



**United Nations**

# **Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees**

**General Assembly  
Official Records  
Seventy-sixth Session  
Supplement No. 12**





**General Assembly**  
Official Records  
Seventy-sixth Session  
Supplement No. 12

# **Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees**



United Nations • New York, 2021

*Note*

Symbols of United Nations documents are composed of letters combined with figures. Mention of such a symbol indicates a reference to a United Nations document.

[20 August 2021]

## Contents

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Page</i>
I. Introduction .....	1
II. Global compact on refugees .....	1
III. Protection .....	2
A. Refugees .....	2
B. Internal displacement .....	3
C. Mixed movements .....	4
D. Education .....	4
E. Jobs and livelihoods .....	5
F. Cash assistance .....	5
G. Specific needs .....	6
H. Climate action .....	7
IV. Statelessness .....	7
V. Emergency response and operational overview .....	8
A. Africa .....	9
B. Americas .....	9
C. Asia and the Pacific .....	10
D. Europe .....	10
E. Middle East and North Africa .....	10
VI. Durable solutions .....	11
A. Voluntary repatriation and return .....	11
B. Integration and other local solutions .....	12
C. Resettlement and complementary pathways .....	12
VII. Partnerships .....	13
A. Development partners and financial institutions .....	13
B. United Nations system and international organizations .....	13
C. Non-governmental organizations .....	14
D. Private sector .....	14
E. Local authorities and city networks .....	14
F. Other stakeholders .....	15
VIII. Reform, accountability and oversight .....	15
A. Transformation .....	15
B. Accountability and oversight .....	15
IX. Contributions to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees .....	16
X. Conclusions .....	17



## I. Introduction

1. As at 31 December 2020, over 91 million<sup>1</sup> people came under the care of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) worldwide, an increase from 86.5 million in 2019. Of the total, 20.7 million were refugees<sup>2</sup> and more than 48 million were internally displaced persons. Violence, persecution and civil strife led to an estimated 11.2 million people being newly displaced during 2020, including 9.8 million who were displaced within their own countries. Some 4.2 million people in 94 countries were reported as stateless, though the actual number was probably significantly higher.

2. Over the past year, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic exacerbated existing humanitarian and protection challenges. Widespread border closures restricted access to territory for people in need of international protection. Millions of displaced people lost their livelihoods due to restrictions and lockdowns, causing socioeconomic hardships. The health crisis had a profound impact on the ability of displaced children to attend school.

3. In that context, solutions were limited. Around 3.4 million people returned to their areas or countries of origin in 2020, including 3.2 million internally displaced persons and 251,000 refugees. While over 1.4 million refugees were estimated to be in need of resettlement, the number of resettled refugees plummeted to its lowest level in almost two decades.

4. Despite these challenges, positive examples emerged as well. Numerous States demonstrated how measures to protect the lives and well-being of their citizens during the pandemic were not incompatible with their international protection obligations – a salient reminder of the enduring value of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951, 70 years after its adoption. Advancements were made regarding inclusion, access to health care and vaccines, while innovative approaches to education and the adaptation of protection tools helped reach people in need during lockdowns. The global compact on refugees provided a solid framework to tackle the additional challenges brought on by the pandemic.

## II. Global compact on refugees

5. The global compact on refugees, underpinned by the principle of international solidarity and burden- and responsibility-sharing, continued to galvanize action. Many of the 1,400 pledges<sup>3</sup> made at the Global Refugee Forum and the high-level segment on statelessness at the seventieth plenary session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme in 2019 were adapted or accelerated to support needs emerging during the pandemic. As at June 2021, some 75 per cent of pledges for which updates had been submitted were in progress and 15 per cent were at the planning stage. In addition, some 5 per cent had been fulfilled. More than 230 good practices linked to the objectives of the global compact on refugees were shared on the dedicated digital platform.<sup>4</sup>

6. Other key initiatives also progressed, including three regional support platforms: (a) the comprehensive regional protection and solutions framework for Central America and Mexico (MIRPS); (b) the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) support platform for the East and Horn of Africa; and (c) the solutions strategy for Afghan refugees to support voluntary repatriation, sustainable reintegration and assistance to host countries.<sup>5</sup> The initiatives strengthened regional responses to forced displacement, galvanized political commitments and mobilized financial, material and technical assistance.

<sup>1</sup> For further information pertaining to statistics on populations of concern to UNHCR at the end of 2020, see [www.unhcr.org/flagship-reports/globaltrends/](http://www.unhcr.org/flagship-reports/globaltrends/).

<sup>2</sup> This number does not include the 5.7 million refugees under the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

<sup>3</sup> See <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/article/solidarity-in-action-grf-anniversary>.

<sup>4</sup> See <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/channel/good-practices>.

<sup>5</sup> See <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/article/support-platforms>.

7. The High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges for 2020 focused on implications of the pandemic for the protection and resilience of persons of concern and their host communities.<sup>6</sup> Participants reflected on how to address pressing protection and solutions questions, building on the international refugee protection regime and principles and the global compact on refugees, and proposed recommendations on participation, protection, health, resilience and climate action.<sup>7</sup>

### III. Protection

#### A. Refugees

8. The number of refugees under the UNHCR mandate reached almost 20.7 million by the end of 2020. Turkey hosted the largest number (3.7 million), followed by Colombia (1.7 million), Pakistan (1.4 million), Uganda (1.4 million) and Germany (1.2 million). Developing countries hosted 86 per cent of the world's refugees and Venezuelans displaced abroad, while the least developed countries provided asylum to 27 per cent, or 5.5 million people, of the global total.

9. In 2020, some 1.3 million individual asylum applications were registered. Despite the substantial drop in new claims, the global backlog of some 4.1 million pending asylum applications remained unchanged.

10. During the pandemic, 195 countries have implemented emergency measures, which have included full or partial border closures. Sixty-four countries made no exception for asylum seekers. UNHCR observed an increase in violations of the principle of non-refoulement. Pushbacks at borders and interceptions at sea were also reported, including some resulting in individuals being returned to places where they faced persecution or serious human rights violations. Nevertheless, numerous countries implemented measures to safely manage arrivals through quarantine and treatment programmes, enabling them to uphold their obligations under international law.

11. The pandemic put pressure on national asylum systems and capacities. Challenges included the suspension of asylum procedures and registration; border closures restricting access to asylum; arbitrary detention of asylum seekers; limits on legal representation in asylum procedures; and attempts to restrict or externalize international protection.

12. UNHCR issued a guide to the working modalities of the Asylum Capacity Support Group, a key international cooperation mechanism under the global compact on refugees.<sup>8</sup> State-to-State support mechanisms were launched. The Office is working with relevant stakeholders to match additional Global Refugee Forum pledges related to asylum capacity-building, which are regularly updated on the Asylum Capacity Support Group portal.<sup>9</sup> UNHCR revised procedural standards for refugee status determination under its mandate to enhance due process and support national asylum procedures and case processing.<sup>10</sup>

13. UNHCR advocated accession to the 1951 Convention and the Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees of 1967 and their translation into domestic law. By 30 June 2021, a total of 149 States had become party to the 1951 Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol, with 70 maintaining reservations to one or both instruments. UNHCR engaged with 93 countries on related legislative processes. Of those, 23 countries adopted laws or legislative changes, including nine that advanced refugee rights.

---

<sup>6</sup> See [www.unhcr.org/high-commissioners-dialogue-on-protection-challenges-2020](http://www.unhcr.org/high-commissioners-dialogue-on-protection-challenges-2020).

<sup>7</sup> See [www.unhcr.org/60421b234](http://www.unhcr.org/60421b234).

<sup>8</sup> See <https://acsg-portal.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/ACSG-Guide-to-Working-Modalities-25-March-2021.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> See <https://acsg-portal.org/acsg-matches/>.

<sup>10</sup> See [www.unhcr.org/publications/legal/4317223c9/procedural-standards-refugee-status-determination-under-unhcrs-mandate.html](http://www.unhcr.org/publications/legal/4317223c9/procedural-standards-refugee-status-determination-under-unhcrs-mandate.html).



14. To leverage the engagement of human rights entities on refugee protection, UNHCR launched a human rights engagement strategy for 2020–2023<sup>11</sup> and issued guidance on engagement with national human rights institutions<sup>12</sup> and on addressing racism and xenophobia affecting persons under its mandate.<sup>13</sup> A Global Refugee Forum pledge made by the legal community to provide pro bono legal support resulted in the provision of nearly 165,000 hours of free legal aid, legal representation and research on issues such as child protection, livelihood initiatives, refugee status determination and statelessness.

## **B. Internal displacement**

15. More than 48 million people were displaced within their own countries owing to conflict and violence by the end of 2020. Disasters, including climate-related events, also triggered millions of new displacements.

16. UNHCR strengthened its engagement in situations of internal displacement, including by providing protection and assistance to millions of internally displaced persons through clusters and technical support. The global protection cluster, led by UNHCR, delivered life-saving services, helping internally displaced persons to access their rights and find safety from violence, abuse and exploitation. UNHCR led 29 out of 32 country-level protection clusters and cluster-like mechanisms, including 16 that were co-facilitated with non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

17. Efforts to promote the self-reliance of internally displaced persons and their access to livelihood opportunities were prioritized. UNHCR supported skills-building activities, the provision of start-up grants for new businesses and the reconstruction of infrastructure in Colombia, the Philippines and South Sudan. In 2020, cash assistance was expanded to improve socioeconomic conditions for internally displaced persons in Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Honduras, Iraq, Libya, the Sudan, Ukraine and Yemen.

18. UNHCR chaired the task team on law and policy of the global protection cluster. It also co-chaired the cluster's task teams on anti-trafficking in humanitarian action and on human rights engagement. It worked with the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States, IGAD and the Southern African Development Community on the ratification and implementation of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa. UNHCR supported the development of national frameworks on internal displacement, providing legal and technical advice.

19. UNHCR co-chaired and hosted the Secretariat of the Plan of Action for Advancing Prevention, Protection and Solutions for Internally Displaced People (GP20).<sup>14</sup> Together with the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, UNHCR produced a compilation of national practices capturing 22 examples from States addressing internal displacement. In 2021, GP20 was succeeded by GP2.0 as an informal platform for joint initiatives and sharing good practices. The Office also supported the work of the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement.

20. UNHCR co-led the global shelter cluster and the camp management and camp coordination cluster. At the country level, it led 16 of the 30 shelter clusters and 19 of the 37 coordination mechanisms, providing shelter and core relief items to over 12 million internally displaced persons. UNHCR co-led 17 of the 20 camp management and camp coordination cluster and cluster-like mechanisms, reaching 5.8 million internally displaced persons in nearly 5,000 sites and camps. The global camp management and camp coordination cluster

<sup>11</sup> See [www.unhcr.org/protection/operations/5fb681264/unhcrs-human-rights-engagement-strategy-2020-2023.html](http://www.unhcr.org/protection/operations/5fb681264/unhcrs-human-rights-engagement-strategy-2020-2023.html).

<sup>12</sup> See [www.unhcr.org/protection/operations/5f92a5604/guidance-unhcrs-engagement-national-human-rights-institutions.html](http://www.unhcr.org/protection/operations/5f92a5604/guidance-unhcrs-engagement-national-human-rights-institutions.html).

<sup>13</sup> See [www.unhcr.org/protection/operations/5f7c860f4/unhcr-guidance-on-racism-and-xenophobia.html](http://www.unhcr.org/protection/operations/5f7c860f4/unhcr-guidance-on-racism-and-xenophobia.html).

<sup>14</sup> See [www.globalprotectioncluster.org/\\_assets/files/unhcr-gp20-plan\\_of\\_action-a5-scren.pdf](http://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/_assets/files/unhcr-gp20-plan_of_action-a5-scren.pdf).

delivered capacity-building workshops remotely for eight UNHCR operations. It produced a paper on area-based approaches<sup>15</sup> and another on camp management standards,<sup>16</sup> and it established a working group on connectivity, sustainability and clean energy.

### **C. Mixed movements**

21. Mixed movements continued along dangerous routes in many regions. UNHCR and its partners worked to reinforce respect for the rights of all people on the move, including through advocacy and activities to support protection-sensitive border and migration management and to counter exploitation by smugglers and traffickers.

22. In Latin America, UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), together with partners, responded to movements of Venezuelans through the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform, assisting some 2.9 million refugees, migrants and host community members in 2020. In Libya, UNHCR and IOM advocated against mass expulsions of mixed groups of third-country nationals without due process and in unsafe and undignified conditions. The advocacy of UNHCR for alternatives to detention led to the release of hundreds of refugees and asylum seekers. Addressing mixed movements in Africa, UNHCR initiated a four-year joint project with the International Labour Organization, IOM and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to support member States of the Southern African Development Community in strengthening institutional mechanisms for asylum and migration management. In early 2021, UNHCR launched an appeal to mitigate risks affecting refugees and other people moving irregularly towards the central and western Mediterranean Sea. Globally, the Office advocated for rescue at sea and disembarkation in safety, including by creating the Inter-Agency Working Group on the Safety of Life at Sea.

23. UNHCR participated in the United Nations Network on Migration, providing advice in the context of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration on alternatives to detention, pathways for regular migration and the safe return of those not needing international protection. UNHCR advocated that safe, dignified and prompt returns were vital to the credibility of effective asylum systems. At regional and country levels, UNHCR supported collaboration on asylum and migration challenges, including partnerships with issue-based coalitions and regional migration networks. UNHCR and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime assumed joint leadership of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons in 2021, promoting the exchange of information and good practices.

### **D. Education**

24. In 2020, 95 per cent of refugee children were impacted by school closures, threatening to undo hard-fought gains. Of some 7.1 million refugee children and youth, nearly half were unable to go to school. At the primary level, 77 per cent were enrolled in school. At the secondary level, enrolment stood at 31 per cent. Thirty-six per cent of boys attended secondary education compared with 27 per cent of girls. Just 3 per cent of refugee youth were enrolled in higher education. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and UNHCR collaborated on a blueprint for joint action for refugee children,<sup>17</sup> including to boost enrolment of refugee and host-community children.

25. In its annual education report for 2020,<sup>18</sup> UNHCR warned of the dire consequences of the pandemic on education, highlighting that, based on previous experience, up to 50 per cent of refugee girls in secondary education might not return to school. In the Sahel, the health crisis and deteriorating security forced thousands of schools to close. Children with disabilities were at increased risk of being left behind as measures to support home-based

---

<sup>15</sup> See [https://ccccluster.org/sites/default/files/2020-12/Final\\_CCCM\\_ABA\\_Position\\_Paper-2020.pdf](https://ccccluster.org/sites/default/files/2020-12/Final_CCCM_ABA_Position_Paper-2020.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> See <https://ccccluster.org/resources/minimum-standards-camp-management>.

<sup>17</sup> See [www.unhcr.org/blueprint-for-joint-action.html](http://www.unhcr.org/blueprint-for-joint-action.html).

<sup>18</sup> See [www.unhcr.org/publications/education/5f4f9a2b4/coming-together-refugee-education-education-report-2020.html](http://www.unhcr.org/publications/education/5f4f9a2b4/coming-together-refugee-education-education-report-2020.html).

learning fell short of their needs. The pandemic also undermined protection services delivered through schools, including psychosocial assistance and school feeding programmes.

26. To mitigate the impact of the pandemic, UNHCR assisted almost 1 million students in 36 countries with home-based learning. Connected learning helped protect refugee children and youth and offered alternatives to negative coping mechanisms. The Connected Learning in Crisis Consortium<sup>19</sup> supported some 55,000 learners with tertiary bridging and professional development programmes. UNHCR supported an innovative mobile learning application delivered via podcast under the Humanitarian Education Accelerator programme, funded by Education Cannot Wait.

27. UNHCR led the Accelerated Education Working Group<sup>20</sup> and, together with NGOs, established the Secondary Education Working Group to promote strategic partnerships and equitable access to education. The Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (DAFI) for tertiary education helped 7,000 refugees study in 54 countries of asylum. Owing to funding constraints and the pandemic, only 230 new students were enrolled in 2020.

## **E. Jobs and livelihoods**

28. UNHCR enhanced its livelihood activities and mobilized resources and partnerships, including with international financial institutions, development partners and the private sector, to mitigate the pandemic's socioeconomic impact. Advocacy was reinforced to ensure inclusion in national social protection schemes and development plans. In 85 countries, over 1.3 million individuals who were vulnerable to or affected by the COVID-19 pandemic benefited from prioritized interventions. These included grants for business creation and recovery and initiatives to facilitate employment and agricultural production. UNHCR allocated over \$113 million towards livelihood activities in 2020 and, together with partners, supported the protection of productive assets, training, and finances to facilitate business creation and wage employment.

29. Bringing refugee-made products to the global market, the UNHCR MADE51 initiative was expanded to 19 countries and involved 29 businesses within a fair trade and protection framework. Refugee-made masks, soap and personal protective equipment were produced in over 15 countries using the MADE51 model, positioning refugees alongside local businesses as part of the solution to the global health crisis.

30. The Poverty Alleviation Coalition provided self-reliance support to over 13,700 households in 2020 using the "graduation approach". However, its goal of reaching 50,000 households was not met, mainly owing to underfunding.

31. UNHCR increased collaboration with development partners to provide persons of concern with digital skills, advocate the inclusion of more female entrepreneurs, and support women with training and computers in order to facilitate labour-market opportunities. Pandemic-related restrictions made digital technology crucial. Over 8,100 refugees in over 70 countries enrolled in UNHCR learning on the Coursera for Refugees platform, up from 1,400 in 2019.

## **F. Cash assistance**

32. In line with its policy on cash-based interventions<sup>21</sup> and its five-year strategy for the institutionalization of cash-based interventions,<sup>22</sup> UNHCR honoured its Grand Bargain commitment to double the use of cash as a proportion of its assistance by 2020. The Office delivered nearly \$700 million to some 8.6 million people in 100 countries, exceeding in-kind assistance.

<sup>19</sup> See <https://connectedlearning4refugees.org/>.

<sup>20</sup> See [www.unhcr.org/accelerated-education-working-group.html](http://www.unhcr.org/accelerated-education-working-group.html).

<sup>21</sup> See [www.unhcr.org/581363414](http://www.unhcr.org/581363414).

<sup>22</sup> See [www.unhcr.org/protection/operations/584131cd7/unhcr-strategy-institutionalisation-cash-based-interventions-2016-2020.html](http://www.unhcr.org/protection/operations/584131cd7/unhcr-strategy-institutionalisation-cash-based-interventions-2016-2020.html).

33. UNHCR delivered cash assistance to stem the pandemic's socioeconomic impact. In collaboration with governments and partners, more than 65 operations launched or expanded cash programmes. In Ecuador, UNHCR adapted its existing cash programme, shifting from cash-in-hand to withdrawal from automated teller machines. In Yemen, some 1.1 million internally displaced persons and 64,200 refugees received \$52.6 million in cash to meet basic needs. A post-distribution monitoring analysis conducted in 13 countries demonstrated that most cash recipients were highly satisfied. The increase in digital methods employed in 47 countries enhanced financial inclusion. In 2020, a total of 80 per cent of the cash assistance provided by UNHCR was disbursed electronically.

## **G. Specific needs**

34. Community-based leadership structures were strengthened, and women were enabled to participate in decision-making. The UNHCR gender equality toolkit provided operational support to advance gender equality and women's empowerment.<sup>23</sup> Increased participation of women and girls who are internally displaced persons in leadership and management structures was achieved in Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Myanmar, South Sudan and Yemen.

35. Displaced children faced numerous protection challenges, exacerbated by the pandemic. In response, UNHCR and partners introduced remote case management and advocated for the continuation of child protection services during lockdowns. They worked with community-outreach workers, volunteers and health professionals through 97 community-based child protection initiatives. The UNHCR-UNICEF blueprint for joint action contributed to protecting the rights of refugee children, including by ensuring their inclusion in national child protection services.

36. UNHCR adopted a new approach focused on strengthening youth programming and engagement, and nurturing young people as active agents of change. Building upon experiences from the UNHCR Youth Initiative Fund and the Global Youth Advisory Council, its members were active in online advocacy and pandemic response initiatives.

37. A UNHCR-led report by the global protection cluster found that gender-based violence had increased since the beginning of the pandemic, with a severe or extreme situation in over 80 per cent of operations involving internally displaced persons. UNHCR issued a new policy on the prevention and risk mitigation of, and response to, gender-based violence,<sup>24</sup> which recognized work in that area as a life-saving priority. The Safe from the Start programme deployed gender-based violence prevention and response experts to support operations in different parts of the world. The Office adapted its gender-based violence prevention and response programming by strengthening collaboration with community and women-led organizations and local partners, expanding remote case management and updating gender-based violence referral pathways. Many operations created or expanded referral and communications channels for survivors, including through emergency hotlines. Some 2 million women and girls were assisted by UNHCR and partners through hotlines that operated 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

38. In many countries, displaced and stateless persons were violently attacked because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, which was often the reason they had sought asylum in the first place. They frequently received insufficient counselling, health care and support. The pandemic increased stigmatization and protection risks, while the psychological impact of isolation and socioeconomic consequences exacerbated the difficulties of their displacement. In order to address the situation, UNHCR collaborated with organizations that were led by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex persons who were themselves displaced. In June 2021, a round table was convened by UNHCR and the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual

---

<sup>23</sup> See [www.unhcr.org/publications/manuals/5e5cd64a7/unhcr-gender-equality-toolkit.html](http://www.unhcr.org/publications/manuals/5e5cd64a7/unhcr-gender-equality-toolkit.html).

<sup>24</sup> See [www.unhcr.org/publications/brochures/5fa018914/unhcr-policy-prevention-risk-mitigation-response-gender-based-violence.html](http://www.unhcr.org/publications/brochures/5fa018914/unhcr-policy-prevention-risk-mitigation-response-gender-based-violence.html).

orientation and gender identity, exploring the forces driving displacement, the challenges facing people seeking asylum, inclusion in national services and the effects of the pandemic.

39. Approximately 12 million people with disabilities were among those forcibly displaced by persecution, violence and human rights violations in 2020. UNHCR launched a five-year action plan on disability inclusion to advance the rights of persons with disabilities across its workforce and operations. It is being implemented in collaboration with the International Disability Alliance, a global network of organizations of persons with disabilities. Efforts were increased to ensure access to socioeconomic activities and education during lockdown for people with disabilities. In many operations, persons with disabilities were involved in COVID-19 response planning. In the Middle East and North Africa region, a research study mapped the needs of refugees with disabilities and provided operational guidance to strengthen responses to COVID-19 and gender-based violence.<sup>25</sup>

40. During the pandemic, UNHCR has witnessed an increase in acute mental health and psychosocial support needs among displaced populations, as well as forced marriages, child labour and adolescent pregnancies, reflecting rising poverty and school closures. UNHCR issued guidance on age, gender and diversity considerations in the context of COVID-19.<sup>26</sup>

41. UNHCR furthered its efforts on accountability to affected people, including through strengthening communication and engagement with communities during the COVID-19 pandemic and issuing new operational guidance.<sup>27</sup>

## H. Climate action

42. Displaced populations were affected by disasters and climate change, exacerbating their situation and hampering access to assistance, including in Central America, the East and Horn of Africa and the Sahel. UNHCR held extensive consultations to inform its strategic framework for climate action,<sup>28</sup> including through the High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges in late 2020.

43. UNHCR supported sustainable energy and environment initiatives across operations and continued to implement the Clean Energy Challenge.<sup>29</sup> Partnerships were reinforced through the Platform on Disaster Displacement and the Task Force on Displacement established by the Warsaw International Mechanism. To address challenges related to climate change, disaster displacement and migration driven by environmental degradation in West Africa and the Sahel, UNHCR, with support from France, partnered with the Platform on Disaster Displacement, the Economic Community of West African States and IOM. It also initiated an inter-agency analytics exercise to determine the likelihood of future climate-related displacement risks in the Sahel.

## IV. Statelessness

44. As at 31 December 2020, the global number of stateless persons stood at 4.2 million, based on information provided by Governments and other sources in 94 countries. However, the true number of stateless persons is believed to be significantly higher. Improving global data remains a priority, and UNHCR redoubled efforts to improve qualitative and quantitative data, in line with the Global Action Plan to End Statelessness 2014–2024.<sup>30</sup>

45. Stateless persons were disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and related mitigation measures owing to their lack of nationality. Often, they were unable to access testing and treatment in the absence of legal status and were excluded from social services. The loss of livelihoods and limited access to education and social services worsened

<sup>25</sup> See <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/74147>.

<sup>26</sup> See [www.refworld.org/docid/5e84a9dd4.html](http://www.refworld.org/docid/5e84a9dd4.html).

<sup>27</sup> See [www.unhcr.org/en-us/handbooks/aap/](http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/handbooks/aap/).

<sup>28</sup> See [www.unhcr.org/604a26d84.pdf](http://www.unhcr.org/604a26d84.pdf).

<sup>29</sup> See [www.unhcr.org/clean-energy-challenge.html](http://www.unhcr.org/clean-energy-challenge.html).

<sup>30</sup> See [www.unhcr.org/54621bf49.html](http://www.unhcr.org/54621bf49.html).

existing inequalities and increased protection risks. Stateless persons risked exclusion from national immunization plans, regardless of whether their age or health status would have otherwise given them priority.

46. In some countries, protection for stateless persons has improved. In Argentina, Côte d'Ivoire, Kazakhstan and Ukraine, new statelessness determination procedures ensured that they could access basic rights, including health care, education and social security. Iceland aligned its domestic laws with international standards on the protection of stateless persons and acceded to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness in January 2021.

47. Several States adopted legislative amendments and resolutions to regularize the stay of stateless persons and grant them associated rights. In January 2021, Thailand approved a resolution giving stateless persons registered in Thailand access to legal immigration status and permanent residency for at least 15 years. In February 2021, the Russian Federation endorsed amendments allowing stateless former citizens of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics to obtain identity cards and the right to work, residency and access to naturalization. In November 2020, the Philippines announced that displaced and stateless persons had uniform access to basic services and assistance.

48. With support from UNHCR, 19 countries reformed their nationality laws, policies and procedures to close the gaps leading to statelessness. Legislative changes introducing safeguards to prevent statelessness were particularly important. Albania adopted a law granting an unrestricted birthright to citizenship, and Argentina passed a law authorizing delayed birth registrations. Chile granted nationality to children born on its territory, and Mexico reformed a constitutional provision allowing children born abroad to acquire citizenship if one or both parents are nationals.

49. Some 63,200 stateless persons in 27 countries acquired nationality in 2020. As a result of efforts by the Governments concerned, UNHCR and civil society, over 34,700 stateless persons acquired nationality in 2020 in Central Asia. In December 2020, following extensive advocacy by UNHCR, Kenya announced a decision to grant citizenship to 1,670 stateless Shona and 1,300 stateless persons of Rwandan descent. In April 2021, Namibia announced it would naturalize all undocumented and stateless persons who had arrived between 1977 and 1990. In Colombia, over 58,000 children born to Venezuelan parents acquired citizenship, while 750 people of Haitian descent obtained nationality in the Dominican Republic. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, a legal amendment allowed children of Iranian women and non-Iranian fathers to apply for citizenship, resulting in the naturalization of over 1,400 people.

## **V. Emergency response and operational overview**

50. By June 2021, UNHCR was responding to emergency situations in 34 countries. Nineteen countries were newly declared emergencies in 2021, most of them affected by the Afghanistan, Central African Republic and Myanmar displacement situations. In 2020, UNHCR deployed over 300 UNHCR and partner staff to emergencies, and delivered more than \$36 million worth of core relief items and other critical goods from global stockpiles.

51. Partnerships, in particular with national NGOs and persons of concern, were crucial to the ability of UNHCR to “stay and deliver” during the pandemic. UNHCR actively participated in the coordinated response facilitated by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee through the Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19. It urged Governments to include persons of concern in national pandemic responses and supported national health systems to increase their capacities. UNHCR constructed or rehabilitated isolation and treatment facilities for local hospitals; supported surveillance, contact tracing and case management capacity; and supplied personal protective equipment, medicines, oxygen and rapid-testing kits.

52. To mitigate the spread of COVID-19, UNHCR reinforced water, sanitation and hygiene interventions, including by distributing soap and increasing access to water. It distributed shelter materials to reduce overcrowding. Thousands of handwashing facilities were installed in public spaces, schools, health facilities and private accommodation. Emergency procedures were activated, providing more operational flexibility for

procurement, partnership arrangements and staffing. Additional framework agreements with suppliers facilitated procurement of critical items for 95 operations. Despite severely restricted transportation links, UNHCR procured \$186.1 million of critical supplies and ensured that 9.9 million persons of concern received essential health care.

## **A. Africa**

### **1. East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes**

53. The East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region hosted 17.9 million persons of concern. That figure included 4.6 million refugees and asylum seekers, the majority of whom were from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia and South Sudan. It also included 9.5 million internally displaced persons. The region suffered from persistent insecurity and climate shocks, including drought, floods, cyclones and desert locusts, the effects of which were exacerbated by the pandemic. Violence flared in the Tigray region of Ethiopia in November 2020, driving more than 54,000 Ethiopians to flee across borders and more than 1.7 million to be displaced inside the country. UNHCR led the inter-agency refugee response, together with the Government of the Sudan, and it established two refugee camps. The conflict also severely affected many of the 96,000 Eritrean refugees registered in Tigray, forcing some to flee elsewhere within Ethiopia. The South Sudan situation remained the largest refugee crisis in Africa, with 2.1 million South Sudanese refugees in neighbouring countries by the end of 2020. Owing to decades of civil war and instability, more than 686,000 Somali refugees were residing in Ethiopia, Kenya and elsewhere in the region, as well as in Yemen. Additionally, some 3 million Somalis remained internally displaced.

### **2. Southern Africa**

54. The Southern Africa region hosted nearly 8.5 million persons of concern, including 6 million internally displaced persons, over 1 million refugees and asylum seekers and 1.4 million returnees. Violence in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo increased the number of internally displaced persons to 5.2 million, while more than 942,400 Congolese refugees and asylum seekers were hosted in neighbouring countries. After the eruption of the Mount Nyiragongo volcano near Goma in May 2021, UNHCR estimated that some 350,000 additional people were in need of humanitarian assistance. There was a notable increase in violence in north-eastern Mozambique, often targeting civilians. Over 756,000 people, mainly women, children and older people, had been internally displaced as at 31 May 2021.

### **3. West and Central Africa**

55. There were some 9.6 million persons of concern in the West and Central Africa region, including 6.4 million internally displaced persons and 1.4 million refugees, as well as returnees, stateless persons and asylum seekers. That represented an increase of 1.7 million compared with the previous year, mainly due to over 1.4 million new internally displaced persons. The region faced a severe humanitarian crisis with widespread and indiscriminate violence by armed groups and rising social and political tensions, forcing more people into displacement. The security situation in the Central African Republic further deteriorated, forcing approximately 131,300 people to seek asylum in neighbouring countries. The pandemic and climate emergency rendered the situation in the region even more complex and volatile. The total number of forcibly displaced persons in the central Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger) reached 2 million. In the Lake Chad Basin, there was a total of 3.2 million forcibly displaced persons, some 2.9 million internally displaced persons and 304,600 refugees.

## **B. Americas**

56. The Americas hosted around 20 per cent of persons of concern to UNHCR worldwide. As at 31 December 2020, refugees, asylum seekers and migrants from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela totalled 5.4 million. That represented the second-largest displacement

crisis globally, with 85 per cent of those individuals hosted in Latin America and the Caribbean. The Quito Process addressed issues related to the regularization, health and inclusion of Venezuelans in a harmonized manner across the region. Colombia granted temporary protection status for 10 years to Venezuelans in the country, while Argentina, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador and Peru announced a similar regularization process. Owing to criminal gangs, violence and economic hardship, the number of people from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras seeking international protection, mostly in neighbouring countries, rose to 549,000. Over 110,000 Nicaraguans sought protection, primarily in Costa Rica. In Central America, COVID-19 prevention measures, such as border closures, limited the ability of people to seek asylum. However, as restrictions were eased, new arrivals were registered, including 9,000 in Mexico in March 2021. In 2020, hurricanes Eta and Iota caused widespread devastation. The worst-hit areas included communities that were already affected by violence and the pandemic, increasing protection concerns.

### **C. Asia and the Pacific**

57. As at 31 December 2020, there were 9.8 million persons of concern, including 4 million refugees and 3.5 million internally displaced persons in Asia and the Pacific, as well as some 2.3 million stateless persons. Millions of Afghans remained in exile, the majority of whom were in Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Pakistan, or were internally displaced. Some 220,000 people were internally displaced in the first half of 2021 alone. With escalating violence in Afghanistan, UNHCR sought to meet essential needs while strengthening investments in health, education and livelihoods. UNHCR and partners assisted more than 900,000 persons of concern in the areas for return and reintegration. Pursuing comprehensive approaches in Myanmar, UNHCR advocated the implementation of the 2017 recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, in particular lifting discriminatory restrictions on the freedom of movement and relating to citizenship for the 600,000 Rohingya in Rakhine State. In Bangladesh, UNHCR worked with the Government to implement COVID-19 mitigation measures for some 867,000 Rohingya refugees. Following a devastating fire in Cox's Bazar, sheltering more than 600,000 refugees, UNHCR and partners provided first aid and psychosocial support.

### **D. Europe**

58. Turkey hosted the largest number of refugees in the world, nearly 3.7 million, which represented 18 per cent of the total number. Germany hosted the second-largest number in Europe, with 1.2 million refugees (6 per cent of the global figure). Overall, the number of refugees in Europe rose by 3 per cent, mainly owing to the granting of international protection to 284,900 people. Armed conflict in and around Nagorno-Karabakh, commencing in September 2020, caused some 90,000 people to flee to Armenia, while over 80,000 people were temporarily displaced in Azerbaijan, according to government data. In 2020, Europe received 40 per cent fewer arrivals via Mediterranean routes compared with 2019, with sharp decreases in Greece, Malta and mainland Spain. The reduction was attributed, in part, to public health measures taken by States as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, including movement restrictions, the imposition of temporary entry bans, the quarantine of new arrivals and, in several cases, the closure of borders. However, arrivals tripled in Italy and increased almost eightfold in the Canary Islands in the first half of 2021. Although the number of people who lost their lives in the Mediterranean Sea fell in 2020, the number of deaths in proportion to arrivals increased by 25 per cent.

### **E. Middle East and North Africa**

59. The Middle East and North Africa region hosted almost 16 million refugees and other persons of concern. The crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic, which entered its eleventh year, continued to drive the largest displacement situation in the world. Over 6.7 million Syrians remained in exile, including 5.5 million hosted in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. Their situation had become increasingly challenging, as the pandemic exacerbated economic



and social distress, leaving many refugees without livelihoods and pushing them further into poverty. In Lebanon in particular, the combined effects of a severe economic crisis and the pandemic remained of great concern. In Iraq, political and security challenges led to continued instability for internally displaced persons (over 1.2 million) and internally displaced person returnees (more than 278,000), while the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic compounded existing vulnerabilities and protection risks. In neighbouring countries, over 240,000 Iraqis were registered with UNHCR, while around 31,000 without registration lived in camps in the Syrian Arab Republic. In Libya, some 105,400 internally displaced persons returned to their places of origin owing to improved security, though some 278,200 remained displaced.

60. Sea departures from Libya increased by over 130 per cent from January to May 2021 compared with the same period in 2020. Meanwhile, over 44,200 refugees and asylum seekers were registered with UNHCR, mostly in urban areas. Yemen remained the largest humanitarian crisis globally, with over 21 million people (66 per cent of the population) in need of assistance. The conflict continued to drive internal displacement, while the blockade and drop-in remittances aggravated poverty and food insecurity. UNHCR distributed non-food items and emergency shelter kits, and operated community centres to provide protection and assistance.

## **VI. Durable solutions**

### **A. Voluntary repatriation and return**

61. As at 31 December 2020, some 251,000 refugees had returned to 30 countries of origin, a decrease of 21 per cent over 2019. Nearly half (122,000) of the returns were to South Sudan, mostly from Uganda (74,000), the Sudan (22,500) and Ethiopia (14,500). UNHCR and its partners facilitated the repatriation of 40,900 Burundians, mainly from the United Republic of Tanzania (30,600), Rwanda (8,000) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (2,000). There were 38,600 reported self-organized returns to the Syrian Arab Republic, mostly from Turkey (44 per cent), Lebanon (24 per cent) and Iraq (22 per cent).

62. Voluntary repatriation was hampered by border closures and other pandemic-related measures. Other obstacles in countries of origin included ongoing conflict, persistent insecurity, impunity for crimes and human rights violations. The absence of essential services and livelihood opportunities also significantly influenced the decision of many refugees to remain in exile.

63. Returns to Afghanistan dropped by 70 per cent over 2019, mainly due to pandemic-related restrictions, worsening security and a lack of basic services and economic opportunities. A drastic reduction was also observed in the Middle East and North Africa, where returns to the Syrian Arab Republic declined by 60 per cent. Guided by its comprehensive protection and solutions strategy,<sup>31</sup> UNHCR and its partners continued to strengthen preparedness and planning for returns when conditions permitted. In addition to refugee returns, at least 124,600 Venezuelans displaced abroad reportedly returned home in 2020, primarily from Colombia. Those returns were triggered by economic hardship resulting from job losses and business closures during the pandemic.

64. With support from UNHCR, the Governments of South Sudan and the Sudan, together with IGAD, launched a regional initiative in October 2020 to advance solutions to the situation of over 7 million displaced persons in the two countries, including through mobilizing international support for the implementation of the national solution strategies and the regional plan of action.

65. Around 3.2 million internally displaced persons returned to their places of origin, mainly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (1.4 million) and Cameroon (466,000).

<sup>31</sup> See <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/63223>.

## **B. Integration and other local solutions**

66. Some 33,800 refugees were naturalized in 28 countries in 2020. Of those naturalizations, 85 per cent were reported by European countries. Refugees were granted long-term legal status in some countries, while in others, they benefited from long-term stay arrangements and were allowed access to education opportunities and labour markets. In Albania, Azerbaijan, Ghana and Namibia, refugees were able to renew their long-term residence permits, allowing them to access employment and ultimately become eligible for naturalization. Frameworks were established to facilitate the legal integration of refugees in the Philippines.

67. Several Governments, with support from UNHCR, pursued integration and other local solutions for refugees, building on momentum generated by the global compact on refugees and Global Refugee Forum pledges. In Chad, all new arrivals were integrated into host villages, pursuing a solutions approach from the outset.

## **C. Resettlement and complementary pathways**

68. UNHCR estimated that 1.4 million refugees needed resettlement and submitted over 39,500 refugees for consideration to 25 countries. Of them, 86 per cent were survivors of torture and violence, people with legal and physical protection needs, and vulnerable women and girls. Just over half of all submissions concerned children. Nonetheless, implementation of the three-year strategy on resettlement and complementary pathways,<sup>32</sup> which anticipated the resettlement of 70,000 refugees in 2020, suffered a setback due to COVID-19. Only 34,400 refugees were resettled in 2020, with two thirds assisted by UNHCR, representing a 69 per cent decline over 2019 (107,700).

69. Despite COVID-19 challenges, UNHCR and partners maintained resettlement operations and ensured protection for many at risk. Innovative remote modalities were used to conduct interviews and to process visas. Emergency transit mechanisms in the Niger, Romania and Rwanda provided a life-saving solution for refugees evacuated from Libya.

70. UNHCR engaged with States and other key stakeholders, including through the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement, the Priority Situations Core Group and the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative. The Sustainable Resettlement and Complementary Pathways Initiative, which UNHCR co-leads with IOM, proved valuable in the implementation of the three-year strategy by supporting States to strengthen their capacity to establish or expand third-country solutions. Under the Sustainable Resettlement and Complementary Pathways Initiative, capacity-building initiatives continued in Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay, with the initiation or revision of national action plans.

71. The number of complementary pathways remained limited. A joint study by UNHCR and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development analysed data on refugees accessing complementary pathways from 2010–2019.<sup>33</sup> In that study, they highlighted that, despite State efforts, barriers such as current costs and documentation requirements prevented families from being reunited and skilled refugees from accessing employment opportunities in third countries. UNHCR led the creation of a global task force on third-country education pathways, supported by the Sustainable Resettlement and Complementary Pathways Initiative; launched a global family reunification network; and worked to create a global refugee labour mobility task force. These initiatives constituted important milestones in the implementation of the three-year strategy.

---

<sup>32</sup> See [www.unhcr.org/protection/resettlement/5d15db254/three-year-strategy-resettlement-complementary-pathways.html](http://www.unhcr.org/protection/resettlement/5d15db254/three-year-strategy-resettlement-complementary-pathways.html).

<sup>33</sup> See <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/sites/default/files/2021-05/UNHCR%20Safe%20Pathways%20for%20Refugees%20II%20Web-version001.pdf>.

## VII. Partnerships

### A. Development partners and financial institutions

72. UNHCR strengthened engagement with financial and development actors to encourage the inclusion of refugees in financing, programmes and social protection policies. In close partnership with the World Bank Group, measures were taken to systematically include persons of concern in COVID-19 response efforts in low- and middle-income countries. As part of the International Development Association's IDA19 envelope for countries facing fragility, conflict and violence, a financial allocation of \$2.2 billion was finalized under the window for host communities and refugees. Of that amount, and in response to the COVID-19 crisis, the World Bank Group committed to provide eligible countries with up to \$1 billion in grant terms during its fiscal year. UNHCR and the World Bank undertook telephone surveys mapping the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 on refugees in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Morocco and Uganda. Collaboration on data was strengthened through the UNHCR-World Bank Joint Data Center on forced displacement.<sup>34</sup> UNHCR contributed to a peer-review of the World Bank's development approach to conflict-induced internal displacement<sup>35</sup> on the rationale for integration of conflict-induced internally displaced persons in the Bank's programmes and supported operationalization of its strategy for tackling fragility, conflict and violence.

73. UNHCR revitalized its engagement with regional multilateral development banks, including the African Development Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank and the Islamic Development Bank. UNHCR and the Executive Secretariat of the Group of Five for the Sahel collaborated to implement the African Development Bank COVID-19 response project for the Sahel in support of the primary health response and community resilience for vulnerable communities, including refugees and internally displaced persons.

### B. United Nations system and international organizations

74. UNHCR engaged in the roll-out of United Nations development system reforms at the regional level, including new collaborative platforms. The Office co-chaired issue-based coalitions on human mobility, displacement and resilience in several regions. It also maintained strong engagement in inter-agency forums, including the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and other mechanisms such as the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination. UNHCR contributed to inter-agency efforts on protecting the health and safety of United Nations personnel during the COVID-19 pandemic, including through participation in the United Nations System-Wide Task Force on Medical Evacuations in Response to COVID-19.

75. UNHCR co-led common data initiatives to strengthen the capacity of the United Nations to gather, access and manage strategic information and to improve its analysis and communication. It contributed to a report on data disaggregation of the Sustainable Development Goal indicators by forced displacement.<sup>36</sup> On the initiative of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities and the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons, UNHCR led technical assessments for two reports on the inclusion of people with disabilities.

76. UNHCR coordinated regional refugee response plans for Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria and South Sudan situations. It also co-led the coordination of the regional refugee resilience plan for the Syrian Arab Republic with the United Nations Development Programme, and the regional refugee and migrant response plan for the

<sup>34</sup> See [www.jointdatacenter.org/](http://www.jointdatacenter.org/).

<sup>35</sup> See <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/826251618911522691/pdf/A-Development-Approach-to-Conflict-Induced-Internal-Displacement.pdf>.

<sup>36</sup> See [www.unhcr.org/5fd237b84.pdf](http://www.unhcr.org/5fd237b84.pdf).

Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela situation with IOM. UNHCR and IOM also co-led the joint response plan for the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh.

### **C. Non-governmental organizations**

77. Together with the International Council of Voluntary Agencies, UNHCR established weekly virtual consultations with NGO partners on preparedness and the response to COVID-19. Owing to the pandemic, the annual global NGO consultations were organized virtually in September 2020. Participants representing over 100 organizations, including international and national NGOs, refugee-led organizations and faith-based organizations from 49 countries, focused on responding both to the current pandemic and to future pandemics. The resulting recommendations were presented at the seventy-first plenary session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme and informed the High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges for 2020. To allow more strategic and meaningful interaction with refugee-led organizations, the Office mapped existing refugee-led organizations and dedicated its NGO Innovation Award for 2020 to refugee-led organizations.

78. UNHCR disbursed approximately \$1.26 billion to 908 national and international NGOs in 2020, including \$802 million to 954 local and national responders. As a result, UNHCR exceeded its Grand Bargain commitment by providing 28 per cent of its programme expenditures through local and national responders.

### **D. Private sector**

79. Together with national partners, UNHCR raised \$537.5 million from the private sector, including over \$256.4 million in unearmarked funding. That represented a 27 per cent growth in income compared with 2019, exceeding the 2020 fundraising target of \$500 million. While COVID-19 shifted fundraising priorities, it ultimately led to increased solidarity among private sector donors and an interest in exploring new ways of partnering with UNHCR, with \$52 million raised for the pandemic response alone.

80. Private sector partners contributed innovative solutions to enhance access to digital educational programmes, employment opportunities, legal services, connectivity, vocational and language training, play-based learning initiatives and clean energy. Global campaigns raised over \$15 million, including \$8 million from the UNHCR Refugee Zakat Fund. In December 2020, UNHCR launched the "Aiming Higher" campaign to fund refugee scholarships. The winterization assistance campaign garnered \$5.34 million in digital revenue, exceeding its \$5.1 million target. Private sector partners supported displaced populations in coping with the impacts of COVID-19, including contributions of hygienic materials and the provision of support for frontline medical responses and for distance learning.

### **E. Local authorities and city networks**

81. With more than 60 per cent of the world's refugees and over half of internally displaced persons sheltering in cities around the world, local authorities are recognized as frontline actors in protecting and assisting displaced populations. UNHCR partnered with the Mayors Migration Council on the Global Cities Fund for Inclusive Pandemic Response. That million-dollar initiative was aimed at responding to the needs of cities in supporting refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants during the pandemic. Funds were granted to Barranquilla, Colombia; Beirut; Freetown; Lima; and Mexico City. Many cities supported refugees as part of their COVID-19 response, and those actions were recognized by UNHCR on 31 October, World Cities Day, and through the Cities #WithRefugees campaign,<sup>37</sup> signed by over 260 cities in over 50 countries.

---

<sup>37</sup> See [www.unhcr.org/withrefugees/cities/](http://www.unhcr.org/withrefugees/cities/).

## **F. Other stakeholders**

82. Recognizing the unique role that faith-based actors play in displacement settings, UNHCR and Religions for Peace,<sup>38</sup> a global, multi-faith religious movement representing the world's faith institutions and traditions, committed to form a multi-faith religious council of leaders, with a view to strengthening efforts to address root causes of conflict and displacement and to supporting peacebuilding, inclusion and reconciliation.

83. UNHCR worked with the International Olympic Committee and the International Paralympic Committee to support refugee athletes. Over 60 refugee athletes received scholarships from sports organizations to train in the hope of competing at the 2020 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games in Tokyo. Together with the Education Above All Foundation and the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy of the Generation Amazing programme of Qatar, launched in connection to the 2022 World Cup, UNHCR developed a "sport for protection" programme to promote peaceful coexistence, enhance interactions of refugee youth and their host communities, and empower girls through equal access to sports and leadership roles. Additionally, UNHCR established a partnership with the International Platform on Sport and Development,<sup>39</sup> creating a dedicated section on its practitioner platform devoted to refugees and sport.

## **VIII. Reform, accountability and oversight**

### **A. Transformation**

84. Following the move of the regional bureaux to their respective regions and the establishment of decentralized authorities, the reform efforts of UNHCR continued with the aim of modernizing internal management systems and processes, and improving country-level protection and assistance delivery. To sustain and support ongoing transformation efforts, a Director for Change was appointed and the Transformation and Change Service was created. That complemented the reinforced governance mechanisms designed to ensure management oversight of transformation initiatives. A field reference group accompanied the consolidation of changes and served as a sounding board for other reforms to ensure these remained grounded in improving delivery.

85. A business transformation programme was launched to replace aging tools, including the enterprise resource management system. The programme affected a range of functions, including planning, reporting, finance, human resources, supply, resource mobilization and management, external engagement, and project monitoring and oversight. COMPASS, the new UNHCR multi-year planning, budgeting, monitoring and reporting system – and a core component of the business transformation programme – was introduced, renewing the organization's approach to results-based management. The system enabled operations to develop longer-term protection and solution strategies using a simplified results chain and a new global results framework, aligned with the United Nations system and the Sustainable Development Goals. By June 2021, a total of 24 operations had developed multi-year strategies.

### **B. Accountability and oversight**

86. In the challenging pandemic context, the UNHCR independent oversight entities delivered on their mandates by adapting their work and using remote and flexible methods. They coordinated and revised plans to ensure a coherent and balanced approach to the fast-evolving risks to UNHCR. The Evaluation Service, for example, provided rapid support to the organization's COVID-19 response by identifying lessons from earlier health emergencies, such as the Ebola response.

<sup>38</sup> See [www.rfp.org/](http://www.rfp.org/).

<sup>39</sup> See [www.sportanddev.org/](http://www.sportanddev.org/).

87. The Inspector-General's Office issued a five-year strategy aimed at providing a professional and independent response to integrity concerns and strengthening the coordination and work of the independent oversight providers. Several areas have been completed, including mapping of the oversight provider landscape across three lines of defence to ensure coherence, and developing policies to improve the response of UNHCR to integrity concerns.

88. The risk management 2.0 initiative, which enabled systematic investments to better manage risks and opportunities and led to maturation of the UNHCR risk culture, was concluded. UNHCR capitalized on those investments through a five-year strategy to further strengthen risk management through 2025.

89. UNHCR launched a new strategy and action plan for 2020–2022 on tackling sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment,<sup>40</sup> guided by four objectives: adopting a victim-centred approach; building the capacity of UNHCR and partner personnel; upholding accountability; and maintaining inter-agency engagement. Several initiatives advanced those objectives, such as the UNHCR policy on a victim-centred approach,<sup>41</sup> and its continued engagement in inter-agency efforts, including the High Commissioner serving as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Champion on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment. These initiatives led to new learning materials, a communications package for Inter-Agency Standing Committee Principals and a community engagement and outreach fund for local NGOs.<sup>42</sup>

90. UNHCR reviewed the roles and responsibilities of entities charged with supporting colleagues to address workplace dilemmas to foster a harmonious work environment and more effectively addressing problematic issues, including abrasive, disrespectful and abusive management styles. This resulted in the creation of coordination mechanisms among entities based at headquarters, renewed communication efforts and enhanced support to personnel and managers to identify, raise and resolve such situations.

## **IX. Contributions to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees**

91. The UNHCR budget for 2020 amounted to \$9.131 billion, including supplementary budgets to address emergency needs relating to the COVID-19 pandemic and the Sahel situation.

92. Total funds available reached a record level of \$5.404 billion, though a 41 per cent funding gap persisted. Expenditure totalled \$4.838 billion, an increase of \$422.4 million, or 9.6 per cent, compared with 2019.

93. The level of earmarking in 2020 (71 per cent) remained similar to 2019, in line with an overall trend of increased earmarking of funds despite Grand Bargain commitments. Flexible funding, comprising unearmarked and softly earmarked funding, represented 29 per cent, or \$1.376 billion, of voluntary contributions, \$120 million more than 2019. Fully unearmarked funding, contributed without restrictions, totalled \$661.2 million. That figure was only \$1.7 million more than in 2019 and comprised 14 per cent of voluntary contributions.

## **X. Conclusions**

94. Throughout the year, there were remarkable efforts to ensure protection for those in need, promote inclusion in national systems and find solutions, even in times of crisis. This would not have been possible without the commitment of the UNHCR workforce to “stay and deliver” despite significant challenges.

---

<sup>40</sup> See [www.unhcr.org/5f3cfec44](http://www.unhcr.org/5f3cfec44).

<sup>41</sup> See [www.unhcr.org/5fdb345e7](http://www.unhcr.org/5fdb345e7).

<sup>42</sup> See [www.unhcr.org/psea-community-outreach-and-communication-fund.html](http://www.unhcr.org/psea-community-outreach-and-communication-fund.html).

95. The COVID-19 pandemic has seriously tested international solidarity and protection principles; however, the standards set forth in the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, adopted in 1951, have proven to be enduring, and the advancements made in implementing the global compact on refugees have allowed UNHCR, Governments and partners to respond decisively to the challenges, often with innovative approaches. The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected the world's most vulnerable, including displaced and stateless persons, and prompted some States to put in place restrictive policies and practices that undermined the international protection regime. The global compact on refugees provided a framework to address both old and new challenges, and the continuous implementation of the commitments made at the Global Refugee Forum was a testament to the willingness of governments and others to strengthen protection.

96. In December 2021, a meeting of high-level officials is to be convened,<sup>43</sup> as set out in the global compact on refugees, to identify progress, challenges and, where further engagement is required, to increase support, self-reliance and access to solutions. With this in mind, the past year serves as a sobering reminder that 70 years after the adoption of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, there has never been a more pressing need for strengthened international cooperation and solidarity.

---

---

<sup>43</sup> See [www.unhcr.org/high-level-officials-meeting.html](http://www.unhcr.org/high-level-officials-meeting.html).