



**UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency

A young girl with dark hair in pigtails, wearing a purple t-shirt with a cartoon character and pink pants, stands in the foreground. She has a serious expression. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with other people, some wearing high-visibility vests, suggesting a refugee camp or transit area.

**EXPANDING  
OPERATIONS IN  
CENTRAL AMERICA  
2019**

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# 1. Overview

 **396,300**

Persons of Concern  
in Central America  
by end of 2018

 **539,500**

Projected Persons  
of Concern in  
Central America by  
end of 2019

 **Six**

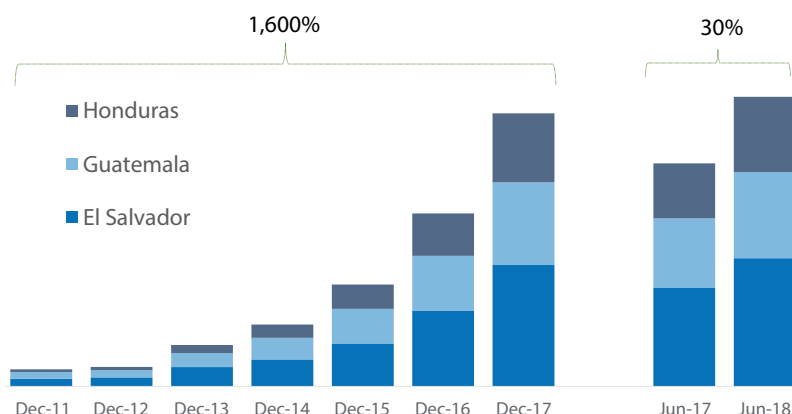
UNHCR operations  
covered by this appeal

In the North of Central America (NCA) tens of thousands of people have been forced into displacement by a confluence of factors that have led to an escalating situation of chronic violence and insecurity. These factors range from the influence of organized crime such as drug cartels and urban gangs, to the limited national capacity—compounded by corruption, poverty and exclusion—of States to provide protection.

By mid-2018, there were 312,000 refugees and asylum-seekers from the NCA region, around five

more than at the end of 2014. Internal displacement has increased with official estimates of around 245,500 internally displaced people (IDPs) in Honduras and El Salvador in the last ten years. In addition, an average of 200,000 people per year have been deported to NCA countries over the last five years, many of whom fear returning to their communities of origin because the violence they fled is still present, if not worse. All countries in the region have been affected—as countries of origin, transit, asylum and or return—and sometimes all of these at the same time.

**312,000** Refugees and asylum-seekers from NCA worldwide  
As of June 2018

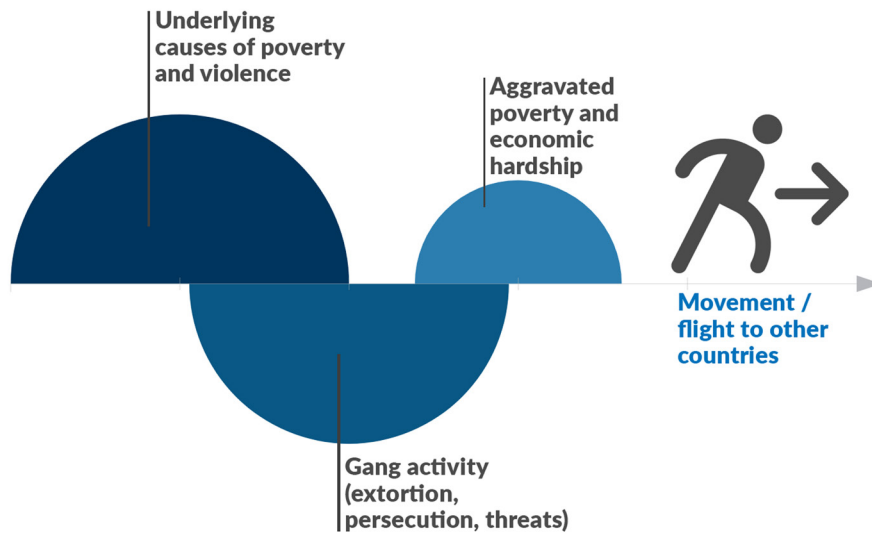


Source: Data provided by Governments to UNHCR.

In response to this increase in forced displacement in the region, UNHCR has expanded its presence and operational capacity in recent years to strengthen protection alternatives and encourage solutions for those affected, promote mechanisms to prevent and address situations of forced displacement and, together with other UN agencies, assist States to address the root causes of flight and promote a secure environment free from persecution, in line with their Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) undertakings. This has allowed UNHCR to increase the number of people of concern assisted in the region, moving from 13,200

people assisted in 2015 to a projected figure of up to 140,000 people assisted in 2018. This has included refugees and asylum-seekers, IDPs, and people in transit with protection needs.

The significant increase in 2018 in asylum applications was largely due to Nicaraguans seeking protection in neighbouring countries, mainly in Costa Rica and Panama. There were over 25,900 asylum claims registered in the two countries during 2018, and approximately 9,000 more waiting to be registered, which would bring the total to over 24,000 in Costa Rica.



Countries in the region work under the regional application of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (the MIRPS, to use its Spanish acronym) which was launched following the 2017 San Pedro Sula Declaration.

**The MIRPS** is a concrete contribution to the **Global Compact on Refugees (GCR)** and seeks to bridge the humanitarian-development divide by integrating country of origin work to address root causes and reduce violence, with a focus on addressing **SDG 16** in a holistic and comprehensive way.

Since October 2017, Belize, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Panama have implemented their national MIRPS action plans, and used this framework as a regional coordination mechanism, incorporating a whole-of-society approach, and convening a wide range of stakeholders, including development actors, cooperating States, regional and international organizations, among others.

This comprehensive response focuses on four priority sectors: (i) improving mechanisms for reception and admission; (ii) responding to immediate and persistent humanitarian and protection needs; (iii) supporting host countries and communities; and (iv) enhancing opportunities for durable solutions.

One year into its implementation, MIRPS countries have paved the way toward providing protection and assistance to the forcibly displaced and in so doing, have made a significant contribution to the advancement of the Global Compact for Refugees. Progress has been made in the creation or

strengthening of laws, public policies, operational guidelines, regulations and protocols on the asylum process and the assistance and protection to forcibly displaced populations; the establishment of safe spaces, such as reception and community centers, for refugees and asylum-seekers, internally displaced people, people on the move and deportees with protection needs; the establishment of measures to address the access to education and security in schools; better identification of the needs of host communities; an analysis of the socioeconomic condition of refugees and asylum-seekers; the promotion of access to work permits and job opportunities, micro-credit and seed capital.

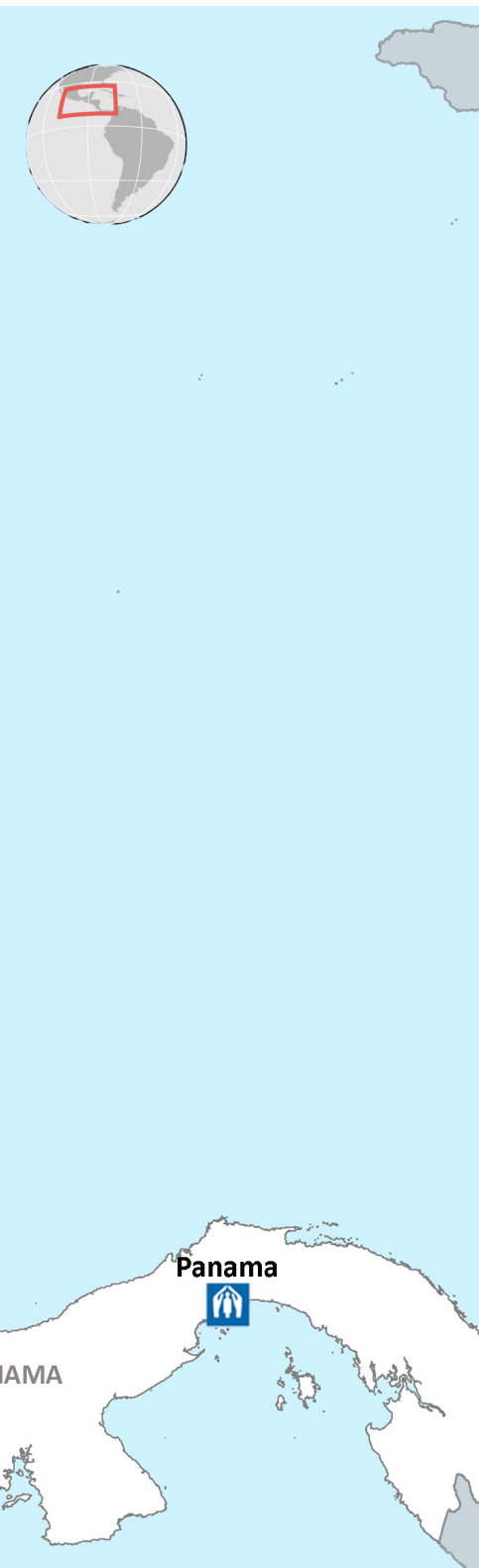
## Key MIRPS achievements to date include:



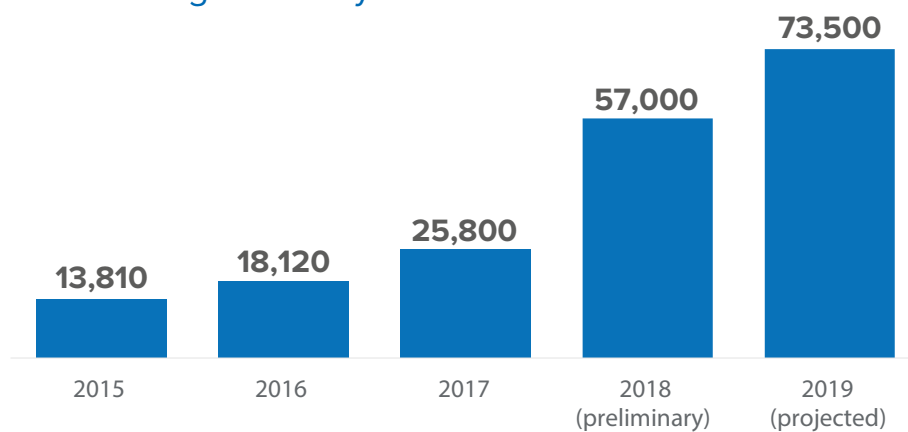
# UNHCR PRESENCE AND KEY POPULATION FIGURES IN CENTRAL AMERICA



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used in this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

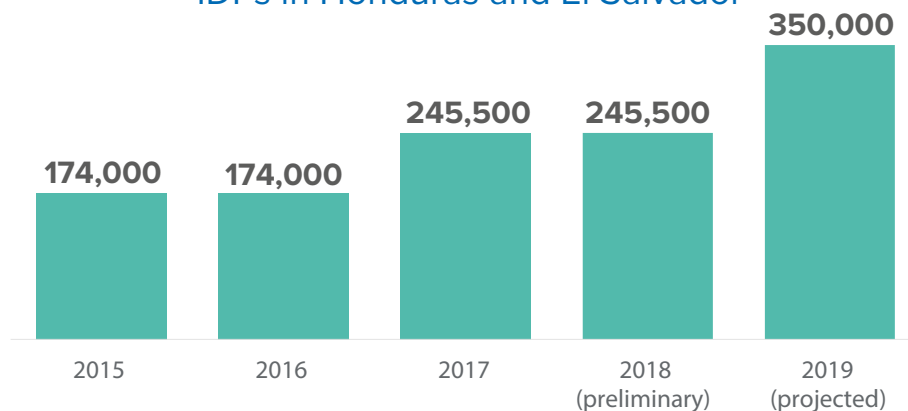


### Refugees & Asylum-Seekers in Central America



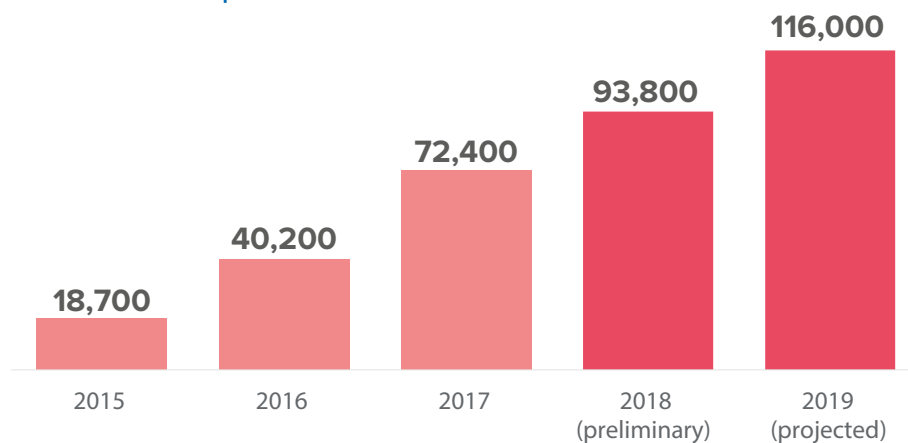
Source : Data provided by Governments to UNHCR. Figures for 2018 are preliminary and can be subject to changes. Figures for 2019 are projections by UNHCR.

### IDPs in Honduras and El Salvador



Source : Government -led profiling exercises supported by UNHCR in Honduras (IDPs between 2004 -2014) and El Salvador (IDPs between 2006 -2016). Figure for 2019 is a UNHCR projection .

### Other persons of concern in Central America



1 Includes people on the move and deportees from NCA with possible protection needs, as well as other people in need of international protection in Belize.  
Source : UNHCR estimations

## 2. Planning assumptions and population data

**Given the volatile situation in the region and upcoming administration changes in many Central American countries, which may have an impact on the political and operational landscape, this supplementary appeal is based on the following assumptions:**

Responses will continue to be framed around the MIRPS, including the implementation of the MIRPS' national chapters for Belize, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Panama.

Considering that chronic violence continues to affect NCA countries (especially El Salvador and Honduras), the number of asylum claims from NCA is likely to increase, though at a slower pace compared to recent years. About 10% will continue to be registered in neighbouring countries, mainly Costa Rica, Panama and Belize.

A new phenomenon of large groups travelling together in mixed movements of refugees and migrants is likely to continue, thus exerting pressure on governments and partners/stakeholders to meet emergency needs and putting a further strain on asylum systems. During the last three months alone, around 29,000 people travelled in such large groups.

The situation in Nicaragua will continue to generate further flows, to Costa Rica, Mexico, Guatemala and Panama. If it degenerates further, it could significantly destabilize the sub-region. During 2019, UNHCR estimates a figure of 20,000 - 25,000 new asylum-seekers from Nicaragua (mainly in Costa Rica).

The number of asylum-seekers from The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela arriving into Central America is likely to increase at the same pace as 2018, mainly to Costa Rica and Panama. The planning figure is estimated at 10,000 new asylum claims in 2019.

Based on increasing trends in the deportations of NCA nationals during 2018 (41% increase between January-November compared to same period in 2017) and taking into consideration the possible lifting of Temporary Protection Status (TPS) in the United States of America (USA) for El Salvador and Nicaragua (pending legal challenges there), NCA countries are likely to see a higher number of deportees during 2019, some of whom will have protection needs upon their return. UNHCR estimates that deportations could reach 250,000 people in 2019, of which at least 12,000 will be needing protection upon return.

Based on the recent IDP profiling exercise in El Salvador (which provided an estimate of 71,500 IDPs) and the ongoing profiling exercise in Honduras, UNHCR estimates that IDPs in the NCA could reach 350,000 by 2019.



COUNTRY	POPULATION GROUP	CURRENT POPULATION OF CONCERN	PROJECTED POPULATION OF CONCERN
		As of December 2018	As of December 2019
Belize	Refugees and asylum-seekers <sup>1</sup>	3,400	3,500
	Other people of concern <sup>2</sup>	2,800	2,800
Costa Rica	Refugees and asylum-seekers <sup>1</sup>	37,500	52,000
El Salvador	Refugees and asylum-seekers <sup>1</sup>	70	70
	Internally displaced people <sup>3</sup>	71,500	100,000
	Other people of concern <sup>4</sup>	4,000	5,000
Guatemala	Refugees and asylum-seekers <sup>1</sup>	650	850
	Other people of concern <sup>5</sup>	82,000	102,000
Honduras	Refugees and asylum-seekers <sup>1</sup>	80	80
	Internally displaced people <sup>6</sup>	174,000	250,000
	Other people of concern <sup>7</sup>	5,000	6,200
Panama	Refugees and asylum-seekers <sup>1</sup>	15,300	17,000
TOTAL	<b>Refugees and asylum-seekers</b>	<b>57,000</b>	<b>73,500</b>
	<b>Internally displaced people</b>	<b>245,500</b>	<b>350,000</b>
	<b>Other people of concern</b>	<b>93,800</b>	<b>116,000</b>
	<b>ALL PEOPLE OF CONCERN</b>	<b>396,300</b>	<b>539,500</b>

**Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> Figures for 2018 are preliminary as per available data provided by Governments as of Jan-2018, and can be subject to changes. Numbers have been rounded up. Projections for 2019 are based on estimation of new asylum-seekers as indicated by recent trends from NCA, The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Nicaraguans, as well as assumptions about RSD decisions by Governments (increased processing capacity).

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR estimation of other people in need of international protection. An ongoing profiling exercise will allow to update the estimate.

<sup>3</sup> Figure for 2018 is based on a joint Government-UNHCR profiling exercise that estimated number of IDPs in the country between 2006-2016. Projection for 2019 is based on estimated number of annual displacements 2017-2019, as per 2018 profiling results.

<sup>4</sup> Figure for 2018 is a UNHCR estimation of deported people with possible protection needs, based on official data regarding number of deportations and proportion of people that had left the country because of violence. Figure for 2019 assumes a 25% increase in the flows.

<sup>5</sup> Figure for 2018 is a UNHCR estimation of people on the move and deported people with possible protection needs, based on estimations of annual flows through the country and proportion of people with protection needs estimated by protection monitoring exercises. Figure for 2019 assumes a 25% increase in the flows.

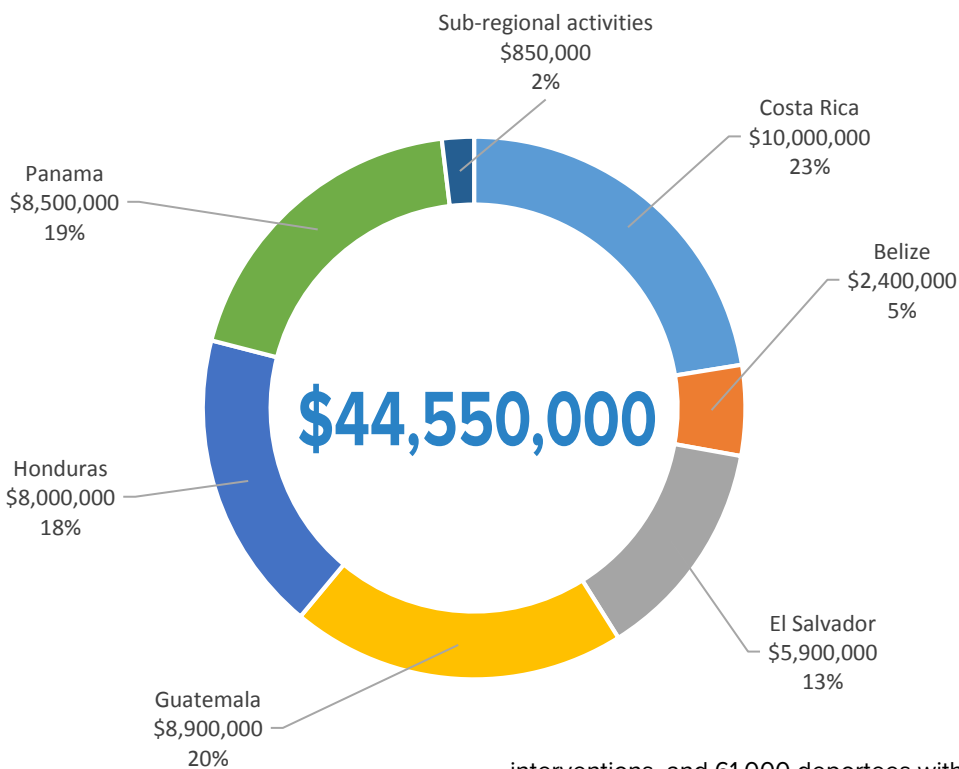
<sup>6</sup> Figure for 2018 is based on a 2015 joint Government-UNHCR profiling exercise that estimated number of IDPs in the 20 municipalities between 2004-2014. Projection for 2019 is based on estimated number of annual displacements 2015-2019, as per 2015 profiling results. An ongoing profiling exercise will allow to update the estimate at the national level.

<sup>7</sup> Figure for 2018 is a UNHCR estimation of deported people with possible protection needs, based on official data regarding number of deportations and proportion of people that had left the country because of violence. Figure for 2019 assumes a 25% increase in the flows.

# 3. Financial requirements for 2019

FINANCIAL REQUIREMENTS FOR THE NORTH OF CENTRAL AMERICA SITUATION

ExCom approved budget dedicated to NCA situation	Additional needs	Total
46,992,073	<b>44,550,000</b>	91,542,073



The initial financial requirements of this appeal cover the most critical protection and assistance needs for over 200,000 people affected by forced displacement from Central America in 2019, including: 73,500 refugees and asylum-seekers in Central American countries, 70,000 IDPs and people at risk of displacement in NCA countries assisted through individual and/or community level

interventions, and 61,000 deportees with protection needs and people on the move with protection needs assisted. The requirements also include staffing, presence and other capacity needs in UNHCR’s Regional Office in Panama, and in country, national and field offices in Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. The initial requirements come to \$47 million, including support costs.

## 4. Strategic objectives

This appeal is based on the MIRPS, adopted through the 2017 San Pedro Sula Declaration, and which is fully aligned with the recommendations and commitments made within the 2014 Brazil Declaration and Plan of Action, and the 2016 San José Action Statement. UNHCR's response is elaborated and delivered in partnership with concerned governments and other players within the framework of a multi-stakeholder approach and MIRPS process, including development actors and UN Country Teams.

These strategic objectives are complementary to the Sustainable Development Goals, which will work to ensure that all refugees and asylum-seekers, internally displaced people, and deportees with protection needs in Central America will have access to socio economic rights and are included in national development plans without discrimination and with no one left behind. Similarly, these strategic objectives also aim to foster close complementarity with rule of law and governance initiatives under SDG 16, which addresses one of the main drivers of forced displacement in NCA.

### a. Enhance asylum-capacity in refugee receiving countries.

This objective aims at strengthening access to fair and efficient refugee status determination (RSD) procedures in full respect for the principle of non-refoulement. The activities will be centered in the main refugee receiving countries in Central America, namely Belize, Costa Rica and Panama.

Further, asylum capacity will be strengthened in Guatemala, which has seen an increase in asylum claims over the past few years. All four countries have as part of the MIRPS detailed in their national action plans over 40 commitments related to enhancing their asylum system. UNHCR will work closely with relevant authorities to assist in the implementation of these commitments.

### b. Consolidate safe space networks and shelter.

Protection networks and safe spaces (PNSS) have been established in most countries in the region. The PNSS includes temporary shelters, mobile information spaces and safe houses along the main migration routes, and provides immediate assistance to people on the move, creating a space to identify those with international protection needs.

Services provided include the referral of people with protection needs to appropriate professionals; information and legal counselling on asylum

processes; physical protection (temporary shelters) and humanitarian assistance; access to child protection and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) case management; and psycho-social support and first aid. These networks will now be expanded or consolidated in order to reach more affected people. This initiative is implemented by civil society, faith-based organizations and human rights networks, with support from UNHCR, other UN agencies, public institutions and development partners.

### c. Enhance protection capacity in countries of origin including programmes for IDPs, children, women, deportees with protection needs, LGTBI (lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual and intersex) people and others who are affected by violence and mitigate the impact of chronic violence in high-risk areas

Protection capacity will be enhanced in three ways: first, in El Salvador and Honduras, UNHCR will build community resilience as a mitigation measure against everyday violence through community-based interventions; including livelihoods, education, psycho-social support, legal counselling, land and property protection, amongst others.

Second, in order to address internal displacement, UNHCR will work with the national authorities to provide technical advice on the enhancement of legal frameworks and public policies for the provision of protection and assistance for people affected by displacement. Third, local authorities' capacities to manage cases of deportees with protection needs, identifying them early and ensuring appropriate referrals, will be enhanced.

### d. Provision of humanitarian aid and multi-purpose cash grants

Timely response to immediate and persistent humanitarian needs is one of the main MIRPS thematic areas, and to this end UNHCR will focus on multi-purpose cashbased interventions (CBI). CBI programmes will be established to reduce protection risks, facilitate solutions and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of programme delivery, while at the same, time fostering positive relations with host communities and supporting local economies. Priority will be placed on scaling up the delivery of multi-purpose CBI to their fullest potential within operations together with partners and different financial entities.

The CBI programmes implemented in the region are generally meant for people of concern to meet their basic needs during status determination procedures. At the same time, however, they will also be implemented in countries of origin, and delivered to high-risk protection cases whenever possible (IDPs, deportees with protection needs or people targeted under the Protection Transfer Arrangement) in order to mitigate their risks during a transitional period whilst solutions are developed.

### e. Local integration and livelihoods

Local integration and livelihoods are key components for the protection of refugees and asylum-seekers in their host countries. Local integration includes the legal, economic and cultural aspects needed to fully integrate into a new society. In particular, addressing the economic aspect of local integration for refugees and asylum-seekers is

often challenging, while at the same time this is paramount to access basic services and be able to sustain their families.

Such interventions must be complementary to supporting host communities, which is one of the main pillars of the MIRPS and the Global Compact on



Baking workshop at a community centre in the La Era district of the Honduran capital, Tegucigalpa.

© UNHCR / T. HERRERA

Refugees. This balanced approach to the integration of refugees and asylum-seekers is central to ensuring that their presence does not hinder the existing balance in host communities, especially where resources are already scarce.

The initiatives, developed to ensure the self-reliance and local integration of refugees and asylum-seekers, include: the provision of tailored education

and vocational skills training; assistance with income generation and employability; micro-credits and seed money; and the promotion of access to safety nets and other basic services (education, health, social security and housing). Additionally, interventions to promote the peaceful coexistence among refugees and host communities will be supported.

The Protection Transfer Arrangement program (PTA) was designed and implemented as a component of the comprehensive protection strategy for the NCA countries.

First piloted by UNHCR in collaboration with El Salvador as Country of Origin (COO), IOM, the United States of America (USA) as the country of resettlement, and Costa Rica as country of transit, the program has now entered its third year of implementation (as of 2019) and it expanded to

Guatemala and Honduras as COO and to Uruguay, Australia, Canada, and Brazil as resettlement countries.

The PTA continues to represent an innovative life-saving mechanism that provides individuals exposed to extreme risks in their country of origin with a safe and legal access to a durable solution in a resettlement country via a country of transit.

Its three main objectives are:

1. Providing a small number of individuals at heightened risk with a

safe access to international protection and solutions.

2. Preventing individuals at heightened risk from taking dangerous routes out of the NCA and undercutting human trafficking.

3. Fostering regional responsibility-sharing and South-South cooperation in line the MIRPS and regional commitments made in support of the NCA countries.

The PTA is a key programme for UNHCR in Central America that has been mainstreamed within relevant country plans and budgets in this appeal.

# 5. Partnerships and Coordination

The MIRPS sets out national action plans of the six participating States, but also puts forward action plans for 15 regional and international organizations which complement the national chapters by proposing cross-border, coordinated programmes and initiatives. This includes capitalizing on regional forums such as the Central America Integration System (SICA) and the Organization of American States (OAS), which will be crucial to offer a space for exchanging best practices and forging new initiatives between States, as well as partnerships and strategic alliances in the implementation of MIRPS commitments. Further, the MIRPS includes ten other States and donors which actively support the process, and which have identified specific areas that they will support through financial assistance

and technical cooperation. Four of those States are from South America, highlighting the MIRPS as an ideal platform for South-South cooperation.

As detailed above, the MIRPS aims at bridging the humanitarian-development nexus by working to engage with development actors to address root causes in the countries of origin, and supporting local integration and host communities in countries of destination. In this respect, UNHCR is looking to strengthen engagement with UN Country Teams to better map and focus development funding. This will help in reducing the main drivers of displacement in the context of the implementation by those governments of the SDGs, especially SDG 16.



Equally, UNHCR engaged early in the Mexico-NCA comprehensive development plan to ensure that the MIRPS was complementary to this emerging development framework, and that areas of intervention under this framework included chronic violence and insecurity as root causes of forced displacement.

With respect to international financial institutions, UNHCR involved the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) closely in the MIRPS, developing a

methodology to support the quantification of commitments made under the MIRPS, and the identification by Governments of the necessary resources in their national budgets. UNHCR has also been advocating for increased grants by the IADB to be targeted to root causes, and will liaise closely with the IADB on the applicability of the recently-opened migration fund, which grants concessional loans to countries affected by a large refugee flow, to both countries of origin and destination.

In all countries of operation, UNHCR maintains close cooperation and coordination with different government counterparts and line ministries, fostering a whole-of-government approach to strengthen the capacity of the State to provide protection.

Building strategic alliances with civil society also remains a priority to create a whole-of-society approach. At national and regional levels, UNHCR continues to lead the Protection Group with the participation of NGOs, UN agencies and others where applicable (such as the International Committee of the Red Cross or Médecins Sans Frontières), to strengthen national protection systems, improve technical capacity in protection, promote information management, reinforce advocacy at the local, regional and international levels and guarantee humanitarian access and

protection for humanitarian actors. The network of existing NGO partners (both implementing and operational) has been expanded, ensuring their engagement in community outreach and community-based protection interventions, child protection activities, legal assistance and humanitarian support for refugees and asylum-seekers as well as for the development of protection networks. Partnership with the Catholic Church and its local parishes is in particular an added value, considering their extended presence, as well as their work with migrants and people of concern to UNHCR and their historic work in supporting refugees and migrants.

Taking into consideration the mixed movements in most countries in the region, special coordination is also maintained with IOM in all countries. This covers national coordination on joint programmes, data management, advocacy and technical support.

© UNHCR / T. HERRERA



UNHCR protection officer talks to young schoolchildren in the Honduran capital, Tegucigalpa.

# 6. Country chapters

## Belize

**Belize has a rich history of ensuring refugee protection and solutions for people fleeing persecution dating back to the 1980s. Following the decrease in refugee movements in the region, Belize scaled down and closed its refugee programme. However, in 2010, increasing levels of violence in neighbouring countries led to a new wave of people seeking safety in Belize. To deal with this new displacement situation, Belize re-established the Refugee Eligibility Committee and the Refugee Department in 2015 and 2016 respectively.**

In 2017, Belize joined the MIRPS and developed a national action plan, centered on strengthening the RSD system and local integration. In order to respond to the refugee influx, MIRPS commitments include: improving access to and quality of asylum, fostering dialogue towards better regional coordination and responsibility-sharing, and working with all relevant stakeholders to address the protection needs of refugees.

Some of the main challenges in providing protection to displaced populations in Belize are the strictly-applied 14-day deadline (upon arrival in the country) for lodging asylum claims, the extensive delays in approving recommendations for refugee recognition and the fact that asylum-seekers are not authorized to work. These various restrictions hamper access to asylum and impede effective local integration.

Juan Barrera\* fled El Salvador alone when he was just 16. It was 1990 and, like thousands of others, the civil war forced him from his home. He bounced around Central America for years, scraping by until his uncle told him of a haven of peace just across the Guatemalan border in the small country of Belize.

He found the village, scraped together enough money for a plot of land and began subsistence farming. Nearly 30 years later, he makes a comfortable living, growing cabbages, cucumbers, tomatoes and more to sell in the Belizean capital, Belmopan. One of his sons has gone to university and a daughter is on her way there.



Belize. Salvadoran family find safety in Valley of Peace.

© UNHCR / D. VOLPE





**3,400**

Refugees and asylum-seekers by end of 2018



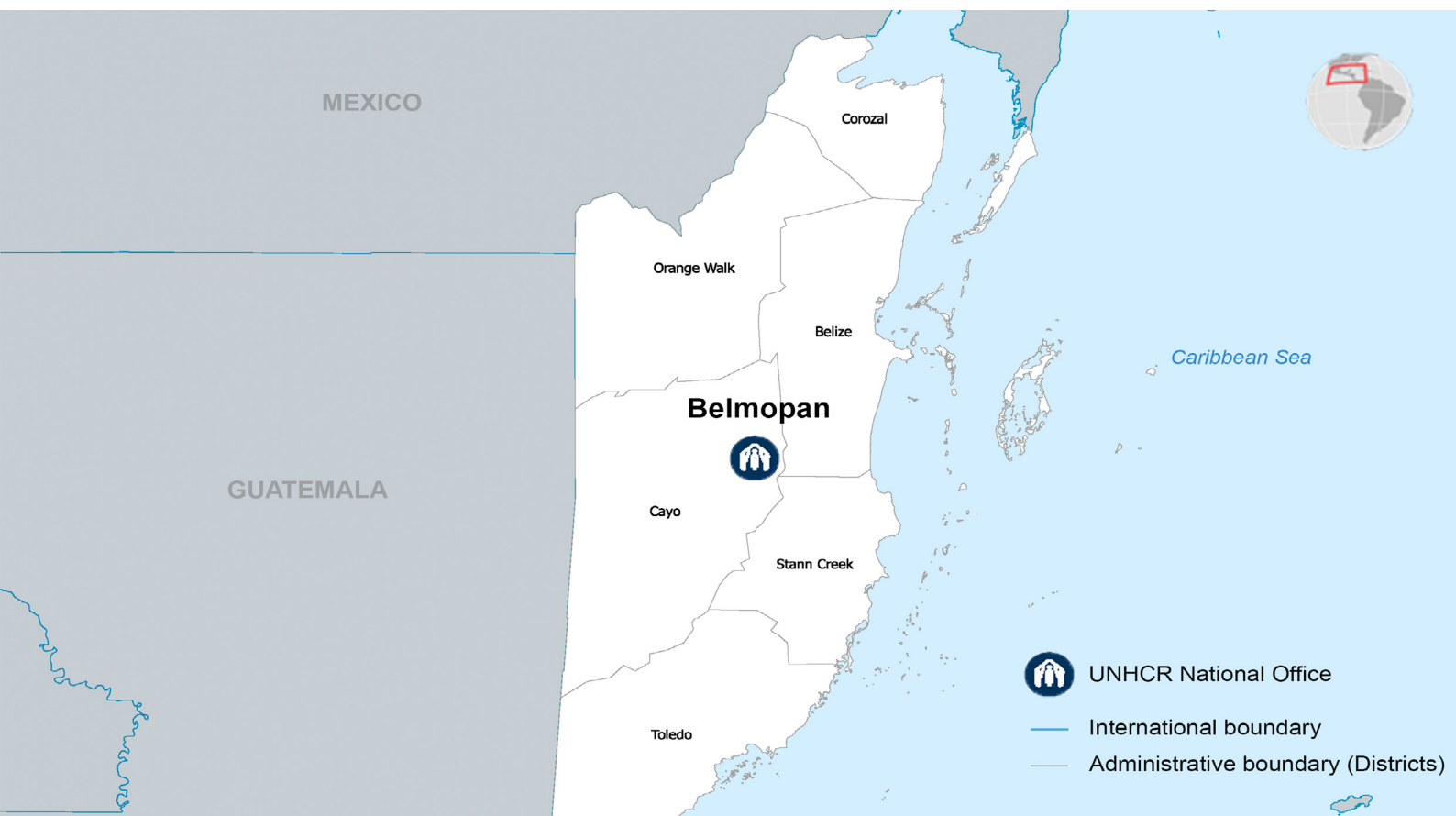
**2,800**

Other persons with international protection needs



**UNHCR presence**

1 national office  
11 staff  
3 implementing partners



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used in this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.



Belize. General view of Valley of Peace, a human settlement founded by Salvadoran refugees in 80ths.

## PRIORITIES

- Ensure that people in need of international protection have access to territory and to a fair and efficient asylum process (information system, border monitoring, training of border officials, etc.).
- Strengthen the asylum system and state capacity (in line with the ongoing Quality Assurance Initiative (QAI) process, capacity building on RSD, interview techniques, referral protocols, etc.).
- Promote and support local integration and community-based interventions benefitting refugees and host communities alike.



© UNHCR / D. VOLPE

“In this town, we are proud Belizeans but we are also refugees. The children of refugees are now doctors, policemen, engineers or, like me, a teacher.”

—Amaya, refugee from El Salvador in Belize.

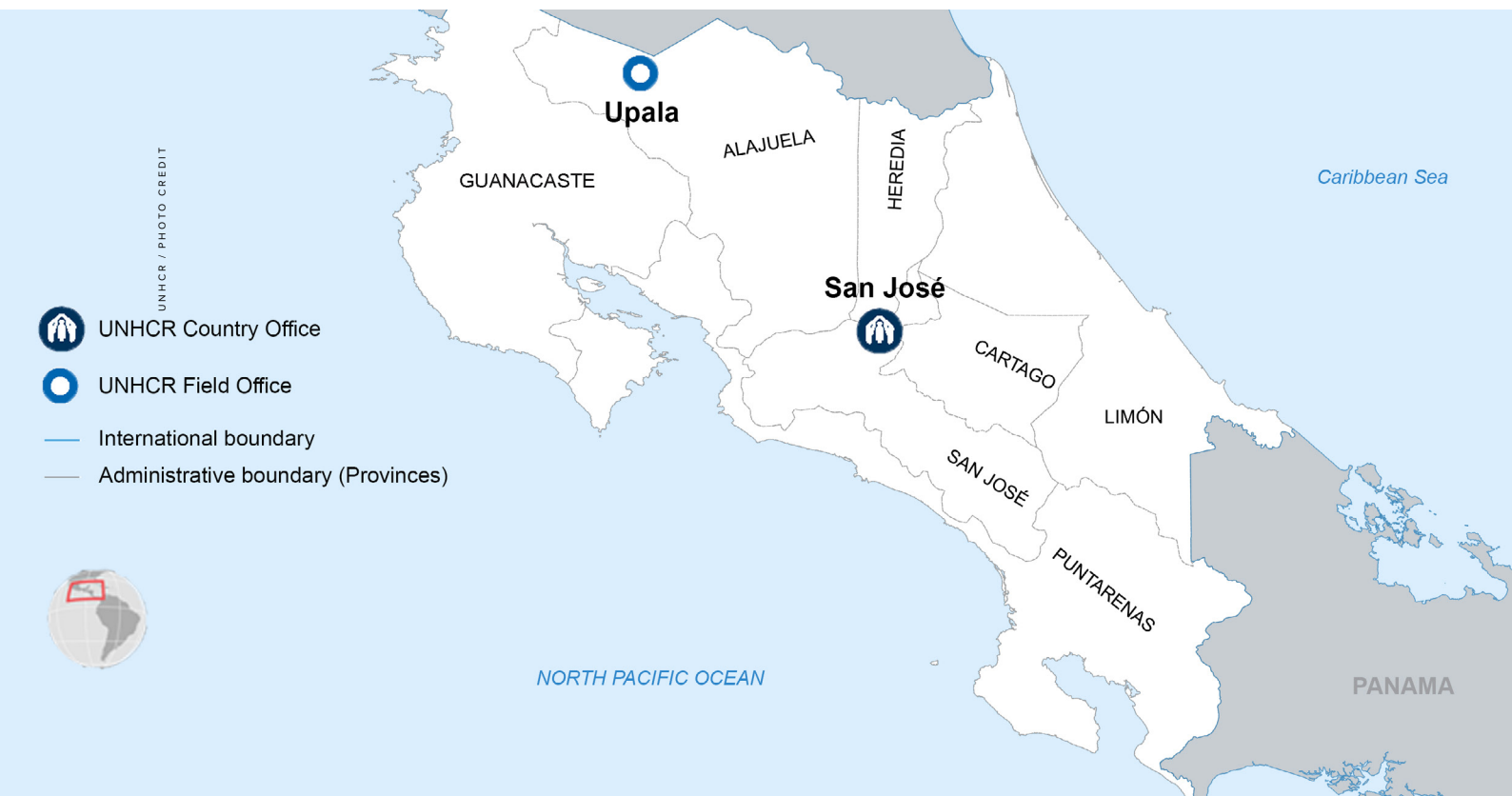
- Ensure up-to-date information on caseloads and people with international protection needs through profiling exercises.
- Boost communications with communities, using campaigns such as “Confía en el Jaguar”, to ensure access to reliable information on asylum procedures and protection mechanisms.
- Sensitize the public at large on refugee protection and demonstrate the mutual benefits of welcoming people with international protection needs in Belize.

# Costa Rica





**In Costa Rica, the asylum system has been put under increasing strain due to the recent large influx of Nicaraguans fleeing persecution for their actual or perceived role in anti-government protests and activities. This is in addition to the already large-scale arrival of Venezuelan nationals, those fleeing criminal violence and persecution in the NCA, as well as the long-standing displacement from Colombia.**

Costa Rica has a solid framework for strengthening its asylum capacity contained in its national MIRPS chapter, known as MINARE. UNHCR will build on the MINARE to support the authorities in ensuring the early identification of people with international protection needs, through increasing the presence of migration authorities in seven border posts and

two international airports, while rolling out a capacity building programme. In four of these seven border posts, the Refugee Unit is planning to decentralize its functions to allow for a speedier RSD process at the border.



UNHCR / PHOTO CREDIT

-  UNHCR Country Office
-  UNHCR Field Office
-  International boundary
-  Administrative boundary (Provinces)



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used in this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.


**37,500**

Refugees and  
asylum-seekers by  
end of 2018


**28,000**

New asylum claims  
in 2018


**UNHCR presence**

1 national office  
1 field office  
46 staff  
5 implementing partners

Gloria used to run a massage therapy business at the International Airport in San Salvador. In 2014, her daughter witnessed a brutal gang kidnapping and agreed to testify in court; however, the family started to receive death threats and they saw no other option than flee their country.

“The prosecutor told us they didn’t have the ability to defend a witness in El Salvador,” says Gloria, who gathered up her family and a bag of clothes, and fled on a two-day overland bus journey to Costa Rica, where they knew no one.

In Costa Rica, Fundación Mujer hosts frequent competitions where enterprising refugees pitch their businesses ideas and can win seed money to start them. Additionally, the Ministry of Economy provides talks and workshops to help entrepreneurs like Gloria navigate Costa Rica’s business landscape.

Costa Rica. Venezuelan entrepreneur's baked goods selling like hotcakes.





## PRIORITIES

- Strengthen the Refugee Unit within the Migration Directorate (DGME) with additional adjudicators and legal staff to address the growing backlog and the increase in asylum claims, as well as with new premises to accommodate the management of a larger number of cases.
- Expand a legal aid programme specifically targeted for asylum-seekers throughout the territory, establishing additional legal aid clinics.
- Enhance safe spaces in both urban areas, mainly in San Jose, as well as border areas for people with international protection needs and victims of sexual and gender-based violence.
- Scale up community-based protection and registration initiatives in 2019, to ensure that people of concern from Nicaragua and Venezuela currently in urban areas are identified and referred to appropriate service providers to attend their specific needs.
- Roll out a communication campaign to provide people of concern with information about a new complementary protection mechanism. This campaign will ensure that access to



“Working here made an impact in my life precisely because of the situation in Venezuela right now. I know this is my place, and where I can contribute with all I am.”

—Pedro - Asylum seeker from Venezuela

the asylum procedure remains unaffected and the most appropriate pathway is chosen by people of concern.

- Strengthen livelihoods and local integration programmes in alliance with international organizations, development actors and others, to facilitate labour insertion as well as inclusion of people of concern in government social safety programmes.
- Increase UNHCR’s operational presence, maintaining throughout 2019 the recently opened Field Office in Upala, near the border with Nicaragua, increasing border monitoring and developing community-based protection interventions in support of host communities.

# El Salvador

**As a result of a Constitutional Court ruling that enjoins the State to recognize internal displacement in the country and take appropriate measures to mitigate its effect, UNHCR’s ability to advocate for protection and solutions for IDPs has been significantly strengthened. As such, advocacy needs to be stepped up to promote the adoption of a legal and regulatory framework for the protection of internally displaced people in line with the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.**

UNHCR has worked in close coordination with the government’s plan, known as “El Salvador Seguro”, and its chapter 4 on protection to victims of violence. This includes the support to twenty Offices for the Attention to Victims (OLAVs) throughout the country, which act as initial counselling and referral services for victims of violence. UNHCR has provided equipment, technical capacity and developed protocols for the assistance and protection of victims of violence. With respect to deportees with protection needs, UNHCR has supported the establishment of an OLAV inside the main reception

center in San Salvador to facilitate their identification and referral.

An increasing number of deportations is foreseen as a result of the ongoing “caravan ” large movements as well as a consequence of the expiry of the Temporary Protection Status (TPS) in the USA in September 2019. Many deportees are likely to have protection concerns which will require significant efforts to consolidate early identification and referral mechanisms and increase community-based interventions and humanitarian assistance.

“Leaving is the only option if you don’t want to join the gangs,” says Anderson. Promises from the gang of good pay and protection quickly become threats. And the Sánchez brothers had the bad luck of living in a neighborhood controlled by one gang, while going to school in another. Their journey to school meant they would be betraying one, or both gangs.

“I enrolled in senior high school but never went,” says Anderson. “I didn’t want to cross from one zone to the other. It was too dangerous.”

Young refugees flee gang violence in El Salvador.




© UNHCR / D. VOLPE





The operation in El Salvador is gradually expanding its presence and interventions in high-risk communities and those affected by forced displacement. Pilot community interventions will be implemented to improve livelihood opportunities particularly for youth and women. Interventions are

also foreseen to improve the organization of protection networks and community boards. Safe spaces, temporary shelter and psychosocial support will be enhanced for cases at heightened risks and for victims of sexual and gender-based violence.

 <p><b>71,500</b></p> <p>IDPs in the country between 2006-2016</p>	 <p><b>30</b></p> <p>High-risk communities with protection interventions</p>	 <p><b>UNHCR presence</b></p> <p>1 national office 20 staff 8 implementing partners</p>
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One of the Menendez\* family's older sons harvests cabbages on a farm in the Valley of Peace.

## PRIORITIES

- Support the State's capacity to identify, assist and refer cases of IDPs and deportees with protection needs through the construction, staffing support and training for ten Offices for the Attention to Victims (OLAVs).
- Advise the Government in developing normative and policy work required to implement the Constitutional Court's decision to protect and assist IDPs.
- Strengthen community protection initiatives to increase self-protection and resilience in 20 communities at high risk.
- Strengthen the referral mechanisms put in place in coordination with state institutions for the provision of protection and local integration services for IDPs and deportees.
- Carry out trainings and develop an inter-institutional strategy to meet specific needs of groups at particularly high-risk (LGBTI, children, journalists, drivers and other high-risk professions.)



- Promote livelihood initiatives with particular emphasis on youth and women networks for IDPs and deportees with protection needs.
- Enhance capacity of local and municipality authorities with special emphasis on ombudsman offices, local OLAVs and child welfare entities through trainings, human resources and material support.
- Increase safe spaces and capacity to assist protection cases at heightened risks through construction and rehabilitation of spaces.

“I enrolled in high school but never went. I didn’t want to cross from one zone to the other. It was too dangerous.”

—Anderson, asylum seeker from El Salvador

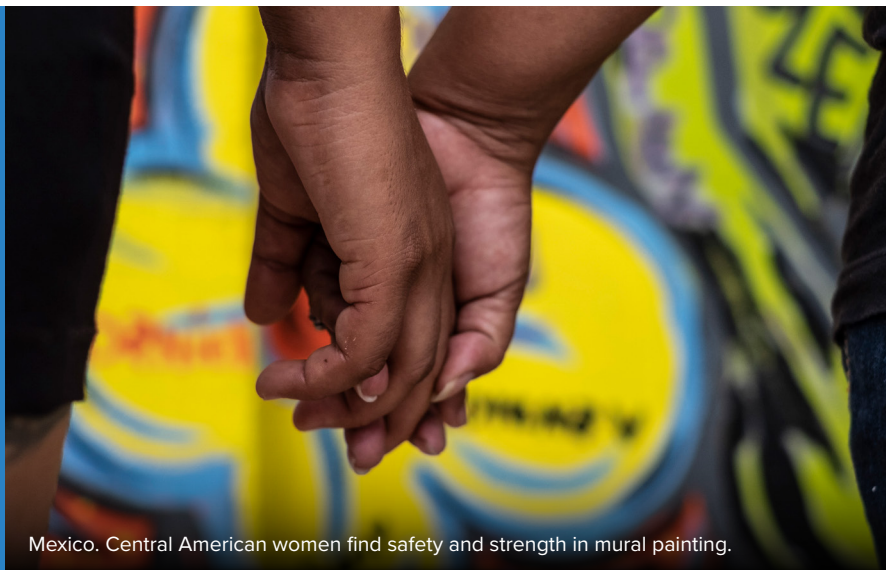
# Guatemala

**Guatemala joined MIRPS in 2017 and prepared a detailed national action plan centered on its position as a country of transit, destination and return. The priority population groups in the Guatemala operation are refugees, asylum-seekers, and people on the move and deportees with protection needs.**

In order to respond to the protection needs of mixed movements heading north, further support is needed to build the capacity of authorities and partners to identify people with international protection needs, and to provide assistance and information on asylum procedures. To ensure more effective communication with people of concern, UNHCR will establish an information and assistance centers in strategic border locations to facilitate access to procedures for people in need of international protection. UNHCR will also increase border and protection monitoring, including implementation of community-based projects benefitting both people of concern as well as host populations.

Guatemala is increasingly becoming a country of asylum, which requires strengthening of the asylum system as well as local integration programmes. Increased capacity building, human and material, is needed for the Guatemalan Institute for Migration (GIM) under whose jurisdiction the Refugee Office will fall. Also, to address the protection needs of vulnerable populations, such as unaccompanied children, the capacity of competent state authorities (such as the Attorney General’s Office), partners, and civil society will be enhanced to reinforce child protection mechanisms.

Manuela has been escaping from the Salvadoran criminal gangs for five years. When she could not afford to meet the extortion fee they demanded – US \$170 each week – she and her mother were harshly beaten. In one of those frightful visits, Manuela’s mother died of a heart attack.



Mexico. Central American women find safety and strength in mural painting.

© UNHCR / M. MARTINEZ



**82,650**

Persons of concern  
by end of 2018



**20**

Safe spaces  
supported by  
UNHCR



**UNHCR presence**

- 1 national office
- 1 field office
- 28 staff
- 8 implementing partners



Thousands of Central Americans flee their home countries hoping to reach safety and protection.

## PRIORITIES

- Support the Guatemalan Institute for Migration (GIM) to establish the Refugee Office.
- Establishment of a dedicated capacity-building programme for multiple national authorities, namely, GIM, Ombudsman, and the Attorney General's Office for Children.
- Enhance child protection mechanisms by further strengthening national authorities, UNHCR partners and civil society actors through the provision of equipment, additional staff and training activities.
- Develop Cash-Based Interventions (CBI) programmes for asylum-seekers and refugees to address basic needs.
- Strengthen the provision of information on asylum (in Guatemala or Mexico) through the establishment of an "Information and Assistance Center" in Tecún Umán in addition to the roll-out of a comprehensive communications plan.



- Expand the Safe Spaces Network, in particular its legal aid capacity.
- Increase border monitoring, both directly as well as through partners, and increase UNHCR field presence.
- Further develop local integration and livelihoods programmes for refugees, asylum-seekers and deportees with protection needs with emphasis on social and economic integration initiatives.
- Strengthen the national authorities' capacity to respond to large-scale influxes including contingency planning and prepositioning of emergency kits in coordination with the Guatemalan Red Cross and other partners in the country.
- Enhance child protection and strengthen the capacity of competent state authorities (such as the Attorney General's Office), partners, and civil society.
- Increase border and protection monitoring, including implementation of community-based projects benefitting both people of concern as well as host communities.

# Honduras

**Despite the reduction in murder rates in the last three years, Honduras continues to experience serious security restrictions especially in areas under gang control. Daily threats to life and limitations of freedom are rampant. It is imperative to strengthen protection and referral mechanisms in communities at high risk, increase their resilience, as well as support robust government responses, including the development of appropriate laws and policies on internal displacement.**

Front-line protection authorities must be strengthened to be able to provide an effective response, particularly in communities that are put under further strain by the increasing number of deportees. In the short term, civil society and other partners will require support to fill the gaps where the respective authorities cannot ensure protection.

For 2019 emphasis will be placed on working with municipal authorities to provide protection and assistance for IDPs and to consolidate safe spaces at the borders, and ensure that people passing through traditional border routes, especially those with international protection needs, have safe transit and access to information and legal counselling on international protection and services available in the neighbouring countries of asylum.

UNHCR will increase its presence at the border with Guatemala as well as at the three reception centers in San Pedro Sula and Omoa to better identify and initiate case management of deportees with protection needs. At the community level, a network of safe spaces will be further consolidated to support protection alternatives for cases at high risk.

UNHCR will continue to support the Government of Honduras in the design and implementation of sectorial public policies (social inclusion, education,

labor, protection of children) that address the prevention and response to internal displacement and in line with their MIRPS commitments. The Inter-Institutional Commission for the Protection of Persons Displaced by Violence (CIPPDV), will be further supported to implement its prevention and response strategy to assist IDPs.

Programmes to promote inclusion, integration and leadership of youth through culture, arts and sports in high-risk communities will be expanded in close coordination with the local municipal governments. The network of women organizations will be supported in data collection, registration and analysis of SGBV cases and its linkages to forced displacement, as well as in their response to receive and guide women victims of violence.

For 2019, new areas of intervention at the community level will include engagement with indigenous communities and the "Patronatos" (local grassroots structures) to strengthen their internal organization and risk analysis capacity as well as support them in their ability to dialogue with the state and other actors.



 <p><b>174,000</b></p> <p>IDPs in the country between 2004-2014</p>	 <p><b>30</b></p> <p>High-risk communities with protection interventions</p>	 <p><b>UNHCR presence</b></p> <p>1 national office 1 field office 33 staff 18 implementing partners</p>
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## PRIORITIES

- Improve the State and other actors' capacities to identify, respond and refer people with protection needs deported to Honduras.
- Consolidate a legal and institutional framework that enables the implementation of assistance, protection and solutions for internally displaced, promoting in particular the approval of the Law on Internal Displacement and the involvement of the judiciary on the protection of the rights of the displaced and persons at risk of displacement.
- Develop programmes and projects aimed at the protection of people at high risk. Special emphasis will be placed on the education sector; protection of schools from the current patterns of persecution and displacement of their students, the protection of teachers under threat, the strengthening of the educational community and the identification of best practices to mitigate risks.
- Develop and implement mechanism for the protection of housing, land and property abandoned due to forced displacement.
- Strengthen community-protection mechanisms and self-organization mechanisms of grassroots, youth and women groups, and develop a specific strategy to assess and respond to the specific vulnerabilities of indigenous communities.

In the hills above the Honduran capital, a typical school day is underway. The voices of hundreds of elementary school students echo through the little courtyard connecting classrooms.

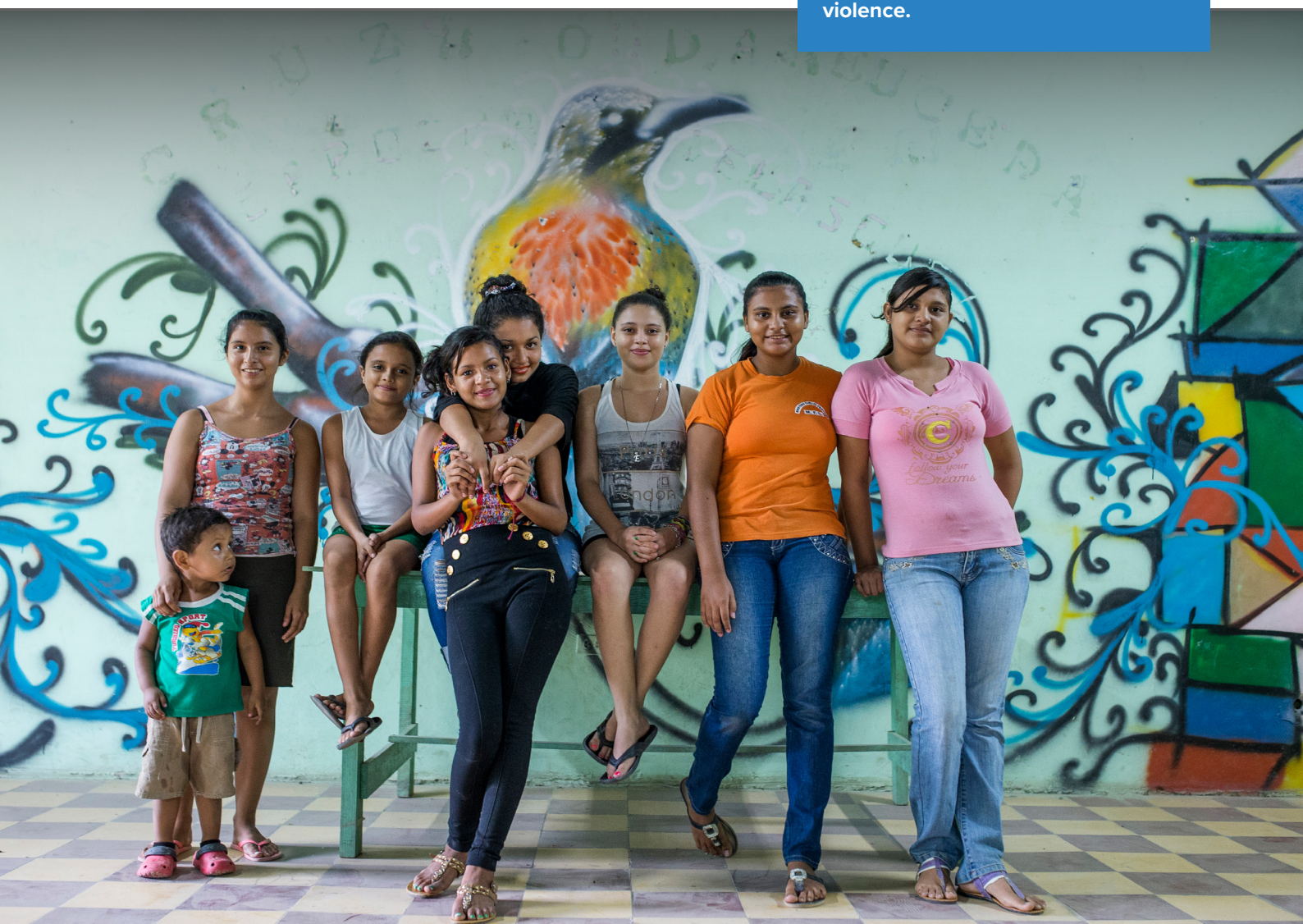
Education centres in high-risk neighbourhoods like Rosalinda and Villafranca in the Honduran capital are often affected by the territorial violence of local gangs. As a result, some older children drop out to avoid the risk of being killed for wandering onto the wrong block or forcibly recruited into gangs.



Honduras. Education centres a haven of peace in gang-controlled zones.

- Promote and support the improvement of living conditions of the population at high risk, especially women and youth, through the participatory design of livelihoods interventions, in close coordination with relevant government, international cooperation and private sector stakeholders.
- Increase border monitoring and presence to improve data management, identification of cases and protection needs.

Youth pose for a portrait at the Augusto Alvarado Castro Community Center in the 6 de Mayo community in San Pedro Sula, Honduras. Young women are sometimes forced to leave school because of gang violence.



© UNHCR / T. HERRERA

# Panama

**Panama developed a detailed MIRPS national action plan which outlines its proposed approach to strengthening the asylum system. Panama has seen a sudden increase in arrivals from The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Nicaragua, as well as the continued arrival of Colombians, Salvadorians and to a lesser extent, Honduran asylum-seekers. In addition, there is a significant mixed flow of “extra continentals” from Asia and Africa entering the southern Panamanian border, in addition to Cubans and other nationalities seeking to transit northward.**

It is imperative to increase the presence of the refugee office (ONPAR) at the southern and northern borders (Meteti and Paso Canoas), and in Tocumen International Airport. This response will require support with identifying and modifying, as necessary, premises as well as the development of a tailored capacity-building programme for all new (and existing) personnel. Training is also required to put into effect the new identification and referral protocol currently being finalized between ONPAR, the Migration Office and the National Border Service (SENAFRONT).

With respect to the RSD procedure, a new decree was adopted in line with Panama’s MIRPS commitments to ensure a more streamlined asylum process. Although the new asylum decree introduces positive modifications, other aspects remain of concern, namely the inclusion of a six-month deadline to seek asylum and an expedited procedure for manifestly unfounded claims. UNHCR will work with national authorities on drafting implementing regulations which mitigate some of the areas of uncertainty and concern with regard to the new decree, including with respect to manifestly unfounded claims.

**Mother-to-be Teresa found herself becoming weaker and weaker as her pregnancy advanced in her home among the indigenous people in the Costa Rican highlands.**

**She is a member of the Ngäbe-Buglé community, a traditional indigenous people whose lands are in present-day Costa Rica and Panama in Central America.**

**Born in Panama, where her birth was unregistered, she had been living in neighbouring Costa Rica without documents since her family crossed the border to pick coffee when she was just 14.**



Costa Rica. Indigenous lady Elida Andrade, pictured with her son Pablo.

© UNHCR / M. RODRIGUEZ-FARRELLY

 **15,300**

Refugees and asylum-seekers by end of 2018

 **10,300**

New asylum claims in 2018

 **UNHCR presence**

1 regional office  
30 staff  
7 implementing partners for Panama

Priority will also be given to increased protection monitoring in the border territory of Darien (border with Colombia) and Paso Canoas (border with Costa Rica), as well as to support local authorities, in order to strengthen their response to mixed flows and people with specific protection needs. Protection monitoring of both Nicaraguan and Venezuelan

caseloads will be enhanced, particularly in urban areas.

Solutions, with special emphasis on labour insertion, vocational training, and micro-credit will be promoted, as well as the work with local authorities and municipalities in enabling local integration.



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.



Mariana and Javier\* fled violence in Colombia after the guerrilla killed a family member and forced them from their land. Today they rebuild their lives in Panama where they hope to establish a business, just like they had back home.

## PRIORITIES

- Support the refugee office (ONPAR) with additional adjudicators and social workers to reduce the current backlog and to manage new claims. ONPAR's premises will be modified to create confidential interview spaces.
- Support ONPAR's existing data base to ensure reliable and updated data is available.
- Strengthen ONPAR's presence in strategic border points and at the international airport.
- Expand the legal aid and counselling programmes to be available from the start of the asylum process.
- Increase protection monitoring in border and urban areas.
- Scale up community-based protection initiatives to ensure early identification and referral of people of concern.



- Develop a communications campaign in partnership with the UN, civil society and local authorities to reduce xenophobia and discrimination attitudes towards asylum-seekers and refugees.
- Increase livelihoods and local integration initiatives (including legal, cultural and economic) for refugees and asylum-seekers.

“Now my two daughters have birth certificates, they have a future here. They can go to school, get an education and progress in life, become important people.”

—Norberto Andrade, former stateless person

## 7. Staffing and management



Costa Rica. Indigenous children sleeping. While they have the same parents, their situation is not the same, some are registered and some are not.

© UNHCR / L. ITURRIZA

For this appeal and its associated response to be successful, UNHCR needs its national and field offices across the region, as well as the overall staffing structure, to be reinforced. Special importance is given to compliance and due diligence functions through the creation of specific positions (Supply, Project Control, Admin-HR, etc.).

UNHCR monitoring will increase in line with its overall protection strategy. This includes establishing permanent field presence in Guatemala (Esquipulas – Tecún Umán) and additional field staff for border monitoring in strategic parts in the region.

In the national offices, UNHCR will also strengthen protection, program management, information management and public information capacity.

At the regional level, technical capacity will be strengthened in areas such as supply and procurement, CBI, interagency and field safety and security.



## 8. Monitoring, compliance and accountability to people of concern



UNHCR is committed to ensuring the integrity of its operations through ongoing and continuous monitoring and mitigating measures to stem fraud. Standard operating procedures are being established to foresee fraud or deal with possible risk situations related to humanitarian assistance, registration and resettlement, amongst others.

At the same time, UNHCR ensures that a thorough programme monitoring system is embedded in the overall program cycle and in line with its results framework. Both programme and project control functions will be reinforced in order to ensure due

diligence and adequate implementation of UNHCR's operations and resources. In addition, case management systems will be strengthened, in particular through the roll-out of UNHCR's global registration database (proGres) for all countries in the region which will better define and monitor the assistance provided to people of concern.

For its cash-based programming UNHCR operations in the region have been implementing specific monitoring tools on the use and application of multi-purpose cash grants which will allow to continuously improve its programming and delivery.

In line with its protection accountability, offices in the region have ensured throughout its implementation that accountability to affected people and the prevention of, mitigation, and response to sexual exploitation and abuse are fully mainstreamed in all programme activities and with partners. UNHCR also has put in place mechanisms to allow people of concern to express their grievances in an anonymous way.

UNHCR in the region has invested in communication with communities through the application of protection monitoring tools and information sessions. This investment ensures a more systematic identification of protection needs to feed into ongoing programmes. People of concern are equally consulted through participatory assessments and focus group discussions on programme development, implementation and evaluation.

The roll-out of communication and mass information initiatives such as the campaign “Confía en El Jaguar” and the website [help.unhcr.org](http://help.unhcr.org) have been prioritized in all countries of the region, serving both the purpose of providing relevant information to people of concern about their rights and available services, as well as establishing a two-way communication channel to provide feedback on UNHCR programmes and services.



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