

Central America and Mexico

Operational Update | June 2021

Regional context

People from **Central American** countries forced to flee are vulnerable to violence and abuse during their journeys to seek safety according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime report "[Abused and Abandoned](#)". The report also notes that women are more likely to be targeted for sexual abuse and assault, with many resorting to taking birth control prior to their journeys to avoid unwanted pregnancies.

Persistent violence and sexual harassment also affect LGBTIQ+ people in the region. In **Guatemala**, two transgender women, including the leader of a trans rights organization, and one gay man were killed in separate attacks. In **Mexico**, according to the [National Observatory of Hate Crimes against LGBT](#), 43 LGBTIQ+ people were killed between January and May 2021. The Inter-American Court of Human Rights [ordered Honduras](#) to enact measures to prevent violence against LGBTIQ+ people, by allowing transgender people to alter their gender identity.

In June, new asylum claims reached a record of 10,470, representing the highest monthly figure since **Mexican** Commission for Refugee Assistance (COMAR) started recording them a decade ago. Around 6,300 people on average crossed the U.S.-Mexico border each day, according to the [U.S. Border Patrol](#).

The U.S. announced expanded eligibility for **MPP**-enrolled individuals, to now include persons who had their cases terminated or were removed in absentia. This could enable up to 34,000 individuals to re-enter the U.S. to continue their protection claim. The U.S. also announced it will expand access to the **Central American Minors** programme.

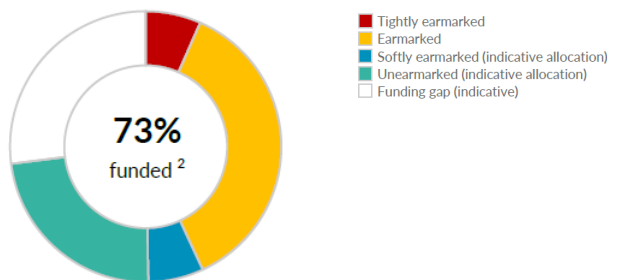
According to **Panama's** Migration Authorities, roughly 26,000 people within mixed movements have transited through the Darien region heading north in 2021. Some have reported being victims of robbery, assault, and sexual violence while crossing through Panamanian territory. An increase of Haitian nationals on the move has been observed in the region.

Many Central American countries like **Belize, Panama and Guatemala** have registered an uptick in new COVID-19 infections. UNHCR and partners advocate with the health system to include asylum-seekers and other forcibly displaced people in vaccination plans.

FUNDING (as of 21 July)

USD 173.5 M

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



DON'T MISS...



Enlaces, a dance programme in Panama is using art and dance to build bridges between communities and help young refugees and asylum seekers like 14-year-old Dayana, adjust to life in a new country. Dayana and her family spent seven days wandering the jungle of the Darien Gap without food or water during their journey to Panama. "I thought I was going to die," she said. "The Enlaces Programme is the best thing that's happened to us," said Dayana's mother, Katiana.

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- o [VIDEO: Dance is helping youth settle into new life in Panama](#)

Updates from the field

(MIRPS) COMPREHENSIVE REGIONAL PROTECTION AND SOLUTIONS FRAMEWORK

- During the **Solidarity Event** for Forcibly Displaced Persons and Host Communities in Central America and Mexico, the international community reaffirmed its solidarity with the MIRPS with pledges of more than \$110 million.
 - [READ the press release: International community mobilizes to find solutions to the forced displacement that affects Central America and Mexico.](#)
- During the **third MIRPS virtual meeting** in 2021, Spain reported on the results of the Solidarity Event held in June and announced a mechanism to follow-up on the pledges made. **Mexico** and **Costa Rica**, as leads of the working group on internal displacement and access to the workforce, respectively, reported on progress and announced the initiatives and regional proposals to be presented by the end of the year.

COORDINATION WITH LOCAL & NATIONAL GOVERNMENT / STRENGTHENING INSTITUTIONS

- In **Costa Rica**, 6,950 asylum seeker ID cards and work permits were issued in June through the support of 12 new registration staff at Refugee Unit which allowed reducing which allowed reduction of backlog of pending renewal of registration (formalisation of asylum request).
- In **El Salvador**, UNHCR started a coordination and cooperation process with the Directorate for the Reconstruction of the Social Fabric aimed to jointly intervene in prioritized communities affected by violence and internal displacement.
- UNHCR started to work with the National Coordinator for Disaster Reduction in Izabal (**Guatemala**), the second most affected department in the 2020 hurricane season, to support disaster risk reduction and response capacity for communities in high-risk areas.
- During a mission to **Panama**'s Darien region, coordinated by the National Office for the Attention of Refugees with the support of UNHCR, 177 refugees renewed their IDs. Furthermore, 25 staff members of the National Migration Service and the National Civil Protection System participated in a capacity building session on international protection.

- As part of the efforts to support the health authorities in **Mexico**'s Chiapas state, two ambulances were delivered by UNHCR in cooperation with the state governor and health secretary. One of the emergency vehicles was designated for Palenque, and other for a region from Mapastepec to Suchiate.
 - [READ the press release: Chiapas strengthens health care with UNHCR support](#)

PROTECTION (INCL. CBP AND SGBV)

- **Belize** vaccinated the first group of refugees as part of the immunization campaign throughout the country.
- In **Costa Rica**, a radio program called "Integrando Voces" was launched with the Upala Cultural community radio as part of a communication strategy to disseminate relevant information on asylum.
- In **Guatemala**, the government with the support of organizations and UNHCR released a Protocol for the Care of Unaccompanied or Separated Children and Adolescents in the context of human mobility to provide them a differentiated protection response.
- In **Honduras**, members of the National Institute of Statistics and the Central American Statistics Commission were trained to measure living conditions of the displaced population and the application of international recommendations on statistics on displaced persons.
 - [READ the Global Report 2020 and the Global Trends on forcibly displaced population.](#)

CHILD PROTECTION

- In Ocotepeque (**Honduras**) a virtual forum on childhood and eradicating violence was held to promote youth participation in community processes and strengthen youth-led protection networks.
- In **Mexico**, UNHCR developed child-friendly information materials on COVID-19 and supported recreational activities for children. UNHCR also developed videos to disseminate distance-learning opportunities made available by the Ministry of Education.
 - [SEE a new data visualization: 'COVID-19 deepens threats for displaced women and children'](#)
- In **Panama**, UNHCR and *Fundación Fútbol con Corazón* launched *La Liga de Todos 2021*, a joint programme with the Ministry of Education that promotes a participatory culture of inclusion and tolerance in public schools through a soccer methodology for social development.

INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION

- In **El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras**, UNHCR coordinated the development of the Humanitarian Needs Overview of the Protection and Global Camp Management and Camp Coordination sectors, jointly with IOM.
- In **El Salvador**, UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM, the National Council for Children and Adolescents, and the Salvadoran Institute for the Comprehensive Development of Children and Adolescents prepare an Action Plan of 2023-2033 for deported children with international protection needs.
- In **Mexico**, in the Working Group on protection against sexual exploitation and abuse in shelters, UNHCR together with UNICEF, IOM and other relevant INGOs, focused on partner assessment and on the mechanism to refer cases for investigation.

DELIVERY OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE & CASH

- In **Belize**, 89 people received food, rent, and legal assistance and psychosocial counselling, and in **El Salvador**, 257 cases across the country received restricted cash to support them in covering basic needs.
- In **Guatemala**, a total of 852 beneficiaries in 324 households received cash assistance in June. The total reached in 2021 is 1,472 people. In **Panama**, 463 refugees and asylum-seekers were assisted with cash interventions for food, medicines and rent, alongside legal counselling.
- In **Honduras**, emergency shelter was provided in coordination with the National Migration Institute to a group of Haitian nationals who were assaulted and robbed at the southern border.

DURABLE SOLUTIONS & LIVELIHOODS

- In **Belize**, roughly 290 asylum-seekers and refugees received livelihoods and language training, as well as mentorship sessions.
- In **Costa Rica**, Accenture, Boston Scientific, and Manpower announced a coalition of companies to jointly promote inclusive policies towards the displaced populations, encouraging recruitment of refugees and asylum seekers, and combating discrimination and xenophobia internally.
- In **Honduras**, UNHCR signed an agreement with the National Institute for Vocational Training to create opportunities for vulnerable people, in particular youth, to access employment through protection-sensitive training.
- In **Mexico**, 2,921 refugees by the end of June were relocated from the south to the central industrial corridor as part of the job placement and local integration program.
- In **Panama**, UNHCR, the Panamanian Red Cross and Microserfin, a financial institution, renewed their cooperation agreement to strengthen future collaboration for microcredit opportunities and financial inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers.
- The national leaders of Youth Employment and Private Sector Partnerships of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MTPS) commenced implementation of the joint MTPS-UNHCR initiative 'My First Job' for access to employment for over 300 young people of concern across 14 departments of **El Salvador**.
 - [READ the press release: UNHCR and the MTPS promote the employability of forcibly displaced people in El Salvador](#)

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 End 2020
