



COUNTRY OPERATIONS PLAN

OVERVIEW

**Country: Argentina (covering Bolivia, Chile,
Paraguay and Uruguay)**

Planning Year: 2006

OVERVIEW

1. Protection and socioeconomic operational environment.

In Southern South America there has been considerable political turmoil and socioeconomic instability. The area is not considered as a refugee-producing region, yet very significant numbers of migrants are known to reach Argentina and Chile mainly from Bolivia and Paraguay, but also from Colombia and Peru as a result of internal conflicts. Among these migrants are unknown numbers of persons who would qualify as refugees, should they apply for refugee status. Generally they do not, due to a lack of knowledge or because they prefer to remain anonymous as become part of the very large illegal immigrant communities present in the countries of asylum. In addition, authorities generally take a migration approach when dealing with refugee issues. Many immigration officials have little or no knowledge of these person's right to seek asylum. Additionally, refugee protection networks remain scarce.

Thus, UNHCR clearly has a role to play in the coming years in strengthening national capacities of Government and civil society to implement the 1951 Convention and other regional instruments related to refugees and to pro-actively interact within the regional integrative processes in the fields of human rights and migration, which are still far from comprehensive.

While it would seem logical to view the member and associated MERCOSUR countries as a whole, it is imperative to deal with them in accordance with the specific context and needs of each country, as there are many significant differences in general and as regards refugees in particular. Therefore, the Regional Office combines a regional perspective (implementation of international standards and best practices, MERCOSUR, OAS) with a national perspective of the issues.

The absence of a major regional humanitarian crisis, other than Colombia, means that refugee issues are not very high on governments' political agendas. Migration remains controversial. Limited political attention and financial resources are devoted to the national commissions dealing with RSD. In addition, a migratory, rather than a human rights approach, dominates the thinking of most authorities.

2. Operational goals and potential for durable solutions

In line with the Mexico Plan of Action, UNHCR goals in Southern South America for 2006 are:

I - Strengthening the legal framework at national and regional levels through:

- Promoting the enactment of refugee laws (where applicable);
- Building national capacities in the implementation of the national/regional framework, in particular on RSD;
- Increasing the use of local resources in training/dissemination activities;
- Improving protection for women taking in consideration different age groups.

II - A self-reliance strategy as a critical step in the pursuit of local integration:

- Capacity building for the government refugee institutions and civil society so that they can increasingly take up operational responsibility for refugee issues.

III - Strengthening the resettlement strategy in the region:

- Consolidating the resettlement programme in Chile;
- Signature of framework agreement with the Government of Argentina;
- Starting discussions with the new Government in Uruguay on resettlement possibilities.

IV - A PI regional strategy aimed at increasing the interest/support of national/private institutions and public opinion at large on refugee issues in the region/world-wide:

- Enhance constituencies and awareness in favour of refugees through the Cathedra Sergio Vieira de Mello

V - Increasing support for UNHCR programs through fund raising activities.