

# 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. However, in the course of 2003, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution that removed the time limitation on the continuation of the Office "until the refugee problem is solved". UNHCR is one of the world's principal humanitarian organizations with 6,100 staff of whom 900 are based at headquarters and 5,200 in field locations, in 121 countries around the world. There are 17 million refugees and other persons of concern who fall under the mandate of the Office, which has twice been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

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## The Mandate

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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 relevant to Africa and the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, which is applied in Latin America, adapt the 1951 definition of a refugee to circumstances in those

regions. The 20th anniversary of the Cartagena Declaration will be celebrated in Mexico in November 2004. The commemorative event will produce a Plan of Action to strengthen international protection of refugees in Latin America based on cooperation between States, UNHCR, the Organization of American States, the United Nations, other intergovernmental organizations and different sectors of civil society.

UNHCR's work is guided by its Statute, the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, the United Nations General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and the decisions and conclusions of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme (ExCom). 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. Resettlement in third countries is explored for persons who meet specific criteria when neither of the other solutions is possible. The decline in the number of persons resettled after the incidents of 11 September 2001 showed a partial increase in 2003 when 27,000 persons (up by 28 per cent from 2002) were resettled in third countries.

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## The High Commissioner

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The High Commissioner is nominated by the United Nations Secretary-General and elected by the General Assembly for a term of five years. The current High Commissioner, Mr. Ruud Lubbers of the Netherlands, assumed office on 1 January 2001. Mr. Lubbers 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. With a keen interest in globalization and environmental conservation, for a number of years he held the chair of Globus; the Institute for Globalization and Development based in Tilburg, and served as the International President of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). Since taking up office, the High Commissioner has launched the "4Rs" initiative (repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction), a strategy that has embraced UN agencies' efforts to link humanitarian relief with longer term development activities in order to render solutions for repatriating refugees more sustainable. This has been piloted in several country operations during the last two years. In 2003, the Convention Plus initiative was designed to help engage States and other UNHCR partners to bring about firmer commitments to resolving refugee situations through responsibility and burden sharing, notably through the development of multilateral special agreements. In addition, under the leadership of the High Commissioner, UNHCR's Framework for Durable Solutions has looked at ways to ensure the inclusion, throughout the United Nations system, of refugees into the relevant planning and programming instruments. These efforts also reflect the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals relating to poverty eradication and developing a global partnership for development.

## 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 Office's finances and administration. The 66 ExCom member States – listed in the annex at the end of this document – meet in plenary session in October each year 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. The High Commissioner presents an annual written report to the General Assembly.

## Part of the United Nations system

UNHCR is part of a broad network of UN funds and programmes, specialized agencies and commissions. The Office works most closely with DPA, DPKO, ILO, IOM, OCHA, OHCHR, UNICEF, UNDP, WFP and WHO. UNHCR also liaises 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.

## Persons of concern

At the beginning of 2004, the total number of persons of concern to UNHCR was 17 million. In addition, there are millions of stateless or potentially stateless cases whose nationality is disputed or unclear.

### Refugees: 9.7 million

Persons who are outside their country of origin and recognized as refugees by governments, which have signed the various UN or regional instruments relating to the status of refugees; or persons, recognized 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: 1 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: 1 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): Millions**

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 September 2004, 57 States had acceded to the former and 29 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: 5.3 million**

UNHCR extends protection or humanitarian assistance to certain groups of persons not included in the Office's original mandate, but for whom the Secretary-General or the General Assembly may have requested UNHCR to provide protection or assistance. 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 provide protection and assistance to certain groups of IDPs.

Populations of concern to UNHCR							
Subregions	Refugees	Asylum-seekers	Returnees	Others of concern			Total populations of concern
				IDPs of concern to UNHCR	IDP returnees	Various	
1 Central Africa and the Great Lakes	1,111,502	25,968	115,514	1,970	-	-	1,254,954
2 Chad / Sudan operation	284,563	649	721	-	-	22,024	307,957
3 East and Horn of Africa	629,980	6,815	24,957	-	-	-	661,752
4 West Africa	531,178	19,633	70,882	569,655	-	15,000	1,206,348
5 Southern Africa	306,195	107,298	132,985	-	-	-	546,478
6 North Africa	183,625	299	14	-	-	29,500	213,438
7 The Middle East	538,957	15,773	55,313	-	-	106,340	716,383
8 South-West Asia	2,109,201	5,389	649,716	184,269	82,067	-	3,030,642
9 Central Asia	82,921	2,052	265	-	-	18,594	103,832
10 South Asia	308,246	784	8,254	386,104	76,722	10,704	790,814
11 East Asia and the Pacific	508,379	17,189	-	-	-	88,554	614,122
12 Eastern Europe	256,995	10,479	159	1,204,044	20,043	509,582	2,001,302
13 South-Eastern Europe	318,526	3,168	35,518	596,645	53,908	85,000	1,092,765
14 Central Europe and the Baltic States	22,208	20,537	35	-	-	500	43,280
15 Western Europe	1,855,675	349,727	-	-	-	-	2,205,402
16 North America and the Caribbean	586,478	392,465	2	-	-	-	978,945
17 Central America and Mexico	21,728	189	58	-	-	-	21,975
18 Northern South America	8,788	5,154	223	1,244,072	-	26,493	1,284,730
19 Southern South America	6,947	1,840	10	-	-	-	8,797
<b>19 Total</b>	<b>9,672,092</b>	<b>985,408</b>	<b>1,094,626</b>	<b>4,186,759</b>	<b>232,740</b>	<b>912,291</b>	<b>17,083,916</b>

Notes:

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

Figures as at 1 January 2004 (provisional and subject to change).

