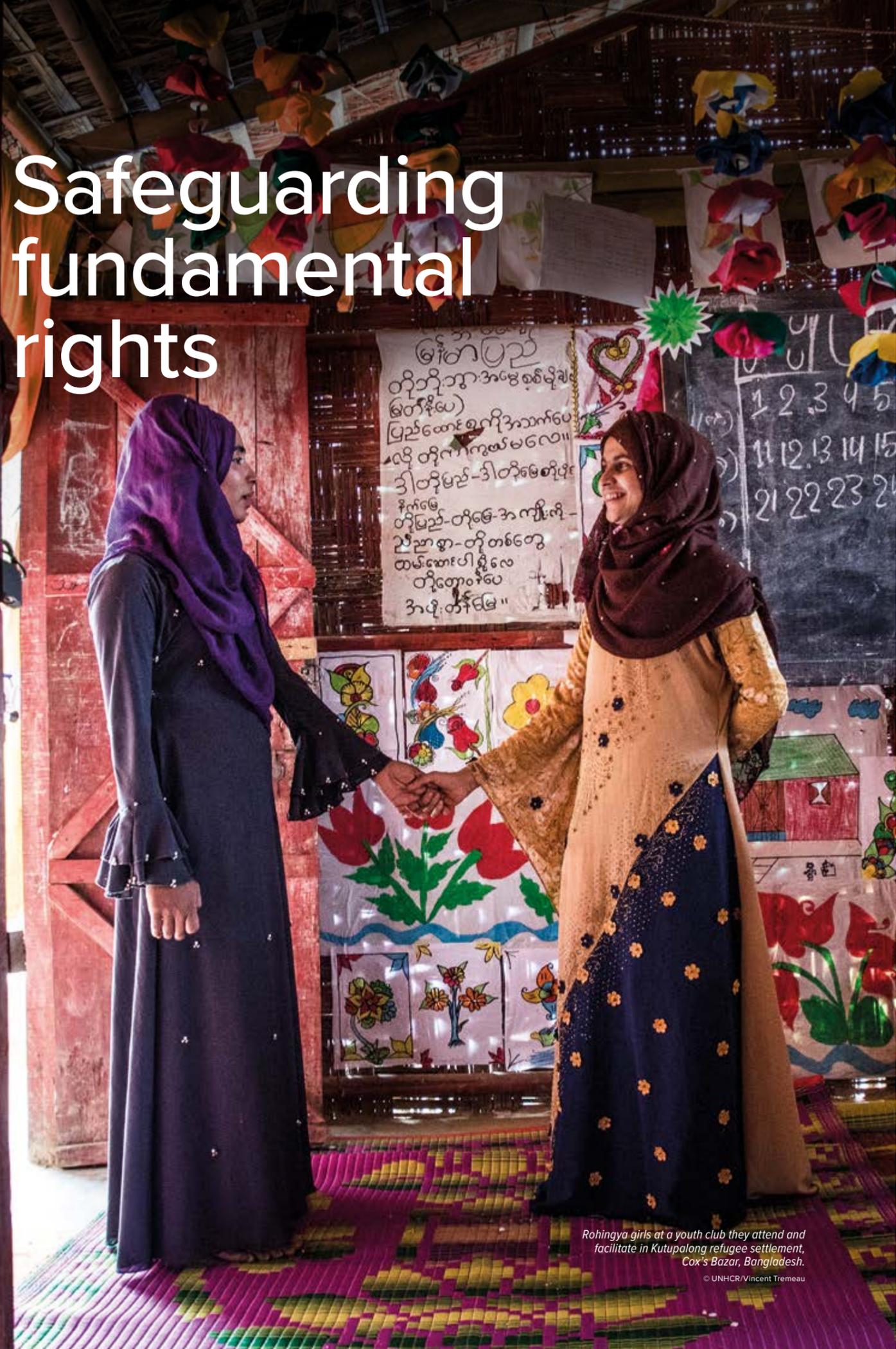


Safeguarding fundamental rights



Rohingya girls at a youth club they attend and facilitate in Kutupalong refugee settlement, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

© UNHCR/Vincent Tremeau

In the year of the 70th anniversary of the adoption of UNHCR's Statute by the UN General Assembly, the drivers of forced displacement multiplied globally, and the COVID-19 pandemic jeopardized the fundamental rights of people of concern. Nevertheless, as the first year of implementation of the Global Refugee Forum pledges, 2020 presented opportunities to further develop asylum capacity, thus supporting States to cope with challenging circumstances such as public health emergencies.

Access to international protection and safeguarding public health are not and should never be mutually exclusive: States' obligations are not suspended in times of crisis.

UNHCR continued to advocate for full respect of the non-derogable principle of non-refoulement, while increased and often violent pushbacks at the border and interceptions at sea were reported, including with returns to risks of persecution or serious human rights violations. Throughout the pandemic, access to protection and the quality of that protection have suffered from restrictive measures applied by States—with limited or no flexibility towards those in need of protection, and from the disruption of basic services, socioeconomic shocks, increased xenophobia, exacerbated protection risks and humanitarian access challenges. UNHCR upheld those countries who were steadfast to their commitments and put in place adaptive procedures to ensure their asylum systems remained accessible and operational, while simultaneously managing COVID-19 quarantine and treatment and undertaking inclusive prevention and response plans.

Greater engagement with communities—including through innovative tools introduced by UNHCR and at inter-agency level—allowed active participation of forcibly displaced people and facilitated their role as frontline responders. Age, gender and diversity considerations in all advocacy, policy and operational interventions proved their worth in responding to the COVID-19 emergency.

With a rise in risks, joint efforts were made towards more inclusive child protection systems, strengthened community-based protection and mental health and psychosocial support, as well as scaled-up best interests procedures, birth registration and strategies to address childhood statelessness. A focus on gender equality proved to be crucial for tackling gender-based violence, disturbingly higher during the pandemic.

Despite the challenges of timely identification of persons with disabilities and older persons in displacement contexts, worsened by the pandemic and its disproportional effect on those at heightened risk, UNHCR advanced its commitments on inclusion, accountability, and collection and proactive use of data through critical collaboration with communities and other partners. Moreover, to support the meaningful inclusion of LGBTIQ+ displaced persons, UNHCR enhanced partnership coordination and advocacy on equal treatment, anti-discrimination, participation, and access to information and services.

In this chapter

- Legal protection frameworks
- Registration, documentation and identity management
- Identifying international protection needs
- Refugee protection and migration, including responses to mixed movements
- Preventing and responding to statelessness
- Community-based protection
- Accountability to affected people
- Child protection, youth engagement and empowerment
- Gender equality
- Protecting persons with disabilities and older persons
- Protecting LGBTIQ+ persons in forced displacement



Legal protection frameworks

© UNHCR/Mohamed Alalem

UNHCR staff identify and assist some of the 148 refugees and asylum-seekers at the community day centre in Tripoli, Libya after facilitating their release from the Suq al Khamees detention centre.

Global Strategic Priorities
Legislation on refugees
Law and policy on IDPs
See p. 12 for GSP results



Results and achievements

To advance the rights and legal protection of refugees and other forcibly displaced people in accordance with its supervisory responsibility, UNHCR continued to advocate for States' accession to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol and their translation into domestic law. By December 2020, 149 States were party to either the 1951 Convention or its 1967 Protocol, 70 of which maintained reservations and declarations to one or both instruments.

UNHCR provided States with guidance on interpreting and applying international and regional refugee law standards domestically. UNHCR also engaged with UN agencies and legal, judicial and academic partners and networks. In 2020, UNHCR engaged with the legislative processes of 93 countries: 23 countries adopted laws or legislative changes, nine of which represented advances in refugee

rights. Although COVID-19 forced many courts to close temporarily, UNHCR intervened as a third party in 18 cases in 10 jurisdictions.

Law and policy on internal displacement

UNHCR supported the development of national frameworks on internal displacement by providing legal and technical advice in 14 States, including Colombia, Mali, Mexico, the Philippines, South Sudan and Ukraine. Mexico's national legal framework, developed with UNHCR's support, was submitted to the Senate as a draft law after unanimous approval by the Chamber of Deputies. At the regional level, Mozambique and Somalia ratified the Kampala Convention, with UNHCR helping translate it into domestic law. In Somalia, a draft federal IDP Act was presented in a validation workshop ahead of review by the Attorney General.

Promoting and protecting human rights

To strengthen its engagement with human rights mechanisms, UNHCR adopted a "[Human rights engagement strategy](#)" in October 2020, underpinned by a learning programme to give staff the knowledge and practical skills on human rights tools to protect people of concern. [Guidance on UNHCR's engagement with national human rights institutions](#) provided a blueprint for leveraging partnerships with national human rights institutions to support UNHCR's mandate and its protection and advocacy work. UNHCR complemented this with [Guidance on addressing racism and xenophobia](#), focusing on responding to discrimination against people of concern.

Operational highlights

Chad, hosting 483,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, adopted its first ever asylum law, guaranteeing fundamental rights including freedom of movement, the right to work, and access to health care, education and justice. The law makes Chad one of the first countries in the region to fulfil a pledge made during the 2019 Global Refugee Forum to strengthen legal, physical and material protection of refugees and asylum-seekers. UNHCR supported the Government of Chad in developing the law, providing technical advice and written observations throughout the legislative process.

In the Philippines, UNHCR provided technical assistance for the development of a regional legal framework for IDP protection in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, in partnership with local organizations

and key UN and government agencies. UNHCR formed a technical working group and organized webinars for policymakers and protection actors, with the support of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of IDPs, key parliamentarians and the national Commission on Human Rights.

Challenges and unmet needs

Many countries hosting large refugee populations are not States parties to the 1951 Convention or its 1967 Protocol and do not have domestic refugee or asylum legislation.

While States often solicited UNHCR's views on proposed legislative changes, those views were not always followed, leading to legislation with reduced protection safeguards, or provisions at variance with the country's international or regional legal obligations. For instance, of the 23 countries which saw the adoption of laws and legislative changes to their domestic refugee protection framework, nine involved some restrictions to refugee rights. In many countries, legislative sessions were also suspended because of the COVID-19 pandemic, causing delays including for processes UNHCR was supporting.

Changes in government authorities and institutions represented a key challenge for adopting and implementing national laws and policies on IDPs in various countries, including Mali and South Sudan. Lack of capacity to respond to IDPs' legal needs and access to justice, due to inadequate implementation of international, regional and national frameworks and standards, was also a key challenge.



9 States saw the adoption of laws and legislative changes demonstrating improvements in refugee rights. 2019 result: 16.



18 judicial proceedings in which UNHCR provided interpretation of relevant principles of international refugee and human rights law. 2019 result: 17.



93 States received technical advice from UNHCR to ensure compliance with international and regional refugee protection standards. 2019 result: 89.



14 States developed national frameworks on internal displacement with UNHCR's support. 2019 result: 11.



Registration, documentation and identity management

© UNHCR/Alexis Huguet

Central African refugees await their turn for biometric screening at the registration site in Ndu, Bas Uele province, in northern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Global Strategic Priorities
Registration
See p. 12 for GSP result



Results and achievements

Registration establishes unique identities for people of concern and is the basis for delivery of protection and assistance and for access to services. It also contributes to identifying trends and patterns in population movements.

Registration protects against refoulement, arbitrary arrest and detention, and helps to reunify families and trace separated children. In 2020 however, the pandemic and concomitant restrictions on movement constituted a major obstacle. In response, UNHCR adapted its policies and guidance, instituting remote registration arrangements across 41 country operations. New methods included technologies that facilitated refugees' self-service, remote training and simulations, and contactless data collection. Biometric devices were remodelled to enable contactless biometric capture and identification. Registration interviews were held via video calls. Plexiglass dividers were installed in registration facilities.

Despite the pandemic, in 2020 UNHCR continued to strengthen its registration,

profiling and identity management capabilities. At the centre of this work was UNHCR's Population Registration and Identity Management EcoSystem (PRIMES), which includes proGres v4, a global, web-based source of information about registered individuals, the Biometric Identity Management System (BIMS)/IrisGuard and the Global Distribution Tool (GDT).

By the end of 2020, 100 operations were using proGres v4, 10 more than originally planned and 27 more than in 2019, covering 15 million individuals, a 44% rise. UNHCR achieved its Grand Bargain commitment to roll out BIMS to a total of 75 operations, adding six in 2020. Individual biometric records in BIMS reached 9.2 million, up from 8.8 million. The GDT was deployed in 20 operations by year-end, up from 14 in 2019. Employing such biometric tools means aid gets to the right recipient swiftly and simply, reducing the risk of fraud.

UNHCR made enhancements to PRIMES, enabling its offline tool (Rapp) to consolidate inputs from multiple data sources, allowing decentralized user management, and launching a mobile

app, Verify Plus, for authenticating identity. These developments helped extend data collection and electronic verification to remote locations, while new French and Spanish versions of the software and training materials strengthened the tool usage and the quality of data in non-English speaking operations.

The emergency registration capacities of eight operations were enhanced thanks to the deployment of nine graduates of the Training on Emergency Registration. Additionally, 12 Danish Refugee Council-managed registration roster members were deployed to 10 operations to conduct continuous registration, population verification and/or prepare for PRIMES deployment.

Operational highlights

In Jordan, to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 disrupting access to documentation, UNHCR launched its first continuous remote registration procedures in the region. Data was collected in phone interviews, with "know your customer" standards to authenticate identities remotely, instead of the biometric information usually taken at registration. A unique caller ID and a one-time password, used during the phone interview and for scheduling purposes, further strengthened the integrity of the process. Records were efficiently processed, efficiently capturing information on new arrivals, births and updated family compositions. In parallel, a hybrid asylum-seeker's certificate distribution mechanism—developed to complement these remote registration procedures—ensured the delivery of certificates to 266,586 individuals in 2020.

In Uganda, UNHCR and mobile operators agreed on the interoperable use of their systems for authenticating the identity of people of concern to UNHCR. This enabled the biometric authentication of the identities of people of concern using

160,000 kiosks run by mobile network operators. As a result, Ugandan authorities allowed mobile operators to issue SIM cards to refugees on the same basis as Ugandan nationals.

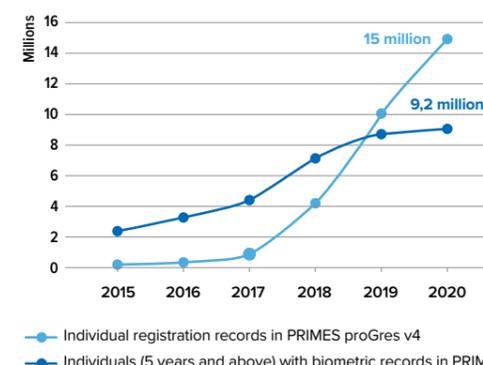
Challenges and unmet needs

The number of individuals newly registered in PRIMES fell 28% between 2019 and 2020 because of prolonged restrictions on movement. Without remote registration arrangements, including technologies to facilitate refugees' self-service, remote training and simulations, and contactless biographic and biometric data collection, the gap would have been three times as large.

Support for developing a refugee self-service platform, known as MyUNHCR, was not provided as planned to UNHCR's Middle East and North Africa bureau and Asia and the Pacific bureau, because more time had to be invested during the technical discovery and design phase, resulting in development, piloting and deployment delays.

UNHCR's policy on registration and identity management was not released in 2020, as COVID-19 raised many new issues, particularly for self-service and remote registration, which must inform the policy going forward. The policy will be prioritized for publication in 2021 to reflect these new registration and identity management methods.

INDIVIDUAL REGISTRATION RECORDS 2015-2020



100 country operations used proGres v4.
Target: 90. 2019 result: 73.



75 country operations used BIMS and IrisGuard.
Target: 75. 2019 result: 69.



20 country operations used UNHCR's Global Distribution Tool. 2019 result: 14.



41 country operations implemented remote registration arrangements in PRIMES.



Identifying international protection needs

© UNHCR/Tom Hines

A UNHCR staff member visits a family of asylum-seekers who are integrating in their host community of Belize and learning English. Over 2,000 refugees and asylum-seekers from Central America have found safety in Belize.



1.3 million

individual new and appeal asylum applications were registered globally. Projection before COVID-19: 2.5 million. 2019 result: 2.3 million.

Results and achievements

The same year that the implementation of Global Refugee Forum pledges started, due to the pandemic, States and partners had to mobilize resources to adapt their systems to ensure the continued identification of people with international protection needs.

As part of its global COVID-19 response, UNHCR issued guidance on remote interviewing of asylum applicants, enabling States and partners to introduce adaptations in national asylum systems, while taking into consideration key protection issues, as highlighted by UNHCR's [protection dashboard](#). Of the approximately 130 States applying a national asylum/refugee status determination (RSD) system, 98 adapted part of their procedures at the onset of the pandemic. By the end of the year, 123 States had adapted their national asylum procedures in response to COVID-19. Such measures helped address public health concerns while maintaining

access to asylum and preventing backlogs building up in national systems.

In parallel, UNHCR issued revised and updated [RSD procedural standards](#) to ensure accurate, timely and consistent decision-making for operations engaged in mandate-RSD activities. Following the issuance of guidance on working modalities of the [Asylum Capacity Support Group](#) (ACSG), UNHCR facilitated the launch of pilot projects within the ACSG framework. Such projects aim to assist the asylum authorities of the countries concerned to assess gaps in their process. They can then draw up an action plan to address any lack of capacity in the national asylum system, implement simplified and accelerated asylum processes, revise and improve the national legal framework, and set up professionalized country of origin information units. These pilot projects laid the groundwork for improvements in the fairness, efficiency, integrity and adaptability of national asylum systems.

Operational highlights

As a result of the pandemic, certain adaptive measures for national asylum systems required States such as Azerbaijan, Ecuador, Kenya, South Sudan, Austria and Estonia and several other European Union member States to increasingly use physical distancing or technology to issue new documents, conduct remote asylum interviews or court hearings. States such as Ghana, the Russian Federation, Luxembourg and certain other European Union member States also extended by law, or practice, the validity of expired or soon to expire asylum documents. Portugal extended the validity of documents and provided access to health care, employment, social benefits and financial services. These adaptive measures effectively ensured asylum-seekers' access to protection, despite a reduction of in-person services.

While many States continued to adapt national asylum processes in the context of COVID-19, others took additional measures, including using group-based responses to strengthen the fairness, efficiency and adaptability of the protection response to large-scale movements. One such example was Sudan's prima facie declaration for Ethiopian refugees.

Challenges and unmet needs

While the impact of COVID-19 is not yet fully understood, the complete suspension or only partial functioning of certain national asylum systems in 2020 impaired people's ability to access international protection, thereby increasing their exposure to protection risks. Globally, the number of new asylum-seekers registered at first instance dropped by 45% in 2020, from 2 million to 1 million. This represented the biggest single year drop in new individual asylum applications over the last two decades. Likewise, despite this significant drop in

asylum applications in most countries due to increased travel restrictions, national asylum systems continued to see increased backlogs that will be challenging to overcome after the situation normalizes. There are additional adaptive measures that countries could be taking to ensure that the asylum systems are prepared to face these risks and minimize the time necessary for the systems to recover.

As this was the first year of the implementation of Global Refugee Forum pledges, 2020 also presented new opportunities, in particular a renewed focus on the importance of asylum system adaptability and the ability of such systems to respond to similar or different challenges in the future. Political support and investment in innovation, including the provision of RSD services through remote arrangements and technology, will be key in enabling asylum systems to effectively respond. Within the framework of the ACSG, additional offers of support will be important in ensuring that the needs of States improving their asylum systems are met.



123 national asylum systems introduced adaptive measures as a result of COVID-19.

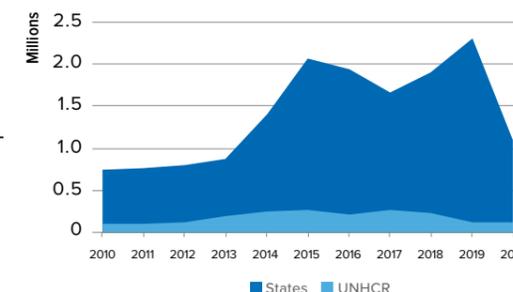


115,800 individual asylum applications processed by UNHCR includes both substantive and administrative decisions. Projection before COVID-19: 120,000. 2019 result: 120,400.



55,000 new and appeal asylum applications registered by UNHCR (includes both substantive and administrative decisions). Projection before COVID-19: 125,000. 2019 result: 124,900.

NEW AND APPEAL ASYLUM APPLICATIONS REGISTERED* | 2010-2020



*In addition, UNHCR and States operating joint procedures received 600 applications in 2020.

For more information on asylum and related trends, see Chapter 5 of the [2020 Global Trends report](#)





Refugee protection and migration, including responses to mixed movements

© UNHCR/Mohamed Alalem

Refugees and migrants from Ghana, Mali and Sudan are counselled by UNHCR staff after disembarking from a Libyan coast guard vessel in Tripoli, Libya.



95,031 arrivals along Mediterranean Sea route. 2019: 123,663.



1,401 estimated dead and/or missing along Mediterranean Sea route. 2019: 1,335.



533 people in need of international protection evacuated through the Emergency Transit Mechanisms. 2019: 2,029.

Results and achievements

In 2020, UNHCR continued efforts to prevent violations and abuses towards people under UNHCR's mandate moving in mixed flows, and to provide them with adequate protection and assistance. Given the multisectoral response, UNHCR developed and strengthened inter-agency engagement, leading or co-leading virtual Mixed Migration Working Groups and Task Forces at country and regional levels.

It engaged with the European Union and African Union, supporting key protection and solutions objectives under the Khartoum and Rabat Processes and the guiding framework of the Joint Valletta Action Plan. It engaged on the new EU pact on asylum and migration and advocated, alongside IOM and via the AU-EU-UN Task Force on Libya, for the rights of refugees and migrants in the context of arbitrary detention and mass expulsions. It engaged with States and humanitarian actors to try to save lives by advocating for strengthened search and rescue in the Mediterranean and West African Atlantic.

To help prevent deaths on dangerous land and sea routes, UNHCR further developed communication with communities (CwC) at risk via its revised Accountability to Affected People policy, country and regional CwC strategies and its flagship initiative [“Telling the Real Story”](#).

UNHCR advocated for increased access to third-country solutions for refugees in mixed movements along the Mediterranean routes, including evacuations to Emergency Transit Mechanisms in Niger and Rwanda, resettlement, and complementary pathways including family reunification. UNHCR proposed route-based protection initiatives to strengthen overall protection responses, in line with the [Central Mediterranean Risk Mitigation Strategy](#) and the [“Live, Learn and Participate”](#) child protection initiative in Egypt, Ethiopia, Libya and Sudan.

As co-chair of the Global Protection Cluster anti-trafficking team, UNHCR developed the [“Introductory guide to anti-trafficking action in internal displacement contexts”](#). With IOM, it issued the

[“Framework document on developing standard operating procedures to facilitate the identification and protection of victims of trafficking”](#).

UNHCR updated learning programmes on mixed movements and trafficking and smuggling and, due to COVID-19, held them online for staff in the West and Central Africa and the Middle East and North Africa regions.

UNHCR participated in the UN Network on Migration, as a member of its Executive Committee and co-lead of its Working Group on Alternatives to Detention, which issued the policy brief [“COVID-19 and immigration detention: What can Governments and other stakeholders do?”](#) Given their potential impact on asylum and international protection, UNHCR also engaged actively with other workstreams of the UN Migration Network, in particular with the Working Group on Return and Reintegration of Migrants, focusing on objective 21 of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration: “Cooperate in facilitating safe and dignified return and readmission, as well as sustainable reintegration”.

Operational highlights

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. UNHCR's advocacy for alternatives to detention led to the release of 400 refugees and asylum-seekers.

Under the Central Mediterranean Family Reunification Project, a partnership with the International Refugee Assistance Project and RefugePoint, 375 children benefited from best interests procedures; 180 unaccompanied children, youth and vulnerable adults were referred for legal aid assistance; 445 individuals benefited from support to family reunification procedures; and 30 individuals departed to reunite with family members in Europe.

Challenges and unmet needs

Dangerous sea movements continued, with fatal incidents in all regions, including off the coast of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, in the Atlantic and in the Mediterranean and Andaman Seas. Too many people were compelled to take precarious sea journeys in overcrowded and unseaworthy vessels, falling prey to unscrupulous smugglers, facing pushbacks at sea and denied disembarkation in a place of safety. Strengthening search and rescue capacity is fundamental and necessary to save lives at sea, although not sufficient to prevent recurring tragedies. Predictable disembarkation in line with international standards is needed to ensure that survivors are promptly delivered to a place of safety. Strengthened international cooperation and responsibility- and burden-sharing are also needed to ensure access to protection, assistance and other solutions for rescued survivors, in line with international law and standards.



643 persons in need of international protection resettled through the Emergency Transit Mechanisms.

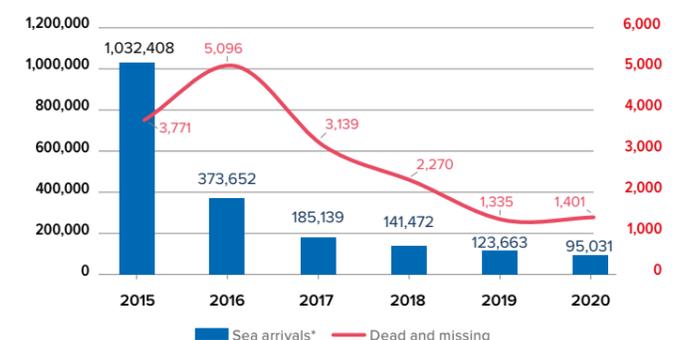


677 people of concern in the Niger Emergency Transit Mechanism. Average length of stay: 535 days.



315 people of concern in the Rwanda Emergency Transit Mechanism. Average length of stay: 155 days.

SEA ARRIVALS AND ESTIMATED DEAD AND MISSING ALONG THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA ROUTE 2015-2020



* Includes sea arrivals to Italy, Cyprus, and Malta, and both sea and land arrivals to Greece and Spain (including the Canary Islands). Data are as of 31 December 2020 for all countries except Cyprus for which last available data are as of 31 August 2020.

** Refugees and migrants continued using dangerous routes to reach Europe, although arrivals decreased by 23% compared to 2019, in part due to COVID-related border closures. Around 55,300 people arrived in Italy, Malta and Spain, 24% more than in 2019. Sea arrivals to Italy in 2020 nearly tripled, Tunisians being the largest group. 23,023 individuals arrived in the Canary Islands via the Atlantic route, an almost eightfold increase, although sea and land arrivals elsewhere in Spain via the Western Mediterranean route fell 37%.



Preventing and responding to statelessness

© UNHCR/Hélène Coux

A stateless mother of four stands at the door of her home in Brits, North West Province, South Africa.

Global Strategic Priorities
Legislation on statelessness
Birth registration
See p. 12 for GSP result



Results and achievements

Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, notable progress was made in raising awareness of the plight of stateless persons and in achieving concrete results to prevent and resolve statelessness. Pledges submitted at the 2019 High-Level Segment on Statelessness and Global Refugee Forum helped accelerate these efforts. Of the 270 pledges to address statelessness submitted by States at the High-Level Segment and the Forum, more than 30 pledges were either fully or partially implemented by the end of 2020.

With technical support from UNHCR, 19 countries reformed their nationality laws, policies and procedures to close gaps leading to statelessness during the year. Particularly important were legislative changes introducing legal safeguards to prevent statelessness. Albania, for instance, adopted a new nationality law which includes an unrestricted safeguard to grant nationality to stateless children born in its territory, if they would otherwise be stateless.

A large number of States with significant populations of persons at risk of statelessness removed barriers to birth registration. In Turkmenistan, a new civil registration law entered into force which guarantees birth registration to all children born in the country. The Republic of the Congo removed fees associated with birth registration and established auxiliary civil status centres in health facilities. A number of States also made arrangements to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on birth registration rates. In March, the Government of Jordan suspended deadlines for birth registration and waived fees for late birth registration. In an effort to identify and protect stateless persons, Côte d'Ivoire, Kazakhstan and Ukraine established statelessness determination procedures.

In 2020, UNHCR strengthened its existing partnerships to address statelessness. UNHCR and UNICEF continued their joint efforts as part of the [Coalition on Every Child's Right to a Nationality](#) and

expanded the number of joint strategies to address childhood statelessness to 18. UNHCR also worked with the Peter McMullin Centre on Statelessness in Australia and the Catholic University of Central Africa in Cameroon to deliver dedicated statelessness courses virtually. Joint activities were undertaken with the Inter-Parliamentary Union, including an advocacy event to bolster parliamentary action to end statelessness.

Operational highlights

Notable progress was made in the area of resolving protracted situations of statelessness. In December, following extensive advocacy efforts by UNHCR, the President of Kenya announced a landmark decision to grant citizenship to 1,670 stateless Shona and 1,300 stateless persons of Rwandan descent.

In Central Asia, UNHCR continued its statelessness identification and reduction programme in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, where UNHCR's legal partners conducted outreach activities and provided legal counselling to identified persons to acquire nationality or have it confirmed. As a result of joint efforts by the Governments, UNHCR and civil society, over 34,600 stateless persons acquired nationality in 2020, including some 28,400 in Uzbekistan, 4,200 in Tajikistan and 2,000 in Kazakhstan.

Challenges and unmet needs

Despite these positive developments, the COVID-19 pandemic caused a setback in statelessness prevention efforts and had a disproportionate impact on stateless populations. Many stateless persons were barred from accessing testing and treatment due to lack of legal status, were excluded from social services, and faced significant socioeconomic impacts as a result of the crisis. In May 2020, UNHCR issued [guidance](#) on policy and good practice to help protect stateless people and ensure their access to services.

2020 saw a lower number of States acceding to the UN Statelessness Conventions than anticipated, however 2021 marks the 60th anniversary of the adoption of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and advocacy efforts to commemorate the anniversary are expected to accelerate the number of accessions.

The lack of reliable data on statelessness also continued to be a challenge. Current statistics cover only 94 countries with a total number of 4.2 million stateless persons reported. A number of initiatives are underway to tackle this problem, including the joint development of International Recommendations on Statelessness Statistics by UNHCR, the Expert Group on Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons Statistics, and UNFPA. The recommendations are likely to be adopted in 2023.



63,200 stateless persons acquired a nationality, or had it confirmed. Target: 100,000. 2019 result: 81,074.



1 accession to the 1954 and the 1961 Statelessness Conventions. Target: 12. 2019 result: 4.



19 States improved their nationality laws, policies and procedures in line with international standards. Target: 20. 2019 result: 13.

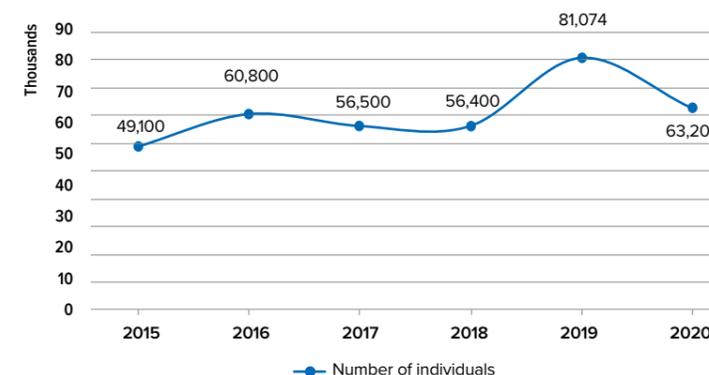


3 States established or improved statelessness determination procedures. Target: 10. 2019 result: 2.



94 States reported reliable quantitative data on stateless persons. Target: 88. 2019 result: 92.

INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE ACQUIRED A NATIONALITY | 2015-2020



For more information on statelessness, see Chapter 7 of the [2020 Global Trends report](#)



Community-based protection

Global Strategic Priorities
Peaceful coexistence
See p. 14 for GSP result



Results and achievements

Communities are often the first responders in situations that humanitarian actors have difficulties reaching, a fact made all the more evident with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Country operations where UNHCR and partners had invested time and resources in forging strong protection partnerships with communities prior to the pandemic were able to adapt to new realities faster, with people of concern experiencing fewer interruptions in access to, and delivery of, protection and other key services, often managed by refugees themselves.



21 operations reported a higher percentage of implemented programme priorities identified by community members. 2019 result: 33.

Examples of refugee frontline responders in 2020 were numerous: in Duhok, Iraq, community members were trained remotely in psychological first aid in response to the growing mental health needs produced by the COVID-19 pandemic. In Nepal, UNHCR increased the number of female community workers to ensure a safe and trusted channel for gender-based violence case referral and to provide confidential 24/7 access to UNHCR's protection hotline. IDPs in Ukraine were also actively involved in the COVID-19 response, including by taking part in coordinating committees led by local authorities, running counselling hotlines, and conducting psychological support and art therapy classes for adolescents. In Lebanon, more than 450 refugees with a medical background were mobilized as community health volunteers, focusing on COVID-19 awareness, hygiene promotion, surveillance and initial advice. To strengthen its support of community structures and frontline refugee responders, UNHCR offered guidance on partnership modalities and followed up on pledges made at the Global Refugee Forum in relation to meaningful participation.



20 operations reported a higher percentage of people of concern represented in leadership management structures. 2019 result: 29.



30 operations reported a higher percentage of host community members' expressions of support for the continued presence of people of concern. 2019 result: 24.



5,516 community groups supported globally across UNHCR operations. 2019 result: 4,235.

UNHCR continued to equip staff with relevant knowledge, skills and practical resources. Since its launch in September 2019, the community-based protection online course benefitted over 1,200 staff. To support

regionalization, UNHCR invested in building regional capacity to design and deliver training to community-based protection officers. In the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region, a tailored learning programme focusing on community-based protection in the context of COVID-19 was rolled out. UNHCR's global online community of practice was revamped and re-launched in 2020, with specific guidance and tools to address challenges related to COVID-19, facilitate peer learning, and identify and document [promising practices in the context of COVID-19](#).

Participatory approaches remained a critical component of UNHCR's age, gender and diversity (AGD) and community-based protection approaches; however COVID-19 physical distancing guidance limited humanitarian access and forced country operations to adapt their participatory methodologies. Successful examples emerged from a number of operations where digital solutions, working through refugee facilitators and diversifying participatory approaches for data collection proved successful. Globally, despite the challenges related to COVID-19, 289 UNHCR-led participatory assessments, inclusive of all people of concern, were reported across operations in 2020, compared to 510 in 2019.

Operational highlights

As part of the larger community structures that UNHCR invested in setting up in Doro refugee camp in South Sudan, representatives from the camp's [youth committee](#) ensured that key information on COVID-19, including good hygiene practices, was communicated and disseminated in each of the eight local dialects. Youth committee members composed eight songs on COVID-19 in their local languages and visited one village after another, sensitizing refugee community members to the risks of COVID-19, and singing the translated version of the songs according to the dialect spoken

in each specific location. In total, the youth committee reached 4,899 community members (2,092 male and 2,807 female).

In Bangladesh, in the settlements of Cox's Bazar, UNHCR's community group programme was expanded to 30 settlements with 150 community groups, comprising over 3,490 volunteers, including 35 female youth groups with 630 active members, disseminating accurate information on COVID-19 prevention. These groups collectively identified and prioritized the needs of their communities, and in response, designed and implemented close to 5,860 service projects, focusing on raising awareness on COVID-19, protection risks, improving infrastructure, disaster risk reduction, and promoting meaningful participation. UNHCR also trained these community volunteers on various issues, including disability inclusion, conflict resolution, community engagement, gender equality, leadership and interpersonal communication. In total, this network conducted 82,635 outreach sessions, reaching 439,200 refugees, covering health, hygiene, COVID-19 prevention and response,

emergency preparedness, and a range of general protection issues.

Challenges and unmet needs

Effective community-based protection requires proximity, regular interactions with communities, time, resources and constant innovation to adapt to rapidly changing contexts. COVID-19 restrictions resulted in limited humanitarian access to affected communities while scarce resources were shifted to address other priorities resulting from interruptions in community-based and gender equality interventions, as well as peaceful-coexistence programming. Social distancing hindered the ability of communities to come together to discuss their needs and work jointly to address them. Where such limitations prevailed, UNHCR invested in innovative outreach and communication, including with those it had limited or no direct contact with. However, additional investments in community-based protection are needed to better support community-based and refugee-led organizations who are standing up in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.



289 participatory assessments reported globally across UNHCR operations. 2019 result: 510.



10 operations reported progress in the disaggregation of data by age, sex and diversity. 2019 result: 28.



SPOTLIGHT: Strengthening peaceful coexistence between communities

The COVID-19 pandemic imposed a strain on national services and severely impacted socioeconomic conditions for host and displaced communities alike. This resulted in increased tensions among displaced and host communities, particularly in areas where resources and livelihoods were already scarce. On the other hand, the pandemic also prompted the emergence of many community-based initiatives in support of those most impacted by the pandemic from both communities. In an effort to support these peaceful coexistence initiatives, UNHCR worked closely with States, local authorities, and community structures to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 through a community-based approach. UNHCR supported communities in identifying issues that were the source of conflict and tension, and implementing social, cultural and livelihoods programming for displaced and host communities alike.

UNHCR also invested in national infrastructure and services for both host and displaced communities. In Nigeria, UNHCR supported the construction and renovation of disease control and primary health facilities, medical staff accommodation quarters, and COVID-19 testing and isolation centres. These projects benefited both the Cameroonian refugees and the local communities hosting them in urban areas and settlements as well as rural areas.

In Tanganyika in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in response to increasing tension linked to competition over basic social services and resources, UNHCR organized 583 awareness-raising sessions on peace and peaceful coexistence. Activities were carried out through 380 focus groups, 36 open sessions, 34 participatory theatre sessions and 133 door-to-door campaigns. In total, 24,372 individuals were reached through face-to-face sessions and messages on peace and peaceful cohabitation were recorded in the form of spots (1,432) and broadcasted on partner community radio stations in the territories of Kalemie, Manono, Moba, Nynzu and Pweto, reaching an estimated population of around 738,803 listeners.



Accountability to affected people

© UNHCR/Eugene Sibomana

A Burundian refugee mother and child prepare to board a bus in the Rwandan border town of Nemba to return home after living in Mahama camp since 2015.

Global Strategic Priorities
International protection
See p. 15 for GSP result



Results and achievements

Open and transparent two-way communication and access to information are key to ensuring the participation of people of concern and UNHCR's accountability to affected people; this was never more apparent than in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Despite movement restrictions and limited access to affected communities, UNHCR had to ensure that consistent, trusted and accessible information on the pandemic was made available to people of concern. It also had to ensure continued access to trusted feedback and complaint mechanisms so that programmes and interventions could be adapted to ensure everyone, regardless of their age, gender, disability, race, religion, sexual orientation and/or gender identity, could safely access services and opportunities on an equal footing.

To help operations ensure accountability to affected people, UNHCR produced

[guidance on risk communication and community engagement](#) at the onset of the pandemic; [guidance](#) on how to establish WhatsApp and other instant messaging trees; the accountability to affected people (AAP) [operational guidance](#); the senior managers' compact guide on AAP, and a [guide for using social media](#) in community-based protection. UNHCR continued to co-chair the IASC Results Group 2 on Accountability and Inclusion to support coordination and collaboration on AAP in humanitarian responses and co-chaired a sub-group in the Global Collective Service for Risk Communication and Community Engagement focused on refugees, migrants and IDPs. As a result of this engagement, [inter-agency guidance](#) was produced and UNHCR organized four global webinars to disseminate best practice on risk communication and community engagement. In addition, UNHCR engaged with community-led organizations and partners to maintain

channels of two-way communication, using new technological approaches.

A number of country offices for instance turned to messaging apps to keep refugee communication channels open during times of physical distancing. These provided critical life-saving information, linked people of concern to online services, and created spaces for feedback and referral to other service providers. UNHCR worked across operations to build on existing initiatives and trial a more systematic and scalable approach for engaging communities on WhatsApp through a pilot project covering four countries, beginning in Ecuador.

In Ecuador, UNHCR launched the first of these WhatsApp pilot projects, using a communication channel trusted by many in the community. The pilot allowed people of concern to access information on COVID-19 and enabled them to share information with UNHCR and partners, such as reporting incidents of violence or abuse. UNHCR ensured a human-centred design approach, engaging with communities to test features and functionalities as the pilot moved forward. In Ecuador, during the initial three-month trial phase, over 200,000 messages were sent between UNHCR, partners and around 12,000 users.

UNHCR proactively sought ways to keep two-way communication channels open despite lockdowns and physical distancing requirements. In Jordan, Morocco, and South Africa, it conducted online focus group discussions to listen to the needs and priorities of people of

concern and provide feedback on adaptive arrangements. In Kenya, the UNHCR-supported call centre became a trusted source of information about the COVID-19 pandemic. In Lebanon, WhatsApp communication trees allowed information to be provided and shared between UNHCR and people of concern.

Challenges and unmet needs

While face-to-face communication and traditional channels like radio remain important, people of concern's preferences are diversifying to include increased use of multi-channel contact centres, digital platforms and social media channels. The pandemic amplified this trend and UNHCR's response has shone a bright light on the Office's innovative work to ensure that UNHCR remains accountable to people of concern. It has also highlighted challenging areas in UNHCR's response.

For instance, despite the adoption of new communication channels to share information and/or to receive and provide feedback, UNHCR needed to ensure that opportunities were securely, systematically and sustainably leveraged, without deprioritizing traditional face-to-face channels. For example, the increasing adoption of social media as a communication channel was not without its challenges: the variety and velocity of information being shared, and the expectations for an "immediate response", strained existing operational resources at all levels and exposed policy and expertise gaps.



Child protection, youth engagement and empowerment

© UNHCR/Lilly Carlisle

A Syrian refugee and community volunteer plays football with refugee and Jordanian children in his neighbourhood in Karak, Jordan.

Global Strategic Priorities
Best interests assessments
Access to national child services
See p. 13 for GSP result



45,974 best interests assessments conducted.
Target: 48,451.
2019 result: 56,091*



16.09 million refugees and IDPs accessed protection services, including gender-based violence and child protection services.

Results and achievements

Children make up 31% of the world population but 40% of IDPs and 50% of refugees. COVID-19 restricted education and youth opportunities while increasing poverty, isolation and violence against children. The most common child protection issues in 2020 were related to unaccompanied and separated children, lack or loss of birth certificates, abuse or violence outside home or school, child labour, child marriage, access to birth registration, and non-child-friendly asylum procedures. UNHCR focused on strengthening access to child protection systems, providing best interests and child-friendly refugee procedures, supporting families and communities, and providing opportunities for youth engagement and empowerment.

Progress was made on the inclusion of refugees in national child protection systems in Greece, Mexico and elsewhere. A UNHCR-UNICEF [“Blueprint for joint action: A fair deal for refugee children”](#) elaborated a holistic strategy to ensure no child was left behind. 11 operations developed plans for including refugee children in national child protection

systems, scaling up best interests procedures, registering births, and strengthening community-based protection, mental health and psychosocial support.

Despite UNHCR’s work to improve access to and quality of child-friendly procedures, there were 18% fewer best interests assessments in 2020 but more children at risk, unaccompanied or separated, and COVID-19 restrictions made it harder to identify and help them. Many operations introduced remote case management, pressed for child protection case managers and social services to be considered essential staff, and worked with community outreach workers, volunteers and health professionals to strengthen identification and referral. Community-based child protection mechanisms such as youth clubs, child protection committees and adolescent and children’s groups grew to 97, from 87 in 2019, with many moving online. Challenges included insufficient qualified child protection staff, limited access to basic services, and limited access to community-based programmes.

A new regional approach, “Raising UNHCR capacities for youth”, focused on strengthening youth programming and

engagement and nurturing youth as active agents of change. It built upon experience from UNHCR’s Youth Initiative Fund and the Global Youth Advisory Council, whose members were active in online advocacy and pandemic response events. Eight UNHCR operations developed youth initiatives after training on a new comprehensive youth engagement package.

UNHCR strengthened information management and data analysis for child protection, publishing child protection funding analysis in the inter-agency [“Still unprotected”](#) report. UNHCR’s child protection module in proGres v4 was used in 61 settings for over 8,000 children at risk.

Operational highlights

In India, UNHCR’s child-friendly COVID-19 information guided parents and helped manage children’s anxiety. UNHCR and partners scaled up a child helpline and referral to remote best interests procedures. Over 9,000 parents, caregivers and children benefited from communication material and online dialogue on child protection issues, including e-safety and online abuse.

In Ethiopia, UNHCR increased staffing and enhanced case management and scaled up family-like care arrangements for unaccompanied and separated children. Before the pandemic, UNHCR and partners had identified additional foster families and increased the child protection workforce to bolster quality case management. Incentives paid to foster families, unchanged in five years, rose after a market assessment. Only 300 unaccompanied or separated children remained in community care when armed conflict broke out in November, a reduction of over 85% within a year and the fewest since community care began in 2010. UNHCR prioritized cash assistance for unaccompanied and separated children in family-based care

and shelter repairs for those in community care centres. Most importantly, it enhanced the capacity of guardians and receiving families, crucial when the conflict blocked humanitarian assistance.

Challenges and unmet needs

A multi-year analysis found the most frequent child protection challenges were government policies and/or capacities, funding, partner capacity, awareness among people of concern about child protection issues and services, and UNHCR staff capacity. Systematic underfunding of child protection, which is on average 47% funded compared to 67% for global humanitarian appeals, worsened in the pandemic. A survey of over 100 UNHCR and partner staff working on inter-agency child protection mechanisms picked funding as the top challenge in refugee settings, followed by shortages of child protection actors and technical capacity, low visibility of the child protection response, limited capacity to scale up and absorb funding, and lack of humanitarian access. No youth-disaggregated data exists across humanitarian agencies, including UNHCR. Nor is there a system to systematically track progress and ensure accountability for the implementation of the “Core actions for refugee youth”.



25 operations increased the proportion of unaccompanied or separated refugee children for whom a Best Interests Procedure was completed or initiated. Target: 30. 2019 result: 25.



15 operations in which non-discriminatory access to national child protection and social services for refugee children was improved. 2019 result: 18.

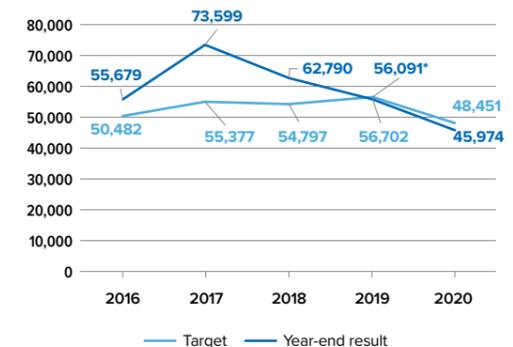


531 youth-led initiatives supported under UNHCR’s Youth Initiative Fund. Target: 700. 2019 result: 551.



30 children’s committees, groups and other structures supported. Target: 30. 2019 result: 18.

NUMBER OF BEST INTERESTS ASSESSMENTS CONDUCTED | 2016-2020



*Data addition included since the previous Global Report reporting cut-off date (55,769 Best Interests assessments reported in Global Report 2019).



Gender equality

© UNHCR/Jaime Giménez

A Venezuelan refugee participates in the painting of a mural organized by UNHCR in Carcelén, north of Quito, Ecuador to promote women's rights and peaceful coexistence between refugees and host communities.

Global Strategic Priorities
 Female participation in leadership and management International protection
 See p. 14 for GSP result



48 situations reporting on UNHCR's global strategic priority indicator for female participation had either improved or maintained the percentage of female participants in leadership and management structures. 2019 result: **56**.

Results and achievements

UNHCR is committed to the equal and meaningful participation of women and girls in decision-making processes, community management and leadership structures, in both emergency and protracted displacement situations. In the context of lockdowns and social distancing, collaboration with community-based women's organizations was reinforced to support remote service delivery, while promoting women's leadership. UNHCR developed guidelines for outreach volunteers to continue awareness-raising activities with telecommunication and social media platforms. In Pakistan, UNHCR collaborated with female outreach volunteers, community mobilizers and gender support groups to enhance access to information on COVID-19 preventive measures, including addressing social stigma and providing psychosocial support.

Women and women-led organizations played a crucial role in the mitigation of the COVID-19 crisis. UNHCR strengthened community-based self-management structures and empowered women with

leadership skills to actively participate in decision-making. Empowered women and girls' committees fostered participation and actively searched for solutions to reduce gender discrimination. Key messages on gender equality were amplified through mobile networks while community-based complaints mechanisms to report sexual exploitation and abuse were strengthened through peer counselling. In the Central African Republic, a radio communication strategy was developed with women returnee community leaders to conduct sensitization on COVID-19, gender-based violence risks and services, and gender equality.

In Chad, India, Nigeria and Uganda, UNHCR and partners focused on women and girls' self-determination and the full exercise of their rights to ensure equal and meaningful participation in decision-making processes. Stronger participation of women and girls in leadership and management structures was achieved in IDP operations in Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Myanmar, South Sudan and Yemen.

UNHCR released its [Gender Equality Toolkit](#) in 2020 and provided operational support towards the institutionalization of gender equality and women's empowerment initiatives. Thanks to an adapted virtual gender equality learning programme, staff in UNHCR's Asia and the Pacific bureau honed technical skills to identify and address gender gaps. To facilitate cross-operational learning and seize opportunities to advance gender equality, UNHCR and partners documented [emerging and promising practices in sub-Saharan Africa](#).

UNHCR also continued to promote and advocate for gender equality in humanitarian action by building on initiatives such as gender audits of global processes around the Global Refugee Forum and the Global Compact on Refugees, becoming a board member of the Compact on Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action. A core action outcome of the "[2020 UNHCR Policy on the prevention of, risk mitigation, and response to gender-based violence](#)" is preventing gender-based violence by addressing gender inequality, discrimination and unequal power relations.

Operational highlights

The highest percentage of women's participation in community leadership structures was achieved in the operations in Cameroon (49%), Rwanda (50.9%) and the United Republic of Tanzania (49.3%). In Cameroon, women were trained by UNHCR and partners in prevention and response to gender-based violence, child protection and services for persons at heightened risk. In Rwanda, women refugee leaders strengthened their advocacy skills and created a forum to bolster their leadership within camp management structures. In the United Republic of Tanzania, elections were organized for vacant positions in three camps shortly after COVID-19 restrictions

were lifted, with UNHCR and partners successfully mobilizing women, including those at heightened risk, to stand for election.

In Chad, UNHCR and partners engaged in emergency protection services during lockdowns. The closure of schools, workplaces and safe spaces for women and girls increased the risk of protection incidents, particularly against women and girls and young children. Ensuring equal or greater representation of female members in committees and focal points was crucial to support protection cases with referrals to relevant resources and protection services.

Challenges and unmet needs

Gender inequalities were exacerbated by COVID-19. Structural violence and discrimination based on gender put women's participation in decision-making and leadership bodies at risk. Refugee communities in Kenya and Indonesia could not achieve leadership gender parity because movement restrictions delayed representative elections. Elsewhere, the number of women participating decreased, dropping from 45% to 37% in Zambia. This reflects an established and known tendency: in the face of an emergency, women's participation in leadership structures tends to decrease.

Equal access to decision-making entities does not guarantee meaningful participation for disadvantaged groups. Operations reported a lower level of participation for women with a disability and for indigenous women. UNHCR will invest in paying more attention to overlapping vulnerabilities and ensuring an intersectional approach to its work with women and girls. Complementary measures such as positive masculinity-related initiatives for boys and men are also necessary to rebalance power relationships.

UNHCR's COMMITMENTS TO WOMEN AND GIRLS

1 Women and girls **participate equally** and meaningfully in all decision making, community management and leadership structures, and committees of people of concern.

2 Women and girls are provided with **individual registration and documentation**, directly or through support provided by UNHCR.

3 Women and girls have equal access to and control over management and provision of **food, core relief items, and cash assistance**.

4 Women and girls have equal access to **economic opportunities, decent work, and quality education and health services**.

5 Women and girls have access to comprehensive **gender-based violence prevention and response services**.



Protecting persons with disabilities and older persons

© UNHCR/Anil Usyan

An internally displaced woman weaves a carpet in Balkh Province, Afghanistan.



Results and achievements

36 operations reported progress in the percentage of older persons of concern who received services for their needs. 2019 result: 30.

An estimated 12 million persons with disabilities and 3.2 million older persons were among those forcibly displaced by persecution, violence and human rights violations.



51 operations reported progress in the percentage of people of concern with disabilities who received services for their needs. 2019 result: 49.

Despite the challenges of identifying persons with disabilities and older persons, made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic, UNHCR's operations provided targeted services for at least 55,672 adults with disabilities, 7,948 children with disabilities and 19,739 older persons. 3,749 households with adults and children with disabilities and 885 households with older persons received targeted cash assistance, COVID-19 prevention items, food packages, medication and disability-related items (including solar lotion for persons with albinism). UNHCR organized over 11,000 targeted home visits and almost 10,000 rehabilitation sessions respecting COVID-19 protective measures. Tele-counselling sessions were held to ensure continuity of services for

households with persons with disabilities, including protection, rehabilitation, access to assistive devices, and home-based education. In addition, at least 3,474 children with disabilities were helped to access education through financial support, adapted learning podcasts, WhatsApp channels, and home-based education.

In Zimbabwe, for instance, four female and three male pre-school refugee learners with a hearing impairment began sign language lessons. Women with disabilities received accessible information on gender-based violence prevention and response in the Americas, Kenya and Zimbabwe and training in business management and entrepreneurship in Djibouti. Over 1,100 shelter and water, hygiene and sanitation facilities were upgraded in Brazil, Ethiopia, Iraq, Jordan, Sudan and Zimbabwe to ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities. Following advocacy efforts from UNHCR, Cameroon and Tunisia provided disability cards to refugees and asylum-seekers,

guaranteeing their access to national protection systems and services for persons with disabilities.

In support of this continued operational disability inclusion work, UNHCR developed a baseline report on the [UN Disability Inclusion Strategy](#) accountability framework and a cross-divisional five-year action plan on disability inclusion to advance the rights of persons with disabilities across its workforce and operations. The action plan will be implemented in collaboration with the [International Disability Alliance](#) (IDA), a global network of organizations of persons with disabilities, through a new partnership developed in 2020. Three regional consultations were organized to ensure the active engagement of IDA's regional and board members and additional consultations and joint collaborations with organizations of persons with disabilities took place in Ecuador, Ethiopia, Mexico and Spain.

UNHCR also updated its [guidance](#) on working with older persons in forced displacement and developed [guidance](#) to enhance identification and registration of persons with disabilities and other data collection initiatives.

Operational highlights

Persons with disabilities and their representative organizations were actively engaged in the development of accessible materials and awareness sessions on COVID-19 and gender-based violence prevention and response, using visual storytelling, photos, banners and radio announcements and producing accessible videos in sign language.

In Ecuador, UNHCR adapted its information materials and communication channels to ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities, developing printed materials in braille as well as easy to read leaflets. Furthermore, UNHCR and the Latin American Network of

Non-Governmental Organizations of Persons with Disabilities and their Families ([RIADIS](#)) conducted a regional assessment on the situation of refugees and asylum-seekers with disabilities in the Americas.

In Ethiopia, UNHCR supported three organizations of persons with disabilities in Aw-barre, Shedder and Kebribeyah camps to conduct sensitization sessions on COVID-19 prevention and response and engage in income-generating activities.

Challenges and unmet needs

Beyond the disproportionately deadly effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on older persons and persons with disabilities, related job losses, school dropouts and rising poverty rates also had a greater impact. The disruption or closure of key services such as medical support for chronic conditions, rehabilitation services and access to assistive devices limited their autonomy and impacted their wellbeing. School closures and the increasing use of the digital space to access education and job opportunities, as well as basic information and services, increased the risk of exclusion of persons with disabilities and older persons living in refugee settings as evidenced by [previous research](#) conducted by UNHCR and partners. To respond to this reality, UNHCR launched a [call for proposals](#) to strengthen digital inclusion of refugees with disabilities as of 2021.

Protecting LGBTIQ+ persons in forced displacement

© UNHCR/Jaime Giménez

Venezuelan LGBTIQ+ refugees practise using UNHCR's new WhatsApp channel during a workshop in Quito, Ecuador.



Results and achievements

LGBTIQ+ persons continued to experience discrimination and abuse on a daily basis in 2020. This discrimination—often exacerbated by displacement and by age, gender, disability, race and other characteristics that intersect with sexual orientation and gender identity—was aggravated by the pandemic, with LGBTIQ+ persons often lacking access to information and basic support services. The psychological impact of isolation and the socioeconomic consequences of COVID-19 added to the already difficult reality for forcibly displaced LGBTIQ+ persons.

In response, UNHCR collaborated with LGBTIQ+ led organizations to reach out to LGBTIQ+ displaced persons and ensure their access to accurate information and feedback mechanisms. In Bangladesh, UNHCR partnered with organizations trusted by LGBTIQ+ communities to help LGBTIQ+ people living in Cox's Bazar safely access protection and health services. In Turkey, UNHCR partners

regularly reach out to LGBTIQ+ refugees and asylum-seekers, providing legal advice on their asylum applications, extend psychosocial support networks and conduct confidential referrals to vetted landlords, health care providers and targeted financial support mechanisms. Counsellors are also made available through phones, e-mail and SMS, ensuring regular access to accurate information and ways to raise concerns and obtain feedback.

To support meaningful inclusion of LGBTIQ+ displaced people in national systems, UNHCR engaged in coordination and advocacy with various stakeholders. In Europe, UNHCR worked with the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) to raise awareness on challenges facing LGBTIQ+ persons seeking asylum in Europe. In West and Central Africa, UNHCR and OHCHR worked with the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States to ensure the needs of LGBTIQ+ people of concern were included in the COVID-19 response.

UNHCR encouraged the participation of LGBTIQ+ persons in decision-making by creating safe and welcoming spaces and open dialogue with LGBTIQ+ groups. In Lebanon, an LGBTIQ+ youth group was created and provided peer-to-peer support, building life skills and greater access to protection assistance and solutions.

UNHCR organized a Training of Trainers and developed an online course on working with LGBTIQ+ persons in forced displacement. In Côte d'Ivoire, UNHCR trained authorities on working with asylum claims linked to sexual orientation and gender identity.

UNHCR also organized three regional and global consultations to map protection stakeholders, analyze gaps and identify promising practices. These consultations brought together stakeholders from the humanitarian and development sectors, civil society and LGBTIQ+ led organizations. The results will inform a global roundtable event on “Protection and solutions for LGBTIQ+ persons in forced displacement”, to be co-convened with OHCHR in the second half of 2021.

Operational highlights

In the Americas, UNHCR supported national and local NGOs to establish a regional network for the protection of LGBTIQ+ refugees, asylum-seekers and IDPs. Across the region, 152 support spaces offered by more than 17 organizations were set up along routes out of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and into Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. In these support spaces, LGBTIQ+ persons received information, orientation, wireless connectivity, psychological first aid, health assistance, safe access to water, sanitation and hygiene services, and found safe spaces for women and children.

In Ecuador, UNHCR supported LGBTIQ+ organizations and community groups. Fundación Equidad, a safe shelter and

community centre for LGBTIQ+ persons at risk, reached over 1,735 people with UNHCR financial and technical support. Together with Organización Diálogo Diverso, an organization supporting LGBTIQ+ rights, and in coordination with the local government, UNHCR strengthened institutional capacity to work with LGBTIQ+ people and to provide psychosocial assistance to LGBTIQ+ persons at risk.

Challenges and unmet needs

Despite significant progress, LGBTIQ+ persons of concern face violence and discrimination in many parts of the world and remain a largely under-identified population, with few targeted programmes and interventions. The pandemic exacerbated their protection needs and limited the ability of humanitarian actors to identify and refer them to existing services. UNHCR continued to invest in partnerships with LGBTIQ+ supported organizations and collaborated with them to establish safe and effective referral pathways; however building such partnerships with national and international actors requires further investment. Building the capacity of UNHCR staff, partners, service providers and asylum adjudicators in this area also requires significant investment. While identified LGBTIQ+ refugees most at risk are prioritized for refugee status determination and resettlement, shrinking resettlement opportunities means more effort must be dedicated to identifying alternatives, including complementary pathways and carefully crafted integration strategies. Lack of sustainable livelihoods for LGBTIQ+ people remains an obstacle.

3 regional consultations organized to better assess protection risks and priorities of LGBTIQ+ persons in forced displacement. 2019 results: 5.



21 UNHCR and partner staff benefited from the Training of Trainers learning programme “Working with LGBTIQ+ persons in forced displacement”. 2019 result: 50.