

# Facts and Figures

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), commonly known as the “UN refugee agency”, was established by United Nations’ General Assembly Resolution 319 A (IV), and began operations on 1 January 1951. The Statute of the Office is contained in General Assembly Resolution 428 (v) of December 1950. Initially established as a temporary office, with a projected life span of three years, UNHCR’s mandate has since then been extended every five years to respond to the world’s growing refugee problems. It celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2001. Today, there are some 20.8 million refugees and other persons who fall under the mandate of the Office. It is one of the world’s principal humanitarian organisations, with 4,395 staff in 153 offices in 67 countries around the world, and has twice been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

## The Mandate

UNHCR’s mandate is to ensure that international protection is provided to refugees and durable solutions are found to ease their plight. The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees defines a refugee as a “person who, owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.” In addition to the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol, the 1969 Convention governing the specific aspects of refugee problems applied in Africa and the 1984 Cartagena Declaration, which is relevant to Central America, adapt the 1951 definition of a refugee, to circumstances in those regions.

Over the years, there have been several General Assembly resolutions, which have requested UNHCR to provide international protection and humanitarian assistance to persons who are outside their country of origin because of persecution, armed conflict, generalised violence, foreign aggression or other circumstances leading to flight, especially when host governments are unable to do so. UNHCR’s involvement has also been requested with respect to internally displaced persons who have been obliged to flee their homes for similar reasons but remain within their country’s borders.

UNHCR’s work is guided by its Statute, the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, the General Assembly,

the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and the decisions and conclusions of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner’s Programme (ExCom) as well as UNHCR’s Global Objectives and Indicators of Progress. Of the various durable solutions it seeks to achieve, the preferred one is voluntary repatriation, whereby refugees return to their homes and resume their lives. When repatriation is impossible, UNHCR tries to help refugees settle locally in the country of asylum. When neither of these solutions is possible, resettlement in third countries is explored for persons who meet specific criteria. Although resettlement remains an important instrument of international protection, the number of refugees resettled in third countries has declined since the late 1980s.

## The High Commissioner

The High Commissioner is nominated by the UN Secretary-General and elected by the General Assembly for a term of five years. On 6 October 2003, the term of the current High Commissioner, Mr. Ruud Lubbers of the Netherlands, was extended for two years through to the end of 2005. With the two-year extension, Mr. Lubbers will have served a term of five years. Mr. Lubbers formerly served as Prime Minister of the Netherlands from 1982 to 1994, following earlier stints as Minister of Economic Affairs and work in the private sector. Since leaving government, Professor Lubbers taught at Tilburg University in the Netherlands and the John F. Kennedy School of Government and Politics at Harvard University. For years, he has been interested in globalisation and environmental conservation, he held the chair of Globus, the Institute for Globalisation and Development based in Tilburg, and served as the International President of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). Immediately after taking up his appointment, the High Commissioner initiated a prioritisation and restructuring exercise, the so-called Actions 1-2-3 process. Since then, the Office has been pursuing the objective of prioritising the use of available resources within a defined vision of how UNHCR wants to carry out its mandate. In addition, the “UNHCR 2004” process, under the leadership of the High Commissioner, is looking at ways to strengthen UNHCR as a multilateral institution.

## The Executive Committee

UNHCR's governing body – ExCom – was created in 1958, pursuant to a request by the General Assembly. Its main tasks are to approve the High Commissioner's assistance programmes, advise the High Commissioner in the exercise of his/her functions (mainly on protection issues) and oversee the agency's finances and administration. The 64 ExCom members – all of them governments, listed as an annex at the end of this document – meet in a plenary session once a year (in October, in Geneva). To maintain a dialogue with UNHCR throughout the year, there are a number of inter-sessional Standing Committee meetings on protection, administration and finance, every three or four months in Geneva. UNHCR reports annually to the General Assembly through ECOSOC.

## Part of the United Nations System

UNHCR was created by a resolution of the General Assembly and is part of a broad network of United Nations funds and programmes, specialised agencies and commissions. The Office works most closely with DPA, DPKO, ILO, IOM, OCHA, OHCHR, UNICEF, UNDP, WFP and WHO. UNHCR also liaises closely with the IMF, the World Bank and affiliated institutions, particularly in helping refugees to rebuild their lives and their communities once they have returned home.

## Populations of concern

The tables on "Planning figures" in the country chapters only reflect the nationality/origin of refugee groups of 500 persons or more (otherwise, smaller groups are shown under "other refugees"), and asylum-seekers when there are 100 or more.

The statistics tables and graphs in this Global Appeal are provisional and subject to change.

At the end of 2002, the total number of persons of concern to UNHCR was 20.8 million. In addition, there are some 1 million stateless or potentially stateless cases whose nationality is disputed or unclear. The total number of persons of concern has decreased from a peak of 27 million in 1995.

### Refugees: 11.5 million

Persons who are outside their country of origin and recognised as refugees by governments which have signed the various UN or regional instruments relating to the status of refugees; or persons recognised by UNHCR, according to the definition contained in its Statute. The

latter are known as "mandate refugees". This category includes persons who have been granted temporary protection on a group basis.

### Asylum-seekers: 0.9 million

Persons who have left their countries of origin and have applied for recognition as refugees in other countries, and whose applications are still pending a decision by the appropriate government body or by UNHCR. The largest groups of asylum-seekers live in Europe and North America.

### Returnees: 2.2 million

Persons who are of concern to UNHCR when outside their country of origin and who remain so for a limited period (usually two years) after their return - while UNHCR assists in their reintegration and monitors their well-being. The agency's activities in the country of origin are intended to make return sustainable and, in some cases, help preclude new refugee outflows or promote reconciliation.

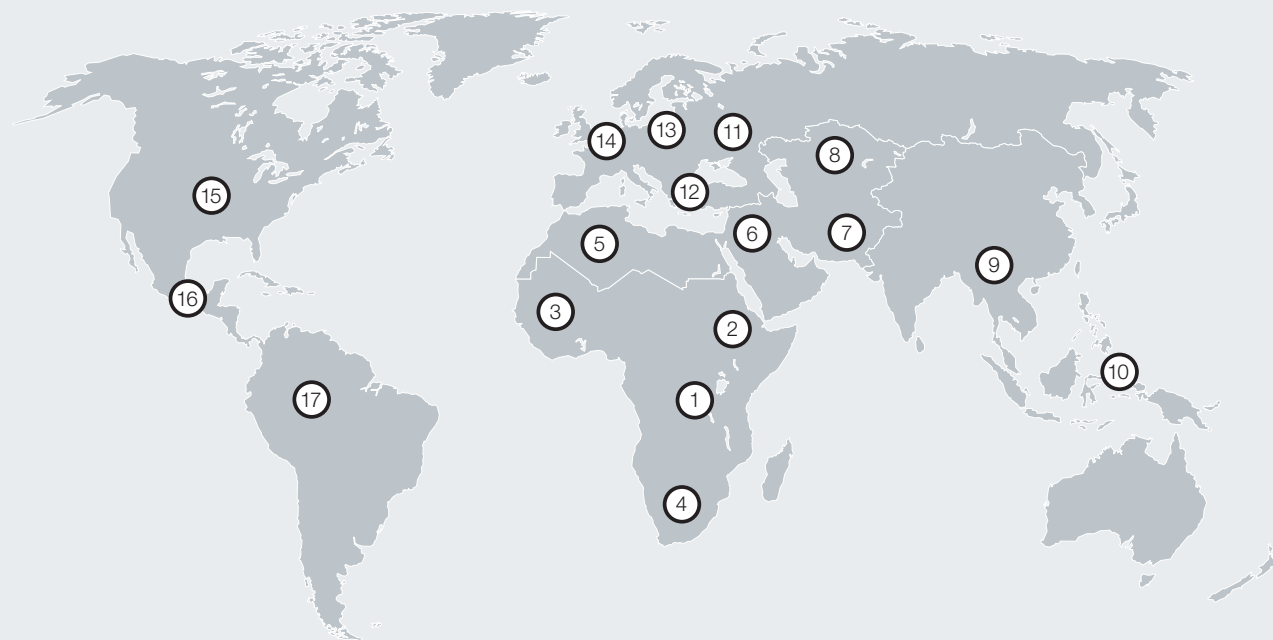
### Stateless Persons (or those with unresolved nationality): 1 million

A person who is not considered as a national by any State under the operation of its law. Avoidance of statelessness and the elimination of statelessness are part of the Office's core mandate. In carrying out this mandate, UNHCR continues to encourage States to accede to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. By October 2002, 55 States had acceded to the former and 27 to the latter instrument. The Office provides technical support and advice to States on issues related to statelessness.

### Internally Displaced Persons and Others of Concern: 6.2 million

UNHCR extends protection or humanitarian assistance to certain groups not included in the Office's original mandate, but which the UN Secretary-General or the General Assembly has requested UNHCR to assist. Like refugees, these persons may have been forced to flee their homes because their lives and/or liberty were at risk; but unlike refugees, they were either unable to or did not wish to cross an international border. According to international law, they remain under the sovereignty of their own government, even though that government may be unable or unwilling to protect them. Given its expertise with mass movements of people in crisis situations, and the fact that internally displaced persons (IDPs) are often in "a refugee-like situation" (in a plight akin to that of refugees), UNHCR has, in recent years, been called upon to protect and assist certain groups of IDPs.

## Populations of concern



Sub-regions	Refugees	Asylum-seekers	Returnees	Others of Concern			Total populations of concern
				Internally displaced persons (IDPs)	Returned IDPs	Various	
1 Central Africa and the Great Lakes	1,202,948	16,427	102,499	109,000	0	0	1,430,874
2 East and Horn of Africa	938,686	27,100	51,588	0	0	992	1,018,366
3 West Africa	630,235	30,992	78,402	238,916	49,416	20,094	1,048,055
4 Southern Africa	324,061	63,962	86,079	188,728	13,272	0	676,102
5 North Africa	183,533	173	0	0	0	29,500	213,206
6 Middle East	485,358	20,312	1,918	0	0	138,000	645,588
7 South-West Asia	3,964,357	1,630	1,803,223	665,156	753,344	0	7,187,710
8 Central Asia	90,345	1,820	1,427	0	0	83,200	176,792
9 South Asia	323,343	547	1,214	447,080	236,206	0	1,008,390
10 East Asia and the Pacific	574,883	19,472	31,882	0	0	1,959	628,196
11 Eastern Europe	270,926	9,464	65	1,210,957	59,404	33,689	1,584,505
12 South-Eastern Europe	393,345	660	72,082	628,859	142,159	87,130	1,324,235
13 Central Europe and the Baltic States	19,039	16,061	0	0	0	1,313	36,413
14 Western Europe	1,573,646	263,896	0	0	0	0	1,837,542
15 North America and the Caribbean	486,176	446,081	0	0	0	0	932,257
16 Central America and Mexico	27,605	162	0	0	0	0	27,767
17 South America	12,442	8,925	0	950,000	0	50,093	1,021,460
<b>Total</b>	<b>11,500,928</b>	<b>927,684</b>	<b>2,230,379</b>	<b>4,438,696</b>	<b>1,253,801</b>	<b>445,970</b>	<b>20,797,458</b>

## Notes:

1. Data are generally provided by governments, based on their own definitions and methods of data collection.

2. Figures as at 1 January 2003 (provisional and subject to change).