

# Colombia Situation

Total requirements:  
USD 41,881,980

- Brazil  
(Amazon region)
- Colombia
- Costa Rica
- Ecuador
- Panama
- Peru
- Venezuela  
(Bolivarian Republic of)



## Working environment

### The context

In 2008, security concerns were at the top of the political agenda in the Andean Region. Latin American countries and the Organization of American States tried to defuse the region's worst diplomatic crisis in years, arising from tensions between Colombia and its neighbours Ecuador and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. At the national level, many countries in the region continue to be in the midst of profound institutional reforms and a reshuffling of their political landscapes. Despite this complex environment, efforts have been made to preserve the humanitarian space and, so far, asylum policies have not been affected.

Large numbers of Colombians are displaced both inside Colombia and in its neighbouring countries. Despite the Government's efforts to find an end to the hostilities, the conflict and related violence continues to affect various parts of Colombia, particularly in its border areas. Criminality is increasing as new armed groups emerge in the wake of the demobilization of paramilitary forces. Gross violations of human rights and international humanitarian law are also frequently reported.

Colombia has one of the largest populations of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the world, with more than 280,000 registered by the Government in 2007 alone. Mass displacements are becoming more frequent in conflict zones. In the department of Nariño alone, recent events have led to more than 30 massive displacements involving close to 20,000 people. The pattern of

displacement is predominantly from rural areas to cities, but displacement within and between urban centres has recently become more frequent. Afro-Colombians and indigenous communities continue to be disproportionately affected by the conflict. Women and children constitute some 70 per cent of the displaced population.

Colombia has a sophisticated legal framework and institutional structure to support displaced people. The Government is the main provider of humanitarian assistance and has allocated USD 2 billion for this purpose for the period 2006- 2010. However, as indicated by Colombia's Constitutional Court, important gaps persist in the implementation of State's response, particularly in the protection of vulnerable civilians.

A new law for protecting the rights of displaced people could help to address this gap. The law, passed in 2008, includes mechanisms to strengthen the implementation of existing legislation, create accountability and coordination among local and national authorities, and promote private sector participation. The Constitutional Court's ruling on displaced women, which orders the Government to create and give priority to programmes for the protection of women and girls, is another positive development.

The conflict in Colombia continues to challenge regional stability. In 2007, Colombians in remote border areas were forced to leave their country on several occasions. The number of new asylum applications in Colombia's neighbours continues to increase significantly. However, asylum-seekers and refugees represent only a small fraction of the Colombians who have fled their country. Recent surveys revealed that between 130,000 and 140,000 Colombians are living in refugee-like situations in Ecuador and some 118,000 in the three border states of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Colombians have also fled to other countries of the region, most notably to Costa Rica, Panama and, more recently, the remote Amazon region of Brazil. Most have, however, not sought asylum for security reasons.

Security and law enforcement in border areas are primary concerns for governments in the region. In some cases, public programmes have been implemented in response to the humanitarian situation. Ecuador recently launched a new comprehensive asylum policy that aims to improve the refugee status determination (RSD) system and promote local integration. The Government, with the support of UNHCR, is planning to provide documents and grant asylum to between 50,000 and 60,000 Colombians in refugee-like situations in the northern provinces of Ecuador (see text box).

## The needs

In addition to the lack of security, difficulties in gaining access to employment, housing, land tenure and

education are the main concerns of IDPs in Colombia. Some 78 per cent of the displaced population in the country originate from rural areas, and IDPs have lost more than 5 million hectares of land. Forced displacement has badly hurt family incomes and led to high rates of poverty. IDPs suffer an unemployment rate that is three times higher than for the urban poor in general, and the average income for a displaced person is only 61 per cent of the statutory minimum wage. The situation is particularly precarious for adolescents, who are vulnerable to forced recruitment by militias and sexual exploitation.

In neighbouring countries, Colombians who are registered as refugees and asylum-seekers generally benefit from the same access to health and education services as the local population. In 2008, UNHCR carried out needs assessments for unregistered Colombians who are in refugee-like situations in Ecuador and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Most of them face serious hurdles in accessing basic services and finding employment because they do not have documentation. Some 70 per cent of this population lives below the poverty line, and less than 10 per cent have access to permanent housing. Only one in three is formally employed.

The situation is particularly precarious for Colombians in the rural areas of the Andean region and in Panama, due to the scarcity of public services and limited economic opportunities. For many refugees, resettlement is the only viable durable solution. This is particularly true for people with specific protection needs and women at risk in Ecuador and Costa Rica.

Persons of concern					
Type of population	Origin	Jan 2009		Dec 2009	
		Total in country	Of whom assisted by UNHCR	Total in country	Of whom assisted by UNHCR
Refugees	Colombia	22,520	22,520	83,580	83,580
	Cuba	800	800	810	810
	Various	4,860	2,850	4,960	3,650
People in refugee-like situations	Colombia	375,000	25,330	244,000	28,000
Returnees (refugees)	Colombia	20	20	20	20
Asylum-seekers	Colombia	47,610	46,610	33,540	32,540
	Peru	1,500	1,500	1,000	1,000
	Cuba	170	170	180	180
	Various	1,680	1,230	1,510	1,060
IDPs	Colombia	<sup>1</sup>	460,000	<sup>1</sup>	530,000
<b>Total</b>		<b>454,160</b>	<b>561,030</b>	<b>369,600</b>	<b>680,840</b>

<sup>1</sup> According to the Constitutional Court of Colombia, there is a discrepancy between the real number of displaced people and the number given by the national registration system. The Court cites the Director of the *Agencia Presidencial para la Acción Social y la Cooperación Internacional* who acknowledged that the number of IDPs in Colombia is close to three million (Order of Compliance 218, dated 11 August 2006, related to the landmark Judgement T-025).



In Ecuador, one of UNHCR's priorities is to inform people in remote communities about their right to asylum.

UNHCR/M.H. Verney

## Main objectives

UNHCR seeks to promote a collaborative and comprehensive response to internal displacement in Colombia and to address the humanitarian concerns of registered and unregistered Colombians in need of international protection in the surrounding countries.

In Colombia, UNHCR will:

- Seek to prevent forced displacement.
- Protect and assist IDPs.
- Search for durable solutions for IDPs.

In the asylum countries, UNHCR will:

- Promote international protection for all refugees and asylum-seekers.
- Seek durable solutions for refugees, particularly through local integration and resettlement.
- Ensure that other Colombians in need of international protection enjoy basic rights.

## Key targets

### Colombia

- The Government increases its budget for displacement issues by 20 per cent compared to 2007.
- At least 25 of the 50 districts most affected by displacement implement integrated action plans.
- Some 100,000 Colombians who are displaced or at risk of displacement receive national identification documents.
- Approximately 300,000 hectares of land in nine departments is protected for the benefit of 15,000 displaced families.
- Some 50,000 displaced children are newly integrated into the education system.
- Legal aid clinics in 11 urban zones provide free legal and psychological counselling, benefiting some 10,000 displaced families.
- The presence and capacity of the Office of the Ombudsman is strengthened in the five regions most affected by the conflict. The Office of the Prosecutor is strengthened in 30 key districts affected by forced displacement.

## Key targets (cont.)

### Asylum countries

- All new asylum-seekers and refugees in the region are registered and documented.
- In Ecuador, some 60,000 Colombians in refugee-like situations are registered and documented.
- The asylum regime in Ecuador is improved and three border offices of the Refugee Directorate are operational.
- In Panama, some 440 long-staying refugees from El Salvador and Nicaragua receive permanent residence.
- Some 500 Colombian refugees in Panama under the Temporary Humanitarian Protection regime are regularized.
- Costa Rica completes reforms of its asylum law, allowing for a revision of RSD procedures.
- All refugees and asylum-seekers in the region have access to public health and education services.
- At least 3,000 people living with HIV and AIDS and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence have access to medical, psychological and legal support.
- Some 2,500 refugees in Costa Rica, Ecuador, Panama, Peru and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela benefit from self-reliance activities, such as micro-credits.
- Some 25,000 people benefit from 50 community-based projects in the border areas of Costa Rica, Ecuador, Panama and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.
- Some 1,200 refugees with specific needs, mostly in Ecuador, Costa Rica and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, are resettled in third countries.

particularly in isolated areas that are at risk of forced displacement. The Office will give priority to promoting the implementation of the Constitutional Court's landmark judgement on forced displacement, particularly in the fields of registration, documentation, protection of property and attention to indigenous people and Afro-Colombians.

The Office will work to strengthen IDP associations, as well as local organizations focusing on protection, citizens' rights and access to social services. It will also inform internally displaced young people on issues such as gender equity, human rights, family planning and the prevention of HIV and AIDS. Specific programmes will encourage the participation of indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities in the formulation of public policies, prevention of forced displacement and project implementation.

While the bulk of UNHCR's work in Colombia is focused on IDP protection, the Office will continue to protect and assist the small number of asylum-seekers and refugees in the country.

In order to better achieve its objectives UNHCR will consolidate its field presence and promote the implementation of a comprehensive protection strategy within the framework of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Protection Group.

### Refugees, asylum-seekers and other Colombians of concern to UNHCR

The main challenge in the countries surrounding Colombia is to strengthen the asylum regime and provide international protection for some 250,000 Colombians in refugee-like situations who have not formally sought asylum.

In line with its regional protection strategy, UNHCR will assist governments as they gradually assume all functions related to refugee protection, including registration, RSD and formulation of public policies. The Office will support efforts to enhance the capacity of national refugee commissions and help with the decentralization process as field offices in border areas assume more responsibilities. UNHCR will also continue to promote the legal integration of long-staying refugees in Panama and the rest of the region.

Based on the results of regional assessments, UNHCR will assist national authorities to foster the legal integration of unregistered Colombians in refugee-like situations. Community-based projects in refugee hosting municipalities will be expanded through inter-agency initiatives. Cooperation within the UN system and other international organizations will also focus on the prevention of HIV and AIDS, and sexual and gender-based violence. In accordance with the Mexico Plan of Action, agreements will be sought to develop the

## Strategy and activities

UNHCR promotes a comprehensive response to forced displacement within Colombia and the protection of Colombian asylum-seekers, refugees and other Colombians in need of international protection in the surrounding countries. The Office's overarching goal is to promote an effective response by states and civil-society organizations.

UNHCR's strategy and activities in Brazil are described in the subregional overview.

### Internally displaced people in Colombia

UNHCR will help the Government to improve its response to internal displacement and comply with existing legislation. It will help build institutions responsible for the protection and assistance of IDPs,

network of Cities of Solidarity to support the integration of refugees and promote their self-reliance. In 2009, UNHCR will seek to resettle 1,200 refugees with specific protection needs within the region.

## Constraints

The lack of security is the main obstacle to delivering protection and assistance in the region. In some areas of Colombia, new factors have contributed to a highly volatile security situation, such as the emergence of newly formed irregular armed groups. The casualty rate from landmines in Colombia has become one of the highest in the world, with rural communities the worst hit. Threats to IDP leaders and humanitarian workers are another grave concern.

The climate of insecurity also prevails outside Colombia, particularly in border areas which have seen an increase in criminality. As governments in the region grow increasingly preoccupied with national security, the asylum system is in danger of being adversely affected. The presence of irregular armed groups and the aerial spraying of coca crops in Colombia's border provinces have created new frictions in relations with Ecuador. All these factors have had a negative impact on the public opinion about Colombians, which could create additional obstacles to their local integration.

## Organization and implementation

UNHCR presence	Colombia	Asylum countries
Number of offices	12	11
Total staff	144	94
International	17	22
National	82	64
JPOs	4	8
UNVs	39	35
Others	2	-

## Coordination

In Colombia, UNHCR is part of a collaborative response to internal displacement. Under the terms of a Memorandum of Understanding between UNHCR and the Government, the Office will help the authorities to implement laws and programmes related to IDPs. At the same time, it will work with the Constitutional Court and the State's supervisory bodies to ensure the protection of IDPs. Agreements with regional and municipal authorities will also enhance support for IDPs.

As lead agency of the IASC Protection Group, UNHCR will coordinate the implementation of a comprehensive protection strategy. A major goal for 2009 is to strengthen the inter-agency protection capacity and consolidate the IASC regional groups established in the six regions with high concentrations of IDPs. UNHCR will strengthen operational partnerships with UN agencies, and will also promote strategic alliances with civil-society organizations.

In the asylum countries, UNHCR coordinates its activities with governments and a wide range of national and international partners. It will also cooperate with line ministries to promote public policies and programmes for refugees and asylum-seekers. UNHCR's participation in inter-agency groups will be developed. Following the example of the Northern Border Inter-Agency Thematic Group in Ecuador, the Office hopes to obtain additional support to improve the living conditions of refugees and host communities within a common development and humanitarian strategy. UNHCR will also reinforce networks of national and international NGOs to intensify the monitoring of volatile border areas.

At the regional level, the Office will work closely with OCHA, IFRC and other international agencies to develop an emergency preparedness and response mechanism for the Colombia Situation. Regional projects are also planned to improve border monitoring and implement comprehensive advocacy strategies for the promotion of refugee and IDP rights.

## Financial information

In 2009, UNHCR's activities for internally displaced Colombians will continue to be covered under a supplementary programme. The operations for refugees, asylum-seekers and others in need of international protection are covered under the annual programme.

UNHCR's financial requirements for the Colombia Situation have increased steadily in recent years. This is mostly due to the expansion of the supplementary programme for IDPs in Colombia. The Annual Programme Budget has also risen due to the increase in the number of assisted people and the reinforcement of protection for unregistered individuals in refugee-like situations.

The 2009 requirements include the implementation of projects to address unmet needs in Ecuador that were identified in the Global Needs Assessment initiative. The regionalization of UNHCR's operations in the Americas, including the partial decentralization of the Americas Bureau from Headquarters, will have an impact on the overall requirements for 2009 as transition costs will be incurred.

## Global Needs Assessment in Ecuador

In 2008, Ecuador was the first country in the Americas to participate in UNHCR's Global Needs Assessment initiative. Using the methodology of the Strengthening Protection Capacity Project, UNHCR and the Government began comprehensively mapping the unmet needs of refugees and people in refugee-like situations. This has involved broad consultation with partners and refugees, as well as the creation of strong links to existing development and humanitarian programmes.

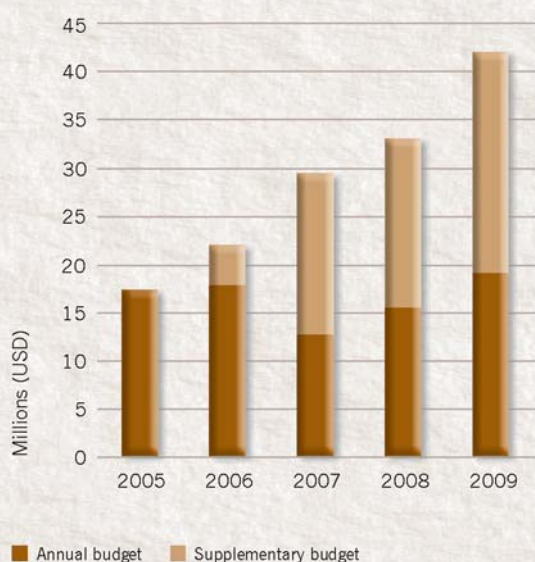
The results in Ecuador show that UNHCR must expand its operation significantly to meet the needs of some 60,000 unregistered Colombians. Without increased support in 2009, many will remain invisible in remote border areas, living without documents and only limited access to basic services in education and health. Assisting the Government to improve its capacity to apply international refugee and human rights standards is a priority if they are to be ensured access to asylum, freedom of movement and protection from violence.

To address unmet needs in Ecuador, UNHCR will require some USD 3.7 million more in financial resources. A fully funded 2009 budget will allow the Office to increase access to international protection and foster socioeconomic integration in host communities. UNHCR's targets in Ecuador are:

- Approximately 60,000 Colombians in need of international protection in remote border areas are registered and recognized as refugees.
- A similar number of Colombians in need of international protection receive individual documents confirming their status.
- National laws and procedures to identify asylum-seekers and determine refugee claims are improved.
- Strengthened national services provide better access to health care and education for refugees in border areas and urban centres.
- The integration of refugees and the receptivity of hosting communities is improved by opportunities for income generation and access to financial institutions, as well as by strengthened refugee associations and the integration of people with specific needs into the national welfare system.
- Child protection and the response to sexual and gender-based violence are improved by means of better referral systems, psychosocial support and awareness raising activities.

This comprehensive strategy will be implemented within the framework of a new asylum policy that was launched by the Government in September 2008. It will also be linked with Plan Ecuador, which is a comprehensive programme to address development and humanitarian needs at the country's northern border.

UNHCR's budget  
2005 - 2009



## Partners

### Colombia

**Government:** *Agencia Presidencial para la Acción Social y la Cooperación Internacional*, Constitutional Court, *Defensoría del Pueblo* (Ombudsman's Office), *Procuraduría General de la Nación* (Prosecutor's Office), *Controlaría*, *Registraduría* (National Registry), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of the Interior and Justice, Ministry of Agriculture

**NGOs:** *Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular*, *Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli*, *Consultoría de Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento*, *Fundación Compartir*, *Instituto Latinoamericano de Servicios Legales*, *Opción Legal*, *Secretaría Nacional de Pastoral Social*, *Opportunity Internacional*, *Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia*, *Liga de Mujeres Desplazadas*

**Others:** *Universidad Nacional de Colombia*, UNV, IOM

### Asylum countries

**Government:** Immigration Directorate, Ministry of Labour (Costa Rica); Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Coordination, Ministry of Interior (Ecuador); *Oficina Nacional para la Atención de Refugiados*, *Ministerio de Gobierno y Justicia* (Panama); *Comisión Nacional para Refugiados*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela)

**NGOs:** *Asociación de Consultores y Asesores Internacionales*; *Asociación de Profesionales para el Desarrollo*; Ecuadorian Red Cross; *Fundación Ambiente y Sociedad*; Catholic Church Ibarra; *Fundación Esquel*; *Desarrollo, Acción y Vida*; Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society; *Cooperazione Internazionale*; *Vicariato del Darién*; *Pueblos del Bosque*; Panamanian Red Cross; *Caritas Táchira*; Jesuit Refugee Services; *Caritas Machiques*; *Caritas Venezuela*; *Justicia y Paz*

**Others:** UNV

Budget (USD)						
Activities and services	2008			2009		
	Annual budget <sup>1</sup>	Supplementary budget IDPs Colombia	Total	Annual budget <sup>2</sup>	Supplementary budget IDPs Colombia	Total
Protection, monitoring and coordination	2,909,234	6,478,120	9,387,354	3,647,325	6,833,325	10,480,650
Community services	992,664	1,237,583	2,230,247	1,439,997	1,922,603	3,362,600
Crop production	0	373,464	373,464	0	279,714	279,714
Domestic needs	534,880	0	534,880	606,299	0	606,299
Education	348,008	590,378	938,386	328,165	406,630	734,795
Food	158,760	0	158,760	94,520	0	94,520
Health	374,685	0	374,685	537,215	0	537,215
Income generation	536,038	511,456	1,047,494	633,023	151,515	784,538
Legal assistance	1,524,856	4,511,622	6,036,478	2,229,207	9,348,914	11,578,121
Operational support (to agencies)	922,332	1,632,579	2,554,911	1,135,295	994,998	2,130,293
Sanitation	7,000	0	7,000	6,000	0	6,000
Shelter and infrastructure	201,440	160,919	362,359	240,950	193,234	434,184
Transport and logistics	33,568	0	33,568	36,186	0	36,186
Water	8,000	0	8,000	4,000	0	4,000
Global Needs Assessment (Ecuador)	0	0	0	3,722,184	0	3,722,184
<b>Total operations</b>	<b>8,551,465</b>	<b>15,496,121</b>	<b>24,047,586</b>	<b>14,660,366</b>	<b>20,130,933</b>	<b>34,791,299</b>
Programme support	3,497,748	2,138,864	5,636,612	4,395,280	2,695,401	7,090,681
<b>Total</b>	<b>12,049,213</b>	<b>17,634,985</b>	<b>29,684,198</b>	<b>19,055,646</b>	<b>22,826,334</b>	<b>41,881,980</b>

<sup>1</sup> Includes activities in Colombia (USD 376,680), Costa Rica (USD 2,293,883), Ecuador (USD 5,238,660), Panama (USD 1,000,000) and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (USD 3,139,990).

<sup>2</sup> Includes activities in Colombia (USD 386,746), Costa Rica (USD 3,041,093), Ecuador (USD 10,555,648), Panama (USD 1,429,231) and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (USD 3,642,927).

Note: Supplementary programme budgets exclude 7 per cent support costs that are recovered from contributions to meet indirect costs for UNHCR.