

# Asia and the Pacific

## Working environment

Forced displacement remains a significant phenomenon in the Asia-Pacific region, though the nature, scale and direction of population movements have changed significantly since the end of the Indo-Chinese refugee crisis. Given the dynamics of rapid social and political developments, there is real potential for conflict and disruptions triggering further population movements, especially in some particularly volatile areas. Meanwhile, migratory movements and changing demographic patterns towards, from and within the Asian region have posed new challenges for governments, particularly at a time when many countries are in the process of consolidating developmental achievements and economic progress.

Some 2.2 million people are currently forcibly displaced and/or in need of solutions in the Asia-Pacific region, out of which 1.3 million are in South Asia and another 900,000 in East Asia. The region is host to many refugees in protracted situations, both in urban and camp-based contexts. These require urgent and bold action to devise solutions in a humanitarian manner.

Although there is cause for hope in many countries – for example in Nepal, where internal strife has eased, and in Indonesia, where talks have brought peace to the province of Aceh – others, particularly Sri Lanka, are rapidly deteriorating. Against this dynamic background of a region rich in cultural, social and economic diversity, the forced displacement issue is but a tiny element of the overall picture. Yet it can be seen as a catalyst for broad social change, not least because its resolution and the creation of national protection structures would benefit the region as a whole. In line with its priority of combating intolerance towards refugees and asylum-seekers, UNHCR must fully engage with this region of enormous potential for the future. Nurturing fundamental humanitarian values and a culture of respect for human rights, including refugee protection, should be part and parcel of the development agenda for this region.



Following the outbreak of the crisis in Timor-Leste in April, UNHCR rapidly mobilized some 14 international staff, and budgeted more than USD 4.8 million to provide emergency protection, shelter and household items for some 30,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs). Approximately 150,000 displaced people sought safety in 56 makeshift camps and other sites inside Dili and with host communities outside of the capital. Decongestion of overcrowded camps helped to avoid sexual and gender-based violence and major outbreaks of disease. As part of a collaborative effort with the Government, UN agencies and other partners, UNHCR took the lead to establish an overall protection framework for all IDPs.

With serious breaches of a four-year-old ceasefire, Sri Lanka has descended into conflict, resulting in over 217,000 internally displaced people, an unstable security situation for staff, and by September, more than 15,000 new refugees arriving in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu. UNHCR is reinforcing its response capacity particularly in the north and east, and is appealing for some USD 5 million to join the inter-agency emergency response in protection and assistance.



Renewed fighting in Sri Lanka has caused the displacement of more than 200,000 people. UNHCR / N. Ng

In Indonesia, UNHCR faces challenges in completing its tsunami response operation in the Province of Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam and the island of Nias. The Office is cooperating with national authorities in a review of its implementation strategy and to ensure the efficiency of its disaster-relief programmes and the appropriate use of funding, in close cooperation with relevant national authorities.

A second tripartite technical meeting between UNHCR, Cambodia and Viet Nam took place in Phnom Penh in August 2006 to review the progress arising from the Memorandum of Understanding to resolve the *Montagnard* question. Durable solutions for almost all of the 750 *Montagnards* specifically referred to in the Memorandum have been achieved. Only 26 *Montagnards*, of whom eight were scheduled for resettlement at the end of August, remain in Cambodia. UNHCR monitoring missions have covered more than 60 per cent of the returnees to Viet Nam.

UNHCR has been granted access to south-eastern Myanmar, although it is still barred from the areas most affected by displacement. Following the visit of the Assistant High Commissioner (Operations) to Myanmar in July, UNHCR proposed an inter-agency assessment in Northern Kayin State and Bago Division. Thousands

of people have been displaced from these areas, and some 3,000 have fled to Thailand. The Office is also maintaining its operations on behalf of the 680,000 stateless residents of Northern Rakhine State (of whom 236,000 are returnees).

## Strategic objectives

UNHCR's strategic objectives for Asia and the Pacific for 2007-2009 are built on five pillars. These are to: 1) enhance protection; 2) find durable solutions, especially in protracted situations; 3) engage governments and civil society in forced displacement issues within a migration context; 4) increase public awareness of refugee issues and thereby help raise funds in the region; and 5) heighten cooperation with regional and national actors on emergency preparedness.

To enhance protection efforts, UNHCR will:

- Widen the humanitarian space for refugees and others of concern through joint efforts with governments.
- Ensure international standards of protection are met through participatory assessments; advocate full access to health care, education and employment;

ensure freedom from arbitrary detention and reinforce mechanisms to respond to sexual and gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS.

- Strengthen and build national capacities on asylum in collaboration with governments.
- Increase its understanding of current and potential situations of statelessness to better address instances of it.
- Support efforts to provide protection for conflict-generated IDPs within the IASC cluster approach to address protection and assistance needs of IDPs.

To find durable solutions and resolve protracted refugee situations, UNHCR will focus not only on the three traditional solutions of voluntary return, local settlement and resettlement, but will also explore the use of other innovative solutions such as the utilization of resettlement as a strategic tool in breaking long-term deadlocks. It will lobby for better treatment of refugees in the interim, and their access to gainful employment, and the promotion of self-reliance activities.

To engage governments and civil society in forced displacement issues within a broader migration context, UNHCR's regional strategy envisages region-wide active engagement with governments and civil society on forced migration-related issues, particularly in regional forums (for example the Asia-Pacific Consultations/Bali Process).

To increase public awareness of refugee issues and raise funds, UNHCR will implement an information strategy that focuses on positive approaches to protection of persons of concern. The Office will strengthen partnerships through joint initiatives on asylum and refugee issues. Training programmes, round tables and studies will include parliamentarians, trade unions, NGOs, and academic, religious and research institutions. UNHCR will work to broaden the donor base throughout this economically expanding region.

To increase cooperation with regional and national actors on emergency preparedness and response, UNHCR will coordinate ongoing discussion with governments. It will review current regional capacity and augment stockpiles and standby arrangements to enhance response mechanisms. Training programmes, already provided through UNHCR's e-Centre, will be targeted at a wider audience.

In support of the above objectives in 2006, UNHCR has carried out the following activities to enhance protection and find durable solutions:

A prototype Regional Protection Hub has been set up in Malaysia in 2006 with the addition of staff and resources devolved from Headquarters. With a view to bringing protection delivery closer to operations, the Hub supports refugee status determination, capacity building and regional institutions.

In Indonesia, UNHCR facilitated the successful launch of the *Handbook for Parliamentarians on Refugee Protection* and provided a translated version of the Handbook to Members of Parliament. It has strengthened its efforts to encourage accession to the 1951 Convention in the Republic of Nauru and the withdrawal of reservations to the Convention in Papua New Guinea.

Following the High Commissioner's visit to China, UNHCR and the Chinese authorities are discussing the status and treatment of asylum-seekers and refugees in the country. Particular attention is being paid to legislation on status determination procedures as well as other measures to ease restrictions in China. In the Hong Kong SAR, China, UNHCR continues to engage the Government in the refugee status determination process, building on recent positive developments.

A women's protection clinic in India, and the re-establishment of the Provincial Admission Boards in Thailand, have both improved the delivery of protection to refugees and asylum-seekers in the respective countries.

UNHCR sees the development of strategic partnerships in Asia and the Pacific as crucial to change, particularly in long-standing refugee situations. For example, UNHCR is taking advantage of recent openings in the situation in Nepal, bolstered by the support and strong efforts of the international community. The Office is focusing on registration of the refugees in camps in the south-east of the country, and the promotion of durable solutions, including repatriation and resettlement, for those in the camps. It has actively participated in the international response to the IDP situation in the country by monitoring protection and establishing a presence in Nepalgunj and Biratnagar.

In Bangladesh, despite setbacks in providing assistance to the 20,000 refugees remaining in camps in the south of the country, UNHCR and the international community have been promoting a two-pronged approach: first, the immediate improvement of protection and assistance in the camps, including through the involvement of other UN agencies and partners in the camps and refugee hosting areas; and second, pushing for durable solutions for these populations.

In Thailand, UNHCR has been able to move forward on a major resettlement programme involving ten countries. The Government's position on resettlement has softened, allowing UNHCR to submit the cases of 13,000 refugees for resettlement. The Government has also agreed to language and job training in the camps to prepare refugees for durable solutions. During the High Commissioner's recent mission to the country, UNHCR held constructive discussions on new employment opportunities for refugees.

## Challenges

The absence of an international legal framework: Only 13 countries in the region have acceded to the international refugee instruments. Regardless of their signatory status, however, there is a tradition of hosting refugees informally in most countries.

The absence of national protection structures: Many governments in the region consider refugees and asylum-seekers as illegal migrants and fear that establishing formal asylum procedures would attract more. Some countries lack the resources to build up refugee status determination processes and institutions on their own. With a few exceptions, most countries in the region rely on UNHCR to determine refugee status, to assist refugees and to identify durable solutions. This

places a considerable burden on UNHCR. Furthermore, national institutions dealing specifically with refugees do not exist in the majority of situations.

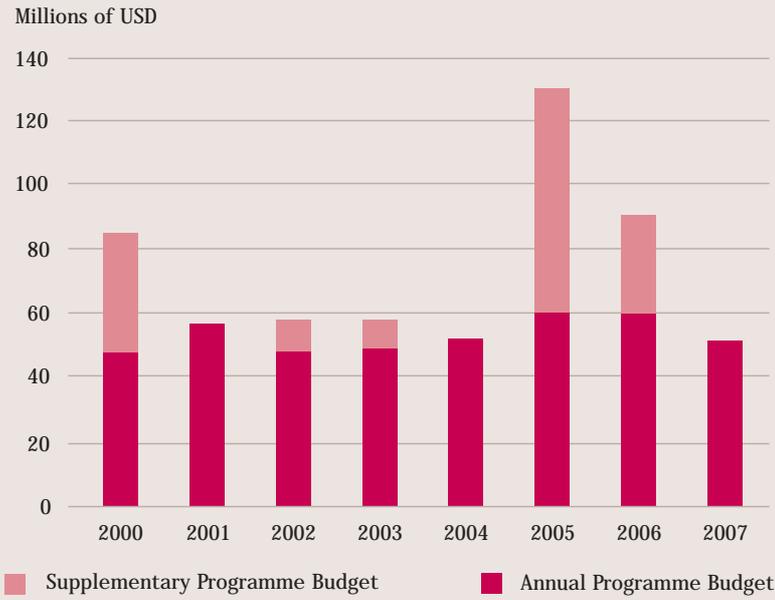
Political constraints: Forced displacement and migration are sensitive issues in the region, and are not usually high on priority lists of governments. Granting asylum is in many cases seen as an unfriendly act to neighbouring countries. Humanitarian concerns are often subordinated to national security, economic and social considerations.

Awareness and understanding of refugee issues: In most countries in the region, refugee-related issues are highly politicized and the media and the public at large frequently confuse refugees with illegal migrants or criminals.

Budget (USD)		
Country	Annual Programme Budget	
	2006	2007
Bangladesh	3,090,368	2,890,103
India	3,858,589	3,438,192
Nepal	6,865,442	6,975,643
Sri Lanka	8,827,990	7,331,779
Sub-total South Asia	22,642,389	20,635,717
Australia and New Zealand	1,121,818	1,096,908
Cambodia	1,391,801	1,054,371
China	4,212,665	3,676,243
Indonesia	2,659,546	2,107,133
Japan	3,352,845	3,188,257
Malaysia	3,268,264	3,931,313
Mongolia	111,846	131,710
Myanmar	4,845,122	4,304,946
Papua New Guinea	465,732	462,600
Philippines	219,395	196,845
Republic of Korea	861,340	920,154
Singapore	46,000	43,800
Thailand	7,665,945	9,785,736
Timor-Leste	308,888	218,656
Viet Nam	443,937	255,722
Regional activities <sup>1</sup>	230,000	359,622
Sub-total East Asia and the Pacific	31,205,144	31,734,016
Total Asia	53,847,533	52,369,733

<sup>1</sup> Includes general protection activities, dissemination of refugee law, transport and repatriation of Indo-Chinese refugees.

## Annual and Supplementary Programme Budgets 2000 - 2007



Note: The figures for 2000 to 2005 represent the final revised Annual and Supplementary Programme Budgets as presented in the Global Reports from 2000 to 2005. For 2006, the revised Annual and Supplementary Programme Budgets as at 1 September 2006 have been used. For 2007, the initial ExCom-approved Annual Programme Budget has been used.