

IDPs from Muttur  
at a makeshift camp  
near Trincomalee,  
Sri Lanka.





# New crises New Strategies

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UNITED NATIONS  
HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

**T**HIS GLOBAL REPORT documents UNHCR's efforts in a volatile year. Climate change, extreme poverty and conflict are becoming more and more interrelated, increasing forced displacement. Energy and food crises relented only in the face of a global recession.

Recognizing the speed and scale of the economic crisis, UNHCR acted promptly to mitigate its worst impacts. To a large extent, these efforts were successful and beneficiaries have not suffered. It was clear by the end of the year, however, that the worst of the crisis was yet to come.

Responding to the increasingly complex pattern of forced displacement worldwide has required UNHCR to increase emergency spending more than fourfold and its overall global expenditures by 50 per cent since 2006. At the same time, continuing with reforms initiated in 2007, UNHCR reduced the size of its staff in Geneva to 767, and diminished Headquarters' share of overall expenditure. Comprehensive reviews of the Division of Information Systems and Telecommunications, the Supply Management Service and the Inspector General's Office were undertaken in 2008, and recommendations are being implemented. UNHCR also decided to consolidate training and learning functions in a Global Learning Centre being established in Budapest.

Significant progress was made in the other four strands of UNHCR reform in 2008: results-based management; the field review; regionalization and decentralization; and human resources reform. *Focus*, the software that integrates UNHCR's protection and programme efforts and supports UNHCR's results-based management system, including the transition to needs-based budgeting through the global needs assessment, began implementation at the end of 2008. A new comprehensive Global Accountability Framework is also being prepared. Revised guidelines for designing UNHCR's presence

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in the field were issued to help standardize workforce profiles and office designations. They are expected to bring about greater predictability and coherence in UNHCR's presence worldwide. Several regional offices in Africa and Asia became fully operational in 2008 and by the end of the year, UNHCR had 16 regional offices covering 67 countries. This was coupled with decentralization of the Regional Bureaux for Europe and the Americas. A redesigned and improved performance appraisal and management system was introduced in November 2008 and a new Staff Management Consultative Council was created to advise on a range of human resources issues, including proposed improvements to UNHCR's recruitment, postings, promotions and rotation policies. Additionally, an Ethics Office was created and a Whistleblower's Policy put in place.

UNHCR has pursued these reforms to improve the protection, assistance and solutions it is mandated to deliver and to ensure that maximum available resources support the needs of beneficiaries. This is the most fundamental part of the Office's accountability to its beneficiaries. It is a responsibility UNHCR takes very seriously, as demonstrated by its participation in the peer review of accountability to beneficiaries, an initiative of the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response.

In 2008, protection and assistance efforts balanced the imperatives of immediate and longer term, more structural response. Funded by resources freed up by the reforms, UNHCR's initiatives to address critical gaps in the areas of malaria, malnutrition, reproductive health and sexual and gender-based violence began to show results. Infant mortality rates decreased among refugees in eastern Sudan, Uganda and Kenya. Improved maternal and child nutrition reduced the rate of low birth-weight deliveries in Bangladesh from 15 to 7 per cent. Investment in maternity wards and the engagement of more skilled health workers increased the availability of delivery rooms and strengthened the care mothers received. In Ethiopia, the proportion of deliveries in a health

centre increased from 11 to 94 per cent. The incidence of malaria declined in Kenya from 84 new cases per 1000 people in 2006 to 9.8 new cases per 1000 people in 2008.

New initiatives were begun in the water and sanitation sector and on anaemia. Anaemia is probably the most common preventable nutritional problem in the world. Left unaddressed at the individual level, it can undermine a child's mental, social, emotional and physical development and increase maternal mortality. Left unaddressed at the societal level, it can reduce economic productivity and diminish national development. Various treatment strategies to address anaemia, including micronutrient powders, were begun to reduce its prevalence in refugee operations, such as in Bangladesh and Nepal.

Throughout the year, UNHCR paid increased attention to asylum-migration issues, hosting regional conferences in the Gulf of Aden and West Africa and improving the response in key operations, such as Yemen. In December 2008, at the Dialogue on Protection Challenges, the nearly 90 States and dozens of non-governmental and other participants agreed to renew their efforts with UNHCR to find solutions to protracted situations.

In 2008, UNHCR made significant progress in the pursuit of durable solutions. With strong support from resettlement countries, UNHCR was able to increase the number of referrals by 20 per cent, building on the impressive increase of the previous year. Approximately 120,000 refugees were submitted for resettlement to 12 traditional and nine new resettlement countries. In addition, an evacuation transit facility was established in Romania for processing emergency resettlement cases.

While official statistics are not yet available, over 600,000 refugees returned to their countries of origin in 2008. Despite the significant return and reintegration challenges, more than 280,000 refugees returned to Afghanistan in 2008. Nearly 150,000 refugees returned

to Sudan and almost 100,000 to Burundi. More than 50,000 repatriated to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and more than 10,000 to Angola, Liberia and Rwanda, respectively. Following repatriation, programmes to rehabilitate refugee-affected areas were initiated in 2008 in Guinea, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda.

Local integration initiatives were undertaken or reinforced in Serbia, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Belarus, Ukraine, the United Republic of Tanzania and West Africa. Thanks to the extraordinary generosity of the United Republic of Tanzania, more than 170,000 refugees who fled Burundi in 1972 will have access to naturalization. In West Africa, a regional local integration initiative for Sierra Leonean and Liberian refugees under the free movement protocols of the Economic Community of West African States raised the interest of other regional bodies in Africa.

The year also saw a major breakthrough in reducing statelessness. After a landmark decision by the High Court in Bangladesh confirmed the Bangladeshi citizenship of the Bihari/Urdu-speaking communities, the Government stepped-up voter registration and the issuance of national identity cards. UNHCR funded research on the legal status of the population and lobbied extensively for a solution to their situation. An estimated 250,000 to 300,000 people benefited from the recent change in policy and a large proportion of them subsequently voted for the first time ever in the general elections held in December. UNHCR's revised budget structure, which treats efforts to prevent and reduce statelessness and protect stateless people as core activities, should result in more systematic attention across the organization to identifying and responding to issues of statelessness.


UNHCR reinforced its partnerships with non-governmental and regional organizations and its collaboration with UN and other agencies throughout 2008. More than 200 NGO partners attended the 2008 UNHCR-NGO consultations. UNHCR

cooperated closely with the African Union in preparation for the Special Summit planned for 2009 in Uganda to consider the first legally binding instrument specifically related to internal displacement.

UNHCR also reinforced cooperation in the UN's Delivering as One initiative, which is benefitting people of concern and host communities in a variety of settings, and catalysing increased activities by development actors. With its lead role for the protection, shelter and the coordination and management of camps for people displaced by conflict, UNHCR cooperated with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in response to the post-election violence in Kenya and in a number of ongoing situations. UNHCR worked closely with the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator to ensure a common approach on issues of vital mutual interest, such as preserving humanitarian space.

Throughout 2008, we were reminded how dangerous humanitarian work can be. Significant additional resources for security were made available to operations in the Horn of Africa, the Middle East, South-West Asia and elsewhere.

Sustaining the progress we have made will not be easy. Many of today's conflicts show no sign of abating and some are actually worsening. The resulting displacement is increasingly difficult to address. The economic crisis threatens aid and humanitarian budgets to an extent that even robust mitigation efforts and increased fundraising from the private sector, which surpassed USD 50 million in 2008, may not be able to make up. Whatever the challenges, and the missions given it by the international community, UNHCR will persevere in pursuing its mandate.



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