

Update on UNHCR operations in southern Africa

A. Situational analysis, including new developments

The southern Africa region hosts 9.8 million forcibly displaced persons, of whom some 8.7 million are internally displaced and more than 1 million are refugees and asylum-seekers. Forced displacement in the region is mainly triggered by insecurity in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique, southern Africa’s most severe humanitarian situations. Nearly 1 million people in protracted displacement situation are hosted by Angola, the Congo (Republic of), Malawi, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. In 2022, some 18,300 people voluntarily repatriated in the region, an increase of 22 per cent compared to 2021.

The operational context in southern Africa is plagued by economic instability, social inequalities, conflict, climate disasters and food insecurity. The situation has been exacerbated by the ongoing effects of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the global political situation and the climate emergency, as well as by reductions in humanitarian funding. Significant backlogs in asylum applications were of great concern, and gender inequality and gender-based violence continued to be major challenges, mainly in countries affected by conflicts. Moreover, health conditions in southern Africa are fragile, and the region faced Ebola and monkeypox outbreaks in 2022 on top of recurring illnesses such as measles, cholera and malaria. Humanitarian needs are increasing, as are mixed movements of people fleeing violence and extreme weather events or searching for livelihood opportunities.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo accounts for over two-thirds of the persons of concern to UNHCR in southern Africa. Around 5.6 million people are displaced within the country, and over 1 million have crossed international borders in search of refuge, both in and outside the region. The Democratic Republic of the Congo also hosts over half a million refugees (mainly from Burundi, the Central African Republic and Rwanda), the largest number in southern Africa. In 2023, the needs are expected to remain significant in the country, especially given chronic instability caused by non-State armed actors and the regionalization of some conflicts, the planned presidential elections and the scaling-down of operations of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. UNHCR will continue to promote protection, provide emergency assistance, advance solutions and coordinate the regional refugee response for this situation.

In Mozambique, the second largest emergency in the region, 1.1 million people are internally displaced persons, and it hosts more than 30,000 refugees and asylum-seekers. Violence perpetrated by non-State armed groups in Cabo Delgado province and recurring natural disasters have caused and aggravated the displacement situation in the country. In the coming months, ongoing stabilization efforts are likely to affect the flight patterns of internally displaced persons. Against this background, UNHCR is collaborating with the Government and partners to support and advocate for the inclusion of displaced populations in national services and the mainstreaming of protection needs in development programmes. UNHCR will also continue to call for humanitarian access and provide life-saving assistance and protection to affected populations in Mozambique.

B. Progress and challenges by impact area in 2022 and updated plans for 2023

Attaining a favourable protection environment

Despite 14 out of the 16 countries in the southern Africa region having ratified the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, some trends towards the reduction of the asylum space have been observed, especially with reservations made by 12 countries over 17 provisions of the Convention. All countries in the southern Africa region adhere to the 1969 Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. In response, UNHCR, together with key stakeholders, continues to promote the strengthening of asylum systems. Close collaboration with States and support for asylum capacity development have helped reduce the regional asylum backlogs by 7 per cent. Moreover, the asylum action plan established with the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) was adopted in June 2022 and has contributed to improving decision-making through the training of relevant personnel.

UNHCR also advocates with governments to ensure respect of the principle of non-refoulement and promotes accession to, and ratification of, relevant international and regional treaties on displacement and statelessness. In particular, UNHCR is working to advance the ratification of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa and for its incorporation into national laws and policies. In 2022, partnerships with the International Association of Refugee and Migration Judges and the University of Cape Town supported the training of over 100 judges and legal practitioners on refugee law and statelessness and strengthened advocacy around forced displacement and the effects of climate change on communities. Moving forward, in collaboration with the University of Pretoria and its Centre for Human Rights, UNHCR will prioritize three activities: i) research on subjects such as the application of African refugee law in the context of climate change, environmental degradation and disasters; ii) training of government officials, judges and legal practitioners; and iii) advocacy with State representatives and regional economic communities.

In line with its policy on UNHCR's engagement in situations of internal displacement, and the responsibilities established by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's cluster system, UNHCR will focus in southern Africa on strengthening leadership on protection, shelter and non-food items and camp coordination and camp management interventions. It will also reinforce rapid response capacity for emergencies and ensure the centrality of protection in all programming. Furthermore, UNHCR will focus on developing innovative data collection techniques and enhancing evidence-based programming; consolidating community-based approaches and strengthening community mobilization; ensuring targeted assistance to persons at heightened vulnerability; promoting peaceful coexistence within affected communities; and implementing solutions strategies for refugees, internally displaced persons and host communities.

In the lead-up to the 2023 Global Refugee Forum and in alignment with the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and the sustainable development goals, UNHCR will leverage partnerships in the region to help collect, analyse and present data on displacement-related issues for advocacy, policy and programmatic work on access to justice and the rule of law. In particular, partnerships with United Nations agencies in the region, including the United Nations Development Programme, will be fostered for collaboration on a joint roadmap on access to justice. A joint study and additional projects will be undertaken with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to strengthen data collection on mixed movements along southern and Indian Ocean routes, assess protection services and improve the delivery of assistance.

In southern Africa, age, gender and diversity will remain a priority focus in programming. UNHCR will strengthen coordination and programming to protect women and girls from gender-based violence and systematically integrate gender-based violence risk mitigation into all sectors of its work. As part of the efforts to protect lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex refugees and asylum-seekers, UNHCR and stakeholders will work towards addressing systemic discrimination against these communities. Finally, UNHCR in southern

Africa will continue to strengthen child protection and empower young refugees. It will work with United Nations agencies and other partners to mainstream child protection in their response and support governments in strengthening inclusive child protection systems and bolstering networks that focus on children in mixed movements.

Realizing basic rights in safe environments

UNHCR has strengthened its emergency preparedness and response capacity and is implementing innovative projects to reduce the impact of climate change and reduce its environmental footprint. In this regard, investments in reforestation, clean cooking, solar energy and projects to help make shelters more resilient have been made. In November 2022, UNHCR and the Mozambique National Disasters Management Institute co-hosted a regional roundtable to identify opportunities to broaden partnerships among relevant actors on climate issues as the regional contribution to the High Commissioner’s Dialogue on Protection Challenges, which focused on development cooperation. In 2023, the Office will continue to foster such partnerships. UNHCR also developed a regional climate action plan to guide future operational work and ensure that climate-resilience activities are anchored in an inclusive, human rights-based approach. Moreover, UNHCR is assisting SADC in the development of a disaster displacement framework.

The food and nutrition situation of refugees and asylum-seekers across southern Africa remains challenging. UNHCR-supported nutrition surveys carried out in the Congo (Republic of), Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe found moderate, severe and critical malnutrition and anaemia levels among children. At the same time, UNHCR and partners have conducted joint assessments in Mozambique, Namibia and some areas of the Democratic Republic of the Congo that identified opportunities for greater livelihoods support and integration with local economies, pathways that supplement incomes and contribute to food security. Additional livelihood assessments for evidence-based interventions will be undertaken in 2023.

In turn, the water and sanitation context is marked by significant variation and is affected by the ongoing arrival of people. On average, UNHCR and partners provide 16.5 litres of potable water per person per day, with many camps and settlements falling short of the post-emergency target of 20 litres per person per day. In 2023, efforts to improve sanitation and health care will continue. Of particular note in the region is the piloting of real-time monitoring technology in Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe that aims to obtain independent and timely data on water supply network performance for analysis and optimization of water supply systems.

Five UNHCR operations in the region (the Republic of Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Malawi, Mozambique and the regional representation in southern Africa) are implementing cash-based interventions. In 2022, these operations provided emergency and regular cash assistance to over 55,000 individuals to help cover basic needs, including education and shelter. UNHCR also used cash assistance in the context of voluntary repatriation, with countries of departure and origin prioritizing cash support for returnees. However, limited funding and insecurity pose challenges to the systematization of cash assistance, especially in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where the largest cash-based programme in the region is carried out.

In 2022, despite limited humanitarian access and funding challenges, UNHCR supported 15,300 households of refugees and internally displaced persons in the Democratic Republic of the Congo with improved shelters and latrines in 2022. Where possible, transitional shelters were built with locally sourced materials to ensure their sustainability. In the Congo (Republic of), UNHCR coordinated with the National Committee for Refugee Assistance to install 100 emergency shelters as part of the rapid response to the influx of refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo in September 2022. In Mozambique, following Cyclone Gombe’s devastating impact on Maratane refugee settlement and other sites hosting displaced people, UNHCR declared an internal level 2 emergency to respond and to build sustainable, climate-resilient housing and repair infrastructure. In addition, in Mozambique, UNHCR coordinated with the Government, the World Bank and the African Development Bank to include forcibly displaced persons in energy projects. In 2022, the connection of

1,500 households to the national electricity grid was facilitated in settlements and host communities in Cabo Delgado and Nampula provinces.

Empowering communities and achieving gender equality

In 2022, UNHCR and partners supported 76,600 refugee children – 48 per cent of whom were girls – to access education in southern Africa. The Instant Network Schools programme, a partnership with the Vodafone Foundation, was expanded to 34 sites in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique, transforming classrooms into multimedia learning hubs and making digital content available to nearly 30,000 refugees and host community learners. Similarly, in Zimbabwe, 4,300 learners received access to digital content and benefited from the integration of information and communications technology into learning activities. Furthermore, UNHCR provided tertiary education scholarships to an estimated three per cent of qualified refugees (229 men and 167 women), with 40 scholars successfully graduating from the programme in 2022. In addition, 27 refugee scholars were admitted to universities in Italy as part of the University Corridors for Refugees programme; 21 have departed and commenced their studies. Nevertheless, only 10 per cent of school-aged refugees in southern Africa have access to secondary education. The low transition rates from primary to secondary education, often aggravated by school fees and limited opportunities for inclusion in national systems, are of concern. UNHCR and partners will continue to advocate for improved access to education and promote skills training, especially among girls.

Opportunities for livelihoods and economic inclusion in the southern Africa region were made possible through enhanced collaboration with various stakeholders and progress in implementing Global Refugee Forum pledges. A three-year project was launched in Mozambique to improve the socioeconomic situation of some 4,000 displaced people and host community members. In Zimbabwe, the Government made an additional 100 hectares available for agricultural activities, and in Zambia, 430 farmers were included in the input support programme, which involves the distribution of tools, seeds and other supplies for agricultural activities. Lastly, UNHCR and the World Bank started pilot projects on insect farming in Malawi and Zimbabwe, which will be scaled up in 2023.

In southern Africa, the legal and policy environment for the economic integration of displaced persons remains challenging. Twelve countries maintain reservations to at least one of the following: right to work, freedom of movement, right to operate businesses, right to access land, and right to access bank accounts. UNHCR, in collaboration with SADC, will continue to advocate the implementation of the asylum action plan and the Global Refugee Forum pledges on employment and livelihoods. UNHCR will also encourage new commitments during the 2023 Global Refugee Forum. Country analyses of labour market access conducted by the International Labour Organization and UNHCR will help inform these efforts. Training-of-trainers courses were conducted on accountability to affected people to establish a core group and strengthen expertise on the concept and its mainstreaming. Operations will continue to work with communities to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse.

Securing solutions

In 2023, UNHCR will continue to support the implementation of solutions-related pledges made at the Global Refugee Forum. It will also encourage the implementation of the regional action plans on asylum and statelessness, jointly established with SADC and endorsed by its Member States in June 2022. In southern Africa, the political will to eradicate statelessness is strong, with most States having pledged to undertake a set of actions towards ending statelessness by 2024. In this regard, their priorities are the following: reliable qualitative and quantitative data; universal, free and accessible birth registration; legislative reform; accession to the statelessness conventions; and the establishment of statelessness determination procedures. The Congo (Republic of) has nearly finalized its accession to the statelessness conventions, and in 2022, Malawi organized a consultation workshop with key ministries on the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness where participants recommended accession to the treaty. Madagascar also drafted a nationality bill that aligns

with international standards for the prevention and reduction of statelessness; it is pending endorsement by the parliament.

As restrictions on movement due to COVID-19 eased in 2022, voluntary repatriation resumed and expanded. In 2022, over 18,300 people returned home, primarily to Burundi and the Central African Republic from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and to the Democratic Republic of the Congo from Angola and Zambia. Smaller-scale voluntary repatriation was also facilitated to the Democratic Republic of the Congo from the Congo (Republic of) and South Africa.

UNHCR identified over 56,000 refugees in need of resettlement in southern Africa, yet only 6,500 places were available for resettlement from the region in 2022. UNHCR submitted the cases of 6,700 refugees, surpassing its target and doubling the number of resettlement submissions compared to 2021. Departures also doubled to 2,700 individuals; however, this represented only 40 per cent of resettlement submissions. Due to slow processing by resettlement countries, the number of individuals whose resettlement cases are in the pipeline amounts to 14,000 and continues to grow. In 2023, advocacy with resettlement countries will be essential to accelerate departures. Complementary pathways will also be further explored.

C. Financial information

In October 2022, the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme approved the 2023 annual budget of \$471.5 million for the southern Africa region. This number represents an increase of approximately \$34.9 million when compared to the 2022 annual budget of \$436.5 million. The breakdown of the region's 2023 annual budget per impact area is as follows: attaining a favourable protection environment, \$172.7 million; realizing basic rights in safe environments, \$122.9 million; empowering communities and achieving gender equality, \$83.6 million; and securing solutions, \$92.3 million.

As of 7 February 2023, 8 per cent of the region's 2023 financial requirements were funded considering the indicative allocation of unearmarked and softly earmarked contributions.
