

mexico in short

Main Objectives

- Facilitate the legal and social integration of Guatemalan refugees by ensuring proper legal documentation and providing basic services for the refugee settlements.
- Find lasting solutions for urban refugees in Mexico City and develop a mechanism to address their needs.
- Assist national authorities to strengthen the asylum system and to establish a national Eligibility Committee.
- Expand and strengthen the national refugee protection framework in Mexico.



WORKING ENVIRONMENT

Recent Developments

On 17 April 2000, the Mexican Senate ratified the 1951 Convention, the 1967 Protocol and the 1954 Convention on Statelessness. At the same time, amendments were made to the General Population Act to allow the full implementation of these legal instruments and to establish an eligibility committee for refugee status determination. UNHCR expanded its training programme for the staff of the national organisations responsible for this activity.

In July 2000, the main opposition party candidate won the presidential elections and is due to assume office on 1 December 2000. UNHCR looks forward to continued positive co-operation with the incoming government.

The local integration of Guatemalan refugees continues. In the states of Campeche and Quintana Roo all the refugees who opted to become Mexican citizens have filed applications for naturalisation. By the end of 2000, nearly 4,700 will have been naturalised. This constitutes 88 per cent of applicants and

PLANNING FIGURES

Population	Jan. 2001	Dec. 2001
Guatemalan Refugees	16,173	9,760
Urban Refugees	3,495	3,495
Total	19,668	13,255

TOTAL REQUIREMENTS • USD 5,866,925

approximately 40 per cent of the refugee population of the two states. The rest of the refugees have been granted legal immigrant status by the Mexican authorities. In the state of Chiapas the entire Guatemalan refugee population is expected to hold legal immigrant documents by the end of 2000.

Constraints

Financial constraints led to delays in the implementation of UNHCR's three-year integration programme. Due to lack of funding in 2000, only a small number of the more than 5,000 eligible candidates were able to become naturalised citizens.

The extension to Chiapas of the Migratory Stabilisation Policy, which gives refugees the option of local integration, resulted in the consolidation of refugee settlements and, in some cases, the purchase of land by organised groups of refugees. The limited

availability of land in Chiapas has, however, resulted in some refugee communities temporarily settling on land owned by others, or in extremely isolated locations. As a result, basic infrastructure - including drinking water supplies, electricity and access routes - could be brought to these settlements only recently. Work on infrastructure will therefore continue during 2001 to ensure that 80 per cent of the new settlements enjoy a minimum level of services.

Refugees in Mexico City are granted the right to work and enjoy freedom of movement throughout the country. Nevertheless, non-Spanish speaking refugees face communication difficulties and need special support to learn the language. Moreover, many refugees and asylum-seekers are tempted to migrate northwards to the United States, resulting in a fluid refugee population.

STRATEGY

Protection and Solutions

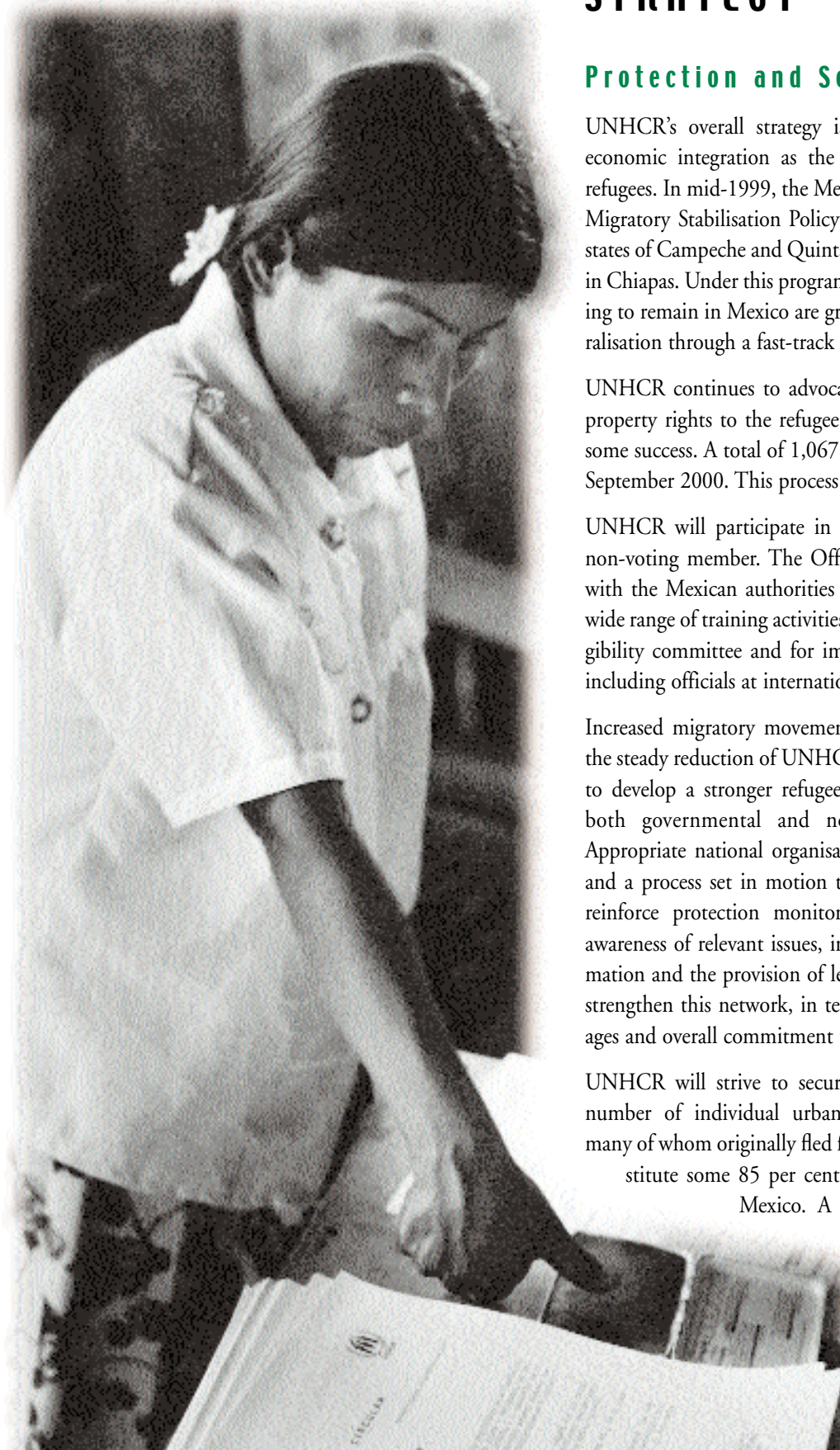
UNHCR's overall strategy is to support legal and socio-economic integration as the preferred durable solution for refugees. In mid-1999, the Mexican Government extended the Migratory Stabilisation Policy previously implemented in the states of Campeche and Quintana Roo to Guatemalan refugees in Chiapas. Under this programme, Guatemalan refugees wishing to remain in Mexico are granted immigrant status or naturalisation through a fast-track procedure.

UNHCR continues to advocate and monitor the transfer of property rights to the refugee communities and has achieved some success. A total of 1,067 land titles had been issued as of September 2000. This process will continue in 2001.

UNHCR will participate in the Eligibility Committee as a non-voting member. The Office will continue to collaborate with the Mexican authorities and academic institutions on a wide range of training activities for the members of the new eligibility committee and for immigration officials at all levels, including officials at international airports and border points.

Increased migratory movements in the region, coupled with the steady reduction of UNHCR's presence, makes it necessary to develop a stronger refugee protection network, involving both governmental and non-governmental institutions. Appropriate national organisations have now been identified and a process set in motion to build up a network that will reinforce protection monitoring and assistance by raising awareness of relevant issues, increasing the exchange of information and the provision of legal aid. In 2001, UNHCR will strengthen this network, in terms of information, skills, linkages and overall commitment to refugee protection.

UNHCR will strive to secure permanent legal status for a number of individual urban refugees. Central Americans, many of whom originally fled from conflicts in the 1980s, constitute some 85 per cent of the urban refugee group in Mexico. A high priority for UNHCR in 2001 will therefore be the provision of immigrant documents or naturalisation cards for them.



Public awareness of refugees and asylum issues needs to be further developed. UNHCR will actively engage in the dissemination of information and educational efforts to foster better understanding of the concept of asylum and the plight of refugees in general. Specialised training of the media will help achieve this, and reinforce UNHCR's credibility as a reliable source of public information.

Assistance

In Chiapas, UNHCR will continue to support the social and economic integration of refugees in 2001, though at a reduced level. This will include expanding infrastructure, improving access to health services, supporting literacy training and the training of community leaders, particularly women. In the area of infrastructure, UNHCR and its government partner have identified priority needs for 60 settlements. While certain infrastructure works have been finished, budget reductions and some community relocations make it necessary to extend completion of this work into 2001.

As access to land is limited in Chiapas, community credit units have proven to be an ideal mechanism to strengthen the economy of refugee communities and thus facilitate the process of integration. Special emphasis will continue to be placed on the

participation of women in the administration of this and other projects.

The growth in the number of non-Spanish speaking urban refugees in Mexico is expected to continue. This group requires special assistance. UNHCR, working through its government partner, will continue to offer legal and social counselling and limited economic assistance to new arrivals when necessary, and to refer them to Mexican institutions for health services, education, documentation, etc. UNHCR has started to reduce direct material assistance to urban refugees, endeavouring instead to increase their economic independence by providing training and credit.

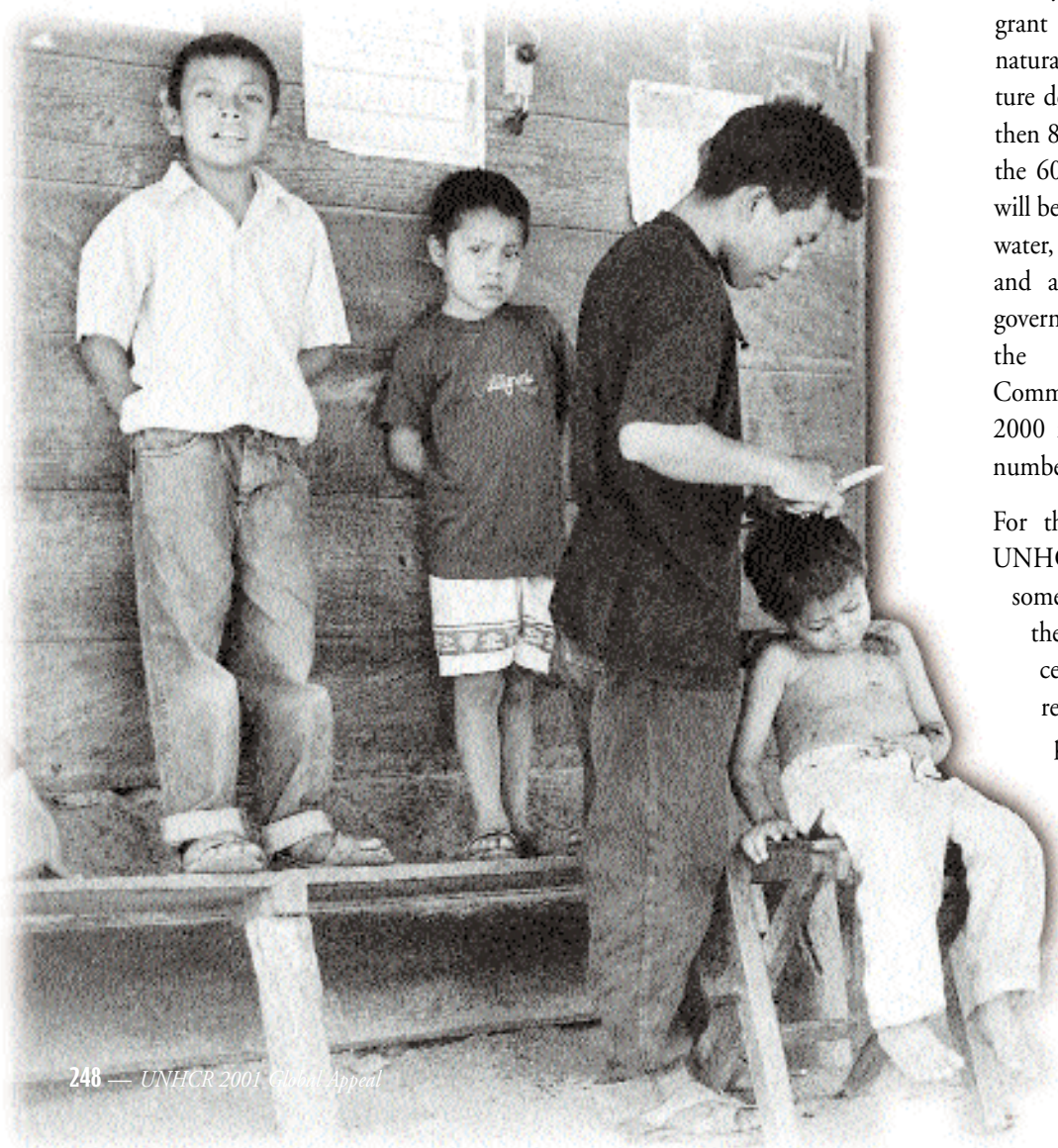
Workshops on reproductive health issues, self-esteem and curbing domestic violence will continue to be organised, targeting both refugee men and women. Forty-nine refugees throughout Mexico will continue to receive support to attend university.

Desired Impact

By the end of 2001, UNHCR expects to have facilitated the completion of naturalisation applications by 3,500 refugees or 70 per cent of the remaining Guatemalan refugee population in Chiapas. The Government will continue to assume responsibility for the renewal of legal immigrant documents for those not yet naturalised. Community infrastructure development will ensure that by then 80 per cent of the population in the 60 refugee settlements identified will benefit from basic services such as water, electricity, health, education and access roads. UNHCR's non-governmental partner will consolidate the 17 existing self-managed Community Credit Units initiated in 2000 in Chiapas, and increase their number to 30.

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By the end of the year, the national eligibility committee should be fully functioning, its members trained and adhering to international standards, which will result in a progressive decrease in UNHCR's involvement. When civil servants dealing with refugee claims have a thorough knowledge of refugee status determination procedures, they will be in a better position to identify asylum-seekers. As the nascent refugee protection network grows, so the voices speaking up for refugees and asylum-seekers will grow stronger, increasing awareness and hopefully leading to improved conditions for refugees.

ORGANISATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Management

As lasting solutions are being found for the Guatemalan refugees, UNHCR will reduce the size of its operation in Mexico. In 2001, UNHCR will operate with 22 staff (six international and 16 national), down from 28 (nine and 19 respectively) in 2000. In addition to the Regional Office based in Mexico City, UNHCR will maintain an office in Comitán, Chiapas. Beyond its programme in Mexico, the Regional



BUDGET (USD)	
Activities and Services	Annual Programme
Protection, Monitoring and Co-ordination	723,693
Community Services	256,029
Domestic Needs/Household Support	167,048
Education	222,272
Health/Nutrition	231,026
Income Generation	268,877
Legal Assistance	1,407,939
Operational Support (to Agencies)	419,361
Shelter/Other Infrastructure	962,567
Transport/Logistics	42,781
Total Operations	4,701,593
Programme Support	1,165,332
Total	5,866,925

Office remains responsible for refugee protection in Belize, Costa Rica, Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua.

OFFICES

Mexico City	Comitán
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Co-ordination

In 2000, UNHCR began to streamline its programme in Chiapas, transferring various sectoral activities to government actors or other agencies in the region and reducing the number of its partnerships. In 2001, UNHCR will work with three national NGO implementing partners. UNHCR's main partner continues to be the *Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados* (COMAR), the governmental body designated to handle refugee matters. At the same time, UNHCR will help to advise and train the National Institute for Migration. As Mexican authorities assume responsibility for conducting refugee status determination, UNHCR will continue to provide advice, training and information. As the only UN office in the state of Chiapas, UNHCR has canvassed other UN and non-UN agencies about proposed longer-term projects to rehabilitate the border areas that were affected by the presence of thousands of refugees. UNHCR will continue to co-ordinate closely with an NGO that has set up a three-year reproductive health project in the region, while phasing out its own activities in this sector.

PARTNERS

Government Agencies

Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados

NGOs

Capacitación y Asesoría en Medio Ambiente y Defensa del Derecho a la Salud

Promotores de Administración y Contabilidad para Empresas de Producción, Industrialización y Comercio

Sin Fronteras