

Preparing for the pandemic

Our actions against coronavirus

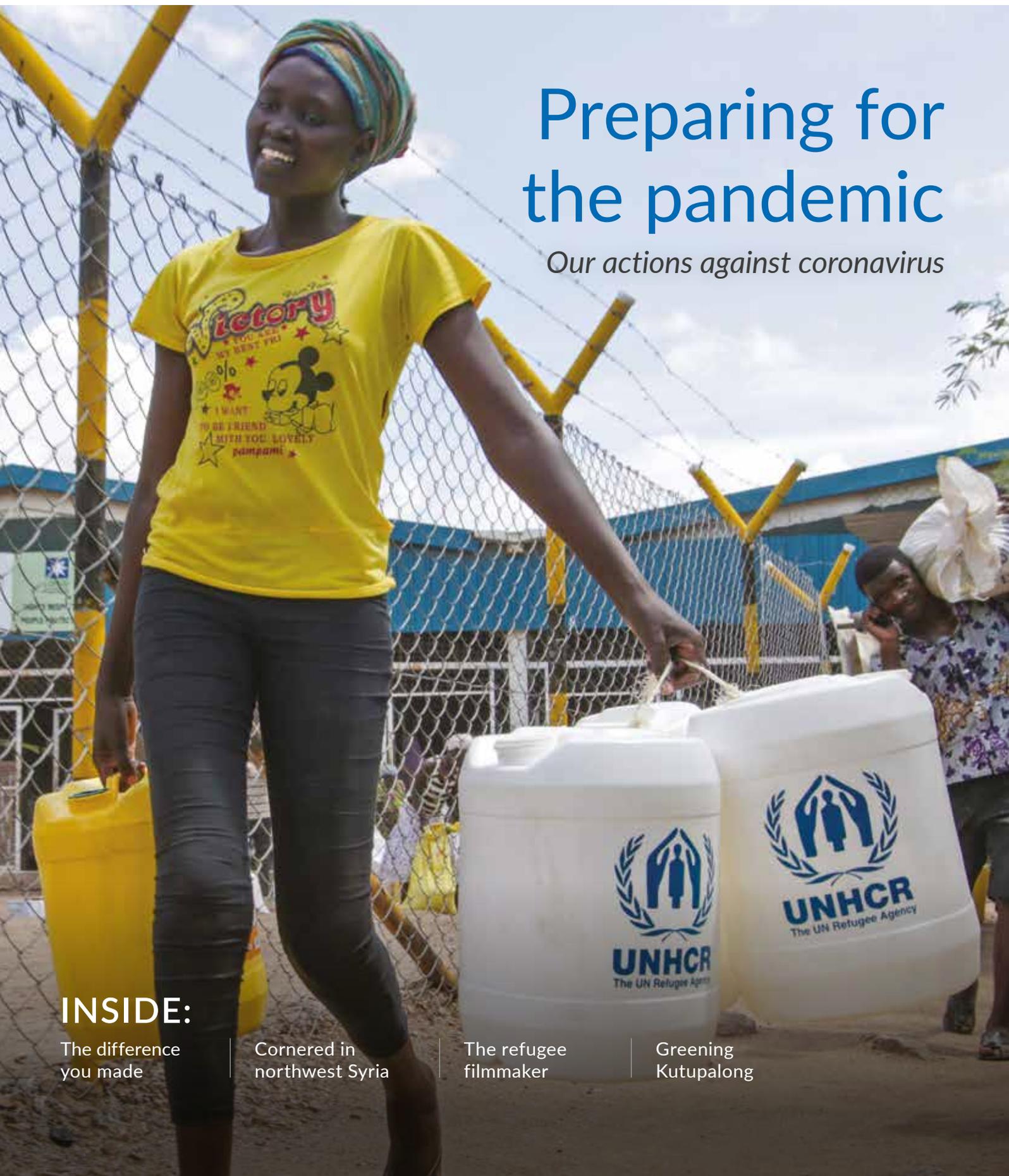
INSIDE:

The difference
you made

Cornered in
northwest Syria

The refugee
filmmaker

Greening
Kutupalong



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Countering coronavirus

Cover image:

A South Sudanese refugee at Kakuma camp in Kenya walks home after collecting her new 20-litre jerrycans as the settlement acts to manage the coronavirus threat.

As well as jerrycans for clean water, on 1 April 2020 UNHCR began a food distribution at Kakuma to help refugees get through the next two months of measures to prevent the spread of coronavirus. Our teams are also distributing soap and other hygiene products.

Photo credit: UNHCR/Allan Kipotrich Cheruiyot



Welcome

It's 20 years since I helped found Australia for UNHCR and in that time we have supported refugees through many humanitarian and natural crises – East Timor, the Boxing Day Tsunami, the Pakistan earthquake, famine in the Horn of Africa, and the Syrian refugee crisis, to name just a few.

I am grateful and proud that our donors have stepped up and continue to support refugees, including during the difficult times in Australia.

The recent bushfire emergency, which impacted on so many of us, also created greater understanding and empathy about what refugees experience. And now we are all facing a new disruption to our lives – the coronavirus pandemic.

Right now, UNHCR is mobilising worldwide to put in place prevention and protection measures for refugees against the spread of COVID-19. If it's hard to social distance in our local supermarket, imagine how much harder it is to do in a crowded refugee camp. But our frontline teams are working together with refugee communities to keep those communities safe. Read more about this on page 12.

This year marks 20 years of Australians raising funds for the UN Refugee Agency – all up more than \$290 million from Australian donors – and providing critical emergency relief and longer-term support. Having met so many refugees whose lives have been changed for the better because of this support, I know it's absolutely something to celebrate together.

As we move through this milestone year, I am confident that we will meet the current and future challenges together – as we always have.

In this edition of *With You* we highlight some of the practical ways your support has made a difference. On page 5 you can read about

"If it's hard to social distance in our local supermarket, imagine how much harder it is to do in a crowded refugee camp."

UNHCR's emergency shelter aid to Syrian refugees in snow-covered refugee camps. These stories all show what a difference your support makes not only globally but also here in Australia.

This year, we created a new scholarship for a refugee storyteller to study at the prestigious Australian Film Television and Radio School and were inundated with fantastic applications – you can read about our talented winner Joelle Sanounou, a young woman from Syria, on page 8.

Finally, I wanted to give the last word to Chantelle who is part of the refugee women's craft group we support in Kampala in Uganda. All the women who work in the group are vulnerable and our donor keyring livelihood project has been a lifeline for them, enabling them to pay rent, their children's school fees, and in some cases set up modest businesses.

During the pandemic, Chantelle is also required to stay at home and told me that while it was very difficult for the women to make ends meet, most of all they missed their regular catch-ups.

Chantelle told me, "Please tell your donors we're thankful for everything they do. We are hopeful this time will pass and that we can come together again soon. In the meantime, it is important to support each other where we can."

Naomi Steer

Naomi Steer, National Director

[Follow me on Twitter @NaomiCSteer](#)



VTC graduate Manishimwe Shalom waters crops at the agricultural training farm

FinoChurdaAid

The difference you made

Training centre alumni finding jobs

The first batch of trainees have graduated from the Vocational Training Centre in Uganda's Kyaka II refugee camp.

All up more than 200 young adults living in or around Kyaka II are on their way to meaningful careers having completed their training at the Vocational Training Centre or 'VTC', which was funded by Australia for UNHCR supporters.

One of the first graduates was Manishimwe Shalom, who studied agriculture at the VTC. He has now earned enough through farming to pay for his siblings' education.

Of the 216 young people who earned certificates in catering and cookery, agriculture, mechanical repair and hairdressing, almost three-quarters were refugees – the remainder are Ugandan youth like Mugyenzi Mercy.

"The skills and knowledge I acquired from Kyaka VTC helped me change to a more marketable profession within the shortest time possible," says Mercy. "I acquired social connections through the internship



The VTC opening in 2019

Australia for UNHCR

and exposure visits program that helped me keep in touch with potential employers and friends in my new profession."

Kyaka II hosts more than 100,000 people seeking safety from violence in neighbouring Burundi, Rwanda and Democratic Republic of the Congo, from where Shalom originally fled.

When he and his family first sought safety in Uganda, he says, their lack of an income forced them into hard choices. Being among the eldest children, he and his younger brother worked in *shambas* (agricultural fields) to provide for their family.

"We juggled between school and digging in many *shambas*," says Shalom. "We would attend school two to three days a week. We eventually couldn't continue with school as we had to support the family." Now he plans to become an employer himself once he can invest his savings into land.

The Vocational Training Centre, which was built following an Australia for UNHCR appeal in 2017, now caters to up to 250 students aged 15-25, and includes dormitories, a dining hall, staff accommodation, workshops and computer laboratory. Courses last six months and the latest round of trainees began studying in January 2020.

In the news



1 SWITZERLAND

UNHCR appoints climate leader

Australian humanitarian Andrew Harper has been appointed UNHCR's first Special Advisor on Climate Action in response to the growing numbers of people forced to flee by climate disasters.

A veteran of assignments in Indonesia, Ukraine, Albania, Iran, Iraq and Jordan, Harper told the UN climate conference in Madrid in December last year: "We need to do far more to help those states which have been doing everything they can to protect refugees, but at the same time are often most exposed to the calamities of climate change. We cannot fail these states, or the most vulnerable who have sought refuge there."



Andrew Harper (right), special advisor on climate action, unveils UNHCR's Clean Energy Challenge at a spotlight session on energy during the Global Refugee Forum in Geneva

Mark Henley

2 SOUTH SUDAN

Leaders announce truce

After several missed deadlines, the leaders of South Sudan announced in February they would form a unity government in March. For years, peace negotiations have failed to end a conflict that provoked Africa's largest refugee crisis. More than two million people have fled to neighbouring countries since 2013, and 1.6 million are displaced within South Sudan itself. The agreement may mean hope for an end to the conflict and a chance for people to return home.



South Sudanese refugees in Gambela camp in Ethiopia

Thomas Mukoya

3 THE WESTERN SAHEL

Indiscriminate violence in multi-country crisis

UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi expressed alarm about the West African region's deteriorating security situation.

"Sahel is the place where we must intervene before this crisis becomes unmanageable," he said after his stop in Burkina Faso, where the number of internally displaced people rose tenfold in 2019 as people fled armed extremists.

Grandi said he had heard shocking stories of indiscriminate killings and destruction by armed groups in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. A recent UN assessment found 3.3 million people in the three countries are going hungry, an increase of nearly 1 million since last year.



UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi talks with displaced Burkinabe women in a refugee housing unit in Burkina Faso

UNHCR/Sylvain Cherkoff



Cornered

Nowhere left to run in northwest Syria

A distribution of nutritional supplements after an aid convoy that reached Syria in 2019. Many of those caught up in the current crisis are children.

We have been here before. But it's never been as bad as this.

Syria's northwest provinces, previously a haven for people fleeing fighting elsewhere in the country, are now themselves under attack.

By 2019, there were already a staggering three million people displaced in the region. But since December, an upsurge of fighting has forced a million of those people to flee. More than three-quarters are women and children.

They join another million already in overcrowded camps and temporary housing. The roads are choked with trucks carrying desperate families with nowhere to go.

What are we doing?

As part of a cross-border operation, UNHCR and its humanitarian partners are providing as much emergency aid and protection services as possible. As the crisis evolves, UNHCR is using stocks of core relief items and emergency tents, and bringing in additional staff.

More than 2,150 trucks carrying aid crossed from Turkey into northwest Syria in January and February. This is more than double the number of trucks crossing during the same period in 2019. UNHCR's teams and partners delivered nearly 40,000 conflict-affected people in northwest Syria emergency non-food items including blankets and hygiene kits, as well as tents for more than 22,400 internally displaced people.

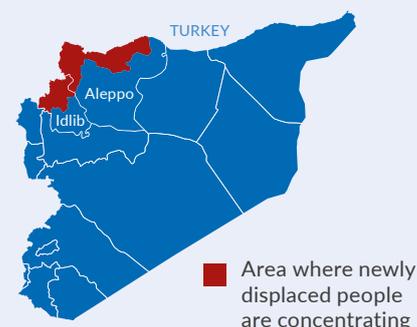
UNHCR's protection partners also provided about 9,000 displaced and vulnerable people with psychosocial support, legal counselling, and information on land and property issues.

What are the needs?

Around
3 million
people **stranded**
in Idlib and
surrounding areas

Around
284,000
people in
over-stretched
camps

Working
to get **shelter** and
essential aid to
359,000
people



How did we get here?

March 2011

Protestors call for reform in the wake of the 'Arab Spring' movements

May 2011

First refugee camps open in Turkey as armed conflict erupts

March 2013

A million Syrian refugees registered with UNHCR

June 2013

UN agencies announce biggest aid appeal in history

June 2014

Nearly half Syria's population affected by the conflict

September 2015

One image shocks the world: the body of toddler Aylan Kurdi

March 2017

The number of people fleeing war in Syria passes 5 million

September 2018

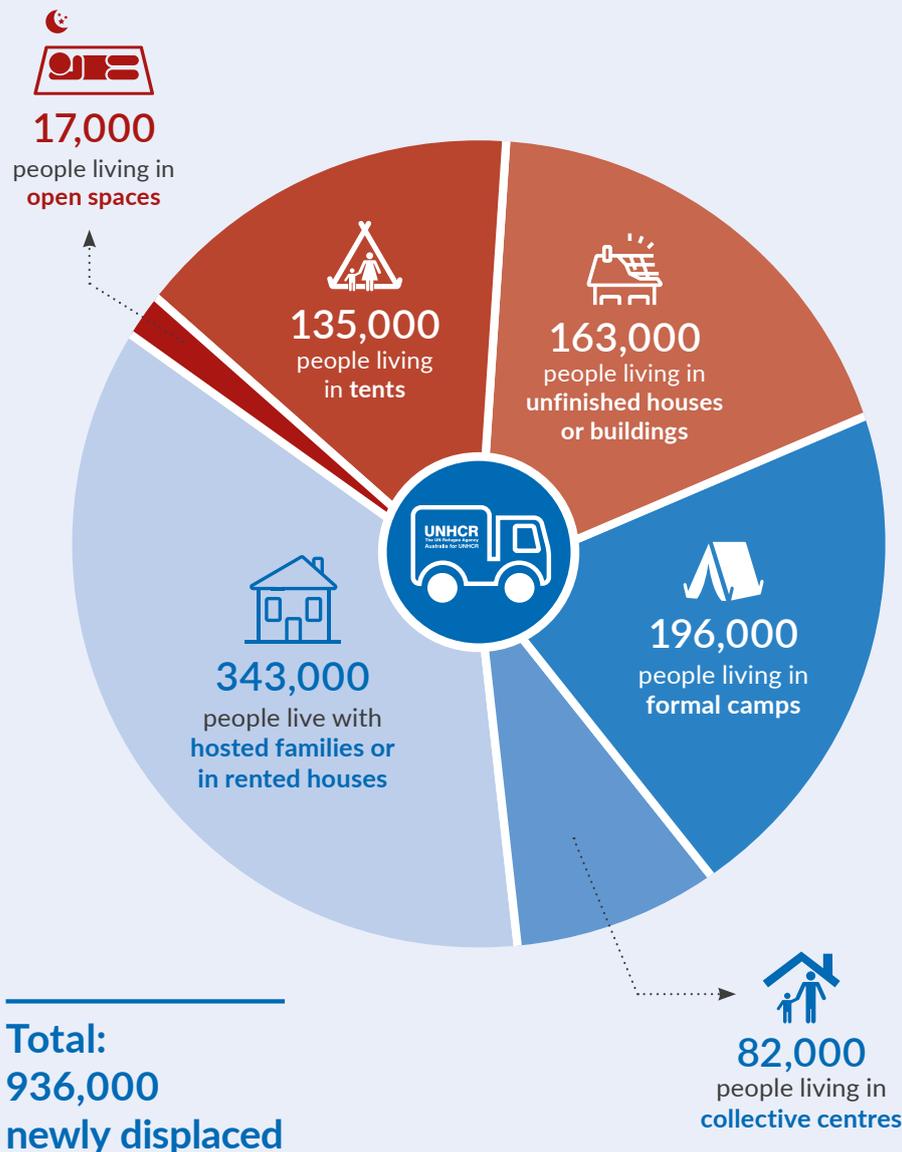
Ceasefire on fighting around Idlib (breaks down in May 2019)

October 2019

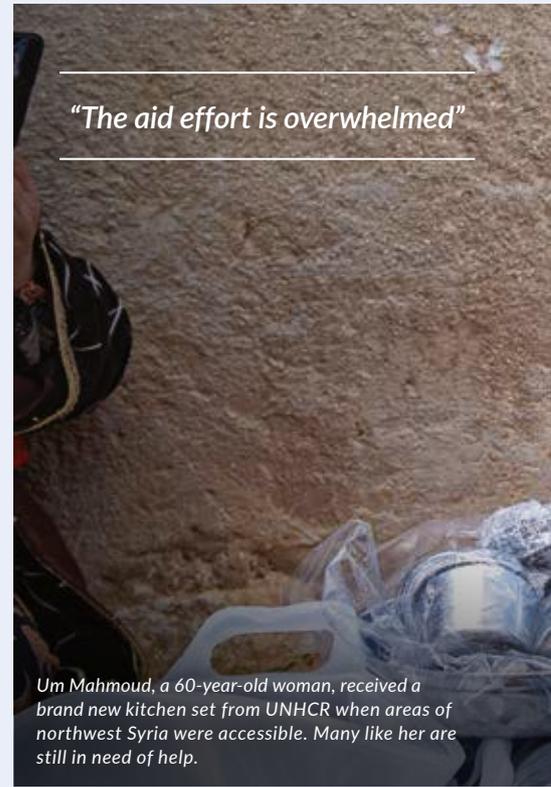
Agreement on another possible 'safe zone' for Syrian refugees in Turkey

March 2020

As the situation escalates, world leaders plan to meet for peace talks



Estimated figures as of end February 2020



"The aid effort is overwhelmed"

Um Mahmoud, a 60-year-old woman, received a brand new kitchen set from UNHCR when areas of northwest Syria were accessible. Many like her are still in need of help.

United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock is using his position to shine a spotlight on the situation in northwest Syria.

Recently in Australia, he spoke with Australia for UNHCR supporters in Canberra. The conversation was moderated by UNHCR Regional Representative Louise Aubin.

LOUISE AUBIN: What is going on now in northwest Syria?

MARK LOWCOCK: We've been warning for some time now of the worst humanitarian horror story of the twentieth century unfolding in this part of northwest Syria, essentially because it's the place of last refuge for Syrians who've fled their own government. There's nowhere left to run to anymore.

Since the beginning of December, a huge military assault from the Government of Syria and its allies is forcing people to flee into an ever-smaller area, tight up against the concrete wall that marks the border between Syria and Turkey.

The population density there is now higher than most of the world's capital cities.

The difference is that the majority are children, tiny children – babies, toddlers, little boys and girls – and tens of thousands are camped outside in the cold, the snow, the rain and the freezing mud.



UNHCR/Antwan Chinkdji

“The worst humanitarian horror story of the twentieth century is unfolding”

They’re looking up at the sky to ask whether the next bomb is the one that’s going to land on them, and wondering where they’re going to shelter at night.

LA: I get the sense that time is of the essence, there’s a real urgency to act. What needs to happen?

ML: There’s only one thing that will resolve this situation in a way that doesn’t involve a loss of life the likes of which we haven’t seen this century. And that is a ceasefire.

Senior UN officials are trying to persuade all of the parties to find a way to get around the table and to stop the carnage. In the meantime, the UN, including UNHCR, is doing everything it can to get aid to the people in the midst of all this suffering.

Every day we’re bringing dozens of trucks in across the Turkish border with food, medicines, and warm clothes and stoves and so on. But the scale of this tragedy is such that the aid effort is overwhelmed.

We’re trying to increase the number of trucks we bring across every day. The UN is appealing for US\$500 million [AUD\$750 million] over the next six months to look after all these people.



Mark Lowcock and Louise Aubin speak at Australia for UNHCR’s Frontline Club in Canberra in February 2020

Jeremy Thompson

Thank you very much to all the supporters of UNHCR in Australia for raising AUD\$31 million over the last year – some of that money will go to support UNHCR’s essential work in northwest Syria. But we are asking governments around the world to support the scale-up of that assistance.

LA: When you face the Security Council and say these things are unfolding, what goes through your mind?

ML: It’s my job to contain my emotions. But I don’t think a normal human being can watch what’s going on, and not feel it very deeply, particularly when you talk to people whose lives are affected. But one of our jobs in the UN is to report the facts and to try to persuade the decision-makers, the people who have authority who could choose to do something different, to make a different choice.

One of the things you learn is that people caught up in these crises are exactly the same in every material respect as me and you, and as my children – except that life’s lottery has been kinder to some of us than others. You have to try to convey to decision-makers that they’re holding the lives of children in their palms and hope they make a different choice.

Mark Lowcock and Louise Aubin spoke at Australia for UNHCR’s Frontline Club – where humanitarian workers, refugees, journalists and others talk about their experiences on the frontline. Watch the session with Louise and Mark: unrefugees.org.au/emergency-response/syria



Refugee storyteller

“This scholarship is not just about telling the refugee story. It’s about a refugee telling the stories,” says Francesca Beddie.

Francesca and Joelle meet up in central Sydney on one of the wettest days of the year, but this doesn’t dampen their spirits.

It seems at first that they’re from different worlds. Francesca Beddie, now a freelance writer and historian, was once a high-flying diplomat. Joelle Sanounou is a student just beginning her studies.

Yet their stories are not that dissimilar. Joelle is from a place where women are rarely seen behind the camera. “When you see the credits on Arab television it’s always men – even make-up is sometimes done by men,” Joelle says. And when Francesca was starting out in Canberra, she was one of the few female faces in a civil service dominated by men.

Dig deeper and they have more in common still. Hailing from Al Hasakah in northeast Syria, Joelle and her family fled conflict there to find safety in Lebanon and ultimately Australia. During the Second World War, Francesca’s mother, Rurer, escaped both the Japanese invasion of China and the German occupation of the island of Jersey before coming here.

“My mother just loved storytelling and the theatre and film,” says Francesca. “Her stories were infused with a strong sense of social justice, as well as admiration for the arts.”

“These two things have come together in my response to Australia’s current refugee policies. I’m angry about the conversation in this country about refugees: how they are often portrayed as ‘illegal’ and are not given adequate support to rebuild their lives.”

Francesca decided she would offer a refugee the opportunity to shine in the creative arts and tell their stories their own way. She hopes this will help change the national conversation.

With matching funds from Australia for UNHCR and support from the Public Education Foundation, the Australia for UNHCR Beddie Scholarship was born. It covers all tuition and living expenses for a bachelor’s degree at the prestigious Australian Film Television and Radio School (AFTRS) in Sydney, and Joelle is the first recipient. Thanks to Francesca and this new scholarship, she will soon have the tools to make her dream a reality.



Australia for UNHCR

Joelle Sinounou will study for a Bachelor of Arts in Screen Production at AFTRS

On coming to Australia, Joelle says, all she wanted to do was study. And she realised that she wanted – needed – to become a film director. “The more I learn about filmmaking, the more I see myself in it,” she says.

“My dream is to create something unique and special, to show the people my world, and tell them something new. As I listen to people’s stories, I believe everyone has a voice they want to project – and a filmmaker can make this voice echo.”



Francesca and Joelle talk about the scholarship opportunity

Australia for UNHCR



Aya Mohammed Abdullah, a former Iraqi refugee now living in Switzerland, addresses delegates at the Global Refugee Forum at the Palais des Nations

UNHCR/Andrew McConnell

Working together with refugees

The first ever Global Refugee Forum, held in Geneva in December, signified a new dawn in how refugees and host communities are supported.

The forum offered a chance for refugee voices to be heard at the highest level. Aya Mohammed Abdullah, a graduate of the Global Youth Advisory Council, spoke about her experiences fleeing to Syria from Iraq at age 14, then being forced to flee again as the war in Syria escalated.

She urged leaders around the world to support refugees: “Believe in us. Invest in us and you will see – we will all be stronger for it.”

The forum was a vital step towards implementing the Global Compact on Refugees, an agreement affirmed by the UN General Assembly in late 2018. The compact recognises the value refugees bring to their new countries, and sees them as a vital part of any solution. It focuses on supporting refugees to become self-reliant; assisting host communities; and expanding opportunities for third country resettlement and voluntary returns.

With 3,000 participants from across the world, it secured more than 1,000 concrete pledges to help make countries’ refugee responses more equitable and effective. Australian pledges focused on disability inclusion, protection and support for vulnerable women and girls, and access to education for refugees and host communities.

Participants in the Forum included governments, international organisations, and leaders from the business,



Australia for UNHCR’s Loredana Fyffe (right) and her Spanish counterpart in Geneva at the Global Refugee Forum Australia for UNHCR

humanitarian and development worlds, including a corporate delegation accompanied by Australia for UNHCR staff.

The pledges came not just from governments, but also from civil society and the private sector, with the majority focused on protection and education. Protection includes inclusive national policies for refugees, such as access to public services including healthcare, support to live outside camps, and the right to work. Pledges around education, from early childhood to vocational training, are key to long-term self-reliance as nearly half the world’s refugees are children.

Many concrete commitments were made, including 15,000 job opportunities for refugees, while business groups pledged US\$250 million. Other pledges covered areas such as resettlement, clean energy, and support for developing countries, which host 84 per cent of the world’s refugees.



"The smoke was everywhere. Worst of all, the children were coughing and their eyes burned." Rohingya refugees Monowara Kamal, 30, and her husband Mostafa, 37, are now cooking with bottled gas in their shelter in Kutupalong.

UNHCR/Roger Arnold

Energising Kutupalong

Greening the earth's biggest refugee settlement

Imagine a city the size of Adelaide springing up almost overnight. How do you supply clean water, electricity and fuel to all those people?

And in a location already particularly vulnerable to cyclones and flooding, how do you do it in a clean, green and sustainable way, without exacerbating the impact on the local environment?

Home to around 900,000 stateless Rohingya refugees, Kutupalong refugee settlement in Bangladesh is the largest in the world. The majority of inhabitants fled a military crackdown in Myanmar in August 2017. Conditions for them are improving, but the basics of life remain a constant challenge.

Limited access to electricity makes it difficult for them to get on with their daily lives after dark; to cook meals without firewood and charcoal.

In the past, camp residents have needed 700 metric tons of wood – the weight of about 40 city buses – every day for cooking alone. Not only is this unsustainable, because wood is getting scarcer and people are having to travel



Mostafa collects a bottled gas refill. The family has been using a gas stove since 2018.

UNHCR/Roger Arnold

further every day to collect it, but smoke inhalation in cramped living spaces is bad for people's health.

All Rohingya refugee households now use Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) for cooking, which has led to a staggering 80 per cent drop in demand for firewood. Some 30,000 local Bangladeshi families are also now included in the initiative.

In parallel with the LPG distribution, our teams are also providing tens of thousands of saplings to help reforest the area and improve the environment.

The introduction of LPG, together with reforestation and conservation work, has resulted in a remarkable "re-greening" of the areas in Cox's Bazar District where the Rohingya refugees are living.

Going solar

For months after arriving in Kutupalong, near Cox's Bazar, Nurul Salam and his wife Lalu Begum drew water from a hand pump. The water frequently left their family with sore throats and diarrhoea.

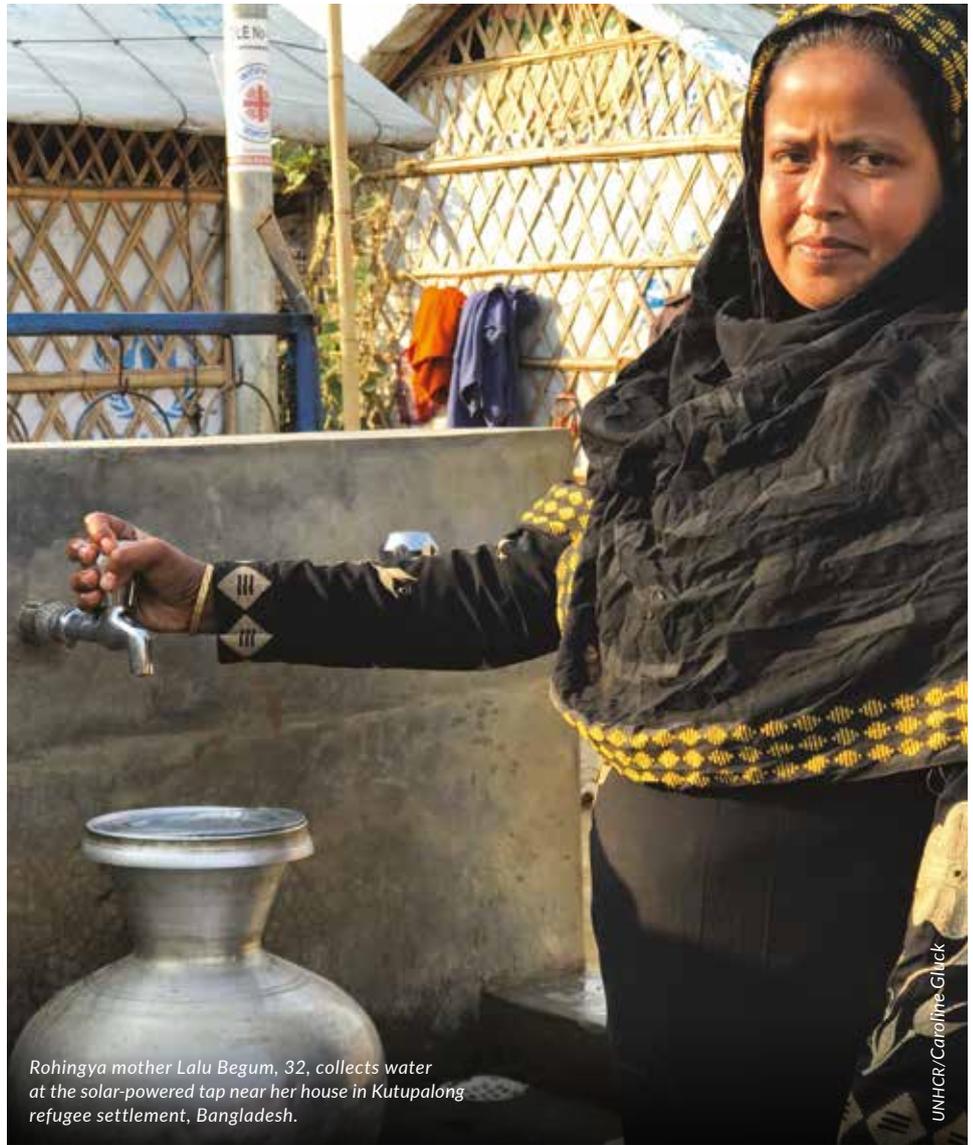
“The water point was near a drain,” says Nurul. “We never knew if it was pure water or not. The area was really dirty and we got sick very often.”

Now, thanks to a solar-powered water system, they can simply walk to a stand, turn on a tap and fill a jug with potable water.

“My wife... had diarrhoea and sometimes she had fever. Now, things are very different. She hasn't been sick in the last few months,” says Nurul, who also relies on clean water for the tea stall he runs.

The first solar-powered safe water systems in Kutupalong have been delivering clean water to families like Nurul's for just over a year. Our teams are extending the safe water network to reach 120,000 people – or around one in seven camp residents.

The systems use solar panels to power motorised pumps. They draw water from deep boreholes into 70,000-litre tanks, where chlorine kills bacteria and other harmful microbes. It is then piped to collective water points installed throughout the site.



Rohingya mother Lalu Begum, 32, collects water at the solar-powered tap near her house in Kutupalong refugee settlement, Bangladesh.

UNHCR/Caroline-Gluck

An electrifying goal

UNHCR's global strategy for clean energy aims to help refugees and host communities meet their needs safely and sustainably. By 2024, our aim is to provide sufficient access to safe, sustainable energy to cook three daily meals and have basic lighting and connectivity.



With better lighting, refugees feel safer, businesses can thrive, and displaced children can study after dark.



With clean cooking fuels, the environment around refugee settlements can be protected, while reducing health and safety risks.



And by supporting energy infrastructure in countries that host refugees, everyone benefits – displaced and local communities alike.

Countering coronavirus

As coronavirus reaches crowded refugee settlements, it's set to have an enormous impact on already vulnerable people. Around the world, UNHCR teams are working tirelessly to meet this incredible challenge.

The usually bustling main shopping thoroughfare of Jordan's Za'atari camp – the biggest refugee camp in the Middle East – is eerily quiet.

Like much of the rest of the world, the nearly 120,000 Syrians living in Za'atari and Jordan's other main camp in Azraq have been on lockdown since March in response to the threat of COVID-19.

“It is completely quiet. I do not hear voices in my neighbourhood anymore. Only silence.” said Ahmad Harb, a 35-year-old refugee from Syria's Dera'a province.

There's no way to know what the coronavirus pandemic will look like by the time you read this, but we know that during a global health emergency it's the most vulnerable who suffer most.

A combination of factors make displaced people particularly susceptible. Refugee settlements are often crowded, water and sanitation systems may be weak, and medical facilities can be stretched. And sharing information is difficult when not everyone speaks the language of the country they're in.

But our teams are committed to staying with the camps and delivering as much aid, information and support as possible under a multi-million dollar emergency response. For example:

Afghanistan – people who received financial support last year to start transport businesses are taking the message about coronavirus prevention out to the streets of Kabul on their tuk-tuks.

Bangladesh – temporary isolation and treatment centres are being built to provide immediate care to 150 to 200 people each.

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



A UNHCR staff member inspects and packs soap and disposable paper towels to distribute in refugee settlements in Iran

UNHCR/Farha Bhojroo

What are we doing?

UNHCR teams around the world are delivering a massive global health operation to slow the spread of coronavirus:

- Bolstering hospitals and clinics, and delivering essential testing equipment and medical supplies;
- Providing emergency direct cash support for the most vulnerable in urban areas;
- Distributing basic hygiene equipment, including soap and face masks, and upgrading water, sanitation and hygiene facilities including handwashing stations;
- Rolling out major public information campaigns to slow the spread of the virus in refugee communities around the world.
- Establishing emergency shelter and other quarantine arrangements;

Brazil – UNHCR staff are talking to migrants about preventing the spread of coronavirus, while distributing hand sanitiser gel and COVID-19 monitoring kits.

Kenya – distributions of food, jerrycans and soap are underway to curb potential outbreaks in refugee camps including Kakuma (see front cover).

Libya – we have stepped up support, donating ambulances to serve the country's hard-to-reach south.



Learning about hand hygiene at a shelter for Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Manaus, Brazil

UNHCR/Felipe Imaldo



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