REGIONAL OFFICE FOR
LATIN AMERICA AND
THE CARIBBEAN

YEAR IN
REVIEW 2020
This publication was produced by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (ROLAC). This publication seeks to provide a comprehensive review of OCHA ROLAC’s actions in responding to the various humanitarian crises present in Latin America and the Caribbean during 2020, as well as actions undertaken with humanitarian partners to build a better-coordinated humanitarian community in the region.

The figures used throughout this publication are from public reports available at the time of publication. They are not conclusive and are meant to be indicative of the overall scope of the various humanitarian scenarios in Latin America and the Caribbean during 2020.

The designations employed and the presentation of material in the report do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

Foreword

In reviewing 2019, we remarked that, as the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (ROLAC), "we must draw on our ability to adapt and position ourselves to become even more agile and better prepared to provide core readiness and response support wherever and whenever it is needed in the decade to come."

Little did we know that the new decade would begin with a global emergency that would affect every facet of life for the more than 650 million people in our region, an emergency that has tested, and will continue to test, OCHA ROLAC’s ability to adapt like nothing that has come before.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the global COVID-19 pandemic found social, economic and humanitarian vulnerabilities that all but guaranteed that any such pandemic would swiftly evolve from an outside threat to monitor to a grim homegrown nightmare. At the end of 2020, Latin America and the Caribbean’s cumulative caseload accounted for more than a fifth of the global tally, while the regional death toll accounted for more than a quarter of all global deaths, despite accounting for under a tenth of the world’s population.

The growth in humanitarian needs in our region during 2020 can only be described as unprecedented, with the pandemic’s compounding effects on extant needs pushing millions deeper into vulnerability. Looking into 2021 and beyond, we fear the pandemic will continue to do so even with the prospects of hope on the horizon with ongoing vaccination campaigns.

Even with this unprecedented growth in needs and response, Latin America and the Caribbean must still deal with being the world’s second most disaster-prone region. The 2020 Atlantic hurricane season became the most active season in recorded history, with Eta and Iota battering Central America in November and creating serious needs for an estimated 8 million people living an area spanning south-eastern Mexico to western Panama.

To meet the challenges posed by the pandemic, the region’s protracted crises and the impacts of recurring climate phenomena, UN agencies, funds and programmes and humanitarian partners required a level of financial support for their plans that easily eclipsed requirements of years past, several times over.

Through the implementation of these plans, OCHA ROLAC and partners received a sobering glimpse of the potential escalation of humanitarian crises in our region; we saw 2020 begin with a global pandemic taking root in the region and end with the convergence of the painful challenges of COVID-19, scenarios in Central America featuring rising COVID-19 cases in storm-battered areas, renewed population movements from communities still plagued by weakened economies, chronic violence and limited access to increasingly strained services.

However, OCHA ROLAC also saw partners stay true to their humanitarian calling in the face of daunting circumstances, tracking about 15,000 activities covering COVID-19 response in virtually every corner of the region and hurricane response in countries in Central America severely affected by Eta and Iota. OCHA ROLAC continued to support UN Resident Coordinators in leading Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs), providing traditional response support through nearly 50 missions across 15 countries and multiple response plans and appeals, while also adapting and providing virtual training sessions and simulations.

The scope and reach of the pandemic and its influence on traditional dynamics also allowed OCHA ROLAC to complement 17 years of hard-won relations by engaging new partnerships and strengthening existing connections. Through this outreach, OCHA ROLAC participated in newfound spaces at the highest levels of national and regional decision-making bodies.

As we progress towards a slow and arduous recovery, OCHA ROLAC must, now more than ever, continue to fulfill its core mandate of providing effective humanitarian coordination services to Member States and partners in the face of evolving challenges, concerns, partnerships and opportunities. Our mission would not be possible without our partners’ continued collaboration in preparedness and response, generous financial and material support and open and frank dialogue in helping OCHA ROLAC improve.

While it may be some time before our region returns to something close to a pre-pandemic state, OCHA ROLAC’s steadfast commitment to ensuring coherent emergency response in Latin America and the Caribbean remains resolutely in place to assist, and reduce the suffering of, its people in need.

We thank you for your continued support.

Rogerio Mobilia
Head of Office (a.i.)
Regional Office for Latin America & the Caribbean
Latin America & the Caribbean
OCHA Presence & Staffing in 2020

OCHA ROLAC operates out of Panama City, Panama, home to virtually all UN and humanitarian regional offices covering Latin America and the Caribbean. OCHA ROLAC has 39 staff located across nine countries to provide flexible and agile support and surge capacity across Latin America and the Caribbean and mobilize staff as needed to support preparedness and response.

OCHA ROLAC covers 45 countries and territories in Latin America and the Caribbean and supports OCHA Country Offices operating in Colombia, Haiti and Venezuela. In addition to its presence in Panama, the OCHA regional team also consists of expert presence via Humanitarian Advisory Teams (HATs) in Barbados, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Peru embedded in UN Resident Coordinator’s Offices, as well as regional support in Bolivia.

The in-country HAT presence, typically comprised of National Disaster Response Advisors (NDRAs) with an active presence in national humanitarian networks and supported in some cases by co-located Information Management Assistants, allows for localized readiness, response capacity and maintenance of strategic operational partnerships at the country level.

By location:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Regional Office</th>
<th>HAT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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By gender:

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<th>Male</th>
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By country status:

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<th>International Staff</th>
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<td>12</td>
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By function:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Coordination</th>
<th>Info. &amp; Advocacy</th>
<th>Administration</th>
<th>Senior Management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
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Response & Surge

Regional Humanitarian Snapshot 2020

ECUADOR

The sudden onset of the COVID-19 pandemic across the region prompted immediate multi-sectoral response actions in countries such as Ecuador. Photo: UNICEF Ecuador
COVID-19 Pandemic (as of 27 December 2020)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Cumulative cases / % of global cases</th>
<th>Cumulative deaths / % of global deaths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>25.2M / 31%</td>
<td>554K / 31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America &amp; the Caribbean</td>
<td>17.2M / 22%</td>
<td>497K / 28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States &amp; Canada</td>
<td>17.1M / 22%</td>
<td>342K / 20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South-East Asia</td>
<td>11.8M / 14%</td>
<td>180K / 10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Mediterranean</td>
<td>4.8M / 6%</td>
<td>119K / 6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>1.8M / 2%</td>
<td>40.2K / 2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Pacific</td>
<td>1M / 1%</td>
<td>19.5K / 1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

17 NATIONAL OR REGIONAL COVID-19 RESPONSE PLANS IN 2020

31.8M+ PEOPLE TARGETED FOR ASSISTANCE BY COVID-19 PLANS IN 2020

$2B IN FINANCING REQUIRED FOR COVID-19 RESPONSE PLANS IN 2020

2020 Atlantic Hurricane Season

30 NAMED STORMS DURING THE 2020 ATLANTIC HURRICANE SEASON, THE MOST ACTIVE SEASON IN HISTORY

8M+ PEOPLE IN CENTRAL AMERICA AFFECTED BY TROPICAL STORM ETA & HURRICANE IOTA

$1.7B IN LOSSES CAUSED BY ETA & IOTA ACROSS GUATEMALA, HONDURAS & NICARAGUA

Regional vulnerabilities

9.2M PEOPLE IN NEED IN EL SALVADOR, GUATEMALA & HONDURAS

3.5M+ PEOPLE IN EL SALVADOR, GUATEMALA & HONDURAS IN FOOD INSECURITY

931K PEOPLE IN RURAL ARGENTINA & PARAGUAY IN NEED DUE TO DROUGHT

3.4M PEOPLE DISPLACED IN THE CARIBBEAN OVER STORMS & FLOODING (2015-2019)
OCHA ROLAC Response & Deployments in 2020

OCHA ROLAC’s strategic footprint allows for immediate surge support, both within and outside the region, as well as for preparedness and technical support.

Although the widespread travel restrictions imposed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic for much of 2020 reduced deployments compared to previous years, OCHA ROLAC nevertheless continued providing effective coordination, information management and training support via deployments, accumulating more than 15 months’ worth of days deployed across 14 countries.

OCHA ROLAC 2020 deployments by type, duration & location

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>No. of missions</th>
<th>No. of deployment days</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Surge/Response</td>
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<td>300</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preparedness</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>OCHA Internal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technical</td>
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<td>36</td>
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</table>

Country Deployed & Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Days deployed &amp; type</th>
<th>No. of missions &amp; type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Honduras</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>35</td>
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<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>33</td>
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<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Barbados</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinidad &amp; Tobago</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolivia</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panama</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Latin America & the Caribbean - COVID-19

Regional response to a global emergency

- **17.2M** cumulative COVID-19 cases in the region during 2020
- **497k** deaths due to COVID-19 in the region during 2020
- **31.8M+** people targeted for assistance by 17 COVID-19 plans in 2020
- **$2B** in financing required for COVID-19 response plans in 2020

**BOLIVIA**

The widespread impact of the COVID-19 pandemic left vulnerable communities in need of scaled-up humanitarian support, prompting UN action such as WFP issuing electronic cash cards to priority families in La Paz and El Alto in Bolivia. Photo: WFP/Morelia Erostegua
Overview

Latin America and the Caribbean began 2020 witnessing the emergence of SARS-CoV-2 virus in Asia and Europe, a new, highly transmissible virus leading to scores of hospitalizations and deaths. The global threat immediately stoked concerns over the virus’ possible transmission throughout a region grappling with multiple longstanding crises stemming from high inequality, shortcomings in basic service infrastructure, recurring climate shocks and ongoing displacement across and within borders, among other factors.

These concerns prompted health officials in various countries to activate epidemiological monitoring protocols in late January 2020. The rapid spread of SARS-CoV-2 throughout the world and the World Health Organization (WHO) declaring a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) led to multiple travel restrictions and widespread national emergency declarations to spur prevention and preparedness measures.

Following the first confirmed case of COVID-19, the virus’ resulting illness responsible for varying severities of fever and respiratory distress, in Brazil in late February 2020, reports of suspected cases all over Latin America and the Caribbean quickly became reports of confirmed cases and deaths as epidemiological indicators began to spiral out of control and cement the new health emergency’s status as a full-scale regional pandemic.

Countries scrambled to scale up testing, tracing and treatment capacities as healthcare system personnel, supplies and infrastructure began to buckle under the strain of the ever-growing need for healthcare services. By the end of May, the Americas had already accumulated more than 2.4 million cases and 183,000 deaths, becoming the global epicentre of a generational crisis.

Beyond the direct health implications of a pandemic, various national mobility restrictions and border closures implemented to curb the spread of COVID-19 all but froze critical socio-economic activity, laying the groundwork for an unprecedented multi-faceted emergency to unfold because of, and alongside with, the pandemic.

The prolonged restrictions stalled sprawling informal economies, where more than half of the region’s labour force of 140 million people work, putting already-vulnerable populations even further at risk. The UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) warns that some 231 million people will be in poverty by year’s end due to the pandemic, a 15-year setback to poverty levels from 2005. UN-backed food and nutritional security analyses note that the pandemic took hold when 47.7 million people in the region, or about 7.4 per cent of the population, were already living with hunger, an increase of more than 13 million in the last five years alone.

The pandemic’s socio-economic consequences also spread to other facets of life in the region, with mass school closures immediately jeopardizing the region’s education; UNICEF estimated that more than 154 million children in Latin America and the Caribbean (about 95 per cent of enrolled students) were at one point temporarily out of school due to the closure of around 90 per cent of all schools in the region. Overall, total and partial school closures have left about 114 million students without face-to-face schooling a nearly a year on from the onset of the pandemic, more than any region in the world.

Chronically underserved and vulnerable populations such as women, girls, indigenous peoples, members of the LGBTI community, the elderly, people with disabilities and people with chronic illnesses have seen their needs grow considerably. Prolonged confinements have led to gender-based violence as vulnerable women and girls staying at home from work and/or school are unable to escape domestic violence. The pandemic also presented a significantly high mortality risk to indigenous populations due to their oft-remote locations with limited access to health services and higher risk of co-infection.

The ripple effects of the pandemic on nearly all facets of life prompted many middle- and high-income countries that do not traditionally receive multilateral assistance to request external support, as many of their citizens began turning to government help. With Latin America and the Caribbean facing the simultaneous health and social strains of the virus, stagnant economies, growing poverty, rising unemployment and skyrocketing debt, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) fears that the COVID-19 pandemic may well set the region’s development back 10 years, setting the stage for years of protracted humanitarian concerns even as the region begins to undertake vaccination campaigns to try and bring the pandemic under control.
Regional response

Even before Brazil reported their first case, OCHA ROLAC immediately began working with its entire network of partners and stakeholders to prepare for the looming crisis, work that swiftly evolved from preparedness to response as hundreds of cases soon became thousands of cases. The fast-growing scale and implications of the nascent pandemic across Latin America and the Caribbean required OCHA ROLAC to exchange unprecedented amounts of information and coordinate with various thematic coordination bodies.

The sudden changes to existing dynamics brought about by the pandemic led to OCHA ROLAC finding new or renewed coordination spaces and partnerships, resulting in a more diverse and strengthened network of relationships that a more traditional emergency response scenario might not have allowed. This included OCHA ROLAC becoming a regular presence in regional decision-making forums chaired by the UN Development Coordination Office (DCO), which provided OCHA ROLAC more opportunities to strengthen humanitarian-development collaboration.

National response needs also allowed OCHA ROLAC to scale up participation in country-level networks that involved governments and local and international NGOs, as well as private sector organizations. Beyond specific support activities to respond to the various needs created by the pandemic, OCHA ROLAC supported 13 UN COVID-19 response plans and socio-economic response plans from Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs) and UN Country Teams (UNCTs), plans that covered 23 countries and territories in Latin America and the Caribbean. By the end of 2020, several countries reported that their response plans had received 70 per cent funding coverage or more.

COVID-19 cases per 1M inhabitants in Latin American & Caribbean countries (as of 27 December 2020)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Cases per 1M inhabitants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Panama</td>
<td>52.3K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>35.0K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>34.6K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>31.9K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>31.3K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>30.9K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>30.4K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belize</td>
<td>26.3K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahamas</td>
<td>19.8K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>15.2K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraguay</td>
<td>14.5K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolivia</td>
<td>13.1K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>11.8K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>10.6K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suriname</td>
<td>10.0K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guyana</td>
<td>7.9K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>7.5K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>6.8K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinidad &amp; Tobago</td>
<td>5.0K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uruguay</td>
<td>4.5K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>4.2K</td>
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<td>Venezuela</td>
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<tr>
<td>Honduras</td>
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<tr>
<td>St. Lucia</td>
<td>1.6K</td>
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<tr>
<td>Antigua &amp; Barbuda</td>
<td>1.5K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominica</td>
<td>1.3K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbados</td>
<td>1.2K</td>
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<td>Grenada</td>
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<td>975</td>
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<td>973</td>
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<tr>
<td>Haiti</td>
<td>863</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nicaragua</td>
<td>723</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Kitts &amp; Nevis</td>
<td>564</td>
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</table>
At the technical level, OCHA ROLAC quickly activated the Regional Group on Risks, Emergencies and Disasters for Latin America and the Caribbean (REDLAC), a dedicated regional forum for coordinating humanitarian action between some 40 partners from UN agencies, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, NGOs, donors and the private sector, with OCHA ROLAC functioning as the REDLAC secretariat. REDLAC’s swift activation and regular activities through nine sector-based working groups and three thematic working groups provided a welcome boost to regional coordination and partner response activity on the ground.

OCHA ROLAC also engaged in key advocacy activities, including a COVID-19 situation analysis publication for indigenous peoples and needs analyses for El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras - collectively referred to as the countries of the North of Central America (NCA) - via a COVID-19 addendum to a Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) for the NCA published before the pandemic and a follow-up analysis of COVID-19’s impact and humanitarian needs, priorities and response plans in these three countries.

The COVID-19 pandemic made its way to all corners of Latin America and the Caribbean, including rural communities with pre-existing limitations in accessing basic services and supplies, such as Chirilagua in El Salvador, that required additional support to ensure access to clean water.

Photo: UNICEF
**Mexico**
- Support for the UN Resident Coordinator’s Office and the UNCT’s COVID-19 response strategy through a UN System pandemic response plan.
- Development of a coordination and information mechanism within the Connecting Business Initiative (CBi) for collaboration and joint analysis between the private sector and UN agencies, funds and programmes, NGOs and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. OCHA’s work also included supporting UN sector leads’ involvement in the platform.
- Support for WFP surge capacity staff and the Government in negotiating and establishing a UN humanitarian aerial hub covering Latin America and the Caribbean when virtually every country in the region had closed their borders and suspended air transit for extended lengths.

**Guatemala**
- Support for drafting of Guatemala’s COVID-19 Multi-Sectoral Response Plan, its subsequent launch and advocating the plan to the in-country donor community.
- Updated national Minimum Preparedness Actions (MPAs) and Advanced Preparedness Actions (APAs), with more than 90 per cent of accomplishments related to COVID-19.

**Honduras**
- Support for drafting of Honduras’ COVID-19 Multi-Sectoral Response Plan, its subsequent launch and advocating the plan to the in-country donor community.
- Reactivation of the Information Management Working Group to support the development of information products and creation of the HCT Communications Working Group to develop a common COVID-19 risk communications strategy.

**El Salvador**
- Support for drafting of El Salvador’s COVID-19 Multi-Sectoral Response Plan, its subsequent launch and advocating the plan to the in-country donor community.
- Supported the activation of working groups for Information Management, Communications and Cash-based solutions.
Ecuador

- Support for the activation of the HCT at the request of the Government, as it had not been activated for response since April 2016.
- Participation in the national response coordination mechanism established by the national emergency management authority and liaised with HCT sectoral focal points.
- Support for drafting of Ecuador’s COVID-19 Multi-Sectoral Response Plan, its subsequent launch and advocating the plan to the in-country donor community, which ended 2020 with 96 per cent funding and was the only non-HRP country in Latin America and the Caribbean to be included in the Global Humanitarian Response Plan.
- Coordination activities with the R4V Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela.

Peru

- Support response to Venezuelan migrants and refugees including participation in, and liaising with, R4V Coordination Platform technical working groups, contributions to study on COVID-19’s impact on the Venezuelan migrant and refugee community in Peru, coordination of food distribution for 30,000 migrants and refugees with IOM, UNHCR and WFP using private sector donations made to the National Civil Defence Institute (INDECI) and support with UNHCR on regularizing hiring processes of Venezuelan doctors and nurses in Peru to support national medical personnel.
- Support to various Government ministries such as coordination of a technical proposal with IOM and UNICEF to assist the Ministry of the Environment in their role as lead public institution for providing temporary shelter for rural migrants returning from urban centres who tested positive, coordination on behalf of the UN Resident Coordinator with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to facilitate transport to Venezuelan, Haitian and Colombian migrants from the southern border to Lima with IOM support and coordination of information management support for the Ministry of Health and Ministry of the Economy to collect district-level information on COVID-19 prevention measures.

Bolivia

- Strengthened links between UN and the Government through the creation of a national situation room to support the Presidency.
- Support for the UN Resident Coordinator’s Office and HCT members in participating in regular National Emergency Operation Committee (COEN) activities and liaising with military authorities involved in the emergency response.
- Support to HCT in coordinating the HCT Technical Committee and supporting the HCT Strategic Coordinating Committee and sectoral groups.
- Trained the national WASH cluster, regional WASH cluster and national Health cluster in defining sector-based indicator dashboard to prioritize strategic areas of intervention in the COVID-19 response.

ECUADOR

Ecuador was one of several countries that launched a multi-sectoral response plan to reach vulnerable populations and provide and reinforce information on personal protection against COVID-19, among other forms of assistance.

Photo: PAHO/WHO
Overview

As the COVID-19 pandemic continued to unfold throughout Latin America and the Caribbean with no end in sight, the region’s humanitarian community also had to prepare for the upcoming hurricane season. Forecasters warned in May 2020 that the season would feature above-normal activity, calling for 13-19 named storms, with 6-10 possibly becoming hurricanes and 3-6 becoming major hurricanes, higher than the average season’s 12 named storms, 6 hurricanes and 3 major hurricanes.\(^8\)

OCHA ROLAC correspondingly began to scale up collaborative hurricane season preparedness efforts with national and regional humanitarian stakeholders, a traditional programmatic commitment stemming from Latin America and the Caribbean’s status as the world’s second most disaster-prone region.

However, the prospect of preparing for, and responding to, a highly active season in the midst of a regional health crisis posed several planning challenges. Ongoing pandemic response efforts were stretching response resources increasingly thin. The resulting economic fallout would undoubtedly complicate response and recovery objectives. Widespread border closures, travel restrictions, quarantine requirements and mobility restrictions stood to hinder international humanitarian deployments, adding uncertainty as to the effectiveness of solely providing remote support.

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**Guatemala**

More than a month after Eta and Iota struck Guatemala, several communities remained underwater. The San Carlos University in Guatemala estimated that some communities may not see floodwaters recede for six months. Photo: Luis Echeverría
Overview

These concerns would soon evolve into real response challenges with the June arrival of Tropical Storm Amanda over El Salvador’s Pacific coast, affecting thousands in El Salvador while also causing smaller scale impacts in Guatemala and Honduras. Amanda’s remnants then crossed Guatemala and Mexico and into Atlantic waters, where conditions allowed for the formation of the Atlantic’s Tropical Storm Cristobal, causing more rains across southern Mexico and parts of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras previously affected by Amanda. Between Amanda and Cristobal, El Salvador accumulated more than 700mm of rainfall, with some areas taking on more than 1,000mm. These rainfall totals exceeded the 400mm accumulated during Hurricane Mitch in 1998. The widespread rains, flooding and landslides came as the surging COVID-19 pandemic in El Salvador, home to 643,000 people in need before the convergence of these emergencies (roughly 10 per cent of the national population9), had prompted authorities to enact strict mobility restrictions.

Civil Protection responded to more than 2,000 incidents nationwide including 57 major floods and 1,114 landslides that damaged 3,000 houses and 555 schools. These impacts affected nearly 150,000 people and left 30 dead.10 The days that followed saw 12,600 people seek shelter, where they required priority access to safe water for consumption and sanitation, as well as personal protective equipment (PPE), to protect against COVID-19.

The storms caused an estimated $5.5 million in damage to basic grain crops, $21.9 million in damage to the industrial agriculture sector and overall damage or destruction of 56,000 hectares of various crops, raising concerns over the compounding effects of the pandemic and the storms on declining incomes and livelihoods and limited access to basic services and food11. WFP estimates that there are some 350,000 food-insecure people in the hardest hit municipalities.12

Response

The Government declared a 15-day state of emergency to expedite response activities such as evacuating families from at-risk areas. The double impact of the storms, estimated to be El Salvador’s worst climate disaster since Mitch’s impact13, and the pandemic created significant strain on national response resources and capacities, leading to a request for international assistance.

HCT partners, who had to deal with challenging COVID-19 access constraints that would affect aid delivery, damage and needs assessments and identification of the affected populations most in need of assistance, carried out more than 2,200 combined COVID-19 and storm response activities between March and August 2020, attending to critical needs in food security and nutrition; health; WASH; protection; logistics and telecommunications; shelter/quarantine centres; early recovery; and education.

OCHA ROLAC facilitated a $3 million allocation from the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to support response targeting 34,000 people through projects supporting water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), food security, nutrition and shelter. El Salvador’s 45-member Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), already active over the pandemic, began expanding COVID-19 response efforts to cover the needs created by Amanda and Cristobal.
Overview

While hurricane seasons in the Atlantic end in November, seasons do not typically feature any major storms past October. However, by October 2020, the Atlantic had already seen a staggering 27 named storms, well above May forecasts and one storm shy of 2005’s record of 28 named storms. Nearly all of the storms in 2020 set new records as being the earliest storms of their sequential order ever formed. The amount of named storms outpaced the amount of names allotted, requiring the use of names from the Greek alphabet by mid-September.

Eta, the 2020 season’s record-tying 28th storm, began affecting the Caribbean shores of Central America on 3 November, first striking northern Nicaragua as a Category 4 hurricane and then degrading to a tropical storm, and eventually a tropical depression, over a slow three-day journey over Honduras and Guatemala. Flooding and landslides damaged or destroyed homes and infrastructure in south-eastern Mexico, parts of Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama and nearly all of Honduras.

As governments and humanitarian partners scrambled to respond to the critical needs of hundreds of thousands of affected people in their countries, climate offices soon began issuing alerts over the increasingly likely formation of Iota, the season’s record-breaking 29th storm on a potential track nearly identical to Eta’s path.

Iota quickly grew in strength and intensity, becoming only the second Category 5 Atlantic hurricane to ever form in November before making landfall over northern Nicaragua less than two weeks after Eta as a Category 4 hurricane and the strongest in Nicaragua’s history. Iota also travelled westward over Honduras and Guatemala, causing more damage to areas already battered by Eta and fresh damage in previously unaffected areas. The two storms brought wind speeds as high as 240 km/h and rainfalls up to 600mm. Nicaragua, Honduras and Guatemala were hit especially hard by the back-to-back events, with official numbers from these three countries collectively amounting to at least 7.3 million people affected.

Eta and Iota drove thousands of people to shelters in these countries, shelters that faced significant challenges in preventing further COVID-19 spread. With health facilities and networks working to restore functionality, the likelihood of localized outbreaks increased by the day. Affected families already facing economic hardships due to the pandemic suffered damaged or destroyed crops and harvests that were all but their sole source of livelihoods and food security.

These extraordinary climate events dealt a crushing blow to highly vulnerable communities, communities where longstanding needs have only grown due to the effects of various COVID-19-related crises. The storms leave behind greater challenges in meeting these already complex needs driven by recurring climate shocks, chronic violence and gender-based violence, displacement across and within borders, high poverty and inequalities in basic service access and opportunities, challenges that will likely persist for years to come.
Nicaragua

Eta and Iota made landfall in northern Nicaragua, bringing hurricane force winds and rainfall to much of the North Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region (RACCN), a rural area home to some of the country’s most at-risk populations due to high poverty and limited access to basic services. More than 34 per cent of RACCN’s population, mostly indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples, live in multidimensional poverty and 21 per cent are at high risk of falling into poverty due to disaster-related shocks.15

Per Government damage and needs evaluations, more than three million people were exposed to the storms, which affected about 1.8 million people, caused 21 deaths and triggered the evacuation of more than 160,500 people, with as many as 59,000 people in shelters. With torrential rains and winds upwards of 230 km/h, Eta and Iota’s effects on agriculture and fishery-based livelihoods drew particular concern, given that about 40 per cent of Nicaragua’s economically active population works in the agriculture sector.16

About 60 per cent of Nicaragua suffered varying degrees of impact, with most damage concentrated in the Puerto Cabezas area in RACCN and in municipalities within the so-called Mining Triangle area near the border with Honduras, as well as the departments of Jinotega, Matagalpa and Nueva Segovia. Eta and Iota’s combined damage also extended to the Pacific coast departments of Chinandega and Rivas on the other side of the country.

The material impact of the storms incurred significant damage and losses to infrastructure (US$361.9 million), the social sector which covers partial or complete damage to homes ($183.7 million), the environment ($141 million) and the productive sector covering agriculture and tourism livelihoods ($48.9 million).

All told, the Government estimates that the overall damage amounts to $738.6 million17, an estimate roughly equal to about 6.2 per cent of Nicaragua’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The combined effects of Eta and Iota were Nicaragua’s worst climate disaster since Hurricane Mitch in 1998, considered one of the most lethal Atlantic hurricanes to ever strike Central America after affecting about 868,200 people and causing 3,000 deaths and nearly $1 billion in damage in Nicaragua alone.

Response

The Government, through the National Disaster Prevention, Mitigation and Response System (SINAPRED), immediately activated central and local response coordination offices to deliver food and construction materials, among other critical supplies. With support from the UN and partners in country, the Government also worked to restore telecommunications, access and basic water and power supplies, as well as provide ongoing medical care through service networks, mobile clinics and medical brigades in affected communities.

OCHA ROLAC provided coordination and financing support, facilitating a $2 million CERF allocation to provide life-saving assistance in health, protection, sexual and reproductive health, food security, early recovery and WASH via projects implemented by UNICEF, WFP and PAHO/WHO. To address the long-term needs caused by the storms, needs including 500,000 people with limited access to basic health services, 490,000 people affected by damage to safe water supply systems and 300,000 people in need of food assistance, OCHA ROLAC collaborated with UN teams and partners to launch a $50.9 million Action Plan targeting 287,000 people for assistance.
Honduras

Eta began affecting northern Honduras as a Category 4 hurricane as it approached Nicaragua, causing widespread flooding and landslides for several days. Eta affected many of the country’s northern Atlantic departments, home to hundreds of thousands of vulnerable people. The departments of Atlántida, Cortés, Santa Bárbara and Yoro suffered most of Eta’s damage, driving tens of thousands of people to shelter and isolating badly affected communities in need of aid.

Iota’s arrival 11 days later caused more flooding in many of the same departments still reeling from Eta. The storms affected 199 of the country’s 298 municipalities, with 103 reporting effects from both, multiplying needs across Honduras and creating a general emergency scenario greater than the sum of each storms’ individual effects. In areas in the flood-prone Sula Valley, Iota’s rains caused hydraulic systems dealing with the slow recession of Eta’s floodwaters to exceed their capacities four times over, unleashing massive amounts of water. In Copán, Ocotépeque and Santa Bárbara, soil saturated by Eta could not absorb Iota’s rainfall, leading to landslides that buried hundreds of homes and blocked critical road access.

The Permanent Commission for Contingencies (COPECO) reported about 4.5 million people affected between both storms. Authorities carried out 936,000 evacuations across the country. With several of the 69,300 affected or damaged homes in communities where floodwaters took weeks to recede, many of the 95,000 or so people in shelters had protracted stays, leading to dire needs in health, food security, WASH and protection. In particular, reports from shelters in the Sula Valley, who at one point harboured 80 per cent of the sheltered population, cited COVID-19 spread and criminal violence. Damage to primary healthcare facilities left a quarter of a million people without access to medical services, with 77 per cent of these people in Cortés.

Authorities identified Eta and Iota’s effects on food security, among other sectors, as a priority, citing damage to, or the loss of, more than 318,600 hectares of crops. The effects of such an impact in a country where 18 per cent of the population was already food-insecure prior to the storms and the COVID-19 pandemic cannot be overstated.

The crises evoked fearful memories of Hurricane Fifi in 1974 and Hurricane Mitch in 1998. Mitch, in particular, is considered to have cost Honduras decades of development. For many in a country that already had 1.3 million people in need, Eta and Iota represented the worst climate disaster in 20 years. The long-term consequences of Eta and Iota’s impact on safety, food security, shelter, livelihoods and health began to unfold almost immediately with the departure of a migrant caravan from San Pedro Sula towards Guatemala in December.

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**4.5M**
People across Honduras affected by Eta & Iota

**2.8M**
People in need in Honduras after Eta & Iota

**1.4M**
People targeted for assistance by Honduras Flash Appeal

**$90M**
In financing required for Honduras Flash Appeal response

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**HONDURAS**

Eta and Iota’s impact in Honduras have pushed many further into vulnerability and have created challenging humanitarian needs that will be felt for years to come. Photo: UNFPA
Response

The Government immediately activated the National Risk Management System (SINAGER), under which COPECO acts as the national response unit operating through the National Emergency Operations Centre (COEN). The scale of the emergency prompted the activation of protocols at national, departmental and municipal levels, beginning with search and rescue operations and food and non-food item (NFI) deliveries to people in temporary shelters and later managing debris removal operations to restore access to isolated communities.

Following the Government’s request for international assistance, humanitarian partners in country deployed personnel to the critically affected Sula Valley in the north-west. Many of the more than 40 members of Honduras’ National Humanitarian Network, the backbone of the HCT, already had a longstanding presence in San Pedro Sula, Honduras’ second-largest city. IOM, PAHO/WHO, UNHCR, UNFPA, WFP, the Honduran Red Cross and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), among others, began supporting evaluations and multi-sectoral response activities.

UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) teams deployed to Honduras, working with national authorities and partners in the capital of Tegucigalpa and in San Pedro Sula. Through an On-Site Operations Coordination Centre (OSOCC) set up in San Pedro Sula, UNDAC began coordinating between sectoral working groups and COPECO. HCT partners and UNDAC carried out a thorough evidence-based diagnostic process of the humanitarian scenario and operating environment based on a model of existing critical needs, using 31 priority municipalities in 9 departments. This process identified needs in shelter, WASH, food and nutrition security, logistics access, humanitarian access, protection against sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), emergency shelter and child and adolescent protection, which would serve as the basis for a coordinated response strategy.

OCHA ROLAC supported coordination, information management and administration activities and facilitated a $3 million CERF allocation that was later increased to $3.9 million after Hurricane Iota. The allocation enabled UNICEF, WFP, WHO and implementing partners to target 171,600 people for life-saving assistance in food security, health and WASH.

After Eta, OCHA ROLAC worked with partners to develop a $62.9 million Flash Appeal targeting 450,000 people out of the 2.3 million in need through various response activities from 33 partners across UN agencies, funds and programmes, NGOs and the Red Cross. Iota’s subsequent impact prompted further work on an addendum that raised requirements to $90 million to respond to 1.4 million people out of the 2.8 million in need.
Guatemala

Although Eta and Iota’s impacts in Guatemala are not as widespread as in Honduras, Eta and Iota still affected some 2.4 million people in 16 of 22 departments, leaving 1.8 million with humanitarian needs, per the National Coordinator for Disaster Reduction (CONRED). Material damage includes 60,000 homes with moderate to severe damage and significant infrastructure damage to roads, bridges, schools and health facilities. The storms triggered the evacuation of about 309,000 people, driving 31,000 to official shelters and 278,000 to unofficial shelters. Official reports from the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock indicate that the storms’ impact on the country’s agricultural sector affected more than 267,300 families.

The most affected departments, by order of magnitude of damage, were Alta Verapaz, Izabal, Quiché, Huehuetenango, Petén, Zacapa and Chiquimula, who collectively account for some 5 million people. Alta Verapaz (population 1.2 million people) and Izabal (population 408,000), in particular, required significant support. Several communities in these departments that lost virtually everything are home to some of the country’s most vulnerable populations, including remote indigenous communities, internally displaced people (IDPs) and afro-descendant Guatemalans.

The losses to crops and harvests across 119,900 hectares during Eta and 44,500 hectares during Iota are especially concerning given chronic undernutrition and food insecurity that have long posed grave risks for vulnerable communities in Guatemala. According to the 2020 Regional Overview of Food Security And Nutrition in Latin America and the Caribbean, Guatemala’s prevalence of undernourished people...
has remained above 16 per cent since 2010, well above other Central American countries.  

Even before the storms, Alta Verapaz and Izabal were already seeing the consequences of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. The rate of chronic undernutrition in Alta Verapaz is 50 per cent. Some 2,222 children suffer from acute undernutrition, the third-highest number in the country and a 26 per cent increase from 2019. Although Izabal’s rate of chronic undernutrition is 26.4 per cent, their growth in acutely undernourished children grew by 118 per cent between 2019 and 2020.

Given its location on Guatemala’s eastern border with Honduras, Izabal is a common point of entry for Honduran migrants departing from San Pedro Sula. The crushing effects of the storms stand to drive further migration from Honduras into Guatemala, making Izabal a potential host to complex humanitarian needs if migration trends in Central America continue to rise in 2021 and beyond.

Response

The Government, through CONRED’s national, departmental and sub-departmental networks, activated immediate response protocols, delivering relief supplies to affected communities by land and by air as teams worked to restore access to isolated communities. Several public institutions, including municipal governments, CONRED and the Ministry for Development received emergency budget allocations to back response and recovery.

With the Government requesting international assistance, humanitarian organizations in country first began using internal resources to respond in areas where they maintained existing operations before expanding response efforts to cover more affected areas. UNDAC teams soon arrived in Guatemala, deploying to Alta Verapaz and Izabal to support coordination and information response efforts among the ever-growing presence of humanitarian partners.

CONRED and HCT members, as well as the Gender, Shelter, WASH, Food Security sectors carried out evaluations in affected communities, with OCHA ROLAC coordinating a targeted multi-sectoral assessment to identify the most pressing needs. Given Alta Verapaz’s concentration of the storms’ damage and operational presence, OCHA ROLAC worked with departmental authorities to scale up and strengthen existing coordination mechanisms. More broadly, OCHA ROLAC supported a $2.5 million CERF request, approved for implementation in December, to enable UNICEF, WHO, WFP and partners to provide life-assistance to some 108,000 people with food security, health, nutrition and WASH needs.

OCHA ROLAC also worked with partners to develop a $39.1 million Action Plan to back targeted response activities from humanitarian partners supporting the Government-led response. The 17 Action Plan activities, most of which are in Alta Verapaz and Izabal, seek to provide assistance in WASH, shelter, nutrition, food security, health, protection, child protection, gender and gender-based violence and education.

GUATEMALA
With Eta and Iota’s impacts concentrated in more remote areas in Guatemala already suffering the impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, local humanitarian teams stepped up to support affected people with assistance that included relief item distributions. Photo: OCHA/Laura Solirzano
Widespread flooding and landslides from Eta and Iota affected millions across Honduras, prompting immediate responses from a diverse array of humanitarian actors, including UNFPA, the Honduran Red Cross, and the Honduran Armed Forces.

Photo: UNFPA
Response Snapshot: **Tropical Storm Eta & Hurricane Iota**

OCHA ROLAC marshaled efforts from staff across the region to support government-led responses in several countries while dealing with COVID-19 restrictions affecting traditional humanitarian response deployments and the multi-country impact of the storms. In addition to deployments in Honduras and Guatemala and remote support from Panama to these countries in coordination, reporting, information management and humanitarian financing, OCHA ROLAC staff also provided remote support to UN teams in Belize, Mexico and Nicaragua.

**OCHA & response partner deployment calendar** (1 November 2020 - 4 January 2021)

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### Sector

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<th>Sector</th>
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<td>Water, Sanitation &amp; Hygiene (WASH)</td>
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<td>Camp Coordination &amp; Camp Management</td>
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</tbody>
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**Organizations by type (no. / %)**

- INGOs: 11 / 16%
- NGOs: 3 / 4%
- UN: 12 / 18%
- Red Cross: 3 / 4%
- Donors: 1 / 1%
- Faith-based groups: 1 / 1%
Regional Humanitarian Response
New crises compounding complex needs

Central America

El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, known as the North of Central America (NCA), host a complex and worsening humanitarian scenario where the number of people in need continues to grow; 2016 analyses from Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs) in the NCA identified 3.5 million people in need, a figure that grew to 5.2 million by late 2019.

About half the NCA’s population lives in poverty, more so in rural, indigenous and afro-descendant communities. Recurring climate shocks such as protracted El Niño-related drought and seasonal floods limit agricultural output, creating dire food security needs. National food security authorities and humanitarian partners estimate there are 3.5 million people in acute food insecurity who require urgent support. Additionally, chronic violence had made the NCA one of the most dangerous regions in the world and has driven mass displacement, with about 1.8 million people in need of protection.

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2020 hurricane season aggravated these conditions and are creating deeper vulnerabilities for 2021 and beyond. Between the pandemic and the effects of Eta and Iota, migration from these countries is on track to surpass 2019 figures; the 275,800 detentions or expulsions along the Mexico-United States border from September to December 2020 are 94,600 more than the 2019 figure for the same months after a pandemic-related decline in mid-2020.

While the consequences of the pandemic and the storms continue to unfold, partners estimate that the number of people in need in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras grew 77 per cent from 2019’s figure of 5.2 million to 9.2 million prior to November 2020.

Response

OCHA ROLAC supported US$9.9 million in CERF allocations for projects to respond to drought and food insecurity in Guatemala and Honduras targeting 129,300 people for assistance. Despite publishing a regional Humanitarian Needs Overview for the NCA in March shortly before the first reported cases of COVID-19, OCHA ROLAC also published an addendum in July to complement the publication with relevant projections based on available secondary sources. OCHA ROLAC’s support to HCT’s in the NCA also included an NCA COVID-19 needs and priorities analysis based on national COVID-19 response plans that OCHA ROLAC also supported to create a more regional focus for stakeholders in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras.

South America

South America became the global pandemic epicentre in 2020 due to structural deficiencies, high inequality and strained health systems. Brazil ended 2020 accounting for more than 40 per cent of all cases in the Americas, including the United States and Canada. Argentina, Brazil, Colombia and Peru were among the 18 countries around the world to end 2020 with more than one million cumulative cases.

The pandemic posed a significant threat in the Amazon basin in parts of Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, French Guyana, Peru and Venezuela, where large indigenous communities with limited access to basic services, and lower immunity and coping capacities feared for their very existence. Areas along the Amazon triple border between Brazil, Colombia and Peru had some of the highest rates of COVID-19 deaths per capita in the world during 2020.

The region also saw the ongoing flight of Venezuelan migrants and refugees; per the R4V Response for Venezuelans Coordination Platform, 2020 ended with 700,000 more Venezuelans arriving in...
host countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (with more than half to South American countries)\(^{27}\), adding to protection and health vulnerabilities on their journeys and in host countries.

While South America often contends with recurring climate shocks, La Niña-related drought in 2021 caused significant impact in the Gran Chaco lowlands spanning rural areas in northern Argentina, southeastern Bolivia and western Paraguay, affecting existing food security, health, WASH, protection and livelihoods needs. Northern Argentina, in particular, suffered a sanitary emergency at the beginning of the year due to severe undernutrition in the remote indigenous Wichi community since December 2019, with 10,000 more children at risk of acute undernutrition.

### Response

Beyond working with national authorities and partners in South American countries with ROLAC presence (Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru) to build coordinated COVID-19 response efforts, OCHA ROLAC worked with OCHA Colombia and the UN in Brazil to draft and develop the UN’s Amazon Triple Border Action Plan to respond to the needs of vulnerable groups, mostly indigenous populations, along the Brazil-Colombia-Peru border.

OCHA ROLAC additionally worked with UN teams in Argentina and Paraguay in drafting and developing preliminary analyses on the long-running drought afflicting rural communities in both countries and their humanitarian impact on existing needs to inform response actions in these oft-neglected areas. OCHA ROLAC also deployed Coordination and Information Management support to northern Argentina to support local authorities, the UN Resident Coordinator, and partners such as UNICEF, PAHO/WHO, IFRC and ECHO in responding to health, nutrition, WASH and protection needs.

### The Caribbean

The COVID-19 pandemic brought Caribbean economies to their knees, with tourism arrivals plummeting by 65.1 per cent in 2020\(^{28}\), a drop that will have lasting effects for a region where tourism can account for 50 to 80 per cent of national employment and gross domestic product. Between short- and long-term effects, the pandemic exacerbated pronounced inequalities and poverty as joblessness grew rapidly and household income dwindled.

Prior to COVID-19, the population-weighted average poverty rate in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) stood at 24 per cent, a figure expected to have increased due to the pandemic's impacts.\(^{29}\) By the end of 2020, the socioeconomic fallout spurred an increase in the number of people estimated to food-insecure in the English-speaking Caribbean to 2.7 million, an increase of 57 per cent since April 2020.\(^{30}\)

Despite being largely spared of the effects of the 2020 Atlantic hurricane season, recurrent climate shocks will continue to pose a threat. Over the last five years, internal displacement due to storms and floods has increased six-fold, with more than 3.4 million displaced between 2015-2019 compared to just over 610,000 from 2010-2014.\(^{31}\)

2020 also served as an ominous reminder of the Caribbean’s vulnerability to non-hydrometeorological events. Heightened volcanic activity in the Eastern Caribbean prompted governments to quickly step up preparedness actions, while a nearly 50 per cent increase in dengue cases across the region compared to 2019\(^{32}\) further complicated the health response amid the pandemic.

### Response

Since establishing a HAT in Barbados in August 2020 to support the UN in Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean, OCHA ROLAC has played a vital role in strengthening localized readiness and response capacity in the region. OCHA ROLAC immediately began to follow-up on the implementation of the sub-region’s COVID-19 Multi-Sectoral Response Plan and carefully monitored shifting access restrictions, providing regular updates to the UN Resident Coordinator’s Office on the evolving humanitarian situation in the 10 countries and territories covered by the multi-country office based in Barbados.

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\(^{27}\) See page 27 for full reference details.

\(^{28}\) See page 28 for full reference details.

\(^{29}\) See page 29 for full reference details.

\(^{30}\) See page 30 for full reference details.

\(^{31}\) See page 31 for full reference details.

\(^{32}\) See page 32 for full reference details.
Independent of the COVID-19 pandemic that changed the course of humanitarian work across the world, Colombia still reckoned with the effects of violence, including forced displacement, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), attacks against the population and civil infrastructure, forced confinement, access restrictions and gender-based violence (GBV), all despite years of progress after the 2016 peace agreement between the Government and Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

The COVID-19 pandemic created a fourth layer of risk for populations already in need due to armed violence, natural disasters and mixed migration from Venezuela. The convergence between armed violence and the pandemic, in particular, greatly reduced protection spaces. Non-state armed actors took advantage of COVID-19 restrictions to expand territorial control, causing some communities to remain confined, forcing others to flee and limiting humanitarian access.

These new dynamics increased the number of people in need from 5.1 million in 2019 to 6.7 million in 2020. With 1.6 million more people in need, Colombia’s humanitarian situation will likely remain critical in 2021. The pandemic’s socioeconomic consequences have increased the unemployment rate by 51 per cent. An estimated 3.5 million people are severely food-insecure. Natural hazards are an ever-present risk, with more than 610,600 people affected by disasters in 2020, a 104 per cent increase from 2019. Persistent rural poverty, inequality and violence will continue to pose severe protection risks.

Response

Between access restrictions, threats from armed groups and limited funding, response in Colombia remains a challenge. More than 325 attacks on medical missions and health workers were reported during 2020, a 49 per cent increase from 2019 and the highest such number in 24 years.

OCHA Colombia nevertheless worked with Local Coordination Teams in 15 departments to support partner response through the COVID-19 Response Plan and Humanitarian Response Plan, reaching 1.6 million people, including 914,000 targeted for specific COVID-19 assistance and 854,000 affected by armed violence and disasters, particularly in indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities.

OCHA Colombia also supported a US$5 million CERF allocation through the Underfunded Emergencies window targeting 185,745 people for response to the effects of COVID-19 on indigenous communities in the Amazonas department and to the needs of conflict- and COVID-19-affected populations in the Chocó and Nariño departments.
Overview

With decades-long sociopolitical and economic challenges and high vulnerability to natural disasters and climate impacts, Haiti stood at great risk of a devastating COVID-19 pandemic. While the country recorded fewer cumulative cases and deaths than other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, the pandemic’s secondary impacts, however, still affected basic service access and heightened the threat of violence and stigmatization.

The pandemic worsened Haiti’s already precarious economic situation, with economic growth forecast to decline 3.1 per cent. Flooding from Tropical Storm Laura in August affected some 8,800 families. An estimated 4 million people are currently food-insecure. Coupled with the pandemic’s access constraints and growing insecurity including gang violence, these conditions affected health, education and access to water and protection for much of 2020.

Despite these challenges, the number of people in need in Haiti declined from 4.6 million people to 4.4 million people, a decrease mostly owing to 1 million facing food insecurity receiving assistance. The welcome reduction notwithstanding, Haiti’s humanitarian situation for 2021 will still hinge on ongoing sociopolitical and economic volatilities spurred by gang violence, high poverty, gender inequality and limited access to basic services, among other factors. Haiti’s historical exposure to natural disasters also poses a significant risk, as any sudden-onset emergency such as a hurricane or an earthquake or deteriorating conditions from climate impacts such as drought will strain limited coping capacities.

Response

OCHA Haiti, together with HCT partners, supported authorities in responding to needs, reaching an estimated 1.4 million people (about 61 per cent of the targeted population) through the Humanitarian Response Plan and its COVID-19 revision. The collective effort managed to mitigate the pandemic’s health impact compared to other countries and provide essential services in the face of limited access due to insecurity, poor road conditions and COVID-19 constrains.

OCHA Haiti’s ongoing work with partners include improved prioritization of humanitarian interventions and strengthening partnerships with development actors, work that contributed to a slight decrease in financial requirements in 2020.

OCHA Haiti also supported CERF allocations for US$12 million through the Underfunded Emergencies window targeting 288,000 people for multi-sectoral assistance in health, WASH, food security, protection, child protection, GBV and education.
Overview

Venezuela's economic and institutional challenges over the past seven years continue to drive humanitarian needs. While these challenges eased somewhat at the start of 2020 through economic measures that helped reduce the effects of inflation and increasing remittances from Venezuelans abroad, the COVID-19 pandemic and its far-reaching implications have stalled or reversed these trends. Between rising costs in food and essential items, declining remittances and decreased global oil prices, the most vulnerable soon began facing increased risks and new needs.

Authorities addressed the pandemic’s immediate health impacts with strict quarantine measures, with cases stabilizing after peaking in September. However, the re-assignment of existing resources and capacities towards COVID-19 response created risks for critical pre-pandemic health needs, including hard-won gains in controlling communicable diseases such as malaria and measles and ensuring adequate water and sanitation at health centres.

With vulnerabilities such as an estimated 2.3 million acutely food-insecure people, an estimated 6.8 million students affected by school closures over COVID-19 and the return of about 160,000 Venezuelan migrants since March due to the pandemic stalling informal economies in host countries, among others, Venezuela will continue to face significant humanitarian challenges in 2021.

The pandemic's effects on the economy stands to affect the most vulnerable and further affect essential services. Additionally, mixed migration flows to and from Venezuela in the context of closed borders creates serious protection needs, including trafficking, sexual violence and exploitation, as migrants use informal crossings.

Response

OCHA Venezuela scaled up their presence across the country in 2020, working with 129 humanitarian partners and national authorities to reach an estimated 4.9 million people with assistance, including 2.4 million people reached with COVID-19 support in health, WASH, protection and education.

The lack of financing for the response is one of the main constraints in scaling up the response, with the HRP 2020 only 21 percent funded, one of the lowest worldwide. Key access constraints include the politicization of aid and bureaucratic and logistical impediments, especially for NGOs. Solutions to these challenges are being sought through continuous advocacy efforts.
Humanitarian Financing

As one of OCHA’s core functions, OCHA ROLAC works in all phases of humanitarian financing support, including developing joint strategies for longer term financing needs through Humanitarian Response Plans, Emergency Response Plans and CERF allocations, monitoring and follow-up of plan implementation. The unprecedented growth in humanitarian needs across Latin America and the Caribbean in 2020 triggered a massive increase in financial requirements to support humanitarian response, pushing financing requirements to \$4.3 billion to target 41.8 million people for assistance, nearly four times the support required for 2019 and more than six times the support required for 2018. Overall, humanitarian financing in 2020 reached \$1.3 billion for a coverage of 30 per cent.

### Required for COVID-19
- **Multi-sector Response Plans in Global Humanitarian Response Plan**
  - Colombia: \$283.9M
  - Ecuador: \$40.1M
  - Mexico: \$144.8M
  - Venezuela: \$81.9M
  - R4V Regional: \$438.8M
  - Total Coverage: 12.7%
- **Multi-sector or Socio-economic Response Plans* outside Global Humanitarian Response Plan**
  - Costa Rica*: \$10.4M
  - Cuba*: \$41.0M
  - Dominican Republic: \$76.9M
  - El Salvador: \$57.9M
  - Guatemala: \$155.5M
  - Honduras: \$273.4M
  - Peru*: \$273.4M
  - Total Coverage: 20.6%
- **Required for Humanitarian & Regional Response Plans (HRPs / RRPs)**
  - Colombia: \$209.7M
  - Ecuador: \$327.6M
  - Haiti: \$327.6M
  - Venezuela: \$674.6M
  - R4V Regional: \$968.8M
  - Total Coverage: 63.3%

### Funding required / received (US$)
- Colombia: \$283.9M / \$81.4M
- Ecuador: \$40.1M / \$3.3M
- Mexico: \$144.8M / \$7.2M
- Venezuela: \$81.9M / \$4.4M
- R4V Regional: \$438.8M / \$28.1M
- Costa Rica*: \$10.4M / \$0.6M
- Cuba*: \$41.0M / \$2.2M
- Dominican Republic: \$76.9M / \$3.1M
- El Salvador: \$57.9M / \$2.9M
- Guatemala: \$155.5M / \$9.0M
- Honduras: \$273.4M / \$2.9M
- Peru*: \$273.4M / \$2.9M
- Colombia: \$209.7M / \$12.8M
- Ecuador: \$327.6M / \$21.8M
- Haiti: \$327.6M / \$21.8M
- Venezuela: \$674.6M / \$37.9M
- R4V Regional: \$968.8M / \$82.6M

### 2020 vs 2021
- Colombia: \$209.7M vs \$210.3M
- Ecuador: \$327.6M vs \$361.7M
- Haiti: \$327.6M vs \$361.7M
- Venezuela: \$674.6M vs \$809.3M
- R4V Regional: \$968.8M vs \$1.0B

### CERF allocation (US$)
- Colombia: \$3M
- Ecuador: \$21.9M
- Haiti: \$16.5M
- Guatemala (Drought): \$16.5M
- Nicaragua (Eta/Iota): \$9.9M
- Honduras (Drought): \$4.3M

### 2020 vs 2021
- Colombia: \$3M vs \$4.3M
- Ecuador: \$21.9M vs \$50.9M
- Haiti: \$16.5M vs \$27.0M
- Guatemala (Drought): \$16.5M vs \$4.3M
- Nicaragua (Eta/Iota): \$9.9M vs \$4.3M
- Honduras (Drought): \$4.3M vs \$4.3M

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**Country / region**

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**Ppl. targeted**

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Coordination
Coordination structures in Latin America & the Caribbean

CARIBBEAN DETAILED MAP

THE CARIBBEAN (National coverage)

Country
Cuba
Haiti
Dominican Republic
Jamaica
Trinidad & Tobago
Barbados*

Coordination Structures

CENTRAL AMERICA & MEXICO

Country
Mexico
Guatemala
Belize +
El Salvador
Honduras
Nicaragua
Costa Rica
Panama

Coordination Structures

SOUTH AMERICA

Country
Colombia
Venezuela
Ecuador
Peru
Bolivia
Chile
Argentina
Paraguay

Coordination Structures

- OCHA ROLAC (Regional Office + HATs)
- OCHA Country Office
- UN Emergency Technical Team (UNETT)
- Humanitarian Country Team
**THE CARIBBEAN**
(UN RC coverage)

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*BARBADOS & THE EASTERN CARIBBEAN*
Through the recently established HAT in Barbados, OCHA ROLAC supports the UN in Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean Multi-Country Office (MCO) in overseeing humanitarian coordination efforts for seven sovereign nations and three British overseas territories.

**Barbados MCO covered Country/Territory**
- British Virgin Islands**
- Anguilla**
- Antigua & Barbuda
- St. Kitts & Nevis
- Montserrat**

** Overseas Territory
REDLAC
Regional Group on Risks, Emergencies and Disasters in Latin America & the Caribbean

The Regional Group on Risks, Emergencies and Disasters for Latin America and the Caribbean (REDLAC) is a dedicated regional forum consisting of more than 40 partners from UN agencies, including OCHA ROLAC as the secretariat, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, NGOs, donors and the private sector. Since its beginning in 2003, REDLAC works to coordinate humanitarian action and build capacities based on Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) standards, strengthen evidence-based analysis and advocate accountability and cross-cutting issues including gender, protection against sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), protection, resilience and the environment.

Through regular and extraordinary meetings, thematic working groups and workshops, REDLAC members are constantly exchanging information and best practices to identify how to best serve the region’s evolving needs.

2020

Prior to the pandemic, REDLAC members were active in trainings and information sessions on humanitarian financing, specifically on CERF request processes and anticipatory action frameworks and Cash Transfer Programming (CTP), while also monitoring and exchanging information on priority situations. Members were also participating in the development of the 2020 Humanitarian Needs Overview for the NCA, supporting analysis and advocacy strategies.

The regional impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the response required by the impact of Eta and Iota in Central America, shifted REDLAC’s priorities for the remainder of 2020, with partners working to address the range of issues posed by the emergencies across sectors and thematic concerns. Key actions include:

- Preparing response and coordinate relevant actions according to continuing information on the pandemic and its humanitarian impact on vulnerable populations, access and logistics.
- Activation of nine clusters and three thematic groups to coordinate regional humanitarian action, each with key results involving response plan development, resource mapping, communications and advocacy, training sessions, support for national-level analyses, information management platforms, increased participation and representation, knowledge sharing and key messages.
- 2020 Atlantic hurricane season preparations, including a review of REDLAC Standard Operating Procedures, and post-impact response coordination, situation analyses and key messages.
Operational Readiness

OCHA ROLAC works to support partners with effective coordination prior to emergencies to cover all aspects of humanitarian response and strengthen the humanitarian community’s ability to anticipate and act in the face of crises affecting Latin America and the Caribbean.

Similar to the COVID-19 pandemic’s effects on response dynamics in 2020, OCHA ROLAC’s traditional avenues of preparedness work were altered by the numerous constraints posed by the emergency. In working to overcome these constraints, OCHA ROLAC adapted its services to meet programmatic preparedness needs and address the challenges emerging from the pandemic, facilitating and leading workshops, trainings and simulations, guiding contingency planning and developing and reviewing operating procedures.

Central America & Mexico

OCHA ROLAC worked with UN teams in Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, Costa Rica and Panama to review and update response and contingency plans, adjusting them to reflect the contexts rising in these countries due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Countries such as Guatemala and El Salvador undertook a thorough revision of their national humanitarian architecture, working with HCT members from NGOs, UN agencies and civil protection systems.

South America

OCHA ROLAC supported reviews and updates to response and contingency plans in Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru to adapt to the new contexts arising from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. In Ecuador, OCHA ROLAC supported the Andean Committee for Disaster Prevention and Response (CAPRADE) in preparing their Guide for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance between CAPRADE members. OCHA ROLAC in Peru continued working with sub-national authorities in the north-western Piura area to facilitate sectoral coordination mechanisms and establish local working sectors for Shelter, WASH, Protection, Early Recovery and Livelihoods.

Caribbean

Through the establishment of a HAT in Barbados to support the UN Resident Coordinator for Barbados and Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) in 2020, OCHA ROLAC’s newfound operational presence allowed for scaled-up support to the sub-region ahead of the potential effects of the 2020 Atlantic hurricane season. Though the hurricane season largely spared the Caribbean, OCHA ROLAC still worked with key partners, including the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA), on a number of preparedness priorities. These included a complete revision and update of preparedness and contingency plans for Barbados, Belize and Jamaica, the development and publication of the OCHA-CDEMA Joint Interoperability Manual and specialized preparedness sessions covering evaluations, information management and humanitarian financing. OCHA ROLAC also supported the establishment of an Analysis and Assessment Cell (A&A) to bolster response capacities for the hurricane season as well as a briefing package on HumanitarianResponse.info to facilitate information for partners.

UNDAC/INSARAG

The UNDAC system, managed by OCHA’s Response Support Branch (RSB), can deploy teams anywhere in 12-48 hours to support UN agencies and governments during the initial response phase. OCHA ROLAC works with partners in the region to strengthen understanding UNDAC processes for emergency coordination, coordination support structures and information management.

Through OCHA’s Emergency Services Section (ESS), RSB functions as the International Search And Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) secretariat, a network of Member States and urban search and rescue (USAR) organizations that work to streamline international USAR team emergency activities. Regionally, OCHA ROLAC facilitates the INSARAG Regional Group for the Americas.

In this role, OCHA ROLAC launched a series of webinars with the Emergency Medical Teams (EMT) initiative, co-led by PAHO/WHO, to share experiences and discuss identified challenges in preparing USAR or EMT response teams during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Civil-Military Coordination

OCHA ROLAC continued to strengthen Civil-Military Coordination (CM-Coord) in 2020, developing a Humanitarian Civil-Military Operational Guidance on interacting with armed actors during COVID-19 response. OCHA ROLAC also gained observer status in the Association of Latin American Peace Operations Training Centres (ALCOPAZ), participating in the group’s general assembly. In Mexico, OCHA ROLAC provided ongoing support to national peacekeeping operations training centre, delivering CM-Coord trainings to military officers set for deployment.

**Regional Events, Webinars & Simulations**

- **41** Regional Events, Webinars & Simulations led by OCHA ROLAC
- **10.3K** Minutes of Hosted Meetings Between June-December 2020
Information & Advocacy
Creating situational awareness

Information Management

OCHA ROLAC works to gather, share and use actionable and reliable data and information to inform timely and effective response based on locations, needs and operational presence. In providing the foundation for decision-making, coordination and advocacy priorities, OCHA ROLAC’s information management services employs various tools and technologies to support joint analysis and help partners build information management capacities.

The sheer volume of information created by the COVID-19 pandemic placed an increased emphasis on OCHA ROLAC’s information management capacities in order to streamline continually evolving information streams from an increasing number of stakeholders across virtually every sector and discipline.

To that end, OCHA ROLAC developed and promoted a 345W tracking tool to map COVID-19 response throughout Latin America. Some 136 partners registered more than 17,400 activities in 19 countries, enabling a detailed look at regional, national and sub-national response coverage as well as sector and organizational activity. At the national level, OCHA ROLAC worked with partners in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru to create similar 345W tools for their context. OCHA ROLAC’s work with Colombia also extended to the creation of a data entry mechanism.

OCHA ROLAC further responded to regional information needs by setting up and promoting the 345W for the hurricane season’s impact in Central America, drawing more than 70 partners to report about 1,600 activities across Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador. Other regional work included the mapping of regional actors participating in all regional sectors, regional donor and activity mapping and creating and maintaining the COVID-19 portal for Latin America and the Caribbean on HumanitarianResponse.info.

OCHA ROLAC supported national information management work as well. In Honduras, OCHA ROLAC re-activated the Information Management Working Group to support information products and host relevant workshops for products targeting the UNETT and HCT.

OCHA ROLAC in Mexico worked with CBi to integrate the regional 345W with CBi’s information management platform and foster further participation and inclusion of private sector response efforts. Together with WFP, OCHA ROLAC in Ecuador developed a logistics platform linked to HCT and OCHA information management tools.

As partners continue to explore opportunities in humanitarian-development-peace collaboration, OCHA ROLAC is working to develop a 345W platform to serve as a hub linking HPC tools, the RAV Response for Venezuelans Coordination Platform and UN INFO monitoring and reporting tools.

Internally, OCHA ROLAC keeps refining its own Single Activity Reporting Application (SARA), which allows aligning activities to workplans, monitoring of Minimum Preparedness Actions (MPAs) and Advanced Preparedness Actions (APAs) by country and an online 3W platform function, among others.
**Advocacy**

In order to raise awareness on the various crises that Latin America and the Caribbean endure, OCHA ROLAC works to reach a varied audience consisting of humanitarian partners, NGOs, civil society, national governments, local and international media outlet, donors and the general public, among others, through targeted advocacy efforts before, during and after emergencies.

Between maps, reports, snapshots, infographics, social media, data visualizations, interactive dashboards and a host of other products, OCHA ROLAC’s advocacy output seeks to create situational awareness for the range of emergencies across the region through timely products. OCHA ROLAC’s public advocacy complements more direct efforts to secure access, build support or mobilize resources.

The growth in OCHA ROLAC’s publishing in 2020 reflects the speed and scale at which humanitarian needs grew during the COVID-19 pandemic and, towards the end of the year, during and after Tropical Storm Eta and Hurricane Iota.

The 435 publications OCHA ROLAC published and distributed in 2020 are more than triple the 140 products shared in 2019. OCHA ROLAC’s 185 maps, snapshots and infographics and 176 situation reports and updates in 2020 also exceed 2019 publishing output of these formats several times over.

OCHA ROLAC engaged in more regular and constant social media activities focused on humanitarian topics in Latin America and the Caribbean, resulting in OCHA ROLAC’s social media following increasing by more than 50 per cent.

OCHA ROLAC also supported partner advocacy work during the year, leading and coordinating the REDAC Communications Group to issue key messages, campaigns, knowledge sharing and promotion of REDAC. OCHA ROLAC supported Honduras in creating the HCT’s Communications Working Group to create a common risk communications strategy for COVID-19.
Gender
Humanitarian Action & Protection against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

OCHA ROLAC operates knowing that crisis response requires meeting differentiated needs for women, girls, boys and men of different ages and abilities. OCHA ROLAC strives for gender equality and for women and girls to be full participants in all phases of response and works to maintain a high-quality gender approach as a cross-cutting priority.

All OCHA ROLAC workshops feature a thematic gender component, regardless of the technical or operational subject matter. In the field, OCHA ROLAC keeps a strict zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse, putting in place proper structures and procedures for ensuring compliance.

OCHA ROLAC adheres to the IASC’s Six Core Principles Relating to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) and all staff are accountable for maintaining environments that protect women, girls, boys and men from all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse, per the UN Secretary-General’s Bulletin on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.

OCHA ROLAC supports Humanitarian Coordinators in Latin America and the Caribbean in implementing and maintaining effective systems to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse and to respond accordingly to any such transgressions.

Given the comparatively high rates of gender-based violence in Latin America, OCHA ROLAC prioritized Protection against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in all facets of response to the various crises brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic and their disproportionate consequences for women and girls.

OCHA ROLAC supported a UN Women and CARE gender analysis for COVID-19 response within HCT gender working groups to inform needs analyses and priorities for subsequent COVID-19 response plans. In Honduras, OCHA ROLAC helped created the HCT’s PSEA Working Group in accordance to the newest PSEA guidelines. OCHA ROLAC collaborated on the development of planning instruments and response plans in Bolivia incorporating proposals for meeting the needs of victims of gender-based violence.

OCHA ROLAC continues to advocate the need for sex-and-age-disaggregated data (SADD) to provide a more accurate reflection of the different needs experienced by women, girls, boys and men to allow for a suitably tailored response.
Every 19 August, the humanitarian community commemorates World Humanitarian Day (WHD), paying tribute to aid workers who put the safety and well-being of others ahead of their own at great risk and raising awareness on the plight of people suffering the extreme hardships that require aid workers’ service. The General Assembly’s designation of this date is to honor the 22 humanitarian workers slain on 19 August 2003 in an attack on the Canal Hotel in Baghdad, Iraq, including UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, Sergio Vieira de Mello.

WHD2020 came as the world fought the COVID-19 pandemic, a generational crisis that took hold in every corner of the world and placed humanitarian workers on the front lines of life-saving response efforts despite the immense risk to their own lives.

The 2020 campaign, #RealLifeHeroes, takes a closer look at what drives these humanitarian workers to save lives in a crisis where they are part of the affected communities. The global OCHA campaign presented the personal stories of local humanitarian workers who have risen to the challenges of the crisis through sheer dedication, perseverance and self-sacrifice.

OCHA ROLAC and OCHA Country Offices supported the campaign’s inclusion of #RealLifeHeroes from Latin America and the Caribbean, championing the stories of humanitarians in Brazil, Colombia, Nicaragua and Venezuela, some of whom know first-hand what it means to need humanitarian aid.

OCHA ROLAC in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Peru participated in national commemoration events and campaigns highlighting local heroes working to save lives amid rising COVID-19 cases in their countries.
Our mission is to coordinate the global emergency response to save lives and protect people in humanitarian crises. We advocate for effective and principled humanitarian action by all, for all.

OCHA RECEIVES CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE FOLLOWING DONORS:
HONDURAS

OCHA and partners responded to the needs of vulnerable people in Cortés, the department most affected by Eta and Iota that was already reeling from existing needs and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Photo: OCHA
As millions of people in Central America suffered the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2020 Atlantic hurricane season, humanitarian organizations worked to coordinate and provide assistance those most in need. Photo: WFP/Gerardo Aguilar