

South America

Northern South America

Major Developments

During the reporting period, political initiatives to end the conflict in Colombia failed. The peace process was abandoned, leading to an intensification of the conflict. All sides to the conflict—the Armed Forces, paramilitary forces and guerrilla groups, particularly the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC)*—embarked on a drive to stockpile weapons and recruit new members. The civilian population remained a target, and repeated human rights violations caused an upsurge in internal displacement. It became more difficult to gain access to IDPs, or to offer any durable solutions to their plight.

There were several increases in cross-border movements of populations into Ecuador, Panama and Venezuela. Border monitoring became an increasingly important source of information on the situation in Colombia. In Europe and North America, the number of Colombian asylum-

Colombia
Ecuador
Guyana
Panama
Peru
Suriname
Venezuela
Argentina
Bolivia
Brazil
Chile
Paraguay
Uruguay



seekers increased significantly: they now represent the 11th largest group of asylum-seekers.

In view of the expanding conflict and the increase in forced displacement, a high-level UN meeting on Colombia was held in New York in October 2001. Various population displacement scenarios were discussed using a range of planning figures, and provisional contingency plans were sketched out for Ecuador, Panama and Venezuela, the three neighbouring countries most acutely affected.

Challenges and Concerns

In Colombia, armed elements continued to perpetrate acts of violence with impunity against civil-

ians, causing population displacement. Colombia has passed laws defending the rights of IDPs, but in most areas local authorities have yet to put them into effect. The Colombian IDP programme did make some progress, but still faces fundamental constraints.

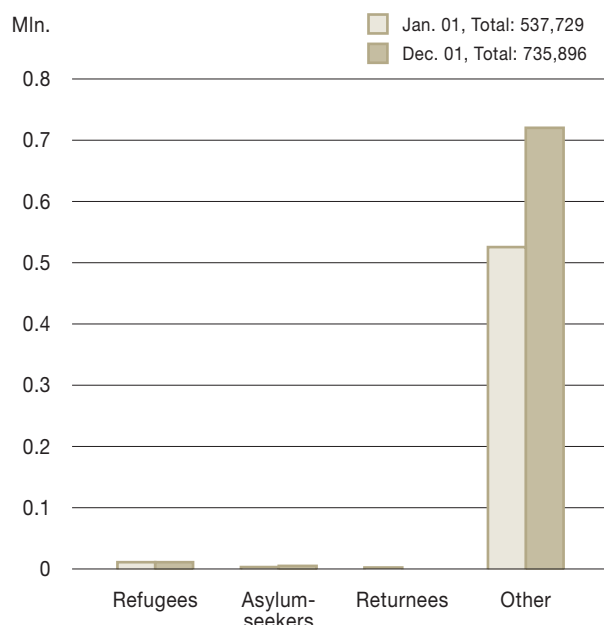
For a start, the scale of the problem is not known from the different figures provided by various sources. UNHCR's government counterpart used figures which ranged from 720,000 to two million persons. NGO estimates were considerably higher. Efforts were therefore made to reinforce the government information system.

The security of IDPs and their leaders was a cause for concern, despite the physical protection extended to them under the Ministry of Interior's programme for human rights workers (covering all IDP leaders working with them). In 2001, the security of humanitarian aid workers also deteriorated. The year 2002 is an election year for Colombia and UNHCR will endeavour to ensure that the IDP issue comes

high on the political agenda. UNHCR will encourage the incoming Government to incorporate IDP provisions in its four-year development plan.

The Colombian conflict spilled over into neighbouring countries and affected asylum countries in the sub-region, such as Costa Rica. Border monitoring was intensified in order to predict and respond to new population movements. UNHCR was concerned about the security of Colombians in neighbouring countries, and therefore increased protection presence in the field, working closely with implementing partners in Ecuador, Panama and Venezuela. Working in close co-ordination with government authorities and implementing partners, UNHCR will increase emergency preparedness in the sub-region by means of substantial

South America Persons of Concern to UNHCR



stockpiles of non-food items in Ecuador, Panama and Venezuela, and stand-by arrangements with international organisations for the rapid deployment of qualified staff to the relevant border areas in the event of a large influx.

Progress Toward Solutions

UNHCR continued to support major institutional and policy changes needed to enhance the protection of IDPs in Colombia and identify solutions for them. A priority was the dissemination and application of Law 387, which defines the rights of IDPs and protects and assists them at the local level. UNHCR strongly advocated adherence to the UN's "Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement". Through its field presence, UNHCR monitored returns and contributed towards the reintegration of IDPs.

The protection of IDPs and the prevention of further population displacement was enhanced by UNHCR's support of initiatives by IDPs and their associations. IDP associations have mitigated the effects of displacement and improved access to shelter, employment opportunities, and basic services, including, education and healthcare. The IDP programme in Colombia continued to focus on those hardest hit by the process and con-

sequences of displacement, i.e. women, children, adolescents, Afro-Colombians and indigenous populations.

UNHCR is the designated co-ordinator on displacement issues for the UN system. This function is supported by UNOCHA through the assignment of staff to UNHCR. A Thematic Group on Displacement (GTD) was created to facilitate inter-agency co-ordination on IDP issues. In 2001, GTD was in the process of developing a joint UN Humanitarian Plan of Action to be shared with the donor community. This UN plan will set priorities for UN interventions on behalf of IDPs for the coming two years and will assist the incoming Government in defining its IDP policy.

UNHCR prioritised border monitoring, which serves as an important source of accurate country of origin information, so as to assist the asylum countries in improving their protection regimes. Tri-partite meetings continued to take place in Ecuador and Panama, and UNHCR will encourage the establishment of a tri-partite agreement with Venezuela. In Ecuador, UNHCR established a refugee status determination (RSD) project and sent in an RSD team from May to August 2001 to clear a backlog of some 2,500 cases.

Operations

To address internal displacement and refugee flows caused by the Colombian conflict, UNHCR has adopted a regional approach which reinforces the asylum systems in Ecuador, Panama and Venezuela, and strengthens the response of national institutions that address internal displacement in Colombia.

According to official sources, internal displacement in **Colombia** increased from 128,000 newly displaced (IDPs) in 2000 to 190,000 in 2001. By contrast, NGO estimates were of 317,200 in 2000 and 341,920 in 2001. Women accounted for more than half the IDPs, and about a quarter were children under the age of 18. Overall, internal displacement became more complex, with more rural-to-rural and urban-to-urban displacement.



Colombia: An IDP family. UNHCR / J. Spaul

In 2001, UNHCR had a Branch Office in Bogotá and three offices in the field (Apartadó, Barrancabermeja and Puerto Asís). In order to enhance national coverage, UNHCR is planning to open a fourth field office in the Atlantic Coast region of the country (Sincelejo). Throughout the year, UNHCR had meetings on the IDP issue with local authorities and implementing partners in order to help civil society to increase its role in protecting and finding solutions for IDPs. UNHCR contributed to humanitarian initiatives for IDPs through international co-operation and effective co-ordination (on behalf of the UN system). It increased the monitoring of cross-border movements and provided country of origin information to UNHCR in neighbouring and other asylum countries. UNHCR also worked in partnership with 14 Colombian NGOs, and participated actively in PARinAC meetings in Bogotá. The Office continued to support the establishment of IDP associations (with adequate representation of women). UNHCR also worked on a project with the Ministry of Education in Colombia to promote the education of IDP children in returning communities.

In **Ecuador**, the border area with Colombia became tense with regular cross-border movements and incursions by armed insurgents in 2001. A UNHCR refugee status determination team supported the

Eligibility Commission for a period of three months, training staff on international refugee law, establishing guidelines on eligibility for Colombian asylum-seekers, and decreasing the backlog of 2,500 cases, mostly Colombian asylum-seekers from two border regions. Three tri-partite meetings were held with Colombia, and border monitoring was improved and extended to the provinces of Carchi and Esmeraldas. To extend protection in the border areas, a presence was established in Ibarra, Imbabura province.

In **Panama**, UNHCR undertook missions to monitor the quality of asylum and encourage the extension of temporary protection for some 760 Colombian asylum-seekers beyond the two months foreseen in Temporary Decree No. 23. UNHCR continued to participate in and support the National Eligibility Commission, and provided training on international refugee law to its government partner, ONPAR (*Oficina Nacional para Ayuda a los Refugiados*), and the police service. Tri-partite mechanisms were initiated, and at the first tri-partite meeting, guidelines for repatriation were established. UNHCR continued to provide assistance and support to some 1,500 Colombian refugees in Panama (water, sanitation, health care and education). The Office also provided individual assistance to new arrivals.

In **Peru**, the Government of Peru forged a bi-lateral agreement with the Government of Colombia in view of possible large influxes from Colombia. A new decree on refugee protection, which will better meet the needs of refugees, was put into place by Peru's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. UNHCR also conducted a training on refugee law for the military, police service and migration officials in and outside of Lima.

Towards the end of 2001, the Colombian conflict increasingly affected the border areas in **Venezuela**. In order to monitor the influx of Colombians, UNHCR entered into appropriate partnerships with sister agencies already working on the border. In August, a Field Office was opened in San Cristobal, Venezuela, to monitor population movements in the four states bordering Colombia (Amazonas, Apure, Tachira and Zulia). Throughout the year, UNHCR continued to work towards the effective functioning of the ad hoc mechanism for refugee status determination. The Organic Law on Refugees and Asylum-Seekers, which came into effect on 3 October 2001, was a welcome step towards improving protection for refugees and asylum-seekers, and implementation details are now being discussed.

In **Guyana** and **Suriname**, UNHCR promoted capacity-building activities in favour of refugees and asylum-seekers with local authorities and implementing partners. In Guyana, UNHCR continued to encourage the country to accede to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol.

Funding

Over the past three years, UNHCR has gained valuable knowledge and experience of the IDP situation in Colombia. UNHCR's co-ordinating role has been acknowledged by the Government of Colombia and the international community. The Special Operation in Colombia was well supported by donors in 2001, and significant contributions were received for the improvement of protection regimes in Ecuador, Panama and Venezuela.

Southern South America

Major Developments

In the region as a whole, the integration process of refugees and asylum-seekers, as well as efforts to build a regional economic bloc were seriously affected by the political, economic and social upheaval in Argentina. The deepening political and economic crisis in Argentina tended to undermine the democratisation process and the rule of law, not only there, but also in Bolivia, Paraguay and Uruguay. In Bolivia, growing social unrest amongst the lowest income groups was further exacerbated by the implementation of the country's coca eradication programme. Paraguay was further destabilised by political infighting. In 2001, Brazil and Chile were the only countries in the Southern Cone to remain stable.

In Southern South America, there are 8,400 persons of concern to UNHCR, of whom 2,300 are asylum-seekers, and 6,130 refugees. The refugee population is largely urban, and originates mainly from Latin America (Colombia, Cuba and Peru) and Africa (Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia and Sierra Leone), with smaller groups from Eastern Europe and the Middle East. Less than 25 per cent are family groups, the majority being young single men (aged 17 to 35). Some 5,100 refugees (37 per cent of them women) received UNHCR's assistance and counselling.

Challenges and Concerns

UNHCR's main goal in 2001 was to continue strengthening and building national constituencies in the sub-region in order to progressively hand over responsibility for refugee protection and local integration to national entities. UNHCR's efforts to provide assistance and support during the reception phase, successfully catalysed greater incorporation of refugee issues into social and labour programmes in the sub-region. However, the national schemes of all the countries in the sub-region were influenced by the ongoing political and economic crisis in Argentina. As a result, the most vulnerable sectors of the population, including refugees, were affected by the reductions in public welfare programmes.



Chile: Resettled refugees from former Yugoslavia accommodated together in a house. They take Spanish lessons and learn the culture. UNHCR / P. Gutnisky

In Brazil and Chile, refugees from outside the sub-region were received for resettlement, demonstrating these countries' commitment to international solidarity and burden sharing. Strengthening of such initiatives in the sub-region would require further financial and technical expertise.

After 11 September 2001, asylum-seekers were affected by stricter immigration controls as a consequence of heightened security concerns in the so-called "triple frontier" area abutting Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay. UNHCR continued to advocate for harmonised regional refugee legislation and procedures in the context of MERCOSUR.

Progress Toward Solutions

During 2001, slow but discernible progress was made towards achieving protection objectives. UNHCR helped governments incorporate norms and principles of international refugee law into national legislation, monitored the implementation of these new and amended laws, and actively nurtured regional protection networks within civil society.

The expanding role of civil society in refugee matters in the sub-region was a cause for considerable satisfaction. About 40 per cent of refugee assistance (i.e. health care, education, vocational training and counselling) was covered by non-UNHCR funds. In Argentina, civil society covered 48 per cent of refugee needs, in Brazil 40 per cent, in Chile and Uruguay 35 per cent and in Bolivia 20 per cent. This cost-sharing approach is indicative of the significant sustainability achieved by national organisations; however, UNHCR still needs to play an uninterrupted co-ordinating role in the sub-region.

It was of great significance at the regional level that refugee issues were on the agenda of MERCOSUR's immigration and internal security meetings, and that UNHCR was able to participate.

During 2001, *Argentina con ACNUR (ARCA)* continued to play its key role in advocacy and public awareness campaigns. ARCA raised USD 36,000 in cash donations and USD 5.8 million in free media slots for publicity campaigns created by UNHCR.

Operations

In **Argentina**, UNHCR improved local integration opportunities through its technical assistance for governmental and other institutions promoting self-sufficiency for refugees. Some 1,800 refugees received counselling and material assistance under UNHCR's programme. 180 refugees received subsistence allowances every month. 140 refugees from outside the sub-region benefited from the intensive Spanish language programme co-ordinated by the University of Buenos Aires. To increase opportunities for refugees in the job market, UNHCR provided vocational training, delivered in co-ordination with one of its implementing partners. Agreements for labour training were concluded with three labour unions. About 50 refugees received financial assistance to enable them to attend these courses. Nearly 70 refugee children benefited from primary education.

In the sub-region, **Brazil** hosted the largest refugee population. More than two-thirds of the assisted refugees reside in Rio de Janeiro, with the remainder in São Paulo and other Brazilian cities. Most refugees in Brazil originate from Africa (80 per cent), particularly from Angola (58 per cent), Democratic Republic of the Congo (7 per cent), Liberia (9 per cent) and Sierra Leone (5 per cent). During 2001, over 500 persons applied for refugee status. The majority of these asylum-seekers came from Angola, Sierra Leone and Romania.

UNHCR worked with government officials and NGO partners to design a resettlement programme, which identified possible resettlement sites and possible implementing partners in Brazil. The Brazilian authorities made an initial commitment, subject to review, to resettle 120 refugees in four different locations over a two-year period. If that process runs to plan, the Government of Brazil will, in principle, be willing to increase the numbers in subsequent years.

In **Chile**, UNHCR worked in close co-operation with the Government and an implementing partner to build national resettlement capacity. The Government of Chile agreed on amendments to the Framework Agreement on Resettlement deleting reference to resettlement as a "pilot project", and all restrictions on nationality or numbers. In the

future, annual numbers of people accepted for resettlement would depend on operational considerations to be jointly assessed by the Government and UNHCR.

In late 2001, UNHCR and the Government of Uruguay began to explore the possibility of providing resettlement opportunities for refugees with an agrarian background. The issue will be reviewed in greater detail in 2002.

Funding

Some core activities such as international refugee law training for law enforcement institutions, initially planned for Argentina and Brazil, could not be implemented as a result of Action 2 and lack of necessary funding.

In addition, a wide range of planned medium and long-term activities for refugees could not be implemented owing to the delays in the release of funds to the field offices. This problem became critical towards the last quarter of the year when the obligation was increased on a monthly basis.

Voluntary Contributions – Restricted (USD)			
Donor	Earmarking ¹	Annual Programme Budget	
		Income	Contribution
Canada	South America	318,471	318,471
<i>España con ACNUR (SPA)</i>	Colombia	186,583	226,827
	Ecuador	112,389	112,389
European Commission	Colombia	895,255	895,255
Japan	Colombia	270,000	270,000
Norway	Colombia	216,685	216,685
Spain	South America	54,637	54,637
	Colombia	136,593	136,593
Sweden	South America	614,584	614,584
Switzerland	Colombia	280,899	280,899
United Kingdom	South America	982,764	982,764
United States of America	Colombia	1,400,000	1,400,000
TOTAL²		5,468,860	5,509,104

¹ For more information on the various earmarkings, please refer to the Donor Profiles.

² Total funds available for obligation in the region also included unrestricted voluntary contributions, lightly restricted contributions, opening balances and adjustments.

Budget and Expenditure (USD)		
Country	Revised Budget	Expenditure
	Annual Programme Budget	
Northern South America		
Colombia	3,887,538	3,806,120
Ecuador	1,100,764	1,038,807
Panama	299,900	299,869
Venezuela	1,648,883	1,596,491
Regional Projects ¹	408,630	315,250
Southern South America		
Argentina	1,102,854	1,086,518
Regional Projects ²	1,837,676	1,789,982
TOTAL South America	10,286,245	9,933,037

¹ Includes local integration and repatriation assistance to refugees in Guyana, Peru, Suriname and Venezuela.

² Includes local integration of refugees in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay, post-secondary education for refugees, and scholarship for refugee students.