

AMERICAS





| Working environment |

Various Latin American countries host a total of more than 400,000 refugees, asylum-seekers and others in need of international protection. Since the adoption of the Mexico Plan of Action in 2004, the legal framework for the protection of refugees in the region has improved. Fourteen countries have now incorporated the broader protection principles of the 1984 Cartagena Declaration into their domestic legal systems, with Colombia and Chile being the latest to do so. A major development in 2010 has been the Enhanced Registration exercise in Ecuador, which has seen some 28,000 refugees registered and documented. With the exception of Cuba, Guyana and some smaller Caribbean States, all the countries in the region are party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol.

In the aftermath of the earthquake that devastated Haiti, two girls who have lost their home live with a host family.

UNHCR / J. BJÖRGVINSSON

Canada and the United States of America receive large numbers of asylum-seekers. Both have well-established asylum systems and their acceptance rates are among the highest of any industrialized countries. They also receive the highest numbers of resettled refugees in the world. In the United States, court interventions have addressed the definition of membership of a particular social group as a criterion for refugee status, and the interpretation of gang-related cases. In Canada, the reform of the refugee system has resulted in a more protection-oriented law that preserves a full first-instance hearing, and has created an appeal procedure for all claimants receiving a negative decision.

In the Caribbean, priorities have been dominated by the humanitarian response to the massive earthquake that destroyed Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince, in January 2010. UNHCR provided initial emergency relief and shelter for more than 200,000 beneficiaries in and outside Port-au-Prince. Many of the injured were evacuated to the Dominican Republic. UNHCR continues to support the protection cluster led by OHCHR, implementing quick impact projects along the border with the Dominican Republic, and in remote areas outside Port-au-Prince. An office in Santo Domingo was opened in June 2010.

In spite of positive actions by the Government, Colombia continues to suffer from a severe displacement crisis. More than 3 million people have been displaced within the country, while hundreds of thousands have sought asylum in other countries in the region. The newly-elected Colombian Government has reaffirmed its commitment to address the humanitarian situation. It has swiftly re-established ties with neighbouring countries, and put refugee issues on the agenda for bilateral cooperation. Though this environment offers new opportunities to strengthen the protection of refugees and find durable solutions, the protection environment in the region could be adversely affected by growing concerns about security among governments.



In the Southern Cone, there has been significant progress in the development of national and regional protection and legal frameworks. The advances include the enactment of a refugee law in Chile, the regulation of the migration law in Argentina and agreement to a first draft refugee law in Bolivia. Other positive steps are the enhancement of refugee status determination procedures in many countries, and the development of standard operating procedures for the identification of trafficked persons and of arrangements to assist them.

Though some countries already provide legal residence and documentation to persons identified as stateless, a lack of resources has impeded more robust implementation of activities designed to establish formal procedures for the determination of the status of these persons.

In Central America and the Caribbean, refugees travel in complex mixed migratory movements. The region's political climate is dominated by concerns over national security and migration control, often to the detriment of international protection needs. The Regional Conference on UNHCR's 10-Point Plan of Action, organized in Costa Rica in November 2009, identified the main protection challenges in a complex mixed-migration context. UNHCR and IOM jointly presented project proposals focusing on extra-continental migration, the setting up of profiling and referral mechanisms, and training for immigration and border officials on protection issues arising from migration movements. These activities will be implemented in Mexico and in countries of Central America, and will be linked to the Regional Conference on Migration (the Puebla Process).

| Strategic priorities in 2011 |

- Contribute to the implementation of high protection standards in North America by monitoring asylum systems in the United States and Canada.
- Strengthen the protection of refugees, IDPs and other persons of concern to UNHCR in Latin America through the 2004 Mexico Plan of Action.
- Find durable solutions through the three strategic pillars of the Mexico Plan of Action: Borders of Solidarity, Cities of Solidarity and Resettlement in Solidarity.
- Strengthen partnerships to improve the protection of refugees and IDPs and to cope better with mixed migration and statelessness.
- Ensure financial and political support for UNHCR.
- Improve the security of staff and ensure the efficiency of operations by optimizing the use of resources.

In North America, UNHCR monitors and supports national refugee protection mechanisms, builds awareness of the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers, and seeks to secure political and financial support for its operations. The Office will continue to work with the concerned governments to achieve the highest standards of refugee protection.

UNHCR's strategy in Latin America is based on the Mexico Plan of Action. The Plan comprises three main pillars that address urban displacement, protection in the sensitive border areas and resettlement.

The Cities of Solidarity pillar supports the local integration and self-reliance of people in need of international protection in urban areas.

Financial information

UNHCR's financial requirements in Latin America have increased steadily in recent years. This is mostly due to greater involvement with IDPs in Colombia and the reinforcement of protection for unregistered individuals in refugee-like situations in the neighbouring countries. The higher budget also takes into account greater resettlement needs in some Latin American countries. Furthermore, the cost of ensuring and improving staff security has added to costs.

For 2011, the budget amounts to USD 97.4 million, and will cover needs identified through comprehensive assessments in all countries in the region.

It aims to ensure that refugees receive health care, education, access to employment and housing on par with services provided to nationals. UNHCR implements income-generating projects for refugees and promotes their free access to the labour market. National and local governments play an important role in this context by implementing refugee-friendly policies and allocating funds for integration programmes.

The Borders of Solidarity pillar helps UNHCR to address protection concerns at borders—primarily those between Colombia and its neighbours. Local integration along the borders is promoted by linking refugee assistance to national and regional development plans. This approach benefits refugees and local host communities.

The Solidarity Resettlement pillar continues to be a responsibility-sharing and protection tool. Participating countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay) have reaffirmed their commitment to this programme which, in 2010, has resettled 58 persons and since its creation in 2004, more than 1,000 persons.

Under a decentralized structure of UNHCR's Bureau for the Americas, the Deputy Director's office was established in Panama in July 2009. This office works closely with the UN Regional Director's team, and provides legal and technical support to UNHCR's operations in Latin America. It also works to develop regional emergency preparedness and response capacity in Latin America.

Challenges

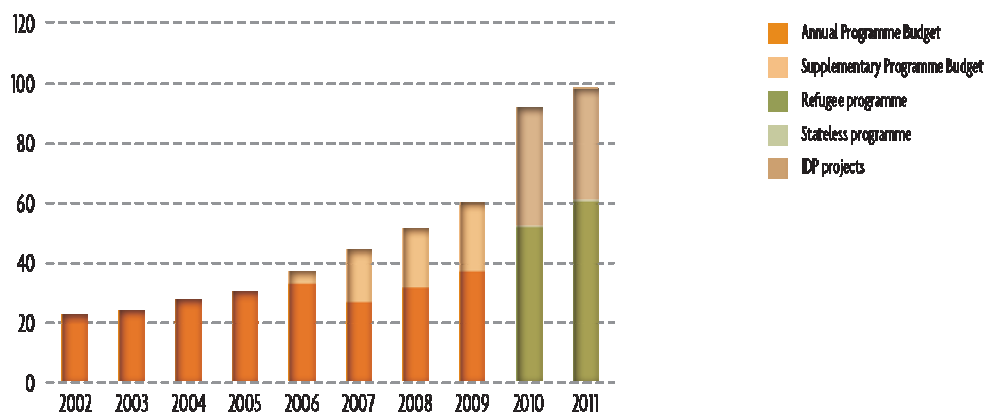
In North America, UNHCR does not have the capacity to monitor all ports of entry, nor to visit all detention centres and areas where asylum claims are being processed, including with respect to compliance with the terms of the Safe Third Country Agreement.

Throughout Latin America, many refugees find it difficult to achieve local integration and economic self-reliance, due to unemployment and to limited access to labour markets, partly for lack of required documentation. The region continues to receive a growing number of asylum-seekers and economic migrants, especially from the Horn of Africa and the Middle East, posing new challenges to sometimes fragile asylum systems.

In Colombia, IDPs continue to face poor security in return areas, difficulties in gaining access to land, a dearth of opportunities for employment and limited State response to the particular needs of displaced women and girls. In 2010, UNHCR has sought to increase the focus of its work at the community level, in an effort to ensure the positive impact of Government policy to guarantee the rights of IDPs. ■

UNHCR's budget in the Americas 2002 - 2011

Millions (USD)



UNHCR'S BUDGET IN THE AMERICAS (USD)

Operation	Revised budget	PILLAR 1	PILLAR 2	PILLAR 3	PILLAR 4	Total
		Refugee programme	Stateless programme	Reintegration projects	IDP projects	
	2010	2011				
NORTH AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN						
Canada	1,802,051	2,078,946	0	0	0	2,078,946
United States of America Regional Office ¹	17,469,981	5,639,323	279,057	0	4,142,080	10,060,460
Subtotal	19,272,032	7,718,269	279,057	0	4,142,080	12,139,406
LATIN AMERICA						
Argentina Regional Office ²	5,415,632	5,039,958	188,018	0	0	5,227,976
Brazil	3,519,965	4,783,864	0	0	0	4,783,864
Colombia	28,493,358	1,397,596	0	0	32,742,242	34,139,838
Costa Rica	2,318,732	2,323,913	0	0	0	2,323,913
Ecuador	16,422,140	21,795,270	0	0	0	21,795,270
Mexico	1,730,414	2,052,649	0	0	0	2,052,649
Panama ³	6,750,523	6,813,039	0	0	0	6,813,039
Venezuela (Bolivarian Rep.)	6,749,298	8,092,882	0	0	0	8,092,882
Subtotal	71,400,062	52,299,171	188,018	0	32,742,242	85,229,431
Total	90,672,094	60,017,440	467,075	0	36,884,322	97,368,837

¹ Covers 15 independent countries and 15 overseas territories or departments, principally in the Caribbean.

² Includes Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay.

³ Includes the Legal Unit in Costa Rica and the Deputy Director's Office in Panama, which covers Cuba, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua.