

Aim, scope and methodology of the review

The number of refugees to be found in the urban areas of developing countries appears to have increased considerably in recent years. It is a trend which has given rise to a wide range of protection and assistance concerns, both within and outside of UNHCR. It was in this context that UNHCR issued a new policy on refugees in urban areas at the end of 1997 (see Appendix A). In a covering memorandum to that document, UNHCR stated that the policy would be revised as necessary in the light of comments received from UNHCR offices and partners.

In October 1999, the Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit (EPAU) was requested to undertake a comprehensive review of the new policy and its implementation. As a first step in this process, a desk-based global survey was undertaken, so as to identify key issues for further research and analysis.

As a second step, a number of case studies have been selected for detailed review. New Delhi was chosen as the first of these evaluations because it accommodates a large and longstanding urban refugee population – almost 16,000 in total, most of them from Afghanistan - and because the UNHCR programme in New Delhi has proven to be a particularly problematic one.

This review was undertaken by two EPAU staff members, who undertook a mission to New Delhi from 3 to 13 April 2000. The team interviewed UNHCR staff members in the Indian capital, as well as personnel from the organization's local implementing partners: the Public Interest Legal Support and Research Centre (PILSARC); Voluntary Health Association of Delhi (VHAD) and the YMCA. The evaluation mission also held discussions with an official from the Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO), a representative of a major resettlement country, as well as refugees from Afghanistan, Myanmar, Somalia and Sudan. The evaluation team also interviewed relevant UNHCR and NGO personnel in Geneva and reviewed a wide range of programme documents in Geneva and New Delhi, including archival sources and statistical data.

This review has benefited particularly from the lengthy comments provided on a first draft of the report by a number of UNHCR units and staff members in Geneva, New Delhi and other locations. On many issues, it should be noted, these comments were substantially at odds with each other, testifying to the complex and controversial nature of the refugee situation in New Delhi.