

Update on UNHCR operations in the Americas

A. Situational analysis, including new developments

The Americas region hosts 21.4 million forcibly displaced people and other persons in need of protection and assistance. Over the last decade, the magnitude and complexity of forced displacement in the region has continued to grow, as addressing the root causes remained a challenge. The situation was further aggravated by the global financial crisis, the lingering socioeconomic impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and climate events. As a result, the number of people traveling in mixed and onward movements reached unprecedented levels in the first eight months of 2023. In Panama alone, over 333,000 people arrived through the Darién province, 76 per cent of whom were Venezuelans, followed by nationals of China, Ecuador and Haiti, among others. This represents a three-fold increase in the number of arrivals into Panama since 2021 and is double the number of those arriving in 2022. At the south-west border of the United States of America, some 1.2 million encounters were reported by the United States Customs and Border Protection agency between January and July 2023, primarily from Mexico (34 per cent), as well as from Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) (each representing between 7 to 10 per cent).

Reception systems, already under pressure from years with high numbers of arrivals, struggled to address the needs, including heightened vulnerabilities. UNHCR and partners redoubled efforts to address protection risks at key border and other reception locations including for women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer persons, many of whom have been repeatedly victimized, trafficked and deliberately misinformed. UNHCR strengthened its capacity to provide temporary shelter, psychosocial support, legal counselling and other protection services to these and other vulnerable individuals. It invested in creating and amplifying trusted and reliable information platforms, such as *El Jaguar* and *Confía en el Tucán*, which aim to protect people from being misinformed. UNHCR also intensified efforts to support the implementation of fair and efficient asylum procedures and other protection-oriented legal stay arrangements.

UNHCR continued to promote comprehensive and coordinated regional responses, strengthening engagement with governments and other stakeholders to open new avenues to protection and offer additional lawful pathways, in line with the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection and other regional initiatives.

Given the increasing intersection between climate change, violence, human rights violations and forced displacement in the region, UNHCR contributed to strengthening national and regional policy, judicial and legislative frameworks, as well as to supporting and conducting evidence-based advocacy. It also leveraged its coordination role in existing platforms, such as the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), and continued to support the work of relevant regional fora on these issues, such as the Regional Comprehensive Protection and Solutions Framework (known by its Spanish acronym MIRPS), the Quito Process to coordinate the response to the humanitarian needs of Venezuelan refugees and migrants, the Regional Conference on Migration (also known as the Puebla Process), the Central American Integration System, the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), Organization of American States, and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

In anticipation of the upcoming second Global Refugee Forum and in the fortieth anniversary year of the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, States and stakeholders in the region will renew their commitments to refugee protection and solutions. These undertakings will help pave the way for the adoption of a regional roadmap to address challenges related to mixed movements, including displacement driven by climate change, and to develop innovative solutions that engage development actors, financial institutions and the private sector.

Venezuela situation

Cross-border displacement and mixed movements from Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) continued, despite an increase in spontaneous returns. As of June 2023, there were over 7.3 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants, of which 84 per cent were in Latin America and the Caribbean. Worldwide, there were over 234,000 recognized Venezuelan refugees and more than 1.1 million asylum-seekers. Over 201,000 Venezuelans crossed the Darién province in the first eight months of 2023.

Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and the United States of America continued to grant asylum to Venezuelans and implemented legal stay arrangements, facilitating access to documentation and socioeconomic rights. Brazil recognized over 89,200 Venezuelans as refugees, issued 50,260 asylum-seeker permits and granted over 320,000 residency permits. Colombia biometrically registered close to 2.5 million Venezuelans, of whom 1.6 million received temporary protection permits. In Ecuador, of the 252,000 people registered, over 196,000 received a certificate of temporary stay. Peru launched a regularization programme in May and granted temporary stay to over 52,000 Venezuelans thus far. The Dominican Republic regularized 25,000 Venezuelans. In the first six months of 2023, more than 58,000 Venezuelans were approved for entry to the United States of America under the expanded parole process.

As spontaneous returns to Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) increased, support to receiving communities was required across key sectors to facilitate reintegration. Income-generation activities, improved access to basic services, community infrastructure, issuance of documentation and psychosocial support were among the activities prioritized.

The Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) continued implementing its refugee and migrant response plan for 2023-2024, which brings together more than 200 partners to assist 3.4 million refugees and migrants and affected host community members. By July 2023, the inter-agency response had provided some 1.4 million refugees and migrants with assistance, while reaching 11 per cent of its financial requirements of \$1.72 billion for this year. The solidarity conference for Venezuelan refugees and migrants and their host communities held in March 2023 resulted in pledges of \$1.6 billion (\$542 million in grants and \$1.13 billion in loans). Member States of the Quito Process signed a joint declaration that highlighted the importance of sustained international cooperation.

Colombia situation

In 2022, 6.8 million persons were internally displaced in Colombia. This represents one of the largest internally displaced populations in the world. In the first half of 2023, over 55,000 people were newly internally displaced. New asylum applications from Colombians were also registered in other countries, mainly in Ecuador.

UNHCR continues to support the Colombian Government with the protection of internally displaced persons, focusing on returns, where possible, relocation and the legalization of urban settlements, building upon the Government's total peace agenda.

Central America and Mexico

Growing numbers of people in Central America were forced to leave their homes due to insecurity, human rights violations, poverty, inequality and the impact of climate change. Globally, the number of asylum-seekers and refugees from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras reached over 665,000. By the end of 2022, over 293,000 Nicaraguans had sought asylum (mainly in Costa Rica), of whom 16,000 were recognized as refugees.

UNHCR stepped up efforts to support national asylum systems in the region, focusing on improving digitalization processes, addressing backlogs of pending cases and strengthening asylum capacity in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Panama. By August 2023, nearly 100,000 new asylum applications were recorded in Mexico, mostly from nationals of Cuba, Haiti and Honduras.

To address internal displacement in the sub-region, UNHCR scaled up prevention efforts and worked to identify the drivers of displacement, together with communities of origin and those hosting internally displaced persons. UNHCR supported the Government of Honduras in the implementation of a landmark law for the prevention, care and protection of internally displaced persons that was adopted in March 2023. UNHCR strengthened partnerships for collecting and analysing reliable data on internal displacement. As of 2023, the Governments of El Salvador and Honduras included questions on internal displacement in national household surveys in order to better identify the populations and measure potential solutions, with a view to informing public policies and national development plans. In Mexico, UNHCR and partners worked with local governments to enact public policies to respond to the needs of internally displaced populations.

UNHCR supported the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (MIRPS), currently led by Panama as pro tempore Presidency. Through the framework's fund, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Panama launched projects on protection and solutions, including those aimed at facilitating economic inclusion for refugees, reinforcing asylum systems and addressing internal displacement. The sixth annual meeting of the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (MIRPS) will take place on 16 November in Panama.

Caribbean

In the Caribbean, UNHCR advocated measures to prevent refoulement, worked to build asylum systems and sought the inclusion of forcibly displaced and stateless people in existing national systems through the provision of technical assistance to governments. Enhanced collaboration with sub-regional entities, such as the Caribbean Community, remained a priority, including in the context of climate change and emergency preparedness.

In Haiti, some 5.2 million people are estimated to be in need of assistance, compared to 4.9 million in 2022. With gang violence affecting all aspects of society, UNHCR expanded its protection response. This included the launching of localized community-based support activities to help prevent the recruitment of youth by gangs. UNHCR responded to the needs of Haitian asylum-seekers and refugees throughout the Americas and advocated increased protection measures. In Chile, special procedures for Haitians to access family reunification visas were put in place, benefiting over 2,300 people. In Brazil, the government launched, with the support of UNHCR, an action plan to strengthen protection and integration for the Haitian population, which foresees support with documentation, access to employment and assistance to community structures. In the first six months of 2023, more than 63,000 Haitians were approved for entry to the United States of America through the expanded parole process. Argentina will shortly activate an environmental humanitarian visa programme for Haitians.

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

Attaining favourable protection environments

UNHCR works with States in the region to strengthen asylum systems through the provision of technical guidance and assistance, and to support the expansion of other lawful pathways for persons in need of international protection. Brazil, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay and Uruguay have continued to apply the expanded regional refugee definition. Support has also been provided for regularization efforts undertaken by States.

Pursuing protection and solutions for internally displaced persons

While scaling up efforts to prevent internal displacement and working with communities of origin and host communities, UNHCR continued to prioritize its work to strengthen national

responses, including to help ensure that internally displaced persons can access public services, legal support and humanitarian assistance. UNHCR advocated and supported the adoption of relevant legal frameworks on internal displacement and strengthened partnerships for collecting and analysing reliable data on issues of internal displacement.

With a view to strengthening joint efforts to mitigate the risks associated with forced displacement, UNHCR signed a memorandum of understanding with the Honduras National Institute for Youth. In Colombia, UNHCR contributed to strengthening community structures to improve self-protection mechanisms for internally displaced persons as well as their effective participation in local planning and decision-making. In El Salvador, UNHCR assisted communities and national institutions through 11 youth-run centres and in Mexico supported the development of information management and protection responses. These are examples of joint efforts to mitigate the risks associated with forced displacement.

Realizing rights in safe environments

Facilitating access to education

UNHCR provides guidance to national education systems for the inclusion of forcibly displaced children in the region. In July, Trinidad and Tobago adopted a policy decision to allow refugee and migrant children to access the national primary education system. In Brazil, the National Council for the Rights of Children and Adolescents published a new resolution, updating procedures for unaccompanied, separated and undocumented children. In Colombia, UNHCR participated in the development of the Forum Beyond Borders, which was organized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in partnership with the Ministry of Education. In Ecuador, the Education Cannot Wait programme helped Venezuelan students transition back into formal education.

Empowering communities and achieving gender equality

In line with its efforts to prioritize localization, UNHCR conducted a mapping of refugee-led organizations, leaders, government entities and operational partners in the region. As a result, nearly 300 organizations and some 60 leaders were identified, mostly women, which support refugees with empowerment, humanitarian aid, responses to gender-based violence and psychosocial support. Regional consultations on local integration and gender equality were held with non-governmental organizations in June 2023. Participants highlighted that local integration must prioritize refugee access to rights and basic needs, while addressing the lack of documentation and expanding livelihood opportunities.

Good practices on gender equality were mapped by UNHCR, including on digital empowerment of refugee women in Argentina, on positive masculinity in Colombia and on women's empowerment in Guatemala.

Securing solutions

To operationalize the Global Compact on Refugees, UNHCR continues to promote sustainable solutions for forcibly displaced populations through the Regional Comprehensive Protection and Solutions Framework (MIRPS) and its Support Platform, the Quito Process, and the Cities of Solidarity initiative.

Engagement with development actors including international financial institutions has resulted in new financing for host countries, through loans and non-reimbursable grants. Regularization processes have been implemented in the Andean region and the Caribbean, benefiting millions of people with protection needs. To support integration efforts and in collaboration with the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), UNHCR helped host governments expand job opportunities, health and educational services and housing for refugees and host communities. Costa Rica became eligible for the Global Concessional Financing Facility, a financial intermediary fund housed at the World Bank, with the goal of strengthening their asylum system and building climate-resilient infrastructure in refugee-hosting areas. Belize implemented its amnesty programme to grant legal status to displaced persons on its territory with the assistance of UNHCR and the Inter-American Development

Bank . Innovative local integration efforts were expanded in Brazil and Mexico with the engagement and support of development actors and the private sector.

Promoting socioeconomic inclusion

As local integration remains the main solution in the region, UNHCR promoted the financial inclusion of asylum-seekers and refugees through access to bank accounts. In Peru, the *Empresas Integradoras* initiative was launched to promote the inclusion of vulnerable people in the labour market with support from the private sector. In Ecuador, the IADB approved a proposal for labour inclusion, benefiting 14,500 refugees and migrants, and including UNHCR as a strategic partner. As of mid-August 2023, more than 30,000 asylum-seekers and refugees were relocated from southern border areas with scarce opportunities for socioeconomic inclusion to 11 cities in northern and central destinations within Mexico, where UNHCR has established cooperations for labour integration with more than 400 private companies. In Brazil, more than 102,000 Venezuelans were relocated in over 930 municipalities as part of the government's *Operação Acolhida* response. In Uruguay, the city of Montevideo city recently signed, in line with the Los Angeles Declaration, an agreement to prevent onward movements by facilitating labour, socioeconomic and cultural inclusion.

Facilitating resettlement and complementary pathways for admission to third countries

UNHCR has significantly scaled up its resettlement identification and processing capacities in the region, with close to 10,000 individuals referred in 2022 and a target of 25,000 in 2023. UNHCR referrals from the western hemisphere for the fiscal year 2023 in the United States of America surpassed 10,000 for the first time in the history of the country's refugee admissions programme.

In June 2023, the United States of America and partner countries announced the initial six-month phase of the Safe Mobility initiative. This initiative, with support from the International Organization for Migration and UNHCR, is facilitating free access to protection and other lawful pathways to the United States of America as well as to Canada and Spain via the [MovilidadSegura.org](https://www.MovilidadSegura.org) website and Safe Mobility Offices. The Safe Mobility initiative is operational in Colombia, Costa Rica and Guatemala. Canada is expanding complementary pathways, including labour mobility, and new resettlement streams for defenders of human rights.

Eradicating statelessness

UNHCR continued to support efforts to address and prevent statelessness, including supporting documentation brigades in Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), the provision of legal assistance to undocumented children in Chile and the issuance of new procedures and guidance by the United State of America to assist stateless persons who wish to obtain immigration benefits. In the Dominican Republic, a new civil registration law was adopted, creating a National Civil Status System that facilitates access to civil registration services. The Privy Council of the Bahamas ruled that all children born in the country out of wedlock to foreign women and Bahamian men are Bahamian citizens at birth. This will ensure equal citizenship rights for all children, irrespective of their parents' marital status, paving the way for ending gender discrimination on the acquisition of citizenship. Colombia extended the decree to ensure Colombian citizenship for all children born to Venezuelan parents on its territory. The Organization of American States adopted a declaration that urged States to respect international law, particularly the prohibition of arbitrary deprivation of nationality. Uruguay is considering how to prevent statelessness and address challenges of legal identity resulting from the legal citizenship status.

C. Financial information

In October 2022, the Executive Committee approved a US \$827.2 million budget for the Americas for 2023. As of 6 August 2023, the budget has increased to \$827.4 million through relocations. The main impact areas for 2023 are: a) attaining favourable protection environments (\$277.3 million); b) realizing basic rights in safe environments (\$254.0 million); and c) securing solutions (\$212.2 million) and empowering communities and achieving gender equality (\$83.9 million). Operational needs for the Americas were 33 per cent funded (\$271.4 million) by 31 August 2023.
