

Update on UNHCR operations in the Americas

A. Situational analysis, including new developments

The Americas region continues to experience an unprecedented scale of forced displacement and mixed movements, driven by persistent and intensifying root causes such as violence, insecurity, inequality and lack of socioeconomic opportunities, further exacerbated by climate change and natural disasters. By mid-2024, the Americas hosted 20.3 million forcibly displaced people and others in need of protection and assistance. This includes 5.8 million refugees and asylum-seekers, 8.1 million internally displaced persons and 5.8 million other people in need of international protection. This represents an increase of 2 million forcibly displaced persons, or 11 per cent, compared to 12 months earlier, in mid-2023.

As of 31 August 2024, some 238,000 people crossed the Darién, heading northwards. This marks a 30 per cent decrease compared to the same period last year. Venezuelans continued to be the largest group represented, followed by Colombians and Ecuadorians. There has been a notable change in displacement patterns in the region, with new routes being used across Central America and the Caribbean.

States and host communities have demonstrated remarkable solidarity and have made significant strides in finding solutions. Asylum and other legal stay arrangements are playing an essential role in providing protection and preventing perilous onward journeys. However, the scale of displacement and complexity of movements demand a more coordinated and comprehensive response.

UNHCR and its partners are working on a comprehensive regional approach that addresses the root causes of displacement, while also providing concrete solutions for those in all stages of their journey – in countries of origin, transit, destination and return. This regional approach builds on strengthened collaboration among States, United Nations agencies, civil society and other key stakeholders, and includes access to asylum, socioeconomic opportunities and alternative legal pathways.

UNHCR seeks to strengthen pragmatic government-led responses to forced displacement and mixed movements, including through engagement in regional intergovernmental processes and frameworks, namely the Quito Process, the Palenque Process, the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (known by its acronym MIRPS in Spanish), the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection, and the Cartagena+40 process.

South America

Cross-border mixed movements from Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) continued, despite a slight increase in returns. According to the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) (known as R4V), which is co-led by UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), there were some 7.8 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants worldwide by mid-2024, of which 85 per cent (6.6 million) were in Latin America and the Caribbean.

In 2024, several States in the region established new or expanded legal stay arrangements and temporary protection processes for Venezuelans. In Colombia, out of 2.9 million Venezuelans,

more than 1.9 million have received temporary protection permits, and a new process was announced in June to provide legal residency to some additional 600,000. In Ecuador, a new regularization process was announced in May this year to benefit some 100,000 Venezuelans, in addition to the over 95,000 who have already obtained temporary residence visas by April. Brazil recognized over 132,000 Venezuelans as refugees and granted over 411,000 temporary residency permits. In May, Uruguay introduced two programmes to provide legal stay solutions for over 23,500 Venezuelan and Cuban nationals with pending asylum applications.

Forced displacement continues to affect Colombia. The country has one of the world's largest populations of internally displaced persons, which despite the Government's best efforts, includes 1.2 million newly displaced since the 2016 Total Peace Agreement. In support of the Government's national strategy for durable solutions for internally displaced persons under development, UNHCR is coordinating the Internal Displacement Solutions Fund, in close collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme, IOM and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme.

In Ecuador, Colombians and Venezuelans in need of international protection continued to seek safety. Insecurity has also led Ecuadorians to leave their country for a variety of reasons.

Central America and Mexico

The increase in mixed movements through Central America and Mexico over recent years – in addition to persistent internal displacement in some countries – has exposed refugees and migrants to severe protection risks, while placing a tremendous strain on reception systems. Costa Rica remains the main hosting country for Nicaraguans in need of international protection. From January to May 2024, some 1.4 million people in an irregular situation were identified in Mexico, according to the country's National Migration Institute.

UNHCR supports governments in the subregion in developing protection-oriented policies and legal frameworks, ensuring access to territory, strengthening asylum procedures and managing backlogs. UNHCR supported Mexico's asylum office to seek efficiencies and increase digitalization to help improve the asylum system. UNHCR is also supporting Costa Rica in modernizing its asylum system. In Belize, the Amnesty Programme has provided several hundreds of asylum-seekers with an alternative pathway to permanent residency.

In fulfilment of a pledge made by the United States of America at the Global Refugee Forum in 2023, six "good practice implementation projects", which were carried under the MIRPS framework, were launched in Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico, focusing on access to mental health and psychosocial support services, the labour integration of displaced persons, and solutions to internal displacement.

The Caribbean

The Caribbean region continued to receive refugees and migrants from within and outside the subregion. In this context, UNHCR supports the development of public policies to prevent refoulement, develop national asylum systems, prevent statelessness and foster partnerships that foster inclusion in national systems.

In Haiti, gang violence increased, resulting in protection concerns for some 578,000 internally displaced persons as of July 2024. UNHCR continues to support local actors and the Government in strengthening protection systems. By the end of 2023, some 391,000 Haitian refugees and asylum-seekers were displaced in the Americas and the Caribbean. In the United States of America, an extension of temporary protected status in June 2024 provided continued protection for some 200,000 Haitians and expanded eligibility to more than 300,000 Haitians who have been residing in the United States of America prior to 3 June 2024. In March 2024, UNHCR issued new guidance on international protection considerations for persons fleeing Haiti with a view to assisting States with the assessment of asylum claims. Nevertheless, in the Caribbean, instances of detention, denial of access to asylum and forced return occurred in 2024.

Cartagena+40 process

Under the leadership of Chile and with the support of Brazil, Colombia, Mexico and other Latin American and Caribbean countries, together with several other stakeholders, consultations on protection in mixed movements, solutions and disaster displacement were held as part of the Cartagena+40 process.

Stakeholders underscored the need for a comprehensive protection strategy for all displacement phases and shared approaches on promoting access to socioeconomic integration, with the support of international financial institutions, development actors and the private sector.

These consultations will pave the way for the negotiation and adoption of the 2024 Chile Declaration and plan of action, as part of the regional implementation over the next decade of the Global Compact on Refugees .

Natural disasters, climate change and displacement

Guided by its new multi-year strategy on climate action,¹ UNHCR has intensified efforts to mitigate the impact of climate change on refugees, internally displaced persons and other vulnerable populations, including through collaboration with States to ensure displaced persons are included in national plans and climate action initiatives. UNHCR also contributed to the advisory opinion on the climate emergency by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

In Colombia, two landmark resolutions that were adopted by the constitutional court highlighted the protection needs of persons displaced by climate change and natural disasters. UNHCR supported Brazil, Chile, El Salvador and Haiti to respond to climate-induced emergencies. Through partnerships with non-governmental organizations, academia and host communities, UNHCR scaled up projects in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Panama to strengthen the resilience of displaced populations to the effects of climate change. Funded by international financial institutions, UNHCR also supported climate-resilient infrastructure projects in refugee-hosting areas across Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico and Peru.

B. Progress and challenges in achieving the 2024 plan for the Americas – by impact area

Attaining favourable protection environments

UNHCR continued to strengthen the capacity of Governments in the region to process asylum claims by promoting targeted investments in case management, digitalization, differentiated processing modalities and the exchange of country-of-origin information. It also offered legal aid and assistance to reduce the backlog of asylum claims. In addition to supporting efforts to improve asylum procedures, UNHCR also advocated the expansion of existing and new arrangements that provide legal residence and access to rights.

As of 30 July 2024, Mexico had received more than 41,400 asylum claims and continues to receive high numbers of new asylum applications in the region. As of mid-2024, the total recognition rate, including asylum and complementary pathways in the country, had increased to 80 per cent. Other countries in the Americas, including Costa Rica and Peru, started a verification procedure to ascertain accurate population figures and reduce backlogs in processing asylum applications. In Guatemala, a decentralization pilot programme will be launched with the asylum authority to facilitate access to asylum at the border areas.

Enhanced digitalization and the implementation of case management systems remained a priority in Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Peru, the United States of America and Uruguay.

¹ See the UNHCR Focus Area Strategic Plan for Climate Action 2024-2030 available on the UNHCR global website.

Pursuing protection and solutions for internally displaced persons

UNHCR continued to support States to address the needs of internally displaced persons, including through data collection and analysis in collaboration with national statistics offices, while pursuing protection initiatives in communities at risk of displacement.

UNHCR plays a leading role in the protection sector and is active in clusters in countries facing internal displacement. UNHCR contributed to inter-agency analyses on protection risks, including the application of a protection analysis framework, which was developed by the global protection cluster with the aim of informing strategies and reducing protection risks in humanitarian contexts. In El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, UNHCR also contributed to the adoption of “protection analysis updates”, which outline the main protection risks, groups at risk and key human rights affected by protection incidents and risks.

In Honduras, UNHCR is supporting the Government in the implementation of the law on internally displaced persons, which was adopted in 2022. In Mexico, UNHCR assists federal entities in adopting policies on internally displaced persons and has provided technical support to six States for the development of local legislation and for prevention and response mechanisms.

Realizing rights in safe environments

Facilitating access to education

UNHCR promotes inclusion in education systems at all levels for forcibly displaced children and youth in the region. Following feedback from UNHCR, the United Nations Children’s Fund and other members of the education working group on the registration plan in Trinidad and Tobago, the country’s Ministry of Education registered Venezuelan refugee and migrant children, giving over 100 children access to the education system for the first time.

In 2024, some 120 students of diverse nationalities living in Colombia, Ecuador and Mexico benefited from the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (known as the DAFI scholarship programme), which supports access to tertiary education. In Ecuador, UNHCR promoted safe educational environments through the “we breathe inclusion” methodology and programme for teachers in 126 educational institutions.

Empowering communities and achieving gender equality

UNHCR supports the inclusion of organizations led by forcibly displaced persons, as well as those led by women, in regional and national advocacy efforts. Of note have been the contributions of a coordination group of 150 organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless persons in the Cartagena+40 process.

In Mexico, UNHCR provided training to more than 700 people on the prevention of gender-based violence and response, and assisted more than 2,500 women at risk or survivors. In the Dominican Republic, UNHCR supported 70 community leaders, including women, who are working to prevent gender-based violence and make referrals to the appropriate services. In El Salvador, UNHCR established digital and in-person feedback and complaint mechanisms in more than 20 urban centres of well-being and opportunities (known as CUBOs), in centres for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or intersex persons, as well as in other support spaces.

Securing solutions

UNHCR continues to prioritize local integration and various socioeconomic inclusion initiatives, based on collaboration with national and local governments and actors in the public and private sector. In 2024, UNHCR enhanced collaboration with development and financial actors such as the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank, the Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean (formerly known in Spanish as the *Corporación Andina de Fomento*) and the International Monetary Fund. UNHCR has also partnered with the International Finance Corporation to advance financial inclusion for refugees and migrants.

In April 2024, Uruguay hosted the first regional meeting of Cities of Solidarity for the Americas, in which the Montevideo Declaration on Contributions from Cities of Solidarity to

the Chile Plan of Action was approved as part of the Cartagena +40 process, highlighting the key role of local authorities in protection and solutions.

UNHCR continues collaborating with the private sector in a wide range of initiatives to connect displaced persons with job opportunities. In Brazil, since the inception of the Government’s “operation welcome” programme in 2018, nearly 137,000 Venezuelans have been relocated internally and received integration services including housing, access to employment, social benefits and education, with the support of UNHCR. Since the launch of the local integration programme in Mexico in 2016, more than 45,000 refugees have relocated from the south to the centre and north of the country, and have found formal employment in partnership with more than 600 companies. Moreover, some 320 refugees were naturalized in Mexico in the first half of 2024.

In northern Central America, Colombia and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), UNHCR works to support returnees, identifying and referring those with protection needs to relevant services, and working with local communicates to facilitate reintegration.

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 family reunification and other complementary pathways.

From March to August 2024, UNHCR submitted the applications of 36,400 individuals in the region for resettlement to Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Spain and the United States of America, up from 7,100 applications when compared to the same period in 2023.

The capacity for the identification and processing of resettlement cases was scaled up, including through the Safe Mobility Offices, which is an initiative of the United States of America, supported by UNHCR and IOM. As part of the pilot phase of the UNHCR “digital gateway” project in Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Guatemala, more than 240,000 individuals have registered in the online self-service portal of the Safe Mobility Offices to facilitate the protection screening, interviews and referrals of those eligible for resettlement or other legal admission pathways. Over 60,000 cases were referred for resettlement through the Safe Mobility Offices since the launch of the pilot programme in June 2023.

UNHCR continued to develop labour mobility pathways in several country operations, including in Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Trinidad and Tobago. Five individuals from the region have been relocated to Canada, and more than 50 additional cases are in the visa processing stage after offers of employment have been received.

Eradicating statelessness

UNHCR continued to support initiatives addressing statelessness in the region. Colombia established an internal working group on statelessness and is working with UNHCR on the adoption of a statelessness determination procedure. UNHCR facilitated statelessness identification exercises in the north of Costa Rica and supported the Government’s mobile documentation teams to facilitate the late registration of births of indigenous children in Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

The Latin American and Caribbean Council for Civil Registration, Identity and Vital Statistics (known as CLARCIEV) adopted a declaration on the right to identity and birth registration for all, including for those living in displacement contexts. At the proposal of Uruguay, the General Assembly of the Organization of American States passed a resolution recommending several measures to eradicate statelessness in the Americas. In the course of 2024, Brazil, Costa Rica, the United States of America and CLARCIEV formally joined the Global Alliance to End Statelessness.

C. Financial information

In October 2023, the Executive Committee approved the 2024 budget of \$834.6 million for the Americas. The current 2024 budget for the region remains unchanged as of 31 August 2024.

The breakdown of requirements by impact area for 2024 is as follows: attaining favourable protection environments (\$311.4 million); securing solutions (\$246.3 million); realizing rights in safe environments (\$177.6 million); and empowering communities and achieving gender equality (\$99.3 million). As of 31 August 2024, 37 per cent of the region’s 2024 financial requirements were funded, taking into consideration the indicative allocation of unearmarked and softly earmarked contributions.
