

El Salvador

Response to Information Request Number:	SLV02003.OPP
Date:	May 21, 2002
Subject:	El Salvador: Information on Recovery and Reconstruction since the Earthquakes of 2001
From:	INS Resource Information Center
Keywords:	El Salvador / Economic conditions / Education / Environmental degradation / Food shortage / Health care services / Housing / Unemployment

Query:

What was the impact of the 2001 earthquakes and to what extent has El Salvador recovered from them? Describe current conditions that would have an impact on hardship considerations.

Response:

EARTHQUAKE DAMAGE:

Two major earthquakes struck El Salvador in January and February of 2001 causing 1,259 deaths, 9,000 injuries and 1.6 million homeless victims in a country with a population of approximately six million (IFRC 11 Jan 2002, IPS 28 Jan 2002, USAID 3 Aug 2001).

150,000 homes were destroyed; 185,000 were damaged (IFRC 11 Jan 2002).

Highways and roads were heavily damaged (AP 18 Jan 2001, CISPES 15 Jan 2001).

Eight hospitals and 113 of 361 health facilities were severely damaged representing 55 percent of the country's capacity to deliver health services (M2 5 Dec 2001).

Nearly 35 percent of all schools were affected (1,681 out of 4,820) (LA PRENSA GRAFICA 27 Jan 2001).

The Government of El Salvador identified 265 places where serious danger of landslides continue to exist as a result of earthquake damage (AP 31 May 2001).

RECONSTRUCTION AND RECOVERY EFFORTS:

Over 200,000 temporary shelters were erected shortly after the earthquakes; however, the construction of more permanent housing has remained slow (ECONOMIST 19 Jul 2001).

Of the 335,000 homes that were destroyed or damaged, only 32,000 replacement homes had been provided by the government as of early 2002 and much of that reconstruction was in areas prone to landslides (IPS 28 Jan 2002, ECONOMIST 19 Jul 2001).

By the end of April 2002 only an estimated half of all families who lost their housing in the quakes were living in proper housing, the other half remained in a "vulnerable condition" in

temporary metal or plastic shelters referred to as “microwaves” because of how rapidly they heat in the sun; overall there remained a “significant shortage of housing throughout the country” (WFP 8 May 2002, AP 23 Mar 2002).

Salvadoran officials estimated that 70 percent of families without adequate housing might have to remain in temporary shelters because they lacked proper title to their destroyed homes, without which international relief agencies would not replace them (MIAMI HERALD 1 Jan 2002).

Most major highways have been repaired but local roads still needed work as of September 2001 (IPS 28 Jan 2002, BBC 28 Sep 2001).

By the beginning of 2002 there had been little reconstruction in the health sector, the seven most damaged hospitals were described by health officials as still in “a critical state,” and work on rebuilding smaller healthcare facilities had only begun. A World Bank loan intended to partially address this problem was announced in December 2001 when health care was still being provided from tents and trailers (M2 5 Dec 2001, LA PRENSA GRAFICA 13 Jan 2002).

An Inter-American Development Bank loan approved in September 2001 is targeted for school and health center repairs and reconstruction of other areas of damaged infrastructure (BBC 28 Sep 2001).

USAID has earmarked funding for earthquake reconstruction through FY 2002 and is seeking funding to cover additional reconstruction needs for FYs 2002 and 2003. This aid will be targeted for rebuilding homes, schools, health facilities, potable water systems, as well as numerous other projects (USAID 3 Aug 2001).

ECONOMIC ISSUES:

Economic losses from the earthquakes have been reported to be as high as \$2.6 billion, almost 15 percent of the gross domestic product of \$18 billion (Bloomberg 14 Feb. 2002, IPS 28 Jan 2002).

According to the UN Development Program, 51 percent of the population now lives below the poverty line, a proportion nearly four percentage points higher than in 1999 considered due to the quakes (IPS 12 Feb 2002, IPS 2 Apr 2002).

More than 200 Salvadorans are reported to be emigrating every day due to poverty (IPS 12 Feb 2002).

Relocated families lost jobs and were still unemployed by mid-year (ECONOMIST 19 Jul 2001).

At least 30 percent of the economically active population is underemployed (IPS 28 Jan 2002).

According to the World Bank and the United Nations, per capita gross domestic product is now lower than it was in 1978 (WASHINGTON POST 24 Mar 2002).

International aid and loans, in many cases, were beginning to be made available only six months after the earthquakes and much of that funding has yet to be utilized (Bloomberg 14 Feb 2002, M2 5 Dec 2001, BBC 28 Sep 2001, USAID 3 Aug 2001).

COMPOUNDING EFFECTS OF DROUGHT, COFFEE COLLAPSE AND THE EXPECTED RETURN OF EL NIÑO:

Following the earthquakes, a drought left at least 35,000 subsistence farming families destitute, affecting some 318,000 people, mainly in the eastern portion of the country, causing damage of about \$189 million, with the situation exacerbated by food stocks already depleted following the quakes (IFRC 26 Feb 2002, IPS 5 Mar 2002, OCHA 5 Apr 2002).

In April 2002 up to 200,000 people were still threatened by "food insecurity," with the next harvest not until August and prospects for subsistence substantially worsened by lack of wage labor due the collapsing coffee industry (EFE 24 Apr 2002, WFP 12 Feb 2002).

UNICEF says in April 2002 that 34 percent of children in the four eastern departments most affected by the 2001 drought are suffering from malnutrition, up from 12 percent in 2000 (LA PRENSA GRAFICA 5 Apr 2002).

Coffee industry officials say that up to 60 percent of coffee cultivating lands have been abandoned due to international price collapse, leaving an estimated 50,000 peasant laborers without work (AFP 13 Mar 2002).

The difficulties could be exacerbated by arrival of another El Niño, as the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in early May 2002 forecast a weak to moderate El Niño likely to develop within six to nine months (NOAA 9 May 2002).

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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