

HUMANITARIAN IMPLEMENTATION PLAN (HIP)

NEPAL – Refugees from Bhutan

1. CONTEXT

With a total estimated population in the range of 27 million, Nepal ranks 157/187 in the 2011 Human Development Index and it has a vulnerability index of 3 (out of 3) within DG ECHO's Global Needs Assessment methodology.

Since the early 1990s, more than 107,000 Bhutanese refugees - approximately 20% of Bhutan's population – have been living in seven camps run by the UNHCR in the Eastern districts of Nepal. The first refugee camp in Nepal was established in 1990 after thousands Bhutanese citizens of Nepalese descent, largely belonging to the 'Lhotsampas' ethnic group of whom some had been living in Bhutan since the 19th century, fled Bhutan after the government issued new citizenship laws.

The Bhutanese government considers the refugees as migrants who have no right to live in Bhutan. On the other hand they are not Nepalese citizens either. The Government of Nepal is neither a signatory to the 1951 Geneva Convention on the status of refugees nor to the 1967 Protocol relating to the status of refugees. According to existing rules and regulations in Nepal, the refugees from Bhutan do not have the right to work or to own land in Nepal. As a result, they rely almost entirely on external assistance for their survival.

In November 2007 a third country resettlement programme started, supported by the Government of Nepal, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and resettlement countries. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as of May 2012 some 65,000 Bhutanese refugees have been resettled, and the process is continuing. Most of the refugees resettled in the USA (54,814), while the rest went to Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Norway, Denmark and the Netherlands. The remaining camp population stands at around 48,000, whilst the resettlement programme continues. Of the original seven camps, at present only two exist after the administrative merger of three camps in January 2011 and the closure of three camps in June 2012. While a large majority of the refugees have declared an interest in resettlement, many still would prefer to return to Bhutan, or stay in Nepal with a work permit. In any event, without a political solution, it will take a number of years at the current rate of progress for all the refugees to be resettled. UNHCR estimates that by 2015 a caseload of 10-12,000 refugees will remain.

2. HUMANITARIAN NEEDS

1) Affected people/ potential beneficiaries

Some 40,000 refugees from Bhutan living in camps in Nepal.

2) Description of most acute humanitarian needs.

The main impediment affecting the remaining refugees is that the Nepalese government does not allow activities that might bestow a more “permanent” status to the refugees (official policy of non-integration). Economic activity and property ownership are not allowed. While refugees have freedom of association, the government’s policy of non-integration limits their access to the economy. As such, they have little means to provide for their basic sustenance without external assistance.

Consequently, no land has been allocated for even the most basic cultivation, and officially refugees are not allowed to seek work outside, or to set up small enterprises within the camps. In reality, however, many young adults find work in the neighbouring villages and fields (mostly unskilled), and some have left the camps to become teachers in other parts of Nepal. However, refugee workers do not earn much, as local contractors take advantage of the illegality of the situation to impose extremely low wages. Moreover, local unions often protest to ensure that employment opportunities remain minimal for this Bhutanese population.

Therefore, refugees are unable to attain basic livelihood and food security and rely almost entirely on World Food Programme's (WFP) food rations, supplemented with vegetables and a number of essential non-food items supplied by the UNHCR. In addition, some refugees benefit from remittances received from relatives, who have already resettled, while others try to grow vegetables on very limited land in between houses (in most cases between 1 to 3 square meters), initiated with the assistance of WFP’s Home and Pot Gardening Projects (WFP handed over the programme to the refugees in 2004). Other micro-projects include vocational training and small income-generating activities for women, but the possibilities to further develop such activities remain limited.

Although WFP's operation was adequately funded in 2012, there is always a risk of 'donor's fatigue' as the number of the refugee caseload decreases. Previously, WFP experienced some difficulties in funding its operation in the camps as total contributions from donors did not always match its annual funding requirements. Any significant disruption in food deliveries (quantity and quality) would most likely result in a deteriorating humanitarian situation and would put the refugees at considerable risk of diseases related to malnutrition, reversing the progress made in their nutritional status achieved, so far, through steady food assistance. The most vulnerable refugees (malnourished children, elderly, pregnant woman), all presently assisted under a supplementary feeding programme, would suffer most if emergency rations were not provided. Acute malnutrition and micro-nutrient deficiency disorders are already a concern inside the camps, although with a lower incidence than the corresponding national figure. In a recent survey

conducted in the refugee camps, the GAM rate was 6.8 percent¹ whereas the National average is 11 percent².

3. HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

1) National / local response and involvement

Bhutan and Nepal refuse to accept the refugees as citizens; which makes most of them almost entirely dependent on international assistance to meet their basic needs.

2) International Humanitarian Response

IOM is in charge of the third country resettlement process, while UNHCR is responsible for protection and the provision of non-food items, and WFP has been in charge of delivering food assistance since 1992. These organizations also work with local and international implementing partners. WFP's yearly budget for humanitarian food assistance in 2012 was EUR 6,582,500 to which ECHO contributed EUR 1,200,000 (around 18%)

3) Constraints and DG ECHO response capacity

'Bandhas' (strikes and blockades) often delay food transport and distribution. Security in the camps has been problematic at times, but has become more manageable and stable since the beginning of the resettlement. So far, the UN agencies in charge have been able to deliver adequate levels of humanitarian assistance, including protection (including against sexual and gender based violence).

4) Envisaged DG ECHO response and expected results of humanitarian aid interventions

DG ECHO is planning to finance EUR 1,000,000 of food assistance through WFP in favour of the refugees, representing around 20 % of the cost of covering their anticipated annual food needs for 2013 (estimated at some EUR 5,050,000). Other donors are expected to finance the remaining part of the WFP programme, but in the context of a certain donor fatigue, ECHO is one of the major and most reliable donors to this population.

DG ECHO will continue to advocate for a political solution for the refugees, in association with the EU Delegation and relevant Commission services.

DG ECHO's response will contribute to maintaining and/or improving the food consumption and nutritional status of the refugee population, particularly of the most vulnerable groups (malnourished children, elderly, pregnant women, while

¹ Nutrition and Micronutrient Survey among Bhutanese Refugee Children - Damak, Nepal, December 2011

² Nepal Demographic and Health Survey, 2011

acknowledging that other factors (including caring practices, water, hygiene and sanitation etc) also impact on nutritional status.

4. LRRD, CO-ORDINATION AND TRANSITION

1) Other DG ECHO interventions

2011: 2011 DIPECHO Action Plan for South Asia including more than EUR 3,000,000 for Nepal

2012: Worldwide Decision including EUR 1,200,000 in favour of Bhutanese refugees

2) Other services/donors availability

In 2011 the European Commission (EEAS/DEVCO) provided Euro 2,950,000 for the ongoing protection and material needs of the refugees from Bhutan, including health and nutrition, education, legal assistance, sanitation, shelter and water, and the camp consolidation process (.International Protection and Assistance to the Refugees from Bhutan in the Camps in Eastern Nepal) The contribution is provided for 2011 to 2014 through UNHCR Regular coordination is maintained on the Bhutanese refugee file between the EU Delegation to Nepal and ECHO.

3) Exit scenarios

The refugee caseload has been steadily decreasing, since November 2007, thanks to the third country resettlement programme and, based on requests already put forward by a majority of the camps' population, this trend is expected to continue during 2013 and beyond. The UNHCR estimates that possibly up to 85% of the initial population may be accepting third country resettlement. As the resettlement programme progresses and the number of those remaining in the camps steadily decreases, it is hoped that sustainable durable solutions will be found for the entire remaining caseload within a reasonable timeframe.

5. OPERATIONAL AND FINANCIAL DETAILS

The provisions of the financing decision ECHO/WWD/BUD/2013/01000 and the general conditions of the Partnership Agreement with the European Commission shall take precedence over the provisions in this document.

5.1 Contacts³

Operational Unit in charge: ECHO/B5

³ Single Forms will be submitted to DG ECHO using APPEL (e-Single-Form).

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5.2 Financial info

Indicative Allocation: EUR 1,000,000

Man-made crises: Food Assistance: EUR 1,000,000

5.3 Proposal Assessment

- a) Description of the humanitarian aid interventions relating to this assessment round: Food assistance to the refugees from Bhutan remaining in camps, in Nepal.
- b) Indicative amount to be allocated in this round of proposals: up to EUR 1,000,000.
- c) Costs will be eligible from 01/01/2013.
- d) The expected initial duration for the Action is up to 12 months.
- e) Potential partners: WFP is a preselected partner because the related activities present specific characteristics that require a particular type of body on account of its mandate, technical competence, logistic capacity, high degree of specialization, and administrative structure.