



## Emergency Response Mechanism

*A flexible, predictable, and rapid funding mechanism for global emergency response*

The UNHCR Emergency Response Mechanism is a life-saving financial mechanism that enables fast and effective responses to humanitarian crises.

It relies on flexible donor commitments to maintain a steady pipeline of funding to support emergency response capacity in UNHCR's field operations.

### Why it matters

Seventy-five years after its founding, UNHCR continues to place emergency response at the heart of its mandate to protect people forced to flee. Yet, despite advances in early warning systems, risk analysis and contingency planning, emergencies can and do erupt without notice. The availability of **pre-positioned funds** ensures that UNHCR can take critical preparedness measures and **respond within 72 hours** to deliver protection and relief to forcibly displaced people without delay.

### What it supports

The **Emergency Response Mechanism** provides allocations of flexible funding to UNHCR's field operations in order to undertake **preparedness actions** in emergency-prone contexts and **emergency response** to new and escalating conflicts, recurring disasters – including natural hazards – and climate change-related impacts affecting forcibly displaced people.

### How it works

Funded by public and private donors throughout the year, the Mechanism can activate preparedness and initiate humanitarian responses within **72 hours** of a UNHCR **emergency declaration**. A board comprised of UNHCR senior leadership allocates resources based on urgency, humanitarian impact, and operational feasibility, allowing:

- **Rapid deployment** of resources as emergencies unfold.
- **Greater predictability** for high-risk contexts before crises escalate.
- **A reliable pool of funding** that is flexible and responsive to urgent humanitarian needs.

Donor contributions are **centrally held and disbursed via allocations** to country operations to support a range of activities for refugees and people forced to flee, including protection interventions, registration and life-saving assistance such as financial aid and the provision of core relief items. They also fund shelter and settlement responses where needed. This complements support to UNHCR's operational budget outlined in the annual Global Appeal, which includes longer-term support for protection, access to basic services and durable solutions.

If alternative resources become available to country operations, funds are expected to be replenished to the Mechanism, enabling their use in future emergency responses.

### How donors can make a difference

- **Direct field impact:** 100% of contributions go directly to country-level emergency preparedness and response – not to HQ or global programme costs.
- **Rapid response:** Pre-positioned funds allow for quick life-saving response within 72 hours.
- **Multiple impact:** As funds can be replenished, maintaining the Mechanism at a healthy level ensures resources are always ready for the next emergency response.

Results will be reported through:

- **The Global Report**, UNHCR's annual results publication with contribution and expenditure data.

- **Flexible Funding Report**, an annual report with data on the use of unearmarked and softly earmarked funding.
- **Annual review on global emergency response**, released at the start of each calendar year, covering the previous year with case studies.
- **Impact reports**, detailing UNHCR's response to individual emergencies with narrative updates.
- **Interactive dashboards**, highlighting how flexible funding is allocated throughout the year.

### What an emergency declaration means

UNHCR issues a formal emergency declaration, signaling the need for an urgent and exceptional response, when the scale and speed of a crisis exceed UNHCR's and local authorities' capacity to respond effectively. This emergency declaration activates internal protocols that mobilize further support and resources.

In 2025, UNHCR has managed **24 active emergency declarations across 16 countries**, including 10 new emergencies declared this year and 14 ongoing crises from 2024. Of these, seven were classified at Level 1 emergencies, 10 as Level 2 and 7 as Level 3 –the highest emergency designation.

- **Emergency Level 1: Proactive preparedness and initial response**  
 UNHCR declares a level 1 emergency when there is an imminent risk of a displacement crisis or when a crisis is already unfolding. This indicates that UNHCR is urgently stepping up preparedness efforts or launching an initial response at the country level.
- **Emergency Level 2: Stepped-up regional support**  
 UNHCR declares a level 2 emergency in a rapidly evolving humanitarian situation. It indicates that the UNHCR country operation requires additional support and resources from the regional bureau to be able to respond effectively to the needs of forcibly displaced people.
- **Emergency Level 3: Whole-of-UNHCR response**  
 UNHCR declares a level 3 emergency in exceptionally serious situations in which the scale, pace, complexity and consequences of the crisis exceed the capacity of the country operation and regional bureau to respond. It indicates that a whole-of-UNHCR response is necessary to address the widespread and urgent needs of people forced to flee.

### Examples of UNHCR's response to emergencies in 2025



For more info, read: [UNHCR's 2025 impact report: Response to new emergencies and protracted crises](#)