

# Key challenges

Given the unpredictable nature of humanitarian crises and forced displacement, it is difficult to forecast with any precision the principal challenges and opportunities that will confront UNHCR in 2009. Emergencies erupt with little warning, requiring UNHCR and other members of the humanitarian community to respond at short notice, often in parts of the world where the operational environment is both politically and logistically demanding. Every new crisis generates its own difficulties and dilemmas, while the range of actors involved varies from one country to another. On the basis of recent developments, however, a number of policy issues seem likely to preoccupy the Office in the year to come. This chapter identifies those issues and provides a brief examination of them.

## Mixed migration

Refugees and other people on the move increasingly travel alongside each other. They often make use of the same routes and means of transport and, in the absence of legal opportunities to enter a State, engage in irregular forms of movement and employ the services of human smugglers.

These mixed migrations, which are a growing global phenomenon, provide UNHCR and its partners with a number of challenges. The first is to ensure that refugees receive the protection to which they are entitled, and that the border controls established by States do not prevent them from seeking asylum. The second is to protect people on the move from arbitrary detention, physical abuse, discrimination and exploitation. The final challenge is to find lasting solutions for both refugees and migrants so that they are not condemned to a prolonged and shadowy life in situations where their rights are at risk.

To address these issues in 2009, UNHCR will continue to mobilize support for and implement its 10-Point Plan of Action on Refugee Protection and Mixed Migration. The plan builds on efforts already underway in the Mediterranean basin, Central America and the Caribbean, South-East Asia and the Gulf of Aden.

## Protracted refugee situations

The last few years have witnessed growing international concern for refugees languishing in exile without the prospect of a solution to their plight through voluntary



Afghan girls returning from Pakistan attend an open school in Jalalabad.

repatriation, local settlement and integration, or resettlement to a third country. The concern has been prompted in large part by the recognition that long-term refugees are obliged to live in extremely harsh and dangerous conditions, with severe constraints on their ability to enjoy secure legal status, exercise freedom of movement, and establish sustainable livelihoods.

UNHCR will continue to underline the importance of this issue in 2009. As a result of a special initiative launched by the High Commissioner, the Office will seek to galvanize the international community to address five specific protracted refugee situations in different parts of the world. The December 2008 meeting of the High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges will be devoted to the problem of protracted refugee situations, providing an important opportunity for the international community to formulate more effective and equitable responses to this issue.

The objective of these initiatives will be threefold: to resolve some of those protracted refugee situations that already exist; to improve conditions for refugees who have been unable to find a solution to their plight; and to prevent the emergence of such situations by means of appropriate action at the early stages of each new refugee emergency.

## Return and reintegration

In its efforts to resolve protracted refugee situations, UNHCR will continue to make voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration in countries of origin a priority.

In 2008, the Office completed a series of evaluations of its role in the reintegration process and issued a new policy statement on the subject. In the coming year this new policy will be implemented in a number of countries where major repatriation movements are taking place, including Afghanistan, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mauritania, as well as Southern Sudan. In all of these situations the absorption capacity is limited, requiring UNHCR and its partners to play a key role in supporting returnees and their communities during the initial phase of the reintegration process.

The Office, in partnership with donor States, development actors and countries of origin, will continue to promote the incorporation of reintegration activities into national and area-based development plans. UNHCR will also work with the authorities and civil society to strengthen national capacity on issues of relevance to returnees, including the rule of law, personal documentation, and the restitution of land and property.

## The urban context

Increasingly, the Office is obliged to protect and meet the needs of refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees and stateless people who live in a city or town, rather than a camp or rural area. No situation exemplifies this better than the Iraq refugee crisis, in which more than two million people have fled their country and have taken refuge in cities such as Amman (Jordan) and Damascus (the Syrian Arab Republic).

An important challenge for UNHCR in 2009 will be to reassess its role in urban areas to determine how protection, assistance and solutions can be most effectively and efficiently delivered to people of concern in such contexts. In camp situations, there is a logic in establishing services for the beneficiaries. In urban areas, however, it will be necessary to strengthen existing systems and reinforce the capacity of national and local actors responsible for the welfare of poor and vulnerable sections of the community.

## Diverse needs

Another important challenge in 2009 will be to formulate and implement programmes that give due recognition to the diversity of the populations that the Office is mandated to protect. To achieve that objective, UNHCR regularly organizes participatory assessments which enable girls, boys, women and men to present their needs, express their concerns and give voice to their aspirations. This helps to identify and understand the specific risks to which different members of the population are exposed, and enables it to design appropriate responses and preventive strategies.

Sexual and gender-based violence continues to be one of the most serious protection risks in situations of human displacement, particularly (but not exclusively) for women and girls. In 2008, UNHCR commissioned an independent evaluation of the organization's work in this domain, the findings and recommendations of which will form the basis of a plan of action to be implemented between 2009 and 2011. In the coming year, the Office will also undertake a field-based review of its efforts to mainstream age, gender and diversity considerations into all of its operational activities.

## Accountability to beneficiaries

Besides recognizing the diversity of the populations it seeks to protect and assist, UNHCR needs to ensure that

it acts in the best interest of refugees and other persons of concern to the Office. For this reason, the High Commissioner has committed to a collaborative peer review of accountability to beneficiaries, organized by the UN's Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response.

The aim of the peer review, which involves eight other humanitarian organizations, is to facilitate learning about accountability based on systematic reflection and self-examination, both in the field and at the headquarters of the participating agencies. The review will focus on two principal themes: the first covers organizational policies and processes; the second, staff conduct and practice.

## Global Needs Assessment

As part of a sustained effort to better meet the needs of people of concern and ensure their basic rights, a pilot Global Needs Assessment, carried out in eight countries in 2008, will be applied to all UNHCR operations for the 2010-2011 planning cycle. Using a rigorous methodology, the Global Needs Assessment aims to collaboratively and comprehensively identify the needs of refugees and others of concern, cost meeting those needs and outline the consequences of any gaps. The assessment will underpin UNHCR's advocacy and fundraising efforts and will be backed up by the *Focus* results-based management tool. UNHCR will then present a more comprehensive view of the needs of refugees and others of concern, including gaps and their consequences. Field operations will develop prioritized plans to meet all needs under UNHCR's mandate and set priorities to progressively address more needs over time.

## Humanitarian and UN reform

Three initiatives that are intended to ensure greater integration and coherence in the work of the UN and the humanitarian community will have a significant impact on the work of UNHCR in the year to come. They are (a) the Delivering as One initiative, which is focused primarily on the UN's role in relation to development; (b) the Humanitarian Reform process; and (c) the deployment of integrated UN missions incorporating peacekeeping, political, developmental and humanitarian components.

There have been some significant achievements in the integration and coherence agenda, most notably the introduction of the cluster approach, which was designed to address the leadership gap in situations of internal displacement. The approach draws on the comparative advantages of each UN agency and builds partnerships to maximize resources and ensure an integrated response.

In 2009, UNHCR will continue to develop its capacity to discharge the enhanced responsibilities it has undertaken in respect to people displaced as a result of armed conflict. At the same time, other agencies and partners are working to improve responses for those displaced by natural disasters.

UNHCR will also continue to participate in the Delivering as One initiative in five of the eight pilot countries where the Office has operations, and with integrated UN missions in countries such as Afghanistan, Chad and Sudan. A key challenge is to identify and capitalize on the opportunities presented by these processes, most notably by means of better partnerships with development agencies, while ensuring that UNHCR's mandated role in refugee protection is fully respected.

## Climate change

There has been growing interest at the global level in the linkage between climate change, natural disasters and human displacement. Climate change and the natural disasters associated with it seem certain to add to the growing scale and complexity of human mobility in the years to come. Besides increasing the number of people who are on the move from one country or continent to another, global warming and flooding are having an adverse impact on UNHCR's efforts to support refugees and IDPs in several parts of the world. Rising food and energy prices constitute another important threat.

In 2009, UNHCR will play an active role in international efforts to monitor, understand, prevent and respond to the consequences of climate change, working closely with other members of the UN system. The Office is developing a strategy to identify and introduce the most appropriate preparedness, adaptation and coping mechanisms in its operations. UNHCR will continue working to mitigate the environmental impact of refugees and other displaced people, thereby reducing the potential for conflict with local populations.