

UNHCR organizes vocational training and brings clean water system to the Wounaan communities in Panama

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)

# Latin America



## | OPERATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS |

- Throughout the Americas UNHCR witnessed a rise in the number of regional and extra-regional asylum-seekers and refugees travelling within broader migratory movements.
- Mexico appointed child protection officers in its National Migration Institute to protect unaccompanied minors trapped in massive mixed migratory flows in Central America.
- In Nicaragua, one of the most advanced asylum laws in the region was passed by the National Assembly in July 2008.
- The right to asylum was incorporated into the new Constitution of Bolivia.
- The Regional Solidarity Resettlement Programme of the Mexico Plan of Action was revamped and confirmed as a key strategy in providing durable solutions to Colombian refugees in the southern cone. A resettlement programme for women-at-risk began in Argentina and Chile.
- After receiving a total of 225 Palestinian refugees for resettlement, Brazil and Chile began taking active steps to assist with their local integration.
- UNHCR continued to engage with regional entities such as Organization of American States (OAS) and MERCOSUR.



## Working environment

The global economic crisis caused a decline in remittances to the region, especially to the Central American countries whose economies are highly dependent on them.

In Mexico and Central America, north-bound migratory movements faced tightened border security influenced by the fight against terrorism and human and narcotics trafficking. Interception, detention and deportation practices have intensified, and there has been an increase in violations of the human rights of undocumented migrants.

The mixed migratory flows include asylum-seekers from elsewhere in the region (principally from Central America and the Caribbean), as well as migrants and asylum-seekers from Africa, the Middle East and Asia. They also include thousands of unaccompanied children who are particularly vulnerable to human rights violations and are often victims of smugglers or traffickers.

## Achievements and impact

The Mexico Plan of Action (MPA) confirmed its value as a strategic framework for protection and durable solutions. In line with the plan, UNHCR offices in the region sought to influence legislation affecting refugees and promote differentiated asylum procedures.

Refugees and others of concern to UNHCR continued to be on the agenda at regional forums such as the OAS or the Specialized Migratory Forum of MERCOSUR. Training and promotional activities were undertaken in cooperation with the OAS and several universities in the region.

More visibility was given to Office's operations and programmes in Latin America through the upgrading of the Spanish UNHCR web site ([www.acnur.org](http://www.acnur.org)) and the launching of the Portuguese language version ([www.acnur.org/portugues](http://www.acnur.org/portugues) or [www.acnur.org.br](http://www.acnur.org.br)) in September.

In Nicaragua, a refugee law was passed by the National Assembly in July 2008. The law, which is fully compatible with international standards and one of the most advanced pieces of asylum legislation in the region, is the culmination of more than four years of intensive lobbying and technical support.

Bolivia's new Constitution incorporates the right to seek and be granted asylum. The Constitution respects the spirit of the proposal presented by UNHCR before the Constitutional Assembly in 2006. In 2008, the Office was involved with the Bolivian National Refugee Commission in the drafting of rules of procedure regarding RSD functions.

In Chile, UNHCR continued to advocate for the adoption of comprehensive refugee legislation. The President of Chile announced that the revised refugee law project would be submitted to the Parliament.

In the search for durable solutions, positive results were obtained for more than 500 cases through the Regional Solidarity Resettlement Programme started in 2005. Extra-regional resettlement activities were also successful and led to the resettlement of 225 Palestinian refugees in Brazil and Chile.

An important effect of the Solidarity Resettlement Programme has been the extension and consolidation of protection networks. Thanks to the programme, UNHCR found new partners in Argentina and Chile to support the reception and integration of the resettled families.

## | Constraints |

Despite the commitment of Latin American governments to the MPA, the difficult socio-economic conditions in most of the Latin American countries posed serious obstacles to the successful local integration of refugees. One of the main constraints refugees and asylum-seekers faced in the region was a lack of opportunities to become economically self-sufficient.

## | Operations |

The Colombia crisis remained UNHCR's major concern and its biggest operation in the region, and a separate chapter will describe the activities in the countries that form part of the Colombia situation, i.e. **Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Panama, Peru and Venezuela**.

Considering the urban profile of the vast majority of the refugees in Latin America, and the fact that the majority of the countries of asylum have proper legislative frameworks and well-developed social institutions, UNHCR's programme focused mainly on facilitating local integration. Assistance was concentrated on extremely vulnerable groups. Particular attention was given to income-generating activities and the placement of people of concern in jobs. Simultaneously, assistance networks were developed and access to essential services enhanced.

UNHCR's presence along **Mexico's** southern border at Tapachula, the principal border crossing into the country from Central America, was essential to ensure that asylum-seekers travelling within larger mixed migratory flows had access to international protection. UNHCR's Field Office in Tapachula was the only United Nations presence along one of the most complex migratory routes in the continent.

The Office joined UNICEF, COMAR (*Comisión de Ayuda al Refugiado*), IOM and the Mexican National Migration Institute to conduct several training sessions for the latter's newly appointed child protection officers.

In **Bolivia**, an agreement was concluded between UNHCR's Regional Office and the Bolivian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the implementation of a project to reinforce the skills and capacities of the Bolivian National Refugee Commission (CONARE). The Office participated on a regular basis in CONARE's meetings and provided

technical advice and on-the-job training. This improved the fairness of RSD procedures and supported the establishment of CONARE's Technical Secretariat. It also allowed UNHCR to train government officials on refugee matters.

In **Brazil**, despite the positive attitudes expressed by central and local governments, a vast majority of the 3,800 refugees and 427 asylum-seekers in the country still depended on some kind of UNHCR assistance.

In the southern cone, UNHCR helped refugees and asylum-seekers to integrate locally and promoted their self-sufficiency. These efforts were shared with national and local authorities and social networks. At the end of 2008 the population of concern in the region stood at some 7,100. In the course of 2008 some 1,900 people filed asylum applications. Most were from the Latin American region, although there was a significant presence of people from Africa.

At the regional level, UNHCR monitored the MERCOSUR process and promoted the adoption of regional policies and agreements on refugee protection and durable solutions. As a result, UNHCR was invited to participate in the first meeting of the Migratory Forum in 2008.

Approximately 140 individuals were resettled in the region under the Regional Solidarity Resettlement Programme of the MPA: 78 in Argentina, 19 in Brazil and 45 in Chile. The majority were Colombian refugees from urban and rural backgrounds in Costa Rica and Ecuador. All the cases selected for resettlement were recognized as refugees either by the respective governments or under UNHCR's mandate. They were individuals or families in need of legal and physical protection in the country of refuge or those facing strong barriers to local integration due to their lack of legal status, including refugees whose right to permanent residence or legal employment in the first country of asylum had been denied. Voluntary repatriation was not a viable alternative in any of these cases.

A women-at-risk project was initiated in 2008 and implemented in Argentina and Chile, for an initial period of two years. The programme aims to address the specific needs of this particularly vulnerable group of women.

The 116 Palestinian refugees who arrived in Chile between April and May 2008 were resettled in the cities of San Felipe and La Calera, and the two Santiago municipalities of Recoleta and Ñuñoa.

## | Financial information |

The fragile socio-economic situation of the majority of the countries of the region made it difficult for them to meet refugee needs in their national budgets. Despite this, Chile and Brazil contributed directly to UNHCR's implementing partners who were assisting new asylum-seekers and refugees. The Solidarity Resettlement programme depended on adequate funding from traditional donors and the commitment and capacity of the involved States to consolidate reception and integration mechanisms in the southern cone.

Budget and expenditure in Latin America (USD)						
Country	Final budget			Expenditure		
	Annual budget	Supplementary budget	Total	Annual budget	Supplementary budget	Total
Argentina <sup>1</sup>	3,430,129	863,587	4,293,716	3,378,247	623,380	4,001,627
Brazil	2,993,741	1,007,078	4,000,819	2,785,780	999,712	3,785,492
Colombia	767,044	17,634,984	18,402,028	717,361	16,239,244	16,956,605
Costa Rica	3,389,350	0	3,389,350	3,148,513	0	3,148,513
Cuba	282,509	0	282,509	277,758	0	277,758
Ecuador	7,356,685	0	7,356,685	7,252,374	0	7,252,374
Mexico	2,259,992	0	2,259,992	2,231,172	0	2,231,172
Panama	1,278,632	0	1,278,632	1,233,116	0	1,233,116
Venezuela (Bolivarian Rep.) <sup>2</sup>	3,578,363	0	3,578,363	3,575,299	0	3,575,299
<b>Total</b>	<b>25,336,445</b>	<b>19,505,649</b>	<b>44,842,094</b>	<b>24,599,621</b>	<b>17,862,335</b>	<b>42,461,956</b>

Note: Excludes indirect support costs that are recovered from contributions against supplementary programmes and the "New or additional activities – mandate-related" (NAM) reserve.

<sup>1</sup> The annual budget includes local settlement in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay, as well as resettlement in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay. The supplementary budget includes resettlement of Iraqis from the Middle East.

<sup>2</sup> Includes local settlement in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Belize.

Voluntary contributions to Latin America (USD)				
Earmarking	Donor	Annual Budget	Supplementary Budget	Total
Argentina Regional Office	Norway	107,784		107,784
	United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF)	50,146		50,146
<b>Argentina Regional Office Subtotal</b>		<b>157,931</b>		<b>157,931</b>
Brazil	United States of America	130,892		130,892
<b>Brazil Subtotal</b>		<b>130,892</b>		<b>130,892</b>
Colombia	Canada		2,809,668	2,809,668
	European Commission		2,984,380	2,984,380
	France		271,137	271,137
	Italy		1,038,774	1,038,774
	Luxembourg		338,921	338,921
	Netherlands		1,570,770	1,570,770
	<i>España con Acnur</i>		108,476	108,476
	HQ Online Donations	2,651		2,651
	Spain		2,061,900	2,061,900
	Sweden		573,190	573,190
	Switzerland		466,399	466,399
	Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)	75,000		75,000
	United Kingdom		41,651	41,651
	United States of America	152,000	3,414,960	3,566,960
<b>Colombia Subtotal</b>		<b>229,651</b>	<b>15,680,225</b>	<b>15,909,875</b>
Costa Rica	United States of America	231,377		231,377
<b>Costa Rica Subtotal</b>		<b>231,377</b>		<b>231,377</b>
Ecuador	European Commission	1,323,988		1,323,988
	France	291,545		291,545
	Germany	258,732		258,732
	Private donors in Italy	54,000		54,000
	Foundation FC Barcelona (Spain)	110,000		110,000
	Trade Plus Aid Charitable Trust (UK)	21,764		21,764
	Spain	546,978		546,978
	Switzerland	243,191		243,191

Earmarking	Donor	Annual Budget	Supplementary Budget	Total
	UN Global Peace and Security Fund	216,799		216,799
	UN Trust Fund Human Security	124,075		124,075
	United States of America	955,000		955,000
	<b>Ecuador Subtotal</b>	<b>4,146,071</b>		<b>4,146,071</b>
<b>Panama</b>	European Commission	189,274		189,274
	International Olympic Committee (Switzerland)	29,760		29,760
	United States of America	72,400		72,400
	<b>Panama Subtotal</b>	<b>291,434</b>		<b>291,434</b>
<b>Venezuela Regional Office</b>	European Commission	388,802		388,802
	International Olympic Committee (Switzerland)	27,900		27,900
	United Kingdom	14,208		14,208
	<b>Venezuela Regional Office Subtotal</b>	<b>430,911</b>		<b>430,911</b>
<b>Central America</b>	United States of America	310,000		310,000
	<b>Central America Subtotal</b>	<b>310,000</b>		<b>310,000</b>
<b>Northern South America</b>	Japan	500,000		500,000
	Luxembourg	364,431		364,431
	United States of America	2,583,000		2,583,000
	<b>Northern South America Subtotal</b>	<b>3,447,431</b>		<b>3,447,431</b>
<b>Southern South America</b>	United States of America	930,000		930,000
	<b>Southern South America Subtotal</b>	<b>930,000</b>		<b>930,000</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>10,305,698</b>	<b>15,680,225</b>	<b>25,985,923</b>

Note: Contributions shown exclude indirect support costs that are recovered from contributions against supplementary programmes and the "New or additional activities - mandate-related" (NAM) reserve and currency adjustments.