

# Humanitarian Bulletin

## Latin America and Caribbean

Volume 28 | July – August 2016

### HIGHLIGHTS

- 8.2 million people affected by disasters in Latin America and the Caribbean from January to August 2016.
- In the Northern Triangle of Central America (NTCA), ongoing and widespread violence perpetrated by criminal groups or gangs is one of the main causes that people seek protection.
- Since late 2015, the drought in Bolivia has continued through the dry season (May to October) and spread to the east and south of the country, affecting more than 740,000 people.

### PEOPLE AFFECTED

#### JANUARY-AUGUST 2016

Drought	3,772,065
Epidemics (dengue)	2,291,916
Epidemics (Zika)	570,758
Floods	462,800
Earthquake	383,000
Cold Wave	227,506
Others	691,304

**Total** 8,295,075

Source: Compiled from reports issued by national authorities from emergency situations monitored by OCHA ROLAC.

Note: The figures are taken from official reports. However, this does not imply they have been officially approved by the countries as the final figures. The figures are solely for reference. Please contact the national authorities if you require further information.



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## 8.2 million people affected by disasters in 2016

Forecasts of a strong La Niña decreased from 75% to 60% for the end of the year, which implies a moderate increase in flooding and climate-related disasters. The drought has intensified in Bolivia as well as economic losses. An estimated 133,000 families have been affected by drought in Bolivia, while those affected by drought in Central America continue to receive assistance, hoping for the first harvest of the year to improve food security conditions. The number of people affected by the earthquake in Ecuador on 16 April is more than 383,000. OCHA has published a [Humanitarian Bulletin relating to Ecuador](#) five months after the disaster.

By end August 2016, the hurricane season has generated six storms in the Atlantic, two of which reached hurricane force, while in the North Pacific 14 storms formed, eight of which became hurricanes. Mexico is the most affected country, with three hurricanes making landfall. Experts predict that hurricane activity will intensify towards the end of the season.



Hurricane Earl made landfall in Belize on 4 August as a Category 1 storm. The system also affected Honduras, Guatemala and Mexico. On its course through Honduras and Guatemala, Earl caused minor damage. In Belize 2,500 people were housed in 94 shelters, while 10,000 needed humanitarian assistance, mainly shelter supplies. In Mexico, Earl left 54 people dead, making it the deadliest storm to affect the country in the last three years. Additionally, the storm affected 32,500 people, damaging 1,600 and causing millions in losses. The Red Cross allocated 143,000 Swiss Francs in emergency funds and OCHA provided a US \$50,000 emergency grant for immediate response in Belize.

In the pictures, damages caused by Hurricane Earl in Mexico and Belize © AFP

## Protecting migrants in Central America: the volunteer work of Andres

*Most of the migrants Andrés encounters are fleeing gang violence and other criminal organizations, to seek refuge in other countries.*

*Migrants travel for weeks and sometimes months to reach the border with Mexico in dire conditions, without money, food, or information often victims of crime and violence.*

Andrés is a volunteer in one of the border communities in the Department of Petén, Guatemala. While caring for his son, he spoke to OCHA about the needs of migrants and asylum seekers. With his own resources, for the past ten years he has been helping people that arrive at the border between Guatemala and Mexico in search of a better life on their way to the US.

Migrants travel for weeks and sometimes months to reach the border with Mexico in dire conditions, without money, food, or information. They are often victims of crime and violence. Andrés provides them with food and a few nights of shelter, as he does not have much more to offer. With the help of the local church, a shower was built for the migrants, as well as a place for them to wash their clothes.



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Most of the migrants Andrés encounters are from Honduras, fleeing the threat of gang violence and of other criminal organizations, to seek refuge in Mexico. Sometimes entire families stay and, in return for his aid, share their life's story, their anguish at abandoning their homes, their country, and also their hopes for what lies ahead on their journey.

Typically, between 15 to 25 people pass through Andrés home per week, although sometimes he helps as many as 36, and he supported an estimated 600 people in the course of 2016 on their way through El Ceibo. He recounted helping a man who arrived with a spike in his foot and was unable to walk. Recalling the urgency of the wound, little could be done with such limited medical supplies. But after their group left them in El Ceibo and the rest continued to Mexico, the man and his wife were able to stay several days to recuperate before turning back. Andrés has many times solicited help from local medics, but hasn't seen them for over 2 months.

Not only does he provide migrants with the amenities at his home when they arrive, he gives them an update of the recent news from the local antenna and tries to connect them with Casa 72, a welcome center in Mexico for the migrants. Here they receive legal orientation and the possibility of applying for asylum in Mexico, others decide to continue the dangerous journey to the US. The organization has recognized Andrés' assistance to the migrants and has invited him to visit Mexico. He triumphantly related being notified of the success of 14 refugees he sent being granted the refugee status.

Andrés will continue to work for the protection and aid of migrants and is looking forward to the construction of a shelter for migrants that is planned to be built in his village in the coming months.

For more information write to: [ocha-rolac@un.org](mailto:ocha-rolac@un.org)

## Increased violence and migration in the Northern Triangle of Central America

*In 2015, the number of asylum seekers, most seeking safety in Mexico and the United States, reached 110,000; which represents more than five-fold increase over three years.*

*OCHA supports the Protection Groups to have a common understanding of violence and displacement, the causes, the humanitarian impact in the region and the protection and assistance needs of affected populations.*

**In the Northern Triangle of Central America (NTCA), ongoing and widespread violence perpetrated by criminal organized groups or gangs is one of the main causes that lead people to seek for protection internally or across international borders.**

In 2015, the number of asylum seekers, with most of them seeking safety in Mexico and United States, reached nearly 110,000. This represents a more than five-fold increase over the past three years. Likewise, the figures of internally displaced people (IDP) show the gravity of the situation in this region.

According to IDMC (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre), 5% of El Salvador's population is internally displaced, while Honduras and Guatemala report 2%. These figures are higher than IDP rates in places like Democratic Republic of Congo, where 4% of the population has been displaced in a country suffering from a complex internal armed conflict for more than two decades. Other countries affected by organized crime and insecurity such as Nigeria and Pakistan also report lower figures than the countries in the Northern Triangle, both reporting 1% of the population internally displaced as of 2015.

**The scope and complexity of this phenomenon requires concrete actions, particularly on protection.**

OCHA is supporting the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to establish and strengthen Protection Working Groups in each of the Northern Triangle's countries (Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras) and a regional protection group based in Panama to reinforce and support the country actions at regional level.

The Protection Working Groups seek a common understanding of violence and displacement, the causes, the humanitarian impact in the region and the protection needs of affected populations, as well as a common stance within the region of the phenomenon and its advocacy strategy at regional and national level. The Protection Groups also aim to work together with national authorities to strengthen and enhance response and protection mechanisms at all stages of the process: prevention, protection, humanitarian assistance and durable solutions.

OCHA is also developing a 3W document (who does what, where) with the support of Protection Group's members in Honduras, Guatemala and Salvador. OCHA took this initiative in order to map protection work in the NTCA and to maintain the humanitarian community updated and informed.

OCHA has been undertaking field missions to better understand displacement and migration in the region and the needs of those affected. Inter-Agency missions were undertaken in July and August 2016 to Santa Helena, Cooperativa Técnica Agropecuaria, El Naranjo, El Ceibo and Buenos Aires in the area of the Laguna del Tigre, all located in the north east of Guatemala. Based on field observations we calculate that an average of 200,000 people could be crossing to Mexico per year through different points in the department of Petén.

For more information visit: [www.redhum.org](http://www.redhum.org)

## The UN Special Envoy for El Niño and the Climate visits Honduras

*In 2016, Honduras was declared as the world's most vulnerable country to the effects of climate change according to Global Climate Risk Index.*

*“These people cannot wait for assistance – they are in immediate danger and need urgent help”, emphasized Mary Robinson during the visit to Honduras.*

The United Nations Special Envoy for El Niño and the Climate, former President of Ireland Mary Robinson visited Honduras from 27 to 29 of July to promote climate change resilience initiatives and monitor progress of the humanitarian response to the drought caused by El Niño in the area.

In 2016, Honduras was declared as the world's most vulnerable country to the effects of climate change according to Global Climate Risk Index. The country was hit by more than 50 socio-natural disasters between 1980 and 2014, resulting in 15,548 deaths. It is estimated that the drought caused by El Niño in 2015 and 2016 affected the food security of around 1.3 million people.

During her visit, Mary Robinson met with authorities of the Government of Honduras actively involved in mitigation, adaptation and response to climate change, the diplomatic community, international donors, and with civil society organizations. She toured the communities of El Coyolar and Pespire, located in the region of the Dry Corridor of Honduras (South), meeting with human rights activists, women's groups and agricultural cooperatives in the area. During the visit to the Dry Corridor, Ms. Robinson was able to see how the people affected by climate change, especially women, are particularly vulnerable due to lack of access to agricultural land and control of productive assets.

“These people cannot wait to receive assistance – they are in immediate danger and require urgent assistance. But the situation also requires a more holistic approach with longer term planning as the impacts of climate change are diminishing agricultural production in the area which is exhausting food reserves thus making people even more vulnerable to El Niño. This is the new normal and therefore requires a new, multifaceted approach to deal with the slow onset impacts of climate change.” emphasized Mary Robinson.



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For more information, see: [www.unocha.org/el-nino](http://www.unocha.org/el-nino)

## 19 August, World Humanitarian Day

Today, the scale of human suffering is the greatest since World War II. As a result of conflicts and disasters, more than 130 million people around the world need humanitarian assistance to survive. But what does 130 million people represent? Together, these people could form the tenth most populous country in the world. 130 million represents one fifth of the population of Latin America and the Caribbean.



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### Ecuador

The Secretary of Risk Management and the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion, in collaboration with the United Nations, conducted humanitarian fairs with activities in disaster preparedness in the provinces of Azuay, Guayas, Chimborazo, Santa Elena, Tungurahua, Manabí, Carchi and Galapagos. The main event was held at the Technical University in Manabí province. During the commemoration, the Government of Ecuador extended recognition to international organizations and non-governmental organizations for their contribution and support after the earthquake last April. OCHA was one of the agencies to receive this recognition.



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### Guatemala

A "Humanitarian Fair" was held, with recreational and educational activities, mural competitions and school bands that accompanied a parade through the town of Zacapa with civil protection staff (CONRED), the Humanitarian Country Team and the public. Different information stands provided the public an opportunity to learn about humanitarian work in the country.



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### Panama

The OCHA Regional Office, together with humanitarian workers and the City of Knowledge Foundation, celebrated with the opening of the Photographic Exhibition: [Ecuador, three months later](#). The exhibition is a show of 40 photographs, mostly by the Salvadoran photographer Juan Jose Lopez Torres, complemented with images of the humanitarian agencies working to alleviate the suffering of those affected by the Ecuador earthquake on 16 April 16. The exhibition is a tribute to the thousands of aid workers who have been assisting those affected since the first day of the earthquake and to the resilience of communities on the north coast of Ecuador.



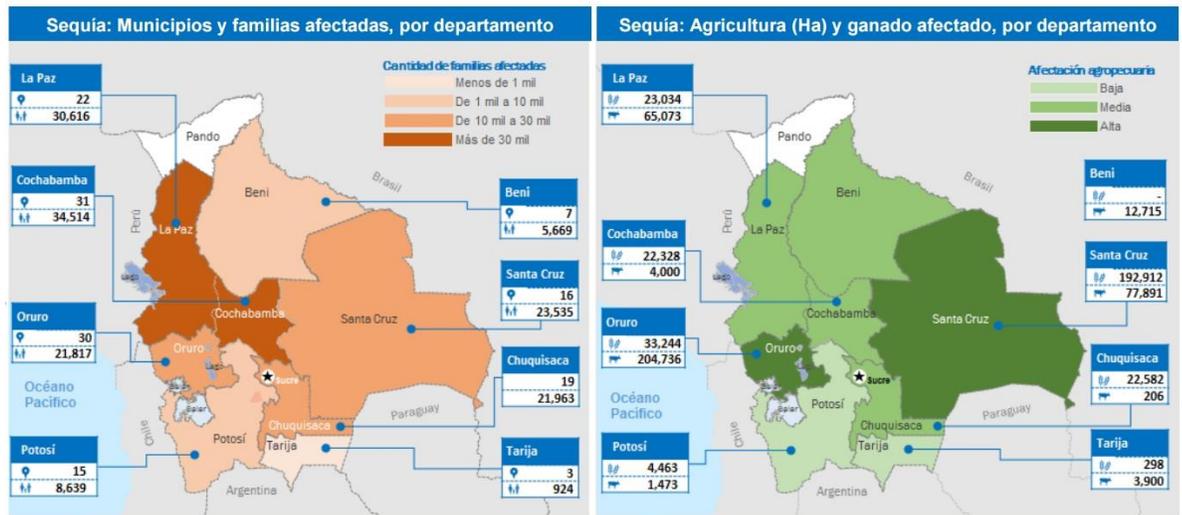
### Peru

Humanitarian partners in Peru held a fair in the Plaza de Armas of Lima where they exhibited activities for visitors about humanitarian action and disaster prevention. A group of animators and mimes led people to tour the fair. The central event was the testimony of a community leader from Chosica, which was affected by recent floods. The day ended with the opening of a photographic exhibition of the National Humanitarian Network institutions.

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## Drought in Bolivia continues

Since late 2015, drought due to El Niño in the west of the country has extended to the dry season (May to October) and spread to the east and south of the country, affecting eight of nine departments. The Government has reported a cumulative figure close to 148,000 affected families (740,000 people) from 1 December 2015 until 2 September this year.



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*Around 740,000 people affected by the drought in Bolivia.*

*143 municipalities issued an emergency declaration.*

*OCHA supports the Government of Bolivia with a strategy to dig deep water wells.*

The most affected sectors are: water, sanitation and hygiene and food security. The Ministry of Rural Development and Land reports 425,150 hectares affected, with a reduction of 30 to 55 percent in production. In addition, about 1.3 million head of livestock (cattle, sheep and camelid) are at risk and more than 285,000 animals have died.

Local authorities indicated that drought also affected other sectors such as protection and education, reporting separated families because family members were forced to migrate in search of resources. The migratory phenomenon has also impacted the education sector, as truancy has increased in many schools. Regarding the health sector, an increase in diarrheal diseases has been reported in several municipalities.

In response, the Bolivian Government is implementing immediate and short term actions, designed to supply water for human and animal consumption, food assistance, mitigation of the drought in the livestock sector and agricultural recovery.

The Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), led by the UN Resident Coordinator in Bolivia, has offered its solidarity and support to the country. The World Food Programme has presented a Food for Work project aimed at subsistence families in the departments of Cochabamba and Oruro.

OCHA, with support from the European Commission Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO), has mobilized two hydro-geological experts to support the Government in its strategy for sustainable deep well water extraction.

For more information, write to: [ocha-rolac@un.org](mailto:ocha-rolac@un.org)



**Foundation  
Cristosal**

*Internal displacement and irregular forced migration in Mesoamerica generates incalculable human suffering. People on the move become commodities for organized crime, fueling its ascendance in societies already torn by corruption and violence.*

*The very personalized and direct persecution by organized crime and state security forces generates a nearly invisible drop-by-drop displacement that makes access to victims both dangerous and difficult in comparison to traditional IDP or refugee camps settings.*

## Commentary: A Year of Consultations in an Era of Crisis

Noah F. Bullock. Executive Director Cristosal Foundation El Salvador

***At recent consultations regarding migrant people and refugees, someone joked that the international community has spent much of 2016 in meetings. Why so many meetings? This series of gatherings responds to the task of fixing a humanitarian field that has not seen a workload of this proportion (64.3 million people displaced by conflict globally) for more than sixty years, yet is equipped with much the same machinery as it was at that time. As one commentator put it: “the machinery of humanitarian aid is not only broke, but also broken.”***

The proposals for updating “the machinery” focus primarily on tangible items like funding and tweaking/bridging humanitarian and development approaches to accelerate solutions for displaced people. It is evident, however, that discussion about the global humanitarian crisis is a proxy for a deeper, less tangible, generational debate about the humanitarian and human rights principles that have formed the basis for international cooperation for more than half a century. Today there are multitude of local and transnational stakeholders with divergent mandates and purposes that all must somehow come to the table to find solutions. This uncertainty might explain the numerous meetings, their different conveners and seemingly noncontiguous outcomes. Optimistically, the meetings might be seen as the rough early phases in a process of updating agreements and systems to secure peace, stability, and safeguard lives. At this stage however, how collective responsibility should be doled out, and by whom, is still unclear.

### **The Humanitarian situation in Mesoamerica**

The crisis in Syria has been central to sparking this conversation and opened a debate about the failing responses to migrant and refugee movements globally. As the director of Cristosal, a human rights organization based in El Salvador, I have advocated for a response to the humanitarian situation in Mesoamerica. The rates of violent death and displacement in Mesoamerica are on par with the largest conflicts in the world today. There were 17,500 violent deaths in Central America’s Northern Triangle (NTCA) and more than a million people were estimated to have been displaced by violence in NTCA and Mexico in 2015.

In the search for solutions, existing experience and skill sets must be adapted, or “tropicalized” as we say in El Salvador, to new dynamics. This is a risky proposition for practitioners and donors who self-identify as risk averse and are the under duress of global demand. In recent months and years, international organizations and donors have increasingly recognized the gravity of situation in NTCA. Many international organizations are sincerely and commendably assessing how they might re-gear their programing to have impact and provide added value.

In the NTCA, early responses were spearheaded by small national organizations like Cristosal that were nimble enough, and, by some standards, crazy enough, to experiment and pilot responses to the problem when it was identified, not when new grant funding was. Lacking major resources to assist large numbers of people, Cristosal set out to accompany one case at a time. Where nothing is being done, assisting one concrete case could have cumulative effect toward broader recognition of the problem. In a similar cumulative fashion, small actions, as much as the large meetings, are necessary to fix the international humanitarian and human rights machinery in a changing world.

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