



South Asia

Major developments

2002 was a year of mixed results in from the region. As described in a separate chapter, the cease-fire agreement, reached in February between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), brought 20 years of hostilities to a halt. A series of peace talks between the parties contributed to growing confidence, and as a result 258,882 internally displaced persons (IDPs) spontaneously returned to their places of origin over the course of the year. In addition, several hundred refugees from Tamil Nadu in southern India returned on their own. Under these circumstances, UNHCR restructured its presence to ensure adequate protection and timely assistance.

In eastern Nepal, there was no practical progress on durable solutions for more than 100,000 camp residents. This was a disappointment after the hopes raised in 2001 when the Governments of Bhutan and of Nepal instituted a joint verification process and 12,000 camp residents were interviewed. The two Governments were unable to close the gap between

Bangladesh
India
Myanmar
Nepal
Sri Lanka



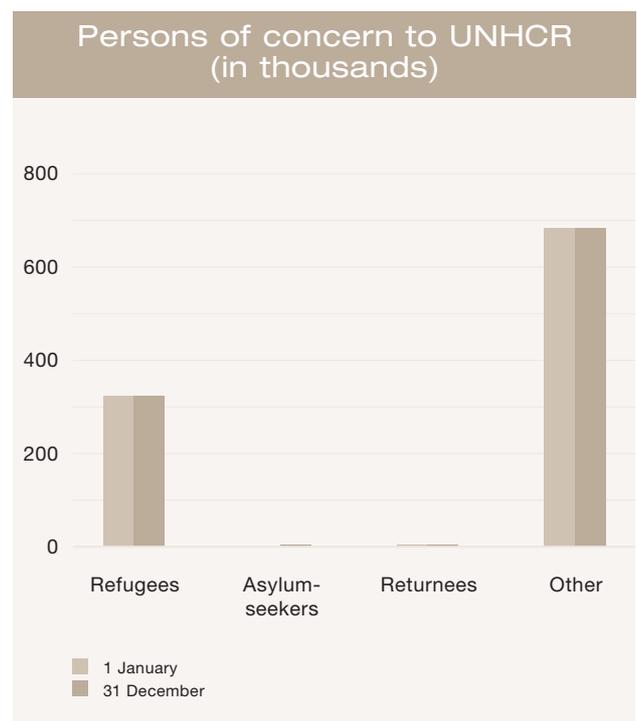
their respective positions. Meanwhile, renewed insecurity in Nepal posed a serious threat to UNHCR’s operations. The already mounting frustration among camp residents worsened as diplomacy was deemed to have failed, and a tense atmosphere resulted. It was in this environment that issues of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) emerged in the camps. UNHCR took immediate remedial steps and instituted preventive measures.

At the end of 2002, some 700,000 persons of concern to UNHCR in the region, including IDPs in Sri Lanka, were awaiting durable solutions in the region.

Challenges and concerns

The refugee situation in the region remained a protracted one. The concerned populations have lived under temporary asylum for more than ten years. It became increasingly evident that any resolution of the situation requires the concerted effort of donors not only in terms of financial assistance but also political support.

The general situation in the region and the added focus on national security made it more difficult for UNHCR to secure broad acceptance for the estab-



ishment of a new refugee regime. Although the countries in the region have traditionally been hospitable towards asylum-seekers and refugees, providing them with temporary asylum, none of the countries are signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention or the 1967 Protocol. Under these circumstances, the enactment of national refugee legislation has been one of the main challenges for UNHCR.

Progress towards solutions

UNHCR redoubled its effort to facilitate voluntary repatriation of refugees from Bangladesh to Myanmar. The number of returnees increased to 760 (283 in 2001). Although a modest figure, with 22,000 remaining in camps, it represents an important step towards fulfilment of the wish of refugees, and reflects the lifting by the Government of Myanmar of certain impediments to return. Together with both Governments concerned, UNHCR helped to set up a timeframe to end the main phase of repatriation on 30 June 2003.

In Sri Lanka, UNHCR strengthened its presence in field locations so as to monitor the human rights situation more closely in priority areas of return. This helped to create conditions conducive to return and improved the protection of IDP rights. Pending progress in the peace talks, UNHCR's protection monitoring was also expected to contribute to the establishment of a positive environment, facilitating the return of refugees from India.

In New Delhi, there was a meeting of the Eminent Persons Group (EPG), consisting of former senior government officials, former judges, lawyers, academics and journalists in the region. The meeting was well attended. The Group discussed the promotion of national refugee law and durable solutions: the key refugee issues in the region.

Operations

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

At the end of 2002, 22,000 refugees still remained in two camps in **Bangladesh**. It became increasingly clear that voluntary repatriation alone would not

bring about lasting solutions for the refugees. In September 2002, UNHCR suggested a new drive towards self-sufficiency i.e., helping refugees become more independent pending return to Myanmar. At the Government's request, UNHCR initiated a concept paper on self-sufficiency for the remaining refugees in the camps. During the process, UNHCR held consultations with major donors and UN agencies to explore their possible involvement in the process. Assistance activities to refugees continued in 2002, with more emphasis on refugee participation in various sectors such as education, food distribution and sanitation.

In **Myanmar's** Northern Rakhine State, the presence of UNHCR continued to play a crucial protection role in promoting the sustainable reintegration of a large number of Muslim returnees. The programme concentrated on ensuring respect for their rights as well as improving their ability to cope with adverse living and economic conditions. Special attention was paid to vulnerable groups among the 232,000 returnees, in order to preclude the potential causes of renewed population movements. Throughout 2002, UNHCR maintained its active dialogue with the authorities, both in the capital and in Northern Rakhine State. Discussions focused on the practices of compulsory labour and compulsory contributions, which have a negative impact on the stability of returnee populations and vulnerable individuals. Incidents of compulsory labour and compulsory contributions reported to UNHCR were systematically assessed and brought to the attention of the authorities. The overall frequency of such practices continued to decline. However, the decline is still too slow, with a marked improvement noted in certain areas only.

The largest refugee groups in **India**, Tibetans and Sri Lankan Tamils, fall under the responsibility of the Government. UNHCR provides protection and assistance to 12,750 refugees of other nationalities who mostly live in and around the capital. 830 refugees were resettled in third countries under UNHCR's mandate. UNHCR facilitated the voluntary repatriation of 131 Afghan and 71 Sri Lankan refugees to their countries of origin. In 2002, two Afghan refugees of Indian origin became naturalised Indian citizens, an encouraging indication that many more will be naturalised in the coming years. UNHCR continued to explore all possible solutions



Myanmar: Returnees participating in school reconstruction. *UNHCR / Y. Saita*

for the refugees. UNHCR's assistance activities continued to focus on meeting the needs of vulnerable groups such as women, children and the elderly. To reduce the dependence of refugees on subsistence allowances and help them prepare for eventual durable solutions, UNHCR developed its strategy for a gradual phase-out over a 15-month period. This approach was developed in collaboration with partners and shared with all stakeholders. Alongside this process, active support towards self-sufficiency was initiated in the course of 2002 through the launch of a multi-year self-reliance scheme involving the provision of vocational training. A total of 557 refugees benefited from the scheme.

Funding

UNHCR's operations in South Asia, particularly in Myanmar and Sri Lanka, were well funded in 2002 by earmarked contributions from several donors. UNHCR's activities in India, on the other hand, received less donor support, despite the fact that they came under its core mandate and concerned a relatively large number of urban refugees.

Voluntary Contributions – Restricted / Earmarked (USD)

Earmarking ¹	Donor	Annual Programme Budget		Supplementary Programme Budget	
		Income	Contribution	Income	Contribution
Bangladesh					
	European Commission	1,083,934	1,066,710	0	0
	Japan	400,000	400,000	0	0
India					
	Italy	211,268	211,268	0	0
Sri Lanka					
	European Commission	2,250,130	2,273,900	0	0
	France	0	0	49,554	49,554
	Japan	1,150,000	1,150,000	1,967,981	1,967,981
	Netherlands	490,677	490,677	0	0
	Norway	0	0	408,163	408,163
	United Kingdom	0	0	1,116,563	1,116,563
	United States of America	1,654,000	1,654,000	0	0
Myanmar					
	European Commission	1,173,710	1,173,710	0	0
	Japan	1,000,000	100,000	0	0
	Switzerland	59,880	59,880	0	0
	United Kingdom	167,188	167,188	0	0
	United States of America	485,000	485,000	0	0
Nepal					
	<i>Association française de soutien à l'UNHCR (FRA)</i>	26,005	26,005	0	0
	European Commission	912,575	874,891	0	0
	<i>Shin-Nyo-En Foundation (JPN)</i>	59,701	59,701	0	0
	<i>Stichting Vluchteling (NET)</i>	67,600	67,600	0	0
	United States of America	247,000	247,000	0	0
	USA for UNHCR (USA)	19,200	19,200	0	0
South Asia					
	Japan	2,400,000	2,400,000	0	0
	United States of America	2,499,000	2,499,000	0	0
Total		16,356,868	15,425,730	3,542,261	3,542,261

¹ For more information on the various earmarkings, please refer to the Donor Profiles.

Budget and Expenditure (USD)

Country	Revised Budget			Expenditure		
	Annual Programme Budget	Supplementary Programme Budget	Total	Annual Programme Budget	Supplementary Programme Budget	Total
Bangladesh	2,749,794	0	2,749,794	2,422,441	0	2,422,441
India	2,714,447	0	2,714,447	2,529,287	0	2,529,287
Myanmar	5,478,445	0	5,478,445	5,450,722	0	5,450,722
Nepal	5,969,230	0	5,969,230	5,289,517	0	5,289,517
Sri Lanka	6,163,616	1,995,796	8,159,412	5,498,113	718,910	6,217,023
Regional Projects ¹	10,000	0	10,000	7,319	0	7,319
Total	23,085,532	1,995,796	25,081,328	21,197,399	718,910	21,916,309

¹ Includes activities for dissemination of refugee law in South Asia.