

SUPPORTING REFUGEES IN INDIA ACHIEVEMENTS 2023



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

| India

**SUPPORTING REFUGEES IN INDIA
ACHIEVEMENTS 2023**

Foreword



Ms. Areti Sianni

Chief of Mission UNHCR India and The Maldives

Amidst unprecedented challenges, writing on achievements feels counterintuitive. With the global count of displaced individuals having soared to a staggering 114 million at the end of 2023, this is a time for sober reflection. Although hope feels misplaced in the face of multiple humanitarian crises, hope is what we have to continue hoping for a better world.

During this period of turmoil and strife, we are witnessing on a daily basis the enduring spirit of resilience on the part of refugees and other displaced populations. We are also encouraged by the generosity and welcome of local communities extending their hand and opening their homes to people forced to flee.

Throughout 2023, guided by the vision of “atithi devo bhava”, working in partnership with the Government of India and local organizations, UNHCR provided protection, assistance, and solutions to some of the most vulnerable among the 46,000 refugees and asylum-seekers registered with the office in India.

Working closely with the authorities in Tamil Nadu, we also sought ways to ensure that solutions can be found to the protracted displacement of Sri Lankan refugees so that they can be supported to go home or to fully participate in the local communities they have lived for the last 40 years. Community engagement and empowerment, communication with communities and resilience building remained key priorities within the broader goal of enabling refugees to learn, work, earn and contribute to their full potential as active members of society.

Strong partnerships define what is possible. In December 2023, UNHCR convened the Global Refugee Forum (GRF) in Geneva. The Forum

provided an opportunity for States, UN agencies, civil society, the private sector and refugee communities to reaffirm their commitment to strengthening refugee protection worldwide, including through greater support to the countries hosting the largest refugee populations, often for protracted periods while refugees wait for durable solutions.

Over 1,600 pledges were made- including 43 multistakeholder pledges co-led by governments and other stakeholders- of which approximately 1,300 were in the form of financial, material, technical, policy, and other support. The Government of India was represented at the Global Refugee Forum bringing to the discussions experiences to date in receiving refugees.

Looking ahead to 2024, UNHCR’s vision for refugee protection and solutions in India is guided by three key principles: **Relevance:** ensuring our actions remain pertinent to the needs of refugees and the challenges facing receiving communities; **Response:** ensuring that are our actions are timely and grounded on sustainable programming; and **Partnership:** underpinned by continuous dialogue with the Government of India, public institutions, UN agencies, civil society and refugee communities and full engagement in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework so that refugees are not left behind.

In 2023, we commemorated the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, reminding us of the solemn recognition by the international community of the right to seek and enjoy asylum. In today’s world of continuous conflict, this right remains relevant more than ever for the millions of people forced to flee their homes.

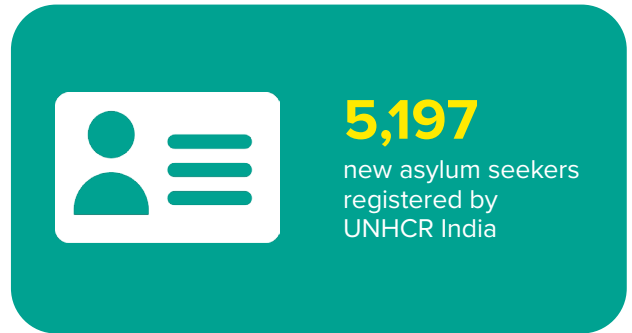
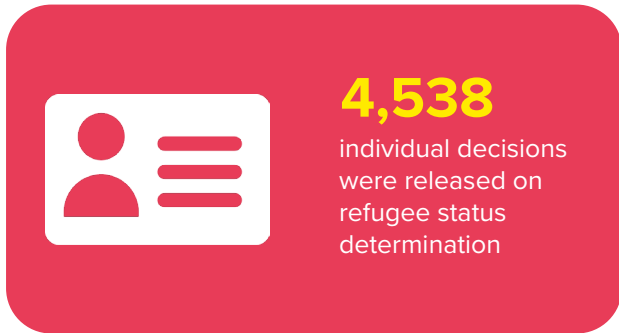
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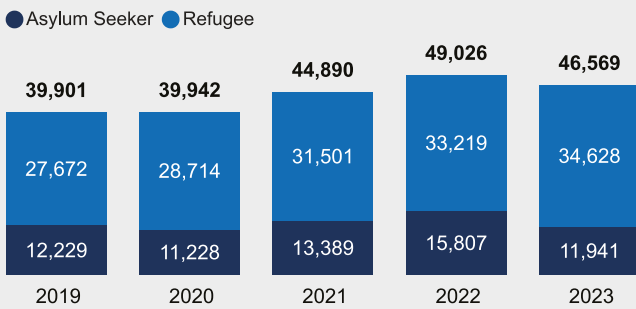


Operational Snapshot 2023

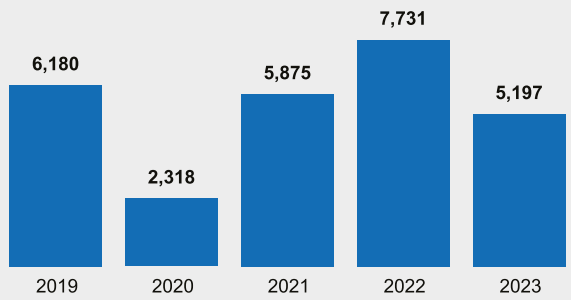
Refugees & Asylum Seekers - Trends



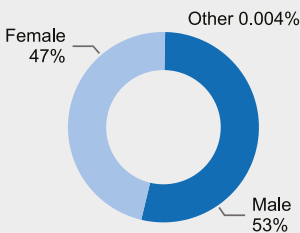
Refugees & Asylum Seekers registered with UNHCR at Year End : 2019-2023



UNHCR New Registrations : 2019-2023

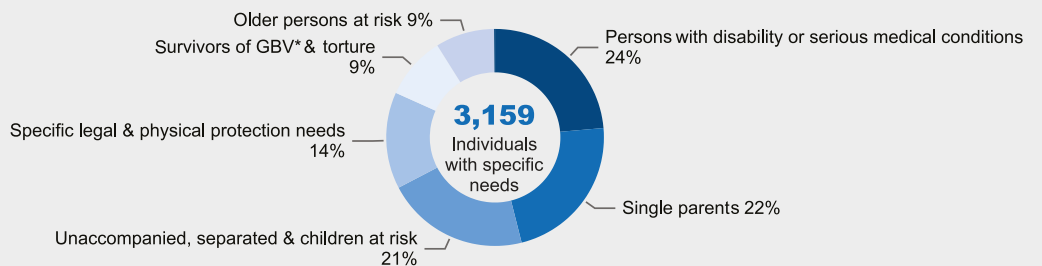


By Gender



*GBV - gender-based violence

By Specific Needs



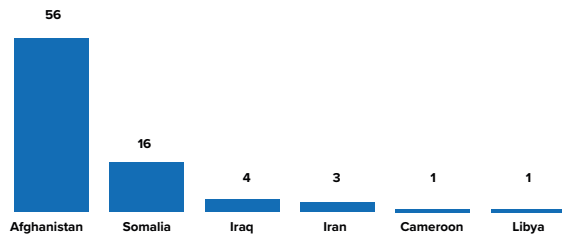
Resettlement Submissions and Departures



Voluntary Repatriation



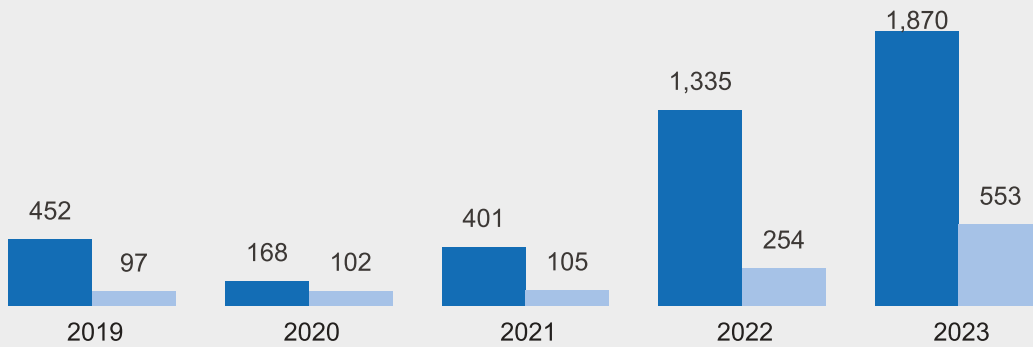
By Country of origin



326 individuals have voluntarily repatriated to Sri Lanka in addition to the above mentioned figures.

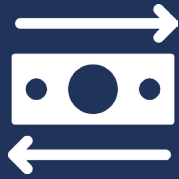
Trends - Individuals : 2019-2023

● Resettlement Submissions ● Resettlement Departures





A refugee entrepreneur running a tailoring shop in Hyderabad, Telangana ©UNHCR/Dhruv Maroo



6,959

individuals received cash assistance



4,022

students were enrolled in school and the National Institute of Open Schooling through NGO partners



17,266

individuals benefitted from 665 Gender Based Violence awareness workshops



1,079

refugees received livelihood training and assistance



3,563

families provided with emergency food assistance



21,744

individuals given access to health care including medical tests and treatment



UNHCR India staff updating biometrics during a community drive ©UNHCR

Registration, refugee status determination and documentation



UNHCR’s work on registration, refugee status determination and documentation helps ensure access to safety, protection and assistance for refugees and asylum seekers.

The process of registration enables States to know who has entered and is present in their territory. It further facilitates the early identification of individuals with specific needs within a population and their referral to an available protection response. In India, UNHCR conducts registration for asylum seekers from countries such as Myanmar, Afghanistan and other non-neighbouring countries.

Refugee Status Determination (RSD) is the legal or administrative process by which governments or UNHCR determine whether a person seeking international protection is considered a refugee under international, regional or national law. In India, UNHCR conducts RSD under its mandate. 4,538 individual RSD decisions were released.

In India, UNHCR issues documents to asylum seekers and refugees, enabling them to establish their identity and certify their status.





Health awareness camp conducted by UNHCR's partner Bal Raksha Bharat in Hyderabad. ©UNHCR/SCI

Ensuring access to health



UNHCR India works with the Government of India and NGO partners to ensure that refugees can access quality and affordable health services.

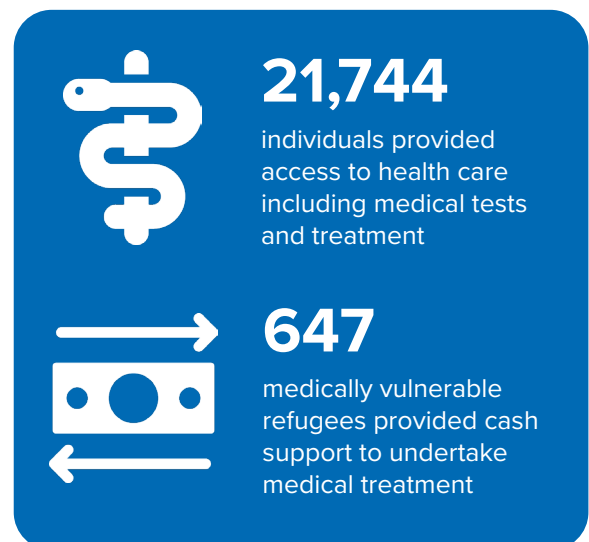
UNHCR's approach to ensuring equitable access to health care prioritizes the inclusion of refugees in national policies, and social welfare schemes.

The Government of India provides refugees and asylum seekers access to basic healthcare in government hospitals and primary healthcare facilities.

647 medically vulnerable refugees were provided cash support to undertake treatment in government hospitals. 308 individuals were provided with medical support and 21,744 individuals were supported with access to government healthcare facilities.

Providing mental health and psychosocial support to refugees and asylum seekers, and supporting public health is an integral part of UNHCR programmes. UNHCR through its partners trained 53 community healthcare workers to identify and manage mental health conditions and supported community led initiatives in this regard.

Families and caregivers are critical to children's safety and well-being. To help them protect and care for children, UNHCR extended psychosocial support and training to 93 caregivers, so that they are better prepared to help families meet their medical needs.





Children studying at a Child Friendly Learning Space (CFLS) in Hyderabad, Telangana. ©UNHCR/Dhruv Maroo

Enhancing access to quality education



UNHCR India strives to ensure sustained access to education for all refugee and asylum seekers and supports formal and informal programmes including language classes, tuition classes and accelerated education programmes.

Access to education remains one of the most effective ways of empowering and protecting refugee and asylum seeker communities and building resilience.

In India, refugees and asylum seekers have access to primary education under the inclusive Right to Education Act. However, refugee children still struggle to gain admission at secondary and tertiary levels.

UNHCR through its partners provided students with 'bridge classes' which are specialized remedial classes that bridge the learning gap that refugee students might have so that they can be integrated into the Indian public schooling system.



69

students received a scholarship from the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (DAFI) to enrol in or continue their university studies.



4,022

students were enrolled in school and the National Institute of Open Schooling through NGO partners.



3,869

children supported with bridge, tuition and language classes



108

children supported with early childhood education



A refugee youth with special needs at the community library in Delhi supported by UNHCR's partner BOSCO. ©UNHCR/Dhruv Maroo

Meeting basic needs



UNHCR uses Cash Based Interventions (CBI) as a preferred modality for delivering assistance in dignity and offering choice to refugees.

Cash is an effective tool to respond to immediate and basic needs, as well as a way to foster resilience and unlock the potential for self-reliance and inclusion.

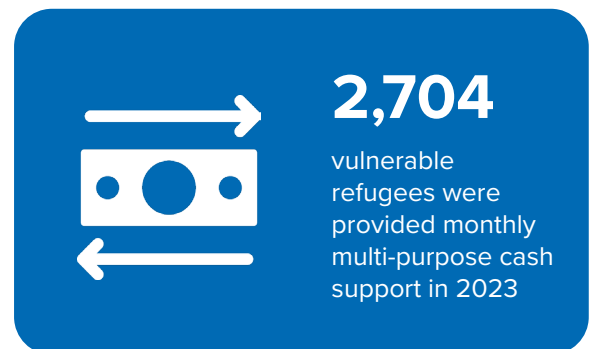
The flexibility that CBI offers makes it a more dignified form of assistance, giving individuals the ability to immediately prioritize and to choose how they can best meet their needs.

This includes persons at heightened risk, such as children, persons living with disabilities, elderly without effective family support, persons living with serious medical conditions, and women at risk.

882 households comprising 2,205 individuals were provided with one - time cash assistance to meet their basic needs or pay rent if at high risk of eviction. Refugees were also supported with multi-purpose cash grants to promote

behavioural change such as to encourage girl-child education and institutional delivery.

UNHCR and its partners assisted 227 refugees living with disabilities and 362 older refugees. Services offered included access to health, including assistive devices and medicines, counselling support, food, core relief items and cash assistance.



A young woman with glasses and a blue plaid blazer is smiling in a music room. The background features a black wall with white musical notes and a treble clef. There are green curtains on the left and a yellow stool on the right.

“

The essence of hope is never giving up, and I am living proof of that.

©UNHCR/BOSCO

Zam Muan Vung was forcibly displaced from Tedim, Chin State, in Myanmar due to violent conflict. Now, nestled amidst the hustle and bustle of Delhi, she has found a new place to call home.

Despite arriving in India with nothing but hope, Zam found strength in her sister and her new community. She now works as a part-time interpreter with UNHCR's partner BOSCO and has been attending university with the help of the DAFI scholarship.



GBV volunteers from the refugee community in Delhi discussing their ongoing initiatives and projects. ©UNHCR/Gaurav

Empowering women and girls

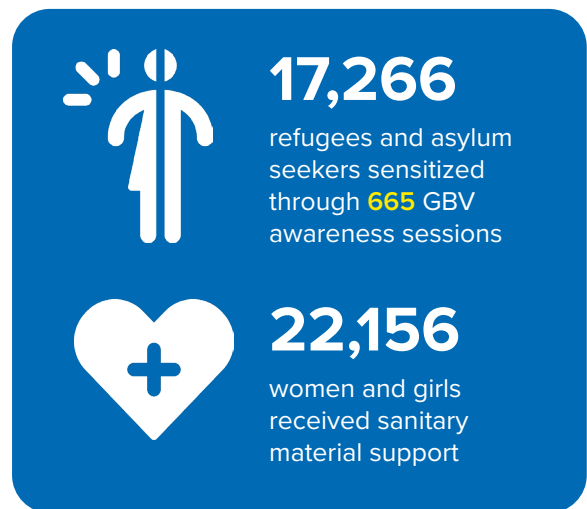


UNHCR works together with the Government of India, UN agencies, local and international NGOs and refugees to promote gender equality and prevent and respond to Gender-Based Violence (GBV).

Engaging with communities and promoting gender equality remains at the core of UNHCR's work, ensuring that the needs, capacities, knowledge and views of communities and individuals of different age, gender and other characteristics inform UNHCR's programmes.

In 2023, UNHCR worked to strengthen access to national social protection systems including access to gender-based violence prevention and provision of response services. UNHCR's response included psychosocial, health, security and legal assistance to survivors, and cash assistance when needed. Cash assistance enables women at risk and survivors of violence to access safe accommodation, food, and non-food items.

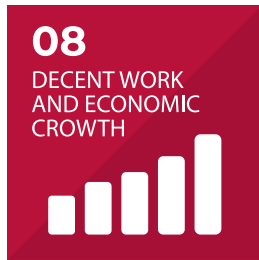
UNHCR also focuses on innovative gender transformative programming that empowers women and girls and engages men and boys as agents for change.





The group of Sri Lankan refugee women behind the restaurant 'Olaiputtu' in Chennai. ©UNHCR/Rama Dwivedi

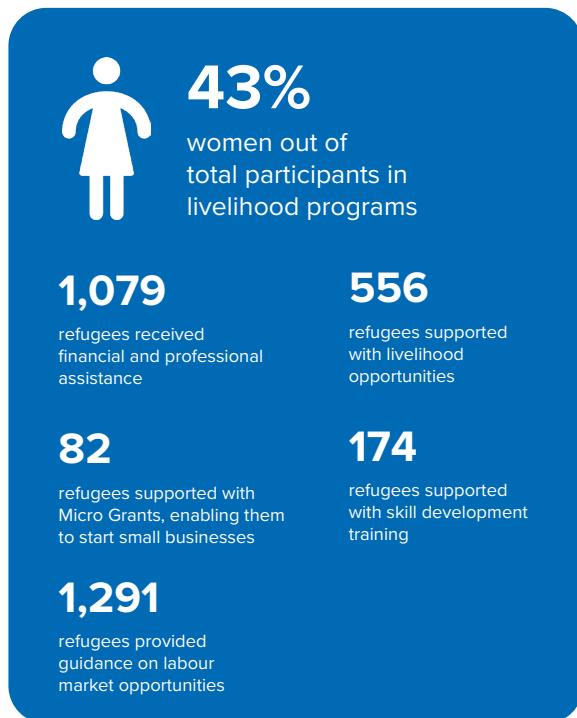
Fostering self-reliance



Being forced to flee does not rob an individual of their skills, capabilities and aspirations. UNHCR seeks to enable refugees to work, earn, learn and contribute to their full potential as active members of society.

In 2023, UNHCR supported livelihood development and economic inclusion for refugees. We advocated for the right of refugees to work and supported individuals in becoming more resilient and achieving self-reliance.

Refugees have skills that can be leveraged but they often require support to be market ready. UNHCR and its partners conducted training such as skills and entrepreneurship development. Additional support was offered to refugees to begin small businesses by providing micro-grants and professional assistance.





Hliya (front right), a Duolingo scholar, celebrating her university admission with her family in Delhi. ©UNHCR/Gaurav

Delivering on solutions



Finding solutions for refugees to live their lives in safety and dignity is a core part of UNHCR's work. Such solutions can include resettlement in a third country, voluntary return to the country of origin or local integration in the country of asylum.

- **Local integration**

In the cases where refugees are unable to return home, local settlement in the country of asylum can be a solution ending displacement.

- **Resettlement**

The transfer of refugees from a country in which they have sought protection to a third country that has agreed to admit them with permanent residence status.

- **Complementary pathways**

Safe and regulated avenues by which refugees may be admitted and stay in a country. These may include family reunification, scholarship, education and private or community sponsorship programmes, as well as labour mobility schemes.

- **Voluntary repatriation**

The free and informed return of refugees to their country of origin in safety and dignity.



553

individuals departed through resettlement programmes



1,741

refugees and asylum seekers departed through complementary pathways



18

Afghan refugees were locally integrated through naturalization



407

individuals returned home through voluntary repatriation

“

Home is being with my family, ensuring their safety and happiness.

©UNHCR/ADRA

S. Mahendran and his family fled to India in 2011, seeking refuge from the ethnic war in Sri Lanka. In India, with his family's future hanging in the balance, Mahendran was driven by his determination. As a part of a self-reliance project supported by UNHCR and ADRA, Mahendran received financial support and training using which, he was able to work towards opening his own shop.

Mahendran's hard work and perseverance eventually paid off. He is currently the proud owner of 'Rishara Woodworks and Hardware' in Trichy where he employs 14 additional workers.

Technical assistance and support for self-reliance & local integration provided by UNHCR in partnership with the Government of Tamil Nadu.



Legal Awareness Sessions conducted by the Government of Tamil Nadu on Citizenship pathways in Sri Lankan Tamil Rehabilitation Camps ©UNHCR



UNHCR Facilitated a Sri Lankan Refugee art exhibition funded by Government of Tamil Nadu ©UNHCR/Siva Sai Jeevanantham



LoU signing with SICCI to promote inclusion of Refugees in private sector. ©UNHCR/Siva Sai Jeevanantham

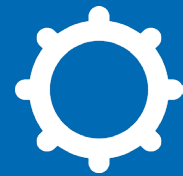


Facilitation of voluntary repatriation and technical assistance on local solutions.

01



02



Technical support for implementation

03



Self-reliance and local integration assistance.

Providing legal aid and access to justice

UNHCR works through a diverse range of partners to raise awareness and provide legal aid to refugees and asylum seekers as many are unable to access such services due to the associated costs, language barriers and other administrative and procedural difficulties.



275

sensitization sessions conducted on refugee protection for authorities and service providers



3,074

refugees and asylum seekers received free legal counselling



165

refugees and asylum seekers released from immigration detention



57

legal awareness sessions conducted



UNHCR's legal partner in India conducting legal awareness sessions for refugees and asylum seekers in Delhi. ©UNHCR/SLIC



UNHCR protection staff conducting community consultation meetings with refugees and asylum seekers in Mathura, Uttar Pradesh.
©UNHCR/Dhruv Maroo

Engaging with communities



UNHCR invests in community empowerment and participation with a focus on youth, women and persons with disability.

Outreach workers counselled asylum seekers and refugees on various matters such as services available, mental health, rights and responsibilities.

UNHCR continued its 24x7 Helpline including a toll-free number to respond more effectively to refugees' and asylum seekers' calls, for easier access to UNHCR services.

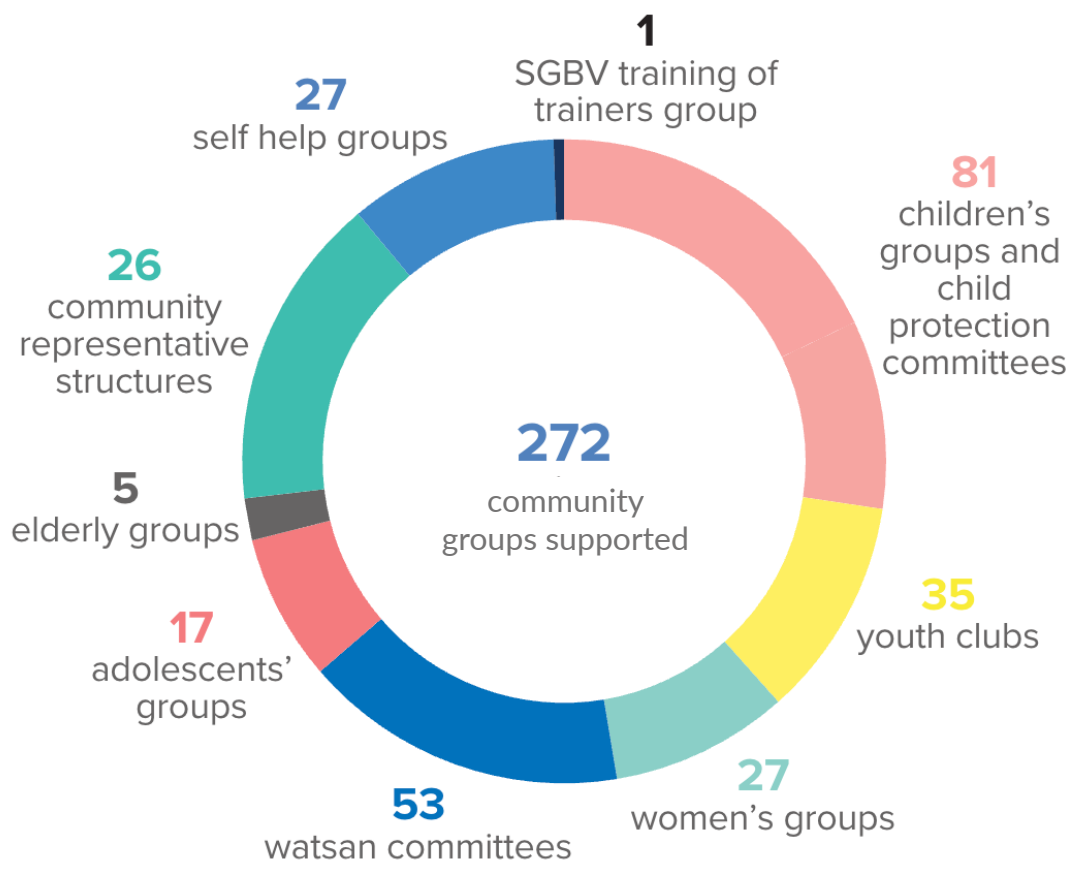
UNHCR and its partners also worked with various community groups that played a critical role in identifying and responding to the protection and assistance needs of refugees including those with specific needs.

Refugee community members worked with UNHCR partners to help refugees through services such as translation, information sharing about health and providing vital support to access local health facilities.

272 refugee community groups were supported with capacity building through 88 community engagement meetings on themes such as GBV, child protection, legal awareness and PSEA. Representative structures were supported to enhance community-based protection.



ACHIEVEMENTS 2023 SUPPORTING REFUGEES IN INDIA





UNHCR High Profile Supporter Anita Nair with school-going refugee and asylum seeker kids in a community settlement in Bangalore. ©UNHCR/Dhruv Maroo





UNHCR India, YuWaah and refugee youth in Delhi commemorating four years of engagement for youth empowerment . ©YuWaah/UNICEF

Public information and advocacy



UNHCR strives to foster solidarity and understanding between refugees and host communities by sensitizing and understanding the public, while mobilizing support through a variety of public education and awareness-raising activities.

UNHCR works with the Government of India, UN agencies, NGOs, CSOs, media, professional associations, academic institutions and the private sector in support of refugees and asylum seekers in India.

Through public engagements, workshops, campaigns and events, UNHCR advocates for the inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers in national services and increased public awareness on refugee issues.

KEY CAMPAIGNS AND INITIATIVES IN 2023 :

- Engaged with other UN agencies for joint thematic campaigns on World Refugee Day and 16 Days of Activism

- Coordinated UNHCR High Profile Supporter Anita Nair's visit to community settlements in Bangalore.
- Partnered with the Partition Museum in New Delhi on the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in collaboration with the UN Resident Coordinator's Office in India, to commemorate India's humanitarian legacy.
- Facilitated UNHCR High Profile Supporter Ricky Kej's live performance at the Nansen Awards ceremony.
- Continued to deliver a nine month Post Graduate Diploma course on Refugee law along with the Indian Society for International Law (ISIL).

“

We are also being reminded of our common humanity to ensure that refugees are treated with humanity.

©UNHCR

UNHCR India and the Partition Museum co-organized an event on the occasion of Human Rights Day to commemorate the 75th year of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

The event focused on India's commitment and generosity in providing asylum to people forced to flee through the years and garnered support and participation from the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, eminent experts, and refugee youth volunteers.



Sri Lankan refugee team at the Diplomatic Premier League Futsal tournament, co-organized by Ascott Limited and Yash Dental. ©UNHCR/Siva Sai Jeevanantham

Partnerships and funding

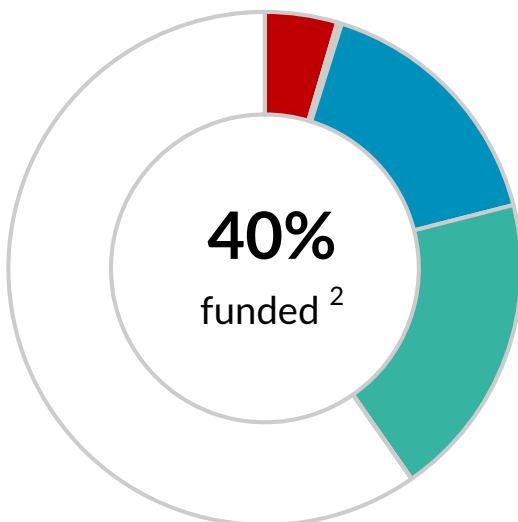
In 2023, UNHCR proactively engaged with the UN Country Team within the scope of Government of India (GoI) - UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) (2023-2027) across its five outcome groups: health; food security and nutrition; quality education; livelihoods and skill development; and youth and gender.

Key partners supporting UNHCR's work in India included: Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Global Initiatives; Kuwait Humanitarian Relief Society; Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations; Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration; and Virgin Atlantic Foundation.



FUNDING AS OF 31 DECEMBER 2023 - USD 21.7 million

Requested for India in 2023



- Tightly earmarked
- Earmarked
- Softly earmarked (indicative allocation)
- Unearmarked (indicative allocation)
- Funding gap (indicative)



©UNHCR/Dhruv Maroo

PRIORITIES FOR 2024



- Collaborate with the Government of India and stakeholders in expanding access to solutions.
- Advocate for access to territory for all people who flee war, conflict and persecution.
- Seek support from all stakeholders including development actors and private sector partners for increased engagement and inclusion of refugees in their programmes and initiatives.
- Ensure that every refugee child has access to education and is equipped with tools and skills to learn and develop.
- Enable refugees to develop skills and knowledge, become self-reliant and support themselves.
- Support refugees, particularly women, to participate in decision-making processes that affect them.
- Leverage best practices from India on solutions for Sri Lankan refugees in support of responses to end displacement in different regions of the world.

Acknowledgements

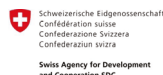
UNHCR India works on the protection of refugees and asylum-seekers in partnership with:

- **The Government of India and relevant public institutions**
- **United Nations (UN):** UNHCR is a member of the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) and contributes to the India-United Nations Sustainable Development Framework (UNSDF) for 2023-2027.
- **Formal partnership agreements with eight national NGOs:** ActionAid (AA), Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), Bosco Organization for Social Concern and Operation (BOSCO), Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI), Development and Justice Initiative (DAJI), Gandhi National Memorial Society (GNMS), and Socio-Legal Information Centre (SLIC).



SUPPORTING THE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE IN INDIA

UNHCR is grateful for contributions by:





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For more information contact

Rama Dwivedi
Assistant External Relations Officer
dwivedir@unhcr.org

UNHCR India www.unhcr.org/en-in/
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