

COVID-19 MEXICO RESPONSE



By end of July, 22,242 people have applied for asylum in 2020 compared to 40,172 in the same period of 2019.



20 Refugee Housing Units were installed in shelters and public health centers in Chiapas, Tabasco and Veracruz



180,900 PPE, including surgical masks, disposable gowns, face shields, eye protection and gloves delivered to public hospitals



20 auxiliary ventilators delivered to public hospitals in Huixtla, Tonalá and Tapachula (Chiapas)



4,451 individual provided with emergency cash assistance covering a 3 month basic needs



25,952 persons were attended by national Help Desk through calls and messages

OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

Since the publication on 14 May, the Government of Mexico has been implementing a strategy for the progressive reopening of social, educational, and economic activities in the country. A system of traffic lights by region was established to weekly assess the epidemiological risk related to the reopening of activities in each federal entity. The National Asylum Commission (COMAR) has continued registering new asylum applications in its offices, while the subsequent processing has been carried out remotely.

By end of July, 22,242 people have applied for asylum in 2020 compared to 40,172 in the same period of 2019. A slight increase of asylum application observed in the last week of June has continued in July, doubling the average weekly applications to over 450 as compared with the previous months. The

increase is expected to continue due to deepening poverty, decreasing security, and worsening governance in North of Central America countries and even more restrictive asylum policies of the United States. Due to difficult economic and sanitary conditions in the southern states, the secondary movement of refugees and asylum seekers towards northern parts of the country, primarily state of Nuevo Leon, has increased. Finally, the further postponed, due to COVID pandemic, relaunching of the Migrant Protection Protocol (MPP) hearings results with a higher number of asylum seekers stranded in the North and is creating anxiety among MPP population, despite ongoing communication efforts.

ENHANCING MEXICO ASYLUM SYSTEM

In July, UNHCR and COMAR adopted a joined Work Plan for 2020-2021. The key objective of the Plan is to strengthen COMAR's operational capacity, through support in structure, equipment, infrastructure, and personnel recruitment and well as technical capacity of COMAR's officials across all functions.

The plan foresees strengthening and digitization of the registration and identity management area, including development of the SIRE, improvement of the management and case management system with an age, gender and diversity focus. It will aim at simplification of the procedure for determining refugee status, implementation of differentiated procedures, and enhancing capacities of the protection teams. Seven working groups have been established, some led by COMAR, to resolve recurrent issues and establish efficient processes in selected thematic areas. Among those special efforts are being made to advance on the remote registration of asylum application, including documentation and on the refugee status determination interviews by videoconference, to prepare for a scenario in which there are many more asylum claims but risks of COVID remain high.

The Work Plan includes also opening in 2020 two new COMAR offices in Saltillo and Guadalajara, remodelling the existing offices in Tijuana and Monterrey and moving to a new location of the COMAR office in Acayucan.



SUPPORTING HEALTH SECTOR

In order to assist the COVID-19 emergency response, UNHCR has donated sanitary materials and personal protective and medical equipment to health authorities in localities with a large asylum-seeking and refugee population both in the southern states and selected municipalities on the Northern border of Mexico. The identification of needs, such as insufficient protective equipment for medical personnel, as well as mechanical ventilators to treat cases of COVID-19, was coordinated with PAHO/WHO, the Health Institute for Well-being (INSABI) and local health jurisdictions and hospitals.

In total, with an investment of 5.7 million pesos, UNHCR has delivered 8,000 face shields, 9,200 lenses, 5,800 surgical gowns, 18,500 surgical masks, 10,400 FFP2 masks (equivalent to N95), 4,500 liters of alcohol gel and 129,000 nitrile gloves. In the South, these materials will be used in hospitals and health centres in Chiapas, Tabasco and Veracruz, the main receiving states for refugees. In the North, medical supplies will strengthen the response to the pandemic in the municipalities of Tijuana, Mexicali and Matamoros, whose health services serve both the local population and refugees and migrants.

In addition, in coordination with the Ministry of

Foreign Affairs (SRE) and the Mexican Foundation for Health (FUNSALUD), 20 auxiliary ventilators have been delivered to the Sanitary District VII of Chiapas, for use in hospitals in Tapachula, Mapastepec and Huixtla. Additionally, 120 accessory kits for the treatment of Covid-19 patients will be distributed in those locations.

UNHCR installed also 19 Refugee Housing Units (RHU) to establish observation and isolation spaces in public hospitals in Chiapas, Tabasco and Tamaulipas. The Units were developed in collaboration with IKEA Foundation as an innovative design to provide a more durable shelter solution. In Mexico, UNHCR uses them to increase the ability of public hospitals to cope with the pandemic.

Finally, with UNHCR's support, 16 refugee and asylum seeker health professionals have been hired by public and private hospitals across the country. 13 of them provide their services in Covid-19 clinics in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Palenque, Ocosingo, Reforma, Comitán and Venustiano Carranza, two in Mexico City and one in Aguascalientes. In Tapachula, UNHCR hired a doctor to provide medical care to the refugees and asylum seekers in Hotel San Augustin shelter, especially to pregnant women and patients with chronic diseases, thus helping to reduce the burden on the health authorities in this municipality.





UNHCR brought together 15 musicians in a series of four “palomazos”.

CELEBRATING WORLD REFUGEE DAY IN MEXICO

For this year celebration of the World Refugee Day, UNHCR brought together 15 rock musicians in a series of four “palomazos”, scheduled on Saturdays every two weeks, starting June 20. In Mexico, a “palomazo” happens when a group of friends or musicians come together to play popular songs, roughly equivalent to a “jam” session. The “Palomazos for Refugees” were disseminated simultaneously on UNHCR social media (Twitter, Facebook and YouTube) and through broadcast and social media of our partner in this project, W Radio. 50 minutes programmes were hosted by the popular radio anchor Gabriela Warkentin and filled with new versions of popular songs. As these were performed by artists who usually don’t play together the audience had a whole

new musical experience, highly appreciated in times of self-isolation due to COVID-19 pandemic. The artists who took part in the four concerts included: **Alfonso André, Denise Gutiérrez, Marcela Viejo in the first palomazo, Meme del Real, Cecilia Toussaint, Fer Casillas** in the second, **La Marisoul, Dr. Shenka, Pascual Reyes, Sergio Arau** in the third and finally **Lila Downs, Aterciopelados, Sofi Mayen** and the Mexican writer, **Juan Villoro**, in the fourth and last palomazo that took place on 15 August. Some of the artists participating have strongly engaged with UNHCR and committed to collaborate in the future.

Beyond the broadcasting the concerts, each “palomazo” focused on a specific topic related to the situation of refugees in Mexico and the role UNHCR plays in addressing their protection needs. The partnership with W Radio has also allowed for significant visibility of refugees matters through



interviews with the key UNHCR staff and participation of high-profile UNHCR supporters: **Alfonso Herrera, Johanna Murillo, Luis Gerardo Méndez, Paola Espinosa, Alberto Lati, Manolo Caro** and influencers: **Kirén Miret and Ana Paulina Chavira**. This helped in reinforcing the global theme “Everyone Can Make a Difference, Every Action Counts”. A message from the High Commissioner was included in the last Palomazo.

The first three concerts gathered over 153, 684 viewers on Facebook, 55, 184 on Twitter 19, 692 on Periscope and 57, 500 on You Tube. The videos have reached 286,061 views, the number which is still growing.

El Jaguar commemorated World Refugee Day with a campaign aimed to honor refugee’s resilience and remind them that they are not alone, that UNHCR and civil society organizations are with them. The 6 publications were widely accepted by people of concern: 43 thousand Facebook users were reached, of which 2 thousand 455 users engaged with the posts.



153, 684



55, 185



YouTube
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19, 692





The new shelter has an initial capacity of the place is of approximately 30 individuals lodged in 8 houses.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD

Aldeas SOS welcomed first residents in Tijuana

UNHCR started a project with Aldeas SOS aiming to provide medium-term accommodation for vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers, including single parent families, women at risk, victims of sexual and gender-based violence and persons at higher risk due to the pandemic. In collaboration with a number of actors, the facility will offer services of legal support for asylum seekers in Mexico and the US as well as psychosocial support, protection case management, child protection services, support in access to education and accompaniment in integration processes for those who have decided to remain in Mexico. The new shelter has an initial capacity of the place is of approximately 30 individuals lodged in 8 houses. However, it is expected to receive about 80 persons, following the construction works currently underway to improve the residential areas and other facilities inside the shelter. This intervention is a part of the European Union co-funded project “Promoting a more stable, inclusive and less violent environment for asylum seekers and refugees in Northern Mexico”.

The #ConsumeLocal initiative in Tapachula

In Tapachula, UNHCR, RET International and the Committee of Medical Students of Tapachula (CEMT)

have joined forces to present the initiative “In Tapachula, we are #WithRefugees, #ConsumeLocal”. The objective of the action is to make visible the contribution of refugees and asylum seekers, who benefit from the UNHCR humanitarian cash-based assistance program, in the activation of local economy by purchasing basic products and services from local businesses. At the same time, various traders have publicly endorsed, through this initiative, their support for refugees’ integration and inclusion in their host community, which allows for generating greater coexistence.





Local support Aguascalientes

UNHCR has expanded existing financial assistance and introduced additional support mechanisms to respond to economic and protection needs, as many asylum seekers and refugees who were already in the process of local integration have lost their sources of income due to the impact of the pandemic. As a result, UNHCR, together with the partner Habesha Project in Aguascalientes, launched a support program for the population of interest affected by the consequences of COVID-19 by providing food baskets and alternative isolation space for those at risk of contracting the virus. UNHCR invited small businesses owned by refugees, whose income has been affected by the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, to participate in the initiative. Frutería Doña Rosa, a two-person venture, provided items included in the food baskets for other refugees and asylum seekers.

Stay and Deliver: Northeast Border Team continues fieldwork

From the UNHCR Monterrey Field Office, the mobile team continued with protection monitoring missions and provision of assistance to vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers in the cities of the northeast border of Mexico. The team, together with partners, worked to ensure access to protection services and adequate shelter conditions for asylum seekers in the United States (including under the Migrant Protection Protocols) and asylum seekers in Mexico in the border cities in Tamaulipas and Coahuila.





Elena *, a Guatemalan refugee in Mexico, graduated as a University Superior Technician in Administrative and Accounting Systems from the Universidad Iberoamericana.

UNHCR HUMAN STORIES

First DAFI fellow graduates

In mid-March, days before the contingency for COVID-19 began, Elena *, a Guatemalan refugee in Mexico, graduated as a University Superior Technician in Administrative and Accounting Systems from the Universidad Iberoamericana. She was the first of 28 DAFI (Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative) fellows in Mexico to graduate.

Elena has always known what it is like to work hard and strive to achieve ones goals. The months she passed in Tapachula, where despite having a legal stay and having permission to work, like other Central Americans she had long working hours without social security, feel now far away. “I worked in a rotisserie shop from 6 am to 7:30 pm, seven days a week, with one day off every fifteen days or sometimes even once a month. When she was admitted to the university in Mexico City, she didn’t think it was true, “when UNHCR notified me I even screamed with excitement. I knew that in Chiapas I was cheap labour and I was not sure how much my abilities were going to allow me to study at the university. The first semester I did not want to fail, I did not want to miss the opportunity; I just studied and didn’t have time to

talk to other people. But then I felt more secure.”

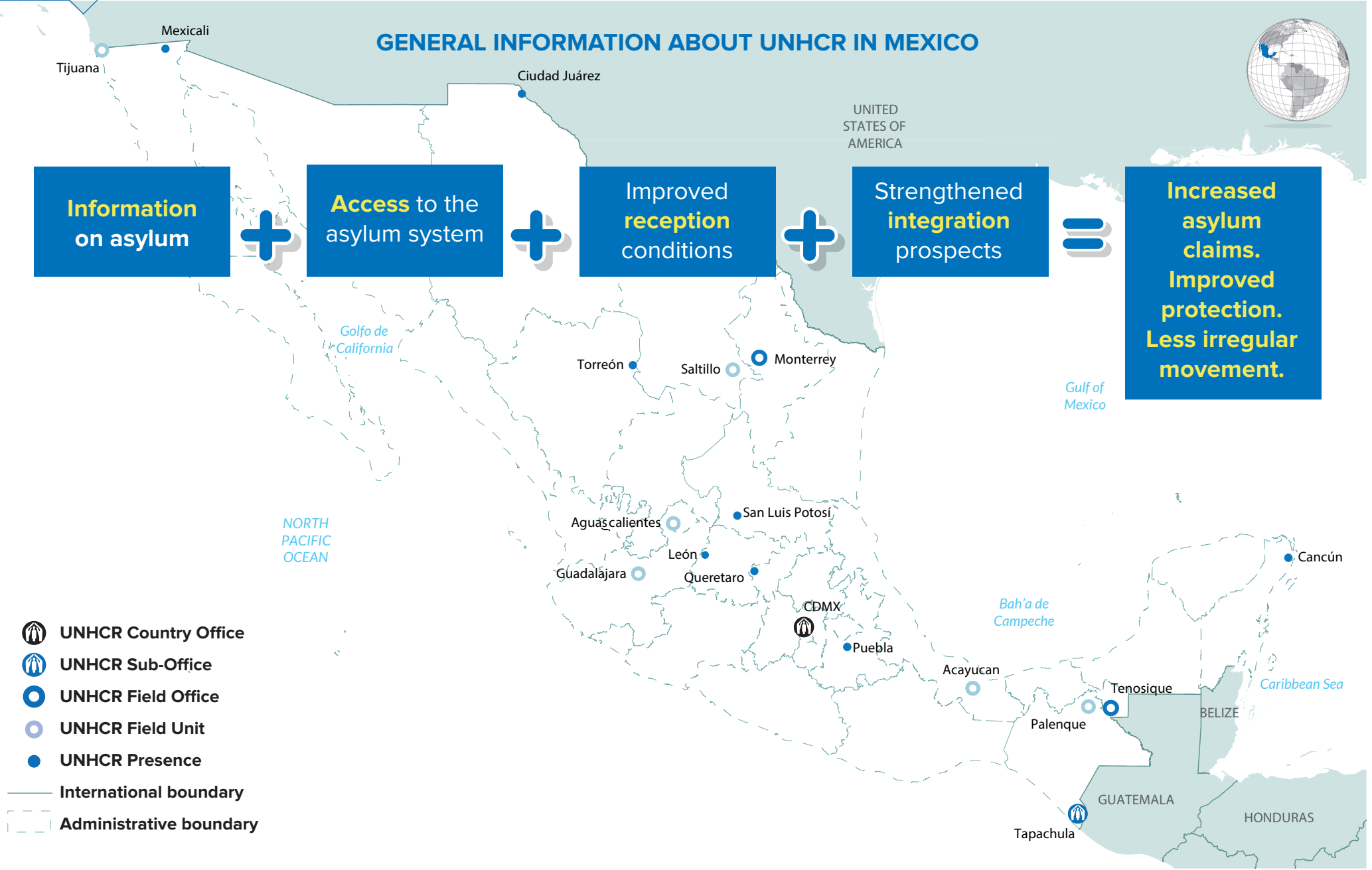
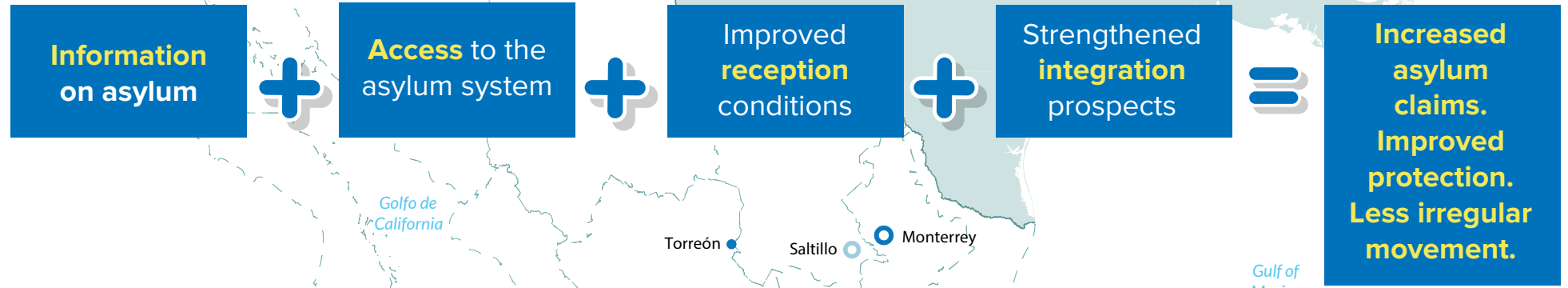
Her effort paid off and Elena currently works as an Accounting Assistant in a fair-trade company, which has also been economically affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Elena trusts that both she and the company where she works will go ahead despite current adverse conditions.






* Her real name was changed for protection reasons

MEET OUR PARTNERS

Alternativas Pacíficas A.C. (AIPaz) is an organization with 24 years of experience in assisting and providing protection to women victims of violence, and if they are mothers – to their daughters and sons. The organization runs care centers and two Women’s Shelter Centers in the state of Nuevo León. In April 2019, AIPaz, with the support of UNHCR Mexico, expanded its services to the cities of Matamoros and Nuevo Laredo in Tamaulipas state. It has been assisting refugees and asylum seekers with specific needs: children, elderly, victims of gender-based violence, LGBTI and persons with medical conditions or disabilities stranded in these locations, by providing legal, psychological, pedagogical, health, and social work care.

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT UNHCR IN MEXICO



-  UNHCR Country Office
-  UNHCR Sub-Office
-  UNHCR Field Office
-  UNHCR Field Unit
-  UNHCR Presence
-  International boundary
-  Administrative boundary

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