

Seventy-third session
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Update on the operations of UNHCR in the Americas

A. Situational analysis, including new developments

The Americas region hosts some 17 million refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons and stateless people. Violence, persecution and human rights violations remain among the main drivers of forced displacement in the region. Climate change and the economic impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic have exacerbated underlying vulnerabilities and deep-rooted inequalities, leading to a significant increase in poverty and extreme poverty, and rising food insecurity in parts of the region. A rise in discrimination and xenophobia towards displaced persons has also been observed, as well as an increase in gender-based violence, human trafficking and other serious protection risks that continue to heighten the vulnerability of women, children, adolescents, the elderly, people with disabilities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons. These factors have accelerated human mobility.

Venezuelans constitute the largest number of displaced people in the Western Hemisphere, followed by nationals of the North of Central America and Nicaragua. In 2021, three countries in the region, Costa Rica, Mexico and the United States of America, were among the world's top five largest recipients of new individual asylum applications, while Colombia remained the country hosting the second largest displaced population worldwide (with more than 1.8 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants).

The number of people from various nationalities, including Haitians, making their way through extremely hazardous conditions to reach Mexico and the United States of America has set a new record this year. Changes have been observed in the profile of persons on the move across the Darién Gap in the first seven months of 2022: approximately 45,000 out of 71,000 were Venezuelans, followed by Haitians (4,800) and Cubans (3,100). At the south-west border of the United States of America, a record number of arrivals has been recorded so far in 2022. The United States Customs and Border Protection agency reported over 1.4 million encounters in between January and July, including more than 241,000 in the month of May alone.

The adoption of the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection in June 2022, on the margins of the ninth Summit of the Americas has translated the will of 20 States in the hemisphere to work together to create the conditions for safe, orderly, humane and regular migration and to strengthen the framework for international refugee protection. The Declaration represents a valuable opportunity to enhance cooperation among governments and other key stakeholders in the region towards the stabilization of people on the move in communities of destination, origin and return. It emphasizes commitments to strengthen reception and protection mechanisms, expand regular pathways for admission and international protection, implement protection-sensitive human mobility management and coordinate emergency response to address the protection needs of persons on the move.

Venezuelan situation

Refugees and migrants from Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) totalled 6.8 million persons globally by August 2022, of which 5.7 million (84 per cent) were hosted by countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Almost 200,000 have been recognized as refugees, and over 970,000 have submitted asylum claims worldwide. While, across the region, some 2.7 million Venezuelans have been granted temporary protection or benefited from stay arrangements, according to the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants

from Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), close to 2 million Venezuelans continue to lack legal stay arrangement. Many who may need international protection have not had access to fair and efficient asylum procedures. This situation continues to result in limited access to formal labour markets and social inclusion programmes, exposing Venezuelans to exploitation and abuse, arbitrary evictions and homelessness, in addition to detention, deportation and other protection risks. Moreover, this situation continues to contribute to the onward movement of Venezuelan refugees and migrants towards South, Central and North America, including through the Darién region along the border between Colombia and Panama, but also through increasingly dangerous sea routes through the Caribbean.

UNHCR welcomes the decision of several countries in the region, including Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Peru and Uruguay, to continue implementing different types of stay arrangements that facilitate the provision of documentation and access to basic socioeconomic rights for Venezuelans. In Colombia, some 2 million Venezuelans have been biometrically registered, with more than 1.4 million already in possession of a temporary protection permit. In June, Ecuador adopted a decree to provide regular legal status to some 200,000 Venezuelans.

Within Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), UNHCR continues to lead the protection cluster, in addition to the cluster responsible for shelter, energy and non-food items. UNHCR provides assistance to refugees and vulnerable Venezuelan nationals, in line with the country's Humanitarian Response Plan (2022-2023), which seeks to provide humanitarian assistance to 5.2 million people.

In the framework of the Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan, collective inter-agency efforts provided assistance and support in 17 countries. In July 2022, the Quito Process held its seventh session in Brasilia, under the leadership of Brazil, bringing together 13 Latin American and Caribbean States hosting Venezuelans, along with the Group of Friends, the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank, in addition to United Nations and representatives of civil society. Participating States adopted a joint declaration, reiterating concern over the situation affecting Venezuelans, reaffirming the need for increased technical and financial support to host States and adopting 13 technical recommendations, including on legal stay arrangements, asylum capacity, temporary protection, child protection, education, socioeconomic integration, family reunification and human trafficking. Chile assumed the pro tempore presidency of the Quito Process during the session.

Colombia situation

Internal displacement in Colombia continued to affect several areas of the country, such as Antioquia, Arauca, Cauca, Valle del Cauca, Risaralda, Córdoba, Bolívar, Magdalena, Norte de Santander, Putumayo, Nariño and Chocó. The national Ombudsman reported that between June 2021 and May 2022 there were 147 events of mass displacement, which affected nearly 60,000 people. Of this number, 42 per cent were from Afro-Colombian communities, 25 per cent were indigenous people and 33 per cent were from rural agricultural communities. Furthermore, there were reportedly four blockaded enclaves, mainly in Chocó Department, where the populations were confined. Together with United Nations partners, UNHCR is implementing a livelihoods strategy for more than 2,600 displaced or confined indigenous persons in the municipalities of Alto Baudo and Bojaya in the Chocó Department, which aims to ensure their priorities in local development plans and related processes.

UNHCR welcomed the publication of Colombia's Truth Commission report in June 2022, which focused on human rights violations that occurred during the internal armed conflict between 1986 and 2016. Colombia's Truth Commission is an essential part of the country's comprehensive system of truth, justice, reparation and non-repetition created under the 2016 peace agreement. The report includes a chapter dedicated to the situation of more than 1 million Colombian refugees and others forced to flee the country due to armed conflict and human rights violations, highlighting the important interface between forceful and violence-induced displacement and transitional justice mechanisms.

North of Central America and Mexico

The number of persons who have fled their homes in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras and are of concern to UNHCR (whether asylum-seekers or refugees) reached close to 615,000

by the end of 2021. Most sought protection in the Costa Rica, Mexico and the United States of America, as well as in Europe. In addition, government estimates indicate that there were 320,000 people internally displaced in El Salvador and Honduras, although the actual number could be higher. The reach, power and violence of gangs and other organized criminal groups, exacerbated by high levels of poverty and inequality, insecurity and the recurrent and negative impact of climate change and disasters, remain the main drivers of forced displacement in the subregion.

Mexico continues to be one of world's largest recipients of new individual asylum applications, with close to 78,000 new asylum claims registered between January and August 2022. In the North of Central America and Mexico, UNHCR focused its efforts on strengthening refugee protection frameworks and asylum systems; enhancing national protection systems to prevent and address situations of internal displacement; expanding community-based protection interventions in prioritized at-risk communities through increased field presence; strengthening identification and referral mechanisms for persons with protection needs; and expanding solutions, including through local integration and the expansion of resettlement opportunities and protection transfer arrangements for cases of persons at heightened risk.

The Regional Comprehensive Protection and Solutions Framework (known by its Spanish acronym, MIRPS) continues to serve as a relevant mechanism to strengthen regional cooperation and responsibility-sharing among countries of origin, transit and destination. As a Member of the MIRPS Technical Secretariat and together with the Organization of American States (OAS), UNHCR continues to support the Pro-temporary Presidency (a role currently held by Honduras). It also provides technical support to MIRPS national actions plans, which constitute policy commitments and concrete initiatives to further protection and solutions for displaced persons.

The MIRPS Support Platform, established in 2019 as a mechanism for greater responsibility-sharing, has continued to facilitate protection and solutions for the forcibly displaced. Organized by Canada and the United States of America, as the current and forthcoming Chairs of the Support Platform, a second MIRPS solidarity event took place in New York in September 2022. States articulated their specific needs and priorities, in line with their national action plans, and participants announced over \$210 million in financial pledges, as well as expressions of technical and political support. Consistent with the Support Platform's objective to broaden the base of engagement, the solidarity event benefited from the participation of a wide range of actors, including from international financial institutions, the private sector, academia, the MIRPS Regional Mechanism for Civil Society, several United Nations agencies, and the International Committee of the Red Cross. Of note, the World Bank's announcement of intention to join the Support Platform as a new member and the participation of the Central American Bank for Economic Integration signaled a critical opportunity for enhanced collaboration with international financial institutions.

UNHCR maintains its catalytic role in other complementary regional processes, ensuring that forced displacement remains high on the agenda of the Central American Integration System, the Regional Conference on Migration and the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

Nicaragua situation

Four years after social protests started in Nicaragua in April 2018, more than 200,000 Nicaraguans left their country and found asylum in the Americas, mainly in Costa Rica. In 2021, Nicaragua became the second major source country of new asylum applications in the world, with more than 111,600 asylum claims recorded during the year. In 2022, the number of Nicaraguans leaving the country in search of international protection remains high, with more than 65,000 new asylum-seekers arriving in Costa Rica alone. Mexico and the United States of America have also recorded an increase in numbers over recent months.

UNHCR provides technical support to Costa Rica to help strengthen its national asylum system. This includes the provision of funding and staff to undertake refugee status determination activities (registration, triage, interview and drafting of eligibility assessments). UNHCR also promotes and works with the Costa Rican authorities on the implementation of temporary protection stay arrangements that would favour the access of Nicaraguans to

protection-oriented legal stay alternatives. Increased support from the international community continues to be urgently needed to expand access to asylum and temporary protection stay arrangements for Nicaraguans in need of international protection, to ensure access to basic services and assistance, and to facilitate their integration in hosting communities.

Haiti

In the context of the protracted and deteriorating political, economic, security, human rights, humanitarian and food security crises in Haiti, UNHCR continues to contribute to the inter-agency response at the country level. UNHCR and its partners are closely monitoring the situation of Haitians temporarily residing in countries in the region or engaging in mixed movements to ensure their access to protection or temporary stay arrangements, and to prevent forced returns and potential situations of refoulement.

Mixed and onward movements across the region

During the first seven months of 2022, the number of persons travelling in mixed and onward movements in the Americas increased by 58 per cent in comparison to the same period in 2021. Venezuelan remains the main nationality, representing more than 45,000 out of 71,000 irregular crossings reported through the Darién Gap, followed by Haitian and Cuban. These onward movements are exposing those on the move to increasing risks along insecure routes. Those at heightened risk include women, families travelling with children, unaccompanied and separated children, persons facing acute medical needs and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons. Among individuals engaged in mixed and onward movements, there were many who were unable to return to their countries of origin for reasons related to violence and persecution.

The dimension and complexity of mixed movements is putting significant pressure on the response mechanisms of States and partners, on the available services at key locations and on asylum systems along the route from South America to the southwestern border of the United States of America. UNHCR continues to support local authorities and their responses, within the framework of regional and national human mobility coordination mechanisms, in particular in southern Mexico, the Darién and other border areas. Concretely, it provides information, counselling, legal assistance, medical first aid, psychosocial support and basic humanitarian assistance.

In the spirit of the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection, UNHCR worked with States and other stakeholders in the region to enhance protection-sensitive entry systems, ensure access to asylum and other protection-oriented arrangements, stabilize populations in communities of destination, origin and return, and expand complementary pathways for admission and international protection.

B. Progress and challenges in achieving the 2022 plan for the Americas – by impact area

Operationalizing the Global Compact on Refugees

With respect to the 2019 Global Refugee Forum, 23 per cent of the 240 pledges made in the Americas region have been fulfilled and 61 per cent are in progress. The MIRPS, Quito Process and other regional initiatives, such as Cities of Solidarity established through the 2014 Brazil Declaration, support the operationalization of the Global Compact on Refugees in the region. The forthcoming High Commissioner’s Dialogue on Protection Challenges, which its focus on development cooperation, seeks to capitalize on existing regional coordination mechanisms and frameworks. Critical to the Americas, this includes the memorandum of understanding signed with the Inter-American Development Bank, collaboration with the Global Concessional Financing Facility of the World Bank and negotiations for enhanced cooperation with the Central American Bank for Economic Integration. Emphasis will be placed on the challenges and opportunities involved in facilitating the inclusion of displaced and stateless persons in national systems and on unlocking solutions for the displaced through enhanced development cooperation. For the Americas region, it is hoped that the Dialogue will pave the

way for new initiatives and pledges for the 2023 Global Refugee Forum and lead to strengthened cooperation and humanitarian assistance in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Ensuring access to protection and strengthening asylum capacities

UNHCR provides technical support and assistance to strengthen national asylum systems in the region, including the secondment of experts, to improve the registration, processing and adjudication of asylum claims as well as the implementation of differentiated refugee status determination modalities. UNHCR also worked with key governments in the region to promote the implementation of temporary protection stay arrangements for certain profiles and nationalities to help decongest overwhelmed asylum systems. UNHCR organized regional meetings in July to build the capacity of States to produce country of origin information and exchange this information, tools and good practices. UNHCR supported meetings of the Southern Common Market National Refugee Eligibility Commissions in June and August on the topics of asylum, complementary protection, identity documentation and mixed movements. UNHCR supported the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to produce reports recommending human rights standards and good practices in the region for the protection of migrants and persons of concern. Several countries in region, including Belize, Colombia and Ecuador, implemented amnesty and regularization programmes to grant legal status to displaced persons on their territories.

Preventing gender-based violence and enhancing child protection

In July 2022, representatives of the Quito Process agreed to validate the operational guide on the best interests of the child in the context of human mobility. The guide serves as an inter-agency tool. Developed by the International Labour Organization, the International Organization for Migration, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) I and UNHCR, it seeks to promote the application of international standards on children's rights and international protection.

Some 1,520 forcibly displaced persons, mainly women and girls living in Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, México, Perú and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), participated in a regional gender-based violence assessment to inform the implementation of gender-based violence risk reduction and quality response strategies. In Honduras, UNHCR sponsored a new office for the local Directorate of Children, Adolescents and Family in collaboration with the Ocoatepeque Municipality, helping with the construction of infrastructure, as well as with the provision of furniture and specialized staff to improve access to child protective services.

Facilitating access to education

UNHCR supported access to national education systems and opportunities. In Ecuador, the "*respiramos inclusión*" programme aims to reduce discrimination and xenophobia among students, which had noticeably increased since the return to school. This year, 200 children have been identified and referred to protection services, including 85 girls in five provinces. In Guatemala, UNHCR advocated with the local authorities in the importance of education to refugee protection. In Honduras, UNHCR and the National Teachers' Committee established a protection case identification and referral route in coordination with international partners. At the regional level, a Regional Education Forum was organized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization within the framework of the Education Cannot Wait programme.

Promoting socioeconomic inclusion

In Brazil, close to 83,000 Venezuelans have been relocated and integrated in over 850 municipalities across the country through the Government's "interiorization strategy. In Costa Rica, to promote financial inclusion the national bank provided refugees and asylum-seekers with access to bank accounts and credit. In El Salvador, 300 participants enrolled in a programme to develop soft and life skills. In Ecuador, UNHCR, the United Nations Global Compact and *Sin Fronteras* launched the "inclusive company seal" programme to award companies that employ refugees, while in Costa Rica an award was given to 30 companies to recognize their efforts in this area. In Chile, the "inclusive market" initiative is supporting the commercialization of products and services offered by refugees and migrants, while facilitating access to job offers, information on commercial legislation and training opportunities. By June

2022, nearly 22,500 refugees and asylum-seekers from southern Mexico relocated to municipalities with higher a demand for workers and better absorptive capacity in the education and health sectors in the central and northern parts of the country.

Pursuing protection and solutions for internally displaced persons

Against a background of increasing forced displacement in countries of the North of Central America and Mexico, and continued events of internal displacement in Colombia, the ongoing advocacy and leading role of UNHCR in the protection clusters and related sectors have remained essential to assert a protection-sensitive narrative on the reality of internal forced displacement and to articulate a protection response. This has also helped ensure constructive coordination among relevant stakeholders, including national and local governments, international organizations, civil society, grass-roots organizations and displaced populations.

UNHCR worked with State authorities to support the development of legislation and policies aimed at protecting internally displaced persons and to strengthen national capacities to respond to their situation. In Mexico, UNHCR worked in cooperation with the Supreme Court of Justice, the Ministry of Interior and the International Committee of the Red Cross on the development of a Manual on Internal Displacement targeting judicial adjudicators that was adopted and launched in June 2022. In Honduras, UNHCR and the Honduras Human Rights Secretariat’s Directorate for the Protection of People Internally Displaced by Violence agreed to work alongside the Secretariat of Education to strengthen case management and follow-up on interventions. In El Salvador, UNHCR and the National Statistics Office are working together to update the 2018 profiling exercise of the internally displaced population. Official results will be ready in January 2023.

UNHCR has strengthened its protection-oriented interventions in key communities to prevent situations of displacement and strengthen protection alternatives for people at risk, with a particular focus on adolescents, youth and women. UNHCR is engaged with Resident Coordinators and United Nations Country Teams in promoting implementation of the United Nations Secretary-General’s Action Agenda on Internal Displacement launched in June 2022. At the regional level, the MIRPS Working Group on Internal Displacement (bringing together key stakeholders in El Salvador, Honduras and Mexico and supported by the Government of Colombia, UNHCR and UNICEF, is collaborating on joint responses to data collection and analysis, early warning systems, protection, assistance and solutions.

Eradicating statelessness

UNHCR pursued actions directed at eradicating statelessness. In Brazil, new information materials were published to provide guidance on how to apply for statelessness status determination online. In the Dominican Republic, UNHCR launched the book “*Somos quien Somos*”, which shares stories of Dominicans of Haitian descent impacted by the 2013 Constitutional Court ruling 168-13. In Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), UNHCR supported mobile registration brigades that delivered birth certificates to nearly 400 children, including to indigenous children. UNHCR reinforced its partnership with the OAS and supported the annual assembly of the Council of Latin American and Caribbean Civil Registries, Identities and Vital Statistics, where 19 Latin American and Caribbean countries reiterated their commitment to the Global Action Plan to End Statelessness and to continue working collaboratively to resolve statelessness.

C. 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-August 2022, the total budget for the region stood at \$779.6 million. The main impact areas for the current budget as of 31 July 2022 were: attaining favourable protection environments (\$246.1 million), realizing basic rights in safe environments (\$272.4 million), securing solutions (\$167.9 million), and empowering communities and achieving gender equality (\$93.2 million). As of 13 September 2022, operational needs for the Americas were 36 per cent funded (including the indicative allocation of flexible funding).

