

COUNTRY OPERATION

# ERITREA

## AT A GLANCE



### Main Objectives and Activities

Provide protection and assistance to Somali and Sudanese refugees; improve refugee status determination procedures through the establishment of a joint eligibility determination panel; pursue local integration possibilities and determine resettlement needs; repatriate Somali refugees wishing to return; and work towards the resumption of the voluntary repatriation of Eritrean refugees from Sudan and Yemen by engaging in high-level negotiations with the respective authorities.

### Impact

- Somali and Sudanese refugees were assisted, as planned, with regular supplies of adequate amounts of clean water as well as basic and complementary food items. Supplementary food was distributed to children under five, lactating and pregnant women as well as refugees with health problems, in order to avoid malnutrition and improve the overall nutritional status of these vulnerable groups.
- UNHCR's procurement of school supplies and the payment of stipends to teachers ensured that all school-age children received an education up to grade five.
- While the Sudanese refugees in need of medical attention still had to walk some nine kilometres to a government-run health centre in Hykota, the Somali refugees benefited from camp-based health services. Regular HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns run by refugee committees in both camps contributed to a longer-term improvement of health standards.
- Refugees participated in mat-making and tailoring courses, as well as in regular camp-cleaning campaigns, leading to improved skills and cleaner camps.
- Little progress was made towards durable solutions. A total of eight Somalis and 19 Sudanese were resettled in a third country. On-going conflict in Sudan and in southern and central Somalia impeded voluntary repatriation, while the Government of Eritrea continued to consider that local integration of refugees was not possible.

### Persons of Concern

MAIN REFUGEE ORIGIN/ TYPE OF POPULATION	TOTAL IN COUNTRY	OF WHICH: UNHCR-ASSISTED	PER CENT FEMALE	PER CENT < 18
Somalia (Refugees)	2,300	2,300	48	62
Sudan (Refugees)	700	700	39	36
Returned in 1999	1,510	0	-	-



### Income and Expenditure - SP Activities (USD)

WORKING BUDGET	INCOME FROM CONTRIBUTIONS*	OTHER FUNDS AVAILABLE**	TOTAL FUNDS AVAILABLE	TOTAL EXPENDITURE
742,166	0	749,582	749,582	335,192

\* Includes contributions earmarked for the Special Operation in East and Horn of Africa.

\*\* Includes opening balance and adjustments.

The above figures do not include costs at Headquarters.

## WORKING ENVIRONMENT

### The Context

Following a successful pilot repatriation and reintegration programme in 1994/1995, wherein 24,200 Eritrean refugees returned from Sudan, political developments in the region compelled UNHCR temporarily to suspend the operation. In mid-1998, the Government of Eritrea and UNHCR reached an understanding that repatriation would resume in the last quarter of 1998 and continue throughout 1999. However, repatriation activities remained on hold during 1998 and 1999 for reasons associated with the border conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia, which led to the deportation of Eritrean nationals from Ethiopia, as well as to population displacement within Eritrea. By the end of 1999, some 266,200 IDPs and more than 67,000 deportees were registered by the Eritrean Relief and Refugee Commission (ERREC). The Government's main concern was that it did not have the capacity to reintegrate returnees in addition to handling the deportee and IDP issues. Towards the end of the year, UNHCR undertook a series of high-level missions to discuss the resumption of repatriation activities from Sudan and the start of voluntary repatriation from Yemen. The parties agreed that repatriation should resume in 2000. Meanwhile, UNHCR's activities in Eritrea focused on protecting and assisting some 3,000 Somali and Sudanese refugees.

The number of refugees in Eritrea remained largely stable in 1999, since the war-related closure of borders limited movement in the region. Almost all Somali refugees in Eritrea, having fled civil war in their home country, went through Ethiopia with the intention of crossing to Yemen or Saudi Arabia. In light of the ongoing insecurity in Somalia, they continued to be considered *prima facie* refugees and to receive assistance in Harsile camp, close to Assab. Unlike the Somali refugees, Sudanese asylum-seekers had to go through an individual eligibility determination process. Following a request from the Government, the 702 Sudanese refugees currently residing in Eritrea were moved from the Hazhaz camp in Asmara to a newly constructed camp in Elit, 300 kilometres west of Asmara. IDPs were not considered persons of direct concern to UNHCR. Nonetheless, the Office examined issues of potential statelessness of deportees and IDPs, and contributed to an inter-agency effort to meet the humanitarian needs of both groups.

### Constraints

The Government of Eritrea has no refugee legislation, nor has it adopted international refugee instruments. Although the Government and people of Eritrea treated the refugees as guests worthy of respect, the Government continued to consider that local integration of refugees was not possible. At the same time resettlement opportunities for both refugee groups were minimal, and voluntary repatriation to Somalia and Sudan was prevented by continued conflict in both countries. The Eritrean authorities' position – that the determination of eligibility is the exclusive domain of the Government – ran counter to UNHCR's aim to establish a joint eligibility determination panel. No such panel was created and the eligibility of Sudanese asylum-seekers was determined without UNHCR's involvement. As a result of the Ethiopian-Eritrean border conflict, an aerial bombardment in the vicinity of the camp hosting Somali refugees posed a temporary security threat in mid-1999.

## ACHIEVEMENTS AND IMPACT

### Protection and Solutions

The Government of Eritrea, which accords only temporary asylum to Sudanese and Somali refugees, carried out all protection-related work itself, with the exception of activities related to resettlement and monitoring. The Government asked for UNHCR's assistance in drafting a national refugee law.

### Activities and Assistance

**Community Services:** Refugees in both camps benefited from community services, while the provision of in-door and out-door sports equipment contributed to the engagement of refugees in social activities. UNHCR gave one-time grants to refugees with new-born babies to meet their immediate needs. Families who had to bury their dead were enabled to do so in a culturally appropriate manner. Somali refugee women were offered a range of tailoring and mat-making courses.

**Domestic Needs/Household Support:** The Office distributed one kerosene stove, two jerry cans, a set of kitchen utensils, 20 litres of kerosene per month and two bed sheets per family. The kerosene stoves had a positive environmental impact, as refugees were no longer obliged to collect firewood.

**Education:** UNHCR provided stipends to ten refugee teachers in the two camps and made available school

supplies, books and other teaching materials. All school-age children attended school. The drop-out rate among girls was insignificant. As efforts to procure Somali schoolbooks from Kenya failed, the education of grade six students continued to follow the Eritrean curriculum, using English as the language of instruction.

**Food:** Food rations, in line with WFP guidelines, were distributed on a fortnightly basis. The food basket contained wheat flour, lentils, oil, sugar and salt. In addition, refugees received complementary food items, such as potatoes and onions. Wheat grain was purchased and milled in Asmara in order to reduce pressure on women who would otherwise have had to grind the cereals themselves. Refugee women, being part of the distribution committee, were well aware of their entitlements.

**Health/Nutrition:** In addition to supplying the camp clinics with drugs and medical supplies, the programme covered all costs related to the maintenance of a health vehicle, as well as the salaries of health staff in Harsile camp and of various other refugee health workers (translators, health assistants and traditional birth attendants). Feeding centres were supplied with gas, sugar, dry skimmed milk and oil, and supplementary food was given to sick refugees who had to be referred to Asmara for further treatment. All children under five received a polio vaccination, and lactating mothers were given vitamin A. HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns took place regularly in both camps.

**Legal Assistance:** Funds were used to replace identification cards, as necessary, as well as to issue birth and death certificates.

**Operational Support (to Agencies):** UNHCR paid salaries and related allowances to project staff in Asmara as well as in Elit and Harsile refugee camps.

**Sanitation:** Camp sanitation committees organised regular cleaning campaigns and the rubbish collected was removed on a weekly basis. The number of refugees needing medical attention declined markedly as health hazards stemming from poor sanitation were brought under control.

**Shelter/Other Infrastructure:** About 50 Ronda frame structures were distributed to Somali refugees in need of shelter in Harsile camp. The use of such steel frames for refugee housing reduced the depletion of natural resources for construction purposes. Another 39 Rondas

were purchased and installed in Elit camp.

**Transport/Logistics:** Food and non-food items were transported regularly from Asmara to Harsile and Elit.

**Water:** In order to ensure refugee access to adequate quantities of clean water, UNHCR improved the water system in Elit and covered the costs of water distribution in Harsile camp. The location of water distribution points within residential areas allowed women to fetch water without risk to their personal safety.

## ORGANISATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

### Management

UNHCR maintained a country office in Asmara and a field office in Assab. The office in Tesseney was closed from August 1999, following the temporary suspension of the repatriation and reintegration operation. All UNHCR activities in Eritrea were run by national staff. Links were forged with other UNHCR offices to deal with issues relating to Eritrean asylum-seekers, the repatriation of Eritrean refugees from countries other than Sudan, and Somali and Sudanese asylum-seekers transiting Eritrea.

### Working with Others

As the number of refugees in Eritrea is less than 5,000, neither WFP nor other UN agencies were involved in UNHCR's refugee programme. However, contacts with the UN sister agencies were maintained through weekly meetings of the UN Country Team. UNHCR also participated in the efforts of the UN family to address the needs of IDPs and deportees. Given the government's Policy of National Execution, all programmes were implemented by government bodies.

## OVERALL ASSESSMENT

UNHCR met its objectives regarding the material assistance to Somali and Sudanese refugees in Eritrea. The pursuit of durable solutions for the two refugee groups was, however, obstructed by a variety of factors beyond UNHCR's control, such as the continuation of conflict in Sudan and Somalia, and the objection of the Eritrean Government to local integration. With regard to lasting solutions for Eritrean refugees in Sudan and Yemen, a breakthrough in negotiations was achieved at the end of 1999, paving the way for the resumption of repatriation activities in 2000.

The participation of refugee women in almost all camp-based refugee committees made them aware of their rights, both as women and as refugees.

Any future exit strategy for UNHCR would depend on durable solutions for both refugee groups, as well as the completion of the voluntary repatriation and reintegration of Eritrean refugees currently hosted in Sudan and Yemen.

### Offices

Asmara  
Assab  
Tesseney (closed on 31 July 1999)

### Partners

**Government Agencies**  
Eritrean Relief and Refugee Commission (ERREC)  
Ministry of Internal Affairs – Department of Immigration

## Financial Report (USD)

Expenditure Breakdown	Current Year's Projects			Prior Years' Projects		
	General Programmes	Special Programmes	Total	General Programmes	Special Programmes	Total
Protection, Monitoring and Coordination	0	202,977	202,977	0	4,887	4,887
Community Services	5,559	0	5,559	1,899	0	1,899
Domestic Needs / Household Support	36,051	0	36,051	26,859	0	26,859
Education	6,163	0	6,163	16,625	0	16,625
Food	202,203	0	202,203	31,821	0	31,821
Health / Nutrition	37,114	0	37,114	13,154	0	13,154
Legal Assistance	1,300	0	1,300	1,203	0	1,203
Operational Support (to Agencies)	42,726	1,796	44,522	19,885	0	19,885
Sanitation	2,796	0	2,796	1,419	0	1,419
Shelter / Other Infrastructure	27,033	0	27,033	143,225	0	143,225
Transport / Logistics	44,787	21,082	65,869	16,676	0	16,676
Water	10,974	0	10,974	31,994	0	31,994
Instalments with Implementing Partners	238,754	0	238,754	(213,850)	0	(213,850)
<b>Sub - total Operational</b>	<b>655,461</b>	<b>225,856</b>	<b>881,316</b>	<b>90,910</b>	<b>4,887</b>	<b>95,797</b>
Administrative Support	0	39,937	39,937	0	0	0
<b>Sub - total Disbursements/Deliveries</b>	<b>655,461</b>	<b>265,793</b>	<b>921,254</b>	<b>90,910</b>	<b>4,887</b>	<b>95,797</b>
Unliquidated Obligations	90,929	69,399	160,329	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>746,390</b>	<b>335,192</b>	<b>1,081,582</b>	<b>90,910</b>	<b>4,887</b>	<b>95,797</b>
<b>Instalments with Implementing Partners</b>						
Payments Made	654,590	0	654,590	82,340	5,170	87,510
Reporting Received	415,836	0	415,836	296,190	5,170	301,360
Balance	238,754	0	238,754	(213,850)	0	(213,850)
Outstanding 1 January	0	0	0	216,635	75,801	292,436
Refunded to UNHCR	0	0	0	1,627	0	1,627
Currency Adjustment	0	0	0	2,608	(1,031)	1,577
<b>Outstanding 31 December</b>	<b>238,754</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>238,754</b>	<b>3,766</b>	<b>74,771</b>	<b>78,536</b>
<b>Unliquidated Obligations</b>						
Outstanding 1 January	0	0	0	105,367	76,762	182,129
New Obligations	746,390	335,192	1,081,582	0	0	0
Disbursements	655,461	265,793	921,254	90,910	4,887	95,797
Cancellations	0	0	0	14,458	71,875	86,333
<b>Outstanding 31 December</b>	<b>90,929</b>	<b>69,399</b>	<b>160,329</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

