

ACTVITIES OF THE OFFICE OF UNHCR

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

A. POLICY AND COORDINATION

In a recent report by the High Commissioner to the General Assembly on *Strengthening the Capacity of the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees to Carry out its Mandate*¹, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)'s policy on asylum and migration has been outlined. This policy is tied in with UNHCR's long-term protection objectives as they were expressed in the 2002 Agenda for Protection². While a clear distinction between voluntary and forced migration should continue to be made, the problems of refugees and asylum-seekers will need to be addressed within the wider context of international migration. The report emphasizes the importance of building efficient asylum systems as well as UNHCR's role in supporting states to strengthen protection capacities and to promote durable solutions.

UNHCR has developed a strategic alliance with IOM through the Action Group on Asylum and Migration (AGAMI). Since November 2001, there have been five of these meetings. Issues discussed have included regional conferences, statistics and other matters.

Since 2003, a Geneva-based consultative mechanism on migration has been initiated: the Geneva Migration Group (GMG). In addition to UNHCR, the GMG includes IOM, ILO, OHCHR and UNODC. It is also envisaged that UNFPA and UN/DESA might be included in these discussions.

In view of the importance the High Commissioner gives to issues relating to the asylum/migration nexus, he has asked relevant UNHCR staff in Geneva to ensure effective internal information sharing. This group meets regularly to share information and to exchange views.

B. REGIONAL ACTIVITIES

Through its Regional Bureaux, UNHCR continues to support and contribute to asylum and migration meetings and processes in different regions of the world. In the Asia region, for instance, UNHCR remains actively engaged in the Bali II follow-up process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime. The High Commissioner for Refugees addressed the last regional ministerial conference, which took place on 29-30 April 2003 in Bali, Indonesia. As part of the Bali II work plan, UNHCR is contributing in the search for solutions to the challenges posed by population movements in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly as they relate to, and influence, the situation of asylum-seekers and refugees. Capacity-building seminars and workshops on asylum issues are taking place on a regular basis throughout the region for government officials and staff from concerned agencies.

C. STATISTICS AND DATA COLLECTION

UNHCR continues to strive to implement the responsibilities assigned to the Office in the area of refugee statistics³. Work to enhance the availability, quality and reliability of statistics on refugees, asylum-seekers and other persons of concern to UNHCR culminated in the publication of the first Statistical Yearbook in October 2002⁴. The Yearbook provides a wealth of data on refugee stocks, flows and characteristics over the past 10 to 20 years. It documents trends in inflows, protection and solutions in more than 150 countries. It also details

¹ Document A/AC/96/980 dated 20 August 2003.

² Document A/AC.96/965/Add. 1 dated 26 June 2002.

³ See Article 35 of the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

⁴ UNHCR Statistical Yearbook 2001. Refugees, Asylum-Seekers, and Other Persons of Concern - Trends in Displacement, Protection and Solutions, UNHCR Geneva, October 2002.

asylum flows, refugee status determination and refugee resettlement in industrialized countries. Where possible, data are broken down by sex and age. Definitions and methodological considerations are also being discussed. One of the main aims of the book is to contribute to informed policy making and public debate in the area of forced migration, asylum and burden sharing.

Recent areas of increased statistical work include establishing credible statistical data at the camp level and measuring the quality of operations through indicators. In 2004, the Office will introduce a global strategy to measure and collect operational indicators. This information will assist UNHCR not only in monitoring and improving its refugee protection and assistance programmes, but also in reporting on the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for populations of its concern.

Because the origin of refugees and asylum-seekers is generally well documented, the data are very useful for country or origin analysis and identifying the size and basic characteristics of 'diaspora' who left their country for refugee related reasons.

UNHCR continues to analyze monthly asylum trends in industrialized countries by detailed origin. Currently, the system covers 29 countries.

The Office is actively engaged in implementing the revised *UN Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration, Revision 1*, particularly where it concerns statistics on asylum. At the national level, UNHCR offices work continuously with Governments to obtain reliable and comparable statistics. International activities, such as the activities of the European Union to strengthen asylum and migration statistics, are also supported.

Refugee registration remains a priority of the High Commissioner⁵. In September 2003, the Office issued a handbook for registration with procedures and standards for registration, documentation and data management⁶. In addition, the Office continues to support refugee registration through missions, direct support to operations and the development of new tools. It is expected that major new software systems will be deployed to field operations starting in the second semester of 2004.

⁵ See also document A/AC.96/980, page 5.

⁶ UNHCR Handbook for Registration: Procedures and Standards for Registration, Population Data Management and Documentation, UNHCR Geneva, September 2003 (provisional release).