



An internally displaced girl
near the village of Turbaco,
Colombia.

AMERICAS



| WORKING ENVIRONMENT |

Some 70 per cent of the 4.5 million people of concern to UNHCR in the Americas region live in urban areas. Displacement within and outside Colombia continues, driven by lack of security in many areas of the country. In Mexico and the countries of Central America, violence unleashed by non-state actors, including gangs and criminal groups, towards people within mixed migration movements is on the rise. On the economic front, the effects of the global slowdown have been apparent in Latin American countries. The region has also experienced a series of natural disasters, the most notable being the 2010 earthquakes in Haiti and in Chile and floods in Colombia, leaving huge economic losses and more than a quarter of a million people dead.

Against this background, there has been a surge in the number of asylum applications in Latin America, where UNHCR offices also report the arrival of a growing number of asylum-seekers from Africa and Asia. Special attention is required to address human trafficking, the protection needs of vulnerable groups such as unaccompanied children, the legal status of stateless people, and complementary protection for people who may not be refugees.

On the positive side, there has been further significant progress in the development of national and regional protection and legal frameworks. Among them was the enactment in January 2011, of a new Refugee Law by Mexico, which has become the first country in Latin America to grant complementary forms of protection. Argentina has adopted a protocol for the protection of unaccompanied minor asylum-seekers and refugees, involving governmental, non-governmental and UN partners.

Argentina, Bolivia and Chile have adopted standard operating procedures for the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence and the protection of victims, while similar procedures are being finalized in Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay.

In November 2010, 18 Latin American States reiterated their commitment to the Mexico Plan of Action of 2004, by adopting the landmark Brasilia Declaration on the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons in the Americas.

In June 2011, Panama acceded to the 1954 and 1961 Statelessness Conventions, becoming the first country to accede to these Conventions during the year of the commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

Other countries in the region are also taking steps to accede or pledge accession to the Conventions during the commemoration year. Nicaragua has included a section on statelessness in its new Migration and Aliens Law, which introduces preventive measures to avoid risk of loss of nationality, complementary protection for people not qualifying for refugee status but in need of international protection, and special protection measures for foreign children.

In Canada, UNHCR and the Government continue to work closely together on the regulations of the Balanced Reform Act. In the United States of America, legislation has been presented to extend the current Trafficking Victims Protection Act, designed to strengthened governmental action to combat human trafficking in the United States and elsewhere. However, grounds for inadmissibility to the United States have been further reinforced by additional security measures, resulting in more detentions - which can affect people of concern to UNHCR.

In Colombia, the Government has made a major effort in 2011 to address the consequences of displacement, by passing laws such as the Victims and Restitution of Land Bill. However, displaced communities continue at risk of violations to their rights under international humanitarian law.

Ecuador hosted two regional meetings in 2010 that will have consequences in the near future. The first Humanitarian Regional Meeting, called to discuss the protection of refugees and displaced people, was attended by representatives of more than 130 organizations and 17 countries. The first regional meeting of representatives of the Cities of Solidarity – one of the three pillars of the Mexico Plan of Action – provided a forum for discussion of the challenges confronting the local integration of refugees and migrants in urban areas.

| Strategic priorities in 2012 |

- Address restrictive practices in refugee status determination across the region through advocacy and by providing technical and legal assistance to governments.
- Find solutions for refugees and IDPs in Colombia and Ecuador through prevention, protection and emphasis on durable solutions, including return, relocation and local integration.
- Address mixed migration movements and new forms of violence in Central America and Mexico, by identifying ways to protect vulnerable groups, such as unaccompanied children.
- Prevent statelessness in the Caribbean by advocating for accession to international instruments, mapping the population concerned or at risk, providing technical and legal support and helping them with their registration and documentation

The Mexico Plan of Action continues to guide the strategies of all operations in Latin America. Its three main pillars address urban displacement, protection in sensitive border areas and resettlement. The Cities of Solidarity pillar supports the local integration and self-reliance of people in need of international protection in urban areas. It aims to ensure that refugees receive health care, education, access to employment and housing on a par with services



provided to nationals. UNHCR implements income generation projects for refugees and promotes their free access to the labour market.

National and local governments play an important role in this context by implementing refugee-friendly policies, and allocating funds for integration programmes. The Borders of Solidarity pillar helps UNHCR to address protection concerns at borders – primarily those of Colombia with its neighbours. Local integration along the borders is promoted by linking refugee assistance to national and regional development plans. This approach benefits refugees and host communities.

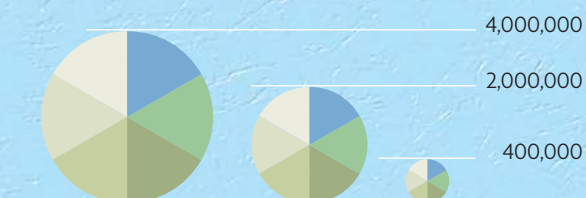
The Resettlement in Solidarity pillar is a regional, responsibility-sharing and protection programme. Since 2004, some 1,100 people have been resettled in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay. The Solidarity Resettlement programme continues to be a valuable responsibility-sharing and protection tool for the region.

In terms of comprehensive durable solutions, UNHCR will seek to expand partnerships aimed at achieving local integration despite an environment characterized by rising levels of discrimination, xenophobia and generalized violence, including sexual and gender-based violence. With some operations reporting difficulties in integrating the large number of refugees recognized over the past decade, the need to focus on comprehensive solutions has been accepted.

As of 2012, the country office in Panama and the Deputy Director's Office will be merged into a Regional Office with oversight and coordination functions for countries in Central America, giving priority to advocacy and support for the various operations.

In North America, UNHCR will continue to encourage governments to undertake measures designed to address existing protection gaps. It will also embark on selected monitoring activities and judicial interventions. UNHCR is also engaged with several Caribbean States and NGO partners in activities to ensure access to a nationality for undocumented people of Haitian descent.

Population size



Financial information

The financial requirements for Latin America remain stable in 2012 and 2013.

Additional initiatives and priorities in the region as mentioned above will be a challenge, since the 2012 prioritized budget represents less than 50 per cent of total financial requirements to cover the needs for the Americas. The Transitional Solutions Initiative (TSI), designed to facilitate the transition from humanitarian aid to sustainable development, is expected to bring additional funding for the Colombia operation. Inflation and unfavourable exchange rates that currently hamper programmes in many countries are expected to persist in 2012.

Challenges

While the Americas continue to have strong regional and national instruments for the protection of people of concern to UNHCR, there are also concerns on States' focus on their national security, lowering recognition rates, the establishment of pre-admissibility procedures that may hamper access to asylum, the use of administrative detention for migrants and asylum-seekers, and the growth of human trafficking. The combination of these various negative factors makes it difficult for UNHCR to achieve its strategic priorities in the region.

In Latin America, refugees seeking local integration face weak national economies and shrinking and discriminatory labour markets. For refugees arriving from other continents, such difficulties are compounded by cultural and linguistic barriers and the absence of ethnic or community support.

UNHCR does not have the capacity to investigate all potential cases of *refoulement*, whereas the increasing complexity of mixed migration movements calls for greater monitoring capacity to ensure that adequate protection safeguards are in place at borders.

Maritime incidents continue to be a concern

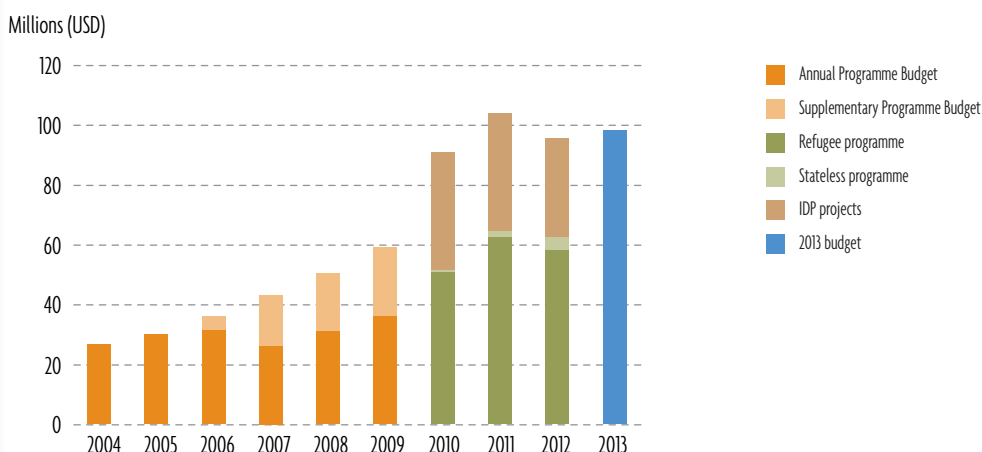
for UNHCR in the Caribbean, where there are continuous arrivals of people travelling in small and often unseaworthy vessels. The maritime environment in the northern Caribbean is extremely complex, and ensuring asylum safeguards are upheld in the context of interception and rescue-at-sea remains a challenge.

Most Caribbean countries that receive migrants, particularly Haitians, have difficulties in meeting their international obligations, owing to a lack of capacity combined with a fear of attracting more people. Only two countries in this region have national legal frameworks covering asylum.

In Colombia, the complex dynamic of the conflict continues to produce displacement. Difficult access to land, limited employment opportunities, sexual and gender-based violence and the lack of means by States to respond to the particular needs of displaced women and girls pose additional difficulties.

In the United States, laws designed to bar the admission of suspected criminals and terrorists may also prevent certain categories of refugees from being accepted for resettlement in the country, and some individuals from being granted asylum. ■

UNHCR's budget in the Americas 2004 - 2013



UNHCR BUDGET IN THE AMERICAS | USD

Operations	2011 Revised budget	2012			Total	2013
		PILLAR 1 Refugee programme	PILLAR 2 Stateless programme	PILLAR 4 IDP projects		
NORTH AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN						
Canada	2,080,946	1,301,317	148,727	0	1,450,044	1,450,044
United States of America Regional Office	14,843,837	6,467,521	4,116,118	4,166,655	14,750,293	14,100,002
Subtotal	16,924,783	7,768,837	4,264,845	4,166,655	16,200,337	15,550,046
LATIN AMERICA						
Argentina Regional Office	5,832,956	4,412,885	0	0	4,412,885	4,538,670
Brazil	4,793,864	4,614,202	0	0	4,614,202	4,650,019
Colombia	34,384,563	1,028,039	0	28,353,223	29,381,262	31,980,000
Costa Rica	2,972,801	2,811,417	0	0	2,811,417	2,100,000
Ecuador	21,936,301	21,009,913	0	0	21,009,913	21,500,000
Mexico	2,067,649	2,988,011	0	0	2,988,011	3,350,000
Panama Regional Office	6,321,301	5,088,209	0	0	5,088,209	5,500,000
Venezuela (Bolivarian Rep. of)	8,122,882	9,020,433	0	0	9,020,433	9,020,000
Subtotal	86,432,317	50,973,109	0	28,353,223	79,326,332	82,638,689
Total	103,357,100	58,741,947	4,264,845	32,519,878	95,526,669	98,188,734