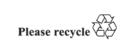# General Assembly

Executive Committee of the
High Commissioner's Programme
Seventy-first session
Geneva, 5-9 October 2020
Item 4 (a) of the provisional agenda
Consideration of reports on the work of the Standing Committee
International Protection

Note on international protection

Summary

Seventy years since the establishment of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, this note on international protection demonstrates the enduring value and continued relevance of the international protection regime and explores how the Office's mandate has adapted to emerging challenges. This includes, most recently, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and its impact on refugees and other persons of concern. The note covers developments during the reporting period from July 2019 to June 2020. It also underscores the importance of UNHCR's work with a wide range of partners and with refugees themselves to harness positive protection and solutions outcomes.

Please recycle

Contents

I. Introduction

1.   Seventy years ago, on 14 December 1950, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Statute of the Office and decided to convene a conference of plenipotentiaries to complete the drafting of and to sign the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (1951 Convention). So began concerted international efforts to give effect to the right to seek asylum from persecution as set out in Article 14 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Since that time, UNHCR has maintained the humanitarian and social and non-political character set out in its Statute.

2.   Since UNHCR was established, there have been many advancements in the international protection regime. This includes, most recently, the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR). Affirmed by the General Assembly in 2018, and grounded in the fundamental principles of international protection, including non-refoulement, the GCR recognizes the importance of international cooperation and sets out arrangements to share more equitably the responsibility and burden associated with hosting large numbers of refugees. This was followed in 2019 by the Global Refugee Forum (GRF), at which an array of stakeholders – including States, civil society, private sector partners and refugees – made over 1400 pledges to put the GCR into action.

3.   It was, thus, with optimism that UNHCR embarked upon its work in 2020. However, COVID-19, declared by the World Health Organization a "public health emergency of international concern" in January, and later characterized as a pandemic in March, has posed a number of unexpected challenges to the protection of refugees and other persons of concern around the world. This health emergency has demonstrated, as almost no other global threat could, the importance of the GCR and, in particular, the commitment to international solidarity and burden- and responsibility-sharing.

4.   COVID-19 has also challenged fundamental norms of refugee law, particularly the right to claim asylum and the principle of non-refoulement. Over 160 States have closed their borders, fully or partially, in an effort to contain the spread of the virus. In adopting measures to protect public health, many States have restricted or denied access to asylum, leaving those fleeing conflict and persecution at risk of refoulement.

5.   The health crisis has not weakened UNHCR's determination to "stay and deliver" nor its commitment to seeking protection and solutions, including for stateless persons. From the outset, UNHCR launched a global operational effort to protect the health and well-being of persons of concern and redoubled its efforts to promote the responsibility of States to ensure access to asylum. As the virus spreads, including notably in the global south, the severe socio-economic impact on vulnerable populations is becoming more evident. UNHCR is committed to working with States and partners to ensure non-discriminatory access for persons of concern to national health and social services and to alleviate the economic impact which has threatened advancements made in recent years towards self-reliance.

6.   During this anniversary year, and at this time of global crisis, the note on international protection shows how UNHCR, in cooperation with partners, has adapted to changing times and demands. It recalls the basis of UNHCR's mandate and engagement with persons of concern and traces developments over time. Recognizing the enduring relevance of the Office's founding instruments, it illustrates the ways in which UNHCR has risen to contemporary challenges – reshaping its approach, while remaining committed to the principles set out in its Statute.

II. International protection of refugees and asylum-seekers

A. UNHCR's refugee mandate

7.   UNHCR was established in 1950 at a time of ideological debate as to the rights of refugees and the obligations of States. The international community, nonetheless, recognized that resolution of what was then referred to as the "refugee problem", following the Second

World War, required international cooperation and an organization within the framework of the United Nations to discharge the function of the international protection of refugees. UNHCR was, thus, entrusted with the mandate to provide international protection to refugees and, together with governments, seek solutions to their plight. In this context, it was foreseen that the High Commissioner "would enjoy a special status within the United Nations" and "possess the degree of independence and the prestige required".[1] Vital to ensuring a globally consistent commitment to and respect for refugee law, States gave UNHCR the authority to supervise the application of international refugee conventions to ensure that the normative character of refugee law was universally recognized and applied. These two factors made UNHCR a unique entity in the United Nations system and unlike other funds, programmes and agencies.

8. Since 1950, and building upon State practice and treaty law, the General Assembly and the United Nations Economic and Social Council, have expanded UNHCR's competency to include the prevention and reduction of statelessness and the protection of internally displaced persons (IDPs). During the first decade of its existence, UNHCR focused on refugees in Europe. With the onset of the Cold War, UNHCR took a cautious approach, encouraging western European countries to adopt laws and procedures to implement the 1951 Convention. Later, in the 1950s, UNHCR engaged operationally in response to tense east-west relations in Europe. Over the next three decades, UNHCR grew rapidly, supporting refugee and host populations during decolonization in Africa, and conflict and political upheaval in South-East Asia and the Americas.

International protection and asylum

9. Ensuring international protection in cooperation with States has remained at the core of UNHCR's work, especially when defining how protection needs are determined and to whom protection is extended. The 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees established a universal framework by removing the geographical and temporal limitations of the 1951 Convention. Currently 149 States are party to either the 1951 Convention, its 1967 Protocol, or both. Many States have adopted asylum legislation, albeit of varying content and coverage which is not always adequate. Some State parties with significant refugee populations lack comprehensive domestic legislation protecting refugees, while others have taken more restrictive approaches when adopting or amending laws.

10. International refugee law has expanded significantly at the regional level, broadening the criteria for refugee status and calling for State solidarity and cooperation. Examples include the 1969 Organization of African Unity (OAU) Convention governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, the 1966 Bangkok Principles on the Status and Treatment of Refugees, the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees and the European Union Qualification Directive and other relevant instruments of the Common European Asylum System. In 2019, the African Union, with support from UNHCR, organized several commemorative events marking the fiftieth anniversary of the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention.

11. International refugee law has proven its resilience and adaptability to changing needs. Decision-makers and courts have granted international protection to those displaced as a result of armed conflict and violence perpetrated by gangs, traffickers and other non-State actors. Refugee law now recognizes that those facing persecution on the grounds of age, gender, and sexual orientation or gender identity, may be refugees. Recently, the relationship between climate change, disasters, displacement and human rights has also been recognized, with States called upon to respect and protect the rights of people displaced by the adverse effects of these phenomena.[2]

12. During the reporting period, many States have improved their national asylum systems. For example, Mexico increased its recognition rates by simplifying its procedures; Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Paraguay and Uruguay adopted laws or policies promoting the

---

[1] See A/C.3/527, 26 October 1949, para. 11.

[2] See the GCR, para 8; The Nansen Initiative: "Agenda for the protection of cross-border displaced persons in the context of disaster and climate change"; and the Human Rights Committee, *Ioane Teitiota v New Zealand*, CCPR/C/127/D2728/2016.

application of the regional refugee criteria, consistent with the Cartagena Declaration for Venezuelans seeking international protection; and refugees from several countries were recognized on a prima facie basis by South Sudan. Conversely, some States put in place measures that infringe upon the right to seek asylum and that are in violation of the principle of non-refoulement. These include pushbacks at borders and the suspension of asylum procedures in response to COVID-19. Other trends include low refugee recognition rates for some groups, despite objective country of origin information and country guidance demonstrating the need for international protection. In some cases, due process safeguards, such as the right to legal representation, were denied in the asylum process.

13. Some States have declined to assume their responsibility for ensuring functional national asylum systems, despite years of good faith support and funding from willing partners. UNHCR continues to provide technical support and advice to other States to ensure access to asylum procedures. During the GRF, more than 50 States pledged to strengthen their national asylum systems or to support States in doing so. UNHCR has since worked to match capacity-development initiatives with relevant technical or other forms of support offered at the GRF under the auspices of the Asylum Capacity Support Group. Pledges of legal aid from civil society and private sector actors will also contribute to ensuring respect for asylum.

14. Central to UNHCR's work and that of the international protection framework lies the cardinal principle of non-refoulement, which is firmly established in international treaty law and a norm of customary international law. While States have the sovereign right to regulate the entry of non-nationals, including to protect public health, international law requires that such measures do not breach the non-refoulement obligation, and access to fair asylum procedures needs to be assured. However, physical and administrative barriers continue to prevent some people in need of international protection from reaching safety and seeking asylum. UNHCR has advocated with State authorities and before judicial and human rights bodies, offering support to ensure adherence to legal standards.

Mixed movements

15. Large numbers of people continue to move across international borders, irregularly and in dangerous conditions. Whether as refugees or migrants travelling in mixed movements, all individuals, regardless of status, are entitled to their human rights. Combating racism and xenophobia is particularly essential to protect the human rights of refugees and migrants and to foster tolerance. UNHCR supports implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. This includes engagement in the Executive Committee of the United Nations Network on Migration, where UNHCR co-leads the workstream on alternatives to detention and supports migration networks at the country and regional levels.

16. While the human rights of refugees and migrants should be respected, their legal positions differ. Refugees, fearing persecution from which their countries are unable or unwilling to protect them, have specific legal rights under international law. Accordingly, UNHCR continues to support operational responses to mixed movements, drawing on its 10-Point-Plan in Action, in particular border management. UNHCR also works with partners to prevent and respond to human trafficking. In this context, UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) updated their "Joint framework document on developing standard operating procedures to facilitate the identification and referral of victims of trafficking". UNHCR contributes to the Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons and co-leads the Global Protection Cluster Task Team on Anti-Trafficking in Humanitarian Action. It also contributed to anti-trafficking capacity-building in conjunction with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the European Asylum Support Office and States, and to the Inter-American Principles on the Human Rights of all Migrants, Refugees, Stateless Persons and Victims of Trafficking in Persons, adopted in December 2019.

Drivers of displacement

17. The causes of displacement have grown in complexity over time. War and oppression have become intertwined with other factors, such as poor governance, natural resource

scarcity, demographic changes and socio-economic inequality, as well as sudden-onset disasters and the adverse effects of climate change. UNHCR continued to support States in the Task Force on Displacement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage, and the Platform on Disaster Displacement. The appointment by UNHCR of a Special Advisor on Climate Action underscores the growing importance of climate change to its work.

18.   In some places, the protection challenges arising from political instability and conflict have been exacerbated by disaster and food insecurity. In Somalia, for instance, worsening droughts have aggravated the effects of continued violence, including displacement within the country and across borders. In several countries in the Sahel, conflict and instability have been exacerbated by endemic poverty in host communities. Conflict has pushed people to flee Cameroon, northern Nigeria and Sudan. Other long-standing crises, such as in Iraq, Libya, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, have left millions of people in protracted displacement, without meaningful protection. To address this, UNHCR scaled up its operations in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, and launched a regional dialogue with governments.

19.   Instability in Venezuela (the Bolivarian Republic of), characterized by insecurity, economic difficulties, inadequate basic services and unmet resource needs, continued to fuel displacement. Despite the goodwill of countries in the region, unresolved challenges left Venezuelans lacking minimum documentation and facing lengthy administrative procedures, restrictions and expensive visa application fees. UNHCR used its regional protection monitoring system to strengthen community outreach, identify and refer people with specific needs, map services and undertake evidence-based advocacy. Within the country, UNHCR led the protection cluster and increased community-based projects for IDPs.

20.   With respect to movements across the Mediterranean, arrival patterns shifted, initially with fewer people reaching Italy and Spain and many more arriving in Cyprus, Greece and Malta. The routes taken, however, along with the characteristics and number of people using them, continue to change. Although the estimated number of lives lost in the Mediterranean in 2019 fell, the number of deaths in proportion to arrivals rose. In a positive development, the transfer from UNHCR to the Greek authorities of the Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation Programme began; nevertheless, new arrivals further strained reception, accommodation and livelihood opportunities, and adequate shelter and services remain elusive for those on Samos and Lesvos. Increased arrivals were seen at the Greek-Turkish border, raising concerns, including over protection risks, for some of those arriving, amidst political discussions about asylum and migration in the two countries and within the European Union.

21.   In 2020, confronted with the COVID-19 pandemic, many countries adopted exceptional measures, dramatically limiting cross-border and internal movements, as well as other activities. The virus compounded the problems facing people forced to flee. In response, UNHCR underscored that measures to contain threats to public health should not close avenues to asylum or force people to return to situations of danger, contrary to non-refoulement obligations. States can – and in some cases, have made noteworthy efforts to – meet their responsibility for public health, while protecting the right to asylum. This can be done through screening, testing and quarantine measures, release from detention and non-discriminatory inclusion in national health care systems and other services.

B. Individuals and communities

22.   UNHCR recognizes that long-term protection and solutions can be achieved only in close partnership with affected individuals and communities. Community-based protection has been highly effective in promoting social cohesion. Examples include advancing accountability to affected people, identifying people at risk and engaging communities in addressing sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), gender inequality, child protection and the exclusion of marginalized groups, including people with disabilities.

23.   Registration and identity management, through the use of biometric and other technologies, is vital to protection. UNHCR's global registration and identity management tool, which uses biometrics to verify identity including at food distribution points, is used in several countries, including most recently in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

24.   Gender equality is fundamental to the well-being and rights of displaced and stateless persons. Many operations helped ensure women's equal representation in management and leadership structures, supporting the establishment of women's committees and offering leadership training. In Burkina Faso, Jordan, Uganda and Yemen, daycare in camps and community centres allowed mothers to continue their studies and pursue livelihood opportunities and community activities. UNHCR documented and shared promising practices across operations and released a gender equality toolkit. A gender equality audit of the GRF was led by refugee women, drawing attention to the challenges posed by gender inequality for refugees.

25.   Sexual and gender-based violence, predominantly perpetrated against women and girls, remains a serious human rights violation and public health problem impacting persons of concern. Over the last decade, thanks to initiatives like the Safe from the Start initiative funded by the United States of America, and other activities with broad donor support, UNHCR's capacity to prioritize and expand SGBV prevention, risk mitigation and response, including at the outset of emergencies, has been enhanced. The deployment of experts to operations has more than doubled, increasing the efficiency of SGBV prevention and response programming.

26.   UNHCR, together with national and local partners, prioritizes SGBV prevention, focusing on combatting unequal gender norms that normalize and legitimize violence against women and girls, and addressing attitudes towards power dynamics in relationships. Men and boys, and religious, community and traditional leaders, are engaged in these efforts through "Start Awareness Support Action", a community-led SGBV prevention programme which aims to address the root causes. Support is enlisted from community groups, facilitating peer-to-peer support. In Nigeria, for example, around 45,000 IDPs have been reached through the Zero Tolerance Village Alliance. SGBV medical referral systems and safe shelters for women are being established in some locations, facilitating health care, psychosocial support and legal aid. During the reporting period, this occurred in Ecuador as well as in numerous countries where a Regional Safe Spaces Network has been established.

27.   Today, over half of the world's refugees are children. UNHCR works with States to strengthen access to quality child protection systems and services and to develop and implement laws and policies that provide equal protection for displaced and stateless children. In 2019, UNHCR, IOM, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other partners, supported the East African Community and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in strengthening national child protection systems and cross-border collaboration to address the needs of refugee and migrant children. In Greece and Kenya, UNHCR and partners worked with the governments to include refugee children in national procedures concerning custody, guardianship and foster families.

28.   UNHCR worked directly with children and communities to strengthen protection and assistance, particularly for children at risk of violence, exploitation, neglect and abuse, including in Namibia and Zambia. In Zimbabwe, the Office partnered with adolescent girls and young women to strengthen protection through weekly girls' empowerment clubs and parental and family dialogues and meetings. In Uganda, UNHCR and partners provided positive parenting sessions to over 10,000 parents and caregivers, and advised 13,000 community members and youth on how communities can prevent violence against children. Despite progress made over the past decade, protection challenges facing unaccompanied and separated children and other children at risk remain great. In Ethiopia, UNHCR, partners and the community have developed a system for family tracing and the reunification of newly arrived unaccompanied children, as well as support for families to care for them in the meantime. In 2019, almost 6,600 unaccompanied and separated children were reunified with family members in camps and surrounding areas.

29.   UNHCR values the perspectives of youth, as well as their ability to contribute positively to their communities. Strengthened engagement with displaced and stateless youth in recent years was reflected in the GCR and at the GRF, in which refugee youth participated through UNHCR's Global Youth Advisory Council. UNHCR operations increasingly engage youth to design and deliver community projects, such as in the Syrian Arab Republic, where UNHCR supported a refugee youth club to organize artistic workshops and outreach activities for children, parents and older persons. The Youth Initiative Fund, now in its sixth year, has supported over 130 youth-led initiatives, with some 4,400 young people leading projects in 54 countries.

30.   UNHCR recognizes that each individual may face different protection challenges, which may be exacerbated due to age, gender and diversity (AGD) factors, exposing some to greater risk of discrimination and abuse. UNHCR's efforts to respond effectively to the needs of all persons of concern reflect its commitment to an AGD approach. This was reinforced by the roll out of its updated AGD policy in 2019. UNHCR operations disaggregate data by AGD factors to improve programmes and services, including increasingly with respect to accessibility for people with disabilities. In Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), for example, UNHCR initiated profiling and registration exercises, collecting AGD-disaggregated data. At the GRF, multiple pledges were made around AGD-inclusive programming, gender equality and meaningful participation, and disability inclusion.

31.   UNHCR is committed to ensuring that displaced and stateless persons participate meaningfully in the decisions affecting their lives, including emergency response, programme design and delivery. In Bangladesh, community outreach volunteers engaged nearly 600,000 refugees on protection matters and emergency preparedness. In Jordan, structured dialogues involving UNHCR, refugees, host communities and local authorities took place in camps and urban areas, and similar discussions were held in the Syrian Arab Republic. In Italy, some 145 refugees, 50 per cent of whom were women, received training on communications, fundraising, international protection, project management and administration, while over 6,000 people directly benefited from micro-projects.

32.   UNHCR used participatory assessments to understand and address barriers to participation by marginalized groups and give everyone the opportunity to voice their concerns and identify solutions to their challenges. In Rwanda, participatory exercises with children were conducted through interactive activities and games. In Lebanon, nearly 130 refugees took part in assessments, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. In South Sudan, IDPs were consulted on the development of a new IDP law.

33.   UNHCR contributed to the development of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy and relevant Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) guidelines. It reinforced collaboration with national and international partners working on ageing and disability issues, including organizations of persons with disabilities. In Lebanon, cooperation with the Lebanese Physically Handicapped Union helped improve humanitarian responses for persons with disabilities. Globally, UNHCR has arrangements with four organizations that support refugees with inclusion in social activities, vocational training, access to prosthetic devices, and awareness raising. A non-governmental organization (NGO) in Jordan supports children with disabilities in their homes.

34.   UNHCR has made significant strides in the protection of persons of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics. Guidance, tools and training were provided to UNHCR offices, including to support the creation of safe spaces and the identification of solutions for these individuals. Nevertheless, in many countries where UNHCR operates, they experience frequent discrimination and abuse, and their protection needs remain little understood or addressed. More recently, UNHCR has invested in better assessing the protection risks and priorities through regional consultations involving displaced and stateless persons of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics across various regions.

35.   The Office made important progress in supporting access to education, working with States and partners. Ten countries supported activities to enhance access to primary education for refugee children, as well as to ensure their transition to secondary school. The Secondary Youth Education Initiative sought to increase enrolment in national secondary

schools in Cameroon, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda. UNHCR supported over 8,300 refugee students in 54 countries with scholarships from the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (DAFI). This included a record number of over 2,600 newly enrolled students and three new countries benefiting from the programme: Afghanistan, Mexico and Somalia. Increasing access to secondary education remains a challenge given the technical complexity and cost of offering post-primary subjects, as well as the fact that high numbers of refugee students have not completed 12 years of basic education. Education was highlighted at the GRF, with 68 actors, including 16 States, joining the Education Co-sponsorship Alliance. Over 200 pledges were received towards expanded educational opportunities, financing, capacity development and the provision of resources. UNHCR supported the launch of the global Tertiary Refugee Student Network, which aims to enable 15 per cent of refugee students to access higher education by 2030. The Connected Learning in Crisis Consortium, which expanded to 27 university and higher education partners, is working to increase access to blended higher educational opportunities in 21 countries.

Operational challenges

36.   Reducing the environmental impact of displacement has been a challenge, alongside ensuring safe and sustainable living conditions. Building on initiatives including solar farms in camps, clean fuel, waste treatment plants and land restoration projects, in 2019 UNHCR launched a four-year "Global strategy on sustainable energy". The strategy, which promotes clean, renewable energy in refugee camps and host countries, received strong support through numerous GRF pledges.

37.   The COVID-19 pandemic can have devastating consequences in camps and locations that are densely populated, where the risks are extremely high due to lack of proper water, sanitation and hygiene facilities, and inadequate health services which do not meet the necessary public health requirements. It is essential that refugees have access to reliable and up-to-date information about the virus, as well as health care, testing and treatment, without discrimination. Over 80 per cent of the world's refugee population and nearly all IDPs live in low- to middle-income countries, many of which have weaker health, water and sanitation systems and need urgent support. Prevention in these locations is paramount. Many States are taking positive measures in this regard, and UNHCR has reinforced this vital work by: distributing soap and increasing access to water; supporting governments with infection prevention and healthcare, including with medical equipment and supplies; distributing core relief items; providing guidance and fact-based information on prevention; expanding cash assistance to mitigate the negative socio-economic impact; and enhancing monitoring.

38.   UNHCR's 2014-2019 "Global Strategy: Beyond detention" led to substantial progress in participating countries, including several which passed laws or introduced high-level policy decisions that resulted in ending the detention of refugee children. Several countries also piloted new alternatives to detention. The strategy represented a strong platform for dialogue, capacity-building, practical cooperation and advocacy with governments and other stakeholders, and fostered the development of an engaged global community of practice. Despite this progress, immigration detention, sometimes involving highly vulnerable children, continues to occur in many countries, including in border and transit zones, and during asylum and return processes. Discrepancies between legislation and practice persist, creating uncertainty for detained asylum-seekers and challenges to judicial oversight. In several countries, detention conditions fall short of international standards. Together with partners such as the International Detention Coalition, UNHCR works closely with national authorities and advocates the exemption of all children from immigration detention, in law and in practice, the introduction of alternatives to detention, and improved immigration detention standards. In October 2019, the United Nations "Global study on children deprived of liberty", to which UNHCR contributed, was presented to the General Assembly.

Easing pressures on host countries

39.   To ease the pressure of host countries and communities in hosting large numbers of refugees, UNHCR worked closely with donors, including financial institutions, to address the consequences of displacement. Both the World Bank Group and the Inter-American Development Bank pledged significant financial and technical assistance to support national

efforts to include refugees and other displaced persons in public services and national development programmes.

40.   Collaboration with the World Bank Group, rooted in complementarity, has brought a significant development focus to refugee protection work, particularly in low-income refugee host countries. Dedicated financing instruments for host countries have supported joint learning and capacity-building programmes, as well as technical collaboration in sectors such as social protection and education. Data collection and analysis through the Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement offer great potential for improved programming. In 2019, UNHCR worked with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee to develop a common position on supporting comprehensive responses in refugee situations that include humanitarian assistance, development and peace interventions, from the outset of a crisis.

41.   UNHCR, in partnership with States and a range of other actors, launched or advanced three support platforms to reinforce existing regional refugee responses: the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework for Central America and Mexico (the MIRPS); the IGAD Support Platform in the East and Horn of Africa; and the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees. As foreseen in the GCR, these platforms seek to redefine the way in which the international community responds to protracted refugee situations and complex mixed movements, drawing on a broader and more diverse group of actors, ensuring greater responsibility-sharing and easing pressure on host countries.

C. Solutions

42.   The international community has acknowledged the need for greater solidarity and cooperation to support host countries, communities and refugee populations. The GRF elicited over 1,000 pledges from States and other stakeholders and some 400 examples of good practices that aim to improve both protection and solutions.

Voluntary repatriation

43.   Voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity, based on a free and informed choice and supported by reintegration assistance, should offer refugees a sustainable option to bring their temporary status as refugees to an end. Regrettably, obstacles persist in many countries of origin, including ongoing insecurity, the absence of essential services and livelihood opportunities, and unresolved housing, land and property issues. Addressing the root causes of displacement and securing peace and stability are central to creating the conditions conducive for voluntary repatriation and for the return of IDPs. In some cases, the conditions in asylum countries become unstable or excessively difficult, compelling refugees to return in adverse conditions and posing risks to their safety and well-being. Ensuring the continuity of protection in host countries is critical, while pursuing opportunities for return.

44.   In August 2019, a tripartite agreement was signed between Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and UNHCR to facilitate organized voluntary repatriation, following the spontaneous return of some 14,500 Congolese from Angola. Approximately 12,400 refugees originating from the Central African Republic returned home after tripartite agreements were signed between UNHCR and the Central African Republic, with the two main host countries: Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Nearly 450 Zimbabwean refugees in Botswana voluntarily returned home. All returnees received transportation assistance and return packages comprising cash and basic household items. UNHCR and partners facilitated the acquisition of civil documents and school certificates, as well as access to health care, education and economic opportunities in return areas.

45.   Somalia took important steps towards creating the conditions for the safe, sustainable and voluntary return of refugees and the reintegration of IDPs and refugees. These include: ratification of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa ("Kampala Convention") and the drafting of a national policy on refugees, returnees and IDPs, a land distribution policy for returning refugees and IDPs, and a national disaster management plan.

46.   Self-organized returns of refugees and IDPs took place to and within South Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic. Although significant insecurity in many parts of the Syrian Arab Republic tests the feasibility of facilitating large-scale voluntary repatriation, the number of spontaneous returns has increased. In South Sudan, caution is needed to ensure that spontaneous returns do not fuel further conflict between returnees and the communities to which they have returned, and trigger secondary displacement.

47.   With 2019 marking 40 years since the beginning of the Afghan refugee situation, UNHCR continues to work with the Afghan Government and other partners to create the conditions for sustainable return. UNHCR encouraged development programming in 15 priority areas for refugee and IDP reintegration in Afghanistan. The launch of the Regional Support Platform for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees aimed to reinforce these efforts.

48.   In other contexts, including Myanmar, UNHCR works with partners such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to remove obstacles to return through increased access to justice, employment and basic services, and by addressing housing, land and property issues. In Iraq, UNHCR, UN-Habitat and UNDP collaborated on rehabilitating houses and handed over occupancy certificates to returnees, while efforts were made to support other essential conditions for safe and dignified return, including security and livelihood opportunities.

Enhancing refugee self-reliance

49.   Economic inclusion, a key factor influencing self-reliance, depends not merely on the right to work but also on freedom of movement, access to transportation, the provision of identification and civil documentation, access to banking services, and access to quality, accredited education in host community languages. Self-reliance also requires investment in host communities, which are often marginalized and economically depressed, fostering social cohesion and ensuring equitable access for the host and refugee community to opportunities for fair and dignified work. When properly supported, refugees can make positive contributions to their host countries, including economic, social and cultural. Efforts to promote self-reliance should take into account the well-being and protection of refugees and host populations with specific needs and constraints. Initiatives that promote access to economic opportunities, thus, require complementary components of support and basic assistance to protect host communities from poverty and destitution.

Resettlement and complementary pathways to admission

50.   Following the launch in May 2019 of the "Three-year strategy on resettlement and complementary pathways", UNHCR has worked with States and partners to achieve progress towards its ambitious goals of enabling 1 million refugees to benefit from resettlement and 2 million from complementary pathways by 2028. A core activity mandated by UNHCR's Statute, resettlement is facing challenges following a significant reduction in the number of places offered by States and the temporary suspension of departure travel due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, several countries have signalled their commitment to resettlement as a crucial protection and solutions tool. Close to 80 commitments were made at the GRF to expand third-country solutions, including resettlement, private or community sponsorship, labour mobility schemes and scholarships for refugees.

51.   In 2019, the target of resettling 60,000 refugees was surpassed by more than 3,000, a modest increase from 2018. This, nevertheless, represents less than 5 per cent of the 1.4 million refugees estimated to be in need of resettlement worldwide. UNHCR and partners continued to take measures to ensure that resettlement responded to the needs on the ground, including through the new Priority Situations Core Group established to maximize the strategic impact of resettlement for refugees in countries affected by the Syria and Central Mediterranean situations. Lifesaving mechanisms for evacuation, resettlement and other solutions were expanded through an Emergency Transfer Mechanism (ETM) in Rwanda, adding to the capacity provided by the existing ETM in Niger. In Central America, the Protection Transfer Arrangement provided people from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras with safe and legal access to a resettlement country. UNHCR and IOM launched the Sustainable Resettlement and Complementary Pathways Initiative to promote

implementation of actions identified under the three-year strategy, including in the context of the GCR. It will support targeted resettlement capacity-building for States and key actors, and strengthen coordination and partnerships. Enhanced case processing, including in the Middle East and North Africa region, aimed to address large numbers of cases and restrictions on access.

52. The GCR recognized that complementary pathways – including the admission of refugees for labour migration, or for educational or family reunification purposes, via humanitarian admission or other channels for entry and stay – can facilitate access to protection and solutions and serve as an expression of solidarity with host countries. UNHCR's work on complementary pathways is, thus, linked to the Office's protection and solutions mandate. UNHCR maintained and enhanced partnerships with external partners on complementary pathways, including Talent Beyond Boundaries, the International Labour Organization, World University Service of Canada (WUSC) and the OECD. A conference on educational pathways, which aimed to expand education pathways globally, was co-organized by UNHCR, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and WUSC at UNESCO in Paris. UNHCR and OECD continued working on the methodology to reflect data on refugees accessing complementary pathways through reporting on the first-time permits issued for family reunification, employment and education. Data provided in the 2018 report indicated that the number in 2017-2018 exceeded the annual average over the previous nine years.

III. Stateless persons

53. UNHCR's statelessness mandate has significantly evolved since the Office's establishment. The 1950 Statute called upon UNHCR to address the situation of stateless refugees. In 1995, UNHCR's Executive Committee responded to a growing crisis of statelessness in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union successor States by adopting a conclusion on the prevention and reduction of statelessness and the protection of stateless persons. Subsequently endorsed as General Assembly resolution 50/152, this conferred upon UNHCR a mandate for stateless persons, regardless of whether they met the refugee definition, and requested UNHCR to undertake efforts to prevent and reduce statelessness and to protect stateless persons.

54. In 2006, the Executive Committee adopted conclusion on international protection 106 which further clarified and consolidated UNHCR's statelessness mandate. The conclusion refers to distinct areas in which the Office is authorized to act: the identification, prevention and reduction of statelessness and the protection of stateless persons.

55. A ministerial meeting convened by UNHCR in 2011 to mark the sixtieth anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention and the fiftieth anniversary of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness (1961 Convention) generated the momentum needed to launch a dedicated global statelessness campaign. In 2014, the ten-year #IBelong Campaign was launched by UNHCR, along with the Global Action Plan to End Statelessness by 2024. The #IBelong Campaign has been a powerful vehicle to raise awareness among States and other relevant actors. It led to the adoption of regional declarations to resolve statelessness in the Americas, West Africa, the Great Lakes Region of Africa, Central Africa and the Middle East and North Africa. To highlight the impact of statelessness on specific groups, UNHCR published two thematic reports – one on childhood statelessness and the other on stateless minorities – based on extensive consultations with stateless and formerly stateless children, youth and minority groups around the world. This work promoted action by States and resulted in strengthened partnerships with UNICEF, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and civil society groups on these topics.

56. The #IBelong Campaign has also driven concrete achievements across the globe. There have been 25 new accessions to the statelessness conventions, bringing the total number of States parties to the 1954 Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention to 94 and 75, respectively. Targeted technical guidance has led to a great number of States reforming their nationality laws, policies and procedures to address issues that may lead to statelessness; setting up dedicated statelessness determination mechanisms

and protection frameworks; introducing procedures for facilitated naturalization for recognized stateless persons; and facilitating access to birth registration and nationality documentation. The campaign has also been instrumental in driving solutions to some large protracted situations of statelessness.

57.   The mid-point of the campaign in 2019 was marked with a high-level segment on statelessness (HLS) as part of the seventieth session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme in October 2019. Preparatory meetings held in all regions galvanized States to exchange good practices and develop pledges, resulting in 360 pledges submitted by States, international organizations and civil society. The past year also saw important developments and achievements in line with the Global Action Plan. Significantly, Kyrgyzstan became the first country to resolve all known statelessness cases on its territory. In March 2020, Uzbekistan made similar progress towards resolving statelessness by adopting a law which grants nationality to an estimated 50,000 stateless people – about half of all known stateless persons on the territory. Angola, Colombia and North Macedonia acceded to the 1954 Convention, while Angola and Colombia acceded to the 1961 Convention.

58.   Since the launch of the #IBelong Campaign, 13 States have reformed their nationality laws, policies and procedures in positive ways. Important examples include a Latvian law that automatically grants citizenship to children born to "non-citizens"; a circular in Côte d'Ivoire authorizing judges to grant nationality to stateless foundlings, resulting in 55 individuals receiving nationality certificates; reform of a nationality law that allows Iranian women to confer nationality on their children upon application; and the removal of barriers to birth registration for children of undocumented parents in Kazakhstan. UNHCR continued supporting States in establishing and improving statelessness determination procedures, with two additional States – Argentina and Panama – implementing such procedures. Pledges made during the HLS have already been implemented by Argentina, Belize, the Central African Republic, Colombia, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Kazakhstan, Malta, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Panama, Sweden and Tajikistan.

59.   Despite this progress, much remains to be done to end statelessness. Increasing xenophobia and nationalism worldwide has given rise to concern. Additionally, risk factors such as gender discrimination in nationality laws and family separation have exacerbated the risk of statelessness in large-scale displacement situations.

60.   The global consensus on the fundamental right to a nationality has never been stronger. However, harmful forms of nationalism and a growing tendency to exclude certain groups in some countries is worrying. It remains critical to make the strongest possible case for inclusive societies and, specifically, the removal of discriminatory provisions in nationality laws, civil registration laws and related procedures and practices. All stakeholders urgently need to work together to build on the momentum generated by the HLS and the achievements to date.

IV. Internally displaced persons

A. UNHCR's responsibilities for internally displaced persons

61.   UNHCR's history of providing protection and assistance to IDPs dates back almost fifty years. Various resolutions of the General Assembly have authorized UNHCR to be involved with IDPs, under certain circumstances and with the consent of the State concerned, in acknowledgement of the Office's expertise in forced displacement and capacity to adapt and respond to evolving emergencies, and the need to address people displaced within their own countries as critical to resolving refugee situations.

62.   UNHCR was first called upon by the General Assembly to extend its expertise and assistance to situations of internal displacement in Bangladesh in 1971, and in what is now South Sudan in 1972. By then, the General Assembly had already called upon UNHCR to respond to refugee needs outside of Europe. Throughout the 1970s, UNHCR was called upon by the General Assembly, the Secretary-General and numerous governments to extend

protection and assistance to IDPs, including in Angola, Ethiopia, Guinea-Bissau, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mozambique, Uganda and Viet Nam. In recognition of the growing scale of internal displacement, the General Assembly in 1975 and 1979 began requesting UNHCR to promote durable and swift solutions for IDPs.

63. In the 1980s, as internal conflicts became more prevalent, the numbers of IDPs rose exponentially and by 1986, there were more IDPs than refugees worldwide, a ratio which continues today. UNHCR continued to protect and assist IDPs, including in Chad, Colombia, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Sri Lanka, while regional discussions on internal displacement – such as the OAU International Conference on the Plight of Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons in Southern Africa in 1988, and the International Conference on Central American Refugees in 1989 – called for better international mechanisms to assist IDPs.

64. Complex humanitarian emergencies, such as Iraq and the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s redefined the way UNHCR worked in responding directly to people in the midst of active conflict, which is particularly relevant to situations of internal displacement. Starting in 1991, the General Assembly began issuing regular resolutions on internal displacement, shifting from discussions on whether to assist IDPs to discussions on how to do so, and in 1992, it acknowledged displaced persons as part of UNHCR's activities in resolution A/RES/47/105 on the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

65. The IASC, formed in 1992, established the cluster system, in which UNHCR was designated global lead for protection and co-lead for shelter and for and camp coordination and camp management (CCCM), core elements of the current framework for addressing internal displacement. Two decades later in Africa, the Kampala Convention, now the cornerstone for addressing internal displacement in Africa, specifically acknowledges UNHCR's role in protecting IDPs.

66. UNHCR has provided protection and assistance for IDPs though its cluster activities in more than fifty countries. Protection remains the most fundamental challenge in internal displacement situations, evident in numerous conflicts over the past two decades, including in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Libya, Sri Lanka, South Sudan, Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. With the number of IDPs continuing to grow, it is more vital than ever to strengthen cooperation with a wide range of stakeholders with the aim of preventing, responding to and finding solutions for internal displacement. In this regard, UNHCR welcomed the Secretary-General's initiative in 2019 to establish a High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement and is committed to supporting its work.

B. Progress during the reporting period

67. UNHCR supported over 11 countries with legal and technical advice on the development of national law and policy frameworks, and consistently advocated the participation of affected communities in the development of such frameworks. Globally, UNHCR continued to co-chair the GP20 Initiative, launched in 2018 in response to the General Assembly's call to mark the 20th anniversary of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. Through a three-year plan of action, UNHCR, together with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of IDPs, has helped spearhead efforts to galvanize support. Regionally, UNHCR engaged in consultations with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and IGAD on the ratification, domestication and implementation of the Kampala Convention, under the auspices of GP20. Ethiopia and Somalia ratified the Kampala Convention, while South Sudan acceded to it, bringing the total number of ratifications to 31 – a significant sign of commitment across the continent to protecting and assisting IDPs.

68.   One of the key commitments in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is to "leave no one behind". The World Bank and others have joined this effort, increasingly engaging in internal displacement situations in coordination with humanitarian organizations. UNHCR has collaborated with a range of actors on various initiatives to support the return and sustainable reintegration of IDPs in places such as Afghanistan, Colombia, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Georgia, Somalia Sudan and the Ukraine.

69.   In 2019, UNHCR issued an updated policy on internal displacement, reaffirming the Office's commitment to decisive and predictable engagement with IDPs worldwide. UNHCR is mobilizing and deploying resources and strengthening capacities to ensure protection and secure solutions for IDPs. The policy aims to reinforce UNHCR's preparedness, global and country leadership, advocacy and coordination, in line with IASC arrangements, as well as its operational involvement on protection and solutions.

70.   UNHCR contributed to the protection and assistance of millions of IDPs, engaging directly in 30 internal displacement responses across 134 countries. In sub-Saharan Africa, conflict and violence, interacting with the effects of climate change, accounted for significant new displacement. In South Sudan, support included a solutions-oriented approach for returning IDPs, while in Burkina Faso, a sudden deterioration in security led to massive displacement. Continued conflict in Libya, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen resulted in further displacement, requiring robust responses in the protection, shelter and CCCM clusters. In Iraq, UNHCR responded to the needs of IDP returnees and those remaining in displacement. In Colombia, UNHCR continued to deliver integrated protection and solutions-oriented programming for IDPs and returnees, alongside responding to the large-scale arrival of Venezuelans. In Afghanistan, UNHCR focused on area-based, whole-of-community approaches to mitigate protection risks and vulnerabilities. In response to displacement caused by the effects of climate change and disasters, UNHCR responded to emergencies caused by Cyclones Idai and Kenneth in Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, and by Hurricane Dorian in the Bahamas.

C.   Global protection cluster

71.   In 2019, UNHCR led 23 out of 24 field protection clusters and cluster-like arrangements, and provided support to the field through missions, technical advice and the sharing of good practices. It also supported the development of the humanitarian country team protection strategies in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Libya, South Sudan, the State of Palestine, Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic.

72.   Following an internal review of its governance arrangement, which called for stronger representation of local actors and more predictable engagement in the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, the global protection cluster (GPC) instituted in 2019 a new Strategic Advisory Group, co-led by an NGO and comprised of local actors and development partners. The Strategic Advisory Group developed a new five-year strategic framework: "Protection in a climate of change 2020-2024". The framework articulates the GPC's commitments and planned focus areas, including: effective coordination capacities, timely and evidence-based protection analysis to support decision-making, accountability to affected populations, support of localization, durable solutions, and adaptability to changing operational environments, such as in relation to climate change, pandemics and new technologies.

V.   Conclusion

73.   Seventy years since its establishment, UNHCR's mandate remains as relevant as when it was conceived, and the Office continues to adapt to changing circumstances. As the tasks have broadened and grown more complex, so has the need for UNHCR to work effectively in partnership and engage with a wider range of actors – with the meaningful involvement of forcibly displaced and stateless persons – as championed by the multi-stakeholder approach enshrined in the GCR and evident at the GRF.

74.   UNHCR's work underscores the importance of a robust legal framework governing the rights of refugees and stateless persons, as well as IDPs. The COVID-19 pandemic further demonstrates the need for countries to come together to address global challenges. The experience and insights of the past 70 years have provided valuable lessons which should inform international efforts, supported by solidarity and responsibility-sharing, to ensure protection and solutions for all those UNHCR serves.