

A woman and a child are looking at a document in a classroom setting. The woman is on the right, and the child is on the left. They are both looking down at the document. The background shows a classroom with posters on the wall.

Antigua and Barbuda

Bahamas

Barbados

British overseas territories
(Anguilla, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands,
Cayman Islands, Turks and Caicos Islands,
Montserrat)

Canada

Dominica

Dominican Republic

French overseas departments (Martinique,
Guadeloupe, Saint-Barthelemy,
Saint-Martin)

Grenada

Guyana

Haiti

Jamaica

St. Kitts and Nevis

St. Lucia

St. Vincent and the Grenadines

Suriname

Trinidad and Tobago

United States of America

North America and the Caribbean

Working environment

Canada and the United States receive a large number of asylum-seekers, and their acceptance rates are among the highest for industrialized countries. Both countries have complex but well-established asylum processes, and both also receive the highest numbers of resettled refugees.

In the United States, the ongoing preoccupation with national security continues to hamper the protection of asylum-seekers and refugees. The application of the material support bar and other terrorism-related barriers to admission to the United States, while ameliorated by some limited waivers, continues to affect many asylum-seekers, as well as refugees in need of resettlement.

UNHCR's office in Washington covers 15 independent States and 12 overseas territories or departments, principally in the Caribbean. The region is characterized by mixed migratory movements. Nine of the 12 independent Caribbean States have acceded to the 1951 Refugee Convention and/or the 1967 Protocol, but only the Dominican Republic has passed implementing legislation. The region's political climate is dominated by concerns over national security and migration control, often to the detriment of international protection needs. There is a risk of political instability, which could lead to new population movements, including increased migration and refugee flight by sea.



Strategy

In North America, UNHCR monitors and supports national refugee protection mechanisms, builds awareness of refugees' and asylum-seekers' rights, and seeks to increase political and financial support for its operations. The Office will continue to work with governments to achieve the highest standards of refugee protection. Such standards ensure that asylum-seekers are granted full access to refugee status determination (RSD) procedures; that persons of concern are not detained unless necessary for specific reasons; that all RSD claims, including those that are gender-based, are considered in a manner consistent with international standards; and that separated children are treated appropriately.

UNHCR will continue to support Canada and the United States to find the right balance between their legitimate security concerns and international refugee protection needs. The Office will also continue to engage with both countries on matters of policy and strategy. It will seek greater support for the Mexico Plan of Action, in order to improve the protection of displaced people in Latin America.

Canada and the United States accept the largest number of resettled refugees worldwide. The Office will seek to increase that number while ensuring the integrity of its resettlement programme. UNHCR's office

in Washington is responsible for maintaining UNHCR's global resettlement statistics and for providing other forms of global support for resettlement, such as collecting and disseminating information on best-practices in integration.

In the Caribbean, UNHCR advises governments on RSD procedures, refugee protection standards and best practices, and undertakes mandate RSD. It will focus on strengthening its own and regional States' capacity to react to newly arriving asylum-seekers, and in responding to the outstanding durable protection needs of displaced people. It will build protection networks with NGOs and the legal and academic communities, as well as strengthen its network of honorary liaisons. The Office will also work to solve statelessness situations in the Caribbean.

Constraints

UNHCR's work in North America will be greatly affected by political considerations. In the United States, significant constraints arise from policies and admission bars that inhibit or prevent certain refugees from being resettled in the country and some individuals from being granted asylum. These policies hinder refugees from finding durable solutions in the United States. Lawmakers, including some who favour strengthening refugee protection, are reluctant to

challenge restrictive national security legislation for fear of the political consequences. In such an environment, UNHCR expects that the judiciary will play an important role in striking a balance between individual rights and national security concerns.

In 2009, a new Government will take office in the United States. This might constrain decision making during the transition period if political appointments to key posts are delayed.

UNHCR does not have enough staff in Canada and the United States to monitor all ports of entry, visit detention centres and areas where asylum claims are being processed, nor monitor expedited removal processes. This makes monitoring of access to the territory, including compliance with the terms of the Safe Third Country Agreement, a challenging task.

Asylum issues are expected to remain a low priority for most Caribbean States, reducing UNHCR's scope for engagement at the policy level. The Office will find it difficult to make significant progress in this region due to the lack of a physical presence.

Operations

In **Canada**, the Office seeks to ensure that asylum-seekers have access to RSD procedures. In this context, it monitors the implementation of the Safe Third Country Agreement, as well as asylum claims lodged inland and at airports.

The Office also monitors detention policies and practices as they relate to persons of concern to UNHCR. Furthermore, it raises awareness on asylum matters, including among border officials, to ensure that asylum claims are effectively dealt with and that the highest possible protection standards are maintained. It will also redouble efforts to demonstrate the challenges that UNHCR faces in order to obtain financial and political support.

Canada is a key resettlement country. In 2009-2010, the Office will seek support from the Government and NGOs to resettle more refugees, especially to find solutions to protracted refugee situations. The resettlement process will be facilitated by UNHCR's increased capacity to refer refugees.



Teachers at the Family Immersion Center in South Dakota, USA, must speak several languages to communicate with children arriving from all over the world.

In the **United States**, UNHCR will work with the new administration to promote legislation and policies that take refugee protection into account while serving legitimate security concerns. To this end, the Office will continue to lobby for a clear separation of asylum and terrorism issues by government agencies, Congress, the media and academic institutions.

UNHCR will promote screening procedures for asylum-seekers that guard against *refoulement*. This will be done by monitoring expedited removals at ports of entry and in the interior, as resources allow. The Office will also support the development of policies on the detention of asylum-seekers, including on families and minors, which favour release unless detention is necessary for specific reasons. Furthermore, UNHCR will encourage the Government to guard against diluting asylum procedures in its efforts to combat immigration fraud.

To bolster its advocacy efforts, UNHCR will conduct congressional briefings and organize missions to regions of strategic interest to the United States. It will promote awareness and respect for people of concern to UNHCR through briefs for Congress, administration officials and media campaigns. The Office will work to maximize support for resettlement both within the country and in other States, particularly those participating in the regional resettlement programme of the Mexico Plan of Action.

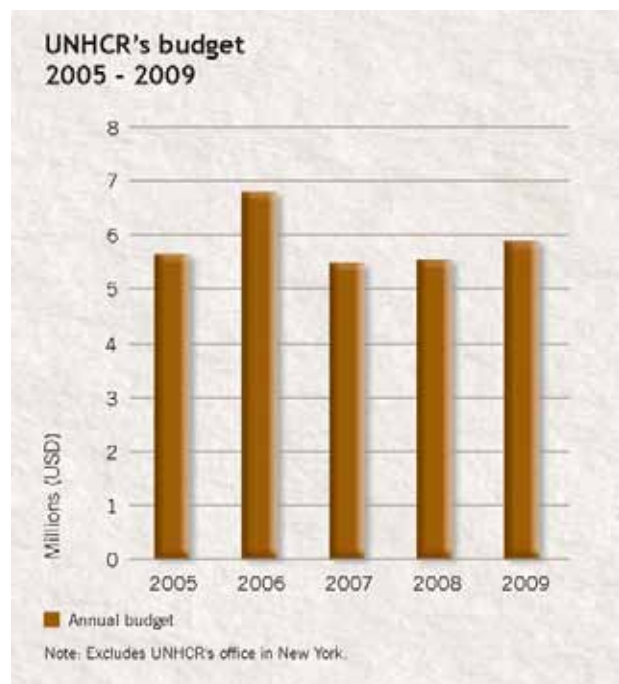
For both the United States and the **Caribbean**, UNHCR will maintain and update contingency plans and review the human and material resources that could be mobilized in case of mass population movements in the region. The Office will monitor political and human rights and socio-economic conditions while strengthening partnerships with international organizations. UNHCR will also continue to engage Caribbean states on the procedural and legal issues related to large-scale refugee arrivals within broader migratory movements.

As it does not have a presence in the Caribbean, UNHCR will expand its network of honorary liaisons in the region. The Office will implement standard operating

procedures to guide this *pro bono* network in activities such as receiving and channelling asylum requests, building government capacity, conducting RSD, and finding durable solutions. At the same time, UNHCR will promote the adoption of legislation that guarantees minimum rights for refugees and others of concern. Other priorities include self-reliance projects and alliances with voluntary organizations to promote the local integration of refugees.

Financial information

UNHCR's financial requirements in North America and the Caribbean have remained relatively stable in the past few years. The biggest budgetary increase was in 2006, arising from the Office's efforts to provide better coverage of the Caribbean region and strengthen its protection-related activities in Canada and the United States. Higher staff costs and staff-intensive operations have also increased the requirements.



Budget (USD)		
Countries	Annual budget	
	2008	2009
Canada	1,859,532	1,880,746
United States ¹	3,999,002	3,986,757
Total	5,858,534	5,867,503

¹ Includes legal assistance and durable solutions for refugees and asylum-seekers in the United States, as well as protection of refugees and capacity building in the Caribbean.