

Main objectives

- Organise the voluntary repatriation of some 35,000 Eritrean refugees from Sudan, and smaller numbers from other countries;
- Address the immediate reintegration assistance needs of returnees;
- Continue to engage development actors in addressing the longer-term needs of returnee-receiving areas.
- Provide international protection and assistance for Somali and Sudanese refugees, as well as for various other refugee groups, and seek durable solutions for these groups.



Working environment

Recent developments

UNHCR's operations are primarily related to the repatriation and the reintegration of a large number of Eritreans, many of whom have remained in Sudan since the 1960s. The Eritrean refugees in Sudan thus represent one of the most protracted problems UNHCR has ever had to deal with. The voluntary repatriation operation, now in its third year, has assisted 104,000 Eritreans to return home. Since July 2000, 54,000 returned, and it is expected that another 35,000 Eritreans will take the opportunity to return through UNHCR's involvement in 2004.

Delays in the repatriation of refugees, due to tensions along the Eritrean-Sudanese border, hampered the operations in late 2002 and early 2003. However, in June, intense bilateral negotiations led to the opening up of a "humanitarian corridor" through which the convoys could pass. The delays resulted in an extension in the timeframe for the operations and the issue of a request to the thousands of Eritreans in Sudan who had registered to go home: that they wait a little longer.

Many of the refugees are returning to the Gash Barka Region, which was badly hit by war and recurrent drought

Planning figures

Population	Jan. 2004	Dec. 2004
Returnee refugees	25,000	35,000
Somalia (refugees)	3,000	2,500
Others of concern	990	500
Other refugees	0	5
Asylum-seekers	75	0
Total	29,065	38,005

Total requirements: USD 14,591,740

and lacks basic infrastructure and essential social services. The socio-economic reintegration needs of the returnees and the communities go well beyond UNHCR's mandate, resources and operational capabilities. In 2003, UNHCR initiated projects to address this "gap", under the aegis of one of its pilot "4Rs" programmes (Repatriation, Reintegration, Reconstruction and Rehabilitation). This was the High Commissioner's strategy to foster synergy between UN agencies and funding institutions in the recovery process. As part of this strategy, UNHCR took a strong role in joint assessment missions and joint planning for post-conflict initiatives under the UNDAF thematic group on recovery. In January 2003, a mission led by UNDP, UNHCR and the Government developed an Integrated Recovery Programme Framework that aims at the sustainable reintegration of the displaced population, post-conflict reconstruction and poverty reduction in a three-year programme targeting three zones in Eritrea: the Gash Barka, Debub and Southern Red Sea regions. UNHCR's activities are part of this integrated programme planning; at the same time, the Office assists in building

the capacity of the Government to assume and manage these responsibilities in the longer term.

UNHCR continues to closely monitor conditions of return to ensure that returnees enjoy the same rights as other citizens, including access to services, and that they are not discriminated against in any way.

In Eritrea, UNHCR provides humanitarian assistance to 4,000 Somali and Sudanese refugees in camps, and to 50 urban refugees. Though Eritrea is neither a party to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees nor the 1969 OAU Convention on the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, the country accepts asylum-seekers on its territory and adheres to the principle of *non-refoulement*.

Constraints

The effective implementation of the Tripartite Agreement signed in 2000, between the Governments of Eritrea and Sudan and UNHCR, is key to the repatriation of the Eritrean refugees from Sudan. The voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration processes cannot continue unless appropriate security can be maintained. However, it is expected that by 2004, the border demarcation process between Eritrea and Ethiopia will be resolved, and this will contribute to lasting peace in the region.

Some repatriating refugees are returning to areas where there is a significant risk of landmines and unexploded ordnance. More mine education programmes will be needed for returnee communities. Additionally, climatic and soil conditions militate against reliable food production in the main areas of return.

UNHCR's reintegration efforts can only ever be intermediate steps towards ensuring that basic long-term needs such as health, education, water, sanitation and agricultural assistance, are met. The long-term sustainability of the returnees' communities will therefore depend on adequate donor support for the Integrated Recovery Programme (IRP) within the framework of the 4Rs strategy.

Strategy

Protection and solutions

UNHCR's protection priorities include: active promotion of accession to the relevant international treaties; advocacy for interim measures to expand refugee rights; the provision of advice on national legislation; training on international protection, ensuring minimum standards are met in both material and legal assistance; the provision of

clarification and assistance to the Government of Eritrea regarding nationality issues in the boundary demarcation process; and direct involvement in the protection of individual refugees.

Assistance

Apart from the mainly logistical exercise of transporting the returnees to their destinations of choice, there are three major elements to UNHCR's strategy for the repatriation and sustainable reintegration of Eritrean refugees: provide initial reinsertion assistance to households; give initial reintegration assistance to the receiving communities to ensure basic infrastructure and social services; and undertake an intensive campaign to engage development actors in addressing longer-term reintegration assistance needs.

Returnees, many who have been out of Eritrea for nearly 30 years, are provided with an initial reinsertion package that allows for their easier transition from camp and urban life in Sudan, to village or urban life in Eritrea. The reinsertion package consists of a shelter structure to provide immediate protection from the elements; non-food items so that a household can immediately begin to function normally; two months' food rations, provided by WFP just before arrival; and a cash grant to allow the returnees some flexibility in addressing their household's most urgent needs. Eritreans returning to rural areas are also allocated two hectares of land per family for agricultural purposes.

Returnee communities benefit from quick impact projects which address immediate needs (water, sanitation, health care, education and agriculture). The Zonal Recovery Committee (ZRC) promotes sustainable reintegration on a localised basis. It was established in September 2001 and chaired by the Governor of Gash Barka with permanent members from the Eritrean Relief and Refugee Commission (ERREC), UNHCR and relevant government ministries. It was expanded, through signed tripartite Memoranda of Understanding with UNDP, UNICEF and WFP, to formalise co-operation.

Care and maintenance assistance including adequate food and non-food items, shelter, access to education, health care and other social services will be provided to refugees in Eritrea. Information on HIV/AIDS awareness and FGM and counselling for those suffering from alcoholism will be provided regularly to refugees. Sanitation conditions will be kept to a standard of one latrine for 20 persons.

Assistance to refugee women and children will include supplementary feeding programmes for malnourished children, pregnant and lactating women and other



Until returnees can sustain themselves, food is distributed to newly arrived returnees. UNHCR / W. Rappeport

medically vulnerable cases. Education of young girls and women will be promoted to combat the traditional practices of early marriages prevailing among the refugee population. Married and pregnant women will be encouraged to remain in school and enrolment of school-age girls will be promoted through girl's education committees. Refugee women will be supported to work out a strategy to address issues related to sexual and gender-based violence. Refugee women will also be encouraged to participate in all decision-making bodies in the camps, especially in food distribution. Sanitary materials will be provided to teenage girls and women. Separated refugee children will be identified, provided with appropriate protection and care, and assisted to trace their family members. Attention will be provided to refugees with special needs, including older refugees.

Desired impact

Eritrean refugees will be enabled to repatriate in safety and dignity and to reintegrate in a sustainable manner. UNHCR and its partners will strive to ensure that all returnees enjoy the same rights as other citizens, including access to essential services.

Sudanese and Somali refugees will benefit from care and maintenance and will be helped to repatriate, if they wish to do so. UNHCR will continue to pursue alternative durable solutions for those who do not return home.

With regard to protection standards, UNHCR hopes to hasten and facilitate Eritrea's accession to international legal instruments pertaining to refugee and statelessness

issues. In the interim, the Office will continue to work with the Government to ensure that appropriate protection mechanisms are in place and functioning effectively.

Organisation and implementation

Management structure

In addition to its main office in Asmara, UNHCR maintains two offices in western Eritrea – the region to which most of the Eritrean refugees in Sudan are returning. All three offices are staffed by 78 national and 23 international staff (including two JPOs, six UNVs, and seven national and international technical specialists deployed through UNOPS). All three offices will be required for the duration of the large-scale repatriation and reintegration operation, which is expected to last until the end of 2005.

Co-ordination

The Eritrean Relief and Refugee Commission (ERREC), and the Gash Barka Regional Administration remain UNHCR's main governmental counterparts for implementing repatriation and reintegration assistance activities. Close collaboration is also enjoyed with the Regional Directorates of the Ministries of Education, Health, Agriculture and Labour and Welfare in the Gash Barka Region under the overall authority of the Governor. UNHCR also enjoys good working relations with national and international NGOs. Refugee and statelessness issues are handled jointly with the Office of Refugee Affairs (ORA) of the Department of Immigration and Nationality. UNHCR works in collaboration with the United Nations Resident / Humanitarian Co-ordinator as well as with other UN agencies, and continues to participate in inter-agency working groups, including the CAP, UNDAF, and Millennium Development Goals (MDG) initiatives. For the second half of 2003, UNHCR assumed the Chairmanship of the HIV/AIDS Technical Working Group under the UNDAF and set up the HIV/AIDS and Humanitarian Response *Ad hoc* Task Force. In 2003, UNHCR took on a new role within the UN Agency Working Group on Demarcation Issues. This entails active engagement on the issues of potential statelessness and property transfers during the demarcation process.

Offices
Asmara
Barentu
Tesseney

Partners
Government agencies
Eritrean Relief and Refugee Commission
Ministry of Education
Ministry of Health
Officer of Refugee Affairs
The Gash Barka Zoba Administration
NGOs
<i>Cooperazione e Sviluppo</i>
Co-ordinating Committee for Voluntary Service Organisations
Eritrean Social Marketing Group
International Medical Corps
Lutheran World Federation
National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students
OXFAM
Refugee Trust International

Budget (USD)	
Activities and services	Annual Programme
Protection, monitoring and co-ordination	1,772,739
Community services	334,470
Crop production	716,911
Domestic needs	2,113,054
Education	764,764
Food	525,764
Forestry	47,794
Health	910,883
Income generation	278,798
Legal assistance	290,718
Livestock	95,600
Operational support (to agencies)	483,453
Sanitation	443,337
Shelter / other infrastructure	3,078,837
Transport / logistics	817,501
Water	634,216
Total Operations	13,308,839
Programme support	1,282,901
Total	14,591,740