

Update on global programmes

A. Introduction

The number of people forced to flee their homes has increased every year over the past decade and currently stands at 108.4 million people. In this context, UNHCR implements its global programmes in the following areas: livelihoods and economic inclusion; education; food security; cash-based interventions; public health, including nutrition, as well as mental health and psychosocial support; water, sanitation and hygiene; shelter and settlements; and energy and the environment. In addition to 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 2022 and 2023.

B. Updates on technical sectors

Livelihoods and economic inclusion

The biennial global survey on livelihoods and economic inclusion reached 132 country operations in 2023. The survey captured key information on the enabling environment for economic inclusion, such as opportunities for employment and self-employment, access to agricultural land and financial services, and access to national systems and services for refugees, asylum-seekers, stateless and internally displaced persons, and returnees and taking into account age, gender and diversity considerations. The results of the survey will be publicly shared in October 2023 and serve as evidence for advocacy and programming at country, regional and global levels.

Insect farming, a new circular economy, has the potential to improve human and animal nutrition, create climate-resilient jobs and income, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and contribute to waste management. Building on the promising results achieved in 2022 in Malawi, South Sudan and Zimbabwe, UNHCR, together with the World Bank, is expanding insect farming in 2023 to operations in Chad, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mexico and Uganda.

UNHCR strengthened its partnerships with the private sector to advance employment and self-employment for refugees. The Refugee Employment Alliance of the World Economic Forum, which is co-chaired by UNHCR and the Ingka Group, worked to accelerate multi-stakeholder support for the economic integration of refugees globally. UNHCR signed a collaboration framework with the International Chamber of Commerce to promote greater participation of refugees in the economy, including through employment and self-employment, as well as cross-border trade and skills building.

A multi-stakeholder pledge on economic inclusion and social protection was launched ahead of the 2023 Global Refugee Forum. This aims to promote synergies and galvanize concrete multi-stakeholder commitments to advance self-reliance through socioeconomic inclusion, building upon the commitments made at the 2019 Global Refugee Forum.

Education

The UNHCR programme Educate A Child was implemented across 14 operations globally. It supported the enrolment of over 385,600 out-of-school children in primary education, surpassing the original target of 365,000 children. This was achieved through strategic

investments in school infrastructure, enhanced community engagement, improved support for teachers and targeted support for vulnerable children, including those with disabilities.

Following the Transforming Education Summit held in 2022, UNHCR led global discussions on increasing access to quality education for refugee children and their inclusion in national systems. As part of the summit’s taskteams on digital learning, teachers and teaching, and finance, UNHCR ensured that the topic of including refugees was part of all thematic papers prepared. The Office was the penholder of the Our Common Agenda policy brief entitled, “transforming education”, to be issued at the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Summit in September 2023. Significant progress was made around developing Global Refugee Forum pledges on education, with the support and leadership of Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the World Bank.

The Instant Network Schools programme, funded by the Vodafone Foundation, was successfully expanded, bringing digital education to refugee communities across six countries. Since its inception, the programme has benefited more than 260,000 children and 4,000 teachers. A connected digital education programme supported by ProFuturo in Rwanda, was expanded to Nigeria and Zimbabwe, enabling more teachers and learners to access digital tools for education.

In 2023, 7 per cent of refugee youth were enrolled in higher education, up from 1 per cent in 2019. These gains were a result of the commitment of academic, corporate, foundational and government partners to create higher educational opportunities for refugees around the world. New emphasis was placed on expanding access via digital and vocational higher educational possibilities, contributing to delivering on the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees. The goal is to achieve 15 per cent enrolment of refugee youth in higher education by 2030. The Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative, known as the DAFI tertiary scholarship programme, supported over 9,000 refugee students in 57 countries worldwide. The leadership of refugee students and networks, including through the global Peer to Peer Refugee Solutions Advisor Network was essential to achieving and maintaining these positive trends.

The international armed conflict in Ukraine resulted in an unprecedented number of refugees fleeing to neighbouring countries. UNHCR worked with key partners, such as the European Union, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, to ensure that children were able to resume their education as quickly as possible in countries neighbouring Ukraine and in other emergency situations. UNHCR provided policy advice to governments on the most effective ways to integrate newly-arrived refugee children in schools in the country of asylum and provide them with the necessary assistance. As part of the commitment to strengthening the quality of education responses in emergencies, UNHCR worked with the global education cluster and partners to strengthen the efficacy of the coordinated response through information exchange and training.

UNHCR continued to work closely with the global education cluster and other key stakeholders to ensure that the quality of the coordinated response is enhanced. This culminated in an in-person and hybrid training programme for Ethiopia, Kenya, South Sudan and Sudan, which were affected by multiple intersecting emergencies.

UNHCR strengthened the availability of data and evidence on refugee education, published documents and papers with key partners, fundraised for and designed projects to address data gaps, and supported the development of evidence-based advocacy. The 2023 Global Education Report will provide results from 74 countries, a significant increase compared to three years ago when results were provided from twelve countries.

Nutrition and food security

In 2023, 1 in 10 refugee children globally suffer from acute malnutrition, and refugee children in emergency situations experience high levels of malnutrition. In response, UNHCR reinforced programmes to treat and prevent undernutrition. Such efforts included community-based management of acute malnutrition (over 50,000 children were admitted for treatment during the first half of 2023 in 15 countries); the promotion of nutrition programmes for infants and young children; assistance to identified vulnerable groups, including pregnant and lactating

women, and people living with chronic diseases such as the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and nutrition situation assessments to monitor and guide programming.

In 2023, UNHCR continued to work in partnership with the Food and Agriculture Organization, UNICEF, the World Food Programme (WFP), and the the World Health Organization (WHO) to advance the reduction of child wasting under the Global Action Plan on Child Wasting. Five priority actions were identified for immediate acceleration in response to the global food and nutrition crisis in 15 of the most affected countries.

The UNHCR-WFP Joint Programme Excellence and Targeting Hub continued to operationalize UNHCR-WFP frameworks at country, regional and global levels. Since 2020, the joint hub has strengthened 14 country operations. In early 2023, with the support of the joint hub, UNHCR and WFP conducted an assessment of refugee needs and vulnerabilities in South Sudan to identify potential risks and design mitigation strategies. Assessment data was used to develop a location-based approach to target and prioritize food and non-food assistance, as well as to inform programming for livelihood activities. With food assistance reduced by 50 per cent in South Sudan since 2021, due to limited financial resources and livelihoods support, the new strategy ensured that the most vulnerable households were prioritized for assistance.

Cash-based interventions

In 2022, UNHCR delivered \$969 million in cash assistance to 10 million people in 100 countries. The largest UNHCR operations delivering cash assistance were in Afghanistan, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Poland, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, Ukraine and Yemen.

As of June 2023, UNHCR had delivered \$262 million cash in some 100 countries. In line with its policy on cash-based interventions (2022-2026), UNHCR delivered cash in Afghanistan, Egypt, Ethiopia, South Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Türkiye, and Ukraine, as well as in other operations in challenging contexts.

Post-distribution monitoring conducted by UNHCR in 77 countries indicated that 89 per cent of beneficiaries preferred cash or a combination of cash and in-kind assistance. Ninety-three per cent of recipients reported that cash assistance improved their living conditions. A study launched in July 2023 in Yemen to measure the impact of cash assistance concluded that, when deployed through an integrated approach, cash assistance had a significant effect on promoting the protection of displaced persons.

Eighty per cent of cash recipients received cash through digital means, with 32 per cent receiving the assistance through their own bank or mobile money accounts. The UNHCR cash management system, CashAssist, was used in 51 countries, and channelled \$1.4 billion in 2023. UNHCR co-led the Global Cash Advisory Group with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and was accountable for cash coordination in refugee settings. UNHCR will implement its policy on cash-based interventions with an emphasis on the use of cash in emergencies and promoting cash as a vehicle for inclusion.

Public health (including mental health and psychosocial support)

In 2023, UNHCR continued to strengthen the integrated refugee health information system used in 19 countries and over 180 settlements, addressing the needs of over 5.5 million refugees. Globally, from January to June 2023, over 4,200,000 health consultations (about 85 per cent refugees and 15 per cent nationals) were provided.

UNHCR consolidated guidance and published its first internal administrative instruction on public health programming. Updated guidance on referral health care and medicines was also issued.

The groundbreaking Rabat Declaration to strengthen the global commitment to improve the health of refugees and migrants was adopted in June 2023 at the third global consultation. This consultation, which was organized by the International Organization for Migration, UNHCR and WHO, resulted in Member States making bold commitments to improve the health of refugees and migrants with emphasis on country led action and international cooperation.

UNHCR and WHO launched the Group of Friends for the Health of Refugees and Host Communities. This initiative aims to mobilize high quality, multi-stakeholder pledges and contributions to foster sustainable access to affordable and quality health services.

In the first half of 2023, UNHCR assisted over 41,700 pregnant refugee women to receive antenatal care, while over 66,600 refugee women benefited from skilled health care providers during child birth. As a co-sponsor of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), UNHCR worked with partners to enable forcibly displaced and stateless persons affected by HIV to access life-saving prevention, treatment and care.

In partnership with the World Diabetes Foundation, UNHCR continued to strengthen care for people living with non-communicable diseases, which accounted for 4 per cent of total outpatient consultations globally in the first quarter of 2023.

A toolkit for suicide prevention in refugee settings was published and is informing suicide prevention work in UNHCR operations. A review document on culture, context and mental health and psychosocial well-being of refugees and internally displaced persons from South Sudan was published by UNHCR. The “Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Minimum Service Package”, released by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, is being introduced by UNHCR in its operations in Ethiopia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Myanmar, Pakistan and the Syrian Arab Republic.

A three-year research project to document good practices on the inclusion of refugees in national health systems is being undertaken by UNHCR together with an academic institution. The research will build on evidence generated by the World Bank’s collaboration on the Columbia University’s programme on forced migration and health.

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

In line with its operational strategy for climate resilience and environmental sustainability for 2022-2025, UNHCR has enhanced the technical integrity of its humanitarian response in the areas of settlement planning; shelter and housing; water, sanitation and hygiene; and energy, with the aim of mitigating the impacts of climate change.

In 2023, in collaboration with the United Nations Satellite Centre, UNHCR finalized a geospatial and hydrological analysis of 30 settlements in 15 countries that were most affected by climate-related shocks. The analysis will enhance site planning and evidence-based decision-making for improved environmental management of settlements, using remote sensing and geographic information system technologies. The project also seeks to increase capacities in the use of geo-information technologies for settlement planning by integrating critical environmental considerations. Through the Geneva Technical Hub and together with the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, UNHCR developed guidance on spatial layout optimization, which includes communal open spaces design, efficient circulation networks, compact facilities and public services. In addition, UNHCR launched a shelter sustainability assessment tool to enable the assessment of shelter designs in relation to environmental impacts, technical performance, habitability and affordability. This assessment will support decisions regarding the design and procurement of emergency, transitional and durable shelters provided by UNHCR and its partners. Under the technical hub, UNHCR collaborated with the Swiss Federal Institute of Aquatic Science and Technology to develop guidance on sustainable sanitation.

To improve the efficiency of water supply services and monitoring through smart water sensors, using the European Innovation Council Horizon Fund, UNHCR continued to implement the Real-Time Monitoring Project in 2023 in 13 selected countries. Smart water sensors were shipped to these countries for installation, while training on their use is currently ongoing.

To reduce dependency and the use of fossil fuels, UNHCR accelerated solarization of water systems through innovative financing mechanisms under Project Flow, an initiative to improve the way in which clean water is provided in refugee communities. In 2023, over 40 water systems were assessed in Ethiopia, Mauritania, Rwanda, South Sudan, the Sudan and Zambia, with technical and financial designs currently under development to transition to clean energy systems.

In Uganda, the Government, UNHCR and the World Bank worked on the transition from short-term humanitarian water service models, designed for emergencies, to a holistic approach integrating the water supply for refugees and host communities in long-term national development planning.

UNHCR completed an action plan and procurement guidelines relating to electronic waste management in humanitarian settings, with support from the German Corporation for International Cooperation. The construction of a “Green Innovation Hub” focusing on e-waste management in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh was ongoing.

Global shelter cluster

In 2023, the global shelter cluster supported the work of shelter clusters in 31 countries, reaching more than 20 million people with shelter and non-food items in 2022, with an aggregated value of \$1.2 billion reported within humanitarian response plans. This record-high level of expenditure reflected not only the increasing number of displaced people, but also the protracted nature of displacement. The cluster adapted its responses with a range of approaches according to the context of displacement, with more than 1,000 partners across 31 countries.¹

Following the devastating earthquakes in Türkiye and the Syrian Arab Republic in February 2023, staff were deployed to affected areas to support the response. This work entailed carrying out damage and needs assessments, quantifying costs and planning the immediate shelter response with local authorities and impacted communities. In the aftermath of the earthquakes, data analysis and extensive narrative were prepared together with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) for the housing, land and settlement chapter of the Syria Emergency Response Needs Assessment. This document appealing for \$8 billion set out the details of the community-based recovery and reconstruction programming for hundreds of thousands of earthquake-affected households. Also in 2023, the global shelter cluster completed the implementation of activities funded by the European Commission for Humanitarian Operations and the Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance in the United States Agency for International Development; these activities focused on greener and environmentally friendly approaches for shelter implementation. The funding benefited all cluster partners and shelter responses with low carbon footprint approaches and more sustainable local shelter practices.

The cluster continued to engage with stakeholders on the preparation of a new cluster strategy to be published in the last quarter of 2023. The new strategy will guide the strategic direction of humanitarian shelter coordination and support global processes, country-level coordination and shelter partner programming. It will focus on environment, localization, addressing housing, land and property issues, and dignified housing solutions.

Camp coordination and camp management cluster

In 2023, 23 million internally displaced persons living in 14,000 sites in 23 countries – a historic increase in the cluster’s target population – were in need of site support services. The cluster’s strategy for camp coordination and camp management remained firmly anchored in a solutions-oriented approach. This year’s Humanitarian Response Plan endorsed appeal for camp coordination and camp management has reached \$515 million. The cluster established partnerships with over 300 partners including non-governmental organizations, of which 54 per cent were local. During the year, UNHCR led 55 per cent and co-led 27 per cent of the existing cluster and cluster-like coordination mechanisms, demonstrating increased engagement in its role as lead of the camp coordination and camp management cluster. During this period, the camp coordination and camp management cluster has contributed to enhancing the overall conditions of millions of internally displaced persons through quality programming and by ensuring that aid and assistance is provided in a dignified manner. The cluster partners improved the overall protection environment in the sites inhabited by internally displaced persons to reduce the protection risks that they (mainly women and

¹ The 2022 Global Cluster Shelter Annual Report specifies priorities and achievements of the global shelter cluster in 2022 at the global and country levels, with key data on impact and the extent of interventions.

children) might face. Lastly, the cluster has worked in many countries to identify longer term solutions for internally displaced persons and to reduce the numbers of those living in IDP sites by establishing conducive environment for them to become self-resilient and as conditions allow them to integrate or return to their areas of origin.
