

**Executive Committee of the
High Commissioner’s Programme**

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Update on UNHCR’s operations in southern Africa**A. Situational overview**

By the end of 2020, the southern Africa region hosted nearly 8.7 million persons of concern to UNHCR. This included some 6.3 million internally displaced people (IDPs), over 1 million refugees and asylum-seekers, and some 1.2 million returnees. Over 76 per cent of persons of concern to UNHCR in southern Africa were displaced by the complex and overlapping humanitarian crises in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. More than 900,000 Congolese are currently hosted across twenty African countries.

Before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, decreases in food rations necessitated by inadequate funding for the World Food Programme (WFP) were already seriously affecting persons of concern, particularly in Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia. In 2021, it is expected that food shortages will remain a challenge in the region.

Due to an increase in violence in eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the number of IDPs reached 5.2 million by 2021. UNHCR had declared a level-3 emergency for North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri provinces in 2020, which allowed the operation to strengthen emergency support. In 2021, UNHCR will continue to coordinate the inter-agency regional refugee response for the situation. Together with some seventy partners, UNHCR is striving to strengthen protection and solutions for Congolese refugees and asylum-seekers, bolster livelihood opportunities, strengthen peaceful coexistence and, in line with the Global Compact on Refugees, support the needs of host populations.

The tense security situation in the Central African Republic deteriorated prior to and following the presidential and legislative elections held in December 2020. By mid-February 2021, the violence had forced approximately 108,000 people to flee their homes and seek asylum in several countries, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo (92,000, according to Government statistics) and the Republic of the Congo (4,300). Consequently, a level-2 emergency was declared for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and a level-1 emergency for the Congo in order to support preparedness and response activities. UNHCR and its partners have prioritized registration so that protection and assistance can be delivered effectively according to the needs.

The deteriorating security situation in north-eastern Cabo Delgado Province of Mozambique required a sustained, joint inter-agency humanitarian response. There was a notable increase in violence during the past year, with the presence of non-State armed groups that directly targeted civilians. So far, more than 2,000 civilians have been killed, while houses were looted and burned and sources of livelihoods destroyed. Approximately 530,000 people have been displaced in Cabo Delgado, Nampula and Niassa Provinces. There were reports of widespread human rights abuses and disregard for international humanitarian law, creating a protection crisis with the potential to spread through the region. Access to some areas has remained limited due to violence and insecurity, and there is a high risk of sexual exploitation and abuse. UNHCR is leading the protection cluster and has extensive operational engagement in the camp coordination and camp management and shelter clusters. The Office has scaled up its operations in the northern provinces in recent months and is working closely with partners and the Government to increase protection services and promote access to affected populations. Areas of focus include protection monitoring, community-based protection programmes and capacity-building, with a view to identifying persons with specific needs

and providing appropriate solutions. UNHCR is also prioritizing the prevention of gender-based violence and response activities, as well as child protection. In 2021, UNHCR will provide shelter assistance to the displaced and distribute core-relief items to 32,000 households.

As of mid-February, there were well over 1.8 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the southern Africa region. UNHCR programmes were adapted to observe social distancing, and other mitigation measures were implemented. For example, health protocols were put in place at registration and food distribution points, and hotlines and community protection structures were used to report protection issues and assistance needs. While the number of COVID-19 cases is decreasing across the region, the risk of a resurgence of the virus will remain in 2021. UNHCR will continue to focus on disseminating communications about the risks involved and prevention measures. Strengthening health systems and reinforcing water, sanitation and hygiene services also remain priorities in 2021. UNHCR will continue to equip health centres, train health care workers and support isolation and quarantine centres for COVID-19 patients, particularly in refugee camps and settlements. In addition, UNHCR will advocate access to territory and respect for asylum obligations, which are not incompatible with COVID-19 related measures.

B. Achieving the global strategic priorities

Favourable protection environment

UNHCR continues to advocate accession to and ratification of international and regional instruments on refugees, IDPs and stateless people. In the Congo, the adoption of a national asylum law is under consideration, while the Seychelles has requested technical support in drafting a national legal asylum framework that could serve as a model for other Indian Ocean Island States. Mauritius and UNHCR have agreed on standard operating procedures to prevent refoulement, facilitate refugee status determination and identify solutions, while the Comoros has expressed its intention to ratify the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. UNHCR will also support ratification of the 2009 African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced People in Africa (Kampala Convention) and its incorporation into national laws and policies.

Positive steps have been taken towards addressing statelessness in the region, albeit with progress slowed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Namibia and Zambia have taken decisive steps towards accession to the statelessness conventions, which will be supported by UNHCR in 2021. Furthermore, UNHCR will provide technical support to the Congo and Eswatini, following their adoption of national action plans to end statelessness. Areas of focus will include reform of nationality laws and enhancement of civil registration systems. Currently, Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Madagascar, Namibia and Zambia have national plans awaiting formal endorsement by their respective governments. Data collection efforts on the risk of statelessness, profiles and size of affected populations in a number of countries¹ have been initiated and will continue to be supported by UNHCR in 2021. Legal aid has been provided to persons of concern in Madagascar, Mozambique and South Africa, with a view to providing access to documentation or to confirming nationality. UNHCR will continue to support this initiative in 2021. UNHCR will redouble its efforts to collect reliable data in these countries to inform policies as well as to strengthen and promote legal and administrative frameworks related to nationality and statelessness.

In 2021, in line with UNHCR's policy on engagement in situations of internal displacement, the organization will focus on: 1) strengthening its protection leadership and reinforcing its capacity to lead the shelter and the camp coordination and camp management clusters; 2) strengthening rapid response to emergencies and ensuring the centrality of protection in all IDP interventions; 3) reinforcing advocacy based on UNHCR's protection monitoring systems; 4) consolidating

¹ These countries include Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eswatini, Madagascar, Namibia, the Congo, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

community-based protection approaches; 5) ensuring targeted assistance to persons at heightened risk; 6) promoting peaceful co-existence within affected communities; 7) strengthening community mobilization; and 8) implementing solution strategies for IDPs in sites and host communities. UNHCR's response is anchored in its responsibilities under the Inter-Agency Standing Committee cluster system.

Fair protection process and documentation

National migration systems in the region are overwhelmed and in need of strengthening to manage mixed movements of refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants originating from over 90 countries. This has left thousands of people in legal limbo, with refugee status determination systems facing backlogs that can take months or even years to process. To address this, UNHCR will seek to improve the quality and integrity of registration and refugee status determination processes by providing technical and financial support. UNHCR and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) established a five year (2020-2024) joint action plan to strengthen support for SADC member States. The action plan, which aims to help ensure regional alignment in managing the response to mixed movements, was endorsed by the SADC Public Security Sub-Committee in June 2020. Furthermore, in line with UNHCR's strategy to address mixed movements in Africa, UNHCR is implementing a four-year joint project with the International Labour Organization, the International Organization for Migration and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to support SADC countries in strengthening institutional mechanisms for migration management.

Security from violence and exploitation

UNHCR will be promoting accountability to affected populations and building capacity for the protection of refugees and other persons of concern. Prevention, risk mitigation and responses to gender-based violence will also remain priorities. Particular attention will be paid to the needs of women and children.

UNHCR is also supporting efforts to provide local solutions through quick impact projects and partnerships with stabilization and development actors. This includes engagement with the United Nations Development Programme on multi-agency, multi-year projects aiming to improve access to justice for survivors of gender-based violence.

Basic needs and services

UNHCR will provide protection and multi-sectoral assistance to persons of concern and host communities, both in the context of emergencies and in protracted situations. The response will be anchored in national services and systems, and development plans, and it will be guided by UNHCR's regional multi-year strategy and protection framework. Cash is, along with other assistance and services, an integral element of UNHCR's protection and solutions strategies. In southern Africa, UNHCR operations are committed to shifting from in-kind assistance to cash-based interventions (CBI), where feasible, and to using cash as a vehicle for the financial inclusion of refugees. UNHCR operations in the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa and Zambia are already implementing CBIs as part of their regular programmes. An increase of CBIs is envisaged in Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe.

Community empowerment and self-reliance

In 2021, UNHCR will seek to further operationalize the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) by strengthening its partnership with the regional economic communities, in particular SADC. The memorandum of understanding between UNHCR and SADC was revised to advance the principles of the GCR and operationalize pledges from the Global Refugee Forum in the region. Cooperation will include exploring a regional mechanism governing freedom of movement, regularization of stay and access to work rights for refugees in transit and in destination countries, as well as alternative pathways for skilled migrants. Enhanced partnerships will also be explored with the Pan African Parliament and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa.

UNHCR is pursuing alliances with a range of stakeholders in 2021 to ensure refugee and host community inclusion in national development plans. Furthermore, UNHCR will contribute to the advancement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063 of the African Union. The organization will leverage its partnership with the World Bank Group to mobilize additional resources in response to situations of forced displacement, in addition to maintaining its strategic partnership with the Identification for Development (ID4D) initiative in the Congo. Partnerships particularly with the African Development Bank, *Agence Française de Développement* and *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit* will be enhanced to advocate investments in refugees-hosting areas and the economic inclusion of persons of concern.

Activities have started in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe to operationalize the global memorandums of understanding with the Food and Agriculture Organization and the WFP towards developing joint livelihoods programmes. Furthermore, persons of concern to UNHCR have been included in the United Nations country team socio-economic response plans in Angola, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The Governments of Malawi and Zambia have included persons of concern in agriculture programmes, helping to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 but also aiming to support longer-term self-reliance. In South Africa, a new policy framework on financial inclusion includes a section on refugees and highlights the need to facilitate better access to financial services. The Poverty Alleviation Coalition, a global network involving the World Bank Partnership for Economic Inclusion and 13 non-governmental organizations, implemented programmes to alleviate poverty, particularly among vulnerable refugees and host communities, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Durable solutions

Approximately 4,700 people were assisted to return home in 2020, even though border closures aimed at limiting the spread of COVID-19 forced UNHCR to suspend voluntary repatriation operations from March onwards. As borders re-open, voluntary repatriation operations will resume, in line with appropriate health measures and subject to available funding. Tripartite consultations involving UNHCR, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and relevant countries of asylum regarding the voluntary repatriation of Congolese refugees and asylum-seekers will also continue. The Government of Namibia has requested that UNHCR and the Government of Burundi facilitate the voluntary return of some 500 Burundian refugees and asylum-seekers residing in the Osire refugee camp.

In Zambia, efforts to locally integrate former Angolan and Rwandan refugees will continue through support for self-reliance and socioeconomic inclusion. In Zimbabwe, the African Development Bank has funded a scheme expanding self-reliance opportunities through agricultural activities. In Namibia, some Angolan refugees are receiving help to acquire permanent residency, while others have already obtained residence permits. Settlement approaches, with refugees living side-by-side with host communities, will be adopted in Malawi and Mozambique, and further developed in Zambia in 2021.

Resettlement in the southern Africa region has been severely constrained by the COVID-19 pandemic, with third-country resettlement having decreased from some 3,500 submissions in 2019 to 1,360 submissions in 2020. Only 940 resettlement places have been made available for 2021, though it is expected that additional places will become available during the year. In line with UNHCR's three-year global strategy on resettlement and complementary pathways (2019-2021), UNHCR conducted a training in 2020 on complementary pathways, including family reunification, educational opportunities, employment opportunities, humanitarian pathways and private

sponsorships. Incorporating feedback from this training, UNHCR aims to finalize its regional strategy and standard operating procedures on complementary pathways in 2021.

C. Financial information

The comprehensive needs budget for the southern Africa region for 2021 that was approved by the Executive Committee at its annual plenary session in October 2020 amounted to \$345.01 million. This has increased to \$375.40 million as of the end of January 2021.

This reflects an increase of \$9.9 million in response to the IDP situation in northern Mozambique and \$20.4 million linked to the establishment of a supplementary budget for activities primarily related to the protection and socio-economic impacts of COVID-19.
