

EGYPT

INITIAL OBJECTIVES

- Assist the Government of Egypt in ensuring the protection of refugees by carrying out status determination.
- Assess the needs of vulnerable refugees and provide assistance as required.
- Identify lasting solutions for refugees through resettlement to third countries or voluntary repatriation.
- Help local authorities and NGOs build national capacity to assume greater legal and administrative responsibility for refugees.
- Develop regional strategies for public awareness and private sector fund-raising.
- Strengthen co-operation with the League of Arab States through co-operation agreements and joint activities.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS, PROGRESS ACHIEVED AND CONSTRAINTS

In line with the efforts to strengthen UNHCR's refugee status determination capacity, several measures were taken to simplify and streamline procedures, while improving procedural safeguards for asylum applicants. These measures led to a significant increase in the number of decisions on refugee status. Decisions increased by 49 per cent during the first six months of the year, compared to the same period in 1999. The number of asylum applications lodged by Somalis and Sudanese jumped by 51 per cent. As at 30 June, there were some 7,400 recognised refugees living in urban areas in Egypt. The largest groups included Sudanese (44 per cent), Somalis (37 per cent), Yemenis (9 per cent) and Sierra Leoneans (2 per cent). The remainder represent 20 other nationalities, mainly African. There was also a group of 156 elderly stateless persons mainly of Armenian origin.

A total of 1,101 refugees departed on resettlement to third countries by the end of June. Financial constraints obliged UNHCR to reduce substantially departure grants to refugees accepted for resettlement, to be able to assist all departing refugees until the end of the year. Capacity for processing and submitting eligible resettlement cases has been maintained. UNHCR assisted 22 refugees to repatriate from Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic to their countries of origin, through the regional repatriation project. UNHCR also sought to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of Somalis, Yemenis and other refugees to their countries of origin.

Thanks to strengthened efforts to resettle refugees, the number of refugees assisted by the Office did not significantly increase, despite an overall increase in the number of refugees recognised in Egypt. The backlog of decisions on refugee applications, however, remained high at 6,200 cases. To address this situation, staff hired under the Middle East Resettlement Programme (MERP) in 1999 continued to work with UNHCR in the national UNV framework to assist with refugee status determination.

During the first six months of the year UNHCR provided various types of assistance to approximately 4,800 urban refugees, principally Somalis, Sudanese and Yemenis. Vulnerable groups such as women-at-risk and refugee children were given special attention whenever required through social counselling provided by UNHCR's implementing partner. Medical assistance was provided to refugees as required. Monthly subsistence allowances given to the most needy refugees did not fully cover their basic living costs, including accommodation, food, household necessities and other needs. Owing to budgetary constraints, financial assistance in 2000 will be further limited only to the neediest refugees through strict, regular needs assessments conducted jointly by UNHCR and its implementing partner. As of July, monthly subsistence allowances were scaled down by 20 per cent, to enable coverage

of the most vulnerable cases in need of assistance until the end of the year. Education grants, due during the second half of 2000 will also be scaled down. Other cost-cutting measures included postponing payments to medical centres and pharmacies, for rent of office premises, and halting vocational training for refugees. To attenuate the impact of cuts on health care, UNHCR conducted a joint survey with partners in Cairo to identify more affordable health care that might be made available to refugees and asylum-seekers, reducing the burden on implementing partners.

In March, UNHCR submitted an aide memoire to the Government of Egypt regarding the gradual hand-over to the competent national authorities of responsibility for refugee status determination. The plan of action detailed in the aide memoire envisages a two-phased hand-over process: in the mid-term, reception and registration of asylum-seekers and refugees in 2001, and in the long-term, development of a national refugee status determination capacity by 2002. A national steering committee led by the Refugee Department of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, with the participation of other government departments and UNHCR, was set up in April to discuss the modalities of this initiative. A number of training activities involving government officials and national UNVs are being planned for the remainder of the year but will depend on the availability of funds.

A People Oriented Planning (POP)/Gender Workshop was conducted in Cairo in April, targeting newly recruited UNVs, NGOs, and government partners. Its aim was to promote implementation of the checklists on gender sensitive asylum procedures and other tools to promote gender equity. Two POP workshops were also conducted in the United Arab Emirates (Abu Dhabi and Ajman) in June, in collaboration with two NGO partners. A regional gender team comprising UNHCR staff working in the Middle East was set up to assist in gender mainstreaming efforts.

In January, the High Commissioner appointed

a well-known Egyptian entertainer, Adel Imam, as UNHCR's Goodwill Ambassador for the Middle East and North Africa. In April the newly appointed Goodwill Ambassador visited refugee camps in Yemen and met with the Yemeni President and other senior officials. In July, he was invited by Queen Noor of Jordan to be guest speaker at a ceremony marking the opening of a Conference on Children in the Arab World. In April, UNHCR published the first issue of a new quarterly regional newsletter aimed at raising awareness of the agency's operations throughout the Middle East and North Africa.

In June, UNHCR signed a Co-operation Agreement with the League of Arab States. The agreement is expected to further enhance co-operation between the two organisations, especially in the fields of refugees and migration in the Arab World. Areas of possible co-operation include the co-sponsorship of a regional dialogue on refugees and migration in the Arab region, co-operation between UNHCR and specialised organisations of the Arab League in areas of mutual concern, as well as joint activities aimed at the promotion and dissemination of refugee law and basic humanitarian principles.

REVISED OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITY ACTIVITIES FOR JULY - DECEMBER

Considering the limited availability of funds for the programme in Egypt, UNHCR's priority activities for the second half of the year will be to:

- Continue consultations with the Government and pursue activities aimed at developing the capacity of the competent national authorities to assume greater responsibility for refugee status determination, in line with the plan of action contained in the March aide memoire.
- In addition to developing national asylum procedures, explore with the Government the possibility of securing limited access to employment and social benefits for specific

groups of refugees who have been residing in Egypt for a number of years but who do not have prospects for resettlement or voluntary repatriation. Together with the Egyptian authorities, local NGOs and other charitable organisations, explore the possibility of reducing the costs of education and medical treatment for refugees.

- Resettlement submissions based on refugee protection needs will continue to be a priority during the second half of the year, since third country resettlement remains the most viable durable solution for many refugees living in Egypt at the present time. Resettle some 3,500 refugees from Egypt

during the year.

- Continue to mainstream UNHCR's policy priorities, with a special emphasis on addressing the needs of refugee women and children.
- Since the budget for public information activities has been reduced by almost 25 per cent, a training session for journalists in the region will be postponed until 2001.
- Intensify co-operation with the League of Arab States in line with the June Co-operation Agreement.

FINANCIAL DATA (USD)

	Initial Budget	Revised Budget	Total Funds Available*	Total Funds Obligated
AB and TF	3,977,010	4,012,568	1,700,100	1,700,100

*Includes income from unrestricted contributions, income from contributions restricted to the region/country, opening balance and adjustments.

