
Update on UNHCR operations in Europe

A. Situational update, including new developments

The international armed conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine continues unabated, with escalations in hostilities driving further displacement. While government-led early recovery efforts are under way in Ukraine, the unpredictable security situation, coupled with compromised energy infrastructure and limited livelihood opportunities, have left millions in need of humanitarian assistance. The 2024 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan for Ukraine estimates that 14.6 million people – about 40 per cent of the population living in the country – are in need of multisectoral humanitarian assistance, including 3.3 million people currently displaced within Ukraine.¹

Some 6.7 million refugees from Ukraine have been recorded worldwide, of whom 6.2 million are currently hosted in Europe.² Refugees continue to undertake short-term visits to Ukraine, mainly to visit family members, while UNHCR intentions surveys indicate that improvements in the security situation continue to be an important precondition for large-scale and sustainable refugee returns.

Elsewhere, mixed movements along the three maritime routes towards Europe decreased in the first eight months of 2024, with some 112,500 refugees and migrants arriving on European shores – a 29 per cent decrease compared to the same period in 2023. Notably, the northwest African maritime route saw a 107 per cent increase in arrivals between January and August this year. Some 1,600 deaths were recorded along the primary sea routes, 47 per cent less than in the same period in 2023. Concerningly, many asylum-seekers and migrants continue to report expulsions, violent pushbacks and incidents of maltreatment when trying to enter the European Union.

B. Progress and challenges in achieving the 2024 plan for Europe – by impact area

Attaining favourable protection environments

Following the adoption of the European Union’s Pact on Migration and Asylum, UNHCR is working with Member States of the European Union and other counterparts in support of the Pact’s forthcoming implementation. Key priorities for UNHCR include supporting systematic approaches to identifying vulnerable individuals in the asylum system; identifying mechanisms for the protection-sensitive implementation of border procedures; promoting independent national monitoring mechanisms to oversee compliance with human rights obligations; and ensuring the provision of effective legal counselling and assistance to persons seeking asylum in Europe.

UNHCR recognizes the complex challenges faced by States due to irregular and mixed population movements at Europe’s external borders, coupled with onward movements within Europe, and remains engaged with States regarding lawful measures to respond more

¹ Statistics from the International Organization for Migration’s Displacement Tracking Matrix, June 2024, available at <https://dtm.iom.int/ukraine>.

² Statistics from UNHCR.

effectively to arrivals, including through the return of individuals found not to be in need of international protection. UNHCR advocates a broader, route-based approach to the management of mixed movements through which innovative approaches seek to provide international protection and solutions for refugees, while upholding rights and creating opportunities for migrants along key routes. UNHCR engaged with States, the International Organization for Migration and other United Nations agencies, civil society partners, migrants and refugees, regarding comprehensive, targeted and coordinated interventions along main routes in countries of origin, asylum, transit and destination.

UNHCR welcomed the decision to extend the application of the European Union’s temporary protection directive to March 2026. The extension provides Ukrainians with continued certainty, along with access to legal status and rights in countries that are Member States of the European Union for an additional year. UNHCR continues to advocate for access to protection, without distinction for persons displaced from Ukraine. The situation of more vulnerable groups in the refugee community who often face challenges in accessing their rights continued to be monitored. Efforts, in partnership with host States, were also made to enhance their access to additional assistance and services, including with a view to preventing premature and unsafe returns. UNHCR emphasizes that decisions to return to Ukraine must be truly voluntary and well informed. Given the importance of refugees undertaking “go-and-see” visits to inform their decisions to return, UNHCR continued to advocate for a flexible approach towards temporary travel to Ukraine, along with the safeguarding of legal status and access to rights in host countries.

Realizing rights in safe environments

Assistance to war-affected populations inside Ukraine remains a priority for UNHCR. From January to July 2024, UNHCR delivered life-saving, emergency assistance to some 1 million individuals most in need. Looking ahead to winter, UNHCR is actively supporting government-led preparedness efforts and contributing to inter-agency response plans. In July 2024, UNHCR launched its winter response plan which aims, with the support of 20 partners, to provide 600,000 forcibly displaced people and war-affected people with cash assistance to meet additional winter needs. Regional stockpiles also remain in place as a preparedness measure in case of future population displacements. Where conditions allowed, UNHCR supported the Government of Ukraine’s early recovery efforts, including repairs to civilian housing and infrastructure. Some 100,000 people in Ukraine have received support since the beginning of 2024.

In countries neighbouring Ukraine, UNHCR maintained its coordination role in the context of the Regional Refugee Response Plan for the Ukraine Situation and in support of government-led responses. In 2024, the response plan engaged more than 300 partners across 11 countries in identifying and assisting the most vulnerable refugees from Ukraine, while enhancing their self-reliance, improving socioeconomic inclusion and fostering social cohesion. From January to July 2024, UNHCR cash assistance for protection programmes provided targeted support to 67,000 of the most vulnerable. The forthcoming regional response plan will seek to consolidate the progress made to date and further enhance local cooperation.

Türkiye remains among the countries with the highest number of refugees globally, hosting some 3.8 million refugees and asylum-seekers. Working closely with the Government of Türkiye, UNHCR sought to promote a favourable protection environment, support access to essential services, foster self-reliance and strengthen social cohesion. UNHCR maintained its co-leadership role in the context of the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan in response to the needs of Syrian refugees. Some 106,000 Syrian refugees are targeted for case processing and support through other protection services in Türkiye in 2024.

In response to the mixed movements in the Mediterranean, UNHCR provided technical and material support to States receiving higher numbers of arrivals by sea. Assistance included support in ensuring adequate physical reception conditions; facilitating access to information and to fair and efficient asylum procedures; and providing legal counselling and psychosocial support.

Empowering communities and achieving gender equality

In July 2024, UNHCR, in cooperation with the Government of Ukraine, launched “Ukraine is Home”, a digital information platform which aims to help Ukrainian refugees and internally displaced persons to make well-informed decisions regarding their potential return or continued stay in host countries and communities. This digital platform provides information about eligibility for services, government entitlements and other forms of assistance that are available in the event of their voluntary return.

The Regional Contact Centre, established in 2023, has responded to more than 52,000 calls to date and providing refugees with vital information regarding their rights and available services. Going forward, the Regional Contact Centre will have broader geographic and linguistic coverage, and a call button feature will be directly accessible from the Help³ and “Ukraine is Home” digital platforms.

Violence against forcibly displaced women and girls remains of significant concern across the region, particularly in the context of the Ukraine response given the high percentage of women and girls among refugees. To date, in 2024, some 16,000 people across the region took part in and benefited from specialized programmes seeking to prevent and respond to gender-based violence, while more than 84,000 people were engaged through awareness-raising activities.

The need for mental health and psychosocial support among forcibly displaced populations remains significant throughout the region. In response, UNHCR strengthened its capacity-building initiatives with humanitarian partners, governments and civil society actors, including frontline workers. Since 2023, UNHCR workshops and webinars have reached over 1,400 actors, with UNHCR partners providing nearly 300,000 people with mental health and psychosocial support.

The inclusion of forcibly displaced and stateless children into the national child protection systems of refugee-hosting countries remained a priority, alongside access to suitable alternative care arrangements and rights.

Safeguarding against sexual exploitation and abuse remains a priority across Europe. Since 2023, training activities have been conducted for 1,200 aid workers and community members in Ukraine, and for some 2,000 aid workers, government officials and border guards across the Ukraine situation response. Efforts to strengthen the investigation capacity of partner non-governmental organizations (NGOs) continue.

Across Europe, UNHCR advanced community-based approaches to protection through its engagement with organizations led by those with lived experiences of forced displacement and statelessness. In 2024, some 84 refugee-led organizations and community-based organizations in the region received grants from UNHCR. Looking ahead, UNHCR will intensify support for the resource mobilization efforts and capacity-building of organizations led by refugees and stateless people.

Securing solutions

In 2024, UNHCR stepped up its advocacy efforts for the adoption of immediate and longer-term measures to support the inclusion of refugee children and young people from Ukraine in the national education systems of host countries. Positive legislative and policy changes have been adopted in several countries, such as the planned abolition of exceptions to compulsory education for refugee children and young people from Ukraine in Latvia and Poland for the 2024-2025 school year. In addition, reforms in enrolment procedures and increases in budgetary commitments in several other European countries have led to improvements in access to education. Support for complementary programmes, such as remote learning, which allow students to follow parts of the Ukrainian curriculum, also continued.

Access to opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, as well as to affordable housing and social protection, for forcibly displaced and stateless people in Europe remain key concerns. Reductions in social assistance and housing benefits for refugees from Ukraine have increasingly affected refugees, while limited support structures, gaps in information, incompatible skills and the lack of local language knowledge hinder effective job

³ See help.unhcr.org.

matching. Refugee employment platforms are now operating in eight countries to link the private sector, forcibly displaced persons and actors supporting integration to employment opportunities. The capacity of the private sector to recruit refugees will also be enhanced through a forthcoming regional platform.

The crises of housing affordability and cost of living across Europe, affecting refugees and locals alike, are eroding public support and solidarity for refugees and undermine social cohesion. In response, UNHCR has promoted coordinated efforts among key actors to address issues related to affordable housing more decisively and to work to improve conditions at the local level. Promising practices piloted with the support of UNHCR, catalytic efforts that are under way and recommendations for concrete solutions on housing are summarized in the *2024 Policy brief on promoting refugee integration and inclusion: Empowering municipalities across Europe*.

Expanding third-country solutions through resettlement and complementary pathways remains an important area of focus. UNHCR welcomes the commitment made by 12 Member States of the European Union to providing over 60,700 places for the 2024-2025 period, which includes nearly 31,000 resettlement places and 29,700 admissions on humanitarian grounds. As of 31 July 2024, the Europe region has resettled some 6,000 refugees, of whom 4,500 were resettled in countries that are Member States of the European Union. UNHCR encourages States to continue their efforts to implement their resettlement targets. UNHCR also welcomed the adoption of the Union Resettlement Framework Regulation in May 2024 that will allow for more predictability, strengthened funding and harmonized admission programmes across Europe.

In partnership with civil society, regional organizations and persons with lived experiences of statelessness, UNHCR continued supporting efforts to address statelessness in Europe. In July 2024, UNHCR and the International Council for Voluntary Agencies organized a regional dialogue on statelessness with NGOs to take stock of the progress made since the start of the #IBelong campaign and to discuss opportunities for increased civil society engagement beyond 2024. UNHCR is encouraged by the expression of support from European States, including from Montenegro, North Macedonia and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and other stakeholders for the Global Alliance to End Statelessness. Further engagement is being fostered.

C. Financial information

In October 2023, the Executive Committee approved the 2024 budget of \$1,466.2 million for the activities of UNHCR in Europe. The current 2024 budget for the region remains unchanged as of 31 August 2024.

The two impact areas with the highest budget allocations are for “realizing rights in safe environments” amounting to \$607.8 million, or 41 per cent of Europe’s budget, and “attaining favourable protection environments” amounting to \$541.5 million, or 37 per cent of the budget. The impact area “securing solutions” has the third highest budget allocation, reaching \$202.2 million or 14 per cent of the budget, for socioeconomic inclusion and integration programmes. The requirements for the impact area “empowering communities and achieving gender equality” amount to \$114.7 million, or 8 per cent of the total budget for Europe.

As of 31 August 2024, some 44 per cent of the 2024 financial requirements for Europe were funded, taking into consideration the indicative allocation of unearmarked and softly earmarked contributions.