



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

Focus Area Strategic Plan for Climate Action 2024-2030

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As a central component of the UNHCR Strategic Directions 2022-2026, UNHCR has identified eight focus areas for renewed attention and accelerated action, including Climate Action. This Focus Area Strategic Plan for Climate Action sets out a global roadmap for prioritized action, providing further clarity on UNHCR's role and direct contribution, its asks of others, and the immediate actions the organization will take to be optimally calibrated to advance this agenda.

The problem we seek to address

Climate change is increasingly linked to conflict and human displacement. **Growing numbers of people fleeing persecution, violence and human rights violations occurring in relation to the adverse effects of climate change and disasters will need international protection.** In 2022, 84 per cent of refugees and asylum seekers fled from highly climate-vulnerable countries, an increase from 61 per cent in 2010. The scope for durable solutions is also narrowing. In 2020, only one per cent of refugees were able to return home¹ – a challenge which is only likely to grow, as the impact of climate change further deteriorates basic living conditions and opportunities for development in countries of origin.

At the same time, a significant percentage of **forcibly displaced and stateless people are living in the most climate-vulnerable situations in the world**, where – together with their host communities – they **lack access to environmentally sustainable resources and resilience to the impacts of climate change.** Women, girls, and other groups with specific needs, often face higher risks and greater burdens from the impacts of climate change due to existing roles, responsibilities and cultural norms. The plan highlights 22 countries of particular concern to UNHCR,² given their heightened vulnerability

¹ UNHCR Refugee Data Finder (2020).

² Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Somalia, Uganda, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Central African Republic, Niger, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Malawi, Mozambique, Jordan, Mauritania, Yemen, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Ecuador, Honduras (see Annex).

to climate change, and the large numbers of forcibly displaced and stateless people residing within them. Projections show that the situation will likely significantly deteriorate in these countries by 2030.³ Despite initial investments by the international community to support national governments' adaptation and resilience efforts in these countries, the poorest areas which host displaced and stateless populations often "fall through the cracks" in national development and adaptation plans and programmes, further exacerbating inequalities and protection concerns for people at heightened risk, and leaving these communities markedly behind.

The plan also addresses **UNHCR's organizational footprint and contribution to global greenhouse gas emissions** from operations, facilities, and supply chain practices. Today UNHCR is recognized as a leader within the UN community for its efforts in "greening" its operations. Nonetheless, in 2022, UNHCR's direct emissions totalled 52 kilotonnes of CO₂, with an additional 450 kilotonnes emitted annually from supply chain activities.

A recent MOPAN⁴ assessment found that UNHCR has made considerable efforts to incorporate climate change and environmental factors as a cross-cutting issue since the launch of the 2021 UNHCR Strategic Framework for Climate Action. UNHCR is now committed to accelerating this progress to deliver more systematic and quantifiable results for populations relevant to its mandate, whose resilience and protection is impacted by the climate crisis. This focus area strategic plan explains how UNHCR will operationalize this commitment.

Vision and objectives

The strategic plan is based on one common vision, firmly rooted in the ambition of UNHCR Strategic Directions 2022-2026, and aligned to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC): ***By 2030, increasing numbers of forcibly displaced and stateless people fleeing from climate-fueled crises and/or living in climate-vulnerable countries find solutions are protected and resilient to the impacts of climate change, and are living self-sufficient lives.***

In order to realize this vision, UNHCR has set four inter-dependent objectives for **protection, solutions, resilience and adaptation** to be achieved in support of national governments, together with partners:

- 1 People fleeing persecution, violence and human rights violations occurring in relation to the adverse effects of climate change and disasters who need **international protection** are effectively protected.
- 2 Forcibly displaced and stateless people and their hosts have increased **access to services** that promote the rights-based, sustainable use of natural resources and a clean and healthy environment.

³ CGIAR projections of future climate hazards (2023).

⁴ The Multilateral Performance Network (MOPAN) is an independent body of member states providing regular independent assessments of UN agencies. Its 2023 review of UNHCR will be published in Q4 2023 at www.mopanonline.org.

- 3 Forcibly displaced and stateless people and their hosts have improved **physical and economic means to prepare, withstand, recover and be protected** from the impacts of climate change.
- 4 UNHCR operates sustainably with systems in place to **minimize negative impacts on the environment**.

The comparative advantage UNHCR brings to each objective is clearly set out in the plan (page 15), as well as clarity on its differentiated mandated role in situations of internal displacement, as per Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) coordination arrangements. This includes, most notably, (a) UNHCR's longstanding experience and mandated role to support governments in strengthening their capacity to provide protection and (b) UNHCR's rich operational expertise programming to reduce vulnerabilities and protection risks for the most vulnerable and remote displaced populations, together with their hosts.

The strategic plan signifies a global shift for UNHCR in aligning around the new global outputs (page 15), which can be measured and tracked. A result framework and monitoring plan will be published in the first quarter of 2024, to coincide with the plan's official launch.

Five priority actions

The plan outlines five high-impact global actions for the organization, including :

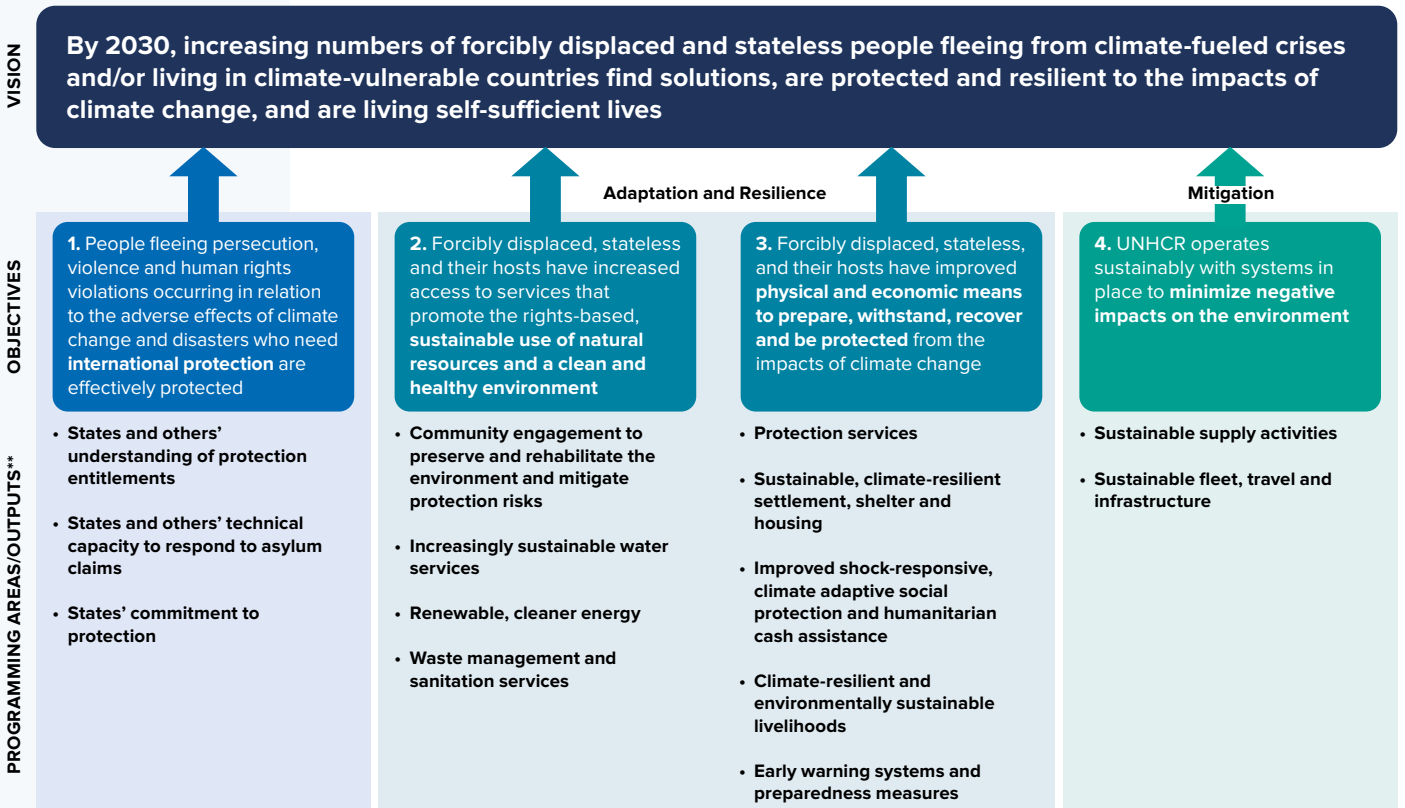
1. Global thought leadership and advocacy
2. Strategic partnerships
3. Leveraging for inclusion
4. Implementing multi-year development projects in sectors where UNHCR has experience
5. Humanitarian action to improve resilience

The plan clearly explains that UNHCR will differentiate which action it prioritizes in any given context, depending on the status of the country on the humanitarian-development continuum. In addition to UNHCR's core advocacy for the application of existing refugee and human rights instruments, three key "advocacy asks" for member States and development actors are central to the plans execution, and are set out on page 25.

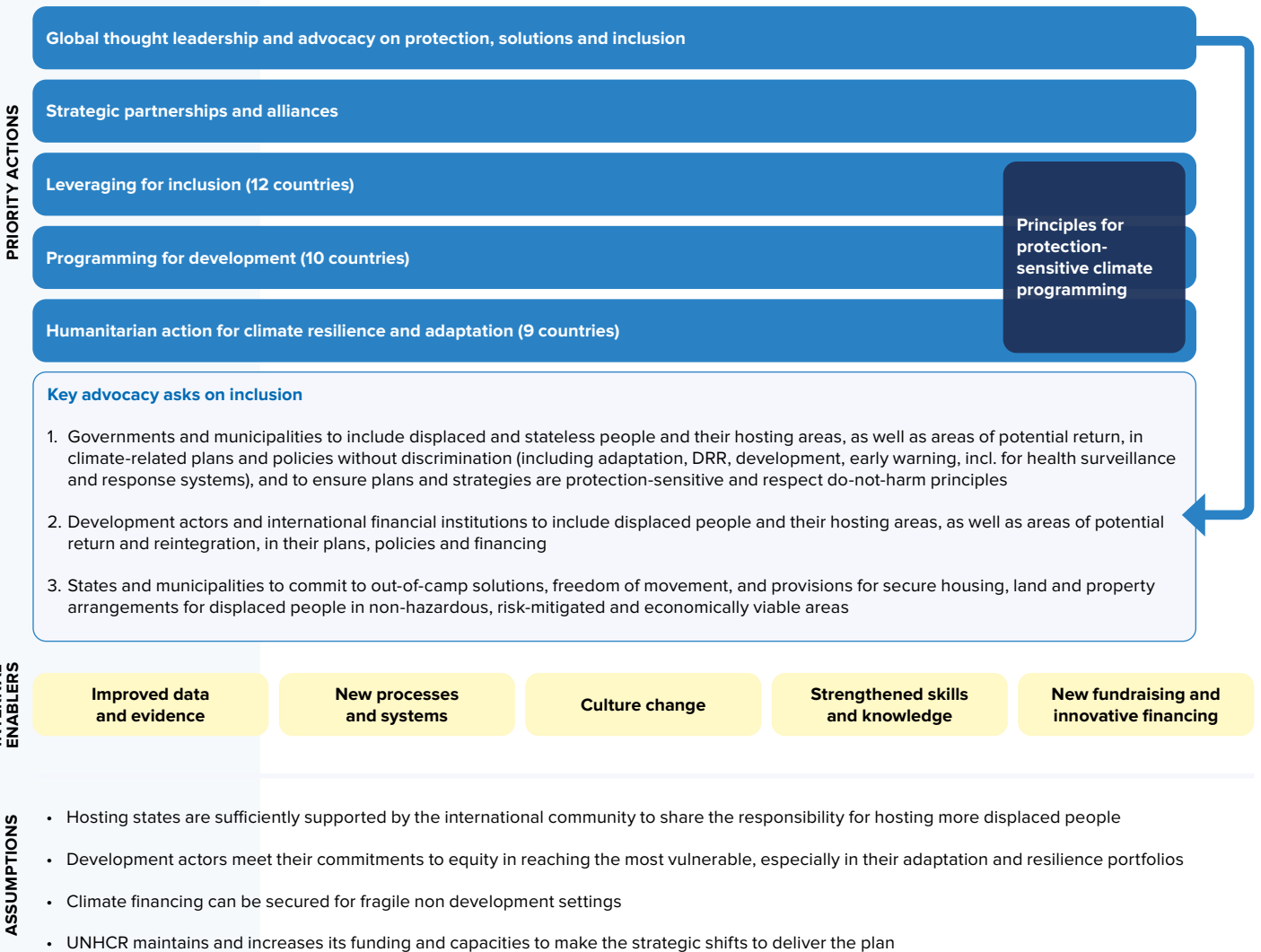
Principles for protection-sensitive climate action programming

UNHCR will introduce cross-cutting programming principles in 2024, with the aim of ensuring that protection-sensitive, environmentally sustainable, and climate-smart measures are mainstreamed across all its work. These principles guide planning, programming, and monitoring efforts, emphasizing a sharpened responsible approach to environmental impact and climate change.

Theory of Change for Climate Action



**outputs delivered in accordance with IASC-mandated responsibilities in situations of internal displacement



1. INTRODUCTION

The global climate crisis is a human crisis, amplifying the drivers of forced displacement and protection needs within and across borders for millions of people and increasing risks of statelessness.⁵ Millions of people UNHCR works with and for, be they internally displaced, refugees or stateless, are living in highly climate-vulnerable as well as fragile and conflict-affected situations. As a result, many lack access to services that are environmentally sustainable, and have few or no means to prepare for, withstand and recover from the impacts of climate change. Moreover, the climate crisis affects people in different ways based on age, gender and other diversity factors. Women and girls often face higher risks and greater burdens from the impacts of climate change due to existing roles, responsibilities and cultural norms.

As a central component of the [UNHCR Strategic Directions 2022-2026](#), the organization has identified eight focus areas for renewed attention and accelerated effort, including climate action. The Strategic Plan for Climate Action 2024-2030 (herein “the strategic plan”) sets out a global roadmap for this accelerated effort. It provides further clarity on UNHCR’s role and direct contribution, its asks of others, and the immediate actions the organization will take to be optimally calibrated to advance this agenda.

⁵ How climate change is multiplying risks for displacement (UNHCR, 2020); Global Compact on Refugees (2018) and Unprotected by Climate Change, responding to the growing risk of displacement (Oxfam, 2017).

The strategic plan complements the logic and approach of UNHCR's strategies for the agency's focus areas.⁶ It provides a climate lens with which to view a set of key problems that are central to all UNHCR's work: forcibly displaced and stateless people's protection by states, and their access to legal solutions, their access to basic services, and their opportunities to live self-sufficient lives and strive for solutions.



UNHCR staff and members of Venezuelan refugee and migrant associations clean up a neighbourhood in Quito, Ecuador, affected by severe flooding and mudslides in January 2022.

© UNHCR/Jaime Giménez

⁶ See, for example, [UNHCR's Strategy on Engaging with Development Actors \(2023\)](#).

2. PROBLEM ANALYSIS

The strategic plan sets out UNHCR's role in addressing three key problems:

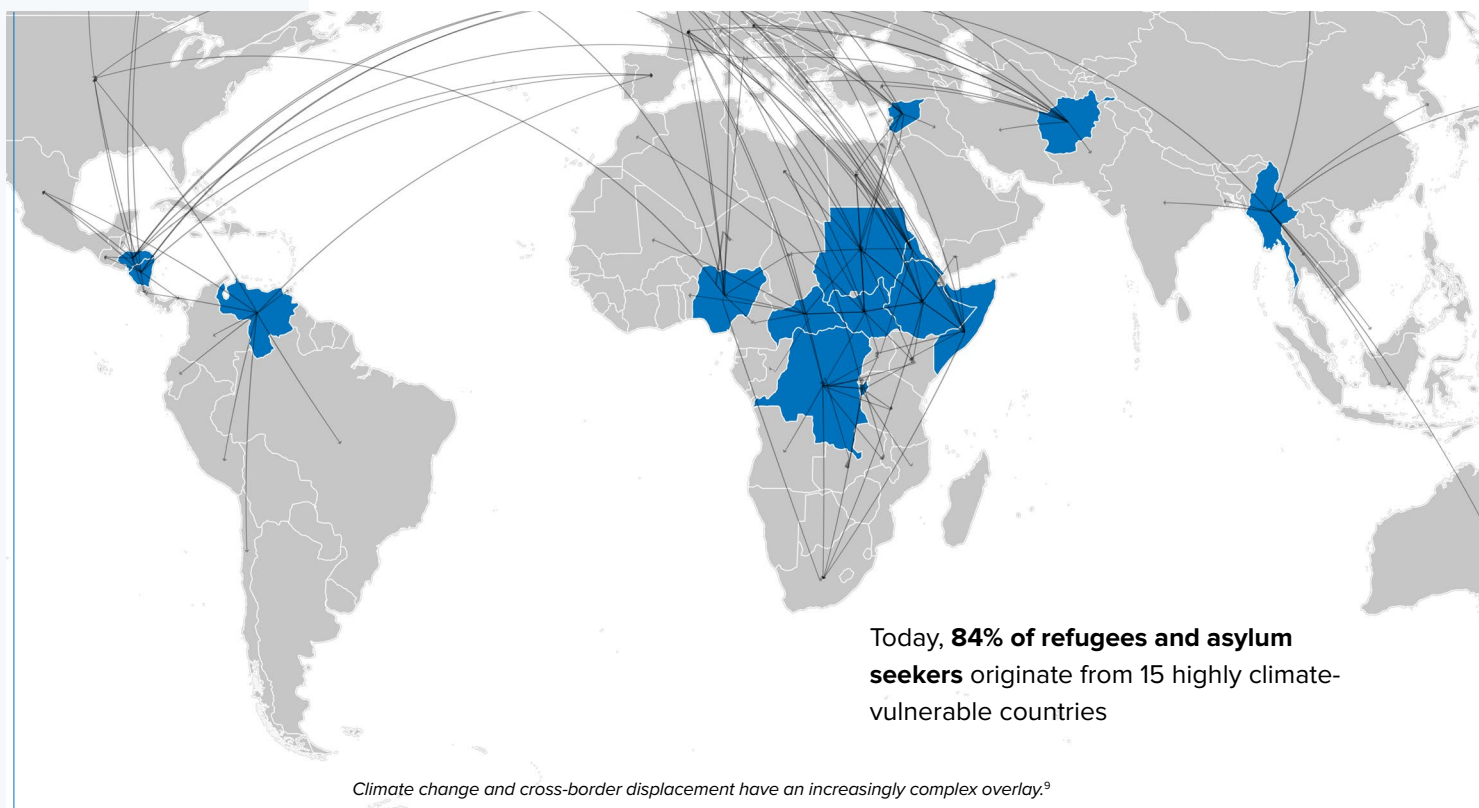
- 1 The growing numbers of **people fleeing persecution, violence and human rights violations occurring in relation to the adverse effects of climate change and disasters** who will need international protection.
- 2 The deteriorating situation for millions of refugees, internally displaced and stateless **people who live in** the most climate-vulnerable⁷ situations in the world, and who – together with their host communities – lack access to environmentally sustainable resources and the means to economically and physically prepare for, withstand and recover from the impacts of climate change and face increased protection risks.
- 3 UNHCR's own **impact on the environment**, including through carbon emissions.

1. **Growing numbers of people fleeing persecution, violence and human rights violations occurring in relation to the adverse effects of climate change and disasters will need international protection.**

In the last decade, the interlinkages between climate change impacts and conflict have become particularly apparent. In 2022, 84 per cent of refugees and asylum seekers fled from countries which are highly climate-vulnerable, compared to 61 per cent in 2010.⁸ Climate change and environmental degradation increasingly drive displacement, in combination with social, economic and political factors. Many countries are affected by both conflict and disaster that interact and overlap as triggers and drivers of displacement.

⁷ Defined using the Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (ND-GAIN) Country Index. The index shows a country's current vulnerability to climate disruptions and readiness to leverage private and public sector investment for adaptive actions. ND-GAIN brings together over 74 variables.

⁸ UNHCR Refugee Data Finder (2022 and 2010) and ND-GAIN Country Index (2010 and 2010).



Today, **84% of refugees and asylum seekers** originate from 15 highly climate-vulnerable countries

Climate change and cross-border displacement have an increasingly complex overlay.⁹

The adverse effects of climate change and the impacts of disasters interact with or add to other environmental, social, economic and political factors, including violence, insecurity, instability, persecution and conflict, as well as fragile governance structures, weak rule of law and other elements which can place countries and people in vulnerable situations. This can ultimately trigger displacement across borders, further driving up international protection needs.

The scope for durable solutions is also narrowing: in 2020, only one per cent of refugees were able to return to their country of origin¹⁰ – a challenge which is only likely to grow as climate-affected livelihoods are rendered untenable, exposure to extreme weather and degraded environments make conditions in some areas unliveable, and competition over depleted ecosystem resources such as food, water and land prolongs conflict and instability.

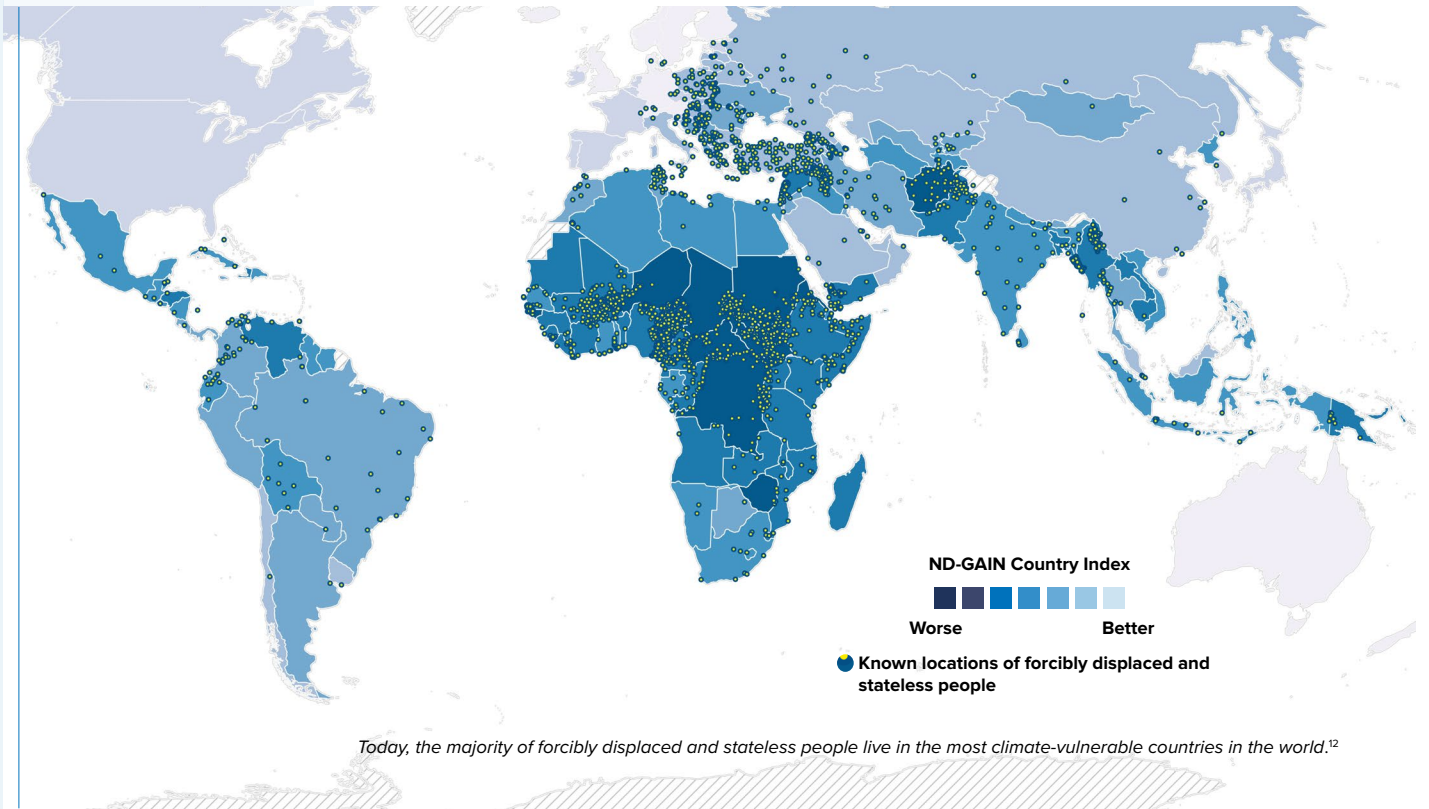
2. Millions of refugees, internally displaced and stateless people live in the most climate-vulnerable situations in the world, and – together with their host communities – lack access to environmentally sustainable resources and the economic and physical means to prepare for, withstand, recover and be protected from the impacts of climate change.

Some 70 per cent of conflict-displaced internally displaced people, 60 per cent of stateless people and 40 per cent of refugees live in fragile and/or conflict-affected countries that are among the most vulnerable to and least ready to adapt to climate change.¹¹

⁹ UNHCR Refugee Data Finder (2020) and ND-GAIN Country Index (2020).

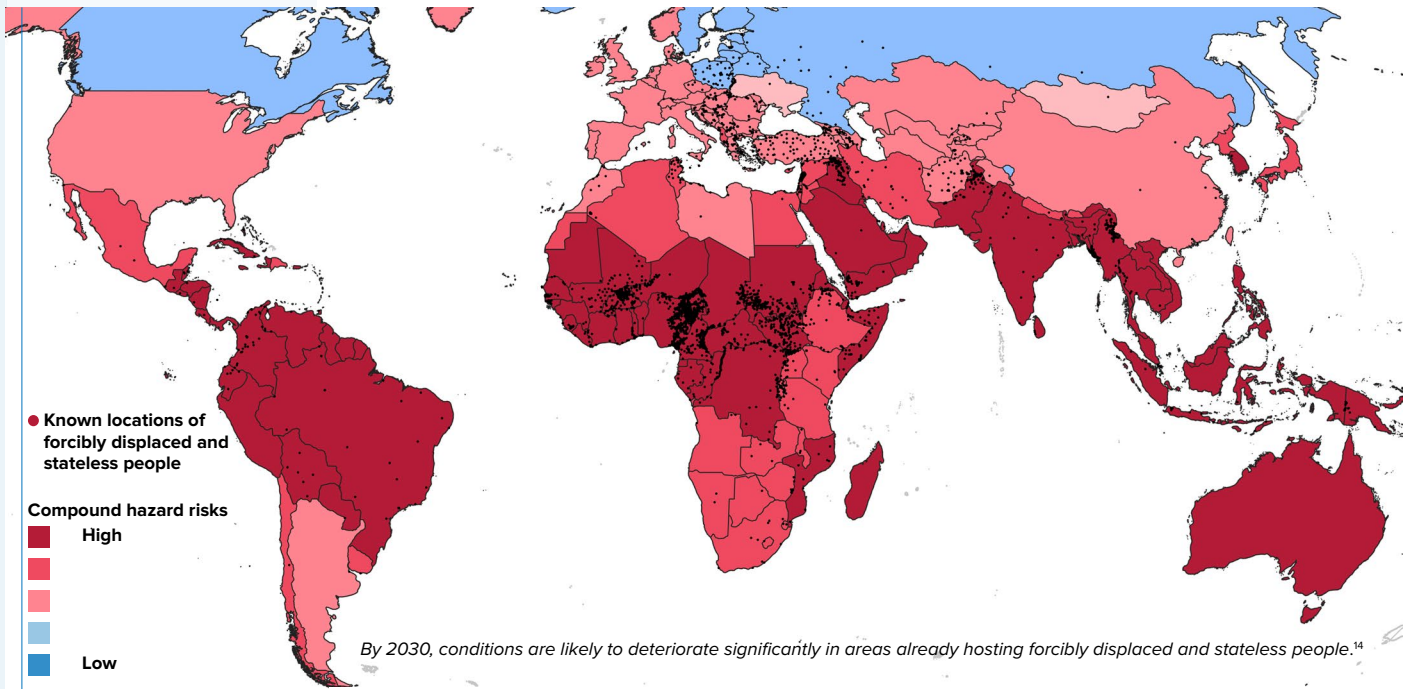
¹⁰ UNHCR Refugee Data Finder (2020).

¹¹ UNHCR Operational Data Portal (2021) and ND-GAIN Country Index (2020).



Today, the majority of forcibly displaced and stateless people live in the most climate-vulnerable countries in the world.¹²

Future projections show that conditions are expected to deteriorate during the period covered by the strategic plan, with countries with large displaced and stateless populations among the most affected.¹³ Climate hazards will increase especially in Africa, South America, South Asia and Oceania.



By 2030, conditions are likely to deteriorate significantly in areas already hosting forcibly displaced and stateless people.¹⁴

¹² Ibid.

¹³ CGIAR (2023), Projections of future climate hazards encompassing the timeframe 2020-2040.

¹⁴ Ibid.

In many areas hosting forcibly displaced and stateless people and returning refugees, communities have limited access to rights-based, environmentally sustainable and climate-resilient services such as water and energy. This can result in harmful coping mechanisms and exposure to protection risks such as women and children having to walk in unsafe areas to fetch firewood and water. Without support, these populations face increased vulnerabilities and exposure to health and protection risks. Communities may be blamed for or inadvertently contribute to deforestation and water scarcity, when they lack access to services that promote the sustainable use of natural resources. This can result in inter-communal tensions that could affect the peaceful co-existence among forcibly displaced and host communities. Where communities contribute to preserving the environment and protecting their members from the impacts of climate change, they are often challenged by limited resources and barriers to their participation.

It is well established that the effects of climate change place increased pressure on natural resources – especially land and water – and result in increased frequency of climate shocks and stresses – from floods and droughts to desertification and sea level rise. In such conditions, displaced communities’ capacity to be resilient and self-reliant will be reduced,¹⁵ further exacerbated by their limited access to national early warning and preparedness efforts. When climate shocks and stresses occur, new protection risks like gender-based violence arise. Existing protection issues are exacerbated for people at heightened risk, including older people and people with disabilities. Access to protection services and community support mechanisms are interrupted, leaving people most affected by those shocks in an extremely vulnerable situation.

Displaced and stateless people often live in the most hazard-prone and economically unviable areas within low- and middle-income countries, where self-sufficiency is particularly challenging given the status of depleted ecosystem resources, most notably nutritious food and water. Livelihoods that communities may have previously relied upon are not transforming quickly enough to withstand climate change, for example through diversifying crops and businesses and accessing new opportunities in “green” jobs such as renewable energy or environmental conservation. Similarly, governments’ social protection schemes and safety nets are rarely shock-responsive or inclusive of displaced populations, where they exist at all. As such, displaced communities and their hosts increasingly rely on short-term humanitarian assistance and systems for the provision of basic subsistence.

The risks of statelessness increase when people move because of the impacts of climate change. People can become stateless when they are unable to prove their nationality due to loss of or inability to replace documentation, including in the context of disasters.

¹⁵ According to UNOSAT-UNHCR analysis, 30 per cent of UNHCR settlements analyzed are in direct or indirect danger by the flooding by and overflowing waterbodies (rivers and streams). Nearly 90 per cent of the UNHCR settlements analyzed are prone to pluvial floods, due to lack of infiltration or drainage.

Forcibly displaced and stateless people, along with their host communities, often fall through the cracks in terms of governments' plans for climate adaptation and sustainable development. While development and climate financing instruments remain inadequate to address the huge challenges faced in climate-vulnerable countries, those in place offer an important opportunity to tackle these challenges in a way that ensures the most affected communities, including forcibly displaced people and their hosts, are not left behind. Furthermore, the capacities and agency of displaced and host communities to protect themselves and the environment is often disregarded and lack adequate recognition or resourcing.

3. UNHCR's organizational footprint contributes to global greenhouse gas emissions, which is the primary driver of climate change.

The organizational footprint is composed of a wide range of emissions, from the direct emissions of UNHCR's operations and facilities to the indirect emissions from its supply chain practice. Therefore, it is important to identify, measure, analyze and reduce the emissions that are generated both internally and externally. UNHCR has one of the most remote and far-reaching network of field offices and staff within the United Nations system – a key necessity for its emergency and humanitarian work delivering services to the most hard-to-reach. Operating in these areas requires working without a stable grid connection and with high security needs, at times requiring armored vehicles and chartered humanitarian flights.

In 2022, UNHCR's office infrastructure, travel and fleet directly emitted a total of 52 kilotonnes of CO₂. In addition, an estimated total of up to 450 kilotonnes of CO₂ are emitted annually as part of UNHCR's supply chain activities, which mainly include the purchase of core relief items and other goods, together with their storage and transportation.

3. VISION AND OBJECTIVES

The strategic plan is centred on a long-term vision, to be achieved by UNHCR together with partners:

By 2030, increasing numbers of forcibly displaced and stateless people fleeing from climate-fueled crises and/or living in climate-vulnerable countries find solutions, are protected from and resilient to the impacts of climate change, and are living self-sufficient lives.

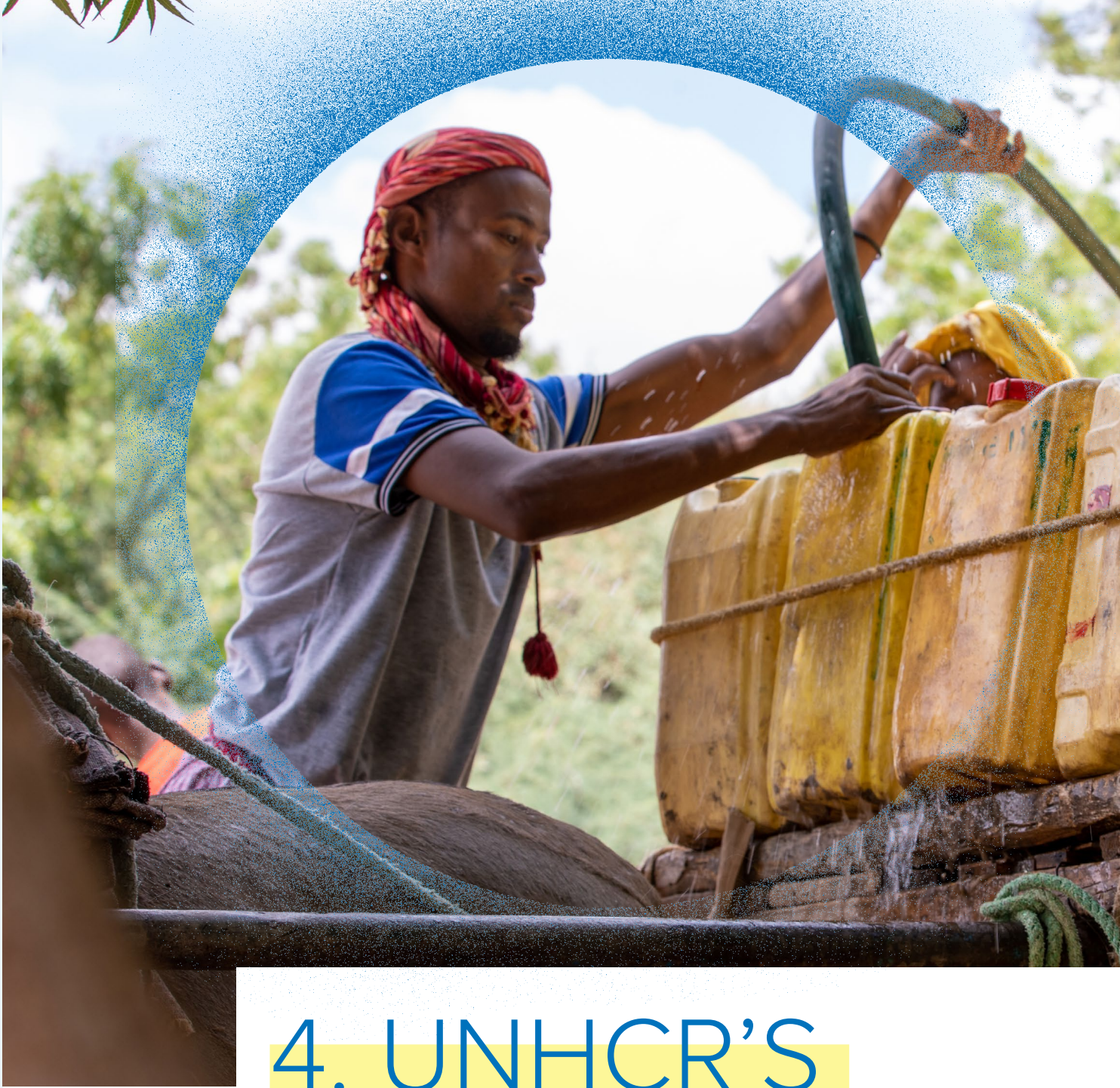
This vision is firmly rooted in UNHCR's contribution to international normative frameworks¹⁶ and UNHCR's own policies and guidance.¹⁷ It operationalizes the Global Compact on Refugees and UNHCR's 2021 Strategic Framework for Climate Action, providing one line-of-sight to 2030.

In order to realize this vision, UNHCR has set **four inter-dependent objectives for protection, solutions, resilience and adaptation** to be achieved by 2030 together with its partners:

- 1** People fleeing persecution, violence and human rights violations occurring in relation to the adverse effects of climate change and disasters who need **international protection** are effectively protected.
- 2** Forcibly displaced and stateless people and their hosts have increased **access to services** that promote the rights-based, sustainable use of natural resources and a clean and healthy environment.
- 3** Forcibly displaced and stateless people and their hosts have improved **physical and economic means to prepare, withstand, recover and be protected** from the impacts of climate change.
- 4** UNHCR operates sustainably with systems in place to **minimize negative impacts on the environment**.

¹⁶ Including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, and UN Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement regarding reducing the displacement risks posed by climate change and disasters.

¹⁷ Including UNHCR's Policy on Emergency Preparedness and Response, Policy on UNHCR's Engagement in Situations of Internal Displacement, and the Guidance for UNHCR Staff on IDP Protection in the Context of Disasters and the Adverse Effects of Climate Change.



4. UNHCR'S PROGRAMMATIC CONTRIBUTION TO THE FOUR OBJECTIVES OF THE PLAN

Mohamed Hussein Issack, a water vendor, fetches water for sale at the water ATM in Dagahaley camp, Kenya.

© UNHCR/Charity Nzomo

UNHCR, across its 130 country operations, regional bureaux and headquarters is already contributing towards achieving these objectives. The strategic plan signifies a renewed global shift for UNHCR in aligning around common outputs and programming areas, which can be measured and tracked, as well as a refreshed commitment to advance its climate action programming. The following section describes what success looks like over the period of this plan for UNHCR in each programming area/output. This logic is set out in pictorial form in the theory of change diagramme above.

OBJECTIVE I

People fleeing persecution, violence and human rights violations occurring in relation to the adverse effects of climate change and disasters who need international protection are effectively protected.

Outputs - By 2030:

- 1.1 National government institutions, regional bodies, legal practitioners, academia, civil society and other relevant entities have increased **understanding of international protection entitlements** arising in climate change and disaster-related contexts.
- 1.2 State institutions (including administrative, judicial and legal institutions) and legal and other partners have increased **technical capacity to respond to asylum claims** of people displaced in the context of climate change and disasters.
- 1.3 States demonstrate increased **commitment to international protection** for people who need it, including in wider policy discussions.

WHY UNHCR? WHAT IS THE COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE WE BRING? UNHCR holds a global leadership role in supporting States to ensure refugees, returnees, stateless and internally displaced people are protected, and that they and their hosting communities are resilient to the effects of climate change, today and in the future. Our priority actions build on our mandated years of expertise and extensive field presence. In line with UNHCR's Statute and based on relevant global and regional instruments, we will continue to provide and further develop authoritative technical and legal guidance to member States and other stakeholders on application of international refugee and human rights law for people displaced across borders in need of international protection. This will build on UNHCR's 2020 Legal Considerations¹⁸ regarding claims of international protection made in the context of the adverse effects of climate change and disasters. Our operations will support the development of technical capacity of state institutions and other relevant entities, in order to ensure that policy makers, the judiciary and the legal profession, among others, are equipped to deal with asylum claims including when they relate to climate change impacts and disasters.

A supplementary paper on climate change impacts, cross-border displacement and international law is available on unhcr.org/what-we-do, further articulating UNHCR's role.

The solar power grid in Buramino refugee camp, Ethiopia, is supported by UNHCR and the IKEA Foundation. Run by a cooperative, it provides clean and sustainable energy to the camp.

© UNHCR/Petterik Wiggers



¹⁸ [Legal Considerations regarding claims of international protection made in the context of the adverse effects of climate change and disasters \(UNHCR, 2020\)](#).

UNHCR's operational, legal and policy engagement and inter-agency responses to internal displacement in the context of the adverse effects of climate change and disaster

Most people who are displaced by conflict, disasters and the adverse effects of climate change become displaced within their own countries. In such situations of internal displacement, UNHCR plays an important role in the development of laws and policies relevant to internally displaced people. UNHCR will retain its focus in accordance with its leadership and coordination responsibilities related to protection, camp coordination and camp management and shelter in line with IASC arrangements, with a particular emphasis on displacement linked to the adverse effects of climate change and disaster that intersect with conflict and violence. UNHCR plays an important role supporting inter-agency responses to disaster-induced internal displacement, taking the lead on protection. The scope of UNHCR's engagement in such situations will generally be time-limited and when large-scale disasters require a system-wide response, UNHCR will participate in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Scale-Up protocols.

UNHCR's focus area strategic plan on its engagement in situations of internal displacement will detail priorities for operational investments and provide more granular focus on how UNHCR will strengthen its response to the adverse effects of climate change and disasters.

OBJECTIVE II

Forcibly displaced and stateless people and their hosts have increased access to services that promote the rights-based, sustainable use of natural resources and a clean and healthy environment.

Outputs - By 2030:

- 2.1 Forcibly displaced and stateless people and their hosts have improved **capacity to preserve and rehabilitate the natural environment**, mitigating protection risks (including gender-based violence) and enhancing peaceful coexistence.
- 2.2 Governments and/or humanitarian and development actors have improved capacity and resources to provide increasingly **sustainable water services**.
- 2.3 Governments, the private sector and/or humanitarian and development actors have improved capacity to provide forcibly displaced people and their host with **sustainable, cleaner energy**.
- 2.4 Governments, the private sector and/or humanitarian and development actors have increased the capacity to provide **waste management and sanitation services** to areas hosting forcibly displaced people.

WHY UNHCR? WHAT IS THE COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE WE BRING? As a protection agency, UNHCR is concerned about people's protection from violence, abuse and exploitation. In many contexts, lack of access to services and ecosystem-based resources such as water, fuel and safe sanitation, increases drivers of conflict with host communities and directly impacts the security, safety and protection of forcibly displaced populations. Inequalities and barriers experienced by women and girls, persons with disabilities and others may result in these groups being at a higher protection risk and excluded from such services.

In humanitarian contexts, whether internal displacement, refugee or mixed settings, UNHCR already has rich experience providing access to basic services such as more sustainable water or greener and cleaner alternatives to firewood, with the objective of reducing protection risks for forcibly displaced communities, as well as the communities that host them. These, often "area-based" approaches have a dual-action outcome – not only providing safer alternatives to depleted resources which are often located beyond the immediate vicinity of forcibly displaced communities, but also providing a more sustainable alternative, which in turn protects local ecosystems and fosters peaceful coexistence. UNHCR has extensive field presence, especially in remote, conflict and disaster affected localities with limited presence of other actors. As such, we are the first to respond alongside affected communities, and in many cases, the only agency present, along with our funded NGO partners. Displaced populations are often forced to settle in climate-hostile areas, where – in the case of refugees and returnee populations – UNHCR is called upon to provide basic services in places where conditions require expert hydrogeological and flood risk analysis skills.

UNHCR has a strong community-based approach, engaging communities in the identification of needs, protection risks and their root causes, while jointly developing responses that build the capacity of communities for sustainable outcomes. When UNHCR establishes community services in lieu of local authorities, it does so with age, gender and diversity inclusivity at the centre.

In less fragile countries and contexts, in support of national governments, development actors and other UN agencies may be better placed to directly deliver and fund sustainable services and protect ecosystem-based resources in areas hosting forcibly displaced and returnee populations. In support of this effort, UNHCR has a critical catalysing role in advocating for the meaningful participation and the inclusion of forcibly displaced and stateless people and their hosting areas in local plans and budgets and ensuring that plans and strategies are protection-sensitive and respect do-not-harm principles.

UNHCR seeks to achieve these outputs in accordance with the Refugee Convention as well as its IASC-mandated coordination and operational responsibilities in situations of internal displacement.

OBJECTIVE III

Forcibly displaced and stateless people and their hosts have improved physical and economic means to prepare, withstand, recover and be protected from the impacts of climate change.

Outputs - By 2030:

- 3.1 Governments and/or local responders have improved capacity and resources to create or expand **protection services** for people whose protection risks are exacerbated by climate impacts.
- 3.2 Governments, humanitarian and/or development actors have improved capacity to provide and/or facilitate **environmentally sustainable, climate-resilient settlements, shelter and housing** to forcibly displaced people and their hosts.
- 3.3 Governments, humanitarian and/or development actors and/or the private sector have the capacity to provide improved **shock-responsive, climate-adaptive social protection and/or humanitarian cash assistance** to refugees, returnees and their hosts.
- 3.4 Governments, humanitarian, development actors and/or private sector have increased their resources and technical support to enable refugees and their hosts, and returnee populations to access, establish or strengthen **climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable livelihoods**.
- 3.5 Governments and/or local responders have improved capacity and resources to create or expand **early warning systems and preparedness measures** in areas hosting forcibly displaced people.

WHY UNHCR? WHAT IS THE COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE WE BRING? UNHCR has longstanding experience and a mandated role to work with governments to strengthen their capacity to provide protection through administrative and legal services that ensure access to rights – such as registration, documentation, and housing, land and property – for people whose displacement is also impacted by sudden and chronic climate impacts.

Our global leadership role and expertise in providing sustainable shelter in refugee, internal displacement and mixed contexts is a critical enabler for solutions: giving people a climate and weather-proof place to call home.

UNHCR has extensive experience in programming to address and reduce vulnerabilities and protection risks for forcibly displaced and host populations at heightened risk. We provide cash and livelihood assistance to refugees based on need, especially in areas where no other actor is present or where efforts for inclusion into existing services have been exhausted. At the same time, we recognize other agencies and actors have responsibility, richer expertise and more longstanding investments in many contexts. As such, our sister agencies and development actors are often better placed to deliver at-scale livelihood programmes, social protection and early warning systems, in support of national government's adaptation and DRR priorities.

Given UNHCR's protection expertise, we take a leadership role advising and supporting governments to ensure that climate adaptation, early warning, preparedness and disaster risk reduction plans and strategies are inclusive of forcibly displaced and stateless people, and that these plans are protection-sensitive and do not cause harm. We will advocate with governments that forcibly displaced and stateless people are included in law and national development and contingency plans and budgets in the event that climate-related shocks take place.

UNHCR seeks achievements of these outputs in accordance with the Refugee Convention as well as its IASC-mandated coordination and operational responsibilities in situations of internal displacement.

OBJECTIVE IV

UNHCR operates sustainably with systems in place to minimize negative impacts on the environment.

Outputs - By 2030:

- 4.1 UNHCR has increased technical expertise and resources at global, regional and field levels to reduce its environmental impact from **supply activities**.
- 4.2 UNHCR has increased technical expertise and resources at global, regional and field levels to reduce its environmental impact from its **own fleet, travel and infrastructure**.

WHY UNHCR? WHAT IS THE COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE WE BRING? UNHCR is already recognized as a sustainability leader amongst UN agencies. In 2021, the direct per capita carbon emissions of UNHCR were 3.0 tons per person, compared to a United Nations average of 4.1. Building on this, UNHCR is committed to measuring and better understanding its environmental footprint and making strategic investments to further mitigate the impact of its infrastructure, fleet, travel and supply on the environment. With one of the widest field presences among UN agencies, UNHCR has potential to make a significant positive contribution to climate change mitigation.

This change will happen at two levels – both from the ground up and centrally through strategic organization-wide initiatives. Ongoing and planned efforts by UNHCR to assess its overarching GHG emissions include developing a standardized methodology to identify GHG reduction opportunities and track performance. The organization will prioritize making strategic investments in renewable energy to transition from its reliance on fossil fuels, particularly in remote locations that are not connected to a reliable electrical grid. It will also reduce the plastic content of its overall supply and the carbon footprint of travel and transport, engaging with its staff across the globe to raise awareness of its environmental impact and promote behaviour change at individual and organizational level through campaigns and policies.



Following a flood in the district of Madagascar, Cameroon, in October 2022, a family from the host community uses a canoe to reach safety, taking with them the remains of their house.

© UNHCR/Moise Amedje Peladai

5. THE FIVE PRIORITY ACTIONS UNHCR WILL TAKE TO BRING ABOUT CHANGE

UNHCR will execute five high-impact global actions through its country operations, regional bureaux and headquarters, joining forces with affected communities, hosting governments, development and climate actors, civil society and other relevant partners:

5.1 Global thought leadership and advocacy for protection, solutions and inclusion

Globally, pursuant to its mandate, UNHCR will reaffirm its position as provider of guidance and expertise to the international community at large, on the protection, solutions and inclusion of forcibly displaced people in the context of climate change impacts.

In line with UNHCR's Statute and in fulfillment of its supervisory role over the application of refugee instruments, we will provide authoritative technical and legal guidance to states and other stakeholders on addressing the international protection needs of people displaced across borders in relation to climate change impacts and disasters where relevant. This includes support to the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees. Further based on our protection leadership in response to internal displacement crises, we will have a leading and coordinating role on addressing the protection needs of internally displaced people in the context of climate change impacts and disasters.

UNHCR will also work with states and other partners to develop frameworks and responses to ensure protection of the rights of other people moving more generally in the context of climate change impacts, including by supporting the implementation of the Global Compact on Migration and other relevant frameworks.

UNHCR will maintain an executive-level presence and provide active expert contributions at key climate fora and at discussions on broader human mobility issues, including the UNFCCC Taskforce on Displacement, the Platform on Disaster Displacement, regional fora and others. In addition to UNHCR's advocacy for the protection of people displaced in relation to the adverse effects of climate change impacts and disasters in line with existing legal, normative and policy frameworks, we will advance three advocacy imperatives at global, regional and local levels, which underpin the logic of the strategic plan's theory of change.

Global advocacy asks to member States and development partners on inclusion and beyond

- 1.** Governments and municipalities to include forcibly displaced and stateless people and their hosting areas, as well as areas of potential return, in climate-related systems, plans and policies without discrimination (including adaptation, DRR, early warning, health surveillance and response systems, and development plans), and ensure their plans and strategies are protection-sensitive and respect do-not-harm principles.
- 2.** Development actors and international financial institutions to include forcibly displaced people and their hosting areas, as well as areas of potential return and reintegration, in their plans, policies and financing.
- 3.** Governments and municipalities to commit to out-of-camp solutions, freedom of movement, and provisions for secure housing, land and property arrangements for forcibly displaced people in non-hazardous, risk-mitigated and economically viable areas.

5.2 Strategic partnerships and alliances

Noting that climate change impacts are driving all types of human mobility, including forced displacement, UNHCR will strengthen strategic partnerships with our sister agencies, human rights institutions and other actors, so that we speak with amplified, harmonized voices on protection, human mobility, and climate change impacts.

5.3 Leveraging for inclusion of displaced and stateless people in others' climate adaptation and resilience programmes

UNHCR has already achieved significant impact in working with governments and development partners to ensure that resilience and adaptation investments are programmed to reach communities that host forcibly displaced populations and implemented with a protection-centered approach.

In **Uganda**, UNHCR played a key role in the design of a government-led water and environment sector plan for areas hosting refugees who fled conflict and persecution in South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Based on the plan, the Government of Uganda adopted several reforms aiming at the inclusion of refugees into national systems. This included transitioning the water service management from humanitarian actors to national systems with the support of development actors. By the end of 2023, more than half of all refugee settlements in Uganda are already assigned to national water utilities. Both refugees and host communities are engaged in the sustainable management of water and other natural resources. This collaborative and integrative approach has attracted significant financial and technical support from development actors to displacement contexts, including from the World Bank, KfW, GIZ, DANIDA and AFD, promoting long-term sustainability and climate resilience and adaptation among refugees and their hosts.

UNHCR will now significantly advance this catalytic approach in countries where existing climate adaptation and resilience programmes are well established, in support of national government priorities. Focusing our efforts on 10 priority countries where the greatest potential for partnership and leverage exist, for the first year of the strategic plan, UNHCR staff will work with governments, UN sister agencies, development partners and civil society to ensure that forcibly displaced, returnees and stateless people are meaningfully included in climate resilience and adaptation policies, plans and programmes. In accordance with the UNHCR Strategy for Working with Development Actors, UNHCR will take a more active role “at the table” in advising development and climate actors on the scope of their investments and the centrality of protection.

Nikuze Rachel (left), a refugee from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, collects water at a water point in Nakivale refugee settlement, Uganda. As a water user committee member, she helps to care for the community water source.

© UNHCR/Esther Ruth Mbabazi



5.4 Implementing multi-year climate projects in sectors/programming areas where UNHCR leads

In contexts where UNHCR has a comparative advantage and is well-placed to deliver multi-year climate projects, it will employ its technical expertise and protection leadership to support national authorities and communities to design, implement and monitor projects which directly contribute to the protection resilience and adaptation capacity of forcibly displaced, returnee and host communities. These sectors include protection, water, renewable energy, shelter/housing and livelihoods and economic inclusion, among others. In all instances, our projects will have a protection outcome.

To support this programming endeavour, UNHCR will seek resources for multi-year climate adaptation or resilience projects from new donors, such as development actors, the private sector and recipients of global climate instruments. There are nine countries where UNHCR will first advance this approach, selected on the basis of our technical comparative advantage and the availability of adaptation and resilience funding.

In **Pakistan**, UNHCR is implementing a multi-year, German development-funded project to empower refugees and host communities to address their energy needs through a sustainable, cleaner approach. The project supports more than 250,000 refugees and their hosts with clean energy at household level and in public and community facilities. Displaced families and their host communities are benefiting from improved cooking measures and clean energy access.¹⁹ The energy project has been instrumental in showcasing the social value of clean energy, thereby attracting funds from other donors. More refugee homes are now connected to renewable energy for lighting and connectivity. These interventions will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 3,000 tons CO₂. The project, in collaboration with the government institutes, is also providing certified energy training to 600 young refugees and hosts. It has increased the access of refugees and hosts to livelihood opportunities, fostering greater self-reliance.

Children from the host community affected by the floods in Pakistan study using the solar lights provided by UNHCR.

© UNHCR/Humera Karim



¹⁹ Learn more about the project [here](#).

5.5 Delivering humanitarian action to immediately support climate resilience and adaptation

Today, there are at least nine countries where climate has emerged as a key factor influencing forcibly displaced people's ongoing protection and humanitarian needs, as food and water become scarcer and drivers of conflict increase.

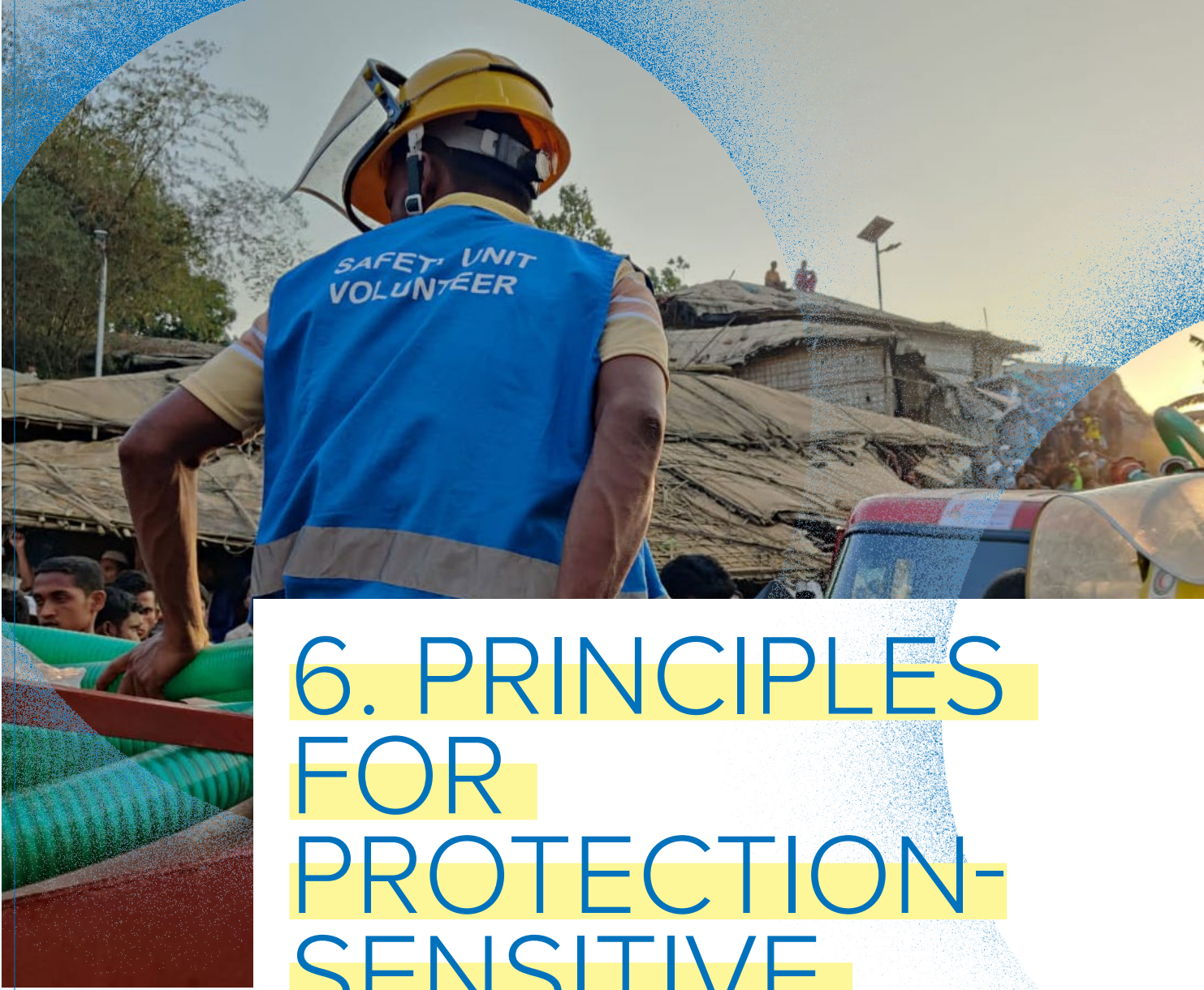
In each of these contexts, there is relatively little investment from national, development and climate actors in adaptation and resilience for the fragile areas where forcibly displaced populations live. In the absence of development investment, UNHCR often finds itself providing relief and support to communities to improve their resilience to the chronic impacts of climate change, a commitment it will continue to advance, while at the same time stepping up the design of its emergency interventions to be more environmentally sustainable and climate resilient, minimizing negative impacts on local ecosystems.

In **South Sudan**, UNHCR supports climate resilience and adaptation by collaborating with refugees and their hosts to turn flooded lands into food growing opportunities. To address the recurring threat of widespread floods during the rainy season, flood response teams have been created in Maban camp, with over 75 per cent participation from women. The teams have identified areas at risk of flooding, developed communication networks for early warning and planted tree seedlings to minimize the impacts of the seasonal flooding. Furthermore, volunteers from both communities have built flood barriers and drainage channels, thereby preventing further damage to property and farmlands and mitigating the risk of onward displacement. This community engagement has not only helped to prepare the over 180,000 refugees at Maban camp and 30,000 host community members for future climate hazards, but also enhanced solidarity among communities, secured farmland to cultivate vegetables and food crops and reduced reliance on humanitarian assistance.

Floods have become the new reality for internally displaced people and refugees in South Sudan, jeopardising their shelters, possessions and livelihoods.

© UNHCR/Andrew McConnell





Hundreds of Rohingya refugee Safety Unit volunteers trained in firefighting are the first to arrive at the scene of the blaze that swept through Camp 11 of Kutupalong Balukhali refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, in March 2023.

© UNHCR/Sahat Zia Hero

6. PRINCIPLES FOR PROTECTION-SENSITIVE CLIMATE ACTION PROGRAMMING

In UNHCR, we will adapt the way we plan, programme and monitor our work to be in line with three cross-cutting principles, to ensure we operate in a protection-centered, environmentally sustainable and climate-smart manner. These principles encompass our work and the work of our partners, as well as the inputs and resources we use, such as supply systems.



7. WHERE: OUR INITIAL FOCUS COUNTRIES

UNHCR has identified 22 countries where climate change and its impacts will be experienced the most severely between now and 2030.²⁰ These countries – already fragile due to poverty and insecurity – will find it particularly challenging to adapt to the effects of climate change. Collectively, they host 52 per cent of internally displaced people, 24 per cent of stateless people and 28 per cent of refugees, with numbers likely to rise.²¹ Among these, UNHCR is particularly concerned about nine countries with very large populations of displaced and stateless people (500,000 or more). These countries feel most deeply the climate emergency, yet they lack substantial planned development investment in climate adaptation and resilience and are not included in global climate financing instruments. UNHCR will focus its global efforts to support initially these 22 countries during the first years of the strategic plan. These countries will be reviewed and adjusted on a regular basis as circumstances change.

Mohammad Zubaid has given some of his land in Janat Bagh village, Afghanistan, for the installation of a water reservoir, which is powered by two solar panels built with UNHCR support. The village has been heavily affected by conflict.

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²⁰ CGIAR (2023). Baseline and future 2030 period climate data are extracted from the Phase 6 Coupled Model Intercomparison Project (CMIP6). The future climate data represents an average from 2020 to 2040. The model uses the climate pathway with the highest radiative forcing (SSP5 8.5). The results are synthesized on three comparable indices based on the three individual hazards. The information is transformed to construct an unbiased weighting composite index that reflects the compounding effects of all hazards when co-occurring.

²¹ UNHCR Operational Data Portal (2021), ND-GAIN Country Index (2020) and Refugee Data Finder (2023). The country selection involved a two-phase process that involved a data-driven analysis and a validation exercise within the organization. The analysis consists of revising and selecting 50 countries with the lowest ND-GAIN scores (most climate-vulnerable) and a minimum of 500,000 forcibly displaced people. From the initial list, a preliminary list of 22 countries was generated, and this was followed by expert judgment by regions.

8. GLOBAL ENABLERS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

UNHCR will internally recalibrate to enact this nuanced and differentiated approach to climate action for (1) people fleeing in relation to the adverse effects of climate change and disasters and seeking international protection, (2) people already displaced and living in climate vulnerable situations and (3) the environment. Five global enablers have been identified that will allow country operations to effectively implement the priority actions.

Improved data and evidence

To effectively deliver on the strategic plan, UNHCR requires enhanced data and evidence. We will introduce new indicators to measure and showcase the results of our climate action. In addition, we will strengthen our collaboration with research institutes, academia and affected communities to understand and monitor the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation on forcibly displaced communities. Both actions will contribute towards evidence-based decision-making at strategic and operational levels.

New systems and processes

UNHCR will ensure its systems and processes are fit to effectively deliver the strategic plan. This will include reviewing the way we seek and receive multi-year development and climate funding, and the way we monitor and report on multi-year, projectized funding. Internal systems for tracking climate action in operations' multi-year strategies will also be enhanced.

Culture change and clarity about our role

Successful implementation of the plan will require all UNHCR personnel to embrace our role in climate action, as defined by the strategic plan and our protection mandate. An internal communications campaign will spread awareness of UNHCR's role and added value in climate action and equip colleagues from senior leadership to those serving in remote field locations to connect our core mandate to the vision of the strategic plan.

Strengthened skills and knowledge

UNHCR will review the skills and capacities of its workforce and partners in climate adaptation and resilience programming and resource mobilization to ensure we can responsibly deliver climate action. This will include tailored training for senior managers, programme, external relations and technical colleagues, among others, to actively pursue major resilience and adaptation programmes and leverage opportunities for inclusion.

Increased resource mobilization and innovative financing

UNHCR will commit to advocate and significantly increase its mobilization of funding and finance to support climate action for the benefit of both displaced populations and host communities. We will establish a new global climate fund for activities in the situations most affected by climate change. We will align our existing innovative financing instruments – such as the Refugee Environmental Protection Fund and Project Flow – to support the most climate-vulnerable contexts, enabling UNHCR to have financing available for a more environmentally sustainable and climate-resilient response. Headquarters and regional bureaux will fast track support to priority situations to attract climate funding, alongside other operations actively pursuing results for climate.



9. MONITORING

The results framework for the strategic plan will set out a concise list of indicators that UNHCR operations will use to monitor progress towards the four objectives and their corresponding outputs.

South Sudanese refugee and climate activist Opira Bosco Okot teaches school students about environmental protection and how to plant trees at Palabek Refugee Settlement, Uganda.

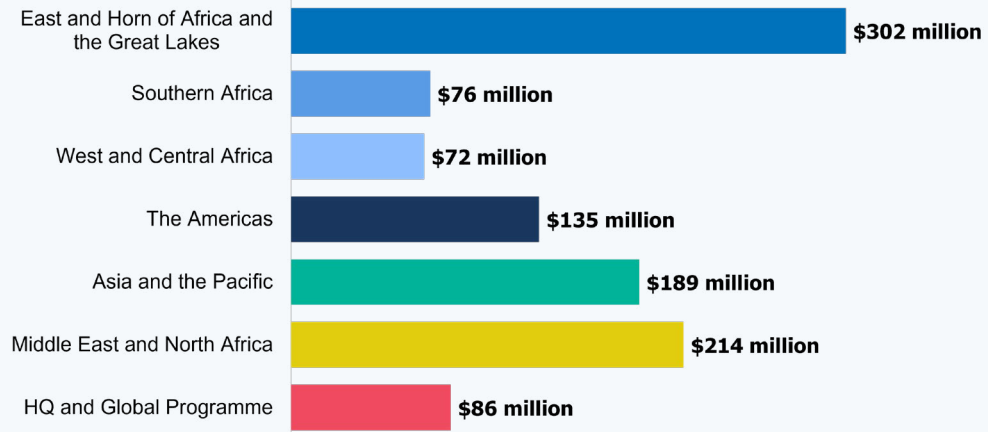
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10. ANNEXES

ANNEX I. Priority countries and actions for the first year

Region	Country	UNHCR role
Eastern Horn of Africa and Great Lakes	Ethiopia	Leverage for inclusion Programme for development
	Kenya	Leverage for inclusion
	Rwanda	Programme for development
	South Sudan	Humanitarian action for climate resilience Programme for development
	Somalia	Humanitarian action for climate resilience Programme for development
	Uganda	Leverage for inclusion Programme for development
West and Central Africa	Burkina Faso	Humanitarian action for climate resilience
	Cameroon	Programme for development
	Chad	Humanitarian action for climate resilience
	Central African Republic	Leverage for inclusion
	Niger	Leverage for inclusion
Southern Africa	Democratic Republic of the Congo	Humanitarian action for climate resilience
	Malawi	Humanitarian action for climate resilience
	Mozambique	Leverage for inclusion Programme for development
Middle East and North Africa	Jordan	Leverage for inclusion
	Mauritania	Leverage for inclusion
	Yemen	Humanitarian action for climate resilience
Asia	Afghanistan	Humanitarian action for climate resilience Programme for development
	Bangladesh	Humanitarian action for climate resilience Leverage for inclusion Programme for development
	Pakistan	Leverage for inclusion Programme for development
Americas	Ecuador	Leverage for inclusion
	Honduras	Leverage for inclusion

ANNEX II. Climate Action Budget for 2024

\$1.074B



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

Cover image

Dorotea, a Burundian refugee and single mother to seven children, waters her potato field near Maratane refugee settlement in Mozambique. Her home was destroyed by Cyclone Gombe in March 2022 and she lost her crop. UNHCR is helping build shelters that are more resilient to future extreme weather.

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