

The Americas

WORKING ENVIRONMENT AND KEY STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Providing life-saving assistance

Across the region, UNHCR will respond to the immediate needs of increasing numbers of people of concern impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, UNHCR provided assistance to meet basic needs in border areas and to the most vulnerable in urban centres, however, it is likely that the number of those in dire need will grow exponentially in the first half of 2021 in the Americas, requiring large-scale assistance in terms of food, safe water, sanitation supplies, basic relief items and emergency shelter. Cash assistance will be even more important to ensure basic needs, such as food, rent and medicines, are met in countries receiving Venezuelans, including Colombia or Brazil; as well as in those

countries hosting people fleeing insecurity in Central America and Nicaragua, such as Mexico and Costa Rica, respectively.

Ensuring access to protection

In a context of restrictions on access to territory and overstretched asylum systems, efforts to strengthen asylum capacities and protection-sensitive migration management are urgent. Through case management, registration and referral mechanisms, UNHCR will focus on identifying and assisting the most vulnerable. Investing in protection monitoring and evidence-based programming and analysis will be at the core of regional strategies, guided also by age, gender and diversity considerations, as well as the need to ensure protection from exploitation and abuse.

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Consequences of COVID-19 on planning, preparedness and response

In 2021, the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 is expected to have negative consequences for the protection environment for displaced people in the region. There may be challenges to securing the inclusion of people of concern in national welfare systems, along with tightened border controls, reduced access to territory and regular stay (including asylum), and public fatigue and xenophobia. Temporary suspensions of or delays in refugee status determination will further strain national asylum systems. The post-pandemic socioeconomic crisis will also disproportionately impact workers in the informal sector and the self-employed, affecting the majority of people of concern to UNHCR. In this demanding environment, UNHCR will focus on the provision of life-saving assistance and protection in the short term, as well as engaging a range of stakeholders on longer-term solutions to address the actual and potential impacts of COVID-19. Health, water and sanitation, shelter, livelihoods and life-saving multipurpose cash assistance will need to be significantly reinforced, both in terms of financial and human resources.

A group of Venezuelans living in Baños de Agua Santa, Ecuador, have created a soap brand called Kuya (meaning “big tree” in the Kichwa indigenous language) with support from UNHCR.

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MAJOR SITUATIONS AND OPERATIONS IN THE AMERICAS IN 2021



BOLIVARIAN REPUBLIC OF VENEZUELA

Population outflows from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela will resume once COVID-19-related restrictions are eased, although irregular movements are expected to continue while borders remain closed. UNHCR activities in border areas—including monitoring, identification and referral of the most vulnerable, and basic assistance and counselling—will acquire greater urgency. Inside the country, humanitarian needs exacerbated by the pandemic will trigger further displacement. Intentions expressed by populations returning to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela in 2020 suggest that many who returned during the pandemic plan to leave the country again in 2021. UNHCR will step up assistance to returnees and local communities in need, while strengthening protection and shelter/energy/non-food items cluster leadership and delivery. UNHCR will co-lead the inter-agency response together with IOM, implementing the Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan across 17 countries, and will provide technical support to governmental coordination in the Quito Process—an initiative of several Latin American countries that seeks to harmonize domestic policies in receiving countries.

NORTH OF CENTRAL AMERICA

Political fragility compounded by the impact of COVID-19 will likely result in additional displacement in and from the north of Central America. Violence and persecution by criminal gangs in El Salvador and Honduras, and increased border restrictions to the north will result in more internal displacement, with numbers projected at around 403,000 people. Border restrictions implemented during the COVID-19 crisis have led people to rely on even more dangerous routes to seek safety. UNHCR will seek to strengthen its capacity along borders to mitigate protection risks, as well as to increase resettlement capacity to manage up to 5,000 cases. Support for the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework for the Americas (MIRPS) and the implementation of national plans will be key, as will work with the Organization of American States to expand the MIRPS support platform.

COLOMBIA

New internal displacement is expected to continue in areas controlled or disputed by irregular armed groups, in line with pre-COVID-19 trends of approximately 100,000 people annually. As local and national authorities cope with the aftermath of COVID-19, coordinated efforts will be required to ensure monitoring, emergency response, community empowerment and solutions, including through land legalization and public policies for IDP integration, aligned with implementation of the peace agreement. UNHCR will co-lead the protection cluster with the Norwegian Refugee Council and coordinate with respective national and local authorities and institutions.

NICARAGUA

As many as 45,000 new arrivals from Nicaragua are projected to arrive in Costa Rica and Panama in 2021. In the context of the 2021 presidential elections in Nicaragua, a political crisis could lead to widespread social turmoil, including violence and displacement. As one of the poorest countries in the region, Nicaragua is also among the most severely impacted by COVID-19. Capacity within Costa Rica, where almost 100,000 Nicaraguans have already sought refuge, is stretched.

In close collaboration with governments in receiving countries, UNHCR will work to improve asylum space in 2021, including registration, documentation and access to basic services. UNHCR will continue to support social protection programmes through cash assistance in the areas of food security, livelihoods and shelter, as well as the social security programme in Costa Rica to improve access for asylum-seekers.

222,000
REFUGEES FROM THE BOLIVARIAN REPUBLIC OF VENEZUELA

1.1 million
ASYLUM-SEEKERS

4.3 million
VENEZUELAN DISPLACED ABROAD

63%
OF DISPLACED VENEZUELAN ARE WOMEN AND CHILDREN



103,000
REFUGEES FROM THE NORTH OF CENTRAL AMERICA

569,000
ASYLUM-SEEKERS

403,000
IDPs

104,000
OTHERS OF CONCERN



70,100
REFUGEES FROM COLOMBIA

82,500
COLOMBIANS IN REFUGEE-LIKE SITUATIONS

47,500
ASYLUM-SEEKERS

8.2 million
IDPs

425,000
OTHERS OF CONCERN



13,400
REFUGEES FROM NICARAGUA

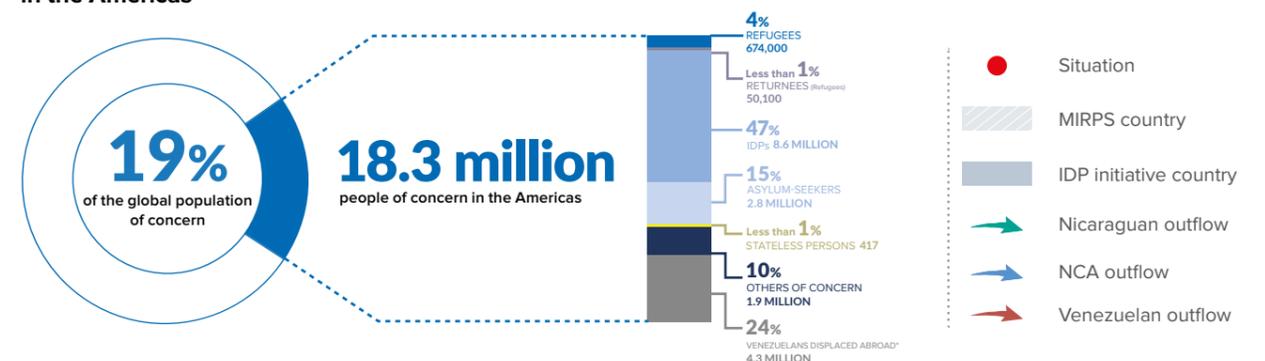
129,000
ASYLUM-SEEKERS

3,100
OTHERS OF CONCERN

As restrictions to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic start to be lifted, the inclusion of refugees and displaced populations in national post-pandemic recovery plans and enhanced support from the international community for the displaced and their host countries and communities will be crucial.



2021 PLANNING FIGURES FOR PEOPLE OF CONCERN in the Americas



* Venezuelans displaced abroad refers to persons of Venezuelan origin who are likely to be in need of international protection under the criteria contained in the Cartagena Declaration, but who have not applied for asylum in the country in which they are present. Regardless of status, Venezuelans displaced abroad require protection against forced returns, and access to basic services.

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In a context of increasing irregular cross-border movements due to border restrictions and health containment measures, the provision of information and a network of support spaces will remain critical in preventing exploitation and abuse.

Pursuing durable solutions

Pending the availability of durable solutions, through a whole-of-society approach, UNHCR will build partnerships in the Americas to mobilize support for the inclusion of refugees in national welfare systems and economic and development efforts.

Building upon the experience of the “Cities of solidarity” initiative, cooperation with local authorities and communities will be central to achieving inclusive public policies for displaced people, ensuring respect for human rights during displacement, and supporting eventual local integration and peaceful coexistence.

Strengthened cooperation with development actors (including international financial institutions) and engagement with the private sector will be essential for viable durable solutions over the longer term.

Advocacy for complementary pathways and resettlement will be needed for many lacking prospects for a safe future, especially women and girls at heightened risk.

Fostering community engagement, participation and mobilization and enhancing solidarity and peaceful coexistence

To prevent displacement, mitigate protection risks and build the resilience of affected communities, UNHCR will prioritize community-centred interventions in the region, including support to community leaders and self-management structures, community mechanisms for identification and referral of persons at heightened risk, as well as enhanced access to information and complaint mechanisms.

Through area-based approaches, UNHCR will strengthen national services to respond to the needs of displaced populations and host communities alike. Two-way communication with communities will be instrumental in boosting their engagement and participation, particularly in the context of responses to increasing risks, notably at borders.



Community innovates for inclusion in Ecuador

UNHCR established a working group of Venezuelans and members of the host community in Bañon de Agua Santa, Ecuador, to combat discrimination against people of concern and promote inclusive social spaces. Supported by UNHCR’s Innovation Fund, this partnership led to a photo exhibition, a community mural, and an effective campaign in response to a rise in xenophobia. In the process, UNHCR harnessed human-centred design and innovation methodologies such as brainstorming, community participation, and analytical techniques. This is the first time in the region that UNHCR has researched, co-designed and implemented a project entirely with refugees, while producing an in-depth toolkit. In 2021, the next stage of the project involves collaborative sessions to share knowledge and tools based on the initiative, to help foster promising community-based protection practices nationally.



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FINANCIAL INFORMATION

Implications of underfunding

Lack of funds in 2020 limited the number of people assisted by UNHCR across the region, a situation compounded by the constraints and demands of the COVID-19 pandemic. With many people of concern losing their livelihoods, the risk of being evicted, of being infected, or of being discriminated against escalated for the displaced and others on the move. Amidst border closures and movement restrictions, only those in extreme need received cash or in-kind assistance, and limited numbers of people were sheltered in fewer operating collective sites.

Despite efforts to increase remote communication and assistance mechanisms, many people remained stranded in areas with no access to assistance and counselling, resorting to negative coping mechanisms such as the sale of sex and child labour. Help lines and information services proved insufficient in many countries, especially Costa Rica. In a desperate move, thousands of Venezuelans, as well as some Nicaraguans, attempted to return to their country, facing risks en route and possible hardships and repercussions upon return. As health needs grew across the region, support for long-term opportunities and solutions, such as relocation schemes and employment or self-employment programmes, was reduced or deprioritized.

For the first half of 2021, UNHCR will need to secure a minimum amount of funds to ensure continuity in life-saving activities in the region, including the delivery of hygiene items; emergency shelter in border areas and for those facing eviction; and cash assistance for people of concern facing challenges in a contracted economy.

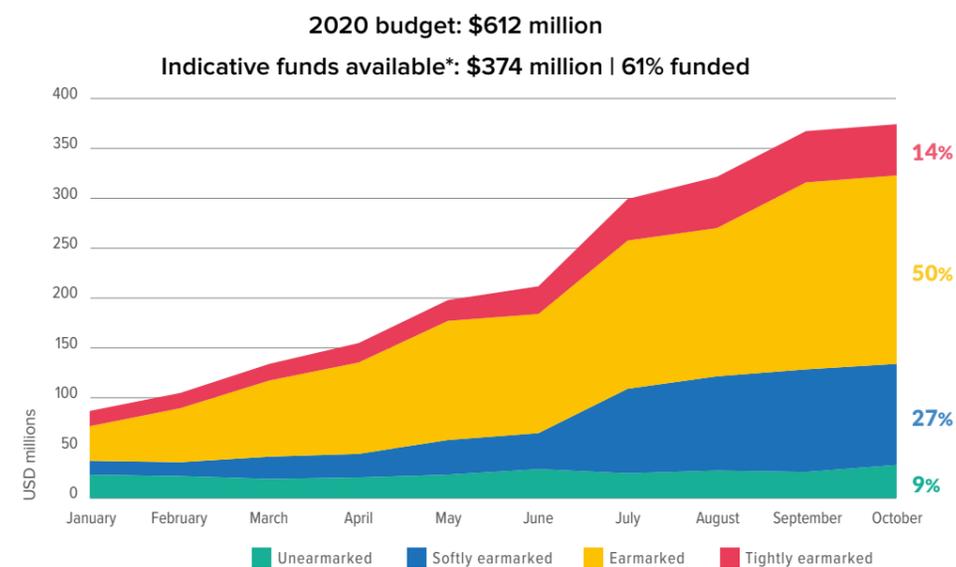
More broadly, considering the challenging socioeconomic environment in 2021 and the expected growth in the numbers of people of concern in the region (possibly reaching around 18 million by the end of 2021), UNHCR will prioritize the provision of life-saving assistance and protection. Particular attention will be paid to those who have lost their sources of income and are in severely vulnerable situations due to the socioeconomic downturn.

UNHCR will provide life-saving assistance, health care, safe water and sanitation, emergency shelter and multipurpose cash assistance through transfers or vouchers, especially in border areas and urban environment with high concentrations of population of concern.

Support for protection responses, access to quality refugee status determination, biometric registration, and referrals to relevant services will be combined with enhanced community outreach and specialized services for children, survivors of violence, and the LGBTIQ+ community.

In the absence of sufficient funding, prioritization of immediate and urgent assistance may negatively impact work on resilience and long-term solutions, which will require UNHCR to reimagine partnerships and explore innovative approaches to livelihoods and other inclusion activities, particularly with the private sector. With the economic downturn caused by the pandemic, growing anti-foreigner sentiment will require UNHCR to invest in innovative and cooperative initiatives to combat xenophobia. The success and range of such initiatives will depend on the amount and type of funding the region receives.

2020 EARMARKING AND TIMELINESS OF FUNDING FOR THE AMERICAS | As of 1 October 2020



* Indicative funds available include carry-over from prior years and an indicative allocation of unearmarked and softly earmarked funds based on the prioritized budget.

BUDGETS FOR THE AMERICAS | USD

OPERATION	ALL PILLARS	PILLAR 1	PILLAR 2	PILLAR 3	PILLAR 4	TOTAL
	2020 Current budget (as of 30 June 2020)	2021 proposed budget*				
		Refugee programme	Stateless programme	Reintegration projects	IDP projects	
THE AMERICAS						
Regional Bureau for the Americas ¹	19,574,035	21,988,058	-	-	-	21,988,058
Regional activities for the Americas ¹	5,740,053	8,149,211	-	-	-	8,149,211
SUBTOTAL	25,314,088	30,137,268	-	-	-	30,137,268
LATIN AMERICA						
Argentina Multi-Country Office ²	23,953,621	35,000,000	-	-	-	35,000,000
Brazil	46,373,057	33,000,000	-	-	-	33,000,000
Colombia	96,683,410	69,196,622	-	-	14,540,928	83,737,550
Costa Rica	26,852,308	27,000,000	-	-	-	27,000,000
Ecuador	74,720,743	58,470,744	-	-	-	58,470,744
Guatemala	34,628,455	33,725,655	-	-	-	33,725,655
Honduras	21,973,913	110,000	-	-	19,163,913	19,273,913
Mexico	65,212,229	61,481,693	-	-	-	61,481,693
Panama Multi-Country Office ³	43,803,631	25,694,349	-	-	18,639,280	44,333,629
Peru	48,625,534	55,000,000	-	-	-	55,000,000
Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	55,226,699	50,244,449	-	-	-	50,244,449
SUBTOTAL	538,053,599	448,923,513	-	-	52,344,120	501,267,633
NORTH AMERICA AND THE CARRIBBEAN						
Canada	2,204,019	2,204,019	-	-	-	2,204,019
United States of America Multi-Country Office ⁴	46,266,667	33,663,056	6,530,500	-	-	40,193,556
SUBTOTAL	48,470,686	35,867,075	6,530,500	-	-	42,397,575
TOTAL	611,838,373	514,927,857	6,530,500	-	52,344,120	573,802,476

¹ Regional Bureau and regional activities cover the whole Americas region.

² Coordinates activities in Argentina and Chile and also covers the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Paraguay and Uruguay.

³ Coordinates activities in Belize, Cuba, El Salvador and Panama.

⁴ Coordinates activities in Aruba, the Dominican Republic, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago and the United States of America and also covers Curaçao and Haiti.

* Note: budget appropriations are those approved by the UNHCR Executive Committee at its 71st session in October 2020. They are based on a budget cut-off date of 15 June 2020. Any subsequent revisions to budgets will be reflected as they are processed. Updated budget information is made available to Member States through regular updates on budgets and funding to the UNHCR Standing Committee. Information on the 2021 budgets will also be updated online on a monthly basis on Global Focus (<https://reporting.unhcr.org>).