

# Community strengthening

2018



**51**

Number of communities at high-risk supported in NCA

**25,000**

Number of persons benefiting from community based interventions in NCA (Jan.-Dec. 2018)

**14**

Number of civil society partners implementing community based projects in NCA

Providing uprooted populations with a safe and secure environment presents both challenges and opportunities. Host countries and communities are key actors in maintaining an open-door policy and providing protection to people fleeing persecution and conflict; in enabling access to health care, education, housing and a job; and in accepting and integrating persons of concern.

UNHCR works closely with governments and host communities around the world to promote understanding and acceptance of refugees and to highlight the positive contributions they can make to the societies where they have found refuge and hospitality. Despite common perceptions that hosting large numbers of refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons (IDPs) may lead to socio-economic problems, the opposite can also happen, especially in the longer term.

At the local level, new markets, structures or business relationships

can benefit both the displaced and host communities. While there are many examples of positive contributions to refugee welfare by host communities at the local level, fostering conciliation and peaceful coexistence among refugees, local authorities and host communities remains vital. Enhancing the integration of refugees and internally displaced persons is central to ensuring that their presence does not upset the existing balance, especially where resources are already scarce.

Community based protection interventions benefitting internally displaced persons, returnees, as well as host communities, especially in the countries of origin which are still characterized by high levels of violence, will further contribute to mitigate the risks of forced displacement. UNHCR and partners, therefore, support community based projects aiming at peaceful coexistence between IDP and host communities.

# Major highlights and achievements

In **El Salvador**, community-Based interventions have increased outreach and impact through Inter-Agency coordination and joint implementation mainly between UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF and IOM. UNHCR has extended its outreach to 21 communities located in 8 Departments. This allowed 189 community leaders and members, including 60 women in leadership positions, to be trained on the identification of persons of concern of UNHCR at heightened risk, particularly children and their families, youth and LGBTI persons.

Nine participatory assessments were developed and revealed protection gaps and risks community groups are facing. Also, 3 communities reached agreements and collaborated on the creation of community plans of action which aim to address protection gaps identified through participatory assessments with government and State institutions competent to deliver an adequate psycho-social, legal and material protection response.

In **Honduras**, UNHCR in partnership with 6 civil society organizations supports protection-by-presence in 30 high-risk communities in Tegucigalpa, San Pedro Sula, Villanueva, El Negrito and El Progreso, working to strengthen community networks and support infrastructure development (community centres, health facilities and schools) to prevent forced displacement and mitigate the impact of violence.

Strengthening of women groups and leaders is paramount to recognizing women's huge potential as agents for change. In coordination with the Health Pastoral, UNHCR is supporting community based interventions in six prioritized areas in the country at high risk of forced displacement (Choloma, Villanueva, Dos Caminos, La Lima, San Pedro Sula – Rivera Hernandez and Calpules). UNHCR is also supporting the strengthening self-management capacity of community structures, community leaders and youth groups.

The Municipality of San Pedro Sula and UNHCR supported the Sináil II community's activity, in the

Rivera Hernandez sector, to recover community spaces and promote safe spaces through recreational community activities. In addition, the construction of a medical dispensary in Chamelecon, San Pedro Sula, was finalized and operations began, providing medical services for 150 people.

A community-protection plan was developed with over 20 leaders which includes risk mitigation/prevention initiatives, actions to consolidate the protection space of the dispensary and alternative registration of abandoned houses and land. UNHCR in Honduras is promoting sports, arts and culture as strategic drivers for youth participation and empowerment. The inclusion of these approaches in community interventions contribute to the mitigation and prevention of protection risks faced by youth, while promoting peaceful coexistence between youth coming from marginalized communities affected by violence and controlled by different gangs.

In San Pedro Sula, close coordination with the local government and partner Children International led to the recovery of community safe spaces through different recreational activities. In Tegucigalpa, UNHCR and Save the Children organized a one-day football tournament where more than 100 youth from high risk areas displayed their talents, shared good practices about mitigation strategies and played football in a neutral sport environment. Through these interventions, 4 Community Youth Centers of Tegucigalpa and 8 of San Pedro Sula have been supported and youth led projects are implemented to encourage the recovery of safe community spaces.



# Main challenges

The presence of gangs and other structures of organized crime makes communities afraid of community participation and leadership, which hinders social cohesion and community development processes.

The environment is quite challenging for youth coming from marginalized areas. Children and youth are affected by limited access to education,

vocational training and basic essential services. They are often stigmatized by media, employers and the society, which worsens their situation and makes them more vulnerable to violence.

Presence of gangs and other structures of organized crime imposes challenges for accessing communities and provide protection by presence.

## Sustainability through shared responsibility

Community-based protection interventions supported are carried out in close coordination with local authorities. As well as engaging international and national organizations in the process.

In the case of **Honduras**, the direct involvement of the Municipality of San Pedro Sula in some community interventions has strengthened dialogue and articulation between local authorities and community leaders. Key actors at local level such as FUNADEH (Fundación Nacional para el Desarrollo de Honduras) supported by USAID, Doctors without Borders, INFOP (Instituto Nacional de Formación Profesional) and FUNDAHRSE (Fundación Hondureña de Responsabilidad Social Empresarial), among others, have showed interest in working hand in hand to join efforts to build more resilient communities and in developing programs for youth and women at risk.

Community-based interventions aim at providing communities with skills and tools to carry out their own risk analysis and propose protection/mitigation measures. Involving the community and promoting their direct participation in the processes ensures long term sustainability.

Children and youth are important components of the community-based protection interventions. Empowering youth leaders and safeguarding protection community assets are essential in the strategy, implemented in the different countries.

# Next steps

Reinforce community assets and safe spaces such as youth centers, schools, community centers, medical dispensaries and community cultural activities.

Establish action plans with key actors at local and municipality level to coordinate programs in prioritized communities aimed at addressing youth concerns in particular (employment/technical and vocational training) and SGBV risks and response.

Reinforce youth programming by creating youth networks that can prioritize common risks, define mitigation initiatives and design advocacy strategies to facilitate the dialogue with the authorities and contribute to build stronger linkages with the State.

Work with development and private sector actors to identify strategies that enable the inclusion of the affected population, mainly by ensuring more access to job and education opportunities.

Document good practices on methodologies used by humanitarian actors on how to access and work in high risk zones.

Reduce the exposure to violence in community spaces through protection by presence and community initiatives to mitigate the risk of recruitment and sexual exploitation.

## RELATED MIRPS PROJECT PROFILES

**PROJECT 9:** Community engagement, strengthening and mitigation of protection risks in Honduras.

**PROJECT 16:** Technical assistance to local government and communities receiving refugees in Mexico.

For more information visit: [www.globalcrrf.org](http://www.globalcrrf.org). Or contact Hugues Van Brabandt, Regional External Relations Officer, Panama, [vanbraba@unhcr.org](mailto:vanbraba@unhcr.org)

*Special thanks to the major donors of regional and unrestricted funds for the MIRPS*