

# SRI LANKA

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## INITIAL OBJECTIVES

- Improve access to national protection and humanitarian assistance for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the north and north-east of Sri Lanka.
- Minimise internal displacement and provide alternatives to flight from regions of instability.
- Stabilise displaced communities and promote conditions for solutions.
- Facilitate return and reintegration of displaced populations, with particular attention to the vulnerable groups.
- Advocate the implementation of policies protecting the rights of the displaced and other victims of the conflict.
- Extend the capacity of the Government, NGOs and displaced communities to respond to displacement and bring about lasting solutions.

## MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND CONSTRAINTS

UNHCR estimates that currently over 800,000 persons remain internally displaced in Sri Lanka as a result of 18 years of armed conflict. Of some 713,000 persons receiving food assistance from the government, an estimated 185,000 persons are sheltering in government welfare centres and 11,840 persons continue to seek refuge in the Madhu Open Relief Centre, where UNHCR maintains a full-time protection presence. The Sri Lankan Government recently launched a relocation initiative for welfare centre residents in Vavuniya and Mannar, which offered an alternative to shelter in a crowded centre. Some 300 Sri Lankan refugees in India have indicated their desire to return to Sri Lanka, and work is now in progress towards achieving this. This programme represents a long-sought shift in policy (advocated by UNHCR in 2000) towards a more open approach to seeking durable solutions.

Enhanced national protection of the displaced remains UNHCR's highest priority. By establishing a strategic partnership with the National Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, UNHCR aims to provide an opportunity for closer co-operation on the ground, between the Commission and UNHCR field teams. The Office will also be involved in analysing ways in which the Commission can strengthen its promotion of human rights and support for IDPs.

To make the relocation of IDPs sustainable, and improve the well-being of people affected by the conflict, UNHCR continues to work closely with the World Bank on the North and East Irrigated Agriculture Project, designed to reinvigorate agricultural production. In addition, UNHCR is also joining efforts with the Asian Development Bank on a new project to provide housing and basic services.

UNHCR's Situation Analysis Project, which includes NGOs, local Human Rights organisations and policy institutes, is based on the *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*, and provides a comprehensive evaluation of the latest situation regarding IDPs in Sri Lanka. To further promote these guiding principles as a protection tool, UNHCR is working with the Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies on a set of training and advocacy materials to be used in workshops and training events in the conflict-affected areas. In addition, through the establishment of a project with the Legal Aid Foundation of the Bar Association of Sri Lanka, UNHCR is able to provide legal services to IDPs.

As a result of an informal working agreement with the immigration authorities, UNHCR has been able to guard against the deportation of those refugees and asylum-seekers for whom it has intervened. UNHCR has been continuing to provide assistance

and protection to a small number of urban refugees and asylum-seekers and to undertake passive monitoring of those rejected and returned from Switzerland and other European countries.

Assistance measures focusing on the most vulnerable groups within the IDP population, namely women and children, include the provision of psychosocial services for children, vocational training for women and young people, support for small businesses and the construction of schools and wells through micro-projects. UNHCR continues to support social mobilisation and self-help projects for women in government welfare centres.

Promoting national protection and finding durable solutions while operating in areas of armed conflict continue to be major challenges. Peace efforts are hampered by a lack of trust between the Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Security incidents resulting from clashes put the lives of civilians and humanitarian workers at serious risk, while security restrictions inhibit freedom of movement and restrict economic progress.

UNHCR has continued to play an active role in the Government's efforts to set up a framework for Relief, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation by serving on the steering committee and acting as secretariat for the working group on programmatic priorities.

In LTTE-dominated areas, working and living conditions for the civilian population and humanitarian workers remain difficult. Due to limited access, the efficiency and effectiveness of essential relief operations is problematic. While some progress has been achieved, the situation remains fragile.

The impact of the conflict on children continues to be a cause of grave concern. A significant number of children remain displaced, access to education and basic health services is inadequate, and in LTTE-dominated areas, the recruitment of children is a severe problem.

However, in the early part of 2001, UNHCR and UNICEF implemented an initiative, with the agreement of the LTTE, to monitor child recruitment and help its prevention. The initiative has the potential to promote greater respect for international laws prohibiting the recruitment of children in the LTTE-dominated areas of Sri Lanka. Furthermore, as a result of UNHCR's efforts to ensure that other humanitarian agencies are able to operate with unimpeded access to the civilian population, UNHCR and its partners were able to successfully carry out a needs assessment covering (directly and indirectly) over 30,000 persons.

In an effort to strengthen emergency preparedness, UNHCR has replenished its emergency stockpiles of non-food relief items and has undertaken emergency response planning in close co-operation with other various international organisations. In addition, UNHCR has enrolled a full-time UNV to work closely with the Government and NGOs on emergency matters. To raise awareness of the problem of landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXOs), UNHCR proposed and helped co-ordinate a visit of the United Nations Mine Action Service to assist the UN country team in devising an improved strategy to deal more effectively with the issue.

### Progress as measured against selected indicators

INDICATOR	PROGRESS
Improved access to national protection for the displaced	Focus of the Human Rights Commission on the problems of the IDPs was strengthened; co-operation between UNHCR and the Human Rights Commission in Trincomalee, Vavuniya and Jaffna was improved and the <i>Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement</i> were adopted as government policy, as a core recommendation of the government's development of a Framework for Relief, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation
Improved freedom of movement for IDPs in welfare centres	Recommendations were made within the Government's Relief, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation process to discontinue the pass system, but yet to be endorsed by the highest levels of the government. Some reduction in the complexity of the pass system was achieved in Vavuniya
Improved policy on welfare centres and durable solutions.	A relocation programme for residents of Government Welfare Centres in Vavuniya and Mannar for 16,000 persons
Number of people returning from India	A total of 300 persons in refugee camps in Tamil Nadu, India have expressed the desire to return to Sri Lanka.
Number of IDPs relocated	A total of 30,000 persons benefited directly or indirectly from UNHCR assistance in the districts of Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu, and 5,200 persons are expected to benefit from the Government's relocation programme this year.
Reduction in number of IDPs in Sri Lanka	Overall numbers of displaced remained at an estimated 800,000 persons though there has been no new displacement in 2001

### REVISED OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITIES FOR JULY-DECEMBER

In the absence of a breakthrough in peace talks or a serious escalation of the armed conflict, UNHCR's overall objectives will remain unchanged. During the second half of the year, UNHCR will concentrate on strengthening partnerships with UNICEF, the Human Rights Commission, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. The Office will continue to give priority to improved emergency preparedness at the district level through support for emergency management training and contingency planning. Enhanced protection for children directly affected by the armed conflict will

remain a high priority, with particular focus on prevention of under-age recruitment.

UNHCR will continue its advocacy efforts to influence government policy on displaced persons through active participation in the Government's Relief, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation Framework process. At the end of the year, UNHCR and its partners expect to publish a Situation Analysis of the Internally Displaced in Sri Lanka. In addition to its pursuit of durable solutions for the displaced, UNHCR will continue to refine its efforts to address the problem of vulnerability and strengthen capacity among the IDP population.

### FINANCIAL DATA (USD)

	Initial Budget	Revised Budget	Total Funds Available <sup>1</sup>	Total Funds Obligated
<b>APB</b>	6,800,386	6,728,526	4,389,137	2,954,585

<sup>1</sup>Includes income from unrestricted contributions, income from contributions restricted to the regional, sub-regional and/or country level, opening balance and adjustments.

