



Country: Mexico

Good practice: Merged procedures: combined registration and eligibility procedures and application of the broader definition.

Implementation Dates: March 2020 - present

General Description:

The Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance (COMAR) implements merged procedures that apply the broader definition proposed by the Cartagena Declaration with a view to achieving a more agile, efficient and high quality procedure. These procedures accelerate the registration and eligibility stages for certain profiles of applicants in vulnerable conditions and that have a high inclusion rate.

In the three years prior to the adoption of this measure, asylum applications in Mexico had increased exponentially, registering 14,619 applicants in 2017, 29,631 in 2018, and 70,609 in 2019. In 2020, and even though the COVID-19 pandemic occurred, COMAR registered 41,303 applicants. This situation affected the entity's institutional response capacity, primarily in terms of efficient processing of applications.

With support from the Quality Assurance Initiative (QAI) and technical advice from UNHCR, COMAR has reviewed all stages of the refugee status determination procedure with a view to expediting the process. In order to strengthen eligibility, tools (interview guide, COI and decision models) were designed to implement procedures for applicants with high inclusion rates and applying the regional definition of refugee from the 1984 Cartagena Declaration (incorporated into [national legislation](#)).

While this measure provided protection to a significant number of asylum seekers, COMAR's processing capacity needed to be improved (the official number of pending applications at the end of 2020 was 83,815).

In this context, COMAR adopted a backlog reduction strategy that included, among others: strengthening the system for registration, documentation, file archiving and individual case management; the restructuring of protection teams (eligibility), division of applications based on nationality and establishment of targets for each team; continuity and expansion of the implementation of diversified case processing strategies.

COMAR resolved to initiate the implementation of merged procedures with a pilot program in Mexico City.

Through a triage mechanism in the registry (lasting 5-10 minutes), staff determine whether the case - based on established vulnerability criteria - can be referred to the merged procedure. If the applicant meets the criteria, within a single day they are admitted to the



procedure, documented and interviewed. They also receive information about assistance services based on their specific needs and are finally summoned to receive a response to their request within 15 working days. Two Registration Officers and two Protection Officers were designated to work on this pilot program with a goal of four cases per day per officer.

- This pilot started on March 2, 2020 and was initially planned to last nine weeks. Following this, an evaluation and adjustments were going to be made with a view to initiating the procedure systematically in the capital and starting the pilot project in the Representative Office in Tapachula, Chiapas. However, the national measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 forced COMAR to suspend this pilot project as of March 23rd. A total of 55 people benefited from this procedure in the first three weeks of its implementation. The pilot plan could not be restarted until October 5 and required a series of operational modifications due to the context of the pandemic (staggered shifts, sanitary measures, etc.). The Pilot Plan was extended to Tapachula from November 2nd to December 23rd, 2020, during which 227 applicants benefited. Between January and March 2021, a total of 294 cases were resolved. The daily average per Protection Officer was 2.52 cases resolved per day.

Activities:

- An information package was prepared for the implementation of the pilot containing: checklist for triage; monitoring and evaluation criteria; scripts for providing information and orientation during the stages of registration, eligibility, institutional care and linkage (DAVI); COI for each nationality based on risk profiles; interview script based on risk profiles; resolutions; registration application form; information form; and checklist with approximate time periods for each stage;
- Joint workshops were held between COMAR and UNHCR to review and readjust the flow of procedures and preparation of materials.
- During the first weeks of the pilot, profiles for the merged procedure were identified in a coordinated manner between the Registration and Protection Units to ensure quality and shared understanding.

Results / Impact:

- 55 people recognized as refugees during three weeks (from 2 to 23 March 2020) as a result of this procedure and another 17 were granted asylum in the period from 5 to 23 October.
- The average duration of the entire procedure during the pilot in Mexico City, including documentation was 7.5 hours (4.5 hours for registration and 3 hours involving work by the Protection, Assistance and Institutional Linkage Directorates).
- At the operational level, the pilot demonstrated:
 - That following the checklists for the procedural stages in each case allows for fluidity and ensuring that all applicants obtain their documentation by the end



of the day, including the summons to receive the decision (notification and resolution).

- Usage of the report in the specific computer system (KoBo) by Protection Officers shows numerical results.
- The resolution models, although they have been significantly shortened (from 15 to 6 pages), still take 30 minutes to be finalized. The section of "results", the verification of the identity of the person and the documents provided are the sections that require more time.
- The average time per interview was 30 minutes.

Implementation challenges:

- At first, the implementation required a change in the mentality of the staff responsible for the interviewing and analysis of the cases as it requires a different working method than the one they previously used.
- Strengthening triage mechanisms continues to be a challenge as this implies training and the availability of tools to carry them out.
- The lack of adequate space in COMAR's offices makes it difficult to organize logistics and delays the procedure.

Partner(s):

COMAR / UNHCR (QAI Initiative)

Lessons learned:

- This procedure demonstrates the benefits of implementing diversified case processing strategies to manage significant growth in asylum applications.
- Monitoring the implementation of the differentiated procedures is crucial for their effective application and to achieve the proposed objectives. This monitoring includes the establishment of concrete deadlines between the different stages and the design of the necessary documents.

Impact of the COVID pandemic on implementation:

- The pandemic led to a suspension of the pilot program after three weeks. Following its resumption, operational and logistical changes in the process had to be implemented to safeguard sanitary measures. While this may have caused delays, the organization adapted positively and the practice could and can continue to be implemented.

Use of the Asylum Capacity Support Group mechanism:

No.

Additional information:

Website of the [Mexican Commission for Aid to Refugees \(COMAR\)](#)