

Update on global programmes

A. Introduction

At the end of 2023, the number of people forced to flee has risen to 117.3 million. In this context, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) implements its global programmes in the following areas: self-reliance and inclusion; development partnerships; education; nutrition and food security; cash-based interventions; public health, including mental health and psychosocial support; water, sanitation and hygiene; settlement planning, shelter and housing; and energy. In addition to leading the global protection cluster, UNHCR also co-leads the global shelter cluster and the global camp coordination and camp management cluster. This paper provides an update on the progress made in these areas in 2024.

B. Updates on technical sectors

Self-reliance and inclusion

In 2024, new opportunities for self-reliance and inclusion arose through increased access to digital work and labour mobility, which benefit displaced persons and address labour shortages in host countries. In Brazil, the Companies with Refugees Forum expanded to include over 125 companies that promote the social inclusion of refugees. The Forum currently employs some 12,000 refugees in Brazil according to a 2024 survey, and over 1,600 refugees trained between 2023 and 2024. UNHCR and partners supported 207,400 Ukrainian refugees with livelihoods and socioeconomic inclusion, while in Romania, Jobs for Ukraine assisted over 6,500 individuals and created approximately 530 new employer accounts in 2023. In Italy, the expansion of the Welcome Programme now offers online access to labour market inclusion opportunities from a network of over 700 companies, which have supported more than 22,000 refugees since 2017. These examples demonstrate a growing acceptance and integration of refugees into local labour markets.

To address some of the challenges regarding legal and practical barriers and local government capacity, UNHCR collaborated with private companies and civil society organizations to establish refugee employment platforms that provide them with information about their right to work and link them with employment opportunities. These platforms have been established in 15 countries (Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Finland, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands (Kingdom of), Panama, Peru, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland). A regional employment platform for Europe is under development and will be launched by the end of 2024.

UNHCR has also partnered with the World Food Programme (WFP) through the Joint Analytical Framework to assess the socioeconomic needs of refugees in East Africa and the Great Lakes region, including in Burundi, Djibouti, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda. This collaboration advanced economic inclusion and self-reliance. By 2023, UNHCR had worked with the national authorities in over 50 countries, integrating 5.8 million refugees and asylum-seekers into social protection systems.

Access to financial services was expanded across regions through partnerships with development financial institutions, financial service providers and impact investors to achieve measurable social benefits and financial gains. Notably, the flagship blended finance programme established by UNHCR and partners in Uganda has reached over 130,000 entrepreneurs among refugees and host communities, providing them with loans, savings accounts and supportive non-financial services. The joint initiative with the International Finance Corporation has also resulted in market diagnostics in several countries in Latin America and East Europe, as well as the creation of guaranteed schemes for microfinance loans for refugees in Kenya and Poland.

Development partnerships

Key development partners doubled their efforts to invest in supporting host governments to include refugees in national services. Progress was also made through financial instruments supporting development programming targeting refugee-hosting areas and host countries.

The PROSPECTS¹ Partnership – a collaborative effort supported by a contribution of 800 million euros from the Government of the Netherlands (Kingdom of) – aims to promote economic inclusion and social protection for displaced populations and host communities, creating 75,000 jobs for them by the end of 2024. Under this partnership, UNHCR worked with the national authorities in over 50 countries to include forcibly displaced and stateless persons in social protection systems, aligning humanitarian assistance with existing national programmes. By the end of 2023, 5.8 million refugees and asylum-seekers benefited from national social protection programmes. Moreover, UNHCR, jointly with UNICEF, has conducted a study to assess the feasibility and options of a technical assistance facility to enhance social protection in forced displacement contexts in 2024.

UNHCR has also stepped up its engagement with peace and development actors on peacebuilding to achieve conditions for return in safety and dignity. The UNHCR Regional Youth Peacebuilding Programme helped capacitate 580 South Sudanese young refugees in Ethiopia, Kenya, South Sudan, the Sudan and Uganda, enabling them to support their own communities in host countries and upon return. The programme supports conflict resolution, fosters social cohesion and drives positive change, strengthening the leadership role that young refugees play in their communities.

UNHCR and the World Bank have achieved significant milestones in supporting national data production and making socioeconomic data available for government, development and humanitarian partners. The World Bank-UNHCR Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement supports activities in over 35 countries, with 16 countries now including forcibly displaced populations in their national statistics. A notable achievement has been the national household living conditions and budget survey, which led to the Central African Republic's first-ever poverty assessment. The report outlines the situation of internally displaced persons and other Central Africans, and offers a roadmap for the government, the World Bank and development actors to address poverty and find solutions to internal displacement.

An ongoing initiative in the Republic of Moldova consists of gathering socioeconomic data on refugees and host communities, with results expected by the end of 2024 to guide policies for better social and economic inclusion. Similarly, in Ethiopia, a comprehensive socioeconomic survey of refugees, conducted by the National Statistical Office, enabled the World Bank to analyze the refugee situation compared to host populations. This study supports policies for refugee self-reliance, economic integration and access to services, aligned with Ethiopia's Global Refugee Forum pledges, and will inform World Bank operations and development investments. Since its inception in 2019, the Joint Data Center

¹ The project is implemented by UNHCR, the International Finance Corporation, the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund and the World Bank. It operates at global and regional level, and focuses on eight countries in the Middle East and North Africa and in the East and Horn of Africa.

has successfully supported 40 large-scale socioeconomic surveys, informing development programmes worth \$2.9 billion around the world.

UNHCR has enhanced development engagement capacity through initiatives such as DevUP, a training programme for over 200 national officers, and the Peer-to-Peer Resilience and Solutions Platform for senior leadership. Additionally, the Development Playbook and e-learning modules, co-produced with the Joint Data Center, provided training to 400 participants, focusing on humanitarian-development-peace engagement and socioeconomic evidence in forced displacement.

Nutrition and food security

In 2024, UNHCR continued to work in partnership with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Children’s Fund, WFP and the World Health Organization (WHO) to advance efforts towards the achievement of the sustainable development goals’ target 2.2 by promoting the reduction of child wasting, a severe form of malnutrition, as part of the Global Action Plan on Child Wasting. Efforts focused on implementing five priority actions to address the global food and nutrition crisis in 15 of the most affected countries, as well as 24 countries that have developed national-level multisectoral roadmaps. In addition to this, UNHCR and partners worked closely with various stakeholders to secure funding. Refugee inclusion remained central to this initiative. From January to August 2024, 139,000 refugee children and 48,500 pregnant and lactating women in 18 countries received treatment for acute malnutrition.

The joint programme excellence and targeting hub continued to operationalize the UNHCR-WFP collaboration in assessment and targeting at country, regional and global levels. Since 2020, the joint hub has supported 19 country operations, providing technical support for joint assessments, analysis, and evidence-based and people-centred decision-making. It has also helped enhance self-reliance and inclusion in national development plans and investments.

UNHCR is developing a global roadmap on agriculture to scale up climate-smart and market-oriented agricultural solutions to promote food security and nutrition, economic inclusion and resilience. The roadmap will also include a comprehensive data set on the potential for agricultural opportunities and challenges in areas where forcibly displaced populations are hosted. This data will significantly support the engagement of UNHCR with stakeholders to design agricultural interventions tailored to the specific needs of both the forcibly displaced and host communities, ensuring better resource allocation and maximizing the impact on food security and economic stability.

Education

UNHCR conducted a strategic review of its education initiatives to coincide with the midpoint of implementing its 2030 Refugee Education Strategy. The review focused on evolving government inclusion efforts and shifts in global education with an emphasis on quality learning. It also examined advancements in connected education post-COVID and with artificial intelligence, the 15by30 approach for tertiary and vocational education, and the key role of education in fostering self-reliance.

Efforts will be made to accelerate the implementation of a multi-stakeholder pledge made at the Global Refugee Forum in 2023 for predictable, multi-year financing to facilitate the inclusion of refugees in national education systems. To this end, INSPIRE, a World Bank technical assistance facility, has been launched in Burundi, Chad, Ethiopia and South Sudan. This initiative provides support for design and research to leverage the World Bank’s International Development Association funding for transitions towards greater inclusion. In addition, UNHCR continues to collaborate with multilateral organizations, the private sector and government partners to better align financing and facilitate the inclusion of refugees in national education systems.

In April 2024, UNHCR and its partner, Education Above All, renewed their strategic partnership agreement to address the global challenge of out-of-school children in refugee contexts. This partnership has already helped enrol over 1.6 million out-of-school refugee children across 15 countries through investments in school infrastructure, community

engagement, teacher support and targeted activities for vulnerable learners, including children with disabilities. In 2023, UNHCR launched the Primary Impact Initiative, a multi-year fundraising mechanism aimed at improving primary education for over 500,000 children in 26 countries. Since its launch, the initiative has also raised \$8.7 million.

The Instant Network Schools Programme, developed by UNHCR and Vodafone Foundation, has brought digital education to over 327,000 children and 6,000 teachers in six countries. In addition, the ProFuturo Foundation, a digital education initiative, supports connected education in Nigeria, Rwanda and Zimbabwe, benefiting over 800 teachers and 24,000 children annually.

Momentum continues to build towards the UNHCR initiative, 15by30 goal, to enrol 15 per cent of young refugees in higher education by 2030, with over 107 pledges made by a wide range of stakeholders. The present global enrolment rate stands at 7 per cent. The Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative, known as the DAFI scholarship programme, has supported over 9,300 refugee students in 59 countries in 2023. It also gives refugees the opportunity to transition from education to employment, including through technical and vocational training.

The conflict in the Sudan forced over 2 million people to flee to neighbouring countries. In the course of 2024, UNHCR and partners continued to expand educational infrastructure in hosting countries and in newly established refugee settlements. Efforts have been made to ensure that emergency response programming in host countries supports and fosters the inclusion of forcibly displaced persons in national education systems. Although Education Cannot Wait, which is a global fund dedicated to education in emergencies and protracted situations, has supported the education response in host countries, the needs continue to exceed the resources available.

Going forward, UNHCR will continue to increase the availability of data and evidence on refugee education with key partners. The forthcoming UNHCR Global Education Report 2024 will provide results from 65 countries, a significant increase from the 12 countries covered in the previous report.

Cash-based interventions

In 2023, UNHCR delivered \$762 million in cash assistance to 7.3 million people in 110 countries. The largest cash assistance delivery programmes were in Afghanistan, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Poland, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, Ukraine and Yemen. In addition, \$540 million were channelled through the UNHCR CashAssist system, which is being used in 65 countries.

Post-distribution monitoring in 73 countries indicated that 96 per cent of beneficiaries preferred cash or a combination of cash and in-kind assistance, with 95 per cent reporting improved living conditions. Over two-thirds of the beneficiaries received cash digitally, with 36 per cent receiving assistance via personal banking or mobile money accounts, which represented a 4 per cent increase from the previous year. UNHCR co-led the Global Cash Advisory Group with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and successfully transitioned to a new cash coordination model in 12 refugee-hosting countries.² Eighty-three per cent of cash working groups are now co-chaired by local actors, which aligns with the UNHCR “grand bargain” commitment.

As of June 2024, UNHCR provided cash assistance in some 97 countries. Following its 2022-2026 policy on cash-based interventions, UNHCR continued to prioritize cash as a primary response modality, including in emergencies. UNHCR has also used cash to promote financial inclusion, empowerment, economic activity and social protection.

Public health, including mental health and psychosocial support

In 2024, UNHCR continued to enhance the integrated refugee health information system, which is operational in 21 countries and over 195 settlements, which host more than

² Ecuador, Egypt, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Jordan, Mauritania, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Rwanda, Slovakia, Türkiye and Uganda.

5.5 million refugees. Globally, more than 4 million health consultations were conducted, benefiting both refugees (83 per cent) and local communities (17 per cent). These also supported over 39,800 (93%) women with skilled childbirth care.

To advance the inclusion of refugees in national health systems, UNHCR has engaged and collaborated with partners, including the World Bank, the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Labour Organization and academic institutions. UNHCR and WHO co-convened the Group of Friends of Health for Refugees and Host Communities with a view to mobilizing support for two multi-stakeholder pledges on the inclusion of refugees in health systems and the provision of mental health and psychosocial support. These efforts led to 235 pledges, including 113 pledges that focused on mental health and psychosocial support.

Best practices and barriers to including refugees in national health systems are being documented by UNHCR in collaboration with academic institutions. In partnership with the World Bank, UNHCR is assessing the cost of refugee inclusion in national health systems and exploring further engagement with the private sector to advance refugee inclusion, together with the International Finance Corporation.

In response to the mpox emergency, UNHCR, in coordination with governments, WHO and the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, has swiftly scaled up critical health and water, sanitation and hygiene measures to protect and assist forcibly displaced persons and host communities across affected countries in Africa.

A global technical event on non-communicable diseases in the context of emergencies was also organized in collaboration with WHO to highlight the need and propose actions to enhance relevant responses in emergencies, including for refugees. In addition, UNHCR partnered with the World Diabetes Foundation to strengthen care for non-communicable diseases in Burundi and the United Republic of Tanzania, and offered courses to build capacity in the Asia and Pacific and the Middle East and North Africa regions. UNHCR and WFP, with the support from the Secretariat of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, reinitiated the inter-agency task team working on the human immunodeficiency virus in emergencies.

UNHCR launched its learning course on public health in refugee emergencies to equip the UNHCR workforce to implement evidence-based public health responses during emergencies. UNHCR released guidance on facilitating access to assistive technology and rehabilitation to support predictable and collaborative multisectoral programming involving a wide range of stakeholders. Of note has been a minimum service package on mental health and psychosocial support that was introduced to assist forcibly displaced persons in countries neighbouring the Sudan.

Energy, settlement planning, shelter and housing, and water, sanitation and hygiene

In line with the 2024-2030 Focus Area Strategic Plan on Climate Action, UNHCR continues to emphasize environmental sustainability and climate resilience in the areas of energy, settlement planning, shelter and housing, and water, sanitation and hygiene. These activities are supported by the Geneva Technical Hub. As part of a Global Refugee Forum pledge, a Geneva Technical Hub 2.0 will be established with key partners. Additional donor support will be sought for its expansion. The aim of Geneva Technical Hub 2.0 will be to further advance technical solutions that are more integrated, environmentally sustainable and context-adapted in humanitarian responses.

In 2024, the Geneva Technical Hub collaborated with Swiss academia to develop various tools, including one³ to assess flood risk and design mitigation measures using a community-based approach. In addition, guidance on “nature-based solutions” in humanitarian settlements⁴ was developed, with a catalogue of environmentally sound technical solutions.

³ Floor Risks in Humanitarian Settlements: Compendium of Mitigation Measures, <https://www.humanitarian-risk.org>.

⁴ The guidelines for integrating nature-based solutions in settlement planning are available on the UNHCR global website.

In the framework of its programme on energy solutions for displacement settings, UNHCR, together with its partners, provided sustainable energy access to 310,000 individuals in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda, as part of the programme on energy solutions in displacement settings. In addition to country-based initiatives, global technical support was offered, linking cooking, electrification and e-waste issues to market-based initiatives with the aim of promoting refugee self-reliance. Other global activities include energy policy assessments, contributions to clean cooking strategies, webinars on energy access, as well as e-waste management and operational and maintenance approaches.

To foster climate resilience and reduce dependency on fossil fuels, UNHCR is advancing the solarization of water systems and health facilities through Project Flow's innovative financing mechanisms. As of August 2024, Ethiopia, Mauritania and Rwanda have agreed to solarize 20 water systems and health facilities, which are expected to benefit 980,000 individuals.

Global shelter cluster

As of June 2024, the global shelter cluster supported shelter clusters in 31 countries, targeting 37 million out of the 98 million internally displaced persons in need of shelter and non-food items. Nearly 8 million people were reached with the efforts of over 1,000 partners. The global shelter cluster activated the donor consultation group, which improved the planning procedures and enhanced the effectiveness of the allocations of the Central Emergency Response Fund.

In addition, the global shelter cluster held an annual meeting that brought together over 200 practitioners to discuss the forthcoming launch of a new global shelter cluster strategy, which will aim to enhance the impact of shelter interventions by improving preparedness, addressing environmental issues, and ensuring safe, accessible living conditions for recovery and more durable shelter solutions. At the meeting, the global shelter cluster's commitment to localization, innovation and accountability to affected populations was also highlighted.

In 2024, based on the new global strategy, technical and funding support was provided to Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, El Salvador, Mali, Somalia, the Sudan, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) and Yemen.

Global camp coordination and camp management cluster

In 2024, 23 million internally displaced persons across 20,000 sites in 26 countries required site support services, marking a significant increase in the global camp coordination and camp management cluster's target population. UNHCR led 46 per cent and co-led 23 per cent of the existing cluster and cluster-like coordination mechanisms. The cluster's strategy remained firmly anchored in a solutions-oriented approach. It focused on managing immediate needs while actively seeking long-term, sustainable solutions for displaced populations, including supporting safe and voluntary return to their areas of origin as well as local integration.

The cluster has made significant progress in advancing the localization agenda with over 310 partnerships, including with non-governmental organizations, of which 58 per cent were local. With the establishment of a localization task force, the global camp coordination and camp management cluster conducted comprehensive research on operations in Ethiopia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Somalia, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. This research, carried out in collaboration with the Humanitarian Advisory Group⁵ and local researchers, showed strong support for localization. It also identified challenges in ensuring accountability to affected populations and in navigating complex operational environments.

⁵ The Humanitarian Advisory Group is an independent partnership of experienced humanitarian practitioners and policy makers committed to promoting excellence in humanitarian practice.