European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations

Central America and Mexico

Introduction

Central American countries and Mexico are highly exposed to earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, hurricanes and other natural hazards. Every year, an average of 1.7 million Central Americans require emergency aid (ECHO assessment). In 2019, nearly 4 million people living in the Dry Corridor regions of Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua faced acute food insecurity (ECHO Food Crisis Report, June 2019).

What are the needs?

Central America is affected by recurrent natural hazards, high levels of poverty, and violence. The most pressing humanitarian needs include temporary shelters, food, clean water and proper sanitation, healthcare, protection, basic relief items, and the recovery of livelihoods. Rapid unplanned urbanisation further exacerbates vulnerability. Empowering communities and local institutions to prepare for, and respond to multiple natural hazards is a priority.

Pervasive organised violence has led to death rates and humanitarian needs similar to those in conflict areas around the world. This includes forced displacements, confinement, severe restrictions in access to basic services such as healthcare and education, recruitment of children, and gender-based violence. At the end of 2018, there were 349,000 refugees and asylum-seekers from the North Triangle of Central America (NTCA). People internally displaced due to pervasive organised violence require protection, along with basic tailored assistance to meet their immediate needs.

Additionally, food shortages increasingly trigger migration from the NTCA. In the areas most affected by irregular rainfall and higher than average temperatures, the most vulnerable engage in negative coping strategies such as purchasing less nutritious food, spacing out mealtimes, or reducing their food intake altogether.
How are we helping?

The European Union addresses disasters before they even hit, funding disaster prevention projects and initiatives throughout the region.

Disaster risk reduction (DRR) is integrated in all projects, with disaster preparedness targeted actions focusing on strengthening local communities and institutions, enabling them to identify risks and mitigation measures before natural hazards affect them. This includes the support for the implementation of national and local policies, setting up early warning systems, or training communities to evacuate civilians or provide emergency healthcare to victims.

Since 1994, the EU allocated more than €240 million in humanitarian aid to Central America and Mexico. About two thirds (€158.91 million) helped respond to emergencies such as floods, droughts, epidemics, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, internal displacements and the humanitarian consequences of organised violence. The remaining third (€81.1 million) helped to prepare vulnerable communities and their institutions to face future disasters.

In 2018, the EU provided €300,000 in healthcare and shelters to victims of the Volcan de Fuego eruption in Guatemala, while also mobilising EU Civil Protection experts.

In 2019, the EU provided €7 million to support people in need in the region. This includes €1 million to provide assistance to the most vulnerable affected by the food crisis, €2.5 million to protect and assist victims of organised violence by funding protection projects throughout the region. Finally, €3.5 million were allocated for actions undertaking disaster preparedness, disaster risk reduction, and resilience activities.

In 2019, the EU allocated €750,000 to respond to the dengue outbreak in Honduras, Guatemala and Nicaragua.

The EU is one of the few donors addressing the severe humanitarian consequences of organised pervasive violence in Central America and Mexico’s Northern Triangle (NTCA) of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, a silent emergency forcing hundreds of thousands to flee and particularly affecting children and women.