

INTER-AGENCY RESPONSE LARGE MOVEMENTS FROM THE NORTH OF CENTRAL AMERICA

15 - 30 November 2018



Persons mobilized since
mid-October 2018

16,000

41% from Honduras.
47% from El
Salvador



1,058

Children among
the group in
Tijuana (UNICEF:
est. data from
Mexican
government)



+3,000

Asylum claims in
Mexico and
Guatemala

ACCORDING TO INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED IN GUATEMALA*, APPROXIMATELY



48%
Travel in
families



71%
Mention having fled
from gang violence



74%
Considers they would be
at risk if returned

+7.000

Returnees to Honduras, over 3,000
are children and youth under the age
of 21, 765 unaccompanied (DINAF, to
23 November)

**Preliminary data gathered between 29 October and 21 November 2018*

Since mid-October, several persons organized in groups left the North of Central America – particularly from Honduras and El Salvador – heading northward with the hope of reaching Mexico and the United States of America. These groups are comprised of persons with international protection needs, and according to interviews more than 74% consider being at risk if they were to be returned home. By the end of November, the number of persons transiting through Guatemala is estimated at 16,000, while the Mexican government has officially reported the presence of some 8,000 in its territory.

During the past two weeks, some 6,000 persons from these groups arrived at the northern border, most with the stated aim of crossing to the United States of America. Due to the long waiting time to cross the Mexican-US border and the high number of persons in need of assistance, alternative shelter arrangements are being developed by national authorities, where basic emergency assistance can be accessed. The incoming federal government has assumed leadership of the response in coordination with state and local authorities to ensure access to shelter and security.

In light of this mixed movements of asylum-seekers and migrants, the United Nations system and partners in the field have been supporting governments in the countries of origin, transit and destination to provide a response to the specific needs of this population, according to the respective mandates.



Figure 1. UNHCR stand in Tijuana, Mexico, where information on the asylum procedure is provided. UNHCR/Roberto Fontanini

In Mexico, over 3,800 persons that entered the country with the large groups sought asylum, 3,300 of whom are estimated to remain in the Mexican asylum procedure. Coordination of the humanitarian response in Tijuana and Mexicali is being led by the federal Civil Protection authorities, while UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM, OCHA and ICRC form part of a working group led by Civil Protection and includes at least 17 government bodies such as ministries of health, education, national security, social welfare, finance, the Army, the Navy, DIF, State Representation of Baja California as well as the Mexican Red Cross.

UNHCR continues to respond to the situation by providing information on the Mexican asylum procedure to persons who arrived in the groups. To date, over 16,000 mass information materials have been distributed to over 8,000 persons through mobile teams along strategic locations in the routes. In Tijuana alone, over 100 volunteers have been trained to support information and outreach efforts. Furthermore, the office runs a Facebook help-page that provides information on the Mexican asylum system and has been accessed over 1.4 million times over the last month.

UNHCR enhanced capacity of the Mexican Refugee Commission (COMAR) to register asylum claims by seconding 43 contractors, while registration brigades have been deployed to Tijuana and Mexicali. UNHCR is also providing assistance to asylum-seekers through shelters across the country and over 2,500 people from the groups have been provided with over MXN4.7 million in cash-based assistance in Mexico. Mobile protection desks have been set-up on strategic locations along the routes, and UNHCR has mapped and established referral mechanisms to specialized services for persons with specific needs, including survivors of SGBV, LGBTI and unaccompanied children. To achieve this, UNHCR Mexico scaled-up operations in Chiapas, Oaxaca, Veracruz, Guadalajara and Mexico City, and is now also present in Tijuana/Mexicali.

UNICEF prioritizes persons seeking asylum in Tapachula and Tijuana. In Tijuana, a pavilion with services for children has been installed in the main shelter, aiding some 450 children per week, including psychosocial support, education and water; nearly 100 litres of water were provided during the first two days. In Tapachula, psychosocial support is provided to children and families in two shelters, while water

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purification systems were installed in Chiapas. UNICEF Works with the government to ensure the appropriate management of cases of children with international protection needs.

In **Guatemala**, UNHCR leads the Protection Working group, and coordinates interventions with other agencies and partners to develop joint activities with local authorities, provide information on asylum procedures, monitor the situation, provide humanitarian assistance and promote the response to the needs of persons at high risk, including unaccompanied children. In continuance to interviews carried out with members of these groups, it has been possible that over 70% of them have fled gang violence in their countries of origin, while 74% considers they will face risks upon return.

UNICEF provides psychosocial support at the Migrant House in Guatemala City and Tecun Uman. With the aim of strengthening the capacity of the Ombudsperson for children and adolescents, UNICEF has supported to hiring of additional staff for the office of the Ombudsperson for Human Rights in Tecun Uman.

In **Honduras**, UNHCR works alongside its partners and the government to support the reception of persons returned from Mexico, as well as the identification of particular protection needs. To the end of November, it is estimated that some 7,500 Hondurans have returned home, many of whom are unaccompanied or separated children. UNHCR will continue to work with partners and the government in Honduras to roll-out tools to mitigate risks within the context of forced displacement.

UNICEF has hired six social workers to facilitate the reintegration of children and their families. With the aim of supporting the efforts of the DINAF (government institution for children, adolescents and families) in providing immediate protection and relevant information, UNICEF has hired eight protection officers with presence in main border areas.

In **El Salvador**, UNHCR works alongside other agencies and partners with the aim of coordinating the identification of protection needs among returnees. An operational inter-institutional plan is being prepared to this end. To date, the government has registered the voluntary return of over 500 Salvadorians.

UNICEF has distributed 51,000 child-friendly brochures with messages on protection in transit through local authorities. 223 kits for children have been distributed, particularly to returned children, while an additional 500 will be handed over to the General Migration Directorate for further distribution. With the support from community radio ARPAS, messages on migration and child protection are being disseminated, with national coverage.

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