

A moment of transition



In the course of 2018, conflict, persecution and civil strife continued to uproot millions of people, in harrowing circumstances. In many parts of the world, the politics around refugee and migration issues became more acrimonious and polarized, with direct consequences for the lives of many refugees who were denied refuge, separated from family members, or pushed back to situations of danger. Yet at the same time, a groundswell of solidarity was evident. Long-standing host countries stood firm in their commitment to protection principles and humanitarian values, and people across all walks of life came together to welcome and support refugees, including in countries where official policies became more restrictive.

For UNHCR and its partners, 2018 brought many challenges. In the first part of the year, we faced a race against time to stabilize conditions for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, ahead of the monsoon season. The Venezuela crisis reverberated across an entire region, as a growing number of destitute and vulnerable people sought stability and refuge beyond its borders. Hostilities in Yemen intensified, exposing millions to hunger; and the number uprooted by recurrent conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic also soared. Countries such as Cameroon, Ethiopia and Nicaragua were affected by new or accelerating displacement.

The plight of refugees and migrants moving in mixed flows—exploited, imprisoned and even enslaved while undertaking perilous journeys—called for resolute action and practical solutions, even as insecurity and other restrictions often limited our scope of action, in Libya and elsewhere. An average of six people lost their lives each day trying to cross the Mediterranean, with search and rescue capacities reduced and governments failing to agree on predictable disembarkation arrangements.



Grace, 27, from Uganda leads a life skills class on sewing machines for men and women from the refugee and host communities at Bidibidi Refugee Settlement in Uganda.



UN Refugee Chief Filippo Grandi talks to a young returnee in the ruins of Souran in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Millions of internally displaced people returned home in Iraq and Syria, often to widespread destruction and hardship, while in Afghanistan, Somalia and other long-standing displacement situations, the scope for solutions remained very limited. By the end of the year, the number of people of concern to UNHCR around the world—asylum-seekers, refugees, returnees, the internally displaced and stateless—had reached 74.8 million people, the highest figure ever.

Amidst these challenges, with the support of committed donors, and working closely with generous host countries and other partners, UNHCR continued to be present in the field—saving lives, securing protection and helping build a future for millions of refugees, internally displaced and stateless persons. Some 39% of our workforce was assigned in “hardship” duty stations, often in insecure environments, separated from their families. We made

significant investments in strengthening the integrity of our programmes, through new risk management measures and additional oversight capacities, and implemented a range of prevention and response measures in relation to sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment.

Record funding commitments made for 2018 at our pledging conference in December 2017 were an important expression of confidence in our programmes. The amount pledged—more importantly, the flexible funding pledged—placed us on a solid footing to commence our 2018 programmes and paved the way to a record year for voluntary contributions. All told, UNHCR received \$4.184 billion in contributions. When added to carry-over and other amounts, UNHCR had funds available to it of \$4.710 billion but, in the face of growing needs, this still left a funding gap of 43%.

This was also a moment of transformation. On 17 December 2018, the Global Compact on Refugees was affirmed by the United Nations General Assembly, presenting a new set of opportunities to translate the principle of responsibility-sharing into concrete action, building on a growing number of positive examples of the application of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework.



The Compact presented an important opportunity to broaden the base of support for refugees and make it more predictable, to accelerate the shift away from outdated camp-based response models; to drive refugee inclusion in local communities; to mobilize development resources, civil society and the private sector; and to refocus attention on solutions.

Making this work requires adaptation, innovation and the ability to influence and shape responses on the ground. This is the driving rationale behind UNHCR’s internal transformation process, and the regionalization and decentralization phase that we launched in 2018. Our aim is to ensure that we have strong and empowered country operations, with the authority and weight of our organization behind them, able to engage a wide range of partners, build and implement strategies,

take decisions and direct resources in a quick and nimble way. This work is aligned with the UN Development System reforms that are now being rolled out, in which we are fully engaged.

With the affirmation of the Compact, we now have a framework to transform our response to major refugee situations around the world, including by broadening the base of support beyond traditional host, donor, and resettlement countries, and making it a truly “whole-of-international-community affair”. The first Global Refugee Forum, to take place in December 2019, will offer an unprecedented opportunity to showcase, and further galvanize, innovative and tangible ways of applying the principles of solidarity and equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing in practice.

At this moment when division and intolerance have gained ground in many parts of the world, it is critical that we are able to demonstrate, in practical, meaningful ways, that international cooperation and multilateralism still work. By giving substance to the Compact, and working together to translate its promise into action, we can do just that—and help strengthen cohesion and build opportunities for millions of uprooted people and hosting communities worldwide.

A Letter From Mosul

Angelina Jolie, the UNHCR Special Envoy

A year after the fighting to liberate it ended, West Mosul lies abandoned, ruined and apocalyptic. The streets are eerily quiet: hundreds of thousands of former residents of the city are living in camps or nearby communities because there is nothing for them to go back to. In streets that look entirely uninhabitable, small numbers of shell-shocked families are clearing the rubble of their homes with their bare hands, braving the concealed explosives left behind. Even worse than the physical ruin of the city, even worse than the sundering of its cultural fabric, is the damage done to the emotional well-being of its people. The injustices done to them and the suffering they endured at the hands of their occupiers is impossible to quantify.

At another time in history, would we have reacted differently to what happened in Mosul? Would we have reacted as we did after the liberation of Europe after World War II, flooding it with assistance to rebuild and recover? I thought of the survivors of chemical weapons attacks, of hospital bombings, of the organized rape and deliberate starvation of civilians that are all features of contemporary conflicts, and

asked myself, have we become numb to human suffering? Are we guilty of performing a form of collective moral triage, selectively choosing when and where we will defend human rights, for how long and to what degree?

In Mosul, I felt I was standing at a ground zero of foreign policy failures over the last decade. But also in a place that represents the human capacity for survival and renewal, and the stubborn endurance of universal values in individual hearts. I think of a father I met, and his joy that his two young daughters are able to go to school again. Penniless and without a roof over their heads, he spoke as if he had no more treasured possession than their report cards. There would be no more profound symbol of victory than every girl in Mosul being able to go back to school and excel.

Not a single family I met in West Mosul asked me for anything. They are not counting on our assistance. Mosul can trace its history back 3,000 years—I am sure its people will overcome those three years of terror. But how much better it would be if we saw their recovery as our joint endeavour.

The above are excerpts from the Special Envoy's original article published in the HuffPost. In addition to her mission to Iraq, the Special Envoy also carried her advocacy and voice to Jordan, to the Republic of Korea, and to the Venezuela situation.



“I felt I was standing at a ground zero of foreign policy failures over the last decade. But also in a place that represents the human capacity for survival and renewal, and the stubborn endurance of universal values in individual hearts.”—Mosul, Iraq, June 2018.

“If we’ve learned anything from the last decade in the Middle East and Afghanistan, it is that if ‘liberty’ is not followed by effective support to ensure stability, then the cycle of violence only continues.”

—Angelina Jolie, UNHCR Special Envoy

Appointed Special Envoy in 2012, Angelina Jolie undertakes advocacy and represents UNHCR and the High Commissioner at the diplomatic level, and engages with decision-makers on global displacement issues. Through this work, she has helped contribute to the vital process of finding solutions for people forced to flee their homes.

GLOBAL STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 2018-2019

UNHCR's Global Strategic Priorities (GSPs) for the 2018-2019 biennium showcase the most important areas in which UNHCR made targeted efforts to improving the protection of, and seeking solutions for, its people of concern. They are divided into two categories: a set of operational priorities for field operations and a set of support and management priorities for core corporate functions.

At the country operations level, UNHCR strongly advocated the inclusion of people of concern into national plans, in line with the SDGs. These efforts were supported by the stronger alignment of the operational GSPs with the SDGs, such as in the areas of gender equality, peace and justice, food security, health, education, livelihoods, and water sanitation and hygiene.

The GSPs were increased from eight to ten—the additional two being on cash and data—to better reflect how UNHCR took forward the vision set out in its 2017-2021 Strategic Directions, and to align them with UNHCR's commitments under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Grand Bargain.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Sustained efforts on core GSP areas prompted improvements in several fields of work. For instance, the operational and coordination capacity for shelter and cash assistance was strengthened in several countries. Cash-based interventions increased 13% compared to 2017, reaching \$568 million. Over 13,600 Refugee Housing Units were deployed to 27 operations. UNHCR as well worked on the inclusion of refugees into national health insurance

systems. Enhancing resilience and facilitating equitable access to health care, UNHCR rolled out a new integrated refugee health information system, and began collecting and analyzing current data from health services in refugee settings.

UNHCR supported governments undertaking individual registration of asylum-seekers and refugees, including completing a joint verification exercise with the Government of Uganda for over 1 million refugees. Other key joint UNHCR-government registration or verification exercises were initiated in Bangladesh and Ethiopia. As it stands, over 7.2 million refugees are now registered in UNHCR's digital population registration and identity management ecosystem.

Globally, the enrolment rates of primary school-aged refugee children improved, with the percentage of children enrolled rising to 61%. By the end of 2018, targeted programmes resulted in the enrolment of an additional 200,000 children (almost 50% of whom were girls) into primary education across twelve countries.

Compared to 2017, there was a 16.5% rise in emergency deployments of trained personnel (including partners), totaling some 420 people (285 UNHCR staff and 135 standby partner staff), reflecting strengthened partnership and emergency-response capacity to meet the needs of refugees and people of concern.

CHALLENGES

The onset of new emergency situations required a reprioritization of funds towards addressing lifesaving needs in many operations including in the Americas, where the exodus of Venezuelans created

significant challenges for neighbouring countries, as well as States further afield. Ensuring access to assistance and basic services was also challenged by the increasing number of people of concern on the move.

Access to adequate shelter remained a major challenge in many operations, despite notable progress in finding solutions for it. Notably, deterioration of the Venezuela crisis escalated the need for shelter in the Americas where UNHCR focused its response on cash-based initiatives to respond to the shelter needs in urban areas as well as emergency shelter provision at transit sites.

UNHCR identified 1.2 million people in need of resettlement in 2018. By the end of the year, 81,337 submissions had been made to 29 countries. UNHCR facilitated the departure of 55,680 people to 27 countries.

Limited resources resulted in cuts in food assistance, food security and nutrition assistance. In eastern Chad for example, where the situation has been deteriorating over the past 3 years, several settlements reported global acute malnutrition rates over 15%, corresponding to emergency levels.

Inclusion of children of concern into national child protection system remained a challenge. Where such systems functioned effectively and were accessible to refugees and other children of concern, key service providers often lacked the knowledge and structures to effectively coordinate and respond to the complex protection needs of children of concern.

While UNHCR made important progress in expanding refugees' financial inclusion and promoting refugees' right to work, existing legal frameworks or practical obstacles, such as high unemployment and poverty rates in many host countries, continued to impede access to safe and sustainable employment for people of concern.

MORE INFORMATION

More detail and context are contained throughout this publication, in the regional summaries, and in particular in the matrices in the thematic chapters. Detailed reporting on UNHCR's achievements and challenges across all GSP areas in 2018 are available in the detailed progress report on the Global Focus website.



OPERATIONAL GSPs

SAFEGUARDING FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS



Favourable protection environment



Fair protection processes and documentation

RESPONDING WITH LIFESAVING SUPPORT



Security from violence and exploitation



Basic needs and services
Reducing mortality
International standards in shelter and WASH

BUILDING BETTER FUTURES



Community empowerment and self-reliance
Building coexistence and active participation
Education and livelihoods



Durable solutions

SUPPORT AND MANAGEMENT GSPs

Financial management	International protection
Information and communications technologies	Coordination
Programme management	Emergency preparedness and response
Mobilization of support	Human resources
Data	Cash