
Update on UNHCR operations in southern Africa

A. Situational analysis, including new developments

As of July 2023, the southern Africa region hosted 8.3 million forcibly displaced people and returnees, including 6.8 million people internally displaced by conflict and nearly 1 million refugees and asylum-seekers. In addition, the region also hosted some 1 million people who were displaced within their countries by the impact of climate change. The main drivers of forced displacement in southern Africa are the complex crises in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique. Angola, the Congo (Republic of), Malawi, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe have hosted refugees for protracted periods.

The operational context in southern Africa is marked by socioeconomic inequalities, conflict, food insecurity and natural disasters, aggravated by the effects of other global crises and by funding shortfalls. In 2023, incidents of gender-based violence and the imposition of asylum restrictions were matters of increasing concern across the region, most notably due to the rising violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the forced relocation of refugees and asylum-seekers to Dzaleka camp in Malawi. Outbreaks of measles, cholera and malaria placed further strain on already-limited health services, while tropical storms and cyclones brought devastation to communities in multiple countries. Moreover, food insecurity reached devastating levels, with Angola, the Congo (Republic of), the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe having experienced or expecting ration cuts and breaks in the food pipeline. Consequently, humanitarian needs increased across southern Africa this year, as did mixed movements of migrants and asylum-seekers. Possible instability following scheduled elections and extreme weather events related to the El Niño phenomenon may pose additional challenges for the region in upcoming months.

Democratic Republic of the Congo emergency

The Democratic Republic of the Congo remains one of the most severe and critically underfunded humanitarian situations in the world. Cyclical violence has displaced around 6 million people within the country and forced over 1 million to cross international borders in search of refuge. In addition, the Democratic Republic of the Congo hosts over half a million refugees (mainly from Burundi, the Central African Republic and Rwanda), the largest number in southern Africa. Since the beginning of 2023, the country has suffered intensifying conflict, acute food insecurity and a spike in protection incidents, which have provoked further displacement. The exponential rise in violations of physical integrity and gender-based violence in the eastern provinces reached unprecedented levels in July, leading 24 United Nations entities to urge immediate action to protect women and girls. In light of the crisis, UNHCR and the humanitarian community amplified their response across multiple sectors. UNHCR is leading the clusters for protection, shelter and camp coordination and camp management in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as leading the inter-agency Regional Refugee Response Plan for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which covers the response in Angola, Burundi, the Congo (Republic of), Rwanda, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia.

Mozambique emergency

In Mozambique, the second largest emergency in southern Africa, conflict in the Cabo Delgado province has displaced some 834,000 people and deeply affected the 27,395

refugees and asylum-seekers hosted in the country. The ongoing volatility is compounded by the growing impact of climate change and cyclical natural disasters. In 2023, Tropical Cyclone Freddy made a double landfall in the country in February and March 2023. There are 41,000 people currently internally displaced by disasters in Mozambique. Against this background, UNHCR is providing life-saving assistance and protection to affected populations. UNHCR is also working with the Government to support the inclusion of displaced populations in national services and the mainstreaming of protection needs in development programmes.

B. Progress and challenges in achieving the 2023 plan for southern Africa

Operationalizing the Global Compact on Refugees

In June 2023, ahead of the Global Refugee Forum in December, UNHCR convened stakeholders at regional and country levels to take stock of pledges made in 2019 and explore new pledges and priority areas. Due to delays and lack of capacity across the region, by mid-2023, only 14 per cent of pledges related to the Global Compact on Refugees had been completed, 73 per cent were in progress and 13 per cent were in the planning stage. Despite challenges, much was accomplished through regional studies on access to the labour market, birth registration and social protection, as well as through supporting refugee status determination efforts. Furthermore, UNHCR worked with partners to promote the inclusion of displaced persons in development programming and their access to social safety nets and livelihood opportunities.

UNHCR prioritized durable solutions when feasible. In 2022, 21,089 people were assisted to return to their countries of origin, while between January and July 2023, UNHCR supported the voluntary repatriation of nearly 700 refugees, mostly to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Similarly, in 2022, UNHCR submitted the cases of nearly 7,000 refugees for resettlement and supported some 3,000 people departing to third countries. In the first seven months of 2023, the cases of nearly 4,620 people were submitted for resettlement and over 1,000 people received support to depart.

Strengthening access to protection and asylum capacity

Although 13 out of the 16 countries in the region have established asylum laws and mechanisms to conduct refugee status determination, there are currently nearly 200,000 asylum claims pending adjudication in southern Africa. To address the gaps, UNHCR focused on strengthening asylum systems together with governments, development actors and other stakeholders. In coordination with the Southern African Development Community, UNHCR trained 105 State officials on asylum matters in 2022 and organized a regional workshop on asylum and refugee inclusion in 2023. Close collaboration with stakeholders and support for capacity development helped governments advance in the implementation of the two-year regional roadmap for improving national asylum systems, which was adopted in 2022 – out of the 22 planned activities, 19 are in progress, 2 have been completed, and 1 is pending. UNHCR also supported the registration of and issuing of documentation for some 28,800 forcibly displaced persons between January and July 2023.

As gender-based violence remained a major protection concern in the region, risk mitigation measures were bolstered in all response activities. Trainings conducted in Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mozambique and Zimbabwe reached over 10,100 people with information on the prevention of gender-based violence and support activities available for survivors and people at risk. Moreover, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, UNHCR partnered with a women-led organization that provides psychosocial and socioeconomic care and legal assistance for internally displaced persons who are survivors or at risk of gender-based violence.

Promoting child protection

UNHCR worked with partners to mainstream child protection, support governments in strengthening inclusive child protection systems and bolster networks that focus on children

in mixed movements. Across the region, improvement was seen in best interests procedures, the UNHCR framework for child protection case management. Refugee children were integrated into national systems in Angola, South Africa and Zambia. Furthermore, youth initiatives were bolstered in Malawi and Zimbabwe, as well as in the Cabo Delgado province in Mozambique.

In 2023, UNHCR and UNICEF, in collaboration with the Government of South Africa, completed the implementation of the European Union Global Promotion of Best Practices for Children in Migration project. Key achievements include the development of an inter-agency protocol for policy and practice related to children on the move, the creation of a national task force on birth registration and capacity-development of stakeholders.

Enhancing access to education

UNHCR and its partners continued to leverage digital technologies to enhance the learning process for the forcibly displaced and their host communities. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique, the Instant Network Schools programme was expanded to make multimedia learning content available to 77,000 students and teachers. Similar projects in Malawi and Zimbabwe have enabled thousands of learners to access interactive digital content. As matters such as food insecurity and integration into national systems continued to affect refugee education, in May 2023, UNHCR convened a regional consultation with the African Development Bank, the World Bank, Education Cannot Wait and the Global Partnership for Education on improving access, retention and completion of education among the forcibly displaced.

Facilitating safe environments

Despite efforts to upgrade infrastructure and improve water supply monitoring, water supply in many operations in southern Africa fell short of the standard of 20 litres per person per day. Moreover, while refugees and asylum-seekers are included in the national health systems of most countries in the region, fragile services and lack of resources in refugee-hosting areas threatened access to care. In Malawi, the forced relocation of refugees and asylum-seekers to the overcrowded Dzaleka camp worsened the sanitation, shelter and health conditions. In Zambia, an agreement was signed between UNHCR and the Government to improve collaboration on refugee healthcare. In South Africa, UNHCR worked with partners to cover health gaps among asylum-seekers.

Almost all countries in southern Africa provided cash assistance to mitigate protection risks and support the forcibly displaced in meeting their basic needs. Transitions to cash-based interventions are planned in Botswana and Namibia. At the same time, in-kind assistance continued to be supplied to vulnerable populations in the region. In the first semester of 2023, UNHCR provided 3,350 emergency shelters and 3,500 durable shelters for internally displaced families in Mozambique; in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, UNHCR provided shelters to some 4,800 people. Between January and July 2023, UNHCR distributed over 67,535 kits with core relief items to vulnerable individuals across southern Africa. In Malawi and Mozambique, populations affected by Tropical Cyclone Freddy received tarpaulins, clothes and tents.

With eight countries in the region identified as highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, UNHCR invested in preparedness for emergencies by establishing a regional climate action plan and assisting the Southern African Development Community in the development of a disaster displacement framework. Investments were also made in reforestation, clean cooking, solar energy and projects to help make shelters more resilient.

Advancing socioeconomic inclusion

Partnerships with traditional and new partners contributed to fostering economic inclusion across southern Africa. In 2022, UNHCR entered into an agreement with the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit* in Mozambique to support the implementation of activities related to the Global Compact on Refugees and the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, improving conditions for 650 internally displaced families. In Zambia, UNHCR partnered with the private sector to facilitate the inclusion of

refugees and host communities in services and supply chains. In Malawi and Zimbabwe, the World Bank and UNHCR launched pilot projects on insect farming to promote livelihoods and increase food security. Other efforts to promote and support livelihoods activities and skills development in Angola, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe improved the socioeconomic situation of over 2,000 households. In the first six months of 2023 alone, over 1,000 people in the region received livelihoods and skills training. Guided by the age, gender and diversity approach, UNHCR partnered with a women's group in Mozambique to improve the financial security of women affected by conflict. Similarly, UNHCR implemented a livelihoods project targeting women and girls at risk in Zambia. However, persisting legal and policy restrictions and challenges in accessing identity papers, work permits and other relevant documentation continued to present major barriers to the economic integration of displaced persons.

Promoting protection and solutions for internally displaced persons

In situations of internal displacement, UNHCR strengthened its leadership on protection, shelter, camp coordination and camp management interventions; reinforced its rapid response capacity for emergencies; and ensured the centrality of protection in all programming. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where protection incidents soared in 2023, UNHCR coordinated with partners to deliver a multi-sectoral response, including legal assistance and documentation for survivors of gender-based violence. Throughout the region, UNHCR also continued to focus on developing innovative data collection techniques such as biometric registration; consolidating community-based approaches and quick impact projects; ensuring targeted assistance to vulnerable persons; promoting peaceful coexistence and implementing solutions strategies.

Eradicating statelessness

UNHCR advocated the accession of governments to relevant statelessness conventions and promoted the reform of legislations and policies related to nationality and birth registration. In collaboration with the Pan-African Parliament, UNHCR provided support for the development of a draft Model Law on Nationality for Africa. As a result of these efforts, the Congo (Republic of), Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe provided documentation to over 140,000 stateless persons; the Congo (Republic of), Eswatini, Madagascar and Namibia engaged in reforming nationality laws; and Angola, the Congo (Republic of), Eswatini and Mozambique initiated comprehensive mobile registration exercises.

C. Financial information

The comprehensive needs budget for southern Africa for 2023, which was approved by the Executive Committee at its seventy-third annual plenary session in October 2022, amounted to \$471.5 million. As of 31 August, 28 per cent of the region's 2023 financial requirements were funded, taking into consideration the indicative allocation of unearmarked and softly earmarked contributions.