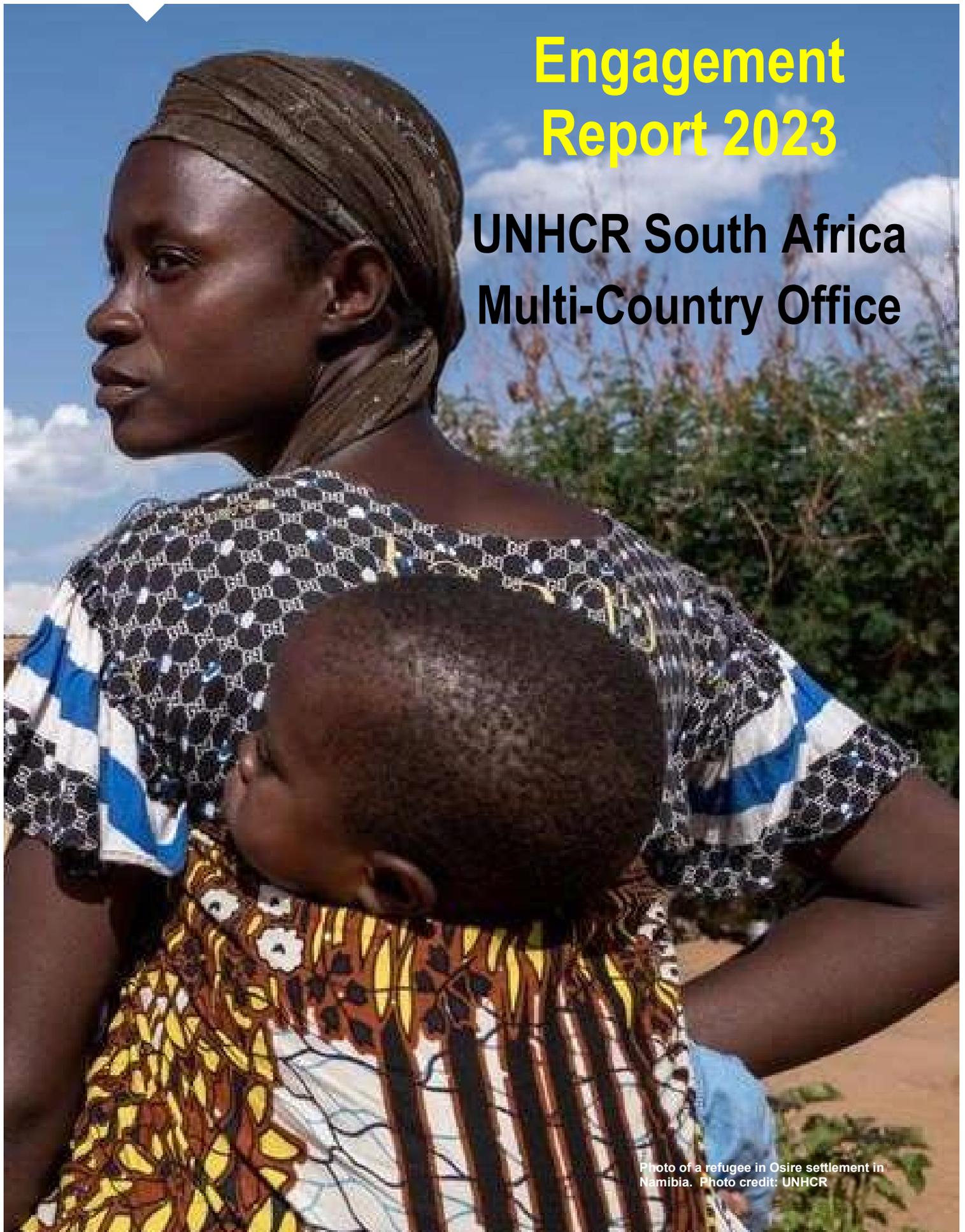


# Engagement Report 2023

**UNHCR South Africa  
Multi-Country Office**



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## Executive Summary

Forcibly Displaced Persons (FDPs) living in the nine countries covered by the UNHCR's South Africa Multi-Country Office (SAMCO) articulated their concerns, successes, and challenges during engagement sessions held throughout 2023. FDPs have felt the impact of repeated budget cuts applied to UNHCR operations particularly in 2022 and 2023, which have specifically targeted some of the most vital services. Food insecurity in Namibia and Botswana stands out as the operation's most pressing unmet need and protection concern. FDPs there were unequivocal about cascading effects of food insecurity, which negatively impact every aspect of their daily lives. In other SAMCO countries, challenges related to access to official documentation/status have affected the perception of UNHCR and its partners among FDPs in many locations. Access to tertiary-level healthcare and livelihoods/economic inclusion remain two significant areas of concern for FDPs where the operation has allocated minimal budget and staffing resources. It will be essential for SAMCO to critically examine all these unmet needs when prioritizing the budget, in view of the continued foreseeable financial austerity.

Despite numerous challenges, FDPs have displayed remarkable resilience in the face of adversity, xenophobia, and exclusion. Many have found ways to enroll their children in school, run businesses, manage their medical expenses, and support other vulnerable community members. Most FDPs living in urban settings in South Africa, Lesotho, Eswatini, and the Indian Ocean Islands are managing without any support from UNHCR or partners. Nevertheless, there is a widespread desire among FDPs to stay connected with UNHCR, remain informed about programs, and actively participate in initiatives and programs which impact their lives.



*A Somali woman photographed after a focus group discussion in Pretoria, South Africa. Photo credit: UNHCR*

## 1. Operational Context & Age, Gender, and Diversity (AGD) Considerations

The following countries are covered by the UNHCR South Africa Multi-Country Office (SAMCO): South Africa, Namibia, Eswatini, Botswana, Lesotho, Madagascar, Comoros and Mauritius. SAMCO also covers Seychelles where no FDPs are not currently recorded.

SAMCO Representation is based in Pretoria, South Africa and has additional field presence in Cape Town (foreseen to close in 2024 due to budgetary constraints), South Africa as well as Botswana and Namibia. At the time of this report, staff members were also deployed to support Madagascar and Comoros. Implementing partners are present in all locations except Comoros and Seychelles.

Detailed population statistics appear below, as of September 2023.<sup>1</sup> The top countries of nationality are the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia and Somalia.

Country of Asylum	Asylum Seeker	Other of concern	Refugee	Not of concern	Total
South Africa	81,974	0	62,538	0	144,512
Namibia	2,140	81	4,975	0	7,196
Eswatini	1,633	15	1,187	0	2,835
Botswana	101	75	759	0	935
Madagascar	651	19	57	0	727
Lesotho	350	6	315	0	671
Mauritius	16	0	8	0	24
Comoros	1	0	11	0	12
Seychelles	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>86,866</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>69,850</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>156,912</b>

Operational context and access to protection space varies widely among the nine countries under SAMCO's remit. Encampment policies in Namibia and Botswana hinder access to livelihood and integration activities. There is a lack of formal asylum systems in the four Indian Ocean Islands and varying degree of "tolerance" for FDPs in each of these countries. In South Africa, freedom of movement is permitted but FDPs grapple with rising rates of violence against foreigners and increasing challenges accessing valid documentation.

Engagement sessions were conducted throughout the year; grouping occurred by nationality, gender, persons living with disabilities and/or medical conditions, refugee leaders/RLOs, children/youth, specific nationalities and new arrivals/those with a specific documentation status were chosen based on location and relevance. Due to the varying issues and contexts, this report will elaborate on the required thematic areas only where relevant per country.

<sup>1</sup> South Africa population statistics are likely much higher, but at the time of the report UNHCR was awaiting updated information from the Department of Home Affairs. While this is the reported number of refugees and asylum-seekers, UNHCR acknowledges that there are severe delays in the issuance of new arrival registration and renewals of permits, as well as long-pending family joining applications which are likely not included in the official DHA statistics.

## 2. Methodology

Refugee engagement sessions were coordinated year-round by SAMCO's Operational Protection Unit (OPU) and Field Units in Cape Town, Botswana and Namibia in collaboration with other units, implementing partners and government. Asylum, Law & Policy, Programme, External Relations and Registration colleagues participated in the multi-functional team. For the locations where in-person presence was not possible, online discussions via Microsoft Teams was used to facilitate engagement sessions.

SAMCO has implemented an online collection tool to record FDP engagement since 2021. The collection tool has been further refined over the past two years and encourages multi-sectoral input from FDPs in a Focus Group Discussion (FGD), Townhall and individual settings.

SAMCO has largely discontinued the need for condensed Participatory Assessment activities at the end of the year, opting instead to conduct engagement throughout the program cycle starting in Q1 and ensuring the systematic recording of feedback on an ongoing basis. This methodology lends itself well to the Multi-Country office setting. SAMCO has ensured that FDP engagement is systematically incorporated into any Multi-Functional Team (MFT) mission/monitoring, either through group, individual or Town-Hall settings. This methodology also prevents "engagement fatigue" among FDPs which is already especially prevalent in Namibia, Botswana and South Africa.

In addition to FGDs and Town Halls, SAMCO also engaged individually with nearly the entire FDP populations in Mauritius and Comoros as well as undertaking a combination of individual and group sessions in Madagascar during a verification exercise.



*Refugees living with disabilities in Johannesburg, South Africa speak to UNHCR about their lives. Photo credit: UNHCR*

The table below indicates the groups engaged and breakdown by gender and location:

Location	Total Persons Engaged	# Women Included
South Africa	995	355
Namibia	226	140
Botswana	95	70
Eswatini	72	52
Lesotho	31	21
Madagascar	255	113
Mauritius	14	3
Comoros	6	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>1694</b>	<b>756</b>

Within the above total, 73 children and youth were engaged directly in 2023 in child/youth-themed FGDs across the locations.

### 3. Sectoral Findings

#### 4.1 Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

##### Overview of Findings

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) remains a prominent and recurring concern among FDPs in Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Lesotho, Eswatini and Comoros.

In Namibia, this year's discussions with FDPs centered on the significant impact of a 50% reduction in food rations, leading to severe food insecurity. The scarcity of food has forced women in the settlement to seek additional employment outside their community, exposing them to heightened risks. Girls as young as 12 years old reported that they are encouraged by parents and caretakers to engage in the sale and exchange of sex to earn supplemental income so that their family can buy more food. Widowed female FDPs reported experiencing pressure from social workers to remarry quickly for increased security. Furthermore, female FDPs expressed their concerns about the absence of GBV services within the settlement, especially in terms of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) for women who have survived GBV in their home countries and sought refuge in Namibia. Additionally, the lack of female interpreters in the settlement was identified as a significant barrier to reporting GBV to UNHCR and partners.

In Botswana, female FDPs raised cultural and practical obstacles to reporting GBV, particularly Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). Many are hesitant to report GBV due to a perceived negative impact on their ongoing resettlement processes. The 50% reduction in food rations in Botswana was noted as a factor exacerbating negative coping mechanisms among adults, including women, who are compelled to seek alternative sources of income in a country where they are not permitted to work. Moreover, the shortage of food has led to heightened physical and psychological stress within families, resulting in more reported instances of IPV and child abuse.

In South Africa, issues related to documentation continue to affect survivors' access to justice and their confidence in reporting GBV. Female FDPs expressed a general fear of reporting GBV to the authorities when they lack valid documents, as they fear the possibility of deportation. They

sometimes perceive apathy from the police which they attribute to bias against foreigners, preventing the official recording and investigation of cases in their communities. Similar to the situation in Namibia, many survivors note a lack of MHPSS support for women who arrive as survivors and need support from mental health professionals. A group of women engaged in a GBV empowerment project funded by Safe from the Start in Western Cape reported higher levels of understanding regarding GBV, increased reporting confidence, and greater awareness in their communities on GBV matters. This small pilot project reveals the impact that direct community engagement and referral awareness can have in FDP populations when done correctly and in cooperation with GBV experts (in this case, Rape Crisis Center).

In Eswatini, Lesotho and Comoros, FDP survivors conveyed their ability to access GBV services, and specifically in Eswatini and Lesotho, they have felt that GBV awareness campaigns conducted by UNHCR's partners have better informed them about their rights and available services.



*UNHCR counsels a refugee in Cape Town, South Africa. Photo credit: UNHCR*

### How the Participatory Assessment (2023) contributed to the planning and programming of GBV for 2024?

**Despite continued reductions in SAMCO's operating level for 2024, the following actions have been prioritized by UNHCR to address FDP concerns on GBV for 2024:**

1. Every partner project over 20,000 USD will include both a GBV and CP Outcome Area with a provision for MHPSS;
2. In the three target countries for GBV (Namibia, Botswana and South Africa), there will be an enhanced focus on Know Your Rights and the engagement of women-led groups through a community-based protection model (in line with the Safe from the Start project's success) to spread key messages on GBV, including reporting and access to justice;
3. Food security issues in Namibia and Botswana which lead to an increased risk of GBV will be addressed as a priority through supplemental fundraising efforts;
4. SAMCO will continue to actively engage in the Gender Theme Groups and sub-regional fundraising initiative in order to earmark funds for GBV in target countries;
5. SAMCO will ensure the provision of female interpreters in Namibia and across all SAMCO countries;
6. Continued engagement of other GBV actors – both UN and civil society – is needed to ensure a comprehensive response considering budget reductions and in line with Leave No One Behind (LNOB).

## 4.2 Child Protection & Youth (including access to primary/secondary education)

### Overview of Findings

Feedback on Child Protection issues in SAMCO countries has once again highlighted concerns related to the lack or delay in documentation, as well as obstacles to accessing primary and secondary education for forcibly displaced persons (FDP) learners.

In Madagascar and Mauritius, the lack of access to the public education sector was identified as a significant barrier to the integration and overall well-being of children. Many families in Madagascar, including newcomers, have resorted to enrolling their children in private schools or opting for homeschooling due to the exclusion from the public sector.

In Eswatini, children are well-integrated into the national education system at primary and secondary level. However, both learners and parents expressed concerns about the high cost of secondary school fees and related expenses, which hinder access to education for some families.



*A refugee child living in the reception center in Eswatini. Photo credit: UNHCR*

This year, a Children's Council in Botswana was formally engaged in the settlement by the Field Office. The council has reported that they perceive an overall lack of support for newcomer children and often feel dismissed when interacting with the police and hospital staff. The children noted that they rely on donations and limited partner/UNHCR funding, which is often insufficient to meet their needs. In both Botswana and Namibia, the pervasive issue of insufficient food rations has consistently been raised by both parents and children, underscoring high levels of suffering and concerns about potential malnutrition in the long-term. Parents in Namibia have also mentioned that the lack of issuance of Refugee Status Determination (RSD) decisions and birth registration documents poses challenges for documenting their children. Youth in Lesotho expressed that they were well-organized in their communities but had little formal mechanisms to have their voices heard, and implored UNHCR and its partner to engage them more often and give them opportunities to implement projects to serve their community.

Child Protection issues in South Africa continue to center primarily around documentation challenges for children, particularly for separated and unaccompanied children who struggle to access proper documentation. Other issues include delays in family file joining and the perception that the Department of Home Affairs systematically refuses to properly document child asylum-seekers. Birth registration access issues persist, including concerns related to the negative impact of handwritten birth certificates and barriers to birth registration for undocumented parents. The withholding of key birth documentation ("Proof of Birth") was raised in several locations when parents are unable to afford hospital delivery fees out-of-pocket.

### How the Participatory Assessment (2023) contributed to the planning and programming on child protection for 2024

Despite continued reductions in SAMCO's operating level for 2024, the following actions have been prioritized by UNHCR to address FDP concerns on Child Protection for 2024:

1. Every partner project over 20,000 USD will include both a GBV and CP Outcome Area with a provision for high-risk management of cases of children at-risk;
2. Continued advocacy around documentation issues in Namibia and South Africa, especially for birth registration and individual high-risk cases of UASC and other categories of children at-risk; deepen partnerships with UNICEF where possible;
3. Resolution of the food insecurity crisis in SAMCO (Namibia and Botswana) as a priority area, considering the huge possible consequences for childhood malnutrition and health;
4. Consider judicial engagement strategies for the unresolved and egregious issues surrounding the lack of documentation of UASC in South Africa, and persistent delays in family joining;
5. Deepen engagement with child and youth-led platforms in Botswana, Lesotho and Eswatini to ensure that UNHCR programs continue to respond to their needs;
6. Continue to link core CP issues in the Indian Ocean Islands (documentation, access to public school, etc) to SAMCO's asylum-system building work.

## 4.3 Education (Tertiary)

### Overview of Findings

FDPs in all locations have consistently expressed the need for more targeted programs to support learners admitted to tertiary education. This feedback remains unchanged from last year, despite increased opportunities in 2023 for both UNHCR and partner-sponsored scholarships, including complimentary education pathways.

Limitations on access to bursary loans across SAMCO countries have hindered FDP learners' ability to access tertiary education since most families are unable to afford the cost of college without financial assistance. This challenge is particularly pronounced in Namibia and Botswana, where FDPs have no right to work or live outside the settlement, and in South Africa, where even recognized refugees are not eligible for assistance under the National Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). Asylum-seeker learners without access to Convention Travel Documents (CTD) in Lesotho and Eswatini

lamented the limited options of local universities available to them, noting that national learners often have the ability to travel to South Africa to attend college.

The issue of matric-level students without documentation in South Africa remains a significant concern, persisting despite the concerted efforts of parents, social workers, and legal partners to resolve this issue. High-achieving asylum-seeking learners in South Africa continue to gain admission to prestigious universities abroad but are then left without the means to travel and undertake their studies, owing to the lack of a CTD and a protracted asylum backlog.

In Madagascar and Mauritius, a few high-achieving learners with financial means have managed to enroll in private universities and continue their education, but this remains out of reach for most FDPs.

### How the Participatory Assessment (2023) contributed to the planning and programming of Education in 2024

Despite continued reductions in SAMCO's operating level for 2024, the following actions have been prioritized by UNHCR to address FDP concerns on Tertiary Education for 2024:

1. Prioritize expansion of the DAFI program to Lesotho and Botswana in 2024 to ensure a more expansive DAFI footprint in SAMCO;
2. Double-down on advocacy with DHA to document matric-level learners as a matter of priority;
3. Continue to advocate with HQ for the expansion of all in-country learning scholarships (including DAFI) to be extended to asylum-seekers;
4. Large-scale communication campaigns on the UNICORE project, DAFI, French education pathway, etc has proven useful and reached candidates in over half of SAMCO's countries. These efforts should be continued and enhanced in 2024 to ensure every FDP in SAMCO is aware of all possible education opportunities.

## 4.4 Registration & Refugee Status Determination

### Overview of Findings

SAMCO is divided between countries which have an asylum system in place (South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Lesotho, and Eswatini), and countries where UNHCR is the only entity conducting registration and RSD under its mandate (Madagascar, Comoros, Seychelles, and Mauritius). Among the three Indian Ocean Islands with FDP presence (all except Seychelles), FDPs generally reported swift registration, but significant delays were reported at the mandate RSD level. FDPs seemed to be generally aware that these delays were due to capacity constraints at the Pretoria level.

In Namibia, Lesotho, and Eswatini, delays in the issuance of RSD decisions by the authorities persist, and in the case of Lesotho and Eswatini, there was a complete freeze on RSD decision-making until September 2023. These documentation/RSD issues continue to hinder FDPs' ability to engage in livelihoods, travel, and subject them to a constant state of living in "limbo." Additionally, the stalled

adjudication of citizenship applications in Eswatini and Botswana further limited prospects for local integration, even among FDPs who qualify according to the national legislation.

South Africa is still grappling with a massive asylum backlog, delays in registration, renewal, issuance of CTDs, the separation of family members, Refugee ID cards, and reports of discrimination, mistreatment, and widespread corruption at Refugee Reception Offices in the country. Conditions at the Desmond Tutu RRO in Pretoria consistently rank worse than the other four RROs. FDPs in South Africa exhibit noticeable "engagement fatigue" when discussing the asylum backlog project and registration issues with UNHCR. They believe UNHCR has prioritized funding for the DHA over much-needed, under-resourced social and legal programs. Implementing partners who joined UNHCR during engagement sessions in South Africa in 2023 continue to report an alarming upward trend of unjustified denials. Legal partners do not have the resources to respond to an increased client base, which now includes many new arrivals and final rejections requiring judicial review.

### How the Participatory Assessment (2023) contributed to the planning and programming on Registration and RSD for 2024

Despite continued reductions in SAMCO's operating level for 2024, the following actions have been prioritized by UNHCR to address FDP concerns on Registration and RSD for 2024:

1. Continue to invest resources and capacity building in Lesotho, Eswatini, Botswana and Namibia to ensure that backlogs do not further grow; MFT missions should examine the delays in registration and decision issuance moving forward;
2. Prioritize asylum-systems building in the IOI with registration handover as a start in Madagascar to ensure better sustainability and government accountability;
3. Prioritize the recruitment of RSD caseworkers where funding allows in SAMCO in order to ensure highest-risk cases remain prioritized and there is capacity to train and oversee the work of the various governments;
4. Consider strong messaging to communities on the change in modality of the backlog project, so that FDPs understand that UNHCR is taking corrective measures to make the project more effective;
5. Consider building more refugee engagement sessions into the design of the backlog project to ensure that both DHA and UNHCR RSD staff are in a continual feedback loop with FDPs on the various challenges in the system.

## 4.5 Community Participation and Representation

### Overview of Findings

The operation made a concerted effort to conduct engagement sessions throughout the program cycle, rather than pushing them all toward the end of the year. This decision was primarily because many of the FDPs in SAMCO have voiced a form of "engagement fatigue" over the past few years. In their own words, "UNHCR talks to us every year but never comes up with solutions to our problems." For instance, in Namibia, issues related to food shortages and the devastating effects of ration cuts meant that only Town Hall-type engagements and targeted sessions with some leaders could occur due to high tensions in the settlement. In South Africa, groups were strategically selected

to enable informative conversations about documentation rather than focusing only on the issues stemming from the backlog project.

SAMCO is committed to engaging FDPs with an AGD approach; it is crucial that the operation not depend solely on a constant feedback loop from traditional "refugee leaders" or "block leaders." In South Africa and Lesotho, Refugee-led organizations, both formal and informal, have been strategically engaged to reach beyond traditional leadership and welfare committees. In Botswana, youth and women's groups are increasingly targeted for feedback on services and challenges.

Feedback within South Africa regarding the reach and impact of the refugee helpline is mostly negative, with FDPs complaining about long wait times and limited advice/referrals. On the other hand, mass information emails and broadcast messages via WhatsApp groups in South Africa, Lesotho, Madagascar, and Mauritius are received favorably, even among refugee leadership. This methodology was launched in late 2022 as part of SAMCO's expanding Digital CwC work and has proven to be a low-cost and high-impact activity. Additionally, a dedicated email address for complex cases in the Indian Ocean Islands has further opened a channel of communication for the small number of FDPs in those locations who have specific questions about services and/or their own individual cases.

FDPs across SAMCO desire more extensive engagement and involvement in the program design, implementation, and service delivery of UNHCR in their respective areas.

### **How the Participatory Assessment (2023) contributed to the planning and programming of Community Engagement for 2024**

**Despite continued reductions in SAMCO's operating level for 2024, the following actions have been prioritized by UNHCR to address FDP concerns on Community Engagement and Empowerment for 2024:**

1. Continue to expand the reach – through virtual and in-person methods – of refugee engagement beyond traditional leadership and RLO structures into 2024;
2. Re-examine how to better engage block/camp leadership in Namibia, Botswana and Eswatini to empower youth, women and FDPs living with specific needs;
3. Recruitment of a third helpline operator for 2024; continue to expand the scope of the effective e-mailer and whatsapp broadcast messaging service;
4. Expand the launch of help.org to cover at least half of SAMCO's countries by end 2024.

## **4.6 Shelter & WASH**

### **Overview of Findings**

Feedback on shelter focused on conditions in the two settlements as well as the reception centers in Eswatini and Lesotho, which currently shelter over 500 and 20 FDPs, respectively. Overall, FDPs in all locations except Lesotho had general complaints about shelter and WASH conditions. Challenges regarding faulty boreholes and taps were more pronounced in Namibia compared to Botswana and Eswatini. The electricity has been cut in Lesotho's reception center for over six months, which has led to a deterioration in the quality of life and shelter/WASH service delivery, especially during the cold months.

In Namibia, some FDPs complained about the housing units donated by Canada and noted that in general, shelters are not durable and in need of refurbishment. In Mauritius and Comoros, a group of FDPs accommodated by UNHCR's partner expressed contentment with their housing situation and acknowledged that most of their basic needs were attended to by UNHCR and operational partners.

FDPs in Eswatini expressed hesitation about moving out of the government and UNHCR-partner run reception center due to their dependence on long-term assistance in the center, with some having been there for over a decade. However, there was an uptick in interest noted throughout the year among some populations who would be willing to move to a block of arable land being developed for cultivation.

### **How the Participatory Assessment (2023) contributed to the planning and programming on Shelter for 2024**

**Despite continued reductions in SAMCO's operating level for 2024, the following actions have been prioritized by UNHCR to address FDP concerns on Shelter and WASH for 2024:**

1. While shelter and WASH in the three target locations are judged largely sufficient by FDPs, SAMCO has no current WASH or Shelter technical expert, and bureau/HQ support should be sought to ensure compliance with CCCM standards including Sphere. Additional capacity in this area would also allow UNHCR to further support government efforts to improve WASH, especially the provision of water and waste disposal;
2. Community-led WASH and shelter rehabilitation should be prioritized as a cost-saving and sustainability measure;
3. Examine possible "green" energy options in both settlements using solar energy (which can also be an income-generating activity);
4. The reception center in Eswatini needs to be decongested urgently; resource mobilization to operationalize the arable land pledge will be an ongoing priority for the operation in 2024 and 2025.

## 4.7 Livelihoods, Local Integration and Social Cohesion



*A refugee woman attends to her mushroom crops in Lesotho. Photo credit: UNHCR*

### Overview of Findings

Among SAMCO's nine locations, FDPs have a legal right to work only in South Africa, Eswatini, and Lesotho. While South Africa has historically been considered a location with more economic opportunities, FDPs in South Africa reported increased movements of community members, especially Somalis, to Eswatini to operate their businesses without the fear of xenophobia. In all three locations, FDPs reported a preference among most employers to hire nationals, and in South Africa, issues related to xenophobia - especially for business owners and children in schools - were widely reported. FDPs in South Africa expressed concern over rising anti-foreigner sentiment in mainstream media and at the community level. This has impacted their ability to find and retain employment, further complicated by a seemingly endless loop of documentation issues, especially for asylum-seekers and new arrivals. Despite rising attacks on foreigners in South Africa, most FDPs acknowledged that in their day-to-day interactions, they had minimal problems with South Africans and found many of them to be good neighbors, customers, and friends.

The isolated locations of both settlements in Namibia and Botswana - coupled with limitations on their right to economic inclusion and movement - lead to little reporting/feedback on social cohesion and local integration from both locations. Livelihood projects in the settlements are minimal due to a lack of UNHCR funding for market-relevant projects, such as farming, fish farming, and computer projects. Catalytic seed funding is not available to help bring these projects to scale. For example, the poultry farming, sewing, and textile work piloted in Botswana was noted as useful and needed but unable to take off due to lack of support and market access. Many of these projects in the two settlement locations would be poised to bring in supplementary food items if they could be properly resourced.

The lack of economic inclusion in Mauritius and Madagascar is the top challenge articulated by FDPs. They are unable to access SIM cards, bank accounts, or engage in any legal employment. Many work in the informal sector and are subject to exploitation, including wage withholding and abuse. While relations with the host community in both locations are overall positive, the Pakistani community in

Madagascar has reported a notable uptick in arrests while selling items informally; they expressed to UNHCR that they feel increasingly targeted by the authorities due to their irregular status.

### How the Participatory Assessment (2023) contributed to the planning and programming of Livelihoods, Local Integration and Social Cohesion for 2024

Despite continued reductions in SAMCO's operating level for 2024, the following actions have been prioritized by UNHCR to address FDP concerns on Livelihoods, Local Integration and Social Cohesion for 2024:

1. Continue to use the power of social media and storytelling to highlight the positive contribution of FDPs in South African society;
2. Prioritize contingency planning in the event of a mass outbreak of violence against foreigners in South Africa;
3. Continue flow monitoring of FDPs from South Africa to Eswatini through the added registration questionnaire;
4. Invest in market-relevant catalytic interventions in Namibia and Botswana which will contribute to both livelihood activities as well as address the issues around food scarcity;
5. Link economic inclusion to asylum-systems building initiatives in the IOI, emphasizing that a strong framework on access to work prevents exploitation and lessens the risk of trafficking for vulnerable groups.

## 4.8 Health

### Overview of Findings

FDPs across SAMCO expressed varying degrees of difficulty accessing non-routine care beyond primary healthcare; this feedback has remained consistent for the past two years. Issues were most pronounced in Madagascar, where there is full exclusion from the public healthcare sector and FDPs must pay private rates out-of-pocket for anything above primary or clinic-level care. While UNHCR's partner has some limited medical budget allocation for serious cases, the increase in new arrivals in Madagascar throughout 2023 has led to many unmet health needs.

For the small FDP populations in Mauritius and Comoros, there is no public access to care. However, FDPs noted that when they have complex health issues, UNHCR's partners are sufficiently equipped to respond to their basic needs including referrals to specialists and filling prescriptions.

In Namibia and Botswana, FDPs are aware of the health services provided in the settlement, but many - especially in Namibia where critical food shortages have exacerbated health needs - consider these services to be insufficient. In both locations, referrals for any complex illness or intervention requiring tertiary-level care necessitate additional costs, which must be borne by the FDP and/or UNHCR's partner, subject to fund availability.

FDPs in South Africa continue to report provincial particularities and nuances when accessing health services. While FDPs, including asylum-seekers, reported few problems in Western Cape and KZN,

FDPs in Gauteng and Mpumalanga reported pushbacks and xenophobia at hospitals for both asylum-seekers and undocumented FDPs. Recognized refugees, on the other hand, generally did not face any issues with access to care due to large part to the prevailing inclusive legal framework in South Africa. The high cost of giving birth was equally raised as an issue across provinces, with asylum-seekers and undocumented persons reporting being charged exorbitant rates for regular delivery (when it should be free of charge). FDPs living with disabilities noted that access to assistive devices and specialized physiotherapy remains out of reach for most, and the community has started to mobilize on their own to cover the cost of devices as needed for some vulnerable FDPs.

No issues on access to health were reported in Lesotho or Eswatini, where all categories of FDPs are well-integrated into national health systems. If any challenges are faced in Lesotho, FDPs reach out to the Ministry of Home Affairs to liaise as needed with the public hospitals.

### How the Participatory Assessment (2023) contributed to the planning and programming on Health for 2024

**Despite continued reductions in SAMCO's operating level for 2024, the following actions have been prioritized by UNHCR to address FDP concerns on Health for 2024:**

1. Advocate for additional medical referral budget for REMREC-approved cases in Madagascar, Namibia and Botswana;
2. Continue to link access to healthcare to asylum-system building work in the IOI;
3. Undertake a campaign to educate the growing population in Madagascar on their responsibilities vis-à-vis their own healthcare costs and UNHCR/partner limitations for direct payment/support;
4. Consider high-level advocacy and/or judicial engagement in South Africa on the NHI Bill which is set to further limit access to health for adult asylum-seekers once implemented;
5. Pursue strategic partnerships with WHO to pursue advocacy and potential support on individual high-risk cases (Namibia and Botswana);
6. Continue to push for a robust MAF budget to ensure that life-saving resettlement is pursued for medical cases meeting the criteria.

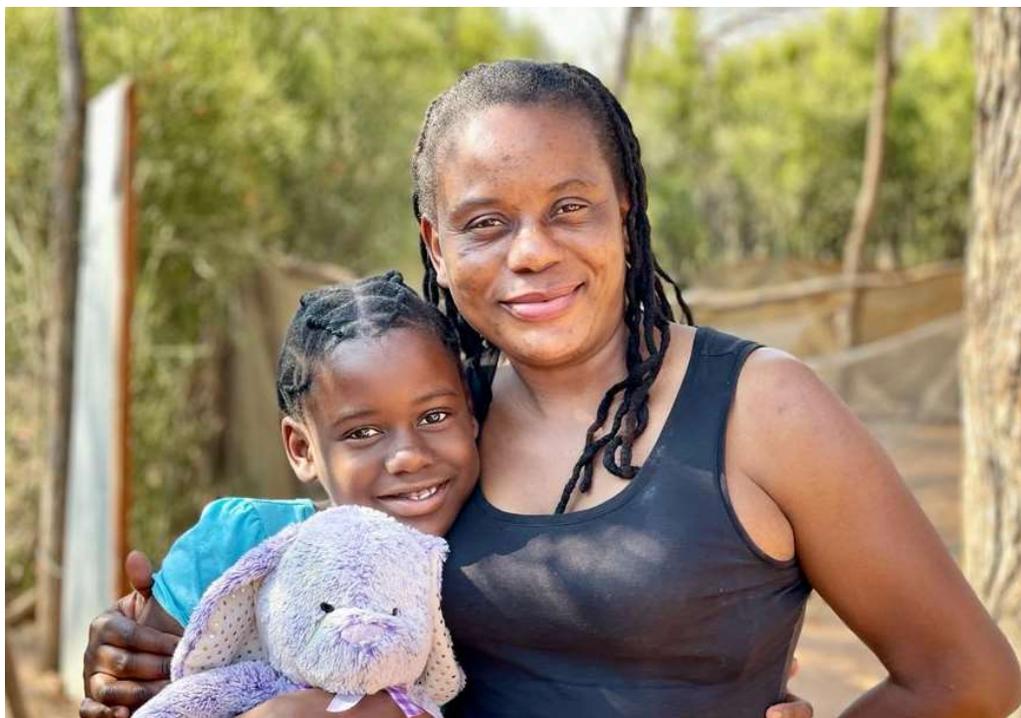
## 4.9 Food and Nutrition

### Overview of Findings

The ration cuts in Namibia and Botswana continue to have devastating consequences on practically all aspects of life for FDPs in both settlements. The ration cuts coincided with increased food prices and inflation in both locations as well as insufficient rainfall which hampered crop production. Both locations are also grappling with a lack of income-generating activities due to budget cuts. Basic needs in terms of nutrition, non-food items, and overall well-being are not being met. Engagement in 2023 showed that this was particularly pronounced in Namibia, where most families are struggling and there are painfully few opportunities to supplement their food intake. FDPs in both Namibia and Botswana reported missed or delayed food distributions and frustration with UNHCR, partners, and

the government over the ration cuts. This has led to tensions in Namibia, causing concern for staff and FDP safety. Very few FDPs in both locations reported being engaged in meaningful livelihood activities, citing the isolated location of the settlements, restrictions on their economic inclusion and lack of UNHCR/partner/government- funded opportunities. Many seem to have "given up hope" that UNHCR, the government, or partners will step in to assist them in meeting their daily needs.

A number of FDPs have innovative ideas on how to generate supplementary income and food items but there is a lack of catalytic funding to bring these projects to fruition. In Namibia - as noted above in the GBV section - some parents and caregivers are encouraging their young daughters to engage in the sale and exchange of sex in order to supplement the family's income to afford food.



*A refugee woman and her daughter in Dukwi Refugee Camp, Botswana.*

### **How the Participatory Assessment (2023) contributed to the planning and programming on Food and Nutrition for 2024**

**Despite continued reductions in SAMCO's operating level for 2024, the following actions have been prioritized by UNHCR to address FDP concerns on Food and Nutrition for 2024:**

1. Food for the full 12 months should be budgeted as a priority in SAMCO while conversations and advocacy with the governments of Botswana and Namibia continue on both out-of-camp policy as well as absorption of the cost of food in the settlements under the government budget;
2. Continue at high levels to request support from WFP where food security and livelihood gaps persist in both settlements;
3. Surge support on nutrition from RBSA should be sought to conduct a baseline evaluation of the impact of the lack of food on children's health/risk of malnutrition in the long-term;
4. Supplemental livelihood projects which bring in additional food items (farming, fish pond, poultry) should be funded as a priority in SAMCO's limited budget. Female-headed households should be prioritized as participants.

## 4.10 Durable Solutions

### Overview of Findings

FDPs across SAMCO - with the exception of Lesotho, Eswatini, and Comoros - displayed very high expectations of resettlement when engaged throughout the program cycle. In both Namibia and Botswana, most of the settlement population is in the resettlement pipeline; those who are not have an expectation that if they remain in the camp long enough they will be resettled. FDPs in South Africa expressed frustration over why some end up in the pipeline and others do not, a common and understandable concern. Grievances over past profiling exercises - which left them with no feedback and a sense of false hope - also added to tensions on the subject. Fraud issues are prevalent in South Africa, with many FDPs mistrusting the process altogether. In Lesotho and Eswatini, FDPs lamented the lack of a resettlement program and implored UNHCR to consider their cases

Availability of voluntary repatriation options is sufficient outside South Africa; for the FDPs in South Africa, the volrep needs far outstrip SAMCO's capacity to assist. There are no options for finally rejected FDPs since IOM ended their Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) program for these populations. Many of these individuals still consider this to be an activity that should be conducted under UNHCR's mandate and expressed frustration that they have no means by which they can return home.

#### How the Participatory Assessment (2023) contributed to the planning and programming on Durable Solutions for 2024

Despite continued reductions in SAMCO's operating level for 2024, the following actions have been prioritized by UNHCR to address FDP concerns on Durable Solutions for 2024:

1. Continued engagement with IOM at high levels is needed to promote AVR for finally rejected FDPs and "stranded migrants" in the SADC region;
2. FDP-accessible materials on resettlement, fraud, volrep and expectation management should be updated and disseminated;
3. Increased awareness sessions on durable solutions (including complementary pathways) should be held in-person and online by SAMCO Durable Solution staff;
4. Dedicated counselling sessions for FDPs in the pipeline in the IOI should be scheduled twice yearly;