

UNHCR

United Nations High
Commissioner for Refugees



LASALLECUNMUN
2026

“Seeking Safety: International
Protection of Refugees from Latin
America countries with internal
conflicts”



BACKGROUND GUIDE



Honourable delegates,

I am grateful for me and for my chair that you be part of this committee in this model LASALLECUNMUN2026. My name is Hannah Sofia Aguirre Barcnas, President of the committee, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Being my first time as president, I have decided to do my best to give you a great experience in MUN with the Moderator Emilio Velázquez Ramírez and the Conference Officer Geraldine Josephine Hernández González.

Now, I am 16 years old. I am currently studying at Universidad La Salle Cancun in my third semester in the area of Hygiene and community health, and I am heading toward the biological chemistry area in my fifth semester. One of my greatest passions is helping people. Some people say I have a chicken heart, which is why I chose this area. My greatest dream is to follow Jesus, live in holiness, and become a mother, but I also wish to pursue a career in veterinary medicine with a specialization in wildlife and zoo, animal medicine or also to study medicine with a specialization in a pediatric surgery and with my career, I would like to be able to volunteer in various parts of the world. My experience in the last MUN was very varied; I had both good and bad experiences, where I learned many things from my mistakes that I would like to pass on to my delegates. When I experienced my LASALLECUNMUN2025, I loved the concept of what MUN is, the fact that young people discuss issues that affect all of us and how MUN teaches us in various ways made me consider running for president of this MUN 2026. And even though I have only participated in one conference, that was enough to appreciate the idea of the model.

I am looking forward to this LASALLECUNMUN2026 and expect that we will have a great, enriching experience, where we can unite our projects to reach a realistic and feasible resolution to the serious problems suffered by refugees. And remember delegates, regardless of the fear, nervousness, and everything that stuns us we must put our faces up. It is not how much you give, but that you give it from the heart. Feel confident to contact me for any questions or concerns that may arise.

Blessed day, delegates.

Hannah Sofia Aguirre Barcnas

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COMMITTEE DESCRIPTION

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, works to ensure that everybody has the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge, having fled violence, persecution or war at home.

Since 1950, the organization has faced multiple crises on multiple continents and provided vital protection and assistance to refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced and stateless people, many of whom have nobody left to turn to.

UNHCR helps to save lives and build better futures for millions forced from home.

Topic: "Seeking Safety: International Protection of Refugees from Latin America countries with internal conflicts."

INTRODUCTION

In Latin America, many people have been forced to leave their home country. There are many reasons why people have to move, including social, economic, and political conflicts, poverty, food crises, situations of extreme violence, and other serious socio-structural problems. These are issues that have prevented people from having a good life. According to the UNHCR, there are 43.3 million refugees worldwide, with a mandate to protect 31.6 million refugees and 5.8 million people in need of international protection.

The term refugee is defined as a person who, "owing to well-founded fears of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinions, is outside the country of their nationality and is unable or, owing to such fears, unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country," according to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. In the countries of the Americas and in Africa, the definition has been expanded to include individuals who have had no choice but to leave their country of origin "due to an act of aggression, foreign occupation or domination, internal conflicts, mass violations of human rights, or other circumstances that have seriously disturbed public order." One in five people in need of shelter is located in the Latin American region. Among the main countries with the highest displacement are Colombia, Venezuela, Central American countries, Mexico, and Haiti, according to UNHCR. The countries that receive the most immigrants are mainly located in the regional countries, the United States of America, and Europe.

Refugees often face long and dangerous journeys; in addition to the travel, they experience shortages of food, water, medicine, and other basic services. Kelly T. Clements, Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees, stated that the majority of forcibly displaced people remain in Latin America, referencing the media attention given to the increasing number of migrants approaching the United States border. In this regard, she added that attention should not only

be paid to the destination countries of refugees and migrants, but it is also crucial to consider the countries of origin and transit, addressing these complex population movements from a comprehensive regional and cooperative approach. Unfortunately, the situations faced by refugees from Latin American countries are precarious. UNHCR warned that there is a lack of necessary funding for its operations, which may affect the maintenance of shelters and safe spaces in border areas, the distribution of essential items, and support for access to procedures for determining refugee status.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In history, migration has been a brave manifestation of humans facing various hardships in order to improve their quality of life. Migration is deeply rooted in our history. The oldest known human or pre-human presence outside of Africa dates back more than two million years. The history of migration in Latin America dates back to colonialism, when Spain and Portugal sought to establish highly restrictive migration policies.

The United Nations General Assembly created the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in 1950, with the initial purpose of helping millions of people seeking refuge. In November 1984, Cartagena, Colombia the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees was carried out, This treaty is based on the promotion of standards within the countries of the region for the protection of refugees, ratifying the peaceful, apolitical, and exclusively humanitarian nature of granting asylum or recognizing refugee status, encouraging the countries of the region to establish a regime for minimum treatment of refugees based on the principles of the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol, as well as the American Convention on Human Rights, and studying in the countries of the area that have a massive presence of refugees the possibilities of achieving the integration of refugees into the productive life of the country.

Since 2010, the region of America has experienced an increase in the number of refugees. The initial mass arrivals, which began in the 2010s, were managed successfully thanks to responses inspired by solidarity. Bold measures were taken by opening temporary legal pathways and granting protection to millions of refugees, but frequently, the temporary permits expired without offering a path to permanence; many migrants encountered obstacles in accessing education and healthcare systems, but the prospect of mass deportations from the United States threatens to exacerbate the vulnerabilities of integration systems in Latin America and the Caribbean. With the increase in migration and the difficulties it entails, on December 17, 2018, the Global Compact on Refugees was carried out at the United Nations General Assembly, aiming for burdens and responsibilities to be distributed more predictably and equitably, recognizing that international cooperation is essential to finding sustainable solutions for refugee situations. It also seeks to serve as a guide for governments, international organizations, and other stakeholders to ensure that host communities receive the support they need and that refugees can lead productive lives.

When discussing the history of migration, it is also necessary to include the stories of refugees, who have to face various difficulties in search of a better quality of life. Unfortunately, people need to move for various reasons, leaving everything behind, including family and homes. This is the testimony of a father who seeks the well-being of his son by

leaving everything behind. I moved to another neighbourhood where there were people from the same gang because my eldest son was already 17 years old, and if I went to an area controlled by the rival gang, I would be putting him in danger. About 15 days later, the same guys found us, and I had to send my eldest son to another place, far from me, so that he would not be in danger. Fortunately, he had already started working and was able to rent a house. I moved to San Salvador, but they found us there, too, and I was threatened with having my child taken away or being killed. So, I decided to go to Moncagua, in San Miguel, in the eastern part of the country. I went thinking that I didn't know anyone there, so no one could know about me, but that was the worst decision I ever made because I didn't have a job. It is very difficult to get there. Moncagua is far from San Miguel; it is a rural area with many gang members as well. I lived there for a year, I couldn't support myself, I couldn't pay for the house, I sold everything I had: the furniture, the TV, everything. To be able to pay for rent and food, I kept only what was necessary, which was a bed and a kitchen." This story reminds us of the needs of refugees, who day by day seek a better future, the importance of listening to their story, and finding a way to help refugees.

CURRENT SITUATION

Refugees, in the present, cannot go back to their country they belong to due to various causes like persecution, conflicts, violence, and other circumstances; most of the people that seeks security elsewhere do not find it.

The current situation of refugees from Latin American countries experiencing conflict who have been able to reach a host country shows that many individuals have been able to start from scratch, contributing to local economies through small businesses, domestic work support, including caregiving, and other professions. However, they still face challenges. One of the main challenges identified for the migrant population was the economic crisis. "Many refugees worked in the informal sector and, therefore, have seen their rights to access healthcare, housing, or income violated," emphasized Murillo of UNHCR. During the pandemic, another issue was highlighted: xenophobia.

In early 2024, encounters at the U.S.-Mexico border reached an all-time high for Latin America. For comparison, the regional peak was 5,000 refugees in fiscal year 2021, 15,000 in fiscal years 2022 and 2023, and a range of 35,000 to 50,000 in fiscal year 2024. This represented a significant increase in the maximum number of refugees from Latin America—a tenfold increase in just four years.

This shift marked the beginning of a rapid upward trend, with fiscal year 2024 reaching a record high for refugees from Latin America at 25,358 arrivals, representing more than a quarter of total arrivals for fiscal year 2024.

This surge in refugees from Latin America was partly due to instability in several countries, including the largest refugee displacement in Latin America from Venezuela, which has reached nearly 8 million people according to UNHCR.

According to Marco Romero Silva, director of CODHES, “in an increasingly challenging regional context, people who defend the rights of migrants and refugees face growing obstacles such as stigmatization, threats, and reduced resources for their work. That is why states and international cooperation must recognize the importance of their role in mitigating migration and refugee crises on the continent, which would be even worse without their help.”

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees commented: "Latin American countries are facing an unprecedented level of displacement. However, they have met the challenge with unique generosity and dedication to find dignified solutions for those forced to flee."

UNHCR seeks to safeguard the rights and well-being of people who have been forced to flee to another country in search of protection with no possibility of returning home. The lack of protection for refugees can result in their most basic rights not being respected, malnutrition, overcrowding of medical facilities, deteriorating housing, overcrowding of children in classrooms, and a decline in school enrolment. At the same time, protection risks increase due to the shortage of personnel to care for unaccompanied minors. These are some of the crises faced by refugees seeking protection elsewhere. Although some do manage to improve their quality of life, it is necessary to seek security for refugees.

As we know, one of the biggest problems faced by refugees is discrimination, stereotypes, and a lack of opportunities. To counteract this, UNHCR, together with 50 Latin American artists, came together to bear witness to the stories of millions of refugees and displaced people. This is a project that began to take shape in 2015 as part of the 50th anniversary of the UNHCR Regional Office for South America. By the end of 2018, more than 50 artists from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay had joined the initiative through a work that reflected the reality of refugees worldwide.

Among the potential consequences of seeking refugee protection are:

Economic growth: Refugees and migrants fill significant gaps in local labour markets and boost demand for goods and services, which can increase tax revenues and raise the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of host countries. However, these individuals often find themselves in vulnerable situations. This population, mostly of working age, is highly educated and employed; moreover, they are frequently overqualified for the jobs they hold and often work informally, which limits their income and exacerbates food insecurity.

Discrimination: Studies also highlight how xenophobia and discrimination can negatively impact the socio-economic inclusion of refugees and migrants, as well as diminish their ability to contribute to host communities.

As is known, the search for safety for Latin American refugees can bring many problems and difficulties, but it is also known to bring great benefits to the host countries and the refugees themselves.

COUNTRY BOX

Argentine Republic

Belize

Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

Canada

Dominican Republic

French Republic

Kingdom of Spain

Republic of Colombia

Republic of Cuba

Republic of Ecuador

Republic of El Salvador

Republic of Guatemala

Republic of Haiti

Republic of Honduras

Republic of Panama

Republic of Peru

Swiss Confederation

The Federative Republic of Brazil

The United States of America

United Mexican States

GUIDE QUESTIONS

- I. What is your country's political stance regarding the search for protection for refugees from Latin American countries experiencing internal conflicts?
- II. What programs does your country propose to seek international protection for Latin American refugees in situations of internal conflict?
- III. How has your country responded in recent years to the search for protection by Latin American refugees in situations of internal conflict?

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