

Americas

North America and
the Caribbean

Latin America



Americas

Working environment

Despite recent economic growth in Latin America and the Caribbean, global increases in food and fuel prices have hurt people across the region. Several countries have also been hit by double-digit inflation rates, affecting socio-economic integration of refugees and other displaced people.

In the Andean region, security concerns were at the top of the political agenda in 2008. Latin American countries and the Organisation of American States have tried to defuse the region's worst diplomatic crisis in years between Colombia and its neighbours, Ecuador and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

At the national level, many Latin American countries continue to be in the midst of profound institutional reforms and reshuffling of their political landscapes. But despite the complexities of this environment, efforts have been made to preserve the humanitarian space. So far, asylum policies have not been affected.

Forced displacement continues to affect a large number of Colombians, both inside the country and in neighbouring States. In 2007, the Colombian Government registered more than 280,000 new internally displaced persons (IDPs). Hundreds of thousands of Colombians in the surrounding countries are also in need of international protection, particularly in Ecuador, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Panama and Costa Rica.

In North America, Canada and the United States continue to receive a large number of asylum-seekers and resettled refugees, and the two countries' acceptance rates for asylum-seekers are among the highest in the industrialized world. However, in the United States, despite fairly developed asylum processes, national security concerns continue to hamper access to protection for asylum-seekers and refugees. The application of the material support bar and other terrorism-related restrictions on admission to the country, while ameliorated by the introduction of some limited waivers, continue to affect many asylum-seekers and refugees in need of resettlement.



In the Caribbean, refugees travel in complex mixed migratory movements. The region's political climate is dominated by concerns over national security and migration control, often to the detriment of international protection needs. There is a risk of political instability, which could lead to new population movements, including increased migration and refugee flight by sea.

In 2009, part of UNHCR's Bureau for the Americas will be moved from Headquarters to Panama to bring decision making and support closer to the field and maximize cost-effectiveness. One of the objectives is to improve coordination and implementation of a comprehensive regional response to situations of displacement, including an all-inclusive strategy for the Colombia Situation, and to improve UNHCR's engagement with regionally based UN partners, NGOs and other institutions. The new regional platform will be better equipped to interact with the Latin American and the Caribbean Regional Directors' Team, which offers strategic support and oversight to address the most pressing issues in the region. The office in

Panama will also provide technical support to other UNHCR offices in Latin America.

Strategic objectives

The Mexico Plan of Action will continue to guide UNHCR's work in Latin America. UNHCR's strategic objectives in the Americas are to:

- Strengthen the protection of refugees, IDPs and others of concern in Latin America through the Mexico Plan of Action;
- attain durable solutions through the three strategic pillars of the Mexico Plan of Action: Borders of Solidarity, Cities of Solidarity, and Resettlement in Solidarity;
- contribute to the implementation of high protection standards in North America by closely monitoring asylum systems in the United States and Canada, and by intervening on particular issues;
- strengthen partnerships to protect refugees and cope with internal displacement, mixed migratory flows and statelessness;
- boost financial and political support for UNHCR from North American countries; and
- ensure the efficiency of operations to help attain strategic objectives, optimize the use of resources and improve the security of staff.

In Colombia, UNHCR will complement the Government's efforts to protect displaced people and promote for an effective State response. Protection gaps persist in Colombia, even though the country has a

sophisticated legal framework, as policies promoting IDP rights are not always applied at lower levels. UNHCR will focus on the reduction of this gap. The recent approval of a law protecting the rights of displaced people will be an important tool for this purpose. The law includes mechanisms to reinforce the implementation of existing legislation, foster accountability and coordination between local and national authorities, and promote private sector participation.

UNHCR will also seek to ensure that Colombians who have fled to other countries in the region have access to international protection. In order to estimate the magnitude of this population, surveys have been undertaken in Ecuador and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. The number of registered refugees in the two countries—less than 20,000—does not reflect the true size of the number of people in need of international protection. The surveys reveal that there are between 130,000 and 140,000 unregistered Colombians in need of international protection in Ecuador and some 118,000 Colombians in the border provinces of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. The survey results will be used to reorient UNHCR's programmes to meet the protection needs of these populations, including the promotion of self-reliance and socio-economic integration in urban centres and border areas.

Ecuador is one of the eight pilot countries for UNHCR's Global Needs Assessment initiative. As a result of the initiative, UNHCR will seek to improve the country's asylum system and provide humanitarian assistance to all persons in need of international protection, and to host communities.



UNHCR and WFP bring food to displaced indigenous communities in remote areas of Colombia.

In September 2008, Ecuador launched a new asylum policy aimed at improving the national refugee status determination (RSD) system and promoting local integration. As part of this policy, the Government will provide documentation and grant refugee status to some 50,000 people in refugee-like situations in the northern provinces of the country through a mass registration exercise conducted with UNHCR's assistance. The authorities will also simplify RSD procedures, which have created heavy backlogs over the years.

In southern South America, UNHCR's main priority is to ensure the sustainability of the regional resettlement programme, a key tool in finding durable solutions for Colombian refugees in Latin America. Argentina, Brazil, and Chile resettled a total of some 380 people between 2005 and 2007, mainly from Colombia. Brazil and Chile have also recently resettled a small number of Palestinian refugees. In 2009, UNHCR will help Uruguay and Paraguay to build resettlement capacity.

In Central America, Mexico and Cuba, UNHCR's main objective is to protect refugees within broader migratory flows. To this end, it will monitor the southern border of Mexico, help to strengthen national asylum systems, and promote the naturalization of long-staying refugees. The Office will strengthen partnerships in refugee protection within mixed migratory flows in the framework of the Regional Conference on Migration and other important regional migration forums.

The Government of Panama has showed a renewed commitment to regularize Colombians in its territory who have been under Temporary Humanitarian Protection. In May 2008, Panama passed a law regularizing the status of long-standing refugees. This allows refugees who have been in the country for more than 10 years to apply for permanent residence, and after five more years to apply for naturalization. In Costa Rica, UNHCR will work with the Government to improve national RSD capacity under the aegis of a recently signed cooperation agreement.

In the Caribbean, UNHCR is prepared to react to new displacements and assist governments in making prompt RSD decisions. The Office will continue to undertake mandate RSD. It will also strengthen its network of honorary representatives and build protection networks with NGOs and the legal and academic communities. The Office will also work to reduce statelessness in the Caribbean.

In Canada and the United States, UNHCR will appeal for the utmost political and financial support for its operations; ascertain that asylum-seekers have access to RSD procedures; and try to ensure that people of concern have access to alternatives to detention and, if detained, are kept in humane conditions. The Office will also keep track of gender-based RSD claims to

see that they are considered in a manner consistent with international standards. Furthermore, it will try to assure appropriate treatment for separated children.

Challenges

Security is the main constraint restricting the delivery of protection and assistance in the region. In certain areas of Colombia, for instance, conflict makes it difficult for humanitarian agencies to reach affected communities. Recent killings of IDP leaders in Colombia are of grave concern to the Office. The civilian population also suffers many casualties from landmines.

An insecure climate prevails also in areas outside Colombia, particularly in border areas that have seen an increase in criminality and a rise in the prevalence of armed groups. As governments in the region grow ever more preoccupied with national security, asylum systems risk being adversely affected. The aerial spraying of coca crops in Colombia's southern border provinces has added new frictions in the country's relations with Ecuador. This has had a negative impact on Ecuadorian public opinion about Colombians, which could create new obstacles to the latter's local integration.

In the United States, where a new Government is due to take office in 2009, decisions affecting asylum risk being delayed during the transition period. In the Caribbean, asylum issues are expected to remain a low priority for States, reducing UNHCR's scope for engagement at the policy level. UNHCR's lack of physical presence and limited resources hinder progress on displacement issues in the area.

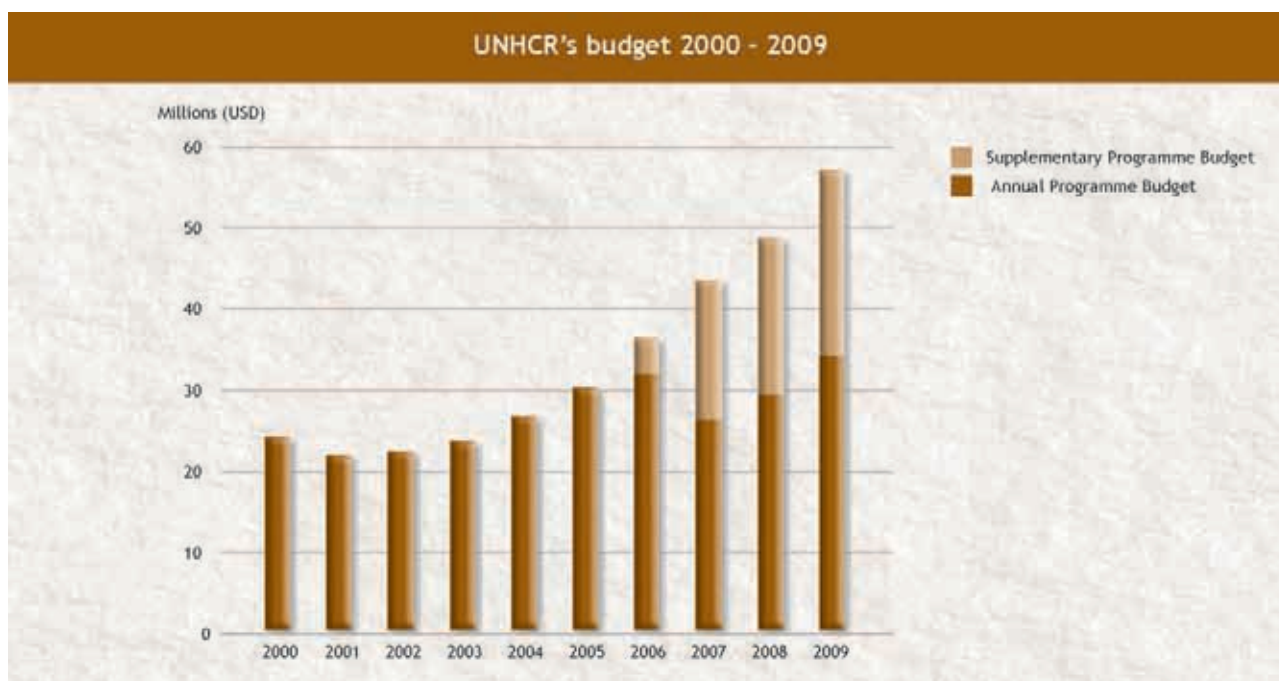
Financial information

UNHCR's financial requirements in the Americas have increased steadily in recent years. This is mostly due to the expansion of the supplementary programme for IDPs in Colombia. The Annual Programme Budget has also grown due to the increase in the number of the displaced being assisted and the reinforcement of protection for unregistered individuals in refugee-like situations in the countries neighbouring Colombia. They have also been boosted by bigger resettlement needs in other Latin American countries.

Furthermore, the cost of improving staff security has added to financial requirements. Though budgets have grown larger, their purchasing power has been reduced by inflation and unfavourable exchange rates in many countries.

The 2009 requirements include the implementation of projects to address unmet needs in Ecuador that were identified in the global needs assessment initiative. They also include the mainstreaming of resettlement activities to make the regional resettlement programme more predictable until receiving States are able to take on more of the financial burden.

Regionalization of UNHCR's operations in the Americas, including the partial decentralization of the Americas Bureau from Headquarters, will have an impact on the overall requirements for 2009 due to transitional costs. The Office will seek to ensure a smooth transition by training newly recruited field staff and conducting a well-organized handover of the relevant Headquarters functions.



| Budget (USD) | | | | | | |
|--|-------------------|----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Countries | 2008 | | | 2009 | | |
| | Annual budget | Supplementary budget | Total | Annual budget | Supplementary budget | Total |
| Canada | 1,859,532 | 0 | 1,859,532 | 1,880,746 | 0 | 1,880,746 |
| United States ¹ | 3,999,002 | 0 | 3,999,002 | 3,986,757 | 0 | 3,986,757 |
| Subtotal North America and the Caribbean | 5,858,534 | 0 | 5,858,534 | 5,867,503 | 0 | 5,867,503 |
| Argentina ² | 2,500,000 | 863,587 | 3,363,587 | 3,565,112 | 0 | 3,565,112 |
| Brazil | 2,550,000 | 897,078 | 3,447,078 | 3,191,174 | 0 | 3,191,174 |
| Colombia | 376,680 | 17,634,984 | 18,011,664 | 386,746 | 22,826,334 | 23,213,080 |
| Costa Rica | 2,293,883 | 0 | 2,293,883 | 3,041,093 | 0 | 3,041,093 |
| Cuba | 267,510 | 0 | 267,510 | 268,000 | 0 | 268,000 |
| Ecuador | 5,238,660 | 0 | 5,238,660 | 10,555,648 | 0 | 10,555,648 |
| Mexico ³ | 2,232,490 | 0 | 2,232,490 | 2,161,309 | 0 | 2,161,309 |
| Panama | 1,000,000 | 0 | 1,000,000 | 1,429,231 | 0 | 1,429,231 |
| Venezuela, Bolivarian Rep. ⁴ | 3,139,990 | 0 | 3,139,990 | 3,642,927 | 0 | 3,642,927 |
| Subtotal Latin America | 19,599,213 | 19,395,649 | 38,994,862 | 28,241,240 | 22,826,334 | 51,067,574 |
| Total | 25,457,747 | 19,395,649 | 44,853,396 | 34,108,743 | 22,826,334 | 56,935,077 |

¹ Includes legal assistance and durable solutions for refugees and asylum-seekers in the United States, as well as protection of refugees and capacity building in the Caribbean.

² Includes local integration in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile and Uruguay, as well as resettlement in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay.

³ Includes local integration in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Belize.

⁴ Includes local integration in Peru.

Note: Supplementary programme budgets exclude 7 per cent support costs that are recovered from contributions to meet indirect costs for UNHCR.