

Guatemala

Migrant caravan

Since 13 October, several thousand migrants have left Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala to form two large caravans and multiple smaller groups travelling by foot towards the United States border. Protection concerns, as well as, urgent food, water and shelter needs, have been reported. Guatemalan and Mexican authorities are attempting to block migrants' progress or return them to their countries of origin. The caravan has become a politicised issue. The caravan's intention to continue, combined with the determination of the US to stop migrants, is likely to create negative outcomes and conditions for migrants.

NEED FOR INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE



IMPACT



Map From: The Guardian 24/10/2018

Anticipated scope and scale

The number of migrants leaving their homes and following the caravan's path is growing every day. The upcoming **US mid-term elections**, in which immigration is a highly politicised issue, mean the migrants are unlikely to be admitted to the US. Hundreds may instead seek asylum in Mexico and others may return to their countries of origin. Those who do make it to the US face an uncertain future, but protection concerns are likely to continue as migrants travel through or remain in Mexico.

Key priorities



+ 7'000
people on the move



Shelter and food
Needs for the displaced



Protection interventions
Required

Humanitarian constraints



Access to the areas affected is largely unrestrained. Humanitarian actors are most likely to face bureaucratic issues, as the caravan has become politically significant and access may be impeded.

Limitations

Estimates on the number of migrants in each caravan vary widely, and few have been verified. Although the caravans have received significant media attention, it is very difficult to determine to which caravan section each report refers.

Crisis impact

Since 13 October, two large caravans of people walking on foot have left Honduras, heading towards the US border with Mexico. These caravans have since been split into several groups of migrants across Guatemala and Mexico, with reports suggesting new groups are forming on an ad hoc basis. The first and largest caravan, estimated to be between 7,000 and 10,000 people, left San Pedro Sula in Honduras on 13 October and grew in size as migrants from El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala joined en route (SBS News 29/10/2018, Reuters 24/10/2018, Al Jazeera 24/10/2018). Migrants are on the move to escape violence, poverty and severe food insecurity, among others.

Despite enhanced security at the Guatemalan and Mexican border crossings, the flow of migrants continues. Although the bridge between Guatemala and Mexico was closed on 28 October, several hundred migrants clashed with Mexican border police and entered Mexico. One migrant was killed by a rubber bullet during clashes. An estimated 2,500 people still remain at the Guatemala-Mexico border as of 28 October, and another caravan from El Salvador has entered southern Guatemala (Mexico News Daily 28/10/2018, Reuters 28/10/2018).

Food security and livelihoods: Local media sources report that many of the migrants in Tecun Uman have run out of money and rely on locals for food (Prensa Libre 27/10/2018). Local migrant support groups report running out of supplies after providing food to a large number of people (Prensa Libre 25/05/2018).

Shelter and NFIs: Many migrants are sleeping in the open at the Guatemala-Mexico border, with little to no protection from the elements, as shelters are overcrowded (Oxfam 24/10/2018). Migrants are reportedly be sleeping in the central park of Tecun Uman in Guatemala, without adequate shelter (Prensa Libre 27/10/2018). One of the local shelters in Tecun Uman said it had reached maximum capacity for hosting people (Prensa Libre 25/05/2018). Shelters at border areas are particularly overcrowded: for example, in Esquipulas, just over the Honduran border, and in Tecun Uman on the Guatemala-Mexico border. Reports also suggest a strong need for shoes and clothes as migrants are walking long distances with few possessions. However, only essential items such as clothes and hygiene kits are required as migrants still have hundreds of kilometres to travel on foot (CNN 28/10/2018, Associated Press 26/10/2018).

Health: Many migrants arrive in Mexico from Guatemala severely dehydrated, with serious sunburn, blisters and burns on their feet from walking long distances along tarmac roads during the hottest part of the day (BBC 22/10/2018). Children suffering from heat exhaustion have been observed. Respiratory issues among migrants exposed to daytime heat and evening rains are reported (Reuters 28/10/2018, Associated Press 26/10/2018). Migrants are further susceptible to injury when detouring around checkpoints through rough terrain and rivers, as well as travelling in overcrowded vehicles. Two migrants have

already died, one after falling from an overcrowded vehicle and the other trying to get onto an overcrowded vehicle (CBC 23/10/2018).

WASH: Some reports indicate that migrants have been exposed to unsanitary conditions for more than a week (Prensa Libre 27/10/2018). The toilets in Tecun Uman square, where many migrants are sleeping, are not free; as a result, migrants spend limited resources or use unsuitable spaces to defecate, causing sanitation risks (TV5Monde 28/10/2018). Safe drinking water is being distributed by NGOs sporadically, however cases of dehydration continue to be reported (UNICEF 26/10/2018).

Protection: UNHCR has identified a number of separated children in the caravan groups that are seeking asylum in Guatemala (UN News 24/10/2018). The circumstances in which the caravan is travelling and its interaction with Guatemalan authorities means there is a risk that unaccompanied children are not adequately supported.

Migrants on the Guatemalan side of the border with Mexico have been crossing the river in rafts or at night in an effort to circumvent attempts by Mexican authorities to stem the flow of people across the border bridge. Crossing the border at night poses risks of SGBV, violence and theft for vulnerable migrants. Those crossing the river risk drowning (The Guardian 21/20/2018).

Documentation for migrants in Guatemala is also an issue. Many are stopped at police checkpoints and ordered to show documentation from the Guatemalan immigration authorities indicating that they have permission to enter the country. However, the immigration control centre at Agua Caliente has been open sporadically and closed since 19 October, so many Hondurans in the corridor are deported back to the Honduran side of the border with Guatemala and prevented from re-entering, as they could not obtain the necessary paperwork (Al Jazeera 23/10/2018). In Honduras, deported migrants face many of the serious protection concerns, including violence, that caused them to flee initially. The Mexican authorities have detained 400–500 migrants as they enter Mexico from Guatemala (TV5Monde 28/10/2018).

Vulnerable groups affected

Violence, corruption and extortion by criminal groups, as well as gang violence, are constant and serious issues in Guatemala (Human Rights Watch, accessed 26/10/2018). The impact of this violence on civilians is significant and puts even more vulnerable groups such as the migrant caravan at greater risk of being exposed to violence and exploitation. This is especially the case now as most migrants have few resources and occupy public spaces on their journey north.

Some migrants report being stuck in Esquipulas in southern Guatemala, just over the border from Honduras and El Salvador. Guatemalan police and special forces have regularly blocked migrants' path or returned them to the border crossings, and migrants

report that a human rights or media presence is required to help protect them from abuses by Guatemalan authorities trying to return them to the border. Groups are being separated and people injured when trying to avoid border checkpoints and police (Al Jazeera 21/10/2018).

Pregnant women and elderly people are among caravan members, as are 2,300 children (UNICEF 26/10/2018).

Aggravating factors

Drought and food security

Several years of drought in southern Guatemala have exacerbated food insecurity for poor households by reducing agricultural production and associated livelihood opportunities. More recently, dry periods in both the east and west of the country have resulted in a decreased output of corn and bean crops, meaning households that rely on these crops for subsistence must purchase staple goods earlier than normal. Consequently, Guatemalans living in the dry corridor already face IPC Phase 2 (stressed) and are projected to face IPC Phase 3 (crisis) by February 2019. Guatemala also has the fourth-highest chronic malnutrition rate in the world (US AID 30/09/2018, FEWS NET September 2018). The challenging agricultural and food security issues that many Guatemalans now face are probably contributing to the decision of Guatemalans to join the caravans as they march through Guatemala. The caravans also aggravate the food security situation of Guatemala as an influx of thousands of migrants may push up local food prices by increasing demand for staples during a period in which production has decreased.

Political tension

The caravans have attracted significant media attention, causing US President Donald Trump to warn Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador that the US will cut aid programmes to the countries if they fail to control the migrant flows. Increasing pressure on the states through which the caravans are passing also influences the type of response deployed to quell the flow of people. Guatemala has already deployed barbed wire barricades and extra security personnel at a key border crossing with Honduras (Daily Mail 24/10/2018, Reuters 22/10/2018). The US mid-term elections will be held on 6 November, and the migrant caravan has become a key element of the political debate about immigration (Associated Press 19/10/2018). The Guatemalan government has indicated it does not support 'irregular migration' (Government of Guatemala 14/10/2018).

Contextual information

Drivers of the displacement

Displacement from and within the northern triangle of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador has increased in recent years, owing to factors including endemic violence, lack of political protection and unemployment (NRC/IDMC 16/05/2018). For many Guatemalans and Hondurans, fears of gang violence and an inability to protect their children from drugs and violence contributed their decision to migrate (Associated Press 26/10/2018). In 2017, some 32,800 Guatemalans were deported from the US and 34,501 were deported from Mexico. Many of those recently deported may now be internally displaced within Guatemala, though limited data is available on this. Others have chosen to try again to migrate to the US or Mexico because of conditions in Guatemala including a lack of security and access to judicial services (IDMC September 2018, CNN 28/10/2018).

Key characteristics of Guatemala

- **Total population:** 16,913,503
- **Urban population:** 50.68%
- **Population living in slums (% of urban population):** 34.5%
- **National poverty rates:** 59.3%
- **Food security figures:** 15.6% of the population is undernourished. 13% of children are undernourished.
- **Nutrition levels:** 12.6% of children under age five suffer from global malnutrition, 46.5% from chronic malnutrition.
- **Health statistics:** Mortality rate under age five: 27.6 per 1,000 live births; cause of death, by communicable diseases and maternal, prenatal and nutrition conditions: 25.1% of total.
- **WASH statistics:** 67.3% of the population use at least basic sanitation services. 60.8% use safely managed drinking water services, 93.5% uses at least basic drinking water services and 76.7% of the population has access to basic handwashing facilities including soap and water.
- **Internally displaced persons:** 242,000 people displaced by conflict and violence, 45,000 displaced by natural disasters.
- **Literacy levels:** Literacy levels 81.2% (of people age 15 and above); share of youth not in education, employment or training: 27%.

Sources: World Bank, FAO, ENSMI

Response capacity

Local and national response capacity

Churches or local volunteers operate a number of the shelters along the migrants' path. Similarly, sympathetic Guatemalans frequently distribute food and clothing. The Guatemalan government is offering assisted returns to Honduras and El Salvador (Al Jazeera 24/10/2018).

International response capacity

Several INGOs and UN bodies are responding to the needs of the caravan, offering hygiene kits and drinking water. However, the wide geographic spread of the migrants and the volume of people requires further intervention, Reporting suggests that shelter needs are still severe and that food supplies of local NGOs are running out.

Information gaps and needs

The fluidity of the situation and the constant movement of the various waves of the caravan make it very challenging to track who is displaced, where and with what specific needs. Though the caravan has attracted significant media attention, it is not always clear to which wave the various reports are referring. Additionally, it has been very difficult to verify the number of migrants on the road, particularly as anecdotal reporting suggests that new migrants continue to arrive while others drop out along the way.

MAP title



Source: The Guardian 24/10/2018