UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

AMERICAS FACTSHEET

October 2023

Panama. Record number of refugees and migrants cross the Darien jungle. © UNHCR/ Ilaria Rapido

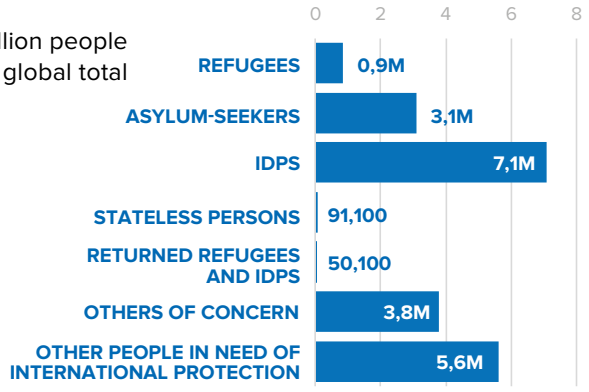
The Americas faces several **overlapping displacement situations** including in and from Colombia, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Northern Central America, Nicaragua, Mexico, and Haiti, which have **grown in scale and complexity** over the years.

To address forced displacement and mixed movements in the Americas, UNHCR is **reinforcing its protection response and coordination** in key border areas and hot spots and supporting governments to establish effective reception and processing systems.

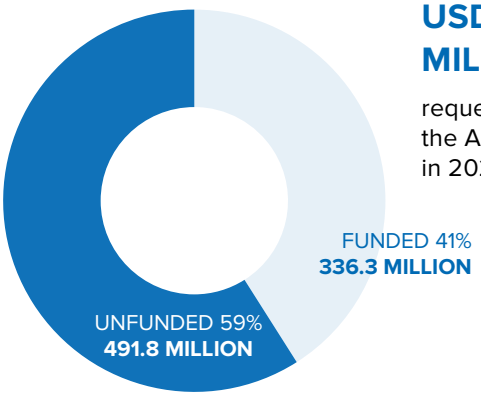
UNHCR prioritizes **protection interventions, humanitarian aid, and long-term solutions**, including local integration. A collaborative, hemispheric approach is pursued within the 2022 **Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection.**

POPULATION PROJECTIONS IN THE AMERICAS (AS PER GLOBAL APPEAL 2023)

20.6 million people
| 18% of global total



FUNDING (AS OF 4 OCTOBER 2023)



USD 827.2 MILLION

requested for the Americas in 2023

UNHCR PRESENCE

STAFF

1,941 NATIONAL STAFF
507 INTERNATIONAL STAFF
58,1% WOMEN, **38,1%** MEN, AND **3,8%** OTHER

OFFICES

1 REGIONAL BUREAU IN PANAMA
3 MULTI-COUNTRY OFFICES IN ARGENTINA, PANAMA, AND U.S.
11 COUNTRY OFFICES
1 COUNTRY MISSION IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
7 NATIONAL OFFICES
23 FIELD OFFICES
10 SUB OFFICES
53 FIELD UNITS

OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

By mid-2023, the Americas hosted 22.1 million people protected/assisted by UNHCR, surpassing the initial projections of 20.6 million in the 2023 Global Appeal. The magnitude and complexity of forced displacement has grown in the Americas over the last decade, as the root causes remain unaddressed and are aggravated by organized crime, violence and insecurity, lingering results of the pandemic and climate events. UNHCR promotes comprehensive and coordinated regional responses, strengthening engagement with governments and other stakeholders to open new protection spaces and offer additional lawful pathways in line with the aims of the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection, and other regional initiatives.

UNHCR PRESENCE IN THE AMERICAS 2023 (Information as of October 2023)

MIXED MOVEMENTS

As the root causes of displacement persist and intensify, the number of people engaged in mixed movements across the Americas reached unprecedented levels in 2023 and is likely to increase. According to the National Migration Service in Panama, over 400,000 people had crossed the Darien in 2023 by 28 September, representing an almost threefold increase compared to the same period in 2022. Venezuelans remain the primary nationality crossing (249,000 people) followed by Ecuadorians (47,000) and Haitians (37,000).

Crossing the jungle is dire; some among those reaching the government-run reception centres in Panama continue to report physical, psychological, or sexual violence and/or abuse during their journeys. The latest monitoring activities conducted with people on the move in the Darien reveals that at least 65 per cent of respondents cited violence and insecurity as reasons for leaving their country of origin.

Reception systems in countries across the region, already strained by years of record-high mixed movements, are overwhelmed as they struggle to address heightened vulnerabilities. UNHCR and partners have redoubled efforts to address protection risks and meet people's needs at key border and other reception locations. Given increasing numbers of individuals – including women and LGBTIQ+ people – who are repeatedly victimized (trafficked, assaulted, robbed, deliberately misinformed) and who have displaced multiple times, UNHCR has stepped up its capacity to provide information, temporary shelter, psychosocial support, legal counselling, and other protection services.

UNHCR has invested in creating and amplifying trusted, reliable information platforms such **El Jaguar** and **Confía en el Tucán** that can protect people from being misled. Core to its mandate, UNHCR has intensified efforts to support the implementation of fair and efficient asylum procedures and other protection-oriented legal stay arrangements, as well as looking for longer-term solutions for the displaced people.

COORDINATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

- Prioritisation of life-saving assistance goes hand in hand with efforts to find long-term solutions by fostering cooperation with a wide array of actors, such as local **authorities** and the **private sector**, including to provide livelihood opportunities and promote inclusion into national systems.

- UNHCR also partners with the people it serves, the public sector, NGOs and civil society organizations in their operations across the Americas, contributing to the whole-of-society approach in the refugee response, and in line with the **UN Global Compact on Refugees**.

- UNHCR co-leads with IOM the regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (**R4V**), coordinating amongst 228 organizations who are implementing the **2023-2024 Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP)** across 17 countries, based on findings of the **Regional Refugee and Migrant Needs Analysis (RMNA)**, which, for 2023, highlighted ongoing humanitarian and integration needs of about 4.4 million (70 per cent) of the 6.5 million refugees and migrants from Venezuela in the region, in addition to the humanitarian needs of some 85 per cent of Venezuelans engaging in transit movements, of 86 per cent of other nationals in transit, as well as 53 per cent of affected host community members. Across the region, integration, protection and food security needs were identified as the top priority needs. Both agencies also provide technical support to the regional intergovernmental coordination forum, **Quito Process** -an initiative including several Latin American countries that seeks to harmonize domestic policies and responses to displacement in receiving countries.

- In **Central America and Mexico**, UNHCR, jointly with the **Organization of American States (OAS)** as the Technical Secretariat, supports the **Regional Comprehensive Protection and Solutions Framework (MIRPS)**, through the implementation of the **MIRPS National Action Plans** and the Government of Panama's Regional Action Plan as **2023 Pro-Tempore Presidency**. In line with the **U.S. Chair Strategy** for the MIRPS Support Platform, a MIRPS Inventory of Good Practices on Integration has been developed, and has served as a basis for regional exchanges between MIRPS States and with Support Platform members.

- UNHCR continues to strengthen **strategic partnerships** with key development actors across the Americas region including the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), International Finance Corporation (IFC) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Relationships with USAID, the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI) and Development Bank of Latin America (CAF) are more preliminary, but progressing. These efforts have led to scaled-up investments in key hosting countries such as Colombia, Costa Rica and Ecuador through the Global Concessional Financing Facility (GCFF), as well as the design of relevant data and evidence-generating activities that inform policy and programming for the populations with and for whom UNHCR works. At the regional level, the World Bank, IDB, USAID and IMF have joined UNHCR and IOM to support implementation of the Los Angeles Declaration pledges and to participate in the MIRPS and Friends of Quito processes.

- Over 35,000 refugees and asylum seekers from cities in southern **Mexico**, have been successfully relocated to 11 cities in the center and north of the country where there is a greater demand for workers. Thorough the **Local Integration Programme,** UNHCR facilitated efficient matching between asylum-seekers' profiles and the workforce needs of more than 500 private sector companies. In Peru PADF, CONFIEP, CEDRO and UNHCR launched the "Inclusive Companies" seal, whose objective is to promote labour inclusion of people in vulnerable situations, among them refugees and migrants. Fifteen companies have been awarded the certification. In 2023, the cities of Medellin and Pereira (Colombia) and San Cristobal (Venezuela) joined the UNHCR's Cities of Solidarity initiative aimed to foster protection and integration of refugees. Furthermore, Montevideo (Uruguay) renewed its agreement.

- From 1 January to 16 October, UNHCR in the Americas referred a total of 13,027 individuals to various resettlement countries, representing an increase of 130 per cent from the same period of 2022 (5,654 submissions). In terms of departures, from 1 January to 16 October, the region recorded the highest figures of individuals who departed to resettlement countries: 4,937, an increase of 103 per cent in comparison with previous year (2,426 departures recorded).

- In June 2023, the United States of America and partner countries announced the initial six-month phase of the **Safe Mobility** initiative which, with UNHCR and IOM support, is facilitating access to protection and other lawful pathways to the US as well as to Spain and Canada via the MovilidadSegura.org website and Safe Mobility Offices (SMOs). The Safe Mobility initiative is currently operational in Colombia, Costa Rica, and Guatemala.

- While scaling-up efforts to prevent **internal displacement** and working with communities of origin and host communities, UNHCR continues to prioritize its work to strengthen national responses, including to help ensure that internally displaced persons can access public services, legal support, and humanitarian assistance. UNHCR advocates for and supports the adoption of relevant legal frameworks on internal displacement and has strengthened partnerships for collecting and analysing reliable data on issues of internal displacement.

- According to the Haiti Humanitarian Needs Overview released on 17 March, some 5.2 million people are in need of assistance, compared to 4.9 million in 2022. With gang violence affecting all aspects of society, UNHCR has taken steps to expand its protection response which has been primarily focused on birth registration, to launch localized community-based support activities to help prevent youth recruitment by gangs. UNHCR is responding to the needs of Haitian asylum-seekers and refugees throughout the Americas, and advocating for increased protection measures for those who are already hosted in the region.

- UNHCR aims to enhance protection-sensitive responses by harnessing the collective capacities of a wide variety of stakeholders. The 40th commemoration of the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees and the 2023 Global Refugee Forum will provide a unique opportunity to guide and promote further national and regional initiatives on law, policies, and innovative solutions.

- UNHCR in the Americas works in Spanish, Portuguese, French, English and Dutch with over 269 partnership agreements, including local and international NGOs, governments, community-based led organizations, and other partners. **Seventy-two per cent of partner agreements in the Americas are with local and refugee or IDP-led NGOs, and UNHCR remains committed to further promote localization efforts and the meaningful participation of the populations** with and for whom UNHCR works.

STRATEGY

PROTECT

ASSERT THE CENTRALITY OF PROTECTION IN RESPONSE TO DISPLACEMENT

- UNHCR works with States to strengthen **asylum capacities and digitalize its systems** and promote protection-sensitive regular stay arrangements and documentation through training and capacity-building of government officials.
- Despite the current challenges, States have implemented **innovative** approached, differentiated refugee status determination procedures, continued to apply the regional refugee definition, and **granted refugee status on "group basis" or "prima facie" recognition for some nationalities**. Several countries in the Americas have also implemented regularization mechanisms or legal stay arrangements, granted humanitarian visas, and temporary protection arrangements for some nationalities.
- UNHCR supports States in terms of assistance to persons with specific needs, **registration**, and links with the national protection services, which also help UNHCR identify and assist the most vulnerable.
- Investing in **protection monitoring**, evidence-based programming and analysis is at the core of regional strategies oriented by age, gender, and diversity considerations, ensuring protection from exploitation and abuse.
- Through a strengthened network of **support spaces**, the provision of information and orientation, identification, and secure reference, helps to prevent displacement.

EMPOWER

EMPOWER COMMUNITIES AND ACHIEVE GENDER EQUALITY

- To prevent displacement, mitigate protection risks and build on the resilience of affected communities, operations prioritize **community-centred interventions,** including supporting volunteer networks in targeted communities. UNHCR promotes communication and integration, identification, and referral of cases with specific needs, as well as enhanced access to information and complaint mechanisms.
- UNHCR boosts feedback and complaint mechanisms across the region, allowing for **constant communication with the affected population** and strengthening two-way communication, to ensure the response adapts to their needs, particularly in increasingly risky environments, such as borders.

RESPOND

ENSURE OPERATIONAL RESPONSE CAPACITIES AND LIFE-SAVING AID FOR THE MOST VULNERABLE DURING EMERGENCIES

- Across the region, UNHCR responds to the **immediate needs** of increasing numbers of people that UNHCR serves. Because of the prolonged COVID-19 pandemic, rising poverty and inequality triggered unprecedented levels of need for **basic relief items, emergency shelter, food, safe water, and sanitation supplies.**
- **Cash assistance** has proven the preferred option for refugees and other people forced to flee to meet basic needs such as food, rent or medicines.
- As severe **climate events** further aggravate the situation of displaced populations and communities at risk of displacement, UNHCR responds with **emergency relief items** to support authorities' response to these situations.

SOLVE

INCLUDE PERSONS WE SERVE AND WORK WITH IN NATIONAL/LOCAL SERVICES WITH DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT

- Through a whole-of-society approach, UNHCR fosters **partnerships** with governments, international financial institutions, and the private sector to **include** refugees and asylum-seekers in national systems and the formal labour market.
- UNHCR actively advocates for enhanced national efforts to provide **regular stay** (such as temporary or permanent schemes through the support to the granting of temporary protection and regularization processes, professional or work-related permits, education programmes) allowing for full enjoyment of rights and integration.

CLIMATE ACTION

Countries in the Americas continue to be prone to severe effects of climate change and natural hazards, aggravating the situation of displaced populations and communities at risk of displacement, exacerbating their vulnerability, and accelerating mobility.

UNHCR is advancing with the implementation of the UNHCR Strategic Framework for Climate Action, as well as follow-up to the UN Climate Conferences and frameworks and its implementation in the Americas.

Guided by its Strategic Framework for Climate Action and related guidance on Climate Action, UNHCR will increase its effort to mitigate the impact of Climate Change on forcibly displaced and stateless persons and to engage more predictably in preparing and responding to climate-related disasters, as well as conducting evidence-based advocacy. UNHCR will continue to work with Governments and partners to strengthen national legislation, policies and protection systems related to climate induced displacement. Through innovation, partnerships and engagement with organizations and communities, UNHCR will upscale its effort to mitigate climate risks through enhancing the response capacities and resilience of displaced populations and host communities, and ensure the recognition and inclusion of displaced people, their needs and contributions in sustainable development, climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction policy, plans and programmes.

INNOVATION

UNHCR's commitment to innovation aims to better serve those forced to flee in the rapidly evolving context of the Americas. The region has made significant innovation efforts, hosting 25 projects since 2018. UNHCR is making a difference through various Innovation Programmes:

- *The Digital Innovation Programme aims at developing solutions and provide safe access to digital technologies to communities and has supported three projects in the Americas in 2022–2023 around indigenous digital inclusion, job matching platforms, and community-led connectivity services.*
- *The Environment and Climate Action Innovation Programme is supporting five projects in the Americas, focusing on addressing climate and environmental challenges to improve sustainability and resilience for displaced communities.*
- *The six projects in the region supported through Data Innovation Programme encourage responsible data approaches to gain insights into UNHCR's challenges and connect services with refugees.*
- *The Innovation Learning Programme, through the Innovation Fellowship, builds innovation skills among UNHCR's workforce and partner organizations. Every year colleagues from the Americas account for 1/3 of the total cohort.*

Nicky and her baby, Ainara, at the Community Center in the community of Alfonso Lacayo, San Pedro Sula. © UNHCR/Santiago Escobar-Jarami

TIMELY FUNDING

As of 4 October, UNHCR in the Americas is 41% funded, having required in 2023 **$827.4 million** to respond to the needs of millions of refugees and others seeking safety and dignified lives. **Timely funding** is urgent to **ensure the continuity of life-saving activities** in the region: unrestricted **cash assistance**; distribution of **core and hygiene items**; provision of **emergency shelter** in border areas and for those facing evictions, and support to States for **regularisation** and documentation.

Faced with a record number in the region, **UNHCR and its partners are confronting major challenges** in their capacity to respond due to insufficient funding for their operations. The "**Critical Needs in the Americas**" report recently released highlights the most underfunded operations, with persistent needs in Brazil, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, the Southern Cone and Trinidad and Tobago, among others.

UNHCR's humanitarian and longer-term response in the Americas is made possible thanks to the **generous support** of major donors who have contributed unrestricted funding to UNHCR's global operations, and to donors who have generously contributed directly to UNHCR operations in the Americas.

Thanks to all our donors in 2023 (as of 4 October 2023)

Belgium | Canada | Denmark | European Union | France | Germany | Ireland | Japan | Luxembourg | Norway | Netherlands | Republic of Korea| Spain | Sweden | Switzerland | United Kingdom | United States of America |Banco de Desarrollo de América Latina y el Caribe (CAF) | CERF | UN Children Fund | UN Joint Programmes | UN Peacebuilding Fund | UN Programme on HIV/AIDS | UNESCO |

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