



## UNHCR's twelfth meeting with NGO partners on preparedness and response to COVID-19 in refugee situations

Theme: Children and youth and the role of sport during the COVID-19 Pandemic

10 June 2020

Online

### Participants:

#### UNHCR, Civil society, NGOs:

- Raouf Mazou, Assistant High Commissioner for Operations
- Amanda Melville, Senior Advisor Children and Youth
- Arafat Jamal, Head, Partnership, and Coordination Service
- Ignacio Packer, Executive Director, ICVA
- Jojo Ferris, Head, Olympic Refuge Foundation
- Joshua Opolot, Executive Director, Youth Sport Uganda
- Maria Bray, Global Advisor on Child Protection and MHPSS, Terre des hommes
- Lea Hinnen, Project Manager, Football Club Social Alliance/ Sport Foundation
  
- About 130+, mostly Sports Foundations, and NGOs.

### Agenda:

1. Welcome and opening remarks
2. Covid-19 Overview
3. Covid-19 Implications for Displaced Children and Youth
4. Panel Discussion
5. Q&A.

### Welcome and opening remarks

#### Ignacio Packer

- The UNHCR-NGO weekly meetings are invaluable with different topics addressed, on which we find a space to be able to update and reflect together.
- Today, we talk about passion so decided to start by sharing an anecdote from 10 years ago but nonetheless linked to COVID-19. I had a skiing accident and was lying flat on my back to take off the pain from a fractured vertebra. It took three months to heal and then many more months to try and come back to the level of sport engagements I was.
- I was doing long distance, running, and then I was confined. Child memories came back to me: how swimming, jumping over a river or running in the woods, riding my bicycle everywhere as part of my daily life when I was a child.
- When I was in therapy full of my childhood memories, I told a colleague who visited me that I was going to first train for swimming as I cannot use my legs. I would use my arms and swim 15 kilometers on a race from Lanzarote to Fuerteventura. I would then follow-up with the Mont Blanc ultra-trail and a month later with the Diagonal des Fous.
- My colleague shook her head but agreed with me that my solution was to get out of my lockdown. Or maybe she thought I was out of my mind.
- Bringing this anecdote for 3 reasons: 1) remember how sports and games impact childhood and youth. This can be positive and negative and that is why all our attention on safeguards is important; 2) point to the capacity to adapt, which is required when the environment in which children and youth grow and develop is disrupted – certainly the case with infectious diseases and COVID-19 – having in mind the situation of refugees, IDPs, stateless children and youth; 3) to refer to the work of psychological support.



## **COVID-19 Overview**

### **Raouf Mazou**

- On COVID-19, we have seen a shift of the epicenter of the pandemic away from Europe, particularly to America and Russia.
- Our concern is about forcibly displaced person and the impact that it would have on fragile populations. 2 groups we were particularly worried about:
  - 1) PoCs in camps because of the absence of social distancing, health conditions, and sanitary conditions.
- We have so far not seen an outbreak in refugee camps. We hope this will continue. This is a result of the work of many partners, some on this call, which have done a lot in preparing and informing refugees and PoCs.
- We worked very closely with authorities to make sure that refugees are included in the response that is provided by the government.
- From the beginning, we did not want a situation where refugees or PoCs would not be included in COVID response and we stressed the fact that the virus will not make a difference between whether you were a refugee or a national of the country.
- More than 1200 refugees have been affected around the world but these figures reflect what we know, definitely not necessarily the reality.
  - 2) Urban refugees.
- Usually welcomed but living in fragile countries. We have seen that this is definitely the group which has been affected the most. We have had to change our programs and provided more cash-based assistance than was done before.

## **COVID-19 Implications for Displaced Children and Youth**

### **Amanda Melville**

- Youth and children are a little affected by the disease and can transmit it. Although we have different statistics about age and infection rates, it is definitely a risk for some young people.
- Impact on family separation: Many families have been separated as a result of border movement restrictions or are unable to be reunified. We estimate that over 150 countries currently have border restrictions or partially closed borders. There are significant travel restrictions within countries with cessation of or limitation of structured activities. It has key impacts on young people in the immediate but also potentially in the long-term.
- In approximately 74 of the operations where we work, refugee or IDP children had partial or no access to education activities.
- We have seen a significant risk and an increase in violence and abuse of young people and children inside the home. Some statistics estimate that up to 85 million more girls and boys worldwide may be exposed to physical, sexual, emotional violence as a result of COVID measures for children. An additional 31 million incidents of GBV are expected if lockdown continues for up to 6 months. There are significant and often hidden impacts on young people and children in terms of their protection.
- Linked to that is the significant reduction in the ability of young people and children to access protection services.
- 40 countries have partial access to child protection services in which we operate.
- In many cases our operations and government authorities have been able to maintain child protection services to some degree with access either remotely or in person.
- On the impact of the unemployment and economic measures, we know that a vast majority of refugees work in the informal sector which has been among the hardest hit and many refugees or asylum seekers do not have access to national social protection schemes or leave in low or middle income countries where such schemes are quite limited.

- Many young people have stopped working since the onset of the virus or have seen their working hours significantly cut, so this leads to increase in economic exploitation, child marriage. Our operations are reporting significant increases in all of these areas.
- Slide 2: Many young refugees and IDPs live in overcrowded environments. Without the daily structure of schools, structured sports or recreational activities they are often very impacted.
- While young people lack those structured activities, they are often in environments that do not allow themselves to isolate or protect themselves from the virus. During sports, schools, recreational activities, contacts with their peers, sports trainers, family, friends are extremely important both in terms of social support but also for them to speak about concerns in their daily life.
- Many of the opportunities that have moved online may have particular difficulty due to economic issues or infrastructure issues related to access and connectivity.
- Slide 3: what has UNHCR been doing to support young people? We put out the core actions for refugee youth which have 7 core principles:
  - 1) The empowerment of young refugees through meaningful engagement. UNHCR is working with a global network of young refugees to develop a social media campaign that highlights the positive contributions of refugee youth during the COVID response.
  - 2) Support young refugees through skills and capacities including looking at how we can support young refugees and IDPs access to the available online learning opportunities, trying to provide information about online courses that are available.
- E.g. in Ukraine, UNHCR has shared information through our refugee youth platform on available free online courses that can support a refugee youth during this lockdown.
- 3) In terms of refugee youth-focused protection. We have adapted our child protection services in 23 of our operations remotely or in person to be able to continue to respond to the important protection needs that young people and children face.
- E.g. in Lebanon a whole referral protocol has been developed to ensure that the child protection work can continue, to ensure that the staff is protected, and the young people receive the services they need.
- 4) Supporting physical and emotional well-being of young refugees including access to health services and psychosocial support.
- E.g. Save the Children & UNHCR in Mexico carry out recreational activities via Zoom in some of the shelters where they work for and with unaccompanied and separated children.
- 5) Support in networking and information sharing. Important for young people to maintain social connections and share their experiences.
- E.g. in Ecuador UNHCR trained youth web influencers from Ecuador, Colombia, and Venezuela in the production of COVID material and the dissemination to their communities.
- 6) Reinforce youth in their role as connectors and peacebuilders. Promoting young people, supporting them to speak out, promote inclusion and promote respect for diversity is extremely important.
- E.g. in South Sudan, UNHCR has worked with the local rap artists to produce a video. In Chad, in many parts of West Africa you have extraordinary music videos that have been produced and disseminated.
- 7) Appropriate data and evidence on refugee youth.
- E.g. in Mali, UNHCR and partners have worked with young refugee community volunteers to assist in the data collection as part of an assessment of the needs in relation to COVID.
- We all come in support of the efforts of young people and children themselves, the solidarity in this time and build on the resilience, the creativity, and the enthusiasm of children and young people.



- The repercussions of COVID will extend beyond health, beyond the pandemic time frame and the current global crisis is exacerbating existing vulnerability and inequalities.

## Panel Discussion

### Maria Bray

*Cross-cultural psychologist. Maria provides remote and on-site technical support at Terre des Hommes. TDH has a focus on community, mental health interventions including through Sports.*

- We have seen an increase of child protection risks due to the pandemic, the lockdown but also to all the secondary impacts at different levels of the social, ecological, environment.
- TDH is a child protection organization. My angle to the discussion is looking at the use of Sports for protection, the COVID impact, how we managed to continue capitalizing on this specific activity, and the COVID impact on various layers of the socio-ecological framework.
- When we work within sport with youth, we can see easily how Sports as a collective game can work on increasing social inclusion, cohesion, and psychosocial support.
- Now we are speaking about a pandemic which included lockdown and all the challenges to continue some activities.
- Slide 3: when we speak about child protection and youth protection intervention because of COVID-19, a lot had to be re-adapted, both in terms of interventions' modalities and focus.
- Some of the key interventions that we use are around community-based child protection, what can be done and how we need to work with communities on case-management.
- Slide 4: Sports for protection and the theory of changes, a strong backbone to the thinking around how to adapt also Sports when it is used for protection in humanitarian settings.
- TDH has been collaborating with an organization to develop a protection toolkit with the idea to use Sports for child protection.
- The safe and supportive environment, the level of capacity building, meaningful engagement, leadership opportunities, and the monitoring are some of the key levels that will help using Sport as a tool that can change children's lives in terms of social cohesion, inclusion, and psychosocial well-being.
- We are looking at some contexts where activities had to stop, we came back on the theory of change and thought of some ways where we can still have the theory of change.
- First level on having a safe and supportive environment, we speak here about the sports field and what can be done in order to create this safe space and supportive environment. Linked with the lockdown and social distancing, the idea was to have activities that would help the environment of children and youth wherever they were, to be as safe as possible, get access to information on the disease, working on the non-discrimination. It is ensuring that you have helplines available and child protection services.
- Ensuring strong advocacy. It is making sure that this type of services whether they are health services, child protection or other can be accessed by this population.
- In terms of capacity building, I was speaking about skills and other technical capacities linked with Sports and meaningful engagement. We know how difficult it can be to have a coaching session in sport organized remotely – not even taking into account the internet access challenges. So, TDH is looking at how to support access to recreational activities, how we can have youth and children still engaged in some physical activities.
- Another angle of our approach is mentoring.
- Slide 5: an example of one of our projects from West Bengal in India which is called "Kabaddi for empowerment". West Bengal has borders with Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan and the state has the highest number of child trafficking and child marriage within India.
- The project started over a year ago. It is designed to support especially girls at risk. Before COVID-19 there was a practice session with girls and boys with discussion, life-skills building,



collective action proposed and supported by the youth themselves to implement in the community.

- Looking at additional challenges with COVID-19, there was a massive return of migrant workers, coming back in their communities. This ended up in some violent incidents at community or family levels because communities were not happy to welcome back these workers. Important misinformation happened; issues of livelihood and economic struggles.
- Slide 6: We are currently working on designing a curriculum that can be done by youth themselves that would imply physical and more informal recreational activities.
- Remote counseling has been put in place also with some of the youth we were working with.
- Case management can be related to the COVID-19 or more linked with the secondary impacts of COVID-19.
- We connected these youth and mobilized them in involving them in global initiative like the COVID-19 initiative, an interagency initiative which looks at trying to involve children and youth and understand the experience of COVID-19.

### **Lea Hinnen**

*Project Manager for Football Club Social Alliance and Sport Foundation for 3 years. She has a degree in sociology and in global studies. She is a footballer playing who played in the Swiss national youth and in the NCA in the US. She has been researching the impact of sports on refugees in Switzerland.*

- On mentoring and the importance of support for sustainable change: think back to your childhood, about a person in your life that has been a mentor, someone that you have admired, someone that you have looked up to as the person that has always been there for you. I played football and for me such a person was the sports coach, always there for me, I trusted him, and he shaped my development. Every child should have the opportunity to have such a significant adult in their lives and particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds such as refugees, stateless, or IDP children.
- We try to achieve this and having adults as positive role models for disadvantaged children.
- In the education we provide, we involve both instructors from the Football Club Social Alliance which is a network of professional European football clubs. We manage the project and we administer the Alliance. The Alliance provides structures from their clubs that then use grassroots football education to teach those young adults how to be leaders, role models, and mentors for vulnerable children in their community.
- Involving these international clubs has been incredibly valuable. It gives them a purpose in providing children a protected space to play and interact. For refugee youth that live in camps or like settings such an education can give them a perspective that they might have not had at this point in their lives.
- Slide 1: example of a young coach. She used to work in the DRC and she had to flee violence and conflict in her home and fled to a camp in Rwanda and now providing meaningful and structured activities for children and youth in the camp that she lives in.
- With COVID-19, we have not been able to travel but we wanted to stay engaged and continue to support our beneficiaries. We reached out to young coaches and local partners to find out and learn about their situation and their challenges underneath specifically in Mexico, Lebanon, Rwanda, and Ukraine.
- Slide 2: Two main concerns were increased violence against children and mental health implications. With no activities, children are at home, no school, living with an environment that has already not been good within their family or under the same roof as their aggressor 24/7 is a big issue. It is a massive concern for many of our young coaches for the children they usually work with.
- On MHPSS, linked to isolation at home, some children might not even understand the situation of COVID-19 and why they cannot go out, this is an issue for their mental health.



- The mental health also of their parents also transpires, because they have a high level of stress and anxiety because of economic issues, of the delay in asylum processes, and the uncertainty of how this situation will be unfolding.
- Young coaches had understood their importance in a role as a mentor and continue engaging with the kids. In our talks with them they have shared some amazing and creative solutions and approaches they have taken for their work with children. They are sending or posting exercises activities through videos or photos including health messages.
- Slide 3. Example of an activity from a young coach in Mexico. On a weekly basis, they are posting activities on their social media not just for sports but also to engage them creatively. They also do educational activities linked to the pandemic, learning the important measures.
- Slide 3. Example of one of our young coaches. Usually she would go in with her organization into the shelter to delivered activities with the kids living there however now most shelters have closed down. She is video chatting with educators and youth at the center and guiding them through activities for children.
- Slide 3: Example in the shelters, they do live stream / video chats and using a little screen in the shelter. They live stream external instructors and children can do activities basically.
- Not everyone has access to the children, not all children can go outside where they can be together and be active, so our young coaches have also printed out material and drop them off at their homes when they have a chance.
- Many have also been supporting their organization in disseminating information on the virus, on protective measures. Talking to them and seeing how dedicated and creative young coaches are in adjusting their work has been very inspiring. We adjust our work and find effective ways to continue supporting them.
- Together with our clubs, we have adapted our work over the past few months and come up with both immediate and longer-term online based support.
- Slide 4: we have started to give an immediate support. We have collected resources from our partners, from organizations and from our clubs to provide coaches and other people from the wider community working with children. We have gathered ideas on how to stay connected with children and why it is important to stay engaged, activities they can do at home, we shared and we also posted other helpful resources.
- The second step of how we have adjusted our work is putting together an E-learning platform for young coaches. It is very important that this platform is accessible to everyone. Refugee population often struggles to have access to internet so for us it is important that this platform is offline, multilingual, and easy to navigate. With this platform we want to support our young coaches to continue furthering their capacity to work with children and to continue supporting the children.

### **Joshua Opolot**

*Executive Director of Youth Sports Uganda. He is a development expert, has been involved in sports as an athlete, as a coach, and as an administrator. Various advisory roles in developing and addressing key challenges faced by underprivileged young persons.*

- Slide 2 & 3: Perspective from a local organization. Youth Sports Uganda is registered in Kampala and we are working with urban refugee and IDP children. Focus on football for developments, education, skills development, and health.
- We have about 4 areas of focus; our football development is one of the areas. We have football for WASH, where we use football messages to young refugees as well as a health program where we try to use sports to address issues like hygiene management and AIDS.
- Slide 4: Challenges faced by refugees during COVID-19. Some measures like social distancing and washing of hands are unrealistic if you are working with refugees because they are in

congested contexts. Hand washing is also a myth in areas where urban refugees stay because they do not have access to clean water. Another challenge is job losses.

- Uganda received its first COVID-19 case on 22 March and the government declared the closing down of all institutions including schools, mosques, churches, and public transport.
- Most of urban IDPs and refugees had to stop selling merchandise on the street, this led to many families without daily meals, children were malnourished and increased tension and stress, gender-based violence.
- There is also a challenge on health and educational services. Hospitals and schools were closed. Refugees had to walk long distances to access facilities which has been a problem for vulnerable people, e.g. pregnant women cannot walk long distances.
- The government passed a law that all children should study from TV and radio, which was impossible for urban refugee and IDP children. Most of them cannot afford this.
- All these challenges are increasing mental problems, GBV violence, no access to health facilities, hunger.
- Slide 5: with COVID-19, we designed a sport model where mothers and fathers act as coaches and moderators. We have designed simple games that can be played within a family and these games can be done in less space and encourage social distancing. There have been messages in the games.
- We have a program named “Football for WASH” we were initially passed on messages of health water and sanitation by using football as a tool. We have worked with coaches to create awareness, to talk on radio programs, programs that talk about proper handwashing, programs that advocate for social distances that we can fight COVID-19 with.
- Before COVID-19 we had formed a special protection consortium in Uganda with five organizations, including UNHCR Uganda, AVSI, Right to Play, Uganda Olympic Committee, YSU. The main objective is sports for protection, act to increase the resilience of young refugees, increase social cohesion among host communities and urban refugees.
- The consortium came at a time when it is needed most.
- Slide 6: recommendations. Many local organizations, all over the world, are doing great work to face the challenges but they do not have a lot of support. Appeal to humanitarian organizations to come forward and support these organizations.

### **Jojo Ferris**

*Head of Olympic Refugee Foundation in Lausanne, Switzerland. She was manager at the London organization for the Olympics and Paralympics. Founding manager of the sports and outreach programs with UNAIDS, ONOC. She has a master’s in international health.*

- There are three seismic challenges that COVID presented.
  - 1) the postponement of the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games to 2021.
  - 2) the indefinite suspension of the sport sector, global sport movement.
  - 3) all the programs that we supported or were involved with were put on hold and not only that the partners which we worked with were left in a place of uncertainty.
- It was extremely challenging particularly for a young foundation like the Olympic Refugee Foundation to consider and question how agile we, as an organization, can (and how quickly) pivot. In fact it called into question the very essence of what we were about. Are we still able to ensure forcibly displaced young people have access to safe sport?
- Through conversations with existing partners, the broader sector, with other foundations that could help us benchmark from their experience as to how we best respond.
- Interestingly, we landed on a position of clarity fairly quickly. We rely on the partners to let us know what is contextual, needed, how could we continue to deliver and have the impact we were intending to have. Our position was we wanted to continue to support partners to be as strong if not stronger at the end of this pandemic.



- We were able to 1) have a flexible funding approach so encourage partners to come to us whether for no-cost extension, reprogramming, redirection of funds. Whatever it is that would help them respond in this particular crisis in the best possible way and that dialogue was one that has actually been extremely insightful and useful to strengthen our own organization and how we will work in the future.  
2) unlock an additional USD half million to encourage our existing partners to come to us with more innovative solutions so that not only can we respond to the needs now but also into the future when there's another pandemic or natural disaster, conflict, etc.  
3) fundraising mechanisms. Stay tuned for the near future on that.
- Our relationship with partners is essential but it has become even more salient. It has indicated to us that this partnership model delivery that Joshua just mentioned in Uganda. We have similar models in Turkey and elsewhere. It is critical to achieve for the sustainability of future direction of support for protection and the trust that you build before pandemic.
- We are about to launch in the near future a refugee foundation think tank. We were looking more broadly around this notion of safe sport with the needs and the evidence emerging. Will focus on the notion of safe sport and MHPSS.
- Now we are looking to rebuild. It is essential as we look to shape our direction for the Olympic Refugee Foundation over the next four years. How do we embed and include the learnings from this. So that we do not just pretend that everything is as it was, and we can continue as we might like to do.
- Those are challenging questions, conversations and realities. For example if the entire delivery model has relied on that trusted coach in a community to bring the community together to deliver the change we want to see in relation to social inclusion, social cohesion, MHPSS; Then if that model does not work anymore how do we adapt? For the foundation we would like to think of ourselves as the coach, as the crowd, and as the commentator.
- The coach offer the support and or tools and you heard earlier about one of those the sport protection toolkit developed a couple of years ago and is available for anyone who is interested in using and referring to that. We are constantly adapting that but how do we ensure that we are providing the best support in a coach setting for the athletes, the community and the forcibly displaced young people to thrive?
- The crowd bringing everyone together individuals and organizations the sport coalition that we together with the International Olympic Committee and UNHCR were able to form ahead of the GRF last year and we can do so much more with this group as a coalition.
- The commentator being the storytelling, how do we tell the stories and make sure that they are heard and understood so that sport is no longer just a recreational activity but also embedded in the future, the next regional response framework.

## Q&A

One question raised several times from civil society: Could you provide more information on the Sport Coalition formed at the Global Refugee Forum?

### Jojo Ferris

- The idea of the pledge is that collectively we can, whether or not you are a sport Federation, look primarily at access for athletes or an organization to activities that are part of a broader ecosystem. It all boils down to access and ensuring that forcibly displaced people have access to safe sport.
- We have now 86 members who signed up from all different sectors and backgrounds. If you are interested, get in touch. We are absolutely open to growing this coalition.
- UNHCR and the IOC expect to have some more ideas about how to mobilize, how to ensure that we are touching base and collectively working towards those goals in the next months.





#### **Andrew Farmer**

- I work with the refugee soccer program in Melbourne, Australia. As a teacher I wonder if we had ideas about how we can build up the confidence of refugee communities and families – as COVID cases decrease – for game and sport to be something for them to follow again?

#### **Lea Hinnen**

- We have collective tips and ideas from our instructors from the club on how to create a football session, football training while respecting for example social physical distancing; how we can ensure that they come to practice thinking this is still safe for them to practice sport. At the same time, we also learn to address the protection challenges and maintain distance. That might be a good way to slowly get back into it to have training, where you show the community you show the people attending the training you could still do sports while having social distancing.

#### **Amanda Melville**

- We listen to and support organizations and sports, the coaches and the refugee communities themselves to be able to find solutions. It is only in dialogue, at the global level, that we can amplify, but it has to be local solutions because contexts are so different.
- We very much appreciate this emphasis on sports and physical activity because we know that both for the protection but also for the mental well-being of young people and children, it is very important.
- Keep in mind the gender aspects and the importance to find gender and culturally appropriate ways to engage young people from different communities who may have different needs and approaches to sports and recreational activities. And ensure that we make an effort to ensure that girls and young people needs are addressed.

#### **Raouf Mazou**

- Sports are and must remain an essential activity and we must make sure that we work together to get the resources that are required for sports and other cultural activities. The dreams and the passion that we all spoke about is crucial generally speaking in situations of displacement but in the situation which we are now, even more than before.

#### **Ignacio Packer**

- We have heard a few examples which are challenging us with COVID-19 or sports. We need to keep this as a safe space for children, for them to realize their rights and we should keep a particular focus on children who are displaced, including within their countries.
- Also, in our efforts as a humanitarian community we have to be focused on where our response is and certainly the models of working are being challenged and evolving.

#### **Arafat Jamal**

- Nick Sore is UNHCR Head of the Sport team and can always be contacted.
- For World Refugee Day, we will share sports-related assets.