



COUNTRY OPERATIONS PLAN

Executive Committee Summary

Country: Arab Republic of Egypt

Planning Year: 2005

UNHCR
Representation in Egypt and to the League of Arab States and the Palestinian Authorities
Country Operations Plan (1 January – 31 December 2005)

Part I: Executive Committee Summary

(a) Context and Beneficiary Population

- **The Socio-economic context**

The Arab Republic of Egypt, which covers an area of approximately one million square kilometres, is bordered by the Mediterranean Sea from the North, Sudan from the South, the Red Sea from the East and Libya from the West. The river Nile and the desert dominate the country's physical features. Less than six percent of the country's total land area is inhabited, with over 97 percent of the population living in the narrow strip of the Nile Valley and in the Nile Delta. This is an extraordinarily high effective population density (1300 persons per square kilometre) for Egypt.

Egypt's population stood at around 69.5 million in 2001 – the largest in the Arab World. Children under the age of 19 years constitute 45 percent of the population. The country's population increased by about 88 percent or at an average of 1.25 million persons per year between 1975 and 2001. The high rate of population growth has placed considerable pressure on the country's limited inhabitable land area and its scarce resources. It is projected that the population will continue to grow significantly, reaching 77 million by 2010 and over 120 million by 2030. This demographic pressure will require substantial investments in additional services (including basic education and health care), urban infrastructure, living facilities and employment opportunities.

Egypt's economic development strategy in the last decade has generally proven successful in quantitative terms. The Economic Reform and Structural Adjustment Programme (ERSAP) introduced in 1991 has succeeded in stabilizing the economy, reducing inflation and fiscal deficit. Services, dominated by tourism and the Suez Canal, account for half of Egypt's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Agriculture accounted for 16 percent of GDP and 28 percent of total employment in 2000/2001. Other key sectors of the economy include industry, mining, petroleum and natural gas. Remittances from Egyptian nationals abroad also contribute significantly to the country's economy.

- **The Asylum environment**

The Arab Republic of Egypt ratified the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol in May 1981. Upon accession to the 1951 Convention, Egypt entered into reservations with regards to articles 12 (1) (Personal Status), 20 (Rationing), 22 (1) (Public Education), 23 (Public Relief) and 24 (Labour Legislation and Social Security). Egypt is also a State Party to the 1969 OAU Convention governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa.

Despite its accession to these refugee instruments, there is no domestic implementing legislation. If and when the government identifies a need to respond to the problems of refugees, practise has been to make recourse to ministerial decrees – as illustrated by regulations enacted to deal with the issuance of temporary residence permits (Ministry of Interior Decree No. 8180/1996) and primary education (Ministry of Education Decree No. 24 of 22/01/1992 and Decision of Minister of Education dated 13/12/2000).

- **UNHCR's role**

In the absence of national asylum legislation and the requisite institutional arrangements and capacity, the functional responsibilities for virtually all aspects of refugee protection are carried out by the Office under a framework agreement signed with the government in 1954 which requests the office to support the government by undertaking registration, refugee status determination, voluntary repatriation, resettlement and assistance activities on behalf of the Egyptian government. The 1954 agreement remains a useful framework in committing the Government of Egypt to maintain a generous admission policy; to observe the principle of *non-refoulement*; to grant UNHCR an unhindered access to any asylum seeker or refugee detained for illegal entry or stay in the country; and to provide temporary residence permits to recognised refugees and asylum seekers.

Since the mid 1990s, UNHCR Cairo has been locked into a growing individual refugee status determination exercise which has entirely absorbed the attention of the office. Despite successive modest increases in human resources to keep up with the growing refugee status determination process and efforts to streamline the procedures, the volume of asylum applications has continued to grow. A number of “push” and “pull” factors have been in play, including the lure of resettlement. It has to be stressed, though, that resettlement from Egypt has served over the years as an indispensable protection measure and a durable solution for many refugees. Besides, resettled refugees would bring with them useful skills, resources and cultural diversity to the receiving society. It could also be argued that when refugees have access to orderly movements through predictable resettlement offers, the incentives for embarking on often dangerous irregular movement may be diminished, thus undercutting the criminal networks that thrive on the predicament of desperate people.

Assisting the Government of Egypt in assuming responsibilities for refugee status determination and other related asylum process has topped UNHCR's agenda for many years and continues to remain a matter of priority for the office. Some progress was made in the early months of 2000 and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, responding to a UNHCR aide mémoire, requested UNHCR's technical assistance to facilitate the transfer of responsibilities. Some further progress was made during the following years and public statements to the effect that Egypt would take-over refugee status determination procedures were made in several fora (including at the UNHCR Executive Committee sessions and during the Global Consultations).

- **Overview of beneficiary population**

As of 29 February 2004, nearly 20,000 refugees of various nationalities were under the protection of UNHCR. Sudanese constituted the largest refugee population (76%) followed by Somalis (16%). The rest was composed of some 27 other different nationalities, mainly from Africa. In addition, some 70,000 Palestinians reportedly reside in Egypt. A number of them occasionally approach UNHCR for protection services, particularly residence issues, access to the territory and family reunion.

Sudanese nationals represented, for several years, the vast majority of asylum-seekers approaching UNHCR Cairo for protection. More than 80 percent of the Sudanese refugee applicants are Christian southerners, predominantly Dinka, Nuer and Nuba. Also present in Egypt is the Fur from the Western region of the Sudan. Roughly 80 percent of the Sudanese claimants are single men. About 42 percent are men over 18 years; women of the same age group constitute around 22 percent.

Somali refugees constitute the second largest beneficiary population. At the beginning of 2003, there were some 1,600 Somalis recognized as refugees by UNHCR under its mandate. By 31 December 2003, that number almost doubled (3,068). Unlike in previous years, where a sizeable

number of Somali refugees were coming to Egypt after having lived for some time in other countries (in particular, Libya, Saudi Arabia and Yemen), recent arrivals are directly from Somalia. The majority is from minority clans and come from a mix of rural and urban background, with very little education. Because of cultural and linguistic differences, Somali refugees are generally isolated from the host society and rely on extended family relations and clan affiliation. Achieving a durable solution for Somali refugees in Egypt by way of voluntary repatriation, local integration or resettlement has been a great challenge. Not many countries have shown receptivity to their resettlement needs.

- **UNHCR's strategic directions for 2004 - 2006**

In line with the regional strategy of the Bureau for CASWANAME, UNHCR Cairo has established the following twelve key priorities for ensuring refugee protection and achieving durable solutions.

Key Protection and Durable Solutions Priorities, 2004 – 2006

	Priority areas of intervention	Overview of current situation	Desired result	Means of achieving result
1.	Promoting a national legislative framework on asylum.	Absence of domestic asylum legislation; the Palestinian refugee issue, which is seen more as a “political” rather than humanitarian issue, dominates the refugee and asylum debates.	In the short term, an inter-Ministerial Committee to study with UNHCR the development of national refugee legislation. In the long term, adoption of domestic refugee legislation meeting international standards.	Increased dialogue with the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, the Interior and Justice; lobbying the Parliament and the judiciary; promotion of international refugee law; continuing active cooperation with regional organizations, in particular the League of Arab States.
2.	Building asylum institution and the requisite capacity.	There is no central authority dealing with asylum matters in a comprehensive manner; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs acts as the virtually exclusive focal point for UNHCR and refugee issues, though the Ministry of Interior also plays a role in asylum and migration issues.	In the short term, establishment of an “asylum unit” within the Ministry of Interior to deal with the day-to-day refugee questions, ranging from registration, documentation, residence permits and possibly joint refugee status determination with UNHCR. In the long term, a single, central, and specialized authority responsible for receiving and deciding on applications for refugee status in the first instance.	Training, exchange programmes and on-the-job coaching of identified government asylum practitioners; promoting a governmental decree on asylum procedures; active engagement with the League of Arab States for a regional approach; facilitating EU-Egypt cooperation in the fields of asylum and migration in the context of the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue (Barcelona process).

	Priority areas of intervention	Overview of current situation	Desired Result	Means of achieving result
3.	Fair and efficient refugee status determination procedure.	UNHCR carries out RSD; continuing increase in asylum applications posing challenges to the Office's ability to meet the twin objectives of fairness and efficiency in RSD.	In the short term, streamlined RSD procedures to ensure that a backlog of unprocessed claims is not accumulated; recourse to group determination of refugee status where warranted; maximum six months waiting period for RSD. In the long term, a functioning RSD procedure operated by the Government with a UNHCR consultative role.	Adequate human resources; professional development programme to enhance the knowledge and skills of UNHCR interviewers; enhanced country of origin information; training and capacity-building activities for relevant government officials.
4.	Ensuring minimum standards of treatment of asylum-seekers that ensures respect for their dignity and fundamental human rights.	The immediate material needs of asylum-seekers are not always met; where asylum-seekers worry about their basic necessities of life, RSD cannot be conducted in a meaningful way; educational, medical and psychological needs of children of asylum seekers not always met.	Rights-respective treatment of asylum-seekers; freedom from arbitrary detention as a basic human right; the basic rights of asylum-seekers enshrined in domestic legislation; adoption of a fair and effective reception policy, including measures to provide education to asylum-seeking children and access to emergency health care; job opportunities and housing support to those with special needs.	Creating a receptive political environment and public opinion; increased cooperation with Governmental partners, local NGOs and other relevant actors of civil society; systematic, regular outreach to the asylum-seeking population for advice and counsel on self-empowerment; measures to enhance harmonious community relations.
	Priority areas of	Overview of current situation	Desired Result	Means of achieving result

	intervention			
5.	Ensuring respect for refugees' rights and supporting their self-sufficiency and self-reliance leading to local integration.	Refugees face legal and practical problems to engage in wage-earning employment or self-employment, although Egypt made no reservations to Article 17 of the 1951 Convention and only to Article 24; not all refugee children have access to public education despite Ministerial Decree No. 24 of 22/01/1992 and decision of the Minister of Education dated 13/12/2000; refugees not granted long-term residence; there is no national integration programme or policy.	Refugees exercise the right to work and be protected by domestic labour legislation; all refugee children have access to education; refugees benefit from some UNHCR self-reliance projects; refugees who have no real prospect of voluntary repatriation are granted long-term residency and integrated into Egypt's social and economic fabric.	Concerted public information and education to promote understanding and active tolerance of refugees; lobbying the authorities for the lifting of the reservations to the 1951 Convention; building multifaceted partnerships with the government, donors, development agencies, refugees, local community and NGOs; increased coordination with refugee-assisting NGOs; reorienting UNHCR Care and Maintenance programme towards self-reliance and self-sufficiency activities.
6.	Credible, efficient and transparent resettlement delivery.	For many refugees in Egypt, resettlement has been the only available durable solution; adequate integrity safeguards are in place but the resettlement process is highly resource-intensive and geared toward high volume delivery; limited NGO involvement in resettlement work; lack of clarity in UNHCR's policy on "irregular movers"; unresolved debate over the "pull factor" nature of resettlement.	Transition away from high volume resettlement in favour of stronger claims for group referral of refugees for whom repatriation is not feasible; systematic review of long-stayers; mainstreaming gender through increased individual and group referral of women at risk; increased receptivity by resettlement countries to group referrals and non-1951 Convention refugees.	Regular meetings with resettlement countries and IOM in environment conducive to free and frank discussion; reallocating resources currently dedicated to individual case review to group identification and strategic resettlement goals (e.g. long-stayer analysis); increased regional initiatives on irregular movement, family unity and fraud prevention.

	Priority areas of intervention	Overview of current situation	Desired Result	Means of achieving result
7.	Active support to voluntary repatriation when conditions in countries of origin permit.	UNHCR has repatriated most Yemeni refugees; the repatriation of Sudanese refugees subject to conclusion of comprehensive peace agreement and initial reintegration programmes put in place; individual returns to Sierra Leone, Liberia and Cote-d'Ivoire a real possibility; conditions in Somalia continue to prohibit repatriation.	Individual requests for voluntary repatriation are assessed quickly; early planning for organized voluntary repatriation to the Sudan depending on the outcome of the peace negotiations.	Regular community dialogue; collection and analysis of baseline data on potential areas of return; systematic contacts with UNHCR offices in countries of origin to which return may be feasible; planning and budgeting for repatriation activities within UNHCR Cairo's country programmes.
8.	Strengthening the capacity of NGOs for protection and community services delivery.	Refugee-assisting NGOs are few and far between; there is an urgent need to build the capacity of NGOs and other civil society actors and establish protection networks; the contribution which NGOs can make to the public support for government policies is not fully exploited;	More NGOs working for the protection of refugees and asylum-seekers in cooperation with UNHCR; refugees and asylum-seekers are empowered to participate in protection delivery; NGOs able to raise funds for refugee programmes from sources other than UNHCR; establishment of a national refugee council.	Helping build the capacities of NGOs and other civil society actors involved in refugee protection through training and other forms of skills development; promoting a legal framework that allows NGOs effective delivery of protection and assistance to refugees and asylum seekers; encourage the establishment of refugee associations, with equal participation of women and men.

	Priority areas of intervention	Overview of current situation	Desired Result	Means of achieving result
9.	Fostering mutual trust and confidence between refugees/asylum seekers and UNHCR.	Most asylum-seekers are destitute, with no assistance from UNHCR; refugees are facing serious difficulties in achieving self-sufficiency; resettlement opportunities are generally not available to other refugees than 1951 Convention refugees; the consequence of these factors is lack of trust and confidence in UNHCR and the international refugee protection system.	A credible, transparent refugee status determination procedure; reduced backlog of undecided cases; timely and durable solution for all refugees; better standard of treatment of asylum-seekers and refugees.	Comprehensive, up-to-date information booklet for asylum-seekers and refugees; regular dialogue and consultations with community leaders; streamlining the asylum procedures; community development services through NGO partners; increased collaboration with research institutions.
10.	Strengthening and broadening public awareness and sensitization activities and constituency-building.	There are some signs that certain segments of Egyptian society are developing a negative attitude towards refugees and asylum-seekers; public awareness of the value of refugee protection and the distinction between asylum seekers and economic migrants is limited; the potential for private fund-raising to support UNHCR's operations in Egypt and in the region not fully exploited.	Enhanced public awareness of the positive contributions that refugees can make to their host society; harmonious community relations; increased public understanding of UNHCR's standing as the international authority on refugee protection; greater understanding and readiness of the private sector to contribute to UNHCR's funding requirements for refugee programmes.	Greater efforts in constituency-building to reach out to Parliamentarians, the judiciary, the legal community, the media, national women's associations and other special interest groups; more use of such educational vehicles as public service announcements, sports, music and entertainment to promote a positive message about refugees and asylum – seekers.

	Priority areas of intervention	Overview of current situation	Desired Result	Means of achieving result
11.	Gender and age mainstreaming	<p>UNHCR Cairo has not been able to fully and effectively implement established policy priorities relating to refugee women and children partly due to the limitation inherent in the Organization's approaches to gender and age mainstreaming. With Egypt's selection as one of the ten pilot countries for operationalising UNHCR's policies on refugee women and children through a multi-functional team approach, UNHCR Cairo will pursue gender and age mainstreaming as a key priority in 2004 and beyond.</p>	<p>Gender and child perspectives are effectively mainstreamed into all aspects of UNHCR Cairo's operations; the specific protection needs of refugee women, children, adolescents and elderly are properly addressed through proactive partnerships, inducing with the refugees themselves, and they are empowered to contribute to their own and their communities' protection and durable solution.</p>	<p>Establishment of a multi-sectoral gender and age mainstreaming team, protection-driven planning and programming based on direct dialogue and structured discussion with refugee women, children and adolescents, as well as all implementing and operational partners; adequate training of UNHCR staff and personnel of partners to build and strengthen expert capacity for gender and age mainstreaming.</p>
12.	Staff development	<p>Staff development activities at UNHCR Cairo have hitherto been pursued more on an <i>ad hoc</i> basis and as a function of individual initiatives. There is a need for a systematic, structured office-wide approach to staff development and training.</p>	<p>To ensure the development of basic skills and expert knowledge of staff and United Nations Volunteers in both general and their functional areas of responsibilities, i.e. protection, programme management, community services, administration, finance, and public information and external relations.</p>	<p>On-the-job training, coaching, workshops, distance learning and self-study programmes, and regional missions for exchange of experiences and skills.</p>

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- **Policy issues relating to the impending Sudan peace agreement**

Despite progress towards a peace settlement, the situation in Sudan continues to be problematic and to generate outflows of people who may be in need of international protection. However, the on-going peace negotiations, based on the Machakos framework agreed to in July 2002, and the *de facto* cessation of hostilities which has accompanied the negotiation process, are making the situation increasingly fluid. As negotiations continue towards a comprehensive peace and cease-fire agreement, the objective situation in Sudan is likely to make accurate status determination progressively more difficult. Under such conditions, individual RSD for Sudanese asylum seekers has been temporarily suspended as of 1 June 2004 for an initial period of 6 months. This temporary arrangement would not exclude a possibility of processing a limited number of cases in view of immediate protection needs and/or considerations of procedural fairness, nor would it affect negatively the protection conditions Sudanese asylum-seekers' stay in Egypt. Resettlement processing for those eligible would also continue. Following this six-month period, UNHCR would reassess the situation and identify necessary follow-up action.

During the period of suspension of RSD, asylum-seekers would continue to be registered by UNHCR Cairo and provided with asylum-seeker cards known as the 'yellow card'. The 'yellow card' would enable registered applicants to benefit from the six-month renewable residence permits which are being issued by the Egyptian authorities. RO Cairo would meanwhile review the financial assistance provided to asylum-seekers together with its implementing partners to ensure that essential assistance is provided to those facing special needs within the population of asylum-seekers.

The signing of a comprehensive peace and cease-fire agreement in the Sudan would not imply an immediate cessation of resettlement activities for the Sudanese asylum-seekers in Egypt. However, the use of resettlement by would be re-oriented and progressively reduced in the light of these developments. Resettlement referrals of those recognised prior to the suspension of RSD would focus on the use of resettlement as a tool of protection, giving less prominence than at present to a lack of local integration opportunities. RO Cairo's resettlement policy would need to be further reviewed if and when substantial voluntary repatriation activities are initiated in the region. Furthermore, the approach to refugee status determination and resettlement of Sudanese asylum-seekers in Egypt should, to the extent feasible, be harmonised with other countries in the region and further afield where Sudanese undergo individual RSD, in order to avoid 'irregular' secondary movement of refugees and asylum-seekers.

(b) Selected Programme Goals and Objectives

Beneficiary Population: Urban refugees and elderly stateless persons

Goal(1): Ensure effective protection of refugees and asylum seekers.	
Principal Objectives	Related Outputs
<ul style="list-style-type: none">All asylum seekers have access to refugee status determination procedures, including a fast track procedure for vulnerable cases, and are effectively protected against refoulement and any other threats to their life or liberty in accordance with Egypt's legal obligations deriving from international refugee law and applicable human rights treaties.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Status determination is carried out fairly and efficiently; all refugees and registered asylum-seekers are issued UNHCR documentation card and stamped with renewable temporary residence permit from the Ministry of Interior; relevant Government officials trained in refugee protection; civil society made aware of refugee/asylum issues; national protection performance monitored; technical assistance in drafting national legislation provided; increased co-operation with the League of Arab States.
Goal(2): Promote self-reliance and self-sufficiency of refugees	
Principal Objectives	Outputs
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Refugees are better able to find and maintain income generating activities to meet their and their families' minimum living needs.Refugee communities are more actively involved with UNHCR and other partners in developing strategies to provide services to their communities. They are supported by providing better quality services closer to their places of residence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Assistance provided through targeted vocational training, job placements, cultural orientation, literacy programme, and micro credit schemes.Refugee community associations strengthened through capacity-building and better able to meet the protection and assistance needs of their members. Service delivery is decentralized to communities hosting large numbers of refugees, asylum seekers and other persons of concern, with more comprehensive attention paid to the special needs and concerns of refugee women and children.
Goal(3): Ensure strategic use of resettlement as a protection tool and durable solution	
Principal Objectives	Outputs
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Resettlement used more strategically, including for long-stayers and groups. A greater number of resettlement countries willing to accept "broader class" refugees and more receptive to groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">UNHCR's resettlement needs are met such that all cases deemed in need of resettlement are submitted and accepted. Consistent application of resettlement criteria and regular community information sessions results in more realistic resettlement expectations by refugees.