In 2008, there were 34.4 million people of concern to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), including 10.5 million refugees. The number of identified stateless persons stood at 6.6 million and the number of stateless persons worldwide was estimated at 12 million. The number of people displaced remained high, at an estimated 26 million, with 14.4 million benefiting from UNHCR protection assistance. The latter figure constituted an increase of more than 600,000 compared to the previous year. More than 1.3 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) were able to go back to their places of origin, and more than 600,000 refugees were able to return to their homes.

During the year, UNHCR exercised its protection mandate more effectively in relation to statelessness, and progress was made in that area, with encouraging developments taking place in countries as diverse as Bangladesh, Ukraine and the United Arab Emirates. UNHCR helped more than 150,000 refugees in Central Africa and the Great Lake region find a durable solution through voluntary repatriation and reintegration in their home countries, including 40,000 refugees who repatriated to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), 95,000 to Burundi and some 8,600 to Rwanda. UNHCR provided international protection and material assistance to some 676,000 refugees, of whom 68,300 were Congolese in camps in Burundi, Rwanda and the United Republic of Tanzania.

The Office also protected and assisted 2,700 Burundians in Rwanda, 112,000 Angolans in the DRC, more than 8,500 refugees from Chad, the Sudan and the DRC in the Central African Republic (CAR) and some 81,000 refugees in Cameroon, of whom almost 63,000 were from the CAR. UNHCR led the efforts of the protection cluster to improve the safety and security of IDPs in the CAR and the DRC.

The volatile situations in Afghanistan and Pakistan, ongoing conflicts in the Darfur region of the Sudan and Colombia, and violence in Georgia, the DRC and Somalia continued to generate forced movements within and across borders. The continued conflict in Somalia caused massive displacement of populations, and the IDP population rose from 450,000 to approximately 1.1 million people. Clashes in Ethiopia’s Ogaden region triggered the internal displacement of thousands of Ethiopians; there were some 200,000 conflict-induced IDPs, living mainly in Somali, Oromiya, Gambella and Tigray regional states. In Kenya, post-election violence that erupted in late 2007 led to the displacement of between 350,000 and 500,000 people to camps and host communities, especially in the Rift Valley.

Fighting between Government forces and irregular armed groups severely affected civilians in the north of the CAR, and the number of IDPs rose to 197,000. The total number of Central African refugees stood at 104,000. The situation in eastern Chad worsened markedly along the volatile border with Darfur. Cross-border movements of armed groups, militia clashes, acts of banditry and general impunity affected the safety and security of 250,000 refugees from Darfur, 186,000 Chadian IDPs and the host communities. South Africa was hit by a wave of unprecedented xenophobic violence targeting Zimbabweans and other foreign nationals, which displaced up to 100,000 people.

Despite States’ obligations to extend cooperation under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees [YUN 1951, p. 520], the Office was often denied access to detention centres to determine international protection needs. UNHCR also continued to face challenges in all aspects of beneficiary and staff safety.

In October, the Executive Committee adopted general conclusions on international protection, which called upon States to scrupulously respect the principle of non-refoulement. It also called on States to take steps to prevent acts of violence against refugees and other persons of concern.

In January, the African Union (AU) Executive Council adopted two decisions on the situation of refugees, returnees and IDPs in Africa. The Council called upon the international community to redouble its assistance to victims of forced displacement in Africa.

In December, the General Assembly adopted resolution 63/149 on assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa. The Assembly emphasized that States had the primary responsibility for the protection of, and assistance to, refugees on their territory. The Assembly also emphasized the need to redouble efforts to develop and implement comprehensive durable solution strategies, in cooperation with the international community.
Office of the United Nations
High Commissioner for Refugees

Programme policy

Executive Committee action. At its fifty-ninth session (Geneva, 6–10 October) [A/63/12/Add.1], the Executive Committee of the UNHCR Programme, in a conclusion on international protection, called upon States to scrupulously respect the principle of non-refoulement; to take steps to prevent acts of violence against refugees and other persons of concern; to facilitate their access without discrimination to effective legal remedies; to safeguard their physical safety; to strengthen justice systems; and to bring perpetrators of such violence to justice. The Committee commended UNHCR for pursuing its age, gender and diversity mainstreaming approach aimed at ensuring gender equality and equal enjoyment of rights, regardless of age, gender or background.

In other actions, the Committee adopted a conclusion on international protection, as well as decisions on programme budgets and funding, on the UNHCR programme in the UN proposed strategic framework for the 2010–2011 biennium and on administrative, financial and programme matters.

In his opening statement to the Committee [A/AC.96/SR.618], the High Commissioner said that adverse economic trends, financial turmoil and the unforeseen consequences of globalization and climate change had increased the number of people on the move in search of security and opportunities. Likewise, rapid population growth, urbanization, lack of employment and rising prices had created tensions, which were compounded by conflicts that increasingly involved competition over scarce resources. The result was that the number of refugees and IDPs worldwide was rising, especially in urban areas. Those trends, which generated an increasing number of emergency deployments, had important implications for UNHCR and its capacity and resources. He noted that spending from the operational reserve in 2008 would be almost double what it was in 2007 and global expenditure in 2008 was set to increase by around 50 per cent over 2006. In a drive to base its planning on beneficiaries’ rights and needs, and mainstream that approach in all its operations, UNHCR launched the Global Needs Assessment process in eight countries. Efficiency savings released additional resources for field operations, which made a real difference to beneficiaries. In 2008, savings of $7 million were freed up for new projects to address critical water and sanitation problems and high levels of anaemia among women and children in refugee camps. UNHCR approved an additional $13.25 million for a water and sanitation project covering 16 countries, and the Budget Committee was deciding on an anaemia reduction programme. The Office had also taken further steps to strengthen field operations. The High Commissioner noted that the new budget structure and resource allocation framework demonstrated the commitment of UNHCR to achieving results. In that regard, the Global Needs Assessment and the Global Accountability Framework would lay the foundations for a results-based management system. The field review had made good progress, and new policies would be introduced on expanding the use of national officers, improving work with implementing partners and attracting more senior staff to deep field locations. Moreover, comprehensive and much-needed reforms in human resources were under way, in close consultation with the Staff Council, with a new emphasis on training that would be supported by the establishment of a learning centre in Budapest.

Regarding a learning centre, UNHCR had drawn up a list of five priority issues, including refugee protection in the context of international migration and mixed population movements. It continued to work with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to implement the 10-Point Plan of Action on Refugee Protection and International Migration [YUN 2006, p. 1386], while promoting improvements in asylum legislation and procedures. The High Commissioner noted that UNHCR had just completed a global evaluation of its work to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence, and that it intended to establish a concerted strategy for the protection of women and girls. Some progress had been made in protecting stateless persons, and UNHCR had strengthened its commitment to protecting IDPs in the framework of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement [YUN 1998, p. 675]. The preparation of an African Union convention on IDPs was viewed as an encouraging development in that regard.

The High Commissioner said that in 2007, with support from UNHCR, some 700,000 refugees and 2 million IDPs had voluntarily returned home in safety. Local initiatives in the United Republic of Tanzania, Latin America and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) region had provided refugees with access to the labour market and education and fostered positive relationships with host communities, thus contributing to their successful reintegration upon return.

UNHCR was also engaged in advocacy to promote sustainable reintegration with States, institutional partners and UN agencies through the Delivering as one initiative [YUN 2006, p. 1060]. He noted UNHCR’s strong commitment to the initiative, which it saw as a key opportunity to engage the entire UN system in finding durable solutions for the challenges included in its mandate. However, while good results
had been achieved in the past year, UNHCR did not have the resources or capacity to provide all the essential elements of successful reintegration. The Office had recently evaluated its reintegration operations in Angola and Southern Sudan and had adopted a new reintegration policy, emphasizing the strategic role of UNHCR, the importance of partnerships and the need to build on the capacities of returnees and to support Governments in reassuming their responsibilities towards their citizens. The policy also stressed the need for return and reintegration to be built into national recovery strategies, development frameworks and peacebuilding processes.

The High Commissioner was encouraged by the progress made in strengthening humanitarian financing. The Central Emergency Response Fund had already provided valuable support to a number of UNHCR operations, although the experience with country-level pooled funds had been more mixed. UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations encountered complex dilemmas when engaging with integrated UN missions. While UNHCR recognized the important role of those missions and continued to work closely with them, particularly in the context of return and reintegration, it was also aware of the importance of preserving the autonomy of the humanitarian space and safeguarding the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence, particularly in countries where a durable peace settlement had yet to be reached. UNHCR was determined to establish a full strategic partnership with its sister UN agencies, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and the NGO community. The Office’s cooperation with the World Food Programme (WFP) had helped avert disaster for many of its beneficiaries during recent food crises, and UNHCR had some 650 NGO partners through which it was channeling increasingly significant levels of expenditure.

The High Commissioner highlighted concerns, including about 2009 funding, which was insufficient to meet the global needs of beneficiaries and cope with growing demands. He also called for a systematic debate on the international response to the growing scale of forced displacement, in which the following questions would be addressed: what impact would climate change and other adverse trends have on forced displacement; and could the international community address those challenges with the current legal and normative framework, or would it be necessary to develop new standards and instruments. He concluded by saying that those questions formed the basis of an important and necessary debate, and called on Member States to assume leadership. Only by thinking and acting together, said the High Commissioner, would it be possible to preserve the rights of the people who fell under the UNHCR mandate.

**General Assembly Action**

On 18 December [meeting 70], the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the Third (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) Committee [A/63/423], adopted resolution 63/148 without vote [agenda item 39].

**Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees**

The General Assembly,

Having considered the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on the activities of his Office and the report of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on the work of its fifty-ninth session and the conclusions and decisions contained therein,

Recalling its previous annual resolutions on the work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees since its establishment by the General Assembly,

Expressing its appreciation for the leadership shown by the High Commissioner, commending the staff and implementing partners of the Office of the High Commissioner for the competent, courageous and dedicated manner in which they discharge their responsibilities, and underlining its strong condemnation of all forms of violence to which humanitarian personnel and United Nations and associated personnel are increasingly exposed,

1. Endorses the report of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on the work of its fifty-ninth session;

2. Welcomes the important work undertaken by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and its Executive Committee in the course of the year, which is aimed at strengthening the international protection regime and at assisting Governments in meeting their protection responsibilities;

3. Notes with appreciation the important guidance provided in the Executive Committee general conclusion on international protection;

4. Reaffirms the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol thereto as the foundation of the international refugee protection regime, recognizes the importance of their full and effective application by States parties and the values they embody, notes with satisfaction that one hundred and forty-seven States are now parties to one instrument or to both, encourages States not parties to consider acceding to those instruments, underlines, in particular, the importance of full respect for the principle of non-refoulement, and recognizes that a number of States not parties to the international refugee instruments have shown a generous approach to hosting refugees;

5. Notes that sixty-three States are now parties to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and that thirty-five States are parties to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, encourages States that have not done so to give consideration to acceding to those instruments, notes the work of the High Commissioner in regard to identifying stateless persons, preventing and reducing statelessness and protecting stateless persons, and urges the Office of the High Commissioner to continue
6. Re-emphasizes that the protection of refugees is primarily the responsibility of States, whose full and effective cooperation, action and political resolve are required to enable the Office of the High Commissioner to fulfill its mandated functions, and strongly emphasizes, in this context, the importance of active international solidarity and burden- and responsibility-sharing;

7. Also re-emphasizes that prevention and reduction of statelessness are primarily the responsibility of States, in appropriate cooperation with the international community;

8. Further re-emphasizes that protection of and assistance to internally displaced persons are primarily the responsibility of States, in appropriate cooperation with the international community;

9. Takes note of the current activities of the Office of the High Commissioner related to protection of and assistance to internally displaced persons, including in the context of inter-agency arrangements in this field, emphasizes that such activities should be consistent with relevant General Assembly resolutions and should not undermine the mandate of the Office for refugees and the institution of asylum, and encourages the High Commissioner to continue his dialogue with States on the role of his Office in this regard;

10. Notes with appreciation the process of structural and management change being undertaken by the Office of the High Commissioner, and encourages the Office to continue its pursuit of reforms, including the implementation of a results-based management framework and strategy, that would enable it to respond adequately and in a more efficient manner to the needs of its beneficiaries and ensure effective and transparent use of its resources;

11. Encourages the Office of the High Commissioner to pursue its efforts to strengthen its capacity to respond adequately to emergencies and thereby ensure a more predictable response to inter-agency commitments in case of emergency;

12. Strongly condemns attacks on refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced persons as well as acts that pose a threat to their personal security and well-being, and calls upon all concerned States and, where applicable, parties involved in an armed conflict to take all necessary measures to ensure respect for human rights and international humanitarian law;

13. Deplores the refoulement and unlawful expulsion of refugees and asylum-seekers, and calls upon all concerned States to ensure respect for the relevant principles of refugee protection and human rights;

14. Emphasizes that international protection of refugees is a dynamic and action-oriented function that is at the core of the mandate of the Office of the High Commissioner and that it includes, in cooperation with States and other partners, the promotion and facilitation of, inter alia, the admission, reception and treatment of refugees in accordance with internationally agreed standards and the ensuring of durable, protection-oriented solutions, bearing in mind the particular needs of vulnerable groups and paying special attention to those with specific needs, and notes in this context that the delivery of international protection is a staff-intensive service that requires adequate staff with the appropriate expertise, especially at the field level;

15. Affirms the importance of age, gender and diversity mainstreaming in analysing protection needs and in ensuring the participation of refugees and other persons of concern to the Office of the High Commissioner, as appropriate, in the planning and implementation of programmes of the Office and State policies, and also affirms the importance of according priority to addressing discrimination, gender inequality and the problem of sexual and gender-based violence, recognizing the importance of addressing the protection needs of women and children in particular;

16. Strongly reaffirms the fundamental importance and the purely humanitarian and non-political character of the function of the Office of the High Commissioner of providing international protection to refugees and seeking permanent solutions to refugee problems, and recalls that those solutions include voluntary repatriation and, where appropriate and feasible, local integration and resettlement in a third country, while reaffirming that voluntary repatriation, supported, as necessary, by rehabilitation and development assistance to facilitate sustainable reintegration, remains the preferred solution;

17. Expresses concern about the particular difficulties faced by the millions of refugees in protracted situations, and emphasizes the need to redouble international efforts and cooperation to find practical and comprehensive approaches to resolving their plight and to realize durable solutions for them, consistent with international law and relevant General Assembly resolutions;

18. Recognizes the importance of achieving durable solutions to refugee problems and, in particular, the need to address in this process the root causes of refugee movements in order to avert new flows of refugees;

19. Recalls the important role of effective partnerships and coordination in meeting the needs of refugees and in finding durable solutions to their situations, welcomes the efforts under way, in cooperation with countries hosting refugees and countries of origin, including their respective local communities, relevant United Nations agencies, international and intergovernmental organizations, regional organizations, as appropriate, non-governmental organizations and development actors, to promote a framework for durable solutions, particularly in protracted refugee situations, which includes an approach to sustainable and timely return which encompasses repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction activities, and encourages States, in cooperation with relevant United Nations agencies, international and intergovernmental organizations, regional organizations, non-governmental organizations and development actors, to support, inter alia, through the allocation of funds, the implementation of such a framework to facilitate an effective transition from relief to development;

20. Recognizes that no solution to displacement can be durable unless it is sustainable, and therefore encourages the Office of the High Commissioner to support the sustainability of return and reintegration;

21. Welcomes the progress that has been achieved in increasing the number of refugees resettled and the number of States offering opportunities for resettlement, and the contribution that those States make to durable solutions to refugees, and invites interested States, the Office of the High Commissioner and other relevant partners to make
use of the Multilateral Framework of Understandings on Resettlement, where appropriate and feasible;

22. Notes the progress that is being made by interested States and the Office of the High Commissioner to take forward elements outlined in the Mexico Plan of Action to Strengthen International Protection of Refugees in Latin America, adopted on 16 November 2004, and expresses its support for the efforts to promote its implementation with the cooperation and assistance of the international community, as appropriate, as well as by supporting host communities that receive large numbers of persons who require international protection;

23. Also notes that some progress is being made by interested States and the Office of the High Commissioner within the context of the European-Asian Programme on Forced Displacement and Migration on issues related to asylum and forced displacement, consistent with the mandate of the Office;

24. Further notes the importance of States and the Office of the High Commissioner discussing and clarifying the role of the Office in mixed migratory flows, in order to better address protection needs in the context of mixed migratory flows, including by safeguarding access to asylum for those in need of international protection, and notes the readiness of the High Commissioner, consistent with his mandate, to assist States in fulfilling their protection responsibilities in this regard;

25. Emphasizes the obligation of all States to accept the return of their nationals, calls upon States to facilitate the return of their nationals who have been determined not to be in need of international protection, and affirms the need for the return of persons to be undertaken in a safe and humane manner and with full respect for their human rights and dignity, irrespective of the status of the persons concerned;

26. Notes the important number of displaced in and from Iraq and its serious impact on the social and economic situation of countries in the region, and calls upon the international community to act in a targeted and coordinated manner to provide protection and increased assistance to the persons displaced to enable the countries in the region to strengthen their capacity to respond to the needs in partnership with the Office of the High Commissioner, other United Nations agencies, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and non-governmental organizations;

27. Urges all States and relevant non-governmental and other organizations, in conjunction with the Office of the High Commissioner, in a spirit of international solidarity and burden- and responsibility-sharing, to cooperate and to mobilize resources with a view to enhancing the capacity of and reducing the heavy burden borne by host countries, in particular those that have received large numbers of refugees and asylum-seekers, and calls upon the Office to continue to play its catalytic role in mobilizing assistance from the international community to address the root causes as well as the economic, environmental and social impact of large-scale refugee populations in developing countries, in particular the least developed countries, and countries with economies in transition;

28. Calls upon the Office of the High Commissioner to further explore ways and means to broaden its donor base, so as to achieve greater burden-sharing by reinforcing cooperation with governmental donors, non-governmental donors and the private sector;

29. Recognizes that adequate and timely resources are essential for the Office of the High Commissioner to continue to fulfill the mandate conferred upon it through its statute and by subsequent General Assembly resolutions on refugees and other persons of concern, recalls its resolutions 58/153 of 22 December 2003, 58/270 of 23 December 2003, 59/170 of 20 December 2004, 60/129 of 16 December 2005, 61/137 of 19 December 2006 and 62/124 of 18 December 2007 concerning, inter alia, the implementation of paragraph 20 of the statute of the Office, and urges Governments and other donors to respond promptly to annual and supplementary appeals issued by the Office for requirements under its programmes;

30. Requests the High Commissioner to report on his activities to the General Assembly at its sixty-fourth session.

**Strengthening UNHCR**

**Oral report of UNHCR.** In response to General Assembly resolution 58/153 [YUN 2003, p. 1226] on strengthening UNHCR capacity to carry out its mandate, a UNHCR representative on 24 July provided an oral report to the Economic and Social Council [E/2008/SR.42]. In the framework of the “Delivering as one” initiative [YUN 2006, p. 1060], UNHCR was involved in five pilot countries—Albania, Mozambique, Pakistan, Rwanda and the United Republic of Tanzania—and supported the goal of coherence in country-level policy development and implementation.

The representative said that under its revised policy framework and implementation strategy for reintegration, UNHCR was committed to establishing early, strategic cooperation with key partners and to situating its reintegration interventions in the context of mid- and longer-term development frameworks developed under national leadership. It was also working with other UN entities to address the humanitarian consequences of climate change. It supported the work of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and the High Level Committees on Management and Programmes (HLCP) within the mechanisms established by the Secretary-General and was considering the impact of climate change on human displacement and UNHCR operations. In support of the campaign for the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, its June 2008 annual consultations with NGOs had taken place under the theme of human rights.

Non-United Nations organizations with which UNHCR worked included the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).
On 25 July, the Economic and Social Council took note of the UNHCR oral report (decision 2008/256).

Coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance

In 2008 [A/64/12], UNHCR continued to participate in initiatives to reform the UN system and improve the global humanitarian response capacity, particularly in the area of inter-agency cooperation. It strengthened its strategic partnerships with a wide variety of actors, including governments, the European Commission, UN agencies, international and regional organizations, and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent movement. The Office also bolstered collaboration with NGOs, academic institutions, financial institutions, bilateral donor agencies, corporations, and individuals from the private sector. In the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, UNHCR contributed to formulating policies on humanitarian reform, managing the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), and redefining and improving the humanitarian coordinator system. UNHCR was fully engaged in the cluster approach—a humanitarian coordination structure aimed at enhancing the predictability and accountability of humanitarian response—and prioritized its cluster-led responsibilities both at the global and field levels, in the areas of protection, emergency shelter, and camp coordination and management. Significant emphasis was placed on the issue of humanitarian space, and access to beneficiaries in particular.

As bilateral relations with a large number of agencies remained a key feature of implementation of the UNHCR mandate, the Office continued to work closely with WFP to include people of concern in food assistance programmes. In 2008, some 30 countries received WFP food assistance. Other UN system entities that UNHCR collaborated with included the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). In 2008, one fourth of UNHCR’s budget was channelled through 635 NGOs—163 international and 472 national—which remained the Office’s largest group of partners.

Evaluation activities

In a July report [A/AC.96/1058], UNHCR described the activities of its Policy Development and Evaluation Service (PDES), which focused on issues and operations that were of particular interest to UNHCR and the Executive Committee. At the same time, the Service made continued efforts to strengthen and integrate the policy development and evaluation functions; ensured the effective dissemination and utilization of evaluation findings and recommendations; and promoted the principles of transparency and accountability within the Office. In that context, the High Commission requested PDES to lead UNHCR’s involvement in a peer review on accountability to disaster-affected populations.

The other components of the PDES work programme focused on: refugee protection and international migration; the return and reintegration of displaced populations; protection and solutions for persons of concern to UNHCR; humanitarian and United Nations reform; and strengthening the UNHCR policy development and evaluation function.

On refugee protection and international migration, PDES published a study on international protection for trafficked persons and those who feared being trafficked and initiated an evaluation of UNHCR’s role in relation to human trafficking. The Service completed a review of State practice in relation to the treatment of unaccompanied and separated children in mixed movements and also planned to evaluate UNHCR’s operational role in a number of those movements, focusing initially on the Mediterranean region. Regarding the return and reintegration of displaced populations, PDES continued to work on the reformulation and articulation of UNHCR policy on the issue, in consultation with the Executive Committee. In order to ensure that the policymaking process was empirically well-founded, the Service initiated a series of evaluations of UNHCR return and reintegration programmes, beginning with those in Angola and Southern Sudan. In association with the Division of Operational Support, PDES convened an inter-agency workshop on the use of cash grants in voluntary repatriation programmes. On the protection and solutions for persons of concern to UNHCR, PDES managed an independent evaluation of UNHCR’s role in preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence in situations of human displacement. PDES also published an analysis of UNHCR’s role in the refugee protection regime, focusing on the means and methods that the Office could employ in encouraging States to respect the founding principles of that regime; another PDES study examined the protection of forced migrants in Islamic law. PDES completed an initial study on IDPs in urban areas and was assisting the Division of Protection Services in the finalization of a new UNHCR policy on refugees in urban areas. It also played a central role in the formulation of the High Commissioner’s Initiative on Protracted Refugee Situations, and prepared a Standing Committee paper on the issue. On humanitarian and UN reform, PDES completed a stocktaking of UNHCR’s engagement with the Delivering as one initiative and was reviewing the role and experience of the Office in integrated UN missions. On strength-
Chapter XII: Refugees and displaced persons

Enabling the UNHCR policy development and evaluation function, it continued to represent UNHCR in relation to the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) and the Active Learning Network on Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP). The Service also acted as UNHCR’s focal point for a number of external or inter-agency evaluation initiatives—an Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) review on of external or inter-agency evaluation initiatives—an evaluation of the UN system; and a Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) evaluation of the UNHCR programme for internally displaced persons in Georgia.

Inspections

During 2008 [A/64/12], the UNHCR Inspector General’s Office (IGO) carried out 10 standard inspections, two compliance missions, and two ad hoc inquiries. Three scheduled standard inspections had to be postponed to 2009 due to resource limitations. IGO received 274 complaints and opened 113 investigations into alleged misconduct. The number of investigations represented a 3.5 per cent reduction compared with 2007. In the context of UNHCR’s own reform process, the High Commissioner requested the Anti-Fraud Office of the European Commission (Olaf) to undertake a periodic independent review of IGO during 2008. The Olaf panel presented its findings and recommendations in November, and a Working Group was established to prepare a road map for implementing the report’s recommendations. That implementation had already resulted in improvements in the procedures used by IGO for conducting inspections, investigations and ad hoc inquiries. A report [A/AC.96/1057] on the activities of the Inspector General’s Office was transmitted to the UNHCR Executive Committee in July.

OIOS activities. The UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), which provided the internal audit function for UNHCR, conducted 16 audits in 2008. In August, OIOS submitted to the UNHCR Executive Committee a report [A/AC.96/1056] on its internal audit of UNHCR for the period from 1 July 2007 to 30 June 2008, which focused on areas such as internal control; programme management, including implementing partners; procurement and asset management; human resources management; travel and transportation; and safety and security. OIOS issued 13 audit reports during the period, including 201 recommendations to improve internal controls, governance processes and organizational efficiency and effectiveness.

Enlargement of Executive Committee

On 25 July, the Economic and Social Council, by decision 2008/255, took note of requests from Djibouti [E/2008/63] and Moldova [E/2008/84] for membership in the UNHCR Executive Committee and recommended that the General Assembly take a decision at its sixty-third (2008) session on the question of enlarging the Committee’s membership from 76 to 78 States.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY ACTION

On 18 December (meeting 70), the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the Third Committee (A/63/423), adopted resolution 63/146 without vote (agenda item 39).

Enlargement of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

The General Assembly,
Taking note of Economic and Social Council decision 2008/255 of 25 July 2008 concerning the enlargement of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees,
Taking note also of the requests regarding the enlargement of the Executive Committee contained in the letter dated 29 February 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Djibouti to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the letter dated 30 May 2008 from the Chargé d’affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Moldova to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General,
1. Decides to increase the number of members of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees from seventy-six to seventy-eight States;
2. Requests the Economic and Social Council to elect the additional members at its resumed organizational session for 2009.

Financial and administrative questions

The Executive Committee set the UNHCR initial annual programme budget for 2008 at $919.2 million [A/AC.96/1055]. Total income for 2008 amounted to $1,755 million, comprising $1,070.8 million in contributions, transfers and miscellaneous income (including currency exchange gains) towards the annual programme budget and $565.6 million towards supplementary programmes, $19.6 million for the Junior Professional Officer (JPO) programme and $33.9 million from the regular UN budget. Expenditures totalled $1,628 million, of which Asia and the
Pacific $221.8 million; and the Americas $47.5 million.

In an October decision [A/63/12/Add.1], the Executive Committee approved the revised annual programme budget for 2008, amounting to $1,163.2 million, which, with the provisions for JPOS of $10 million and $577.2 million for supplementary programmes, brought total requirements in 2008 to $1,750.4 million. The Committee authorized the High Commissioner, within those total appropriations, to effect adjustments in regional programmes, global programmes and headquarters budgets.

The Committee approved $1,265.5 million for the 2009 annual programme budget, which included the UN regular budget contribution, an operational reserve of $108.2 million, or 10 per cent of programme activities, $75 million for new or additional mandate-related activities, and $63.5 million for the global needs assessment identified by UNHCR in eight pilot countries. Those provisions, together with $10 million for JPOSs, brought total requirements in 2009 to $1,275.5 million. The Committee authorized the High Commissioner, within those total appropriations, to effect adjustments in regional programmes, global programmes and headquarters budgets. The Committee requested the High Commissioner, within the resources available, to respond flexibly and efficiently to the needs indicated for the 2008–2009 biennial programme budget. The Committee authorized the High Commissioner, in case of additional new emergency needs that could not be fully met from the operational reserve, to create supplementary programmes and issue special appeals.

Accounts (2007)

The audited financial statements of voluntary funds administered by UNHCR for the year ending 31 December 2007 [A/63/5/Add.5] showed a total expenditure of $1,345.8 million and total available funds of $300.8 million, with a reserve balance of $178.1 million.

The UN Board of Auditors coordinated with the Office of Internal Oversight Services in the planning of the UNHCR audit in order to avoid duplication of efforts. It also reviewed the internal audit coverage of the operations of UNHCR so as to assess the extent to which reliance could be placed on its work. With regard to the follow-up on previous recommendations, as requested by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) and in accordance with General Assembly resolution 59/264 [YUN 2004, p. 1398], the Board evaluated previous recommendations that had not yet been fully implemented and indicated the financial periods in which such recommendations were first made.

It reported on the overall financial overview for the year ended 31 December 2007, in which the total income amounted to $1,333 million, compared with $1,151 million for the previous year, which represented a 15.8 per cent increase. Total expenditure amounted to $1,352 million, which, compared with $1,104 million for the previous year, was a 22.4 per cent increase. The result was a $19 million shortfall of income over expenditure, compared with a $47 million surplus of income over expenditure in 2006. After prior-period adjustments were taken into account, the gross deficit of $19 million increased to a net deficit of $382 million. The deficit did not result from a sudden deterioration in the financial situation of UNHCR, but rather from the disclosure for the first time of accrued end-of-service and post-retirement liabilities, notably those for after-service health insurance benefits. Previously, those liabilities were only indicated in notes to the financial statements. Funding for the liabilities had not yet been decided upon by the General Assembly. The current expenditure reduction trend observed in 2006 did not continue in 2007. UNHCR expenditures increased by 22.4 per cent, while income rose by 15.8 per cent. On the other hand, the deficit resulting from the provision for end-of-service and post-retirement liabilities without appropriate funding resulted in a negative balance of $178 million in funds and reserves as at 31 December 2007.

There was progress towards implementation of the International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS) in a plan which UNHCR had prepared. The plan was adopted in June and the key players in charge were appointed. The total cost for the implementation of IPSAS was estimated at $3.2 million for the period 2007–2009, but that amount needed to be reviewed. The Board found that certain current accounts remained inactive without being closed, and discovered accounting errors in the petty cash accounts. The Board also discovered that the total amount of accrued liabilities for after-service health insurance benefits, estimated by actuarial valuation, amounted to $308 million as at 31 December 2007, out of a total $374.1 million in liabilities for all the end-of-service benefits. It had validated the after-service health insurance liabilities reported in the financial statements.

UNHCR pursued its efforts to clean up its non-expendable property database, as recommended by the Board in previous reports. However, the total value of non-expendable property as at 31 December 2007, as calculated by the Board, was different from the value disclosed in note 15 to the financial statements, illustrating that the clean-up of the database had not been completed. UNHCR made progress compared with previous years in receiving monitoring subproject reports from its implementing partners, as well as audit
certificates. As at 25 June 2008, 352 audit certificates were received, representing $150.5 million, or 49 per cent of the total due. In June 2007, only 22 audit certificates were received from project independent auditors, totalling $9.9 million, or 3.3 per cent of 2006 expenditure. The Board made several recommendations based on its audit.

UNHCR, in a September report [A/AC.96/1054 & Add.1] described measures taken or proposed in response to the Board’s recommendations.

ACABQ, in October [A/63/474], concurred with the Board that any outstanding inter-fund balances should be resolved expeditiously. It noted that while the Board’s comments indicated an overall improvement in the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) operations, further measures were required. ACABQ stressed the importance of continued review by the Board, particularly in respect of the recent partial merger of UNOPS with the Inter-Agency Procurement Services Office. It further noted that it was essential for all organizations to develop comprehensive funding strategies and principles to guide their fundraising policies in order to support the objectives set by their governing bodies, and that it shared the Board’s views that UN system organizations should develop effective funding strategies and diversify funding sources. On the implementation of IPSAS, it recommended that the General Assembly keep the matter under review as the Organizations moved towards migration of the UN financial statements under IPSAS.

The Executive Committee, in an October decision [A/63/12/Add.1], requested that it be kept regularly informed on the measures taken to address the recommendations and the observations raised by the Board of Auditors and ACABQ.

**Management and administrative change**

**Lump-sum arrangement**

**Report of Secretary-General.** Under paragraph 23.20, Sect. 23, of the proposed programme budget for the 2002–2003 biennium [YUN 2001, p. 1296], UNHCR was to review, after three biennia, the lump-sum arrangement which began in the biennium 2002–2003 to fund a portion of the Office’s management- and administration-related costs under the UN regular budget. In compliance with that provision, the Secretary-General in November submitted a report [A/63/537] on the review of the UNHCR lump-sum arrangement. The report reviewed the budgetary process prior to the lump-sum arrangement, lump-sum grant arrangement, and the proposed retention of the lump-sum grant arrangement. The Secretary-General concluded that the arrangement to provide a lump sum from the UN regular budget to UNHCR had streamlined the budgetary presentation and simplified the work of the Office by eliminating the need for separate administrative procedures in respect of the management and administration posts funded under the UN regular budget. Recommending that the arrangement be maintained, the Secretary-General requested that the General Assembly take note of the report and endorse the maintenance of the arrangement in future budget presentation of the proposed programme budget.

In December [A/63/616], ACABQ endorsed the Secretary-General’s recommendations.

**General Assembly action.** On 24 December, by section VII of resolution 63/263 (see p. 1547), the General Assembly took note of the Secretary-General’s report and endorsed the recommendations of ACABQ.

**Standing Committee**

The UNHCR Standing Committee held three meetings in 2008 (4–6 March [A/AC.96/1052 & Corr.1]; 24–26 June [A/AC.96/1060]; and 23–24 September [A/AC.96/1061]). It considered issues relating to UNHCR programme budgets and funding; international protection; regional activities and global programmes; programme/protection policy; coordination; management, financial control, administrative oversight and human resources; governance; and consultations.

In October [A/63/12/Add.1], the Executive Committee called upon its members to ensure that debate at the Executive Committee and its Standing Committee be of a substantive and interactive nature, yielding practical guidance and clear advice to the High Commissioner, in keeping with the Committee’s statutory functions; and called on UNHCR to be explicit and analytical in its reports and presentations to the Committee and to submit documentation in a timely manner. It also called on UNHCR to consult with the Committee with regard to ongoing reform measures and the consequent structural and management changes within the organization, including the proposed new budget structure, through informal consultative meetings as well as at Standing Committee meetings. It requested the Standing Committee to report on its work in 2009. The Executive Committee approved applications by six Government delegations to participate as observers in Standing Committee meetings, as well as a list of intergovernmental and international organizations to be invited to participate as observers in relevant meetings of its Standing Committee from October 2008 to October 2009. It adopted the provisional agenda for its sixtyieth session.
Staff safety

At the June meeting of the Standing Committee [A/AC.96/1060], the Deputy Director of the UNHCR Division of Operational Services presented an update on staff safety and security issues [EC/59/SC/CRP.17], which described efforts to implement the recommendations of the UNHCR Security Policy and Policy Implementation Review, as well as new initiatives in support of the security of beneficiaries and other security-related activities. He noted that over 40 per cent of UNHCR staff worked in high-risk security environments and that since 2004 additional resources had been allocated to security-related activities. UNHCR was working closely with other UN departments and agencies to ensure adequate coordination of security management. The Office welcomed a stronger inter-agency security mechanism, but cautioned that the UN security management system needed to give more consideration to the specific organizational and mandate-related concerns of UNHCR, notably the physical protection of people of concern. The Deputy Director also informed the meeting of the global assessment on vulnerability to explosions that had been carried out following the bombing of the UN premises in Algiers in December 2007 [YUN 2007, p. 61]. Delegations welcomed UNHCR’s efforts to increase security for staff and people of concern, notably in respect of Minimum Operating Security Standards compliance and the inclusion of partners in security training. They also took note of the corresponding increase in costs and the need for additional support. UNHCR confirmed that great importance was placed on working on security with non-UN partners through information-sharing and joint training. Although it was often difficult to quantify requirements to mitigate constantly evolving risks and manage security standards, the Office was in the process of calculating current and additional costs, which would be shared with the Committee. In that context, a renewed focus on local risk assessments was needed.

Refugee protection and assistance

Protection issues

In his annual report covering 2008 [A/64/12], the High Commissioner said that the provision of protection and humanitarian assistance to refugees, stateless persons and IDPs had become increasingly challenging. He noted that forced population displacement had grown in size and complexity. Major challenges included the reduction of humanitarian space, restrictions on access for humanitarian workers, more emphasis by States on sovereignty, increasing urbanization, extreme poverty and poor governance. In addition, environmental factors such as climate change, drought, and declining resources and inequitable access to them, were having a greater impact on displacement than ever before. Finding durable solutions for assisting the estimated 5.7 million refugees who had been living in exile for more than five years remained a serious concern for the Office. At the end of 2008, there were 34.4 million people of concern to UNHCR, including some 10.5 million refugees. The numbers of people displaced in their own country as a result of conflicts remained high at an estimated 26 million, with 14.4 million of them benefiting from UNHCR protection and assistance activities. The latter constituted an increase of more than 600,000 compared to the previous year (13.7 million) and that was the highest figure ever recorded by UNHCR. By the end of the year, developing countries were hosting 8.4 million refugees, or 80 per cent of the global refugee population. Pakistan again topped the list, hosting nearly 1.8 million, most of whom were refugees from Afghanistan. Afghan and Iraqi refugees accounted for almost half of the refugee population under UNHCR’s responsibility. During 2008, at least 839,000 applications for asylum or refugee status were submitted to Governments or UNHCR offices in 154 countries. UNHCR made operational the concept of an evacuation transit facility to provide a temporary safe haven for refugees, pending final resettlement to a third country. The first evacuation facility opened in Romania in 2008 and further initiatives in other regions of the world were being explored.

With regard to refugee protection in the context of international migration, UNHCR received credible accounts of hundreds of Eritreans being detained and deported, despite repeated appeals to the authorities to refrain from forcible return. The Office was often denied access to detention centres to determine international protection needs, despite States’ obligations to extend cooperation under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees [YUN 1951, p. 520]. On a positive note, the hospitality extended by major refugee-hosting countries in the Middle East, notably Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic, to large numbers of Iraqi refugees in addition to hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees, was noteworthy. Yemen had also been a positive example, generously granting prima facie refugee recognition to Somalis fleeing hostilities in their country.

The second meeting of the High Commissioner’s Dialogue on Protection Challenges (Geneva, 10–11 December), attended by 135 delegations representing some 90 States and more than 50 national, international, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, focused on protracted refugee situa-
tions and the need for durable solutions. Participants examined various approaches aimed at finding solutions for the 6 million refugees in some 30 different situations worldwide who had been in exile for at least five years—many of them for decades—and examined the challenges and opportunities for refugees and other stakeholders in camps, rural and urban contexts. In particular, the Dialogue examined instruments that could unlock protracted refugee situations: those included providing settlement places; ensuring that voluntary repatriation and reintegration were sustainable; supporting self-reliance activities; and fostering local integration. Participants emphasized the importance of providing education and training as ways of building self-reliance. However, repatriation remained the preferred solution whenever feasible.

In October [A/63/12/Add.1], the Executive Committee encouraged States to prevent and reduce statelessness by adopting and implementing safeguards in nationality laws and policies, consistent with fundamental principles of international law, and by facilitating birth registration as a means of providing an identity. The Committee stressed the importance of safeguarding the right of every child to acquire a nationality, particularly where the child might otherwise be stateless. States should consider facilitating the naturalization of habitually and lawfully residing stateless persons in accordance with national legislation. It also requested UNHCR to continue to provide technical advice and operational support to States.

In March [A/AC.96/1052], the Director of the International Protection Services briefed the Standing Committee on the first meeting of the High Commissioner’s Dialogue on Protection Challenges [YUN 2007, p. 1243], which focused on refugee protection, durable solutions and international migration.

In a June note on international protection [A/AC.96/1053], the High Commissioner examined developments from mid-2007 to mid-2008 and outlined protection measures taken to address them, including the right to seek asylum; the legal framework established by the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees [YUN 1951, p. 520] and its 1967 Protocol [YUN 1967, p. 477]; the right to enjoy asylum; the right to a nationality; the rights of internally displaced persons; and durable solutions. The note showed how the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provided the underlying framework supporting persons of concern to secure non-discriminatory enjoyment of their rights, including the rights to seek and enjoy asylum, to a nationality, and to return to one’s country. It also highlighted examples of how UNHCR and its partners used international human rights and refugee law in complementary ways to support States in securing the rights of persons of concern, including by using a rights-based approach; by drawing on international human rights law standards in legal interventions; and by using the human rights machinery to reinforce initiatives. In bringing out the linkages between international refugee law and international human rights law, the note pointed towards the value of developing that interface in mutually reinforcing ways.

Mainstreaming human rights throughout the UN system, including UNHCR, and strengthening cooperation among UN bodies, including the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, could only reinforce the protection of persons of concern. Likewise, the integration of issues relevant to persons of concern into the work of the human rights mechanisms, including the Universal Periodic Review, affirmed the applicability of that framework to the subject of protection.

In October [A/63/12/Add.1], the UNHCR Executive Committee adopted conclusions on: general international protection; age, gender and diversity mainstreaming approach; refugees and others of concern with disabilities; protracted refugee situations; resettlement; internal displacement; and statelessness. It welcomed UNHCR’s initiative to commence a review of achievements under the Agenda for Protection, to identify outstanding challenges and assist States to devise national plans of action in consultation with relevant stakeholders and actors so as to enhance the international protection of refugees and others of concern.

International instruments

In 2008, the numbers of parties to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees [YUN 1951, p. 520] and its 1967 Protocol [YUN 1967, p. 477] remained at 144, while the number of State parties to one or both instruments increased to 149. The number of States parties to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons [YUN 1954, p. 416] increased to 63. With the accession of Finland, the number of States parties to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness [YUN 1961, p. 533] increased to 35.

In October, the UNHCR Executive Committee welcomed the entry into force of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol [YUN 2006, p. 785]; and, for State parties, the Committee underlined that refugees and others of concern to UNHCR with disabilities were entitled on the same basis as others to the full enjoyment of the rights and standards set forth in those instruments.
Assistance measures

The global population of concern to UNHCR increased to 34.4 million in 2008 from 31.7 million in 2007. The number of IDPs receiving UNHCR assistance rose from 13.7 million in 2007 to 14.4 million in 2008 due to the outbreak, renewal and prolongation of armed conflicts in many regions of the world such as Afghanistan and Pakistan, ongoing conflict in the Darfur region of the Sudan and in Colombia, and violence in Georgia, Somalia and the DRC, which continued to generate forced movements within and across borders. Improvements in the security situation in Iraq brought tempered optimism, but conditions were not yet sufficiently stable to envisage voluntary return and the sustainable reintegration of the displaced. The number of identified stateless people stood at almost 6.6 million; however, the actual number of stateless people worldwide was estimated to be closer to 12 million. During 2008, over 839,000 individual applications for asylum or refugee status were submitted to Governments or UNHCR offices in 154 countries, which constituted a 28 per cent increase compared to the previous year (635,800).

Situations of concern included the escalating conflict and the deliberate targeting of aid workers in Afghanistan, which limited access by humanitarian organizations to approximately half of the country, as well as the plight of some 2.7 million Afghans who remained in exile in Iran and Pakistan, deterred from returning by the ongoing violence. While the overall security situation improved in Iraq at the beginning of the year, some 1.6 million Iraqis remained in exile in Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic and some 2.6 million Iraqis remained displaced within the country. In the Sudan’s Darfur region, some 2.7 million people remained internally displaced. In the Central African Republic, some 25,000 refugees were forced to flee to Chad and Cameroon during 2008, bringing the total number of refugees from the Central African Republic in those two countries to almost 124,000. Hostilities in the DRC, particularly in the eastern provinces, aggravated the humanitarian situation there and provoked renewed displacement. The estimated 1.4 million IDPs in the country were often subject to armed attacks, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and the recruitment, including of children, by armed groups. In Somalia, where UNHCR coordinated protection and shelter activities for 1.3 million displaced people, the security situation remained volatile. In Colombia, an estimated 3 million people were internally displaced, with nearly 300,000 in a refugee-like situation in neighbouring countries. In Georgia, out of the more than 130,000 people who fled the South Ossetia conflict in August, some 14,000 were still displaced.

The main countries which saw voluntary repatriation in 2008 included Afghanistan (278,500), Angola (13,100), Burundi (95,400), the DRC (54,000), Iraq (25,600) and the Sudan (90,100). An estimated 1.3 million IDPs protected/assisted by UNHCR returned to their places of origin, including some 700,000 within Uganda and 350,000 inside Kenya. More than 600,000 refugees were also able to return to their homes. UNHCR provided cash and transport assistance for Sierra Leonean refugees who wished to be repatriated. Furthermore, UNHCR’s repatriation operation for Burundian refugees living in the United Republic of Tanzania, which began in 2002, reached the 300,000 mark in March. More than 30,000 refugees from old settlements established after the 1972 influx were included in the return figures for 2008. The repatriation movements included 14,000 Mauritanian refugees who repatriated with UNHCR’s assistance, and nearly 11,000 Liberian refugees, mainly from Ghana. More than 121,000 resettlement submissions and 65,800 departures in 2008 represented a 22 per cent and 32 per cent increase, respectively, compared to 2007. In Asia, the naturalization of around 3,000 former Cambodian refugees in Viet Nam also represented progress. In Latin America, the “Cities of Solidarity” and “Borders of Solidarity” programmes through the Mexico Plan of Action [YUN 2004, p. 1210] aimed to facilitate self-sufficiency and local integration. In Asia, more than 16,000 refugees from Myanmar left Thailand and over 13,000 Bhutanese left Nepal in major resettlement efforts.

Refugees and the environment

During the year, UNHCR continued to implement its environmental policy and activities, based on the four principles outlined in the 2005 revision [YUN 2005, p. 1310] of its Environmental Guidelines: prevention, integrated approach, cost-effectiveness and local participation. That was in line with the Office’s broader objective to defend the institution of asylum, as widespread damage to the environment or depletion of natural resources could be a source of conflict and affect States’ willingness to provide asylum. The Office continued to work together with other agencies concerned with environmental management, particularly in the context of cluster arrangements, Delivering as one [YUN 2006, p. 1060], and other coordination mechanisms to promote the sustainable conservation and rehabilitation of areas affected by the presence of displaced populations.

Refugees and HIV/AIDS

During 2008, in accordance with its HIV/AIDS Strategic Plan 2008–2009, UNHCR continued to combat HIV/AIDS among refugees and other persons of con-
cern and ensure that the basic rights of those affected by HIV/AIDS were respected. Close collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO) Department for Mental Health and Substance Abuse enabled the Office to undertake rapid assessments and programmatic interventions on alcohol and substance abuse and their linkages to HIV transmission and prevention, as well as other health and social issues, among refugees and IDPs in selected countries in Africa and Asia. In the Asian region, UNHCR worked closely with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) on HIV transmission among injection drug users, refugees and returnees. In partnership with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UNHCR worked more comprehensively on HIV and sex work in eastern Africa and eastern Europe. That was carried out through a series of capacity-building workshops and programmatic reviews of the extent of access for sex workers and their families and clients to HIV prevention, care and treatment. UNHCR continued to work closely with the UNAIDS co-sponsors and secretariat, as well as with other UN agencies, on all HIV policies and programmes related to HIV and conflict and displacement. Under the UNAIDS Inter-Agency Task Team for Young People, UNHCR helped develop a global guidance brief on HIV and youth in humanitarian emergency settings.

Significant improvements were made to the quality of public health programmes by involving local authorities and people of concern. To make those programmes sustainable, the Office focused on capacity development at the national level and among the populations concerned. UNHCR and its operational partners carried out training programmes in primary health care, including reproductive and child health. UNHCR strove to ensure universal access to HIV prevention, care, treatment and support programmes. By the end of 2008, more than 90 per cent of UNHCR's refugee operations had access to culturally and linguistically appropriate education and information on HIV/AIDS. The Office focused on developing prevention materials targeting young people and reducing discrimination against those with the disease. It continued to advocate for the inclusion of refugees and IDPs in national HIV plans and policies. At the end of 2008, refugees had equal access to antiretroviral treatment where it was available to surrounding host communities in 85 per cent of UNHCR operations. The Office also expanded its programmes in Africa to prevent mother-to-child transmission.

**Refugee women**

In 2008, UNHCR completed the introduction of the age, gender and diversity mainstreaming (AGDM) strategy to all operations and developed the AGDM Action Plan. The Plan established responsibility for supporting field operations in implementing the AGDM strategy across the organization in a corporate manner.

During the year, the Office undertook an analysis of the AGDM Accountability Framework, which provided field operations with a mechanism to measure progress in implementing policies specifically related to the protection of women and children, as well as a community-based approach to operations management. The Framework placed accountability on senior management and aimed to identify gaps in compliance with relevant policies and standards. The analysis revealed that progress in compliance varied by region. Operations in Africa reported the highest rates of compliance with SGBV prevention, response actions, and AGDM activities. Operations in Asia reported the highest levels of compliance on activities targeting the enhanced protection of children, women and girls. The analysis also revealed constraints related to staffing, socio-cultural obstacles and the engagement of partners. In 2008, the Framework was expanded to countries in Europe, North America and Asia, where the main focus of UNHCR's work was advocacy. Gender equality was addressed from the perspectives of both leadership and livelihoods. Women were encouraged to participate in camp committees and food and non-food item distribution. They were also assisted in organizing women's groups and in communicating with UNHCR, as well as other organizations and relevant authorities. In some operations, displaced women's groups established contacts with local women's organizations that supported their work and, at times, their local integration. In all operations, UNHCR continued to strive to reach the targets for the participation of refugee women in refugee management and leadership committees. UNHCR was committed to women's economic self-reliance and promoted livelihood strategies that included gender analysis and design. That also included targeting training and vocational capacity-building to the specific needs of women and men. To that end, an important initiative was the Women Leading for Livelihoods project, aimed at the economic self-sufficiency of displaced women through a range of activities focusing on computer literacy, language and vocational training, innovative farming and market access, micro-credit and small business centres. At the beginning of 2008, the UNHCR Handbook for the Protection of Women and Girls was published and distributed widely within and outside the Office.

**Refugee children**

In 2008, UNHCR continued to emphasize education, nutrition and protection from violence in addressing the needs of refugee children. It started drafting guidelines on effective child protection systems in accordance with the 2007 Executive Committee
conclusion on children at risk [YUN 2007, p. 1234], which called for children’s non-discriminatory access to such systems. It also recommended improvements in identifying children at risk and the mechanisms for monitoring, reporting and referral; strengthening strategic partnerships; and giving greater attention to prevention, family support and early intervention. Testing of the approach began in five operations in late 2008.

In May, UNHCR finalized its Guidelines on Determining the Best Interests of the Child, which recommended that a best interest determination (bid) be conducted under strict procedural safeguards for particularly important decisions affecting a child, such as durable solutions for unaccompanied and separated children; temporary care arrangements for unaccompanied or separated children in exceptional situations; and the involuntary separation of a child from his or her parents.

In 2008, UNHCR also reviewed minimum standards for education in emergencies, chronic crises and early recovery, and aligned its Education Field Guidelines with other policies and standards. A comprehensive report analysing UNHCR’s progress in education highlighted that 67 per cent of refugee children aged 6–17 were enrolled in primary and secondary schooling.

**Regional activities**

**Africa**

In 2008, persons of concern to UNHCR in Africa, excluding North Africa, decreased from 10.5 million in 2007 to 10.2 million. The total comprised some 2.1 million refugees, 6.3 million IDPs, 305,620 asylum-seekers, and 1.3 million returned refugees and IDPs of concern.

**Report of Secretary-General.** In response to General Assembly resolution 62/125 [YUN 2007 p. 1250], the Secretary-General submitted an August report [A/63/321] on assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa, covering 2007 and the first half of 2008. He stated that displacement by armed conflict and other situations of violence in Africa increased during 2007, with the total number of uprooted people growing by approximately 1 million. At the end of 2007, the total population of concern to the Office stood at 15.2 million, with IDPs outnumbering refugees by a wide margin. The estimated 12.7 million IDPs in Africa made up almost half the worldwide total. African nations hosted 2.3 million refugees in 2007, continuing the trend of decreasing numbers observed since 2001. Underlying those broad trends were both the significant progress made in achieving durable solutions and the impact of several new population movements across the continent. More than 2 million displaced people found solutions to their plight. In 2007, an estimated 300,000 refugees and 1.7 million IDPs made the decisive step of returning home, often after years of exile. Significant progress was made in the local integration of residual refugee groups in Central, Southern and West Africa. For some 19,000 refugees across the continent, third-country resettlement provided the most appropriate long-term solution. At the same time, conflict in the north of the Central African Republic, Chad, North Kivu Province of the DRC, Somalia and the Darfur region of the Sudan caused new displacement within and across international borders and exacerbated already dire humanitarian situations. Providing assistance and protection was challenging and frequently dangerous, yet vital for millions of people fleeing insecurity, political unrest and persecution. African countries continued to require the bulk of international funding for humanitarian emergencies and operations. Between January 2007 and July 2008, humanitarian activities in Africa identified in 36 inter-agency appeals of the United Nations and its partners received over $5.5 billion. The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) contributed to ensuring a more predictable response to emergencies, including grants for Africa of over $398 million against global disbursements of $613 million. In addition, several donors continued to pool humanitarian resources for the Sudan and the DRC, giving the humanitarian coordinators in those countries a strategic funding mechanism to ensure early support for critical activities. UN entities and NGOs received significant funding through emergency response funds in the Central African Republic, the DRC, Somalia, the Sudan and Zimbabwe. The report also described humanitarian response and inter-agency cooperation in the context of UN reform, promotion of international protection principles, ending forced displacement, delivery of assistance and special needs and partnerships with non-UN entities.

East Africa and the Horn of Africa were hit hard by conflict and natural disasters, particularly Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia and the Sudan, which resulted in additional population displacements. Overall, the number of refugees in that region increased by 15 per cent in 2007 despite improvements in Southern Sudan that allowed a significant number of refugees and IDPs to return to their places of origin. The Sudan was the site of the largest humanitarian operation in Africa. That situation included handling the biggest IDP crisis, with 5.8 million persons affected, as well as the largest refugee repatriation operations. The Sudan was also the largest refugee-producing country on the continent in 2007, with its refugees numbering some 523,000. Darfur remained in a state of humanitarian emergency as a result of unabated violence and deteriorating security. New displacement occurred within Darfur and into neighbouring Chad and the Central
African Republic. In Somalia, the continued conflict in south and central Somalia caused the massive displacement of populations. During the reporting period, the IDP population rose from 450,000 to approximately 1.1 million people. Clashes in the Ogaden region, coupled with drought, floods and food insecurity in southern Ethiopia, triggered the internal displacement of thousands of Ethiopians. There were some 200,000 conflict-induced IDPs, living mainly in Somali, Oromiya, Gambella and Tigray regional states. In Kenya, post-election violence that erupted in late 2007 led to the displacement of between 350,000 and 500,000 people to camps and host communities, especially in the Rift Valley. In addition, some 12,000 Kenyans sought refuge in Uganda. In Uganda, Southern Sudanese refugees showed strong interest in returning home, and between January and June 2008, some 41,000 Sudanese were assisted to repatriate. The consolidation of security, the lifting of restrictions on freedom of movement and ongoing development efforts in northern Uganda allowed over 1.1 million IDPs to begin returning and re-establishing their livelihoods.

In Central Africa and the Great Lakes region, deteriorating security in parts of the Central African Republic, Chad and the DRC caused more suffering and displacements. On a positive note, progress in achieving durable solutions for refugees in the camps in the north-west of the United Republic of Tanzania had led to a decrease in the refugee population from 285,000 to 160,000 in the previous 18 months, as well as to the closure of seven camps. In Burundi, while clashes between Government forces and rebel groups continued in the north-west, at times limiting humanitarian access, the recent return of the leader of the Forces nationales de libération (FNL) and the start of the cantonment process of FNL troops gave hope for further stabilization of the country. Refugees continued to repatriate to Burundi, almost exclusively from the United Republic of Tanzania. Since January 2007, almost 80,000 refugees had returned home. In the Central African Republic, fighting between Government forces and irregular armed groups, combined with widespread banditry, severely affected civilians in the north of the country and the number of IDPs rose to 197,000. Tens of thousands of civilians also sought asylum in neighbouring Chad, Cameroon and the Sudan. The total number of refugees from the Central African Republic stood at 104,000. The situation in eastern Chad worsened markedly along the volatile border with Darfur, where cross-border movements of armed groups, militia clashes, acts of banditry and general impunity affected the safety and security of 250,000 refugees from Darfur, 186,000 Chadian IDPs and the host communities. In the DRC, fighting continued in eastern parts of the country, particularly in North Kivu and certain parts of South Kivu. Insecurity caused the internal displacement of about half a million people in 2007. Congolese IDPs totalled 1.3 million. In total, some 158,700 Congolese refugees had returned home since the repatriation operation started in 2004.

In Southern Africa, repatriation efforts were completed for Angolan refugees and launched for Congolese refugees in Zambia, contributing to the achievement of durable solutions and reducing the number of refugees in the subregion. Another encouraging trend was the growing willingness of Governments to consider the possibility of local integration for remaining refugee groups. Zimbabwe slipped deeper into turmoil as the human rights situation worsened in the aftermath of the March 2008 presidential and parliamentary elections. Politically motivated violence resulted in significant new internal displacement, adding to the victims of forced evictions and displacing farm workers—who constituted the majority of those previously displaced. In May, South Africa was hit by a wave of unprecedented xenophobic violence targeting Zimbabweans and other foreign nationals, resulting in some 60 deaths and displacing up to 100,000 people. About 25,000 displaced foreign nationals were accommodated at temporary sites where they received physical protection and assistance. By the end of June, the number of people in those sites had decreased by almost half.

West Africa remained relatively stable in 2007, with the consolidation of peace and strengthening of constitutional order in previously war-ravaged countries such as Liberia and Sierra Leone. In 2007, West Africa had 175,000 refugees—30 per cent fewer compared to 2006—owing to successful voluntary repatriation operations and positive achievements in terms of resettlement to third countries. By the end of the assisted repatriation operation in June 2007, over 158,000 refugees had returned to Liberia. In 2008, repatriation continued on a case-by-case basis. In Côte d’Ivoire, the signing of the Ouagadougou Peace Agreement in March 2007 between the Government and the Forces nouvelles improved prospects for stability and the return of refugees and an estimated 700,000 IDPs. By the end of May 2008, some 61,000 IDPs had returned to their areas of origin, mainly in western and central Côte d’Ivoire.

The Secretary-General said that while certain post-conflict situations had stabilized, millions more Africans were still forcibly displaced. He concluded that African States, which remained the primary bearers of the responsibility to protect and assist victims of forced displacement, should redouble their efforts to develop and implement strategies for durable solutions, including by expanding opportunities for local integration for refugees. In addition, States, the AU, subregional organizations and the international...
community should enhance their collaboration and interventions to ensure that peace would be sustainable in countries emerging from conflict. The recovery process and bridging the gap between humanitarian relief and longer-term development continued to be real and problematic challenges to that goal. He noted that, in particular, the international donor community must abide by its commitment to increase its post-conflict and development aid to Africa. It was recommended that the AU conclude the draft convention for the protection and assistance of internally displaced persons in Africa. Once adopted, that convention would be a groundbreaking achievement as the first international treaty focusing on IDPs. The Secretary-General said that humanitarian workers were at times faced with grave security problems and limited access to displaced populations. States and other parties to conflicts must ensure safe, timely and unhindered access to displaced populations. Troop-contributing countries and donors must provide the necessary resources and capacities to peacekeeping operations that were mandated to protect civilians, including displaced people.

**Subregional developments**

**UNHCR report.** According to the UNHCR Global Report 2008, UNHCR helped more than 150,000 refugees in Central Africa and the Great Lakes region find a durable solution through voluntary repatriation and reintegration in their home countries, including 40,000 refugees who repatriated to the DRC, 95,000 to Burundi and some 8,600 to Rwanda. The Office strengthened its resettlement capacity and almost 2,400 refugees departed for third countries. UNHCR provided international protection and material assistance to some 676,000 refugees, of whom 68,300 Congolese were in camps in Burundi, Rwanda and the United Republic of Tanzania. UNHCR also protected and assisted 2,700 Burundians in Rwanda, 112,000 Angolans in the DRC, more than 8,500 refugees from Chad, Sudan and the DRC in the Central African Republic and some 81,000 refugees in Cameroon, of whom almost 63,000 were from the Central African Republic. The Office led the efforts of the protection cluster to improve the safety and security of IDPs in the Central African Republic and the DRC. Among other challenges, refugees in the Central African Republic did not live in camps but were scattered across more than 70 settlements along the border. Their mobility and dispersion over a vast swathe of territory, in addition to bad road conditions, hindered humanitarian access. Access to IDPs in the country remained a challenge given the lack of security in some areas.

In East Africa and the Horn of Africa, continuing conflicts in Somalia in 2008 prompted large-scale displacements. More than 70,000 Somali refugees sought asylum in neighbouring countries, with more than 60,000 entering Kenya. In Somalia, the deteriorating security situation and the shrinking humanitarian space compelled most aid agencies, including UNHCR, to withdraw staff from the central and southern parts of the country. The Head of UNHCR’s Mogadishu office was abducted in June and was released in late August. UNHCR could not implement planned activities in Somalia due to insecurity in the country.

In December, Ethiopian forces ended their two-year intervention in Somalia. The decommissioning of the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea and the termination of the mandate of the Boundary Commission heightened tensions between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Nevertheless, UNHCR carried out participatory assessments in all refugee and IDP sites. The absence of a peace accord between the Lord’s Resistance Army and the Government of Uganda had a negative impact on UNHCR activities. The protracted nature of the refugee situation in Uganda was exacerbated by the lack of a comprehensive policy on local integration. UNHCR advocated that acceptable standards of treatment for all refugees be maintained and that newly enacted refugee legislation be implemented in Kenya. The Office registered all newly arrived refugees in Kenya in three camps in Dadaab, including some 20,000 who arrived before 2008. The successful repatriation to Southern Sudan from Ethiopia led to the closure of two camps hosting Sudanese refugees from Bonga and Dimma in the Gambella region of Ethiopia, and to the dramatic downsizing of the Sherkole camp in Benshangul-Gumuz. However, the ongoing influx from Eritrea and Somalia required the opening of two new camps in Mayani and Shedar, respectively. In Eritrea, UNHCR continued to face restrictions in movement which affected its ability to monitor the condition of deportees. The protection environment in Djibouti continued to be challenging throughout 2008. More than 19,000 refugees, about half of them from Ethiopia, were referred for resettlement from the region.

In West Africa, UNHCR’s Regional Office in Dakar protected and assisted some 65,500 refugees and nearly 5,000 asylum-seekers in the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Mali and Senegal. The agreement reached between Senegal and Mauritania in 2007 allowed the repatriation of some 7,000 Mauritanian refugees from Senegal in 2008. A re-profiling exercise boosted the number of candidates for return among refugees in Senegal and Mali from some 25,000 to 35,000. The Dakar Office conducted a verification exercise for Sierra Leonean refugees in preparation for invocation of the cessation clause. Some 1,900 refugees applied for local integration and would be assisted in 2009 with documentation and livelihood support. The Office in Benin coordinated activities for Benin, Burkina Faso, Niger and Togo until the end of 2008. Some 4,650
Togolese refugees were repatriated, more than 4,250 of them from Ghana. In Nigeria, the UNHCR Office assisted more than 10,100 refugees and some 1,200 asylum-seekers. Some 300 Liberian refugees and 70 Sierra Leonean refugees were repatriated in 2008. However, the challenging socio-economic situation in the region was restricting progress in the areas of local integration and livelihood. High expectations of resettlement led some 800 Sierra Leonean refugees in the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau and Nigeria to apply for exemptions to the cessation clause. Resettlement from Benin and Nigeria also affected the voluntary repatriation of Togolese and Liberian refugees. Difficulties rose in mobilizing development agencies to support durable solutions and in promoting the local integration of smaller and dispersed groups in urban areas.

In Southern Africa, UNHCR assisted 350 Congolese refugees from Mozambique in returning home in 2008. The UNHCR Office in the subregion referred more than 1,340 people for resettlement, and some 560 refugees departed for various third countries during the year. UNHCR in Southern Africa provided support and guidance to Governments in the region to enable them to properly conduct refugee status determination and handle registration and data management for refugees and asylum-seekers. That support aided Government authorities in clearing backlogs of pending refugee status applications and gradually assuming responsibility for registration. UNHCR also encouraged the Governments of Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia and Zambia to adopt the legal frameworks needed to facilitate access to local integration. Following the outbreak of xenophobic violence against foreigners in South Africa, as well as the mixed outflow of Zimbabweans to the country, UNHCR’s Regional Office in Pretoria devoted much of its attention and resources towards meeting the needs of displaced populations. By the end of 2008, the majority had returned to local communities, although many continued to experience problems with reintegration and a few hundred persons remained in temporary sites established for the displaced. The huge challenges in South Africa taxed the capacity of the Pretoria Office, hampered its regional support functions and slowed progress in meeting some of its objectives. Despite those constraints, UNHCR trained more than 100 employees of Governments and implementing partners in Botswana, Mozambique, South Africa and Zambia to conduct registration in both emergencies and continuous asylum environments. While the organized repatriation of Angolan refugees ended in 2007, new opportunities emerged to bring home some of the remaining Angolan refugees in the region, particularly from Zambia, Namibia and Botswana. The Angolan Government affirmed its readiness to welcome the remaining Angolan refugees home and a series of tripartite meetings with neighbouring countries and UNHCR were scheduled to take place in order to prepare for their return.

By subregion, UNHCR assisted 3.2 million persons in Central Africa and the Great Lakes region, which received $273 million in agency expenditures. In East Africa and the Horn of Africa, $260 million was spent on 5.7 million persons of concern, while some $75 million was spent on programmes assisting 910,000 persons in need in West Africa. In Southern Africa, $42 million was spent on 418,000 persons of concern.

**Other developments.** The African Union (AU) Executive Council, at its twelfth ordinary session (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 25–29 January), adopted two decisions (EX.CL/Dec.381(XII) and EX.CL/Dec.382(XII)) on the situation of refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons in Africa. In decision EX.CL/Dec.381(XII), the Council called upon the international community to redouble its assistance to victims of forced displacement in Africa. It requested the AU Commission, together with the Permanent Representatives Committee’s Sub-Committee on Refugees and the AU partners, in particular UNHCR, ICRC, WFP and IOM, to continue monitoring the problem of forced displacement in Africa. It further requested the AU Commission to develop a mechanism for verifying the statistics provided on victims of forced displacement. The Council, in decision EX.CL/Dec.382(XII), adopted the revised Rules of Procedure of the Revitalized African Union Coordinating Committee on Assistance and Protection to Refugees, Returnees and IDPs in Africa and the Terms of Reference of its Working Group, as amended by the Permanent Representatives Committee. It requested the Commission to reactivate the Coordinating Committee as soon as possible so as to enable it to address the challenges of forced displacement in Africa.

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY ACTION**

On 18 December (meeting 70), the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the Third Committee [A/63/423], adopted resolution 63/149 without vote [agenda item 39].

**Assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa**

The General Assembly,

Recalling the Organization of African Unity Convention governing the specific aspects of refugee problems in Africa of 1969 and the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights,

Reaffirming that the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, together with the 1967 Protocol thereto, as complemented by the Organization of African Unity Convention of 1969, remains the foundation of the international refugee protection regime in Africa,
Recognizing the particular vulnerability of women and children among refugees and other persons of concern, including exposure to discrimination and sexual and physical abuse,

Recognizing also that refugees, internally displaced persons and, in particular, women and children are at an increased risk of exposure to HIV/AIDS, malaria and other infectious diseases,

Expressing its appreciation for the decision of the African Union to convene the Special Summit of Heads of State and Government of the African Union on Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons in Africa, and welcoming the ongoing process to elaborate a draft African Union convention for the protection and assistance of internally displaced persons in Africa,

Noting with appreciation the Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the Great Lakes Region and its instruments, in particular two of the Protocols to the Pact which are relevant to the protection of displaced persons, namely, the Protocol on Protection and Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons and the Protocol on the Property Rights of Returning Persons,

Recognizing that host States have the primary responsibility for the protection of and assistance to refugees on their territory, and the need to redouble efforts to develop and implement comprehensive durable solution strategies, in appropriate cooperation with the international community, and burden- and responsibility-sharing,

Emphasizing that States have the primary responsibility to provide protection and assistance to internally displaced persons within their jurisdiction, as well as to address the root causes of the displacement problem in appropriate cooperation with the international community,

1. Takes note of the reports of the Secretary-General and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees;

2. Notes the need for African States to address root causes of all forms of forced displacement in Africa and to foster peace, stability and prosperity throughout the African continent so as to forestall refugee flows;

3. Notes with great concern that, despite all of the efforts made so far by the United Nations, the African Union and others, the situation of refugees and displaced persons in Africa remains precarious, and calls upon States and other parties to armed conflict to observe scrupulously the letter and spirit of international humanitarian law, bearing in mind that armed conflict is one of the principal causes of forced displacement in Africa;

4. Welcomes decision EX.CL/Dec.423(XIII) on the situation of refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa adopted by the Executive Council of the African Union at its thirteenth ordinary session, held in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, on 27 and 28 June 2008;

5. Expresses its appreciation for the leadership shown by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and commends the Office for its ongoing efforts, with the support of the international community, to assist African countries of asylum and to respond to the protection and assistance needs of refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa;

6. Notes the initiatives taken by the African Union and the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, in particular the role of its Special Rapporteur on Refugees, Asylum Seekers, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons in Africa;

7. Notes with appreciation the general conclusion on international protection adopted by the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees at its fifty-ninth session, held in Geneva from 6 to 10 October 2008;

8. Acknowledges the important contribution of the age, gender and diversity mainstreaming strategy in identifying, through a participatory approach, the protection risks faced by the different members of the refugee community, in particular the non-discriminatory treatment and protection of refugee women and refugee children and minority groups of refugees;

9. Affirms that children, because of their age, social status and physical and mental development, are often more vulnerable than adults in situations of forced displacement, recognizes that forced displacement, return to post-conflict situations, integration in new societies, protracted situations of displacement and statelessness can increase child-protection risks, taking into account the particular vulnerability of refugee children to forcible exposure to the risks of physical and psychological injury, exploitation and death in connection with armed conflict, and acknowledges that wider environmental factors and individual risk factors, particularly when combined, may generate different protection needs;

10. Recognizes that no solution to displacement can be durable unless it is sustainable, and therefore encourages the Office of the High Commissioner to support the sustainability of return and reintegration;

11. Also recognizes the importance of early registration and effective registration systems and censuses as a tool of protection and as a means to the quantification and assessment of needs for the provision and distribution of humanitarian assistance and to implement appropriate durable solutions;

12. Recalls the conclusion on registration of refugees and asylum-seekers adopted by the Executive Committee at its fifty-second session, notes the many forms of harassment faced by refugees and asylum-seekers who remain without any form of documentation attesting to their status, recalls the responsibility of States to register refugees on their territories and, as appropriate, the responsibility of the Office of the High Commissioner or mandated international bodies to do so, reiterates in this context the central role that early and effective registration and documentation can play, guided by protection considerations, in enhancing protection and supporting efforts to find durable solutions, and calls upon the Office, as appropriate, to help States to conduct this procedure should they be unable to register refugees on their territory;

13. Calls upon the international community, including States and the Office of the High Commissioner and other relevant United Nations organizations, within their respective mandates, to take concrete action to meet the protection and assistance needs of refugees, returnees and displaced persons and to contribute generously to projects and programmes aimed at alleviating their plight and facilitating durable solutions for refugees and displaced persons;
14. Reaffirms the importance of timely and adequate assistance and protection for refugees, returnees and displaced persons, also reaffirms that assistance and protection are mutually reinforcing and that inadequate material assistance and food shortages undermine protection, notes the importance of a rights- and community-based approach in engaging constructively with individual refugees, returnees and displaced persons and their communities so as to achieve fair and equitable access to food and other forms of material assistance, and expresses concern in regard to situations in which minimum standards of assistance are not met, including those in which adequate needs assessments have yet to be undertaken;

15. Also reaffirms that respect by States for their protection responsibilities towards refugees is strengthened by international solidarity involving all members of the international community and that the refugee protection regime is enhanced through committed international cooperation in a spirit of solidarity and burden- and responsibility-sharing among all States;

16. Further reaffirms that host States have the primary responsibility to ensure the civilian and humanitarian character of asylum, calls upon States, in cooperation with international organizations, within their mandates, to take all necessary measures to ensure respect for the principles of refugee protection and, in particular, to ensure that the civilian and humanitarian nature of refugee camps is not compromised by the presence or the activities of armed elements or used for purposes that are incompatible with their civilian character, and encourages the High Commissioner to continue efforts, in consultation with States and other relevant actors, to ensure the civilian and humanitarian character of camps;

17. Condemns all acts that pose a threat to the personal security and well-being of refugees and asylum-seekers, such as refoulement, unlawful expulsion and physical attacks, calls upon States of refuge, in cooperation with international organizations, where appropriate, to take all necessary measures to ensure respect for the principles of refugee protection, including the humane treatment of asylum-seekers, notes with interest that the High Commissioner has continued to take steps to encourage the development of measures to better ensure the civilian and humanitarian character of asylum, and encourages the High Commissioner to continue those efforts, in consultation with States and other relevant actors;

18. Deplores the continuing violence and insecurity which constitute an ongoing threat to the safety and security of staff members of the Office of the High Commissioner and other humanitarian organizations and an obstacle to the effective fulfilment of the mandate of the Office and the ability of its implementing partners and other humanitarian personnel to discharge their respective humanitarian functions, urges States, parties to conflict and all other relevant actors to take all measures necessary to protect activities related to humanitarian assistance, prevent attacks on and kidnapping of national and international humanitarian workers and ensure the safety and security of the personnel and property of the Office and that of all humanitarian organizations discharging functions mandated by the Office, and calls upon States to investigate fully any crime committed against humanitarian personnel and bring to justice the persons responsible for such crimes;

19. Calls upon the Office of the High Commissioner, the African Union, subregional organizations and all African States, in conjunction with agencies of the United Nations system, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and the international community, to strengthen and revitalize existing partnerships and forge new ones in support of the protection system for refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced persons;

20. Calls upon the Office of the High Commissioner, the international community and other entities concerned to intensify their support to African Governments through appropriate capacity-building activities, including training of relevant officers, disseminating information about refugee instruments and principles, providing financial, technical and advisory services to accelerate the enactment or amendment and implementation of legislation relating to refugees, strengthening emergency response and enhancing capacities for the coordination of humanitarian activities, in particular those Governments that have received large numbers of refugees and asylum-seekers;

21. Reaffirms the right of return and the principle of voluntary repatriation, appeals to countries of origin and countries of asylum to create conditions that are conducive to voluntary repatriation, and recognizes that, while voluntary repatriation remains the pre-eminent solution, local integration and third-country resettlement, where appropriate and feasible, are also viable options for dealing with the situation of African refugees who, owing to prevailing circumstances in their respective countries of origin, are unable to return home;

22. Also reaffirms that voluntary repatriation should not necessarily be conditioned on the accomplishment of political solutions in the country of origin in order not to impede the exercise of the refugees’ right to return, recognizes that the voluntary repatriation and reintegration process is normally guided by the conditions in the country of origin, in particular that voluntary repatriation can be accomplished in conditions of safety and dignity, and urges the High Commissioner to promote sustainable return through the development of durable and lasting solutions, particularly in protracted refugee situations;

23. Calls upon the international donor community to provide financial and material assistance that allows for the implementation of community-based development programmes that benefit both refugees and host communities, as appropriate, in agreement with host countries and consistent with humanitarian objectives;

24. Appeals to the international community to respond positively, in the spirit of solidarity and burden- and responsibility-sharing, to the third-country resettlement needs of African refugees, notes in this regard the importance of using resettlement strategically, as part of situation-specific comprehensive responses to refugee situations, and to this end encourages States, the Office of the High Commissioner and other relevant partners to make full use of the Multilateral Framework of Understandings on Resettlement, where appropriate;

25. Calls upon the international donor community to provide material and financial assistance for the implementation of programmes intended for the rehabilitation
of the environment and infrastructure affected by refugees in countries of asylum;

26. **Urges** the international community, in the spirit of international solidarity and burden-sharing, to continue to fund generously the refugee programmes of the Office of the High Commissioner and, taking into account the substantially increased needs of programmes in Africa, inter alia, as a result of repatriation possibilities, to ensure that Africa receives a fair and equitable share of the resources designated for refugees;

27. **Encourages** the Office of the High Commissioner and interested States to identify protracted refugee situations which might lend themselves to resolution through the development of specific, multilateral, comprehensive and practical approaches to resolving such refugee situations, including improvement of international burden- and responsibility-sharing and realization of durable solutions, within a multilateral context;

28. **Expresses grave concern** about the plight of internally displaced persons in Africa, notes the efforts of African States in strengthening the regional mechanisms for protection of and assistance to internally displaced persons, calls upon States to take concrete action to pre-empt internal displacement and to meet the protection and assistance needs of internally displaced persons, recalls in that regard the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, takes note of the current activities of the Office of the High Commissioner related to protection of and assistance to internally displaced persons, including in the context of inter-agency arrangements in this field, emphasizes that such activities should be consistent with relevant General Assembly resolutions and should not undermine the refugee mandate of the Office and the institution of asylum, and encourages the High Commissioner to continue his dialogue with States on the role of his Office in this regard;

29. **Invites** the Representative of the Secretary-General on the human rights of internally displaced persons to continue his ongoing dialogue with Member States and the intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations concerned, in accordance with his mandate, and to include information thereon in his reports to the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly;

30. **Requests** the Secretary-General to submit a comprehensive report on assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa to the General Assembly at its sixty-fourth session, taking fully into account the efforts expended by countries of asylum, under the item entitled “Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions”.

**The Americas**

In North America and the Caribbean, **UNHCR** advocated for the political and financial support of the Governments of the United States and Canada and sought their backing for protection and durable solutions programmes for refugees. The United States resettled some 65,000 refugees in 2008. Of those, some 49,000 (or 75 per cent) were referred by **UNHCR**. That represented the highest number and proportion of **UNHCR** referrals in that country for the past 20 years. With national security concerns affecting domestic asylum policies in the United States, the Department of Homeland Security continued to emphasize enforcement, including more use of detention and stricter border controls. In 2008, Canada resettled over 10,000 refugees, some 7,300 through its Government assisted programme and more than 3,500 through its Private Sponsorship of Refugees scheme. Since 2006, **UNHCR** had been urging the Canadian Government to fill vacant posts in the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) to avoid the re-emergence of a backlog. The number of asylum-seekers awaiting a decision at IRB had increased from a low of 20,000 in mid-2006 to more than 54,000 in 2008. The IRB did not have the resources to address the caseload. In the Caribbean, where systematic interception, detention and return policies were widely implemented, returns were often carried out through bilateral agreements which lacked specific asylum safeguards. Most of the Caribbean States and territories did not have adequate procedures to address existing gaps. **UNHCR** also faced resource constraints, including limited programme funding and human resources and an insufficient travel budget, which made it difficult to achieve its objectives.

In Latin America, **UNHCR** witnessed a rise in the number of regional and extra-regional asylum-seekers and refugees travelling within broader migratory movements. Mexico appointed child protection officers within its National Migration Institute to protect unaccompanied minors trapped in massive mixed migratory flows in Central America. The Regional Solidarity Resettlement Programme of the Mexico Plan of Action was revamped and confirmed as a key strategy in providing durable solutions to Colombian refugees in the southern cone. A resettlement programme for women at risk began in Argentina and Chile. After receiving 225 Palestinian refugees for resettlement, Brazil and Chile began taking steps to assist in their local integration. Nevertheless, the global economic crisis caused a decline in remittances to the region, especially to the Central American countries whose economies were highly dependent on them. In Mexico and Central America, north-bound migratory movements faced tightened border security, influenced by the fight against terrorism and human and narcotics trafficking. Interception, detention and deportation practices intensified, and there was an increase in human rights violations against undocumented immigrants. The mixed migration flow included asylum-seekers from elsewhere in the region, principally from Central America and the Caribbean, as well as migrants and asylum-seekers from Africa, the Middle East and Asia. They also included thousands of unaccompanied children who were particularly vulnerable...
to human rights violations and were often the victims of smugglers or traffickers.

The crisis in Colombia, which also involved or affected Costa Rica, Ecuador, Panama, Peru and Venezuela, remained UNHCR’s major concern and largest operation in Latin America. Nevertheless, the Mexico Plan of Action (MPA) [YUN, 2004, p. 1210] confirmed its value as a strategic framework for protection and durable solutions. In line with the Plan, UNHCR offices in the region sought to influence legislation affecting refugees and promoted differentiated asylum procedures. In Chile, UNHCR continued to advocate for the adoption of comprehensive refugee legislation. In Brazil, despite the positive attitudes expressed by central and local governments, a vast majority of the 3,800 refugees and 427 asylum-seekers in the country still depended on some kind of UNHCR assistance. Refugees and asylum-seekers in the southern cone received UNHCR’s help with local integration and the promotion of self-sufficiency. At the end of 2008, the population of concern in the region stood at some 7,100. In the course of 2008, some 1,900 people filed asylum applications. Approximately 140 individuals were resettled in the region under the Regional Solidarity Resettlement Programme of the MPA: 78 in Argentina, 19 in Brazil and 45 in Chile. The majority were Colombian refugees from urban and rural backgrounds in Costa Rica and Ecuador. In Nicaragua, the National Assembly in July passed one of the most advanced asylum laws in the region. The right to asylum was also incorporated into the new Constitution of Bolivia.

Total UNHCR expenditure in the Americas and the Caribbean for the year was $47.5 million for a population of concern of 4.0 million.

**Asia and the Pacific, the Middle East and North Africa**

In 2008, UNHCR spent $221.8 million on activities in Asia and the Pacific for a population of concern of 10.1 million. Expenditures for operations in the Middle East and North Africa amounted to $268.7 million for a population of concern of 6.1 million.

**South Asia**

In 2008, UNHCR led the collective humanitarian response in a difficult security environment in Sri Lanka, which saw considerable displacement in the north of the country as military operations there were intensified. By the end of the year, the progress of the Sri Lankan Army and the retreat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to a smaller geographical area aggravated the situation. An estimated 150,000 civilians were trapped by the hostilities, with limited access to humanitarian aid and no chance to move to safer locations. At the same time, in the east UNHCR monitored the protection of 20,000 IDPs and assisted them in returning to their homes. Throughout the year, the total number of IDPs in Sri Lanka stood at more than 500,000. In Nepal, the cooperation of the Government and the support of a core group of countries committed to finding durable solution for refugees allowed for the start of a large-scale resettlement of camp-based refugees. Some 8,000 refugees left for third countries in 2008. The Government’s proactive engagement allowed for a secure environment in the camps. That enabled refugees to access information on settlement and other durable solutions provided by UNHCR and its partners, and to make free and informed decisions. In India, the rise in the number of arrivals of asylum-seekers stretched UNHCR’s capacity to address their concerns in a timely and efficient manner, compelling the Office to initiate a review of its procedures. At the end of 2008 there were almost 3,800 pending applications. In Bangladesh, the living conditions started to improve for 28,300 refugees from Myanmar living in two camps, particularly in the areas of shelter, health, skills training, education and community mobilization. UNHCR and its partners completed projects to improve water supply and sanitation in both camps. They also ensured better access to primary and secondary health care. The construction of new shelters for refugees in Kutupalong camp was completed and, subject to continued funding, rehabilitation in Nayapara, which started in 2008, was expected to be finished by the end of 2009.

**East Asia and the Pacific**

During 2008, UNHCR focused on the search for durable solutions. In Malaysia, the Office submitted a landmark 9,000 resettlement submissions during the year, and saw 6,000 refugees departing for third countries. Approximately 17,000 persons of concern were registered by UNHCR in 2008, bringing the total number of those registered in Malaysia to over 45,400. In addition, in Malaysia UNHCR was able to enhance awareness of refugees’ issues through dialogue with the national authorities and by strengthening ties with civil societies. In Thailand, the large-scale resettlement process reduced the number of registered refugees in the border camps to some 111,100 by the end of 2008, down from some 124,000 in the previous year. However, the arrival in Thailand of people from Myanmar and their informal settlement in refugee camps resulted in an unregistered population of some 30,000 to 40,000. To address that concern, the Office and the Government agreed at the end of 2008 to take steps to ensure screening of the unregistered population. UNHCR’s continued cooperation with the authorities to prepare for Indonesia’s accession to the
international refugees instruments helped promote asylum issues. The Office’s enhanced capacity in Indonesia contributed to more efficient protection and helped develop the capacity of stakeholders. In China, the Government revived discussions on the development of national refugee legislation during the second half of the year. In Hong Kong, the Government and UNHCR finalized a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on enhanced cooperation, through which the training of immigration officers on screening procedures would be improved. In December, the Government of Japan announced its decision to pilot a three-year resettlement programme for 90 refugees from Myanmar, starting in 2010, which made Japan the first country on the Asian continent to adopt a resettlement programme. Asylum applications increased multi-fold, from 384 in 2005 to an estimated 1,600 by the end of 2008. In the Republic of Korea, UNHCR and the Korea Immigration Service signed an Exchange of Letters aimed at enhancing the quality and sustainability of refugee status determination (RSD) in the country. Australia’s resettlement programme continued in 2008 and provided durable solutions for approximately 6,000 UNHCR-referred refugees. In Cambodia, following the Government’s decision to assume responsibility for RSD, a Refugee Office was established under the Ministry of the Interior in October. There was significant progress in the search for solutions for Montagnard refugees in Cambodia following implementation of the MoU signed by UNHCR, Cambodia and Viet Nam in 2005 [YUN 2005, p. 1317]. At the end of 2008, only 236 Montagnards remained at UNHCR-assisted sites awaiting a durable solution. In Viet Nam, UNHCR was able to travel to the Central Highlands to observe the situation of Montagnards who had returned from Cambodia. Further strides were made in the prevention and reduction of statelessness as the naturalization process for some 9,500 former Cambodian refugees began to take effect in September.

Central Asia, South-West Asia, North Africa and the Middle East

In 2008, South-West Asia saw more than 278,000 registered Afghans return to their country with UNHCR assistance. All benefited from a $100 per person return and reintegration cash grant to meet their basic needs during the first months after return. The Government of Afghanistan and the international community endorsed the incorporation of returnee reintegration needs in the Afghanistan National Development Strategy at the Kabul Conference in November. That was expected to lead to increased support for returnees in national development programmes. In Iran, the authorities completed the online Amayesh III re-registration project, which provided some level of continued protection for the approximately 936,000 Afghan refugees who were included in the process. The issuance of work permits to registered Afghan refugees in Iran had commenced. Towards the end of the year, the Government of Pakistan indicated that the Three-Year Plan, which foresaw all registered Afghans returning to their home country in advance of the 2009 expiration of their proof of residence cards, would be reviewed.

In Central Asia, the number of new Afghan asylum-seekers in Tajikistan increased by 80 per cent. All new arrivals, with UNHCR’s support, were registered. However, the recognition rate fell significantly in 2008. The majority of those arrivals were in great need of care, straining the UNHCR and the Government assistance programmes. The Office revised its social assistance policy and programmes to target refugees with specific needs. UNHCR also advocated for refugees and asylum issues to be included in training activities for Border Security and Ministry of the Interior officials. With UNHCR support and advocacy, the Government of Kazakhstan developed a draft national refugee legislation and presented it to Parliament at the end of the year. In line with its regionalization priorities, UNHCR established a Regional Office for Central Asia in the capital, Almaty. In Turkmenistan, an inter-ministerial working group was established to review the refugee and citizenship laws. The Government also agreed to take over RSD from UNHCR in accordance with its international and national obligations. The Kyrgyz Government provided citizenship to the remaining Tajik refugees in the country. Uzbekistan was not a signatory to either the 1951 Refugee Convention or the 1967 Protocol, nor had it adopted refugee legislation. Under those circumstances, resettlement remained the most viable solution for refugees and in 2008 UNHCR resettled 238 people to third countries. The Office was committed to finding solutions for the approximately 750 refugees remaining in the country, primary through resettlement. UNHCR operations in Central Asia focused on improving the quality of asylum in accordance with international standards, preventing refoulement, providing access to appropriate durable solutions, reducing and preventing statelessness, and strengthening emergency preparedness and contingency planning. Sustained advocacy efforts by UNHCR and its NGO partners led to an improved draft of the refugee law in Kazakhstan. However, in some Central Asian countries, access to asylum procedures was selective and based on political and economic issues and perceived national security concerns. That resulted in a decline in the recognition of certain groups of refugees and asylum-seekers. UNHCR was obliged to establish or maintain parallel systems to ensure RSD and provide the necessary protection and assistance to people of concern.
In 2008, UNHCR worked to protect and assist large numbers of refugees and others of concern throughout North Africa. The large mixed migration movements in North Africa were straining the capacities of national migration management structures and challenging UNHCR’s ability to protect and assist refugees and other people of concern in the region. The Office provided monthly subsidies and education and housing allowances to the most vulnerable among the urban refugees. UNHCR’s advocacy and capacity-building efforts had generated support for its 10-Point Plan of Action on Refugee Protection and International Migration and forged partnerships aimed at protecting people of concern moving to and through North Africa. The establishment of a national asylum procedure or process in Mauritania, and the Moroccan Government’s interest in creating a national asylum system resulted from those efforts. In the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, UNHCR’s partnership with the authorities resulted in the drafting of a national refugee law and the conclusion of a partnership agreement with the National Association of Youth Voluntary Work, as well as improved access to refugees and asylum-seekers in detention. In collaboration with WFP and other partners, UNHCR provided the Sahrawi refugees in the Tindouf camps in Algeria with food, shelter, water, sanitation, health care and education. In order to improve the refugees’ nutritional status and address rampant anaemia among women and children, UNHCR widened the range of foodstuffs provided to the refugees by including more fresh meat, fruits and vegetables. In Tunisia, UNHCR conducted RSD under its mandate and ensured respects for the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers. The Office also promoted refugees’ self reliance through vocational training. Tunisia expressed readiness to prepare asylum legislation as part of a comprehensive asylum system.

In the Middle East, UNHCR faced a complicated picture of displacement. That included millions of Iraqis who had fled their homes to seek safety in other parts of their country and hundreds of thousands more who found refuge in Jordan, the Syrian Arab Republic and other countries in the region and beyond. Both Syria and Jordan remained particularly generous in their treatment of Iraqis despite already bearing the burden of large numbers of Palestinians and other refugees. There was some improvement in the situation in Iraq, however, with many parts of the country seeing a notable reduction in the number of security incidents. Furthermore, there was a rise in the numbers of people returning to their home areas, especially among IDPs. In anticipation of such returns, UNHCR developed an individual case management mechanism to respond to the returnees’ protection and assistance needs. However, the security situation in Iraq remained fragile and was not conducive to large-scale returns. The humanitarian crisis in Gaza dominated events in the region in late 2008. Although hostilities between Israel and the Hamas Government in Gaza did not lead to significant external displacements, UNHCR provided non-food items and logistical support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The High Commissioner issued a public statement reiterating the need to protect civilians fleeing the violence. In Israel, a strengthened UNHCR presence helped to build the Government’s capacity to protect and assist refugees. The Office supported the Government’s efforts to establish responsive national asylum systems consistent with international standards. It also intervened in detention and other protection cases. In 2008, UNHCR recorded a 70 per cent increase in the number of asylum-seekers and immigrants arriving in Yemen from the Horn of Africa, with more than 50,000 people making the dangerous journey across the Gulf of Aden on smugglers’ boats. Some 950 individuals were reported to have drowned or gone missing during the voyage. The traditionally positive protection climate in Egypt was negatively affected by an increase in the number of asylum-seekers and migrants attempting to cross the Sinai desert to Israel. Several asylum-seekers and migrants were returned by the Israeli authorities, without prior assessments of their protection needs. Also, hundreds of Eritreans were detained and deported from Egypt, despite UNHCR’s appeals to the authorities of both countries to refrain from forcible return and grant the Office access to detention centres. With the exception of a group detained in the Aswan prison in Egypt, UNHCR was not permitted access to detained Eritrean asylum-seekers, nor did it receive any verifiable information about them.

Europe

In 2008, UNHCR expenditures for activities in Europe totalled $124.4 million, for a population of concern of 4.1 million. More than one third of that amount ($47.9 million) was for the 1.2 million persons of concern in Eastern Europe, while $39.5 million was for the 598,620 persons of concern in South-Eastern Europe.

West, Central and Eastern Europe

In 2008, the number of asylum applications in Western Europe increased by some 6 per cent over the previous year. Some western European States like Italy, Norway, the Netherlands and Switzerland had to deal with massive increases in the number of asylum applications. Cyprus, Greece and Sweden, which had been major recipients of new asylum-seekers in 2007, saw a considerable decline. The change in asylum policy in Sweden, especially towards Iraqis in 2008, had immediate repercussions in the Nordic countries,
with the number of asylum-seekers sharply rising in Finland and Norway. While the number of individuals requesting refugee status continued to decrease in most of the industrialized countries in 2008, the Nordic countries recorded an increase of about 2 per cent. Mixed migration flows at the southern borders of Europe continued to grow during the year. Greece reported 146,000 arrivals of irregular migrants, while Spain saw a decrease in arrivals over the same period, with some 13,000 individuals reaching its shores. In Ireland, the Office supported the revision of the new refugee bill. In Portugal, the newly adopted law on asylum incorporated most of UNHCR's recommendations. In the United Kingdom, the Government endorsed recommendations made by UNHCR on improving the asylum system, as part of the European Quality Initiative project aimed at promoting a fair and efficient asylum system. The Office advocated in several multilateral and national forums for the creation of a Common European Asylum System that adhered to the spirit of the 1951 Refugee Convention. UNHCR followed the transposition of the European Union (EU) Qualification and Procedures Directives in a number of EU member States. It signed an exchange of letters with Frontex, the EU External Border Agency, including on protection training in the context of border management. The Office collaborated closely with the European Commission, the European Council and the European Parliament, the Council of Europe, the European Court of Justice and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), as well as national counterparts. It continued its effective partnerships with competent national authorities in Spain, Italy and to some degree in Greece and Malta to identify people in need of international protection or with special needs. In the Nordic countries, working relationships with civil society were strengthened through NGOs. France, Switzerland and Germany responded to UNHCR's call to resettle vulnerable refugees for whom no other solution could be found. They joined the traditional (Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom), new (Ireland and Portugal) and ad hoc (Italy, Spain) resettlement countries. Malta continued to be the only western European country from where resettlement took place. The Office advocated with European States for the eventual naturalization of refugees who had no perspective of return.

In Central Europe and the Baltic States, the number of asylum applications decreased in 2008 compared to 2007. The only exception was Romania, where the number of applications surged by some 70 per cent over the same period. The Office's main goals in Central Europe and the Baltic States included: access to territory and RSD procedures; advocacy for better reception conditions in line with international standards; promotion of durable solutions for refugees and stateless persons; advocacy for fair and efficient asylum procedures; and promotion of external relations and partnership. The Office had redoubled its efforts to promote resettlement as a tool. In that respect, a recent innovation in Europe was the establishment of an Emergency Transit Centre in Romania. The Centre provided a temporary safe location for refugees who were at risk or could not remain in their host country while their resettlement was finalized. In September the Office formally launched the Asylum System Quality Assurance and Evaluation Mechanism, also known as the Quality Initiative project. The project covered Austria, Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia. Based on UNHCR's mandated responsibilities, the project would also play a key role in the development of fair and efficient asylum procedures. While UNHCR continued to advocate that Europe remain a continent of asylum, a number of States had security concerns about asylum-seekers. In Bulgaria, cases of refoulement were observed in 2008. The detention of asylum-seekers, including those with specific needs, was reported. In the Czech Republic, an increase in the detention of those applying for international protection was of concern to the Office. The prospects for durable solutions in Central Europe and the Baltic States remained a challenge. Meanwhile, States in the region had shown increasing interest in establishing national resettlement programmes. In the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), the year ended without a clear indication that they would consider adhering to the 1954 and 1961 Statelessness Conventions.

In Eastern Europe, the conflicts over South Ossetia in August displaced 134,000 people. Some 102,800 returned by the end of 2008, leaving some 21,000 IDPs in need of humanitarian assistance. In response to the August crisis, UNHCR provided some 65,000 new IDPs in Georgia with basic non-food items and winterization packages, including stoves and firewood. The adoption by the Government in July of a National IDP Action Plan, which provided UNHCR with a legal basis for its interventions for durable solutions, was a major step towards resolving the situation of long-term IDPs. Although the Plan was suspended due to the August events, the Government adapted it to the new circumstances and expressed a strong commitment to finding durable solutions for people in protracted displacement. With UNHCR's support, national legislation in the region was brought closer to international standards. Under the 10-point Plan of Action, border monitoring was discussed within the Söderköping/Cross-Border Cooperation Process and improved in Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine, with particular focus on protection-sensitive entry systems. In addition, Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine strove to align their policies, legislation and governance within EU standards. Belarus made substantial
progress in the areas of border management, immigration and asylum. Moldova finalized the implementation of the Moldova-eu Action Plan under the European Neighbourhood Policy. For Ukraine, the signature on 9 September of the Association Agreement with the eu was an important step towards its closer cooperation with the latter. The Government of the Russian Federation took steps to improve migration legislation. Several legal acts became effective, among them amendments to the federal law, On Registration of Foreign Nations and Stateless Persons Temporarily Residing in the Russian Federation, which streamlined registration procedures and allowed unhcr to focus on building national capacity to deal with refugee matters. In 2008, the unhcr shelter programme in the Russian Federation completed 37 houses in Ingushetia and 29 in the Chechen Republic, allowing idps to return to their places of origin. Unhcr accorded priority to idps in temporary collective shelters who did not have alternative shelter, met the vulnerability criteria and were from rural areas where the Government’s shelter programme had not begun. Hostile attitudes by the local population towards foreigners in Ukraine and the Russian Federation posed a risk to people of concern to unhcr. The Office worked with international partners, Government authorities and civil society to promote tolerance, acceptance of diversity and law enforcement action to combat racially motivated crimes. In Azerbaijan, unhcr promoted a fair and efficient asylum regime that complied with minimum international standards in the provision of protection and assistance to asylum-seekers and recognized refugees. In December, the Parliament of Moldova adopted a new law on asylum that was drawn up with the participation of unhcr, ngos and other experts.

South-Eastern Europe

In 2008, unhcr protected and assisted some 133,000 refugees and some 354,000 idps in South-Eastern Europe. Some countries, such as Serbia and Croatia, saw internal divisions linked to the elections. In February, the unilateral declaration of independence by Kosovo (see p. 435) affected regional relations. unhcr's efforts to find durable solution for persons of concern resulted in a decline in the total number of refugees and idps in the region to some 486,000 by the end of the year. Political developments in Serbia and Kosovo cut idp returns to Kosovo drastically in 2008. The Office sought durable solutions by facilitating returns to Kosovo. During the year, some 122 individuals were repatriated to Serbia and Kosovo, either with unhcr’s assistance or spontaneously. In Croatia, the Office sought sustainable solutions for the returnees and helped the authorities establish a fair and efficient asylum and immigration system. It monitored the implementation of the Housing Care programme, which aimed to provide accommodation to returnees and foster developments in private property repossession. It also cooperated with the Government and ngos in setting up a border monitoring project. Some refugees in Serbia hesitated to opt for local integration and linked their eventual decision to a resolution of the occupancy/tenancy rights issue still pending in Croatia. That issue also affected the naturalization process in Serbia. Certain minority idp groups faced additional difficulties upon returning to their places of origin. In some areas of potential return, security remained a concern. The Roma, Ashkali and so-called Egyptian communities were the most disadvantaged in that respect. In Montenegro, four new laws were passed that had a direct bearing on populations of concern to unhcr. Additionally, unhcr continued to pursue durable solutions, facilitating returns to Serbia and Kosovo. In the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, there were 1,772 persons of concern to unhcr, mostly Roma from Kosovo. In December, unhcr’s advocacy activities translated into the adoption by the Government of a strategy for the integration of refugees and foreigners in the country, which provided a policy framework for integration. Refugee repatriation and idp returns stagnated in the region in 2008, and the Sarajevo Declaration [YUN 2005, p. 1320] had yet to be fully implemented. In December, the High Commissioner’s Dialogue on Protracted Refugee Situations brought the issue of durable solutions to the fore. It gave new momentum to efforts to resolve long-standing issues affecting repatriation to Croatia and local integration of refugees in Serbia.