

SETTLEMENT AND SHELTER

OVERVIEW OF UNHCR SETTLEMENT AND SHELTER PROGRAMMES 2024



\$393 million of expenditure spent against a budget of **\$1.104 billion** for Shelter and Settlement



9.4% of shelters provided are considered **environmentally friendly** or sustainable.



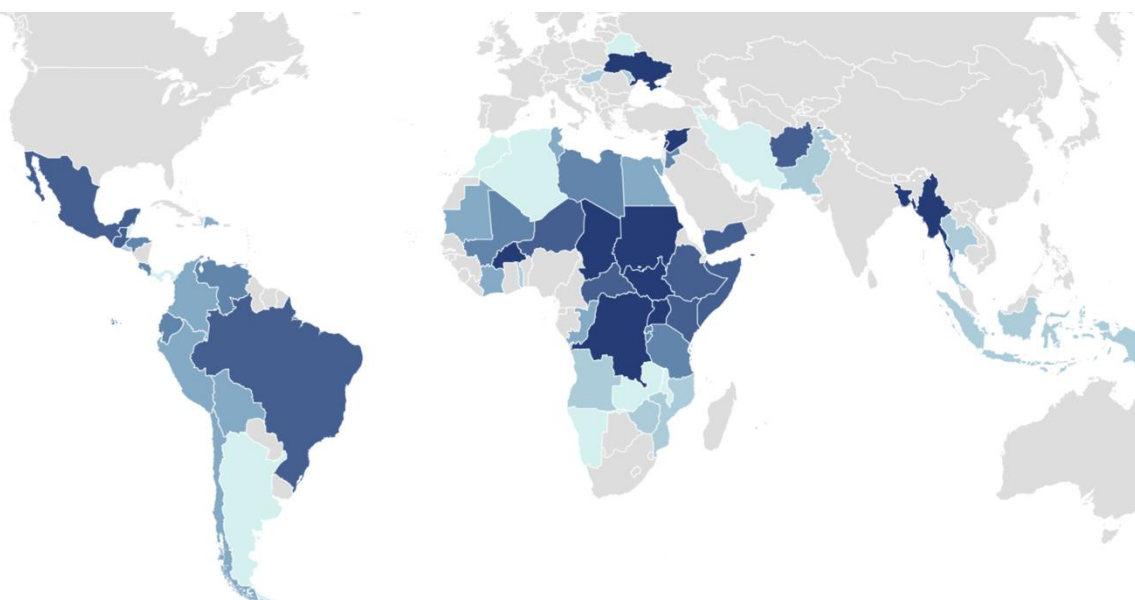
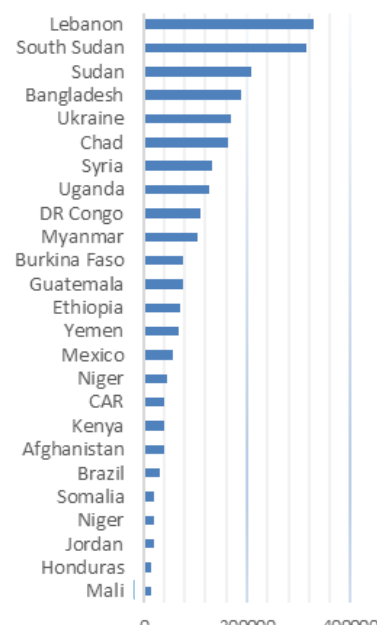
The largest UNHCR Shelter responses are in **South Sudan, Sudan, Lebanon, Bangladesh, Ukraine**



47% of those receiving assistance are **refugees**, while **31%** are **IDPs**, the rest are **Returnees, HC and others of concern**.

UNHCR Operations with a Shelter Programme

Top 20 Countries providing Shelter support for most people



Number of People Assisted: ■ < 652 ■ 652–2021 ■ 2021–7229 ■ 7229–20788 ■ 20788–77051 ■ ≥ 77051

The report provides an overview of Settlement and Shelter Programs in the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR's) operations. It highlights key achievements in UNHCR's global efforts to ensure refugees and other forcibly displaced people have adequate access to adequate shelter and housing.

Introduction – 2024 in Figures

In 2024, UNHCR's Settlement and Shelter interventions reached 2.64 million forcibly displaced people across 66 countries. From responding to sudden emergencies to planning sustainable settlements, UNHCR's work centered on ensuring access to safe settlements and dignified shelter and housing, while building resilience in some of the world's most vulnerable communities. The year was marked by strategic advances in sustainability, disaster risk reduction, and integration with host communities—all while navigating persistent challenges of displacement, climate change, and funding shortfalls.

Emergency Shelter Support

In context of massive displacement, UNHCR provided immediate emergency shelter to thousands. **Ukraine** remained one of the largest recipients of emergency kits, with 70,865 distributed to people affected by conflict and natural disasters. In **Afghanistan**, more than 9,600 individuals received tents after earthquakes and floods.

Sudan's war-torn context saw more than 200,000 people supported through emergency shelter kits, tents, and communal shelter construction. Meanwhile, Thailand's timely distribution of tarpaulins and solar lanterns after fire and storm events enabled vulnerable refugee households to recover with dignity. In **Lebanon**, in response to the IDP crisis, UNHCR improved conditions in 259 collective sites hosting approximately 33,000 individuals—primarily Lebanese IDPs—through repairs, weatherproofing, partition installations, and light WASH interventions, to enhance access to essential services while ensuring privacy, protection, and dignity.

Transitional & Durable Shelter Support

Transitional and durable shelters served as the basis for durable solutions in many protracted displacement contexts. Across East Africa, UNHCR constructed thousands of transitional shelters: 2,672 in **Kenya**, 1,812 rehabilitated units in **Rwanda**, and over 2,500 in **Ethiopia**. **Durable shelters** in **South Sudan**, **Somalia**, and **Burundi** integrated climate-adaptive designs to withstand harsh weather and reduce the need for frequent maintenance.

In **Somalia**, transitional and durable shelters featured raised floors and plinth walls to prevent flood damage. Meanwhile, community consultations and construction skills training promoted ownership and improved the relevance of shelter designs. In **Bangladesh**, double-story shelter prototypes were piloted to address space constraints and advocate for more durable solutions.

The shift toward longer term, sustainable housing **continues to face obstacles** such as limited land access, budget constraints, and supply chain disruptions. Nevertheless, UNHCR remains committed to scaling up durable shelter interventions and advocating for policy changes that enable investment in sustainable shelter.



In Bangladesh, double-story shelter prototypes were piloted to address space constraints.

Cash for Shelter Assistance

Cash-based interventions (CBIs) emerged as a cornerstone of UNHCR's shelter support in 2024, offering flexibility and choice to displaced families while stimulating local economies. In **Afghanistan**, over 600 shelter repair projects were funded through CBI, empowering 4,700 individuals to restore their homes after disasters. Similarly, in **Kenya**, as part of the overall Kalobeyi settlement plan, 112 permanent shelters were constructed using a CBI model, allowing beneficiaries to participate directly in procurement and decision-making, increasing local ownership and sustainability. Cash for emergency shelter kit is also one of the shelter response provided during emergencies for example Uganda.

In **Lebanon**, cash-for-rent programmes supported more than 90,000 displaced individuals, providing a vital lifeline amid increasing evictions and a worsening economic climate. UNHCR's assistance enabled families to maintain access to dignified shelter despite escalating housing costs. Cash for rent programmes are also provided to Ukraine, Moldova, Jordan Egypt and Syria. These interventions were often coupled with light repairs and utility subsidies, easing the financial burden on both refugee and host communities.

Sustainable Shelter Interventions

UNHCR's commitment to sustainability in 2024 was reflected in the growing emphasis on **durable, climate-adapted shelter designs** and settlement planning that respects environmental constraints and enhances long-term livability. The [Shelter and Sustainability Assessment Tool](#), developed by the [Geneva Technical Hub](#), provided field operations with new ways to evaluate shelter models based on durability, climate compatibility, and environmental impact, guiding more sustainable choices across regions, environmental considerations are now integral to UNHCR's shelter assessments. In **Somalia**, transitional and durable shelters were elevated with **raised floors and plinth walls** to withstand seasonal floods, a recurring risk in many parts of the country. Beneficiaries were trained in shelter construction and maintenance to enhance sustainability

and promote ownership.

In **Burundi**, new shelters at Musenyi incorporated more durable construction methods, reducing the need for constant repairs and pressure on local forest resources. In **Kenya**, permanent shelters built through community-managed cash interventions adopted **flood-resistant designs** and better roofing to increase resilience to the long rainy season.

Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Action

In 2024, UNHCR prioritized reducing the vulnerability of displacement sites to climate-related hazards, particularly flooding, landslides, and extreme weather. Operations increasingly integrated disaster risk reduction into settlement planning and shelter design. In **Bangladesh**, the Integrated Settlement Planning Approach was expanded across several camps to optimize land use, minimize flood risk, and incorporate firebreaks and drainage systems. Notably, stilt shelters were constructed in flood-prone areas of Camp 26 to elevate housing above seasonal water levels, helping prevent damage during monsoons. In Camp 5, the rapid development of a site plan within 72 hours of a devastating fire marked the first full integration of risk-informed planning in emergency response.

In **Sudan**, where flat terrain and seasonal rains contribute to widespread flooding, UNHCR implemented desilting of drainage canals, constructed dykes and culverts, and trained displaced communities in disaster preparedness. These physical and capacity-building measures directly protected thousands of households from recurrent flood emergencies.

Further advancing environmental responsibility, [the Refugee Environmental Protection \(REP\) Fund](#) progressed its carbon-financed reforestation and clean cooking initiatives, with pilot projects set to begin in Uganda and Rwanda. These are expected to reach tens of thousands of households and restore up to 85,000 hectares of degraded land.

In **South Sudan**, dyke reinforcement along the Nile basin safeguarded shelter and infrastructure for over 300,000 people. Site selection and development in flood-prone regions increasingly emphasized elevated ground and natural barriers to water flow. Efforts to incorporate nature-based solutions into settlement planning were evident across regions. Such interventions helped to secure land for returnees and support peaceful coexistence with host communities. In **Pakistan**, watershed restoration and reforestation initiatives complemented settlement development by improving water retention and reducing erosion risks. These measures supported the integrity of shelters and improved overall environmental sustainability.

Under the [Geneva Technical Hub \(GTH\)](#), and in partnership with ETH Zurich, in 2024 the [Flood Risk Mitigation Toolbox](#) was finalized and field-tested. It includes a [compendium of risk mitigation measures](#), a [GIS tool](#) and a [participatory risk mapping methodology](#). A 2-week field mission to perform a [pilot study](#) during the rainy season in the Republic of Congo helped to develop

a flood mitigation strategy for the town of Bétou, where the 15 Avril site houses 6,400 refugees.

Settlement Planning and Development

UNHCR continued its commitment to more integrated, inclusive settlement planning. In **Bangladesh**, the Integrated Settlement Planning Approach transformed the way settlements are organized—prioritizing protection, fire safety, and flood resilience.

In **Ethiopia**, the Aftit settlement showcased forward-thinking planning, with 169 sustainable shelters constructed and key infrastructure like roads, communal shelters, and transit zones developed to support over 920 households.

Iraq launched a pilot camp-to-neighbourhood transformation initiative, reflecting growing collaboration with local authorities to integrate refugees into public service frameworks. Settlement planning also focused on mobility and access. In **Rwanda and Jordan**, roads were upgraded to improve service delivery and enable year-round access, particularly in flood-prone areas.



Chad. Cameroonian refugees impacted by flood waters at Guilmei site. ©UNHCR/Andrew McConnell



Recycled Plastic Doors: transforming plastic waste from plastic sheets in informal settlements , Lebanon

Innovation and Research

In 2024, the **3-year Eco-design Tarpaulin Project, in collaboration with ICRC and IFRC**, has concluded. Following field tests, technical specifications were improved for 1.8 million tarpaulins distributed annually to enhance sustainability. The new design reduces CO2 emissions by 8,000 tones and plastic use by 1 million kg yearly. It is 14% lighter, includes 15% recycled PE, and offers a longer lifespan without compromising quality. Cost savings include a 20–30% lower unit price and 10% less in transport costs. The updated tarpaulin will feature in future Frame Agreements and global stockpiles by 2025.

At the heart of these efforts was the [Geneva Technical Hub \(GTH\)](#), which continued to provide cutting-edge tools and technical guidance to field operations. Notably, the [Shelter and Sustainability Assessment Tool](#), launched in 2023, saw widespread adoption with over 40 completed assessments globally.

Case Study

Repurposing Plastic Waste in Informal Settlements – Lebanon

In Lebanon’s informal settlements, years of plastic sheet distributions for weatherproofing led to environmental strain, with torn sheets piling up and adding to the solid waste collection challenges. In 2023, UNHCR launched a pilot project to recycle this waste into shelter doors. Funded by the UNHCR Environment and Climate Action Innovation Fund, the initiative aimed to produce 300 doors using extrusion and compression techniques on old tarpaulin sheets. The recycled doors are more cost-effective; priced at \$32 compared to \$45 for timber options, they offer a ten-year lifespan, reducing the need for frequent replacements. The project improves privacy, reduces waste, and upgrades shelter conditions for displaced families. With over 400,000 m² of plastic distributed annually, it has strong potential to scale into a circular system that turns plastic waste into sustainable shelter materials.

These entries indicated the different shelter types used around the world, with an equal distribution of emergency, transitional and durable shelters. The East and Horn of Africa has the highest number of the data entries (15), followed by Asia and Pacific (12). The following designs have highest habitability and technical performance: Dignified Shelter in Syria's Dar Alkiram camp; the Melkadida Transitional Bamboo Shelter, the HCB Wall Durable Shelter, and the Emergency Standalone Shelter in Ethiopia; as well as the Permanent Rakhine Shelter and semi-permanent shelters in Myanmar, among others.

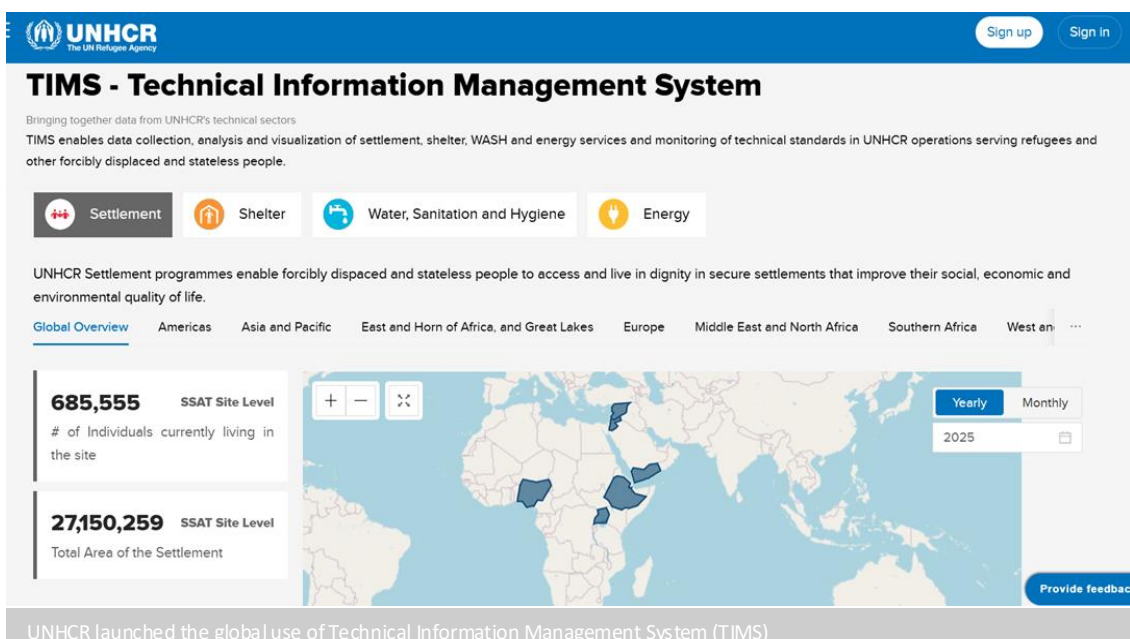
[Guidelines for integrating nature-based solutions in settlement planning](#) was published mid year. The research-based guide was developed in an academic partnership facilitated by GTH, UNHCR, SDC and the Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL). The guideline is intended to support efforts to integrate nature-based solutions (NBS) into current settlement planning, development and management practices. It provides a general overview of NBS and technical guidance regarding integration of particular forms of NBS into settlements. This information can support initial considerations about potential integration of NBS into settlement planning prior to detailed assessments and design.

Technical Information Management System (TIMS)

UNHCR launched the global use of [Technical Information Management System \(TIMS\)](#). TIMS is designed to store, visualize and analyze UNHCR's data on Shelter, Settlement, Energy and WASH programmes in one single platform, which will soon become a key global tool for UNHCR's monitoring of technical activities.

Following the user test in Kakuma-Kenya and Cox's Bazar-Bangladesh, UNHCR rolled out key functions of TIMS globally during 2024, with familiarization sessions for all country operations and regional bureaus. The initial rollout step focused on the Shelter and Settlement Assessment Tool (SSAT), site and shelter level surveys, followed by feedback sessions. In 2025, rollout sessions will continue to be held for more operations, along with feedback and one on one support sessions with HQ.

TIMS also hosts a range of other applications and tools including the Shelter and Settlement Sustainability tool, The Greenhouse Gas Emissions Calculator Tool, and The Flood Risk Mitigation Toolbox.



Human Settlements

Human Settlements refer to urban and rural areas designed and managed to promote climate resilience, environmental sustainability, social inclusion, and community participation. This approach integrates key elements such as urban planning, access to basic services and housing, enabling policies, livelihoods, and climate action. The goal is to create safe, livable, and environmentally responsible communities that improve quality of life for both displaced and host populations. A key focus is transitioning from temporary camps to more sustainable, integrated settlements—like municipalities or planned urban areas—fostering long-term resilience and social cohesion.

Through a catalytic role, UNHCR supports local actors and partner to develop settlements that meet minimum living conditions through strengthened infrastructure and services—such as shelter, water, sanitation, renewable energy, waste management, communal spaces, land for livelihoods, and access to markets, education, and healthcare.

2024 Highlights – Human Settlements Multistakeholder GRF Pledge

- **July:** UNHCR and UN-Habitat co-hosted a webinar on transitioning refugee camps into sustainable municipalities, showcasing Kenya’s experience and inspiring global action on refugee inclusion.
- **September:** At the 3rd Informal Briefing on the Global Compact on Refugees, Ethiopia shared progress on the Multistakeholder Pledge, highlighting efforts to build sustainable and inclusive human settlements.
- **November:** At the 12th World Urban Forum in Cairo, under the theme of “Loss of Home”, UNHCR highlighted the evolving nature of displacement and the importance of inclusive, locally driven solutions. Senior UNHCR officials joined high-level panels, emphasizing collaboration with governments and partners to address forced displacement.
- **December:** The inaugural roundtable of the Pledge brought together 100+ participants to share progress, challenges, and ideas on pledge implementation, including representatives from Ethiopia, Mauritania, Mozambique, South Sudan, Switzerland, and UN-Habitat, and broad representation from governments, UN agencies, and donors.



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