

Southern South America

Operational highlights

- In Argentina and Uruguay, new refugee laws were passed. These are in line with international protection standards and take into account gender- and age-specific needs.
- The protection network in Brazil facilitated local integration of refugees and the provision of timely information on border movements.
- Brazil approved a decree enabling the Government to grant complementary protection to asylum-seekers who do not meet the refugee definition of the 1951 Refugee Convention, but who are in need of international protection on humanitarian grounds.

Argentina

Bolivia

Brazil

Chile

Paraguay

Uruguay

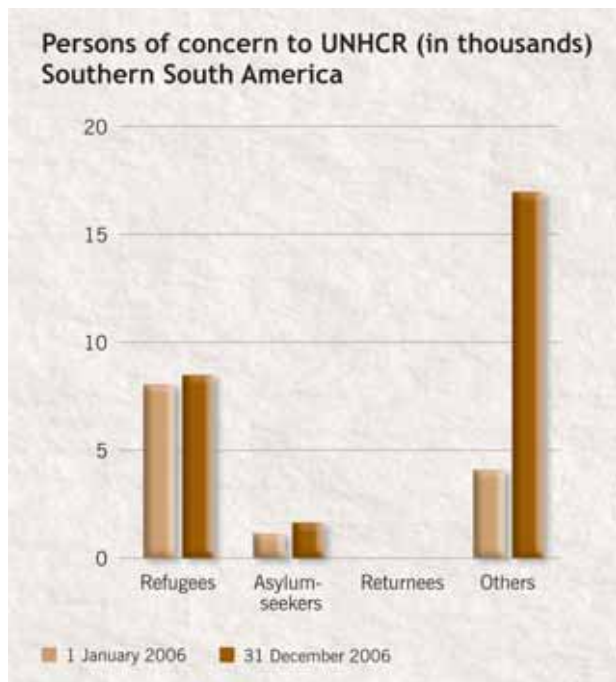
Working environment

Although development improved in most countries of the subregion, poverty, unemployment and underemployment continued to affect large parts of the population. Refugees are mostly engaged in the informal employment sector at the bottom of the income scale. In Southern South America, refugee concerns were usually subordinated by national priorities. Nonetheless, the socio-political context has been generally conducive to UNHCR's work. This may be attributed to the respect for human rights, support for refugees by politicians who have themselves been former refugees, and relative political stability in most countries of the subregion.

All countries in the region have signed the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol. The domestic legal framework in the region is contained in refugee laws and decrees which establish national refugee commissions in charge of asylum applications and durable solutions for refugees. Refugee laws are complemented by a number of decrees and

administrative regulations on issues such as residence permits, documentation and extradition. Generally, legislation is in line with international protection standards. All countries have also ratified relevant international and regional instruments on human rights and recognized the competence of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

There are some 8,500 refugees in the region. Most of them are from Latin America, but there are also a significant number of African refugees, particularly in Argentina and Brazil. In 2006, some 1,900 new asylum-seekers were reported in the region, compared to some 1,400 in the previous year. The increase in asylum applications was most significant in Chile and Bolivia. The new arrivals are mainly Colombians, except in Argentina where half of the new arrivals are Africans. In Brazil, UNHCR's assessment missions to the Amazon region revealed the presence of an undetermined but significant number of Colombians in need of international protection.



Achievements and impact

In 2006, refugee laws were passed in Argentina and Uruguay. Both countries adopted national legislation that is in line with international protection standards and establishes fair and efficient refugee status determination procedures.

Much effort was spent on the reinforcement of national eligibility commissions. As a result, the backlog of pending asylum claims was reduced and the quality of decisions improved in Argentina. In Bolivia, an agreement was reached with the Refugee Eligibility Committee on a capacity-building project that includes registration and documentation mechanisms for refugees. In Chile, progress was reported in refugee status determination as a result of on-the-job training at commission meetings. In Uruguay, a tripartite agreement for institutional strengthening was signed between UNHCR, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and UNHCR's implementing partner. The first training activities, targeting the eligibility commission's technical secretariat, government officials and civil society actors, started towards the end of the year.

In Brazil, the Ministry of Labour removed the word *refugee* from work permits. This facilitated local integration and reduced the potential for misinterpretation and stigmatization of refugees.

In 2006, much emphasis was given to strengthening national and regional protection networks. Efforts by the Office resulted in an extension of the networks and consolidation of existing alliances. In Chile, an agreement was reached between UNHCR's implementing partner and the dioceses in the town of Arica, through which assistance and advice will be provided to the increasing number of Colombian refugees and asylum-seekers. In Brazil, protection networks were enlarged to comprise more than 100 organizations throughout the country. Partners in Brazil have provided emergency assistance to Colombian asylum-seekers in the Amazon region, received resettled families from Ecuador and Costa Rica, and provided cross-border information. An agreement was also signed with the Special Secretary for the Promotion of Racial Equality and municipal authorities of the city of Santos to improve standards of treatment for mostly African asylum-seekers arriving in Brazil's biggest port town.

Constraints

Due to the 20 per cent capping of budgets, UNHCR was unable to provide assistance in line with the established minimum standards. This has created hardship among refugees and asylum-seekers, as well as disturbances for UNHCR's partners. The consequences were particularly

dramatic in Chile and to some extent in Bolivia. It should, however be noted, that the difficult financial situation prompted the Government of Chile to assume additional responsibility by contributing funds to UNHCR's implementing partner.

Operations

In most countries of the region, a growing number of refugees benefited from government welfare programmes, such as scholarships for education, legal assistance, emergency accommodation and cultural and economic opportunities.

One of UNHCR's main objectives is to facilitate local integration for refugees, in line with the Mexico Plan of Action, according to refugees, the main obstacles to successful integration are delays in documentation, lack of access to appropriate housing and unemployment. Consequently, more attention was given to these issues. Financial constraints and budget capping hindered UNHCR to fully achieve this objective. Consequently, the Office put much emphasis on lobbying for more government and civil society support towards refugees and asylum-seekers. As a result, key ministries and local administrations included refugees in public programmes in some of the countries. Joint involvement in participatory assessments fostered coordination and planning between UNHCR and partners. In Argentina, a concrete result from this joint participatory assessment was the commitment by the City of Buenos Aires to assume responsibility for unaccompanied and separated children. Similar results were achieved in Brazil and Chile.

In **Brazil**, refugees affected by HIV and AIDS continued to have equal access to existing government programmes. UNHCR strengthened its collaboration with UNAIDS to promote family planning among refugees and foster support to extremely vulnerable refugees. The national refugee commission provided psychological care for victims of violence, including women victims of domestic violence. As a result of the growing number of Colombian women asylum-seekers, emergency accommodation was provided for them in São Paulo by a religious institution. Combined efforts by UNHCR and civil society, allowed for some 19 per cent of resettled refugee families to move into their own houses. An agreement was signed between an NGO and a private university in Rio de Janeiro for the provision of 30 scholarships for refugees. UNHCR covered costs related to the professional training of 141 refugees (40 per cent women). Some 400 refugees received support in finding a job. A similar number of refugee children and adolescents (50 per cent girls) received education grants. Language courses were given to 147 refugees to facilitate their local integration. Some 470 newly-arrived

refugees and asylum-seekers received subsistence allowances for the first few months after their arrival.

The **Regional Office in Argentina** provided material assistance and/or counselling to some 2,800 individuals. Some 1,000 new asylum-seekers received a subsistence allowance upon their arrival. Nearly 400 asylum-seekers and refugees (40 per cent women) received health assistance. Special attention was given to people with specific needs, such as HIV-infected people, pregnant women and people with heart problems. More than 300 asylum-seekers and refugees were assisted in obtaining documentation as a first step to ensuring their enjoyment of basic rights. Nearly 400 refugee children and adolescents were given education grants, follow-up and educational counselling. The same was provided to 134 extra-continental asylum-seekers and refugees who attended language and cultural orientation courses. Female heads of households were given equal access to assistance and additional support through pre-school allowances in order to facilitate their integration within the labour market. UNHCR offered training for 125 refugees through agreements with

private and public institutions in a variety of fields, such as carpentry, car mechanics, tourism, computer training, electricity, clothes design and accounting. Microcredit programmes continued to facilitate self-reliance in Argentina, Chile and Bolivia. Forty-five per cent of the first-time credits were given to women. In Argentina, the Government provided financial support for microcredits to one of UNHCR implementing partners in the context of a new law that was passed towards the end of the year.

Due to a very tight budget that was further subject to a 20 per cent cap, only some 117 refugees could be resettled in Argentina, Chile and Brazil. Some 30 per cent of the resettled refugees in Brazil benefited from fast-track procedures. All of the resettled refugees received subsistence allowance and temporary assistance for housing, education, health and documentation. Psychosocial counselling, legal advice and orientation on employment and housing possibilities were provided through partnerships with national and local authorities and specialized institutions.

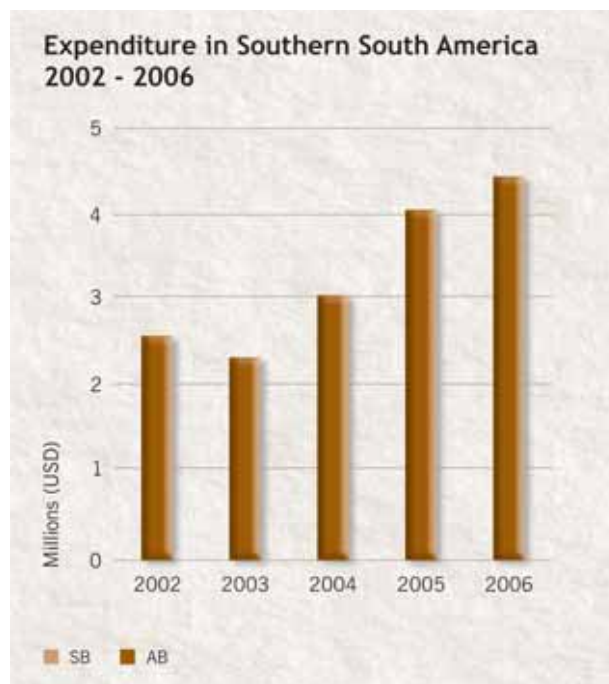


UNHCR's Goodwill Ambassador Osvaldo Laport with refugee children in Argentina.

UNHCR's advocacy efforts were extensively publicized in national and international media. Government officials in the region participated actively in awareness-raising and advocacy activities. In Argentina, the Office launched a private sector fund raising campaign that produced some USD 57,000 in new contributions for UNHCR's programmes worldwide.

Financial information

National governments, local authorities and private donors provided funds to UNHCR's implementing partners, which reduced the negative impact of budget caps on refugees and asylum-seekers. Additional funding for resettlement activities was received late in the year, but could not help in reaching the resettlement targets. UNHCR's expenditure levels for Southern South America have increased steadily since 2003, as countries in the region have become destinations for resettled refugees.



Budget and expenditure (USD)		
Country	AB	
	Final budget	Expenditure
Argentina	912,105	820,517
Brazil	2,376,207	2,238,009
Regional activities ¹	1,394,328	1,387,261
Total	4,682,641	4,445,787

¹ Includes local integration of refugees in Southern South America.

Restricted voluntary contributions (USD)		
Earmarking	Donor	AB
Southern South America	Norway	210,510
	Private donors in Argentina	54,841
	Sweden	251,256
	United States	570,845
	Sub-total	1,087,452
Brazil	Norway	100,000
	United States	112,350
	Sub-total	212,350
Total		1,299,802