Adolescence is a difficult age - nowhere more so than in areas of humanitarian crisis and displacement. The particular developmental needs of teenagers, however, are often overlooked in situations where children have to grow up fast. On the one hand, the 'under-18s' are often treated as 'children' with regard to their legal status. But on the other hand, youth in poor and war-affected regions are expected to endure hardship and bear responsibilities that would seem impossible for most adults to handle. Few manage to get through unharmed.

Adolescents in refugee situations are exposed to a number of serious risks. It is not uncommon for teenagers to arrive in the asylum country alone, as unaccompanied minors (UAMs), perhaps because their relatives were killed or separated from them during flight, or because they were sent away by their families to save them from forced military recruitment. The famous 'lost boys' from southern Sudan who continue to seek refuge in Northern Uganda are a case in point. Unaccompanied youth are amongst the most vulnerable groups in society, since they are without the vital protection of their family. Not only is it more difficult for them to obtain material assistance (often distributed to adult heads of family) and services (including education), they are at a far greater risk of physical attack, sexual and economic exploitation, forced military recruitment, abduction and human trafficking.

Another sad consequence of high-intensity wars with large numbers of casualties is the occurrence of child-headed households resulting from the death of both parents. It is also not unusual for orphans of different families to find each other and form new family units under the leadership of an older child. Their particular educational and developmental needs as adolescents are often completely neglected.

Perhaps the most tragic destinies are those of children who are forced to take part themselves in the conflict. Removed from their families, against their will, they are abducted while running errands or playing in the street. Some particularly savage groups force their young recruits to kill or violate their own relatives and to go through gruesome rites of initiation, so as to ensure they will never be able to return to their villages. When former child soldiers become refugees, they have a unique chance to begin to work through their traumatic pasts and to reintegrate into society. However, without intensive and targeted support, there is a considerable risk that they will relapse into violence.

Yet even those adolescents who have been able to stay with their families and have faced none of this 'extreme' hardship continue to struggle against enormous obstacles. This is especially true in protracted camp situations, in countries where the refugees' ability to integrate and be productive is limited. Many feel they have no future at all. Despite aid agencies' efforts in the education sector, the focus remains on primary education. Due to limited funds and capacity, opportunities for refugee students to proceed to secondary or tertiary education are reserved for a lucky few. In addition, drop-out rates are high, and girls, in particular, are likely to be taken out of school at a certain age to help out at home or to get married. Early and forced marriage, sexual exploitation, high incidence of sexually transmitted diseases and early pregnancies are widespread problems resulting from a combination of poverty and harmful cultural practices.

More must be done to meet the needs of youth and to help them grow into healthy, productive and responsible adults. The importance of the 'under-18s' is reinforced by their demographic strength in many refugee populations. Among Bhutanese refugees in Nepal, for example, 43% are under the age of 18. In Rwanda, minors make up 62% of Congolese and 58% of Burundian refugees. Unfortunately, refugee communities rarely have the means and necessary infrastructure to provide their youth with the opportunity to realize their potential or even simply to enjoy their childhood.
WHAT WE DO

The following are but a few illustrations of how adolescent boys and girls are assisted within the framework of our programmes.

**Community Services**

In line with the special needs of individuals, qualified community services staff and trained refugee workers offer counselling and other support services. In addition, teenagers in all refugee situations are targeted by concerted awareness-raising campaigns, which use education and leisure facilities to disseminate important messages about reproductive health, drugs, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, peace and conflict management, protection of the environment and the detrimental effect of harmful traditional practices. These types of comprehensive support programmes are particularly important in countries like Sierra Leone, with a high incidence of sexual assault, rape and other sexually transmitted diseases, peace and conflict management, protection of the environment and the detrimental effect of harmful traditional practices. These types of programmes are particularly important in countries like Sierra Leone, DRC or Liberia benefit from customised rehabilitation programmes.

UNHCR works with other agencies such as the Red Cross, UNICEF and Save the Children to ensure that unaccompanied minors are registered and their families traced. In the Rwandan crisis in the mid-1990s, an estimated 67,000 children were reunited with their families. Pending such long-term solutions, UAMs may be placed in foster families, orphanages or other forms of supervised living arrangements. Community services staff closely monitor foster families to ensure that children receive the necessary care and are not subject to abuse, early marriage or forced return. Former child soldiers in some places like the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) or Liberia benefit from customised rehabilitation programmes.

UNHCR also liaises with authorities to obtain better opportunities for adolescents. For example, we work to secure issuance of work permits, national recognition of refugee school diplomas and naturalisation of young refugees, many of whom were born in the country of asylum. In Croatia, where the integration of adolescents forms a vital element in the process of inter-ethnic reconciliation, UNHCR pursues naturalisation for refugee adolescents, so as to make them eligible for free secondary and university education in national institutions.

**Protection**

Through the registration and monitoring of refugee populations, UNHCR staff on the ground are in a position to assess the situation of refugee youth and to identify those with particular needs, such as school drop-outs, victims of violence or abuse, unaccompanied minors, members of disadvantaged minorities, disabled or sick children or girls struggling in forced marriages and early pregnancies.

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**Education**

In addition to extensive efforts to increase overall school enrolment and promote girls’ education, UNHCR offers vocational training and apprenticeship services to clubs, environment groups, etc. In Nepal, UNHCR supports child play centres and child/youth forums for youngsters to develop their social skills and creative interests. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, UNHCR works to enable teenagers to join cultural and arts groups and to participate in national sports activities. We also sponsor sports tournaments and other recreational activities in Bangladesh, where children and adolescents make up 56% of camp-based refugees. Where appropriate, UNHCR also supports community-based and NGO initiatives with materials such as sports equipment, uniforms, construction of playgrounds and the like. Due to limited resources, however, existing projects still reach only a fraction of refugees in the targeted age groups.
refugee and returnee youth. School dropouts, child heads of family and unaccompanied minors are particularly targeted, as they depend on vocational and skills training opportunities to boost their coping mechanisms and to help them integrate into society. Education programmes are generally designed to impart social and life skills as well as factual knowledge.

Naturally, the range of educational activities offered is determined by the particular needs on the ground. In Myanmar, for instance, where a deep cultural divide and language barrier hampers the reintegration of the returning Muslim minority, returnee children receive language instruction, to enable them to enrol in public schools.

### Other assistance
Apart from protection, community and education services, UNHCR also addresses the needs of adolescent refugees in many ways. Regular monitoring and proper planning of distribution mechanisms ensure that unaccompanied minors or child headed households are not overlooked in the distribution of material assistance and that malnourished children can benefit from supplementary feeding programmes. Adequate site planning, lighting and infrastructure construction in refugee camps help to increase the physical security of young refugees, whereas targeted reproductive and other health services aim to ensure their healthy transition to adulthood. Most importantly, however, UNHCR, through its comprehensive assistance programmes, aims to support families and entire communities as the best way of protecting and nourishing the younger generations. In the long run, a healthy and stable environment is the best guarantee for the development of healthy and stable individuals.

### HOW YOU CAN HELP

Supporting disadvantaged youth is only part of our complex task, and only one of the basic concerns of refugees.

Your unrestricted financial contribution could help UNHCR to operate and expand its comprehensive, multi-sectoral programmes for refugees around the world and, most importantly, would:

- **Make a difference in the lives of some of the world’s poorest and most vulnerable persons, enabling them to take care of themselves and their families;**
- **Help protect and empower women, children and other vulnerable persons;**
- **Curtail the spread of HIV/AIDS and other communicable diseases;**
- **Contribute to the recovery of war-ravaged countries;**
- **Help us not only to assist victims of high-profile current emergencies, but to sustain the ‘forgotten’ refugees who are mired in protracted situations and remote areas – beyond the radar of short-lived media and public attention.**
**UNHCR IN SHORT**

### MANDATE AND BENEFICIARIES

UNHCR has an official mandate to protect and assist refugees world-wide and to seek durable solutions to their plight. At times, UNHCR is also called on to care for other people in ‘refugee-like’ situations, such as persons who have been displaced within their own country or who are not recognised as nationals of any state. Today, almost 20 million people are forced to live away from their homes as a result of conflict and persecution around the world. Some 75% of them are women and children.

UNHCR’s work is guided by the 1951 Geneva Convention and 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees and by other relevant international legal instruments. For the implementation of its far-reaching protection and assistance work, UNHCR co-operates closely with governments and some 510 non-governmental partner agencies in 114 countries.

### FUNDING

Despite its mandate and more than 50 years of achievements - recognised twice with the Nobel Prize for Peace - UNHCR still has to go to great lengths, year after year, to mobilise the necessary resources for its important work. Unlike other agencies, UNHCR does not receive mandatory contributions from governments but relies almost exclusively (i.e. for 97% of its needs) on strictly voluntary contributions from governments and intergovernmental or private sources. However, each year this support falls drastically short of meeting refugees’ needs. Furthermore, the world continues to witness new humanitarian crises, which by definition require a quick and comprehensive response and the rapid reallocation of financial, material and human resources to where they are most urgently needed. We therefore thank both our new and established partners for entrusting us with unrestricted contributions, giving us the necessary flexibility to respond to pressing needs as they arise.

Consult our website for more detailed information: www.unhcr.org

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**2001 CONTRIBUTIONS**

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**2001 EXPENDITURE**

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<td>HQ support cost 9.8%</td>
<td>Fundraising 1.0%</td>
<td>Public awareness/ advocacy 0.4%</td>
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<td>11%</td>
<td>89%</td>
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**Refugee support programmes by activity**

- **8%** Education
- **8%** Food, Health & Nutrition
- **14%** Legal Assistance, Protection & Monitoring
- **24%** Programme Delivery & Support (1)
- **19%** Partner Capacity Building
- **3%** Shelter & Domestic Needs
- **12%** To be distributed (2)
- **2%** Community Services
- **4%** Transport
- **2%** Water, Sanitation & Environmental Protection
- **5%** Income Generation
- **3%** To be distributed (2)

[1] Includes, inter alia, costs in the field related to staff, vehicles, warehouses, rent, logistics and public information.

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‘A refugee is a person who, owning 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 or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.’

1951 Geneva Refugee Convention