

Guatemala

Multi-year Strategy 2023 – 2025



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1.1 Executive Summary

Guatemala is a country of origin, transit, destination and return for people in need of protection. These populations have distinct needs, including survivors of trafficking and gender-based violence, unaccompanied children, LGBTIQ+ individuals, and Guatemalans who face risks within their country.

Northbound mixed movements transiting through Guatemala have continued to increase. Expanded access to asylum opportunities has led more people to choose to stay in Guatemala, mainly from Honduras, El Salvador, Venezuela, and Nicaragua. UNHCR's strategy in Guatemala focuses on improving the protection environment for asylum-seekers and refugees, individuals in mixed movements, nationals at risk. The operation aims to reduce the drivers of displacement, enhance protection capacity of authorities and civil society, and strengthen access to rights and services. These priorities are aligned with actions included in the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2020-2025, the National Chapter of the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (MIRPS), and the current Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP). UNHCR also works to advance the framework of the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection issued in June 2022.

UNHCR's 2023-2025 multi-year strategy is focused on four global impact areas: protect, respond, empower, and solve.

Protect: Key protection issues include access to territory and identification of international protection needs. Irregular crossings into Guatemala increase risks such as gender-based violence, human trafficking and extortion as people on the move are more difficult to reach. Lack of opportunities for reintegration negatively affects Guatemalan returnees and heightens protection risks. Against this backdrop, UNHCR will provide technical and operational support to strengthen institutions in charge of border and asylum systems, documentation, and legal support.

Respond: To ensure access to basic rights and services, UNHCR will increase advocacy and training with State institutions and service providers to promote access and an adequate response. Cash and in-kind assistance will be expanded to cover the gaps, while UNHCR supports State institutions to include displaced populations in their national social services. The operation will also support partner organizations to meet protection standards in shelters.

Empower: UNHCR will work to empower several community-based initiatives to ensure the inclusion and participation of displaced populations in host communities. It will also support the Cities of Solidarity initiative and community networks to prevent and address discrimination and promote peaceful coexistence.

Solutions: UNHCR will increase advocacy and training with institutions to improve refugee access to social programs. A comprehensive livelihoods, education, and economic strategy will also be prioritized, in coordination with UN agencies and State institutions. UNHCR will continue to work to expand resettlement and complementary pathways, and with the support of partners will improve the identification of people facing heightened risks to ensure their referral to the Safe Mobility Initiative.

1.2 Situation Analysis

Guatemala is a country of origin, transit, destination, and return for refugees and migrants, and a state party to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. The current refugee legal framework adopts the refugee definition provided by the 1951 Convention and the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees while considering gender-related persecution as a basis for the concession of asylum. The country has also ratified main international and regional instruments to protect human rights.

During the second Global Refugee Forum held in December 2023, Guatemala presented 13 pledges related to protection, education, employment, and livelihoods. Guatemala also joined the multi-stakeholder pledge Cartagena +40 reaffirming its commitment to continue national and regional efforts towards refugee and asylum-seeker protection and integration.

UNHCR has partnership agreements with 10 non-governmental organizations and works closely with other United Nations agencies (including UN Women, IOM, and UNICEF) and governmental institutions. The Office has supported the implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) with the Government of Guatemala and continues co-leading the United Nations Specialized Working Group on Migration (GEMIG) and the Protection Cluster. At the local level, UNHCR works closely with departmental governments, municipalities, and local authorities to protect displaced people.

Due to its geographical location, UNHCR expects that the number of displaced people transiting through, leaving, returning, and seeking asylum in Guatemala will continue to increase in the coming years. During the last five years, the Guatemalan asylum system has received an increasing number of asylum applications, almost doubling annually

(except for 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic). Since its opening in 2021, around 550 persons have been recognized as refugees in Guatemala. In the last three years, 629 people have been recognized, showing the strengthening of the asylum system. Therefore, UNHCR Guatemala estimates a population of approximately 4,715 refugees and asylum-seekers will be living in the country in 2025. Also, it is estimated that 276,930 other people of concern will be assisted in 2025, including 209,610 people in mixed movements with protection needs, 61,047 Guatemalans at risk of displacement, and 7,294 Guatemalan returnees with protection needs. In addition, UNHCR expects close collaboration with the Government of Guatemala to enhance the national protection system, aiming to support 406,161 individuals from host communities.

It is estimated that at least one million people in mixed movements crossed through Guatemala towards Mexico and the United States in 2023. According to the Mixed Movements Monitoring Survey in 2023, 42% of the people mentioned violence and insecurity as their main reason for leaving their country of origin. Given the regional political contexts, similar mixed flow movements are expected for 2024 and 2025. Additional efforts to strengthen reception capacities, improve identification and referral mechanisms, and expand protection services for people at heightened risk and access to information will remain UNHCR's response priorities for mixed movements. UNHCR has strengthened the Guatemalan asylum system through the provision of human resources and technical expertise to achieve a favourable protection environment for the increasing number of people in need of international protection. Nevertheless, some challenges must be addressed, including shortcomings in the referral of individuals with protection needs, lack of specialized services for survivors of gender-based violence, and gaps in access to information on protection risks and available protection services. In addition, reintegration programmes for Guatemalan returnees with protection needs must continue to be strengthened.

Asylum-seekers, refugees, Guatemalans at risk, and other people struggle to meet their basic needs and often resort to negative coping mechanisms. In response, UNHCR has been providing cash assistance to cover basic needs, which in 2021 allowed 91% of beneficiaries to improve their living conditions while promoting their inclusion into national social systems. Although UNHCR has made significant advances to protect children on the move, the national child protection system needs to be further strengthened by establishing and expanding safe spaces, temporary care arrangements, and enhanced response capacities to ensure access to rights in a safe environment.

Community outreach and empowerment activities have been expanded through mobile units led by relevant government institutions and partner organizations. In addition, specialized services are being implemented at municipal and community levels to prevent and respond to gender-based violence. Nevertheless, considering the critical need for these services and the diverse context in Guatemala, further strengthening is required to provide differentiated care tailored for each population group.

Despite many advancements made by the Government of Guatemala, some key challenges remain to be addressed for the protection and well-being of displaced populations. For example, access to effective personal documentation for asylum-seekers and refugees is the main obstacle to accessing essential services (including education, health, welfare, financial services, and employment) and improving opportunities for integration. Other challenges to the economic inclusion of asylum-seekers and refugees include the limited percentage of foreign workers that companies can employ, legal regulations of documentation required for bank accounts, centralization of the process for obtaining work permits, and lack of knowledge of public and private sectors on refugee rights, among others. Accordingly, the strategy will support advocacy efforts to overcome these barriers and mitigate their effects on displaced populations.

Finally, for those whose integration is not an option due to their specific protection profile, UNHCR will provide durable solutions to Guatemalans at risk and individuals of other nationalities through the expansion of its resettlement and complementary pathways programmes, particularly through the Safe Mobility Initiative.

1.3 Vision and Strategic Orientation

In 2023-2025, UNHCR will pursue the vision of Guatemala as a country that improves its protection environment for refugees, individuals in mixed movements and Guatemalans at risk, reducing displacement drivers, enhancing State and civil society protection capacities, and promoting inclusion. This vision is linked and aligned with actions included in the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2020-2025, the National Chapter of the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (MIRPS), and the current Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP). Through its programmes and initiatives, UNHCR will also seek to contribute to Guatemala's efforts to implement the priorities foreseen under the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection.

UNHCR's multi-year strategy 2023-2025 will focus on the four global impact areas (protect, respond, empower, and solve). UNHCR will support the capacities of public institutions mandated to protect displaced populations, including staffing, technical assistance, infrastructural support, and advocacy at the political level for the rights of people with protection needs. Such initiatives will ensure better access to documentation, strengthened public institutions, and compliance with international standards on refugee status determination. Yet while UNHCR aims to enhance the State response capacities, the Agency is also called to provide immediate assistance to safeguard the well-being of individuals through cash and in-kind assistance. To achieve the full inclusion of people with protection needs in Guatemala, UNHCR will strengthen community participation structures, promote peaceful coexistence, and

advocate for including asylum-seekers and refugees in national and local public policies. It will also enhance national gender-based violence prevention and response systems and promote gender equality through effective public policies to guarantee a life free from violence for women, girls, LGBTIQ+ people, and other vulnerable groups.

The strategy aims at enhancing the capacity to achieve durable solutions through two focus areas. The first seeks to promote social and economic inclusion through entrepreneurship and creating job opportunities for asylum-seekers, refugees, and Guatemalan nationals at risk. Acquiring permanent residency remains a milestone of integration for refugees. It is critical to implement a comprehensive livelihoods and economic inclusion strategy, including access to financial services, certification of technical skills, and employment or entrepreneurship. The second area aims to enhance opportunities for solutions through resettlement to third countries, both for refugees who will be resettled in case of unsuccessful integration or other protection risks and for Guatemalan nationals at heightened risk in the country, under the Safe Mobility Initiative UNHCR will also develop complementary pathways, seizing opportunities in the region linked with study, work, and family reunification visas.

The strategic vision and priorities also consider the impacts of climate change, confirming UNHCR's commitment to contribute to the Strategic Framework for Climate Action in Guatemala.

1.4 Fair Access and Representation

UNHCR will prioritize key strategic objectives to increase the inclusion and participation of asylum-seekers, refugees, and Guatemalans at risk in the planning, implementation, and monitoring across the operational cycle of its protection and solutions response.

Initiatives include ensuring that people on the move and affected communities participate in institutional spaces for decision-making and development of public policies; strengthening peaceful coexistence between displaced people and host communities; and ensuring that displaced populations have access to safe and efficient feedback and complaint systems, aiming at promoting learning and adaptation for UNHCR and partners.

UNHCR will continue to advance capacities for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, increasing safeguards across all response areas and projects. UNHCR will also strengthen communication with communities to guarantee access to timely, secure, and relevant information through accessible, inclusive, and culturally appropriate communication channels. As such, UNHCR will continue to prioritize its internal and external capacity concerning age, gender, and diversity data collection and its ability to assess risks that hamper attaining a favourable protection environment.

UNHCR will consolidate the communication channels used to reach targeted communities to reduce overlap while also diversifying or adapting communication channels where needed to ensure that information on rights and services is accessible to all populations in need. Finally, to improve data-driven response, digital information on communication with communities will be collected, standardized, and analyzed, considering the accessibility and reliability of the data.

2. Impact Statements

Impact statement

All people under UNHCR's mandate have safe and effective access to protection systems, asylum and justice.

Impact area: Attaining favourable protection environments

Outcome statements

Enhanced government capacities ensure access to territory and documentation, reduce risk of refoulement and facilitate access to services.

Outcome area: Access to territory, registration and documentation

Government has effective registration and refugee status determination (RSD) procedures in place to ensure access to fair and efficient asylum procedures according to international standards.

Outcome area: Refugee status determination

National legal framework, public policies, administrative and judiciary practices are in accordance with human rights, international protection and forced displacement standards.

Outcome area: Protection policy and law

Impact statement

People under UNHCR's mandate enjoy fundamental rights and meet their basic and specific protection needs in a safe environment.

Impact area: Realizing rights in safe environments

Outcome statements

Food, water and basic services are available to people under UNHCR's mandate in a safe environment.

Outcome area: Well-being and basic needs

People under UNHCR's mandate have access to adequate emergency shelter and safe housing.

Outcome area: Sustainable housing and settlements

People under UNHCR's mandate have access to primary and secondary education, as well as additional/higher/tertiary education, through the inclusion into the national education system.

Outcome area: Education

People under UNHCR's mandate have access to health services.

Outcome area: Healthy lives

Forcibly displaced or unaccompanied children at risk have access to national child protection systems.

Outcome area: Child protection

Impact statement

People under UNHCR's mandate of different ages, gender and diversity are active and productive members in empowered communities, and live violence free lives.

Impact area: Empowering communities and achieving gender equality

Outcome statements

Gender-based violence affecting people under UNHCR's mandate is prevented and, when it occurs, receives a comprehensive response in a timely, effective and safe manner.

Outcome area: Gender-based violence

People under UNHCR's mandate are meaningful actors of their own protection and solutions, creating conditions for equal enjoyment of rights through representation in management, coordination and leadership structures.

Outcome area: Community engagement and women's empowerment

Impact statement

People under UNHCR's mandate become self-reliant and achieve local integration and those at risk and with specific protection needs have access to resettlement and complementary pathways.

Impact area: Securing solutions

Outcome statements

Decent market-based employment or self-employment are accessible to people under UNHCR's mandate to generate income.

Outcome area: Self-reliance, economic inclusion and livelihoods

Resettlement, in-country processing and complementary pathways programmes are strengthened to effectively respond to people under UNHCR's mandate with specific protection needs.

Outcome area: Resettlement and complementary pathways

The government at national and local level increases its capacity to include people under UNHCR's mandate in social policies and programmes.

Outcome area: Local integration and other local solutions

3. Guatemala 2025 Indicators and Targets

Country	Results Level	Result Area	Indicator	Population Type	Baseline	Target 2025
Guatemala	Impact	IA1: Protect	1.1 Proportion of people seeking international protection who are able to access asylum procedures	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	99%	Not applicable
Guatemala	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
Guatemala	Impact	IA2: Respond	2.2 Proportion of people residing in physically safe and secure settlements with access to basic facilities	Others of Concern	10%	Not applicable
Guatemala	Impact	IA2: Respond	2.2 Proportion of people residing in physically safe and secure settlements with access to basic facilities	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	4%	Not applicable
Guatemala	Impact	IA2: Respond	2.3 Proportion of people with access to health services	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	96%	Not applicable
Guatemala	Impact	IA3: Empower	3.1 Proportion of people who have the right to decent work	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100%	Not applicable
Guatemala	Impact	IA3: Empower	3.2a Proportion of children and young people enrolled in primary education	Others of Concern	52%	Not applicable
Guatemala	Impact	IA3: Empower	3.2a Proportion of children and young people enrolled in primary education	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	49%	Not applicable

Guatemala	Impact	IA3: Empower	3.2b Proportion of children and young people enrolled in secondary education	Others of Concern	34%	Not applicable
Guatemala	Impact	IA3: Empower	3.2b Proportion of children and young people enrolled in secondary education	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	30%	Not applicable
Guatemala	Impact	IA3: Empower	3.3 Proportion of people feeling safe walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark	Others of Concern	14%	Not applicable
Guatemala	Impact	IA3: Empower	3.3 Proportion of people feeling safe walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	44%	Not applicable
Guatemala	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
Guatemala	Impact	IA4: Solve	4.2a Number of people who departed on resettlement	Others of Concern	2,157	Not applicable
Guatemala	Impact	IA4: Solve	4.2a Number of people who departed on resettlement	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	143	Not applicable
Guatemala	Impact	IA4: Solve	4.3b Number of refugees for whom residency status is granted or confirmed	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	293	Not applicable
Guatemala	Outcome	OA1: Access/Doc	1.1 Proportion of refugees and asylum seekers registered on an individual basis	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100%	100%
Guatemala	Outcome	OA1: Access/Doc	1.2 Proportion of children under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority	Others of Concern	100%	100%
Guatemala	Outcome	OA1: Access/Doc	1.2 Proportion of children under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	94%	96%
Guatemala	Outcome	OA1:	1.3 Proportion of people with	Others of	100%	100%

		Access/Doc	legally recognized identity documents or credentials	Concern		
Guatemala	Outcome	OA1: Access/Doc	1.3 Proportion of people with legally recognized identity documents or credentials	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	98%	100%
Guatemala	Outcome	OA2: Status	2.1 Average processing time (in days) from registration to first instance asylum decision	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	450	380
Guatemala	Outcome	OA2: Status	2.2 Proportion of people undergoing asylum procedures who have access to legal representation	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100%	100%
Guatemala	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%
Guatemala	Outcome	OA3: Policy/Law	3.1 Extent national legal framework is in line with the 1951 Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol	None	Broadly aligned: ≥90 points	Broadly aligned: ≥90 points
Guatemala	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	Broadly aligned: ≥90 points
Guatemala	Outcome	OA4: GBV	4.1 Proportion of people who know where to access available GBV services	Others of Concern	33%	33%
Guatemala	Outcome	OA4: GBV	4.1 Proportion of people who know where to access available GBV services	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	22%	30%
Guatemala	Outcome	OA4: GBV	4.3 Proportion of survivors who are satisfied with GBV case management services	Others of Concern	100%	100%
Guatemala	Outcome	OA4: GBV	4.3 Proportion of survivors who are satisfied with GBV case management services	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	88%	90%

Guatemala	Outcome	OA5: Children	5.1 Proportion of children at heightened risk who are supported by a Best Interests Procedure	Others of Concern	71%	71%
Guatemala	Outcome	OA5: Children	5.1 Proportion of children at heightened risk who are supported by a Best Interests Procedure	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	78%	78%
Guatemala	Outcome	OA5: Children	5.2 Proportion of children who participate in community-based child protection programmes	Others of Concern	21%	30%
Guatemala	Outcome	OA5: Children	5.2 Proportion of children who participate in community-based child protection programmes	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	35%	35%
Guatemala	Outcome	OA5: Children	5.3 Proportion of unaccompanied and separated children who are in an alternative care arrangement	Others of Concern	100%	100%
Guatemala	Outcome	OA5: Children	5.3 Proportion of unaccompanied and separated children who are in an alternative care arrangement	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	58%	58%
Guatemala	Outcome	OA7: Community	7.1 Extent participation of displaced and stateless people across programme phases is supported.	Others of Concern	Moderate: 40-69 points	Moderate: 40-69 points
Guatemala	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	Moderate: 40-69 points
Guatemala	Outcome	OA7: Community	7.3 Proportion of women participating in leadership/management structures	Others of Concern	75%	75%
Guatemala	Outcome	OA7: Community	7.3 Proportion of women participating in leadership/management structures	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	58%	58%

Guatemala	Outcome	OA8: Well-being	8.1 Proportion of people that receive cash transfers and/or non-food items	Others of Concern	2%	2%
Guatemala	Outcome	OA8: Well-being	8.1 Proportion of people that receive cash transfers and/or non-food items	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	25%	25%
Guatemala	Outcome	OA8: Well-being	8.2 Proportion of people with primary reliance on clean (cooking) fuels and technology	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	85%	85%
Guatemala	Outcome	OA9: Housing	9.1 Proportion of people living in habitable and affordable housing	Others of Concern	10%	10%
Guatemala	Outcome	OA9: Housing	9.1 Proportion of people living in habitable and affordable housing	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	2%	8%
Guatemala	Outcome	OA9: Housing	9.2 Proportion of people that have energy to ensure lighting	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	97%	98%
Guatemala	Outcome	OA10: Health	10.1 Proportion of children aged 9 months to five years who have received measles vaccination	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	87%	87%
Guatemala	Outcome	OA10: Health	10.2. Proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	87%	87%
Guatemala	Outcome	OA11: Education	11.1 Proportion of young people enrolled in tertiary and higher education	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	4%	4%
Guatemala	Outcome	OA11: Education	11.2 Proportion of children and young people enrolled in the national education system	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	41%	41%
Guatemala	Outcome	OA13: Livelihood	13.1. Proportion of people with an account at a bank or other financial institution or with a mobile-money-service	Others of Concern	66%	80%

			provider			
Guatemala	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	36%	42%
Guatemala	Outcome	OA13: Livelihood	13.2. Proportion of people who self-report positive changes in their income compared to previous year	Others of Concern	6%	10%
Guatemala	Outcome	OA13: Livelihood	13.2. Proportion of people who self-report positive changes in their income compared to previous year	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	10%	10%
Guatemala	Outcome	OA13: Livelihood	13.3 Proportion of people (working age) who are unemployed	Others of Concern	2%	2%
Guatemala	Outcome	OA13: Livelihood	13.3 Proportion of people (working age) who are unemployed	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	6%	5%
Guatemala	Outcome	OA15: Resettle	15.1 Number of refugees submitted by UNHCR for resettlement	Others of Concern	4,648	To be confirmed
Guatemala	Outcome	OA15: Resettle	15.1 Number of refugees submitted by UNHCR for resettlement	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	183	To be confirmed
Guatemala	Outcome	OA16: Integrate	16.1 Proportion of people with secure tenure rights to housing and/or land	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	4%	13%
Guatemala	Outcome	OA16: Integrate	16.2 Proportion of people covered by national social protection systems	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	56%	62%