

Internally displaced persons return to their homes in the Swat Valley, Pakistan, in a Government-organized return programme.



# *Finding* Durable Solutions

**T**he millions of refugees and IDPs worldwide who have been waiting for years for a solution to their plight will see no improvement in their lot without international cooperation and support. It is a primary aim of UNHCR to garner that support in order to implement more effectively the three traditional durable solutions for refugees: voluntary repatriation, resettlement and local integration. In line with Executive Committee Conclusion No.109 (LXI), the High Commissioner's Special Initiative on Protracted Refugee Situations, and the Global Plan of Action on Protracted Situations, the year 2011 will see

UNHCR redouble its efforts to find and facilitate durable solutions for those in need of them.

Protracted refugee situations continue to be a central policy priority for UNHCR. Some 5.7 million refugees worldwide have been in exile for more than five years, including Afghan refugees in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan, Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, Bosnian and Croatian refugees in Serbia, Burundian refugees in the United Republic of Tanzania and Eritrean refugees in eastern Sudan. To improve conditions in these and other protracted situations, UNHCR is reviewing existing statistics and plans, and will develop specific strategies to

strengthen the refugees' self-reliance, education and development in broader collaboration with local contact groups of donors and partners. These groups will also assist in efforts to increase support for voluntary repatriation, resettlement and local integration.

Evaluations of UNHCR's programmes in Bangladesh, eastern Sudan, Serbia and the United Republic of Tanzania undertaken in 2010 serve to assess progress in finding solutions for refugees in these countries and identify best practices which could be replicated elsewhere. UNHCR will adjust its country programmes in accordance with the findings of these reviews.

In line with the High Commissioner's 2009 Dialogue on Protection Challenges, and with UNHCR's new policy on refugees in urban areas, increased activities are under way to enable refugees in such areas to benefit from equal and timely access to durable solutions. They include measures to facilitate their access to income-generating activities, which play a vital role in preparing them for durable solutions. All programmes take age, gender and diversity issues into account. Key pilot operations in urban areas will be evaluated in order to assess their impact. Finally, in collaboration with the Representative of the Secretary-General on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), UNHCR has initiated an inter-agency process designed to achieve a more equitable provision of protection and assistance to IDPs living outside camps, both in urban and rural areas. This will cover the specific durable solutions needs of IDPs, notably local integration. As part of this process, in 2010, UNHCR has participated in the revision and piloting of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's *Framework on Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons*.

## VOLUNTARY RETURN AND REINTEGRATION

Returning home remains the most desirable durable solutions for the vast majority of refugees and IDPs. Throughout the world today, many refugees and IDPs are considering if and when they can return home, basing their decisions mainly on security considerations and the chances of reintegration in areas of return.

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UNHCR's principal protection concern is to ensure that return movements are based on the voluntary decisions of individuals. UNHCR estimates that more than 1 million IDPs and more than half a million refugees

will decide to return home in 2011. They will require increased activities to facilitate this return and subsequent reintegration.

It is anticipated that most of the refugee returns in 2011 will be to Afghanistan, Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Iraq and Southern Sudan. UNHCR has also started preparations to invoke at the end of 2011 the "ceased circumstances" cessation clause contained in Article 1C(5) of the 1951 Refugee Convention for Angolan, Burundian, Liberian and Rwandan refugees. The related cessation processes are expected to boost voluntary repatriation movements to the countries concerned.

With regards to IDPs, communities in Pakistan that have been internally displaced as a result of floods in 2010 are expected to return to their home communities. Other IDP return movements are expected to continue in Chad, Colombia, the DRC, Iraq, Kenya, Somalia, Sri Lanka and Sudan in 2011.

Communities emerging from war often face insecure conditions, a lack of infrastructure, and slow rates of socio-economic recovery. Inadequate access to basic services in education, health and employment presents other challenges. Furthermore, the absence of mechanisms to address land and property issues can lead to renewed conflict in many returnee areas or limit the prospects of return altogether. Moreover, reintegration situations often involve diverse population groups. Apart from tensions arising from religious and ethnic differences, returnees may find themselves alongside people who are still displaced within the host communities.

While continuing to advocate for the rights of returnees, UNHCR will implement community-based reintegration projects, benefiting all groups, to promote and improve delivery of services, local economic revitalization, social integration, as well as capacity building of local authorities and communities to support durable solutions. UNHCR will also seek to promote peaceful coexistence within and among returnee, displaced and host populations, and develop new tools to assist these efforts.

UNHCR will continue to support peacebuilding programmes that promote sustainable reintegration, by implementing recommendations arising from a 2010 review on UNHCR's

The end of the civil war in Sri Lanka has allowed people to return to their homes in the northern districts.



UNHCR / D. SENEVIRATNE

## THE ABSENCE OF MECHANISMS TO ADDRESS LAND AND PROPERTY ISSUES CAN LEAD TO RENEWED CONFLICT IN MANY RETURNEE AREAS OR LIMIT THE PROSPECTS OF RETURN ALTOGETHER

engagement in the Peacebuilding Fund. These recommendations identify key lessons learned in Burundi, the Central African Republic and Liberia, highlighting specific areas where UNHCR can contribute to peacebuilding, both operationally and strategically.

To help ensure that reintegration is sustainable, UNHCR will continue to work with development agencies, and to participate in UN joint programming processes, such as UNDAF and the Delivering as One initiative. UNHCR also participates in the inter-agency early recovery cluster, where it has helped to develop a reintegration information management system. Close collaboration with the World Bank, UNDP and the Japan International Cooperation Agency on issues related to urban reintegration, development and displacement will continue in 2011.

### RESETTLEMENT

While the number of refugees in need of resettlement has grown in recent years, the availability of resettlement places has not kept pace. The number of those in need of resettlement rose from 560,000 in 2009 to some 747,000 in 2010, and is expected to rise even further, to over 805,000 in 2011. Within this group, some 233,000 are likely to face heightened protection risks. Yet resettlement countries offer only a total of some 80,000 places annually.

Assessing the growing numbers in need of resettlement reflects UNHCR's focus on multi-year planning, and its efforts to use resettlement strategically, as one of several new approaches to finding comprehensive solutions.

Resettlement is a labour-intensive activity. For 2010, all resettlement staffing needs have been included within UNHCR's budget, and this will

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continue in 2011, as resettlement is now recognized as an important and essential durable solution. UNHCR will continue to maintain the resettlement expert deployment scheme to cover surges in staffing demands, or other newly identified needs.

Key resettlement challenges for UNHCR in 2011 will include: (i) addressing unmet resettlement needs due to limited capacity both within UNHCR and among resettlement countries; (ii) ensuring that resettlement is used strategically, particularly in protracted refugee situations; and (iii) making certain that all resettlement programmes are needs-based, non-discriminatory and achieve sustainable solutions.

### **(i) Addressing unmet needs**

Over recent years, UNHCR has submitted increasing numbers of resettlement applications, surpassing the number of places made available by resettlement countries. In 2008, it submitted more than 121,000 refugees for consideration by resettlement countries—the highest number in 15 years. In 2009, a record number of over 128,000 people were referred for resettlement. In 2010, however, UNHCR expects to make only 90,000 to 100,000 referrals, thereby relieving some of the pressure on resettlement mechanisms at the country level.

UNHCR is also placing more emphasis on resettling particularly vulnerable refugees, such as women and girls. In 2008, resettlement submissions for women grew by 42 per cent compared to the previous year. In 2009, women at risk comprised 8.7 per cent of all cases referred for resettlement.

Clearly, any increase in resettlement referrals calls for a corresponding increase in resettlement places. In this context, UNHCR is also concerned that

many resettlement countries do not fill their quotas, which means that resettlement arrivals often fall short of programme targets.

There are encouraging signs, however, that more States in Latin America and Europe are contemplating becoming resettlement countries. The Czech Republic, for example, accepted some people from Myanmar in 2008 and again in 2009. Japan has begun a resettlement programme in 2010, as has Romania. Bulgaria, Poland and Spain all hope to begin resettlement programmes in 2011. There has also been encouraging progress towards developing a common resettlement initiative by the European Union. A joint EU mission to the Middle East led to a recommendation that EU Member States accept up to 10,000 refugees for resettlement – a recommendation yet to be fully implemented.

The gap between resettlement needs in 2011 and UNHCR's expected capacity to meet them is significant. Of the 233,000 persons expected to urgently need resettlement in 2011, UNHCR estimates that it will be able to refer 133,000, notably by using simplified and faster procedures. UNHCR will also prioritize emergency cases, individuals with medical needs and women with protection risks.

### **(ii) Strategic use of resettlement in protracted refugee situations**

The Office continues to encourage countries to implement multi-year plans to enhance flexibility and predictability in resettlement. Such an approach is more cost-effective in protracted refugee situations. Resettlement countries will also be encouraged to use resources and capabilities developed in resettlement programmes for strengthening refugee status determination and reception systems and procedures.

To mitigate the risk of onward and irregular movements by asylum-seekers and refugees, UNHCR will provide protection and search for durable solutions, such as resettlement, at the earliest possible stage of displacement and in the country of first asylum.

**(iii) Ensuring resettlement programmes are fair and needs-based**

The success of resettlement lies not only in numbers, but also in the way those resettled are selected, received and supported in becoming full members of their new communities.

UNHCR will continue to encourage resettlement countries to refrain from using discriminatory criteria, such as family size, age, health status, ethnicity and religion when selecting refugees for resettlement. Such practices create inequalities and protection gaps, and reduce the access to resettlement of some refugees who are most at risk.

**LOCAL INTEGRATION**

UNHCR is confident that in 2011, more countries will embrace and support local integration as a durable solution for both refugees and IDPs. The Office will continue to raise awareness among refugee-hosting countries about the many positive aspects related to local integration and finding lasting solutions for the displaced. In addition, it will build upon lessons learned from a joint NGO and inter-agency seminar on local integration in situations of protracted internal displacement.

In Africa, UNHCR will continue to implement projects in close consultation with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), UN country teams and other partners, to ensure the economic, social and legal integration of Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees remaining in the region. In 2011, UNHCR will continue to support the integration of some 160,000 newly naturalized Burundian refugees who arrived in the United Republic of Tanzania in 1972 and have been living in the so-called Old Settlements.

In Europe, UNHCR works with governments to expand local integration

opportunities for refugees. For instance, efforts will be accelerated in 2011 to find durable solutions for Bosnian and Croatian refugees in Serbia, where local integration represents a real possibility for most.

In Central Europe, UNHCR will use its *Agenda for the Integration of Refugees in Central Europe*, presented in February 2010, as a framework to work towards the legal, economic and socio-cultural integration of refugees. Measures will include strengthened partnerships among key stakeholders; needs assessments and targeted integration measures; participatory and community development approaches; and vocational training and the development of basic skills. The Agenda also calls for advocacy for a secure legal status and equal access to rights, including safe, secure and affordable housing; strategies and programmes to facilitate refugee self-reliance and access to meaningful employment; and advocacy for refugee education and language learning as a path to independence and self-reliance.

Host governments in all regions will be assisted to implement local integration programmes, in collaboration with other relevant stakeholders. UNHCR will provide targeted assistance and support to refugees in urban areas and support initiatives for local integration in urban contexts. In Latin America, UNHCR will increase vocational training, housing schemes and microcredit projects to aid local integration efforts.

Field operations will be assisted in conducting assessments, devising strategies and implementing livelihoods schemes, and the capacity of UNHCR and partner staff will be strengthened through training. Handbooks, guidelines and other tools will be developed, updated and revised to reflect current challenges in field operations. Furthermore, in 2011, UNHCR will facilitate the deployment of experts working on coexistence and other issues related to host communities and conduct workshops and training sessions in support of sustainable local integration. ■