# REGIONAL SUMMARIES The Americas

# FOREWORD

In 2018, the Americas saw a complex situation that was unlike anything the region had experienced in decades. Thousands of people abandoned their homes and reached neighbouring countries in search of safety, livelihoods and protection. Against this backdrop, it was heartening to witness acts of solidarity at all levels. At the regional level, countries joined efforts to find solutions for the most vulnerable and the United Nations came together in supporting them, while at the grassroots level, it was encouraging to see some of the poorest and most vulnerable people of concern to UNHCR, such as Colombian IDPs and returnees, opening their doors to Venezuelans in a similar situation. The Americas region, once again, displayed remarkable solidarity.

Ahead of the adoption of the global compact on refugees, a range of new initiatives were developed in 2018 and will continue in 2019. It was the first year that commitments started to be implemented by countries in Central America and Mexico in the context of the MIRPS, the Spanish acronym for the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework. Although initially conceptualized to respond to the North of Central America (NCA) situation, it is inspiring to see how the MIRPS has also been applied to new contexts, such as the Venezuela and Nicaragua situations.

Venezuelans walk and hitchhike along the highway to Pamplona, searching for work and safety in Colombia. REGIONAL SUMMARIES | THE AMERICAS

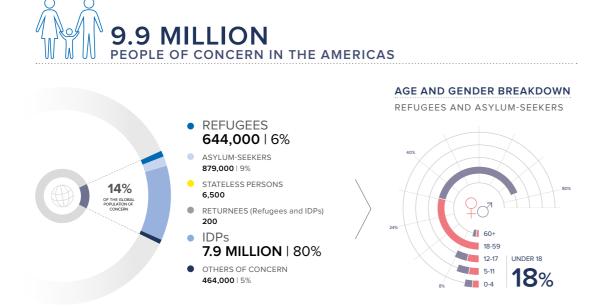
At local level, the Cities of Solidarity initiative recognised and supported local municipalities as crucial actors in socioeconomic and cultural inclusion, as well as in solutions for refugees and migrants.

There was also progress in eradicating statelessness. Chile and Haiti acceded to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, and adopted relevant legal frameworks. A regional monitoring system was set up in preparation for the High-Level Event on Statelessness, which UNHCR will convene with partners in October 2019.

These initiatives point to UNHCR's priorities in 2019 to advance the regional operational response to Venezuelan refugees and migrants, the rising displacement in Colombia, the refugee outflow to Ecuador, and the increasing flow of Nicaraguan and NCA refugees. The Office will also implement and quantify the MIRPS commitments, the monitoring mechanism on progress towards ending statelessness, and the roll-out of the Cities of Solidarity initiative. UNHCR will also invest in strengthening asylum systems in the region by fostering regional cooperation, and will expand the Regional Safe Spaces Network towards the Andean corridor to assist Venezuelans on the move.

### Renata Dubini

Director of UNHCR's Regional Bureau for the Americas



Population figures verified as of January 2018

Population figures for the situations on this map are the most up-to-date in 2018





Venezuelans cross the Simon Bolivar International Bridge into the border city of Cúcuta, Colombia.

### Overview

Since 2015, more than 2.4 million

Venezuelans have left for other countries in the region and beyond. While initially the reasons cited for leaving included lack of food, medicine or essential social services, in recent months, an increasing number of Venezuelans referred to the lack of protection systems in the country, and incidents of violence and insecurity, particularly targeting individuals or groups such as students or journalists, among others. Venezuelans continue to leave at an average of 5,000 a day.

The developments over the last months

protection-sensitive reception approaches

that facilitate access to regular stay to

have reinforced UNHCR's position (as set in the March 2018 Protection Guidance Note on the Outflow of Venezuelans), that a significant and growing proportion of Venezuelans who left their country are in need of international refugee protection. More than 360,000 Venezuelans have filed asylum claims globally. Building on existing regional legal frameworks and through ad-hoc measures, countries in the region have adopted pragmatic and

Venezuelans.

By the end of September 2018, over 967,000 Venezuelans had benefitted from a variety of forms of legal stay in Latin America. However, many are in an irregular situation, without documentation. This makes them particularly vulnerable to risks such as sexual exploitation, forced recruitment into labour, discrimination and xenophobia.

Sexual and labour exploitation and abuse, as well as other forms of gender-based violence and trafficking, are a priority protection concern. These affect women, girls and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people in particular, but also men and boys.

Access to basic services also remains challenging. Limited access to formal schools is leaving many Venezuelan children without education. Limited access to health services, including chronic medication and treatment, puts Venezuelans with serious medical conditions at risk in host countries. The situation also affects people who had found refuge in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and are now returning to their countries of origin.

"Venezuelans without access to a legal status are particularly vulnerable to exploitation, trafficking and discrimination"

-Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees while visiting Colombia

While most countries in the region have shown commendable solidarity, maintaining an open door policy and facilitating access to protection and assistance to Venezuelans, some are reaching the stage where they need urgent support from the international community to sustain their efforts.

Colombia is the main host country for Venezuelans. However, it is estimated that half of them continue their journey further south, which gives a regional dimension to this situation. The commitment to a regional coordinated response has seen agreement from States to cooperate on key issues such as access for those in need to regular status and asylum, documentation, provision of humanitarian assistance, data collection, the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and trafficking, while calling for more support from the international community. Other regional initiatives brought migration authorities, ombudspersons and NGOs to work together to promote the rights of Venezuelans and facilitate their access to essential services in the region.

### Response

UNHCR will implement a tailored approach to address the needs of Venezuelans at different stages of displacement. This includes those who settle in the

of the Venezuela situation

receiving countries, in transit, along borders, and crossing into neighbouring countries for short periods. UNHCR will continue to reinforce its field presence across the region and support governments to address Venezuelans' most pressing protection and essential needs in host countries.

Given the complex nature of the movements in the region, UNHCR and IOM appointed a Joint Special Representative for Venezuelan refugees and migrants who will promote dialogue and the consensus necessary for the humanitarian response, ensuring access to territory and protection, promote legal stay arrangements and the identification of solutions for Venezuelan refugees and migrants.

Moreover, under the joint leadership of UNHCR and IOM, a new Regional Inter-agency Coordination Platform has been set up to steer the operational response. It brings together a broad range of actors, including the United Nations, other international organizations, civil society, development and financial institutions and the private sector. The platform has developed a 2019 "Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela" which serves as a common appeal for support from the international community.

Colombia is the main host country for Venezuelans.

A Supplementary Budget of \$72 million was approved to address the growing needs

BUDGET FOR THE ExCom approved Budget increase VENEZUELA SITUATION \$74 million \$72 million \$146 million

Protection
Guidance Note on
the Outflow of
Venezuelans
available here



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Vulnerable Venezuelans find help in Colombia

"I was so thin when we got here that a bar of soap would fit right here," said Liliana Paz, 55, showing her bony left clavicle. She and her 10-year-old grandson, Gleiber, have slept for the past three months on flattened cardboard boxes in a parking lot where they pay the equivalent of \$1 a night in Maicao, Colombia.



Liliana Paz, vulnerable Venezuelan seeking help among Colombian neighbours.



# UNHCR's El Jaguar project

UNHCR and its partners in Central America set up a platform to provide information on the asylum system in the country of origin, transit, and destination for people fleeing from insecurity and persecution. The platform is unique as it is built on a simple and easy to access Facebook page and hotline under the name "Confiar en el Jaguar" (in English 'trust the jaguar'). UNHCR set up the innovative platform to be more compelling than traditional communicating with communities' initiatives so it would break with asylum-seekers' preconceptions of humanitarian support. UNHCR is currently sharing information and protection messages with people of concern, in addition to directly answering questions or responding to doubts via Facebook's messenger function.

# OTHER MAJOR SITUATIONS

### Colombia situation



While public attention has recently shifted towards the Venezuela situation, the implementation of the historic peace agreement between the

Forces of Colombia (FARC) remains challenging. The humanitarian situation deteriorated in areas of Colombia where irregular armed actors compete for control of territories left by the FARC. As a result, there is significant insecurity and high levels of violence. Community leaders, farmers, youth and children are particularly vulnerable. Internal displacement in Colombia increased from some 15,000 in 2017 to over 20,000 people affected by the end of August 2018. New and recurrent displacement, as well as restrictions on freedom of movement in Colombia. continue to trigger an influx of refugees into Ecuador.

Government and the Revolutionary Armed

UNHCR's 2018-2020 multi-year, multi-partner (MYMP) protection and solutions strategy will remain the overall framework for its engagement in Colombia, adapted to reflect the increasingly mixed nature of the operation. In 2019, UNHCR will advocate the protection of IDPs and prevention of new displacement, focusing on ethnic communities, prevention and response to

SGBV, as well as child protection.

The Office will support the legalization of prioritized informal peri-urban settlements as part of its strategy to secure durable

solutions for IDPs.

UNHCR will continue to support the implementation of the peace agreement by advocating respect for victims' rights (including IDPs) as well as support the Special Jurisdiction for Peace and the Truth Commission. Strengthening coordination between public oversight institutions, the Government and the Constitutional Court to advance in overcoming the unconstitutional state of affairs on displacement will continue to be important component of the IDP programme.

In Ecuador, UNHCR will continuously adjust its 2018-2020 MYMP strategy to include the response to the consistent inflow of Venezuelans. Ecuador, as well as Costa Rica, forms part of the Solutions Capital, a donor pact proposed by UNHCR to enable operations to fully implement their MYMP protection and solution strategies (see as well the chapters on *Strengthening the collective response* and *UNHCR's 2019 financial requirements*).

UNHCR will strengthen the national asylum system to respond to the new arrivals from both Colombia and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, improve reception conditions, support documentation, work towards improving self-reliance through the "Graduation approach". This is a sequenced, multi-sector intervention that

supports the poorest and most vulnerable households to achieve sustained income and move out of extreme poverty within a specified period. UNHCR will also support the national authorities with needs assessments and technical advice to deal with the increasingly challenging border situation.

# North of Central America situation



There has been a significant increase in the number of people fleeing violence and persecution in the North of Central America (NCA), more than

300,000 asylum-seekers and refugees registered globally by mid-2018, mainly in the United States of America and Mexico, double the number of the previous year. The first half of 2018 also saw 43% more people from NCA countries deported. Violence in NCA countries has also forced people into internal displacement, with an estimated 245,500 IDPs in Honduras and El Salvador, according to estimates from joint Government and UNHCR profiling exercises.

In 2019, in line with the MIRPS, UNHCR will continue supporting governments to consolidate asylum systems in destination countries and strengthen mechanisms to provide durable solutions and respond to urgent protection risks, identify and protect deportees with protection needs, and ensure safe transit along the main

migration routes. This will be accomplished by establishing protection networks and providing humanitarian assistance, with a particular focus on the most vulnerable (women, children, and LGBTI people).

### Nicaragua

Since April 2018, thousands of Nicaraguans have fled mounting political tension, violence, persecution and serious human rights violations. The number of asylum applications by Nicaraguans registered in North and Central America countries has reached 21,500 with an increase of more than 4,000% from June to November 2018 compared to the previous months. Another 10,000 Nicaraguans have requested appointments for an asylum application in Costa Rica. While Costa Rica has received the most asylum claims, Mexico and Panama, as well as countries in the NCA, have also recorded a rise in asylum claims by Nicaraguans seeking international protection.

In 2019, UNHCR will implement a regional response to strengthen the asylum system and the preparedness and capacity of reception conditions. This will include reinforcing border monitoring, supporting temporary transit centres, implementing cash-based interventions, delivering assistance and looking for solutions.

More than
21,500
asylum claims
by Nicaraguans
were registered
in North and
Central America
by November 2018.

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2 MYMP countries form part of the Solutions Capital



# **REGIONAL STRATEGY**

# Progressing towards solutions

In 2019, UNHCR will advocate the development of inclusive public policies that promote social, economic and cultural inclusion. The Cities of Solidarity framework, which gives due recognition and support to the key role local municipalities have in ensuring socioeconomic and cultural inclusion and solutions for refugees and migrants, will be further expanded and implemented. This contributes to the effective implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, which mainstream the principle of "leaving no one behind".

UNHCR will continue supporting a "whole-of-society" approach to developing and implementing progressive community-based sponsorship and resettlement programmes, as well as complementary pathways in the region. This will provide durable solutions, in line with the commitments of the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants.

UNHCR will also continue supporting countries to:

- Promote local integration, with a particular focus on responding to refugees with special needs and complex cases.
- Maintain and strengthen the protection transfer arrangement, an innovative lifesaving tool that provides legal and safe access to third-country resettlement for people at heightened risk in their countries of origin.

 Advocate expansion of complementary pathways and resettlement places, particularly for LGBTI and other people at heightened risk.

UNHCR will also support a wide range of campaigns to promote more tolerance and respect for people of concern across the region, addressing themes such as discrimination and xenophobia.

# Building a harmonized asylum system

In 2017, there was a significant spike in asylum applications in the Americas, with about 1.3 million pending cases, putting a strain on asylum systems. In 2018, most countries in the Caribbean had not established State-run asylum systems and some lacked national legislation. The 2017-2019 Regional Quality Assurance Initiative (QAI) supports countries seeking to consolidate their asylum systems so they can respond to increasing international protection needs by promoting fair and efficient access to protection. In the longer term, States may recognize and endorse the existence of a harmonized area of asylum in the region.

In 2019, UNHCR will continue to support the 10 States in the region that have currently committed to increasing the efficiency of their asylum systems through the QAI. These are Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, Peru, and Trinidad and Tobago. It will also encourage new States to join, possibly Aruba, Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, and Uruguay. UNHCR will host the third regional QAI meeting and will prioritize regional cooperation among

States' asylum bodies in the framework of the Asylum Support Group, creating working groups on dedicated topics.

UNHCR plans to revamp registration, case management and referral mechanisms in 2019 to improve compatibility between systems used by migration and asylum authorities, access to procedure, as well as the timely issuance of documentation. In view of the rising number of Venezuelan refugees and migrants, UNHCR will enhance and expand protection monitoring activities and increase legal counselling to people of concern. It will achieve the latter by supporting the Americas Network of Refugee Legal Aid, which orients, counsels and represents those in need of international protection.

# **Ending statelessness**

In the spirit of the #IBelong Campaign to End Statelessness and the regional 10-year framework set out by the Brazil Plan of Action, States held a regional meeting in June 2018, in preparation of the High-Level Event on Statelessness and joined around a common goal to be the first region to eradicate statelessness.

In 2019, UNHCR will focus on expanding regional adherence to the statelessness conventions, namely with Cuba, El Salvador, Mexico and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. The adoption of internal regulations on stateless people in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay will also be prioritized as part of the implementation of the

"Draft articles on the protection of stateless persons". Likewise, UNHCR will continue to strengthen its partnership with the Americas Network on Nationality and Statelessness to support specific projects designed and implemented by civil society.

In the United States, UNHCR is supporting the creation of an advocacy and mutual support network of stateless people (United Stateless) and will continue to consolidate this initiative in the coming years. UNHCR has also partnered with the Centre for Migration Studies to improve its understanding of the scope of the stateless population in the United States and the hardships they face. This research will inform the work of UNHCR and its partners as they seek protection and solutions for statelessness in the United States.

In preparation for the 2019 High-Level Event on Statelessness, the region has identified State pledges and adopted an evaluation and follow-up mechanism. This mechanism aims to identify existing needs and develop high-impact, low-cost national projects to end statelessness in the Americas. This tool also allows interested countries, UNHCR, civil society organizations and stateless people to collaborate on the design and implementation of projects, ensuring sufficient fund allocation at national level. With the identification of countries that act as champions for the **#IBelong Campaign to End Statelessness** and given that this is a priority for the region, a high level of participation of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean is expected at the event.

# Child protection and sexual and gender-based violence

High rates of femicide, sexual violence and exploitation continue to affect displaced populations in the Americas and the Caribbean. UNHCR will expand the regional safe spaces network to enhance access to specialized and multi-sectoral services for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence and children at risk along the displacement cycle across countries. In 2019, UNHCR will prioritize the consolidation of this network through the Andean Corridor to serve Venezuelan refugees and migrants. The network will also implement a regional information-sharing protocol and will support socioeconomic profiling to improve the targeting of assistance and facilitate the integration of people of concern.

# Strengthening regional cooperation

In responding to the evolving situation in the region, UNHCR will continue to support the implementation of the MIRPS (Marco Integral Regional para la Protección y Soluciones). This has brought six countries and over ten international, regional and national partners together under one framework to provide protection to people of concern, share responsibility and enhance durable solutions. States will meet annually to track the implementation of national commitments, relying on the Organization of American States (OAS) Committee of Political and Juridical Affairs as a follow-up mechanism, and 2019 will be the second year of implementation of this three year plan.

UNHCR will continue to strengthen the MIRPS's responsibility-sharing mechanisms to enhance protection of asylum-seekers, refugees and IDPs by forging new alliances with regional development actors and the private sector. UNHCR will also work with

both the Inter-American Development Bank and UNDP to identify funds from both national budgets and international cooperation for the implementation of MIRPS commitments.

The Office will also support the compilation and translation of the jurisprudence of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights on issues relating to people of concern to UNHCR. It will integrate a human rights focus into all regional training and capacity-building activities. Active participation will be sought in all regional consultative migration fora to ensure protection safeguards, such as the Regional Conference on Migration, the South American Conference on Migration, the Caribbean Migration Consultations and the Specialized Forum on Migration.

This will help identify people in need of international protection within mixed movements and avoid indiscriminate application of migration control measures.

UNHCR will also advocate issues related to protecting people of concern in regional and sub-regional bodies, such as the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CARICOM), the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), OAS, the Central American Integration System, and others. Synergies will also be sought with other UN agencies regionally, including the ILO, IOM, the PAHO/WHO, UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP, to better coordinate responses to the needs of people of concern to UNHCR and migrants, ensuring they are based on complementary mandates and responsibilities.



Tegucigalpa, Honduras. UNHCR-supported education centres, a haven of peace in gang-controlled zones.

# **MIRPS** fosters education in Honduras

Under the MIRPS comprehensive regional support and protection programme developed by UNHCR and regional governments, the Government of Honduras is committed to formulating and implementing a prevention and protection strategy for schools by 2020 within the Ministry of Education.

With UNHCR support, teachers have begun working to improve safety and conditions in schools. UNHCR is helping them develop protection measures and security protocols both for staff and the students themselves. They are creating communication networks among themselves and school administrators to report issues and warnings to protect teachers and students.



Anais (15) fled the violence in Burundi with her mother and sister. She attends secondary school classes at Paysannat school, near Mahama camp. Rwanda.

# LDS Charities and USA for UNHCR join hands for the most vulnerable displaced

Since 2004, the Latter-day Saints Charities (LDS Charities), one of USA for UNHCR's leading partners has been supporting an array of UNHCR projects and programs, including critical emergency relief, water, sanitation and hygiene, health and education. LDS Charities has emphasized assistance to the world's most vulnerable populations, and counts refugees and other displaced people as one of the core pillars of their mission going forward. LDS Charities' partnership with USA for UNHCR has grown over the last years and will continue to expand, remaining focused on prioritizing the unmet needs of displaced people across UNHCR's operations.



# **CONSTRAINTS**

The region is going through rapid changes. Upcoming elections in some countries may delay the implementation of regional responses. Political changes throughout the Americas are having an impact on the characterization and reception of people of concern to UNHCR. Efforts should be reinforced to keep humanitarian space open, reminding States of this continent's tradition of regional solidarity, generosity and burden-sharing.

Efforts to implement QAI recommendations in some countries have been impaired by the overwhelming arrival of new asylum-seekers. More pragmatic protection responses will need to be applied, including accelerated or simplified processing and adjudication along with the implementation of collective or group-based responses and recognition. Despite the region's legal and policy developments, such as inclusive and equal registration and documentation of people with diverse gender identity and sexual orientation, there are still challenges within existing asylum systems.

Problems relating to the recognition of refugee identity documents are being addressed in all operations where asylum-seekers and refugees face difficulties accessing employment and housing, opening bank accounts or dealing with public administration.

The influx of Venezuelan refugees and migrants has created considerable challenges for southern Caribbean countries. As States' migration policies towards Venezuelans become more restrictive, UNHCR will engage more systematically with them to ensure Venezuelans and other people of concern can access territory, asylum and basic services. Continued capacity-building, targeted protection interventions and the further consolidation of the Caribbean Migration Consultations are crucial to maintaining the region's protection space and developing asylum systems.

# FINANCIAL INFORMATION **Budget**

- \$213 million, accounting for 2.5% of UNHCR's overall budget.
- +8% compared to 2018 current budget mainly due to the protection needs of Venezuelans seeking asylum in Caribbean countries and in Latin America but also to expand the implementation of the MIRPS.

# Regional budget breakdown per

- 88% of the Americas budget is allocated to Pillar 1 (refugee programmes).
- 8% to Pillar 4 (IDP projects in Colombia).
- 4% to Pillar 2 (stateless programmes).

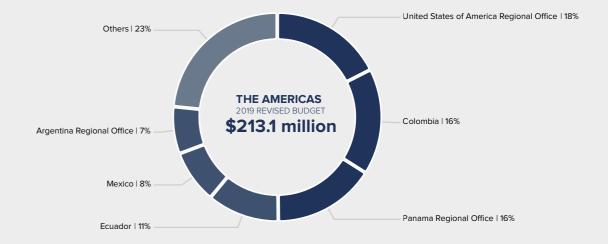
## Sub-regional needs

• 82% of the regional budget (\$173 million) is allocated to the Latin America sub-region to cover the needs mainly linked to the Colombia, Nicaragua, NCA and Venezuela situations.

• 18% of the regional budget (\$39 million) is allocated to the North America and the Caribbean sub-region including to cover the needs of Venezuelans seeking asylum in Caribbean countries.

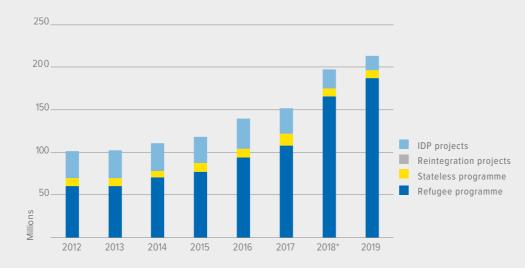
# Major rights groups

- 35% of the regional budget is intended to cover activities to create a favourable protection environment (\$42 million) and fair protection processes and documentation (\$32 million) in the region in 2019.
- 25% of the regional budget is planned for activities to achieve durable solutions (\$28 million) and community empowerment and self-reliance (\$25 million).
- 16% of the regional budget will be allocated to cater for the basic needs and essential services of people of concern in the Americas region.
- 10% (\$22 million) is planned for security from violence and exploitation programs.



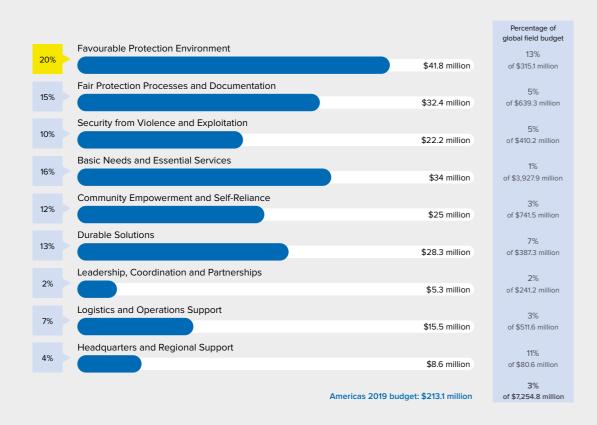
<sup>\*</sup> Note: figures do not include supplementary requirements of \$72 million for the Venezuela situation, requested after ExCom approval of the 2019 budge

# BUDGETS FOR AMERICAS 2012-2019 | USD millions



\* As of 30 June 2018

# THE AMERICAS 2019 **BUDGET BY RIGHTS GROUP | USD millions**



# **BUDGETS FOR THE AMERICAS | USD**

	ALL PILLARS	PILLAR 1	PILLAR 2	PILLAR 3	PILLAR 4	
	2018			2019		
OPERATION	Current budget (as of 30 June 2018)	Refugee programmes	Stateless programmes	Reintegration projects	IDP projects	TOTAL
LATIN AMERICA						
Argentina Regional Office <sup>1</sup>	11,291,809	15,579,632	-	-	-	15,579,632
Brazil	13,828,400	13,412,482	-	-	-	13,412,482
Colombia	31,816,893	18,100,038	-	-	16,963,267	35,063,305
Costa Rica	9,150,306	9,281,703	-	-	-	9,281,703
Costa Rica Regional Legal Unit	4,261,616	3,858,564	981,548	-	-	4,840,112
Ecuador	22,705,543	23,860,423	-	-	-	23,860,423
Mexico	17,788,265	17,600,000	-	-	-	17,600,000
Panama Regional Office <sup>2</sup>	27,033,209	33,818,444	-	-	-	33,818,444
Venezuela, Bolivarian Republic of	17,813,695	11,987,612	-	-	-	11,987,612
Regional activities <sup>3</sup>	5,153,801	8,283,259	-	-	-	8,283,259
SUBTOTAL	160,843,538	155,782,158	981,548	-	16,963,267	*173,726,972
NORTH AMERICA AND THE CAR	RIBBEAN					
Canada	1,887,351	1,939,540	97,935	-	-	2,037,474
United States of America Regional Office <sup>4</sup>	33,870,142	28,985,369	8,317,075	-	-	37,302,444
SUBTOTAL	35,757,493	30,924,909	8,415,010	-	-	39,339,919
TOTAL	196,601,031	186,707,066	9,396,558		16,963,267	213,066,891

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Includes activities in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay.
 Covers activities in Belize (since 2018), Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Regional activities cover the entire Americas region.

 $<sup>^{\</sup>rm 4}$  Includes activities in the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

<sup>\*</sup> Note: subtotal for the Americas does not include supplementary requirements of \$72 million for the Venezuela situation, requested after ExCom approval of the 2019 budget.