

# 2017 IMPACT REPORT

A special update  
for our valued donors



# Contents

365 days together	4
Spotlight on: Bangladesh Rohingya Emergency	8
Survival	10
Restoring hope	18
Finding home	22
Key figures at a glance	24
Staff profile: The woman at the head of UNHCR's supply chain	28



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to talented photographer Roger Arnold for the cover image of this report, as well as gratitude to all of the dedicated photographers and colleagues who bring our work to life and whose images are featured in this publication. All images copyright of UNHCR and commissioned photographers as referenced.

This report has been produced by UNHCR's Private Sector Partnerships (PSP) Communication team.  
Design: Tom Fincham.

Published: March 2018





© UNHCR/Santiago Escobar-Jaramillo

In 2017, you did something amazing.

By supporting UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, you delivered assistance to families who have been forced to flee war or persecution in their time of greatest need. Thanks to you, we made sure that they received shelter, essential supplies such as blankets and kitchen supplies, food, clean water, and access to vital services. Together, we also helped to protect their rights and give them a safe place to call home.

None of this would be possible without the support of generous, caring donors like you. This report showcases the lasting impact that our supporters made in 2017 on the lives of women, men and children who have lost so much.

From all of us here at UNHCR, **thank you** for all you do.

*“Through determined action, we can truly share responsibility in addressing the plight of the uprooted - and offer them the prospect of a better future.”*

**Filippo Grandi,  
UN High Commissioner  
for Refugees**

# 365 days together

At UNHCR, everything we do helps protect people forced to flee their homes. Our teams work in some 130 countries worldwide, protecting and caring for millions every day. Your thoughtful and generous support makes this possible. Here's a look at the events and emergencies that marked 2017 and how we responded, together.

## January Braving the Cold

As temperatures in many regions drop below freezing, families fleeing war or persecution brace for a long winter away from home. In Greece, UNHCR transfers hundreds of people to better accommodation, while in Serbia, we work with partners to distribute critical winter supplies like thermal blankets and warm clothing.



© UNHCR/Daniel Etter

## February Crisis in South Sudan

As violence surges in South Sudan, the number of refugees fleeing for safety tops 1.5 million. This makes it the largest refugee crisis in Africa. Women and children make up 86 per cent of refugees arriving in Uganda. UNHCR teams on the ground do all they can to help meet their basic needs, thanks to donors like you.

## March Six years of war in Syria

Six years since the start of the Syria conflict, UNHCR urges the international community to increase support to help offset the suffering of millions of innocent civilians. "Ultimately, Syria's conflict isn't about numbers – it's about people," says UN Refugee Chief Filippo Grandi. "Families have been torn apart, innocent civilians killed, houses destroyed, businesses and livelihoods shattered."

## May A children's crisis

After three years of escalating conflict in South Sudan, the number of children fleeing the nation in search of safety tops one million – 62 per cent of all South Sudanese refugees. Most arrive in Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Sudan, and over 75,000 children have crossed South Sudan's borders on their own. UNHCR staff are on the frontlines, providing life-saving assistance to children and families as they arrive.



© UNHCR/David Azia

## April Starvation threatens millions

Conflict and drought in the Horn of Africa, Yemen and Nigeria put families at risk of starvation, including refugees and people displaced in their own country. Over 20 million people in Nigeria, South Sudan, Somalia and Yemen experience or are at risk of famine. With your help, UNHCR and partners race to deliver emergency nutrition, health care, water and protection to displaced families.

## June Record forced displacement

Our latest Global Trends report reveals that one person is forced to flee their home every three seconds, on average. That equates to an unprecedented 65.6 million people uprooted by conflict and persecution at the end of 2016. June also marks the end of Ramadan – a time for reflection, gathering and giving for communities across the Muslim world. UNHCR helps lift spirits with food distributions and gatherings for refugees, while calling for people to donate their alms (or 'zakat') to help refugees in the Middle East. Thanks to generous individuals, foundations and corporate partners, the 2017 Ramadan campaign raised over \$4 million in support of refugee families.





© UNHCR/Roger Arnold

## August Rohingya emergency

Fresh violence in Myanmar's Rakhine state sends women, men and children fleeing to neighbouring Bangladesh – walking for days through jungles and mountains or braving dangerous sea voyages to escape. By the end of the 2017, it will have become the world's fastest-growing refugee crisis. In the first 100 days, thanks to your generosity, UNHCR airlifts and ships emergency life-saving aid – including 178,000 blankets and 36,000 kitchen sets – and provides access to water and toilets to over 100,000 people, as well as medical attention and counselling to nearly 60,000.

## July Families return to Mosul

The Iraqi government declares victory in Mosul, a city battered by fighting. Displaced residents begin repairing their war-damaged homes, as well as reopening shops and businesses. UNHCR steps up support for those returning home, distributing shelter kits and cash assistance to the most vulnerable families.

## September Somali refugees return home

More than 100 refugees leave Yemen, in the first UNHCR-assisted spontaneous return for Somali refugees. Given the current life-threatening conditions in Yemen, UNHCR is supporting the voluntary return of Somali refugees, who make up 91 per cent of Yemen's 280,000 refugees and asylum seekers. We provide support for up to 10,000 refugees who have decided to return while continuing to assist those who remain in Yemen.



## December First evacuation of refugees from Libya

The first group of 162 refugees from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia and Yemen – including single mothers, children on their own and disabled people – are safely evacuated from Libya to Italy. All are in need of health care and counselling after being held captive in inhumane conditions and undergoing abuse from traffickers, smugglers and others on dangerous journeys across Africa. The group is accompanied from detention facilities by Libya-based UNHCR staff and flown to Italy, where our teams welcome and give them information. More evacuations follow.

## October Civil registration for refugees in Ethiopia

In a historic first, Ethiopia begins civil registration for refugees – allowing refugees to register life events such as birth, death and marriage. This was made possible following an amendment to existing legislation by Ethiopia's government, which UNHCR and UNICEF helped prepare. Registering a birth establishes a child's legal identity and is critical to guaranteeing basic human rights.

## November Jordan's Zaatari camp goes green

Jordan's Zaatari camp inaugurates its newly constructed solar plant, the largest ever built in a refugee camp. Funded by the German Government, the plant will bring free and clean energy to 80,000 Syrian refugees and the host community. It will improve living conditions and safety in the camp, reduce CO2 emissions by 13,000 tons per year, and increase access to electricity from 8 to 14 hours per day. This follows the opening of a solar farm in Jordan's Azraq refugee camp earlier in the year, funded by the IKEA Foundation's Brighter Lives for Refugees campaign.



# Bangladesh Rohingya emergency – your questions, answered

You've seen the images on the news. Since August 2017, brutal violence in Myanmar's Rakhine state has sent men, women and children fleeing for their lives. Here's what you need to know about the world's fastest-growing refugee emergency.

**671,000**

Rohingya refugees estimated to have fled to Bangladesh since late August 2017\*

Nearly **80%** are women and children

Most arrive **on foot** and by **boat**

*\*As of February 2018*



## WHO ARE THE ROHINGYA?

The Rohingya are a stateless Muslim minority in Myanmar who have faced discrimination and extreme poverty for decades. They have not been allowed to exercise their basic rights, including the freedom to move, right to education, work and other social, civil and political rights. The Rohingya fleeing Myanmar are now stateless refugees, making them even more vulnerable.

## WHAT CONDITION ARE REFUGEES ARRIVING IN WHEN THEY REACH BANGLADESH?

People are arriving exhausted, hungry and in desperate need of shelter. The vast majority are women including mothers with new-born babies, families with children. Most have walked for days through jungles and mountains with little or no food. Thousands have resorted to desperate means to flee Myanmar, risking their lives on flimsy rafts. Many have died trying to reach safety.





## HOW ARE YOUR DONATIONS HELPING UNHCR RESPOND?

With the help of supporters like you, UNHCR is on the ground doing all we can to help: providing urgently-needed shelter, access to clean water, medical care and more. Airlifting life-saving aid including blankets, sleeping mats, tents, kitchen sets and jerry cans for water. Working around the clock with the Bangladeshi government and partners to respond to the massive needs, including developing the Kutupalong refugee camp area – now the largest refugee settlement in the world. In less than six months, together with partners, we helped provide essentials including:

*“There is so much work to be done [...] but that means there is so much opportunity to make a real difference. Every donation you make counts.”*



**UNHCR  
Emergency  
Response  
Coordinator  
Joungh-ah  
Ghedini-Williams**



**108,433**  
Plastic sheets



**46,958**  
Buckets



**44,071**  
Kitchen Set



**86,867**  
Mosquito Nets



**217,932**  
Blankets



**87,978**  
Jerry Cans



**217,720**  
Sleeping Mat

### More than 20 airlifts

carrying life-saving aid sent by UNHCR since August

**Over 200** UNHCR staff on the ground

**More than 155,000 refugees** reached with medical care

**231,000 refugees** given access to clean water\*\*

\*\*As of January 2018





# Survival

Every minute, nearly 20 people are forced to flee their homes because of conflict or persecution. In 2017, your support enabled us to be on the ground, wherever needed, supporting families on the move all around the globe. We provided protection and assistance, including emergency shelter, food, water and healthcare, thanks to you.



© UNHCR/Andrew McConnell

25-year-old Rohingya refugee Hamida with her new-born baby boy and two-year-old son, safe at a transit camp in Kutupalong, Bangladesh.



# Protection

You helped to protect people who were forced to flee.

In 2017, thanks to your generosity, we continued to protect and care for people displaced around the world, who so often had to leave everything behind. This includes making sure that vulnerable people are identified and receive the support they need to survive. Particularly children and the elderly, such as Dolu.

## HELPING DOLU RECEIVE VITAL AID

Having an address may not seem like a big deal, but for refugees like Dolu, it is. “I’m old, I’m sick and I’m tired of moving,” she says. The 75-year-old is among hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees who have been identified through UNHCR’s family counting teams in Bangladesh. These teams gather data on families staying on the hillsides of Kutupalong refugee camp, to be able to give them aid – whether it be food, kitchen sets or shelter kits. Those who have been counted receive a yellow laminated card with a unique number assigned by the Bangladeshi government. For many, it’s the first time they have received this kind of identification, and it means they can get the help and access to services they need to survive.

*“Finally, I have an address... My life will be stable now.”*





# Shelter

You helped to provide shelter to fleeing families who've lost everything.

When families are forced to flee home, one of their main concerns is finding a safe place for their children to sleep. Imagine the relief they feel when they finally reach safety. The moment they can lay their little ones down to sleep in a shelter provided by UNHCR. Last year, thanks to caring donors like you, we provided a range of shelter solutions – including prefabricated housing and tents – to displaced people, restoring a sense of home. We also repaired the shelters of families returning home, like Thana'a and Khalid's family in Iraq.

## SHELTERING KHALID, THANA'A AND THEIR CHILDREN

Thana'a, her husband Khalid and their children fled their home in the Iraqi city of Falluja in 2014, as fighting edged closer and closer. When the family returned two years later, after the Iraqi Government retook the city from armed extremists, they found their house looted and burned, with the roof partly destroyed. "We had lost everything," explains Thana'a. Thanks to UNHCR and partners, the family was among nearly 600 in Falluja to receive assistance with shelter repairs to make their homes habitable again. In Thana'a and Khalid's house, walls were repaired and electricity was rewired, allowing the family to return home. To mothers like Thana'a, this help means everything.

*"This help was a lifeline.  
Now we feel secure here."*





## AN UPDATE ON UNHCR'S GLOBAL SHELTER CAMPAIGN

In 2016, UNHCR launched a three-year global campaign to provide shelter to people forced to flee – calling on individuals like you, companies and foundations to raise funds to help shelter men, women and children who have been driven from their homes. By the

end of 2017, we raised over \$20 million as part of the campaign to shelter displaced families around the world. Your efforts helped to give hundreds of thousands of people a warm, safe place to sleep every night and a place for their children to be safe.



*“For when people become refugees they need a special kind of home—defined in this case as a place of sanctuary where they can heal, and where they can rebuild.”*

Melissa Fleming  
UNHCR Head of  
Communications and  
Chief Spokesperson

Threatened by El Salvador street gangs, 72-year-old Margarita\* fled to Mexico, where she rents a small one-room house through financial support from UNHCR. “I am so grateful to be here,” she says.

*\*Name changed for protection reasons.*



# Water

You helped to make sure that people forced to flee have access to safe, clean water.

How often do you turn on the tap? Do you ever stop to think what it would be like not to have access to safe, clean water? For people who've been forced to flee home, clean water is not always easy to come by. And that can lead to the spread of disease. That's why in 2017, thanks to your support, we continued to make sure that displaced people had sufficient amounts of clean water and proper washroom facilities, at home and in places such as health clinics and schools. In Mozambique, for example, you helped to provide water to both refugees and the locals that have welcomed them.

## GIVING WATER TO HELENA AND HER COMMUNITY

Twenty-year-old Helena is from Mozambique. She grew up in a village next to Maratane refugee camp. As a mother to two young children, she is very happy with the new borehole that UNHCR has helped build near her home. To support the local host community, UNHCR helped install eight boreholes in the area this past year, reducing congestion at water points like those in Maratane camp, and making sure locals – like refugee families – have clean water to drink, nourish their crops and use at home.

*“Being able to get water so close to my house has given me so much more time. I also feel more secure because I don't have to worry about snakes on the paths.”*





# Nutrition

You helped people learn valuable new skills to enable them to better feed their families.

Did you know that malnutrition is one of the biggest killers of children under the age of five in displaced populations? Each year, millions of deaths from diseases brought on in part by malnutrition could be prevented. That's why, with your support, UNHCR and partners are working hard to help treat refugee children for malnutrition, give refugees the ability to make healthier choices, and ensure they can eat nutrient-rich food. Together, in 2017, we helped refugee families like Sham's, who learned how to farm and live a healthier life.

## HARVESTING A FUTURE FOR SHAM

For Sham, the best part of the day is going to his farm. It's close to his current home at Doro refugee camp, in South Sudan. The 39-year-old father of six fled his native Sudan in 2011, when an armed group stormed his village and started killing everyone around him. Sham did some farming back home, but he never received any specific training. When UNHCR helped start a 'farmer's school' in the camp, he immediately enrolled – and he's already reaping the benefits. "I can now feed my family with vegetables and crops from my farm. I sell some of my harvest to the community too. Now, I feel more independent," he says with a warm, broad smile. He also wants to help others.

*“One day, I want to go back to my country to share my knowledge, which I gained thanks to UNHCR.”*









# Health

You helped to save lives by making sure displaced people get the care they need.

Refugees fleeing conflict often arrive malnourished and in poor health. With your support, UNHCR strives to ensure all refugees can access quality public health services. Our staff is working to better assess initial refugee health needs and improve our preparedness and response. As of September 2017, timely interventions and regular monitoring enabled UNHCR and over 240 partners to provide lifesaving assistance to approximately 7.3 million people in camps and other displacement settings. In 2017, we worked with partners to protect the health and well-being of refugees of all ages, like eight-year-old Farah from Syria.

## HELPING FARAH GROW HEALTHY AND STRONG

Little Farah is an ambitious young girl who dreams of one day becoming a doctor. But her own doctor is concerned about her health. Farah is smaller and weighs less than an average eight-year-old. When her family first sought refuge in Jordan, they came with so little that she often only ate bread with some olive oil and spices.

Thanks to donors like you, UNHCR makes sure they receive monthly cash assistance to pay for essentials. We are also working with a local clinic to make sure vulnerable refugees like Farah can access free healthcare. The clinic has a doctor, dentist and nutritionist on hand to serve patients.

Inspired by the people who are helping her, Farah wants to become a doctor because, she says, “I need to support other people.”

# Restoring Hope

People forced to flee often lose or leave behind everything, including identification documents and access to school, health care and job services. In 2017, with your support, we helped to provide refugees with documents, education and training, empowering them to build bright futures and stronger ties with their host communities, while strengthening their capacity to reclaim their rights.



© UNHCR/Hannah Maule-ffinch

15-year-old Anais (right) in class at Paysannat school, Mahama refugee camp, where UNHCR has helped build 133 classrooms. "I want to be a scientist. You must believe in yourself because everything is possible."



# Education

You helped to give displaced children the chance to go to school.

Picture your life being turned upside down in seconds because you were forced to flee home to escape war or persecution. Education might be the furthest thing from your mind. But once you reach safety, wouldn't you want to do everything you could to give your children a chance at a better future? As one of UNHCR's generous supporters, we know that you understand the value of education. Last year, thanks to caring donors like you, we helped refugees around the world gain the knowledge and skills they need to succeed. Refugees like Afrah.

## HELPING AFRAH LEARN

Afrah is no stranger to bombs, bullets and poverty. The 12-year-old is a Somali refugee in Yemen, caught in the nation's brutal conflict after having escaped fighting in her own country. But she's determined not to let war get in the way of her dreams. "I am very frightened by the war, but I really want to stay in school," she says. "With the war it has been very difficult to study and we don't even have text books." With your support, UNHCR is providing educational supplies in areas with high numbers of refugee and displaced children in Yemen. This assistance also includes early childhood development programmes, informal education classes and training for teachers, administrators and social workers on child protection and psychosocial issues. UNHCR has also repaired damaged schools.

*"I am happy because I finally have books to study with. I want to stay in school to finish my education so I can become a doctor."*





# Livelihoods

You helped people start their own businesses, boosting their independence.

We all want to be able to create a better future for ourselves and our families. Refugees are no different. The opportunity to work and earn a living is one of the most effective ways they can achieve that, with dignity. Last year, thanks to the support of caring people like you, we helped to offer training, supported small businesses and made sure people – both refugees and locals alike – had the tools and resources they needed to thrive.

## GIVING AISHA AND JANINE SKILLS FOR LIFE

Every morning, on a lake in western Uganda, Aisha sets out to go fishing. She's part of a fishing collective of 20 refugees and five locals, set up with help from UNHCR. Fishing has given her a new start. "My life has changed within months," says the Ugandan mother of two.

The day's catch is brought to shore to sell to their community. Together, the collective's members pool their savings and, from this money, take out loans to start other small businesses, like restaurants or animal breeding.

Janine, a Congolese refugee and mother of two,



is part of the same collective. She took out her first loan to buy a pregnant pig. She then sold the piglets to build herself a house. Thanks to your generosity, groups like this one give mothers like Aisha and Janine a way to proudly support their families.



A woman, Janine, is shown in profile, looking towards the left. She is wearing a bright orange life vest over a patterned orange and black headscarf. She is holding a white plastic bowl filled with small, dark brown pellets. The background shows a body of water and a man in a blue shirt and hat standing on a boat. The sky is clear and blue.

*“We work together, locals and refugees. We support each other.”*

Janine,  
Congolese  
refugee



# Finding Home

At UNHCR, we work hard to protect and assist those who have been forcibly displaced, day in and out. But our ultimate goal is to find solutions that allow them to rebuild their lives. Last year, thanks to your generous donations, we helped empower people forced from home to live with safety and dignity. Together, we have helped people voluntarily return or settle somewhere new, but most importantly, we have helped them restore their sense of home.



After fleeing armed conflict in Colombia in 2002, Ricardo and Miriam now run a successful bakery in Costa Rica, thanks to help received through the Living Integration programme, developed by the Costa Rican Migration Agency in collaboration with UNHCR.



# Resettlement

You helped families find a new home.

For people who are displaced, one of their dreams is finding a new place to call home. Whether that means voluntarily returning to their country, integrating into their host community or being resettled in a new land, your assistance in 2017 helped refugees access long-term solutions to start rebuilding their lives. Your support has made a true impact, changing futures for the better for refugees like Bora and her family.

## GIVING BORA AND HER CHILDREN A NEW CHANCE AT LIFE

Bora is only 24, but the pain she's experienced spans a lifetime. She fled conflict at home in the Democratic Republic of the Congo after her parents were killed. When she arrived in South Africa, she tried to create a better life. And she did – by marrying and having two children. But a few years later, tragedy struck again. Her husband was fatally shot in front of her during a carjacking. Soon after, her brother was also killed. But then Bora was given hope. She received a chance to start again – this time, in France, with help from a UNHCR scheme to resettle the most vulnerable refugees. Bora and her children Amina and Ibrahim (now five and seven) are now rebuilding their lives on the outskirts of Paris, where she has finally found some respite. Bora's strength and resilience – and your dedication to helping refugees like her – are nothing short of inspiring.

*“Now I am very happy.”*



# Key figures at a glance

If you were forced to flee your home to escape war or persecution, wouldn't you hope someone would extend a helping hand? In 2017, you did just that.

By donating to UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, you have helped save lives, protect rights and build a better future for refugees, forcibly displaced communities and stateless people. Together, we are responding to refugee crises around the world, making a real, lasting impact on the lives of men, women and children forced from the place they call 'home.'

## THE CONTEXT:

# 65.6 million

forcibly displaced people worldwide, including nearly 22.5 million refugees – over half of whom are



# children

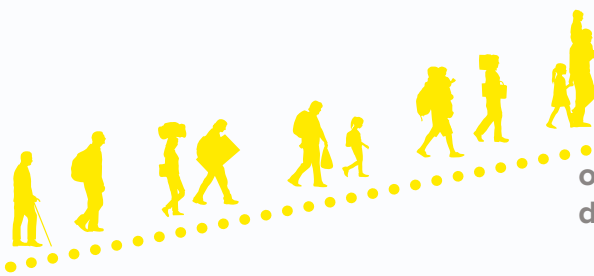
# 20

Nearly **people** forcibly displaced every minute

# 55%

of all refugees come from three countries:

**Syria, Afghanistan & South Sudan**



Almost **60%** of the world's displaced hosted in **Africa and the Middle East**

## DID YOU KNOW?

UNHCR was created in 1950, to help Europeans uprooted by World War II. Since then, we've helped millions of people worldwide restart their lives.





## THE RESPONSE:



UNHCR is on the ground responding in

**130 countries**



**87%**

of our staff are based in the field, in direct contact with people of concern



Our staff encompasses over

**150 different nationalities**

**361 aid workers** were deployed by UNHCR to emergencies in 2017, with many more specialist short term staff also sent in to assist

## YOUR FUNDS IN ACTION

When you donate to UNHCR, you make a true difference in the lives of people forced to flee. You help save, protect and rebuild lives.

Nobody chooses to become a refugee, **but you have chosen to help**, giving care and hope to some of the world's most vulnerable people. In 2017, amazing donors like you stepped forward, helping UNHCR respond to ever-growing needs. From on-going crises to large-scale emergencies, we were there. Saving lives. Protecting rights. Building better futures.

UNHCR is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions. In a world facing record levels of displacement, your support matters now

more than ever. And for this, we want to express our **deepest gratitude**.

On behalf of our staff worldwide and those we serve, **thank you** for all your support.

### A global community of supporters and donors:

In 2017, \$400 million was raised from almost 2 million committed individual donors from more than 50 countries, as well as foundations, corporate and philanthropist partners.

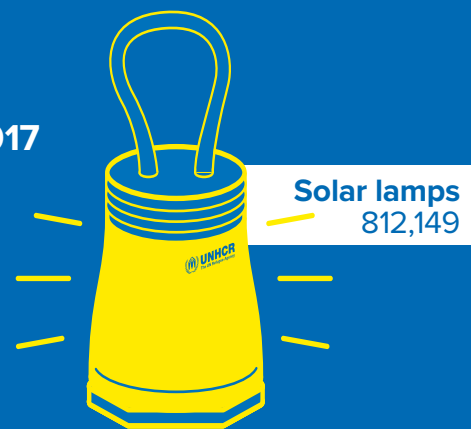


## DELIVERING VITAL SUPPLIES

### Core relief items sent for emergencies in 2017

If you had just a few minutes to leave your home, what would you take with you? People forced to flee war or persecution often leave everything behind to make the dangerous journey to safety. In times of crisis, UNHCR leads efforts to rush in life-saving assistance – including shelter, food, water and medical care.

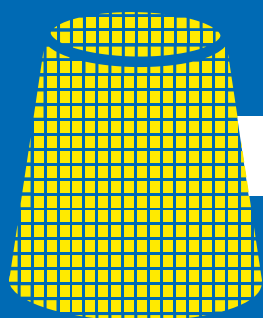
When an emergency strikes, our network of warehouses and stockpiles – strategically located across Africa, Asia and Europe – ensures we can respond. In 2017, thanks to caring donors like you, millions of items were shipped from our warehouses, stockpiles and directly from suppliers, including:



**Solar lamps**  
812,149



**Jerry cans**  
1,165,095



**Mosquito nets**  
594,671

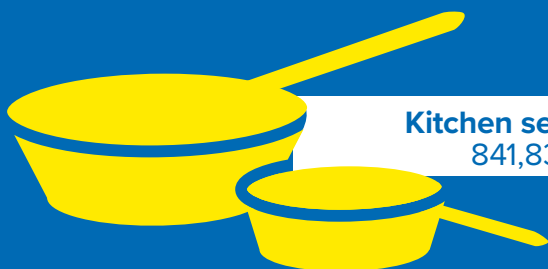


**Sleeping mats**  
2,438,895





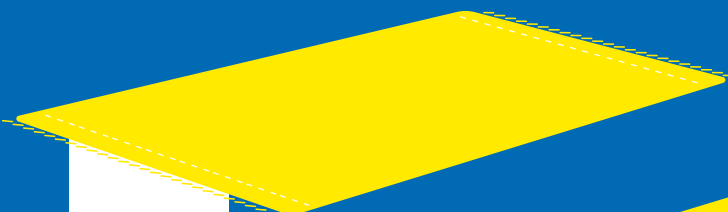
**Family tents**  
28,560



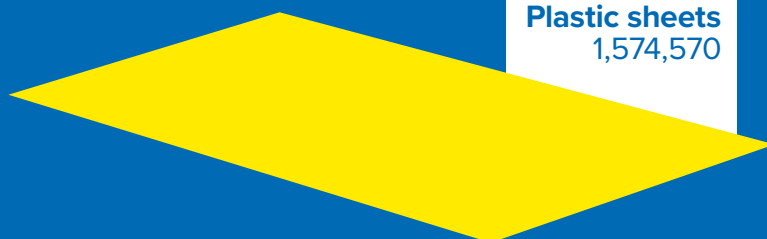
**Kitchen sets**  
841,839



**Buckets**  
267,872



**Blankets**  
2,977,213



**Plastic sheets**  
1,574,570



# The woman at the head of UNHCR's supply chain

If you've ever wondered how refugees receive life-saving supplies in emergencies, Anna Spindler can tell you.

She's the Head of Supply Management and Logistics, in UNHCR's Division of Emergency, Security and Supply. Providing blankets, tents and other core relief items in the early days of a person's arrival are essential to keeping them protected. With teams as committed and passionate as she is, Anna ensures that refugees and other people of concern are protected. Anna is based in Budapest, Hungary, but last year alone, she assisted with humanitarian crises in Bangladesh, Syria, Uganda, Angola and many other countries, deploying staff and resources all over the world.



**You're the head of the supply chain with UNHCR. How would you describe your job in three words?**

I would say delivery is one. Definitely a drive for results – I know that's three words, but we really have to stay focused on the people we serve. Speed and efficiency are also essential. And I have a soft spot for teambuilding, so teamwork should also be mentioned. None of us can do what we do alone. It's a huge chain – people talk about the supply chain, but there is a human chain too. If both systems are solid and in place, then many things can go wrong, but we can still deliver.

**How do these chains work when it comes to emergencies, such as the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh – the fastest-growing refugee emergency today?**

The first thing we did was ask: what supplies do they have in the country warehouse that can be deployed immediately, and what can they buy locally? We also activated shipments from one or more of our seven stockpiles, in Dubai, Nairobi, Kampala, Douala, Accra, Amman and Copenhagen. We also looked at our stock in the region and then, of course, we mobilized staff.

*“Supply means more than just delivering blankets or tarpaulins. We are delivering protection, in many forms.”*

Bangladesh was a complex emergency to deliver to. The main port became congested very quickly. And when that happens, your containers and ships just sit there, and you can't offload them. So we looked at other options, such as bringing supplies in by road, other ports and by air. We did a total of 21 airlifts to Bangladesh, with supplies coming from our stockpiles and suppliers around the world.

People often think, “Just get it on the plane and send it,” but that's oversimplified. There are many steps that have to be well coordinated to do a successful airlift. For example, we need to know what size planes the receiving end can handle and if they have the equipment required to offload the planes. Then there is all the paperwork that has to be prepared and processed.

Supply means more than just delivering blankets or tarpaulins. We are delivering protection, in many forms. Our speed and timing are critical to saving lives.

**You also mentioned a human chain when it comes to delivering supplies. How did that work for Bangladesh?**

It's a lot of teamwork. Supply staff, especially in Budapest and Dubai, were working tireless hours. We had to do many things in parallel or sequence.





Such as coordinating the schedules with the aircraft and service providers. Making sure each aircraft was properly loaded and that the pallets were packed correctly so they fit into the aircraft.

And then, there's the supply staff in the field. It's extremely important that we have strong people there to coordinate and deliver. Their dedication and perseverance made the difference between delivering supplies in days or weeks.

**As someone who often assesses refugees' needs on the ground, you must get to know a lot of them and hear their stories. Who are some you've met?**

When I was in Bangladesh last November, I noticed a man with a baby on his lap. They had just arrived a few hours before. His wife was in a chair nearby. He told me that she had diabetes and became paralysed six months ago. Later, I found out that she'd had a stroke. The couple had seven children, but they all got separated on the move. I asked the man about his journey. He told me he walked at night for 10 days over the hills, carrying his wife and child the entire way. He showed me his shoulders. The skin was so raw. And the muscles were in visible knots. He was 61-years-old. I saw him the next day and he had been reunited with all of his children. I was struck by this man's courage, and really, the courage that all refugees have. Their strength and will to survive through horrible circumstances, to have a chance at a better life for their families. That always puts things into perspective.

### When did you want to become a humanitarian worker?

I spent 13 years in the private sector, in manufacturing, mostly in the high-tech industry. I've always been in supply, in one aspect or another. At that time, I would go with my father, a physician, on different medical trips, to countries such as Mexico, Honduras or Kenya. In 2005, we went to Honduras, where we helped to build a wheelchair distribution clinic. My dad sent me off to the market to buy supplies. I had such an adventure that day talking to people and seeing my skills used in such a different way. I loved it. So I made a decision to do it full time. I've been working with different UN agencies for the past 12 years. I really love what I do.

*“Even a small amount of money helps [...] provide hope and security for people who crossed the border with sometimes nothing other than their strength, courage, love for their family and their will to survive.”*

### What can people reading this do to help?

First, I'd like them to know that supplies do actually get to refugees because my teams are the ones responsible for getting it there. So I know it gets there because I actually see it happen. We're at a time now where the world really needs empathy. We need it for each other and for displaced populations. We need it for refugees that may have arrived in your home country and need your friendly face and helping hand. Financially speaking too, even a small amount of money helps. It helps provide hope and security for people who crossed the border with sometimes nothing other than their strength, courage, love for their family and their will to survive.



*“I'd like people to know that supplies do actually get to refugees because my teams are the ones responsible for getting it there.”*

© UNHCR/James Vanka



unhcr.org

