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STUDY GUIDE

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Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and
disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including
special economic assistance

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Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Report of the Secretary-General **

Summary

The present report was prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 46/182, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report annually to the Assembly and the Economic and Social Council on the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance. The report is also submitted in response to Assembly resolution 78/119 and Council resolution 2023/16. The period covered by the report is from 1 January to 31 December 2023.

The report contains an outline of measures taken to strengthen humanitarian coordination and response, information on humanitarian trends, challenges and recommendations, including in response to escalating humanitarian suffering due to conflicts and the climate crisis.

* A/79/50.

** The present report was submitted late in order to reflect the most recent information.



1 Did you know that...

Resolution 46/182 establishes the guiding principles for humanitarian assistance, and even calls for the development of the Inter Agency Standing Committee. In 1991, it was revolutionary for its contributions to the coordination of humanitarian aid.

I. Introduction

Overview of key trends

1. For people caught in humanitarian crises, 2023 was a devastating year, in which the humanitarian system was stretched to the brink and the importance of effective humanitarian coordination was underscored. There was a global escalation of armed conflicts, with devastating impacts on civilians, from the Sudan to the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ukraine, Yemen and beyond.

2. Violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law were increasingly flagrant. Starvation and sexual violence were used as methods of war. Attacks hitting civilians and civilian infrastructure increased, and the use of explosive weapons in populated areas harmed people and destroyed infrastructure. Hospitals and schools were hit, in addition to water and sanitation, energy and agricultural infrastructure. Deliberate destruction and deprivation drove forced displacement and exposed people to increased protection risks. Humanitarian and medical personnel were attacked, killed, threatened and harassed.

3. Some 399 disaster events were recorded globally in 2023, killing 86,457 people, affecting 93 million people and causing \$202.7 billion in economic damages.¹ Deaths due to disasters rose by 13 percentage points compared with 2022, in part owing to devastating earthquakes in the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye; floods in Libya, Somalia and Yemen; and climate-related disasters across the Asia-Pacific region, Central and South America and Southern Africa. El Niño intensified weather events, such as droughts, floods and extreme heat. Many developing countries faced repeated shocks, which stretched their ability to recover, and were further hindered by sustained inflation, rising debt and shrinking fiscal space.

4. The climate crisis compounded humanitarian needs, increased food insecurity and displacement, undermined resilience and worsened health and protection risks, straining humanitarian response capacities. In 2023, records were broken in terms of greenhouse gas levels, surface temperatures, ocean heat and acidification, sea level rise, Antarctic sea ice cover and glacial retreat.²

5. Population displacement reached historic levels, driven by conflict and climate-related disasters. By mid-2023, 110 million people had been forcibly displaced worldwide.³ The number of refugees increased to a record 36.4 million people.⁴ A record 71.1 million people were internally displaced – 62.5 million due to conflict and violence and 8.7 million due to disasters.⁵ Three quarters of the world's internally displaced people lived in just 10 countries, in which disasters and conflict often overlapped.

6. Food insecurity rose to unprecedented levels. Over 280 million people across 59 countries and territories faced acute food insecurity (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) phase 3 and above).⁶ Among them, 705,000 people faced catastrophic levels of food insecurity (IPC phase 5), experiencing an extreme lack of food, starvation and exhaustion of coping capacities, and were at risk of famine. A total

¹ Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters, International Disaster database, available at <https://public.emdat.be> (accessed on 16 April 2024).

² World Meteorological Organization, *State of the Global Climate 2023* (Geneva, 2024). Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Mid-Year Trends 2023* (Geneva 2023). Ibid. Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, *Global Report on Internal Displacement 2023*:

³ *Internal Displacement and Food Security* (Geneva, 2023).

⁴ Food Security Information Network and Global Network Against Food Crises, *Global Report on Food Crises 2024* (Rome, 2024).

1 Did you know that...

According to the world bank, conflicts drive up to 80% of humanitarian needs.

of 36 million people faced emergency levels of food insecurity (IPC phase 4) and required urgent action to save their lives and livelihoods. By December, in Gaza alone, more than 90 per cent of the population was estimated to be experiencing acute food insecurity, including some 577,000 people facing catastrophic levels (IPC phase 5). As experts had warned, the risk of famine increased daily with hostilities and restrictions on humanitarian access.⁷ In the Sudan, immediate action was also required to prevent widespread death, the total collapse of livelihoods and a catastrophic hunger crisis.⁸

7. Women and children, persons with disabilities, older persons, internally displaced persons, refugees, migrants and minorities were disproportionately affected by humanitarian crises. There were continued setbacks to women's rights in 2023. The protection crisis for women and children worsened, with forced displacement, increased trafficking, negative coping mechanisms (such as the curtailing of access to school, especially for girls, child labour, child marriage and missed meals), and soaring levels of gender-based violence, including sexual violence. Women and women's organizations remained indispensable leaders and responders in humanitarian action.

8. One in five children globally lived in or fled conflict zones.⁹ Millions of children lost access to education for prolonged periods. The need for mental health and psychosocial support as an integral part of humanitarian responses climbed.

9. The United Nations and humanitarian partners played an essential role in responding to these challenges. With the funds received, more than 150 million people were reached through United Nations-coordinated humanitarian response plans. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee system-wide scale-up mechanism was either triggered or already in place for seven humanitarian crises globally, marking the highest number of concurrent scale-up activations. The humanitarian system continued to work collectively through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to adapt, innovate and strengthen the effectiveness of principled humanitarian assistance.

10. Some 235 humanitarian workers were killed, 120 were wounded and 53 were abducted in 15 conflicts (see S/2024/385).¹⁰ In Gaza alone, 144 United Nations staff were killed between October and December (see S/2024/385).¹¹ Impediments such as administrative delays and the obstruction of humanitarian access increased, worsening and prolonging suffering. In the Sudan, security conditions were also grave, with 22 humanitarian workers killed in 2023.¹²

11. With just over one third of the required \$56.7 billion received for humanitarian appeals, the funding gap widened in 2023 by 16 percentage points compared with funding received in 2022. Despite the enormous generosity of donors and the tireless efforts of humanitarian organizations, the funding gap necessitated cuts in humanitarian programming.

12. As indicated in the 2024 Global Humanitarian Overview, which was released in early December 2023, the United Nations and its partners require \$46.4 billion to

7 Did you know that...

Recommended actions to deal with the IPC alert in Sudan included a call for immediate ceasefire and unhindered humanitarian access, mobilization of resources for multifactorial programming, provision of safe food, malnutrition treatment and agriculture livelihood support.

⁷ Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, "Famine Review Committee: Gaza Strip, March 2024 – conclusions and recommendations", 18 March 2024.

⁸ Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, "IPC alert: Sudan", 29 March 2024. Catherine Russell, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

⁹ "Children live in a world that is increasingly hostile to their rights", statement on World Children's Day, New York, 20 November 2023.

¹⁰ Humanitarian Outcomes, "2023", Aid Worker Security database, available at www.aidworkersecurity.org/.

¹¹ United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), "UNRWA situation report #59 on the situation in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem", 2 January 2024.

¹² Humanitarian Outcomes, "2023", Aid Worker Security database, available at www.aidworkersecurity.org/.

assist 180.5 million people in need of assistance in 72 countries and territories. The lower requirements for the 2024 appeal, compared with 2023, reflect the prioritization of the most severe and urgent needs in humanitarian programming.

13. In 2023, global developments demonstrated starkly the urgency of: ensuring compliance with international law, including, as applicable, international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international refugee law; reinforcing the imperative of the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence for humanitarian action; ensuring that humanitarian assistance and protection reach those in need, wherever they are, without discrimination, interference, delay or neglect; and mobilizing international action to address the root causes of current crises. As the international community marks the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and prepares for the Summit of the Future, these actions have never been more necessary in the history of the United Nations.

II. Overview of humanitarian emergencies in 2023

A. Complex emergencies

14. The United Nations and its partners responded to numerous complex emergencies, including those in which violations of international humanitarian law may have occurred, humanitarian access was impeded and the protection of civilians remained a grave concern.
15. In Afghanistan, 29.2 million people needed humanitarian assistance. Approximately 15.5 million people faced acute food insecurity, with 2.7 million people at emergency levels. Over 1.9 million Afghans returned, including over 470,000 from Pakistan. A series of 6.3 magnitude earthquakes over eight days left 275,000 people in need of urgent support.
16. In Ethiopia, 28.6 million people required assistance as the lingering effects of the worst drought in 40 years were aggravated by the conflict in northern Ethiopia, floods and an economic slowdown. There were 4.5 million internally displaced persons by the end of the reporting period.
17. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 26.4 million people needed humanitarian assistance. Around 25.8 million people faced acute food insecurity and were in urgent need of assistance, including 3.4 million people facing emergency levels of food insecurity (IPC phase 4). Gender-based violence increased, with 67 per cent of 110,000 reported cases occurring in three eastern provinces. Over 6 million people were internally displaced. The country hosted more than 500,000 refugees.
18. The outbreak of conflict in the Sudan in April 2023 created a humanitarian catastrophe, with 24.7 million people in need – an increase of 57 per cent compared with 2022. Fighting forced 1.4 million people to flee to neighbouring countries, and 6 million people were internally displaced. Some 20.3 million people faced acute food insecurity.
19. In Yemen, 21.6 million people – two thirds of the population – needed humanitarian assistance. Approximately 17.3 million people faced food insecurity and around 2 million children under 5 years of age suffered from stunting. A total of 4.5 million people remained internally displaced.
20. In Burkina Faso, some 4.7 million people required humanitarian assistance, and over 2 million people were internally displaced.
21. In Burundi, the humanitarian situation improved, with the number people in need dropping by 20 per cent to 1.5 million. Internally displaced persons and returnees lacked access to basic services.

A Did you know that...

Complex Emergencies are defined as humanitarian crises that occur in a country where there is considerable breakdown of authority, requiring intensive political coordination that goes beyond the mandate of any single agency.

21 Something to think about

Climate emergencies did not cease to represent an important cause of internal displacement in Burundi, with the focus of humanitarian help being shone upon the alleviation of food insecurity and malnutrition

22. In Cameroon, conflict and violence, climate shocks and disease outbreaks affected some 4.3 million people. Approximately 500,000 people lacked adequate shelter and 1 million people were displaced internally.

23. In the Central African Republic, some 3.4 million people required assistance due to conflict, limited access to markets and lack of health care, clean water and social protection. The country also received influxes of refugees from the Sudan and Chad. Around 511,800 people remained internally displaced.

24. In Chad, the number of people in need increased by 20 per cent to 7.6 million. Some 380,000 people were internally displaced, while 1.1 million persons from neighbouring countries sought refuge.

25. In the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, approximately 11 million people – 40 per cent of the population – needed assistance.

26. In Haiti, 5.2 million people, or half the population, needed humanitarian assistance, as gang violence escalated and restricted access to essential services, precipitating a rise in casualties, gender-based violence, kidnappings and internal displacement. Some 1.8 million people faced emergency levels of food insecurity (IPC phase 4).

27. In Mali, 8.8 million people required assistance due to insecurity, climate shocks and socioeconomic challenges. Escalating violence drove displacement and hindered aid operations.

28. In Mozambique, some 2 million people needed humanitarian assistance due to the ongoing conflict in the northern region, resulting in new displacements. Natural disasters, including Tropical Cyclone Freddy, affected more than 1.1 million people.

29. In Myanmar, a third of the population – 17.6 million people – were in need, including 2.6 million internally displaced persons. Escalating fighting, surging displacement and extreme protection threats were compounded by Cyclone Mocha.

30. In the Niger, the number of people in need increased to 4.3 million, including some 460,000 internally displaced persons and 290,000 refugees.

31. In Nigeria, 8.3 million people needed humanitarian assistance, including some 2.2 million internally displaced persons.

32. In Somalia, 8.25 million people needed assistance. Months after avoiding famine, Somalia suffered heavy flooding. Nearly 3 million people were internally displaced, including 1.7 million by flooding, 650,000 by conflict and 530,000 due to drought.

33. In South Sudan, violence increased displacement and decreased humanitarian access, leading the number of people in need of assistance to rise to 9.4 million, including 2 million internally displaced persons and some 450,000 South Sudanese returnees and refugees.

34. In the Syrian Arab Republic, 15.3 million people needed humanitarian assistance, including 2.1 million internally displaced persons. A series of earthquakes deepened needs. The cost of the food basket doubled in 2023, increasing poverty and reliance on humanitarian assistance.

35. In Ukraine, some 17.6 million people – 40 per cent of the population – needed assistance. Around 6.3 million people from Ukraine remained refugees, while 3.7 million persons were internally displaced, including nearly 1 million children.

36. In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, some 7 million people needed humanitarian assistance, owing to socioeconomic challenges and climate-related disasters. Several million Venezuelans in different migration situations required support abroad.

37. In Gaza, the humanitarian impact of the latest hostilities was catastrophic. An estimated 85 per cent of the population of Gaza was displaced and approximately 2.3

22 Interesting facts...

To put things into perspective, the 4.3 million people affected by conflict represent nearly 20% of Cameroon's population!

million people lacked access to sufficient shelter, food, life-saving medical services, clean water, education and livelihoods. Moreover, over 90 per cent of the population faced acute food insecurity (IPC phase 3 or above), with over 40 per cent at emergency levels of food insecurity (IPC phase 4) and over 15 per cent at catastrophic levels (IPC phase 5). In December 2023, the Famine Review Committee warned of a risk of famine.¹³

B. Disasters associated with natural hazards and climate change

38. Massive earthquakes struck the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye. In Türkiye, 50,000 people died and 9.1 million people were directly affected across 11 provinces. In the Syrian Arab Republic, where the population was already struggling owing to conflict, close to 9 million people were affected and 5,900 persons died. Millions were displaced and homes and vital facilities were destroyed.

39. Tropical Cyclone Freddy, the longest-lasting cyclone on record, struck Madagascar, Malawi and Mozambique, affecting 2.7 million people, 1 million of whom were internally displaced. The cyclone destroyed some 660,000 hectares of farmland and led to a five-fold increase in cholera cases in Mozambique in one month.

40. In Libya, Storm Daniel killed over 4,000 people and displaced 43,000. Thousands remain missing.

41. In Bangladesh, Cyclone Mocha caused landslides and damaged homes and facilities in all 33 Rohingya refugee camps. In Myanmar, it caused extensive damage, including to displacement camps, farmlands and public infrastructure.

42. In the Philippines, Super Typhoon Doksuri (Egay), combined with the south-west monsoon, affected over 3.6 million people, displaced 620,000 people and damaged over 98,000 homes.

43. Two category 4 cyclones, Judy and Kevin, and a 6.5 magnitude earthquake hit Vanuatu, affecting up to 250,000 people, displacing thousands of persons and destroying critical infrastructure.

44. In Colombia, Ecuador and Peru there were bouts of either drought or flooding due to El Niño. In Colombia, 7.7 million people needed humanitarian assistance, with close to 3 million refugees and migrants and significant food insecurity levels. In Peru, massive flooding and a dengue outbreak affected more than 800,000 people. Climate change was the primary cause of the severe drought in 2023 in the Amazon Basin.

45. In El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua there were irregular drought patterns linked to El Niño. In Guatemala, 5 million people needed assistance due to food insecurity, acute malnutrition in children under 5 years of age and increased flows of migrants and refugees. In El Salvador and Honduras, at least 1.1 million and 3.2 million people, respectively, required assistance.

III. Humanitarian response in 2023: key challenges

A. Climate crisis

46. The climate crisis was a threat multiplier, exacerbating humanitarian needs, triggering displacement, increasing food insecurity, interacting with conflict and compounding risks and vulnerabilities. Heatwaves, heavy precipitation, droughts and cyclones increased in frequency and intensity. Climate change exposed about half the

¹³ Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, "Famine Review Committee: Gaza Strip".

37 Did you know that...

The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification Acute Food Insecurity (IPC AFI) provides an important panorama on the severity of food insecurity in international standards that helps draw short term objectives to tackle the problem. The different phases referred to here are:

- (1) Minimal/ None
- (2) Stressed
- (3) Crisis
- (4) Emergency
- (5) Catastrophe/ Famine

45 Did you know that...

El Niño is a natural phenomenon that occurs roughly every five to seven years, caused by trade winds. It causes a rise on the temperatures of the water in the Pacific and has important impacts on the climate and the pluviometric regimen of affected countries

46 Did you know that...

According to the Global Humanitarian View, the year 2023 has been declared the hottest in history! With over 249 climate related disasters and affecting over 44 million people

world's population to food insecurity and reduced water security, with the largest adverse impacts in Africa, Asia, Central and South America and small island developing States. Sea level rise posed an existential threat for such States, increasing risks of storm surges, coastal erosion, displacement and the loss of homes and livelihoods. Global warming increased the geographical dispersion of waterborne and vector-borne diseases.

47. Almost 72 million people in 18 countries faced acute food insecurity, primarily due to climate-related shocks, up from 57 million in 12 countries in 2022.¹⁴ At the end of 2022, at least 8.7 million people were displaced within their own countries due to weather-related disasters.¹⁵ The countries most vulnerable to climate change experienced some of the highest maternal death and child marriage rates, and among the most chronic levels of gender-based violence. Of the 14 countries most at risk from the impacts of climate change, 13 had a humanitarian response plan in 2023, 14 were coping with conflict or fragility, and 5 faced infectious disease outbreaks.¹⁶

48. The scale of the climate crisis continued along its concerning trajectory, straining the capacities of the humanitarian community. Humanitarian organizations continued to adapt programming and operations to respond at scale, get ahead of crises and reduce needs through strengthened preparedness, multi-hazard early warning systems, early action and anticipatory approaches. Organizations continued to improve knowledge of climate-related disaster risk implications for humanitarian operations and enhanced the use of climate data and modelling to strengthen risk-informed programming. This included pre-positioning supplies and providing drought-resistant seeds and emergency shelters that could withstand increasingly strong heat, storm winds and floods.

49. Without additional climate financing to spur adaptation and mitigation, the climate crisis will continue exacerbating humanitarian needs. Increased investment by the development sector – including international financial institutions and multilateral development banks – in adaptation, resilience and disaster risk reduction in highly vulnerable communities would help to reduce climate-related vulnerabilities and humanitarian needs. The World Meteorological Organization and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction are leading the implementation of the Early Warnings for All initiative, in collaboration with partners.

50. The Getting Ahead of Disasters: A Charter on Finance for Managing Risks, an initiative launched at the twenty-eighth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, sought to mobilize endorsing Governments and partner organizations to increase ex-ante financing for climate-related disasters through early warning and early action.¹⁷ If adaptation and mitigation efforts are not accelerated and made accessible to the most climate-vulnerable communities, the climate crisis will continue compounding humanitarian needs.

51. In 2022, the Central Emergency Response Fund allocated approximately one third of its funding – \$247 million out of \$735 million – to climate-related events. This focus continued into 2023, with over 30 per cent of funding allocated to similar initiatives. The Emergency Relief Coordinator announced a Central Emergency Response Fund climate action account to attract new and additional funding to help to address the ever-increasing adverse effects of climate-related disasters in humanitarian emergencies, including through scaled-up anticipatory action.

48 Something to think about

The relationship between child marriage and environmental crisis, although not outright intuitive, is extremely important to develop an ample comprehension of humanitarian aid. A study shows that times of drought is associated with a 3% increase in child marriage, although in some dowry predominant countries, such as Eritrea, it actually decreases the likelihood of child marriage.

51 Did you know that...

Last year, the humanitarian response in Madagascar was able to reach 1.1 million people, pulling at least 5 districts out of a state of nutritional emergency, partially due to drought-resistant seeds that were enough to provide even a small surplus, enabling market trade and even food storage!

¹⁴ Food Security Information Network and Global Network Against Food Crises, *Global Report on Food Crises 2023* (Rome, 2023).

¹⁵ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, *Global Report on Internal Displacement 2023*.

¹⁶ United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Global Humanitarian Overview 2024* (2023).

¹⁷ *Ibid.* (2023).

¹⁸ See <https://gettingaheadofdisasters.org>.

B. Combating food insecurity and averting famine

52. In 2023, there were historic levels of food insecurity plaguing 280 million people across 59 countries and territories. 18 Emergency food assistance remained the largest component of humanitarian appeals at 37 per cent of the total requested.¹⁹

53. Conflict was the primary driver in almost half of all instances of people facing acute food insecurity – some 135 million people in 20 countries and territories.²⁰ As stated above, almost 72 million people in 18 countries and territories faced acute food insecurity, primarily due to climate-related shocks, compared with 57 million people in 12 countries in 2022.

54. Scaled-up efforts to meet and reduce food insecurity made an impact, including in Afghanistan and the Horn of Africa, where the number of people facing catastrophic levels of food insecurity (IPC phase 5) fell from over 370,000 to under 130,000²¹ due to concerted humanitarian efforts and more favourable weather conditions in the affected regions. However, by the end of the year, experts warned of famine in Gaza, and acute food insecurity surged in other contexts, most sharply in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti and the Sudan.

55. The use of starvation of the civilian population as a method of warfare and the attacking, destroying, removing or rendering useless of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population are prohibited under international humanitarian law. This includes attacks targeting foodstuffs, crops, livestock, drinking water supplies and irrigation works. The humanitarian community and decision makers should not wait until there is a famine declaration to act, as starvation can occur long before there is sufficient IPC data to declare a famine.

56. As either a climate-adaptive strategy or a necessity due to conflict and food insecurity, countries with the highest numbers of people in situations of acute food insecurity also faced the most devastating internal displacement crises.²²

57. Women and girls were particularly vulnerable to food insecurity, which posed life-threatening risks for lactating and pregnant women and their babies. Women and girls also faced increased protection and health risks, physical and psychosocial harm, including gender-based violence, unsafe coping practices such as early marriage, and often needed to travel far in search of food and water.²³

C. Gender equality and rights of women and girls

58. Women and girls bore the brunt of growing and protracted humanitarian emergencies. In every humanitarian crisis, women and girls were disproportionately affected, with devastating consequences for their health, livelihoods and access to and participation in humanitarian relief. Humanitarian emergencies exacerbated

¹⁹ Food Security Information Network and Global Network Against Food Crises, *Global Report on Food Crises 2024*.

²⁰ United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Humanitarian aid contributions 2024", Financial Tracking Service database. Available at <https://fts.snocha.org>.

²¹ Food Security Information Network and Global Network Against Food Crises, *Global Report on Food Crises 2024*.

²² Food Security Information Network and Global Network Against Food Crises, *Global Report on Food Crises 2023: Mid-Year Update (Rome, 2023)*.

²³ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, *Global Report on Internal Displacement 2023*.

²⁴ United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Gendered drivers, risks and impacts of food insecurity in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa", November 2023; and

²⁵ Gender-Based Violence AsR, "Links between food insecurity and gender-based violence in conflict affected settings", November 2021.

52 Something to think about

Putting things to scale, the reduction in the food insecurity index - from 370,000 to under 130,000 - represents a 65% decrease over the year!

53 Something to think about

Conflict is widely recognized with its relationship to hunger because it worsens people's displacement and restricts access to life-saving assistance.

pre-existing gender inequalities, leading to increased discrimination and the further curtailing of women's rights. Hate speech has led to increased protection risks and sexual violence, especially for women and girls.

59. Women and girls were more vulnerable to climate risks and the most affected by climate change.²⁴ While they played essential roles in preparing their communities for climate shocks, in post-disaster recovery and in longer-term climate planning and adaptation, local women's organizations on the front line of climate change-driven crises were underfunded and underrepresented in decision-making and leadership roles.

60. The prevalence of gender-based violence, grave violations of women's rights and violence towards those defending such rights rose across emergencies. Displaced women and girls reported sexual violence, including conflict-related sexual violence, abuse and harassment, at an alarming scale, and faced increased barriers to essential services and meaningful participation in their communities. In his reports on conflict-related sexual violence (see S/2024/292) and children and armed conflict (see A/77/895-S/2023/263), the Secretary-General outlined horrific impacts for women and children. The United Nations verified 3,688 cases of conflict-related sexual violence in 2023, a 50 per cent increase from 2022. Most incidents (95 per cent) targeted women and girls (see S/2024/292). However, only 21.5 per cent (\$321 million) of requested funding for the prevention of gender-based violence was received in 2023.²⁵

61. Some progress was made on women's meaningful participation in humanitarian decision-making. The representation of local women-led organizations on the advisory boards of country-based pooled funds grew, with local women-led organizations participating in 13 of 19 such boards. Gender in humanitarian action working groups contributed to the work of 21 humanitarian country teams. Ten humanitarian country teams had at least one local women-led representative organization as a member. In cross-border operations in Afghanistan and the Syrian Arab Republic, women's advisory groups actively informed the humanitarian country teams.

62. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee Gender Standby Capacity Project provided expertise on gender equality in humanitarian action across 21 contexts, including for improved access for women's organizations to country-based pooled funds, and on the analysis and use of cash programming in humanitarian country teams. Under the gender-based violence area of responsibility, support was provided to humanitarian country teams in the planning and implementation of strategies to respond to, prevent and mitigate risks of gender-based violence. Gender analysis and the use of sex- and age-disaggregated data was strengthened in humanitarian needs overviews and humanitarian response plans.

63. The Central Emergency Response Fund approved \$496.6 million, or 71 per cent of its total funding, and country-based pooled funds allocated \$918 million, or 55 per cent of their total funding, for projects with gender mainstreaming components, as scored by the Gender with Age Marker. The allocation by the Central Emergency Response Fund of a \$25 million gender-based violence block grant to the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) was fully implemented in 2023, with more than 30 per cent disbursed to local women's organizations on the front line of gender-based violence response.

²⁴ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), *The Unjust Climate: Measuring the Impacts of Climate Change on Rural Poor, Women and Youth* (Rome, 2024).

²⁵ United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Protection: gender-based violence 2023", Financial Tracking Service database. Available at <https://fts.unocha.org/global-sectors/13/summary/2023>.

59 Something to think about

In humanitarian aid, women and girls have specific necessities that need to be treated differently in order to promote equality and effectiveness in outcomes. It is important to differentiate the concepts of equality and equity!

60 Something to think about

When looking into the impacts of humanitarian disasters on the lives of women and girls, it is important to understand that the difficulties inflicted upon them create a retro-feeding system that concatenates a series of hazards. For example, the increase in child marriage and sexual assault, combined with the lack of access to medical help, create problems such as maternal deaths and hazardous pregnancies, which in turn call for even more specific – and not seldom more neglected – medical care and assistance, hindering the work towards gender equality even in humanitarian response

D. Armed conflict: protecting civilians

Respect for international humanitarian law

64. High levels of civilian casualties, injury and psychological trauma, sexual violence, hunger and enforced disappearances characterized armed conflicts. Conflict damaged critical infrastructure, disrupting vital water, sanitation, electricity and health services. Hostilities, bureaucratic impediments and violence against humanitarian personnel and assets overlapped to hinder access, with harsh consequences for civilians in need. Continuing impunity for violations of international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international refugee law risked fuelling further disrespect for those laws.

Humanitarian access

65. Bureaucratic and administrative impediments hindered humanitarian action. Delays in the movement of humanitarian personnel and supplies, including protracted visa and customs procedures, movement and checkpoint restrictions, and burdensome administrative requirements, hampered humanitarian access and operations, and deprived populations of timely and vital assistance.

66. Access constraints severely impeded the timely delivery of aid and services to vulnerable populations, exacerbated humanitarian needs and endangered the safety and well-being of affected communities. Active hostilities, insecurity, deliberate attacks, threats and movement restrictions contributed to access limitations. Damaged infrastructure and physical access constraints further compounded these challenges.

67. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and humanitarian partners continued to address these challenges through humanitarian diplomacy efforts, including access negotiations and principled engagement with State and non-State armed groups to advocate for unhindered access to affected populations and safeguard humanitarian operating spaces. At the same time, Member States must also exercise their influence and diplomatic efforts to advocate for access across contexts.

68. Humanitarian civil-military coordination efforts were crucial to facilitating humanitarian access by enabling engagement between humanitarian and military actors, advocating for compliance with international humanitarian law, providing a better understanding of access challenges and supporting operational partners. In humanitarian operations with active conflicts, such as those in the Sudan, civil-military coordination was established or strengthened to notify all parties of humanitarian movements and sites (humanitarian notification system).

69. As United Nations peacekeeping missions drew down, it remained important to assess the implications for access to affected populations and liaise with all actors to ensure that humanitarian assistance and protection reached those in need.

Protecting humanitarian personnel and assets

70. Attacks against humanitarian personnel and assets continued. Statistically, 2023 was the worst year on record for deaths of aid workers. A total of 235 humanitarian workers were killed, 120 were wounded and 53 were abducted in 15 conflicts. National staff constituted 90 per cent of those affected.²⁶ Rhetoric against aid work and aid workers also contributed to threats against humanitarian personnel. Despite

D Did you know that...

We can understand international humanitarian law as the body of rules set to be enforced in the context of armed conflict, aiming to mitigate its effects – especially on civilians – and establishing a set of responsibilities which are incumbent upon any States involved

²⁶ United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Protection: gender-based violence 2023", Financial Tracking Service database. Available at <https://fta.unocha.org/global-sectoral/13/summary/2023>.

serious threats and growing violence, the United Nations and its humanitarian partners stayed and delivered coordinated humanitarian responses.

Protecting medical care in conflict

71.

In 2023, there were horrific levels of attacks, destruction and interference against medical workers, patients, hospitals and other medical facilities, equipment, supplies and transport. More than 2,220 incidents of violence and interference were recorded in 21 conflicts, with the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the Sudan and Ukraine among the most affected. In Gaza, the military operations that began in October devastated health care, reducing the number of functioning hospitals from 36 to 13 by the end of the year, with the remainder only partially functioning. In the Sudan, health-care facilities were damaged and destroyed, leaving only 20 to 30 per cent functioning by the end of the year. In Ukraine, 18 facilities were destroyed and 85 were damaged, and health-care workers and patients were killed or injured.²⁷ Urban warfare and use of explosive weapons

72.

Conflicts continued to shift towards towns and cities in 2023, with 76 per cent of explosive incidents recorded in populated areas – an 85 per cent increase from 2022. There was a 122 per cent increase in civilian fatalities from the use of explosive weapons compared with 2022, and 90 per cent of casualties were civilians hit by explosive weapons in populated areas. The use of explosive weapons by State actors increased by 89 per cent in 2023, leading to a 157 per cent increase in civilian fatalities from such use.²⁸

E. Managing risks of technologies

73. Misinformation, disinformation and hate speech increased people's exposure to risk and vulnerabilities, including when those in need received intentionally misleading information about life-saving services and resources, and when such information affected humanitarian organizations' ability to operate, thereby leaving the needs of the population unmet. Hate speech endangered civilian safety and dignity, often with a disproportionate impact on vulnerable communities and groups.²⁹

74. Artificial intelligence holds immense potential to increase efficiency and support early action, particularly in connection with climate-related displacement and disaster management and response. However, the use of artificial intelligence and lethal autonomous weapons poses significant risks for civilians. As underscored in the New Vision of the Secretary-General for the Rule of Law, international human rights and protection standards must apply to new technologies and include safeguards for the responsible use of digital technologies and artificial intelligence. In his policy brief on A New Agenda for Peace, the Secretary-General calls for action to prevent the extension and escalation of conflict to the cyberdomain, calls upon States to declare infrastructure off-limits to malicious cyberactivity from both State and non-State actors, and recommends a legally binding instrument to prohibit lethal autonomous weapon systems that function without human control or oversight, as well as the regulation all other types of autonomous weapons systems.

²⁷ Insecurity Insight: <https://insecurityinsight.org/>.

²⁸ Action on Armed Violence, "122% rise in global civilian fatalities from explosive weapons in 2023: a year of harm reviewed", 8 January 2024. Available at <https://aoav.org.uk/2024/2023-a-year-of-explosive-violence-harm-reviewed/>.

²⁹ International Committee of the Red Cross, "Misinformation, disinformation and hate speech: questions and answers", 17 February 2023.

73 Something to think about

Misinformation should be considered a crucial concern in the humanitarian sector, directly impacting not only the community that receives such information, but the very credibility of humanitarian organizations as a reliable information source.

F. Counter-terrorism measures and sanctions

75. Member States made progress in implementing Security Council resolution 2664 (2022), which initiated a series of measures by Member States and regional organizations for the systematic consideration of the potential consequences of counter-terrorism measures and sanctions on humanitarian action. Many introduced humanitarian exemptions in their domestic legislation and several extended exemptions to autonomous sanctions. Such measures have allowed humanitarian organizations to maintain humanitarian activities in areas with direct or indirect interactions with targeted actors and to access formal banking systems in such contexts. However, counter-terrorism laws and some financial and economic sanctions adopted by States and regional organizations exposed humanitarian organizations and their personnel, suppliers, banks and service providers to legal risks.

G. Centrality of protection

Protection in humanitarian response

76. The Global Protection Cluster reported a 42 per cent increase in the number of people in need of protection from 2021–2023, driven particularly by escalating conflict and violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, Myanmar, the Sudan and Ukraine, as well as in Gaza, adding to the protection needs of protracted crises including in Afghanistan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen.³⁰

77. The Protection Standby Capacity Project deployed 18 senior protection advisors in 2023 to support humanitarian leadership and humanitarian country teams in prioritizing protection and implementing the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Centrality of Protection Action Plan (2023–2025).
Child protection

78.

Some 460 million children lived in conflict zones in 2023. The scale and severity of violations being committed against children in armed conflict, including all six grave violations, were alarming. Attacks, killing and maiming, the recruitment and use of children, sexual violence, attacks on schools and hospitals and the denial of humanitarian access increased compared with 2022. There were 3,931 cases of denial of humanitarian access – making it one of the highest verified violations in 2022 – and further increases were expected in 2023 (see A/77/895-S/2023/363). Attacks on schools and hospitals deprived children of education, health care and protective spaces. Many children were displaced multiple times and separated from their families, losing critical years of education.

79. Crises often overlapped and amplified each other, disproportionately affecting children. For example, 2.4 million children in South Sudan and the central Sahel suffered severe wasting because of conflict and drought linked to climate change. The United Nations Children's Fund and its partners provided treatment for severe wasting to more than 3 million children under 5 years of age; reached more than 23 million people, including children, with safe drinking water; helped 14 million children to access both formal and non-formal education; and vaccinated 27 million children against measles.³¹

Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse

80. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee accelerated efforts to implement a multi-year strategy on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual

³⁰ Global Protection Cluster, "Global Protection Cluster annual report 2023", 2024.

³¹ UNICEF, *UNICEF Humanitarian Action for Children 2024: Overview* (New York, 2023).

75 Something to think about

There is some debate regarding the application of international Humanitarian Law in countering terrorism. Although it is important to identify the causes and motivations between armed attacks and differentiate between lawful warfare and terrorism, it is sometimes argued that the very denunciation of a certain movement as a terrorist could discourage the actors of such to respect international Humanitarian Law, once already banished into unlawfulness.

80 Did you know that...

Approximately one in every five women in conflict zones has been sexually assaulted

harassment,³² including agreed principles of a victim/survivor centred approach and inter-agency referral procedures to ensure all allegations are referred for appropriate follow-up, including support to victims and survivors and prompt investigation. Inter-agency protection from sexual exploitation and abuse coordinators supported a network of protection from sexual exploitation and abuse focal points in humanitarian contexts. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs created a protection from sexual exploitation and abuse capacity project³³ to provide predictable coordination capacity in the most high-risk contexts.

81. However, shortfalls in humanitarian funding led to more extreme coping mechanisms, while limited access hampered monitoring. The Core Humanitarian Standard Alliance assessed that half of the victims/survivors of sexual exploitation and abuse did not have access to assistance.³⁴ Due to a lack of access to timely support, under-reporting remains high.

H. Addressing and reducing displacement

82. The number of people displaced more than doubled in the past 10 years to surpass 118 million. This included an unprecedented 71.1 million internally displaced persons by the end of 2022, 62.5 million of whom had been displaced by conflict and 8.7 million by disasters. The number of refugees had also reached an all-time high of 36.4 million by mid-2023.

83. Conflict continued to be the predominant driver of displacement. For example, in the Sudan, renewed violence resulted in the internal displacement of 6.1 million additional persons and forced 1.5 million people to flee to neighbouring countries between April 2023 and the end of the year. In Gaza, nearly 2 million people were displaced. Conflict was increasingly interconnected with climate change in causing displacement, exacerbating the vulnerabilities faced by internally displaced persons and complicating their search for durable solutions. For instance, of the over 850,000 people displaced by drought and floods in Ethiopia as of December 2023, the majority had been previously displaced by conflict.

84. The United Nations system continued to take action to implement the Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement, under the leadership of the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on Solutions to Internal Displacement, and in close collaboration with Governments and relevant partners to better focus efforts on advancing solutions in 15 countries.

IV. Humanitarian response in 2023: developments in operations and coordination

A. Improving humanitarian preparedness, coordination and response

85. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs continued its efforts to lighten the humanitarian programme cycle and make humanitarian action more efficient, effective and accountable to those it served. It oversaw the implementation of the Joint and Intersectoral Analysis Framework 2.0. Applied in 24 countries, the

³² Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "IASC vision and strategy: protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment 2022–2026", 2022.

³³ United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Funding humanitarian systemwide capacity for effective protection from sexual exploitation and abuse: Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Capacity Project (PSEACaps)", October 2023.

³⁴ CHS Alliance, "Harmonized reporting scheme on sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH): finding from a year of piloting", September 2022–October 2023.

H Did you know that...

Displacement occurs when people are forced to leave their homes because of a crisis, however, it is important to keep in mind that this can include situations where people move voluntarily, looking for safety or dignity

methodology balanced rigour with flexibility in needs analyses. The Joint and Intersectoral Analysis Framework 2.0 allowed sectors to jointly determine the severity of need across sectors and helped to avoid duplication.

86. In addition to the application of the Joint and Intersectoral Analysis Framework 2.0, the elaboration of response plans included a careful reflection on the associated financial cost of programming and focused responses on people in the most urgent and intense need of life-saving assistance to reduce their suffering. This involved presenting rigorous plans, with careful prioritization of activities, to direct scarce funds to areas where they would have the most impact for people in need. Overall, this resulted in a reduced global appeal for 2024 that prioritized responses in areas where people faced the most life-threatening needs, based on a realistic understanding of operations' capacity and a plan to deliver.

B. Disaster preparedness and response

In 2023, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee rapidly scaled up emergency responses in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, Somalia and the Sudan, and the earthquake response in the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs continued long-standing programming designed to mobilize a wide range of partners in support of disaster preparedness and response. The Standby Partnerships Programme deployed 72 experts to escalating humanitarian emergencies and to situations where specific expertise was required, for an average of six and a half months. These experts were deployed to support 26 humanitarian operations, including in Inter-Agency Standing Committee scale-up emergencies.

88. After the earthquakes, the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group mobilized 10 urban search and rescue teams to support national responses in the Syrian Arab Republic and 49 teams in Türkiye. In addition, United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination Teams were deployed to Cabo Verde (volcanic activity), Chile (forest fires), Ghana (flooding), Libya (flooding), Morocco (earthquake), Peru (flooding), and the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye (earthquakes), together with 115 United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination staff members for a total of 1,800 days in 2023. Teams from the Civil-Military Coordination Service were deployed to support several humanitarian emergencies, including in Somalia, the Sudan and Türkiye.

89. The Connecting Business initiative, which was established to mobilize and coordinate local private sector partners during humanitarian emergencies, grew to cover more than 50 countries. CBI member networks responded in several contexts, including in the wake of earthquakes in the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye, and of cyclones in Madagascar, Peru and Vanuatu. The initiative distributed over \$15 million of cash and in-kind assistance in 2023.

90. In 2023, the Joint Environment Unit of the United Nations Environment Programme and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs responded to numerous environmental emergencies, including in Cabo Verde (volcanic eruption), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (mudslide), Guinea (fire), Libya (flooding), the Occupied Palestinian Territory (environmental impacts assessment), Peru (flooding), north-west Syrian Arab Republic (dam assessment) and Ukraine (dam assessment).

C. Advancing early action and anticipatory approaches

91. The humanitarian community continued to scale up and mainstream coordinated anticipatory approaches and early warning and early action systems. Several

87 Did you know that...

Preparedness for effective response is an approach designed to make disaster relief operations more timely, appropriate, well-coordinated, relevant and effective. The approach consists of five phases: orientation, assessment, prioritization and analysis, workplan, action and accountability.

inter-agency anticipatory action frameworks for natural hazards were developed or improved in 2023, including for climate-related hazards in Bangladesh, Fiji, Nepal, the Philippines and Yemen. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a coordinated anticipatory action framework for cholera was activated, leading to a rapid decline in cases, coupled with additional secondary benefits, such as reduced risk of sexual violence.

92. The humanitarian community also made financing more risk-informed, applying anticipatory approaches to get ahead of predictable global crises by prearranging finance, where possible. For instance, in 2023, the Central Emergency Response Fund provided more than \$124 million to various partners for anticipatory and early action based on forecasts of rising food insecurity and El Niño. Country-based pooled funds provided over \$16 million for anticipatory and early action in Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen.

93. In partnership with the African Risk Capacity and the Premium Support Facility, the United Nations supported the development of an innovative, anticipatory insurance scheme. During the 2023/24 agricultural season, two anticipatory insurance policies were issued to Malawi and Zambia that would pay out before the impact of a predicted drought to support resilience-building activities and diversify livelihood options for populations at risk.

94. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies scaled up and innovated the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund, adding an innovative insurance mechanism to provide contingency financing in particularly hazardous years, should existing contributions to the Fund be exhausted.

D. Humanitarian and development collaboration and linkages to peace

95. Humanitarian, development and peace collaboration systematically reduces risk, needs and vulnerability, and contributes to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The Development Coordination Office, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Peacebuilding Support Office continue to strengthen collaboration, in order to support country leadership in enhancing programmatic coherence and complementarity. In Yemen, for example, a collaborative platform with stakeholders was used for discussions on coherent and complementary humanitarian-development work through technical subgroups on health, education, agriculture and livelihoods, economic stabilization and gender and human rights.

96. Humanitarian organizations continued to see first-hand the urgent need for development actors, donors, multilateral development banks and international financial institutions to reassess their organizational risk appetite and remain engaged in fragile, conflict- and climate-affected contexts. Much more work needs to be done to better align development actors and bilateral and multilateral donors with humanitarian efforts, so as to vastly strengthen complementary action in support of vulnerable people and prevent development gains from being lost, particularly in highly fragile operational contexts. Investments should be focused on those who are the furthest behind first – especially those in marginalized areas or from marginalized groups – and be designed and implemented in partnership with affected communities.

97. In highly complex operational contexts where development investments are insufficient, innovative ways of financing community development would help greatly to reduce the needs, risks and vulnerabilities of those left furthest behind. In Afghanistan, for example, the Afghanistan reconstruction trust fund and the World Bank supported essential food, livelihood and health services.

E. Optimizing humanitarian financing

98. In 2023, donors contributed \$1.72 billion to humanitarian pooled funds managed by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Central Emergency Response Fund and country-based pooled funds. Together, those funds allocated \$1.8 billion to humanitarian partners across 42 countries and territories – \$668 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund and \$1.1 billion from 16 country-based pooled funds and 1 regional pooled fund. The funds enabled responses to humanitarian needs, including those stemming from food insecurity, the humanitarian impacts of climate change, disease outbreaks and the consequences of conflict and displacement. The Afghanistan humanitarian response plan was the top recipient, receiving a total of \$189 million through the complementary use of grants from the Central Emergency Response Fund and the Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund to ensure sustained and comprehensive humanitarian action.

99. The Central Emergency Response Fund and country-based pooled funds are highly effective funding mechanisms for ensuring that life-saving assistance reaches people caught in crises. When their resources are provided in the same contexts, humanitarian coordinators at the country level ensure that the resources are used in a complementary and coherent manner to engage the comparative advantages of each, thereby maximizing their joint impact.³⁵ The Central Emergency Response Fund and country-based pooled funds continued to innovate to achieve greater impact. The Central Emergency Response Fund more than doubled prearranged financing for anticipatory action frameworks from \$43 million in 2022 to \$102 million in 2023. The funds also continued to promote more forward-leaning allocations. The Central Emergency Response Fund provided more than \$142.5 million for early action to get ahead of rising food insecurity, flooding and drought, including in relation to events driven by El Niño. The Somalia Humanitarian Fund allocated \$15 million for early life-saving interventions targeting communities anticipated to be severely impacted by floods.

F. Accountability to affected people

100. Efforts to strengthen accountability to affected people and community engagement in all elements of humanitarian action were a priority in 2023. For example, for the first time, the Central Emergency Response Fund underfunded emergencies window included a dedicated envelope of \$5 million for collective accountability to affected people initiatives across 10 contexts.

101. Ongoing efforts are focused on gaining a better understanding of what people in humanitarian crises need, and listening to and improving strategies to deliver better assistance that is more responsive to their expressed needs and priorities. Initiatives to strengthen community engagement and for more adaptive community-centred responses are being piloted in several contexts to learn lessons and maximize impact.

G. Reinforcing localization of humanitarian assistance

102. Local and national actors are often the first responders and essential partners in humanitarian response, who bring a critical understanding of local challenges and potential solutions and can mobilize local networks and access affected populations. Local partners participated in humanitarian coordination mechanisms at national,

³⁵ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “OCHA pooled funds complementary: central emergency response fund and country-based pooled funds”, August 2023.

101 Something to think about

Protecting children's education goes way beyond the already very extensive benefits of education children that first meets the eye. It is important to consider that schooling also provides actual shelter and supervision for children, that have a place to attend and are better kept safe from dangers of abuse, exploitation and recruitment by armed forces.

subnational and operational levels, including in humanitarian country teams, and as Co-Chairs of humanitarian clusters, and also participated in strategic advisory groups, thematic working groups and inter-cluster coordination groups on operational responses in 2023.

103. Localization, in line with humanitarian response and coordination systems, remained a key priority for pooled funds, emphasizing support for front-line responders and women-led organizations. By October 2023, 43 per cent of all funding from country-based pooled funds had been channelled to local and national partners, surpassing the 25 per cent global benchmark. About a quarter of allocations through the Central Emergency Response Fund underfunded emergencies window were subgranted to national and local partners – well above historical levels of approximately 15 per cent.

H. Mental health and psychosocial support

104. Technical working groups integrated mental health and psychosocial support activities across sectors, such as health, protection and education in humanitarian response plans. The inter-agency mental health and psychosocial support surge mechanism deployed 17 experts to support mental health and psychosocial support implementation in contexts with high needs and limited resources, including in the Central African Republic, Chad, the Niger and Somalia, and in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

I. White Helmets Commission of Argentina

105. In 2023, the White Helmets Commission of Argentina chaired the Americas regional group, orchestrating a comprehensive international earthquake response exercise in the Americas region that mobilized stakeholders – including national and subnational entities, health services, the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination system, search and rescue teams and international partners – to enhance regional preparedness and response capabilities.

106. Within the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination system, the White Helmets Commission contributed invaluable expertise, including during the humanitarian response to the earthquakes in the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye, where the Commission deployed an urban search and rescue team and supported United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination field operations.

J. Strengthening human resources capacity

107. In line with the Secretary-General's system-wide strategy on gender parity and the Geographical Diversity Strategy, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs worked to maintain gender parity and improve geographical representation. The Office continued to implement its People Strategy 2022–2026, including an action plan focused on gender and geographical representation, diversity and inclusion.

108. Work on diversity, equity, inclusion and anti-racism is guided by the strategic action plan for addressing racism and promoting dignity for all in the United Nations Secretariat, the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Deputies Group Compact on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Focused on Racial Equality and Equity. The Compact contains commitments on racial equality and equity, and an agreement to collectively support and learn from each

I Did you know that...

The White Helmets are an international civil corps that set an important mark on participation of developing countries in international humanitarian aid. Since its creation, the White Helmets have conducted over 400 humanitarian aid missions!

other to implement those commitments. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs appointed diversity, equity, inclusion and anti-racism focal points to prioritize and advance the diversity, equity, inclusion and anti-racism initiative across offices.

V. Recommendations

109. On the basis of the foregoing, the Secretary-General recommends the following:

(a) Member States, parties to conflict and humanitarian organizations should promote and ensure full respect for and adherence to the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence to ensure that people in need receive humanitarian assistance, wherever and wherever they are, without discrimination or interference;

(b) Member States and parties to conflict should allow and facilitate the rapid, unimpeded, safe and sustained access of impartial humanitarian relief, at scale and through all routes, as well as simplify and expedite procedures for the entry and deployment of medical and humanitarian personnel, goods and services, and remove barriers and constraints impeding such access;

(c) Member States and parties to conflict must comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international refugee law, as applicable; in armed conflict, the principles of distinction, proportionality and precautions in attack must be respected at all times;

(d) Member States and parties to conflict must not use starvation of the civilian population as a method of warfare. They must not attack, destroy, remove or render useless objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population. This includes ensuring the availability of essential food, water, medical supplies, electricity and fuel;

(e) Member States, parties to conflict, the United Nations, humanitarian, development and peace organizations and other relevant actors should take urgent measures to prevent famine and scale up actions and flexible funding that meet immediate food security, nutritional, health, protection and other cross-sectoral needs, and mitigate harmful coping strategies, while addressing the root causes of food crises;

(f) Member States must uphold the rule of law and fight impunity by strengthening accountability mechanisms and thoroughly investigating alleged breaches of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, including those committed against civilians, humanitarian personnel and United Nations personnel;

(g) Member States, the United Nations and humanitarian organizations should continue to place protection at the centre of humanitarian action, increase capacity and programming to minimize protection risks faced by affected populations, promote the safety, dignity and agency of affected persons and systematically scale up measures to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse in a victim/survivor-centred manner;

(h) Parties to conflict should avoid the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. Member States are encouraged to implement the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas adopted in November 2022;

(i) Member States, the United Nations and humanitarian organizations should prioritize and scale up efforts and funding to prevent, mitigate and respond to gender-

c) Did you know that...

The principles states of distinction, proportionality and precautions are to be observed in any actions taken in humanitarian aid!

g) Something to think about

This is an important insight on the approach of humanitarian action by the UN.

based violence, and ensure that measures to mitigate gender-based violence risks are part of all sectoral interventions and that survivors have access to critical services from the onset of emergencies;

(j) Member States should protect the rights and respond to the needs of internally displaced persons, in line with the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, and collaborate with the United Nations, humanitarian and development actors, including international financial institutions, and affected communities, and advance solutions in line with the Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement;

(k) Member States should fully implement Security Council resolution 2664 (2022). Member States and regional organizations should ensure that their counter-terrorism and sanctions measures comply with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international refugee law, as applicable, and that they do not have adverse consequences for exclusively humanitarian activities, including medical activities, that are carried out by impartial humanitarian actors in a manner consistent with international humanitarian law;

(l) Member States, the United Nations and humanitarian organizations should advance and protect the rights of women and girls in humanitarian action, ensure that robust gender analysis informs the design and implementation of all humanitarian policies and assistance, and ensure that local women's organizations are represented in humanitarian decision-making, at all levels, and that they have adequate and flexible funding;

(m) Member States and parties to conflict should act to prevent and counter misinformation and disinformation against the United Nations, humanitarian work and personnel, which hampers humanitarian assistance;

(n) Member States are called upon to fully resource humanitarian response plans and provide flexible funding. Member States are encouraged to continue their strong support for country-based pooled funds and to fund the Secretary-General's Central Emergency Response Fund to the level of \$1 billion;

(o) Member States, the United Nations and humanitarian organizations should continue to promote inclusive partnerships among international, regional, national and local actors and organizations to reinforce capacities and promote inclusive community engagement and increased funding to local organizations, including women's organizations;

(p) Member States, the United Nations and humanitarian organizations should scale up their efforts to prevent, mitigate and respond to disasters, including the adverse effects of climate change in humanitarian emergencies, and accelerate adaptation and resilience-building efforts through humanitarian preparedness and response;

(q) Member States, the United Nations and humanitarian organizations should expand climate and environmental policies and financing to avert, minimize and address loss and damage for communities exposed and vulnerable to natural hazards in humanitarian emergencies;

(r) Member States, the United Nations and humanitarian organizations should strengthen the availability of and access to effective multi-hazard early warning systems in communities and countries exposed to natural hazards and environmental degradation, and enable more anticipatory action.

l) Something to think about

It is always important to keep the most vulnerable at the center of humanitarian aid coordination.