. UNHCR's Information Center (IC) handled 693 inquiries in one week of the reporting period, including through Facebook chat.
- In **El Salvador**, UNHCR provided a training on international protection frameworks and elements of forced displacement in the Salvadoran context for 44 participants, including officials of three ministries, the Presidential House, and the Refugee Status Determination National Commission (CODER), as well as civil society organizations and partners. UNHCR and partner COMCAVIS TRANS inaugurated a photo exhibition on the impact of forced displacement on members of the LGBTI community and participated in an online forum on forced displacement and migration of LGBTI people. Radio drama "Veredas de esperanza", produced with UNHCR support, aired on radio on 1 December covering testimonies of internally displaced people in the country and offering information on their protection.
- In **Guatemala**, locally produced short videos are being disseminated by authorities to shelter managers to strengthen their capacities on general protection and humanitarian principles in shelter settings, as a way of respecting social distancing requirements and to broaden the impact. 192 community members and local authorities (neighbors, police, health staff, teachers, fire department) were trained on how to identify people in need of protection and the existing referral mechanisms.

PROTECTION (INCLUDING CBP & SGBV)

- In **Guatemala**, furniture and school equipment have been delivered to the schools of Las Pilas and El Tempisque, in the municipality of Comapa, and the school of Sitio Las Flores, in the municipality of Asunción Mita, Jutiapa. UNHCR and Save the Children also delivered supplies to the health centre of Comapa, and the Centre for Comprehensive Maternal and Child Care of Asunción Mita.

- In **Honduras**, child-friendly spaces at Corinto border are ready to be used by the Directorate of Children, Adolescents and Family (DINAF). In addition, future collaboration has been agreed between UNHCR and Public Prosecutor's Office, to implement a child-friendly room to provide support to children suffering from abuse in Ocotepeque.

CHILD PROTECTION

INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION

- In **Belize**, remote mobile GBV centers, conducted by UNFPA in coordination with UNCHR, benefited persons of concern in communities in the south and north of the country. Through this initiative, women and girls receive psychosocial counselling, legal support and advice through our partner, as well as sexual and reproductive health services from state and civil society actors. A noted rise in SGBV incidences coincides with the devastating impact of the pandemic on the economic situation for PoC's, especially in the south of Belize.
- In **Costa Rica**, UNHCR coordinated with ILO, WHO/PAHO and IOM the implementation of funds from the UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund for COVID-19 response. These funds will be used to reinforce capacities and partnerships among different actors in host communities to ensure an agile and adequate immigration and health procedures; to design and implement a community-based Health Surveillance System and a community-based risk communication strategy, as well as to establish an office space within or near the Zones Protocol to assist the refugee unit in the resolution of asylum claims and the issuance of proper documentation, including work permits.
- In **Guatemala**, under the Protection Cluster, UNHCR met with coordinators of 15 emergency shelters in four municipalities in the department of Izabal to support the GBV prevention and response and identify protection-related issues in emergency and shelter settings.
- In **Honduras**, the Cluster system for the Eta Emergency Response was officially activated, including the Protection cluster, led by UNHCR, with GBV and Child Protection Sub-Clusters. • In **Panama**, UNICEF, the Resident Coordinator Office and UNHCR jointly donated 100,000 soap bars to the Education Ministry to support the bio safety programmes for the back-to-school plans in 2021.

REINFORCING SHELTERS & SAFE SPACE NETWORKS

- In **Guatemala**, one Refugee Housing Unit (RHU) was installed in the health centre of the municipality of Esquipulas, Chiquimula, to provide support to the local health response to COVID-19. Another RHU was installed in the border community El Bailadero community, Esquipulas municipality, Chiquimula, where the community health post will operate.

- In **Honduras**, an agreement to transfer 150 RHUs has been signed between COPECO (the Permanent Contingency Commission of Honduras) and UNHCR. 100 RHU units were delivered at San Pedro Sula and 50 units to Tegucigalpa, in order to provide temporary shelter to people affected by tropical storms Eta and Iota.

DELIVERY OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE & CASH-BASED INTERVENTIONS (CBI)

- In **Belize**, 82 cases/200 individuals received CBI assistance to meet basic needs of food, rent, and psychosocial assistance.
- In **Cuba**, UNHCR distributed CBI and rental assistance to 146 persons of concern in Havana and are not eligible for government assistance.
- In **El Salvador**, UNHCR donated 200 beds to the Directorate of Civil Protection of El Salvador to strengthen the national response to emergencies, including the recent tropical storms that have affected the country and the region. The donation adds to the support already provided by UNHCR through NFIs such as sleeping mats, kitchen sets, solar lamps and others. [See more](#). UNHCR identified 96 new cases comprising of 369 individuals to be included in humanitarian assistance response. 270 packets of different types of seeds were delivered to communities in San Miguel to contribute to food security in areas with high rates of violence.
- In **Guatemala**, 39 people have been selected for the CBI programme during the reporting period, with 436 families enrolled in the CBI programme since its start in May. As part of the CBI programme's work to secure access of bank accounts for asylum seekers and refugees, a legal analysis is being undertaken, detailing all documents that the Guatemalan Migration Institute must deliver to asylum seekers and refugees in order to be presented to the Superintendence of Banks. In addition, UNHCR donated personal protection equipment, ecofilters and soaps to Casa Joven Peronia, Casa Joven Villa Nueva, Casa Joven Mixco, Zone 3 health centre, Zone 5 health centre and to the second largest hospital in the country, Hospital General San Juan de Dios.

- In **Honduras**, UNHCR is prioritizing its emergency response in Cortes, Yoro, Atlántida, Olancho, three of the main areas affected by the storms and where high forced internal displacements are common. In addition, two out of four of the most affected Municipalities in Cortes were also the top two points of origin of IDPs (San Pedro Sula and Choloma). To date, UNHCR and 16 partners (NGOs, communities and authorities) delivered assistance to 3,668 persons in 20 prioritized shelters, including Personal Protective Equipment, hygiene kits, food kits, medical care, psychosocial assistance and safe spaces for children.

In **Panama**, 10,000 soap bars were donated to the Ministry of Government to be distributed in Boca de Cupe, a host community located in the Darien Province.

DURABLE SOLUTIONS & LIVELIHOODS

- In **Belize**, 15 persons of concern, 8 young women and 7 young men are enrolled in online ESL classes and are now moving from the B1 to B2 level. At the end of this level, the students will be ready to start their vocational education at the Centre for Employment Training for one year.
- In **Costa Rica**, 21 refugee and asylum seeker community organizations or community leaders participated in a workshop on leadership and 16 participated in a workshop on assertive communication.
- In **Guatemala**, Women Association Ixqik carried out an event on female empowerment with the participation of 19 asylum-seekers.
- In **Panama**, HIAS and UNHCR are working on a Christmas ornaments project made by asylum seekers and refugees as part of the income generating activities.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD



Global heating is compounding threats for people already living with conflict and insecurity, **further driving displacement around the world.**

Until two years ago, David Cruz* had his own land in Nicaragua where he raised cattle and chickens and grew tomatoes and chiles. But that way of life was under threat even before his role in protests made him a target for persecution.

Over the years, the climate in his region of Nicaragua had become drier and more unpredictable. When it did rain, it was often torrential and damaged David's crops.

"My crops failed," he said. "And because the authorities had basically declared me an 'enemy', they made it impossible for me to get loans that I would have needed to be able to plant again."

Climate change alone did not force David to abandon his farm and flee to Costa Rica, but for him and growing numbers of people around the world, it was a significant

factor driving his displacement.

In Central America's so-called 'Dry Corridor' – a stretch of increasingly parched mountainous farmland running from Guatemala to northern Costa Rica – the first move for many small-scale farmers fleeing drought and devastating storms is to a nearby city. But cities in the region can be inhospitable places for rural newcomers. A shortage of jobs and housing often force them into slum areas where they are vulnerable to street gang violence and extortion, and to flooding when the next storm comes.

The two consecutive hurricanes that barrelled through the region in November 2020 are expected to compound hardships for people whose survival was already precarious, particularly in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.



To learn
more about
the impact of
climate change
over refugees.

We thank the contributions of our donors

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