



# 2020 Impact Report



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

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Who we are	What we do	Why we matter
UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, protects people forced to flee their homes because of conflict and persecution.	We are in the field in over 130 countries, saving lives, protecting rights and helping build better futures.	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.

# 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 79.5 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. 19)

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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 (p. 31)

© UNHCR/Diegolbarra Sanchez



*"I feel like we have been reborn."*

- Samer, relocated to Spain (p. 35)

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## 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

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.



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 is about to enter 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.



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.

*"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.

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.

### Thanks to support from our generous donors, in 2020:



## 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

© UNHCR/Jaime Giménez Sánchez de la Blanca

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.

Thanks to your generous support, last year we were able to support mothers like Noura through the hard winter months, help families like Rahima's to be prepared in the face of natural disasters, provide parents like Said an opportunity to provide for their families amid dire emergencies and empower refugees like Saidul to join the fight against COVID-19.



## Supporting Noura's family during the cold winter

© UNHCR/Vincent Tremeau

**“For winter, the most important thing is warmth,” says Noura, a Syrian mother of four living in Bekaa, Lebanon. Like any mother, she simply wants to keep her children safe and warm during the cold winter months. But Noura knows all too well what it’s like to not be able to do that.**

After being forced to flee the war in Syria, winters have been hard for Noura’s family. Last winter especially. The shelter they live in flooded, and on

top of that both Noura and her husband Hussein faced bad health issues. “We felt really cold this winter. It was a very harsh winter, harsher than all the other winters,” Noura recalls, holding her youngest child, 9-month-old Mohammed, tightly in her arms.

Thankfully, the family got support from UNHCR and partners. Thanks to food, fuel, blankets and winter cash assistance, Noura was able to

keep her children warm and get medical support for herself and her husband.

“Without the winter aid, my situation would’ve been very bad,” Noura concludes. “It came as a saviour during hardship. It really helped me.”

With the help from supporters like you, we were able to protect families like Noura’s from the cold last year. We couldn’t be more grateful for your life-saving support.



## Helping Rahima face the monsoon season

© UNHCR/Vincent Tremeau

**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.”



## Helping Said provide for his family

© UNHCR/Marie-Joelle Jean-Charles

**Said has lost a lot in Yemen's long-running conflict. His home. His business. But one thing he's not going to lose is his entrepreneurial mindset.**

Back home in Al Hudaydah on the Yemen's west coast, Said had a successful business making traditional ornate floor cushions known as madkha. But after a wave of violence swept the area in 2018, the family went from living a comfortable life to fleeing with nothing – joining the estimated 3.65 million Yemenis displaced internally by the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

The family found safety in Aden, where Said now works as a recyclable waste collector. He

is one of more than 200 people that have benefited from a project launched by UNHCR to address the dire need for livelihood opportunities, providing tricycles and protective gear to those already engaged in collecting recyclable materials in the city.

Said works 12-hour days, collecting plastic bottles and cans to sell and making an equivalent of around US\$4 each day. It might not be a lot, but his average monthly income has doubled since receiving the equipment.

"At the end of the day, I make enough to feed my family and pay for small expenses," Said explains. "With the tricycle, in

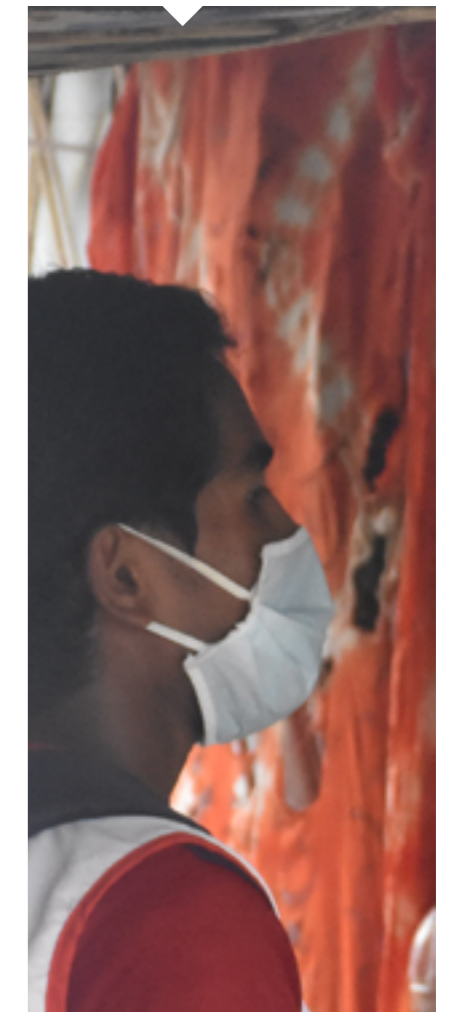
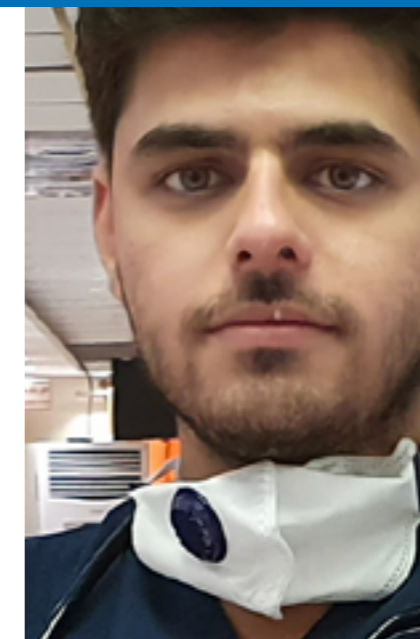
just a little over two months I was able to improve my life."

Thanks to supporters like you, Said also received a one-off cash assistance payment from UNHCR, which he decided to invest in the materials he needed to begin making madkhas again.

"I know I can restart my business here and make enough to support my family," Said says.

"I wish for my kids to be able to go to school to improve their life. I wish for all to live in health and peace and I trust that with the tricycle, my will, and God's help, I can start again and make a better life for us."

## Three refugees joining the fight against COVID-19



**While COVID-19 started to spread across the world last year, affecting the lives of refugees and host communities alike, many refugees were working on the front line against COVID-19, actively protecting their communities. With your help, we have been supporting their tireless efforts.**

This health emergency has served as a powerful reminder of the fact that no one is immune to threats like COVID-19. We're all in this together. And together, we've also been able to respond to this emergency – thanks to the resilience of refugees and the generous support from donors like you.

Want to find out just how refugees are making a difference during this crisis? Here are three inspiring examples.



## Nurses and doctors working on the front line

“We are all scared, but I choose to still hope,” Moheyman says. The Iraqi nurse is working tirelessly to assist his community in the current COVID-19 crisis.

Moheyman is a part of a team of dedicated nurses at the in-patient ward of the Taleghani hospital in Abadan, southwestern Iran, monitoring

patients in the quarantine unit while they await their test results. He feels proud to be able to help both people in the host community and fellow refugees during this challenging time. Thanks to a scholarship from UNHCR, he was able to pursue a degree in nursing.

“I remember people telling me that, because I was a refugee, I shouldn’t dream to go to university,” Moheyman recalls. “But I wanted to make a difference in people’s lives.” In these times of crisis, he’s definitely doing exactly that.



## Tailors supplying face masks and protective gear

“I wanted to use my talent and locally available fabric to show that we can also contribute to the response to the pandemic and not just rely on assistance,” says Samir, a 24-year-old refugee from the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

He runs a fashion design and tailoring business in north-western Kenya’s Kakuma camp. When Kenya issued a directive requiring everyone to wear face masks in public places to prevent the spread of the disease, Samir realized that his skills could now be put to a new use. Within a week, he had delivered 300 masks to

UNHCR office in Kakuma, to be distributed to staff working there. But Samir didn’t stop there: he also gave away masks to refugees and local people who could not afford to buy them.

“Social distancing is just not possible in the camps. The best we can do is to protect ourselves as much as we can,” Samir notes.



## Volunteers sharing life-saving information

“I think this is the best work that I can do for the good of my community,” Saidul says.

He is one of over 1,400 community health workers trained by UNHCR – all of them Rohingya refugees – that refer suspected COVID-19 patients in Bangladesh’s Cox’s Bazar

district for testing and care. They go door-to-door in the densely populated camps, sharing information about health and hygiene, looking out for signs of illness, and acting as a bridge between refugee communities and health facilities.

Saidul now visits the 150 households in his assigned block every week. For those he identifies as having symptoms, he counsels them to get tested for COVID-19 and explains the support they can receive.

*“I want to continue working as a community health work volunteer because this way I can serve my community and support their wellbeing.”*

- Saidul

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.

We are doing all we can to make sure that babies like Absatou's stay healthy, kids like Naamat can go to school and that children that have gone through trauma can recover.



## 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 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.



## Helping exploited children heal

**Mayerlín Vergara Pérez has dedicated her life to defending sexually exploited and trafficked children – many of them refugees. She is the 2020 winner of the Nansen Refugee Award, a humanitarian prize given annually by UNHCR to honour outstanding service to people who have been forcibly displaced.**

For over 20 years, Mayerlín has gone to extraordinary lengths, often risking her own safety to rescue children who are victims of sexual exploitation and trafficking. She and her team

regularly conduct risky, all-night reconnaissance missions in areas of the northeastern Colombian city of Riohacha where children and teens are subject to sexual abuse and exploitation. Thanks to those interventions, some of those children ultimately end up at the residential home run by the NGO that Mayerlín has worked with for over 20 years, the Fundación Renacer.

The children under Mayerlín's care have gone through almost unimaginable trauma, making their recovery process a long and tumultuous one.

"Sexual violence has all but destroyed their ability to dream. It's stolen their smiles and filled them with pain, anguish and anxiety," Mayerlín describes.

Founded 32 years ago, Fundación Renacer is dedicated to providing sometimes life-saving assistance to child and adolescent survivors of commercial sexual exploitation and other types of sexual and gender-based violence. The organization has helped over 22,000 children and teens throughout its 32-year history. ...

...

Mayerlín has been the director of the organization's new residential home for survivors of childhood sexual violence in La Guajira since it opened in 2019. This north-eastern border region has seen a spike in child sexual exploitation among refugees and migrants fleeing the political and economic crisis in neighbouring Venezuela. Around half of the children currently living in the home in La Guajira are Venezuelans.

"Many of the girls told us that their circumstances, having to live on the streets in extreme poverty, had forced them into sexual exploitation," Mayerlín recalls.

She says that the pain these children feel is so profound that they simply don't want to live anymore. But at the home, their lives change with the help from a team of professionals, including a psychologist, a social worker and a lawyer. A rigorous daily schedule packed with individual therapy, group sessions and educational activities provides the children order and structure while also giving them the space and time they need to process their trauma. Once they are able, the children resume their studies.

Mayerlín says that over the years, there have been many success stories as the children

have gone on to lead successful careers as chefs, doctors and accountants, among others.

"It is possible for survivors of sexual violence to change their lives," Mayerlín says of the children she has assisted. "They are the real heroes of their own stories. They teach us so much and inspire us to continue doing this work."

## Did you know?

- Millions of people continue to be trafficked every year. Women and girls account for the largest numbers of detected victims.
- Forcibly displaced people are at heightened risk of trafficking.
- The socioeconomic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic have made displaced people even more vulnerable. Deepening poverty and disrupted education have left many children exposed to sexual exploitation, child labour and child marriage.



© UNHCR/Diego Ibarra Sánchez

**When Naamat talks about her dreams for the future, her face lights up just like any other 11-year-old's. She says that one day, she'd like to be a pilot.**

"I imagine a lot when I am alone. I imagine how I would fly above the sky. It must be a beautiful feeling, like a flying bird!"

But right now, Naamat has to bear a lot of responsibility for her age. She was forced to flee the war in Syria when she was just four years old. Today, seven years after arriving in Jordan, her family is still

struggling to make ends meet. Naamat's father is sick and unable to work. Her mother has to work long hours cleaning other people's houses, leaving Naamat to take care of most household chores as well as her younger brothers.

"I am 11 years old, but I feel like I'm 100," she says. "It's because of our situation. I have to support my parents and my brothers. They don't have anyone else, I'm the eldest."

Naamat and her family don't have it easy. But thanks to the

monthly cash assistance they receive from UNHCR, they are able to cover the rent and pay for the school bus for Naamat and her brothers. Thankfully, their host country Jordan offers Syrian refugee children free access to education.

And Naamat is very determined to stay in school.

"I love education a lot, because I feel that it will give me a beautiful future. I lost part of my childhood, but I find what remains in education, and in building a future for myself."



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.

We help families, like little Ashwaq's, return home when it's safe to do so. When it's not, we help people forced to flee – like Josué\* – to settle and make a positive contribution within the community that hosts them. And for others like Ghaith, the chance to find home in another country may be the best alternative.



© UNHCR/Alexis Masciarelli

# New job and a chance to belong: a dream come true for Josué\*

\*Name changed for protection reasons. The photo is from El Mirador-Rio Azul National Park in northern Guatemala, where asylum-seekers have been recruited as park rangers by a UNHCR partner.

**Although his workday starts at sunrise, Josué\* does not need to set an alarm. The raucous shrieks and calls of the forest dawn chorus are more than enough to wake him up. For Josué, his new job as a ranger in Guatemala's El Mirador National Park – one of the most biodiverse spots on earth – is nothing short of a dream come true.**

"When I was little, I used to watch nature shows on TV. They were my favourite. This job is like being in the middle of one of those shows," says Josué. "I always dreamed of such a job."

But not too long ago, it all looked like a distant dream.

Josué is just one of some 720,000 people in northern Central America that have been forced to flee their homes due to gang threats, violence and persecution. He used to live in one of Honduras' most dangerous cities, controlled by armed gangs that seek to recruit vulnerable young people. Josué, too, was targeted. After rebuffing the attempts of a gang to recruit him, he was chased down and shot. Josué survived his injuries – but after that, his only option was to leave the country.

"Leaving Honduras was a very difficult journey for me, but it was a question of life and death," Josué recalls.

It's never easy to leave your home behind. But Josué is an excellent example of the ability to adapt that people forced to flee often have. After all, he has been able to start from zero in a new country and find a job – and not just any kind of job, but a job he has always dreamt of.

This is all thanks to a programme run by local organizations and supported by UNHCR. In Guatemala, several asylum-seekers and refugees like Josué have been hired and trained to work as rangers in the country's national park system. With support from donors like you, we are able to support similar initiatives all over the world – and make more dreams come true.



© UNHCR/Houssam Hairri

# Bringing Ghaith one step closer to his dream

**13-year-old Ghaith (in blue) is obsessed about football – and his favorite team, Real Madrid, in particular. He has often asked his father Samer if they could one day visit the team's famous home stadium in Spain.**

"I used to tell him it's impossible for us to go there," says Samer. As Syrian refugees living in an impoverished neighborhood of the Lebanese capital Beirut, struggling to make ends meet, he didn't want to give Ghaith false hope.

But now, in the very near future, it seems that Ghaith's wish may come true after all. The family was accepted for resettlement to Spain by UNHCR and the Spanish authorities.

"I feel like we have been reborn," Samer said shortly before their departure to Madrid. "Here, life was very difficult but now we have been given a new chance."

His two oldest sons – Ghaith and Mohammed – had to drop out of school to help him sell vegetables in their local neighborhood. Samer feels like he's failed his kids in regard to education, but due to his health issues it's impossible for Samer to work alone.

Resettlement is a vital solution for some of the world's most vulnerable refugees. Yet at the same time, the chance of a fresh start in a new country is only open to a small fraction of the 1.4 million refugees in need of resettlement. And the number of refugees resettled has dwindled even further

during the COVID-19 pandemic. Samer's family's resettlement had also been put on hold for a year due to the pandemic – so in late 2020, when they finally boarded a flight to Spain, they were beyond relieved.

Prior to their departure, Ghaith and his brothers were more than excited about the opportunity to start over and go back to school. They had already learned several words of Spanish. And for Ghaith especially, it was a dream come true to move to the country of his favorite team – a team for which, one day, he hopes to play himself.

"I'm going to Spain to play football," said Ghaith decisively. It could be that before long, Real Madrid will have a young Syrian prospect.



© UNHCR/Rasheed Hussein Rasheed

# Helping little Ashwaq return home

**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

## Meet our people

From drivers and data scientists, to engineers and environmental experts, to public health workers and protection specialists – our people are our greatest strength. UNHCR depends on the dedication and expertise of every single one of our team to translate your support into action for people forced to flee.

**Name:**

Onesta Guya

**Job title:**

Field Associate

**Location:**

Jamjang, South Sudan



### **How long have you been working for UNHCR and what is your role with UNHCR in Jamjang?**

I started working with UNHCR in 2011. My work as a Field Associate involves monitoring and interacting with the refugees, neighbouring host communities and humanitarian partners. We discuss what they face and seek solutions to their problems.

### **What impact has COVID-19 had on your work?**

It has been challenging and the way we do our work had to change. For example, the refugees here in Jamjang are from South Kordofan, Sudan. They are being relocated from Yida at the border to one of Jamjang's refugee camps based on protection and safety grounds. Before COVID-19, when refugees arrived in Yida, they were registered and then relocated quickly. However, since March of last year relocation had to be put on hold out of an abundance of caution and to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

The relocation of the refugees to Jamjang camp resumed in June but with measures in place including quarantine for 14 days. People enter quarantine according to their date of arrival. This process

requires a lot of resources and time to do all this safely, including ensuring social distancing. We manage the movement of a small number of refugees at a time. When one or two individuals complete their quarantine, they are relocated to create more space for another admission. The implications for the operation were immediate, including increased consumption of fuel to relocate, the capacity of the transit center capacity had to be expanded, and the number of personnel needed to be increased. And in case a refugee has the virus, then it will have to be ready to manage very well so that the spread is controlled. COVID-19 really changed our way of life.

Another big difference to my daily work is that we had to limit our in-person interaction with the communities. Meetings are scheduled with refugee leadership to get feedback from the community on services provided. This is an essential two-way process for information sharing. So in the COVID-19 context, it's very, very challenging as sometimes there are gaps in the communication. We cannot stop working but again, we need to make sure that we do the right things to keep refugees safe and to keep others safe.

### **What has the impact of COVID-19 been on refugee children?**

Since the outbreak of this virus in March last year, schools have been closed. Only certain grades resumed to allow them sit for their exams. But others remained at home. Most of those children either support their families with chores, farm work.

Education is very important to the refugee community in Jamjang and staying at home at this very moment is really challenging. School keeps children busy and being out of school will impact negatively on them, not only in terms of their schoolwork but also time spent with friends in a safe environment. So many parents are worried about their children's future, and what will happen should schools remain closed.

### **What is UNHCR currently doing in Jamjang to help protect refugees?**

Basically, UNHCR is providing essential services and life-saving activities in the refugee camp but also for the host communities in the surrounding areas. That includes the provision of health care services such as general practice, delivery of new babies, vaccinations for children,

provision of medicines. Bearing in mind that most refugees arrive with little more than what they can carry, the team also provides shelter support and provision of core relief items including, blankets, plastic sheeting, jerry cans as well as sanitation materials for women and girls. Another key area of our work is the provision of water and sanitation services, essential for the wellbeing of refugee communities including construction and maintenance of boreholes. This is especially important during the global pandemic, with additional water stations also installed around the camp. UNHCR also provides critical protection services including counselling and outreach to vulnerable people like older persons or persons who have suffered trauma. Everything above can be considered protection because all these are interlinked and contribute to the safety of the refugee.

I'm proud to say that UNHCR continues to deliver services even in the current situation, and our teams have remained on the ground. On saying that, due to COVID-19, one has to be very careful so that whatever UNHCR does is not putting anyone at risk.

Meetings at the community level, meetings with refugee families to do individual

interviews and all that, stopped for a while until we figured out how to safely adapt our outreach. But we do continue to work with community outreach volunteers who are refugees themselves. They carry out continuous monitoring and reporting of what is happening in the community, building on their network and understanding of the situation because they live there.

### **What impact does the support from UNHCR have on the lives of refugees?**

UNHCR helps rebuild lives. This support can change someone's life from a state of despair to putting a smile on their face. You can imagine that at the time of their arrival to the refugee camp, the life of that person has totally changed. But after they settle and receive food, are provided with shelter, water, medical care, and of course through the government they are given a piece of land, and their children are enrolled in school. This may not be the very best situation, but I can say that it's better and critically they are safe. Even when comparing the lives of refugees and the host community, still, UNHCR does a great job, and the team is committed to doing their best. At this point I can say that UNHCR impacts really positively on the lives of refugees.

### **You were forced to flee your own home when you were very young. How has this experience influenced your career and the work you do?**

This job we are doing with UNHCR, it can build someone's future. Knowing the impact of what UNHCR does to change lives of those in dire need, like me at that time, encourages me. UNHCR mostly operates in very remote locations with insecurity and limited or completely no access to medical care. I believe that many of those who took up this calling and work with UNHCR feel the same as I do. It is one way of giving back to UNHCR the support one received at one point. I think that's the drive for me to work with UNHCR. I'm really glad that today I'm part of the UNHCR team. It's a wonderful feeling. It makes me happy.

### **What did you want to be when you were a kid?**

To be honest, as a kid I was not sure of what I wanted to be. This was because life in the refugee camp was sometimes difficult. But I thank God for my family for putting me in school, even if I didn't know the benefit at that time. And being the only girl sometimes, there were those days when I would miss my classes because I had to do chores. My instincts told me I needed to work

very hard because life would be more difficult if I dropped out of school. I wanted to be independent.

UNHCR supported my education for some time. Then my brother supported me when I was in secondary school until I reached university level. My only surviving parent was not working. We were depending mostly on support from my brother who lives abroad, it was not enough to meet the needs of the family. I said no, this is not sustainable. I didn't think about living an expensive life or nice clothing or going to private schools or something. I concentrated on my studies for as long I had my fees paid. I think that was what really helped, and it made me who I am today.

**Supporting other women and girls is especially important to you. What is UNHCR doing in Jamjang to promote gender equality?**

When I was at school, I had the support from my brother and now I am able to support my relatives, especially girls. It doesn't mean that I don't help the boys, too, but the girls are very vulnerable especially in this setting and it is important to pay attention. When a woman is educated, she looks at all aspects in life. It helps to build the community better.

UNHCR has always been advocating for gender equality

and trying its best to make sure that gender ratio is 50/50. This is something that UNHCR uses as a tool to ensure that representation in the community is equal, so it's been mainstreamed in our work. In our daily work, we encourage that all children are children, it doesn't matter whether they are girls or boys, they all contribute equally to the society. All genders are encouraged to participate and when we do that, we build a better future for everybody.

**What is a typical day on the job like for you?**

Every day is totally different. I start working at 8.30 am and finish by 5.30 pm. However, sometimes there are those days when work starts at 7 am and you leave the refugee camp even as late as 7 pm.

For example, we relocated about 400 to 500 individuals in a day. This took the entire day with no break from morning until late evening. We worked with partners who provide food, the allocation of plots is done by the camp management, shelter materials and non-food items such as sleeping mats and blankets are also provided. You must carry some water with you, or maybe a soft drink.

**How would you describe your job in just three words?**

Interesting, fulfilling but challenging. The good thing is

that at the end of the day we can resolve our challenges.

**What is the most rewarding part of your job?**

The most rewarding part is that through UNHCR, I'm able to put a smile on somebody's face by encouraging them to think that tomorrow will be better. They will be able to smile at the end of the day because at least they received the assistance that they required.

**And the hardest part?**

There are a lot of demands, yet there are limited resources. Sometimes it's difficult but we keep trying. We give our best to make sure that we provide at least the minimal services, without making promises that we cannot keep. On a personal level, living very far from our families due to the political situation of South Sudan can sometimes be stressful.

**Why is it important for people to donate to UNHCR to support our work in South Sudan?**

I believe that without the support of individual donors, UNHCR would not be able to support people who are fleeing their homes. I see the difference our assistance makes every single day. And really, the donors are doing a great job supporting UNHCR, to be able to provide refugees that opportunity to thrive, like me.

*“UNHCR helps rebuild lives. This support can change someone's life.”*

- Onesta

# Your support in 2020

## A record emergency year

2020 has been a record year in terms of number of emergencies, but also – and more positively – in terms of solidarity showed by donors like you.

Thanks to your generous and timely support, UNHCR was able to raise more than \$196 million for new and ongoing emergencies. These funds were key for us to respond to the new or deteriorating emergencies that happened almost every month: starting from the refugee influx from Sudan’s Darfur into Chad in January to the unprecedented

COVID-19 pandemic affecting the whole world since March, until the Ethiopia Tigray conflict since November and still ongoing.

**Thank you for believing in us, doing your fantastic part and having made this impossible year a bit less tragic for people forced to flee.**



## COVID-19 emergency appeal

The coronavirus pandemic made us all live amid uncertainty and fear for months. But you have showed that kindness is possible and needed even when we are all struggling, because everyone is safe only when the most vulnerable among our societies are safe too. Heartwarming solidarity from individuals, companies, foundations and philanthropists like you allowed us to raise **over \$52 million for UNHCR’s COVID-19 appeal in 2020**, making this the most successful private emergency appeal ever for our organization and enabling our teams on the ground to stay and deliver across the world. This crisis is not over yet, but we are confident that we will win it if we continue standing together.



## The Ramadan Campaign

For Muslims all around the world, Ramadan is a special month of the year. While it is a time of celebration and spending time with loved ones, it is also a moment of reflection and charity.

In 2020, thousands of people joined hands through the Ramadan Campaign to support families forced to flee conflict and persecution. With the generous donations of our supporters the **campaign raised \$8.1 million to secure lifesaving support for 8,141 families for a whole year.** Families across Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt and Syria as well as Rohingya and Yemeni families received urgent support with the amazing contribution of donors like you.



## The Winter Campaign

For those who have been forced to flee their homes the winter months are a fight for survival. Without proper shelter, warm clothing and medicine, parents struggle to keep their children warm and healthy.

That is why the donations from UNHCR supporters are more valuable than ever during this volatile time of year and **it is with the kindness and generosity of donors like you that over \$7.8 million was raised in 2020 to keep refugee families warm through the coldest months.**

Thank you for your amazing support!

# Key figures at a glance

## Delivering vital supplies around the world

People forced to flee their homes often have little time to pack. Vital items – medication, diplomas, birth certificates – may be left behind along with precious possessions like photo albums, wedding rings and favourite toys.

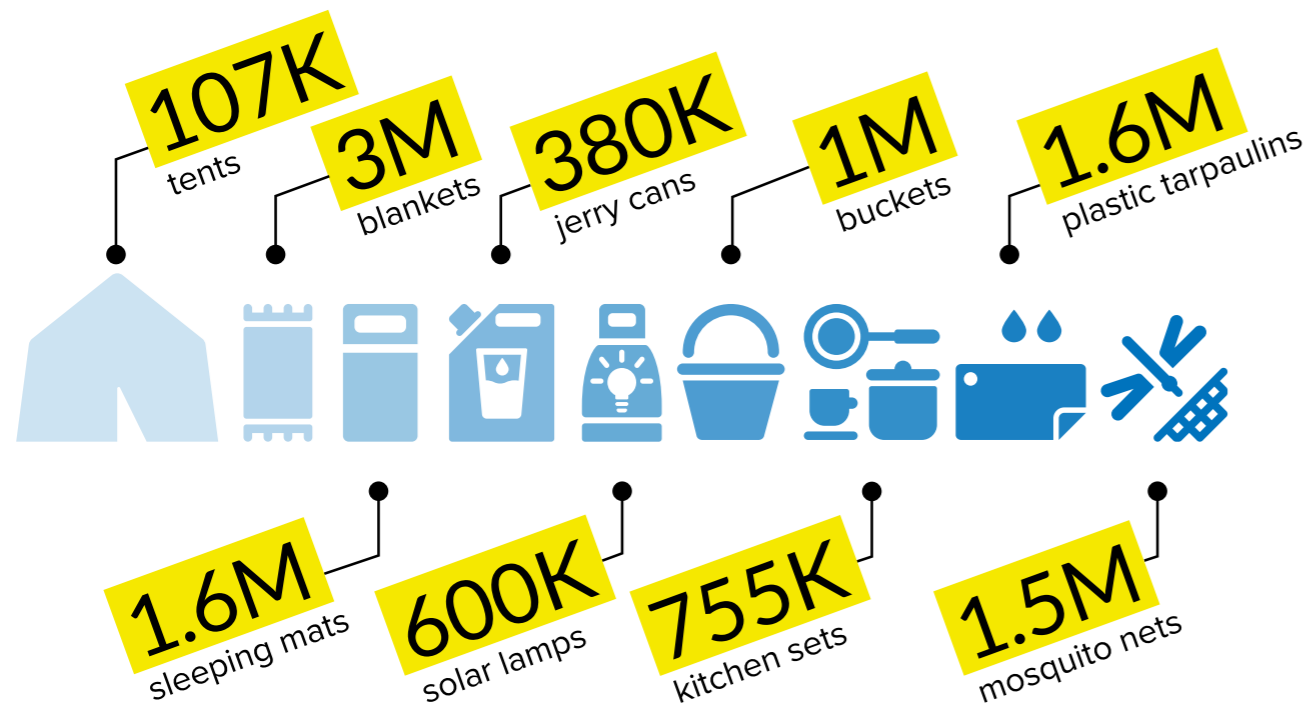
Most leave with a few belongings carried in bags or pockets. Others, carrying children or elderly relatives to safety, are unable to take anything at all. Some arrive

at their destinations after long and dangerous journeys with nothing more than the clothes on their backs.

That means that when people forced to flee finally reach safety, they need basic supplies: tents to protect them from the elements. Blankets to keep their children warm at night. Cooking utensils, so they can prepare food and eat. Jerry cans to store clean water.

That's where UNHCR steps in. With caring donors like you by our side, we are able to act fast and rush in life-saving assistance.

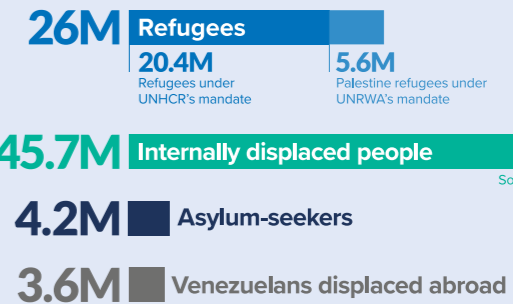
In 2020, our teams shipped millions of vital supplies from our global warehouses or through our suppliers to new emergencies and on-going operations around the world, to serve up to 26 million people:



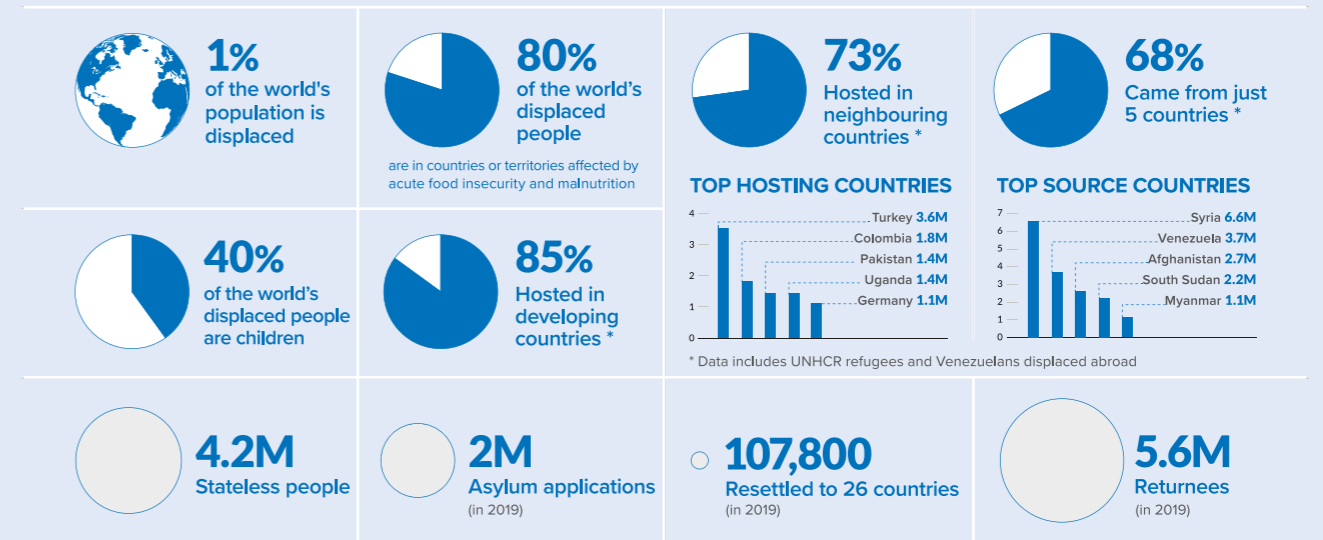
# The challenge in numbers

**79.5 MILLION** forcibly displaced people worldwide at the end of 2019

Source: UNHCR / 18 June 2020



Source: IDMC



## UNHCR in action

**UNHCR** The UN Refugee Agency employs **17,324** personnel (as of 31 May 2020)

We are funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions, with 86% from governments and the European Union and 10% from private donors.

Within **72 hours** of an emergency, UNHCR can launch an emergency operation, thanks to our global network of suppliers, specialist agencies and partners.

**212** trained aid workers were deployed by UNHCR to emergencies in 2020.

Nearly **90%** of our over 17,000 staff are based in the field – often in hazardous locations – in direct contact with people in need.

Over **130 countries** worldwide have a UNHCR presence in more than 530 locations, from urban hubs to remote villages.



# Afterword

**By Astrid van Genderen Stort**  
**Head of UNHCR's Emergencies and Marketing team**

2020 was a year, I am sure, that we will not easily forget and one of the toughest I have seen in my 26 years with UNHCR. Yes, it was a year full of many crises, emergencies and challenges. But more than that: it was the year when the COVID-19 pandemic spread around the world, affecting us all, and turning our lives – and those of the most vulnerable around the world – upside down.

More than ever before, we needed to adjust our ways of working. In many of the over 130 countries where UNHCR works, COVID-19 was yet another emergency within an emergency, making life even more difficult for millions of displaced people, many of them on the brink of poverty and destitution. At the same time, it became increasingly difficult for many of our staff – worried about their own health and loved ones – to reach, talk to and support the people we serve.

It was tough, challenging and sad, but – as I hope this report has illustrated – it was also a year filled with kindness, global solidarity, compassion and impact. Our colleagues in some of the world's most remote and challenging places – far from home and loved ones – went above and beyond their normal duties to keep protecting refugees and mitigating the effects of the pandemic. Refugees responded in often-heroic ways, keeping their families, communities and also their host communities safe. They worked as doctors and nurses in hospitals around the world. They served as community workers in places like Bangladesh's Rohingya settlements, making sure some 900,000 refugees are kept informed, and know what to do if and when COVID-19 hits. In countries including Niger, displaced people made masks and soap, helping each other to stay healthy and survive.



And like those many individuals around the world, they agreed that we can only overcome this challenge if we unite as one and help each other – including the most vulnerable.

This, and much more, is what gave and continues to give me hope.

You – our dedicated supporters – make all this possible. Because of you, we've been able to stay and deliver during one of the most difficult and unpredictable years in memory. Thanks to your support, we have been able to continue to fulfill our mission to save lives, protect rights, and build better futures for people who have been forced to flee their homes.

This year has shown us more than ever that it takes all of us – individuals, companies, foundations, governments and organizations – working together to address the world's pressing challenges. This is how we should go forward.

Despite all the challenges, I am proud of what we collectively managed to achieve and your contributions made a tremendous impact.

**I thank you so much for being there for refugees and displaced people around the world.**

Seventeen-month-old Rohingya refugee, Arafat, sleeps soundly in his new monsoon-ready shelter where he lives with his parents and older brother in Kutupalong settlement.



[unhcr.org](https://unhcr.org)



**UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency

# 2020 Impact Report