

# Policy priorities

UNHCR's global strategic objectives highlight certain policy priorities, which have a direct and profound impact on the lives of people of concern. In 2009, these priorities include:

- protecting the displaced against violence, abuse, intimidation and exploitation, including sexual and gender-based violence;
- reducing malnutrition and anaemia and addressing major causes of morbidity and mortality, notably malaria and HIV, and providing adequate reproductive health services;
- reducing the protection risks faced by people of concern and improving their standard of living, especially in relation to water, shelter and sanitation services;
- facilitating the self-sufficiency of displaced women and their meaningful participation in the management of community decision-making bodies; and
- improving the educational and vocational skills of children and young people.

An additional priority for UNHCR is management reform, which aims to revise structures, processes, staffing and implementation to improve the performance of the organization.

## Gender equality and protection of women

UNHCR is launching a new gender equality policy to improve the protection of women and girls of concern. This calls for targeted action to address protection gaps and relies on implementation of the age, gender and diversity mainstreaming approach in all UNHCR programmes. It also calls for the participation of men and women of concern in the organization's activities.

The gender equality policy identifies five ways to address common problems in UNHCR operations. These include working inclusively with men and boys; providing education for all; involving women and girls in dealing with their civil and political concerns; making economic opportunities available for women; and combating sexual and gender-based violence.

To support these efforts, in 2009 UNHCR will expand the use of its Heightened Risk Identification Tool. This helps to detect refugees at risk through community-based participatory assessments and individual assessment methodologies.



The tool can be used in a variety of contexts. For instance, it could be employed in conjunction with refugee status determination and participatory assessment exercises; by itself in community-based consultations and individual assessments; to survey a refugee population to estimate the level of risk within the community; as an interview format for case workers; and as a checklist tool in refugee camps or urban settings.

UNHCR will distribute the gender equality policy in English as well as French, Spanish, Russian and Arabic. A series of training films for people of concern, staff and partner agencies will support expanded use of UNHCR's *Handbook for the Protection of Women and Girls*.

UNHCR will participate in Inter-Agency Standing Committee activities, in particular the sub-working group on gender in humanitarian settings, to ensure a common approach to Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and use of the *Inter-Agency Standing Committee Gender Handbook*.

To strengthen women's participation in community leadership and economic development, UNHCR aims to achieve the targets for women's participation in refugee management committees set out in its five commitments to refugee women. It will train and mobilize women to address the problems they face, and to strengthen their knowledge of international legal instruments to protect their rights. Both refugee and internally displaced women will be given more chances to participate in peace processes; this will be done through partnership with other UN agencies and targeted activities in selected repatriation countries.

In a bid to improve the economic self-sufficiency of displaced women, UNHCR will provide technical and financial support to women's livelihood projects. The aim is to enable women to improve their basic living conditions and protect them from being forced into survival sex. In this regard, UNHCR's Women Leading for Livelihoods (WLL) project encourages businesswomen to support displaced women's economic development, besides providing funds for small income-generating activities.

## Protection of children

UNHCR and its partners are working to implement the ExCom Conclusion no.107 (LVIII) 2007 on Children at Risk and the relevant recommendations in the UN Study on Violence against Children.



Refugees register at UNHCR offices in Amman, Jordan.

Specifically, UNHCR is working with partners to develop guidelines on child protection in emergencies. These guidelines will ensure a comprehensive approach to the protection and care of children through monitoring, identifying those at risk of violation of their rights, preventing and responding to those violations, determining best interests and finding durable solutions.

At the same time, UNHCR will disseminate its *Guidelines on Determining the Best Interests of the Child* and ensure their implementation by building partnerships, providing technical support, building staff capacity and mobilizing resources.

Other important activities in 2009 include strengthening the participation of children in UNHCR's programming by involving them in assessments and in the development of child protection systems. The competence of UNHCR and partner staff in child protection will be enhanced by use of the revised Action for the Rights of Children training and capacity-building tool and other inter-agency training initiatives for child protection in emergencies.

## Protection of older people and those with disabilities

The adoption of the 2006 UN Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of People with Disabilities, which came into effect in 2008, provides a clear framework for the protection of people of concern with disabilities.

Some improvements in protection and assistance for older people and those with disabilities have already been made. For example, use of the *proGres* registration system has improved the early identification, registration and regularization of status of these people. The Office's age, gender and diversity mainstreaming strategy ensures the participation of older people and those living with disabilities in the planning and implementation of programmes.



In 2008, HelpAge International and Handicap International seconded staff to UNHCR to support its programmes for older persons and those living with disabilities in IDP settings. They provide training and coaching in several IDP operations.

However, more needs to be done to incorporate the protection of older people and those living with disabilities into policies and programmes. To that end, UNHCR will:

- Improve early identification and individual case management through use of the Heightened Risk Identification Tool for refugees and others in urgent need of protection;
- ensure optimal use of the *proGres* registration database to record and analyze information on those with specific needs;
- promote the systematic incorporation of the needs of older people and those with disabilities, as well as recognition of their capacities, into country programmes, policy guidance and learning projects;
- develop and strengthen partnerships with UN agencies, specialized NGOs and academic institutions so that their expertise in dealing with older persons and those living with disabilities benefits UNHCR field operations; and
- promote the application of the UN Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities.

Finally, to build and strengthen both its community services and child protection capacity, UNHCR will continue its Emergency Standby Agreement with Save the Children Norway and Save the Children Sweden. This arrangement also allows for community services support in the early stages of an emergency.

## Education

The right to education is an integral part of UNHCR's assistance and protection interventions. While many refugee children are enrolled in primary education, issues of quality, girls' participation and safety, as well as post-primary education remain of significant concern. Few refugees have access to secondary education and even fewer to tertiary education. To address these issues, UNHCR will develop regional and country-specific multi-year education strategies that identify and address barriers to education at all levels. Global areas of concern will be addressed in UNHCR's Education Strategy, which is aligned with its Global Strategic Objectives.

In 2009, UNHCR will continue to focus on improving the safety and quality of education, and identify real and replicable solutions. A model for this is the Safe Learning Environment (SLE) initiative. UNHCR will also implement its codes of conduct for teachers and



Internally displaced children attend classes under a tree in Uganda.

UNHCR/M. Odojonyero

students, and link education more closely with livelihood support for families.

Significant gaps remain at the field and global levels in education. In the field, support is needed to ensure that all children have access to education, particularly post-primary education. A shortage of education officers hinders programme planning, implementation and the quality of programmes in some operations.

Since 2006, the **ninemillion.org** campaign has supported refugee education, particularly for girls, and has expanded opportunities for refugee children to participate in sports. In 2009, most of the programme will be mainstreamed into UNHCR's regular budget. The remaining funds will be utilized to implement secondary education and sports programmes focusing on girls in Chad and Uganda.

The **Education for All** initiative aims for 100 per cent enrolment among school-aged children of both sexes. In 2009, UNHCR will translate and disseminate its *Education Field Guidelines* through a global training workshop for the major UNHCR operations.

Through the SLE initiative, UNHCR will work with partners to increase girls' access to education and provide a secure learning environment. The Office will develop an assessment tool and a training module for the SLE initiative.

UNHCR will find ways to increase access to post-primary education and employment. It will reinforce technical capacity in field operations, including in emergencies, using common standards developed by the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies. The Office will also participate in the education cluster.

The **Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (DAFI)** scholarship programme provides educational opportunities at university level for young refugees in about 40 countries. The programme makes it possible for the graduates to contribute to reconstruction, peace and stability in their home countries. Additional funding in 2009 will allow UNHCR to support some 1,750 students, mainly to obtain a first university degree. Some scholarships for further study will also be available for a limited number of refugee students in sub-Saharan Africa.

Additional funding in 2009 will also enable UNHCR to focus on high-quality university education programmes in countries of asylum. UNHCR plans to expand the programme to new refugee operations. Furthermore, the Office will reinforce new mechanisms such as student transfers and the *DAFI for Return* programme; the latter provides educational opportunities to refugees upon their return to their home countries.

## Environment

The quality of life of refugees, returnees, IDPs and host communities depends on the state of their immediate environment. In refugee and IDP situations, excessive damage to the environment or competition with the local population over scarce resources can be a source of friction. Concerns about refugees' environmental impact can even influence a country's decision to provide asylum. Environmental considerations are therefore an important element in the design of UNHCR's operations.

In view of the linkage between its protection mandate and the environment, UNHCR gives due regard to environmental issues in its operations. Growing interest in the connections between climate change, natural disasters and human displacement has prompted UNHCR to consider climate change issues in parallel with environmental management activities.

UNHCR will base its environmental policy on four principles stipulated in its *Environmental Guidelines*. These are: 1) prevention before cure; 2) an integrated approach; 3) local participation; and 4) cost effectiveness. In 2009, UNHCR will continue to mainstream these principles into all its work.

The success of UNHCR's environmental policy will hinge on raising awareness of key environmental issues; intervening at the earliest possible stage of an operation to prevent or limit damage; developing practical field projects; helping host countries to develop environmental action plans in refugee and IDP-hosting areas; and supporting partners and government agencies in their implementation.

UNHCR's environmental work plan for 2009 and beyond calls for close collaboration with implementing partners, governments and other relevant agencies. The plan includes the promotion of best practices and introduction of new techniques in field operations; dissemination of environmental guidelines; training in environmental management for UNHCR staff, implementing partners and government counterparts; and introduction of environmental programming tools, community action plans and country strategies for priority countries.

The plan also requires the implementation of environmental rehabilitation and ecosystem-restoration strategies in refugee, IDP and returnee areas; the promotion of sustainable agricultural practices; and implementation of programmes to raise environmental awareness. UNHCR will organize a workshop in 2009 to identify best practices in natural resource management in refugee and IDP hosting areas.

As part of the UN system-wide initiative on climate neutrality, UNHCR will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by promoting behavioural change among its staff and reducing the carbon footprints of its office buildings and other facilities.

Under its 2009 global programme, UNHCR will promote environmentally friendly shelter construction and solar-heating techniques as well as energy-efficient stoves and other cooking techniques to minimize deforestation. The programme will assist country operations in environmentally friendly land use methods and sustainable agriculture, and in the preparation of rehabilitation plans. Most activities will target protracted refugee situations in Africa and in Asia.

UNHCR will work with the World Conservation Union on restoration and rehabilitation strategies; with CARE International on assessment, monitoring and evaluation tools; with the Southern Alliance for Indigenous Resources on sustainable small-scale agriculture; and with the Environmental Foundation for Africa and the Gaia Association on renewable energy, bio-fuels, environmental education and awareness raising. UNHCR will also strengthen its collaboration at the policy level with UNEP, OCHA, UN-Energy and WMO on issues related to climate change and natural disaster management.

## Health

The objective of UNHCR's public health and HIV programmes is to minimize mortality and morbidity. In refugee situations in developing countries, the top five killers of children under the age of five are malaria, malnutrition, measles, diarrhoea and respiratory tract infections. UNHCR's programmes aim to ensure that refugees enjoy access to health services equivalent to that of the surrounding population and to meet minimum humanitarian standards. Health and nutrition programmes are conducted within a public health and community development framework, with an emphasis on primary and preventive public health care.

In 2009, UNHCR will continue working to ensure international standards of health; implement timely interventions for the prevention and mitigation of communicable and non-communicable diseases; and reduce acute malnutrition rates and micronutrient deficiencies.

In pursuit of these goals, UNHCR has more than 100 experts covering the areas of public health, nutrition and food security, HIV and water and sanitation working around the globe. This technical expertise ensures that public health and HIV programmes are implemented effectively and that people of concern have access to quality support.

UNHCR's health activities aim to:

- Improve primary health services and referral systems, and ensure that refugees and others of concern have better access to them;
- prevent and control malaria outbreaks;
- implement integrated management of child health initiatives;
- establish quality reproductive health services;
- provide HIV prevention and AIDS care, treatment and support services;
- prevent and reduce malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies—the latter with a special focus on the prevention of anaemia;
- provide water, sanitation and hygiene services; and
- monitor and evaluate health programmes and the response capacities of its partners to health issues.

To address the urgent gaps in the health and nutrition sectors identified in 2007, UNHCR developed an integrated package of activities for seven countries—Bangladesh, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Myanmar, Nepal and Sudan. These activities included projects for reproductive health; malaria prevention and treatment; nutrition and the provision of micronutrients; water and sanitation services; and programme monitoring and evaluation. Significant improvements have been achieved, particularly with regard to better health and improved access to primary health care, safe water and adequate nutrition among people of concern.

In 2008, the Office expanded capacity-building activities in Algeria, Brazil, Cameroon, Chad, Costa Rica, Ecuador, India, Panama, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Yemen. The projects deployed experts; strengthened working relations with partners; and provided essential drugs, material and equipment—such as insecticide treated mosquito nets—complementary and therapeutic food, birth delivery kits and essential medicines. They also helped to improve basic health infrastructure. UNHCR is mainstreaming the projects into its annual programme to ensure the improvements will be sustained.

## Reproductive health

Reproductive health needs increase during crises. Malnutrition, stress and epidemics increase the risk of complications; childbirth can occur on the wayside during population movements; sexual and gender-based violence can increase due to social instability; and harmful traditional practices such as genital mutilation can be perpetuated.

While the quality and availability of health services are the major determinants of reproductive health, behavioural patterns, socio-economic conditions and living conditions also play a part. Reproductive health is affected by major societal, religious and cultural



structures and systems. UNHCR recognizes that successful programmes promote healthy behaviour while respecting the traditional values of communities affected by displacement.

The Office has launched a five-year strategic plan for reproductive health which aims to reduce maternal and newborn morbidity and mortality; reduce the transmission of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV; prevent and manage the consequences of sexual and gender-based violence; and reduce unwanted and mistimed pregnancies.



Information session on HIV and AIDS in Mugano transit centre, Burundi.

UNHCR / A. Kirchhof

## HIV and AIDS

In 2009, UNHCR will continue to implement comprehensive HIV and AIDS protection, prevention, care and treatment programmes. It will strengthen its advocacy efforts with national governments to ensure that refugees and IDPs are included in updated national plans to reduce the number of people becoming infected. The Office will focus its anti-HIV programmes on groups particularly vulnerable or at risk, including sex workers, alcohol and other substance users, and young people.

## Malaria

UNHCR has begun to implement its Malaria Strategic Plan for 2008-2012. Currently, most refugees in malaria endemic areas have access to highly effective anti-malaria drugs, including Artemisin (ACT). The emphasis for 2008-2012 is on strengthening the quality of care by means of rapid diagnoses and full implementation of the ACT regimen in more countries.

Furthermore, preventive treatment programmes for pregnant women will be reinforced, and more long-lasting insecticide-treated mosquito nets will be distributed in tandem with community-based malaria prevention campaigns. The Office will expand training for NGOs and public sector health staff on the treatment of fevers among small children.

## Nutrition and food security

UNHCR and key partners have taken strategic steps to address the poor nutrition situation in many refugee operations. The Office's Nutrition and Food Security Strategic Plan calls for better coordination, the reduction and treatment of acute malnutrition, control of micronutrient deficiencies—in particular anaemia among children and women, and access to food security, if needed through food aid.

UNHCR has created a project for anaemia control to respond effectively to its high prevalence and to other micronutrient deficiencies in protracted refugee operations. The project focuses on reinforcing existing activities, such as the promotion of appropriate infant and young child feeding methods, boosting the micronutrient content of the general food ration, and providing complementary feeding products for children between the ages of six months and two years.

The plan includes the improvement of existing public health initiatives such as malaria prevention and treatment, de-worming and schistosomiasis control. It also covers the strengthening of antenatal care, including iron supplementation.

New priority activities are the biochemical diagnosis of anaemia, its treatment in moderately and severely affected individuals, and preventative measures using therapeutic nutrition products. UNHCR will work closely with key partners to conduct rigorous assessments and nutritional surveys and to ensure close monitoring and evaluation of programmes.

UNHCR will continue to participate in nutrition activities under the cluster approach. It will be a member of the thematic working groups on assessment and capacity building and take the lead in the development of some cluster-specific tools. It is also exploring ways to increase its participation in field-level clusters.

## Focus on the global food crisis

The global rise in food prices poses a complex challenge to both UNHCR and WFP in providing basic and complementary food rations to more than two million refugees and six million IDPs worldwide. Many refugee children and women in protracted refugee situations are reported to be suffering from severe malnutrition and

anaemia due to a monotonous diet deficient in key micronutrients and restrictions on their ability to grow their own food.

The price hikes also affect the capacity of displaced populations to become self-reliant, especially in urban areas where refugees and asylum-seekers need to purchase their food on the local market. A number of refugees have reportedly returned to camps in order to receive food rations; others are adopting negative coping mechanisms, such as taking children out of school to work, engaging in transactional sex, and selling household goods. Positive strategies are also adopted, such as starting or increasing home-based vegetable or small-scale crop production.

UNHCR and its partners are making food aid and livelihoods support a priority, working closely with WFP and FAO under the UN Comprehensive Framework for Action on the food crisis. UNHCR will implement food security and livelihoods projects to promote self-reliance as a way of addressing malnutrition and economic vulnerability among people of concern. It will also advocate for increased refugee access to land, and build the capacity of refugees in micro-agricultural production, and support projects such as multi-storey gardens and small livestock farming to improve the nutritional status of refugee households and IDPs, and to help strengthen and diversify their livelihood options.

## Water, sanitation and hygiene

Refugees are often in dire need of clean water and sanitation, a situation which leaves them exposed to exploitation. UNHCR aims to improve its water and sanitation programmes and ensure minimum services in accordance with humanitarian standards. In 2009, under a special initiative to cover 24 operations, the Office will improve and refurbish existing water and sanitation facilities, provide non-food items, monitor and improve the quality of services, and implement hygiene promotion activities.

In addition, UNHCR will implement monitoring and evaluation systems at regional and country levels. All operations will integrate these systems into their programmes and report on progress against targets.

UNHCR will expand partnerships with key water and sanitation actors in 2009. It will increase its participation in the global water, sanitation and hygiene cluster (WASH). At the request of the cluster, UNHCR is working on a framework, to be completed in 2009, for the provision of technical support services in emergencies. Existing agreements with Oxfam Great Britain and Norwegian Church Aid to provide standby technical assistance in the water and sanitation sectors during refugee emergencies will be reviewed in 2009. UNHCR will continue to participate in global water initiatives led by UN-Water to raise awareness of refugee issues and to ensure that related concerns are adequately addressed.

## Organizational reform

Important milestones have been reached in UNHCR's structural and management reform process, which was launched in 2006, with the opening of the Office's Global Service Centre in Budapest, the strengthening and consolidation of regional offices, and the progressive delegation of authority to field managers. These changes not only allow for more resources to be channelled directly to people of concern, but enhance the organization's overall flexibility, responsiveness and accountability.

UNHCR will continue to be guided by the objectives of the reform process in 2009. Headquarters will be further streamlined by simplifying processes, consolidating functions and maximizing opportunities to relocate support services to Budapest or to regional offices. Flexibility at the field level will be enhanced by an easing of restrictions on the use of national officers and implementing partners.

Three related initiatives will be implemented globally in 2009 to advance results-based management throughout UNHCR: the *Focus* software, the Global Needs Assessment and the Global Accountability Framework. All three will improve UNHCR's ability to identify and express the total needs of people of concern, ensure effective and transparent planning to meet those needs, enhance advocacy and resource mobilization, and guarantee greater accountability throughout the organization.



A refugee child takes her first steps with prosthetic limbs in Damascus, Syria.