



South Asia

Recent developments

Security concerns in the region, particularly in Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, increased in the first half of 2005, affecting refugee and displaced populations and the delivery of UNHCR operations in all three countries. An increasing factor is the possibility of further displacement within the countries and throughout the region.

Following nine years of internal conflict in Nepal, which has led to the massive displacement of between 100,000 and 200,000 people scattered throughout the country, an inter-agency response was discussed, and an appeal prepared through the Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP). The UN collaborative approach to internal displacement is still in the planning phase, but is expected to progress to the operational phase in 2006 following the UN Joint Needs Assessment and discussions with the authorities. UNHCR is expected to chair the protection sub-sector working group, together with OCHA. UNHCR will also chair the inter-agency shelter/non-food items working group.

There is increasing concern about the political situation in Sri Lanka, with sporadic ceasefire violations. While recent international mediation to

Bangladesh

India

Nepal

Sri Lanka



bring the warring parties back to the negotiating table stands a reasonable chance of success, the future outlook for peace will depend, in part, on the outcome of the presidential election in November 2005. Differences emerged between the Government and the Tamil rebels over post-tsunami aid distribution.

Strategic objectives

Overall objectives in the region focus on continued efforts to address the protracted stay of large numbers of refugees in camps, particularly in Nepal and Bangladesh. Rising frustration in the camps, coupled with a continued deterioration of security in these countries, urgently calls for further work with relevant UN agencies, regional governmental partners and the international community to find durable solutions. UNHCR will also continue to adopt a regional approach, networking with partners in South Asia, to addressing the need for a legal framework for refugee protection. Increased engagement and involvement in regional forums such as the

Asia-Pacific Consultations, the Bali Process and, potentially, with the Association of South-East Asian Nations, may open doors for further advocacy and a sharper focus on pending refugee issues.

Dealing with protracted refugee situations in innovative ways remains UNHCR's focus in the region. UNHCR maintains its commitment to reduce the number of refugees in long-term situations and to adopt a rights-based approach to alleviating their plight.

In line with the Office's participation in the UN system's response to internal displacement, UNHCR's offices in South Asia are already directly and effectively involved in preparing analyses, participating in needs assessments to identify protection and assistance gaps and providing recommendations on the engagement of relevant actors. In 2006 UNHCR will expand its participation in this collaborative approach to addressing situations of internal displacement. Finding solutions for the 70,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the government welfare centres in Sri Lanka will remain a priority in 2006.

While it is expected that the age, gender and diversity mainstreaming project will be launched in Bangladesh and Nepal at the end of 2005, implementation will begin in Sri Lanka in 2006. UNHCR will continue to advocate measures to combat sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in 2006. It will support activities oriented towards increased self-reliance for women through support groups and the establishment of outreach networks. Bringing about a change in perception and attitudes among the refugee population is a key factor in reducing the number of SGBV incidents within the camps. UNHCR will promote respect for women and give them opportunities to play a role in decision-making not only in camp management but also in their own lives as a long-term goal.

Based on a thorough social survey of the various Bihari populations throughout Bangladesh, UNHCR, in close cooperation with relevant UN Agencies and NGOs, will assist the Government in its effort to integrate the stateless Biharis into the local community and thereby find durable solutions to a long-standing issue.

In India, UNHCR conducted a comparative survey of the difficult living conditions of the Myanmar refugees in New Delhi in 2005. This led to measures to alleviate their social needs.

Operations

UNHCR's operations in **Nepal** and **Sri Lanka** are covered in separate country chapters.

UNHCR aims to improve the consistency of its protection presence in the two refugee camps in Cox's Bazaar in **Bangladesh**, and will continue to meet the basic humanitarian needs of the remaining 20,000 Rohingyas until a solution for their plight is identified. To that end, the Office undertook a profiling exercise in the camps in November 2005 in order to collect basic data, verify existing records and identify those who are not of concern to UNHCR. The Government maintains its position that repatriation is the only durable solution for the remaining refugee population in the south-east of the country, and thus far has

rejected UNHCR's proposals. With only 90 refugees having voluntarily repatriated in the first eight months of 2005, it is increasingly clear that repatriation is unlikely to be the solution of preference for the refugee population in the near future. The deteriorating situation in the two camps in Cox's Bazaar remains a grave concern, and underlines the urgent need to resolve this protracted situation. To address this, UNHCR has been actively engaged with UN agencies and donor embassies in identifying opportunities for durable solutions for the remaining camp population. Assistance to the population surrounding the camps is a priority, as attention to the larger development needs in the area could also ultimately benefit the refugees.

In **India**, progress has been made in discussions with the authorities regarding the practicalities of naturalization for 8,500 Afghan ethnic Hindu Sikhs. UNHCR will pursue resettlement and limited voluntary repatriation for the remaining 1,200 Afghans in India. UNHCR India continues to emphasize participatory assessments with refugee groups as an outreach tool to better assist and protect vulnerable refugees. A study of the Myanmar community in India was carried out in 2005 to assess the consequences of terminating direct financial assistance from UNHCR. This study was prompted by the fact that the majority of refugees from Myanmar had become ineligible for such assistance, but were unable to attain self-reliance and also faced assorted protection problems. A plan of action has since been put in place, though its implementation will depend on available resources for 2006. UNHCR will continue to facilitate the return by air of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees from camps in southern India, until such time as conditions are conducive to large-scale government-assisted voluntary repatriation by boat. By June 2005, a total of 830 refugees had been helped by UNHCR to return to Sri Lanka by air.

UNHCR began to expand HIV/AIDS activities to the Asia region in 2005 with the appointment of a Regional HIV/AIDS Coordinator. Initial activities have focused on an assessment of the HIV/AIDS situation for refugees and other persons of concern with missions undertaken in Nepal, Bangladesh and Thailand; the provision of technical



Bangladesh: Achieving gender equality in education is one of UNHCR's policy priorities. Here, Rohingya refugee girls and boys from Myanmar receive primary education in Burmese in a camp. *UNHCR / J. Pagonis*

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support; and the allocation of limited funds to address identified gaps. A strategy to address HIV/AIDS among refugees in Asia has been developed and will be guided by UNHCR's Strategic Plan for 2005-2007 and lessons learned from the Office's HIV/AIDS activities in Africa. In 2006, UNHCR will aim to address several key areas that characterize the HIV/AIDS situation for refugees in Asia. UNHCR will pay greater attention to identifying and reaching those groups that are at greatest risk with preventive interventions and services. UNHCR – especially through the UN thematic groups on HIV/AIDS – will also advocate for the inclusion of refugees in regional and national HIV/AIDS programming at all levels. Similarly, the Office will ensure that minimum standards are met and will work with its implementing and operational partners to provide comprehensive

HIV/AIDS services that are appropriate to the phase of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Particular attention will be paid to the situation of refugee women and children and their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS.

Budget (USD)	
Country	Annual Programme Budget
Bangladesh	3,090,368
India	3,858,589
Nepal	6,865,442
Sri Lanka	8,827,990
Total	22,642,389