

# REFUGEE CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

## BACKGROUND

Children and adolescents under the age of 18 account for approximately 10 million of the world's 22.3 million refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR. Refugee children and adolescents have special needs and face specific risks during flight, while in exile and after return home. The Office has adopted a policy of "mainstreaming" the needs of young people: in other words, factoring them into all its programmes and protection activities, drawing on several key documents:

- UNHCR's Guidelines on Refugee Children, last updated in 1994, recognised that the Convention on the Rights of the Child must be the foundation of UNHCR's protection and assistance activities for children and adolescents.
- The 1996 UN Study on the *Impact of Armed Conflict on Children* (better known as the "Machel Study") highlighted the need for a better focused and activist approach on behalf of children affected by war.
- A 1997 Joint UNHCR/Save the Children Alliance Evaluation of UNHCR's efforts on behalf of children and adolescents identified several areas where UNHCR's responses could be improved. The evaluation stressed the need for training both of UN and NGO staff, and recognised that UNHCR/NGO partnerships are often the most effective means of ensuring "on the spot" protection and assistance to children and adolescents.

## OBJECTIVES

The Senior Co-ordinator for Refugee Children and Adolescents is the focal point at UNHCR Headquarters for activities on behalf of refugee children and adolescents. During 1999 the Refugee Children's Unit:

- implemented UNHCR's policy and guidelines on refugee children and adolescents;
- monitored and supported the Machel Study follow-up strategy;
- supported field operations in specific areas and projects relating to the protection of and assistance to refugee children and adolescents; and
- promoted inter-agency co-operation, donor relations and awareness raising.

## ACHIEVEMENTS AND IMPACT

### *Mainstreaming and Support to Operations*

To further pursue the objective of mainstreaming, the Refugee Children's Unit provided crucial inputs into the new Operations Management System (OMS) programming guidelines for 2000. By participating in regional programme workshops, the Unit engineered a more child-focused involvement of protection, programme, and community services staff in the design and planning process.

The Machel Study plan of action continues to be the driving force behind UNHCR's activities for children and adolescents. The Refugee Children's Unit reviewed progress reports from over 75 countries with the aim of further developing UNHCR's strategy and action on behalf of refugee children.

In early 1999, during the Kosovo crisis, a regional inter-agency workshop on children's issues in Belgrade promoted an approach to emergencies whereby children's rights are paramount. UNHCR also provided financial support for a study by the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children. This study elaborated model programmes for adolescents affected by armed conflict, and led to the publication of *Untapped Potential: Adolescents Affected by Armed Conflict*, which reviews programmes and policies relating to adolescents, analyses their living conditions and makes recommendations on appropriate measures to address their situation.

Access to education is a fundamental human right of all refugee children. Support for refugee education is a vital way to rehabilitate children and young people traumatised by war. In some cases, education gives them an alternative to joining armed groups. Despite funding constraints, some progress has been made in refugee education since the Machel Study. In refugee schools in Pakistan, for example, girls' attendance rates have improved. In Armenia, a revolving textbook project (in which UNHCR participated with UNICEF, UNDP, the World Bank and the Norwegian Refugee

Council) has helped to reduce drop-out rates among both local and refugee school children. Liberian refugee children in Côte d'Ivoire have been successfully integrated into local primary schools. Vocational training for refugee youth expanded in several countries. The Liberian Children's Initiative (LCI) continued to highlight the educational needs of returning refugees, and by mid-1999 was phased into the general programme for Liberia.

Access to secondary and tertiary education is made possible for some refugees by scholarships, such as those offered by the Albert Einstein Academic Scholarship Programme for Refugees (DAFI), the Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize Scholarship programme, and the Windle Trust.

In support of its efforts to address sexual and gender-based violence, UNHCR implemented projects in Guinea, Kenya, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and the United Republic of Tanzania. The projects have already raised awareness among refugee communities and service providers, which has translated into improved reporting of incidents of sexual and gender-based violence.

#### *Trust Fund for Refugee Children and Adolescents*

The Fund was established in late 1997 with the aim of kick-starting children's rights and youth programmes in various regions, benefiting refugees under the age of 18. In 1998, the Fund put in place four Regional Policy Officers for Refugee Children.

The policy officer for West Africa is based in Abidjan and covers Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone. Key activities during 1999 included cross-border tracing of separated children, the demobilisation of child soldiers, education during emergencies, rehabilitation of school infrastructure, and the training of female lawyers.

The policy officer based in Addis Ababa covers Ethiopia, Djibouti, Eritrea, Kenya, Somalia, the Sudan, Uganda and, since 1999, the Great Lakes region. Key activities during 1999 included the holding of regional workshops on separated children, capacity-building workshops as a follow-up to ARC training (see below), curriculum development and production of teaching materials.

In Ankara, the policy officer is responsible for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation, and Ukraine, and provides assistance to the UNHCR office in Turkey. Key activities included: support for adolescent groups; education

of internally displaced persons; protection training focusing on children at risk; and access to education for rejected asylum-seekers and stateless persons.

Central Asia (Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) is covered by the policy officer in Dushanbe, where key activities included returnee education (especially of girls), tolerance education, and vocational training.

Although the post of policy officer for Western and Central Europe was not set up by the trust fund, the scope of work fully complemented that being done by the other regional policy officers. The post was not filled until late 1999, but preparations were made to establish a shared policy of best practice on separated children at national and European Union levels. This included the distribution of a "Statement of Good Practice" (and work began on its French translation).

#### *Action for the Rights of Children*

Action for the Rights of Children (ARC) was initiated by UNHCR and the Save the Children Alliance in 1997 in response to the Machel Study. ARC's primary goal is to help enable UNHCR, government, and NGO field staff to protect and care for children and adolescents through rights-based capacity-building and training, from the outset of an emergency until durable solutions are found. ARC has published a compendium of guidelines, participatory training material, critical issues and case studies, to encourage field workers and policy-makers to apply their experience to regional situations. In line with ARC's objective of mobilising inter-agency collaboration in the area of child rights, UNICEF and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) joined the ARC Steering Committee in March 1999.

A series of 13 ARC resource packs, based on regional input and in-house technical expertise, were printed and distributed during the first half of 1999. The resource packs offer practical assistance to facilitators of child-focused workshops and a reference guide for those working at field level in the area of children's activities. One of the resource packs addresses issues related to child soldiers, from a definition of the concept through to rehabilitation and reintegration of former child soldiers into their communities.

Six "training of trainers" workshops were organised, targeting the original pilot regions of East and West Africa, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS),

Central Asia, and the Great Lakes region, with the Regional Policy Officers acting as focal points. The training benefited staff (39 UNHCR staff and 41 partner staff) engaged in children's activities. They were selected to form resource teams which then identified strategies to nurture the ARC process within their regions, using seed funding to develop pilot activities. These included regional workshops addressing issues such as separated children, and country-specific initiatives, such as community mobilisation in Uganda. In Pakistan, the resource team conducted further training to expand its network. In the Sudan, workshops involving government officials and local NGOs were linked to projects adopting community-based approaches to help children in refugee camps. ARC partners initiated an extensive review process in 1999 to revise and finalise ARC-related material by mid-2000.

*Education for Life Skills, Peace and Conflict Resolution*  
The Education for Life Skills, Peace and Conflict Resolution programme began in 1998 with the development of Peace Education training materials for community groups and schools in the refugee camps of Kenya. The programme aims to develop an education programme promoting skills, values, and concepts that support peace by introducing peace-related initiatives within the refugee community.

In 1999, peace education was fully integrated into the school programme for all grades in Kenya, covering 40,000 children and 160 community workshops with participants of mixed gender, age and ethnicity. The Peace Education programme was also introduced in Uganda and Ethiopia with a series of awareness workshops held in regions where refugees were settled. Preliminary work was begun in West Africa (Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone), where the programme will be implemented in phases, beginning in the schools. Peace education materials were written for the different components of the programme, including formal education and community-based programmes. These materials were evaluated, modified and finalised in 1999. A public awareness programme continued in 1999 with activities that included street theatre and writers' workshops.

## ORGANISATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

### Management

The Senior Co-ordinator for Refugee Children reports to the Director of the Division of Operational Support (DOS), which is an integral part of the Department

of Operations that oversees all aspects of UNHCR's activities, including ensuring full compliance with policy priorities. This arrangement is intended to assist the process of mainstreaming by ensuring that the Senior Co-ordinator is involved in policy making and monitoring through key contacts in UNHCR headquarters and through the Regional Policy Officers for Refugee Children. These four regional officers continued to support UNHCR field offices by ensuring that protection and programme activities effectively addressed the needs and rights of refugee children and adolescents in their respective country and regional programmes. They provided technical advice on child-specific activities and participated in country programme planning. In September 1999, an additional regional policy post, based in Brussels, was created under the joint UNHCR/Save the Children Alliance Programme for Separated Children in Europe. Activities for refugee children were hampered due to the six-month gap between the departure of the former Senior Co-ordinator and the arrival of the current Co-ordinator in November.

### Working with Others

Efforts were redoubled to engage NGOs as partners in monitoring the protection of refugee women and children. To this end, UNHCR began to develop protection monitoring indicators through consultations with NGOs working in this area. *Protecting Refugees: A Field Guide for NGOs* proved to be an especially useful tool.

## OVERALL ASSESSMENT

Substantial progress was achieved in various child-related areas in 1999. Field planning and implementation benefited considerably from the input of the Regional Child Policy Officers. Efforts to raise public and donor awareness and to promote UNHCR's policy priorities were encouraging, but much remains to be done.



## Voluntary Contributions - Earmarked (USD)

Donor	Special Programmes / OTF	
	Income	Contribution
Canada	200,000	200,000
Denmark	139,082	139,082
South Africa	37,944	37,944
Sweden	94,909	94,909
United States of America	1,578,700	1,578,700
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,050,635</b>	<b>2,050,635</b>

## Financial Report (USD)

Country/Operation	Name of Project	Amount
Côte d'Ivoire	Regional Coordinator for Refugee Children in Côte d'Ivoire	137,580
Ethiopia	Regional Coordinator for Refugee Children in Ethiopia	98,782
Tajikistan	Regional Coordinator for Refugee Children in Tajikistan	106,405
Turkey	Regional Coordinator for Refugee Children in Turkey	133,937
Sudan	Capacity-building, Refugee Children/Adolescents	17,397
Headquarters	Programme Delivery and Related Costs at HQs in Connection with the Refugee Children's Unit	41,249
Various	Education for Life Skills, Peace and Conflict Resolution Programme	175,204
	Initiative Fund for Refugee Children	178,501
	Programme Delivery and Related Costs for Training in Connection with Refugee Children	53,410
	Other Activities	45,000
<b>Sub-total Disbursements/Deliveries</b>		<b>987,463</b>
Unliquidated Obligations		541,163
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>1,528,626</b>