



# Southern South America

## Major developments

Countries in Southern South America gradually progressed towards greater political stability, with faster economic growth reported in most countries, but democratic processes and the rule of law remained fragile. During the year, over half of the 9,050 refugees and asylum-seekers in the subregion received legal support and assistance from UNHCR. More than 34 per cent of the refugee population is female.

Following the request of the Government of Brazil, UNHCR re-opened an office in Brasilia. The Government of Brazil played an important role in commemorating the Cartagena Declaration, and promoting the programme for resettlement in Latin America, which led to an increased number of refugees being resettled in Brazil and Chile and opened the way for new resettlement projects in Argentina and Uruguay.

Prior to the commemoration of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Cartagena Declaration, a preparatory meeting was held in Brasilia, attended by representatives of all the countries of the Southern Cone, to establish a common agenda on the development of refugee legislation, local integration and resettlement. This

Argentina

Bolivia

Brazil

Chile

Paraguay

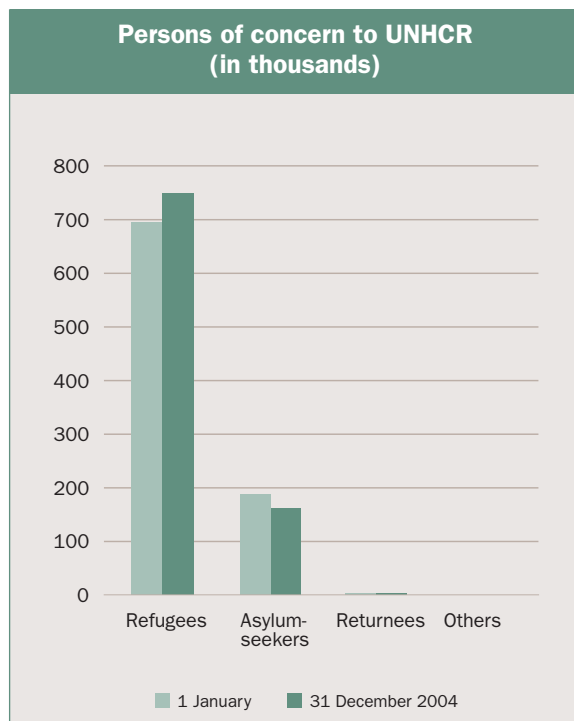
Uruguay

agenda was later incorporated into the Mexico Declaration and Plan of Action adopted at the commemorative event in November 2004 (please see the box under the Central America and Mexico chapter).

## Challenges and concerns

Although Governments in the region were more proactive on human rights issues, it has been a challenge to bring refugee issues to the forefront. However, the adoption of the Mexico Declaration was a positive step towards renewed governmental action on refugee issues. Throughout the year, UNHCR focused on the Migratory Forum of MERCOSUR, and its intra-regional debates on migration and human rights.

Working in collaboration with States in the subregion, UNHCR monitored refugee situations, emphasized the importance of identifying refugees and asylum-seekers within larger migration flows, especially in border areas and provided training on refugee law to migration and police officers, ensuring refugees had access to eligibility procedures.



Refugees were able to enter the labour market legally; however, the economic situation in 2004 in Southern South America was not particularly conducive to local integration. UNHCR faced many challenges in its efforts to reduce refugees' dependence on humanitarian assistance. Despite these challenges, the Office increased the self-reliance of refugees through micro-credit and job placement schemes.

## Progress towards solutions

UNHCR's technical advice and support to the MERCOSUR Forum on Migratory Issues led to a postponement of the adoption of a "Schengen-type" agreement on the transfer of responsibility of migration procedures. The Office's involvement in these meetings entailed a more intensive exchange of ideas with the authorities in charge of designing





Brazil: Refugees who are afforded resettlement opportunities in Brazil are helped to become self-reliant. Here, a resettled refugee is taking extra lessons. *UNHCR/G. Gutarra*

immigration policies for MERCOSUR. In this respect, UNHCR coordinated activities with IOM and participated in a meeting on the Bern Initiative on migration issues in Bolivia.

In line with the resettlement programme in the Mexico Plan of Action, resettlement to Brazil and Chile was accelerated and the Government of Brazil explored the possibility of fast-track resettlement

procedures to enable the speedy resettlement of extremely vulnerable refugees. During 2004, after the visit of selection missions from Brazil and Chile to resettlement offices in Costa Rica and Ecuador, 75 persons were resettled to Brazil and 26 to Chile. Resettled refugees had access to health and education, but encountered difficulties when searching for work. UNHCR supported their basic needs, and implemented micro-credit schemes to help the





resettled people to supplement the support provided by local authorities and host communities.

During the year, UNHCR concluded an agreement with the Montevideo Group of Universities, in the framework of the Sergio Vieira de Mello Chair. Its objective is to disseminate and reinforce human rights and refugee issues. An agreement was also signed with the University of La Plata in Argentina on

refugee protection and related activities. The Office provided three courses on refugee issues, migration, human rights, and gender for university professors from five countries. These courses will be replicated in universities throughout the region.

UNHCR increased its public information and awareness activities throughout the region. In 2004, the Office received 750 free local media slots, and produced a video on resettlement in Chile in coordination with a local partner. The video will be used by the UNHCR offices in Costa Rica and Ecuador to inform resettlement candidates about living conditions in Chile.

Refugee women and children received support in education, reproductive health and psychosocial counselling. All refugee women received their own documentation, had the same access to basic social services as men and obtained 21 per cent of the micro-credits provided by UNHCR partners. Efforts were made to strengthen micro-credit schemes initiated in 2002 in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile and Uruguay through the provision of vocational training, to enhance refugees' self reliance. The Office also provided pre-school care to facilitate skills training for female heads of households. Of the 900 refugee children who benefited from educational opportunities, including primary and secondary education and language training, 40 per cent were female.

## Operations

In 2004, UNHCR and its partners registered some 940 new arrivals (380 asylum-seekers arrived in Brazil, 310 in Argentina, 200 in Chile and 50 in other countries). Most of the refugees in the region were of Colombian origin and, in the case of Brazil, some came from Africa. There was also a small group of elderly European refugees who were supported by the Tolstoi Foundation in Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Paraguay. UNHCR provided assistance to refugees, based on individual evaluations carried out by implementing partners, taking into consideration the circumstances of the new arrivals and any delays in receiving their documentation. Eligibility commissions were convened regularly, but significant backlogs remained (over 1,560 asylum claims pending in the region).

In **Argentina**, the prospects for local integration remained limited despite an economic growth of

nine per cent and a reduction in the unemployment rate from 16 to 13 per cent during the year. UNHCR had to continue its support for labour insertion and micro-credit schemes to promote refugee self-reliance.

In **Bolivia**, the dire economic situation, coupled with social protests throughout the year, made the local integration of refugees difficult. UNHCR consequently continued to support refugees with basic assistance and with opportunities to obtain support through micro-credit schemes.

In **Brazil**, UNHCR reinforced contacts with central and municipal authorities and the private sector, to facilitate local integration and enhance refugee self-reliance. The UNHCR office in Brazil established contacts with the Ministry of Racial Integration to address the integration needs of African refugees. The reopening of the office in early 2004 reinforced UNHCR's relationship with government authorities and civil society partners. Nineteen new NGOs and church groups joined the country's protection network, and an additional representative of civil society was given observer status on the National Committee for Refugees (CONARE) meetings.

In **Chile**, UNHCR continued to lobby for the adoption and inclusion of a specific refugee chapter in

the Immigration Law. The Office provided technical advice to the Department of Immigration on the new draft law on asylum and refuge and participated in several meetings of the National Refugee Commission.

The National Committee for Refugees (CONARE) in **Paraguay** held several meetings in 2004 and concluded several RSD sessions. At the request of CONARE, UNHCR and an implementing partner held training sessions on refugee law for immigration and border control officials.

In **Uruguay**, UNHCR supported the implementation of the presidential decree that established national RSD mechanisms compliant with international standards. A draft law on refugees was presented to the newly elected Government.

## Funding

The refugee programmes in Southern South America depended mainly on contributions from local civic and professional organizations. UNHCR's funding was directed mostly to the refugee assistance programme. In Argentina, UNHCR endeavoured to increase funds from the private sector, but limited public awareness made that a difficult task.

Restricted voluntary contributions (USD)		
Earmarking <sup>1</sup>	Donor	Annual programme budget
<b>Southern South America</b>		
	Argentina	20,000
<b>Total</b>		<b>20,000</b>

<sup>1</sup> For more information on the earmarkings, please refer to the donor profiles.

Budget and expenditure (USD)		
Country	Revised budget	Expenditure
	Annual programme budget	
Argentina	726,757	726,757
Brazil	312,709	312,709
Regional projects <sup>1</sup>	2,035,925	2,028,110
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,075,391</b>	<b>3,067,576</b>

<sup>1</sup> Includes local integration of refugees in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay and scholarships for refugee students and resettlement assistance to refugees in Chile and Brazil.