



South America

Northern South America

Northern South America

Colombia
Ecuador
Guyana
Panama
Peru
Suriname
Venezuela

Southern South America

Argentina
Bolivia
Brazil
Chile
Paraguay
Uruguay

Recent Developments

The security situation in the sub-region has deteriorated over the course of the year as the conflict in Colombia has continued to escalate. Clashes between guerrilla and paramilitary groups have been particularly frequent along Colombia's borders with its neighbours. This has caused the violence to spill over into some border areas of Ecuador, Panama and Venezuela, with incursions by armed groups and an increasing number of violent incidents reported in the media. In Venezuela, UNHCR and its partners have recently responded to the worsening security situation in border areas by stepping up their efforts to strengthen emergency preparedness mechanisms.

Although many victims of the conflicts continue to seek protection in neighbouring countries, few of



Colombian refugees and asylum-seekers, and to ensure a coherent application of the 1951 Refugee Convention.

Strategic Objectives

UNHCR's regional programmes will continue to benefit persons of concern of various nationalities, with Colombians constituting the majority. UNHCR will maintain its dual approach to assisting victims of the armed conflict in the sub-region. The first part of this strategy entails the promotion of an effective State and civil society response to the problem of IDPs within Colombia. The second part of the approach concerns the neighbouring asylum countries – Venezuela, Panama, Ecuador and Peru. In these countries, one of UNHCR's key objectives will be the improvement of asylum procedures so that fleeing Colombians have access to international protection. Other objectives for UNHCR in the region in 2003 include: enhancing emergency response mechanisms and contingency planning; identifying durable solutions for refugees and asylum-seekers; encouraging sustainable local integration; supporting not only refugees, but also their receiving

communities; and in Guyana and Suriname, building or reinforcing the institutional frameworks for refugee protection.

them request refugee status; partly for fear of stigmatisation, but also because some countries in the region still lack fair and efficient Refugee Status Determination and efficient RSD procedures. In addition, an increasing number of Colombians (8,784 persons during the first eight months of 2002) are leaving the country to seek a more stable solution outside of the region, particularly in OECD countries. In this context, UNHCR recently issued a set of guidelines on the eligibility of Colombian asylum-seekers which provides country information and details on vulnerable groups. The guidelines will help governments to assess the protection needs of

communities; and in Guyana and Suriname, building or reinforcing the institutional frameworks for refugee protection.

Operations

UNHCR's country programme in Colombia is described in a separate chapter.

As **Ecuador** continues to be the neighbouring country that absorbs the largest number of asylum requests by Colombians, UNHCR's activities in



Northern South America: Colombian refugees in Ecuador in a UNHCR-funded shelter, Apafano, Sucumbios Province.
UNHCR / L. Boscardi

2003 will focus on facilitating the asylum application process. The Office will continue to support the national RSD Committee in order to further reduce the backlog of pending applications. UNHCR will reinforce its partnerships and co-ordination mechanisms with NGOs in order to address the needs of Colombian refugees and the refugee-receiving communities, particularly in Sucumbios, Carchi and Esmeraldas. Likewise, the national police, migration officers and civil society organisations will receive training in refugee law issues. UNHCR is concerned about rising levels of xenophobia and discrimination against Colombians, and will address the problem through advocacy work and the dissemination of information. UNHCR will participate in a Tri-partite Commission with the Governments of Ecuador and Colombia in order to ensure the protection of Colombian refugees and asylum-seekers and to find durable solutions to their plight.

The longstanding conflict in Colombia has a significant spill-over effect into **Panama**, with frequent cross-border movements from the Colombian Urabá region to the Darien and San Blas provinces in Eastern Panama. The case for the establishment

of a permanent presence in Panama is becoming more compelling, especially with a recent upsurge of security incidents in Urabá underlining the need for improved border monitoring and the provision of international protection. At the end of 2002, UNHCR will deploy a mission to Panama to cover immediate protection and assistance needs and further review the need for the opening of an office in Panama in 2003. Efforts will concentrate on how best to improve the legal framework to achieve harmonisation with international principles of refugee protection. UNHCR will participate in the National Eligibility Commission and provide training on international refugee law to its government counterpart and the police service. Through three main implementing partners, UNHCR will also support the provision of basic services and infrastructure, alongside income-generating activities for refugees and asylum-seekers.

While **Peru's** refugee population remained almost stable at some 700 throughout the year, there is increasing concern about reports of undocumented arrivals and departures of Colombians who would qualify as persons of concern to UNHCR. To adequately monitor such movements,

the Regional Office in Venezuela intends to set up mechanisms for refugee protection along the borders. This will involve monitoring networks established with NGOs and local stakeholders, as well as capacity-building with national authorities for the registration and processing of asylum applications. UNHCR will continue to promote the passing of a national refugee law and maintain updated contingency plans to respond to a possible refugee influx.

In **Venezuela**, increasing numbers of uprooted Colombians have been approaching UNHCR or its implementing partners for protection and assistance. However, many are believed to have settled in remote and unsafe border areas or smaller urban centres without filing applications for refugee status. A reason for this may be that the country still lacks a National Eligibility Commission and RSD procedures, although the refugee law came into force in October 2001. If the draft regulation for a National Eligibility Commission which the Government presented in July 2002 is adopted, UNHCR will provide technical advice to the Commission and authorities carrying out RSD. Other efforts in 2003 will include border monitoring to ensure protection, enhancing emergency response mechanisms along the border, and supporting refugee-receiving communities. In this regard, particular attention will be paid to the strengthening of local capacities and the building of a network of national NGOs with a presence at different border points.

In all countries in the sub-region, UNHCR will support protection networks at the borders with Colombia by reinforcing its presence and consolidating institutional alliances, particularly at the local level. A comprehensive survey of the situation of Colombians in the asylum countries will be undertaken to obtain a more precise profile of the refugee population and identify major patterns of mobility. UNHCR will also emphasise the promotion of durable solutions for refugees, as well as emergency preparedness to ensure an adequate response in the case of potential mass influxes.

During 2002, UNHCR signed co-operation agreements and identified new implementing partners in border regions. All of these new partners will require further support in capacity-building during 2003 to be fully operational, and UNHCR will make

their training a priority. This challenge is thrown into stark relief by the fact that international NGOs and other UN agencies have virtually no presence in border zones, except in Ecuador and, to a lesser extent, in Panama.

Mass media campaigns will be implemented in 2003 in order to highlight the plight of civilian victims and the humanitarian consequences of the conflict. Other priorities will include public information and refugee law dissemination activities, with a special focus on gender related issues. UNHCR will support media programmes that emphasise the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers. In addition, UNHCR will reinforce the co-ordination of its offices in the sub-region, which will help them to voice a common message.

Southern South America

Recent Developments

The political and economic crises that have troubled the Southern South America region in 2002, particularly in Argentina, have adversely affected the lives of refugees and asylum-seekers, as well as the local populations.

Although Southern South America is not a region that produces many refugees, the turmoil in Argentina has now intensified the movements of economic migrants throughout the sub-region. As a consequence, migration and human rights have moved centre stage in intra-regional debate, resulting recently in welcome concerted efforts to improve migrants' rights. These issues serve as important points of leverage for UNHCR and its partners in their efforts to bring the totality of refugee affairs closer to the top of the region's social and political agenda.

Strategic Objectives

UNHCR's principal goal in Southern South America is to build and expand refugee support constituencies and progressively hand over responsibilities for protection and local integration to national societies. Key objectives for UNHCR in



Southern South America: Refugees in Argentina are engaging in activities to provide some form of income. UNHCR / C. Fedele

2003 will include: reinforcing the legal frameworks for protection, promoting resettlement programmes in Chile and Brazil, providing assistance to the most vulnerable asylum-seekers while still encouraging sustainable local integration, strengthening civil society protection networks, and implementing public information activities.

Operations

Reinforcing Legal Frameworks: The regional approach in the field of refugee protection is still in its initial stage. In order to encourage countries in the sub-region to adopt a model refugee law, UNHCR will actively promote such a law at national and regional levels, particularly through MERCOSUR. UNHCR will also help develop the capacity of governments and civil societies to fully implement the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. In **Argentina**, UNHCR will reinforce refugee status determination procedures through a project, initiated in October 2002, that will help to clear the backlog of pending asylum claims and provide specialised training to local counterparts. The Office will also provide support to RSD procedures in **Chile, Bolivia, Paraguay** and **Uruguay**, in order to ensure they meet international protec-

tion standards. In Argentina, Bolivia and Paraguay UNHCR will endeavour to broaden its reach by using local legal capacities to promote refugee law training, in particular for border control officials.

Promoting Resettlement: UNHCR will promote and strengthen the emerging resettlement programmes in Chile and Brazil. During the first quarter of 2002, a group of 23 resettled Afghan refugees arrived in Porto Alegre, Brazil. The Office deployed an integration expert who, with the assistance of an implementing partner, supported the local authorities in their integration efforts. The integration expert will continue his work in 2003. UNHCR will also support the integration of some 33 refugees expected to be resettled to Chile by year's end. A pro-active public information campaign will be conducted with local partners in Chile and Brazil, providing basic information on refugee resettlement, as well as encouraging discussion of refugee issues in a larger context.

Assistance to Asylum-seekers: UNHCR's limited assistance programme will be directed towards covering the basic material needs of asylum-seekers, in particular vulnerable cases, until arrangements are made by national institutions – governmental and non-governmental – to take over these

responsibilities. At the same time, UNHCR will foster the local integration of refugees by pursuing increased civil society support in the countries in the sub-region, particularly in Argentina, Brazil and Chile. These efforts will pay special attention to durable solutions initiatives such as micro-credit systems.

Strengthening Protection Networks: UNHCR's partnership with civil society at large, including national and international NGOs, the Church, and academics, is bearing fruit in the sub-region. The civil society protection networks are expected to continue performing critical tasks in 2003, such as building awareness of refugee protection principles and rights, monitoring the timely identification of asylum-seekers and refugees, providing legal counselling, and bringing to UNHCR's attention precedent-setting cases. National societies are gradually becoming more directly involved in refugee protection and assistance. The Office will continue to help to sustain these networks.

Public Information Activities: Considering the severe economic crisis in Argentina, private sector fund raising activities in this country were suspended for 2002 and will remain suspended in 2003. UNHCR and its implementing partner will concentrate on building awareness through public information efforts and media events. The aim of these activities will be to draw public attention to refugee protection and local integration, thus enhancing government and public understanding of refugee issues as well as UNHCR's work.

Budget (USD)	
Country	Annual Programme
Northern South America	
Colombia	5,842,993
Ecuador	1,581,138
Panama	461,600
Venezuela	2,019,451
Regional Activities ¹	974,300
Southern South America	
Argentina	1,076,838
Regional Activities ²	2,369,700
Total	14,326,020

¹ Includes assistance to refugees in Guyana, Peru, Suriname and Venezuela.
² Includes local integration of refugees in countries in Southern South America, resettlement of refugees in Brazil and Chile, and scholarships for refugee students.