

SOUTH AMERICA

NORTHERN SOUTH AMERICA

Colombia,
Ecuador,
Guyana,
Peru,

SOUTHERN SOUTH AMERICA

Argentina,
Brazil,
Bolivia,
Chile,
Paraguay,
Uruguay

SOUTH AMERICA REGIONAL OVERVIEW

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NORTHERN SOUTH AMERICA

Recent Developments

UNHCR's prime concern in Northern South America is forced displacement as a result of the worsening armed conflict in Colombia. Concerned by the spill-over effects of the conflict, neighbouring countries have militarised their borders to protect their territory from incursions of guerilla and paramilitary groups. National security concerns have led to an increasingly negative attitude towards Colombians in search of protection. That means the risk of rejection at the border and, in the case of Panama, facing a temporary protection regime incompatible with inter-

national protection standards. States are also inclined to treat cross-border displacement bilaterally, without UNHCR's participation.

Strategic Objectives

UNHCR's integrated humanitarian response on behalf of IDPs is aimed at neighbouring countries currently most affected by the arrival of Colombians in need of protection as well as Colombia itself. UNHCR's main objectives in Ecuador, Panama and Venezuela are to: strengthen the legal framework for refugee protection, taking into account the different needs

of men, women and children; enhance contingency planning and emergency response for potential mass influx; and reinforce institutions, governmental and non-governmental, locally and nationally.

Operations

Based on projections of steady arrivals (and excluding potential large-scale outflows), UNHCR is using the following planning figures for 2000: (i) about 2,200 refugees and asylum-seekers, mainly Colombians, and (ii) 2,400 Colombians in a “refugee-like situation”, in Panama and Ecuador. Priorities are as follows, country by country:

UNHCR plans to open a Liaison Office, in Quito, **Ecuador**, in late 1999. Despite the country’s chronic socio-economic crisis, asylum policies are generally conducted in line with international standards and in full cooperation with UNHCR. In 2000, UNHCR’s support will be directed at provinces most affected by the arrival of Colombians searching for sanctuary (i.e. Carchi, Imbabura and Sucumbios). In border areas, UNHCR will help about 1,000 people integrate locally. Health and education facilities will be reinforced, and operational partners supported. Training courses will be organised for police and immigration officials. UNHCR will continue to help train and expand the National Eligibility Commission, and provide legal expertise for the Human Rights Plan, and for new legislation on refugee children (enacting the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child).

Armed conflict in the neighbouring Uraba region of Colombia resulted in further arrivals in **Panama** in mid-1999. In 2000, UNHCR will encourage the recently elected Government to amend refugee legislation in line with international standards. Legal expertise and training will be provided for the National Eligibility Commission, the police and the *Oficina Nacional para Atencion a los Refugiados*. In Darien and San Blas provinces, the focus will be on emergency assistance and community services, in cooperation with the Vicarage of El Darien and a national NGO.

In **Venezuela**, awareness of the humanitarian implications of the Colombian conflict has increased greatly since the arrival of 3,500 Colombians in June 1999. The influx prompted the Government to set up a Technical Commission for the coordination of all activities related to Colombian arrivals and to draft a legal norm to address the problem, pending adoption of a Constitutional provision on asylum. To enhance access to asylum, UNHCR

will provide legal expertise to the Technical Commission, continue negotiations with the Government on the adoption of national refugee legislation and train civilian and military authorities on refugee matters, especially in border areas. Emergency preparedness will be stepped up, particularly in Tachira, Apure and Zulia States. UNHCR will boost the limited capacity of NGO partners in the area and forge a “protection network” among local authorities, NGOs and the Church. Public awareness of refugees’ rights and UNHCR’s mandate will be promoted at all levels of government and society.

In **Colombia** itself, internal displacement has continued to soar. According to the *Consultoria para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento* (CODHES), 123,000 people were forcibly displaced between January and June 1999. A conservative estimate of the number of people displaced since 1996 would be 800,000. Expulsion rates are highest wherever guerrillas and paramilitaries struggle for territorial control (i.e. Antioquia, Bolivar, Norte de Santander, Cordoba and Valle de Cauca). UNHCR’s Operational Plan for IDPs in Colombia covers the provision by UNHCR of technical cooperation and expertise in line with the Memorandum of Intent signed by the Government of Colombia and UNHCR in January 1999. For priorities in 2000 see insert on “Strengthening the Institutional Framework for IDPs in Colombia”.

The scope and complex causes of the IDP phenomenon clearly exceed the mandate and capacities of any one agency. A Common Approach among UN agencies (UNDP, WFP, UNICEF, IOM and OHCHR) and linkages with key agencies like ICRC and ECHO are therefore essential. An interface is also sought with the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank, both of which work to alleviate poverty. Following recommendations of the UN Secretary-General’s Representative for IDPs and OCHA, and an endorsement by the working group of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, UNHCR has been entrusted with the role of facilitating interaction on IDP issues between UN agencies in Colombia. In 2000 there will be more consultation with the Government on policy as well as linkages at the programme level with relevant agencies.

The UNHCR office in Bogotá will benefit from the expertise of a Senior World Bank Adviser, through the World Bank/UNHCR staff exchange programme. The Office will be reinforced by a security officer, following a review of staff safety. Field-based offices will be opened progressively in

Barrancabermeja and Apartado, while Putumayo will be covered from Bogotá. Six United Nations Volunteers (two per location) will maintain a field presence and premises will be shared with other

UN agencies whenever feasible. The UNHCR office in Colombia will closely coordinate with the Regional Office in Venezuela regarding eventual voluntary repatriation and monitoring of borders.

Strengthening the Institutional Framework for IDPs in Colombia

UNHCR's overall objectives in Colombia over a three-year period (July 1999–June 2002) are: to strengthen the national institutional framework for IDPs in line with fundamental protection principles; and to contribute to peace initiatives by ensuring that humanitarian and political initiatives are mutually reinforcing. Priorities for 2000 under the Operational Plan for Colombia are as follows:

Overall Legal and Institutional Framework:

UNHCR will focus its support on the *Red de Solidaridad* (RSS), the designated national executive agency for IDPs, in order to ensure an integrated, effective response to IDP needs. A priority will be the ongoing structuring and staffing of the Joint Technical Team within the RSS which coordinates and helps train and expand local-level entities working with IDPs. UNHCR will also support the creation of a national information system on IDPs, the adoption of safe registration procedures and address the problem of IDP land and property rights.

Prevention: Key priorities will be the elaboration of preventive strategies in conflict areas together with institutions such as the Human Rights Ombudsman, and the development of an early warning system in the RSS. Community-based protection mechanisms will be strengthened, with emphasis on vulnerable groups, especially Afro-Colombians, women and children. A joint UNICEF/UNHCR programme will aim to prevent forced recruitment of IDP children.

Emergency Response: Given the scope of the IDP crisis in Colombia, a high priority will be given to improving the coverage and quality of emergency assistance, in line with international standards. This will lean heavily on the findings of a joint evaluation by UNHCR and agencies involved in relief (ECHO, ICRC and the

RSS). UNHCR will also encourage self-sufficiency and advocate reducing dependency among IDPs on relief. To this end, UNHCR will share with the RSS its expertise and world-wide experience in running Quick Impact Projects. Specific protection strategies for emergencies will be promoted for humanitarian workers, indigenous groups, women and children.

Solutions: With the current expansion of the conflict, the best approach to solutions, even though limited to the medium-term at this stage, involves availing IDPs of all options (resettlement, local settlement and reintegration) in line with internationally accepted norms of safety and dignity. UNHCR will provide technical assistance to RSS, NGOs and IDP representatives in the design of community-based projects for selected municipalities. Leadership training, especially of women, will be emphasised during the return process. UNHCR will also advocate the provision by the state of regular documentation to IDPs to restore their rights as citizens, with special emphasis on women and children. UNHCR will support a joint documentation campaign with the National Registry as well as the creation of a Mobile Unit within the Registry to work in IDP settlements.

Advocacy and Dissemination: Official recognition of the IDP problem is relatively recent; public information is limited and often inaccurate. Advocacy and dissemination form an essential complement to UNHCR's technical cooperation programme. A broad-based media campaign will be initiated jointly with the United Nations Information Centre. A series of joint dissemination activities on IDP rights will also be conducted with the HR Ombudsman, UNICEF and NGOs.



SOUTHERN SOUTH AMERICA

Recent Developments

Despite an overall increase in asylum-seekers, governments in the sub-region continue to apply liberal asylum policies. However, a financial crisis has seriously affected the Southern Cone countries. This has in turn affected UNHCR's efforts to achieve self-reliance and local integration of refugees. The number of assisted refugees in Southern South America is 4,000, out of a total population of concern of 10,000.

UNHCR works with non-governmental partners throughout the sub-region in order to expand

local integration opportunities. Local partners finance a third of all refugee programmes from their own resources. In 2000, UNHCR plans to capitalise on these positive trends and explore the potential for private sector fund-raising.

A framework resettlement agreement signed with the Government of Chile in early 1999 laid the foundation for international solidarity in the region. Under this agreement, a first group of refugees from South-Eastern Europe arrived in Chile in June. The Government of Brazil followed suit by signing a similar agreement in August 1999, and encouraging progress is being made in Argentina. In Paraguay and Uruguay, the drafting of a national law on refugees is well underway.

Strategic Objectives

UNHCR's primary objectives are to strengthen the protection framework by incorporating the norms and principles of international refugee law (with a gender perspective) into national structures and procedures, and to work closely with governments to enact new and/or update existing refugee legislation. UNHCR will also encourage accession to the Conventions on Statelessness. This in turn is expected to enable UNHCR to progressively hand over responsibility for refugee protection to national societies. This will be achieved by providing partners with adequate technical support and expertise. UNHCR's partnership with academic institutions will be expanded and linkages will be formed with other relevant organisations.

Until the above goals have been met, UNHCR will work to harmonise assistance criteria for refugees and review current implementing arrangements. UNHCR will continue to support the process of local integration and self-sufficiency for refugees, particularly women. Building on the positive experiences of 1999, UNHCR will consolidate its alliances with private sector partners. This involves building constituencies and awareness for UNHCR's activities through a network of journalists, media publicity campaigns, and where possible the creation of national associations for private sector fund-raising.

Operations

In **Argentina**, UNHCR will help the Government respond to the needs of refugees and handle status determination. This will involve training officials within the National Migration Bureau as well as border guards, police officers and the Documentation Department. UNHCR will also assist in updating national refugee legislation to incorporate gender issues. Public awareness activities will involve promoting the creation of a national association "Argentina for UNHCR" and negotiating agreements with legal and social organisations to reinforce the protection and assistance network. The resettlement agreement is expected to be formalised in 2000.

UNHCR will encourage the Government of **Brazil** to accede to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and help implement the resettlement agreement. The National Committee for Refugees will be trained and expanded to deal effectively with eligibility issues and facilitate local integration. Existing partnerships with civil

society and the private sector (including the faculty of law at the University of Sao Paulo) will be strengthened and new ones will be explored.

In **Chile**, UNHCR will support national structures in the implementation of the resettlement project and local integration activities at large. Training courses will be organised for the police as well as the Migration Department.

UNHCR will actively encourage the Government of **Bolivia** to adopt a procedure for refugee status determination. The institutional framework will be strengthened through the establishment of a Permanent Secretariat of the National Commission as well as by developing a protection network with non-governmental partners.

In **Uruguay** and **Paraguay**, UNHCR will establish a legal and institutional framework that guarantees appropriate treatment of refugees and asylum-seekers. An assistance strategy that enhances self-sufficiency will be promoted.

SOUTH AMERICA	
BUDGET (USD)	
Country	Annual Programme
<i>Northern South America</i>	
Colombia	1,531,973
Ecuador	165,297
Venezuela	1,509,560
Regional Projects*	912,200
<i>Southern South America</i>	
Argentina	1,140,322
Regional Projects**	2,420,800
Sub-total	7,680,152
Regional Bureau at Headquarters	566,900
Total	8,247,052

* Covers activities in Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Panama, Peru, Suriname and Venezuela.
 ** Covers activities in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay.