

# EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

## INTRODUCTION

Effective emergency preparedness and response has been a high priority for UNHCR throughout the past decade. UNHCR's Emergency Preparedness and Response Section (EPRS) was established in 1991, in the wake of the refugee crisis in the Persian Gulf, to develop and maintain emergency preparedness and

response mechanisms for refugee emergencies wherever and whenever they occur. In responding to complex emergencies, UNHCR works closely with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), other UN agencies and the wider humanitarian community.

## OBJECTIVES

EPRS focused on attaining three broad objectives in 1999:

- To strengthen *institutional emergency preparedness*, by building in-house capacity through: staff training and development; updating and developing new emergency management tools and standby emergency arrangements; and closer cooperation with external bodies and partners to expand the availability of complementary emergency resources.
- To reinforce *situational preparedness* for emergency-

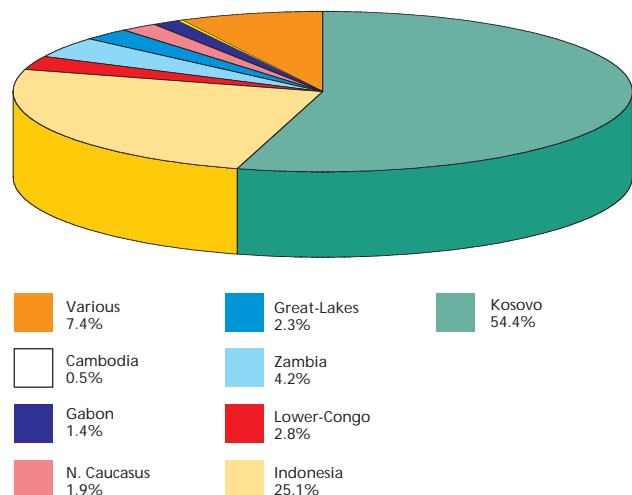
prone regions through strengthened contingency planning processes and preparedness measures at the country and regional levels.

- To provide effective multisectoral support to *respond to emergencies*, including sudden large-scale repatriation movements, by mobilising UNHCR's centralised support capacity. This means the rapid deployment of experienced and trained internal and external staff, as well as equipment and emergency relief items.

## MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS

Unprecedented demands were placed on UNHCR's emergency preparedness and response capacity in 1999. The Office responded to two major complex emergencies: the exodus and rapid repatriation of refugees from Kosovo (beginning in March) and the movement of displaced persons from East Timor to West Timor (beginning in September). UNHCR also responded to the following other crisis situations (Cambodia, the Great Lakes region, Lower Congo/Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Kivu/DRC, Gabon, North Caucasus, North Zambia and West Zambia). UNHCR also published the second revised edition of the *UNHCR Handbook for Emergencies* and began translation into the other official UN languages and Japanese. Other achievements are described below.

Number of Deployments to Emergency Operations in 1999\*



TOTAL NUMBER OF PERSONS DEPLOYED  
(Internal & External)  
169 Persons  
(215 Deployments)

\*Not including the deployment of Red R engineers.

### Institutional Preparedness

This is founded on:

- A core staff of senior officers in EPRS, as well as an Emergency Response Team roster of some 30 well-trained UNHCR staff members who are on standby for emergency deployment for six months at a time;
- A pool of auxiliary personnel for rapid deployment, through standby agreements with partner agencies;
- An intensive emergency management training programme;
- The availability of essential relief items maintained in the Central Emergency Stockpile warehouses in Amsterdam and Copenhagen.

### Training

Training of UNHCR and partner staff is a basic component of institutional preparedness and includes:

- *Workshops on Emergency Management for UNHCR's Emergency Response Team (WEM/ERT)*. Those who have attended these workshops, held twice a year, join UNHCR's Emergency Response Team roster: a group of 30 officers who remain on standby for a six-month period. In 1999, a WEM/ERT took place in March in Switzerland, with the support of the Swiss Civil Defence, and a second took place in September in Denmark, with the support of the Danish Emergency Management Agency.
- *The Emergency Management Training Programme (EMTP)*: In 1999, 150 UNHCR, Government and NGO staff participated in three courses held in Amman (Jordan), Conakry (Guinea) and Libreville (Gabon). Participants were drawn from 19 countries: Angola, Republic of the Congo, Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, DRC, Djibouti, Eritrea, Gabon, Guinea, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Liberia, Saudi Arabia, Sierra Leone, Syria, Turkey and Yemen.
- *New training initiatives*: Notable progress was made on new initiatives, such as distance-learning modules on emergency management and related topics. Some six modules were revised and tested. UNHCR finalised arrangements with the University of Wisconsin's Disaster Management Center for printing and administering the distance-learning courses. UNHCR also discussed with OCHA, UNICEF and WFP the establishment of Emergency Field Coordination Training to complement UNHCR's internal training activities. The aim is to build an inter-agency core group of staff who will be deployed to emergencies to support Humanitarian Coordinators.
- Two other standard training events were deferred

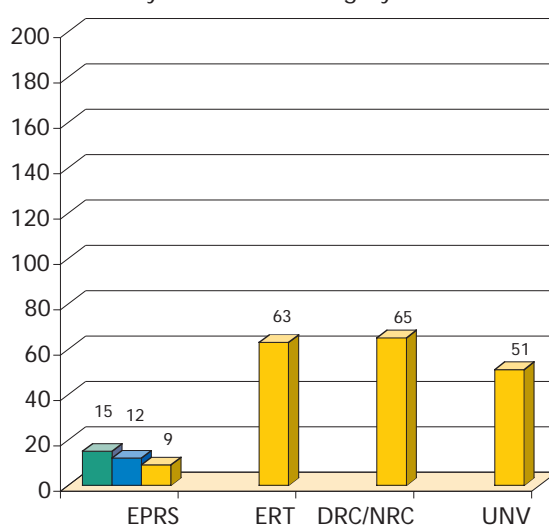
in 1999 owing to constraints imposed by the Kosovo refugee emergency. The *Workshop on Emergency Management at Headquarters (WEM/HQ)*, trains staff based at UNHCR Headquarters – 25 per workshop – to provide appropriate support during emergencies anywhere in the world. The *Advanced Emergency Management Seminar* trains some 20 UNHCR senior managers to respond to complex emergencies.

### Standby Arrangements

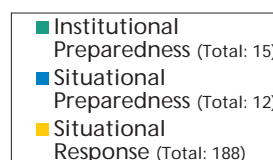
UNHCR worked on the following additional standby arrangements:

- The Office initiated negotiations in November with five international NGOs and some regional NGOs to establish agreements to deploy staff with a variety of essential technical skills, within a 72-hour period.
- UNHCR asked the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) to consider the feasibility and legal aspects of a new roster of experienced ex-UNHCR staff for rapid deployment to emergencies (to be administered by UNOPS).
- In addition to providing in-house support in the vital area of telecommunications to emergency operations, UNHCR initiated negotiations with *Telecoms Sans Frontières France (TSF)* with the objective of establishing a standby agreement in the first part of 2000.

Number of Deployments to Emergency Operations by Source and Category in 1999\*



\* Not including the deployment of Red R engineers.



### Other Arrangements

Another standby agreement between UNHCR/RedR (Registered Engineers for Disaster Relief, Australia) can also be used in emergencies. A total of 16 professionals with an engineering or logistics background were deployed to UNHCR's operations for two- to six-month periods in 1999 (person/days of deployment exceeded 1,600). Thirteen were deployed to the Kosovo and Timor emergency operations, whereas three were deployed to non-emergency operations, including Cambodia. For emergency operations, they were deployed along with personnel mobilised under existing emergency standby agreements. AusAID directly funded RedR's deployments to UNHCR.

### Situational Preparedness

- In 1999, EPRS published the Global Overview of Situational Preparedness, for internal use, which serves as a planning tool to identify any contingency planning initiatives and related training exercises which might be required.
- In addition, EPRS facilitated regional contingency planning workshops in the following locations: Bosnia and Herzegovina (March), Indonesia (April), the Great Lakes Region (July) and Tanzania

(October). The UNHCR Great Lakes workshop was followed by an inter-agency contingency planning workshop, co-hosted by OCHA and UNHCR.

### Emergency Response

During the year, there were 215 deployments of emergency personnel on missions ranging from several days to up to four months; 169 people were deployed, a few of them more than once (please see table on page 42). These included UNHCR staff members (both EPRS and ERT roster members) and personnel deployed under standby arrangements with the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and United Nations Volunteers (UNVs).

### Evaluation

Well aware of weaknesses in its response to the Kosovo refugee emergency, UNHCR commissioned an independent team of experts to evaluate its preparedness for and response to the emergency during the period March-June 1999. UNHCR also launched an internal review, which will recommend ways to strengthen UNHCR's emergency preparedness and response capacity in light of both its own and the team's findings.

