

The Americas



WORKING ENVIRONMENT

In 2016, UNHCR worked in the Americas region to address challenges in responding to the needs of increasing numbers of displaced people, enhancing the protection of refugees and other displaced and stateless people, and promoting durable solutions. Since its adoption in 2014, the Brazil Declaration and Plan of Action (see *Glossary*) has continued to be an essential framework in the region for strengthening protection and fostering comprehensive solutions, in the spirit of enhanced cooperation and solidarity.

In a major development for the region, after four years of intensive negotiations a final peace agreement was signed between the Government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), which was approved by Congress and entered into force on 1 December 2016.

Makeshift rafts on the Suchiate River are a route into Mexico for thousands of refugees fleeing gang violence in the Northern Triangle of Central America (El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras).

UNHCR was assigned a role under the peace process to support the agreement's peacebuilding efforts. Despite key progress achieved following the peace agreement, new displacement continued to take place both inside the country and across borders, mainly because of increased violence by illegal armed groups. The organization also continued to monitor the situation in volatile regions, where armed groups appeared in areas vacated by the FARC. Security incidents for local social leaders have also increased, specifically affecting supporters of the peace process.

There were more asylum applications in the region during 2016 than in previous years. In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, growing political, social and economic tensions throughout the year led to the displacement of Venezuelans. Since 2011, over 40,000 lodged asylum claims in the Americas and beyond, including at least 27,000 who applied in 2016 mainly in Brazil, Costa Rica, Peru, Spain and the United States of America. While the number of Venezuelans granted refugee status increased, most tried to regularize their status under different bilateral or multilateral regional frameworks in host countries within the region. In the Caribbean, given the small size of some of the island States, the arrival of Venezuelans, even in relatively small numbers, had a disproportionate impact on their limited reception capacities.

Forced displacement within and from the Northern Triangle of Central America

(NTCA, comprising El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras) continued unabated, triggered mainly by high levels of violence stemming from organized criminal groups, despite several positive policy and institutional interventions by the three Governments. In response to growing protection needs, UNHCR launched a supplementary appeal in June 2016, which enabled the Office to reinforce inter-agency protection networks, and expand partnerships on the ground. It also supported the authorities in countries of origin, transit and asylum with the implementation of protection, reception and referral mechanisms, and advocacy and awareness-raising activities.

In the spirit of shared responsibility and complementary action, the region's governments held a High-Level Roundtable in July 2016 to discuss a "Call to Action: Protection Needs in the NTCA." The roundtable resulted in the adoption of the San José Action Statement, which calls for a comprehensive, multi-sectorial regional response to address forced displacement in Central America.

In addition, several countries in the region continued to demonstrate solidarity with global and regional refugee situations by offering alternative protection solutions to people of concern to UNHCR. In this regard, UNHCR initiated the "Protection transfer arrangement programme," aiming to evacuate people at heightened risk from El Salvador to Costa Rica, and then from

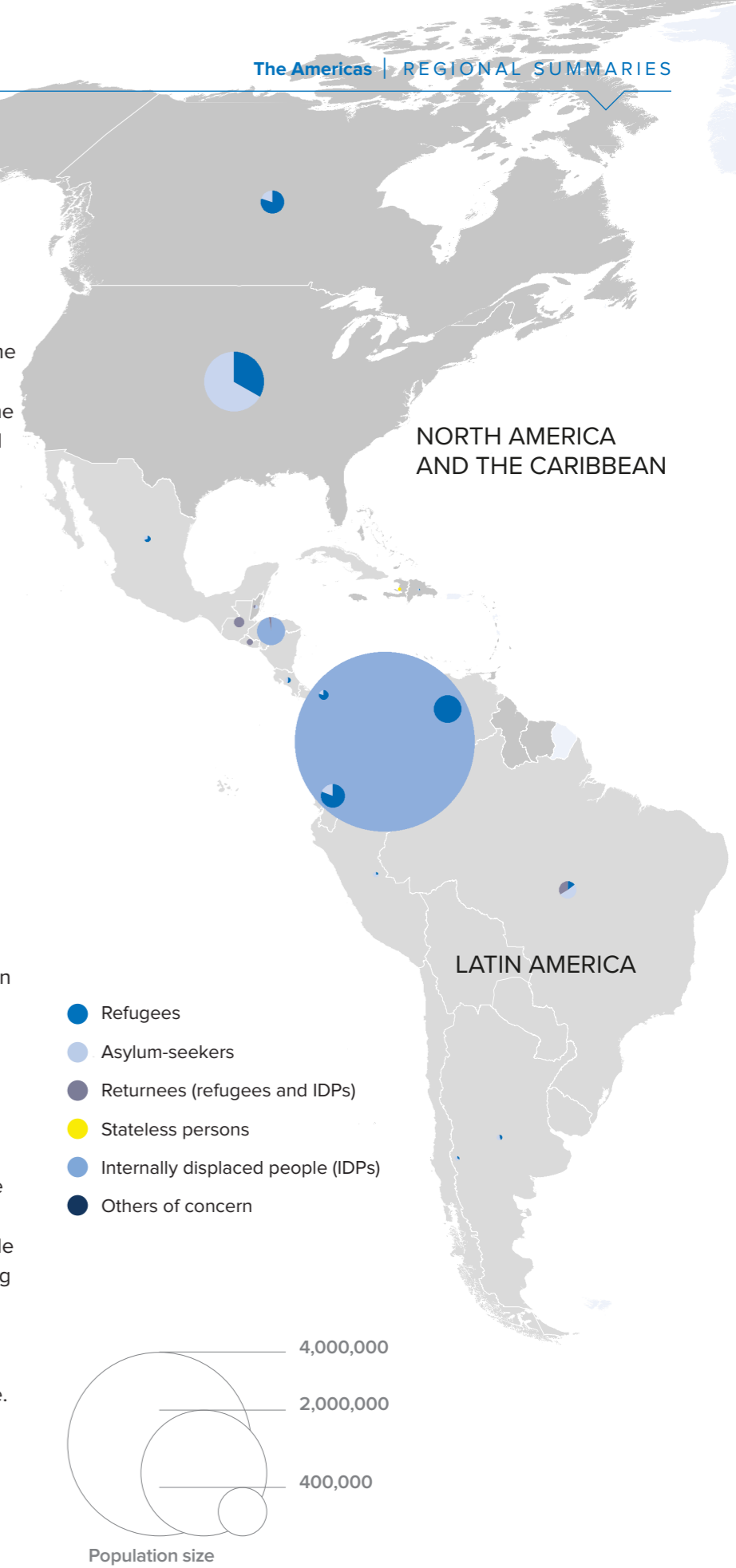
Costa Rica to resettlement countries. Some families have already benefited from this programme in 2016. An important outcome of the Leaders' Summit on Refugees, held in the United States in September 2016, was the establishment of an "Emerging resettlement countries joint support mechanism," a fund to support countries setting up sustainable resettlement or complementary pathway programmes for refugees.

MAJOR SITUATIONS

Colombia situation

UNHCR's 2016-2018 regional protection and solutions strategy aims to respond in an enhanced, coordinated manner to operational exigencies that a post-agreement phase entails, focusing on securing and protecting the rights of forcibly displaced people in Colombia as well as Colombian refugees in neighbouring countries.

Colombia has the largest number of IDPs globally, with more than 7.4 million people displaced by more than five decades of conflict. UNHCR continued to adapt its role and activities to support the peacebuilding agenda. In 2016, the Office registered 47 emergencies that included mass displacement, confinement or restrictions to mobility, affecting nearly 14,000 people. At least two-thirds of those affected were indigenous people, the rest being mainly



IDPs and members of host communities benefited from community-based infrastructure and empowerment projects

Afro-Colombians and farmers. The Office advocated the protection of IDPs and the prevention of new displacement in more than 170 communities by deploying Ombudsmen and implementing community-based infrastructure and empowerment projects, which benefited more than 18,000 IDPs and members of host communities.

In Ecuador, UNHCR promoted local integration, enabling refugees to actively contribute to Ecuador's development. Around 1,500 households across the country participated in UNHCR's "graduation approach" programme (see *Glossary*). Important progress was also made with regards to legal status, registration and access to social security and services. The National Assembly unanimously passed a human mobility law, which was subsequently approved in January 2017, updating the framework for regularizing the status of refugees and migrants in the country and reaffirming important principles, such as equal treatment of all people before the law, the principle of non-refoulement, and non-criminalization of irregular entry.

In December 2016, the Venezuelan authorities with UNHCR's support launched a profiling exercise of an estimated 168,500 Colombians living in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. The results will be used to design policies and plans to ensure people in need of international protection have access to solutions and are included in national social programmes.

Northern Triangle of Central America situation

Unlike previous years, while a rising number of asylum-seekers was recorded mainly in Canada and the United States of America, the steepest increase in asylum requests by individuals from the NTCA in 2016 was recorded in neighbouring countries. Mexico received around 9,000 new asylum applications, representing a 156 per cent increase on 2015. High numbers of asylum applications were also registered in Costa Rica and Panama and, to a lesser extent, in Belize and Nicaragua.

UNHCR's 2016-2018 protection and solutions strategy for the NTCA also aims to respond to the most urgent needs of refugees, asylum-seekers, returnees with protection needs, and IDPs from the NTCA in countries of origin, transit and asylum. In Costa Rica and Mexico, the organization supported asylum systems and reception mechanisms, by providing adequate shelter and cash assistance for vulnerable groups.

UNHCR also strengthened its cooperation with governments in the subregion by signing a memorandum of understanding with Guatemala to reinforce its asylum system and better manage mixed movements. In addition, the Office supported Honduran and Salvadoran institutions dealing with displaced people, and victims of violence in assisting their nationals abroad in need of international protection.

Finally, strategic alliances were forged with Ombudsperson, faith-based organizations and civil society partners to provide protection and assistance to people and communities affected by violence, as well as to returnees with protection needs. The inter-agency working groups led by UNHCR have been key to including a protection perspective in United Nations' frameworks, programmes, and groups, such as the United Nations Development Group for Latin America and the Caribbean.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND IMPACT

Building a common asylum space

The Quality Assurance Initiative (QAI), which has been implemented in Argentina, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Mexico, Panama and Peru, seeks to enhance the fairness and efficiency of national asylum systems. As part of this initiative, Brazil established a registration system for asylum-seekers that allows a more predictable and manageable schedule for the refugee status determination (RSD) process, resulting in better protection against refoulement, arrest and detention, as well as access to assistance. Costa Rica increased the capacity of its national eligibility bodies both at first and second instances, assuming greater responsibility in the processing of asylum claims.

Mexico amended its Constitution to include the right to seek asylum and refugee protection. In 2016, the Organization of American States' (OAS) General Assembly, during its session in the Dominican Republic, adopted a resolution on human rights, which includes references to protection of refugees and stateless people. In addition, a separate resolution on IDPs was adopted. Trinidad and Tobago became the first country in the Caribbean to use QAI standards and methodology to develop national refugee status determination. Other countries in the Caribbean have also expressed interest in doing so. In Ecuador, UNHCR has taken measures to improve its asylum system through capacity building and technical support.

UNHCR continued working with governments to promote alternatives to detention. In Canada and the United States of America, the implementation of the "Beyond detention" global initiative identified alternatives to detention for children. In Costa Rica, UNHCR supported the establishment of centres for migrants in border areas, and of a shelter for female survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex asylum-seekers. In the northern border area, UNHCR expanded its presence to ensure immediate registration and effective access to RSD procedures. In Mexico, over 2,400 asylum-seekers were housed in eight UNHCR-supported shelters.

In 2016, the United States of America welcomed over 96,800 refugees and Canada resettled nearly 46,300 refugees, its largest annual refugee admission in the past two decades

Pursuing durable solutions

UNHCR continued to promote the inclusion of refugees and other people of concern into national plans and policies. In Costa Rica, an agreement was concluded with the Ministry of the Presidency and the Migration Authority to guarantee the access of refugees to the national development and poverty reduction programme, facilitating the early integration of NTCA refugees. A shelter for women survivors of SGBV and their children from the NTCA and Nicaragua was also established. In Colombia, support was provided to 92 Colombians that had returned from Ecuador and Venezuela, as well as to assist more than 200,000 people with civil status documentation. UNHCR also supported local authorities' efforts to legalize informal IDP settlements in urban areas. In Ecuador, the Office signed agreements with the Social Development Coordination Ministry and with the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion to facilitate the integration of refugees in national policy and programmes. UNHCR also signed an agreement with the civil registry to register refugees, to facilitate their access to basic services and formal employment.

States in the region remained committed to solidarity and responsibility sharing for

refugee resettlement programmes. In 2016, the United States of America welcomed over 96,800 refugees and Canada resettled nearly 46,300 refugees, its largest annual refugee admission in the past two decades. With UNHCR's support, Canada launched a global refugee sponsorship initiative to bring together sponsorship groups, international delegates, partners and government officials. These actors shared the experience of Canada's private sponsorship model for refugees, and sought to develop practical guidance and tools for other countries looking to adopt similar programmes.

Argentina, Brazil, and Chile pledged to receive refugees, especially from the Syrian Arab Republic and the NTCA. Argentina and Chile also advanced preparations to receive Syrian refugees either for resettlement or through other legal pathways such as humanitarian visas.

In Southern Cone countries, UNHCR enhanced its strategic partnerships with governments, civil society and private sector counterparts, to consolidate protection space in the subregion, including by establishing resettlement programmes and other forms of admission, and by implementing local integration initiatives.

Supporting the regional initiative for Central America and Mexico

In line with the San José Action Statement, UNHCR strengthened alliances with partners, establishing 30 agreements for protection interventions in the NTCA. These agreements had a crucial impact on: child protection; community-based protection; protection networks and border monitoring; the strengthening of reception centres; protection responses for cases at heightened risk; as well as the reinforcement of national human rights entities (ombudsman offices) in the three NTCA countries.

Following the example of the profiling exercise carried out in Honduras, UNHCR supported the Government of El Salvador (Ministry of Justice and Public Safety) to conduct a similar exercise in 2016. UNHCR will also be supporting an academic study on the different forms of displacement in Guatemala. This is expected to have a positive impact on the visibility of protection issues related to displacement.

In hosting countries, UNHCR continues to work with asylum-seekers and refugees, implementing identification and referral mechanisms, adequate reception arrangements and alternatives to detention.

Addressing mixed movements in the Caribbean

Countries in the Caribbean continued to receive people who arrived, in increasing numbers, within mixed movement flows. UNHCR developed a protection strategy to support Caribbean States and Territories to strengthen protection and solutions. The strategy includes guidance on: screening and identifying people in need of international protection, within the context of mixed movements; the adoption of national asylum procedures; the establishment of national asylum procedures and adequate reception facilities; access to asylum procedures; the adoption of alternatives to detention, as well as efforts towards local integration; and the eradication of statelessness. In 2016, UNHCR and its partners registered over 5,000 asylum-seekers in the Caribbean, at least 50 per cent more than during 2015.

With the support of UNHCR, IOM and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), representatives from 14 States gathered for the first substantive meeting of the Caribbean Migration Consultations, hosted by Trinidad and Tobago in December 2016. They met to establish a Caribbean Information Management Centre for regional data collection, information sharing and develop consistent approaches in response to mixed movements.

Working towards eradicating statelessness

The region saw positive developments in efforts to eradicate statelessness. The General Assembly of the Organization of American States adopted a resolution on human rights that welcomed UNHCR's 2014-2024 Global Action Plan to End Statelessness and endorsed the #IBelong Campaign.

The first regional workshop on "Statelessness and nationality for parliamentarians from Latin America and the Caribbean" was held in Quito, Ecuador, in November 2016. It focused on the need to adopt comprehensive laws to ensure the protection of stateless people, including by facilitating naturalization. In 2016, the naturalization of stateless people was included in the migratory law in Brazil and the regulations of the civil registry in Costa Rica.

Chile enacted a law reducing the minimum age required for foreigners to be eligible to acquire Chilean nationality (from 21 to 18 years), and eliminating the age limit for refugee children with one parent who had become a Chilean national.

In the Dominican Republic, important steps were taken following the adoption of a special law (Law 169-14) to confirm Dominican nationality through the validation of birth certificates belonging to individuals born in the country to two migrant parents. Thousands of individuals are also believed to have been issued their Dominican civil documents in 2016.

CONSTRAINTS

Complex mixed movements throughout the Americas region, including a surge of asylum-seekers from within and outside the region, have continued to strain the capacity of asylum countries to receive, process and protect those in need. UNHCR continued working with governments to ensure access to asylum procedures for those seeking international protection, including through alternative case processing strategies; however, the limited mobilization of adequate and predictable human and financial resources that States in the region dedicate to ensuring that asylum authorities have increased and sustainable means to respond to new dynamics is a recurring challenge.

More details on individual operations are available in the relevant subregional and country operations pages on the Global focus website (<http://reporting.unhcr.org>)

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

The original 2016 budget for the Americas region was \$115.7 million. By the end of 2016, the budget had been revised to \$139.2 million. This was mainly due to the inclusion of a supplementary budget of \$16.9 million to strengthen the regional response to the NTCA situation in June 2016. In addition, regional needs increased due to the emergency response to the earthquake in Ecuador, the implementation of activities related to the Brazil Plan of Action, the resettlement of Syrian refugees in Uruguay and activities in support of the Syria situation.

The region received very little in the way of earmarked funding. While total voluntary contributions to the region came to \$37.5 million, including 7 per cent programme support costs, UNHCR used an indicative amount of \$36.4 million in unearmarked funding to cover gaps, equivalent to 12 per cent of all unearmarked funds used in the field.

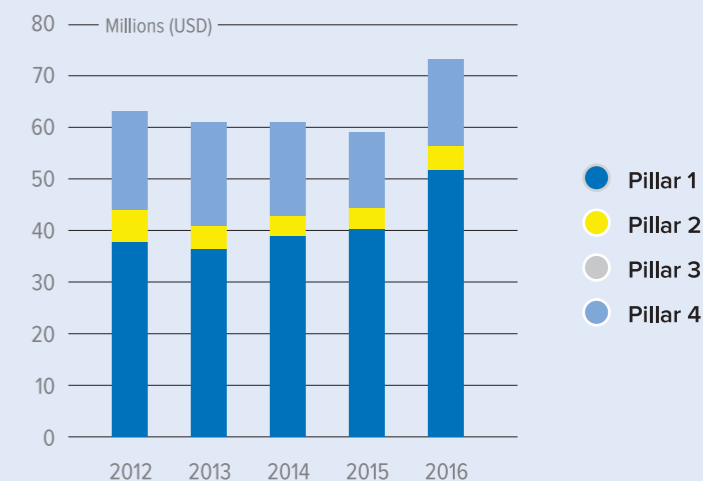
Expenditure in the Americas increased in 2016, amounting to \$73.2 million or about 53 per cent of

the approved budget and accounting for approximately 2 per cent of programmed activities, the same level as in 2015. The region's funding shortfall substantially limited UNHCR's ability to provide the necessary technical assistance to governments to enhance national asylum systems and gradually transfer responsibility to them for RSD procedures. The lack of funding available made itself particularly felt in the following areas:

- Ensuring the availability of effective solutions for people of concern who were facing limited resettlement places.

- A lack of local integration alternatives and limited livelihood support.
- Efficiently coordinating and building protection and integration networks.
- Facilitating access to alternative protection mechanisms in Ecuador.
- Advancing the legalization of informal settlements in Colombia, with a high concentration of IDPs
- Implementing border monitoring activities.

EXPENDITURE IN THE AMERICAS | 2012-2016



BUDGET AND EXPENDITURE IN THE AMERICAS | USD

OPERATION		PILLAR 1	PILLAR 2	PILLAR 3	PILLAR 4	TOTAL
		Refugee programme	Stateless programme	Reintegration projects	IDP projects	
NORTH AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN						
Canada	Budget	1,434,642	95,478	0	0	1,530,119
	Expenditure	1,193,207	93,006	0	0	1,286,213
United States of America Regional Office ¹	Budget	13,630,391	8,666,806	0	0	22,297,197
	Expenditure	7,610,219	3,498,421	0	0	11,108,640
SUBTOTAL	Budget	15,065,033	8,762,284	0	0	23,827,317
	Expenditure	8,803,426	3,591,427	0	0	12,394,853
LATIN AMERICA						
Argentina Regional Office ²	Budget	4,646,960	168,559	0	0	4,815,518
	Expenditure	3,105,023	152,036	0	0	3,257,059
Brazil	Budget	5,990,893	242,570	0	0	6,233,463
	Expenditure	2,655,452	115,215	0	0	2,770,667
Colombia	Budget	974,747	0	0	30,513,568	31,488,315
	Expenditure	572,636	0	0	13,769,857	14,342,493
Costa Rica	Budget	4,522,237	248,639	0	0	4,770,876
	Expenditure	3,210,758	247,363	0	0	3,458,121
Costa Rica Regional Legal Unit	Budget	2,488,622	512,726	0	0	3,001,348
	Expenditure	1,896,872	391,035	0	0	2,287,907
Ecuador	Budget	19,945,565	0	0	5,090,000	25,035,565
	Expenditure	11,339,826	0	0	2,969,991	14,309,817
Mexico	Budget	12,519,043	0	0	0	12,519,043
	Expenditure	6,736,627	0	0	0	6,736,627
Panama Regional Office ³	Budget	16,647,694	0	0	0	16,647,694
	Expenditure	9,238,602	0	0	0	9,238,602
Venezuela	Budget	9,132,293	0	0	0	9,132,293
	Expenditure	3,969,854	0	0	0	3,969,854
Regional Activities ⁴	Budget	1,748,595	0	0	0	1,748,595
	Expenditure	428,880	0	0	0	428,880
SUBTOTAL	Budget	78,616,649	1,172,494	0	35,603,568	115,392,710
	Expenditure	43,154,531	905,649	0	16,739,848	60,800,028
TOTAL	Budget	93,681,682	9,934,777	0	35,603,568	139,220,027
	Expenditure	51,957,957	4,497,076	0	16,739,848	73,194,880

¹ Includes Belize, Dominican Republic and Haiti² Includes activities in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay³ Includes activities in Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua⁴ Regional activities cover the entire Americas region

VOLUNTARY CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE AMERICAS | USD

DONOR	PILLAR 1	PILLAR 2	PILLAR 4	ALL PILLARS	TOTAL
	Refugee programme	Stateless programme	IDP projects		
Argentina				123,420	123,420
Brazil	619,419			43,359	662,778
Canada	1,000,000			1,872,659	2,872,659
Central Emergency Response Fund			423,929		423,929
Chile	70,000				70,000
Denmark	30,000				30,000
European Union	2,152,397	136,261	434,047		2,722,706
International Organization for Migration		62,814			62,814
Mexico				25,000	25,000
Private Donors in Australia			44,430		44,430
Private Donors in Canada	75		35,279		35,354
Private Donors in China			116,971		116,971
Private Donors in Germany			112,111		112,111
Private Donors in Italy			42,140		42,140
Private Donors in Mexico				5,721	5,721
Private Donors in Spain	2,011		470,843	477,707	950,561
Private Donors in Switzerland			102,149	3,095	105,245
Private Donors in Thailand			39,940		39,940
Private Donors in the United Kingdom			36,787		36,787
Private Donors in the United States of America			461,007	75,000	536,007
Republic of Korea			420,000		420,000
Spain	223,464		670,391		893,855
Switzerland			914,634		914,634
United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security	97,743				97,743
United States of America	6,050,000			20,150,000	26,200,000
TOTAL	10,245,110	199,075	4,324,658	22,775,962	37,544,806

Note: Contributions include seven per cent support costs