



General Assembly

Distr.: General
19 August 2021

Original: English

Seventy-sixth session

Item 66 of the provisional agenda*

Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions

Assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [75/164](#) on assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa. It updates information contained in the report of the Secretary-General submitted to the Assembly at its seventy-fifth session ([A/75/322](#)) and covers the period from 1 July 2020 through 30 June 2021. The report was coordinated by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and includes information provided by the International Labour Organization, the International Organization for Migration, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, the United Nations Population Fund, the World Food Programme and the World Health Organization.

* [A/76/150](#).



I. Introduction

1. During the reporting period, Africa¹ continued to host increasing numbers of refugees, internally displaced persons and others affected by conflict, persecution and violence, with the humanitarian landscape characterized by both new emergencies and protracted situations. By the end of 2020, the number of persons of concern² in Africa reached 35.9 million, up from 33.4 million in 2019. That figure includes 6.6 million refugees, 22.2 million internally displaced persons, 982,000 stateless persons and 490,000 asylum seekers.³ In 2020, some 2.8 million forcibly displaced people returned to their areas of origin (2.6 million internally displaced persons and 208,000 refugees), compared with 4.4 million (4.2 million internally displaced persons and 212,000 refugees) in 2019.

2. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic hampered the ability of the United Nations and its partners to ensure protection and assistance to those in need and to pursue durable solutions. Across the continent, closed borders, lockdowns and curfews affected asylum space and freedom of movement, and the closure of businesses and schools threatened to derail hard-fought gains made in previous years to achieve self-reliance, enhance livelihood opportunities and ensure that displaced children could claim their right to education. Stigmatization and discrimination against forcibly displaced persons exacerbated their situation. Together with the economic downturn, that led to increased vulnerability to poverty, food insecurity and health problems. An increase in sexual and gender-based violence was observed, with violence against women and girls emerging as a shadow pandemic alongside the decreased ability of survivors to access support. The African Union considered COVID-19 a serious threat to peace and security and called for inclusive measures to support refugees and other vulnerable groups.

3. Despite pressing domestic challenges, compounded by COVID-19, African countries generously continued to host refugees and asylum seekers, including from outside the region. In 2020, Uganda hosted the highest number, at 1.42 million. Other countries hosting large numbers of refugees included the Sudan (1.04 million), Ethiopia (800,000), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (490,000), Chad (479,000), Kenya (453,000), Cameroon (436,000) and South Sudan (314,000). The majority of refugees came from South Sudan (2.2 million), Somalia (815,000), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (840,000), the Sudan (787,000), the Central African Republic (642,000), Eritrea (522,000), Burundi (373,000) and Nigeria (353,000).

4. In 2020, there were an unprecedented 22.2 million internally displaced persons in Africa. Widespread and indiscriminate violence escalated in Burkina Faso, with the number of internally displaced persons nearly doubling during the year, to 1.1 million. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the number reached 5.2 million. Other major internal displacement situations included those in Somalia (3 million), Ethiopia (2.7 million), Nigeria (2.6 million), the Sudan (2.6 million) and South Sudan (1.6 million).

5. In December 2020, the Chairperson of the African Union and the Secretary-General convened the fourth African Union-United Nations annual conference to

¹ In the present report, Africa refers to sub-Saharan Africa only.

² The figure includes refugees, internally displaced persons, asylum seekers, stateless persons and other people of concern. For purposes of coherence, the statistics on refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced and stateless persons in the report are drawn from the 2020 report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees *Global trends: Forced displacement in 2020*.

³ This figure refers to claimants whose individual applications were pending at the end of 2020, irrespective of when the claims may have been lodged.

discuss cooperation on peace and security, development and human rights and review progress in the implementation of joint commitments. They agreed to accelerate joint efforts in the context of the decade of action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals and to ensure robust cooperation in the context of COVID-19, including a unified response to leave no country behind and contribute to longer-term recovery.

6. In June 2021, the African Union Peace and Security Council expressed concern about the unprecedented levels of forced displacement in Africa, which undermined efforts to achieve the aspirations set out in Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want of the African Union and the Sustainable Development Goals. The Peace and Security Council called for the immediate operationalization of the African Humanitarian Agency to empower and strengthen the predictive, preventive and response capabilities of African countries.

II. Subregional overviews

A. West and Central Africa

7. In 2020, the number of forcibly displaced persons in West and Central Africa increased, with the number of refugees and internally displaced persons reaching 1.4 million and 6.4 million, respectively.

8. The Lake Chad basin region⁴ continued to be a major source of conflict, sexual and gender-based violence and displacement, with rising attacks by extremist groups against civilians and humanitarian workers. The number of internally displaced persons reached nearly 3 million, including 2.2 million in north-eastern Nigeria alone and 322,000 in northern Cameroon, 336,000 in Chad and 120,000 in the Niger. The number of refugees exceeded 300,000, including 117,000 in Cameroon and 171,000 in the Niger. Insecurity diminished freedom of movement and hindered humanitarian response. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) provided psychosocial support to internally displaced persons in the Lake Chad basin and Burkina Faso and engaged in counter-trafficking activities, including leading or co-leading working groups and mechanisms.

9. Prospects for the return of refugees and internally displaced persons to several parts of the Central African Republic diminished following the deterioration of the security situation before and after the presidential elections held in December 2020. That rendered humanitarian access more challenging and led to new waves of displacement, with sexual and gender-based violence steadily increasing. As at mid-May 2021, the crisis had generated more than 164,000 new internally displaced persons and 123,000 new refugees.

10. Following the presidential elections in Côte d'Ivoire in October 2020 and the related instability, the number of new Ivorian refugees in neighbouring countries rose to nearly 31,000 by April 2021. Ongoing reconciliation efforts, however, aim to create conditions that are conducive to return.

11. As at April 2021, more than 539,000 people had been displaced by conflict, including 298,000 internally displaced persons and 231,000 refugees mainly from Nigeria and Mali, with an additional 34,000 returnees from Nigeria. More than 1.9 million people in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe States in Nigeria were internally displaced. In 2020, intercommunal conflict, armed attacks and violence escalated in Mali, causing the number of internally displaced persons to jump to 333,000, with 166,000 people seeking refuge

⁴ The region includes parts of Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, Libya, the Niger and Nigeria.

abroad. In the Niger, non-State armed groups were increasingly active at the borders with Burkina Faso, Mali and Nigeria, resulting in large population movements.

12. Cameroon faced complex humanitarian challenges owing to widespread insecurity, epidemics and floods. At the end of 2020, Cameroon hosted more than 443,000 refugees and asylum seekers, primarily from the Central African Republic (321,000) and Nigeria (117,000), as well as large numbers of internally displaced persons and internally displaced person returnees.

13. In 2020, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in partnership with the Danish Refugee Council, spearheaded Project 21, an inter-agency protection monitoring system in West Africa. Initially piloted in Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger, it provides an evidence-based understanding of the protection environment and identifies risks and needs to better design and coordinate response. Following its success, the project was expanded to Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia and is now being introduced in Chad and Nigeria.

B. East Africa, the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes

14. Conflict and violence continued to force people in the subregion to flee their homes and, by the end of 2020, a total of 9.9 million internally displaced persons and 4.5 million refugees and asylum seekers remained displaced in the subregion. Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan and the Sudan were adversely affected by interconnected and mutually reinforcing crises, including armed conflict, intracommunal tensions and disasters, locust infestations, drought and flooding. The crises were exacerbated by mixed movements, human trafficking and recurrent food insecurity. There were also reports of refoulement in the subregion.

15. In 2020, there were 2.7 million internally displaced persons and 800,000 refugees in need of assistance in Ethiopia. By June 2021, the conflict in Tigray, marked by widespread reports of sexual violence against women and girls, caused an estimated 1.7 million people to be displaced within their country and a new refugee emergency in the Sudan, with more than 54,000 people crossing the border. Access to Eritrean refugees, who were caught up in the conflict, and growing numbers of internally displaced persons was restricted and remains constrained by ongoing insecurity.

16. South Sudan continued to face considerable humanitarian needs owing to high levels of food insecurity, conflict, mass displacement, loss of livelihoods and lack of access to health care, resulting in severe levels of malnutrition, outbreaks of preventable diseases and urgent protection needs. Despite some progress in the South Sudan peace process, which resulted in self-organized returns of refugees and internally displaced persons, subnational conflict and the critical humanitarian situation kept 2.2 million South Sudanese refugees in exile and 1.6 million people internally displaced. The transitioning of five of the six former United Nations Mission in South Sudan protection-of-civilian sites into internally displaced person camps, with the Government assuming primary responsibility to protect them, was a positive development, as was the close cooperation between the Government and the Mission on returns from neighbouring countries. The participation of refugees and internally displaced persons in the National Dialogue Conference in November 2020 was also a welcome development and an important step towards inclusive consultation and dialogue.

17. The Sudan continued to face significant humanitarian challenges, with more than 13 million people in need, including 1 million refugees and 2.6 million internally displaced persons at the end of 2020. The ongoing political transformation, economic reforms and peacebuilding efforts were tested by COVID-19, a new influx from

Ethiopia and increased fighting in West Darfur in early 2021, which displaced more than 100,000 people. The drawdown of the United Nations-African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur after its mandate expired on 31 December 2020 and the introduction of the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan, with a smaller presence and no protection-of-civilian mandate, may limit the ability to respond to protection needs in the area. The Government nevertheless remains committed to stabilizing the situation to ensure the safety of civilians, supported by the Assistance Mission.

18. The crisis in Somalia continued to be one of the most complex and protracted in the world owing to armed conflict and insecurity, recurrent climate shocks, political instability and socioeconomic fragility, exacerbated by COVID-19 and an upsurge in desert locusts. A total of 3 million people remain internally displaced, many of whom are living in deplorable conditions in 2,400 sites with minimal access to basic services, livelihood opportunities and protection. Developments in Yemen and Ethiopia may lead to an increase in refugee returns to Somalia, further exacerbating the situation in that country.

C. Southern Africa

19. Southern African countries faced multiple shocks, including conflict, COVID-19 and other infectious diseases, crop-threatening pests, drought, cyclones and heavy rainfall. At the end of 2020, the region hosted 6 million internally displaced persons, 721,000 refugees, 295,000 asylum seekers, 1.4 million internally displaced person returnees and 37,000 other persons of concern.

20. In Mozambique, as at May 2021, some 732,000 people were displaced within Cabo Delgado Province and into the neighbouring provinces of Nampula and Niassa, owing to the combined effect of natural disaster, conflict and violence. There are continued reports of widespread human rights abuses and disregard for international humanitarian law, creating a protection crisis with potential to spread through the region. Access to some areas remained limited owing to insecurity.

21. The Democratic Republic of the Congo continued to face ongoing conflict in the eastern part of the country, resulting in the rise in the number of internally displaced persons to 5.2 million at the end of 2020, representing the largest internal displacement situation in Africa. It also hosted 490,000 refugees and the highest absolute number of food-insecure people in the world, at 27.3 million. IOM and UNHCR co-led the camp coordination and camp management working group in the eastern provinces of the country, ensuring the provision of services in 100 internally displaced person camps. More than 943,000 Congolese refugees and asylum seekers were hosted across 39 African countries, 14 of which are in southern Africa. To address the regional dimension, UNHCR led the coordination of the inter-agency regional refugee response plan, which provides protection and solutions for the most vulnerable, bolsters livelihood opportunities, supports the needs of host populations and strengthens peaceful coexistence, in line with the global compact on refugees.

III. Protection

A. Refugees and asylum seekers

22. Notwithstanding the pandemic, UNHCR advocated that borders remain open for refugees and asylum seekers. However, restrictions remained in place in many countries. New arrivals were sometimes forced to enter through dangerous informal

border crossings, and concerns arose regarding the non-fulfilment by some States of their international protection obligations, in particular non-refoulement. Restrictions prevented access by humanitarian organizations to border areas for monitoring and protection purposes.

23. Registration remains an important protection tool for refugees to ensure their access to services and rights. It also facilitates inclusiveness and contributes to the prevention of statelessness. Adaptive COVID-19 mitigation measures, such as the use of Plexiglas interview dividers, remote interviewing and virtual coordination meetings, allowed registration and refugee status determination processing, albeit on a more limited scale. In several countries, with the relaxation of restrictions, State-led registration and refugee status determination activities gradually recommenced with in-person interviews.

24. UNHCR continued to advocate the accession to and ratification of international and regional refugee instruments. Comoros expressed its intention to ratify the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1969 Organization of African Unity Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa.

25. UNHCR provided support to States in developing national asylum systems, laws and policies. It also helped affected countries to manage increased numbers of arrivals and asylum applications, implement group-based approaches and address situations involving mixed movements of refugees and migrants. Chad, the Congo, Mauritius, the Niger and Seychelles benefited from support.

B. Mixed movements

26. Refugees, asylum seekers and migrants undertook dangerous journeys from sub-Saharan Africa to North Africa and Europe and from the Horn of Africa to the Middle East, as well as towards Southern Africa. In West and Central Africa, a re-emergence of the western African route was observed, employing maritime channels from coastal countries towards the Canary Islands, Spain, with IOM recording the arrival of some 23,000 migrants in 745 boats in 2020, a stark increase from 2,700 migrants on 129 boats in 2019. These routes are often controlled by human traffickers and smugglers, frequently subjecting people to serious human rights violations.

27. The World Health Organization (WHO) worked closely with States and partners, including UNHCR and IOM, and through the Global Health Cluster, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the United Nations Network on Migration, to promote equitable and universal access to COVID-19 vaccines for people on the move. WHO reviewed 40 COVID-19 vaccine deployment plans and requested support from the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility for their inclusion.

28. Through the Southern Africa Migration Management Project, the International Labour Organization (ILO) together with UNHCR, IOM and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, worked to improve the policy environment for labour migration and strengthen informed decision-making for managing mixed flows to improve protection for vulnerable refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in the Southern Africa and Indian Ocean region. In addition, the relaunch of the regional migrant response plan for the Horn of Africa and Yemen 2021–2024 by the United Nations and partners is aimed at providing an effective framework for regional coordination.

C. Internally displaced persons

29. Africa remained the only region to conclude a binding instrument to address internal displacement. The African Union Convention for the Protection and

Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention) provides a solid framework for protecting internally displaced persons and seeking solutions to their plight. By 2021, 31 of the 55 African Union member States had ratified the Convention and 40 had signed it.

30. The High-level Panel on Internal Displacement established by the Secretary-General consulted with a wide range of stakeholders, including internally displaced persons and host community members in several African countries. The final report is expected in September 2021.

D. Prevention of and response to sexual and gender-based violence

31. Displacement exacerbated by COVID-19 exposed refugees and internally displaced persons, especially women and girls, to a heightened risk of sexual and gender-based violence. Such risks included rape, sexual assault, forced child marriage, dowry-related violence, sexual slavery and female genital mutilation. While women and girls constituted the majority of the survivors, men and boys were also affected. Sexual and gender-based violence was often used as a tactic of war, with impunity.

32. The United Nations and partners undertook prevention, risk mitigation and response activities relating to sexual and gender-based violence in refugee and internally displaced person operations across Africa. Together with the African Union Peace and Security Council, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS developed strategic recommendations to promote community engagement to stop conflict-related sexual violence, sexual exploitation and abuse and to reduce HIV transmission. In Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, the Congo, Ghana, Mauritania, the Niger and Nigeria, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) reached 672,000 women with sexual reproductive health-care services and assisted 92,000 safe deliveries. In Uganda, it supported 47 safe spaces across 23 refugee settlements, reaching some 1,880 refugee women as part of the “Women, adolescents and youth rights empowerment” programme. In March 2021, UNHCR launched a new project in the Central African Republic called *Ma Mbi Si* in the local Sango language, meaning “Listen to me too”, to provide holistic support to survivors of sexual and gender-based violence through listening centres. The initiative, which relies on broad community networks, addresses gaps in displacement areas. In cooperation with UNHCR, UNFPA reached 140,000 women in the Niger with sexual and reproductive health-care services in refugee camps. In Somalia, in collaboration with the Government, the United Nations Organization for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) established two new safe hubs for internally displaced persons in Baidoa, providing psychosocial support and trauma counselling for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. In Ethiopia, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) reached 510,000 people, including refugees and host community members, in Tigray and the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples’ Region with risk mitigation measures.

33. In March 2021, the Inter-agency Standing Committee principals, including the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons, issued a statement on the situation in Tigray, calling for all actors to protect civilian populations and women and children in particular from human rights abuses, including sexual and gender-based violence, and to take action to bring the perpetrators to justice.

E. Gender equality and the empowerment of women

34. Displaced and stateless women and girls were affected by COVID-19 on a variety of fronts, including lack of access to livelihoods, health care and education, further exposing them to protection and security risks. Working with partners, the United Nations endeavoured to address the widening gender gap adversely affecting the ability of women and girls, including older women and those with disabilities, to exercise their basic rights.

35. The Gender Standby Capacity Project of the Inter-agency Standing Committee, hosted by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, deployed senior gender advisers to 11 countries in Africa. They worked with humanitarian country teams and national authorities to strengthen gender equality and women's empowerment in displacement situations.

36. Across the continent, UN-Women led various initiatives to advance gender equality in refugee responses, including in the context of COVID-19. Through sustained efforts in Uganda, refugee welfare committee leaders among Adjumani and Yumbe women rose to 48 per cent, up from 10 per cent in 2017. In Malawi, some 100 community leaders, 62 per cent of them women, in the Dzaleka refugee camp were sensitized on COVID-19 prevention in a gender-responsive manner. In Burundi, income-generation initiatives led by UN-Women helped 4,000 displaced and returnee women to increase their agricultural production, modernize their economic activities and benefit from socioeconomic opportunities.

37. The Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund channelled funds to more than 80 local women's rights organizations supporting refugees and internally displaced persons. As a result, local women's organizations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo improved access to basic health-care services for 2,900 women and distributed 5,400 hygiene kits to 2,700 Burundian refugees and internally displaced women.

F. Child protection

38. Displaced children continued to be at risk of abuse, exploitation, trafficking and forced recruitment into armed groups. The global compact on refugees underscores the importance of addressing the specific vulnerabilities and protection needs of children at risk, including unaccompanied and separated children and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. However, underfunding in many operations hampered access to basic services for refugee children and left humanitarian organizations unable to meet the minimum standards of protection and care.

39. Increased physical, sexual and psychological violence against children as a result of COVID-19 restrictions and lockdowns was observed. Prolonged school closures exposed children to heightened protection risks and negatively affected their mental health and well-being.

40. To address the situation, UNICEF strengthened its child protection services. In Ethiopia, psychosocial support was provided to 50,000 vulnerable children, including refugees. In South Sudan, 95,000 children, including refugees, received psychosocial support through child-friendly spaces and community-based activities. Psychosocial support was also provided for 50,000 refugee and host community children in Uganda. In Mozambique, IOM provided more than 350 children with services and referrals for mental health and psychosocial support.

41. The *2021 UNHCR Best interests procedure guidelines: Assessing and determining the best interests of the child* helped to guide the inter-agency response and coordination in child protection in operations across Africa. UNHCR and

UNICEF accelerated joint efforts through their “Blueprint for joint action for refugee children”, focusing on child protection, education, and water, sanitation and hygiene. The initiative, which was piloted in Cameroon, Ethiopia and Rwanda, helps host countries to include refugee children in national development plans and budgets and ensure that they can access essential services.

G. Stateless persons

42. In 2020, there were 982,000 stateless persons across Africa. Positive steps were taken to address statelessness, albeit with progress slowed by COVID-19. The Governments of Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Sudan and the Sudan adopted national action plans to end statelessness, with concrete deliverables on the identification of stateless persons and the prevention and reduction of statelessness. The Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Madagascar, Namibia, Togo and Zambia took decisive steps towards accession to the statelessness conventions, with support from UNHCR.

43. In September 2020, Côte d’Ivoire became the first African country to establish statelessness determination procedures in law, allowing stateless individuals to access the rights enshrined in the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons.

44. In 2020, the Government of Kenya decided to register qualifying persons of Shona and Rwandan descent as citizens, putting an end to their legal limbo. As a result, 1,670 persons of Shona descent have been recognized as Kenyan citizens and some 1,300 persons of Rwandan descent are to be issued their citizenship documents in 2021.

45. Gender discrimination in nationality laws remains a cause of statelessness. In many countries, including Burundi, Eswatini, Liberia, Somalia, the Sudan and Togo, nationality laws do not provide mothers with rights equal to those of fathers to confer nationality on their children, leading to a risk of statelessness. Momentum for reform is increasing, however, as a result of regional declarations calling for the eradication of gender discrimination in nationality laws. That includes the pending Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Specific Aspects of the Right to a Nationality and the Eradication of Statelessness in Africa, presently under consideration by the African Union.

H. Implementation of the global compact on refugees and pledges for Africa emanating from the Global Refugee Forum

46. In line with the global compact on refugees, collaboration with multilateral development banks and bilateral development agencies was strengthened. As a result of its partnership with UNHCR, the World Bank supported projects in 12 countries in Africa, providing \$1 billion in grants under its window for host communities and refugees. The World Bank is also ensuring that refugees are systematically included in all of the COVID-19 vaccination campaigns that it supports. Partnership with the African Development Bank led to a number of multi-year projects, including \$20.5 million for COVID-19 responses in the Sahel region. For its 2021–2027 programming cycle, the European Union included migration and forced displacement as a sectoral priority in almost all key refugee-hosting countries across Africa.

47. In April 2021, Uganda, in line with the global compact on refugees, launched a jobs and livelihoods integrated refugee plan to ensure that refugees and host communities are socially, economically and financially included in local development plans, in a sustainable manner, by 2025. In March 2021, the Federal Government of

Somalia adopted a national durable solutions strategy for 2020–2024 to address the root causes of displacement and its consequences in a holistic manner. In Zambia, approval was received from the Bank of Zambia and the country's telecommunications regulator to accept the proof of registration, refugee certificate and refugee identity card as valid sources of identification for mobile wallet registration. As a result, refugees gained access to formal financial services under their own name, a significant move towards full financial inclusion.

I. Registration and documentation

48. The COVID-19 pandemic affected the registration of refugees and asylum seekers in the region, following restrictions on freedom of movement, quarantines and freezes on registration imposed by some governments. UNHCR prioritized registration as a life-saving activity and advocated for access to documentation in countries where registration had been suspended. Remote registration was also carried out in several operations.

49. States in the Southern Africa region gradually resumed registration activities. By June 2021, more than 92,000 individuals had been registered and more than 100,000 documents issued. In West and Central Africa, 68,000 refugees and asylum seekers were registered and issued with documentation between July 2020 and May 2021. In the East Africa, Horn of Africa and Great Lakes region, more than 381,000 were registered in 2020 and the first quarter of 2021.

50. UNICEF and UNHCR collaborated to ensure that no child was born stateless and that every birth was registered. In Ethiopia, they successfully advocated the revision of national legislation to include refugees and address the low levels of civil registration in the country.

IV. Humanitarian operations

A. Humanitarian response capacity and constraints

51. Conflict and insecurity continued to be major constraints to humanitarian access. In 2020, 179 security incidents targeting humanitarian workers resulted in 65 deaths. More than 96 per cent of those affected were national staff. More than 60 per cent of the attacks took place in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali and South Sudan. In February 2021, the Ambassador of Italy to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, his security detail and World Food Programme (WFP) driver were ambushed and killed while travelling in a United Nations convoy near Goma.

52. The security environment deteriorated drastically across the Sahel region as violent extremism spread. Despite counter-terrorist operations carried out by national and international security forces, extremist groups maintained strongholds in the Mali-Niger-Burkina Faso tri-border area, targeting security forces, humanitarian workers and local civilian populations alike. In June 2021, non-State armed groups attacked Solhan village in the Sahel region of Burkina Faso, killing more than 130 people, injuring dozens, torching homes and displacing more than 10,000 people.

53. Bureaucratic impediments, poor infrastructure, the limited presence of partners and funding constraints undermined the delivery of humanitarian assistance in some countries. Many United Nations entities and partners were unable to be deployed to their duty stations owing to visa restrictions and refusals or other impediments such as the denial of work permits. Humanitarian organizations also faced obstacles in

importing life-saving medicines and other forms of assistance and experienced delays in the registration of non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

54. COVID-19 was used by some governments as an excuse for heavy-handed security measures in refugee areas. That included crackdowns on dissenting voices, the criminalization of demonstrations and mobilization of civil society, the silencing of independent reporting and the curtailing of permitted NGO activities.

55. Disasters also affected humanitarian operations in several countries. For example, some regions of South Sudan were affected by flooding, hampering humanitarian activities and resulting in security incidents. In May 2021, the eruption of the Mount Nyiragongo volcano in the Democratic Republic of the Congo resulted in dangerous lava flows, tremors and risks from toxic gases.

56. Incidents of kidnapping by extremist groups and criminal networks increased, especially in West and Central Africa, as well as in East Africa, the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region. A growing number of aid workers were killed as a result.

B. Food and nutrition

57. Prior to COVID-19, decreases in food rations necessitated by inadequate funding for WFP were already seriously affecting the continent. Given their limited access to land, agriculture and livelihoods, refugees remain highly dependent on humanitarian assistance and have had to resort to negative coping mechanisms such as child labour and early marriage. Inadequate funding further led to reduced supplementary feeding programmes for refugees in Southern Africa. Food insecurity and lack of proper nutrition remain major concerns in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, northern Nigeria, South Sudan, the Sudan and Zimbabwe.

58. With COVID-19 prompting school closures in many countries, school feeding programmes were discontinued. However, in Kenya and Rwanda, UNHCR and WFP adapted school feeding programmes to meet the needs: in Kakuma, Kenya, students attending online schooling were provided with food to ensure that their nutritional needs were met and to encourage e-learning enrolment; in Rwanda, school feeding rations were included in the general food distribution in refugee areas. Through its school feeding programmes, WFP also provided meals to children from refugee, internally displaced person and host community families in Ethiopia and South Sudan.

59. To mitigate the spreading of the virus, the United Nations and partners adjusted their methods of delivering food assistance, such as scheduling more distributions, distributing two-month instead of one-month rations, pre-packing food and switching to cash assistance.

60. WFP continued to use innovative early warning systems to anticipate spikes in emergency needs, including in the context of disasters. Food stocks were also pre-positioned in a number of countries, including Ethiopia, South Sudan and the Sudan.

61. In Yambio, South Sudan, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, UNHCR and WFP implemented a joint project benefiting 6,000 refugees with agricultural assistance. The Government of South Sudan allocated land to refugees, who were then supported with seeds, tools and livestock vaccinations. They were also given access to local markets to sell their crops and seeds to the local community. Agricultural output was so high that WFP was able to source some of its food staples from this refugee-run project.

C. Cash assistance

62. Cash was increasingly used to provide protection and solutions for refugees, internally displaced persons, returnees and host communities in Africa. Many operations launched new cash initiatives or expanded existing initiatives in response to COVID-19. In 2020, UNHCR disbursed \$60 million in 30 countries in Africa, more than \$30 million of which reached 1 million people in the East Africa, Horn of Africa and Great Lakes region alone.

63. Methods of distributing cash assistance were adapted to the COVID-19 situation with the use of new technologies, such as digital payments. In Ethiopia, Malawi and Zambia, UNHCR, in coordination with the Governments, piloted contactless biometrics to decrease COVID-19 transmission when authenticating cash. In Cameroon, UNHCR shifted cash assistance to digital payments, wherever possible, to decrease transmission risks. In Uganda, UNHCR and WFP provided a one-off cash assistance payment to urban refugees through mobile money.

D. Health

64. In the face of COVID-19, the United Nations and partners supported governments to bolster surveillance, prevention, contact tracing and case management, providing personal protective equipment, medicines, rapid-testing kits and oxygen concentrators. Work was undertaken to strengthen national health-care systems, including by creating and equipping intensive care and isolation units and treatment facilities as well as ensuring that refugee communities were included in national vaccination plans and received accurate information on risk mitigation. In West Africa, a regional COVID-19 digital platform was launched with the support of UNHCR, Doctors Without Borders and IOM to disseminate information and enhance awareness-raising, including with respect to prevention, in English, French and more than 18 local languages. IOM provided health assessments for 17,310 refugees prior to resettlement, which included COVID-19 testing, and administered more than 32,500 vaccine doses.

65. In response to COVID-19, a number of initiatives were created to support refugees and internally displaced persons and enhance their self-reliance. In the Niger, WFP, UNHCR, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and local NGOs supported the local production of face masks and hygienic kits by displaced women and youth to strengthen livelihoods and promote economic opportunities. UNICEF supported refugees and displaced persons by strengthening its health interventions in Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, South Sudan, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania.

66. In line with the Sustainable Development Goal of reducing maternal and infant mortality and with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, high-impact maternal and neonatal health interventions were implemented in 31 health-care facilities in Cameroon, Chad and the Niger. The initiative benefited more than 8,300 mothers and infants.

67. The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS and UNHCR worked to ensure expanded inclusion of refugees and other displaced populations in national strategic plans and to integrate HIV services for refugees and displaced populations in country humanitarian plans. They also worked to improve health and protection services for people forced to sell sex in exchange for goods and services and to strengthen tuberculosis programming and linkages with HIV care. In South Sudan, 13,000 people received HIV counselling and testing and 50,000 people benefited from HIV awareness-raising activities. In Uganda, 1.5 million condoms were distributed,

180,000 people received HIV counselling and more than 1,800 cases of tuberculosis were identified, with treatment initiated.

68. In Mozambique, UNICEF and WHO supported national authorities to strengthen awareness-raising among internally displaced persons and host communities on COVID-19 as well as measles, cholera and acute watery diarrhoea. They also deployed epidemiologists and emergency health workers to support local health officials during the 2020 cholera outbreak and procured, through funding from the Central Emergency Response Fund, cholera kits and emergency health kits.

E. Education

69. The COVID-19 pandemic affected learning across Africa, with disruptions in vital school feeding programmes and access to protective environments. While many governments organized long-distance and online learning, many refugee and displaced children continued to have no or limited access to the Internet. The World Bank estimates that school closures will have a significant negative effect on learning, which will affect the long-term resilience of refugee communities.

70. Innovative approaches were taken to address the problem. In Kenya, UNICEF distributed 2,500 solar radios to refugee children, allowing them to access distance learning. Similarly, in Mali, UNHCR procured and distributed 5,500 radios and school kits for remote learning. In the United Republic of Tanzania, UNICEF and partners supported the Government to develop a national education response and recovery plan that was inclusive of refugees. As a result, 2.5 million children, including refugee children, continued learning during school closures through radio, television and home-learning packages.

71. In support of the pledges made at the Global Refugee Forum, States are increasingly including refugees in their national education systems. Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, the Sudan and Uganda included refugees in their national education emergency crisis response plans to provide remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

72. In the Congo and South Africa, refugees are able to access education at the same level as nationals. In Namibia, 1,400 refugees accessed primary and secondary education through public schools, supported by extra teachers.

73. In both Chad and the Niger, WFP, UNFPA and UNICEF implemented a joint gender-responsive initiative, “Breaking barriers to girls’ education”, which uses targeted support to ensure that girls, especially adolescent girls, are enrolled and stay in school. Among other things, it provides conditional cash incentives, support related to sexual and reproductive health rights, and mentoring and coaching.

74. In response to the displacement and violence in the Central African Republic, in June 2021, the Education Cannot Wait fund contributed \$5 million to the emergency response in neighbouring Cameroon, Chad and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, aimed at reaching more than 43,000 children and young people.

F. Shelter

75. The shelter-related needs of refugees and internally displaced persons in Africa continued to grow, and the United Nations and partners worked to identify urgent solutions for the most vulnerable populations in the context of the pandemic. Physical distancing was a fundamental consideration, given that displaced populations often live in overcrowded conditions in camps, makeshift settlements and urban centres.

UNHCR supported national emergency responses, in particular with the establishment of emergency hospitals and quarantine and isolation areas and the expansion of medical facilities to create additional space for triage and testing.

76. In response to the emergency in the Sahel region, UNHCR and its partners provided 154,000 people with shelter-related support. IOM provided core relief items and shelter assistance in Africa, reaching more than 1.2 million people in 2020.

G. Livelihoods

77. In Africa, COVID-19 exacerbated an already fragile situation in which assistance had been reduced globally owing to funding shortfalls over the past few years. The United Nations and partners nevertheless continued to work together to promote livelihood opportunities and build resilience among refugees, internally displaced persons and host communities. ILO, in partnership with UNHCR, carried out livelihood interventions in Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, the Niger and Uganda. UNDP also supported livelihoods and self-reliance in Cameroon, Ethiopia, Mali and Uganda.

78. The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) held its first meeting of regional technical experts in April 2021, as part of its support platform launched at the Global Refugee Forum. The technical experts reviewed progress made by member States on the implementation of the Kampala Declaration on Jobs, Livelihoods and Self-reliance for Refugees, Returnees and Host Communities in the IGAD Region signed in March 2019. Some 100 experts from member States and partners reiterated their commitment to implementing the Kampala Declaration and promoting the inclusion of refugees in national systems.

79. The Poverty Alleviation Coalition (involving UNHCR, the World Bank and 13 international NGOs) used the “graduation approach” to move persons of concern out of extreme poverty. The initiative supported vulnerable populations in 16 countries throughout Africa.

80. In Uganda, the UNHCR partnership with the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency and the Grameen Crédit Agricole Foundation supported two microfinance institutions in extending their services to more than 5,000 refugees and host community members. UNDP and partners provided livelihood support to 5,100 refugees and host community members, and 10,000 women benefited from livelihood support provided by UN-Women.

V. Ending forced displacement

A. Voluntary returns

81. Most facilitated refugee returns were initially suspended because of the pandemic. Returns in locations such as Somalia and South Sudan slowly resumed in the second half of 2020, with COVID-19 preventive measures in place.

82. Since voluntary repatriation operations to Burundi started in September 2017, some 165,500 refugees have returned home. There were 45,000 returns in 2021 alone, including from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (1,946), Rwanda (20,000) and the United Republic of Tanzania (20,000). Results from recent monitoring in return areas in Burundi indicated some improvement in the ability of returnees to access services and reintegrate, with 79 per cent of returnee households reported to have

access to primary health care and 82 per cent to land and 72 per cent reported to have obtained civil status documents.

83. Some 135,000 refugees returned to the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria and South Sudan, both spontaneously and with UNHCR assistance. In South Sudan and the Sudan, UNHCR monitored conditions in return areas and provided support to returning refugees and internally displaced persons, including through community-based projects focused on peacebuilding efforts. The approach taken by South Sudan and the Sudan in their respective national peace processes provides a robust foundation for increasing the prospects for sustainable returns. Both UNHCR and UNDP provide support to the Peace Commission in the Sudan for the implementation of the Juba Peace Agreement.

B. Local integration

84. Initiatives to foster local integration throughout Africa continued. In Chad, an "out of camp" approach was implemented, and all new refugees were integrated in host villages. The goal is to transform 30 per cent of the refugee camps into villages by 2024, pursuing a solutions-oriented approach from the outset. Other initiatives to enhance dignity and foster self-reliance were seen in Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe. By the end of 2020, five-year residency permits for nearly 2,000 Liberian refugees were renewed in Ghana, providing them with the opportunity to work legally in the country and ultimately become eligible for naturalization. In the context of the Global Refugee Forum, the Democratic Republic of the Congo pledged to offer 10-year residence permits to Rwandan refugees.

C. Resettlement

85. COVID-19 severely disrupted resettlement processes in Africa. Movement restrictions and remote-working arrangements resulted in a decrease in identification, interviews and submissions. Travel was also suspended for several months. Departures for resettlement countries decreased from 18,700 in 2019 to 11,100 in 2020, primarily those originating from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea and the Sudan.

86. The Niger and Rwanda continued to contribute to life-saving solutions for refugees through their emergency transit mechanisms. For example, in 2020, 281 persons were evacuated from Libya to the Niger and 209 from Libya to Rwanda. However, the lengthy processing of cases by some resettlement countries, owing in part to constraints related to COVID-19, impeded resettlement departures from both countries, which hampered further evacuations from Libya.

D. Solutions to internal displacement

87. In 2020, significantly fewer internally displaced persons (2.7 million compared with 4.2 million in 2019) were able to return to their place of residence, owing in part to COVID-19. The largest numbers occurred in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (1.4 million) and Cameroon (466,000). Smaller returns also took place in Somalia (289,000) and South Sudan (174,000).

88. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, IOM and UNHCR continued to advocate the integration of internally displaced persons in their places of displacement or elsewhere when return to their places of origin was not possible. UNHCR

promoted the transformation of the existing returns strategy for internally displaced persons in Borno State in north-eastern Nigeria into a more viable solutions strategy.

E. Sustainability of solutions

89. To ensure that refugee returns are sustainable, support is necessary to help returnees to rebuild their lives. That can include cash and livelihood assistance, as well as legal assistance to obtain documentation and access land and property rights. The United Nations and partners worked together to render returns sustainable and respond to the longer-term reintegration needs of returnees. The 2021 joint refugee return and reintegration plan for Burundi, led by UNDP and UNHCR, represents a positive example of an integrated response to the immediate and longer-term needs of the returnees and their communities. In 2021, Burundi will receive returnees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Rwanda and the United Republic of Tanzania. As spontaneous returns increased in the Lake Chad basin, IOM assessed stability in areas of return in Cameroon, Chad and Nigeria to design interventions for durable solutions and inform transition and recovery programming priorities.

90. The partnership for improving prospects for host communities and forcibly displaced persons, supported by the Netherlands, the International Finance Corporation, ILO, UNICEF, UNHCR and the World Bank promotes long-term sustainable solutions to forced displacement. It targets host communities and refugees in Ethiopia, Kenya, the Sudan and Uganda through activities that transition the responses from humanitarian to development. In Rwanda, the UNHCR-WFP Joint Programme of Excellence and Targeting Hub aims to transition blanket assistance to all refugees towards a needs-based approach that includes activities to support livelihoods and self-reliance.

91. In October 2020, the Governments of the Sudan and South Sudan, with support from IGAD and UNHCR, launched a joint comprehensive solutions initiative for the 7 million forcibly displaced people from those countries. Under the IGAD Support Platform, the initiative seeks to galvanize international support towards early recovery and the longer-term peacebuilding and resilience needs of refugees, returnees, internally displaced persons and host communities in the Sudan and South Sudan, as well as in the neighbouring host countries.

92. The United Nations peace and security architecture played an important role in addressing the root causes of displacement and creating conditions for the safe and sustainable return of refugees and internally displaced persons. The Peacebuilding Fund provided financial support to several solutions-related projects, including in Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Sudan. The Peacebuilding Commission supported national and regional efforts to address political, socioeconomic and security challenges in conflict-affected settings, including in the Central Africa region, the Great Lakes region, the Lake Chad basin and West Africa and the Sahel.

VI. Partnerships

93. Partnerships with a wide range of actors, including NGOs, development partners, regional organizations and the private sector, were vital to bringing protection, assistance and solutions to refugees in Africa. The Regional Coordination Mechanism facilitates effective coordination between the African Union and the United Nations, in line with the 2017 Joint United Nations-African Union Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security and the 2018 African Union-United Nations Framework for the Implementation of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

94. Four inter-Agency regional refugee response plans were developed, for Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia and South Sudan. The plans fostered closer engagement with the Governments concerned and reinforced humanitarian-development cooperation, in line with the global compact on refugees. The regional refugee response plans involve 13 countries of asylum in Africa and 235 partners.

95. Private-sector partnerships increasingly contributed to the delivery of protection and solutions to displaced people, for example by providing support to 25 UNHCR country operations in Africa.

VII. Funding

96. Between July 2020 and 15 May 2021, the Emergency Relief Coordinator allocated \$107.5 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund to support life-saving activities in nine countries in Africa that were affected by conflict. That amount comprised allocations from the rapid response window (\$71.5 million) and the underfunded emergencies window (\$36 million). The Response Fund was instrumental in addressing both the acute humanitarian needs of new displacements triggered by violence in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia and Nigeria, as well as critical gaps in life-sustaining assistance for those in protracted displacement in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and other countries.

97. Aid organizations in Nigeria received the highest amount of funding (\$28 million), followed by Ethiopia (\$13 million), Burkina Faso (\$12 million), the Sudan (\$10 million), the Central African Republic (\$9 million), South Sudan (\$7 million), Mozambique (\$7 million), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (\$7 million), Burundi (\$5 million), Uganda (\$5 million) and Chad (\$4.5 million).

98. Country-based pooled funds in Africa provided \$375.5 million to humanitarian partners between January 2020 and May 2021. National and local partners received 27 per cent (\$102 million) of the total funding, exceeding the Grand Bargain target. Seven country-based pooled funds in Africa allocated \$60 million to humanitarian partners to support the COVID-19 response.

VIII. Conclusions and recommendations

99. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted all facets of life and led to increased human suffering, economic loss, restrictions on human mobility and access to asylum, gaps in education and a sharp increase in sexual and gender-based violence and mental health issues. Displaced people were severely affected by the effects of the pandemic, and the humanitarian response by the United Nations and partners was severely hampered. Many of the gains made in the areas of education and self-reliance in Africa faced setbacks. At the same time, opportunities were opened up to promote inclusion, in line with the global compact on refugees, and solidarity among countries hosting refugees remained strong.

100. The African Union theme for the year 2020 was “Silencing the Guns in Africa”. Unfortunately, human rights violations, conflict and violence continued to displace large numbers of persons in Africa and kept millions from returning home. Solutions for some 36 million persons of concern in the region can be secured only through strong, multilateral cooperation and partnerships, in line with the global compact on refugees. With that in mind:

(a) In line with my appeal for a global ceasefire, I call upon all actors to redouble efforts to “silence the guns” to address the root causes of displacement,

with the objective of ending conflict, averting grave humanitarian consequences and facilitating development in Africa;

(b) I call upon all parties to ensure respect for international humanitarian and human rights law; protect civilians during armed conflict; prevent serious human rights violations, in particular sexual and gender-based violence; and address smuggling and trafficking of human beings;

(c) I remind States of their obligation to respect the right to seek asylum, keep their borders open to those fleeing conflict and persecution and abide by the principle of non-refoulement, recalling that ensuring refugee protection and protecting public health are not mutually exclusive;

(d) In line with my calls for an equitable and universal distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, I appeal to States to include refugees, returnees, internally displaced and stateless persons and other vulnerable populations in national COVID-19 responses, including access to vaccines;

(e) I call upon all parties to take urgent steps to address the widening gender inequalities that COVID-19 has inflicted and urge all stakeholders to redouble efforts to support the leadership of displaced women and girls, prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence, and ensure a comprehensive multisectoral response;

(f) Recalling with sorrow the loss of aid workers during the year, I implore States and non-State actors to take all appropriate steps to protect humanitarian personnel and facilitate rapid and unimpeded access to people in need of assistance;

(g) Recognizing the positive steps taken in some countries in support of the global compact on refugees, I urge States to accelerate their implementation of Global Refugee Forum pledges and use the upcoming meeting of high-level officials in December 2021 to identify progress and areas in need of support;

(h) I encourage the 15 States that have not yet signed the Kampala Convention and the 24 States that have not yet ratified it to do so; and I encourage States that have not yet acceded to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness to do so and to work towards the goal of eradicating statelessness by 2024;

(i) With an unprecedented 22.2 million people internally displaced in 2020, I implore all parties to step up efforts to address the root causes of internal displacement on the continent and advance protection and solutions for internally displaced persons, consistent with the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement;

(j) I urge the international community to redouble its efforts towards securing solutions for refugees, including voluntary return, local integration, resettlement and complementary pathways for admission, and to ensure that returns are voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable;

(k) Noting the urgent need for increased investment in education to advance the aspirations of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and realize Sustainable Development Goal 4, I appeal to States to enhance access to education for refugees, including through inclusion in national systems;

(l) I encourage States to support good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law and to promote inclusion and

sustainable development, in line with Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want of the African Union and the Sustainable Development Goals;

(m) I support the timely and ongoing efforts by the African Union to operationalize the African Humanitarian Agency to empower and strengthen the predictive, preventive and response capabilities of Africa to address humanitarian crises, including forced displacement, reinforcing the international humanitarian system;

(n) I appeal to States hosting refugees to anchor comprehensive refugee responses in their national development plans, with support from development partners and financial institutions, and to pursue inclusive approaches that promote durable solutions;

(o) While recognizing the deteriorating global economic situation resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, I urge donors to continue to ensure adequate, flexible and predictable funding to help to address the needs of refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons in Africa and support the sharing of the burden and the responsibility as outlined in the global compact on refugees.
