



Central America and Mexico

Recent developments

The increasing presence of asylum-seekers within migration flows has led countries in the region to tighten their asylum policies. Since September 11, States have restricted the movements of certain nationalities, in particular from the Middle East and Colombia, which have weakened established protection regimes. In 2004, UNHCR will continue to encourage the adoption by States of effective mechanisms for the identification of asylum-seekers and monitor their adherence to fair and efficient procedures for RSD.

The Office will continue to support the *ad hoc* RSD procedure established in Mexico in March 2003. UNHCR will also aim at the adoption of new asylum legislation in 2004.

Costa Rica receives the second largest number of Colombian asylum-seekers in Latin America. During the first six months of 2003, there were 1,150 new arrivals in Costa Rica, the majority of them Colombians.

Strategic objectives

In 2004, UNHCR will emphasize the obligations of States under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of

Belize
Costa Rica
El Salvador
Guatemala
Honduras
Mexico
Nicaragua



Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. In so doing, UNHCR will promote a gender-sensitive approach, and consensus on refugee rights and related humanitarian issues. The Office will strengthen refugee protection networks in the region to ensure that civil society plays a role in the protection of asylum-seekers and refugees, and to increase public awareness of refugee issues. UNHCR will promote the search for durable solutions, and it will encourage the naturalisation or regularisation of long-staying refugees. In addition, the Office will carry out resettlement for those refugees for whom local integration is not an option.

Operations

In **Mexico**, there are 13,120 refugees of various nationalities. In 2004, UNHCR will support the Government of Mexico in receiving, examining and adjudicating asylum requests and in issuing identification documentation. Mexico's adoption of a law on asylum will be a vital step in institutionalising the new role of the Government's refugee agency. In the coming year, the Office will publicise the new policy and procedures on asylum-seekers and refugees, and will provide training and technical advice to local authorities on the reception and treatment of asylum-seekers, and the analysis of asylum claims. Through its implementing partner, UNHCR will also provide basic

material assistance and social and legal counselling to asylum-seekers and refugees. It is expected that in 2004, there will be new arrivals from Colombia and Guatemala, as well as from Iran, Iraq, Sri Lanka and Sierra Leone. Longer periods of assistance may be needed for this group, for whom integration will be more difficult.

In **Costa Rica**, UNHCR will continue to monitor the final decisions on asylum claims by the Migration Department for Refugees (MDR), including the criteria applied in analysing the cases, and the quality of eligibility interviews. MDR is now issuing final decisions in less than 30 days, as required by the national refugee legislation. UNHCR will also train the Ministry of Public Security on refugee law. In 2004, UNHCR will consolidate the micro-credit project which started in late 2002, which will benefit both refugees and host communities, as well as further promote the self-reliance of refugees. The Office will continue to carry out resettlement from the region to Canada, the United States and certain Nordic countries, for refugees with special protection needs and for those without any prospect of local integration in their host countries. It is anticipated that 100 cases will be processed by the Resettlement Unit in 2004.

Some 2,090 refugees of various nationalities live in **Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras** and **Nicaragua** (most of them in urban locations). In the coming year,

UNHCR will promote the granting by the Governments of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua of permanent migratory status (as residents or through naturalisation) to long-staying refugees from Central America. In Guatemala, these efforts have resulted in the recent adoption of a decree granting long-staying refugees permanent resident status. In Central America, UNHCR will orient and provide material assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers through the good offices of its implementing partners.

To further strengthen national protection networks, UNHCR will continue to provide training on refugee law to local authorities and strengthen contacts with the National Human Rights Commissions, NGOs and academic and religious institutions in Central America and Mexico, especially those in border areas. At the Regional Migration Conference (Puebla Process) in 2003, UNHCR's promotion of regionwide refugee protection safeguards led key members of the Conference, including Canada, Mexico and the United States, to incorporate a UNHCR training module into their 2004 pilot project for regional training on migratory control.

In Costa Rica, UNHCR will continue to use its Spanish website to reinforce the legal framework for the protection of persons of concern to UNHCR in the Americas. The Office will provide training and technical legal advice to strengthen the local capacities of governments, non-governmental organisations and other sectors of civil society. As a result of the Office's advocacy efforts, issues of concern to UNHCR are now reflected in the agenda of the Organisation of American States (OAS) and its various political and human rights organs.

Working in co-ordination with refugees and NGOs, UNHCR will prepare a handbook on asylum, refugees' rights and protection networks. This handbook will put a special emphasis on gender equity and the empowerment of women.

Budget (USD)	
Country	Annual Programme
Costa Rica	1,361,996
Mexico	1,551,755
Regional Activities ¹	1,212,600
Total	4,126,351

¹ Includes legal assistance for new arrivals in Mexico and Central America, regional promotion and consolidation of durable solutions in Central America, Cuba and Mexico, as well as the promotion of refugee law and scholarships for refugee students.



Mexico: Former Guatemalan refugees received land titles in Quintana Roo. UNHCR / M. Echandi

