

**Standing Committee Executive Committee of the
High Commissioner’s Programme**

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**Standing Committee
Eighty-ninth meeting**

Update on UNHCR operations in the Americas region

A. Situational analysis, including new developments

The Americas region continues to face unprecedented numbers of displacement and mixed movements, with people fleeing violence and persecution alongside those seeking to escape poverty, a lack of opportunity and the adverse effects of climate change and natural disasters. As of 30 June 2023, more than 22.1 million persons of concern to UNHCR were being hosted in the region, including some 4.6 million refugees and asylum-seekers, 7.7 million internally displaced persons and nearly 5.3 million people in need of international protection. Protection-oriented legal stay arrangements and similar national protection schemes, such as the temporary protection regime in Colombia for Venezuelans and the implementation of humanitarian visas in various countries, play an essential role in ensuring protection.

There was a notable increase in the number of individuals on the move in Central and North America, where irregular movements across the Darién doubled to 520,000 persons, compared to 248,000 in 2022. Some 2.5 million encounters were recorded at the southwestern border of the United States of America in 2023.

To address the challenges of displacement and mixed movements, UNHCR employed a comprehensive route-based approach in the Americas to strengthen access to asylum, other forms of protection and solutions, from countries of origin through transit to final destination. UNHCR also supported responsibility-sharing arrangements to improve and stabilize the situation of displaced populations across the entire region, including through the Los Angeles Declaration and the Palenque Summit.

Andean region

Cross-border mixed movements from Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) continue, despite an increase in returns. According to the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), co-led by UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), at the end of 2023 there were over 7.7 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants worldwide, of which 84 per cent (6.5 million) were in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Several States in the region have put in place legal stay arrangements and temporary protection processes to regularize the status of Venezuelans. Brazil recognized over 128,000 Venezuelans as refugees and granted over 411,000 temporary residency permits. In Colombia, 1.9 million out of 2.5 million registered Venezuelans have received temporary protection permits as part of an ongoing biometric registration process. In Ecuador, some 259,000 Venezuelans have been registered as part of a new mechanism to regularize status, with over 201,000 people granted a certificate of temporary stay in 2023. A similar programme in Peru has resulted in over 200,000 Venezuelans being granted temporary stay. The Peruvian authorities simultaneously approved a plan to address the backlog of asylum applications. The Dominican Republic regularized the status of 25,000 Venezuelans. In the United States of America, close to 243,000 Venezuelans are beneficiaries of temporary protected status, while more than 81,000 Venezuelans arrived in the United States of America in 2023 under the parole process. In Chile, a biometric registration process has identified over 182,000 people who require a formalized status in the country, predominantly Venezuelans as well as others in need of international protection.

Further to these commendable efforts, acquiring a formalized residency status, such as through asylum, alternative legal stay arrangements and temporary protection mechanisms, remains a protection need for Venezuelans in the region.

In Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), in addition to ongoing support to the National Refugee Commission, within the framework of the humanitarian response plan, support for returnees and receiving communities is required across key sectors in order to facilitate reintegration and to discourage further onward movements. In 2024, UNHCR will prioritize income-generation activities, improve access to basic services, reinforce community infrastructure, facilitate the issuance of civil documentation and enhance legal and psychosocial support.

In November 2023, Chile concluded its presidency of the Quito Process, an intergovernmental technical forum for cooperation on human mobility in the region. Significant advancements were made in the context of regularization and documentation processes for refugees and migrants, as well as in the consolidation of protection protocols, guides and toolboxes prepared for the assistance of populations on the move. Under Chile's presidency, engagement with academia, non-governmental organizations and local actors was strengthened to help address regional protection and migration issues. Costa Rica is now the first country outside South America to assume the presidency of the Quito Process, giving an important signal of wider regional cooperation.

Colombia is at the centre of multiple and overlapping displacement situations. The country has 6.9 million internally displaced persons, including over 1 million new displacements since the signing of the peace agreement in 2016. In addition, there are over 330,000 registered refugees and asylum-seekers from Colombia worldwide. Colombia hosts the fourth largest population of refugees and other persons in need of international protection, including 2.9 million Venezuelans and more than half a million Colombians returning from Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

Furthermore, a growing number of people engaged in mixed movements are crossing Colombia towards the Darién. UNHCR remains concerned about the significant increase in mixed movements through the Darién, where refugees and migrants are exposed to threats from criminal groups perpetrating violence, sexual abuse and theft, and other dangers associated with the hazardous journey.

In Colombia, the Government's efforts to advance its Total Peace initiative are crucial in preventing new internal displacement, strengthening the humanitarian response and facilitating lasting solutions for millions of internally displaced persons. The Total Peace initiative is also vital for the protection of the most affected communities, including the collective territories of Afro-descendants and indigenous peoples.

At national and local levels, UNHCR supported the Colombian institutional response to displacement by fostering a network of protection actors, applying an area-based approach and prioritizing the legalization of informal settlements with high concentrations of internally displaced persons. UNHCR also engaged in humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts of the United Nations system, within the framework of the Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement.

In Ecuador, a deteriorating security situation in 2023 led to a state of emergency in early 2024 and the declaration of an internal armed conflict. The country remains at the centre of a complex human displacement situation, with continuing arrivals of Colombians and Venezuelans in need of international protection, as well as Ecuadorians leaving for a variety of reasons, including violence associated with the presence of organized criminal groups.

Central America and Mexico

In 2023, the sub-region was marked by an exponential increase in the scale and complexity of mixed movements, aggravated by a number of factors such as violence, insecurity, inequality and human rights violations. Globally, there were over 687,000 asylum-seekers and refugees from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador and 290,000 asylum seekers and refugees from Nicaragua, the majority of whom are in Costa Rica. UNHCR reinforced the capacity of States to meet critical humanitarian needs, while advocating commitments and investments to address displacement. This included promoting access to asylum and other

viable legal stay options, as well as solutions for those on the move, including through integration programmes.

UNHCR worked with national asylum authorities to establish or strengthen their presence in key border locations in order to facilitate access to asylum procedures for people in need of international protection, including in Darién, Panama and Tapachula, Mexico. Across the sub-region, UNHCR provided people on the move with mental health and psychosocial support, worked to prevent and respond to gender-based violence, provided and rehabilitated shelter in host communities, and provided advice on rights, available services and the potential risks of making onward journeys.

Over 581,000 people remained internally displaced in El Salvador, Honduras and Mexico in 2023. UNHCR supported governments to strengthen national responses to internally displaced persons, facilitating and advocating access to public services, legal support and humanitarian assistance. UNHCR continues to advocate the adoption of relevant legal and public policy frameworks on internal displacement, while strengthening partnerships with national statistical offices for collecting and analyzing reliable data on issues of internal displacement.

To implement a coherent humanitarian response, UNHCR supported coordination structures involving the United Nations, civil society and State authorities. Through the regional comprehensive protection and solutions framework (known in Spanish as *Marco Integral Regional para la Protección y Soluciones*, or MIRPS) and its support platform, governments have adopted a holistic approach that addresses each stage of displacement, providing assistance in countries of origin, host communities, transit countries and countries of destination, while seeking solutions. Development institutions worked with the governments in Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Panama, together with UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations, to meet the needs of persons of concern, extending services to new arrivals and integrating displaced populations in the local societies and economies.

During the sixth annual meeting of the regional comprehensive protection and solutions framework that was held in January 2024, the Government of Panama handed over the pro-tempore presidency to the Government of Belize. During the meeting, the Panama City Declaration was also adopted. The Panama City Declaration provides a roadmap for 2024, reflecting commitments to redouble regional efforts to address forced displacement, with a focus on enhancing national asylum systems, facilitating economic integration, strengthening the role of local governments in the response to displacement and solutions, and promoting systematic data inclusion.

The United States of America, as outgoing Chair of the support platform, led the high-level solidarity segment, in which governments and international financial institutions made commitments of financial, political and technical resources in support of national and regional plans under the regional comprehensive protection and solutions framework.

The Caribbean

The Caribbean region continued to receive refugees and migrants from within and outside the sub-region. Regional efforts concentrated on addressing the root causes of forced displacement from Haiti, mainly through the Caribbean Community. UNHCR supported the development of public policies aimed at preventing refoulement, while supporting the development of national asylum systems, the prevention of statelessness and partnerships that foster and support inclusion in national systems.

In Haiti, gang violence increased, resulting in protection concerns for over 314,000 internally displaced people in 2023. UNHCR supported local actors and the Government to strengthen protection systems. Over 312,000 Haitian refugees and asylum seekers were displaced worldwide by mid-2023 and another 164,200 enjoyed temporary protected status in the United States of America. UNHCR continued to advocate access to protection for those fleeing Haiti. This included seeking recognition of the situation of generalized violence and human rights violations in Haiti under the Cartagena extended definition, as well as supporting special procedures that enable Haitians to access visas for family reunification. In

Brazil, UNHCR is assisting the Government with the implementation of the 2023 action plan to enhance the protection and integration of Haitians residing in the country.

The Global Refugee Forum 2023 and the Cartagena+40 process

During the Global Refugee Forum 2023, States and stakeholders from the Americas contributed substantially to the successful outcomes of the event, which brought together refugees, civil society, refugee-led organizations and local authorities and mayors from the region. Representing 21 per cent of the total pledges made, 352 pledges were registered from States and other stakeholders, including from regional entities such the Organization of American States, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the Inter-American Development Bank, the Latin American and Caribbean Council for Registration, Identity and Vital Statistics, and the Southern Common Market. Commitments were made to strengthen asylum systems, foster inclusion and local integration, and find solutions for displaced populations.

On the margins of the Global Refugee Forum, under the leadership of Chile and with the support and coordination of Brazil and Colombia, Latin American and Caribbean States launched the Cartagena+40 process during a high-level event in Geneva. A regional pledge was also launched by Colombia for the adoption in 2024 of a new declaration and plan of action for the commemoration of the fortieth anniversary of the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, as a regional implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees. The Cartagena+40 process, led by Chile, will produce a common roadmap for protection and solutions for the region. The roadmap aims to address new priorities, such as protection in the context of human mobility, solutions through development and disaster displacement.

B. Progress and challenges in achieving the 2023 plan for the Americas by result area

(i) Attaining favourable protection environments

Given the persistent backlogs in asylum systems and the ongoing influx of individuals in need of protection across the continent, UNHCR focused on supporting governments in ensuring access to territory, implementing fair and efficient asylum procedures and establishing protection-oriented legal stay arrangements. In 2023, Mexico saw over 140,000 applications for asylum and Canada received over 144,000 applications, while other countries in the Americas, including Costa Rica and Peru, grappled with extended backlogs and prolonged wait times. Guatemala and Panama are in the early stages of developing functional asylum systems and require assistance in enhancing their intake and referral systems for more effective case adjudication.

The strategic use of technology has become fundamental to achieving much-needed efficiencies in asylum systems. Additional protection-sensitive stay arrangements and other forms of protection, such as Colombia's temporary protection regime for Venezuelans and Ecuador's implementation of humanitarian visas, offer crucial and practical responses. These initiatives have demonstrated their value in creating opportunities for integration and inclusion when accompanied by sufficient investment in host communities.

In the context of its revised route-based approach, UNHCR continues to strengthen the capacity of governments in the region to receive and process asylum claims by promoting targeted investments in case management, digitization, differentiated processing modalities, exchange of country-of-origin information, legal aid and initiatives to reduce application backlogs. UNHCR advocates and supports the expansion of existing and new temporary protection and protection-oriented legal stay arrangements that provide legal residence and rights. Enhanced digitalization and the implementation of innovative case management systems remain a priority in Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama and Peru.

Pursuing protection and solutions for internally displaced persons

UNHCR continues to aid States in their efforts to establish comprehensive legal frameworks and policies aimed at preventing and addressing the needs of internally displaced persons.

UNHCR support to States in advancing operational responses to internal displacement includes the collection and analysis of data on internally displaced persons, in collaboration with national statistics offices, to inform evidence-based policies and the response of States. UNHCR remains committed to pursuing protection initiatives rooted in communities at risk of displacement, working closely with national and local governments, United Nations partners, civil society and grassroots organizations.

In Honduras, UNHCR offered technical support for the implementation of the protection law for internally displaced persons. Additionally, UNHCR provided recommendations aimed at fortifying the legal framework to address the forced recruitment of children by criminal groups and supported the establishment of a registry of abandoned property in collaboration with the Property Institute. In El Salvador, a support space mobile unit called “By your side” (*A tu lado* in Spanish), supported by UNHCR, the Government and partners provided comprehensive assistance and services to the internally displaced and others in need of protection. UNHCR also collaborated with the Attorney General’s Office to establish two psychosocial attention rooms, as a reinforcement to the Government’s internal forced displacement unit. In Mexico, UNHCR played a crucial role in assisting the state of Sinaloa in developing a comprehensive registration and case management tool. Furthermore, UNHCR contributed to the identification of protection and assistance routes. UNHCR also supported the states of Michoacán and Chiapas to facilitate the adoption or implementation of local regulations pertaining to internally displaced persons.

(ii) Realizing rights in safe environments

Facilitating access to education

UNHCR continued to support the inclusion of refugees in national education systems. In Brazil, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Mexico and Panama, over 1,000 students benefited from UNHCR assistance for school enrolment or attendance. In Ecuador, some 2,600 educational kits were delivered to children, and cash grants for education were made to promote school attendance. In November, UNHCR, together with partners, supported the regional workshop on accelerated education, which included the participation of the ministries of education of eight countries in the region.

(iii) Empowering communities and achieving gender equality

Localization remained a regional priority for UNHCR, particularly with respect to the inclusion of forcibly-displaced women and organizations led by women in regional and national advocacy efforts. In October 2023, some 27 organizations participated in a localization workshop in Panama City, reaffirming their commitment to promote the meaningful participation of local actors. In Peru, UNHCR is working to empower local organizations as part of a localization strategy, with the objective of improving the effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of humanitarian responses. In November 2023, UNHCR supported the creation of the regional Youth in Mobility Network, involving young refugees, internally displaced and stateless persons from nine countries.

UNHCR strengthened collaboration with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and the United Nations Population Fund, through the signature of regional agreements and the development of joint action plans. These were aimed at improving gender equality, services to respond to gender-based violence and access to sexual and reproductive health. Interventions that targeted young people were also supported. UNHCR supported a World Bank initiative aimed at enhancing national responses to address gender-based violence in mixed movements in Central America.

During the 16 days of activism to end gender-based violence, over 100 activities took place in the region, reaching over 380,000 people. A promising case study was documented in Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) to address the impact of lack of access to safe and hygienic menstrual products on the lives of women and girls. At the Global Refugee Forum, the Government of Chile became the co-lead of the call-to-action multistakeholder pledge on gender.

(iv) Securing solutions

In 2023, UNHCR continued to advance the socioeconomic inclusion of refugees, asylum-seekers, the internally displaced and stateless persons in the Americas, with multifaceted programming in coordination with development actors. In Costa Rica, joint analysis with the International Monetary Fund and the Inter-American Development Bank highlighted the contribution of refugees and asylum-seekers to the national economy. In Ecuador, UNHCR partnered with the Inter-American Development Bank on a \$28 million project to improve integration in the labour market, particularly in quality jobs, by removing barriers affecting refugees and asylum-seekers. UNHCR partnered with the International Finance Corporation across the region to advance financial inclusion for refugees and migrants. In addition, in Brazil and Mexico, UNHCR helped connect tens of thousands of persons of concern with job opportunities, facilitating their movement and settlement in new areas.

Facilitating resettlement and complementary pathways for admission to third countries

UNHCR promoted a responsive third-country solutions framework that included refugee resettlement as well as other complementary pathways to protection and solutions for refugees. Such pathways have the potential to reduce onward movements and dangerous journeys of refugees, while fostering responsibility-sharing between States.

In 2023, UNHCR submitted applications for nearly 24,500 individuals under resettlement programmes in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Spain and the United States of America, up from 9,500 applications in 2022. Resettlement identification and processing capacities have been scaled up in the region, including through innovative initiatives undertaken with support from the United States of America.

As part of a wider comprehensive strategy to address human mobility in the region, UNHCR, together with IOM, is supporting *Movilidad Segura* (safe mobility), an initiative led by the United States of America. In its pilot phase in Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Guatemala, this initiative has already broadened access to resettlement and shows potential as a model that can substantially expand the scale and scope of available durable solutions. More than 140,000 individuals have been registered in the system, and protection screening and interviews were conducted to refer those eligible for resettlement or other legal admission pathways to Spain and the United States of America. UNHCR plans to reach a record number of resettlement submissions in 2024, with close to 80,000 individuals benefiting from resettlement opportunities primarily to the United States of America.

While these protection outcomes are significant, UNHCR calls for more flexibility within the applicable criteria for refugees to access legal admission pathways, such as humanitarian parole, family reunification and temporary labour visas. In addition, the expansion of other safe pathways, such as labour mobility through private employers, education pathways via university sponsorships and family reunification, would further reduce the impact of mixed movements on border management and strained asylum systems.

Eradicating statelessness

UNHCR continued to support regional actions to tackle statelessness. Colombia adopted a new law regulating the procedures for the acquisition, loss and reacquisition of nationality, which includes measures to facilitate naturalization for stateless persons. The United States of America put into effect new policy guidance, including a definition on statelessness, that facilitates access to legal solutions for stateless individuals in the country. Brazil amended its constitution to suppress the loss of Brazilian nationality in case of the acquisition of another nationality and other related provisions. Peru issued a decree easing the documentation requirements for the recovery of nationality. The Latin American and Caribbean Council for Civil Registration, Identity and Vital Statistics adopted a declaration that included provisions on the strengthening of civil registration and the prevention of statelessness. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights published a resolution on the right to nationality, the prohibition of arbitrary deprivation of nationality and statelessness.

C. Financial information

The Executive Committee approved a budget of \$834.6 million for the Americas for 2024. The breakdown of requirements by main impact areas for 2024 is as follows: attaining favourable protection environments (\$302.3 million); securing solutions (\$232.3 million); realizing basic rights in safe environments (\$197.7 million); and empowering communities and achieving gender equality (\$102.3 million). As of 31 January 2024, some 11 per cent of the region's 2023 financial requirements were funded, taking into consideration the indicative allocation of unearmarked and softly earmarked contributions.
