

Section 2: Information Sheets





Some Basic Facts and Figures relevant to Refugee Youth

- [Graça Machel](#) says that there are over 40 million people who are displaced by conflict or human rights violations. Over half of them are children and young people.
- [UNICEF](#) estimates that over the last decade, armed conflicts have directly or indirectly resulted in the deaths of over two million children with a further million being orphaned. An estimated six million have been maimed or seriously injured, while a great many survivors have suffered and are still suffering psychological damage and trauma.
- Article 1 of the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) defines children as all human beings under the age of 18, unless relevant national laws recognize an earlier age of majority.
- [An estimated 300,000 children under the age of 18 are fighting as child soldiers around the world.](#)
- When an adolescent becomes a mother, her health and that of her child are threatened. Early child-bearing also means girls lose out on schooling and have few employment options, thus perpetuating circumstances that disadvantage girls. The risks associated with adolescent motherhood make it a clear violation of children's right to health and survival – for both the young mother and her child.

For the young mothers, the risk of dying during childbirth is heightened. Teenage girls over 15 years of age are twice as likely to die from childbirth as are women in their 20s, while girls under 15 are at five times greater risk. Early sexual activity also increases the risk of infection with HIV/AIDS.

- [About one-third of those currently living with HIV/AIDS are aged 15-24. Most of them do not know they carry the virus. In sub-Saharan Africa, girls are twice as likely as boys to be infected with HIV/AIDS.](#)

Sources:

- UNAIDS/WHO (2002) Aids Epidemic Update December 2002. WHO, Geneva
- UNHCR (2001) HIV/AIDS Education for Refugee Youth: The Window of Hope. UNHCR Education Unit, Geneva
- UNHCR (2002) Refugees By Number. UNHCR, Geneva
- UNHCR (2002) Statistical Yearbook 2001. UNHCR, Geneva

Identifying Young People

The definitions of children, adolescents and adults vary from culture to culture. Field workers adapt the definitions they use to suit the specific refugee situation in which they are working. Whether an adolescent has assumed roles and responsibilities of an adult is a reflection of the culture and the refugee situation. When working with young people, the cultural, ethical and religious values of the refugee community must be recognised and addressed. Adolescents should be given particular attention, as they are commonly left out of most humanitarian interventions for both children and adults, despite their distinct needs and rights.

- Children 0-17 (Convention on the Rights of the Child)
- Adolescents 10-19 (UNFPA, WHO, UNICEF)
- Young people 10-24 (UNFPA, WHO, UNICEF)
- Youth 15-24 (UNFPA, WHO, UNICEF)
- Youth 15-25 (UNESCO)
- Youth 13-25 (Save the Children)

Numbers of Refugee Youth

- An estimated 7.7 million people under the care of UNHCR and its partners are children below the age of 18. The percentage of children compared with the overall refugee population ranges from 57% in Central Africa to 20% in Central and Eastern Europe.

- Refugee children, including adolescents under the age of 18, make up 45% of refugee populations world-wide.

- Young people between the ages of 12 and 24 represent 35% of the world's refugees and displaced populations.

- **40% of the people UNHCR cares for live in camps**, 13% reside in urban areas and 47% are dispersed in rural regions or other unspecified areas. The situation varies widely depending on geographical location. While 50% of the refugee population in Africa and Asia live in camps, the figure in Europe, the Americas and Oceania is less than 10%.

(The collection of [Refugee Youth Stories](#) in this Information Kit contains accounts of young urban refugees, as well stories about refugee youth who sought shelter and protection in refugee camps).



UNHCR / N. Behring-Chisholm



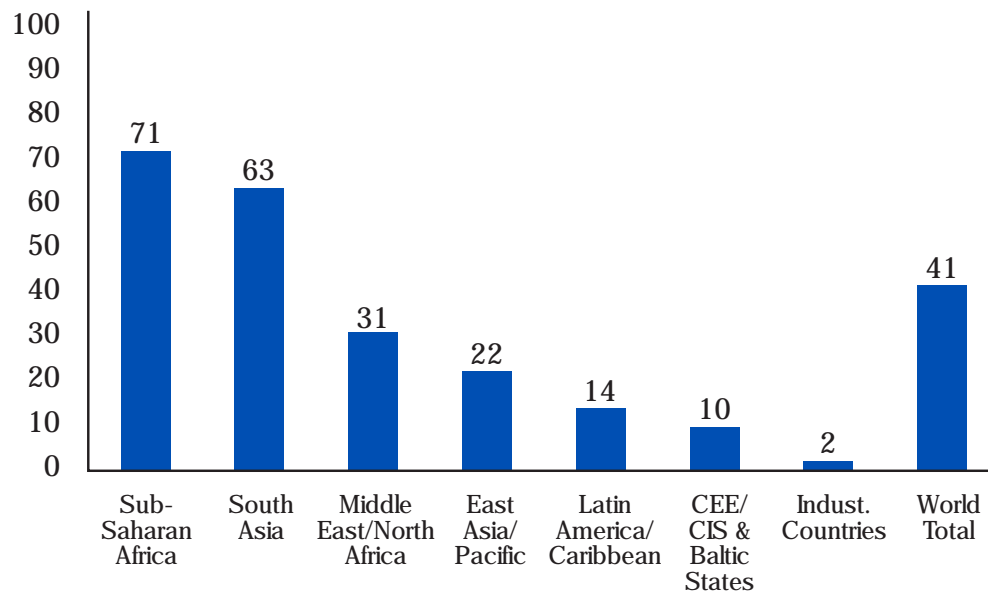
UNHCR / N. Behring-Chisholm

Registration and Documentation

According to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, every child should be registered immediately after birth and has the right to acquire nationality. Birth registration is essential to enable date and place of birth to be conclusively established, in order to activate certain rights, including those rights which are dependent upon nationality and personal status.

States should work toward ensuring that their national laws and administrative mechanisms allow for registering the births of children of refugee parents, and providing them with official birth certificates. For refugee children born in a country of asylum, registration of birth details may be a prerequisite for obtaining a nationality, enrolling in a school or protecting their property and inheritance rights after repatriation to their parents' home country. Moving children without proper documentation of their social history can result in the loss of nationality. (Refer to [news clipping](#): "UNHCR issues ID cards to Congo's refugees")

Over 50 million births not registered
Percentage of annual births not registered by region, 2000



At the end of 2000, over two fifths world's births, 132 million annually, went unregistered. Rates are highest in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, where 71% and 63% of all births go unregistered. (see graph)
UNICEF Statistics

Sources:

- "Refugee Children", Global Consultation on International Protection, 4th Meeting, 25 April 2002
- UNHCR (1994) Refugee Children: Guidelines on Protection and Care. UNHCR, Geneva
- UNICEF (2002) Birth Registration Right From the Start. UNICEF, Florence

In refugee situations, children and youth must have the proper documentation, including birth registration with certificates, and registration as refugees, in order to gain access to humanitarian aid and basic services such as education and health care. They are put at unnecessary risk when they are only listed on their parents' registration form and not issued their own identity documents. From a protection viewpoint, valid birth certificates and registration documents can be important in helping to prevent refoulement, under-age military recruitment (as without the proof of birth their actual age may be disputed), abduction and trafficking (which is much easier if there is no earlier proof of their existence). Furthermore, valid birth certificates and registration documents can be used as tools for family tracing and reunification. Proper registration can also help in identifying the specific needs of adolescents, separated children, disabled children and child-headed households.



UNHCR / S. Boness

Separation

The turmoil of conflict and flight often results in the separation of families. Given the fundamental role the family plays in the protection, physical care and emotional well being of its members, separation from families can be devastating for refugee children and adolescents.

When separated from their previous primary caregivers, unaccompanied or separated refugee children and teenagers face a greater risk of detention, sexual exploitation and abuse, military recruitment, child labour, and denial of access to education and basic assistance. They may find themselves in exceptionally difficult situations. Often, foster homes cannot be found for them, and some may end up bearing responsibilities for younger siblings or other children as young heads of households themselves.

In emergency situations, refugee children and adolescents may be with an extended family member, such as an uncle who is not the previous primary caregiver, and are 'accompanied'. However, they may still face risks similar to those faced by unaccompanied refugee children and adolescents. To ensure that all young refugees are entitled to international protection, and benefit from the efforts to trace and reunify them with their previous primary caregivers, UNHCR, UNICEF, ICRC, and the Save the Children Alliance have adopted the broader concept of 'separated minors'. These are children under the age of 18 who are separated from both parents or from their previous legal or customary caregiver. (Refer to [Refugee Youth Stories of Areneo, Assumani, Bekilda, Hussein, Ismail, James, Paul, and Manyua.](#))

The number of unaccompanied child refugees varies widely. It often comprises 3 to 5 per cent of a refugee population.

The aim of UNHCR and its partners is to prevent separation, to identify children and adolescents who have become separated from their families, to ensure that such children receive the protection and assistance they need, and to reunite them with their families.

- [In the Rwandan crisis in the mid-1990s, an estimated 67,000 children were reunited with their families.](#)

Sources:

- UNHCR (1994) *Refugee Children: Guidelines on Protection and Care*. UNHCR, Geneva
- UNHCR (1996) *Working with Unaccompanied Children: A Community-based Approach*. UNHCR Community Services Unit, Geneva
- "Refugee Children", *Global Consultation on International Protection, 4th Meeting*, 25 April 2002

Recent initiatives to address the problem of separation include:

- **Separated Children in Europe Programme (SCEP)**, a joint UNHCR and Save the Children Alliance initiative on behalf of separated children arriving in Western and Central European countries, seeking asylum. Because of this project, a number of countries, particularly in Central Europe, have included in their legislation, provisions ensuring the protection of separated children. Some States have provided appropriate accommodation and guardianship systems and improved interviewing arrangements.

(Refer to the [Resource Sheet](#) on SCEP for further information about this programme).

([Refugee Youth Stories](#) about young refugees, separated from their families, who have sought asylum in Europe: Bekilda, Hussein, Nabil). ([News clippings](#): “Protect the asylum orphans”; “Number of unaccompanied children seeking asylum steady despite wars and forced conscription”; “Half of the refugees in the world are children under 18 years old”).

- **Family tracing and reunification** through collaborative efforts and strengthened partnerships between UNHCR and UNICEF, ICRC, International Rescue Committee (IRC), World Vision International and Save the Children Alliance aim to improve the methods of tracing and reunification of separated children in developing countries such as Guinea and Sierra Leone. In Tanzania, although cross-border tracing and reunification have not been possible for Burundian and Congolese refugee children and teenagers, owing to the volatile situation in their respective countries of origin, documentation, inter-camp tracing and reunification continue in the country of asylum. Efforts were made to increase the co-ordination and accuracy of data-bases established by the relevant organisations, as well as continued use of tools such ‘[Photo-tracing albums](#)’ and [radio broadcasts](#).

(Refer to [news clippings](#): “West Africa: Massive poster campaign to find parents of unaccompanied children; “Belgium-URCS unites pining hearts”).

- **Post-primary education, vocational training and income-generating activities:** Unaccompanied or separated adolescents who are young heads of households are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. They require careful monitoring and protection. The key to supporting their rights and capacities and to help them become self-sufficient is to

provide them access to post-primary education, vocational training and income-generating activities. Examples of such activities are the vocational and skills-training programmes in Azerbaijan and Russia. In Ethiopia, re-registration of unaccompanied children in camps made it possible to identify those who had reached 18 years of age, so that vocational training and small enterprise resources could be provided in order to help support their transition into maturity and self-sufficiency.

(Refer to the [Resource Sheet](#) on the Refugee Education Trust (RET) which deals with the launch of the Trust to help develop further opportunities for post-primary education and vocational training).

The ICRC photo-tracing programme was launched in co-operation with UNICEF in 1997 in Rwanda, 10,000 copies of three photo albums containing photographs of young children, who were separated from their families, were distributed throughout the country to associations and local authorities. The albums were displayed where the public could easily see the photos. The albums were entitled “Do you know this child?”, and contained the plea to anyone who recognised any of the children to contact the nearest ICRC office. The photo-tracing concept was developed for children who were too young or too traumatised to provide information needed to start up the normal reunification process. Hundreds of children were reunited with relatives through this programme.



ICRC / B. Heger

It is fear that drives refugee youth from their countries – fear of persecution or fear for their lives. Young Armenians have left their home country with parents who fear persecution because of their political stance over the territorial dispute over Nagorno Karabach. Teenagers from Sierra Leone and Liberia have fled en masse to neighbouring countries to escape brutal fighting between rival military forces, while youth from Myanmar have crossed into Thailand to avoid forced labour or military conscription by government forces.

During the period before flight and even afterwards, some refugee youth witness the deaths of relatives or friends, others suffer physical injuries or handicaps. Some are forced to separate from their parents or close family members. Still others are forced to become soldiers and take part in bloodshed. All of them suffer the poignant sadness of leaving behind, perhaps forever, what was once home.

The problems that refugee youth have to face do not dissipate after crossing a border to reach safety. In various refugee camps from Asia to Africa, refugee youth are often subjected to inequitable distribution of food and other material goods. They may suffer sexual and physical harassment and abuse, and risk recruitment into armed forces. A common ailment experienced by countless refugee youth is loneliness. This could be due to many reasons, including separation from close family members, not knowing the local language which could inhibit a spontaneous integration into the local society, or discrimination from local people and even from other refugees.

Making the transition from childhood to adulthood, can be difficult even at the best of times, when a young person's world is stable and not fraught with danger and stress. For many refugee youth, their social and psychological needs are compounded by their experiences before flight in their home countries, and afterwards in the country of asylum.

Field workers have observed that adolescents are often the age group most psychologically affected by war and subsequent displacement. They are old enough to understand the dangers of war but have not developed the maturity to cope with the stress, are less receptive to family support than younger children, and they experience life in extremes.

Sources:

- UNHCR (1994) Refugee Children: Guidelines on Protection and Care. UNHCR, Geneva
- Save the Children Federation USA (1996) Promoting Psychosocial Well-being Among Children Affected by Armed Conflict and Displacement: Principles and Approaches, Working Paper No 1. ISCA, Geneva
- UNHCR/WHO (1996) Mental Health of Refugees. UNHCR/WHO, Geneva
- J. Lowicki (2000) Untapped Potential: Adolescents Affected by Armed Conflict. Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, New York
- Mona Macksoud (2000) Helping Children cope with the Stresses of War. UNICEF, New York
- M. Sommers (2001) Youth: Care and Protection of Children in Emergencies: A Field Guide. Save the Children, Washington DC

In certain traumatic situations, children and teenagers may withdraw from contact, stop playing and laughing, become obsessed with stereotypical war games, while others will dwell on feelings of guilt or fantasies of revenge and continual preoccupation of their role in past events. Many become depressed and anxious.

(Refer to the [Refugee Youth Stories](#) about Moses and Joshua, and Hussein).

Other reactions include aggressiveness, changes in temperament, nightmares, eating disturbances, learning problems, repeated fainting, vague aches and pains, loss of speech and of bladder and bowel control, and clinging to adults. In most cases, such stress reactions disappear over time. But extreme reactions can include episodes of psychosis.

The provision of psychosocial programmes to meet the psychological and social needs of refugee youth requires a blend of expertise in child development and psychology with knowledge about the culture, history, tradition and political realities that exist where the programmes are to take place. [Children and adolescents do not develop in isolation: the family and community are essential in providing the sense of self-esteem, security and identity that is necessary for children and teenagers to successfully learn from, and fit into, the rest of society.](#)

Often, structured activities are the first line of response for promoting the recovery and well-being of children and adolescents. [In a refugee setting, daily family routines and organised activities such as going to school and sports and recreation, convey a sense of dependability and normalcy in a chaotic and threatening world that, from a young person's perspective, has gone out of control.](#)

Also, psychosocial well-being and competence to satisfy material needs are inter-related. Young people in war-torn societies need to earn a living. Vocational and skills training for young people not only helps to augment income-earning ability and economic independence, it also serves to increase a feeling of identity and self-worth that enhances psychological healing.

UNHCR's partner, the International Save the Children Alliance, has issued an important statement of basic principles and approaches to be followed in programmes involving war-affected children and youth:

1. Apply a long-term perspective that incorporates psychological well-being of children
2. Adopt a community-based approach that encourages self-help and builds on local culture, realities and perceptions of child development.
3. Promote normal family and everyday life so as to reinforce a child's natural resilience.
4. Focus on primary care and prevention of further harm in the healing of children's psychological wounds.
5. Provide support as well as training for personnel who care for children.
6. Ensure clarity on ethical issues in order to protect children.
7. Advocate children's rights.

(Refer to the [Information Sheet on Education](#); also refer to the [Resource Sheet on 'Right to Play'](#), a partner organisation that helps in the provision of recreational activities and sport. Also refer to the [news clippings](#): "Ugandan refugees stand tall with new sports equipment"; "UNHCR to expand programme for refugee children"; "Crisis centre opens for wartime rape victims"; "Guinea: new Sierra Leone arrivals include child soldiers".)



UNHCR / N.Behring-Chisholm

Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Violence

Incidents of sexual exploitation, abuse, and violence often increase in situations of forced population movement. Weak or ineffective legal systems, limited investigative capacities of the local police force, isolation and social stigma associated with reporting contribute to the occurrence of sexual abuse and violence.

Sexual exploitation, abuse, and violence, all involve coercion – the use of a difference in power. Exploitation includes the exchange of food, work permits or other ‘favours’ for sex. Sexual abuse involves unlawful sexual contact between adults and minors. Because children and adolescents are still developing, the psychological, social and medical consequences of sexual violence are profound and differ from those of adults. The ways of preventing or responding to these child-adolescent issues also differ.

Factors that influence adolescents to engage in prostitution or sex for favours include the nature and density of many refugee camp populations, family separation, lack of adult authority, lack of food and basic material items such as clothing and toiletries, and the exchange of sex for protection.

Preventive measures include providing programmes specifically concerned with youth sexuality, for example:

- Ensuring that food, firewood clothing and other assistance are adequately and equitably distributed, especially to the most vulnerable households.
- Listening to young people to identify the risks and pressures they face.
- Encouraging and supporting community efforts to protect children and adolescents, targeting men in public education efforts and supporting the prosecution of offenders.
- Avoiding the placement of young, separated boys with single adult men.
- Providing sufficient and safe opportunities for all minors in education, training, recreation, sports and where appropriate, income generation.
- Establishing youth clubs or safe spaces where adolescents can come to talk about their concerns, obtain information about their needs, have fun and take part in constructive activities such as learning life skills.

Sources:

- J. Lowicki (2000) Untapped Potential: Adolescents Affected by Armed Conflict. Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children, New York
- UNHCR (2002) Mid-Year Progress Report 2002. UNHCR, Geneva
- UNHCR (2002) Summary Note on UNHCR’s Strategy and Activities concerning Refugee Children. UNHCR, Geneva
- Valid International (2002) Meeting the Rights and Protection Needs of Refugee Children: An Independent Evaluation of the Impact of UNHCR’s Activities. UNHCR Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit, Geneva

“40 to 60 percent of sexual assaults are against girls below the age of 16” says Linnie Kesselly, Senior Community Services Officer, UNHCR, Uganda. “Girls and women are deceived and sexually used because they don’t know their rights as refugees and because they can’t sustain themselves financially”.

Both girls and boys are at risk of sexual exploitation, abuse and violence, but adolescent girls are the principal targets. Separated girls, including those living in foster care, with relatives or heading a household, are particularly at risk. Many girls experience sexual exploitation and abuse and are more exposed than young males of the same age to the risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS. Many are also being exploited as domestic labour.

As most cases involve female victims and male perpetrators, sexual exploitation, abuse and violence should be analysed in terms of its disproportionate impact on women and girls. Consequently, an effective response to sexual exploitation and abuse requires an understanding of inequitable gender/power relations in a given society. UNHCR, in collaboration with its operational partners, is seeking to address these problems through preventive measures such as education, sensitisation, awareness-raising and appropriate camp layout, as well as through the provision of curative services such as health facilities for victims of violence, counselling and information and follow-ups on sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS.

Destitute and alone in a vast refugee camp, 15-year old Sierra Leonean Massa was promised food, clothing and a home of her own by a Liberian builder on a relief organisation’s payroll if she would be his girlfriend. He was ten years older than she. The apartment never materialised but he brought her food and small amounts of money until she became pregnant and refused to have an abortion. At 17, she became a single mother.

22-year old Mariama said she had been sleeping with different men since her boyfriend of eight years walked out on her last year. These relationships usually last a couple of weeks, sometimes one night. The man leaves a ‘gift’ as little as 5 Liberian dollars (10 cents). “I never wanted to live that life” she said, taking a break from washing clothes outside the hut she shares with her sister. “Apart from relationships, there is no other way to survive”.

When Musu applied for a high school scholarship for refugees, she said she was approached by one of the teachers on the interviewing committee who asked her to be his girlfriend. “I said I didn’t want to be his friend, and I never got that scholarship,” the 18-year old recalled bitterly.

In 1995, UNHCR published *Sexual Violence against Refugees: Guidelines on Prevention and Responses* as a guidance tool for field staff. In 2001, a practical *Step by Step Guide for Protection Officers* was prepared to help Protection Officers in responding to incidences of sexual and gender-based violence in field operations. The refugee child-specific training programme, [Action for the Rights of Children \(ARC\)](#) includes a module on preventing and responding to sexual exploitation, abuse and violence. Currently, UNHCR is finalising a manual on the rights of children and women, and on sexual and gender-based violence. Its purpose is to raise awareness in refugee communities about women’s and children’s rights under national and international law. Rights-awareness training for adult refugees is an important first step towards the empowerment of women and girls, and will ultimately improve their protection.

During October and November 2001, UNHCR and Save the Children (UK) visited Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone to explore allegations of sexual violence and exploitation as it affects refugee children. Allegations contained in their report of the involvement of staff of NGOs and UN agencies prompted UNHCR to request an investigation of the UN Office of Internal Oversight. This took place in the early months of 2002. Meanwhile, UNHCR and its partners are carrying out a range of activities aimed at preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence against refugees.



UNHCR / R.Chalasanani

Reproductive Health and HIV/AIDS

Reproductive health problems which face refugee youth include:

Early and unwanted pregnancies

Complications of pregnancy and delivery

Maternal mortality

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS

Unsafe abortions

Rape, forced marriage, sexual enslavement and other forms of sexual violence

Genital mutilation

Basic reproductive health needs and rights of refugee youth include:

Information on sexuality and reproductive health, including HIV/AIDS

Access to family planning services

Access to comprehensive antenatal, safe delivery and post-birth services

Confidentiality, privacy and respect when seeking and receiving services

Prevention of unsafe abortion and access to post-abortion care

Access to quality STI prevention and services

Freedom and protection from sexual and other gender-based abuses and access to appropriate services.

Refugee adolescents, especially girls, may face increased exposure to STIs, including HIV/AIDS, as they are often victims of sexual violence and exploitation by fighting forces, and as they increasingly have sex at a younger age without prevention information.

Tens of thousands of refugee youth have lost or are separated from their parents and families as a result of war. They are particularly at risk of being sexually enslaved and forcibly recruited by combatants, compelled into prostitution, or forced into early marriages. These and other factors increase the number of early, unwanted and dangerous pregnancies and other health problems among refugee girls, who have little access to health care services.

Sources:

- UNHCR (2001) HIV/AIDS Education for Refugee Youth: The Window of Hope. UNHCR Education Unit, Geneva
- UNHCR (2002) Work with Young Refugees to Address Their Reproductive Needs: It's Their Right and Our Duty. UNHCR, Geneva
- UNHCR (2002) Summary Note on UNHCR's Strategy and Activities concerning Refugee Children. UNHCR, Geneva
- Valid International (2002) Meeting the Rights and Protection Needs of Refugee Children: An Independent Evaluation of the Impact of UNHCR's Activities. UNHCR Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit, Geneva

Adolescents, especially girls, are primary targets of sexual violence and exploitation, and they may be exposed to potentially harmful practices. For example, every day 6,000 girls are subjected to female genital mutilation.

Early and unwanted pregnancy may lead to dangerous childbirth or unsafe abortions. In developing countries, maternal mortality is five times greater among girls under 18 than among women 18-25.

Despite international and institutional commitments to ensuring refugee young people's right to health, few programmes exist to address their health needs specifically, while useful links between programme sectors are not consistently made.

Conflict, civil war and the consequent population displacements exacerbate the spread of HIV, and complicate efforts toward social and economic development. Because of the threat of HIV infection and the need to offer care and support for those already infected, UNHCR developed a policy on HIV/AIDS. This policy recognises that effective protection for refugees, especially refugee children and youth must include the promotion for HIV/AIDS prevention and care programmes.

(Refer to the [Resource Sheet](#) on HIV/AIDS Preventive Education.)

In East Africa and the Horn of Africa, UNHCR has developed an HIV/AIDS prevention and response programme for the refugees and returnees. High population mobility, which is often associated with violent conflict, is conducive to a higher risk of the spread of HIV/AIDS infection. The level of knowledge about HIV/AIDS among refugee populations is reportedly low, while the difficult situation of camp life increases the risk of HIV infection.

The threat of AIDS cannot be ignored and must be addressed in all the programmes that are designed in refugee settings.

Facts about HIV/AIDS

By the end of 2002, an estimated 42 million people were infected with HIV, with over 95% of those living in developing countries. Approximately 19.2 million people with HIV are women and 3.2 million are children under age 15.

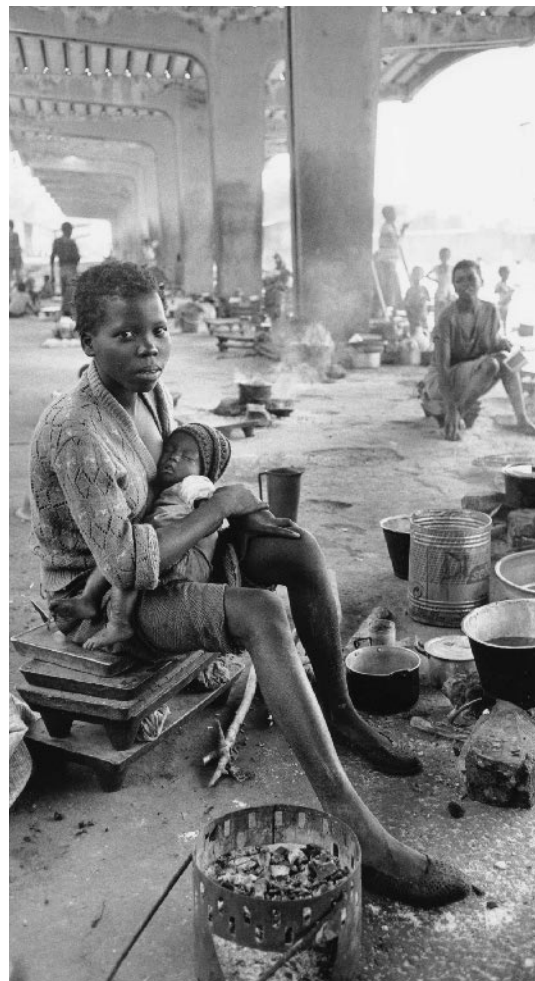
About one-third of those currently living with HIV/AIDS are aged 15-24. Most of them do not know they carry the virus.

Every minute, six young people under the age of 25 are infected with HIV, and overall, more than half of all new HIV infections worldwide occur among people aged 15-25.

AIDS has killed the mother or both parents of 10.4 million children under the age of 15, orphaning some 2.3 million children in 2000 alone.

In some countries, regions, districts in Africa, over 15% of 15 to 18 year old girls are already infected with HIV.

In sub-Saharan Africa, girls are twice as likely as boys to be infected with HIV/AIDS.



UNHCR / C. Sattleberger

In the past decade, children are more frequently targeted in war.

Children and teenagers become child soldiers in many ways: some are conscripted, others are press-ganged, and yet others join as a way to protect their families from victimisation.

The United Nations estimates that more than 300,000 children under the age of 18 are fighting world-wide, mostly with rebel groups. Most are between 15 and 17 years old, but some are as young as 7. Most have been kidnapped.

In some situations, the proximity of refugee camps to conflict zones exposes adolescents to the risk of forcible recruitment, either by State or non-State entities. Separated children face an even greater risk of military recruitment. Most child soldiers are adolescent. Military recruitment affects boys and girls in different ways: boys are used in combat, as porters or hostages, whereas girls are more frequently used for sexual slavery and forced labour. (Refer to the [Refugee Youth Story](#) of Moses and Joshua).

In recent conflicts, the distinction between civilians and combatants has become progressively blurred. Minors in particular have been targeted, militarised and involved in perpetuating conflict. The former Yugoslavia and the Great Lakes region in Africa provide examples of situations in which the distinction between victim and aggressor has become hard to draw. Where there is no clear distinction, a greater focus on young refugees can make it clear to all parties and outside observers that there is a need for a humanitarian and neutral assistance programme.

UNHCR continues to advocate against the use of child soldiers in all circumstances and encourages States that have not yet done so to accede to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict. The ARC module 'Child Soldiers' is used to raise awareness and conduct training on the prevention of recruitment, demobilisation and social integration.

Sources:

- Save the Children Federation USA (1996) Promoting Psychosocial Well-being among Children Affected by Armed Conflict and Displacement: Principles and Approaches, Working Paper No 1. ISCA, Geneva
- J. Lowicki (2000) Untapped Potential: Adolescents Affected by Armed Conflict. Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, New York
- Mona Macksoud (2000) Helping Children Cope with the Stresses of War. UNICEF, New York
- M. Sommers (2001) Youth: Care and Protection of Children in Emergencies: A Field Guide. Save the Children, Washington DC
- UNHCR (2002) Summary Note on UNHCR's Strategy and Activities concerning Refugee Children. UNHCR, Geneva
- Valid International (2002) Meeting the Rights and Protection Needs of Refugee Children: An Independent Evaluation of the Impact of UNHCR's Activities. UNHCR Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit, Geneva

It is vital to provide alternatives to joining an armed group. Such alternatives include education, training, employment, sports and recreation.

(Refer to the [Resource Sheets](#) on the Refugee Education Trust and on Right to Play).

Provision of adequate food rations may be even more important in reducing the vulnerability of displaced and war-affected minors to recruitment. Separated minors are especially vulnerable to recruitment, so measures for their protection, care, documentation and reunification are essential. Schools can play constructive roles, through instruction in peace education and conflict resolution.

(Refer to the [Resource Sheet](#) on the Peace Education Programme).

In post-conflict situations, war-affected populations of concern to UNHCR often include former child-soldiers who experience difficulties reintegrating into families and communities or in participating in regular education programmes. UNHCR programmes in several countries have demonstrated that family reunification is a principal way of rehabilitating former child soldiers. UNHCR, in co-ordination with UNICEF and other partners, implements various activities to rehabilitate and reintegrate former child soldiers into their communities through, among others, non-formal education, skills training and income generating activities.

Examples of programmes specifically targeted at child soldiers include efforts to reintegrate former child soldiers into the refugee community in Guinea, and community awareness-raising initiatives in Pakistan and Tanzania concerning the rights and needs of such young people. In Sri Lanka, UNHCR, in close collaboration with UNICEF, supports 'children's zones of peace', that provide alternatives to child recruitment through creating educational and recreational opportunities. In Sierra Leone, UNHCR has arranged with a local NGO to provide foster care and other forms of alternative care for returnee children including ex-combatants, pending tracing and family reunification, as well as for those children who are unable to unite with their families or community. The NGO collaborates with other organisations to provide psychosocial care, medical services, educational assistance, vocational training and apprenticeships for these children.

(Refer to [news clippings](#) on the issue of child soldiers: "Treaty to ban child soldiers"; "UNHCR welcomes Optional Protocol on child soldiers"; "UNHCR concerned about child soldiers in Columbia"; "Guinea: new Sierra Leone arrivals include child soldiers").

Education

Education is recognised as a fundamental human right of every individual, including refugees. This is spelt out in international instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. Emergencies and crisis situations block the achievement of the global goal of Education for All.

Education is an essential tool in the protection of refugee children and youth from exploitation, military recruitment, prostitution and other harmful practices. Education helps meet refugee children's developmental and psychosocial needs and prepares them for a productive life and for durable solutions. It imparts essential life skills, in areas such as health, hygiene, HIV/AIDS, the environment, land-mine awareness, peace and vocational training. Education also contributes to durable solutions, helping prepare refugees for a more productive and sustainable life upon repatriation or resettlement. Where they settle in their country of asylum, their education contributes to that country's social and economic development.

Around one million refugee children and young people are enrolled in UNHCR-supported education programmes around the world. Girls and young women constitute around 40% of those enrolled. Of all beneficiaries, approximately 10% are enrolled in pre-school, 76% in primary, 5% in secondary, 6% in non-formal and 3% in vocational and tertiary education programmes.

Refugees usually start educational activities for their children within days of arrival at their place of asylum. Typically, UNHCR works with NGOs and/or government partners to provide refugee children and youth with classrooms, textbooks, school materials, and their teachers with training.



An issue of great concern to young refugees is the curriculum they are to follow. UNHCR's policy is to encourage the use of the curriculum of the country of origin, to facilitate reintegration of refugee youth upon repatriation. In some countries, where refugees have stayed for a long time, they adopt the curriculum of the country of asylum, which allows greater employment opportunities. The best solution is to have a curriculum that 'faces both ways', for example, permitting young refugees to learn the languages of both countries.

In many places, UNHCR negotiates with the Ministry of Education of the country of origin, to make it possible for young refugees to receive credit for the studies they undertake in exile, when they return home. This is a deeply felt need of refugee youth.

UNHCR has several global priorities in the field of education:

1. **The organisation is seeking to strengthen educational support to increase enrolment and reduce drop-out rates, especially among girls.** UNHCR believes that specific measures must be introduced in order to achieve gender parity in schooling. These might be the recruitment of female teachers, supplementary assistance targeting girls who attend school regularly, and community sensitisation on the benefits of educating girls.

2. **A principal protection objective in the initial phase of an emergency is to provide basic education and recreation activities for refugee children and young people.** In partnership with other agencies, notably UNICEF, the Norwegian Refugee Council and Save the Children, UNHCR is trying to improve its capacity to respond swiftly to the educational needs of refugees in emergencies and rapid repatriations.

3. **UNHCR works to improve the quality of education provided to young refugees.** This is done through improvements to educational infrastructure, such as construction of classrooms and provision of textbooks and learning materials. A crucial determinant of the quality of learning is teacher training. UNHCR and its partners invest considerable resources in upgrading teachers' skills.

4. **UNHCR focuses on post-primary education.** UNHCR support for vocational, secondary or tertiary education is currently limited by financial constraints. Although a small number of refugee youth benefit from tertiary education scholarships, it is not enough.

As a result, **UNHCR facilitated the establishment of the Refugee Education Trust (RET) to provide post-primary education to the world's refugee children and youth.** The Trust works with refugees and local communities to find innovative ways of using local skills and resources.

(Refer to the **Resource Sheet** on RET).

5. A fifth priority is **the integration of programmes to enhance basic survival skills into refugee education programmes** and general awareness-raising. To this end, HIV/AIDS education has been introduced in various places both in schools and on a more informal basis with youth and community groups, as a preventive measure.

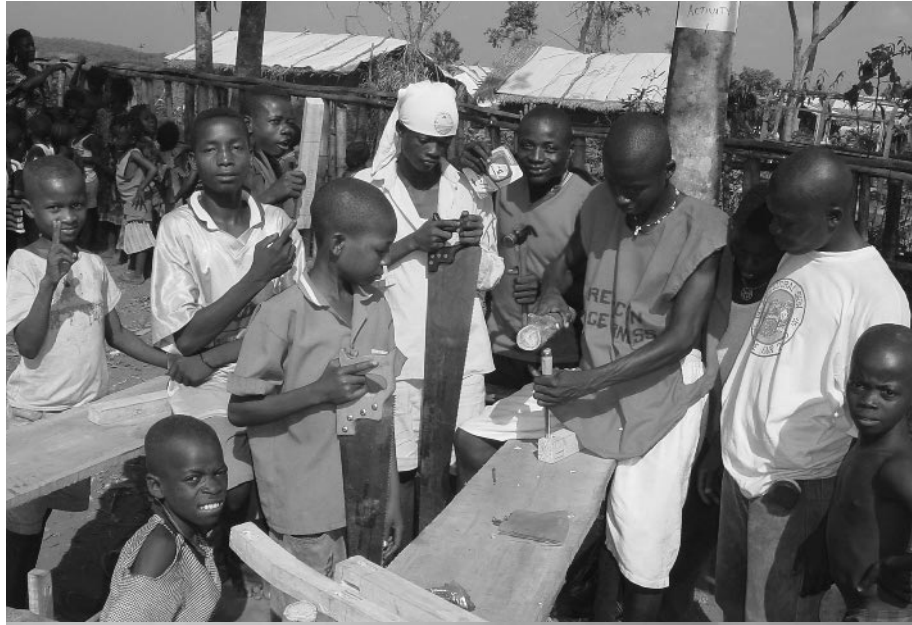
(Refer to the **Resource Sheet** on HIV/AIDS Preventive Education).

In post-conflict situations, **mine awareness education** is vital. UNHCR also supports **environmental education** in several refugee education programmes, including the development of education materials in co-operation with UNESCO. In addition, UNHCR has developed a **peace education programme** which has gained international recognition. It was first introduced in 1998 in the refugee camps in Kenya. Peace education is also offered to refugee youth in many other places, including Uganda, Guinea, Liberia, Colombia and Caucasus countries.

(Refer to **Resource Sheet** on UNHCR's Peace Education Programme.)

6. Finally, UNHCR is seeking to build **external partnerships.** An Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) was set up in November 2000. INEE is an open network of UN agencies, NGOs, practitioners and researchers, working together to ensure children's right to education in situations of emergency and crisis. INEE promotes improved collaboration and effectiveness in education responses to emergencies, by improving communications and sharing information, expertise and materials. UNHCR is an active member in this network and works on strengthening the quality of schooling in refugee camps and settlements.

In sum, **UNHCR – with its mandate to protect and safeguard the rights of refugees – regards education as both a life-saving and life-sustaining activity. Education gives refugee youth hope, dignity and a sense of purpose for the future.**



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Education and literacy are key for empowering women and preparing girls for future roles. Globally, for the years 2000-2001, the ratio of boys to girls enrolment in UNHCR-assisted education programmes alone has averaged 42 per cent female to 58 per cent male. The gap in the ratio of boys to girls in education widens as the grade of education increases. Thus, whilst 41 per cent of beneficiaries of UNHCR-assisted primary education programmes in 2000 were female, the proportion dropped to 33 per cent at the level of secondary education.

Non-formal education

Many refugee children and youth are not enrolled in formal schools, especially at post-primary level. In order to reach the large number of out-of-school youth with messages concerning reproductive health and HIV/AIDS, conflict resolution and peace education, gender sensitisation, and maintaining the environment, other means of communication need to be tried.

While the formal school system is subject to regulations, non-formal education and out-of-school activities are more flexible in nature and can be adapted to suit different situations and needs of refugee youth. Their setting is more suitable to alternative ways of teaching and learning through Peer Education, participatory training methods such as role play, and youth initiatives such as youth centres, youth newspapers, radio shows and advocacy groups. Non-formal education and out-of-school activities are more likely to provide opportunities for young people to discuss sensitive issues more openly.

Non-formal education programmes are often organised around thematic issues such as reproductive health and HIV/AIDS and environmental education, and can be creative and stimulating. In some refugee camps, youth centres have been set up where dance, drama and musical activity are used as a medium to encourage young refugees to either express their experiences about relevant issues, or to convey necessary educational messages. "Cultural workshops" have been organised with painting, poetry writing, puppetry, song and dance to attract the participation of young refugees.

Peer Education uses young people to reach out to other youth, especially those who are marginalised and denied access to formal, institutional settings such as schools and health clinics. Young people are natural experts in communicating with other young people, especially where adult-adolescent communication on sensitive issues is limited or stilted. They are familiar with the language used by their peers and may therefore have better credibility than adults in delivering messages. However, in order for programmes such as the HIV/AIDS peer education programmes which have been set up in Eritrea, Ethiopia and Uganda to succeed, the volunteer support of the refugee communities is required.

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