General Assembly

Executive Committee of the
High Commissioner's Programme
Seventieth session
Geneva, 7 to 11 October 2019
Item 4 (a) of the provisional agenda
Consideration of reports on the work of the Standing Committee
International Protection

Note on international protection

Summary

>	Important advances were made in bringing about protection and solutions for persons of concern to UNHCR during the period from July 2018 to June 2019, including, in particular, the affirmation of the Global Compact on Refugees by the United Nations General Assembly in December 2018. At the same time, there were challenges to the fundamental principles of international refugee protection, while broader concepts of protection were applied in humanitarian action and response. Against this background, this year's note on international protection brings into focus protection achievements and challenges in relation to displaced and stateless persons, and highlights progress in placing protection at the centre of humanitarian responses.

Contents

I. Introduction

1. The period from July 2018 to June 2019 marked a number of milestones in protection for persons of concern to UNHCR. This includes the affirmation of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) by the United Nations General Assembly in December 2018, which represents one of the most significant efforts to strengthen burden- and responsibility-sharing to date. There were also important developments in the identification, prevention and reduction of statelessness, as UNHCR reached the mid-way point of its campaign to end statelessness. Meanwhile, the twentieth anniversary of the "Guiding principles on internal displacement" in 2018 provided an opportunity to take stock of efforts to ensure protection for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and develop a multi-stakeholder plan of action to improve responses. Notwithstanding these advances, there were also serious challenges to the right to seek and enjoy asylum and to the principle of non-refoulement, while humanitarian access to affected populations was lacking in a number of acute crisis situations and gaps were experienced in ensuring protection and assistance for those with specific needs.

2. This note covers developments in the provision of international protection to refugees pursuant to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (the 1951 Convention) and its 1967 Protocol, as well as to regional refugee instruments and complementary forms of protection, including on the basis of human rights law. It also provides an update on protection and solutions for IDPs and the identification and protection of stateless persons. With some key principles under close scrutiny, this year's note brings into focus major challenges and achievements in relation to international protection, including refugee protection and asylum, as well as to the broader concept of protection applied to all humanitarian action, through analysis, operational information and examples of developments taking place, including responses by States, UNHCR and partners. This broader notion of protection encompasses all activities aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and spirit of relevant bodies of law, namely international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law.

II. International protection of refugees, asylum-seekers and returnees

3. There are currently 20.4 million refugees under UNHCR's mandate, along with 3.5 million asylum-seekers. Syrians continued to constitute the largest refugee population (6.7 million) and, together with refugees from Afghanistan (2.7 million), South Sudan (2.3 million), Myanmar (1.1 million) and Somalia (0.9 million), represented 67 per cent of refugees worldwide. Other large outflows of refugees included persons fleeing conflict, persecution and violence in the north of Central America, as well as Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

A. Legal framework and other arrangements

4. The 1951 Convention, together with its 1967 Protocol, is the cornerstone of international refugee protection. The accession by South Sudan to both instruments in December 2018 brought the total number of States having ratified either the 1951 Convention or the 1967 Protocol to 149.

5. The centrality of these instruments, together with the cardinal principle of non-refoulement, was reaffirmed in the GCR, which builds on the refugee protection regime and represents a framework for more predictable and equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing in support of the countries affected by large and protracted refugee situations. The comprehensive refugee response framework (CRRF) continued to be applied in 15 countries and two regions throughout the period leading up to the affirmation of the GCR and has yielded important results, including changes in national laws and solutions. Implementation of the GCR will be key to strengthening the practical relevance of the legal protection

framework, particularly through concrete pledges and contributions at the first Global Refugee Forum in December 2019.

6.   The 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol are also complemented by important regional instruments and arrangements. In 2019, the African Union commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the 1969 Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa (OAU Convention). It declared 2019 as the year of "refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons" and convened a series of consultative meetings focusing on root causes, durable solutions and the capacity of governments to tackle displacement. In Europe, UNHCR urged States to continue discussions on the reform of the Common European Asylum System, including on asylum procedures and intra-European Union solidarity measures, and to bring this process to a positive conclusion. In the Americas, countries affected by the situation in the north of Central America applied the comprehensive regional protection and solutions framework (MIRPS), the regional iteration of the CRRF. In response to the situation in Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), the Declaration of Quito on Human Mobility of Venezuelan Citizens in the Region and its plan of action, adopted in 2018, aided harmonization of policies and practices across countries in the Americas. The "Quito Process" continued into 2019, with a follow-up meeting in April 2019 to evaluate the results of the plan of action, establish follow-up mechanisms and analyse the funding needs.

7.   The 1951 Convention, together with the 1967 Protocol and regional instruments, has continued to demonstrate its relevance in ensuring international protection for persons fleeing a wide range of socio-political crises. Nevertheless, a small number of countries sought to apply a narrow interpretation to the scope of the 1951 Convention with regard to those fleeing armed conflict and violence, including by non-State actors, organized gangs or in the context of domestic violence, as well as in relation to the interpretation of certain grounds such as sexual orientation and identity. Discrimination based on mode or place of arrival was also a factor. UNHCR intervened in 22 court cases in 12 different jurisdictions in 2018 to support the full and effective application of the 1951 Convention and other relevant instruments. The Office also continued to issue protection considerations, eligibility guidelines and positions on returns, including for [Afghanistan](#) (August 2018), [Libya](#) (September 2018), [South Sudan](#) (April 2019), [Iraq](#) and [Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)](#) (May 2019). UNHCR urged States to take into account the progressive development of international human rights law in interpreting and applying relevant refugee instruments. This includes the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the seventieth anniversary of the adoption of which took place in December 2018. The adoption and revision of national laws in alignment with international standards was welcome, including in Ethiopia (January 2019), Guinea (September 2018) and Qatar (September 2018).

B.   Reception and admission

8.   The vast majority of States continued to respect the fundamental principle of non-refoulement and to receive persons fleeing persecution and other serious harm, admitting them to their territory and providing access to asylum procedures or other mechanisms for international protection. In some countries, however, the closure of official border crossings or strict border controls forced refugees to take risky alternative routes. There were also reported instances of asylum-seekers being "pushed back" or denied admission. Recognizing that States have rights and responsibilities to manage and control their borders, it is vital that any person who faces persecution or other serious harm is able to access territory and seek asylum in a safe country promptly and without obstruction, in conformity with applicable obligations under international law. In 2018, instances were reported of asylum-seekers not being able to make asylum claims upon their arrival at airports and being stopped in transit areas or "international" zones before being removed. As a result, the Office published [guidance](#) in January 2019 on considerations for States in the context of people arriving by air seeking asylum prior to passing through immigration clearance. There were also returns of individuals and families in detention, without UNHCR being granted access to ascertain their circumstances and the voluntariness of their decision to return, as well as instances of non-respect for national court orders directing authorities not to return individuals and for direct representations made by UNHCR. Refugees caught up in broader mass expulsions of migrants were also subject to forced return.

9.   Challenges regarding admission and access to asylum procedures also persisted in the context of irregular movements by sea, with delays in disembarkation, disembarkation in places not meeting the criteria of safety under international law, and reduced search and rescue capacity leading to the death of refugees and others on the move.   In the Mediterranean, an estimated 2,275 persons died or went missing in 2018, despite a major drop in the number of arrivals reaching Europe by this sea route to 139,300, the lowest number in five years.   In June 2018, UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) proposed a regional disembarkation mechanism for the Mediterranean region to ensure more predictability.   A subsequent detailed proposal was made for timely and predictable disembarkation in Europe within a strengthened responsibility-sharing framework aimed to build on positive steps taken by several States.

10.   Ensuring adequate reception arrangements remained a challenge for several States receiving large numbers of new arrivals.   UNHCR continued to work with national and local authorities to strengthen and expand reception facilities, support alternatives to camps and transition accommodation and cash programmes to national institutions, as appropriate.   UNHCR welcomed ongoing efforts by some States to end the detention of refugees and asylum-seekers or to pilot alternatives to detention, in line with UNHCR's "Beyond detention strategy", such as an agreement in January 2019 between relevant ministries in Thailand to provide alternatives to immigration detention for children.   Recourse in other States to the systematic and arbitrary detention of asylum-seekers and refugees, including children, remained deeply concerning.   In Libya, the detention of refugees and migrants continued in deplorable conditions, with reports of sexual assault and torture.   A "gathering and departure facility" was opened in December 2018, in cooperation with the Libyan Ministry of Interior, to house vulnerable refugees while solutions were being sought.   The facility also enabled the relocation of hundreds of refugees in detention centres impacted by violent clashes in and around Tripoli from April 2019.

11.   UNHCR continued to work with States to develop and strengthen national asylum systems, including in response to increased applications in several regions.   The establishment of the Asylum Capacity Support Group, as called for in the GCR, will build on positive examples of asylum capacity development globally, enable UNHCR to more effectively to carry out its coordinating role, and facilitate timely and targeted support by a range of stakeholders.   UNHCR advised States in Africa, the Americas and Europe on the use of simplified and accelerated procedures, as well as group-based determination procedures, to increase efficiency.   It reinforced capacity through additional case adjudicators, technical advice, training and equipment, including in Costa Rica, Greece, Malawi, Mexico, Niger and Uganda.   The full assumption of responsibility by Turkey for registration and determination of all asylum applications in September 2018 was welcomed. Where States did not have functioning asylum systems, or those systems had gaps, UNHCR continued to conduct refugee status determination (RSD) under its mandate.   This took place in 55 countries in 2018, with UNHCR registering approximately 227,800 applications.   In line with UNHCR's strategic engagement in RSD, the Office implemented merged registration and RSD procedures in Trinidad and Tobago, while simplified case processing modalities were applied in a number of countries in the Middle East and North Africa.

12.   In addition to asylum procedures, countries in several regions facilitated access to documentation and alternative forms of legal stay for persons with international protection needs.   Some countries in the Americas developed ad hoc protection-sensitive arrangements or used alternatives in applicable national and regional legal frameworks to provide documentation, legal stay and access to rights in the context of the Venezuela situation, which has seen some 3.7 million leave their country between 2015 and April 2019.   In the United Arab Emirates, the extension of an amnesty period enabled those with international protection needs to obtain relevant documentation and apply for an employment visa or a one-year residency permit.   In line with Pakistan's 2017 "Comprehensive policy on voluntary repatriation and management of Afghan nationals", close to 880,000 undocumented Afghans were registered and 380,000 Afghans were given an "Afghan citizen card", while "proof of registration" cards were extended to the end of June 2019.   In the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Government conducted a headcount exercise and issued temporary documentation to 850,000 undocumented Afghans.   In Mauritania, the Government began issuing national identity cards for over 57,000 Malian refugees in the Mbera camp.

13.   The adoption of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in December 2018 was a significant achievement, providing an opportunity to address gaps in responses for migrants. As a member of the Executive Committee of the United Nations Network on Migration, UNHCR is working with other agencies to ensure coherent system-wide support to States in its implementation. Operationally, the phenomenon of mixed movements, where refugees travel irregularly using similar routes and methods of transport as migrants, continued to create challenges. Guided by its "10-Point Plan in Action on refugee protection and mixed movements", UNHCR worked as part of mixed movement task forces and arrangements, including in the Horn of Africa, to support protection-sensitive entry procedures, screening, and referral mechanisms to access asylum. The GCR foresees the possibility of arrangements for burden- and responsibility-sharing being used by States affected by large mixed movement situations, building on existing operational partnerships. UNHCR and IOM have worked closely in the context of the joint African Union-European Union-United Nations Taskforce on Libya, with UNHCR supporting the evacuation of refugees for resettlement processing and other solutions, and IOM carrying out assisted returns, reintegration and community-based support for migrants. UNHCR also provided advice on managing mixed movements of refugees and migrants in the European Union. This includes a discussion paper on accelerated and simplified procedures for manifestly well-founded and manifestly unfounded claims. In response to movements from Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), UNHCR and IOM established a regional inter-agency coordination platform in September 2018 and appointed a Joint Special Representative, who is working with governments and partners to build regional alliances and foster support for affected countries.

14.   UNHCR worked with partners to address the needs of victims of human trafficking, including identification, referral and protection. To bridge the gap between national asylum procedures and anti-trafficking responses, UNHCR sought to strengthen internal and inter-agency capacity in this area. It supported an update of the "Joint IOM-UNHCR framework document on developing standard operating procedures to facilitate the identification and referral of victims of trafficking," which will be published shortly. UNHCR continued to contribute to the Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons (ICAT) and co-lead the global protection cluster task team on anti-trafficking in humanitarian action.

15.   In recent years, displacement associated with the nexus between causes of refugee movements and other phenomena, including famine, natural hazards, disasters or the adverse effects of climate change, has been of growing concern. This was highlighted in a study ("In harm's way: international protection in the context of nexus dynamics between conflict or violence and disaster or climate change") published by UNHCR in 2018, as well as in the GCR. In 2018, thousands of Somalis fled across borders as a result of protracted conflict, but also drought, flooding and food insecurity; while in November 2018, UNHCR began the first in a series of airlifts to western Afghanistan in support of some 250,000 people displaced by a mix of conflict and severe drought. UNHCR continued to work with partners, including the Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Task Force on Displacement. With respect to the latter, UNHCR contributed to recommendations on integrated approaches to avert, minimize and address displacement due to climate change that were endorsed at the twenty-fourth session of the Conference of Parties to the UNFCCC in December 2018. The impact of disasters and environmental degradation also posed risks to refugees in some host countries, including Bangladesh, where UNHCR and its partners worked in support of the Government to mitigate the risk of landslides and flooding for thousands of refugees during the monsoon and cyclone season.

C.   Meeting needs and supporting communities

16.   One of the important advances made by the GCR was the recognition of the need to support the self-reliance and resilience of refugees and their host communities, pending the availability of durable solutions. From a protection perspective, this has resulted in burden- and responsibility-sharing to enhance access to important socio-economic rights, including

the right to work, freedom of movement, as well as health and education – increasingly through adequate support to national systems.

17.   Strong humanitarian and development collaboration to reduce need, risk and vulnerability for both refugees and host communities is key in this regard. UNHCR and the World Bank Group have further strengthened their cooperation, with 14 countries being determined eligible for funding under the International Development Association (IDA) refugee and host community sub-window, initiated in December 2016. UNHCR also engaged with the World Bank Group within the framework of the Global Concessional Financing Facility (GCFF), which supported projects in Jordan and Lebanon aimed at building social and economic resilience within refugee and local populations, as well as projects in Africa in a range of sectors such as agriculture and education. Together with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNHCR continued to co-lead the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) in response to the Syria crisis, built around government-led national plans with humanitarian and development programming, and involving a coalition of over 270 partners. The ongoing reform of the United Nations development system offers further opportunities to strengthen humanitarian and development collaboration. This includes the revision of development planning (through United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks) and analysis tools (such as the Common Country Analysis) allowing for joint analysis and strengthened humanitarian needs overviews and humanitarian response plans.

18.   With the support of humanitarian and development actors, a number of countries applying the CRRF enacted laws and regulations that guarantee the rights of refugees and expand their access to national services. In January 2019, Ethiopia adopted a proclamation which enables refugees to acquire work permits, access primary education, obtain drivers licences, register life events to facilitate civil registration and open bank accounts. Through its "jobs compact", Ethiopia also created economic opportunities for refugees and citizens alike. Uganda continued to pursue its progressive refugee policy that permits refugees to conduct farming, work and move freely. Among the countries hosting refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic, where the conflict entered its ninth year in March 2019, Jordan and Turkey issued tens of thousands of work permits, while in Lebanon schools operated double shifts to accommodate Syrian children. Despite these considerable efforts, an estimated 83 per cent of Syrian refugees lived below the poverty line in 2018, demonstrating the need for more burden- and responsibility-sharing by the international community.

19.   Elsewhere, Rwanda provided Burundian refugees with the right to work and progressively included them in national health and education systems, as well as in national development plans. Djibouti, Kenya, Uganda and Zambia also worked to include refugees in their national health systems, while projects implemented by UNHCR and the World Bank Group in Cameroon, Chad, the Congo, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Niger and Uganda aimed to help refugees and host communities access health care, education, social protection, livelihoods and infrastructure. In Pakistan, the Refugee Affected and Hosting Areas initiative, in place since 2009, continued to foster social cohesion between refugees and host communities, supporting projects in sectors such as education, health, livelihoods, infrastructure and social protection. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, access to health insurance, available to refugees since 2015, provided coverage to 92,000 vulnerable refugees in 2018. Close to 500,000 refugee and undocumented Afghan children had access to public schools, despite infrastructure challenges. In Europe, UNHCR worked closely with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on a joint action plan to expand employment opportunities for refugees and a series of employment workshops that brought together potential employers, local authorities and refugees in Bulgaria and Hungary.

20.   In countries in the Southern Cone of the Americas, the Office continued to work with States and civil society partners to support the right to work, health care and education for refugees. In Morocco, UNHCR signed a memorandum of understanding with the authorities to support livelihood opportunities for refugees. More broadly, a "Policy guide on entrepreneurship for migrants and refugees", developed jointly by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), IOM and UNHCR, was released in December 2018, while UNHCR and the International Labour Organization (ILO) developed a tool to facilitate socio-economic market assessments.

21. In 2018, more than half of the world's refugee population lived in urban areas, making city and municipal authorities important actors in the delivery of protection and assistance. This is clearly recognized in the GCR, which supports their engagement. In the Americas, the "cities of solidarity" concept, applied in the region for some 14 years, recognizes the central role of cities in welcoming refugees, enabling them to enjoy social, economic and cultural rights, and facilitating their inclusion in national systems. In 2018, a methodology was developed for cities to conduct self-assessments and establish communities of practice, to be piloted in seven cities and municipalities in Canada (Montreal), Colombia (Medellin), Costa Rica (Alajuelita and Escazu) and Mexico (Guadalajara, Mexico City and Saltillo) in 2019. The High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges in 2018 addressed the protection and assistance of refugees, IDPs and stateless persons in urban settings, with a particular focus on cities. Participants agreed that the GCR provided a solid framework for developing the existing affinities between UNHCR, cities and partners, and the Office committed to further engaging city networks.

22. Globally, supporting access to education for refugee and host community children continued to be a priority for UNHCR, in line with the objectives of the GCR and Sustainable Development Goal 4. While over 500,000 additional refugee children were enrolled in school in 2018, it was estimated that some 4 million remained out of school. As a member of the "SDG-education 2030 Steering Committee", UNHCR advocated regional and global commitments for the inclusion of refugees and other persons of concern in education systems. Strengthened partnerships with ministries of education were key to facilitating enrolment. UNHCR worked to support governments within the framework of the 3RP and the "no lost generation" initiative to reduce the percentage of out-of-school Syrian children. National action plans to improve humanitarian and development collaboration in support of quality education and access to it for both refugees and host communities were developed in several countries in Africa. In East Africa, a second planning meeting of the ministries of education of Member States of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) was held with UNHCR, the European Union and other partners. It aimed to develop plans in support of the systematic inclusion of refugees in national education services across the region by 2020, guided by the goals of the GCR and the Djibouti Declaration on Refugee Education. UNHCR led the Accelerated Education Working Group, comprising education partners in Africa and Asia. This initiative aims to engage and enrol out-of-school or over-age students in accredited, quality education, providing young people with opportunities to develop marketable skills and engage more fully in their local community, creating an alternative to forced recruitment and exploitation, and reducing radicalization risks for dispossessed and marginalized youth. More than 6,760 students received university scholarships through DAFI (the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative) in 2018, while over 4,000 refugee and host community students accessed accredited tertiary education through certified connected learning programmes in 23 countries.

D. Solutions

23. Achieving durable solutions for refugees is a crucial part of UNHCR's mandate and of the international protection regime. Voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity is often the preferred solution, where the decision to return is based on a free and informed choice and supported by reintegration measures. Several large and protracted refugee situations saw some progress in this regard during the reporting period. Some 56,000 Syrian refugees returned to their areas of origin in 2018. Together with its partners, the Office engaged in preparedness activities guided by the "Comprehensive protection and solutions strategy: protection thresholds and parameters for refugee return to Syria," issued in February 2018. In June 2018, UNHCR, UNDP and the Government of Myanmar signed a tripartite memorandum of understanding to support Myanmar in creating the conditions conducive to return, including livelihood opportunities for all communities living in Rakhine State. This complements the April 2018 memorandum of understanding between UNHCR and the Government of Bangladesh, which will serve as a framework for cooperation on voluntary repatriation for Rohingya refugees once the conditions in Myanmar are conducive.

24.   Some 45,300 refugees returned to Burundi in 2018. UNHCR assisted those refugees who wished to voluntarily return to Burundi based on an informed choice, while urging governments in the region to maintain open borders and access to asylum for those who continued to need it. The Office welcomed the signing of the Revitalized Agreement of the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan in September 2018. An increase in self-organized repatriation was observed, with more than 20,000 individuals returning between November 2018 and early 2019, despite the overall security and human rights situation remaining volatile.

25.   The Government of Afghanistan decided in July 2018 to apply the relevant components of the CRRF as a country of origin, building on the "Solutions strategy for Afghan refugees to support voluntary repatriation, sustainable reintegration and assistance to host countries". Just over 15,000 Afghan refugees returned to Afghanistan in 2018, mostly from Pakistan. UNHCR strengthened its partnership with the World Bank Group to better understand the factors that influenced return and to aid in the design of reintegration and livelihood projects. It also supported the Government of Afghanistan in implementing its Displacement and Return Executive Committee action plan in 15 priority areas. In Somalia, efforts continued to create an enabling environment for the safe, sustainable and voluntary return and reintegration of Somali refugees as part of a comprehensive refugee response, in line with the objectives of the Nairobi Declaration on Durable Solutions for Somali Refugees and Reintegration of Returnees in Somalia, adopted by IGAD in 2017. UNHCR, in cooperation with IOM, continued to support the return of Somali refugees from Yemen, with almost 2,600 people returning in 2018.

26.   Recognizing the critical importance of resettlement and complementary pathways for admission to third countries, UNHCR has been working with States and partners to develop the three-year strategy called for in the GCR, with a view to increasing the pool of resettlement places, encouraging more countries to participate in resettlement, and improving access to and expanding complementary pathways for the admission of refugees. This effort takes place in a context where resettlement places are available for just 7 per cent of the estimated 1.2 million refugees in need (81,300 in 2018). Less than 55,700 refugees departed to resettlement countries in 2018, with the largest number having been referred by UNHCR from major refugee-hosting countries, including Lebanon (9,800), Turkey (9,000), Jordan (5,100), Uganda (4,000) and the United Republic of Tanzania (3,400). Sixty-eight per cent of the submissions were for survivors of violence and torture, those with legal and physical protection needs, and women and girls at risk. More than half (52 per cent) of all resettlement submissions in 2018 were for children.

27.   The Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement focused on ways of expanding resettlement programmes and enhancing their effectiveness. UNHCR worked with the Syria Resettlement Core Group and the Central Mediterranean Core Group throughout 2018 to share good practices, demonstrate the strategic impact of resettlement, and mobilize support for increased resettlement and complementary pathways. Canada and the United States of America remained the two largest resettlement countries in 2018. The European Union has also emerged as a key resettlement partner for UNHCR in recent years, facilitating and supporting an increasing number of Member States to pledge over 50,000 resettlement places for 2018-2019 and to take steps to admit larger numbers. Resettlement and community-based sponsorship programmes in Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay continued to progress, with the support of the Emerging Resettlement Countries Joint Support Mechanism. The decision by some established resettlement countries, including Canada and New Zealand, to progressively increase their resettlement quotas was also welcome.

28.   Arrangements for evacuation and resettlement on an emergency basis were increasingly prominent.   The protection transfer arrangement, in its third year of implementation, has identified some 2,500 individuals facing significant protection risks in countries in the north of Central America since its inception, with cases submitted to the United States of America (520), Australia (36), Uruguay (18) and Brazil (6) in 2018. Since November 2017, UNHCR has also supported the evacuation of some 3,500 vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers from Libya to Italy, and to emergency transit facilities in Niger and Romania.

29.   In addition to resettlement, complementary pathways for admission of refugees in third countries continued to be pursued. A study by UNHCR and the OECD in December 2018 showed that 34 OECD countries admitted more than 560,000 refugees from five major origin countries through family reunification, work and study permits between 2010 and 2017, compared to just 350,400 who arrived through resettlement schemes during the same period. A joint statement in July 2018 by ministers from Argentina, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, Spain and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland pledging to pilot or implement community-based refugee sponsorship programmes was welcome. UNHCR also maintained its involvement in the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative, and provided technical guidance to Ireland on its humanitarian admission programme, to Sweden on family reunification and to Japan on its initiative for the future of Syrian refugees, which will allow 30 refugees to complete higher university degrees.

30.   UNHCR provided technical support for law and policy changes by States electing to offer local integration to refugees, including with regard to naturalization processes and residency options. In Ethiopia, local integration efforts continued for refugees who have been in the country for more than two decades. In Liberia, local integration was pursued for some 8,000 Ivorian refugees, including through programmes focusing on naturalization procedures, land acquisition, social cohesion, employment opportunities and the provision of basic social services. Guinea-Bissau also approved eligibility for citizenship for Senegalese refugees who have been in the country for several decades. Identification cards were provided to some 7,000 Senegalese refugees with the support of UNHCR, and the Government reduced administrative fees by 80 per cent to facilitate access to the naturalization process.

III. Protection and solutions for internally displaced persons

31.   In 2018, according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, the global IDP population reached an estimated 41.3 million persons, including some 10.8 million displaced by conflict and violence, and 17.2 million displaced by disasters, including as a result of the adverse effects of climate change.

32.   While the protection to which the internally displaced are entitled stems from the fact that they are citizens or habitual residents of a particular State, they may also have unique needs and heightened vulnerabilities resulting from their displacement that are distinct from those of the general population. Responsibility for the protection of the internally displaced lies first and foremost with national governments; however, support by the international community may be needed in many circumstances. Countries that experienced ongoing large-scale internal displacement during the reporting period included Burkina Faso, Cameroon and Colombia – the latter in a context where implementation of the peace agreement signed more than two years ago continued to be hampered by armed actors fighting for control in areas vacated by the demobilized Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

33.   The twentieth anniversary of the "Guiding principles on internal displacement" in 2018 provided an opportunity to take stock of efforts to protect, assist and find solutions for the internally displaced. UNHCR is actively supporting the implementation of the three-year multi-stakeholder plan of action ("GP20 plan of action"), launched by United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), UNHCR and the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons in April 2018.

34.   Africa remained the only region to have concluded a binding instrument addressing internal displacement. This year marks the tenth anniversary of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention). At the end of 2018, Niger enacted comprehensive national legislation on internal displacement becoming the first State to do so following ratification of the Kampala Convention. The focus of the African Union on 2019 as the year of refugees, returnees and IDPs provides an opportunity to encourage other States parties to adopt national laws and policies.

35.   UNHCR worked with affected governments and partners to address the protection and assistance needs of IDPs, despite security concerns and limitations on humanitarian access

in many contexts. In Yemen, 75 per cent of the population, or 22 million people, was estimated to be in need of assistance at the end of 2018, and more than 2.3 million were displaced. UNHCR provided emergency cash assistance, shelter assistance, protection and basic assistance. Inside the Syrian Arab Republic, UNHCR reached over 2 million people in 2018 with protection shelter support, basic relief items and health assistance.

36.   In Ukraine, the Government finalized an action plan in November 2018 to support the implementation of its "Strategy for integration of internally displaced persons and implementation of long-term solutions to internal displacement until 2020". The action plan foresees, among other elements, the elaboration of integration plans and simplified procedures for the protection and realization of property rights. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, UNHCR transferred responsibility for the management of data on the needs of IDPs, returnees and members of the Roma community to the Government.

37.   UNHCR continued to lead the global protection cluster and co-lead the global shelter, and camp coordination and camp management clusters. In 2018, it led 24 out of 26 field protection clusters and cluster-like mechanisms, including in Afghanistan, Myanmar and the Philippines. In March 2019, the Office co-led the protection clusters in Malawi and Mozambique in response to tropical cyclone Idai, which affected some 2.6 million people in those countries, as well as in Zimbabwe.

38.   In 2018, 17 field missions in support of 12 countries and 3 regions were undertaken by the global protection cluster, including to help develop humanitarian country team protection strategies, which were in place in 70 per cent of humanitarian country teams by the end of the year. The global protection cluster facilitated a review of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) protection policy in 2018, including through a stocktaking exercise involving Resident Coordinators, United Nations agencies and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

39.   In line with the GCR, UNHCR continued to advocate holistic solutions for the IDPs and returning refugees, and worked with OCHA and IASC partners to develop more coherent approaches to solutions for internal displacement situations. The increasing engagement of development actors and financial institutions, including the World Bank Group, was also welcome. In Pakistan, the Office supported the Government with the return and reintegration of some 1.8 million IDPs since 2015 and continued to provide technical assistance to the authorities through the protection cluster. In Iraq, an estimated 4 million IDPs returned to their areas of origin by the end of 2018, though many faced insecurity and constrained access to basic services. UNHCR continued to provide protection and assistance to Iraqi IDPs and to work with the authorities, as well as with development actors, to incorporate the needs of IDPs in development plans and the national social welfare system. Some 1.4 million IDPs who returned to their areas of origin in the Syrian Arab Republic faced similar challenges to their reintegration.

IV. Identification and protection of stateless persons, and preventing and reducing statelessness

40.   In 2018, based on statistical information available to UNHCR in 75 countries, the number of stateless people, not recognized as a national of any country, amounted to 3.9 million, though UNHCR estimates that the total number may be significantly higher. In addition to being a right in and of itself, nationality is also important for full State protection and can affect the enjoyment of many rights, including access to education, health care and legal employment, as well as property ownership, political participation and freedom of movement.

41.   UNHCR supported strengthened United Nations-wide engagement on statelessness, including the Secretary-General's issuance of a guidance note and key messages on statelessness in January 2019. The high-level segment on statelessness at the annual session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme in October 2019 will take stock of achievements and good practices at the mid-way point of UNHCR's #IBelong campaign to end statelessness by 2024. In 2018 and 2019, UNHCR, together with States and regional organizations, organized regional preparatory meetings ahead of the high-level segment on statelessness. These regional preparatory meetings took place in Asia and the Pacific, Central Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Great Lakes Region of

Africa, and West Africa, with preparatory meetings in the Middle East and North, and Southern Africa to follow in the near future. The meetings have been instrumental in giving States the opportunity to share good practices and indicative pledges in the lead-up to the high-level segment. Since the campaign was launched, important results have been achieved. More than 222,700 have acquired or had their nationality confirmed; three States established or improved statelessness determination procedures; and eight States improved their nationality laws, policies and procedures. A number of States also took steps to finalize national action plans to end statelessness. In September 2018, Spain acceded to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness (1961 Convention), and Haiti acceded to both the 1961 Convention and the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons (1954 Convention). This brought the number of States parties to 91 for the 1954 Convention and 73 for the 1961 Convention. In Asia, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Thailand, Turkmenistan and Viet Nam all took steps to grant citizenship to formerly stateless persons in 2018.

42.   Legislation that prevents statelessness in the first place remains the most effective way to address statelessness. In West Africa, Member States of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) continued to implement the "Banjul plan of action on the eradication of statelessness (2017-2024)", with Guinea-Bissau adopting in November 2018 a national action plan to end statelessness. A regional expert meeting to review a draft declaration and action plan on statelessness was convened by the Government of South Africa and UNHCR in November 2018, and the outcomes will be submitted for consideration by the Southern African Development Community (SADC). In December 2018, States in Central Africa adopted the N'Djamena Initiative on the Eradication of Statelessness, adding to the numerous regional declarations around the world focused on addressing the issue. Kenya drafted a national action plan to end statelessness, while in Colombia a draft bill on migration included a chapter dedicated to the prevention of statelessness. UNHCR released a new handbook on "Good practices in nationality laws for the prevention and reduction of statelessness" in November 2018, in cooperation with the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

43.   Birth and civil registration are important tools to prevent statelessness and to ensure the protection of stateless persons. Albania removed barriers to birth registration, including for children born abroad, in October 2018. UNHCR supported countries in issuing birth certificates to children at risk of statelessness, including in Burkina Faso, Chad and Côte d'Ivoire, benefiting collectively more than 430,000 children. The percentage of Syrian refugee children in the Middle East and North Africa region without any form of identity document has also been reduced from about 35 per cent in 2012 to 1.8 per cent by the end of October 2018, following dedicated efforts by UNHCR and 3RP partners, as well as the adoption by the League of Arab States of the Arab Declaration on Belonging and Legal Identity in February 2018. The Office continued to provide technical support to regional processes, initiatives and workshops on civil registration and vital statistics in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

44.   Until statelessness is eliminated, it is vital to identify and protect persons recognized as stateless, who may have special protection needs. Implicit in the 1954 Convention, and a necessary step in order to provide protection, is the need to identify stateless persons, including through formalized stateless determination procedures with due process safeguards where necessary. Several States in the Americas, including Panama, Paraguay and Uruguay, established statelessness determination procedures, while Argentina developed legislation with a view to establishing such a procedure. Several States in Europe, including Armenia, Iceland, Montenegro, the Netherlands and Ukraine, were in the process of adopting or improving existing statelessness determination procedures, while the Philippines granted rights including to work and to travel) to persons of Indonesian descent whose nationality was previously undetermined,. In 2018, UNHCR and the National Institute of Statistics of Côte d'Ivoire launched a nationwide household survey to map statelessness, and the Office also worked with governments and other stakeholders to publish mapping studies on statelessness in Portugal and Switzerland.

V. Placing protection at the centre of humanitarian action

45.   In 2018, humanitarian response plans targeted a record 97.9 million people affected by humanitarian crises, nearly three quarters of whom were in countries that had been affected for seven or more years. At the same time, complex irregular mixed movements in some regions exposed refugees and others on the move to harm during travel and in some countries of destination. These developments have led to an increasing, and welcome, focus on the protection of the rights of all persons, regardless of whether they are refugees, internally displaced, civilians caught up in conflict or migrants.

46.   For protection to be placed at the centre of humanitarian action, it is important to make a link between the rights accorded under national, regional and international law, and the assistance activities that will enhance the enjoyment of these rights. Since the issuance of its new policy on age, gender and diversity in March 2018, UNHCR is increasingly analysing the impact of such demographics on people's vulnerabilities in the context of displacement and statelessness, to be able to better act upon their priorities and concerns. As recognized in the GCR, broad and inclusive approaches to support better responses for those with specific needs, including women and girls, children and youth, and persons with disabilities are critical.

47.   The age, gender and diversity policy consolidated and renewed commitments to women and girls, including five "core actions" to advance gender equality and empowerment. UNHCR continued to make progress in promoting gender equality in its operations by including women and girls in decision-making processes, ensuring individual registration and enhancing access to assistance and services. Targeting displaced women, the Office increased participation in community decision-making processes in South Sudan; provided leadership training in Malaysia; enhanced access to land rights in Sri Lanka; provided livelihood and skills development, and raised awareness about sexual and gender-based violence, in Egypt; and undertook projects to promote livelihoods, including language classes, vocational training and targeted cash assistance, in Turkey. UNHCR also contributed to the updated IASC "Gender with age marker", published in August 2018, as well as the revised IASC "Gender handbook for humanitarian action" and its accompanying accountability framework, which provides a useful tool to assess the quality of humanitarian programming in the area of gender.

48.   UNHCR sought to improve access to medical, psychosocial and legal services for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, and promote the inclusivity of services, including for men and boys, in 44 situations covering refugees, IDPs and returnees. In the Americas, the Regional Safe Spaces Network supported survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, and other vulnerable groups; while in the Middle East and North Africa, almost 127,000 survivors and persons at risk of sexual- and gender-based violence benefited from multi-sectoral services provided by UNHCR and 3RP partners. In Jordan, a mobile application was developed by UNHCR to provide guidance on safe referrals and contacts for service providers. The Office also supported the drafting of a strategy to combat sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, which was endorsed by the IASC principals in 2018, and supported operations in implementing UNHCR's zero tolerance policy on this issue.

49.   Child protection and youth empowerment remained a vital area of focus for governments, UNHCR and partners. The UNHCR Youth Initiative Fund, together with the European Youth Initiative Fund (launched by the European Youth Forum with the support of UNHCR) awarded 35 small grants to youth-led projects promoting social cohesion, protection and participation. Significant progress was made in facilitating access by refugees and others of concern to national child protection systems, with 33 operations reporting improved or sustained access. Working with States, UNHCR supported the development and strengthening of best interests procedures, and issued new guidance in this area in 2018. The Office also increased situation-specific child protection responses. For example, more than 127,000 girls and boys affected by the Syria crisis had access to specialized child protection services, and over 351,000 children participated in child protection or psychosocial support programmes.   UNHCR also launched pilot cash-based interventions with a view to strengthening child protection in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, and carried out a mapping of alternative care arrangements in the region.

50.   UNHCR is refocusing its attention on the inclusion of persons of concern with disabilities, which has been an increasing global priority, including in light of the 2018 Global Disability Summit. In particular, the Office has sought to address under-identification; the lack of systematic monitoring and reporting on access to protection, assistance and solutions; and limited resources to facilitate targeted assistance and services. In 2018, UNHCR and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) agreed to work together to strengthen inclusion for persons with disabilities in humanitarian settings, with a focus on humanitarian needs overviews and humanitarian response plans.

51.   Effective and accountable humanitarian responses require continuous and meaningful engagement with affected people; understanding their needs and protection risks; building on their capacities; and pursuing protection, assistance and solutions that take into account their perspectives and priorities. Community-based approaches have proven effective in promoting social cohesion, advancing accountability to affected people, enhancing the identification of those at heightened risk and addressing a range of protection challenges. Specific activities being supported by UNHCR included community peacebuilding projects in Chad; community support initiatives in Ukraine; and the establishment of a feedback and referral mechanism, including a toll-free call centre, to respond to inquiries and complaints by refugees in Uganda. In the Middle East and North Africa region, the Office established an identification and referral mechanism run by community members and volunteers for some 65,000 persons at heightened risk, as well as 400 community spaces and centres providing assistance and information.

52.   More broadly, UNHCR sought to deepen its partnerships for protection, in line with the multi-stakeholder and partnerships approach endorsed in the GCR. This included advocating differentiated approaches to protection that enhance rather than restrict the assistance provided to affected populations, building on complementary roles to strengthen protection outcomes. To this end, UNHCR concluded agreements in 2018 and 2019 with a range of partners on a number of priority issues. The areas covered include: collaboration in emergency settings (UNHCR and the United Nations Population Fund, March/April 2018); mixed refugee-IDP situations (OCHA and UNHCR, June 2018); CRRF and working with governments to strengthen the humanitarian-development nexus (UNICEF and UNHCR, July 2018); internal displacement (OCHA, UNHCR, UNDP and IOM, July 2018); the civilian and humanitarian character of refugee and IDP camps and settlements (ICRC and UNHCR, October 2018); key principles for a common cash platform (OCHA, UNICEF, UNHCR, WFP, December 2018) and mixed movements (IOM and UNHCR, January 2019).

VI.   Conclusion

53.   Protection in all its facets, as exemplified through this note, must remain a priority and central in responding across the entire continuum of displacement, in addressing statelessness and in humanitarian action more generally. Whether by supporting strengthened legal frameworks or ensuring effective operational responses, UNHCR will continue to work towards strengthened protection for refugees, asylum-seekers and returnees, as well as stateless persons and the internally displaced. A robust commitment by the international community to implement the GCR, which retains protection at its core, will be critical going forward.

_____