



South America

Northern South America

Recent developments

Worsening conflict in Colombia, and a series of critical developments have affected the security in the country. As a result, many Colombians, particularly those living in the border areas, have been compelled to seek asylum abroad. Ecuador has received more than 1,200 new arrivals per month in 2003. This influx has been the result of increased hostilities in the department of Nariño, and the fumigation of coca plantations in the department of Putumayo. It has been reported that the latter has also prompted smaller movements of Colombians into Lima and the Province of Loreto in Peru.

Security in the border areas is of growing concern to Colombia, and the Government is seeking agreements with the Governments of neighbouring countries. This is attributable in large part to recent increases in mixed migration flows, and widespread stigmatisation of Colombians (as kidnappers and drug traffickers). In April 2003, a bilateral agreement was signed with the Government of Venezuela, to improve the monitoring of borders and population movements. UNHCR is

Northern South America

Colombia
Ecuador
Guyana
Panamá
Peru
Suriname
Venezuela

Southern South America

Argentina
Bolivia
Brazil
Chile
Paraguay
Uruguay



concerned that these measures will weaken the established protection regimes and lead to increasingly restrictive protection practices.

Northern South America has been affected by political and economic instability throughout 2003. In Venezuela, there were several confrontations between government supporters and the opposition. Likewise, in Ecuador and Peru, there has been public disenchantment with the authorities.

Strategic objectives

In Northern South America, UNHCR aims to provide protection and solutions for refugees, asylum-seekers and persons of concern in the countries bordering Colombia. Despite the constraints presented by a volatile regional environment, UNHCR is making progress

in improving national refugee legislation, and strengthening RSD procedures and regional protection frameworks (particularly in Ecuador and Venezuela). At the regional level, UNHCR will strengthen the protection networks in border areas with the help of the Church, NGO partners and UN agencies. It will also increase visibility of the humanitarian aspects of the conflict, including the protection and assistance needs of the civilian victims of the Colombian conflict, and other affected populations in neighbouring host countries. UNHCR's regional strategy is to continue focusing on the border areas and to respond to the needs of Colombians through registration, humanitarian assistance, community-based projects, extended protection networks and capacity-building for State authorities. In 2004, UNHCR will seek to make advances in: safeguarding the right to seek asylum, and access to assistance in the border areas; consolidating the national legal frameworks in Ecuador, Panamá, Peru, and Venezuela; and developing and strengthening protection networks, especially in the border areas.

By the end of 2003, UNHCR will finalise a regional assessment of the numbers and characteristics of

persons of concern to the Office in Ecuador, Panamá, and Venezuela. This data will enable UNHCR to adapt the region's protection framework more effectively to the needs of Colombians living in neighbouring countries. Persons of concern to UNHCR in the region will be registered, to ensure that their rights are respected in accordance with national and international law. The Office will also support community development projects initiated in late 2002, for those communities with high concentrations of Colombians. Since many Colombians do not come forward and present themselves as asylum-seekers, UNHCR has tried to accommodate their most immediate needs and increase their self-sufficiency through these projects. In Ecuador, Panamá, and Venezuela, community development projects in education, health, water, infrastructure and agriculture have had an important protection impact by improving relations of refugees with their host communities. These have also helped to improve the living conditions of both groups. In 2004, UNHCR will



Venezuela: A Colombian woman living in Urena takes care of housekeeping chores. UNHCR / D. Rochkind/Polaris

make a concerted effort to further mainstream refugee women and refugee children's issues in its protection and assistance activities, as well as capacity-building and training for the Office and its implementing partners.

So far, UNHCR has not facilitated the voluntary repatriation of Colombians from neighbouring countries, as the overall situation has not improved. At the same time, there are no indications that it will improve in 2004. Nevertheless, a few individuals have been assisted to return home on a case by case basis. UNHCR continues to ensure that all Colombians returning home are fully informed of the situation in their home town. The Office will promote asylum-seekers' participation in community development and micro-credit projects to promote their self-reliance. In January, UNHCR opened a resettlement office in Quito,

with regional coverage, to facilitate durable solutions for individuals facing personal security threats in their country of asylum. As of September, the office had referred 196 individuals for resettlement in third countries. In 2004, the resettlement programme will be further consolidated.

Operations

As in previous years, **Ecuador** remains the country that receives the most Colombian asylum-seekers. During the first six months of 2003, some 7,260 asylum requests had been received, surpassing the figure for the whole of 2002. By August 2003, the population of concern to UNHCR had reached almost 20,000. In 2004, UNHCR will continue to support the RSD Committee, implementing



partners, the implementation of community development activities, and the monitoring of borders. The Office will also strengthen protection networks in the region through improved co-operation with NGOs and UN agencies, in particular UNIFEM and WFP. Training on refugee issues will be made available for national and migration police, military authorities and civil society organisations.

UNHCR, in co-operation with other UN and international agencies, will establish a temporary presence in **Panamá** to monitor the implementation of the national refugee legislation, and the situation of Colombians in the province of Darién.

In **Peru** there are some 680 refugees. This may well increase in 2004, depending on the security situation at the border with Colombia. The Government has asked UNHCR to assist in capacity-building for its officials in border areas. UNHCR will co-operate with local NGOs and UN agencies to enhance monitoring and information-sharing in border areas.

In **Venezuela**, UNHCR will provide logistical and operational support to the newly established National Refugee Commission and to the 'Provincial Technical Secretariats', whose task is to prepare asylum-seekers' files with the help of the provincial authorities. Relevant personnel will receive training in registration and RSD procedures. UNHCR will also organise workshops in refugee law for the Migration Department, the Ministry of Interior and Justice, provincial authorities and the armed services.

In Venezuela, there were 60 refugees and 1,880 asylum-seekers in September 2003. Altogether, the country hosted 12,920 persons of concern to UNHCR, mostly Colombians. UNHCR and the Government plan to register this population, working together, in order to identify protection needs and provide identification documents.

For the coming year, UNHCR intends to employ a registration system similar to the one used in Ecuador. From September 2003, UNHCR will carry out a major awareness campaign in the border areas of Venezuela to publicise the national asylum and refugee legislation. The Office will also consolidate its presence at the border, provide vital support for its implementing partners, and work closely with other UN agencies.

In 2004, UNHCR will implement mass media campaigns to highlight the plight of civilian victims and the humanitarian consequences of the Colombian conflict. The Office will disseminate information on refugee rights, and carry out special training workshops for journalists covering refugee issues. An important aspect of UNHCR's public information efforts in 2004 will be the elaboration of campaigns demonstrating the positive impact of community development projects in refugee receiving communities.

Southern South America

Recent developments

Following its presidential elections in April 2003, Argentina embarked on renewed efforts to solve its economic crisis. At the same time, the region has witnessed a period of political and economic stability in Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay.

In December 2002, Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay signed a MERCOSUR agreement allowing free transit and residence for all of their citizens. This agreement will have positive implications for refugees and for those who are in a refugee-like situation. It will facilitate the local integration of those individuals who flee one MERCOSUR country, and seek asylum in another.

The restrictive measures implemented in Southern South America since September 11, have affected the number of persons who have been granted asylum throughout the region. In view of the expanding Colombian conflict, Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay have accepted some 170 Colombian refugees. This demonstrates these countries' commitment to the protection of refugees.

Strategic objectives

In Southern South America, UNHCR has three main purposes: to build constituencies in the region and pro-

gressively hand over responsibility for refugee protection and local integration to national institutions; to reinforce resettlement programmes in Brazil and Chile; and to promote sustainable self-sufficiency for refugees through micro-credit systems. A further challenge for UNHCR in Argentina, Brazil and Chile will be the objective of helping those countries to increase their participation in international and regional fora on refugee/humanitarian issues.

Operations

Regional legal framework

In the MERCOSUR countries and associated States, UNHCR will monitor States' practices, provide expert

commentaries and advice on refugee issues, and facilitate the harmonisation of regional policies on refugee matters. In the same vein, the Office will also monitor any initiatives to combat terrorism or migrant smuggling in order to better protect refugees and asylum-seekers, whilst taking into account the security concerns of States.

In 2004, UNHCR will strengthen and expand protection networks through existing and new partners. These networks will provide basic legal and material assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers. They will also engage in advocacy and the provision of legal expertise on national refugee legislation.



Refugee children in Argentina. UNHCR/J. Mohr

Emerging resettlement countries

The agreements between UNHCR and the Governments of Brazil and Chile and related sub-agreements with implementing partners open up new opportunities for tripartite collaboration on refugee matters. They also serve to heighten these Governments' intention to bridge gaps in their social systems, as refugees do not always have access to education, health, and housing. Many refugees and asylum-seekers in Brazil and Chile, emerging resettlement countries, experience barriers to their successful integration. Furthermore, more material and financial resources are needed to support the local integration of resettled refugees. These constraints have impacted the Office's efforts to establish sustainable resettlement programmes in these countries. In 2004, UNHCR will assist resettled refugees to participate in micro-credit projects, to support their efforts to become self-reliant.

Assistance to refugees and self-reliance programmes

UNHCR will continue to provide relief assistance to newly arrived refugees and asylum-seekers. The focus will be mainly on meeting the basic needs of vulnerable persons. During 2003, more than 300 refugees benefited from vocational training programmes in the region. In Argentina, Chile and Uruguay, the Office implemented a micro-credit scheme which allowed refugees to set up small projects such as a pub, a beauty salon, a photography studio and a bakery. Forty-two per cent of these loans were extended to women, and some 200 families benefited from this project. In 2003, there was a loan recovery rate of 96 per cent in these three countries. In view of this success, UNHCR will launch similar programmes in Bolivia and Brazil in 2004.

Capacity-building and protection networks

To make the best use of UNHCR's limited resources in Southern South America, the Office will support national and regional legislative processes, and support and strengthen co-ordination mechanisms amongst civil society institutions involved in refugee issues. The Office will reinforce protection networks with

local NGOs, human rights groups, universities and local authorities in small border towns and in capitals, through training on refugee law and international protection. These networks will be responsible for: increasing public understanding of refugee rights; monitoring the timely identification of asylum-seekers and refugees; and providing legal counselling where necessary.

Public information and public awareness

In 2004, UNHCR will promote public information and public awareness activities, including media and television campaigns, newspaper articles and posters, which will further support the resettlement programme in the region. The Office will closely co-ordinate a comprehensive media strategy, involving other agencies and government interlocutors, so as to improve the public image of refugees, and the accuracy of media coverage on refugee issues.

UNHCR will distribute a comprehensive information handbook to asylum-seekers and refugees in Argentina. This will include details on RSD procedures and local sources of support. The handbook will be adapted by other countries in the region. UNHCR will encourage implementing partners to publicise their work in UN publications (UNHCR's own, and those of sister agencies), and on the internet.

In addition to targeted media activities, UNHCR will support sustained efforts to enhance the general visibility of the refugee problem. The continued pro bono support of advertising agencies in Argentina and Brazil will be instrumental in raising local awareness of the refugee situation worldwide. In 2004, UNHCR will continue to expand its range of public information activities, through a pool of dedicated volunteers.

Budget (USD)

Country	Annual Programme
Northern South America	
Colombia	5,616,549
Ecuador	2,111,487
Panamá	804,621
Venezuela	1,302,296
Regional Activities ¹	900,000
Southern South America	
Argentina	769,140
Brazil	234,210
Regional Activities ²	2,272,900
Total	14,011,203

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

² Includes local integration of refugees in Southern South American countries, resettlement of refugees in Brazil and Chile, and scholarships for refugee students.

