

Colombia Situation

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

Operational highlights

- The Government of Colombia increased support for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and passed a law proclaiming 2008 as the Year of the Promotion of the Rights of Displaced People.
- More than 80,000 IDPs in Colombia received identity cards. Over two million hectares of land from which IDPs had fled was kept safe for their eventual return, to the benefit of 71,000 families.
- Ecuador launched a development and peace plan to address the humanitarian situation on its northern border. The plan will improve the asylum regime in the area and address the needs of Colombians in need of international protection.
- UNHCR conducted surveys in Brazil, Ecuador and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to estimate the number of unregistered Colombians in these countries, identify their protection needs, and design registration and documentation procedures for them.



- The Office helped strengthen the capacity of national mechanisms to respond to sexual and gender-based violence in all asylum countries, and funded safe shelters for victims.

Working environment

The humanitarian crisis in Colombia is the worst in the Western hemisphere, and the country has one of the

Persons of concern					
Type of population	Origin	Total	Of whom assisted by UNHCR	Per cent female	Per cent under 18
Refugees	Colombia	26,100	25,440	45	30
	Nicaragua	600	600	42	25
	Cuba	1,100	620	42	19
	Various	2,410	1,950	-	-
Refugee-like	Colombia	464,600	1,600	-	-
	Various	5,980	380	-	-
Asylum-seekers	Colombia	35,230	30,350	44	30
	Peru	2,200	2,200	22	6
	Cuba	130	40	31	1
	Various	1,040	940	-	-
IDPs	Colombia	¹	558,300	48	36
Total		539,390	622,420		

¹ According to the Constitutional Court of Colombia, there is a discrepancy between the real number of internally 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).

largest IDP populations in the world. More than 200,000 newly displaced people were registered by the Government in 2007 alone. Rural communities, ethnic minorities, households headed by women, older persons and youth have been hardest hit.

In recent years, the conflict has moved from the country's central regions to the border provinces of Arauca, Chocó, Nariño and Putumayo. The year 2007 saw the rise of tensions between Colombia and its neighbours Ecuador and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela over the aerial spraying of coca crops and the deterioration of security in border areas.

Up to half a million Colombians have fled to neighbouring countries. Most live in poor areas on the outskirts of cities and towns or in remote rural communities. About 15,000 Colombians applied for asylum in 2007. The majority remained unregistered for a variety of reasons, including security reasons and ignorance of their rights.

Achievements and impact

Main objectives

The Mexico Plan of Action (MPA) provided the strategic and operational framework for UNHCR's activities in the region. In Colombia, UNHCR's objectives were to prevent displacement and protect and assist displaced people while seeking durable solutions for them. In the asylum countries, UNHCR sought to provide international protection and find durable solutions for registered refugees and asylum-seekers as well as other Colombians of concern.

Protection and solutions

In 2007, UNHCR tried to narrow the gap between legislation and its implementation in Colombia. The Office worked with government institutions to improve their response to displacement and to ensure their compliance with national legislation and international human rights principles. UNHCR campaigned to increase awareness of displacement and published its evaluation of public policies.

In most asylum countries, a priority for the Office was to address the protection needs of unregistered Colombians. The results of surveys in Brazil, Ecuador and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to define the size of this population and its needs will be published in 2008.

UNHCR's efforts in the asylum countries focused on local integration and self-reliance. An evaluation of the

Community Support and Integration Programme was carried out in Ecuador, Panama and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. The programme will be revised as needed, based on the survey results.

The year 2007 saw a total of 848 people referred for resettlement from Costa Rica (187), Ecuador (619) and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (42). Forty-one per cent were referred to countries within the region and the rest to resettlement countries elsewhere in the world.

The Regional Legal Unit in Costa Rica campaigned for the inclusion of asylum issues in various regional forums such as the Organization of American States, the Regional Conference on Migration and the South American Conference on Migrations. It provided training in refugee law and implemented promotional activities in cooperation with other organizations. It also disseminated information about UNHCR's programmes in Latin America by publishing an evaluation of the MPA and running UNHCR's Spanish language web site.

Activities and assistance

Community services: In Colombia, the specific needs of displaced women, girls and indigenous people were incorporated into public policies on internal displacement. More than 140 IDP associations improved their management skills and worked for the inclusion of over 130,000 IDPs in public programmes. Special training projects helped women, children and young people.

In Ecuador, Panama and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 27 projects were implemented to strengthen community structures and assist the local integration of refugees. In Costa Rica, the opening of a House of Rights outside San José allowed the Office to strengthen its protection network and to extend its presence to an area with many foreigners. In Ecuador, two centres for information and orientation in Quito and Ibarra provided legal assistance and social counselling, and helped more than 300 people find employment.

Special projects were implemented in the asylum countries to improve the response to sexual and gender-based violence and HIV and AIDS. The projects improved access to safe shelters for victims of sexual or gender-based violence and established legal and psychosocial counselling mechanisms for them. The projects allowed UNHCR and its partners to build the trust of refugees so that they felt free to discuss sensitive issues such as domestic violence.

Crop production: In Colombia, UNHCR helped 600 displaced families improve their food security through

agricultural training, water and sanitation projects, psychosocial orientation and health management.

Domestic needs and household support: In the asylum countries, short-term humanitarian assistance was provided to asylum-seekers with specific needs. In some cases, assistance was also provided to refugees with specific needs and persons under temporary humanitarian protection in Panama.

Education: In Colombia, the Office campaigned for the enrolment of displaced children in local educational institutions. UNHCR guidelines for the protection and assistance of displaced youth were accepted by 22 provincial education offices and public schools.

Refugee children had access to public schooling in the asylum countries, and UNHCR supported their integration into local systems. In Ecuador, the Government announced that it would increase support for public education in communities hosting refugees. As of September 2007, all school supplies, uniforms and books were paid for by the Government.

In Costa Rica, refugee, local and migrant youth created a street theatre against xenophobia which toured the country and received significant media attention. Vocational training was provided to more than 200 people - more than 60 per cent of them women - to improve their employment prospects.

In Panama, seven projects were implemented to improve school conditions. Some 370 children, most of them in isolated areas in the Darien region, were provided stationery and uniforms. Forty-six people benefited from literacy and vocational training.

In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, some 700 children and adolescents were given education grants and vocational training. Eleven projects improved basic infrastructure and sanitation and water systems in rural schools.

Food: In Ecuador, UNHCR distributed some 57,500 food rations, as well as fresh food for some refugees at the northern border.



Internally displaced children in El Charco, Nariño, Colombia.

UNHCR/M.H. Verney

Health and nutrition: UNHCR covered health care costs for refugees in Colombia as needed. The Office also advocated for IDPs to have access to the public health care system.

In the asylum countries, refugees enjoyed the same public health services as the local population. UNHCR covered medical expenditures in some cases where patients had to assume the costs of certain treatments and drugs. In Panama, the Office arranged medical evacuations from the Darien region to specialized health services in the capital.

Health-related projects were implemented in areas with many displaced people to alleviate the pressure on the local public health sector. Seven such projects implemented in Ecuador and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela benefited more than 14,000 people. In Costa Rica, the Office helped the Government to draft a national policy on the prevention of, and response to, HIV and AIDS.

Income generation: IDPs in Colombia benefited from micro-credit schemes. The Office engaged the private sector in self-reliance and local integration programmes in urban areas to ensure the sustainability of these efforts. More micro-credit loans were also given in asylum countries.

Legal assistance: In Colombia, nine universities established legal aid centres which assisted almost 5,000 people. IDPs were also given legal orientation in the House of Rights in Soacha and through a governmental network of Assistance and Orientation Units.

UNHCR and the National Registry Office in Colombia provided identity documents to 85,600 IDPs or persons at risk of displacement. The project was implemented by nine field offices in 55 municipalities. Since 2000, some 530,000 people have received documents, allowing them to use public services.

At the end of the year, some 2,250,000 hectares of land abandoned by IDPs, or at risk of being abandoned, had been protected by the Land and Property Protection Project. The project is conducted in cooperation with local authorities and has benefited some 71,200 families.

In Costa Rica, UNHCR gave advice on the reform of the Immigration Law and provided training to improve eligibility procedures. Close coordination with immigration officials helped improve conditions in detention centres, especially for women.

In Panama, the Office promoted the reform of the country's refugee legislation. Asylum-seekers were given advice on refugee status determination (RSD) procedures, and more than 500 public officials received training on refugee issues.

The number of registered asylum-seekers in Ecuador almost doubled as a result of the worsening security situation in southern Colombia and due to UNHCR's pro-active identification of people of concern. More than 2,600 people, including military and police personnel, were trained in refugee matters.

In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, UNHCR trained and assisted more than 3,200 officials of the Eligibility Commission and the regional technical secretariats. The National Office for Identification and Foreigners authorized more offices to renew provisional documents for asylum-seekers. But the process was slow, especially in remote border areas, and only 55 per cent of asylum-seekers had proper documents. The Regional Office also trained 1,500 personnel in Peru in asylum issues.

Operational support to agencies: Administrative support was provided to implementing partners. Funds were also used to build capacity and for audits of major partners.

Shelter and other infrastructure: In Colombia, health, cultural and education facilities were rehabilitated in six rural communities, benefiting more than 2,000 people.

Eleven houses were built in the Darien region of Panama for indigenous refugees. In Ecuador, UNHCR provided rental support to some asylum-seekers and refugees, as well as temporary accommodation for people awaiting resettlement. In Costa Rica, the Office started a pilot project with a private credit institution to help refugees obtain housing credits.

Transport and logistics: In Ecuador, the Office covered the cost of transporting food rations. UNHCR relocated refugees to secure areas of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and transported refugees to the sites of resettlement and eligibility interviews in Ecuador and Peru.

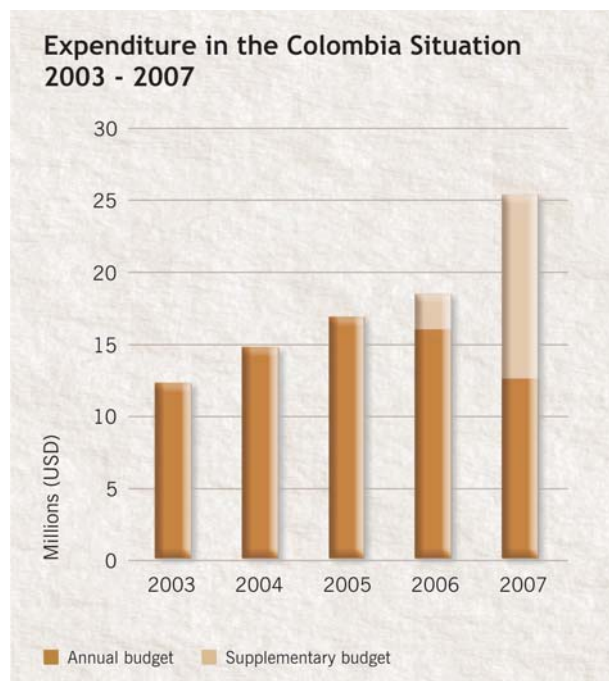
Constraints

Border areas in the region are characterized by poverty, lack of public services and insecurity. In certain parts of Colombia, the internal conflict makes it difficult for humanitarian agencies to reach affected communities. Despite increased support for IDPs, many local authorities and civil servants in Colombia still lack the commitment to address displacement issues under their jurisdiction. In the asylum countries, the preoccupation with national security and a rise in discriminatory attitudes have hurt the integration of refugees.

Financial information

The Colombia Situation received considerable donor support. Earmarked contributions increased significantly, compared to the previous year. Many of the asylum countries received extra-budgetary contributions from the private sector and local embassies, allowing them to implement specific projects to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence.

During the past five years, expenditure in the Colombia Situation has grown significantly due to the steady increase of internally displaced persons and refugees in the region. Since 2003, operations in Colombia have been strengthened with six new field offices in areas



most affected by displacement. In the neighbouring countries, operations have been reinforced to respond to the protection needs of Colombians in refugee-like situations, particularly in Ecuador and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Organization and implementation

Management

In Colombia, UNHCR had 81 staff in 11 offices, with a new office opened in Medellín. The Office began a decentralization strategy, which included the upgrading of field offices in Medellín, Bucaramanga and Pasto to sub-offices. At the end of the year, the Office in Barrancabermeja was closed.

In the asylum countries, UNHCR had 71 staff in 9 offices in four countries. Field presence in border areas was reinforced with 36 UNVs, secondees and consultants. No substantial changes were made to UNHCR's structure in these countries in 2007.

Working with others

In Colombia, UNHCR worked closely with the Government, a wide range of national partners, international organizations and NGOs. The Office signed several agreements to reinforce collaboration with relevant partners. Strategic alliances were forged with the Ombudsman's Office and several international NGOs. UNHCR led the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Protection Working Group, which includes over 30 UN agencies and international NGOs. The main priority was to create an operational structure to coordinate the group at the national level. UNHCR field offices participated in four IASC groups in areas that were most affected by the conflict and helped to guide several IASC responses to humanitarian crises during the year.

In the asylum countries, UNHCR continued to work with key governments and local NGOs. In Ecuador, the Northern Border Inter-Agency Thematic Group strengthened its operations.

Overall assessment

UNHCR's work was part of the larger regional approach to improving the protection of IDPs in Colombia, and refugees and others of concern in neighbouring

countries. The main challenge was to keep humanitarian issues at the top of the political agenda.

Colombia's far-reaching legislation and the ensuing policy framework show the Government's willingness to address the humanitarian challenge. However, the gap between legislation and implementation at the local level remained large. The campaign to promote IDP rights and the new law for the same purpose will hopefully increase awareness of displacement issues and lead to better programmes for displaced people.

The Office continued to strengthen mechanisms for multi-lateral coordination, such as the regional Inter-Agency Standing Committee Protection Groups, in order to increase response capacity at regional and local levels. In Colombia, the UN presence was reinforced in the main regions of displacement. In Ecuador, UN programmes supported the government's peace and development plan for the northern border.

The resettlement programme proved to be an effective way to address the specific protection needs of refugees, particularly in Costa Rica and Ecuador. It has strengthened solidarity and cooperation on refugee protection within the region.

Partners
Colombia
<p>Government agencies: Agencia Presidencial para la Acción Social y la Cooperación Internacional, Defensoría del Pueblo (Ombudsman's Office), Procuraduría General de la Nación (Prosecutor's Office), Registraduría (National Registry)</p> <p>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, Opportunity Internacional, Secretaría Nacional de Pastoral Social, Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia, Liga de Mujeres Desplazadas</p> <p>Others: UN agencies, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Universidad de Antioquia, UNV, IOM</p>
Asylum countries
<p>Government agencies: Ministry of Labour (Costa Rica), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ecuador), ONPAR (Panama), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ombudsman's Office, Ministry of Defence (Peru), Ministry of Defence, Ministry of the Interior and Justice, National Commission for Refugees, Regional Technical Secretariats, Táchira Governor's Office, Mayor's Office of Maracaibo, Banco del Pueblo Soberano, Ministry of Education and Sports (Venezuela)</p> <p>NGOs: Asociación de Consultores y Asesores Internacionales, Asociación de Profesionales en Desarrollo (Costa Rica); Centro de Estudios de Población y Desarrollo Social, Cooperazione Internazionale, Red Cross, Fundación Ambiente y Sociedad, Fundación Esquel, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (Ecuador); Red Cross, VIDA, Pueblos del Bosque (Panama); Comisión Católica Peruana de Migración (Peru); Jesuit Refugee Service, Caritas, Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli, Comisión Justicia y Paz, CISOR, Niña Madre, Project Counselling Service (Venezuela)</p> <p>Others: FAO, IOM, Norwegian Refugee Council, Red Cross, UNAIDS, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNIFEM, UNV, WFP</p>

Budget, income and expenditure (USD)

	Final budget	Income from contributions	Other funds available	Total funds available	Total expenditure
Annual budget	12,644,428	11,199,364	2,914,836	14,114,200	12,591,833
IDP SB	16,599,215	14,960,766	302,657	15,263,423	12,874,740
Total	29,243,643	26,160,130	3,217,493	29,377,623	25,466,573

Note: Supplementary programmes do not include seven per cent support costs that are recovered from contributions to meet indirect costs for UNHCR. Income from contributions includes contributions earmarked at the country and situation level. Other funds available include transfers from unearmarked and broadly earmarked contributions, opening balance and adjustments.

Financial Report (USD)

Expenditure breakdown	Current year's projects			Previous years' projects
	Annual budget ¹	Supplementary budget	Total	Annual and supplementary budgets
Protection, monitoring and coordination	2,376,072	3,716,360	6,092,432	0
Community services	1,441,720	1,127,374	2,569,093	654,801
Crop production	6,300	539,453	545,753	0
Domestic needs and household support	422,835	0	422,835	(3,224)
Education	243,032	441,538	684,570	170,002
Food	121,900	0	121,900	22,803
Health and nutrition	253,594	0	253,594	55,738
Income generation	535,778	204,875	740,653	408,707
Legal assistance	1,925,076	3,051,225	4,976,301	1,018,595
Operational support (to agencies)	1,179,095	912,386	2,091,481	273,767
Sanitation	3,088	0	3,088	0
Shelter and infrastructure	422,200	102,281	524,481	87,337
Transport and logistics	21,715	(316)	21,399	18,058
Water	13,145	0	13,145	1,918
Instalments with implementing partners	415,612	1,287,333	1,702,945	(2,708,501)
Sub-total operational activities	9,381,162	11,382,508	20,763,670	0
Programme support	3,210,671	1,492,232	4,702,903	0
Total expenditure	12,591,833	12,874,740	25,466,573	0
Cancellation on previous years' expenditure				(66,769)
Instalments with implementing partners				
Payments made	5,242,551	6,268,217	11,510,768	
Reporting received	(4,826,938)	(4,980,884)	(9,807,822)	
Balance	415,613	1,287,333	1,702,946	
Previous years' report				
Instalments with implementing partners				
Outstanding 1st January				2,979,056
Reporting received				(2,708,501)
Refunded to UNHCR				(278,035)
Adjustments				7,480
Balance				0

¹ Includes expenditure in Colombia (USD 676,771), Costa Rica (USD 1,995,559), Ecuador (USD 5,215,949), Panama (USD 1,040,605), and Venezuela (USD 3,662,948).