

South America

Northern South America

Northern South America

Colombia
Ecuador
Guyana
Panama
Peru
Suriname
Venezuela

Southern South America

Argentina
Bolivia
Brazil
Chile
Paraguay
Uruguay

Major developments

There were fewer newly displaced persons in 2003 than in previous years. Yet, the conflict in Colombia continued to cause Colombians to flee to neighbouring countries in search of international protection. The influx of refugees and the simultaneous presence of illegally armed groups along the borders with Colombia had a negative impact on the asylum policies of countries in the region. Without losing sight of the security concerns of these countries, UNHCR continued to implement and reinforce a regional response to the crisis. This response focused on ensuring that persons seeking asylum had access to protection and assistance; consolidating the legal and institutional asylum framework; and coordinating protection and assistance networks.

During the latter half of 2003, Ecuador's governing coalition split, and strikes and protests became frequent. In 2003, a total of 11,463 persons requested asylum in Ecuador, of whom 3,270 were granted refugee status. Since January 2000, the total number



Without giving prior notice to UNHCR, a group of 109 Colombians was returned by Panamanian security forces from Darién province to Colombia in April 2003. In December, another group of 84 Colombians was returned from Darién, in conformity with bilateral agreements between the two countries, and this time UNHCR participated as an observer, to monitor the voluntary nature of the return. In October, the Government agreed to allow UNHCR to establish a temporary presence in Panama for an initial period of six months.

Challenges and concerns

The ongoing Colombian conflict caused major population displacement within the country, as well as the exodus of victims to neighbouring countries. In 2003, there was a greater number of incursions by illegally armed groups into neighbouring countries. These groups managed to establish a permanent but fluid presence in the border areas of Ecuador, Panama, and Venezuela. In 2003, there were reports of rising crime, kidnapping, and drug-trafficking. This situation led to a gradual militarization of the borders, and the establishment of bilateral agreements between the Government of Colombia and its neighbours.

of asylum-seekers, mostly Colombians, reached 21,721 by the end of 2003, and the number of Colombians who sought protection in Ecuador almost doubled. In November, during the visit of the United Nations Secretary General, Kofi Annan, to Ecuador, the Government expressed its concern about uncontrollable numbers of persons crossing the border into Ecuador against a background of national economic difficulties.

In January 2003, four indigenous leaders were killed as a result of incursions by Colombian paramilitaries into the Panamanian border villages of Pucuru and Paya. Thereafter, the Governments of Colombia and Panama increased efforts to strengthen their common border and prevent illegal Colombian armed forces from using Panamanian territory as a base.

Progress towards solutions

A resettlement unit was established in Ecuador in January to respond to the increasing numbers of refugees facing urgent security problems. By the end of the year the unit had referred 157 cases, most of them to the USA. A new registration database was set up, following UNHCR's new guidelines on registration for asylum-seekers. In February 2003, the Ecuadorian authorities started issuing new identification documents for asylum-seekers and refugees on the basis of the information contained in the database. The issuance of these documents significantly reduced the risks of arbitrary detention and deportation.

During discussions with the Government of Panama on the establishment of a UNHCR office in the country, it was agreed that the national entity in charge of refugee matters, ONPAR, would set up a field presence with the financial support of UNHCR, to enable it to assume its protection responsibilities in the border region more effectively. In October, a UNHCR representation office was opened in Panama City. A Field Office in Yaviza (Darién province) will be opened at the beginning of 2004.

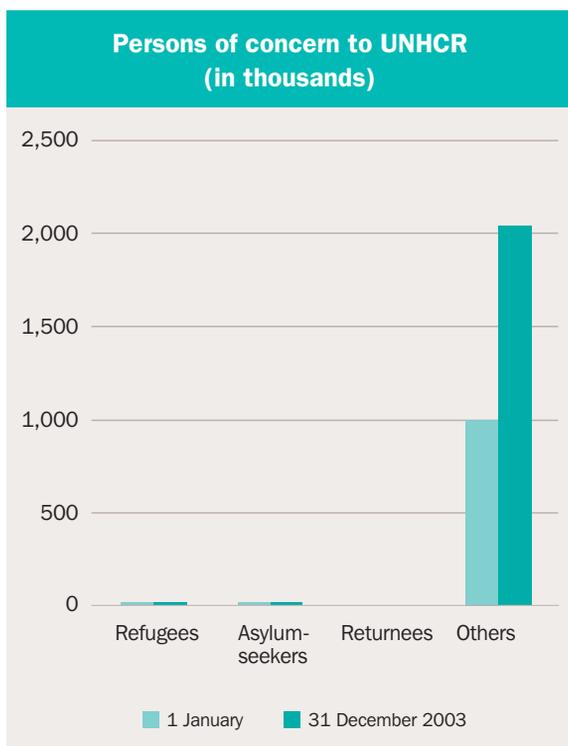
Following the adoption of a new refugee law in December 2002, the Government of Peru adopted the relevant implementing decree in October 2003. The Special Refugee Commission resumed its work in October, having been inoperative for more than a year. During 2003, some 150 persons were granted refugee status. By the end of 2003, the country hosted 718 refugees and 111 cases were pending refugee status determination by the Special Refugee Commission. In order to enhance institutional capacity-building, UNHCR offered training on

refugee law to members of the Special Refugee Commission, and followed up on their work.

In Venezuela, rules of procedure guiding the implementation of the refugee and asylum law were issued in August. The National Refugee Commission, with its Regional Technical Secretariat in the border state of Táchira, was created to regulate the status of asylum-seekers pending the determination of their status. The new institutional framework is a welcome step towards improved protection mechanisms in the country. In 2003, UNHCR set up 76 community-based Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) in 27 communities along the borders for some 26,000 individuals (Colombians and locals). In parallel, UNHCR undertook a public information campaign to raise awareness of refugee issues among communities and local authorities in the border areas. The Office also began the registration of asylum-seekers in Táchira, providing them with temporary identification documents, which helped to prevent them from being deported or detained as illegal immigrants.

Venezuela: A nurse weighs a one-day old baby on a machine that was bought with the support of UNHCR. *UNHCR/D. Rochkind*





Operations

UNHCR's operations for **Colombia**, are described in a separate country chapter.

In 2003, the QIP programmes implemented in **Ecuador**, **Panama** and **Venezuela** directly benefited some 49,900 persons (Colombians and locals). The QIPs included projects on road construction; training for community health workers; construction of water systems; rehabilitation and furnishing of schools and clinics; and improved sanitation. Furthermore, by the end of the year, 68 heads of household in Panama, 38 in **Peru**, and 48 in Ecuador had participated in income-generating projects. In Venezuela, 31 asylum-seekers opted to receive items needed for setting up small businesses in lieu of household items to which they would otherwise have been entitled. UNHCR also helped 107 refugees with vocational training in Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela. The number of activities will be increased in 2004 to help refugees achieve self-sufficiency.

Some 1,540 primary school and 87 secondary school children in Ecuador, Panama, Peru and Venezuela received uniforms and school supplies. Of this number, 16 children in Panama received scholarships.

UNHCR provided basic assistance to some 417 Colombians and 64 Panamanians living alongside

refugees in Jaqué, Panama. UNHCR also provided complementary food for children, pregnant and breastfeeding women, and vulnerable adults in Jaqué, as well as 87 individuals in the Tuira region, and a small number of refugees in the capital. In Ecuador, 6,170 refugees and asylum-seekers received food aid through WFP. As in previous years, in all countries of the region, UNHCR provided domestic items to asylum-seekers and refugees, and medical assistance for those in need.

UNHCR strengthened its cooperation with UN agencies and national entities for the benefit of refugee and asylum-seekers. An agreement was concluded with UNIFEM in Venezuela and Ecuador on 17 January, and joint training activities and projects were implemented with UNICEF, UNFPA and Pan American Health Organization (PAHO)-WHO.

The organization of a regional conference of bishops in March 2003 led to a common plan of action and formed a basis for the comprehensive development of protection networks in the region. In response to the increase of asylum-seekers, particularly in Ecuador, cooperation with key partners was enhanced, and all implementing partners strengthened their field presence during 2003.

Funding

UNHCR's regional strategy and programmes were fully encouraged and supported by the international community. The budget for the programme in Ecuador had to be increased towards the second half of the year to take into account the increased number of refugees in the country.

Southern South America

Major developments

There was a change of government in four out of the six countries in Southern South America during 2003. Throughout the subregion, general political instability coupled with economic crises resulted in social unrest, while democratic processes and the rule of law were undermined. Invariably, the refugee protection regime was also adversely affected.



Chile: A Rwandan refugee woman at a market in Santiago. *UNHCR/D. Guerrero and I. Carmona.*

In Argentina, the new Government placed human rights at the top of its agenda. The adoption of a new migration law, which replaced the more restrictive law of 1981, relaxed the criteria for residency for refugees. Unfortunately, however, unemployment rates were high despite an economic growth of seven per cent in 2003. The Government also reformed the upper strata of the army and police, which led to more streamlined, efficient forces. Through regional meetings, efforts were made to better coordinate their relations with other MERCOSUR countries.

Challenges and concerns

In the region, there were 8,787 refugees and asylum-seekers, of whom 5,160 received humanitarian assistance and legal support from UNHCR for an initial period of six months following their arrival. In coordination with national institutions, UNHCR monitored the situation of refugees to ensure that local authorities continued to consider safeguard clauses related to both refugees and those seeking asylum. In mixed migration flows, there were still large numbers of would-be asylum-seekers who did not request asylum, mainly due to their lack of knowledge of their rights. This may also be attributed to a lack of knowledge of refugee law among



Progress towards solutions

In 2003, the Refugee Commission in Argentina was restructured, and UNHCR trained its newly recruited secretariat staff. By the end of the year this had resulted in a 50 per cent decrease in the backlog of pending asylum cases. The Refugee Commission also formally adopted the application of the 1984 Cartagena Declaration as specific grounds for recognition of refugees, with special attention to refugee women. Two draft refugee laws, based on the model law proposed by UNHCR, were promoted by government agencies, and will be passed on to the legislative bodies in 2004 for consideration. The Office trained immigration officers in the border areas, and organized regional consultations with implementing partners, to improve coordination, as well as to discuss the challenges in the region.

The Bolivian Government accelerated the issuance of identification documents to refugees during the second half of 2003, as had been agreed in the meeting held between the Minister of Foreign Affairs and UNHCR at the XXIII Organization of American States (OAS) General Assembly in June 2003. The Bolivian Episcopal Conference also began to participate in the National Refugee Commission. A micro-credit scheme was set up in 2003 to help refugees become more self-reliant. UNHCR lobbied authorities for the enactment of a new governmental decree to implement the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol.

Brazil played an important role in promoting international refugee protection, in the context of MERCOSUR. In 2003, the Government reiterated its commitment to consolidate and further expand its resettlement programme. UNHCR signed agreements with Brazilian universities in order to implement the newly created *Cathedra Sergio Vieira de Mello*, aimed at disseminating and reinforcing human rights and refugee issues.

In Chile, resettlement criteria were updated and revised to better respond to the needs and challenges facing the programme. The Government also agreed to adopt accelerated procedures for the consideration of cases in urgent need of resettlement. In June 2003, at the OAS General Assembly held in Santiago, a resolution was adopted on "The Protection of Refugees, Returnees, Stateless, and Internally Displaced Persons in the Americas." The resolution encouraged States which have not yet

immigration and local officials. In 2004, UNHCR will continue its efforts to train immigration and police officers on refugee law issues.

UNHCR continued to promote modest numbers for resettlement in Brazil and Chile. The integration of groups of resettled refugees remained difficult, due to the restricted opportunities for self-reliance open to them. UNHCR continued to work with the Governments to ensure that refugees had access to basic education and health care. The development of resettlement programmes is dependent on the appropriate selection of cases and much-needed technical assistance for personnel involved in the process.

ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, to do so, and called upon countries to adopt national mechanisms for the protection of asylum-seekers and refugees in accordance with international protection standards. It also introduced two important recommendations: that States establish specific standards for the reception of asylum-seekers and refugees, and that States combat xenophobia and racial discrimination against these vulnerable groups.

The Government in Paraguay established a National Refugee Commission. UNHCR provided technical support and training for the commission members on RSD and on local integration issues. The Office trained border officials on eligibility procedures. In April 2003, UNHCR officials met with MERCOSUR's Technical Commission on Immigration to discuss issues related to migration and asylum.

The Government of Uruguay enacted a decree establishing a National Committee in charge of refugee issues. UNHCR provided training on RSD for the authorities responsible for RSD, and on refugee law for immigration authorities. This helped increase their awareness of the rights of stowaways who arrive on sea vessels and seek asylum.

Operations

In 2003, UNHCR and its partners registered 788 new arrivals. Amongst these, 422 sought asylum in **Brazil**, 243 in **Argentina** and 123 in the rest of the region. There were some 25 persons who voluntarily repatriated from Argentina and Brazil to Afghanistan, Angola and **Chile**.

UNHCR's work on resettlement was centred on selecting new cases and consolidating the integration of small groups of refugees in Brazil and Chile. Following a selection mission to Ecuador and Costa Rica, 16 Colombians living in those countries were resettled to Porto Alegre, Brazil. A selection mission was also carried out by the Chilean authorities to Ecuador and Costa Rica in December 2003. It is expected that a group of 38 refugees will be resettled in Chile during the first quarter of 2004. Resettlement programmes such as those in Brazil and Chile bring challenges, but also offer opportunities to strengthen the refugee protection regime by offering permanent solutions for refugees.

UNHCR participated in UN interagency meetings in Argentina, **Bolivia**, Brazil, Chile, **Paraguay** and **Uruguay**. The Office, in coordination with national authorities and civil society institutions, organized joint activities on refugee issues, particularly in Argentina, Bolivia and Brazil.

In countries in Southern South America, UNHCR and its implementing partners reviewed the needs of refugee families and provided basic assistance accordingly. Some 1,200 asylum-seekers received subsistence allowances, pending their achievement of self-reliance, with local NGOs assisting them to find temporary housing, food and clothing. About 2,200 asylum-seekers received medical assistance, and the special needs of refugee women and children were met.

Some 445 refugee children benefited from primary education, 270 attended secondary schools, and 74 refugee children attended pre-school. Of the 166 refugees who received language training, 45 per cent were female. Twenty-four refugees (half of them women) gained university degrees, facilitating the process of their local integration.

To enhance socio-economic empowerment, 120 refugees (28 per cent women) received micro-credits to start income-generating activities: raising poultry and pigs, opening small shops, beauty parlours, and internet cafés. These were coupled with vocational training for 428 refugees. To provide refugees with access to employment, agreements were reached with municipal welfare centres, universities, trade unions, and private associations in Argentina, Brazil and Chile.

Funding

During 2003, the refugee programmes in Southern South America were modest and heavily dependent on contributions from civic and professional organizations. Limited levels of political attention and financial resources were also devoted to the national commissions dealing with RSD. UNHCR's funding was directed mostly to the refugee assistance programmes. However, the Office recognizes that increased efforts will be needed to enhance the self-reliance of refugees. To this effect, a donor submission was made to the private sector to attract additional funding for income-generating activities in the region.

Voluntary contributions - Restricted / Earmarked (USD)

Earmarking ¹	Earmarking	Annual programme budget	
		Income	Contribution
South America	Norway	273,973	273,973
	Sweden	912,201	912,201
Colombia	<i>Association Française de Soutien à l'UNHCR (FRA)</i>	11,395	11,395
	<i>Deutsche Stiftung (GFR)</i>	232,257	232,257
	European Commission	975,590	1,951,180
	Japan	500,000	500,000
	Private donors Italy	341,830	341,830
	Spain	578,533	532,386
	<i>Stichting Vluchteling (NET)</i>	171,428	171,428
	Switzerland	370,370	370,370
	United Kingdom	161,783	161,783
	United States of America	1,500,000	1,500,000
Ecuador	European Commission	244,656	244,656
	Germany	294,464	294,464
	Spain	329,778	262,256
	United States of America	227,000	227,000
Total		7,125,258	7,987,179

¹ For more information on the various earmarkings, please refer to the donor profiles.

Budget and expenditure (USD)

Country	Revised budget	Expenditure
	Annual programme budget	
Northern South America		
Colombia	6,100,307	6,018,242
Ecuador	1,994,105	1,914,751
Panama	575,598	516,805
Venezuela	1,635,970	1,629,096
Regional projects ¹	891,279	834,003
Southern South America		
Argentina	745,094	721,648
Regional projects ²	1,949,578	1,624,626
Total South America	13,891,931	13,259,171

¹ Includes care and maintenance and durable solutions for refugees in Northern South America.

² Includes local integration of refugees in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay and scholarships for refugee students and resettlement assistance to refugees in Chile and Brazil.