

# MEXICO

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## INITIAL OBJECTIVES

- Facilitate the legal, economic and social integration of Guatemalan refugees by ensuring proper legal documentation and providing basic services for refugee settlements.
- Find lasting solutions for urban refugees and develop a mechanism of uniform assistance criteria and delivery to address refugee needs.
- Assist national authorities to strengthen the asylum system and to establish a national Eligibility Committee.
- Expand and strengthen the national refugee protection framework in Mexico.

## MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND CONSTRAINTS

### *Local Integration of Guatemalan Refugees*

A major transition in Government took place during December 2000 and January 2001, involving personnel replacement at all levels. UNHCR's government implementing partner also experienced staffing changes, including the appointment of a new Co-ordinator General in mid-January, leading to a slow down in planned activities.

Action 2 recommended the accelerated termination of the integration programme for Guatemalan refugees in Chiapas as of 30 September of this year. Another significant consequence was UNHCR's suspension of funding for the naturalisation of 3,500 of these refugees. However, in June, the Secretary of the Interior announced that the Mexican Government would fund 1,000 naturalisation cards in 2001, a notable achievement and reaffirmation of the Mexican Government's commitment to refugees. UNHCR is discussing with the Government the possibility of continuing this initiative in subsequent years.

By mid-year nearly 100 per cent of the Guatemalan refugee population in the state of Chiapas held legal immigrant documents, 40 per cent of their Mexican-born children had been registered with birth certificates, and 180 naturalisation cards had been delivered. In the states of Campeche and Quintana Roo the final 439 naturalisation cards were delivered, bringing the number of naturalised refugees to 98 per cent of applicants and 43 per cent of the total refugee population. The remainder are Mexican-born children who will be eligible for Mexican nationality at age 18.

Given the accelerated termination date, UNHCR and its government counterpart launched a final effort to consolidate basic infrastructure for old and new settlements in Chiapas. Priority has been given to potable water projects and to minimal access facilities in new settlements. Reductions in the infrastructure budget have led to the cancellation of eight electrical supply systems affecting 1,250 refugees. Given the lack of development actors, it is unclear whether these works will be assumed by the state or any other agency.

In the first semester of 2001, eight water systems benefiting 730 refugee families (approximately 3,650 individuals) were finalised, and two other systems were significantly improved. Six other works, including one electrification system, two community projects, two rural clinics, and one access bridge were finalised with the participation of the beneficiary communities and for the benefit of 660 families. As the period of transition experienced by UNHCR's government counterpart negatively impacted progress in the infrastructure works, UNHCR assumed direct supervision and implementation of a larger share of these activities to ensure timely completion.

The other main component of the integration strategy, the community credit project, has continued to operate through 12 Community Credit Unions and one Central Union (covering 55 credit groups). The cumulative result of the various credit activities has led to the organisation of 956 partners (49 per cent women). A total of 768 of these partners have already received credits for productive projects totalling over USD 300,000. UNHCR and its non-governmental partner have changed their strategy by incorporating small groups into a Central Credit Union in place of the individual credit unions. This was done to decrease the logistical difficulties involved in maintaining large numbers of individual, widely dispersed unions.

Among other achievements this year, UNHCR has fully transferred the literacy project involving 502 refugees (76 per cent women) to a local institution. The Office has

completed its support to existing vulnerable cases, with 64 families overcoming their vulnerability status (56 per cent female-headed households). A total of 39 high school students (38 per cent women), four secondary students and four technical students (50 per cent women) have continued their studies in a scholarship programme. Reproductive health services have been expanded with UNHCR's local partner providing double the number of planned consultations in the ten rural health clinics servicing refugee communities.

In Campeche and Quintana Roo, the issuance of additional land titles to refugees residing on lands managed by a Trust Fund has yet to take place. Again, government staff changes and budgetary shortages resulted in a slowdown in the regularisation process of the Trust Fund while new staff became familiar with the complicated legal issues.

#### Progress as measured against selected indicators

INDICATORS	PROGRESS
70 per cent of vulnerable individuals demonstrate greater ability to meet daily needs.	69 per cent of individuals who received assistance towards housing or productive projects now enjoy a higher standard of living and no longer require assistance to meet daily needs.
At the end of the project 90 per cent of people receiving credits have the capacity and the will to repay them according to the respective repayment plans.	96 per cent average recovery rate to date.
12 water systems constructed. Ten electricity systems installed. Eight community projects implemented. Two women's health clinics built.	Ten water systems (including two improvement projects) were finalised. One electricity supply system was installed. Two community projects were implemented and one access bridge completed. Two women's health clinics were built.
The literacy campaign transferred to a local institution and evaluated during 2001.	Transfer to the National Adult Education Institute 100 per cent completed, involving 502 participants.
17 Communal Credit Unions consolidated. 23 new Communal Credit Unions established. 30 per cent recovery rate of outstanding revolving fund loans. 50 per cent participation of women in credit unions.	12 Communal Credit Unions operating. Central Credit Union was established covering 55 smaller groups in 49 communities. 61 per cent recovery rate of revolving fund loans was recorded. 49 per cent participation of women in credit unions was achieved.
3,500 naturalisation cards issued.	1,000 files for naturalisation were completed and will be processed and delivered this year. Cards are to be paid by the Mexican Government.

#### Urban Refugees

UNHCR and its national NGO partner have started negotiations with the Secretary of the Interior for the inclusion of long-staying

urban refugees in a fast-track naturalisation process similar to the one applied to Guatemalan refugees residing in refugee settlements. The first 80 cases have been

processed and UNHCR is hoping to receive a positive response from the Government of Mexico regarding its funding of naturalisation for this population.

UNHCR's implementing partner has assisted 72 recently recognised refugees, which represents 86 per cent of the previously anticipated total population to be assisted in 2001. This increase in new arrivals, coupled with budget reductions ensuing from Action 2, has resulted in a reduction of subsistence allowances from four to three months. Budget reductions have also diminished

UNHCR's capacity to provide migratory documentation, education and supplementary assistance to vulnerable groups. At the same time, delays in the waiver of fees for destitute refugees by the Government have resulted in a tenuous situation whereby newly recognised refugees have their subsistence allowances terminated before they have proper documentation and work permits. UNHCR is attempting to address this situation within its budgetary limitations, but additional subsistence assistance in the interim may be required.

**Progress as measured against selected indicators**

INDICATORS	PROGRESS
At least 110 long-staying refugees become Mexican citizens. 50 per cent of refugees obtain their migratory documents without financial assistance.	59 new naturalisation cases were submitted this year and 21 authorised by the Government. Funding available to assist only five per cent of refugee migratory documentation applications.
58 individual refugees and 9 families (26 persons) receive required financial assistance to cover their food, lodging and basic personal needs.	37 newly recognised individual refugees and six new refugee families (18 persons) received assistance. 11 extremely vulnerable individual cases and two family cases (six persons) recognised at the end of 2000 continued to receive assistance.
35 elderly refugees receive a monthly pension according to an assessment carried out by UNHCR's implementing partner.	33 elderly refugees received pension payments during the first two quarters. Six cases are currently being reviewed for possible suspension of assistance as their economic situations have improved.
Seven refugees belonging to vulnerable groups with special needs regularly assisted.	Ten refugees are currently being assisted.

***Eligibility Committee and National Refugee Protection Network***

As a result of the ratification of the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol, the Government of Mexico amended the implementing regulations of the General Population Act, including the establishment of an Eligibility Committee in which UNHCR will participate as a non-voting member. The new Government has announced that it will carry out an overall review of the Act to ensure that it is in accordance with the international instruments signed by Mexico. UNHCR will closely follow this process, as parts of the implementing legislation of the current Act need to be revised in view of Mexico's accession.

Despite UNHCR's efforts to transfer responsibility for refugee status

determination, the Government has not yet taken the necessary steps to make the eligibility committee operational. UNHCR has been informed that the Government is linking the transfer of responsibility for refugee status determination with the planned revision of the General Population Act, hoped to be completed in 2001.

UNHCR has continued to foster the development of the National Refugee Protection Network. A meeting of 22 associations and NGOs involved in migration and human rights issues in the northern border region, including a representative from the National Migration Institute, was held in May. The meeting was an important training opportunity as many of the participants were unfamiliar with refugee law and issues concerning current Mexican law. It also provided an

important forum for developing strategies for refugee and asylum-seeker protection in the midst of the larger migration milieu in the northern border area.

### **Public Information**

The main activity during this period was the celebration of **World Refugee Day**, for which UNHCR's government counterpart organised a well-publicised event at the Ministry of Interior. During the ceremony, 521 naturalisation cards were presented to Guatemalan refugees and a postal stamp and a lottery ticket with a picture of a Guatemalan refugee girl were issued. A working agreement was also signed between UNHCR's government counterpart and the Rigoberta Menchú Tum Foundation, concerning work with former refugees and the refugee population in the southern border area. As part of the world-wide RESPECT campaign, Mexican newspapers and media also launched a number of articles and television spots highlighting refugees and UNHCR's work with them.

### **REVISED OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITIES FOR JULY-DECEMBER**

While most of the objectives remain valid for the remainder of the year, there have been some changes as a result of Action 2.

### **FINANCIAL DATA (USD)**

	<b>Initial Budget</b>	<b>Revised Budget</b>	<b>Total Funds Available<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Total Funds Obligated</b>
<b>APB</b>	5,866,925	4,566,210	2,758,827	2,622,347

<sup>1</sup>Includes income from unrestricted contributions, income from contributions restricted to the regional, sub-regional and/or country level, opening balance and adjustments.

UNHCR will no longer fund the naturalisation component of the integration project in Chiapas, while the Mexican Government will fund some 1,000 of the 3,500 eligible. UNHCR will continue to be responsible for a major share of the implementation of community infrastructure projects in order to meet the accelerated programme termination date. However, UNHCR will no longer be able to guarantee that a majority of the integrated population has access to electricity.

Priority activities for the second half of 2001 will be to:

- Complete all planned infrastructure works in Chiapas on time and ensure that maintenance training is undertaken in beneficiary communities;
- Ensure that the Communal Credit programme is self-sufficient;
- Transfer responsibility for eligibility status determination to the Government of Mexico;
- Guarantee legal documentation and adequate subsistence assistance to newly-recognised refugees; and
- Continue development and training of National Protection Networks.