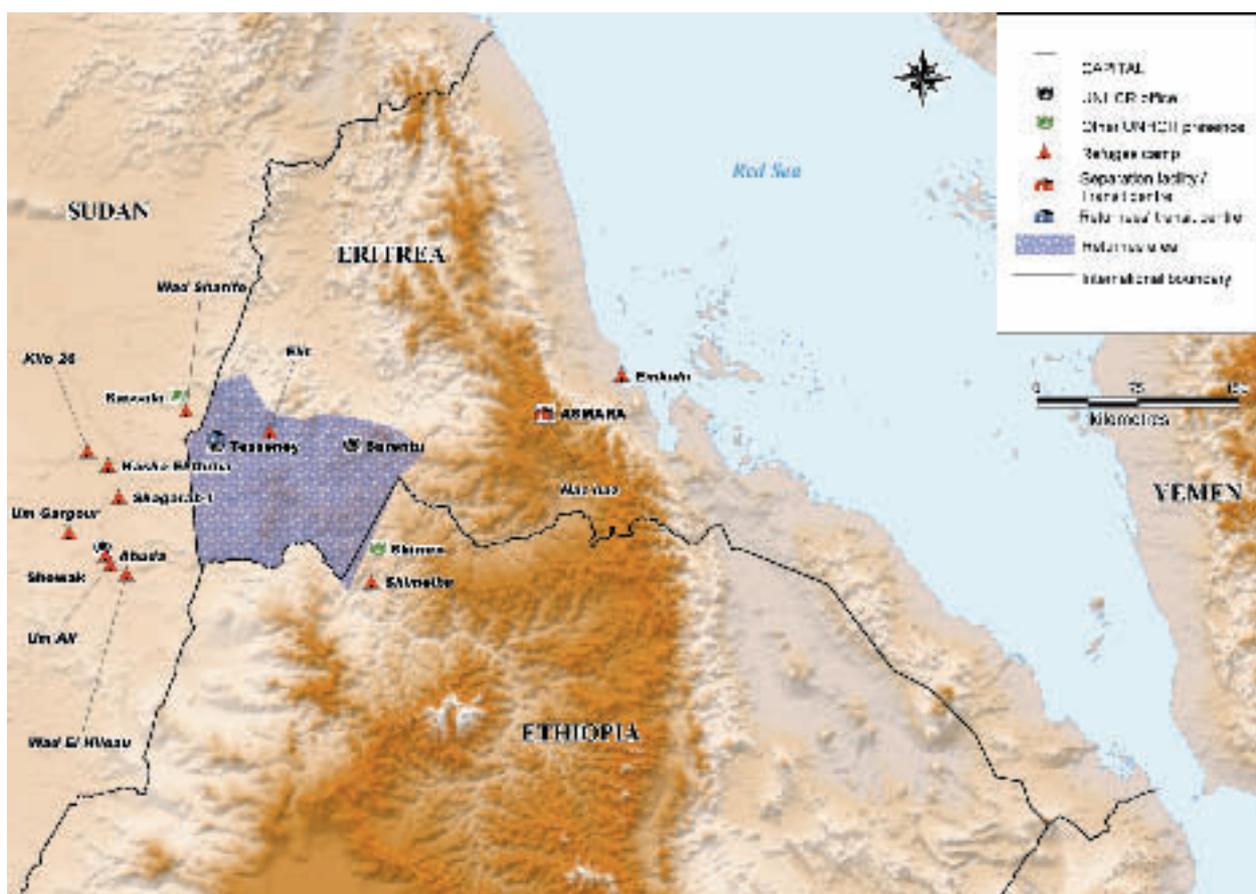


Eritrea



Main objectives

UNHCR's main objectives were to provide international protection and basic assistance and to seek durable solutions for some 4,400 refugees and 1,600 asylum-seekers; facilitate the voluntary repatriation of 3,000 Eritrean refugees from Sudan; consolidate the response to the immediate needs of returnees and returnee-receiving areas; and mobilize the support of other UN and development agencies in addressing longer-term needs in returnee areas.

Impact

- UNHCR provided full protection and assistance with basic services to some 4,400 refugees in two refugee camps and roughly 1,600 asylum-seekers.
- Reintegration assistance was provided to 120,000 returnees and their host communities in the sectors of water, sanitation, health, community services, education, income generation and agriculture.
- UNHCR promoted universal primary education in refugee camps and returnee areas, with a strong focus on girls' education. A Memorandum of Understanding concluded with the Ministry of Education allowed qualifying refugee students to attend national secondary schools.

Working environment

The context

Eritrea is not a signatory to the 1951 Convention nor does it have any national legislation relating to refugee matters. In 2005, UNHCR funded the management of the two refugee camps, provided assistance to urban asylum-seekers and refugees and continued to search for durable solutions – mainly voluntary repatriation or resettlement, as local integration was not viable. Camp populations totalled just over 4,400 at the end of 2005 (including an additional 36 Somalis and 41 Sudanese who arrived during the year).

Continued tensions over the Ethiopian border demarcation dispute kept Eritrea in a heightened state of mobilization. The situation was particularly tense at the end of 2005 and was compounded by government-imposed restrictions on the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE), which included a ban on helicopter services. This had an impact on access and medical evacuation plans for UNHCR in main areas of returnee operations – and also contributed to security phase changes and relocation of some UNHCR staff (see below, also see *Glossary* for security phase definitions).

Overall, the political climate changed little throughout the year. The Government maintained its policy of close management of the economy, increasing its focus on self-reliance efforts and progressing with numerous infrastructure projects. UNHCR advocated for representation of refugee and returnee needs in national and UN plans. This involved intensive work within the UN Country Team, including in the preparation of the 2005 Common Country Assessment and the UN Development Assistance Framework (2007-2011). UNHCR continued to enjoy relatively good working relations with the Government and positive developments in early 2006 suggest further productive cooperation in the near future.

Constraints

UNHCR's main operational area became less accessible, and security phases changed in the second half of the year from phase one to three in Asmara and from phase three to four in the main returnee area of Gash Barka, entailing the temporary relocation of international staff to Asmara (see *Glossary*). Project implementation capacity was affected by shortages and an increase in the cost of building materials and basic commodities, along with limitations in the availability of skilled labour. New regulations for NGOs, which also restricted their use of UN funds, further limited UNHCR's operational capacity.

UNHCR conducted refugee status determination of priority asylum-seekers (most of them defined as such in terms of vulnerability); however, the backlog of cases increased due to limited staff resources.

Some progress was made towards engaging other United Nations and development agencies to provide for

longer-term rehabilitation and capacity building of service providers in returnee areas, in the form of a modest draft joint UN programme proposal. However, due to unresolved modalities for funding and coordination, much effort is required to make this a reality. Numerous issues relating to the sustainability of projects remain to be solved, and, unfortunately, UNHCR's phase out strategy cannot be described with confidence as incorporating a durable solution for Eritrean returnees.

Funding

UNHCR was the only agency responsible for covering the costs of refugee-related activities in 2005. Assistance generally met minimum standards, but proved to be a challenge due to an initial low budget allocation and rapidly rising costs of commodities. WFP agreed in late 2005 to provide food, a welcome programme contribution to the refugee camps; however, Government approval was still pending at the end of the year. In the meantime UNHCR endeavoured to cover the cost of all basic and supplementary food. With little voluntary repatriation in 2005, funding for UNHCR operations in Eritrea was notably harder to secure than in previous years.

Achievements and impact

Protection and solutions

A preliminary registration of Somali refugees in Emkulu camp showed that ten per cent wanted to repatriate. Some 90 Sudanese refugees also expressed a desire to return to Sudan. Over 450 Ethiopian urban asylum-seekers were registered. Protection work, including increased

Persons of concern					
Type of population	Origin	Total in country	Of whom UNHCR assisted	Per cent female	Per cent under 18
Refugees	Somalia	3,600	3,600	44	53
	Sudan	700	700	33	45
Asylum-seekers	Ethiopia	1,500	1,500	49	40

Note: In addition, there were over 121,000 returnees who arrived before 2005 and received UNHCR assistance during the year. There are also an estimated 50,000 IDPs in Eritrea: 42,000 living in camps and 8,000 elsewhere.

Budget, income and expenditure (USD)				
Annual programme budget				
Final budget	Income from contributions ¹	Other funds available ²	Total funds available	Total expenditure
10,858,533	3,423,415	6,948,496	10,371,911	10,371,912

¹ Includes income from contributions earmarked at the country level.

² Includes allocations by UNHCR from unearmarked or broadly earmarked contributions, opening balance and adjustments.

monitoring in camps and returnee areas, was accompanied by improvements in the standard of humanitarian assistance and safety. Most refugees remained in camps, as local integration was not possible.

The organized repatriation of Eritrean refugees ended in 2004, and few refugees returned spontaneously in 2005. Returnees continued to benefit from UNHCR projects, but full socio-economic reintegration remains a challenge.



Returnee children at a school in Ali Ghider which was equipped by UNHCR.
UNHCR / M. Abubaker

Activities and assistance

Community services: Over 500 vulnerable returnees in Gash Barka, mainly female-headed households, received training in home economics and in the production of fuel-efficient stoves.

Crop production: Each returnee family was entitled to two hectares of agricultural land. UNHCR, in close cooperation with FAO, distributed seeds to farmers in returnee areas and helped in land clearing, ploughing and preparation. Some 1,000 hectares of agricultural land were cleared, over 2,200 were ploughed and almost 3,700 harrowed. Soil embankments and river diversions were built for irrigation and water and soil conservation. UNHCR continued to support an FAO-seconded agricultural specialist.

Domestic needs and household support: Newly-arrived Somali refugees received a limited allocation of non-food items (jerry cans, kitchen sets, blankets and bedsheets). All refugee women aged 15 to 45 regularly received sanitary materials. Regular distribution of soap continued.

Education: Some 1,100 refugee students attended primary schools in refugee camps, and 400 refugees received adult education. Under a new Memorandum of Understanding with the Government, 37 refugee students attended national secondary schools. For returnee children, six new schools were completed and two extended with additional classrooms. UNHCR also provided equipment for schools and supplementary English classes to some 3,000 returnee students and supported over 120 Arabic-speaking teachers to attend an English-language summer school.

Food: All refugees in camps received food rations consisting of wheat flour or rice, lentils, oil, sugar, salt and fresh vegetables. Supplementary feeding was continued in a consistent effort to redress persistent unsatisfactory malnutrition levels (a global acute malnutrition rate of 15 per cent).

Forestry: Because of the fragility of the environment and the scarcity of natural resources in Eritrea, UNHCR

continued to support substitutes for wood, which would otherwise be consumed for fuel or construction purposes. Metal-framed structures were provided for refugee and returnee shelters. Kerosene and kerosene stoves were also provided. These had the advantage, from a protection perspective, of largely eliminating the risks posed to refugee women and children in their daily journey to collect firewood.

Health and Nutrition: Two primary health care clinics were run in refugee camps, with supplementary feeding centres for malnourished children, pregnant and lactating women and sick refugees. Drugs were procured and delivered to health stations in returnee areas, where five new health clinics were completed and supplied with furniture and medical equipment. A further five health stations were rehabilitated and three voluntary counselling and treatment centres equipped to support joint UN efforts on HIV/AIDS awareness raising and prevention. With national authorities, UNHCR ensured respect for returnees' right to free medical treatment for a minimum of one year after return.

Income generation: In coordination with the Ministry of Agriculture, 600 female-headed households in Gash Barka received poultry and training on animal husbandry. Another 500 female-headed households received goats in Gash Barka. In the northern Red Sea area, about 1,000 vulnerable returnees received goats, donkeys and cattle.

Legal assistance: Cash assistance was provided to extremely vulnerable urban refugees and asylum-seekers. Interpreters were routinely employed. Refugee identification cards, as well as birth and death certificates were issued, and returnees were registered and provided with documentation. A new comprehensive refugee registration system was implemented (using *proGres* software) to provide better individual follow-up and improved statistical reporting.

Livestock: Four livestock watering ponds were constructed in Gash Barka for the livestock belonging to some 15,000 returnees.

Operational support (to agencies): To ensure effective management of refugee and reintegration programmes, UNHCR supported government counterparts with salaries and allowances for project staff, vehicles, office supplies, training, rent and utilities. Training for implementing partners enabled them to undertake their activities, in line with UNHCR rules and regulations on coordination, reporting, asset management and financial accountability.

Sanitation: Camp sanitation committees organized regular cleaning campaigns. Garbage collection barrels and cleaning materials were provided and sanitation workers received cash incentives. Sanitation-related diseases were rarely observed in the camps. In returnee areas, latrines were built and garbage pits were dug.

Shelter and infrastructure: A semi-permanent metal housing structure was maintained for each refugee family in the camps. For protection and security reasons, both refugee camps had electricity for outdoor lighting. Metal shelter structures and plastic sheeting were distributed to returnees in rural areas. A cash-for-shelter alternative was made available to vulnerable urban returnees.

Transport and logistics: Food and non-food items were transported regularly from Asmara to the refugee camps. A fleet of 60 UNHCR trucks with 20 trailers was used to transport returnees and reintegration-related commodities.

Water: Hydrogeological surveys were carried out and seven new boreholes drilled in returnee areas. Spare parts for water systems were procured and water systems in four returnee sites were completed.

Organization and implementation

Management

UNHCR maintained three offices in Eritrea with a total of 86 staff at the start of the year (20 international, 66 national), including seven UNVs, and six national and one international UNOPS consultants. During 2005, UNHCR reduced its international staff to 14, including four UNVs and one UNOPS consultant, due to the deteriorating security situation.

Working with others

UNHCR had four implementing partners, three government agencies and one international NGO, until the government proclamation of May 2005, which introduced new NGO registration procedures and limitations on NGO activity. The Office maintained a close relationship

with the Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator and other UN agencies and contributed to the preparation of the Millennium Development Goals Review. UNHCR chaired the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) Recovery Thematic Group for 2007-2011 and managed the overall monitoring strategy component. UNHCR was also active in the UN Theme Group on HIV/AIDS, providing input in the form of activities in returnee areas, such as awareness raising and the establishment of voluntary counselling and testing centres.

UNHCR's partner for the repatriation and reintegration operation, the Eritrean Relief and Refugee Committee (ERREC), was dissolved and its functions taken over by the Ministry of Labour and Human Welfare. At the time of writing, negotiations were still under way on the use of assets procured by UNHCR that were previously managed by ERREC. Although UNHCR did not assist internally displaced people, an in-kind contribution of transport (use of trucks), generators and shelter materials was made to UNDP's joint programme in early 2005. As a result of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee adoption, in September 2005, of the cluster approach to internal displacement, the Office took the lead role in planning for protection, emergency shelter and camp coordination and management. UNHCR's office in Asmara coordinated drafting of the Common Humanitarian Action Plan (CHAP) with respect to those clusters with other UN agencies and NGOs.

Overall assessment

UNHCR's activities had some positive impact on returnee reintegration but the needs remained high – especially in terms of livelihoods and diversification of sources of income. Reintegration projects directly or indirectly benefited more than 120,000 returnees and local residents of host communities. UNHCR made efforts to engage other UN agencies in returnee areas, but could not reach an agreement on financial management and coordination modalities. Following UNHCR's substantial input in reintegration in Eritrea (2001-2005), a clear transitional strategy based on returnee needs has yet to be defined. But it is clear that, in general, returnee areas need the attention of other UN and development agencies: indeed, without donors' support for the successful phase-in of other agencies, it will be difficult for UNHCR to scale down and phase out in a responsible manner.

Assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers was restricted to basic needs. Guidelines on protection procedures were improved and followed, although resource availability limited the number of refugee status decisions. The external audit process and the introduction of standards and indicators allowed UNHCR to fine-tune its operations and improve its arguments for an

adequate response. Capacity building in the form of protection training seminars for government officials resulted in closer cooperation and better understanding of UNHCR's mandate and procedures.

Offices
Asmara
Barentu
Tesseney

Partners
Government agencies
Eritrean Relief and Refugee Commission
Gash Barka Zoba Administration
Ministry of Labour and Human Welfare
Office of Refugee Affairs
UN Agencies
FAO
UNICEF
UNAIDS
UNDP
NGOs
Refugee Trust International (until May 2005)

Financial Report (USD)		
Expenditure breakdown	Current year's projects	Prior years' projects
	Annual programme budget	Annual and supplementary programme budgets
Protection, monitoring and coordination	1,548,378	0
Community services	10,102	5,420
Crop production	380,046	217,733
Domestic needs and household support	206,731	94,372
Education	1,040,718	1,424,276
Food	446,094	154,198
Forestry	24,773	38,579
Health and nutrition	976,619	890,888
Income generation	73,794	195,689
Legal assistance	45,070	33,572
Livestock	34,584	0
Operational support (to agencies)	619,425	212,673
Sanitation	153,101	7,210
Shelter and infrastructure	120,696	445,648
Transport and logistics	314,424	339,406
Water	185,873	1,031,031
Instalments with implementing partners	2,910,399	(5,090,695)
Sub-total operational activities	9,090,827	0
Programme support	1,281,085	0
Total expenditure	10,371,912	0
Cancellation on prior years' expenditure		(211,608)
Instalments with implementing partners		
Payments made	6,827,492	
Reporting received	(3,917,093)	
Balance	2,910,399	
Prior years' report		
Instalments with implementing partners		
Outstanding 1st January		6,066,064
Reporting received		(5,090,695)
Refunded to UNHCR		(247,850)
Adjustments		100,044
Balance		827,563