UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

# CRITICAL NEEDS IN THE AMERICAS

**August 2023**

*Colombia: Floods in La Sierpe, municipality of Majagual in the department of Sucre.*
*©UNHCR/Catalina Betancur Sánchez*

## INTRODUCTION

The Americas faces five overlapping displacement situations including in and from Colombia, Venezuela, Central America and Mexico, Nicaragua, and Haiti. This is coupled with the challenges posed by large population movements, which have grown in scale and complexity over the years. Now, one in every five people with and for whom UNHCR works worldwide lives in the Americas. Over 7.24 million refugees and migrants from Venezuela have left their homes, of whom more than six million are in Latin America and the Caribbean. Other people with and for whom UNHCR works include over 7.4 million IDPs in Colombia (Underfunded Report: The implications of underfunding UNHCR's activities in 2023 | Global Focus), El Salvador, Honduras, and Mexico, and some 285,000 asylum-seekers and refugees from Nicaragua throughout the region, in addition to 636,000 asylum-seekers and refugees from El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala.

In 2022, the region experienced a significant escalation in mixed and onward movements, with almost 250,000 people crossing Darien between Colombia and Panama on route to the United States. This escalation has led to a rise in humanitarian needs and placed additional strain on already overstretched reception capacities, shelter networks and host communities.

Despite the growing needs, funding for UNHCR in the Americas has been insufficient with less funding secured in 2022 ($355 million) compared to 2021 ($436 million). With the current projections, UNHCR expects $277 million by the end of 2023 while the total needs amount to $827 million.

Some of the most pressing needs remain unmet due to inadequate funding. Lack of funding will significantly compromise access to documentation, healthcare, protection services and emergency shelter for the people with and for whom UNHCR works. While innovative solutions to ensure long-term resilience of forcibly displaced people are being pursued, cash assistance is critical in helping them meet essential needs and avoid relying on harmful coping mechanisms. Supporting governments in preventing forced displacement and delivering protection responses remains also critical.

This report looks at six operations where funding has fallen furthest behind the needs projected by the end of December 2023 and provides some examples of where support is urgently needed.

Total needs for the Americas: **$ 24.96 M**

| Country/Situation | Funding gap (US$) | Overview of needs and # of impacted people |
|---|---|---|
| **Brazil** | 1,785,000 | Establishing and maintenance of shelters to support accommodation assistance to 13,749 people with and for whom UNHCR works in coordination with authorities and civil society organizations. |
| | 250,000 | Assistance to 10,709 forcibly displaced people for self-reliance through vocational training including language courses, extra curricula classes, and diploma recognition. |
| | 1,000,000 | Core relief, domestic, household and hygiene items provided to 17,798 people with and for whom UNHCR works to meet their basic needs. |
| | 860,000 | Cash assistance for people at heightened risk (3,400). |
| **Costa Rica** | 4,949,000 | Assistance to strengthen the asylum system in Costa Rica to reduce the backlog of over 200,000 cases pending resolution and improve processing efficiency in registration, assessing asylum claims and document issuance. |
| | 1,691,000 | At least 4,000 vulnerable asylum-seekers and refugees need assistance to access the insurance scheme of the Costa Rican Social Security Fund. |
| | 3,314,000 | Cash assistance for basic needs (300 families a month on average); and emergency shelter (for 2,000 people in mixed movements and those who intend to stay in Costa Rica). |
| **El Salvador** | 817,000 | Cash assistance for people at heightened risk (2,401 forcibly displaced people). |
| | 500,000 | Field presence through 4 Support Spaces and 4 mobile units (19,500 individuals) across the country. |
| | 561,000 | Durable solutions programmes (745 forcibly displaced people): adult LGBTIQ+ education, My First Job for stigmatized youth, technical and vocational training, and seed capital for forcibly displaced entrepreneurs. |
| **Honduras** | 3,750,000 | Multisectoral assistance for 35,000 IDPs, returnees and people in mixed movements such as mental and physical health, shelter, orientation and legal assistance, documentation, and internal relocation. |
| | 2,450,000 | Community empowerment activities for 20,000 IDPs to reduce the risk of recruitment and other forms of violence against people and their communities. |
| | 1,200,000 | Technical support for the main government institutions to operationalize the recently approved Law for Prevention, Care and Protection of internally Displaced Persons in Honduras, the first legal framework protecting IDPs in the country. |
| **Southern Cone (Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay)** | 680,000 | Cash assistance for basic needs and livelihoods for 5,100 forcibly displaced people at heightened risk to prevent negative coping mechanisms. |
| | 100,000 | Non-food items, including core relief items for 2,800 forcibly displaced people to overcome the harsh climatic conditions of the Andean corridor |
| | 340,000 | At least 18,600 forcibly displaced and people at risk of statelessness lacking key information need to make well-informed decisions (access to protection, local integration, right to citizenship) and access legal representation. |
| **Trinidad and Tobago** | 240,000 | Primary and secondary education provided to 2,100 children under the Equal Place and DAWERE education programmes, jointly implemented by UNHCR and UNICEF. |
| | 240,000 | Access to specialized healthcare services for vulnerable individuals, including free sexual and reproductive health services (1,000 people). |
| | 240,000 | Assistance to gender-based violence survivors with shelter (40 survivors), case management (150 people), and psychosocial support (200 survivors and others in need). |

Critical funding need: **$ 3.89 M**

# Brazil

Brazil is observing an increasing number of arrivals of refugees and migrants from Venezuela in very vulnerable situations. This impacts the shelter response, making the existing emergency facilities in the state of Roraima operate close to their maximum capacity. Without additional funding, some 13,000 forcibly displaced people will not be able to enjoy adequate living conditions, which in turn guarantee their dignity, privacy, comfort, and personal and emotional security.

Although Brazil does not impose legal restrictions on refugees as to the right to work or engage in income-generating activities, refugees still experience practical challenges. These include language barriers, xenophobia and discrimination, difficulties in obtaining formal recognition of academic degrees, limited access to financial services, and lack of awareness among employers of legal provisions that make it possible to hire refugees. Without additional funding, over 10,000 refugees and other forcibly displaced people will not be able to get the support they need to rebuild their lives and achieve self-reliance in Brazil.

In an emergency, families often flee with little more than the clothes they are wearing and find themselves displaced without any personal belongings. In addition to food, they urgently need certain core relief items to survive, including for shelter (tents, plastic sheeting, blankets, sleeping mats), cooking (stoves, pots, fuel), and health and sanitation (buckets, soap, jerry cans, sanitary cloths). In this context, cash assistance is also a crucial component of protection interventions to assist the most vulnerable. It offers forcibly displaced people as much dignity, flexibility, and efficiency as possible to meet their needs and expand their capacities. More urgent support is needed to ensure that some 20,000 people can meet their basic needs.

*A family hang out together outside their shelter in Rondon 3 temporary shelter.*
*© UNHCR/Vincent Tremeau*

Critical funding need: **$ 9.54 M**

# Costa Rica

Costa Rica is a main destination country for people in need of international protection in Latin America, primarily from Nicaragua. Given the exponential increase of new asylum claims, Costa Rica has ranked among the top four countries globally for the number of individual asylum-seeker registrations received in 2021 and 2022.

The significant increase of new asylum claims in the recent years and the lack of an official dedicated database or tools to handle the refugee status determination process has hindered the efficiency of the current asylum system. Currently, there is a backlog of over **240,000 asylum-seekers** awaiting resolution of their cases. In the meantime, delays in the delivery of documentation continue to challenge access to employment. Furthermore, although Costa Rica offers free healthcare services for emergency care – including to minors, pregnant and lactating women– many asylum-seekers and refugees face severe or chronic illnesses that require regular healthcare attention. Without additional funding, over **4,000 most** vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers will not be able to access the medical assistance then need.

*Costa Rica. Nicaraguan asylum-seekers struggle to survive in remote areas.*
*©UNHCR/Nicolo Filippo Rosso*

Critical funding need: **$ 1.87 M**

# El Salvador

Amidst improvement in security, historical violence and systemic challenges mean displaced people in El Salvador still struggle to rebuild their lives. The effects of violence, forced displacement, and structural exclusion are particularly acute for women and girls, who face multiple forms of discrimination and gender-based violence. Similarly, LGBTIQ+ people are at heightened risk of violence and discrimination, which further limits their access to rights and opportunities.

Inadequate funding is severely compromising UNHCR's support to displaced people in **El Salvador**. Insufficient financial resources will lead to the premature closure of UNHCR's Support Spaces and mobile units, leaving approximately **19,500 people** without access to humanitarian assistance, support, and information. Moreover, the current provision of cash assistance is inadequate to meet the basic needs of **2,400 IDPs and returnees**, including shelter, hygiene, and food.

Lack of resources would affect 745 forcibly displaced people from accessing livelihoods programmes such as adult LGBTIQ+ education, employment opportunities, technical and vocational training, and seed capital for forcibly displaced entrepreneurs. Urgent additional resources are required for UNHCR to enhance opportunities and advance solutions to prevent further displacement in El Salvador.

*El Salvador. Indigenous woman from Nahuizalco participates in forum to discuss on challenges of the digital gap.*
*© UNHCR/Enrique Pocasangre*

Critical funding need: **$ 7.40 M**

# Honduras

Internal displacement in Honduras is closely linked to violence at the hands of criminal groups and gangs. Preliminary evidence indicates that the adverse effects of climate change and disasters are also increasingly influencing the drivers and dynamics of displacement.

UNHCR provides mental and physical health, shelter, internal relocation, legal orientation, and community-based protection. Without additional funding, over **55,000 IDPs**, returnees and people in mixed movements will be exposed to high risks and vulnerability due to the generalized violence context of the country. Furthermore, support, advocacy and technical support to governments institutions is essential to ensure the implementation of the newly approved Law for the Prevention, Care and Protection of Internally Displacement Persons in Honduras for the assistance of IDPs.

*A young primary student stands with a bright smile in a multipurpose room adorned with a diverse array of psycho-pedagogical materials donated by UNHCR. © UNHCR/Santiago Escobar-Jarami*

Critical funding need: **$ 1.12 M**

# Southern Cone

The Southern Cone countries feature hosting (Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay) and transit countries (Bolivia) that receive mixed population flows daily. Lack of access to protection systems exacerbate vulnerability and hence the need for humanitarian assistance and effective access to basic services for forcibly displaced people. Housing, both temporary and permanent, remains one of the main challenges, and many people end up homeless and occupying public spaces.

In the Southern Cone, UNHCR uses cash grants as a cost-effective assistance modality to ensure that forcibly displaced people can access shelter, food, medical care, and seed capital. This modality minimizes resorting to negative coping strategies and promotes participation in local economies. Without adequate funding, UNHCR will not be able to provide cash assistance to 5,100 forcibly displaced people, putting at risk the fulfillment of their basic needs with choice and dignity.

Due to the harsh climatic conditions in the Andean Corridor, UNHCR provides forcibly displaced people with core relief items such as warm clothes and blankets, hygiene items, medicines, and first aid kits. Inadequate funding will result in 2,800 forcibly displaced people in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay not receiving full core-relief items to address their immediate and basic needs. UNHCR also needs funds to address the identification of people on the move, provide protection services and legal counselling to more than 18,000 forcibly displaced and people at risk of statelessness.

*A group of Venezuelan refugee families walk along the highway that runs parallel to the border with Chile on December 3, 2021, in the southern region of Tacna, Peru. © UNHCR/Raul Garcia Pereira*

Critical funding need: **$ 720,000**

# Trinidad and Tobago

Trinidad and Tobago has over 26,000 asylum-seekers and refugees from 41 countries. Of these, 25 per cent are children, most of them of primary-school age. The national legal framework does not allow non-nationals – including asylum-seekers and refugees - to benefit from the public education system, limiting their access to a fundamental human right. Also in the public system, non-nationals can only receive primary and emergency health care, but not specialized attention, treatments, and medicines. Language barriers and a lack of awareness pose additional obstacles to accessing these and other life-saving services.

UNHCR and partners receive regular requests for humanitarian assistance and legal support, particularly from gender-based violence survivors, who often need shelter and urgent mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) related to traumatic experiences. UNHCR works with the Government and other organizations to provide the needed support, assistance, and protection to forcibly displaced people in the country, registering some 200 asylum-seekers per month, most of them from Venezuela (86 per cent).

If UNHCR does not secure at least $480,000 in additional funding, over 2,100 children will be left with no primary and secondary education and more than 1,000 vulnerable individuals will not receive the needed medical attention. Without additional funding, over 400 gender-based violence survivors will not receive assistance with shelter, case management and psychosocial support.

*Trinidad and Tobago. A Warao girl during classes facilitated by the UNHCR/UNICEF Equal Place programme, which allows refugee and migrant children the chance to continue schooling despite the lack of access to the national education system. © UNHCR/ Carla Bridglal*

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