

HUMANITARIAN IMPLEMENTATION PLAN (HIP)

NEPAL/Refugees from Bhutan

AMOUNT: EUR 1 300 000

0. MAJOR CHANGES SINCE PREVIOUS VERSION OF THE HIP

As a result of the devastating floods last August (the most severe since 2008), 150 000 people in the Mid-Western districts have lost their homes and more than 34 000 were displaced. Most of those affected are from the most vulnerable/marginalized communities (landless farmers, Dalits and Kamaiya - former bonded labourers) and their coping mechanisms are severely stretched. Despite urgent calls from the Nepalese Government, the international community has provided very little humanitarian assistance. The Commission through ECHO¹ provided EUR 250 000 with a small scale response intervention. Huge unmet gaps still remain, in particular in terms of shelter repair, WASH and food/livelihood recovery. It is therefore appropriate to increase the allocation under the present HIP by EUR 500 000.

1. CONTEXT

With a total estimated population in the range of 26.5 million, Nepal ranks 157/187 in the 2012 Human Development Index. ECHO's Integrated Analysis Framework for 2013-14 identified moderate humanitarian needs in Nepal. The vulnerability of the population affected by the crisis is assessed to be very high.

In the early 1990s, in the sequence of the adoption of new citizenship laws in Bhutan, more than 108 000 - approximately 20% of the then Bhutan's population – 'Lhotsampas' fled or were moved to Eastern Nepal, where they lived in seven refugee camps run by the UNHCR. The 'Lhotsampas' are an ethnic group close to Nepali, some of whom had been living in Bhutan since the 19th century.

The Bhutanese government considers the refugees as migrants who have no right to live in Bhutan, but 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 and rely almost entirely on World Food Programme's (WFP) food rations to attain basic livelihood and food security.

In November 2007 a third country resettlement programme started, supported by the Government of Nepal, IOM and resettlement countries. According to the UNHCR, as of April 2013 some 80 000 Bhutanese refugees have been resettled, and the process is continuing. Most of the refugees resettled in the USA (66 134), while the rest went to Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Norway, Denmark and the Netherlands. The remaining camp population stands at around 38 000, as of April 2013, in two camps. While a large majority of the remaining refugees have declared an interest in resettlement, many still

¹ Directorate General for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection

would prefer to return to Bhutan, or stay in Nepal with a work permit. Without a political solution, it will still take some 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:

Around 38 000 refugees from Bhutan living in camps in Eastern Nepal

2) Description of the most acute humanitarian needs:

The main impediment to resolving the plight of the remaining refugees is that the Nepalese government does not officially allow activities that might bestow them a more permanent integration into Nepali society (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 subsistence without external assistance.

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 businesses within the camps. In reality, however, many young adults find work in the neighbouring villages and fields, or even Kathmandu (mostly unskilled labour for very low wages). However, this trend is now decreasing as most able-bodied refugees have already left for third country resettlement.

Refugees are therefore unable to access basic livelihood and food security and rely almost entirely on World Food Programme's (WFP) food rations and a number of essential non-food items supplied by the UNHCR. The provision of fresh vegetables by UNHCR was stopped in January 2013. Some refugees receive remittances from relatives, who have already resettled, while others try to grow vegetables on very small plots between houses (in most cases 1 to 3 square meters), a project 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.

In 2013 WFP experienced some difficulties in funding its operation in the camps, as total contributions from donors did not 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 food consumption and nutritional status achieved so far. The most vulnerable refugees (malnourished children, elderly, pregnant woman), all presently assisted under a supplementary feeding programme, would suffer most if 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 5%² whereas the National average is 11%³.

A UNHCR-WFP Joint Assessment mission conducted in June 2012 found that despite the reduction of the refugee population, the needs for the remaining ones have not decreased⁴. Additional vulnerabilities were identified as a result of the resettlement process, which has left some elders, persons with disability, single women and children more vulnerable as result of decreased support from refugee communities.

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 charged with delivering food assistance since 1992. These organizations also work with local and international implementing partners. WFP's yearly budget for humanitarian food assistance in 2013 was EUR 4 099 404 to which ECHO contributed EUR 1 000 000 (around 24%).

3) Constraints and 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 have been able to deliver adequate levels of humanitarian assistance, including protection (including against sexual and gender based violence).

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

ECHO is planning to finance EUR 800 000 for food assistance to the refugees through WFP, representing around 28% of the anticipated cost of covering their food needs for 2014 (estimated at some EUR 3 190 000). 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.

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

² UNHCR Nutrition Survey in Bhutanese Refugee Camps, Nepal, November 2012

³ Nepal Demographic and Health Survey, 2011

⁴ ECHO participated together with the EU Delegation and the US BPRM

ECHO's response will contribute to maintaining and/or improving the food consumption and nutritional status of the refugee population, particularly the most vulnerable groups (under-nourished children, elderly, pregnant women), while acknowledging that other factors (including care practices, water, hygiene and sanitation, etc.) addressed by UNHCR also impact positively on nutritional status.

The intervention will address integration of gender and age in a coherent way, including in terms of needs assessment and risk analysis.

Effective coordination is essential. ECHO supports the **Inter-Agency Standing Committee's Transformative Agenda (ITA)** and encourages partners to demonstrate their engagement in implementing its objectives, to take part in coordination mechanisms (e.g. Humanitarian Country Team/Clusters) and to allocate resources to foster the ITA roll-out.

Partners will be expected to ensure full compliance with **visibility** requirements and to acknowledge the funding role of the EU/ECHO, as set out in the applicable contractual arrangements.

4. LRRD, COORDINATION AND TRANSITION

1) *Other ECHO interventions:*

2013: 2013-14 DIPECHO Action Plan for South Asia including EUR 3 280 000 for Nepal (though this programme does not address the needs of the refugees from Bhutan).

2013: Worldwide Decision including EUR 1 000 000 in favour of the refugees from Bhutan.

2) *Other services/donors availability (such as for LRRD and transition):*

In 2011, through the Aid to Uprooted People (AUP) programme, the European Commission provided Euro 2 950 000 for addressing protection and material needs of the refugees from Bhutan, including health and nutrition, education, legal assistance, sanitation, shelter, water, and the camp consolidation process (International Protection and Assistance to the Refugees from Bhutan in the Camps in Eastern Nepal). The programme, managed by UNHCR, runs until 2014. Regular coordination is maintained on the Bhutanese refugee file between ECHO and the EU Delegation to Nepal with a number of joint field missions.

ECHO and the EU Delegation to Nepal have worked together to mitigate a number of risks in the refugee camps. In a fire accident in the camps in 2011, ECHO funded UNHCR for rebuilding huts destroyed by fire and improving fire preparedness among the refugee community.

In general ECHO and the EU Delegation to Nepal maintain close coordination for promoting the disaster risk reduction (DRR) agenda and mainstreaming it in both EU humanitarian aid and development programming, as DRR is perceived as a critical sector in Nepal considering the country's significant vulnerability to natural disasters. ECHO - through its DIPECHO funding line - continues to work on disaster

risk reduction in the country. The ‘National Strategy for Disaster Management in Nepal’ was formulated with ECHO support and ECHO is an active member of the Nepalese National Risk Reduction Consortium (NRRC). Furthermore, discussions are on-going to promote Nepal as one of the 'flagship countries' under the EU Resilience Strategy and Action Plan, in the framework of which investments in DRR should be reinforced.

3) *Other concomitant EU interventions (e.g. IfS):*

N/A

4) *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 2014 and 2015. The UNHCR estimates that over 85% of the initial population may accept third country resettlement and they expect the caseload to drop to 10 000 – 12 000 by end 2015; this may correspond to the residual population, unwilling or unable to resettle in a third country. Sustainable solutions are in the meantime being sought for this remaining caseload, involving both the governments of Nepal and Bhutan.