



After 13 years forced to live away from home, this Iraqi IDP returnee family can once again fish in their home area of Chibaesh.

Finding Durable Solutions



UNHCR / A. ARBAY

Millions of displaced persons around the world remain without access to timely and durable solutions. Nearly 7.1 million people, almost three quarters of the refugee population under UNHCR's mandate, have been living in exile for five years or more. It is a worrying trend that the length of stay in such

protracted refugee situations is growing, with a large proportion of refugees remaining in exile for a decade or more. This not only has detrimental effects on their physical, mental, social, cultural and economic well-being, but also increases their exposure to the risks of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), human trafficking and other forms of abuse and exploitation. ●●●

UNHCR has traditionally pursued three durable solutions for refugees: voluntary repatriation, local integration and third-country resettlement. Seeking and providing durable solutions for refugees is a key element of international protection and has been a core part of UNHCR's mandate and work since its inception.

DEVELOPMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE SOLUTIONS STRATEGIES

The three traditional durable solutions are complementary. Implementing them in tandem benefits a higher number of refugees than would be the case if only one solution were made available. In addition, UNHCR is also exploring new approaches, such as labour mobility, temporary migration and alternative forms of legal stay, that can also help bring about solutions. For example, in 2012, UNHCR and ILO organized a workshop on labour mobility for refugees. The workshop provided an important opportunity for States, international organizations, members of civil society and academics to discuss how labour mobility might increase employment opportunities and freedom of movement for refugees, as well as its potential for facilitating durable solutions without undermining protection principles.

Such cooperation is necessary, as lasting solutions cannot be achieved by UNHCR alone. In 2012, UNHCR worked in partnership with a range of actors, including international and national NGOs, bilateral development agencies, such as the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), and other humanitarian organizations, to harness their expertise and resources.

Ensuring that refugees and IDPs are included in the development agenda in asylum countries was also a key element of UNHCR's work in this area. An important development in 2012 affecting UNHCR's Asia operations was the development of a multi-year *Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees to support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries*. The strategy promotes continued voluntary repatriation, strengthened reintegration through community-based investments

in areas of high return in Afghanistan, and the preservation of asylum space and assistance to refugee-affected and host areas in neighbouring countries.

In Africa, comprehensive solutions strategies for Angolan, Liberian and Rwandan refugees were implemented along with the cessation of refugee status. The strategies resulted in increased voluntary returns and opportunities for local integration, paving the way for ending three of the most protracted refugee situations in 2013.

UNHCR introduced a multi-year plan of action to address the situation of some 430,000 refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) who are living in sub-Saharan Africa. In West Africa, UNHCR is implementing a comprehensive strategy aimed at bringing to a close the following protracted refugee situations: Mauritians in Mali and Senegal; Ghanaians in Togo; Chadians in Niger; and Togolese in Benin and Ghana.

To measure the impact of UNHCR's interventions in promoting durable solutions, several operations were identified in late 2012 for support in developing and refining a solutions-monitoring and evaluation framework that would include improved indicators.

VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION AND RETURN OF IDPS

In Africa, in addition to the large number of Angolan (almost 20,000) and Liberian (29,000) refugees who repatriated in 2012, UNHCR assisted more than 46,000 Congolese refugees to return vol-

untarily from the Republic of the Congo to their homes in northern areas of the DRC. Some 1,600 Chadian refugees repatriated from Cameroon under a tripartite agreement signed in November 2012. UNHCR also facilitated the repatriation of 6,500 Mauritanian refugees from northern Senegal and more than 6,000 Ivorian refugees from Liberia.

In Asia, more than 98,000 Afghan refugees returned home. Over the past decade, more than 5.7 million refugees have repatriated voluntarily to Afghanistan, some 4.6 million of them with UNHCR's assistance. In light of positive developments in Myanmar, UNHCR is assessing opportunities for repatriation to some parts of the country. In Sri Lanka, the majority of IDPs had returned to their places of origin by the end of 2012. UNHCR will work with the Government of Sri Lanka to find durable solutions for the remaining IDPs.

In the Middle East and North Africa region, nearly 84,900 refugees returned to Iraq. In Yemen, UNHCR continued to advocate with the Government and the international community to ensure the sustainable return of almost 100,000 IDPs in Abyan Governorate.

In the Americas, UNHCR continued to assess opportunities and the intentions of refugees to return to Colombia.

REINTEGRATION OF REFUGEES AND IDPS

In 2012, reintegration programmes were implemented in several countries, including Afghanistan, Côte d'Ivoire, the

● Exploring new solutions

As a participant in the "Delivering as One" initiative, UNHCR works with UN partners to advance the search for durable solutions. For example, UNHCR is playing a lead role in a three-year programme currently under way in Rwanda that is assisting 70,000 Rwandan refugees to return home and reintegrate. This initiative of the Government of Rwanda and the United Nations is expected to have a significant

impact on solutions for a large protracted refugee situation. In eastern Sudan, UNHCR, the World Bank and UNDP are collaborating on the Transitional Solutions Initiative (TSI) aimed at assisting affected populations become more self-reliant. The TSI strives to ensure the engagement of development actors as well as the inclusion of displacement issues on the development agendas of national governments. UNHCR and UNDP have undertaken a similar programme in Colombia. □

DRC, Iraq, Rwanda and South Sudan. These programmes were designed and implemented in close partnership with communities, government counterparts and development actors. UNHCR also increased monitoring to identify gaps and ensure that the needs of vulnerable persons were met.

UNHCR's reintegration projects aim to promote the enjoyment of economic, social, legal and cultural rights. Yet, for reintegration to be sustainable, they must also strengthen harmonious relations and promote reconciliation at the community level. Community-based peacebuilding and coexistence activities are therefore important elements of reintegration efforts.

In Iraq, assistance for returnees centred on self-reliance and protection, including the provision of shelter, access to legal services and documentation. In the DRC, UNHCR supported Congolese returnees and collaborated with concerned governments and implementing partners to conduct "go and see" visits for IDPs and refugees. UNHCR also supported programmes aimed at preventing SGBV.

In Afghanistan, in coordination with other stakeholders, UNHCR continued to pursue sustainable reintegration through collaboration with development agencies and Government line ministries, in selected high-return areas. Working together with ministries, UN agencies and national and international NGOs, UNHCR advocated for these areas of high return to be included in the Afghan Government's national priority programmes, in partnership with UNDP and in anticipation of the possible inclusion of other UN agencies.

In Colombia, there was close collaboration with UNDP and the Government under the Transitional Solutions Initiative to pilot community-based projects that support comprehensive solutions strategies for IDPs. Reintegration activities focused on assisting returnee communities to achieve long-term self-reliance. Since the adoption of Colombia's Law on Victims and Land Restitution in 2011, UNHCR has continued to provide legal support on land-restitution issues.

Afghanistan, Côte d'Ivoire and Kyrgyzstan were selected in 2012 as pi-

lot countries for the development of joint durable solutions strategies with development actors. The Secretary-General's Policy Committee adopted a decision on durable solutions which promotes the creation of partnerships in the immediate aftermath of conflict to support durable solutions for IDPs and refugees returning to their country of origin.

LOCAL INTEGRATION

In 2012, UNHCR supported the local integration of approximately 60,000 former Angolan refugees, as well as more than 10,000 former Liberian refugees, as part of comprehensive solutions strategies. Local integration in these contexts has entailed requesting countries of origin to provide passports for former refugees, and asylum countries to issue long-term legal stay documents that can lead over time to naturalization. In Zambia, for instance, the Government agreed to issue up to 10,000 residence permits for former Angolan refugees.

In Kosovo (Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999)), UNHCR profiled IDPs in order to improve its understanding of their integration needs and intentions regarding return. In Georgia, UNHCR worked with UNDP to provide IDPs with access to housing and livelihood opportunities.

To find durable solutions for the most vulnerable of those displaced during the 1991-1995 conflicts in the Balkans, UNHCR participated in the Sarajevo Process and the Regional Housing Programme for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia. The regional programme and work plan set out concrete steps, such as the provision of civil documentation, to remove persistent obstacles to solutions.

RESETTLEMENT

UNHCR and its resettlement partners continued to be confronted with multiple challenges in making resettlement available to those who need it most. The number of resettlement places available globally falls far short of the needs. At the same time, resource constraints, restrictive process-

ing criteria and difficulties in gaining access to certain refugee groups posed challenges in filling all available resettlement places. For example, deteriorating security conditions in the Dadaab camps in Kenya, as well as in the Syrian Arab Republic, hampered access to refugee populations for resettlement processing.

In 2012, UNHCR presented 75,200 refugees for resettlement consideration, an 18 per cent drop from the 92,000 submissions made in 2011. While the 68,000 departures that took place represented an increase of 11 per cent over the previous year, the number is considerably below the available global resettlement capacity. A positive note is that 11 per cent of UNHCR's submissions were women and girls at risk, achieving the 10 per cent target set out in Executive Committee Conclusion No. 105 (2006) for a second consecutive year.

The number of resettlement places available rose to 86,000, with Australia doubling its target. With Belgium and Germany establishing regular resettlement programmes, the number of resettlement countries increased to 27. The establishment of the Joint European Union (EU) Resettlement Programme led to greater opportunities for increasing resources, building capacity and enhancing resettlement coordination among EU Member States.

UNHCR continued to work with resettlement partners to advocate for flexible processing criteria, as well as faster processing. To this end, an abridged resettlement registration form was made available for use in operations. Where access to refugee populations in need of resettlement was not possible, UNHCR worked with resettlement countries to find innovative ways of processing applications, including through enhanced use of emergency transit centres, dossier submissions, video-conferencing and in-country/cross-border transfer of refugees for onward processing.

The Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement remained the primary forum for resettlement partners to discuss policy and operational issues. States increased their engagement in the strategic use of resettlement for selected priority refugee populations, particularly within the framework of Core Groups,



RESETTLEMENT

In **Malaysia**, resettlement submissions and departures increased significantly compared to 2011. By the end of 2012, some 10,500 refugees and asylum-seekers residing in urban areas had departed for resettlement. A major factor contributing to these high rates of resettlement was the group resettlement programme for refugees originating from Myanmar: under this programme, some 7,800 **Myanmar refugees** were resettled to the United States. Australia and several other resettlement countries also increased their quotas.

Marked progress was also reported in the **Islamic Republic of Iran** where resettlement quotas have tripled in the past three years. Submissions of **Afghan refugees** for resettlement doubled compared to 2011, and the number of receiving countries involved in the Iranian resettlement operation grew from five to eight in the same period. Thanks to continued engagement by States interested in helping resolve protracted situations like this, through multilateral commitments, in addition to achieving higher resettlement rates, the Office is now able to use resettlement programmes strategically in order to enhance protection space within the country.

In **Syria**, resettlement submissions fell by almost 75 per cent, and departures decreased by over 20 per cent from 2011. This decline reflects the deteriorating security situation in Syria, which forced embassies in Damascus to close down. The situation also limited or at times prevented UNHCR from having access to refugees for resettlement interviewing and processing. However, thanks to the flexibility and ingenuity of several resettlement countries, these obstacles were largely overcome by increasing the use of emergency transit centres and videoconferencing technology to interview refugees as well as willingness to extend the validity of medical and security checks required for resettlement.

VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION

Several African operations reported successful voluntary returns in 2012. These included the voluntary repatriation of **Liberian refugees**, actively promoted by UNHCR. Between October 2004 and the end of December 2012, around 200,000 Liberian refugees returned home, the vast majority of whom were assisted by UNHCR. In 2012 alone, the Office repatriated more than 29,500 refugees. In the coming year, UNHCR will concentrate its activities on facilitating the return of the 700 Liberian refugees who remain in Côte d'Ivoire. UNHCR's monitoring of refugee returns has indicated that returnees have reintegrated reasonably well; although in some cases they face socio-economic constraints and lack access to basic services, such as health and education.

In 2012, some 11,200 **Rwandans** were assisted to return home. The launch of a three-year programme for the return and reintegration of over 70,000 Rwandan refugees by the Government of Rwanda and the United Nations is expected to have a significant impact. With the cessation clauses for Rwandan refugees coming into force on 30 June 2013, UNHCR will intensify its work with all concerned in order to facilitate the return prior to the deadline.

Voluntary repatriation of **Mauritanian refugees** in Senegal was completed in March 2012. A total of 6,200 remaining refugees returned voluntarily. Since the start of the organized voluntary repatriation operation in 2008, over 24,000 Mauritanian refugees have repatriated. ●

● An important protection tool

Resettlement can serve as a critical protection tool in emergency situations. Such was the case for a group of 28 individuals who fled the conflict in Syria in 2012. For three months, they travelled from one country to another in search of refuge, but were unable to find lasting protection. They were finally detained in an airport transit zone and threatened with deportation to Syria. UNHCR quickly intervened to prevent their imminent *refoulement* by seeking emergency resettlement to secure their immediate protection. Five resettlement countries responded promptly, and most of the refugees departed for resettlement in less than a month. The remaining refugees were transferred to an emergency transit facility in a nearby country, where they were accommodated in safety while their cases were processed for onward travel to resettlement countries. As a result of these joint and coordinated efforts to provide a solution, all of the refugees were resettled within a few weeks. ■

which bring resettlement States together to enhance collaboration. The priority refugee populations included Somalis in Kenya; Afghans in the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan; refugees of several nationalities in Turkey; Iraqis in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan; Colombian refugees in the surrounding region; and refugees from the DRC in neighbouring countries and southern Africa. Besides traditional resettlement countries with large resettlement programmes, new and emerging resettlement countries were encouraged to participate in these multilateral efforts.

UNHCR supported partners working to enhance the integration of resettled refugees. This included the exchange of good practices through capacity-building and twinning arrangements. Efforts to foster knowledge-sharing were particularly dynamic in the European Union, where the "Linking-in EU Resettlement" project with IOM and the ICMC led to the establishment of an EU Resettlement Practitioners Network and an online forum to facilitate exchanges among practitioners in EU Member States.

As part of a comprehensive solutions strategy, UNHCR introduced a four-year programme to resettle 50,000 Congolese (DRC) refugees living in protracted ex-

ile in the Great Lakes Region of Africa. Verification exercises were conducted in major UNHCR operations hosting DRC refugees. Australia took the welcome decision to double its annual resettlement intake of DRC refugees, and provided additional financial support.

Workforce arrangements with NGO partners continued to be of crucial support in the preparation of resettlement submissions. Under the UNHCR-ICMC Resettlement Deployment Scheme, some 120 experts were deployed to 57 UNHCR duty stations in the course of 2012. An increase in the number of resettlement submissions was achieved by strengthening existing partnerships with ICMC and RefugePoint. UNHCR continued to develop thematic training tools, including e-learning modules, video tutorials and the Resettlement Learning Programme, to disseminate the guidance provided in the 2011 Resettlement Handbook. The handbook was translated into French and Spanish. UNHCR also provided guidance to field offices on fraud investigation, anti-fraud risk assessment and compliance with resettlement anti-fraud policy and procedures. ■

Celina in her new home, thanks to the *Rancho por Casa* project.



PHOTO / JAVIER JARA

DREAMS DO COME TRUE: ADVANCING LOCAL INTEGRATION IN VENEZUELA

UNHCR GUASDUALITO

GUASDUALITO, BOLIVARIAN REPUBLIC OF VENEZUELA, AUGUST 2012 | Celina was

celebrating with a house-warming party, joined by refugee friends, neighbours, government officials and UNHCR staff. The parish priest of the Guasdualito Cathedral was also there on the patio to bless the new three-bedroom house she had received from the Venezuelan Government.

Some 20 years after she was first displaced from her home in Colombia, a dream had come true.

Celina was born in San Ignacio, in Cesar Department, Colombia, but spent a decade displaced inside her native country, fleeing several times with her family from irregular armed groups. “Eventually, the situation became so unbearable that I had no choice but to take my children and flee our home country,” she said. “We left our home and all our possessions there; we arrived in Venezuela with empty hands.”

In 2002 she came to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela with her two sons. Now aged 35 and 30, one has a mild cognitive disorder but the second has

a severe mental disability. Since their arrival, the 66-year-old asylum-seeker and the family that she heads had lived in a tin shack in Samaria, on the outskirts of Guasdualito, Apure State.

“Living in a new country with a disabled child and without regular employment, I found it almost impossible to improve my situation,” Celina said, citing the search for a decent place to live among the biggest challenges. “Nevertheless, I always dreamt about a better and safer house for my children.”

Despite the challenges, Celina, assisted by a micro-finance programme, raises hens and ducks to earn income, keeping her active in the community and helping with her own integration.

She takes part in projects organised by UNHCR, CARITAS, the Apure State Secretary of Culture and the government programme named *Barrio Adentro* that is aimed at elderly refugees and Venezuelan nationals in the Guasdualito area. The programme includes cultural and sport activities, and beneficiaries also receive weekly medical check-ups.

Additionally, Celina has joined in other community-based projects funded by UNHCR and the local Community

Council in Samaria to promote human rights and local integration of refugees and asylum-seekers. UNHCR has recorded some 400 recognized refugees and 4,300 asylum-seekers in Apure State, all originally from Colombia.

Taking Celina’s situation into account, the Community Council in Samaria included her and her family as beneficiaries of the government-run housing project *Rancho por Casa* (Huts for Houses) in which the community builds free housing for those in extreme poverty. She in turn assisted by cooking meals for those involved in the construction and painted not only her own house, but those of neighbours built under the programme.

Her case illustrated what can be achieved through UNHCR community-based projects in partnership with local institutions. It also showed the commitment of the Venezuelan government to refugees’ rights and including refugees in public policy. Celina’s life has taken on new hope and colour. After a day of music and food spent with her friends, neighbours and representatives of her community, Celina and her children spent the first night in the safety of their new home. □