

**WOMEN'S  
REFUGEE  
COMMISSION**

Research. Rethink. Resolve.

# FY 2021

## **ANNUAL REPORT**

October 2020 – September 2021

## **Vision**

Our vision is a world in which refugee and internally displaced women, children, and youth are safe, healthy, and self-reliant; have their human rights respected and protected; and inform and drive their own solutions and development.

## **Mission**

Our mission is to improve the lives and protect the rights of women, children, and youth displaced by conflict and crisis. We research their needs, identify solutions, and advocate for programs and policies to strengthen their resilience and drive change in humanitarian practice.

## **How We Achieve Change: Research. Rethink. Resolve.**

Our work begins in the community. We listen to displaced people and learn about their strengths and their unmet needs. Together with them and local partners we identify potential solutions to the challenges they face. We develop tools and provide technical assistance to practitioners to improve humanitarian response. We work with donors and policymakers to ensure that our recommendations are institutionalized and implemented across the globe.



This has been a year of both great uncertainty and remarkable resilience. Unimaginable violence and upheaval in countries such as Afghanistan and Ethiopia – and the rapidly increasing number of people who are displaced by conflict, disasters, and the climate crisis – mean that the work of the Women's Refugee Commission is more urgent than ever. We have risen to the challenge and found new ways of working with our partners and with refugees themselves to help displaced women, children, and youth rebuild their lives.

Despite these crises, and the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, I am proud of the progress we have made in advocating for gender equity in humanitarian settings, empowering women through cash transfers, elevating the voices of refugee youth, protecting reproductive health rights, helping partners combat child marriage, and much more.

In FY 2021, WRC worked in the United States and more than 25 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. Our strong local and international partnerships and advocacy ensure that our reach stretches far beyond those borders.

Our robust research and advocacy have the power to lift up fundamental human rights, ensure that humanitarian aid is effective in meeting the needs of all who are impacted by crises, and catalyze action so that refugees and other displaced people can live in safety and dignity.

Thank you for standing with us and helping us do whatever it takes to ensure that refugees are safe, healthy, and self-reliant

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah Costa". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sarah Costa  
Executive Director

## WRC RESPONDS TO THE CRISIS IN AFGHANISTAN

When Afghanistan fell to the Taliban in August 2021 following the withdrawal of US troops, a humanitarian and human rights crisis rapidly unfolded. The lives of human rights activists, particularly women's rights defenders, were immediately at risk. Between President Biden's announcement in April 2021 that US troops would be withdrawn and the end of September, more than 530,000 people were displaced, bringing the total number of internally displaced people in Afghanistan to 5.5 million. Some 80 percent of the displaced were women and children. The crisis was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, ongoing drought, and severe food shortages. More than 18 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance.

When it became clear that Afghanistan would fall to the Taliban, WRC went into action.

## WRC IN THE NEWS



*Gayatri Patel, WRC's vice president, external affairs, appeared on CNN's Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer.*

Gayatri Patel, vice president, external relations, was a sought-after expert on the situation in Afghanistan. She appeared on CNN's "The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer," and was quoted in *The Washington Post* and *USA Today*. [Watch Gayatri's interview on CNN.](#)

“Thousands of women put their lives at risk over the last two decades to advance the rights of women and girls across Afghanistan, many of whom helped the US mission. The Biden administration has a moral obligation to ensure they are evacuated and safely resettled.”

-Gayatri Patel in [The Washington Post](#), August 17, 2021

## **CALLING ON THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION TO DO THE RIGHT THING**

WRC called on the Biden administration to immediately evacuate Afghan women's rights activists and families trapped in Afghanistan. We also appealed directly to the president to not abandon Afghan women human rights defenders.

**“ I am hearing stories daily of women in hiding because their homes have already been targeted or raided by the Taliban, and there is a culture of fear building as the evacuation process starts to run out of time. The US government must keep its promise to stand with the Afghan people. If we abandon these women, many may die and many more will face horrific human rights abuses. We cannot leave these women behind. ”**

**-Gayatri Patel, [WRC statement](#), August 24, 2021**

## **DELIVERING A STATEMENT AT THE UN**

In September, Stephanie Johanssen, WRC's associate director of advocacy and UN representative, delivered a statement at the UN's High-Level Ministerial Meeting on the Humanitarian Situation in Afghanistan.

**“ We call on UN and member states to listen, support, and fund the work of Afghan women human rights defenders and humanitarians....Women must enjoy safe, equal, and unrestricted access to deliver lifesaving services and their full, equal, and meaningful participation in humanitarian action is critical to identify the priorities and needs of women and girls; mitigating risks of gender-based violence; and providing essential health care such as maternal and reproductive services. ”**

**-WRC statement at the United Nations, September 14, 2021.**

## DEFENDING THE RIGHTS OF REFUGEE, MIGRANT, AND STATELESS WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Refugee, migrant, and stateless women and children around the world routinely face legal and human rights violations. WRC holds governments accountable to their obligation to respect women and children's rights, so they can find safety, access justice, and rebuild their lives.

## WELCOMING PEOPLE SEEKING ASYLUM WITH DIGNITY

WRC plays a leading role in advocacy to create a just and welcoming asylum process at and beyond the US-Mexico border. We were a leading partner in launching the #WelcomeWithDignity campaign in 2021, when the campaign manager and communications coordinator joined our staff. In just a few months, the campaign grew to more than 90 diverse local and national partner organizations, united in the call for the restoration of asylum rights in the United States. The campaign is founded in policy work, strategic communications, and field organizing to reimagine the US asylum system so that those who are seeking safety are welcomed with dignity.



*#WelcomeWithDignity campaign manager, Melina Roche (far left) attends the November 19, 2021 petition delivery outside the White House. The delivery was the culmination of the campaign's advocacy days. © WRC/Bilal Askaryar*



## ADVOCACY AT THE US-MEXICO BORDER

Starting in the fall of 2020, WRC partnered with advocacy organizations and people seeking safety at the US-Mexico border to bring about policy change at the border. In addition to helping launch the #WelcomeWithDignity campaign, we helped develop five regional welcoming committees and task forces that are a central point of border advocacy and engagement with the Biden administration. WRC's leadership helped ensure that the White House and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) engaged on the border at a local and regional level rather than solely at a national level. This has been vital in preventing one-size-fits-all policymaking that is not responsive to local needs.

At the same time, we conducted, with partners, a nationwide survey of organizations providing community-based services that support families and others going through the immigration process. Our thought leadership played a role in Congress including new provisions in proposed appropriations bills around both border reception and to further look at moving case management into a more appropriate, community-based model.



*Casa Tochan shelter mural © WRC/Ursela Ojeda*



Malaysian mothers and activists call for gender-equal citizenship laws. © Family Frontiers

## CAMPAIGNING FOR EQUAL NATIONALITY RIGHTS

The Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights (GCENR), housed at WRC, promotes reform of nationality laws that discriminate on the basis of gender. The Campaign's support for the Malaysian Campaign for Equal Citizenship resulted in concrete steps toward reform in FY 2021. Following more than two years of joint advocacy and a legal challenge launched in December 2020 by GCENR's coalition member Family Frontiers, Kuala Lumpur's High Court reached a landmark decision in September 2021 in favor of Family Frontiers and six affected mothers. The decision found that women must have the same right as men to pass citizenship to children born abroad according to the Constitution's ban on sex-based discrimination. Unfortunately, the government is appealing the ruling, although it has raised the possibility of a constitutional amendment to uphold women's right to pass citizenship to children born abroad. GCENR is working with Malaysian national coalition members and UN country staff to support nationality law reform in Malaysia to uphold gender equality.

## FAMILY REUNIFICATION

WRC continued our extensive work and leadership in reuniting and protecting separated families. We co-led a working group of more than 30 nongovernmental organizations to coordinate partner engagement with the newly formed Interagency Task Force on the Reunification of Families and developed critical recommendations with technical and policy expertise. When DHS Secretary Mayorkas met with separated parents, we facilitated the sharing of stories of two separated families we interviewed in our Storytelling Project, which collected the oral histories of separated families and asylum seekers. We also continued to play a critical role on the steering committee of the class-action lawsuit to locate and reunify families separated during the Trump administration.



The US-Mexico border between Tijuana, Mexico, and California. © WRC/Ursela Ojeda

## MITIGATING THE EFFECTS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

All displaced people are at risk of sexual and gender-based violence (GBV) and exploitation. The risk is particularly high for women and girls, but also exists for men and boys. WRC is working to fundamentally transform the way GBV is addressed in humanitarian settings.

### CASH HELPS SURVIVORS OF VIOLENCE START OVER

We carried out research in Ecuador, Colombia, and Syria with our partners to measure how cash transfers can support survivors of GBV in their recovery from violence. By providing technical assistance, we helped make the provision of GBV services delivered by CARE and local partners in each setting more comprehensive for survivors. We captured what we learned through evaluations so that the approach can be used more broadly.

In addition, WRC partnered with CARE and an advisory group of international organizations to develop an online training that will reach 500 practitioners around the world by early 2022. The COVID-19 pandemic has illustrated how critical remote training opportunities are.

*Women perform a "hand dance" in "Resilient women creating and healing together," an experiential program to process emotions and be an instrument of healing. © 2021 José Carrasco/CARE*



*One survivor, who used to experience physical assaults by her intimate partner, used a portion of her cash transfer to purchase hairdressing materials and tools. The comprehensive GBV response services with a cash component that she received helped her to become financially independent from her abusive partner and enabled her 13-year-old child to return to school.*

*Ecuador cash and GBV program*

## CALL TO ACTION: A PARTNERSHIP TO MITIGATE THE RISKS OF GBV

The Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies is a groundbreaking initiative involving states and donors, international organizations, and nongovernmental organizations. The goal of the Call to Action partnership is to ensure that humanitarian responses mitigate the risks of GBV, especially violence against women and girls, and provide safe and comprehensive services for survivors.

In 2021, WRC played a critical role working with Denmark, the lead of the Call to Action, to support the partnership as it implements its 2021-2025 Road Map. WRC organized and facilitated the 2021 annual meeting of the partnership and produced the 2020 Progress Report, highlighting achievements across the partnership.



Kutupalong refugee camp, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh © WRC/Sarah Chynoweth

## SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST MEN AND BOYS

In 2018, WRC launched a groundbreaking initiative to investigate the impact and scope of sexual violence against refugee men and boys, including persons with diverse gender identities and sexual orientations. We found high levels of sexual violence and a near-total lack of prevention and response mechanisms to meet the mental health, physical, social, and economic needs of male sexual violence survivors.

The tools and guidance we developed are now being used by interpreters, child protection officers, and other staff working with male survivors across humanitarian sectors, including health, mental health, gender-based violence, protection, and livelihoods.

We embarked on phase 2 of the project in 2021, with a focus on the most overlooked subgroups—sexually exploited adolescent boys, male youth, and LGBTQI+ refugees. We are applying our learning to build local capacity at the field level, raise awareness, catalyze uptake of tools, and expand service provision.

## ADVOCATING FOR SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS FOR ALL PEOPLE AFFECTED BY CRISIS

Lack of sexual and reproductive health (SRH) care is a leading cause of death, disease, and disability among crisis-affected women and girls of reproductive age. WRC is committed to protecting the sexual and reproductive rights of people affected by crisis and ensuring that lifesaving health services are available from the onset of an emergency through recovery.

### HOW TO CLOSE THE CONTRACEPTION GAP IN CRISIS SETTINGS

Access to contraceptive services is both a fundamental human right and a lifesaving public health intervention. However, in crisis-affected settings it remains difficult for people to access contraceptives.

WRC led a global assessment to evaluate the barriers, opportunities, and effective strategies to provide the full range of contraceptives to women, girls, and couples affected by crises. Subsequently, we developed—with stakeholders—recommendations for governments, donors, researchers, advocates, and implementing partners to advance the availability and accessibility of sustainable, good quality contraceptive services in crisis-affected settings.

In a special supplementary report, we looked at the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the availability and accessibility of contraceptive services across humanitarian and development settings. We found that facilities in some settings were forced to close, and restrictions on movement impeded both providers' and clients' ability to reach facilities. Contraception and other sexual and reproductive health services were particularly impacted during the pandemic in part because key decision-makers did not perceive them to be essential or lifesaving.

[Read](#) "How to Close the Contraception Gap in Crisis Settings" by Sarah Rich, associate director, sexual and reproductive rights program, in Devex.



*Illustration seen in an IRC midwife room in a women-friendly space, Ukhiya camp, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Photograph © WRC/Sara Casey*

### A GLOBAL COALITION ADVANCES SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

To prevent SRH-related death and illness in emergencies and ensure human rights are upheld, responders must be trained in the essential services included in the Minimum Initial Service Package (MISP) for SRH. In 2021, the Inter-Agency Working Group (IAWG) on Reproductive Health in Crises, which is hosted by WRC, disseminated resources to equip humanitarian and development actors with the latest knowledge and skills needed to implement the MISP. Our Clinical Outreach Refresher Trainings, for example, were used by partners in the Tigray humanitarian response in Ethiopia to strengthen the capacity of clinical service providers on basic emergency obstetric and newborn care and care for sexual violence survivors.

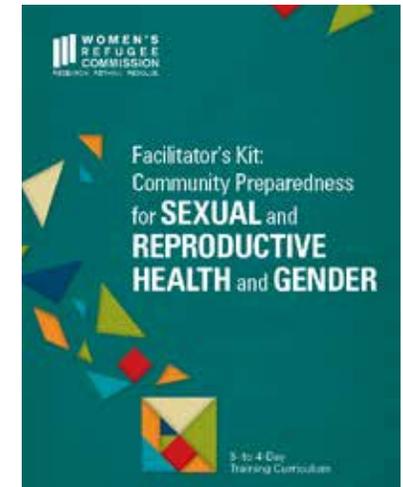
Planning for the expansion from minimum to comprehensive SRH services is a key component of the MISP. IAWG, together with WHO Global Health Cluster and UNFPA, launched the MISP to Comprehensive SRH Planning Toolkit. The toolkit was used in six diverse emergency settings in 2021 and was adapted to respond to COVID-related restrictions on in-person gatherings.

## COMMUNITY PREPAREDNESS FOR SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND GENDER

Climate change is leading to increasingly frequent, severe, and large-scale natural disasters around the world, with a significant impact on social, economic, and public health realities.

In collaboration with the Family Planning Association of Nepal and Open University, WRC revised the *Facilitator's Kit: Community-based Preparedness for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Gender*, a three-day training that aims to build capacity at the community level to prepare for and respond to risks and inequities faced by women, girls, and marginalized and underserved subpopulations in emergencies. There is an optional additional half-day module on pandemic/epidemic preparedness.

The curriculum was developed with support from the UK Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office through the Approaches in Complex and Challenging Environments for Sustainable Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) (ACCESS) Consortium, led by the International Planned Parenthood Foundation.



## VILLAGE HEALTH WORKERS STRENGTHEN PRIMARY HEALTH SERVICES IN NIGERIA

Northeast Nigeria has been affected by armed conflict for more than a decade. According to the United Nations, as of January 2021, 8.7 million people faced limited access to basic health and other essential services. To address these needs, WRC supported a community health program in Borno State, the epicenter of the conflict, through an innovative, localized approach designed to deliver services while strengthening local health systems. The Borno State Primary Health Care Development Agency, with support from WRC and other partners, implemented an integrated package of community and primary health interventions to increase access to reproductive, maternal, newborn, child, and adolescent health and nutrition services.

More than 200 community health workers were trained and deployed in three sites in Borno State, reaching more than 6,600 households, providing health and nutrition information and encouraging health-seeking behavior. An evaluation found that the program resulted in improved health-seeking behaviors, with community members reporting an increased likelihood to visit health facilities, especially for pregnancy, delivery, and newborn health issues.



A village health worker in Borno State, Nigeria, conducts a middle-upper arm circumference (MUAC) test on a young child. The test serves as a quick diagnostic of acute or severe malnutrition. © Bintu Bukar Imam, Borno State Primary Health Care Development Agency

## DEVELOPING TOOLS FOR ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND SELF-RELIANCE

Most refugees have a profound desire to provide for themselves and their families. WRC works to ensure that humanitarian programs provide refugee women and youth access to cash assistance and opportunities to help them safely earn a living. This increases refugees' self-reliance and resilience, restores their dignity, and protects them from harm.

## CASH SUPPORTS ADOLESCENTS' WELL-BEING

WRC's pioneering research is defining how cash transfers can enable choice and freedom for people in humanitarian situations, setting the stage for their long-term self-reliance.

Adolescents are often overlooked in humanitarian response, and cash is rarely used to enhance their access to key opportunities including education, healthcare, and vocational training. In 2021, we collaborated with Plan International to develop an innovative toolkit for humanitarian practitioners to use cash in support of adolescents' protection, education, and well-being.

The toolkit will be institutionalized by Plan and used across its 75 country operations. It will ultimately be made available to be used by other organizations around the world.

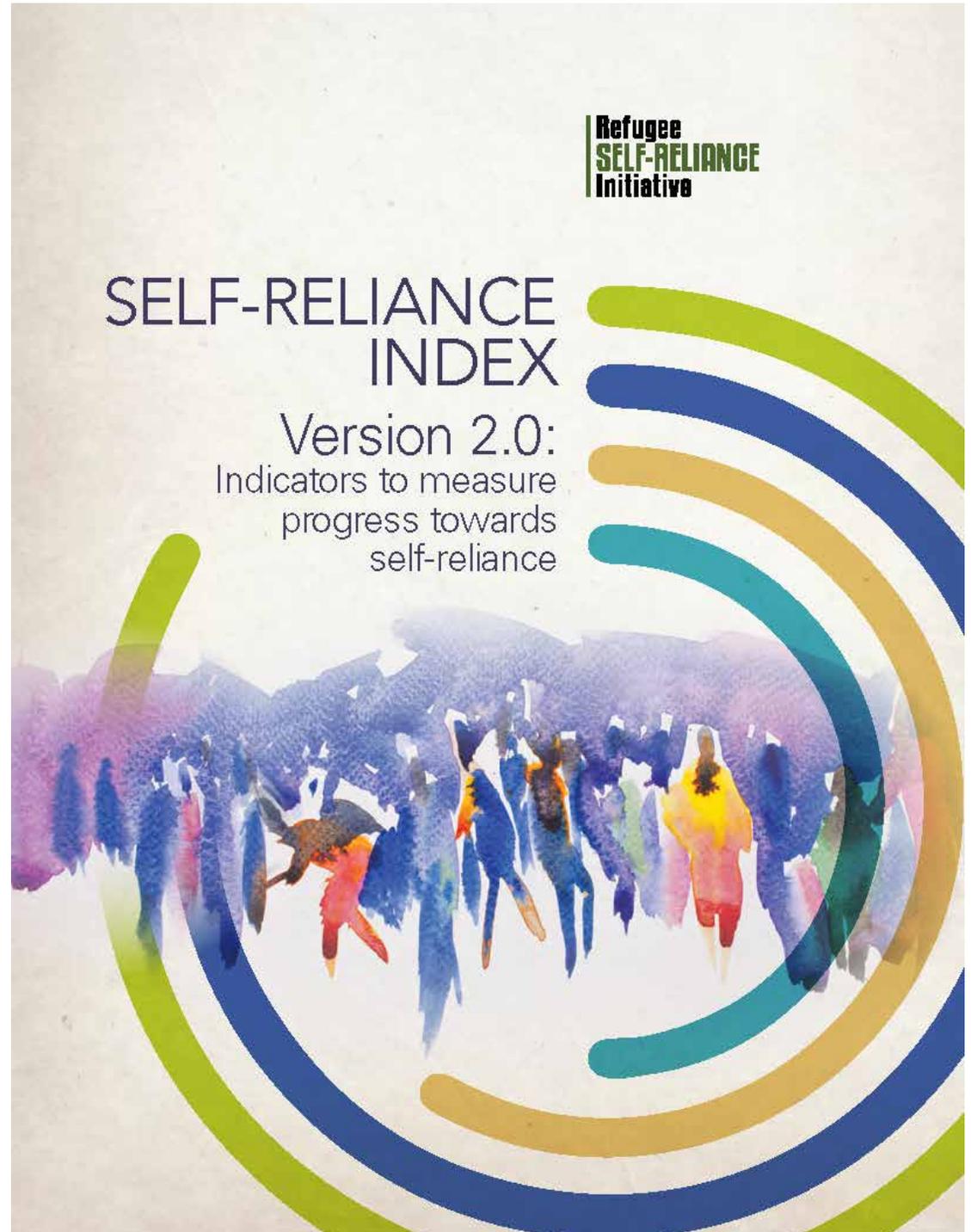
*Girls take part in danger zones mapping exercise for Safer Cities project. © Plan International/Heba Khalifa*



## A "SELF-RELIANCE INDEX" MEASURES REFUGEES' WELL-BEING

The Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative, which is co-led by WRC and RefugePoint, developed the Self-Reliance Index (SRI), a tool for measuring refugee households' progress towards self-reliance. The SRI measures economic and social well-being with indicators tracking employment, savings, debt, shelter, food and nutrition, access to health care, school attendance, safety, and social networks.

Since the SRI was finalized in June 2020, it has been used by 21 partner organizations in 14 countries. It is being used with more than 9,000 households, representing 45,000 refugees. This is the first time that livelihood programs and economic interventions in humanitarian settings have been measured this way, enabling organizations to assess if and when refugee households can stand on their own two feet and allowing limited humanitarian assistance to be redirected to those most in need.



## GENDER AND SOCIAL INCLUSION: LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

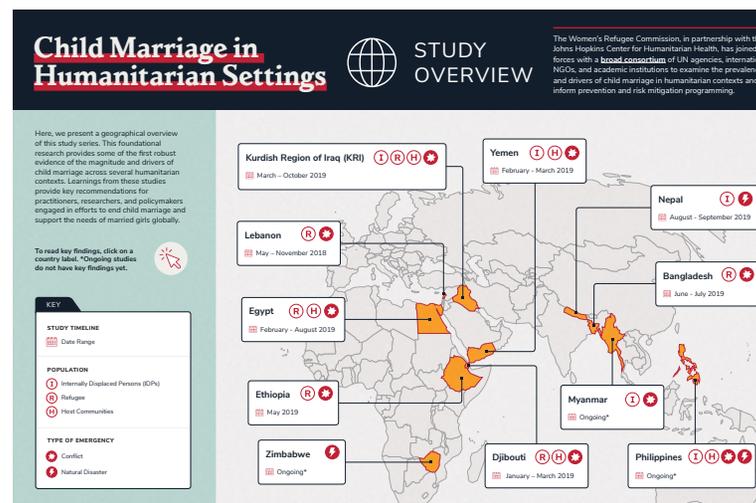
WRC promotes the full inclusion of traditionally marginalized groups, such as refugee women, people with disabilities, the LGBTQI+ community, and adolescent girls, in identifying solutions and designing programs that meet their unique needs and build upon their capacities.

## DISPLACEMENT IS A FACTOR IN CHILD MARRIAGE

In a fundamental violation of their human rights, one in five girls worldwide is engaged or married before the age of 18, unlocking a lifetime of consequences that can stymie their health, safety, and future.

Findings from our research across 11 emergency contexts confirmed that drivers of child marriage include displacement, systemic poverty, economic and physical insecurity, lack of education, and gender-based discrimination. We found that transformative approaches used within programs, such as cash transfers and safe spaces for adolescent girls, have the potential to help prevent or lessen the risk of child marriage.

We are building the capacity of humanitarian practitioners to respond to child marriage in crisis-affected areas. We are also working in partnership with girls and communities themselves to help end the practice so that girls can reach their full potential.



## GLOBAL REFUGEE YOUTH NETWORK

In 2021, WRC helped establish and supported the Global Refugee Youth Network (GRYN). GRYN brings the voices of refugee youth to global forums, creates networking and mentorship linkages and peer-to-peer support among refugee youth around the world, and supports and funds refugee youth-led initiatives in their own communities.

During its first year, GRYN partnered with World University Service Canada (WUSC) to conduct a [round table](#) on refugee leadership with refugee youth leaders, UNICEF, UNHCR, and the Danish Refugee Council. It collaborated with the Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative (RSRI) and the Refugee-Led Research Hub to conduct a study and draft an [advocacy paper](#) "Refugee Self-Reliance and the Global Compact on Refugees: Unpacking Barriers and Opportunities for Success." And members presented at key forums such as events hosted by the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action and UNICEF's Adolescent and Youth Engagement in Humanitarian Settings.



## SIBLING SUPPORT FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN EMERGENCIES

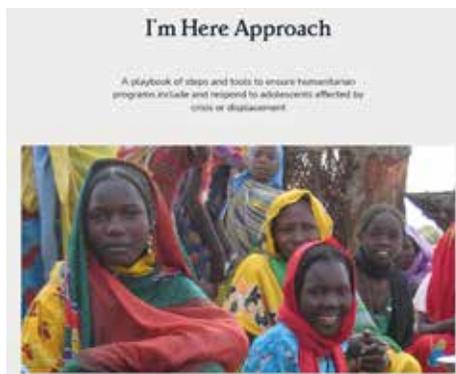
Adolescent girls are disproportionately vulnerable to violence, often stemming from harmful gender norms and exposure to violence within the household. In humanitarian settings, disrupted social support systems and changing roles within a family can increase levels of violence in households, while also compromising adolescent girls' safety and well-being.

WRC's Sibling Support for Adolescent Girls in Emergencies (SSAGE) Initiative aims to build the protective capacities of adolescent girls through a gender-transformative program that engages girls, their male siblings, and their parents and caregivers. Launched in 2020, the SSAGE Initiative has reached more than 1,000 participants to date, in 12 crisis-affected communities in Jordan, Niger, and Nigeria. The SSAGE intervention is complemented by research to better understand the impact of the project and how best to involve families and households in future protection programming for adolescent girls in humanitarian settings.

**“ [W]e are depriving our [female] children. Because with little maturity, we would remove them from school and marry them off and leave the male child [in school]. Is the female child not also your child? ... [E]ven from the aspect of education, we should treat them equal without differentiating between male and female children. ”**

**-Male caregiver who participated in a SSAGE intervention.**

## I'M HERE: A NEW APPROACH TO ENGAGING ADOLESCENTS



*I'm Here* is an innovative approach developed by WRC that helps humanitarian staff reach the most vulnerable adolescents and supports them in being accountable to adolescents' safety, health, and well-being. It enables humanitarian actors to engage adolescents in creating their own solutions—ensuring their rights are protected and programs are effective.

In 2021, WRC developed an online *I'm Here* playbook of steps and tools to ensure humanitarian programs include and respond to adolescents affected by crisis or

displacement. The interactive playbook was used to build the capacity of Partners in Health and Development (PHD) to implement the *I'm Here* approach in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Using the *I'm Here* tools, PHD mapped an isolated area of Kutapalong refugee camp and consulted with more than 150 Rohingya adolescent boys and girls who were not accessing programming. Using this information, PHD created an organizational strategic plan for adolescents, expanding the reach and the scope of their programming.

## ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY IN HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS



In FY2021, WRC published a first-of-its kind study examining how the experts who are charged with addressing gender inequality and creating gender-

transformative change in humanitarian response assess how well the system is doing. Our research found that a gender-transformative agenda must happen within humanitarian organizations, especially by senior leadership, in order for the operational work they do to achieve gender-transformative outcomes. In addition, we argue that gender work is not only technical, but also political, and must be treated as such if we are serious about achieving equitable, inclusive, and transformative impacts.

## ADVOCACY GETS RESULTS

The goal of WRC's advocacy team, based in Washington, DC, New York, and Geneva, is to advance gender equality and inclusion in refugee settings by influencing the programs, policies, and practices of humanitarian agencies, donor governments, and local partners. Our Migrant Rights and Justice Team also conducts robust advocacy with the administration and congress in Washington, DC, to advance the rights of people seeking asylum in the United States (see Rights and Justice section, page 6).

## RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS IN AFGHANISTAN

After the Taliban took complete control in Afghanistan in August 2021, WRC engaged with the US administration and congress. We coordinated among international NGOs to directly put names forward for immediate evacuation of activists, community leaders, and others at risk and urgently advocate for their protection in country. Our vice president, external relations, released a letter as co-chair of the Coalition to End Violence against Women and Girls Globally calling for particular attention to a rise in gender-based violence and human rights abuses against Afghan women and girls. She was also interviewed by several print and broadcast news outlets (see page 4).

In New York, we engaged with the United Nations and member states, supporting joint and bilateral advocacy that put the voices and priorities of Afghan women human rights defenders themselves at the center. We also raised the alarm on the worsening human rights and humanitarian situation and the need to fund and support Afghan women-led grassroots organizations, which was also emphasized by our UN representative at a UN High-Level Ministerial Meeting with the UN convened by the UN Secretary-General.



*Stephanie Johanssen, WRC's associate director of advocacy and UN representative, delivers a statement at the UN's High-Level Ministerial Meeting on the Humanitarian Situation in Afghanistan.*

## PUSHING FOR GENDER EQUALITY AND MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION

At the UN, WRC advocates for gender equality and the full, equal, and meaningful participation of refugee women and girls, in all their diversity, in humanitarian action. In FY 2021, WRC actively engaged in the Generation Equality Forum, a global convening commemorating the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Conference on Women. The Forum focused on advancing gender equality in humanitarian action, economic justice, gender-based violence (GBV), and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Our advocacy with key UN member states on the new Compact on Women, Peace, and Security and Humanitarian Action resulted in strengthened language on SRHR, cash and voucher assistance, and legal reform. Commitments by the United States also reflected WRC's advocacy, including pledges related to the Call to Action on Protection from GBV in Emergencies and the Safe from the Start initiative on GBV in crises.

In Washington, DC, WRC organized civil society efforts to integrate a humanitarian lens into the US Gender Equality and Equity Strategy, which was developed by the Biden administration's newly formed White House Gender Policy Council. We advocated for the strategy to reflect key gender concerns in emergencies, including child marriage, GBV, SRHR, and women's livelihoods.



Gayatri Patel, WRC's VP for external relations (bottom row, second from left), participates in a Generation Equality event.

## EFFORTS TO ADVANCE GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND RESPONSE

WRC leads advocacy efforts in Washington, DC, to advance US programs and funding for GBV prevention and response, including wider availability of SRH services and economic empowerment opportunities for survivors. We advocate strongly for the *(Keeping Women and Girls) Safe from the Start Act* in Congress, which dedicates resources to prevent and address GBV in emergencies globally, and provides high-quality services to survivors; between May and September 2021, our advocacy resulted in 19 new House co-sponsors for the *Safe from the Start Act* and four new Senate co-sponsors.

We advocated for robust funds in the President's FY22 Budget Request (PBR) for humanitarian response, GBV, SRH, and women's economic empowerment. When the PBR requested less than we sought, WRC influenced Hill offices to increase funds through the annual appropriations process. Our advocacy unlocked increased funding amounts for these issues over the FY21 appropriations, as well as several critical policy measures that would improve programs and attention for the needs of women and girls in emergencies.

In response to the situation in Tigray, Ethiopia, we worked closely with congressional representatives on a resolution bringing attention to sexual violence and other abuses against women and girls and their sexual and reproductive health needs. The resolution, which condemned the use of rape and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence by parties to the conflict and called for specific actions to be taken to support survivors and address the humanitarian crisis, was introduced in Congress in December 2021. And as an active member of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace, and Security, we pushed for action at the UN Security Council level by supporting targeted advocacy.

WRC also continued to take a lead role in the Call to Action on Protection on Gender-Based Violence, a multi-stakeholder initiative to fundamentally transform the way GBV is addressed in humanitarian emergencies. (See page 9.)

## THE LANTERN TALKS: BRIDGING ART AND ADVOCACY

When COVID-19 forced WRC to suspend the Lantern Tour II: Concerts for Migrant and Refugee Families, we pivoted to the Lantern Talks, a series of virtual conversations that bridged art and advocacy. Each Talk featured an artist from the world of film, music, or literature, a refugee policy expert, and a guest host. Artists included legendary author and Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient Isabel Allende; songwriter, musician, and producer Thao Nguyen; and Grammy Award-winning singer and human rights activist Lila Downs. Guest hosts included Grammy Award-winning musician Steve Earle; actor, film producer, and director Trudie Styler; and award-winning reporter Lomi Kriel. The wide-ranging conversations covered immigration and asylum, and the situation for refugee women and girls around the world.

[www.lantern talks.org](http://www.lantern talks.org)



The promotional graphic is a vertical rectangle with a red background. On the left side, there are two stacked portrait photographs. The top photo shows Isabel Allende, a woman with short brown hair, wearing a dark patterned top, sitting in front of a bookshelf. The bottom photo shows Sarah Costa, a woman with long grey hair, wearing a dark patterned top, smiling. On the right side, the text is white. At the top, it says "The Lantern Talks" in a large, bold, serif font, with "The" in a smaller font above "Lantern Talks". Below this, in a smaller font, it says "Art · Advocacy · Conversation". Further down, it says "A Conversation with" in a smaller font, followed by "Author **Isabel Allende** and **WRC's Sarah Costa**," and "with Special Guest Host **Kavita Ramdas**." Below that, it says "Noon ET, 9 a.m. PT / Thursday, June 24, 2021" in a bold font. At the bottom, there are three logos: "#TheLanternTalks", "LanternTalks.org", and the Women's Refugee Commission logo, which consists of three vertical bars of increasing height and the text "WOMEN'S REFUGEE COMMISSION" and "POLITICAL · ECONOMIC · HUMANITARIAN" below it.

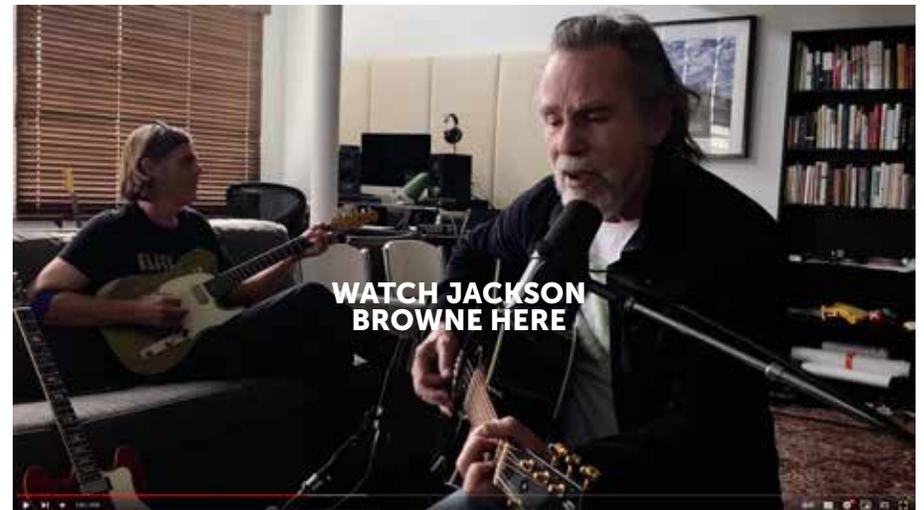
## VIRTUAL VOICES OF COURAGE AWARDS CELEBRATE THE RESILIENCE OF REFUGEE WOMEN

For the second year in a row, we gathered online for our annual Voices of Courage Awards Luncheon. Our honorees—Dr. Amani Ballour, a Syrian resident pediatrician and an advocate for women’s and children’s rights; Faridah Luanda, a refugee youth leader and activist, originally from the Democratic Republic of Congo; and Kandace Vallejo, founder and executive director of Youth Rise Texas—participated in a lively discussion moderated by former Voices of Courage honoree and WRC board member Zrinka Bralo. Grammy Award-winning artist Emmylou Harris introduced Grammy Award-nominated singer-songwriter and Rock and Roll Hall of Famer Jackson Browne, who performed from his home studio.

Watch Voices of Courage at <https://bit.ly/voc-2021-youtube>



*Zrinka Bralo (top left) moderated a conversation with Voices of Courage honorees Dr. Amani Ballour (top right), Kandace Vallejo (bottom left), and Faridah Luanda (bottom right).*



*Jackson Browne performed “Our Lady of the Well” from his home studio.*

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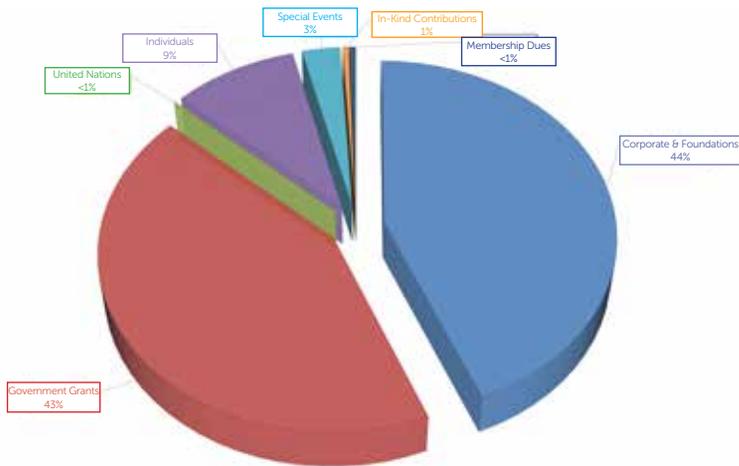
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\* Donors who made multi-year grants are included at the funding level of their total grant amount.

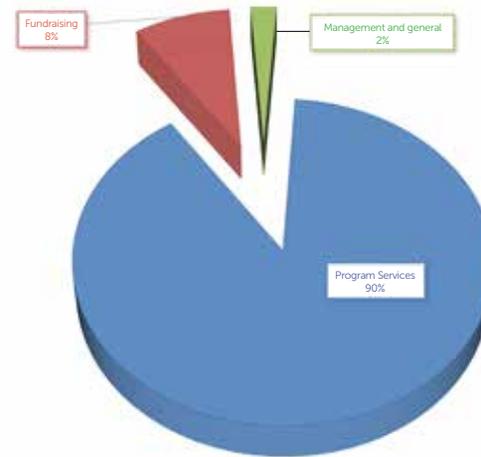
# FINANCIAL REPORT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2021

The Women's Refugee Commission is exempt from federal income taxes under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Copies of our audited financial statements for FY 2021 are available on our website.

**FY 2021 REVENUE**  
TOTAL REVENUE: \$8.3 million\*



**FY 2021 EXPENSES**  
TOTAL EXPENSES: \$9.8 million



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(As of September 2021)

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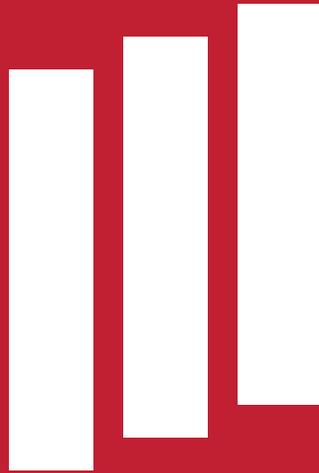
The board and staff of the Women's Refugee Commission thank Ambassador Donald Steinberg for his nine years of dedication to the organization and his leadership as co-chair of the board of directors from 2019 to 2021. We salute his unwavering efforts to improve the lives of refugee women, children, and youth around the world.



## **CREATE LASTING CHANGE TODAY**

The Women's Refugee Commission is the only international organization dedicated solely to protecting refugee women's rights to sexual and reproductive health care, to freedom from gender-based violence, and to economic and social empowerment.

Change a life today at: [www.womensrefugeecommission.org/donate-now](http://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/donate-now) or contact us at [info@wrcommission.org](mailto:info@wrcommission.org) to join our mailing list and stay up to date on ways you can be involved.



**WOMEN'S  
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