

NICARAGUA AND HONDURAS

Hurricane Eta



KEY FIGURES

1.8 million

PEOPLE AFFECTED
IN HONDURAS

150,000

PEOPLE AFFECTED
IN NICARAGUA

2700

HOUSES DAMAGED
IN HONDURAS

1170

HOUSES DAMAGED
IN NICARAGUA

High Risk

OF DISEASE OUTBREAK
IN AFFECTED AREAS

CRISIS IMPACT OVERVIEW

- On Tuesday 3 November, Hurricane Eta made landfall on the North Atlantic coast of Nicaragua – just south of the city of Bilwi (also known as Puerto Cabezas) – as a category 4 hurricane, with heavy rainfall and high winds of up to 230km/h (OCHA 03/11/2020). As the hurricane moved further inland and was downgraded to a tropical storm, it exposed Honduras and other Central American countries to heavy rains that have resulted in widespread flooding and deadly landslides (AccuWeather 05/11/2020; IFRC 09/11/2020).
- The North Atlantic coast of Nicaragua bore the brunt of the hurricane and people there have urgent needs. These are aggravated by pre-existing vulnerabilities and the remoteness of affected communities, which have limited response efforts (OCHA 04/11/2020). The situation is even more critical in Honduras, where almost 1.8 million people have been directly affected and 38 have been killed by flooding and landslides (OCHA 08/11/2020).
- The hurricane has caused widespread damage to roads, bridges, houses, and power lines, leaving people cut off from assistance and with urgent shelter, non-food item (NFI), food, and WASH needs (AccuWeather 05/11/2020; Reuters 03/11/2020; OCHA 03/11/2020).
- The impacts of the hurricane reach far beyond the areas directly hit by the storm. Heavy rains have triggered flooding and landslides in Guatemala, Mexico, El Salvador, Panama, Costa Rica, and Belize. Guatemala is the third worst-hit country after Nicaragua and Honduras. In Guatemala, flooding has affected over 311,000 people and almost 10,000 are currently in shelters (OCHA 09/11/2020). Landslides have killed at least 31 people with the death toll expected to rise as 100 more remain missing (CONRED 09/11/2020; IFRC 09/11/2020). At least 27 people have also died in southern states in Mexico (ECHO 09/11/2020).

ANTICIPATED SCOPE AND SCALE

- Hurricane Eta has now cleared Central America and has turned back over the Caribbean Sea. Persistent rainfall and resulting floods across Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and parts of Costa Rica, Panama, and Belize have affected up to three million people across the region (OCHA 06/11/2020).
- As forecasted, the system strengthened again as it headed north-east across the Caribbean Sea. It hit Cuba on Sunday 8 November and caused flooding in coastal zones, but no deaths have been reported (Al Jazeera 08/11/2020). The storm reached Florida on Sunday night with high winds and heavy rains. The US National Hurricane Center has declared hurricane and storm surge warnings for parts of Florida (The Guardian 09/11/2020).
- The Atlantic hurricane season officially lasts until the end of November, but meteorologists have warned that threats could remain well into December (AccuWeather 05/11/2020).

HUMANITARIAN CONSTRAINTS

- Flooding and landslides have damaged roads and bridges and severed power supplies in both Honduras and Nicaragua, cutting off 68 communities (95,000 people) in Honduras and at least three communities in Nicaragua from physical access and telecommunications (IFRC 09/11/2020; OCHA 08/11/2020; AccuWeather 05/11/2020; Reuters 03/11/2020).
- In some affected areas in Honduras, gang members are extorting people and restricting access to humanitarian workers (OCHA 08/11/2020).
- Several Nicaraguan NGOs and community groups have reported that the government has obstructed efforts to collect and distribute donations for affected communities (Confidencial 05/11/2020; El Periódico 05/11/2020; La Vanguardia 05/11/2020). The North Atlantic is an autonomous region of Nicaragua and there are tensions between the affected Miskita and Mayagna communities in this region and the Nicaraguan state.

CRISIS IMPACT

Shelter

Nicaragua: High winds have damaged houses in the affected areas. According to the National System for Prevention, Mitigation and Attention of Disasters (SINAPRED), approximately 47,000 people are sheltering in different sites including family homes, churches, and schools (OCHA 04/11/2020; OCHA 06/11/2020). Evacuation shelters in Bilwi have reached maximum capacity (AccuWeather 05/11/2020).

Honduras: Flooding and landslides have affected over 2,700 houses. The armed forces and relief workers have evacuated 4,700 people, and over 38,000 are staying in temporary collective shelters. Other riverside communities are at risk of flooding (IFRC 09/11/2020; The Guardian 04/11/2020; OCHA 04/11/2020). Some of the shelters are reporting COVID-19 outbreaks and stomach illnesses (OCHA 09/11/2020).

In both countries, NFI needs include clothing, blankets, bedding, and hygiene items (IFRC 04/11/2020; OCHA 08/11/2020).

Health

In both countries, there is a lack of accurate information on specific health needs, but the following risks can be highlighted:

Damages to health centres are likely to limit people's access to vital services. At least two health centres have been destroyed in Nicaragua (IFRC 09/11/2020). In the hardest-hit department of Honduras – Cortés – most health facilities have been closed because of damage, injuries among health personnel, and blocked roads (UNFPA 08/11/2020).

People in temporary collective shelters are at increased risk of COVID-19 transmission. Overcrowded shelters, lack of PPE, limited access to water and hygiene supplies, and inadequate safety protocols are likely to lead to outbreaks of the virus in affected areas, as has already been reported in some shelters in Honduras (UNICEF 09/11/2020; OCHA 08/11/2020).

Stagnant water increases risks of water and vector-borne disease outbreaks of dengue, zika, malaria, cholera, and chikungunya. Exposure to humidity and cold may cause respiratory diseases (IFRC 09/11/2020).

The affected population has also been exposed to high levels of stress and trauma and will require psychosocial support (IFRC 09/11/2020).

WASH

Nicaragua: Initial reports indicate that at least 32,000 families have experienced partial disruption of water supplies, mainly as a result of contaminated water sources (UNICEF 06/11/2020). Most households in the affected North Atlantic coastal region did not have ac-

cess to potable water prior to the hurricane (CEJIL 03/2019). SINAPRED reports damages to water systems as well as thousands of contaminated wells and damaged latrines as a result of overflowing rivers, further restricting access to drinking water (OCHA 06/11/2020; IFRC 04/11/2020).

Honduras: High levels of rainfall and overflowing rivers have increased contamination in water sources, reducing accessibility to drinking water. Numbers of those affected are currently unavailable (IFRC 09/11/2020).

Food and livelihoods

Nicaragua: Agriculture accounts for 17% of GDP and is the primary source of livelihoods for 90% of the rural population (WFP 08/2020). The North Atlantic Autonomous Region has 72% of the country's forested area, 70% of fishing production, 23% of the total agricultural area, and 60% of mining resources. The hurricane is likely to have a devastating effect on communities' main livelihoods of fishing and agriculture (WFP 06/11/2020; CEJIL 03/2019). In northern Nicaragua, landslides could affect coffee plants and block roads that are needed to bring harvest produce to market, impacting livelihoods (AP News 04/11/2020).

Honduras: Floods have damaged the infrastructure of small businesses and disrupted agricultural production activities. Over 32,000 hectares of crops have been destroyed. Damages to roads and bridges are also likely to affect access routes to markets. These livelihood disruptions may result in the affected population lacking resources to cover basic food and NFI needs, and – as a consequence – they may resort to negative coping mechanisms (IFRC 09/11/2020).

Emergency telecommunications

Nicaragua and Honduras: Interruptions to power supplies as a result of fallen trees severing power lines are affecting Atlantic coast communities in both countries (OCHA 03/11/2020). In Bilwi, Nicaragua, 25,000 households remain without power (IFRC 09/11/2020).

Protection

Nicaragua: Rates of domestic violence, gender-based violence (GBV), underage pregnancies, and femicides are high in Bilwi compared to other regions. Risks to girls and women are likely to increase during this emergency, particularly in overcrowded, mixed shelters and isolated communities.

Honduras: An increase in domestic violence and GBV has been reported since COVID-19 restrictions began. The stress caused by the hurricane and temporary shelter arrangements may expose girls and women to further protection risks.

In both countries, children also face increased protection risks, especially those who have been separated from caregivers (IFRC 09/11/2020).

AGGRAVATING FACTORS

Political instability in Nicaragua: Nicaragua has been facing a political crisis since 16 April 2018, when reforms to the social security system prompted a period of large-scale civil unrest. Violent crackdowns by the government against opposition protesters and human rights defenders have increased and are likely to continue, with no political resolution in sight (OHCHR 22/11/2018; HRW 19/06/2019).

Poor infrastructure in affected regions: The most affected region in Nicaragua – the North Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region – is one of the country's poorest areas. Inadequate infrastructure has both increased the need for humanitarian assistance and complicated humanitarian access (OCHA 04/11/2020). In this region, houses are made from wood and adobe and cannot withstand powerful storms (WFP 03/11/2020; AccuWeather 05/11/2020). Because of a lack of state investment, other basic infrastructure such as roads, bridges, health services, and public buildings are also highly vulnerable to extreme weather conditions (IFRC 04/11/2020). Even before the storm, the region was isolated and the main city of Bilwi, where the hurricane made landfall, was only accessible by river (The Guardian 04/11/2020). Flooding has made river routes unsafe and has physically cut off some communities from assistance (AccuWeather 05/11/2020).

Marginalised communities: Affected Miskita and Mayagna communities in the the North Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region have repeatedly denounced human rights violations by the government related to the exploitation of forests and other natural resources on indigenous land (El País 24/02/2020). These communities continue to be threatened, attacked, and displaced by settlers and armed non-indigenous groups. The government did not act to prevent and punish such attacks, ignoring the needs of the indigenous communities. It is likely that such inaction will be reflected in national responses to the affected people of Hurricane Eta (IWGIA 11/05/2020; CEJIL 03/2019).

Socio-economic situation: Pre-existing economic vulnerabilities have been aggravated by COVID-19-related shocks. Depletion of income and remittances because of the social and economic impacts of COVID-19 has severely affected households in Nicaragua and Honduras, reducing sources of income and purchasing power. According to WFP surveys, all income-generating activities in Honduras have been affected by COVID-19-related restrictions and employment has dropped by over 50% (WFP 04/2020). Prior to the hurricane, 18% of the population (962,000 people) were food insecure (OCHA 05/2020). The hurricane is likely to further limit livelihood options and economic resources, and affected households will be less able to cope with these additional shocks. Remittances are likely to be affected as around 20% come from neighbouring countries that were also hit by Hurricane Eta (IFRC 04/11/2020).

COVID-19 and vulnerable populations: COVID-19 outbreaks in Honduras are concentrated along the Caribbean coast, where many indigenous communities live. These communities are among the poorest and most neglected in the region and many lacked access to health services and WASH facilities prior to the hurricane (OCHA 05/2020). In Nicaragua, communities in the North Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region reported a lack of information on

COVID-19 in their language, absence of health personnel, and lack of facilities and medical supplies including masks (UNHCR 13/10/2020). These areas were hit hardest by the hurricane, which in turn has increased health risks including COVID-19 transmission.

RESPONSE CAPACITY

National authorities and humanitarian partners in the affected countries have undertaken preparedness and relief efforts. Search and rescue missions have prevented higher death tolls (OCHA 03/11/2020; AccuWeather 05/11/2020).

Local and national response capacity

Nicaragua: SINAPRED, national armed forces, Nicaraguan Red Cross

Honduras: SINAGER, COPECO

International response capacity

Nicaragua: IFRC, international NGOs, UN agencies (FAO, IOM, UNICEF, WFP, WHO)

Honduras: UN agencies (OCHA, UNCT, UNFPA, UNICEF)

HURRICANE ETA

Potential affected area and indigenous communities, November 4 2020

