



With You

The newsletter for Australians supporting the UN Refugee Agency | 2020 Issue 2



INSIDE: The difference you made: DRC

Australia for UNHCR 20th Anniversary

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The Leading Women Fund

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Why I support refugees



Welcome

There's no doubt 2020 has been one of the most challenging years the world has seen in decades, and one of the most formidable we have faced in the 20 years Australia for UNHCR has been supporting refugees.

As COVID-19 reached crowded refugee settlements around the world, our teams were on the ground bolstering medical facilities, rolling out hand washing and sanitation infrastructure and supporting community awareness campaigns. This has been an unprecedented global operation, and refugees have been at the centre of it, which you can read about on page 10.

The catastrophic explosions in Beirut had a huge impact on every person in Lebanon, regardless of nationality or status, and for many in the Lebanese diaspora in Australia as well. Our teams were on the ground immediately and worked around the clock to distribute shelter kits, blankets, food and health care to all those affected, particularly those who are most vulnerable. You can read the stories from some of our colleagues at UNHCR in Lebanon on page 8.

As ever, I am so grateful and proud to see the way our donors have stepped up to support refugees, even while facing tough times themselves. In the 20 years since Australia for UNHCR began, donors have given a phenomenal \$300 million, providing critical emergency relief and long-term support to refugees around the world.

In this edition of *With You*, we highlight some of the ways your support has made a difference. On page 3 you can read about our work in the Democratic Republic of Congo, a three-year partnership with Teachers Health

that has created safer birthing facilities for expectant mothers and helped see the neonatal mortality rate fall drastically. On page 6, we take a look back on the last two decades of Australia for UNHCR, the achievements we've made and the impact they've had thanks to your support.

As ever, I am so grateful and proud to see the way our donors have stepped up to support refugees, even while facing tough times themselves.

With four out of five refugees being women and children, we have launched a new initiative to engage women in Australia to support refugee women through raising funds, sharing skills and opening up networks of support both here in Australia and globally.

My hope is the Leading Women Fund will create a community of women working together for gender equality. As UN Secretary-General António Guterres says, this is "the unfinished business of our time". To find out more and get involved with this important and life-changing project and social network, turn to page 14.

As we move through this challenging year together, I want to thank you for your ongoing support and for continuing to stand with refugees.

Naomi Steer

Naomi Steer, National Director

[Follow me on Twitter @NaomiCSteer](#)

The difference you made

Raising survival rates for mothers and babies in the DRC

For refugee women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, pregnancy can be a dangerous and daunting experience.

Without access to essential health services, women can be left with no other choice but to travel long distances to seek medical attention or give birth without proper support.

In the DRC, where more than 96,000 babies die within their first month of life, the situation can quickly turn from one of joy to a matter of life and death – especially for refugee women who do not have access to adequate maternal health facilities.

More than 530,000 refugees, mainly from Burundi, South Sudan and Central African Republic, now live in the DRC in addition to 4.5 million internally displaced people.

Debra O'Neill, Australia for UNHCR's Strategic Development Director, was deeply affected when she was shown a photo of a 'birthing chair' – literally just an office chair that had been sellotaped together. She was told mothers were also giving birth on the banks of rivers due to a lack of facilities.

"As a mother, that really resonated with me," Debra says. "I started to understand the challenges expectant and new mothers faced and saw these challenges reflected in high maternal and neonatal mortality statistics."

"We consulted with our UNHCR field staff to identify a project focusing on maternal health to improve outcomes for mothers and babies, speaking with refugee women committees as well as health experts about what they wanted and needed for themselves and their families."



Internally displaced Congolese women and their newborns at Kapangu maternity health centre in Kaniki-Kapangu.

In response to this crisis, Australian not-for-profit health fund, Teachers Health, began a three-year partnership with Australia for UNHCR in 2018 to support maternal and neonatal care in the DRC.

Together with Teachers Health, Australia for UNHCR donors have been delivering healthcare services including life-saving antenatal, obstetric and postnatal care for both local and refugee women, as well as transport to the nearest hospital for more complicated births.

We have provided equipment such as birthing chairs, torches to tend to night-time deliveries, infant incubating heaters and portable ultrasound machines, as well as mosquito nets, anti-malaria medication and iron supplements.

The impact of Australian donor support has been direct and life-changing, with the neonatal mortality rate now five times lower than it was in 2016.

Between July 2018 and December 2019, almost 2,000 safe and clean deliveries were provided by skilled birth attendants in health facilities at Inke refugee camp. Outside the camps, funding supported essential medicines, basic equipment and staff salaries for eight centres, targeting more than 20,000 children and over 4,200 breastfeeding mothers. □



Australia for UNHCR's Debra O'Neill and members of the Lembo mixed committee including Josie-Esther (far left).

Into the light

In Lembo the Australia for UNHCR team met with Josie-Esther, a refugee from the Central African Republic and mother of nine.

Josie-Esther says before the health centre was established in the village of Lembo, she saw women dying from giving birth.

"Before there was no delivery bed, no mosquito nets," she says. "Women would give birth before they could get to a health centre and had to bring their own mats to birth on."

"There was no electricity and children were dying. Before it was darkness, now it is light." □

In the news



Heavy rain and floods affect displaced families in Aden.

© UNHCR/Essam Adduais

1 YEMEN

Thousands displaced in Yemen floods

More than 150 people have died and roughly 300,000 have lost their homes, crops, livestock and personal belongings due to torrential rains and severe flash floods in Yemen.

Families have taken shelter in mosques, schools, with relatives, out in the open or in damaged buildings and homes at risk of collapsing.

Many of those displaced by the floods had already been living in overcrowded and makeshift shelters that have now been washed away or significantly damaged during heavy rains over the past few months.

Among those who are newly displaced are families that have previously been forced to flee their homes due to conflict in Yemen and who now, once again, are having to rebuild their lives and communities. □

2 SYRIA

Syrian refugees struggle to meet basic needs

An increase in the number of COVID-19 cases and a sharp economic downturn is pushing hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees into an even more dire situation and has drastically increased their humanitarian needs. While poverty rates were already at 80 per cent prior to COVID-19, refugees have lost their livelihoods, are taking on debt and are increasingly unable to meet their basic needs including food, education, health and rent due to the impact of the virus.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, UNHCR has provided emergency cash support to nearly 200,000 additional Syrian refugees across the Middle East, but we are lacking the funds needed to support the growing number of vulnerable refugees. □



Syrian Kurdish refugees at the border crossing in Turkey.

© UNHCR / J. Prickett



© UNHCR/Roger Arnold

Asylum seekers in Canada will have a smoother path to residency.

3 CANADA

Canada offers residency to asylum seekers

UNHCR has welcomed Canada's announcement to open pathways to permanent residency for asylum seekers in the healthcare sector who have worked on the frontlines of the country's COVID-19 response.

Normally asylum seekers have to wait for their claims to be accepted before they can become permanent residents, but the new program waives that requirement for those who meet the criteria and who have been playing a crucial role in healthcare institutions during the pandemic.

"This is an exemplary act of solidarity which recognises the service and dedication of some of the most marginalised and vulnerable members in society," says Rema Jamous Imseis, UNHCR's Representative in Canada.

"It is a reminder of the exceptional contributions refugees and asylum seekers make to the communities that welcome them.

"They risk their own lives to support and care for others in the fight against COVID-19. From Colombia to Bangladesh, from Uganda to Canada, incredible stories have emerged as people come together to battle a disease that knows no borders". □

4 GREECE

Fires destroy refugee camp in Greece

In September a series of fires almost completely destroyed Moria asylum centre on Lesbos island, leaving thousands of men, women and children without shelter and forcing them to sleep out in the open in the streets, fields and beaches.

UNHCR has been offering support to Greek authorities to help protect and assist asylum seekers affected by the fires, mobilising resources and aid. UNHCR has also provided emergency assistance to ensure people don't sleep in the open.

UNHCR has long been highlighting the need to address the situation and conditions for asylum seekers on the Aegean Islands. The incidents at Moria highlight the importance of taking action to improve living conditions, alleviate overcrowding, improve security, infrastructure and access to services in all five reception centres on the Greek islands. □

5 EDUCATION

A brighter future for refugee youth

Thousands of refugee youth who have the ability and desire to continue studying are currently unable to further their education due to lack of resources, violence against schools and the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced many educational facilities to close.

UNHCR is on a mission to increase the number of refugee students who have access to secondary and tertiary education from three per cent to 15 per cent over the coming decade as part of the #15by30 initiative.

Tertiary education creates opportunities for young refugee women and men to develop skills, earn qualifications, build leadership skills, contribute to social cohesion and pursue self-reliance in the long term. Obtaining tertiary education also supports the conditions for refugees to become entrepreneurs, business owners, and individuals who go on to invest in the education of their own children. □



© UNHCR/Athanasios Zanolis

UNHCR ramps up support in Moria after fires destroy the asylum centre.



© Australia for UNHCR

Refugee students at Bujubuli secondary school in western Uganda.

Twentieth Anniversary of Australia for UNHCR

National Director Naomi Steer reflects on two decades of supporting refugees.



Australia for UNHCR National Director, Naomi Steer, on a visit to the early childhood care and development (ECCD) facilities at the Jewi refugee camp in Ethiopia's Gambella region.

© Australia for UNHCR/Thomas Mukoya

What motivated you to launch Australia for UNHCR 20 years ago?

I have had a number of varied jobs – lawyer, diplomat and trade union leader – but all with a consistent focus on themes around displacement, gender equity and human rights, so when I spotted a small ad in the paper for someone to set up a new private sector organisation for UNHCR in Australia I jumped at the chance. I loved the opportunity to help connect Australians to this important global cause. If you have the opportunity to make a positive difference then you should. That has been a guiding philosophy for me.

What did you anticipate the work would be like? Has it differed from your expectations?

The debate around asylum seekers has become much more virulent and xenophobia is now a concern globally. On a positive note, there has been real interest in people wanting to understand more about global displacement. We now have 90,000 active supporters, so I am very proud of how we have engaged and mobilised Australians in this wider cause.

What have been some of your greatest support systems?

There are so many to thank from my amazing UNHCR colleagues to our Chair, Michael Dwyer AM, and Board – all leaders in their field who are passionate about our cause. I also

have a great team led by our Deputy National Director Trudi Mitchell and Strategic Development Director Debra O'Neill. Also none of our work would be possible without our donors who have raised more than \$300 million for UNHCR's humanitarian operations. My family have also supported me every step of the way. My mother was one of our first volunteers! My husband Peter and our children are also keen supporters and fundraisers for Australia for UNHCR.

What are some of the greatest things you've learned from the role and your field visits?

Two key things stand out – the resourcefulness and resilience of refugees and the dedication of UNHCR staff. While everyone needs food, water and shelter, we also need things that give us hope and meaning – education, jobs and connectivity to our wider community. These are all areas Australia for UNHCR has focused our support on for the last two decades. What makes my role so special and the work we do so fulfilling, is having that connection to refugees, listening to what they want, recognising their potential, then helping give them the resources to achieve that potential.

What are some of the projects you feel proudest of?

With our donor support, Australia for UNHCR has supported UNHCR in every major emergency. We were the largest

private sector donor for the Horn of Africa famine relief operations in 2011 and more recently for the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. We have supported Syrian refugees for over nine years now. We have helped those affected by natural disasters, from the Boxing Day Tsunami and the earthquake in Nepal to storms and floods in Africa and Asia. We have also employed hundreds of refugees over the years in our various fundraising activities. Who better to be our advocates than refugees themselves?

What are your hopes for the next 20 years at Australia for UNHCR?

When Australia for UNHCR was founded, we faced a single major crisis in a given year and there were approximately 20 million people displaced in the world. We are now dealing with many concurrent crises and more than 79 million people displaced. At the same time, we've faced a challenging global environment and devastating bushfires at home, however we've seen an uplift in support for refugees. There are a number of reasons for this, but at its heart I see a greater compassion and empathy for refugees. We hope to build on this and help create not only a more welcoming and humanitarian response to asylum seekers and refugees who arrive in Australia but recognition of the contribution refugees make if given the resources and opportunity to do so. □



Rohingya refugee, Rahima Khatun, 25, and her son Arafat, at Kutupalong settlement.

© UNHCR/Vincent Tremseau

Shelter from the storm

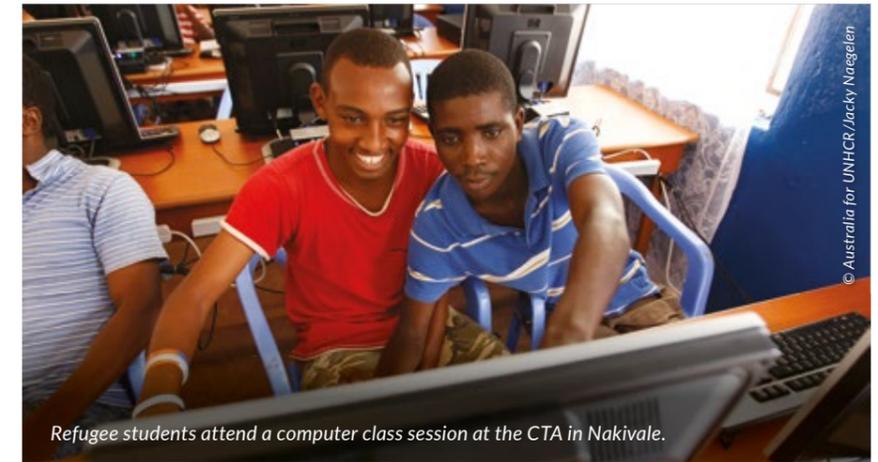
After fleeing Myanmar when their neighbourhood was attacked in 2017, Rahima and her husband Abul arrived in Kutupalong, the world's largest refugee settlement in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

Despite finding safety in the camps, they were faced with challenging conditions such as a lack of infrastructure, inadequate sanitation and the threat of monsoon season.

Rahima and her husband lived in fear that heavy monsoon rains and flooding would wash away their home. Their anxieties eased after they were relocated to a new bamboo-framed shelter on stilts with their three-year-old son Ayaz and his baby brother Arafat.

In a joint effort, UNHCR has helped replace and repair tens of thousands of shelters, built extensive road networks, installed drainage, bridges and solar-powered streetlights, and opened dozens of health facilities and nutrition centres.

"I'm not worried about the rains now. We are at peace," Rahima says. □



Refugee students attend a computer class session at the CTA in Nakivale.

© Australia for UNHCR/Jacky Naegelen

Building a secure future

In the Nakivale and Kyaka II refugee settlements in Uganda, we built a secondary school, a Computer Technology Centre and a Vocational Training Centre (VTC), opening doors to further education and employment for refugee children.

The VTC has offered courses in bricklaying, agronomy, tailoring and carpentry to both refugees living in Nakivale and Ugandan nationals. Of the 216 young people who are the first graduates of the VTC, almost three-quarters were refugees, the remainder are Ugandan youth like Mercy.

"I acquired social connections through the internship and exposure visits program that helped me keep in touch with potential employers and friends in my new profession," Mercy says.

"The skills and knowledge I acquired from Kyaka VTC helped me change to a more marketable profession within the shortest time possible." □



Fatmeh, 31, is a Syrian refugee in Jordan and mother of eight.

© UNHCR/Benoit Almeras

Easing the burden

In recent years, we have provided thousands of refugees across the Middle East with direct cash assistance which has helped restore dignity and choice, allowing families to determine and prioritise their needs.

Fatmeh is a Syrian refugee and mother of eight children. Cash assistance has helped her provide radiotherapy treatment for her young son, Loay, who was diagnosed with bladder cancer. Before receiving this financial support, Fatmeh had great difficulty making ends meet and was evicted from her home for failing to pay the rent. "The cash assistance is literally what's keeping my son alive," she says. "Without it I don't know how we could go on living." □



The blasts in Beirut have affected everyone in Lebanon regardless of nationality or status.

© Rizau Scarpix

Emergency update: Lebanon

The explosion that decimated the city of Beirut has displaced hundreds of thousands of people.

At the beginning of August, two devastating blasts decimated the city of Beirut, displacing more than 300,000 people from their homes. The scale was so huge that every person in Lebanon has been affected by the event, regardless of nationality or status, including the 1.5 million refugees who currently live there.

Our teams were on the ground immediately with stocks of emergency aid. UNHCR field workers went door-to-door in heavily impacted neighbourhoods to assess needs and distribute shelter kits, blankets, plastic sheeting, mattresses, large tents and other critical items.

Around a month after the explosions occurred, a large fire broke out in the port. While no-one was hurt, thousands of food parcels were destroyed, putting the humanitarian operation at serious risk of disruption.

The fire also reignited the trauma and anxiety that people are still dealing with since the explosions. The blaze

produced huge plumes of smoke covering Beirut for many hours and entering houses that are still without windows.

Many UNHCR staff have been personally affected, including Reem El Katib, who gave a harrowing account of her experience.

“People initially thought it was an earthquake, everyone felt it,” she says. “The reality is even worse than what the media portray – many neighbourhoods were destroyed completely.”

“Our colleagues are injured, displaced and trying to rebuild their homes. It was very overwhelming but we



Intersos staff unload relief items to fix damaged houses in the Achrafieh neighbourhood of Beirut.

© UNHCR/Hadar Derwish

needed to be on the frontline. We made a commitment to ‘stay and deliver’ and that’s what we have done.”

Reem says while the blast has had a severe mental, physical, emotional and psychological impact on everyone, it has been heartwarming to see the generous donations and engagement from donors.

“The families I met have suffered terrible physical and psychological injuries, but despite everything they remain determined to rebuild their homes and their lives.”

UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi visited the city in the wake of the explosions to meet with victims of the disaster, his first field visit to the region since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

“It was shocking to see first-hand the scale of the destruction, but it is the human cost of this disaster that is truly heartbreaking,” he said.

“The families I met have suffered terrible physical and psychological

injuries, but despite everything they remain determined to rebuild their homes and their lives.”

“We as humanitarian organisations and the whole aid community must stand alongside the people of Beirut in their hour of need. I have pledged UNHCR’s full support to those whose lives were upended in the explosion, whether Lebanese, refugees or migrants.”

UNHCR is providing psychological first aid to those most affected. A dedicated helpline has been established to ensure timely response to requests for assistance. Community outreach volunteers are visiting affected families to provide information and support, and refer to assistance and service as needed.

During the initial clean-up, refugee volunteers from Syria and Iraq worked side-by-side with their Lebanese neighbours to help remove the rubble and glass from the streets and the homes.

The next steps will be to help rebuild, repair and rehabilitate the city of Beirut and the communities that live there before winter comes.

If you would like to help the people of Lebanon recover from this catastrophe, please go to: www.unrefugees.org.au/helplebanon or call 1300 361 288. □



Syrian refugee Sama Al Hamad, six, at her home in Beirut, Lebanon.

© UNHCR/Sam Tarling

A little girl’s bravery

Makhoul Al-Hama is a refugee from Manbij in northern Syria, whose six-year-old daughter Sama lost the sight in her left eye in the blast.

“This was the most terrifying thing, seeing her bleeding from her eye,” Makhoul said. “The scenes were horrific. All the hospitals were damaged, the doctors that helped us needed treatment themselves.”

Little Sama showed incredible bravery despite the trauma she has experienced, and says she would like to one day become a doctor so she can help others in need.

“Sama is my soul, life, hope and future,” her father says. “I couldn’t stand the thought of losing her.” □



Brett Moore, UNHCR’s Head of Shelter and Settlements, in the field in Beirut.

© Australia for UNHCR

Brett Moore is UNHCR’s Head of Shelter and Settlements in Geneva. Currently in the field in Beirut, he shares his experience and the impact Australian donations have had in Lebanon.

“I arrived in Lebanon mid-August, about a week after the blast. The area around the port was completely destroyed: ships turned over, parts of the port submerged in the harbour, hundreds of warehouses and storage facilities

flattened. The downtown area and immediate residential neighbourhood, Karantina, was heavily damaged also, with many buildings affected. More than 80,000 apartments were damaged. The repair and rehabilitation planning began immediately.

“UNHCR concentrated on the distribution of around 6,400 emergency shelter kits in the first weeks. We also focused on repairing residential buildings. More than 35,000 refugees, mostly Syrian, live in the affected area. UNHCR is targeting work to 2,680 damaged apartments of the most vulnerable population, plus direct cash transfers to a further 11,500 households to support self-recovery.

“Since UNHCR launched the ‘Stand with Lebanon’ emergency appeal on 10 August 2020, we raised over US\$1 million. Australian donors have been the most generous so far, contributing US\$230,000 to support thousands whose lives have been devastated by the terrible explosion with emergency shelter and psychosocial care.

“Thanks to the kindness and solidarity demonstrated by the Australian people and other UNHCR donors across the world, we were able to immediately mobilise life-saving protection and assistance for over 100,000 people affected by the blast. So far, we have distributed over 6,500 weatherproofing shelter kits benefiting over 20,000 people, we have provided 1,400 people with psychosocial first-aid or specialised mental health support, and reached 500 people with emergency cash assistance to cover basic needs.

“Now the response is transitioning to a second phase, focused on medium-term support to women, girls, men and boys that remain in the affected areas or have moved away. We are now providing cash assistance for repair and rehabilitation of housing, and further mental health care and specialised assistance through our partners. The greatest needs remain shelter, food and cash assistance. The upcoming winter makes covering such needs even more urgent. So we thank you for your continuous support.” □



Sudanese refugee Ekram and her daughter Rana, three, visit Luzmila Hospital in Amman, where their healthcare costs are covered by UNHCR.

© UNHCR/Mohammad Hawari

Refugee communities take the lead

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected everyone worldwide and refugees and displaced people are particularly vulnerable, but they're also playing a crucial role in the response.

With restrictions on movement and limited access to refugees and displaced people across the globe, UNHCR is supporting refugee communities to take the lead during the coronavirus pandemic.

In Bangladesh, trained community health workers – all of them Rohingya refugees – have been going door-to-door sharing information about health and hygiene, looking out for signs of illness, recording births and deaths and acting as a bridge between refugee communities and health facilities.

It has been no small feat, according to Senior Public Health Officer Sandra Harlass, who says rumours throughout the densely populated camps that house 860,000 Rohingya refugees have evoked fear and prompted a sharp decline in visits to healthcare centres.

"Refugees are worried that they will get infected but there are also a lot

of rumours that if you are COVID-19 positive, you will be taken away or locked away," Sandra says.

"We have seen a decline in consultations for preventative services like antenatal care, postnatal care and immunisations – which is really worrying for us," she says.

Sandra says the misinformation is preventing women from accessing much-needed care and advice, while a lack of immunisations could see outbreaks in other diseases such as chicken pox, measles, cholera and dengue.

"We have seen a decline in consultations for preventative services like antenatal care, postnatal care and immunisations – which is really worrying for us."



Venezuelan refugees in Brazil receive COVID-19 prevention guidelines.

© UNHCR/Mohammad Hawari

The 370 UNHCR volunteer health workers visit 160 houses in their assigned block each week and explain the common symptoms of COVID-19 and how families can protect themselves from the virus.

UNHCR has also trained volunteers to identify respiratory cases and provide targeted support and guidance on treatment for patients. During their visits, volunteers use flip charts, which have photographs of the healthcare facilities, to help diminish fears.

"The volunteers helped me defeat my fear"

Haroon, a 55-year-old refugee living in the Kutupalong camp, began to develop COVID-19 symptoms in June and was referred for testing by one of the community health workers.

"We didn't know about the disease, just that it was deadly," he says.

"The community health volunteers helped me defeat my fear and get proper treatment. I have learned that this disease is curable if proper steps are taken."

Since the onset of the community health workers, more and more refugees are now coming forth to facilities for COVID-19 testing.

"The community workers are able to engage as refugees themselves and have these counselling abilities to provide advice to patients," Sandra says.

"At first we had 30 tests a day and now we are close to 100 tests. To achieve this change – that's a real credit to the volunteer workers."

In previous health emergencies, the diseases have been reasonably well understood and predictable. But COVID-19 is unprecedented. With limited access to refugee camps, the disease has forced UNHCR staff around the world to rethink how to protect refugees during the crisis.

"This whole element of not knowing how things could develop – that makes it very, very hard for all partners to plan," Sandra says.

"We didn't know about the disease, just that it was deadly."



Waiting to receive food assistance in Tripoli.

© UNHCR/Caroline Gluck



Handwashing facilities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo help stop the spread of COVID-19.

© UNHCR/YDF

Slowing the spread of COVID-19 globally

Since the beginning of the pandemic, UNHCR teams have been vital in delivering aid and healthcare support and supplies around the world to help combat the spread of coronavirus.

Months on, we are continuing to strengthen healthcare systems, delivering vital aid and shelter and rolling out major public health information campaigns to counter misinformation.

- **Bangladesh:** UNHCR has built two isolation and treatment centres with almost 200 beds for refugees and members of the local community.
- **Afghanistan:** UNHCR has reached some 1,464,000 people with COVID-19 awareness raising activities.
- **Syria:** More than 467,000 individuals have been reached through risk communication and community engagement, including more than 135,000 Syrians as well as refugees who have been contacted through community outreach volunteers.
- **Rwanda:** UNHCR started the installation of refugee housing units (RHUs) to act as COVID-19 treatment centres. The centre has 43 RHUs which have had water, sanitation and hygiene facilities installed, an intensive care unit and hospital tents.
- **Southern Africa:** Almost 1,900 health workers have been trained on COVID-19 prevention and response, nearly 4,400 additional handwashing stations have been established and over 329,000 households received soap for handwashing to prevent COVID-19. □



UNHCR and WFP deliver emergency food aid to Libya during the COVID-19 crisis.

© UNHCR/Caroline Gluck

FACT FILE: HOW UNHCR HAS RESPONDED TO COVID-19

23.9 million

Masks procured, 1.4 million gowns and 2,000 oxygen concentrators.

12 metric tons

Delivered of hospital tents, 250 metric tons of personal protective equipment (PPE) and medical items.

USD \$50 million

Distributed across 65 countries reaching 1 million people with COVID-19 related cash assistance.



Skilled refugee women make face masks to help protect frontline workers from COVID-19.

© Australia for UNHCR/TAI

of the largest in the world. The settlements that sprung from their exodus now form the world's largest refugee camp. Forced displacement, monsoon weather and the COVID-19 pandemic means many Rohingya refugees are now triply vulnerable.

However, thanks to the generous support of donors, UNHCR and humanitarian partners have been able to rapidly scale up activities to address these emerging challenges for both refugee and host communities.

"The family are all delighted that our gift is going towards employing Rohingya women to make masks," the donor says.

"We had a family Zoom meeting and the children were quite chuffed to hear that our gift was specifically helping this group of women, as well as having a positive impact on the wider community through the supply of masks."

If you are interested in donating to a project, please contact Development Manager Liz Grady at egrady@unrefugees.org.au or 0420 323 766. □

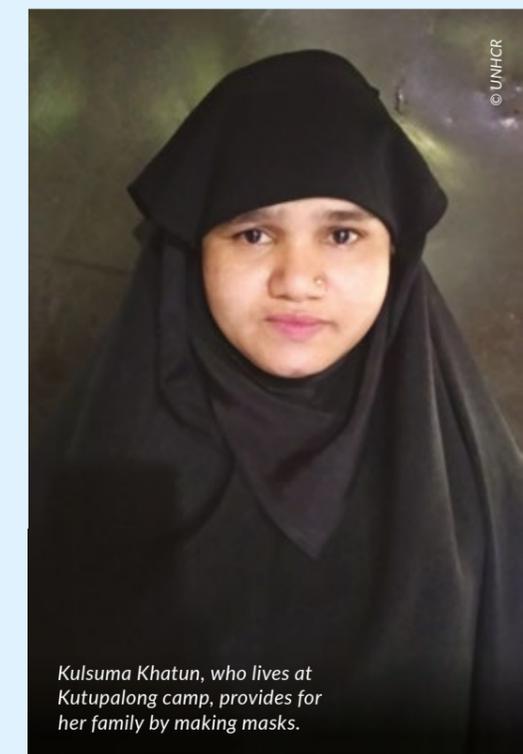
Supporting families, supporting communities

Kulsuma Khatun, 35, is a mother of five and the sole provider for her family. She came to Kutupalong as a child refugee in 1992 and was brought up there.

Her husband left her in 2016 but she received training from TAI tailoring group and has now become one of the skilled tailoring masters in the camp. "I joined in mask production when the lockdown started and movement was restricted in the camps," Kulsuma says.

The money Kulsuma earns through her work allows her to support her family. "I am happy because I could spend this money on the education of my children and could buy food," she explains.

"I feel happy as the masks will be used by the refugee community and I contributed to my community. My community members also appreciated my involvement in mask production." □



Kulsuma Khatun, who lives at Kutupalong camp, provides for her family by making masks.

© UNHCR

Face mask project helps combat COVID-19

A new initiative is helping refugee women protect their communities while supporting their families at the same time.

Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh is home to around one million Rohingya refugees. Families live in close quarters to one another, making social distancing almost impossible.

A collective effort is vital to help combat the threat of the virus, which is why UNHCR and partners are working to help refugees protect their communities. And thanks to financial support from an Australian donor, UNHCR has been able to implement a new mask-making initiative in Bangladesh.

This initiative not only helps protect the community, it also helps women improve their skills and provide a stable income for their families.

A group of skilled refugee women are busy producing non-surgical cloth masks for use in the camps. The project began with a group of 20 women with a target of creating 32,000 masks. To date, production has scaled up to engage 42 workers who have collaborated to make more than 37,000 masks.

Minara Begum, 25, arrived in the camp from Myanmar in 2001. She was abandoned by her husband in 2016, but under the program, she now has the means to provide for her three children.

"I spent four to five hours a day to produce cloth masks based on design and materials," she says.

"I am happy to earn this amount within the lockdown situation and spent some of my income to repay my previous loan... the rest will be used for the purpose of the children's educational expenses."

The face masks are being used by volunteers and frontline workers who are continuing their critical activities in the camps, and by elderly refugees, who are among the most vulnerable to COVID-19. This initiative not only helps protect the community, it also helps women improve their skills and provide a stable income for their families.

The latest mass exodus of Rohingya began in August 2017, when hundreds of thousands of people were forced to flee their homes due to extreme violence in Myanmar's conflict-stricken Rakhine State.

Some travelled on foot, enduring days of trekking across mountains, through jungles and treacherous waters, often with babies and young children in tow, in order to cross the border into southeastern Bangladesh.

Three years later, the crisis for Rohingya refugees remains one

Five minutes with... Tefera Wordeffa, Campaign Manager at Australia for UNHCR



© Australia for UNHCR

Tefera is a former refugee who was forced to leave his home country, Ethiopia, due to threats from corrupt government officials. He eventually made it to a UNHCR camp, then resettled in Australia. He started his career as a Frontliner in 2016 and was recently promoted to Campaign Manager at the Sydney office.

What do you enjoy most about your job? There are two things I love about my job; its nature and the cause. The nature of my job is that it helps me give donors the opportunity to make an impact through Australia for UNHCR. The cause of my job is deeply rooted in me as a former refugee.

Can you talk about your experience as a former refugee? I fled my homeland of Ethiopia and spent seven long days journeying across the desert. When I finally reached the refugee camp I was totally exhausted. I arrived at 6am and by 11am was offered a decent meal by UNHCR.

I had never thought becoming a refugee would be something that would happen to me, but I was forced. I am very proud to represent Australia

for UNHCR and advocate for refugees. The cause is close to my heart and it's very satisfying for me to give back.

What has been your biggest challenge? Currently the biggest challenge is everything that is associated with COVID-19; its general environment and the safety rules we have to follow.

What's your favourite book, movie or TV show? My favourite book is the second edition of *Culture's Consequences* by Geert Hofstede.

Do you have a favourite quote or motto? Live in the present.

What do you like to do in your spare time? I don't have a lot of spare time but I do enjoy having fun with my kids playing Xbox and going bushwalking. □



The Leading Women Fund is helping to empower refugee women and girls.

© UNHCR/Natalie Hill



Syrian refugee, Koneh Ali, 75, lives in Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan, where UNHCR is distributing winter core relief items.

© UNHCR/Mohammad Hawari

Women working to change the world

The most life-changing network you'll ever join

The Leading Women Fund is a new multi-faceted community initiative that offers Australian women the chance to support, and connect with, refugee women from around the world.

Donations for the first project go directly to Syrian refugee women who are currently living in Jordan and have found themselves alone, as the single heads of households, and struggling to survive.

"Ever since I launched Australia for UNHCR 20 years ago, I've dreamed of creating a fund that focused on helping refugee women and girls," explains National Director Naomi Steer.

"Displacement has always been a gendered issue – four out of five of the world's 80 million refugees are women and children. Often these women have faced enormous hardship and suffering, but I am always struck by their strength and resilience. I know that with support and funding they could achieve financial independence."

Making connections

The Leading Women Fund isn't only about donating; it also offers a unique opportunity for women to connect and learn from each other. While there's a focus on learning about the

"What I love about it is that it's real. Instead of just donating to a charity you can actually see firsthand the difference you make."

challenges that refugee women face, it's also about celebrating successes and achievements, and bonding over common goals and interests.

Through the world-first app Connecting Worlds, donors are matched up with female heads of household in Jordan and can text directly with refugee women to share their lives together.

Joining the Fund also gives donors the opportunity to connect with other inspiring women such as Leading Women Fund Ambassador, entrepreneur, businesswoman and Boost Juice founder, Janine Allis, and Zoe Ghani, a former refugee, author, tech leader with Atlassian and Australia for UNHCR board member. Both women were part of the trial group for the Connecting Worlds app and raved about their experience at a recent webinar for the Leading Women Fund.



Janine Allis, Boost Juice founder and Leading Women Fund Ambassador.

"It's been a really rewarding experience to be able to bring some of my tech insights into this field and to work on the app," Zoe says. "I was matched up with a young lady in Jordan who had two kids and we connected and bonded through recipes. I like trying new ingredients and so did she and we exchanged recipes and connected over food.

"I think the app is an amazing way for us to connect with other women – I felt like it was a penpal 2.0. The connections can become very deep and the information exchanges much faster than you would have in a penpal setting, but it was a really good opportunity to spend time one-on-one."

Janine Allis compared the experience to "having a chat with a girlfriend" and also loved the deep connections she made with the refugee women she interacted with, sharing recipes, jokes and talking about their children together.

"What I love about it is that it's real. Instead of just donating to a charity you can actually see firsthand the difference you make. And I think that's actually what's really exciting about this program.

"These beautiful women are incredible musicians, artists and homemakers and they just want what we want; freedom, purpose, respect and a future for our families."

The Founding 50

The first group to sign up for the Leading Women Fund are called the 'Founding 50', and they will have the chance to connect directly with female Syrian refugees living in Jordan through UNHCR's ground-breaking new app.

The Connecting Worlds app can be used to swap texts and photos with refugee women and learn more about each other's daily lives and experience.

"It's a way to meet each other not as donors and beneficiaries, but as equals, with much to share and learn from each other," says UNHCR's Larissa Schlotterbeck, responsible for app concept.

"Through this simple connection, we can help make our lives a little richer."

We're asking Leading Women Fund donors to give \$3,000 (or \$230 every four weeks) to the Fund, which is enough to support a female refugee and her family for a year. That's her rent, utilities and food covered – enabling her to focus on maximising her own and her children's potential and building a better life. □



Iman, 26, lives in Jordan with her husband and three children.

© UNHCR/Hannah Maule-Finch

For more information on joining, visit www.unrefugees.org.au/get-involved/leading-women-fund/connecting-worlds-app

Winter warmth campaign

Each year, UNHCR's winterisation program assists millions of refugees and internally displaced people.

Across the Middle East and North Africa, winters are very harsh, with temperatures plummeting to as low as -10°C. There are almost 10 million refugees and internally displaced persons in Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon and Syria. For some families, this is their first year of displacement. For others, it is their tenth.

UNHCR estimates that four million people are in need of urgent assistance to help them endure this difficult and life-threatening time of year. Freezing temperatures, snow and torrential rainfall are disastrous for the displaced and the makeshift tents and unfinished buildings where they try to shelter from the elements.

Each year, UNHCR's winter aid program helps support refugees and displaced people by providing core relief items such as thermal blankets; seasonal cash assistance for vulnerable families so they can buy heaters, food, fuel and medicine; and shelter weather-proofing kits and improvements to infrastructure to help withstand the worst of the weather.

With few able to return home and fewer resettled to third countries, the number of people in need of urgent help to survive the harsh winter is growing. This year, COVID-19 is making humanitarian needs more acute than ever – the arrival of the pandemic and restrictions to contain its spread threatens jobs and pushes households deeper into poverty.

Protection is urgently needed now, ahead of winter, before vulnerable families face life-threatening consequences. To support the winter aid campaign please visit unrefugees.org.au/appeals/winter-survival-fund/donate/ □

Running for refugees

All across the nation, Australians have been raising funds for refugees through the 555 community fundraising campaign. The concept is simple: run, walk or ride 5km, donate \$5 and nominate five people to take on the challenge. To date the campaign has raised around \$5,000.

Emily Yong is a school teacher at Homebush Boys High School in Sydney and encouraged her students to get involved with the campaign. A team of around 15 students rallied together, with the Year 12 cohort leading the way.

“They have taken up the initiative and run with it,” Emily says. “We are still completing the challenge and more students are asking to participate.”

Most of the students ran, while teachers walked or biked, raising \$245 to date. Emily says the students really enjoyed the experience and mostly completed their runs before their Trial HSC exams which helped relieve some of the stress.

“Getting our school community involved in this fundraiser has been a wonderful way to think about how we can support those in need,” Emily says. “It has been a tremendous opportunity to see the generosity during these tough times, especially by our students.” □

To find out more about the 555 campaign visit unrefugees.org.au/get-involved/fundraise/555/



Emily Yong.



John Rostas at a family wedding.

The small boy in the pictures

Hungary, 1956. A young boy and his parents look at us from a black-and-white photograph, perhaps not yet knowing that they are soon to become refugees.

John Rostas and his parents fled the violence following the Hungarian Uprising, a failed revolt against the Soviet Union. As they waited in Italy for permission to migrate to Australia, their three-month visas were about to expire and the government threatened to deport them back to Hungary. But an Italian friend of his father introduced them to a colleague who worked for the United Nations.

“We were issued with United Nations Stateless Refugee Passports to allow us to remain in Italy,” John explains.

“Eventually, once the permission to migrate had been received, we boarded a ship in Genoa and arrived in Australia as stateless refugees.”

Now living in Newcastle, John recalls his experience as clear as day: “I distinctly remember the gates

to the refugee camp. I’d never been in a place where... there were armed guards to get in and out.

“We slept on stretchers in large halls where you are simply divided from the people next to you by a sheet hanging down from the ceiling.”

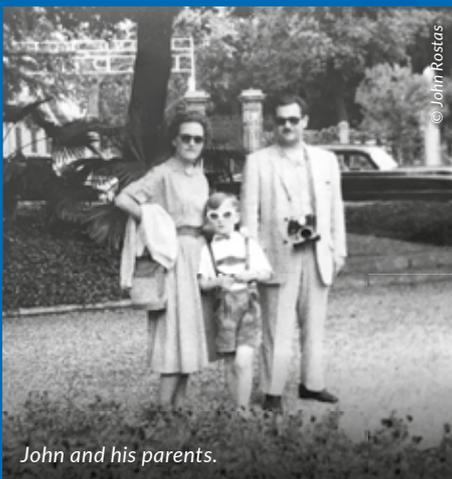
“There are so many children who are trapped in frightening, dangerous situations, just like I was all those years ago...”

John went on to become a Professor of Biomedical Science at the University of Newcastle and is a world-renowned expert on brain development. Now retired, he has never forgotten the small boy in the pictures.

“There are so many children who are trapped in frightening, dangerous situations, just like I was all those years ago, and need the help of generous Australians – just like me and my family were helped in the 1950s,” he says.

“By leaving a bequest to Australia for UNHCR in my Will I’m ensuring that refugees just like my family receive vital support in their time of need.” □

To find out more about how ‘Your Will can be their refuge’, please contact Aylin Salt, Planned Giving Manager on (02) 9276 6871 or visit www.unrefugees.org.au/yourwill



John and his parents.

Thank you to all our generous and loyal supporters for making the life-saving work of UNHCR possible.



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