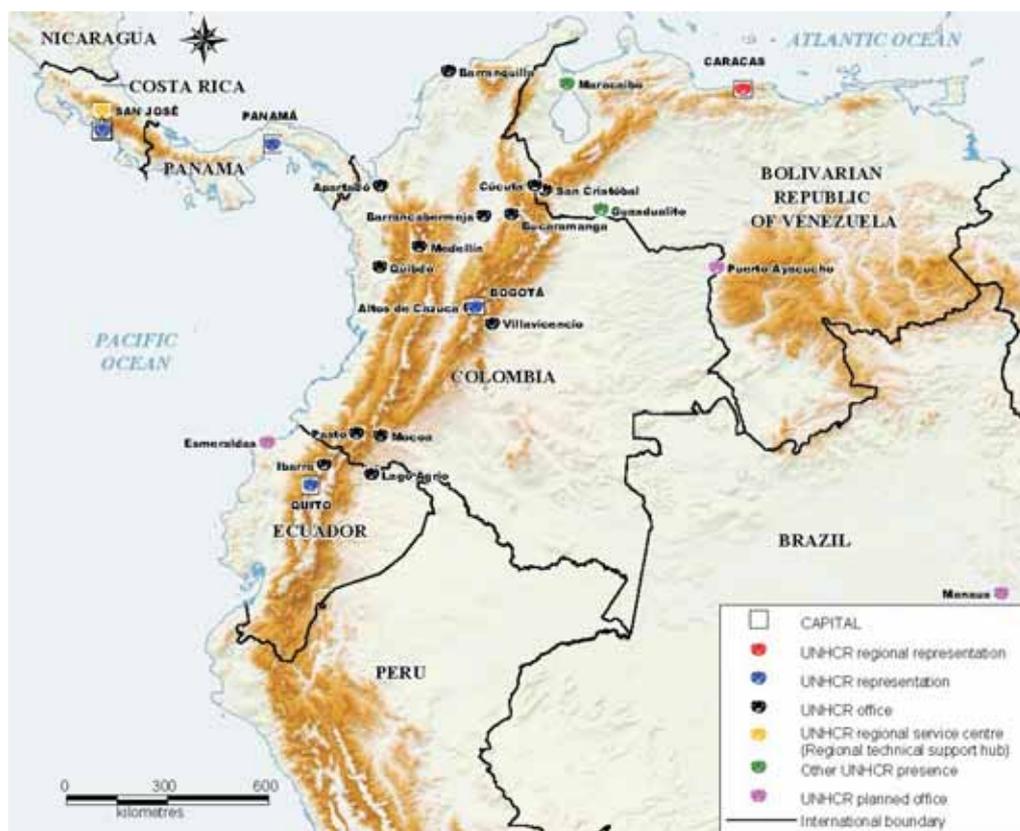


# Colombia Situation

Brazil (Amazon region)  
Colombia  
Costa Rica  
Ecuador  
Panama  
Peru  
Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)



## Working environment

### The context

In the wake of elections, many countries in the region are in the midst of profound institutional reform and reshuffling of their political landscapes. The transition has been characterized by social unrest and mounting antagonism between ruling parties and the opposition. In such an environment humanitarian issues, such as large-scale displacement, are not high on the political agenda. Furthermore, the volatile situation in Colombia's border regions has led to tension with the country's neighbours, particularly with Ecuador because of aerial fumigation of coca crops.

In Colombia, an end to hostilities between the Government and the two main guerrilla groups remains a distant prospect. Meanwhile, new armed groups have emerged in several parts of the country, hampering the Government's efforts to demobilize paramilitary bands. Gross violations of human rights and international humanitarian law are common. Currently, Colombia has one of the largest populations of internally displaced people (IDPs) in the world; more than 200,000 were registered in 2006 alone.

Most Colombians who are displaced move individually, not in groups. However, the country saw several group displacements in 2007. Nearly 70 per cent of those in need of protection live in capital cities and other large and medium-sized towns. Displaced women are particularly hard hit by the violence, while girls are vulnerable to sexual and gender-based abuse. Afro-Colombians and indigenous communities have also been disproportionately affected. Over the past few years, violence has forced many indigenous groups to leave Colombia and settle in neighbouring countries.

On the positive side, Colombia has a sophisticated legal framework and institutional structure to support the humanitarian response. The Government is the main provider of humanitarian assistance for IDPs, and has reserved USD 2 billion for this purpose for the period 2006-2010. An initiative is underway in the Colombian Congress to adopt the Year of the Rights of IDPs. This has the support of the United States Congress, which has issued a resolution urging more efforts to help the displaced in Colombia. However, as indicated by Colombia's Constitutional Court, important gaps persist in the State's response to the displacement crisis and in the protection of vulnerable civilians.

The spread of conflict from Colombia's central regions to its remote border areas over the past decade threatens

regional stability. In 2006, more than 11,000 Colombians applied for asylum in neighbouring countries. However, this figure represents only a small fraction of the estimated half a million Colombians who have fled their country due to violence and violations of their human rights. They have escaped mostly to Ecuador, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Panama, Costa Rica and, most recently, the remote Amazon region of Brazil. Indeed, up to 20,000 Colombians, many of whom are from indigenous groups, live in a refugee-like situation in Brazil's Amazon region. Most have not sought asylum for fear of deportation or discrimination.

Governments in the region have focused mainly on security and law enforcement in border areas. In some cases, however, public programmes have been implemented in response to the humanitarian situation. Ecuador's recently launched Plan Ecuador is a major development in this regard (see text box).

## The needs

A UNHCR assessment in 2006 revealed that security and difficulties in availing themselves of their economic and social rights were the main concerns of IDPs in Colombia. The Presidential Agency for Social Action and International Cooperation says the major problems for displaced households relate to access to land, housing and jobs. Forced displacement has significantly hurt family incomes and has led to high rates of poverty. It is estimated that the average income for a displaced person is only 61 per cent of the statutory minimum wage, while IDPs suffer an unemployment rate that is three times higher than for the urban poor in general.

The situation is particularly precarious for internally displaced families headed by single women, adolescents vulnerable to forced recruitment into militias, and older people.

Colombians who are registered as refugees and asylum-seekers generally benefit from the same access to public health and education services as local populations. In 2007, UNHCR carried out surveys in Brazil, Ecuador and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to assess the needs of Colombians in these countries who have not officially sought asylum. Without official registration and documentation most of them face serious hurdles in accessing basic services and finding work.

Recent surveys reveal that up to 70 per cent of Colombians in need of protection live below the poverty line. Of these, less than one in 10 have access to permanent housing, and only one in three have found formal employment. The situation is particularly precarious for Colombians in the rural areas of the Andean region and Panama, due to the scarcity of public services and limited economic opportunities in these areas. For many refugees, resettlement is often the only viable durable solution. This is particularly the case for those with specific protection needs and women at risk in Ecuador and Costa Rica.

## Total requirements

2008: USD 12,049,213

2009: USD 13,541,313

(Annual programme only. The financial requirements for the supplementary programme for IDPs are being finalized.)

Planning figures							
Type of population	Origin	Jan 2008		Dec 2008 / Jan 2009		Dec 2009	
		Total in country	Of whom assisted by UNHCR	Total in country	Of whom assisted by UNHCR	Total in country	Of whom assisted by UNHCR
Refugees	Colombia	29,360	15,800	35,580	20,350	42,470	25,610
	Various	6,560	3,650	7,110	3,890	6,480	4,400
Returnees (refugees)	Colombia	20	20	20	20	20	20
Asylum-seekers	Colombia	17,600	12,690	22,630	16,450	28,740	20,690
	Various	2,680	2,160	3,510	2,790	4,320	3,400
IDPs	Colombia	<sup>1</sup>	435,000	<sup>1</sup>	470,000	<sup>1</sup>	500,000
Others of concern <sup>2</sup>	Colombians in Ecuador	250,000	80,000	250,000	100,000	250,000	150,000
	Colombians in Venezuela	200,000	-	200,000	5,200	200,000	14,000
	Colombians in Brazil	17,000	1,500	18,000	3,000	19,000	5,000
	Colombians in Panama	13,500	4,720	13,500	5,500	13,500	6,750
	Colombians in Costa Rica	6,000	3,000	7,000	3,500	8,000	4,000
<b>Total</b>		<b>542,720</b>	<b>558,540</b>	<b>557,350</b>	<b>630,700</b>	<b>572,530</b>	<b>733,870</b>

<sup>1</sup> According to the Constitutional Court of Colombia, there is a discrepancy between the real number of displaced people and the number given by the national registration system. The Court cites the Director of the *Agencia Presidencial para la Acción Social y la Cooperación Internacional* who acknowledged that the number of IDPs in Colombia is close to three million (Order of Compliance 218, dated 11 August 2006, related to the landmark Judgement T-025).

<sup>2</sup> Surveys are in course to validate these figures.

## Main objectives

UNHCR seeks to promote a collaborative and comprehensive response to internal displacement in Colombia, to protect Colombian asylum-seekers and refugees and to address the humanitarian concerns of unregistered Colombians in need of international protection in the surrounding countries.

### In Colombia, UNHCR will:

- Seek to prevent forced displacement.
- Promote protection and assistance of IDPs.
- Foster durable solutions for IDPs.

### In the asylum countries, UNHCR will:

- Promote international protection for all refugees and asylum-seekers.
- Seek durable solutions for refugees, particularly through local integration and resettlement.
- Ensure that other Colombians in need of international protection enjoy basic rights.

## Key targets for 2008 and 2009

### Colombia

- More than 400,000 IDPs receive legal and humanitarian support in 2008; in 2009 some 500,000 IDPs receive the same services.
- State institutions implement the Constitutional Court's orders on minimum standards of treatment for displaced people.
- 220,000 undocumented IDPs receive documents from the Special Unit for Assistance to Vulnerable Populations of the National Registry.
- 80,000 families who are displaced or at risk of displacement benefit from land-property protection measures in seven departments.
- Legal aid clinics in eleven urban zones provide free legal and psychological counselling benefiting some 10,000 displaced families.
- At least 1,000 families in key areas of forced displacement benefit from economic stabilization programmes.
- The presence and capacity of the Office of the Ombudsman is strengthened in five regions most affected by the conflict. Furthermore, the Office of the Prosecutor is strengthened in 30 key districts affected by forced displacement.
- The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Protection Group coordinates all protection activities of international NGOs and UN agencies, particularly in six regions severely affected by forced displacement.

## Asylum countries

- All new asylum-seekers and refugees in the region are registered and documented.
- Legal protection is provided for up to 500,000 Colombians who have not come forward to seek asylum, particularly in Ecuador, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Brazil.
- In Panama, a new law for the regularization of long-staying refugees grants permanent residence to 439 people, mainly from El Salvador and Nicaragua.
- In Costa Rica, the reform of a law on asylum will be completed, allowing for a revision of refugee status determination (RSD) procedures.
- All refugees and asylum-seekers in the region have access to public health and education services.
- At least 2,250 people of concern to UNHCR have access to medical, psychological and legal support on HIV and AIDS, and sexual and gender-based violence.
- In 2008, new micro-credits benefit some 1,800 refugees in Costa Rica, Ecuador, Panama, Peru and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. The number of refugees helped in this way will increase by 25 per cent in 2009.
- Some 200 community-based projects are implemented in border communities in Costa Rica, Ecuador, Panama and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. These will benefit some 67,000 people, including refugees, other Colombians in need of international protection and the local population. This programme will be expanded by more than 50 per cent in 2009.
- Up to 900 vulnerable refugees, most of them in Ecuador and Costa Rica, are resettled in third countries in 2008. A similar number will be resettled in 2009.

## Strategy and activities

In 2008 and 2009, a supplementary programme will cover UNHCR's activities for internally displaced Colombians, whereas the operations for refugees, asylum-seekers and other people in need of international protection are covered under the annual programme. UNHCR's operations in Brazil, except for the Amazon region, are described in the sub-regional overview for Latin America (Mexico Plan of Action).

UNHCR promotes a comprehensive response to forced displacement within Colombia and the protection of Colombian asylum-seekers, refugees and other Colombians in need of international protection in the surrounding countries. The Office's overarching goal is to promote an effective response by States and civil-society organizations.

## Internally displaced people in Colombia

UNHCR will assist the Government to improve its response to internal displacement and comply with existing legislation. It will help build institutions responsible for the protection and assistance of IDPs, particularly in isolated areas that are at risk of forced displacement (e.g. Chocó, Nariño and Putumayo). The Office will give priority to promoting the implementation of the Constitutional Court's landmark judgement on forced displacement, particularly in the fields of registration, documentation, property protection and attention to indigenous people and Afro-Colombians.

UNHCR will reinforce IDP associations, as well as local organizations focusing on protection, citizens' rights and access to social services. In accordance with the High Commissioner's priorities, the Office will sensitize and educate internally displaced young people on issues such as gender equity, human rights, sexual education, family planning and HIV and AIDS prevention. Specific programmes will encourage the participation of indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities in the formulation of public policies, prevention of forced displacement and project implementation.

While the bulk of UNHCR's work in Colombia is focused on IDP protection, the Office will continue to protect and assist the small number of asylum-seekers and refugees in the country.

In order to better achieve its objectives and to ensure the implementation of the IASC protection strategy, UNHCR will consolidate its field presence.

## Refugees, asylum-seekers and other Colombians of concern to UNHCR

The main challenge in the countries surrounding Colombia is to strengthen the asylum regime and provide international protection for almost half a million Colombians who have not formally sought asylum.

In line with its regional protection strategy, UNHCR will assist governments as they gradually assume all functions related to refugee protection, including registration, RSD and formulation of public policies. The Office will also support efforts to enhance the capacity of national refugee commissions and help with the decentralization process as regional offices in border areas assume more responsibilities. UNHCR will also continue to promote the legal integration of long-staying refugees in Panama and the wider region.

With the help of regional surveys, UNHCR will assist national authorities to foster the legal integration of unregistered Colombians in need of international protection. Community-based projects in refugee-hosting municipalities will be expanded through inter-agency

initiatives. Cooperation within the UN system will also focus on the prevention of HIV and AIDS, and sexual and gender-based violence. In the spirit of the Mexico Plan of Action, agreements will be sought to develop the network of Cities of Solidarity to support the integration of refugees and promote their self-reliance. In 2008-2009 resettlement will remain an option for 1,800 refugees with special protection needs.

In Brazil, one of UNHCR's main challenges is to help the Government to protect and assist Colombians in the Amazon region. UNHCR will extend and consolidate partnerships in the area, especially in the cities of Manaus and Tabatinga (on the border with Colombia) and the indigenous communities around São Gabriel da Cachoeira. In 2009, the Office will train the new partners and assist riverside host communities under the Development through Local Integration framework

## Borders of Solidarity in Ecuador

In Ecuador, like in other Andean countries, border zones are among the country's least developed areas. In the border area with Colombia, more than half of the population lives on less than two US dollars per day. During the last few years, poor socio-economic conditions have been exacerbated by high levels of violence, environmental degradation and an increasing influx of Colombians in need of international protection. In April 2007, the Ecuadorian Government launched the *Plan Ecuador*, which is a comprehensive programme to address development and humanitarian needs at the northern border. Within this framework, UNHCR will assist the authorities to regularize the situation of unregistered Colombians in need of international protection. As lead agency of the Northern Border Inter-Agency Thematic Group, UNHCR hopes to raise additional support for border communities. Similar initiatives will be encouraged in other countries of the region.

## Constraints

Security is the main obstacle to delivering protection and assistance in the region. In certain areas of Colombia, the internal conflict makes it difficult for humanitarian agencies to reach affected communities. The civilian population suffers many casualties from landmines, and recent killings of humanitarian workers and IDP leaders are a matter of grave concern.

The climate of insecurity also prevails outside Colombia, particularly in border areas, which have seen an increase in irregular armed groups and criminality. As governments in the region grow



UNHCR/P. Smith

A Colombian IDP has just received an identification card, which is key to gain access to health care, education and bank loans.

increasingly preoccupied with national security, the asylum system is in danger of being adversely affected. The aerial spraying of coca crops in Colombia's border provinces of Nariño and Putumayo has added new frictions in relations with Ecuador. All these factors have had a negative impact on public opinion about Colombians, which could create additional obstacles to their local integration.

## Organization and implementation

### UNHCR presence

	Colombia		Asylum countries	
	2008	2009	2008	2009
Number of offices	13	14	10	10
Total staff	160	166	122	128
International	30	31	20	22
National	79	82	61	64
UNVs	47	49	28	29
JPOs	3	3	7	7
Deployees	1	1	6	6

### Coordination

In Colombia, UNHCR is part of a collaborative response to internal displacement. Under the terms of a 1999

Memorandum of Understanding between UNHCR and the Government, the Office will assist the State in its implementation of existing laws related to IDPs. At the same time, it will work with the Constitutional Court and the State's supervisory bodies to ensure the protection of IDPs. Agreements with regional and municipal authorities will also enhance support for IDPs.

As the lead agency of the IASC Protection Group, UNHCR will coordinate the implementation of a comprehensive protection strategy. A major goal for 2008 and 2009 is to strengthen inter-agency protection capacity, with particular focus on regions with high concentrations of IDPs. UNHCR will also continue to promote strategic alliances with civil-society organizations.

In the asylum countries, UNHCR coordinates its activities with governments and a wide range of national and international partners. It will also cooperate with line ministries to promote public policies and programmes for refugees and asylum-seekers. UNHCR's participation in inter-agency groups will be developed. Following the example of the Northern Border Inter-Agency Thematic Group in Ecuador, the Office hopes to obtain additional funding to improve the living conditions of refugees and host communities within a common development and humanitarian strategy. UNHCR will also reinforce networks of national and international NGOs to intensify the monitoring of volatile border areas.

## Partners

### Colombia

**Government:** *Agencia Presidencial para la Acción Social y la Cooperación Internacional, Controlaría, Defensoría del Pueblo* (Ombudsman's Office), *Procuraduría General de la Nación* (Prosecutor's Office), *Registraduría* (National Registry), Ministry of the Interior and Justice.

**NGOs:** *Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular, Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli, Consultoría de Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento, Fundación Compartir, Instituto Latinoamericano de Servicios Legales, Opción Legal, Secretaría Nacional de Pastoral Social, Opportunity Internacional, Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia, Liga de Mujeres Desplazadas.*

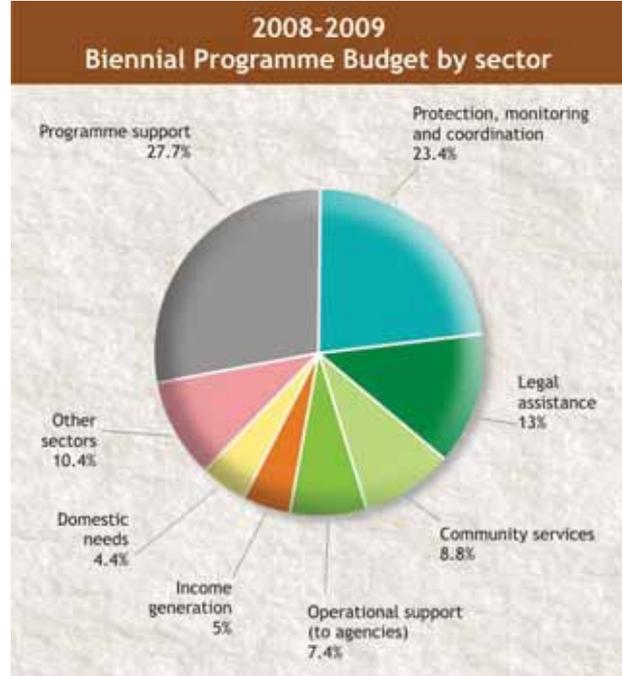
**Others:** *Universidad Nacional de Colombia, UNV, IOM.*

### Asylum countries

**Government:** Immigration Directorate, Ministry of Labour (Costa Rica); Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ecuador); *Oficina Nacional para la Atención de Refugiados (ONPAR), Ministerio de Gobierno y Justicia* (Panama); *Comisión Nacional para Refugiados* (the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela).

**NGOs:** *Asociación de Consultores y Asesores Internacionales (ACAI); Asociación de Profesionales para el Desarrollo (APRODE);* Ecuadorian Red Cross; *Fundación Ambiente y Sociedad; Catholic Church Ibarra; Fundación Esquel; Desarrollo, Acción y Vida;* Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS); *Cooperazione Internazionale (COOPI); Vicariato del Darién; Pueblos del Bosque;* Panamanian Red Cross; Caritas Táchira; Jesuit Refugee Services; Caritas Machiques; Caritas Venezuela; *Justicia y Paz.*

**Others:** UNV.



## Budget (USD)

Activities and services	2007			2008	2009
	Annual Programme Budget	Supp. Programme Budget	Total <sup>1</sup>	Annual Programme Budget <sup>2</sup>	Annual Programme Budget <sup>3</sup>
Protection, monitoring and coordination	2,351,823	5,385,798	7,737,621	2,909,234	3,083,301
Community services	813,312	2,113,733	2,927,045	992,664	1,246,694
Crop production	0	83,755	83,755	0	0
Domestic needs	725,007	0	725,007	534,880	579,605
Education	335,655	607,069	942,724	348,008	533,575
Food	145,928	0	145,928	158,760	224,520
Health	240,414	0	240,414	374,685	434,588
Income generation	473,179	643,905	1,117,084	536,038	745,778
Legal assistance	1,430,554	4,256,716	5,687,270	1,524,856	1,801,817
Operational support (to agencies)	818,298	1,036,971	1,855,269	922,332	969,925
Sanitation	0	0	0	7,000	7,000
Shelter and infrastructure	140,913	153,750	294,663	201,440	265,647
Transport and logistics	31,101	0	31,101	33,568	38,703
Water	0	0	0	8,000	20,000
<b>Total operations</b>	<b>7,506,184</b>	<b>14,281,697</b>	<b>21,787,881</b>	<b>8,551,465</b>	<b>9,951,153</b>
Programme support	3,113,409	2,317,418	5,430,827	3,497,748	3,590,160
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,619,593</b>	<b>16,599,115</b>	<b>27,218,708</b>	<b>12,049,213</b>	<b>13,541,313</b>

<sup>1</sup> The Annual Programme Budget includes activities in Colombia (USD 353,362), Costa Rica (USD 1,926,507), Ecuador (USD 4,446,802), Panama (USD 847,304) and under the Regional Office in Venezuela (USD 3,045,617). The Supplementary Programme Budget does not include seven per cent support costs of USD 1,184,794 that are recovered from contributions to meet indirect costs for UNHCR.

<sup>2</sup> The Annual Programme Budget includes activities in Colombia (USD 376,680), Costa Rica (USD 2,293,883), Ecuador (USD 5,238,660), Panama (USD 1,000,000) and under the Regional Office in Venezuela (USD 3,139,990). Activities in Brazil's Amazon region are not included.

<sup>3</sup> The Annual Programme Budget includes activities in Colombia (USD 386,746), Costa Rica (USD 2,423,118), Ecuador (USD 5,949,500), Panama (USD 1,148,856) and under the Regional Office in Venezuela (USD 3,633,093). Activities in Brazil's Amazon region are not included.

Note: The Supplementary Programme Budget excludes a 7 per cent support cost that is recovered from contributions to meet indirect costs for UNHCR.