

Policy priorities

Protection is at the centre of everything UNHCR does. All its programmes and activities are geared to ensure that refugees and others of concern enjoy fundamental rights and are able to exercise them in safety and dignity. UNHCR's global strategic objectives establish clear targets against which to measure the effectiveness of its protection and assistance programmes. In 2008-2009, the priority objectives that will have a direct impact on the lives of people of concern include:

- Protecting the displaced against violence, abuse, intimidation and exploitation, including sexual and gender-based violence;
- Reducing malnutrition and major health hazards, notably malaria, HIV and AIDS, and addressing inadequate reproductive health services;
- Reducing the protection risks people of concern face and improving their standards of living, especially in relation to water, shelter and sanitation services;
- Facilitating the economic empowerment of displaced women and their meaningful participation in management and leadership of community decision-making bodies; and
- Improving the educational and vocational skills of young people;

A further current priority for UNHCR is management reform, led by the Structural and Change Management team. This aims to revise structures, processes, staffing and implementation to improve the overall performance of the organization.

Protection of women and gender equality

In 2007, UNHCR followed up on the recommendations contained in its Executive Committee (ExCom) Conclusion on Women and Girls at Risk (A/AC.96/1035, para.17) and contributed to the UN-wide implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security. A pilot project in early 2007 in Asia (see *box*) led to the development of a tool – to be disseminated in 2008 – to help identify individuals most at risk of trauma and violations of their rights.



Fred Noy/DW photo

Eritrea, Kilo 26 refugee camp. Strengthening protection for women and girls-at-risk is one of UNHCR's Five Commitments to Refugee Women.

To further its work on the protection of women and gender equality, in 2008 UNHCR aims to:

- Ensure that staff and partners use the *UNHCR Handbook for the Protection of Women and Girls*, (publication due in 2008) which includes the Executive Committee Conclusion on women and girls at risk adopted in 2006 and Security Council Resolution 1325;
- Strengthen women's participation in leadership and economic development;
- Participate in Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) activities, in particular the Sub-Working Group on Gender in Humanitarian Settings, to ensure a common approach by promoting Security Council Resolution 1325 and use of the *Inter-Agency Standing Committee Gender Handbook*, published in December 2006.

UNHCR will focus on two areas as it works to improve the situation of refugee women. First, it will strive to achieve the targets for their participation in refugee management and leadership committees, as set out in the High Commissioner's Five Commitments to Refugee Women. Since 2007, UNHCR has been reviewing women's participation in camp-management committees to identify the 10 camps in each region with the lowest participation rates. Each year, one region is targeted for improvement. UNHCR will train and mobilize women to address the problems they face and to strengthen their knowledge of international legal instruments to protect their rights. UNHCR will seek to increase opportunities for both refugee and internally displaced women to participate in peace processes through partnership with other UN agencies and targeted activities in selected repatriation countries.

UNHCR's second area of focus is economic self-sufficiency, for example through technical and financial support for women's livelihood projects. The aim is to enable women and their families to improve their basic living conditions and to combat survival sex. In addition to funds in country operations for small income-generation activities, the Office is working to raise resources through the Women Leading for Livelihoods project, which encourages businesswomen to support displaced women's economic development. Fund-raising work will also draw attention to those funding gaps in operations which particularly affect women, such as shortages in the provision of sanitary materials.

Refugees and risk assessment

In a follow-up to the ExCom Conclusion on Women and Girls at Risk, in 2006 UNHCR joined forces with two Australian organizations, the Centre for Refugee Research of the University of New South Wales and the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, to build on their work on refugees and risk assessment. The purpose of the pilot project was to test an assessment methodology for the early identification of those individuals, particularly women and girls, most traumatized or facing other grave protection risks, and hence in urgent need of protection in a refugee community.

In March 2007 the assessment methodology was used in refugee camps in Bangladesh. Consultations with refugees included four-day sessions with groups of 30 women and men in the Nayapara and Kutupalong refugee camps, and 80 individual interviews. The process enabled the assessment team to undertake, with the participation of the community, a situation analysis of protection risks, community capacities and proposed solutions. The methodology focused on eliciting from the women and men the history of their flight, the protection risks they faced in their current living conditions, the coping mechanisms they had developed and the solutions they saw for the future. The consultations also brought forth refugees' opinions on who was most at risk of violations of their rights in their community.

The individual interviews were conducted using a risk-assessment tool to identify those people in need of immediate support due to the traumatic effects of their experiences as well as those most likely to suffer further violence. Based on the field testing, the methodology and risk-assessment tool were improved for use by UNHCR.

Protection of children

In 2007, UNHCR improved protection for unaccompanied and separated children by strengthening implementation of its *Guidelines on the Formal Determination of the Best Interests of the Child*. Furthermore, it conducted a study on identification and referral and, together with the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, outlined the services provided to unaccompanied and separated children. Building on this and on ExCom's Conclusion on Children at Risk (A/AC.96/1048, para.14), adopted in October 2007, UNHCR and its partners will work to strengthen child-protection systems. Furthermore, the Office will promote the participation of girls and boys in its operations, with a particular focus on their perceptions of violence and how to address them.

Within the framework of the Five Global Priorities for Refugee Children, UNHCR will:

- Develop and promote effective child-protection systems through partnership, advocacy and resource mobilization. This will ensure a holistic approach to the protection and care of children through monitoring, identifying those at risk of violations of their rights, determining best interests and finding durable solutions;
- Disseminate the *Guidelines on the Formal Determination of the Best Interests of the Child* and ensure their implementation;
- Strengthen the participation of children in UNHCR's programming through participatory assessments, research on children's perceptions and experience of violence, and specific projects for adolescent girls and boys;
- Strengthen the competence of UNHCR and partner staff by promoting use of the Action for the Rights of Children training and capacity-building initiative and supporting inter-agency training for child protection in emergencies.

Protection of older people and those with disabilities

In 2000, UNHCR's Standing Committee endorsed its policy on older persons, which outlines the protection risks older refugees face, highlights their capacities and calls for the integration of their needs into programming. The adoption of the 2006 UN Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities provides UNHCR with a clear framework for the protection of refugees with disabilities. In June 2007, UNHCR presented a paper on the Protection of Older Persons and Persons with Disabilities to the 30th Meeting of the Standing Committee. The paper highlights the main protection challenges in this area and outlines efforts by UNHCR to respond to them. Finally, it summarizes the key areas for attention and follow-up in the next three years.

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



UNHCR/G. Amarasinghe

Sri Lanka. The Kotagola school has 366 boys and girls studying for the General Certificate of Education.



UNHCR/A. Webster

Kenya. A Sudanese educator discusses reproductive health and family planning with a group of Sudanese women in Kakuma refugee camp, Kenya.

Nevertheless, more must be done to incorporate the protection needs of older people and those with disabilities into policies and programmes, with a focus on their capabilities. To that end, UNHCR will:

- Improve early identification and individual case management through use of the assessment tool for refugees and others in urgent need of protection;
- Ensure increased use of the *proGres* registration database to record and analyse 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 programmes;
- Develop and strengthen partnerships with UN agencies, specialized NGOs and academic institutions so that UNHCR field operations benefit from their expertise in dealing with older people and those with disabilities;
- 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 essential community-services support in the early stages of an emergency.

HIV and AIDS

UNHCR will begin implementing its new HIV and AIDS Strategic Plan for 2008–2010. As a UNAIDS co-sponsor, UNHCR will be the technical lead agency for HIV and AIDS among conflict-affected and displaced people, under the UNAIDS-agreed Division of Labour. Indeed, providing protection is inextricably linked to providing HIV and AIDS prevention, care and treatment. UNHCR will ensure that HIV and AIDS modules are integrated into all its training programmes and included in related international guidelines and policies; expand technical support to the Field; and participate in interagency assessments.

As the Chair of the UNAIDS' Committee of Co-sponsoring Organizations in 2007/08, UNHCR will advocate for the inclusion of people of concern into HIV and AIDS programmes, policy documents and guidelines. UNHCR programmes will be developed in line with UNAIDS' key objectives. UNHCR also participates in the IASC team on HIV in emergencies.

UNHCR will continue to work on the relationship between HIV, substance abuse, transactional sex and sexual and gender-based violence. Prevention, care and treatment will be integrated into existing programmes and policies in countries of asylum and in all voluntary

repatriation and reintegration programmes in countries of origin. Through its Antiretroviral Medication Policy for Refugees, UNHCR will strengthen treatment for refugees, IDPs and other people of concern.

In moving towards the goal of universal access to HIV and AIDS prevention, care and treatment by 2010, UNHCR will ensure that people of concern to the Office are adequately covered. Collaboration with other UN agencies in programme areas will also be intensified. These partnerships include those with UNFPA on male and female condoms, transactional sex, and sexual and gender-based violence; with WHO on HIV and AIDS policies; and with WFP on food security. Links with other humanitarian actors such as UNICEF and OCHA will also be fostered.

Under the “UNHCR Cares” programme, the Office will continue to provide all staff members and their families with basic information about HIV and AIDS. It will work to reduce discrimination against people with HIV and AIDS in its offices, and provide staff with care and treatment. Regular staff information bulletins on HIV and AIDS issues will be published.

Special health priorities

UNHCR will focus on implementing strategies to achieve international standards of health among people of concern through timely interventions for the prevention and mitigation of communicable and non-communicable diseases and by reducing acute malnutrition rates and micronutrient deficiencies. These efforts will minimize mortality and morbidity among people of concern while protecting their human rights and dignity.

UNHCR will advocate with host Governments for refugees to have access to public health services at equivalent levels to host populations, and for the inclusion of refugees in national prevention and response campaigns for major diseases. The Office will focus priority attention on malaria and other communicable disease control, integrated management of childhood illnesses, safe motherhood, SGBV and reproductive health care. Programme planning and monitoring will strengthen UNHCR and partners’ surveillance capacity and reporting systems. UNHCR will also improve its surveillance system through further field implementation of the Health Information System in all operations.

Communicable diseases brought on in part by malnutrition are responsible for millions of preventable deaths each year. In 2008-2009, UNHCR will strengthen its preparedness and response capacity for the epidemics which often affect operations.

Malaria

UNHCR will implement a new Malaria Strategic Plan for 2008-2010. Currently, most refugees in malaria-endemic areas have access to the recommended anti-malaria treatment – a combination of drugs including Artemisinin – which is recommended by national ministries of health, WHO and UNHCR. The emphasis for 2008-2010 will be to fully implement the strategic plan in more countries ensuring access to adequate treatment, and reinforce specific strategies, such as preventive treatment of pregnant women during antenatal visits; providing insecticide-treated mosquito nets; checking all suspected malaria cases with rapid tests and/or microscopy; and improving case management by training health staff.

Nutrition

UNHCR, in partnership with WFP and others, has taken strategic steps to reach acceptable standards in nutrition and related sectors. The Office has included nutrition as part of its Global Strategic Objectives for 2008-2009 and will focus on the link between health and HIV and AIDS programmes. UNHCR has given priority to nutrition in its budget planning for 2008-2009. All these measures will raise the nutritional and health status of refugees, IDPs and others of concern.

UNHCR’s technical capacity in nutrition management has been enhanced by short-term arrangements. These include a new Junior Professional Officer post at Headquarters and the integration of a food security component into the terms of reference for UNHCR’s WFP liaison officer, and consultancies at regional and country levels.

To ensure that the nutrition policy is consistent throughout its programmes, UNHCR will participate in the UNICEF-led IASC nutrition cluster, the Ending Child Hunger and Undernutrition Initiative led by UNICEF and WFP, the inter-agency working groups on infant and young child feeding, and the UN Standing Committee on Nutrition.

UNHCR’s Nutrition and Food Security Strategic Plan for 2008-2010 includes nine objectives relating to advocacy, prevention, care and treatment, capacity-building, assessments, surveillance, monitoring and evaluation, operational research and resource mobilization. In 2008-2009, UNHCR will focus on improving technical support at headquarters, regional and country levels; strengthening its partnership with WFP; ensuring adequate, high-quality food rations;

ensuring provision of micronutrients through fortified foods or supplements; scaling-up infant and young child feeding programmes; improving treatment of severe acute malnutrition; and establishing and advocating for integration and return policies that protect nutritional requirements.

Safe motherhood

Reproductive-health interventions must continue and often be intensified in times of crisis. Lack of emergency obstetric care increases the risk of maternal and newborn death and disability; so can malnutrition, stress and epidemics. At times of conflict and population displacement, childbirth can occur on the wayside and in other precarious situations. The attendant social instability increases the danger of sexual and gender-based violence.

Though the reproductive-health situation has improved in many emergency and post-emergency settings in the past few years, numerous gaps remain to be filled. These include:

- Delayed implementation of the Minimum Initial Standard of Services at the onset of emergencies;
- Inadequate capacity in health facilities to offer basic reproductive-health services, including emergency obstetric care;
- Difficulties in receiving friendly, confidential, high-quality and comprehensive services;
- Limited capacities among women and adolescents to control their sexual and reproductive lives.

UNHCR will implement the new Reproductive Health Strategic Plan 2008-2010, working to achieve the UN's Millennium Development Goals related to reduction of maternal and newborn morbidity and mortality, stemming the transmission of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, attaining comprehensive prevention, treatment and response to SGBV cases, and ensuring that reproductive health is mainstreamed into regular health services.

Education

UNHCR recognizes that safeguarding the right to a good education in a safe learning environment is essential both for the protection of refugee children and for finding durable solutions for them. In that respect, UNHCR's policy is to ensure the delivery of primary education, lower secondary education and non-formal education to all people of concern, as well as to facilitate access to post-primary education, particularly for girls.

UNHCR will base its 2008-2009 activities on its Education Strategy, which calls for an updated analysis of gaps in access to education in all phases of operations; securing the safety and the quality of learning environments; and offering post-primary education, including vocational training. In line with UNHCR's Global Strategic Objectives, the overall goal of this strategy is to raise school enrolment rates by 10 per cent each year while maintaining gender parity. Particular attention will be paid to the huge needs with regard to Iraqi displacement. Based on detailed assessments of educational needs in Jordan and Syrian Arab Republic, UNHCR and UNICEF launched a joint appeal for USD 129 million which will expand the educational infrastructure in host countries. This includes construction and rehabilitation of schools, recruitment of teachers, teacher-training, school material and equipment as well as support to community-based initiatives such as remedial classes for out-of-school children and youth and support to vulnerable families. UNHCR needs strong and continued support for the following planned activities:

- *Access and retention of education.* Under the Education for All project, UNHCR will give technical support to countries with low enrolment rates. It will also play an active role in the global education cluster to deliver education in emergencies. It will also facilitate regional workshops on the *Minimum Standards on Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction*;
- *Continuity of education in all phases of operations.* UNHCR will revise the *Education Field Guidelines* to include clear instructions on education in emergencies and stable operations, as well as in local integration and reintegration contexts;
- *Safety and quality of education.* The Office will disseminate the *Guidelines on Safe Learning Environments*, develop training modules and lead an inter-agency initiative on safe learning environments. The initiative will include technical and financial support for countries where unsafe learning environments result in high drop-out rates. Regional workshops will promote use of the *Guidelines*;
- *Post-primary education.* The Adolescents-at-risk project initiated in West Africa will be expanded to countries outside the region. Funding for vocational training will be secured through earmarked funds.
- Under the Ninemillion.org campaign, UNHCR will pilot Education (Plus), a multi-sectoral approach to strengthening education programmes to help children develop their full potential. The initiative will emphasize safe and high-quality education, girls' participation, post-primary opportunities, life-skills training and sports.
- *Post-secondary education.* UNHCR will provide educational opportunities at university level for 1,500 students in more than 35 countries under the annual

Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (DAFI). A forthcoming expansion of the programme will enable DAFI to provide academic support for Master's degree programmes. Furthermore, UNHCR will introduce, for the first time, academic support on a limited scale for returning refugees. It will also launch a DAFI alumni network.

respond to identified needs and promote sound environmental management in UNHCR operations, including internal displacement situations. This will require raising awareness of key environmental issues; intervening at the earliest possible stage of an operation to prevent or limit damage; developing practical field projects; and training and supporting implementing partners and government agencies in their work.

The environment

UNHCR will implement its environmental policy in refugee, IDP and returnee operations based on four principles stipulated in its *Environmental Guidelines* (1966, 2005): 1) prevention before cure; 2) an integrated approach; 3) local participation; and 4) cost effectiveness. In 2008-2009 UNHCR will integrate these principles into all relevant activities and ensure that its inputs are timely, appropriate and well coordinated. A broad range of projects and activities will

Experience has shown that if environmental concerns are factored into the earliest stage of an operation, damage to the environment can be limited and costly rehabilitation avoided. Activities under the 2008-2009 work plan include promotion of best practices and introduction of new techniques in field operations; dissemination of environmental guidelines in light of lessons learned; training in environmental management for UNHCR staff, implementing partners and government counterparts; the roll-out in priority countries of environmental assessment, planning, monitoring and evaluation tools; and promoting sustainable agricultural practices.



Syria. A school for Palestinian refugees who fled Iraq, at the Al Tanf Camp on the Iraq-Syria border.

UNHCR will work to manage resources responsibly in its global operations. Energy efficiency in buildings and field operations, reductions in travel, the search for renewable energy, proper land-use management, soil and water conservation and reforestation will contribute to reducing greenhouse emissions. New public and private-sector partnerships will be developed to support innovative energy solutions with technical expertise and funding.

UNHCR will team up with the World Conservation Union to devise restoration and rehabilitation plans; with CARE International in the dissemination of assessment, monitoring and evaluation tools; the Southern Alliance for Indigenous Resources (SAFIRE) on sustainable agriculture; and UNESCO on environmental education. The Office will collaborate at the policy level with UNEP, OCHA, UN-Energy and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

Structural and management change

The aim of the Structural and Management Change Process launched in February 2006 is to improve UNHCR's responsiveness to the needs of its beneficiaries by channelling more of its resources into operations, reducing administration and headquarters costs, and locating staff and services where they are most effective. This has involved reviewing and realigning structures and processes, as well as workforce and implementing arrangements, to maximize flexibility, effectiveness and overall performance.

Structures

The structural part of UNHCR's reform comprises two main strands. Under the first, the Office will transfer a number of its administrative and centralized support functions to Budapest, thereby freeing resources for its field operations. The savings accruing from the move to Budapest are expected to be in the range of USD 10 million per year, once the initial investments have been made. The Government of Hungary is contributing top-grade premises in central Budapest and office

furniture, as well as free utilities for a period of ten years.

Under the second structural strand, the Office has been examining ways of improving operational effectiveness by strengthening regional offices, decentralizing a number of operational support functions, and improving planning capacity at the sub-regional level. A framework on decentralization and regionalization adopted in June 2007 sets out four models for regional structures, to be used flexibly in response to conditions on the ground. By strengthening regional structures, it is expected that the number of stand-alone country operations reporting directly to Headquarters will be reduced from 71 today to a fraction of that number by 2010.

Processes

Work in the area of processes has focused on clarifying organizational priorities through a revision of UNHCR's Global Strategic Objectives and linking these more clearly with planning. Equally important is a new resource allocation model which increases flexibility, empowers field and operations managers, and clarifies accountability for operations and for financial management and control. A parallel redesign of UNHCR's budget structure has been proposed to provide the flexibility called for by increasing inter-agency collaboration at field level and by the Office's need to tap decentralized sources of funding.

Workforce and implementing arrangements

Reforms in this area include the alignment of staffing policies and strategies with organizational needs, and a review of the composition and deployment of UNHCR staff in the field. Also under review is the balance between projects implemented directly by UNHCR and those carried out by partners.

An annual Global Staff Survey was introduced in 2006 as a change management tool that ensures staff participation in identifying and addressing critical workplace issues.