

Country Operations Plan for Sri Lanka 2002

Part I: Executive Committee Summary

Context and Beneficiary Population

UNHCR's presence in Sri Lanka dates back to the Indian - Sri Lankan peace agreement of 1987 with UNHCR operations being linked to the repatriation of refugees from India. The refugee had fled Sri Lanka since 1983 following full-scale communal violence in the island. Large-scale repatriation took place between 1987 and 1989 and again between 1992 and 1995, resulting in the return of more than 100,000 refugees. Since then repatriation movements have been interrupted due to the resumption of hostilities.

As part of its repatriation operation, from the beginning UNHCR assisted both returnees and the communities to where they were returning. Because of the recurrence of conflict causing internal displacement, many returnees joined the ranks of the internally displaced persons. As a consequence UNHCR extended its protection and assistance to the displaced, a role endorsed by the Secretary-General in 1991 and reaffirmed in 1997.

The total number affected by displacement in the country at present is estimated to be over 800,000 persons. While UNHCR's operations in Sri Lanka focus on the displaced, there is an important refugee dimension to the situation. There are an estimated 100,000 Sri Lanka Tamil refugees in Tamil Nadu, India, some 66, 000 of whom reside in refugee camps. Since July 1996, more than 22,000 Sri Lankan Tamil refugees have arrived in India. Minimal return to Sri Lanka is also taking place as 95 persons spontaneously returned to Mannar Island in 1999, and 16 persons in 2000 as individual cases to Colombo or spontaneously to Mannar. Since January 1998, bilateral arrangements between Sri Lanka and India have enabled 64 persons to return to Sri Lanka with UNHCR providing air transport and initial reintegration assistance. Some 300 persons are presently awaiting UNHCR assistance for return to Sri Lanka. UNHCR India and Sri Lanka have begun preparations for their return in 2001.

The core problem UNHCR is addressing in its operation is the continuing phenomenon of displacement and lack of national protection and durable solutions for the conflict-affected population. The overall purpose of UNHCR's involvement in Sri Lanka is thus to enhance access of the displaced to national protection and durable solutions. UNHCR's operations in the country help mitigate the negative consequences of displacement and facilitate return and resettlement. In addition, UNHCR's involvement in Sri Lanka helps establish an alternative for the IDPs to renewed flight to India where refugees from Sri Lanka are receiving asylum. UNHCR continues to work to improve policy and build capacity within Government and NGOs to respond effectively to the displaced population in Sri Lanka and abroad.

The population in the North and East of Sri Lanka is severely affected by the protracted conflict. The categories of persons that UNHCR works to protect and assist include the following:

1. Persons recently displaced or on the move as a result of military operations.

2. Persons in “stabilising situations” whose existence remains precarious and insecure;
3. Persons in government welfare centres;
4. Persons re-integrated into their original communities as resettled, but whose “recovery” is slow and fragile depending on the prevailing security and economic situation.
5. Persons being resettled as a durable solution in new locations other than their original communities.

The first two categories are closely inter-linked and typify the fluid situation on the ground. People may shift from one category to another within a short span of time depending on military operations. In all of the categories there are vulnerable individuals who require special attention including female-headed households, children and adolescents. UNHCR and its partners give priority to these "sub-groups" within the larger population through the assessment and design processes that are undertaken at all levels of the programme

The six districts of Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu, Mannar, Vavuniya, Trincomalee and Jaffna where UNHCR is operational can be divided into two main categories: the so-called cleared areas under government civilian administration control and the so-called uncleared areas where the LTTE is dominant, even though the government continues to function.

The cleared areas close to the frontlines as well as the Jaffna peninsula are characterised by high military presence. Movement of persons and goods is strictly controlled through a system of passes and military and police checkpoints, all of which are stark reminders of the constant vulnerability of people in the area.

In the LTTE dominated areas of the Vanni, the civilian government administrative structure is present as in the rest of the nation. Staff shortages, strict control of supplies and inadequate infrastructure severely limit the functioning of government services including health, education, roads and agriculture. The government provides food assistance to the population in the uncleared areas; however, controversy around population figures and utilization of the food makes this extremely problematic. Government and international organisations/agencies have access to the population, but all movement of persons and supplies are subject to Ministry of Defence (MOD) permits. There is neither a telecommunication system since it was disconnected in 1986, nor electricity as supply was cut off in June 1990. Access to the area and movement inside is strictly regulated. The economy is essentially closed, as there is no legal trade between the “cleared” and “uncleared” areas.

Economic activities in both the cleared and uncleared areas centre on small-scale trade, subsistence agriculture and limited coastal/lagoon fishing. Outside the seasonal demand of agricultural and fishing cycles, there is a huge pool of casual labour.

One of the core problems characteristic of the on-going conflict is the repeated displacement of people, thus increasing their vulnerability and dependence. There is a general sense of insecurity arising out of the fear of being caught in crossfire. This constant fear heightens their preparedness to move. Many actually move at the slightest sign of danger. Compounding this uncertainty is the lack of access to basic shelter, health services, and education and employment opportunities.

Inter-agency co-operation remains a high priority for UNHCR. In addition to its implementing partners and close co-operation with the UN System and the Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies, UNHCR will maintain its strategic partnership with the World Bank and enter into new strategic partnerships with the Asian Development Bank and GTZ.

In addition, UNHCR Sri Lanka also provides protection and assistance to a small urban refugee caseload that at present consists of 21 individuals.

Selected Programme Goals and Objectives

Internally Displaced Persons in and Returnees to Sri Lanka	
Main Goal:	
The displaced children, women and men in Sri Lanka have access to national protection and durable solutions	
Principal Objectives	Related Outputs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimise internal displacement and provide alternatives to flight • Stabilise internal displacement and promote conditions for solutions • Facilitate voluntary return 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical Protection/ basic rights and access to humanitarian assistance for women, children and men ensured • Management and Coordination systems in areas of new displacement established • Non-food relief items delivered and distributed to newly displaced on the basis of need • Potable water accessible to newly displaced • Sanitation facilities and waste disposal available and maintained in accordance with Sphere Standards • Access to health services including special services for women and children ensured • Physical Protection/ security, basic rights and access to humanitarian assistance for women, children and men assured • Processes for identification of durable solutions for displaced with both displaced and authorities established • Community Infrastructure improved in order to facilitate hosting of displaced • Community services for vulnerable groups enhanced • Increase access to education for displaced children • Increase food security and income generation for the displaced and conflict-affected population

<p>and reintegration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote conditions conducive to return from India • Improved policies, conditions and rights for victims • Improved performance by NGOs, GoSL on behalf of the displaced 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical Protection, basic rights, and access to humanitarian assistance for women, children and men ensured • Management and coordination systems in place in areas of return/ relocation • Potable water accessible in returnee/ relocations so as to minimise illness due to water-borne diseases • Sanitation facilities and waste disposal systems available in accordance with Sphere Standards • Health services accessible to returnee/ relocation communities • Basic shelter provided to returnee/ relocation families on basis of need • Essential Community structures and services strengthened in terms of capacity to manage own affairs and address needs of vulnerable within population • Education services accessible to returnee/ relocation communities • Tank and irrigation systems functional and supporting returnee/ relocation communities • Environmental degradation reduced through forestry activities • Enhanced self-reliance of returnee/ relocation families through Income Generation activities including Livestock/ Animal Husbandry activities • Key government decision-makers aware of and sensitive to problems and issues related to government policy towards the displaced and returnees • Guiding Principles on Internal displacement accepted as a normative framework for policy and practice for the displaced with government, NGO, and civil society organisations • Policy papers on improved policy and practice for the displaced are produced and shared with key government decision-makers • Workshops and seminars on the situation of the displaced as well as the guiding principles on internal displacement organised and implemented • Advocacy materials on behalf of the displaced developed and disseminated to opinion leaders and the general public • Emergency preparedness and contingency planning workshops organised in all districts directly -affected by the conflict • Training and development needs for government and NGO officials assessed and activities organised with UNHCR's contribution being part of a larger training and development initiative
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