

UN refugee chief warns of severe cuts without urgent funding

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Rohingya women and children queue at a food distribution centre at the Balukhali refugee camp in Bangladesh [File: Showkat Shafi/Al Jazeera]

United Nations, October 12 (RHC)-- The UN refugee agency will have to make deep cuts with dire consequences for displaced people around the globe unless it quickly receives \$700 million in new funding, according to the head of the agency.

The war in Ukraine has created millions of refugees, and there are now more than 100 million people who have been forcibly displaced in the world, UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Filippo Grandi

said. He said the crisis has caused his his agency's budget to balloon to more than \$10 billion.

"I regret to inform you that for the first time during my tenure, I'm worried about UNHCR's financial situation," Grandi said. "If we do not receive at least an additional \$700 million, especially for our most underfunded operations between now and the end of this year, we will be forced to make severe cuts with negative and sometimes dramatic consequences for refugees and host communities," he said. "In the strongest of terms to all donors, please do more."

He said the Ukraine conflict had spurred "the largest and fastest displacement crisis" in Europe since World War II and added more than \$1 billion to the UNHCR's budget this year.

More than 7.6 million Ukrainians have fled their country since Russia's invasion began on February 24. Grandi said he was worried about the impact of cold weather during the Northern Hemisphere's winter on 6.2 million people internally displaced in Ukraine. "I share the government's concerns about the looming winter," he said, adding that the elderly and disabled were especially vulnerable.

Grandi complained that most of the funding his UN agency receives from countries is heavily earmarked for particular projects, making it difficult to respond to where it sees the greatest needs.

This has left its response dramatically underfunded for dire refugee crises in places such as Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan and the Sahel region. Funding to help the millions of Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries is "at its lowest level ever", he warned.

randi said the UN refugee agency had been working hard to expand its donor base and has dramatically increased the funds it raises from private sources from \$421 million in 2019 to more than \$1 billion this year. But he stressed, "as a United Nations agency, one created by member states with a specific mandate, we cannot be reliant on the goodwill of individuals or companies alone".

"If we do not maintain focus on all crises, if we do not adequately resource all responses, we are dooming refugees and their hosts to further hardship, loss of hope and the risk of onward movement," Grandi said.

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