

SOUTH AFRICA

INITIAL OBJECTIVES

- Identify lasting solutions for refugees and asylum-seekers with an urban socio-economic background, primarily through local integration, resettlement or voluntary repatriation.
- Help the Government and civil society develop additional legal and institutional capacity to protect and assist refugees through the implementation of national refugee legislation, support for institution-building and training.
- Advance the local integration of refugees by helping them achieve economic independence through various projects geared towards self-sufficiency.
- Conduct public information and awareness campaigns to counter increasing signs of intolerance towards refugees and asylum-seekers.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS, PROGRESS ACHIEVED AND CONSTRAINTS

South Africa hosts approximately 15,000 refugees and 45,000 asylum-seekers originating from a variety of African countries as well as from outside the continent. Of these, some 30,000 are currently registered with the Ministry of Home Affairs, mainly in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town. UNHCR protects and assists them through a network of national refugee fora, NGOs and lawyers' associations. During the period under review, UNHCR provided assistance in the form of grants for accommodation, food, health services and education for about 2,120 refugees. Of these, 800 refugee children at pre-school and primary level and 200 refugee students at secondary level received scholarships to cover tuition, books and living allowances. In addition, some 100 refugees attended English language courses. Those who graduated were subse-

quently helped with job placement. A further 120 refugees received support for income-generating activities and refugee women in Cape Town participated in skills training. Despite efforts to obtain increased financial support from South African civil society, many of the organisations which support refugees and asylum-seekers are still largely dependent on UNHCR for their funding.

The issuance in April of the regulations to implement the 1998 Refugee Act, and the entry into force of a new and revamped eligibility procedure represented major achievements towards the establishment of a new refugee protection regime in South Africa. However, it also created several additional challenges for the Office.

The existing backlog of asylum applications (first-instance and appeal level) which have accumulated over the past six years has to be cleared to enable the Government to begin implementing the new eligibility procedure with a clean slate. UNHCR will therefore assist the Department of Home Affairs in carrying out status determination during the second half of the year. A series of measures to counter abuse and corruption in the asylum procedure and speed up processing of asylum applications has also been introduced. These include issuance of identity cards to recognised refugees, hiring of professional interpreters, issuance of name badges for refugee officials and posters to discourage corruption, as well as making it possible for "manifestly founded" claims to be considered under a speedier procedure. To improve the capacity of the Government to deal with these issues, UNHCR organised training on refugee law and international protection, interviewing techniques and how to work with interpreters for 20 government officers and five NGO representatives working with status determination. Workshops for 50 border police and immigration officers were held in Cape Town in March and East London in June. Participants broadened their understanding of refugee-related issues and have begun to

call on NGO counsellors for advice whenever they are confronted with questions relating to refugees and asylum-seekers.

The Government also announced plans to set up a comprehensive system to register refugees' fingerprints as well as an arrangement with IOM for the removal of rejected asylum-seekers. However, the announcement that the right of asylum-seekers to work or study would be withdrawn for the standard duration of the eligibility procedure (up to six months, after which they may apply for relief if applications are still pending) caused great concern for UNHCR. In the absence of any form of institutionalised assistance for refugees and asylum-seekers, the pressure on already stretched financial resources is likely to increase. The Government has therefore been asked to become more actively involved in ensuring the welfare of refugees and asylum-seekers, especially with regards to their accommodation. The Office has identified several empty municipal buildings which could be usefully employed to provide emergency accommodation to those with a genuine need.

UNHCR continued to co-ordinate the activities of the NGO-based organisations which provide assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers. The Office also provided advice on protection-related questions, such as family reunification, the renewal of permits, etc. UNHCR's main concern is to build additional capacity among national partners to deal with refugee issues and to focus on the most vulnerable and deserving among the large number of individuals who approach them for aid. Women in particular are encouraged to apply for various integration-related programmes to enhance their self-reliance. A special task force (which includes representatives of UNHCR, NGOs, refugees and relevant government departments) has been established to address the needs of an increasing number of separated children arriving in South Africa and focus on how to make social services accessible to them.

A project to address the reproductive health needs of young refugees in the region was

launched in April. It is managed from Pretoria and seeks to increase knowledge and awareness of reproductive health issues through peer education, strengthen existing health care services, and increase awareness among organisations assisting refugees about their rights to adequate health care and information. It also focuses on HIV/AIDS education and prevention, especially as the infection rate in countries in Southern Africa has reached alarming proportions.

The national Roll Back Xenophobia campaign continued with radio programmes (on community radio), media campaigns (to ensure that refugee issues remain in the public debate), art and photo exhibits, the development of materials (posters and pamphlets) and other activities. The campaign is a joint initiative of the South African Human Rights Commission, the National Consortium for Refugee Affairs and UNHCR, to increase awareness of the plight and rights of refugees in South Africa and promote understanding and acceptance of refugees and asylum-seekers by their host communities. Specific activities to create understanding for refugees and reduce xenophobic feelings during the period under review included the production of a radio series documenting the experiences of ten prominent former South African exiles who today hold key positions in different sectors. The series was launched as part of UNHCR's activities for Africa Refugee Day. Another project involved refugees themselves, who were trained to produce their own five-minute radio documentary. The programmes were later aired on private South African radio and generated widespread discussions within the country. Following a number of workshops held in Cape Town in March, a 30-minute documentary and several shorter reports on refugees were produced through a local radio station. Three workshops on refugees were organised for journalists and other members of the media in co-operation with the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism. The aim was to place refugee issues on the media's agenda and foster favourable attitudes towards human rights. The creation of dialogue with the media is an important element in de-

veloping tolerance towards refugees among South Africans and encourages objective journalism and a commitment towards human rights reporting. A photo exhibit which captured refugees and asylum-seekers in their daily activities was organised in Pretoria, Durban and Cape Town in co-operation with theatres, art galleries, universities and the refugees themselves.

The Roll Back Xenophobia campaign was discussed during the August 2000 national conference on racism and xenophobia for which UNHCR provided support and materials. Posters and pamphlets with refugee-related messages have been widely distributed, journalists have been assisted in producing stories on refugees and public meetings were held in all nine provinces with the participation of regional NGO refugee fora. UNHCR is currently exploring ways to ensure the continuity of the

campaign and to diversify its funding sources.

REVISED OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITY ACTIVITIES FOR JULY -DECEMBER

The initial objective to help refugees integrate locally remains valid as this continues to be the only viable solution for many refugees who originate from countries affected by long-standing political instability or armed conflict. The three-pronged strategy to facilitate this process also remains valid (legal and institutional capacity-building, attainment of economic self-sufficiency, and public awareness and information campaigns). UNHCR will continue to help individual refugees who cannot integrate find alternative solutions, mainly through resettlement or voluntary repatriation.

FINANCIAL DATA (USD)

	Initial Budget	Revised Budget	Total Funds Available*	Total Funds Obligated
AB and TF	5,315,322	6,012,808	2,890,400	2,679,800

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

