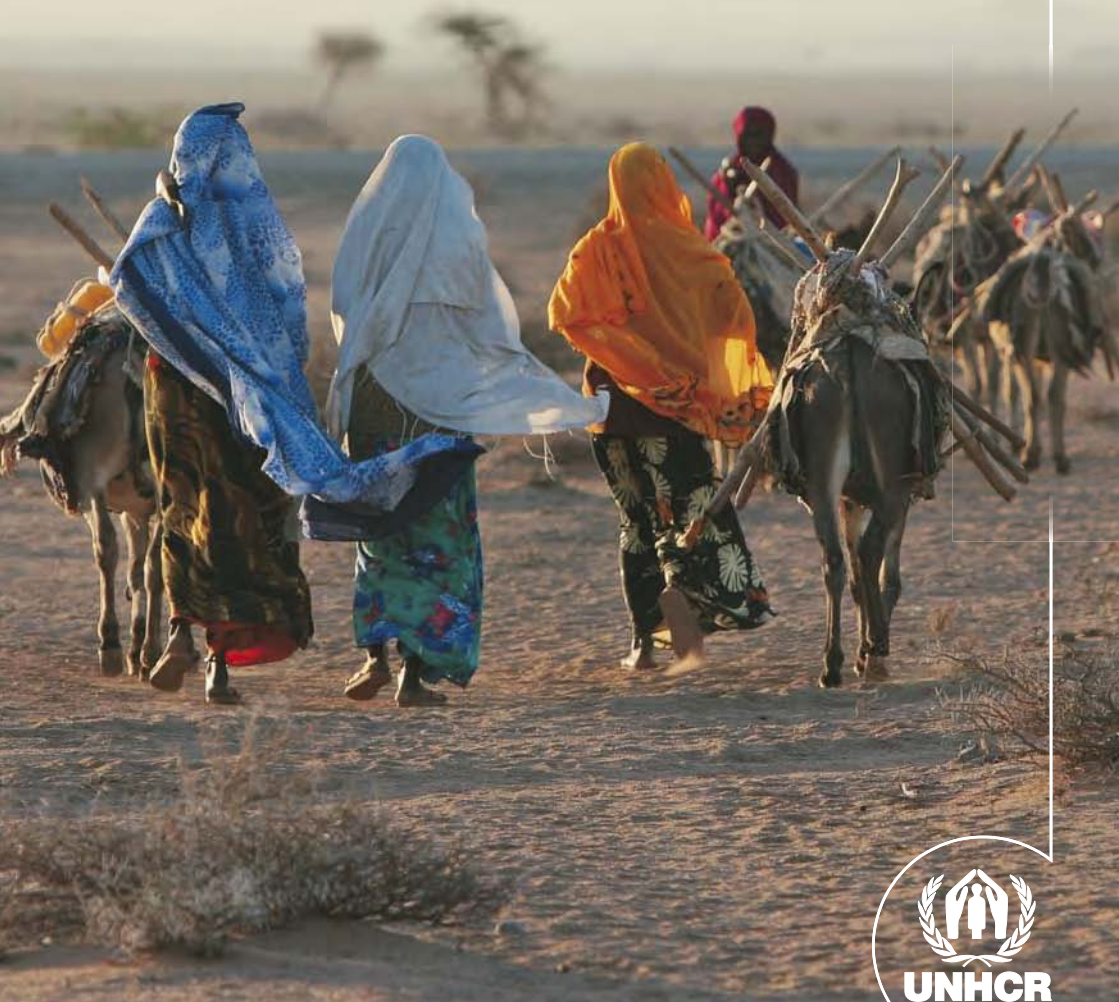


2007-08

# PROTECTING REFUGEES

& THE ROLE OF UNHCR





Education is a key issue for refugee children.

# PROTECTING REFUGEES

& THE ROLE OF UNHCR

Cover:

**Somali refugee women** leave their camp in Ethiopia in search of wood for cooking.



UNHCR/B. HEGER/ETH-2005

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# WHO IS A REF

A REFUGEE IS SOMEONE WHO "OWING TO A WELL-FOUNDED FEAR OF BEING PERSECUTED FOR REASONS OF RACE, RELIGION, NATIONALITY, MEMBERSHIP OF A PARTICULAR SOCIAL GROUP, OR POLITICAL OPINION, IS OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY OF HIS NATIONALITY, AND IS UNABLE TO OR, OWING TO SUCH FEAR, IS UNWILLING TO AVAIL HIMSELF OF THE PROTECTION OF THAT COUNTRY..."

The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees

UNHCR / H. CAUX / TCD / 2006



**Chad, one of the world's poorest countries,** is hosting over 230,000 refugees from Sudan's Darfur region, as well as tens of thousands of its own people displaced by fighting and ethnic tensions.

# UGEE?



**T**HE PRACTICE OF granting asylum to people fleeing persecution in foreign lands is one of the earliest hallmarks of civilization. References to it have been found in texts written 3,500 years ago, during the blossoming of the great early empires in the Middle East such as the Hittites, Babylonians, Assyrians and ancient Egyptians.

Over three millennia later, protecting refugees was made the core mandate of the UN refugee agency, UNHCR, which was founded in 1950. This booklet addresses some of the most commonly asked questions about refugees themselves and how UNHCR and its partners are engaged in a constant struggle to help them physically and legally.

Who, for instance, qualifies as a refugee – and why? What rights does a refugee enjoy and what obligations? What is the role of governments and of UNHCR itself? It also introduces related issues such as the future of millions of so-called ‘internally displaced people,’ the Kafkaesque world of statelessness, the development of ‘temporary protection,’ and the increasing confusion between refugees and migrants.



## | REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS |

CURRENT GLOBAL MIGRATION PATTERNS ARE PARTICULARLY complex, involving not just refugees, but also millions of economic migrants seeking a better way of life – as well as the people smugglers who have built a multi-billion dollar business by preying on the desires and desperation of many of those who believe they can no longer cross borders in any other way.

**Every year hundreds of refugees and migrants die crossing the sea from Somalia to Yemen. These survivors wait for help on a Yemeni beach.**



Refugees and migrants are fundamentally different, and for that reason are treated very differently under modern international law – even if they often travel in the same way. Migrants, especially economic migrants, *choose* to move in order to improve the future prospects of themselves and their families. Refugees *have to* move if they are to save their lives or preserve their freedom.

Refugees fleeing war or persecution are in a very vulnerable situation. They have no protection from their own state – indeed it is often their own government that is threatening to persecute them. If other countries do not let them in, and do not help them once they are in, then they may be condemning them to death – or to an intolerable life in the shadows, without sustenance and without rights.

Even people forced from their homes by floods, earthquakes and other natural disasters are not in the same position. Their government is usually sympathetic towards them. As a result – however great their needs may be in terms of food, shelter and healthcare – they are normally not refugees and do not need asylum.



UNICEF / B. STANDELSKY / IJUN+2006

**A young asylum seeker** awaits a decision on her future in a Central European country.


## | ...AND ASYLUM SEEKERS |

**T**HE TERMS 'ASYLUM SEEKER' AND 'REFUGEE' ARE OFTEN CONFUSED: an asylum seeker is someone who says he or she is a refugee, but whose claim has not yet been definitively evaluated.

National asylum systems are there to decide which asylum seekers actually qualify for international protection. Those judged through proper procedures not to be refugees, nor to be in need of any other form of international protection, can be sent back to their home countries.

The efficiency of the asylum system is key. If the asylum system is both fast and fair, then people who know they are not refugees have little incentive to make a claim in the first place, thereby benefiting both the host country and the refugees for whom the system is intended.

During mass movements of refugees (usually as a result of conflicts or generalized violence as opposed to individual persecution), there is not – and never will be – a capacity to conduct individual asylum interviews for everyone who has crossed the border. Nor is it usually necessary, since in such circumstances it is generally evident why they have fled. As a result, such groups are often declared 'prima facie refugees.'



**Asylum seekers from Myanmar** living a tough life in the Malaysian jungle.



## WHY DEFINITIONS MATTER

**T**HE TWO MAIN GROUPS OF PEOPLE ON THE MOVE – REFUGEES and economic migrants – are increasingly being confused, and increasingly being treated in the same way: with mistrust, even hatred and outright rejection. The impressive body of international law designed to protect refugees is under intense pressure. Border controls are constantly being strengthened and made stricter.

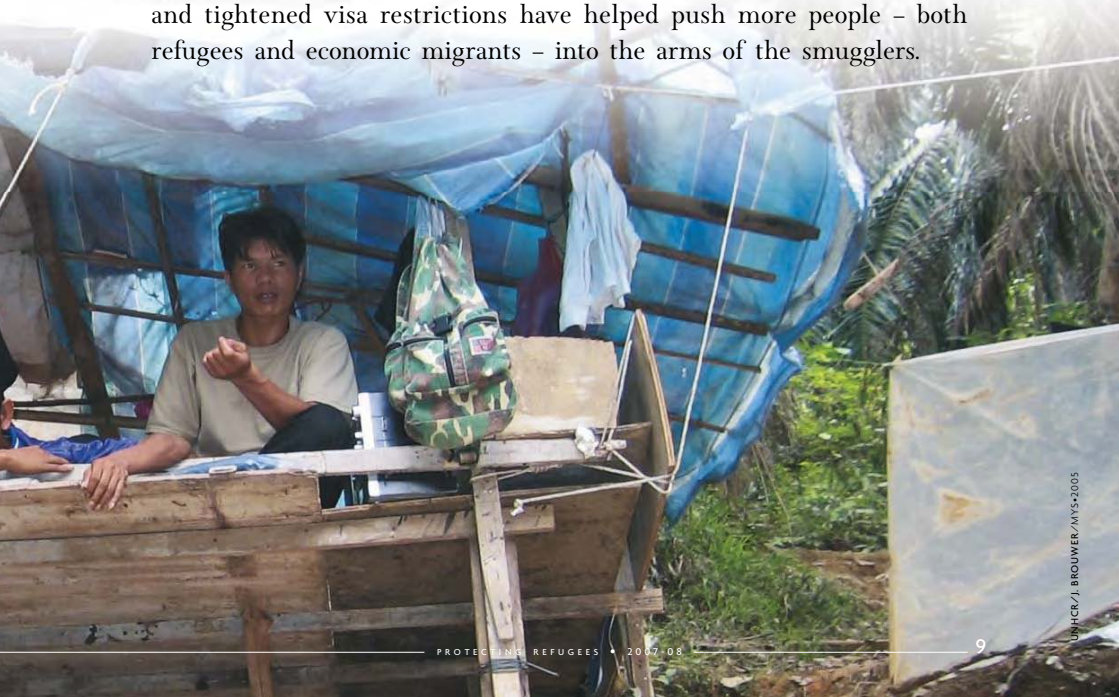
The aim is to keep out illegal immigrants and improve security – something states have a perfect right to do. But refugees may be paying the penalty too. And, in their case, the failure to get to a safe country could in some instances lead to torture or even cost them their lives. That is why the legal distinctions matter.

Most people smugglers do not distinguish between refugees and migrants either – they'll simply smuggle anyone who can pay. That has been part of the problem in recent years. All smugglers thrive on prohibition, so stronger borders and tightened visa restrictions have helped push more people – both refugees and economic migrants – into the arms of the smugglers.



UNHCR/B. SZANDELSKY/POL/2006

**A Gambian asylum seeker gazes out of his cell in a Polish detention centre.**



UNHCR/J. BROUWER/MYS/2005

# DEFINITIONS IN BRIEF

## REFUGEE

The 1951 Refugee Convention describes refugees as people who are outside their country of nationality or habitual residence, and have a well-founded fear of persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion (*for full definition see p. 4*). People fleeing conflicts or generalized violence are also generally considered as refugees, although sometimes under legal mechanisms other than the 1951 Convention.

## ASYLUM SEEKER

Someone who has made a claim that he or she is a refugee, and is waiting for that claim to be accepted or rejected. The term contains no presumption either way - it simply describes the fact that someone has lodged the claim. Some asylum seekers will be judged to be refugees and others will not.

## MIGRANT

A wide-ranging term that covers most people who move to a foreign country for a variety of reasons and for a certain length of time (usually a minimum of a year, so as not to include very temporary visitors such as tourists, people on business visits etc). Different from 'immigrant' which means someone who takes up permanent residence in a country other than his or her original homeland.

## ECONOMIC MIGRANT

Someone who leaves their country of origin for financial reasons, rather than for refugee ones.



**Djabal camp, carved out of the parched wastelands of eastern Chad, hosts some 14,000 Sudanese refugees from Darfur.**

## INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSON (IDP)

Someone who has been forced to move from his or her home – because of conflict, persecution (i.e. refugee-like reasons); or because of a natural disaster or some other unusual circumstance of this type. Unlike refugees, however, IDPs remain inside their own country.

## STATELESS PERSON

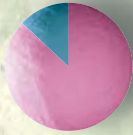
Someone who is not considered as a national by ANY state (de jure stateless); or possibly someone who does not enjoy fundamental rights enjoyed by other nationals in their home state (de facto stateless). Statelessness can be a personal disaster: some stateless people live in a Kafkaesque netherworld where they do not officially exist and therefore have virtually no rights at all. Unlike the other groups outlined here, they may have never moved away from the place where they were born. But some stateless people are also refugees.



UNHCR/S. SCHULMAN/COD-2006

A displaced child in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

# PEOPLE OF CON



**NORTH AMERICA**

**1,143,000**

**EUROPE**

**3,427,000**



**LATIN AMERICA\***

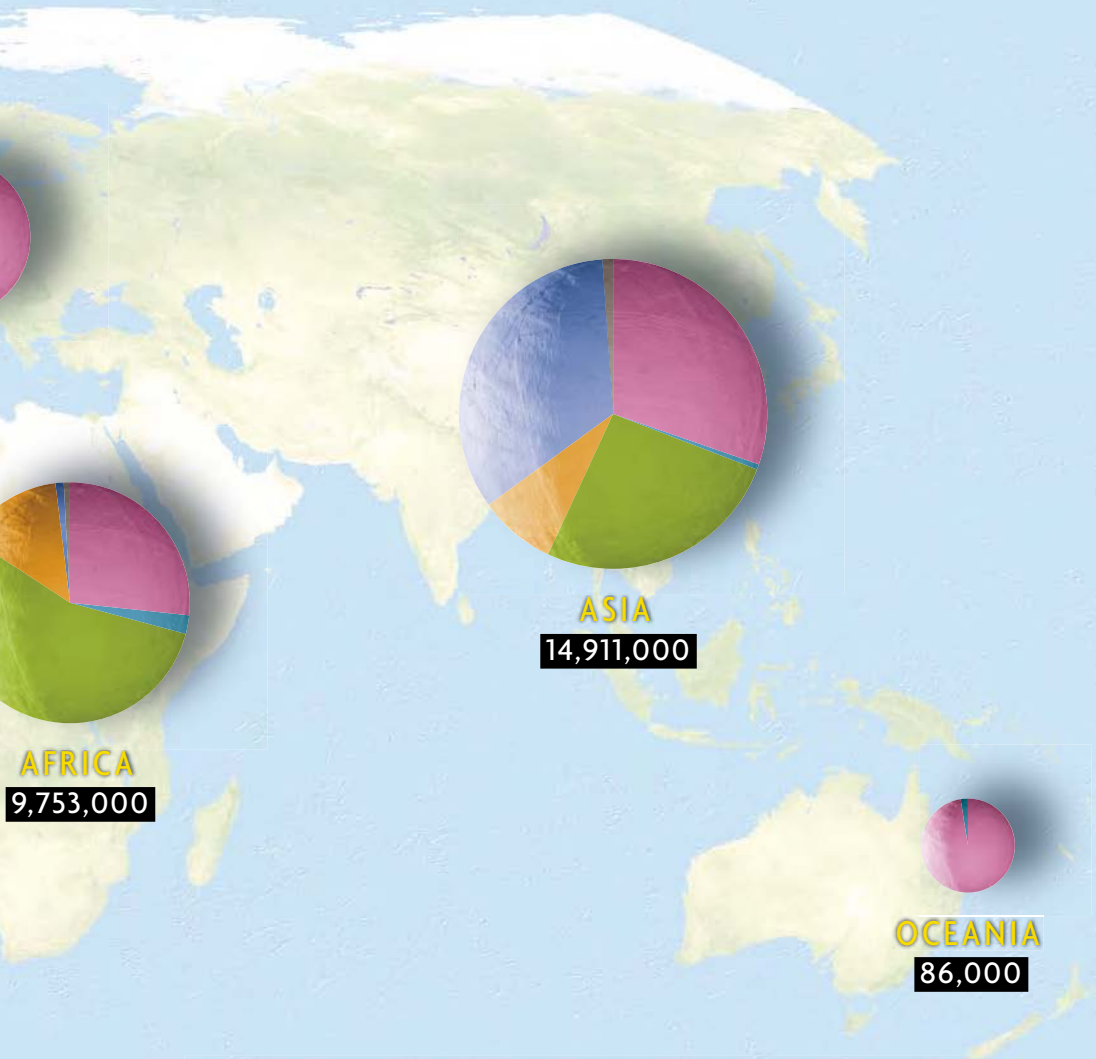
**3,543,000**

\* Includes Caribbean

† Includes both returned refugees and IDPs

Numbers may not add up due to rounding

# CERN TO UNHCR



**AFRICA**  
9,753,000

**ASIA**  
14,911,000

**OCEANIA**  
86,000

	REFUGEES	ASYLUM SEEKERS	IDPs	RETURNEES <sup>†</sup>	STATELESS PEOPLE	OTHERS
AFRICA	2,608,000	244,000	5,373,000	1,356,000	100,000	72,000
ASIA	4,538,000	90,000	3,879,000	1,221,000	5,027,000	157,000
EUROPE	1,612,000	240,000	542,000	21,000	679,000	332,000
LATIN AMERICA*	41,000	16,000	3,000,000	—	—	486,000
NORTH AMERICA	995,000	148,000	—	—	—	—
OCEANIA	84,000	2,000	—	—	—	—
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9,878,000</b>	<b>740,000</b>	<b>12,794,000</b>	<b>2,598,000</b>	<b>5,806,000</b>	<b>1,046,000</b>

# HOW ARE REFUGEES PROTECTED?

**G**OVERNMENTS NORMALLY GUARANTEE the basic human rights and physical security of their citizens. But when civilians become refugees this safety net disappears. Without some sort of legal status in their asylum country, they would be exceptionally vulnerable to exploitation and other forms of ill treatment, as well as to imprisonment or deportation.



**Refugees from Indonesia's Papua province** celebrate receiving residency permits – and all the rights that go with them – in Papua New Guinea.

Governments bear the prime responsibility for protecting refugees on their territory, and often do so in concert with local non-governmental organizations (NGOs). However, in many countries, UNHCR staff also work alongside NGOs and other partners in a variety of locations ranging from capital cities to remote camps and border areas. They attempt to promote or provide legal and physical protection, and

minimize the threat of violence – including sexual assault – which many refugees are subject to, even in countries of asylum.



**UNHCR staff** registering Colombians who have fled into neighbouring Ecuador.

**An asylum seeker**

discusses his case with a lawyer in Hungary.



UNHCR / B. SZANDELSKY / HUNG 2006

## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE 1951 REFUGEE CONVENTION

### TOP 10 COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN

[ AS OF 1 JANUARY 2007 ]

COUNTRY	REFUGEES
Afghanistan	2,108,000
Iraq*	1,451,000
Sudan	686,000
Somalia	464,000
DR Congo	402,000
Burundi	397,000
Viet Nam	374,000
Turkey	227,000
Angola	207,000
Myanmar	203,000

\* Estimated at over 2 million by September 2007.

**Note:** Some 334,000 Palestinian refugees also come under UNHCR's mandate, while a further 4.4 million Palestinian refugees are cared for by UNRWA.

**T**HE 1951 REFUGEE CONVENTION AND ITS 1967 Protocol are the cornerstones of modern refugee protection, and the legal principles they enshrine have permeated into countless other international, regional and national laws and practices governing the way refugees are treated.

One of the most crucial principles laid down in the 1951 Convention is that refugees should not be expelled or returned “to the frontiers of territories where [their] life or freedom would be threatened.” The Convention also outlines the basic rights which states should afford to refugees, and it defines who is a refugee – and who is not (for example it clearly excludes fighters, terrorists or people guilty of serious crimes).

The 1951 Convention was never intended to sort out all migration issues. Its sole aim was – and still is – to protect refugees. The challenge is to find other efficient mechanisms to manage economic migration and maintain border security – legitimate state concerns that need to be carefully balanced with their responsibility to protect refugees.

By September 2007, a total of 147 countries had signed the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol (see separate brochure on the 1951 Refugee Convention for more details).

### TOP 10 ASYLUM COUNTRIES

[ AS OF 1 JANUARY 2007 ]

COUNTRY	REFUGEES
Pakistan*	1,044,000
Iran	968,000
United States	844,000
Syria	702,000
Germany	605,000
Jordan	500,000
Tanzania	485,000
United Kingdom	301,000
China	301,000
Chad	287,000

\* UNHCR Estimate.



**This Eritrean refugee** has spent two decades in a camp in eastern Sudan.



## | WHAT IS UNHCR? |

**U**NHCR IS THE UNITED NATIONS REFUGEE agency (its full name is the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees). The agency was created by the UN General Assembly in 1950, but actually began work on 1 January 1951. States still recovering from the devastation of World War II wanted to make sure that they had a strong and effective organization to look after the interests of – or ‘protect’ – refugees in the countries where they had sought asylum. UNHCR was also charged with helping governments to find ‘permanent solutions’ for refugees.

UNHCR’s original mandate was limited to a three-year program to help the remaining World War II refugees. However, the problem of displacement not only failed to disappear, it turned into a persistent worldwide phenomenon. In December 2003, the UN General Assembly finally abolished the requirement for the agency to keep renewing its mandate every few years.

UNHCR’s statute was drafted virtually simultaneously with the 1951 Refugee Convention, and as a result the key international legal instrument, and the organization designed to monitor it, are particularly well synchronized. Article 35 of the 1951 Convention makes the relationship explicit, and requests states to co-operate with

UNHCR in matters relating to the implementation of the Convention itself and to any laws, regulations or decrees that states might draw up that could affect refugees.

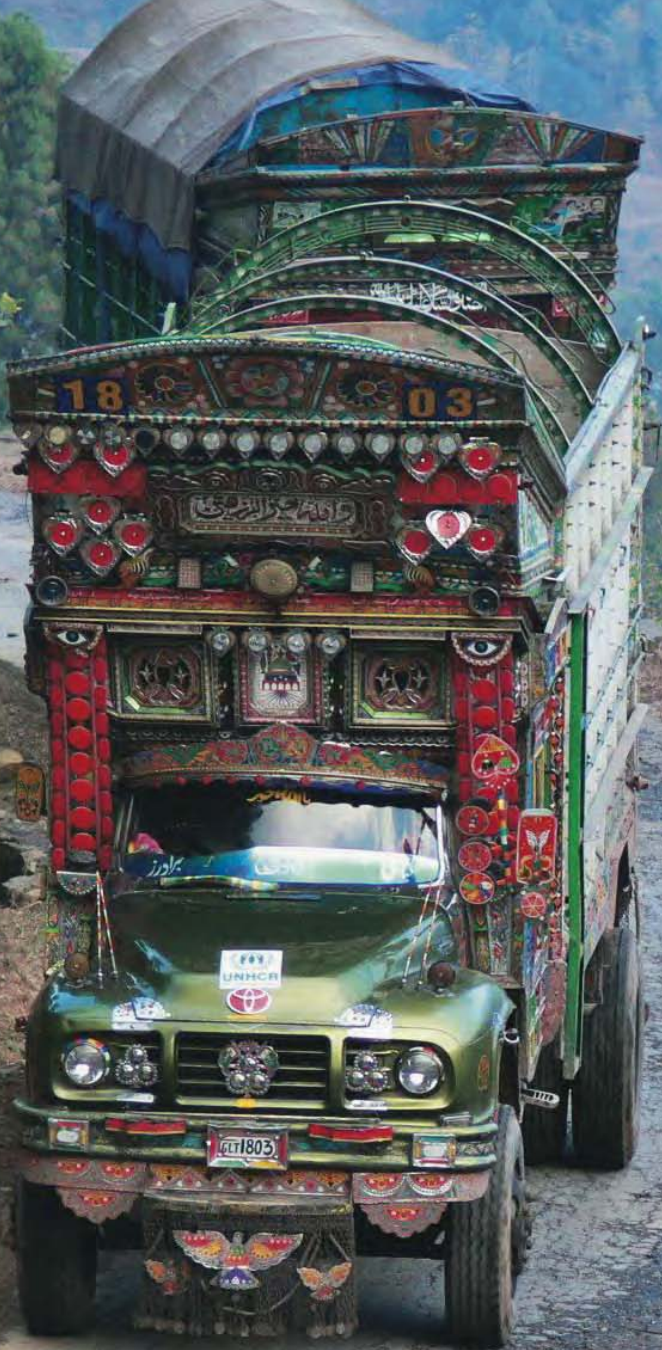
**“THE CONTRACTING STATES UNDERTAKE TO CO-OPERATE WITH THE OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES...”**

*Article 35, 1951 UN Refugee Convention*



FRED NOV/UN PHOTO/SDN+2007

A UNHCR convoy bringing relief supplies to some of the 140,000 people made homeless by the 2005 earthquake in northern Pakistan.



## HOW UNHCR'S ROLE HAS EVOLVED

**C**oncerning refugees: UNHCR is engaged in a constant effort, alongside states, to explain, clarify and build upon the existing body of international law spawned by the 1951 Refugee Convention. In recent years, it has launched a series of initiatives that aim both to bolster the Convention and to encourage the search for permanent and safe solutions for the world's uprooted peoples.

In 2001, the most important global refugee conference in half a century adopted a landmark declaration reaffirming the commitment of signatory states to the 1951 Refugee Convention. Through a process of global consultations, UNHCR drew up a set of objectives called the 'Agenda for Protection' which continues to serve as a guide to governments and humanitarian organizations in their efforts to strengthen worldwide refugee protection.

**C**oncerning other groups of disadvantaged people: Over the years, the agency has taken on responsibilities for a number of other groups that are similar to refugees in some ways, but which were not explicitly woven into its mandate

**UNHCR staff discussing reconstruction plans with the inhabitants of one of three villages submerged by an earthquake that struck Indonesia's Nias Island in 2005.**



UNHCR/JI, PERUGIA/IDN+2005

at the time of its founding – most notably becoming the UN agency responsible for monitoring the situation of stateless people (in 1974). More recently it became a major player in the UN's new 'cluster approach' designed to improve the delivery of protection and assistance for internally displaced people, who – unlike refugees – have never had a single agency wholly dedicated to their well-being. UNHCR has been involved with IDPs to some extent for at least two decades, but on a much more ad hoc basis.

In general, nowadays, UNHCR plays a more prominent role in the countries where the displacement is occurring – either because of its substantial involvement in helping returning refugees settle back into their home areas, or because of its increased activities on behalf of IDPs.

Occasionally, UNHCR's particular expertise has led to its being given an even broader role. In the 1990s, for example, UNHCR ran the world's longest-ever airlift as part of its operation to assist besieged

populations, as well as displaced ones, in Bosnia and Herzegovina. And more recently – although it is not normally involved in natural disaster relief – UNHCR launched major operations after the 2004 Asian tsunami and the 2005 Pakistan earthquake, because in both cases the sheer scale of destruction meant that any major agency that could help was asked



UNHCR/AM. YONEKAWA/IDN • 2005

**A Swiss helicopter loaned to UNHCR** after the 2004 tsunami in Indonesia killed over 150,000 people and made half a million others homeless.

to do so, and shelter and camp management – UNHCR's two assistance specialities – were at a premium.



A UNHCR-funded micro-credit project has enabled these Colombian refugees in Panama to make “panela” bricks from boiled sugar cane juice.

UNHCR/B. HEGER/PAN•2006

## | ASSISTING REFUGEES |

**P**ROTECTION AND MATERIAL HELP ARE INTERRELATED. UNHCR can best provide effective legal protection if a person’s basic needs – shelter, food, water, sanitation and medical care – are also met.

The agency therefore coordinates the provision and delivery of such items, manages – or helps manage – individual camps or camp systems, and has designed specific projects for vulnerable women, children and the elderly who comprise 80 percent of a ‘normal’ refugee population. Education is a major priority once the dust has settled slightly.

UNHCR also seek ways to find durable solutions to refugees’ plight, by helping them repatriate to their homeland if conditions warrant, or by helping them to integrate in their countries of asylum or to resettle in third countries (*see below*).

### FIVE BIGGEST OPERATIONS IN 2006

COUNTRY	EXPENDITURE (US\$)
Sudan	68,571,000
Chad	65,214,000
Afghanistan	47,533,000
Pakistan	43,110,000
DR Congo	40,207,000



## | FINDING DURABLE SOLUTIONS |

**T**HE UN REFUGEE AGENCY'S MANDATE ALSO INCLUDES ACTIVELY looking for solutions to refugees' plight. Three main options exist:

**Voluntary repatriation** is the preferred long-term solution for the majority of refugees. Most refugees prefer to return home as soon as circumstances permit (generally when a conflict has ended), and a degree of stability has been restored. UNHCR encourages voluntary repatriation as the best solution for displaced people, providing it is safe and their reintegration is viable. The agency often provides transportation and a start-up package which may include cash grants, income-generation projects and practical assistance such as farm tools and seeds.

### TOP 5 REPATRIATIONS IN 2006

COUNTRY	RETURNEES
Afghanistan	388,000
Liberia	108,000
Burundi	48,000
Angola	47,000
Sudan	42,000

Sometimes, along with its many NGO partners, it extends this help to include the rebuilding of individual homes, as well as communal infrastructure such as schools and clinics, roads,

**Angolan refugees cross the Zambezi river on their way home.** The 27-year civil war devastated the country's roads and bridges.

bridges and wells. Such projects are often designed to help IDPs as well as returning refugees – while also benefiting other impoverished people in the area who may never have moved anywhere. Field staff monitor the well-being of returnees in delicate situations. Longer term development assistance is provided by other organizations.

In all, some 734,000 refugees repatriated voluntarily to 57 countries during 2006. Globally, an estimated 11.6 million refugees have returned home over the past 10 years, 63 per cent of them with UNHCR assistance.

## Local integration and resettlement

**S**OME REFUGEES CANNOT GO HOME OR ARE UNWILLING to do so, usually because they would face continued persecution. In such circumstances, UNHCR helps to find them new homes, either in the asylum country where they are living (and in an increasingly crowded world, relatively few countries are prepared to offer this option), or in third countries where they can be permanently resettled.

**A UNHCR-funded irrigation project** has made it possible for these Afghan returnees to grow food on the arid land around their village.

## TOP 5 COUNTRIES OF RESETTLEMENT, 2006

COUNTRY	REFUGEES
United States <sup>1</sup>	41,300
Australia	13,400
Canada	10,700
Sweden	2,400
Norway	1,000

<sup>1</sup> US fiscal year.





UNHCR / J. REDDEN / NYF-2007

**A young Congolese refugee in Malawi prepares for the scheduled resettlement of his family to Denmark.**

Only a small number of nations take part in UNHCR resettlement programmes and accept quotas of refugees on an annual basis. In 2006, for example, some 71,700 people were resettled in 15 countries – 27,700 of them with UNHCR assistance, the rest directly by the resettlement countries.

### Who benefits from resettlement?

**P**EOPLE FACING PARTICULAR PROBLEMS OR CONTINUED threats to their safety in their first asylum countries are foremost among those who can benefit from resettlement. In some cases it is an essential life-saving option – or the only way to save a particular refugee from having to resort to desperate measures (one unfortunately common example is the rape victim who has been rejected by her family and society, and has nowhere else to turn). Some very specific refugee populations are also on occasion beneficiaries of group resettlement programmes.

In 2006, refugees from Myanmar were the largest group to benefit from resettlement with 5,700 being transported to a new life outside their first asylum countries, followed by Somalis (5,200), Sudanese (2,900), refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (2,000), and Afghans (1,900).



## SOME FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT REFUGEES

### ■ What rights and obligations does a refugee have?

A refugee has the right to seek asylum. However, international protection involves more than just physical safety: refugees should receive at least the same basic rights and help as any other foreigner who is a legal resident, including freedom of thought, of movement and freedom from torture and degrading treatment. They should also benefit from the same fundamental economic and social rights. In return, refugees are required to respect the laws and regulations of their country of asylum.

### ■ What's the difference between an asylum seeker and a refugee?

When people flee their own country and seek sanctuary in another state, they often have to officially apply for asylum. While their case is still being decided, they are known as asylum seekers. If asylum is granted, it means they have been recognized as refugees in need of international protection.

### ■ What happens when governments can't or won't provide help?

In certain circumstances, when adequate government resources are not available (for example after the sudden arrival of large numbers of uprooted people),

UNHCR and other international organizations provide assistance such as food, tools and shelter, schools and clinics.

### ■ Are people fleeing war zones refugees?

The 1951 Convention does not specifically address the issue of civilians fleeing conflict, unless they fall within a particular group being persecuted within the context of the conflict. However, UNHCR's long-held position is that people fleeing conflicts should be more generally considered refugees, if their own state is unwilling or unable to protect them. Regional instruments, such as the 1969 Organization of African Unity Convention on refugees and the Cartagena Declaration in Latin America, explicitly support this stance.



UNHCR/NI NDOLBE/ICD-2016

An increasing number of security incidents have plagued relief operations in recent years.



### ■ Can governments deport people who are found not to be refugees?

People who have been determined, under a fair procedure, not to be in need of international protection are in a situation similar to that of illegal aliens, and may be deported. However, UNHCR advocates that a fair procedure has to include the right to a review before they are deported, since the consequences of a faulty decision may be disastrous for the individuals concerned.

### ■ Can a war criminal or terrorist be a refugee?

No. People who have participated in war crimes and violations of international humanitarian and human rights law – including acts of terrorism – are specifically excluded from the protection accorded to refugees.

### ■ Can a soldier be a refugee?

Only civilians can be refugees. A person who continues to pursue armed action from the country of asylum cannot be considered a refugee. However, soldiers or fighters who have laid down their arms may subsequently be granted refugee status, providing they are not excludable for other reasons.

### ■ Do all refugees have to go through an asylum determination process?

In many countries, people who apply for refugee status have to establish individually that their fear of persecution is well-founded. However, during major exoduses involving tens or even hundreds of thousands of people, individual screening may be impossible. In such circumstances, the entire group may be granted 'prima facie' refugee status.



**UNHCR has launched projects to improve conditions for refugees** from Georgia living in dilapidated collective centres in the Russian Federation.

## ■ What is 'temporary protection?'

Nations sometimes offer 'temporary protection' when their regular asylum systems risk being overwhelmed by a sudden mass influx of people, as happened during the 1990s conflicts in the former Yugoslavia. In such circumstances people can be rapidly admitted to safe countries, but without any guarantee of permanent asylum. Temporary protection can work to the advantage of both governments and

asylum seekers in specific circumstances. But it only complements – and does not substitute for – the wider protection measures, including formal refugee status, offered by the 1951 Convention. UNHCR advocates that, after a reasonable period of time has passed, people benefiting from temporary protection who are still unable to return home should be given the right to claim full refugee status.

### For more information...

*On the 1951 Refugee Convention and on IDPs: there are additional brochures in this series dedicated to these specific subjects. The issue of statelessness is examined in depth in a special issue of REFUGEEES magazine (No. 147 'The Excluded'). All three publications are available from UNHCR offices, or can be downloaded from the **Publications** page at [www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org)*



**A US Air Force C-130 disgorges its cargo of UNHCR supplies** after massive floods hit Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya.



## How big is UNHCR, and how does it function?

**T**ODAY, UNHCR IS ONE OF THE WORLD'S PRINCIPAL HUMANITARIAN agencies, with some 6,200 employees working out of 278 offices in 111 countries. During over half a century of work, the agency has provided assistance to well over 50 million people, earning two Nobel Peace Prizes in 1954 and 1981.

António Guterres, who became the 10th High Commissioner in June 2005, reports verbally to the Economic and Social Council on coordination aspects of the work of the agency, and submits a written report annually to the General Assembly on the overall work of UNHCR.

UNHCR's programmes and guidelines are approved by an Executive Committee of 76 member states which meets annually in Geneva. A second 'working group' or Standing Committee meets several times a year.

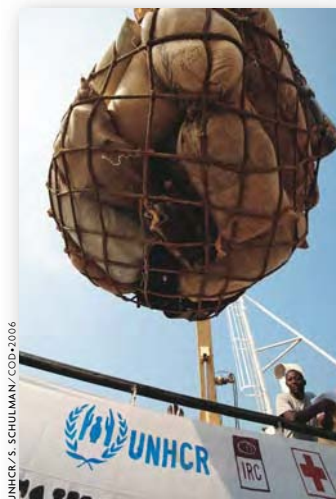
**Iraqi refugee children at a school in Syria.** Lack of education is a huge problem for the 4 million Iraqi refugees and displaced people in the Middle East.



## Where does its money come from?

**U**NHCR IS FUNDED ALMOST entirely by voluntary contributions, principally from governments but also from intergovernmental organizations, corporations and individuals. It receives a limited subsidy of just over three percent of its funding from the United Nations regular budget for administrative costs, and accepts ‘in-kind’ contributions including relief items such as tents, medicines, trucks and air transport.

As the number of people of concern to UNHCR increased, its annual budget rose to more than US\$1 billion in the early 1990s and has stayed at similar levels ever since. UNHCR’s Annual Programme Budget includes general programmes – supporting ongoing, regular operations – and special programmes used to cover emergencies or large-scale repatriation operations (for example the remorselessly expanding Iraqi displacement, and the return and reintegration of Congolese and Sudanese refugees and IDPs).



UNHCR/S. SCHULMAN/CORBIS/2006

**Many UNHCR operations and projects** are carried out jointly with other agencies, including the Red Cross movement and NGOs.

## What other organizations help refugees?

**A**S HUMANITARIAN CRISES HAVE BECOME MORE COMPLEX, UNHCR has expanded both the number and type of organizations it works with. United Nations sister agencies include the World Food Program (WFP), the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO), the UN Development Program (UNDP), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

Other organizations include the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and some 650 non-governmental organizations.

## General

- Asia hosted around **45% of all the people of concern to UNHCR** [15 million], followed by **Africa** with 9.7 million [30%], **Latin America** with 3.5 million [10%], **Europe** with 3.4 million [10%], **North America** with 1.1 million [3.5%] and **Oceania** with 85,500 [0.2%].

- At the beginning of 2007, the **number of people** of concern to UNHCR was a record **32.9 million**.

They included:

- 9.9 million refugees .....30%
- 12.8 million internally displaced people .....39%
- 5.8 million stateless people .....17%
- 2.6 million returned refugees and IDPs .....8%
- 740,000 asylum seekers .....2%
- 1,000,000 'others of concern' to UNHCR.

- The figure of **32.9 million** represents a **56 percent increase** compared to the previous year, which results from three main developments: **new displacements**, a doubling in the number of **internally displaced persons** as a result of UNHCR's more systematic involvement with IDPs under the UN's new 'cluster approach,' and better statistical data on **stateless people**.

## Refugees

- For the first time in 5 years, the global refugee population – UNHCR's 'core constituency' – **increased**, from **8.7 million to 9.9 million**, principally because of the growth of the Iraqi refugee population in neighbouring countries to an estimated 1.2 million (a number that had climbed to well over 2 million by September 2007).

- Some **734,000 refugees repatriated** in 2006, a third fewer than the total for the previous year. Around 362,500 of them benefited from UNHCR assistance.

- In addition to Iraq, in 2006 there were significant new outflows of refugees from the **Central African Republic** [31,000], **Chad** [20,000], **Sri Lanka** [16,600], **Sudan** [14,400], and **Somalia** [13,600].

- Afghanistan remained the top refugee-producing country, however, with **2.1 million Afghan refugees** still spread over more than 70 asylum countries (20% of the entire global refugee population).

## Asylum seekers

- During 2006, a total of **596,000 individuals applied for asylum worldwide**, including 299,000 in Europe. At the beginning of 2007, there was a total of **740,000 asylum seekers** whose claims were still pending (a figure that includes unresolved cases from earlier years).

- The number of new claims was **11 percent down** on the previous year, continuing a trend that began in 2002. **Somalis** submitted the largest number of new individual asylum claims [45,600], followed by **Iraqis** [34,200], **Zimbabweans** [22,200], **Eritreans** [19,400], **Chinese** [19,300] and **Rwandans** [19,200]. In all, 196,000 asylum seekers were granted refugee status or a similar sort of protection status during 2006.

- **South Africa** received more asylum seekers than any other country, with **53,400** new asylum claims, followed by the **United States** [50,800], **Kenya** [37,300], **France** [30,800], the **United Kingdom** [27,800], **Sweden** [24,300] and **Canada** [22,900].

\* Figures do not include some 4.4 million Palestinian refugees cared for under a separate mandate by UNRWA in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

## ■ Internally displaced

- At the beginning of 2007, the total number of **conflict-related IDPs worldwide was estimated at 24.5 million**, out of which 12.8 million received some protection or assistance from UNHCR during 2006 (compared to 6.6 million the previous year).

## ■ Stateless

- As a result of a 2003 survey, a more comprehensive view of the scale and complexity of statelessness around the world has been emerging. By 2006, **the number of stateless people identified had more than doubled to 5.8 million**. However, **the real total is believed to be nearer 15 million**.

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**A young  
Palestinian refugee  
marooned for  
months in no-man's  
land between Iraq  
and Syria.**

Back cover:  
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in a remote part of  
Panama.**

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