

A man with glasses is looking at a laptop screen in a workshop setting. The background is slightly blurred, showing a sewing machine and other equipment. The overall tone is professional and focused.

Southern South America

Recent developments

In several parts of this region political instability has been exacerbated by socio-economic difficulties. During 2005, serious political and social unrest hit Bolivia, where the change of government and the organization of elections have affected the local integration opportunities for refugees. UNHCR updated contingency plans for possible displacement within Bolivia and across its borders. In Argentina, the legal framework was recently strengthened by the adoption in the Senate of new asylum legislation compatible with international refugee protection standards. The major challenge in the region remains the local integration of some 9,000 refugees in economies with high unemployment rates. The search for sustainable durable solutions, as promoted in the Mexico Plan of Action, has been increased. Refugee self-reliance is being enhanced through micro-credit and employment schemes which address the specific needs of refugee women and promote their participation.

Following up on commitments made in the Mexico Plan of Action, several Governments in the region have stepped up implementation of

Argentina

Bolivia

Brazil

Chile

Paraguay

Uruguay



Strategic objectives

In line with the Mexico Plan of Action, UNHCR's main objectives in southern South America are to strengthen the legal framework at national and regional levels through promotion of new refugee legislation and the building of national capacities; enhance refugee self-reliance as a critical step in the pursuit of local integration; reinforce the resettlement strategy in the region by consolidating the existing resettlement programmes in Brazil and Chile and supporting new resettlement initiatives in Argentina and Uruguay; improve public awareness to reduce xenophobia; and enlarge existing protection networks and reinforce border monitoring.

new resettlement programmes. In Brazil, the newly reopened UNHCR office addressed the integration challenges of a growing number of resettled refugees, and emergency resettlement procedures were implemented for Colombian refugees arriving from Costa Rica and Ecuador. The programme also has special measures for the reception and integration of women-at-risk. In Chile, the Government established a new department for refugees and started resettlement programmes which facilitate local integration. Both the Brazilian and Chilean Governments have undertaken selection missions to Ecuador and Costa Rica to identify refugees for resettlement. In Argentina, an agreement was signed to undertake a new resettlement programme for Colombian refugees. Ongoing talks with the Government of Uruguay about a new resettlement programme are opening up new and viable durable solutions for Colombian refugees at risk within Latin America.

Operations

In **Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay** and **Uruguay**, UNHCR will build national capacities and support the adoption of new refugee legislation in accordance with international standards. UNHCR will continue to review new legislation projects and eligibility procedures and will encourage the incorporation of the broader refugee definition, as reflected in the 1984 Cartagena Declaration.

The Office will be monitoring any national or Common Market of the Southern Cone (MERCOSUR) initiatives that may have adverse implications for refugees and asylum seekers, providing technical advice. The regional harmonization process in MERCOSUR is of special interest

to UNHCR. Due to firm opposition from Brazil, the "transfer of responsibility" agreement on harmonization of the asylum system was not adopted and was finally crossed off the agenda of the MERCOSUR migratory forum. In terms of protection of refugees within broader migration movements, the Office will develop capacity-building projects with universities in the region on potential refugees within larger migration flows, including smuggled and trafficked migrants.

The Office will develop new procedures to strengthen border monitoring in areas affected by increased population movements. In this respect protection networks will be developed with a wide range of partners, as a way to consolidate support for refugees and other persons of concern. Training of border officials will be undertaken in border areas of Brazil/Colombia, Chile/Peru and Argentina/Paraguay/Brazil. Increased presence in border areas (a project known as "Borders of Solidarity/*Fronteras Solidarias*") will aim at raising standards of treatment at the borders and improving access to refugee status determination (RSD). Among other activities, the Office and its partners will try to prevent arbitrary arrest of asylum-seekers, provide vital initial humanitarian assistance and ensure refugees' access to legal aid and protection. In Argentina and Brazil, additional efforts will be made to establish a number of legal aid clinics to serve refugees with specific protection issues.

Roughly 80 per cent of the more than 3,200 refugees in Brazil are of African origin. UNHCR established contacts with the new Ministry against Racial Discrimination to seek alternatives to local integration. If the situation in Angola improves markedly, there may be some interest in voluntary repatriation on the part of certain Angolan refugees, in which case UNHCR will facilitate the process, in coordination with the office in Luanda. However, it must be noted that most Angolan refugees in Brazil are young males who left Angola several years ago and are now reluctant to go back.

As part of the durable solutions component of the Mexico Plan of Action ("Cities of Solidarity/*Ciudades Solidarias*"), the Office is increasing its efforts to support self-reliance activities. These

activities are geared towards the local integration of refugees through initial assistance with housing and basic needs and orientation towards basic public services and job placements. In Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil and Chile existing micro-credit schemes will be reinforced, aiming at wide coverage and sustainability of the micro-finance institutions. Refugee women will participate equally in the micro-credit schemes.

The emerging resettlement programmes in the region offer both challenges and opportunities for expanding and consolidating durable solutions within the framework of the Mexico Plan of Action. The Resettlement in Solidarity programme (*Reasentamiento Solidario*) mainly addresses the protection needs of Colombian refugees in Costa Rica and Ecuador who face serious hardship and danger. This component of the Mexico Plan of Action aims at creating opportunities for durable solutions through burden sharing and South-South solidarity. The experiences of Brazil and Chile will be shared with Argentina and Uruguay, as both Governments have expressed an interest in providing resettlement opportunities for refugees and support for local integration activities.

Resettlement initiatives must take into account any shortcomings in public and private support for refugee integration in the receiving countries. Although the receiving governments are committed to support the local integration of resettled refugees, UNHCR will continue to provide basic assistance during the initial phase of the resettlement programmes. The government in question and UNHCR will have to address the longer-term local integration challenges. It is expected that some 400 refugees will be resettled in southern South America.

In the emerging resettlement countries, the development and expansion of resettlement is dependent upon appropriate selection of protection cases, formal involvement of government institutions, technical assistance to NGOs as well as an expansion of local networks of public and private partners to provide direct services to the resettled refugees. UNHCR will organize a regional resettlement meeting to discuss lessons learned and to define a strategy for the region.



Chile: A Sri Lankan refugee receiving training in sewing in the capital, Santiago. UNHCR / D. Guerrero

Southern South America will be part of the age, gender and diversity mainstreaming initiative. In Argentina, Brazil and Chile, participatory assessments will be undertaken to allow for joint planning and analysis with partners and refugees. It is expected that by collecting more field-based data and information, the identified protection risks and objectives will be addressed in a more coherent and effective way. The implementation of the age, gender and diversity mainstreaming initiative will also be part of the results-based management strategy and form an integral part of the country operations plans.

Public information and awareness will support the Office's efforts towards improving protection, local integration and resettlement of refugees in the region through a combination of visibility-raising and specific targeted activities. Visibility activities will be used to support fund raising

efforts and information materials on UNHCR's work will be disseminated. All public information activities will be coordinated with governments, agencies and refugees themselves who will actively take part in the process. The Office will draw upon a pool of dedicated volunteers who have enabled the Office to steadily expand its range of public information activities.

Budget (USD)	
Country	Annual Programme Budget
Argentina	861,452
Brazil	1,787,569
Regional activities ¹	1,461,200
Total	4,110,221

¹ Includes local integration of refugees in southern South American countries, resettlement of refugees in Chile and scholarships for refugee students.