

2020 Impact Report



Looking back at what you,
our valued supporters,
helped to make possible

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Who we are UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, protects people forced to flee their homes because of conflict and persecution.	What we do We are in the field in over 130 countries, saving lives, protecting rights and helping build better futures.	Why we matter Every year, millions of children, women and men are forced to flee their homes. We are the world's leading organisation dedicated to supporting them.
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Introduction

2020 was an extraordinary – and extraordinarily challenging – year.

The outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic turned our lives upside down. This crisis changed everything, for all of us. Our daily routines had to change. Many could no longer work, children could no longer go to school, we had to stay isolated. We found ourselves in a state of the unknown, living with unprecedented uncertainty.

This pandemic has affected everyone. But few have been more affected than the 80 million individuals worldwide who have been driven from their homes by conflict and persecution.

Confronted with their suffering, you responded with compassion.

Every gift you gave helped to save lives, protect human rights and build a better future for refugees, the displaced, and the stateless. Your support meant that UNHCR could reach more children, women and men in need, at a time when the world's forcibly displaced population is at a record high.

Our work would not be possible without the generosity and compassion of people like you.

This report showcases the **lasting impact that we made, together**, in the lives of the world's most vulnerable people at their hour of greatest need.

From all of us at UNHCR, thank you.

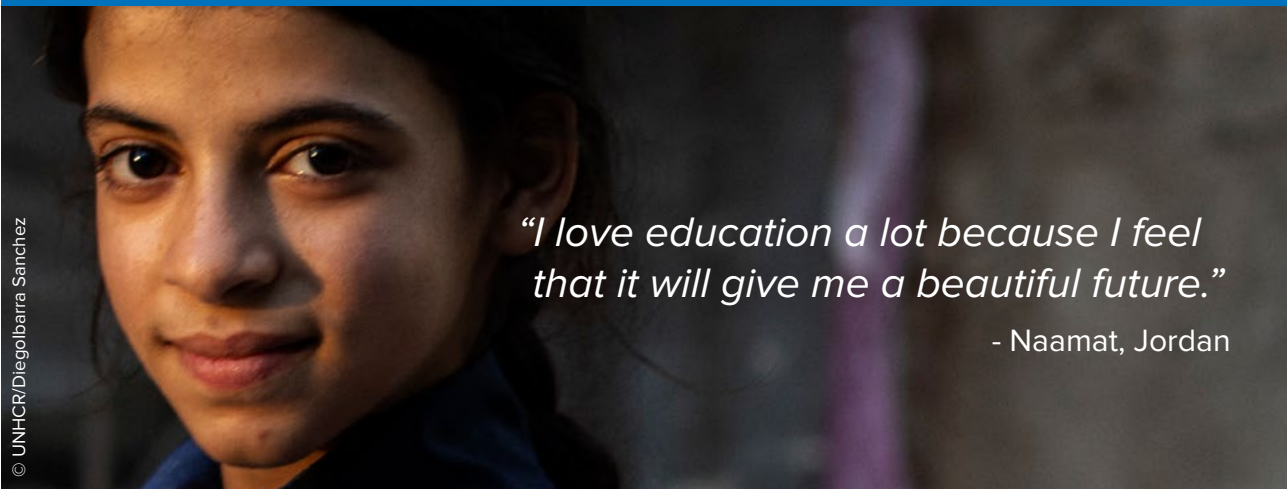


*“I’m not worried about the rains now.
We are at peace.”*

- Rahima, Bangladesh (p.18)

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Meet some of the people
whose lives were transformed
last year – **thanks to support
from people like you.**



*“I love education a lot because I feel
that it will give me a beautiful future.”*

- Naamat, Jordan

© UNHCR/Diegolbarra Sanchez



“I feel like we have been reborn.”

- Samer, relocated to Spain

© UNHCR/Mark Henley



A message from our High Commissioner

For 70 years, UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, has been on the frontlines of every displacement crisis – yet 2020 was a year unlike any other. The coronavirus exposed the fragility of our health and livelihoods, while magnifying the already acute vulnerabilities refugees and the displaced face around the world.

But the pandemic has also exposed remarkable resilience. The resilience of the people we serve, who continue to endure life-threatening journeys in search of safety. The resilience of UNHCR's global team, which stayed and delivered. And the resilience of our supporters – you – who have remained by our side throughout this global crisis.

As an organisation almost entirely funded by voluntary contributions, we simply cannot save lives without your help. I want to thank you for your continued support.

Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees

2020 – a year like no other



January

Violence in Sudan's West Darfur displaces tens of thousands

In Sudan's West Darfur State, clashes displace 46,000 people inside the country, and another 11,000 people flee as refugees into neighbouring Chad. With you by our side, UNHCR starts the year by responding to the needs of tens of thousands of Sudanese people forced from their homes by violence.



February

Conflict escalates in northwest Syria

Fighting escalates in Syria's Idlib province, leaving close to a million people displaced and in critical need of shelter during the coldest months of the year. As settlements of internally displaced people become overcrowded and space in houses, mosques and schools grows scarce, we help shelter families – but as the conflict in Syria entered its tenth year, many families have already had to flee several times.



March

COVID-19 – a threat that does not discriminate

A new coronavirus spreads around the world, prompting the World Health Organization to declare a pandemic. During the course of the year, COVID-19 changes life for us all. The virus can affect anyone, but the global crisis has an especially severe impact on people forced to flee their homes. They mostly live in developing countries with weak health and water and sanitation systems. Furthermore, restrictions on travel, work and school threaten their most basic survival. For most of them, COVID-19 is an emergency on top of other emergencies. With your support, UNHCR jumps into action, scaling up health, water, sanitation and hygiene services to keep vulnerable people safe.

By donating to UNHCR, you have helped to protect people forced to flee their homes. Our teams are on the ground in 130 countries and territories, 365 days a year, caring for millions of people in the emergencies you've heard about – and the ones you haven't. Your support makes it all possible. Last year was full of unprecedented challenges, conflicts and crises – the COVID-19 emergency being the biggest of them all. But together, we responded.



April

Sahel – the world's fastest growing displacement crisis

UNHCR warns chronic lack of resources is contributing to new crisis in Burkina Faso. The wider Sahel region is facing the fastest growing displacement crisis in the world – and yet one of the most underreported. Indiscriminate attacks on homes, schools and health centres had forced 2.8 million people to flee within their country or across borders in the region by the end of 2020. COVID-19 is further compounding this emergency, combined with climate change, food insecurity and chronic underfunding. UNHCR scaled up protection and assistance to displaced families, including shelter and counselling to survivors of sexual violence, but humanitarian access is limited by widespread armed conflict.



May

Rohingya refugees face double threat

Cyclone Amphan, the strongest storm ever recorded in the Bay of Bengal, hits as the monsoon season arrives in Bangladesh. The cyclone is the latest emergency for more than 860,000 Rohingya refugees who fled from violence in Myanmar, but have been threatened by landslides, flooding, storms – and now the spread of COVID-19. UNHCR works to strengthen shelters and pre-positions supplies, while refugee volunteers who are trained by UNHCR and partners are at the forefront of emergency response to support families affected by the extreme weather.



June

Winter intensifies hardship for displaced Venezuelans

Winter begins in the southern hemisphere. As temperatures plummet, shelter, blankets, food, and cash assistance are critically needed for many vulnerable Venezuelan refugees and migrants at risk of becoming homeless or living on the streets. UNHCR is stepping up its response to face this double challenge in South America, where Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay together host more than 1.5 million displaced Venezuelans – but national capacities are stretched to breaking point by COVID-19, particularly healthcare systems.



July

Aid funding gap spells disaster for Yemenis on the brink

Already the world's worst humanitarian crisis after over five years of conflict and mass displacement, aid cuts due to lack of funds and arrival of COVID-19 put millions of lives at risk in Yemen. Some 24 million people rely on aid to survive and more than 3.6 million were forced to flee their homes. Most displaced people live in unsanitary and overcrowded conditions, making both physical distancing and regular handwashing impossible. Only half of the country's health facilities are operational. With your help, UNHCR was able to stay and deliver in Yemen, making a difference in the lives of millions of Yemenis through our cash assistance, shelter and protection services.



August

Devastation in Lebanon

An explosion in the port of Beirut leaves swathes of the city in ruins. The tragedy kills hundreds, injures thousands and destroys or damages 300,000 homes in the Lebanese capital. With support from donors like you, UNHCR is immediately on the ground to provide shelter, cash assistance and psychosocial support to those in need. But the blast adds to the already severe economic crisis that has pushed many Lebanese and refugee families deeper into poverty, made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic.



September

Fires destroy Moria camp in Lesbos, Greece

Almost 12,000 refugees and asylum seekers, including 4,000 children, are made homeless overnight on the Greek island of Lesbos as a series of fires destroy the Moria Registration and Identification Centre. For many families, the fires mark the second time they have lost everything. The local authorities quickly set up an emergency temporary site and UNHCR is on hand to provide life-saving support and family tents for those sleeping in the streets.



October

Underfunding threatens refugees

Millions of displaced people and their host communities are feeling the pinch of massive underfunding, as the COVID-19 crisis continues to increase humanitarian needs globally. A shortage of resources is putting women and children at heightened risk, and disrupting vital services including, health, shelter, water and sanitation. Flexible funding from donors like you helps turn the tide and make sure vital protection and assistance is maintained.



November

Thousands flee Tigray, Ethiopia to seek safety

A full-scale humanitarian crisis is unfolding as thousands of refugees flee fresh fighting in Ethiopia's Tigray region to seek safety in eastern Sudan. Since the violence began in early November 2020, refugees have been arriving at remote border points with barely any belongings and exhausted from walking long distances over harsh terrain. With no end in sight to the conflict, the steady stream of daily arrivals is overwhelming the current capacity to provide aid. Your support allowed UNHCR to provide lifesaving assistance to the thousands of women, children and men arriving in search of refuge.



December

Climate change multiplying risks for displacement

UNHCR warns that climate change is raising tensions around the world and compounding threats for people already living with conflict and insecurity. Without ambitious climate action and disaster risk reduction, climate-related disasters could as much as double the number of people requiring humanitarian assistance by 2050. The threats posed by climate change – including food and water shortages, increased outbreaks of diseases and loss of livelihoods – particularly impact the world's displaced. UNHCR is stepping up climate action, including advocating for measures to protect forcibly displaced from these threats, identifying at risk populations and mitigating the effects of climate change.

COVID-19

Your questions, answered

We have all been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic: the virus respects no boundaries or borders. But the millions of people that have been forced to flee their homes have been especially vulnerable. Here's what you need to know about the biggest global crisis of 2020, and how your support is helping to keep the refugees safe and healthy.

What is the COVID-19 pandemic?

COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by the most recently discovered coronavirus. On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization declared the outbreak a pandemic. There have been over 113 million cases reported worldwide, with people affected directly or indirectly in almost every country in the world. Sadly, over 2.5 million people have died as of the end of February 2021.

How does the coronavirus outbreak affect refugees?

While COVID-19 has affected us all, refugees already living

with uncertainty have been disproportionately impacted. Refugees and other displaced people usually belong to the most marginalized and vulnerable members of society. They are particularly at risk during this outbreak because they often have limited access to water, sanitation systems and health facilities.

85 per cent of the world's refugees and nearly all the world's internally displaced people are hosted in low- and middle-income countries, many of which have fragile health systems. They often live in overcrowded camps, makeshift settlements or urban centres, where social distancing is virtually

impossible. The pandemic has also compounded existing challenges such as poverty, food insecurity, discrimination, border closures, protection risks such as domestic violence and sexual abuse, and access to livelihoods and education. COVID-19 is a new emergency on top of existing ones.

UNHCR monitoring indicates that 74% of refugees can only meet half or less of their basic needs. With the World Bank predicting the deepest global recession since WWII, these needs will deepen, further compounding vulnerabilities.

Have there been outbreaks in refugee camps?

While no major outbreaks in refugee and internally displaced camps and settlements have so far been reported, it is very hard to have a full picture of the situation. COVID-19 statistics depend on different approaches of testing, data segregation and reporting by national authorities. As of 8 February 2021, over 49,000 cases have been reported among UNHCR’s persons of concern across 105 countries. Countless others are suffering from the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic, none more so than the millions of forcibly displaced whose lives often depend on employment in the informal sector.

In the fight against the coronavirus, how is UNHCR helping people forced to flee?

Since the start of the pandemic, UNHCR teams worldwide have been working around the clock to prepare, prevent and respond to possible outbreaks among refugee and displaced populations, and to alleviate the socioeconomic and protection impacts of the crisis.

We help monitor the spread of the outbreak and act to limit infections. We have boosted public health and hygiene in areas hosting displaced people, including airlifting emergency supplies and establishing isolation units.


We’ve been stockpiling essential medicines and medical equipment, including oxygen concentrators. We’ve distributed soap for the general community, combined with hygiene promotion and hand sanitiser for health workers. We’ve stepped up training of staff in early identification, notification, case management and contact tracing, data collection and analysis and interpretation. UNHCR also has early warning systems in place to monitor and alert in the event of a surge in acute respiratory illnesses.

“If ever we needed reminding that we live in an interconnected world, the novel coronavirus has brought that home.”

– UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi

We’ve scaled up our work to keep refugees and internally displaced people safe by responding to the coronavirus with life-saving support, including water, medical care and hygiene materials.

Thanks to support from our generous donors, in 2020:

 Over **39 million** forcibly displaced people received COVID-19 assistance

 **9M** people were assisted with health care

 **15M** refugees and internally displaced people accessed protection services, including prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence

 **33M** masks were distributed

 **8.5M** individuals received cash assistance

How can donors and supporters help the efforts of UNHCR and its partners?

You can help stop this pandemic. The more support for our health, sanitation and protection activities, the more we will be able to prevent or mitigate the direct impact of COVID-19 for the world's most vulnerable.

Your support to UNHCR can also help reduce the socioeconomic and protection impacts of the pandemic – loss of livelihoods, disrupted learning, increased sexual and gender-based violence, mental health issues, and deepening poverty.

With new waves of the pandemic being felt and in the absence of a widely available vaccine or effective treatment, COVID-19 will continue to have significant implications on the people UNHCR serves. Your support to help protect the most vulnerable and advocate for their inclusion in national vaccination campaigns is needed now more than ever. We can all be safe only when everyone is safe.

UNHCR staff delivering hygiene kits that help prevent the spread of COVID-19



Having a safe place to sleep in is one of the most critical needs for us all, and even more so for people who have been forced to flee their homes. 7-year-old Josue and his family found safety in UNHCR's São Vicente temporary shelter in Boa Vista, Brazil. He has drawn a picture of the flags of Venezuela and Brazil, showing his love to the place he comes from and to the place where he is living now.



Protecting people forced to flee home

Every year, millions of people are forced to flee their homes, often embarking on dangerous journeys with no guarantee of safety at the end.

This is why UNHCR exists. Everything we do has one goal: to protect people forced to flee their homes. Today, we are working harder than ever to save lives, protect rights and help build better futures for those uprooted by conflict and persecution.

As new emergencies arise and older ones persist, supporters like you make it possible for us to continue this work. UNHCR is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions. And as we continue to face record levels of displacement, your support is now more important than ever before.

Thank you for choosing to help. We couldn't do this without you.

In 2020, a record \$538 million was raised from our global community of individual donors, foundations, and corporate and philanthropic partners.

On 4 August 2020, a huge explosion ripped through Beirut, killing hundreds and injuring thousands. UNHCR responded by rushing in relief items, providing temporary shelter, helping with reconstruction, and providing psychological support.





Responding with life-saving support

When an emergency hits, people often lose everything. All around the world, UNHCR is on standby, ready to help. Our first priority is saving lives. We do this by providing emergency support such as safe shelter, clean water, food and medical care. It is also critical that we are as prepared as possible for future emergencies.



The young mother smiles as she lays her 17-month-old son on a mat for a nap. His three-year-old sibling laughs enthusiastically just outside, energetically playing with friends, as his father carries an armload of food back to the family. It feels and sounds like a happy moment in the life of this household – but, for Rahima and her family, security and wellbeing are new prospects.

In 2017, the family was suddenly forced to flee their home near Buthidaung, Myanmar, when their neighborhood was attacked. Like thousands of other Rohingya refugees, they found safety from Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar district – an area that was transformed into the world's largest refugee settlement, sanctuary to nearly 915,000 Rohingya.

However, even though families have found safety here, they've also faced

considerable challenges: environmental degradation. Insufficient sanitation. Lack of infrastructure. And, perhaps most devastating, the threat of catastrophic weather including the monsoon.

“Our biggest challenge used to be the shelter where we lived. During the monsoon, whenever it rained, the floor got very wet and turned to mud,” says 25-year-old Rahima. “There were insects, and it was very unhealthy. It made our children sick.”

The monsoon has also brought additional fears to parents like Rahima: the possibility of floods and landslides. Extreme weather, steep slopes and makeshift shelters can be a deadly combination in such a densely-populated place.

With support from donors like you, UNHCR and its partners have worked to save and improve the lives of Rohingya

refugees by helping develop and safeguard the settlements in Cox's Bazar district. Tens of thousands of shelters have been replaced or repaired, tens of hectares of degraded land have been replanted, and thousands of refugees have been trained in emergency response – among many other things.

Last year, Rahima's family received a new, improved shelter, which was constructed to withstand the effects of the monsoon and other extreme weather threats. The shelter was built with durable bamboo, and is elevated on small stilts so that water can flow under it.

“I used to be worried in our previous place, but now I'm not. The floor and the foundation are stronger,” Rahima says. “I'm not worried about the rains now; we are at peace. We look forward to a better life with your support.”

“I used to be worried in our previous place, but now I’m not. The floor and the foundation are stronger.”

- Rahima

Four-year-old Syrian refugee Manar and her mother Fahima after a psychological support session in Beirut. In Lebanon's capital, thousands of injured and traumatised children are dealing with the aftermath of the city's port explosion in August 2020. Providing psychological support is a key part of UNHCR's response. Due to the explosion, little Manar suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). But her mom says that the sessions, using methods like storytelling and drawing, have had a positive impact.

"When I see a therapist, I feel that there is hope."

- Fahima



Safeguarding fundamental human rights

When people are forced to flee their basic human rights are often in danger. But thanks to your support, UNHCR is there to protect and safeguard their rights. Together with governments, we work to ensure refugees are safe and can exercise their rights to get documents, go to school, earn a living and access healthcare. We also work towards ensuring the stateless achieve their right to a nationality.



© UNHCR/Xavier Bourgois

Keeping Absatou's baby girl safe

Absatou has had to endure far more in life than most 22-year-olds. Not only was she forced to flee her home in the Central African Republic because of fighting, but she has also faced the unimaginable tragedy of losing two babies, both born prematurely. But now that she's holding her newborn baby girl in her arms, there is renewed hope.

It's hard to imagine what it must be like to give birth in Gado refugee camp. In this remote region in eastern Cameroon, refugees like Absatou have access to health services, but facilities are limited and power outages recurrent. The lack of constant electricity and specialized care for premature babies puts them at a high risk of death in remote areas like this.

"I gave birth in the night," Absatou says. "She was premature. She was born two months early."

The baby weighed less than two kilograms and Absatou feared for the worst.

"I thought I was going to lose her," she says quietly.

But this time, her baby's life was saved because of a method called Kangaroo care, a simple form of neonatal care is inspired by how kangaroos care for their young. Wrapped next to the mother's chest, the baby maintains a stable body temperature from the natural heat generated by the mother's body.

"The midwife showed me how to use the Kangaroo method and to take care of my baby," Absatou explains.

The method has transformed neonatal care in the area. With support from UNHCR and partners, 690 kangaroo kits have been distributed to six refugee camps in the area, and health workers have been trained on the method, to help more babies survive.

"We regularly lost babies due to hypothermia. But thanks to this method, despite the recurrent power outages, we can maintain babies at a constant temperature," Monique Meka, a midwife at a nearby hospital, explains.

Thanks to support from donors like you, we are able to help more mothers like Absatou keep their babies safe.

“We regularly lost babies due to hypothermia. But thanks to this method, despite the recurrent power outages, we can maintain babies at a constant temperature.”

- Monique Meka,
a midwife at a hospital

Fadi, his mother Salma and sister Lana came to Germany as refugees. But it didn't take them long to find a way to put their cooking skills to good use in their new home. For Salma, food had always been a hobby – but after being asked to cater for volunteers at a tech non-profit event, the word of her culinary skills spread, and orders started flooding in. Salma and Fadi decided to start a catering business of their own. And now Berlin's high-tech clients like Facebook and Cisco can't get enough of their home-cooked Syrian food.

“We try to give something back, somehow, in terms of sharing food, sharing culture. I really feel at home here in Berlin.”

- Fadi, 32



Building better futures

People forced to flee need a safe place to call home where they can restart their lives and build a better future for themselves and their families. Your support helps us find durable solutions that allow refugees to rebuild their lives in safety and dignity.



Helping little Ashwaq return home

© UNHCR/Rasheed Hussein Rasheed

Ashwaq was just four years old when ISIS took over her home city, Mosul, in Iraq. For the first three years of occupation, her father Saad kept Ashwaq indoors to protect her. But when the battle to retake the city was launched in 2016, the family was forced to flee fighting that was getting dangerously close to their home in Mosul’s historic Old City.

For Saad, the most important thing was to keep his family safe and they sought safety in another part of Mosul, becoming internally displaced. But the fighting left much of their old neighborhood in ruins and their home damaged, making it difficult to return even when the conflict was finally over.

Thanks to financial support from UNHCR, Ashwaq, Saad and the rest of the family were finally able to return home last year. Through a cash-for-shelter programme led by UNHCR, hundreds of families like theirs have received cash for essential repairs, making it possible for them to fix up their homes and return.

“I was very keen on going back to my old neighbourhood,” Saad recalls. “I want to bring life back to it”.

And he’s done a great deal to do just that. Saad’s first priority after moving back was to reopen his metal welding workshop – and to help his neighbours. For a small cost, he helped other returnees fix their damaged water tanks and heaters. And when not all of

them could afford to pay, he helped them for free.

“People deserve a second chance. Most of them are poor and they need a helping hand. We are all citizens of Mosul. Those of us who are able to should help those who are less fortunate than us,” Saad notes.

After years of displacement, Ashwaq no longer recognizes her own neighbourhood. But Saad wants her to know the streets their family have called home for generations. Together, hand in hand, the father and the daughter walk past the rubble of destroyed buildings.

“All what I want is for my children to live a good life,” Saad concludes. “I hope they have a good future in Mosul.”

“All what I want is for my children to live a good life, I hope they have a good future in Mosul.”

- Saad

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