UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

CLIMATE ACTION IN THE AMERICAS

October 2024

Guatemala. Residents of a community near the Guatemala-Mexico border attempt to extinguish a fire. © UNHCR/Nicolo Filippo Rosso

UNHCR IS REQUESTING $135 MILLION FOR CLIMATE ACTION INITIATIVES IN THE AMERICAS IN 2024

HIGHLIGHTS

- As of June 2024, around **86% of asylum-seekers, refugees, and stateless people** in the **Americas lived in countries** highly vulnerable to climate disruptions, where limited capacity hinders effective responses and mitigation efforts.

- Through partnerships with NGOs, academia, and communities, **UNHCR scaled up innovative projects** in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Panama to build resilience and improve the response capacity of displaced populations. It also supported climate-resilient infrastructure projects in refugee-hosting areas across Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, and Peru.

- As climate change intensifies, there is an **urgent need for stronger regional protection mechanisms**, enhanced resilience, and solutions for forcibly displaced people and host communities. This approach requires a coordinated and **collaborative regional effort**, based on cooperation, solidarity, and shared responsibility.

MANY PEOPLE UNDER UNHCR´S MANDATE IN THE REGION HAVE EITHER FLED FROM OR ARE LIVING IN CLIMATE-VULNERABLE COUNTRIES

Data Limitation: The comparison between the country's vulnerability to climate change (GAIN data, 2022) and population size (UNHCR mid-2024) are the most recent data points available for each respective sources at the time of analysis. As population dynamics and climate vulnerability can shift over time, this timeframe's discrepancy should be considered when interpreting the results.

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

The Americas 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 socio-economic opportunities, further exacerbated by climate change and natural disasters. In the region, disasters have triggered an annual average of more than 2.4 million internal displacements in the past decade, mainly due to weather-related hazards according to **IDMC´s 2024 Global Report on Internal Displacement**.

To operationalize its commitment to reduce and manage the effects of climate change on forcibly displaced and stateless people, UNHCR released a global **Strategic Plan for Climate Action 2024-2030**. **Ecuador** and **Honduras** are among 22 identified countries by UNHCR worldwide where data demonstrates the **impact of the climate crisis will only get worse by 2030**.

UNHCR´S RESPONSE

UNHCR is applying its technical expertise and extensive operational capacity to mitigate the impact of climate change on displaced people and to contribute to disaster response. UNHCR's operations in the Americas are supporting key initiatives in the context of UNHCR's Climate Action agenda in the following areas:

PROTECTION

UNHCR supports efforts to amend and adopt national legislation and policies that address the prevention of and response to internal displacement, with particular attention to those displaced due to the impacts of climate change-induced disasters. UNHCR also collaborates and advocates for the inclusion of forcibly displaced and stateless people in national adaptation and response plans to climate change.

UNHCR supports States in the region to develop protection-oriented measures derived from international refugee law, human rights law, as well as migration law which offer legal and policy options for admitting and protecting people displaced across borders in the context of disasters and the adverse effects of climate change and environmental degradation.

UNHCR collaborates with the Inter-American Human Rights System to establish regional standards for protecting the human rights of people in human mobility due to the effects of climate change. In February 2024, UNHCR participated in a regional hearing on 'Human Rights of People in Human Mobility Due to the Effects of Climate Change,' convened during the 189th session of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). Additionally, UNHCR has provided legal considerations to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in the framework of the Advisory Opinion on the Climate Emergency and Human Rights, requested by the Governments of Chile and Colombia.

*Under the leadership of the government of Chile, Colombia and UNHCR, the third round of consultations of the Cartagena+40 Process on refugees took place in Bogotá, Colombia, on 19 and 20 June. This was the **last consultation before the adoption of the Chile Plan of Action 2024-2034**, a document that will be a ten-year strategic plan with actions to be taken for the protection of forcibly displaced people in the region, in accordance with current challenges. Within this consultation, delegates from Latin American and Caribbean countries discussed regional responses to situations of forced displacement in the context of disasters and adverse effects of climate change. As a result of the discussions, the regional response of countries to those situations will have a cross-cutting and differentiated approach for groups and individuals in vulnerable situations, who will be the central focus of all actions.*

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

UNHCR and the Government of Rio Grande do Sul in Brazil signed in October an agreement for collaboration in emergencies. The memorandum provides technical support for drawing up contingency plans for risk and emergencies involving people in need of international protection and those affected by extreme weather events. UNHCR supports nature-based infrastructure in the region focusing on integration and sustainability. A key example is in Ecuador, the "El Palmar" Community Centre in Manta, constructed using locally sourced bamboo. This project promotes sustainable practices and community engagement by employing local bamboo construction specialists. Solar panels will be installed on the roof, providing energy independence, and ensuring operational continuity during emergencies. The installation includes a training programme for refugees, supported by our capacity-building initiatives and an inclusive-certified partner company. In response to energy shortages, UNHCR is also investing in solar panels for shelters and community centres nationwide, ensuring essential services, enhancing protection, and promoting eco-friendly solutions to climate change challenges.

HUMANITARIAN-DEVELOPMENT-NEXUS

UNHCR works with international financial institutions (IFI) and development actors to advance inclusion of refugees, asylum-seekers, IDPs and stateless people in development-supported climate action. UNHCR advocates for the inclusion of forcibly displaced people in social registries and other systems that are used for emergency response in case of natural disasters. UNHCR supported IFI investments in climate resilient infrastructure in refugee-hosting regions of Costa Rica, climate-resilient schools in refugee hosting regions of Ecuador and water systems in sections of Lima, Peru, hosting large numbers of Venezuelans.

INNOVATIVE APPROACHES

UNHCR supports a series of innovative projects, under the 2024 cohort of the Innovation Funds most notably in Colombia, Panama/Darien, Ecuador, and Brazil, geared notably towards the leadership and engagement of refugee, displaced and host communities, and to support refugee-led and refugee-centric solutions. Throughout 2023 and 2024, there have been eight Innovation projects under the Environment and Climate Action Innovation Fund (ECAIF) across five countries, supported by over $720,000.

COLOMBIA: RESTORING ECOSYSTEMS, REVIVING HOPE

*In the city of Turbo, in northern Colombia, the neighbourhoods of Pescador 1 and 2 have welcomed people displaced from surrounding areas that have experienced conflict. Since 2018, UNHCR has been supporting the local integration process in these neighbourhoods, where internally displaced people and people from other countries live together amid a mangrove reserve. Read more **here**.*

ECUADOR: STRATEGIC SUPPORT FOR A REFUGEE-LED GREEN ECONOMY

Most forcibly displaced people in Ecuador work in the informal sector and live in areas with few income-generating opportunities. The green economy could offer a solution, but opportunities and methods to successfully leverage it have not been fully explored or understood. This is an example of work with refugees, host communities and stakeholders to identify and assess how they could successfully develop green products and businesses not only for income, but to address key local challenges, such as food waste in wholesale markets, and associated negative environmental and human health impacts. Over 128 refugee entrepreneurs will directly benefit from capacity-building and other support, with further benefits derived from improved livelihoods, greener practices, and a method to follow with other refugees.

WORKING WITH GOVERNMENTS AND PARTNERS

- In **Argentina**, the Special Humanitarian Visa Programme is designed to support nationals and residents from Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean who have been displaced by socio-natural disasters. The programme offers temporary visas for up to three years, with the possibility of transitioning to permanent residency. Beneficiaries receive housing and integration support for one year through a **community sponsorship programme led by civil society organizations**. The initiative involves coordination with UNHCR, IOM and ICRC.

- In **Ecuador**, UNHCR collaborates with the University of Cuenca on a project aimed at helping displaced and Ecuadorian entrepreneurs **incorporate circular and green practices into their businesses**. Since 2023, over 40 entrepreneurs have been supported, implementing practices such as recycling materials to produce biodegradable packaging. Through its partner FUDELA, UNHCR also works with textile workshops to repurpose advertising banners and other sources into fashionable accessories. Community protection activities, including reforestation, urban gardens, and recycling collection through refugee and Ecuadorian associations across the country, continue to focus on ecosystem and environment protection.

- In **Haiti**, a country vulnerable to climate induced disasters, UNHCR has been working with the **Dominican Institute for Integral Development (IDDI)** and Haitian NGO **ODEPOL** to r**educe the impact of natural disasters in Leogane**, a town that was affected by massive floods in 2023. This is achieved through community engagement in risk identification, strategic planning for risk mitigation, and effective communication within the community.

- In **Honduras**, UNHCR is collaborating with the Secretariat of Social Development (SEDESOL) to support their work developing public policy to respond to people displaced by climate change and disasters. This work includes supporting nationwide consultations with the most affected communities. UNHCR is also organizing a forum with research institute CGIAR and SEDESOL to promote capacity-building for government officials on the risks of climate change induced displacement. UNHCR is also progressively moving towards reducing the carbon footprint of its fleet.

- In **Mexico**, together with the Ministry of Interior's National Population Council (CONAPO), UNHCR analyzes **internal displacement patterns that are prompted by environmental causes and climate change** in the country, including how these effects can exacerbate violence. UNHCR closely works with the law clinic of climate justice of the Iberoamerican University. Together with the university, UNHCR held a forum regarding Climate Change and its effect on people on the move, especially those in need of International Protection. UNHCR, legal allies and key counterparts from academia agreed on legal and advocacy actions to influence legislation. In addition, UNHCR is currently collaborating with partner OXFAM on a study focusing on internal displacement and climate change. UNHCR is promoting the use of renewable energies in shelters and the newly built Multi-Service Centre in Tapachula, which collects rainwater to save water and is built with high ceilings to allow ventilation and reduce the use of air conditioning.

- In **Peru**, UNHCR is part of the National Humanitarian Network, led by the Office of the Resident Coordinator (**OCHA**) and the **National Civil Defense Institute** for inter-institutional collaboration and commitment to the protection and assistance to communities affected by natural disasters, including refugees and asylum-seekers. UNHCR also leads the Protection **Working Group** and **collaborates with IFRC** in the leadership of the Shelter Working Group.

- In **Venezuela**, **UNHCR** developed a consultancy on risk maps to better identify the points with the greatest risk of disaster and the coincidence with the people under its mandate. UNHCR is also strengthening the National Risk Management System through training on cross-cutting issues at the national, regional, and local levels, complemented by infrastructure rehabilitations and provision of inputs that improve the response to the needs of the population. In coordination with the Ministry of Energy, UNHCR enhances the rehabilitation of photovoltaic systems to **promote access to energy in remote areas of the country**. Through partner **CISP**, UNHCR works to strengthen communities in emergency preparedness and response through the formation of emergency brigades, the preparation of community risk maps and contingency plans.

- In **Guatemala**, UNHCR collaborates with local partners ODHAG, PMH, LAMBDA, TN, and MSCS to pilot renewable energy projects in seven shelters across the country. This initiative aims to combat climate change by minimizing environmental impact. Additionally, UNHCR and Ak'Tenamit CSO are implementing a project to empower youth and communities by enhancing their understanding of climate change. The project also provides tools for emergency response, coordinating actions with local and national emergency response institutions.

TIMELY FUNDING

UNHCR in the Americas requires $135 million in 2024 to drive climate action initiatives that boost climate resilience, support environmental sustainability across our activities, and engage our partners in these efforts. This essential funding will enable UNHCR to tackle the increasing impacts of climate change on displaced communities by implementing crucial activities such as disaster preparedness, nature-based solutions, and programmes to strengthen community resilience. These efforts are made possible through the generous contributions of key donors who provide both unrestricted funding for UNHCR's global operations and targeted support for initiatives in the Americas.

In response to recent climate-related disasters, such as the wildfires in Chile and flooding in Brazil, UNHCR has successfully delivered over 100 Refugee Housing Units (RHUs) to affected areas, with the generous support of private donors from Brazil, Spain, Portugal, Sweden, the United States of America, and other countries. **Thanks to flexible funding**, UNHCR has also mobilized emergency relief items from its prepositioned stocks in Panama City, Bogotá, and Boa Vista, distributing approximately 13,000 shelter and core relief items to those in need. These essential supplies include sleeping mats, blankets, solar lamps, mosquito nets, jerrycans, and kitchen sets, ensuring that displaced individuals receive the critical support they need during these emergencies.

SPECIAL THANKS TO ALL OUR DONORS IN 2024 (AS OF 30 SEPTEMBER 2024)

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