



Southern South America

Major developments

In Southern South America, elections led to changes of government in various countries; new presidents were elected in Bolivia, Chile and Uruguay, and in Argentina the Government won decisive popular backing in congressional elections. Several governments appointed to office former refugees who are supportive of UNHCR's work.

The region was host to some 9,200 refugees and asylum-seekers, of whom half received support from UNHCR. All countries in the region have signed the Mexico Plan of Action and progress was made with its implementation. New refugee legislation was passed in Argentina, Bolivia and Uruguay. Protection networks were strengthened to increase border monitoring, and the region expanded its emerging resettlement programme. There are now consolidated resettlement programmes in Brazil and Chile and a new programme in Argentina. UNHCR also entered into discussions with Uruguay on beginning resettlement in 2006.

The working environment in Argentina and Brazil remained favourable throughout the year, with close collaboration between the governments, UNHCR and its partners.

The year 2005 brought Bolivia to one the most challenging crossroads in its history. In the first half of the year, the Government had to contend with protests, social

Argentina
Bolivia
Brazil
Chile
Paraguay
Uruguay

tension and a demand for autonomy in the province of Santa Cruz, which is the country's largest and richest. During the elections in December, Bolivia's first indigenous president was chosen – a historic development, which promises to strengthen regional cooperation. During the year, UNHCR closely monitored the humanitarian situation and contingency plans were updated to address possible refugee outflows, which fortunately did not materialize.

In Chile, a new constitution signed in September eliminated those elements that were left over from the military rule of General Augusto Pinochet. The new constitution and the elections held at the end of the year, which brought to power the country's first female president, marked the end of Chile's transition to democracy.

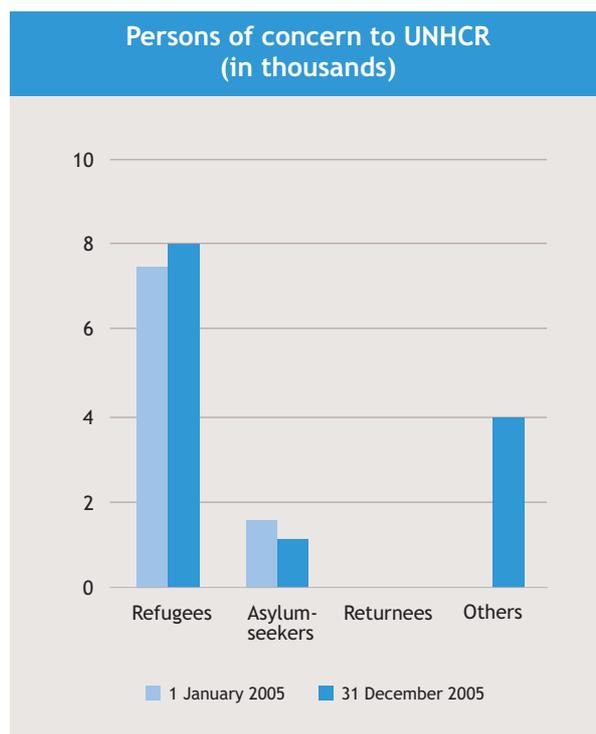
In Uruguay, 2005 was marked by the assumption of power by a new party, *Encuentro Progresista/Frente Amplio*, for the first time in 174 years.

Challenges and concerns

The Mexico Plan of Action has prompted a renewal of the operational framework and set new challenges for refugee protection in the region. Although governments in the region have welcomed the launch of the Plan and have made progress in its implementation, more commitment is required to find durable solutions to forced displacement. Governments in the region will have to take greater ownership of the Plan and their political support needs to be translated into firm practical solutions. The regional resettlement programme, mainly for Colombian refugees, was consolidated and expanded in 2005; however, more needs to be done to facilitate their integration in the host countries.

In this region, national refugee legislation is generally generous. Yet, refugees and asylum-seekers continued to face difficulties as they endeavoured to integrate fully in the main refugee-hosting countries, Argentina, Brazil and Chile. This is primarily due to high unemployment rates in large cities such as Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, Santiago and São Paulo, where most refugees were concentrated.

Income disparities remain very significant in Southern South America; large numbers of people have limited access to minimal basic government services, such as





Argentina: UNHCR's microcredit scheme has allowed this refugee to set up her own shop. *UNHCR / P. Gutnisky*

primary health care, education, drinking water, sewage and electricity. All of the countries have a market economy with a large informal sector, where most refugee populations integrate. In this context, it was difficult to withdraw humanitarian assistance after the stipulated period of six months, as most refugees have no access to alternative sources of income. Participatory assessments undertaken in São Paulo and Buenos Aires highlighted these harsh conditions for urban refugees in the region.

With fewer available resources, UNHCR will most likely be constrained to ask national governments and local authorities to assume more responsibility for refugee protection and the search for durable solutions.

Progress towards solutions

During 2005, UNHCR's lobbying and advocacy for the adoption of refugee laws resulted in the passage of a refugee law by the Argentinian Senate; the approval by the Uruguayan Chamber of Deputies of a draft law, which needs Senate approval; the issuance in Bolivia of a new Supreme Decree on Refugees and the approval of a draft refugee law by the Chamber of Deputies; and the

preparation in Chile of a new draft law by the Immigration Department. In Brazil, UNHCR offered to collaborate with the Government on the compilation and analysis of decisions by the National Refugee Commission (CONARE), in order to document the criteria for granting refugee status.

Throughout the region, UNHCR facilitated the functioning of national refugee commissions and promoted the implementation of procedures and criteria according to international standards. A number of recommendations to improve the refugee status determination procedures were submitted to governments, with promising results. In Brazil, CONARE met every 45 days and all meetings were attended by UNHCR in an advisory role. In Argentina, new questionnaire forms were used in the decision-making process and UNHCR guidelines on international protection were followed. In Chile, UNHCR attended the National Recognition Commission meetings with the aim of strengthening existing procedures, and improving the eligibility criteria as well as consolidating institutional structures and capacities for the protection of asylum-seekers and refugees.

In line with the Mexico Plan of Action and its resettlement component, UNHCR expanded and consolidated resettlement activities in the region. In 2005, 245 Colombian refugees were resettled from Costa Rica and Ecuador within the region: Brazil received 151 of these refugees and Chile 60; the remaining 34 were resettled in Argentina, where a new resettlement programme was launched after a framework agreement was signed with the Government. Resettlement procedures were improved throughout the region and emergency resettlement procedures were put in place in Brazil.

In 2005, the strengthening of protection networks in border areas was identified as a priority and new partners were selected in often marginalized regions affected by refugee and migrant flows. In Arica, Chile, a local network linked to the Catholic Church received UNHCR's support to set up a protection and self-reliance programme for Colombian asylum-seekers and refugees crossing Chile's northern border. UNHCR also increased the training of border officials dealing with mixed migratory flows. UNHCR maintained contact with 40 universities in the region participating in the Sergio Vieira de Mello University Chair. These contacts helped to expand the protection network and generate advocacy on refugee issues, involving the provision of legal expertise and social and health assistance.

Operations

About half of the refugees and asylum-seekers in the region were directly assisted so as to address their basic needs; at the same time they were supported towards achieving local integration and self-sufficiency. These efforts were shared with social networks and national and local authorities, whose contributions covered over 40 per cent of the needs. Counselling and legal aid were offered to refugees as needed.

Refugees had access to the basic health and primary education services of the countries of asylum. Local NGOs and UNHCR continued to provide health care supplementary to that provided by the authorities. The Office provided school materials and uniforms to some refugee children. It also provided language courses where needed. Women at risk benefited from longer periods of assistance, involving access to psychological care and reproductive health services using existing support systems.

In 2005, UNHCR's age, gender and diversity mainstreaming strategy was launched in the region and is now reflected in the planning of all activities.

Throughout the year, nearly 200 microcredit loans were granted in **Argentina, Chile** and **Bolivia**, 40 per cent of

them to women. The average amount recovered was 50 per cent (the highest percentage recovered was in Bolivia: 82 per cent). Business activities launched with the microcredit loans varied from handicrafts to the provision of food services, cyber-cafes and clothing repair and manufacturing. Local authorities and institutions were involved in the implementation of credit schemes and in some cases, the beneficiaries borrowed seed capital from governmental microcredit programmes.

In **Brazil**, refugees continued to benefit from employment counselling and vocational training in State schools. Access to credit was only introduced late in the year, following an agreement signed with a professional microfinance institute. Some 60 refugees benefited from credit facilities and 15 even had access to credit schemes to build their own houses. In this respect, an initial contact was established with UN Habitat to have refugees included in a government housing project.

The UNHCR offices in Argentina and Brazil continued to draw maximum media attention to refugees and to promote the Mexico Plan of Action. In Argentina, the support of Uruguayan-born actor Osvaldo Laport, the *pro bono* support of an advertising company and the involvement of both refugees and implementing agencies continued to be instrumental. Media interest in UNHCR's work is on the rise, as reflected in the continuous increase in requests for information, offers of volunteer work and numbers of media appearances. In Argentina, refugee-related announcements during high profile sport events contributed to raising awareness on refugee issues. In Brazil, public interest in refugee issues was kept high throughout the year, particularly at the time of the High Commissioner's visit to the country.

Funding

This geographically vast region is covered from one Regional Office in Buenos Aires and one Country Office in Brasilia. The region received additional funding for the "Resettlement in Solidarity" component of the Mexico Plan of Action. Due to limited funding, however, the operation did not cover the sensitive border areas between Colombia and Brazil, and Chile and Peru, where mixed migration flows occur frequently.

UNHCR's local fundraising strategy in the region was further developed. Several cultural and sports events were organized to raise funds for partners directly working with the refugee population. About USD 13,600 was raised locally in Argentina.

Restricted voluntary contributions (USD)		
Earmarking ¹	Donor	Annual programme budget
Southern South America		
	Argentina	20,000
	Norway	129,023
	Sweden	302,572
	United States	999,370
Sub-total		1,450,965
Brazil		
	Norway	209,023
Sub-total		209,023
Total		1,659,987

¹ For more information on the earmarking, please refer to the donor profiles.

Budget and expenditure (USD)		
Country	Final budget	Expenditure
	Annual programme budget	
Argentina	838,677	838,677
Brazil	1,922,317	1,847,690
Regional projects ¹	1,438,705	1,368,454
Total	4,199,699	4,054,821

¹ Includes local integration of refugees in Southern South America, scholarships for refugee students and resettlement assistance to refugees in Chile and Brazil.