

A Regional Humanitarian Response Plan for an Intensifying Humanitarian Crisis in the North of Central America

Displaced persons deserve the international community's commitment to ensure timely and effective humanitarian assistance. OCHA's coordination and leadership is essential for responding to the context of violence and displacement.

The growing humanitarian needs in the North of Central America are of grave concern to operational NGOs, and require an upscaling and strengthening of the humanitarian response. Violence perpetrated by criminal actors continues to generate widespread human rights violations, threats and intimidation, homicides, extortion, trafficking, kidnappings, child recruitment and sexual and gender based violence. As mentioned by the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons, such is the environment of fear and insecurity that many describe the scenario and its impacts as a situation similar to armed conflicts. Displacement is on the rise, both internally and across borders, while at the same time, options for international protection are dwindling as the United States and Mexico restrict access to asylum systems. Recent developments including efforts to reduce migration and increase deportation by the US and Mexico, and an increasingly closed border between Guatemala and Mexico, are pushing the region to breaking point. Forcibly displaced people experience high levels of vulnerability and lack access to basic needs such as food, housing, health, safe education, and employment. Children and adolescents are especially vulnerable, at risk of recruitment by criminal groups and separation from their families at the US border, as are women due to trafficking and sexual exploitation. The impacts of climate breakdown, including the prolonged drought in the Dry Corridor, have further increased the vulnerability of communities and exacerbated displacement.

Humanitarian actors working in the region are faced with extremely limited options of funding, most of which are allocated to development and disaster-response programmes (some key donors, such as ECHO, have recognised and are providing funding for the humanitarian needs due to violence). The high levels of violence mean that humanitarian organisations are limited in their operations and access. In the three countries there are hard-to-reach areas, particularly in places with a lack of state presence and high levels of violence. Capacity to identify needs is weak (especially as many people fear seeking assistance due to impunity), as is the response to human rights violations, humanitarian assistance for basic needs, and access to durable solutions.

We call OCHA and the Resident Coordinators to develop a Regional Humanitarian Response Plan, which would enable the humanitarian community to:

1. Call attention to the humanitarian crisis in the North of Central America at the international level, ensuring that all stakeholders (states, donors and the humanitarian system) recognise the importance of the humanitarian response, and the increasing costs and risks if violence and displacement are not addressed.
2. Ensure coordination, improve prioritisation, and reduce duplication of the humanitarian response. Strengthen information management services, informing a rapid, effective and principled response.
3. Mobilise and engage the full range of financial instruments, mechanisms and partners to ensure that the growing humanitarian needs are met.
4. Promote humanitarian leadership and coordination mechanisms at the country and regional level.



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The Protection Crisis in Figures

Homicides:

El Salvador and Honduras have the 1st and 4th highest homicide rates in the world at **51 and 40 homicides**¹ per 100'000 people respectively. The levels of **violent deaths are matched only by Syria, Venezuela and Afghanistan**². Half as many people have been killed in the last eight years alone as during 50 years of conflict in Colombia.

Disappearances:

At epidemic and increasing levels, with four women disappearing each day in Guatemala³, and ten people each day in El Salvador⁴. Close to 10'000 children have gone missing in Guatemala in the last 8 years and have not been found⁵.

Children out of school due to violence and poverty:

In 2018 alone, 49,000 children and adolescents dropped out of school in El Salvador⁶, as did 226,000 in Guatemala⁷. In total in Honduras, 900,000 children are out of school⁸. School desertions are related to recruitments into gangs, dangerous routes, violence within schools, shortage of schools, lack of infrastructure, poverty and displacement. In urban communities affected by violence in Honduras and El Salvador, **up to 50% of all children are out of school**⁹, levels higher than in Syria¹⁰.

Climate breakdown and hunger:

2.2 million people in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua have lost their crops due to rainfall and drought; 1.4 million urgently need food assistance¹¹. Humanitarian actors working in the region observe that these pressures are pushing more people to move to urban areas, already affected by poverty and violence, and/or to attempt the migration route to Mexico and the United States – where they are faced with high protection risks.

Internal displacement:

At least 190'000 people have been displaced in Honduras, 246'000 in El Salvador¹². Humanitarian organisations responding to internal displacement report that case numbers are growing exponentially and that in many projects, available funding for 2019 has already run out.

Asylum seekers and refugees:

In 2018, **Honduras, Guatemalans, Salvadorans and Mexicans were in the top ten nationalities claiming asylum in the world**, alongside people from Syria, Venezuela, South Sudan and Afghanistan. 123'100 new asylum claims were made from Central Americans in 2018 alone¹³. There are five times more refugees and asylum seekers from the region than five years ago, despite the reductions in homicide rates and the increasing humanitarian response¹⁴. Mexico has reported a 196 percent jump in asylum applications this year¹⁵.

Deportations:

Last year, close to 200'000 people were deported back to the region from Mexico and the United States, a 40% increase on the previous year¹⁶. The region has already received 70'000 people as of April this year¹⁷, many of who have protection needs (UNHCR estimates at least 20%)¹⁸.

Regional tensions:

Beyond the NCA, the political situation in neighbouring Nicaragua is also of grave concern and could further destabilise the region should the conditions worsen. In June, the US State Department officially announced details of massive cuts in foreign assistance to the region, including more than \$180 million from FY2017 funding and approximately \$370 million allocated in FY2018.

1. <https://homicide.igarape.org.br/>

2. <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/U-Reports/SAS-Report-GVD2017.pdf> (p. 25)

3. <https://elperiodico.com.gt/nacion/2018/11/12/cada-dia-desaparecen-cuatro-mujeres-en-guatemala/>

4. <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/brief/el-salvador-homicide-drop-smokescreen-increased-disappearances/>

5. <https://lahora.gt/sin-rastro-de-mas-de-9-mil-ninos-desaparecidos/>

6. <https://www.mined.gob.sv/EstadisticaWeb/observatorio/2018/OBSERVATORIO%20MINED%202018%20NACIONAL.pdf>

7. Gobierno de la República de Guatemala, Ministerio de Educación, Anuario Estadístico de la educación de Guatemala, Años: 1992 al 2018, 2019.

8. http://www.new.casa-alianza.org/hn/datos_descargables/observatorio/Informes-2019/InformesMensuales/02.InformeMensualFebrero2019.pdf

9. <https://www.nrc.no/news/2019/may/violence-has-pushed-thousands-of-children-in-honduras-and-el-salvador-out-of-school/>

10. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/180918%20Syria%20Crisis%20Education%202018%20Hires.pdf>

11. <https://www1.wfp.org/news/erratic-weather-patterns-central-american-dry-corridor-leave-14-million-people-urgent-need>

12. <http://www.internal-displacement.org/database/displacement-data>

13. <https://www.unhcr.org/statistics/unhcrstats/5d08d7ee7/unhcr-global-trends-2018.html>

14. <http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Expanding%20Operations%20in%20Central%20America%20-%20February%202019.pdf>

15. <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2019/6/5d0132624/unhcr-appeals-regional-talks-central-america-displacement.html>

16. <http://mic.iom.int/webntmi/descargas/tanca/2018/reg12-2018.pdf>

17. <http://mic.iom.int/webntmi/descargas/tanca/2019/reg4-2019.pdf>

18. <http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Expanding%20Operations%20in%20Central%20America%20-%20February%202019.pdf>