



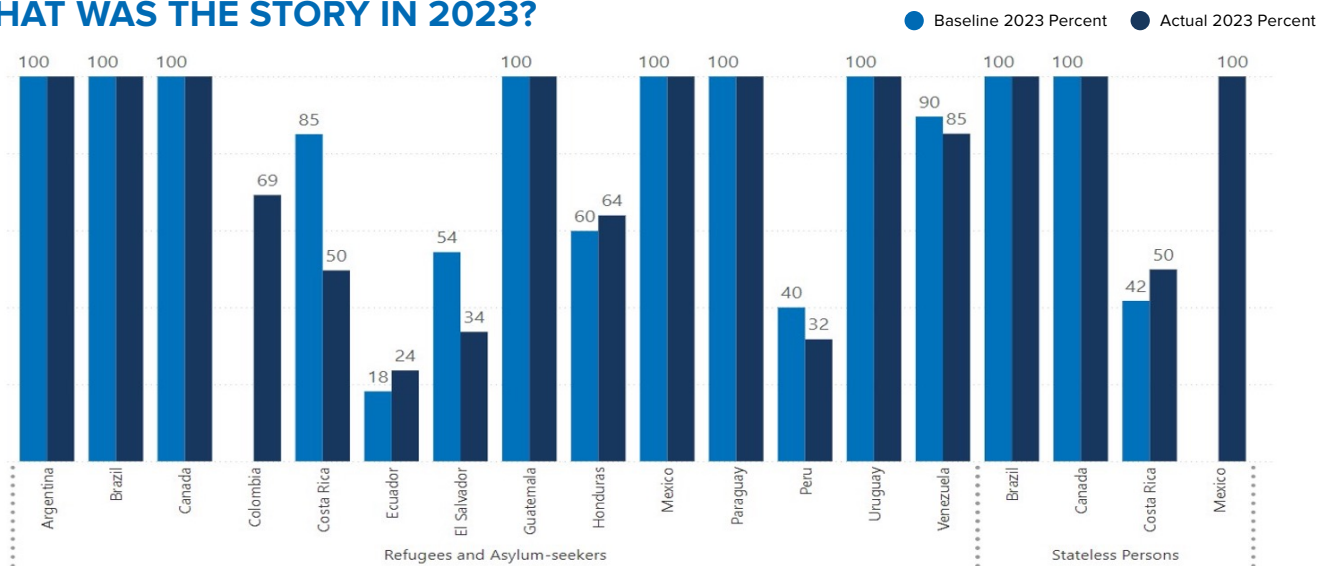
LIVELIHOODS AND ECONOMIC INCLUSION

OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

While most countries in the region have relatively progressive legal frameworks allowing access to work, gaps in implementation, lack of awareness among employers, and informal labor markets persist. Refugees and migrants often contribute to local economies, filling labor shortages and driving innovation, yet they remain vulnerable to exploitation and underemployment. The refugee workforce has untapped potential: around 70% are within working age, and a large portion possess technical, vocational, or university-level education, yet face significant obstacles in accessing formal employment opportunities.

NATIONAL INITIATIVES

WHAT WAS THE STORY IN 2023?



UNHCR RESPONSE

- Created in 2021 by UNHCR and the UN Global Compact - Brazil Network, the [Companies with Refugees Forum](#) promotes access to decent work and income generation for forcibly displaced and stateless persons in Brazil, currently more than **130 companies** are part of the Forum. The [3rd Annual Meeting of the Forum](#), held in São Paulo on October 31st, brought together around 180 attendees, including representatives from civil society, government, private sector, and refugee communities. During the event,

data collected in August 2024 was shared, highlighting that **participating companies now employ over 12,000 refugees and migrants**. Currently, Brazil formally employs around 200,000 refugees and people in need of international protection. Since joining the initiative, Forum’s companies have seen an average increase of 39% in refugee hires. Furthermore, over the past three years, the Forum has organized or supported more than 65 events, including workshops, webinars, trainings, and meetings, with two

previous annual events drawing over 350 participants. Additionally, the Forum has produced over fifteen guides, policy notes, and regular bulletins documenting the actions and progress of member companies in fostering inclusive hiring practices.

- Since its inception in 2016, more than **45,000 people** have participated and benefited from the **Local Integration Program in Mexico**. The private sector network facilitating the employment of forcibly displaced people increased to more than **600 companies** by the end of 2023. In addition, more than 100,000 people have been supported with on-site integration in 20 cities. The Program helps relocate refugees from Mexico's southern regions, where most asylum requests are made, to central and northern cities with greater capacity to meet their needs. It offers tailored support for refugees, covering documentation, housing, education, employment, and social integration. Destination cities are chosen based on each person's specific needs, with the program providing workshops and assistance to ensure a smooth transition into their new communities.

- In **Ecuador** in 2024, UNHCR recognized **102 companies** with the **Inclusive Company Seal**, an award that, for the third consecutive year, highlights the efforts of the private sector to integrate refugees and migrants. Since its inception in 2022, 187 companies, 12 industries and 15 cities have been awarded. The seal is part of the wider **Companies with Refugees** initiative, a space for building and developing relationships between the business sector and the refugee population, where companies share best corporate practices that promote inclusion, equality and diversity, and can find all the information and resources - statistics, studies and guidance material - developed to address the needs of companies interested in being more inclusive.

The "**Vivir la Inclusión - Living the Inclusion (VLI)**" framework, established by UNHCR **Costa Rica** in 2014 in partnership with public, private, and civil society actors, has become a cornerstone for promoting refugee inclusion in the labor market. Through this initiative, companies contribute by hiring refugees, offering training opportunities, integrating

refugees into their value chains, or supporting awareness and information campaigns. The program has seen growing collaboration with the Ministry of Labor, which aims to align the initiative with national labor market priorities. This alignment is facilitated through an agreement with UNHCR that focuses on matching refugee labor insertion efforts with market demands.

As part of VLI, UNHCR and its partners created the "**VLI Seal**", a recognition awarded to institutions demonstrating exemplary efforts in fostering refugee inclusion. In 2024, 36 institutions have received the seal, bringing the number of awarded institutions since its inception to a total of 188 across 73 organizations, including private companies, public institutions, local governments, NGOs, and academic institutions. These coordinated efforts have contributed to the decrease of unemployment among forcibly displaced people in Costa Rica, dropping from 9% in 2022 to 7.2% in 2023, according to data from the University of Costa Rica (UCR).

- In **El Salvador**, My First Job programme, a joint UNHCR-Ministry of Labour initiative promoting employability of youth forcibly displaced and at-risk of displacement, is in its third year of implementation. By November 2024, **1563 youth** received market orientation and **814** of them have obtained formal contract with more than **200 companies** and were enrolled in the Salvadoran Social Security Institute (ISSS), generating more than **3.6M USD** in productivity gains for the national economy.



CITIES OF SOLIDARITY IN THE AMERICAS

"Cities of Solidarity in the Americas" initiative is based on the recommendations identified by the States in the region under the 2004 Mexico Plan of Action and the 2014 Brazil Plan of Action, with the objective of recognizing and supporting the efforts of local governments to provide protection and integration to forcibly displaced persons.

- On **APRIL 25-26**, during the 1st regional meeting of the **Cities of Solidarity in the Americas** in Montevideo (Uruguay), 16 local governments and international organizations in the Solidarity Cities program presented recommendations for Chile's upcoming regional Action Plan. Set for adoption in December 2024 by Latin American and Caribbean countries, the ten-year plan aims to enhance protection for refugees and stateless individuals across all stages of migration. Organized by UNHCR with Montevideo's support and Chile's endorsement, this meeting marked a milestone in the Cartagena+40 initiative and concluded with the **Montevideo Declaration**, reflecting local authorities' commitment to addressing migration-related challenges in transit and destination cities across the region.

- On **SEPTEMBER 25-26**, the **II National Conference of Cities of Solidarity** was held in **Guatemala** with the aim of promoting the adoption of inclusive policies and programs at the local level that favor the coexistence and integration of refugees and in

the context of human mobility together with the host communities. During the meeting, mayors and departmental governors, signed the ‘**Joint Declaration of the Initiative of Solidarity Cities of Guatemala**’ highlighting the importance of the creation of the Network of Solidarity Cities in Guatemala, to strengthen the ties of the initiative at the regional level.

- On **OCTOBER 9-10**, representatives from local governments in **Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay** gathered in Córdoba, Argentina, for the **meeting of Cities of Solidarity in the Southern Cone**. The event aimed to strengthen collaboration among local governments in these countries to promote dignified reception and integration of refugees and displaced persons, while also enhancing support for the communities that have generously welcomed them.
- In **2024**, thirteen new municipalities from four countries of the region joined the initiative, bringing the total number of members to **eighty-three local governments and networks from eleven countries**.

SUCCESS STORIES

VENEZUELAN ENGINEER DISCOVERS HER PASSION FOR URBAN AGRICULTURE IN ARGENTINA

As part of the Cities of Solidarity initiative, the Municipality of Córdoba and the Foundation for Business Incubation (FIDE), with support from UNHCR, organized events connecting companies with refugees whose skills align with their business needs. It was through this initiative that Abelis Carrillo, 29, discovered Loopfarms, an innovative company dedicated to sustainable food production. What began as a five-month internship led to more than just employment; Abelis found a passion. Now, as a production supervisor of microgreens and edible mushrooms at Loopfarms, she has gained a renewed sense of purpose: “I hope to stay here, to keep learning and growing,” she says. “Argentina is now my home.”



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THE STORY OF DOÑA ANTONIA, REBORN IN GUATEMALA: DOÑA ANTONIA'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Doña Antonia left her homeland in 2021; insecurity, instability, and the collapse of basic services forced her to move to Guatemala. However, the transition was not easy. Leaving her land, her home, and her siblings was a hard emotional blow.

A resilient and entrepreneurial woman by nature, Doña Antonia had the idea to start a business making traditional snacks from her home country to generate income and cover her basic needs. She participated in trainings provided by the Youth Ready program, a framework that helps vulnerable individuals strengthen skills for employment and entrepreneurship. This gave her the opportunity to also access seed capital to launch her venture. “Joining the World Vision and UNHCR program helped me build support networks and connect with other families who have also left their countries. Now I don’t feel alone” says Doña Antonia. With the support received she successfully established her business and learned how to manage the business’s finances and expand operations through access to financial services. “Now I am 100% independent and generate my own income,” she says proudly. “With the support I received, I bought machinery and now I even have access to financial services to apply for credit and expand and diversify my business.”

Doña Antonia highlights that “the support from UNHCR and World Vision was key. It’s like having a friend you can always trust. The staff from the organizations were always there to lend a hand and support me throughout the process.” Finally, Doña Anto concludes: “Although Guatemala also has its challenges, I have managed to rebuild my life and become self-sufficient.”

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CONTACT

FABIO SIANI, Senior Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion Officer, siani@unhcr.org