
**Executive Committee of the
High Commissioner's Programme**

Distr.: Restricted
16 March 2021
English
Original: English and French

Standing Committee
80th meeting

Global programmes, inclusion and resilience

Summary

This paper provides an overview of developments in UNHCR's programmes since the last update to the Committee in March 2020. It focuses on implementation in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and covers key areas such as: public health, shelter and settlement, environmental management and energy, cash assistance, education, food security and nutrition. Inclusion and resilience are underlining principles that guide UNHCR's approach in these areas.

Contents

<i>Chapter</i>		<i>Paragraphs</i>	<i>Page</i>
I.	Introduction	1-2	3
II.	Delivering global programmes in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic	3-14	3
III.	Ensuring inclusion and building resilience: update on global programmes in 2020	15-27	6

I. Introduction

1. In 2020, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic exacerbated existing humanitarian challenges across the world. With more than 85 per cent of the world's refugees hosted in low- and middle-income countries, COVID-19 intensified the existing vulnerabilities of persons of concern to UNHCR, while violence, persecution and civil strife continued to cause displacement. Amid these challenges, UNHCR continued to deliver its global programmes and ensured that its response was adapted to the pandemic, while firmly retaining the principles of self-reliance and inclusion at the core of its work.

2. This paper provides an update on how UNHCR adapted and delivered its global programmes in the context of COVID-19. It then illustrates the progress achieved in UNHCR's global programmes throughout 2020, emphasizing the impact on refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), stateless persons and returnees, in line with the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR).

II. Delivering global programmes in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic

3. Over the past year, UNHCR dedicated significant resources to COVID-19 preparedness and response. The challenges were substantial given that refugees and IDPs, in both camp and urban settings, often live in densely populated areas with inadequate housing, crowded living conditions, lack of access to clean water, and weak health infrastructure that compromises health outcomes and increases protection risks (including gender-based violence). This made refugees and IDPs particularly vulnerable to the virus. COVID-19 particularly impacted access to education, while the socioeconomic ramifications of the pandemic meant that the displaced often struggled to meet their basic needs and faced income losses. Thus, in 2020, UNHCR focused on mitigating the physical, economic and social effects of COVID-19.

4. To assess the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19, UNHCR worked with the World Bank, including through the World Bank-UNHCR Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement, and national governments to include forcibly displaced persons in phone surveys. Some 13 countries have either completed or are currently collecting data, and 8 additional countries will begin data collection in 2021¹. To date, the information gathered from the phone surveys has provided insight into the extent of the impact of the pandemic and its associated restrictions on forcibly displaced populations. In countries such as Ethiopia and Kenya, for instance, the widespread loss of income often led to reduced food intake. This work also highlights the importance of the Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement, which provides data and evidence to better inform programming, policy and advocacy.

5. With refugees and IDPs disproportionately affected by COVID-19, UNHCR rapidly delivered cash-based interventions to help stem the socioeconomic impact. In collaboration with governments and other partners, more than 65 UNHCR operations launched new cash initiatives or expanded existing cash programmes, reaching approximately 8.5 million vulnerable people in 2020. In Ecuador, UNHCR adapted its existing cash assistance programme, shifting its delivery mechanism from cash-in-hand to withdrawal from automated teller machines (ATMs) using PIN codes. Allowing users to withdraw money

¹ Countries that have completed or are in the advanced stages of completing the phone surveys are: Bangladesh, Costa Rica, Djibouti, Ecuador, Ethiopia, India, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Mexico, Morocco, Uganda and Yemen. The countries that plan to begin data collection in 2021 are: Burkina Faso, Chad, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ecuador, Niger, Peru and Rwanda.

from over 1200 ATMs in the country, with no need for a physical card, reduced direct interaction between people, while financial service providers closed. A post-distribution monitoring analysis conducted in 13 countries demonstrated that the majority of cash recipients were highly satisfied with the service provided.

6. Another priority for UNHCR was to enhance livelihood responses at the local, regional and global levels. UNHCR and partners provided support to more than 1.3 million individuals in households that were most vulnerable to or affected by COVID-19 in 85 countries. Prioritized interventions included support to protect productive assets, inputs and grants for business creation and recovery, and the facilitation of employment and agricultural activities. UNHCR provided skills training and reinforced partnerships to support evidence-based programming and advocate the inclusion of forcibly displaced people in government economic relief plans and social services. UNHCR's [MADE51](#) initiative, which brings refugee-made products to the global market, was expanded to 19 countries and involves 29 social businesses within a fair trade and protection framework. Furthermore, refugee-made masks, soap and personal protective equipment (PPE) were produced in over 15 countries using the MADE51 model, positioning refugees alongside local businesses to be part of the solution to the global health crisis.

7. To limit the major health risks presented by the pandemic, UNHCR's response included capacity-building activities for government and partner staff on surveillance, contact tracing and case management, and the provision of PPE, medicines, oxygen, rapid testing kits and other supplies. From March to September 2020, 380 metric tonnes of PPE and medical equipment were delivered to UNHCR operations worldwide, including 41.2 million masks, over 2,000 oxygen concentrators, 2.8 million gowns and 195 ventilators. National structures were supported in several countries, including the establishment and equipping of intensive care units in Bangladesh and Lebanon, as well as the creation of isolation and treatment units². In sub-Saharan Africa, UNHCR's partnership with the African Development Bank (AfDB) led to a \$ 20.5 million COVID-19 response project for the Sahel region.³ This project supported the primary health response and community resilience of vulnerable communities, including refugees and IDPs, and was approved by the AfDB Board of Directors, with UNHCR and the G5 Sahel Secretariat as implementing entities.

8. UNHCR advocated the inclusion of persons of concern in national COVID-19 vaccination strategies and vaccine orders. It engaged with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) partners; Gavi (the Vaccine Alliance); and the COVAX Facility on the establishment of a "humanitarian buffer"⁴. The buffer will serve as a last resort, providing up to 100 million doses for populations that have not been included in national orders. Another key priority for UNHCR was to ensure the continuation of care and health service provision to the displaced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Adaptations were made to ensure continued access to prenatal and postnatal care, the delivery of babies by skilled attendants, family planning, and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) prevention, treatment and related services.

9. Mental health and psychosocial support activities were supported as part of the COVID-19 response in 34 countries. Capacity-building for 239 primary health care workers was provided using the "[mental health Gap Action Programme \(mhGAP\)](#)" (developed by

² Countries where UNHCR supported the creation of isolation and treatment facilities for COVID-19 include: Algeria, Bangladesh, Brazil, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Greece, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Libya, Malawi, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Uganda and Yemen.

³ The project benefited persons of concern in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger.

⁴ Under COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX), the humanitarian buffer provides that around 5 per cent of the total number of available doses be kept aside to build a stockpile to help with acute outbreaks and to support humanitarian organizations, for example to vaccinate refugees who may not otherwise have access.

UNHCR and the World Health Organization) in Chad, Uganda and Zambia, and psychological interventions were introduced in Bangladesh, Greece, Iraq, Peru and the United Republic of Tanzania. Training in basic psychosocial skills was also conducted for health care and protection staff, refugee outreach volunteers, help-line staff and other front-line workers. In total, UNHCR and partners provided more than 550,000 people with mental health and psychosocial support services.

10. UNHCR supported a podcast under the [Humanitarian Education Accelerator programme](#) (funded by Education Cannot Wait) called “Colors of Kindness” an innovative mobile learning application invented by Ustad Mobile. This initiative aims to bridge the learning gap and provide psychosocial support to children and their families during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The application provides social and emotional learning-centred content that enhances well-being, and was designed to run on low-technology phones to reach the widest possible audience. In 2020, 95 per cent of refugee children were impacted by school closures, and COVID-19 drew attention to the benefits of inclusion in national systems. UNHCR assisted almost 1 million students in 36 countries to follow home-based learning approaches aimed at mitigating learning loss and protection risks. UNHCR worked with academic, government and civil society partners to ensure that tertiary-level refugee students were able to continue their education during the pandemic. Globally, tertiary-level refugee students responded proactively to the challenges posed by the pandemic, bringing their training and professional skills to bear where they were needed most.

11. UNHCR leveraged bilateral partnerships, such as with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, to pay teachers’ salaries and provide other incentives in 10 countries, guarding against teacher attrition and facilitating continued learning and community support. Parent-teacher collaboration in Chad enabled 4,000 Sudanese and national secondary school pupils to prepare for national exams. As a result, over 1,200 refugees (57 per cent of whom were girls) were able to take the baccalaureate national exam. While COVID-19 highlighted the digital divide, connected education initiatives (such as the Kolibri learning platform in Uganda), supported learning at home for some pupils. Adequate access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities were key to the safe re-opening of schools. During the latter months of 2020, there was a surge in enrolment and course completion rates on [Coursera for Refugees](#). Operational in 61 countries, this platform facilitates access to online courses from universities around the world.

12. Crowded living conditions, lack of access to adequate WASH services and energy deficiencies have amplified the consequences of the impact and varied quarantine approaches worldwide. UNHCR helped repair, upgrade and extend existing shelters to reduce density. Close to 1.8 million people were provided with emergency shelters and a further 500,000 with transitional shelters. Context-specific guidance was developed to support national emergency responses, particularly with the establishment of emergency hospitals, quarantine and isolation areas, and the expansion of medical facilities to create additional space for triage and testing. In 2020, more than 100 health care facilities and 95 schools were provided with additional WASH facilities. Over 50 million bars of soap, as well as hand sanitizer and disinfectant, were distributed to over 60 UNHCR operations, covering every region. Thousands of handwashing facilities were installed in public spaces, school buildings and health care facilities, and private accommodation.

13. Adaptations were also made to food assistance and nutrition programmes. This included simplified protocols for the admission of cases of malnourishment and the inclusion of COVID-19 mitigation measures in food distribution systems. At the community level, in-home screening for malnutrition was done to limit gatherings. Eight countries implemented mother-MUAC (mid-upper arm circumference) measures to refer malnourished children. In Chad, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Uganda and Zambia, radios and phones were used to deliver nutrition-related information.

14. In the context of internal displacement, the global shelter cluster (GSC) established a dedicated webpage and dashboard compiling shelter guidance from different countries and organizations. This included guidance on how shelter and settlement initiatives could help mitigate the spread of COVID-19. The GSC provided nearly 160 days of mission support to country-level clusters in Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Sudan and Turkey. In response to COVID-19, UNHCR's camp coordination and camp management (CCCM) unit developed "[Camp/site management interim operational guidance for COVID-19 readiness and response](#)" and delivered eight COVID-19-related CCCM webinars.

III. Ensuring inclusion and building resilience: update on global programmes in 2020

15. Ensuring that refugees are not left behind in a country's progress towards the United Nations sustainable development goals (SDGs) – by supporting inclusion in national development planning, educational systems, labour markets, health systems, social services and child protection programmes, among other measures – is a key element of the GCR. The economic, social and cultural inclusion of refugees also benefits host communities and supports the ability of both to meet their essential needs and enjoy their human rights. UNHCR worked to safeguard and expand the progress made towards self-reliance and inclusion, and helped ensure that health programmes remained responsive to the needs of persons of concern. Sustained advocacy for the inclusion of refugees in national health services proved effective.

16. In line with the SDGs and the specific focus on the reduction of maternal and newborn mortality, as well as access to modern contraceptive methods, UNHCR, with support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, implemented high-impact maternal and neonatal health interventions in Chad, Cameroon and the Niger. More than 8,300 mothers and their newborns were supported by the programme in the first nine months of 2020. UNHCR also worked to ensure that 90 per cent of births were attended by a skilled birth attendant.

17. A survey of 48 refugee-hosting countries conducted in 2020 found that 89.6 per cent of refugees living with HIV were able to access anti-retroviral treatment through national health systems. UNHCR supported HIV-related activities in more than 48 countries during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a co-sponsor of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), UNHCR worked with partners at the national, regional and global levels to scale up services available for adolescents, improve health and protection services for people who sell or exchange sex, and strengthen tuberculosis programming and linkages with HIV care. Advocacy with national governments and international donors made services more inclusive, increasingly giving refugees access to HIV services under the same conditions as nationals.

18. Beyond COVID-19, UNHCR continues to ensure that displaced populations can satisfy their basic needs and access essential services in the areas of housing, WASH and energy, while remaining mindful of the environmental impact of its interventions. UNHCR is in the process of reviewing the specifications of core relief items to improve their environmental sustainability. For example, improvements in the packaging of kitchen sets has helped reduce annual plastic and cardboard waste by 47 and 43 metric tonnes respectively per year.

19. To strengthen the Office's response to the growing challenges and protection concerns posed by the climate emergency, the High Commissioner appointed the first UNHCR Special Advisor on Climate Action. UNHCR is in the process of publishing a "Strategic framework on climate action" that emphasizes collaboration with a broad range of partners to achieve collective outcomes and impacts at scale. It sets the parameters for the organization's response to the climate emergency under three pillars of action: law and policy guidance, operational response and UNHCR's environmental footprint. The 2020 High

Commissioner’s Dialogue on Protection Challenges offered an opportunity for experts and affected populations to reflect on how lessons learned from COVID-19 could inform preparedness and response to the climate emergency. The Office is leading the development of an inter-agency predictive analytics project addressing the interconnected risks in the Sahel region and how climate change will affect the humanitarian, development, and peace and security sectors. UNHCR also signed a memorandum of understanding with the Platform on Disaster Displacement, strengthening the strategic partnership and supporting the implementation of the [Nansen Initiative protection agenda](#).

20. UNHCR remains committed to the use of cash assistance, in line with its [“Policy on cash-based interventions”](#). With respect to its “grand bargain” commitment to double the use of cash as a proportion of its assistance by 2020, UNHCR’s cash assistance now exceeds in-kind assistance. In 2020, UNHCR delivered just short of \$700 million to some 8.5 million people in 100 countries.

21. The financial and digital inclusion of refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR is a vital component of achieving protection, self-reliance and resilience. UNHCR has systematically promoted financial inclusion by seeking to deliver cash assistance through beneficiary-owned payment mechanisms, such as bank or mobile money accounts. The increase in digital payments of UNHCR’s cash assistance, now in 47 countries, provided a pathway to financial inclusion, with refugees accessing their own bank or mobile money accounts.

22. In IDP situations, as co-lead of the shelter and the CCCM clusters, UNHCR led 16 of the 30 active shelter clusters and 19 of the 37 coordination mechanisms, providing shelter and non-food items to over 8 million people.

23. UNHCR also co-led 17 of the 20 CCCM cluster and cluster-like mechanisms involving nearly 150 international and some 80 national partners, reaching 5.8 million IDPs in nearly 5,000 sites or camps. The CCCM cluster delivered capacity-building workshops remotely for eight UNHCR operations and provided virtual coordination and information management missions to the Sudan operation. The global CCCM cluster, through its Strategic Advisory Group and various working groups, produced a [CCCM paper on area-based approaches](#) and a publication on [camp management standards](#), and also established a Connectivity, Sustainability and Clean Energy in Displacement Working Group.

24. In follow up to the Global Refugee Forum, UNHCR and 15 partners established the Secondary Education Working Group, a platform to increase secondary school enrolment for refugee and crisis-affected children. A partnership with BMZ/GIZ of Germany and the International Labour Organization on enhancing access to technical and vocational education and training was established. In 2020, UNHCR and UNICEF launched an ambitious two-year [Blueprint for joint action for refugee children](#), focusing on the key areas of education, WASH and child protection. This initiative, which initially targeted 11 countries, aimed to advance inclusion through policy and advocacy work as well as measures to rapidly scale up delivery.

25. To strengthen refugee self-reliance and sustainable livelihoods, UNHCR, the World Bank’s Partnership for Economic Inclusion and 13 non-governmental organizations scaled up the “graduation approach”, a poverty alleviation model, through the Poverty Alleviation Coalition (PAC). A PAC fundraising workshop was organized to boost funding, particularly in view of rising poverty as a result of COVID-19. UNHCR established partnerships with 19 financial service providers (FSPs) in 12 countries to enhance financial inclusion as part of its livelihood activities. FSPs introduced flexible measures to support refugee borrowers, such as the restructuring or refinancing of loans and the promotion of digital services. UNHCR’s partnership with Kiva, a non-profit microfinance company, provided capital at zero-interest to over 17,000 refugee borrowers through Kiva’s microfinance crowdfunding platform. The financial inclusion programme, jointly launched by UNHCR, the Swedish

International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and the Grameen Crédit Agricole Foundation, continued to see results in Uganda. UNHCR and the United Nations Capital Development Fund published a joint study on remittances for forcibly displaced persons in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the framework of the joint financial inclusion initiative targeting nine countries in Africa. UNHCR worked with the International Labour Organization (ILO) on bridging the humanitarian-development nexus through the approach to inclusive market systems (AIMS) in forced displaced contexts, collaborating in Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Mali and Mozambique, among others. In line with the GRF pledge from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on promoting digital work in 22 countries, and in the framework of the joint UNDP-UNHCR action plan, UNHCR and UNDP are establishing a global working group on digital employment for refugees.

26. In 2020, the close partnership between UNHCR and the World Bank Group continued to focus on policy and programme development and implementation; data, evidence and analytics; knowledge management; and human resource development. By 30 June 2020, the \$2 billion under the International Development Association (IDA)18 sub-window for refugees and host communities had been allocated to 14 eligible countries in Africa and Asia, with 35 projects approved. As part of the IDA19 policy package for fragility, conflict and violence, a financial allocation of \$2.2 billion was allocated under the sub-window for refugees and host communities. In preparation, UNHCR worked closely with the World Bank on the development and rollout of a refugee policy review framework (RPRF) which aims to systematically analyse institutional environments affecting refugees in eligible countries. This will be key to informing the dialogue around the policies that can help advance the socio-economic development of refugee and host communities.

27. In 2020, greater collaboration with United Nations partners on nutrition and food security was realized. With a view to improving food security, UNHCR worked alongside the United Nations Children’s Fund, the World Food Programme (WFP), the Food and Agriculture Organization, and others to develop and launch the “[Global action plan on child wasting](#),” which advocates a multi-sectoral, multi-partner systems approach to move forward on the SDGs. Recognizing the importance of targeting assistance to those in need and of supporting refugee inclusion and self-reliance, a joint UNHCR-WFP “programme of excellence and targeting hub” was established. The hub will provide guidance on targeting assistance to meet basic needs and support joint programming for greater refugee protection and self-reliance. Based on country requests, the joint hub team provided support to UNHCR and WFP operations in Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Jordan, Mozambique, Rwanda and Zambia. UNHCR contributed data and analysis to include refugees in the 2020 edition of the “[Global report on food crises](#)” and continued efforts to jointly assess refugee food security with partners and improve country, regional and global analyses.
