

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

Distr.: Restricted  
21 February 2024

Original: English and French

**Standing Committee**  
Eighty-ninth meeting

---

**Global programmes**

*Summary*

This paper provides an update on the progress achieved in 2023 through the implementation of UNHCR global programmes, which were carried out in support of the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees. It includes developments since the previous update presented to the eighty-sixth meeting of the Standing Committee (EC/74/SC/CRP.3).

## **I. Introduction**

1. In 2023, UNHCR global programmes succeeded in supporting millions of forcibly displaced women, men and children against a backdrop of new and ongoing conflict, continued persecution and human rights violations. These programmes covered the following areas: (a) livelihoods and economic inclusion; (b) cash-based interventions; (c) education; (d) food security and nutrition; (e) public health, including mental health and psychosocial support; (f) shelter and settlements; (g) water, sanitation and hygiene; and (h) energy and the environment. UNHCR continued to co-lead the global shelter cluster and the global camp coordination and camp management cluster.

## **II. Updates on technical sectors**

### **A. Livelihoods and economic inclusion**

2. The UNHCR Global Survey on Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion, which was released in December 2023, encompasses data from 132 countries, accounting for 99.6 per cent of the global refugee population. The survey shows that refugees have seen an improvement in the realization of their economic and social rights, with a notable increase from 18 per cent in 2019 to 45 per cent in 2023 in the number of refugees residing in countries with unrestricted access to formal employment. Over 50 per cent of refugees were also found to have the legal right to open bank accounts, a crucial step towards financial inclusion. In addition, the survey notes advancements in social protection, with approximately 40 per cent of surveyed countries offering support to refugees. Such positive trends can be partially attributed to commitments and pledges made by States at the first Global Refugee Forum in December 2019.

3. Despite these positive developments, the report identifies persistent challenges. These include legal and practical barriers to access services, limited local government capacity and financial constraints, which affect in particular the access of women and older adolescents to formal employment. Significantly, the survey also extends its analysis beyond refugees to asylum-seekers, internally displaced returnees, refugee returnees and stateless people. In 2023, the survey showed the type of enabling environments that helped provide access to formal employment, entrepreneurship and self-employment, foster inclusion in the digital economy and uphold the right to access land for agriculture.

4. An encouraging development at the second Global Refugee Forum, which was held in Geneva, Switzerland in December 2023, was a multi-stakeholder pledge on economic inclusion and social protection was made by over 200 entities. Host countries, donors, development actors and the private sector were among those who contributed to this multi-stakeholder pledge that aims to improve policy frameworks, expand programmes and increase research and knowledge to help inform future interventions.

5. In 2023, UNHCR conducted extensive consultations to develop its global livelihoods and economic inclusion strategy for 2024-2028, which was also informed by the contributions made to the multi-stakeholder pledge on economic inclusion and social protection. The strategy is designed to guide UNHCR and its partners in promoting the economic inclusion of forcibly displaced and stateless populations, including by leveraging partnerships with host countries, development organizations and the private sector.

6. Forty-nine operations were supported to ensure the monitoring of livelihoods and economic inclusion activities using the livelihoods information system. In partnership with CartONG,<sup>1</sup> UNHCR ensured technical support and system interoperability, and co-hosted annual webinars to facilitate the effective use of the livelihood information system.

7. As a sustainable model of a circular economy, insect farming offers numerous benefits including better nutrition, job creation, reduced gas emissions and improved waste management. Following its success in Malawi, South Sudan and Zimbabwe in 2022 and

---

<sup>1</sup> CartONG is a non-governmental organization that specializes in information management. Its mission is to put data at the service of humanitarian, development and social action projects.

2023, UNHCR and the World Bank are set to expand this initiative to operations in Chad, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mexico and Uganda in 2024.

8. UNHCR also strengthened its partnerships with the private sector to advance employment and self-employment opportunities for refugees. The World Economic Forum's Refugee Employment Alliance, which is co-chaired by UNHCR and the Ingka Group, have worked to accelerate multi-stakeholder support for the economic integration of refugees globally.

9. In 2023, the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and the UNHCR Joint Initiative supported financial inclusion gap assessments in Ecuador, Poland, the Republic of Moldova and Romania. IFC and UNHCR also co-hosted events to engage with the banking sector and the regulators in Poland and the Republic of Moldova. In particular, the UNHCR Joint Initiative supported IFC in designing an initiative with Santander Polka to extend loans worth over \$17 million to micro, small and medium enterprises owned by refugees, as well as to Polish micro, small and medium enterprises hiring refugees or providing services to refugees.

## **B. Education**

10. UNHCR continues to deliver on its education strategy 2030 at all levels of education and with a focus on inclusion in national systems, whether in emergencies or protracted situations. In 2024, UNHCR will undertake a strategic review of key areas, reflecting on successes and challenges and preparing for the next five years. The second Global Refugee Forum saw a multi-stakeholder pledge on inclusion in national education systems generate significant support from donors, such as Canada, Germany and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, international financial institutions, such as the World Bank, the private sector, and host countries, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya and Mauritania. In 2024, technical assistance will be provided in a number of pilot countries to help operationalize the Global Compact on Refugees for equitable, quality education.

11. In 2023, the fourth phase of the UNHCR and Educate A Child programme, which is supported by Qatar's Education Above All Foundation, successfully concluded. The programme facilitated the enrolment of some 420,000 displaced out-of-school children into primary education across 14 countries. A new global initiative called "primary impact" was launched in 2023 and will help bolster primary education in an additional 16 countries.

12. At the end of 2023, UNHCR, together with a coalition of partners, released the first Global 15by30 Roadmap.<sup>2</sup> This roadmap outlines five pathways to achieve a 15 per cent enrolment rate of refugee youth in higher education by 2030. The DAFI (Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative) scholarship programme remains the cornerstone of 15by30. Furthermore, improved coordination in this sector resulted in more than 90 education-related pledges at the second Global Refugee Forum, including a multi-stakeholder pledge on the strengthening of national systems and the inclusion of refugees.

13. UNHCR remains the guardian of data on education for refugees worldwide and has further enhanced data collection and analysis in the course of 2023. More than 70 countries contributed data for the annual report on refugee education, an increase of nearly 50 per cent compared to 2022. In addition, UNHCR collaborated with the United States Agency for International Development and the World Bank on joint advocacy and the promotion of availability and access to evidence through the Higher Education Learning Network and the Building Evidence in Education donor working group.

14. The Vodafone Foundation-funded Instant Network Schools programme significantly expanded access to equitable and quality digital education in refugee communities in six countries, namely the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Kenya, Mozambique, South Sudan and the United Republic of Tanzania. Since its inception, the Instant Network Schools programme has had a positive impact on over 274,000 children and 4,700 teachers. In 2023 alone, the programme benefited over 81,000 students and 3,900 teachers.

15. Collaboration with ProFuturo in Nigeria, Rwanda and Zimbabwe benefited more than 25,000 children and nearly 1,000 teachers, promoting a connected digital learning

<sup>2</sup> Available from <https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2023-12/15by30-roadmap.pdf>.

environment for enhanced educational opportunities. Through the UNHCR Refugee Connected Education Challenge, the connected education task team was established including some 15 partners. This collaborative effort resulted in pledges that help meet content, connectivity and capacity challenges and that ultimately aim to improve the equitable delivery of quality education for refugees.

### C. Food security and nutrition

16. In the course of 2023, the growing food security crisis was exacerbated by a shortfall in humanitarian funding and posed acute protection risks for the forcibly displaced. In response to these challenges, UNHCR has joined the Global Network Against Food Crises, actively participating in its Senior Steering Group and Advisory Group and in technical-level discussions. New members of this global network include the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development.

17. UNHCR continued to work with the World Food Programme (WFP) on the Joint Programme Excellence and Targeting Hub – hereafter Joint Hub – on food aid and related resilience and food security solutions. In 2023, the Joint Hub provided technical, operational and coordination support to 10 country operations<sup>3</sup> and five regional bureaux, reaching some 40 per cent<sup>4</sup> of UNHCR and WFP global operations since 2020. Support included joint needs assessments, a targeting approach and associated accountability to refugees, the internally displaced and vulnerable host communities. The Joint Hub has significantly improved the delivery of humanitarian assistance in complex situations, underscoring the power of collaboration between UNHCR and WFP.

18. At the second Global Refugee Forum, UNHCR, together with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and WFP, co-led a multi-stakeholder pledge on agriculture, food security and food systems. UNHCR is following up on the analysis, advocacy and implementation of pledges received, in particular at country level, and on the matching of in-country policy commitments with donor resources.

19. In November 2023, with support from the Joint Hub, UNHCR and WFP also introduced a joint analytical framework, a set of tools to guide their country operations in reaching a common understanding of the ability of refugees, asylum-seekers and other forcibly displaced people to meet their basic needs. The joint analytical framework addresses an important gap in existing guidance, including by streamlining joint processes and contributing to the development of comparative data in operations where UNHCR and WFP collaborate.

20. In 2023, various forms of malnutrition persisted, with 1 in 10 refugee children suffering from acute malnutrition, 1 in 3 from stunting and 1 in 2 from micronutrient deficiencies. Refugee children in emergency situations experienced even higher levels of malnutrition, such as in the Sudan Situation where 1 in 3 children were affected by acute malnutrition. To address this, UNHCR reinforced programmes to treat and prevent undernutrition. Strengthened community-based management of acute malnutrition resulted in: over 270,000 admissions, including children, pregnant and breastfeeding women and people living with the human immunodeficiency virus and tuberculosis, in 30 countries; infant and young child nutrition promotion programmes; micronutrient supplementation interventions; and nutrition situation assessments to monitor and guide programming. In addition, two trainings were carried out to enhance the technical and operational capacity to better respond to nutrition-related needs. Thirty-one participants from nine countries in the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region and 20 participants from six countries in the southern Africa region took part in these trainings.

21. UNHCR continued to work in partnership with the other United Nations agencies, including FAO, UNICEF, WFP and the World Health Organization (WHO), to help reduce wasting, in line with the Global Action Plan on Child Wasting.<sup>5</sup> In 2023, five priority actions

---

<sup>3</sup> Bangladesh, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, South Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

<sup>4</sup> Relevant projects were completed in Cameroon, Djibouti, Jordan, Rwanda, the Sudan and the United Republic of Tanzania.

<sup>5</sup> See [www.childwasting.org](http://www.childwasting.org).

were identified to accelerate the response to the global food and nutrition crisis in 15 of the most-affected countries. The inclusion of forcibly displaced populations in this initiative is crucial given that over 4.6 million refugees are hosted in 12<sup>6</sup> of the 15 most-affected countries.

22. Agriculture offers significant opportunities for refugee livelihoods, food security and economic inclusion. In 2023, 54 per cent of refugees were living in countries with unrestricted access to land for agriculture, 14 per cent more than in 2021. However, further investments are required. While major investments in agriculture and food systems have been made by development actors, the transformation necessary for refugee and host communities to become food secure, self-reliant and resilient to climate shocks has not yet been observed.

#### **D. Cash-based interventions**

23. In line with its policy on cash-based interventions 2022-2026,<sup>7</sup> UNHCR delivered more than \$700 million to 7 million people in 100 countries. Some 95 per cent of the cash was unrestricted. The top 10 UNHCR operations delivering cash assistance were: Afghanistan, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Pakistan, Poland, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Yemen. The 2023 post-distribution monitoring data results found that over 90 per cent of interviewed households said cash improved their living conditions and well-being and that it was their preferred modality of assistance.

24. With 80 per cent delivered through digital means, it remained a vehicle for digital and financial inclusion and empowerment, reaching 36 per cent of forcibly displaced through their own bank and/or mobile money accounts, a four per cent increase compared to 2022. Where refugees could not access formal financial services, UNHCR found other ways of delivering cash, such as with pre-paid cards. Yet, around 77 per cent reported meeting only half or less of their basic needs, and over 60 per cent engaged in negative coping mechanisms. Nevertheless, UNHCR has documented the positive impact of cash on protection in Yemen and good practices on cash and child protection in Bulgaria, Poland, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine.

25. Accountable for cash coordination in refugee settings, UNHCR successfully ensured that all of its cash working groups adopted the new cash coordination model. In 72 per cent of cases, cash working groups also benefited from local co-chairmanship.

26. In 2023, UNHCR won an award for its innovative use of blockchain technology in the disbursements of cash assistance to the forcibly displaced in Ukraine, providing real-time traceability of funds. UNHCR rolled out CashAssist – its cash management system – to an additional eight countries, bringing the total using CashAssist to 35 countries and channeling some \$540 million in cash to recipients.

27. In 2024, UNHCR aims to scale up cash as the primary response modality, including in emergencies, and to leverage it as a vehicle for inclusion, linking people to financial institutions, economic activities and social protection programmes.

#### **E. Public health, including mental health and psychosocial support**

28. In 2023, UNHCR continued to strengthen the integrated refugee health information system used in 19 countries and in over 220 settlements. Globally, over 9 million health consultations that benefited both refugees (84 per cent) and members of local communities (16 per cent) were carried out. Technical support was also provided in public health emergencies, including in the Ukraine and Sudan situations.

29. Positive strides were made to help enhance the access of refugees to health care services. Notably, UNHCR and World Bank held initial consultations with host countries on measuring the cost of the inclusion of refugees in national health systems. UNHCR also contributed to multi-stakeholder training on “big questions in forced displacement and

<sup>6</sup> Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, South Sudan, the Sudan and Yemen.

<sup>7</sup> Available from [www.unhcr.org/media/2022-2026-unhcr-policy-cash-based-interventions](http://www.unhcr.org/media/2022-2026-unhcr-policy-cash-based-interventions).

health” project<sup>8</sup> carried out in partnership with Columbia University, the World Bank and the United Kingdom’s Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

30. Another innovative platform that helps advance inclusion is the Group of Friends of Health for Refugees and Host Communities, which was established in May 2023 and is co-convened by UNHCR and WHO.<sup>9</sup> The Group’s leaders include the Governments of Germany, Morocco and the Netherlands (Kingdom of), as well as the European Commission, Amal Alliance, the Gavi Alliance, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, Johns Hopkins University and UNICEF. In the lead-up to the second Global Refugee Forum, the Group supported the development of two multi-stakeholder pledges on health and mental health and psychosocial support, which received over 150 pledges from partners, including 31 States.

31. Collaboration continues with the International Labour Organization to advance social health protection for refugees through the “Partnership for improving prospects for forcibly displaced persons and host communities” (PROSPECTS). Feasibility assessments on the inclusion of refugees in national social health protection systems were conducted in Egypt, Ethiopia and Kenya.

32. UNHCR worked with UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund and WHO on the introduction of a new “minimum service package for mental health and psychosocial support”<sup>10</sup> at the global level and through support visits to Ethiopia and Pakistan. In Bangladesh and Peru, 60 refugee and national partner staff started training that was provided in partnership with Columbia University on how to become trainers and providers of interpersonal psychotherapy for depression.

33. In over 50 countries, UNHCR and partners sustained support for sexual and reproductive health, including access to life-saving maternal and newborn care, before, during and after childbirth, as well as for life-saving services for people living with the human immunodeficiency virus. A round table discussion jointly organized by the Centre for Reproductive Rights, UNHCR and WHO, together with over 70 representatives of partner organizations from Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia, addressed persistent barriers to access sexual and reproductive health and services in response to gender-based violence faced by refugees from Ukraine.

34. The partnership with the World Diabetes Foundation was further strengthened to help provide care for refugees and host communities with non-communicable diseases in Burundi and the United Republic of Tanzania. Support for capacity-building was also extended to government and non-governmental partners.

## **F. Settlements and shelter, water, sanitation and hygiene, and energy**

35. In line with its operational strategy for climate resilience and environmental sustainability 2022-2025, UNHCR has made further progress in mitigating the impact of climate change by improving the technical integrity of its humanitarian response in the areas of settlement planning; shelter and housing; water, sanitation and hygiene; and energy.

36. The Office’s four-year global strategy on water, sanitation and hygiene is under development, aligning with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and underpinned by the inclusion principle, striving to transition from life-saving to sustainable and inclusive service delivery. As part of this strategic direction, UNHCR continues to contribute to climate resilient water, sanitation and hygiene programmes to address climate risks through sustainable natural resource management, proactive environmental conservation and the reduction of carbon emissions.

37. UNHCR continued to implement a smart water sensors project for climate smart water programmes, with the use of real-time monitoring and “internet of things” technology that aim to improve the efficiency and operational effectiveness of water supply services. The

<sup>8</sup> Please see [www.publichealth.columbia.edu/research/programs/program-forced-migration-health/research/big-questions-forced-displacement-health](http://www.publichealth.columbia.edu/research/programs/program-forced-migration-health/research/big-questions-forced-displacement-health).

<sup>9</sup> Please see <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/group-friends-health-refugees-and-host-communities>.

<sup>10</sup> Please see [www.mhpssmsp.org/en](http://www.mhpssmsp.org/en).

installation of smart water sensors, the training of UNHCR staff and partners, and the use of the data to help improve the implementation of such activities are ongoing in 10 countries.<sup>11</sup>.

38. To enhance the climate resilience of UNHCR operations and reduce dependency on fossil fuels, UNHCR is advancing the solarization of water systems through an innovative financing mechanism. The cost of solar pumping systems is being covered by a global fund, which UNHCR operations replenish in the course of several years with the savings achieved by switching from the previous diesel-powered systems to solar ones. These savings allow the funds to revolve and facilitate the solarization of additional water systems. In 2023, feasibility studies were conducted, and detailed solar designs were developed for over 40 water systems in Ethiopia, Mauritania, Rwanda, South Sudan, the Sudan and Zambia.

39. In 2023, collaboration continued with the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit*, or GIZ, on a programme on energy solutions in displacement settings. Addressing household and community electrification, electronic waste management and clean cooking, the initiative was implemented in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda. In Bangladesh, significant progress was made in electronic waste management thanks to the establishment of the Green Innovation Hub. In Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania, the successful mobilization of funds, with the support of development banks and the private sector, enabled the initiation of solarization of 19 additional communal facilities. Thirty-nine communal facilities (i.e. 11 schools and 28 health facilities) were newly solarized in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Mauritania, Nigeria and Uganda contributing to increase the sustainable use of renewable energy sources and to reduce carbon footprint.

40. After a multi-stakeholder pledge on human settlements was made at the second Global Refugee Forum in December 2023, some 40 pledges made by States (45 per cent) and other partners (55 per cent) were received and are being analysed. These pledges articulate a vision to make transformative improvements in the lives of refugees and host communities, while demonstrating government leadership and a multi-stakeholder and partnership approach.

## **G. Global shelter cluster**

41. In 2023, the global shelter cluster supported shelter clusters in 31 countries across the globe. It reached 12 million people in need of shelter and non-food item assistance in a collective response that was implemented with the support of more than 1,000 partners worldwide. In 2023, a total of \$662 million was raised for shelter and non-food item assistance.

42. The earthquakes in Afghanistan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye, as well as conflict and violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti and the Sudan, among others, resulted in increased demands for support from the global shelter cluster. This included assistance with coordination and information management, both virtually and through deployments. In the case of the earthquake response in the Syrian Arab Republic, additional support was provided for context analysis and resource mobilization during emergency response needs assessments, in collaboration with UNDP and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme. Continuous assistance, including through field visits and remote coordination and information management support, was also provided in Somalia.

43. The global shelter cluster is developing its strategy for 2024-2029. The process includes stakeholder engagement and the definition of strategic priorities for fostering rights-based, integrated shelter and settlement approaches. Support for localization efforts and linking emergencies to longer-term solutions will also feature in the strategy. In addition, the global shelter cluster developed guidance and tools to support country-level shelter clusters to reduce the environmental impact of their responses.

44. In 2023, the global shelter cluster introduced a shelter severity classification system that helps to standardize the way in which the severity of shelter needs is measured and that improves evidence-based decision-making. Shelter clusters around the world, including in Ethiopia, Myanmar, the Sudan and Yemen, have provided positive feedback on this system.

<sup>11</sup> Angola, Bangladesh, Cameroon, Iraq, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zimbabwe.

**H. Camp coordination and camp management cluster**

45. In 2023, with more than 47 million people in need of camp coordination and camp management services, the global camp coordination and camp management cluster supported country clusters and cluster-like coordination mechanisms in 22 countries where more than 300 cluster partners operate. Escalating violence and conflict led to a surge in the number of people fleeing to sites hosting the internally displaced. Against this background, greater demands were placed on the camp coordination and camp management cluster to provide support with coordination and information management at global and country level.

46. At the global level, the camp coordination and camp management cluster continued to pursue its strategic objectives through consultative processes and stakeholder engagement. To further enhance coordination capacity at the country level, the global cluster issued the camp coordination and camp management cluster coordinator's toolkit which outlines specific coordination and technical requirements.

47. The global camp coordination and camp management cluster, together with the Norwegian Refugee Council, also helped enhance accountability to affected populations by scaling up the use of a community engagement platform. It supported the development of a community of practice for camp coordination and camp management and other humanitarian endeavours, and encouraged engagement with communities affected by displacement.

---