

Finding durable solutions



UNHCR/H. Caux

UNHCR's ninemillion.org campaign aims to provide a healthy and safe learning environment for nine million refugee children by 2010.

Searching for durable solutions for displaced populations is one of UNHCR's core mandates. In 2007, the Office achieved notable progress in all three of the traditional durable solutions: important voluntary repatriation programmes were completed; resettlement reached record numbers; and more host governments agreed to support opportunities for local integration, particularly in several protracted refugee situations. UNHCR, however, was not alone in the search for durable solutions for displaced populations. In 2007, the Office reinforced its partnership with development actors, governments and other UN agencies to increase opportunities for solutions.

Global Strategic Objective 3.1: Promoting the creation of conditions conducive to return and to ensuring sustainable reintegration

The year 2007 saw remarkable progress in voluntary repatriation. An estimated 730,580 refugees returned to their countries of origin voluntarily – at least 87 per cent of them with UNHCR's assistance. Major repatriation

operations were concluded for Liberian and Angolan refugees, with 44,000 Liberians and 12,000 Angolans returning home. Meanwhile, other large repatriation efforts were continuing: In 2007, a total of 374,000 Afghan refugees returned home from Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran; 131,000 refugees went back to Southern Sudan from six neighbouring countries, including Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda; and 60,000 Congolese refugees were repatriated from Mozambique, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia.

Furthermore, UNHCR signed a tripartite agreement with the Governments of Senegal and Mauritania which paved the way for the repatriation of Mauritanian refugees in Senegal. These individuals, numbering about 24,000, had fled their country in 1989 following ethnic and political disturbances. The first repatriation under the agreement occurred in early 2008.

At the global level, UNHCR reviewed strategies and policies to strengthen partnerships in reintegration. A workshop on this topic brought together staff from UNHCR, other UN agencies and NGOs. Their recommendations formed the basis for a new UNHCR policy on reintegration. The new policy defines

principles which guide UNHCR's involvement in reintegration activities, identifies areas for interventions, and includes best practices.

Major UNHCR reintegration operations in 2007 were implemented in Afghanistan, Angola, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Liberia and Southern Sudan. UNHCR assisted areas of return with community-based programmes. These included projects to rehabilitate water and sanitation facilities, health clinics and schools. Farming, cash-for-work and micro-finance schemes improved livelihoods. By benefiting both returnees and host community members, the programmes encouraged peaceful coexistence.

In Liberia's Lofa county, which absorbed 70 per cent of the returnees to the country, reintegration programmes helped to improve health services and education, increase food production and enhance security. Furthermore, community-based projects increased enrolment of girls in school and raised awareness of the risks associated with early marriage. Participatory assessments in returnee communities indicate that cases of sexual violence and mortality rates had been reduced as a result of UNHCR's three-year reintegration programme.

To ensure the sustainability of returns, returnee reintegration must be mainstreamed into national planning. In Afghanistan, reintegration needs were made part of the Afghanistan National Development Strategy. UNHCR advocated that development assistance under the strategy give priority to high-return areas. The Office also completed comprehensive needs assessments for returnee reintegration; these will help donors to direct bilateral development assistance to high-return areas in 2008 and beyond.

Global Strategic Objective 3.2: Developing and implementing comprehensive strategies to resolve protracted situations

A protracted refugee situation is "one in which refugees find themselves in a long-lasting and intractable state of limbo. Their lives may not be at risk, but their basic rights and essential economic, social and psychological needs remain unfulfilled after years in exile" (Protracted refugee situations (EC/54/SC/CRP.14), June 2004). UNHCR defines a protracted refugee situation as a refugee population of 25,000 persons or more who have been in exile for at least five consecutive years.

The international community's concern with the issue of protracted refugee situations dates back to the adoption of the Agenda for Protection in December 2002, which called for a concerted effort to address the situation of

people who have lived in exile for many years, "Millions of refugees around the world presently have no access to timely and durable solutions, the securing of which is one of the principal goals of international protection."

The developments in voluntary repatriation, resettlement and local integration had a positive impact on several protracted refugee situations. At the end of 2007, these 30 situations involved some 5 million refugees worldwide. For instance, in Thailand, where the voluntary repatriation of Myanmar refugees was not feasible, 30,352 resettlement applications were submitted for this group in 2007. By the end of the year 14,615 individuals had left for their new homes.

Another significant breakthrough involved Burundian refugees in the United Republic of Tanzania. These long-staying refugees had fled their country in 1972. In 2007, the Government of Tanzania agreed to the local integration of some 172,000 of these refugees. (Another 56,000 had requested voluntary repatriation.) Those who remain in Tanzania will be considered for naturalization. Angolan and Liberian refugees remaining in the DRC and Zambia also benefited from more opportunities for local integration.

In the search for durable solutions in protracted refugee situations, UNHCR worked to strengthen protection by linking it to self-reliance and livelihood opportunities. In Thailand, UNHCR's Strengthen Protection Capacity Project addressed issues such as sexual and gender-based violence, child protection, health and psychosocial services, education and livelihoods. Under the scheme, UNHCR worked with ILO to develop a livelihood strategy for camp-based refugees.

In 2007, a new UNHCR initiative, the Women Leading for Livelihoods (WLL) project, looked at ways in which women leaders could help refugee women through livelihood activities, in the context of both return to their countries of origin, as well as achieving self-reliance in countries of asylum. UNHCR obtained support from senior executive women who contributed financially to the project. The first meeting on WLL, held in December, provided businesswomen and donors with targeted information on the initiative.

UNHCR proceeded with the pilot implementation of its provisional Guidelines on the Formal Determination of the Best Interests of the Child, which were released in May 2006. The Best Interests Determination (BID) process includes procedural safeguards and documentation which balance all the relevant factors in a particular case, and are notably used, among other instances, in the identification of durable solutions for minors, including those in protracted situations. It gives due weight to rights and obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other human rights instruments which protect children. At a workshop in October 2007, BID



UNHCR/J. Fedden

This clinic in Mayukwaykwa camp welcomes both local Zambians and Angolan refugees as part of the Zambia Initiative, aiming at easing the local integration of Angolan refugees.

experts shared best practices and revised the BID Guidelines, taking into account guidance provided in Executive Committee Conclusion 107/LVIII (2007) on Children at Risk. Tools for implementation, such as checklists, were added and shared with partner organizations and staff.

The BID procedures are now implemented in 40 operations, with child protection officers deployed in five locations. Partner agencies, such as UNICEF and the ICRC, as well as NGOs with expertise in child protection, support the process in the field; they participate in BID panels and assist UNHCR to prepare individual files. The International Rescue Committee helped to develop the BID Guidelines by publishing the lessons learned when they were used in Guinea.

UNHCR took the lead in several protracted IDP situations in 2007. In Uganda, it led the inter-agency protection cluster. The Office also led the camp coordination and camp management (CCCM) cluster, and planned the closure of 40 camps following the return of some 580,000 IDPs to their areas of origin. UNHCR worked to protect and assist the more than 1,200,000 IDPs in Uganda, and to support the reintegration of returnees in coordination with members of the early recovery cluster. The Office also helped Afghan and Sudanese IDPs return to their areas of origin.

Global Strategic Objective 3.3: Strengthening local integration as a durable solution

A significant development in 2007 was the emergence of local integration opportunities for Burundian refugees who fled to Tanzania in 1972. The estimated 172,000 of them who have chosen to remain in Tanzania will benefit from opportunities for full social and economic integration. The Government of Tanzania agreed to grant citizenship to refugees from this group for individuals older than 18 years. UNHCR worked closely with the Governments of Tanzania and Burundi on the issue.

In other countries where large repatriation operations had been completed governments stood ready to consider the local integration of remaining individuals. This was the case in the Republic of the Congo and Zambia. For their part, seven West African countries (Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone) were looking into the local integration of Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees, including giving them legal status.

In Europe, the Government of Armenia granted citizenship to the majority of refugees in the country. This resulted in a dramatic reduction in the size of Armenia's refugee population, from 113,000 in 2006 to 4,600 at the end of 2007. In Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, UNHCR collaborated with other international

organizations on a study of local integration of refugees in these countries. Its recommendations were endorsed by the three host governments as a framework for action that now needs to be implemented. In Asia, the Government of India considered the local integration of refugees. In Latin America, local integration was supported by regional efforts under the Mexico Plan of Action. Overall, UNHCR has developed local integration initiatives in over 40 countries worldwide.

Global Strategic Objective 3.4: Enhance resettlement as a strategic protection tool, durable solution and burden- and responsibility-sharing mechanism

The use of resettlement as a durable solution increased dramatically in 2007. UNHCR submitted some 100,000 referrals, a significant increase compared to the 54,000 referrals in 2006. The numbers were boosted by a major resettlement operation for Iraqis, especially in Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey. Resettlement figures increased through the use of group referrals in Malaysia (which saw more than 10,000 submissions), Nepal (some 7,500) and Thailand (some 30,000). The resettlement of Iraqi refugees was an important protection tool as well as a burden-sharing mechanism – the latter as it alleviated

some of the economic and social pressures on Jordan and Syria. Between them, these two countries are host to some 2 million Iraqi refugees.

The pace of resettlement departures accelerated also, with approximately 50,000 refugees leaving for resettlement countries in 2007. This was close to an increase of 70 per cent compared to 30,000 departures in 2006. As referrals of refugees in Nepal and some of the Myanmar in Malaysia occurred late in 2007, only after an agreement had been reached with some resettlement countries on group methodologies, there was a gap between the number of referrals and that of departures. Iraqi refugees encountered delays in departures as resettlement countries had to expand their capacity to process them. Prior to 2007, on average fewer than 2,000 refugees were referred annually from the Middle East region.

In 2007, UNHCR for the first time made more referrals than resettlement countries had the capacity to accept during the year. Consequently, the Office identified seven countries willing to establish new resettlement programmes. The Czech Republic, France, Portugal and Spain announced that they would become resettlement countries. Italy accepted 40 Eritrean women who had been in detention in Libya. Romania indicated its willingness to accept refugees and also commenced discussions with UNHCR about establishing an evacuation transit facility.



UNHCR/V. Tan

Nepal. Refugees from Bhutan prepare to leave Sanischare camp for resettlement in the United States.

These notable achievements came in the first full working year of the enhanced Resettlement Service. The Service, established and fully staffed by the third quarter of 2006, was a response to donor recommendations. In the field, there are three regional Hubs (Accra, Beirut and Nairobi) which coordinate and maintain quality control over referrals from the geographic areas they cover. More decentralization and regionalization will occur in 2008, with regional positions established in Bangkok and Pretoria. The Hub in Accra will be transferred to Senegal.

As part of the implementation of ExCom Conclusion 105 on women and girls at risk, the Resettlement Service set the global objective of having 10 per cent of its overall submissions worldwide related to women and girls at risk. This objective was not met in 2007, although the number of women and girls at risk submitted for resettlement by UNHCR during the year increased substantially, to more than 5,800, up 70 per cent from 2006.

The target was not met partly because some field offices did not use the women at risk standard as the primary criteria for submission, but rather, as a secondary condition. However, the overall trends are positive, and illustrated UNHCR's efforts to give a higher priority to the resettlement of this vulnerable group of refugees.

UNHCR streamlined resettlement forms and profiling methodologies in 2007, leading to more efficient processing of refugees in need of resettlement. Group methodology is a process whereby members of a specific refugee group are identified as having a common resettlement need. All members of that group are then eligible for resettlement without needing to establish individual claims.

This methodology was used in Malaysia, Nepal and Thailand, as well as for three groups in Africa. These three groups in Africa consist of survivors of the August 2004 massacre at the Gatumba refugee camp in Burundi; the "1972 Burundians" who experienced multiple flights and are presently in refugee camps in Tanzania; and a group of Eritrean refugees of Kunama ethnicity in Ethiopia. Furthermore, a profiling exercise for Somali refugees in Kenyan camps is expected to generate a significant number of resettlement submissions. Individual claims had to be processed for refugees from Iraq; however, with the agreement of resettlement countries, the submission forms were simplified to speed up the process.

UNHCR staff were trained throughout 2007 on identification and processing methods, quality assurance and compliance systems. Additionally, the Office issued a draft policy on the consequences of fraud, and conducted regional training sessions on fraud detection. Regions where fraud was prevalent were given



Iraqi refugees depart from Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic.

operational support to prevent, minimize and deal with crime. In this regard, cooperation with the Inspector-General's Office was strengthened.

In 2007 the Resettlement Service received special contributions from Australia, Norway, the United Kingdom and the United States to support critical resettlement staffing needs at the field and regional levels. Resettlement is a labour-intensive activity, and a surge of staffing may be required to meet specific needs in a timely fashion. In 2007, 45 per cent of the resettlement positions at the national and international level were funded externally.

UNHCR also continued its partnership with the International Catholic Migration Commission through the Resettlement Deployment Scheme. This supports field operations by enhancing UNHCR's capacity to identify refugees for resettlement. During the year, the scheme supported 70 deployments. The enlarging of operations in the Middle East and Nepal absorbed a considerable proportion of these resources and illustrated the capacity of the scheme to support new operations.

The majority of deployments continued to target operations in Africa. Elsewhere, an expert coordinated the care and identification of unaccompanied and separated refugee children in Thailand, including an assessment of whether resettlement was an appropriate solution for them.

Since the June 2006 Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement, the Resettlement Service has worked to strengthen the role of NGOs in this area of UNHCR's activities. The Service has opened its regional meetings and training events to NGO participants. NGOs have participated in community outreach programmes to identify refugees with specific needs in need of protection, including resettlement.

A pilot project in Jordan explored ways to implement outreach programmes more effectively. Some of the suggested interventions include referrals for those refugees unable to obtain life-saving medical treatment in their country of asylum. Also in coordination with NGOs, UNHCR piloted the use of a Heightened Risk

Identification Tool (HRIT) in Bangladesh. The tool helped to identify refugees in need of protection or assistance.

Global Strategic Objective 3.5: Implementing effective exit and phase-down strategies through partnership and handover arrangements with development partners and the competent authorities

UNHCR continued to build its partnerships with UN and international agencies and bilateral aid organizations in 2007. Particularly notable was inter-agency collaboration in the context of reintegration. In Liberia, following an ILO-UNHCR joint assessment on reintegration in 2006, an ILO expert conducted a survey of employment opportunities to facilitate the reintegration of returnees. In Southern Sudan, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) implemented small-scale infrastructure projects to facilitate the return of IDPs and reintegration of returnees. UNHCR in coordination with the Government of Southern Sudan, JICA, UNICEF and

WFP planned joint programmes to train and reintegrate returnee teachers.

Inter-agency collaboration progressed in the area of local integration as well. In the DRC, for instance, JICA surveyed planned community development projects in areas hosting Angolans who have chosen to remain in the country.

The cluster approach for IDP situations strengthened UNHCR's partnership with UN development actors such as FAO, ILO, UNDP and UN-Habitat. Through the early recovery cluster, UNHCR campaigned for development agencies to focus on livelihood opportunities in conflict-affected countries. This led to a joint FAO-ILO mission to assess livelihood opportunities in the DRC. UNHCR and ILO jointly facilitated a pilot workshop on micro-finance in Colombia.

Linking UNHCR's activities in reintegration with longer-term development programmes requires skills beyond those needed in UNHCR's traditional activities. To this end, UNHCR and the Danish Refugee Council established a stand-by roster of livelihood and self-reliance experts to be deployed to UNHCR field offices.



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Refugees from Tajikistan with their new passports, in Turkmenistan.