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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 [74/131](#) on assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa. It covers the period from 1 July 2019 through 30 June 2020. 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 (UN-Women), the United Nations Population Fund, the World Food Programme and the World Health Organization. It also includes statistics provided by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre.

* [A/75/150](#).



I. Introduction

1. Africa¹ is home to more than a third of the world's refugees and internally displaced persons. Across the continent, displacement has been triggered by armed conflict, generalized violence, persecution, terrorist activities, food insecurity and disasters, such as drought, flooding and locust swarms. In 2020, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic posed additional challenges for displaced persons and exacerbated the pressure on host communities.

2. The African Union considered COVID-19 to be a serious threat to peace and security and called for inclusive measures in support of refugees and other vulnerable groups. Although the number of confirmed cases among displaced persons remained low, the impact on their protection and the socioeconomic consequences of the pandemic were significant. In some places, restrictions on movements hampered the ability of humanitarian organizations to deliver aid. Border closures, supply chain interruptions, rising food prices and the loss of livelihoods threatened to leave millions without food. The risk of sexual and gender-based violence increased, forced evictions occurred in some countries and school closures severely affected displaced children.

3. By the end of 2019, the number of persons of concern in Africa reached 33.4 million,² up from 26.4 million in 2018. That number included 6.3 million refugees, 18.5 million internally displaced persons, 529,600 asylum seekers and 975,000 stateless persons.

4. South Sudan had the largest number of refugees in Africa, with 2.2 million refugees by the end of 2019, followed by Somalia (905,000), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (807,170), the Sudan (732,800), the Central African Republic (610,200), Eritrea (493,100) and Burundi (381,500).

5. Despite pressing domestic challenges, compounded by COVID-19, African countries continued to generously host refugees. In 2019, Uganda hosted the highest number of refugees (nearly 1.4 million), mostly from South Sudan. Large refugee populations were also hosted in the Sudan (1.1 million), Ethiopia (733,000), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (523,700), Chad (442,700), Kenya (438,900), Cameroon (406,300), South Sudan (298,300) and the United Republic of Tanzania (242,200).

6. Internal displacement continued to rise. Across the Sahel, more than 1 million people were displaced internally in 2019, bringing the number of internally displaced persons in the subregion to some 5 million. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the number of internally displaced persons reached 5 million. Other major situations of internal displacement occurred in Nigeria (2.7 million), Somalia (2.6 million), the Sudan (1.9 million), Ethiopia (1.7 million) and South Sudan (1.6 million).

7. Some 211,700 refugees and 4.2 million internally displaced persons returned home in 2019. However, they often did so even when the sustainability of returns could not be assured. Identifying solutions remained a challenge, with resettlement sites benefiting only a fraction of Africa's refugees.

8. Against that backdrop, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with its promise to "leave no one behind", Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want of the African Union and the global compact on refugees, in which international solidarity and more

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 others in a refugee-like situation, as well as those who repatriated in 2019 and were still receiving assistance.

equitable responsibility-sharing are promoted, together provide a framework for the international community to expand access to solutions and enhance the socioeconomic situation of the displaced and host communities. At the Global Refugee Forum, held in December 2019, over 400 pledges were made by States, the African Union and an array of stakeholders towards fulfilling those objectives in Africa.

II. Subregional overviews

A. West and Central Africa

9. In 2019, there was a sharp rise in forced displacement in West and Central Africa. The number of internally displaced persons reached some 5 million, an increase of over 30 per cent from 2018, owing mainly to the deteriorating situation in the Sahel. There were also 1.2 million refugees in the subregion. Extreme weather events related to climate change added to the challenges caused by ongoing conflict.

10. Humanitarian access was hindered in the central Sahel, especially in the border areas between Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger, while attacks on communities, schools and health centres forced people to seek safety elsewhere. By mid-June 2020, some 24 million people, including an estimated 4.5 million internally displaced persons and refugees, were in need of assistance in the Sahel.

11. The security situation in Mali worsened in 2019, as armed attacks spread from the northern to the central part of the country and to the borders with Burkina Faso and the Niger. Growing insecurity affected Burkina Faso, in particular, with attacks on refugee camps and a dramatic rise in displacement. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) launched a Sahel strategy in early 2020 to address protection challenges, building on the regional dialogue on protection and solutions, held in Bamako in September 2019, and the Bamako ministerial declaration, adopted in Geneva in October 2019.

12. In north-western Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin, some 2.6 million internally displaced persons and 285,000 refugees were displaced in Cameroon, Chad, the Niger and Nigeria, where insecurity, sexual and gender-based violence and terrorist activities posed serious risks to those populations and undermined humanitarian access. Through the Nigeria regional refugee response plan, the United Nations and its partners supported protection and provided humanitarian assistance. However, many needs remained unmet and returns occurred alongside new displacements. In Chad, the presence of thousands of internally displaced persons and refugees in the Lake Chad Basin put pressure on natural resources, and sexual and gender-based violence was widespread. The Lake Chad Basin Commission worked with the Multinational Joint Task Force and aid organizations to enhance humanitarian access across the region.

13. In Cameroon, violence in the south-western and north-western regions continued, with a prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence. By the end of 2019, there were 970,000 internally displaced persons in the country, some 240,000 of whom were newly displaced, and 406,400 refugees. In the Central African Republic, where the situation remained volatile, the United Nations and its partners assisted some 423,000 internally displaced persons. Meanwhile, 610,000 people from the Central African Republic remained in exile.

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

14. Several countries in the subregion were adversely affected by multifaceted and often overlapping situations of armed conflict, intracommunal tensions and disasters, including locust infestations and flooding, which affected settlements for refugees and internally displaced persons in Somalia and South Sudan. The situation was also characterized by human trafficking and recurrent food insecurity. The subregion hosted some 4.4 million refugees, representing 69 per cent of the refugees on the continent and 21 per cent of the global refugee population.

15. The situation in Burundi remained complex, with some refugees returning while others continued to seek asylum abroad. Some 313,000 refugees from Burundi were supported under the Burundi regional refugee response plan, and 21,200 Burundian returnees were assisted through the Burundi joint refugee return and reintegration plan, which was jointly led by the United Nations Development Programme and UNHCR.

16. In Ethiopia, while humanitarian access was constrained by hostilities between security forces and armed groups, assistance reached over 3 million internally displaced persons. The country continued to experience internal displacement and, while some 1.3 million internally displaced persons returned home, about 1.7 million remained displaced at the end of 2019.

17. As the South Sudan peace process advanced, some refugees and internally displaced persons spontaneously returned. Nevertheless, conflict and a critical humanitarian situation kept 2.2 million South Sudanese refugees in exile, and nearly 1.7 million people internally displaced. The United Nations and its partners provided assistance to refugees, host communities, internally displaced persons and returnees under the South Sudan regional refugee response plan.

18. The Sudan hosted over 1.1 million refugees, mostly from South Sudan, while 1.9 million people remained internally displaced and some 733,000 Sudanese refugees were living in protracted exile. Delays in the peace process and continued security incidents in Darfur, alongside the planned drawdown of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), generated concern. Sporadic outbreaks of conflict continued in Blue Nile and Southern Kordofan States. The Government of the Sudan signed a \$20 million programme with the Peacebuilding Fund, which was aimed at supporting the transitional authorities. For Darfur, three priority areas were identified: rule of law, durable solutions and peacebuilding.

19. In Somalia, conflict and extreme weather events caused further displacement in 2019. There were some 2.6 million internally displaced persons, many living in some 2,000 informal settlements with limited access to essential services and risking forced eviction. The Somalia humanitarian response plan aimed to reach 3 million people, while assistance was provided to some 614,000 Somali refugees who remained in a protracted situation, mostly in Ethiopia and Kenya. In 2020, the African Union Mission in Somalia is expected to gradually transfer responsibilities to the Somali national army.

C. Southern Africa

20. A total of 16 countries in southern Africa hosted more than 8.9 million persons of concern, nearly 90 per cent of whom were located in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This included 1 million refugees and asylum seekers, mainly from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Rwanda and South Sudan. In addition to insecurity, the subregion was affected by cyclones and drought.

21. Some 807,000 refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo were hosted in Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania. The regional refugee response plan, involving 66 partners, supported protection and assistance, livelihood opportunities and peaceful coexistence.

22. In the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, intercommunal hostilities continued, with an increase in violent attacks on displaced civilians in May and June 2020. The United Nations escalated its emergency response, as the number of internally displaced persons surpassed 5 million, and the situation was compounded by outbreaks of the Ebola virus disease and measles. Protection monitoring and measures to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence were major areas of focus. However, humanitarian access remained a challenge.

23. The effects of Cyclone Idai in March 2019 in Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe continued to linger, with those affected struggling to rebuild their lives. In Mozambique, over 95,000 people were relocated to 71 sites, where they received assistance that was airlifted to the area by humanitarian organizations.

24. In parts of Mozambique, particularly Cabo Delgado, the security situation deteriorated, with armed attacks against civilians, humanitarian facilities and local authorities. Humanitarian actors faced challenges responding to the needs of some 700,000 people, including internally displaced persons. A rapid response plan targeting 250,000 people was launched in June 2020.

III. Protection

A. Refugees and asylum seekers

25. The number of refugees in Africa tripled over the last decade, from 2.2 million to 6.3 million. The principle of non-refoulement remained central, although movement restrictions and border closures owing to COVID-19 infringed upon the right to seek asylum in some countries. There were worrying instances in which refugees and asylum seekers were prevented from crossing borders.

26. In a positive development, following initial restrictions owing to COVID-19, Uganda issued a directive to allow a group of asylum seekers from the Democratic Republic of the Congo to enter the country, while ensuring health screening and quarantine measures for new arrivals. UNHCR and its partners supported the Government in the life-saving endeavour, installing tents, health screening areas, toilets, hand-washing facilities and water tanks. The progressive policy set a good example for the region and beyond, demonstrating that even during a global crisis such as COVID-19, there are ways to manage border restrictions while respecting international law. At the same time, many host countries are facing multiple challenges related to underfunding and severe food ration cuts.

27. UNHCR and its partners worked with States and regional actors to strengthen asylum systems. In West Africa, significant improvements were observed in Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and Togo. In Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone, new decrees and legislation related to asylum awaited parliamentary endorsement. Mauritius agreed on standard operating procedures to prevent refoulement, facilitate refugee status determination and identify solutions. In South Africa, a plan was developed to address the backlog of some 150,000 individuals in the refugee status determination appeal process.

28. The year 2019 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the Organization of African Unity Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa of 1969. The African Union organized several commemorative events to showcase the

enduring relevance of the regional instrument and its influence on the development of progressive laws and policies.

B. Mixed movements

29. Refugees and asylum seekers continued to travel alongside migrants in mixed movements. They undertook dangerous journeys from sub-Saharan Africa to North Africa and across the central and western Mediterranean Sea to Europe, as well as towards South Africa. Along routes between East and West Africa and the Mediterranean coast of Africa, thousands of refugees and migrants suffered extreme human rights abuses, including sexual and gender-based violence, detention, torture and human trafficking.

30. Mixed movements persisted in southern Africa; while many individuals were from the subregion, others endured a journey of over 5,000 km from West Africa, as well as from Eritrea, Somalia and the Sudan. The United Nations worked with the African Union, the Southern African Development Community and affected Governments on the development of protection-sensitive asylum and migration strategies. A project in the southern Africa and Indian Ocean region to improve migration management was funded by the European Union and involved the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and UNHCR.

31. In the search for solutions for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Libya, an emergency transit mechanism was established in Rwanda in late 2019, following the Government's offer to host some 30,000 vulnerable persons. By the end of the year, 300 individuals had been evacuated to the mechanism. The previously established mechanism in the Niger secured the evacuation of some 880 refugees from Libya. UNHCR made 1,260 resettlement submissions for those groups. A new partnership between UNHCR and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in West and Central Africa led to increased access to status determination procedures along routes, including for victims and survivors of trafficking, providing them with alternatives to onward movement.

32. IOM reported mixed movements through the eastern route towards the countries of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, passing through Yemen, with 138,000 arrivals in 2019. Crossings through the western and central Mediterranean routes declined by roughly half; however, there was a re-emergence of movements from coastal West Africa to the Canary Islands. In the desert near the Niger, IOM rescued over 15,800 individuals in 2019.

C. Internally displaced persons

33. Sub-Saharan Africa continued to be affected by massive internal displacement, with some 18.5 million internally displaced persons on the continent by the end of 2019, representing 43 per cent of the global population of internally displaced persons.

34. In 2019, the African Union commemorated the tenth anniversary of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention). Equatorial Guinea, Mozambique, Somalia and South Sudan became the most recent countries to ratify the Convention. In March 2020, Ethiopia completed its national ratification process. The Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons advocated the rights of internally

displaced persons and their involvement in durable solutions, and promoted accession to the Convention.

35. To advance protection and solutions for internally displaced persons, efforts were focused on the implementation of the multi-stakeholder plan of action launched on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. In March 2020, UNHCR launched an internally displaced persons initiative in select countries, including Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, South Sudan and the Sudan, to ensure a more predictable and effective response to internal displacement and to operationalize its updated policy on internally displaced persons. In Somalia, the Government adopted a national framework on internally displaced persons and returnees.

36. In December 2019, Ethiopia launched a national durable solutions initiative, developed in partnership with the United Nations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and donors, to support internally displaced persons. IOM and its partners also worked with national stakeholders to strengthen peacebuilding and support social cohesion among internally displaced persons.

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

37. Sexual and gender-based violence, perpetrated mostly against women and girls, remained a serious concern throughout the region and was exacerbated by COVID-19. The United Nations prioritized and expanded prevention, risk mitigation and response, working closely with national and local partners. UNHCR led and coordinated the refugee response and international protection, assistance and solutions, including sexual and gender-based violence prevention, risk mitigation and response. The inter-agency projects, Protection Standby Capacity Project and Gender Standby Capacity, deployed 24 senior protection advisers and gender advisers to sub-Saharan African countries through UNHCR, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, boosting capacity in field operations.

38. Prevention activities were implemented across the continent by a wide range of actors. In Burundi and Uganda, men and boys engaged in community-led prevention initiatives aimed at addressing the link between violence against women and HIV/AIDS. In north-eastern Nigeria, community engagement was promoted to combat sexual and gender-based violence through the Zero Tolerance Village Alliance, reaching 45,000 internally displaced persons. In Nigeria, UN-Women collaborated with the Ministry of Women's Affairs on awareness and prevention of gender-based violence, targeting some 10,000 refugees and internally displaced persons.

39. Safe spaces for women and girls, including survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, were established. In South Sudan, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) supported one-stop centres that provided integrated medical, psychosocial and legal support to survivors and, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, it supported over 30,000 survivors. In Uganda, UN-Women supported legal aid services for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, including over 51,000 women and girls, and 4,000 men and boys from refugee and host communities, and provided psychosocial support to 18,900 individuals. In Ethiopia, areas with a large number of internally displaced persons were targeted with sexual and gender-based violence risk mitigation actions, survivor-centred support and community-based complaint mechanisms. UNFPA supported training on the clinical management of rape for 320 health-care workers serving refugees and internally displaced persons in eight countries and supplied 1,875,000 reproductive health kits in six countries.

E. Gender equality and the empowerment of women

40. Gender equality is fundamental to the well-being and rights of displaced women, while empowerment, through meaningful participation in decision-making, is central to building resilience. UN-Women helped to build the capacity of more than 750 humanitarian actors across the continent to address the needs and priorities of crisis-affected women and girls. In the Niger, it supported “women’s cohesion spaces” and, together with partners, supported more than 50,000 women in developing livelihood skills.

41. In Mali, UN-Women provided internally displaced women and women in host communities with kits to foster economic activities. In Kenya, UN-Women and its partners trained over 2,100 women in leadership, conflict management, gender equality and sexual and gender-based violence prevention and response, and sensitized 1,260 men on sexual and gender-based violence prevention and gender equality. In Uganda, capacity-building was provided for 40 women’s rights organizations, enabling them to influence the humanitarian response, while in north-eastern Nigeria, 3,700 internally displaced women benefited from leadership, communication and advocacy training.

42. At food distribution points, the World Food Programme (WFP) and its partners established child-friendly spaces to support women and ensure that older children could attend school. UNHCR released a gender equality toolkit, including best practices.

F. Child protection

43. In sub-Saharan Africa, where children represented 62 per cent of displaced persons, the number of incidents of child abandonment, child marriage and teen pregnancy increased. The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), IOM, UNHCR and their partners supported the East African Community and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development in strengthening national child protection systems and cross-border collaboration to address the needs of refugee and migrant children.

44. UNICEF provided over 83,500 vulnerable children in the central Sahel with psychosocial support and supported 400,700 children in South Sudan. In Chad, UNICEF provided psychosocial support to 106,000 children in refugee camps and host communities through child-friendly spaces and community-based interventions. In Nigeria, community volunteers were trained to provide psychosocial support. As a result, 245,000 children were reached in the north-east and tens of thousands of children received risk education on the explosive remnants of war. UNICEF supported some 37,000 children in accessing education in safe learning spaces in Nigeria, while psychosocial training for teachers benefited 249,000 children.

45. In South Sudan, UNICEF and its partners rolled out a new version of the Child Protection Information Management System to facilitate family tracing and reunification to support child protection more broadly. Across Africa, UNHCR and its partners conducted more than 48,600 best interest determination procedures for unaccompanied and separated children and worked with States to develop laws and policies to provide equal protection for displaced and stateless children. In Ethiopia, UNHCR, its partners and community members developed a family tracing and reunification system for newly arrived children, and 6,600 were reunited with family in camps and surrounding areas. In Uganda, over 10,000 parents and caregivers joined positive parenting sessions, and 13,000 community members and young people were sensitized on the prevention of violence against children.

G. Stateless persons

46. The UNHCR I Belong campaign continued to drive progress in eradicating statelessness, including through the provision of technical guidance to States on the reform of nationality laws, policies and procedures to address issues that may lead to statelessness. The African Union, with technical support from UNHCR, is finalizing a draft continental protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on specific aspects of the right to nationality and the eradication of statelessness in Africa.

47. Strong commitments to eradicate statelessness were made by States and other stakeholders during the high-level segment on statelessness, held at the seventieth session of the UNHCR Executive Committee in October 2019, with over 100 pledges for Africa. Numerous States committed themselves to resolving statelessness, adopting national actions plans, undertaking law and policy reforms and acceding to the conventions on statelessness. The secretariat of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region pledged to support the endorsement of a draft consolidated action plan on the eradication of statelessness (2017–2024) by its Regional Inter-Ministerial Committee.

48. An action plan to eradicate statelessness in the southern Africa subregion was submitted for approval to the Public Security Committee of the Southern African Development Community, while during the high-level segment and the Global Refugee Forum, some 50 commitments were made by countries in the subregion to end statelessness. The Congo and Eswatini adopted national action plans to end statelessness through nationality law reform. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Madagascar, Namibia and Zambia, national plans to eradicate statelessness awaited formal endorsement by the respective Governments. In October 2019, Angola acceded to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

49. In line with the Banjul Plan of Action on the Eradication of Statelessness 2017–2024, which was adopted by the Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS), national action plans against statelessness were adopted by Côte d'Ivoire and the Niger. ECOWAS and the Central African Economic and Monetary Community also made statelessness pledges during the high-level segment.

50. Birth registration continues to be a vital tool in preventing statelessness. In South Sudan, through digitalized birth registration, UNICEF supported 73,000 displaced and host community children. In Uganda, birth registration and the use of the mobile vital records system were scaled up in 2019.

H. Implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees and pledges for Africa emanating from the Global Refugee Forum

51. In line with the global compact on refugees, UNHCR engaged Governments and its partners to expand the socioeconomic inclusion of refugees, strengthened partnerships with development actors, including the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme and ILO, and worked with Governments to build inclusive national strategies. Important progress was made towards more comprehensive refugee responses in Africa. In Ethiopia, refugees were granted greater access to local economies, while in Malawi, they gained access to banking services, stimulating micro-businesses. The Government of the Niger and UNHCR worked with the World Bank and the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development of

Germany on an ambitious out-of-camp policy to achieve solutions for Nigerian and Malian refugees, while improving the lives of host communities.

52. At the first Global Refugee Forum, there were over 400 pledges specific to Africa. Some 250 were financial commitments to technical and material support made by donors, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders. Pledges were aimed at increasing access to education, facilitating jobs and livelihoods, improving access to clean energy and bolstering infrastructure. Of the 400 pledges, 180 were from 54 entities in Africa, including 34 States, as well as NGOs and the private sector. Half of the pledges focused on strengthening asylum and protection mechanisms and facilitating durable solutions.

53. At the Global Refugee Forum, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development Support Platform was launched and will be pivotal in mobilizing additional political, financial and technical support to promote durable solutions and help host countries, including to address the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic.

IV. Humanitarian operations

A. Emergency response capacity and constraints

54. Active conflict and the presence of armed actors hampered humanitarian access in numerous countries. Responses were often impeded by generalized violence, improvised explosive devices and landmines, disasters and logistical constraints.

55. There were nearly 3,000 security incidents in sub-Saharan Africa concerning staff from the United Nations and peacekeeping and political missions. Of those incidents, 189 were categorized as critical: 16 deaths, 40 serious injuries, 128 detentions and 5 abductions.

56. Preparedness activities were conducted in 23 sub-Saharan countries, involving 14 inter-agency contingency plans for potential refugee movements. The United Nations and its partners scaled up their emergency response in several countries, providing life-saving assistance, including food and water. WFP engaged in rigorous planning and used innovative early warning systems to anticipate emergencies and pre-position food stocks, including in the Central African Republic, South Sudan and the Sudan.

57. Of the 13 United Nations peacekeeping operations in the world, 6 are located in sub-Saharan Africa. During the reporting period, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic worked closely with humanitarian organizations to facilitate humanitarian access and ensure the protection of civilians. UNAMID provided armed escorts for humanitarian operations. As UNAMID prepares to withdraw, the security situation in Darfur remains a concern, in particular as refugees living in camps and cities have fallen victim to armed attacks and intracommunal conflict.

B. Food and nutrition

58. Conflict and violence amplified food insecurity and malnutrition in affected countries. In fleeing violence, many people were forced to abandon crops, and some returned to find their homes and crops destroyed or their property occupied. UNHCR and WFP warned that conflict and disasters, severe underfunding, supply chain challenges, rising food prices and the loss of income from COVID-19 threatened to leave millions of refugees across Africa without food. Other factors contributing to

increased food insecurity included a lack of access to agricultural land and livelihoods, and limited income opportunities.

59. In Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, Ethiopia, Malawi, Rwanda, South Sudan, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zimbabwe, persons of concern were almost entirely dependent on food assistance. A decline in funding for protracted situations led to ration cuts and the prioritization of the most vulnerable.

60. WFP provided essential food and nutritional aid and assistance to refugees, internally displaced persons and returnees. In the Sudan, food and cash transfers benefited over 1.8 million internally displaced persons, 400,000 refugees and 13,000 returnees; in Uganda, food and cash transfers assisted 1.3 million refugees; and in Ethiopia, food and cash transfers reached 690,000 refugees. In Kenya, more than 415,000 refugees received food, nutritional aid and assistance and livelihood support, while food assistance was provided to 140,000 refugees in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and over 250,000 refugees in the United Republic of Tanzania. In the Central African Republic, 80 per cent of WFP resources supported internally displaced persons, returnees and host families, reaching approximately 525,000 beneficiaries per month.

61. Cash transfers were increasingly used to meet food needs in a number of operations. WFP shifted from in-kind food assistance to cash transfers in various countries, including in South Sudan, the Sudan and Uganda, supporting 450,000 refugees, nearly a 50 per cent increase from 2018.

62. Nutrition surveys carried out by UNHCR and its partners in 70 refugee sites and 14 host communities revealed child malnutrition with very high stunting in almost 50 per cent of sites, high anaemia in about 70 per cent of sites and global acute malnutrition exceeding the 10 per cent threshold in 39 per cent of sites. Blanket supplementary feeding was provided in 24 refugee sites, including in Kenya, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania.

63. UNICEF strengthened community surveillance and referral systems throughout eastern and southern Africa to address acute malnutrition. More than 600 children, including refugees, were treated for severe acute malnutrition in Eswatini, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia. In the central Sahel, UNICEF treated some 240,000 children for severe malnutrition, while in Uganda, 86,500 children received treatment, including more than 15,000 in districts hosting refugees.

C. Cash assistance

64. Cash-based interventions were scaled up throughout the region, enhancing protection and assistance outcomes. Cash grants not only served basic needs, but were used to support access to education and shelter, enhance livelihoods and facilitate sustainable returns and reintegration. They also served as a vehicle for financial inclusion and benefited host populations.

65. In East Africa and the Horn of Africa, cash grants supported return and reintegration, and cash-based interventions were scaled up to assist refugees whose livelihoods were severely affected by COVID-19. UNHCR had assisted 35,000 households by 30 June.

66. In southern Africa, UNHCR operations were committed to shifting from in-kind assistance to cash-based interventions in 2020. Cash-based interventions were implemented in Angola, South Africa and Zambia, and refugees and internally displaced persons in the Democratic Republic of the Congo received increased cash assistance.

67. In West and Central Africa, UNHCR expanded partnerships with financial service providers to deliver cash more effectively and engaged with Governments and development partners to foster stronger linkages with national social protection schemes. In Burkina Faso alone, over \$1.2 million was disbursed to internally displaced persons in the second half of 2019.

D. Health

Response to COVID-19

68. COVID-19 posed a number of operational challenges. Working with Governments, the United Nations endeavoured to ensure protection and assistance for persons of concern through continuity plans and risk mitigation measures. In some cases, core functions were maintained through the use of helplines and online protection counselling. In March 2020, the United Nations launched the Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19. Of the 63 countries covered under the plan, 26 are in sub-Saharan Africa.

69. UNHCR advocated the inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers in public health responses and social safety nets across Africa, in line with the global compact on refugees and building on strengthened partnerships with development actors. National health responses were supported by the deployment of emergency medical teams to Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, South Africa, Togo and Zambia.

70. Awareness-raising, prevention and treatment information campaigns were carried out across operations, with the help of refugee and community groups and using telephone hotlines, mobile messaging, flyers, posters and billboards. In some countries, such as Burkina Faso and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, community-based protection committees were trained on prevention measures. Refugees and internally displaced persons were an essential part of the response, including acting as health workers and aiding in the production of personal protective equipment.

71. As part of the response, transit and reception facilities for refugees were converted into isolation and quarantine facilities, including in Uganda, where they also served host communities. In Kenya, isolation centres with 1,000 beds were constructed at the Dadaab camp. In camps in the Gambela region of Ethiopia, 127 communal hand-washing stations and nearly 15,000 household stations were installed. In South Darfur, a 1,000-litre water tank was installed in the Beliel registration centre. The distribution of sanitation and hygiene items, including soap, increased across operations.

Other health responses

72. In 2019, the World Health Organization reported 140 public health emergencies in Africa, including more than 120 disease outbreaks, while the continent faced a severe shortage of trained medical staff. In situations of internally displaced persons, the Organization led the health cluster, working with more than 50 partners and Governments. The health cluster was active in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Mali, the Niger, Nigeria, Somalia and South Sudan.

73. Women and children were targeted in health-related interventions. In the Sudan, UNICEF treated diarrhoea, malaria and respiratory tract infections for 615,400 refugee and internally displaced children. In Zambia, UNICEF provided 20,000 mothers, newborns and children from refugee and host communities with health care and 5,100 refugee children with psychosocial support. With funding from the Bill and

Melinda Gates Foundation, UNHCR strengthened health care for refugee women and infants in Cameroon, Chad and the Niger.

74. UNFPA provided life-saving sexual and reproductive health services through the Minimum Initial Service Package for Reproductive Health in emergencies. In Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mozambique, Nigeria and the Sudan, UNFPA trained midwives and provided reproductive health services.

75. The United Nations and NGOs worked with Governments to support the Ebola response. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, IOM provided population mobility mapping and data analytics for prevention and control, including in the context of cross-border movements. In Burundi, Rwanda, South Sudan and Uganda, UNICEF reached over 170,000 people with Ebola prevention information campaigns and essential supplies.

76. Progress was made in integrating refugees into national health programmes in the Central African Republic. In Rwanda, ILO and UNHCR worked with the Ministry of Health to include refugees in the national health system, resulting in the inclusion of 12,000 urban refugees in the national hepatitis insurance scheme and expanding access to treatment. In the United Republic of Tanzania, refugees were included in the national malaria control programme.

77. Refugees and nationals received equal access to HIV treatment in 26 refugee-hosting countries in Africa through national programmes. In Ethiopia, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) provided sexual and reproductive health services to 2 million returnees, while UNHCR promoted the inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers in national strategies in Uganda and, with UNAIDS, strengthened HIV programmes in refugee camps in Malawi. In Mozambique, UNAIDS and IOM supported the integration of HIV into emergency health responses led by the Ministry of Health.

78. In 2019, UNICEF supported immunization services in refugee-hosting areas, including in Ethiopia, the Sudan, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania. Some 16,500 refugee children received measles vaccinations.

E. Education

79. UNHCR supported education for millions of refugees and host community children, including through a comprehensive primary school programme in eight African countries and the Secondary Youth Education Initiative for refugees in Cameroon, Ethiopia, Kenya and Zambia. The Instant Network Schools programme provided over 54,000 students and 900 teachers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, South Sudan and the United Republic of Tanzania with digital resources for education. Nearly 3,800 refugee students (30 per cent female) in 32 countries in Africa received scholarships from the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative for university studies in their country of asylum. To mark its 2019 theme, the “Year of refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons: towards durable solutions to forced displacement in Africa”, the African Union offered 25 university scholarships for refugees.

80. At the Global Refugee Forum, African States, including Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Congo, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South Sudan, the Sudan, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe, pledged to start or continue working towards including refugee learners in national education systems.

81. UNICEF supported education for millions of refugees and host community children in Cameroon, the Central African Republic, the Congo, the Democratic

Republic of the Congo, Kenya, South Sudan and Uganda, among others. UNICEF and its partners provided education for over 112,000 refugee children in Rwanda, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia, and helped 61,000 children regain access to education in the Sahel. In Ethiopia, UNICEF assisted 101,000 refugee and host community children, as well as nearly 34,000 internally displaced children, with early childhood education.

82. School feeding programmes for refugee children were carried out in numerous countries. WFP provided meals to displaced, returnee and host community children in the Sudan, including more than 700,000 in Darfur, Blue Nile and Southern Kordofan States. In the Central African Republic, WFP provided meals to primary schoolchildren from internally displaced person, refugee and host communities. In South Sudan, WFP and UNHCR piloted a school feeding programme at the Gorom refugee camp.

83. In the context of COVID-19, following the closure of schools in many countries, the United Nations worked to ensure that refugee and displaced children and young people were included in the education response led by ministries of education.

F. Shelter

84. UNHCR improved access to emergency and transitional shelter, deploying over 15,000 refugee housing units to 14 operations. Shelter and settlement responses supported durable solutions and the transformation of camps into sustainable settlements. Settlement profiling tools were developed with the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) to improve decision-making and infrastructure investments, and profiles were created for sites in Ethiopia and Uganda. In the Niger, in collaboration with the Government and host communities, UNHCR used urban development strategies to transform camps into integrated settlements.

85. UNHCR led nine shelter clusters in Africa, supporting shelter solutions through 194 partners and over \$80 million in funding. Shelter clusters were activated in Burkina Faso and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. UNHCR and its partners responded to shelter needs linked to both displacement and return. Where access to land for construction was compromised by insecurity, flooding and displacement, such as in Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, Nigeria and Somalia, shelter clusters provided a coordinated response.

86. As a result of the COVID-19 crisis, there was pressure to rapidly decongest and implement physical distancing measures in overcrowded settlements and host communities. UNHCR operations in Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, the Niger and Nigeria donated refugee housing units to be used as health facilities, and 1,160 additional units were deployed to four operations.

G. Livelihoods

87. Livelihood programmes helped many refugees to avoid slipping into poverty and to prepare for a durable solution, while benefiting local communities and fostering coexistence. ILO and UNHCR worked with their partners on livelihood activities for refugees and host communities in Ethiopia, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger.

88. The World Bank, NGOs and UNHCR began a five-year project using the “graduation approach” that will benefit 220,000 refugees and host community members living in extreme poverty in 18 sub-Saharan countries. In Malawi, refugees

in the Dzaleka refugee camp were able to open bank accounts and access small loans to support micro-businesses.

89. In Mozambique, a three-year livelihoods project was implemented by WFP, UNHCR, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and UN-Habitat with the National Refugee Support Institute. In Ethiopia, WFP helped establish savings and loan associations, and rural savings and credit cooperatives. It also supported livelihoods following a proclamation by the Government that afforded refugees the right to work.

90. UN-Women supported over 10,000 refugee and internally displaced person households in Nigeria with livelihood interventions and provided training, coaching and start-up kits to 1,300 conflict-affected women. In Cameroon, UN-Women worked with the Government to support some 13,000 refugee, internally displaced and host community women with livelihood training and start-up support.

V. Ending forced displacement

91. In 2019, in the light of the significant growth of internal displacement over the past decade (from just over 5 million to over 18 million internally displaced persons in sub-Saharan Africa), the Secretary-General established a High-level Panel on Internal Displacement. Its aim is to find long-term solutions to internal displacement globally, developing concrete recommendations for Member States, the United Nations system and other relevant stakeholders.

A. Voluntary returns

92. Obstacles to return, including ongoing insecurity, the absence of essential services and livelihood opportunities, and unresolved housing, land and property issues, persisted in many countries. The decline in socioeconomic conditions in many host countries drove refugees to return out of necessity, often in unsustainable circumstances. In 2020, voluntary repatriation operations were affected by measures to mitigate COVID-19, resulting in the suspension of organized returns. Addressing the root causes of displacement and securing peace and stability remained central to creating conducive conditions for return.

93. In East Africa and the Horn of Africa, a revitalized peace agreement created opportunities for the return of some displaced South Sudanese persons. In 2019, 99,800 refugees returned to the country. Despite official border closures, as at the end of April 2020, over 5,000 persons from South Sudan had spontaneously returned from neighbouring countries since the beginning of the year. In 2019, UNHCR supported 21,200 Burundian and 6,200 Somali refugees in voluntarily repatriating. In 2020, more than 6,700 Burundian refugees returned from the United Republic of Tanzania. In Ethiopia, over 1 million internally displaced persons returned in 2019.

94. The largest number of returns in the West and Central Africa subregion were to the Central African Republic (46,500), followed by Mali (5,250) and Côte d'Ivoire (3,250). In Nigeria, circumstances in the north-east allowed for the repatriation of 130 Nigerian refugees from Cameroon with the support of UNHCR and the two Governments. In 2020, UNHCR established a monitoring system to gather information on potential return areas, while negotiating a tripartite agreement with the Niger and Nigeria.

95. In southern Africa, UNHCR facilitated the voluntary repatriation of over 3,000 refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the Central African Republic. In addition, over 17,000 refugees were assisted in voluntarily returning from Angola

to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with cash assistance as part of their return package. In the Congo, UNHCR facilitated the return of 6,216 refugees to the Central African Republic.

B. Local integration

96. Although the prospects for local integration remain limited, efforts are under way with a number of host Governments and other stakeholders to facilitate opportunities. Support to aid socioeconomic inclusion, educational opportunities, self-reliance and livelihoods – also benefiting host communities – would help local integration projects succeed.

97. Local integration can be facilitated by the issuance of residence permits to ensure lawful stay, along with the establishment of pathways to naturalization. In Zambia, UNHCR advocated the issuance of residence permits to 10,000 former Angolan refugees and 4,000 former Rwandan refugees as part of the legal integration process. Namibia was also in the process of formalizing the residency and inclusion of former Angolan refugees.

98. Guinea-Bissau granted citizenship to some 5,500 refugees, offering a durable solution to a protracted situation. At the Global Refugee Forum, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Namibia and Zambia pledged to facilitate the integration of refugees and former refugees, including through long-term legal stay and naturalization.

C. Resettlement and complementary pathways

99. UNHCR worked with States and partners in rolling out its three-year strategy on resettlement and complementary pathways, which is aimed at involving new resettlement countries and expanding complementary pathways for admission to third countries.

100. In East Africa and the Horn of Africa, while opportunities for third-country resettlement were reduced by 11 per cent, more than 18,700 individuals departed for resettlement countries in 2019. In southern Africa, 1,342 resettlement departures took place for various countries, and UNHCR continued to advocate further resettlement opportunities. In West and Central Africa, 1,246 individuals departed for resettlement countries in 2019, including refugees evacuated from Libya through the emergency transit mechanism in the Niger.

VI. Partnerships

101. In 2019, aligned with the refugee coordination model, regional refugee response plans were developed for four situations in Africa, involving 14 countries and 258 partners. Nearly \$900 million was mobilized for the situations, which were funded as follows: Burundi (28 per cent), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (22 per cent), Nigeria (46 per cent) and South Sudan (43 per cent). Response plans fostered closer engagement with Governments and reinforced humanitarian-development cooperation, in line with the global compact on refugees.

102. Local, national and international NGOs were pivotal in reaching persons of concern and implementing a wide range of activities across sub-Saharan Africa. In 2019, UNHCR provided some \$125 million to 272 local and national responders and NGOs on the continent. The United Nations Partner Portal launched by UNHCR,

UNICEF and WFP in 2018, was joined by UNFPA and continued to enhance collaboration with civil society organizations.

103. Regional organizations played a crucial role in addressing displacement challenges and promoting solutions in Africa. The United Nations worked particularly closely with the African Union, including in the context of the commemoration of the anniversaries of two landmark treaties on displacement in Africa (the Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa of 1969 and the Kampala Convention of 2009) and the “Year of refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons: towards durable solutions to forced displacement in Africa”.

104. At the Global Refugee Forum, the African Development Bank, alongside other financial institutions, affirmed its commitment to operationalizing the global compact on refugees, while the World Bank announced \$2.2 billion in additional financing to the dedicated window for host communities and refugees under the nineteenth replenishment of the International Development Association. Under the eighteenth replenishment, nearly \$1.5 billion had been approved as of 30 June 2020 for projects in sub-Saharan Africa.

VII. Funding

105. The Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator allocated \$135.6 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund to support life-saving activities in nine conflict-affected countries in sub-Saharan Africa. That amount comprised allocations from the rapid response window (\$71.6 million) and the underfunded emergencies window (\$64 million). The Fund was instrumental in addressing the acute humanitarian needs caused by new displacement that was triggered by violence in Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Ethiopia, as well as critical gaps in assistance for those in protracted displacement in the Sudan and other countries.

106. Aid organizations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo received the highest amount of funding (\$27.0 million), followed by the Niger (\$21.1 million), South Sudan (\$16.8 million), Burkina Faso (\$16.0 million), Cameroon (\$13.7 million), Mali (\$12.8 million), Ethiopia (\$10.8 million), Chad (\$10.0 million) and Mozambique (\$6.9 million).

107. In 2019, country-based pooled funds allocated \$396 million for life-saving humanitarian activities, including in the Central African Republic (\$39.0 million), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (\$77.6 million), Ethiopia (\$60.6 million), Nigeria (\$26.7 million), Somalia (\$53.4 million), South Sudan (\$80.0 million) and the Sudan (\$58.9 million). Country-based pooled funds in Somalia, South Sudan and the Sudan assisted people affected by floods and droughts. Some 13 per cent of country-based pooled funds in Africa supported protection for refugees, internally displaced persons and returnees.

108. With only 49 per cent of funding needs met in the Africa region in 2019 and none of the regional refugee response plans adequately funded, the delivery of protection and assistance to persons of concern was seriously affected. That meant that life-saving interventions had to be prioritized, and self-reliance and other activities were often put on hold.

VIII. Conclusions and recommendations

109. Conflict displaced large numbers of persons in sub-Saharan Africa and kept millions from returning home, while the effects of COVID-19 exacerbated

humanitarian crises. Solutions for some 33 million persons of concern in the region can only be secured through strong, multilateral cooperation.

110. At the Global Refugee Forum, held in December 2019, States and other stakeholders made visionary and ambitious pledges to share the responsibility for protecting and assisting refugees and to pursue durable solutions in line with the global compact on refugees. That gave rise to hope, particularly for Africa, where developing countries host a disproportionately large share of displaced populations. It is vital that the international community ensure that displaced persons and their host communities are not left behind and that, in the spirit of solidarity that shaped the global compact on refugees, the pledges are put into action and are accompanied by resolute efforts to address the root causes of displacement and restore peace. With that in mind:

(a) I call on all parties to ensure respect for international humanitarian and human rights law, including by protecting civilians during armed conflict, preventing serious human rights violations, in particular sexual and gender-based violence, and addressing smuggling and trafficking in human beings;

(b) Noting that the African Union declared 2020 as the “Year of silencing the guns: creating conducive conditions for Africa’s development” and recalling my appeal for a global ceasefire in the context of COVID-19, I appeal to all actors to redouble efforts to address the root causes of displacement, with the objective of ending conflict and averting grave humanitarian consequences;

(c) I remind States of their obligation to respect the right to seek asylum and to keep their borders open to those fleeing conflict and persecution, abiding by the principle of non-refoulement;

(d) With respect to COVID-19 and as outlined in the policy brief entitled “COVID-19 and people on the move”, I urge States to ensure that restrictive measures, including with regard to border management, do not infringe upon the right to seek asylum, recalling that even in the midst of such a global crisis, practical arrangements are available that can ensure refugee protection and respect for human rights while protecting public health, and I further appeal to States to include refugees and other vulnerable populations in national health responses and measures to respond to the pandemic, including to mitigate its socioeconomic impact;

(e) I implore States and non-State actors to facilitate rapid and unimpeded access to victims of conflict, to take all appropriate steps to protect humanitarian personnel and to ensure the civilian and humanitarian character of asylum;

(f) Recognizing the importance of the principle of international solidarity and burden- and responsibility-sharing, I call on all stakeholders to support the implementation of the global compact on refugees and to accelerate the implementation of the pledges made at the Global Refugee Forum, adapting them as necessary in a practical and pragmatic manner, to meet current challenges related to the pandemic and its consequences;

(g) I encourage States that have not yet signed or ratified the Kampala Convention to do so and those that have ratified the Convention to fully incorporate it into domestic law;

(h) I further 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) I count on all parties to step up efforts to address the growing levels of internal displacement on the continent, with full respect for the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and robust efforts to implement the three-year multi-stakeholder plan of action to advance protection and solutions for internally displaced persons;

(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 based on the principles of voluntariness, safety, dignity, non-discrimination and sustainability;

(k) I appeal to all stakeholders to ensure the protection of displaced women and children, to promote gender equality and to empower women and young people as agents of change;

(l) I urge States and other stakeholders to ensure that no one is left behind in addressing displacement, including people with disabilities and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex individuals;

(m) 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, including by engaging in new partnerships with development actors;

(n) I appeal to host countries 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) I urge donors to ensure adequate, flexible and predictable funding to help address the needs of refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons in Africa and support comprehensive refugee responses as outlined in the global compact on refugees.