



# DONOR REPORT 2021





# Table of Contents

PAGE

4

## ICF: A CARIBBEAN ISLAND REBUILDS

- Hurricane Irma - Barbuda 2017

8

## EARTHQUAKES OF 2017 - Morelos, Mexico State, and Oaxaca

- Voces y Visiones de Malinalco: School destroyed by quake holds 'onto a light of hope'
- Hope WorldWide Mexico: Medical volunteers reach out to devastated town
- UNDP: A taco vendor gets a second chance
- Oaxaca Community Foundation: A family cheese business finds a way forward

15

## MIGRATION

- Espacio Migrante: After receiving help, sisters from Haiti now reach out to others
- Asylum Access: Attorneys help migrants find safe haven in Mexico
- Casa Arcoiris: A 'Rainbow House' for LGBTQ migrants
- Centro FBT: "It was like angels had fallen from the sky"

24

## COVID-19 - Tijuana and Veracruz

- Banati: Keeping food on the table in tough times
- Centro Ser: As pandemic spreads, reaching out to most vulnerable
- Fundación CAAAREM: Helping coffee growing community fight



The International Community Foundation is a nonprofit organization that works across borders to connect people, ideas, and smarter investments in the transformative power of community.

ICF's core strengths include over 30 years of experience in building trust and relationships with grantees, funders, and other partners to form alliances, and respond expeditiously to current and future events; in-house technical and adaptive expertise and capacity-building with our allies – our team serves as financial and philanthropic advisors with unique cultural insights and knowledge of the communities and programs we support in the places where we work; and our commitment to strengthen communities to become self-sustaining ecosystems of change.

From supporting grassroots organizations to providing critical relief after natural disasters, ICF has worked closely with other partners to advance on-the-ground efforts. In this report, we summarize our efforts and the work of our partners to address the immediate and long-term needs of the communities affected by Hurricane Irma that hit Barbuda in 2017, catastrophic earthquakes that struck Mexico in 2017, migrant crisis in the San Diego-Tijuana border region, and spread of COVID-19 in Tijuana and Veracruz.

We would like to thank journalist Sandra Dibble for interviewing our partner organizations and writing this amazing report. She covered the U.S. Mexico border for more than two decades before retiring last year.

We also want to thank our donors for providing this leadership support. Without your contributions, we would not have been able to respond to the nonprofits' immediate needs or learn more about how to better serve their needs in the future.

Please join us in creating meaningful change in your community today by visiting our website or learning more about our partner organizations at

<https://icfdn.org/donate>



# ICF: A CARIBBEAN ISLAND REBUILDS

Hurricane Irma  
Barbuda 2017

---



## “They believe in direct contact. They believe in getting to understand the people that they work with and helping them grow.”

When Hurricane Irma tore through the Caribbean on Sept. 5, 2017, the tiny island of Barbuda suffered devastating losses. Winds reaching up to 185 miles per hour ripped off roofs, blew down walls--and destroyed more than two thirds of the buildings on the island. Left without food or potable water, the entire population of nearly 1,800 residents was evacuated to the neighboring island of Antigua.

The International Community Foundation became one of the first organizations to step in with disaster relief efforts. It was a far reach — ICF's expertise is primarily in Latin America — not the Caribbean. Yet just two days after Irma struck, the foundation became involved. A year later, as Barbudans rebuilt their community, the ICF team took on a greater role. But in the end, success has meant stepping aside so Barbudans could step in.

“They have been a real gem for us,” said Pethrolynn Isaac, longtime English teacher on Barbuda - and a director of Barbudan GO, a small non profit created with support from ICF. “As a very young organization, it's important to find an NGO that is willing to mentor you.”

Barbuda covers 62 square miles. It is by far the smaller and less populated of two major islands that comprise the eastern Caribbean nation of Antigua and Barbuda, once part of the British West Indies colony. The island is known for pink and white sand beaches, blue waters and the largest frigate bird colony outside the Galapagos Islands.

Barbudans form a close-knit community and share one of the most untouched spots in the Caribbean. Yet they face some growing challenges. Hurricane Irma showed just how vulnerable their little island--flat and close to the Atlantic Ocean - has become to

climate change. Islanders are also contending with unprecedented development pressures. The island has its own governing council, and Barbudans hold their land communally - and must agree to any major new projects--yet there are fears that their needs will be overlooked as the central government champions new tourism developments .

“Some people see it as a threat to our way of life, some see it as a necessity to improving quality of life,” Isaac said. “How do we create the right balance between the two?”

The story of ICF's work in Barbuda begins with another San Diego-based organization, the Waitt Foundation. Waitt has been promoting marine conservation in Barbuda since 2013 through its nonprofit institute. When Hurricane Irma hit, Waitt staffers immediately switched their focus to disaster relief. But Waitt couldn't do it alone. It needed a technical partner — an organization with the ability to quickly set up an international disaster relief fund to accept donations from the general public.

“We needed a funding vehicle, and that's something they were perfectly suited for,” Jacob James, former managing director of the Waitt Foundation and the fund's senior advisor. ICF “is very skilled and experienced in international grant making.... In the world of philanthropy, they're very nimble, and that's a very high value because that's not a particularly common attribute.”

Two days after the hurricane hit, Waitt and ICF joined forces to create a special fund, the Barbudan Recovery and Conservation Trust, with Waitt contributing \$100,000 in seed money.







## Hurricane Irma - Barbuda 2017

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY FOUNDATION | DONOR REPORT 2021

James was one of the first outsiders to reach the island after the hurricane. With the residents gone, "It was an absolute ghost town. I remember walking down the street, and there was a piece of metal that had been blown around. It was just sort of creeping back and forth," he recalled. "There was standing water everywhere, and the swarms of mosquitoes were so intense that the air was almost black," he recalled.

ICF's quick action in establishing the fund was crucial, and especially welcome as many of the displaced Barbudans feared they would not be allowed to return home.

"The fund was completely set up and running and spending money and raising money by the time we were on the ground," James said. "I didn't have to teach them anything."

Donations eventually reached close to \$800,000 with members of the Barbudan Council advising how the money should be spent. Funds initially went to purchase emergency supplies, pay for cleanup crews to start removing debris, and support tutoring after school programs for students displaced by the hurricane. In all, 11 programs were created, and 46 Barbudans were employed.

A year after the hurricane, Waitt returned to its original environmental mission on Barbuda. The post-hurricane focus changed from recovery to building resilience. ICF stepped into the lead role, and the Barbuda Resiliency Fund was established with the money left over - more than \$100,000.

Marisa Quiroz, ICF's vice president of programs, flew to Antigua and Barbuda to see the situation first-hand. "ICF works through our relationships," Quiroz said. "Unless I went and started building relationships on behalf of ICF, I couldn't with confidence take the reins of this program."







## Hurricane Irma - Barbuda 2017

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY FOUNDATION | DONOR REPORT 2021

To solicit proposals, ICF worked with the Barbudan Council, calling for community projects under \$25,000 - “we were looking for spark plug projects that could generate all kinds of things,” Quiroz said.

Response was enthusiastic and varied, and eventually the council settled on ten projects. Grants to reopen small businesses, a backyard garden project, water well restoration, the repair of rooftop water tanks, support of Barbuda’s only news website, and a youth media apprenticeship program.

“The projects were very dynamic and very very impactful,” Quiroz said. One student was so won over by the media apprenticeship program that she switched her career objective from nursing. “She got a scholarship and is now studying in the United States for journalism.

With ICF’s support, two local nonprofits took root. The Be Foundation, which had proposed the backyard garden project and Barbudan GO, in charge of the water tank project.

“They believe in direct contact. They believe in getting to understand the people that they work with and helping them grow,” said Isaac of Barbudan GO. “They help you to start to visualize your pathway.

Today, Barbudan GO has become “the go-to organization to sponsor other community projects,” Quiroz said. The three directors “are incredibly committed and they are thriving. Barbudans know what their community needs and they are the experts in generating those

community solutions.

Quiroz has continued steering Barbudan GO toward funders and grant opportunities. One of those is the nonprofit Global Giving. It now supports BarbudanGo and the BeFoundation with a \$60,000 annual grant to pay small stipends and staff development expenses.

ICF has yet to completely sever ties. When COVID hit, ICF donated funds that allowed Barbudan GO to purchase hand soap, sanitizer and towel dispensers for Barbuda’s hospital. They also supported public awareness campaigns.

Leaders of Barbudan GO then took a further step - organizing a music and songwriting competition to spread awareness of the virus, with separate categories for youth and adults. “It was a very popular contest that showed off the island’s talent and creativity,” Quiroz said.

Earlier this year, ICF transferred \$7000 of the donations that remained in Barbudan Resiliency Fund to Barbudan GO, which used it to support a children’s performing arts program. More recently, it transferred \$2000 received through a separate fund to the youth media apprenticeship program.

“People have the ability to determine their own destinies, and with support, they can do incredible things,” Quiroz said. While ICF offered technical advice and connections to advance Barbudan GO’s goals, she said, “the community has the answers and the solutions already exist.”







# EARTHQUAKES OF 2017

Morelos,  
Mexico State,  
and Oaxaca

---



“We were broken, our emotions were broken,  
broken from seeing so much destruction,  
from seeing our children’s sad faces.”

## Voces y Visiones de Malinalco: School destroyed by quake holds ‘onto a light of hope’

**SANTA MARIA OCUILAN**—Yesenia Porcayo Romero was at home washing dishes in Santa Monica Ocuilan on September 19, 2017, when the earthquake struck. As she stood in her kitchen, she felt the floor move. She heard a printer fall to the ground. She watched the water tank spring a leak.

But her first thoughts were for her nine-year-old daughter, Jukari, who was minutes from ending the day at her elementary school.

The small, semi-rural community of some 4,000 residents was in the grips of a 7.1-magnitude earthquake that upended the lives of millions of residents throughout the states of Puebla, Morelos, and the greater Mexico City area. It came nearly two weeks after an 8.1-magnitude earthquake struck southern Mexico, devastating communities there.

With hundreds dead, thousands injured, and many others left homeless by the two earthquakes, the International Community Foundation moved swiftly. Within the three months, it raised close to \$800,000 through two relief funds earmarked for Mexico’s earthquake victims.

Though ICF is not a disaster relief organization, it was able to respond quickly through a broad network of connections and decades of work in Mexico.

Initial aid helped ensure medical attention and drinking

water to some of the hardest-hit regions. In the months that followed, the ICF supported efforts to keep children in school and sustain small businesses. Longer-term, the ICF’s backing has gone to sustainable recovery of communities affected by the earthquakes.

The Sept. 19th earthquake struck at 1:14 p.m. – 16 minutes before the end of the morning session at Escuela Primaria Licenciado Benito Juárez. It’s the only elementary school in Santa Monica Ocuilan, a semi-rural town of some 4000 residents that’s about an hour’s drive from the city of Cuernavaca, Morelos.

Porcayo and other panicked parents arrived to find the two-story building partially collapsed and students outside – all had been safely evacuated. “The children were devastated, devastated, they were crying for their backpacks,” Porcayo said. “They couldn’t even carry out a pencil.”

At the time, she was serving as the secretary of the parents’ organization. Like many other parents at the school, she and her husband work as vendors – in their case preparing the region’s traditional barbacoa dish and selling it at outdoor markets in the neighboring state of Morelos.

The building had to be torn down. And with dozens of schools across the region damaged or destroyed by the earthquake, they were unlikely to get a new school anytime soon.





## Earthquakes of 2017 Morelos, Mexico State, and Oaxaca

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY FOUNDATION | DONOR REPORT 2021



"We were broken, our emotions were broken, broken from seeing so much destruction, from seeing our children's sad faces," said Porcayo.

The government had promised temporary classrooms but was not coming through. "There was devastation in many places, we weren't the only ones," Porcayo said. "The students and their parents worried they were going to end up losing the school year."

That's when they approached Voces y Visiones de Malinalco, a nonprofit organization that promotes educational opportunities to underserved communities in the region.

"A month had gone by, and nobody had even come by to evaluate the damage," at the school, said Circe Peralta, a staff member at Voces y Visiones who worked closely with the parents.

Peralta agreed to moderate an initial meeting with members of the school community.

But the solution had to come from the residents themselves – not dictated by outsiders. The first step involved listening to what they had to say. She relied on a methodology called "appreciative inquiry" that looked to the community's strengths and worked to encourage inclusion.

"Voces y Visiones gave us a light of hope at a time of crisis," said Porcayo. "They offered psychologists, community workshops. Some people were resistant, others incredulous. They didn't think outsiders would come in and help."

Rapid action was necessary – to keep the children motivated to stay in school. The decision was to set up temporary classrooms until a permanent one could be opened. When Voces y Visiones sent out a request for funds, ICF was quick to step in, with a \$30,000 donation. "They were the first to say yes," said Peralta, who oversaw the fund.

But the parents also provided critical in-kind support that kept the project moving forward. "What was incredible was the way the community mobilized," Peralta said. "If we'd hold a meeting, they'd bring the tarps, put out tables, if we needed a sound system, they'd find neighbors to provide it."

With help from ICF and other supporters, students were back in school before the year was out, inside 15 portable classrooms set up on a field at an athletic facility. "We had a functioning school," said Porcayo, the secretary of the parents group. "The children were delighted; it changed their lives."

They remained there until August of 2020, when their new permanent school opened.

The portable classrooms have been moved and are now being used by children in a community school run by Voces y Visiones.

The earthquake caused much damage in Santa Monica. Yet it also brought out the community's strengths. "It showed us we are a great community when we decide to be," Porcayo said.



## Hope WorldWide Mexico: Medical volunteers reach out to devastated town

**JOJUTLA MORELOS**—This municipality of some 60,000 residents – an important rice-growing region – was one of the areas in Central Mexico that suffered the greatest devastation from the Sept. 19th earthquake.

Dozens lost their lives, and hundreds were injured as buildings and businesses crumbled. Yet as rescue teams rushed across the Mexican capital, aid was slow to arrive in Jojutla, located 90-minute drive away in the state of Morelos.

ICF donors supported one of the first outside groups allowed into the hard-hit urban center. Two weeks after the quake, volunteers from Hope WorldWide Mexico, a Mexico City-based nonprofit, were on the scene to offer medical, psychological and dental care to residents.

“The area was still very devastated,” said Pedro Tapia, director of Hope WorldWide Mexico. “We’d go to houses where people were living under a tarp, without a roof, without walls.”

Hope WorldWide Mexico is affiliated with an international San Diego-based organization, Hope Worldwide, that runs programs in impoverished communities around the world. Hope WorldWide Mexico operates community medical and dental clinics, but also sends mobile clinics to areas that lack access to medical care in the Mexico City area. The focus is on children, women, and the elderly.

ICF’s support paid the expenses of two Hope Worldwide brigades that worked 12-hour days as they attended patients in an outdoor plaza. Many of the patients came suffering

from throat infections, due to the dust. Skin irritations were also common, Tapia said.

Some with chronic conditions such as diabetes and high blood pressure needed supplies. “They had lost everything, and they couldn’t even afford medications,” Tapia said. “We tried to leave them enough for a month.”

One member of Hope Worldwide’s first brigade was Patricia Gomez de Zavala, a psychologist who lives in Mexico City. She had survived the earthquake unscathed – but what she experienced in Jojutla left a profound impression.

“They had gone through very very strong trauma, they had never been through a situation like this,” Gomez said. Many came to her suffering from physical symptoms such as headaches and stomach pain.

She recalled the case of one woman in her 20s who arrived holding her sister’s hand. She’d hadn’t left her house since the earthquake and lived in constant fear that it could happen again. “She was doing very very very badly. The whole time she was trembling, she wouldn’t let go of her sister,” Gomez said. “Her trauma was profound.”

In other cases, patients had cut off their emotions. “They’d say, ‘I cannot cry, because I don’t want my children to see me,’” Gomez said. “And I’d tell them, Señora, you are a human being, and have a right to emotions. And then they would break down and cry and unburden themselves. And we’d just listen and listen.”







## UNDP: A Taco Vendor Gets a Second Chance

**JOJUTLA, MORELOS**— After the earthquake struck, Hector Santi Rivas temporarily shut down the Tacos La Gloria, the small stand named after his wife. The business had suffered little harm, but family and friends in Jojutla were desperate for help to clean up and repair their damaged properties.

“A lot of people told me, ‘Open, open,’ but my wife and I needed to physically support people who had suffered more than we had,” said Rivas.

Six weeks later, when they reopened Tacos La Gloria, the couple’s own struggle began. As the months passed, few of their old customers were stopping by – instead spending any money they had fixing up their properties or re-starting their own businesses. With sales low, “we thought we’d have to close the business, or else move to another location,” Vivas said.

Ten months after the earthquake, Vivas was thrown a lifeline through a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) initiative aimed at reactivating the economies in Jojutla and other communities struggling to recover from the disaster.

The program, which focused on small businesses, was launched in June 2018, with \$100,000 in funding from ICF. Dubbed *En Marcha con PNUD* – in Step with UNDP – the effort marked ICF’s first collaboration with this United Nations agency that promotes sustainable development with the goal of eradicating poverty and reducing inequality.

UNDP statistics show Mexico as a middle-income

country, with a high human development index – a figure that reflects a population’s average longevity, education, and income.

“But in reality, we are a country of great, great inequality,” said Cynthia Valdes, a country specialist with the UNDP’s Mexico City office. “The informal economy is too large; the rich are very rich and the poor are very poor.”

In Jojutla and elsewhere, many of those who suffered the earthquake’s harshest consequences had little to cushion the blow.

The “In Step With UNDP” program offered training, temporary employment, and support for small businesses. Though it relied on funding from the ICF, it also forged critical alliances with groups such as the state and local governments and the country’s main construction industry chamber, CMIC.

The approach was modeled on UNDP programs that proved successful in following earthquakes in Haiti and Ecuador, said Fernando Atristain, the project manager.

“This was a methodology that was tested in Ecuador, and adapted to Mexico,” Atristain said. *En Marcha con PNUD* proved so successful that the state government has now adopted a similar program.

The initiative included a program that trained 40 people in construction trades such as heavy equipment operation and then hired them to help rebuild the town.

Another program connected 20 local craftsmen and





## Oaxaca Community Foundation: A family cheese business finds a way forward

**ASUNCION IXTALTEPEC, OAXACA**—an 8.2-magnitude earthquake struck on Sept. 7, 2017, off the coast of Chiapas, no region suffered greater damage than Oaxaca's Isthmus of Tehuantepec. More than 70 people died and thousands were left homeless.

The region's largest city, Juchitan, experienced widespread destruction. But so did smaller, outlying communities in the Isthmus that got less attention. Profoundly affected was Asuncion Ixtaltepec, a town of some 14,000 people located about five miles from Juchitan.

Despite the Isthmus' warm and exuberant culture, "like a lot of regions of Oaxaca, it's an area with a lot of vulnerabilities, a lot of needs," said Jonathan Velasco Romero, director of programs and funds for the Oaxaca Community Foundation. ICF donors brought critical help to Isthmus to where effects of the earthquake have lingered to this day.

Rescuing victims from the rubble and rebuilding fallen structures proved to be just the beginning of a long road to recovery for this region of Oaxaca steeped in Zapotec language and traditions. Rebuilding the economies of hard-hit communities has been the longer-term challenge. And that is how the ICF entered the picture.

Since 2006, ICF has acted as fiscal agent for the Oaxaca Community Foundation – channeling any U.S. donations. When the earthquake struck, ICF immediately reached out with a \$20,000 grant to help pay for a diagnosis of the devastated region and design a strategy for moving forward.

women – including a family that produced huaraches – with outside businesses that might promote their products in areas beyond Jojutla.

A third program focused on small businesses such as Tacos La Gloria, offering 280 hours of training and 240 hours of technical assistance over a six-month period, from June to December 2018.

As part of that program, Vivas' taco stand got a new logo, new chairs and tables, and some good ideas for ways to bring in customers – such as a Tuesday promotion that offers three tacos for the price of two.

Three years later, the business has survived, even in the face of the COVID pandemic. The most lasting benefit was not the material support, Vivas said, but the training. "Things are going better for us, they gave us the ability to keep our accounts correctly," Vivas said. "No matter what you earn, if you don't know how to administer it, the business is going to go under."

And with time, they have found another asset: their daughter Kaila, who is six years old and starting first grade, is a customer favorite. "She works hard, thank God, and people often come asking after her."







## Earthquakes of 2017 Morelos, Mexico State, and Oaxaca

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY FOUNDATION | DONOR REPORT 2021

Two years later, a second ICF grant of \$25,000 went toward supporting four small-scale producers in Ixtaltepec through a long-established Oaxaca Community Foundation Program known as De Mi Region. One makes cheese, another traditional weaving, and third hand-made leather goods such as huaraches. The fourth sells roasted peanuts and fruit preserves.

Carlos Bolio and Maria del Coral Viveros are a husband-and-wife team who produce Oaxacan cheese – a family business run out of their house and started by Bolio's grandmother. Their products are 100 percent organic and include items such as queso seco – a hard, salty cheese used to flavor beans and meat dishes; the semi-soft queso panela, and the mild, soft white cheese known as queso fresco.

They were barely recovering from the earthquake when COVID-19 hit in March 2020. Because they sold their cheese through a network of local office workers, demand plummeted when the pandemic forced the shutdown of local offices.

"We thought of closing down, because we were giving the cheese away, we couldn't keep so much cheese in the refrigerator, but thankfully someone always came through to keep us going," Bolio said.

Since enrolling in the ICF-backed program, they have been working closely with Otilia Noriega Cisneros, a community specialist with the Oaxaca Community Foundation. They say it has not just allowed them to survive – but to move forward.

They now have a name, Quesos Na' Qu, the Zapotec name for Bolio's grandmother. The program paid 90 percent of the cost of a cream separator, and they now have added fresh cream to their offerings.

They have learned to keep close tabs on expenses, how to use social media to promote their product, and expand their market beyond the region. Most important: they are developing their own brand.

"We've been selling a bit more, fortunately," Bolio said. "I hope that when we have our own brand, then we can see our sales boom."







# MIGRATION



“They are so friendly. I feel comfortable.  
In this group, we understand our problems, we  
share our problems. That makes you feel secure.”

Jessie and Jessica Lenoir arrived in Tijuana in August 2017, eager for a new start. But they didn’t speak Spanish and had no one to guide them. The twins from Port au Prince — both former medical students — felt lost.

After several months in the city, they discovered a fledgling organization called Espacio Migrante. It offered them Spanish instruction and orientation on their legal rights. And, as their language skills improved, classes geared to help young Haitians like themselves enter a local university.

“An organization that supports migrants? It was the first time that I’d seen this,” said Jessica. Twin sister Jessie readily agreed. “Espacio Migrante transformed our lives completely.”

The largest city on Mexico’s northern border, Tijuana was for decades primarily a way station for Mexican workers headed to and from the United States – and a limited number of shelters offered a meal and a place to sleep. Today new groups and shelters have emerged to receive a widely varied group of migrants with a greater range of needs.

Violence, poverty, corruption, and natural disasters continue to push people out of their homes, and rising numbers continue heading for the U.S. border. But as the U.S. asylum process remains virtually shut down, thousands are forced to wait in Tijuana and other border cities, ICF is funding Espacio Migrante and a broad spectrum of other groups at the border that are responding.

ICF has supported immigrant communities in Tijuana since its founding in 1996 – at first indirectly through programs

focusing on issues such as health, education and the environment. That changed in 2016, when the arrival of large numbers of Haitians in the city led to the creation of the ICF Border Fund. Today, the fund supports both immediate and longer term needs of the organizations supporting newly arrived people in Tijuana, wherever they may come from.

The Border fund is guided by ICF’s overall strategy. But the fact that it is discretionary – not tied to any specific donor or program – offers maximum flexibility. This has allowed organizations on the ground to shift gears as new needs arise. For example, at the onset of the COVID19 pandemic, the fund granted over \$100,000 to help over 20 shelters equip themselves with personal protective equipment and cleaning supplies.

Since August 2021, the fund has begun addressing a new influx of Haitian and Afghani refugees following recent events in those countries. This involves going beyond providing food and shelter and taking additional steps such as hiring interpreters and psychologists.

ICF works closely with larger international organizations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration. But funding priority is given to local grassroots groups working with few resources. That is because the overall goal is to invest in local leadership and capacity.

Thanks to ICF’s donors, the Border Fund since early 2018 has raised more than \$1 million, with contributions ranging from \$5 to \$350,000. The fund has supported more than 40 nonprofit organizations that offer a wide range of services to the newcomers, most in limbo as they seek legal status in the United States or Mexico.



As asylum seekers face longer waits, the challenge is not just addressing immediate needs, but also long-term ones: offering assistance with legal status in Mexico; providing psychological support and educational opportunities for migrant children and adults, and helping shelters adapt their spaces and programs so they can continue operating under the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Here are the stories of  
some of those groups supported by ICF  
that are striving to meet their needs:



## Espacio Migrante: After receiving help, sisters from Haiti now reach out to others

**TIJUANA**—Espacio Migrante began as a collective of university students in 2012 who “wanted to do something about the migration issue,” said Paulina Olvera, one of the project’s founders. They dreamed of opening a shelter, “but we really didn’t have resources back then.”

So they started volunteering at an established soup kitchen and shelter near the U.S. border called Desayunador Padre Chava. Then, with some private contributions, they purchased five computers and began offering computer literacy classes at the shelter. They helped migrants and deportees write resumes and look for work. And they launched an annual cultural festival, Miradas Fronterizas, with music, food and panels aimed at raising awareness about migration.

Then, starting in May 2016, the unexpected arrival of thousands of Haitians at the border created unprecedented needs for shelter and other services in Tijuana. It also brought in some new actors, and Olvera became part of an all-volunteer coalition of Tijuana women – Comité Estratégico de Ayuda Humanitaria.

Many of the Haitians had traveled to the border after losing their jobs in Brazil due to an economic downturn there. Their plan was not to stay in Mexico, but to petition for asylum in the United States.

But in September 2016, the lifting of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Haitians in the United States meant that

they were now subject to detention and deportation if they tried to cross. And so, some 5,000 Haitians in Tijuana decided to stay in Mexico, rather than risk being sent home.

It was through the coalition that Espacio Migrante initially connected with the International Community Foundation — and in 2018 got its first formal grant: \$18,000 to organize “know-your-rights” legal workshops at various shelters in Tijuana and nearby Rosarito Beach. With materials in Spanish, Haitian Creole and English, they aimed to reach a broad range of the migrant population.

“When nobody knows you, it’s very difficult to get your first grant,” said Olvera, Espacio Migrante’s director. “It was amazing, because finally we had the resources to pay an attorney, and to pay translators to have the materials that we needed. It allowed us to make our first contact with the Haitian community and give them information about their rights.”

Though stranded in Tijuana, many were not content to put their lives on hold. “We noticed a lot of Haitians were young people who were interested in learning Spanish, or going to school,” Olvera said.

Before long, Espacio Migrante was operating in a rented space, offering classes geared to the young Haitians. The Lenoir sisters were among the students.







## Inclusion, Receptivity, Compassion, **Inspiration**

Jessica and Jessie had come to Mexico in 2017 to follow their mother, who had fled to Mexico in 2015 after their father, a taxi driver, was killed in Port-au-Prince. In Haiti, the sisters had been first-year medical students. They had studied math and physics, “but the way they teach it in Mexico is completely different,” said Jessica.

Their persistence and connection with Espacio Migrante paid off. The private University of Tijuana (CUT) offered both of them scholarships that paid half their tuition. The two young women, now 25, are studying psychology – Jesse wants to work with families and children, while Jessica is interested in forensics.

As the sisters have pressed forward, so has Espacio Migrante. A \$5,000 grant from ICF’s Border Fund allowed the organization in early 2019 to open a community center and a 40-bed shelter to house

migrant families with children.

A second \$30,000 grant helped pay initial operating costs including salaries, utilities and food. ICF also helped them connect with other foundations or donors who have provided funding as Espacio Migrante has continued to grow and adapt to the evolving needs of Tijuana’s migrant community.

The Lenoir sisters have maintained their connection to Espacio Migrante. They served as volunteers, then earlier this year joined the staff as community organizers. “They know better than anyone the needs of the Haitian community,” Olvera said. “To me, they represent hope for the future. They’re already contributing to the community, but when they finish their education, they’re going to contribute even more.”





## Asylum Access: Attorneys help migrants find safe haven in Mexico

**TIJUANA**—When thousands of Central Americans traveled by caravan to the Tijuana-San Diego border in November 2018, most had no intention of staying in Mexico. Among them was Bryan, a 22-year-old from the Honduran capital of Tegucigalpa.

“My idea was to cross to the United States, to ask for asylum, that’s the main goal for all of us who come here from Honduras,” said Bryan.

But now nearly three years after arriving at the U.S. border, he’s never even tried to cross. Instead, he has stayed in Tijuana with help from Asylum Access Mexico, a nonprofit group supported by ICF.

Before former U.S. president Donald Trump “shut down the border, most people who made it to Tijuana were just going to go to the U.S.,” said Daniel Berlin, deputy director for Asylum Access Mexico. Today, unprecedented numbers are petitioning to stay, and Asylum Access attorneys are helping them do so.

Based in Oakland, Asylum Access opened offices in Thailand and Malaysia before coming to Mexico in 2015. Asylum Access Mexico (AAMX) today has become the largest refugee legal aid group in the country with offices in seven cities. The Tijuana office opened in 2019, on the heels of the Central American caravan, to represent migrants seeking legal status in Mexico – often after seeing little hope of obtaining asylum in the U.S.

ICF supported AAMX in 2020 with a \$15,000 grant to

expand its legal services in northern Mexico. Though most of Asylum Access’ funding comes through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), ICF “plugged some really important gaps” – such as support for the group’s community outreach and advocacy work, Berlin said.

AAMX made the decision to open its Tijuana office after the U.S. government began imposing a series of increasingly restrictive measures on asylum seekers at the Mexican border. The policies have forced tens of thousands of asylum applicants to linger in Tijuana and other Mexican border cities for indefinite periods and left many fearful for their safety and scrambling to find food and housing.

Though President Biden has lowered Trump’s anti-immigration rhetoric, as of September 2021, the Trump era policies remain in-effect and the future of U.S. immigration reform is far from certain. “We have been hopeful, but in a lot of instances disappointed by the speed at which the Biden administration is moving to unwind the really terrible policies of the Trump administration,” Berlin said. “Some of the worst abuses that have ever happened are still happening at the border.”

While focused on clients seeking refugee status in Mexico, AAMX works closely with groups such as Al Otro Lado that represent U.S. asylum seekers.

“We certainly have clients who have found success in







Tijuana and other places, and we have other clients who are unable to find protection here,” Berlin said. “We view each client as having the agency to make their own decisions about where they are going to be able to find safety.”

Like so many other Central Americans who came to Tijuana in November 2018, Bryan said his life was marked by poverty and violence – and he had no faith that things could improve. He had lost his job selling cosmetics when the store he had worked at for four years went bankrupt. His brother was shot in the back by gang members. Then the entire family was threatened and forced to flee the neighborhood.

“A gang told us we couldn’t be there, these are neighborhoods that belong to them, with their laws and their orders,” said Bryan. His last name is being withheld at the request of AAMX, a measure to ensure the safety of refugees it represents.

When a cousin urged him to join the caravan, Bryan agreed. A sister in the U.S. sent money for bus fare to the Guatemala border, where he was able to join a growing group of migrants making their way north.

But once in Tijuana, Bryan soon saw that crossing to the United States would not be so easy – especially for a single male like himself. He learned of companions from the caravan who were taken into custody and deported back to Honduras. “Authorities were giving priority to women and children, and we didn’t have the same options,” Bryan said.

In Tijuana, Bryan was able to obtain a one-year humanitarian visa from the Mexican government. He found jobs in construction, and then in a factory that

made dentures. When his visa expired in late 2019, he petitioned for refugee status in Mexico, but the paperwork was moving slowly. He knew that without documents, he was vulnerable to police detention and even deportation.

Then someone passed on a tip: “They told me that there are some really good lawyers who charge you nothing,” Bryan said. And before long, he was talking with Licenciada Guadalupe, the attorney at AAMX who helped guide his petition through COMAR, Mexico’s refugee agency.

In early 2020 Bryan learned that gang members had shot and killed his youngest sister in Honduras. It was a tragedy that offered concrete evidence of the dangers Bryan faced if he returned.

In October 2020 – two years after leaving his country – Bryan obtained refugee status and a permanent resident card in Mexico.

He’s back to selling cosmetics – nail supplies – at open air markets in Tijuana with his Honduran girlfriend. On his time off, he’s been playing soccer with Honduran and Mexican teammates.

Though he still dreams of joining two sisters in the United States, he has made peace with being in Mexico for now. He’s living in a neighborhood that has high crime rates, but it still feels safer than Honduras. “You don’t walk around with the same risks, with the same fear,” he said. “Here you can walk around with more tranquility.”



## Casa Arcoiris: A 'Rainbow House' for LGBTQ migrants

**TIJUANA**—Ronni Palacios had been on the run for 15 months by the time he made it to Tijuana in late June. First, he escaped his hometown in Honduras, where gang members demanded protection money. Then he fled the central Mexican city of Guadalajara, where he feared he was being targeted by drug traffickers.

Palacios, 53, finally found a haven at Casa Arcoiris – or Rainbow House – a small migrant shelter in Tijuana that protects an especially vulnerable sector of the city's migrant population – members of the LGBTQ community.

The shelter opened in Feb. 2019 – just months after the Nov. 2018 caravan, which had highlighted the vulnerability LGBTQ migrants fleeing persecution in their home countries. And at the overcrowded government-run Benito Juarez shelter, a temporary government facility that housed thousands of caravan members, they were subject to harassment – and worse, said Casa Arcoiris director Cristina Franco Abundis.

"They arrive with a lot of emotional stress, because they've left their families, friends, or community, and because of the uncertainty of what will happen to them on the journey," Franco said. Being members of the LGBTQ community only compounds the stress, she said.

Franco is part of a circle of Tijuana activists who set out to open a shelter to address those needs. They rented a two-story house in a residential neighborhood that overlooks the border. And they immediately approached ICF for

technical assistance and funding to register as a formal nonprofit in Mexico. In 2020 the Border Fund contributed \$17,000 towards general operational costs – funding intended to help stabilize the shelter economically – and to give it flexibility as conditions evolve.

ICF has backed the shelter in other ways as well – acting as its fiscal agent to receive and channel the contributions of other U.S. donors such as Planned Parenthood and Choose Love. ICF has also connected Casa Arcoiris with other funders through communication tools, conferences, and personal introductions. The relationship with ICF has opened the door to institutional strengthening webinars and training to Casa Arcoiris staff. "They help us become more professional as an organization," Franco said.

At Casa Arcoiris, migrants can stay as long as three or four months. They are offered medical care as well as mental health counseling. There is also an arts program, and the walls are decorated with colorful, hopeful paintings of beach scenes and birds in flight. Casa Arcoiris residents have come from as far as Iran, Ghana, Turkey, China – and virtually all of them are planning to cross to the United States.

Growing up poor to a single mother in Guaimaca, Honduras, Palacios knew harsh circumstances early on. As a boy, he found a way out through a nearby Mennonite colony, whose members took him in and taught him English. But years later, when they learned he was gay, they threw him out. Back in his hometown, Palacios faced

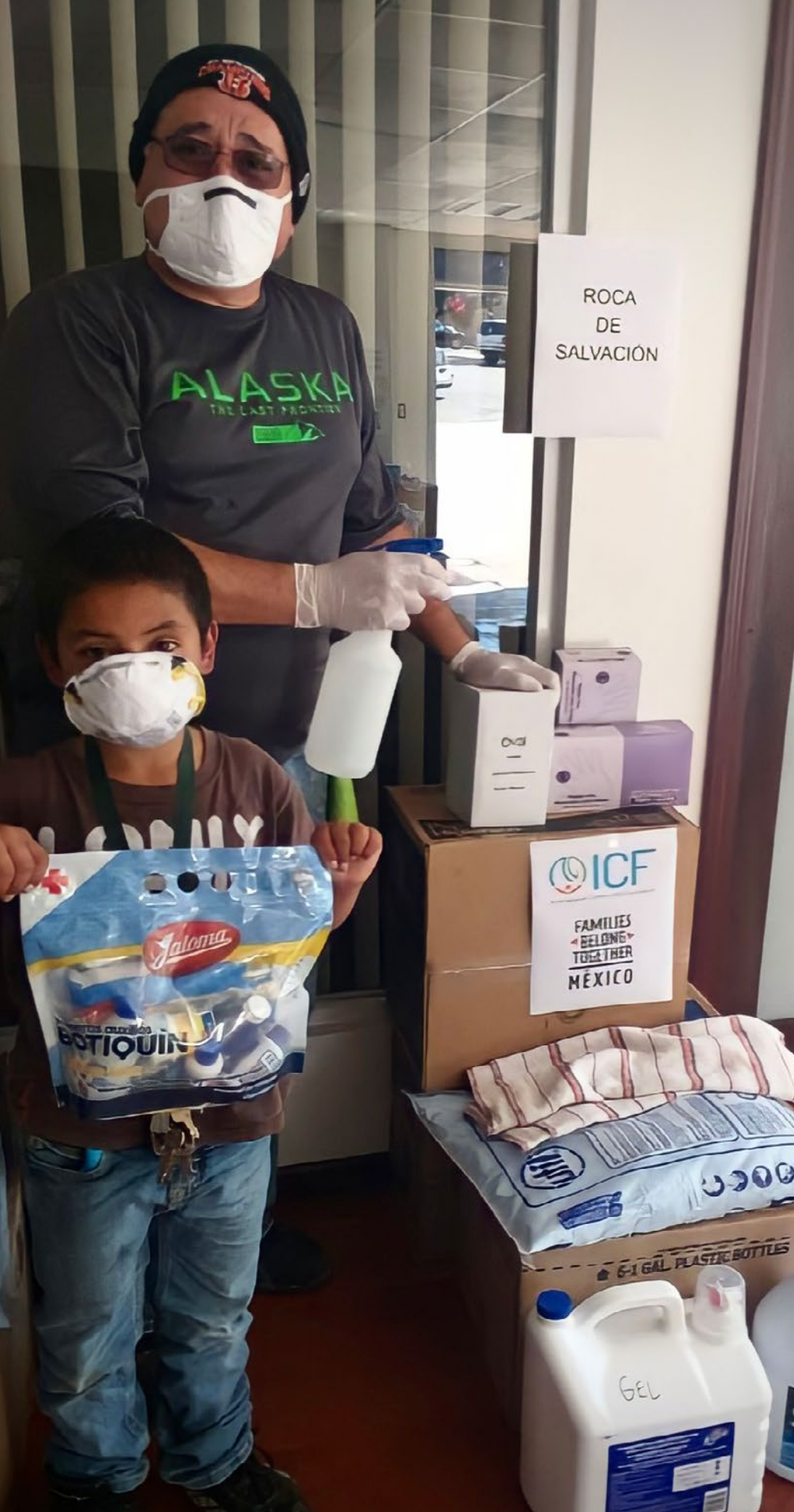


discrimination as well, so he decided to leave for the United States. Then his mother fell ill, and he returned to take care of her.

Back in Honduras, he found conditions had only worsened. Gangs began targeting him for extortion, threatening to kill him if he went to police. When his mother died, he fled for Mexico, where he obtained refugee status, moved to Guadalajara, and found work in a restaurant. But when a man he was told worked for drug traffickers began following him, Palacios was so terrified that he fled again – with plans to seek asylum in the U.S.

In Tijuana at Casa Arcoiris, Palacios said he feels safe as he's preparing for his next step — seeking asylum at the U.S. border. He has stayed at shelters before but "this is totally different," he said. "They are so friendly. I feel comfortable. "In this group we understand our problems, we share our problems. That makes you feel secure."





## Centro FBT: “It was like angels had fallen from the sky”

**TIJUANA**—Even in the best of times, the nonprofit migrant shelters in Tijuana have struggled to meet the needs of deportees, migrants and refugees who come in search of refuge. In the midst of the surging numbers of people at the border, largely the result of Trump-era policies, the situation became increasingly desperate when the global COVID pandemic hit in March 2020.

Support from ICF ensured timely delivery of facemasks, gloves, soap, chlorine, toilet paper and other supplies to many organizations in Tijuana, including migrant shelters at a time of worldwide shortages. One grant of \$7,000 went to Centro32 FBT, to support 15 shelters providing urgent protection to the marginalized migrants and U.S. deportees in the city.

“We were the first to address the issue (in Tijuana) ...before the United Nations, before the government,” said Lourdes Medrano, the operations director of Centro32 FBT, which coordinated the purchase and delivery of the supplies. They also produced critical communication materials about the virus and protective protocols, working to disseminate these amongst shelters and other organizations, and translating them to different languages.

Centro32 is primarily funded through Families Belong Together, a campaign to end family separations at the border. It is led by the U.S.-based National Domestic Workers Alliance with the support of 250 organizations.

The Tijuana office opened its doors following the 2018 Central American “caravans” that brought thousands

to the city, strengthening networks and services across existing shelters in the city.

With six staff members and several dozen volunteers, Centro32 focuses on supporting areas of greatest need in the city’s migrant community – whether helping shelters make ends meet or connecting migrants with jobs, education and housing as they wait for U.S. asylum hearings. One of its programs offers psychological counseling. Another, English instruction. One program has migrants skilled in cutting hair or manicures pass on their skills to others through formalized training.

“People arrive devastated, so depressed. They are beaten down by so many things that have happened to them,” said Soraya Vazquez, director of Centro32 and a long-time immigrant rights activist and lawyer. “The first thing we need to do is to help them rebuild themselves as people, to recover their dignity, so they can make good decisions.”

FBT’s network of 15 shelters range in size – but they often struggle for resources. The largest, AGAPE, Embajadores de Jesús, and Pro Amore Dei, have space for close to 200 people. The smallest, Iglesia Casa de Dios, only has capacity for 12. In the early months of the COVID-19, pandemic, as some of the city’s better established migrant shelters stopped accepting new residents, these facilities kept accepting newcomers. “They are shelters that, in a time of need, have very generously opened their doors,” Vazquez said. “You say, ‘I have this family,’ and they say, ‘Bring them,’” she said.



The ICF funding was spent on communications materials, and basic hygiene and cleaning supplies to reduce the risk of disease within the shelters. Within a matter of days, these emergency supplies directly benefited nearly 1,200 people.

At Albergue Volviendo a la Patria, an all-male shelter with 45 beds in Tijuana's Colonia Libertad "we were like the forgotten children," when the COVID pandemic hit, said Cesar Vanegas, a U.S. deportee who is now helping run the shelter. "The donations of cleaning supplies and protective equipment were badly needed, since even those residents who had been able to find work lost their jobs in the pandemic and faced economic insecurity", he said.

West of downtown Tijuana in Colonia Castillo, the small shelter called Albergue Casa del Deportado Sagrado Corazón has managed to remain open for over a decade, "thanks to people with good hearts," said director Perla Hernandez.

When the pandemic hit, donations dried up, but "we never closed our doors," Hernandez said. "Whether or not there are storms, we have to be here." The shelter "didn't have alcohol or antibacterial gel, we had nothing," she said. "When they brought us this help, it was as though angels had fallen from the sky."







# COVID-19

Tijuana  
and Veracruz



“There is a relationship of trust, of transparency, we are used to working as allies.”

**TIJUANA**—Catching the COVID-19 virus wasn't Obdulia Chaires' first concern when the worldwide pandemic reached Tijuana in March 2020. Her family needed to put food on the table, and she'd been laid off from her job assembling electronic components at a German-owned maquiladora factory.

To make matters worse, her husband's business selling small clip credit card terminals had dried up as shops and restaurants closed. Many of their neighbors were in the same boat: “People couldn't make monthly payments, pay expenses for water, for electricity,” Chaires said.

So, the couple reached out to Tijuana's food bank, Banco de Alimentos de Tijuana. Since 1996, the nonprofit bank known as Banati has supplied beans, rice and other dry goods – as well as fruits and vegetables – to tens of thousands of people in Tijuana.

As COVID-19 spread fear on both sides of the San Diego-Tijuana border, it also highlighted the sharp contrast in resources to fight and contain the illness. The rapid and generous response of ICF partners and donors helped Banati and other nonprofits in Tijuana navigate the early months of the pandemic. Some received direct cash contributions, while others received shipments of hard-to-get masks, gloves, toilet paper, cleaning products.

Critical support came through an initiative sponsored by ICF, in collaboration with This is About Humanity. The group had joined forces with ICF 2018 to help families separated by the U.S.-Mexico border. When COVID-19 hit, it worked with ICF to establish matching grant campaigns to bring resources to vulnerable communities in Tijuana affected by the pandemic.

An initial campaign brought \$130,000 over a two-week

period for 25 grassroots organizations working with migrants and other vulnerable populations in Tijuana. A second campaign raised \$150,000 for medicine as well personal protective equipment to frontline workers in hospitals and clinics in the city. The third raised \$20,000 for LGBTQ+ organizations in the city.

The fourth involved fighting food insecurity with a matching grant campaign that raised \$100,000 to support Tijuana shelters, orphanages – and Banati, the city's only food bank.

Overall, ICF made grants totaling nearly \$3.5 million in response to the pandemic between March and May of 2020, funding more than 60 organizations in Mexico and beyond. The support came from individuals, but also through donor-advised funds, family foundations and businesses in Mexico and the U.S.

The donations reached deep into the homes and lives of people at the border struggling through COVID with little outside support. But the ICF's efforts went far beyond the border, to communities as far as the Galapagos Islands, Guatemala, and Barbuda. And closer to home, to an isolated mountain town of coffee growers in Mexico's state of Veracruz.







## Banati: Keeping food on the table in tough times

When the pandemic struck, Banati's support dried up. "A lot of businesses stopped donating," said David Espinosa, Banati's general director.

At the same time, as people lost jobs in factories, restaurants, shops and other businesses, the demand for Banati's food supplies rose sharply. The deliveries of dry goods known as despensas shot up from 350 per day to 500.

Obdulia Chaires and her husband, Francisco Hernandez, were among those who signed up. "We couldn't put off the expenses that kept coming, and with children we could even less stop buying food," Chaires said. "They were grown up, but they still needed to eat."

Banati has traditionally relied primarily on in-kind donations, sent by local markets and businesses to its distribution center in the eastern El Florido section of the city. Banati then redistributes the good at a low cost. But just as those donations plummeted, the ICF came through with four grants totaling \$20,000 in 2020.

The funds went to purchase dry goods – rice and beans, paying for most of a 35-ton truck delivery ordered directly from farmers in the state of Zacatecas. "It helped us a lot," Espinosa said.

Banati today supports an average of 38,000 people weekly and distributes food in two ways. One channel is through to organizations such as migrant shelters and soup kitchens. The second is through networks of

families and individuals in neighborhoods across the city who join Banati's distribution list, vetted by a Banati social worker.

"There's a bit of everything," said Espinosa. "They could be people who are working, but not earning enough to support a household, or they could be unemployed. With COVID, we saw more and more families who were unemployed."

Banati charges a nominal fee for the food – enough to cover expenses. Staff make neighborhood deliveries at set locations once a week, where participants pay 90 pesos – less than \$4.50 – for a bag filled with items such as pasta, beans, rice, juice, tomato sauce, pantry items that Banati says would cost them more than 350 pesos, or \$17, in a supermarket. Reduced-price fruits and vegetables must be picked up directly at Banati's large warehouse in eastern Tijuana.

Chaires and her husband, Francisco Hernandez, had joined Banati in the past, and understood its benefits. So, when the pandemic hit, they reached out to residents in their neighborhood of Vistas del Sol to form a new group: Banati's rules require at least 50 qualifying families to enroll to ensure the deliveries.

As Tijuana recovers from the pandemic, and people return to work, there are still families struggling to put food on the table. And Chaires and her husband say their children are now supporting them as they make it their mission to make sure their neighbors are supplied with fruit and vegetables.





## Centro Ser: As pandemic spreads, reaching out to most vulnerable

**TIJUANA**—As businesses closed, and streets downtown emptied in the early days of the pandemic, staffers from a small Tijuana nonprofit called Centro de Servicios Ser sought out the city's most destitute and vulnerable residents.

They dropped in on bars by the U.S. border in the city's Zona Norte; navigated narrow alleyways called callejones and walked into crowded tenements known as vecindades. They brought with them bottled water, sandwiches, bags of groceries, jugs of chlorine, facemasks, and antibacterial gel.

Their targets included drug users and sex workers. Migrants, deportees, and others living on the streets with nowhere to go. Older residents without income or families to see them through the crisis.

The effort was supported through a \$5000 grant from the ICF. It allowed Centro Ser to reach hundreds of at-risk residents during the uncertain early months of the pandemic. The city's homeless population was especially exposed, said Rosario Padilla, Centro Ser's director and one of its founders.

"Of all the vulnerable groups, this was the most vulnerable, because you'd say, 'You have to wash your hands', and they didn't even have access to soap and water," Padilla said.

Since its launching in 2011, Centro Ser has functioned

On a recent Tuesday morning, the couple was at Banati's warehouse, standing by crates of papaya and watermelons. They were donated by local markets to Banati, which shares them with its members for a small fee. Later in the day, the couple would offer them to people in their neighborhood charging only their costs.

"We go house by house, for three, four hours," said Chaires. "There are families who work, who can't go out to buy food. We bring it to their door, and they are grateful."







as a community center for members of Tijuana's LGBTQI+ community. It operates out of a small, rented house in downtown Tijuana, a block from Teniente Guerrero Park, a location that places it within easy reach of many of the people it serves.

Centro Ser provides mental health care and medical services to populations that often struggle for care. It offers clean needles to intravenous drug users and conducts rapid testing for HIV. Since 2016, it has operated a "Trans Clinic" that works closely with individuals in the process of transitioning genders.

As the pandemic spread in the spring of 2020 and Tijuana's hospitals filled with COVID-19 patients, Centro Ser received pleas for help from some of its trans clients. "They'd say, 'Listen, Rosario, I don't feel well, and they won't receive me at the General Hospital.' What should I do?"

Through a "telemedicine" program launched thanks to the ICF funds, Centro Ser staff were able to review the patients' symptoms from a safe distance. "And if we determined they had the signs of COVID, then we would accompany that person to the General Hospital for treatment," Padilla said.

Centro Ser has placed priority on reaching out "to vulnerable populations that other community centers and government offices do not," Padilla said. And that sometimes involves extra measures. When

they deliver sandwiches on the street, they install a handwashing station. And when they step into crowded vecindades, they make sure it's with the approval of the residents.

On a recent weekday, Padilla and psychologist Rita Encinas, the center's director of operations, parked their car outside one such compound in the city's Zona Norte. It's a place where drugs are sold and sex workers live – and outsiders are greeted with suspicion. But the two women were well received as they arrived with KN-95 masks and despensas filled with cereal, pasta, beans and other dry goods.

Standing at the door of his rented room to accept some groceries, Pedro Gonzalez Solano said he is a street musician who lost all possibilities of working when the pandemic hit. He had no way to support himself and his ailing wife, who has since passed away.

"It was a catastrophe for all workers, looking for clients," said Gonzalez, now 73 years old. Life is no easier today, he added. "We're begging in taco shops. There's no need to be ashamed, it's necessary."

Centro Ser support helped him and his wife pull through the frightening early weeks. "When they help us with a *despensa*, we are able to eat for three days," he said.







## Fundación CAAAREM: Helping coffee growing community fight COVID-19

**EL PARAISO REFORMA, VERACRUZ**—Even as the COVID-19 virus raised alarm across Mexico in the spring of 2020, residents of El Paraiso Reforma were skeptical. Then in June 2020, an agricultural worker fell ill.

“We had some doubts, and thought that it could be something political, something false,” recalled Sara Rodriguez, a longtime resident of this small community of coffee growers in southern Mexico. “But when this person passed away...that’s when we understood that yes, COVID exists.”

Over the following weeks, as communities across the globe scrambled for masks and gloves, the ICF worked with a Mexican partner, Fundación CAAAREM, to ensure that Mexican agricultural communities had access to a supply.

It was no simple operation: the items were produced in China, the funds to purchase them came from the United States, and Mexican nonprofits made the deliveries. ICF’s strong relationship with Fundación CAAAREM was key to the mission’s success.

CAAAREM is the acronym for Confederación de Agentes Aduanales de la República Mexicana, the main association of Mexican customs brokers. Fundación CAAAREM, based in Mexico City, is the group’s social arm.

The goodwill between the two foundations “comes from long before this situation that came up in 2020,” said Maria de Jesus Cortes Torres, the director of

Fundación CAAAREM. “There is a relationship of trust, of transparency, we are used to working as allies.”

The COVID effort started when a Washington, D.C.-based philanthropy consulting firm called Arabella Advisors through its nonprofit Windward Fund set out to send protective equipment to agricultural communities throughout Mexico. Through contacts in China, Arabella-Windward purchased one million masks and 600,000 pairs of gloves.

The first challenge involved getting the products into Mexico. Staff from the Arabella-Windward fund reached out to ICF for help. And ICF in turn contacted Fundación CAAAREM. The Mexican foundation has a program called “Importando Sonrisas” which relies on Mexican customs brokers who volunteer to guide imported donations through the necessary steps.

Fundación CAAAREM not only arranged to import the equipment but found places to store it. And then it helped channel the donations “to the vulnerable agricultural population, which is sometimes more difficult to reach,” Cortes said.

Half the masks and more than half the gloves were sent to Baja California and Baja California Sur, where ICF worked with members of the government and nonprofit sectors to distribute the equipment to farmworkers, as well as clinics and hospitals that support them.

That left 500,000 masks and 219,000 pairs of gloves for



communities in seven other states. To deliver them, Fundación CAAAREM reached into its network of organizations who work closely with local communities.

One of those was Fondo Para la Paz, a Mexican nonprofit that fights extreme poverty in rural areas. Staff members delivered 30,000 blue surgical masks and 18,000 pairs of gloves to members of 14 communities in the state of Veracruz. The recipients were participants in a program that supports better working conditions for migrant farm communities in the sugarcane and coffee sectors.

On Sept. 23, 2020, the packages of face masks and gloves reached El Paraiso, a community of 2,500 people that sits in a wet and mountainous region of the state in a municipality known as Tezonapa. The nearest city is Cordoba, about an hour's drive away.

One of those deliveries reached Manuel Lopez Ixtlahuaca, a former schoolteacher and coffee grower who lives in El Paraiso-Reforma with his wife Sara Rodriguez.

Today El Paraiso has long shed its skepticism about COVID-19. The annual Semana Santa festivities were canceled this year, and people avoid crowds. And when they go out in public, "fortunately, people have become aware, and are using facemasks," Lopez said.

Lopez said protective equipment has hard to come by in El Paraiso, and the donations helped fight the spread of the disease. "Because without health, believe me, even if you have riches, it's worthless," Lopez said. "When a person is sick and depends on others, it's unpleasant, so this is very very very valuable."

