



COUNTRY OPERATIONS PLAN

Executive Committee Summary

Arab Republic of Egypt

Planning Year : 2007

2007 Arab Republic of Egypt Country Operations Plan

Part 1: OVERVIEW

1. Protection and socio-economic operational 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 to articles 12 (1) (personal status), 20 (rationing), 22 (1) (access to primary education), 23 (public relief and assistance) 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.

Egypt has yet to take concrete steps towards the adoption of domestic refugee legislation and to put in place the necessary arrangements for the reception and registration of refugee applicants and determination of their refugee status. These critically important functions are still performed by UNHCR, fifty years after the Office established its presence in Egypt.

At the end of 2005, there were 18,946 refugees in Egypt recognized by UNHCR under its mandate. The majority (13,372) originated from Sudan, followed by Somalia (3,339). In addition, an estimated 40,000 to 70,000 Palestinian refugees are reported to be in Egypt although only 255 of them are registered with UNHCR Cairo. A variety of constraints have stood in the way of UNHCR exercising its protection mandate in relation to Palestinian refugees.

Despite the de facto cessation of armed conflict in most parts of south Sudan, UNHCR Cairo has continued to receive large numbers of south Sudanese asylum-seekers. Out of nearly 11,005 asylum seekers registered with UNHCR during 2005, 10,191 were Sudanese. In June 2004, UNHCR instituted a six month suspension of refugee status determination for Sudanese. The suspension has been extended since 2004 on a regular basis. All Sudanese nationals registered with UNHCR as asylum-seekers are provided with asylum seeker registration cards which entitle them to apply for a 6 month renewable residence permit and protect them against forced return to Sudan.

Following the signing of the peace agreement between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan Peoples' Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/SPLA) in January 2005, as part of a broader regional contingency plan, RO Cairo started preparations for the voluntary repatriation of some 2,000 refugees in 2005. That persons did not return in these numbers is due to the overall lack of infrastructure in the south of Sudan and the continued political uncertainty in the country. UNHCR Cairo has planned for the voluntary return of 1,000 persons in 2006 and 2,500 persons in 2007.

At the same time as UNHCR has been preparing for voluntary repatriation, Sudanese continue to approach RO Cairo in large numbers (averaging 400-500 persons per week) to apply for refugee status. Some 40% of the Sudanese approaching the office claim to be from Darfur. According to Egyptian Government sources, some 7000 – 9000 Sudanese enter Egypt legally per month with some 2000 – 3000 leaving. The Iraqi caseload is also on the increase considering the prevailing situation in Iraq.

The majority of refugees and asylum-seekers in Egypt live in Cairo and are dispersed throughout the poor quarters of the city where they compete with local Egyptians for scarce resources and limited jobs. They do not enjoy many socio-economic rights provided for by the 1951 Convention partly due to Egypt's reservations to some of the key provisions of the Convention, namely Articles 12 (1) (Personal Status), 20 (Rationing), 22 (1) (Public Education), 23 (Public Relief) and 24 (Labour Legislation and Social Security). Refugees and Asylum Seekers are not able to access state education, public health care, public relief and assistance, social security and food subsidies on the same basis as nationals.

In the circumstances, UNHCR has had for many years a sizable assistance program for refugees in Egypt to help them meet their basic human needs. In recent years however, the population of concern has increased so drastically (from around 4,000 in 1997 to around 30,000 refugees and asylum seekers at present) as to put UNHCR's assistance programme under tremendous pressure. As a result assistance is now provided only to the most vulnerable cases. With the limited funds available, UNHCR provides assistance to only 20% of the total caseload. This assistance is often not enough to cover the basic needs even for those who meet the strict vulnerability assistance criteria. Furthermore, refugee-assisting non-governmental organizations in Egypt are very few and are unable to fill the gap in assistance. There are some church organizations that cater to some vulnerable refugees, and finding a durable solution.

The difficulties in meeting basic needs contributed to a growing sense of frustration and hopelessness which led to a three month sit-in of Sudanese in the Mustapha Mahmoud Park close to the UNHCR Cairo office. The sit-in began in late September 2005 with less than 30 people and by the end, it numbered 3,000. The demonstrators' demands focused largely on the difficulties of living in Egypt and the desire to be sent to another country where life would be better. The demonstrators stressed that they did not want voluntary repatriation to Sudan. With the limits of the UNHCR mandate and an already overstretched assistance budget, UNHCR was not in a position to meet many of their demands.

The demonstration ended on the night of 29-30 December 2005 with the forcible removal of the demonstrators from the park by the Egyptian police. Twenty-seven people (many of them children) were killed in the process.

UNHCR has analysed the circumstances as well the motives behind the sit-in and drew the necessary conclusions in terms of policies and approaches regarding its operations in Egypt. In this connection, UNHCR Cairo plans to significantly reduce individual subsistence assistance as of 2006 and place a greater emphasis on building community assistance structures, and concentrate on vocational training and job placement services which will enable refugees to better provide for themselves while they are in Egypt. At the same time, UNHCR Cairo will continue to engage the Government in refugee protection and support building local capacities in this regard.

2. Operational goals and potential for durable solutions

In line with UNHCR's Global Strategic Objectives for 2007-2009, RO Cairo will focus on the following objectives during 2007:

■ Strategic Objective 1:

Ensure international standards of protection are met for all persons of concern to UNHCR regardless of their age, gender or personal background through fair and efficient Refugee Status Determination under the UNHCR mandate.

Priority will be given to:

- Improving protection against *refoulement* and physical security and reducing incidents of violence, in particular preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence,
- Preventing malnutrition, and reducing the prevalence and impact of HIV/AIDS,
- Promoting civil, social and economic rights,
- Ensuring the right to education,
- Increasing and improving the level and quality of registration of persons of concern,
- Strengthening national capacity for protection and asylum through advocacy, promotion, and technical support for developing refugee legislation and refugee status determination procedures in a gradual, incremental process. .
- Strengthen outreach to and communication with different refugee communities by holding regular monthly meetings with community leaders, women refugee groups, children and the youth to ascertain their needs, review problems and discuss follow-up.

■ Strategic Objective 2:

Redoubling the search for durable solutions by:

- Facilitating voluntary repatriation when conditions in countries of origin permit,
- Strengthening refugees' self-sufficiency and self-reliance leading to eventual local integration,
- Enhancing the use of resettlement as a strategic protection tool, durable solution, and burden and responsibility sharing mechanism,

■ Strategic Objective 3:

Strengthen local partnerships for protection and durable solutions through:

- Improved public information, public awareness, media relations and support towards capacity building of NGOs and other relevant actors,

- Promoting values of tolerance and respect for asylum seekers, refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR,
- Raising UNHCR's overall visibility and relevance,
- Expanding UNHCR's donor base and increasing contributions to UNHCR's programmes.

Part II: COMPREHENSIVE NEEDS AND PARTNERSHIP

1. Outcomes of joint planning and management of identified gaps

Given the nature of the urban refugee and asylum seeker population especially in a large city like Cairo, it is not feasible to conduct an extensive needs assessment. However last year RO Cairo conducted ten participatory assessments with the refugee community to identify the needs and problem areas. The following broad needs were highlighted during the focus group discussions:

Self Reliance:

- Low Salary of many of the refugee jobs versus High Rent for local accommodation
- Employment opportunities should be expanded - current opportunities limited to Informal Sector
- Targeted Vocational Training should be linked to job opportunities.
- Small Business & Micro finance opportunities should be expanded.
- Language training in Arabic needed as many refugees do not speak local language.
- Gender role reversal: females currently get jobs easier than males, leaving men at home to deal with children and housework creating family problems.
- Income generation needed at the community level.

Education

- Advocacy for access to government schools.
- School enrolment & retention needs to be increased.
- Accreditation of school certificates. Refugee schools currently not accredited in Egypt.
- University level education. Currently limited to small number of DAFI scholarships.
- Adult education to be encouraged and assisted.
- Teachers training needs to be increased so that greater number of teachers are available to community.
- Dissemination of educational information to community should be increased.

Health Care

- Access to essential health care services needs to be strengthened.
- De- centralized medical and health care services to different areas in Cairo.
- Primary Health Care approach to be established with help of partners and community healthcare professionals.

- Accurate and wider information to the community on existing services.
- Psychosocial services network can be expanded.
- Substance abuse is becoming a growing concern that needs to be addressed together.
- Sexual Gender Based Violence referral system to be strengthened.

Protection needs

- Arbitrary detention by local authorities.
- Verbal harassment & physical abuse can be dealt with by effective and regular awareness raising between the host and the refugee population.
- Sexual Gender Based Violence (SGBV) referral network to be strengthened.
- Exploitation from employers needs to be addressed.
- Inter community conflict has increased and needs to be managed through dialogue
- Legal aid that can support in advocacy work for the refugees should be instituted.
- Helpline Services such as a hot line telephone to UNHCR needs to be instituted.
- Access to UNHCR office needs to be improved and user friendly environment engendered.

In view of the above identified needs, UNHCR and its partners have planned for the following interventions and follow-ups:

- Because refugees and asylum seekers have limited access to public services in terms of education, health, and vocational training, UNHCR through its implementing partners and in a community based approach is planning in 2007 to provide needed assistance in these areas. A small micro-credit program for refugees will be maintained. Although refugees do have the right to work, it is difficult to obtain a work permit and therefore work is limited to the informal sectors of the economy where only low paying jobs are available. The income earned from these jobs does not cover basic needs.
- UNHCR will seek to enhance the health care capacities of the implementing partners and at the same time allow for greater access of refugees and asylum seekers to government health care facilities.
- Prompt registration and issuance of identity cards would ensure that refugees and asylum seekers are protected against expulsion/detention.
- UNHCR will seek to establish a partnership with an NGO and/or a group of licensed lawyers in order to follow up on legal representation of persons of concern before the Egyptian courts and police. This will be done with close monitoring by UNHCR to ensure due process.
- As refugees and asylum seekers face from time to time harassment by the local population, UNHCR needs to promote awareness raising about their situation.
- To address incidents of SGBV occasionally reported to UNHCR, legal, social and medical assistance to SGBV survivors is needed.

- There are few NGOs assisting refugees and they are in need of greater capacity and resources. Therefore, UNHCR will seek to support and build the capacity of these NGOs.
- There are a number of refugees, e.g. Somalis, for whom return home is unlikely soon. Durable solutions in terms of local integration or resettlement will need to be identified.
- UNHCR will increase its accessibility to refugees and asylum seekers to meet their needs. The current premises does not allow for the proper reception of refugees and asylum seekers and UNHCR is planning to relocate to a new more secure and refugee friendly office.

2. Comprehensive needs and contributions

The total population of concern to UNHCR at the end of 2007 is estimated at around 46,700. Charity organizations will continue to focus primarily on assistance to those who will not be assisted by UNHCR (mainly unsuccessful refugee applicants).

UNHCR Cairo estimates that the assistance needs for refugees and asylum-seekers in 2007 will amount to some US\$ 6 million of which the office is requesting a total budget of US\$ 3.6 million. UNHCR will try to address some of the gaps by encouraging and supporting refugee assisting NGOs to seek funding support of potential donors. UNHCR will try to raise locally additional funds from potential donor organisations (e.g. European Commission) to help reduce the gaps and address priority needs. In addition, UNHCR will continue its advocacy efforts with the Government of Egypt to facilitate refugee access to the national health and educational programmes. Still there will be significant unmet needs.

The Government of Egypt does not provide financial support to the refugee program in Egypt. The Government's contribution has focused on territorial protection by issuing a six month renewable residency stamp on UNHCR Blue (refugee) and Yellow (asylum seeker) cards. This allows refugees and asylum seekers to legally stay in Egypt. UNHCR will work to broaden the scope of support provided to refugees by the Government of Egypt in the areas of education, health and medical care. Despite RO Cairo's best efforts, the Government of Egypt has not been willing so far to become more involved in the assistance programs for refugees and asylum seekers.

3. Implementation and Cooperation

3.1 UNHCR Cairo

Pending high level negotiation between UNHCR and the Government of Egypt to redefine UNHCR's role in Egypt, RO Cairo will continue its direct implementation of the following activities: registration of asylum seekers, refugee status determination and issuance of ID cards for refugees and asylum-seekers; protection training of Government officials, judges, NGO personnel and journalists; resettlement processing; identification of sustainable self-reliance activities; and public awareness information and education.

3.2 Implementing Partners

In 2007, Caritas Egypt will be responsible for assessing the needs of refugees and providing assistance, health care and community services in support of self-sufficiency and self-reliance within a community-based approach as well as vocational training in the areas of sewing, carpentry, car and electrical repair.

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) will be responsible for the education sector for refugee and asylum seeker children. It is planned that CRS will assist some 5000 refugee and asylum seekers students with education grants.

Refuge Egypt will be responsible for counseling and medical assistance for pregnant refugee women, victims of torture and TB cases.

The Refugee Ministry (church) of St. Andrews and All Saints Cathedral will provide individual education assistance to refugee children who are not able to enroll in Government or special refugee schools. English language courses will continue to be provided for adult refugees by St. Andrews.

El Mobadra will be responsible for managing a revolving loan fund to help refugees with small business development. El Mobadra opened a new office in Ard El Lawaa at the beginning of 2005 to serve the refugees residing in this area.

Family Planning Association will continue to provide basic health education and information on reproductive health.

The United Nations Volunteer (UNV) programme managed by UNDP Egypt will continue to recruit UNVs (in the absence of essential regular posts) to provide support in a number of crucially important areas: refugee status determination interviewing, identification of resettlement needs, family reunification processing, registration and documentation, country of origin and legal research and protection monitoring.

3.3 Operational Partners

Musadeen will continue to co-operate with UNHCR in the areas of psycho-social care of refugees and asylum seekers and help UNHCR in facilitating identification of SGBV cases and assisting on the care and support of unaccompanied minors and separated children.

Sacred Heart Church will continue to run the special refugee schools that have been in operation for many years now. It will also continue to provide assistance to needy asylum seekers and displaced persons. The Sacred Heart Church acts as a focal point for the Sudanese refugee and asylum seeker community and as such is an important venue for any assistance operation.

SOS Kinderdorf will provide assistance to separated refugee children.

4. Co-ordination Strategy

UNHCR meets regularly with the implementing and operational partners both on an ad hoc basis and within the context of specialized meetings. The bi-monthly interagency meeting, chaired by UNHCR will continue. Regular briefings will be also organized, as in the past, for selected embassies on issues of interest such as resettlement.

During 2005, UNHCR provided support to six community based associations to help them build their capacity through training and material assistance (such as stationary and other supplies). These community based associations will serve as the basis for RO Cairo's expanded community out-reach activities which will better enable the refugee community to serve its own needs.

5. Cooperation within the UN System and Other Agencies

The scope of the operational cooperation with other UN agencies is very limited as their programs are focused on areas outside of Cairo while UNHCR's assistance programmes are implemented in Cairo. Assistance to refugees is not included in the country programme of other UN agencies. Meanwhile, UNHCR has made increased efforts to ensure that refugee rights are addressed within the national agenda of the CCA/UNDAF and the Millennium Development Goals.

UNHCR will continue to participate in the UN Disaster Management Team and will work with UN specialized agencies such as WFP and UNICEF on issues related to provision of food to targeted refugee groups and health and nutrition of refugee children. UNHCR will continue to liaise with UNRWA on issues related to Palestinian refugees as appropriate.