



South Asia

Working environment

The interim Government in Bangladesh has regularized the status of the country's approximately 250,000-strong stateless Bihari/Urdu-speaking population, granting it effective citizenship. All members of the community are being issued national identity cards and registered as voters. The Government has also permitted UNHCR to issue individual identity cards to all refugees both in camps and urban areas.

UNHCR's cooperation with the Government of Bangladesh has resulted in improvements in the lives of the 28,000 refugees in the two camps in Cox's Bazaar District. The authorities have allowed UNHCR, other UN agencies and NGOs to offer these refugees basic services that were previously unavailable to them. Furthermore, the Government moved some 7,500 unregistered Rohingyas who had been living in makeshift accommodation along the Naf River to a safer location.

With India's tradition of generosity and hospitality toward refugee populations, its Government is considering a national legal framework to ensure protection for refugees within mixed migration flows. Over the past two years, several countries have provided more resettlement opportunities for long-staying refugees in India.

The year 2008 saw landmark developments in Nepal's peace process and significant change in the political landscape. The party of the former Maoist insurgents emerged as the largest following national elections, and

Bangladesh

India

Nepal

Sri Lanka



became the main pillar of a new coalition government. It will be a challenge for Nepal to manage the transition from a centralized monarchy to a federal democratic republic while maintaining a balance of power among various parties and ethnic groups.

Nonetheless, for the first time in 17 years there was progress in the search for a solution to the protracted situation of the 107,000 refugees in seven camps in eastern Nepal. Since March 2008, refugees from this group have been departing for third-country resettlement, which is one component of a comprehensive durable solutions strategy for them.

In Sri Lanka, the Government abrogated the 2002 ceasefire agreement with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The intensified hostilities in the north of the country produced a new wave of internally displaced persons (IDPs), whose total number reached some 212,000 as of July 2008.

At the beginning of 2008, the total number of IDPs in Sri Lanka stood at some 459,000. But improvements in security in the east had encouraged over 180,000 IDPs (as of July 2008) to return to their places of origin in Batticaloa and Trincomalee districts. The returns were organized by the Government and monitored and accompanied by UNHCR and other agencies, which also provided reintegration assistance.

Strategy

In Bangladesh, a comprehensive durable solutions strategy is being pursued for the Rohingya refugees from Myanmar's Northern Rakhine State. UN agencies have agreed to enhance development in refugee-hosting areas in Cox's Bazaar. UNHCR will continue to protect, assist and ensure more equitable living conditions for all camp-based refugees—as well as for some 200,000 unregistered refugees outside the camps and the local population that hosts them.

UNHCR's main tasks on behalf of urban refugees are to work with the Government on refugee status determination (RSD) and promote the establishment of national refugee legislation. The Office will also work to protect refugees within broader migration movements.

In India, UNHCR will undertake individual RSD until a national framework for asylum-seekers is established.

In Nepal, 35,000 refugees are expected to have been resettled between March 2008 and December 2009. It is also hoped that the resumption of bilateral negotiations with Bhutan will create opportunities for repatriation.

UNHCR's operations in Sri Lanka aim to prevent further displacement by restoring trust among different

communities, the civil administration and security forces. The long-term goal of UNHCR's operations in Sri Lanka is the creation of a national protection network that is fully able to ensure the rights of the internally displaced.

Constraints

In Bangladesh, the significant progress that has been made in working with the Government on a number of fronts has yet to translate into a fundamental change in the protection regime. While opportunities to lead normal and productive lives are becoming more accessible to the camp-based refugees, the need to diminish the differences between refugees in the camps and those outside and to reduce the dependency on the humanitarian programme, is becoming more pronounced. Opening the camps would provide the refugees with the freedom of movement and access to livelihoods that would enable them to become self-reliant, eventually improving their chances for voluntary repatriation or resettlement in a third country.

In India, the increase in the number of asylum-seekers and the generalized rise in the cost of living are expected to affect assistance to newly arrived refugees.

The peace process and the political transition need to be consolidated in Nepal. The demobilization of insurgent armed forces, reconciliation between the former warring factions and the drafting of a new constitution remain

crucial for the country's democratic future. Success in these areas is necessary to improve the political, operational and security environment for UNHCR. Despite the Government's commitment to maintaining security by providing a regular police presence in the camps, with swift investigation and prosecution, there are continued attempts to intimidate those considering third-country resettlement both in the camps and the surrounding areas.

The operation in Sri Lanka is constrained by security concerns for UNHCR and partner staff as well as for people of concern. Military activities in the north of the country, particularly intense in the middle of the year, hampered delivery of humanitarian assistance in areas close to the front lines.

Operations

UNHCR's operations in **Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka** are covered in separate country chapters.

In **India**, UNHCR protects and assists some 11,000 urban refugees, most of them from Afghanistan and Myanmar. The Office will pursue durable solutions for all these groups, focusing on resettlement. Local integration through naturalization has been negotiated with regard to Hindu and Sikh refugees from Afghanistan. The Office promotes self-reliance to strengthen refugees' coping mechanisms and reduce their dependence on assistance.



Toys and clothes distributed to refugee children from Myanmar in India.

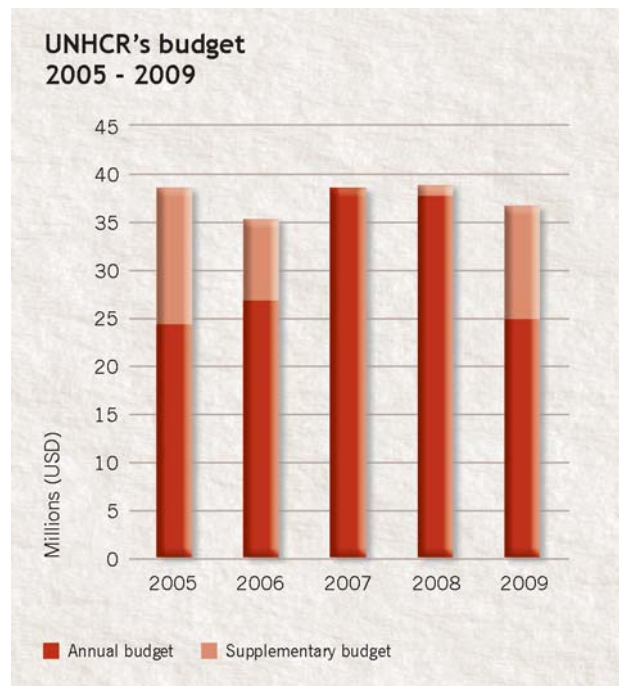
UNHCR/IN. Bose

UNHCR manages a women's protection clinic in New Delhi which provides a safe, convenient and confidential place for refugee women seeking counselling on issues related to domestic and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence.

Though India is not party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, it has been continuously broadening the humanitarian space for people of concern to UNHCR with solutions-oriented arrangements. The Office will work to formalize these arrangements and promote the conclusion of a country agreement.

Financial information

UNHCR's expenditures in South Asia have been relatively stable since 2005. In 2007 and 2008, the initial budget was increased during the year to meet additional requirements for new initiatives to improve the quality of protection delivery and assistance to refugees, as well as to facilitate durable solutions, mainly resettlement.



Budget (USD)						
Countries	2008			2009		
	Annual budget	Supplementary budget	Total	Annual budget	Supplementary budget	Total
Bangladesh	5,097,910	164,010	5,261,920	5,109,390	0	5,109,390
India	3,756,783	0	3,756,783	5,202,074	0	5,202,074
Nepal	8,816,251	253,000	9,069,251	9,564,100	0	9,564,100
Sri Lanka	10,789,341	616,200	11,405,541	4,932,696	11,655,829	16,588,525
Regional activities ¹	0	0	0	100,000	0	100,000
Total	28,460,285	1,033,210	29,493,495	24,908,260	11,655,829	36,564,089

¹ Includes protection activities, dissemination of refugee law, transport and repatriation activities.

Note: Supplementary programme budgets exclude 7 per cent support costs that are recovered from contributions to meet indirect costs for UNHCR.