

A decade of crisis, a decade of opportunity



In the course of the last ten years, UNHCR has become in many respects a different organization, working in a quite different world.

As 2019 drew to a close, we reached the end of a decade in which forced displacement climbed to a record high. The number of people of concern to the Office rose from 36.4 million people in 2009 to over 86.5 million people at the end of 2019. The number of refugees under UNHCR's responsibility almost doubled, from 10.4 to 20.4 million, and internal displacement grew by more than 60% from 27.1 million people to 43.5 million.

Two of the biggest and most complex crises currently facing us did not exist in 2009. Then, the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria) hosted over one million refugees, the third highest number worldwide, most of whom were from Iraq. By the end of 2019, however, it had become the epicentre of the largest displacement crisis in decades, with nearly 15 million of its people—well over half of its pre-war population—displaced inside the country or abroad.

In December 2009, more than 300,000 refugees had recently returned home to southern Sudan as hopes for a peaceful and prosperous future grew after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005. A decade later, more than 2.2 million refugees have fled a brutal civil war, and some 1.67 million people are displaced within the world's newest country.

Crises persisted in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo,

Having fled Afghanistan 40 years ago, Abdul Rashid is a refugee in Pakistan. Now in his 70s, he sells qabli—an Afghan dish his family makes with rice, chicken, raisins and cumin—on the streets of Quetta.

and Somalia, and new or recurring crises in many other countries required large-scale emergency responses.

While the vast majority of refugees remained in regions of origin, responses to mixed movements, consisting of refugees and migrants on the move for different reasons, became more complex and politically charged, as was the case of the influx of more than a million refugees and migrants into Europe in 2015. The complexity of population flows deepened as climate change, weak governance, inequitable development, urban violence, organized crime and transnational extremist networks wreaked havoc and despair across communities and regions. As these fault-lines widened, the number of refugees continued to grow.

With few political solutions reached, voluntary repatriation benefited an average of just under 400,000 refugees per year. Resettlement as a solution declined. There was a net drop in refugees departing for resettlement, with some 86,200 refugees resettled in 2009, but only 63,726 in 2019, and this over a period during which the number of refugees doubled.

As the decade drew to a close, UNHCR was also stepping up its engagement with the over 43.5 million internally displaced people around the world. A new policy on internal displacement was issued in 2019, placing particular emphasis on protection leadership, solutions and aligning interventions with those of partners. Major IDP operations in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of

the Congo, Iraq, Syria, Ukraine, Yemen and the Lake Chad Basin remained among the Office's most politically and operationally complex, and represented important priorities.

The situation of stateless people also took on greater prominence, as UNHCR's ten-year #IBelong Campaign reached the half-way mark in 2019. UNHCR accelerated its work with States and other partners to eradicate statelessness, including through the High-Level Segment in October 2019, which resulted in some 360 pledges from 66 States, as well as from international and regional entities and civil society organizations.

Last but not least, by the end of the decade the climate emergency had taken on considerable prominence, and climate-related causes had become a growing driver of displacement. UNHCR stepped up its work to highlight in particular the protection gaps resulting from climate-driven cross-border displacement and helped steer the policy and normative debate. It also continued to work to help governments deliver an operational response to disaster-related displacement, guided by protection considerations. Further, in Bangladesh and elsewhere, UNHCR reduced the environmental impact of refugee crises through renewable energy options, reforestation, and the provision of clean fuels. Conscious of its own environmental impact, UNHCR worked to measure and reduce its carbon footprint.

In the course of the decade, it became clear that tackling the challenge of refugee crises and their complex root causes, called for a bigger and broader ambition than had been evident in the past. This vision shaped the Global Compact on Refugees, grounded in more equitable and

predictable burden- and responsibility-sharing by the international community, and led to the Global Refugee Forum in December 2019.

Through its burden- and responsibility-sharing arrangements, the Compact built on and accelerated many of the trends that had been emerging in the course of the decade—the growing involvement of the private sector; the drive for practical instruments to bridge the humanitarian-development divide, recognizing the impact of large refugee flows for development outcomes in hosting States; and a shift from camp-based assistance models that entrenched exclusion towards a more inclusive one based on building the resilience of both refugees and their hosts. The Compact is notable for its comprehensive approach that preserves the humanitarian imperative, but brings in peacebuilding, development action and private sector investment, seeks to leverage the Sustainable Development Goals, and draws on synergies with UN reforms.

In the East and Horn of Africa, for example, the regional application of the Comprehensive Refugee Response model by the Intergovernmental Authority for Development is helping strengthen asylum, access to rights, and refugee inclusion in health, education and national economies. In Latin America, too, a regional application has helped build a coherent response in a context of high mobility. Expertise and financing from the World Bank and other international financial institutions, bilateral development support and private sector investments are helping drive these achievements and so transforming the lives of refugees and refugee-hosting communities and providing models for the Compact's application elsewhere.



In Nyarugusu camp, in the United Republic of Tanzania, the High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi talks with an elderly Congolese refugee.

This decade of crisis and opportunity also called for changes in how UNHCR equipped itself to respond, with consequences for its budget, its presence around the world, and its staff and organizational culture.

It saw our needs-based budget increase from \$2.3 billion to \$8.6 billion. UNHCR received strong and steadfast support from its donors throughout the decade, and accelerated efforts to diversify its funding base in the spirit of responsibility-sharing and ensuring a stable platform for its work. Nowhere was this more notable than in the success of UNHCR's private sector fundraising, growing from \$50.7 million in 2009 to \$421.7 million in 2019. Overall funds available to UNHCR in 2019 reached \$4.8 billion; however, the gap between requirements and available resources remained at around 42% throughout the decade.

The number of regular staff increased from 6,000 to over 12,800, and by the end of 2019 the entire workforce exceeded 17,460, of whom 44% were female, and 90% of which was in the field. The number of countries and territories where UNHCR was present increased from 126 to 130. UNHCR's regionalization and decentralization process, undertaken in the course of 2019, brought greater authority and flexibility for country offices, front-loading support through bureaux located in their regions, as part of a wider transformation process. Risk management was strengthened across the Office, and systems and tools were reinforced for preventing and responding to misconduct, including sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment. These will remain important priorities in the coming years.

UNHCR also continued to invest in the quality of its work, improving and streamlining systems and processes, creating space

for innovation, and increasing efficiency, in line with its Grand Bargain commitments and as an active participant in broader UN reforms. A Joint Data Centre was established together with the World Bank and a new data transformation strategy was issued in 2019 to help inform and drive these efforts.

As the decade drew to a close, the Global Refugee Forum marked a pivotal moment. It was the largest-ever gathering on refugee matters, building on many months of consultations and bringing together over 3,000 participants from diverse backgrounds. It helped showcase what had been achieved through the application of the Comprehensive Refugee Response model and generated some 1,400 pledges across a broad range of areas. Some are already being operationalized, or will be very shortly, while others will take more time, requiring legislative changes, new instruments, or resources to support their implementation.

Looking ahead to the decade to come, I believe that in the Global Compact we have a powerful tool, born of a narrative of possibility and charting a measurable, practical way forward. I hope that the Compact, and the Global Refugee Forum, can provide a springboard for collective action, inspiring and driving our work over the next decade and beyond, and demonstrating in practical and concrete ways why international cooperation remains essential in addressing forced displacement and other shared global challenges, and how it can be made to work.

The Special Envoy



“A generation of Rohingya children are still without access to the education they deserve.”
The Special Envoy talks to refugees in Chakmarkul camp, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

UNHCR's Special Envoy, Angelina Jolie, continued her focus on major displacement situations and advocacy work for UNHCR throughout the year, carrying out field visits and other activities. Since joining in 2001, the Special Envoy has now conducted more than 65 field missions on behalf of UNHCR.

In early 2019, the Special Envoy visited Bangladesh for a three-day mission to assess the humanitarian needs of Rohingya refugees and some of the more critical challenges faced in Cox's Bazar, observing as well the humanitarian response led jointly by the Government of Bangladesh and UNHCR. This was not the Special Envoy's first mission to this crisis, having met with forcibly displaced Rohingya people during prior visits to Myanmar in 2015, and India in 2006.

She heard humbling testimony from Rohingya women, children and men who had endured lifetimes of persecution and discrimination, and urged continued support for those who have been displaced until such a time as refugees may return voluntarily, in safety and in dignity.

Focusing also on education, the Special Envoy appealed strongly for access to formal education for refugee children during her visit with the Prime Minister in Dhaka, subsequently raising the matter through an exchange of letters with the Government. Nearly a year later, Bangladesh announced steps to improve education programmes for Rohingya refugee children in the camps.

GLOBAL STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 2018-2019

The Global Strategic Priorities (GSPs) for the 2018-2019 biennium set out areas targeted by UNHCR to enhance protection for people of concern and identify solutions for them. The GSPs are divided into two categories: operational priorities for field operations and support and management priorities for core organizational functions. The operational priorities influence the development and implementation of country-level plans by field operations and take into account the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The support and management GSPs reflect UNHCR's 2017-2021 Strategic Directions, as well as commitments made at the World Humanitarian Summit and under the Grand Bargain. In line with the Global Compact on Refugees, UNHCR continued strengthening a broad range of partnerships within the humanitarian and development fields and the private sector.

UNHCR's operations collected and analysed programme implementation information and communicated progress and results through Focus, UNHCR's results-based management system, as well as through the organization's integrated refugee health information system.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Continued efforts across core GSP areas prompted significant improvements in several areas. At the end of 2019, 149 States were party to the 1951 Convention relating

to the Status of Refugees, its 1967 Protocol, or both. The first Global Refugee Forum encouraged many States to address refugee protection in a more comprehensive manner. UNHCR-led efforts to reinforce collaboration aimed at addressing internal displacement, including through the improvement of legislation and national policies in Ethiopia, Mali, the Philippines, Somalia and the Syrian Arab Republic. Angola acceded to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, while Colombia and Malta acceded to the 1954 Convention. This brought to 94 the number of States party to the 1954 Convention, and 74 States to the 1961 Convention. Furthermore, the Kyrgyz Republic became the first country to resolve all known cases of statelessness on its territory, having granted nationality to 13,700 stateless persons over the last five years.

UNHCR registered over 8.8 million refugees in its digital population registration and identity management ecosystem (PRIMES) and strengthened its identity management capacity to achieve a 38% expansion in coverage compared to 2018. Some 15,200 refugee housing units (RHUs) were deployed to 15 operations with 219,000 people of concern (including some 90,020 IDPs) living in them by year's end.

UNHCR supported new and ongoing emergencies, dispatching \$30 million-worth

of emergency core relief items from seven global stockpiles to 23 emergency-affected countries. Approximately \$650 million in cash assistance was distributed, an increase of 13% compared to 2018 and 50% compared to 2015. Of the cash provided by UNHCR, 95% was unrestricted in use.

UNHCR launched the "Refugee Education 2030" strategy, and supported the launch of the Tertiary Refugee Student Network, a global network of refugee students committed to enabling 15% of all refugee students to access higher education by 2030. Supporting community empowerment and self-reliance, UNHCR invested in the capacities and skills of people of concern. UNHCR expanded its MADE51 multi-stakeholder initiative to provide refugee artisans with access to international markets developing refugee-made product lines in 15 countries.

CHALLENGES

Throughout 2019, UNHCR staff and partners planned, budgeted, implemented and adjusted strategies tailored to their local context, applying those GSPs which were relevant, and reprioritizing in the face of unexpected developments. In some instances, reprioritization forced operations to address certain essential needs over others, due to limited availability of resources.

The main challenge, however, remained that of accommodating a comprehensive response within limited budgetary resources which, in 2019, left a 44% funding gap.

Limited resources resulted in cuts across the range of planned services and activities. They affected lifesaving assistance and support to meet basic needs, with cuts to food and nutritional assistance

and a rise in food insecurity in places such as Chad, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi and South Sudan. They also hampered progress achieved by both UNHCR and partners on the prevention of risk mitigation for and response to sexual and gender-based violence in emergencies and protracted situations, with challenges including lack of funding, limited access to justice for survivors, insecurity and limited and fragmented services in certain locations.

There were also constraints on UNHCR's work to promote solutions. In 2019, 63,726 refugees referred by UNHCR were resettled to 29 countries, a modest increase from 2018 which surpassed the target of 60,000 set out in UNHCR's Three-Year Strategy. Still, this represents less than 5% of the 1.4 million refugees estimated to be in need of resettlement. Although other durable solutions, such as local integration or repatriation had some successes, none of them kept pace with needs, and in only in very few situations did conditions allow for voluntary return in safety and dignity.

MORE INFORMATION

Detailed reporting on UNHCR's achievements and challenges across all GSP areas in 2019 can be found in the 2019 GSP Progress Report, which is available on the Thematic page of the Global Focus website.

UNHCR's Refugee Education 2030 Strategy



MADE51



The Three Year (2019-2021) Strategy on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways



Integrated Refugee Health Information System

