

RESPONSE TO ARRIVALS OF ASYLUM-SEEKERS FROM THE NORTH OF CENTRAL AMERICA TO MEXICO

4
“caravans”
since October

3,800
started an asylum
claim in Mexico

2,600
currently remain in the
Mexican asylum
process

+30%
of people who
entered Mexico
with the “caravans”
claimed asylum

The above information is based on public information provided by the Mexican Government, last updated on 15 November 2018.

HIGHLIGHTS OF UNHCR RESPONSE



36 deployments to COMAR to support the Mexican government with **asylum registration**, including in Tapachula, Tenosique, Acayucan, and Mexico City and with a mobile unit in Tijuana. **Over 30%** of people from the “caravans” were **registered for Asylum in Mexico**.



The **individual advice** given to people from the “caravans” via the **El Jaguar Facebook help-page** has increased by **128%**. The page reached over 1.4 million individual users over the past 30 days.








Waiting line in front of the COMAR tent in Mexico City, where UNHCR deployes support registration of asylum claims.

Background

Since mid-October 2018, several **organized groups of people from the North of Central America region**, Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador, have been traveling north in hope of reaching Mexico and the United States. In Mexico, there are approximately 7,000-9,000 people in these groups, widely referred to as “caravans”, currently spread out between Mexico City and Baja California. Among them are people **fleeing persecution and violence** and in need of **international protection**. Many are vulnerable and in need of **humanitarian assistance**, including women and around 2,300 children. New-born babies, pregnant women, elderly people and people with disabilities have also been identified. Many suffer mental and physical stress, health issues and exhaustion. The groups can be divided into four main “caravans” and various smaller groups, as the groups merge and split-up on their route northward. **UNHCR supports national and local authorities; provides information on and supports facilitation of access to the Mexican asylum system;** and provides humanitarian assistance to those who seek asylum. Additional UNHCR **resources and staff are being mobilized** along the routes.

Population movements and composition

	1 st “caravan”	2 nd “caravan”	3 rd “caravan”
 Mexico	18 October	29 October	2 November
	Initially 5,600 people, according to federal authorities	1,050 people, according to National Human Rights Commission (CNDH)	1,500 people
	60% young families, pregnant women, 400 children, elderly	95% young men, pregnant women, children	60% young families, pregnant women, 200 children, elderly (<i>correction of earlier reports</i>)
	Mexicali (300 people) Tijuana (4,520)	Tijuana (300); Mexico City (100) Groups are moving via states of Jalisco, Nayarit, and Sinaloa towards Tijuana	Mexico City (900), Small groups are moving via states of Jalisco, Nayarit, and Sinaloa towards Tijuana
	Mainly from Honduras but also El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua	Mainly from Honduras but also El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua	mainly from El Salvador

The above information is based on estimates by Federal Authorities, the National Human Rights Commission and UNHCR field staff. The information provides a snapshot from 21 November 12h00 of a fast-changing situation.

A **fourth group** of 250 people mainly from El Salvador, was detained in Metapa de Dominguez on 21 November.

UNHCR Presence

Offices, Mexico

- Mexico City
- Tapachula
- Tenosique
- Acayucan
- Saltillo

ADDITIONAL STAFF

International emergency response team mobilized

10 additional staff in **Tijuana**

7 additional international staff deployed in **Mexico City**

3 additional international staff deployed in **Tapachula**

36 deployments to **COMAR**

Main Activities

- On 19 October 2018, the arrival day of the first “caravan”, the **Government of Mexico requested UNHCR support** in particular to **address the situation of asylum-seekers**, in coordination with relevant authorities. UNHCR agreed to assist in responding to the situation by providing information to people in the “caravans” on access to asylum procedures; enhancing COMAR capacity, in particular for registration; providing assistance to asylum seekers through shelters and cash-based humanitarian assistance; and providing support for durable solutions. **UNHCR Mexico scaled up operations** in Chiapas, Oaxaca, Veracruz and Mexico City and is now also present in Tijuana.



Locations of migrants and asylum-seekers of the “caravans”, UNHCR offices and mobile teams.

Working with partners and coordination

Given the mixed nature of these movements and the complexity of the situation, UNHCR coordinates its activities with the relevant government entities, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), other agencies inside and outside the UN system, including the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), civil society, faith-based organizations, the private sector and others, as relevant. This collaboration aims at a **whole of government and whole of society response**, achieved in line with the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (**MIRPS**).

- The COMAR Tijuana deployment operates in the context of the Job Fair organized by the **National Employment Service**. As of 19 November, state authorities are offering bus transport to the nearby Job Fair for those asylum-seekers and migrants housed at the Ciudad Deportiva B. The Job Fair will operate daily for one month and participating businesses will offer **more than 20,000 vacancies**. Employment requires having regularized one's presence in Mexico, either by registering with the Migration Institute (INM) or claiming asylum through COMAR, and both entities are present at the Job Fair location. COMAR, with logistical support from UNHCR, registers asylum claims on the spot and issues relevant documentation (including a national identification number for asylum-seekers, or "CURP").
- UNHCR is considering expanding the **vocational training** component of asylum-seeker shelters located on the Northern border, as an entry point for job placement and local integration support. On Monday 12 November 2018, UNHCR and **IOM** met with the **Regional Coordinator of the Scalabrini International Migration Network** in Tapachula and the director of several shelters located in Mexico (Tapachula, Mexico City, Guadalajara and Tijuana) to discuss this possibility. Scalabrini vocational training centres were recently inaugurated in Mexico City and Guadalajara.
- UNHCR is actively advocating for the **inclusion of asylum seekers in the national health scheme**, Seguro Popular. UNHCR and four sister agencies composing the **inter-agency health and migration working group** participated in a workshop with health service providers in Tapachula.
- UNHCR continues to convene a **working group on international protection in Tapachula** that brings together UNICEF, IOM and civil society organisations present in the area. UNHCR also continues to participate in the **daily coordination meetings held by the municipal Government in Mexico City**.
- UNHCR supported a **volunteer initiative by Salvadorian asylum-seekers in Tapachula**. To show their gratitude to the Mexican population and state to welcome them and allow to build a new life in safety, they suggested a "clean-up day", and mobilized around **120 volunteers** to jointly clean up streets and parks and whitewashed public walls in Tapachula. The municipality provided cleaning equipment and UNHCR distributed food and drinks to the volunteers.



Protection

Measures undertaken by UNHCR aim at identifying, processing and assisting people in need of international protection as well as identifying and referring people with specific needs. These include, *inter alia*:

- **Increasing capacity of COMAR** to register and process claims. The 36 contractors that UNHCR has seconded to COMAR in order to support registration are now also active in Tapachula, Tenosique, Acayucan, Mexico City and - with a mobile team – in Tijuana. Since the first “caravan” arrived to Mexico, **over 3,400 asylum claims** have been filed.
- **Strengthening UNHCR protection response capacity** to help protect the most vulnerable people in the “caravans” and meet the protection needs of asylum-seekers and refugees. In this effort UNHCR has coordinated with and trained government personnel, legal aid partners and volunteers along the “caravan” routes in Chiapas, Oaxaca, Veracruz, Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Baja California.
- **Identifying specific needs** among those who have sought asylum and implementing structured **referral mechanisms** through mobile protection staff deployed at key locations along the routes. This includes referrals of unaccompanied children, survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, and people in urgent need of medical support. UNHCR has identified over 600 cases of persons with specific needs and **referred them to appropriate service providers** in Chiapas, Oaxaca, Veracruz and Mexico City.
- **Increasing outreach efforts** via UNHCR mobile protection teams at strategic locations along the routes. These mobile teams have reached over **6,000** people in the “caravans”, informing them – both verbally and through dissemination of information materials - **on their right to seek asylum** and **the Mexican asylum procedures**. UNHCR’s outreach efforts complement those of the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) and civil society partners. UNHCR will increase its outreach efforts by deploying new teams in Tijuana, and by training volunteers to further expand its reach, both in terms of breadth and time spent counselling per individual.
- **Providing a Facebook help-page** (www.facebook.com/ConfiaEnElJaguar) for people in search of international protection jointly with the National Human Rights Commission, COMAR, IOM, UNODC and UNICEF. The direct message function of the page provides the opportunity for specific, anonymous legal counselling. El Jaguar reached this month over **1.4 million users** and the activities, including **individual counselling, have increased by 128% (5 individual cases a day)** since the first “caravan” arrived to Mexico.
- **Distributing materials to inform about asylum in Mexico**. To date, UNHCR has distributed **16,000 print information products**, including the brochure “Step by step guidance to the Mexican asylum procedure” (12,940 distributed), maps on services for asylum-seekers, and El Jaguar Stickers (over 3,200 distributed).
- **Providing a free telephone helpline** through which people can seek support and information on international Protection in Mexico: **Tel. 01800 226 8769**.

Shelter & cash-based assistance

- Once registered for asylum, most people traveling with the “caravans” have been **transferred to specific shelters**, where they are being provided with **orientation and assistance**. These shelters are mostly run by UNHCR partners, church groups and civil society.
- UNHCR continues to work with partners to **increase its shelter capacity** for asylum seekers. The office is identifying shelter options in Tijuana, despite **specific challenges**, including the absence of a UNHCR field office and a lack of implementing partner agreements. Moreover, the shelter/housing market is already saturated by the approximately 2,500 people who were waiting in Tijuana to seek asylum in the U.S. *prior* to the arrival of the “caravans”. The shelter strategy in Tapachula can serve as a best practice, where UNHCR and its partners were able to double the shelter capacity to 962 shelter spaces.
- UNHCR increased its distribution of **Cash-Based Assistance** by 115% over the previous week. Over **2,450** asylum-seekers have received cash-based assistance from UNHCR, totalling over **4.7m MXN**. This includes people who were released from detention, facilitating their ability to rent their own accommodation. This will gradually free up additional shelter space for new arrivals.

Durable Solutions

- UNHCR has the capacity to support **integration in the labor market** through already existing integration programs in states such as Coahuila and Jalisco. This requires authorization by COMAR for each case and issuance of a provisional CURP (national identification number for asylum-seekers). UNHCR is therefore advocating for the Government of Mexico to **expedite processing of documentation for refugees and asylum-seekers** in Chiapas and Baja California and to **allow for relocation and local integration** within Mexico. This would ease pressure on strained services, particularly in Chiapas State.
- UNHCR launched a new initiative to provide **individualized local integration support in Mexico City and its suburbs**. The system is conducted by UNHCR partners and is based on a home visit scheme, with close follow-up on individual integration processes. The purpose is to provide guidance on integration opportunities to asylum-seekers located in Mexico City. As part of this initiative, UNHCR plans to implement a similar system in Tapachula, Tenosique and Acayucan.



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