

Conference on the 70th Anniversary of the founding of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

70 Years Protecting People Forced to Flee

On 14 December 1950, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Statute of the Office and decided to complete the drafting of and to sign the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (1951 Convention). While the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees was adopted that year, international negotiations on the protection needs of stateless persons continued until 28 September 1954, when the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons was adopted. The adoption of UNHCR's Statute began concerted international efforts to implement Article 14 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which recognizes the right to seek asylum from persecution. In the seventy years since the international protection regime has adapted to many challenges.

Since 1950, UNHCR's mandate has expanded to include refugees, asylum-seekers, persons internally displaced and stateless persons. The challenging environment of refugee protection as UNHCR enters its eighth decade has taken on yet another dimension with the affirmation in 2018 of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), which, while not legally binding, is based on a strong commitment by States to enhance refugee protection and inclusion alongside fairer and more predictable burden- and responsibility-sharing. Greater predictability and equity are urgently needed as there were over 79.5 million persons of concern to UNHCR in 2019, 85 per cent of whom were hosted in low- or middle-income countries.

In acknowledgement of this anniversary and the potential step-change in the global response to displacement that the GCR could bring, it is proposed to organize a two-day conference in January 2020 to bring together practitioners, governments, international organizations and humanitarian actors, civil society and academics to discuss, *inter alia*:

- What does protection for the forcibly displaced mean today
- Seeking solutions, especially in protracted displacement
- Working with local and whole-of-society actors

This conference also occurs eleven months before the 2021 ministerial stocktaking meeting on the Global Refugee Forum, where progress on implementing pledges made in 2019 to advance burden and responsibility sharing will be undertaken. The conference is, therefore, a good opportunity to examine, through an interdisciplinary lens, challenges and good practices on the implementation of protection and solution pledges made in 2019.

Given the multifaceted challenges to protection and solutions for displaced people today, it is critical that the discussion at this event be interdisciplinary, reflecting both the different disciplines and actors contributing to protection and solutions for persons of concern to UNHCR.

Practical Matters

To foster greater engagement of academics worldwide and forcibly displaced persons themselves and to abide by social distancing recommendations in response to COVID-19, the conference will be held in a virtual format. A recorded opening ceremony will be broadcast in two different time zones on the 18th January and will open a chat through which participants can start communicating and submitting questions, which will 'set the scene' for two-day regional discussions (19th and 21st January). Discussions will be hosted by different academic institutions which are part of the Global Academic Interdisciplinary Network (GAIN) and submitted pledges and contributions at the Global Refugee Forum (GRF). On 28th January, a closing ceremony will present key conference outcomes and conclusions and highlight regional opportunities and challenges to implement the GCR. A conference report will be presented during the 80th Standing Committee Meeting in March.

This event will be co-hosted by the Global Academic Interdisciplinary Network (GAIN), a mechanism called for in the Global Compact Refugees to facilitate research, teaching and scholarship opportunities which result in specific deliverables in support of the four objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees. GAIN engages universities, academic alliances, and research institutions, and has a secretariat which in 2021 is led by the University of Essex and UNHCR. GAIN seeks to partner with an existing academic alliance/network in each region to co-host the event that has significant membership in displacement-hosting contexts.