

PROTECTION IN THE NORTH OF CENTRAL AMERICA

Snapshot June – July 2018



Key figures

High levels of violence persist:



283 homicides in Honduras, 303 in El Salvador, and 316 in Guatemala in June alone.

In June and July in Honduras, 3 schools and 2 peaceful demonstrations were attacked. In El Salvador, 1 health centre 2 police cars, 2 bus routes, 2 schools were attacked. In Guatemala, 8 environmental defenders and indigenous leaders were murdered, and attacks were reported during a demonstration, as well as against 11 census-takers and 4 buses.



In June alone, 213 rapes were registered in El Salvador. In Guatemala, every four hours, a girl under the age of 15 gives birth.



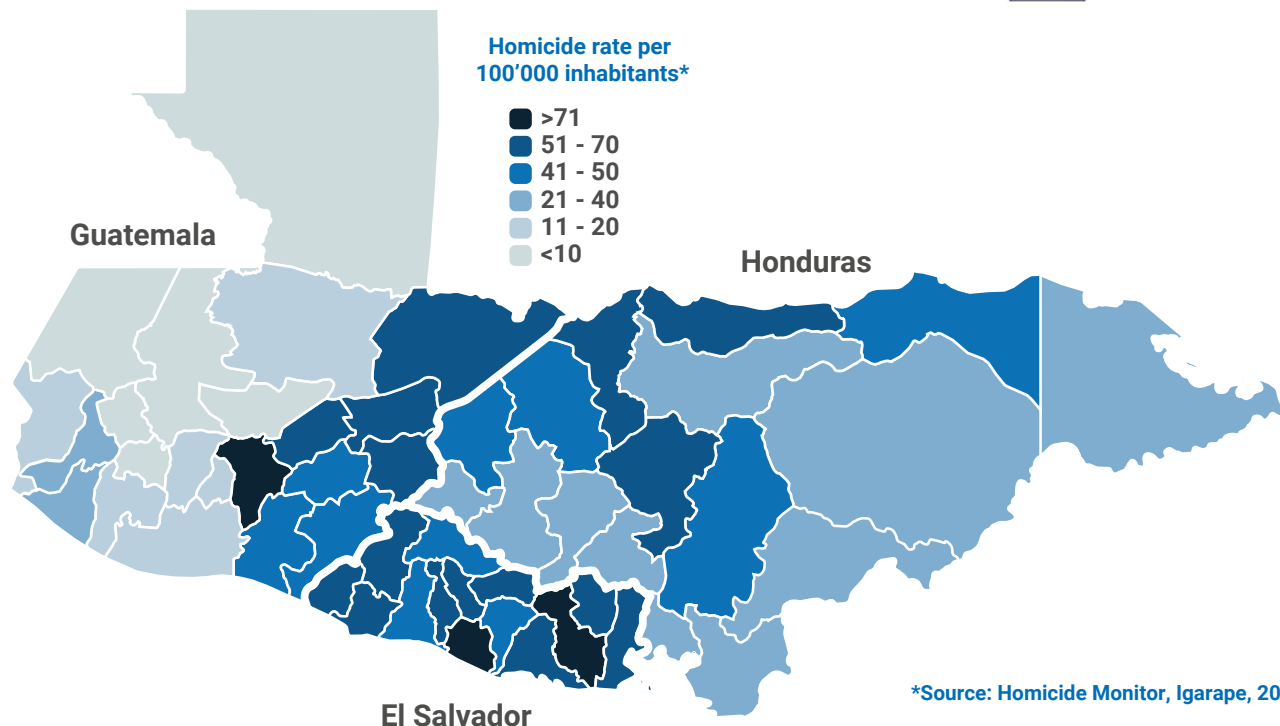
In El Salvador, in June and July 141 reports of extortion were registered. In June alone there were 749 reports of extortion in Guatemala.



In June and July, 7 kidnappings, 7 cases of human trafficking, and 13 massacres were reported in the press in Honduras, and 22 kidnappings were reported in El Salvador (observers estimate that 5 people disappear each day). In Guatemala a nationwide alert for missing children was activated 308 times.



During June and July 13,001 people were deported to Honduras, 4,096 to El Salvador and 13,313 to Guatemala.



*Source: Homicide Monitor, Igarape, 2018.

This report, led by the Norwegian Refugee Council and supported by UNHCR, stems from an initiative of the REDLAC Regional Protection Group and aims to improve the analysis and visibility of the ongoing protection crisis in the North of Central America. The analysis is based on a series of qualitative and quantitative indicators on violence and displacement, using as primary sources inputs from operational organisations based in the region and official statistics, as well as reports from a wide range of press, academia and civil society.

The analysis is based on available data for June and July 2018, as well as information from the past two years, for comparison and to fill data gaps. The report will be updated every two months in 2018. Ongoing support from humanitarian organisations is therefore essential for ensuring the quality and coherence of each update. The reports are also intended to support the Protection Groups based in each of the countries of the NCA, to improve context analysis and joint positioning for responding to displacement.

KEY MESSAGES



Protection crisis:

- **Forcibly displaced people** experience **high levels of vulnerability and lack access to basic needs** such as food, housing, health, education, and employment. **Limited access to durable solutions.** Communities affected by violence experience difficulties in accessing basic public services.
- High levels of **impunity** and under reporting of crimes. The implementation of an adequate response is significantly hindered by the lack of consistent monitoring on both displacement and a range of indicators of violence.
- The majority of people deported back to the NCA are **men** (87% of adult deportees to Honduras are male) as are the victims of homicides (90% of homicide victims in Honduras are male). Increase in **femicides** in El Salvador. **Children and adolescents** are particularly affected by sexual violence (79% of sexual abuses in El Salvador are committed against minors), kidnappings (308 children disappeared in Guatemala in 2 months) and in their access to education. Various attacks on **people working in transport, and human rights and environmental activists** in Honduras and Guatemala.



State responses:

- Advocacy initiatives undertaken by civil society and UN agencies to push for the **recognition of internal displacement** yielded positive results in El Salvador. The Supreme Court recently ruled that the State must implement public policies and provide an immediate response to internal displacement.
- In Honduras, the draft law on addressing internal displacement has not been presented to Congress. Guatemala remains the country in the NCA that showing the least progress on addressing displacement, and **is yet to recognise its responsibilities** as a country generating internal displacement.
- **Efforts:** Local Victims Assistance Offices (in Spanish, OLAVs) have been established around **El Salvador**. Administrative procedures for getting deportee children back to school have been simplified in **Honduras**. The Human Rights Secretary of Honduras has opened a Department for the Protection of Displaced Persons.
- Some state practices currently may worsen the protection risks of vulnerable people: for example, children affected by violence interned in state shelters are at risk of abuse. The militarisation of schools has been proposed as a state response to violence.



Humanitarian response:

- Growing initiatives to **monitor displacement** in El Salvador and Honduras, yet to be launched in Guatemala.
- Challenges in identifying **protection needs of deportees**. In general, needs are iden-

tified on an ad hoc basis by civil society groups. Many are not identified or assisted.

- Humanitarian organisations operate with a high degree of flexibility in order to **secure humanitarian access**, and minimise disruptions in service provision due to violence.
- The majority of protection programming offered by humanitarian organisations are focused on **prevention** (education, community work with youth and peace culture promotion). **Capacity to provide response to human rights violations, provide humanitarian assistance and offer durable solutions is very limited**, nor is sufficient to respond to the rising needs.
- Humanitarian assistance is mainly provided in the **capitals and urban areas in El Salvador and Honduras**, despite needs in other zones. In **Guatemala**, humanitarian/development programming targets rural areas as well as the migration route, but there are **few services addressing needs in areas affected by urban violence**. In the three countries there are hard-to-reach areas, particularly in places with a lack of state presence and high levels of violence.
- **Insecurity affects operations:** organisations have been attacked and monitored by criminal groups, and field work has been constrained by limited hours and lack of access.
- There are few humanitarian programmes targeting men. Some organisations refuse to attend to some cases for security reasons, in particular if these are linked to criminal groups. Best practices include flexible programming, and working through networks, enabling case referrals and early warning systems to flag individuals at risk of displacement.

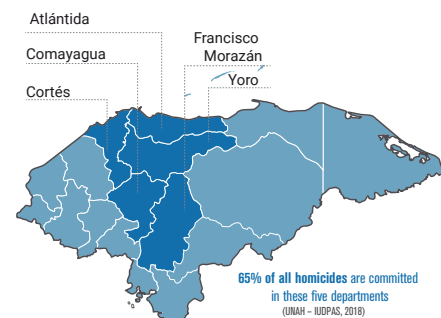


Main recommendations:

- The humanitarian community must strengthen protection in the NCA, in particular by increasing programming that provides a response to human rights violations and supports access to durable solutions.
- The exchange of best practices between organisations must be strengthened in order to increase response capacities in this highly volatile context, and ensure that organisations are providing assistance to the most affected communities. An in-depth analysis on how the Humanitarian Principles are adhered to in obtaining access in this context can support the increase of organisations operating in the region.
- States must ensure the identification of deportees arriving with protection needs; establish procedures, responsibilities and referral pathways in order to protect deportees; and guarantee access for organisations with relevant protection expertise into the deportation centres.
- States must ratify and implement existing draft legislation, policies and protocols which have been designed to respond to internal displacement.
- Good practices in advocacy which have succeeded in pushing governments to recognise and respond to displacement should also be used in Guatemala. Funding is needed for programmes in Guatemala which respond to displacement due to violence, and which are not redirected or suspended during emergency responses to natural hazards.

HONDURAS – SITUATION

283 homicides were registered in June, and 294 in July¹, resulting in an average of 9.5 homicides per day in 2018 so far². 90% of the victims were men³. If this daily homicide rate persists, the total number of homicides for 2018 will reach 3,528. In 2017, 3,791 homicides placed Honduras as having the fourth highest homicide rate in the world⁴. In 2017, 65.5% of all homicides took place in only 5 departments: Cortés, Atlántida, Francisco Morazán (FM), Yoro and Atlántida⁵. In June



and July, local media reported 13 massacres (homicides of 3 or more people per event): 4 in Francisco Morazán, 4 in Cortés, 2 in Intibucá, 1 in El Paraíso, 1 in Copán and 1 in Santa Bárbara. Reports of people wounded by armed attacks were reported with 2 cases in Comayagua, 5 cases in Francisco Morazán and 2 in Atlántida. In June, the weekly extortion fee charged on buses and taxis rose⁶. One trend to observe in the coming months is that of a potential change in strategy made by criminal groups such as the MS13. According to a study published in March, the organisation supposedly stopped charging regular extortion fees in certain communities in Honduras, in order to start building a loyal base of political supporters⁷. Recent evidence also points to a political campaign which was financed by MS13, further suggesting the growing infiltration of gangs into local politics⁸.

“Three men were massacred in Intibucá because the gang members supposedly didn’t like the way they were dressed.” La Prensa, July 2018



The presence of violence in daily life continues, particularly affecting children and youth, and their access to education. In Comayagüela, a **shooting within a school** left holes in the walls⁹. According to a teacher from the school, this was the fourth time that the school had been attacked so far this year. In Cortés, a tortured cadaver was found in front of a pre-school¹⁰. Alleged members of criminal groups entered the National University of Honduras and attacked a student¹¹. According to organisations operating in Tegucigalpa, a school closed for one month after a child was assassinated and a death threat was made against a teacher inside the school premises. As a result, 29 teachers from this school are looking to be transferred. This is not an isolated case: in 2017, official reports indicate that violence provoked displacement and high levels of risk for teachers and students in 38 schools across the country¹². One organisation working with youth in Tegucigalpa identified 27 young people who had to abandon school in June and July, and another organisation identified another 6 children out of school in San Pedro Sula.

In Tegucigalpa, four local organisations attended to 34 cases of physical or sexual violence in June and July 2018. Three of these cases were young LGBTQIA survivors of sexual abuse.

Violence targeted at human rights defenders, journalists and civil servants continued in June and July. Defenders of the Protection Committee of the Río Reitoca were **threatened by people with machetes and pistols** during a protest¹³. A journalist from the HispanTV television channel reported being at risk due to the lack of state protection; despite receiving threats from criminal groups, the Public Prosecutor’s Office claimed that they had lost his file and that he was not in any danger¹⁴. The Director of Forensic Medicine reported receiving violent threats against her and her staff¹⁵. In June, the regional head of the Technical Agency for

VIOLENCE IN THE NORTH OF CENTRAL AMERICA- BACKGROUND

- Violence perpetrated by both criminal groups and state authorities (in their response to criminal violence) has and continues to generate widespread human rights violations, including homicides, femicides, threats, extortion, kidnapping, child recruitment, trafficking and gender-based violence.
- The epidemic rates of homicides in the three countries reached an all-time high between 2011 and 2016. While homicide rates have decreased since 2016, they remain extremely high in comparison to the global average. In 2017, the homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants was 43.6 in Honduras, 60.1 in El Salvador and 26 in Guatemala.
- Alarming levels of internal displacement have been reported in the three countries. Because most displaced people do not register their cases with public authorities, available data is based on estimations. For example: approximately 174,000 persons were displaced in Honduras between 2004 and 2014.
- Internal displacement is often the first step in a series of subsequent displacements in the search for durable solutions. In 2017, 294,000 asylum claims from people from the NCA were made, a 58% rise from the previous year, and 16 times more claims made than in 2011.

EL SALVADOR – SITUATION

Criminal Investigation was assassinated¹⁶. In 2017, Honduras was ranked as the twelfth country with highest impunity in the world¹⁷.



There is a serious lack of public and updated information on kidnappings, disappearances and torture in Honduras. In the press in June and July, 6 kidnappings were reported in Francisco Morazán (including the kidnapping and assassination of three women aged 20, 18 and 14) and one of a child in Yoro. There are few public reports of sexual and gender-based violence. In 2017 however, the Forensic Medicine department attended 3,105 cases of sexual violence, where almost 60% of the victims were young women and girls between the aged between 10 and 19 years old¹⁸. One humanitarian NGO working in Francisco Morazán identified 9 cases of trafficking in the last two months.



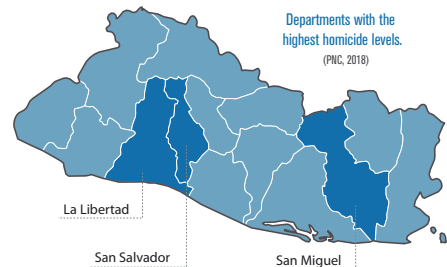
The Civil Society Network on Displacement recently triangulated data on asylum with recent studies on internal displacement and data from their own registries of cases, and found a total of 268 families displaced in the first trimester of 2018¹⁹. Between June and July, 5 organisations with presence in Francisco Morazán, Cortés and Yoro attended **276 people newly displaced by threats, extortion, territorial conflict, forced recruitment, assassination of family members and changes in invisible boundaries between gang territories**. Amongst others, these people highlighted that they were faced with the lack of provision for basic needs, such as food, shelter, health, access to education and employment. Furthermore, many displaced people require support in acquiring identity documentation in order to be able to leave the country, transfer their children to new schools, and access health services (this is especially the case for many deportees arriving without documentation, internally displaced people fleeing in a rush and leaving their belongings behind, as well as children who have not been formally registered at birth).



Between June and July, **13,001 people were deported to Honduras**²⁰. Amongst the 36,580 deported Hondurans in the first semester of the year were 4,699 children (12.8%). **87% of the total adult deported population this year were men**²¹. The high levels of deportations measured this year are reminiscent of the high levels of 2015/16, and are significantly higher than in 2017. In particular, deportations from Mexico have increased a 74% in comparison to 2017²². Since the beginning of the year, 182 deportees with protection needs have been identified in the Centre for Attention for Returned Migrants in San Pedro Sula, with 56 cases reported during June and July. **30% of these cases are women**. In June and July, 17 people with protection needs were identified in the OMOA centre in the north of the country. The process for identifying protection needs in deportee reception centres is primarily based on interviews collecting socio-economic data. Often, these interviews take place in spaces lacking the privacy necessary for people to divulge sensitive information. Moreover, the government officials in charge of carrying out the interviews often lack the expertise

In June, a press report documented a dozen deportees sleeping in the streets, recently having arrived in Honduras and planning on taking the migration route again.

necessary for identifying protection needs. As the government is unable to offer a durable solution for those identified with protection needs, it is often easier for people to declare that they fled the country in search of economic opportunities or family reunification so that the authorities will leave them be and they can start their journey again²³. Bearing in mind these conditions for data collection, it is evident that the statistics on protection needs of deportees do not reflect the scope of the situation.



In June, the National Civil Police registered **303 homicides**, an average of **10.1 homicides per day**, with a higher incidence in San Salvador, La Libertad and San Miguel²⁴. At the time of publication, data for July was unavailable. If this trend continues, the total number of homicides will reach 3,636 in 2018. In 2017, 3,954 registered homicides placed El Salvador as the country with the highest homicide rate in the world²⁵. A rise in femicides was reported

from January to May, in comparison to the same time period in 2017, **with an average of one woman killed every day**, with more than half of all victims younger than 34 years old²⁶. In June and July, 9 cases of torture and mutilation were reported in the press. **141 reports of extortion** were registered by the police in June²⁷. Up-to-date and publicly accessible data on kidnappings is limited, but it is estimated that **1,670 people disappeared in 2017, an average of 5 people per day**²⁸. During June and July, there were 5 press reports of kidnappings in San Salvador, 4 in La Paz, 3 in Ahuachapán, 2 in La Libertad, and 1 in Usulután, and 7 children were reported missing in San Salvador²⁹. Added to these are the unknown numbers of deaths and disappearances of minors that go unreported. In 2017, El Salvador was ranked as the thirteenth country with the highest impunity in the world³⁰.



Despite the fall in the national homicide rate over the past few years, and the improvement in public opinion on the security levels in El Salvador³¹, for many, daily life has not improved. For instance, crime rates have risen in certain zones in the north of the capital that were specifically targeted under the national plan to combat violence (el Plan El Salvador Seguro)³². Press reports from June and July show patterns of **regular violent confrontation between police forces and armed groups**. In ten days, three prisoners died in the same police cells in La Paz³³; three family members of a police agent were assassinated in Morazán³⁴; in La Paz a policeman was prosecuted for intimidation³⁵; in Santa Ana a grenade was thrown against a police car³⁶; in Chalatenango the explosion of a bomb left in police car wounded several people³⁷. In February, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial Executions reported on the disproportionate use of force employed by the national police³⁸; at the end of December 2017, the Public Prosecutor for the Defence of Human Rights had 40 cases of extrajudicial executions under investigation³⁹.

"In Mejicanos, gang members kidnapped a woman, killed her and dragged her across a hill, because she was talking with the police" El Salvador Times, June 2018



The **impact of crime** fell heavily on **public transport**: an attack on a bus in San Salvador perpetrated by criminal groups left two people dead⁴⁰, and the 202 bus route in Ahuachapán had to suspend its services due to receiving threats⁴¹. Other **public services** also suffered attacks: in two weeks, the same school in La Unión was robbed twice⁴²; a health centre was attacked and patients had their belongings stolen⁴³. In June and July in La Libertad a **school closed due to crime and insecurity** in the vicinity, and the Technological Institute of Usulután is at risk of closing its doors after more than 350 students dropped out over three years due to violence in front of the school gates⁴⁴. In 2017, 12,221 children and teenagers dropped out of school due to generalised violence and displacement⁴⁵ and 19 schools closed due to threats from criminal groups⁴⁶.

GUATEMALA – SITUATION



A particular phenomenon lacking visibility is that of sexual and gender-based violence. A recent study carried out by the Salvadorian Foundation for Economic and Social Development showed that while harassment and attacks on public transport is common, only 17% of all victims make an official complaint⁴⁷. Nevertheless, the National Police registered **213 reports of sexual violence** in the month of June⁴⁸. In the first half of 2017, **79% of sexual abuse cases were committed against minors under 17 years old**⁴⁹. Furthermore, in the first three months of this year, the National Council for Children and Adolescents counted **2,900 cases of sexual abuse against minors, of which two thirds were to girls**⁵⁰. In June, a young girl, who was raped by 5 gang members and suffered a miscarriage, was condemned to 30 years in jail for abortion⁵¹. Various reports have shown that, due to fear of the criminal groups responsible for the abuses, very few teachers or health professionals register, report or help pregnant girls⁵².

When asked in the UReport study “why do you think children go to other countries?” 41% of 1000 young people interviewed replied: to escape from violence.

*“Two sisters who had just arrived to the neighbourhood were killed, for having previously lived in a zone controlled by a rival gang”
El Mundo, junio 2018*

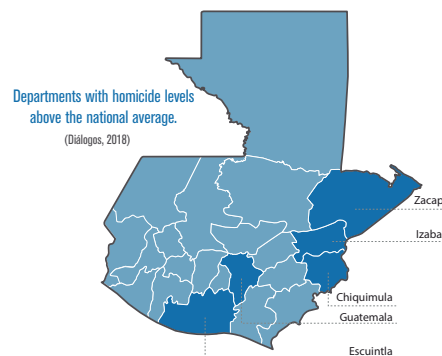


There are growing efforts to quantify and monitor cases of people displaced by violence (such as the Platform on Displacement, Cristosal, the Public Prosecutor for the Defence of Human Rights, among others); according to the latest profiling exercise on internal mobility, it is estimated that a total of **1.1% of the total population** has been internally displaced⁵³, as was also confirmed in the last report of the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons on her last visit to El Salvador. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, based on an extrapolation from the IUDOP survey, 296,000 people were displaced in 2017⁵⁴.

Marking a profound turning point in the state’s response to displacement, on the 13th of July the Supreme Court of Justice of El Salvador ordered the government to take the necessary steps within the next six months to recognise internal displacement and to enact public policies to protect its victims.



In June and July, **4,096 people were deported to El Salvador**⁵⁵. During the first semester of this year, the rate of deportations was 19.9% lower than during the same time frame of 2017⁵⁶. Several humanitarian organisations have interpreted this reduction as a result of an improved understanding and greater information about asylum rights across the migration routes, improving the likelihood that displaced people seek international protection. This is corroborated with the 294,000 asylum claims from the NCA registered in 2017, a figure 58% higher than the previous year and 16 times more than the number registered in 2011⁵⁷. Of the people deported between January and June, 14.5% indicated that they fled the country due to generalised violence, as did 26.4% of children and adolescents (however, over a third of minors did not answer the question)⁵⁸. Due to not being able to register more than one motive for leaving the country during the migration process, and also due to the suboptimal conditions for collecting data (in particular for generating an open discussion on the individual reasons that led to migration), these statistics paint an incomplete picture of reality.



According to the National Civil Police, there were **316 homicides in June**; an average of **10.5 homicides per day**⁵⁹. Data from the police is not yet available for July, but the National Institute of Forensic Science registered 448 necropsies due to crimes in the month of July⁶⁰. The departments most affected by homicides remain Guatemala (in particular the municipalities of Guatemala, Villa Nueva and Mixco), Escuintla, Zacapa, Chiquimula and Izabal⁶¹. The past few months have been marked by **a series of killings of human rights defend-**

ers and members of indigenous and rural organisations. Between the 9th of May and the 8th of June, seven activists who were members of the Comité Campesino del Altiplano y el Comité de Desarrollo Campesino (CODECA) were assassinated in Alta Verapaz, Jutiapa and Jalapa⁶². Two of them, activists with CODECA, were kidnapped and mutilated with machetes. At the end of July, an Ixil activist, also member of CODECA and working with communities to expose corruption, was kidnapped, tortured and killed⁶³. These homicides are another in a long line of political violence, with one human rights defender killed almost every month on average since 2000 in Guatemala⁶⁴.



In June and July, activists, journalists, people working in public transport, and other civilians, sustained injuries due to violent attacks as they were going about their daily activities. **During a peaceful protest** in July, the National Platform of Maya Waqib'kej and communities from San Juan Sacatepéquez were attacked by a group of approximately 70 masked people, wounding 17 people⁶⁵. In the department of Guatemala, two journalists were robbed⁶⁶ and two were mugged⁶⁷, and one activist was wounded by a bullet⁶⁸. In July, as data collection for the national Population Census started, at least 11 census workers were attacked in the first week⁶⁹. Reports of community ‘mob-justice’ violence persisted. In San Vicente Pacaya, while residents shot against alleged criminals, a vehicle of the United States Embassy driving through the area received a bullet⁷⁰. In Villa Nueva, Guatemala, it was reported that a ‘watchdog’ group was patrolling the neighbourhood with high calibre arms, in order to protect the community after two people were assassinated by criminal groups⁷¹.




Public services in urban areas were particularly impacted by criminal violence. According to press reports, there is a growing fear among medical professionals of providing care to members of criminal groups⁷². In the department of Guatemala (where 21% of the population lives but 38% of all homicides occur⁷³), at least **four buses were attacked**, leaving six people wounded and two killed.

“A 6-year-old girl died and a 3-year-old boy has been wounded in zone 18 of Guatemala after two people came to look for a family member of the children. When they couldn’t find the person in question, they shot at the children.” La Hora, June 2018


In particular, the buses on the 203 route (a route taken by 20,000 people per day) pay extortion every week to three different criminal groups (in the 6, 7 and 12 zones)⁷⁴. There were **749 reports of extortion** reported to the police in June alone⁷⁵. In the last ten years, 43% of all reports of extortion were registered in the department of Guatemala. Between


REGIONAL RESPONSE IN THE NORTH OF CENTRAL AMERICA

2005 and 2014, between 88% (in San Marcos) and 97.7% (in Alta Verapaz) of all criminal cases remained unsolved⁷⁶. Furthermore, available data from 2014 shows that almost 70% of victims of crimes did not make an official complaint⁷⁷. In 2017, Guatemala was ranked as the nineteenth country with the highest impunity in the world⁷⁸.

 An **epidemic of child disappearances** can be observed through the Alba-Keneth alert, which was activated 308 times in June and July⁷⁹. Approximately 35 alerts were activated the day after the Fuego Volcano eruption in departments affected by the disaster, but more than a third of the alerts were activated in the Guatemala department, in areas affected by urban violence. It is important to note that two thirds of the alerts were for girls, and that 75% of the total cases were teenagers. However, information on disappearances and kidnapping of adults is scarce. On gender-based and sexual violence, the National Institute for Forensic Sciences registered **4,067 rapes** in the first half of the year⁸⁰. Furthermore, in the same time period, the Observatory on Reproductive Health registered 51,110 pregnancies of teenagers between 10 and 19 years of age⁸¹ (**every 4 hours a girl under the age of 15 gives birth**⁸²). The normality of violence is alarming: in the UReport study conducted with 650 young people, 59% responded that their communities considered that violence against women was merely a family problem, and 21% saw it as normal⁸³.

Although the police have recently have improved their capacity to respond to crimes of sexual violence, it is estimated that for each victim that does report a crime, seven victims do not.

 In Guatemala there is even less quantification of the phenomenon of **internal displacement** than in El Salvador and Honduras, nor has the phenomenon been recognised. The recent study of the Universidad Rafael Landívar suggests that 20,337 people were displaced between 2011 and 2014 due to violence, particularly from and towards Guatemala, El Progreso, Izabal, Huehuetenango, Escuintla and Chimaltenango⁸⁴. The study also pointed towards the correlations between departments with higher rates of reports of extortion and with displacement due to violence, as well as between departments generating displacement due to violence as well as those with higher rates of school desertion⁸⁵. In addition to displacement due to violence, people are frequently displaced due to **development and agriculture 'megaprojects'**. In the last few months, the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights granted protective measures to four communities in Petén, Izabal and Alta Verapaz. In the case of the Maya Q'ueqchi 'La Cumbre Sa'Kuxhá' community, 25 families who were displaced in November 2017 remain without access to healthcare, sanitation, water, electricity, and are living in precarious housing with poor access to food^{86,87}.

 In June and July, **13,313 people were deported from the United States and Mexico**. In the first half of 2018, 65% more people were deported in comparison to 2017⁸⁸. Data on protection needs is limited, especially as the identification of needs is not systematic. Assistance is provided only by a handful of civil society organisations, and these are only able to attend to people outside the reception centre.

From the humanitarian community:



Despite the growing recognition of the impact of violence and the phenomenon of displacement in the NCA, a significant amount of people remain unprotected and unassisted. A regional analysis shows that civil society organisations offer a variety of protection services, but these are primarily violence prevention programmes (promoting culture of peace, education and alternatives to violence for youth at risk of recruitment). **Programming focused on responding to violations, and providing access to both remedies and durable solutions, is scarce**. This is particularly the case in Guatemala, while local and religious organisations are working to respond to violence (in particular gender-based violence and violence against children), according to the information analysed for this report, there are less than five local and international organisations for which responding to internal displacement is a priority.

In general, comprehensive services are **located in urban centres and are unavailable for victims in rural and marginalised areas**^{89,90}. Humanitarian organisations such as the National Societies of the Red Cross, the ICRC, as well as medical organisations such as MSF and Médicos del Mundo provide assistance in municipalities with scarce access to state healthcare, however, according to the information analysed for this report, these organisations do not have national coverage in any of the countries, nor are they able to access all affected areas.

There are growing initiatives to provide specialised services for vulnerable groups (children, women, LGBTQIA persons), particularly responding to gender-based violence and for reintegrating deportees. However, decision-makers in the humanitarian sector must take into account that the majority of people affected by homicides and the majority of deportees are men. As a result, reintegration and protection services that only benefit families and women do not respond to all humanitarian needs. In the three countries, Protection Groups have been established, led by UNHCR and including UN agencies, INGOs and members of civil society. While these groups are relatively new, they are the first step in strengthening collaboration and coordination, identifying protection needs, establishing a joint narrative and supporting the humanitarian response.

Many organisations are filling the gaps in state responses with innovative and flexible programming. A few examples of these include: providing mobile legal and psychological services which move around communities, facilitating communication between victims and the state; the use of cash transfers to ensure a dignified and efficient response to displacement; the use of networks to activate early warning alerts when people are at risk of displacement, the referral of cases between specialised organisations to ensure accompaniment during and after displacement.

DEVELOPMENTS, CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES AHEAD

From states:



The **lack of official reports** made to authorities on violence and displacement remains an important obstacle for ensuring solid and updated data, needs assessments and response implementation. As a general rule, government responses to displacement are limited to witness protection programmes, but these are small-scale and only offer **protection for the witness in question** (and not for their families) during the legal proceedings (and not afterwards)⁹¹. Displaced people do not

receive financial support from governments in the NCA, and there are limited funds available for organisations working on humanitarian evacuations or providing support during displacement. As a result, access to durable solutions is minimal. International support for international protection programmes (such as the Protection Transfer Agreement) is urgent.

Furthermore, while the majority of problems with state responses are due to states not assuming responsibility and for failing to respond to violence and displacement, **certain state practices put vulnerable people at further risk**. One example of this is the institutionalisation of children in state shelters. In El Salvador, it is estimated that 40% of all cases of sexual violence against children happen within state institutions⁹². In Guatemala, widespread abuse has been documented in public institutions where children and adolescents are sent in order to protect them from violence⁹³. In Honduras, authorities have proposed stationing the military in schools to combat violence, in direct contradiction with the commitments made by the Honduran government by their adherence to the Declaration on Safe Schools.

A range of gaps remain in the **protection of deportees** arriving in all three countries, however, opportunities exist to share best practices, in particular to strengthen the identification and protection of people arriving with protection needs. For example, in Honduras, the Ministry for Education is currently in the process of improving methods to ensure that children are able to re-start school as soon as possible, by simplifying the paperwork necessary for establishing the child's education level. **So far, state services for deportees have been limited to reception (providing a small amount of food, a hygiene kit, first aid and an employment counselling session), while the protection of deportees has fallen on the shoulders of civil society**. Despite this, in the majority of reception centres across the region, organisations specialised in protection do not have access to the centres and do not play a role in directly and systematically identifying needs. In all three countries, it is urgent to ensure that procedures are established to identify needs and refer cases for the deportees, clear responsibilities are identified, and budgets are secured, as well as that employment, education, shelter and healthcare services are offered. A draft procedure detailing these responsibilities was established in Honduras, but has remained stalled in the hands of the Chancellery since May, and has not been used nor published.



Honduras

▪ **State response and legal framework:** Almost five years in the making, the long-awaited reform of the Penal Code to include forced displacement as a crime, and the adoption of the Law on Prevention, Response and Protection of Internally Displaced People, is still pending. This law will define responsibilities, competencies and coordination between state institutions.

Research for this snapshot report reconfirmed the large data gaps on violence in Honduras, as well as the need for initiatives to monitor displacement. Advocacy efforts are being led by the Civil Society Network on Displacement, who in July presented a communiqué and petition to the Inter-American Court on Human Rights.

- **National coverage:** Transport, food, medical and psychosocial support, and temporary shelter services offered to displaced persons by humanitarian organisations are mainly available in the municipalities of Distrito Central and San Pedro Sula. An analysis of OCHA's most recent 3W shows that **there are very few operations in Olancho** (despite the fact that in 2017 according to the CONADEH, Juticalpa in Olancho received the second highest number of reports of internal displacement), **Atlántida, Yoro, Ocotepeque, Intibucá and La Paz, which all have high rates of violence and risk of displacement**⁹⁴. Organisations which have national or semi-national presence often do not have physical offices beyond the capital or San Pedro Sula, but send staff on missions across the country or receive beneficiaries coming from other parts of the country. This lack of national coverage limits the potential for case follow-up and management.

In certain urban areas heavily impacted by violence, the state does not provide basic services and humanitarian organisations cannot enter due to insecurity.

- **Hard to reach areas:** In addition to humanitarian actors being unable to provide national coverage, they are also unable to reach certain vulnerable which are highly affected by violence. One example of these areas are the irregular settlements in San Pedro Sula, known as the 'Bordos' (built on mitigation infrastructures intended to prevent flooding from the rivers that cross the city), home to approximately 100.000 inhabitants⁹⁵. Only three organisations have access to this zone, and are only able to operate at the entrance of each community as it is considered to be insecure for them to enter further into the area. There is a serious lack of services, for instance in one of the communities, the only infrastructure is a kindergarden run purely by volunteers. **There are no health services, no public transport, and taxis do not enter the area at night.**
- **Operating in insecure environments:** Political polarization could increase the risk of human rights violations, such as those reported in mid-July when political protests turned violent in Tegucigalpa and Danlí, impacting the operations and access of various humanitarian organisations. **The majority of the organisations interviewed employ security measures, and are limited in their operations due to insecurity**. For example, operations in communities affected by violence is limited to a reduced work day, in general until 3pm. It is often necessary for organisations to develop negotiation and access strategies in order to cross invisible borders and to work in commu-

The provision of services is higher in the capital, but other departments, such as San Miguel and La Paz, are heavily impacted by violence and lack access to basic services and humanitarian assistance.

nities impacted by violence, in general negotiating with community leaders and operating under a low profile or using pseudonyms. This low profile includes using separate telephone numbers for dealing with delicate cases. Some organisations mentioned that they have to refuse attending to some cases for security reasons, in particular if these are linked to criminal groups. In June and July, in Choloma, a humanitarian organisation reported that during an activity, watchdogs working for a criminal

group interrogated them about their operations, resulting in the withdrawal of the NGO. In another region, humanitarian workers were followed by unidentified vehicles. 'Invisible borders' between criminal groups limited aid delivery to certain communities in San Pedro Sula. In June, one NGO experienced a security incident while delivering school kits, when a beneficiary crossed an 'invisible border' to take part in the activity. Another human rights organisation reported an assault on a member of staff and two NGOs experienced theft, one of a car parked in front of their office. The perception of certain NGOs working with communities in San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa is that 'invisible borders' are progressively drawing in closer and closer, and that mobility restrictions are getting worse



El Salvador

- **State response and legal framework:** While El Salvador has still not officially recognized the phenomenon of internal displacement, advances have been made in terms of state response. One example is that the Public Prosecutor has announced the creation of a new unit to tackle the rising rates of feminicides⁹⁶. In July an important step forward was made when

the Supreme Court released a decision to compel the state to take responsibility for internal displacement, a win for civil society organisations who had been advocating for state recognition of the phenomenon. The Local Victim Assistance Offices (OLAVs) are an important state initiative for providing specialised attention to victims, and must receive secure funding. Between January and July, the offices attended 4,195 persons (2,083 women, 593 men, 1,087 girls and 432 boys at the national level), and two new offices will open shortly in Morazán and Chalatenango⁹⁷. Nevertheless, the OLAVs do not generally have enough skilled personnel in displacement, nor can support families in finding durable solutions⁹⁸. In general, the protection response to displacement in El Salvador has been ad hoc so far, with cases transferred from organisation to organisation so that each can provide its specialized service. It is urgent, therefore, that the government of El Salvador establishes a legal framework to provide a comprehensive response to protection needs.

- **National and sectorial coverage:** There are a growing number of initiatives to systematically monitor displacement in El Salvador. Moreover, UNHCR and UNICEF are starting community protection-monitoring projects, a practice which will generate valuable information and understanding for improving the response. Coordination between the different actors implementing monitoring exercises is essential to ensure complementary data. An analysis from the 3W OCHA tool⁹⁹ shows there are no organisations working with displaced persons in La Unión, and very few in San Vicente and Morazán. The majority of organisations working on protection are in San Salvador, and those with national coverage do not specialise in providing protection or response to the impacts of violence. The *CuentaNos.org*¹⁰⁰ platform established by IRC (a public interactive mapping of existing services around the country accessible to people at

risk, aiming to provide reliable and accessible information) shows that there is a concentration of services at the departmental headquarters level and a lack of attention in the rural areas. Together these different mapping tools show that state services are focused on vocational training for young people, and counselling for female victims of violence. In some departments, psychological support is available for victims of gender-based and sexual violence. In San Salvador the provision of services is higher, with a range of organisations providing legal services, medical assistance, specialized services for LGBTQIA persons, children, deportees, and programmes offering cash-based assistance. However, **other departments highly impacted by violence such as San Miguel and La Paz, lack services for victims of violence and displaced people.** It is therefore important to bear in mind that there are needs beyond San Salvador; according to the data on deportations in May 2018, San Miguel received the highest number of deported people¹⁰¹.

- **Limitations in the response due to insecurity:** In 2017, 22 attacks against humanitarian actors were publicly reported in El Salvador¹⁰². Over the last two months, a vehicle was robbed from a medical NGO, and another had to withdraw its operations due to direct threats. Another humanitarian NGO reported that due to arriving at a community at the same time as the police, their operations raised suspicions about their intentions. In order to continue their operations, they had to negotiate indirectly (through community leaders) with the criminal organisation controlling the area, explaining that they weren't linked to police. Contact and negotiations with armed groups is an important and delicate topic that must be analysed and considered by the humanitarian community. For example, an INGO mentioned that its current working protocol stipulates that, due to security reasons, they cannot provide assistance to people linked to the armed groups and therefore have to examine criminal records of each beneficiary before providing assistance. This raises serious questions about the adherence to the humanitarian principles within this particular context. On the other hand, reports show that evangelization provides one of the only escape routes for men to leave criminal groups and re-integrate into society¹⁰³. Nevertheless, between June and July, an evangelical pastor committed to helping gang members¹⁰⁴, and also a former gang member who had turned to preaching, were murdered¹⁰⁵ (furthermore, criminal groups closely monitor those who have left the group for the church, and check if they are attending religious services and smoking or drinking).



Guatemala

- **State response and legal framework: The Guatemalan state is yet to recognise or respond to internal displacement due to violence.** According to the interviews conducted for this research, the relationship between the government and civil society is extremely weak, especially as the former cancels appointments frequently, constantly changes civil servants, and fails to recognise its responsibilities towards the displacement crisis.
- Moreover, national protection systems put in place to protect people affected by violence can often put them at further risk. This is particularly the case for the 4,282 children living in public institutions around the country¹⁰⁶. As the state often puts children at risk in institutions, especially those at risk of gang recruitment, sexual violence and trafficking, as well as children separated from their families on the migration route institutions, this adds to the fear of reporting crimes to avoid children being taken away and sent to these shelters¹⁰⁷. The example of Hogar Seguro, which burned down

in 2017, killing 41 girls, is not an isolated case. A recent report from the Disability Rights Initiative shows the serious physical and psychological abuses committed in both public and private institutions (which receive national and international funds) against children: **psychological abuse physical and sexual, restrictions on liberty and movement, the incarceration of minors with disabilities, high risk of being trafficking and supervision by volunteers lacking screening and qualifications in child protection**¹⁰⁸. Between June and July, eight teenagers escaped from an state shelter in Quetzaltenango¹⁰⁹. A handful of organisations are currently advocating for a comprehensive law on child protection; it is urgent that the Guatemalan Government assumes its responsibility and tackles this issue.

There is little response to internal displacement from the humanitarian community in Guatemala, and no recognition nor response from the state.

- National and sectorial coverage:** Most organisations working on displacement in Guatemala work together in networks to provide assistance to displaced people and migrants traveling north on the migration route (the latter was considered beyond the scope of this report, but it will be covered in future reports). Subsequently there is a gap to be filled by actors that prioritise responding to internal displacement. A handful of organisations work in urban areas on specific issues (health, education, employment), for example by providing legal assistance, psychological support or shelter for victims of gender-based violence, but these are overwhelmed by the quantity of needs (for example, more than 4,000 cases of sexual violence were reported in the first half of 2018¹¹⁰). According to the 3W tool provided by OCHA, there is no national coverage in terms of protection, in particular in Escuintla, Suchitepéquez, Santa Rosa, El Progreso, Zacapa, and very few services in Petén e Izabal.
- In terms of providing protection services for people at all stages of displacement, there is an immense gap in assisting those who have been deported. Some organisations provide assistance livelihoods opportunities and temporary shelter for those leaving the deportation centre, but the **identification of protections needs is even less developed than in Honduras and El Salvador**. For example, only children are asked why they left the country, an essential first step in establishing whether violence triggered their displacement. According to interviews, no civil society organisations are present in the deportee centre in Guatemala, nor is there a strategy to identify people with needs, whether they be people who were refused international protection, persons who cannot return to their place of origin due to fear, or homeless persons.
- Other priorities for the response:** International organisations with large nation-wide operations in general are working on poverty reduction or responding to natural disasters. Although they sometimes have operations in urban areas, responding to internal displacement is not generally considered a priority. Cooperation between humanitarian actors is divided between the new protection cluster and different advocacy platforms (working on legal framework on migration and child protection). While the ratification and implementation of these draft legislations will take time, there remains to be a joint strategy to respond to the current protection needs of forcibly displaced persons and deportees. The scale and number of issues that need to be addressed (displacement due to natural disasters poverty, evictions due to megaprojects and development, the migration route, violence) is frequently mentioned as prohibiting

strategic work on internal displacement. Moreover, recurrent natural hazards (such as the eruption of the Fuego Volcano) often force organisations to re-direct their resources and time towards new priorities, reducing their capacity to work on violence and displacement.

METHODOLOGY

This report is based on the collection and analysis of primary and secondary data: primary data was obtained through interviews with a network of key informants (programme managers and protection officers in humanitarian organisations based in the three countries), and secondary data from a systematic monitoring of media, operational reports from national and international agencies, and relevant academic literature.

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