

# Latin America (Mexico Plan of Action)

Argentina

Belize

Bolivia

Brazil

Chile

Colombia

Costa Rica

Cuba

Ecuador

El Salvador

Guatemala

Guyana

Honduras

Mexico

Nicaragua

Panama

Paraguay

Peru

Suriname

Uruguay

Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)

## Working environment

Most of the countries Latin America are party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. The exceptions are the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, which has acceded to the Protocol only, and Cuba and Guyana, which are not party to either treaty. The region hosts more than 500,000 refugees, asylum-seekers and others of concern to UNHCR. Most of them are from Colombia, which also has one of the largest populations of internally displaced people (IDPs) in the world: more than 200,000 were registered in 2006 alone.

Of the some half-million Colombians who have fled violence and human-rights abuses in their country, most have found refuge in Ecuador, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Panama, Costa Rica and, more recently, the remote Amazon region of Brazil. But only a small number in this group are registered as asylum-seekers and refugees.

In Central America and Mexico, efforts to improve border security, guard against terrorism and counter human and drug trafficking have led to stricter controls on the movements of undocumented migrants. While the number of asylum-seekers has remained stable, it appears that the number of interceptions, detentions and deportations has increased.

All the Central American countries participate in the Puebla Process, a regional forum on migration which reflects the importance these countries attach to migration issues. In this context, UNHCR will strive to keep asylum on the agenda and to ensure that asylum-seekers within mixed migratory flows are identified and have access to fair procedures.

In southern Latin America (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay), the number of refugees



and asylum-seekers—particularly Colombians—continues to increase. The socio-political context is generally conducive to UNHCR’s work. Governments in the region have positive attitudes towards human-rights issues, while relative political stability and the support of former refugees in prominent political positions also help.

The displaced in the southern Latin American region also benefit from laws and decrees that have established national refugee commissions to look into asylum applications and find durable solutions for refugees. These are complemented by regulations covering residence permits, documentation and extradition. The legal framework is mostly in line with minimum international protection standards. Moreover, the southern Latin American countries have ratified relevant international and regional instruments on human rights; recognizing the competence of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

In a very positive development which reflects a growing commitment to refugee welfare in southern Latin America, some governments have assigned public funds to tackle displacement issues. In Brazil, the Government

has increased its budget for humanitarian assistance, local integration and the National Refugee Commission. In Chile, the Ministry of Planning is becoming involved in refugee affairs, and there is a plan to allow refugees to benefit from the public welfare system. In Argentina, asylum-seekers and refugees benefit from existing public programmes, including a micro-credit fund that helps urban refugees in the capital, Buenos Aires.

## Strategy

The Agenda for Protection and the Mexico Plan of Action will remain the framework for UNHCR’s operations in Latin America. The main goals of this strategy are to strengthen protection and find durable solutions for those of concern to the Office.

The Cities of Solidarity pillar of the Mexico Plan helps the Office to support the local integration and self-sufficiency of people in need of international protection in medium-sized and large cities. The pillar’s main objective is to provide health care, education, employment and housing for refugees on par with services provided to nationals. To aid refugees’

self-sufficiency, UNHCR promotes their access to the labour market and implements income-generating activities. In this context, national and local governments play a growing role by instituting refugee-friendly policies and allocating funds to assist the displaced.

The Borders of Solidarity pillar of the Mexico Plan will help UNHCR to address protection concerns at borders—primarily those touching Colombia. Local integration along the borders will be promoted by closely linking assistance programmes to national and regional development plans.

The Resettlement in Solidarity pillar of the Mexico Plan of Action is of particular importance as an expression of regional solidarity and responsibility-sharing. It benefits a limited number of mostly Colombian refugees who face severe protection risks in their countries of asylum. Argentina, Brazil and Chile have accepted refugees for resettlement in recent years. UNHCR has also signed resettlement agreements with Uruguay and Paraguay. The next two years will be crucial for the establishment of reception capacity and local-integration schemes in these countries. Experience gained from resettlement programmes elsewhere will be of great importance in making the new programmes a success.

In Mexico, meanwhile, UNHCR is trying to identify people in need of international protection among the many undocumented migrants, including victims of trafficking and smuggling, entering and leaving the country. To reach this objective, UNHCR is seeking strategic partnerships with national and civil-society organizations.

In Central America, UNHCR will focus on strengthening legislation and the national capacity for refugee protection, foster the establishment of civil-society protection networks, seek durable solutions for refugees through local integration, and build institutional capacity to decide upon asylum claims.

## Constraints

Throughout the region, unemployment and limited access to labour markets hamper the local integration of refugees and their search for self-sufficiency. These constraints affect also those refugees who have benefited from the regional resettlement programme.

In many countries, the separation between asylum and migration issues is not clear to the authorities and the local population. Migration policies are sometimes incoherent and migration-control measures adversely affect those in need of international protection. In many



Palestinian refugees arriving in Brazil as part of the emerging resettlement programme in Latin America.

parts of the region UNHCR faces difficulties reaching displaced people in remote areas. The wide dispersal of people of concern is another problem.

In Mexico and Central America, inadequate asylum law and a lack of legal representation for asylum-seekers and refugees pose challenges. A major challenge is to ensure access to asylum procedures for unaccompanied and separated minors, as well as for victims of trafficking at Mexico's southern border. Another constraint is a shortage of NGOs working with refugees. Furthermore, with most lawyers busy with migration work, it is hard to provide *pro bono* legal assistance to assist refugees challenge rejected asylum applications.

In Brazil, the slow naturalization process delays the search for durable solutions for refugees. The country's size makes programme and border monitoring expensive. And for the other countries bordering Colombia, the potential spill-over of conflict from the latter's border regions is a serious concern.

## Operations

UNHCR's operations in the countries that are part of the Colombia Situation are described in a separate chapter.

The number of refugees and asylum-seekers in **Mexico** and **Central America** is some 5,300. In 2008-2009, UNHCR will strive to keep the door open for asylum; it will seek to ensure that asylum-seekers within mixed migratory flows are identified and have access to fair and efficient asylum procedures. In this context, UNHCR's presence at Mexico's southern border is essential.

UNHCR will also focus on addressing problems that hamper the local integration of refugees. The Regional Office in Mexico City will concentrate on overcoming impediments such as the regularization of status, recognition of diplomas and certificates and difficulties in accessing public services. UNHCR—and its

partners—will strengthen cooperation with relevant institutions to help refugees enter local labour markets.

In **Cuba**, local integration is a remote option for refugees although the Government offers free health care and education. Resettlement and repatriation are therefore the only durable solution options. UNHCR will provide material and legal protection for the small number of refugees until another solution can be found. In 2009, the last 75 Sahrawi students are expected to return to the camps in Tindouf as they finish their studies in Cuba.

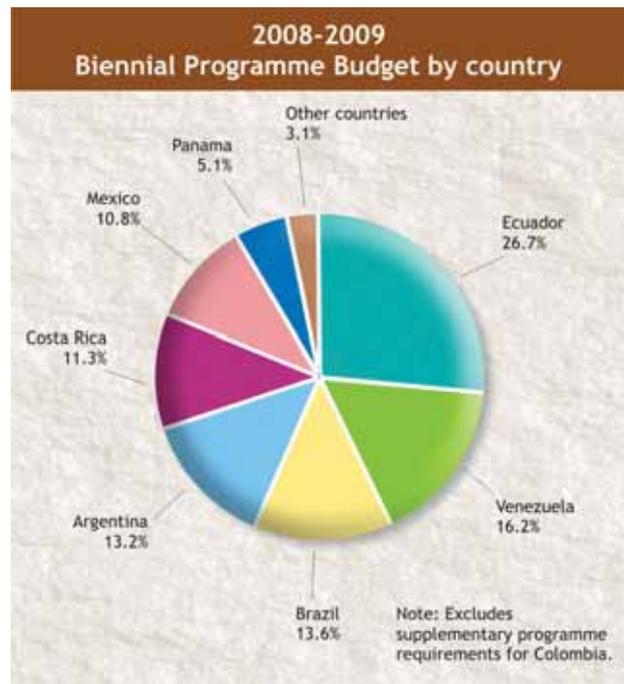
In **Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay**, the number of refugees is expected to further rise as a consequence of the Colombian conflict. In June 2007, the region hosted 5,200 refugees and 1,500 asylum-seekers—a big hike from the previous year. Apart from protecting and assisting new arrivals and people with specific needs, UNHCR will continue to seek durable solutions for people who cannot return home.

The Regional Office in Argentina will also focus on strengthening national and regional networks for the protection of refugees and asylum-seekers and the promotion of their rights; this is particularly crucial in border areas. It will also focus on the implementation of national laws and strengthening refugee status determination (RSD) procedures and institutional structures. A major aim is to consolidate the existing resettlement programmes in Chile and Argentina and develop resettlement capacity in Uruguay.

In **Brazil**, which hosted some 3,600 refugees and 400 asylum-seekers in March 2007, the Office will lobby for

the formulation of specific public policies on refugees and access to existing social welfare programmes for all refugees. UNHCR will begin a gradual handover of its protection and assistance functions for urban refugees to the Brazilian Government. Strengthening the regional resettlement programme will be another key objective for the Office in Brazil which, as of January 2008, will also cover Paraguay. A key objective in Paraguay will be to assist government and civil-society partners build resettlement infrastructure in the country.

A **regional technical support hub** will be established in Costa Rica in 2008 to provide legal and operational assistance to UNHCR's operations in Latin America.



Budget (USD)					
Country	2007			2008	2009
	Annual Programme Budget	Supp. Programme Budget	Total	Annual Programme Budget	Annual Programme Budget
Argentina <sup>1</sup>	2,302,621	0	2,302,621	2,500,000	3,048,131
Brazil <sup>2</sup>	2,353,162	0	2,353,162	2,550,000	3,151,270
Colombia	353,362	16,599,115	16,952,477	376,680	386,746
Costa Rica <sup>3</sup>	1,926,507	0	1,926,507	2,293,883	2,423,118
Cuba	287,600	0	287,600	267,510	268,000
Ecuador	4,446,802	0	4,446,802	5,238,660	5,949,500
Mexico <sup>4</sup>	2,281,010	0	2,281,010	2,232,490	2,289,243
Panama	847,304	0	847,304	1,000,000	1,148,856
Venezuela <sup>5</sup>	3,045,617	0	3,045,617	3,139,990	3,633,093
<b>Total</b>	<b>17,843,985</b>	<b>16,599,115</b>	<b>34,443,100</b>	<b>19,599,213</b>	<b>22,297,957</b>

<sup>1</sup> Includes local integration in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Uruguay, as well as resettlement in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay.

<sup>2</sup> Includes local integration and resettlement in Paraguay.

<sup>3</sup> The requirements for the regional technical support hub are partly reported under Costa Rica and partly under Headquarters.

<sup>4</sup> Includes local integration in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Belize.

<sup>5</sup> Includes local integration in Peru, Guyana and Suriname.

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