

October 2017

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The future of the Brazilian resettlement programme

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Brazil's resettlement programmes have been praised for demonstrating the country's commitment to refugee protection but the number resettled remains small compared with international need. Brazil needs to address the financing of such programmes if it is to ensure their sustainability and growth.

In 2004, Brazil marked the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Cartagena Declaration by proposing a regional resettlement programme. The Cartagena Declaration of 1984 had encouraged the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean to make greater provision for the protection of refugees; the Mexico Declaration and Plan of Action of 2004 built on existing regional cooperation by initiating a Solidarity Resettlement Programme which would focus on resettlement of refugees from the region, particularly Colombia and the Northern Triangle of Central America¹. The Declaration also widened the scope for all countries in Latin America to be involved and for more refugees to be included in the future.²

Brazil has resettled more refugees than any country in the region and its resettlement programme has not been suspended or delayed for political and/or financial reasons, as has happened in Argentina, Chile and Paraguay. From 2002 (when the resettlement programme was first implemented) to July 2017, Brazil resettled 715 refugees. Brazil's resettlement programme has been praised for demonstrating the country's commitment to the international protection of refugees

– but why has the Brazilian programme been unable to resettle even larger numbers of refugees? One answer may lie in the way in which the task of financing was assigned to just one of the programme's stakeholders: UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency.

The greatest asset of the Brazilian Resettlement Programme is its tripartite structure. The framework comprises the National Committee for Refugees (CONARE), an executive inter-ministerial committee which provides the legal and bureaucratic support that refugees need when they arrive; UNHCR, which is able to identify people at risk in their first country of asylum and to advocate their resettlement in countries where protection and local integration are possible; and civil society institutions, which have a long history of supporting refugees in Brazil, which enables them to anticipate the needs of newcomers, prepare for their reception and monitor their integration. UNHCR is responsible for implementing the programme and also for financing it. This structure is common among resettlement programmes in the Latin American region. While on the one hand UNHCR has an ability to raise funds from the international community that most countries do not have, on the other hand a number of countries to which UNHCR allocates funds might, collectively, raise more funds than UNHCR could on its own, thus facilitating the resettlement of an overall greater number of refugees. As UNHCR is in most cases the only funder of the cost of refugees' selection and transportation to Brazil, the agency is crucial not only to the successful implementation of the resettlement programme but also to its existence and continuity. This issue of exclusive financing by UNHCR has raised significant concerns about the future of the programme since there are no guarantees that UNHCR will be able to sustain this funding.

How then will Brazil be able to maintain and develop a programme that is totally dependent on external resources? Competing demands on UNHCR's limited



Human Rights Watch/César Muñoz Acebes 2017

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resources – including acute refugee crises in other regions, such as in the Middle East – might mean that hard choices have to be made about priorities, perhaps risking the loss of all the expertise built around this protection tool in Brazil.

Twenty years after the first agreement on the resettlement of refugees in the region was signed, it may be time for Brazil to strengthen support for its own national resettlement programme. It is true that Brazil has developed other protection tools, such as the humanitarian visa for individuals affected by the Syrian conflict (which also extends to Palestinian refugees who have been living in Syria).³ However, in order to contribute more assertively to the international protection of refugees, the Brazilian government needs to take a leading role in its national resettlement programme while at the same time working closely with UNHCR and civil society. To achieve this Brazil needs to provide the primary funding for its resettlement programmes, in accordance with national commitments and needs. The tripartite structure of the Brazilian Resettlement Programme is its greatest

asset but a move away from its exclusive financing by UNHCR could help to reinforce the programme and provide protection to a greater number of refugees. It could also lead to new possibilities for the design of a national resettlement programme that is not only sustainable and effective but which also reflects to an even greater degree Brazil's commitment to international solidarity and shared responsibility for protecting refugees.

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www.justica.gov.br/central-de-atendimento/estrangeiros/refugio-1/refugio

1. Also now referred to as Northern Central America.
2. See also Barreto L P T F and Leão R Z R (2010) 'Brazil and the spirit of Cartagena', *Forced Migration Review* issue 35 <http://bit.ly/Barreto-Leao-Cartagena-2010>
3. Once individuals declare that they want to apply for asylum in Brazil they are issued with a tourist visa but are exempted from the usual requirement to submit bank accounts, letters of invitation, proof of employment and/or economic activity and return tickets. See also article by Gilberto M A Rodrigues, José Blanes Sala and Débora C de Siqueira in this issue.