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Update on UNHCR’s operations in southern Africa**A. Situational analysis including new developments***Regional overview*

The southern Africa region hosted more than 9 million persons of concern to UNHCR by the end of December 2021. This included some 6.75 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), nearly 1.1 million refugees and asylum-seekers and more than 1 million IDP returnees. The operational context was marked by complex humanitarian crises in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and internal conflict in northern Mozambique, while protracted refugee situations endured in Angola, Botswana, the Congo (Republic of), the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Arrivals from the Central African Republic largely subsided, although sporadic movements into southern Africa continued to occur. Ongoing mixed movements from across Africa and further afield presented further challenges. The region was also impacted by climate change and natural disasters, which caused loss of life, livelihoods and property.

Approximately two thirds of displaced persons in the region were from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which remains one of the most complex and long-standing humanitarian crises in Africa. Inter-communal conflict and violence by armed groups triggered vast and repeated displacement. By the end of 2021, some 5.6 million¹ Congolese were internally displaced and more than 1 million had sought asylum across 20 African countries. In response to the IDP situation, UNHCR led the protection cluster, the shelter cluster and the non-food items working group, and co-led the camp coordination and camp management working group. In support of refugees, UNHCR led the inter-agency regional refugee response plan for the Democratic Republic of the Congo situation. In addition to facilitating protection and assistance for refugees and host populations, the plan also aims to bolster livelihood opportunities.

More than 745,000² people were internally displaced in northern Mozambique due to the conflict in Cabo Delgado Province. Although the situation had initially improved following the intervention of regional allied forces in July 2021, violent attacks have resumed, and conflict has spilled over into other provinces. Although the security situation hindered humanitarian access and the provision of assistance, UNHCR was able to scale up its protection presence and activities. It led the protection cluster at the national and sub-national levels and has increasingly played a critical role in delivering assistance through the shelter and non-food items cluster and the camp coordination and camp management cluster.

As of January 2022, the southern Africa region had reported over 5 million cases of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). The devastating socioeconomic impact of the pandemic

¹ This figure is according to statistics from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, as of November 2021.

² This figure is according to statistics from the International Organization for Migration Displacement Tracking Matrix, as of September 2021.

meant that previously self-sufficient refugees and asylum-seekers were forced to rely on humanitarian assistance for survival. Persons of concern were included in national COVID-19 plans, although with health systems under pressure, there were significant gaps in access to testing. Vaccine coverage also remained low, with less than 3 per cent of refugees and asylum-seekers in most countries having received at least one dose. This could be attributed both to a lack of vaccine supply and vaccine hesitancy. Assessments showed that only South Africa had a vaccine coverage of 10 per cent for refugees and asylum-seekers. UNHCR continued to support COVID-19 preventive measures, including by equipping health, isolation and quarantine centres; providing essential medicines; facilitating training for health workers; and supporting vaccine delivery. Water, sanitation and hygiene initiatives were also scaled up and displaced communities, with the support of UNHCR, played an active role in raising awareness about COVID-19 and combating vaccine hesitancy.

Across the region, UNHCR strengthened protection and sought to put in place innovative solutions, in line with the organization's regional strategic directions (2020-2022), the multi-year, multi-partner protection and solutions strategy (2020-2024), and the regional external engagement strategy (2021-2022). In support of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), UNHCR engaged a wide range of stakeholders at the regional and country levels to promote implementation of pledges made at the Global Refugee Forum (GRF) and the high-level segment on statelessness, which took place during the seventieth annual session of UNHCR's Executive Committee. Virtual regional consultations with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were held in September 2021, bringing together an estimated 600 participants, and concluded in a joint action plan for strengthened collaboration on localization, partnerships and GRF pledges.

B. Progress and challenges in achieving the global strategic priorities

Favourable protection environment

To support ratification of the refugee conventions and other key international and regional instruments, UNHCR and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) established a five-year joint action plan (2020-2024). The plan has already resulted in several new joint initiatives, including a conference on GRF pledge implementation and the development of a draft action plan on asylum capacity, livelihoods, education, energy and statelessness.

UNHCR developed an Africa-wide action plan with the International Association of Refugee and Migration Judges, an important feature of which was establishing regional training centres for judges. For the southern Africa region, the training centre is located in Cape Town, and it began delivering training on asylum and statelessness in 2021, with the objective of training 2,000 legal practitioners and judges by 2023. This strategic partnership will support UNHCR engagement on policy and judicial decisions in the years to come.

In the Congo (Republic of), a law establishing the right to asylum and refugee status was promulgated in September 2021. Ratification of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention) was ongoing, following a legal mapping exercise and progression towards incorporation in national laws and policies.

UNHCR advocated with governments and regional economic communities to ensure respect for the principle of non-refoulement. Legal aid was provided to enhance access to documentation and action are underway to strengthen national asylum systems and reduce refugee status determination (RSD) backlogs, in Angola, Eswatini, Malawi, Mozambique and South Africa.

Fair protection process and documentation

UNHCR continues to support States in the region to strengthen asylum systems. Although 12 out of 16 countries already have national asylum systems in place, these efforts are focused on strengthening asylum procedures, building the capacity of eligibility officers and enhancing management and decisions. In South Africa, UNHCR signed a “backlog project” agreement with the Ministry of Home Affairs in 2021, with the aim of reducing 88 per cent of pending asylum applications. In Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe, UNHCR reached agreement with the Governments to enhance the registration of asylum-seekers, refugees and stateless persons using its biometric identity management registration system. The Office also supported alternatives to detention in Zimbabwe, which were incorporated in the referral mechanism for asylum-seekers and refugees.

Qualitative data on statelessness was being collected in nine operations (Angola, the Congo (Republic of), the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eswatini, Madagascar, Malawi, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe), while Namibia, Botswana, South Africa and Zambia were considering including statelessness-related questions in upcoming population censuses. In Madagascar, Mozambique and South Africa, UNHCR’s partners helped identify and assist stateless persons or those at risk of statelessness through legal clinics.

In the case of those born in transit and in host States, birth certificates issued by the civil registry helped prevent statelessness. In Malawi and Zambia, UNHCR promoted the use of national identity documentation to help prevent refoulement and arrest; facilitate inclusion in national health, education and social protection systems; and enable legal access to the labour market, as well as to banking and mobile and other digital services. In the Congo (Republic of), UNHCR supported a government initiative in 2021, during which 25,000 undocumented Congolese received a birth certificate, including 5,000 people from the indigenous minority.

Ensuring protection from violence and exploitation

Gender-based violence remained a major protection concern in both emergency and protracted situations. In the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, UNHCR protection monitoring recorded some 7,700 incidents, following which 2,400 survivors were identified and given support. UNHCR prioritized community-based approaches and undertook preventive activities including in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe. A regional learning event on mainstreaming the mitigation of gender-based violence targeted 37 staff in southern Africa. This was followed by an in-depth series of workshops involving 28 staff in Mozambique that allowed for risks to be analysed and actions taken in all sectors of the response.

A network of UNHCR focal points covering all operations was mobilized to strengthen efforts aimed at prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), and UNHCR played a leadership role at the inter-agency level through coordination of PSEA working groups, as well as training and awareness-raising initiatives. UNHCR’s work on PSEA was especially critical in emergency operations, including in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and northern Mozambique. UNHCR also increased efforts to protect LGBTIQ+ asylum-seekers and refugees who were exposed to heightened protection risks.

Improved data was a priority for strengthening advocacy at all levels. UNHCR worked to strengthen child protection including through advocating inclusion in national services. In South Africa, for example, a dialogue with between United Nations partners and government stakeholders in December 2021 led to progress on inclusion. In Mozambique, UNHCR worked with displaced youth, strengthening their capacity to play a positive role in the communities.

Basic needs and services

UNHCR supported the inclusion of refugees in national health systems, which were often critically resource-constrained due to the impact of COVID-19. Ongoing support from UNHCR and partners was needed to sustain access to health care, including HIV prevention, care and treatment, and nutrition services for refugees. Continuing food insecurity and reductions in food assistance remained a concern, and UNHCR invested in assessments to generate evidence-based data and improve food and nutrition programming.

The use of solar-powered boreholes was intensified in Malawi and Zimbabwe, and the reliability of distribution systems was improved by piloting real-time monitoring technology. In response to the pandemic, investments were made in water, sanitation and hygiene in households as well as in public institutions, including schools, which had a positive effect on infection, prevention and control.

Investments in shelter for refugees remained a priority in sites, camps and settlements. In Malawi, shelter construction was of critical importance to decongest the Dzaleka refugee camp. UNHCR supported refugees with shelter materials, including in Mozambique, Namibia and Zimbabwe.

Leveraging technology to enhance access to education, the instant network school programme by UNHCR and the Vodafone Foundation was expanded to 12 schools in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The schools were equipped with digital educational materials and resources, as well as connectivity where available. Pedagogical support was provided to ensure that digital learning tools could be fully utilized in the classroom by teachers, students and community members.

Cash-based interventions were integrated in regular programming in 2021 in the Congo (Republic of), the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa and Zambia. More than 150,000 vulnerable people received cash assistance to support their subsistence and mitigate the socioeconomic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Community empowerment and self-reliance

UNHCR ensured accountability to affected populations, including through dedicated regional staff and funding in key areas. For example, additional community-based protection staff will help strengthen feedback mechanisms, protection and participation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in conflict-affected areas of Mozambique. Feedback mechanisms and transparent communication will be enhanced through the use of digital platforms, such as Help.org in South Africa, and inter-agency hotlines in places like Mozambique.

In line with the GCR, promoting livelihood initiatives and economic inclusion through multi-stakeholder engagement remained a priority for the region. Additional resources were committed by development actors towards economic inclusion programmes in the Congo (Republic of), the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. NGO partners, in collaboration with UNHCR, also stepped-up resource mobilization for economic inclusion programmes. Through the World Food Programme (WFP)-UNHCR Joint Programme Excellence and Targeting Hub, resources were mobilized for joint programmes in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mozambique and Zambia. Furthermore, UNHCR completed implementation of an African Development Bank funded project in Zimbabwe in December 2021, to increase livelihood activities and well-being of refugees, asylum-seekers and host communities.

With a focus on including persons of concern in development programmes, UNHCR embarked on several large-scale development projects, including two African Development Bank (AfDB) projects in Mozambique, the first aimed at supporting access to electricity for

refugees, IDPs and hosting communities. The second project provided IDPs in northern Mozambique with basic equipment to support agricultural production and small-trading activities. In Zambia, refugees and host communities in Mantapala refugee settlement were included in a Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) project with an aim to promote rice cultivation and enhance self-reliance.

Furthermore, UNHCR established coordination with the World Bank on the International Development Association (IDA-18) sub-window for host communities and refugees in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, allowing for more engagement in beneficiary selection and monitoring. In the Congo (Republic of), UNHCR signed an agreement with the Government to monitor the World Bank's Lisungi Project³, and further collaboration was also expected in relation to the IDA-19 sub-window for host communities and refugees.

There were also opportunities for a settlement approach and socioeconomic integration in Eswatini, Lesotho and Namibia. In Malawi, UNHCR will aim to enhance livelihood support to refugees in camps, despite the Government having reinforced its encampment policy in 2021.

Achieving durable solutions

In 2021, over 14,000 persons returned to their countries of origin, primarily to Burundi and the Central African Republic from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In Zambia, the voluntary repatriation of refugees from Mantapala refugee settlement to Pweto in the Democratic Republic of the Congo commenced, with 300 persons departing in late December 2021 and early January 2022. As restrictions related to the pandemic ease and borders re-open, voluntary repatriation is expected to resume and, in some cases, expand. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, repatriation to Burundi is expected to continue, while plans are in place to support an additional 4,300 persons to return from Zambia. Consultations are ongoing with a view to facilitating voluntary repatriation to the Democratic Republic of the Congo from the Congo (Republic of) and South Africa.

Operations in the region identified 56,000 refugees in need of resettlement in the 2022 planning process, though only 5,300 places are available. In 2021, restrictions related to COVID-19 meant that operations struggled to fulfil quotas, reaching only 59 per cent of the target with 3,105 submissions, while 1,300 persons departed for resettlement. The pandemic also made it challenging to implement resettlement programmes due to delays in the recruitment of personnel. By the end of 2021, however, almost all additional staff needed had been recruited. Other complementary pathways were also explored, including through education, labour migration and family reunification.

Prospects for local integration were pursued in Mozambique, where the operation engaged with development actors in refugee-hosting areas. In Zambia, finding solutions for former Angolan and Rwandan refugees, who continued to reside in settlements after cessation, was a priority. For Rwandans in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, opportunities for local integration were also pursued.

C. Plans for 2022 and financial information

Overview - Impact areas

In line with UNHCR's new results-based management framework, operations in the region selected areas of focus for 2022 to make an impact for persons of concern. All operations in

³ The aim of the project is to provide emergency income support to households affected by the COVID-19 health and economic crisis and increase access to safety nets for recovery.

southern Africa prioritized “attaining favourable protection environments”, while a majority also focused on “securing solutions” in view of the opportunities available. Some operations focused on “realizing basic rights in safe environments” due to encampment policies or in the absence of opportunities to include persons of concern in national plans. In IDP operations and in refugee operations with dispersed refugee populations integrated in local villages, “empowering communities and achieving gender equality” was emphasized to ensure the resilience of both persons of concern and their host communities.

Attaining favourable protection environments

UNHCR is committed to providing practical, concrete support to secure protection and advance solutions for persons of concern. Key milestones for 2022 will include a regional action plan to implement pledges from the GRF and the high-level segment on statelessness, which will be submitted for adoption by the Member States of the South African Development Community in 2022. All countries in the region have committed, albeit to varying degrees, to addressing statelessness through their pledges.

Operations with IDPs will continue to play a leadership role through the protection cluster and provide protection expertise in other sectors. Addressing gender-based violence will remain a priority, and UNHCR will intensify activities to prevent and address this including through community-based approaches. UNHCR will continue to expand its support to address backlogs in refugee status determination.

Realizing basic rights in safe environments

UNHCR will pursue a holistic approach to ensuring basic and essential services, recognizing that shelter, water, sanitation, energy, health and livelihood opportunities are crucial elements enabling people to exercise their rights in a safe environment. A key priority for 2022 will be to scale up advocacy and support for governments to secure the inclusion of persons of concern in national and local systems. In coordination with partners, cash-based interventions will be mainstreamed in regular programming. Food assistance in partnership with WFP will continue, where necessary.

Empowering communities and achieving gender equality

In 2022, UNHCR will reinforce its accountabilities to affect persons by strengthening protection outcomes, guided by its age, gender and diversity approach. Emphasis will be placed on empowering refugees as agents of change and effective partners in delivering protection. This will be supported by improved two-way communication and effective community engagement to support decision-making. Community-based protection will continue to play a key role in strengthening the safety and participation of all groups, while feedback mechanisms and transparent communication will be facilitated through a variety of channels for communication.

Securing solutions

UNHCR will promote and facilitate comprehensive and durable solutions by scaling up livelihoods, financial inclusion and self-reliance. The Office expects to have up to 7,200 allocated places for resettlement in 2022 and up to 12,000 by 2024. In addition to resettlement, UNHCR will promote initiatives that foster local integration and support voluntary repatriation, where conditions allow. Initial planning figures for 2022 are for 47,000 refugees to voluntarily repatriate from and to the region. As borders continue to re-open, voluntary repatriation is expected to resume and, in some cases, expand.

Financial information

The comprehensive needs budget for the southern Africa region for 2022, which was approved by the Executive Committee at its annual plenary session in October 2021, amounted to \$436.5 million. Reflecting a \$46.6 million increase from the 2021 final budget of \$389.9 million, the budget approved for 2022 remains unchanged as of the end of January 2022.

As of 25 January 2022, some 5 per cent of the region's 2022 financial requirements were funded, taking into consideration the indicative allocation of unearmarked and softly earmarked contributions.
