

Update on UNHCR operations in the Americas

A. Situational analysis, including new developments

In the Americas region, geopolitical changes and human mobility dynamics may create opportunities for solutions, while also driving new and ongoing displacement. Fuelled by violence, persecution, insecurity, human rights violations and disasters, displacement affected nearly 21.8 million people (one in six globally), mostly from Colombia, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), as well as Northern Central America.

With respect to mixed movements, there were historic lows northbound and a 97 per cent drop in those entering the Darién, while reverse flows from Panama to Colombia rose to over 22,000 persons in 2025. Asylum claims continued to grow, while resettlement pathways remained limited.

Most displaced people remained within Latin America and the Caribbean, supported by solid legal frameworks and strong government and partner efforts. Eighty-five per cent of the 6.9 million displaced Venezuelans were hosted in neighbouring countries, while Costa Rica hosted most Nicaraguan refugees.

Socioeconomic inclusion efforts in Brazil, Colombia and Mexico served as regional good practices, while private sector engagement and development financing (including from the Inter-American Development Bank and World Bank) helped sustain asylum and integration programmes, yielding economic benefits in countries like Costa Rica and Peru.

Political will and responsibility-sharing remained strong, with States expanding protection and solutions through asylum, regularization, socioeconomic inclusion and naturalization. This work was guided by the Chile Plan of Action, the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions framework (known as MIRPS in Spanish) and the Quito Process. UNHCR’s Regional Strategic Plan for Climate Action 2024-2030 and engagement in the COP30 further supported protection responses and climate-resilient inclusion in national systems.

Alongside significant opportunities, the region faces new and ongoing protection challenges, as violence by organized crime and armed groups is driving new displacement. Meanwhile, increasing numbers of returnees require sustained reintegration support, which would help prevent further onward movements. Restrictive migration enforcement and hostile narratives, at times accompanied by discrimination, xenophobia and criminalization, and compounded by misinformation and hate speech, have heightened risks for displaced and stateless people.

To address these challenges, UNHCR is working with States and host communities through a comprehensive regional approach that promotes protection, stabilization and solutions across all stages of displacement, including by tackling root causes in countries of origin. Through its leadership and coordination role, UNHCR continues to mobilize more than 230 partners across the region, including through the Inter-Agency Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (known as R4V), co-led with the International Organization for Migration (IOM). However, more sustained political and financial support is needed from the international community to further advance this regional protection and solutions agenda.

South America

UNHCR is monitoring developments with respect to the Venezuela situation following recent events. The humanitarian needs of Venezuelans persist inside the country and in neighbouring countries, and enhanced support is needed for the reception, identification of needs and reintegration of Venezuelan returnees. No surge in movements has been seen, though

preparedness measures remain in place, including for returns. Spontaneous return movements have been documented.

Despite regional efforts through the R4V platform, more funding is needed for stabilization and integration efforts, and contingency planning in countries neighbouring Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

Several States, including Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Peru and others have expanded legal stay and temporary protection options for Venezuelans. Opportunities for regularization have also arisen in Aruba and Trinidad and Tobago. In addition, refugee recognition has been granted for Venezuelans in many other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.

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. This trend continued in 2025 with over 100,000 people forcibly displaced because of violence and Norte de Santander, Nariño and Cauca among the most affected departments. UNHCR continues supporting national and local authorities as part of inter-agency efforts, including to respond to and mitigate significant new displacement in the Catatumbo region.

Ecuador continues to host Colombians and Venezuelans seeking protection, while increasing violence is prompting more Ecuadorians to leave. A 2025 report by the national Ombudsman's office showed internal displacement in Ecuador as an increasingly common trend.

Central America and Mexico

Since early 2025, restrictive policies sharply reduced northbound mixed movements through Central America, bringing crossings through the Darién down to just over 3,000 from over 302,000 in 2024. Nevertheless, displacement and humanitarian needs continue to increase in the region.

Asylum demand in the region remained high in 2025. Mexico registered over 71,600 new claims, mainly from Cubans, Haitians, Hondurans and Venezuelans. Costa Rica continued hosting most Nicaraguans, and Guatemala and Honduras saw increases as people sought protection closer to home. UNHCR helped governments preserve asylum space by reducing backlogs, streamlining procedures, expanding digital case management and improving access to legal stay, including via the Belize amnesty programme. It also supported the reception and reintegration of returnees in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. Violence and insecurity continued to drive internal displacement, while UNHCR supported government-led legislative, data and prevention efforts. Some countries were simultaneously a country of origin, transit, destination and return such as Guatemala, which reported 573,000 internally displaced persons in 2025 alongside rising asylum claims and return movements.

Regional cooperation under the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions framework remained central, with the 2025 Annual Meeting in Costa Rica handing over the Pro Tempore Presidency to El Salvador and adopting the Heredia Declaration to strengthen asylum systems, promote socioeconomic inclusion and mobilize broader support.

The Caribbean

In the Caribbean, UNHCR prioritized support to States in strengthening identification and preventing refoulement, as well as in developing national asylum systems. Efforts to prevent statelessness and promote stabilization remained a priority.

Haiti is facing a rapidly worsening internal displacement crisis, with more than 1.4 million people displaced—a 50 per cent increase in one year—driven mainly by escalating violence and severe protection risks. UNHCR maintains a limited but strategic presence in the country, working with United Nations partners, the government, civil society and community-led organizations to strengthen protection across humanitarian and development responses, expand access to civil documentation and prevent statelessness, and promote coordinated, protection-sensitive returns.

Across the Americas, over 135,000 Haitians have received refugee status or other protection responses, while nearly 250,000 are asylum-seekers. Regionally, UNHCR continues

advocating application of the Cartagena refugee definition for Haitian asylum-seekers, including through simplified procedures.

Advancing the Global Compact on Refugees

In December 2025, engagement from the Americas region in the Global Refugee Forum Progress Review was strong, with numerous countries contributing to dialogues, reporting on pledge implementation and announcing new commitments. Colombia announced acceleration of the processing of refugee claims, Peru made a pledge on issuing refugee travel documents, and El Salvador announced support to the United Nations Country Team’s initiatives on inclusion and peacebuilding. The region’s engagement was highlighted at the Nansen Refugee Award ceremony, where Mexico’s Pablo Moreno, of the private company MABE, was recognized for leading impactful refugee employment and socioeconomic integration initiatives.

Extreme weather events, disasters and displacement

In 2025, UNHCR developed a Climate Action Strategy for the Americas (2025-2030) and at COP30 in Belém advanced regional and national initiatives to include refugees, internally displaced persons, and host communities across adaptation, loss and damage, and climate finance discussions.

In Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, El Salvador and Haiti, UNHCR supported government efforts to ensure protection and assistance for the displaced and others affected by extreme weather events and disasters. The Office also advocated the inclusion of refugees, internally displaced persons, and stateless persons in national adaptation and resilience plans.

B. Progress and challenges by impact area in 2025 and updated plans for 2026

Attaining favourable protection environments

Maintaining and strengthening asylum space remains a core priority for UNHCR. It continues supporting governments to reinforce State-led systems by simplifying procedures, strengthening legal frameworks and ensuring safeguards for the most vulnerable. Capacity investments have reduced costs, backlogs and abandonment risks and promoted more efficient, fair and adaptable processing. These efforts are complemented by initiatives expanding protection-oriented legal stay and regularization programmes that have provided legal stay and access to services and employment for over 4 million people across the region.

Multiple countries have advanced measures to enhance adjudication through differentiated processing under the Cartagena refugee definition and taken other innovative steps in this area. Mexico applies simplified procedures for displaced Haitians; Uruguay recognizes individuals using prima facie processing, while facilitating residence for asylum-seekers with family, labour or educational ties; Guatemala and Honduras have expanded access to asylum procedures through decentralization; Brazil issues over 90 per cent of decisions through prima facie procedures; and Costa Rica has reduced backlogs through simplified processing for Nicaraguans and verification of pending claims.

UNHCR also works with receiving States on asylum transfer agreements to promote lawful, protection-sensitive approaches and expand complementary legal stay pathways, in countries such as Ecuador and Honduras.

Regional solidarity and harmonization have been strengthened through the Second Technical Regional Meeting under the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions framework and the Quito Process, where asylum authorities advanced cooperation on digitalization, artificial intelligence, differentiated processing, admissibility, public defenders, civil society engagement and transfer arrangements.

Pursuing protection and solutions for internally displaced persons

UNHCR supports States in addressing internal displacement by strengthening legal frameworks, public policies and the generation of statistical data. Despite funding constraints, it maintains a strategic presence and prioritizes high-impact protection in at-risk communities.

In Colombia, new legislation on displacement linked to extreme weather events and disasters—grounded in a 2024 Constitutional Court ruling and the resolution of the advisory opinion of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights—positions the country as a regional leader in addressing climate-related displacement. In Guatemala, UNHCR supported the first official statistics on internal displacement through the 2023 national survey of living conditions (*Encuesta Nacional de Condiciones de Vida*). The statistics were released in September 2025, marking a major step toward data-based policymaking. In Honduras, UNHCR’s partnership with the Hague Institute for Innovation of Law delivered the first comprehensive assessment of justice and protection needs for internally displaced and at-risk populations, informing implementation of the national law on prevention, care and the protection of internally displaced persons and strengthening institutional readiness for a protection-centered response

Realizing rights in safe environments

Facilitating access to education

UNHCR works to expand the inclusion of forcibly displaced children and youth in national education systems at all levels. In 2025, UNHCR, UNESCO, the Institute for Social Studies of Latin America and the Caribbean (known as the *Instituto de Estudios Sociales de América Latina y el Caribe* (IESALC)) implemented a joint plan focused on training, promoting higher education within the Quito Process and strengthening the advocacy capacities of refugee students. Colombia, Ecuador and Mexico supported the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative Fund (known as the DAFI scholarship programme) for 150 students, while the regionalization of the Refugee Student Network was consolidated. Looking ahead to 2026, UNHCR will prioritize efforts to facilitate the recognition of educational qualifications for refugees and improve their access to tertiary education, while identifying and addressing barriers that limit access to schooling for refugee and asylum-seeker children.

Empowering communities and achieving gender equality

UNHCR maintained a strong community-based protection footprint in 2025 by supporting refugee, community, and women-led initiatives across the region. Joint work continued with the Regional Network of Local Refugee Organizations (GARLOS), with which a regional training programme was developed, certifying 27 refugee led-organizations. In addition, it supported their participation and positioning in regional forums, such as the Quito Process, the Chile Action Plan, and the civil society and refugee-led organizations’ mechanism of the Regional Comprehensive Framework for Protection and Solutions. Support for women-led organizations was strengthened within the framework of the fourth Regional Meeting of Women Leaders, held in September 2025 in Peru. Digital outreach campaigns reached more than 220,000 users across eight countries,¹ and partnerships with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Organization of American States (OAS) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) supported regional women leaders and their engagement in the Global Refugee Forum Progress Review.

In Colombia, the National Community Empowerment Programme strengthened community-based organizations in multiple cities and enabled women-led groups to secure funding. In Venezuela (the Bolivarian Republic of), UNHCR opened a second Protection and Community Development Centre, offering a one-stop hub for legal, educational and psychosocial services, rooted in local institutions.

In 2026, efforts will be guided by the updated Americas Localization Agenda, a common regional framework to advance meaningful participation, strengthen local and refugee-led leadership and partnerships, and promote more sustainable protection responses. It translates global localization commitments into clear regional priorities for country operations and moves beyond funding as the primary measure of success, embedding localization across leadership, decision-making, accountability and operational practice.

¹ These countries are Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Peru and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

Securing solutions

In 2025, UNHCR strengthened collaboration with development and financial institutions—including the Inter-American Development Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank—to help refugees and asylum-seekers access national services and formal employment, while development actors engaged actively in platforms such as the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions framework, the Quito Process and the Chile Plan of Action. Work with national statistics offices continued to improve the inclusion of people in need of international protection in official data.

UNHCR expanded private-sector partnerships to increase job opportunities for displaced people, including through relocation programmes. In Brazil, 155,000 Venezuelans were voluntarily relocated from Boa Vista to other cities by November 2025, allowing them to gain access to housing, employment, social benefits and education. In Mexico, more than 170,000 refugees secured formal employment with UNHCR's support. Approximately 53,000 of them have relocated from the south to the centre of the country since 2016, finding employment with over 650 companies, while over 600 refugees began naturalization processes in 2025.

UNHCR further supports inter-institutional efforts in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras to ensure safe, dignified return and sustainable reintegration. Together with partners, it provides documentation, child protection and support to enhance violence prevention for vulnerable returnees, while identifying individuals needing international protection at key reception centres and referring them to appropriate mechanisms.

Facilitating resettlement and complementary pathways for admission to third countries

In 2025, the Americas experienced a decline in resettlement places, despite sustained and growing needs across the region. Regional resettlement submissions fell to approximately 1,700, compared to more than 70,000 cases processed in 2024. In this context, UNHCR supported a responsive third-country solutions framework, strategically combining refugee resettlement, private sponsorship programmes, family reunification and complementary pathways to maximize protection outcomes within limited quotas.

Between January and December 2025, UNHCR submitted nearly 1,700 individuals for resettlement to Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Spain, prioritizing refugees facing heightened protection risks and vulnerabilities. At the same time, it worked with States to expand complementary pathways. In Brazil, the launch of a community sponsorship programme facilitated the admission and local integration of Afghan nationals, strengthening access to durable solutions beyond traditional resettlement channels.

Eradicating statelessness

UNHCR continues to advance the prevention and reduction of statelessness through legal reform, improved documentation systems and partnerships with governments, civil society and regional bodies. In 2025, its advocacy helped resolve long-standing statelessness cases, strengthen nationality laws, establish statelessness determination procedures and expand access to civil documentation, with a particular focus on ensuring children born to refugees and migrants can acquire nationality.

UNHCR supported Chile and Colombia in confirming nationality for children of displaced parents, informed new nationality legislation and a statelessness determination procedure in Peru, and advanced birth registration, civil registry reform and documentation recovery in Haiti. UNHCR works with the Latin American and Caribbean Council of Civil Registry, (CLARCIEV in Spanish) and supports collaboration among Brazil, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Peru and Uruguay—together with OAS—under the Global Alliance to End Statelessness, helping strengthen legal identity, reduce protection risks and expand solutions for stateless and at-risk populations.

C. Financial information

In 2025, the Executive Committee at its seventy-sixth plenary session, adopted a budget of \$715 million for 2026 for the Americas region. The 2026 budget represented a decrease by \$100 million, or 12 per cent, compared to the 2025 budget. The breakdown of requirements by impact area for 2026 is: attaining favourable protection environments (\$356 million); securing solutions (\$255 million); realizing rights in safe environments (\$56 million); and empowering communities and achieving gender equality (\$48 million). As of 31 January 2026, 10 per cent of the region's 2026 financial requirements were funded, taking into consideration the indicative allocation of unearmarked and softly earmarked contributions.
