

MEXICO

INITIAL OBJECTIVES

- Achieve sustainable local integration of some 12,500 Guatemalans in Chiapas by promoting access to proper documentation and legal services, initiating construction or rehabilitation of basic infrastructure, implementing community credit programmes and establishing linkages with Mexican social service institutions.
- Consolidate the local integration of over 12,200 Guatemalans in the states of Campeche and Quintana Roo by assisting them with access to documentation and naturalisation and encouraging the transfer of ownership of 19,000 hectares of land to both men and women.
- Identify lasting solutions for urban refugees by supporting activities leading to self-sufficiency while at the same time reducing material assistance.
- Advocate the enactment of national legislation implementing the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol and the establishment of refugee status determination procedures in co-ordination with the Government.
- Raise awareness of refugee issues among government officials, civil society and the population at large through the media and various youth groups as well as activities related to UNHCR's 50th anniversary.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS, PROGRESS ACHIEVED AND CONSTRAINTS

Local Integration in Chiapas

Nearly all refugees now have documentation legalising their stay and giving them access to State services in conditions comparable to the local population. Basic and community health care as well as pre-school and primary education for refugees have been transferred to the

respective local institutions. Refugee communities have been reorganised and reduced from 99 to 62 more secure settlements, offering better opportunities for local integration. In view of UNHCR's gradual withdrawal from the region and the need to prioritise activities due to funding constraints, the budget for Chiapas was reduced by more than 20 per cent.

Further progress was made in documentation with 92 per cent of the adult refugee population now having obtained FM2 documents (immigrant documents, leading to permanent residence after five years) and 89 per cent of refugee children and adolescents holding a Mexican birth certificate. The first 100 requests for naturalisation have been presented to the authorities and are awaiting processing.

As a result of funding restrictions, UNHCR decided to complete infrastructure works begun in previous years, reevaluate planned activities and focus on meeting only the most urgent needs. The number one priority was to provide potable water to as many refugee settlements as possible, and to improve water treatment and electrical systems. The work on six water supply systems, two bio-digesters (water treatment systems), three electrical systems (and other minor improvements to the settlements) was initiated – and in some cases completed – during the first half of the year. UNHCR also funded seven rural development studies, 14 water supply studies and five studies on electrical systems. Other infrastructure projects were either postponed or cancelled and it is uncertain whether they will be carried out in the second half of the year. Failure to obtain the necessary funds could have very negative consequences for the local integration programme. For example, if access to water is not provided in some settlements, women will have to walk long distances to water collection points. The inability to complete some works would have both political and economic implications as subcontractors could take legal action against UNHCR and its national partners.

A review of the cost-efficiency of the micro-credit/savings programme resulted in the consolidation of most activities under a refugee-based NGO. Nine community credit associations were formed with 225 partners, of which 44 per cent are women.

UNHCR continued to provide support to a local NGO for reproductive health services. A total of 826 refugee women attended consultations in six women's health clinics. Some 370 refugee women received reproductive health services at State-run clinics during the reporting period. An international NGO specialised in reproductive health initiated operations in the region with plans to deploy mobile units in the refugee communities to complement and enhance services there.

UNHCR provided limited funds for education in the settlements: 66 refugees received support to finish high school and 16 refugees attended technical courses. Nineteen literacy groups were also supported, but the transfer of both the scholarship and the adult literacy programmes to local institutions is under discussion. Forty-seven refugee facilitators were instructed on training methods and the rights of refugees in the integration process. The trainers are expected to pass on this knowledge in subsequent workshops to a total of 900 people in their respective refugee settlements. A manual on the integration process was produced by UNHCR in co-ordination with the Government and UN agencies, and three workshops were conducted for *Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados* (COMAR) staff to determine the most effective use of the manual prior to distributing 3,400 copies to refugee families.

As of June, UNHCR began to review the situation of vulnerable individuals living in Chiapas and work for the establishment of long-term support mechanisms. Currently, 124 vulnerable individuals are supported in various ways. A special project for children and adolescents was finalised in April. It has succeeded in providing a group of young people (312 girls and

adolescents) with the necessary skills to continue their radio reporting activities through the end of the year. A gender perspective has also been integrated into all programme activities to promote equal access to ongoing activities by men and women.

The forest nursery at Chamic was formally transferred to a national NGO as a productive project to be continued by the community, while the forest nursery at Montebello was transferred to the local environmental authorities. The fish nursery project is now being converted into a community-run self-sufficient prawn farm.

Local Integration in Campeche and Quintana Roo

Several co-ordination meetings were held with the authorities to define appropriate mechanisms for land transfer and proceed with pending works. Individual plots (urban and rural) have now been marked and the first formal land purchase requests (federal ownership) have been received by the Ministry of Agrarian Reform. A total of 1,060 land titles have been issued. Land transfer has been a very complicated process as there are constitutional restrictions on land ownership by foreigners in some zones.

Major progress was achieved in naturalising refugees in both states, with 498 naturalisation cards paid for and another 331 cards pending for the second semester. A total of 1,846 cards were distributed in April. As of 30 June, 4,030 Guatemalans had been naturalised, 51 per cent of them women. Only 3.5 per cent of the refugee population have not yet obtained legal documentation. There are mainly refugees who are located outside the settlements and consequently have never initiated the documentation process.

A total of 124 students (46 women) were assisted with scholarships to attend lower and higher secondary education, enabling those who enrolled as of 1997 to finalise their schooling. By July, all of them will have finished their studies, bringing an end to

UNHCR's scholarship programme in Campeche and Quintana Roo.

Urban Refugees

A higher number of refugees (mostly from outside Central America) were assisted than originally planned, affecting the work of UNHCR's NGO partner. The strategy focused on legalising refugees' stay and building their self-sufficiency through attainment of naturalisation cards and work permits. Forty-one refugees received residence permits for the first time, with fifty-three naturalisation cards pending before the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In addition, 99 urban refugees had their non-immigrant status documents (FM3s) renewed and 47 refugees had their immigrant status documents (FM2s) renewed, allowing them to work.

Forty-eight newly arrived refugees received subsistence allowances and help with housing. Only recently arrived refugees or those in an extremely vulnerable situation received support in health care. A total of 65 refugees received medical assistance in the form of hospitalisation, surgery or mental health care.

UNHCR monitored the situation of elderly long-staying refugees and 33 vulnerable elderly refugees without family support were granted pension payments. Eight also psychosocial workshops were also conducted. Due to the reduced budget, training for staff was not conducted as originally planned.

A total of 266 refugees were given educational support for studies ranging from pre-school to high school as well as technical training, literacy and Spanish classes. Due to budget reductions, one-third less students now benefit from educational support than last year, although this type of assistance is essential for refugee women heads of household to gain and hold employment.

National Refugee Legislation and Status Determination Procedures

Since ratification, new regulations have been

added to the General Population Act to implement the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol. Training courses on refugee status determination and interviewing techniques were conducted for staff from the migration authorities and COMAR (20 participants) preparing them for their work in the Eligibility Committee. UNHCR organised various training courses and workshops on refugee law, international protection and refugee status determination, targeting 50 persons from different organisations. Six courses on refugee law and international protection were held with university professors from 12 different universities (314 participants, 129 of whom were women).

Public Information

A video on the tradition of asylum in Mexico since the 19th Century that includes interviews with refugees and ex-refugees was produced by UNHCR and COMAR. Within the framework of UNHCR's 50th anniversary, the Office has been working with the Government, Amnesty International and refugees/ex-refugees to create *El Parque de Los Refugiados*. This park has now been designated by the Government and is scheduled to open in September. Special awareness-raising activities were also conducted to target youth, scout and student organisations. The Education for Peace programme reached a total of 6,473 participants (151 sessions) from Mexico City, Chiapas, Campeche and cities throughout Mexico.

REVISED OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITY ACTIVITIES FOR JULY - DECEMBER

Most of the initial objectives remain valid for the second half of the year, although the extent to which they will be achieved depends largely on the availability of funds. Priority activities for this period will be to:

- Complete migration documentation for all refugees living in the settlements in Chiapas and present another 100 naturalisation requests to the authorities; and complete infrastructure activities in all new settlements;

- Consolidate and finalise the documentation and naturalisation process in Campeche and Quintana Roo (331 cards pending); and terminate the integration programme in both states;
- Reduce the number of secondary education scholarships for urban refugees to cover an anticipated increase in basic assis-

tance to new arrivals;

- Continue refugee status determination interviews while also incorporating Mexican officials in Eligibility Committee meetings as a transitional measure until the Government establishes its own Eligibility Committee; and
- Pursue public information activities to the extent possible budgetary constraints.

FINANCIAL DATA (USD)

| | Initial Budget | Revised Budget | Total Funds Available* | Total Funds Obligated |
|-----------|----------------|----------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| AB and TF | 6,604,932 | 5,756,680 | 3,239,200 | 3,239,000 |

*Includes income from unrestricted contributions, income from contributions restricted to the region/country, opening balance and adjustments.

