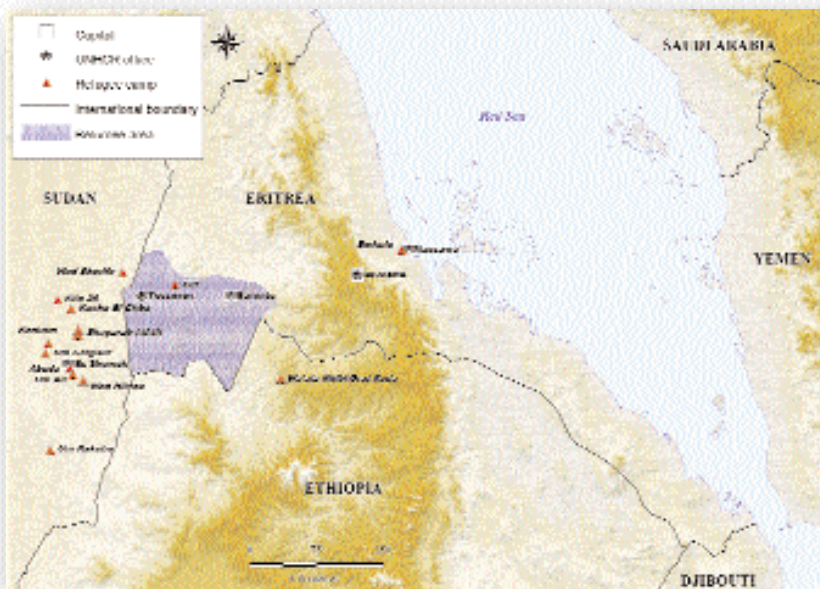


Eritrea

Main Objectives

- Promote and facilitate the voluntary repatriation of some 90,000 Eritrean refugees from Sudan, and smaller numbers from Yemen and Djibouti.
- In co-operation with the Government of Eritrea, UN agencies and NGOs, provide initial reintegration assistance to returnees and returnee-receiving communities, simultaneously engaging development actors to address medium to long-term reintegration needs.
- Ensure that returnees enjoy basic rights and equal access to services.
- Maintain a focus on vulnerable persons such as female heads-of-household, children and adolescents, the disabled and the elderly.
- Protect and assist Sudanese and Somali refugees, and seek durable solutions for these groups.



WORKING ENVIRONMENT

Recent Developments

After 30 years of conflict, Eritrea gained its independence from Ethiopia in 1991 and was internationally recognised in 1993. However, over 160,000 Eritreans (so-called long-term refugees) were still dependent on UNHCR assistance five years later. In 1998, a border conflict flared up and Eritrea and Ethiopia were at war again, at a cost of thousands of lives and severe hardship for millions. More than one million Eritreans, mainly from the Gash Barka and Debub regions, were either displaced within Eritrea or fled to Sudan. This complex humanitarian situation was exacerbated by three consecutive years of drought in certain parts of Eritrea. Since the cessation of hostilities in June 2000 (followed by a Peace Accord signed six months later), the peace process has developed positively. In the first half of 2001, a UN peacekeeping force was deployed and a Temporary Security Zone (TSZ) established to create a

PLANNING FIGURES		
Population	Jan. 2002	Dec. 2002
Eritrean Returnees	62,000	152,000
Somali Refugees	1,500	3,000
Sudanese Refugees	676	750
Total	64,176	155,750

TOTAL REQUIREMENTS • USD 28,145,330

buffer between the two armies. Ethiopia began withdrawing its troops from Eritrea in March, and relations between the two Governments have since improved. At the same time, the Eritrean and Sudanese authorities began to work together more closely. Also in March 2001, a fourth Tripartite Meeting between UNHCR and the Governments of Eritrea and Sudan agreed upon the details for the return of refugees in 2001 and 2002.

As a result of these positive developments, the vast majority of IDPs have returned to their homes, and UNHCR finds itself with an opportunity to resolve one of the world's most protracted large-scale refugee situations, ending more than three decades of exile for thousands of people. Following the organised return of 25,000, the spontaneous return of another 5,000 recently displaced who de-registered from camps in Sudan, and the reported spontaneous return of 26,000 Eritreans in 2000, voluntary repatriation continued in 2001. Of 21,000 refugees repatriated during the first phase of the operation in 2001, some 11,500 were from the 160,000 long-term refugees, who had fled during the 30-year war of independence. The other 9,500 returnees had been displaced during the recent round of fighting in 2000. UNHCR aimed to repatriate a total of 62,000 Eritreans in 2001. At the time of publication, the repatriation is well on track and all recently displaced Eritrean refugees should have returned by the end of 2001. UNHCR regards the ongoing repatriation as more than just a solution to a problem of population displacement: it is an integral part of the process of consolidating peace and stabilising the region as a whole.

Relations between UNHCR and the Government of Eritrea have been strengthened, not only as a consequence of UNHCR's involvement with returnees and refugees in the country, but also as a result of UNHCR's role in the inter-agency response to the IDP crisis in 2000 - 2001. Over time, as the majority of IDPs returned home, UNHCR adopted a strategy of responsible disengagement from what were, at the outset, emergency activities on behalf of IDPs.

The situation of some 2,000 Sudanese and Somali refugees in Eritrea has changed little over the past year. Continued conflict and instability in Somalia and Sudan preclude large-scale return to those countries.

IDPs queuing for water distribution. UNHCR/
P. Joynson-Hicks.

In the absence of either governmental or non-governmental agencies able to care adequately for refugees in Eritrea, UNHCR is obliged to maintain its protection, care and maintenance programme for these groups.

Constraints

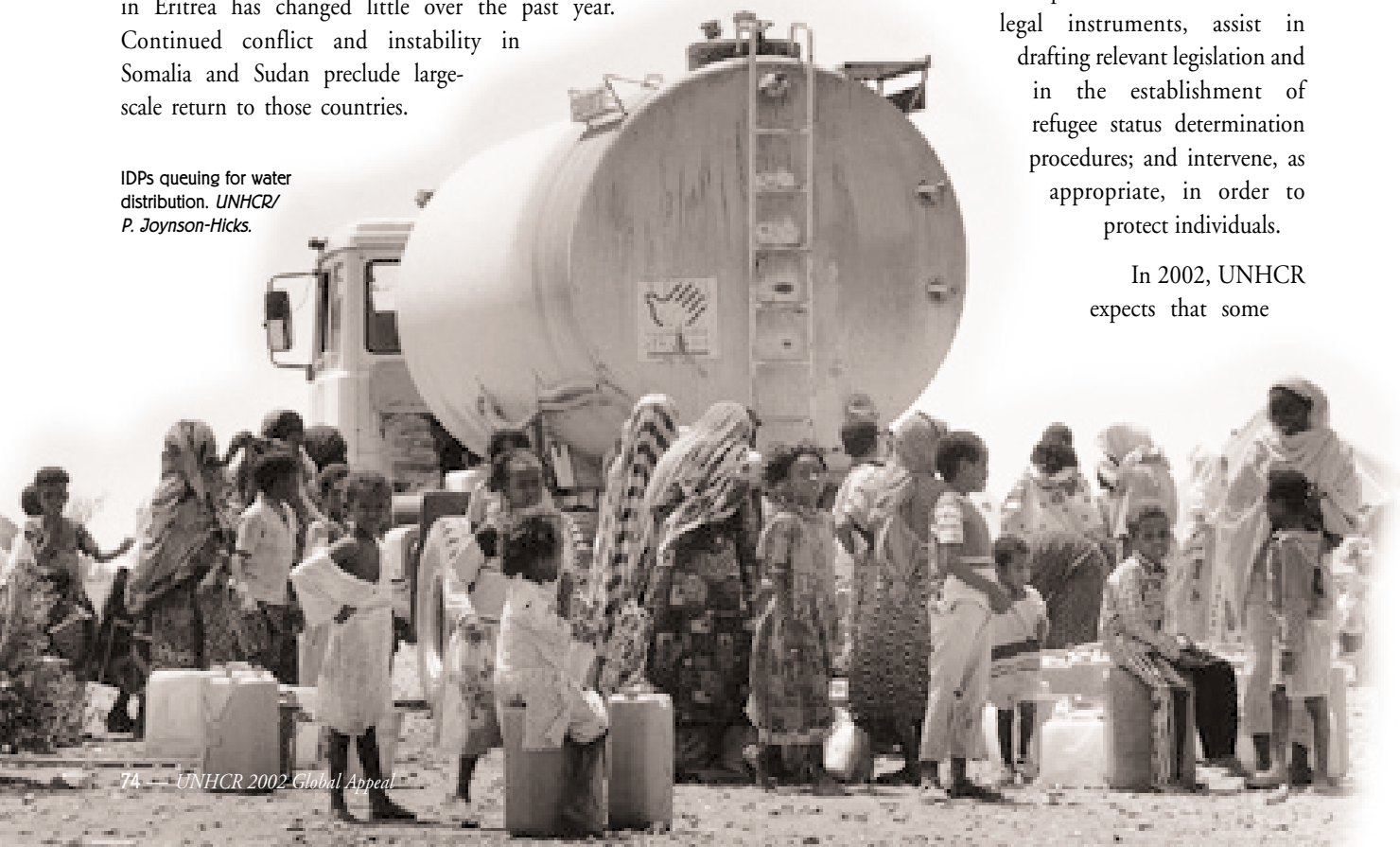
Although surveys conducted by UNHCR indicate that 90 per cent of Eritrean refugees in Sudan wish to return, there is almost nothing for them to return to: no homes and no economic opportunities. Returning refugees and IDPs face the prospect of returning to communities with destroyed houses, looted farms and lost livestock. Furthermore, income-generating activities in the Gash Barka Zone, previously one of the most fertile areas of Eritrea, are hampered by the effects of three years of drought, as well as the presence of landmines and unexploded ordnance. To rebuild the necessary infrastructure and ensure that reintegration and repatriation activities are carried out in parallel, UNHCR is working to involve development agencies more substantially in the rehabilitation of returnee-receiving areas.

STRATEGY

Protection and Solutions

Eritrea is neither a State party to any of the international refugee instruments, nor to either of the conventions relating to statelessness. It also lacks national legislation or administrative arrangements to address refugee and statelessness issues. UNHCR will therefore continue to promote accession to these legal instruments, assist in drafting relevant legislation and in the establishment of refugee status determination procedures; and intervene, as appropriate, in order to protect individuals.

In 2002, UNHCR expects that some



90,000 Eritrean refugees from Sudan will repatriate voluntarily, along with smaller numbers from Djibouti and Yemen. This voluntary repatriation will be conducted in accordance with generally accepted principles of international protection. UNHCR will verify the voluntary nature of return and ensure that refugees can make a free and informed choice on whether to repatriate. UNHCR has been assured that refugees will be allowed to return with their personal belongings, settle wherever they choose and have access to and use of land in Eritrea. In accordance with existing laws, the Eritrean Government will help returnees who wish to recover their lost property. UNHCR will also closely monitor respect for returnees' rights and ensure that they enjoy equality of access to services.

While large-scale repatriation is not currently an option for Sudanese and Somali refugees in Eritrea due to the prevailing conditions in their countries of origin, voluntary repatriation will be facilitated as and when individual refugees make an informed decision to return home. Opportunities for local integration in Eritrea are limited, as the country's attention and resources are focused on reintegrating its own nationals, and refugees are legally prohibited from entering the local job market. The Office will work with the Government to allow limited local integration for appropriate cases. Following the successful emergency resettlement to third countries of a few Sudanese refugees, UNHCR will pursue resettlement for those who meet the relevant criteria. However, the majority of the refugees in Eritrea will continue to depend on care and maintenance assistance in 2002. In order to improve its capacity to monitor the protection situation and intervene as necessary, UNHCR is establishing a database containing comprehensive information on all refugees in Eritrea. Work on this database will continue in 2002. Furthermore, the Office is discussing with the Government on the relocation of the Somali refugee population from Emkulu camp to a more suitable site. If approved, the preparation of this site would begin in 2001 and would be completed in 2002.

Assistance

Upon their return, Eritrean refugees will receive initial reintegration assistance, with particular attention being paid to vulnerable groups. In view of the Government's limited resources, UNHCR has fielded a team of technical experts in the key sectors of health, education, water and community services as well as a reintegration specialist to assist the communities and authorities in the planning and implementation of the reintegration programme. Returnees will receive metal frames in the shape of the roofing structure of a traditional hut. These will provide rapid temporary shelter and can subsequently be converted into a permanent dwelling.

UNHCR will continue to work with the Office of Refugee Affairs of the Government of Eritrea and with other imple-

menting partners, as appropriate, to provide care and maintenance assistance to Sudanese and Somali refugees, making sure that they have enough food and water as well as access to health care and primary education. Activities benefiting refugees with special needs, such as female-headed households, unaccompanied elderly people and the physically or mentally handicapped, will be undertaken, including income-generating activities, skills training, physiotherapy, awareness raising, strengthening of community services, and various types of material support.

Assistance addressing the special needs of women and children will be integrated into all elements of the refugee programme as well as the repatriation and reintegration programmes. This is particularly important, as it is estimated that 71 per cent of Eritrean refugees returning from Sudan are female, and 90 per cent are women and children. Young adults head about two thirds of the households, and it is often girls who take responsibility for their younger siblings, thus sacrificing their own education and youth. The activities to be implemented include special feeding programmes for pregnant or lactating women, reproductive health services for adolescents, as well as awareness-raising and counselling services on reproductive health and HIV/AIDS. Special assistance will also be provided to children, particularly unaccompanied minors, and to victims of domestic violence. Early childhood programmes such as kindergartens will be strengthened, in order not only to promote mental and emotional development but also to allow children to benefit from health care services, sanitation and clean water in these facilities. Peace education will be included in the primary school curriculum and in community-based non-formal education programmes; and vocational training for adolescents will be offered in co-operation with NGOs and line ministries.

As traditional firewood collectors and managers of household resources, women and girls play a key role in the protection of the environment. Their own welfare is intricately linked to that of their surroundings. UNHCR is planning to provide kerosene stoves and fuel to all returnees to curtail further degradation of the already depleted natural resources. The provision of the above-mentioned non-timber roofing frames will also reduce pressure on the natural resources.

Desired Impact

Eritrean refugees should be enabled to repatriate in safety and dignity and to reintegrate in a sustainable manner. It is hoped that UNHCR's assistance activities will facilitate a peaceful and smooth reintegration process in all major areas of return, meeting the special needs of vulnerable groups such as households headed by a single adult or child, separated families, the elderly or the disabled. 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 effective international protection as well as care and maintenance assistance. They will be helped to repatriate, if they wish to do so, and UNHCR will continue to pursue all durable solutions available.

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

UNHCR's programmes in Eritrea will be managed by the main office in Asmara with support from three field offices, involving a total of 58 national and 22 international staff (including two JPOs and eight UNVs). The voluntary repatriation operation will be closely co-ordinated with UNHCR offices in Sudan, Djibouti and Yemen.

Co-ordination

The repatriation operation will be implemented principally through the Eritrean Relief and Refugee Commission (ERREC), with NGOs assuming a supporting role in such areas as in-transit health care and mine-awareness education. With regard to the reintegration programme, key players will include local authorities (such as zonal, sub-zonal and village administrations), line ministries as well as the Ministry of Local Government. As in previous years, UNHCR will actively participate in the inter-agency co-ordination of assistance activities, under the leadership of the Resident and Humanitarian Co-ordinator.

As the voluntary repatriation continues through 2002, the focus will shift to social and economic reintegration needs. Comprehensive multi-sectoral programmes will need to be designed to address community-based rehabilitation, including repair and reconstruction of infrastructure. Given its limited capacity and responsibilities vis-à-vis the longer-term reintegration needs of returnees, UNHCR aims to effectively engage bilateral and multilateral donors and development agencies in the reintegration process. Efforts to combine and co-ordinate UNHCR-funded initial reintegration assistance with the medium to long-term programmes of other actors will be intensified in 2002.

Principal responsibility for the protection of and assistance to refugees in Eritrea lies with the Office of Refugee Affairs within the Department of Immigration and Nationality Affairs.

When unforeseen assistance needs arise, UNHCR will make appropriate ad hoc arrangements, either acting directly or involving appropriate line ministries or NGOs. Protection monitoring, and any intervention required, will be undertaken directly by UNHCR protection staff. In line with the global Memorandum of Understanding between UNHCR and WFP, the Office is providing food assistance to all refugee populations in three refugee camps in Eritrea.

OFFICES

Asmara

Barentu

Massawa

Tesseney

PARTNERS

Government Agencies

Eritrean Relief and Refugee Commission

Ministry of Education

Ministry of Health

Ministry of Local Government

Office of Refugee Affairs

The Gash Barka Zoba Administration

NGOs

International Catholic Migration Commission

International Medical Corps

National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students

National Union of Eritrean Women

BUDGET (USD)

Activities and Services	Annual Programme
Protection, Monitoring and Co-ordination	1,523,147
Community Services	152,941
Crop Production	100,000
Domestic Needs	5,122,647
Education	2,565,609
Fisheries	100,000
Food	942,669
Forestry	150,000
Health	1,733,587
Legal Assistance	320,537
Operational Support (to Agencies)	2,976,282
Sanitation	245,002
Shelter/Other Infrastructure	6,179,113
Transport/Logistics	3,481,655
Water	1,022,958
Total Operations	26,616,147
Programme Support	1,529,183
Total	28,145,330