

**Executive Committee of the  
High Commissioner's Programme**

19 September 2017  
English  
Original: English and French

**Sixty-eighth session**  
Geneva, 2-6 October 2017

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## **Overview of UNHCR's operations in the Americas**

### **A. Situational context including new developments**

#### **Colombia situation**

The Colombian Government has been implementing the peace agreement with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) since December 2016. The FARC have since turned over more than 7,000 weapons and begun reintegrating into civilian communities. Within this context, UNHCR is supporting the United Nations' efforts to help stabilize the FARC "demobilization zones" through inter-agency needs assessments and the development of a common response plan. However, the humanitarian situation remains challenging, with illegal armed groups resorting to violence and triggering displacement in remote areas. UNHCR continues to monitor and raise awareness of new displacement, including along the Pacific coast and in the border areas.

In Ecuador, UNHCR provides ongoing technical assistance to the Government in relation to the regulatory decree of the human mobility law, which incorporates some of UNHCR's recommendations. At their request, UNHCR is helping to draft legislation to facilitate the implementation of the law. In addition, the Office is providing technical assistance with other regulations, key protocols and resolutions. With the number of asylum claims, mainly lodged by Colombians and Venezuelans, increasing by 29 per cent when compared to the same period in 2016, UNHCR also supports efforts to strengthen the asylum system.

#### **Venezuela situation**

The deteriorating political and economic situation in Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) has continued to generate population outflows. The number of asylum applications lodged by Venezuelans around the world rose to around 39,000 from January through July 2017. This is a considerable increase over 2016, which saw 34,000 claims lodged by year end. The main countries of destination are Brazil, Costa Rica, Mexico, Peru, Spain and the United States of America. The influx of Venezuelans has posed a number of challenges, and despite the efforts of host countries to generously meet increasing needs, a strengthened response is required in the areas of physical security, documentation, as well as sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and exploitation and abuse. In certain areas, armed groups and criminal gangs are exploiting new arrivals and the local population.

In May 2017, UNHCR undertook preparedness missions to Brazil, Colombia and Trinidad and Tobago to assess border movements, together with partners and the respective Governments. The protection and humanitarian needs of those crossing were evaluated, in addition to the needs in case of increased arrivals. UNHCR also deployed technical missions to look at cash-based interventions, shelter and registration. In follow-up, the Office has scaled up its response by enhancing its presence in the border areas and capacity to provide basic assistance, including through multipurpose cash grants, the issuance of documentation, and activities relating to registration and refugee status determination.

### **Central America**

Recent regional developments, coupled with greater migratory controls and checkpoints on the southern Mexican border, have changed displacement patterns and resulted in growing numbers of asylum claims lodged in countries such as Guatemala and Mexico. As of 30 June 2017, more than 6,800 asylum-seekers had arrived in Mexico, nearly twice as many when compared to the first half of 2016 (3,500). Against this background, UNHCR helps ensure access to territory and asylum procedures, provide immediate humanitarian assistance and secure solutions for people with urgent protection needs, including through resettlement, humanitarian evacuation and relocation.

In addition, UNHCR, together with government counterparts, organized a protection dialogue in Mexico in March 2017, and a regional protection dialogue in May 2017 with participants from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, in order to discuss the challenges associated with the protection of individuals uprooted by violence and insecurity. Participants at these dialogues agreed that UNHCR should strengthen collaboration with local and regional authorities, as well as civil society and other groups which provide shelter and assistance. They also noted that an effective international protection and solutions response will depend on political will, institutional capacity and regional cooperation in countries of origin, transit and asylum.

The Office is assisting with the implementation of the comprehensive refugee response framework (CRRF) in the subregion, aiming to develop protection sensitive programmes and to design regional cooperation mechanisms with States that are part of the process. A broad range of stakeholders will be invited to participate in related activities, including to help address the root causes of violence and displacement. Plans are under way, together with the Government of Honduras and the Organization of American States (OAS), to convene a regional conference in Honduras in October 2017, with a view to examining the main elements of the regional framework known as the comprehensive regional protection and solutions framework (CRPSF).

UNHCR is also supporting government-led consultations in the countries that have joined the CRPSF in order to review progress achieved and identify gaps. These consultations also provide the basis for each country applying the CRPSF – namely Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Panama – to develop their respective national action plans, which will outline what is needed to implement commitments and address new challenges. The findings will also inform the development of a global compact on refugees in 2018.

### **The Caribbean**

In the Dominican Republic, UNHCR and partners continued to provide assistance and support to individuals wishing to obtain nationality documents under law 169-14. Discussions with the national authorities and other stakeholders are under way with a view to enhancing outreach activities and ensuring the provision of adequate documentation. UNHCR continues to advocate solutions for those who did not apply for nationality documents under the law.

In Haiti, UNHCR continued to verify and conduct the registration of Dominican-born individuals with a legitimate claim to Dominican nationality who are currently in Haiti. The status of some 2,800 people out of 6,200 has been verified to date.

In Belize, UNHCR continued to strengthen its operational engagement through assistance and small-scale community-based projects targeting both asylum-seekers and host communities.

### **The Southern Cone**

In May, the President of Brazil sanctioned a new migration law, which will come into force in November 2017 and thus replace the previous framework first implemented in 1980. The new law is an important achievement in terms of informing public policy on migration, using

a human rights approach and facilitating migrants' access to procedures to regularize their stay. It also helps promote socioeconomic inclusion and expand complementary pathways to protection, and includes provisions to prevent and resolve statelessness.

In Peru, special migratory arrangements, which approve temporary permits for Venezuelans who have entered Peru regularly in 2017, were extended. Under such arrangements, more than 11,000 temporary permits were previously granted to Venezuelans.

## **B. Achieving the global strategic priorities**

### **Brazil Plan of Action**

MERCOSUR<sup>1</sup> formally adopted a set of indicators jointly developed with UNHCR and the *Instituto de Política Pública en Derechos Humanos* (Institute of Public Policy on Human Rights) in view of the triennial evaluation of the Brazil Plan of Action. National consultations with governments and civil society have started, and three subregional consultations will be held in early November 2017, focusing on the quality of asylum, statelessness and local integration programmes. A regional meeting to present the conclusions and recommendations of the subregional consultations and discuss regional inputs for the global compact for refugees is expected to take place in Brasilia in February 2018. The Brazil Plan of Action's triennial evaluation will also be discussed at the upcoming meeting of the Caribbean Migration Consultations.

In July 2017, the first thematic session leading to the development of the global compact on refugees presented the Brazil Plan of Action as a regional model. The session aimed to identify key elements of, and good practices and lessons learned from, past and present burden- and responsibility-sharing arrangements in order to inform the development of a programme of action.

### **Access to asylum**

States in the region continued to implement joint recommendations to enhance asylum standards through the Quality of Asylum Initiative (QAI). Trinidad and Tobago initiated a "QAI from the start" initiative by applying international and regional efficiency and due process standards to refugee status determination procedures. Mexico developed an eligibility manual for asylum-processing staff. Peru adopted a set of QAI recommendations and is designing a workplan to prioritize certain areas of work. Brazil devised a special registration form which allows increased focus on the needs of unaccompanied children. Costa Rica implemented the review of second instance decision-making under the QAI.

Moreover, in August 2017, the QAI countries (Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Mexico, Panama, Peru and Trinidad and Tobago) and observer States (Canada, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador and the United States of America) met in São Paulo for the first QAI regional roundtable. During the roundtable, participants discussed strategies related to effective case management and backlog reduction, as well as good practices to increase the access of asylum-seekers and refugees to procedures, registration and referrals.

In May 2017, with a view to enhancing access to refugee status determination procedures, UNHCR, the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights and 40 civil society organizations launched the Americas Network for Refugee Legal Aid (ANRLA). ANRLA researches refugee protection standards, supports legal counselling and representation for an increasing number of people in need of international protection, as well as trains refugee lawyers and practitioners.

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<sup>1</sup> *Mercado Común del Sur.*

### **Comprehensive solutions**

Argentina, Brazil and Chile maintained their strong commitment to international solidarity and responsibility-sharing. They became the first countries to apply the emerging resettlement country mechanism (ERCM) and establish sponsorship, resettlement and complementary pathway programmes. In May 2017, representatives from these countries, who attended a capacity-building workshop in Ottawa organized by the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative, familiarized themselves with practical guidance and tools that support the development of community sponsorship programmes.

Argentina has received more than 280 Syrians as of 31 July 2017, through the humanitarian visa programme. This is in accordance with its pledge to receive 3,000 Syrian refugees, which was made during the United Nations General Assembly's high-level summit to address large movements of refugees and migrants in September 2016. In addition, in August 2017, the Government of Argentina, together with the International Organization for Migration and UNHCR, adopted a 2017-2018 plan of action on capacity-building under the ERCM. Chile prepared to resettle 120 Syrian refugees, and Brazil plans to set up a private sponsorship programme to receive 3,000 Syrian refugees and establish a resettlement programme for refugees from the north of Central America.

In Ecuador, UNHCR continued to implement the "graduation model", which has enabled more than 1,800 families to make significant advances. Some 87 per cent of the families now eat three adequate meals per day, and 63 per cent earned an income bringing them up above the poverty line. Seventy-nine per cent also participated in community and social networks.

In Colombia, UNHCR is supporting the Ministry of Housing's efforts to profile informal settlements and amend the national legal framework to recognize the "legalization" of settlements as an important durable solutions measure. The Office is currently assisting with 27 legalization processes.

Costa Rica continues to locally integrate refugees through initiatives jointly developed with the public and private sectors. The Living Integration Project, which promotes access to the labour market for refugees, is a corporate social responsibility scheme that is recognized by the Government.

Through the Protection Transfer Arrangement, a humanitarian evacuation mechanism for individuals at heightened risk in the north of Central America, some 200 individuals were identified and referred to the authorities of Australia, Canada and the United States of America. Nearly 100 individuals have left their country of origin, most of them via Costa Rica, to reach the country of destination. Brazil and Uruguay have expressed interest in taking part in this responsibility-sharing mechanism.

### **Eradication of statelessness**

Countries in the Americas continued taking steps towards the eradication of statelessness. Haiti's parliament approved accession to the statelessness conventions, and in May 2017, the President of Chile committed to acceding to both conventions. Brazil and Ecuador passed human mobility and migration laws mandating the establishment of statelessness determination procedures and facilitating the acquisition of nationality for stateless persons. Similarly, draft bills on statelessness are being discussed in Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay. Costa Rica, Chile and Panama continued to implement initiatives to confirm the nationality of individuals. The Costa Rican Supreme Electoral Tribunal also passed a new regulation to facilitate the naturalization of stateless persons and stateless refugees.

In August 2017, the Government of Peru and UNHCR convened the third regional meeting on statelessness determination procedures and facilitated naturalization, with over 40 government representatives from across the Americas participating. The meeting was an opportunity to promote the implementation of the Global Action Plan to End Statelessness and the programme on eradicating statelessness in the Brazil Plan of Action. In addition, participants exchanged good practices, discussed draft articles on the protection of stateless

persons and facilities for their naturalization, and emphasized the importance of the provision of technical assistance, particularly on international standards, to prevent and resolve statelessness.

### **Protection of children and youth**

UNHCR continued its work to protect children and youth in the Americas from serious protection risks by supporting partners and governments with technical assistance and capacity-building. The Office improved inter-agency coordination and advocated for the protection of children on the move and their families. Together with other United Nations agencies, UNHCR co-organized the Regional Youth Consultation on Peace and Security in late May and early June 2017 in Panama in follow-up to the adoption of Security Council Resolution 2250 on the same issue. The Consultation involved young people in a discussion on their contributions to the prevention of violence and conflict and the promotion of peace. Brazil adopted a resolution to better protect unaccompanied and separated children in the border regions.

### **Sexual and gender-based violence**

One of the main protection concerns in the Americas continues to be SGBV, disproportionately affecting displaced people. The Regional Safe Spaces Network<sup>2</sup> aims to improve the disclosure, identification and response to SGBV by providing a minimum service package through multi-country cooperation. Costa Rica, Guatemala and Mexico joined the initiative in 2017. In addition, UNHCR organized a series of trainings and consultations on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) and has since supported the establishment of a Regional Network on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in June 2017. The Regional Network on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse is composed of national and international humanitarian staff and aims to raise awareness of, and protect displaced individuals from, sexual exploitation and abuse. The Network currently has 32 members, and part of their efforts has included designing tools for the development of community-based complaint mechanisms.

### **Regional cooperation**

During a meeting in June 2017 in El Salvador, the Regional Consultation Group on Migration reaffirmed the importance of ensuring that the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration complements national and regional processes, including the development of the global compact on refugees, in collaboration with UNHCR. The OAS's General Assembly passed a resolution on human rights, calling on States to continue implementing the Brazil Plan of Action as a strategic framework for the protection of refugees and stateless persons.

## **C. Financial information**

In October 2016, the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme (ExCom) approved a budget of \$145.6 million for the Americas in 2017. As of 31 July 2017, the budget for 2017 increased by \$4.5 million, amounting to \$150.1 million. This amount enabled UNHCR to bolster its presence and monitoring capacity in border areas in response to increased arrivals from Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), and respond to the growing needs in the north of Central America. As at 31 July 2017, voluntary contributions earmarked for UNHCR's operations in the Americas amounted to \$27.0 million.

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<sup>2</sup> In displacement settings, the Regional Safe Spaces Network was established in partnership with civil society, humanitarian and government organizations, national and local institutions, both public and private, as well as UNHCR, with the goal of bringing together and improving the services available to SGBV survivors.