

## NORTHERN SOUTH AMERICA

### Recent Developments

Despite intensive national and international efforts to secure lasting progress towards peace, internal armed conflict in Colombia continues to worsen leading to soaring levels of forced displacement. Territorial struggles between armed groups in border zones are expected to lead to recurrent cross-border movements, especially into Ecuador and Venezuela. Throughout the Andean sub-region, the spillover effects of the Colombian conflict are further compounded by domestic socio-economic difficulties. Access to asylum for Colombians is also impeded by national security concerns, militarisation of borders and the tendency for countries to deal with the issue on a bilateral basis, without the participation of UNHCR.

### Strategic Objectives

UNHCR will continue to pursue an integrated regional strategy that aims to protect and find solutions for Colombian asylum-seekers and refugees in the region, as well as for internally displaced persons (IDPs) within Colombia. While UNHCR's programmes in the region will continue to benefit refugees and other persons of concern of various nationalities, the Office projects that over 90 per cent of all beneficiaries will be Colombians. Most are of rural origin, mainly from the border districts in Colombia. It is estimated that UNHCR programmes in 2001 will benefit about 13,000 asylum-seekers, refugees and others of concern. This figure includes a potential influx of some 5,000 refugees from southern Colombia into Ecuador.

To combat restrictive trends in all three countries receiving influxes of Colombians (Ecuador, Panama and Venezuela), UNHCR's primary goal is to reinforce the regional asylum framework by ensuring access to safety as well as to refugee status determination procedures. To pursue durable solutions, UNHCR will encourage the establishment of Tripartite Commissions (with the participation of Colombia, the country of asylum and UNHCR) to establish modalities for solutions,

#### Northern South America

Colombia  
Ecuador  
Guyana  
Panama  
Peru  
Surinam  
Venezuela

#### Southern South America

Argentina  
Bolivia  
Brazil  
Chile  
Paraguay  
Uruguay



including voluntary repatriation in conditions of safety and dignity. UNHCR will step up monitoring of border zones and strengthen its links with networks in civil society concerned with the protection of refugees. To respond to potential large influxes of refugees, UNHCR will strengthen contingency planning and remain on high alert for any potential emergency. The Office will also promote solutions for long-staying urban refugees, particularly through local integration.

Within Colombia, UNHCR's overall objectives vis-à-vis IDPs are to promote an effective, integrated state and civil society response for both protection and solutions, and ensure that humanitarian initiatives for IDPs and political initiatives related to the peace process are mutually reinforcing.

## Operations

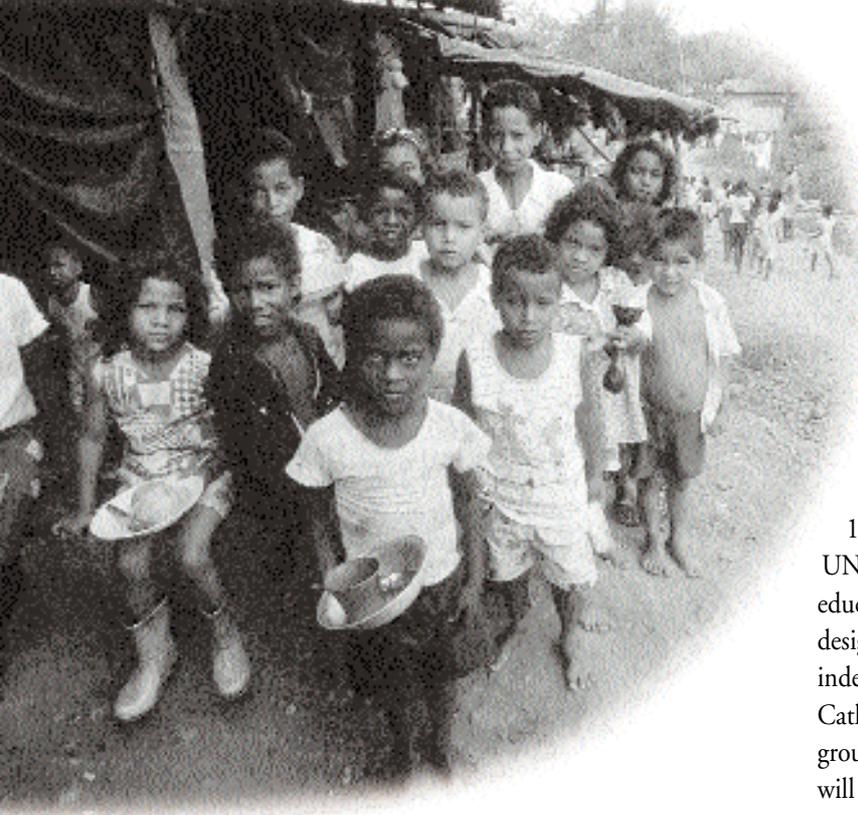
In Colombia, the intensification of armed conflict is expected to result in persistently high levels of forced displacement in 2001. Although accurate estimates of the IDP population do not exist, official sources estimate that half a million people require immediate attention. According to CODHES (*Consultoría para el Desplazamiento y los Derechos Humanos*), 135,000 persons were displaced in the first six months of 2000 alone, an increase of eleven per cent over the same period in 1999. Women and children continue to be especially affected by conflict and displacement. Women account for more than 55 per cent of IDPs and are the family head in 45 per cent of all IDP families. Some 17 per cent of IDPs are under the age of seven. Most IDPs are of rural origin. Whilst the department of Antioquia continues to witness the worst forced displacement, expulsion rates are also high in areas experiencing struggles for territorial control, such as Bolivar, Norte de Santander, Cordoba, Choco, Valle del Cauca and Putumayo. (Please refer to the following page for an overview of UNHCR's priorities in Colombia.)

In Ecuador, national policies towards refugees are generally implemented in line with international standards. UNHCR will continue to support and participate in the national refugee status determination committee and encourage the registration and documentation of new arrivals. Refugee law training will be given to national police and migration officials, especially in



border regions. The Office will give priority to implementing the recommendations of a UNHCR emergency assessment mission carried out in March 2000. These included strengthening community services in border provinces, especially Sucumbios, where up to 4,000 Colombians have sought refuge due to clashes between armed groups in the Colombian department of Putumayo. UNHCR's support, implemented primarily through church groups, will focus on water, sanitation, health and education, and direct assistance to vulnerable groups, including isolated women and women heads of household. In addition, UNHCR will continue to work with the Government of Ecuador and local partners to update a contingency plan for an influx of up to 5,000 people, if the conflict in Putumayo deteriorates further.

Continuing conflict in the neighbouring Colombian department of Choco implies that new refugees are likely to arrive in Panama, although natural barriers and the presence of armed groups in the border area may limit their numbers. A prime



objective is to ensure continued flexible application by the authorities of the temporary protection regime in favour of Colombians in need of protection. UNHCR will continue to participate in and support the National Eligibility Commission and provide training in protection matters to its government partner, ONPAR (*Oficina Nacional para Ayuda a los Refugiados*), and the police. UNHCR will also continue to provide emergency assistance and community-based support to some 5,900 beneficiaries, including 1,500 Colombian refugees located in five communities. UNHCR will support vital 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 be implemented through the Catholic church, government, a local NGO and a women's group. Further contingency planning for potential new arrivals will be carried out jointly with the Panamanian Government.

## Priorities in Colombia

UNHCR's priorities in Colombia will be to: strengthen the national institutional framework for addressing the plight of IDPs; promote area-based programmes in the three UNHCR priority regions; and improve co-ordination amongst international partners working with IDPs.

**Strengthening the National Institutional Framework for IDPs:** UNHCR will continue to support major institutional and policy changes needed to enhance the protection of IDPs in Colombia and identify solutions for them. Legal advice will be provided to draft regulations needed for the implementation of Law 387, which defines the rights of IDPs and the institutional framework for their protection. Another high priority will be implementation of the revised national registration system, to ensure effective and safe access by IDPs to State benefits. UNHCR's support of the *Red de Solidaridad* (Joint Technical Unit) will encourage co-ordinated, local-level application of national IDP policy in accordance with international standards.

The dissemination training programme and campaign for members of the armed forces and the police is intended to help prevent forced displacement and improve the protection of IDPs. Other advocacy efforts will target the local and international media to increase awareness of the plight of IDPs, and widely disseminate the UN's "Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement". In addition, early warning of and response to displacement at both national and local level will be supported through an agreement signed in 2000 with the National Ombudsman's Office. In co-operation with the Civil Registry, extensive personal documentation campaigns will be carried

out in areas with high concentrations of IDPs to improve safety and access to social services, such as health and education.

**Area-based Programmes at the Local Level:** Since UNHCR is now operational in the three priority regions of Uraba, Magdalena Medio and Putumayo, the programme will shift to promoting effective, co-ordinated application of national IDP policies at the local level. In Uraba and Magdalena Medio, UNHCR will provide community-based support to some 40,000 IDPs who are either settling locally or seeking to return to their homes. The aim is to improve protection, while contributing to reconciliation and socio-economic stabilisation. UNHCR will support local initiatives to improve services in the areas of education, health and water/sanitation, as well as projects to promote productive activities, especially those managed by women heads of household. In Putumayo, the main focus will be on strengthening the emergency response capacity of local authorities and NGOs, with an appropriate emphasis on disseminating and advocating the principles underpinning the protection of IDPs.

**Enhancing Co-ordination Amongst International Partners Working with IDPs:** UNHCR's capacity to facilitate UN efforts in favour of IDPs was strengthened in September 2000 with the arrival of an OCHA officer assigned to the office in Bogota. A second OCHA officer is expected before the end of the year. UNHCR will continue efforts to forge operational linkages with partner agencies working with IDPs, especially at the local level. UNHCR will also continue to interface with other key agencies working with IDPs, notably the ICRC and ECHO.

In **Venezuela**, UNHCR's primary concern is to ensure effective functioning of the ad hoc mechanism for refugee status determination, given the potential for refugee influxes owing to the unresolved territorial dispute between illegal armed groups in the adjacent Colombian department of Norte de Santander. UNHCR's prime focus will therefore be to ensure that the legal framework adopted for the protection of asylum-seekers and refugees is implemented effectively, in compliance with constitutional and international standards. To this end, regular training will be provided for members of the National Eligibility Commission and the Attorney General's office. Through its field office in San Cristobal, UNHCR will work to strengthen networks with local partners for the protection of refugees, reinforce social services, especially health and education, and provide training for civilian and military authorities on international standards for the treatment of Colombians in need of protection.

## SOUTHERN SOUTH AMERICA

### Recent Developments

There is considerable concern throughout the continent over the prospect of population movements caused by the Colombian conflict, particularly in Brazil, which is experiencing increasing cross-border tension. Despite economic difficulties, many South American countries continued to apply liberal asylum policies. Some (Argentina, Brazil and Chile) have agreed to provide or increase resettlement opportunities for refugees from outside the continent. The economic squeeze continues, however, to attenuate UNHCR's efforts to achieve self-reliance and the local integration of refugees.

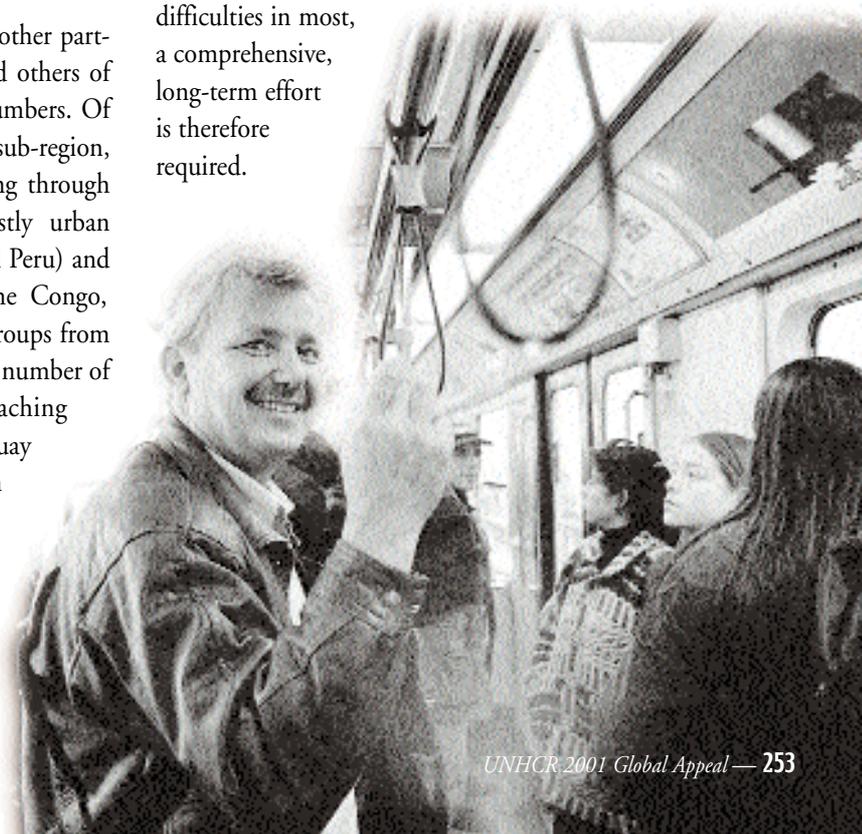
In 2000, UNHCR worked with governments and other partners to verify and update statistics on refugees and others of concern. This resulted in a reduction in overall numbers. Of the estimated 7,600 persons of concern in the sub-region, some 3,500 are receiving assistance and counselling through UNHCR-supported programmes. They are mostly urban refugees from Latin America (Colombia, Cuba and Peru) and from Africa (Angola, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia and Sierra Leone). There are also smaller groups from Eastern Europe and the Middle East. An increasing number of irregular migrants and asylum-seekers is reaching Argentina and Chile from Bolivia, Colombia, Paraguay and Peru. Migration and human rights now loom large in formal intergovernmental consultations, and in any consideration of population flows there is growing recognition of the interdependence of countries in the hemisphere. UNHCR has taken the opportunity to promote awareness

of refugee issues in several forums hosting discussion of migration and refugees. In so doing, UNHCR stressed the need for governments and societies in the region to attach greater importance to the question of refugee rights, especially in government efforts to stem irregular migration.

UNHCR works with governmental and non-governmental partners throughout the sub-region to expand local integration opportunities and build local capacity to assume primary responsibility for assisting and protecting refugees. In 2000, these covered over 30 per cent of assistance to refugees in terms of counselling, vocational training, health and education. At the same time, the Office has reached out to non-traditional partners in civil society, including the private sector, to encourage them to play a more active role in meeting the needs of refugees and others of concern. To build a harmonised, region-wide legislative framework for asylum, UNHCR is promoting the development and adoption of a model law on refugees at both the national and sub-regional level (within the MERCOSUR framework, comprising Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay, with Bolivia and Chile as associate members).

### Strategic Objectives

UNHCR's long-term strategic objective in the sub-region is to build a constituency in each country, encompassing individuals and institutions in government, the non-governmental community and other sectors of civil society committed to deal with refugee matters. As these constituencies grow in strength and effectiveness, UNHCR hopes to diminish gradually its direct operational role in assistance and protection and act instead as a catalyst. This would maximise the impact of its limited resources. The Office recognises that in this endeavour prospects for progress vary from country to country. Given the serious economic difficulties in most, a comprehensive, long-term effort is therefore required.



In 2001, this will entail encouraging the enactment of new or amended refugee legislation through MERCOSUR's model legislation initiative, combined with training for officials dealing with refugee status determination. This will contribute to the harmonisation of laws and eligibility procedures and encourage a comprehensive regional approach to asylum claims and refugee protection. UNHCR will also strengthen protection networks within civil society in each country, paying special attention to raising awareness of gender and children's issues and introducing a gender equality perspective into the refugee status determination process. At the same time, UNHCR will encourage authorities to grant refugee women and children access to existing national services. Through training, technical support and advocacy, the Office will boost the expertise and confidence of government and non-government bodies, and thus help them take on an increased role to meet refugee needs. UNHCR will continue to support the local integration of refugees, particularly women, while providing training and technical support to expand and strengthen national resettlement capacities. The Office will work to increase public awareness of refugee issues. Moreover, it will strengthen efforts to raise funds from the private sector for UNHCR's activities world-wide, with the support of national associations where possible.

## Operations

In **Argentina**, the number of refugees receiving UNHCR assistance increased to 1,300. Although the Office will continue to provide such assistance in 2001, it will redouble efforts to encourage the Government and its growing network of partner organisations to take on a greater share of the workload. To assist the Government to meet the protection needs of refugees and handle refugee status determination, UNHCR will help it update national refugee legislation so as to incorporate a gender perspective and key elements of the model legislation. Training will be provided for law enforcement officials and partner organisations. Public awareness and private sector fund-raising activities will continue, with the support of *Argentina con ACNUR* (ARCA: UNHCR's national association) and the established protection networks.

UNHCR continues to support the establishment of a legal and institutional framework to provide international protection to asylum-seekers and refugees in **Bolivia**. Under the MERCOSUR initiative, the Office will promote the adoption of more comprehensive legislation on refugees. In 2001 a new partnership will be launched with a well-established local NGO with lengthy experience in social and legal matters. Updated training modules on refugee law will be used to train border officials, as well as government and private lawyers handling refugee claims.

**Brazil's** 1997 refugee law has served as the basis for drafting the model legislation being promoted for adoption in MERCOSUR

countries. UNHCR will continue its programme of refugee law training to increase awareness of refugee law and related issues. The Office will lobby members of Parliament and other political actors to urge the adoption of legislation on statelessness. It will work with the authorities to verify the number of refugees presently in Brazil and support their local integration. UNHCR will continue to explore increased support from the private sector. Given the likelihood of new arrivals from Colombia, the Office will help the authorities draw up thorough contingency plans, working in close consultation with UNHCR offices in neighbouring countries.

In 2001 the number of implementing partners in **Chile** will be reduced from three to one, to rationalise expenditure and reduce overheads. Chile is a resettlement country hosting refugees from South-Eastern Europe and due to receive further groups of refugees. UNHCR will therefore provide appropriate technical assistance to governmental and other institutions involved in receiving refugees and helping them to integrate. UNHCR will continue to support resettlement projects, and to urge that all refugees be eligible to benefit from national health care, housing and employment programmes. To strengthen national protection mechanisms, UNHCR will provide additional training for the Migration Department, the police and institutions in civil society. UNHCR will also endeavour to establish an effective protection network in Chile.

In **Paraguay** and **Uruguay**, UNHCR will promote the adoption of model legislation on refugees. It will also seek to identify new partners to strengthen the protection networks in both countries. As well as offering legal counselling in individual cases, UNHCR's implementing partners will begin to assume protection-related tasks, such as advocacy, and will strengthen their links with other public and private institutions, with UNHCR's guidance and support.

BUDGET (USD)	
Country	Annual Programme
<b>Northern South America</b>	
Colombia	4,095,499
Ecuador	165,891
Venezuela	1,540,102
Regional Projects <sup>1</sup>	1,100,000
<b>Southern South America</b>	
Argentina	1,425,064
Regional Projects <sup>2</sup>	2,231,300
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,557,856</b>

<sup>1</sup> Includes activities in Ecuador, Guyana, Panama, Peru, Suriname and Venezuela.

<sup>2</sup> Includes activities in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay, and scholarships for refugee students (DAFI).