

# The Americas

North America and  
the Caribbean

Latin America  
(Mexico Plan of Action)



# The Americas

## Working environment

In the wake of elections, many countries in Latin America are in the midst of profound institutional reform and reshuffling of their political landscapes. The transition has been characterized by social unrest and mounting antagonism between ruling parties and the opposition. In such an environment, humanitarian issues, such as large-scale displacement, are not high on the political agenda. Nonetheless, States throughout the region have shown a renewed commitment to the Mexico Plan of Action, which seeks to address refugee and internal-displacement issues from a regional perspective.

Colombia continues to be trapped in a complex internal conflict, and has one of the largest internally displaced populations in the world. Indeed, it registered more than 200,000 new displaced people in 2006 alone. The country has a sophisticated legal framework for addressing displacement and the Government has allocated substantially more resources for internally displaced persons (IDPs). However, there is a considerable gap between legislation and implementation, particularly outside the capital city. In the last few years the conflict has spread from central regions to remote border areas, leading to new displacements that have affected Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities disproportionately.

The number of Colombians fleeing their country continues to increase. The large majority of Colombians in need of international protection generally keep a low profile in remote border areas or urban shanty towns. The number of unregistered Colombians in neighbouring countries is estimated at some 500,000. The conflict is now also having an impact on Brazil's Amazon region, where local authorities report the presence of an increasing number of Colombians of concern to UNHCR. Simultaneously, the number of Colombian asylum-seekers in North America and Europe continues to increase.

In Canada, concerns for UNHCR include the absence of a focal point on asylum matters in the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) and the continued use of the so-called "direct back" policy. Under this procedure, asylum-seekers arriving at border ports of entry are directed back to the United States and given an appointment for an eligibility interview in Canada at a later stage—without knowing if they qualify for an



exception under the Safe Third Country Agreement. Although Canada has an exemplary asylum process, the growing backlog of asylum claims is a concern.

In the United States, despite a fairly smooth asylum process, the ongoing preoccupation with national security continues to hinder access to protection for asylum-seekers and refugees. The application of the material-support and other terrorism-related bars to admission to the United States, while ameliorated by the introduction of some limited waivers, continues to affect many refugees in need of resettlement, as well as asylum-seekers in the United States.

UNHCR's office in Washington covers 13 independent States and 12 overseas territories, principally in the Caribbean. The region is characterized by mixed migratory movements originating from diverse locations around the world, as well as by intraregional flows. Ten of the 12 independent Caribbean States have acceded to the 1951 Refugee Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol, but only the Dominican Republic has passed implementing legislation.

## Strategic objectives

UNHCR's strategic objectives in the Americas are to:

- Strengthen the protection of refugees, internally displaced people and others of concern in Latin America through the Mexico Plan of Action.

- Attain durable solutions through the three strategic pillars of the Mexico Plan of Action: Borders of Solidarity; Cities of Solidarity; and Resettlement in Solidarity.
- Contribute to the implementation of protection standards in North America by closely monitoring asylum systems in the United States and Canada, and by proactively intervening on particular issues.
- Ensure that overall regional priorities concerning gender, age and diversity are included in the strategic planning of field operations.
- Strengthen partnership arrangements on refugee protection, internal displacement, mixed migratory flows and statelessness.
- Strengthen financial and political support from North American countries for UNHCR's operations worldwide and in Latin America.
- Ensure efficiency in operations to help attain strategic objectives, optimize the use of resources and improve the security of staff.

UNHCR tries to ensure a coherent protection response in all countries affected by the conflict in Colombia. An important challenge is to protect the basic rights of Colombians who — despite being un-registered or not having undergone a formal refugee status determination (RSD) procedure — might be in need of international protection. UNHCR's protection strategy will target almost half a million Colombians who have not officially sought asylum because of security or other reasons. The Office will also promote the self-reliance and socio-economic integration of refugees, IDPs and others of concern in urban centres and border areas.

In Colombia, UNHCR's priority is to bridge the gap between the sophisticated legislation on displacement and its implementation in the field. To this end, and following discussions with the Government, UNHCR has expanded its activities in the country.

In southern South America, UNHCR is gradually developing a regional resettlement programme that helps to ease the pressure on those countries that receive the largest number of refugees in the region. The programme's key challenge is to find solutions for the integration of resettled refugees in their new host communities. The Office will also strengthen asylum legislation and give support to eligibility commissions; monitor sensitive border areas; and train border officials in identifying people in need of international protection within broader migration movements.

In Central America, Mexico and Cuba, UNHCR's main objectives are to ensure the protection of refugees within broader migratory flows, in particular by monitoring the southern border of Mexico; to strengthen national asylum systems; and to promote the naturalization of long-staying refugees.

In the Caribbean, UNHCR will be prepared to react to any new displacements and assist governments in making prompt RSD decisions. In nine Caribbean countries, the Office will undertake mandate RSD. The Office will also strengthen its network of honorary representatives and build protection networks with NGOs, legal and academic communities.

In Canada and the United States, the Office will seek to ensure maximum political and financial support for UNHCR's global operations; to ascertain that asylum-seekers have access to RSD procedures; and that people of concern have access to alternatives to detention and, if detained, that conditions are humane. UNHCR will also monitor that gender-based RSD claims are considered in a manner consistent with international standards and that separated children are treated appropriately.

## Challenges

Despite a spirit of solidarity and generosity towards refugees and asylum-seekers in the region, there are many outstanding challenges. The Mexico Plan of Action has created a strategic and operational framework for asylum and protection in the region, but its effective implementation requires the



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Ecuador: opening of a health center in Santa Rosa, Ecuador, by the chairman of the Executive Committee, in June 2007.

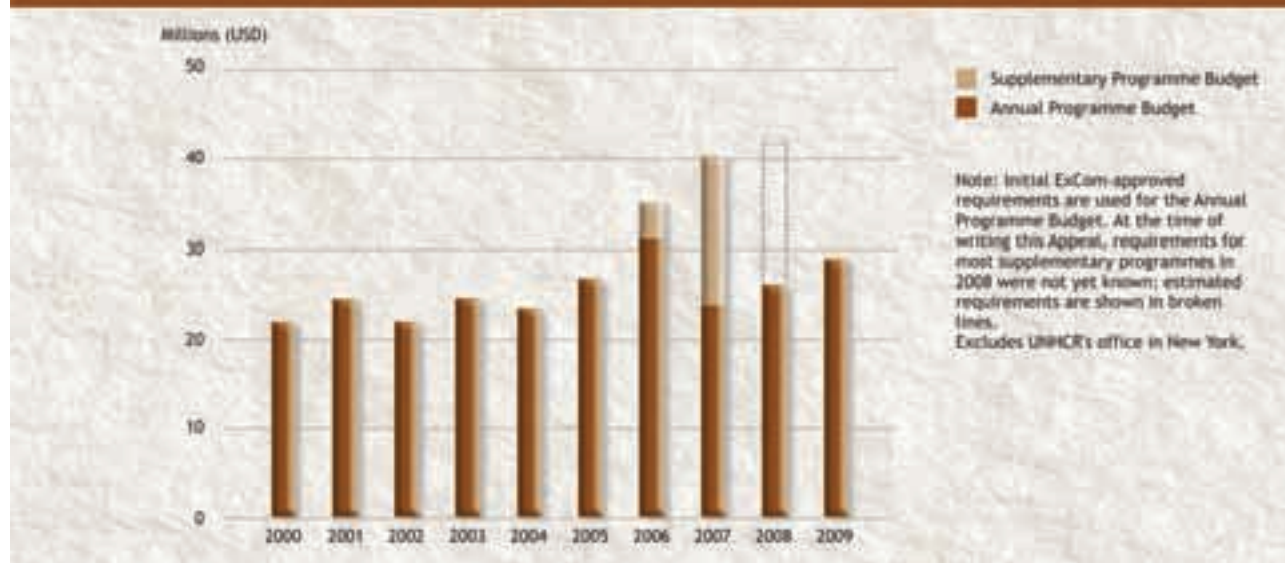
continued commitment of all parties. Some countries that have adopted the Plan need to take a more active role in its implementation. National security concerns are another challenge to the protection of people of concern to UNHCR, particularly in North America.

One of UNHCR's major goals is to find legal and humanitarian solutions for more than half a million unregistered Colombians in need of international protection, particularly in the border areas and urban centres of Ecuador (some 250,000) and the Bolivarian

Republic of Venezuela (some 200,000). More surveys will be conducted in 2008-2009 to better assess the needs. The results will hopefully allow for a reorientation of programmes.

The sustainability of the regional resettlement programme is another major challenge. The programme, whose success will depend on the support of the international community, will be consolidated in the coming year.

UNHCR's budget in the Americas 2000 - 2009



Budget (USD)

Activities and services	2007			2008	2009
	Annual Programme Budget	Supp. Programme Budget	Total	Annual Programme Budget	Annual Programme Budget
Canada	1,877,024	0	1,877,024	1,859,532	1,857,566
United States of America <sup>1</sup>	3,477,033	0	3,477,033	3,999,002	4,096,060
Sub-total North America and the Caribbean	5,354,057	0	5,354,057	5,858,534	5,953,626
Argentina <sup>2</sup>	2,302,621	0	2,302,621	2,500,000	3,048,131
Brazil <sup>3</sup>	2,353,162	0	2,353,162	2,550,000	3,151,270
Colombia	353,362	16,599,115	16,952,477	376,680	386,746
Costa Rica <sup>4</sup>	1,926,507	0	1,926,507	2,293,883	2,423,118
Cuba	287,600	0	287,600	267,510	268,000
Ecuador	4,446,802	0	4,446,802	5,238,660	5,949,500
Mexico <sup>5</sup>	2,281,010	0	2,281,010	2,232,490	2,289,243
Panama	847,304	0	847,304	1,000,000	1,148,856
Venezuela (Bolivarian Rep.) <sup>6</sup>	3,045,617	0	3,045,617	3,139,990	3,633,093
Sub-total Latin America	17,843,985	16,599,115	34,443,100	19,599,213	22,297,957
Total the Americas	23,198,042	16,599,115	39,797,157	25,457,747	28,251,583

<sup>1</sup> Includes legal assistance and durable solutions for asylum-seekers and refugees in the United States, and refugee protection and capacity building in Trinidad and Tobago, the Dominican Republic and Jamaica. The budget for UNHCR's office in New York is now shown under Headquarters.

<sup>2</sup> Includes local integration in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile and Uruguay, as well as resettlement in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay.

<sup>3</sup> Includes local integration and resettlement in Paraguay.

<sup>4</sup> The requirements for the regional technical support hub are partly reported under Costa Rica and partly under Headquarters.

<sup>5</sup> Includes local integration in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Belize.

<sup>6</sup> Includes local integration in Peru, Guyana and Suriname.

Note: The Supplementary Programme Budget excludes a 7 per cent support cost that is recovered from contributions to meet indirect costs for UNHCR.