

Finding durable solutions

One of the principal goals of international protection is the realization of durable solutions for refugees. Yet, millions of refugees around the world are stranded in long-standing situations of exile with no foreseeable end to their plight. In the absence of durable solutions, refugees face a host of protection concerns, many of which manifest themselves in camp settings. The search for durable solutions therefore constitutes an important element of UNHCR's efforts to provide international protection to refugees and other persons of concern.

In 2002, UNHCR launched a process of Global Consultations on International Protection, which gave particular attention to improving the tools of protection. The intention was to foster a more reliable and effective international response and ensure greater equity in the sharing of responsibilities and burdens. The resulting *Agenda for Protection* made the search for comprehensive durable solutions an important element of its programme of action, and called for the

development of new arrangements and tools. It recognizes that the key to achieving durable solutions lies in the cooperation among countries of origin, host States, UNHCR and its partners as well as refugees and their host communities. Initiatives such as "Convention Plus" and the *Framework for Durable Solutions for Refugees and Persons of Concern* were developed as a result.

Countries hosting large refugee populations are frequently amongst the least developed in the world and refugees fleeing to these countries often find themselves living in remote, neglected areas where high levels of poverty prevail. In addition, although their lives may not be in immediate danger, refugees may face limitations on their freedom of movement, employment and, in some cases, education, stifling their capacity to become productive members of a society and, consequently, perpetuating poverty. For the host country, the presence of refugee populations for protracted periods has a long-term economic and social impact that, if not adequately addressed,



Somalia: Returnees from Ethiopia arrive at Harrirad village, "Somaliland". Harrirad had been almost entirely destroyed by the war, but now, reconstruction of villages and infrastructure is taking place at a rapid pace. UNHCR / B. Heger

can exacerbate situations of conflict and insecurity. Developing countries, especially the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) need to be supported in their efforts to assist and protect refugees, in ways that improve refugee self-reliance and that serve to reduce poverty amongst refugee-hosting communities.

The causes of protracted refugee situations are political, and solutions must be sought in this arena. In the meantime, a facilitating element of any durable solution is building the capacity of the refugees to attain self-reliance by enhancing their skills and capacities, and providing them with the necessary tools (e.g. loans, land, and income-generating projects). Evidence suggests that the most effective means to foster self-reliance within refugee populations is to focus on the circumstances they face and remove the obstacles to their productivity. Consideration also needs to be given to the human and material assets refugees bring with them and how these can be utilized to support development.

With this in mind, UNHCR developed the *Framework for Durable Solutions* with the aim of providing methodological models to facilitate the targeting of development assistance more effectively to underpin and sustain solutions for refugees. The **Development Assistance for Refugees (DAR)** initiative seeks to address protracted refugee situations in an integrated manner by improving burden sharing for countries hosting large numbers of refugees, promoting self-reliance for refugees pending durable solutions, and improving the quality of life for host communities. In Uganda, the Government and UNHCR launched the *Development Assistance to Refugee Hosting Areas* programme to improve food security, access to social services and income-generating opportunities for refugees and host communities. Through this project, both refugees and local communities have been active participants in the planning and implementation of their own development agenda. The DAR programme in Uganda builds on the earlier gains made through the Self-Reliance Strategy programme, which achieved significant improvements in food production, access to social services, provision of training and increased consultations between refugees and host communities.

For refugees who cannot go home, some refugee-hosting countries offer the possibility of **local integration**. Local integration is a legal process, whereby refugees are granted a progressively wider range of rights or entitlements by the host State commensurate with those enjoyed by its citizens. Over time the process should lead to permanent residence rights and, in some cases, the acquisition of citizenship in the country of asylum. Local integration is also an economic process, as refugees become progressively less reliant on State aid and are able to contribute to the economic life of the host country, and a social and cultural process of acclimatization in the society that has received them.

In situations where the State opts to provide opportunities for gradual integration of refugees, UNHCR has developed the **Development through Local Integration (DLI)** strategy. DLI aims to solicit additional development assistance to support the local integration of refugees. Central to the success of this strategy is the attitude of the host government and the local authorities as well as the commitment on the part of the donor community to provide additional assistance. The Zambia Initiative, launched in 2001, is one example of a successful effort to enhance the self-reliance of refugees and provide support to the communities that host them. An evaluation of the Zambia Initiative programme will be conducted in late 2005 and early 2006 to document good practices and lessons learned. In addition, the Initiative will be extended to other parts of Zambia in 2006.

An important landmark was reached in October 2005 at the Fifty-sixth Session of UNHCR's Executive Committee with the adoption of the Executive Committee Conclusion on Local Integration, confirming the support of States for local integration as a durable solution and recognizing the importance of international cooperation to build the capacity of developing countries and assist them in integrating refugees. The Conclusion also stresses the importance of including refugee hosting areas in national development plans and strategies for sustainable funding.

Voluntary repatriation, which entails the return of refugees in safety and dignity to their country of

origin, is by far the preferred durable solution today. However, in post-conflict situations, the reintegration of returnees poses considerable challenges. The transition from short-term humanitarian assistance in support of reintegration to longer-term reconstruction is rarely a smooth process. In the politically fragile environment that frequently characterizes post-conflict situations, returnees are often left in deprived conditions for extended periods without means or opportunities to better their situation. As a result, roughly half of all post-conflict situations slide back into violence within five years.

In response, UNHCR developed the **Repatriation, Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction (4Rs)** approach as a means to bring together humanitarian and development actors and funds. The aim is to ensure that greater resources are allocated to create an environment conducive to sustainable repatriation. This initiative has been piloted in Afghanistan, Eritrea, Sierra Leone and Sri Lanka, where UNHCR established linkages with governments, development actors such as UNDP, the World Bank, UNICEF and WFP, the donor community and bilateral aid agencies. Subsequently, UNHCR utilized the principles behind the "4Rs" approach to establish or reorient reintegration programmes in Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Somalia and Sudan. In 2005 in Angola, for example, the Government, supported by UNHCR, launched the Sustainable Reintegration Initiative, which targets key districts in areas receiving the largest numbers of returnees. Detailed assessments highlighting gaps in social services, transport infrastructure and economic opportunities as well as identifying key development priorities, were prepared in collaboration with provincial and local authorities, traditional leaders, UN agencies, NGOs, returnee representatives and other key actors. Project planning for 2006 is now under way.

Finally, **resettlement** can be used as an effective tool to achieve equitable burden and responsibility sharing. In 2006, UNHCR will focus on further developing the strategic use of resettlement, linking it to the identification of other durable solutions, particularly when seeking comprehensive solutions for refugees in protracted situations. Also during 2006, more staff will be made

available to field resettlement operations. In order to promote resettlement both as a protection tool and as a durable solution, UNHCR has established regional resettlement hubs in Africa in past years. In 2006, the capacity of the regional resettlement hubs will be expanded and similar hubs will be established in other regions of the world.

Another initiative aimed at developing new ways of planning and bringing about durable solutions for refugees is Convention Plus. Launched in 2003 and steered by the Convention Plus Unit, the initiative has contributed to the methodology underlying the development of comprehensive approaches. In January 2006, the work of the Unit will be mainstreamed within Headquarters organizational units and the Field as originally foreseen. One example of how Convention Plus is being mainstreamed is the yearly review of protracted refugee situations that will commence in 2006, with a view to identifying opportunities for resolving long-running crises. Based on the outcomes of this review, collaborative and comprehensive strategies can be developed, including efforts to bridge the gap between relief and development in cooperation with the refugee-hosting countries, international development agencies and relevant donors.

Current examples of such planning include the consultations on the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Somalia and the Comprehensive Solutions for Afghans. The Comprehensive Plan of Action for Somalia, initiated in August 2004, will benefit returnees, refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and other groups with specific needs in communities where returnees and IDPs live. UNHCR is also involved in discussions with UNDP on a new collaborative framework for durable solutions in Africa.

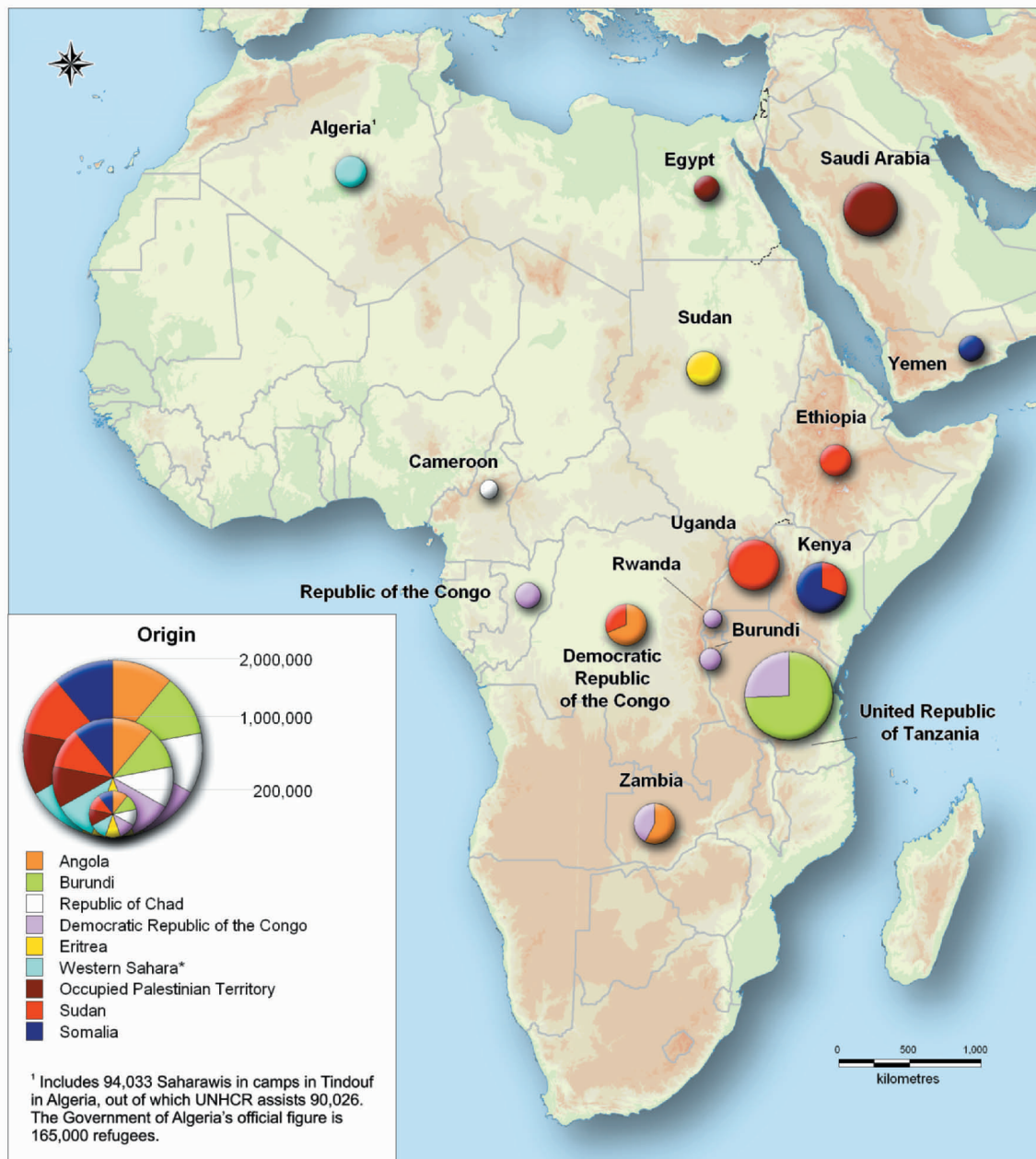
Another example is the Mexico Plan of Action, adopted in November 2004. It proposes concrete actions to achieve comprehensive solutions to forced displacement. These include working to achieve self-sufficiency and local integration in the cities (the "Cities of Solidarity" programme), stimulating social and economic development in border areas to benefit refugees and the local population (the "Borders of Solidarity" programme), and establishing a programme of resettlement in

Latin America as a way to ease pressure on those countries receiving large numbers of refugees (the "Resettlement in solidarity" programme). The Plan also includes a comprehensive programme to assess the needs of refugees and of local host communities, especially in border areas of neighbouring countries, allowing for complementary humanitarian and development-oriented activities.

UNHCR hopes that by drawing on the capacity of refugees to sustain themselves, creating partnerships that foster the provision of development assistance to the countries that host them, and promoting burden-sharing between States, the institution of asylum will be strengthened and improved and possibilities for more durable solutions will be created.

Protracted refugee populations in countries of asylum, by origin

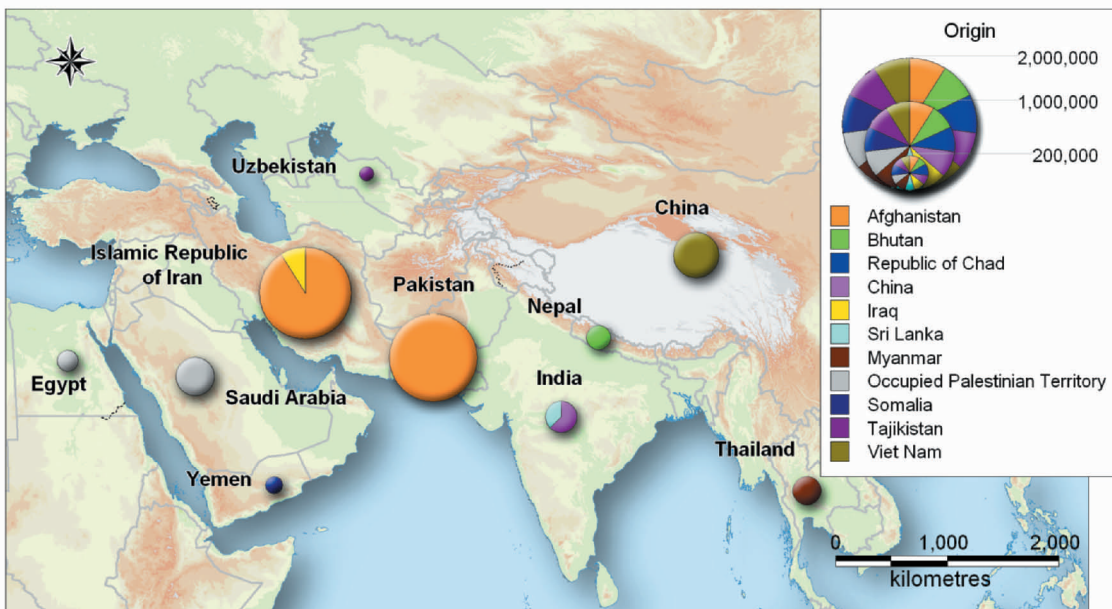
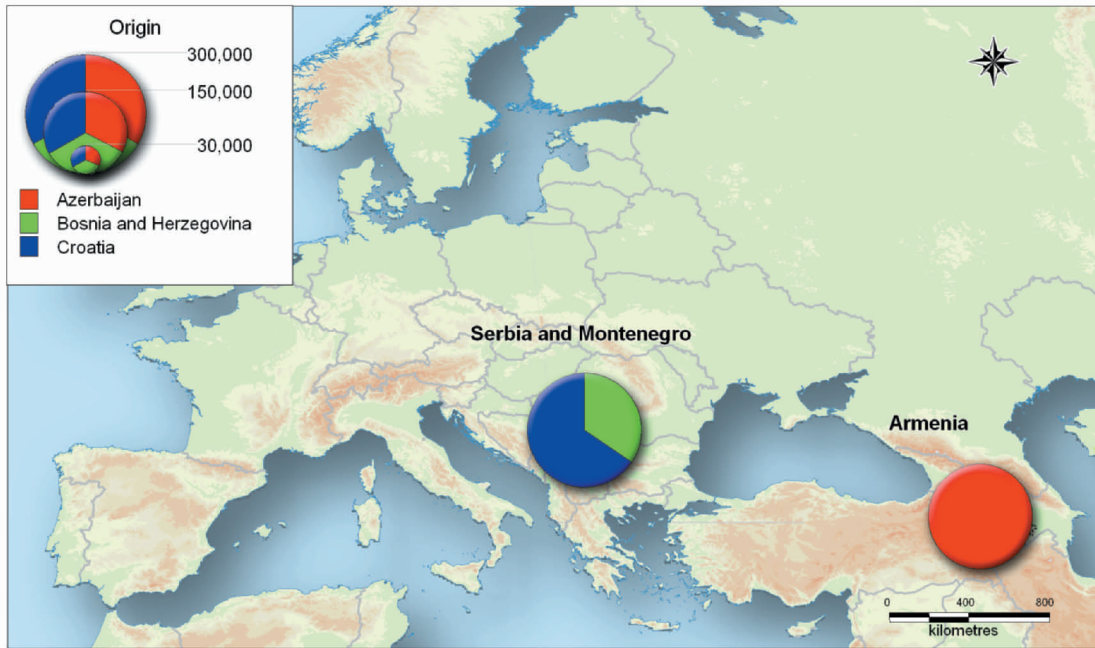
Figures as at beginning 2005



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Protracted refugee populations in countries of asylum, by origin

Figures as at beginning 2005



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on these maps do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.