EXTREME HEAT ACTION PROFILE

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

www.unhcr.org

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UNHCR addresses extreme heat by promoting resilience through operational adaptations, research, and integrated heat preparedness and adaptation strategies to safeguard displaced people and their hosts.

UNHCR is mandated by the United Nations to protect and safeguard the rights of refugees. The UNHCR also supports former refugees who have returned to their home country, people displaced within their own country, and people who are stateless or whose nationality is disputed.

UNHCR addresses extreme heat through a multifaceted approach that includes promoting resilience via operational adaptations, conducting research initiatives, and coordinating integrated heat preparedness and adaptation strategies within cluster responses to protect and safeguard refugees.

Lead Heat Entities:

Office of the Special Advisor on Climate Action
Division of Resilience and Solutions (DRS):
- Public Health Section
- Technical Support Section

UNHCR-led Clusters:
- Shelter Cluster
- Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster
- Global Protection Cluster

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KEY FACTS

Extreme heat is a human crisis.

Millions of people across the globe continue to be forced to flee their homes because of violence, conflict, and weather-related hazards. The number of forcibly displaced people in the world today has never been higher – doubling to more than 120 million people over the past 10 years.

Focus Area Strategic Plan for Climate Action 2024-2030

Extreme heat may trap displaced people.

As extreme heat, in combination with other weather-related hazards, affects homelands and destinations, displaced people face greater challenges finding durable solutions, heightening risks of prolonged and recurrent displacement.

No Escape: On the Frontlines of Climate Change, Conflict, and Displacement (2024)

By mid-century, most refugee camps and settlements are expected to endure 2x as many days of dangerous heat.

Between 2007-2016, over 100 refugee camps and settlements experienced 100 days or more of dangerous heat. These camps and settlements were in Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Senegal. Yet with current trends, by 2050, this number will likely jump to over 600 camps and settlements experiencing dangerous heat, with the top 10 hottest sites experiencing an additional 74 days of dangerous heat.

No Escape: On the Frontlines of Climate Change, Conflict, and Displacement (2024)

90 million displaced people are living in countries with high-to-extreme exposure to weather-related hazards.

Nearly half out of all forcibly displaced people are bearing the burden of both conflict and extreme weather events. As extreme weather events increase in the coming decades, the risks for displaced people and their hosts will grow significantly.

No Escape: On the Frontlines of Climate Change, Conflict, and Displacement (2024)

Sahel Predictive Analytics Projects

The Sahel Predictive Analytics Project focuses on crisis prevention and resilience building to address the region's growing risks, including climate change, environmental degradation, food insecurity, weak governance, conflict, and displacement. Aligned with the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS), the project incorporates heat-related challenges into its analysis.

Core Partners: United Nations Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel (OSCDS); German Federal Foreign Office; and a research consortium of leading academic institutions including Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK), City University of New York and Uppsala University.

Global Protection Cluster

Protection clusters aim to ensure coordinated, effective, and principled preparedness and response actions, placing protection at the center of humanitarian, development, and peace initiatives. The Global Protection Cluster (GPC) has released guidance for field protection clusters on preparedness in the context of climate change and disasters, including extreme heat as a key hazard.

UNHCR Global Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster Section (Conflict Situations)

UNHCR leads the CCCM Cluster in conflict situations, coordinating protection and services for internally displaced persons (IDPs) while advocating for durable solutions. The Cluster's Global Strategy highlights climate adaptation, with a focus on extreme heat. Over the next five years, efforts will prioritize preparedness, prevention, and adaptation by collaborating with national authorities, supporting climate resilience policies, developing early warning systems, and advocating for displaced populations. In 2024, the CCCM Global Annual Meeting addressed environmental and climate change impacts on displacement, producing global guidance on managing extreme heat.

Core Partners: International Organization for Migration (IOM), Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Danish Refugee Council (DRC), Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED)

UNHCR Global Shelter Cluster Section

UNHCR leads the Global Shelter Cluster in conflict situations, coordinating shelter, settlement, and related non-food item (NFI) responses for internally displaced persons (IDPs). To address the growing challenge of extreme heat, the Cluster has established a Heat Working Group to integrate heat-resilience considerations into shelter and settlement design. A key strategic priority is strengthening capacity for environmentally sustainable and climate-smart shelter solutions.

At the 2024 Humanitarian Network Partnership Week, the Cluster hosted the session Heat, Humidity, Shelter, and Settlements: Addressing a Critical Challenge for Humanitarian Assistance. Additionally, in collaboration with CRAterre, the Cluster is developing methods to assess local building cultures (LBC) with disaster risk reduction (DRR) considerations, including extreme heat, to enhance housing reconstruction, retrofitting, and improvement projects.

Core Partners: International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), CRAterre

Featured initiative

Research and analysis on weather-related hazards in displacement contexts

UNHCR collaborates with leading academic institutions and organizations to anticipate, prepare for, and respond to extreme weather events on displaced populations and host communities. Partnering with the Consortium of International Agricultural Research Centers (CGIAR), UNHCR is developing risk analyses for present and future weather-related hazards—including heat, drought, floods, and cyclones—while considering the mediating role of governance in affected areas.

With Oregon State and Montana State universities, UNHCR is analyzing trends in extreme heat exposure in refugee camps and settlements, using the daily maximum heat index to understand current and future risks. These efforts aim to enhance preparedness and resilience for displaced populations in the face of escalating extreme weather events.

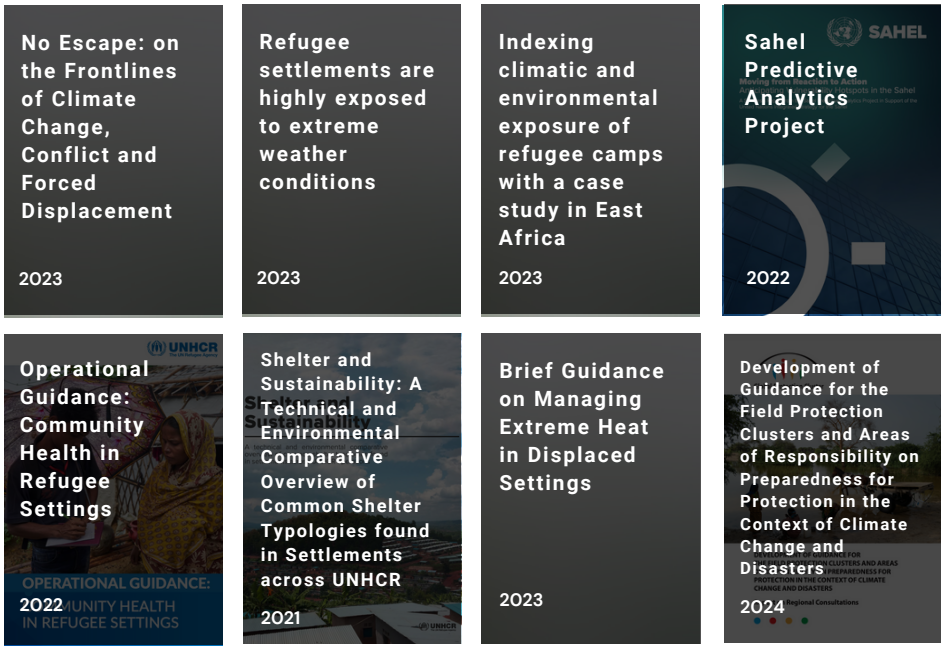
Core Partners: Alp Analytica; Consortium of International Agricultural Research Centers (CGIAR); German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP); Green Climate Fund (GCF); Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC); IMPACT Initiatives; Montana State University; Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI); Oregon State University; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); YOUNGO. Refugee-led Organizations: Community Aid Network and Dadaab Response Association

UNHCR Operational Responses in Shelter Situations

Forcibly displaced people assisted by UNHCR are often in locations where extreme heat events are recurrent. UNHCR is addressing this extreme heat by improving the quality of its shelter programs, and their thermal comfort including improved ventilation, improved insulation and improved positioning. To evaluate different types of shelter, UNHCR with the support of the Geneva Technical Hub developed the Shelter and Sustainability Assessment tool, which enables assessment of shelter designs in relation to environmental impacts, technical performance, habitability and affordability. Furthermore, UNHCR has collaborated with academic actors to conduct studies on improving the thermal comfort of shelter, as in this research by the University of Bath .

Core Partners: University of Bath, Geneva Technical Hub

HEAT RESOURCES



Foundational documents governing institutional heat activities

Strategic Framework for Climate Action and Focus Area Strategic Plan for Climate Action 2024-2030
The Strategic Framework for Climate Action sets out the parameters for UNHCR's response to the growing, global climate emergency. It provides a common framework and approach to step up our ambition under three core pillars for action – law and policy, operations, and "greening" UNHCR. The Focus Area Strategic Plan for Climate Action 2024-2030 sets out a global roadmap for prioritized action, providing further clarity on UNHCR's role and direct contribution, its asks of others, and the immediate actions the organization will take to be optimally calibrated to advance this agenda.

Operational Strategy for Climate Resilience and Environmental Sustainability 2022-2025
Contributes to the implementation of UNHCR's Strategic Framework for Climate Action.

UNHCR's Global Public Health Strategy
The UNHCR Global Public Health Strategy notes the importance of promoting measures to mitigate and adapt to climate change towards reducing health vulnerability. UNHCR's operational guidance emphasizes community health approaches to manage heat risks. This includes training community health workers to recognize and respond to heat-related illnesses, and integrating heat risk reduction into broader health and emergency response plans.

Regional Climate Action Plan for the East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes 2023-2028
Works to better implement and translate existing UNHCR global climate commitments to the regional level.

SUPPORTING THE SDGS, INCLUDING:

This heat action profile was developed by the Global Heat Health Information Network in partnership with the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), as a contribution to the United Nations Secretary-General's Call to Action on Extreme Heat (2024). The content was validated by focal points from the profiled international organization / agency, and captures a snapshot of its heat work at the time of publication. The profile will be periodically updated.

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GLOBAL HEAT HEALTH INFORMATION NETWORK
WORLD METEOROLOGICAL ORGANIZATION
UNDRR UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction