

73rd Session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme

Statement by Ms Gillian Triggs, Assistant High Commissioner for Protection

13 October 2022

Mr Chairperson (H.E. Mr. Salim BADDOURA) / Ms. First Vice-Chairperson (H.E. Ms. Kadra AHMED HASSAN) / Ms. Second Vice Chairperson (H.E. Ms. Katharina STASCH), Excellencies, ladies, and gentlemen,



The words “100 million people forcibly displaced” have reverberated throughout this year’s ExCom discussions at the UN in Geneva. The world now faces a humanitarian protection crisis on an unprecedented scale, driven by root causes of inequality, poverty, discrimination, violence, food insecurity, and weak governance, each exacerbated by the impacts of climate change and the lingering social and economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Let us be clear: overwhelmingly, people are displaced by conflict and persecution whether in Myanmar, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, Afghanistan, Yemen, Mozambique, or Ukraine. Each year we report ever increasing numbers. Each year the dire plight of those displaced deepens.

It is now time for some refreshed, original thinking, for new ideas, initiatives, and strategies to promote peace and protection.

For just as forced displacement rises, so do protection needs.

- Sadly, 42 per cent of those forcibly displaced are children. They are especially vulnerable to exploitation and harm. In conflict, millions of children cannot go to school, denying a generation of young people the opportunity to reach their potential.
- The inability in conflict to register births or obtain documentation increases the risk of statelessness.

- Gender-based violence against women and girls in conflict and sexual exploitation and abuse are a serious reason for and underreported consequences of displacement, and this includes risks of trafficking.
- Displaced people are often forced to take dangerous measures, to go without food, take loans at exorbitant interest rates, to resort to forced and child marriage, to send children to work interrupting their education, and to begging or the sale of sex.

Last week, my colleague Raouf Mazou, the Assistant High Commissioner for Operations, and I visited Ukraine. There we saw the impacts of the destruction on the lives of about 7 million Ukrainians displaced within their country. Many will be unable to return to their destroyed homes and villages for many months - even years - and are in desperate need of warm, dry accommodation. Winterization, through repairs to shelter, blankets, and cash assistance, will be critical to save lives, enable self-sufficiency and alleviate the misery of displacement. It was especially striking to see the plight of older women and men, and of people with disabilities, most of them poor, who exist in the shadows of war and are truly left behind.

An age, gender, and diversity lens for their protection is vital.

We visited a collective centre near Vinnytsia, where mothers and grandmothers show great personal resilience, where children have access to digital learning and attend the local school. It was a joy of see these children playing with a dog, as part of ‘canine therapy’, bringing some semblance of normality to their lives.

The war in Ukraine has paradoxically shown why, after 70 years, the principles of the Refugee Convention continue to have an enduring, life-saving role. The activation, for the first time, by the European Union of its Temporary Protection Directive, and the hospitality given to Ukrainian refugees by nations throughout the world, have demonstrated that the right to claim asylum is both a necessary and widely respected principle of international law.

The global response to the Ukrainian protection crisis shows that, with political will, countries and their citizens welcome millions in an emergency. Refugee hosting countries such as Bangladesh, Türkiye, Germany, Lebanon, Pakistan, Jordan, and Uganda have protected the displaced, in some cases for years. They have been true to the normative principles of refugee law.



But there are many protection challenges ahead:

- At UNHCR we observe the continued denial by some States of access to asylum at their frontiers, pushbacks at sea and land borders continue. The instrumentalization of refugees for political purposes is troubling.
- We expect a rise in the mixed movements of refugees with migrants seeking a better life, a phenomenon that, while not new, demands better collaboration with a “whole of society” approach with government, the private corporate sector, local communities, and development partners and closer coordination of the two UN compacts on Migration and Refugees.
- The impacts of climate change, seen recently in the fatal floods of Pakistan, are likely to increase, demanding ever more international aid and stringent measures to adapt and prevent.
- Food insecurity for millions, economic shocks of fuel and energy price rises and inter-communal competition for water and arable land, create a pernicious cycle of hunger and conflict, propelling further refugee displacement and protection needs.
- There is growing pressure for refugees to return to their countries of origin as host nations buckle under the burden of protecting unprecedented millions. Yet in protracted conflicts where schools, clinics and houses are destroyed and livelihood opportunities are few, returns may be unsafe and close to impossible, despite the fervent wish of most refugees to go home.

UNHCR is significantly scaling up our responses to these mounting protection needs. We are doing so with clear strategic direction. The High Commissioner has identified eight areas for additional, accelerated, and targeted action over the next 4 years.

We are committed to the age, gender, and diversity approach, and to the Sustainable Development Goal of gender equality. We advocate for inclusion of refugees in social systems and for the protection of people with specific needs such as the elderly and those living with disabilities.

In short, we have the legal and policy tools for effective international protection and are committed to implement them with innovation, and creativity.

1. Safeguard international protection, including in the context of mixed movements



Ensuring respect for the right to seek and enjoy international protection remains at the core of our mandate at the UN Refugee Agency. It has been troubling to observe efforts by a small number of States to adopt extreme policies to avoid their international obligations. For these countries, deterrence has become a priority. Irrationally, despite the failure and expense of such policies, efforts to transport refugees to other countries, thousands of miles away for processing continue.

This said, we should try to understand why such extreme and inhumane policies are attractive to some governments.

It is true, national asylum processes have become slow, clogging up domestic administrative authorities and courts for years. It is also true that there are real impediments to returning to their countries of origin people who, after fair legal processes, are assessed as not in need of international protection. The High Commissioner has made the point that it is the management or operationalization of asylum that needs reform not the principle of asylum itself.

Efforts to externalize asylum processes, to deny access to asylum at the border, to push back or adopt draconian deterrent policies are not the answer. UNHCR is working with governments to improve the efficiency of asylum systems, to adopt fair and fast processes. The work of the Asylum Capacity Support Group, established under the Global Compact on Refugees, is bearing fruit and has great potential to advance fair and fast systems.

2. Strengthen accountability to the people we serve, especially women and children



In January 2022, UNHCR launched a five-year plan to strengthen our accountability to those we serve. We are working with our partners and local communities to strengthen access to information and community-based protection in all our 580 field locations worldwide. We have, for example, launched and improved online HELP sites, receiving over 10 million visits in the first half of 2022.

UNHCR is fully committed to the Grand Bargain process. As agreed in the Grand Bargain, we are working to increase direct funding to local community-based NGOs who we know are on the front line of protection, especially during the pandemic. We have established the NGO innovation award and the Refugee Innovation Fund and are working with organizations led by refugees and people internally displaced to establish an Advisory Board to UNHCR.

A core element of meaningful accountability to those we serve and their participation in all matters affecting their lives is to include their voices in decisions. We welcome the inclusion by the United States, Germany and Canada of a refugee in their delegation here at ExCom.

3. Reinforce efforts to strengthen gender-based violence prevention, risk mitigation and response.

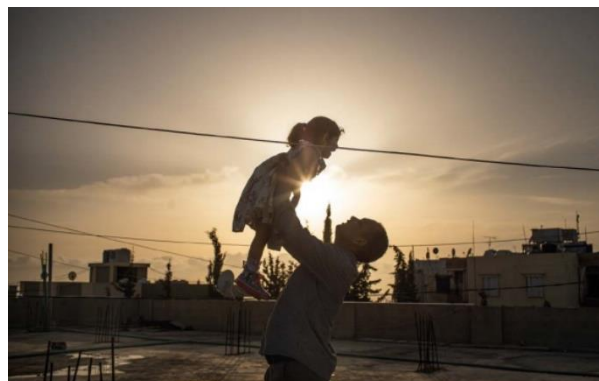


We know that, in conflict, women are disproportionately exposed to deep-rooted discrimination, and are highly vulnerable to gender-based violence, including sexual violence, and trafficking. UNHCR continues to scale up prevention, risk mitigation and responses to gender-based violence. We are working to ensure that displaced and stateless women are fully included in national social safety nets.

We have supported innovative approaches using mobile units to operate in remote areas and along movement pathways to ensure refugees have access help. I saw this myself while on mission in Guatemala last year with the launch of “blue buses” that help victims report incidents of GBV in rural areas and receive support.

Similarly, the 36 Blue Dot centers established together with UNICEF in Europe in response to the war in Ukraine have delivered GBV services and safe referrals where they are most needed at border crossings, railway stations, cities and local communities, including for psychosocial support, information about employment opportunities, child protection, safe accommodation and registration for social services and support.

4. Resettlement and complementary pathways.



Resettlement remains a key UNHCR priority as we recover from a slowdown during the pandemic.

The Three-Year Strategy, a crucial part of implementing the Global Compact on Refugees, aims to expand third country solutions for refugees so that by the end of 2028, 3 million refugees will have been resettled or benefited from complementary or regular pathways through labor mobility, education scholarships, community sponsorship and family reunions. We urge states to explore resettlement and complementary pathways as alternatives to dangerous journeys that so often lead to tragic deaths.

At UNHCR, we are scaling up our activities to meet our resettlement targets. I am very pleased to say our colleagues have worked tirelessly to ensure that we are set to meet this year's target of 112,756 submissions.

Of the many regular pathways to protection, access to livelihoods and employment through labor mobility programs is one of the most exciting. Australia for example has lifted obstacles so that refugees who have the capacity to work immediately can be recruited on the same basis as migrants, but without any reduction (indeed, an increase) in the resettlement places they offer to people with protection needs. The evidence is that many, especially developed nations, are aging, and have growing needs for labor in health care, agriculture, hospitality, and industry. Refugees come with education and many technical and professional skills. Importantly, most refugees are highly motivated to be self-sufficient and to contribute to the countries that have provided them with sanctuary. The challenge is to match the skills and experiences of a refugee with the labor needs of business and the corporate sector. Groups such as Talent Beyond Boundaries and the International Chamber of Commerce are bringing their creativity to make this vital connection.

When pursuing solutions through resettlement and complementary pathways, it is vital that each option is additional. An increase in work visas for refugees must not lead to a decline in resettlement places. Resettlement places also cannot replace the obligation to offer asylum at a state border, nor should they be employed as a bargaining chip in negotiations with other countries.

5. To mainstream our work with development partners, including from the start of a protection crisis



One of UNHCR's most fruitful initiatives over the last few years has been its work with development partners, especially with the World Bank and regional financial institutions. With our presence in 580 field locations worldwide, we have a deep understanding of local needs—knowledge that can inform development actors. Through these non-transactional relationships, billions of dollars have been released to governments, giving effect to the Humanitarian-Peace-

Development Nexus and ensuring that many of the root causes of displacement can be addressed from the outset of an emergency. The OECD estimates about 3.3 billion USD of bilateral development funds are now injected into refugee situations every year - adding to the 2 billion USD a year from multilateral development banks, and of course humanitarian resources mobilized by UNHCR itself with our partners.

Protection data and analysis lie at the heart of an effective protection response, from the emergency itself to long-term development. We need bold thinking and initiatives to advance development financing and hope that the High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges will stimulate fresh investment and advance protection solutions and inclusion. The regional round tables have just begun, and we hope they will provide substantive ideas for the Dialogue itself on 7-8 December this year.

6. Protection and solutions for internally displaced people.



The number of people forcibly displaced in their own country, about 60 million, is daunting with ever increasing protection needs.

UNHCR's IDP policy is to support governments, as primarily responsible for their citizens, while recognizing the severe political and security challenges they face. We aim to provide protection by presence and concrete support for services such as documentation, child protection and legal aid but also shelter and camp management and camp coordination, to ensure the specific needs of older people, people with disabilities, and those subject to sexual and gender-based violence, are met.

UNHCR's recent report on our IDP work shows encouraging progress. Our 'value added' is our operational experience in the field and our unique expertise on law and policy protecting internally displaced. This brings us close to the people we serve, and strengthens relationships with cluster partners, and governments, and supports the Humanitarian-Peace-Development Nexus.

The UN Secretary General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement is a tool to help expand solutions for internally displaced people. It is notable that in 2021, over 3.7 million IDPs returned to their homes and about a million have been included in national social services.

7. Redouble efforts on statelessness



Despite the vision and ambition of the #IBelong campaign, statelessness will not be ended by 2024. Significant progress has, nonetheless, been achieved with increased accessions to one, or both of the Statelessness Conventions, and the establishment of statelessness determination procedures. Advances have also been made in access to birth registration of those caught up in conflict, and reforms are being made to discriminatory nationality laws under which women have been denied the opportunity to pass on their nationality to their children. We are currently prioritizing 33 operations to redouble our efforts and to stimulate reforms.

Importantly, our efforts to end statelessness will not end with the #IBelong campaign. A Global Alliance will be established in 2024 to maintain the momentum in ending statelessness. We must, however, be vigilant: without legal safeguards and birth registration and documentation, statelessness will remain an invisible barrier to inclusion in society and effective protection of the most vulnerable.

8. Mitigate the impacts of the climate change



The climate crisis is a protection crisis. It has a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable and has a multiplier effect in forcing people to flee to safety. 80 per cent of people displaced by conflict and violence are from the most climate vulnerable countries worldwide - Somalia, Sudan, Afghanistan, and Yemen. Climate changes, drought, and floods, often lead to food insecurity that, in turn, leads to forced displacement and the urgent need for further protection.

- In the first quarter of 2022, Mozambique was battered by five tropical storms and cyclones along its northern coastal areas, affecting thousands of families, including refugees and people internally displaced by violence in the northern province of Cabo Delgado.
- Early this year, thousands of people were internally displaced by the severe drought in Somalia after three consecutive failed rainy seasons that decimated crops and livestock forcing people to flee their homes for food, shelter, and safe drinking water.

For these reasons, UNHCR is reducing its own environmental footprint, while also finding sustainable, green solutions for people displaced in urban areas or remote camps, especially to ensure that women do not have to risk sexual assaults to collect firewood in surrounding woods.

The Strategic Framework on Climate Action, including a focus on legal, normative and protection elements will guide us in our work.

These then are our strategic priorities and actions and we trust that our budgets can be adjusted to match them.

Conclusion



The global protection crises we face cannot be resolved unilaterally. We must act collaboratively, and we have the tools to do so. The Secretary-General's Our Common Agenda provides a roadmap and a bold vision for the future and will - if implemented - help to address many of the protection needs of the people we serve.

The Global Compact on Refugees - our lode star- calls for a “whole of society” approach, including mayors and cities, the media, local communities and elected Parliamentarians, UN agencies, international and national NGOs, scholars, religious groups and displaced and stateless people. Our expansion of partnerships is therefore fundamental to our work and to achieving the principle of equitable responsibility sharing.

In this spirit, we look forward to working together with you towards the GRF in December next year and on behalf of all our colleagues, may I thank you for your most encouraging support.

END