

Statement to the 77th session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme

Introductory Remarks by Assistant High Commissioner for Operations

Assembly Hall, Palais des Nations

14 October 2026

Mister Chair,
High Commissioner,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

This is my first Executive Committee as Assistant High Commissioner for Operations.

Over the past days, I have listened carefully to your statements. Your perspectives differ, and so do your priorities. But one conviction runs through them all: no one forced to flee, and no stateless person, should be denied safety, dignity or hope.

That conviction is now being tested. Displacement is at record levels. The resources to respond are unfortunately not.

I also heard strong words of encouragement and support for UNHCR, its mission, its work.

UNHCR can only show up for people forced to flee because you show up too: as hosts, as donors and as partners in responsibility-sharing. Thank you.

And a particular word of thanks to Switzerland, our host country here in Geneva, for its long-standing support to UNHCR.

Distinguished delegates,

Today I want to explain how we are honouring the trust you place in us: how we plan to use the resources you entrust to us, how we hold ourselves to account, and how we are changing to adapt to a fast-evolving world.

As the High Commissioner set out on Monday, we are building on the Independent Management Review to become simpler, more focused and more effective, as part of the wider transformation of the UN and the humanitarian system.

As a field-oriented organization, the starting point for the changes is an answer to one question: how can we deliver better on the ground for the people we serve? We have therefore reviewed every country presence against protection needs, operational risk and the value of our direct role. On that basis, we are proposing changes to 31 presences, moving to lighter models where national systems are strong, with protection safeguards in place and the flexibility to scale back up if needed.

At the same time, we are strategically streamlining regional structures and Headquarters to become leaner and less top-heavy, so that authority sits closer to operations. We are consolidating more transactional functions in Global Shared Services. We are bringing

technology, data and artificial intelligence into one structure. And we are moving to a lighter, more locally anchored private sector partnership model. Much of this is still being designed and costed, and we will keep you closely engaged as we move forward.

In all of this, our transformation is guided by two imperatives: stabilization and frugality.

Stabilization means ensuring that UNHCR remains sustainable and focused on its core mandate.

Frugality means exercising discipline in how we use every resource we receive.

Chair, distinguished delegates,

The financial reality is stark.

As of 9 October, UNHCR has received 35 per cent of the funding required for 2026. As a result, some 8.3 million people risk losing access to essential support this year alone.

We are trying to prioritize and doing more – or at least better – with less. But there is a limit to what we can achieve with these efforts. As the Assistant High Commissioner for Protection noted earlier, in some of the world's largest displacement crises, funding has fallen to levels at which protection systems and services are beginning to erode.

UNHCR has already taken difficult measures to adapt. We have drastically reduced our workforce, closed offices, and tightened financial controls. In addition, our enabling functions generated USD 135 million in measured benefits in 2025 alone, including proceeds from asset sales, cost savings and quantified efficiency gains. But these measures alone cannot close the gap.

Greater efficiency is also one of our goals as we work closer than ever before with the rest of the UN system. Under the Humanitarian Reset, we will keep investing in their capacity so that support stays close to the people we serve. At the same time, as part of UN80, we are working with WFP, UNICEF, IOM, UNDP, and others to share services, connect our data and integrate supply chains, so that together we deliver faster and at lower cost.

The quality of funding matters as much as its volume. Our funding base is broader than at any time in the past decade, in part due to the massive increase in private sector support representing more than 20 per cent of funds available this year.

But we still very much rely on around 20 public donors who each give more than USD 20 million a year. We need more Member States to step up, even with modest amounts at first.

We also need more flexibility. Flexible funding is essential because we can allocate and reallocate it as emergencies strike, and to overlooked crises. That is why we are concerned that the proportion of tightly earmarked funding is continuing to increase: from 19 per cent in 2022 to 52 per cent of what we have received so far this year.

I therefore appeal not only for more support, but for support that comes earlier, more predictably and as flexibly as your systems allow.

Distinguished delegates,

The proposed programme budget for 2027 is USD 7.1 billion, a reduction of 16 per cent compared to the current 2026 budget.

Let me be very clear: This reduction does not reflect a decline in global needs.

By the end of 2027, the number of refugees, internally displaced and stateless people, and others within UNHCR's concern, is projected to reach approximately 131 million.

Our budget must remain a needs-driven: it sets out what is needed, based on assessed protection and assistance requirements. How much of it we can implement depends on the funding we receive.

What has changed is how we respond. We are concentrating our resources where we think our protection mandate and comparative advantage are strongest.

While we preserve and protect our capacity to deliver life-saving humanitarian assistance and respond to a growing number of complex emergencies, we are also exploring opportunities to build and expand partnerships to transition to more targeted support, working more with (and I would say through) governments, national systems and development partners.

Most refugees are hosted by countries with far fewer resources, many of which have opened their schools, health systems and labour markets despite their own pressures. Their generosity deserves more than our thanks. It deserves predictable support.

Let me be very clear: inclusion is not a transfer of responsibility to host countries. It shouldn't be. It works only with predictable international support and genuine responsibility-sharing, and where national capacities allow.

The budget is informed by the ongoing consultations on new Strategic Directions that all delegations are contributing to, starting in 2027 and reflects the 50by35 vision.

The budget numbers fully reflect this approach. Protection and durable solutions are taking up a larger share of the budget, even as the overall envelope declines. In addition to voluntary return, resettlement and complementary pathways, we are promoting refugees' inclusion in national services and opportunities for self-reliance. Under 50by35, simply reducing assistance does not count as progress. Progress means refugees becoming genuinely more self-reliant or reaching a durable solution.

Our commitment to local and national partners is long-standing, and we are deepening it. Localization is more than channeling funds through local organization. Is about listening and empowering refugees and host communities. Our budget also reflects that.

We will also continue to review, in consultation with you, how we finance our work, including a range of funding modalities, including innovative financing vehicles and our 6.5 per cent indirect support cost.

We look forward to continued dialogue with Member States about the choices we make, the risks they carry and the results they produce.

Chair, distinguished delegates,

Let me turn to our workforce, the most visible example of the adjustments our organization has been forced to make and, at the same time, our biggest asset.

Since 2024, our workforce has fallen from nearly 20,000 to just under 12,000, a reduction of around 40 per cent. This has been a painful adjustment to a very different financial reality.

Despite the reductions, we remain a field-based organization. 88 per cent of our personnel continue to serve outside headquarters, and around 95 per cent of our protection and solutions capacity remains in field operations. We have preserved our emergency response capacity. And the latest figures indicate that gender and geographic representation have remained stable despite this contraction and changes.

Looking ahead, our workforce model must evolve alongside our operating model. Our aim is to stabilize the organization during 2027. As we implement our strategic directions, we are accelerating the shift towards a more skills-based workforce model, one that allows us to better identify, deploy and develop the critical capacities required to deliver our mandate in a rapidly changing environment. Alongside our traditional strengths in protection and emergency response, we will need stronger, more flexible capacity in leveraging partnerships, public policy, systems strengthening, data and technology. The objective is a workforce that is more sustainable and better equipped for the challenges ahead.

And to our colleagues, let me express my sincere appreciation: to those who have left, for years of service often in the hardest places, and to those who remain, who have continued to serve through a long period of uncertainty, often with smaller teams and greater responsibilities. Their professionalism, resilience and unwavering commitment have enabled the organization to continue delivering on its important mandate despite the pressures. As we move from adjustment to stabilization, our priority is to provide greater certainty about the future and support the colleagues who carry our mandate every day, everywhere.

Distinguished delegates,

A more focused organization must also be a more accountable organization.

Accountability starts at the top. The High Commissioner launched an internal integrity action plan in the first quarter of his mandate, and he has led concrete progress in implementing oversight recommendations and following up on evaluations, including a 2026 baseline to track progress. We are also creating a Core Risk Committee, made up of the Senior Executive Team, to reinforce enterprise risk management and oversight.

We are pleased that UNHCR received an unqualified audit opinion for 2025, a strong affirmation of sound financial stewardship during an exceptionally challenging period.

I would like to thank the Board of Auditors, the Office of Internal Oversight Services, the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee, the Inspector General's Office and our Evaluation Office for their independent review, advice, recommendations and investigations, which help us ensure accountability and deliver better every day. You will hear more from them later in the agenda.

Chair, distinguished delegates,

UNHCR is changing. How we work, with whom we work. More partnerships, more agility, more focus.

But our purpose remains unchanged: protecting people forced to flee and accompanying and empowering them to move towards safety, dignity and solutions.

Needs are not shrinking. The question before us is how we meet them with fewer resources, without losing the protection on which millions depend.

The budget before you is our honest answer to that question. It starts from need. It is honest about the choices we face. And it is open to your scrutiny.

I respectfully invite the Executive Committee to approve it today.

At the outset, I said that UNHCR can show up because you show up. On the road to the High Commissioner's Dialogue in December and the Global Refugee Forum next year, we will need you to keep showing up: with hosting refugees, with flexible funding, with responsibility-sharing and with your trust.

We will work every day, rest assured, to earn it.

Thank you.