

NEW ISSUES IN REFUGEE RESEARCH

Research Paper No. 239

A pillar of protection: solidarity resettlement for refugees in Latin America

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June 2012



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ISSN 1020-7473

Introduction

In 2004 government representatives of twenty Latin American countries gathered in Mexico to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees. One of the outcomes of the meeting was a renewed commitment to the principles of refugee protection and an agreement on specific steps and programmes to implement that commitment. The Mexico Plan of Action to Strengthen International Protection of Refugees in Latin America (MPA) emphasizes solidarity as a fundamental principle guiding state policies on refugee matters. More specifically, the MPA established as one of their action plans a regional resettlement programme as a response mechanism to the displacement of Colombian refugees, the largest refugee population in the Latin America.

It is estimated that there are 500,000 Colombian refugees in the region, but only 50,000 have been recognized as refugees according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).¹ The largest numbers of Colombian refugees are mainly in Ecuador, Venezuela, Panama and Costa Rica. In 2011 UNHCR identified more than 20,000 people in need of resettlement in the Americas, as well as a 57% capacity shortfall to ensure that resettlement of these people becomes a reality.²

The MPA acknowledges the need of urgent protection and humanitarian assistance for Colombian refugees. It also underlines the need for collaboration from countries in the region in an effort to find durable solutions. As part of the Action Plan countries proposed a three pronged approach: Solidarity Borders, Solidarity Cities and Solidarity Resettlement. These three parallel programmes seek to provide a response to the needs of refugees in mixed migration flows in different contexts (border and urban areas). As expressed by UNHCR the programme “is the concrete expression of the will of Latin American countries to provide support to the countries hosting large numbers of refugees in the region.”³

The regional Solidarity Resettlement Programme was based on a proposal from the government of Brazil. The programme was initially implemented in Chile, Brazil and Argentina. Almost 400 people were resettled in these countries from 2005 to 2007⁴. In 2007, the programme was extended to include refugees from outside the region.⁵ The programme was later expanded, though on a small scale, to Uruguay and Paraguay.

The solidarity resettlement programme remains small and highly dependent on UNHCR resources. As “emerging” countries of resettlement, technical and financial support was needed to ensure the initial implementation of the programme. The coming years will be crucial for the establishment of reception capacity and local integration schemes in these countries if the programme is not only to continue but to expand in the future. UNHCR has identified the need to establish pre-departure support and to strengthen integration mechanisms within resettlement in the region.⁶ Experience gained since the beginning of this experience and from resettlement programmes elsewhere will be of great importance in making the new programmes a success.

¹ Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2010, Report to Congress, Department of State, Bureau of Population Refugee and Migration, 2009. <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/129393.pdf>

² Ibid.

³ Projected Global Resettlement Needs. UNHCR. 2011 <http://www.unhcr.org/4c31e3716.html>

⁴ Global Needs Assessment Ecuador. UNHCR. 2008 <http://www.unhcr.org/48ef09a62.html>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Projected Global Resettlement Needs. UNHCR. 2011 <http://www.unhcr.org/4c31e3716.html>

This report looks to identify lessons learned in Argentina, Brazil and Chile as part of the experience of regional solidarity resettlement. I visited Argentina, Brazil and Chile in November 2011 and met with UNHCR, government officials, NGOs and refugees. The research seeks to provide a better understanding of the programme's implementation, its strengths and challenges; and explore the regional solidarity resettlement approach as not only a model for Latin American countries but other regions in the world.

The solidarity framework as a regional plan of action

The 'solidarity resettlement' programme is one of the main pillars of the Mexico Plan of Action. It is an expression of the commitment of Latin American countries to resettle refugees arriving in first asylum countries in the region, in a sign of regional solidarity and burden and responsibility sharing and is already helping to sustain first asylum in the face of continued flows of refugees.⁷

Erika Feller, Assistant High Commissioner for Protection.

The concept of international solidarity is not new to humanitarian law and refugee protection. This principle has a long history and it is at the core of the spirit of cooperation between states in international law.⁸ In the refugee context this principle is discussed in the 1988 EXCOM conclusion (No. 52) on International Solidarity and Refugee Protection as having "a fundamental role to play in encouraging a humanitarian approach to the granting of asylum and in the effective implementation of international protection in general."⁹

The conclusion also stresses that this principle is of utmost importance to the satisfactory implementation of humanitarian principles and obligations by all members of the international community.¹⁰ This principle has "thus gained momentum and is arguably considered nowadays as a principle of international law."¹¹

A framework of solidarity and responsibility sharing in the area of refugee protection has been embraced by Latin American countries in the past, as exemplified by the Declaration of Cartagena of 1984 and the San Jose Declaration of 1994. However, the MPA goes a step further by providing a concrete plan to put in action ideas of regional solidarity. The principle of solidarity in the MPA is expressed in three ways, as stated by Christine Goodall first, it aims to help both displaced people and host communities; second, seeks to protect refugees from the same region; and third, "many of the politicians and local officials and others working in positions of responsibility were once themselves refugees."¹²

The solidarity resettlement is conceived under those guiding principles from a regional perspective with the goal of provide an option for Colombian refugees in need of

⁷ Erica Feller. Resettlement Editorial. Review No. 3. 2006

⁸ Note on International Solidarity and Refugee Protection. EC/SCP/50 International Protection (SCIP), July 1988 <http://www.unhcr.org/3ae68cd4c.html>

⁹ EXCOM Conclusions No. 52, 1988 International Solidarity and Refugee Protection <http://www.unhcr.org/3ae68c433c.html>

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Liliana Lyra Jubilit and Wellington Perira Carneiro. Resettlement in solidarity: a new regional approach towards a more humane durable solution Refugee Survey Quarterly Vol 30, No 3. September 2011

¹² Christine Goodall. Sanctuary and solidarity: urban community responses to refugees and asylum seekers on three continents. UNHCR Research Paper No. 221 <http://www.unhcr.org/4e79f41e9.html>

resettlement. In addition to expanding the resettlement space for Colombian refugees, the programme intended to show regional support to the countries that have received the largest numbers of Colombian refugees. Therefore ‘solidarity’ emphasizes sharing of responsibility within a ‘south to south’ approach, countries of the global south cooperating to protect vulnerable and displaced citizens.¹³

Mexico Declaration and Plan of Action¹⁴

To welcome and to support the proposal made by Brazil for the establishment of a regional resettlement programme in Latin America.

[...] Regional “Solidarity Resettlement” Programme

In the preparatory meeting held in Brasilia (26-27 August 2004), the Government of Brazil proposed the creation of a regional resettlement programme for Latin American refugees, in the framework of international solidarity and responsibility-sharing. This initiative opens the possibility for any Latin American country, at the opportune time, to participate and to receive refugees who are in other Latin American countries. The announcement of this programme was well received by the countries of the region who currently host an important number of refugees, as a tool to help to mitigate the effects of the humanitarian situation these countries face.

Latin American countries agreed upon the importance of establishing resettlement policies that include a framework of principles and eligibility criteria, with due regard for the principle of non-discrimination. Furthermore, based on the experience of Brazil and Chile as emerging resettlement countries, they appeal to the international community to support the strengthening and consolidation of these initiatives, in order to improve and replicate them in other countries of Latin America.

In any case, it is underlined that resettlement, as a durable solution in the region and for the region, should not be viewed as “burden-sharing” but, instead, as a duty deriving from international solidarity, and the need for technical and financial cooperation from the international community for its strengthening and consolidation was reiterated. [...]

In 2008 and 2009 the General Assembly of the Organization of American States passed resolutions in support of the MPA as the expression of regional ideals and called member states and the international community to collaborate in the strengthening of Solidarity Cities, Borders and Resettlement programmes (General Assembly OAS - AG/RES. 2511 (XXXIX-O/09)).¹⁵ One of those resolutions also underscores “the importance of international technical and financial cooperation to adequately address, and to find or, as appropriate, support durable solutions to the situation of refugees and asylum seekers; and noting with

¹³ Aguilar, S. Brazil helps ease integration of refugees in northern Ecuador. UNHCR. February 2011 <http://www.unhcr.org/4d5d4afd6.html>

¹⁴ Mexico Declaration and Plan of Action, 2004 http://www.oas.org/dil/mexico_declaration_plan_of_action_16nov2004.pdf

¹⁵ General Assembly OAS - AG/RES. 2511 (XXXIX-O/09) http://www.oas.org/dil/esp/AG-RES_2511_XXXIX-O-09.pdf

satisfaction, in this context, the signing of agreements between the UNHCR and various countries of the region aimed at improving national protection mechanisms” (AG/RES. 2402 (XXXVIII-O/08)).¹⁶

The MPA solidarity resettlement programme has also been noted to be an innovative mechanism that provides an expansion of resettlement options and a positive step towards the diversification of resettlement in the international arena: “the Solidarity Resettlement [...] contributes to increase the number of resettlement countries to strengthen the global resettlement system, and provide a wider range of resettlement options. Moreover, for a number of refugees, resettlement to a country within the region of origin, where the language is familiar, can be preferred.”¹⁷

The innovative approach of the Mexico Plan of Action has also been portrayed as an excellent example of what can be achieved through effective partnerships with civil society and faith-based organizations.¹⁸ The potential offered by the expansion of resettlement space in non-traditional countries rapidly garnered attention and fostered critical discussion over its sustainability, resources, and responsibility divisions between governments, civil society and UNHCR¹⁹:

Resettlement in solidarity is an idea in progress that, if successful, can lead to both a new approach to refugee protection in light of acute refugee crises, and to a new model of dialogue among States and among actors involved in refugee protection. This is relevant in so far as International Refugee Law, as Human Rights Law, is founded on the principle of human dignity. Hence, to be effective, resettlement has to be analyzed both in light of its actual results and its adequacy to uphold the most protective standards of human dignity.

Liliana Lyra Jubilut and Wellington Perira Carneiro²⁰

Since the MPA declaration there have been several regional meetings and conferences where commitments made in 2004 were evaluated by government officials and civil society representatives. In 2010 in the Brasilia Declaration on the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons in the Americas participating governments restated ideas over the innovative character of the solidarity resettlement programme and expressed the need “to consolidate this with the technical and financial support of the international community.”²¹

From the onset the potential success of the programme and its future carried the responsibility of showing real commitment to the principle of international solidarity and the possibility of establishing resettlement programmes in non-traditional resettlement countries. According to Philippe Lavanchy, former Director of UNHCR America’s Bureau, the consolidation of the programme had a double responsibility a regional one on the states actions in response to a common challenge and a second responsibility of international character: “the success of the regional programme of resettlement in Latin America would be able to incentivize similar initiatives in other parts of the world [...] more than a good example, would be proof of the

¹⁶ General Assembly OAS - AG/RES. 2402 (XXXVIII-O/08) http://www.oas.org/dil/AGRES_2402.doc

¹⁷ Rubin Ahlvin, Senior, Refugee Quota Coordinator, Swedish Migration Board Refview No. 3. 2006

¹⁸ UNHCR High-Level Side Event on the Mexico Plan of Action. Lesley-Anne Knight. CARITAS. http://www.caritas.org/about/structure/secretary_general_2.html?cnt=649

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Liliana Lyra Jubilut and Wellington Perira Carneiro Resettlement in solidarity: a new regional approach towards a more humane durable solution., Refugee Survey Quarterly Vol 30, No 3. September 2011

principles of international solidarity and that responsibility sharing can outweigh the difficulties faced in resettlement by the developing countries.”²²

The regional solidarity resettlement programme

The MPA regional resettlement programme first started in Brazil and Chile; both countries already had Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on resettlement with UNHCR and had experience with resettlement in the past. It is important to highlight that by that time both countries had experience with resettlement of refugees from outside Latin America and that considered that experience to have been fraught with challenges. In 2005 Argentina joined the programme by signing an MOU with UNHCR. Argentina did not have a recent resettlement experience and the last group resettled dates to the 1970s. In the last years Paraguay and Uruguay started small resettlement programmes, in the case of Uruguay with a focus on women-at-risk cases.

In Argentina, Brazil and Chile resettled individuals are interviewed by a selection mission formed by representatives from the government and civil society (represented by the NGO working as the implementing partner of UNHCR in the country of resettlement). In most years one selection mission travelled to both Ecuador and Costa Rica. In all cases the selection mission is also the opportunity to provide information about the country of resettlement and an initial orientation, in most cases by using videos or group information sessions.

All the decisions are made by refugee commissions; in the case of Chile the final decision is made by the Ministry of Interior after a presentation of findings of the mission. The time frame for the decisions and departures of refugees varies by country. In all three countries reconsideration of denied cases takes place after a request is made by UNHCR and with the presentation of additional information. One of the important characteristics of the programme is the acceptance of cases recognized as refugees under the expanded definition of the Cartagena Declaration, especially in light of the fact that many refugees in Ecuador, particularly those recognized in the Enhanced Registration Process, have been granted refugee status under the expanded definition.

In relation to selection criteria the three countries have included several categories in their MOUs such as: physical and legal protection needs, women-at-risk, survivors of violence and torture and lack of local integration prospects. Even though these are included as part of the selection criteria, in the last years of the programme's implementation most countries concluded that cases with physical and legal protection needs are more suited for the solidarity programme. The issue of selection criteria and integration prospects has emerged as a key issue in the programme, creating tension between the needs for resettlement and protection and concerns around integration potential.

While maintaining the selection criteria the three countries have placed certain exclusions in relation to characteristics of cases referred for resettlement, including rural background and large families with one parent. While these limitations are perceived by governments of the

²¹ Brasilia Declaration on the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons in the Americas Brasilia, 11 November 2010 <http://www.unhcr.org/4cdd3fac6.htm>

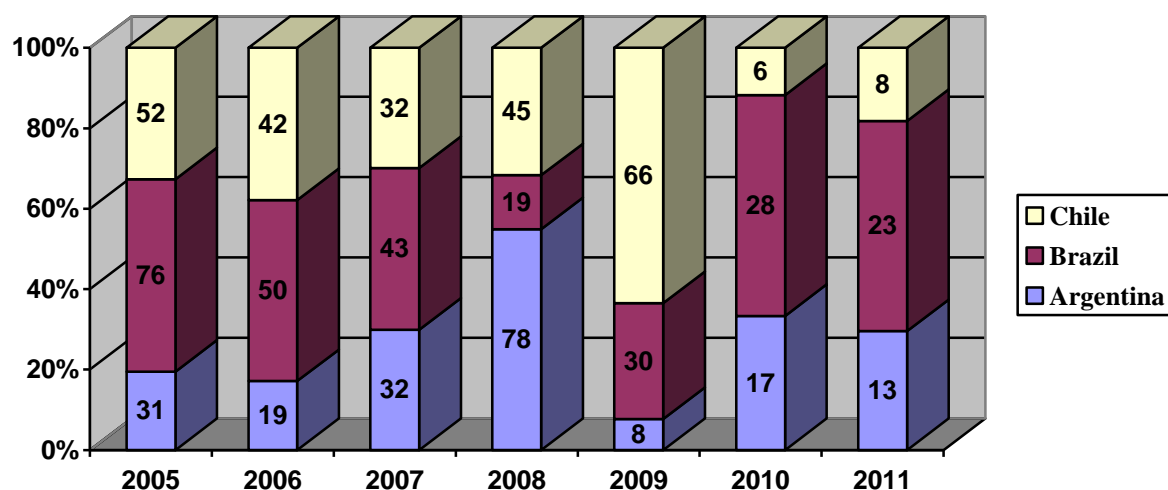
²²Philippe Lavanchy ACNUR e América Latina: estratégias regionais e soluções aos problemas no continente. <http://portal.mj.gov.br/main.asp?Team=%7BC728A416-5AA7-476D-B239-CC89FFB36301%7D>

resettlement countries as a responsible step which ensures the success of the programme and limits the “transferring” of a problem from one country to another; they do raise concerns over how they impact resettlement as a protection tool that can provide a genuine answer to the resettlement needs in the region.

As illustrated in chart No 1 the number of people resettled to the three countries has varied from year to year, with all three showing some years with very low arrival numbers. Since 2005 Brazil resettled a total of 308 Colombian refugees, Chile a total of 260 and Argentina a total of 168. The numbers are much lower than the quotas set by each of the countries.

The reasons given for the lower numbers in relation to the stated capacity by each country included lack of resources, low numbers of referrals for resettlement, and the number of cases referred that for several reasons do not get resettled (denials, decision of the refugees to not be resettled in the region, long processing times and changes in the circumstances of the refugees). Another challenge has been the refusal or hesitation of many refugees to be resettled in countries in the region, which has been experienced by the three countries, particularly in the first years of the programme.

Chart No. 1 - Total Refugee Resettled by Country and Year



Source: UNHCR

The difference between the number of cases submitted for resettlement and refugees resettled is even larger. Between 2005 and September 2011 a total of 452 refugees were submitted for resettlement to Argentina and only 168 departed (37%). There were 715 submissions for Brazil, and 43% of them departed (308 refugees). Similarly, there were a total of 674 people submitted to Chile and a total of 260 departures in the same period of time (38.5%).

A breakdown by year in submissions and departures for each country can be seen in charts 2, 3 and 4. Questions have emerged over quality referrals matching countries’ selection criteria and needs in the countries of first asylum. Also central to the consolidation of the programme that would improve the resettlement experience for all stakeholders is the need for adequate information provided pre selection missions to unable refugees to make informed decisions and the reduction of the time period between first submission and departure (in some cases it has taken more than one year since the selection mission interview and departure).

Chart 2 - Argentina - Submissions and Departures by year

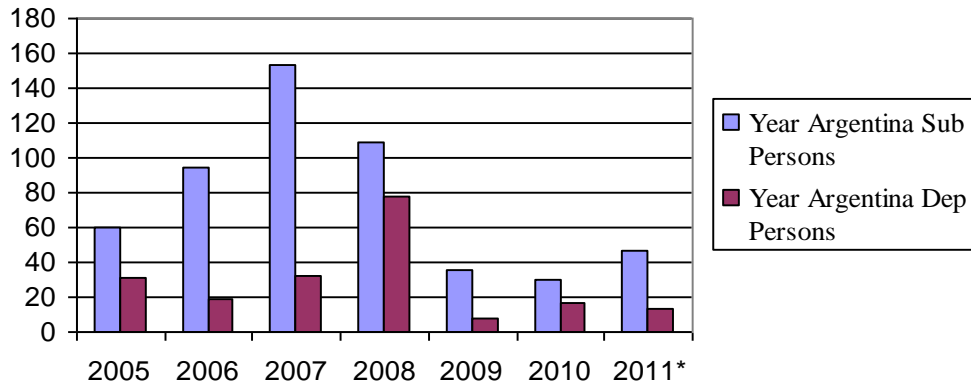


Chart 3 Brazil - Submissions vs. Departures by year

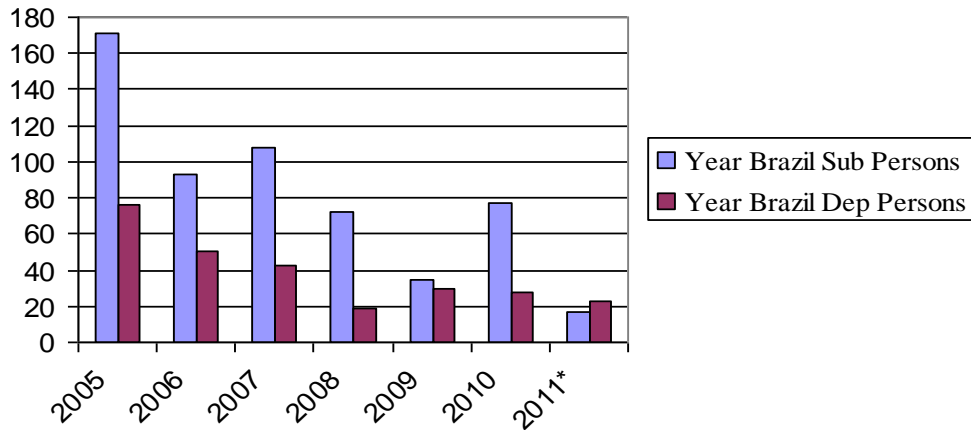
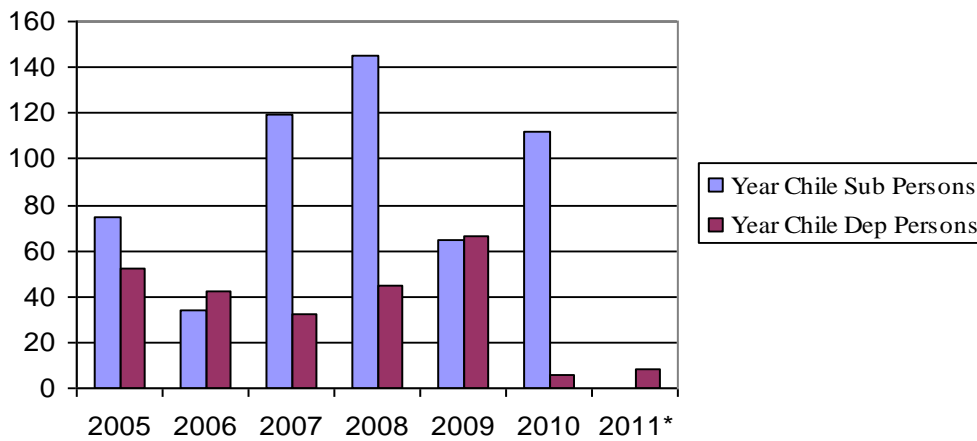


Chart 4 Chile - Submissions vs. Departures by year



Resettlement in Argentina: legal framework and selection missions

In 2004 Argentina enacted new immigration legislation (Law No. 25.871), which was followed by a new refugee law (Law No. 26.165) in 2006. These reforms brought a significant shift to the legal approach on immigration and refugee issues, particularly since the prior legal framework dated from the dictatorship in the 1970s. Some of the most important aspects of this new legal framework are: the recognition of migration as a human right, the inclusion of an expanded refugee definition aligned with the Declaration of Cartagena and the creation of the National Commission for Refugees (CONARE) and its secretariat.²³

CONARE consists of five representatives of different ministries of the government (Ministry of Interior, Foreign Relations, Justice, Social Development and the National Institute against Discrimination and Xenophobia). The multi-ministerial make-up looks to create shared responsibilities for refugee issues in the different agencies of the government. The Commission also has a representative of the civil society and UNHCR.

Argentina launched its resettlement programme in 2005 when it decided to join Brazil and Chile as part of the MPA solidarity resettlement programme and signed an MOU with UNHCR. The Argentine government states that the resettlement programme is an important part of its policies that prioritize the defence of human rights, which has been a key issue for the current government. Since 2005 Argentina has resettled a total of 168 Colombian refugees.

In December of 2011 a new group of thirty refugees is expected to arrive, which is still below the quota of 50 people set by the Argentine government for the same year. In this context it is important to mention that as part of the new immigration law the government of Argentina also created a programme called “Patria Grande” that allows the citizens of countries that are either members or associate states of the MERCOSUR to apply for temporary residency, which benefits Colombian citizens.

UNHCR has a key role in the resettlement programme and provides significant resources; its implementing partner in Argentina is the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS). The selection mission is a tripartite enterprise, consisting of representatives of CONARE, HIAS, and UNHCR. CONARE has the responsibility for selecting cases according to the criteria established in the MOU.

The criteria for resettlement set out in the MOU are: legal and physical protection needs; survivors of violence and torture; women in situations of risk; children and adolescents; and refugees without the prospect of local integration in the country of first asylum.²⁴ With the support of the Norwegian government, in 2009 Argentina established a women-at-risk programme in the city of Rosario. The selection mission conducts interviews of referred cases and provides CONARE with information needed to make a decision. A decision has to be issued within fourteen days.

Argentina’s programme has given high priority to those cases with legal and physical protection needs. The integration potential of individuals is taken into consideration during the selection process. Throughout the resettlement experience some changes have been made

²³ Law No. 26.165 http://www.accem.es/ficheros/documentos/pdf_reasentamiento/ley_refugiados.pdf

²⁴ Memorandum de Entendimiento para reasentamiento de refugiados en la Argentina, entre el Gobierno de la República Argentina y UNHCR, 2005

in relation to these profiles. Argentina's government has expressed that as an emerging resettlement country it must consider the availability of services and the fact that resettlement is taking place in urban areas.²⁵ For example, the government has expressed preference of families with two heads of household and individuals coming from urban areas. The need for "motivation" on the part of the refugee has been noted as an important element in the decision, though this seems to be a more subjective criteria applied in the selection mission.

Reception and integration of resettled refugees in Argentina

The current programme places refugees in Mendoza, Rosario, Buenos Aires and Córdoba, following the model of decentralization. While placement decisions have been established as a collaborate process, in practice the criteria used in the decision making process seems unclear. While HIAS is the main implementer of the programme (to a lesser extent in Córdoba), there is coordination with UNHCR and CONARE in several aspects and stages. Direct resources for financial assistance, housing assistance, reception, and case management are currently provided by UNHCR.

CONARE and UNHCR put forward a protocol for the implementation of the resettlement programme which highlights refugees as central actors of the resettlement process. The protocol defines that the implementing partner (HIAS) will carry out the following activities: participate in the selection mission, organize an orientation mission for selected cases, provide the reception and initial orientation, provide psychosocial assistance and implement integration programmes.

The protocol also defines time-frames for the selection process, access to documentation, and some integration activities. For example the reception and initial orientation should take place in the first three days and social assistance is for twelve months. Steps like this one that seek to formalize practices, responsibility roles, objectives and benchmarks are important to consolidating the programme.

CONARE is the nexus between the implementing agency and governmental agencies. In addition, CONARE sees local integration as part of their responsibilities, which is an important aspect of government involvement on long term integration:

The goal of the Solidarity Resettlement Programme is to provide protection and a lasting solution for refugees whose lives, safety freedom or other fundamental rights are threatened in their first country of asylum. Consequently, it should aim for the establishment of solid foundations for local integration of refugees in the welcoming country, through self-sufficiency and their positive contribution to local society. It should promote their capacity to reconstruct a positive future, the creation of ties with the welcoming community and the reestablishment of trust in political institutions and systems, always respecting religious and cultural identities.²⁶

Managing expectations and the provision of adequate and accurate information prior to a refugee's departure to the country of resettlement has been signalled as a challenge. During the selection mission HIAS and the representative of CONARE provides information about

²⁵ Resettlement Handbook 2011. Country Chapter Argentina. UNHCR. <http://www.unhcr.org/4b7bc3a19.html>

²⁶ Resettlement Handbook 2011. Country Chapter Argentina. UNHCR. <http://www.unhcr.org/4b7bc3a19.html>

the country and the resettlement programme. Additional orientation is provided by HIAS prior to departure, mainly focus on the main characteristics of the programme and responsibilities of refugees. As in the programmes in Brazil and Chile resettled refugees receive two main sources of assistance: a monthly financial assistance and housing assistance. This assistance is provided for a maximum of twelve months, and in the cases of women-at-risk assistance is available for up to two years. As part of the programme refugees receive other types of assistance, for example for purchasing medication not provided by the public health system, school supplies, and school and/or winter clothes when necessary.

Resettled refugees are admitted as temporary residents and upon arrival can apply for a national identification for foreigners, which grants them the right to legally work in the country and access most social services as nationals. After two years refugees can apply for permanent residency or Argentine citizenship. HIAS provides assistance in obtaining documentation after arrival. The lack of permanent residency upon arrival prevents refugees from accessing some public assistance programmes.

When refugees arrive they are placed in temporary housing (hostels, shelters, residential hotels, pensions, etc.) for up to three months. After this period, refugees are placed in subsidized housing for one year. Access to affordable housing and complying with rent requirements is a major challenge for the programme. In order to address some of these challenges HIAS and UNHCR have created a fund which enables them to serve as guarantors of rental agreements and the payment of several months of rent is offered as an incentive. Access to public housing remains challenging and many issues arise when the one year programme's housing assistance period ends and refugees need to start paying the rent or find alternative housing.

Accessing employment and achieving self-sufficiency are the greatest challenges faced by refugees resettled under this programme. In the Argentine context access to employment in the formal sector and the need of at least two incomes per household to achieve self-sufficiency add to that challenge.

HIAS provides guidance on enrolling refugees in training and occupational retraining courses, and has partnered with two institutions (AMIA and MANPOWER) that provide job placement assistance. There is also access to a micro-credit programme which has had mixed results and presents some difficulties as a source of alternative income that helps refugees obtain self-sufficiency. It is less clear how extensive and integrated employment services and income generating activities are during the first year when financial assistance is available.

Refugees resettled in Argentina have access to the public health care system like citizens, which includes services such as mental health services, maternal and infant care and high complexity treatment at no cost. HIAS accompanies refugees to initial health screenings and provides limited psychosocial assistance and referrals to the public mental health system.

Refugees also have access to the public education system; including higher education at public universities. This is a major asset of the programme allowing refugees to continue or further their education and offers important possibilities for refugee youth. In addition, refugee children have access to public summer camps, and there have been some success stories from this experience. The programme has also had some positive experiences on revalidation and recertification of professional degrees.

UNHCR recently conducted an evaluation of cases resettled in Argentina. The evaluation was not made public, but some findings shared revealed that housing and employment are the major challenges to integration.

On the positive side UNHCR reported that cases interviewed were living in adequate housing conditions and that they had incomes over the poverty line. While access to social services such as health care and education have resulted in positive resettlement experiences more work needs to be done to ensure that refugees have access to other social programmes, including housing programmes or social assistance for children, which is currently only available for permanent residents.

Resettlement in Argentina is still highly dependent on a small network of organizations and resources. Few partnerships seem to exist with organizations working with refugees, immigrants or other social services focused agencies. Diversifying partnerships and creating a broader network of support can not only benefit refugees resettled through the programme but also all other refugees in the country.

In 2011 a small resettlement programme was initiated in the city Cordoba (two families) under an alternative model in which the provincial government assumes the coordinator role and provides housing for one year. Financial assistance continues to be provided by UNHCR and HIAS has a supportive role. It is still too early to form general conclusions on this new model, although it presents an interesting alternative approach that has a larger involvement of the local government.

Resettlement in Brazil: legal framework and selection missions

Brazil was the first country in the southern cone to ratify the 1951 Refugee Convention and the first in the region to enact a refugee law. The Brazilian Refugee Act of 1997 (Law No 9.474/97) includes the expanded definition of the Cartagena Declaration and creates the National Commission for Refugees (CONARE).²⁷

CONARE is presided over by the Ministry of Justice and includes five other government agencies (Foreign Relations, Labor, Health, Education and the Federal Police), UNHCR and a representative of civil society. As in the case of Refugee Status Determinations (RSDs) the resettlement programme is a tripartite enterprise: “this tripartite character and especially the participation of the civil society is an impressive feature of RSD in Brazil. It thus seems to be a practice that should be analyzed to see if indeed it can be regarded as a ‘best practice’.”²⁸

The Brazilian Refugee Act includes resettlement as one of durable solutions. Articles 45 and 46 of the refugee law highlight the voluntary nature of resettlement and that the planning process will include the participation of state agencies and, when possible, non-governmental organizations. The law also calls for the identification of areas of cooperation and determination of responsibilities.²⁹ Brazil started a resettlement programme in 2002, after

²⁷ Juliana Arantes Dominguez and Rosana Baeninger. Programa de Reassentamento de Refugiados no Brasil. <http://www.migrante.org.br/programadereassentamento.pdf>

²⁸ Refugee Status Determination in Brazil: A Tripartite Enterprise. Liliana Lyra Jubilut And Silvia Menicucci de Oliveira Selmi Apolinario. Refuge Vol 25 No. 2. 2008
<http://pi.library.yorku.ca/ojs/index.php/refuge/article/view/26029>

²⁹ Lei No 9.474. 1997 <http://portal.mj.gov.br/main.asp?Team={73F2E3CA-0CF1-4375-AAA0-D31EDF33B616}>

signing an MOU with UNHCR in 1999. The resettlement target for 2011 was set to sixty refugees from the region. The MOU recognizes that resettlement “is an important tool of protection in seeking durable solutions” and states that the Brazilian government “is responsible for the reception and will facilitate the integration of resettled refugees, with the support of UNHCR and NGOs. UNHCR will contribute financially to the integration of refugees through a project for which an implementing partner will be designated.”³⁰

In the beginning of the programme Brazil placed an emphasis on two selection criteria: legal and physical protection needs and women-at-risk. Currently there is no programme that focuses on women-at-risk cases due to a lack of resources. Similar to the Argentine programme there is preference for individuals from urban environments. The selection missions are tripartite, including representatives of CONARE, NGOs and UNHCR.

During the mission an initial orientation takes place using a video and refugees sign an agreement expressing their interest in resettlement and acknowledging the voluntary nature of the process. The initial orientation continues to be a challenge in relation to expectations of refugees and the social and economic reality in Brazil. Cases are referred by the mission to CONARE, which makes a final decision at a plenary meeting and a simple majority is needed.³¹

An important aspect of the Brazilian resettlement programme is the expedited resettlement process for emergency cases in a fast track procedure. Submissions are presented by UNHCR to the CONARE justifying the urgency of the case and a decision is made in seventy-two hours (the decision must be unanimous on these cases). Expedited cases can arrive in Brazil within ten days of the initial referral. Expedited and emergency resettlement has presented many challenges for traditional resettlement countries; thus this is an interesting model for newer countries of resettlement or others considering creating or formalizing an expedited procedure.

Brazil has resettled other populations in the past; including more recently the resettlement of Palestinian refugees from camps on the border between Syria and Iraq. This experience is evaluated as less positive and one that has presented numerous challenges. Resettlement of Palestinians by Brazil and Chile was crucial in opening the door of resettlement and set a precedent later followed by other countries. However, the programme had numerous missteps in its planning and implementation: “By comparing the resettlement of Colombian and Palestinian refugees in Brazil, some lessons can be drawn, both positive and negative, although all analysis should be considered as simply preliminary considerations given the short existence of the programme to date.”³²

The experience with Palestinian refugees had an impact on those involved in the programme, clearly marking a ‘before’ and ‘after’. On the positive side, it initiated work on the formalization of practices and “professionalization” of the programme. CONARE recently approved a regulation on the implementation of the programme, which has yet to be made official. This is a positive step that will hopefully provide clearer divisions of responsibilities, goals and benchmarks.

³⁰ Cyntia Sampaio. Programa Brasileiro de Reassentamento Solidário: evolução e reflexões para seu fortalecimento. Refugio, Migracoes e Cidadania, Caderno de Debates 5, November 2010. UNHCR.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Programa Brasileiro de Reassentamento Solidário: evolução e reflexões para seu fortalecimento. Cyntia Sampaio. Refugio, Migracoes e Cidadania, Caderno de Debates 5, November 2010. UNHCR.

Reception and integration of resettled refugees in Brazil

Once refugees arrive in Brazil they receive a two year temporary visa, which can be renewed for an additional two years. After four years of temporary residency status refugees are eligible to apply for permanent residency. The issue of temporary residency, as in Argentina, precludes refugees accessing some social programmes (for example housing programmes). Refugees can acquire Brazilian citizenship after four years of permanent residency in the country.³³ In relation to documentation a positive step taken by the National Council for Immigration was to remove the word "refugee" on work permits and replace it with "foreigner under the law 9474/97".

UNHCR currently has two implementing partners in Brazil on resettlement: the Centro de Defesa e de Direitos Humanos (CCDH) in Guarulhos, San Paulo; and the Associação Antônio Vieira (ASAV) in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul. CCDH became an implementing partner in 2010 and in 2011 they received their first group of resettled refugees.

Implementing partners are responsible, among other things, for the reception at the airport, social-cultural orientation, initial housing, referrals to Portuguese classes, assistance in obtaining documentation (national registry for foreigners, work permit and the individual taxpayer registry), financial assistance in purchasing clothes and food, facilitating access to the education and health public systems, providing financial assistance for twelve months, and job placement assistance.³⁴ During the first month a case manager visits resettled refugees three times a week, after which these visits are reduced to once a month for the first year.

In the context of the programme in Brazil, there are additional challenges that do not manifest in the other solidarity resettlement programmes in the region. These challenges are related to the cultural differences that can be found within Brazil and the language barrier that is not present in the other countries: "Unlike Argentina or Chile, refugees willing to be resettled in Brazil also had to face a considerable cultural challenge."³⁵

Implementing partners placed adults and children refugees in Portuguese classes after arrival. The lack of Portuguese language skills can impact access to employment, recertification of professional degrees, and can also be a barrier for those refugees pursuing higher education in the public system.

As in the other solidarity resettlement programmes, access to employment and housing are two major challenges. While there was a general perception that access to employment has improved; challenges persist in relation to work conditions and income levels: "the most critical obstacles to the social and economic integration of refugees in Brazil are a lack of employment and housing, and discrimination. Our research showed that refugees consider their working conditions and pay as unsatisfactory. They find it difficult to access basic public services, particularly health care and housing."³⁶

³³ Resettlement Handbook, 2011. Brazil Country chapter . UNHCR <http://www.unhcr.org/4e2d622713.html>

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Liliana Lyra Jubilut and Wellington Perira Carneiro. Resettlement in solidarity: a new regional approach towards a more humane durable solution. Refugee Survey Quarterly Vol 30, No 3. September 2011

³⁶ Julia Bertino Moreira and Rosana Baeninger. Local integration of refugees in Brazil Forced Migration Review No. 35 July 2010. <http://www.fmreview.org/disability/FMR35/48-49.pdf>

Other studies have shown positive outcomes for resettled refugees: seventy-seven per cent of working age refugees involved in income generating activities.³⁷ In 2011 an innovative project on employment access for refugees was launched. The Programme to Support the Placement of Refugees (PARR) seeks to facilitate the placement of refugees and asylum seekers in Brazilian companies and increase awareness about refugees among potential employers.³⁸

Other challenges that seem to create barriers to the integration of resettled refugees are the lack of/or difficulties accessing to government programmes and insufficient involvement of local and state governmental agencies. Currently there are several public programmes that do not benefit refugees due to eligibility requirements.³⁹

In 2010 CONARE organized an evaluation meeting with government officials, UNHCR and implementing partners from civil society. The resulting conclusion of this meeting stresses the need of increase involvement of local authorities and permanent inclusion of municipal governments in meetings. In addition, it signalled the need to increase partnerships with universities and involvement of members of CONARE with municipal and state programmes.⁴⁰

The Brazilian resettlement programme has been presented as a model with two important characteristics: the decentralization of placement in the country⁴¹ and the diversification of support and partnerships, particularly from the private sector. By June 2007, it was calculated that over eighty enterprises, government departments, NGOs, social clubs, churches, educational institutions, and individuals in twenty towns in five States were actively involved in different aspects related to the reception of refugees in Brazil.⁴²

As stated by Karin Wapenchowski from ASAV who coordinates the programme in Rio Grande do Sul: “the local community, the public and private sectors in addition to the institutions have played an important role contributing to the integration of the refugees.”⁴³ A successful resettlement model based on decentralization and diversification needs to ensure involvement and commitment from local communities and governments, access to local services, support in the locations where refugees are resettled, and that the diversification translates into additional resources, partnerships and support for refugees in employment access, education, healthcare and mental healthcare, and language acquisition. These two approaches used by Brazil in its resettlement programme need to be further evaluated and strengthened to ensure that the programme can be sustainable.

³⁷ Liliana Lyra Jubilit and Wellington Perira Carneiro. Resettlement in solidarity: a new regional approach towards a more humane durable solution. Refugee Survey Quarterly Vol 30, No 3. September 2011

³⁸ Program to Support the Placement of Refugees (PARR). <http://www.refugiadosnobrasil.com.br>

³⁹ Cynthia Sampaio Brasileiro de Reassentamento Solidário: evolução e reflexões para seu fortalecimento. Programa Refugio, Migracoes e Cidadania, Caderno de Debates 5, November 2010. UNHCR,

⁴⁰ Encontro de auto-avaliacao do programa de reassentamento Brasileiro. Ministerio da Justica, CONARE, Brasilia, June 8 2010.

⁴¹ Mexico Plan of Action. The Impact of Regional Solidarity 2005-2007 - UNHCR http://www.acnur.org/paginas/index.php?id_pag=6889

⁴² Valeria Graziano and Luis Fernando Godinho Refugiados reassentados construyen una nueva vida. Refview No. 6 UNHCR <http://www.acnur.org/t3/fileadmin/scripts/doc.php?file=biblioteca/pdf/6690>

⁴³ Ibid.

Resettlement in Chile: legal framework and selection missions

Chile was the first country in South America to start a resettlement programme. The programme began in 1999, the same year that it signed a MOU with UNHCR on resettlement. In 2010 Chile enacted a new refugee law (Law No. 20.430) which includes the expanded refugee definition of the Cartagena Declaration and establishes refugees' rights and obligations.

The law also created a Commission on refugee recognition which is presided over by the Department of Foreigners' and includes two representatives from the Ministry of Interior and two representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Relations. UNHCR can be present at the meetings of the Commission.⁴⁴ In addition, the law also outlined responsibilities of the Commission, such as proposing the recognition or denial of refugee status, family reunification cases, and resettlement cases to the Ministry of Interior; promoting and coordinating policies on the protection of refugees by working with public, private, local or international organizations; and assisting in the identification and implementation of durable solutions.

An important provision included in the new refugee law was the change to the residency status given to those that are recognized as refugees. Before the 2010 refugee law refugees were provided with temporary residency, similarly to current laws in Argentina and Brazil. This precluded refugees from accessing certain public assistance programmes. Article 45 of the refugee law states that recognized refugees and their families will be provided with permanent residency.⁴⁵ After five years of permanent residency refugees can apply for Chilean citizenship.

The MOU⁴⁶ signed with UNHCR states that the objective of the resettlement programme is to "allow refugees to integrate in Chilean society and achieve self-sufficiency as fast as possible. Refugees must contribute in a positive way to the local society."⁴⁷ It also assigns responsibility to the government, with the support of UNHCR and NGOs, for the reception and integration of resettled refugees. The MOU also establishes a committee that is in charge of reception and local integration, and is made up by representatives of the Ministry of Interior, UNHCR and NGOs. This committee met regularly during the resettlement of Palestinian refugees, but has not been active on the solidarity resettlement at the regional level.

As in the case of Brazil, Chile had resettlement experience with other populations, including refugees from the former Yugoslavia in 1999 and more recently Palestinian refugees. The first experience was an important learning experience with numerous difficulties and mistakes in its implementation. The case of Palestinian refugees presented numerous challenges too, but in comparison with the Brazilian experience the results are perceived by the government as more positive. Currently, the solidarity resettlement programme has been put on hold and it is under review. This year Chile did not take any selection missions and cases arriving this year were interviewed at the end of 2010.

⁴⁴ El trabajo del Acnur en Chile. UNHCR

http://www.acnur.org/t3/uploads/tx_refugiadosamericas/El_trabajo_del_ACNUR_en_Chile.pdf?view=1

⁴⁵ Law 20.430/2010 <http://www.leychile.cl/Navegar?idLey=20430>

⁴⁶ Acuerdo marco con el Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Refugiados, para reasentamiento de refugiados en Chile. 1999 http://www.accem.es/ficheros/documentos/pdf_reasentamiento/402cde114.pdf

⁴⁷ Ibid

The selection missions include one delegate from the Department of Foreigners and one representative from the NGO that works as the implementing partner of UNHCR, in this case the Vicaria de Pastoral Social. The recommendations of the selection delegation are submitted to the Ministry of the Interior, which informs UNHCR of its decision. As in the case of the programmes in Brazil and Argentina, the selection mission also provides an initial orientation and refugees interested in resettlement must sign a document accepting the conditions of the programme.

A unique aspect of the programme is an initial evaluation by the Vicaria de Pastoral Social prior to the selection mission. The MOU includes the following selection criteria: legal or physical protection needs: victims of violence and /or torture, women-at-risk, refugees without local integration prospects in the first country of asylum, and refugees with special needs. As in other programmes in the region integration potential is taken into consideration in the selection of cases. A recent positive development was the opening of a programme for women-at-risk, with some of these cases arriving in 2011.

Reception and integration of resettled refugees in Chile

The Vicaria de Pastoral Social is responsible for the reception at the airport, cultural orientation, social and legal counselling, individual case management, supplementary assistance, vocational training, linking refugees to social services and obtaining housing among other activities.⁴⁸ The programme looks to incorporate refugees into the process of integration by refining goals and responsibilities jointly and requesting their signature on a document that explains agreed upon goals and timeframes.

This is in line with the approach from the Vicaria de Pastoral Social which states that “in occasions it is thought that the responsibility and success of the integration in a resettlement country relays on the good management of the institutions that provide support, but the experience shows that the fundamental motor of this process are the refugees themselves.”⁴⁹

After arrival refugees are provided with one week of socio-cultural orientation and one week of training and assistance on employment placement. Refugees receive an orientation guide, which provides general information about the country, useful tips such as use of currency and transportation, information about what to expect in the first month after arrival, access to social services, and documentation.

Refugees are initially placed in a temporary shelter for no more than thirty days, and after that period refugees need to find housing covered by the financial assistance they receive for the first year. The implementing partner provides assistance and support for the first year. During the second year support is provided but no financial assistance, except in emergency cases.

During the initial period, refugees are assisted by the Vicaria de Pastoral Social to find permanent housing and refugees are offered a one-time grant to purchase basic furniture. Finding housing was described as the “first job of the refugee”, though they are assisted by the Vicaria de Pastoral Social and work with real estate agencies. Similarly to Argentina the

⁴⁸ UNHCR Resettlement Handbook. Chile Country Chapter. January 2002

<http://www.unhcr.org/3c5e576c6.html>

⁴⁹ Programa de Reasentamiento Solidario en Chile. Vicaria de Pastoral Social y de los Trabajadores.

programme offers payment of several months of rent as an incentive for landlords. The new refugee law has also recently made public housing programmes available to refugees.

Refugees have access to public healthcare and education systems as Chilean citizens. An initial health screening takes place after arrival. A mental health programme implemented by the Vicaria de Pastoral Social provides an initial evaluation, orientation and referral to mental health providers. A creative partnership has been created with “PRISMA”, a mental health programme from the University Alberto Hurtado for migrants and refugees.⁵⁰

The programme provides comprehensive mental health services, psychological and psychiatric treatment, for refugees and immigrants from a multidisciplinary approach. These types of partnerships, such as with legal clinics, are good examples of utilizing existing networks and resources. This is a step toward prioritizing mental health services as part of initial reception services.

Refugees have the same access to the public education system as citizens. There have been no major challenges for children in accessing public primary and middle schools. The difficulties emerge in relation to access to higher education, particularly the high cost and admission requirements, though these are the same challenges faced by Chilean citizens. The resettlement programme offers scholarships for technical and professional studies; currently thirty-three refugees receive them. It is recognized that more work is needed to create partnerships with universities to increase access to scholarships.

To assist refugees in accessing employment the programme provides job placement and orientation workshops and assistance in the job search process.⁵¹ In addition, the programme provides funds for training and income generating activities. Achieving self-sufficiency is a major challenge particularly in view of the high cost of living, low wages, discrimination, and the need to have two incomes per household. Additional issues arise for refugees that have only had labour experience in the informal market.

One of the issues regularly raised in relation to the regional resettlement programme is the lack of measurable integration benchmarks. Chile is perhaps the country that has made the most progress in this regard and has created a set of indicators on local integration. This positive step has created a useful evaluation tool that includes responsibilities by actors and time frames. This evaluation tool designed by UNHCR provides specific indicators for numerous areas of the integration process, including partnerships with other NGOs, local governmental programmes, access to documentation, reception services, housing, medical screenings, access to education, income generation activities, and access to mental health services.⁵²

Throughout the years the resettlement programme in Chile has gone through changes and has taken steps toward formalizing and strengthening good practices. It is clear that there are challenges that persist and areas require further improvement, including securing additional resources, involving local communities and municipal governments, diversifying partnerships, and creating programmes focusing on children and youth. The programme is

⁵⁰ PRISMA mental health program for migrants and refugees of the University Alberto Hurtado <http://psicologia.uahurtado.cl/migrantes/>

⁵¹ UNHCR Resettlement Handbook. Chile Country Chapter .January 2002 <http://www.unhcr.org/3c5e576c6.html>

⁵² Set de Indicadores de Integración local para el seguimiento y evaluación del programa de reasentamiento Colombiano en Chile. UNHCR.

currently suspended and it is important that as part of any evaluation and conversation between UNHCR and the Chilean government there is consideration given to lessons learned and best practices acquired through prior experience.

Strengths and challenges of the regional solidarity resettlement programme

The solidarity regional resettlement programme has been evaluated on a number of occasions, particularly in regional meetings and conferences. In 2006 representatives of eight Latin American countries and NGOs, in addition to representatives from the United States, Canada, Norway and Sweden, met in Quito to discuss the sustainability of the resettlement programme in Latin America.⁵³ This regional meeting on solidarity resettlement has been followed by others including meetings in Buenos Aires in 2007, in Santiago in 2008, and in Porto Alegre in 2010. In these meetings participants have emphasized as essential for the success of the programme the need of cooperation between government and NGOs and securing additional resources.

In addition it has been highlighted in the meetings the political importance of the solidarity resettlement programme for the region and globally.⁵⁴ As expressed by Eva Demant regional UNHCR representative for South America (covering Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, Chile, Peru and Bolivia) at the regional meeting in Brasilia: “we must recognize that beyond the progress achieved in the implementation of the solidarity resettlement programme in Latin America, some challenges persist. The financing is a crucial issue, as also are the challenges faced by refugees to achieve self-sufficiency and adequate integration in the resettlement countries.”⁵⁵ Government of solidarity resettlement countries have also expressed concerns over integration challenges faced by refugees once they are resettled.

While further consolidation is needed, the Brazilian experience as a pioneer of the initiative allows for important lessons to be drawn. On the one hand, it shows that there is still a need to enhance the level of professionalization of partners and municipal agents. A more effective approach to public policies should also be introduced, so that the integration prospects of a higher number of resettled refugees may be improved.⁵⁶

Questions on the sustainability have been at the centre of most evaluations and meetings on the solidarity resettlement programme. Any such analyses and evaluations need to take into account that the programme is relatively new and small in scale. In many instances evaluations have overplayed challenges and underplayed strengths, or vice versa. I have identified key areas of the programme that present both challenges and opportunities for the programme. These are issue areas that can become positive aspects or great obstacles for the future of the solidarity resettlement programme in the region. This will depend on the steps taken by those involved in the planning and implementation of the programme.

⁵³ Plan de Accion de Mexico. Reasentamiento Solidario. UNHCR. www.acnur.org/t3/pam/resultados-en-soluciones-duraderas/reasentamiento-solidario/

⁵⁴ Reasentamiento solidario en acción: políticas, programas y necesidades: oportunidades de cooperación. Resumen del debate entre Gobiernos participantes, ONGs y ACNUR. Quito. 2006. <http://www.acnur.org/biblioteca/pdf/4057.pdf?view=1>

⁵⁵ Reasentamiento en America Latina ya beneficia a más de mil personas. UNHCR. November, 2010. http://www.acnur.org/t3/index.php?id=559&no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=1696&cHash=f0623b267d3154bbc3b5d58ddec26357

⁵⁶ Liliana Lyra Jubilit and Wellington Perira Carneiro. Resettlement in solidarity: a new regional approach towards a more humane durable solution. Refugee Survey Quarterly Vol 30, No 3. September 2011

Selection criteria: resettlement needs and integration potential

The three countries have included multiple selection criteria in their MOUs but throughout the years have prioritized cases that have legal and physical protection needs. The inclusion of local integration potential as part of the selection criteria has created some tension in relation to the needs of resettlement in countries of first asylum. Resettlement countries believe that as the process is new to them integration in their social and economic context presents the greatest challenge to the success of the programme:⁵⁷ “the obstacles posed by the public health systems and fragile labour markets of the resettlement countries led to a more restrictive approach on resettlement selection criteria.”⁵⁸ The use of integration potential as a criterion seems to be applied subjectively, using few clear indicators, such as individuals from rural areas.

Countries of resettlement, UNHCR, and countries of first asylum, need to work together to ensure that the need for resettlement based on vulnerability is not overshadowed by integration potential criterion. Resettlement needs to be both a protection mechanism and a durable solution. At the same time, more needs to be done to better match cases with expectations and concerns of the resettlement countries.

The countries of solidarity resettlement are accepting cases under the expanded definition of the Cartagena Declaration. This is an important step, particularly if we consider that cases in Ecuador recognized through the Enhanced Registration Programme were granted status under the expanded definition. Another positive development has been the inclusion of programmes that focus on women-at-risk cases.

Resources

The issue of resources has been one of the most challenging in the implementation of the programme and it is at the core of the question on sustainability. UNHCR provides significant resources towards the programme, which is a new role for UNHCR in resettlement. Countries in the region provide mostly indirect resources, although some doors have started to open on direct contributions (i.e.: housing assistance is provided by the government of Cordoba for cases resettled there).

There is a clear need for diversification of resources to include private and public funding combined with the use of existing and currently untapped networks. In the short and medium term the question of financing of the programme will need the convergence of multiple sources including UNHCR, countries of solidarity resettlement, and the international community. A more concerted effort is needed to ensure resources for the programme if there is a future for the solidarity regional programme.

Expectations vs. reality: challenges for countries of resettlement and resettled refugees

The design and delivery of adequate initial orientation is challenging in all resettlement contexts and requires continuous updates and adjustments based on lessons learned. The three

⁵⁷ Mexico Plan of Action The Impact of Regional Solidarity 2005-2007 UNHCR http://www.acnur.org/paginas/index.php?id_pag=6889

⁵⁸ Liliana Lyra Jubilit and Wellington Perira Carneiro. Resettlement in solidarity: a new regional approach towards a more humane durable solution. Refugee Survey Quarterly Vol 30, No 3. September 2011

countries quickly realized the importance of this stage to address expectations and misinformed decisions. There have been some attempts to better present the reality and challenges in the countries of resettlement, what the programme offers and what is expected of resettled refugees. More is needed to formalize lessons learned and integrate good practices in the pre-arrival and post-arrival orientation. This is an area where collaboration and sharing of best practices with countries in the region and traditional countries of resettlement can result in positive changes to the orientation stage.

Decentralization

In its implementation of the resettlement programme Brazil embraced a decentralization model placing refugees in up to twenty-two different towns and cities in several states. Argentina has followed suit and is now placing refugees in four cities. There have been several conversations between governments of the countries of solidarity resettlement and UNHCR about the expansion of the programme to small towns and rural areas, which would perhaps open the door to cases with rural background.

There are positive aspects to the decentralization model, such as engagement of local governments, the possibility of developing a wider support network, and community support for a small number of cases. Additionally, different locations can offer different prospects for integration. At the same time, the model requires investment on building relationships and gaining support from local governments, communities and civil society. It is worth evaluating how decentralization has worked in Brazil and in Cordoba, Argentina where the central role of the state government can provide an alternative model to the implementation of decentralization.

Diversification of partnerships and broadening cooperation

The diversification of partnerships is not a new idea in the solidarity resettlement context, but has not been fully developed in any of the three countries. Increasing cooperation and participation will need the concerted effort of all the entities currently involved and should target existing networks and organizations, including public, private, local, state, and federal. An important and often overlooked characteristic of these three countries is the significant engagement of civil society.

The countries in the region have numerous and well established non-governmental organizations and networks which could address some of the needs and challenges refugees face. This could also benefit refugees outside the resettlement programme. The diversification strategy should include partnerships with universities, which can offer creative cooperation initiatives in various areas from mental health to legal assistance. There are a number of creative experiences in the three countries that need to be better showcased as good practices, strengthened and expanded.

Integration: challenges achieving self-sufficiency and accessing affordable housing

Integration challenges have been at the centre of the sustainability of the solidarity regional resettlement programme. Achieving integration, mainly understood as self-sufficiency at the end of financial assistance or a one year period for most refugees, has presented numerous

barriers. These include the high cost of living, low salaries, the need for at least two incomes per household, limited access to formal employment, and difficulties in establishing independent income generating activities. Another challenge related to self-reliance is accessing adequate and affordable housing. Accessing housing has presented numerous hurdles in all three countries, although to different degrees, not only in relation to cost but compliance with rent requirements.

The three programmes have found different ways to address some of those challenges, though more work is needed exploring different alternatives to find adequate responses. The model in Cordoba where the state government provides housing presents an alternative. Access to public housing programmes, which can also be an alternative, remains limited or not currently a possibility.

Addressing these challenges should be a central priority of all actors involved in the implementation of the programme. Employment and income generating programmes need to be evaluated to determine if they need to be redefined, or modified. The three countries have either micro-credit or grants programmes with very mixed results.

These programmes can be important tools in difficult job markets but need improvement in their implementation to ensure success and sustainability. There are also other programmes and creative initiatives that need to be better utilized or expanded, including relatively easy recertification and validation of professional degrees in Argentina, access to training programmes and scholarships in Chile, and the programme to increase employment of refugees in Brazilian companies.

Access to public services and programmes

One of the assets of the programmes in the three countries is refugees' access to public healthcare and education as nationals. This includes access to broad health services at low or no cost, including mental health, dental, maternity care, and high complexity medical procedures. Few challenges have emerged in relation to access to education in public schools. Argentina also offers access to higher education in the public system with few requirements and no or low cost. This is of major importance for refugee youth and those interested in furthering their education.

The value of these two aspects of the programme have been underplayed and need to be revalorized and taken into consideration in relation to the selection of cases. There are other areas where refugees are ineligible or confront numerous barriers in accessing other public programmes and benefits, such as housing and other assistance programmes for low income families. In addition, progress is needed in exploring and expanding access to public programmes at the local and state level in the three countries. A greater understanding of and access to available programmes and resources from public services would positively impact the integration of all refugees.

Evaluation of the programme: the importance of measuring outcomes

The evaluation of the programme upon agreed indicators and outcomes need to be integrated into the implementation of the programme. The tool developed by UNHCR in Chile is a good example of formalizing an evaluation tool based on clear indicators. It is crucial that the

evaluation be an ongoing part of the programme that can also include long term assessment of the integration of refugees. This will require the use of information obtained in the evaluation to adjust and improve the implementation of the programme. It is also important to keep in mind that the low number of cases would impact the results of any evaluation creating the possibility of premature conclusions driven by too many variables.

Redefining twinning programmes and regional meetings

Best practices and experiences have been shared in the solidarity resettlement programme in two ways: regional or international meetings and twinning experiences with traditional resettlement countries. The regional meetings have been a positive experience, but sharing practices and challenges needs to be further developed to create a foundation for genuine collaboration and discussion between the different actors involved in the programme.

Currently, there are no such initiatives that allow implementing partners, government agencies and other stakeholders to communicate and share lessons learned, barriers, and creative models or programmes. While resources may be a barrier, the use of technology such as video conference calls over the internet, blogs, and websites with restrictive access, can provide a low cost alternative.

Twinning programmes with traditional resettlement countries such as Norway and Sweden played an important role particularly in the initial stages of the programme. These twinning experiences have allowed the countries in the region to learn about how selection missions and reception/integration programmes work in other resettlement countries. The social, economic and cultural differences between the countries participating in the twinning programmes has led to lessons learned and experiences that are not possible to be duplicated or created in the countries of solidarity resettlement. It is a good time to re-evaluate how to use twinning programmes to generate genuine learning experiences and the establishment of creative initiatives.

Conclusion

The regional solidarity resettlement programme currently takes place in five countries in the region and is an expression of regional solidarity and a commitment to refugee protection. An important aspect of the programme has been the engagement of many partners in the region on refugee issues and, at the same time, has opened the door to the expansion of resettlement to countries beyond traditional developed countries.

To analyze this experience it is crucial to understand its socio-economic context, its short history, and low scale. Future evaluations, implementation of integration initiatives and twinning experiences need to better incorporate the unique characteristics that define these programmes. Taking into account specific features of the programmes, their contexts and available resources will provide a more accurate and realistic scenario from which to work.

It is important to identify barriers to the integration of refugees and design alternative and creative ways to address them with the collaboration of NGOs, governments and UNHCR. Greater efforts need to be placed on the diversification of resources and partnerships, maximizing the potential of existing networks, services and programmes. Additional steps need to be taken to ensure the needs of countries of first asylum are adequately addressed

through the resettlement programme and to put in place the adequate implementation of policies and programmes geared toward long term integration of resettled refugees.

The experiences in these three countries have shown challenges and successes. There is a clear need to strengthen good practices to envision a future for the programme. Questions about the sustainability of the programme have emerged since the conception of the programme, in many cases with premature conclusions. But there have been fewer efforts to address the issues that are at the core of the question of sustainability.

To be able to ensure a future for the regional solidarity resettlement programme all those involved in the process will have to take further steps to continue good practices and work creatively to address challenges. The international community will also need to continue its support for the programme if there is any interest in the success of this experience and its future expansion to other regions in the world.

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