

NORTHERN SOUTH AMERICA

Recent Developments

Escalating levels of violence and an increase in forced displacement are expected as a result of the worsening conflict in Colombia. Struggles for territorial control in strategically important border areas have intensified, increasing concerns in neighbouring countries over national security and a potential for mass refugee influxes. Although there has been a decrease in mass movements across the Colombian border since 2000, the number of individual Colombians being recognised as refugees continues to rise. The vast majority of Colombians tend not to request refugee status, often for fear of stigmatisation. From January to August 2001 alone, 121,115 persons left the country permanently by air (according to official sources) compared with approximately 125,000 during the whole of 2000. Furthermore, in Europe and in North America, Colombians now represent the 12th largest group of asylum-seekers (21st largest in 2000).

Strategic Objectives

UNHCR will continue to pursue a regional strategy based on a two-pronged approach for people forcibly displaced within Colombia itself, and for Colombian refugees and asylum-seekers in neighbouring countries. While UNHCR's programmes in the region continue to benefit refugees and other persons of concern of various nationalities, Colombians comprise 57 per cent of the total number. Most are of rural background, mainly of Afro-Colombian or indigenous origin from the border areas of Ecuador, Panama and Venezuela. Assuming a continuation of the current trend of about 2,000 new arrivals per year, and limited, but continuous voluntary repatriation, UNHCR estimates that it will assist at least 8,000 asylum-seekers, refugees and others of concern in the three main asylum countries in 2002. This figure does not account for the possibility of massive influxes which could be several times greater.

In Colombia, UNHCR will continue to: promote an effective State and civil society response to both protection and solutions for IDPs; ensure that humanitarian initiatives for IDPs and political initiatives related to the peace process are mutually reinforcing; and contribute to a strengthening of the regional asylum framework, in co-ordination with UNHCR's office in Caracas (Venezuela).

In the countries receiving Colombian asylum-seekers - mainly Ecuador, Panama and Venezuela -UNHCR has revised its objectives to focus on (i) the reinforcement of national asylum systems, especially at the local level; (ii) ensuring emergency response for potential mass influxes through the implementation and regular updating of contingency plans, with careful protection monitoring in border zones; and (iii) the promotion of durable solutions for both rural and urban refugees.

Northern South America

Colombia
Ecuador
Guyana
Peru
Panama
Venezuela
Surinam

Southern South America

Argentina
Bolivia
Brazil
Chile
Paraguay
Uruguay

Operations

In **Colombia**, the continued expansion of both the conflict and forced displacement will continue to deeply affect women, children, rural communities, ethnic minorities and the poor. Nearly 72 per cent of IDPs are adult women and children. Afro-Colombians and indigenous people make up 11 per cent of the national population, but account for more than a third of IDPs. In 2002, levels of displacement are expected to rise further.

In **Ecuador**, UNHCR will continue to strengthen the National Refugee Status Determination Committee. There is a backlog of cases pending from Africa, the Middle East, Latin America and South Asia, of which the majority are applications for asylum by Colombians. In 2001, some 2,000 asylum applications by Colombians were registered, compared with only 30 in 2000. Refugee law training activities will continue to be provided to the national police, migration officials, and civil society organisations, especially in the provinces of Carchi, Esmeraldas and Imbabura, where Colombians have sought refuge. In co-operation with the Government of Ecuador and other local and international partners, UNHCR will expand the implementation of its emergency assistance to reach all registered Colombians along the border. Contingency plans will also be updated for the above three provinces. Particular attention will be given to the possible influx of up to 30,000 people, if the conflict worsens in Nariño and Putumayo. UNHCR will also continue to participate in the Tripartite Commission, along with the Governments of Ecuador and Colombia, to facilitate voluntary repatriation, when possible.

UNHCR's priority in **Panama** will be to revise the National Refugee Legislation, ensuring a flexible application of the temporary protection regime and to improve overall conditions of asylum in the provinces of Darien and San Blas. As local integration in Panama is difficult, refugees are often obliged to view repatriation as the only alternative, despite unsafe conditions in their country of origin. The need to establish a UNHCR presence in Panama will also be reviewed. In 2002, UNHCR plans to provide emergency assistance and community-based support to some 2,000 asylum-seekers, refugees and others of concern including 1,000 Colombian refugees, located in five communities in Darien and San Blas. UNHCR will also sup-

port vital social services such as water, health and education as well as community-based productive activities designed to supplement the family diet and increase economic independence. Activities will continue to be implemented through the Catholic Church, government, a local NGO and a women's group.

In **Venezuela**, the national refugee law adopted by the National Assembly in August 2001, was a step forward towards strengthening refugee protection in the country. Efforts will now focus on the development of a secondary legislation, such as the regulations governing the Eligibility Commission. UNHCR will also provide refugee law training to members of the National Eligibility Commission, migration officers, police, military and other officials in key border areas as well as to civil society partners. UNHCR's field office in San Cristóbal was officially opened in August 2001 in a ceremony attended by the President of Venezuela, as well as the diplomatic community. The new office will place renewed emphasis on contingency planning and response in the border areas in the States of Apure, Tachira and Zulia, and in the reinforcement of





Argentina: Resettled refugees from Estonia. Income-generating activities (production of candles). UNHCR.

social services for asylum-seekers and refugees. Durable solutions and tripartite mechanisms will be sought with the Governments of Colombia and Venezuela.

UNHCR will support the Government of **Peru** to assess the influx of people from Colombia into the Peruvian Amazon region. Contingency plans and protection and assistance mechanisms will be established. UNHCR will also carry out a review of the existing urban refugee programme.

SOUTHERN SOUTH AMERICA

Recent Developments

The fragile political stability of the sub-region has been undermined by a deepening economic recession, manifest in widespread social protests and further reductions in social ser-

Priorities in Colombia

In **Colombia**, UNHCR will continue to implement activities in all five components of the IDP programme: Overall Institutional Framework, Prevention, Emergency Response, Solutions and Advocacy/Dissemination. UNHCR will strive to ensure continuity of the national IDP policy despite the change in government following elections in 2002, and encourage the mutual reinforcement of national and local levels of the programme, as follows:

National Level: UNHCR will seek to strengthen the legal and institutional structure and key national institutions mandated to protect and assist IDPs, within the framework of Law 387. This law defines the rights of IDPs and the institutional framework for their protection and assistance. Training in emergency response and IDP registration will also be delivered in priority areas. UNHCR will continue to co-fund the Joint Technical Unit, a team of specialists within UNHCR's main government counterpart, the *Red de Solidaridad Social* (RSS). Specific strategies geared to the special needs of ethnic minorities, in particular, Afro-Colombians and indigenous people, will be promoted. UNHCR will step up contingency planning at the local level to respond to increasing IDP flows. Personal documentation campaigns will be carried out in priority areas with the participation of IDPs organisations to enhance the personal security of IDPs, as well as their access to social services through the National Registry. Such campaigns are targeted in particular at women heads of household and children, most of whom have no documents. UNHCR will also work to strengthen the protective function of the National Ombudsman's Office, at both the national and local level. Training for the military and the national police on their preventive role in relation to forced displacement will be car-

ried out through an agreement between UNHCR and the Ministry of Defence. Advocacy efforts will focus on local and international media to increase awareness of the plight of IDPs, as well as UNHCR's role and mandate.

Area-based programmes at the local level: UNHCR will maintain its field presence in the three priority regions of Magdalena Medio, Putumayo and Uraba. In 2002, these area-based programmes will concentrate on: i) ensuring the implementation of domestic legislation for IDPs at the local level, in all phases of displacement, and ii) facilitating solutions where possible. UNHCR will continue to provide community-based support to some 60,000 IDPs directly through IDP organisations in the three regions, with the aim of enhancing protection, reconciliation and socio-economic stabilisation. UNHCR will stress the empowerment of women's organisations to enable them to improve protection against sexual exploitation and to promote self-reliance. Education for Peace pilot projects, with special curricula and teaching techniques, have brought increased attention to the psychosocial needs of IDP children. These projects will also promote the creation of parent-teacher associations as a means of resolving social conflicts at the community level. In 2002, these pilot projects will be extended to all three regions in co-operation with local education authorities.

Inter-agency Co-ordination: In Colombia, UNHCR will continue to facilitate co-ordination on IDP issues, within the UN system and with the support of OCHA. In addition, UNHCR will nurture new operational ties with partner agencies working with IDPs, both within the UN system and with other key partners including ECHO, ICRC and bilateral organisations.

vices and employment opportunities for the majority of the population, especially refugees and asylum-seekers. National capacities and resources have been severely strained throughout the region. In Peru, however, the smooth change of government in July 2001 opened the way for the voluntary repatriation of Peruvian refugees, both from within the region and from abroad, albeit in small numbers as the country's ability to reabsorb the millions living abroad is strictly limited. From 2001 to 2002, the total number of assisted refugees and asylum-seekers in the region is expected to increase by 55 per cent from an estimated 3,756 to 5,805. Arrivals come in from Latin America, Africa and Eastern Europe in a broad mix of both regular and irregular migratory flows. Within this group, unknown numbers of potential asylum-seekers choose not to apply for recognition of refugee status as administrative processes are not adequate in all countries. UNHCR's financial constraints led to a further tightening of assistance criteria. As a result, material support could only be provided to new arrivals for a maximum of four to six months and all UNHCR-supported secondary education had to be discontinued. Nevertheless, despite regional economic constraints, progress continues in the building of networks of formal and informal public support for refugees, both within the region, and worldwide. It is particularly encouraging to observe the increasing interest shown by Brazil and Chile in providing resettlement opportunities for refugees from outside the region.

Strategic Objectives

UNHCR's primary goal in the region is to build or reinforce the institutional framework for refugee protection and to set up networks of support for refugees, with national institutions, to enable the progressive hand-over of responsibility for refugee protection and assistance. In addition, UNHCR aims to develop the three largest countries - Argentina, Brazil and Chile - into active partners on the international humanitarian scene. Key objectives for UNHCR in 2002 will include: strengthening the regional and national asylum framework; encouraging sustainable local integration; promoting resettlement from abroad; disseminating public information; and developing private sector fund-raising.

Operations

Strengthening the Regional and National Asylum Framework: UNHCR will continue to encourage the adoption of a model refugee law by the MERCOSUR countries, in line with their Rio de Janeiro Declaration of November 2000. UNHCR will also reinforce refugee status determination procedures in order to help ease the backlog of pending cases in many countries. In Argentina, a project initiated at the end of 2001 in support of the National Eligibility Commission will help clear the backlog of pending asylum claims and provide specialised training to local counterparts. In view of the ten-

dency within the region to restrict the flow of irregular migrants, UNHCR will also promote the incorporation of a human rights curriculum into the training of law enforcement agencies (in Argentina and in Brazil), with a special focus on the rights of refugees and migrants.

Encouraging Sustainable Local Integration: Argentina and Brazil are two of the countries receiving the largest number of refugees in the region. Despite severe economic constraints, implementing partners in these two countries continue to cover some 45 per cent of refugee assistance in the post-reception phase. UNHCR will continue to strengthen the capacity of traditional national partners while identifying new ones from civil society and the private sector. This goal will be further enhanced through the PARinAC process.

Promoting Resettlement: UNHCR will continue to build on the solid partnership for resettlement from abroad established with the Governments of Brazil and Chile. The Government of Chile is expected to renew its resettlement quota for a third year in 2002. Specialised technical expertise will continue to be provided by a UNHCR Regional Resettlement Officer. Efforts will also be made to establish a small resettlement programme in Uruguay. A successful national resettlement workshop was held in Brazil in August 2001, involving UNHCR, the Government and local partners. This paved the way for up to 100 cases to be resettled in Brazil by the end of 2002.

Public Information and Private Sector Fund-raising: UNHCR will continue to use the media to enhance the visibility of its role, and refugee issues in general. Networking with the local media in Argentina generated free media slots worth more than one million USD in 2001 alone. Private sector fund-raising appeals will be expanded in 2002 through *Argentina con ACNUR* (ARCA), with the aim of enabling ARCA to cover its own running costs.

BUDGET (USD)	
Country	Annual Programme
Northern South America	
Colombia	4,398,476
Ecuador	1,271,637
Panama	392,500
Venezuela	1,671,525
Regional Activities ¹	752,700
Southern South America	
Argentina	1,336,471
Regional Projects ²	2,148,100
Total	11,971,409

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

²Includes local integration of refugees in Southern Latin American countries.