



**United Nations**

# **Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees**

**Part II  
Strategic Review pursuant to General Assembly  
Resolution 58/153**

**General Assembly  
Official Records  
Seventy-eighth session  
Supplement No. 12**

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[22 August 2023]

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## I. Introduction

1. When the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was created in 1950 to provide international protection to refugees and find solutions to their plight, it had a three-year renewable term.<sup>1</sup> As per the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (1951 Convention), the Office had been established to help resolve the refugee crisis in Europe caused by the Second World War. In the decades to follow, new displacement crises erupted in different parts of the world, necessitating the continuation of the work carried out by UNHCR and rendering the mandate of the High Commissioner global.<sup>2</sup> The General Assembly gave UNHCR a specific mandate to identify and protect stateless people, and find ways to prevent and reduce statelessness, as of 1 January 1975.<sup>3</sup> Over the years, the General Assembly authorized the Office's involvement in certain situations of internal displacement, which was further clarified in 1993<sup>4</sup> and in subsequent resolutions.

2. In 2003, a review was undertaken in the context of the continuation of the Office to ensure that UNHCR would be well equipped "to carry out [its] mandate and to respond to the challenges of modernity". Based on the review's recommendations, the General Assembly moved beyond its repeated short-term extensions of the Office and provided for its tenure "until the refugee problem is solved".<sup>5</sup>

3. The High Commissioner reports directly to the General Assembly with an annual report. However, in 2003, anticipating the value of periodic longer-term reviews of global displacement trends, the General Assembly decided that "every ten years... the [High Commissioner's] report will include a strategic review of the global situation of refugees and the role of the Office, prepared in consultation with the Secretary-General and the Executive Committee".<sup>6</sup> The first strategic review was prepared in 2013 and published as part II of the High Commissioner's annual report to the General Assembly.<sup>7</sup>

4. This second decennial review covers the period 1 January 2013 until 31 December 2022, although, in some cases, relevant examples from the first half of 2023 have been included. The second decennial review is in addition to the High Commissioner's annual reports of these years, which describe protection and operational trends and responses in the different regions in more detail.<sup>8</sup> More information on the UNHCR transformation and related initiatives, including on accountability, can also be found in these reports. With displacement at unprecedented levels, this 10-year review will look at the challenges and opportunities that have emerged in relation to forced displacement and statelessness. Growing displacement numbers are straining systems, infrastructures and communities in hosting States that are often facing development challenges as well. It will also look at how the response of the international community has evolved over the last decade, with a stronger focus on burden- and responsibility-sharing and international cooperation.

<sup>1</sup> General Assembly resolution 319 (IV) and General Assembly resolution 428 (V).

<sup>2</sup> As recognized by the Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees from 1967 (Res/2198 (XXI)) and subsequent regional instruments, including the Organization of African Unity Convention governing the Specific Aspects of the Refugee Problem in Africa (article VIII) of 1969 and the Cartagena Declaration of 1984.

<sup>3</sup> General Assembly resolution 3274 (XXIX).

<sup>4</sup> General Assembly resolution 48/116.

<sup>5</sup> General Assembly resolution 58/153, para. 9.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 10.

<sup>7</sup> Strategic Review pursuant to General Assembly resolution 58/153 (A/68/12, part II).

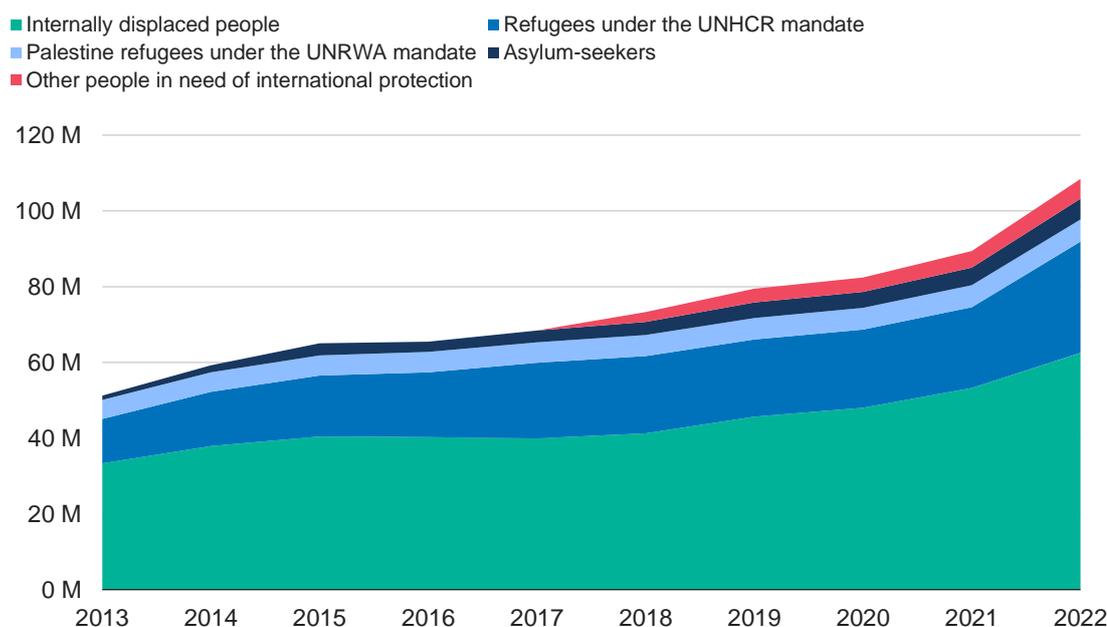
<sup>8</sup> The High Commissioner's annual reports can be found on the United Nations Official Document System: A/68/12, A/69/12, A/70/12, A/71/12, A/72/12, A/73/12, A/74/12, A/75/12, A/76/12 and A/77/12.

## II. Yet another turbulent decade

5. In the past decade, the global number of forcibly displaced people has more than doubled, with new displacement situations emerging on all continents. While persecution, human rights violations and conflict were often the immediate triggers for displacement, underlying problems such as inequality, discrimination and exclusion, structural poverty, absence of rule of law and the impact of a changing climate on people's livelihoods and communities remained widespread and largely unaddressed. Geopolitical divisions deepened, making it more difficult to end conflict, find peaceful solutions and create conditions for voluntary and sustainable return, as evidenced by the growing divisions within the United Nations Security Council, impacting its ability to prevent or resolve conflict.

6. By the end of 2013, the number of people forced to flee worldwide stood at 51.2 million; 10 years later, some 108.4 million people were in this situation.<sup>9</sup> Of these totals, in 2013, 12.9 million were refugees and asylum-seekers, and 33.3 million people were internally displaced. A decade later, 40 million people were in need of international protection or seeking asylum, and 62.5 million people were internally displaced due to conflict.<sup>10</sup> Low- and middle-income countries continued to shoulder the bulk of the responsibility of receiving and protecting refugees; the number of refugees in low- and middle-income countries more than doubled, from 10.1 million in 2013 to 26.2 million in 2022, putting an even greater strain on national systems and often already scarce resources.

**Figure I: People forced to flee worldwide 2013-2022**



7. Displacement grew more protracted over the last decade.<sup>11</sup> In 2013, 33 situations were considered protracted, involving nearly 6.3 million out of 11.7 million refugees and people in refugee-like situations (54 per cent). In 2022, there were 57 protracted situations concerning 23.3 million people of a total of 34.6 million refugees and people in need of international protection (over 67 per cent). This increase was mostly driven by long-standing crises in Afghanistan, Myanmar,

<sup>9</sup> These numbers include Palestine refugees falling under the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), 5 million at the end of 2013 and 5.9 million at the end of 2022.

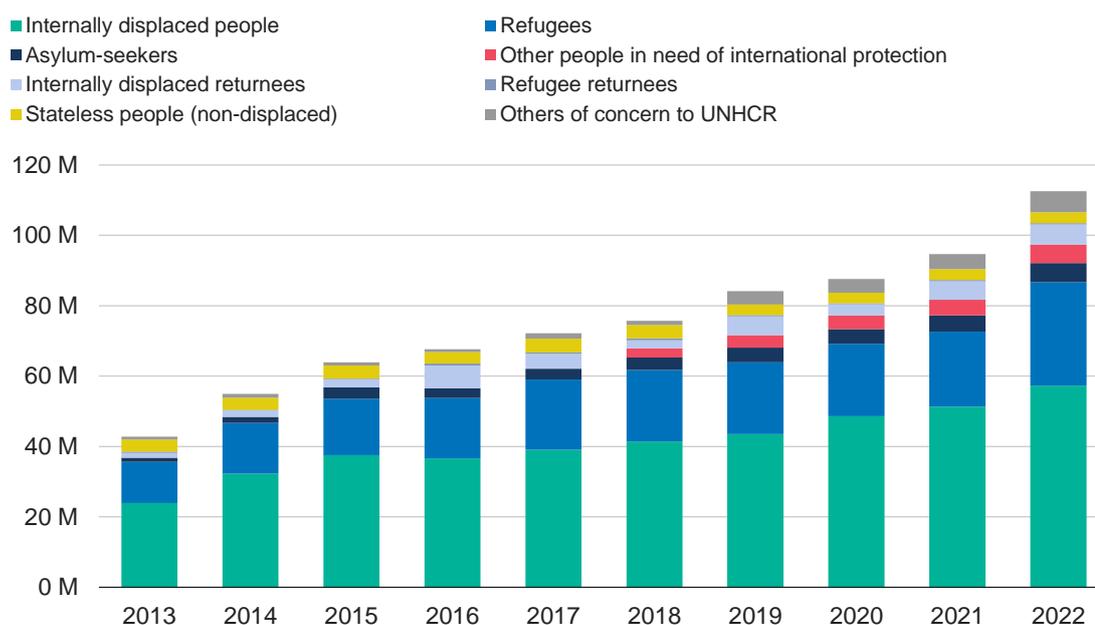
<sup>10</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2023 Global Report on Internal Displacement.

<sup>11</sup> UNHCR defines protracted situations as those where more than 25,000 refugees from the same country of origin have been in exile for over five consecutive years.

South Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as the situation in Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

8. The number of people reported as stateless rose from 3.5 million in 2013 to 4.4 million at the end of 2022, including 1.1 million stateless Rohingya refugees and asylum-seekers, an increase mostly due to improved data collection and reporting. In 2022, 95 countries reported statistics on stateless people (compared to 75 in 2013). While this was an improvement, data reported to UNHCR was not always complete or comparable, which means that statelessness remains a largely underreported phenomenon.

**Figure II: Forcibly displaced and stateless people 2013-2022**



9. Over the last decade, population movements have in many cases become more complex. In mixed movements, people travel together using the same routes and often irregular means but for different reasons, including escaping conflict, persecution or human rights abuses. In the context of practices and policies shaping global mobility, UNHCR worked to ensure that migration management policies took into account the rights and needs of people in need of international protection based on existing international and regional legal frameworks. The risks of these irregular movements are numerous and often deadly. Large numbers have drowned in the central Mediterranean Sea; others lost their lives crossing the Sahara Desert, the Darién region, the Caribbean Sea, the Andaman Sea, the Bay of Bengal or the Gulf of Aden. UNHCR has worked with States to find legally sound ways and alternatives to address challenges related to mixed movements, promoting a response that focuses on regular pathways to safety and strong and efficient systems based on international law that protect the rights of refugees, while taking full account of legitimate concerns that States may have.

10. The climate emergency is one of the defining features of the last decade. In the Sahel region, it has been identified as one of the four key interconnected drivers of vulnerability: the others being food insecurity, conflict and displacement. The adverse effects of climate change interact with and often reinforce other causes of conflict, such as competition over resources, poor governance and lack of economic prospects. In addition, natural hazards were displacing more and more people. In 2022, more than half of all new internal displacement was because of natural hazards, the

overwhelming majority weather related,<sup>12</sup> such as the extensive flooding in Pakistan that displaced 8.2 million people.

11. The outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in late 2019 brought the world to a standstill, leading to a global loss of \$5 trillion in gross domestic product (GDP) in the first year of the pandemic, according to the United Nations. The economic downturn that followed hit the poorest the hardest. COVID-related lockdowns dramatically reduced the income of refugees and other displaced and stateless people, many of whom worked in the informal sector, as well as increased food insecurity. The impact was particularly devastating for women and girls, from heightened domestic violence to an increase in child marriages.

12. During the last decade, UNHCR responded to the protection and assistance needs of the forcibly displaced in new emergencies and protracted situations, which often had recurring spikes in needs. Humanitarian crises grew more complex, with increasing access and security constraints, as well as challenges related to COVID-19 and the effects of climate change. High security risks for humanitarian workers, particularly in active conflict situations, required that UNHCR continuously review security risk management to ensure ongoing delivery. The resources of host governments, as well as of UNHCR and its partners, were under enormous strain, and additional operational capacity needed to be mobilized to provide coordinated emergency responses.

13. To better guide the organization in this complex environment, UNHCR articulated five strategic directions. These were to: (a) protect and defend the rights of forcibly displaced and stateless people; (b) respond rapidly and reliably to emergencies; (c) promote the inclusion and self-reliance of forcibly displaced and stateless people; (d) empower people of concern to UNHCR; and (e) pursue solutions for forcibly displaced people.<sup>13</sup> In line with these strategic directions, the engagement of UNHCR in situations of internal displacement also became more decisive and predictable during the last 10 years. Within the inter-agency context, the organization undertook concerted efforts to strengthen the protection of and the search for solutions for internally displaced persons.

## **A. Hosting the world's forcibly displaced and stateless people**

14. In the last decade, the number of Afghan refugees doubled from 2.6 million in 2013 to nearly 5.7 million at the end of 2022 due to multiple intractable crises in Afghanistan.<sup>14</sup> Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Pakistan continued to host the majority of Afghan refugees, and by 2014, Türkiye became the world's largest refugee-hosting country. The Syrian Arab Republic (6.5 million), Afghanistan (5.7 million) and Ukraine (5.7 million) were the main countries of origin. The Syrian displacement situation remained protracted, with most refugees living in neighbouring countries, adding pressure to national services. In Jordan and Lebanon, one in every four people is a refugee.

15. In Asia, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Pakistan have been hosting millions of Afghan refugees for more than 40 years. While several voluntary repatriation operations took place over the last decade, war, persecution and human rights violations continued to displace people within Afghanistan and across its borders. Despite economic and financial constraints, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Pakistan extend their inclusive national health and education policies to millions of Afghans. In the region, Bangladesh also hosts 1.1 million stateless Rohingya refugees, of which 740,000 fled their country following violent attacks in August 2017.

16. In the Americas, the magnitude and complexity of forced displacement continued to grow over the last decade. More than 7.4 million people were internally displaced in the region. Mixed and onward movements became a regional challenge, as witnessed in the Darien province where the

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<sup>12</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2023 Global Report on Internal Displacement.

<sup>13</sup> The UNHCR strategic directions 2017-2021 and UNHCR strategic directions 2022-2026 are available on the UNHCR global website.

<sup>14</sup> The increase was largely due to the inclusion of previously unregistered Afghans by Iran (Islamic Republic of).

number of people crossing – originally from Cuba, Ecuador, Haiti and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), as well as from Africa and Asia – reached record levels. In Central America, growing numbers of people were forced to leave their homes by a confluence of factors, including insecurity, human rights violations, poverty and the impact of climate change.

17. In Europe, as of February 2022, the war in Ukraine propelled the largest and fastest displacement ever, forcing some 11.6 million people from their homes. The European Union's temporary protection directive provided some 4.3 million Ukrainian refugees with protection, residency, the right to work, and access to national health and education systems, demonstrating that welcoming and protecting large refugee flows is possible when the political will is present. In 2015, over a million refugees, mostly from the Syrian Arab Republic, arrived in Europe across the Mediterranean Sea and through the Western Balkans. They, together with large numbers of Afghan refugees, were mostly received by Germany.

18. In Africa, new conflicts erupted while old displacement situations remained unresolved and became more protracted. Cyclical violence in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo displaced millions inside the country and continued to force refugees to neighbouring countries. Many of these countries are also hosting refugees from other conflicts on the continent, adding pressure to national services and infrastructure as well as to natural resources, including water, forests and land. The outbreak of fighting in Mozambique displaced hundreds of thousands inside the country, while their situation was aggravated by the country's susceptibility to extreme weather events. Generations of Somalis remain in exile in neighbouring countries while the number of internally displaced Somalis tripled over the last decade.

19. Two-and-a-half years after gaining independence in July 2011, South Sudan descended into a brutal civil war, displacing millions of people internally and across borders, making it the largest displacement situation in Africa. At the same time, South Sudan received and continued to host hundreds of thousands of refugees from the Sudan. In late 2020, violence in northern Ethiopia displaced hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians internally and across borders, as well as many refugees who had been living there for years.

20. Violent extremism and ethnic violence displaced over 3 million people internally in Nigeria and sent thousands into neighbouring countries over the last decade, destabilizing the entire Lake Chad Basin region. Escalating violence, including the kidnapping of thousands of children, mostly girls, caused mass displacement and upended countless lives, while also disrupting cross-border trade and livelihoods. This created a dire humanitarian situation in an already fragile region. Ongoing instability in the central Sahel continued to keep millions of people in displacement and increasingly affected other West African countries. In 2014, conflict erupted in the Central African Republic with alarming levels of human rights abuses, including widespread sexual and gender-based violence, such as the rape of women and girls targeted because of their religion or ethnicity. Almost 1.3 million people from this small country remained displaced at the end of 2022, both internally and in neighbouring countries.

21. Over eight years of war in Yemen left more than 21.5 million people in need of humanitarian assistance and protection, including 4.5 million who are internally displaced. Despite the extreme humanitarian situation in the country, people mostly fleeing drought and conflict in Ethiopia and Somalia continued to arrive, often in the hope of travelling onwards. The Syrian displacement crisis dominated the multilateral landscape over the past decade. Eleven years later, more than 13 million Syrians remained displaced, including some 6.7 million inside the country. The magnitude and complexity of this crisis transformed the international response to refugee situations and led to notable changes in terms of the engagement of UNHCR with development actors and partners.

## **B. The protection landscape**

22. Growing displacement numbers and more complex population movements over the last decade have presented a number of challenges, in particular to several host countries, many of which have scarce resources. The least developed countries which comprise less than two per cent of the

global GDP hosted some 20 per cent of the world's refugees, yet kept their borders open in times of need. Solidarity and protection for refugees and asylum-seekers has remained strong throughout the past decade, even when faced with large movements.

23. Yet, there have also been instances in which attempts were made to limit the application of the 1951 Convention. In some countries, restrictive interpretation of certain grounds for applying the Convention sought to limit the protections that it affords. Furthermore, a few industrialized countries have proposed more restrictive measures that are contrary to their international legal obligations and endanger the lives and welfare of people forced to flee. Some of these measures include border restrictions and pushbacks, sometimes with violence, or refusing disembarkations from vessels lost at sea. Other measures include the externalization of asylum obligations, defined by UNHCR as measures taken by States, implemented outside their territories, which seek to prevent asylum-seekers and refugees from reaching a particular destination country and from claiming or enjoying protection there. These run contrary to the principles of international cooperation and burden- and responsibility-sharing that underpin the international refugee protection system and, without needed safeguards, are incompatible with international law.

24. Xenophobia, islamophobia, false and negative perceptions of people on the move have jeopardized their access to rights and services and contributed to a growth in hate speech and misinformation. Together with partners, UNHCR has voiced deep concern about acts of racism, intolerance and discrimination against displaced and stateless populations, whether for racial, ethnic, religious or other reasons, and remains committed to fighting all forms of discrimination. In 2020, UNHCR released guidance on how it can address and better respond to situations of racism and xenophobia affecting people under its mandate. Moreover, UNHCR is actively working together with partners, including affected communities, to develop a response to these harms, especially on digital platforms, and to help prevent their distribution and influence.

25. Public health measures put in place to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 impacted access to territory and the right to seek asylum, posing a significant risk of refoulement. At the start of the pandemic, more than 140 countries closed their border completely or partially. Over time, often with help of UNHCR, more protection-sensitive measures were introduced to help authorities identify people in need of international protection and grant them, including through newly developed remote mechanisms, access to asylum procedures. However, during the first half of 2023, some countries still used public health-related restrictions to refuse people entry or access to asylum. For displaced children and youth, the closure of schools had a devastating impact, not only because of loss of learning but also because safe schools are key to protecting them. As the pandemic and its socioeconomic impact wore on, the number of child marriages increased, as did forced recruitment, bonded labour of children and other forms of exploitation. At the same time, important progress was made by including refugees in national vaccination campaigns, in close collaboration with the World Health Organization.

26. In line with its mandate to prevent and reduce statelessness, in 2014, UNHCR launched the #Ibelong campaign to end statelessness in 10 years. Together with States, civil society and other organizations, it developed a global action plan that contained guidance and concrete actions for States to successfully address statelessness. In 2019, Kyrgyzstan became the first country in the world to eradicate statelessness. Accessions to the two statelessness conventions increased significantly following the launch of the #Ibelong campaign, with 96 States parties to the 1954 Convention on the Status of Stateless persons and 78 to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness at the end of 2022 (compared to 79 and 55 States that were party to the respective conventions in 2013). The Secretary-General's Our Common Agenda report includes a call to ensure that everyone is seen and recognized and that measures are taken to prove legal identity and end statelessness, including by closing legal loopholes. Heeding this call, UNHCR leads a new multi-stakeholder Global Alliance to End Statelessness, which aims at mobilizing efforts to reduce and prevent statelessness globally and will be launched in late 2024 when the #Ibelong campaign comes to an end.

27. One country, South Sudan, acceded to the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol during the last decade, bringing the total number of States parties to these instruments to 149. The representation of United Nations Member States in the Executive Committee that advises the High Commissioner and approves the Office's annual budget grew from 87 members in 2013 to 108 in April 2023, when Angola was welcomed as the latest Member State to join the Committee. This ongoing growth reflects the diversity of States affected by forced displacement that are working on ending the plight of the forcibly displaced.

28. During the last decade, UNHCR worked extensively with States on the adoption of policies and other normative frameworks to protect the rights of internally displaced people. In Africa, it supported States with preparing national legislative frameworks in line with a pioneering regional framework on protecting internally displaced people, the African Union Convention on the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons (the Kampala Convention), which entered into force in December 2012.

### **C. Solutions during the last decade**

29. While new displacement crises occurred on all continents, few were resolved. Over the last 10 years, some 43 million people found a solution, compared to nearly 25 million people who had found a solution in the previous decade. Some 41.6 million people returned to their countries or areas of origin, including 38 million who had been displaced in their own country. Some 3.5 million refugees voluntarily returned to their countries of origin during the last decade, mostly to Afghanistan, Burundi and South Sudan, compared to 7.2 million in the previous decade. More than half a million stateless people acquired a nationality since the start of the #Ibelong campaign to end statelessness in 2014.

30. Refugee status is meant to be temporary, and the 1951 Convention sets out the conditions to formally end refugee status. These cessation clauses, usually preceded by a comprehensive solutions strategy, allow for the closing of the refugee chapter in peoples' lives because the circumstances that led to the recognition of their refugee status have ceased to exist. Over the last decade, the cessation clause was applied twice. The cessation clause for Rwandan refugees who had fled their country before 31 December 1998 entered into effect in December 2017. This brought closure for many of the more than 3 million Rwandans who had fled the 1994 genocide and its aftermath, either through voluntary return or local solutions in countries of asylum.

31. Benin, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mali and Togo invoked the cessation clause for refugees from Côte d'Ivoire, as of 30 June 2022. More than 316,000 refugees have been voluntarily repatriated since 2011, while exemption to the cessation procedures were made available for those who remained in need of international protection. In Ghana and Liberia, residency permits were provided at no or low cost to former Ivorian refugees who wished to remain in their host country.

32. Local integration is another possible solution for refugees. This is a gradual and complex process, with legal, social and economic dimensions that usually result in the refugee becoming a national of the country of asylum. Many States have allowed refugees to integrate in their country. Over the last decade, some 442,000 people were naturalized, compared to more than 801,000 in the previous one.

33. Resettlement is an important protection tool and a means to share the burdens of host countries. Over 992,000 refugees were resettled in the last 10 years, compared to some 837,000 during the previous decade. Resettlement numbers have fluctuated in the past decade, reaching a record of nearly 173,000 people, mostly Syrian and Congolese refugees from neighbouring hosting countries, in 2016. The top three resettlement countries in the last 10 years were: the United States of America (439,000), Canada (253,000) and Australia (115,000), while the others were resettled in over 40 countries. Travel restrictions related to the outbreak of COVID-19 virtually halted resettlement in 2020, with the exception of a handful of countries that accepted refugees on an emergency basis. Two years later, with more than 114,000 people resettled in 2022 (nearly half with

UNHCR assistance), numbers were back to pre-COVID levels, but still a drop in the ocean compared to the more than 2 million people estimated to be in need of resettlement in 2023.

34. Against this backdrop, the search for complementary pathways of admission to third countries gained importance.<sup>15</sup> Complementary pathways are legal avenues for people in need of international protection to go to a third country, often for family reunification, or education and employment opportunities. While family reunification is a right and thus part of a different process in many countries, refugees often face similar barriers to those who relocate as part of a skills-based pathway. Complementary pathways are not solutions per se, although many over time attain a long-term status in the destination country. New multi-stakeholder partnerships have been key to implementing the strategy on resettlement and complementary pathways (2019-2021), enhancing capacities and exchanging best practices. The strategy built the foundation for increasing resettlement places and complementary pathways. Its next phase, *Third-country solutions for refugees: Roadmap 2030*, seeks to scale up the number of departures to 3 million, namely 1 million through resettlement and 2 million through complementary pathways by 2030.

### **III. Strengthening protection and solutions through international solidarity**

35. In 2015, the General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, setting ambitious goals and targets for the next 15 years to make the world a better place. It envisaged a world in which the human rights of all were respected, with a focus on the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.<sup>16</sup> Its promise to “leave no one behind” became a rallying cry for governments, policymakers and civil society actors to work towards more peaceful, prosperous, inclusive and just societies, and to protect the planet from degradation. While the 2030 Agenda did not directly address the issue of forced displacement, it underpinned the vision that displacement and statelessness are not only humanitarian concerns but have longer term development implications. The following year, the General Assembly turned its attention to the plight of displaced people and adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, “determined to realize the full potential of that Agenda for refugees and migrants”.<sup>17</sup>

36. The General Assembly invited the High Commissioner to engage with Member States and other relevant stakeholders and to present a Global Compact on Refugees at its seventy-third session. The New York Declaration included the comprehensive refugee response framework, providing a blueprint on how to respond to large-scale refugee movements based on the principles of international cooperation and solidarity. It aimed at better protecting and assisting refugees and supporting host States and communities. Many of its key tenets, including burden- and responsibility-sharing, the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and the inclusion of refugees, had been developed well before 2016. The New York Declaration consolidated them in a single framework and gave them the authority of unanimous endorsement by all 193 United Nations Member States.

37. During the two years of applying the comprehensive refugee response framework and extensive consultations on the global compact that followed, UNHCR deepened relations with existing partners and brought new stakeholders to the table. Mindful of the multi-stakeholder approach promoted by the 2030 Agenda, UNHCR fully engaged civil society organizations, faith-based groups, academics, refugees and refugee-led organizations, local authorities and municipalities, as well as development partners and others in its consultations with Member States.

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<sup>15</sup> More information can be found in the joint report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development-UNHCR entitled, “Safe pathways for refugees III”.

<sup>16</sup> General Assembly Resolution 70/1.

<sup>17</sup> General Assembly Resolution 71/1.

38. The resulting Global Compact on Refugees, affirmed by the General Assembly in December 2018,<sup>18</sup> articulates four interdependent objectives, namely to: (a) ease pressure on host countries; (b) enhance refugee self-reliance; (c) expand access to third-country solutions; and (d) support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity. Most of the world's refugees live in low- and middle-income countries, and the global compact offers effective means of sharing this responsibility through specific global, regional and national arrangements and tools.

39. Receiving large numbers of refugees has development implications for host communities, in particular when the displacement situation becomes protracted. Humanitarian assistance alone, while vital and life-saving, cannot offset this impact. National and international humanitarian organizations are often the first to come to the scene and assist authorities with receiving forcibly displaced people. Their programmes are short-term and focus on addressing basic and immediate needs. Refugee status is meant to be temporary until a durable solution can be found, and for most, the preferred solution remains to return home in safety and dignity. However, negotiated peace agreements that allow hundreds of thousands of forcibly displaced people to go home have become rare, resulting in many protracted displacement situations. This has caused generations of refugees to remain in camps, dependent on aid, with temporary, parallel structures and services. At the same time, non-camp-based refugees were often excluded from the labour market with limited or no access to fragile national services. The arrangements and tools set out in the Global Compact on Refugees sought to change this through comprehensive responses, support for greater inclusion in national systems and economies, and planning for solutions from the outset of an emergency.

## A. Implementing the Global Compact on Refugees

40. The Global Compact on Refugees brought development actors, the private sector and others to the table in a way that would have a real impact on people's lives. Easing pressure on host communities and enhancing self-reliance of refugees go hand in hand. National services are reinforced rather than setting up parallel services. Refugees can become tax-paying and contributing members of society, rather than being dependent on humanitarian aid that diminishes over time, including when resources are needed to respond to the next emergency. As the architecture of a refugee response is set up in the initial phases of the displacement, early involvement of development actors is crucial to laying the groundwork for a longer term, more sustainable approach. In addition, development funding, in particular when coupled with peacebuilding activities, can help prevent displacement by addressing and mitigating its underlying causes and improve conditions and services in areas of return.

41. The World Bank has been at the forefront of such efforts, through pioneering work with data, analytics and new financial instruments. For low-income countries hosting refugees, it made available \$3.6 billion in concessional financing through two International Development Association (IDA) mechanisms, the regional sub-window for refugees and host communities (IDA18) and the window for host communities and refugees (IDA19) since 2016. Of the funding available under the IDA19 window, \$1 billion was for addressing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on refugees and host communities. Countries eligible for this type of funding commit to adhering to a framework to protect refugees, and to facilitating the socioeconomic inclusion of refugees and advancing solutions for them. The funds are in addition to regular World Bank development funding and bilateral development assistance for these countries. According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, \$44.3 billion was provided in bilateral development funding to refugee-hosting countries in 2018 and 2019.

42. Fourteen countries<sup>19</sup> are currently receiving IDA18 funding, supporting them to implement policies to strengthen institutions and include refugees in national education, health, water and social

<sup>18</sup> General Assembly resolution 73/151.

<sup>19</sup> These countries are Bangladesh, Burundi, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Congo (Republic of), the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Mauritania, Niger, Pakistan, Rwanda and Uganda.

protection systems until solutions are found. Uganda was the first country to apply the comprehensive refugee response framework. Refugees live in settlements, together with the communities that host them. Support from the World Bank has been crucial to extend basic national services to the refugee settlements and host communities.

43. In 2016, in response to the Syrian refugee crisis, the World Bank, the United Nations and the Islamic Development Bank created the Global Concessional Financing Facility to support Jordan and Lebanon with hosting millions of Syrian refugees through a combination of grants and concessional loans. By the end of 2022, the facility extended similar support to Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador and the Republic of Moldova. In six years, it provided \$755 million in grants,<sup>20</sup> which unlocked more than \$6.1 billion in loans from multilateral development banks on highly concessional terms. In other words, every dollar provided as a grant brought in an additional \$8 million in concessional loans.<sup>21</sup>

44. This type of financing was key to supporting the Government of Colombia as it extended temporary protection permits to some 1.7 million Venezuelans. This facilitated their access to rights and socioeconomic inclusion. The Government and the private sector worked together on mitigating barriers to the labour market and financial inclusion, promoting self-sufficiency.

45. Between 2013 and 2022, UNHCR made substantial advances in its data work and data transformation. The registration data processes and systems were completely overhauled. UNHCR expanded its work on statistics, reflected in its annual Global Trends report and, more recently, in its first indicator report on the Global Compact for Refugees. Over the same period, UNHCR invested in information management and data work in relation to refugee response plans in line with the refugee coordination model. In 2019, UNHCR and the World Bank broke important new ground when inaugurating the Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement in Copenhagen. The Joint Data Center focuses on socioeconomic data and aims to enhance the capacity of stakeholders – including governments, international organizations and non-governmental organizations – to make timely and evidence-based decisions that can improve the lives of persons impacted by forced displacement, including refugees and internally displaced persons.

46. Since the affirmation of the Global Compact on Refugees, tangible progress has been made towards achieving its objectives. The first indicator report offered evidence of incremental increases in bilateral official development assistance to countries with developing economies hosting refugees; more partnerships in support of comprehensive refugee responses; enhanced legal access to decent work, freedom of movement and inclusion in national education systems. The report also noted the implementation of policies that mitigate poverty and the impact of the pandemic on refugees and host communities.

47. The Global Compact on Refugees established a ministerial-level Global Refugee Forum, to be held every four years, to take stock of the implementation of the Compact and of progress towards achieving its objectives, as well as to provide a forum for making pledges of financial, technical and other support. The first such forum took place in December 2019, only one year after the affirmation of the Compact. It generated over 1,700 pledges, a historic set of commitments that could have a positive impact on the lives of tens of millions of refugees, members of host communities and stateless people. Pledges related to building resilience of refugees and enabling their socioeconomic inclusion. There were also pledges to strengthen national services so that they can be extended to displaced people and help pave the way for solutions. Some were of a legislative nature; others financial. By mid-2023, progress had been reported on more than 1,100 pledges, of which nearly 30 per cent had been fulfilled, 65 per cent were under implementation, and 5 per cent were still in their planning phase.

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<sup>20</sup> The Global Concessional Financing Facility is funded by Canada, Denmark, Germany, Japan, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America, as well as the European Commission.

<sup>21</sup> More information is available in the annual report 2021-20223 of the Global Concessional Financing Facility.

48. To reinvigorate the drive for protection and solutions in certain complex displacement situations, three regional support platforms were launched at the Forum for: (a) the solutions strategy for Afghan refugees; (b) the comprehensive regional refugee response to displacement in Central America and Mexico (known by its Spanish acronym MIRPS); and (c) the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) for the implementation of the Nairobi Declaration on Durable Solutions for Somali refugees and finding solutions for displaced people from South Sudan. A recent review demonstrated that the support platforms added considerable value to existing displacement responses. They provided an opportunity to convene key government and other stakeholders, creating space, including at the political level, for important advances. They also helped keep large displacement situations on the international agenda and facilitated a wide range of assistance across the humanitarian-development-peace spectrum to countries affected by displacement.

49. The inclusion of refugees in national systems, until they can return home, can be a win-win situation for refugees and host communities, if adequately supported. For example, education is the world's greatest equalizer, and according to World Bank estimates, \$4.85 billion a year is required to include all refugee learners in national education systems. While many host countries have made major strides in creating an enabling policy environment which facilitates the inclusion of refugee children, further policy and programme shifts from the international community are needed. Refugee enrolment rates, in particular in primary education, have increased over the last decade. Strengthening education in under-resourced host communities, including with development financing, can provide opportunities for refugee and host children alike, strengthening the quality of education on offer, as well as promoting social cohesion.

50. The first Global Refugee Forum demonstrated a broadening of the base of support for comprehensive refugee responses. The role of the private sector in mobilizing resources and providing technical and other expertise to support refugee responses has grown, and UNHCR has expanded its partnerships with the corporate sector, foundations and philanthropists in ways that go beyond financial support alone. Examples include partnerships that enabled UNHCR to increase access to e-learning for refugees and host communities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Mozambique, South Sudan and the United Republic of Tanzania; facilitate job creation for refugees and host communities in Ethiopia; and support relocation, job placement and local integration in Brazil and Mexico. The private sector has become an important stakeholder during the last decade, not only as a significant source of funding but also a driver of innovation.

## **B. Climate action**

51. Recognizing the impact of the climate emergency on all aspects of its work, UNHCR played a key role in establishing the Nansen Initiative and its Agenda for the Protection of Cross-Border Displaced Persons in the Context of Disasters and Climate Change, in 2012, and subsequently, the Platform on Disaster Displacement. In 2019, UNHCR made the climate emergency an institutional priority and appointed a Special Adviser on Climate Action to provide oversight and guidance to the organization. In 2021, a strategic framework for climate action was issued with a focus on three main areas: (a) law and policy; (b) operational response; and (c) reducing the organization's environmental footprint.

52. The Global Compact on Refugees recognizes that "while not in themselves causes of refugee movements, climate, environmental degradation and natural disasters increasingly interact with the drivers of refugee movements".<sup>22</sup> Building on international and regional instruments, UNHCR issued legal considerations relating to claims for international protection made in the context of climate change. It concluded that adverse effects of climate change or disasters could be a contributing factor and that thus people seeking international protection might have a valid claim for refugee status. It further recommended that claims should be assessed under the relevant refugee status determination procedures. Moreover, temporary protection and stay arrangements might be granted to protect

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<sup>22</sup> A/73/12 (Part II), para. 8.

people who were displaced in the context of climate change impacts, environmental degradation and disasters.

53. Strengthening the resilience of displaced people and host communities to climate risks and protecting the environment in displacement settings were key operational priorities. The Office focused on incorporating environmental considerations and risks in preparedness activities, operational responses and supply management. Together with partners, it is investing in reforestation and clean cooking programmes in refugee-hosting communities through innovative financing mechanism, involving carbon credits to finance future initiatives of this kind. UNHCR sought to mitigate climate impacts such as flooding, landslides, water scarcity and deforestation in displacement settings through climate-smart settlement planning, in particular with regard to shelter, water, sanitation, hygiene and energy use. It has also strengthened its disaster preparedness and response, including for situations of internal displacement. In this context, UNHCR actively participated in inter-agency emergency preparedness and response activities, including strengthening local and national capacities to prevent displacement and mitigate risks.

54. In 2018, UNHCR set a baseline to reduce its own environmental footprint and greenhouse gas emissions by at least 45 per cent by 2030. The Green Financing Facility focused on reducing the organization's carbon footprint and aimed at "greening" UNHCR in the most financially efficient way by converting offices run on diesel generators to solar energy. In 2022, UNHCR achieved climate neutrality through these offsets for the fourth consecutive year.

### **C. Partnerships**

55. UNHCR broadened and diversified its partnerships over the last 10 years. It maintained strategic partnerships with nearly 1,200 partners, including non-governmental organizations, government entities, international financial institutions and United Nations agencies, and works with many more. In 2022 alone, UNHCR disbursed 57 per cent its annual expenditure through partners, including at least 25 per cent through local and national responders, in line with its commitment under the Grand Bargain. Moreover, UNHCR has systematically worked with community-based organizations, including those led by refugees, women and people with disabilities, and developed more agile internal funding mechanisms to support their important grass-roots work. For example, a grant programme was established for organizations led by refugees and stateless people to allow their participation in processes and decisions that affect them, and a special innovation fund provided these organizations with funding and technical assistance for innovative projects.

56. Partnerships expanded during the 11 years of the regional refugee response plans. The first refugee response plan was prepared in 2012 in response to the Syrian refugee crisis to help refugees and alleviate the impact on host countries in the region. UNHCR aimed to strengthen coordination among the many stakeholders by putting in place a structured inter-agency plan to better deliver on its mandate, maximize efficiencies and avoid duplication. These plans have brought together over 3,400 partners, ranging from humanitarian and development actors to faith-based and sports organizations, as well as refugee-led organizations and others. During these 11 years, the regional refugee response plans helped raise \$41 billion for refugees and their hosts in 13 regional situations affecting 66 countries.

57. Regional refugee response plans are underpinned by the refugee coordination model, introduced in 2013 and updated following the affirmation of the Global Compact on Refugees. The plans provided an inclusive platform to develop comprehensive and solution-oriented responses to displacement situations. National leadership was key, and the plans served as a basis for the transition from short-term to medium- and long-term planning. They promoted progress towards achieving the sustainable development goals and fostered collaboration with development actors and partners working on conflict resolution and peacebuilding. The plans prioritized localization and accountability to affected populations. At the same time, they maintained UNHCR's accountability and supervisory responsibility for refugees and international protection, and outlined the responsibilities of partners within a country team. They were context-specific and often resulted in

a blended approach with, for example, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in situations that involve both refugees and internally displaced persons; with IOM in situations of mixed movements; or with the United Nations Development Programme to promote the resilience of refugees and support host communities. Cooperation and coordination with partners, including many non-governmental organizations around the world, went from strength to strength and were indispensable to the work of the entire humanitarian system.

58. In internal displacement situations, UNHCR continued to fulfil its responsibility in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee cluster system as global lead agency in protection, and co-lead for shelter (with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) and for the camp coordination and camp management cluster (with IOM). The Office also played a critical role in advancing humanitarian principles, standards and effective responses as a member of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee in its various forums, and co-leading at different times the working group on accountability to affected populations and, currently, the task force on the centrality of protection. UNHCR is also contributing to the implementation of the Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement. It plays a central role in facilitating the work of the Special Adviser on Solutions to Internal Displacement and will continue to do so.

59. Other important partnership arrangements included the 2019 UNHCR-IOM joint letter on coordination and framework agreement of engagement, in particular to address situations of mixed movements. The organizations expanded their operational partnership, including in the critical area of data gathering and sharing. Another notable partnership has been the 2020 UNHCR-United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Blueprint for Joint Action, which promotes the rights of refugee children and their inclusion in national systems, with a special focus on education, water, sanitation and hygiene, and child protection for 2.1 million refugee children in 10 countries. The blueprint also supported host communities by investing in improving national service delivery in these sectors. UNHCR and UNICEF committed to ensuring that refugee and stateless children are fully included in national plans, budgets, datasets and service delivery systems by 2030, in all 120 countries where both organizations have a presence. The World Food Programme (WFP) is also a long-standing partner of UNHCR. Not only did the two agencies work together in providing food to millions of forcibly displaced people in emergencies and protracted situations around the world, but WFP also provided logistical support to operations, and UNHCR and WFP managed the joint programme and excellence targeting hub, aimed at strengthening joint programming.

60. In recent years, United Nations agencies have significantly scaled up cash assistance to meet humanitarian needs. In 2022 alone, UNHCR disbursed nearly \$970 million in cash to almost 10 million people in over 100 countries. Feedback from beneficiaries indicated that unrestricted cash was their preferred form of assistance. To ensure a common, coordinated and efficient approach, OCHA, UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP signed the United Nations Common Cash Statement in 2018, with UNHCR being accountable for cash assistance in refugee settings. In line with the Grand Bargain framework, a new cash coordination model was adopted in 2022, with UNHCR assuming the co-leadership of the Global Cash Advisory Group. This group assists all agencies with ensuring standardized protocols, market assessments and the delivery of cash.

61. Partnerships with faith-based organizations and faith leaders deepened in the wake of the High Commissioner's dialogue on protection challenges that explored the role of faith and faith communities in humanitarian response in December 2012. Faith-based philanthropy became an important pillar of support for forcibly displaced people, in particular in the Muslim world. In 2017, UNHCR launched the Refugee Zakat Fund, endorsed by legal scholars and institutions to receive and distribute Zakat (obligatory alms giving). During the five years of its existence, the Refugee Zakat Fund has provided Zakat-compliant assistance to some 6 million refugees in 26 countries.

62. In 2016, for the first time, 10 refugee athletes competed under the Olympic flag at the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro. Since then, refugee participation has continued. In 2021, UNHCR supported the participation of the Refugee Olympic and Paralympic Teams in the Tokyo Games, working closely with the International Olympic Committee, the International Paralympic Committee

and the Olympic Refugee Foundation. Now, refugee athletes are training to compete in the 2024 games.

#### **IV. Transformation of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees**

63. In response to a rapidly changing global landscape and taking advantage of technological advances, UNHCR launched an ambitious transformation process in 2017. Profound changes in structures, systems and staffing were implemented in the following years to make UNHCR more responsive and results oriented. This process transformed UNHCR and brought it closer to the people it serves by giving country offices the flexibility and authority to pursue context-driven protection and solutions strategies, and respond to local and regional dynamics. The number of regional bureaux was increased from five to seven, incorporating existing regional structures, and these bureaux were established in the regions to frontload support for the operations, effective January 2020.

64. The decentralized design was immediately put to the test by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, at the time when field operations were being reinforced and each regional bureau took on a stronger support role for the operations in their regions. This structure allowed UNHCR to “stay and deliver” during the height of the pandemic, which manifested itself at different times across the regions. By bringing the decision-making authority closer to the point of delivery, UNHCR had the flexibility to respond more effectively to emerging and different needs. At the same time, UNHCR continued to ensure that the forcibly displaced and stateless people and their needs remained at the centre of its programmes and activities, by applying participatory methodologies across its programming cycle and by using the Office’s age, gender and diversity approach to all aspects of its work. As part of its people-centered approach, UNHCR pursued innovative ways to promote the participation of displaced and stateless people, and its accountability towards them, including through systems and technologies for effective communication and feedback.

65. Part of the transformation was the overhaul of the systems and processes that underpin UNHCR’s work. The Business Transformation Programme was created to modernize and simplify key business processes, and introduce updated and innovative cloud-based solutions, in a coordinated manner. It covers: (a) strategic planning and results-based management, including the new results-based management programming tool COMPASS; (b) human resources (Workday); (c) finance and supply chain (Cloud enterprise resource planning); (d) project implementation and partnership; (e) external engagement (Synergy); and (f) systems integration (Link). COMPASS and Workday were launched in 2021 and 2022 respectively, and underpin the organization’s multi-year programming and planning for millions of forcibly displaced and stateless people, as well as its human resources management. The new business systems under the remaining four areas are expected to be launched in the second half of 2023.

66. Transformation is not only about changing structures, accountabilities and processes. It is also about changing the organizational culture. Starting in 2014, a comprehensive risk management framework has been put in place, and a strong risk culture has been embedded in the organization. Processes and tools to strengthen the prevention, mitigation and response to strategic and operational risks, comprising all forms of corruption, fraud, misconduct and exploitation, including sexual abuse and exploitation and sexual harassment, have been deeply anchored across the organization. Oversight was strengthened with the appointment of an independent Inspector General in 2020. Coordination among the different oversight services has since been improved. The UNHCR investigation service has been professionalized, while greater coherence has been established among the different integrity and oversight entities.

67. In 2018, UNHCR adopted a new approach to tackling sexual misconduct by bringing the fight against sexual exploitation and abuse of displaced and stateless people and sexual harassment of colleagues together. Acknowledging the common roots of both forms of sexual misconduct, this approach placed emphasis on addressing power imbalances and gender differentials that give rise to such abuses, and on ensuring a victim-centred approach in addressing abuses. Driving system-wide

efforts against sexual harassment and ensuring a victim-centred approach, UNHCR provided significant support to the United Nations Chief Executive Board Task Force, including in the design of the annual survey on the reporting of sexual harassment.

68. The UNHCR transformation dovetails with the broader United Nations reform process launched by the Secretary-General in 2017. It reflects the new management paradigm that aims to empower managers in the field, simplify and update processes, increase transparency, and improve delivery of the mandate. UNHCR has proactively contributed to the United Nations reform, including financially, and will continue to do so “without prejudice to the responsibilities conferred on it by the General Assembly”.<sup>23</sup> In practice, this meant that UNHCR representatives remained fully accountable to the High Commissioner on the delivery of the Office’s mandate, but they also reported to the resident coordinator on country activities and their impact on achieving the sustainable development goals.

69. Ten years ago, the Office worked with a needs-based budget of \$5.3 billion. In 2022, UNHCR had a presence in 139 countries and a needs-based annual budget of over \$10.7 billion. These increases in the capacity and needs of the Office were conservatively commensurate with the more than doubling of the number of people of concern to UNHCR. Throughout the period, funding continued to be provided mostly by Member States, with an increasing percentage from the private sector. The organization’s investment in the diversification of income resulted in a significant increase in income from the private sector, from \$191 million in 2013 to \$1.2 billion in 2022. As a proportion of the total income, contributions from the private sector have increased from 6.4 per cent in 2013 to 21 per cent in 2022, a sign of growing popular support for and solidarity with refugees. The private sector has been a key driver of unearmarked funding, representing 41 per cent of the total unearmarked funding of the organization in 2022. Over the last 10 years, the gap between funds available and the budget increased from 39 per cent in 2013 to 42 per cent in 2022. In real terms, unmet needs in the UNHCR budget grew from \$2.1 billion in 2013 to \$4.5 billion at the end of 2022.

70. The UNHCR strategic directions were renewed for the period 2022-2026. Following an internal analysis of progress made against the first set of strategic directions, eight areas were identified for accelerated and targeted action. These are: (a) safeguarding international protection, including in the context of mixed movements; (b) strengthening accountability to displaced and stateless people, in particular women and children; (c) strengthening efforts to prevent and respond to gender-based violence; (d) expanding resettlement and complementary pathways; (e) mainstreaming the engagement of development partners, including from the start of an emergency; (f) increasing engagement in situations of internal displacement and finding solutions in this context; (g) redoubling efforts to end statelessness; and (h) proactively mitigating the effects of the climate emergency on displacement in line with the organization’s protection mandate.

71. The strategic directions reflect the commitment of UNHCR to attaining the sustainable development goals, and advancing the priorities outlined in the Secretary-General’s *Our Common Agenda* report. Forging alliances, UNHCR will continue to promote the inclusion of refugees and stateless people in development programmes and national development frameworks. The organization is aligning its programmes, and today, 70 per cent of UNHCR operations have multi-year plans that contribute to achieving the sustainable development goals. These directions will guide the organization’s work in the coming years.

## V. Conclusion and looking forward

72. The past decade has seen old conflicts continue, and new ones erupt. Many of the root causes remain unaddressed, and the number of forcibly displaced people around the world reached unprecedented levels. The search for solutions needs to be reinvigorated and comprehensive, starting with a commitment to upholding international law, protecting civilians and bringing conflicts to an

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<sup>23</sup> See footnote 31 of the Management and Accountability Framework of the United Nations Development and Resident Coordinator System, September 2021.

end. Humanitarian aid will continue to save lives, but by itself, will not be enough to address the underlying root causes. In addition to conflict prevention and resolution, addressing underlying issues such as human rights abuses, inequality, the lack of good governance, and arresting and reversing the climate emergency are all urgently required.

73. Yet, despite challenges in the current context of international relations, a number of important developments took place in the past decade to change and improve the way the international community responds to forced displacement. These included important elements of cooperation among States and others that better enabled protection and inclusion of refugees in national systems until they can return home, and UNHCR's own reforms strengthened its activities in line with its mandate to protect and assist displaced people, stateless people and others.

74. Chief among these was the Global Compact on Refugees, which re-energized the international community's responsibility for refugees and recognized that while most displaced people stay as close to home as possible, including refugees who are mostly in neighbouring countries, those host countries and communities cannot be left alone to shoulder the responsibility. Instead, more effort is required among all actors. The Global Compact on Refugees provided the necessary framework for a whole-of-society response to forced displacement. While donors continued to fund humanitarian responses, others, including international financial institutions, development organizations, the private sector, sports organizations, academia and faith-based groups, also stepped up to show the strength of global solidarity with refugees, displaced people and their host communities, and brought their own expertise to complement the more traditional response.

75. While this important shift in response has improved the global response to forced displacement considerably in many aspects, there remains work to be done. The Global Refugee Forum, which will be held in December 2023, will provide another opportunity for the international community to come together to realize the four objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees and further strengthen burden- and responsibility-sharing as well as the collective response, until such time as refugees can return home voluntarily and in safety and dignity.

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