

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

**3,300**

people that entered the country with “caravans” are currently seeking asylum in Mexico

**24-28%**

of people that entered the country with “caravans” are currently seeking asylum in Mexico

**2,839**


people attended the Job Fair in Tijuana

**12%**

of the people attending the Job Fair claimed asylum

*The above information is based on latest public information provided by the Mexican Government and UNHCR estimates.*

### HOW WE HELP FINDING SOLUTIONS

 UNHCR promotes **solutions right from the start**. We support the Mexican government in an innovative process, in which people from the “caravans” are supported to build a **new life in safety and dignity**. To achieve this, the Mexican government created a **one-stop-shop** as part of a **Job Fair in Tijuana**, including:

- ✓ UNHCR supports the government providing **bus shuttles** for people from the emergency shelter to the Fair;
- ✓ At the Fair people can **apply for asylum or regularize their migratory status** and **receive a work permit**;
- ✓ Once regularized, people get job advice and can directly **sign a work contract**;
- ✓ At the UNHCR protection desk, people get **support for specific needs** and, if required, referrals to specialized services, such as child protection or sexual and gender-based violence;
- ✓ UNHCR provides access to **safe shelters** for individuals and families, who seek asylum in Mexico;
- ✓ Once in the shelter, we support with access to healthcare, education and support to access for long-term accommodation to **start a new life in safety and dignity** and to **locally integrate**.

### THE TIJUANA JOB FAIR

- runs since 19 November;
- is organized by the **National Employment Service**;
- several Chambers of Commerce, such as INDEX, and private businesses offer **more than 20,000 vacancies**;
- COMAR **registered to date over 320 asylum-claims at the Fair** and issued **temporary work permits** (through the issuance of the CURP);
- UNHCR supports through COMAR deployments, logistics, **a protection desk** and referral mechanisms.



Ready to start their new lives: people from the “caravans” seek asylum, obtain work permits and sign job contracts at the Job Fair in Tijuana on Thursday, 22 November 2018

# UNHCR Presence

## Offices, Mexico

- Mexico City
- Tapachula
- Tenosique
- Acayucan
- Saltillo

## ADDITIONAL STAFF

**International emergency response team** mobilized

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

3 additional international staff deployed in **Tapachula**

12 staff with mobile teams in **Tijuana and Mexicali**

43 deployments to **COMAR**

## Main Activities

- Since 19 October 2018, the arrival day of the first “caravan”, UNHCR has scaled up its presence in Mexico. The agency focuses on 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, Guadalajara and Mexico City and is now also present with mobile teams in Tijuana/Mexicali.



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

## Background

Since mid-October 2018, several **organized groups of people from the North of Central America**, Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador and some people from Nicaragua, have been traveling north in hope of reaching Mexico and the United States. The majority of people, who entered Mexico with one of these groups, widely referred to as “caravans”, are currently in the state of 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**. Children, including new-born babies, pregnant women, elderly people and people with disabilities have been identified. Many suffer mental and physical stress, health issues and exhaustion. **UNHCR supports national, state and local authorities; provides information on and supports facilitation of access to the Mexican asylum system;** provides humanitarian assistance and promote integration of those, who seek asylum.

## Economic Inclusion of Asylum-Seekers

After **fleeing violence or persecution**, the opportunity to work and earn a living is one of the most effective ways people can **rebuild their lives** with dignity and in peace. We work to promote **economic inclusion of those forced to flee their homes** by advocating for their right to work and building their livelihoods through market-oriented programmes. People re-gain self-reliance avoiding dependency on humanitarian aid and social welfare. We strive to empower asylum,-seekers and refugees to build strong social, economic and cultural ties with their host communities, and to strengthen their capacity to claim their rights. Our work in this area is guided by core protection principles – including diversity, equity, access and sustainability – outlined in the **UNHCR economic Inclusion Strategy Concept Note** and the **Policy Guide on Entrepreneurship for Migrants and Refugees**.

## Population Movements

In Mexico, the “caravans” increasingly split up and re-group on their way north. Hence, the widely-used differentiation into “caravans” might no longer serve as most useful analytical classification. Due to the localized need for UNHCR support, this reporting rather differentiates between locations.



According to government statistics, 8,247 people are reported to have entered Mexico as part of the “caravans”. Organizers estimated up to 11,200 people.



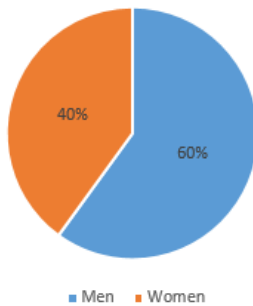
According to government statistics, 2,372 people are reported to stay at the Barretal shelter in Tijuana. Around 380 people remain in Mexico City. 2,435 people are estimated to remain in Tapachula, Chiapas, currently in the asylum process.

## Profile of Asylum-Seekers

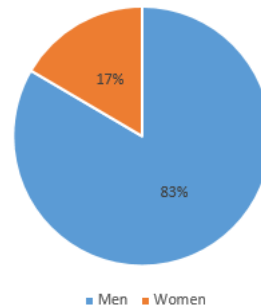
### Age and Gender

Asylum-seekers that came with one of the “caravans” are, according to the federal government, around 60% male and 40% female with around 25% children. Asylum-seekers in Tijuana, however, are mainly men with only around 17% women. This tends to support reports that more men continued the onwards journey through Mexico, while more women and children remain in the southern and central parts of the country. While approximately 25% of asylum-seekers from the caravans are children, only around 8% of the asylum-seekers in Tijuana are children.

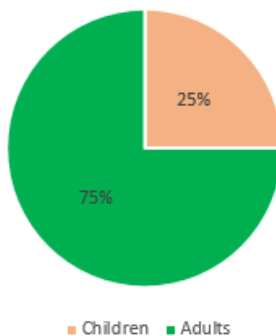
Gender composition of asylum-seekers along the "caravan" routes



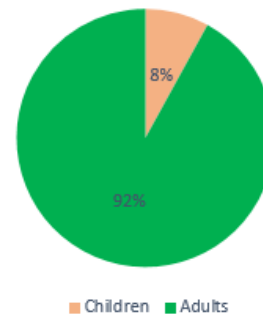
Gender composition of asylum-seekers in Tijuana



Adult and Children asylum-seekers from the "caravans" across Mexico



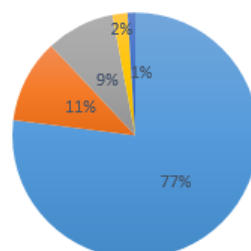
Adults and children amongst asylum-seekers in Tijuana



### Country of Origin

The majority of asylum-seekers in Tijuana are from Honduras, followed by people from El Salvador and Guatemala. However, there are also a few asylum-seekers from Nicaragua and Venezuela.

Countries of Origin of Asylum-Seekers in Tijuana



## Working with partners and coordination

Given the mixed nature of the movements and the complexity of the situation, UNHCR coordinates with relevant government entities, other agencies inside and outside the UN system, 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**).

### Tijuana and Mexicali

- Coordination of the humanitarian response in Tijuana and Mexicali is being led by the federal Civil Protection authorities. UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM, OCHA and ICRC form part of a working group that is led by Civil Protection and which includes also at least 17 government bodies, including ministries of health, education, national security, social welfare, finance, the Army, the Navy, DIF, State Representation of Baja California. UNHCR continues responding to the situation by providing information to people, who arrived in the “caravans”, about the Mexican asylum procedures.
- On Sunday, 02 December, the Federal Government presented to the State Government of Baja California an **inter-sectional programme for the response to the central-American migrants and asylum-seekers in Baja California**. The programme focuses, firstly, on reviewing the shelters in Tijuana, to meet minimum standards and ensure dignified shelter conditions, and secondly, to increase security both, for migrant and asylum-seekers as well as in the wider Baja California.
- UNHCR **acknowledges COMAR’s** decision from 26 November to **open an office in Tijuana** and a satellite office in **Mexicali**, to register asylum claims. UNHCR continues to support COMAR through 43 dedicated deployments as well as logistics.

### Tapachula

- UNHCR continues to chair the weekly **protection working group** meetings in Tapachula. The group follows a whole-of-society approach and includes government and UN agencies, international and national NGOs and faith based organizations. The team works on a joint plan to address in a coordinated way key protection challenges and gaps and referral pathways, including regarding housing, delivery of cash as aid, protection of unaccompanied children, and access to employment as well as health. Furthermore, the group works on emergency preparedness.

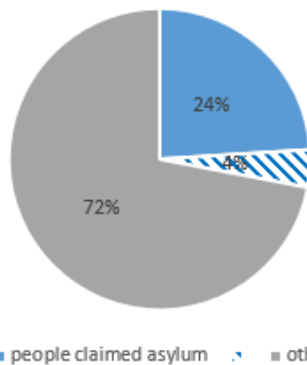


## Protection



UNHCR estimates that **over 3,310 people** from the “caravans” have **claimed asylum and remain in the process**. The majority of people that claimed asylum remain in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas with around 2,435 people currently in the process. In Mexico City, UNHCR estimates that already 414 people claimed asylum, in Oaxaca over 50 people and in Baja California over 410 people, with over 320 in Tijuana and 90 in Mexicali.

People that arrive with the “caravans” and claimed asylum

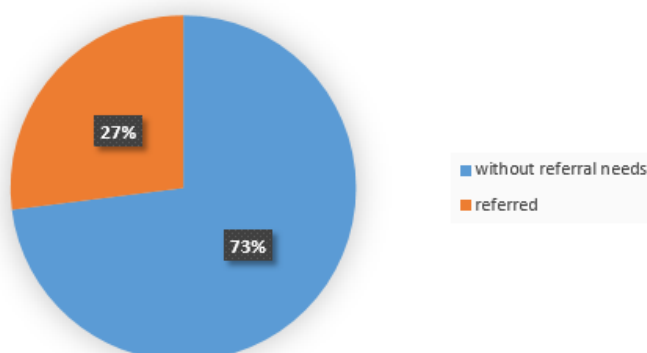


UNHCR, based on government updates, estimates that 24-28% of people, who arrived with the “caravans” are currently in the asylum procedure in Mexico.

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

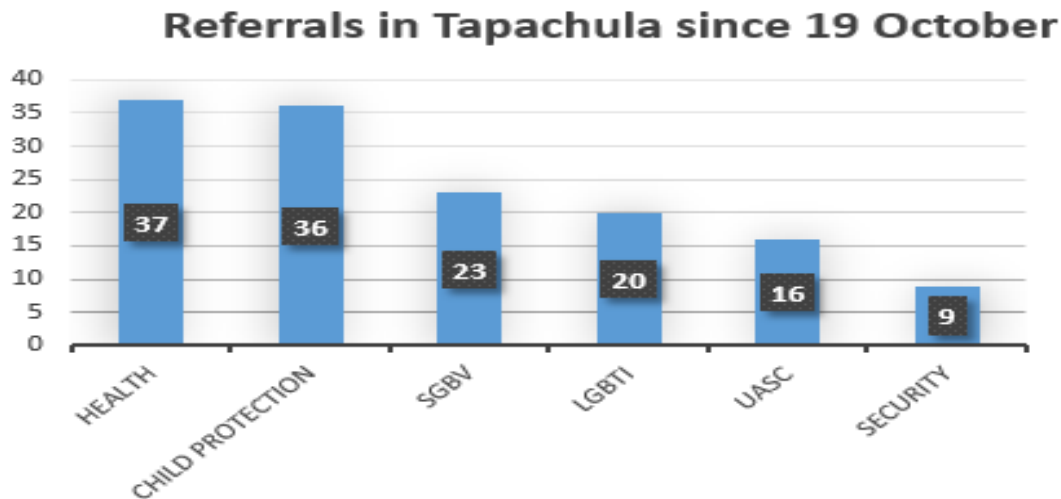
- UNHCR set-up mobile **protection desks** in key locations of the “caravan” routes. At the protection desks asylum-seekers are being provided with advice and information on the Mexican asylum system. Furthermore, people with **specific needs are being identified** and referred to specialized services. UNHCR directly and through partners, also has installed protection desks in several shelters to which asylum-seekers are referred to, where additional information on humanitarian assistance, education/training and local integration is being provided. **Referral pathways** for SGBV have been established along strategic points at the route, in coordination with local and federal authorities.

Referral Rate, Tapachula since 19 October



Since the arrival of the first “caravan” on 19 October, in the southern city of Tapachula, UNHCR advised 522 people at the protection desks. Of these, 141 or 27%, have been identified to have specific needs and have been referred to specialized services.

The below graphic shows the breakdown of needs identified and referred to special services including health, child protection, SGBV, LGBTI, unaccompanied children (UAC) and security:



- Through its **mass information strategy**, UNHCR provides people from the “caravans” with information on their right to asylum and specifically on the Mexican asylum-system. UNHCR mobilized **information teams** along the “caravan” routes that **distributed print materials to inform about asylum in Mexico**. Since Monday, 26 November, UNHCR has a mobile information desk in Tijuana to implement the mass-information strategy, where trained volunteers and UNHCR staff distribute materials and inform people. Since then, the UNHCR outreach team in Tijuana, supported by trained volunteers, informed 4327 persons on the Mexican asylum procedure. This work was done with the help of 16 volunteers, 2 paralegals and 3 lawyers. Furthermore, there has been a significant increase of people accessing the online-help page “El Jaguar” from locations in Baja California since the UNHCR team and volunteers are present.

Access of Facebook help-page per State – August 2018

STATES	PEOPLE
Mexico City	5,589
Guatemala	1,578
Jalisco	683
Chiapas	539
Mexico State	460
Puebla	441
Quintana Roo	403

Access of Facebook help-page per State – November 2018

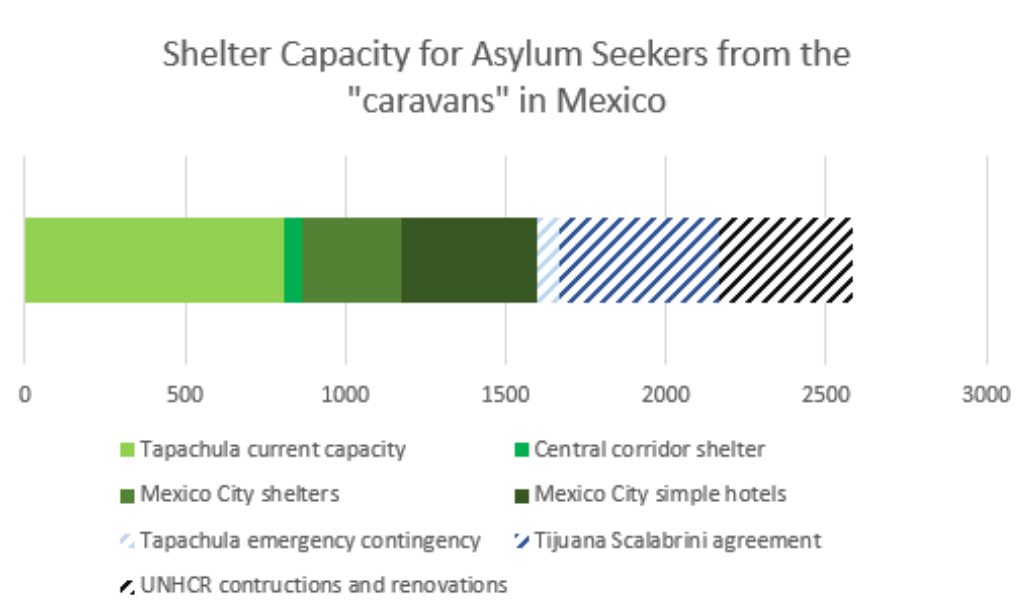
STATES	PEOPLE
Mexico City	183,074
Jalisco	81,759
Puebla	79,904
Guanajuato	75,120
<b>Baja California</b>	<b>71,512</b>
Coahuila	42,320

- UNHCR works towards ensuring that **people in need of international protection have information about and access to the asylum procedures and are not detained**. UNHCR acknowledges the efforts by the Mexican government to release people from detention (so-called migrant stations) and continues to support COMAR to speedily issue documentation in order to release people in need of international protection from detention. Over the last two weeks, there were two highlights regarding detention:
  - On 21 November, around 250 Salvadorians that crossed the southern Mexican border were **detained by Mexican migration authorities**. UNHCR conducted detention monitoring visits, informed people about their right to seek asylum and identified persons in need of international protection. Last week, UNHCR was able to support **51 people in need of international protection** to access to the Mexican asylum system and their subsequent **release from detention in Chiapas**, with some of those belonging to this group of Salvadorians.
  - UNHCR monitors the detention centre Estación Migratoria de Tijuana. From Wednesday 28 November to Saturday 1 December, 262 people were detained, most of whom have been deported. On average per monitoring visit 5 people request refugee status per day. UNHCR is concerned that inadequate information is provided on access to asylum to people in detention. Some days there are two buses to deport up to 100 people. UNHCR works with the detention authorities and COMAR to ensure that people are being given access to asylum procedures.
- UNHCR regularly meets with **Child protection** authorities, COMAR, INM, DIF, UNICEF and others, in order to discuss the situation of unaccompanied children (UASC) and children at risk and established specialized referral pathways. UNHCR advocated that for each child a **“best interest determination” (BID)** has to be conducted and that **no child should be deported** without BID and in **no circumstances should be put in detention**. UNHCR closely works with the child protection authorities and other stakeholders to ensure that children get released from detention and transferred to alternative care arrangements that conform to child protection standards such as the open doors shelter SOS Children’s Villages and Covenant House. Judicial authorities ruled favourably on a constitutional rights claim filed by UNHCR legal partners, alleging omission by the federal child protection authorities to respond to children traveling in the “caravans”. The first ruling suspends deportation of any child that entered the country during the “caravans”. The second ruling orders the intervention of the federal child protection authority to send specialized personnel to assess the situation, establish a comprehensive plan to respond to these needs, as well as execute BID procedures including issuing binding measures to relevant authorities.



## Shelter & cash-based assistance

- In line with UNHCR's mandate, the shelter strategy focuses on **working with partners to provide access to shelter for people in need of international protection**. The below graph shows the current shelter capacity for asylum-seekers from the "caravans" in the three main locations Tapachula with central corridor, Mexico City and Tijuana. The graph shows also planned capacities that include an agreement with the Scalabrini migrant shelter network to increase shelter capacity in Tijuana by 500 spaces. This can be expanded to up to 1,000 spaces. Furthermore, it includes an emergency contingency that has been built-up in Tapachula as well as shelter spaces that will be made available through UNHCR renovation and constructions.



- Given the organizations expertise in **emergency shelter coordination**, UNHCR is also providing the federal government in Tijuana with recommendations and know-how to improve the emergency shelter options in line with **international standards** that reflect protection and security considerations. In a meeting with the federal authorities, COMAR, UNICEF and ICRC, UNHCR shared a recommendations catalogue and site management plan on Sunday, 2 December. Furthermore, the coordinating participants forged an agreement to facilitate multi-sector aid delivery.
- UNHCR further increased its distribution of cash-based assistance to people, who have sought asylum in southern and central Mexico. Over the last five weeks, UNHCR has provided **over 2,500 asylum-seekers** from the "caravans" with **cash-based assistance** in central and southern Mexico. This amounts to over 4.7 million MXN. Once provided with cash, people can enter the local housing market, which supports self-reliance and at the same time relaxes the shelter situation for asylum-seekers, creating space for new arrivals.

## Durable Solutions

- UNHCR supports a close link between registration of asylum claims, provision of jobs, identification of and relocation to adequate shelter and local integration, in order to create pathways for solutions right from the start. Beyond the above described contribution to the “Tijuana one-stop-shop”, UNHCR provides pathways for asylum-seekers to **support local integration**, including **access to the labour market and national services**, such as health, welfare and education. To be fully successful in this endeavour, UNHCR continues to advocate to the Mexican government to relax restrictions on freedom of movement and allow for asylum-seekers to relocate in parts of the country, where local integration is most promising.

## Donor Support

### Special thanks to the major donors to UNHCR Mexico in 2018

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### LINKS

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