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Update on global programmes**A. Introduction**

Addressing the challenges posed by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic remained a key focus of UNHCR's work throughout 2021. Within this context, UNHCR continued to implement its global programmes in the following areas: livelihoods and economic inclusion; education; food security; cash-based interventions; public health, including nutrition, mental health and psychosocial support; water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH); shelter and settlements; and energy and the environment. UNHCR also co-led the global shelter cluster and the global camp coordination and camp management (CCCM) cluster. This paper provides an update on the progress achieved in these areas in 2021.

B. Updates on technical sectors**Livelihood and economic inclusion**

A priority for UNHCR is to improve the livelihoods of displaced populations at local, regional and global levels. In 2021, UNHCR and partners provided assistance to refugee households that were particularly impacted by COVID-19. Prioritized interventions included support to protect productive assets, inputs and grants for business creation and recovery, and facilitation of access to employment, entrepreneurship and agricultural activities. The Office delivered skills training and enforced partnerships to promote development-oriented and evidence-based livelihood programming. At the same time, it continued to advocate the inclusion of the forcibly displaced in government economic relief plans and social services.

With the aim of advancing economic inclusion, UNHCR worked with financial service providers, advocating more support for refugees in the current challenging context. The Office strengthened its partnership with the non-profit organization Kiva, which has provided risk-tolerant funding to over 17,000 refugees since 2016 through 13 local partners, with a loan repayment rate of 96 per cent. The [MADE51](#) initiative was expanded to 30 countries, engaging 30 local social enterprises and creating employment for 2,700 refugee artisans worldwide. [The Poverty Alleviation Coalition](#) is active in 20 countries and, in collaboration with [13 non-governmental organizations \(NGOs\)](#), is supporting over 32,000 refugee, IDP, returnee and host households to become self-reliant using the "[graduation approach](#)".

Inclusion in national systems is a key strategy to address the needs of displaced populations in a more predictable manner and to promote their self-reliance. To this end, UNHCR worked with governments and development actors in fostering opportunities to include displaced populations in existing social protection programmes. For example, with funding from the World Bank's International Development Association (IDA 18 and 19), 14 projects are enhancing refugee access to social safety nets in low-income countries. Furthermore, additional funding has been channelled through the projects as part of the COVID-19 response and recovery efforts.

Education

Through Educate A Child, and with the support of the Education Above All Foundation, UNHCR increased access to primary education for displaced out-of-school children in 15 countries across the world.

The Office utilizes sport as a tool to promote school enrolment and retention among displaced youth and children. For example, as part of the “sport for protection” initiative, which was piloted in Chad, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda, a group of refugee youth and primary school teachers received training in child protection, human rights, and gender and disability inclusion. The second phase of the initiative will focus on sport activities in primary schools, with the aim of increasing school enrolment and retention, and enhancing protection.

To achieve the goal of increasing the enrolment of refugees in higher education to 15 per cent by 2030, UNHCR launched the “[aiming higher](#)” campaign in December 2020, which has so far raised \$3.7 million in funding for scholarships. Together with the Tertiary Refugee Student Network, the Office hosted the first meeting of the global tertiary education task team, as part of the GRF education alliance, in 2021. It also convened two webinars to strengthen collaboration among development and education teams across operations.

The Accelerated Education Working Group leveraged UNHCR’s expertise in accelerated learning initiatives. Guidance was provided in response to the COVID-19 pandemic for donors, implementers and education systems with a view to helping learners catch up when schools re-open.

Building on lessons learned from school closures related to COVID-19, UNHCR worked to increase the digital inclusion of refugees through connected learning initiatives. In Rwanda, it worked with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and other partners to provide broadband internet to public schools hosting refugees and implemented digital education programmes in nine schools. Moreover, 20 “instant network schools” were established in Egypt and Mozambique to bring digital education to refugee communities.

Food security

In 2021, UNHCR increased its engagement in inter-agency coordination efforts on global nutrition and food security. It advocated the inclusion of forcibly displaced populations in country action plans to address child wasting, the 2020 “[Global Report on Food Crisis](#)” and the preparation process for the upcoming [United Nations Food System Summit](#).

To improve food security and protection outcomes for refugees, UNHCR expanded operational collaboration with the World Food Programme (WFP) at country and global levels, including through the Joint Programme Excellence and Targeting Hub. Based on country requests, the hub provided technical and programmatic support to Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Jordan, Mauritania, Mozambique, Rwanda, Uganda and Zambia to assess needs and vulnerabilities; design protection-sensitive strategies for targeting and prioritizing assistance to meet food and other basic needs; and develop joint plans for greater refugee self-reliance. Persistent gaps in funding for food and other basic assistance remained a key challenge, significantly affecting the ability of refugees to meet their basic needs and increasing protection risks.

Cash-based interventions

At the end of 2020, UNHCR’s five-year “[Strategy for the institutionalisation of cash-based interventions](#)” came to an end. Between 2016 and 2020, UNHCR delivered some \$3 billion in cash assistance to 25 million persons of concern in 100 countries, achieving its “grand bargain” commitment to double the proportion of its assistance provided through cash by 2020. Cash assistance now exceeds in-kind assistance. In 2020, despite the challenges of face-to-face transactions due to COVID-19, UNHCR distributed \$695 million to 8.5 million persons of concern. The majority of cash assistance (95 per cent) was disbursed without restrictions, allowing recipients to determine how best to meet their needs.

Persons of concern to UNHCR are now able to access bank accounts and use mobile money or other digital payment solutions in 47 countries, an endeavour which is integral to their

financial inclusion. UNHCR further harmonized its approach with partners, providing cash assistance through collaborative approaches, in line with the [United Nations common cash statement](#). In line with its results-based management approach, the Office rolled out the redesigned post-distribution monitoring tool with extended coverage and CashAssist (UNHCR's cash assistance management system).

UNHCR will launch a new five-year (2021-2026) policy on cash-based interventions, with the aim of strengthening the use of cash as a key modality for delivering assistance, services and protection across operations worldwide. In 2021, UNHCR will work to strengthen cash coordination by supporting governments in taking a leading role in coordinating the cash assistance response and collaborating with local actors on sustainable arrangements. In refugee settings, UNHCR will support governments to ensure that appropriate, collaborative and efficient country-based mechanisms, such as cash working groups, are put in place to optimize the delivery of cash assistance.

Public health (including nutrition, mental health and psychosocial support)

UNHCR remained focused on advocating for the inclusion of refugees in national COVID-19 response plans. The Office supported national health systems including by procuring personal protective and respiratory equipment, COVID-19 tests and medication, as well as by increasing intensive care capacity, for example in Bangladesh and Lebanon.

At the onset of the pandemic, movement restrictions, combined with a fear of COVID-19 infection, significantly affected refugee access to and use of health facilities. Nevertheless, measures were undertaken to ensure continued and safe access to essential services. As COVID-19 restrictions have been eased, access to and the use of health services have returned to normal. UNHCR worked to reduce crowding in clinics, employs alternative modalities to deliver services (such as remote follow-up) and keeps refugee communities informed. Concerted efforts are needed to ensure the continuity of maternal and neonatal health services, as well as mental health and psychosocial support services, in the context of COVID-19. In February 2021, UNHCR [provided guidance](#) to its operations on strengthening the integration of mental health and psychosocial support in programming for refugees.

Acute malnutrition remains a significant health problem in many displacement situations. Considering movement restrictions related to the pandemic, UNHCR and partners adapted the delivery of nutritional programmes to ensure the continuity of assistance to persons of concern, while adhering to COVID-19 mitigation measures. To maintain therapeutic and supplementary feeding programmes – which help fill nutritional gaps experienced by children, women and others with specific nutritional needs, including those living with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and tuberculosis – UNHCR pre-positioned supplies to ensure the provision of rations for a longer period and to reduce the frequency of visits to clinics. The Office also increased the number of distribution days to reduce crowding. In a number of countries, including Chad and Rwanda, UNHCR provided counselling through radio and by telephone on recommended feeding practices for infants and young children.

In April 2020, the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility was launched to ensure equitable vaccine distribution worldwide. UNHCR monitored the inclusion of refugees and asylum-seekers in COVID-19 vaccination and roll-out plans across 162 countries. As of June 2021, 123 out of 126 countries with a refugee population of more than 500 people had either included refugees in their vaccination plans or provided assurances that they would do so. This is also the case for asylum-seekers in 93 out of 96 countries. Overall, refugees and asylum-seekers have begun receiving COVID-19 vaccinations in 91 out of the 162 countries monitored. UNHCR will continue to work with States to ensure that at least 20 per cent of refugees and asylum-seekers are vaccinated by the end of 2021, in line with the global target set by the COVAX Facility.

Energy, Environment, Shelter and WASH

Together with the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation, UNHCR launched the Geneva Technical Hub in June 2021 with the aim of helping reduce the environmental impact of humanitarian action. It brings together Swiss academics and expert practitioners

to tackle technical challenges in the areas of disaster risk reduction, energy, settlement planning and WASH, and to devise solutions adapted to operational contexts. The hub will serve as a valuable resource for UNHCR, providing not only technical guidance but capacity-building.

Guided by its “[Strategic framework for climate action](#)”, UNHCR focused on mitigating environmental degradation in displacement settings and ensuring the sustainability of its response. To this end, an [overview](#) of shelter and sustainability in settlements across UNHCR operations was published in April 2021 with the aim of helping humanitarian actors and host governments evaluate shelter solutions from a technical, cultural and environmental perspective and in a context-specific manner. Building on this, UNHCR is developing a tool to review shelter designs, assess the life-cycle of materials and help identify possible strategies for increasing their sustainability. Together with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), UNHCR launched a research and development project to reduce the plastic content of tarpaulins and extend their lifespan, with a view to reducing overall waste.

In the context of COVID-19, UNHCR implemented multisectoral and comprehensive WASH preparedness and response measures. This included increasing hand-washing facilities in high-risk public places, communicating culturally appropriate messages to promote safe hygiene practices, and distributing cash assistance and hygiene supplies. UNHCR will continue to strengthen and adapt WASH services in residential areas, health care facilities and schools.

Over the past decade, UNHCR has changed the energy source of more than 165 water pumps from diesel to solar. Nonetheless, hundreds of large water boreholes continue to run on diesel power, which negatively impacts the environment and has high operating costs. Through Project Flow, which was launched in 2021, UNHCR will change the energy source of 100-160 water boreholes that serve between 500,000 and 800,000 refugees from diesel to solar by 2030. In addition to strengthening WASH infrastructure for refugees and host communities, switching the boreholes to solar power will help cut an estimated 180,000 tons in CO2 emissions.

Shelter cluster

UNHCR leads 16 of the 30 shelter clusters and 19 of the 37 other types of shelter coordination mechanisms, of which only one was newly activated in 2020 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Through the clusters, shelter and core relief items were provided to some 12.8 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in collaboration with over 530 partners. This represents 83 per cent of all IDPs assisted by shelter clusters worldwide. In addition, some 2.3 million people were reached with shelter assistance in the context of the COVID-19 response. The total budget requirement for the shelter clusters amounted to \$1.3 million, of which 43 per cent was received (\$582 million), leaving more than 57 per cent of the needs unmet.

Despite challenges related to the COVID-19 situation in 2020, the global shelter cluster provided 132 days of mission support to country-level clusters in Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Syrian Arab Republic and Sudan, as well as 274 days of remote support. In the context of COVID-19, it also provided over 80 days of support to help countries adapt their shelter response and made shelter-related resources available from different organizations in multiple languages through an online [library](#).

Camp coordination and camp management (CCCM) cluster

UNHCR supported 10 country-level camp coordination and camp management (CCCM) clusters and nine cluster-like structures in 2020, providing assistance to over 5.8 million IDPs. The global CCCM cluster support team organized eight webinars on COVID-19 prevention and response for country clusters, involving practitioners and other relevant stakeholders from around the world.

UNHCR delivered virtual capacity-building workshops on CCCM for operations in Brazil, Cameroon, Chad, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, Mexico, Pakistan and Yemen. Support was provided to the Sudan operation to establish a COVID-

19 coordination task force for IDP camps and conduct a survey on gaps in preparedness measures and services.

Regular consultations with stakeholders were held to advance strategies for improving CCCM activities in Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Iraq, Mozambique, Myanmar, Somalia and Sudan including through scaling up staffing, resource mobilization, advocacy, capacity-building, coordination and operational support missions.
