



**United Nations**

# **Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees**

**Annual report pursuant to General Assembly  
Resolution 428 (V)**

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## Chapter I

### Introduction

1. An increase in forced displacement worldwide and growing complexity of conflicts was observed during the reporting period of 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024. Humanitarian responses fell short in addressing the ever-growing needs of the forcibly displaced and stateless persons. As the gap between funding levels and needs widened, the capacity of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and its partners was significantly challenged.

2. However, noteworthy progress was made despite these challenges, in advancing the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees. The Global Refugee Forum, held in 2023, was a strong demonstration of international solidarity for forcibly displaced populations and their host communities.

3. By the end of 2023, 117.3 million<sup>1</sup> people remained displaced by persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations and events seriously disturbing public order, an increase of 8 per cent compared to 108.4 million in 2022. The total included 43.4 million refugees,<sup>2</sup> 68.3 million internally displaced persons,<sup>3</sup> 6.9 million asylum-seekers and 5.8 million other people in need of protection. An estimated 4.4 million people were stateless or of undetermined nationality.

4. New and worsening conflicts in 2023 displaced millions, while ongoing crises impeded return, including for many in situations of protracted displacement. The war in the Sudan, since April 2023, forced nearly 9 million people to flee within and from the country, causing one of the largest humanitarian crises in the world. In Ukraine, the armed conflict entered its third year, with significant internal displacement. In Haiti, gang violence intensified and with it internal and cross-border displacement. In Colombia, over 250,000 people were internally displaced in the past 18 months. Escalation of conflict in Myanmar led to further internal displacement and across borders. Some 141,900 refugees fled to Armenia, with most arriving after renewed armed conflict in the South Caucasus region in September 2023. While UNHCR does not have a mandate inside Gaza, the conflict had a profound impact on the Palestinian civilian population and regional implications including displacement in Lebanon.

5. In addition, environmental degradation and climate change caused frequent and extreme natural hazards, which often interacted with conflict, violence and socioeconomic fragility in ways that caused or increased displacement.

6. In 2023, UNHCR declared 43 emergencies, the highest yearly total in a decade. It responded to unprecedented humanitarian needs by scaling up its preparedness and emergency deployments and supply capacity. It dispatched \$53.5 million worth of relief items from its seven global emergency stockpiles, an increase from \$37 million in 2022.

7. Durable solutions for refugees, internally displaced persons and stateless people were available to a fraction of those in need of them. In 2023, 1.2 million refugees returned voluntarily to their home country, were resettled to a third country or became citizens of their host States. Most of the returning refugees either returned to Ukraine, despite the ongoing conflict, or to South Sudan to escape the escalating conflict in the Sudan. Against this backdrop, it is clear that sustainable solutions cannot be achieved without strengthened political will and broadening the base of support.

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<sup>1</sup> Updated figures are available from the UNHCR Refugee Data Finder.

<sup>2</sup> This number includes refugees under the mandate of UNHCR and 6 million Palestine refugees that fall under the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees.

<sup>3</sup> Estimate by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre.

## Chapter II

### Global Compact on Refugees

8. At a time of increasing, and often unresolved, forced displacement and crises globally, the Global Compact on Refugees (A/RES/73/151), continued to serve as a critical framework to strengthen burden- and responsibility-sharing. The second Global Compact on Refugees indicator report was published in November 2023, highlighting progress made towards its implementation.

9. The second Global Refugee Forum took place in Switzerland in December 2023. The Forum was co-convened by Colombia, France, Japan, Jordan and Uganda, and co-hosted by Switzerland and UNHCR. The co-convenors and co-hosts brought together diverse stakeholder groups to advance durable solutions for forcibly displaced and stateless persons worldwide, and to strengthen support for the countries and communities hosting them.

10. Over 4,000 participants from 168 countries and over 420 organizations attended the event. States, international and regional organizations, civil society, faith-based actors, sports entities, the private sector, humanitarian and development actors, academia, local authorities, forcibly displaced and stateless persons came together with a shared sense of purpose. Over 300 refugees and stateless persons were present, a fourfold increase in participation since the first Global Refugee Forum in 2019. They presented their priorities through a joint refugee statement and announced multi-stakeholder pledges to which they had contributed.

11. The event witnessed substantive engagement with financial, technical, material, and policy support announced through 1,750 pledges, of which over 600 were made by States. Nearly 1,100 pledges were made by non-State actors, demonstrating a true whole-of-society approach. A central feature of the Global Refugee Forum was the announcement of 47 multi-stakeholder pledges to contribute to the key outcomes of the Forum.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, some \$2.2 billion in financial contributions were pledged by States and other actors, in addition to dedicated bilateral and multilateral development funding. Development actors also demonstrated their commitment towards the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees by supporting middle-income countries impacted by refugee crises through mechanisms such as the Global Concessional Financing Facility.

12. UNHCR published the outcomes of the Global Refugee Forum in March 2024.<sup>5</sup> Quarterly informal briefings on the Global Compact on Refugees in 2024 aim to take stock of the progress made and provide an opportunity for pledging entities and representatives of multi-stakeholder initiatives to share their plans for pledge follow-up and implementation.

13. Efforts to integrate the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees in UNHCR programmes resulted in 83 per cent of country operations tracking implementation associated with the 2019 Global Refugee Forum pledges. These efforts will also continue with respect to the implementation of the 2023 pledges.

14. UNHCR supported four government-led regional support platforms under the Global Compact on Refugees: the solutions strategy for Afghan refugees; the regional comprehensive protection and solutions framework in Central America and Mexico; the Nairobi process facilitated by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in the East and Horn of Africa; and the solutions initiative for the Central African Republic situation. These support platforms have evolved into effective mechanisms of international cooperation that convene key stakeholders with a view to enhancing displacement responses.

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<sup>4</sup> List and details of all pledges is available on the Global Refugee Forum 2023 webpage.

<sup>5</sup> The outcomes document is available on the Global Refugee Forum 2023 webpage.



## Chapter III Protection

### A. Refugees and asylum-seekers

15. The number of refugees<sup>6</sup> under the mandate of UNHCR and other people in need of international protection worldwide rose by 8 per cent, reaching 37.4 million at the end of 2023 compared to 34.6 million at the end of 2022. Women and girls accounted for 49 per cent and children accounted for 40 per cent of the total refugee population.

16. During 2023, nearly 5 million people were granted international protection or temporary protection including 823,800 people who had made an individual asylum claim. Nearly 3.6 million new individual asylum applications were registered with States or UNHCR worldwide, compared to 2.9 million applications in 2022.

17. The responsibility for protecting the world's refugees continued to fall disproportionately on low- and middle-income countries. They hosted 75 per cent of the world's refugees and other people in need of international protection in 2023. The least developed countries provided asylum to 21 per cent of the total. By the end of the year, 69 per cent of refugees and other people in need of international protection were living in neighbouring countries.

18. As the number of people seeking international protection continued to rise, asylum systems faced significant challenges. UNHCR continued to assist States in the development of fair and efficient asylum procedures and policies that were compliant with international legal standards. Many States made improvements in their asylum systems and processes, often building on good practices from other States. For example, UNHCR continued its capacity-building work in Angola, where the Government resumed refugee registration after an eight-year suspension and recognized refugee status for all asylum-seekers who had processes pending prior to 2015.

19. In response to refugee outflows from the Sudan, the Central African Republic, Chad, Ethiopia and South Sudan granted refugee status to Sudanese refugees using group-based prima facie approaches. In the Americas, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay granted group-based prima facie recognition based on the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees. Other countries used simplified approaches to refugee recognition, as witnessed in Benin and Togo (for arrivals from Burkina Faso) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (for arrivals from the Central African Republic and the Sudan). This was also applied in Mexico (for arrivals from El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)). Brazil leveraged investments in their registration systems to facilitate recognition for some asylum-seekers with a high presumption of eligibility, without the need for eligibility interviews or through shortened interviews. In March 2024, Colombia launched a digital tool that allowed tracking of the refugee status determination process, from application to final decision. With support from the World Bank, Ethiopia introduced a national identification project to strengthen the integrity of the asylum system. Other States took steps to establish asylum frameworks, including Egypt and Iraq, or strengthened their legislation, including Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya and Somalia. In the European Union, temporary protection for people fleeing the armed conflict in Ukraine was extended until March 2026, for nearly 3.9 million refugees.

20. Many regional organizations worked on the development of asylum capacity through collaborative mechanisms, including the comprehensive regional protection and solutions framework (known by its Spanish acronym MIRPS), the Cartagena+40 process, and the Quito Process in the Americas, and increased engagement by economic and development communities at the sub-regional level in Africa. This increased engagement was evident in the commitments made by States from all regions under the asylum capacity multi-stakeholder pledge at the Global Refugee Forum. Over 50 pledges, including 40 by States to improve their asylum capacity or support other countries were made.

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<sup>6</sup> Including people in a refugee-like situation.

21. To enhance the integrity and efficiency of asylum procedures and to facilitate the provision of assistance, UNHCR used digital technology for registration and documentation, in line with data protection principles and safeguards. Digital tools strengthened the accountability of UNHCR to displaced people by providing them with ownership over and access to their own data.

22. To promote international refugee law instruments and supervise their application, UNHCR launched an interactive refugee treaty and legislation dashboard in 2024, containing information on the legal protection environment for refugees and asylum-seekers, including data on refugee treaties and asylum laws worldwide. To enhance accessibility to law and policy documents relating to displaced and stateless persons, UNHCR, in February 2024, launched an updated version of Refworld, the world's largest repository for these documents.

23. While positive laws and policies were adopted in 2023 and 2024 in many countries, restrictive standards were legislated in others. In many countries, implementation of legal standards was insufficient. Developments, such as, pursuit of externalization measures raised concerns, affecting the right to seek asylum and protection from refoulement. Legal and practical barriers to access asylum procedures in some instances for people seeking asylum based on nationality, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity were also of concern. UNHCR recalled that States parties are obliged to apply international instruments such as the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees in good faith, along with the customary international legal principle of non-refoulement.

24. In many countries, asylum-seekers and refugees, including children, were detained for prolonged periods, in inadequate conditions and without procedural safeguards or subjected to restrictions of movement. UNHCR underlined that detention must remain a matter of last resort and only applied after less restrictive alternatives have been considered. Together with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the International Detention Coalition, UNHCR supported the migration youth and children's platform in organizing global youth consultations on ending child detention.

25. A significant number of incidents of refoulement were also reported worldwide, from arbitrary expulsions to large-scale pushbacks and other non-entry measures at borders. UNHCR worked with partners to prevent and respond to cases of refoulement.

26. Nationalistic, and anti-refugee, anti-foreigner narratives were of growing concern to UNHCR. Misinformation, disinformation and hate speech proliferated in many regions, and racism, xenophobia and religious tensions frequently went unaddressed. To combat these threats, UNHCR launched a new project on digital protection to enhance its ability and that of its partners to effectively respond on digital platforms.

## **B. Internally displaced persons**

27. The scale of internal displacement reached a high of 75.9 million people by year-end. Of the total number, 68.3 million were displaced due to conflict and violence, and 7.7 million as a result of disasters. UNHCR responded to situations of internal displacement in 37 countries in 2023. During the year, 13.7 million persons were newly displaced due to conflict, persecution, human rights violations and generalized violence. Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen reported the largest number of people displaced within their own countries.

28. In response, UNHCR prioritized support to States to fulfil their primary responsibility towards internally displaced persons, assisting them in developing, amending, adopting and implementing laws, policies and strategies on internal displacement and solutions for internally displaced persons. Chad and Honduras adopted laws in 2023 to incorporate international standards on protection and solutions for internally displaced persons into national legislation and to articulate State response. In Sinaloa and Chiapas States in Mexico, UNHCR supported the development of regulations to implement existing legal frameworks for internally displaced persons, in consultation with affected communities. UNHCR, together with the protection cluster partners, contributed to reforms strengthening legislative and policy frameworks in countries such as Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Colombia, Ethiopia,

Mozambique, Nigeria, the Philippines, Somalia and Ukraine. At the global level, UNHCR launched a new law and policy dashboard on internal displacement complementing its refugee treaty and legislation dashboard. At the regional level, UNHCR worked with the League of Arab States to advance a model law to address internal displacement for member states.

29. UNHCR continued to strengthen leadership accountability in situations of internal displacement. Together with the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons, UNHCR co-led the Protection Expert Group for Internally Displaced Persons, providing senior-level support to United Nations and State officials on key protection challenges through country visits.

30. UNHCR reaffirmed its commitment under the Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement by developing an institutional plan outlining operational strategies and concrete actions for prevention, response and solutions to internal displacement. A protection risk assessment tool for internally displaced persons was created to enhance protection while implementing solutions. UNHCR is updating its intention surveys for refugees and internally displaced persons by aligning them with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Framework on Durable Solutions and by prioritizing dialogue with internally displaced persons, including in the search for solutions from the onset of the emergency. The Office also contributed to the Inter-Agency Standing Committee independent review of humanitarian response to internal displacement.

### **C. Mixed and onward movements**

31. In 2023, people seeking international protection continued to cross borders alongside migrants, often using the same routes and means of transport. Major routes for such mixed movements in 2023 included those from Colombia through the Darien region of Panama, towards and across the Mediterranean Sea, and across land routes southwards to South Africa. Such movements posed multifaceted challenges for States and local communities in countries of origin, transit often involving high risks for refugees and migrants on the move.

32. To effectively respond to the challenges of mixed and onward movements, UNHCR developed a comprehensive, rights-focused "route-based" approach, together with States, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and other partners. It aims to reinforce international protection and solutions for refugees, in line with the Global Compact on Refugees, and create opportunities for migrants, as per the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration; and to uphold rights, while supporting and working with States along key routes, involving countries of origin, of asylum, transit and destination. This approach can provide lawful and viable alternatives to externalization, push-backs, irregular movements and attempts to shift responsibilities for refugee and migrant populations to unsafe, overburdened and under-capacitated third countries.

33. Reports of increasingly restrictive practices involving pushbacks and violence at land and sea, including border areas, were prevalent in many regions. Some States adopted draconian legislation to limit access to territory, including for asylum-seekers, in some cases citing security concerns. Other States continued to conduct expulsions without due process safeguards, sometimes also affecting refugees and asylum-seekers registered with UNHCR. Laws and policies hindering or preventing efforts by civil society to undertake rescue at sea were also alarming. To facilitate dialogue on challenges around interception, rescue and disembarkation among key stakeholders, including the International Maritime Organization and other United Nations agencies, the International Chamber of Shipping and civil society, UNHCR led an inter-agency group on the protection of refugees and migrants moving by sea. In 2023, IOM and UNHCR launched an e-learning course on this subject, complementing training of government officials and other partners on protection in mixed movements in different regions.

34. Displaced and stateless persons, on account of their often-insecure legal status, faced high risk of exploitation and abuse by traffickers. In the Sudan, the risk of trafficking was particularly acute in border areas and refugee camps. An introductory guide to anti-trafficking action in internal displacement contexts, published by the Global Protection

Cluster in 2020, continued to serve as a relevant source in this regard. A multi-stakeholder pledge made at the Global Refugee Forum for the protection of refugees and migrants at risk of, or affected by, trafficking in persons, focused on enhancing access to protection and solutions for these individuals.

#### **D. Protection from gender-based violence**

35. Gender-based violence continued to be a major global protection concern. Displaced and stateless women and girls remained disproportionately affected, with one in five refugee women subjected to sexual violence. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Sudan, women and girls were exposed to conflict-related sexual violence, with risks persisting in countries of asylum following displacement across borders. Severe underfunding created gaps in life-saving assistance and service delivery, pushing women and girls, particularly those without household support, into situations of heightened risk to meet basic needs.

36. Together with partners, UNHCR continued to implement programming and interventions to prevent, mitigate and respond to gender-based violence. In 2023, 72 per cent of country operations provided assistance to survivors of gender-based violence. Specialists worked with partners to accelerate the establishment of safe and quality responses for survivors and community-based prevention programmes in Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Kenya, the Republic of Moldova, South Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic. In response to the Sudan emergency, gender-based violence prevention and response programming reached over 291,000 displaced Sudanese, primarily women and girls, inside the country and in the Central African Republic, Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia and South Sudan. Prevention programmes were implemented in 16 operations, including in Bangladesh, Colombia, Ecuador, Ethiopia, South Sudan and Uganda, reaching approximately 240,000 people. Over 160 multi-stakeholder pledges on gender equality and the prevention of gender-based violence were announced at the 2023 Global Refugee Forum.

37. In 2023, UNHCR made further efforts to engage organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless women in coordination mechanisms to prevent and mitigate gender-based violence in refugee settings. UNHCR provided direct funding to local women-led organizations and supported their participation in decision-making processes. UNHCR collaborated with over 60 women-led organizations to establish safe spaces where women and girls could access psychosocial support, medical assistance, legal aid and cash assistance.

#### **E. Specific needs**

38. UNHCR ensures that its approaches are designed and informed by age, gender and diversity to address protection risks faced by vulnerable groups. An evaluation of the implementation of the organization's age, gender and diversity policy found good practices such as the regular use of participatory assessments, and growing collaboration with organizations with specialized expertise in working with specific vulnerable groups. The evaluation recommended that UNHCR reinforce and adapt existing data systems to provide more disaggregated analysis and apply a stronger intersectional lens in its programming.

39. UNHCR invested in supporting community-based initiatives and the participation of forcibly displaced and stateless people in its programming in 2023, with women's groups and refugee volunteers, playing a pivotal role. However, the ability of UNHCR to regularly consult with communities was hindered by lack of access due to security concerns and restrictions by authorities. Discriminatory legislation and social and cultural norms posed additional barriers for the engagement of marginalized groups.

40. Despite the challenges, UNHCR provided targeted support to nearly 41,000 older persons and 480,000 persons with disabilities in 2023. This included facilitating access to cash assistance and relief items, relocating vulnerable people to safer areas, providing referrals to health services, and ensuring access to social assistance. Fifteen country operations, compared to four in 2022, facilitated access to national protection schemes for refugees with disabilities and older persons.

41. Almost 6,000 children with disabilities received community-based support and financial assistance to access education in Algeria, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Egypt, Iraq, the Republic of Moldova, Rwanda and Yemen. In Kigali, UNHCR collaborated with the Rwandan National Association of Deaf Women to launch a pilot Rwandan sign language class for 22 deaf refugees, their families and community leaders.

## **F. Child protection and education**

42. Children accounted for 40 per cent of all forcibly displaced people in 2023. Conflict and violence had devastating effects on children and their families. As parties to conflicts in numerous countries disregarded international legal standards relating to the protection of children in conflict, child protection concerns continued to rise. UNHCR advocated prioritization of the protection of children, among other civilians, based on international humanitarian law.

43. During the year, 7 million children received protection services, including 3.8 million refugees and asylum seekers, 2.1 million internally displaced persons and 1.1 million others of concern. UNHCR and partners provided services, including best interest procedures and alternative care arrangements, among others. In the Syrian Arab Republic, UNHCR and UNICEF launched their strategic collaboration framework to better protect children at risk and, to support children and youth affected by conflict.

44. UNHCR encouraged States to strengthen and ensure child-friendly asylum procedures, non-discriminatory inclusion and access to quality child protection systems, birth registration and basic services. Efforts were also made by some countries to adopt laws or policies to prohibit or limit to the extent possible the detention of children in immigration, whether accompanied or unaccompanied, such as Mexico. At the Global Refugee Forum, the multi-stakeholder pledge on child rights, resulted in over 200 child-focused and child-sensitive pledges. States committed to strengthen the capacity of national child protection systems to protect displaced and stateless children. During the Global Refugee Forum, children were consulted by UNHCR and partners and were able to participate for the first time in the global event.

45. In 2024, UNHCR launched its policy on child protection, outlining core actions for UNHCR to strengthen protection for children. The policy was accompanied by operational guidance for country operations to aid the design of comprehensive child protection plans and implementation of child protection programming.

46. With regards to access to education, the Global Compact on Refugees indicator report showed that 73 per cent of hosting countries had legislation explicitly permitting refugee inclusion in national primary education systems. By contrast, only 51 per cent of refugee children of primary and secondary school age were enrolled in national education systems. Several countries aimed to increase access to education, including through pledges made at the Global Refugee Forum. Several countries aimed to boost access to education. For example, Ethiopia pledged to enable refugees to participate in the national secondary education system, and Mauritania also committed to include refugees in the national education system. In addition, Uganda took steps to advance the inclusion of refugees in its national system.

47. In many countries, a significant gender gap in education continued, with a decline in enrolment among refugee girls compared to boys. In the Sudan, the escalating conflict caused nation-wide school closures, as many schools were destroyed and classrooms used for temporary shelter. Such events threatened the future educational prospects of millions of children. In 2024, refugee children and youth from Ukraine were facing their third school year of disrupted education.

48. With respect to tertiary education, 7 per cent of refugees were enrolled. With support from the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (known by its German acronym DAFI) and other scholarship programmes, nearly 111,500 refugee students were enrolled in tertiary education in the Middle East and North Africa in 2023. The Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee initiative provided scholarships in 59 States to over

9,000 refugee students from 54 countries. Female students represented 42 per cent of the total number of students. Other scholarship opportunities were provided by the Mastercard Foundation and universities in Africa, the Americas and Europe. Furthermore, academic institutions, under the Global Academic Interdisciplinary Network, pledged scholarships and facilitated admission for refugees.

## **G. Climate change and displacement**

49. Climate change can be a significant contributing factor to the movement of people within and across borders. In 2023, droughts, floods and severe heat, often exacerbated or contributed to displacement and affected forcibly displaced populations and host communities. With increasing severity of climate-fuelled extreme weather events, UNHCR is working with partners to identify potential populations at risk; put in place measures, including policies and programmes within our mandate to reduce the risk of displacement and statelessness.

50. Seventy per cent of refugees and asylum-seekers came from highly climate-vulnerable countries. Nearly half of all forcibly displaced people were living in countries where they were exposed to conflict and climate-related hazards. Countries experiencing extreme levels of climate-related hazards, and conflict, included the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, Mauritania, Mozambique, Somalia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen.

51. To address climate-related challenges faced by forcibly displaced and stateless persons, UNHCR developed a strategic plan for climate action 2024-2030 to accelerate advocacy for protection and solutions for them, and for their inclusion in national adaptation plans and resilience programmes.

52. UNHCR undertook measures to assist governments strengthen their climate adaptation and resilience programmes to mitigate displacement linked to the climate crisis. With the help of satellite imagery-based analysis of climate-related risks in 15 of the most climate-vulnerable countries, it identified mitigation measures to reduce risks related to floods, drought and deforestation. Interventions to reduce climate vulnerability and improve community resilience involved durable shelter, clean cooking, reforestation, flood and soil erosion mitigation, climate-smart water systems, solarization of boreholes and facilities, and infrastructure upgrades. Feasibility assessments in Rwanda, South Sudan, the Sudan and Uganda were conducted through the Refugee Environmental Protection Fund, an innovative and sustainable financing mechanism supporting investment in reforestation and clean cooking in climate-vulnerable refugee-hosting communities. In addition, nearly half of UNHCR-run water systems and health care facilities were solarized in 2023.

53. At the twenty-eighth United Nations Climate Change Conference the engagement and advocacy of UNHCR, alongside refugees, internally displaced persons, governments and other partners, contributed to the inclusion of displacement in the first global stocktake of efforts made towards meeting the goals of the Paris Agreement.

54. UNHCR continued to provide legal advice and guidance on the application of existing international refugee instruments for the protection of people displaced across borders in the context of adverse effects of climate change and disasters. During the Global Refugee Forum, UNHCR and the Platform on Disaster Displacement issued a policy brief highlighting good practices to support implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees in the context of climate change. In the Americas, the Cartagena+40 process included a regional consultation on protection in the context of forced displacement due to disasters, held in Colombia in 2023 with the support of the Platform on Disaster Displacement.

55. UNHCR also provided technical support to countries seeking to develop and adopt laws and policies to advance protection and solutions for internally displaced persons in the context of disaster and climate change, including in Brazil, Cameroon, Colombia, Nigeria, the Philippines and Somalia. In Malawi, UNHCR and partners supported the development of the “Disaster Risk Management Act 2023”, strengthening protection-sensitive provisions on issues such as relocation and the protection of children and vulnerable adults in evacuation centres. Under the leadership of the Centre of Excellence for Climate

Adaptation and Environmental Protection of IGAD, UNHCR supported the development of a climate adaptation strategy for the period 2023-2030 together with a consortium of global research institutes. In April 2024, UNHCR signed a memorandum of understanding with Consortium of International Agricultural Research Centers to better anticipate, prepare for, and respond to current and future climate-related risks by using climate hazard data tailored to displacement contexts.

56. As part of its efforts to “green the blue”, UNHCR was on track to reduce its environmental footprint and greenhouse gas emissions by at least 30 per cent by 2030. Significant progress was made in greening the supply chain in 2023. Product specifications for solar lamps and kitchen sets – the non-solar versions of which were two high-emitting relief items – were changed. Blankets and sleeping mats exclusively made of 100 per cent recycled plastic were sourced.

57. During the Global Refugee Forum, a multi-stakeholder pledge was made by governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and stakeholders to strengthen the protection, preparedness and resilience of forcibly displaced and stateless people and their host communities in the context of climate impacts.

## Chapter IV

### Statelessness

58. The ten-year #IBelong campaign to end statelessness, launched by UNHCR in 2014, to end statelessness, effectively raised awareness, renewed commitments from States, and led to significant progress in efforts to resolve statelessness. A high-level segment on statelessness, as part of the seventy-fifth plenary session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme will mark the official closure of the #IBelong campaign and will launch a new global alliance to end statelessness. The global alliance will bring together States, stateless-led organizations, regional bodies, the United Nations and civil society organizations to advance efforts to eradicate statelessness. Through its solution-seeker programme, key champion States will be identified and engaged, including those with sizeable stateless populations, to address statelessness at the country level. The alliance is also central to achieving the goal of ending statelessness under the United Nations Secretary-General's Our Common Agenda and the related Sustainable Development Goal 16.9 “providing legal identity for all”.

59. In 2023, an estimated 4.4 million people worldwide were either stateless or of undetermined nationality, based on data received from 95 countries. As data was unavailable for almost half of the countries and with data limitations in some of the countries that do report, the real number of stateless persons is expected to be higher.

60. In an effort to improve the availability of reliable and comprehensive data on statelessness at national level and promote greater harmonization of data at the regional and global levels, UNHCR disseminated and fostered implementation of the International Recommendations on Statelessness Statistics, adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission in early 2023.<sup>7</sup>

61. Several States took important steps to address statelessness, resulting in 32,200 people acquiring citizenship or having their nationality confirmed in 29 countries. Kenya formally recognized the Pemba as an ethnic community, and 7,000 Pemba individuals were confirmed as citizens. Kazakhstan confirmed citizenship to over 1,600 stateless persons, and Uzbekistan recognized over 4,990 stateless persons as citizens. In 2023, the first phase of a joint project between Indonesia and the Philippines facilitated the confirmation of nationality for over 8,700 people of Indonesian descent in the Philippines. In the United Republic of Tanzania, over 3,300 individuals from historical migrant communities who were at risk of statelessness were granted nationality.

<sup>7</sup> For more information, see section 54/121 of the report of the United Nations Statistical Commission contained in E/2023/24-E/CN.3/2023/37.

62. UNHCR continued to advocate strengthening of legal and policy frameworks on statelessness and provided technical support and assistance towards this objective. In 2023, 14 States improved their laws, policies and procedures to prevent and reduce statelessness. Several countries, including the Bahamas, Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia, and the Republic of Moldova introduced legal amendments to ensure that children were not born into statelessness and could inherit it from their parents. Brazil introduced a constitutional amendment to prevent the loss of Brazilian nationality when acquiring another and to safeguard against statelessness from renunciation. Following advocacy by UNHCR, Colombia extended the “children first” programme for two more years, ensuring that almost 100,000 children born in Colombia to foreign parents would receive Colombian nationality and mitigate the risk of statelessness.

63. UNHCR advocated universal reform of nationality laws that discriminate against women, and supported States in this endeavour. A call for expedited action to end gender-based discrimination in nationality laws was made at a global summit on gender equality in nationality laws organized by the Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights, UNHCR, UNICEF and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). As a result, Eswatini, Iraq and Kiribati reaffirmed their commitment to achieve gender equality in their nationality laws.

64. There were considerable achievements in the strengthening of protection frameworks for stateless persons, in line with the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons. The United States of America put into effect new policy guidance to assist stateless individuals, facilitating access to legal remedies within the immigration system, while Portugal approved legal amendments paving the way for the establishment of a statelessness determination procedure. In Georgia, legal amendments were adopted to reduce the residence requirement from 10 to 5 years, facilitating naturalization for stateless persons in line with international standards.

65. In 2023, the Congo (Republic of) became a State party to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. Sao Tome and Principe approved accession to both conventions in 2023 and deposited accession instruments in January 2024. Slovenia and South Sudan, with support from UNHCR, took steps towards becoming parties to one or both of the statelessness conventions, with accessions expected in 2024.

66. Significant developments took place at the regional level, particularly in Africa. A regional model law on statelessness determination, the protection of stateless persons and naturalization was prepared with the support of UNHCR and endorsed by experts of the Economic Community of West African States and the Economic Community of Central African States. In addition, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights relating to the specific aspects of the right to a nationality and the eradication of statelessness in Africa was adopted by the African Union Assembly of Heads of State and Government in 2024.

## **Chapter V**

### **Durable solutions**

#### **A. Voluntary repatriation and return**

67. In 2023, over 1 million refugees voluntarily returned to 39 countries of origin, a decrease of 22 per cent compared to 2022. The voluntary nature and sustainability of returns were undermined by continuing insecurity; fragile or faltering peace processes; the failure to address the root causes of conflicts; the destruction or confiscation of housing, land and property; severely overstretched services; and the absence of viable livelihoods in countries of origin.

68. The majority of those returning were South Sudanese or Ukrainians, followed by Afghan and Syrian refugees. Over 500,000 South Sudanese refugees returned in 2023, including over 380,000 from the Sudan and over 100,000 from Ethiopia, despite ongoing



instability in South Sudan. UNHCR continued to support the Government of South Sudan to find immediate solutions for those who opted to return. UNHCR provided cash and in-kind support to address their immediate needs.

69. During 2023, nearly 324,600 refugees returned to Ukraine, mostly from Germany (75,200), Poland (65,500) and Czechia (25,600). This represented a decline by 68 per cent compared to 2022. In Ukraine, UNHCR piloted an area-based approach, in consultation with 500 local government entities and communities, to support war-affected and displaced people with repairs and the rehabilitation of health, education and energy infrastructure.

70. Of the 37,600 refugees who repatriated to the Syrian Arab Republic, the majority returned from Türkiye (19,900) and Lebanon (10,100), while of the 31,700 refugees who repatriated to Nigeria, 87 per cent returned from the Niger (27,600).

71. Over 26,000 Burundian refugees were assisted to return in 2023. The stable political and security situation prompted UNHCR, in discussion with the Governments of Burundi and the United Republic of Tanzania, to transition from facilitating to promoting voluntary repatriation in 2024. The Government of Burundi and UNHCR will continue to advocate for development assistance to meet the reintegration needs of returnees and affected communities.

72. In West and Central Africa, UNHCR supported the voluntary repatriation of over 4,000 refugees to the Central African Republic, mainly from Cameroon, Chad, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Over 6,000 Central Africans returned, following the eruption of fighting in the Sudan. Additionally, 2,000 Cameroonians voluntarily repatriated from Chad with the assistance of UNHCR.

73. The Central African Republic Solutions Support Platform, launched in 2023, aims to create an enabling environment for the sustainable return and reintegration of nearly 300,000 refugees expected to voluntarily repatriate between 2024 and 2027. In addition, a first poverty assessment was carried out in the Central African Republic by the World Bank, with support from UNHCR. The assessment will aid national authorities and development actors in designing programmes that foster solutions for internally displaced persons and returnees.

74. In 2023, over 57,000 Afghan refugees returned home, mainly from Pakistan, under the UNHCR assisted voluntary repatriation programme, a substantial increase from 2022. In Pakistan, plans to order undocumented foreigners to leave the country resulted in nearly 600,000 Afghans having returned to Afghanistan since 2023. The Pakistani Government and UNHCR are discussing approaches to ensure that those in need of international protection are not forcibly returned. Together with partners, UNHCR improved conditions for sustainable repatriation to Afghanistan through an area-based approach in priority areas of return and reintegration, while providing individual assistance to returnees. This was facilitated by a UNHCR-World Bank strategic analysis hub, established in 2022, that analyses displacement and return trends, as well as challenges and opportunities.

## **B. Local integration**

75. Local integration remained elusive for a significant proportion of refugees worldwide. With restrictive policies in many situations of protracted displacement, refugees remained in limbo, with limited access to opportunities for employment, entrepreneurship, and financial and social protection services. However, in Iraq, area-based programming for protection and solutions promoted the integration of refugees, including Syrians, and reintegration of internally displaced Iraqis. It was the largest local integration initiative of UNHCR in 2023, benefitting over 170,500 refugees, internally displaced persons and local communities. In 2023, approximately 30,800 refugees originating from 131 countries acquired citizenship, representing a decrease by 39 per cent over 2022. Almost half of the refugees who were naturalized were reported by the Kingdom of the Netherlands (14,900), followed by Canada (9,400) and France (2,500).

### C. Resettlement and complementary pathways

76. A total of 158,700 refugees were resettled in 2023 including through community sponsorship and family reunification programmes, representing an increase of 39 per cent over 2022. UNHCR submitted the files of over 155,500 refugees to 24 States for resettlement, 33 per cent more than in 2022. The 2023 departure rate marked good progress towards achieving the target of 1 million resettlement places by 2030, set by the UNHCR 2030 roadmap to third country solutions.

77. Despite the increase in numbers, the needs continue to exceed available resettlement places, representing only 8 per cent of the estimated 2 million individuals globally identified by UNHCR as in need of resettlement. Over 777,800 Syrian refugees worldwide required urgent resettlement along with other groups from Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar and South Sudan.

78. The United States of America received 75,100 resettled refugees in 2023, the largest number globally, followed by 51,100 who landed in Canada and 4,500 in Germany. Given the gap between needs and places available, States were encouraged to offer additional resettlement places and more States were urged to create resettlement programmes.

79. Notable increases were seen in the resettlement of Rohingya refugees and various groups from the Americas, for whom submissions more than doubled, as resettlement identification and processing capacities were scaled up. The expansion of resettlement opportunities and lawful pathways benefited from the Safe Mobility Initiative in Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Guatemala.

80. Pledges made at the Global Refugee Forum reflected renewed commitments from States and civil society to strengthen resettlement in an inclusive and sustainable manner. In 2023, UNHCR released its updated Resettlement Handbook, a comprehensive repository of resettlement standards, procedures and best practices.

81. Access to safe and regulated complementary pathways, including labour and education mobility, humanitarian admission and sponsorship pathways, provide opportunities to find protection and solutions. The fourth edition of the Safe Pathways for Refugees report, jointly issued by UNHCR and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2024, highlighted that over 24,000 family, work, study and sponsorship permits were issued by OECD countries and Brazil. At the Global Refugee Forum, a pledge was made to increase skills-based complementary pathways for 200,000 refugees via labour mobility and education pathways over 5 years.

82. An estimated 41 per cent of refugees did not have access to travel documents from their host State, presenting a barrier to protection and solutions through complementary pathways. UNHCR presented a working paper on machine-readable travel documents to the International Civil Aviation Organization Facilitation Panel, recommending concrete ways to facilitate access to machine readable travel documents for refugees and stateless persons.

83. UNHCR worked with States and partners to advance the use of community sponsorship as both a complementary pathway to protection and solutions and a means of integration support for new arrivals. The Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative launched a sponsorship fund at the Global Refugee Forum, broadening the availability of sponsorship through grants to support communities.

84. Preserving and restoring family unity remained an essential step to ensure protection and support responsibility-sharing. UNHCR worked with the Global Family Reunification Network Advisory Group and others to mobilize stakeholders in support of refugee family reunification. A multi-stakeholder pledge made at the Global Refugee Forum aims to help 1 million refugee families reunite by 2030, aided by State leadership from Brazil and Portugal, and increased engagement from refugee-led organizations and the private sector.

## Chapter VI Partnerships

### A. Resilience and inclusion

85. The work of UNHCR to promote the inclusion of forcibly displaced persons in national systems and economies gained momentum, including through strategic partnerships with governments, development agencies, and private sector partners. These partnerships, aligned with the High Commissioner's strategic directions for 2022-2026 and the Global Compact on Refugees, have strengthened collaboration across the humanitarian, development, and peace nexus.

86. UNHCR supported the Government of Zambia in the formulation of its national refugee policy and implementation plan, aimed at promoting refugee inclusion in national systems and enabling refugees to contribute to the local economy. Similarly in Kenya, UNHCR also collaborated with the Government on the country's approach to refugee management through its Shirika plan with a vision of transforming decades-old refugee camps into integrated settlements.

87. Despite restrictive policies in some countries, an overall positive trend was observed in the ability of refugees to access opportunities for self-reliance. Some 54 per cent of refugees residing in countries with unrestricted legal rights were able to access land for agricultural purposes, an increase from 40 per cent in 2021. Some 63 per cent of refugees residing in countries where they had unrestricted legal rights to own or lease property for business purposes were able to do so, an increase from 46 per cent in 2021.

88. UNHCR supported an initiative of the Government of Uganda that provided refugees living in settlements with plots of land for agricultural use. UNHCR continued to advocate that the Government of South Sudan enable housing, land and property rights for returnees and collaborated with the World Bank on its project to strengthen the national social safety net through the provision of cash transfers and access to income generating opportunities. In Mexico, over 43,000 refugees accessed employment opportunities and in Brazil over 11,000 refugees and asylum-seekers gained sustainable livelihoods through private sector companies.

89. The initiatives outlined above demonstrate how UNHCR has moved beyond traditional approaches. UNHCR is strengthening programmes and approaches aimed at furthering the self-resilience of forcibly displaced persons, while also working towards the achievement of durable solutions for them. At its core, this means collectively supporting refugee-hosting States to include refugees in national systems from the outset of displacement; establishing inclusive policies as well as ensuring effective implementation in practice; and, adopting multi-year planning that is supported by more predictable funding.

### B. Development actors and financial institutions

90. In 2023, UNHCR issued a strategy of engagement with development actors, outlining ways to leverage partnerships to support host countries and countries of origin, and to foster self-reliance for refugees and returnees. The two Global Refugee Forums in 2019 and 2023 have played a vital role in building strong partnerships among humanitarian, development and peace actors.

91. Since 2016, the Office's partnership with the World Bank Group has continued to promote refugee inclusion and solutions through dedicated financing. Under the International Development Association window for host communities and refugees, the World Bank invested \$4.7 billion in 18 low-income host countries. Moreover, under the Global Concessional Financing Facility, \$953 million in grants have been allocated to provide \$7.3 billion in concessional loans to seven middle-income countries. Other multilateral development banks include the Inter-American Development Bank, the Islamic Development Bank and the Islamic Bank of Asia which deployed hundreds of millions of dollars to support

host governments in their efforts to integrate forcibly displaced populations and counteract shocks to local communities.

92. UNHCR increased its engagement with the African Development Bank, the co-chair of the Core Group of the Central African Republic Solutions Support Platform. UNHCR participated in the Africa Resilience Forum organized by the Bank, advancing efforts to include forced displacement in the fragility and resilience agenda of development and peace actors.

93. The partnership with the Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement established by the World Bank and UNHCR, has contributed to better data and evidence. The poverty assessment by the World Bank for the Central African Republic and a multi-country analytical report on Venezuelans in Latin America have helped guide programming for UNHCR and its partners. Moreover, UNHCR worked closely with the World Bank on measuring the impact of hosting, protecting, and assisting refugees with a view to assessing gaps in international cooperation and promoting more equitable, predictable and sustainable burden- and responsibility-sharing. To date, a global costing exercise for inclusion in national education systems has been published.<sup>8</sup>

94. UNHCR in partnership with the International Finance Corporation (IFC) set up a joint initiative in 2023 to facilitate private-sector solutions in forced displacement contexts. Besides employment, entrepreneurship and local market development, the partnership made significant gains in financial inclusion. Through the joint initiative, IFC provided investment services in Poland. This enabled a \$17 million second-loss guarantee for consumer loans with Santander Bank Polska, freeing up capital of \$100 million in new loans for refugees from Ukraine and refugee-owned businesses in Poland.

95. Partnerships with bilateral development actors, including the international cooperation and development agencies of Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the European Commission's Directorate-General for International Partnerships and the PROSPECTS Partnership funded by the Netherlands (Kingdom of the), continued to promote the inclusion of refugees, internally displaced persons and returnees in development programmes in host countries and countries of return. Following a roundtable hosted by Germany, OECD and UNHCR, the OECD International Network on Conflict and Fragility, multilateral development banks and United Nations agencies adopted a new common position on addressing forced displacement through a humanitarian, development and peace nexus approach, outlining priority engagement areas for development cooperation, peace and climate action in low and middle-income countries.

### **C. Inter-agency engagement**

96. UNHCR worked within the inter-agency context to address humanitarian needs, mobilize resources, strengthen policy, conduct joint programming and ensure coherence of action. Working towards the achievement of the United Nations sustainable development goals, UNHCR contributed to inter-agency policies, guidance and tools to operationalize the United Nations development reform. A results-based management tool allowed UNHCR country strategies to be coherent with collective priorities outlined in the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks.

97. Through the new global strategic collaboration framework, established in February 2023, UNHCR and UNICEF signed 16 letters of understanding to strengthen collaboration in the areas of education, water and sanitation, child protection, social protection, data, statelessness, and health and nutrition.

98. The UNHCR-World Food Programme (WFP) Joint Programme Excellence and Targeting Hub that supports refugee self-reliance provided assistance across joint programmes, for example, in Mozambique to expand long-term sustainable food security and inclusion opportunities.

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<sup>8</sup> The Global Cost of Inclusive Refugee Education: 2023 Update is available on the global website of the World Bank.

99. In the context of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNHCR global collaboration framework for inclusion and solutions for 2023-2025, new commitments towards joint action plans were adopted in 10 country operations in Africa. At the Global Refugee Forum, UNDP co-led with Japan, the multi-stakeholder pledge on the humanitarian, development and peace nexus, and made an institutional pledge to scale up investments in refugee-hosting countries and countries of origin.

100. In July 2023, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and UNHCR launched a joint action plan for 2023-2025, to operationalize their memorandum of understanding. At the Global Refugee Forum, ILO supported several multi-stakeholder pledges, including on economic inclusion, social protection, vocational education and training.

101. UNHCR supported the participation of organizations led by forcibly displaced persons, at the first dialogue on peacebuilding between civil society organizations and the United Nations in November 2023. The United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs co-led a multi-stakeholder pledge focusing on the inclusion of refugees and other forcibly displaced in peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

102. Cooperation with IOM remained critical, particularly in the context of mixed and onward movements and internal displacement situations. IOM and UNHCR conducted joint advocacy for an updated route-based approach, building on the 2022 IOM-UNHCR framework of engagement. The two organizations will jointly work on regional and cross-regional initiatives in line with the framework's call for complementary action, reaffirmed by the joint letter from UNHCR and IOM in May 2024.

103. UNHCR and the World Health Organization (WHO) co-convened the Group of Friends of Health for Refugees and Host Communities, an initiative which mobilized multi-stakeholder pledges at the Global Refugee Forum. UNHCR collaborated on health, migration and displacement with WHO in the lead-up to high-level meetings on health at the opening of the seventy-eighth session of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2023.

104. The United Nations Common Pledge 2.0, co-led by UNHCR, the United Nations Development Coordination Office and the United Nations Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, serves both as a tool for collaboration on refugee inclusion and a bridge between the Global Compact on Refugees, the 2030 Agenda and United Nations development frameworks.

105. In the context of inter-agency coordination, in 2023, UNHCR led 29 out of 31 protection cluster and cluster-like mechanisms. Country protection clusters sought to uphold the continuity of protection in situations of armed conflict, including in light of the withdrawal of United Nations peacekeeping missions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali and the Sudan, working to identify protection risks and implement mitigation measures during the year.

106. The global shelter cluster reached 20 million people in need through 1,100 partners and made progress towards reducing the environmental impact of humanitarian shelter responses. UNHCR led or co-led 16 country shelter clusters out of 31 clusters in 2023.

107. The camp coordination and camp management cluster operated in 26 countries, with UNHCR leading or co-leading efforts in 18, and overseeing the management and coordination of activities for over 18 million individuals.

108. In the context of inter-agency coordination in refugee emergencies, regional refugee response plans expanded and diversified partnerships to better support governments in assisting refugees and the communities hosting them. UNHCR developed and coordinated seven regional refugee response plans, supporting inter-agency responses in 52 countries. These plans continue to include more local and national NGOs, faith-based organizations, refugee-led and women-led organizations.

109. In line with the refugee coordination model, partners assisted refugees and host communities, including 2.2 million individuals impacted by the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic through food assistance, 1.2 million refugees from Ukraine through cash assistance, and over 760,000 people who benefited from the installation of new or rehabilitated water supply systems in countries hosting Afghans. Over 390,000 South Sudanese refugee children

were enrolled in primary school, and 1.1 million refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and host community members were able to access basic health services. UNHCR-led multisectoral refugee response chapters were included in 18 out of 26 humanitarian response plans. In terms of assistance to mixed movements in the Americas, in 2023, over 400 implementing partners of the UNHCR and IOM co-led the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants. With the support of 43 refugee and migrant-led organizations, some 2.2 million refugees, migrants and affected host community members in 17 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean received assistance under the Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan.<sup>9</sup>

#### **D. Non-governmental organizations**

110. UNHCR maintained strategic collaboration with NGOs and civil society organizations. Local and international NGOs participated in online briefings, regional consultations in 2023, and to the global NGO consultations in 2024 on solutions, inclusion and gender equality.

111. UNHCR strengthened its commitment towards localization. In 2023, 85 per cent of UNHCR funded partners were local or national organizations, receiving 57 per cent (US\$778.7 million) of funding provided to partners. UNHCR also adopted innovative approaches in areas of digital transformation and gender equality and the refugee-led innovation fund, benefitting organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless persons. These organizations were also consulted on the child protection policy, the livelihoods and economic inclusion strategy for 2023-2027, and guidance on the inclusion of local organizations in the refugee coordination model.

112. In 2023, UNHCR continued developing new sport partnerships to benefit displaced and stateless people and their host communities, including with Adidas and Anta. It signed a memorandum of understanding with the *Fédération Internationale de Football Association* (FIFA) and worked for the first time with the European Club Association. UNHCR launched the sport strategy called “More than a game” in 17 country operations to improve the well-being and resilience of forcibly displaced and stateless persons through sports activities.

113. UNHCR partnered with Football Club Barcelona on storytelling to create positive narratives around refugees and with FIFA on the joint “Unite for peace” campaign at the FIFA Women’s World Cup. UNHCR collaborated with World Athletics, the European Olympic Committee and the Olympic Refugee Foundation to support the participation of refugees in the World Athletics Championships in Hungary and the European Games in Poland. With the Scort Foundation and the Olympic Refugee Foundation, UNHCR established a multi-stakeholder reference group for a new pledge on sport for inclusion and protection, ahead of the Global Refugee Forum. Over 800,000 people are expected to benefit from this pledge through financial commitments of nearly \$50 million for safe sport.

## **Chapter VII**

### **Reform, accountability and oversight**

#### **A. Transformation**

114. UNHCR continued to build on its business transformation programme to strengthen key administrative systems and management processes. The digital transformation reached a turning point in 2023, with the successful launch of remaining cloud-based solutions. This enabled UNHCR to modernize and optimize management processes covering human resources, finance and supply, partnerships and external engagement functions.

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<sup>9</sup> More information on the implementation of the regionally coordinated approach for mixed movements is available on the website of the Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela.

115. The business transformation programme formally came to a close at the end of the year with the shift to enhanced user support, and system stabilization and change management. To strengthen the initial stabilization phase, a dedicated business support team was established.

116. Reviewing and streamlining structures within UNHCR remained a priority. In 2023, UNHCR initiated a realignment exercise aimed at identifying further efficiencies by minimizing overlaps and eliminating duplication in functions across Headquarters, regional bureaux and country operations. The realignment process led to significant reductions in positions at all levels, with the highest percentage of reductions at Headquarters and in the regional bureaux. While this affected many individuals and teams, support was provided to mitigate the impact of these measures.

117. As a revitalized organizational culture is critical to the long-term success and sustainability of the transformation of the organization, UNHCR launched a comprehensive assessment to better understand its internal culture and to inform decision-making.

## **B. Accountability and oversight**

118. As part of its long-standing commitment to strengthening accountability and oversight, UNHCR initiated work on its first overarching accountability framework, drawing on recommendations made by relevant oversight bodies. The accountability framework aims to bring together accountability strands such as the risk management and high-level internal control frameworks, the independent oversight framework and a broad set of accountability-related systems.

119. Under the leadership of the Ethics Office, there was greater engagement in 2023 in code of conduct sessions. The support desk, set up in 2022, enabled collaboration across independent integrity and oversight bodies for the triage and referral of workplace issues. The Ethics Office continued to monitor and adjust the policy on protection against retaliation.

120. Addressing and resolving conflicts informally remained a priority for UNHCR and for the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator in 2023. UNHCR strengthened staff capacity in resolving conflict across all regions, while raising awareness of the power of mediation as a cost and time-effective avenue to address workplace conflict.

121. UNHCR remained committed to combating sexual misconduct. It adopted a policy to address sexual misconduct which codified common standards of conduct for all UNHCR personnel to ensure that appropriate measures were taken to prevent and address sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment. An updated strategy and action plan for addressing sexual misconduct was issued in 2023. A confidential online platform called NotOnlyMe was launched to support victims of sexual harassment, with significant engagement of the victim care team. The organization continued to contribute to United Nations system-wide efforts to prevent and combat sexual misconduct, including through the newly established United Nations Executive Group on the Prevention and Response to Sexual Harassment.

122. UNHCR mainstreamed risk management in its programme systems, tools, processes and policies, in line with its risk management strategy. The progress achieved was recognized by the Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network and the Board of Auditors. The Enterprise Risk Management Service initiated work on defining the risk appetite of UNHCR and tolerance for key risks at the global and country levels.

123. Aiming to bring greater coherence to the UNHCR oversight systems, and to ensure that they are effective and efficient, the Inspector General's Office convened independent oversight providers to facilitate coordination and dialogue and to make recommendations to management, including following investigative work.

124. In response to a record number of complaints of misconduct processed in 2023, the Inspector General's Office restructured its intake capacity, capitalizing on software tools for remote data gathering and analysis. Strategic reports and analyses were also issued, providing in-depth analysis of oversight findings for senior management.

125. Complementing the organization's 2022 evaluation policy, UNHCR developed a multi-year evaluation strategy framed around the three pillars of coverage and quality, capacity and culture. Strategic evaluations that were completed covered the age, gender and diversity policy of UNHCR, its engagement in humanitarian-development cooperation, and its engagement in situations of internal displacement and of several large-scale inter-agency emergency responses, including in Afghanistan and northern Ethiopia.

## **Chapter VIII**

### **Contributions to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees**

126. The final budget of UNHCR for 2023 was \$10.9 billion, including five supplementary budgets for Pakistan, Somalia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye, and the Ukraine situation. A budget reduction of \$100 million in Iraq, reflected the alignment of the UNHCR programme with the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework and an increased focus on development interventions.

127. UNHCR received \$4.8 billion in voluntary contributions in 2023, almost a billion less than the \$5.8 billion received in 2022, and \$44.6 million from the United Nations regular budget.

128. Seventy-five per cent of voluntary contributions were provided by government donors and 15 per cent by the private sector. Total funds available reached \$5.7 billion, leaving a 47.7 per cent funding gap. Expenditure totalled \$5.2 billion, a decrease of 8 per cent compared to 2022.<sup>10</sup>

129. In 2023, UNHCR faced funding challenges due to a decline in the quantity, quality and timeliness of voluntary contributions. Many donors confronted fiscal pressures, which resulted in reduced levels of support. The decrease in voluntary contributions created heightened difficulties for UNHCR in meeting the most pressing needs of forcibly displaced persons.

130. At the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, the Governments of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland led the formulation of a multi-stakeholder pledge on quality humanitarian funding for refugee situations. In line with Grand Bargain commitments, the pledge encouraged longer-term support to provide UNHCR a greater proportion of contributions in unearmarked or flexible funds.

## **Chapter IX**

### **Conclusions**

131. Challenges of forced displacement and statelessness grew in scope, scale and complexity in 2023, resulting in increased global humanitarian needs which outpaced the available resources. Despite these significant challenges, UNHCR continued to protect, empower and seek inclusion and solutions for forcibly displaced and stateless persons. In the framework of the Global Compact on Refugees, UNHCR strengthened efforts to broaden partnerships, mainstream development programmes in the organization's responses, and mitigate the effects of the climate change crisis on displacement. Advocacy efforts were intensified to holistically address the needs of refugees who travel alongside migrants in countries of origin, transit and destination through the route-based approach. UNHCR remained steadfast in its commitment to advocate for the possibility of safe and dignified voluntary returns where feasible, including through political solutions to end prolonged and new conflicts.

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<sup>10</sup> For more information on budget and expenditure for 2023, see: <https://reporting.unhcr.org/dashboards/budget-and-expenditure?year2023>.



132. UNHCR played a catalytic role in bringing together key stakeholders at the Global Refugee Forum. Over 1,700 pledges of support, including 42 multi-stakeholder pledges made at the event, were a demonstration of global solidarity with refugees and stateless persons. One of the most important lessons to be drawn from the Global Refugee Forum was that a shared purpose and vision can unite the international community to address the root causes of forced displacement and to seek lasting solutions through international cooperation and partnership.

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