IRIN WEB SPECIAL

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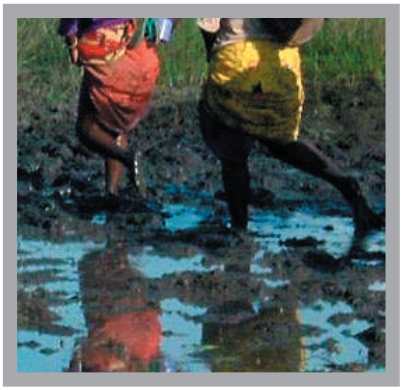
The Long Journey Home:

an IRIN Web Special on the challenge of refugee return and reintegration



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inside this issue

1. Contents - Lead article and introduction

Refugee Return and Reintegration. How Good Is Home?

An estimated 3.5 million afghan refugees have returned home since 2001, only to face the challenge of rebuilding their lives and country. Credit: IRIN

In the hearts and minds of uprooted people, the power and mystique of the word 'home' inspire the greatest efforts to return. However, there are times when the reality of home and the initial euphoria of going back sour and turn to frustration as families struggle to reintegrate into societies ravaged by war and social dislocation.

They might even have to retrace their steps. An aid worker managing a reception centre in Angola - Martin Catongo - told IRIN, "Some of the returnees may have to go back to Zambia because they won't be supplied with food and they won't have enough to eat. There is a risk that they will become refugees again - not because of war, but because of hunger".

In most cases returnees do not have the choice of becoming refugees again, and for economic and political reasons have to survive and rebuild their lives in their homeland - whatever its condition.

IRIN's new Web Special on Return and Reintegration outlines the difficulties facing millions of uprooted people worldwide as they return home.

Uprooted Millions

In most cases people flee because of conflict and severe social disruption. Those who survive the violence and upheaval have been ripped from their homes and forced to seek refuge in neighbouring countries. Most refugees find asylum in a country as poor as the one they left, whose communities struggle to absorb the burden that destitute incoming populations place on them. Once in their country of asylum, most refugees are entirely dependent on external assistance.

For those uprooted from their homes but who do not cross their national borders - internally displaced persons (IDPs) - assistance is more ambiguous. IDPs fall between the cracks of international law and are not protected and assisted under the original mandate of the office for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The Global IDP Project of the Norwegian Refugee Council estimated in 2004 that there are currently over 25 million internally displaced people in the world - more than double the number of refugees. Hundreds of thousands of Tsunami victims have also recently been displaced but despite their number they do not alter the overall ration of refugees to IDPs.

Dennis McNamara, head of the UN's Internal Displacement Division (IDD), told IRIN they thought the real number was higher. "Globally, we estimate approximately 25 million IDPs have been created from conflict and violence, and probably another 25 to 30 million through natural disasters, including the current tsunami."

The numbers of refugees and IDPs repeatedly being created by political violence and armed conflict, and the extent to which they remain dependent on assistance before and after returning home, are of grave humanitarian concern.

According to the UNHCR, the average duration of a major refugee situation increased from nine years in 1993 to 17 years in 2003. The agency describes the consequences of these protracted refugee situations as "wasted lives, squandered resources and future problems, in terms of potential security risks".

The sheer number of refugees and IDPs in the global sea of uprooted people is as sobering as the movements and dispersal of these populations are complex. Collecting data on refugees and IDPs is as statistically difficult as it is political. Unresolved discussions concerning the actual definition of IDPs mean different agencies arrive at different totals, while the definition of refugees is clearer. Currently, UNHCR has identified approximately 9.7 million refugees, according to its published reports of September 2004.

Landmines are a major impediment to the return of refugees to post-conflict areas like Angola. Credit: IRIN

A new era of return?

With refugee statistics indicating widespread repatriation and a reduction in the global refugee population for two consecutive years, international organisations are applauding a turning of the tide and a new era of return. Around the world, and particularly in Africa, millions of refugees and internally displaced people are going home; but they return to very uncertain futures.

When discussing refugee return in Burundi, the Chief of Staff in the Ministry of Reinsertion and Reinstallation of the Displaced told IRIN "repatriation is a process every Burundian supports, which is to say that refugees who return are warmly greeted". Even if this is the case in Burundi, it is not true for other countries, where returnees, already hampered by a serious lack of resources and options, face enormous difficulties in obtaining land and access to services. Acceptance by local communities is often complicated by prejudice and jealousy.

In March 2004 a United Nations-sponsored

international conference in Geneva met to discuss how to provide a sustainable and durable homecoming for the millions of refugees returning in what was heralded as an "unprecedented number" of new repatriation situations, created by the cessation of conflict in different parts of Africa. Elsewhere, especially in Afghanistan, favourable conditions for return have allowed 3.5 million refugees in that country alone to go home since 2001.

According to the UNHCR's categories of people 'of concern' - and therefore eligible for assistance - the number of uprooted persons fell by 17 percent to 17.1 million in 2003. This is the lowest figure in a decade, and reflects not only increased international efforts to find solutions for uprooted people, but also an end to some of the world's longest conflicts.

The downward trend continued in 2004. With the signing of a peace agreement for south Sudan and the continued flow of returnees in Angola and Afghanistan, refugee-focused agencies are predicting that the numbers for 2005 could be equally good.

UNHCR is still negotiating the assistance of IDPs. As long as they remain within their country's borders they are not refugees, and therefore not officially afforded the same protection or assistance that refugees are entitled to. Nevertheless, UNHCR said it had assisted approximately 4.4 million of the estimated of 25 million IDPs worldwide during 2004. This January Ruud Lubbers, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, told IRIN, "I won't say that UNHCR, with fewer refugees, should simply take care of IDP questions … we are assisting about five million IDPs now. I imagine we could do more, gradually, in terms of IDPs ..."

Although more than 550 refugee-focused non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other partner agencies assist UNHCR in fulfilling its mandate, it remains the guardian of the refugee convention (1951), and the driving force in developing international refugee law and operational policy.


Afghans, as many returnees around the world, often face insecurity and uncertainty upon returning home.
Credit: IRIN

Those working to assist refugees have been wrestling for over a decade with the question of where the responsibilities of the UNHCR and its partners stop in relation to ensuring a safe, dignified return for refugees. How good is home to return to when conditions there may be neither safe nor dignified, and how responsible are those facilitating and encouraging repatriation for improving those conditions?

Many displacement analysts welcome the recent trend in refugee figures, but their optimism is tempered by the still high overall numbers of uprooted people. Ken Bacon, director of Refugees International, feels that many of the changes are occurring as much by chance than specific design. He argues that political changes in Afghanistan would "not have happened without [the attacks on the US of] 9/11". In the case of Angola, Bacon thinks it was "almost accidental" that the leader of UNITA, the Angolan rebel group, was killed and in the subsequent implosion of the rebel movement, peace was secured. He pointed out to IRIN that "there is no magic formula or tool kit. The international community haven't given the European Union, the US or the UN a blueprint on how to make sure people - refugees and IDPs - return."

Almost all refugees flee from the "flames of war", as Lubbers recently described the chaos that creates refugees. In most cases, their flight takes them to countries of asylum as poor as the one they left, where they immediately become dependent on international assistance in the bleak environments of refugee camps. When the political and security situation eventually allows them to return home, they normally encounter ruined property and infrastructure, with a severe lack of health, sanitation and education services. Without livestock, tools or seeds, and reduced employment options, they immediately fall into a cycle of debilitating poverty. Their governments, already hard pressed to meet many of the basic needs of their populations, have limited ability and often little interest in giving hundreds of thousand of returnees special treatment.

Whether from northern Sri Lanka, western Afghanistan, southern Sudan, eastern Angola or northern Liberia, returning refugees list the same deprivations and frustrations. However difficult camp life was in their country of asylum, they were not prepared for the conditions they faced on return: destitution and landlessness and, all too frequently, physical insecurity from a hostile local community, continued internal conflicts and increased lawlessness. In many areas there is also a high threat of uncleared landmines.

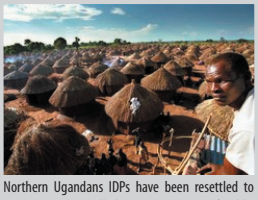
Returnees often go back to find the very conditions that spawned conflict in the first place, and observers are increasingly seeing the need for reintegration and rehabilitation in returnee areas as crucial interventions for building peace and preventing further conflict.

According to Bacon of Refugees International, the need to assist returnees is both urgent and practical. "Not only is it humanitarian but it's cost-efficient when you think of the destruction and endless crises and costs that arise from conflict." He cites World Bank studies that have shown that it is far cheaper to help refugees rebuild their lives than to abandon them in a situation that may well result in instability and renewed conflict.

The assistance impasse

For years those involved in assisting refugees to return have recognised that their responsibility has to go beyond facilitating their journey home. Refugee agencies continually advocate for the support of

returnees and are engaged in numerous short- and medium-term programmes to support returnee families as they reintegrate. But the support of returnees, and the rationale and expectations that accompany it, reach an inevitable impasse in terms of what they are able to realistically achieve. A reality gap can be created quickly as rhetoric is easier than hard result on the ground.


Northern Ugandans IDPs have been resettled to government-controlled camps, sometimes forcibly, in the face of the ongoing civil conflict.
Credit: IRIN

In most countries, what the returnees need is exactly what the rest of the population lacks. There is generally a widespread need for the rehabilitation and recovery of a war-shattered economy, an eviscerated infrastructure and core community services - nothing less than development and prosperity.

This is the vision of all humanitarian and development work, and the elusive objective of governments and aid agencies. By calling for maximum support to returning refugees, the UNHCR and other agencies are effectively requesting a commitment to transformation that is huge is scope and beyond the responsibility of refugee agencies alone.

Wider co-operation for wider ambitions

Parts of West Africa and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) illustrate starkly the difficulties of maintaining stable post-conflict situations, with displaced and demobilised people returning home to devastation and an absence of hope for reconstruction and recovery.

The driving forces behind international initiatives to find durable and sustainable solutions for uprooted persons are not only the humanitarian imperative but also the risk of a cycle of displacement after return. The UNHCR has taken a lead in developing comprehensive plans of action (known as CPAs) for specific refugee situations, to ensure that the sociopolitical and economic aspects of each situation are examined as solutions are sought.

The programme profiles and budgets of UNHCR, and numerous international non-government agencies, illustrate that experts recognise the crucial importance of investing in local areas if stability is to be given a chance. The '4 Rs' programme (Repatriation, Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction) developed by UNHCR seeks to ensure durable solutions by tying its work closely to that of other major international agencies (World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme, UN country teams and others), allowing an integrated strategy.

This relatively new collaborative approach is underway in Sierra Leone, Eritrea and northwest Somalia, and will soon be operational in Angola and Liberia. It remains to be seen whether this will solve the long-term needs of millions of refugees and IDPs as they try to rebuild their lives.

Windows of opportunity may be opening for some of the millions of uprooted, displaced people, affording them the chance to return home. Many of those fortunate enough to be considering return will be soon asking, 'How good is home?' as they struggle to survive and prosper.

This web special has gathered reports from around the world, to illustrate the challenges facing both returnees and those trying to help them. The interviews and feature articles highlight the endeavours of individuals in countries such as Pakistan, Liberia, Angola and Lebanon, the DRC, Iraq and many other nations, where the choices are limited, conditions are bleak, and the process of returning home does not always have a happy ending.

It also seeks to emphasise the importance of clearly defining the needs of IDPs, and recognise their long-neglected status in terms of legal protection and assistance.

2. Feature articles

Making room under the umbrella: the legal framework of forced migration

One of the challenges of returned refugees is to confront an uncertain future in their homeland without the minimum resources to start rebuilding their lives.
Credit: IRIN

International refugee law first saw the light of day on 28 July 1951, when the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees was adopted. Never before had civilians uprooted by man-made disasters been considered in need of protection by a special branch of law.

The aftermath of World War II called the world's attention to a new phenomenon: the mass displacement of persons fleeing conflicts and political crises. For the first time, forced migrants were legally identified as 'refugees' and their plight taken into account by what would later be called the 'international community'.

Treaties dealing with refugee law are instrumental in binding states to their obligations concerning forced migrants. The principles contained in the legal framework covering forced migrations, first established in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the four Geneva Conventions of 1949, have been substantially enlarged since then.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was created in 1950 by the UN General Assembly and mandated to help resettle 1.2 million European refugees displaced by World War II. Its mandate to protect and find durable solutions for refugees now covers the entire globe.

The 1967 Protocol of the UN relating to the Status of Refugees expanded the earlier definitions to bring greater protection to migrants worldwide, continuing the trend to enlarge the category of persons defined by UNHCR as 'people of concern'.

However, in recognition of the need to clarify responsibilities and fill legal gaps in the protection of refugees as well as internally displaced persons (IDPs), additional treaties specifying states' obligations have been developed.

The recognition of IDPs as the largest and fastest growing category of uprooted people is relatively recent. Dennis McNamara, director of the Inter-Agency Internal Displacement Division, which coordinates the UN's response to IDP crises, estimates that "25 million IDPs have been created from conflict and violence, and probably another 25 to 30 million through natural disasters, including the current tsunami". Of those, 5.3 million IDPs - only a tenth - are covered by UNHCR.

In comparison, the global figure for refugees is declining, with UNHCR giving the figure of 9.7 million refugees of concern to its mandate for 2004, dropping almost 10 percent from 10.6 million in 2003.

These developments and changes in the global profile of refugees and uprooted people have led to calls for adjustments to the legal framework governing forced migration.

Defining 'persons of concern'

In the words of the 1951 Convention, a refugee is someone who has a "well-founded fear of persecution because of his/her race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion; is outside his/her country of origin and is unable or unwilling to avail him/herself of the protection of that country, or to return there, for fear of persecution".

UNHCR is mandated to protect and provide material relief in major emergencies to refugees and other persons of concern. They are also required to find durable solutions for refugees and enable safe and dignified repatriation or resettlement for uprooted people.

These people include those "fleeing conflict or serious disturbances of the public order" - as defined by regional treaties such as the African Union Convention and the South American Cartagena Declaration - "returnees" (former refugees), "stateless persons" and, in some situations only, IDPs.

However, limitations apply.

In theory, a soldier cannot be a refugee. A refugee, by necessity, is a civilian. This specifically aims at excluding protection for groups that pursue armed actions against their country of origin from the country of asylum. However, this requirement is sometimes overlooked by states with an interest in given conflicts.

In some arid regions the refugees and IDP's are facing a desperate shortage of water.
Credit: IRIN

After invading and looting the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) town of Bukavu in June 2004, the Rwanda-backed faction leader, Jules Mutebutsi, crossed the border into neighbouring Rwanda, where he and 300 of his armed militiamen were granted refugee status. Legal normalities were discounted by Rwanda's interest in sheltering such armed groups operating in the DRC.

On the other hand, when the Rwandans poured over their eastern border into Zaire in 1994 they were all granted asylum by the host government and treated as refugees by the international community, despite the knowledge that thousands of genocidaires were among the refugees. Many of these genocidaires and

militia members immediately re-formed in the refugee camps, while officially protected by their status as refugees, notwithstanding continued complaints from the new leadership in Rwanda.

Specific cases may also constitute 'persons of concern': women who are subjected to harmful traditional practices, threatened due to their refusal to either wear restrictive clothing, or persecuted due to their desire to choose a spouse and live an independent life, may qualify for refugee status. The European Parliament determined in 1984 that women who face cruel or inhuman treatment because they seemed to transgress social codes - for instance, refusing to undergo female circumcision - may be considered refugees.

When UNHCR is faced with individuals who are not covered by the agency's mandate, it sometimes resorts to outside aid organisations. Emanuel Nyabera, spokesman for UNHCR's Kenya office, explained that "partnerships enable aid organisations to intervene where UNHCR cannot, as UNHCR can sometimes be limited by its mandate".

In Kenya, the 90,000-strong population of the Kakuma refugee camp has repeatedly clashed with the local Turkana community. In this arid region, resources are scarce and competition fierce for wood and water. In order to defuse tensions, UNHCR has had to team up with independent aid agencies, which care for the Turkana, whom UNHCR is not mandated to help.

Obligations under the conventions

UNHCR's position as a first responder to displacement crises makes it one of the most visible actors in the field of forced migrations. However, this must not cloud the responsibilities and actions of other entities just as heavily involved in the management of such crises.

States are often the first to be concerned with refugees, either because their population is fleeing the national territory or because they have to bear with an influx of refugees over their border.

States which sign the Refugee Convention are required to ensure their full cooperation with UNHCR "in the exercise of its functions and, in particular, to help UNHCR supervise the implementation of the provisions found in those treaties", and agree to "inform the UN Secretary-General about the laws and regulations they may adopt to ensure the application of the Convention".

Hosting states are always required to grant refugee status to foreigners who fulfil the Convention definition, regardless of how the refugee-producing country treats the host state's nationals. The notion of reciprocity of legal obligations between sovereign states does not apply to refugees.

A state, being a sovereign entity according to the UN charter of 1945, is not required by international law to allow foreigners onto its territory. Refugee law provides an exception to this, in that states may not return individuals who qualify for refugee status to the frontiers of territories where their life or freedom would be threatened.

This is the principle of 'non-refoulement', set out in the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol, as the international obligation not to return refugees to danger. The prohibition of forcible refugee returns applies to all countries, regardless of their level of economic development.

It implies that no repatriation can be undertaken forcibly - refugees must never be forced to go back home against their will.

Since the mid-1900s the countries hosting most refugees have been mainly in Central Asia and Africa - among the poorest regions on the globe. According to UNHCR figures for 2005, out of 17,083,916 refugees of concern, 8,730,337, or 51 percent, came from these regions. Refugees often add to the economic burden of states already striving to care for their nationals.

Economic imperatives have sometimes led to the premature adoption of 'cessation clauses', defined as the official proclamation that "the reasons for the person's fear of persecution in the country that the person left, or outside of which the person remained, cease to exist". When a cessation clause is adopted, officially declaring the end of the displacement crisis, the hosting state's obligations to refugees cease to apply.

In such cases, refugees may be compelled to return to their country of origin before the reasons for their seeking refuge have been eliminated, as the host country cannot or will not fend for them and refugees have no choice but to return, regardless of what is facing them.

Repatriation programmes depend on a tripartite agreement, signed between the two countries being assisted and UNHCR, to enable the agency's intervention in ensuring refugee protection before and during their repatriation. The decision to repatriate or not will be based on UNHCR's security assessments.

Despite a relative lull in the fighting in southern Sudan in 2004, Kitty McKinsey, of UNHCR's East Africa office, explained in June that "the conditions are not correct yet. We are waiting for the signature of a comprehensive peace agreement [signed on 9 January 2005] before discussing the Sudan-Kenya-UNHCR tripartite agreement. Only then will UNHCR be able to assist those who choose voluntary repatriation to South Sudan".

Many refugees do not wait for UNHCR's green light and decide to go home without UNHCR assistance. They are called 'spontaneous returnees', as opposed to 'assisted returnees', and do not benefit from the agency's help with transport or the rehabilitation of their location of origin.

According to UNHCR, during the first nine months of 2004 more than 700,000 refugees returned to Afghanistan, bringing the total number of returnees from Iran and Pakistan since March 2002 to some 3.5 million. Of those, more than a fifth (21 percent, or 823,440) was spontaneous.

Broadening the criteria of refugee protection

UNHCR is also mandated to assist states in fulfilling their obligations to uprooted populations. Despite claims to objectivity and universalism, legal texts stem from a historical context, as with the 1951 Convention, when the particular concern was post-World War II European refugees. International treaties relating to refugee law can therefore be specific to certain areas.

In 1969 the Organisation of African Unity - now the African Union - adopted its Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, aimed at the refugee caseloads resulting from African conflicts that erupted after the end of the colonial era. It broadened the definition of refugees to any person forced to leave a country because of "external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in either part or the whole of his country of origin or nationality". This lifts the obligation of individuals fleeing conflicts to prove a well-founded fear of persecution.

In the same spirit, the 1984 Cartagena Declaration adopted by Latin American governments offers an expanded, more objective criterion than the 1951 Convention, defining refugees as "persons who flee their countries because their lives, safety or freedom have been threatened by generalised violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, massive violation of human rights or other circumstances which have seriously disturbed public order".

IDPs: Falling through the net of migrant protection


Dennis McNamara director of the Inter-Agency Internal Displacement Division.
Credit: IRIN

IDPs are individuals who have fled their homes but remain on the national territory. They have long been the invisible victims of conflicts and disasters, falling through the legal net covering international forced migrations.

The UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement adopted in 1998 define IDPs as "persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognised state border".

There is no single agency in the UN system mandated to care for the internally displaced, but the UN's Inter-Agency Internal Displacement Division (IAIDD) was set up in July 2004 to "promote system-wide improvements in the response to the needs of the internally displaced people".

Although UNHCR is mandated to protect and care for refugees, its intervention on behalf of IDPs is limited by stringent conditions, including the consent of the state in which the IDPs are displaced.

Mass displacement often stems from civil conflicts, yet the permission of one of the parties at war must be sought to protect the very civilians it may often consider an enemy or part of a rebel movement.

The current conflict in the Darfur area of western Sudan is an illustration of this deadlock: in order to care for millions of civilians displaced by the fighting, UNHCR needs the approval of the Sudanese government, based in Khartoum, which many aid organisations accuse of supporting the militias preying on the same civilians.

One explanation is that countries with IDPs mostly see the issue as an internal matter - and what is perceived as interference from the international community is rarely welcome.

According to Dennis McNamara, current chief of the IDD, "IDPs don't get enough limelight, but the world is turning its attention more than ever towards [them]. The Guiding Principles recently developed for IDPs have been a huge contribution to refugee law and IDP protection, but what we don't have yet is [a] political agreement on how to deal with the IDP crisis".

Francis Deng, former representative of the UN Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons and a Sudanese national, described his approach when urging the Sudanese government to assist IDPs by saying, "National sovereignty must be respected, but sovereignty comes with responsibilities towards a population."

Sovereignty versus individualism

In the words of Ruud Lubbers, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "[The UNHCR's] main objective is repatriation". However, repatriation is not always the preferred choice of those affected.

Despite the peace agreements signed on 9 January 2005, refugees from southern Sudan - who still trickle into the refugee camps in Kenya at the rate of approximately one hundred persons a week, according to UNHCR data - do not necessarily share the view that repatriation suits them best.

John Tor is a southern Sudanese refugee in his early twenties. "When I finish secondary school, my last

option is to go to Australia for further studies there," he told IRIN in Nairobi, speaking for others whose primary concern is to get an education. Many Sudanese refugees equally think they have nothing to go home to and would rather resettle in another country. However, that implies legal permits, which are seldom granted.


The UNHCR's main objective is repatriation said Ruud Lubbers, UN High Commissioner for Refugees.
Credit: IRIN

Few doubt that repatriation is the preferred solution of the hosting state. The political and economic burden of a refugee caseload can be tremendous for developing countries, which receive the greatest number of forced migrants, and is often compounded by an age-old distrust of foreigners and increased competition for scarce economic resources. But UNHCR is sometimes not at liberty to promote alternative solutions to repatriation, such as local integration into the host country or resettlement to other countries.

Legal Ways forward

Despite a substantial and growing legal arsenal of agreements and treaties, protection of forced migrants can still be broadened. The Geneva-based Inter-Parliamentary Union's Committee on Parliamentary, Juridical and Human Rights Questions, one of the oldest such organisations, advocates that:

- the principle of non-refoulement should be incorporated in national legislation
- parliaments broaden the definition of refugees in national legislation to reflect that of the Organisation of African Unity (African Union) Convention and the Cartagena Declaration
- national legislators encourage cooperation with UNHCR.

The adoption of legal norms is only the first step towards effective protection of forced migrants, and by no means a guarantee of implementation or of being respected by signatories. It is essential to enforce actual, efficient protection of refugees by the state.

The solidarity displayed by Chadian nationals greeting Sudanese refugees fleeing Darfur at the beginning of the crisis illustrates that where there is the will, no one waits for laws to be passed.

Unfortunately, given the extent of this refugee crisis, the material means of such solidarity have long dried up and struggles over natural resources between the refugees and the host population have occurred. Proper refugee legislation can make such precious support to forced migrants more sustainable.

Refugee law continues to develop to cover the various and critical needs of displaced people. The social and political contexts in which displacement occurs, and the aspects of security demanded, continue to clash with issues of sovereignty, presenting huge challenges to those seeking to protect the rights and safety of refugees and, increasingly, IDPs.

A Home Far Away from Home: Third country resettlement of refugees


Somali Bantus going for resettlement to the US in Lokichoggio airport about 100 Km from Kakuma Camp, Kenya.
Credit: IRIN

Resettlement is the transfer of refugees to a country that is neither the migrant's country of origin nor the country where he or she sought refuge. Resettling refugees or internally displaced persons (IDPs) implies that a state is willing to transport (often for thousands of kilometres), greet, and facilitate the integration of foreigners in its territory.

Of the three solutions to forced displacement - repatriation to the home country, local integration in the host country, or resettlement in a third country - the last is the least practised.

The financial burden of such operations means that resettlement countries will most likely be Western nations, whose immigration policies have gradually become more restrictive since the end of the colonial era in the 1960s. Some countries are currently emerging as new resettlement destinations, among them Ireland, Iceland and Spain in Europe, and Chile, Brazil and Argentina in South America.

According to the UNHCR, the United Nations' refugee agency, nine governments currently host the bulk of people who are annually resettled in new countries: the United States, Canada, Australia, Sweden, Norway, Finland, New Zealand, Denmark and The Netherlands, in decreasing order. In 2003, African refugees continued to remain the largest caseload in UNHCR-assisted resettlement programmes (57 percent), followed by refugees from the Middle East (35 percent) and

Asia/Oceania (4 percent). A total of 28,255 refugees departed for resettlement in 2003, representing an increase of 34 percent compared to 2002 figures.

There are several explanations for the traditional reluctance of the West to open its borders to foreign refugees. Immigration policy - and therefore resettlement prospects for forced migrants - usually depends on domestic political issues. In the face of the economic crises of the 1970s, and the subsequent high unemployment rates in the West, immigration has become an electoral issue, often manipulated by populist politicians.


An entire family registered as refugees in Kakuma Camp, Kenya.
Credit: Justo Casal

Despite this, some Western nations operate a select policy of refugee resettlement. UNHCR figures for 2003 show that 55,520 refugees were resettled in the United States of America (51 percent), Australia (21 percent) and Canada (19 percent), accounting for more than 90 percent of resettlements.

Resettlement, the American way

The possibilities for resettlement in the US, offered to specific ethnic groups from sub-Saharan African countries by different American administrations, highlight the selective nature of such programmes.

The inhabitants of countries south of the Sahara sometimes see themselves as two diverse groups: "African of Arab descent" northerners, as opposed to "Black African" southerners. Although many argue that such a division is artificial, it has time and again been used for political purposes in Sahelian countries along the southern edge of the Sahara.

At the western end of the Sahara, after a border clash between nomadic Mauritanian pastoralists and Senegalese farmers in 1989, the Mauritanian "Arab" government expelled thousands of "Black Africans" from the Fulani ethnic group into Senegal.

In Somalia, at the eastern end of the same desert, Bantu Africans have for years been treated as slave labour, after being forcibly abducted from the coasts of what is now Mozambique and Tanzania.

West of Somalia in Sudan, violent civil war has pitched the "Arab" northerners, led by Khartoum, against the "Christian and Animist" southerners during most of the time since its independence in 1956.

Mauritanian Fulani, Somali Bantus and Sudanese Southerners have all been deemed eligible for resettlement programmes in the US.

Some US officials are privately candid that resettlement possibilities for designated groups are often the result of political choices. Christian and other specific interest groups and constituencies may lobby Congress and the administration of the day to grant protection to ethnic groups they deem to be persecuted.

The Department of State designates which groups of individuals and refugees are eligible for resettlement schemes. Criteria apply: the candidates for resettlement must be refugees (i.e., they have left their country of origin), demonstrate that they are being persecuted and unable or unwilling to go home, and cannot stay permanently in the host country, in this case, Kenya.

According to a long-time observer of American resettlement schemes, another reason explains the choice of these populations to benefit from resettlement. "It's simply supply and demand: as the influx of Bosnian refugees after the war in ex-Yugoslavia, and the influx of Jewish and Evangelical Christians from Eastern Europe eventually dried up after the end of the Cold War, the United States turned to other refugee-producing countries to fill their immigration quotas," he told IRIN.

Logistics of a new life

The resettlement of the Somali Bantus to the US is an illustrative case study of the complexity of the process.


Resettled refugees must adapt to the often very different culture of their new country.
Credit: Justo Casal

Somali Bantus Refugees started pouring into Kenya when the civil war in Somalia erupted in 1991. They were originally confined to the Daadab refugee camp in the arid north-eastern district of Garissa, which still shelters 138, 000 refugees today, according to the United Nations' World Food Programme (WFP). However, as they kept being persecuted by non-Bantu Somalis in Daadab, they were moved to Kakuma refugee camp in north-western Kenya.

In Kakuma the 15,000 Somali Bantus underwent identification and registration. Registration is made on the basis of physical features, as Somali Bantus supposedly have darker skins than other Somalis, and of the language spoken. Information is then cross-checked, with testimony from other Bantus confirming family ties and social relations, to flush out 'free-riders'.

Screening is conducted by American officials of the former Immigration and Naturalization Services, now the Department of Homeland Security.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM), an intergovernmental organization working with migrants and governments, implements the resettle-

ment scheme under a mandate from the American Department of State.

The entire resettlement process takes a couple of months from start to finish.

Somali Bantus are flown from Kakuma camp to Nairobi, the Kenyan capital. For most of them, this is the first time they have boarded a plane, and their eerie silence as they walk onto Lokichokio airport's tarmac (about 100 km from Kakuma camp) attests to their anxiety before the two-hour flight.

At the IOM offices in Nairobi, refugees undergo a medical check-up and are taken through the immigration paperwork. Their rights and obligations as resettled refugees in the United States are explained to them. Most sign their papers by dipping a thumb in ink while they are told that "khat" - the natural amphetamine traditionally chewed in Somalia - is an illegal narcotic in the US.

Children taking the resettlement option could have an identity conflict in their future as they leave their own culture but never really adapt to their new environment.
Credit: Justo Casal

Pindie Stephen, the Regional Cultural Orientation Coordinator for IOM, supervises the classroom sessions at a summer-camp-like barracks, flying an American flag and decorated with large maps of the world, where Somali Bantus are "culturally orientated".

In groups of about 10, refugees are taken through the basics of life in America, from using a freezer and a shower - which most refugees have never used before - to learning about American employment regulations and opportunities. According to Stephen, resettlement from Somalia and Kenyan refugee camps to the US is the cultural equivalent "of taking someone from the 18th century and catapulting him or her into the 21st century".

According to Stephen, the main challenges Somali Bantus face when arriving in the US are to learn to schedule their lives on an hourly basis, which can be quite stressful, and adjust to an urban environment. It takes most refugees a while to adapt to the contrast between the camps and American city life. For instance, they will be required by American law to supervise their children at all times, while in Kakuma children roam freely and play without much supervision.

The Somali Bantus are flown aboard commercial jets in groups of 30 to 40, escorted by personnel trained to help them cope with the shock of their first transcontinental flight, which costs USD 800 for each adult and around USD 100 per child. Resettled refugees are expected to pay this back once they are employed in the US.

A Somali Bantu in Dadaab Refugee Camp. She is next to be attended by UNHCR staff. The Bantus are being resettled to the U.S.A in order to have a decent life.
Credit: Justo Casal

Although they cannot choose their final destination in the US, refugees will preferably be located in areas where they can rely on family ties, for example where siblings have previously been resettled. The choice of location also depends on the facilitation offered by American resettlement agencies working in partnership with the government.

On arrival at their final destination, they are provided with furnished accommodation and food for 30 days, and enrolled in classes to learn English as a second language. All children are immediately registered in schools. "The kids will pick up the language faster than their parents, they will be the real success story," Stephen says.

During 2004, 15, 400 refugees were flown to the US. IOM estimates that the entire group of Somali Bantus will have been relocated by the end of 2005, and begin the real journey towards permanent integration in a new world.

Of the three solutions to forced displacement, resettlement is clearly the one option for which demand exceeds supply. It is the hardest and most costly durable solution to the plight of refugees, but is often the preferred way out of exile for refugees who have no home to return to.

Many refugees have little appreciation of the social, economic and psychological difficulties involved in adjusting to a western society. Children often have to face serious questions of personal identity, feeling neither entirely at home in Western culture, nor in that of their parents.

Internally displaced people and refugees: The neglected plight of IDPs


There are more IDPs than refugees in the world.
Credit: Marcus Prior/WFP

In at least 50 countries around the world, an estimated 35 million uprooted people are living in a state of flight from conflict and persecution, while many other millions have been displaced by natural disasters, according to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).

A large proportion of these uprooted people are classified as 'Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)' - people who, through natural disaster or conflict, have had to flee their homes but have stayed within their state of origin. Unlike refugees, IDPs do not cross an international border.

Dennis McNamara, director of the UN Inter-Agency Internal Displacement Division (IAIDD) told IRIN: "Globally we estimate approximately 25 million IDPs have been created from conflict and violence, and probably another 25 to 30 million through natural disasters, including the current tsunami … so the IDPs are two to three times the size of the global refugee problem."

IDPs are usually destitute for the same reasons as refugees, but do not enjoy the same legal protection. Jens-Hagan Eschenbacher, Communication Coordinator of the Global IDP Project, told IRIN that "Internally displaced people are among the most vulnerable victims of conflict. Like refugees, they have fled fighting or human rights abuses but, unlike them, they have not crossed an international border. This means that the international community is not under the same legal obligation to protect them, help them to return home, or find them somewhere new to live. Millions are forced to live in utter destitution, without adequate access to food, jobs, healthcare and education."

No international mechanisms are in place to assist IDPs in their home country. "The UN and member states are far more reluctant to use force to stop IDP flows than flows of refugees," said Ken Bacon, director of Washington-based Refugees International. "There is a vast reluctance to interfere in the affairs of a sovereign state."

This continued dilemma facing the international community results in reactive responses to IDPs, coupled with an absence of preventative action. "The world is only able to deal with the symptoms, and not the disease it self, that causes displacement in places like Darfur and Cote D'Ivoire" he told IRIN.

Uprooted and unprotected

The number of refugees worldwide has been falling in recent years, while the number of internally displaced persons has grown significantly. The Global IDP Project supported by the Norwegian Refugee Council estimates that conflict or human rights violations have created at least 25 million IDPs; by comparison, the United Nations refugee agency, UNHCR, announced in late 2004 that the global refugee population was under 10 million, and falling steadily.

While refugee numbers are declining, partly due to the cessation of specific conflicts and massive returns witnessed in Afghanistan and Angola, the statistics for IDPs are bleak: "Most IDPs are displaced by internal conflicts, and the increase in the number of internal conflicts since the end of the Cold War certainly has been one of the reasons for the growing number of IDPs, particularly in the early 1990s." Jens-Hagan Eschenbacher explained to IRIN.

Although there have been a number of recent wars between states in Africa, most conflicts have been internal: the prevalence of unstable states, underdevelopment combined with unremitting poverty, weak civil societies, social marginalisation and the absence of accountable governments are factors raised by analysts to explain the social and political strife that has produced a disproportionate number of IDPs in Africa. Significant numbers of people have also been displaced by natural disasters.


IDPs receiving food provision in Sudan.
Credit: Marcus Prior/WFP

Further exacerbating the vexed question of IDPs, it appears to be increasingly difficult to cross borders in search of protection from violence, with neighbouring states and other asylum countries closing their borders in fear of large influxes of refugees. To prevent more internal displacement, it is considered essential to do more to prevent the conflicts that force people to flee.

The immediate issues facing IDPs are those of survival and protection. Until relatively recently, IDPs were neglected by the international community, and the mechanisms for assistance and legal protection. According to McNamara of the IAIDD, "Protection remains a major concern. It is a highly sensitive issue due to the whole emphasis given to national sovereignty, and requires careful handling."

IDPs often have nobody to turn to. Many governments, though responsible for the security and well-being of their citizens, are unable or unwilling to help; government-backed militias, or governments themselves, are sometimes the main agents of displacement.

Once people have fled across an international boundary, making them refugees, they may face hardship, but normally their lives are no longer endangered by the violence or persecution that caused their flight. By contrast, IDPs may face ongoing persecution and violence, and be forced to keep moving for months

or years. In Sierra Leone, Liberia and the Democratic Republic of Congo there are numerous stories of families and communities who have been on the run in their own country for years.

"IDPs often remain exposed to grave security risks and human rights violations, and assistance often does not reach them because of insecurity, governments limiting humanitarian access, or lack of attention by national or international actors," Eschenbacher commented to IRIN.

Though the UNHCR's central role is to help those who have fled their countries of origin, the sheer scale of the problem, and the humanitarian concerns it raises, have recently forced the international community to give IDPs increasing attention. The countries with the largest number of IDPs - Sudan, Angola, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) - have all suffered protracted civil wars, while others - such as Somalia, Afghanistan, Liberia, and Sierra Leone - not only experienced domestic conflict but also the collapse of government institutions and services. In Sudan alone there are an estimated 4 million IDPs.

Led by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), advocating on behalf of IDPs for change in assistance policy and humanitarian law, the international community is beginning to take action. "Clearly, IDPs don't get enough limelight but the world is turning its attention more than ever towards IDPs," noted Bacon of Refugee International. "The Guiding Principles recently developed for IDPs have been a huge contribution to refugee law and IDP protection, but what we don't have yet is political agreement on how to deal with the IDP crisis."

Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement

The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement drawn up by a team of international experts under the direction of the UN Secretary-General, were launched by the UN in 1998.

The 30 principles create a clear legal framework for the protection of IDPs, and are the first international standards to define their rights, the obligation of both governments and rebel groups to protect them, and to empower the IDPs themselves.

Under the Guiding Principles (GPs), IDPs have the right to request and receive protection and humanitarian assistance from national authorities. However, as Dennis McNamara told IRIN, "the major weakness here is that these principles are non-binding in international law. A few countries have incorporated them into national law, but generally this has not happened."

At their core the GPs represent a potentially formidable tool for the empowerment of IDPs, and are also meant to provide direction for UN agencies and other organisations concerned with IDPs. The GPs do not involve additions or alterations to laws, but instead draw on existing laws, particularly those governing international human rights, international humanitarian law and refugee law.

If disseminated, understood and implemented, the GPs represent a critical tool for responding to the needs of IDPs.

The Principles further speak of the right of IDPs to participate in planning and distributing supplies, and in managing their return home and reintegration. Knowledge of these rights is very clearly a first step to acquiring power. The GPs also set standards against which conditions in countries can be monitored and assessed.

While destitute IDPs may not be in a position to pursue advocacy, they do have this right, and in more favourable circumstances it can be exercised. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the US-based Brookings Institution have published a 'Handbook for Applying the Guiding Principles', which details the kinds of steps that can be taken to provide and improve protection for IDPs.

The GPs make it clear that IDPs not only need to have their basic needs fulfilled but also have the right to protection, and that there is a need to create a framework for developing protection strategies.

Important though this right is, there is as yet no international consensus on who should undertake protection activities to support the response strategies. Instead, what has emerged is a collaborative approach on the part of UN agencies, with the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator assuming the lead role. When asked what powers the IAIDD or other bodies have in implementing the GPs, McNamara said, "In terms of whether we have any 'teeth', what we have is an inter-agency mechanism that can make recommendations to agencies and donors."

The GPs do not give people new rights, or provide the means by which these rights can be achieved. Ultimately, the GPs are only a tool which can be used by the politically weak (and their advocates) to challenge the politically powerful.

Despite increased attention to the plight of IDPs, the UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee reported in 2001 that the needs of displaced populations "continue to be inadequately addressed". The report attributed this to two broad factors: first, the unwillingness or inability of governments to address the needs of the displaced; and second, "serious gaps" in the UN's response to IDPs.

Stark legal differences between refugees and IDPs

According to UNHCR data, the agency is currently assisting 9.7 million refugees, 1.1 million returned refugees and 5.3 million IDPs.

A refugee is someone who, "owing to a well-founded

fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country," according to the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees.

The 1969 Convention of the Organization of African Unity on refugee problems in Africa and the 1984 Cartegena Declaration on refugees have broadened that definition to include people fleeing events that seriously disrupt public order, such as armed conflicts and disturbances.

Born out of the need to address the masses of European refugees after WW2, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees has a mandate primarily to protect refugees. IDPs fall through bureaucratic, legal and programmatic cracks and to date have been assisted to a limited degree only by international and local NGOs.

IDPs, especially children, require assistance and protection.
Credit: Marcus Prior/WFP

Remaining in one's own country as an IDP is risky, as there are no international mechanisms for protection. IDPs are often under threat from hostile government forces or militias, such as those in Sudan's western Darfur region, where Arab militias continually terrify residents of the camps.

IDPs can be assisted, but UN agencies can only operate at the request of the United Nations Secretary-General or the General Assembly, and with the consent of the country involved. For example, through government cooperation, the international community has been able to assist the millions of people displaced by the Indian Ocean tsunami in December 2004.

"If you are a refugee you have some sort of international protection," said David Mazersky of the International Crisis Group. "You have coverage by UNHCR and your rights are also protected - IDPs are still citizens of their countries, and are not afforded protection. These people are harder to identify."

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is active in trying to protect the rights of internally displaced people. As the overseer of the Geneva Conventions, the organisation has long cared for the victims of internal violence and conflict. It conducts protection and assistance programmes for victims of armed conflict in close to 80 situations worldwide, in almost all of which people have been displaced.

The ICRC also looks after the tens of thousands of people who have not been displaced, but live in areas from which others have fled or where they have settled. For reasons such as illness or injury, many cannot flee and require assistance, while people in areas where others resettle may also need help, as they often experience a swift decline their standard of living once IDPs arrive en masse.

Problems resulting from displacement are a government's responsibility, says the ICRC, and the government bears primary responsibility for IDPs. Aid is only a temporary measure - it is the government in question that must solve the problem.

UNHCR seeks to make sure that states are aware of their obligations in protecting refugees and those seeking asylum. Countries who attempt to forcibly return refugees to their country of origin are breaking international law, as refugees may face danger or discrimination between groups of refugees.
But IDPs can be forced to leave camps or designated areas by their own national officials, as in Darfur, and no aid organization or government has the authority to prevent this.

Physical and material assistance

The legal status of refugees and IDPs is strikingly different under international law, and their access to assistance is no less marked. Newly arrived refugees are entitled to receive food, shelter and a safe environment in their country of asylum. International laws and conventions, which have been reviewed over the years, are in place to protect them. UNHCR works with other aid organizations within this well-defined legal framework to either repatriate or resettle registered refugees, or maintain them in camps, where the agencies strive to comply with internationally agreed standards of minimum food provision, access to health and water, and adequate sanitation and shelter.

Refugee camps often have more resources and services than the home communities of the refugees. A camp administered by aid organizations for the UNHCR often not only provides basic medical care and establishes schools, but may also offer adults literacy and job training. UNHCR and over 500 local or international partner agencies provide a wide range of services, sometimes including financial grants and income-generating projects, so that refugees become self-sufficient as quickly as possible and are better prepared for life when they return home. When registered refugees return home they are provided with basic packages of provisions and are often assisted with transportation and other means.

The internally displaced face much more uncertain treatment. Unlike refugees, IDPs may be trapped in violent conflict and remain invisible to the international community for months or years as populations disperse, flee and continually move to avoid conflict or direct harassment.

In some cases their government may view them as enemies for economic, sociopolitical or ethnic reasons and threaten their safety. Humanitarian law prohibits the forcible removal of civilians from their residence unless security concerns or military reasons

require it, but the international community has a poor record of successful interventions in situations where a government may be the main belligerent in an internal conflict. Donors, too, are normally reluctant to become involved in what may be deemed an internal situation.

Some displaced people move a few miles from their homes; others travel great distances; some stay with family or friends in other areas. Uprooted from their livelihoods, community support systems and any kind of representation, their plight is often severe.

When such people end up in IDP 'camps' or designated areas, they are the responsibility of the government, and their welfare depends on how willing it is to help, or allow outside agencies access to assist them.

"Every situation has different needs," said Nigel Marsh, a spokesman for World Vision, one of many international NGOs assisting IDPs. "Much depends on physical location - some people are in desperate need of water and some are backed up against a lake, so we can't treat everyone the same at all".

One illustration is the 1.6 million people who have been displaced by insurgency in northern Uganda. They are forced to live in hundreds of camps with minimal access to services and low quantities of donated food, while scant protection from the authorities means they are still preyed upon by the rebels that caused their displacement. Some have lived in these wretched camp environments for years and would prefer to be independent in 'the bush', fending for themselves, but survival is too uncertain.

"The world has grown used to large numbers of displaced people across Africa. These numbers are in Sudan, Somalia and the Congo," Marsh explained, "What we have to get across is just how corrosive [displacement] is - it saps people's will to get their lives on track."

Agencies have found that an astonishing number of displaced persons suffer from clinical depression.

A few months after assuming directorship of the Inter-Agency for the Internal Displaced Division (IAIDD), Dennis McNamara told IRIN, "I have been very struck by the communities of IDPs that I have visited. They are the poorest of the poor - amongst the most vulnerable of already impoverished communities. They don't get any attention, are hidden away, and often very neglected."

"Unprecedented returns": Cautious optimism as refugee numbers fall

Millions of Angolan refugees have returned home, some say prematurely.
Credit: Debbie Morello/WFP

"Life has to continue, and the war is over and behind us," said Stephen Zizi, owner of a popular bar in Voinjama, Liberia, expressing the optimism and resolve of tens of thousands of spontaneous refugees flowing back into Liberia across the nearby Guinean border.

Like eight of Liberia's other 15 counties, Lofa has not been declared safe for the country's 600,000 refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) to return to, but town officials and the local office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have reported large numbers of spontaneous returnees in the county's main towns.

In the last three years, millions of refugees all over the world have been going back to their homes in the Balkans, Angola, Afghanistan, Sierra Leone and Liberia, giving rise to a wave of optimism that the tide in global refugee numbers is turning. The expected return of millions of Sudanese refugees and IDPs after the January 2005 peace deals will add to this flow, reducing the number of uprooted people even further.

"The statistics are very encouraging," said Ruud Lubbers, head of UNHCR, "especially for the nearly five million people who, over the past few years, have been able to either go home or find a new place to rebuild their lives."

The UN refugee agency appears delighted with the declining numbers. Around the world, the number of refugees, asylum seekers, returnees, stateless people and internally displaced persons as a whole dropped by 18 percent to 17.1 million in 2003 - the lowest total in at least a decade.

More specifically, with the global refugee population at 9.7 million, the figures released by UNHCR (in September 2004) suggest a ten per cent decrease between 2002 and 2003, making 2003 the second consecutive year in which a sharp drop was recorded, and the trend seems set to continue in 2004.

UNHCR cites several reasons for this decline, including increased international efforts to find solutions for those who fled their homes and the ongoing work by the UN agency, working in partnership with numerous other agencies, to end refugee situations that have lasted for years.

The strong desire to go home, coupled with the perception of higher levels of security in their home countries, have lured many millions of Afghan and Angolan refugees back. Hundreds of thousands have returned with assistance from the UNHCR and its partners, while many more have made the journey home spontaneously, without assistance.

According to UNHCR, the level of voluntary returns in 2003 was unprecedented, with some 3.5 million refugees going home, mostly Afghans from Iran and Pakistan.


Afghans have been returning in huge numbers to their homeland.
Credit: IRIN

"The phenomenal return of Afghans to their homeland over the past few years underscores the benefits of sustained international attention and support for the work of UNHCR and its partners in regions of origin," said Lubbers. "The impact is felt as far away as Europe, where the numbers of Afghan asylum seekers have plunged. But the countries of return themselves also need continuing international support and investment throughout the entire process of repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and long-term reconstruction. Then we know refugees can go home and stay home, ensuring the sustainability of their return."

Cycles of instability: the revolving door of displacement

However, Ken Bacon, director of Washington-based Refugees International, told IRIN the current optimism should be tempered with caution: "We are entering a new era, but with considerable doubt and trouble - the world is only able to deal with the symptoms, and not the disease itself, that causes displacement."

How the international community approaches the issue of returnees is critical to avoiding a cycle of insecurity and displacement. World Bank studies have shown that it is far cheaper to help returnees rebuild their lives than to abandon them to a situation that may result in impoverishment, instability and a renewal of conflict. According to Bacon, it is "not only humanitarian but it's cost-efficient, when you think of the destruction and endless crises and costs that arise from conflict."

Dennis McNamara, director of the Inter-Agency Internal Displacement Division (IDD) of the UN, pointed out to IRIN that the failure to reintegrate returnees presented a serious problem to the international community. "You have the risk of a cycle of displacement after return. If basic services and structures are not in place … and if people cannot get land or find work, you are more likely to have secondary displacement and lawlessness, and these are classic symptoms of return to areas without structures. In these situations you have a risk of continued instability."

In recognition of the problems around refugee reintegration, UNHCR hosted an international meeting in Geneva in March 2004 specifically to discuss the needs of returnees. The findings of the conference illustrated the enormous challenges that face post-conflict countries like Angola, Sierra Leone and Liberia in offering support to returnees. The needs are colossal, with most refugees going back to devastated areas, in chronically poor countries lacking the most basic infrastructure and services. Many ex-combatants are newly demobilized, and there is often the real fear that they will once again take up arms.

The importance of the 4 'Rs'

After years of grappling with how best to provide for the needs of returning refugees - shelter, food, water, healthcare and education, among others - UNHCR developed the '4Rs': repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction.

The agency works in partnership with hundreds of NGOs in implementing programmes designed to ensure that refugee return is sustainable and durable. Ruud Lubbers recently told IRIN: "It is clear that these things cannot all be done by HCR; we are always there for repatriation, and we do some projects in reintegration, but we try to partner with others ..."

UNHCR's budget projections illustrate the emphasis it places on reintegration and rehabilitation. In Afghanistan, HCR expects to spend almost US $7 million (10 percent of the 2005 allocation for the country) on income-generation projects, and $6.8 million on shelter and other infrastructure. In Angola and Sudan similar proportions of the budgets are set aside for programmes covering heath, education and other needs traditionally provided by national governments and international NGOs.

Fewer refugees but more IDPs

Despite the achievement of large-scale returns in Afghanistan, Angola, Bosnia, Sierra Leone and Sri Lanka in recent years, the problems of uprooted people continue, with similar numbers being internally displaced in Columbia, Burundi, Africa's Congo basin, Sudan and other regions.

Refugees are not the only uprooted people who need to return home and rebuild their lives. According to Jens-Hagen Eschenbacher, Communication Coordi-


Despite longing for home, refugees fear the ongoing insecurity in Sudan.
Credit: Justo Casal

nator of the Global IDP Project, "While it is true that the number of refugees has been decreasing, the number of conflict-induced IDPs went up dramatically, with a peak in the first half of the 1990s.Currently, it is estimated that there are some 25 million IDPs - twice as many as refugees."

IDPs are among the world's most vulnerable and neglected people. According to UNHCR's most recent figures, in 2003 one-third of IDPs were in situations where their lives were in constant danger; over 10 million had hostile or indifferent governments who did not provide any protection; nearly 18 million received only occasional or no humanitarian assistance at all from their governments.

Displacement in Sudan

The example of Sudan illustrates how an emphasis on refugees, coupled with the failure to recognize the scale of IDP numbers and the problems of their return can distort perception of the challenges facing post-conflict societies.

Over four million people are estimated to have been uprooted by the war in southern Sudan. Of these, approximately 600,000 live in the seven countries surrounding Sudan - many of them for as long as 12 years - and are reluctant to return to an area ruined by conflict. However, the vast majority of those who fled their homes are IDPs scattered across the country, and their return will place a huge burden on the under-developed and war-damaged southern region.

When these refugees and IDPs will return is also unclear. "The scenario that seems likely is that many will wait and see how things go back home, and stay where they are. Services are a big issue, and people will probably watch and see how those are set up," David Mozersky, a political analyst from the Sudan International Crisis Group, commented to IRIN. "In refugee camps, people have access to medical attention and there are schools."

In the Darfur region of western Sudan the contrast between IDPs and refugees is also striking. Approximately 200,000 people fled across the border to eastern Chad, seeking protection and assistance as refugees, while a far greater number - 1.6 million - remain in Darfur amid continued conflict, facing food insecurity and physical danger as IDPs.

Observers and analysts examining the global problem of uprooted people question the current optimism surrounding refugee return, suggesting instead that the political map of the world has changed since the end of the Cold War, followed by the September 11 attacks on the US. Localised conflicts around the world have accelerated, producing IDPs fleeing unresolved internal crises.

While refugees are covered by an explicit legal framework providing them with international protection and assistance, IDPs, according to the Director of the IDD, "are the poorest of the poor, amongst the most vulnerable of already impoverished communities. They don't get any attention, are hidden away, and often neglected." However, if the IDPs are to return to their homes, like refugees, they will need structures and services to allow them to develop and prosper in security.

Referring to the Sudanese refugees, Emmanuel Nyabera, a UNHCR spokesman, told IRIN: "We have to create a situation where there is an urge to go back. The country of origin has to be better than the country of asylum."

Without massive long-term investment in development and civil society in Sudan and many other devastated countries where people have been uprooted, it is hard to see how refugee and IDP return will be sustainable, durable or imminent.

3. Special reports and articles

AFGHANISTAN: Returns steady, reintegration still a challenge

A UNHCR worker helps an Afghan refugee with the repatriation process.
Credit: UNHCR

Sitting in a tiny tent overlooking an endless, dusty plain, Samandar Ali and his family are happy that they are back home after several years of life in exile. Even though the eight-member family does not have enough food or proper shelter to survive the cold winter, they are optimistic that life will change for the better.

"Drought is continuing and there is no work while armed men are still in power. But we are hopeful that it will get better," Ali, who returned from neighbouring Pakistan in September 2004, told IRIN in Qaisar district of the northwestern province of Faryab.

While insecurity and poverty continue to be the main challenge the returnees face at home, Afghan refugees continue to return as they hear that millions of dollars have been pledged by international donors to assist their war-ravaged country.

Three years after the fall of the Taliban, over three million Afghans have returned from Pakistan and Iran. In 2004 alone, around 780,000 refugees came back from these countries. But there is a long way to go. There are at least three million Afghans still in exile, many waiting for more visible signs of development and stability before returning.

Many of those refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) who have returned home in the last two years complain of a lack of assistance. Unemployment and the lack of public services, including health clinics, schools and roads, are the chief concerns.

"The major and only change in Afghanistan is the newly elected government and everyone hopes that it will bring a change in our lives," Ali said.

For the millions of Afghans who have returned home since the end of the Taliban era in late 2001, life is hard and reintegration is slow. Although undeniable progress has been made in many sectors, returnees are often more destitute than the local population.

Sahargul, a former school teacher, said that despite the large number of NGOs and UN agencies working in Faryab province, many returnees like himself had not been prioritised. "Those armed groups who have grabbed our land and made us displaced are now more important for the UN than the poor returnees," the father of four told IRIN as he and his children worked on rebuilding their ruined house.

Sahargul pointed to the ex-combatants, who he said were receiving preferential treatment from the UN and other agencies, rather than returnees. He said his children missed school since they returned to their village of Qaisar as there was no girls' school in the entire village. Sahar's children had studied up to Grade Four in the city of Peshawar in Pakistan. "For us, the return means losing my job and my children's education," he noted dismally.

But some others have managed to earn a living and reintegrate. Bibi Fatema, a 40-year-old widow, sensing a gap in the market, opened a small health centre for women in the Dash Barchi district of Kabul after she obtained a US $200 loan from a local micro finance agency.

"My income is more than I earned in Iran. Here, women do not go to male nurses for injections or other first aid services; therefore, I have many customers," the mother of three told IRIN.

Fatema had attended a nursing training course in Iran and now she earns $150 per month. "I pay half of my earnings for house rent and the remainder helps us to survive," she noted.

Ruud Lubbers, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, believes successful reintegration requires long-term development assistance.

Women such as these returnees from northern Badakhshan can an especially vulnerable category if they are single parent households.
Credit: IRIN

"I think the work of the HCR [The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees] is not just transporting people home. It is also being with them for a while and trying to convince others to improve life and live together," Lubbers told IRIN as he visited a return area north of the capital, Kabul, in mid-January.

UNHCR and its partners have rebuilt some 170,000 houses across Afghanistan since 2002 and some 8,000 wells or water points have been established in areas of high return.

Despite this, he was critical of the pace of rural infrastructure development. "While returnees are eager to restart their lives they need water projects, dams and therefore it [development] has to go a bit faster," the high commissioner noted.

Habibullah Qaderi, the former chief adviser for the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation, believes that not much has been done for returnees by donor countries. "We appeal for more assistance and more money for the return programme because we should think of the sustainability of return and reintegration which is

the right of every returnee," he told IRIN.

"We should not be just dumping the people in. We still have more than three million Afghans still in neighbouring countries," Qaderi noted.

Slow IDP returns in 2004

People like Gul's family, as hundreds of thousands in the north-eastern province of Faryab, will face an acute food crisis if immediate assistance is not provided.
Credit: IRIN

After another year of drought and crop failure in 2004, more than a third of the Afghan population remains dependent on food aid. Among them are at least 167,000 IDPs, most of them living in camps in the south and the west of the country. Persistent drought, a lack of infrastructure and slow reconstruction have considerably slowed down the pace of return during 2004. Only 17,000 IDPs have made the journey home since the beginning of the year.

Unable or unwilling to return to their homes, the remaining IDPs, most of them drought-affected nomadic Kuchis, are now in need of long-term solutions that go beyond humanitarian assistance.

For the estimated 440,000 IDPs who returned home during 2002 and 2003, the main need is for a sustained effort by the international community to deliver on its reconstruction pledge in order to further their reintegration.

With drought conditions continuing in the areas these IDPs came from, some destitute families prefer to settle locally rather than return to their places of origin.

Those that IRIN interviewed in the southern Zhari Dasht IDP camp said they could manage to earn a living or receive some assistance while remaining in the bleak IDP camp.

In addition to drought, one of the main challenges that IDPs face after return is land grabbing and continuous harassment by local militias. In Faryab, while many have been able to regain their land and houses and managed to secure some level of sustainable livelihood, others have found that their homes have either been destroyed or are now occupied by others.

In January 2005, hundreds of people, including women and children, had to flee to the mountains after their houses were entirely looted by armed local militia groups in Kohistan district of Faryab.

"We were told that these commanders were no longer in power, but that was not true," Fazal Rabi, a returnee in the northern city of Baghlan, told IRIN. He said he had harvested a good crop of wheat, but had been forced to give a third of it to a local commander as compulsory taxation.

ANGOLA: Portuguese lessons give hope to returning refugees

Returning Angolan children learning Portuguese - their homeland's national language- but new to them after years abroad as refugees.
Credit: IRIN

For all of her 11 years, Marcelina Vite has spoken only Luvale and a smattering of Portuguese, which she picked up from fellow Angolans in Zambia's refugee camps.

As refugees living in Zambia, her inability to speak Portuguese did not seem to matter, but now that the family has returned home to Angola, learning the official language of her mother country has become a priority.

"I like coming to school and learning to speak and write Portuguese," Vite said, before starting her morning literacy class in the village of Chipoia, near Cazombo in Angola's eastern Moxico province. "But it's very difficult."

Since the UN refugee agency, UNHCR, started its voluntary repatriation programme in June 2004, around 9,500 Angolans have returned to Cazombo in convoys from neighbouring Zambia. Eager to get home after the end of a 27-year civil war, another 2,200 or more have made their way back, unassisted, since the start of the year 2004.

Lack of Portuguese an obstacle

However, with many speaking only the local Luvale language during their absence, there are fears that not understanding Portuguese will prove a real obstacle when it comes to community re-integration, such as education or employment opportunities.

In 2003, the Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS), supported by UNHCR, started intensive Portuguese lessons

for returnee children aged seven to 17 in Cazombo and Luau, also in Moxico, with the aim of teaching them sufficient Portuguese in order to enrol in local schools.

"Especially for the children, it's a problem that they don't speak Portuguese because without Portuguese they cannot enter the Angolan education system," Nelito Fortuna, project director for JRS in Cazombo, said.

"It is important for these children to have [an] education, so that they improve - then they have a better chance of development," Fortuna, himself a returning refugee, added.

The demand for the courses has certainly been high, and the project, in which JRS and UNHCR provide the teaching and classroom materials, quickly got off the ground with parents keen to lend a hand in constructing the school buildings.

"When we started the programme, we only had limited funds - enough to enrol only 600 and many parents were asking us 'Why so few?'," Fortuna said. In 2004 we increased this to 6,000 and in 2005 we want to reach another 6,000.

Classrooms are basic, with old milk cans doubling as seats for returnee kids.
Credit: IRIN

JRS and UNHCR plan to extend the idea to include literacy courses for adults and women in particular, so they can communicate, get involved in local issues and increase their chances of employment.

"This project has been very, very helpful," Frances Olayiwola, UNHCR's field officer in Cazombo, said. "One of the issues which stops people coming back is the question of how will they integrate - how will their children integrate?

"The literacy project for 2005 will also help with the re-integration of the returnee population," Olayiwola added. "It will facilitate whatever they are doing and they will feel they are part of the country."

Back in Vite's class, the children get to work. The intensive three-month course uses Portuguese lessons to teach the children mathematics, sciences and important tips on hygiene and safety.

Eleven-year-old Alexo Domingos, initially shy when asked to show off his language skills, explained why the school - housed in a wooden straw-roofed structure - is so important to him.

"I want to understand the others and when I go to Angolan school I need to understand the teachers," he said.

"We write, we read and we use pictures and the blackboard to learn all kinds of things," Domingos said, adding that he tries to speak Portuguese at home and enjoys correcting the rest of his family when they get words wrong.

The free classes, designed for 35 children, are popular in the local villages and extra children often turn up to see what they can pick up.

Problems of access

The project is not just confined to Cazombo centre. In Cahanganhi, around five km from Cazombo along a bumpy red sand road, Jorge Paulo Sapaulo is busy teaching his students about domestic animals.

"They are very good students," he said. "They have a lot of enthusiasm and they really want to learn."

As in all of Angola, poor access and a lack of funding have hampered the growth of the project and many returnees who make it home to even more remote villages are cut off from such development initiatives.

"There are other places requesting the same programme, but they are difficult for us to reach because of destroyed bridges, impassable roads and landmines," Fortuna said. "The major problem is access."

Even for those lucky enough to have a class nearby, there are no guarantees of a place in an Angolan school once they make it through the course. The war also took a heavy toll on the country's education system and there are few schools and fewer teachers to cope with the rising demand.

"The nearest Angolan school for these children is five km away in Chissamba," Sapaulo said. "Some of the bigger children can make the journey on foot, but for the smaller ones, it is too far."

The Angolan government is constructing new school buildings across the municipality, but finding qualified teachers and the money to pay them is difficult.

Still, many children are just happy to be back in their home country and keen to take part in its rebirth.

"I believe these Angolan children want to create better lives for themselves and I want to help them with that," Sapaulo said. "Maybe there are future doctors and teachers sitting here - perhaps even a future president."

ANGOLA: Homecoming not so sweet for some refugees

Landmines are a serious threat to returnees.
Credit: IRIN

With more than 160,000 Angolan refugees still waiting to return home, the UN refugee agency's repatriation programme is expected to maintain its projected pace through 2005, but will also shift its focus to help those who have made it back to re-integrate into their communities.

More than 280,000 refugees are believed to have returned since the end of the 27-year civil war in April 2002, with UNHCR directly repatriating more than 94,000 people and providing basic kits to a further 78,000 who arrived under their own initiative. The remainder went home spontaneously and received no assistance, according to figures released by the agency in December 2004.

An estimated 500,000 Angolans fled their country's brutal conflict, seeking refuge mainly in Zambia, Namibia, the Republic of Congo and the Democratic Republic of Congo, as well as Botswana and South Africa.

Following the signing of a peace deal between the government and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola -UNITA rebel group, most 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.

UNHCR, working with the Angolan government, the World Food Programme (WFP), the International Organisation for Migration, the Food and Agriculture Organisation and 21 NGO implementing partners, had planned to bring back 90,000 Angolans during the 2004 operation, but by the time the rainy season began and put a halt to operations back in mid-December, only 51,000 had returned.

"While conditions have improved in some locations, a number of communities remain inaccessible, particularly in northern Angola," the agency said in its Global Appeal for 2005. "More and faster road rehabilitation and demining [operations] will be required if the refugees in all the camps and settlements - in bordering countries - are to have the opportunity to return home in 2005."

UNHCR has made an agreement with Angola and the major asylum countries to try and return some 53,000 refugees remaining in camps and settlements who wish to repatriate. The agency has no plans to continue organised repatriation in 2006, although there will be a "window of opportunity" for spontaneously settled Angolan refugees to return home with UNHCR assistance.

Impatience

In the meantime, UNHCR has been urging Angolans stuck in neighbouring countries not to attempt the trip on their own until the rains have cleared in May or June.

"It is too dangerous because of the poor condition of the roads and the mines," said Veronique Genaille, head of the UNHCR sub-office in Luena, the capital of the eastern province of Moxico. "We all know mines can move, so if people return on foot, it is extremely unsafe." Genaille was referring to the shifting nature of planted mines during rainy weather.

The real desire for refugees to return has been illustrated by the 100,000-plus surprise returnees who, too impatient to sit it out and wait for their name to come up on the UNHCR manifest, have made their own way back, often enduring weeks of arduous travel through the bush.


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

Some - like Mutaipi Kawashu, who left his home in Kaoma, Zambia, in September with his wife and four sons - endured appalling tragedies just to get their feet on Angolan soil.

Kawashu's 11-year-old son, Okumbi, drowned in the river Nengo, inside Angola, during the three-week trek to Lumbala N'Guimbo in Moxico Province, but his heartbroken father still believes he had no choice but to make the trip.

"This is our country," he said. "This is where I was born. Despite everything, I'm happy to be back."

Tough life

Few seem to have given much consideration to what they will do for work or food upon returning.

No one can deny that life for these returnees will be difficult. In Moxico, which has received the largest number of refugees, vast stretches of road are impassable, bridges are destroyed and the countryside remains littered with landmines.

The main complaint among returnees, however, is hunger.

"We are receiving only a small bucket of corn to eat and there are not enough seeds and tools to go round," said Macai Liawema, the traditional leader of Macai village on the outskirts of Lumbala N'Guimbo.

Martin Catongo, who manages the reception centre and works for Medair, UNHCR's implementing partner

in Lumbala N'Guimbo, said surviving on the meager rations would be difficult for returnees.

He believes some are retracing their steps, their initial euphoria about being home in Angola turning to frustration as they struggle to feed their families.


Returnees reunited with families after being separated during the civil war.
Credit: IRIN

"Some of the returnees may have to go back to Zambia because they won't be supplied with food and they won't have enough to eat," he said. "There is a risk that they will become refugees again - not because of war, but because of hunger."

Aid workers say the "bush telegraph" is working well, with news of these difficulties reaching refugees waiting in neighbouring countries and cooling their desire to return home.

One of the reasons UNHCR fell short of its repatriation target in 2003 was that some potential returnees changed their minds and decided to wait for conditions at home to improve.

"My family is waiting for me in Zambia, but I have sent messages that they should stay there a bit longer," said 23-year-old Amos Chingumbe, who is desperately seeking work before sending for his mother, father and eight brothers and sisters.

"They want to know if the conditions are okay and they'll come later if the repatriation programme continues," Chingumbe continued. "But I'm wondering if they'll be a bit disappointed when they arrive because life here is very difficult."

His story is not unique. One Angolan NGO worker could not wait to get home, but his family will not join him for a number of years.

"When I stepped on Angolan soil it felt great," Chingumbe said. "We arrived at the border at night and although I couldn't see much, I stopped and thought, 'At last, I'm back home.'"

Tackling the issues of hunger, health, education and employment, as well as the more thorny problems of discrimination and violence, will move up the UNHCR priority list in 2005 as it seeks to shift from repatriation assistance to re-integration.

Genaille's priority is the smooth integration of the refugees, which means improving services for the entire population.

"Rehabilitation is not only a question of the infrastructure," she said. "It is also necessary to reach out to the hearts and minds of people for reconciliation."

The agency has said it needs US $21.3 million to carry out its Angolan activities in 2005.

ANGOLA: Returnees face threats and discrimination


Angolan returnees unloading goods. Most returnees try to restart their lives in a state of extreme destitution with few if any resources.
Credit: IRIN

When Julio Oliveiro (alias) came back to Angola in June 2003, he was overjoyed to be home at last and eagerly anticipated his new life.

After three years in Zambia, mostly spent in the capital, Lusaka, he had picked up English and completed a course in computing. Confident he could put his skills to good use in Angola, he hoped to make a better life for his family and help his country get back on its feet after decades of war.

After building a hut for himself, his wife and his child in his home village of Lumbala N'Guimbo in eastern Angola, he managed to secure a job with a demining organisation. With a reasonable salary, a home and a job, life was certainly looking up.

However, all that changed when he was badly beaten up, a victim of discrimination and jealousy against educated, English-speaking returnees from Zambia.

More than 12,000 Angolans came home to this remote region in southern Moxico province in 2004, usually assisted by the UN refugee agency, UNHCR.

Still, with most people living on next to nothing, food scarce and the area almost completely cut off from the rest of Angola, there is growing frustration and resentment against those who manage to find work at one of the few international organisations operating here.

Oliveiro found that out when, returning from church one evening, he was attacked by a man waiting for him at his home.

"This guy turned and insulted me, calling me a Zambian and calling me a thief and using very strong language," Oliveiro said. "He hit me in the face and burst my lip. He started to drag me to the police, two or three km away. People around came to help and I got away, but he said he was going to come back and burn my hut."

Oliveiro went to the police, but because it was a Sunday, he was told to go home and come back if there was any more "confusion".

"When I got home there were 14 men and eight women waiting for me," he said. "They beat me with a stick. Then they dragged me to the police station where they forced me to lie down and stamped on me, stepping on my ribs and my arms."

After five days in a hospital, his wounds were still not healing. According to a doctor's note, his ongoing symptoms included chest pains, blood in the urine and stool, bladder pain and digestion problems. He was evacuated to Luena, the provincial capital, for better medical care.

His initial enthusiasm and excitement at coming home has evaporated, replaced by fear and disappointment.


Returnees in Cazombo are in need of aid.
Credit: WFP

"I'm still sick," he said. "I'm hurting from my injuries, but emotionally, I'm sick too.

"I'm scared to go back to Lumbala N'Guimbo," he continued. "My wife and child are still there and I'm worried about them. I was happy when I left Zambia because I knew I was coming back to my motherland. But now I'm frustrated and broken, both physically and emotionally."

Unfortunately, Oliveiro's case does not seem to be an isolated one. He alleges that such beatings, and even rapes, are "the order of the day" in Lumbala N'Guimbo.

Almost everyone here is a returnee, and many face a tough life, where food is in short supply and educational facilities and job prospects are scant. Those who used their time in Zambia to get an education and have put it to good use back in Angola face resentment and jealousy.

"Some of the local communities see the returnees as 'Zambians'," said one aid worker. "The police see some of the people who are coming back as more employable by the humanitarian organisations because they have more skills and they speak English. This creates a difficult situation.


For returning children, home is a new place.
Credit: WFP

"There are a lot of threats - mainly to burn down their huts," the aid worker added. "Sometimes the police get drunk and this kind of thing happens. It's not a normal occurrence, but it happens and it shouldn't."

Oliveiro is sure envy was the motivation behind the attack - the second against him since he came home - but that does not make his treatment any easier to understand.

"They say we are Zambians and that we're not supposed to be in this country," he said. "I think it's because I speak English. But the government wants to repatriate us, so why are the police mistreating us? I'm doing a good job. I'm helping to demine this country. I don't understand why they treat us like this."

UNHCR says it is greatly concerned about the problem and wants to expand some of its training on human rights, in which it enlists the help of the traditional village leaders in the Lumbala N'Guimbo region.

For now, most victims of discrimination appear to be staying put, waiting and hoping for action to be taken against such prejudice.

However, Oliveiro does not intend to risk hanging around.

"I'm thinking of going back home to Zambia as soon as I get well," he said. "I don't feel at home anymore. Angola's peace has been stolen from me."

BURKINA FASO: Thousands of migrants now living as strangers in their homeland

Burkinabe women who fled Cote d'Ivoire wile away the days in the dusty western town of Bama, hoping for jobs and food.
Credit: IRIN

More than 365,000 people have fled from violence in Cote d'Ivoire to safety in Burkina Faso over the last two years. However there are no haunting images of refugee camps, packed to overflowing with people who have lost everything. For the new arrivals are former Burkinabe migrants going home. They have simply melted into the villages and the countryside, taken in by relatives and in some cases, even strangers.

They are refugees in their own country.

The civil war that erupted in next-door Cote d'Ivoire in September 2002, and the reprisals against migrants that followed, forced thousands of Burkinabe to leave the land where they had worked for years and head for home.

For some, "home" was a country whose passport they carried but where they had never set foot. They were the children of Burkinabe immigrants born in Cote d'Ivoire who had never been given full Ivorian citizenship.

"I may be Burkinabe but when I came here from Cote d'Ivoire it was my first time in the country," Minata Savadogo, who arrived last year, told IRIN.

The 25-year-old woman was born and grew up in Abidjan, West Africa's most cosmopolitan city. Before the civil war broke out in Cote d'Ivoire, it was viewed as a tropical Paris, with its mix of steamy palm-fringed lagoon, mangrove swamps and gleaming skyscrapers.

But then the Ivorian army went to Minata's home. They accused her of being in league with the rebels who had seized the north of Cote d'Ivoire, an allegation often levelled against Burkinabe.

The soldiers demanded money and when Minata pleaded she had no cash they started to beat her. Her neighbours intervened and the troops went on their way but the episode was enough to persuade her to pack her bags.

Swapping skyscrapers for mud houses

Minata used to sell iced water on the busy streets of Abidjan, where cars and buses stream past glass-fronted high rise buildings and crowds of commuters bustle along the pavements.

Now she is eking out an existence in Bama in western Burkina Faso, a rural town of earth-baked brick houses where the most common vehicles on the dusty streets are bicycles.

"It's very, very hard for us. I grew up in the city, I've no idea how to work the land," she explained as she cradled her two-year old daughter.

Even those used to tilling the land are finding the going tough.

Amidou Compaore once earned a handsome living from his cocoa plantations in the forested south of Cote d'Ivoire, but the dry land around Bama, although fertile by Burkina Faso standards, is proving more difficult to cultivate.

"This year everything is ruined. We've had poor rains and the crops have failed. So now I have lots of kids that need feeding and little to feed them with," the wizened 49-year-old father of 23 said.

Bama, which lies less than 100 km from the Ivorian border, has seen its population swell by about 20 percent since Cote d'Ivoire collapsed into conflict.

"We used to have a population of around 20,000 but now it's 24,000 and that is just based on the people who are here officially," Fatoumata Boly, the town's prefect (government administrator), told IRIN. "We might have twice as many extra people if we take into account those without papers."

Burkina Faso is one of the world's poorest countries, ranked third from bottom of the UN Human Development Index, with only Niger and war-scarred Sierra Leone worse off.

The implosion of Cote d'Ivoire, a country seen by many Burkinabe as an Eldorado where an enterprising man might work his way to modest wealth, has only heightened the problems.

Many Burkinabe families used to receive money from relatives working in Cote d'Ivoire as cocoa planters, petty traders and night watchmen, but with the migrants' return this vital source of income has dried up.

Ballooning population straining resources

And the newly returned migrants -- who have added three percent to Burkina Faso's 12 million population are putting more pressure on already scant resources.

"I know people who have had to dismantle their beds to make room for everyone to sleep," Boly explained. "Poverty is growing all the time. What once fed 10 people, now has to feed 20. We have seen a rise in malnutrition here in Bama."


Amidou Compaore is struggling to produce enough crops to feed his large family, let alone selling any for profit.
Credit: IRIN

Rassmane Kabore, whose store is a porch in front of his house from which he sells fertiliser and the occasional piece of dried fish, knows about having to share a shrinking pie with more and more people.

His brother's two wives and their three children turned up on his doorstep at the start of 2003 when the fighting in Cote d'Ivoire was at its height. They have been living with him ever since.

Kabore now has to feed 11 mouths instead of six, and this costs him an extra 350 CFA (70 US cents) a day. When business got lean, more drastic measures were called for.

"Before I had a scooter but I had to sell it to make ends meet once my brother's family arrived. Now I get around by bicycle," the petty trader told IRIN, pulling his holey green coat tight about him.

When the mass exodus of Burkinabe from Cote d'Ivoire was in full swing, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the Burkinabe government helped bus people back to their villages and reunite them with their families.

The International Federation of the Red Cross, the UN World Food Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund, the World Heath Organisation (WHO) and other agencies chipped in with aid.

Paradoxically, the generosity which local people showed in welcoming the new arrivals may have doomed longer-term international relief efforts to help the returning migrants.

Latent crisis

"It's never been seen as a humanitarian crisis. All the donors congratulated Burkina Faso for taking these people in and then stopped right there," said Georg Charpentier, the UN Resident Coordinator in the country.

The number of Burkinabe migrants that poured out of Cote d'Ivoire is almost double the number of Darfur refugees that have spilled across the Sudanese border into Chad.

But while overcrowded refugees camps in eastern Chad have repeatedly come under the spotlight, attracting generous international aid, Burkina Faso's masses have largely fallen off the international community's radar screen.

"We're not being confronted with a catastrophic humanitarian vision but that doesn't mean to say there's no crisis. It's a silent, latent crisis... it is there and it is there for the long haul," Charpentier told IRIN in the capital, Ouagadougou.

He said the problem was worse than the official government statistics suggested, especially when the Burkinabe that flocked home from Cote d'Ivoire in earlier mass departures in 1998 and 1999 are taken into account.

"Overall we think one million people came in these three waves," Charpentier said. "If we leave it alone, thinking that people have been reintegrated, we run the risk of creating a vacuum in which problems between communities and with disenfranchised youth could grow."

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has just recruited a representative for Burkina Faso, an appointment that Charpentier hopes will hone relief efforts. However, he also thinks the government in Ouagadougou needs to bang the drum louder.

Ramato Diallo, acting head of Conasur, the government agency leading efforts to reintegrate the returnees, agrees that much still needs to be done, "We need about 17 billion CFA (US$ 34 million) to allow us to reintegrate all those that have fled Cote d'Ivoire. There have been small projects here and there, but nothing that targets the problem as a whole," she said.

The money Diallo wants does not seem much, considering that the United Nations has appealed to international donors for US$183 million to feed, clothe and shelter the 200,000 refugees from Darfur who have sought sanctuary in eastern Chad and to help the locals living alongside them.

Parents to work, kids to school

One of the first problems to be tackled in Burkina Faso is employment.


Rassmane Kabore had to trade his scooter for this bicycle to raise money to support his brother's wives and children who fled the troubles in Cote d'Ivoire.
Credit: IRIN

Many of the returning migrants are used to the relatively affluent urban life that Cote d'Ivoire, the economic engine of Francophone West Africa, once offered them.

Those who are skilled farmers don't own hectares here that they can cultivate. And even if they do, the likelihood is they lack the necessary tools and the water for irrigation.

In Bama, the prefect wants to create a fund to loan money to returnees so they can set up their own money-spinners. People could buy tools for an agriculture project, a sewing machine or cooking utensils for clothing and food ventures or a small stock to set up a street stall.

Getting parents back to work is one part of the equation. The other is making sure children continue their education.

A September 2004 survey by Conasur estimated that a third of those who had returned from Cote d'Ivoire were under 15.

"The education system was already overburdened and now there are all these extra children," Diallo, the acting head of the government relief agency, explained.

In Bama, Boly, the prefect, has already requisitioned some disused shops in town and turned them into makeshift classrooms. However, even when space can be found, parents, like Kadijata Sawadogo, are often not in a position to pay the 3,000 CFA (US$6) annual registration fee or to buy books and stationery.

Kadijata spent three months in the Ivorian bush with two children and heavily pregnant with a third before escaping to Bama. She is now trying to scrape together enough money so that her eldest, eight-year-old Jean-Baptiste, can go to school, but finding work is impossible.

"Since we got here, no one has helped us. You just have to do what you can to get by," the 28-year-old sighed.

The IOM is currently looking for donors for projects to help reintegrate the returning migrants, starting with 10,000 people in southwestern Burkina Faso.

Salome Kombere, the director of IOM operations in Ouagadougou, says it will be a hard sell.

"I don't know if we'll end up with the funds we need. I think donors are hesitant because they think these returnees will take off again the moment there is peace in Cote d'Ivoire," she said.

"But when will that be? And how do they live in the meantime?"

DRC: Thousands of miners expelled from Angola trapped on Congolese border

Congolese miners expelled from Angola sheltered in Tshikapa, Province of Kasai - Occidental.
Credit: UN DPI

Thousand of illegal Congolese miners expelled from Angola remain, in early 2005, trapped in the border regions of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

According to the Ministry for Solidarity and Humanitarian Affairs, 12,000 expelled Congolese nationals are currently being sheltered in Tshikapa, 50 km from the DRC's southern border with Angola in the province of Kasai-Occidental.

Humanitarian assistance was withdrawn five months ago and Louis Ibonge, who is responsible for refugees and internally displaced persons at the Ministry, feels the miners are caught in limbo.

"I can't reach my home in Kananga, as I don't have enough money since I was expelled from Angola with my fellow countrymen on 12 April 2004, but I manage to get by, selling chickens," said Edouard Mwamba, a father of two.

Non-governmental organizations put the total number of Congolese miners expelled from Angola at around 80,000.

"There are many of us, expelled miners, stuck in Tshikapa with no possibility of getting home, living on people's charity and begging on the streets. Some even started digging for diamonds again near the border with Angola, but on the Congolese side," he commented.

Tito Ndombi, the public information officer for the medical NGO, Médecins sans Frontières-Belgium (MSF-B), explained: "the General Directorate of Migration's census for the third wave of arrivals [from 2 to 13 May 2004] registered 28,856 expelled miners … 50 percent made it home, to their families in Kinshasa, the capital. Others went back to Angola."

The 12,000 expelled miners in Tshikapa are thought to come from the town originally, and are therefore not displaced. Accordingly, humanitarian organizations on site, including MSF-B and Caritas, suspended assistance, which had consisted mainly of medical services and distributions of food and non-food items.

"We received humanitarian assistance for a while, but we are still waiting for the substantial support the government promised, because we lost everything when we were expelled empty-handed from Angola," said Mwamba.


During their journey home, expelled Congolese miners reported being robbed and abused by police, the army and even Angolan civilians.
Credit: IRC

The miners are often in a state of exhaustion when they reach the DRC. Some are wounded. "They said they were robbed, systematically searched by the police, and subjected to rape and violence from the Angolan population, as well as the police and the army," said Ndombi.

The expulsion of illegal Congolese which started in early 2004 was stopped last June in the same year, after talks between the Angolan and Congolese governments. Angola had planned to expel 35,000 illegal Congolese from its northern mining region, formerly occupied by the UNITA rebel movement, according to the DRC ambassador to Angola, Joa Mawete, who noted that 90,000 people from other countries, including South Africa, Mauritius, Mali, Sierra Leone, Senegal and Albania were in the process of being expelled from Angola.

"The Angolan government, after restoring peace, and being eager for economic recovery, wants to recover its control over the diamond-producing regions," said Mawete.

IRAQ: Mixed picture for IDPs in the north


Baghdad rubbish dump is rapidly becoming a source of income for IDPs.
Credit: IRIN

"Iraq and accurate statistics," said one senior Iraqi official in Kirkuk, "are two entirely different things." Nowhere is this truer than when it comes to internally displaced persons (IDPs) in northern Iraq. Officially, 20 years of village clearances, Arabisation campaigns in ethnically mixed areas and a Kurdish civil war have forced around 800,000 people - out of a total population of four million - to leave their homes. A UN-Habitat survey of October 2000 put the total at 805,505, not including IDPs who had fended for themselves and disappeared into the general population.

However, some experts suggest that such figures need to be viewed with skepticism, for several reasons. The word IDP summons up images of dire poverty and tarpaulin. While living conditions in the collective towns built by Saddam Hussein at Binaslawa near Arbil or Shorj near Sulaymaniyah are far from good, they are not significantly worse than in towns under central government control until 2003 that were left untouched by the former regime.

A tiny minority of Iraqi Kurdish IDPs do still live in squalor in public buildings such as the former Baathist military fort outside Dahuk. However, there is now no sign in Kurdish-controlled areas of the 6,366 IDPs mentioned in the UN-Habitat survey as living in tents. Tent-dwellers there are, but they are either Iranian Kurds who fled violence around the Al-Tash refugee camp near Ramadi this spring and summer, or Iraqi Kurds returning from refugee camps in Iran.

Working with UN Oil-for-Food funds set aside for Iraqi Kurdistan, the Kurdish authorities have worked efficiently to counteract the destruction wrought by the former regime in the north. According to Abdullah Dler, director of IDPs for the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs in the southern area controlled by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), all the villages destroyed during the 1970s and 1980s have been partially or fully rebuilt.

"There is no IDP problem in Sulaymaniyah governorate," Dler said, "only a problem of returnees." He questioned the argument, common among Kurdish officials, that everything should be done to encourage IDPs back to their original homes.

"Why would a 25-year-old, forced from his village when he was two and living in a city ever since, want to return to a mountain hamlet," he asked, pointing out that only 25-30 percent of IDPs in his area of control had taken the decision to return.

The biggest change to have happened since UN-Habitat and others did their surveys, has been the toppling of Iraq's Baathist regime. In the north, this has had three major effects on the IDP situation. First, it has opened up vast areas of land immediately abutting the region run by the Kurds since 1991 to resettlement by Kurds, and to a lesser extent, Turkoman and Christians, evicted by the former regime. Before the war, the so-called Green Line which marked the northern limits of Baghdad's control was in places almost entirely depopulated, villages emptied and replaced by military camps and minefields.
Eighteen months ago Karahenjir, a small town of around 1,000 houses 30 km east of Kirkuk on the main Sulaymaniyah road, was deserted, the pasture land that surrounded it riddled with mines. The mines

have almost all gone now, and the town is once again bustling with life. There are two schools, electricity, water, as well as the ubiquitous headquarters of Kurdish parties.

The same transformation is only slightly more slowly taking place in Qadir Karam, another small town 22 km south of Karahenjir. In these formerly highly militarised areas, returns have not brought a new wave of displacement. In districts such as Sheikhan and Makhmur, southeast of Dahuk and south of Arbil respectively, they have. Former Kurdish villages Arabised during the 1980s are now Kurdish again. The Arab inhabitants have fled south - to their homelands in and around Mosul and Tikrit.

Diyala hard hit by post-Saddam movements

Diyala governorate in the northeast would appear to be the region worst affected by this new movement. Thousands of previously imported Arabs are known to have fled from the towns of Khanaqin and Mandali before or immediately after the arrival of the Kurdish militias in spring 2003. How many new IDPs there are is far from clear - surveying in the area is impossible because of lack of security.

IDPs returning to Kirkuk have set up home at the edge of the track at the former international sports stadium.
Credit: IRIN

Interviewed by IRIN last September, the IDP coordinator at the Iraqi Ministry of Migration and Displacement Safeh Hussein said recently arrived IDPs in Baqouba, the Diyala administrative capital, numbered about 11,300. International NGOs working in Diyala governorate gave a higher figure, claiming there were 2,700 IDP families in Baqouba and 3,200 in Mugdadiyya, a town on the road to Khanaqin.

Assuming a mean of six people per Iraqi family, that gives a total of 35,400 IDPs in Arab-controlled Diyala. In a survey of Iraqi IDPs published in November 2004, the International Organisation for Migration(IOM) counted 6,882 families - over 41,000 people. In the Kurdish-controlled sub-districts of Khanaqin and Mandali, meanwhile, NGOs report a further 12,000 IDPs. Their living conditions largely appear to be tolerable, but the same is not true for many IDPs in Baqouba and Muqdadiyya.

"Their situation is very, very bad," one international aid worker told IRIN in Diyala governorate. "Many do not have roofs over their heads. They are living seven to a room, and lack essential things such as clothing."

Since autumn, NGOs have been distributing plastic sheeting, blankets and 1.5 million litres of kerosene to help these people through the winter. With violence on the increase in Diyala in recent months, little more can easily be done.

Large displacements seen in Kirkuk area

But the largest movement of population to have occurred in northern Iraq since the war has been in the oil-rich city of Kirkuk, extensively Arabised since the late 1950s. Nobody knows for sure how many Kurds and Turkoman Saddam Hussein and his predecessors in power evicted from the city and surrounding areas: in Kirkuk, the politics of oil has made the characteristic fogginess of Iraqi statistics even more impenetrable.

The 2000 UN-Habitat survey counted 58,704 "victims of ethnic cleansing" in Kirkuk. The US Special Committee for Refugees estimated 100,000 Kurdish and Turkoman IDPs from the city and villages. The two main Kurdish parties, like NGO Human Rights Watch (HRW), meanwhile, put the total number at close to 120,000.

In the aftermath of the 2003 war, all agreed that Kirkuk was an ethnic time bomb, a disaster waiting to happen. It is a view that continues to be purveyed in the western press, as well as by the Kurdish authorities. The April 2004 Temporary Administrative Laws, they say, agreed all efforts should be made to wipe out the Baathist legacy of ethnic cleansing in Kirkuk. Why has nothing been done?

To all appearances, something has. The authorities in Kirkuk told IRIN in December that an estimated 14,500 IDP families had returned to the cities in Tameem governorate since the fall of the Baathist regime - approximately 90,000 people. The IOM's survey gives a higher number - 12,380 Kurdish families and 4,131 Turkoman.

In a pre-conflict UN study of Kurdish IDPs from Kirkuk, 89 percent of respondents said they intended to return. In Sulaymaniyah, IDP director Abdullah Dler told IRIN he thought over 70 percent of former Kirkuki IDPs in his area of responsibility had already done so.

"In my view," said Esteban Sacco, an Arbil-based aid worker who has done extensive survey work in newly liberated northern Iraq, "the whole return process in Kirkuk is almost complete. Only those with nothing in the [Kurdish-controlled] north have gone back. I doubt well-established, middle-class Kurds will return."

The living conditions of returnees, scattered around 67 locations within the city, is very varied. Some have rented flats. On the outskirts of almost exclusively Kurdish northern neighbourhoods, others have almost completed new houses. The less fortunate continue to live amidst the dirt of the overcrowded football stadium, and in tent villages that have sprung up on the roadside nearby.

"I would estimate that 30 percent of Kirkuk returnees are having real difficulties living from day to day," the director of Norwegian Peoples' Aid's Kirkuk office Awat Yassin told IRIN in Kirkuk. For a long time, squabbling between the various factions in Kirkuk had hampered efforts to find a solution to the IDP issue in the city.


Returning family finds their home in Fallujah destroyed.
Credit: IRIN

Kurds insisted all possible help should be given to them. Some of the Turkoman and Arab leaders publicly expressed doubts as to the genuineness of returnees, whom they feared were a Trojan horse for Kurdish plans to take control of the city.

Mutual distrust led in September 2003 to the collapse of an agreement to accommodate all IDPs in selected locations around the city. Deprived of the support of all sides, NGOs suspended long-term aid programmes. By December, peace had again been restored to the city council, the IDP delegates could resume work, and work encouraging returnees to move into designated areas had begun.

In the long term, however, it is unclear what will be done for these people. The new camps at Faylakh and on the Leylan road have been designated for temporary accommodation only. Observers think that the situation looks as though the Iraqi Property Claims Commission (IPCC), set up by the US-led Coalition as part of a structure to right the wrongs done in Kirkuk, will benefit only a minority of returnees.

The IPCC has the authority to award compensation to families whose property was confiscated by the former regime. The trouble is that the vast majority of those who have come back to Kirkuk since spring 2003 were renting accommodation when they were evicted, and have no land deeds to show a judge. Many of the others come from surrounding villages that were not so much confiscated as razed.

KAZAKHSTAN: The challenge of sustaining returnees


Kazakhs from China working in their shop- a sustainable way of staying in the host country.
Credit: IRIN

Standing outside his simple, roughly constructed home with his wife and three children, Bakhtyar Kelmanov, an ethnic Kazakh from Nukus, Uzbekistan, couldn't be happier.

"As soon as I get citizenship, I'll have more opportunities here," the 28-year-old Kelmanov told IRIN, knowing that his mud-brick house could hold the key to a more prosperous future in Kazakhstan - a country his family fled over half a century ago.

While such stories are not unusual in Kazakhstan, the struggle for many ethnic Kazakhs like him remains fraught with challenges. Officially, 277,000 have returned since 1991, but millions more remain scattered among the country's Central Asian neighbours, including China and Russia.

In the 1920s and 1930s, thousands of local people fled to neighbouring countries to escape the political turmoil, repression and forced collectivisation that Stalin imposed on Kazakhstan. The result was a famine that killed off a large part of the population. According to official census figures, Kazakhstan's population fell from 3.63 million in 1926 to 2.31 million in 1939.

In a bid to compensate for past injustices, following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the government enacted a special law allowing for the return of expatriate Kazakhs and their descendents - a law still in force today.

Despite plans this year by the Kazakh government to increase the annual quota of ethnic Kazakhs returning to the country, a more comprehensive strategy will be needed to ensure that their return is sustainable.

"The issue is not the number, but the way this quota is managed," Michael Tschanz, chief of mission for the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Kazakhstan, told IRIN in the commercial capital, Almaty. "For the last year, there has been a complete absence of legal criteria to determine who should be included in the quota and who should not."

Problems with the quota system

On 30 November 2004, Zhazbek Abdiyev, chairman of the Kazakh migration committee and social security ministry, formally announced that the government would increase the state quota from 10,000 to 15,000 families annually over the next two years.

"The quota aims to help the organised return of those who cannot return to their homeland because of poor financial status or old age," the Russian Itar-Tass news agency reported Abdiyev as saying.

However, the effort has much larger implications for Central Asia's biggest, yet least densely populated nation. Astana, the federal capital of Kazakhstan since 1997, hopes to boost the landlocked country's population from 15 million to 20 million by 2015.

With well over two million ethnic Kazakhs outside the country, according to IOM - five million according to the World Association of Kazakhs, that goal is not nec-

essarily out of reach.

The law established the legal status of "oralman" - meaning returnee, or simply, Kazakh ethnic immigrant. Exiled ethnic Kazakhs granted this status had the right to be transported to Kazakhstan free of charge, receive a house or flat, social assistance like other Kazakh citizens and have access to a simplified procedure in obtaining citizenship, as well as assistance in finding employment.

This ethnic Kazakh child is part of the two million Kazakhs living outside their home country.
Credit: IRIN

Over the past 12 years, more than 59,000 families, amounting to a total of 300,000 people, have returned to their homeland under the national Oralman programme. Most have come from Mongolia, Uzbekistan, China, Russia, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Turkey, the Itar-Tass report explained.

Stateless returnees

Nevertheless, the programme has also been fraught with problems and many of the Oralman today remain stateless, activists complain. According to a recent UN report, at the end of 2002, the total number of ethnic Kazakhs arriving in the country with the intention of settling stood at 250,000, while at the same time 80,000 remained stateless.

Moreover, without legal status to work in the country, the ability of the returnees to sustain themselves - much less successfully integrate into Kazakh society - has proven a challenge.

Even so, it is the quota issue - allocating returnees to one of the country's 14 provinces - that has proven the most controversial. Recent statistics suggest a widening gap between the actual ethnic immigration and the quota for government-assisted returnees. In 2001, 9,105 families returned - over 15 times the government quota.

Oralman children.
Credit: IRIN

While Astana increased the quota to 2,655 families for 2002, it failed to do so before 16 September of that year, while - according to government figures - 10,377 Oralman families immigrated in that year alone. The government responded by subsequently increasing the quotas to 5,000 families in 2003, 10,000 in 2004 and 15,000 in 2005.

Kayrat Bodaukhan, director of Avsar, an NGO dedicated to helping ethnic Kazakhs in Almaty, however, believed that the quotas should be scrapped altogether.

"The quota is going up, but it's still not enough to meet the needs of those ethnic Kazakhs who want to return," the 41-year-old economist told IRIN.

Only a quarter of the estimated 10,000 ethnic Kazakh returnees living in Almaty arrived under the quota system, Bodaukhan charged, a fact seriously impeding their successful integration.

Unable to register easily, those returnees without proper documentation faced a barrage of problems, including access to employment, housing, education and health services, he claimed.

In fact, according to IOM's Tschanz, the quota's lack of legal criteria had created three categories of migrants: those included in the quota, those excluded, and those waiting or fighting for years to be included.

New chance to get it right

The change of leadership of the Committee for Migration and Demography under the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection was a new opportunity to organise the quota system and introduce objective criteria for including immigrants into the quota, including social vulnerability, date of application, criteria of professional qualification or a combination, he added.

In an effort to mitigate some of the problems, two years earlier IOM helped establish a central database of the Oralman population.

This Oralman family returned under the national Oralman programme, under which 300,000 people have returned home.
Credit: IRIN

"Unfortunately, this seemed to be a low priority of the agency under its former management," Tschanz said. "Very little data has been entered in the database and the database was not used as a management tool. This may change under the new management."

According to the IOM official, if energy-rich Kazakhstan wanted to remain a multi-ethnic country, it could choose to have more than a mono-ethnic immigration policy.

"The current immigration policy for ethnic Kazakhs could be complimented with an immigration policy based on professional criteria, taking into consideration the needs of a growing economy," he said. "Additionally, residence permits and citizenship should be more accessible for family members of Kazakh citizens and Oralman, to protect the concerned families.

"Opening up additional legal migration options would help reduce irregular migration - including irregular labour migration - and the problems connected with it, including human trafficking," he maintained.

KENYA: No place to call home: Obstacles to refugee integration

A Somali woman in the Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya.
Credit: Justo Casal

In November 2004 the UN Security Council met in Nairobi, the capital of Kenya, to discuss the future of Somalia under its recently elected president. In his address, President Mwai Kibaki of Kenya raised a number of issues.

"It must be appreciated that the establishment of a government in Somalia is not only good for the people of Somalia, but also good for us in the region, and the world [...]. There is no way of monitoring the movement of illicit arms, which have infiltrated our borders and are the cause of the rise in the incidence of violent crimes in our cities," he told the audience.

President Kibaki's statement reflected some of the difficulties, and even resentment, felt by Kenya concerning the continued stay of refugees within their borders, and its reluctance to host large numbers of refugees indefinitely.

A reluctant host

According to UN Development Programme figures for 2004, Kenya, with an annual GDP per capita of around US $1000, hosts a quarter of a million refugees from various countries.

From east to west, northern Kenya has common borders with Somalia, Ethiopia and Sudan. All three countries have experienced serious political crises and armed conflicts in the past 20 years. Millions of their nationals have fled their homes, and hundreds of thousands have sought refuge in Kenya, their comparatively stable neighbour.

Initially sheltered in camps near the coastal city of Mombassa, the refugees were later moved to two different refugee camps: the Sudanese - among others - were sent to Kakuma camp in the northwestern Rift Valley province near the Sudanese border; Somalis were transported to Daadab camp in the remote North-eastern Province near the border with Somalia.

Both these areas are arid or semi-arid, characterized by low, erratic rainfall. They are desolate and isolated regions - a long way from the authorities in Nairobi.

According to a recently released report by the Society for International Development, the Rift Valley province is the second poorest in the country; North-eastern Province couldn't be ranked, due to lack of statistical data.

The scarcity of essential resources means the refugee population has to compete with local residents for water, firewood and pasture. Refugees in Kenya are legally confined to the camp limits, but the chronic shortages of food and other necessities compel them to gather goods outside the camps, or to trade with hosting populations, such as the Turkana, the ethnic group living around Kakuma.

Developing countries, often the major recipients of refugee influxes, are already burdened with the task of caring for their own nationals, and therefore reluctant to grant residence and work permits to refugees. However, in rare cases, some governments offer them the chance to establish a semblance of normal life outside the camps.

In central Uganda, during the 1980s and '90s, groups of Sudanese refugees were given land and allowed to settle. They still have refugee status, but are allowed to live and farm in designated areas, as an alternative to the frustrating and unproductive 'warehousing' of long-term refugees in camps.

Kakuma's sparce market, where refugees conduct what little trade they can with the local Turkana community.
Credit: IRIN

In Kenya it is illegal for refugees to leave their camp, even to collect essential basics such as firewood. Kenyan law also forbids them to farm, forcing refugees to barter items for food when camp supplies run low.

At Kakuma, competition for scarce resources repeatedly led to armed clashes between refugees and locals, as well as among refugees themselves. In June 2003, the pastoralist 'hosting' Turkana community attacked the camp. Triggered by cattle raiding, the week long fighting between Turkanas and refugees killed thirteen people.

Some refugees have therefore chosen to leave the camp illegally, and try their luck in the capital, Nairobi.

Living on the run

Urban refugee life is hardly a better lot in the cities of Kenya, a country ranked 148th out of 177 by the UN Human Development Index.

Somali and Sudanese refugees are therefore illegal immigrants outside their camps, vulnerable to abuse and virtually unprotected by Kenyan law.

Even the Somali refugees who have been selected as eligible for resettlement in the USA have reportedly been subjected to mistreatment, in some cases by Kenyan authorities. Refugees must come to the offices of UNHCR and the International Organisation


Refugees are confined by Kenyan law within the limits of Kakuma Camp.
Credit: Justo Casal

for Migration (IOM) in Nairobi to register for resettlement. Although their reason for coming to the capital is to organise their departure from the country, they are illegal aliens for the duration of their stay.

The UNHCR, caretaker and campaigner

The UN refugee agency's role is not limited to providing material relief to refugees while living in long-stay camps.

Working with refugee-hosting states to protect migrants and resolve the causes of forced migrations are an essential aspect of UNHCR's role. The agency is a major advocate for the integration of treaties concerning refugees - such as the 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees, which Kenya signed on 16 May 1966 - into national law.

The UNHCR also strives to sensitise public opinion to the plight of forced migrants but, despite its laudable efforts, refugees around the world are still subjected to discrimination.

This explains why, according to UN High Commissioner for Refugees Ruud Lubbers, "[of the three possible solutions to forced migration,] the best is repatriation, the second is local integration, and third is resettlement in countries far abroad."

LEBANON: In Chatila, 57 years of "temporary" refuge


The Chatila camp has been home to Palestinian refugees for 57 years.
Credit: UNRWA/M. Nasr

Chatila refugee camp in south Beirut, the capital of Lebanon, was set up by the International Committee of the Red Cross to host thousands of Palestinian families displaced in 1948, when the state of Israel was established. After almost six decades, Chatila looks more like a town than a temporary refuge.

Palestinian refugees fall under the aegis of the United Nations Relief Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and are not covered by the mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which was created in 1951. About three million Palestinians are registered with UNRWA.

For the last 57 years the residents of Chatila have been restricted by a legal status that prevents them from truly settling, and a political status quo that prevents them from returning to what they still consider home.

Bassam Hobaishy works with the Palestinian Human Rights Organisation (PHRO), a Beirut-based non-governmental organisation. Although his mother and wife are Lebanese, his father is Palestinian, so Bassam has no legal right to inherit from his parents and neither does his daughter.

From 1975 to 1990 the refugees had to cope with the 15-year civil war that divided Lebanon, during which a violent assault on the settlement led to many civilian deaths. Most of these were Palestinians, but around a quarter were Lebanese families who had moved into the camp because of economic constraints. Children's murals painted on bullet-pocked walls depict American and Israeli bombs being dropped on Chatila.
In a total of 15,000 residents, the camp is "home" to 12,235 Palestinian refugees, according to UNRWA figures. The stagnation of their status nourishes a deep feeling of despair; scepticism towards aid programmes prevails.

"They just come, take what they want and forget about you," said Chaled, a middle-aged Palestinian father of two who has spent most of his life here, after his 19-year old daughter, Issa, participated in a 1998 documentary film on children's access to education in the camp.

He felt the filmmakers could have done more for her, and believes 10 years of collaboration with relief workers and the media have done nothing to improve his situation: "I know I will die [in Chatila], but I was hoping my daughters would have a better life", he said.

The head of the youth centre expressed similar concerns: "We have been here since 1948, and only now that we are overcoming our terror and sadness, people come to ask how it feels to be in our position. You cannot imagine what it is to be questioned about your loss when we are just starting to forget. And what did they bring us? Nothing has changed, no wonder more and more children take drugs", he said. Pharmacies sell amphetamines and codeine, an opiate, over

Chatila's run-down infrastructure.
Credit: UNRWA/M. Nasr

the counter.

In Chatila, only the residents are uprooted - the infrastructure betrays a long-term perspective. Originally set up as an enclosed space for temporary settlement, the camp covers one square kilometre, on which families were given plots to occupy.

It has become a small town where concrete buildings, to which stories are gradually added, are separated by overcrowded, winding alleys. Pharmacies and small grocery stores have opened, there is a youth centre, a Palestinian Red Crescent centre, and UNWRA runs a health centre and two elementary schools.

The temporary nature of the camp is emphasised by its lack of proper sewerage system, with open drains where children play, its poor water purification system, poor water and energy distribution, and generally poor environmental health.

Education is a major concern for refugees living in Chatila.
Credit: UNRWA/H. Haider

The recently elected Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, himself a former refugee, has stated his intention to push for progress on the question of Palestinian refugees and their descendants.

In the meantime, Chatila remains the "temporary" home of thousands of people.

LIBERIA: A touch of normality returns to former rebel headquarters

Ivorian refugees crossing the river border into Liberia. They have left their homes fearing fresh fighting between government troops and rebel forces. November 2004.
Credit: IRIN

In the dusty devastated town of Voinjama, that once served as headquarters for Liberia's main rebel army, schools are undergoing repair and homes are being rebuilt as a touch of normality returns to Lofa County in the remote northwest after 14 years of civil war.

"We are seeing that things are coming on fine in Lofa," said Mulbah Farkollie, who was putting up a sheet of roofing on his home, burnt in a bout of fighting in 1999 between the Liberians United for Democracy (LURD) rebel movement and fighters loyal to then president Charles Taylor.

"Those of us who have homes that were destroyed are repairing them so that our families who fled from here can return and have places to reside," Farkollie said.

However, for the few Liberians who have returned home spontaneously, starting up a new life again amid the scars of war is no easy task.

Krubo Mulbah, who worked as a schoolteacher while in exile in Guinea, said it was hard to come home to see everything destroyed.

"We have to make life better here," she said. "Our presence will encourage others who fled [to return]."

"Coming from a refugee camp with no money on hand, it is very difficult for us to start renovating homes destroyed in the fighting," Tarnue Kollie, back from neighbouring Guinea after 10 years away from home, said. "Some of us are trying to use local palm thatch to roof our homes, so as at least to have a place to live in."

Barely a month ago, Lofa, located in the forested northwest tip of Liberia bordering Guinea and Sierra Leone, became the district in the country to be officially disarmed by UN peacekeepers.

Still, it has yet to be declared officially safe for the return of refugees or internally displaced persons (IDPs) by the conflict - one out of every five Liberians.

Before the outbreak of fighting in 1990, Voinjama was a hive of activity with a population of 100,000. It served as the capital of Lofa, a rich agricultural and diamond-mining area, which was regarded as Liberia's food basket prior to the war.

Unfortunately in 1999, when the guns opened up again after a two-year lull, it was from Voinjama that LURD launched its campaign to bring down Taylor. The town came to serve as the rebel capital.

Voinjama changed hands several times in fierce battles that have turned it into a burnt-out, bullet-scarred wreck. Most of its main buildings, including schools, clinics and government offices, have been destroyed by heavy artillery.

Rebels with guns all over

When disarmament finally came to an end in Lofa in late November, almost a month after the deadline set for handing in weapons in most other areas of Liberia, the UN found itself with quite an arsenal.

Gen Daniel Opande, commander of the UN peacekeeping force, said the amount of ammunition collected in this one county was almost equivalent to the total gathered by peacekeepers in the whole of Sierra Leone two years earlier.

Liberian refugee setting sail for home in mid-December 2004 in the first sea repatriation supervised by UNHCR in West Africa.
Credit: IRIN

Opande said peacekeepers of the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) had disarmed 5,000 fighters and collected 800,000 rounds of ammunition in Lofa, as well as a large number of mortar bombs and rockets.

Now, for the first time in five years, ordinary civilians are able to go about their business freely.

"Thank God that the UNMIL Pakistani peacekeepers are here and disarmament has ended," resident Daniel Korvah told IRIN. "We can now move about our normal activities without harassment and intimidation by fighters."

Kebeh Kessely, a former schoolteacher who remained in Voinjama throughout the war said "in the last five years, we had rebels with guns all over".

Improved security has brought trucks and other vehicles back onto the streets of Voinjama, carrying traders returning from the nearby Guinean border town of Macenta. A few shops have re-opened, offering food, clothing and household utensils brought across the border.

Three bars have been re-opened too, offering a bit of social life, notably for staff from the non-governmental organizations in town.

"Life has to continue and the war is over and behind us," said Stephen Zizi, owner of one popular spot.

Nevertheless, despite the upswing in safety, schools are not yet functioning and health centres need to be rehabilitated and staffed with trained practitioners.

William Jallah, Lofa's development superintendent, told IRIN that not a single school had been re-opened in any of the county's major towns.

"Some of the schools have been renovated," he said. "But they still lack benches and tables for students and teaching staff."

"Our children are idle and want to return to school," he added.

Similarly, although a few clinics had been renovated and re-opened, Voinjama's Tellewoyan Hospital, the main referral hospital for Lofa, had no assigned doctor and very few nurses and medical assistants, he said.

Spontaneous return of IDPs and refugees

Although Lofa, like eight other of Liberia's 15 counties, has not been declared safe for the return of the country's 600,000 refugees and IDPs. Town officials, as well as the local office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), have reported large numbers of spontaneous returnees in the county's main towns.

A briefing note prepared by the UNHCR sub-office in Voinjama dated 12 December said about 35,000 refugees and IDPs around Liberia had spontaneously returned to Lofa.

"Norwegian Refugee Council has employed forty-two monitors in Lofa to monitor the borders and document spontaneous returns", according to the briefing note, which was made available to IRIN. "They have been operational since the beginning of October."

Jallah, who is in charge of development in Lofa, said some of the returnees had traveled home to assess the situation before returning for good with their families.

Liberian refugees arriving at the border point of Bo Waterside from Sierra Leone at the start of the UNHCR official repatriation programme October 1 2004.
Credit: IRIN

"Because of the calm in security and the completion of disarmament, we are appealing to the UN and to the transitional government to declare Lofa safe for the return of refugees and displaced persons," he said.

To avoid trouble, both the UN and Liberia's transitional authorities have insisted that people be encouraged to return only when a county is safe. Key safety points are completion of disarmament, the presence of civil authorities, rehabilitation of basic services and full access for humanitarian workers.

Lt Colonel Ghulam Raza, the commanding officer of the UN's Pakistani peacekeepers in Lofa, said more time was needed before the county could be declared safe.

"We want to complete the second tranche payment of demobilized ex-combatants in the county before we declare it's safe, and this will take few weeks", he said.

All former combatants who registered for disarmament received a US $300 resettlement grant. The first tranche of $150 was paid as they handed in their weapons. The second was payable up to three months

later once they returned to their home community.

However, many returnees are refusing to wait for official declarations and international assistance.

"One cannot just sit and wait for money," said Jenneh Kortu, who has begun selling second-hand clothes imported from Guinea. "We have to try to make money and that is why is why I opened my used clothes business in Voinjama."

NIGERIA: Plateau state IDPs face daunting obstacles to return to "home of peace and tourism"

Allocated land for IDP resettlement near Marraban Bauchi state.
Credit: IRIN

Throughout Plateau state in central Nigeria, colorful billboards urge people to "give peace a chance", to "stand united" and to "restore Plateau the beautiful".

However, almost one year after spiraling violence between Christians and Muslims left more than 1,000 people dead and over 200,000 others displaced, many of those who fled are still too scared to return to the "home of peace and tourism", as this picturesque hilly state is officially known.

A six-month, state of emergency was imposed in Plateau by President Olusegun Obasanjo in May 2004 to stop the indiscriminate slaughter of mainly Muslim cattle herders by Christian farmers and retaliatory attacks by the Muslims, which were equally bloody and horrific.

Yet the state of emergency was lifted in mid-November. Many fear the lifting of exceptional security measures could presage a slide back into the bloody cycle of revenge attacks. Worse still, people fear that such killings could spread to other parts of Nigeria, Africa's most populous country with 126 million inhabitants.

It would not be the first time.

The massacre of several hundred Muslims in the small town of Yelwa in southern Plateau state last May, sparked deadly reprisals in Kano, Nigeria's second largest city, 350 km to the north. Yelwa's Muslim majority went on the rampage against Christians from the south of the country.

The destruction wrought in last year's clashes is still plain to see in a string of towns and villages in and around Yelwa, where the violence reached its climax.

In Yelwa itself, life remains grim. The Nigerian Red Cross reported at least 600 Muslims were killed in the town during one particularly bad fight in May 2004. This incident finally triggered the imposition of a state of emergency.

Several mass graves in both the Muslim and Christian areas of the town attest to heavy losses on both sides over a period of intermittent skirmishing during the preceding four months.

According to an assessment mission led by the European Commission's Humanitarian Office in July 2004, up to 80 percent of houses in Yelwa were destroyed, decimating the population of about 26,000.

The Plateau state government calculated the total number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) within the state at almost 220,000 in September 2004, representing a cumulative total since ethnic and religious violence erupted in the state capital, Jos, in September 2001.

Some of those who fled Yelwa have returned and are trying to pick up the pieces among the rubble and charred remains of their homes. Still, few have the means to start rebuilding.

Esther Joseph and her nine children, who live in the one small part of her compound that remains relatively intact, are among these impoverished returnees.

Joseph witnessed her husband being hacked to death when gangs of Muslim Hausa-Fulani attackers killed some 70 people from her own, predominantly Christian, Tarok tribe, as they hid in a church in February 2004. Her house overlooks both the church, which was burned to the ground, and the mass grave where her husband and scores of others are buried.

"I never know what tomorrow will bring," Joseph said. "But I am not afraid because I have faith in God's protection."

The church is slowly being rebuilt, as are several mosques that were destroyed in the violence. Pastor Sunday Wuyep described the reconstruction of these places of worship as a "confidence-building measure"

to help heal wounds and encourage the community to return.

Some of the wounds run deep, though, and will not heal easily.

Since news of the crisis in Plateau disappeared from the headlines within Nigeria and further, humanitarian assistance has been virtually non-existent.

The only relief agency present in the area, Medecins Sans Frontieres (Holland), is treating around 150 people a day, mostly for malaria and diarrhea, but also for trauma.

Many people witnessed their own relatives being mutilated and killed, and hundreds of women and girls were abducted. Some were raped.

Six-year-old Abdul Majid haltingly described how his Christian captors forced him to do domestic work and to drink alcohol. Relatives managed to trace him after he had spent seven months in captivity.

Although some of those who fled their homes at the height of the violence have returned, many others are too afraid to come back. These include several thousand displaced people who remain stuck in camps in neighboring Bauchi and Nassarawa states. Many others have been taken in by friends and relatives and are effectively hidden within their host communities.

As a result, there is no reliable data about the overall number of displaced people. Zanna Muhammed, the deputy director of Nigeria's National Emergency Management Agency, said there had been no registration or verification of numbers of IDPs and many of the estimates in circulation were "grossly misleading".

In Nassarawa state, to the south of Plateau, only 250 people remain in the Shinge IDP camp near the town of Lafia.

Some of the camp's former residents have integrated into the local community; some have joined relatives in other states, while others have returned to the Yelwa area to try and salvage what they can of their homes.

Many of those who remain cite a lack of shelter as the main obstacle to their return.

In Bauchi state - which is predominantly Hausa-Fulani and administered under Islamic Sharia law - about 3,000 IDPs from Plateau are living in a variety of public buildings in and around Bauchi city. They have even occupied two primary schools.

In the Muazu House camp, 32-year-old Maimuna Adamu, who lost her husband and five of her seven children in the May 2004 attack on Yelwa, spoke for many of those who fled.

"I definitely don't want to return there - ever," she said. "This will be my home now. But I need help to get shelter."

In the nearby Women's Centre, camp leader Husain Mohamed echoed the same sentiment.

"The great majority of people here will never return," he said. "In this place our own brethren welcome us. As long as Yelwa is under Shendam [the Christian-dominated local government authority] it won't be safe for us to live there."

Conditions in the IDP camps are generally good, with the Bauchi state government providing food and other relief items, as well as allocating some land for resettlement.

Displaced girls awaiting feeding at Womens' Centre camp Bauchi.
Credit: IRIN

"It is not our policy to encourage resettlement in Bauchi," said Mohamed Babayo, director of the Bauchi state Task Force Committee set up to look after the people displaced from Plateau. "But with an estimated total of 24,000 internally displaced people still staying here, who may never return to their homes, we have to do something about it. Of course we have to be careful that we're not inundated with bogus IDPs trying to claim land, so we're proceeding very slowly and waiting for IDPs themselves to show genuine commitment to staying here and trying to rebuild by themselves."

More than 2,000 plots of land have so far been allocated to displaced families near Bauchi city, but conditions vary greatly.

At Baram there is electricity, there is a newly built primary school and a few new houses are going up.

Meanwhile, at Marrabaran, a handful of people have started trying to clear the rocky land to put up new houses, but there is no infrastructure for them. There has been some ad hoc assistance with building materials, but nothing at all in terms of income-generation projects.

Babayo blamed this on financial constraints and a lack of donor interest. He acknowledged that it could take "a very long time" for people to rebuild their homes and livelihoods.

"But people are extremely enterprising," he added. "Host communities have also been extraordinarily generous and accommodating, so ultimately, people will succeed in resettling here."

Despite the high levels of fear and animosity, the

majority of Muslims and Christians in Plateau state agree that land disputes and a long history of ethnic rivalry are the underlying cause of the simmering conflict between them - not religious differences.

Hausa-Fulani Muslims in Plateau have long complained that predominantly Christian farmers steal their cattle and prevent them from grazing, whilst the farmers counter that the Hausa-Fulani cattle encroach on their land.

"The crux of the problem is that a lot of people are coming to this part of the country and trying to stake a claim to land that is not rightfully theirs," said Sheikh Yusuf Gomwalk, an Islamic scholar of the Jama'atu Nasril Islam organisation in Jos.

IDP resettlement in Baram, where some houses are slowly going up.
Credit: IRIN

He was referring to the entrenched divisions throughout Nigeria between people who are considered indigenous to an area, and those regarded as settlers. Even though settlers may have lived in an area for hundreds of years, they are consistently discriminated against in terms of land ownership, control of commerce, jobs and education.

In predominantly Christian Plateau state, the majority of "settlers" belong to the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group, who have gradually trekked south from northern Nigeria and even Niger as the expanding Sahara desert has dried up their traditional grazing lands.

"It is only the politicians who play the religious card," Gomwalk said. "This whole crisis is part of a larger scheme by the northern power base to dominate the country's Middle Belt. But there is particularly intense resistance to this in Plateau."

Some Plateau residents, including prominent community leaders, remain convinced that the state government initiated the recent crisis in order to rid the area of Muslim settlers. To them, the state of emergency was a blessing, which helped to restore confidence.

Others are adamant that the recently re-instated state governor, Joshua Dariye, was made a scapegoat for the crisis. He was ejected from power six months ago, while Chris Ali, a former army general, handpicked by Obasanjo, was put in charge of Plateau.

Nigeria has experienced numerous outbreaks of serious violence since the end of military rule in 1999, yet such emergency powers had not previously been invoked.

Obasanjo will be forced by the constitution to retire after serving two consecutive, four-year terms as Nigeria's elected president, but there are already two main candidates limbering up for the presidential nomination of his People's Democratic Party (PDP).

One is Vice President Atiku Abubakar. The other is former military head of state, Ibrahim Babangida, who like Obasanjo, is a former army general.

Both these contenders are powerful northerners. However, Obasanjo, a Christian from the Yoruba southwest of Nigeria, is widely regarded to favor Babangida, who supported his own bid for power.

Yet one of Abubakar's key supporters is the disgraced Plateau state governor, who lost his power.

Against this background of Machiavellian politics at a national level, there are many who fear that the federal government's attempts to bring peace to Plateau state are largely empty gestures.

One set event that formed part of this process was a Plateau state peace conference in September 2004, which President Obasanjo personally attended.

This event was described by Yelwa councilor Abullahi D. Abdullahi II as "superficially good, but definitely not truly representative of the Plateau state residents and if anything, entrenching divisions even more deeply".

Questions are also being asked about a proposed Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

"This may be just a cover to avoid the issue of prosecuting and bringing to justice the perpetrators of the violence - including the security forces," said one Yelwa resident. "Until this happens there can be no forgiveness and no chance of peace."
Further violence could trigger potentially massive population movements with a destabilising effect on the entire country. Ordinary Nigerians can only hope that the politicians will see this as a risk too far.

PAKISTAN: Integrated Afghan refugees want to stay on

Afghan refugees in Lahore - most want to stay in the Pakistani city after having built a life there. Credit: IRIN

Gul Hakeem, 52, is a respected shopkeeper in the Shadman Market area of the eastern Pakistan city of Lahore. He is frequently called upon, as a respected elder known for his cool head, to settle minor arguments. His cloth shop in the market's basement area is a favourite gathering spot, not least because of the tales and the jokes Hakeem can tell. He tells them in Punjabi - the dominant language of the city.

Only a slight accent to his Punjabi vowels and his love for freshly brewed green tea gives Hakeem away as an Afghan. While those gathering around him enjoy cups of the sweetened, milky tea, Hakeem pours his green tea from a small kettle into his lacquered cup and allows the aroma of his homeland to drift across the crowded shop as he talks of his days as a young man.

Hakeem came to Peshawar, capital of Pakistan's North West Frontier Province (NWFP), among the first wave of refugees from Afghanistan in 1980, only months after the Soviet invasion of his homeland. He stayed at a refugee camp in the city for a few weeks and then, searching for both adventure and a livelihood, reached Lahore the same year.

"I fell in love with the city," he told IRIN. "In some ways, it reminded me of my home near Herat, even though everything was different. Yet, even though I spoke little Urdu at the time, people were friendly and the resentment against Afghans that came later had not yet set in."

Hakeem did odd jobs for about a year, but by the end of 1981 was able to rent a shop, selling cloth he brought in from Peshawar. He has expanded his business since then, buying the shop he rented in 1990. He married an Afghan woman from another refugee family in 1985 and the couple, with four children all studying at local institutions, plan on staying in Lahore.

"It is my home," Hakeem said. "What happened in the past is now only a part of the stories I tell."

According to Tajammul John Muneer, coordinator of the Afghan Refugees Programme at Caritas in Lahore, the implementing partner for refugee programmes with the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there are currently around 7,000 Afghan refugees in the city. He also believes that "at least some among these will go home". A large number of refugees returned home in 2003 and 2004 under UNHCR-assisted programmes.

However, it is also clear that a large number won't. Many of the refugees who came from Afghanistan are now well established in the city and have strong links to local families. They naturally have little wish to close flourishing businesses or abandon jobs to return to a country where economic insecurity and the aftermath of war are still plainly visible.

"Look, the fact is that the Kabul I knew as a young girl is no longer there," said Raheema Bibi, 32, who left Afghanistan with her parents when she was 15. "It is a different place. The families we knew have moved away. So many have been killed that I know no one there."

Her parents have since died in Peshawar. Bibi added: "For me and my three children, this city is where we now want to live. I have parents-in-law and my children's grandparents - as my husband Wali's family is here. They too came from Afghanistan, but are now happy to stay here."

Bibi and Wali still talk to each other in Dari, the first language of both families. However, they speak to their children, Shamsa, 10, Waleed, 8, and Hashim, 5, mainly in Urdu, indicating a break from the past and the start of a new life.

Children returning to their home country will have to learn Dari, their mother language. Credit: IRIN

"The older children understand Dari, but they don't speak it," Wali said. "I would like them to learn, but Urdu is more important for them right now."

As Tariq Khan, coordinator of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) in Peshawar and in charge of programmes linked to refugee affairs, told IRIN: "Many of those who came as refugees are now in fact a part of their communities in cities such as Lahore. As with every Diaspora, there are people who move away from their roots and into a new setting, never to return home. It is hardly surprising that should happen in the case of the Afghans as well."

The close linguistic and cultural links between Afghans and Pashtuns made amalgamation easier. However, even in Lahore, Afghans have managed to blend in and in some cases, even married into Punjabi families.

"My parents were not happy when I married Kulsoom," Habib Khan, 33, said. "But then they came to know her and like her. Now that things are calmer, I hope to take her and our son to visit my parents, who are still in Afghanistan, but then we will return to our lives here."

While some Afghans, such as Habib, have moved away from their own communities and into mainstream society in the city, most of those still staying on are based in settlements around the Garden Town area, or Bedian Road, where quarters in "katchi abadis" (slum areas) are made up of Afghans.

The bright, pink and green skirts of the older women, or the blonde hair and green eyes of small children, as they play a game of street cricket with Lahori youngsters, give them away as Afghans, even though many have in fact been born in the city and have never known their ancestral homeland.

Some among these communities say that, even with the UNHCR's help, they are too poor to return. Others seem unwilling to risk the uncertainty and possible economic suffering the shift would bring, happier to continue with the small business or jobs as guards, carpenters or vendors that they have found locally.

The reputation of Afghans as good businessmen has also held true, with a large number now dominating markets, such as the cloth bazaar at the Auriga Centre in Gulberg.

These Afghans seem certain to remain a part of the city scene, and are known by the generic name of "Khan", a popular clan-name among Pashtuns and Afghans. Certainly, many among them show little interest in returning. They maintain that the homeland many left as children is now nothing but a distant memory - and that it is in the historic city of Lahore that they now hope to build their futures and bring up their families, with ties to Afghanistan having grown weaker over the years since they left it far behind.

SUDAN: Longing for home as IDP camp life toughens

Destroyed section of El Salaam IDP camp. Credit: IRIN

At dawn every morning, a number of women leave Mayo-Madela internally displaced persons (IDPs) camp in search of odd jobs within the Sudanese capital, Khartoum. Those who clean houses earn 150 Sudanese dinars a day (US $0.50).

The majority of the women are Dinka IDPs from the Nuba Mountains in South Kordofan state, some living in the camp for the past 20 years.

"The situation has become much harder, especially for the most vulnerable groups, resulting in an increased willingness of many to return [to their homes]," Ann Kristin Brunborg, programme coordinator of the sustainable returns team at the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Khartoum, told IRIN on 13 December. "They just can't stand it anymore."

Karak Mayik Nyok, executive director of a local NGO, the Friendship Agency for Community Training (FACT), said the wish to return to the Nuba Mountains area had increased with the end of the rainy season and a decrease in fighting in the south.

Many IDPs were affected by recent demolitions of their homes. Quite a number have already decided to return to their southern roots. Every other week, a bus carrying returnees roars down from Khartoum headed for the Nuba Mountains.

According to OCHA, an estimated 360,000 IDPs had returned to the southern areas during 2004, the majority coming from the Khartoum area. They have returned to places such as Kosti, Bentiu, Juba and Malakal.

Still, it has not been very safe for those who ventured to take the trip.

Sources in Khartoum said in March 2003, a group of 15 families from Mayo tried to return to the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) controlled area of Unku. Upon arrival in Pariang, 100 km away, they learned Unku was too unsafe.

IDP camps around Khartoum

Mayo is one of the major IDP camps around Khartoum - the others are El Salaam and Wad El Bashir, near Omdurman in the north. In the camp, one-story, mud-brick structures stretch in every direction, as far as the eye can see.

"The camps house hundreds of thousands of people, primarily displaced from war-torn southern Sudan, but also from Darfur and refugees from Chad, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Uganda," Maghoub Mostafa, protection officer for the UN refugee agency, UNHCR, told IRIN on 16 November in Khartoum.

Between 100,000 and 200,000 people are estimated to live in Mayo camp, including 14,000 households with an average of six persons per family, according to figures provided by the Mayo Public Committee, which registers IDPs in the camp.


Karak Mayik Nyok executive director of FACT in Mayo-Mandela.
Credit: IRIN

To the north of Khartoum, El Salaam - or "Peace" - camp houses approximately 120,000 residents, while Wad El Bashir camp hosts 75,000.

There are nearly 900,000 IDPs living in four IDP-designated camps and 15 squatter areas around Khartoum. OCHA estimated that the total number of Khartoum IDPs could be 1.8 million, some of who were integrated into host communities.

Demolitions

Since mid-2003, however, the authorities have bulldozed thousands of mud-brick houses in the camps in El Salaam and Wad El Bashir.

A government official, who declined to be named, said the demolitions were part of a larger replanning programme that is meant to provide plots for residents and bring them vital services such as electricity and water.

Out of the 12 blocks in El Salaam camp, each containing about 2,270 houses, nine blocks were destroyed, according to representatives of five community-based organisations (CBOs) in the camp.

Some 25,000 families had applied for the new government-allocated plots that are expected to replace the area cleared by the demolitions. From these families, 11,000 could afford a plot and had the necessary documents, such as a birth certificate and a medical assessment of age, to make the purchase. However, 6,000 could not afford the costs of constructing a new home.


Makeshift shelters on leveled section of El Salaam camp.
Credit: IRIN

"Mayo-Mandela was built on private farmland," Karak Nyok said. "However, the lease is about to expire and many people in the camp fear that their mud houses will soon be destroyed."

Between 2,000 and 2,400 homes were flattened so far, he added.

"The whole process of replanning, demolitions and the re-allocation of new plots has been very open to mismanagement, resulting in many IDPs not getting a plot," Brunborg said. "The demolitions have been badly communicated - the procedures were not very clear or transparent and the prices of the plots continued to change."

According to a humanitarian source in Khartoum, the average price for a plot in El Salaam was 106,916 Sudanese dinars ($414), in Wad El Beshir 189,182 dinars ($732), and in Mayo 279,456 dinars ($1,081).

Services deteriorating

The medical charity, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), operated a clinic and a therapeutic feeding centre in Mayo-Mandela for about 10 years, but pulled out recently, as have many other international relief organisations.

According to local CBO officials in El Salaam, most international NGOs left the camp by 2002.

Guisma Mohamed Ragano, of Aluifag - the first women's organisation in El Salaam camp - told IRIN that health services had suffered as a result of the withdrawal of international aid organisations.


Partly destroyed El Salaam IDP camp.
Credit: IRIN

"Medical services are scarce now and have to be paid for," Ragano said. "In the afternoon, no emergency services are available as the remaining doctors work half-days. There is one nurse who helps with the delivery of the babies of approximately 12,000 families."

Within the camp, there used to be 7,000 latrines - 1 per every 3 families. Now, most of them have been destroyed, leaving most people without access to latrines, CBO officials said.

Umer Anech Mangoui, medical assistant in a supplementary feeding centre in El Beshir camp, told IRIN that following the demolitions of the latrines, sanitation was the biggest health problem in the camp. Malaria was also a big problem.

Recent demolitions of houses had also affected service delivery in the camps. CBO workers said nine school buildings had been destroyed.

Karibuu Duar, of the local CBO Sawa Sava, told IRIN that water provisions had also suffered from the demolitions.


Planned road will soon destroy this school in El Salaam IDP camp.
Credit: IRIN

"We had 65 certified water points where people would get their water - now six of the 12 blocks in El Salaam are left without water provision and only get water through the expensive donkey service," Duar said.

In Mayo-Mandela, international NGOs installed 60 water pumps, but 20 of them have broken down since and are in need of repair. Here too, inhabitants increasingly rely on the donkey-water services, which charge

between 200-500 dinars ($0.75-$2) per water tank.


Rebuilding among the rubble in El Salaam camp.
Credit: IRIN

According to OCHA, a critical health situation was developing in the IDP camps around Khartoum.

"The latrines and the water infrastructure were heavily affected by the demolitions, resulting in an increased prevalence of diarrhea and malaria," Brunborg said.

Insecurity has also increased with thieves entering the camps from outside and some armed men allegedly terrorising the IDPs. An armed man was reportedly killed in Mayo in May 2004, in response to one such incident.

In order to support the IDPs and generate some income, FACT was trying to teach women skills, such as spinning wool, knitting and dyeing fabrics. The women, however, said they faced a problem of marketing their products.

Returning home

According to FACT, the 50 women who took part in its skills-training activities wanted to go back to southern Sudan, even while they knew that most schools and hospitals were destroyed in more than 20 years of war.

"If the peace would return today, we would go home today," the leader of the knitting-group told IRIN on 18 November.

Many, however, had other worries.

"The most important reason why people don't return yet is landmines," Joyce Modi said. "They need to be cleared so that people can cultivate their lands."

SUDAN: Refugees contemplate return with trepidition


Despite the recent peace accord, some Sudanese refugees plan on staying in the camp, where their children have access to some education.
Credit: IRIN

"I will be the last man to leave," declared 43-year-old Gideon Kenyi, a Sudanese refugee who has lived in the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya for a decade, but is not looking forward to going back home despite the signing of an agreement aimed at ending 21 years of war between the government and rebels.

"If I left now, I would just be taking back tears," said Kenyi, adding that he recently traveled to the Eastern Equatoria region of southern Sudan, where he hails from, and was appalled by the plight of 12 children left behind by his two brothers, who were killed during the war.

"They don't even have clothes to wear. I have to hold on here [in Kenya] and prepare myself to take better care of my family," Kenyi told IRIN in Nairobi on January 10, the day after the signing of a comprehensive peace accord between the government and former rebels of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A).

"There is nothing for me in Sudan. I would rather remain here and get some skills or start a business," said Kenyi.

David Ibon, a 48-year-old refugee and a father of four, said he was willing to return to his home in Dibor area of Upper Nile, but had misgivings about the peace accord.

"There is no guarantee that there will be peace because there is no unity among the southerners," said the Presbyterian church minister, who has lived in the Kakuma refugee camp in northwestern Kenya for 12 years. Ibon traveled from the camp to Nairobi to witness the signing of the peace agreement.

"There are militias fighting the SPLA and there are politicians who are opposed to SPLA policies. If all these problems can be solved then everybody would go back and cultivate [the land] or start business," he added.

Ibon's fears are shared by Kenyi who said that internal rivalries within SPLM/A could spark ethnic strife and deny southerners the stability that they crave. "We do not know how many years Naivasha [peace agreement] will give us. SPLM might start fighting amongst themselves for positions," he said.

"Implementation [of the peace accord] will be the difficult part," said Kenyi, adding that his other concern was that the government might use rivalries among the southerners to derail the implementation process. "You know some southerners could be bought to corrupt the process," he added.
Moses Pal Tor, another refugee, prefers resettlement in Australia to repatriation.

"I prefer Australia because there my children can get an education," said the 35-year-old father of six who added that his application for resettlement in Australia was being processed.

He said he might consider returning if, after the six-year transitional period, southern Sudan votes to secede from the rest of the country. The peace agreement provides for a referendum after six years to give the southerners an opportunity to decide whether to remain united with the north or become a separate entity.

Abel Ashien, 34, arrived in Kenya in December, 2004 from Bahr el-Ghazal to seek eye treatment in Nairobi and is trying to get registered as a refugee.

"This is my only chance to get out of the bush," he told IRIN. "What is there for me in Sudan?. My father and mother were killed during an attack in 1994 and my family was scattered. I do not even know where my wife and daughter are, but I have heard that my aunt is in Australia," he said.

The signing of the peace agreement was widely welcomed by Sudanese refugees in Kenya and the majority are looking forward to going back.

But according to Kenyi, who has served as a community leader in the Kakuma camp, many refugees worry about the lack of social facilities such as schools, hospitals and water sources in their areas of origin in southern Sudan.

"The other problem is security. There are a lot of guns, even children have guns. Who will ensure our security when we return?," said Kenyi.

"People want to be sure that there is some infrastructure and security is in place before they can return under the guidance of UNHCR [UN High Commissioner for Refugees]," he added.

Kenyi said some of the refugees may not be willing to go back home because they may have committed crimes and fear retribution. "This group of people would probably go back only when there is a judicial system," he said.

He said among the refugee women, there are those who fled forced marriage after their husbands were killed. This group of women was unsure whether they will be safe in their villages where disputes over the custody of children could erupt.

"They [women] want to go back, but want to know what kind of protection UNHCR will provide. Or will it [UNHCR] say 'it is up to the government' which might decide to rely on tradition [to resolve family disputes] where women have little say," Kenyi said.

Faris Victor, 36, has lived in Kenya as a refugee for 11 years and feels that it was time he went home despite that fact that fighters of the Ugandan rebel group, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), have in recent past attacked villages in his Eastern Equitoria region.

"[Joseph] Kony [LRA leader] is the only problem, but we will know how to deal with him," said Victor.


Sudanese refugees in Kakuma closely followed the Sudanese peace talks.
Credit: IRIN

UNHCR has been planning for an initial return of 150,000 Sudanese refugees in the first 18 months following the signing of the peace agreement.

According to the agency, 500,000 people from southern Sudan live as refugees in neighbouring countries with Uganda hosting the largest group of 223,000. Another 88,000 are in Ethiopia, 69,000 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 65,000 in Kenya, an estimated 36,000 in the Central African Republic and 30,000 in Egypt.

According to UNHCR's spokesman in Nairobi, Emmanuel Nyabera, the agency has opened offices in the southern Sudanese towns of Rumbek, Juba and Yei to begin preparing for the refugee return.
He said UNHCR had, in collaboration with its partners, started rehabilitating community health centres, schools and water and sanitation facilities in areas where refugees are expected to return.

UNHCR estimates that it will need some $60 million for the return and reintegration of refugees to southern Sudan in 2005 alone.

SYRIA: Iraqis have rough ride, but reluctant to return

These Iraqi women are part of the 13,000 refugees were able to register to vote in Damascus, Syria for the 2005 election in Iraq.
Credit: IRIN

It is almost two years since Iraqis began flowing across the border into Syria, searching for security in the face of war. Many are genuine refugees, others are members or supporters of the old regime, looking to flee possible retribution.

International organisations investigating the situation of Iraqis in Syria face serious challenges in developing a true picture of how many Iraqis are currently in the country, where they are, and often, exactly who they are.

Dr Abdulhamid El Ouali is the resident representative of the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Syria. According to him, "there are no official statistics about the number of Iraqis in Syria." However, in his last meeting with Syrian authorities, Ouali was told that the number was "approximately 400,000."

But only some 13,000 Iraqis are now registered with the UNHCR office in Damascus. El Ouali explained that UNHCR grants temporary protection to Iraqis who approach his office for assistance. The document is not in itself recognition of refugee status, but assures that the bearer will not immediately be sent back to Iraq.

UNHCR regularly monitors humanitarian and security concerns in Iraq and will renew the temporary protection document as long as it is deemed that the bearer could potentially be at risk if he or she were to return home.

El Ouali stressed that "not all Iraqis in Syria are registered with UNHCR. Many are financially self-sufficient or have family connections in Syria, and consequently have never approached the UN". However, the temporary protection document is made available to those who request it, so that "they have some official proof of their status in Syria".

Iraqi influx brings change

It appears that the presence of an estimated 400,000 Iraqis into Syria has begun to contribute visibly to demographic and cultural changes in areas where they have settled, often on the margins of towns and cities. Around Damascus, it is now well known that Iraqi Shi'ites are mainly found in Sitt Zeinab, the suburb that has grown around one of the world's most important Shi'ite pilgrimage sites.

Shi'ite Kazem Mobarak, who works trading goods between Damascus and Baghdad, lives with his family in the suburb and said they encountered few problems in their daily lives. "We are satisfied in Syria. We do all our religious duties in mosques without difficulties. We have complete freedom in such things," he told IRIN, adding that they received nothing from any foreign or local organisation.

Ali Taleb, who came with his family from Baghdad only three months ago and is now living in the town of Hajera near Damascus, also said they were comfortable in Syria. "I am working in trading." Ali told IRIN. "We rely on the small income coming from my work and on the rest of the money which my father brought with him when we left Baghdad. We feel safe in Syria and we have very good social relations with the Syrians."

Meanwhile, Assyrian and Chaldean Christians, and Bahais from Iraq, live predominantly in Jaramana, another suburb that has traditionally attracted a mixed group of residents - Druze, Christians, Muslims, young families and students in search of affordable housing.

Here, Father Georges Jbeil, a Catholic priest who works with his congregation to provide moral support and limited financial assistance to a number of Iraqi families, said that Jaramana residents were beginning to resent the arrival of the 300 Iraqi families now living there. They blame the Iraqis for increases in petty crime, sex workers, overcrowding and a steep increase in the coast of rent and food.

According to some estimates, rents in Jaramana have gone up by as much as 40 percent since Iraqis first started to move into the area. Similar increases are reported by real estate agents in other parts of Damascus and throughout the country.

Despite the negative stereotypes associated with Iraqis, Father Georges continually reminds his mainly Syrian congregation that: "Most of the Iraqis who moved to Jaramana, did so because they are poor, not because they intended to create problems for others. Many of them left their money and valuables and assets in Iraq as they fled war, searching for safety and security."

Gynecologist Nizar Awad, who has a clinic in Hajera, 11 km from Damascus, said that it was "very rare that any Iraqi who came for medical treatment could afford to pay for medicine."

Iraqis face tough conditions

Father Jbeil noted that for the majority of Iraqis, employment was difficult to find. "They are prohibited from working in government jobs and must resort to informal labour, often in bad conditions and for little pay".

Even skilled workers routinely earn less than half of what their Syrian counterparts make. "Sadly, prostitution is becoming the most attractive option for many women," Father Jbeil added. Iraqi prostitutes are attracting a growing clientele because they charge so much less than Syrians or women from the CIS or eastern Europe.

Families who cannot afford to keep their children in school send them to work long hours in bakeries. "Hundreds of school-age Iraqi children are now working in Syria for a pittance, each day falling further behind in their education" he said.

The priest recently held a service at Mar Yusef Church to pray for children in Palestine, Iraq and Sudan. He said that, before the war, Syria started preparing for a possible influx of Iraqi immigrants by constructing camps.

At the same time, the church began to collect food, clothes and medicines. When the Iraqis started to flee across the border, the church established a volunteer committee to coordinate relief efforts.

Some of the newly arrived Iraqi say they fled religious persecution and others suffered oppression. Some even faced threats of kidnapping, and finally fled to Syria in search of safety.

Shaza Dawood, an Iraqi Christian woman, arrived in Syria two days before the war began. She and her family are registered with UNHCR, but she cannot afford to send her children to school. "The church in Syria doesn't give me any support. I go to the church only for prayer," she told IRIN.

Her mother, who arrived only 10 days ago from Mosul in northern Iraq, said that the situation had become very frightening for Christians in Iraq. "A terrorist group recently murdered a Christian family in Mosul, slitting their throats and destroying all their religious icons."

If the results of the election in Iraq does not bring security and stability, it is likely most Iraqi refugees in Syria will stay on.
Credit: IRIN

Many Iraqi families face difficulties in making sure that even their most basic needs are met. And some Syrian workers say they have begun to suffer due to the influx of cheap Iraqi labour. Saleh Sarakby, a Syrian who used to work in a restaurant in Kasaa, was recently fired from his job because his employer found Iraqis who would work for less.

As the Iraqi elections approach and the security situation remains unstable, it is likely that these Iraqi families will remain in Syria for some time. Many Damascus districts, like Sitt Zeinab, Hajera and Barzeh, have become "Iraqi" and even the Yarmuk Palestinian camp has become home to hundreds of Iraqi families.

Nonetheless, while many Iraqis are slowly giving up hope of ever returning to Iraq, Syria is far from feeling like home. For most, the most important connection they have is the local Internet café, which brings them news of Iraq and of those they have left behind.

TAJIKISTAN: Returnees held up by property disputes

Returning from the Tajik capital, Dushanbe, where she had lived for eight years, Safargul Davlatova had expected to find the home she used to live in before the civil war in Bokhtar district, in the southern Khatlon region, destroyed. She had prepared to be confronted with a burnt out shell that would need lots of work to make it habitable again, but at least it would be hers.

"But instead, to my utter surprise, I found a new building with white curtains at the windows and a well-groomed kitchen-garden," she told IRIN.

It appears that in 1992, when everybody fled, fearing for their lives and those of their children, her husband's brother sold the house they shared for next to nothing to their neighbour. When she demanded the house back, the new owner showed a receipt for payment and refused to return it.

During the civil war, bitter fighting between militias representing different regions of Tajikistan led to massive destruction and tore the country apart. The conflict and its aftermath resulted in the deaths of over 50,000 people and led to a humanitarian catastrophe, with some 1.2 million people becoming refugees or internally displaced persons (IDPs).

The issue of legal ownership of property that changed hands during the war is hampering the return of thousands of refugees and IDPs who fled the conflict. While waiting for their property to be returned to them, perhaps in vain, Davlatova, her husband and three children live in a two-room apartment in a hostel close to the Sakhovat farm market in a Dushanbe suburb.

They chose the place carefully. The two rooms are basic and cheap to rent and the market where Davlatova and her husband, Nizom, run a small produce stall is close by. This has allowed them to buy some of life's necessities.

Carpet weaving provides employment for refugees. Credit: IRIN

"We bought two new carpets, a few blankets, dishes," she said, pointing at the inexpensive belongings in the room.

However, life remains at subsistence level. In the corner, corncobs are being boiled on a handmade electric stove.

"This is for sale," Davlatova explained. "When it is boiled, the children will go out to sell it." The family believes their lives would be easier back in Bokhtar, but without a house to go back to, they are stuck in their miserable existence in the capital.

The family cannot afford to send the children to school, so they sit staring at the walls or help out the parents at the market.

"It is necessary to buy school uniforms, footwear, belongings for them for school," she said. "We are not able to do that."

Latofat Dzhafarova, the judge of Bokhtar, confirmed that the majority of forced migrants, who are trying to return are homeless. He fears disputes over ownership could turn violent unless there is swift action to resolve the problem.

"Many people apply to the court to get back their houses, which were illegally taken away," Dzhafarova said. "But people who sense there is no justice could resort to using weapons, as they did several years ago."

The problem is likely to worsen as more refugees make their way home from neighbouring countries. According to the protection adviser to the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Khurshed Junusov, 56 people returned from Turkmenistan in 2004, and 12 have come back from Kyrgyzstan.

A spokesman for the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, Boi Radjabov, said his ministry, along with local law enforcement bodies and UNHCR, were working to help refugees and IDPs get their properties back.

"However, if a house has been sold and a sale and purchase agreement was formalised, we are not able to help them," Radjabov says. "In such a case, the sides should settle the matter on their own or via the court."

Meanwhile, UNHCR said it was offering practical help to returnees where possible.

"We help them to develop and strengthen their farms - we distribute agricultural seeds and cattle," Junusov said. "Some have to accept the reality that they have no house anymore."

In addition to this aid, this year UNHCR started microcredit assistance through its partners. The returnees receive small credits to develop their farms and start small businesses, according to Idibek Gadoev, a UNHCR field officer. The beneficiaries, mostly women, receive US $100 - $300 dollars at a nominal monthly rate of two or three percent, to develop their farms or start small businesses.

Still, many returnees are saying this help is not enough. Some are calling for government compensation for the houses taken from them.

"Then we could feel good about making a new start in life in our old communities," one homeless returnee from Kyrgyzstan said. The government argues it does not have the resources to be able to offer cash payments of this kind.

4. Interviews

Interview with Dennis McNamara, Director of the United Nations Inter-Agency Internal Displacement Division

Dennis McNamara, Director of the United Nations Inter-Agency Internal Displacement Division, OCHA, interviewed by IRIN.
Credit: IRIN

After years of working with UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, in 2004 Dennis McNamara became director of the IAIDD, situated in the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), in Geneva, and reporting to the Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs. He told IRIN of the special difficulties facing internally displaced persons (IDPs) and the moves being made to address some of these needs.

Question: What figures is your office using to quantify the current scale of IDPs worldwide, and how do these compare with the number of refugees?

Answer: Globally we estimate approximately 25 million IDPs have been created from conflict and violence, and probably another 25 to 30 million through natural disasters, including the current tsunami. This compares with a figure of less than 10 million refugees - so the IDPs are two to three times the size of the global refugee problem.

Q: To what extent has protection and assistance for IDPs been overlooked in humanitarian law and, specifically, in the formulation of the UN mandates in the post-WW2 period?

A: It's a good question. Historically it is linked to the issue of sovereignty, which was the major preoccupation in the establishment of the post-war institutions of the UN. Human rights are a key part of the UN Charter, but it was only in the 1990s that the office of High Commissioner for Human rights (UNHCR) was set up. IDPs from abuse and violence were lost in the debate between sovereignty and human rights, hence no agency was specifically mandated for this particular group of people - consequently, we are now developing a collaborative response. According to recent decisions, all agencies are committed to assisting and protecting IDPs, in accordance with this inter-agency collaborative response.

Q: Generally, what moves are taking place, if any, to address the lack of assistance and legal protection for IDPs?

A: Legally, IDPs are covered by international humanitarian law and human rights law and refugee law, as far as applicable. The 'Guiding Principles on IDPs' embody these norms. If one uses the legal concept of mutatis mutandis [Latin: with the necessary changes being made], then they are covered by the central principles. [The previous special representative of the UN Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons,] Francis Deng has been promoting these principles and the protection of IDPs as part of international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law. However, the major weakness here is that these principles are non-binding in international law. A few countries have incorporated them into national law, but generally this has not happened.

Protection remains a major concern - it's a highly sensitive issue due to the emphasis given to national sovereignty, and requires careful handling.

Q: Should UNHCR be more involved in protecting and assisting IDPs, or should an alternative mechanism be established?

A: We think all the key operational agencies, not only the UNHCR, should be consistently involved in supporting the collaborative responses for IDPs. All these agencies have unique operational experience, and UNHCR has special expertise in protection and return. Effective collaboration will depend on active collaboration; real collaboration; and consistent collaboration. A major problem we face is a lack of consistent involvement by major humanitarian agencies in the issue of IDPs - in some cases there is assistance and in others there isn't any.

Q: Specifically what activities is the IAIDD involved in to address the needs of IDPs?

A: The division has been charged to look at seven or eight key countries where there are major IDP problems, over a one- to two-year period. We are reviewing the problem in specific countries, such as DRC [Democratic Republic of Congo], Uganda, Liberia, Sudan and Somalia, for example, to identify what can be done to strengthen the operational response of agencies to assist IDPs. We are not only working with UN agencies but also with NGOs, the Red Cross, etc, and looking at the role of host authorities as well as donors.

In terms of whether we have any 'teeth', what we have is an inter-agency mechanism that can make recommendations to agencies and donors. Working under the aegis of OCHA, we have the Under Secretary General for

Humanitarian Affairs, who can take these recommendations forward and ensure that they are acted upon.

Q: Could you identify where IDPs are most vulnerable or where they need most support?

A: Basic relief in all sectors, especially - and by definition - IDPs need shelter. Often they also have an urgent need for protection, and for longer-term rehabilitation and recovery support. Geographically, the big areas of concern are obviously Sudan - north, south and Darfur - DRC [Democratic Republic of Congo], Uganda, Colombia, Liberia and Somalia; they are all significant areas of concern. Somalia has been more neglected than other countries in some ways. Burundi and, possibly, Nepal are also emerging as worrying hotspots.

A new dimension is those displaced by the tsunami, which may become a major issue - I mean dealing with people displaced by natural disasters, which can be a more complicated issue when they start to return home.

Q: If national governments sometimes fail to protect and assist IDPs, is this primarily due to a shortage of resources, to political reasons, or lack of awareness, or are there other reasons?

A: Of course, sometimes the national authorities are directly responsible themselves for causing displacement. There may be a lack of resources because the country is generally impoverished, and lack of protection may also be due to lack of capacity, but also, the government itself is often part of the reason for displacement. A grave problem facing IDPs is their lack of profile - they simply don't have the same profile, attention and donor support as refugees.

Q: If and when IDPs are able to return to their home areas, what specific problems or risks do they face?

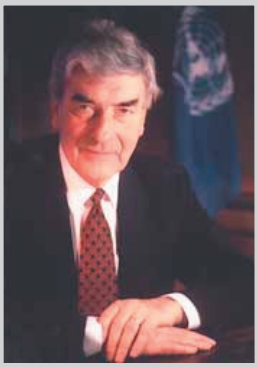
A: You have the risk of a cycle of displacement after return. If basic services and structures are not in place … and if people cannot get land or find work, you are more likely to have secondary displacement and lawlessness. These are classic symptoms of return to areas without structures; in these situations you have a risk of continued instability.

Q: Having previously worked for many years with UNHCR, dealing with refugees, and now with your present responsibilities for IDPs, are there aspects that have made a strong impact on you?

A: The main impact is seeing very clearly the lack of consistency and institutional mechanisms available to deal with IDPs. This is a major dilemma, and this is why this Division and OCHA are clearly supporting the collaborative response - currently we are very dependent on the goodwill of key operational agencies to provide the support that IDPs need. Clearly, this is nowhere near enough.

From a personal point of view, I have been very struck by the communities of IDPs that I have visited. They are the poorest of the poor - among the most vulnerable of already impoverished communities. They don't get any attention, are hidden away and, often, very neglected.

Interview with Ruud Lubbers, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees



United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Ruud Lubbers.
Credit: UNHCR

During his recent visit to Afghanistan in January 2005, Ruud Lubbers spoke with the IRIN Kabul reporter about his hopes for Afghan refugees and the wider issues of the global challenges facing refugees world-wide.

Question: How do you see the situation in Afghanistan?

Answer: There is a lot of progress in Afghanistan. With the new government in place, refugees are finding their way home. People are returning to the villages and, of course, things go better when they plan projects together to improve their lives. I think a lot still has to be done, but it is positive to have a bit of ambition and I hope larger projects will be created. It is also good to see that this is not only a question of money; it is also cooperating with each other. I think the work of UNHCR [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees] is not just transporting people home; it is also being with them for a while, and trying to convince others to improve their lives by living and working together.

Q: At what stage is the return of the Afghan refugees now?

A: We have to be aware that half have gone home but the other half still have to come home - there is still quite a way to go - and that will happen only when there is confidence in the peace - not only political, but also confidence in the quality of village life: that there is justice; that there is no violence; and that people are capable of coping with the necessities of each day - that is what they are practicing here.

The largest operation was and is Afghanistan. We hope to continue repatriation for three-quarters of a year - we are trying our utmost, working with development agencies, like UNDP and other agencies, as well as the government.

Q: What are the chief concerns of UNHCR globally?

A: Worldwide - to say a few words about UNHCR - we are now working in terms of about 17 million people, which is four or five million less than when I came into office four years ago, and there is an ongoing effort to find permanent solutions for [refugees and displaced] people. There are always three possibilities: the best is repatriation, and the second is local integration, and third is resettlement in countries abroad.

Resettlement is increasing again, but in limited numbers. Our main objective is repatriation. In the past year we developed programmes where we don't confine ourselves to repatriation - the concept of the 'Four Rs': repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation, reconstruction. It is clear that those things cannot all be done by HCR; HCR is always there for repatriation, and we do some projects in reintegration, but we try to partner with others, for example, when a shelter programme, or water or educational programmes are required, we hope these will be put in place by others, such as the government of the home country. People repatriate after a conflict, and almost always the country is devastated. Reconstruction takes time, but we are doing it.

In terms of the global situation, I expect that as we continue repatriation, so every year it [the number of refugees] will go down by a million - that is possible. It is partly successful in Afghanistan - these are very large numbers.

We have also done large repatriations in the former Yugoslavia, in countries like Bosnia Herzegovina, in Serbia, in Croatia, even in Kosovo. Then of course, we also have large repatriations in Sierra Leone, in Angola and now in Liberia, so it is an ongoing process.

The number of a million less means that we are finding more durable solutions, because at the same time, new conflicts are emerging - not many, but still, it is happening. For example in Darfur in Sudan, 200,000 had to flee the conflict last year and we are now taking care of them in [neighbouring] Chad - so there are more refugees, but this is balanced by the fact that we are bringing more people home.

Q: Which country is your top concern?

A: The largest operations were and are still in Afghanistan. We hope to continue the repatriation of, lets say, three-quarters of a million people every year - so in 2005 you will see 750,000 more coming home.

In Iraq there were fewer refugees outside the country - I think we are talking of about 500,000 in neighbouring countries. Of course, many Iraqis fled the regime of Saddam Hussein - millions of Iraqis have gone all over the

world, and most of them are integrated in those societies, so they are not refugees anymore, they are accepted there.

I would guess that of the 500,000 Iraqi refugees, around 200,000 have already come home. Even with the fighting going on, quite a few have gone back to their villages in Iraq, especially from Iran. At present it is not possible for HCR to locate international staff there, so we work with our local staff, and assist somewhat in the return process but the situation is still very fragile.

If there were really peace on the ground in Iraq, we could do much more by way of returning refugees, and also internally displaced persons. Saddam Hussein drove out the Kurds, particularly in the north, in what he called his 'Arabianisation' campaign; he was also driving people out in the south, where the Shiites were resisting him.

Our other large action now is Sudan, where there are two operations: one I've mentioned already is Darfur. We have 200,000 refugees from Darfur in Chad, but we also take care of the internally displaced persons in West Darfur, which is an important part of the operation.

Why only West Darfur? Because taking on all of Darfur would be too big for us, and the people in West Darfur have a relationship with those who fled to Chad, so having a presence in West Darfur will be an advantage when we want to return them. At the moment, by assisting people there we can prevent hundreds of thousands more from going to Chad. The situation In Chad is very difficult in terms of water - It is almost impossible, and no more than 200,000 can be accommodated - so it is better if we give assistance in west Darfur.

Then I would certainly mention Burundi, where there is a fragile peace but we are bringing people back. I think last year almost a hundred thousand people came back, which slowed down by the end of the year, but is picking up again. I would not be surprised if we brought back - maybe not a hundred thousand, but certainly more than fifty thousand and, hopefully, up to hundred thousand. Angola is also an important repatriation area.

Now we've had the tsunami natural disaster, which hit heavily in Sri Lanka - a country where we were in the middle of repatriating 400,000 people - but this is typical of HCR work. We had a green light from both the Tamils and the central government, but now there are many additional tsunami victims, so we will see we if can expand our assistance to help these people reintegrate by means of shelter programmes, etc. This is urgent but, at the same time, it has to be well organised.

The resident coordinator will see what will be the best course to take, and who is doing what. But I have a feeling that we, as HCR, will make an important contribution to the tsunami victims in Sri Lanka. We already have teams in Sumatra, the next place we are going to, where we will have to do the first two weeks all by ourselves, but if the UN and the government of Indonesia ask us to take care of other parts of the country, we could do a similar job there.

Q: Do you think the tsunami added to the burden of work you were already doing? Do you think you will need more funding?

A: All of HCR's work is funded by governments and, of course, we cannot do it all, but there is always a certain capacity to expand. There are many people, particularly young people, who want to work with us, so if the international community asks us to do more, we can do more.

We are succeeding in gradually reducing the number of refugees, so that gives us the potential to care for internally displaced persons. We are helping five million now, so if there are, lets say, a million victims of the tsunami - in terms of survivors to be assisted - it is not an impossible task for the HCR, and the number could be higher, as we are geared for handling that particular type of situation. My position as high commissioner is that assistance should be available, but that is the key word - we are only 'available' when the Secretary General [of the United Nations] asks us; when the government of a country asks the donors, and us - that makes it possible for us to assist. These are the three green lights.

Q: How will the international community feel about the increasing number of IDPs, when they are celebrating the decline in refugees?

A: By recognising that we also have to be available to assist IDPs. There are situations where it is more logical to take care of IDPs: when we have IDPs because of drought, it requires more development programmes to make it possible for them to return after the drought. You give assistance when there is a need to assist IDPs, but providing food is more the province of the WFP in such situations.

I won't say that UNHCR, with fewer refugees, should take simply take care of IDP questions, but when the IDPs' problems are very similar to those of refugees, for example in west Darfur, we have to be available - and we are

doing more for the IDPs there. We are assisting about five million IDPs now - and maybe ten million in terms of refugees and those who are on the way - to find solutions for returnees, and so on. I imagine that we could do more, gradually, in terms of IDPs too.

Q: Why is there often very little to return to, and reintegration does not take place very well?

A: I think an important factor is that the development work takes too long: the returnees are eager to restart their lives - they want water, irrigation projects, dams - and it has to go a bit faster. We have to work with the developmental agencies, like UNDP and many others, and the governments. They should bear in mind that the returning refugees have enormous productive capacity, and take that into account when projects are defined.

Q: Do you think the US-led coalition operation against Al-Qaeda has created conflicts and, as a result, more displacements?

A: No I don't think so. I think that in all the problems in the world, the world has difficulty in coping, firstly, with regimes that become corrupt or undemocratic, and if you don't find solutions to that, sooner or later you will have movements that use violence; and secondly, especially in the world of Islam, there is a large vulnerability because of the middle-east problem of Palestine and Israel, which hasn't really been solved.

And then, on the interface between superpowers and, particularly, the influence of the United States on the world and other cultures, you often sense that young Muslims feel a bit dominated by this, and that the United States is putting pressure on them. The United States itself thinks they are bringing justice and peace, but others think they are bringing injustice or a lack of justice, so that fuels movements that use violence: sometimes they are desperate people; sometimes young people who want to do something useful with their lives, but then they say, 'lets go and fight'. So I think there is an indirect cause, in the sense of terrorism, but there is also a lack of alternative motivation to prevent young people from becoming terrorists.

Q: When will the last Afghan refugee return home?

A: I think the number of returnees will fade out gradually - it's a question of how long UNHCR needs a formal programme of repatriation. We have assisted more than half now, so we are talking about two to three more years - then we should be there.

Interview with Théogene Sindayihebura of the Burundian Ministry for Repatriation

Théogene Sindayihebura - Chief of staff of the Ministry of Reinsertion an d Reinstallation of the Displaced and the Repatriated in Burundi.
Credit: IRIN

The chief of staff of the Ministry of Reinsertion and Reinstallation of the Displaced and the Repatriated in Burundi took time to explain to IRIN his perception of the issues and challenges facing refugees in his country.

Question: How many Burundian refugees are there?

Answer: About half a million Burundian Refugees are located in Tanzania. They are the ones who left recently, ten years ago in 1993 and 1994, and the ones who left in 1972, those we call "long-term refugees".

Q: What are the oldest and most recent caseloads?

A: Most of the Burundian refugees left because of the problems the country has had, because of the war and insecurity. Those who left in 1993 left because of the war that has affected our country for the past 11 years. It is the same for those who left in 1972, they left for the same reasons.

Q: What are the most difficult aspects of bringing the refugees home?

A: Our ministry was created during the war in order to reinsert and reinstall refugees. First comes the repatriation of refugees, a task that is carried out with support from UNHCR. But after repatriation, we must reinsert and reinstall these people who come back to their country.

Our main problem, which applies to the whole country, is a lack of funds to cope with the needs of the refugees. Because, in addition to refugees, Burundi also has internally displaced persons, who face the same problems and have the same needs. We lack the means to assist all of those needs.

Q: Is sexual violence a problem for IDPs and refugees? How is the ministry handling the issue of rape?

A: Violence against women is a reality. Women are raped and subjected to different kinds of violence. It is an issue the government tries to tackle. This problem is felt by everyone, a sadness shared by everyone. Because of the war, women are often raped, and it is a real problem. It's sad, but it's a reality in this country.

The government has taken this issue very seriously. There has been a sensitization effort directed at all actors, to prevent and punish this violence against women.

Q: In your opinion, how are the refugees living outside Burundi, and how does this compare to the life of the majority of the people who live in Burundi?

A: Life in refugee camps is hard. Refugees live a miserable existence, compared to the life Burundians lead. Burundi is the 173rd poorest country in the world. Most Burundians are poor, but there is a difference. If you look at human development indicators as published by UNDP, there is a huge difference.

First, Burundians who live at home have the "moral wealth" of being at home.

And I must say that 80 per cent of the population of Burundi lives from agriculture. Burundian peasants who live off the land lead a decent life, they are far better off than life in the camps. Also, Burundians are a hard-working people. If it were not for the war, the situation would be much better today. So there is no comparison between life in the camps and family life. Family life is far more pleasant.

Q: Do you think there will be a shortfall in expectations between what the refugees are expecting to come home to, and what they are actually returning to?

A: Upon coming home, the first concern for refugees and returnees is to get their possessions back. And to the Burundian, land is what is most precious. But there are also other goods and possessions.

The government has paid special attention to the land issue, and has comprehensively studied the question. The Ministry of Reinsertion and Reinstallation of the Displaced and the Repatriated, in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Town and Country Planning, listed all real estate properties and their demarcation, in order to find solutions to the problems that might arise.

Among the long-term refugees, those who left in 1972, that's 32 years ago, risk having land issues. This is why the

government carried out this inventory, so that, in case it is needed, the government may give the land back to its owner. But the more recent refugees do not have to face this problem, when they return, they are still familiar with their land, they find their land and goods back. If they left a cassava field, a banana field, neighbours may have cultivated it, but the land is still there.

Q: What are the issues that are preventing the safe return of refugees?

A: I am not personally aware of what is keeping refugees from coming back, but I must specify that return and repatriation are voluntary. Only those who want to return come back. But when we visit camps to inform and sensitize refugees, the questions we are most often asked are about peace and the security situation, and about the property they left behind.

But the government has set up several institutions, among which are the Ministry of Reinsertion and Reinstallation of the Displaced and the Repatriated, and the National Commission for the Rehabilitation of Disaster Victims (CNRS in its French acronym), to find solutions to the problems refugees face.

Summing up, insecurity is the main obstacle to repatriation, but almost 90 per cent of the national territory is now secure. If there are problems recovering property, it is linked to land occupation by people who have stayed in Burundi.

The young, the children who are born abroad in refugee camps, and who just spent 32 years in asylum countries, may think "let's wait a while, see how the social, economic, and political situation evolves". So I'm not sure what is keeping the refugees from coming home en masse, but the figures we have show that those who are in Tanzania are returning.

Q: In some cases refugees have been away for so long that in terms of their culture and daily lives, they will have a culture shock.

A: It's true, some long-term refugees have grown used to the lifestyle of the country hosting them. They might have problems readjusting. For instance, children born [in Tanzania] were educated in an Anglophone country, and might have a hard time learning Kirundi and French when they return.

But there is no cultural gap with Tanzania that would prevent people from returning home, given the cross-border trade and movements.

Q: What is the most important issue facing the returnees? Is it land? And if so, what are the issues?

A: The first need, the most essential property, is land. Refugees need a material base to return to.

That is the question the government has already found answers to, by listing lands and establishing institutions to deal with land issues. There is a National Commission for the Rehabilitation of Disaster Victims, which deals with land issues.

I want to reassure everyone, the question of land is very important to people, as most refugees who left Burundi are farmers. So land is the essential matter and must be available, it is the returnees' first need.

Q: How do Burundians feel about returning refugees? Are they welcome upon their return?

A: Repatriation is a process every Burundian supports, which is to say that refugees who return are warmly greeted, for several reasons.

For the return to be as smooth as possible, the government set up greeting committees, consisting of the leader of the community, and the leader of the town. It is a pleasure for all Burundians to greet their brothers and sisters who chose exile, because they have spent lots of time together, they have a lot in common.

Despite the crisis, despite the effects of the war, they are close, they have a common culture. Some people have stayed in Burundi, but they have parents or cousins who have left. For them, it is a real joy to see their kin return.

It is also positive in that the fear subsides. People who left are anxious to know how those who stayed see the whole situation. So, to attain "moral peace", they need to return, they like seeing their neighbours return to their hill. This is the feeling they most often express.

5. Resources

Refugee organization links and synopsis

International organisations

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees - UNHCR
http://www.unhcr.org/

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees - UNRWA
http://www.un.org/unrwa/

OCHA - UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
http://ochaonline.un.org

IOM - International Organization for Migration
http://www.iom.int

UN World Food Programme
http://www.wfp.org/

NON Governmental Organisations

Refuge! (Amnesty International)
http://www.refuge.amnesty.org/htm/home.htm

American Refugee Committee
http://www.archq.org
The American Refugee Committee works for the survival, health and well being of refugees, displaced people, and those at risk, enabling them to rebuild productive lives of dignity and purpose, striving always to respect their values.

Anera
http://www.anera.org
American Near East Refugee Aid (ANERA) was founded in 1968 in the aftermath of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, to help the hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians.

Asylum Aid
http://www.asylumaid.org.uk
An independent, national charity assisting refugees in the UK.

Asylum Law
http://www.asylumlaw.org/
asylumlaw.org, is a free website run by an international consortium of agencies that help asylum seekers in Australia, Canada, the United States, and several countries in Europe.

Australian Refugee Council
http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au
The Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) is a non-profit peak organisation. It provides information on and advocacy for refugees and humanitarian entrants in Australia on behalf of its 90 organisational members and many individual members. It is not a part of the Australian Government.

Brookings Institute Project on Internal Displacement
http://www.brook.edu/fp/projects/idp/idp.htm

British Refugee Council
http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk
The Refugee Council is the largest organisation in the UK working with asylum seekers and refugees.

Cafod - Catholic Agency for Overseas Development
http://www.cafod.org.uk

Canadian Council for Refugees
http://www.web.net/~ccr/
The Canadian Council for Refugees is a non-profit umbrella organization committed to the rights and protection of refugees in Canada and around the world and to the settlement of refugees and immigrants in Canada.

Centre for Refugee Studies-York University, Canada.
http://www.yorku.ca/crs/
The Centre for Refugee Studies is engaged in research on refugee issues.

Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS)
http://www.compas.ox.ac.uk
The British Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) has recently awarded the University of Oxford a new national research centre on migration.

Cultural Orientation
http://www.culturalorientation.net
The United States Refugee Program helps thousands of refugees resettle in the United States each year. Refugees are processed overseas by a variety of governmental and non-governmental organizations. As part of this preparation, most refugees receive cultural orientation (CO) training.

European Networks on Integration of Refugees
http://www.refugeenet.org

Exilio
http://www.exilio.de

Humanitarian Practice Network
http://www.odihpn.org/index.asp
The Humanitarian Practice Network (HPN) is an independent forum where field workers, managers and policymakers in the humanitarian sector share information, analysis and experience.

Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees in the UK (ICAR)
http://www.icar.org.uk
ICAR is the only independent centre set up to collect, record, compile and disseminate up to date, comprehensive and academically credible information about refugees and asylum seekers in the UK. It aims to raise the level of public debate and to promote better understanding of the issues. ICAR is located in the School of Social Science and Public Policy at King's College London and is funded by charitable trusts.

Immigration Law Practitioners' Association (ILPA)
http://www.ilpa.org.uk
ILPA was established in 1984 by a group of leading UK immigration practitioners to: promote and improve the advising and representation of immigrants; provide information to members on domestic and European immigration, refugee and nationality law; and secure a non-racist, non-sexist, just and equitable system of immigration, refugee and nationality law.

International Consortium for Refugees in Iran-ICRI
http://www.icri-ir.com

International Refugee Rights Initiative
http://www.refugee-rights.orgwww.refugee-rights.org

International Rescue Committee
http://www.theirc.org
The International Rescue Committee is a world leader in relief, rehabilitation, protection, post-conflict development, resettlement services and advocacy for those uprooted or affected by violent conflict and oppression.

IRSA - Immigration and Refugee Services of America
http://www.refugeeusa.org

Jesuit Refugee Service
http://www.jesref.orgwww.jesref.org
The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) is an international Catholic organisation with a mission is to accompany, serve and defend the rights of refugees and forcibly displaced people.

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
http://www.lirs.org/
LIRS is an international organization that envision a world where all communities welcome refugees and migrants.

Ockenden International
http://www.ockenden.ir
Ockenden International is a British-based NGO mandated to work with refugees, displaced people, returnees, and their host communities. Its works is primarily focused on the areas affected by war and complex political situations.

Red Cross Center for Tortured Refugees
http://www.redcross.se/rkcstockholm
The Red Cross Center for Tortured Refugees, is currently a foundation, connected to the Swedish Red Cross, and is funded by grants from Stockholm County Council, Stockholm Municipality, the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, the return on foundation capital, project contributions, other smaller contributions, and lecture fees.

Refugee Academics
http://www.academic-refugees.org
The aim of the Council for Assisting Refugee Academics is to assist university teachers or researchers who have lost their jobs as a result of political, racial or religious discrimination and have become refugees in UK.

Refugees International
http://www.refugeesinternational.org
Refugees International generates lifesaving humanitarian assistance and protection for displaced people around the world, and works to end the conditions that create displacement.

Refugee Law Project - Uganda
http://www.refugeelawproject.org
RLP is an organization which ensure the fundamental human rights for all refugees and internally displaced persons within Uganda. Ultimately, we wish Uganda to treat all such people with the same standards of individual respect and social justice that should be applied to the rest of its citizens.

Refugee Studies Centre
http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/
The Refugee Studies Centre (RSC) was established in 1982 as part of Queen Elizabeth House, the University of Oxford's Centre for Development Studies. It has since won an international reputation as the leading multidisciplinary centre for research and teaching on the causes and consequences of forced migration.

ReliefWeb
http://www.reliefweb.int
ReliefWeb is the world's leading online gateway to information (documents and maps) on humanitarian emergencies and disasters. An independent vehicle of information, designed specifically to assist the international humanitarian community in effective delivery of emergency assistance, it provides timely, reliable and relevant information as events unfold, while emphasizing the coverage of "forgotten emergencies" at the same time. ReliefWeb was launched in October 1996 and is administered by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Student Action for Refugees
http://www.star-network.org.uk

The Foundation for the Refugee Education Trust
http://www.r-e-t.com
The RET is an independent, impartial, non-partisan organisation, with no religious or political affiliation, purposefully set up to be independent from UNHCR. Although financially independent from UN agencies, we have strategic alliances with both UNHCR and UNESCO - IBE, and welcome other opportunities to deliver our mission with greater strength and magnitude.

U.S. Committee for Refugees
http://www.refugees.org
USCR defends the rights of all uprooted people regardless of their nationality, race, religion, ideology, or social group.

Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children (IRC)
http://www.womenscommission.org/

ECRE - European Council on Refugees and Exiles
http://www.ecre.org
ECRE is a pan-European network of refugee-assisting non-governmental organisations. ECRE is concerned with the needs of all individuals who seek refuge and protection within Europe. Its aim is to promote the protection and integration of refugees in Europe based on the values of human dignity, human rights, and an ethic of solidarity.

Norwegian Refugee Council
http://www.nrc.no
The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) has worked for displaced persons since 1946.
NRC is a private foundation, and one of the largest humanitarian organizations in Norway. NRC has specialized in international activities for refugees and displaced persons.
Norwegian Refugee Council: Global IDP Project
http://www.idpproject.org

Refugee resources - Legislation, manuals and publications

Legal References

• 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights
http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html

• 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees
http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/o_c_ref.htm

• 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees
http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/o_p_ref.htm

• Arab World Declaration (1992)
http://www.lnf.org.lb/migrationnetwork/unn12.html

• Asian-African Principles (1966)
http://www.lnf.org.lb/migrationnetwork/unn10.html

• EU legislation, main proposals and Community acts
http://europa.eu.int/comm/justice_home/doc_centre/asylum/doc_asylum_intro_en.htm

• Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949
http://www.icrc.org/ihl.nsf/7c4d08d9b287a42141256739003e636b/6756482d86146898c125641e004aa3c5

• Guiding principles on internal displacement, UN document, 11 February 1998
http://www.icrc.org/web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/html/57JPGL

• OAS Cartagena Declaration (1984)
http://www.asylumlaw.org/docs/international/CentralAmerica.PDF

• Parties and NonParties to the UN Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees
http://72.3.131.88/data/wrs/04/pdf/page16.pdf

• Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court
http://www.icrc.org/ihl.nsf/385ec082b509e76c41256739003e636d/fb2c5995d7cbf846412566900039e535

• The Protection of Refugees in Armed Conflict
http://www.icrc.org/Web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/section_review_2001_843

Journals

• Asylum Support Information
http://www.asylumsupport.info/

• Exile Images
http://www.exileimages.co.uk

• Forced Migration Review
http://www.fmreview.org/
  • Forced Migration Review.- issue 21 - Home for Good? Challenges of return and reintegration.
  http://www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/FMR21/FMR21full.pdf
  • Forced Migration Review.- issue 22 - "Displaced Iraqis caught in the maelstrom"
  http://www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/FMR22/FMR2227.pdf
  • Forced Migration Review - issue 22 - "Educational reconstruction in Rwanda"
  • Forced Migration Review in Arabic
  http://www.hijra.org.uk/hijrahome.htm
  • Migraciones Forzadas - Forced Migration Review in Spanish
  http://www.migracionesforzadas.org/
  • Revue de la migration forcée - Forced Migration Review in French
  http://www.migrationforcee.org/

• InExile Magazine
http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/publications/index.htm

• International Journal of Refugee Law
http://www3.oup.co.uk/reflaw/contents

• IRR News. Independent race and refugees news Network
http://www.irr.org.uk/

• Journal of Refugee Studies
http://www3.oup.co.uk/refuge/contents

• Refugee Survey Quarterly
http://www3.oup.co.uk/refqtl/contents

Manuals

• Brookings Institution - Handbook for Applying the Guiding Principles of Internal Displacement.
http://www.brook.edu/fp/projects/idp/articles/guiding.htm

• Clinical Management of Rape Survivors - Developing protocols for use with refugees and internally displaced persons
http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2004/924159263X.pdf

• Inter-Parliamentary Union - Refugee Protection: A Guide to International Refugee Law
http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/lib.nsf/db900SID/LGEL-5E6KUQ/$FILE/unhcr-refugeelaw-dec01.pdf?OpenElement

• International Rescue Committee - Blueprint for Refugee Integration - A Focus on Women and Youth
http://intranet.theirc.org/docs/Community Collaboratives

• International Rescue Committee - Creating Comfort- Ways to Encourage Refugee Women to Participate in Programs and Be Active in their Communities

• Norwegian Refugee Council - Return, Resettlement and Reintegration
http://www.idpproject.org/training/nrc_modules/module4.pdf

• UNHCR - Handbook for Repatriation and Reintegration
http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/partners/+-wwBme7SvhexxwwwwnwwwwwwwxFqzvxmnxsW+vmFqo7E2RN02IhFqo7E2RN02ItFqopwGBDnG5zFqmRbZAFqo7E2RN02IDzmxwwwwwww1FqmRbZ/opendoc.pdf

• UNHCR - Handbook on Procedures and Criteria for Determining Refugee Status under the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees.
http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/+7wwBm_el4VpwwwwnwwwwwwwhFqhT0yfEtFqnp1xcAFqhT0yfEcFqewlnhDrqGarwDmxddAadDapGdqnm1Gn5awDmaqGoBnGowahdGamnBnGMoDoDtaGnh1tnna5BwB15DzmxwwwwwwW1FqmRbZ/opendoc.pdf

• UNHCR - Protecting Refugees - A Field Guide for NGOs
http://www.the-ecentre.net/resources/e_library/doc/Protecting Refugees - A Field Guide for NGOs.pdf

• UNHCR - Water Manual for Refugee Situations
http://www.the-ecentre.net/resources/e_library/doc/11-WATER.PDF

• The UN Migration Catalogue
http://www.odihpn.org/guidelinereport.asp?ID=16

• United Nations (1998), Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement
http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu2/7/b/principles.htm

Others Reports and articles

• Aiding peace and war: UNHCR, returnee reintegration, and the relief-development debate.-Joanna Macrae
http://www.jha.ac/articles/u014.htm

• Angolans return home to peace and hunger.
http://www.wfp.org/newsroom/subsections/preview.asp?content_item_id=1587&item_id=931&section=13

• Derecho de los refugiados y derecho internacional humanitario: paralelismos, enseñanzas y perspectivas para el futuro La opinión de una organización no gubernamental
http://www.icrc.org/web/spa/sitespa0.nsf/iwpList128/D622A9AFFA603424C1256DE10067B81E

• External Evaluation of OCHAs Internal Displacement Unit
http://www.reliefweb.int/idp/docs/references/UnitEvalutionJan2004.pdf

• HIV/AIDS and STI prevention and care in Rwandan refugee camps in the United Republic of Tanzania.
http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2003/9291731625.pdf

• Human Rights First: A Decade of Unrest.- Unrecognized Rwandan Refugees in Uganda and the Future of Refugee Protection in the Great Lakes
http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/refugees/reports/Decade-of-Unrest.pdf

• Humanitarian Practice Network -Return requires time and patience
http://www.odihpn.org/report.asp?ID=2184

• "If We Return, We Will Be Killed" Consolidation of Ethnic Cleansing in Darfur, Sudan
http://hrw.org/backgrounder/africa/darfur1104/

• Nowhere To Run, No Place To Hide. Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, November 2002. Roberta Cohen, Senior Fellow, Foreign Policy Studies
http://www.brook.edu/views/articles/cohenr/20021101.htm

• Refugee Education in 2002/2003.- Indicators and standards for 66 camps locations
http://www.refugeesinternational.org/files/2992_file_PK_WestAfrica_Jun04_v2.pdf

• Refugee Law Project Working Paper No. 13
http://www.refugeelawproject.org/Working%20papers/RLPWP13.pdf

• Returning refugees or migrating villagers? Voluntary repatriation programmes in Africa reconsidered.- Oliver Bakewell
http://www.jha.ac/articles/u015.htm

• Significant VOLUNTARY Repatriations 2003. US Committee for refugees. World Refugee Survey 2004
http://72.3.131.88/data/wrs/04/pdf/voluntary.pdf

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http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendoc.pdf?tbl=MEDIA&id=40570d7b7&page=home

• UNHCR (May 2004), "Preparatory project for the elaboration of a Comprehensive Plan of Action for Somali Refugees".
http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendoc.pdf?tbl=PROTECTION&id=4157babf4&page=protect

• Womens Commission for Refugee Women and Children
http://www.womenscommission.org/pdf/Ed_Emerg.pdf

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