

AMERICAS



| Working environment |

The region hosts hundreds of thousands of refugees, asylum-seekers and others of concern to UNHCR. Most come from Colombia, which also has one of the biggest populations of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the world.

The situation of internal displacement in Colombia is one of UNHCR's most pressing concerns in the region. An aggravation of the humanitarian situation, particularly in remote rural areas, has left more than three million

people displaced within the country, while hundreds of thousands have sought refuge in other countries in the region. The security situation in Colombia remains difficult, with ongoing threats and other forms of intimidation against the civilian population, targeted killings of IDP leaders and rapes of women causing further displacement. At the same time, national security concerns related to cross-border movements have increased tensions among the Andean countries.



Resettled refugees are assisted to settle in new homes in the United States, by local partners.

In Honduras, a political crisis has emerged following the ousting of the President at the end of June 2009. UNHCR, in coordination with the UN system, is closely monitoring the situation and has developed contingency plans for the neighbouring countries.

Canada and the United States of America receive large numbers of asylum-seekers. Both have complex, but well-established asylum processes and their acceptance rates are among the highest of any industrialized countries. They also receive the highest numbers of resettled refugees in the world.

The Government of the United States has recently agreed to review a number of policies affecting the ability of refugees to seek protection in the country. For example, it is examining its application of terrorism-related barriers to asylum, which have had unintended consequences on asylum-seekers and refugees seeking permanent legal status, and on those in need of resettlement.

Most countries in the region are party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol. Only Cuba, Guyana and some smaller Caribbean States have not signed either treaty. November 2009 will mark the 25th anniversary of the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees and the 5th anniversary of the Mexico Plan of Action. Since the adoption of the Mexico Plan of Action, many countries have amended their legislation to improve the protection of refugees and IDPs. It is expected that 13 countries will have included the broader refugee principles of the Cartagena Declaration in their legislation by 2010.



In Chile, a new refugee law has been approved by the Parliament and will be presented to the Senate in October 2009 for final approval. Refugees and asylum-seekers in Argentina, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay benefit from a legal framework that is generally in line with international protection standards. These countries have set up national refugee commissions to handle asylum applications and seek durable solutions for refugees. They have also ratified the relevant international and regional instruments on human rights.

In Central America and the Caribbean, refugees travel in complex mixed migratory movements. The region's political climate is dominated by concerns over national security and migration control, often to the detriment of international protection needs.

A regional conference on refugee protection and international migration in the Americas will be held in November 2009 in Costa Rica. The conference seeks to encourage sound management approaches to regional migration, which balance international protection needs with national security concerns. The results will be used to implement a regional strategy for migration based on UNHCR's 10-Point Plan of Action.

| Strategic objectives |

- Strengthen the protection of refugees, IDPs and others of concern to UNHCR in Latin America, through the Mexico Plan of Action.
- Find durable solutions through the three strategic pillars of the Mexico Plan of Action: Borders of Solidarity, Cities of Solidarity, and Resettlement in Solidarity.
- Contribute to the implementation of high protection standards in North America by monitoring asylum systems in the United States and Canada.
- Strengthen partnerships to improve the protection of refugees and IDPs and to better cope with situations of mixed migration and statelessness.
- Ensure financial and political support for UNHCR.
- Improve the security of staff and ensure the efficiency of operations by optimizing the use of resources.

| Strategy |

UNHCR's strategy in Latin America is based on the Mexico Plan of Action. The Plan comprises three main pillars that address urban displacement, protection in the sensitive border areas and resettlement.

The Cities of Solidarity pillar supports the local integration and self-reliance of people in need of international protection in urban areas. It aims to ensure that refugees receive health care, education, access to employment and housing, on par with services provided to nationals. UNHCR implements income-generating projects for refugees and promotes their free access to the labour market. National and local governments play an important role in this context by implementing refugee-friendly policies and allocating funds for integration programmes.

The Borders of Solidarity pillar helps UNHCR to address protection concerns at borders—primarily those between Colombia and its neighbours. Local integration along the borders is promoted by linking refugee assistance to national and regional development plans. This approach benefits refugees and the local host communities.

The Resettlement in Solidarity pillar is a regional responsibility-sharing programme. It benefits a limited number of refugees who face protection risks in their countries of asylum. Since 2004, more than 500 people have been resettled in Argentina, Brazil and Chile. Uruguay joined the programme in 2009 by resettling a first group of 14 Colombian refugees from Ecuador.

UNHCR began decentralizing its Bureau for the Americas in July 2009 with the establishment of the Deputy Director's office in Panama. The office will work closely with the UN Regional Director's Team and provide legal and technical support to UNHCR's operations in Latin America. The office will also work to develop regional emergency preparedness and response capacity in Latin America.

In North America, UNHCR monitors and supports national refugee protection mechanisms, builds awareness of the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers, and seeks to secure political and financial support for its operations. The Office will continue to work with the concerned Governments to achieve the highest standards of refugee protection.

Financial information

UNHCR's financial requirements in Latin America have increased steadily in recent years. This is mostly due to the Office's greater involvement with IDPs in Colombia and the reinforcement of protection for unregistered individuals in refugee-like situations in the neighbouring countries. The higher budget also takes into account greater resettlement needs in some Latin American countries. Furthermore, the cost of ensuring and improving staff security has added to the financial requirements. In 2010, the budget will cover needs based on comprehensive assessments in all countries of the region.

Additional funds made available through the Global Needs Assessment pilot project in Ecuador have allowed UNHCR, the Government and their partners to strengthen protection in the country and support the local integration of up to 140,000 Colombians in need of international protection. The Government's enhanced registration process represents a good example of successful protection solutions, which will benefit some 60,000 people by the end of 2010.

Challenges

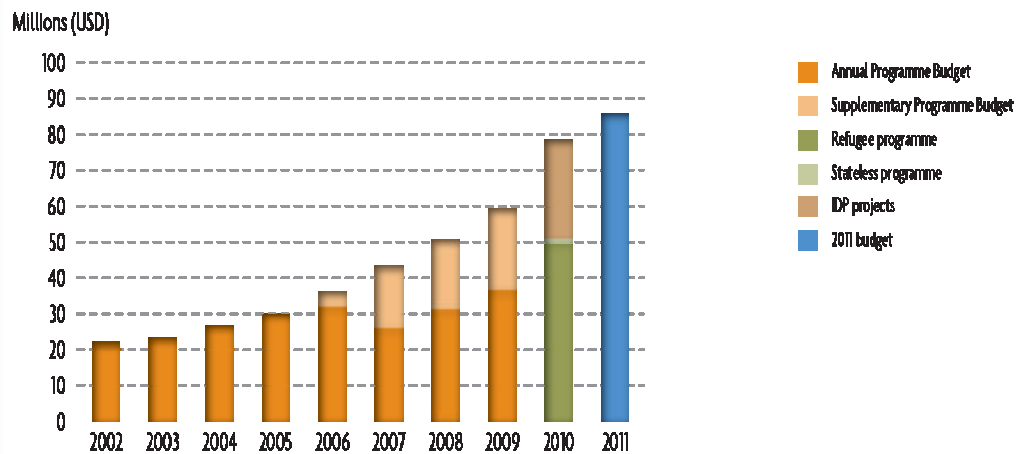
Throughout Latin America, unemployment and limited access to labour markets, partly due to the lack of required documentation, hamper the local integration of refugees and their search for economic self-reliance. The region is receiving a growing number of asylum-seekers and economic migrants, especially from the Horn of Africa and the Middle East, posing new challenges to the sometimes fragile asylum systems.

Some of the major challenges for IDPs in Colombia are poor security conditions in return areas, difficulties in accessing land, limited

employment opportunities and a limited State response to meet the particular needs of displaced women and girls. In 2010, UNHCR will increase its focus at the community level to ensure that public policy meant to guarantee the rights of IDPs, has a positive impact on individual persons of concern.

In North America, UNHCR does not have the capacity to monitor all ports of entry, nor to visit all detention centres and areas where asylum claims are being processed. This makes monitoring a challenging task, including with respect to compliance with the terms of the Safe Third Country Agreement. ■

UNHCR's budget in the Americas 2000 - 2011



UNHCR'S BUDGET IN AMERICAS (USD)

Operation	Revised budget ¹	PILLAR 1 Refugee programme	PILLAR 2 Stateless programme	PILLAR 4 IDP projects	Total	
	2009	2010				2011
NORTH AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN						
Canada	1,581,392	1,802,051	0	0	1,802,051	1,683,300
United States of America ²	4,015,120	4,591,195	1,086,434	0	5,677,629	5,522,700
Subtotal	5,596,512	6,393,246	1,086,434	0	7,479,680	7,206,000
LATIN AMERICA						
Argentina ³	3,771,985	5,222,373	107,761	0	5,330,134	6,150,600
Brazil	3,138,561	3,519,965	0	0	3,519,965	3,880,700
Colombia	23,428,553	957,302	59,852	27,476,204	28,493,358	30,174,100
Costa Rica	3,257,400	2,308,732	0	0	2,308,732	2,308,700
Cuba	268,000	0	0	0	0	0
Ecuador	10,735,401	16,186,546	225,594	0	16,412,140	19,995,700
Mexico	2,087,061	1,730,414	0	0	1,730,414	1,663,400
Panama ⁴	3,147,512	6,582,249	0	0	6,582,249	6,920,600
Venezuela (Bolivarian Rep.)	3,769,219	6,659,282	0	0	6,659,282	7,474,800
Subtotal	53,603,692	43,166,861	393,207	27,476,204	71,036,273	78,568,600
Total	59,200,204	49,560,107	1,479,642	27,476,204	78,515,953	85,774,600

¹ Includes supplementary programme requirements of USD 22,828,757.

² Includes protection of refugees and capacity-building in the Caribbean and local integration in Belize, Guyana and Suriname.

³ Includes local integration and resettlement in Bolivia, Chile, Peru, Paraguay and Uruguay.

⁴ Includes the Legal Unit in Costa Rica and the Deputy Director's Office in Panama, which covers Cuba, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua.