



UNHCR 25 years in Ukraine

*Providing
protection,
seeking
solutions*



INTRODUCTION

This is a brochure pegged to three interrelated jubilees related to the UN Refugee Agency – UNHCR, particularly the quarter of a century it has been active in Ukraine.

In December 2020, UNHCR marked the 25th anniversary of the formal opening of its office in Ukraine. And this jubilee coincided with the 50th anniversary of the creation of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on 14 December 1950, and the 75th anniversary of the creation of the United Nations in 1945.

The UNHCR Representation in Ukraine wants to use this opportunity to recall and assess its agency's role and contribution in this country's challenging and evolving conditions.

UNHCR's work in Ukraine is about helping the country deal with very real challenges related to the multifaceted and complex faces of forced displacement, cooperating with other partners, from the Government, other UN agencies and international and national NGOs, donors and civil society, to the displaced themselves. Moreover, it is about protecting and helping individuals who have been uprooted from their homelands and homes and require such assistance. In other words, it is not simply about being present, but having an impact and making a difference.

In view of UNHCR's specific mandates and expertise, we want to indicate what added value our agency has brought, its contribution on the human level with protection and assistance, general capacity, and particularly, legal infrastructure, building and facilitating Ukraine's integration into the broader international legal system and European Union (EU) neighborhood.

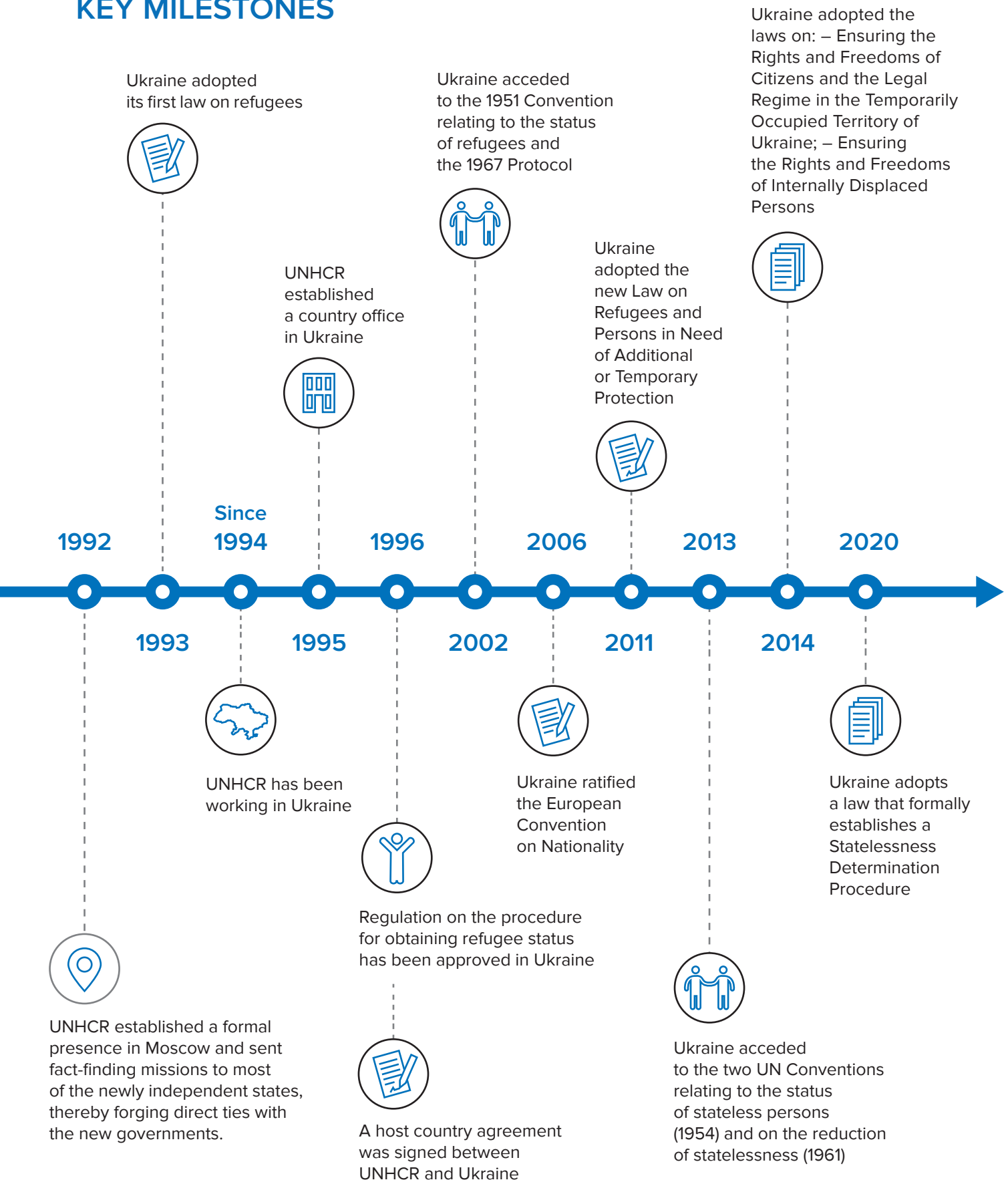
The brochure employs a chronological narrative, adding thematic boxes, photos and infographics. We hope it will serve as a testament to 25 years of UNHCR's activity and contribution in the Ukrainian context, as well as a source of reference and stimulus to help in the years to come.

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CONTENTS

Key Milestones	4
Ukraine and Refugees – from the League of Nations to the United Nations	5
The Dissolution of the USSR, Forced Migration, Ukraine and UNHCR	8
Ukraine and UNHCR in the 1990s	11
Ukraine and UNHCR 2000-2014: Interfacing with the Enlarged EU.....	14
UNHCR during War and Massive Internal Displacement in Ukraine, 2014-2020	17
The Current Status of Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Stateless in Ukraine	21
Internally displaced people in Ukraine	24
Conclusion and words of appreciation	25

KEY MILESTONES



Sources: Country Factsheet Ukraine, January 2021; UNHCR welcomes new Ukrainian statelessness law set to end legal limbo for thousands, July 2020; Закон України «Про біженців» 1993 р.; «Положення про порядок оформлення надання статусу біженця» 1996 р.; Закон України «Про біженців та осіб, які потребують додаткового або тимчасового захисту» 2011 р.; Європейська конвенція про громадянство; Закон України «Про забезпечення прав і свобод внутрішньо переміщених осіб»; Закон України «Про забезпечення прав і свобод громадян та правовий режим на тимчасово окупованій території України»

Ukrainian refugee boy, resettled from German camp to Canada after WWII/© UN Archives

A young Ukrainian refugee boy, wearing a light-colored, textured jacket and dark pants, is walking towards the camera. He is carrying a dark suitcase in his right hand. In the background, a crowd of people, including women and children, is visible, suggesting a resettlement camp or a public gathering. The entire image is overlaid with a blue tint.

UKRAINE AND REFUGEES – FROM THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS TO THE UNITED NATIONS

Refugees – people forced to leave their homeland because of persecution and even the threat of death - are not just foreigners who turn up and become a nuisance: they are people like you and me fleeing from wars, persecution and intolerance. Because of their precarious, sometimes seemingly hopeless situation, they require understanding, protection and help.

From the very outset, since refugees and stateless persons were first recognized internationally and legally as people who need international protection requiring solidarity and concerted responses, Ukrainians have figured prominently among the forcibly displaced.

During the last 120 or so years, millions of people at different times were forced to leave Ukraine because of two world wars, repression, intolerance, economic hardship, and more recent conflicts. They sought safety elsewhere and many countries all around the world provided asylum and new opportunities.

Today's large and vibrant Ukrainian diaspora is a product of these outflows, some forced, which create refugees and stateless persons, and others voluntary, as in the case of economically motivated emigration.

Many Ukrainians emigrated at the turn of the twentieth century because of economic hardship and intolerance. However, the First World War, and then the collapse of the Russian empire and the Bolshevik seizure of power, the national revolution in Ukraine and the civil war in Russia produced millions of refugees.

In response to the massive and growing challenge posed by diverse waves of refugees after the First World War, the international community recognized the need to pool resources and efforts in addressing it (burden sharing, it is called) and the need for a common international protection regime.

The initial attempts were made in the early 1920s by the League of Nations. Its first High Commissioner for Refugees, the famous Norwegian explorer Fridtjof Nansen, came to Ukraine in 1921 to oversee relief work.

During the Second World War massive numbers of Ukrainians were again displaced and constituted a significant proportion of the millions of Europe's refugees who in the second half of the 1940s awaited an international solution to their predicament. Within Soviet Ukraine itself there were forced deportations and forcible transfers of population both within, and especially from, the republic.



Signature of the 1951 Refugee Convention in Geneva, Switzerland / the three seated men (l-r): Mr. John Humphrey, Director of the Human Rights Division; Mr. Knud Larsen (Denmark) President of the Conference; Dr. G.V. van Heuven Goedhart, High Commissioner for Refugees/© Arni/UN Archives /1951

In 1945, at the end of World War II, the United Nations was created with the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic as one of its founding members. Today, it is not so important what Stalin's political motives were in permitting Soviet Ukraine and Soviet Belarus to have separate representation in the UN, alongside the USSR as such; the pertinent thing is that Ukraine was represented from the very outset in this international institution.

One of the major challenges facing the international community at this point was the issue of the post-war-refugees, which were more commonly referred to at that time as displaced persons. There were so many Ukrainians among these so-called DPs (Displaced Persons) in camps in post-war Germany, that the celebrated British author George Orwell wrote a special introduction to a Ukrainian edition of his political satire "Animal Farm" dedicated to them.

The onset of the Cold War between the Communist world centered on Moscow and Western world increasingly led by the United States complicated finding a common approach. Eventually, after the UN was able to adopt its landmark Universal Declaration of Human Rights in December 1948, solutions for the post-war displaced also developed. Two years later, under the aegis of the UN, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was created. The Refugee Convention adopted by the UN in 1951 became the key legal document underlying UNHCR's subsequent work.

The Refugee Convention, which entered into force only in April 1954, elaborated the obligations and rights of refugees, and the obligation of states towards them. The two key provisions were the definition of the term "refugee" (any person who...owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted... is outside the country of his nationality... [and] is unable or... is unwilling to return to it), and the prohibition of expulsion or return (refoulement) of refugees "to territories where his life or freedom would be threatened..."

Against the background of the Cold War, the Communist bloc was suspicious of UNHCR, viewing it as a Western tool. This became clearer in 1956 when, during the Hungarian anti-Communist Revolution suppressed by Moscow, 200,000 people fled to neighboring Austria. The uprising, next door to Ukraine, and its aftermath shaped the way in which UNHCR and partner humanitarian organizations would deal with refugee emergencies in the future. During the 1960s, the decolonization of Africa produced numerous refugee crises and Asia and Latin America were to have their share of them. In 1967 a Protocol was added to the 1951 Refugee convention to update its applicability.

In the last decade of the twentieth century the ethnic conflicts, wars of independence, and ethnic cleansing connected with the collapse of the Communist bloc and the break-up of the former Yugoslavia reminded Europe that no continent or region was immune.



Food distribution in the refugee camp in Kalonge, Democratic Republic of Congo. All the refugees from Rwanda receive an average of three kilos of manioc, beans and palm oil until are able to grow their own food/© UNHCR/S.Wright/1961

Children at first restored National School in Oktyabrskoe for Crimean Tatar returnees,
north of Simferopol, Ukraine/© UNHCR/B.Nahajlo/1996

THE DISSOLUTION OF THE USSR, FORCED MIGRATION, UKRAINE AND UNHCR



When, in the second half of the 1980s, political controls were loosened in the Soviet Union and the giant diverse but unitary state began dissolving, ethnic conflicts uprooted hundreds of thousands. While the USSR existed, these victims were internally displaced persons (IDPs), not refugees, as they had not fled across an international border. Some, from the North and South Caucasus and Central Asia, sought refuge in Ukraine while it was still part of the Soviet Union.

Not all the people who were moving within the USSR at this time were doing so forcibly. Tens of thousands of representatives of populations, in some cases, entire small nations, such as the Crimean Tatars who had been banished in 1944 from Crimea, by now part of Soviet Ukraine, or the Meskhetian Turks deported that same year from Soviet Georgia, wanted to return to their homelands.

The challenges generated by these massive population movements led the Soviet authorities to recognize the need to integrate the USSR into the international refugee protection system. In 1989 the Soviet Government informed UNHCR that it intended to accede to the 1951 Refugee Convention.



The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mrs Sadako Ogata, presented the Nansen medal to the Crimean Tatar activist Mustafa Dzhemilev, 55, for his commitment to the right of return of the Crimean Tatar people/© UNHCR/Anneliese Hollmann/1998



First restored Crimean Tatar National School in Oktyabrskoe for Crimean Tatar returnees, north of Simferopol/© UNHCR/B.Nahajlo/1996

The Soviet Union finally dissolved in December 1991. Under its new High Commissioner Sadako Ogata, UNHCR had already begun shaping a strategy for the vast complex Soviet region based on a concept of “pragmatic,” “pro-active,” “preventive protection.” This approach recognized the need for close cooperation not only with other relevant agencies of the UN System and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), but also the Council of Europe and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) – the predecessor of the OSCE, and also to strengthen the capacities of governments and local NGOs to address issues related to forced displacement

After the disappearance of the USSR, 15 new independent states appeared on its former territory, including Ukraine. Twelve of them remained connected in a loose non-state association called the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and three Baltic countries preferred not to join it.

The IDPs from the Soviet period were suddenly transformed into refugees. Some were left in a situation of potential statelessness. Asylum seekers from war-torn regions in the post-Soviet space continued to arrive in Ukraine, but so did the first asylum seekers from conflict-ridden countries in Africa and the Middle East, usually making their way there via Russia.

In early 1992 UNHCR established a formal presence in Moscow and sent fact-finding missions to most of the newly independent states, thereby forging direct ties with the new governments.

In the meantime, the CIS states themselves sought to work together in tackling the issues connected with population movements. In October 1992 they agreed in Bishkek on ways to address the question of the formerly deported peoples, and the following year on the broader challenges connected with displacement.

Ukraine, like the other independent post-Soviet states, was not yet part of the international system to protect refugees and stateless persons with its agreed on legal principles, terminology, developed strategies and concept of “burden sharing.”

In addition, Ukraine was confronted with addressing the consequences of a crime committed during the Stalin era when the entire Crimean Tatar nation had been deported from the Crimean peninsula to Soviet Central Asia. Now, almost 50 years later around 250,000 of them wanted to return to their Crimean homeland, which in 1954 had been “transferred” by Moscow to Soviet Ukraine.

This complex process of Crimean Tatar repatriation and reintegration required political will on the part of official Kyiv and involved a myriad of legal and socio-economic issues. It is to the credit of the authorities of Ukraine that, as it underwent transformation from a Soviet republic to an independent European state, they permitted the repatriation of the traditionally Muslim Crimean Tatars and other formerly deported populations. Independent Georgia, for example, did not allow the Meskhetian Turks to return to their homeland on the Georgian-Turkish border.



Crimean Tatar refugees from Tajikistan, near Simferopol/© UNHCR/B.Nahajlo/1996

UKRAINE AND UNHCR IN THE 1990s

Formerly deported people in Dobroe village, Crimea, during the counselling. The main objective of UNHCR's assistance program in Ukraine is to promote the acquisition of Ukrainian citizenship by Crimean Tatars who had been deported to Asia during the second World War/© UNHCR/E. Lauwers/1999

How did UNHCR become involved in Ukraine and what were its initial tasks?

Initially, the UN began its activities in the post-Soviet space in Moscow and gradually spread its activities with the help of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to the newly independent states that had replaced the USSR. A UNHCR Representation was established in Moscow in 1992.

UNHCR began working in Ukraine in late 1992 under the umbrella of the UN/UNDP Agreement with the Ukrainian authorities of 6 October 1992. Despite UNHCR's specific mandate and spheres of concern, and missions to Ukraine by its representatives, Ukrainian officials initially did not properly understand how the UN system functioned and what UNHCR's role was. As late as January 1995, a UNHCR colleague noted in a report to Headquarters that "the impression here in some quarters still is that UNHCR activities are some component of UNDP activities."

Understandably, UNHCR, sticking to its core mandate, initially concentrated on encouraging the Ukrainian Government to establish a proper asylum system in accordance with international norms. Ukraine, however, was primarily interested in seeking assistance to deal with the return of the formerly deported Crimean Tatar population from Central Asia and its re-integration.

On 29 March 1993, the then Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Borys Tarasiuk wrote to High Commissioner Ogata requesting UNHCR's cooperation in "addressing the problems of refugees in Ukraine." The initial UNHCR officials who came on mission to Kyiv had to explain to UNHCR Headquarters what the Crimean Tatar issue originating from the Stalin era was and why, because of the statelessness angle, it should concern UNHCR.

In these early years, UNHCR conducted its activities in the region from Moscow. In November 1993, UNHCR's Regional Representative in Moscow, French Juan Amunategui, presented his credential to Ukraine's MFA.

The following month Ukraine adopted its first Refugee Law. It was not entirely consistent with international standards but indicated movement in the right direction. Due to scarcity of funds to develop the necessary infrastructure for the protection of refugees and asylum seekers, the implementation of the Law began only in January 1996.

During 1994, with more and more Crimean Tatars returning, UNHCR's attention was increasingly drawn to this issue. UNHCR missions to Ukraine and now also to Crimea became more frequent. In November 1994, Mykola Shulha, Ukraine's Minister for Nationalities, Migrations and Cults wrote to the High Commissioner reiterating the request for "support and assistance for Ukraine relating to the deported peoples."

The Minister affirmed that contacts had been established with "representatives of UNHCR who visited Ukraine recently." In fact, by this time UNHCR was contemplating opening a UNHCR office in Kyiv. The Ukrainian Government also began signaling its interest in playing an active role in the CIS Conference, which was just being prepared by UNHCR and its partners, and in acceding to the 1951 Refugee Convention.

For the record, and to emphasize UNHCR's international nature, the names of the agency's "pioneers" in Ukraine during these early years deserve to be mentioned. They were Belgian Daniel Bellamy (1994), followed by Bangladeshi Taslimur Rahman (1995) and Briton of Ukrainian origin, Bohdan Nahaylo (1995-96).

1995 became the year of the breakthrough in formalizing bilateral relations between the Ukrainian Government and UNHCR. During it, UNHCR established a Liaison Office in Kyiv independent from the Regional Office in Moscow, and High Commissioner Ogata appointed a former Hungarian diplomat, Joseph Gyorke, to head it.

The Crimean issue remained the burning topic. On 23 August 1995 Ukraine's Prime Minister Yevhen Marchuk wrote to the High Commissioner once again requesting assistance with resolving "problems relating to the return of the Crimean Tatars to Ukraine." The following month, Kyiv hosted a sub-regional preparatory meeting for the CIS Conference at which the Crimean Tatar issue was among the topics discussed.

High Commissioner Ogata responded to Mr. Marchuk on 6 October saying: "It is gratifying to note the enhanced collaboration between your Government and my Office, and I look forward to furthering these fruitful relations... My Office attaches great importance to the question of people deported during the Soviet era, who are now returning to their homelands under difficult conditions." She also emphasized that, "considering the scale of the Crimean Tatar problem and its regional implications, it is clear that a concerted approach involving Ukrainian institutions, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and the donor community is crucial."



The portrait of Sergio Vieira de Mello, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and United Nations Special Representative for Iraq/© Bahia Journal/Jean Marc Ferre



A stateless ethnic Korean man moved from Uzbekistan to Ukraine in 1993. He has been living with a Ukrainian woman for a decade, but cannot register their union without the valid documents. He has been trying to receive citizenship for years; without Uzbek citizenship and unrecognized in Ukraine, he is at risk of deportation. "By the time I get my passport, I think that I will no longer be living," he says/© UNHCR/G. Constantine/2009

At the end of November 1995, the High Commissioner sent her Director of Policy Planning and Operations, Brazilian humanitarian Sergio Vieira de Mello, to emphasize UNHCR's commitment to helping Ukraine. During his mission, he met with senior Ukrainian officials, and representatives of local NGOs and refugee communities. On his return, he recommended that the capacity and status of the UNHCR's Kyiv office be reviewed to enable "UNHCR to take a more active role in Ukraine, not least in terms of bringing about a status determination mechanism, assisting in its functioning and in the regularization of the status of recognized refugees."

Such changes were made and UNHCR's operations in Ukraine in 1996 were given impetus by both a series of new missions to Crimea and the opportunities provided by the CIS Conference which was finally convened in Geneva in May of that year. The UNHCR missions to Crimea, where UNDP had already launched a project the previous year, resulted in the development of an operational plan. A six-month pilot project was launched and UNHCR Kyiv's project management capacity was boosted. The activities in Crimea, in collaboration with UNDP and IOM, included shelter, income generating activities, and legal assistance and protection sectors.

From the beginning of 1996, the State Migration Service (SMS) in Kyiv and several other large cities gradually began to receive and process applications from asylum seekers. At this point, there were 2-3,000 Afghan cases alone. UNHCR assisted with capacity building activities and provided modest assistance to the most vulnerable asylum seekers awaiting access to the refugee status determination procedure.

On 23 September 1996, the Ukrainian Government and UNHCR formalized their cooperation in the form of a Host Country Agreement.

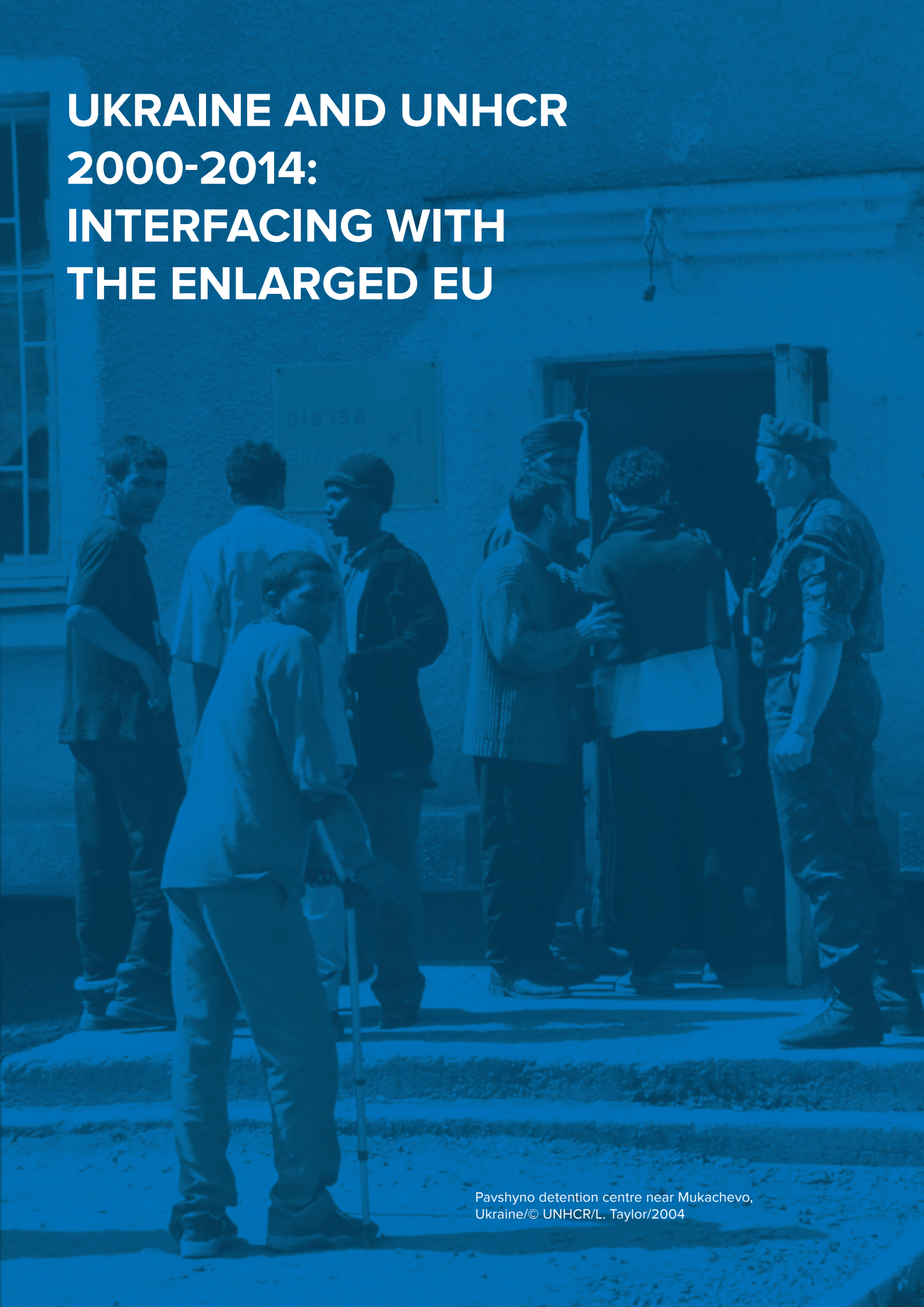
When High Commissioner Ogata visited Kyiv in September 1997 she could see the results of UNHCR's engagement. She was able to congratulate the Ukrainian Government on its recognition of almost 2,000 refugees, which made the country a model at that time for the entire region. As well as visiting centers for refugees from other countries, she also saw reintegration projects in Crimea.

By this time, UNHCR was providing shelter for 4,000 of the most destitute Tatar returnees. It was also setting up citizenship processing centers across Crimea. Later that year, in cooperation with the OSCE's High Commissioner on National Minorities, UNHCR was instrumental in the conclusion of an Accord signed between Ukraine and Uzbekistan, from where most of the Crimean Tatars had returned, on facilitating the resolution of citizenship and statelessness issues.

Throughout the remainder of the 1990s and beyond, in close cooperation with UNHCR, Ukraine continued to play an active and constructive role in the CIS Conference process. It was largely thanks to Ukraine's advocacy on behalf of the formerly deported peoples that this hitherto obscure category of displaced population was recognized for the first time in a broader high-level international multilateral forum and the need to find durable solutions for them recognized.

As the decade approached its end, in May 1999 the UNHCR Representative in Kyiv, Mr. Gyorke, informed the press that there were 3,350 recognized refugees living in Ukraine, and around 15,000 asylum seekers.

UKRAINE AND UNHCR 2000-2014: INTERFACING WITH THE ENLARGED EU



Pavshyno detention centre near Mukachevo,
Ukraine/© UNHCR/L. Taylor/2004

The CIS Conference process lasted until 2005 and continued to stimulate dialogue and cooperation on refugees, asylum, migration, stateless, formerly deported peoples, and related issues. It was instrumental in bringing the countries involved into the mainstream of international norms and practices relating to refugees and displaced populations and to focus the attention of donors on the region.

In 2001, Ukraine revised its citizenship law, allowing refugees to be naturalized after three years of residence in the country. “Illegal” migrants were to apply for asylum within 3 days, if legal migrants – 5 days.

In 2002 Ukraine finally fully integrated herself into the international refugee protection regime by adhering to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. This proved to be a timely move.

The enlargement eastward of the EU scheduled for May 2004 created new concerns and priorities for Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus, the three countries which would be on its new frontier. The need to respond to this change and promote better cooperation on asylum and migration issues among countries situated on the new EU border was also understood by UNHCR, its partners, and the EU itself.



Ukraine – Hungary border. With the May 2004 admission of Hungary within the EU, border security has increased substantially. UNHCR Head of Publications, Ray Wilkinson in discussion with a border guard/© UNHCR/L. Taylor/2004

In May 2001, the presidency of the EU, which at the time was held by Sweden, through the Swedish Migration Board (SMB), together with UNHCR and IOM, pro-actively launched the Söderköping Process (named after a Swedish town). Encompassing Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Poland, Hungary, Romania, the Slovak Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the EC, SMB, UNHCR and IOM, it created an important new regional platform for cross-border dialogue and cooperation.

In May 2003, the Söderköping Process established a Secretariat within the UNHCR office in Kyiv. From 2003 until June 2009 the Process was funded within the framework of the TACIS and ANEAS programs of the EC. It was instrumental in facilitating the sharing with Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus, of information and best practices on migration and asylum management in neighboring and EU Member States further West.

As the Process continued to gather momentum, in 2004 Ukraine’s Office assumed regional functions covering Belarus and Moldova.

Ukraine remained both a source and a transit country for irregular migrants and asylum seekers. It still lacked the finances and infrastructure to cope properly with these legal and humanitarian challenges. At the end of 2002, the BBC reported on the “miserable” conditions at a “temporary detention center” in Pavshino in the Carpathians. UNHCR’s Representative in Kyiv at the time, Canadian Guy Ouellet commented: “The Ukrainian authorities are overwhelmed. They are struggling to cope.”

TACIS agreed to assist with increasing reception facilities and enhancing the capacity of the government. It enabled reception centers to be constructed in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Odesa and Zakarpattya, aimed at providing a capacity to house around 500 asylum seekers by 2005.

According to UNHCR, at the end of 2004, just after Ukraine’s new EU neighbors had secured their borders as part of the Schengen system requirements, between 1,200 and 1,400 people were now applying for asylum in Ukraine every year. There were 2,595 recognized refugees in the country at that time, more than half were from Afghanistan, and the rest from the other newly independent states of the former Soviet Union, Africa and the Middle East.

UNHCR’s Global Appeal of 2005 provides a good insight into what UNHCR in Ukraine was focused on during this decade. According to this document, UNHCR intended “to support capacity-building activities to enable key actors within the asylum system to ensure access to fair and efficient asylum procedures”; and, “share its expertise on issues related to refugees.

UNHCR was redirecting its assistance activities towards refugee self-reliance and supporting the Government in shaping a national plan for the integration of refugees. It was also expanding a network of legal assistance NGOs to four additional regions, thus covering 19 regions with

significant numbers of asylum seekers and refugees. And it was continuing to call for Ukraine's accession to international instruments governing statelessness.

In fact, this eventually occurred in 2013 when Ukraine ratified the two UN Conventions relating to the status of stateless persons (1954) and on the reduction of statelessness (1961). Follow-up was required with the Government to establish status determination procedure mechanisms and training for staff involved.

Two years earlier Ukraine also adopted a revised Refugee Law regulating the treatment of refugees which still, unfortunately, retained some flaws as far as international norms were concerned. All this time, the prevention of *refoulement* had remained an intractable problem. The Ukrainian authorities had in the context of extradition proceedings periodically violated this critical protection principle and have continued to do so.

Nevertheless, with the administration of President Viktor Yanukovich ostensibly committed to signing an association agreement with the EU, the prospects for strengthening Ukraine's asylum system and statelessness prevention practices seemed promising.

In the meantime, the Söderköping process was absorbed by the EU's "Eastern Partnership" scheme. UNHCR and IOM continued to be part of the follow-up, including a direct partnership in an EU pilot project on Readmission.

The CIS Conference process

In view of the numerous pressing and diverse issues related to displacement confronting the newly independent states that appeared after the dissolution of the USSR, and their broader international ramifications, the need for an international multilateral effort to address them was recognized.

"The CIS Conference" was established in 1996, following a UN General Assembly Resolution "to convene a regional conference to address the problems of refugees, displaced persons, other forms of involuntary displacement and returnees in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States and relevant neighboring States."

It was organized jointly by UNHCR, IOM and OSCE / ODIHR and convened in Geneva. Participants, who included 11 of the CIS states, adopted a Program of Action, with a follow-up process designed initially to last five years. The forum was intended to encourage exchange for CIS states on asylum and migration challenges; to review the types of population movements being encountered; and, to establish categories of concern.

The CIS Conference developed into a process involving high-level and sub-regional meetings and continued for a decade. It played a major role in the development of an integrative strategy for the region and fostered cooperation on various levels.



Various asylum seekers at the Pavshyno detention centre near Mukachevo, Ukraine/© UNHCR/L. Taylor/ 2004

UNHCR DURING WAR AND MASSIVE INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT IN UKRAINE, 2014-2020



Yuri and Tetiana stand in the ruins of their home in Nikishino, eastern Ukraine. The couple's home was hit during fighting in the village and was completely destroyed/© UNHCR/Andrew McConnell/2015



Ukrainian soldiers standing outside the village of Talakovka, a village of about 4,000 people, at the checkpoint. Thirty buildings have been destroyed in the fighting since September 2014. Ukrainian soldiers, then no-man's land, then the "contact line" moves back and forth - just 5-10 km from city/© UNHCR/G. Kotschy/2014

In the final weeks of 2013, the situation in the country suddenly began to change rapidly. Ukraine was gripped by the effects of the mass protests which began on 21 November in Kyiv after President Yanukovich unexpectedly reversed the decision to sign an Association Agreement with the EU. Centered on the capital's main square – the Maidan, this "EuroMaidan" revolt developed into Ukraine's "Revolution of Dignity." After its bloody conclusion in February 2014, and the ouster of Mr. Yanukovich, Russia unexpectedly occupied Ukraine's Crimea region and subsequently supported pro-Russian forces in eastern Ukraine hostile to the new authorities in Kyiv. The conflict there turned into a war.

The occupation of Ukrainian territory by Russia in Crimea and the fighting in eastern Ukraine, resulted in enormous suffering, loss of life, destruction and the sudden appearance of a huge wave of IDPs. This humanitarian catastrophe tested to the limit not only Ukraine's resilience and coping capacity, but also those of UNHCR and the entire humanitarian community and their ability to respond effectively to the crisis.

The regions centered on the eastern cities of Donetsk and Luhansk declared themselves to be "people's republics." They engaged in heavy fighting in 2014 and early 2015 against Ukrainian forces and have remained enclaves that are not recognized by Kyiv nor the international community. Since a second set of "peace" accords were agreed on in Minsk in February 2015 by Ukraine, Russia, Germany and France, the front-

or "contact line" as it is referred to, running through Donetsk and Luhansk regions in eastern Ukraine has remained static. Negotiations among the parties failed to produce a peace settlement, and regular shooting and shelling, interspersed with occasional ceasefires, continued.



Galina, 65, walks along the main street in Nikishino village, in eastern Ukraine. 'I'm 65 and everything I have I'm holding,' says Galina. The street is littered with unexploded mortars and mines and Galina has just returned from her destroyed home where she salvaged what she could/© UNHCR/Andrew McConnell/2015

The size of the population in the conflict-affected regions in the east was 5.2 million of whom at least 3.9 million were directly affected by the war. By March 2015, 7,000 were reported to have been killed, some 18,000 wounded and over 1.6 million people displaced mainly internally in Ukraine, but also outside of the country. Of these, the UN estimated that 800,000 resided permanently in government-controlled areas, while others moved frequently across the “contact line” or registered as IDPs to maintain access to their pensions.

Most of the IDPs have had to live in displacement since the peak of hostilities in 2014, unable to return home in the absence of a sustained peace. Although the number of civilian casualties subsequently continued to decrease, families along the contact line continued to suffer the effects of regular shelling, including property damage, stress and economic blight. In February 2020, the Office of the UN the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) estimated that since April 2014 up to 13,200 people had been killed, a quarter of them civilians, and as many as 31,000 injured, 7,000-9,000 of them civilians.

UNHCR and its partner humanitarian actors were confronted with immense new challenges: having to ensure efficient cooperation, responsiveness and funding through pragmatic reorganization and division of

responsibilities; serious security concerns; human rights abuses; and, politically sensitive questions about how to treat the areas not under the control of the Ukrainian Government. For instance, from December 2014 the Ukrainian Government stopped the social service delivery and payments in areas not under its control and where the conflict had produced considerable hardship.

In March 2015 UNHCR’s Office in Kyiv, forced to concentrate on the country-wide emergency created by the conflict in Donbas and hemorrhaging of IDPs from there and Crimea, relinquished its role as a Regional Representation. Instead, responding to the acute new challenges, it promptly reconfigured its presence and internal organization. Initially UNHCR established a Sub-Office in Dnipropetrovsk (now Dnipro), and six Field Offices – in Donetsk, Kharkiv, Kherson, Luhansk, Mariupol and Sievierodonetsk. At the same time, UNHCR ensured that it would keep its regular refugee and statelessness programs active.

In November 2016, the new UNHCR High Commissioner Filippo Grandi visited Ukraine and went to the “contact line” zone to see for himself the conditions there and to meet with IDPs, including those with disabilities. He reassured them that humanitarian “organizations like UNHCR will have to remain engaged to ensure that people like you have access to basic services and rights



A young Ukrainian girl hugs High Commissioner Filippo Grandi during a visit to a restored kindergarten in Luhansk, Ukraine. The building was recently repaired after being shelled in 2014/© UNHCR/Alina Cherkashina/2017

such as education and a dignified life.” On meeting with Ukraine’s then President Petro Poroshenko, the High Commissioners called for safety nets for those really in need – the disabled and poorest.”

As an operational protection and humanitarian agency, UNHCR has remained in the forefront of the joint integrated efforts by the UN system and its partners in the humanitarian community to help address the daunting challenges facing Ukraine as a result of conflict, occupation of its territory and forced displacement.



On his first official visit to Ukraine, Filippo Grandi is photographed during a meeting with President Petro Poroshenko and cabinet members at the Presidential Administration Building/© UNHCR/Volodymyr Shuvayev/2017

In 2017, after extensive consultations with partners, UNHCR prepared a Multi-Year, Multi-Partner Protection and Solutions Strategy for Ukraine. It set out UNHCR’s plan for engagement in Ukraine for a period of five years (2018-2022). Recognizing the value of pursuing a concerted approach among humanitarian and development actors in the context of the enduring conflict in eastern Ukraine, as well as the goal of achieving protection and durable solutions for IDPs, refugees and stateless persons throughout the country, the period was synchronized with the cycle of the UN-Government of Ukraine Partnership Framework (UNPF).

Concretely, how has UNHCR been working in Ukraine for the protection of IDP’s rights and provision of humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable among them?

UNHCR has provided various types of support to IDPs and conflict-affected communities, either directly or through its partner organizations, as the situation has required. Humanitarian assistance has involved providing non-food items such as blankets, kitchen sets, clothing, coal, or other items to conflict-affected persons during their initial displacement or as winterization assistance. During emergency situations aid has included life-saving assistance, such as temporary shelter or minimum financial assistance. This assistance is provided along the “contact line” in both the government- and non-government controlled areas in east Ukraine. Since the

beginning of the conflict, UNHCR has been, together with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), consistently allowed by the de facto authorities in non-government controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk to implement humanitarian activities.



UNHCR delivers coal to village on the contact line in east Ukraine. Anna, 68, and Victor, 67, stand in front of several bags of coal that will heat their homes in the village of Luhanske, Donetsk/© UNHCR/Evgeny Maloletka/2016

UNHCR and its partners work with Ukrainian authorities to provide durable solutions for displaced people that are suitable at both the individual and community level. Such solutions depend on whether people wish to integrate locally, return home, or move to another location. Advocacy, reinforced by participatory assessments, has helped to voice the concerns of IDPs with the relevant authorities, and press for their resolution through legislative changes, action plans and their implementation.

Support is given by UNHCR to community groups to help resolve the concerns of IDPs and communities hosting them. UNHCR’s partners provide legal and protection assistance from primary counselling up to court representation on matters related to displaced persons in various oblasts.

Naturally, UNHCR has also concerned itself with the capacity building of government actors and partner organizations to improve their ability to deliver high quality assistance to IDPs. It also remains active in highlighting the situation and needs of IDPs through systematic public information work.



After successfully facilitating the first humanitarian convoy through Shchastya exit-entry crossing point, UNHCR Ukraine briefed President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky and Charles Michel, the President of the European Council, on freedom of movement across the contact line in eastern Ukraine/© UNHCR/2021

THE CURRENT STATUS OF ASYLUM SEEKERS, REFUGEES AND STATELESS IN UKRAINE

Refugee family from Somalia received self-reliance grant from UNHCR to support business on producing sauces in Odesa/© UNHCR/Oleg Kutskyi/2019



While preoccupied with the realities of forced internal displacement, complicated during 2020 by the COVID-19 epidemic, UNHCR, according to its Representative in Ukraine since 2016, Salvadoran Pablo Mateu, has continued “to work closely with the Ukrainian authorities on building an asylum system that extends protection and promotes durable solutions.” Based on an assessment developed with the State Migration Service (SMS) in 2018, as well as a participatory assessment with refugees and asylum seekers in 2019, “UNHCR advocates for a number of improvements in the asylum system.”



The portrait of Pablo Mateu, UNHCR Representative in Ukraine/© UNHCR/Serhiy Korovaynyi/2019

UNHCR has urged the Ukrainian Government to adopt a procedure for considering asylum applications at international airports, provide adequate funding and procedures for the use of interpreters, and avoid detention of asylum seekers. “We believe that asylum-seekers must have access to free urgent medical care, and access to employment must be simple and practical,” – Mr. Mateu explained.

Since 2011, Ukraine has offered two forms of protection to those who have fled persecution and war in their own countries and have sought asylum in Ukraine: refugee status and complementary protection. However, the refugee recognition rate has remained low and many asylum seekers have encountered problems while awaiting the status determination procedure and integrating.

As of mid-2020, Ukraine hosted 2,218 recognized refugees and persons with complementary protection and around 2,300 asylum-seekers, a diverse population drawn from 60 countries. 23% are women and girls. Until the start of the conflict in eastern Ukraine, an average of 1,500 persons per year applied for asylum in Ukraine. Most entered the country irregularly through the eastern border with the Russian Federation. The number dropped sharply after the conflict started but

rose again to 1,036 in 2019. New applications decreased in 2020 due to COVID-related border closures and the closure of SMS offices. The recognition rate in 2019 was 21% but was comparatively low for persons from refugee-producing countries such as Syria and Afghanistan. Based on a re-opening of borders and more consistent working conditions of SMS offices in 2021, UNHCR expects there to be around 2,800 asylum-seekers in Ukraine as of the end of 2021.

In 2020 important progress was made in another area in which UNHCR has remained highly active – promoting the ending of statelessness in Ukraine. In June UNHCR welcomed a new statelessness law which will give thousands of people who lack a nationality a chance to work legally, study and access healthcare among other rights and opportunities, and will ultimately provide a pathway to citizenship, once they are recognized as stateless.

The new law also formally established a Statelessness Determination Procedure which is expected to benefit an estimated 35,000 people in the country who were either stateless or whose nationality was undetermined. These include people who have been residing in Ukraine for many years— many since the dissolution of the former Soviet Union — but have not been able to acquire Ukrainian citizenship or any other nationality due to a lack of documentation or ties to post-Soviet countries.



A stateless Roma man showing his only document – a damaged birth certificate. Lawyers from the NGO NEEKA are working to assist him in obtaining a Ukrainian passport, Barkasovo, Zakarpattya region /© UNHCR/Oleksandr Chekmenev/2019

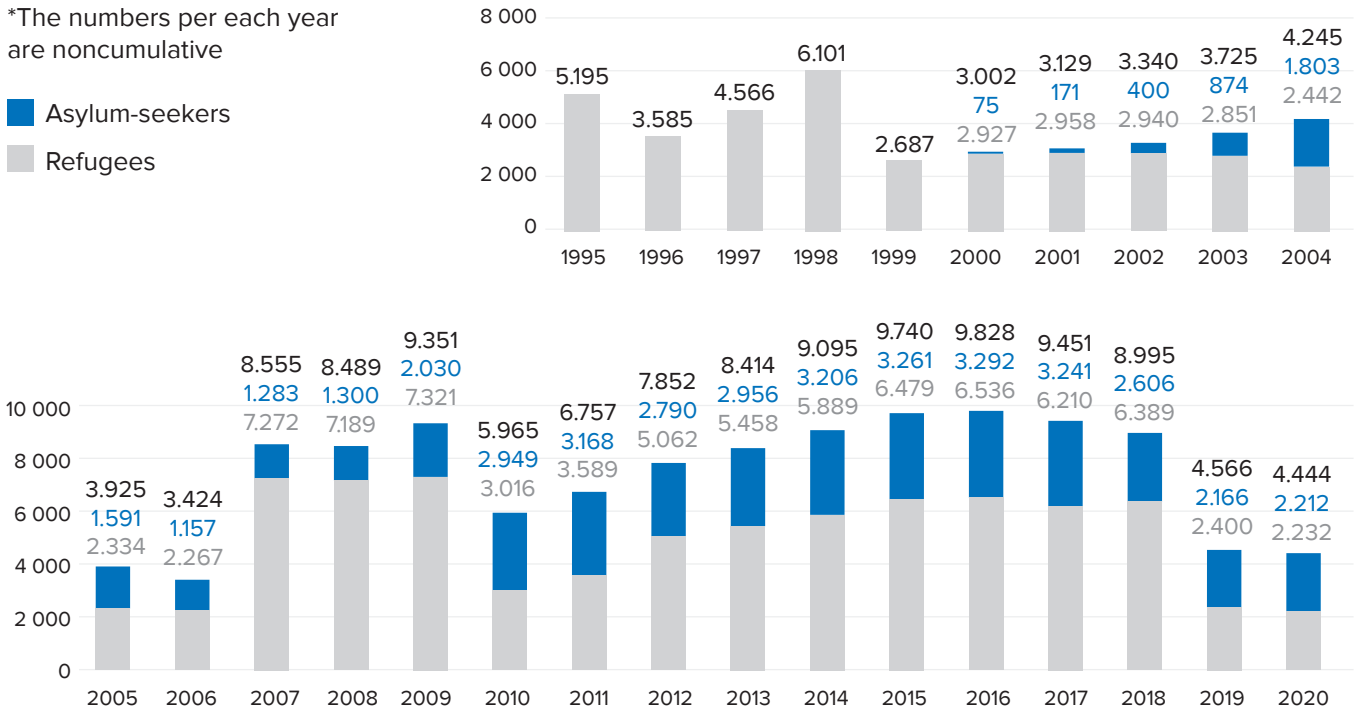
With the introduction of the procedure, recognized stateless people will be able to regularize their stay by obtaining temporary residence permits. They will have the right to freedom of movement, to work, and to access education and health services.

Crucially, the law will pave the way for their naturalization as Ukrainian citizens. After seven years of permanent residence in Ukraine, people recognized as being stateless will be eligible to apply for naturalization.

Asylum-Seekers and Refugees in Ukraine 1995-2020

*The numbers per each year are noncumulative

■ Asylum-seekers
■ Refugees



Why people are fleeing from their countries:



Afghanistan

For more than 40 years, Afghans have been fleeing violence, conflict and natural disasters. At times, the number exceeded six million. During the last decade, it dropped to **2.7 million**, primarily due to an increase in returns to Afghanistan.



Syria

Since 2014 Syrians continue to be by far the largest forcibly displaced population worldwide. At the end of 2019, there were **6.6 million** Syrian refugees hosted by 126 countries worldwide.



Somalia

Almost two-and-a-half decades of armed conflict in Somalia, compounded by drought and other natural hazards, forced people to flee from the country. At the end of 2019 there were around **900,000** Somalis displaced across borders.

UNHCR estimates that as many as **35,000** persons are stateless in Ukraine.

The majority of persons at risk of statelessness identified by UNHCR partners in Ukraine include:



Roma minority



Holders of Soviet passports



Children born in non-government controlled areas



Homeless persons



Persons released from prisons

INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE IN UKRAINE

Following the start of conflict in eastern Ukraine and the occupation of Crimea in 2014, over 1.4 million people are registered as IDPs by the Government of Ukraine, 734,000 of whom reside permanently in GCA.

UNHCR provides various types of support to internally displaced persons, either directly or through its partner organisations.

UNHCR also provides humanitarian assistance to affected population in both government-controlled and non-government controlled areas in eastern Ukraine, in accordance with Ukraine’s Humanitarian Response Plan:

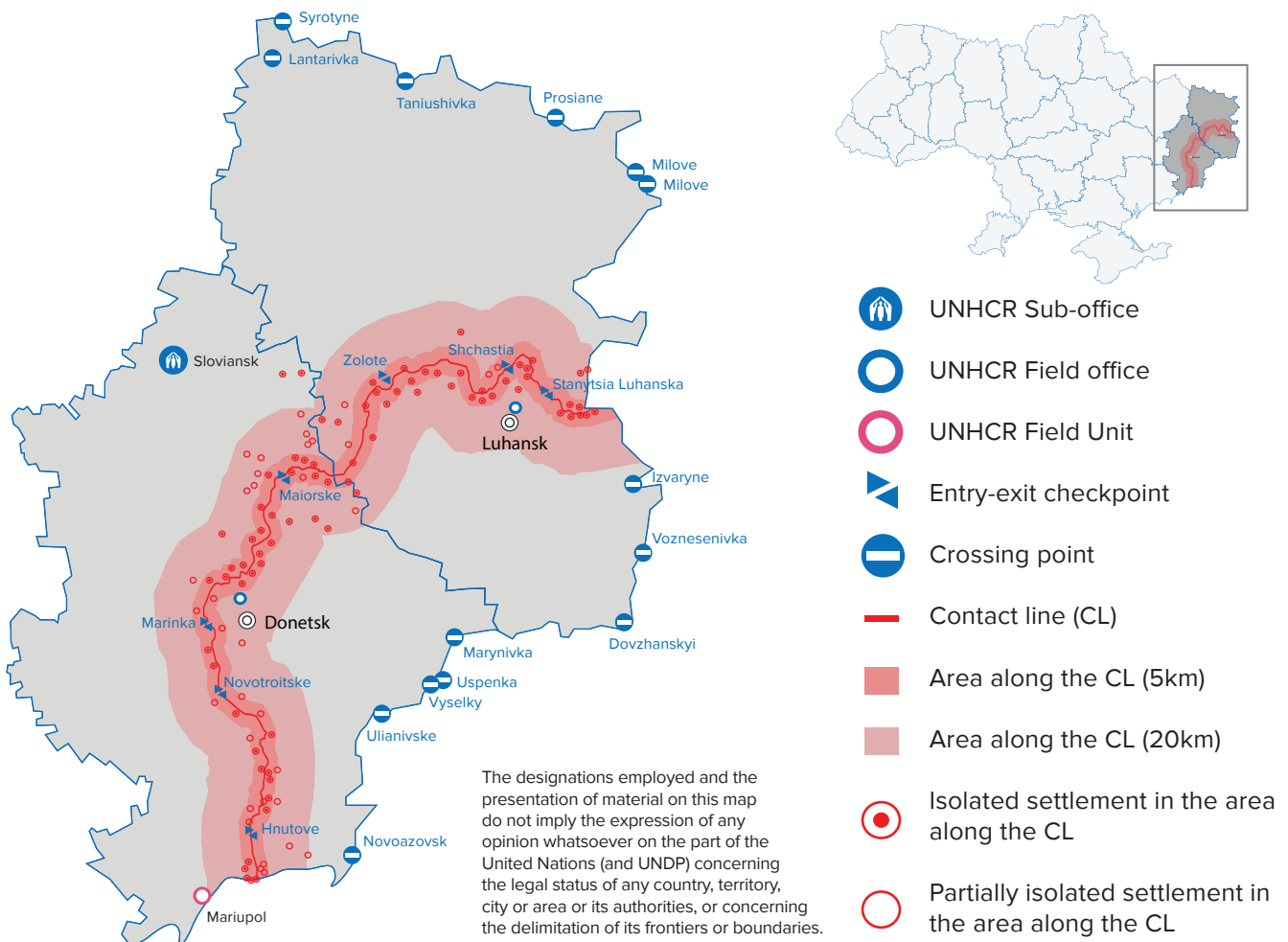
Humanitarian response in Government-controlled areas (GCA)

PEOPLE IN NEED (PIN)	PIN BY WOMEN / MEN (%)	PIN BY CHILDREN / ADULTS / ELDERLY (%)	PIN BY DISABILITY(%)
1.7 M*	54 / 46	14 / 35 / 51	14

* Including 1.5 million people in GCA of Donetsk and Luhanska oblasts and 0.2 million of IDPs in other oblasts.

Humanitarian response in non-Government-controlled areas (NGCA)

PEOPLE IN NEED (PIN)	PIN BY WOMEN / MEN (%)	PIN BY CHILDREN / ADULTS / ELDERLY (%)	PIN BY DISABILITY (%)
1.7 M	54 / 46	14 / 59 / 26	12



CONCLUSION AND WORDS OF APPRECIATION

During its modern history, the territory of Ukraine has witnessed many forms of forced displacement and emigration. This brought diverse challenges, with humanitarian, economic and socio-political implications. When in the early and later parts of the twentieth century the international community strove to devise legal and humanitarian means to address such issues around the globe, Ukraine and its population figured among its efforts.

After the League of Nations, its successor the United Nations systematized work in this direction through the 1950 Refugee Convention and the creation of UNHCR. But it was only in the early 1990s, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, that UNHCR was to appear in Ukraine and begin assisting the country in addressing complex, disparate and changing challenges related to forced displacement.

For over a quarter of a century, UNHCR has stood with the Government and people of the Ukraine in seeking to manage, mitigate and, where possible, provide solutions to a host of challenges rarely encountered in such diversity, complexity, and on such a scale.

Over these years, Ukraine has dealt with the population movements in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and emergence of new independent states, the appearance of asylum seekers and refugees from both near and afar, the issue of stateless people, and the repatriation and reintegration of formerly deported peoples, to, more recently, grappling with the massive problem of internal displacement in conditions of war and pandemic.

UNHCR has endeavored to do its best within the limitations of its mandate, capacity and resources and make a difference in Ukraine. To provide protection, assistance and expertise and ensure international standards and best practices are upheld. Much has been achieved, thanks to the productive interaction with the Government of Ukraine, partner organizations, both local and international, and donors. But much more remains to be done.

So, after 25 years of its international service for humankind in the specific Ukrainian setting, UNHCR invites you to reflect on the contents of this brochure and judge for yourselves what the meaning of our joint contribution has been and continues to be.

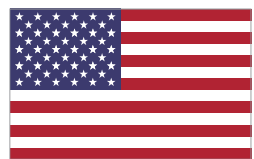
UNHCR expresses its gratitude for the support and understanding it has always received from the Ukrainian authorities, from our sister agencies in the UN system, local and international NGOs, representatives of the media, social service providers, legal profession, and faith-based organizations. And, of course, the local population, and especially those communities that have required our help and intervention, and have shown a high degree of resilience and solidarity.

UNHCR's activities in Ukraine have been made possible largely thanks to the generous support of our donors over the years. We, along with the people of Ukraine, are grateful for this.

Last, but not least, a special thanks to all the staff of UNHCR in Ukraine, national and international, who over the years were instrumental in making our contribution possible, or who will continue our work while it is needed.

We are thankful for the generous support of donors.

In 2020, 18,5 million USD were provided to support people under the mandate of UNHCR in Ukraine by these countries, organizations, funds and private donors:



Government of the United States of America



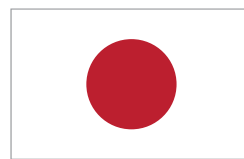
European Union Humanitarian Aid



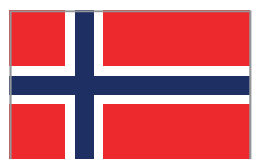
Government of Canada



Government of the Kingdom of Sweden



From the Government and the People of Japan



Government of the Kingdom of Norway



Government of the Republic of Estonia



Government of the Slovak Republic



Private donors in Switzerland, UK and USA.

We are grateful to all the donors who have supported UNHCR in Ukraine throughout 25 years:



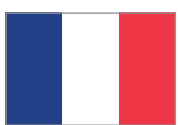
Government of the Kingdom of Belgium



Government of the Kingdom of Denmark



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Government of the Hellenic Republic



Government of the Italian Republic



Government of the Republic of Korea



Government of the Republic of Latvia



Government of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg



Government of the Republic of Lithuania



Government of the Netherlands



Government of the Portuguese Republic



Government of the Kingdom of Spain



Government of the Swiss Confederation



Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland



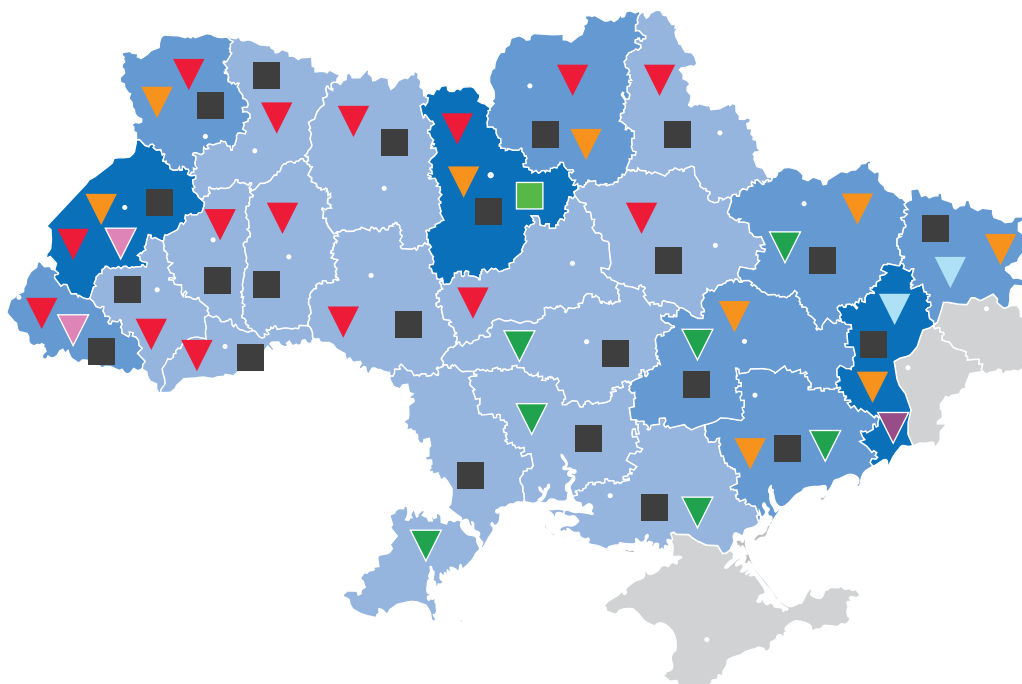
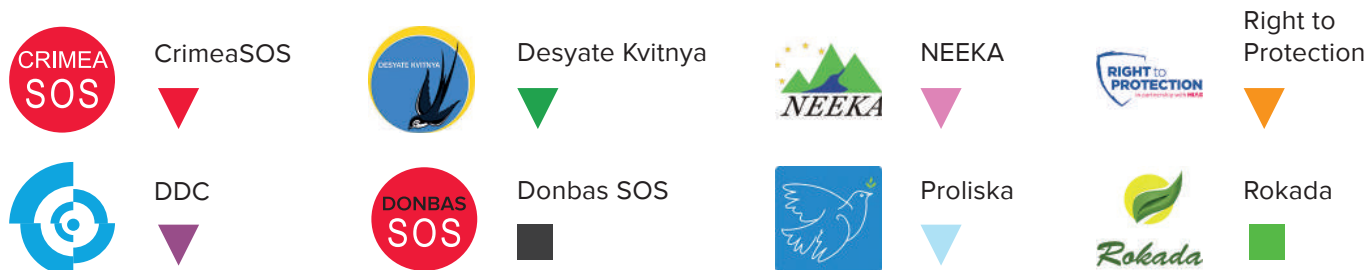
UNHCR PARTNERS

We are very grateful for the cooperation throughout these years with the Government of Ukraine on national and local levels, and non-governmental organizations, in particular

- Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA)
- Beetroot Academy
- “Bridge Charitable foundation” Center for Social Development
- Caritas Ukraine
- Crimea Development Fund Charitable organization
- CSO Ukrainian Institute for Human Rights
- Danish Refugee Council (DRC)
- “Dopomoha Dnipra” Charity fund
- “Ednannia” Initiative Center to Support Social Action
- European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD)
- “Faith, Hope, Love” Public Movement
- Foundation.101 NGO
- Glovo
- “Gorenje” All-Ukrainian Charity Foundation
- Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS)
- HelpAge International UK
- Hilton Kyiv
- Lavka Tradyciy (Silpo)
- “Maximal” Youth Organization
- “MIRA” International Child Fund
- National Assembly of People with Disabilities of Ukraine
- “No Borders Project” Social action centre
- People in Need
- Roma Women Fund “Chiricli” International Charitable Organization
- “Slavic Heart” Charitable foundation
- “Station Kharkiv” Volunteer initiative
- Ukraine Crisis Media Center NGO
- Unilever Ukraine
- Vodafone Ukraine
- “World” Kharkiv charitable foundation

UKRAINE: UNHCR COVERAGE

2021 NGO Partners



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(UNHCR)**

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