



United  
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# AUSTRALIAN AID AT WORK

## SPOTLIGHT ON UNHCR, THE UN REFUGEE AGENCY

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established by the UN General Assembly in 1950 and is mandated to lead and co-ordinate international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems worldwide.

Its primary purpose is to safeguard the rights and wellbeing of refugees. It strives to ensure that everyone can exercise the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge in another State, with the option to return home voluntarily, integrate locally or to resettle in a third country. It also has a mandate to help stateless people and assists people displaced within their own country. 23,000 people a day are forced to flee their homes because of conflict and persecution.

At the end of 2016 there were 65.6 million people around the world forcibly displaced due to

persecution, conflict, violence and human rights violations, a 300,000 increase in last year. This includes 22.5 million refugees and 10 million stateless people. Displacement in 2016 was at the highest level ever seen. War and conflict remain the dominant causes of forced displacement. A full 53% of all refugees come from just three conflict-affected countries, namely Afghanistan, Somalia, and Syria. 189,300 refugees resettled in 2016.

UNHCR's global needs-based budget reached USD 7.5 billion for 2016. Despite sustained contributions from existing supporters and growing support from new and non-traditional donors, UNHCR received USD 3.96 billion in voluntary contributions in 2016, meaning only 53% of the budgetary requirements were covered, leaving unmet many of the needs of UNHCR's beneficiaries.

### > AUSTRALIA AND THE UNHCR

2016 saw a record high number of new submissions for asylum or refugee status with 2 million having been proposed. By end of 2015, about 3.2 million people were waiting for a decision on their application for asylum.

In this context, the number of asylum-seekers and refugees in Australia (17,555 refugee and humanitarian visas granted in the 2015-2016 period), is small by global standards, however, the country still makes a significant contribution to global refugee protection.

Australia contributed USD 39 million to UNHCR in 2016 and ranks 12th in UNHCR's donors list. In addition, Australians donate around \$14 million a year through our national fundraising association, Australia for UNHCR. These contributions help UNHCR to provide life-saving relief to refugees in emergencies such as we are currently seeing in Syria, Sudan, Mali and the Democratic Republic of Congo as well as the protracted situations of refugees from places like Afghanistan.



Photo: Australia for UNHCR/T Mukoya





## > SNAPSHOT OF UNHCR AT WORK

### EUROPE REFUGEES: ALLEVIATING A CRISIS

In 2016, over 1 million people fled their homelands, boarding dangerous and unseaworthy boats in a desperate attempt to reach Europe. Forced to flee their homes due to poverty, conflict and persecution, refugees and migrants risk their own lives as well as their family's to reach safety. 2016 has also seen another 350,000 arrive by boat to Europe, majority of which reach the islands of Greece and Italy. At least 4,690 people are missing, died or have died crossing the Mediterranean Sea in an attempt to reach Europe this year alone.

Of those arriving by boat on the Mediterranean Sea since 1 January 2016, 26% are Syrian nationals and 13% are from Afghanistan. The devastating conflict occurring in Syria has resulted in 6.5 million people being forced from their homes within the nation itself. Having no means of income or shelter, millions of Syrian are quickly sliding into poverty as they desperately try to improve the lives of their children by seeking refuge in Europe and elsewhere.

UNHCR has been quick to respond to this refugee emergency, mobilising over 600 staff and resources in 20 different locations to ensure lifesaving relief and shelter can be delivered to those most in need. This includes the provision of humanitarian assistance, improvements in accommodation as well as shelter during winter months, establishing 24/7 presence at all countries' entry points and efforts to reunite separated and unaccompanied children. UNHCR has been able to deliver 361,000 thermal blankets, 800,000 raincoats and 340,000 blankets, sleeping

bags and 43,900 sleeping mats to refugees in Europe alone. As borders have closed in various European countries, UNHCR has been effective in shifting resources as needed to increase reception capacity and services as well as supporting Greek authorities to aid incoming refugees.

Thanks to generous support of Australia and other donors as well as the contributions of NGO partners, IOM, and other UN agencies, UNHCR was able to respond to emergencies in multiple countries and provide assistance and protection to people displaced in the Europe emergency.

#### FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT UNHCR'S WORK:



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