

# South America

## Northern South America

### Major developments

Following the end of the formal peace talks between the Government of Colombia and the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias* (FARC) in February 2002, hostilities amongst all the main factions (FARC, *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* – ELN, and the paramilitaries – AUC) increased, leaving limited options for a solution to this humanitarian crisis. The armed conflict amongst these three irregular groups and the army, continues to force Colombians to cross borders into neighbouring countries. In 2002, the presence of Colombian insurgent groups in the border areas of Ecuador, Panama and Venezuela raised concerns about the possible spill-over of the conflict into these territories. From 2001 to 2002, asylum applications in the neighbouring countries almost doubled from 3,750 applications in 2001 to 7,110 in 2002.

In Ecuador, the election of a new government, in November 2002, did not change the country's open

#### Northern South America

Colombia  
Ecuador  
Guyana  
Panama  
Peru  
Suriname  
Venezuela

#### Southern South America

Argentina  
Bolivia  
Brazil  
Chile  
Paraguay  
Uruguay



to national security. There was widespread concern among governments that liberal asylum-policies would create a pull factor for coca growers, drug-traffickers, common criminals, and combatants or ex-combatants. Widespread poverty and social tensions in most of the refugee-receiving areas also affected previously open attitudes towards refugees and asylum-seekers, and reduced possibilities for local integration.

During the year, incursions by Colombian insurgent groups into neighbouring countries heightened the vulnerability of refugees. The attacks often led to an increase in the homicide rates of Colombians in the border areas of Ecuador and Venezuela, and sometimes resulted in clashes with the national border police in Panama.

## Progress towards solutions

Within the framework of a coordinated regional approach to the Colombian humanitarian crisis,

UNHCR's three main objectives were to:

- Protect the rights of individuals to seek asylum and receive assistance in the border areas;
- Consolidate the national legal frameworks in Ecuador, Panama, Peru and Venezuela;
- Develop protection networks, especially in border areas.

The focus of UNHCR's programme was on the border regions, where there was a high concentration of individuals looking to UNHCR for protection and assistance. The Office and its partner agencies in these areas implemented Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) in refugee-hosting communities to further reinforce the national protection networks. At the same time, strategic partnerships were sought at the regional level with the Catholic Church, other

attitude towards refugees. The Government of Ecuador remained committed to fair asylum policies and internationally-accepted practices.

Following a failed *coup d'état* in Venezuela in April 2002, the country was rocked by domestic turmoil which continued throughout the year. This seriously affected all sectors of society, and the refugee law which came into effect in October 2001 was not implemented.

## Challenges and concerns

Due to their perceived links with arms and drug-trafficking, Colombian asylum-seekers and refugees are regarded by governments in the region as a threat

UN agencies, IOM and the ICRC. It is expected that these partnerships will lead to more joint activities in the border areas of Ecuador, Panama, and Venezuela in 2003.

During the year, the Office endeavoured to establish new implementing arrangements and to expand its operational coverage in all of the countries concerned. Ecuador received the highest number of asylum-seekers, mostly Colombians. In 2002, there were 6,280 new asylum cases, compared to 3,460 in the previous year. As a result, UNHCR increased its field presence by deploying additional protection staff and reaching agreements with local NGOs and development agencies to assist with the RSD process. These efforts, though designed purely to meet the needs of refugees and asylum-seekers, did permit financial savings, and made it possible for UNHCR to expand its community projects in Ecuador. In Venezuela, UNHCR signed a new agreement with a local NGO and deployed field staff to Machiques and Guasualito to provide better monitoring and assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers in the areas bordering Colombia.

In Peru, a notable accomplishment for UNHCR was the passing of the first refugee law, which came into effect on 22 December 2002. In Ecuador, UNHCR made major advances in re-drafting the decree regulating refugee protection to ensure closer adherence

to international standards. The Office continued to support the Eligibility Commission in the country, particularly through intensive on-the-job coaching. This led to a three-fold increase in the number of decisions made on asylum applications. During the year, UNHCR also introduced essential protection tools through the adoption of a new electronic database for registration countrywide. The Government issued new identification documents to asylum-seekers and refugees.

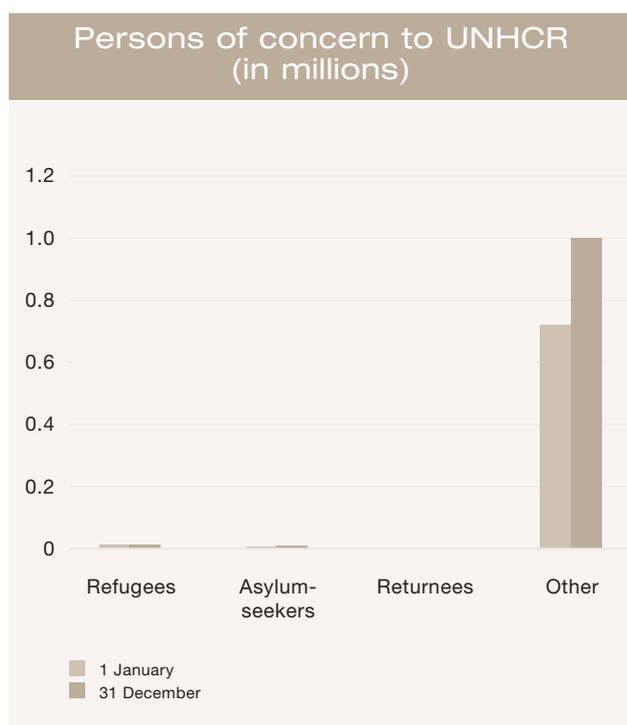
In September 2002, UNHCR produced a set of guidelines entitled "International Protection Considerations Regarding Colombian Asylum-seekers and Refugees," and shared them with countries of asylum and partners. These guidelines were important in facilitating the adjudication of asylum applications.

## Operations

The following paragraphs summarise UNHCR's operations and activities by country, except for **Colombia**, which is described in a separate country chapter.

In **Ecuador**, with the support of UNHCR, the Government made considerable progress in its RSD procedures. The Eligibility Commission reviewed 3,250 asylum applications (up from 1,130 in 2001), of which 1,710 were favourably recognised. However, in view of the growing number of asylum-seekers in 2002 (6,280, compared to 3,460 in 2001) and the roughly 2,000 cases still awaiting a decision, the Government may have to review the RSD process, and adopt a *prima facie* recognition policy in border areas.

UNHCR's main implementing partner and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs created a new electronic database for refugees which significantly improved the response to the increased demands of asylum-seekers. In addition, the Government approved the issuance of new identity documents, which are difficult to forge and therefore provide better protection for refugees. In 2002, the relocation of Colombians in Ecuador to a third country became increasingly important, in view of the security risks brought upon them by the presence on Ecuadorian territory of illegal Colombian armed groups. Three out of the 11 transit centres situated in the proxim-



ity of the border with Colombia were closed in order to improve security and meet the protection needs of asylum-seekers.

In **Guyana**, there was violent conflict between supporters of the main political parties over political power and economic influence. Although the situation did not lead to an exodus to neighbouring Suriname or Venezuela, OCHA's Early Warning and Contingency Planning Unit stressed the need for UN agencies to adopt a co-ordinated approach to address possible population displacements. The resulting plan accorded to UNHCR the task of monitoring potential refugee movements.

In **Panama**, domestic and international factors led to an increasingly restrictive asylum policy, which resulted in relatively few applications for asylum being lodged (only 126) despite the intensified conflict in Colombia. Decree 23, although under review, provides only temporary humanitarian status to asylum-seekers in the border areas of the Province of Darién and restricted their freedom of movement and the right to work. As a consequence, UNHCR focused its attention on ensuring the effective delivery of assistance to asylum-seekers. UNHCR carried out numerous missions to the area, from headquarters and UNHCR's office in Venezuela. Since September 2002, a protection officer was also deployed to Panama on a semi-permanent basis to address emerging protection problems in the country. In collaboration with implementing partners in the Province of Darién, UNHCR developed small-scale community-based projects, which will benefit both the local population and refugees. In December 2002, UNHCR approved the opening of new offices in Panama City and Yaviza (Darién Province). These are expected to become operational in 2003.



Panama: QIPs in Puerto Obaldin: Here a fisherman has received fishing material to help him to earn a living. *UNHCR / J. Morland*

UNHCR's proactive lobbying with the Government of **Peru**, led to the adoption of a fairly liberal refugee law in October 2002. The law, which is expected to improve the country's RSD procedures, represents a major step forward for UNHCR, in view of the country's political, economic and social situation. The Office continued to assist 70 refugees of different nationalities, out of a group of 690. UNHCR's implementing partner assisted 90 new arrivals, mostly Colombians.

In **Venezuela**, the regulations implementing the refugee law (passed in 2001) had still not been put in place in 2002, and there was a backlog of asylum applications. The deteriorating security situation in

the country's border states was of concern to UNHCR, as irregular troops from both Colombia and Venezuela have reportedly been operating in the area and targeting Colombians. At the same time, the lack of documentation for most Colombians impeded their access to basic health and education services, and their chances of finding a job. UNHCR continued to press the Government to implement RSD procedures. The Office also increased its presence in the border areas to improve its access to persons of concern (two national and two international staff were deployed). UNHCR approved the opening of two antenna offices in Guasdalito and Machiques at the end of 2002. Relations with local authorities were enhanced and protection networks (NGOs and the Church) strengthened. A comprehensive QIP programme was developed for communities in the border areas and seven projects were implemented (school rehabilitation and the improvement of health and sanitation infrastructure).

## Funding

In 2002, donors expressed an increase interest in the impact of the Colombian conflict on neighbouring countries. UNHCR's regional strategy consisted of improving national refugee legislation, strengthening national protection networks, and establishing and maintaining an increased UNHCR presence in border areas. These aims were actively encouraged and supported by donors. The number of asylum applications in the region is expected to increase even more rapidly in 2003 than in 2002. Therefore, additional resources will continue to be needed, particularly for UNHCR's programme in Ecuador.

# Southern South America

## Major developments

In 2002, the financial and socio-economic crisis in Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay, and Uruguay affected those countries' capacity to accommodate refugees.

In the region, there were 8,660 refugees and asylum-seekers, 4,760 of whom received assistance and counselling through UNHCR programmes. The refugee

population is largely urban, and originates mainly from Angola, Colombia, Cuba, Liberia, Peru and Sierra Leone, with smaller groups from Afghanistan, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East. During the year, a monthly average of 100 asylum-seekers arrived, mostly in Argentina, Brazil and Chile, more than half of them were single men aged 17 to 35, and women represented a third of the adult population (roughly 700).

## Challenges and concerns

UNHCR's overall strategy in the region was based on three main objectives, all of which embody a gender-based approach: 1) reinforcing the promotion and/or adoption of a legal framework at national and regional levels; 2) designing an integration strategy, which prioritises self-sufficiency for urban refugees through micro-credit schemes, with financial and other support from civil society; and 3) strengthening the role of emerging resettlement countries: Brazil and Chile. However, the socio-economic reality of the region, coupled with UNHCR's own financial constraints posed serious handicaps for the Office to rapidly implement the planned strategy.

The political and economic situation in Argentina, Bolivia and Paraguay led to delays in the refugee status determination (RSD) process. Asylum-seekers' access to RSD procedures was affected by immigration control measures in border areas declared to be a security concern by the governments concerned (i.e. around the area where the borders of Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay meet). UNHCR carried out missions to these border areas, in co-ordination with national authorities and implementing partners, to monitor asylum-seekers' access to these procedures. In 2002, the lack of trained personnel, and information materials on asylum procedures, access to legal aid and interpretation for non-Spanish-speaking asylum-seekers were the main shortcomings.

## Progress towards solutions

In 2002, MERCOSUR added refugee issues to its regular agenda. In December, the six MERCOSUR countries signed an agreement granting free transit and residence to all citizens, including refugees.

The agreement facilitated the movement and local integration of refugees fleeing one MERCOSUR country and seeking asylum in another.

UNHCR reinforced and expanded partnerships in Southern South America, in its efforts to achieve durable solutions in the region. As a result, NGOs and civil society institutions continued to include refugee issues in their own policies and activities. In 2002, implementing partners in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay covered some 40 per cent of refugee assistance from non-UNHCR funds in the areas of health, education, vocational training and counselling.

Brazil and Chile demonstrated their commitment as emerging resettlement countries by receiving refugees from Afghanistan and other Middle East countries. Through continued collaboration and on-the-job training with NGOs, UNHCR strengthened their capacity to respond to new challenges, and to provide economic support during the initial integration period for the resettled persons.

In view of the socio-economic difficulties prevailing in Argentina, private sector fund raising activities in the country were suspended in 2002. UNHCR and *Argentina con ACNUR* (ARCA) concentrated on building awareness through public information and media events. Despite the financial constraints, ARCA raised some USD 8,500 for the region.

Chile: Refugees from former Yugoslavia in Santiago receive advice and assistance to enable them to become more self-sufficient.  
UNHCR / P. Gutnisky

## Operations

**Argentina** received 280 new arrivals. UNHCR and its implementing partner assisted some 1,530 refugees and asylum-seekers. In October 2002, the Office began an RSD project in Argentina, with the aim of helping the Refugee Committee to reduce the backlog of some 1,500 asylum claims, and at the same time to reinforce its technical capacity. By the end of the year, the number of pending asylum claims had fallen by 15 per cent.

UNHCR's implementing partners in Buenos Aires financed 88 income generation projects. 249 persons (35 per cent women) benefited from micro-credit schemes by the end of the year. More than 400 refugees attended vocational training in order to improve their chances in a drastically contracted job market. UNHCR, in co-ordination with the University of Buenos Aires and local NGOs established legal clinics with funds received from the University of Texas. These clinics provided legal counselling to refugees and migrants, analysed national legislation and promoted international refugee law.

In **Bolivia**, there were 24 new arrivals and the Office assisted some 52 refugees and asylum-seekers. During the year, UNHCR continued to lobby for the adoption of a refugee law.



**Brazil** received 880 asylum requests, and the Office assisted some 2,730 refugees and asylum-seekers. Efforts were made to reinforce the protection framework for refugees and asylum-seekers. The Office supported the National Academy of Federal Police by sponsoring a regional seminar on refugee law and RSD procedures for law enforcement officers (police and border authorities). As a result, an agreement was reached between UNHCR and the academy to incorporate refugee issues into the existing curricula of the institution. In April 2002, a first group of 23 Afghan refugees arrived in Porto Alegre from the Islamic Republic of Iran and India. Civil society and local authorities provided them with identity cards, as well as health and education benefits.

**Chile** received 43 new arrivals during the year. UNHCR assisted some 370 refugees and asylum-seekers in the region, and helped 10 refugee families to become more self-sufficient through micro-credit schemes. As a result of a mission to Azerbaijan and Pakistan, the Government of Chile approved the resettlement of 12 Afghan refugees.

In **Paraguay**, the Office received three new arrivals, and assisted 25 refugees and asylum-seekers. In July 2002, Paraguay adopted a refugee law based largely on the UNHCR model law.

**Uruguay** received eight asylum requests and UNHCR assisted some 50 refugees and asylum-seekers. The

Office launched a micro-credit project to support the local integration of refugees in the country.

With the pro-bono support of advertising agencies, UNHCR raised awareness of the situation of refugees in Argentina and Brazil. UNHCR produced 13 new awareness campaigns for both the print media and television. Some television spots were also created at headquarters, and both were broadcast or published, mostly in Argentina, Brazil and Chile. In 2002, the Office obtained free media slots which amounted to USD 356,705,19. UNHCR also set up 25 photo exhibits in Argentina and Chile. On the occasion of World Refugee Day, a media kit was sent to journalists throughout the region, resulting in 38 articles and 18 interviews on refugee issues in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay. UNHCR continued to regularly translate briefing notes on UNHCR activities worldwide for regional partners and other Spanish-speaking offices, in addition to translating and editing UNHCR videos used by the Office.

## Funding

Due to budgetary constraints, the RSD project had to be postponed until the end of the year. This postponement delayed the full implementation of an expedited RSD procedure and reduced the opportunities for recognised refugees to integrate locally.

### Voluntary Contributions – Restricted / Earmarked (USD)

| Earmarking <sup>1</sup> | Donor                          | Annual Programme Budget |              |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|
|                         |                                | Income                  | Contribution |
| <b>Colombia</b>         |                                |                         |              |
|                         | <i>Deutsche Stiftung (GFR)</i> | 146,921                 | 146,921      |
|                         | <i>España con ACNUR (SPA)</i>  | 222,799                 | 90,199       |
|                         | European Commission            | 1,509,303               | 1,509,303    |
|                         | Italy                          | 314,469                 | 314,469      |
|                         | Japan                          | 500,000                 | 500,000      |
|                         | Private Donors Italy           | 259,193                 | 259,193      |
|                         | Spain                          | 205,826                 | 205,826      |
|                         | Sweden                         | 235,805                 | 235,805      |
|                         | Switzerland                    | 299,401                 | 299,401      |
|                         | United States of America       | 1,406,332               | 1,406,332    |
|                         |                                |                         | >>>          |

| Earmarking <sup>1</sup>   | Donor                         | Annual Programme Budget |                  |
|---|-------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------|
|   |                               | Income                  | Contribution     |
| <b>&gt;&gt;&gt;</b>   |                               |                         |                  |
| <b>Ecuador</b>  |                               |                         |                  |
|   | <i>España con ACNUR (SPA)</i> | 0                       | 122,167          |
|   | Germany                       | 246,063                 | 246,063          |
|   | Italy                         | 157,234                 | 157,234          |
|   | Spain                         | 445,986                 | 445,986          |
|   | United States of America      | 210,000                 | 210,000          |
|   | USA for UNHCR (USA)           | 25,000                  | 25,000           |
| <b>Panama</b>   |                               |                         |                  |
|   | Italy                         | 276,698                 | 276,698          |
|   | United States of America      | 80,000                  | 80,000           |
| <b>Venezuela</b>  |                               |                         |                  |
|   | Italy                         | 235,851                 | 235,851          |
|   | Private Donors Italy          | 62,200                  | 62,200           |
|   | United States of America      | 80,000                  | 80,000           |
| <b>South America</b>  |                               |                         |                  |
|   | Canada                        | 310,559                 | 310,559          |
|   | Norway                        | 371,005                 | 371,005          |
|   | Sweden                        | 329,436                 | 329,436          |
|   | United States of America      | 1,790,000               | 1,790,000        |
| <b>Total</b>  |                               | <b>9,720,081</b>        | <b>9,709,648</b> |
| <sup>1</sup> For more information on the various earmarkings, please refer to the Donor Profiles. |                               |                         |                  |

| Budget and Expenditure (USD)   |                         |                   |
|--|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Country  | Revised Budget          | Expenditure       |
|  | Annual Programme Budget |                   |
| <b>Northern South America</b>  |                         |                   |
| Colombia   | 4,562,114               | 4,418,955         |
| Ecuador  | 1,513,137               | 1,372,036         |
| Panama   | 392,500                 | 392,500           |
| Venezuela  | 1,711,731               | 1,638,694         |
| Regional Projects <sup>1</sup>   | 752,700                 | 541,059           |
| <b>Southern South America</b>  |                         |                   |
| Argentina  | 992,751                 | 842,467           |
| Regional Projects <sup>2</sup>   | 2,008,345               | 1,753,570         |
| <b>Total South America</b>   | <b>11,933,278</b>       | <b>10,959,281</b> |
| <sup>1</sup> Includes local integration and repatriation assistance to refugees in Guyana, Peru, Suriname and Venezuela.                               |                         |                   |
| <sup>2</sup> Includes local integration of refugees in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay, and scholarships for refugee students. |                         |                   |