

# The Americas

## Working environment

With nine elections during the year, the political landscape of Latin America has changed significantly in 2006. Now, with the transition over, there is room for dialogue with governments on their asylum obligations and, more specifically, their implementation of the Mexico Plan of Action. Signed by 20 States, the Plan is a continent-wide framework for the protection of displaced people. By adopting it, governments have committed themselves to strengthening refugee protection and implementing an integrated approach to durable solutions.

The conflict in Colombia and its consequences on human displacement are the main focus of UNHCR's work in Latin America. The Government of Colombia recently acknowledged that there are some 3 to 3.5 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the country, of whom some 2 million are registered. Escalating violence has induced new displacement, particularly among indigenous communities. Nariño province, in the south-east of the country near the border with Ecuador, witnessed some of the worst fighting and several waves of mass displacement in 2006.

Ecuador, Costa Rica, Panama and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela have felt the effects of the humanitarian crisis in Colombia directly, with large numbers of people fleeing into their territories. The conflict is also having an impact on Brazil, particularly in the Amazon region, where authorities report the presence of some 4,000 Colombians in need of protection.

It is estimated that up to 500,000 Colombians of concern to UNHCR have fled their country and sought protection throughout the region. Although most continue to seek asylum in neighbouring countries, a growing number are opting to go farther afield for security reasons, particularly to Chile, Bolivia and Argentina. Consequently, the number of asylum-seekers in these countries is on the increase.



To ensure effective coverage in the Caribbean, UNHCR has stepped up its presence in North America and the Caribbean. The Office's first priority in the region is to update contingency plans for any major outflows.

In North America, Canada ended its "direct-back" policy, under which asylum-seekers arriving at land borders were sent back to the United States with an appointment for an eligibility interview in Canada at a later stage, without knowing if they would qualify for an exception under the Safe Third Country Agreement signed by the two countries. The "direct-back" policy risked undermining the principle of *non-refoulement*.

In the United States, the application of the "material support" bar to admission to the country under anti-terrorist laws is of grave concern to UNHCR. These provisions have been used to deny access to the United States to people with genuine fears of persecution, as well as to refugees in need of resettlement. UNHCR and the Government are discussing this issue.



Many Colombians have fled to remote areas in neighbouring countries, but have not requested asylum. UNHCR will ensure their basic rights are protected. *UNHCR / B. Heger*

UNHCR continues to work closely with the United States and Canada on their resettlement programmes.

## Strategic objectives

UNHCR's strategic objectives for the Americas region are to:

- Strengthen the protection of refugees and internally displaced people in Latin America and find durable solutions for them under the framework of the Mexico Plan of Action.
- Promote and consolidate a viable resettlement programme for Latin American countries and improve the use of resettlement as a strategic protection tool and responsibility-sharing mechanism.
- In North America, maintain high protection standards for refugees and asylum-seekers and increase political support for UNHCR's operations.

UNHCR tries to ensure a coherent protection response in all countries affected by the conflict in Colombia. One of the main challenges is to ensure the basic rights of Colombians who — despite not being registered or

having undergone a formal refugee status determination (RSD) procedure — are in need of protection. Accordingly, UNHCR's protection strategy will target almost half a million Colombians in need of protection who do not have access to the Office for security and other reasons. UNHCR will also promote the self-reliance and socio-economic integration of refugees, IDPs and others of concern in urban centres and border areas.

Within Colombia, UNHCR's priority is to bridge the gap between the country's sophisticated legislation on displacement issues and its implementation. To this end, and following discussions with the Government, UNHCR is expanding its activities in the country. New offices have been opened in Bucaramanga and Villavicencio. In 2007, a new office will be opened in Medellín. In order to ensure close inter-agency cooperation, the UN Thematic Group on Displacement has been reactivated under the leadership of UNHCR.

In southern Latin America, UNHCR will develop the intra-regional resettlement programme to ease pressure on those countries in the region receiving large number of refugees. The sustainability of the programme depends on the integration of resettled refugees into their host communities. The Office will also strengthen

asylum legislation and the functioning of eligibility commissions; monitor sensitive border areas; and train border officials in identifying those in need of international protection within broader migration movements.

In Central America, Mexico and Cuba, UNHCR's main objectives are to ensure the protection of refugees within broader migratory flows, in particular by monitoring the southern border of Mexico and strengthening national asylum systems; and to promote the naturalization of long-staying refugees.

In the Caribbean, UNHCR aims to be prepared to react immediately to any group of asylum-seekers in the region and assist governments in making prompt RSD decisions. The Office will also build protection networks with NGO partners and the legal and academic communities, besides strengthening its network of honorary representatives in the region.

In Canada and the United States, UNHCR will focus on ensuring political and financial support for its global operations. Furthermore, the Office will check that asylum-seekers have full access to RSD procedures and that persons of concern have access to alternatives to detention and, if detained, that conditions are humane. Finally, UNHCR will try to make certain that gender-

based RSD claims are considered in a manner consistent with international standards and that separated children are treated appropriately.

## Challenges

National security concerns throughout the continent make it increasingly difficult to protect asylum-seekers and refugees. Nonetheless, the Mexico Plan of Action has renewed commitment to the refugee cause and provided a platform for addressing related issues within a regional perspective.

The increase in movements of irregular migrants within and to the region has led States to develop measures to manage migration and control their borders better. In this context, there is a need to mainstream protection to maintain the asylum space in the region.

Despite the challenges, a spirit of solidarity and generosity towards refugees and asylum-seekers persists throughout Latin America. However, longer-term support of the international community is required if programmes under the Mexico Plan of Action, particularly in regional resettlement and local integration, are to be sustained.

Budget (USD)				
Country	2006	2007		
	AB	AB	SB	Total
UNHCR office in New York	2,780,654	3,002,256	0	3,002,256
Canada	1,638,952	1,877,024	0	1,877,024
Cuba	400,000	287,600	0	287,600
United States of America <sup>1</sup>	3,689,220	3,477,033	0	3,477,033
Sub-total North America and the Caribbean	8,508,826	8,643,913	0	8,643,913
Argentina regional office <sup>2</sup>	2,322,652	2,302,621	0	2,302,621
Brazil	1,787,569	2,353,162	0	2,353,162
Colombia <sup>3</sup>	8,443,625	353,362	13,255,230	13,608,592
Costa Rica	1,705,293	1,926,507	0	1,926,507
Ecuador	3,944,085	4,446,802	0	4,446,802
Mexico regional office <sup>4</sup>	2,765,089	2,281,010	0	2,281,010
Panama	857,493	847,304	0	847,304
Venezuela regional office <sup>5</sup>	2,941,696	3,045,617	0	3,045,617
Sub-total Latin America	24,767,502	17,556,385	13,255,230	30,811,615
Total Americas	33,276,328	26,200,298	13,255,230	39,455,528

<sup>1</sup> Includes legal assistance and durable solutions for asylum-seekers and refugees in the United States, and refugee protection and capacity building in the Caribbean (Trinidad and Tobago, the Dominican Republic and Jamaica).

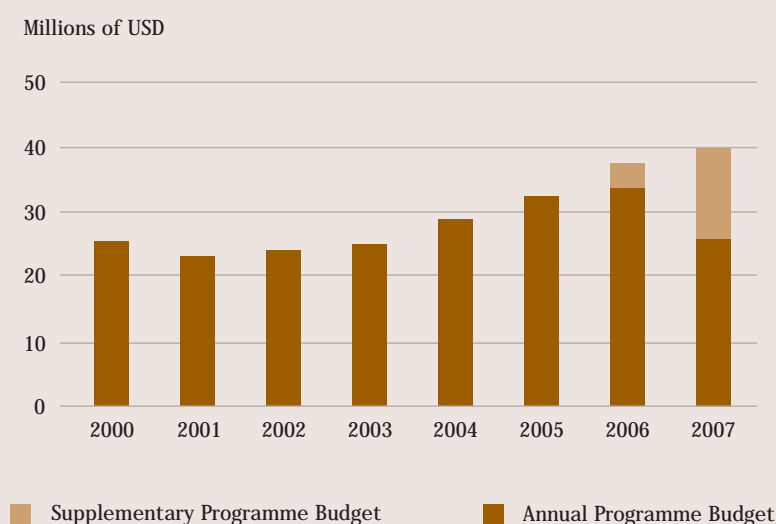
<sup>2</sup> Includes local integration in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay, as well as resettlement in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay.

<sup>3</sup> In 2007, the requirements for internally displaced people in Colombia are presented in a Supplementary Programme Budget.

<sup>4</sup> Includes local integration in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Belize.

<sup>5</sup> Includes local integration in northern South America.

### Annual and Supplementary Programme Budgets 2000 - 2007



Note: The figures for 2000 to 2005 represent the final revised Annual and Supplementary Programme Budgets as presented in the Global Reports 2000-2005. For 2006, the revised Annual and Supplementary Programme Budgets as at 1 September 2006 have been used. For 2007, the initial ExCom-approved Annual Programme Budget has been used. Annual Programme Budget and the Supplementary Programme Budget for IDPs in Colombia have been used.