

# Finding durable solutions

Millions of refugees around the world presently have no access to timely and durable solutions. The protection problems for refugees confined for many years in closed camps without freedom of movement or possibilities of achieving some degree of self-reliance are compounded by the absence of solutions in the longer term. Likewise, urban refugees suffer from social exclusion and live in precarious conditions in marginalized communities around big towns. Therefore, an important element of providing international protection to refugees and others of concern is to find durable solutions to their plight. In 2007, the search for durable solutions will focus on clear objectives and targets as part of comprehensive strategies to resolve protracted situations (Global Strategic Objective - GSO 3.2); promote the creation of conditions conducive for return and ensure sustainable reintegration (GSO 3.1); strengthen local integration as a durable solution (GSO 3.3); and increase the use of resettlement as a strategic protection tool, durable solution, and burden- and responsibility-sharing mechanism (GSO 3.4).

As part of its ongoing efforts to formulate comprehensive approaches to durable solutions, in 2006, UNHCR created a Solutions and Operations Support Section within the Division of International Protection Services, charged primarily with reviewing **protracted refugee situations** in consultation with Regional Bureaux. Of some 38 protracted situations worldwide, UNHCR will

review, in particular, the situation of Sudanese refugees in Cairo; the Afghan refugees in Tajikistan; the situation of refugees in camps in Nepal; the Myanmar refugees in Thailand and Bangladesh as well as, in Africa, the protracted situation of the Eritrean refugees in Sudan; Liberian refugees in West Africa; Angolan refugees in Zambia, Namibia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo; a Sierra Leonean residual refugee group in Liberia; and the Congolese refugees in Angola.

By the end of 2007, UNHCR aims to have put in place multi-year, comprehensive durable solutions strategies to resolve protracted refugee situations, developed in collaboration with relevant actors, which contemplate the strategic use of resettlement and local integration in all its operations dealing with protracted refugee situations (GSO 3.2.1). At the same time, UNHCR will promote refugee livelihoods whenever possible, and make self-reliance and empowerment a policy priority in situations where short-term solutions are not available, such as in Bangladesh, Gabon, Malaysia and Thailand.

The need to address the negative effects of the presence of large numbers of refugees in often remote and impoverished areas has been repeatedly discussed. In recent years, UNHCR has sought to promote the beneficial effects that a refugee population can bring to its hosts, for example, in terms of availability of basic services such as health, education and water, as well as attention and



Since January 2006, some 25,000 refugees have returned to the Democratic Republic of the Congo with UNHCR's assistance.  
UNHCR / J. Ose

funding from agencies involved in longer-term development. In addition, refugees often bring new skills and can make an important contribution to local development.

Through its **Development Assistance for Refugees (DAR)** approach, UNHCR has sought to address protracted refugee situations in an integrated manner, by promoting self-reliance for refugees pending durable solutions, and improving the quality of life for host communities. In Bangladesh, for example, a rural participatory assessment conducted in 2006 led to a joint UN proposal for community development opportunities in the Cox's Bazar area that will benefit the local population and refugees alike. DAR projects will be designed in Ecuador and Gabon in cooperation with other agencies.

Most refugees prefer to return home as soon as circumstances permit, generally when a conflict has ended, a degree of stability has been restored and basic infrastructure is being rebuilt. UNHCR encourages **voluntary repatriation** as the best solution for displaced people, providing it is safe and their reintegration is viable. The same can be said for the return of IDPs. In 2005, some 1.1 million refugees returned home. In 2007, it is expected that around one million refugees and 700,000 IDPs will return to their areas of origin, mainly in Afghanistan, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Lebanon, Uganda, Sudan and Iraq.

In any operation, the promotion of return comes only after minimum conditions are met and UNHCR is reassured that returnees will be safe. But even when peace and security have been restored in a country, voluntary return presents enormous challenges, not least the sustainability of returns. There is a strong need to address the transition between reconstruction and rehabilitation and long-term development in order to ensure that infrastructure is in place to allow returnees to rebuild their lives.

UNHCR, together with UNDP and other agencies in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Early Recovery Cluster, will support the initial reintegration of returnees, and partner with development agencies to ensure that the recovery and long-term development processes lead to sustainable return. It will also work with the UN Peacebuilding Commission and the Peacebuilding Support Office (to which it has seconded a staff member) and will be involved in its pilot programmes in Burundi and Sierra Leone. Furthermore, in 2007, UNHCR will focus on improving data collection and returnee monitoring to provide technically sound inputs to development and transition actors. However, several constraints, such as lack of resources for reintegration activities for returning refugees and IDPs, lack of expertise and strategic planning; difficulties in mainstreaming reintegration efforts into national transition and development plans; and difficulties in establishing partnerships with development agencies still need to be addressed.

UNHCR will reinforce its partnership with UNDP both at the global level and in some of the ongoing return and **reintegration** operations. By taking into account the lessons learned from the implementation of the "4Rs" (Repatriation, Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction) approach, and reviewing and drawing on the analysis of challenges and opportunities surrounding the existing collaboration, the two organizations will work closer together in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda to create conditions conducive for return and sustainable reintegration (GSO 3.1). UNHCR and UNDP will agree on practical options for proposed actions, and outline mechanisms for the implementation and monitoring stages. UNHCR aims to measure the progress made by returnees within a year of return, aiming at ensuring that they are self-reliant and that they are fully integrated into national and area recovery and development programmes (GSO, 3.1.1).

When voluntary repatriation is not possible, host States may opt to provide opportunities for the gradual integration of refugees. To that effect, UNHCR has developed a strategy for **Development through Local Integration** which, in a similar way to Development Assistance for Refugees, seeks to exploit the potential of refugees to contribute to the development of their host communities by creating economic opportunities for both. The Zambia Initiative (ZI) was a pioneering example of improving the self-reliance of refugees and providing support to the communities that hosted them. An external evaluation of the Zambia Initiative in 2006 recommended the closure of the first phase of the Initiative, a reorganization of the programme and the relaunch of a "ZI phase 2". A framework to clarify the goals, context and strategies of the Initiative will be developed and an umbrella created under which improved coordination of activities can take place. Finally, lessons identified by the reviewing team will be taken into consideration to improve the implementation of similar programmes in the future (GSO 3.2).

In other parts of the world, UNHCR will map the extent to which **local integration** can be utilized as a solution. UNHCR aims at increasing the number of countries allowing refugees to integrate locally (GSO 3.3.2) and at the inclusion of refugee-hosting areas in national development plans and strategies (especially in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers) and in UN common programming processes such as the Common Country Assessments and the UN Development Assistance Frameworks (GSO 3.3.1). Benchmarks will be developed to measure progress in achieving local integration and a catalogue of good practices will be prepared. In 2006, comprehensive durable solutions strategies, including those for local integration, were initiated in Belarus, Guinea, Liberia, the Republic of Moldova, Papua-New Guinea, Sierra Leone, Tajikistan and Ukraine. These initiatives will need further support in 2007. By adopting a holistic approach, UNHCR will seek ways to support local integration initiatives in

countries where voluntary repatriation is taking place, and to prioritize the operations that have already started through consultations with governments on local integration opportunities for residual populations. Based on decisions taken by the Task Force on Local Integration in Africa in 2006, governments and UNHCR offices in West and Southern Africa will be assisted to improve integration prospects of refugees in legal, social and economic areas and conclude discussions on the eventual integration of residual refugee populations.

According to two 2006 evaluations, UNHCR staff require training in the area of reintegration, local integration and livelihoods generation. In 2007, these areas will be incorporated into the operations and protection learning programmes as well as the protection thematic learning course on durable solutions offered to staff worldwide.

Following the High Commissioner's call to increase the use of **resettlement** by reinforcing and expanding

### Building entrepreneurial capacity for returnee women in Lumbala N'Guimbo, Angola

Self-reliance support provided in a country of asylum does not necessarily hamper the return of refugees, but is certainly a factor taken into account when deciding whether to repatriate or not, especially when no social structures are functioning in the areas of origin. Hence, UNHCR tries to make sure that refugees freely choose to return to their country and are gradually reintegrated into their former societies both socially and economically. In Angola, UNHCR has implemented a series of activities together with other agencies to make returns sustainable and bridge the gap before the emergence of more long-term development initiatives.



Residents of Lumbala N'Guimbo, themselves returnees, welcome new arrivals from Zambia. *IRIN*

Following the signing of the peace agreement between the Government and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), most Angolan refugees were eager to return home. However, landmines, impassable roads and a shortage of food, seeds and tools, as well as education and employment opportunities, prevented or discouraged many from making the journey immediately. Moreover, many refugees from eastern Angola were generously hosted by the Government of Zambia, where they were encouraged to practise the skills acquired through vocational training programmes and to engage in income-generating activities.

In Angola, UNHCR and ILO explored an innovative approach in the six destroyed communes of Lumbala N'Guimbo, to develop them and make it a place where women could come back to find economic opportunities. Already in March 2003, UNHCR had helped open a Community Development Centre in Lumbala N'Guimbo, six months before the organized repatriation started. Today, this centre is run by a women's group called Kukwava ("Bringing Women Together") and focuses mainly on women's socio-economic empowerment. Kukwava helps women to start activities such as dressmaking, making handicrafts and practicing horticulture or attending literacy classes. In addition, it also gathers women for sensitization campaigns on issues that affect the community such as domestic violence, HIV/AIDS and mine hazards, and creates innovative ways to address them.

Through the UNHCR-ILO cooperation, the ILO Women's Entrepreneurship Development and Gender Equality Team helped the Lumbala N'Guimbo Community Development Centre to empower women and thereby rehabilitate the region's economy. To this effect, a technical expert undertook an economic mapping exercise of the administrative area of Lumbala N'Guimbo and a capacity-building training for the women at the centre. The economic mapping brought to light capacities already existing among the population, and identified the kind of economic opportunities that could flourish in the region. The communities were then given practical advice on those income-generating activities with strong potential to succeed. Subsequently, training was given to assist women on how to start, run and manage individual businesses in a sustainable manner. The participants were, furthermore, exposed to the concept and advantages of association, and instructed on how to best structure the functions and overall management of the Community Development Centre, which is also used to promote the improvement of the condition of women, women's rights and gender equality and restore dignity.

This project is only one example of how partnerships can lead to the development of sustainable solutions for returning refugees. Further possibilities for collaboration are being explored with ILO and other partners in Angola and in other post-conflict situations to help the smooth transition from relief to development and to stabilize the condition of the populations.



Reconstruction in Lofa County, one of the most destroyed areas in Liberia. UNHCR / E. Compte Verdaguer

resettlement activities, a Resettlement Service was created in 2006. It aims to enhance outreach and communication with resettlement countries and other partners, as well as advocate resettlement in line with the *Agenda for Protection*.

In 2007, resettlement will continue to be used as a protection tool, a durable solution and a responsibility- and burden-sharing mechanism, as stated in UNHCR's Global Strategic Objective 3.4. It will be considered as part of comprehensive durable solution agreements, with emphasis on finding solutions in protracted refugee situations and making use of the Multilateral Framework of Understandings on Resettlement.

UNHCR will improve the quality of resettlement operations worldwide. Resettlement criteria for similar groups of refugees and procedures will be harmonized to improve global predictability and consistency of resettlement delivery. Resettlement-related family reunion procedures will also be reviewed. Regional resettlement hubs in Accra, Nairobi and Beirut will be consolidated and, where needed, similar structures will be established. Training on resettlement will be provided to UNHCR staff and partners.

Partnerships with governments, IOM and NGOs will be strengthened through the Annual Tripartite Consultations and the Working Group on Resettlement. The UNHCR-ICMC deployment scheme will continue to have a vital role in forging closer working relationships with NGOs and supporting field operations. Options for "regional resettlement transit facilities" will be explored with partners. Resettlement countries will be encouraged to support education and skills development in countries of asylum to upgrade refugees' potential for integration in resettlement countries.

Best practices will be collected and disseminated among all stakeholders to better manage refugees' expectations and misperceptions about resettlement. UNHCR will take stock of lessons learned and make more effective use of group resettlement. Culturally oriented pre-departure packages will be harmonized among resettlement countries.

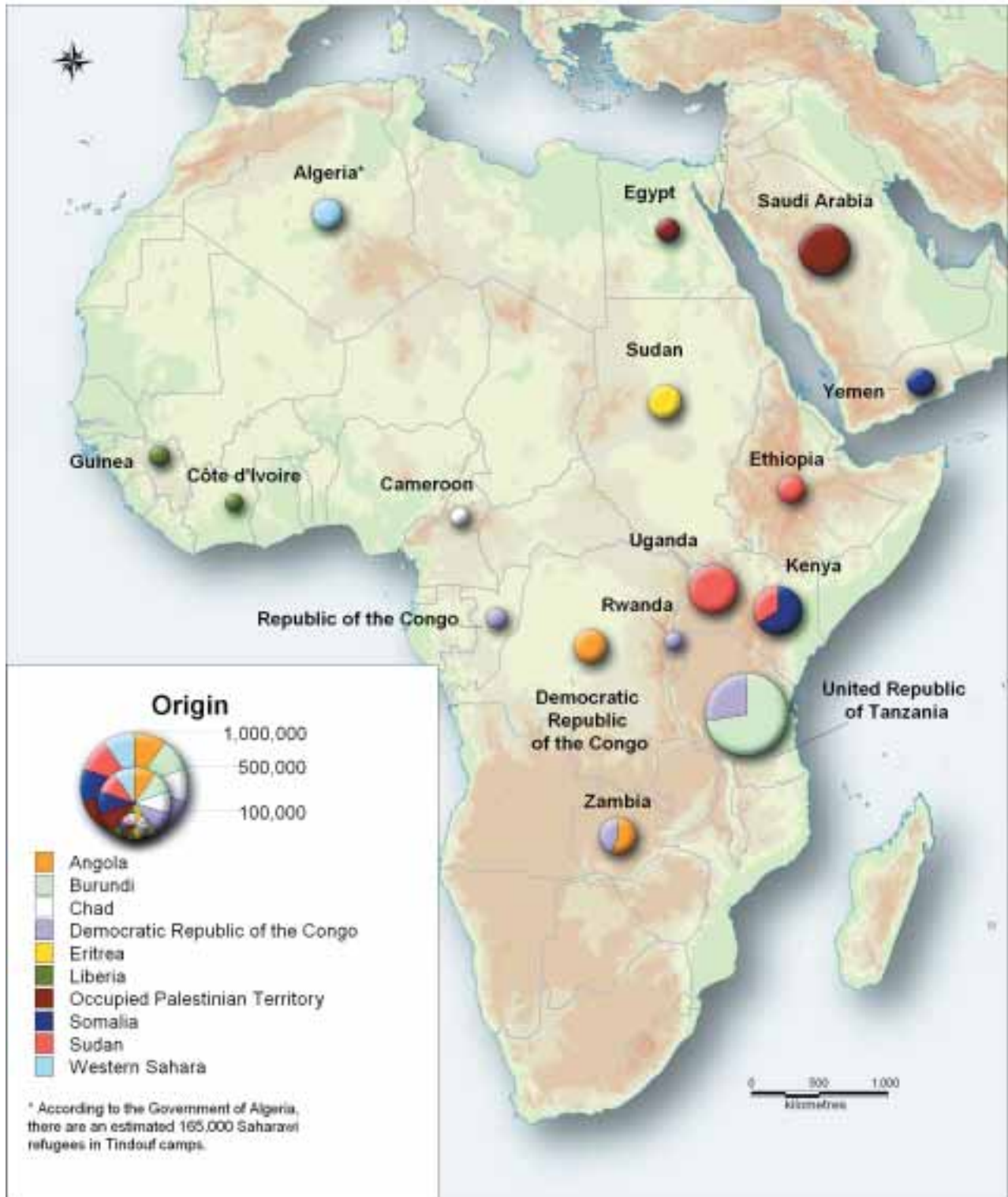
The Resettlement Service will prioritize efforts to improve the access of refugees to resettlement opportunities through active participation in operational and strategic planning activities such as participatory assessments and protection profiling methodologies – tools which assist gender, age and diversity mainstreaming and the identification of refugees, or groups of refugees, most in need for resettlement. The development of practical tools to improve identification and processing methods will assist UNHCR offices to engage resettlement in a more predictable and effective manner. The quality, consistency and efficiency of resettlement delivery will also be improved with the widespread use of the *proGres* database for registration purposes. This will dovetail with training initiatives and improvements in organizational understanding of the strategic use of resettlement and ways to mitigate risks whilst providing resettlement in a comprehensive and proactive way.

Managing risks to ensure the integrity of resettlement will be a priority in 2007. This will involve the implementation of the UNHCR Resettlement Anti-Fraud Plan of Action to specifically upgrade field offices' capacity to mitigate fraud in the resettlement process. Simultaneously, offices' procedures will be systematized through the application of global baseline standard operating procedures on resettlement.

Furthermore, support and advice will be provided in relation to UNHCR's mandate, legal standards and policy aspects of the organization's engagement with IDPs to strengthen operational involvement as the leading agency in the Protection Cluster.

## Protracted refugee situations in countries of asylum, by origin

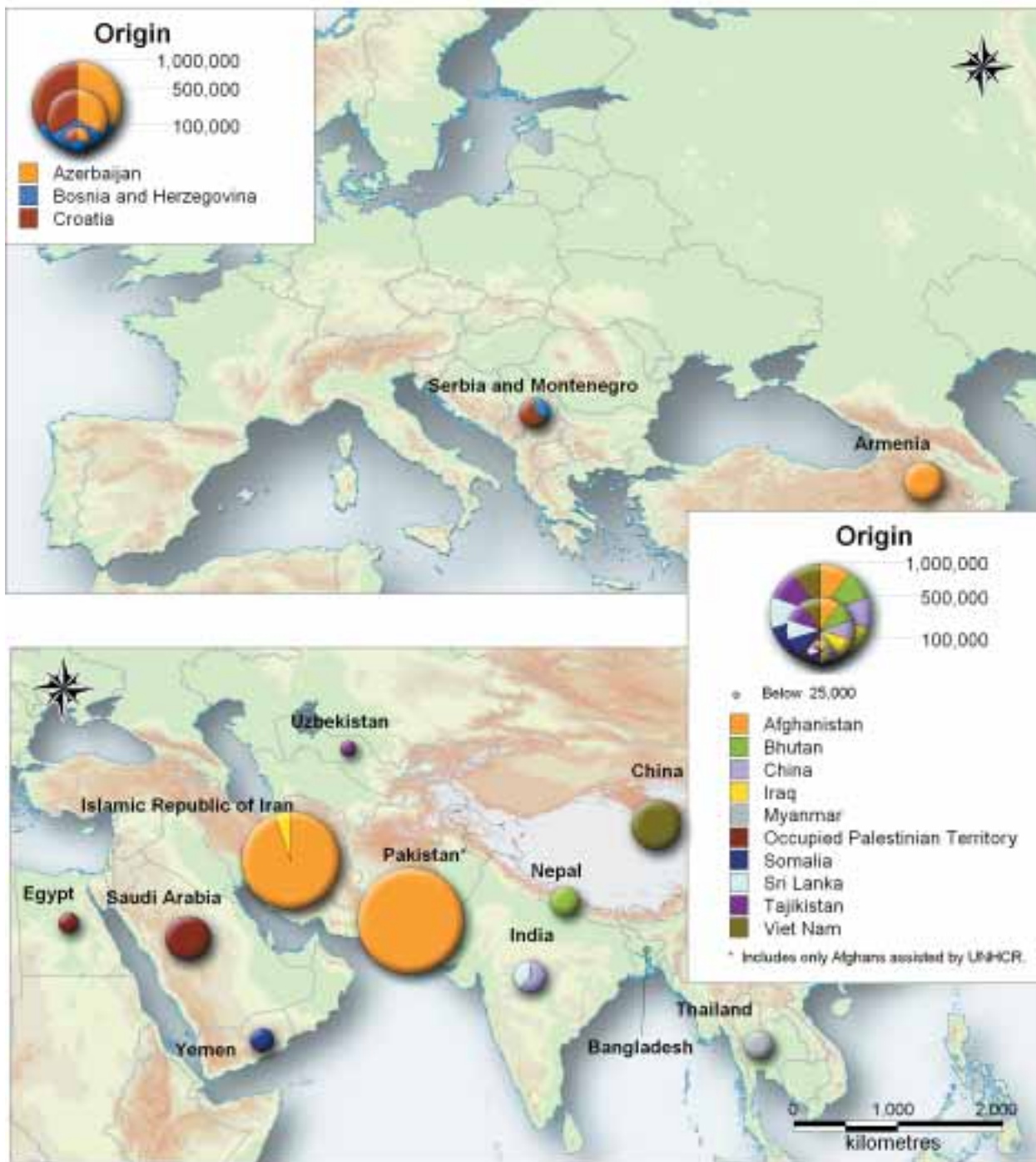
As at 1 January 2006



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

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