

Update on UNHCR's operations in the Americas

A. Situational context

The Americas region hosts more than 18.4 million refugees, asylum-seekers, displaced and stateless people, representing some 20 per cent of persons of concern to UNHCR worldwide. During the last two years, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic had a disproportionate impact on refugees and migrants in host communities, including loss of livelihoods opportunities and an increase in evictions, engagement in negative coping mechanisms, discrimination and xenophobia. This exacerbated pre-existing obstacles to exercising basic human rights and self-reliance. Further compounded by limited access to regularization and documentation in some countries, these impacts have contributed to onward movements of people in search of protection and/or better opportunities elsewhere. Heightened protection risks along such routes include exposure to gender-based violence and other threats to physical security, as well as other risks inherent to trafficking and smuggling. Many countries in the region have formally included persons of concern in their national vaccination programmes, with several countries, such as Brazil, Ecuador and Peru, achieving high vaccination rates.

Venezuela situation

By the end of 2021, the number of refugees and migrants from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela surpassed 6 million globally. Close to 83 per cent of them are hosted in Latin America and the Caribbean. More than 186,000 have been recognized as refugees, and over 952,000 have lodged asylum claims. In the region, an additional 2.6 million have been granted some form of residency or regular stay permit.

In Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), UNHCR continued to support the implementation of the Humanitarian Response Plan and led the protection cluster, as well as the cluster responsible for shelter, energy and non-food items. Over the course of 2021, more than 1.9 million people, including host community members, displaced people, those at risk of displacement, and spontaneous returnees, were directly or indirectly assisted in 71 prioritized communities, especially in border areas. UNHCR also provided technical assistance on shelter management and coordination and stepped-up assistance in reception areas, temporary shelters and public health facilities to increase capacities while also supporting public health measures.

For Venezuelans, Brazil, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador and Peru have initiated different types of regularization processes to provide documentation and improve access to rights. In 2021, more than 500,000 Venezuelan applicants have been approved for some form of regular stay, and more than 3 million refugees and migrants could potentially benefit from regularization. Colombia has registered more than 1.8 million applicants for temporary protection status. Some 1.2 million of them have completed biometric registration, and over 300,000 have been approved and received their documentation.

In the context of the Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP), collective inter-agency efforts provided assistance and support to 3.3 million people in 17 countries. Under the co-leadership of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UNHCR in the regional inter-agency coordination platform (R4V), the 2022 RMRP now includes 192 organizations – with 23 organizations led by diaspora members – and will aim to reach 3.82 million refugees and migrants, as well as host community members.

The Quito Process remains the central forum for inter-governmental coordination among host countries. In addition to the 13 participating governments, there are 34 actors involved, including United Nations organizations, cooperating States and international financial institutions supporting the Group of Friends of the Quito Process.

Colombia situation

Despite efforts of the Government of Colombia to address armed violence, the national registry of victims recorded more than 130,000 newly displaced people in Colombia in 2021, and an additional 21,000 people were forced to remain in their communities. Ethnic minorities were disproportionately affected, and afro-Colombian and indigenous communities together accounted for 41 per cent of those displaced and 99 per cent of those confined. New displacement, confinement, violence and control by illegal armed groups, together with the pandemic posed further challenges to advancing solutions for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and improving humanitarian access. Clashes between illegal armed groups have continued in 2022 and have impacted communities on both sides of the border between Colombia and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

UNHCR and partners complement Colombia's institutional response to conflict-affected populations through strengthening State's capacity at the national and local level to prevent displacement, provide protection and support durable solutions. UNHCR ensures the centrality of protection in inter-agency coordination platforms, ongoing protection monitoring, advocacy and outreach activities targeting vulnerable communities in areas particularly affected by conflict. The victims' unit and UNHCR have started to develop criteria and metrics – linked to recommendations of the Expert Group on Refugee and IDP Statistics established by the Bureau of the United Nations Statistical Commission – to improve data on vulnerability levels among IDPs and on possible linkages with durable solutions. In 2022, some of the key priorities will focus on the geographic area of the operational response - for example, those with recurring emergencies - as well as on thematic responses, such as the prevention of forced recruitment or exploitation of children, emergency shelter support, and strengthened coordination and capacity-building of local institutions (e.g. the local ombudsperson's office).

North of Central America situation

In 2021, growing numbers of people were forced to leave their homes in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. There are now nearly 600,000 asylum-seekers and refugees from these countries, mainly in Costa Rica, Mexico and the United States of America. It is estimated that approximately 320,000 people are internally displaced in El Salvador and Honduras, although the actual number could be higher. This trend is expected to continue in 2022.

The root causes of displacement are multiple and interrelated: widespread violence, territorial control by criminal organizations and gangs, fragile institutions, the impact of climate change and deeply entrenched inequalities – all compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic's socioeconomic consequences.

Strengthened asylum capacities of States have enabled to process more asylum applications and provide alternative protection for those in need. The number of asylum-seekers and refugees in Central America and Mexico rose from some 33,000 in 2015 to over 296,000 by mid-2021. Mexico has become the third largest recipient country of asylum claims in the world with more than 130,000 new asylum applications in 2021. Similarly, Central American States, while remaining mostly transit countries, are increasingly hosting people in search of protection.

Successful reintegration of returnees requires access to effective protection, basic services, assistance and livelihood opportunities. In this context, socioeconomic investments, strengthening of the rule of law, and ensuring access to justice and community-based protection mechanisms are essential to prevent future displacement and onward movements.

In coordination with partners, UNHCR supports a range of multi-sectorial humanitarian and protection services under the humanitarian response plans in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. In addition, in the framework of the Comprehensive Development Plan for El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and south and southeast Mexico, a comprehensive package

of priority projects has been consolidated to support developmental investments in strengthening the response capacity of national institutions and effective inclusion of displaced people.

UNHCR works with multiple stakeholders, including national and State-departmental authorities, parliaments and local governments to promote institutional frameworks and policies on the prevention of internal displacement and protection of IDPs. Various initiatives in key countries, El Salvador, Honduras and Mexico, include the adoption and/or implementation of IDP legislation, policies and protection and assistance programmes, such as a framework to protect housing, land and property rights and the recovery of physical and community assets. Furthermore, national authorities are supported with developing national statistics and information on IDPs, in line with the international recommendations on IDP statistics. In El Salvador, UNHCR and the Government will be updating the profiling of the displaced population, which will inform future strategies and interventions for people displaced by violence.

UNHCR has expanded its community-based protection initiatives in communities hosting internally displaced populations or people at heightened risk of displacement. In collaboration with grassroot organizations, the Office supports interventions to mitigate risks and strengthen protection networks through the rehabilitation of communal areas and programmes that promote community organization and expand alternatives for groups at heightened risk.

In the context of the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (MIRPS), UNHCR together with the Organization of American States supports the collective response in Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Panama to ensure protection and solutions for some 916,000 displaced people across the sub-region. These seven States have adopted policy commitments within their national action plans in the areas of asylum, protection, social protection, education, health and livelihood opportunities for forcibly displaced people and those at risk of displacement in the region.

In the framework of the fourth MIRPS annual meeting, the Government of Honduras assumed the pro-tempore presidency for 2022. In December 2021, MIRPS States renewed their political will to support the MIRPS through the declaration of Antigua Guatemala. The MIRPS support platform was also launched at the first Global Refugee Forum in December 2019. A key focus of Canada's term as the chair of the support platform is to advance empowerment and protection of women and girls, including by enhanced and focused international cooperation through a series of high-level events and thematic workshops on key issues identified within MIRPS national action plans.

Nicaragua situation

The political situation in Nicaragua has led to protracted population outflows, mainly to Costa Rica, Honduras, Panama, and the United States of America. While the monthly rate of pre-registration applications for asylum in Costa Rica was approximately 4,000 people from January to May 2021, this rose to an average of some 11,700 individuals per month from August to December 2021, bringing the total of Nicaraguan asylum-seekers in Costa Rica to 137,000.

UNHCR supports countries in responding to the increased needs of Nicaraguans seeking international protection, including by bolstering access to asylum systems, regular stay arrangements and documentation, as well as inclusion in social protection schemes and provision of shelter, cash assistance or social security in the framework of the MIRPS.

B. Progress and challenges in achieving the global strategic priorities

Operationalization of the Global Compact on Refugees

Progress was made in 2021 in the implementation of States' pledges made for the region at the 2019 Global Refugee Forum and High-Level Segment on Statelessness. At the High-Level Officials Meeting in December 2021, updates on some 240 pledges relating to

the region were presented. In November 2021, UNHCR published the second triennial progress report on the implementation of the Brazil plan of action (2018-2020). The report reaffirms validity of the regional roadmap for protection and solutions and highlights the synergies with subsequent regional coordination mechanisms and agreements among States on areas of focus for the next three years to strengthen cooperation and humanitarian assistance in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Access to protection and strengthening asylum capacities

UNHCR welcomes States' efforts to continue providing access to protection despite ongoing public health challenges. Out of the global total of new asylum applications lodged between January and June 2021 of some 707,000, approximately 194,000 presented were in the Americas, mostly in the United States of America (some 84,000), Mexico (51,000), Canada (15,000), Costa Rica (14,000) and Colombia (11,000). The main countries of origin in the Americas were Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) (some 36,000 asylum applications), Honduras (33,000), Haiti (15,000), Guatemala (14,000) and Nicaragua (14,000).

States continued to implement temporary legal entry and stay arrangements and regularization programmes for Haitian and Venezuelan nationals. At the end of 2021, more than 800,000 applications were submitted for migration regularization process in Chile. Similarly, at the end of 2021, Brazil announced that it would grant humanitarian visas to Haitians who left as a result of the August 2021 earthquake. Mexico also granted temporary residency on humanitarian grounds to Haitian nationals and offered relocation to decongest the entry points.

Registration

Registration by governments continued remotely across the region while in-person registration was resumed in a few countries. UNHCR continued to provide technical support to governments to ensure access to asylum in the region as borders gradually re-opened after some of COVID-19 preventive measures were lifted. Argentina, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Paraguay and Uruguay developed remote registration and eligibility interview systems. In Panama, in-person interviews were resumed, and outreach brigades for receiving asylum applications and renewing documentation were restored in Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of). Chile, Colombia and Costa Rica also extended the validity of personal documentation and work permits of asylum-seekers through online systems. The rollout of registration database and case management system as well as issuance of individualized documentation in Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) and other countries increased access to the asylum system which led to an increase in the number of recognitions. Significant cross-border movements, predominantly of Cubans, Haitians and Venezuelans, continued to be reported, putting additional pressure on asylum systems, mostly in Central America and Mexico. In 2021, UNHCR and partners registered some 766,000 persons of concern in the region. UNHCR further engaged with governments to support the digitalization of national asylum systems, which will be a priority area for 2022.

Shelter and settlement response in the Americas

UNHCR works with civil society to support access to temporary collective shelter through infrastructure works and shelter management capacity-building with an aim to consolidate a regional response emergency accommodation network. Access to individual shelters through rental programmes has been strengthened, and settlement and community infrastructure interventions have been prioritized in host communities. A total of 425 shelter and settlements projects have been implemented mainly in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Honduras and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

Gender-based violence and child protection

UNHCR and partners advanced advocacy to strengthen national child protection systems at the regional and country levels. All 11 Member States of the Regional Conference on Migration endorsed the operational guide on best interests of the child in the context of human mobility, an inter-agency engagement developed by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Labour Organization (ILO), IOM and UNHCR. It aims to improve key actors' operational capacity of best interests determination, considering international, regional, and national standards. In Chile, the Supreme Court also adopted a

protocol to strengthen the protection of migrant and refugee unaccompanied and separated children. UNHCR and its partner HIAS are conducting a regional gender-based violence assessment in Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) with the final report expected in the second quarter of 2022. As part of the global 16 days of activism against gender-based violence campaign and aligned with the United Nations Secretary-General's UNiTE by 2030 to End Violence against Women campaign, UNHCR's regional social media campaign reached over 50,000 people.

By the end of 2021, more than 200 participatory assessments were carried out both in person and virtually. In Ecuador, in collaboration with the Latin American network of non-governmental organizations of persons with disabilities and their families, a training programme on inclusive response for individuals with disabilities was developed for State organizations and partners. In Brazil, in coordination with governmental institutions, a community guide for indigenous refugees and migrants was prepared to provide a framework of care for, participation of and intervention with indigenous communities. The network of 206 support spaces of the R4V provided access to information and basic services, including safe identification and referrals of people with specific needs.

Achieving durable solutions

Efforts continued to expand resettlement programmes both as a strategic tool to secure protection and durable solutions for individuals at heightened risk and as a concrete responsibility-sharing mechanism to support and ease the pressure on host countries. Through increased resettlement identification and processing capacities, 4,500 individuals were submitted for resettlement by the end of 2021, an increase of 130 per cent compared to previous years. Complementary pathways of admission to third countries remain a strategic priority. Following the announcement of Canada to extend its labour mobility programme for Venezuelan refugees, UNHCR organized a workshop in the region to explore its implementation in Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico and Peru. As part of Quito Process, UNHCR and IOM undertook a study on family reunification in the region. In the north of Central America context, UNHCR supports the United States of America to expand admission for Central Americans based on family reunification through identification, counselling and support to potential beneficiaries. Chile incorporated a family reunification programme into its new immigration regulations and authorized the issuance of safe-conduct for Venezuelans without documentation who were qualified for family reunification or other exceptional humanitarian situations. Uruguay reported progress in family reunification, despite challenges related to COVID-19 pandemic. Brazil also announced the implementation of a humanitarian visa programme for Afghans.

By the end of 2021, nearly 16,000 refugees had been relocated in Mexico. Most of them integrated well with the host communities. Refugees are contributing with the equivalent of some \$5 million in taxes to the Mexican economy.

Education

UNHCR continued supporting access to national education systems and opportunities. As part of its community strategy, Honduras strengthened the schools in high-risk communities affected by violence. In Brazil, the citizens of the world project promotes effective access to education for 600 refugee children. Panama carried out awareness campaigns to advocate equality and inclusion of students of concern to UNHCR, as well as anti-bullying campaigns in schools involving students, parents and teachers. At the regional level, UNHCR established baselines to develop a regional education strategy in 2022. The pedagogy and protection for refugee and migrant children with a mixed approach project in Colombia, aiming adaption of the institutional framework to guarantee the right to education of children and adolescents, has been implemented in eight cities benefiting nearly 8,500 Venezuelan refugee and migrant children and adolescents.

Ensuring protection and solutions for internally displaced persons

In 2022, UNHCR will continue to implement its policy on engagement in situations of internal displacement, which frames the response to more than 8 million IDPs in Colombia, Mexico and countries in Northern Central America. UNHCR works in close collaboration

with State authorities, regional entities, development actors, civil society and community grassroots organizations to support the development of national legislation and policies and strengthen capacities. UNHCR also implements community-based initiatives to prevent displacement and protect those at heightened risk, such as children, youth, women and girls, and community leaders, as well as initiatives aimed at strengthening information management. Efforts to facilitate the implementation of the international recommendations on internally displaced persons statistics are ongoing in coordination with national authorities of relevant countries to improve information management to enhance protection and solutions responses for IDPs.

In Colombia in 2021, UNHCR in coordination with the Public Ministry and Civil Registry provided information and legal support to more than 80,000 people. In 2022, collaboration with the Public Ministry to support the “houses of rights” (*casas de derechos*) will be prioritized, and joint missions with the Ministry of Interior to rural and hard-to-reach areas will provide legal services and mobilize civilian State presence in areas with high concentrations of IDPs or elevated risk of displacement. UNHCR will also continue its work to create protective environments, including education and other measures that mitigate the risks of recruitment of children into armed groups. In addition, UNHCR has supported the legalization of 22 urban informal settlements benefitting more than 55,000 people since 2014. In 2022, UNHCR plans to support communities to legalize 23 informal settlements in 14 municipalities, allowing for the regularization, formalization and/or restitution of land titles, as well as effective access to housing.

Eradication of statelessness

UNHCR continued to support efforts towards the prevention and eradication of statelessness in the region, and notable progress was made in Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and the United States of America. As of mid-January 2022, through a legal measure of “Children first” (*Primero la niñez*) of the Government of Colombia, over 70,000 children born to Venezuelan parents in Colombia received Colombian nationality. The Constitutional Court of Ecuador ruled in favour of the right of adolescent migrant mothers to register the birth of their children regardless of the presence of a legal representative. At the High-Level Officials Meeting in December 2021, the United States of America pledged to adopt a definition of statelessness and to establish a statelessness determination procedure. In Chile, UNHCR and UNICEF presented a set of recommendations to the constitutional convention on the right to nationality and the prevention and resolution of statelessness in support of the ongoing constitutional reform.

UNHCR continued to strengthen its strategic partnership with the Universal Civil Identity Program of the OAS and participated in the annual assembly of the Latin American and Caribbean Council for Civil Registration, Identity and Vital Statistics (CLARCIEV). The meeting focused on the right to identity, good practices and the follow-up on implementation of pledges made by CLARCIEV at the Global Refugee Forum. UNHCR, CLARCIEV and the Universal Civil Identity Program in the Americas released the English edition of the joint regional study on late birth registration, issuance of nationality documents, and statelessness. UNHCR delivered trainings on international protection and statelessness for government officials of the OAS and for the countries in the Caribbean.

Strengthening inter-agency coordination, advocacy, partnerships, and mobilizing support

Within the regional refugee and migrant response plan, UNHCR co-leads regional sectors on protection, shelter, and humanitarian transportation, as well as regional working groups on support spaces, communication, information management and the overall coordination of the world’s largest response plan. Enhancing the national R4V platform coordination capacities and donor engagement and increasing support to governments and collaboration with them will characterize the workplan that the Office pursues in the R4V platform in the first half of 2022.

UNHCR maintained its catalytic role in various regional processes and inter-agency coordination response mechanisms, remaining actively engaged with the regional United Nations response through the issue-based coalitions and the regional collaborative platform for Latin America and the Caribbean. The Office ensured that forced displacement remains high on the political, development and humanitarian agenda of the United Nations Economic

Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the OAS, the Inter-American Human Rights System, MERCOSUR¹, the Central American Integration System, the Caribbean Community, and the Regional Conferences on Migration. In addition, UNHCR has renewed its commitment as co-lead of the Network of Latin American and Caribbean Environmental Fund' protection group. The group actively supports the protection clusters/sectors at the national level for development, implementation and follow-up of relevant humanitarian needs overviews/humanitarian response plans, strengthening of protection information management capacities and consistent implementation of the protection analytical framework for robust and context-specific protection analyses.

Through its co-leading role in the issue-based coalition on human mobility and of the R4V platform, UNHCR continues to promote a predictable and coordinated response to the challenges of increasing mixed and onward movements across the region.

UNHCR signed a memorandum of understanding with the Inter-American Development Bank. An action plan will be adopted in 2022 focusing on development challenges and opportunities of forced displacement and inclusion of displaced populations in host communities, especially of vulnerable people. The Office also continues to develop its relationship with the World Bank with a new project to profile the IDP population in Honduras, funded by the World Bank-UNHCR Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement.

UNHCR provided \$152 million of support to 264 partners in 2021, including \$82 million to 206 local and national non-governmental organizations. The investment made significant progress on localization addressed by Grand Bargain. An international donors' conference in solidarity with Venezuelan refugees and migrants organized by Canada with the support of UNHCR, IOM and the R4V platform in June 2021 mobilized \$2,350 million. Overall contributions to UNHCR's programmes in the Americas increased from \$385 million in 2020 to \$431 million in 2021.

C. Plans for 2022 and financial information

In October 2021, the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme approved a budget of \$779.4 million for the Americas for 2022. By mid-January 2022, the total budget for the region stands at \$779.6 million. The main impact areas for the approved budgets are Attaining favourable protection environments (\$249.4million), Realizing basic rights in safe environments (\$265.1 million), Securing solutions (\$168.7 million), followed by Empowering communities and achieving gender equality (\$95.8 million). As of 11 January 2022, operational needs for the Americas have been 6 per cent funded (with \$44.3 million including indicative allocation of flexible funding).

¹ The Southern Common Market