

Colombia

Main objectives

In 2005, UNHCR's main objective in Colombia was to promote a comprehensive and coordinated response to the humanitarian crisis, in order to reinforce the protection and assistance of internally displaced people (IDPs), foster durable solutions and contribute to improved international protection of Colombians in neighbouring countries, as well as to provide international protection for 200 refugees and asylum-seekers in Colombia.

Impact

- The Colombian Constitutional Court, based on UNHCR's recommendations and advice, intervened in favour of IDPs by issuing three court orders which oblige the authorities to deploy greater resources to help displaced people.
- In February, the Government adopted by decree a new national IDP plan, under which public policy will be rights-based, taking into account gender, age and ethnicity. The plan includes the adoption of an integrated approach to the prevention of displacement, as recommended by UNHCR.
- At the end of the year, the Government adopted a policy document, prepared by the Economic and Social Policy Council, committing funds of approximately USD 2.2 billion to IDP protection and assistance between 2006 and 2010 (i.e. annual spending almost six times higher than in 2005).
- With the support of UNHCR, local authorities became more involved in addressing the internal displacement crisis. They facilitated assistance and protection through information and advice centres (*Unidades de Asistencia y Orientación*), through the establishment of a "House of Rights" (*Casa de Derechos*, see below) and by promoting local development plans that address displacement issues (*Planes Integrales Unicos*). All these initiatives afforded the Government a greater presence in areas with a high number of displaced people and opened direct channels of communication with IDP



organizations through the Municipal and Departmental IDP Committees.

- Coordination among the Government, UN agencies and other stakeholders improved following the reactivation of the Thematic Group on Displacement chaired by UNHCR.
- Country of origin information was provided to asylum countries and revised eligibility guidelines were published in March 2005.
- Public awareness of the internal displacement crisis was maintained through an effective information strategy and advocacy of respect for IDP rights.
- UNHCR gave protection and basic humanitarian assistance to 153 recognized refugees in Colombia.

Working environment

The context

During 2005, a pre-electoral year in Colombia, the authorities registered 136,000 newly displaced people.

While some irregular armed groups declared a ceasefire during the electoral campaigns, others stepped up armed activity. This caused further population displacement and made humanitarian work more difficult, particularly in marginalized border areas. There were mass displacements in Nariño, Putumayo and Chocó provinces, with more sporadic individual, often intra-urban, displacement elsewhere. In several cases, displacement was followed by return movements within a period of a few weeks, despite the continued threat of armed activity.

The Colombian conflict has also affected regional stability. In 2005, tensions mounted between Colombia and Venezuela regarding the capture of a guerrilla leader, and between Colombia and Ecuador following allegations of incursions by Colombian armed forces into the border area of Ecuador. UNHCR has adopted what it calls a situational approach, which allows for better international protection in the surrounding asylum countries through the provision of country of origin information, border monitoring and early warning procedures.

In 2005, no substantive peace talks were held between the Government and the two main left-wing guerrilla groups. In its effort to fight the guerrilla groups, the Government launched a military offensive (*Plan Patriota*) that led to numerous security incidents and further displacement, both internally and across the border into Ecuador. At the same time, the demobilization of right-wing paramilitary groups continued. According to the Government, 28,000 paramilitaries have been demobilized since 2003. However, the reintegration of demobilized paramilitaries is a major challenge and there are concerns about the sustainability of the process. The Justice and Peace Law, enacted in June 2005, became the legal framework for the demobilization process, but the international community has criticized it for failing to address adequately the issue of

impunity and the question of reparations to civilian victims of the conflict.

Although Colombia has a comprehensive legal framework that conforms to the Guiding Principles for Internal Displacement, in practice this has often failed to respond to the needs of IDPs, who have frequently been denied access to basic services and other rights. Therefore, the main challenge for UNHCR in its protection work continues to be to fill the gap between law and public policy, and to encourage the State to accept its primary responsibility for IDPs.

Constraints

Confrontations between the Government and irregular armed groups continued to render extensive areas of Colombia dangerous. The resulting humanitarian problems were further exacerbated by increased attacks on the civilian population. In certain areas of the country, violence and armed clashes made it difficult for humanitarian aid agencies to reach affected communities and to protect IDPs.

Although the State response to displacement improved, it failed to address the discrimination against IDPs and their difficulty in gaining access to basic services. State authorities increased their presence in certain areas of the country; however, their absence in conflict-affected areas still hindered the return of IDPs, and could cause further displacement. A major concern for the displaced population is the issue of land and property restitution, which has also hampered voluntary return.

Funding

Donors interest in Colombia was high and they responded very generously to UNHCR's appeal; thanks to their support, the operation was fully funded.

Persons of concern				
Origin	Total in country	Of whom UNHCR assisted	Per cent female	Per cent under 18
IDPs ¹	>2,000,000	260,000	51	41
Various	200	-	-	-

¹ The Government has acknowledged that there are more than two million IDPs, whereas NGOs estimate more than three million.

Budget, income and expenditure (USD) Annual programme budget				
Final budget	Income from contributions ¹	Other funds available ²	Total funds available	Total expenditure
8,831,410	9,092,957	723,275	9,816,231	8,724,668

¹ Includes income from contributions earmarked at the country level.

² Includes allocations by UNHCR from unearmarked or broadly earmarked contributions, opening balance and adjustments.

Achievements and impact

Protection and solutions

UNHCR concentrated on achieving its objectives through: 1) promotion and dissemination of the existing legal framework for IDP protection; 2) development of national mechanisms, including domestic supervisory mechanisms, for improving State compliance with the existing legal framework; and 3) promotion of community organization and IDP participation, taking into account gender, age and ethnic diversity.

Following UNHCR's recommendations, the Constitutional Court concluded in August 2005 that the Government's inadequate response to internal displacement, declared by the Court in 2004, had yet to be overcome. Consequently, it ordered a series of follow-up actions. These related principally to the necessity of increasing the national budget for displaced people and improving coordination between national and local authorities, as well as the need to design and implement programmes that guarantee minimum conditions for a dignified life, including access to agricultural land and income-generation projects. UNHCR, the Ombudsman's Office, the Procurator's Office, NGOs and IDP organizations were requested to evaluate the Government's response.

In 2005, UNHCR supported the Municipal and Departmental IDP Support Committees and facilitated the dialogue between them and IDP organizations. In many cases, this led to the establishment of local development plans (*Planes Integrales Unicos*) and dedicated budget lines to address IDP needs. At the same time, UNHCR continued its empowerment and capacity-building work with IDP organizations. As a result, they have become better equipped to claim their rights through various State institutions, such as the Ombudsman's Office, the Procurator's Office and *Acción Social*.

The Office and its partners were committed to age, gender and ethnic diversity in their operations, and the implementation of participatory assessments facilitated direct communication with IDPs and allowed for more effective planning. However, UNHCR noted little inclusion of the differential and gender approach into public policies, which led to inconsistencies in the delivery of humanitarian assistance and the response to claims for the restoration of rights.

Activities and assistance

Community services: UNHCR promoted community participation at many levels, which resulted in a more equal involvement of displaced men and women in organizational processes and in the implementation of small

protection projects. Some 100 IDP organizations were supported and their managerial capacity strengthened. This facilitated political participation by IDP organizations and left them in a stronger position to negotiate free access to services and to defend their rights at the community level in their dealings with local authorities.

Special projects were implemented with displaced children and youth to increase their participation and to address some of the risks they face. In conflict-affected communities, cultural and recreational activities for children and young people were developed. This was important in order to counteract the lure of crime or recruitment into armed groups. Other projects were implemented with Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities, reinforcing mechanisms to prevent their displacement and addressing their individual and collective rights in all phases of the displacement cycle.

Domestic needs and household support: Newly arrived refugee families in Colombia received basic household items to facilitate their local integration.

Education: The right to education was promoted through an improved educational system, whereby teachers and educational authorities provided better access and more equal participation for displaced children. The project's success was evident in that the drop-out rate for displaced children was 25 per cent lower in the participating schools than in other schools. UNHCR intends to hand over the project to the Ministry of Education and local education authorities in order to make it more sustainable.

Health and nutrition: Newly arrived refugee families in Colombia received health care as needed.

Income generation: UNHCR lobbied for the inclusion of income-generating activities (employment and microcredit schemes) for IDPs in local development plans. In some cases, UNHCR supported pilot projects, introducing the microcredit methodology for IDPs, stressing their responsibilities and duties. These projects were implemented through professional microfinance institutions and addressed the need for vocational training through State-sponsored institutions. Equal participation of displaced women and men was promoted at all times.

Legal assistance: In addition to collaboration with State institutions, UNHCR focused on the direct delivery of protection to IDP communities. The Office provided legal aid to some 5,800 IDPs in legal aid centres in cooperation with the National University, where some 230 students were trained to address the legal problems of IDPs. Moreover, UNHCR supported the Registry Office with the issuance of national identity cards for over 98,300 IDPs, specifically addressing indigenous and



UNHCR field staff visit remote communities like this one in Colombia's Nariño Department in order to provide some measure of protection to displaced people. Over two million people have been uprooted by the internal conflict in Colombia.
UNHCR/ A.M. Rodriguez

Afro-Colombian communities. Through public information and continuous advocacy, UNHCR kept the internal displacement crisis high on the political agenda, encouraging the State institutions to respond more effectively.

The Office promoted several initiatives within the "Cities of Solidarity" component of the Mexico Plan of Action. With the support of UNHCR, the cities of Bogotá, Medellín, Cali and Bucaramanga committed significant resources to work with IDPs, elaborated local development plans and established offices to inform, advise and assist IDPs. One of the most relevant results was a "House of Rights", established in cooperation with the Ombudsman's Office in a slum south of Bogotá. The House ensured the presence of the State in an insecure area, offering services to IDPs and the local population alike.

Operational support (to agencies): All implementing partners received administrative support, which allowed them to implement sub-agreements and all the projects covered by "umbrella" agencies in a timely and adequate manner. The larger partners received funding to conduct end-of-year audits.

Shelter and infrastructure: The Office implemented various small infrastructure projects in IDP communities to facilitate the delivery of basic community services. These "practical protection projects" provided solutions to identified community needs and facilitated access to isolated areas.

Organization and implementation

Management

UNHCR has a Branch Office in Bogotá and nine field offices. In 2005, the Office had 81 staff: 12 international, 38 national, 20 UNVs, five secondees, two consultants and four interns.

Working with others

Following recommendations by the Internal Displacement Division of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and in line with the IASC's cluster approach towards IDPs, the inter-institutional Thematic Group on Displacement was reactivated and chaired by UNHCR. The

Office cooperated closely with UNIFEM and OHCHR, promoting inter-agency workshops on the human rights-based approach, as well as with UNAIDS and the Global Fund Project on the eradication of AIDS in Colombia. Coordination also continued with OCHA, FAO, UNFPA, WFP and UNDP. New contacts were established with UNIDO, IOM and WHO. UNHCR consolidated its inter-institutional coordination at the field level, with the aim of ensuring consistency between central and local interventions and avoiding the duplication of activities between UN agencies. UNHCR was part of the UN committee that was preparing the Common Country Assessment — UN Development Assistance Framework for Colombia.

UNHCR worked with implementing partners that can be grouped into three categories: State institutions, NGOs and community-based organizations. Some projects were implemented to promote operational partnerships among different organizations and institutions at all three levels.

Overall assessment

In 2005, despite continued internal displacement and widespread insecurity, UNHCR managed to address an array of protection problems faced by IDPs. This was accomplished in cooperation with the Government, encouraging the authorities to assume their primary responsibility to assist and protect internally displaced people. The Office was able to put the Constitution and the existing legal system at the service of better IDP protection, i.e. UNHCR stepped in to bridge the gap between the law and practice. However, security problems continued to hamper access to the more isolated areas of the country.

The Office focused on building the capacity of national actors to defend IDP rights, on improving the coping strategies of affected communities, on promoting viable and safe solutions and on advocating a post-return environment that permits full enjoyment of rights and compensation for losses. UNHCR also had an impact, through pilot projects, on the protection of the many IDPs in urban areas. The Office implemented wide-ranging initiatives to ensure that local IDP programmes included a proper gender and age focus and from the active participation of IDP representatives in their planning and delivery. At the same time, the operation

was part of a larger regional approach and supported refugee protection in asylum countries by means of country of origin information and border monitoring.

UNHCR's remaining challenges are twofold: firstly, to improve the capacity of State institutions to meet the demand of protection and restoration of rights in the long-term (and thereby gradually reduce its involvement in critical protection activities); and, secondly, to consolidate the relationships between State institutions, IDPs and civil society.

Offices

Bogotá
 Apartadó
 Barrancabermeja
 Barranquilla
 Bucaramanga
 Cúcuta
 Mocoa
 Pasto
 Quibdó
 Soacha

Partners

Government agencies

Acción Social
 Ombudsman's Office (*Defensoría del Pueblo*)
 Procurator's Office (*Procuraduría General de la Nación*)
 Registry Office (*Registraduría*)

NGOs

Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular
Consultoría para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento
Instituto Latinoamericano de Servicios Legales Alternativos
Liga de Mujeres de Bolívar
Mujer y Futuro
Opción Legal
Organización Nacional de Indígena de Colombia

Others

IOM
 Opportunity International
Secretariado Nacional de Pastoral Social
Universidad Nacional
 UNV

Financial Report (USD)

Expenditure breakdown	Current year's projects Annual Programme Budget	Prior years' projects Annual and supplementary Programme Budget
Protection, monitoring and coordination	2,511,268	0
Community services	623,908	446,780
Domestic needs and household support	37,184	151
Education	164,875	109,906
Health and nutrition	2,995	0
Shelter and infrastructure	64,553	55,663
Income generation	197,081	112,593
Legal assistance	1,810,760	312,887
Operational support (to agencies)	487,658	99,357
Instalments with implementing partners	1,458,711	(1,137,337)
Sub-total operational activities	7,358,993	0
Programme support	1,365,675	0
Total expenditure	8,724,668	0
Cancellation on prior years' expenditure		(20,812)
Instalments with implementing partners		
Payments made	3,575,640	
Reporting received	(2,116,929)	
Balance	1,458,711	
Prior years' report		
Instalments with implementing partners		
Outstanding 1 January		1,242,804
Reporting received		(1,137,337)
Refunded to UNHCR		(61,014)
Adjustments		(9,614)
Balance		34,839