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Icon for sustainable working methods

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented and multifaceted impact on people in need of protection. Restrictions in movement made it difficult for people to flee persecution and increased the risk of resorting to smuggling networks or following more dangerous routes to seek safety.13

Lockdowns created additional barriers for displaced populations to access education, health services and socio-psychological support. In addition, disruptions in economic activity meant that displaced persons had even fewer possibilities to generate their own income.14

To address the new challenges and ensure a continuity in services, actors involved in the provision of protection adapted their methodologies and turned to digital solutions. Throughout 2021, innovations which were introduced as an immediate response to the pandemic, such as online, remote registration and processing of applications, became an integral part of the standard working methods *(see Section 4).*

To facilitate the return to normality, vaccination campaigns were also targeted at applicants and beneficiaries of international protection in many countries to increase immunisation and alleviate pressure on the medical infrastructure.15 Studies show that a significant gap exists between higher-income and lower-income countries in terms of immunisation.16 Many of the world's displaced people, hosted by lower-income countries, faced barriers in accessing vaccines, testing, treatment and even reliable information, despite the campaigns.17 Substantial efforts are needed to ensure vaccine equity across countries and sharing knowledge and expertise.18 Stepping up financial, political and technical support to these countries and communities will help to ensure that COVID-19-related challenges become part of a broader health strategy to catalyse the improvement of and access to health care.19

These developments in 2021 have signalled a desire for a transition from reactive responses to the pandemic toward an acknowledgement that COVID-19 is an established reality and new working methods must be sustainable in the long term to provide effective protection solutions.

- 13Migration Policy Institute. (April 2021). COVID-19 and the State of Global Mobility in 2020. https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/mpi_covid19-impact-global-mobility_final.pdf
- 14United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2020, December 18). COVID-19 Supplementary Appeal 2021. https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/COVID-19%20Supplementary%20Appeal%202021%20-%2018%20December%202020.pdf
- 15United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2021). Mid-Year Trends 2021. https://www.unhcr.org/statistics/unhcrstats/618ae4694/mid-year-trends-2021.html
- 16United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2021). Mid-Year Trends 2021. https://www.unhcr.org/statistics/unhcrstats/618ae4694/mid-year-trends-2021.html
- 17United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, International Organisation for Migration, & World Health Organisation. (2021, October 29). Open letter to G20 Heads of State and Government - UNHCR, IOM & WHO. https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2021/10/617bffc64/open-letter-g20-heads-state-government.html
- 18United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2021, May 24). Statement: No-one is safe until everyone is safe – why we need a global response to COVID-19. https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2021/5/60a7fc9b4/statement-no-one-safe-safe-need-global-response-covid-19.html
- 19United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2021, May 24). Statement: No-one is safe until everyone is safe – why we need a global response to COVID-19. https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2021/5/60a7fc9b4/statement-no-one-safe-safe-need-global-response-covid-19.html

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