



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: Limited
30 June 2023

Original: English

Committee for Programme and Coordination

Sixty-third session

30 May–30 June 2023

Draft report

Rapporteur: Mr. Rouven **Klein** (Germany)

Addendum

Programme questions: proposed programme budget for 2024

(Item 3 (a))

Programme 21

International protection, durable solutions and assistance to refugees

1. At its 12th meeting, on 6 June 2023, the Committee considered programme 21, International protection, durable solutions and assistance to refugees, of the proposed programme plan for 2024 and programme performance in 2022 ([A/78/6 \(Sect.25\)](#)). The Committee also had before it a note by the Secretariat on the review of the proposed programme plan by sectoral, functional and regional bodies ([E/AC.51/2023/9](#)).

2. The representative of the Secretary-General introduced the programme and, together with other representatives of the Secretary-General, responded to questions raised by the Committee during its consideration of the programme.

Discussion

3. Delegations expressed support for the work carried out by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), including its efforts to assist refugees, asylum-seekers, persons with disabilities and stateless persons, which was one of the United Nations priorities under the humanitarian pillar. A number of delegations acknowledged the crucial role of UNHCR as the main international agency for the protection of those categories of persons, in particular in the context of the ongoing migration and refugee crisis affecting almost the entire globe. It was noted that the Office continued to successfully perform its important functions under the current challenging conditions, and that ongoing conflicts around the world were



forcing hundreds of thousands of people to leave their places of permanent residence in search of protection. Delegations expressed their support for and their intent to collaborate with UNHCR to help it to realize its 2024 programme plan.

4. Delegations expressed appreciation for the presentation of the document and its content, noting that it was comprehensive, compact and logical. Clarification was sought on how the planned results for 2024 reflected the impact of the war in Ukraine, which had increased the level of forced displacement and consequently affected the work of the Office.

5. Some delegations opined that the work of the Office was of great importance as it supported States in protecting and assisting millions of people around the world who had been forced to flee as a result of armed conflict, persecution, discrimination and the climate emergency. The Office was encouraged to advocate adherence by States to relevant international and regional instruments and to support the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees, including by advocating greater financial support for refugee host countries and communities and by reacting swiftly to new humanitarian crises, including in conflict-affected areas.

6. A delegation emphasized that it was important for UNHCR to conduct its functions in strict accordance with its mandates, the principles of independence, neutrality and impartiality, and international law. The delegation also emphasized that predictable and equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing among States and stakeholders was critical, and noted that addressing the root causes of displacement was essential for achieving durable solutions.

7. Another delegation emphasized the importance of dealing with the underlying causes of displacement, including climate change and unilateral coercive measures, and of a strengthened partnership for sustainable development. A delegation opined that UNHCR should focus on its core functions and that the humanitarian nature of its work should be safeguarded to avoid politicization. The delegation expressed its serious concern at the abuse of refugees during transit, and noted that prevention, mitigation and responding to sexual and gender-based violence and violence against children, including sexual violence, was critical. The delegation expressed its hope that UNHCR would advocate against the practice of transferring refugees to other continents.

8. A delegation noted with regret that a list of countries were subject to illegally imposed unilateral coercive measures, which affected the speed with which much-needed humanitarian assistance was provided to the most vulnerable victims. In that regard, the delegation inquired about UNHCR's plans to work towards lifting the sanctions that had been imposed, and the full implementation of humanitarian exemptions.

9. A delegation noted that the mandate of UNHCR included providing assistance for the inclusion of refugees in local societies and for their repatriation, return and resettlement. The delegation said that the programme plan insufficiently presented and covered durable solutions for refugees, and expressed the hope that other areas of the Office's work would be reflected in future programmes. The heavy burden of refugees on host States in terms of education and health services, job opportunities, infrastructure and water was emphasized, and the view was expressed that the Office's programmes needed to mobilize resources to respond to the demands of host countries, especially in the development of infrastructure, such as the construction of schools and health-care facilities, for the benefit of both refugees and local communities. While the Office's efforts to mobilize extrabudgetary resources were recognized, a delegation opined that such resources were not adequate to meet the minimum needs of refugees. The delegation highlighted the regional aspect and noted that refugees

often had an impact on more than one country, and in that regard emphasized the importance of regional projects.

10. A delegation noted the seriousness of the global refugee situation. The total number of forcibly displaced persons had increased to 103 million, which presented many risks. It was further noted that developing countries were hosting over 80 per cent of refugees. The view was expressed that refugees should be included in the pandemic-related and economic plans of host States, and that UNHCR should encourage developed countries to provide more support to refugees and host countries.

11. With regard to the Yaoundé Declaration on Solutions in the context of Forced Displacement related to the Central African Republic Crisis, a delegation noted the difficulties experienced in refugee camps in terms of accessing medical services, the provision of food and shelter, and the risk of tensions between the host population and refugees because of a lack of funding and refugees settling outside shelter sites.

12. A delegation said that the staffing of UNHCR could be made more inclusive and diverse, and expressed the hope that the ratio of staff from developing and underrepresented and unrepresented countries would increase.

13. The Chair emphasized that matters related to parts of the programme dealing with resources were not within the mandate of the Committee and called on the Committee to focus the discussion on part A of the programme.

14. With regard to the strategy and external factors, a delegation welcomed the programme's reference to the role of the Global Compact on Refugees in achieving sustainable solutions for refugees. A delegation noted that it looked forward to the Global Refugee Forum to be held in December 2023 and the opportunity that it presented for the work of UNHCR, member States and those across society to advance progress towards achieving the objectives of the Compact.

15. A delegation expressed its support for the mandate of UNHCR and for the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees, and acknowledged the importance of protection in humanitarian assistance and in the mandate of UNHCR, and noted the complex environment in which the Office operated. The delegation highlighted the challenges that UNHCR faced in terms of security, particularly in the context of armed conflict, as well as the risks of violence to which the Office's staff were exposed. The delegation also noted the financial challenges faced by the Office and recalled the importance of flexible and predictable support, highlighting its own multiannual funding commitment of €30 million over three years.

16. A delegation recalled that the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its Protocol of 1967 were the main legal foundation of the international refugee protection regime. The delegation said that the work of UNHCR should be guided by the Global Compact on Refugees, with strengthened cooperation with States and other stakeholders. At the same time, the delegation recalled that the provisions of the Compact were not legally binding, and noted that it was important for UNHCR to align its activities with the national laws and policies of affected States.

17. With respect to paragraph 25.3 (d) of the proposed programme plan, a delegation emphasized the need to adhere to intergovernmentally agreed terms in the preparation of programme plans.

18. With reference to paragraph 25.3 (f), a delegation noted with satisfaction that enhanced protection for internally displaced persons was mentioned in the programme plan, and asked how the programme would make best use of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's independent review of humanitarian responses to internal displacement, and the potential learnings that this would provide.

19. Noting the importance of the work carried out by UNHCR to ensure the international protection of refugees and other persons of concern, a delegation emphasized the importance of close cooperation with national and local authorities in order to achieve maximum impact, and in this regard asked about the actions that were envisaged to strengthen national asylum systems at both the global and regional levels. Another delegation welcomed the commitment of UNHCR to devoting more than 25 per cent of its expenditure to local and national responders and emphasized the need for stronger involvement of local civil societies.

20. With reference to the planning assumption that voluntary funding from donors would enable UNHCR to meet the budgeted needs of refugees and other persons of concern in full, as reflected in paragraph 25.6 (e), a delegation asked UNHCR to elaborate on the efforts undertaken by the Office to encourage voluntary contributions.

21. With reference to paragraph 25.7, a delegation noted with satisfaction that a reference to “the principle of participation” had been included in the programme plan, and sought clarification on the Office’s relationship with refugee interlocutors and the mechanisms to engage with them. In the context of programme delivery partners, UNHCR was requested to provide further information about its accountability to affected populations and its localization efforts, particularly with regard to refugee-led organizations. With reference to the same paragraph, another delegation noted the growing necessity and urgency of active work to attract donor resources, including from international financial institutions and development banks, and sought clarification about the proposed work in that area.

22. With respect to paragraphs 25.9 and 25.10, support was expressed for the commitment of UNHCR to include a gender perspective and disability inclusion framework to mitigate the needs of the most vulnerable. With respect to the gender perspective, a delegation said that there was a need to provide access to health care, psychosocial support, safe shelter and legal aid, among other services, and sought clarification on whether UNHCR planned to coordinate with local partners and other non-governmental organizations to provide such essential services. A question was asked about the protection of beneficiaries against sexual abuse and exploitation. A delegation emphasized that it was important that the programme plan address that issue, particularly with reference to possible abuses by humanitarian actors. With respect to paragraph 25.9, a delegation expressed the view that the term “sexual and gender-based violence” should be reformulated as “sexual violence against women and girls”.

23. Noting its strong support for the mandate of UNHCR, which had a unique and crucial responsibility to protect the continuously increasing number of people around the world that were forced to leave their homes behind, a delegation welcomed the Office’s innovation efforts during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic to ensure that the basic needs of refugees were met, in particular the use of digital tools to provide services in the areas of telehealth, education, refugee status determination and cash assistance support. The efforts of UNHCR to innovate and digitize some of its activities following the pandemic were welcomed. At the same time, the importance of protecting the data of beneficiaries was emphasized. A delegation welcomed the efforts of UNHCR to reduce its environmental impact, both in terms of its management and the activities implemented, and further noted its support for the increased use of direct financial assistance (cash) as a more dignified and sustainable means of supporting recipients.

24. With respect to evaluation activities, a delegation welcomed the Office’s efforts to take into account the results of and lessons learned from evaluations in the proposed programme plan for 2024, and sought clarification on which country strategies would be evaluated in 2024. Noting the reference to development actors, a delegation sought

clarification on how UNHCR viewed the division of labour and responsibilities with such actors, while maintaining its refugee protection mandate in contexts where crises were not acute but where protection needs remained. It was noted that UNHCR had significant global operational activities, with staff resources representing up to 30 per cent of resources, and in this regard it was noted that evaluation activities should also address how to make operations more effective and efficient.

25. With respect to programme performance in 2022, a delegation commended UNHCR for its efforts to assist 13.3 million persons of concern and 5 million children in emergency situations.

26. With respect to planned results for 2024, result 1: strengthened protection of and durable solutions for refugees and asylum-seekers through individual registration, a delegation made reference to paragraph 25.19 and expressed its strong support for the efforts of UNHCR, which had exceeded its planned target by 2.5 million for the number of refugees and asylum-seekers who had received registration and documentation services in 2022, and sought clarification regarding the specific challenges faced in the process.

27. With respect to planned result 2: solutions through resettlement provided for refugees at risk, a delegation noted with concern the low actual performance rate for the number of resettled refugees in 2022 against the planned target. The delegation noted the planned target of 100,000 and inquired about the plans for achieving that goal. Another delegation noted the reasons for the shortfall in meeting the planned target in 2022 and asked whether other reasons, such as institutional or funding challenges, had also affected the delivery of the Office's mandate. With respect to figure 25.III, it was noted that the graph reflected the number of resettled refugees who departed for resettlement to third countries and, in that regard, clarification was sought about what measures UNHCR was implementing to encourage the voluntary return of refugees to their own countries.

28. With respect to paragraph 25.27 and the deliverables listed in table 25.1, a delegation inquired about the measures UNHCR was taking to encourage peaceful coexistence between refugees and local populations, and to extend partnerships with, for example, the Peacebuilding Fund or the World Food Programme, in support of refugees.

Conclusions and recommendations

29. **The Committee recommended that the plenary or the relevant Main Committee or Main Committees of the General Assembly, in line with Assembly resolution 77/254, consider the programme plan for programme 21, International protection, durable solutions and assistance to refugees, of the proposed programme budget for 2024 under the agenda item entitled "Programme planning" at the seventy-eighth session of the Assembly.**