



## World Refugee Day “Together we heal, learn and shine.”

By Louise McLeod, GWI VP Advocacy and Education

Refugees are among the most vulnerable people in the world. In fact, according to the United Nations, every minute that passes sees 20 people forced to leave everything behind to escape war, persecution or terror.

Forcibly displaced women face barriers to securing economic livelihoods, discrimination in many forms, sexual violence, limited access to service and negative consequences from some cultural practices.<sup>1</sup> Refugee and migrant women and children are at particular risk for human trafficking and other abuses as a result of their vulnerable status as they are often pawns in larger political games of intractable conflict.

Children alone make up half of the "people of concern" according to the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), as they are often separated from parents or traditional caregivers and even recruited to be child soldiers - both boys and girls. Obtaining any education becomes impossible.

GWI has created [Advocacy Campaigns](#), containing recent facts and statistics on the impact of COVID-19, to help GWI NFAs and their members urge their respective governments to positive actions around these issues. In addition, GWI uses its consultative role with UN Women, UN Refugee Agency, UN Human Rights Council, and other international bodies to assist in their implementation.

At the beginning of 2020, before COVID-19, nearly 50 million children had been uprooted and almost 80 million people had been displaced from their homes due to conflict and persecution. Over 80 per cent of the world's refugees and nearly all the world's internally displaced people are hosted in low- and middle-income countries, all of which are under severe economic strain.

The impact of COVID-19 has only exacerbated the issue. *“The pandemic has threatened the social and economic rights of the most vulnerable in society – among them refugees and those forcibly displaced who, all too often, depend on the informal economy. They are among the first to suffer the economic impacts of a lockdown”.*<sup>2</sup>

According to the UN Secretary General Policy Brief “People on the Move”<sup>3</sup>, while COVID-19 has left few lives and places untouched, the impact is especially harsh for groups already in crisis particularly those on the move: migrants, workers in the informal economy, human trafficking victims, people in conflict areas fleeing their homes, and victims of climate change and environmental disasters. The pandemic presents greater challenges for the protection of refugees, internally displaced and Stateless people. Refugees and other displaced people are at risk during the pandemic due to limited access to services such as access to water, sanitation systems and health facilities, and other social protection mechanisms along with increasing incidents of discrimination, stigmatization and xenophobia against them.

At the 2019 at the GWI General Assembly, GWI members passed two resolutions proposed by its NFAs to address *Human Rights for Refugees and Migrant Women and Children (Resolution 5-2019)* and advocate for *Fair and Non-Discriminatory Management of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (Resolution 6-2019)*. These resolutions emphasize the need to recognize the rights of all refugees and asylum

<sup>1</sup> 2020 Advocacy Campaign – 2019 Resolutions – R5.docx

<sup>2</sup> <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/11/1076892>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg\\_policy\\_brief\\_on\\_people\\_on\\_the\\_move.pdf](https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg_policy_brief_on_people_on_the_move.pdf) June 2020



seekers and the need for governments to provide adequate and just resources to those affected. GWI (IFUW) first addressed support for refugees in a resolution in 1939 (#4), and subsequently added refugee and/or human rights resolutions in 1968 (#2, human rights for all), 1992 (#20, refugee women), 1995 (#14, refugee women and girls), and 2001 (#8, refugee women and human rights). Due to COVID-19, the need to act on these resolutions is even greater than ever.

World Refugee Day honours refugees around the globe and celebrates their strength and courage. It is an occasion to build empathy and understanding of their plight by shining a light on their rights, dreams and needs<sup>4</sup>.

The 2021 theme for World Refugee Day is appropriately cast as *“Together we heal, learn and shine.”*

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/world-refugee-day.html>