

Global Programmes
Remarks by the Director of Emergency and Programme Support,
Mr. Ayaki Ito
95th Standing Committee
24-26 March 2026

Chair, Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

As we look to 2026, forced displacement is expected to remain exceptionally high, driven by protracted conflicts, new emergencies, and climate and economic shocks—while asylum systems and public finances are under growing strain. In this context, UNHCR is sharpening its focus on protecting those most at risk, reinforcing emergency response capacity, and investing in more sustainable approaches that reduce long-term humanitarian dependence while supporting host countries and communities.

Our responses will be designed from the outset with transition in mind—working with governments and partners to strengthen national systems, avoid parallel structures, and engage development and private sector actors early. Self-reliance must never be understood as a transfer of responsibility to countries of asylum. Our approach remains grounded in partnership: supporting national systems, reinforcing shared responsibility, and continuing to provide critical, time-bound humanitarian assistance wherever it is needed.

Progress in 2025 has shown that inclusion strengthens resilience and reduces aid dependency over time.

In education, which remains central to both protection and solutions and is reflected in the ongoing ExCom discussions, we welcome the strong engagement of Member States on this issue. We are seeing steady progress. The 2025 Refugee Education Report shows modest but meaningful progress across more than 70 countries: enrolment is rising, gender parity is improving, and tertiary enrolment has increased from 7 to 9 per cent,. This is supported through DAFI and other scholarship pathways now reaching 5,750 students across 58 countries.

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These gains are fragile. Funding reductions in 2025 have already disrupted programmes and widened existing gaps, particularly at secondary level, where nearly two-thirds of refugee adolescents remain out of school.

Early inclusion in national systems from the outset of displacement remains UNHCR's priority. Experience in Chad, Burundi, and the Central African Republic demonstrates that this approach strengthens host country systems and delivers measurable protection outcomes, including a 60 per cent pass rate among CAR refugee students sitting national exams for the first time.

These efforts are only possible through strong partnerships with Education Cannot Wait, the Global Partnership for Education, Education Above All and the Mastercard Foundation, working alongside governments to expand capacity where it is most needed. These efforts also reflect the growing momentum behind Global Refugee Forum pledges on refugee education inclusion, which are beginning to translate into support at scale.

In health, we see a similar pattern.

UNHCR continues to deliver services at scale, including millions of consultations each year. Funding constraints are already having visible consequences, reducing coverage and increasing the risk of untreated illness.

At the same time, recent cholera and measles outbreaks across multiple regions have reinforced a broader lesson. Parallel systems do not hold.

Where refugees are included in national health systems, including surveillance, vaccination and service delivery, responses are more effective, and risks are reduced for entire populations.

This is why we are seeing growing inclusion in national health plans and insurance schemes, supported by partnerships with governments, WHO and development actors. This is also reflected in commitments made through the Global Refugee Forum to strengthen inclusive

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national health systems. Our forthcoming global public health strategy for 2026 will build on this momentum.

Food assistance remains a stabilizing factor for vulnerable refugees and host communities. However, we are increasingly linking food support to livelihoods and national social protection systems. This shift supports both immediate needs and longterm resilience.

Shelter remains a central priority in both refugee and IDP contexts. Within the new **Shelter, Land and Site Coordination (SLSC) Cluster**, established under the Humanitarian Reset, UNHCR remains a key actor and will continue to **lead or co-lead coordination at country level in contexts where it already holds leadership responsibilities or has a comparative advantage**. Through the **Geneva Technical Hub**, launched in partnership with the Swiss Development Cooperation, over the period 2021 – 2025 we were able to provide highimpact technical assistance to 40 operations and trained over 200 staff in climateresponsive settlement planning and housing designs, flood risk mitigation, and sustainable water and energy systems. The GTH is now entering its second phase—strengthening the humanitarian system’s ability to deliver resilient, costeffective services aligned with the UN80 agenda.

Our flagship water initiative, **Project Flow**, supported by the Danish MFA, Grundfos Foundation and GIZ, is driving the solarization of water systems. Rising fuel costs make this work even more critical. An additional USD 3 million from the Grundfos Foundation will enable essential upgrades that pave the way for integration into national water services.

In line with the multistakeholder pledge on Sustainable Human Settlements, UNHCR is working with UNHabitat, the World Bank and host governments to accelerate the transition of camps into inclusive, sustainable settlements for both displaced and host populations.

UNHCR continues to implement Cash for Return, highlighting good practices from Afghanistan, Burundi, Syria, and Sudan. Evidence shows that cash support for returnees improves social cohesion and stimulates local economies: in Moldova, every USD 1 of cash delivered generated over USD 2 in household income.

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The **2025 PostDistribution Monitoring Report**, *which was just launched this week*, confirms that cash remains one of the most efficient and effective modalities for meeting urgent needs across both emergency and protracted contexts—while highlighting persistent gaps where funding is constrained.

The Global Cash Advisory Group—cochaired by UNHCR and OCHA—has submitted a proposal to the IASC Deputies to increase multipurpose cash within the Humanitarian Reset agenda.

Across education, health, food security, and WASH, the direction is clear: inclusion in national systems, backed by sustained international support, builds resilience and reduces long-term dependence. Achieving HC **vision 50 by 35** will require predictable financing, stronger engagement with development and private sector actors, and a deliberate shift toward strengthening existing systems rather than duplicating them. This includes creating conditions for voluntary return in safety and dignity wherever possible. Two Conference Room Papers to be presented at the June Standing Committee will take these issues further: one on sustainable responses and one on solutions.

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We recognize that these efforts are unfolding amid significant financial strain, with needs outpacing resources. UNHCR is therefore sharpening global priorities and strengthening partnerships with local and refugee-led actors to deliver more inclusive and cost-effective responses. In 2026, we remain firmly committed to standing with host countries and communities, protecting those forced to flee, and advancing sustainable solutions—work that continues to rely on your vital support.

Thank you.