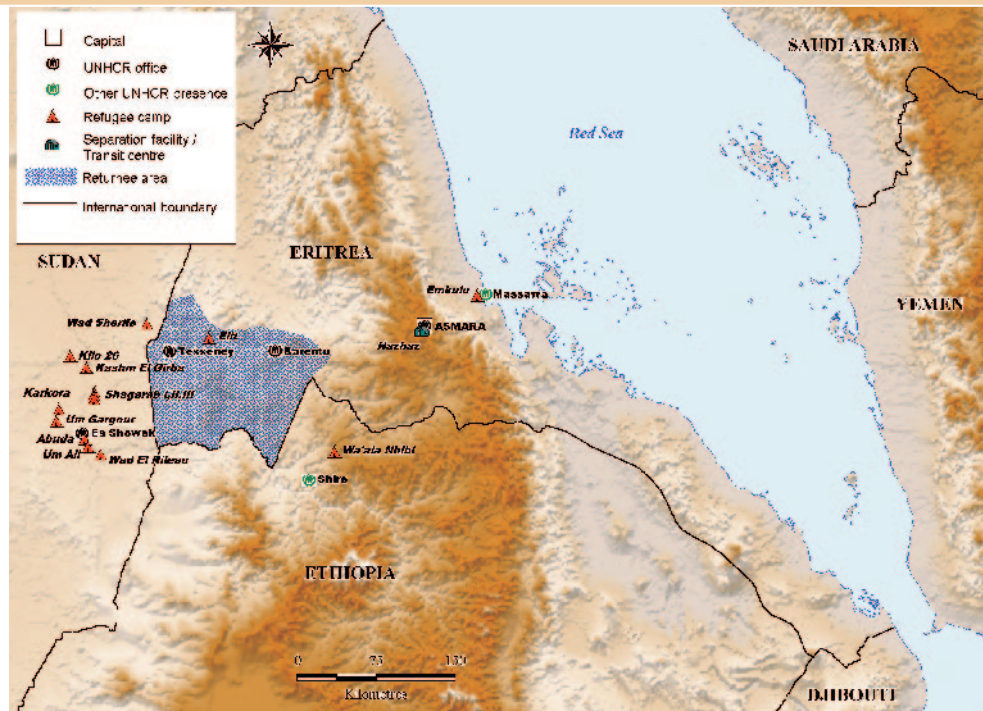


Eritrea

Main Objectives

- Carry out the voluntary repatriation of 82,000 Eritrean refugees from Sudan and of smaller numbers from further abroad.
- Address the immediate re-integration assistance needs of returnees and returnee-receiving areas.
- Engage development actors in addressing the longer-term support needs of returnee-receiving areas.
- Enhance international protection of and provide humanitarian assistance to a total of 4,600 mainly Somali and Sudanese refugees.



Working Environment

Recent Developments

UNHCR and other agencies in Eritrea have stepped up their efforts to facilitate the repatriation and re-integration of the large number of refugees who sought asylum in the Sudan during Eritrea's thirty year struggle for independence, which ended in 1991, as well as of the additional numbers who fled in 2000 during the third flare-up of the Ethiopia-Eritrea border war. UNHCR's primary operational objective in Eritrea is the resolution of this protracted refugee situation through voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration.

Since the beginning of the peace process in July 2000, over 103,000 refugees have returned to Eritrea. Yet, by the end of 2002, Sudan will still be hosting an estimated 82,000 camp-based refugees, plus a significant number of urban refugees. By means of a mass information campaign, all Eritrean

Planning Figures

Population	Jan. 2003	Dec. 2003
Refugees	4,600	6,600
Returnees	32,000	82,000
Others of Concern	1,420	1,420
Total	38,020	90,020

Total Requirements: USD 25,159,104

refugees in the Sudan are being informed of their options in light of the application of the "ceased circumstances" Cessation Clause, which will come into effect on 31 December 2002. By that date, all refugees have to either register for voluntary repatriation, apply for regularisation of their status in Sudan or claim continued refugee status.

Meanwhile in Eritrea, UNHCR is closely monitoring conditions of return so as to ensure that all returnees enjoy the same rights and access to services as resident citizens. However, drought and limited absorption capacity in the main areas of return have been hampering smooth reintegration. Repatriation patterns so far show that refugees are returning predominantly to barren areas, especially in the Gash Barka region, that have been devastated by war and

drought and now lack basic infrastructure and essential social services. The presence of mines and unexploded devices (UXO) in main areas of return creates additional problems. To address the reintegration needs, the Eritrean authorities, together with the UN Agencies, are preparing a transitional recovery programme, within the government-led framework for the co-ordination of the post-conflict recovery process. Pending the development and implementation of this strategy, UNHCR will continue its programme of quick-impact projects to assist reintegration. It will also continue to support mine awareness programmes to educate returnees and aid workers about the existing risks.

Constraints

In addition to the drought in returnee areas, and the presence of mines and UXO, which greatly hinder UNHCR's operations, reintegration efforts are further hampered by the limited supply of skilled labour, technical expertise and technical services in both the public and private sectors. This limits the capacity of most agencies involved in humanitarian and development work. As the socio-economic needs of returnees and receiving communities manifestly outstrip UNHCR's mandate and capacity, they require the attention of major development actors. At this point, however, the various large-scale rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes undertaken by development agencies and international financial institutions in Eritrea do not target returnees or have little bearing on the refugee return and reintegration process. The resulting gap between short-term reintegration assistance and longer-term recovery programmes must be bridged if repatriation and reintegration are to be sustainable. Meanwhile, durable solutions for the Sudanese and Somali refugees in Eritrea remain elusive, given the prevailing instability in both countries. In the absence of effective local structures to assist these refugees, UNHCR will retain responsibility for their care and protection.

Strategy

Protection and Solutions

UNHCR will continue to advocate the country's accession to relevant international legal instruments such as the conventions and protocols relating to

refugees and stateless persons. In the same context, it will promote the introduction of corresponding national law and administrative structures to deal with refugee and statelessness issues. Most importantly, the Office will continue discussions with the immigration authorities concerning the establishment of joint refugee status determination procedures. As part of its efforts to ensure respect for the basic rights of Sudanese and Somali refugees, UNHCR will intervene as necessary in individual protection cases. Groups and individuals with special protection needs, like unaccompanied refugee children, will be identified and given special assistance. Newly arriving Somali refugees, who are recognised by both the Eritrean Government and UNHCR on a *prima facie* basis, will be received and temporarily assisted at reception facilities in Assab before being transferred to Emkulu refugee camp near Massawa. The establishment of a more suitable and permanent site is being discussed. In the absence of opportunities for large-scale voluntary repatriation to either Sudan or Somalia, UNHCR will pursue alternative durable solutions for the two groups, including local integration and third country resettlement. Nonetheless, individuals wishing to return home will be assisted to do so.

With regard to Eritrean returnees, UNHCR expects to repatriate some 82,000 from Sudan in the course of 2003, along with smaller numbers from Djibouti and Yemen and elsewhere. UNHCR will organise convoys, mainly from Sudan, to take people across the border and to reception centres, where they will be registered and receive initial assistance and temporary accommodation. From the centres, they will then be transported to their chosen destinations. Throughout the process, UNHCR protection staff will monitor conditions and ensure that returnees are not discriminated against and that their rights are respected. For the small numbers of Eritreans wishing to return from other countries, arrangements will be made as needed.

Assistance

In the absence of opportunities for large-scale repatriation, UNHCR will continue to provide multi-sectoral assistance to refugees from Sudan (in Elit camp, Gash-Barka region) and Somalia (in Emkulu camp, Northern Red Sea region), ensuring access to adequate supplies of food, water and household

items, as well as to health services and primary education. UNHCR is also providing shelter assistance, maintaining sanitation systems and monitoring health and nutrition levels. A supplementary feeding programme will prevent malnutrition among children under five as well as pregnant and lactating women. In addition, refugees are sensitised to the risk of HIV/AIDs and other sexually transmitted diseases and to the detrimental effects of harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation. In an effort to reduce the prevalence of alcoholism in certain refugee communities, special counselling services will be offered.

Refugee women will be encouraged to participate in the decision-making structures in the camps, including the food distribution committee. Food rations for women and their children will, as in previous years, be given directly to the mothers. UNHCR will furthermore, support the training of women in traditional birth attendance, reproductive health and issues of sexual and gender-based violence, for the benefit of all women in the community. The provision of underwear and sanitary parcels to women and teenage girls will be continued as it has been seen to raise their self-esteem and willingness to engage in social activities outside the home. Victims of sexual violence, unwed mothers and unaccompanied children will be assisted individually.

Eritrean returnees, many of whom have been out of the country for more than 20 years, are provided with an initial “reinsertion package” containing shelter material, basic household items, agricultural tools and a cash grant to cover their most urgent needs. The packages are distributed at the reception centres prior to the returnees’ onward travel to their final destination. Vulnerable individuals are identified and receive special attention, including practical assistance in the construction of shelters etc. Refugees returning to urban areas are provided with a cash sum to the value of the shelter materials and agricultural tools.

To assist the effective reintegration of returnees, UNHCR will carry out quick impact

projects at the community level, focusing on rehabilitation of basic infrastructure, water and sanitation systems, health and education services as well as agriculture. A technical team will be working closely with local actors to assess critical needs in returnee areas, provide expertise and monitor the implementation of projects. To reduce the risk of injury or illness, UNHCR will continue to raise safety awareness – both at the centres and in returnee communities – especially with regard to landmines, HIV/AIDs and other infectious diseases. All reintegration activities will place an emphasis on the empowerment of women. Various capacity-building measures, including skills training and income generation activities, will help them to become self-sufficient, and a part of the local community. For the benefit of returnee and local children, UNHCR will construct and equip schools and recruit teachers. Environmental concerns will be taken into account in the planning and construction of settlement infrastructure and in the implementation of agricultural projects. The returnee package has been specifically designed to contain environmentally-friendly items such as kerosene stoves (including fuel) and metallic shelter structures, which help to reduce pressure on wood resources in returnee areas.

Desired Impact

Eritrean refugees will 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.



IDPs. Camp life: preparing food.
UNHCR / P. Kessler

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 alternative durable solutions.

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 two field offices, involving a total of 75 national and 25 international staff (including two JPOs, seven UNVs, and four technical specialists deployed through UNOPS). The voluntary repatriation operation will be closely co-ordinated with UNHCR offices in Sudan, and elsewhere.

Co-ordination

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. Memoranda of Understanding have been concluded with UNDP, UNICEF and WFP, and close collaboration will be pursued with the Regional

Directorates of the Ministries of Education, Health, Agriculture and Labour and Welfare under the overall authority of the Governor of Gash-Barka. UNHCR has also forged strong working relationships with national and international NGOs.

Offices
Asmara
Barentu
Tesseney

Partners
Government Agencies
Eritrean Relief and Refugee Commission
Ministry of Education
Ministry of Health
Office of Refugee Affairs
The Gash Barka Zoba Administration
NGOs
International Medical Corps
Intersos
Japan Emergency NGOs
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	1,465,378
Community Services	363,507
Crop Production	1,051,042
Domestic Needs	4,786,496
Education	1,746,888
Fisheries	225,830
Food	748,979
Forestry	162,731
Health	1,717,287
Legal Assistance	354,623
Operational Support (to Agencies)	619,168
Sanitation	344,286
Shelter / Other Infrastructure	5,565,273
Transport / Logistics	1,985,775
Water	2,075,015
Total Operations	23,212,278
Programme Support	1,946,826
Total	25,159,104