The State of The World's Refugees
in search of solutions

Published by Oxford University Press

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1 Changing approaches to the refugee problem

Russian peacekeeping troops check the documents of a refugee returning from Afghanistan to Khatlon Province in Tajikistan, May 1995.
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The last five years have witnessed some significant changes in the scale, scope and complexity of the global refugee question. During that period, millions of people have been forced to abandon their homes as a result of political terror, armed conflict and social violence. A growing number of regions have been affected by the problem of human displacement. And, as recent experience in the Balkans, Central Africa and parts of the former Soviet Union has demonstrated, governments and humanitarian organizations alike are finding it increasingly difficult to cope with the multiple demands generated by these emergencies.

At the same time, millions of other refugees and displaced people have been able to return to their own country and community. In some instances, they have chosen to repatriate because peace has been restored to their homeland. Elsewhere, they have left their country of asylum because the conditions of life have become too difficult there, or because they no longer enjoy the hospitality of the host government and population.

In their efforts to respond to these contradictory developments, UNHCR and its partners have been obliged to reassess the continued relevance of established approaches to the problem of involuntary migration. New strategies are emerging from this process, which, in contrast to earlier approaches, are designed to address the causes as well as the consequences of forced displacement. As a result, international attention is moving away from the difficulties confronting refugees in their countries of asylum and towards the circumstances which have obliged them to leave their homeland. At the same time, much greater efforts are now being made to ensure that refugees are able to go back to their homes and to reintegrate within their own society, thereby enabling them to find a lasting solution to their plight.

Population displacements in the 1990s

The number of people of concern to UNHCR has risen substantially in recent years: 17 million in 1991, 23 million in 1993 and more than 27 million at the beginning of 1995. Of this number, some 14.5 million are refugees - people who have crossed an international border and been granted asylum in another state. UNHCR is also involved with some 5.4 million internally displaced people - those who have fled for similar reasons to refugees but who have not crossed into another country - as well as 4 million former refugees who have now returned to their homeland. In addition, there are approximately 3.5 million people outside of their own country who have not been recognized as refugees, but who are considered to be of concern to UNHCR.

No continent is immune to the problem of mass displacement. Refugee populations in excess of 10,000 can now be found in 70 countries around the world. Regarded for many years as an essentially African, South-East Asian and Latin American phenomenon, significant movements of refugees, asylum seekers and returnees have recently taken place in areas such as Eastern and Central Europe, the Caribbean, the Caucasus, Central and South Asia. Within Africa, the focus of the refugee problem has shifted from the north-eastern and southern parts of the continent to the western and central regions.

Figure 1.1 ▶ **Number of refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR, 1975-1995**

The state of the world's refugees is not wholly negative. Although the number of refugees and displaced people continues to increase, the easing of East-West tensions and the consequent resolution of several longstanding regional conflicts has made it possible for more than nine million refugees to return to their homes since the beginning of the decade.

Countries such as Cambodia, El Salvador, Namibia and Nicaragua, where large numbers of people were uprooted in the 1970s and 1980s, have been able to establish peace agreements, elect new governments and welcome home those citizens who had sought refuge in other states. Most recently, a similar sequence of events has taken place in Mozambique, a country which has witnessed the return of no fewer than 1.6 million refugees over the past three years.

In each of these cases, the United Nations has played an important part in the reconciliation and repatriation process. Typically, this role has included both political and humanitarian activities: brokering peace agreements, disarming and demobilizing combatants, transporting refugees back to their homes, registering voters, observing and organizing elections, monitoring human rights and promoting social and economic reconstruction. Despite the initial success of these operations, the countries concerned continue to be affected by some deep-rooted political divisions, social tensions and economic problems.

Experience has demonstrated that large-scale and longstanding refugee movements cannot usually be reversed overnight, even if the factors which prompted the original exodus have subsided or disappeared. Eritrea's struggle for independence from Ethiopia, for example, was effectively won four years ago. Yet more than 275,000 Eritrean refugees have remained in Sudan, deterred from repatriating by the devastation of their homeland and, initially, by their government's reluctance to encourage mass returns until an internationally financed rehabilitation programme had been established.

A similar reluctance to repatriate can be observed in regions where there is a large disparity between the economic opportunities available to a refugee population in their homeland and in their country of asylum. The Mozambicans who are living and working in South Africa, for example - some 100,000 people according to recent estimates - have generally not shown any enthusiasm to go home, and are unlikely to do so until their country's war-torn economy revives.

Elsewhere in the world, long-established refugee problems have been prolonged by conflicts rooted in the Cold War period, but which have now proved to have a life of their own. Afghanistan and Angola provide two particularly tragic examples of this phenomenon. In both of these cases, foreign troops have withdrawn, the external support provided to the combatants has been scaled down, and formal peace agreements have been signed. But in both cases the fighting and suffering has continued, generating new population displacements and limiting the number of refugees who are prepared to repatriate. Thus 2.7 million Afghans and 175,000 Angolans continue to live in exile, while in both countries much larger numbers of internally displaced people wait for the day when they can go back to their own town or village.

Recent humanitarian crises

In a number of recent crises, mass population displacements have not simply been a consequence of armed conflict, but an explicit objective of the warring parties.

The longstanding refugee problems associated with countries such as Afghanistan and Angola have in recent years been overshadowed and outnumbered by a succession of new humanitarian crises. The origin of these emergencies is to be found in several of the predominant characteristics of the post-Cold War world: the dissolution of states which no longer enjoy the support or protection of the world's more powerful nations; a proliferation of internal conflicts characterized by strong ethnic, tribal and communal hostilities; and the easy availability of small arms, land-mines and other instruments of violence.

In a number of these recent crises, mass population displacements have not simply been a consequence of armed conflict, but have also been the explicit objective of the warring parties. In former Yugoslavia alone, where the chilling concept of 'ethnic cleansing' originated, more than three million people have been uprooted, victims of armed conflict and human rights abuses such as imprisonment, torture, rape and other forms of physical and psychological intimidation. Many others are desperate to flee, but have been herded into overcrowded pockets of territory from which there is no escape.

Similar forces are at work in the former Soviet Union, particularly the Caucasian republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, where the disappearance of the communist state apparatus and the concomitant struggle for power and territory amongst local leaders and communities has uprooted over two million people in recent years. Many more are now threatened with displacement by the far-reaching political and economic changes taking place in the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union (see Box 1.1).

While the process of state dissolution and internal conflict has been particularly evident in areas emerging from communist rule, similar developments can be seen in countries falling within the western sphere of influence. Africa provides three particularly graphic examples: Somalia in the east, Liberia in the west, and Rwanda in the central part of the continent. In each of these cases, existing political and administrative structures have been destroyed, society has fragmented, and power has passed into the hands of local warlords and military leaders. In earlier years, the world's more prosperous states may not have tolerated such developments. But now that the threat of communist expansion has disappeared, the western powers have relatively little interest in the political future of countries which are so strategically and economically marginalized.

In the volatile circumstances which accompany the dissolution of states, political and social conflict is liable to assume particularly brutal and indiscriminate forms, provoking unusually large and speedy population displacements. Indeed, while the number of refugee-producing conflicts has not increased significantly in recent years, the number of people displaced in each conflict has become much larger.

The civil war in Liberia, for example, which is currently being fought by half a dozen different armed groups, has uprooted more than 50 percent of the country's 2.3 million people. The clan-based conflict in Somalia has created around 500,000 refugees and untold numbers of displaced people. In Rwanda, the consequences of conflict have been even more appalling: half a million people massacred in the first half of 1994, followed by an exodus of around two million refugees to Tanzania and Zaire, most of whom fled from their homeland within a single week.

Elsewhere in the world, refugee flows have been provoked not by the break-up of countries, but by efforts to impose the authority of the state on minority groups, opposition movements and secessionist forces. In Asia, for example, this process has been witnessed in Myanmar, where human rights abuses allegedly committed by the armed forces led to an exodus of over 270,000 Muslims in 1991 and 1992, and in Bhutan, where the intimidation of the ethnic Nepalese population has led to the departure of up to 100,000 people since 1991. In southern Sudan, fighting continues between government and rebel forces, a conflict which has led to the displacement of large portions of the population, of whom more than 200,000 have found refuge abroad. And in the Russian Federation, the military operation in Chechnya had uprooted more than 200,000 people by mid-1995.

Humanitarian and strategic imperatives

There is a dual need to find solutions to the crisis of human displacement: a humanitarian need, which stems from the suffering experienced by the world's refugees; and a strategic need, derived from the security problems which arise as a result of mass population movements and the forces which provoke them.

Refugees have a distinctive claim upon the humanitarian conscience. They are, by definition, people who need to be protected. Some are the victims of political terror, persecuted on the basis of their race, ethnic origins, religion or opinions. Others flee because their life and liberty are threatened by war, civil conflict or social violence.

When individuals, families and communities decide to leave their own country and seek refuge elsewhere, it is usually because they feel that they have no other option. For some, becoming a refugee is the final act in a long period of uncertainty, an agonizing decision taken only when all other survival strategies have failed. In other cases, it is an instinctive response to immediate and life-threatening circumstances.

For the growing number of people subjected to ethnic cleansing and other forms of organized expulsion, the element of compulsion is usually even more direct and humiliating. Forced at gunpoint to leave their own town or village, many of the people displaced by this process in former Yugoslavia, for example, have also been required to sign over their homes to the very people who are persecuting them. In a number of conflicts in the former Soviet Union, there is evidence to suggest that the seizure of property is one of the principal motivations in the deliberate creation of mass population displacements.

To become a refugee is to experience a deep sense of loss. When people go into exile, they are frequently obliged to abandon many of the assets which they had accumulated in their homeland, however meagre those might have been. Becoming a refugee normally entails a lowering of one's social and economic status. Even in countries with generous asylum policies, refugees are almost inevitably obliged to settle on the most marginal land and to accept the least desirable and worst paid jobs.

The loss experienced by a refugee also has important social, psychological and legal dimensions. When people are forced into exile, they are separated from a familiar environment and cut off from friends, family and established social networks. Not knowing when they will be able to return to their homes, or what they will find when they get there, many refugees live in a perpetual state of uncertainty. And while some refugees are able to settle down and integrate in another society, many find that they are obliged to live as second-class residents

in their country of asylum, deprived of rights, freedoms and benefits enjoyed by ordinary citizens of that state.

Vulnerable populations

The plight of people who are displaced within their own country is often as bad as - or even worse than - that of refugees.

The experience of exile falls heavily on the most vulnerable members of a population: disabled people, children, the elderly, widows and other refugee women who are attempting to bring up their children without the support of a partner. In many refugee situations, able-bodied men are the last to leave their country of origin and the first to return when repatriation becomes possible. They may remain in their homeland to fight, or move to a location where work is available, leaving their relatives in a refugee camp.

Family and community life is often seriously disrupted within displaced populations. Parents and their children are frequently separated in the confusion that surrounds a refugee movement. Once they have arrived in a country of asylum, men, women and children may all have to assume unfamiliar (and unwelcome) roles and responsibilities (see Box 1.2).

Refugees from different villages, clans and ethnic groups may find themselves packed closely together in a large camp or settlement, without sufficient food, water or health care to sustain the whole population. In such circumstances, the potential for domestic violence and social conflict is inevitably high.

Recent experience around the world, from Afghanistan to Angola and from Somalia to Sri Lanka, suggests that the plight of people who are displaced within their own country is often as bad as - or even worse than - than that of refugees. While they are ostensibly protected by their own state, many of the world's internally displaced people are actually trapped in conflict zones where there is no governmental authority, and where they are subjected to frequent intimidation and relocation by the warring forces. In a growing number of instances, they remain in their country of origin not out of choice, but because they have been prevented from seeking asylum in neighbouring and nearby states.

While internally displaced people frequently need both protection and assistance, UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations have found it difficult to meet this need. The internally displaced are often located in inaccessible and dangerous locations. Moreover, in several parts of the world - Angola, Sudan and former Yugoslavia, to give three of many examples - the parties involved in armed conflicts have subordinated the needs of internally displaced populations to their military and political objectives.

In some situations, governments have been reluctant to acknowledge that a problem of internal displacement exists, and have therefore been slow to request any help from the international community. Elsewhere, national or local authorities have used forceful means to return or transfer displaced people to other locations.

The very conditions which create internal displacement - armed conflict, a breakdown in governmental authority and severe economic disruption - can also act as a strong disincentive to potential donor countries. Thus even in situations where mass population movements threaten to be a politically destabilizing force, as in the Caucasus and Central Asia, there has not always been sufficient international interest to finance programmes designed to find solutions for the internally displaced.

The security dimension

Experience has demonstrated that refugees and other displaced people can bring benefits to the areas where they settle. They may attract international aid to a region which has been deprived of development assistance. They have sometimes been able to introduce new agricultural techniques and entrepreneurial skills to the host community, thereby boosting the local economy. And in many situations, refugees have provided a pool of cheap and willing labour, which has been used by local employers to increase production and expand the provision of services.

At the same time, however, mass population movements have the potential to inflict considerable damage on the environment and infrastructure of the receiving areas, thereby reducing their development potential. When large numbers of displaced and destitute people settle in a location, they are often obliged to survive by cutting down large quantities of wood, by occupying extensive areas of land and by making substantial use of communal facilities such as wells, water supply systems, schools and health centres.

Local and international relief efforts may help to sustain the new arrivals and even bring some help to the resident population. At the same time, however, large-scale assistance programmes may exert a heavy pressure on local roads, bridges and warehouses, while government officials and departments are obliged to divert their attention from developmental activities in order to deal with emergency needs.

In such circumstances, tensions and conflict can easily arise between new arrivals and the resident population, particularly if they do not share the same ethnic or linguistic background. In some instances, an influx of refugees or displaced people may alter the demographic balance of a whole region, an occurrence which can easily be exploited by politicians and community leaders. In other cases, refugee populations may themselves be divided into opposing groups or factions, and bring their rivalries and conflict into the host community.

Under international law, there is an understanding that when a state grants asylum to a refugee population, it does so for purely humanitarian reasons, and without any implication of hostility towards the country of origin. In practice, however, cross-border population movements have proved to be an almost inevitable source of friction between the states concerned.

While humanitarian organizations have a natural tendency to portray refugees purely as victims of circumstance, exiled populations are often active supporters of rebel groups within their own country. Indeed, as experience in Rwanda has demonstrated, people are often politicized in the process of becoming refugees and living in exile, and may be unable or unwilling to return to their homeland until the government there has been ousted (see Box 1.3).

Traditional approaches to the refugee problem

In the 50 years since the end of the Second World War, the international community has devoted a considerable amount of effort and resources to the refugee problem. As a result, there now exists a complex network of institutions, laws and agreements specifically designed to meet the needs of people who have been forced to leave their homeland. Sometimes referred to as the 'international refugee regime', this network is essentially led and coordinated by UNHCR, which was established in 1951 with a statutory responsibility for 'seeking permanent solutions for the problem of refugees.'

Until quite recently, UNHCR and its partners pursued this objective in a manner which is best described by three related adjectives: reactive, exile-oriented and refugee-specific.

The traditional approach to refugee problems was reactive in the sense that UNHCR became interested in a person or population only when they had become displaced, crossed a border and sought asylum in another state. Humanitarian organizations made some effort to anticipate new refugee movements and to prepare for any influxes in potential countries of asylum. But little attention was given to averting such movements by tackling the causes of displacement in the country of origin.

From the 1950s to the 1980s, there was a general international consensus that UNHCR could only respect its humanitarian status by dealing with refugee movements once they had taken place. Any effort to address the conditions giving rise to such movements, it was argued, would be 'political', and therefore inadmissable. As the incumbent UN High Commissioner for Refugees stated in 1981, 'the mandate of UNHCR, as defined by its Statute, is non-political and purely humanitarian. It is on this basis that the Office insists on the solution to refugee problems, and it cannot concern itself with the circumstances which have brought them into existence.'

As this comment indicates, for UNHCR and other refugee organizations, the concept of solution presupposed the existence of exiled populations. Their concern was primarily to solve the problems of refugees, not to resolve the refugee problem.

This exile-oriented approach had a number of consequences. First, it ensured that considerable emphasis was placed on the right of people to leave their own country and to seek asylum in another state, but ignored what is arguably a more fundamental human right: the right to live in safety and security in one's own country and community.

Second, the exile-oriented approach effectively placed responsibility for solving refugee problems on the countries which received them, rather than the states from which they had fled. The 1951 UN Refugee Convention, for example, deals substantially with the obligations of asylum countries and goes into great detail with regard to the legal, social and economic rights which should be granted to refugees. The Convention says nothing, however, about the role and responsibilities of countries of origin in seeking solutions to refugee problems.

Third, when it came to the practical task of resolving refugee situations, the international community focused on three specific solutions, all of which started from an assumption of exile. Refugees could remain in their country of asylum and become socially, economically and legally integrated there, a solution known

as local settlement. They could move on from their country of asylum and take up residence and citizenship in another state which had agreed to admit them, a solution described as resettlement. Or they could benefit from the solution of voluntary repatriation, freely choosing to go back to their homeland and to assume all the rights and obligations of the resident population.

Focusing on refugees

For much of the past five decades, primary emphasis has been placed on the solutions of local settlement and third country resettlement. While a number of large-scale voluntary repatriation programmes were organized in the 1970s, primarily to newly independent countries such as Angola, Bangladesh, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, only in the 1980s was voluntary repatriation recognized as the preferred solution to refugee problems. And even then, UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations continued to concentrate their efforts in countries of asylum: registering potential returnees, verifying that their departure was genuinely voluntary and arranging their transport home. Once they had recrossed the border into their homeland, they were considered to be the responsibility of their own state and therefore ceased to be of international concern.

This orientation was symptomatic of what can be described as the refugee-specific or refugee-centric character of the traditional approach to refugee problems. The 1951 UN Refugee Convention defined a refugee as someone with a 'well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.' In the context of Africa and other less developed regions, this definition was normally extended to include people who were forced into exile by serious disruptions to peace and security.

In its search for solutions, UNHCR focused almost exclusively on people who were deemed to fall within these definitions of the refugee concept. The organization expended little time, effort or resources on other groups of needy or vulnerable people: those who were displaced within their own countries; refugees who had returned to their homeland; asylum seekers whose claims for refugee status had been rejected; and people who had migrated to other countries for primarily economic reasons. Above all, organizations concerned with refugees essentially ignored people and communities who continued to live in their own country and usual place of residence, however difficult their circumstances and however likely they were to be uprooted.

This approach to the problem of human displacement was replicated at the organizational level. UNHCR, as the international community's specialized refugee agency, generally restricted its interests and efforts to refugees, just as, for example, the UN Development Programme focused on economic issues, the UN Environment Programme concentrated on ecological matters and the UN Centre for Human Rights directed its attention to questions relating to individual and group freedoms.

While there was a logic to this arrangement which did not exclude a degree of cooperation and collaboration between the various organizations, it was also symptomatic of a preoccupation with the common legal status of people who had been forced into exile. Refugees were essentially a 'problem' to be 'solved' by UNHCR, while other institutions and elements of the UN system addressed international problems such as underdevelopment, environmental degradation and human rights abuses.

Contemporary forces for change

In the past few years, a number of different factors have combined to bring about a reassessment and revision of the traditional approach to refugee problems. Some of the most pertinent forces for change are identified below.

The new international disorder

The end of the Cold War generated a strong sense of optimism about the international refugee situation. With the rivalry of the superpowers over, it was thought, many conflicts would be resolved, large numbers of refugees would be able to go back to their homes, and resources being used for relief could be moved to rehabilitation and development.

In the event, almost precisely the opposite has happened. Relatively successful (if still fragile) peace settlements in countries such as Cambodia, El Salvador and Mozambique now appear to be the exception rather than the norm, and they have been overshadowed by a crop of new and very large humanitarian emergencies in areas such as the Balkans, the Caucasus, Central and West Africa. Refugee and relief organizations have acknowledged that they are struggling - and in some cases failing - to cope with these crises.

This admission, coupled with a mounting concern amongst the industrialized states regarding the number of asylum seekers arriving on their territory from the less-developed areas of the world (more than 1.5 million in the past three years) has contributed to the perception that the global refugee problem is running out of control. While the most recent statistics demonstrate a drop in the number of new arrivals in Western Europe, the governments concerned have left no doubt about their determination to look for new methods of controlling and reducing what they perceive to be an unacceptably large influx.

Figure 1.2 ▶ **Refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR by region, 1985, 1990 and 1995**

The inadequacy of traditional responses

Traditional solutions to the refugee problem have in many ways proved inadequate to meet contemporary needs. Recent experience has demonstrated that voluntary repatriation can be very difficult and expensive to organize, and may not be possible at all when the countries of origin concerned are affected by continuing conflict, economic devastation and the legacy of war. Relatively few host countries are now prepared to contemplate the long-term settlement and integration of large refugee populations, while third country resettlement is available for only a tiny proportion of the world's refugees.

There is now a growing recognition that the world's response to refugee movements in the 1970s and 1980s may have actually contributed to the scale of the problem in the 1990s. The large-scale resettlement programme for the Vietnamese boat people, for example, and the long-term assistance programmes provided to many refugees in Africa, continue to obstruct the search for solutions in those parts of the world.

At the same time, new population displacements are taking place for which none of the traditional solutions seem to be appropriate. What, for example, will happen to the displaced Moslems and Croats whose land and homes have been

occupied by Serbs, or the ethnic Azeris from Nagorno-Karabakh, whose territory remains under Armenian occupation? And what kind of solutions will be available for the growing numbers of people displaced within their own country? Will they eventually be able to return to the communities they left, or will alternative solutions have to be devised?

Donor state disquiet

The industrialized states, which provide most of the funds required to assist the world's displaced people, are increasingly eager to find new solutions to the refugee problem. As well as the US$ 1.3 billion absorbed by UNHCR in 1994, huge amounts of money are also channelled to refugees through other international organizations, such as the World Food Programme and the International Committee of the Red Cross, as well as non-governmental organizations and bilateral assistance programmes.

According to some reports, donor state expenditure amounted to around US$ 2 billion in the first two weeks of the Rwandese refugee crisis in mid-1994. While a proportion of this amount was undoubtedly recouped from regular defence and development budgets, this figure provides some indication of the massive costs which can be incurred in an effort to respond to (and not even resolve) a major refugee emergency.

Host country concerns

Similar sentiments are being expressed by the states which are most directly and seriously affected by the problem of mass displacement: the less-developed countries which host the vast majority of the world's refugees. Many of these societies are confronted with a cluster of interrelated and steadily worsening problems: stagnant or declining economies, rapidly growing populations, environmental degradation, increased competition for jobs and land, rising crime levels and increased social tensions. In some cases these difficulties are being exacerbated (in the short term at least) by structural adjustment programmes which place strict constraints on the amount of public expenditure devoted to wages and social welfare.

Figure 1.3 ▶ **UNHCR expenditure, 1970-1994**

Understandably, countries which find themselves in these circumstances and which have traditionally maintained an open-door policy towards refugees are now beginning to wonder whether the time has not come for a new approach to the problem of forced migration. In the words of an official in Goma, the Zairian town to which hundreds of thousands of Rwandans fled during 1994, 'the refugees are of different cultural ethics and behaviour. Carrying weapons and killing are quite common among them; the same goes for stealing and squatting on other people's property. The refugee population has overwhelmed Zairian resources, destroyed our environment, introduced uncontrolled inflation into our market and abused our hospitality. We want them out of here soon.'

Changing strategic interests

During the Cold War, the superpowers and their allies in the less- developed regions had a strategic interest in refugees - an interest which offset the costs

incurred by granting them asylum and providing them with assistance. In some instances, as with the exodus of Vietnamese boat people in the 1970s and 1980s, a flow of refugees could be used to both discredit the government of the country of origin and to bolster the image of the countries granting them asylum. In other situations, exemplified, for example, by the Nicaraguan Contras in Honduras, the Afghan mujahideen in Pakistan and the Namibian exiles in Angola, the world's more powerful states were able to take advantage of refugee movements by arming and training some of the people concerned and using them to destabilize the government within their homeland.

As recent experience in Rwanda and former Yugoslavia has demonstrated, the day of the politically and militarily active refugee is far from over. Nevertheless, with the end of the bipolar state system and the resolution of most of the principal regional conflicts associated with the Cold War era, refugee populations now have a more limited and localized strategic significance.

The breakdown of conventional categories

The growing scale and complexity of involuntary migration has made it more and more difficult to sustain the fairly rigid distinction which humanitarian organizations have traditionally made between refugees, returnees, internally displaced people and the resident population. In the border areas of countries such as Liberia and Sierra Leone or Ethiopia and Somalia, for example, it is possible to find people from all four groups living alongside each other in indistinguishable circumstances. A single individual or family may even move from one of these categories to another, depending on their changing circumstances and survival strategies.

Events in former Yugoslavia have provided another very clear demonstration of the breakdown of conventional categories. UNHCR, for example, has always described itself as a refugee organization, although in recent years it has become increasingly involved with internally displaced populations. In Bosnia and Herzegovina this process has gone one step further, with the result that UNHCR now finds itself providing food and other assistance to thousands of people who are besieged in their own communities, and who are consequently unable to move. At the same time, the break-up of the Yugoslav state and the associated conflict within and between a number of the successor republics have made even the legal status of many displaced people in the area a matter of some confusion.

As a result of these developments, there is now a growing tendency for both analysts and operational agencies to insist less upon the refugee definition enshrined in the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, and to talk in more general terms of displaced people, uprooted populations and involuntary migrants. This practice has also been adopted in the following chapters of this book.

New notions of security

> Now that the threat of superpower confrontation has receded, new notions of security are emerging, based on a recognition that states and their citizens are confronted with a much wider range of problems.

The end of the Cold War and other recent international developments have prompted a redefinition of the notions of national and international security. During the era of superpower rivalry, politicians and strategists on both sides of the East-West divide tended to perceive such concepts almost exclusively in terms of military strength, strategic alliances, technological progress and industrial performance. A state, in other words, was only as strong as its capacity to project power and to defend its territory from attack.

Now that the threat of superpower confrontation and nuclear war has receded, new notions of security are emerging, based on a recognition that states and their citizens are confronted with a much wider range of problems: environmental pollution and the depletion of the world's natural resources, rapid demographic growth, the production and distribution of drugs, organized crime, international terrorism, human rights violations, the proliferation of small arms, unemployment and economic deprivation as well as mass migratory movements, to give just a few examples.

In addition to recognizing the importance of such issues, states have become increasingly aware that they cannot be effectively addressed on a unilateral basis. As a result, governments, including those which opposed each other during the Cold War period, are now entering into new forms of cooperation, particularly at the regional level. Differences of opinion still exist, of course, as has been seen in relation to recent controversies concerning the future membership of NATO, the Russian military operation in Chechnya and the Turkish counterinsurgency campaign in northern Iraq. As these examples suggest, governments continue to place their national interests first, even at the risk of alienating their neighbours and allies. Nevertheless, as the growth of the 59-member Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has demonstrated, states with different political and cultural traditions perceive a real advantage in addressing both the conventional and the new range of security issues in a collectve manner.

At the same time, governments are now paying much closer attention to the linkages between different security issues, and recognizing the need to address them in an integrated manner. An interesting attempt to institutionalize this approach can be seen in the decision to appoint an Undersecretary for Global Affairs in the US State Department, responsible for placing issues such as refugees, the environment, democratization and humanitarian assistance in the mainstream of the foreign policy process. At the international level, a similar orientation informed the March 1995 World Summit for Social Development, which stressed the interdependence between issues such as poverty, unemployment and social disintegration on one hand, and insecurity, violence, conflict and human rights violations on the other.

The debate over sovereignty

Ever since the UN Security Council passed Resolution 688 in 1991, insisting that the government of Iraq 'allow immediate access by international humanitarian organizations to all those in need of assistance,' it has become commonplace for analysts to observe that the world is witnessing an erosion in the notion of national sovereignty and a declining commitment to the principle of non-interference in the domestic affairs of states. Subsequent UN resolutions and governmental actions with regard to countries such as Haiti, Rwanda and Somalia would appear to confirm this analysis. In contrast to the Cold War era, there is now a much greater readiness amongst the world's more powerful states to

acknowledge that events taking place within a country can constitute a threat to international peace and security.

The notion that the principle of sovereignty is in terminal decline is much more difficult to sustain. When approving Resolution 688, for example, the Security Council was careful to avoid any explicit reference to the use of military force and to reaffirm 'the commitment of all Member States to the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of Iraq.' In the past year or two, moreover, the consensus necessary to approve such interventions has started to subside. On the question of former Yugoslavia, for example, some significant differences have emerged both within and between important institutions such as the UN Security Council, the European Union, NATO and the OSCE. At the same time, many of the world's less-developed and newly industrialized countries, which are not permanently represented in these institutions, have expressed their serious misgivings about the interventionist trend and their eagerness to uphold the principle and practice of sovereignty. The withdrawal of the UN peacekeeping force from Somalia in March 1995, and the new caution which governments are expressing in relation to the intervention of UN troops, suggest that they may enjoy some success in this effort.

Even so, it is difficult to disagree with the UN Secretary-General's statement that 'the time of absolute and exclusive sovereignty' has passed. For in the contemporary world, no country can hope to shield itself from external influences and attention. As the Commission on Global Governance has observed, 'in an increasingly interdependent world, old notions of territoriality, independence and non-intervention lose some of their meaning. National boundaries are increasingly permeable - and in some respects, less relevant. A global flood of money, threats, images and ideas has overflowed the old system of national dikes that preserved state autonomy and control.'

Increased emphasis on human rights

Another significant manifestation of the challenge to national sovereignty can be seen in an increased international emphasis on human rights, and a greater willingness to scrutinize the way in which governments treat (or mistreat) their citizens, including those who have been displaced within their own country (see Box 1.4).

This trend is to some extent related to the political and economic dominance of the western powers. With the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the strategic marginalization of many non-aligned states, the values of the industrialized countries, with their strong emphasis on individual and political freedoms, have assumed a prominent position in the human rights discourse. Moreover, by linking loans, grants and other forms of development assistance to notions such as democratization and 'good governance', the more affluent states and the international financial organizations also have the capacity to impose such values on poorer countries. The political and economic changes which have taken place in African states such as Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia, for example, would almost certainly not have taken place so quickly without this kind of pressure.

The increased interest in human rights also has a more pragmatic basis, for there is now a growing awareness that grave violations of human rights can have serious consequences for regional and international security. As recent events in countries as diverse as Armenia, Haiti, Iraq and Rwanda have demonstrated, the natural consequence of such abuses is armed conflict, social violence, economic dislocation and population displacements - phenomena which have a natural

tendency to cross national borders, with adverse consequences for neighbouring and nearby states.

As with the debate over sovereignty, however, the pace and degree of change in area of human rights should not be exaggerated. On one hand, the western concept of human rights continues to be strongly challenged, by both the Islamic states and by many countries in East Asia, where primary emphasis is placed on social order, political stability and economic growth, rather than individual rights and freedoms. On the other hand, recent moves to reinforce the UN's human rights institutions and to give them greater operational capacity have yet to bear significant fruit, due in large part to a simple shortage of money. Given the massive amounts of money which have been allocated to humanitarian relief operations over the past five years, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that even the world's more affluent states are somewhat ambivalent about this development.

The changing character of the United Nations

The United Nations was seriously affected by the Cold War. Ostensibly established on the basis of universal principles, the organization quickly became a theatre of conflict between the superpowers and their allies. At the political level, the Security Council was frequently deadlocked. At a more operational level, the various activities of the United Nations and its specialized agencies often became associated with one or another of the two main power blocs. For some 40 years after its formation in 1951, for example, UNHCR was essentially funded, staffed and guided by the members of the western alliance and the non-aligned countries, a situation which inevitably had some influence on its approach to refugee problems.

During the past five years, the new (if fragile) degree of consensus amongst the permanent members of the Security Council has enabled the United Nations to support and engage in activities which would have been inconceivable during the Cold War, particularly in areas such as peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance and the imposition of sanctions. At the same time, UNHCR has now started to assume a more genuinely multilateral complexion. Many of the former eastern bloc countries have signed the UN Refugee Convention. UNHCR is now represented in cities from Baku to Bucharest and from Tashkent to Tirana, while the organization's field offices now work in increasingly close cooperation with peacekeeping units from every corner of the globe.

Figure 1.4 ▶ **New UNHCR national offices, 1991-1994**

Emerging trends and strategies

The forces for change identified above have both obliged and enabled the international community to develop alternative strategies in the search for solutions to refugee problems. This new orientation is perhaps most easily understood by comparing it with the more traditional approach. Whereas the older paradigm can be described as reactive, exile-oriented and refugee-specific, the one which has started to emerge over the past few years can be characterized as proactive, homeland-oriented and holistic.

Refugee movements are not inevitable, but can be averted if action is taken to reduce or remove the threats which force people to leave their own country and to seek sanctuary elsewhere. That is a fundamental principle of the emerging approach to the issue of human displacement. The concept of prevention, as used in this context, includes activities such as monitoring and early warning, diplomatic intervention, economic and social development, conflict resolution, institution building, the protection of human and minority rights and the dissemination of information to prospective asylum seekers.

As this list of activities suggests, UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations have the mandate, skills and resources to play only a limited role in the prevention of refugee movements. This task must be undertaken primarily by other members of the international community, including, most significantly, the governments of countries where refugee movements, internal population displacements and other forms of turmoil are taking place. The notion of prevention, therefore, is directly related to another key element of the emerging paradigm: the concept of state responsibility. Governments, in other words, must not only be held to account for actions which force people to seek sanctuary in other countries, but must also be encouraged to create the conditions which will allow refugees to return to their homeland.

The proactive approach to solutions is also based on the notion that refugee movements and population displacements can be contained, controlled or managed if preventive activities have failed. Such objectives can be achieved in a variety of different ways. Military intervention to prevent human rights abuses, for example, may halt the flight of people whose security has been threatened and enable their return. In situations where people are leaving their own country because armed conflict has led to serious economic disruption, the provision of relief and rehabilitation assistance to people who are still in their own country might enable them to stay there. And efforts to establish an international presence in a country of origin and to monitor human rights standards there may encourage significant numbers of exiles to return to their homeland. Successful examples of these strategies have been seen during the past five years in Iraq, Somalia and Tajikistan respectively.

One of the most recent efforts to manage a refugee movement is to be found in Rwanda, where the international community has adopted a multidimensional strategy, intended to minimize any further outflows and to encourage the repatriation of those refugees who have already left their homeland. This strategy is based upon a number of initiatives described as 'confidence building measures', which have included, for example:

- encouraging the Rwandese government to issue a declaration inviting the refugees to return in conditions of safety and dignity, and with full respect for their property rights;
- deploying international human rights monitors in Rwanda, with unimpeded access to all parts of the country, including prisons and other places of detention;
- improving security in the refugee camps of Tanzania and Zaire in order to protect potential returnees against intimidation by their compatriots;
- facilitating repatriation by establishing staging areas, transit camps and relief centres within Rwanda, as well as providing the returnees with relief and rehabilitation assistance in their areas of origin; and,
- establishing an international tribunal to prosecute people who have been responsible for instigating or committing genocide, with the intention of reducing the risk of private revenge and reassuring potential returnees.

The Rwandese example also provides an insight into the difficulties involved in the management of refugee movements. For despite all of these initiatives, in mid-1995 the overwhelming majority of refugees in Tanzania and Zaire remained unwilling or unable to return to their homeland.

Countries of origin

Rwandese refugees at Benaco camp, Tanzania, May 1994
© S.Salgado

The homeland-orientation of the emerging approach to refugee problems has assumed a number of different forms. First, in contrast to the traditional paradigm, which placed primary emphasis on the right to leave one's own country and to seek asylum elsewhere, the newer perspective focuses equal attention on the right to return to one's homeland and on a notion which has become known as the 'right to remain' or the 'right not to be displaced'. Exemplified again by the international response to the Rwandan exodus, these principles not only allow but also require governments and humanitarian organizations to take active steps to prevent, limit and reverse the movement of refugees from their country of origin.

Second, as a natural corollary of the principle of state responsibility, there is now a general consensus that countries of origin should be centrally involved in the effort to resolve refugee problems. In the years when resettlement and local integration were the preferred solution for refugees, countries of origin could be largely ignored. But now that the international community places primary emphasis on voluntary repatriation, that is no longer the case.

One of the best examples of this reorientation is to be found in South-East Asia, where Viet Nam has been brought progressively into the regional and international fold. This process initially took place through the country's

participation in an international initiative known as the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese Refugees (CPA), and subsequently through the withdrawal of the trade, aid and diplomatic boycott imposed on the country by a number of the world's more prosperous states.

More recently, UNHCR has taken a lead in establishing a dialogue with the authorities in Myanmar, a process which has enabled the organization to establish an international presence in the country and to begin the repatriation of more than 250,000 refugees who fled from Myanmar to Bangladesh in 1991 and 1992. As these examples suggest, as well as assisting in the search for solutions to refugee problems, humanitarian activities focused on countries of origin can also make a useful contribution to broader tasks such as the promotion and monitoring of human rights and the reinforcement of regional cooperation.

A third manifestation of the homeland-oriented approach can be seen in the growing operational involvement of UNHCR and its partners within countries of origin. Traditionally, the organization's role in such countries was very limited, confined primarily to situations where significant numbers of refugees were returning to their homeland under UNHCR auspices, and who were in need of some short-term relief.

Over the past decade, however, and more particularly during the past four or five years, UNHCR's activities in countries of origin have expanded very rapidly. Particular emphasis has been placed on meeting the reintegration and rehabilitation needs of returnees and their communities, a far cry from the days when refugees were provided with transport back to their own country and largely left to fend for themselves.

One of the earliest initiatives of this type took place in Nicaragua at the beginning of the 1990s, when UNHCR launched a US$12 million programme of 350 'quick impact projects', designed to rebuild damaged infrastructure, rehabilitate public amenities and revive local economic activity in areas where some 70,000 returnees had settled. Programmes of this type are now a standard feature of UNHCR's voluntary repatriation programmes, and have recently been undertaken in countries such as Mozambique, Myanmar, Somalia and Sri Lanka.

Actors, issues and beneficiaries

> Refugee problems are by definition transnational problems, which cannot be resolved by means of uncoordinated activities in separate countries.

The holistic character of the emerging approach to refugee problems has been manifested in three ways: in the range of actors involved in the search for solutions; in the range of issues which it seeks to address; and in the range of people which it is designed to benefit.

The scale and complexity of the global refugee problem has produced a growing gap between the operational demands made upon UNHCR and the resources which the organization can mobilize. As the High Commissioner for Refugees has acknowledged, UNHCR has been 'stretched to the limit' by the succession of

recent emergencies and large-scale repatriation programmes. At the same time, the development of a proactive and homeland-oriented approach to refugee problems has required UNHCR to extend its activities to a number of functional areas in which it lacks appropriate skills and experience.

This situation has given rise to a two-way process of organizational change. On one hand, UNHCR has been obliged to develop new areas of competence and to undertake a number of non-traditional activities. These include, for example, providing protection and assistance to besieged and war-affected populations; monitoring the protection needs of returnees and internally displaced people in their own country; establishing community-based rehabilitation programmes in returnee areas; and providing accurate information on migration opportunities to prospective asylum seekers. As a result of these developments, UNHCR has been transformed from a refugee organization into a more broadly-based humanitarian agency.

On the other hand, a variety of different organizations, many of which traditionally had little involvement with refugee-related issues, are now lending their resources and expertise to the problem of human displacement. The UN Security Council, for example, is now much more directly involved in the prevention and resolution of refugee problems than ever before, as are security organizations such as NATO and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, regional bodies such as the Economic Community of West African States and the European Union, and specialized bodies such as the UN Centre for Human Rights and the UN Development Programme. Financial institutions such as the World Bank and the regional development banks also seem likely to play an increasingly important role in refugee issues, both in addressing the social and economic conditions underlying many refugee movements and in the process of post-conflict reconstruction.

The role which such actors have assumed in the refugee arena is a manifestation of the international community's new awareness of the need to address the problem of human displacement in a comprehensive manner. If refugee problems are to be resolved and if further population displacements are to be averted, then concerted action will be needed in a whole range of areas, many of which fall beyond the competence of UNHCR and its partners: the protection of human rights, the maintenance of peace and security within and between states, the promotion of sustainable development and the management of mass migratory movements.

In addition, governments and humanitarian organizations have become increasingly aware of the fact that refugee problems are by definition transnational problems, and that they cannot be resolved by means of uncoordinated activities in separate countries. Recent years have therefore witnessed a growing interest in regional approaches to refugee questions, combining the efforts of countries of origin and asylum, as well as other governments, international organizations and voluntary agencies.

A particularly successful example of the regional approach is to be found in the process initiated at CIREFCA, the International Conference on Central American Refugees, which was held in Guatemala City in 1989. Completed five years later, CIREFCA's founding principle was 'that peace and development are inseparable, and that a lasting peace cannot be achieved without initiatives to solve the problems of refugees, displaced persons and returnees throughout the region' (see Box 1.5).

As this quotation also indicates, a final characteristic of the emerging approach to refugee problems concerns the range of people whose plight it addresses. In contrast to the refugee-centric focus of earlier years, it has now been recognized that if UNHCR is to discharge its mandate of 'seeking permanent solutions for the problem of refugees', then the organization must address the situation of people who have been displaced within their own country, exiled populations who have returned to their homeland, and those communities which are at risk of being uprooted.

Difficulties and dangers of the new paradigm

Some words of caution are required in relation to the alternative paradigm which is emerging in the search for solutions to refugee problems. More specifically, there is a need to be realistic about the origins of the proactive, homeland-oriented and holistic approach, about the extent to which it has been implemented in operational terms, and about the way it is perceived by different members of the international community.

As suggested in the Introduction, the driving force behind the international community's changing approach to the issue of human displacement has in many senses been the force of circumstance, rather than a premeditated policy-making process on the part of the United Nations, its member states and specialized organizations. Many of the most significant innovations of recent years have come about as a response to urgent and unexpected circumstances, and only in retrospect has it been possible to see coherent trends and patterns emerging in the effort to address refugee problems.

Given the rapid and radical changes which have taken place over the past five years, it is hardly surprising that some of the new responses should have proved to be more effective than others. Not long ago, for example, there was a growing belief that the United Nations would be able to establish the kind of collective security system envisaged when the world body was created in 1945, capable of imposing peace upon the parties to conflicts and limiting the number of people displaced by war. After the experience of Rwanda, Somalia and former Yugoslavia, however, few if any decision-makers or analysts would subscribe to this view.

Similarly, in the early days of the UNHCR operation in former Yugoslavia, it was felt that by establishing a strong presence in the region and by providing conflict-affected communities with assistance, it would be possible to avert population displacements and limit the scale of the refugee problem. In the event, however, the strategy of 'preventive protection' was undermined by the escalation of the conflict and the ruthlessness with which the policy of ethnic cleansing was pursued.

Continuity and change

Refugee policies and practices have undoubtedly moved in a very discernable direction over the past five years. But it would be false to give the impression that the international community's response to the refugee issue changed completely with the fall of the Berlin Wall and disintegration of the Soviet state. In fact, a number of the most recent initiatives were presaged by earlier intellectual and operational efforts.

Notions such as the deployment of humanitarian observers in countries of origin, for example, as well as the active involvement of such states in the search for

solutions, were advocated in an influential report submitted to the Human Rights Commission in 1981 by Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, a former UN High Commissioner for Refugees. The idea of linking the relief assistance provided to refugees and returnees with longer-term development activities in the areas where they have settled, a key feature of the solution-oriented approach to refugee problems, can be traced back to the mid-1960s, when the first post-colonial refugee movements began to take place in Africa. And the principle that 'prevention is better than cure', and that action should be taken to avert population displacements before they take place, goes back at least 75 years, to the time when governments and the League of Nations were struggling to deal with refugee crises in the wake of the First World War. Indeed, the 1990s have seen a rediscovey of many ideas that were current during the inter-war period, but which were frozen out with the onset of the Cold War.

It would be equally false to suggest that the emergence of a new paradigm in the search for solutions has led to a complete reorientation of the work undertaken by UNHCR, its partners and other humanitarian agencies. Many of the tasks which the organization performs today are essentially the same as those which it performed in the first four decades of its existence: providing legal and physical protection to refugees and asylum seekers; ensuring that their basic needs are met; and assisting them to become members of a settled community again, whether in their homeland or in a country of asylum. In that sense, there is a somewhat greater degree of continuity in UNHCR's activities than is implied by the notion of an 'old' and 'new' approach.

Home alone?

The international community's emerging approach to the solution of refugee problems could save millions of people from the trauma of exile.

The international community's emerging approach to the solution of refugee problems has a number of potential advantages. It could save millions of people from the trauma and hardship of exile and enable millions more to resume a settled life within their own country. It could ease the burden imposed upon countries of asylum and enable new and more productive uses to be found for the very large amounts of resources which are currently committed to refugee relief programmes. And it could help to ease some of the political and social tensions which are liable to result when large numbers of people are forced to abandon their homes and seek sanctuary elsewhere.

At the same time, there is a need to subject the emerging approach to a critical examination and to assess its implications for long-established humanitarian principles. More specifically, the adoption of proactive and homeland-oriented strategies must be considered in relation to the commitment of states to the institution of asylum and the principles of refugee protection.

In recent years, many countries have made little secret of their weariness with the refugee problem and their reluctance to provide open-ended asylum to large numbers of displaced people. On a number of occasions, states have closed (or attempted to close) their borders, thereby denying refuge to asylum seekers from

conflict-affected countries such as Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burundi, Cambodia and Iraq. In the industrialized world, governments have tended to achieve similar results by more sophisticated means, either by interdicting asylum seekers who are making their way to a potential country of refuge, or by extending their immigration controls to countries of origin and countries of transit by the introduction of visa requirements and pre-boarding passenger checks.

On several recent occasions, moreover, states which have admitted substantial numbers of refugees have announced their intention to repatriate them as quickly as possible, often with inadequate regard to the conditions prevailing in their homeland. While such threats have rarely been implemented, they send an unmistakable signal - to the refugees, to the organizations assisting them and to the local population - that the new arrivals are not wanted and should leave their country of asylum as quickly as possible.

As these occurrences suggest, there is a growing and distressing tendency amongst states to regard refugees and asylum seekers as an unwanted burden and an unnecessary inconvenience. The easiest way of resolving the refugee problem, some governments appear to have concluded, is simply to make sure that displaced and distressed populations are obliged to stay in their own country.

Unfortunately, some of the central concepts of the emerging approach to refugee problems can be (and already have been) used to legitimize this restrictive strategy, which effectively denies refugees their right to seek and enjoy asylum in another country. Like UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations, governments are increasingly referring to the need to prevent refugee movements, to contain population displacements and to recognize the right which people have to remain in their homeland. The way they interpret and operationalize such ideas, however, threatens to be quite different.

Prevention, for example, can be used in the constructive sense of removing the underlying causes of forced migratory movements. But it can also mean building barriers to stop the victims of persecution from entering another country. The concept of containment might be used in one context to mean the restoration of peace and security in a conflict-affected country, thereby limiting the number of people who are obliged to flee for their lives. In another context, however, containment could mean closing borders and prohibiting a besieged population from leaving the towns and villages where they have congregated.

The right to remain concept is also prone to misinterpretation. If it is to have any real meaning, this right must be understood in the sense of a person's ability to live peacefully and securely within his or her own country and community. What it must not become is a requirement for people to stay in situations where they cannot be properly protected and where no solution can be found to their plight.

Partnership in action

The notion of an 'international refugee regime' implies (in popular language if not in the vocabulary of the political scientist) a convergence of interests and a capacity for the enforcement of norms which appears to be lacking amongst the many countries and organizations concerned with refugee affairs. Donor states and host governments, UNHCR and the non-governmental organizations, not to mention refugees and displaced people themselves, may have a common interest in resolving the problem of forced migration and averting new population

movements. But when it comes to the means which are used to achieve that objective, their purposes and priorities may be quite different.

States, for example, have a natural tendency to focus on the defence of national interests and the protection of their territory. As recent experience has demonstrated, when confronted with the arrival of substantial numbers of asylum seekers, they may be tempted to close their borders or to find other means of obstructing and deterring the influx. Non-governmental agencies and advocacy groups, however, have an equally understandable inclination to place primary emphasis on the rights of refugees and asylum seekers, and may not take full account of the legitimate interests of states. Refugees themselves have their own interests to defend, although these interests may not always be consistent. Like any community, refugee populations are heterogenous, divided by age, gender, education, skills and socio-economic status.

UNHCR often finds itself subjected to contradictory pressures by its beneficiaries as well as its governmental and non-governmental partners. In a period of rapid and radical change, such as that of the past five years, those pressures can be difficult to reconcile.

The turbulent state of the world's refugees in 1995 therefore calls for an honest dialogue between all of those organizations, institutions and individuals engaged in the search for solutions to the problem of human displacement. An important first step in this process was made in 1994, when UNHCR conducted a year-long and worldwide series of consultations with its non-governmental partners, the largest exercise of this type ever undertaken by a UN agency.

An equally intense dialogue is required with and between the wide range of actors which can bring their skills and resources to bear on the refugee question. For as the following chapters suggest, governments, regional organizations, development agencies, peacekeeping forces, human rights bodies, the media and academic researchers - to name but a few - all have important contributions to make to the prevention and resolution of refugee problems. Only a comprehensive approach to this task will meet today's needs and tomorrow's demands.

The State of The World's Refugees
in search of solutions

Published by Oxford University Press

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Box 1.1 Displaced people in the former Soviet states

Since the collapse of the communist regime in 1991, millions of former Soviet citizens have migrated within and between the 15 successor states of the USSR. Some have been uprooted by armed conflict, while others have moved to look for new economic opportunities, to escape from discrimination or to go back to areas from which they or their ancestors had been displaced in the past. At the same time, the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) have experienced a growing influx of people from other parts of the world, many of them migrants and asylum seekers who are in transit to Western Europe.

The Soviet Union was well acquainted with involuntary migrations. In the 70 years of its existence, millions of people were forcibly transferred or induced to move from one part of the country to another. Such relocations had a number of different objectives: to reinforce governmental control of the country; to eliminate perceived threats to the communist state; to punish dissident individuals and disloyal ethnic groups; and to promote economic development in inhospitable and sparsely populated areas of the USSR.

For most of its history the Soviet Union remained closed to outsiders, and so these massive population displacements (unlike the fate of some prominent individual dissidents) attracted relatively little international attention. The forced migrations of the past few years, however, have been widely publicized by the media and have aroused the concern of neighbouring and nearby states, which fear the consequences of continued instability and refugee movements in the region.

Armed conflict

The CIS states which have been most troubled by armed conflict and refugee movements are to be found in two principal areas: the Caucasus and Central Asia.

In the Caucasus, the government of Georgia has been confronted with two secessionist struggles, both of which have led to large-scale population movements. The war for the independence of South Ossetia, which began in 1989, has created

some 36,000 internally displaced people and 120,000 refugees, the majority of whom have fled to Russia. The conflict in Abkhazia, which broke out in 1992, has led to the internal displacement of 270,000 people, while a further 80,000 have fled to Russia and other CIS states.

The Caucasus region is also the scene of a protracted war involving the newly independent states of Armenia and Azerbaijan. The focus of this conflict is Nagorno-Karabakh, an area populated primarily by ethnic Armenians, but which was placed under the control of Azerbaijan during the Stalinist period. Now in its seventh year, the struggle for control of Nagorno-Karabakh and the related war between Armenia and Azerbaijan have displaced an estimated 1.6 million people.

More recently, in the Russian Federation, armed conflict between the central authorities and the breakaway republic of Chechnya has led to the displacement of half a million people, many of them fleeing to the neighbouring autonomous republics of the Federation. UNHCR's relief operation in the area, which was launched at the beginning of 1995, is the first UN humanitarian operation to be carried out on Russian territory.

Of the five Central Asian republics, Tajikistan has been most seriously affected by armed conflict and population displacements. A civil war erupted in that country in 1992, with one side frequently characterized as Islamic and the other as neo-communist. As a result of the violence, 600,000 people were displaced within the country while another 250,000 took refuge in Afghanistan, Russia and other neighbouring states.

Operational problems

Providing protection and assistance to these and other displaced populations in the former Soviet Union has proved to be a challenging task. Very large numbers of people are involved, concentrated in numerous different locations. UNHCR staff and other humanitarian personnel have had to work in an entirely new political and operational environment, where the language, culture, legal and political systems are all unfamiliar.

The political and economic disruption which has created the refugee problem has at the same time made it very difficult to establish effective relief programmes. The region's physical infrastructure is unreliable and its institutions generally lack the capacity to respond to urgent humanitarian needs. Many of the region's displaced people have found shelter in private homes and public amenities, placing further pressure on local incomes and living standards.

In these circumstances, UNHCR's prim- ary concern has been to resolve existing refugee problems and to avert further population displacements. These objectives have been achieved to some extent in Tajikistan, where most of the refugees and internally displaced people have now returned to their homes. Nevertheless, the country is still affected by political instability and sporadic fighting, leaving thousands of people in precarious circumstances.

In the Caucasus, the situation is even more disturbing. By mid-1995, little progress had been made in settling the Abkhazia conflict, leading to a suspension of plans for the large-scale repatriation of ethnic Georgians. In Armenia and Azerbaijan, a six-

month UNHCR emergency programme launched in 1993 has had to be extended because of the continuation of the conflict and the absence of any immediate prospect for repatriation.

Returns and arrivals

An estimated two million people have moved to Russia from other CIS states since 1989, prompted by a number of different motivations: for economic motives, to escape from armed conflicts, or because they fear persecution and discrimination in the countries where they live.

During the communist period, Russians were a privileged elite who wielded the most authority, held the best jobs, and enjoyed a cultural and linguistic dominance within the Soviet Union. Now, however, some of the newly independent states are abandoning Russian as the official language and have introduced discriminatory measures against the Russians in an attempt to redress historic grievances. Roughly a quarter of the people who have moved to Russia since 1989 have been recognized as refugees or forced migrants, the largest numbers coming from Tajikistan, Georgia and Azerbaijan.

In addition to the population movements which have taken place within and between the newly independent states, an estimated 700,000 people have found their way to the territory of the former Soviet Union from other parts of the world, including a substantial number of Chinese citizens. A large majority are believed to be economic migrants en route to the West. However, with the introduction of measures intended to limit the number of people who can enter Western Europe, many of these transit migrants have essentially become trapped in the CIS area.

The imprecision of these figures is indicative of the fact that the CIS states currently lack the procedures required to determine whether asylum seekers qualify for refugee status. Moreover, the process of drafting immigration and refugee regulations, training staff to administer these laws and establishing an effective working relationship with UNHCR and other international organizations is only just beginning.

In order to tackle the problem of displacement in the region, UNHCR is organizing a major international conference, which will bring together the governments of the CIS and relevant neighbouring states, as well as the International Organization for Migration, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and other international organizations working in the area. Provisionally planned for the end of 1995, this initiative will also enable the refugee problem in the former Soviet states to be addressed from a regional perspective.

Map B
Cross-border population displacements in the Caucasus region
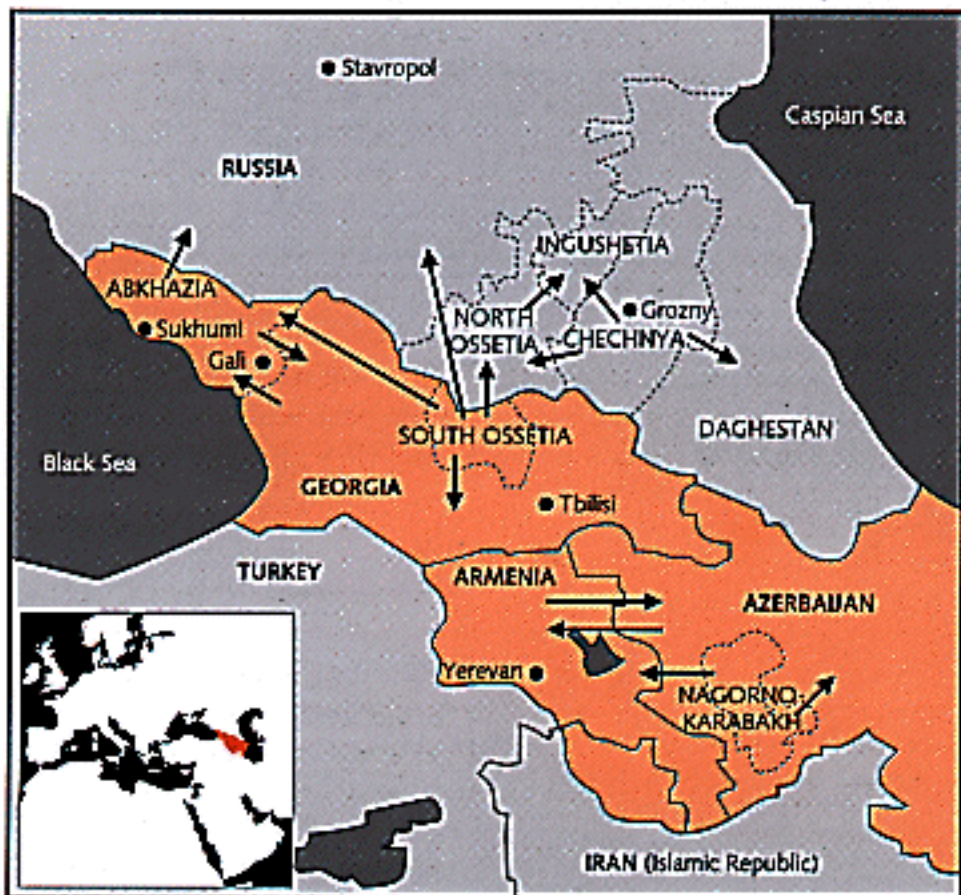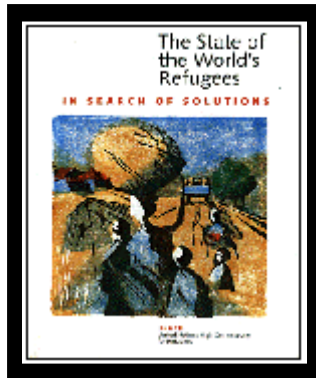
Box 1.2 Realizing the rights of younger refugees

More than half of the world's refugees are children and adolescents, and in some refugee situations, they constitute as much as 65 per cent of the displaced population. The Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes that all minors are entitled to 'special care and assistance.' The needs and capabilities of minors, however, are not all the same, nor do all refugee children and adolescents find themselves in identical circumstances.

Infants and children are often the hardest hit during refugee emergencies. At this age, young people are particularly vulnerable, especially when, as is usually the case, they come from countries where dietary standards are poor, primary health care services have collapsed and immunization programmes have been disrupted.

Because they have not yet acquired the necessary immunities, refugee children are highly susceptible to disease and illness. Diarrhoea caused by polluted water and the contamination of food and hands is a leading cause of infant death in most poorer countries, and can be particularly prevalent in a crowded and hastily established refugee settlement.

Malnutrition represents another major threat to the lives of young refugee children. Infants in less developed countries have a particular need for their mother's milk, with its high nutritional content and antibodies, as well as specially prepared foods. In a refugee emergency, adult family members may not have the time or resources to prepare appropriate or sufficient food for the infants in their care.

Needless separations

Refugee children who have been separated from their parents and family require particular help and care. Such separations occur in many ways. When a refugee movement is triggered by an unexpected event, there may simply be no time or opportunity for a family to flee together. While travelling in a frightened crowd, even children who are in the physical grasp of a parent can easily become detached and lost.

In other situations, parents may be so desperate to get their children to safety that they entrust them to others, even strangers, who subsequently cannot be traced. Once children have been separated from their family members, reuniting them can take months or even years of effort by the refugees themselves and by humanitarian agencies - a daunting task given that unaccompanied children usually make up between two and five percent of a refugee population during an emergency.

At the same time, well-meaning efforts to assist refugee children can easily have the effect of creating needless separations. In some situations, such as former Yugoslavia, refugee children have been evacuated to third countries before a proper effort has been made to find their parents or family members. In others, such as Central Africa, the construction of orphanages has discouraged families and communities from looking after separated children, and has even prompted hard-pressed parents to abandon their sons and daughters.

A family is critical to children because they are dependent upon others for physical survival. In the difficult circumstances that refugees typically encounter, it is the parents' determination to ensure that their children will survive and thrive that can make a life or death difference. While it is true that in less developed countries unaccompanied children are commonly taken into another family, temporary care by strangers and distant relatives is not a substitute for the greater commitment that parents can provide.
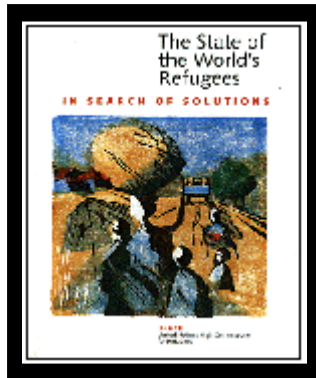
Families play a particularly important role in meeting the emotional and developmental needs of young people. Experience demonstrates, for example, that the impact of a traumatic event on a young child is shaped more by the degree of emotional comfort and security provided by the family than the objective seriousness of the tragedy itself.

It is for this reason that UNHCR's guidelines on refugee children emphasize that 'one of the best ways to help refugee children is to help their families, and one of the best ways to help their families is to help their community.' Like the rest of the guidelines, this principle is derived directly from the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which UNHCR applies to all of its work with younger refugees.

During the transition from childhood to adulthood, teenagers become physically capable of engaging in adult activities, even if they do not possess a comparable degree of emotional or intellectual maturity. While family and community members usually help adolescents to navigate this difficult passage, such guidance and support may not be available during a war or refugee crisis.

Adolescents are better able than children to understand the circumstances which have forced them into exile. As a result, their levels of fear and anxiety can be correspondingly greater. Because they are on the verge of adulthood, adolescents are acquiring skills and forming identities which will prepare them for the day when they leave the family home. Becoming a refugee interrupts this learning process.

Children and adolescents are entitled to 'special care and assistance' not simply because their needs are different from (and often greater than) those of adults, but also because of their dependence upon the protection, instruction and support provided by older people. Every part of a young person's world is a classroom and every adult a teacher.

Box 1.3 Rwanda: causes and consequences of the refugee crisis

Forced migrations within and across national borders are one of the most visible consequences of political persecution and armed conflict. But as the recent crisis in Rwanda has demonstrated, refugee problems that are left unresolved can also become the cause of further instability, violence and population displacements.

Refugee repatriation has been a dominant issue in Rwandese politics for the past 30 years. By the time the country gained independence in 1962, 120,000 people, primarily from the minority Tutsi population, had already taken refuge in neighbouring states, escaping the violence which accompanied the progressive seizure of power by the majority Hutu community. Over the next two decades, the exiles made repeated efforts to return to Rwanda by the force of arms, each of which provoked renewed violence, reprisals and refugee outflows. By the end of the 1980s, some 480,000 Rwandese - around seven per cent of the total population and half of the Tutsi community - had become refugees, primarily in Burundi (280,000), Uganda (80,000), Zaire (80,000) and Tanzania (30,000).

This situation took a decisive turn in October 1990, when the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF), a movement composed mainly of Tutsi exiles, attacked north-east Rwanda from Uganda, where they had helped Yuweri Museveni's National Resistance Army to come to power four years earlier. After taking charge in Uganda, President Museveni had reminded his Rwandese counterpart of the need to find a solution to the refugee problem. But the Hutu-led government claimed that there was so little land available in Rwanda that repatriation was out of the question.

Right to return

After the outbreak of the war in 1990, the prospects for a settlement of the refugee problem appeared to improve. As a result of internal and external pressures, the Rwandese government was obliged to end 16 years of one-party rule. A transitional administration was created, which in 1993 recognized the refugees' right to return and signed a peace agreement with the RPF. But the agreement was rejected by

radical elements in both the government and rebel movement, and Rwanda became embroiled in an increasingly disruptive civil war, which created up to a million internally displaced people.

The country was plunged further into crisis on 6 April 1994, when presidents Juvenal Habyarimana of Rwanda and Cyprien Ntaryamira of Burundi were killed in a plane crash. Ironically, the two leaders were returning from a peace conference in the Tanzanian capital of Dar-es-Salaam, which had been convened to discuss the implementation of a power-sharing plan in both countries.

While the cause of the plane crash remains unknown, it is clear that detailed preparations had already been made in Rwanda for the massacre of the Tutsi population and moderate Hutus. In attacks of indescribable brutality, committed by ordinary men and women as well as Hutu militia, at least 500,000 people are believed to have been killed. Some commentators put the figure much higher.

The killings were accompanied and followed by massive population displacements. On 28 and 29 April alone, as the RPF launched a new offensive against government forces, some 250,000 Rwandese flooded into Tanzania. And even this appeared modest in comparison with the movement which was to take place in mid-July 1994, when in the space of a few days, approximately 800,000 people (most of them Hutus), fled into Zaire, fearing reprisals by the advancing forces of the RPF.

But this was not simply a refugee movement. Assiduously encouraged by the retreating government, the exodus from Rwanda was in effect a calculated evacuation of the Hutu population. With a large proportion of the Tutsis already massacred, the victorious RPF was to be left in control of a state with a severely depleted population, as well as a hostile body of exiles, including the defeated army and militia, massed on the country's borders. Underlining the strategic nature of the movement, members of the ousted administration quickly asserted control over the refugee camps and established a dominant role in the distribution of aid.

Threat of violence

While they struggled to cope with the human consequences of the influx into Tanzania and Zaire, relief agency personnel also had to contend with the militant Hutus who had planned and executed the massacres, and who were now using threats of violence to prevent any refugees from returning to Rwanda. At the end of 1994, a proposal to curtail the violence by deploying a UN peacekeeping force in the refugee camps of Zaire was rejected by the UN Security Council. In February 1995, however, the government of Zaire agreed to send an elite force of 1,500 men to the settlement areas. UNHCR subsequently established a group of police and military personnel from the western states to work alongside the Zairian security force, an unprecedented arrangement in the organization's history.

Despite a general improvement in camp security and living conditions, by mid-1995 there was little immediate prospect of a solution to the Rwandese refugee problem. At a conference held in February 1995, the countries of Central Africa and the major donor states agreed on the need to encourage repatriation by a package of confidence-building measures within Rwanda, including the restoration of the rule of law and the rehabilitation of the country's shattered economy.

The implementation of this plan, however, has been obstructed by a variety of factors: continued pressure on the refugees to remain outside of their homeland; the slow rate at which a promised US$600 million in rehabilitation assistance has become available; disputes over property ownership, linked to the long-awaited return of the Tutsi exiles from Uganda; persistent reports of arbitrary arrests in Rwanda, leading to grossly overcrowded prisons; and the forcible closure of camps for internally displaced people in south-west Rwanda.

In April 1995, hundreds of people were killed when government troops opened fire at a camp for displaced people in Kibeho, an incident which had a serious impact on the prospects for a resolution of the refugee problem. At the end of 1994, UNHCR had started to provide transport and other assistance to the small number of refugees who wished to return to Rwanda. By February 1995, as many as 800 Rwandese were going back every day. But after the Kibeho killings, the numbers dropped to nothing.

Progress on the political front has also proved very slow. The new leaders in Kigali have stated that reconciliation with the former government is possible, but only if the individuals responsible for the genocide are punished for their crimes. Members of the former administration say that they will return to their homeland, but only if they are allowed a share of power. According to many reports, in mid-1995 the soldiers and militia forces who had withdrawn to Zaire were continuing to receive military training and supplies, and to conduct low-intensity operations in the border areas of Rwanda. With images of mass murders still fresh in the minds of the Rwandese people, peace is unlikely to come quickly or easily.

Map C
The Rwandese refugee population
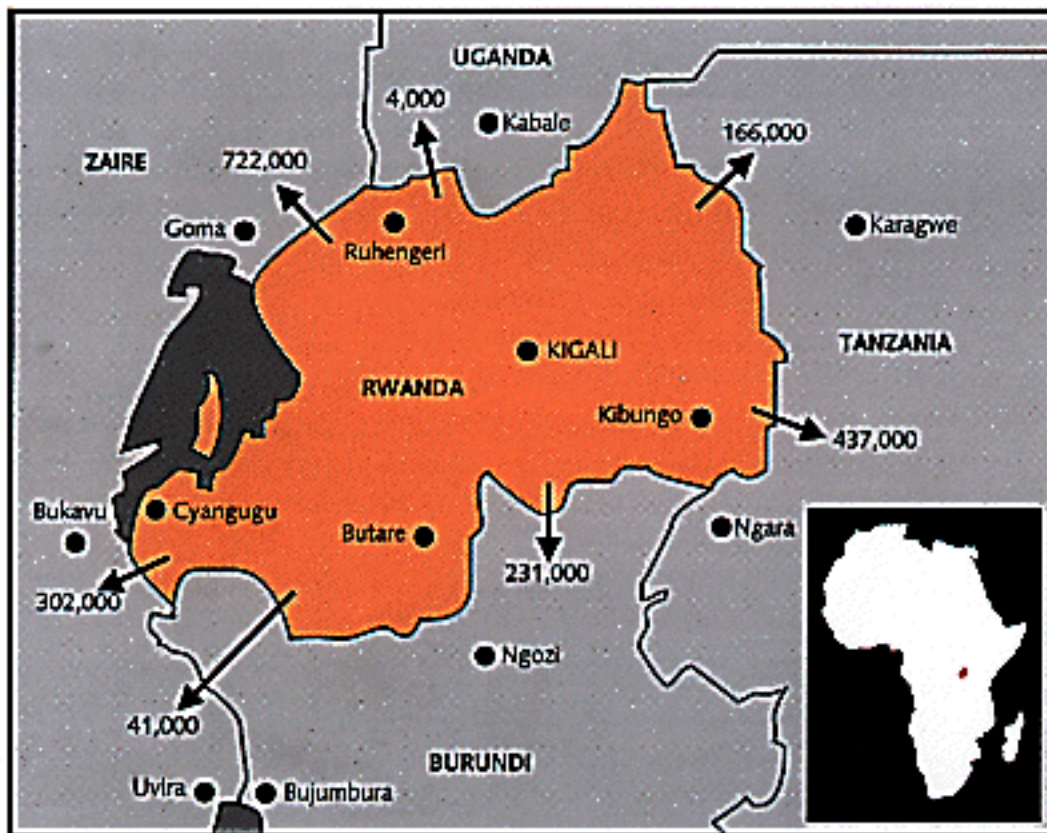
Statistics dated May 1995

Box 1.4 International action on behalf of internally displaced people

In the 14-year period between 1975 and 1989, UNHCR's Documentation Centre catalogued just 49 publications which specifically referred to the problem of internally displaced people. In the four years between 1990 and early 1995, however, the number of acquisitions relating to this issue amounted to no fewer than 183.

These figures provide a crude but nevertheless revealing indication of the extent to which the question of internally displaced people has found its way onto the international agenda. Such interest can, for a number of different reasons, be expected to increase even further in the future: the increase in the number of people uprooted by internal armed conflicts; the growing recognition that events taking place within states are a subject of legitimate international concern; the mounting awareness of the need to avert mass population displacements; and the increasing tendency of potential asylum countries to close their doors to would-be refugees, leaving them stranded within their own country.

Current estimates of the number of people falling into the highly elastic category of 'internally displaced person' vary considerably. According to one UN source, the total now runs as high as 30 million. Of this total, sixteen million are estimated to be in Africa, up to seven million in Asia, more than five million in Europe and up to three million in the Americas.

Exile: a last resort

A comprehensive approach to the global refugee problem must, for both pragmatic and ethical reasons, also address the situation of internally displaced people. Many of the world's internally displaced have been forced to abandon their homes for the precisely the same reasons as refugees.

External and internal population displacements often take place within and from the same country at the same time. And in some situations they involve the same

people. While remarkably little is known about the dynamics of forced migration, it is clear that many people whose lives and liberty are at risk initially seek sanctuary within their own country, and only go into exile as a last resort. In other situations, moreover, internally displaced populations include sizeable numbers of former refugees who have been uprooted for a second time after returning to their homeland.

No international organization has a global mandate to protect or assist people who have been displaced within their own country. This is not to say that their needs are being completely ignored. Indeed, the last few years have witnessed a plethora of efforts to define, analyze and address this problem.

One of the most significant steps was taken in 1992, when the UN Commission on Human Rights requested the Secretary-General to appoint a Representative to examine the issue in a systematic manner. Since that time, the role of the Representative, Mr. Francis Deng, has evolved into that of a catalyst and an advocate for internally displaced people.

Criteria for involvement

In 1993, UNHCR established a set of criteria in order to determine the nature and extent of its involvement in situations of internal displacement. In short, the organization will assume primary responsibility for protection and assistance in situations of internal displacement when such activities are clearly linked to the prevention or resolution of a refugee problem.

When such links do not exist, UNHCR may also contribute to the broader efforts of the United Nations to help the internally displaced. In both instances, however, the organization's involvement will also be dependent upon a specific request from the United Nations, the consent of the state concerned, and the availability of funds. UNHCR's criteria also state unequivocally that the organization's involvement 'should not be, nor interpreted to be, an obstacle limiting the availability of asylum. The option to seek asylum must remain open.'

Many other international organizations also serve the needs of domestically displaced populations. The International Committee of the Red Cross, which has a mandate to protect and assist the victims of war, regularly extends its services to such people. The UN Development Programme has in a number of situations served as the coordinator for international assistance to the internally displaced.

The World Food Programme (35 per cent of whose beneficiaries are internally displaced) as well as UNICEF, the World Health Organization and the International Organization for Migration also play vital roles in assisting internally displaced people.

While the significance of these international efforts should not be ignored, it should be remembered that the internally displaced often rely most heavily on the support which they receive from local authorities and various non-governmental institutions: chiefs and community leaders; churches, mosques and other religious organizations; political parties and opposition movements; as well as indigenous voluntary agencies.
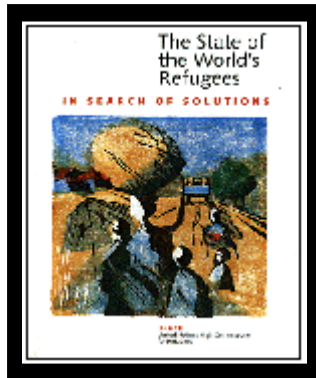
Definitional difficulties

One of the principal difficulties encountered in establishing a more systematic approach to the plight of internally displaced people is the debatable nature of the concept itself. Some analysts limit the term to people who have left their usual place of residence in the context of large-scale movements, and in circumstances similar to those which create refugees.

Others, however, tend to employ the concept in relation to all those people who have moved within their own country for reasons that are not entirely voluntary. This includes, for example, changes of residence induced by environmental and industrial disasters, as well as the forcible relocation and population distribution programmes which governments often employ to counter security threats and to implement large-scale development projects.

Some serious doubts remain about the advisability of creating a distinct legal category of 'internally displaced person'. Even if it were possible to find an agreed definition of the concept, it would undoubtedly be difficult to apply in practice. A large proportion of the world's internally displaced people, for example, are to be found in urban areas, where their situation is virtually indistinguishable from other rural-to-urban migrants.

As Francis Deng has pointed out, some advocates suggest that international action should be based on people's needs, and not on their legal status. In accordance with this principle, a comprehensive approach to humanitarian problems should focus on preventing human rights abuses, ensuring that the laws of war are respected and helping people who are at risk. Whether those people have chosen to move - or were fortunate enough to be able to move - should not be the decisive factor in triggering international involvement.

At the same time, it is necessary to recognize that state sovereignty continues to place a serious constraint on the international community's efforts to protect displaced people and other threatened populations who remain within their country of origin. It is for this reason that action on behalf of the internally displaced must be combined with an insistence on the right to seek asylum in another country.

Box 1.5 CIREFCA: resolving Central America's refugee problem

During the 1980s, more than two million people were uprooted by the civil wars which raged in El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua. The people most directly affected by these conflicts were primarily from poor, rural communities, caught up in the fighting between government and guerrilla forces and subjected to the human rights abuses committed by the combatants.

The whole of Central America was affected by these refugee movements, which both derived from and contributed to the regional conflict. In addition to the three war-torn countries themselves, Belize, Costa Rica, Honduras, Mexico and the USA all became involved in the refugee problem by hosting substantial numbers of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants.

Despite a number of efforts to bring peace to Central America in the early 1980s, the three wars remained intractable. By the mid-1980s, however, the Cold War was drawing to a close and nearly all of the parties concerned had grown weary of the region's conflicts. In August 1987, the five Central American presidents signed the Esquipulas II accords, which laid down plans for a 'firm and lasting peace' in the region, and which recognized that the issues of peace, development, political reform and population displacement were inseparable.

Esquipulas II was the spark that ignited the CIREFCA process. In May 1989, the five Central American governments joined Mexico and Belize in convening CIREFCA, the International Conference on Central American Refugees, which was co-sponsored by the UN Secretary-General, UNHCR and the UN Development Programme (UNDP). From the beginning, therefore, CIREFCA adopted an integrated approach to the political, humanitarian and developmental dimensions of the refugee problem.

The Plan of Action agreed upon at CIREFCA identified a number of important objectives. First, it called for the voluntary return of refugees under conditions of safety. As the governments of the conflict-affected countries often associated refugees with rebel forces, this commitment to allow them to return in peace represented a major step forward. Second, the plan agreed that the refugee-hosting countries of the region would assist in the settlement and integration of those

refugees who were unable to return to their homeland. Third, the plan included a commitment to the implementation of development programmes which would benefit refugees, returnees and displaced people, as well as local residents.

Although much remains to be done to complete the Central American peace process, many of CIREFCA's objectives have now been achieved. Respect for the human rights of refugees, returnees and displaced people - and for the role of the organizations assisting them - has been strengthened. The region's formal refugee camps have been closed down, and some 70,000 Nicaraguans, 32,000 Salvadorians and 15,000 Guatemalans have voluntarily returned to their own countries.

Thousands of other refugees who have decided not to repatriate are settling down in their countries of asylum, enabling them to live a more productive life and allowing UNHCR to phase out its relief operations. Finding a solution for the 45,000 remaining Guatemalan refugees in Mexico remains the major challenge.

The ingredients of success

The general effectiveness of the CIREFCA process can be ascribed to a number of different factors.

First and foremost, perhaps, was the political will which underpinned the search for solutions in Central America. By the mid-1980s, the region's refugee situation was in deadlock. Host governments were largely hostile to the refugees on their territory, but voluntary repatriation was not considered to be an option. As a result, UNHCR was left to run costly and open-ended assistance programmes. The signing of the Esquipulas II agreement cut through this deadlock and placed the refugee problem within an entirely new political framework.

Second, the CIREFCA process was characterized by broad consensus and intensive dialogue. The Plan of Action was carefully worked out by the seven countries of the region, together with major donor states, UN agencies and the non-governmental organizations, including those based in the region.

Despite this consensus, Central America remained a region in conflict, characterized by bitter civil wars, polarized political attitudes and divergent economic interests. One of CIREFCA's most important achievements was to foster a dialogue amongst the actors involved, providing a neutral forum for discussions between people who had formerly distrusted, opposed and even fought each other.

This objective was achieved in part through a series of meetings at the international, regional and national levels, at which the key CIRFECA participants were able to review their progress, determine their priorities and raise the funds which they required.

At the same time, the development programmes and projects implemented under the auspices of CIREFCA required a process of reconciliation to take place at the grassroots level, amongst the refugees, returnees, displaced people, demobilized soldiers and local residents most directly affected by the region's conflicts and population displacements. Whether rebuilding a bridge, rehabilitating a health centre

or installing a water-supply system, individuals and groups of people were obliged to work together if they wished to benefit from CIREFCA projects.
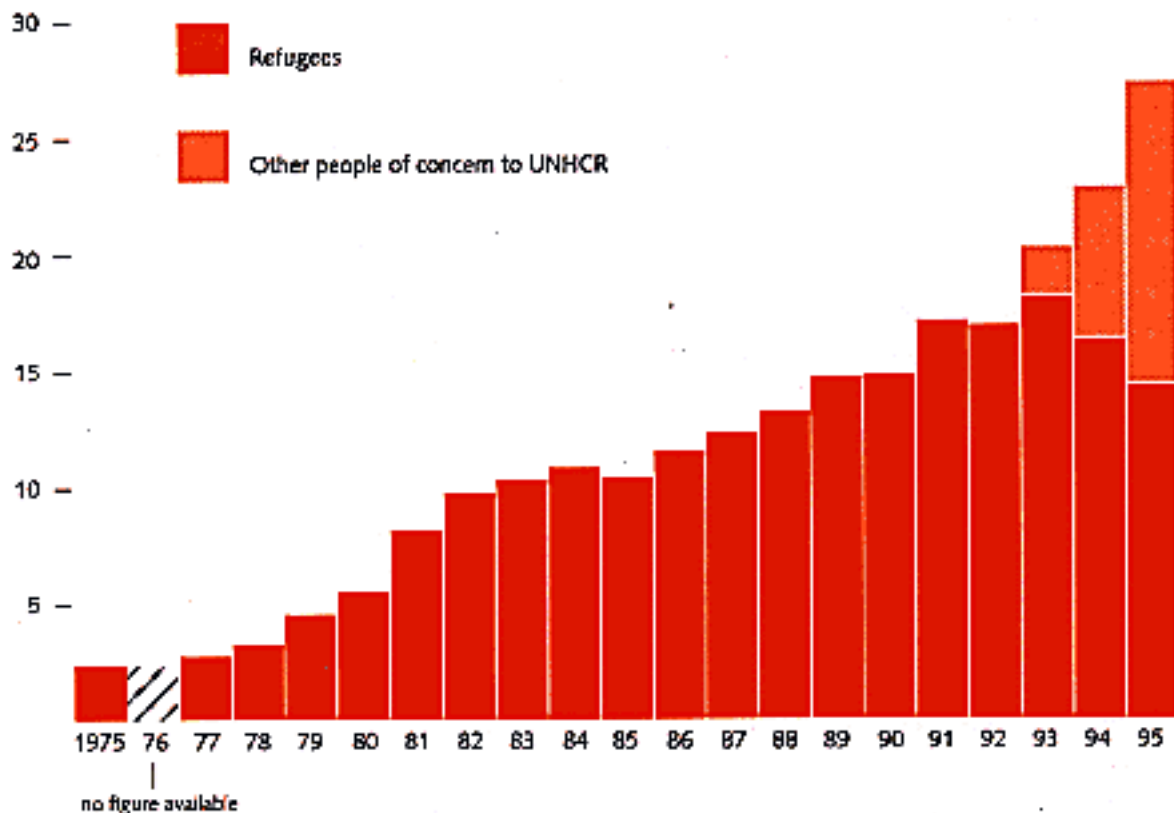
Cash and cooperation

The substantial amounts of money which donor states committed to CIREFCA - over US$425 million in total, and an additional US$115 million provided by the Italian government to a related development programme - represented a third ingredient in the effectiveness of the process. These resources not only allowed UNHCR and its partners to implement a wide range of practical integration programmes, but also provided the governments of the region with a strong incentive to respect the Plan of Action.

Fourth and finally, the search for solutions in Central America benefited from effective cooperation amongst the many different actors involved in the CIREFCA process. The organizational arrangements established for CIREFCA were of particular significance because they underscored the need to support the regional peace process by means of interlocking relief, rehabilitation and development efforts. Thus for four years, the lead agency role was played by UNHCR. But in 1993, as the refugee problem diminished and the focus of CIREFCA shifted towards longer-term development, responsibility was assumed by UNDP.

CIREFCA may not be a precise blueprint for the resolution of refugee situations everywhere else in the world. Indeed, one of the strengths of the process was the extent to which it was rooted in local participation, experience and values. Nevertheless, the key components of CIREFCA - political will, intensive dialogue and effective cooperation - are vital elements in the search for solutions to refugee problems, wherever they are to be found.

Fig. 1.1
Number of refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR, 1975-1995

millions

Legend:
- Refugees
- Other people of concern to UNHCR

1975 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95
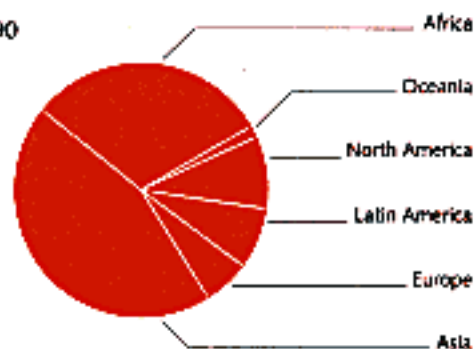
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Statistics dated 1 January of each year. Totals do not include Palestinians assisted by the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. 'Other people of concern' refers to internally displaced people, returnees, war affected populations and other groups benefiting from UNHCR's protection and assistance activities.

Fig. 1.2
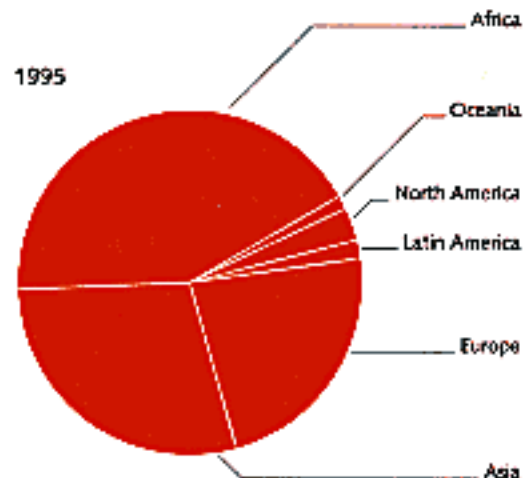**Refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR by region, 1985, 1990 and 1995**

(figures below in millions)

	1985	1990	1995
Africa	3.0	4.6	11.8
Asia	5.1	6.8	7.9
Europe	0.7	0.8	6.5
Latin America	0.4	1.2	0.1
North America	1.4	1.4	0.9
Oceania	0.1	0.1	0.05

Statistics dated 1 January of each year.

Fig. 1.3
UNHCR expenditure, 1970-1994

US$ millions
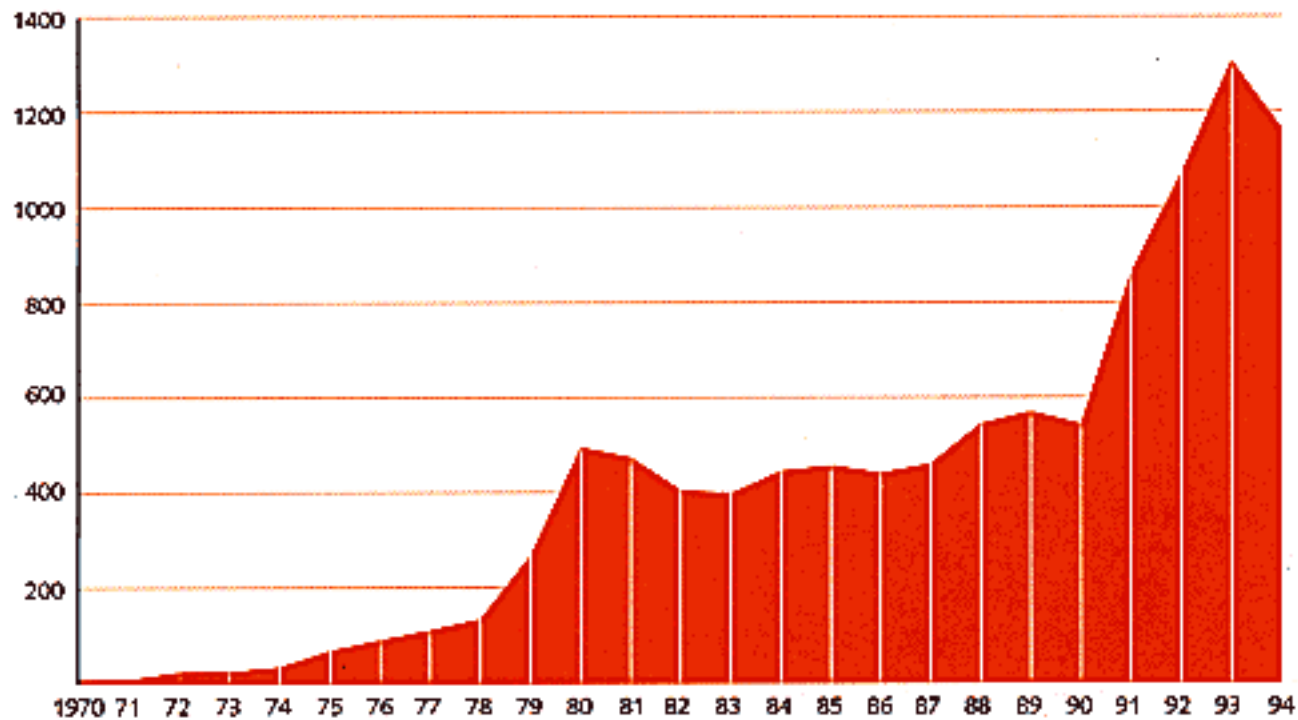
Fig. 1.4
New UNHCR national offices, 1991-1994

Albania (Tirana)
Algeria (Algiers)
Armenia (Yerevan)
Azerbaijan (Baku)
Belarus (Minsk)
Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sarajevo)
Bangladesh (Dhaka)
Benin (Cotonou)
Bulgaria (Sofia)
Croatia (Zagreb)
Czech Republic (Prague)
Dominican Republic (Santo Domingo)
Eritrea (Asmara)
Ghana (Accra)
Georgia (Tbilisi)
Haiti (Port-au-Prince)
Kuwait (Kuwait City)
Liberia (Monrovia)
FYRM * (Skopje)
Mali (Bamako)
Myanmar (Yangon)
Namibia (Windhoek)
Poland (Warsaw)
Russian Federation (Moscow)
Slovak Republic (Bratislava)
Slovenia (Ljubljana)
South Africa (Johannesburg)
Syria (Damascus)
Ukraine (Kiev)

* Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

This list omits countries where UNHCR has
established a temporary presence or has not
yet formalized a longer term presence with
the authorities.