

# North America and the Caribbean

Antigua and Barbuda

Bahamas

Barbados

Canada

Cuba

Dominica

Dominican Republic

Grenada

Haiti

Jamaica

St. Kitts and Nevis

St. Lucia

St. Vincent and the Grenadines

Trinidad and Tobago

United States of America

## Operational highlights

- In 2006, the United States accepted some 41,000 people for resettlement, which corresponds to about half of the people resettled by UNHCR globally. In addition, almost 11,000 people were resettled in Canada.
- The United States Citizenship and Immigration Services continued to strengthen the refugee protection capacity in the country, especially through its Asylum Division and the Refugee Corps.
- UNHCR provided information on refugee issues to the Governments of the United States and Canada to encourage greater understanding of UNHCR's priorities and operations and to increase the United States' financial and political support for global refugee work.
- In the Caribbean, UNHCR performed refugee status determination in nine countries and provided advice to two Caribbean governments on asylum-seekers in national ad hoc procedures. In collaboration with governments, UNHCR also undertook contingency planning in case of mass migration or refugee emergencies in the Caribbean.

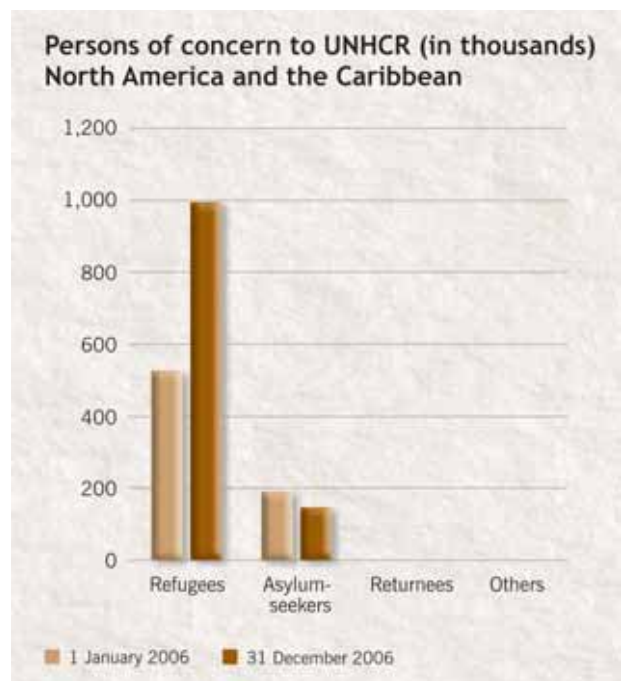


## Working environment

UNHCR estimates that there are some 848,000 refugees in the United States. In 2006, more than 50,000 people sought asylum in the country; the highest number in any industrialized country. The acceptance rates were 31 per cent by the Citizenship and Immigration Services and 45 per cent by the Executive Office for Immigration Review. In 2006, national security, which continued to be the primary focus in the United States, had a negative impact on its domestic asylum policies. The Department of Homeland Security emphasized enforcement of security measures, such as an increased use of detention and stricter border controls. Proposed legislation to tighten immigration control, including provisions which would have an adverse affect on refugees and asylum-seekers, was considered by Congress. In this context, UNHCR advocated for laws and policies, and their implementation, to be in accordance with the obligations under the 1967 Protocol to the 1951 Refugee Convention.

In Canada, part of the general public has lost confidence in the refugee system because of perceived misuse by undeserving claimants. In 2006, the Canadian Government received some 23,000 asylum applications. The Immigration and Refugee Board made decisions on almost 20,000 claims, with an acceptance rate of 47 per cent.

The Caribbean region is a site of mixed migratory movements of intra- and extra-regional undocumented people, travelling from south to north, mostly by sea. The majority of them are Cuban, Haitian and Dominican, but an increasing number of Africans was also reported. Asylum-seekers and refugees found themselves within these wider migratory movements. Only one Caribbean State has national refugee legislation and two States have functioning ad hoc national asylum procedures. This presents a challenge







UNHCR/J. Rea

Resettled refugees at the Refugee and Immigration Centre of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, United States.

to UNHCR's efforts to promote the protection of people of concern arriving within mixed migratory movements.

## Achievements and impact

Despite continued difficulties with terrorism-related bars to admission to the United States, which affected asylum claims and applications for resettlement, some progress was made in 2006. Several waivers of the material support bar to admission to the United States were issued for refugees from Myanmar. This allowed over 2,100 refugees to be resettled in the second half of the year. At the end of 2006, the Government proposed legislative and administrative initiatives that would expand its authority to declare the inapplicability of terrorism-related bars.

There were several achievements in efforts to ensure that refugee protection safeguards were respected within broader migration controls in the United States. Volunteer lawyers were provided for some 8,000

unaccompanied children involved in immigration removal proceedings. Legislation that would encourage government funding for the development of pro bono counselling networks for unaccompanied children was passed by the Senate by unanimous consent. In addition, the National Centre for Refugee and Immigrant Children, funded through a grant from one of UNHCR's Goodwill Ambassadors, provided over 500 unaccompanied children with volunteer lawyers.

In 2006, UNHCR continued to advocate for the highest possible standard of refugee protection in Canada's asylum policy and practice. UNHCR's primary objective in 2006 was to ensure that asylum-seekers had access to the territory and to refugee status determination procedures. The Office made periodic recommendations and comments to the Government on management and operational issues relating to asylum-seekers. This led to improvements in the treatment of asylum-seekers and in the processing of claims, as well as to better coordination of refugee-related issues between UNHCR and the Government.

Another key objective in Canada was to ensure that refugees and asylum-seekers in detention centres and provincial jails were not intermingled with accused or convicted criminals and that UNHCR had unhindered access to them in these facilities. A series of round tables on detention, bringing together government staff, international organizations, NGOs, lawyers and academics, resulted in formal and informal linkages promoting alternatives to detention.

The Office's activities with the media and other parties, including Citizenship and Immigration Canada, the Immigration and Refugee Board and NGOs, helped provide a more balanced view of refugee and asylum issues. High profile refugee-related public events organized by the Office, such as World Refugee Day in Toronto, Montreal and Ottawa helped to create more understanding and sympathy towards refugees.

UNHCR's assessment of the first year of implementation of the Safe Third Country Agreement between Canada and the United States revealed that both countries implemented the agreement in accordance with its terms and conditions. For example, the burden of proof required from asylum-seekers, such as establishing family links, was reasonable. Moreover, UNHCR enjoyed good cooperation with government authorities and port-of-entry officials on both sides of the border. The Office submitted a number of recommendations regarding the implementation of the Agreement. One important recommendation – the discontinuation of the so-called “direct back” policy in all but the most exceptional circumstances – was implemented by the Canadian Government as of 1 September 2006.

UNHCR's work in the Caribbean was guided by the overarching goal of improving protection and durable solutions for asylum-seekers and refugees in mixed migratory movements. To meet this goal, UNHCR strengthened regional preparedness for mass arrivals by sea, promoted asylum safeguards in interception practices as well as alternatives to detention, and advocated for the enactment of national refugee legislation and the establishment of national eligibility procedures in the Caribbean.

## Constraints

In Canada, the Government postponed its plans to overhaul the refugee system. In late 2006, UNHCR was informed that the statutory provision instituting the Refugee Appeal Division would not be implemented in 2006. As a result, despite its generosity towards asylum-seekers and refugees, Canada remains without a mechanism for appeals based on merits.

Progress in the Caribbean was limited by the complexity of mixed migratory movements in the region, lack of political priority on asylum issues, and UNHCR's limited

human and financial resources. Within these constraints, however, UNHCR was able to make significant advances, particularly in strengthening the honorary liaison network and building new NGO partnerships, both of which had a positive impact on protection and assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers in the region.

## Operations

UNHCR's objectives in the **United States** fell generally into three areas; maintaining high standards of protection for refugees and asylum-seekers; facilitating durable solutions, primarily through resettlement; and mobilizing public and governmental support for refugees and UNHCR's activities. The Office pursued these objectives through public advocacy and policy development in extensive collaboration with governmental and non-governmental counterparts.

To ensure that asylum adjudicators in the United States continued to be well-trained in international refugee law, UNHCR provided training to new asylum and refugee corps officers and input into an asylum training module for immigration enforcement personnel. The Office continued to train private and non-profit lawyers representing asylum-seekers. Cooperation between UNHCR and the United States on interception and contingency planning was reinforced through training and observation missions. The Washington office acted as a spokesperson on global refugee issues to national and international media.

UNHCR's objectives in **Canada** fell into three overlapping areas: refugee protection, resettlement and mobilizing support for refugees and the work of the Office. In 2006, these were pursued by working closely with governmental and non-governmental counterparts, and by engaging in public advocacy.

Throughout 2006, UNHCR undertook monitoring visits to major ports of entry in Canada, to ensure compliance with international refugee law. According to official statistics, more than 99 per cent of asylum-seekers were allowed entry to the territory and to refugee status determination. The Office also continued to monitor detention facilities where people of concern may be located. UNHCR compiled a detailed report on detention issues, which was shared with concerned government officials. During the course of 2006 and early 2007, UNHCR co-hosted with the Canadian Red Cross a series of five round tables entitled *Detention and the Protection of Refugees*.

In the two **Caribbean** States with functioning ad hoc refugee status determination procedures, UNHCR supported the governments to strengthen their procedures, through legal and technical advice and/or in-country training of government officials. UNHCR carried out

refugee status determination in nine Caribbean countries, thus ensuring that asylum-seekers had access to asylum procedures. Cooperation was improved with several States on contingency planning for mass migration or refugee movements. UNHCR continued to work with a network of NGO partners and honorary liaisons who supported the Regional Office in Washington with provision of assistance, counselling, refugee status determination, durable solutions activities, media monitoring, and reporting on arrivals and national asylum practices.

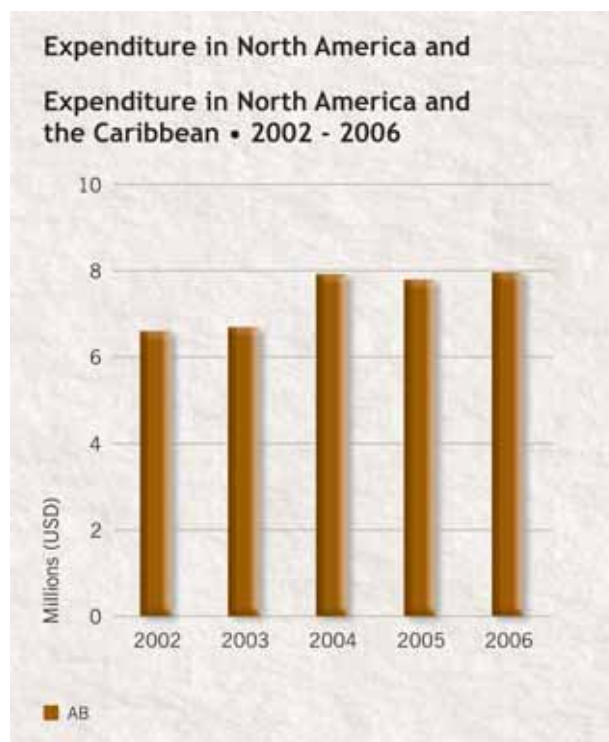
**Cuba**, administered by UNHCR's regional office in Mexico, has not signed the 1951 Convention or the 1967 Protocol. In 2006, 25 people applied for asylum in Cuba. During the year, 25 asylum-seekers were recognized as refugees, while three applications were rejected and two were closed before a decision was taken. Local integration is not an option for the refugees although the Government does provide to refugees free education and medical care. Repatriation and resettlement are therefore the only durable solution options. Twenty-six Saharawi students were assisted to return to their first country of asylum, Algeria. Due to various reasons, including policy changes in resettlement countries, only half of the 24 people who had been accepted before 2006 and were waiting to be resettled were able to depart. In addition, three people were resettled in 2006, bringing the total number of resettled refugees to 15.

## Financial information

Throughout the year, UNHCR in Washington had to deal with an unusually high turnover of staff. These complications were aggravated by sudden post cuts stemming from an organization-wide financial shortfall. Budget reductions and austerity measures, resulting from the organization's financial crisis, further had a negative impact on the capacity of the Office, particularly due to lack of funds to carry out key missions.

In 2006, the United States remained UNHCR's biggest donor by contributing almost USD 330 million. Increasing emphasis was also given to private sector fund raising in order to broaden financial support and raise awareness on UNHCR's activities.

In 2006, the Government of Canada contributed USD 27.3 million to UNHCR. In addition the private sector fund raising initiative in Canada continued to attract new donors and generate greater awareness. At the end of 2006, more than 22,000 private donors had made contributions since the initiative began in 2002. In 2006 alone, the income amounted to almost one million US dollars. Significantly, more than 12 per cent of contributions were received online, while monthly donations from regular donors accounted for another 10 per cent.



Budget and expenditure (USD)		
Country	AB	
	Final budget	Expenditure
Canada	2,055,958	1,669,177
Cuba <sup>1</sup>	287,500	281,611
United States of America	4,280,643	3,557,220
UNHCR Office in New York <sup>2</sup>	2,687,889	2,306,660
Regional activities <sup>3</sup>	160,000	152,290
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,471,989</b>	<b>7,966,958</b>

<sup>1</sup> UNHCR's activities in Cuba are administered by the regional office in Mexico.

<sup>2</sup> For a description of activities relating to the Office in New York, please refer to the Headquarters chapter under Executive Direction and Management.

<sup>3</sup> Includes refugee protection and capacity-building activities in the Caribbean.

Restricted voluntary contributions (USD)		
Earmarking	Donor	AB
North America and the Caribbean		
	United States	2,040,000
Sub-total		2,040,000
United States		
	USA for UNHCR	251,000
Sub-total		251,000
Total		2,291,000