

Update on UNHCR operations in southern Africa

A. Situational context including new developments

The southern Africa region hosted some 8.6 million forcibly displaced persons by the end of August 2022, including 7 million internally displaced persons and more than 1 million refugees and asylum-seekers. The operational context continued to be marked by ongoing complex humanitarian crises in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and internal conflict in northern Mozambique, while long-term refugee situations are endured in Angola, Botswana, the Congo (Republic of), the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Sporadic movements from the Central African Republic into southern Africa continued to occur, while mixed movements from across Africa and further afield presented ongoing challenges. In 2022, four countries in the region were impacted by five tropical storms and cyclones, resulting in the loss of lives, displacement of over a million people and widespread destruction of shelters and infrastructure in settlements for refugees and internally displaced persons. Host communities were also affected. In addition, prolonged droughts and floods continued to affect agricultural production, livelihood opportunities and food security.

With some 5.5 million persons internally displaced, the Democratic Republic of the Congo was the largest internal displacement situation in Africa and among the largest in the world. The ongoing volatility in the east as well as the newly evolving situation in the west of the country continued to cause displacement both internally and into other countries. More than a million refugees and asylum-seekers from the Democratic Republic of the Congo were sheltered across the African continent. With its partners, UNHCR provided protection and distributed basic assistance, such as shelter and household items, to those in need. The organization led the protection, camp coordination and camp management and emergency shelter clusters for the response to internal displacement, as well as the inter-agency regional refugee response plan for the Democratic Republic of the Congo situation.

In Mozambique, conflict in Cabo Delgado province had displaced almost 947,000 people since 2017. The situation deteriorated further, with waves of violent attacks and ambushes by road. UNHCR scaled up activities in the areas of protection, documentation, prevention of and response to gender-based violence, camp coordination and management, shelter and humanitarian assistance, and livelihoods. It worked closely with the Government and local authorities, including in its role as lead of the protection cluster for internal displacement. The growing impact of climate change and natural disasters continued to be felt in Mozambique, amplifying vulnerability and making life harder for refugees, internally displaced persons and host communities. The situation was also marked by extreme climate events, such as tropical Cyclone Gombe in March 2022. UNHCR strengthened operations in Maratane refugee camp and internal displacement sites to meet the assistance and protection needs exacerbated by these factors.

The impact of the conflict in Ukraine was felt across the region. Rising prices, including for grain and fuel, left refugees, internally displaced persons and host communities struggling to afford food and basic services. This situation was worsened by the challenges faced by UNHCR and the World Food Programme (WFP) in securing funding for food assistance in many operations, with ration reductions being implemented as a result.

B. Progress and challenges in achieving the plan for 2022 (by impact area)

Attaining a favourable protection environment

Across the region, UNHCR worked with States and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to strengthen national asylum systems and support capacity-building, and to address backlogs and ensure access to territory and international protection, in line with the principle of non-refoulement and other international standards and conventions. To this end, a regional action plan on asylum was jointly established with SADC, which was endorsed by member States in June 2022.

The region continued to experience mixed flows of persons from over 90 countries fleeing conflict, persecution and natural disasters, and searching for economic opportunities. Since 2017, there have been an estimated 8,900 cross-border movements towards, within and outside the region. The protection and rights of those undertaking such movements were addressed at country level by relevant United Nations agencies and also at regional level through the Southern Africa Migration Management Project, implemented since January 2020 in collaboration with the International Labour Organization (ILO), International Organization for Migration (IOM) and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Since May 2022, UNHCR and IOM also worked closely on data-sharing in relation to mixed movements and protection-related issues, and in July the two organizations agreed to set up a joint coordination mechanism on these issues to be able to conduct evidence-based advocacy.

In support of the Global Compact on Refugees, UNHCR engaged a wide range of stakeholders at the regional and country levels to promote implementation of pledges made at the Global Refugee Forum and at the high-level segment on statelessness, which took place during the seventieth session of the Executive Committee in 2019. Delays in implementation meant that only 5 per cent of the 141 pledges had been completed, while 78 per cent were in the early stages of implementation and 17 per cent were not yet started.

Important steps were taken to protect internally displaced persons. UNHCR held a stocktaking dialogue on the issue in February 2022, with key recommendations already underway. These included the harmonization of protection monitoring and profiling of the internally displaced population in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique. Guidance and standards for data collection were developed to improve understanding of the situation for the internally displaced in the region. UNHCR also worked towards expanding partnerships with national statistical offices, with a view to including internally displaced persons in censuses and obtaining socio-economic data. To this end, in May 2022, UNHCR and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) signed a regional memorandum of understanding on data-sharing and dataset inclusion in the national population and housing censuses across the region. It will help overcome challenges to collect, analyse and share accurate data, particularly in the fields of statelessness and internal displacement

UNHCR provided legal assistance to internally displaced persons in Mozambique to obtain civil documentation, particularly identity cards. Between December 2020 and May 2022, more than 23,300 people from displaced and host communities received legal assistance, out of whom 15,630 received identity documents and birth certificates. UNHCR also worked with partners to ensure internally displaced persons were included in development programming and that they had access to social safety nets and livelihood opportunities.

Gender-based violence remained a major protection concern in both emergency and protracted situations. In the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, UNHCR worked with local women-led organizations and traditional leaders to change harmful practices affecting survivors of gender-based violence, such as being forced to pay a fine (cash or in-kind) to be able to re-integrate in the family. In both the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Cabo Delgado province of Mozambique, UNHCR supported the sub-cluster on the prevention of and response to gender-based violence to reduce risks and ensure that survivors have adequate and timely access to quality services. In total, gender-based violence and mental health and psychosocial support actions reached around 77,250 persons in Mozambique.

UNHCR continued its work to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse, which was especially critical in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique. It included setting up a regional network of

focal points, conducting trainings, and vetting partners on their protection capacity in relation to sexual exploitation and abuse.

UNHCR also increased efforts to protect lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTIQ+) refugees and asylum-seekers who were exposed to heightened protection risks. The refugee status determination of LGBTIQ+ asylum-seekers was strengthened, including through the mapping and assessing of national laws and policies, as well as the launch of a training programme on claims based on sexual orientation and gender identity to harmonize refugee status claims in the region.

Strengthening child protection remained a priority in the region, and improvement was seen in best interest procedures and the inclusion of children in national systems in Angola, South Africa and Zambia. Youth initiatives were reinforced in Malawi and Zimbabwe, as well as in Cabo Delgado province in Mozambique.

Realizing basic rights in safe environments

UNHCR invested in preparedness for emergencies brought on by conflict, climate-related and natural disasters and began building a pool of first responders in emergency-prone countries. Projects aimed at reducing the impact of climate change were implemented in Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The projects supported the use of natural resources and solar power, the prevention of soil erosion through tree planting, reforestation, clean cooking, the use of energy-efficient stoves and the transition to renewable energy. In July 2022, UNHCR in partnership with the Centre for Human Rights at the University of Pretoria, organized a webinar on the protection of people in the context of climate change and natural disasters in Africa. The webinar assessed the main challenges related to climate change in the region and explored ways to address them.

Food insecurity had a negative impact on the nutritional status of the most vulnerable, such as children and pregnant and lactating women. UNHCR supported nutrition surveys in refugee settings in the Congo, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe to generate data on the nutrition assistance needs of refugees and to inform programming. The organization provided therapeutic feeding supplies in refugee locations in Angola, the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to bridge gaps in the supply chains of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and governments. In addition, UNHCR supported targeted supplementary feeding programmes in Mozambique and Zambia.

Cash-based interventions were integrated in regular programming in the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa and Zambia. To mitigate protection risks and to support other needs, more than 58,600 individuals received cash assistance in the region in 2022.

UNHCR provided shelter and core relief items to vulnerable refugees, internally displaced persons and host communities to address their most urgent needs. In the Maratane refugee settlement in Mozambique, which hosted some 9,300 refugees, 80 per cent of households had their shelters severely damaged by tropical Cyclone Gombe. UNHCR responded to the disaster with emergency and transitional shelters. In Malawi, shelter construction continued in order to decongest the Dzaleka refugee camp. In South Africa, emergency flood relief efforts reached some 6,000 South Africans and foreign nationals, including refugees.

Gaps in the provision of essential health supplies remained a significant challenge in a number of countries. To mitigate the gaps, UNHCR provided essential medicine and medical supplies in refugee-hosting areas in Angola, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The low coronavirus disease (COVID-19) vaccination coverage among refugees and asylum-seekers remained a concern. In response, UNHCR provided vaccine delivery support to the Ministries of Health in Angola, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Malawi and Zambia.

With the continuous need for preventing and responding to HIV/AIDS, and noting the high prevalence in the region, UNHCR continued to work as a co-sponsor of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS) supporting HIV prevention, testing and treatment programmes in Angola, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Malawi, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Empowering communities and achieving gender equality

In an effort to strengthen accountability to affected populations, UNHCR led inter-agency working groups in Mozambique and developed digital communications methods to reach communities in several countries in the region. In Angola, a text message project was launched which enabled refugees, asylum-seekers and persons at risk of statelessness to receive information and at the same time provide feedback directly to UNHCR.

Together with partners, UNHCR supported more than 76,600 school-age children to access preschool, primary and secondary education in the region. In Zambia, schools were provided with tablets preloaded with the primary education curriculum materials, enabling the diversification of reference materials to enhance the quality of instruction. In Malawi, UNHCR and partners re-enrolled 1,800 out-of-school refugee children to ensure their access to education. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique, the Instant Network Schools programme reached over 16,000 learners with an integrated platform that transformed existing classrooms into multimedia learning hubs.

UNHCR and WFP worked in synergy to scale up livelihood programming in Angola and Zimbabwe, in addition to the work being done in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mozambique and Zambia, where refugees benefited from the joint UNHCR-WFP Programme Excellence and Targeting Hub. Seven out of eight livelihood-related pledges from the Global Refugee Forum were in progress, including the inclusion of refugees in the national strategy in Malawi and in agriculture programmes in Zambia. Training and learning opportunities on livelihood and economic inclusion were provided by UNHCR to United Nations and partner staff, while new livelihood strategies were developed in Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

With a focus on livelihood activities, economic inclusion and social safety nets, several innovative partnerships were strengthened, including with development actors such as the World Bank Group in the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the German Agency for International Cooperation in Mozambique, the African Development Bank in Mozambique, and the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund in Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. UNHCR also fostered linkages with the World Bank Group through the Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement, aiming to improve the availability and accessibility of high-quality socioeconomic data and evidence on affected populations to facilitate assistance and solutions for displaced persons.

Securing solutions

The regional action plan to end statelessness was adopted by SADC member States. The action plan covered objectives on the prevention of, protection from and the resolution of statelessness, including the collection of reliable qualitative and quantitative data; accession to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness; universal, free and accessible birth registration; legislative reform; and the establishment of statelessness determination procedures. Qualitative data on statelessness was collected in nine operations: Angola, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eswatini, Madagascar, Malawi, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

UNHCR facilitated safe and dignified returns for those who wished to repatriate to their countries of origin, although opportunities for durable solutions through repatriation remained limited. In 2022, some 12,500 refugees returned to their countries of origin, primarily to Burundi, Central Africa Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda.

The need for resettlement far outweighed the number of available places. UNHCR had identified more than 60,000 refugees in need of resettlement from the region, yet there were only 6,500 available places. As of end August, the cases of some 3,600 refugees had been submitted for resettlement consideration, while around 1,200 refugees had departed for resettlement. UNHCR worked closely with country operations to identify candidates for scholarships in Italy through the University Corridors for Refugees programme.

C. Financial information

The comprehensive needs budget for the southern Africa region for 2022, which was approved by the Executive Committee at its annual plenary session in October 2021, amounted to \$436.5 million. As

of 13 September, 29 per cent of the region's 2022 financial requirements were funded, taking into consideration the indicative allocation of unearmarked and softly earmarked contributions.
