

COUNTRY OPERATIONS PLAN

Country: ERITREA

Planning Year: 2003

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE SUMMARY

(a) Context and Beneficiary Populations

Since UNHCR resumed an international presence in Eritrea in early 2000, it has been consolidating its position as one of the principal multilateral organisations dealing with humanitarian issues. It enjoys close and effective working relations with the Government, and with the other international agencies, missions and NGOs operating in Eritrea, including UNMEE - the UN peace-keeping mission to Eritrea and Ethiopia, which is headquartered in Asmara. UNHCR's enhanced presence in the country is mainly related to its role in facilitating the repatriation and reintegration of the very large number of refugees who sought asylum in the Sudan during the thirty year liberation struggle which ended in 1991 and the additional numbers who fled in 2000 in the third round of the Ethio-Eritrean border war. The Eritrean refugees in the Sudan constitute UNHCR's most protracted large-scale refugee caseload in the world, and the resolution of this long-running situation through voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration is UNHCR's main operational objective in Eritrea at this time.

Throughout this period, UNHCR has also assumed its mandated responsibility to protect and assist the relatively small, but complex and sensitive caseload of refugees from Somalia and the Sudan who have sought and received asylum in Eritrea. As of end-February 2002, UNHCR provided protection and care and maintenance support to 2,208 Somali and 625 Sudanese refugees housed in three facilities in western, central and eastern Eritrea. While the Sudanese caseload has remained relatively stable over the last year, in the latter half of 2001 and continuing up to the present there has been a significant increase in the numbers of Somali asylum-seekers arriving in Eritrea, due to continuing unstable conditions in their homeland. This development will require establishing an expanded and more sustainable camp facility to accommodate the growing Somali caseload.

Following the conclusion of the comprehensive peace accord with Ethiopia on 12 December 2000, Eritrea has been on the path to recovery. However, at this juncture, political and security conditions in Eritrea present a mixed picture. On the positive side, the peace agreement has been formalised and both Ethiopia and Eritrea have reiterated their commitment to abide by the forthcoming decision of the Boundary Commission, Temporary Security Zone separating Ethiopian and Eritrean forces continues to be effective, out of the estimated 1.1 million persons (as of mid-2000) displaced by war and drought, all but 45,000 have been able to return to their homes; over 40,000 refugees have repatriated from the Sudan; and normal, peace-time patterns of life and work have resumed in many parts of the country. Relations between Eritrea and Sudan have also continued on a positive course, with the two country leaders visiting each other and exchanging high level delegations to deal with outstanding issues. Given these improving conditions, in 2001 UNHCR phased out its involvement with IDPs and now focuses its operational efforts on the voluntary repatriation and reintegration of Eritrean refugees from the Sudan, which began in May 2001, and on finding protection-based durable solutions for the Sudanese and Somali refugees in country.

The political context in the recent period has, however, also included the emergence of political dissent in the country, related to the conduct of the war, management of

the economy and democratisation and the rule of law. A number of prominent dissidents, most of them former high ranking officials, have been arrested and the private press has been suspended. The demobilisation of the large army has been postponed.

The latter developments have changed the climate for donor support in Eritrea, and a number of major donors have rescinded aid commitments and/or put on hold further development assistance plans. As yet, humanitarian aid flows to Eritrea have not been affected, but the repercussions of these developments for UNHCR are still unfolding and could eventually impact, in particular, prospects for the successful reintegration of returning Eritrean refugees which depend crucially upon sustained and inclusive recovery and development processes.

A significant feature of the operating environment is the presence of mines and unexploded ordnance. According to information provided by the National Demining Centre, there are some 1.5 million mines and 3 million unexploded ordnance in the country with a especially heavy concentration in the Debub and Gash Barka Regions, to where refugees are returning in large numbers. Although the Government, with the assistance of UNMEE and other UN agencies, is undertaking various measures to address these risks, the impact on UNHCR operations is quite extensive. Provisions need to be made in administrative budgets for such items as ballistic blankets for vehicles, body armour, extra radio equipment etc. Among other measures, it is necessary to carry out continuous mine risk awareness programmes targeting both UNHCR beneficiaries and staff. Other risks to UNHCR staff in Eritrea derive from the harsh living and working conditions in field locations, where services and amenities are rudimentary at best, and malaria, hepatitis and other illnesses are common. The main areas of UNHCR returnee operations remain in Security Phases III and IV.

A second major constraint, which cuts across all sectors, and particularly affects rates of implementation of UNHCR projects that involve technical activities, is the very limited supply of labour, technical expertise and technical services in the country, both in the public and private sectors. The implementation capacity of all actors involved in humanitarian and development assistance, including government departments and commercial firms, is affected by these underlying limitations. To overcome these constraints, UNHCR may need to resort to exceptional measures to ensure timely execution of its assistance programme, such as direct implementation of selected activities.

Eritrea has few indigenous and independent NGOs – all of them small and with very limited capacity. However, there is a growing number of international NGOs operational within the country and in 2001 UNHCR began to engage them in its operations. Although they are subject to the technical constraints mentioned above, in 2002 –2003 UNHCR will continue to expand and diversify its implementation options through project agreements with additional international NGOs.

Of UNHCR's three main operational objectives in Eritrea – protection, care and maintenance of refugees; voluntary repatriation; and the effective reintegration of returnees – the last mentioned presents by far the most daunting challenge. The refugees from Sudan are returning predominantly to barren areas that have been devastated by war and drought and are lacking in basic infrastructure and essential social services. Their socio-economic reintegration needs, including the support needs of returnee-receiving communities, go well beyond UNHCR's mandate, resources

and operational capabilities. UNHCR's strategy, therefore, is two-pronged: (1) directly to address the immediate, short-term needs of the returning populations and their receiving communities, both through provision of household-level assistance and community-based quick impact projects; and (2) at the same time carry out an intensive campaign to engage development actors in addressing medium-to-long term requirements. The latter task entails not only undertaking advocacy, information dissemination and promotion in the development assistance community, but also detailed technical work on needs assessment, project identification and project formulation with a view to ensuring that returnee reintegration needs are, with timely, specific and practical effect, factored into recovery and development programmes. To these ends UNHCR is an active participant in the UN system wide UNDAF process.

On the whole, donors have responded generously to Eritrea's post-war reconstruction needs. Financing has been pledged for large multi-sectoral programmes for rehabilitation, repair and reconstruction of infrastructure and for the demobilisation and reintegration of some 200,000 soldiers. The World Bank-led Emergency Reconstruction (ERP) and Demobilisation and Reintegration (DRP) programmes, as well as UNDP's Post War Emergency Recovery (POWER) programmes are notable in this connection. However, as yet these programmes either do not include returnees among their beneficiary populations or, as in the case of DRP, have implementation time lines that have little bearing on the refugee return and reintegration process. Consequently, as of this writing, there remains a wide gap between UNHCR's short-term reintegration assistance efforts and longer term recovery and development activities in returnee-receiving areas. The sustainability of the voluntary repatriation from Sudan is at considerable risk if this gap is not rapidly closed.

The repatriation operation per se – i.e. the cross-border movements from Sudan - continues to go well, albeit at a slower pace than earlier projected. The voluntary repatriation of the so-called "new caseload", i.e. those who fled the May 2000 Ethio-Eritrean hostilities, was completed by the end of 2001. In 2002 UNHCR plans to facilitate the repatriation of 60,000 camp-based refugees from the "old", liberation-war period caseload, with a further 62,000 to follow in 2003. Concurrently during this period, UNHCR will, in agreement with the two governments, address the question of the large undocumented caseload of urban refugees in the Sudan. All of this will be done within the framework of the application of the "ceased circumstances" Cessation Clauses which will come into effect as of 31 December 2002. Throughout, UNHCR will continue to closely monitor conditions of return in Eritrea so as to ensure that all returnees enjoy the same rights, including access to services, as resident citizens and are not discriminated against.

It is now clear that only a handful of Eritrean refugees will repatriate from other neighbouring countries, including Djibouti and Yemen. Nevertheless, a sub-regional situation-based approach will continue to guide UNHCR planning and inter-country coordination.

In contrast to the positive developments affecting the situation of Eritrean refugees in the region, continuing armed conflict and instability in Somalia and parts of southern Sudan mean that UNHCR will have to continue to provide protection and care and maintenance assistance to some 4,600 Somali and Sudanese refugees who have been granted asylum in Eritrea. Neither the government nor other agencies present in Eritrea have the capacity or expertise to do so.

Eritrea is not a state party to any of the international refugee instruments or to either of the conventions relating to statelessness, and furthermore, does not have legislation or administrative arrangements for dealing with refugee issues. Therefore, UNHCR's protection priorities will include active promotion of accession to the relevant treaties; advocacy of interim measures expanding refugee rights; provision of advice on national legislation; interventions in precedent-setting court cases; involvement in refugee status determination; and direct involvement in the protection of individual cases.

Of the approximately 71,000 persons expelled from Ethiopia to Eritrea during the course of the border war between the two countries, the great majority have been able to validate, regain or acquire *de facto* Eritrean nationality. However, significant numbers have not been able to do so and remain potentially at risk of statelessness. Their predicament gives a particular salience to UNHCR's responsibilities with respect to the two statelessness conventions.

The Eritrean Relief and Refugee Commission (ERREC) and the Gash Barka Regional Administration are UNHCR's main governmental counterparts for implementing repatriation and reintegration assistance activities respectively. Refugee and statelessness issues are dealt with in co-ordination and co-operation with the Office of Refugee Affairs (ORA) of the Department of Immigration and Nationality. UNHCR works in collaboration with the UN Resident/ Humanitarian Co-ordinator as well as other UN Agencies, and continues to participate actively in inter-agency working groups, such as the UNDAF Theme Group on Recovery and the Child Protection Working Group. Letters of Understanding on collaboration on reintegration assistance activities have been concluded or are in process with UNDP, UNICEF and WFP.

(b) Main Programme Goals and Principal Objectives

Name of Beneficiary Population / Theme: Sudanese refugees	
Main Goal(s): Protection, Care and Maintenance, Durable Solutions for 600 Sudanese Refugees in Eritrea	
Principal Objectives	Related Outputs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide protection, care and maintenance and seek durable solutions for some 600 Sudanese refugees in Eritrea. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The basic rights of refugees are respected and direct interventions are made as necessary; Individual refugee status determination is carried out; Durable solutions options such as voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement are explored for each beneficiary;

Name of Beneficiary Population / Theme: Somali refugees	
Main Goal(s): Protection, Care and Maintenance, Durable Solutions for 4,000 Somali refugees in Eritrea	
Principal Objectives	Related Outputs
To provide protection, care and maintenance and seek durable solutions for some 4,000 Somali refugees in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The basic rights of refugees are respected and direct interventions are made as necessary;

Eritrea.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Care and maintenance assistance, including adequate food and non-food items and essential social services, is provided.
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Name of Beneficiary Population / Theme: Eritrean returnees	
Main Goal(s): Facilitate the Voluntary Repatriation and Sustainable Reintegration of 62,000 Eritrean Refugees from Sudan, Yemen and Djibouti	
Principal Objectives	Related Outputs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carry out the voluntary repatriation of 62,000 Eritrean refugees from the Sudan, Yemen and Djibouti; Address the immediate reintegration assistance needs of returnees and returnee-receiving areas; Engage development actors in addressing the longer term support needs of returnee-receiving areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Returning refugees are transported to their chosen destinations in safety and dignity; An adequate reinsertion package is provided to each returning household; Systematic protection-based returnee monitoring is carried out; Returnees are not discriminated against and enjoy the same rights and access to services as other Eritrean citizens; Returnees have access to all basic social services;

Name of Beneficiary Population / Theme: Promotion and advocacy of international law relating to refugees and statelessness	
Main Goal(s): Eritrea accedes to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, and/or to the 1969 OAU Convention on Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, as well as the two conventions relating to statelessness.	
Principal Objectives	Related Outputs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eritrea accedes to the international treaties on refugees and statelessness; Eritrea enacts appropriate national legislation governing refugee and statelessness issues; Structures and procedures are established to deal with claims of asylum-seekers and the situation of persons at risk of statelessness; Refugee rights are expanded. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Government is assisted to take tangible steps towards acceding to these instruments; Technical assistance is made available to the Government for drafting appropriate legislation; The Government is assisted in setting up satisfactory interim arrangements for dealing with persons of concern to UNHCR; Refugees are provided with ID documents and given greater freedom of movement as well as permission to work in the country;

Name of Beneficiary Population / Theme: Expellees from Ethiopia who have not been able to acquire Eritrean nationality	
Main Goal(s): Prevent the occurrence of statelessness in this population.	
Principal Objectives	Related Outputs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure no expellee ends up as a stateless person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interventions on behalf of persons at risk of statelessness are made by UNHCR when necessary; • Training is provided to government officials on issues of statelessness.

PART II

Part II- Beneficiary Population # 1 - Care and Maintenance of Sudanese Refugees in Eritrea

Section A: Programme Goals, Objectives, Outputs and Indicators

Name of Beneficiary Population: Sudanese refugees		FMIS Project Code:
Main Goals: Protection, Care and Maintenance, Durable Solutions for 600 Sudanese refugees in Eritrea		03/AB/ERT/CM/200 *
Objectives	Outputs	Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To provide protection, care and maintenance and seek durable solutions for some 600 Sudanese refugees in Eritrea. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The basic rights of refugees are respected and direct interventions are made as necessary; • Voluntary repatriation of those ICs who make an informed choice to repatriate is facilitated; • Selected ICs are resettled on protection grounds; • Distribution of basic and complementary food, according to the result of a nutritional survey undertaken in 2002; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No case of harassment of refugees is reported; • Refugees have access to education, health, employment and documentation; • Refugees' freedom of movement is respected within well-defined limits; • An effective separation of non-refugee elements from refugees takes place; • Acceptance by ORA /DIN that this is an option for refugees; • Number of ICs who are able to integrate locally; • Number of ICs submitted and accepted for resettlement; • No report received indicating a lack of these basic services; • 600 refugees are receiving the equivalent of 2,100 Kcal per day as basic rations; • No case of malnutrition reported;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of proper education facilities following the Sudanese curriculum; • Provision of health facilities; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All school age children have access to primary education; and appropriate teacher training is provided; • All refugees have access to appropriate health facilities, including referral system;
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Section B: Statistical and demographic information on the target population

Demographic data on beneficiaries to be protected and assisted under the programme

Name of Group of beneficiaries : Population # 1 : Sudanese Refugees						
Age Group	Male		Female		Total	
	In No.	In %	In No.	In %	In No.	In %
0 - 4 years	86	14	61	10	147	24
5 - 17 years	52	9	32	5	84	14
18 - 59 years	250	42	102	17	352	59
60 and above	9	2	8	1	17	3
Total	397	67	203	33	600	100
Major location : Elit camp (Gash-Barka)						