

Latin America

Argentina

Bolivia (Plurinational State of)

Brazil

Chile

Colombia

Costa Rica

Cuba

Ecuador

El Salvador

Guatemala

Honduras

Mexico

Nicaragua

Panama

Paraguay

Peru

Uruguay

Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)

UNHCR staff in Colombia travel by boat to visit the indigenous Tule group who have only recently been able to return to their land but are at risk of being displaced again.

| Working environment |

Latin American countries host a total of more than 400,000 refugees, asylum-seekers and others in need of international protection. Since the adoption of the Mexico Plan of Action in 2004, the legal framework for the protection of refugees in the region has improved. With the addition of Colombia and Chile, a total of 14 Latin American countries have now included the broader definition of refugee contained in the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees in their domestic legal systems.

With the exception of Cuba, all countries in the region are party to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol. A major development in the protection of refugees in Latin America was the Enhanced Registration exercise in Ecuador, which was completed in March 2010, and which has resulted in the registration and documentation of approximately 28,000 refugees. In addition, the Regional Conference on Refugee Protection and International Migration, held in Costa Rica in November 2009, provided an opportunity to identify the main protection challenges in a complex mixed migratory context.

Colombia continues to experience the consequences of the severe displacement crisis that has left more than 3 million people still displaced within the country, while tens of thousands have sought asylum in other countries in the region. The newly-elected Government has reaffirmed its willingness to address the humanitarian situation in the country and has worked swiftly to re-establish ties with neighbouring countries, putting refugees on the bilateral cooperation agenda. This environment offers new opportunities to enhance the protection of refugees and foster durable solutions.

Growing concerns among governments in the region about law enforcement and security nevertheless risk an adverse effect on the global protection environment of the region.

| Strategy in 2011 |

The Mexico Plan of Action adopted in 2004, remains relevant throughout Latin America and serves to define strategic priorities for strengthening protection mechanisms, and to develop innovative ways to promote durable solutions. It comprises three pillars, all based on the principle of solidarity. The first concerns the local settlement and self-reliance of persons in need of protection in urban areas; the second is designed to protect those located in border areas, especially between Colombia and its neighbours; and the third offers resettlement opportunities for a limited number of persons facing protection risks.

The **Cities of Solidarity** pillar of the Plan supports the local integration and self-reliance of people in need of international protection in urban areas. It aims to ensure that refugees receive health care, education, access to employment and housing on par with services provided to nationals. UNHCR implements income-generating projects for refugees and promotes their entry into the labour market. National and local governments play an important role in this context by implementing refugee-friendly policies and allocating funds for integration programmes.

The **Borders of Solidarity** pillar helps UNHCR to address protection concerns at borders, primarily those between Colombia and its neighbours. Local integration along the borders is promoted by linking refugee assistance to national and regional development plans. This approach benefits refugees and local host communities.

The **Solidarity Resettlement** pillar is a regional responsibility-sharing programme. It benefits a limited number of refugees who face protection risks in their countries of asylum. Since 2004, more than one thousand people have been resettled in Argentina, Brazil and Chile. Uruguay joined the programme in 2009, when it received a first group of 14 Colombian refugees from Ecuador. The integration of resettled Palestinian refugees from Iraq in Chile and Brazil is also progressing.

Under a decentralized structure introduced in July 2009, the Bureau for the Americas now has a Deputy Director's office in Panama. This office will continue to work with the United Nations Development Group and provide legal assistance and technical support in the areas of livelihoods, HIV and AIDS, public health and information management to UNHCR's operations in Latin America. It will also reinforce regional emergency preparedness and response capacity in Latin America.

Constraints

Refugees throughout Latin America are hampered in their search for economic self-reliance by high unemployment, compounded by limits to their access to labour markets, partly due to the lack of required documentation. There is also a growing number of asylum-seekers and economic migrants arriving from the Horn of Africa, the Middle East and elsewhere, and posing new challenges to sometimes fragile asylum systems. In Colombia and its neighbouring countries, security remains a major constraint, restricting access to displaced people and the delivery of protection, particularly in border areas.

Operations

UNHCR's operations in **Colombia** and **Ecuador** are described in separate country chapters

In the **Colombia Situation**, UNHCR's main objectives are to promote a collaborative response to internal displacement in Colombia, ensure the international protection of refugees in the wider region, and promote durable solutions for all Colombians in need of protection. In the **Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela**, UNHCR's main challenge lies in strengthening the asylum regime and providing effective protection to all Colombians in refugee-like situations, particularly those who have not yet been registered in border communities, nor received documents. The Office will also focus on opportunities for the local integration of refugees, mainly through their inclusion in existing social and economic programmes and microcredit systems.

In **Panama**, the promotion of fair and efficient protection processes and local integration, with the support of self-reliance and community-based projects, will continue to be the main thrust of UNHCR's protection strategy. As its economy grows, Panama is becoming a country of destination for mixed migration flows, with a steady inflow of asylum-seekers to the capital city, mainly from Colombia but also from outside the



continent. Restrictive practices currently prevent asylum-seekers and refugees from having full access to their rights. UNHCR will work to ensure that its people of concern have access to asylum procedures and to improve refugee status determination (RSD) mechanisms.

In **Costa Rica**, UNHCR's main focus will again be on local integration through a microcredit scheme providing small loans to asylum-seekers and refugees.

Countries in the **Southern Cone** (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay) have reaffirmed their commitment to the solidarity resettlement programme in favour of refugees facing particular protection risks.

UNHCR's Regional Office in **Argentina** will focus on strengthening national and regional networks in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay for the protection of refugees and asylum-seekers. It will monitor the implementation of national laws and the strengthening of institutional structures and RSD procedures. Assistance will be provided to new arrivals and people with specific needs, and local integration will be promoted for those who cannot return home. The Regional Office will also develop resettlement capacity and consolidate existing resettlement programmes. It will also continue advocating for refugee protection in mixed migration movements through the Specialized Migratory Forum of MERCOSUR.

In **Brazil**, the Office will lobby for the formulation of public policies that aim to protect the rights of refugees, including their access to social welfare programmes. Strengthening the

resettlement programme will be another key objective for the Office, which signed an agreement with the Government of Brazil in September 2010 that is expected to cement their partnership.

Following the Regional Conference on Refugee Protection and International Migration, organized in Costa Rica in November 2009, UNHCR and IOM jointly presented project proposals focusing on extra-continental migration. The proposals covered the setting up of profiling and referral mechanisms, as well as capacity-building and training activities for immigration and border officials on the protection considerations arising from migration movements. These activities will be implemented in **Mexico and Central America** and will be linked to the Regional Conference on Migration (Puebla Process). In this context, UNHCR's presence at Mexico's southern border is essential.

In **Central America**, the Deputy Director's office will provide more support for the national refugee commissions and develop protection networks to identify and address protection needs in broader migratory movements. Coordination with other UN agencies and other relevant actors will help to develop more predictable, comprehensive and effective responses to the

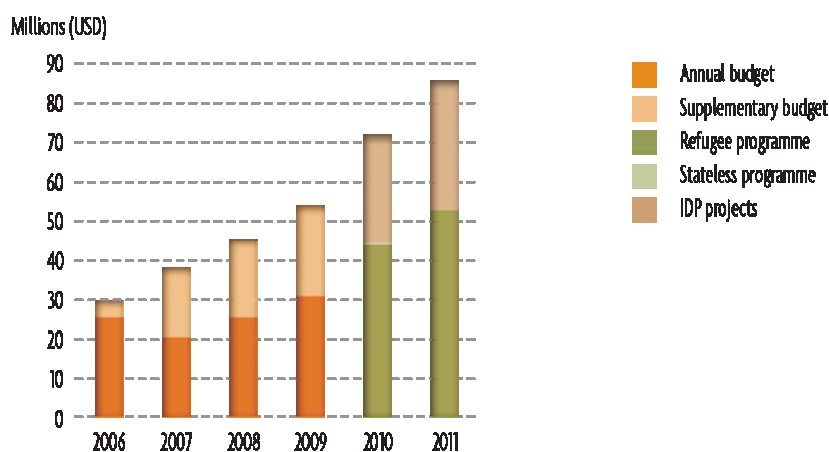
protection challenges emerging from emergencies, including displacement situations in the context of natural disasters.

In **Cuba**, although the Government offers free health care and education to refugees, local integration is unlikely. Resettlement and voluntary repatriation are therefore the only durable solutions. In this context, UNHCR will provide material assistance and legal protection for the small number of refugees in the country until solutions can be found.

Financial information

UNHCR's financial requirements in Latin America have increased steadily in recent years. This is mostly due to the Office's greater involvement with IDPs in Colombia and the reinforcement of protection for unregistered individuals in refugee-like situations in the neighbouring countries. The bigger budget also takes into account greater resettlement needs in some Latin American countries. Furthermore, the cost of ensuring and improving staff security has increased financial requirements. Although budgets have grown larger, their purchasing power has been reduced by inflation and fluctuating exchange rates in many countries.

UNHCR's budget in Latin America 2006 – 2011



UNHCR budget for Latin America (USD)

OPERATION	2010 REVISED BUDGET	2011				TOTAL
		REFUGEE PROGRAMME PILLAR 1	STATELESS PROGRAMME PILLAR 2	REINTEGRATION PROJECTS PILLAR 3	IDP PROJECTS PILLAR 4	
Argentina Regional Office ¹	5,415,632	5,039,958	188,018	0	0	5,227,976
Brazil	3,519,965	4,783,864	0	0	0	4,783,864
Colombia	28,493,358	1,397,596	0	0	32,742,242	34,139,838
Costa Rica	2,318,732	2,323,913	0	0	0	2,323,913
Ecuador	16,422,140	21,795,270	0	0	0	21,795,270
Mexico	1,730,414	2,052,649	0	0	0	2,052,649
Panama ²	6,750,523	6,813,039	0	0	0	6,813,039
Venezuela (Bolivarian Rep.)	6,749,298	8,092,882	0	0	0	8,092,882
Total	71,400,062	52,299,171	188,018	0	32,742,242	85,229,431

¹ Includes Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay.

² Includes the Legal Unit in Costa Rica and the Deputy Director's Office in Panama, which covers Cuba, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua.