

SPCP Ecuador

June 2008

Background

The Strengthening Protection Capacity Project (SPCP) has been introduced in Ecuador, in April 2008, to strengthen State and community capacities to protect refugees and other populations of concerns. Ecuador is among the eight pilot countries that will undertake this year a comprehensive process to identify gaps and develop targeted projects to address them, under the Global Needs Assessment initiative.

Ecuador is at the forefront in Latin America in the implementation of this methodology, which is being developed in the framework of the 2004 Mexico Declaration and Plan of Action and a progressive State Policy on Asylum that is a landmark in refugee protection for the whole region.

This initiative will also work in the context of Plan Ecuador, a comprehensive development program launched by the Government of Ecuador to address peace and development in the Northern border region. The plan includes among its seven strategic areas of intervention, human rights, humanitarian assistance and refugees.

Methodology

The SPCP starts from an initial analysis of gaps in the protection of refugees, other persons of concerns and the receiving local communities and aims at building agreement on measures needed to remedy those gaps, among all key stakeholders, including host governments, international and national partners and persons of concerns. It then facilitates the development and implementation of projects to further protection, expand access to rights, livelihoods and solutions over the medium and longer term.



Microcredits enable refugees to start income generating initiatives in Ecuador

Activities

National Consultations

The Government, UNHCR, the civil society, the refugee and host communities are participating in a comprehensive analysis of protection and integration gaps. The analysis will feed into a National Consultation that will take place in Quito, on 3 and 4 July, with the participation of government authorities, beneficiaries, host communities, civil society and the international community.

The National Consultations process will result in a Plan of Action that will form a common framework for all actors involved. The Plan will support the implementation of the State Policy on Asylum and will contribute in the long term to the national developments plans.

Enhanced Registration

UNHCR is leading the organization efforts for a registration exercise that will allow some fifty thousand refugees to register with the Ecuadorean government within the next year. This endeavor will consist of mobile brigades that will work in the northern border region, an area thought to have the largest concentration of persons of concern. Each brigade will have the necessary staff and equipment for registering, determining refugee status

and documenting persons of concern in areas where the main problem for this population is the lack of documentation, which also impedes individuals from accessing their most basic rights.



Refugee children at the World Refugee Day fair in Quito, 2006

Opening of the Government's Office for Refugees in Border Town – Lago Agrio

The General Directorate for Refugees (GDR) under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is the government authority in charge of refugee issues. This office is present in Quito, the capital city of Ecuador, as well as in Cuenca in southern Ecuador.

On June 20, to mark the commemoration of World Refugee Day, the GDR will open its first office in the northern border region. It is estimated that some 60 thousand persons in need of international protection live in this region. The GDR presence in Lago Agrio will speed up the refugee status determination process, improving access to rights and making a major improvement in the asylum system.

Strengthening national capacity to determine refugee claims

Access to up-to-date legal and country information is vital in making fair and efficient decisions on asylum claims.

In June 2008 UNHCR held a training seminar for 35 staff members of the General Directorate for Refugees. Participants received updated information

about the conflict in Colombia, the country of origin of the majority of refugees in Ecuador. The seminar was facilitated by UNHCR's Regional Legal Unit (Costa Rica) and included presentations from several experts from Ecuador and Colombia.

Ecuador commemorates World Refugee Day

Ecuador is currently the Latin American country with the largest population of concern, estimated at 180,000 persons. For this reason, World Refugee Day has also gained importance. This year several events will take place in different Ecuadorean cities, including a film festival, trade fairs, media campaigns, music concerts and more.

More information on the Strengthening Protection Capacity Project, including the Ecuador initiative can be found at www.unhcr.org/spcp