

El Salvador

Multi-year Strategy 2023 – 2026



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1.1 Executive Summary

El Salvador continues to experience high levels of human mobility. By end of 2023, the number of asylum-seekers and refugees from El Salvador had reached approximately 202,000 individuals. There are several reasons why people leave El Salvador, including economic hardship, family reunification, natural disasters, instability, violence, and crime. Gang violence triggered displacement in and outside the country. Since 2015, the levels of violence have been on a downward trend. A spike in violence in March 2022 prompted the Government to declare a State of Exception. This event marked a significant shift in the country's security situation leading to a decline in violent crime and weakening gangs' territorial control.

The root causes of gang violence and displacement remain mostly unaddressed. Displaced people face challenges in accessing education, healthcare, livelihood opportunities and recreational activities. Women, girls, children, and adolescents are at a heightened risk of experiencing violence and abuse. LGBTIQ+ people are vulnerable to discrimination and violence. Many asylum-seekers and refugees live in poor communities facing similar challenges to those experienced by their neighbours. Some individuals returned to the country mostly from the United States of America and Mexico, and fear returning to their communities of origin for similar reasons.

UNHCR's 2023-2026 strategy seeks to address the protection needs of forcibly displaced and stateless people and those of returnees with protection needs irrespective of their age, gender, and diversity. To achieve this, UNHCR will galvanize others to build a favourable protection environment and will advocate to safeguard the rights and dignity of affected individuals and communities. With a whole of society approach, UNHCR will work with partners to pursue solutions to displacement.

The vision is aligned with the 2022-2026 UNSDCF, the 2024 Humanitarian Response Plan, and the national chapter of the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (MIRPS). The strategy seeks to contribute to the UN Secretary General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement. To achieve this, UNHCR prioritizes four areas of intervention:

1. Upholding the basic rights of displaced and stateless people and ensuring they are not returned to a place where they may face danger or persecution.
2. Ensuring that forcibly displaced and stateless people are safe from harm, their rights are respected, and they can meet their basic needs. UNHCR will deliver assistance

directly and through partners. UNHCR will work with the Humanitarian Country Team to ensure emergency preparedness and response.

3. Ensuring that individuals and communities are meaningfully engaged and empowered. UNHCR will promote their active participation in decision-making processes that affect their lives.

4. Strengthening partnerships with humanitarian, development, and peace actors to pursue solutions to displacement. UNHCR will further pursue the admission of people with protection needs into alternative pathways for solutions. UNHCR will promote economic inclusion and self-reliance.

UNHCR ensures that forcibly displaced and stateless people and returnees with protection needs are at the centre of all interventions and participate meaningfully in decisions that affect their lives. UNHCR will be accountable to them and will strive to ensure that they enjoy their rights on equal footing.

1.2 Situation Analysis

El Salvador continues to experience high levels of human mobility. As of end of 2023, there were 133,042 asylum-seekers with pending decisions from El Salvador and 68,633 Salvadoran refugees worldwide. Between 2006 and 2016, 1.1 per cent of families in El Salvador were forcibly displaced, resulting in an estimated 71,500 internally displaced people (IDPs). The majority of these IDPs are young, from socio-economically vulnerable families, according to a profiling exercise published by the Ministry of Justice and Public Security in 2018. As in previous years, thousands of Salvadoran nationals were intercepted while trying to reach the United States of America. By August 2024, the number of Salvadoran nationals returned after attempting to reach the U.S. and Mexico reached 10,326. Efforts are ongoing to address the root causes of migration, including violence, poverty, and lack of opportunities.

El Salvador hosts a small number of asylum-seekers and refugees. As perceptions of safety in El Salvador continue to improve, as well as the increased of people in mixed movements transiting the country, it is likely that the number of asylum-seekers and recognized refugees will maintain an upward trend in the coming years.

El Salvador is committed to identifying and addressing gaps in protection and solutions impacting refugees, IDPs, returnees with protection needs, and stateless individuals. El Salvador is party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol, and to the 1954 Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons. To further reduce statelessness, UNHCR advocates for the adoption of the 1961 Convention. In 2020, El Salvador approved the Special Law for the Care and Integral Protection of Victims of Violence in Conditions of Forced Displacement (IDP Law). The passage of the IDP Law was an

important step towards protecting people forced to flee their homes due to violence or persecution. The law demonstrates El Salvador's commitment to providing much-needed support and assistance to those who have been forcibly displaced within their own country. While there is still work to be done to fully implement and enforce the law, its passage is an important milestone in El Salvador's efforts to protect and support those who have been displaced by violence and persecution.

Forced displacement has far-reaching and complex impacts on the enjoyment of human rights. Recurrent internal displacement can ultimately lead people to leave the country in search of safety and protection. The effects of violence, forced displacement, and structural exclusion are particularly acute for women and girls, who face multiple forms of discrimination and gender-based violence. Similarly, LGBTIQ+ people are at heightened risk of violence and exclusion, which further limits their access to rights and opportunities.

National public institutions provide psycho-social support, legal services, and assistance for specific vulnerable groups, such as children, adolescents, and women. Effective responses to the specific needs of IDPs still require stronger engagement from all stakeholders, including public institutions. Coordination among stakeholders has proven to be useful in enhancing adequate services for children and improving the livelihoods of displaced young people. There are opportunities to develop a comprehensive national strategy to advance solutions to displacement.

To ensure the protection of returnees with specific needs, a government-run facility in El Salvador provides comprehensive attention and protection-oriented services to most deportees and returnees arriving from Mexico and the United States of America.

UNHCR supports this effort to ensure that returnees with protection needs are identified and referred to the appropriate services during the reception process.

The legal framework on asylum does not sufficiently address the specific protection needs of diverse groups, such as children, women, and LGBTIQ+ people. Further alignment with migration regulations will facilitate asylum-seekers and refugees' access to legal documentation, towards better access to work, and financial and other services.

Persistent poverty, gender-based violence, and the worsening impacts of climate change will pose significant barriers to finding solutions allowing families and individuals to remain rooted in their communities.

UNHCR recognizes the need to work collaboratively with a whole of society approach to identify and support solutions and opportunities for livelihoods that can create long-term sustainable solutions. Additionally, UNHCR advocates for and facilitates access to complementary pathways for those individuals who cannot remain in the country.

UNHCR submitted 1,683 individuals in 2023 and expects to submit 3,050 individuals in 2024 for the In Country Processing (ICP) Programme .

El Salvador plays an active role in the implementation of the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (MIRPS), which is the regional application of the Global Compact on Refugees, and in the Cartagena +40 process. Given the growing number of people in mixed movements in the region, there is a pressing need for coordinated and protection-oriented responses with an hemispheric perspective, and sensitive to the diverse and complex needs of those affected by forced displacement.

UNHCR is actively engaged in implementing, coordinating, and monitoring the 2022-2026 United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) which prioritizes responses to the needs of internally displaced people and refugees. In line with the UN Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement, UNHCR works with the Resident Coordinator, the United Nations Country Team (UNCT), the Government to advance durable solutions to displacement.

The UNHCR-led Protection Sector continues to expand its membership and is key to ensure the inclusion of displaced populations in the UNSDCF and in the 2025 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP). Additionally, UNHCR takes on co-leadership of the Shelter and Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Sectors, thereby bolstering the capacity of the humanitarian architecture to respond effectively to emergency situations .

In a fluid environment, dialogue with affected communities and their empowerment is central for UNHCR's response. Monitoring of the humanitarian access and understanding of the evolving situation feed data-driven decisions.

UNHCR catalyses efforts in support of those forcibly displaced through the proactive engagement of a variety of stakeholders, including development actors, civil society, faith groups, academia, and the private sector.

1.3 Vision and Strategic Orientation

Vision: By 2026, an increasing number of forcibly displaced, stateless populations and returnees with protection needs will exercise and enjoy their rights irrespective of their age, gender, and diversity. With a whole of society approach, UNHCR will pursue sustainable solutions to displacement, achieving transformative and measurable change improving the lives of displaced and stateless people.

Strategic orientation: The vision is in alignment with the 2022-2026 UNSDCF, the 2025 Humanitarian Response Plan, and the national chapter of the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (MIRPS). Furthermore, the strategy seeks to contribute to the UN Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement. To achieve this, UNHCR has four objectives :

Protect. UNHCR will seek to uphold the basic rights of forcibly displaced and stateless people and ensure they are not returned to a place where they may face danger or persecution. UNHCR will galvanize support to build a favourable protection environment and will advocate for safeguarding protection principles, access to the territory and asylum and the rights of affected populations. UNHCR will work with the Government to strengthen refugee and IDP legal and institutional frameworks and to support access to fair and efficient asylum procedures. UNHCR will strengthen the protection of IDPs and people at risk of displacement by further strengthening UNHCR’s operational capacity for the delivery of protection in communities affected by violence and displacement. UNHCR will boost interventions to prevent, respond, and mitigate protection risks, including gender-based violence and violence against children.

Respond. UNHCR will seek to ensure that displaced and stateless people are safe from harm, their rights are respected, and they can meet their basic needs. UNHCR will deliver assistance, including individual case management, access to basic services, assistance in kind and cash-based interventions. UNHCR will work with the Humanitarian Country Team to ensure emergency preparedness and response and by leading the Protection Sector and co-leading CCCM and Shelter Sectors. UNHCR will ensure protection and its dividends guide humanitarian action.

Empower. UNHCR will ensure that individuals and communities are meaningfully engaged and empowered. UNHCR will promote their participation in decision-making processes that affect their lives. UNHCR’s expanded work with communities at heightened risk of displacement will foster inclusion and people’s engagement for a better enjoyment of rights and access to services. UNHCR will strengthen conflict resolution and violence prevention at the community level. To generate safe and inclusive spaces conducive for community engagement in climate action, UNHCR will boost community- structures and processes sensitive to protection and to age, gender, and diversity.

Solve. UNHCR will strengthen partnerships with humanitarian, development, and peace actors to pursue solutions to displacement. UNHCR will explore opportunities for solutions for internally displaced and stateless people and for refugees. UNHCR will further pursue the admission of people with heightened protection risks into complementary protection and alternative pathways for solutions. UNHCR will promote economic inclusion and self-reliance by scaling up engagement with development actors, the private sector, and international financial institutions. UNHCR will support refugees access to permanent residency and citizenship.

1.4 Fair Access and Representation

Age, gender, and diversity considerations will inform UNHCR's interventions, advocacy, and programmes. In adherence with the Policy on Age, Gender, and Diversity (2018) and the Accountability to Affected People (2020), UNHCR will collect and analyse data disaggregated by age and gender, using the Population Registration and Identity Management Ecosystem (PRIMES) tool and data collected in the field and monitoring tools.

UNHCR will ensure that internally displaced and stateless people and returnees with protection needs are at the centre of all interventions and participate meaningfully in the decisions that affect their lives. Women, men, girls, and boys of diverse backgrounds and ages will be consulted to incorporate their priorities, needs, and capacities during all stages of the operational cycle. Structured dialogue and one-on-one interviews, focus group discussions, and surveys will inform the analysis of the situation of people affected by displacement and UNHCR's response.

Two-way communication will be enhanced, diversifying, and improving communication channels, furthering accessibility to all groups, operational effectiveness, and accountability. UNHCR's free toll number will continue operating. Feedback and complaint mechanisms by UNHCR and partners will strengthen the registration and tracking of complaints of unfair treatment, wrongdoing, sexual exploitation, and abuse. Surveys will allow collecting feedback at service delivery points.

UNHCR will work with communities to foster safe and inclusive spaces of participation, promoting peaceful coexistence between displaced people and host communities, where everyone feels they belong and that all participants are actively engaged in processes to build inclusive communities.

UNHCR will promote targeted interventions to improve the protection and wellbeing of children, women, youth, LGBTIQ+ people, people with disabilities, older people, gender-based violence survivors, and indigenous peoples and people of African descent, among other groups at heightened risk. To prevent discrimination and safeguard the rights of LGBTIQ+ people, UNHCR will raise awareness on sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.

UNHCR will strengthen community mobilization, including the active participation of women in leadership structures. To support gender equality, UNHCR will ensure that women and girls participate equally and meaningfully in all decision-making processes, are part of community self-management structures and their voices are heard.

2. Impact Statements

Impact statement

Forcibly displaced people fully enjoy their rights and equal access to effective protection systems.

Impact area: Attaining favourable protection environments

Outcome statements

Asylum-seekers have access to a fair and efficient refugee status determination procedure and have their asylum claims determined in a fair and timely manner.

Outcome area: Refugee status determination

Rights of forcibly displaced people are recognized and guaranteed in the national legal framework and public policies.

Outcome area: Protection policy and law

Impact statement

Forcibly displaced people meet their basic needs.

Impact area: Realizing rights in safe environments

Outcome statements

Gender-based violence survivors have adequate and timely access to specialized services, and communities are actively engaged in prevention and risk mitigation activities.

Outcome area: Gender-based violence

Forcibly displaced children are included in national child protection systems and have access to child friendly procedures and services, including best interest procedures.

Outcome area: Child protection

Forcibly displaced people access efficient and effective national services and humanitarian responses.

Outcome area: Well-being and basic needs

Impact statement

Forcibly displaced people are empowered, informed and are meaningful actors of their own protection and solutions.

Impact area: Empowering communities and achieving gender equality

Outcome statements

Strengthened community structures promote inclusion and effective participation for the enjoyment of their rights.

Outcome area: Community engagement and women's empowerment

Impact statement

Forcibly displaced people find solutions to their situation and become self-reliant, while also contributing to the development and resilience of their communities.

Impact area: Securing solutions

Outcome statements

Forcibly displaced people have access to decent/formal employment or self-employment and livelihoods opportunities.

Outcome area: Self-reliance, economic inclusion and livelihoods

People at heightened risk are identified, referred, submitted, and processed for solutions in another country through strengthened and efficient mechanisms.

Outcome area: Resettlement and complementary pathways

Forcibly displaced people access programmes advancing solutions to displacement.

Outcome area: Local integration and other local solutions

3. El Salvador 2025 Indicators and Targets

Country	Results Level	Result Area	Indicator	Population Type	Baseline	Target 2025
El Salvador	Impact	IA1: Protect	1.1 Proportion of people seeking international protection who are able to access asylum procedures	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100%	Not applicable
El Salvador	Impact	IA1: Protect	1.2 Proportion of people who are able to move freely within the country of habitual residence	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100%	Not applicable
El Salvador	Impact	IA2: Respond	2.2 Proportion of people residing in physically safe and secure settlements with access to basic facilities	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	18%	Not applicable
El Salvador	Impact	IA2: Respond	2.3 Proportion of people with access to health services	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	96%	Not applicable
El Salvador	Impact	IA3: Empower	3.1 Proportion of people who have the right to decent work	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	34%	Not applicable

El Salvador	Impact	IA3: Empower	3.2a Proportion of children and young people enrolled in primary education	IDPs	119%	Not applicable
El Salvador	Impact	IA3: Empower	3.2a Proportion of children and young people enrolled in primary education	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	83%	Not applicable
El Salvador	Impact	IA3: Empower	3.2b Proportion of children and young people enrolled in secondary education	IDPs	21%	Not applicable
El Salvador	Impact	IA3: Empower	3.2b Proportion of children and young people enrolled in secondary education	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	67%	Not applicable
El Salvador	Impact	IA3: Empower	3.3 Proportion of people feeling safe walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	80%	Not applicable
El Salvador	Impact	IA4: Solve	4.1 Number of refugees who voluntarily return in safety and dignity to their country of origin	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	0	Not applicable
El Salvador	Impact	IA4: Solve	4.2a Number of people who departed on resettlement	Others of Concern	839	Not applicable
El Salvador	Impact	IA4: Solve	4.3b Number of refugees for whom residency status is granted or confirmed	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	0	Not applicable
El Salvador	Outcome	OA2: Status	2.1 Average processing time (in days) from registration to first instance asylum decision	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	413	30
El Salvador	Outcome	OA2: Status	2.2 Proportion of people undergoing asylum procedures who have access to legal representation	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100%	100%
El Salvador	Outcome	OA2: Status	2.3 Proportion of people undergoing asylum procedures who have access to an effective appeal mechanism after first instance rejection of their claim	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100%	100%
El	Outcome	OA3:	3.1 Extent national legal	None	Broadly	To be

Salvador		Policy/Law	framework is in line with the 1951 Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol		aligned: ≥90 points	confirmed
El Salvador	Outcome	OA3: Policy/Law	3.2 Extent national legal framework is in line with the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness	None	Broadly aligned: ≥90 points	To be confirmed
El Salvador	Outcome	OA4: GBV	4.1 Proportion of people who know where to access available GBV services	IDPs	87%	100%
El Salvador	Outcome	OA4: GBV	4.1 Proportion of people who know where to access available GBV services	Others of Concern	To be confirmed	71%
El Salvador	Outcome	OA4: GBV	4.1 Proportion of people who know where to access available GBV services	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	41%	71%
El Salvador	Outcome	OA4: GBV	4.2 Proportion of people who do not accept violence against women	IDPs	To be confirmed	60%
El Salvador	Outcome	OA4: GBV	4.2 Proportion of people who do not accept violence against women	Others of Concern	To be confirmed	60%
El Salvador	Outcome	OA4: GBV	4.2 Proportion of people who do not accept violence against women	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	To be confirmed	100%
El Salvador	Outcome	OA4: GBV	4.3 Proportion of survivors who are satisfied with GBV case management services	IDPs	100%	100%
El Salvador	Outcome	OA4: GBV	4.3 Proportion of survivors who are satisfied with GBV case management services	Others of Concern	100%	100%
El Salvador	Outcome	OA4: GBV	4.3 Proportion of survivors who are satisfied with GBV case management services	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100%	100%
El Salvador	Outcome	OA5: Children	5.1 Proportion of children at heightened risk who are supported by a Best Interests Procedure	IDPs	100%	100%

El Salvador	Outcome	OA5: Children	5.1 Proportion of children at heightened risk who are supported by a Best Interests Procedure	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	To be confirmed	100%
El Salvador	Outcome	OA5: Children	5.2 Proportion of children who participate in community-based child protection programmes	IDPs	19%	70%
El Salvador	Outcome	OA5: Children	5.2 Proportion of children who participate in community-based child protection programmes	Others of Concern	To be confirmed	70%
El Salvador	Outcome	OA5: Children	5.2 Proportion of children who participate in community-based child protection programmes	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	41%	70%
El Salvador	Outcome	OA5: Children	5.3 Proportion of unaccompanied and separated children who are in an alternative care arrangement	IDPs	0%	100%
El Salvador	Outcome	OA5: Children	5.3 Proportion of unaccompanied and separated children who are in an alternative care arrangement	Others of Concern	To be confirmed	100%
El Salvador	Outcome	OA5: Children	5.3 Proportion of unaccompanied and separated children who are in an alternative care arrangement	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	0%	100%
El Salvador	Outcome	OA7: Community	7.1 Extent participation of displaced and stateless people across programme phases is supported.	IDPs	Extensive: ≥ 70 points	Extensive: ≥ 70 points
El Salvador	Outcome	OA7: Community	7.1 Extent participation of displaced and stateless people across programme phases is supported.	Others of Concern	Extensive: ≥ 70 points	Extensive: ≥ 70 points
El Salvador	Outcome	OA7: Community	7.1 Extent participation of displaced and stateless people across programme phases is supported.	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	Moderate: 40-69 points	Extensive: ≥ 70 points
El Salvador	Outcome	OA7: Community	7.2 Proportion of people who have access to safe feedback and response mechanisms	IDPs	To be confirmed	71%
El	Outcome	OA7:	7.2 Proportion of people who	Others of	To be	71%

Salvador		Community	have access to safe feedback and response mechanisms	Concern	confirmed	
El Salvador	Outcome	OA7: Community	7.2 Proportion of people who have access to safe feedback and response mechanisms	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	To be confirmed	71%
El Salvador	Outcome	OA7: Community	7.3 Proportion of women participating in leadership/management structures	IDPs	57%	60%
El Salvador	Outcome	OA7: Community	7.3 Proportion of women participating in leadership/management structures	Others of Concern	61%	65%
El Salvador	Outcome	OA7: Community	7.3 Proportion of women participating in leadership/management structures	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	41%	50%
El Salvador	Outcome	OA8: Well-being	8.1 Proportion of people that receive cash transfers and/or non-food items	IDPs	3%	5%
El Salvador	Outcome	OA8: Well-being	8.1 Proportion of people that receive cash transfers and/or non-food items	Others of Concern	4%	5%
El Salvador	Outcome	OA8: Well-being	8.1 Proportion of people that receive cash transfers and/or non-food items	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	47%	60%
El Salvador	Outcome	OA8: Well-being	8.2 Proportion of people with primary reliance on clean (cooking) fuels and technology	IDPs	To be confirmed	100%
El Salvador	Outcome	OA8: Well-being	8.2 Proportion of people with primary reliance on clean (cooking) fuels and technology	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	83%	90%
El Salvador	Outcome	OA13: Livelihood	13.1. Proportion of people with an account at a bank or other financial institution or with a mobile-money-service provider	IDPs	65%	71%
El Salvador	Outcome	OA13: Livelihood	13.1. Proportion of people with an account at a bank or other financial institution or with a	Others of Concern	To be confirmed	71%

			mobile-money-service provider			
El Salvador	Outcome	OA13: Livelihood	13.1. Proportion of people with an account at a bank or other financial institution or with a mobile-money-service provider	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	27%	71%
El Salvador	Outcome	OA13: Livelihood	13.2. Proportion of people who self-report positive changes in their income compared to previous year	IDPs	18%	33%
El Salvador	Outcome	OA13: Livelihood	13.2. Proportion of people who self-report positive changes in their income compared to previous year	Others of Concern	To be confirmed	33%
El Salvador	Outcome	OA13: Livelihood	13.2. Proportion of people who self-report positive changes in their income compared to previous year	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	8%	33%
El Salvador	Outcome	OA13: Livelihood	13.3 Proportion of people (working age) who are unemployed	IDPs	6%	5%
El Salvador	Outcome	OA13: Livelihood	13.3 Proportion of people (working age) who are unemployed	Others of Concern	To be confirmed	5%
El Salvador	Outcome	OA13: Livelihood	13.3 Proportion of people (working age) who are unemployed	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	7%	5%
El Salvador	Outcome	OA15: Resettle	15.1 Number of refugees submitted by UNHCR for resettlement	Others of Concern	1,683	To be confirmed
El Salvador	Outcome	OA16: Integrate	16.1 Proportion of people with secure tenure rights to housing and/or land	IDPs	To be confirmed	50%
El Salvador	Outcome	OA16: Integrate	16.1 Proportion of people with secure tenure rights to housing and/or land	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	26%	50%
El Salvador	Outcome	OA16: Integrate	16.2 Proportion of people covered by national social protection systems	IDPs	To be confirmed	100%
El	Outcome	OA16:	16.2 Proportion of people	Refugees	24%	50%

Salvador		Integrate	covered by national social protection systems	and Asylum-seekers		
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