

# Policy priorities

Protection encompasses all activities aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and the spirit of the relevant legal instruments. For UNHCR, the protection of refugees and others of concern entails, among other things, ensuring that their right to the highest attainable standards of physical and mental well-being is respected.

The Office has set a number of global strategic objectives relating to this responsibility, and has established clear targets against which to measure its performance. These include:

- improving physical security, protecting against *refoulement* and reducing incidents of violence, in particular by preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence (Global Strategic Objective – GSO – 1.1);
- ensuring civil, social and economic rights are secured and opportunities for self-reliance maximized, with particular attention to the rights of women and children (GSO 1.3);
- preventing malnutrition, and reducing the prevalence and impact of HIV and AIDS (GSO 1.2); and
- ensuring the right to education (GSO 1.4).

Thus, the Office has established a number of policy priorities in key areas that are aimed to guide UNHCR's protection and assistance programmes. First among these is the protection of women, children and older refugees; but they also address HIV/AIDS, malaria, nutrition, safe motherhood and the environment. These policy priorities are detailed below.

## Protection of refugee women and gender equality

In 2006, discussions with governments and non-government organizations in preparation for the ExCom Conclusion on Women and Girls at Risk stressed the need to go beyond responses and focus more on solutions for women and girls facing these challenges. In 2007, gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment activities will continue to underscore a rights and community-based approach with the following objectives:

- **Gender analysis:** Achieve gender-sensitive protection and assistance interventions targeting the different and specific needs of women and men of all ages through the collection and analysis of data disaggregated by sex and age in all phases of UNHCR operations, including emergencies. As part of the inter-agency

response to internal displacement, UNHCR aims to achieve this objective by supporting the use of the inter-agency *Handbook on Gender Mainstreaming in Humanitarian Disasters*, in participatory assessments, strategic planning, and response activities.

- **UNHCR's Five Commitments to Refugee Women:** Monitor progress in the implementation of the Five Commitments and strengthen protection systems to monitor and develop solutions for women and girls facing heightened protection risks.
- **Empowerment and participation:** Address discrimination and barriers to the empowerment of displaced women and girls and support their meaningful participation in peace processes through promoting the continued implementation of UNHCR's Plan of Action on Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security in field operations. This will include supporting UNHCR and partner staff in the use of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and other international instruments.
- **Women's leadership and economic empowerment:** Strengthen the skills of refugee, internally displaced and returnee women in leadership, women's rights and microenterprise through building capacity in selected countries in partnership with regional non-government organizations, national authorities and UN agencies.

## Protection of refugee children

In 2007, UNHCR will work towards establishing effective child protection systems and promoting child participation and respect for their rights through partnership, advocacy and resource mobilization. UNHCR has made progress in establishing vocational programmes for adolescents; providing assistance to attend school; sensitizing and raising awareness among communities; as well as making available counselling services for victims of abuse and violence. Nonetheless, participatory assessments in 2005 and 2006 revealed serious gaps in the protection of children of concern to UNHCR, such as the need for greater attention to, in particular, the identification, registration, tracing and family reunification of unaccompanied and separated girls and boys and the monitoring of their care arrangements.

Within the framework of a rights- and community-based approach and the five global priority issues for refugee children, the main objectives will be:

- **Effective child protection systems** - Within the overall objective of supporting the development of protection systems, provide support and guidance to



Identification and documentation of children are important protection elements during repatriation.  
UNHCR / E. Compte Verdaguer

offices on the establishment of effective child protection systems that promote respect for the rights of children, including adolescents, and especially unaccompanied and separated children.

- **Child participation** - Strengthen the participation of children, and in particular adolescents, in UNHCR operations, through participatory assessments, access to education, skills training and recreational activities.
- **Capacity development** - Increase the capacity of UNHCR and partner staff to better address child protection risks through the deployment of child protection officers, the promotion of the *Action for the Rights of Children* and other inter-agency training tools and technical missions.

The delivery of protection in field operations needs sufficient staff with the required expertise and, in this regard, UNHCR will continue to closely monitor and strengthen the role of community services staff in operations, although unfortunately budget reductions in 2006 have already begun to reverse the progress made since 2004. Crucial to providing support to field operations have been the standby agreements with Save the Children Norway and Sweden, which have enabled UNHCR to deploy an increasing number of community service officers and child protection officers. These arrangements will continue in 2007.

## Protection of older refugees and those with disabilities

The age, gender and diversity analysis undertaken in follow-up to the participatory assessments has highlighted serious protection gaps for older refugees and those with disabilities. Particular challenges faced by older people include exclusion by the community, which in turn leads to heightened dependency and problems in accessing resources. Other challenges relate to the increasing number of grandparent-headed households as a result of the death of parents due to conflict or HIV/AIDS. Despite the challenges, there are good examples of UNHCR working to build the skills of older people: in Colombia, the Office advocated for older internally displaced persons (IDPs) to participate in the technical working group on older citizens; in Sierra Leone, older returnees form part of the community advisory committee; and in Djibouti older people play a role in combating female genital mutilation and early marriage. The continued training of staff and partners on a community-based working approach is important to improve the protection of different groups, particularly older people and people with disabilities and to ensure respect for their rights. Furthermore, UNHCR is building partnerships with other agencies to strengthen its response capacity for groups with specific needs. The Office's objectives in protecting older refugees and those with disabilities will be to:

- **Improve service delivery to older women and men** in repatriation operations through adequate information dissemination, appropriate logistical arrangements and repatriation packages which take into consideration their specific needs, as well as disseminate good field practices using a community-based approach to resolve the protection challenges faced by older people.
- **Promote the rights of persons with disabilities** - Build awareness among UNHCR staff and partners on the draft *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (to be submitted for approval to the UN General Assembly in December 2006) and promote its application in field operations. Using the *ProGres* database, community services staff will analyze monitoring and follow up mechanisms established to protect the rights of those people with disabilities identified as facing protection risks and incorporate these into the global protection system.

## HIV/AIDS



In line with the UNHCR's 2007 Strategic HIV Plan, the Office will continue to implement essential HIV/AIDS interventions in emergency situations, as well as in its more comprehensive protection, prevention, care and treatment programmes.



Making refugees aware of the risks of HIV/AIDS in Nakivale camp, Uganda. UNHCR / P. Spiegel

UNHCR will continue to work with governments, UNAIDS co-sponsors and the Secretariat, as well as with the Chair of the UN HIV/AIDS Theme Group at the country level, to advocate for HIV/AIDS policies and interventions to ensure that conflict-affected and displaced populations benefit from global and country policies and programmes. This will ensure an equitable approach to universal access (prevention and treatment programmes) is adopted, so that these services can be provided to displaced people who are often located in isolated areas.

UNHCR has assumed the lead role as technical coordinating organization for HIV/AIDS and displaced populations (refugees and IDPs). In this lead technical role, UNHCR and its partners will target the needs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nepal, Colombia, and Uganda. A consultative meeting on HIV/AIDS and IDPs will be held during the first quarter of 2007.

In July 2007, UNHCR will become the chair of the UNAIDS Co-sponsoring Committee, which will provide an opportunity to continue to highlight the needs of conflict-affected and displaced people. The Office will continue to promote regional and sub-regional HIV/AIDS initiatives. In addition to the Great Lakes Initiative on AIDS and the Mano River Union Initiative, UNHCR will play a more active role in the Oubangui-Chiari and Horn of Africa initiatives.

UNHCR will continue to expand its HIV/AIDS programmes in Africa and Asia. Following assessments in Europe and Latin America, UNHCR will work with its partners to improve its programme and the integration of other existing programmes in these regions so as to improve assistance and avoid the duplication of activities and parallel structures. UNHCR will continue to develop prevention strategies, targeting in particular refugee and IDP women and youth, and expanding HIV/AIDS prevention programmes in relation to substance abuse.

Communication materials will be developed, with an emphasis on publications in Arabic, in order to tackle

the HIV/AIDS-related protection problems in Middle Eastern and North African countries. Partnerships will be strengthened with UNFPA, UNICEF and WHO in the promotion of the use of condoms, post-exposure prophylaxis, education and improved access to antiretroviral therapy programmes.

UNHCR will continue to focus on the important correlation between protection and HIV/AIDS with a strong emphasis on specific protection issues for HIV-positive refugees and a reduction in stigma and discrimination. UNHCR staff members and implementing partners will undergo training on protection and HIV/AIDS.

## Malaria

Malaria remains an important cause of illness and death among refugee and displaced populations. The majority of today's refugees live in malaria-endemic areas and pregnant women and young children are particularly at risk of severe illness and death.

UNHCR has a long experience in dealing with malaria prevention and control. Since 2005, it has worked along the lines established in its 2005-2007 Strategic Plan for Malaria Control. In 2007, the Office will continue with the implementation of the Plan, distributing long-lasting insecticidal nets; ensuring that pregnant refugee women are under intermittent preventive treatment; and that refugees are treated with new first-line malaria treatments that follow national protocols.

## Nutrition

Ensuring adequate nutrition and preventing malnutrition are an essential part of protection, especially with regard to refugee women and children. Poor nutrition results not only in wasting and/or stunting, but it also causes micronutrient deficiencies (hidden hunger), which are frequently prevalent among refugees. UNHCR will work in close collaboration with WFP and other partners to address undernutrition. Adequate nutrition is important in achieving the Millennium Development Goals related to education, gender equality, child mortality, maternal health, HIV/AIDS and the eradication of poverty.

In partnership with WFP, UNHCR will pursue measures to meet acceptable standards in nutrition and the health status of refugees through an integrated approach to dealing with undernutrition (GSO 1.2). More specifically, UNHCR will support systematic monitoring, appropriate infant feeding practices, hygiene promotion, the provision of micronutrients, as well as building technical capacity while also ensuring the standardization of nutrition policies and strategies. In order to expand UNHCR's current efforts and ensure the inclusion of refugees in global



initiatives related to nutrition, UNHCR will actively participate in the Ending Child Hunger and Undernutrition Initiative. In addition, UNHCR will continue to play an active role in the inter-agency Nutrition Cluster led by UNICEF.

UNHCR is part of the **Ending Child Hunger and Undernutrition Initiative** launched by WFP and UNICEF in mid-2005, in collaboration with a range of partners including national governments, multilateral and bilateral organizations, non-governmental organizations, as well as the private sector and civil society. With the support of the international community, it is anticipated that States will be able to address the food and nutrition needs of all people on their territory, thereby contributing to meeting their targets under the Millennium Development Goals.

UNHCR began work with the Initiative in February 2006 and is working with other partners towards the launch of a Global Action Plan in early 2007. The Office supports the Initiative as its objectives complement UNHCR's efforts to address malnutrition in selected refugee situations. Ensuring adequate nutrition and eliminating acute malnutrition is an essential part of UNHCR's wider protection mandate and indeed is a priority objective (GSO 1.2). By the end of 2007, UNHCR hopes to stabilize acute malnutrition rates to a level below 10 per cent and to eliminate micronutrient deficiencies. For more details on UNHCR's strategy and challenges faced while ensuring adequate nutrition for persons of concern, please refer to the Conference Room Paper on Nutrition (EC/57/SC/CRP.17) presented to the Executive Committee and its Standing Committee on the website [www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org).

Within the partnership framework and institutional management structure of the Initiative, the High Commissioner will be a member of the Initiative's Steering Committee and chair the Global Partners Group, a key forum for action and decision making for all stakeholders, for a two-year term starting in 2007. The Initiative will provide UNHCR with a platform on which to build broad-based partnerships and alliances and to advocate for the inclusion of refugees and others of concern into national policies and action plans.

To ensure that public health priorities are met, reliable data on health and nutrition is needed for programme planning, monitoring and evaluation. UNHCR will continue to introduce the standardized **Health Information System (HIS)** in selected UNHCR operations. HIS shows how a common set of tools, guidelines and indicators should be used by health and nutrition partners to monitor refugee health and nutrition programmes accurately and reliably. The capacity of the HIS will be increased to collect information on existing as well as emerging infectious diseases focusing on acute febrile and influenza-like illnesses. UNHCR will continue developing a contingency plan for a potential avian and human

influenza pandemic as part of the emergency preparedness and response capacity to potential health threats.

## Safe motherhood

UNHCR will continue to develop prevention strategies to reduce maternal and newborn morbidity and mortality, to reduce sexually-transmitted infections and to prevent unwanted and mistimed pregnancies. UNHCR will continue to promote and facilitate safe pregnancy and safe births through the training of birth attendants, the distribution of delivery kits for safe deliveries and access to maternal health services, as well as ensuring 24-hour referral services for obstetric emergencies.

## The environment

One of UNHCR's policy priorities is to strengthen environmental management programmes in refugee and returnee operations. In areas hosting a large number of refugees, environmental degradation or competition over scarce resources between the local and refugee populations can be a source of conflict. Environmental considerations are therefore an important element in the design of UNHCR's interventions. Ensuring that the environmental impact of refugees and related assistance operations on a region are kept to a minimum is only one of UNHCR's broader efforts to mitigate the adverse consequences of large refugee influxes. UNHCR's environmental guidelines will continue to serve as a framework for environmental action in refugee and returnee operations.

Responding to environmental challenges requires a multi-sectoral approach that addresses not only ecological concerns but also the socio-economic and protection needs of refugees and returnees. In 2007, in partnership with host governments, UN agencies, NGOs and host communities, UNHCR will continue to raise awareness of key environmental issues in refugee areas by intervening to prevent and limit damage to the environment. UNHCR will also develop projects and focus on building the capacity of staff, implementing partners and relevant government departments so that they are better able to carry out more effective environmental management programmes.

A number of activities are planned to increase the impact and visibility of environmental programmes in refugee hosting areas. Such initiatives will include awareness raising and environmental education; the development and implementation of national environmental action plans; reforestation and rehabilitation support projects; the promotion of sustainable agricultural practices; environmental management training events for UNHCR's implementing partners and government staff; and the promotion of energy conservation technologies and

techniques. UNHCR will work with UN agencies and other partners to implement the above mentioned activities for IDPs, in particular within the Camp Coordination and Camp Management and Early Recovery clusters.

Asylum countries have asked UNHCR to assist in the environmental rehabilitation of refugee hosting areas once refugees have been repatriated. UNHCR will provide support for site rehabilitation and camp clean-up activities. Efforts will be made to ensure that capable partners and UN agencies are engaged in the environmental rehabilitation initiatives implemented by UNHCR.

Ongoing partnership with UN agencies working on environmental issues will be further strengthened. These include United Nations Environment Programme (on post-conflict environmental assessment), the World Conservation Union (on the development and support of community environmental action plans), and UNESCO (on environmental education).

## Education

Refugees' right to education is one of UNHCR's global strategic objectives and policy priorities. Education is an essential tool in the prevention of exploitation and sexual and gender-based violence. It is also important in reducing malnutrition, HIV/AIDS and achieving durable solutions. Taking the above into account, UNHCR has set three objectives related to education in 2007. They are to ensure refugee children and others of concern can access education; that schools are made safe; and that the quality of education is guaranteed.

UNHCR has continued to gather educational data related to refugee children and others of concern. Based on information collected from a large number of country operations involving refugees in both camp and urban settings, UNHCR has identified several global challenges to refugee education. At least a third of refugee children and adolescents are not enrolled in school. Education for refugees at the secondary level is often not given enough support, and girls, who only account for 30 per cent of the students enrolled in secondary schools, are disproportionately affected. Furthermore, only 60 per cent of teachers in refugee camps are qualified or properly trained. Only 30 per cent of all teachers are women. In addition, non-formal education and vocational training for adolescent refugees often receive low priority and the programmes of study are not always context relevant.

To achieve the 2007 target of increasing primary school enrolment of refugee boys and girls in camp and urban situations, and in line with UNHCR's global commitment to education for all and the Millennium



Education for all refugee children is one of UNHCR's priorities.  
*UNHCR / J. Redfern*

Development Goals, UNHCR's strategy for education for 2007-2009 will focus on addressing the main issues affecting school attendance and completion of schooling. To address the protection risks faced by refugee students in school environments and to respond to major challenges related to access to education, UNHCR is developing guidelines on safety in school and a standard refugee teacher-training manual.

Factors that affect retention rates and cause students to drop out include poverty, unsafe learning environments and a lack of post-primary education opportunities. Furthermore, participatory assessments conducted in over 60 countries have revealed that in some cases adolescent girls are subjected to sexual exploitation. Often female students have no choice but to exchange sex in order to pay for school fees and supplies or to buy sanitary materials.

UNHCR will address these challenges by ensuring non-discriminatory access to formal and non-formal education for all children of concern; providing a safe learning environment, and implementing specific targeted interventions for adolescents at risk and school dropouts. Furthermore, UNHCR will strengthen inter-agency collaboration and partnerships at headquarters and field levels, in particular through the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies. The existing memorandum of understanding will be revised with both UNICEF and UNESCO, while partnerships with the ILO and the Youth Employment Network will be reinforced to expand the adolescents-at-risk vocational training project in West Africa. The Office will also ensure that education is an essential part of the humanitarian response through deployment agreements with the Norwegian Refugee Council and Save the Children. Finally, UNHCR will also collaborate with organizations specialized in education to address financial gaps in secondary education.