

IN SEARCH OF SUSTAINABLE REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT SOLUTIONS FOR LATIN AMERICA

Por S. MICHELLE ALFARO¹ y MARTIN LETTIERI²

Abstract:

In recent years, refugee resettlement in Latin America has been generally based upon a particular form of resettlement known as “Solidarity Resettlement” which was envisaged within the XX Anniversary of the Cartagena Declaration’s 2004 Mexico Plan of Action (MPA). However, more recently, countries of the Southern Cone, in particular, Argentina, Chile and Uruguay, have begun to shift away from the concept of Solidarity Resettlement, and have begun exploring other, possibly more sustainable models, including private sponsorship. This paper provides a brief overview of the various resettlement programs in the region, with a focus on Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay. While to date the programs have remained comparatively small in scale, significant opportunities remain for expansion in the years ahead. Fundamental to the success of any program will be ensuring proper coordination structures are in place (including support to integration and cultural orientation), along with allocating sufficient funding for the term of the program, without which, challenges may be expected to arise.

Keywords:

Durable Solutions, Resettlement, Sponsorship Programmes, Local Integration, Latin America

¹ Abogada. Graduada de la Universidad de California, Berkeley, en “Peace and Conflict Studies”, Juris Doctor de la Universidad del Sur de California y Magister en Estudios del Cercano y Medio Oriente de la Escuela de Estudios Orientales & Africanos de la Universidad de Londres, Reino Unido. Ha trabajado para el ACNUR desde 1998 y ocupó varios puestos en las Unidades de Protección y Reasentamiento del ACNUR en Bosnia, Mozambique; Etiopía; Turquía; Indonesia; Jordania; Siria, y Buenos Aires, Argentina. En la actualidad es Oficial de Protección Senior de la Unidad de Protección y Soluciones del ACNUR en Washington DC. E-mail: alfaro@unhcr.org.

² Abogado de la Universidad de Buenos Aires. Maestrando en Derechos Humanos de la Universidad Nacional de Lanús. Ha realizado diversos cursos de especialización sobre protección de refugiados y migraciones internacionales y ha contribuido en diferentes publicaciones sobre la temática. Ha colaborado como Asistente docente de la materia Derecho Internacional de los Refugiados de la Facultad de Derecho UBA y como profesor regular de Derecho Internacional Público en la Universidad de Palermo. Es actualmente Oficial Nacional de Reasentamiento en la Oficina Regional para el Sur de América Latina del ACNUR. E-mail: martin_lettieri@yahoo.com.ar.

EN BÚSQUEDA DE SOLUCIONES SOSTENIBLES PARA EL REASENTAMIENTO DE REFUGIADOS EN AMÉRICA LATINA

Resumen:

El reasentamiento de refugiados en Latinoamérica ha estado basado, en los últimos años, en un modelo particular conocido como “Reasentamiento Solidario”, introducido a partir del Plan de Acción de México de 2004 en el marco del proceso del XX Aniversario de la Declaración de Cartagena de 1984. No obstante, más recientemente algunos países del Cono Sur, en particular Argentina, Chile y Uruguay, han empezado a explorar otros modelos distintos al del “Reasentamiento Solidario”, entre los cuales se destaca el denominado “patrocinio comunitario o privado”. El siguiente artículo ofrece una sintética revisión de los distintos modelos de programas de reasentamiento existentes en la región, especialmente en los tres países mencionados. En ese marco, el artículo afirma que mientras que estos programas se han caracterizado hasta la fecha por su escala relativamente pequeña, podrían tener al mismo tiempo significativas oportunidades de expansión en los próximos años. Para promover una exitosa implementación de estos Programas resultaría fundamental asegurar el establecimiento de estructuras de coordinación adecuadas (en particular en las áreas de apoyo a la integración y a la orientación intercultural), junto con la asignación del financiamiento requerido para completar dichos programas hasta su finalización.

Palabras claves:

Soluciones duraderas, reasentamiento, Programas de Patrocinio comunitario o privado, integración local, América Latina.

1. BACKGROUND

1.1. Resettlement as a durable solution

The pursuit of durable solutions for the forcibly displaced is a core component of the international refugee protection regime.

Historically, three durable solutions have been recognized: voluntary repatriation, local integration, and resettlement to a third country. “All three solutions are regarded as durable because they promise an end to refugees’ suffering and their need for international protection and dependence on humanitarian assistance”³.

Some have contended that the three solutions depend more on geopolitical, economic and social considerations, rather than strictly humanitarian considerations. As Chimni states after analyzing the prevalence of one over the

³ UNHCR, *The State of the World’s Refugees 2006, Human Displacement in the new Millennium*, UNHCR, 2006, see: <http://www.unhcr.org/publications/sowr/4444afcc0/state-worlds-refugees-2006-human-displacement-new-millennium-chapter-6.html>.

other two durable solutions at different periods of refugee protection history, “The only conclusion that one can draw from this episode in the evolution of the international refugee regime is that humanitarian factors do not shape the refugee policies of the dominant states in the international system. It underlines the need to be alert to the non-humanitarian objectives which are pursued by these actors from time to time behind the facade of humanitarianism”⁴.

A UNHCR report indicated, “During the Cold War and the national-liberation struggles of the 1960s and 1970s, those who fled communist regimes and colonial oppression were granted refugee status on the assumption that repatriation was not an option. Resettlement and local integration were generally regarded as the most viable and strategically desirable durable solutions. With the demise of communism and colonialism, however, repatriation became more realistic and attractive for states. Furthermore, the increase since the 1980s in migration from poor to rich countries and the growing association of refugees with migrants fleeing poverty have added to the reluctance of wealthy nations to offer resettlement. As for southern states, in the aftermath of economic adjustment and democratization most of them have been less willing to support local integration. This is in contrast to the situation in the 1960s and 1970s when, in Africa, for instance, rural refugees were allowed a high level of de facto local *integratio*”⁵.

In recent years, conflicts have become increasingly protracted, preventing timely humanitarian solutions and/or immediate voluntary return. Indeed, the level of voluntary repatriations of the last few years has been one of the lowest of past decades.

On the other hand, as most refugees are hosted by developing countries where economies and public resources are not always in a position to provide an adequate response to their needs and demands, many countries are reluctant towards local integration of refugees. Yet increasingly restrictive migratory policies implemented by many countries creates a complex environment which tends to restrict refugees in the first country of asylum (countries bordering conflict states, which are oftentimes impoverished themselves).

With regard to the third durable solution, very few countries around the globe offer significant resettlement spaces. In 2016, 85% of UNHCR’s resettlement departures went to just three countries: the United States (62%), Canada (17%), and Australia (6%)⁶.

In this context, innovative approaches around resettlement are being explored in an attempt to address expanding resettlement needs by increasing the

⁴ CHIMNI, B. S., ‘From Resettlement to Involuntary Repatriation: Towards a Critical History of Durable Solutions to Refugee Problems’, *New Issues in Refugee Research*, Working Paper N° 2, UNHCR, Geneva, 1999. See http://www.migration4development.org/sites/default/files/bs_chimni.pdf.

⁵ *Ibid.*, note 2.

⁶ UNHCR resettlement statistics 2016, <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/resettlement-data.html>.

number of countries committed to this solution, and also pursuing the involvement of local levels of Governments, civil society and the communities themselves to be part of the Resettlement process.

1.2. Solidarity Resettlement

Although resettlement in the region existed previously (particularly in Chile and Brazil), the 2004 Mexico Plan of Action (MPA) formally established the concept of *Solidarity Resettlement* as a “possibility for any Latin American country, at the opportune time, to participate and to receive refugees who are in other Latin American countries”, calling on “the need for technical and financial cooperation from the international community for its strengthening and consolidation...”⁷, establishing two key aspects of Solidarity Resettlement, which was that it was initially meant for refugees from Latin America, and with the expectation that there would be technical and financial support from the international community. The technical support primarily came from UNHCR, with funds from the international community, also normally channeled via UNHCR.

While Solidarity Resettlement was used to expand and encourage resettlement to Latin American countries, especially for Colombian refugees, the reliance on international funds persisted. This ultimately created an issue of not only sustainability, but more importantly “ownership” of the various programs, as UNHCR was left to identify and allocate funds for the continuation of the programs, as well as provide oversight and follow up for the programs in conjunction with national Refugee Commissions, as well as with locally identified partners, which contributed to other challenges, particularly with regard to local integration.

In the end, no country formally established an exceptional allocation of government funds, or a formal state budget for resettlement, apart from the general inclusion of resettled refugees in public services such as health or education, and in some specific social housing schemes in Paraguay and Uruguay⁸.

In 2014, to commemorate the XXX Anniversary of the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, participating countries from Latin America and the Caribbean, including civil society organizations, presented the Brazil Declaration and Plan of Action. The Brazil Plan of Action (BPA), in addition to setting out a number of initiatives and objectives, furthers key aspects of

⁷ “Mexico Declaration and Plan of Action to Strengthen the International Protection of Refugees in Latin America”, Mexico City, 16/11/2004, Chapter 3.3. (https://www.oas.org/dil/mexico_declaration_plan_of_action_16nov2004.pdf).

⁸ In 2014, Uruguay carried out a fully state-funded small-scale resettlement program for 42 Syrian refugees which is discussed in more detail below. For the purposes of this article, this program is not considered a solidarity resettlement program, as it was a fully state-funded program for extra-regional refugees. Uruguay maintains solidarity resettlement on a small scale for refugees from Latin America and with the support of funds provided by the international community.

the MPA Solidarity Resettlement scheme through identifying and stressing the challenges of local integration for refugees, as well as extending Solidarity Resettlement to “demonstrate solidarity with international humanitarian crises through either the use of humanitarian visas or resettlement quotas”⁹. Moreover, the BPA called for UNHCR to conduct an evaluation of the Solidarity Resettlement Program.

The “Evaluation of Resettlement Programs in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay” (hereinafter “the Evaluation”) was conducted by UNHCR in 2015 through an external consultant¹⁰. The objective of the Evaluation was to “identify obstacles and good practices during the selection and profiling phases and in the integration process”¹¹. The study took into account the 1,514 persons resettled to the 5 countries between 2005 and 2014, including 363 extra-regional refugees primarily consisting of ex-Iraq Palestinians and Syrians. There were 183 refugees/ 58 cases interviewed for the study, including some refugees that had not been resettled, but were considered “spontaneous” arrivals.

The perspectives and experiences of these additional groups was helpful to understand parallel levels of support that the different refugee groups received, depending on how and under what conditions they arrived to the solidarity resettlement country. Generally, Solidarity Resettlement programs provided Spanish—speaking refugees with approximately one year of support, including housing and financial support, as well as vocational skills training. Single mothers with children, or other vulnerable cases, were considered to need greater support in the integration process and were normally entitled to a second year of support under the program. Spontaneous refugees, on the other hand, receive minimal, if any, support when in need, often far more heavily relying on limited and often over-burdened state social programs.

The Evaluation includes a list of recommendations to help resettlement countries “assess the feasibility of continuing their regional—through the Solidarity program—and extra-regional resettlement programs”¹².

Some of the key recommendations include:

— States that have the impetus, capacity, and political will to fully or primarily fund resettlement would certainly make a very significant contribution to international refugee protection by doing so. States unable to make that long-term commitment should pursue solidarity through other means.

⁹ “A Framework for Cooperation and Regional Solidarity to Strengthen the International Protection of Refugees, Displaced and Stateless Persons in Latin America and the Caribbean”, Brasilia, 3/12/2014.

¹⁰ RUIZ, Hiram, “Evaluation of Resettlement Programs in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay”, December 2015, UNHCR (<http://www.unhcr.org/57c983557.pdf>).

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

· **Role of the State:** The State must be involved and engaged at every stage of the resettlement process, from planning to integration, even if day-to-day implementation of the program is in the hands of a partner agency from civil society... In order to achieve successful resettlement, both national and local governments must take ownership of the program... Efforts should be made to secure support for a resettlement program from across the political spectrum to ensure that the program, and refugees who are resettled, have continuity and stability... The Government agency tasked with managing the resettlement program should play both a planning and a coordinating role, serving as the liaison between involved Government entities at the national level and between the national Government and local authorities. It should be fully staffed with experienced personnel and be given the authority it needs to carry out its functions.

· **Financing:** States should assess the many costs of a resettlement program and make available sufficient funds (whether from domestic or international sources) to implement the program effectively.

· **Employment and Housing:** Ensuring that resettled refugees are placed in stable, full-time employment with sufficient wages to cover their living expenses is quintessential to successful resettlement. Job development and job placement services must be at the core of resettlement programs to ensure that refugees are employed by the end of their first year—if not well before then... Resettlement programs must ensure that refugees have access to stable, affordable housing once rent subsidies end. That is a sine qua non for future resettlement.

· **Local Integration:** Both States that continue resettlement and those that do not should focus greater efforts on strengthening programs to enhance the economic and social integration of all refugees, including the growing number of spontaneous refugees and recipients of humanitarian visas applying for refugee status, who, combined, now significantly outnumber refugees resettled since the start of the SRP¹³.

Many of these recommendations were correctly summarized by Marcogliese:

In the first place, the Program was based on the states' commitment to provide refugees with residence permits, documentation, and access to rights equal to those of foreigners who resided in the territory. But it was simultaneously based on the international community's commitment through UNHCR to finance the transfer of individual refugees or families and to contract local agencies and civil society organizations to implement the program—that is, to manage the reception of and provision of lodging and food for the refugees, and to support the process of integrating them into the workforce. Local asylum authorities and the state should, however, have played a larger

¹³ *Ibid.*

role in the integration process than they did. For those who accepted the offer of resettlement, structural difficulties typical of the receiving societies (relating to access to jobs or housing, income generation, public safety and so on) made the process of integration difficult¹⁴.

The importance that the Evaluation places on the states' role in resettlement or related activities cannot be overemphasized. The recommendations in several places makes reference not only to the state's essential role "from planning to integration", but also to ensuring that sufficient state funds are committed to carrying out the programs, and that the role and presence of the state should extend from the central to the local level. The local integration recommendations highlight that these are not only relevant for resettlement programs, but for any efforts made towards local integration of refugees, including for other programs under consideration, such as humanitarian visa programs.

In other words, before states can reasonably consider resettlement or humanitarian visa type schemes, they should first examine the level of commitment required for such an endeavor, starting from the coordination necessary from a central to a local level, as well as ensuring sufficient funding for the term of the program, without which, they can expect predictable and foreseeable challenges to arise.

2. CURRENT COUNTRY PROGRAMMES; FROM SOLIDARITY RESETTLEMENT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

2.1. Uruguay

After a visit by the then Uruguayan Foreign Minister to the Zaatari Refugee Camp in Jordan in early 2014, the Uruguayan government committed to resettle a set number of Syrian refugees. Uruguay was the first country in Latin America to fund a program for Syrian refugees with state funds, setting a precedent in the region. Although a small-scale initiative (resettling 42 Syrian individuals in total), Uruguay's efforts to initiate a resettlement program was well received and was used as an example to encourage other countries in the region to do the same¹⁵. As reviewed in the aforementioned Solidarity Resettlement Evaluation, the resettlement program was quickly organized between June and October 2014 by government authorities unfamiliar with resettlement and local

¹⁴ MARCOGLIESE, María José, "The Solidarity Resettlement Programme, and alternatives, in Latin America", *Forced Migration Review* 54, February 2017 see <http://www.fmreview.org/resettlement/marcoliase.html> [N. del E. This article was sent to publishing in October 2017. Since then, resettled refugees arrived to Chile and Uruguay as announced in this section, creating a new chapter of achievements and challenges which will require further analysis in the future].

¹⁵ "Uruguay es el primer país de América Latina en reasentar familias refugiadas sirias", 9/10/2014 (<https://www.presidencia.gub.uy/comunicacion/comunicacionnoticias/conferencia-oficial-arribo-familias-sirias-primer-contingente>).

integration, and took some time to become solidly established, which led to a series of challenges.

The Uruguay Syrian resettlement program achieved a number of important goals. While solidarity resettlement in Uruguay is coordinated by the Uruguay Refugee Commission (CORE) and an NGO, Servicio Ecu mico para la Dignidad Humana - SEDHU, in contrast, the Syrian resettlement program was supported by the state, with state actors exclusively seeking and obtaining housing solutions, establishing and offering Spanish language programs, and accompanying and supporting the refugees families to seek employment as well as obtain vocational training opportunities. The children were enrolled in school and given access to education, including higher education, which is not the case for many Syrian refugee children and adolescents in Lebanon, and the families had access to free universal healthcare. Older and better-established resettlement programs in other parts of the world could not necessarily make the same claim. Uruguay state actors gained valuable hands on experience and played an operational role in this local integration process, experience that will hopefully be applied in the future to their solidarity resettlement program.

However, the implementation of the program in Uruguay was not without challenges. The press coverage of this group was especially intense, some integration challenges arose expectations by some refugees were not realistic, and several of the families publicly demanded to leave Uruguay. The initially positive and warm public reception turned markedly chillier towards Syrian refugees and resettlement in general.

Resettlement is not an overnight process, but a multi-year endeavor which takes time to develop, advance, and show results. Challenges and frustrations in the adaptation and integration process are a given. In the end, while the original plan was for Uruguay to take 120 Syrian refugees from Lebanon, ultimately Uruguay did not expand the program beyond the initial group of 42 Syrian refugees.

In theory, the solidarity resettlement program in Uruguay is one of the few remaining solidarity resettlement programs, although it has not received refugees since 2014. The government has expressed its intentions to not only continue the program with persons fleeing the violence in El Salvador, but also made reference to the possibility of hosting a Protection Transfer Arrangement (PTA) which would allow persons at imminent risk in Northern Central America (NCA) to remain temporarily in Uruguay while they are processed for other resettlement countries¹⁶.

While a small beginning, the symbolism of the initiative demonstrates important commitment and solidarity with regions bearing the brunt of the

¹⁶ URWICZ, Tomer, "Salvadore os refugiados vienen para quedarse", *El Pa s*, 30/5/2017. (<http://www.elpais.com.uy/informacion/salvadorenos-refugiados-vienen-que darse-uruguay.html>).

refugee crises, setting an example for other countries in the region to consider similar efforts. In order to be successful in the long-term, additional support mechanisms will be needed to improve refugee integration and cultural orientation.

2.2. *Argentina*

Prior to the Resettlement Evaluation in 2015, Argentina had already suspended its Solidarity Resettlement program.

Without the continued financing of the international community and with the region sliding into an economic downturn, Argentina was unlikely to prioritize the needed funding from its budget to support a resettlement program.

Instead, they sought other models to support the crisis in Syria. About the same time that Uruguay launched its Syrian Resettlement program and the year after Brazil rolled out its humanitarian visa¹⁷, Argentina initiated its own “Programa Especial de Visado Humanitario para Extranjeros afectados por el conflicto de la Republica Arabe Siria” (*Programa Siria*) in October 2014 through the National Direction of Migration (DNM), to provide humanitarian visas for refugees fleeing the crisis in Syria, including ex-Syria Palestinian refugees. This commitment was further expanded with the September 2016 announcement at the 71st General Assembly and the Leaders’ Summit in Refugees in New York, where Argentina President committed to accept 3000 Syrian Refugees¹⁸.

The Argentine humanitarian visa (HV) takes the Brazilian HV several steps further by incorporating a reception and local integration component, as well as the usual measures, such as security checks.

The *Programa Siria* requires a sponsor, or *llamante*, who agrees to invite and provide accommodation and cover basic needs (or “maintenance”) for the beneficiary or beneficiaries. It grants a 2 year renewable residence permit, taking into account that after two years, a person is eligible to apply

¹⁷ In neighboring Brazil, the Refugee Commission issued a Humanitarian Visa in September 2013 meant to be a 2 year visa for persons affected by the armed conflict in Syria wishing to seek asylum in Brazil. While the Brazilian humanitarian visa is well intentioned, it has had mixed results due to, amongst other issues, a lack of provision for transportation to Brazil, reception and local integration support for visa beneficiaries, leaving associated costs up to the personal resources of persons fleeing armed conflict or to civil society to seek solutions. For desperate people with resources or a personal, reliable network in Brazil seeking to flee the conflict, it is an opportunity. However, for persons who may have depleted all savings, have no friends or family in the country, and may be especially vulnerable or at risk, it is a far less accessible solution. See Resolução Normativa CONARE N° 17 de 20/9/2013 (<https://www.legisweb.com.br/legislacao/?id=258708>).

¹⁸ OBARRIO, Mariano, “Compromiso para recibir a refugiados sirios”, *La Nación*, 21 Septiembre 2016. (<http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1939850-compromiso-para-recibir-a-refugiados-sirios>).

for citizenship or after three years to request permanent residence under the migration law.

The HV does not confer refugee status, as that requires a separate administrative procedure, although a possible option for the beneficiaries is to seek asylum upon arrival.

In the 2014 version of the program, the *llamantes* were required to have a family tie and the period of support was left open-ended¹⁹. However, since its initiation, the *llamante* criteria has become considerably more flexible and can include the support of a civil society or faith based organization. The need for a family link is no longer required and the possibility to be a *llamante* is open to any private Argentine national present in the country or foreigner with valid temporary or permanent residence. Now the period of required support for the beneficiaries is 12 months²⁰. With the current scheme in place, Argentina is the first country in the region exploring the so-called “private sponsorship programmes” for refugees.

Further changes to the *Programa Siria* can be reasonably expected in the yearly renewal of the program. By late 2017, approximately 300 persons have arrived to Argentina under this scheme, against the original commitment of 3,000, so approximately 10% fulfilled.

As shared above, the *Programa Siria* primarily depends on private citizens or organizations to come forward to sponsor refugees fleeing the conflict for a year. It substitutes what would be the role of the state to provide reception and local integration support in a traditional resettlement program, with private individuals who choose to come forward and essentially assume that role and responsibility.

Although the government is not providing direct financial support upon arrival, it plays an important coordination role, through the DNM and the Chief of Cabinet Office, especially with other ministries, including Foreign Affairs, Education, Health, Labor, etc. to ensure that beneficiaries can access documentation, services, and social programs, to facilitate their local integration and remove or reduce possible obstacles. This role is key to coordinate between the National Government and the Provinces and/or the Municipalities, which are, in most cases, responsible for providing social support.

Although the Argentine HV program is in a relatively nascent stage of development, Argentina’s inclusion in programs such as the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative (GRSI), discussed below, encourages the government to look for ways to reinforce and strengthen its own program and seek a practical, alternative pathway or resettlement-type model that best fits its reality and resources.

¹⁹ Disposición DNM 3915/2014 (<http://www.migraciones.gov.ar/programasiria/pdf/3915-2014.pdf>).

²⁰ Disposición DNM 4683/2016 (<http://www.migraciones.gov.ar/programasiria/?inicio>).

Given the HV sponsorship possibility, in early 2017, the Province of San Luis committed to sponsor 200 Syrians fleeing the conflict over a three year period and provide the required support. Whereas the vast majority of persons granted HVs to date in Argentina have done so either through individual contacts or with the support of NGOs, San Luis has requested the support of the UNHCR to identify and refer Syrian refugees in Lebanon to the Humanitarian Visa program. Once approved for HVs, these beneficiaries can be sponsored by San Luis. Not only has the province committed to supporting the beneficiaries for 2 years, but San Luis has also set up a special body, the *Corredor Humanitario y Comité de Refugiados San Luis* (the Humanitarian Corridor and Refugee Committee San Luis) which accompanies and eases the integration process, and which includes volunteers from the community to welcome the arriving families. The *Corredor* provides individualized attention to the families and coordinates the necessary reception and local integration activities, from housing, to language classes, to enrolling children in school and helping the heads of household seek employment, etc. In practice, it more closely resembles a formal resettlement program, than the HV program, given the level of support provided by the province. Efforts have been made to seek additional provinces or municipalities to make similar sponsorship commitments, which remains a work in progress to date.

While Argentina has seemingly set aside the solidarity resettlement program, the *Programa Siria* has provided a unique opportunity to develop and establish what could be considered a more sustainable durable solution model, which is hoped could eventually be extended to other groups, such as persons fleeing Northern Central America, and other international humanitarian crises, following similar initiatives that are evolving around the world²¹.

2.3. Chile

Chile was one of the first countries in the region to resettle refugees, with the resettlement of persons fleeing the former Yugoslavia in 1999, long before the 2004 MPA and its concept of Solidarity Resettlement. Since 1999, Chile has resettled 598 refugees, including 116 ex-Iraq Palestinians from the Al Tanf camp at the Syrian/Iraqi border in 2007/2008, the first country to resettle from this particularly hostile environment, which paved the way for other countries to follow suit.

Since 2016, Chile has actively planned for their next resettlement group of 120 Syrian refugees from Lebanon, with the first group of 66 persons arriving 12 October 2017. In Chile, resettlement is led by the Refuge and Resettlement

²¹ FRATZKE, Susan, *Engaging Communities in Refugee Protection: The Potential of Private Sponsorship in Europe*, 2017, Migration Policy Institute. See <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/engaging-communities-refugee-protection-potential-private-sponsorship-europe>.

Section of the Foreigners Department (DEM) within the Ministry of Interior. The DEM plays a particularly proactive role in coordinating and planning the Syrian resettlement program, which will be further supported by the *Vicaria*, the same civil society actor that supported and coordinated the arrival and local integration of the ex-Iraq Palestinians.

Chile, unlike Argentina has opted to remain with the solidarity resettlement model, reliant in part upon the international community to finance it. A portion of this support will come from the Emerging Resettlement Countries Joint Mechanism (ERCM), discussed further below. However, Chile has acknowledged that this is not a sustainable model and has begun to explore the possibility of private sector support for resettlement as a means to reinforce the government's contribution and provide the necessary additional financing. In theory, this private sector support could draw on large companies present in Chile which have an interest in humanitarian or philanthropic causes, or even establish some way to gather and apply donations from the public. It will be important to encourage this initiative in order to use the valuable resources and possibilities at their disposal given the government's hesitation to increase financial support for resettlement. To date, private sector support for resettlement in Latin America is considered a relatively new concept and at an embryonic stage, but if successful, could prove an excellent best practice and model for other countries to follow.

Chile also participated in a study visit to Canada in December 2016 in order to learn more about the private sponsorship model. Although it is unclear to what extent they may choose to pursue private sponsorship in the future, the lessons shared by the Canadian program are to be considered as additional tools to help each country take and develop ideas to apply to their own resettlement or alternative pathway model.

3. THE ROLE OF ERCM IN THE SOUTHERN CONE

The processes of implementing Sponsorship Programs have been further bolstered by the Emerging Resettlement Countries Joint Support Mechanism (ERCM), a platform managed by UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and established in 2016 in the context of the September 2016 Leaders' Summit on Refugees to help countries create robust and sustainable refugee resettlement programs. The ERCM's three main stated objectives are:

1. Providing a mechanism for governments, private sponsors and donors to harness their expertise and contribute both financially and technically to supporting refugee resettlement around the world in a strategic and coordinated manner;
2. Assisting new and emerging resettlement countries in assessing the sustainability of their resettlement program, helping to identify vulnerable

areas in need of support and providing, accordingly, targeted financial and/or technical assistance;

3. Channeling and supporting the sharing of technical expertise and good practices among experienced resettlement countries, international organizations, international NGOs and governmental and non-governmental actors in new and emerging resettlement countries²².

It is relevant to note some of the concrete ways in which countries that have been accepted into the ERCM program have been supported, namely Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, including through various capacity-building and training activities for government officials on resettlement processes, and participation in a study visit to Canada to learn more about their private sponsorship scheme and local integration activities, including the important need to include civil society and communities in this process²³. The Canadian Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative (GRSI) was responsible for coordinating this study visit as it aims to build on Canada's private sponsorship model to promote and support the development of new community-based sponsorship programs in other countries²⁴. It is hoped that providing countries with a front row seat of these best practices and sharing the valuable experiences of other countries will help build better programs in Latin America, serving as an example to generate momentum and interest with potential newcomers. Other forms of ERCM assistance include logistical travel support for refugees from host country to resettlement or humanitarian visa country, as well as medical checkups and pre-departure country orientation.

While the ERCM is meant to support and strengthen emerging programs by sharing technical expertise to support the overall planning process and providing targeted and limited financial support for specific activities, it is not an instrument meant to assume the role of the state to ensure the required coordination and funding for resettlement or humanitarian visa programs.

4. PRIVATE SPONSORSHIP AS A WAY FORWARD

By far the country most advanced in the region with a concept of private sponsorship is Argentina. Their immigration mechanism to grant people a migratory status upon arrival is in place, the Humanitarian Visa, and a reception and support scheme exists through the support of private individuals and/or organizations, as well as the San Luis program.

²² Information Sheet on ERCM September 2016. (<http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/Information%20Sheet%20on%20ERCM%20September%202016.pdf>).

²³ HARRIS, Kathleen, "'Extraordinary initiative': Canada's private refugee sponsorship system exported as model for the world", *CBC News*, 14 Dec 2016, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canada-refugees-privately-sponsored-global-initiative-1.3895704>.

²⁴ *Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative*, see www.refugeesponsorship.org.

While this is a start, it is the foundation for a program, but not a complete one. As noted above, governments have an essential role in any resettlement, private sponsorship or legal pathway program, above and beyond the review and confirmation of beneficiaries, which should include a mechanism to follow up on the post arrival situation beneficiaries; preparation and training of *llamantes* on the rights of beneficiaries and their access to resources; ensure adequate support for beneficiaries and their access to essential services such as health care, education, labor integration, interpreters and language courses, social integration, and include a coordination role with local provincial and municipal governments, to name a few of the necessary elements.

A support structure must be maintained which leaves the government at the top to ensure the health and viability of the program, even if the daily support and maintenance of the beneficiaries comes from private individuals and/or organizations. This could mean establishing an intermediary civil society role that can provide additional coverage to ensure the well-being of beneficiaries and help provide additional solutions or bring challenges to the attention of the local authorities for support. Ensuring that there is local integration support and assessing whether local integration is successful, and addressing concerns that arise, may require governments to step in and play a more active role and seek additional or alternative solutions, if necessary.

Resettlement as a durable solution in the region remains a possibility if and when countries choose to invest the required resources that resettlement requires. Private sponsorship is by no means a model which allows the government to transfer the required financial and program ownership to private individuals. Governments must retain the *coordination role* and a *coordination structure* in order for any resettlement, private sponsorship, or legal pathway model to be successful.

There is potential in the region to receive and successfully integrate a much larger number of persons fleeing violence and persecution, and the instincts and expressed commitments of these countries to demonstrate such vital solidarity with these persons should be fully realized. Finding the proper vehicle for each country to bring, support, and successfully integrate arriving refugees is a fundamental part of that process.

5. CONCLUSION

Refugee resettlement remains a vital tool for ensuring refugee protection worldwide, particular for the most vulnerable individuals. In the Latin America region, to date the programs have remained comparatively small in scale, yet significant opportunities remain for expansion in the years ahead. Unless countries are willing to come forward with the resources resettlement requires, there is little hope for continuing resettlement in its traditional form. Private sector support may be a solution for some countries. Canada's model of private

sponsorship has served as an inspiration for other countries to establish large-scale resettlement programs and other legal pathways. In order for countries to continue to express their support and solidarity for refugees from international humanitarian crises in a meaningful way which provides people with hope to restart their lives, suitable models must be found, and private sponsorship may be a realistic opportunity for the Latin American region.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- CHIMNI, B. S., 'From Resettlement to Involuntary Repatriation: Towards a Critical History of Durable Solutions to Refugee Problems', *New Issues in Refugee Research*, Working Paper N° 2, UNHCR, Geneva, 1999, available at: http://www.migration4development.org/sites/default/files/bs_chimni.pdf.
- FRATZKE, Susan, *Engaging Communities in Refugee Protection: The Potential of Private Sponsorship in Europe*, 2017, Migration Policy Institute, available at: <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/engaging-communities-refugee-protection-potential-private-sponsorship-europe>.
- MARCOGLIESE, María José, The Solidarity Resettlement Programme, and alternatives, in Latin America, in *Forced Migration Review* 54, February 2017, available at: <http://www.fmreview.org/resettlement/marcogliese.html>.
- RUIZ, Hiram, "Evaluation of Resettlement Programs in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay", December 2015, UNHCR, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/57c983557.pdf>.
- UNHCR, *The State of the World's Refugees 2006*, Human Displacement in the new Millennium, UNHCR, 2006, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/publications/sowr/4444afcc0/state-worlds-refugees-2006-human-displacement-new-millennium-chapter-6.html>.

Recepción: 25/10/2017

Aceptación: 15/11/2017