

# Central America & Cuba

## Bi-weekly Operational Update

### Operations: Regional context

The number of new COVID-19 infections in the region reached 44,800 in the first half of October, with Costa Rica having the highest number of active confirmed cases (16,324). Since the beginning of the pandemic, Panama has exceeded 120,000 positive COVID-19 cases, and Guatemala has the highest number of deaths from the virus in the region (3,453). Despite increasing COVID-19 infections, restrictions across the region are progressively being lifted, and economic sectors are reopening. It is expected that persons of concern to UNHCR can now re-join economic activities and begin to generate income. Nevertheless, vacancies in the formal labour economy are still very limited and dependence on humanitarian assistance provided by UNHCR and partner organizations to persons of concern is expected to continue for the coming months.

Violence continues to be reported, despite the prolonged situations of mobility restrictions and confinement across northern Central America. According to official data, in the first half of 2020, El Salvador registered 1,475 personal injury crimes, 2,339 cases of theft, 609 cases of extortion, 587 homicides and 1,630 missing persons. In Honduras,

official figures report over 2,200 violent deaths so far in 2020, 66% of which are related to drug trafficking and territorial disputes among gangs. This figure provides for an average of 9 deaths per day, only one point below that recorded in 2019. In Guatemala, violence against women, particularly femicides and sexual violence are also significant, with 319 women killed and over 5,600 reports of sexual violence to date.

In Guatemala, the government ended the State of Prevention in Petén, Izabal, Zacapa, Chiquimula, Jutiapa and El Progreso, that had been decreed for 15 days due to the large mixed movement that sought to travel north. Among those in this movement, 35 people have sought asylum in Guatemala.

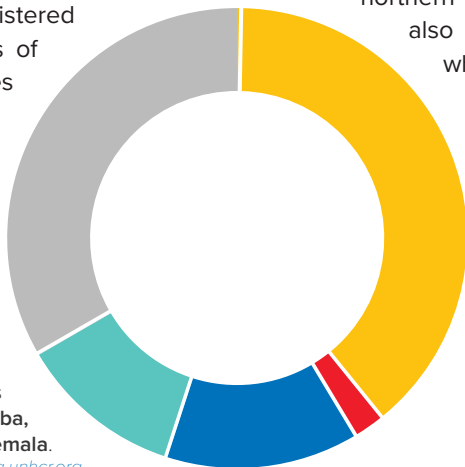
UNHCR and partners continue to provide assistance to persons of concern, and to advance community-based interventions to ensure continuity of humanitarian access in prioritized high-risk communities affected by the significant levels of violence in northern Central America. UNHCR, through partners, also continues to monitor incidents of violence which may prompt forced displacement, while coordinating with local authorities to enable timely responses.

#### Regional funding overview as of 14 October 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.**

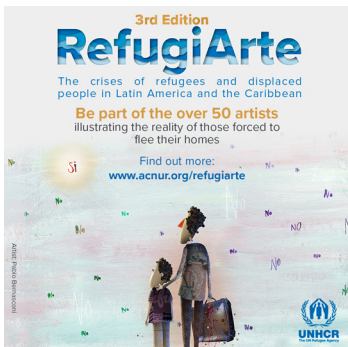
*For further details consult [reporting.unhcr.org](http://reporting.unhcr.org)*



**66% funded**

- Tightly earmarked
- Earmarked
- Softly earmarked (indicative allocation)
- Unearmarked (indicative allocation)
- Funding gap (indicative)

#### Don't miss



#### UNHCR extends request for proposals for the third edition of RefugiArte until 20 October.

In this new version, UNHCR calls for the voluntary participation of artists to represent the complex dynamics and the growing displacement in the Latin American continent, particularly with the increase in the numbers of people fleeing northern Central America, Nicaragua and Venezuela, and the many others that are internally displaced in Honduras, El Salvador and Colombia.

To participate, visit [www.acnur.org/refugiarte](http://www.acnur.org/refugiarte)

# Update on country activities

## COMPREHENSIVE REGIONAL PROTECTION AND SOLUTIONS FRAMEWORK (MIRPS)

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

- The MIRPS Pro-Temporary Presidency convened the XV Regional Virtual Meeting. As part of the consultations, MIRPS States agreed to an alphabetical rotation of the annual Temporary Presidency. As a result, Guatemala will assume the role in 2021, following the conclusion of El Salvador's stewardship this year.
- The Panel of Experts advising the MIRPS Working Group on Internal Displacement shared lessons learned in the delivery of national governmental coordination mechanisms for IDPs from Colombia, Kenya, Somalia, and Ethiopia, to inform the development of the region's emerging IDPs protection mechanisms.
- A joint MIRPS-CRM (Regional Migration Conference) workshop took place from 6-7 October, as part of a commitment to define areas of mutual collaboration between the two regional platforms, providing a space for dialogue in the context of mixed movements in the region. Consideration was given to developing a harmonized approach to data collection and analysis, protection-sensitive entry systems, reception arrangements, mechanisms for screening and referral and a joint mass information strategy.

- In **Belize**, the Ministry of Labour, Local Government, and Rural Development, together with UNHCR and UNDP, have supported the delivery of a pilot model for community based participation in local development planning in Bella Vista. As a result, local authorities, are set to partner with refugees and asylum seekers, migrants, and their host communities in defining local needs and priorities.
- In **El Salvador**, 12 representatives of key institutions from the municipalities of Quelepa and San Miguel, including the Mayor's Office, the Ministry of Health, the Office of the Ombudsperson and the Ministry of Education, participated in a training focused on establishing an early warning system to identify protection-related incidents in communities, developing referral pathways for internally displaced persons (IDPs), and using a protection sensitive approach when working with IDPs who are survivors of gender-based violence and victims of recruitment.
- In **Honduras**, UNHCR provided technical advice to the Inter-Institutional Commission for the Protection of People Displaced by Violence (CIPPDV) in the design of a training planned for 80 national judges on the criminalization of forced displacement in the new Penal Code. The training includes the development of the international normative framework on internal displacement; a comparative law analysis of criminal investigation; and the context of internal displacement in the country.
- In **Guatemala**, the Municipalities of [Flores](#) and [San Benito](#) formalized their participation in the Cities of Solidarity Initiative. Both municipal authorities expressed their commitment to refugees and willingness to partner with UNHCR and civil society in the provision of humanitarian assistance and steps towards local integration.

- In **Costa Rica**, the UNHCR Information Centre (IC) registered 801 inquiries, 61% of which came from Nicaraguans and other nationals from the north of Central America; principally Honduras and El Salvador. The main inquiries relate to food security and shelter, protection and health. Through each enquiry, UNHCR is able to provide general counseling on rights and services, as well as specific information corresponding to individual cases, together with corresponding referrals as necessary, to government entities and non-governmental organizations.

- In **El Salvador**, UNHCR continues to remotely monitor situations of violence which may lead to forced displacement in different communities. 33 field staff of partner organizations analyzed the current complaint mechanisms related to Protection from Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (PSEA), assessing strengths and areas of improvement where necessary. Three virtual trainings with the participation of 76 representatives from different local institutions were held for the Municipal Committees for the Prevention of Violence (CMPV) of San Miguel, La Unión, Ciudad Delgado and Mejicanos municipalities to support capacity development and knowledge of UNHCR's mandate, international protection, national legislation on internal displacement and existing protection mechanisms.
- In **Guatemala**, the Procumóvil Jutiapa carried out a monitoring mission to the Corinto border, Casa del Migrante, Migration Delegation, health border post and the National Civil Police, where they sensitized civil detachment personnel, military and the police about the right to seek asylum.
- In **Honduras**, as part of the project "Network of Community Youth Communicators", UNHCR launched a communications virtual learning programme for 18 youth from three community-based organizations, to strengthen community responses to forced displacement. In addition, UNHCR held training activities for 219 persons, including community leaders, authorities and partner NGOs within seven communities affected by displacement. This included 50 people with visual impairments.

In **Panama**, 394 persons were provided with general counseling on rights and services, as well as specific information corresponding to individual cases, together with corresponding referrals as necessary, government entities and non-governmental organizations.

## PROTECTION (INCLUDING CBP & SGBV)

## CHILD PROTECTION

- In **El Salvador**, educational materials outlining the causal risks that contribute to forced displacement, together with associated mitigation measures, are being designed for teachers and students. The student data management system of the Ministry of Education is being strengthened to enable the analysis of variables related to forced displacement and gang recruitment, when students drop out of their studies.
- Ten youth entrepreneurs affected by violence and forced displacement presented their business proposals to UNHCR and Fundasal, as part of a livelihoods initiative. Following a training on life-plan development and livelihoods, the youth will receive funding to start their own businesses.
- In **Honduras**, within the framework of Blueprint for Joint Action, the second edition of the five-month virtual Diploma on Child Protection was launched with 150 child human rights defenders from 17 departments participating in the programme through scholarships. 100 of those 150 scholarships are financed by UNHCR.
- In **Panama**, 700 tablets are being distributed to refugees and asylum seekers' families, to support school-age children to continue their studies through virtual education modalities.

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

- In **Belize**, 826 persons were provided with CBI to meet their basic needs.
- In **Costa Rica**, 850 refugees and asylum seekers received CBI cards for assistance purposes from 1-30 September (742 were Nicaraguans, 91 Salvadorians, 15 Hondurans, and 2 Guatemalans). 70 cleaning kits, 90 blankets and 600 soaps were delivered to 70 Nicaraguan refugees and asylum seekers' households. 5,000 mosquito nets, 2,500 soap bars, 500 solar lamps, 500 towels, 100 books for children and 25 diapers for adults/children, were provided to the authorities to be distributed at the Temporary Centers for Migrants and Refugees (CATEM) in the north of the country.
- In **El Salvador**, the first delivery of equipment and supplies within the "Familia Activa" project for the municipality of San Miguel took place, as part of efforts to provide a safe space for children and youth. It included 6 packages of paper of 500 units each, 3 sets of face paint, 9 sets of crayons, 30 boxes of playdough, 18 cans of paint, 12 sets of brushes for children and adolescents. Additionally, 15 boxes of surgical masks and 50 cans of alcohol were delivered to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19.
- In **Guatemala**, 24 persons were interviewed to assess eligibility for CBI in the last week and 8 new individuals were considered eligible for CBI. An asylum-seeker from Honduras used the cash-based assistance to start a [business growing succulents](#) and other plants. A total of 281 refugees and asylum seekers have received cash since the start of the programme in May. UNHCR has shared a legal analysis on access to banking services for asylum-seekers and refugees in Guatemala with the Cash Working Group, to support joint advocacy for the inclusion of refugees and asylum-seeking in these services.
- In **Honduras**, 224 vulnerable families were provided with COVID-19 prevention materials, in the high-risk communities of "La Era" and "La Esperanza" in Tegucigalpa. The delivery plan was developed and implemented by local community leaders. In coordination with the Red Cross, UNHCR also provided the Returnee Reception Centre (CAMR) with 4,500 Hygiene kits and Personal Protective Equipment.
- In **Panama**, UNHCR provided multipurpose cash to cover basic needs and COVID-19 prevention kits to 628 persons, while rental support was provided to 44 cases (90 persons).

## INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION

- In **Guatemala**, UNHCR is collaborating with UN Women in developing an SGBV referral pathway to enhance coordination among service providers in Tecún Umán. UNHCR is providing technical support in reviewing the diagnostic survey about violence faced by women refugees, asylum-seekers, and those in need of international protection.
- In **Honduras**, the Protection Cluster held a meeting on the current mixed movements situation, and it was agreed to conduct an urgent assessment of the situation on the ground and coordinate assistance efforts for returns.
- In **Panama**, UNHCR and UNFPA, together with HIAS, NRC and the Municipality of Panama, are developing a joint campaign on the 16 Days of Activism for the Prevention of Violence against Women. UNHCR and IOM have reinforced cooperation in the area of human mobility and mixed movements in Darien Province in support of the Ministry of Public Security.

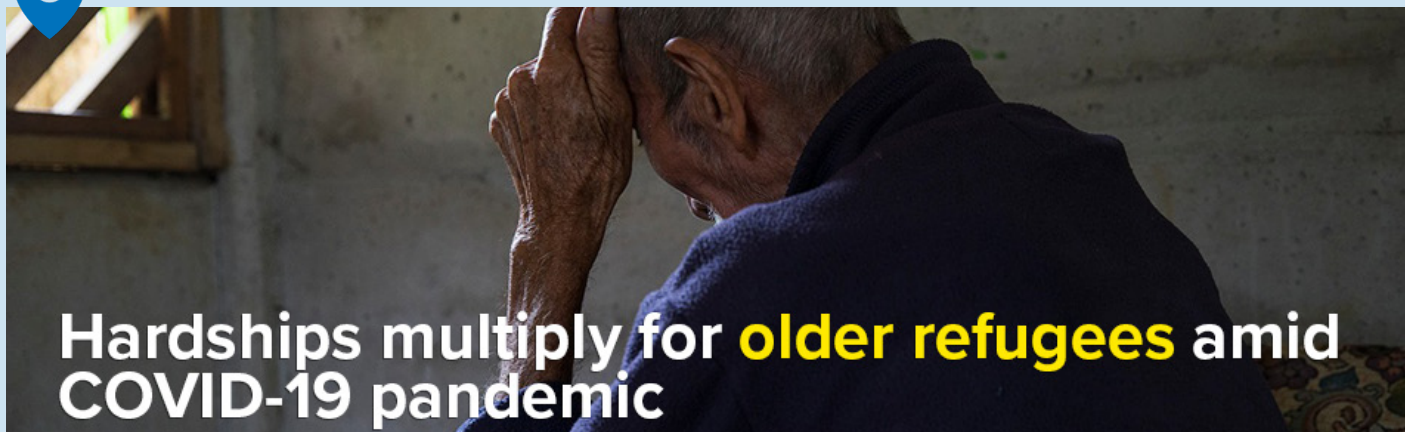
## REINFORCING SHELTERS & SAFE SPACE NETWORKS

- In **Guatemala**, UNHCR and the Human Mobility Pastoral are adapting a location in Ixcán to be used as a shelter for persons in mixed movements which will support the efforts of identifying persons in need of international protection. A refugee housing unit was installed at the Pedro de Alvarado border to provide assistance for people in transit.
- In **Honduras**, the Reception Centre of Toncontín in Tegucigalpa, the Child and Family Protection field care centre for migrant children in Choluteca and the field office of the National Migration Institute in Trojes, department of El Paraíso, are in the process of being refurbished. Works are anticipated to conclude at the close of the year.
- In **Panama**, UNHCR delivered to authorities a donation of 50 fire extinguishers, evacuation routes signs, reflective tape and other safety and fire prevention supplies, during the visit to the new reception station located in San Vicente, Province of Darién. The visit also provided an opportunity to identify camp management needs and training requirements.

# STORIES FROM THE FIELD



## Costa Rica & Guatemala



### Hardships multiply for **older refugees** amid COVID-19 pandemic

Despite suffering knee problems and hypertension, 69-year-old Nicaraguan asylum-seeker Esperanza\* used to get up at dawn every day to pick coffee to support her family in Costa Rica.

“Being old makes it hard to do the kinds of jobs we have to do to keep food on the table,” says the grandmother of 10 who fled Nicaragua in 2018 after a government crackdown on street protests there.

“Picking coffee is very physically demanding, and at our age it’s very difficult to be out there in the fields all day, sometimes freezing and shivering under the pouring rain. If we were younger, it would be easier,” she said.

As older people seeking safety in a foreign country, life was already “a daily struggle” for Esperanza and her husband, who also escaped to Costa Rica. And now with the COVID-19 pandemic, that situation has only grown tougher.

As lockdown hit, Esperanza’s work dried up and she and her husband fell behind on payments for the room they

rented and were threatened with eviction.

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, provided them with assistance that allowed them to pay the back rent they owed and keep a roof over their heads.

Older asylum-seekers like Esperanza make up some four per cent of the population of concern to UNHCR around the world.

Among older refugees struggling with poverty and discrimination is 69-year-old Salvadoran cook Francisco, who fled to neighbouring Guatemala after street gang members murdered his wife and son in front of him.

In Guatemala, Francisco managed to find a job, but the business shuttered during the pandemic. When he returned to work after the lockdown restrictions were eased, the boss said his services would no longer be needed. “I never imagined having to live through something like this,” said Francisco. “I’ve had to start over. And at my age, it’s hard to find work.”



To learn more about how COVID-19 affects older refugees, visit [our site](#).

## We thank the contributions of our donors

updated to 14 October 2020

UNHCR is grateful for the critical support provided by donors who have provided generous and timely support to the Coronavirus Emergency Situation globally, and countries in Central America, as well as those who have contributed to UNHCR programmes with unearmarked funding.



### UN COVID-19 MPTF

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