

Update on UNHCR operations in the Americas

A. Situational analysis, including new developments

The situation in the Americas remains complex in 2025, with continued forced displacement across borders, internal displacement and mixed movements expected. The root causes of forced displacement include violence, persecution, human rights violations and insecurity, with the situation further exacerbated by the negative impact of disasters. An increase in the number of returns is also foreseen.

UNHCR's latest statistics indicate that by mid-2024, the region hosted 20.3 million forcibly displaced persons and others in need of international protection and assistance, mainly originating from Colombia, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), as well as Northern Central America. In 2024, over 302,000 people crossed the Darién region of Panama, representing a 40 per cent decrease compared to 2023. Most originated from Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), followed by Colombia and Ecuador.

Most displaced persons choose to remain in Latin America and the Caribbean, supported by the commendable efforts of governments and partners in the region to secure protection and solutions and to foster stabilization and socioeconomic inclusion. For example, 85 per cent of the 7.9 million displaced Venezuelans are living in Latin America and the Caribbean, the vast majority welcomed by host communities in neighbouring countries. In addition, Costa Rica hosts most Nicaraguan refugees in the region. The socioeconomic local integration initiatives being implemented in Brazil, Colombia and Mexico are considered regional good practices.

As evidenced by regional intergovernmental processes and frameworks, including the Quito Process, and the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (known by its Spanish acronym MIRPS), political will and solidarity and responsibility-sharing remain strong. States and host communities have made significant strides in finding solutions, including through the granting of asylum, regularization and other legal stay arrangements, socioeconomic inclusion and naturalization efforts, which are all considered essential elements of a comprehensive approach.

Latin America and the Caribbean countries reaffirmed their commitment to providing protection and solutions for refugees, the internally displaced and stateless persons by adopting the Chile Declaration and Plan of Action, as part of the Cartagena +40 process. The Plan of Action represents the regional implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees.

With stronger support and investment from the international community, Latin America and the Caribbean will remain a region where protection responses and solutions can be found and implemented for the people UNHCR serves. Their inclusion and integration (including through access to education, health services and employment opportunities) continue to bring about important socioeconomic benefits for the region. For example, in Peru, for every sol invested in the refugee and migrant population, 2.6 soles are returned in taxes.¹ In Costa Rica, Nicaraguan refugees and migrants contribute 6.5 per cent to the GDP.²

¹ World Bank and UNHCR, *Un Encuentro de Oportunidades: La Movilidad Humana de Venezuela y el Desarrollo del Perú* (2024).

² International Monetary Fund, *Characteristics and Economic Impact of Migrants and Refugees in Costa Rica* (2023).

In parallel to many opportunities on the horizon, new and ongoing challenges present protection concerns. Across the region, violence generated by organized crime and armed groups is leading to increased forced displacement. In addition, Latin America and the Caribbean is one of the world's most vulnerable and prone regions to extreme weather events and disasters. Meanwhile, those deported and returnees need to be supported with proper reception facilities and reintegration measures. Without such support, and in the face of continued instability and fragility in their countries of origin, these populations might seek solutions elsewhere once again.

Security concerns have led to restrictive policies in some countries, including instances of discrimination, xenophobia and criminalization of the people UNHCR serves. While constituting positive communication channels, digital spaces are also prone to misinformation, disinformation and hate speech that translates into offline protection risks for refugees, displaced and stateless persons.

To address the scale and complexity of the challenges in the region, UNHCR is increasingly advocating sustainable responses to forced displacement. It is working with a wide range of partners through a comprehensive regional approach that promotes stabilization and provides solutions at all stages of displacement, including by addressing root causes in countries of origin.

UNHCR's leadership, inter-agency coordination and catalytic role garner the support of more than 230 partners in Latin America and the Caribbean for these endeavours. This includes work undertaken in the context of the Inter-Agency Platform for Refugees and Migrants for Venezuela, which is co-led by UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

South America

Movements from Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) continue, despite a slight increase in returns. By the end of 2024, there were some 7.89 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants worldwide, the majority in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Several States in the region have established new or expanded legal stay arrangements and temporary protection processes for Venezuelans. In Colombia, more than 1.9 million Venezuelans have received temporary protection permits, and a new process was announced in June of 2024 to benefit an additional 600,000. In Ecuador, a new regularization process has resulted in 14,900 temporary stay certificates, and almost 15,000 new or renewed visas. Argentina introduced a temporary measure to facilitate the entry of Venezuelans in the country and regularize their status, benefiting thousands of people. Brazil recognized over 132,000 Venezuelans as refugees and granted over 479,000 temporary residency permits. In Uruguay, more than 2,500 individuals were able to regularize their stay by meeting a variety of requirements, and more than 3,900 eligible applications have been identified for prima facie recognition.

In Colombia, 1.4 million new internally displaced persons have been registered since the 2016 peace agreement, while additional numbers have left the country seeking international protection. UNHCR is supporting national and local authorities as part of inter-agency efforts to respond to and mitigate increased displacement in the Catatumbo region, which since January 2025 has led to the displacement of tens of thousands of people, including Venezuelan nationals living in Colombia, and led to some cross-border movements.

In Ecuador, Colombians and Venezuelans in need of international protection continue to seek safety. In 2024, Ecuadorians continued leaving the country due to several reasons, including as a result of the socioeconomic and security situation.

Central America and Mexico

The increase in forced displacement in Central America and Mexico over recent years – including persistent internal displacement in some countries – has exposed those in need of protection to heightened risks, while placing a tremendous strain on reception systems. The year 2024 closed with some 78,000 new asylum claims in Mexico, mostly from Cubans, Haitians, Hondurans and Salvadorans. Costa Rica remains the main hosting country for

Nicaraguans in need of international protection. In Belize, permanent residency cards were issued for asylum-seekers thanks to the Government's amnesty programme, marking a significant step towards citizenship.

The increased number of returns in the subregion needs to be accompanied by strengthened reception and reintegration capacities in countries of origin. UNHCR has been supporting the identification of those in need of international protection, the provision of humanitarian assistance and community empowerment to facilitate the stabilization and reintegration of returnees.

UNHCR also supports governments in the subregion to strengthen their asylum systems by promoting targeted investments in the digitalization of case management practices, streamlined and differentiated processing modalities, country-of-origin information, and the prevention and reduction of backlogs. Asylum-building remains a priority in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Panama.

The Governments of Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Panama continue working together within the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework to enhance protection and solutions in the subregion. The annual meeting of the countries of the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework, hosted by Belize in December 2024, marked its handover to Costa Rica as the 2025 pro-tempore Presidency. The Support Platform also completed a transition of leadership from the United States of America to Colombia as Chair.

The Caribbean

The Caribbean receives refugees and other persons in need of international protection within and outside the subregion. In this context, UNHCR will continue to support public policies to prevent refoulement, to develop national asylum systems, to foster partnerships to prevent statelessness and foster stabilization, and to promote socioeconomic inclusion in national systems.

Gang violence in Haiti surged in 2024, resulting in severe human rights violations and the displacement of more than 700,000 people. In Haiti, UNHCR works with national partners on community-based protection, on establishing a collective system for accountability to affected people, on protection monitoring and on measures to improve access to birth registration. This work helps ensure Haitians can fully exercise their rights and reduces the risk of statelessness. Additionally, protection programmes to support deportees were established at the border, including a project in cooperation with the Inter-American Development Bank.

At the regional level, UNHCR works with governments and partners to ensure Haitians have access to protection and solutions. UNHCR continues to provide legal support to displaced Haitians, helping them access social systems and apply for legal documentation. The “Action Plan for Strengthening the Protection and Local Integration of the Haitian Population in Brazil” is an important example of these efforts.

Cartagena+40 process

Under the leadership of Chile, and with the support of Brazil, Colombia, Mexico and other countries in the region, the Chile Declaration and Plan of Action was adopted at a ministerial meeting in December 2024. The decade-long roadmap followed consultations in 2024 as part of the Cartagena+40 process and is a concrete example of the Global Compact on Refugees in action. During the ministerial-level event, States underscored the need for a comprehensive multi-stakeholder regional strategy for refugees, displaced and stateless persons.

The Chile Plan of Action focuses on protection in all phases of displacement, the implementation of comprehensive solutions alongside development and financial actors, local governments (including through the Cities of Solidarity initiative), and the private sector (through the Network of Solidarity Companies). It also advocates protection responses for those affected by the negative impacts of extreme weather events and disasters. A follow-up mechanism led by Chile will ensure the constant adaptation of priorities within the Plan of Action and will mobilize resources for the concrete implementation of the 100 recommended actions that are foreseen in the Plan.

Extreme weather events, disasters and displacement

UNHCR is focusing efforts on mitigating the impact of extreme weather events and disasters on forcibly displaced people and contributes to disaster response. In Brazil, Chile, Colombia, El Salvador and Haiti, UNHCR provided humanitarian assistance to those affected by such events. The Office also supports government efforts to ensure protection for the displaced in the context of extreme weather events and disasters and the inclusion of refugees, displaced and stateless persons in national adaptation and resilience plans.

At the regional level, some progress has been made with respect to legal frameworks. UNHCR provided an advisory opinion to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights for the adoption of a resolution on protection responses to be accorded to those affected by natural disasters. UNHCR is supporting the efforts of Brazil and Colombia to adopt legal frameworks for those affected by disasters.

In Cali, Colombia, UNHCR engagements at the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP16) were key in supporting the participation and inclusion of refugees and forcibly displaced populations. UNHCR will also be participating in COP30 in Brazil, advocating support for States in protection responses and the inclusion of refugees and other displaced persons in national adaptation and resilience plans.

B. Progress and challenges by impact area in 2024 and updated plans for 2025

Attaining favourable protection environments

Strengthening asylum systems in the region will continue to be a priority for UNHCR, so that receiving States are better equipped to process asylum claims in a fair and efficient manner. This is supported through better technology, differentiated processing modalities and the improved use of country-of-origin information. UNHCR also offers legal support and technical assistance to reduce backlogs. To preserve the integrity of asylum procedures, UNHCR advocates expanded arrangements that provide legal residence and access to rights for those in need.

In Mexico, since July 2024, Haitian nationals are recognized under the Cartagena definition enshrined in its domestic refugee law. Uruguay has adopted a pilot *prima facie* process for asylum claims, while also implementing its programme to facilitate access to legal residence for asylum-seekers with family, labour or educational ties to the country. In Colombia, the Constitutional Court adopted a landmark judgment that paves the way for national asylum system reform. In Brazil, the Government is about to adopt a national integration policy for refugees and migrants.

Pursuing protection and solutions for internally displaced persons

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

In Honduras, since the adoption of the Law for the Prevention, Care and Protection of Internally Displaced Persons in 2022, UNHCR has supported the Inter-Institutional Commission for the Protection of Forcibly Displaced Persons in drafting regulations to guide implementation of the law. Internally displaced persons are now also included in statistical systems.

In Colombia, UNHCR coordinates the Internal Displacement Solutions Fund, working with IOM, the United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Human Settlements Programme and the Resident Coordinator's office to strengthen the Government's capacity for durable solutions to forced displacement through policy development, inter-institutional coordination, measurement tools and strategic planning aligned with national priorities.

In Mexico, UNHCR assists national authorities and eight state governments in the development and adoption of laws and policies on internally displaced persons and provides technical support for emergency response and information management. UNHCR and the International

Committee of the Red Cross, in collaboration with the Supreme Court of Justice, issued a manual on internal displacement, which is already being used by the Federal Judiciary in decisions protecting the rights of internally displaced persons. Together with the Ministry of Interior, UNHCR developed a guide for registration and referral pathways for internally displaced persons.

Realizing rights in safe environments

Facilitating access to education

UNHCR promotes inclusion in educational systems at all levels for forcibly displaced children and youth through various initiatives. Notably, the “Breathe Inclusion” initiative in Ecuador benefited 150 children, while the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (known as DAFI) supported 150 refugees with tertiary education. In Brazil, 26 universities awarded scholarships to refugee students through the Sergio Vieira de Mello Chair.

Empowering communities and achieving gender equality

In 2024, UNHCR prioritized the meaningful participation of refugee-led organizations in regional processes. Notably, the Regional Group of Refugee-led Organizations of Latin America and the Caribbean played a crucial role in the review of the Chile Plan of Action and participated in the December ministerial event. UNHCR, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women joined forces with 25 organizations from the Americas to develop a roadmap for enhancing local partnerships and gender equality. UNHCR also engaged forcibly displaced communities with a focus on the prevention of violence against women and girls through 92 different activities during the 16 days of activism.

Through 110 communication channels, including face-to-face and digital interactions, across 21 operations in the Americas, UNHCR engages with the communities it serves by receiving comments and feedback about services. These channels, which also provide an opportunity for important advice around sensitive protection issues to be provided, handle an average of 23,000 interactions monthly.

Securing solutions

In 2024, UNHCR enhanced collaboration with development and financial actors such as the Inter-American Development Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. UNHCR has also partnered with the International Finance Corporation to advance financial inclusion for refugees. Statistical inclusion for persons in need of international protection has also been supported in partnership with national statistic institutions.

In April 2024, Uruguay hosted the first regional meeting of Cities of Solidarity, in which the Montevideo Declaration was adopted. The Cities of Solidarity network also contributed to the Chile Plan of Action, highlighting the key role of local authorities in securing protection and solutions.

UNHCR continues to collaborate with the private sector to increase the number of displaced persons that are matched with job opportunities, including through relocation programmes to areas offering more employment options. In Brazil, 144,000 Venezuelans have been relocated internally and have received housing, access to employment, social benefits and education. In Mexico, 49,400 refugees have relocated from the south to the centre of the country and have found formal employment with more than 650 companies since 2016. Moreover, thanks to integration opportunities, more than 600 refugees initiated their naturalization process in 2024 with the help of UNHCR.

UNHCR actively supports inter-institutional efforts to ensure the safe, dignified return and sustainable reintegration of individuals in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. Together with partners, the Office supports protection initiatives for returnees, focusing on personal documentation, child protection and the prevention of violence and exploitation affecting the most vulnerable individuals. Present at key returnee centres, UNHCR and partners identify individuals in need of international protection and refer them to appropriate mechanisms for further assistance.

Facilitating resettlement and complementary pathways for admission to third countries

UNHCR promoted a responsive third-country solutions framework that included refugee resettlement, family reunification and other complementary pathways. From January to December 2024, UNHCR submitted the applications of nearly 76,500 individuals in the region for resettlement to Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Spain and the United States of America.

UNHCR continued to work with States to develop labour mobility pathways in several countries, including Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Trinidad and Tobago. It helped facilitate the relocation of over a dozen individuals to Australia and Canada, with 120 in the visa processing stage with offers of employment.

Eradicating statelessness

The Colombian Government 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 birth registration of indigenous children in Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

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

C. Financial information

In October 2024, the Executive Committee approved the 2025 budget of \$815.2 million for the Americas. The 2025 budget decreased by \$19.4 million, or 2 per cent, compared to the 2024 budget.

The breakdown of requirements by impact area for 2025 is as follows: “protect: attaining favourable protection environments”, \$322.6 million; “solve: securing solutions”, \$267.5 million; “respond: realizing rights in safe environments”, \$132.0 million; and “empower: empowering communities and achieving gender equality”, \$93.1 million. As of 31 January 2025, 9 per cent of the region's 2025 financial requirements were funded.