

U.S. Government Closing Statement
UNHCR High Commissioner Protection Dialogue:
Protection and Resilience During Pandemics
December 9, 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic has had enormous consequences for forcibly displaced persons, the stateless, and their host communities. The United States government appreciates the informative discussion that UNHCR facilitated through the 2020 High Commissioner’s Dialogue on Protection Challenges. In particular, the Dialogue elevated the essential voices of refugees, stateless persons, and affected communities, and highlighted their contributions to fighting the pandemic. One such example is from Mexico, where a doctor who fled Venezuela was able to find employment in Mexico City in a public hospital assisting COVID-19 patients through the recognition of her diplomas and the issuance of medical credentials by the Mexican authorities with UNHCR support.

The United States has taken significant steps to help address the short- and long-term protection and resilience implications of COVID-19 for refugees, other persons of concern, and their host communities.

The United States is leading the global response to COVID-19 with \$20.5 billion committed for the development of vaccines and therapeutics, preparedness efforts, and other foreign assistance. This includes more than \$1.6 billion in State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) emergency health, humanitarian, economic, and development assistance aimed at helping governments, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) fight the pandemic, including \$350 million in humanitarian assistance from the Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) account for activities in more than 65 countries. Of this, more than \$186 million has supported UNHCR’s COVID-19 response efforts. These funds help international organizations and NGO partners address the increased vulnerability of refugees, stateless persons, and host communities, as well as vulnerable migrants and conflict-affected people, created by the global pandemic. This includes strengthening local health responses, supply of emergency relief items and cash to vulnerable families, as well as provision of vital protection services.

The United States is also addressing acute protection risks by working with partners to adapt the humanitarian programs we support to the COVID-19

context. For example, to mitigate and address gender-based violence, the United States is funding humanitarian partners to establish or expand women and girls' safe spaces; amplify staffing of domestic violence hotlines; train health responders to safely and compassionately support GBV survivors; switch to radio, phone, internet, or SMS-based modalities for awareness-raising campaigns and to reach survivors; and support local women-led organizations to engage survivors and at-risk women and girls. To continue to protect vulnerable children, the U.S. is funding partners to tailor child-friendly space activities for door-to-door or small group settings and creating parenting tools to equip caregivers to manage their own stress and support children learning at home. To address widespread mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) needs, the U.S. considers MHPSS programming cross-cutting for COVID-19 response in humanitarian settings and continues to support holistic, community-based interventions to improve well-being and address uncertainty, grief, distress, and the breakdown of social support structures. We must continue to look for creative and innovative ways to address the protection challenges exacerbated by COVID-19 effectively and at scale.

Finally, while we are still battling the immediate health impacts from the pandemic, the protection, socio-economic, and education effects for the forcibly displaced and stateless will be long-lasting. The United States strongly advocates for building resilience by including refugees, internally displaced, and stateless persons, particularly ensuring the input of women and girls, in national pandemic-response plans for health, education, and economic recovery. We applaud host countries like Thailand and Jordan, where governments proactively incorporated refugees into COVID-19 planning and response at the onset of the pandemic with the support of UNHCR, NGOs, and international donors, including the United States.