

Country profile

World Vision

Honduras

GEOGRAPHY

Honduras is located in Central America and is about half the size of Victoria. Surrounded by the Caribbean Sea and the North Pacific Ocean, it shares its border with Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador. It is a mountainous country, and less than 20 percent of the land is suitable for farming. The mountainous terrain also means that the climate varies greatly, from subtropical in the lowlands to temperate in the higher altitudes. The Caribbean coast is also highly susceptible to hurricanes and floods.

PEOPLE

The population of Honduras is 7.6 million, with the majority living in the highlands. The capital, Tegucigalpa (meaning “Silver Hill”), is home to more than a million people, and lies in a mountain basin. For many years it was isolated from the rest of the country due to poor roads.

Spanish is the official language, although other indigenous dialects are also spoken. Ninety-seven percent of the population are Catholic and the remaining is Protestant. In April 2000, the government passed an historic Equal Opportunities law, which gave Honduran women the right to occupy at least 30 percent of all political positions.



Map courtesy of The General Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin

HISTORY

Very early signs of human settlement have been found in this region, dating back to 1700BC. The area was part of the Mayan empire, which reached its peak between 250-900AD. By the time the Spanish invaded in the 16th century it was largely in decline, and while 100,000 native people still lived in the country when the Europeans arrived, their numbers were drastically reduced by war, slavery and disease. When independence was granted in 1821, Honduras briefly became part of Mexico before joining the Central American Federation. When internal conflicts led to a break in the union, Honduras declared independence in 1838.

Toward the end of the 19th century much of the land to the north of the country was sold to US companies so they could ship bananas to southern USA. These companies quickly became powerful economic and political forces, and by 1913 bananas had become 66 percent of all Honduran exports and the companies owned 75 percent of the plantations.

The country suffered a massive economic loss when a hurricane destroyed 75 percent of the banana crop in 1974. In 1998, natural forces again affected the country, when Hurricane Mitch killed over 5,000 people and destroyed some 70 percent of the country's crops. Hundreds of thousands were left homeless, while major damage was caused to much of the infrastructure. In all, the hurricane caused almost US\$3 billion in damage.

In 2009, President Manuel Zelaya Rosales was ousted by the military, and Porfirio “Pepe” Lobo Sosa of the right-wing National Party was elected as President after seven months of political chaos.



Sponsored children Noris (bottom) Dennis and Abel benefit from increased access to healthcare and educational opportunities.

ECONOMY

Honduras is one of the poorest nations in the Western Hemisphere, with nearly 30 percent of the population earning less than \$2 a day. There are large disparities in wealth, and many people are unemployed. There are hopes that expanded trade under the US-Central America Free Trade Agreement and debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative will positively impact the economy.

Economic growth remains dependent on the economy of the US for continued exports of non-traditional agricultural products (such as melons, chillies, tilapia and shrimp), and on the reduction of the high crime rate.

Bananas, coffee and shrimp are key exports, but these are vulnerable to sharp changes in world prices, the status of the US economy and commodity prices (especially coffee). Since Hurricane Mitch in 1998 and Hurricane Stan in 2005, the country has been busy rebuilding damaged infrastructure.

LIVING CONDITIONS

Poverty is a major problem for the people of Honduras. Malnutrition, disease and poor housing are prevalent. In urban areas, many people are still living in temporary shelters, unable to rebuild their homes following natural disasters. In rural areas, most families live in one- or two-room thatched huts built of adobe (sun-dried brick) or sugarcane stalks and mud, with an earth floor.

The fall in coffee prices and low rainfall make it very difficult for people to gain a steady income. Thousands of Hondurans leave the country each year, most of them for the USA. The money sent home by these overseas workers is an important source of income for many families.

The country has a young population with 50 percent under the age of 19. Poverty, chronic unemployment and the prospects offered by drug trafficking have contributed to high rates of crime among youth gangs.

HIV and AIDS has had an effect on the country, with nearly 60 percent of all Central American HIV cases located in Honduras (around 0.7 percent of the population are infected).



Amparo and his daughter Gloria in the family potato plot. World Vision is assisting farmers like Amparo to grow nutritious food for household consumption and income generation.

Comparatively speaking...

CATEGORY	HONDURAS	AUSTRALIA
Population	7.6 million	21.5 million
Urban population	51.6 %	89.1%
GNI per capita (US\$ PPP)	\$3,750	\$38,692
Population with an improved water source	86%	100%
Adult literacy rate	83.6%	99%
Population living on less than US\$1.25 (PPP) a day	18.2%	0%
Under-5 mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	31	6
Life expectancy at birth	72.6 years	81.9 years

Source: United Nations Development Programme
Human Development Report 2010

EDUCATION

Many children are forced to drop out of school to help their family earn a steady income and adults, especially in rural areas, are unable to read and write. This compounds the problem of unemployment and the difficulties families face in generating income.

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- children, their families and communities are assisted through child sponsorship to meet basic needs in areas like healthcare, education, food production, income generation and other basic needs;
- relief supplies (food, blankets, medicine) are provided for communities affected by hurricanes, floods or drought;
- Area Development Programs are helping communities develop knowledge and skills to better manage and reduce the impacts of natural disasters.