

Argentina

Bolivia

(Plurinational State of)

Brazil

Chile

Colombia

Costa Rica

Cuba

Ecuador

El Salvador

Guatemala

Honduras

Mexico

Nicaragua

Panama

Paraguay

Peru

Uruguay

Venezuela

(Bolivarian Republic of)

A Colombian refugee in northern Ecuador shows his new refugee visa.

UNHCR / S. AGUILAR

Latin America

| Working environment |

While the majority of the hundreds of thousands of asylum-seekers and refugees in Latin America are from Colombia, a growing number of people from countries in Africa and Asia are found in mixed migratory movements in the region. Between 60 and 70 per cent of asylum-seekers and refugees live in urban areas.

UNHCR is conducting a study on forced displacement generated by new forms of violence in Central America. According to UN reports, crime rates in Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras are among the highest in the world. During the last few years, some 15,000 Central Americans have sought asylum in the United States of America, Canada and other countries in the region.

Against this context, special attention is required to address human trafficking, the protection needs of vulnerable groups such as unaccompanied children, the legal status of stateless persons, and complementary forms of protection for people who may not be refugees.

All countries in Latin America, with the exception of Cuba, are parties to the 1951 Convention and/or the 1967 Protocol and have adopted national enactment legislation. Fifteen countries have incorporated the wider definition of refugee in their legislation. However, some countries in Latin America have recently adopted pre-admissibility procedures or procedures for manifestly unfounded or abusive claims, often without appropriate protection safeguards.



Refugees and asylum-seekers in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay benefit from a legal framework that is generally in line with international protection standards. National Refugee Commissions have made advances in several areas, including safeguards for victims of trafficking and unaccompanied children.

In 2010 Chile passed a Refugee Law, and in 2011 Mexico has adopted breakthrough legislation, which includes the regional refugee definition recommended by the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees. It includes gender as a ground for persecution, and establishes Mexico as the first country in Latin America to grant and regulate complementary forms of protection.

Eighteen Latin American States reiterated their commitment to the 2004 Mexico Plan of Action by adopting the landmark Brasília Declaration on the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons in the Americas in 2010. Resolutions on refugees, IDPs and, for the first time, stateless persons, were unanimously adopted by the General Assembly of the Organization of American States, held in Peru and El Salvador

Altogether, eight countries are in the process of acceding to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, while four are developing statelessness determination procedures to ensure that stateless persons are identified and provided with administrative assistance. Panama acceded to both statelessness conventions in 2011.

Strategy

UNHCR strives to strengthen governments' capacity to detect people in need of protection within mixed migration movements, offer them a fair refugee status determination (RSD) process and facilitate the local integration of recognized refugees.

The Mexico Plan of Action articulates UNHCR's strategy by addressing protection at border areas, urban settlements and resettlement through three Pillars.

The Borders of Solidarity pillar helps UNHCR to address protection concerns at borders—primarily those between Colombia and its neighbours. Local integration along the borders is promoted by linking refugee assistance to national and regional development plans. This approach benefits refugees and local host communities.

The Cities of Solidarity pillar supports the local integration and self-reliance of people in need of international protection in urban areas. It aims to ensure that refugees receive health care, education, access to employment and housing on par with services provided to nationals. UNHCR implements income-generating projects for refugees and promotes their free access to the labour market. National and local governments play an important role in this context by implementing refugee-friendly policies and allocating funds for integration programmes.

The Solidarity Resettlement pillar is a regional responsibility-sharing programme benefiting a limited number of refugees who face protection risks in their countries of asylum. Since 2004, some 1,100 people have been resettled in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay and Paraguay.

As of 2012, the country office in Panama and the Deputy Director's Office there will be merged into a Regional Office with oversight and coordination functions for Mexico and countries in Central America. Legal and technical support to operations throughout the region will be provided in close coordination with the Regional Bureau for the Americas.



Constraints

With a few successful exceptions, the local integration of refugees continues to face constraints. Weak national economies and depressed and discriminatory labour markets hinder economic integration. The subregion is receiving a growing number of asylum-seekers and economic migrants from other countries in the wider region, the Horn of Africa and the Middle East, posing new challenges to sometimes fragile asylum systems. Extra-continental refugees confront additional obstacles to local integration owing to cultural and linguistic barriers and the absence of ethnic and national community support.

Restrictive RSD procedures leave asylum-seekers without the necessary protection safeguards. For its part, UNHCR lacks sufficient monitoring capacity to deal with all cases of possible *refoulement* across Latin America. Increasingly complex mixed migration movements require a reinforced monitoring capacity to ensure that sufficient protection safeguards are in place at borders.

Operations

UNHCR's operations in **Colombia** and **Ecuador** are described in separate country chapters.

UNHCR's Regional Office in **Argentina** will strengthen national and regional networks to provide refugees and asylum-seekers with protection and durable solutions in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay. New arrivals and people with specific needs will receive assistance, and the search for durable solutions will continue, with special emphasis on self-reliance for those who cannot return home. UNHCR will also strengthen existing resettlement programmes and advocate for refugee protection in mixed migration movements through the Specialized Migratory Forum of MERCOSUR.

The Regional Office in **Panama** will seek to boost protection standards by advocating for accession to refugee and statelessness instruments and reversing restrictive practices to ensure that asylum-seekers travelling in mixed movements are detected and have access to fair RSD procedures. In Central America and Panama, UNHCR will develop self-reliance and livelihoods strategies and enhance emergency preparedness. At the same time, it will maintain close cooperation with the OAS and promote the Mexico Plan of Action. UNHCR will lobby for protection-sensitive migration policies and increase cooperation with IOM and other partners to address protection and assistance gaps.

In **Brazil**, UNHCR will strive to strengthen the resettlement programme and lobby for the implementation of public policies that ensure refugees' access to rights, including social welfare programmes. UNHCR will also seek full implementation of the statelessness conventions and encourage Brazil to sustain its support for UNHCR operations worldwide.

UNHCR will work in **Mexico** to ensure that refugees are identified within complex mixed movements, while new forms of violence threaten the security of migrants and refugees. It aims to ensure that people of concern have access to the territory, enjoy fair asylum procedures and, once recognized as refugees, can integrate locally.

In **Costa Rica**, UNHCR will help the Government to conduct RSD and advocate for adequate protection space. It will lobby for the issuance of temporary work permits to asylum-seekers who face lengthy waiting periods for decisions on their asylum claims.

In **Venezuela**, UNHCR tries to ensure that all asylum-seekers and refugees have access to fair asylum procedures and documentation, while supporting the Government and communities to improve their capacity to provide effective protection and promote self-reliance among people of concern.

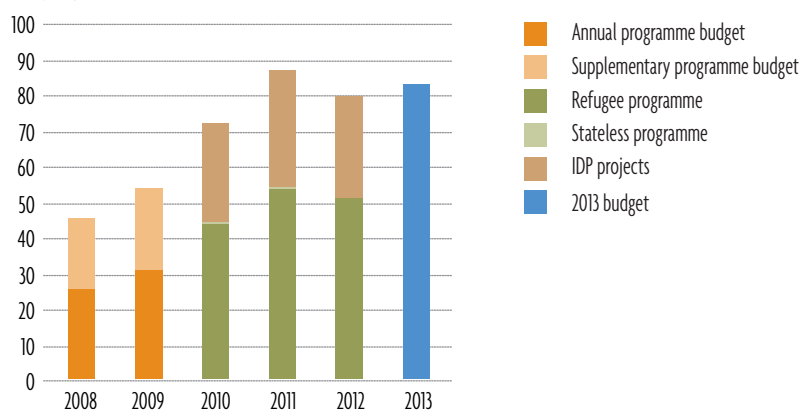
UNHCR's office in **Cuba** will promote the country's accession to the international refugee and statelessness instruments and facilitate refugees' access to basic assistance, in addition to the free health care and education provided by the Government. Local integration in Cuba for refugees remains an unlikely prospect.

Financial information

There was little change in the budget for Latin America in 2012, which represents almost half of the total financial requirements for the Americas. However, funding new initiatives and priorities in the region will be a challenge. The restructuring of the Colombia and Ecuador offices in late 2011 will be followed by that of the Panama operation in 2012. Inflation and unfavourable exchange rates persist in many countries.

UNHCR's budget in Latin America 2008 – 2013

Millions (USD)



UNHCR Budget in Latin America (USD)

OPERATION	2011 REVISED BUDGET	2012			2013
		REFUGEE PROGRAMME PILLAR 1	IDP PROJECTS PILLAR 4	TOTAL	
Argentina Regional Office	5,832,956	4,412,885	0	4,412,885	4,538,670
Brazil	4,793,864	4,614,202	0	4,614,202	4,650,019
Colombia	34,384,563	1,028,039	28,353,223	29,381,262	31,980,000
Costa Rica	2,972,801	2,811,417	0	2,811,417	2,100,000
Ecuador	21,936,301	21,009,913	0	21,009,913	21,500,000
Mexico	2,067,649	2,988,011	0	2,988,011	3,350,000
Panama Regional Office	6,321,301	5,088,209	0	5,088,209	5,500,000
Venezuela (Bolivarian Rep.)	8,122,882	9,020,433	0	9,020,433	9,020,000
Total	86,432,317	50,973,109	28,353,223	79,326,332	82,638,689