



FY 2020 ANNUAL REPORT

October 2019 – September 2020



 **WOMEN'S
REFUGEE
COMMISSION**
RESEARCH. RETHINK. RESOLVE.

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.

Cover Photos © (left side): 1. Plan International, 2. Plan International, 3. War Child Canada, 4. Plan International, 5. Plan International, (right side) 1. Jessica Dimmock, 2. Care

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When our new fiscal year began in October 2019, we could not have predicted how much our lives would change over the coming months. The COVID-19 pandemic has left a trail of devastation in its wake, and uncertainty as to its long-term social and economic consequences.

It highlighted what we can do—together—even in the hardest of times, to tackle the entrenched disparities for displaced women and girls in access to rights, safety, livelihoods, food, well-being, and health care. It also reinforced our belief that when you rely on the strength of women, nothing is impossible.

Despite tremendous challenges, the Women's Refugee Commission was able to pivot and continue our essential mission without interruption. Because of our role as a convener and our well-established partnerships on the ground, we were in a good position to switch to working remotely. We collaborated with partners around the world to bridge the gap between affected populations and local organizations in the field and the humanitarian system at large. I'm proud of all we and our partners have

managed to achieve. Again, we have proved that our vision to create a better world for refugees—with refugees—where solutions are informed and driven by the affected populations themselves, is possible. We are more confident than ever that our strategic focus on gender equality and women's empowerment—our work to strengthen and invest in the assets, skills, and capacities of refugee women and girls—is vital to creating a system that fosters the resilience of refugees.

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 of Sarah Costa in black ink.

Sarah Costa
Executive Director

[Read](#) about our COVID-related response.

DEFENDING THE RIGHTS OF FAMILIES SEEKING SAFETY AT THE US BORDER

Migrant, stateless, and refugee 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.

FIGHTING FOR THE RIGHTS OF PEOPLE SEEKING SAFETY AT THE US BORDER

Throughout 2020, the Trump administration continued its push to all but eliminate access to asylum in the United States. WRC fought back, engaging in coalition campaigns and advocacy, supporting legal challenges, and submitting official comments opposing regulations that sought to dismantle asylum.

We helped to lay the groundwork for the United States to support reception processes at the border if a new administration came into office. We coordinated closely with dozens of partners at the US border to be ready and resourced to support those seeking asylum. We also provided ongoing support to a lawsuit filed in 2017 challenging the Trump administration's family separation policies. WRC sits on the steering committee in the case, assisting the ACLU to locate separated parents and helping to reunify parents with their children in accordance with families' wishes. Over the course of 2020, hundreds of parents were located.



© Jessica Dimmock



© Jessica Dimmock



"[T]he administration has taken advantage of this moment to 'expel'... children and anyone seeking asylum at our border. COVID-19 did not eliminate the dangers people are fleeing. ... So, when we 'expel' vulnerable asylum seekers, including unaccompanied children, we are throwing them right back into those dangers. ... Traffickers, kidnappers, cartels are waiting right there at the border and that's why we've seen these kidnappings and these dangers go up." – Michelle Brané, senior director, Migrant Rights and Justice Program, on MSNBC

[Read more](#)



Youth Sustainable Development Centre, GCENR's coalition member in Eswatini
© Youth Sustainable Development Centre

CAMPAIGNING FOR EQUAL NATIONALITY RIGHTS

COVID travel bans had a significant impact on families living in countries that deny women's equal right to pass citizenship to their children and non-citizen spouse, leaving families separated for months. In some countries with gender-discriminatory nationality laws, the families of women citizens were denied equal access to COVID relief packages, as their children—including those born and raised in the country—are considered foreigners under the discriminatory law.

The Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights, which is hosted by WRC, fought for equal access to COVID relief for all persons regardless of citizenship status and for spouses and children of citizens to be permitted entry to their respective countries. The Campaign successfully ensured that gender-equal nationality rights reforms were integrated in the [UN Refugee Agency \(UNHCR\)'s policy recommendations](#) for addressing the impact of COVID-19 on stateless populations.



Watch *"The birthright of a child to its mother's nationality—the gender discriminatory laws which can lead to statelessness" in which Catherine Harrington, campaign manager of the Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights, describes the growing movement against such gender bias, which can prevent children of mixed marriages or single mothers from accessing education, healthcare, social services and formal employment.*

MITIGATING THE EFFECTS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

All displaced people are at risk of sexual and gender-based violence and exploitation. The risk is particularly high for women and girls, but also exists for men and boys. WRC partners and collaborates with local organizations and the international humanitarian community to improve safety and services.

CASH. DIGNITY. AGENCY.: HOW CASH TRANSFERS CAN BENEFIT SURVIVORS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Traditionally, refugees have been provided with emergency services and goods, such as food and blankets. Increasingly, they are receiving cash transfers or vouchers to spend as they prioritize, whether to pay rent, buy tools to set up a business, or go to a doctor. Cash can even help women escape and recover from abusive and violent situations.

WRC worked with our partner, CARE Ecuador, and two local partners to provide survivors of GBV with cash transfers. Survivors used the cash to access health and legal services and psychosocial support, pay for shelter and utilities, and start small businesses. In refugee settings around the world, WRC advocates for the use of cash assistance, which affords women the dignity and agency they deserve.



[Watch our video: Cash. Dignity. Agency.](#)

Left: Fundación Quimera staff in Ecuador prepare cash transfer documentation with project participants. © CARE

Girls wear masks to prevent COVID-19 infection in a child-friendly space in Kabul, Afghanistan.
© War Child Canada



MANAGING GBV PROGRAMS REMOTELY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

As humanitarian operations, including GBV support services, were reduced or halted because of the COVID-19 pandemic, women and girls who were already at risk of GBV were in even more dire situations.

WRC and our partner War Child Canada published guidance to help organizations remotely monitor and manage GBV programs in the context of the pandemic. Remote monitoring and management enables organizations to proactively monitor project activities, troubleshoot implementation challenges, and inform or share decision-making with communities, without being physically present in the project sites.

TRANSFORMING HOW GBV IS ADDRESSED IN EMERGENCIES

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 is to ensure that every humanitarian response mitigates the risks of GBV, especially violence against women and girls, and provides safe and comprehensive services for survivors. WRC plays a leading role in the partnership. In 2020, we worked with Canada, the Lead of the Call to Action, to update the “Road Map” that will guide the partnership for the next five years.



SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST MEN AND BOYS

Men and boys, particularly unaccompanied boys, boys and men with disabilities, adolescent boys, and people with diverse sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, are at risk of sexual violence, abuse, and exploitation.

In 2018 and 2019, WRC undertook cutting-edge work on sexual violence against men and boys. In 2020, we released a report synthesizing our findings and recommendations from studies in Bangladesh, Italy, and Kenya. As a result of our work, several agencies, including UNICEF, the International Committee of the Red Cross, Human Rights Watch, and International Planned Parenthood Foundation, have significantly expanded their work on this issue. They have developed training materials and provided trainings for child protection staff; increased programming; formed working groups; and conducted workshops with donors and practitioners.

ADVOCATING FOR SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH 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.

ADVANCING COMMUNITY-LED SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH THROUGH LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS

More than 1.5 million people are displaced by conflict in Borno State in northeast Nigeria, and less than half of health facilities are fully operational. In partnership with the government and local organizations, WRC is undertaking an innovative health initiative to improve reproductive, maternal, newborn, child, and adolescent health and nutrition by increasing community members' access to information and services. Since the program launched in December 2019, 103 village health workers (VHWs) have been trained to go door to door in their communities to provide basic health information and encourage the use of health services. In the first year, the VHWs visited some 45,000 community members, including almost 8,500 women and girls aged 15–49 years.



STATE OF THE FIELD: ACCESS TO CONTRACEPTION FOR CRISIS-AFFECTED POPULATIONS

Although people affected by crises consistently report a desire to delay or avoid pregnancy, access to contraception remains a gap in many crisis-affected settings. WRC conducted a global assessment to understand the barriers to accessing contraception and to identify solutions that will improve access for women, girls, and couples. In FY2020, we published case studies documenting contraceptive service provision in humanitarian responses in Nigeria and Mozambique. We also undertook an analysis of disruptions and adaptations to contraceptive service delivery related to COVID-19.



COMMUNITY PREPAREDNESS FOR SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND GENDER

In FY2020, WRC continued our work in crisis-affected districts in three provinces in Pakistan to build the community health workforce's capacity to prepare for and respond to SRH needs and risks in emergencies. As a result of our activities, uptake of SRH and family planning services at our local partner's family health clinics increased by 20 percent. GBV referral systems were established with community awareness raising about where survivors could access services, resulting in increased reporting of intimate partner violence within targeted local union councils. Blood donor group lists were activated in two emergencies, enabling prompt attention for survivors requiring blood transfusions. And the local emergency transport system in these communities was revamped, allowing women suffering complications of pregnancy and childbirth to reach health facilities more quickly.



All page photos © IPPF/Family Planning Association of Pakistan/Rahnuma



SRH DURING THE PANDEMIC

In March 2020, the Inter-Agency Working Group on Reproductive Health in Crises (IAWG), which is hosted by WRC, launched a COVID-19 taskforce and a [COVID-19 hub](#), where it shared COVID-related resources on sexual and reproductive health developed by IAWG and its members.

IAWG advocacy contributed to inclusion of sexual reproductive health and rights recommendations in the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan. IAWG recommended the continuation of contraception and family planning during the pandemic; explicit inclusion of SRH in mentions of "essential health services" throughout the plan; and inclusion of language that lifesaving GBV and SRH services must be made accessible to refugees, migrants, internally displaced persons, people of concern, and host population groups.

DEVELOPING TOOLS FOR ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND SELF-RELIANCE

Most refugees have a profound desire to provide for themselves and their families—to work, to use their skills, and to make their own decisions about their finances, their lives, and their futures. 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.

USING CASH TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES FOR ADOLESCENTS

There is currently limited evidence and guidance on the use of cash and voucher assistance (CVA) to safely and effectively meet the needs and support the capacities of diverse adolescents. In FY2020, in collaboration with Plan International, WRC published first-of-their-kind learnings on integrating CVA into programs to effectively and safely achieve protection, education, and well-being outcomes for crisis-affected adolescent girls and boys. The learnings were based on a literature review on the use of CVA in adolescent programming in crisis settings and case studies in Egypt and the Central African Republic. The findings and recommendations will be used by humanitarian agencies to strengthen their adolescent programming and to guide further evidence generation and guidance related to the use of CVA for adolescents in crisis, including a Toolkit on Adolescent-Responsive CVA authored by WRC.

“The combined effects of project components [including CVA components] increased access to and retention in school and appeared to reduce protection risks for adolescent boys and adolescent girls.”

-Cash Transfer and Education: Supporting basic education for Syrian refugees and Egyptian host communities.



A TOOL TO HELP REFUGEES ACHIEVE SELF-RELIANCE

The Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative (the Initiative), which is co-led by WRC, launched version 2.0 of the Self-Reliance Index (SRI) in May 2020. The SRI is a tool for measuring refugee households' progress towards self-reliance. WRC and our partner, RefugePoint, conducted a series of virtual launches and webinars to promote awareness and uptake of the Index. To date, the SRI has been downloaded more than 700 times. Since the launch, we have received immense interest in the tool from practitioners, researchers, and policymakers. Agencies in seven countries are using the SRI to inform their programs and the Initiative is supporting agencies in 17 countries through training and technical assistance in preparation to use the SRI in 2021. The Initiative aims to reach 5 million refugees in five years with self-reliance programming.



All page photos © Plan International



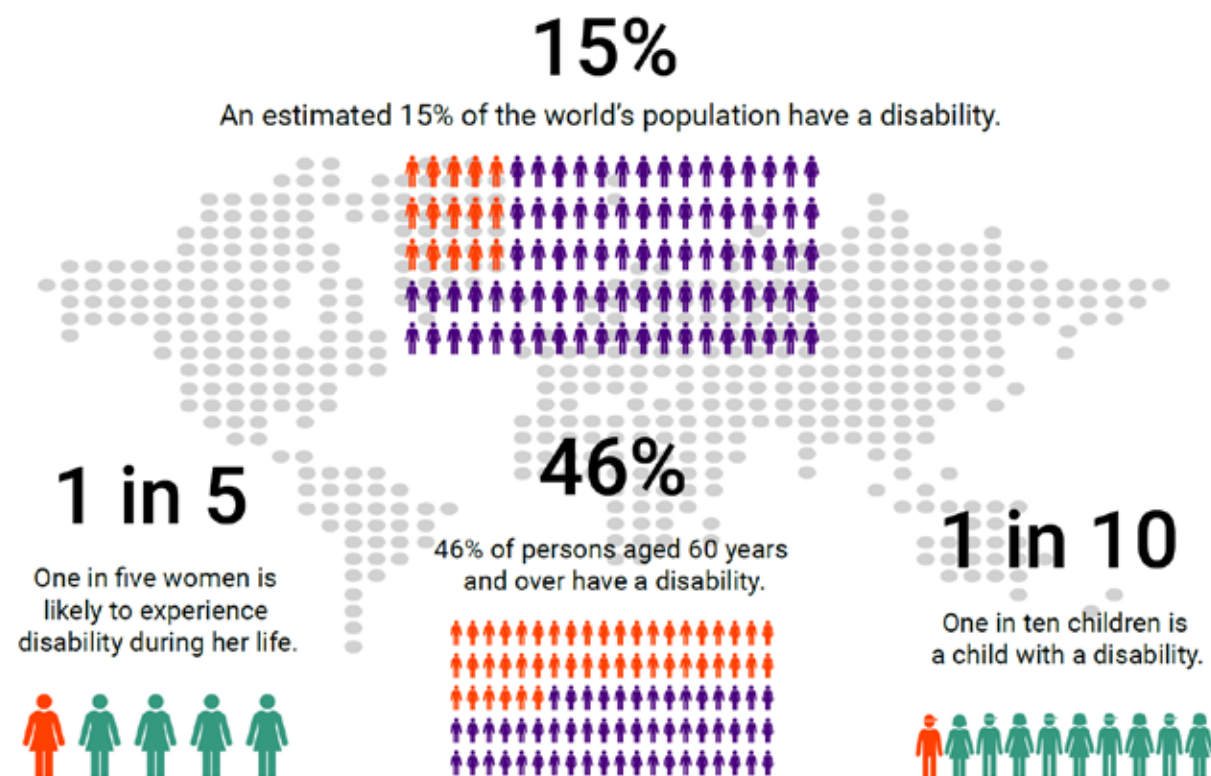
GENDER AND SOCIAL INCLUSION: LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

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.

STANDING UP FOR REFUGEES WITH DISABILITIES

WRC played a key role in the development of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee *Guidelines on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action*, which were launched in late 2019. In FY2020, WRC led a dozen trainings on the GBV section of the guidelines for GBV practitioners and organizations of persons with disabilities to promote understanding and use of the guidelines. The trainings reached hundreds of partners across multiple countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and South and Southeast Asia.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, WRC recommended that humanitarian agencies make information on the pandemic and health precautions accessible to people with disabilities, build on and leverage the social networks of people with disabilities, and tap the skills and abilities of people with disabilities.



Global population of persons with disabilities, from IASC Guidelines on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action.

REFUGEE YOUTH RESPOND TO THE COVID CRISIS

When humanitarian organizations that typically distribute food and non-food items and provide services in refugee settings had to restrict the movement of their national and international staff, refugee and displaced youth stepped in to fill the gap. Many of these youth are members of the Global Youth Advisory Council, which is supported and coordinated by WRC and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Among many activities, they informed their communities about how to avoid spreading COVID-19; made and distributed hygiene kits with tippy taps, soap, and masks; identified and addressed protection concerns such as the risk to girls of child marriage or transactional sex; ran workshops on sexual and reproductive health and distributed condoms and SRH kits; raised funds to purchase food and hygiene items to distribute to vulnerable members of their communities; and promoted online education in places where classes were suspended.

SAFE SPACES FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS PROVIDE CRITICAL SRH INFORMATION

Access to SRH information and services is fundamental to the physical health and psychosocial well-being of adolescent girls. In 2018, WRC research in refugee settlements in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, identified barriers faced by adolescent girls in accessing SRH information and services, and found that women and girls' safe spaces were a trusted source of information that could provide targeted adolescent SRH programming. In 2019, we conducted a pilot project that reached 144 Rohingya adolescent girls ages 10–19 with critical information related to puberty, menstrual hygiene, reproduction, and contextual safety concerns. Based on this work, UNICEF incorporated adolescent SRH programming in 20 of its women and girls' safe spaces in Cox's Bazar, reaching more than 600 adolescent girls in FY2020.

We also launched a virtual safe space platform for adolescent girls who cannot access a physical space in Lebanon and Iraq.



THE LANTERN TOUR BRIDGES ART AND ADVOCACY

The Lantern Tour II: Concerts for Migrant and Refugee Families brought together a group of music legends to raise their voices in song and solidarity, and raise money for WRC. Artists included Emmylou Harris, Jackson Browne, Steve Earle, Patty Griffin, Thao Nguyen, Amy Ray of the Indigo Girls, and Sheryl Crow. In FY2020, concerts were held in Washington, DC, New York City, and Nashville, before COVID forced us to suspend the tour.



Photo: Performers Jerry Douglas, Sheryl Crow, Emmylou Harris, Steve Earle, Amy Ray, and Matraca Berg perform at the War Memorial Auditorium in Nashville © Keith Griner

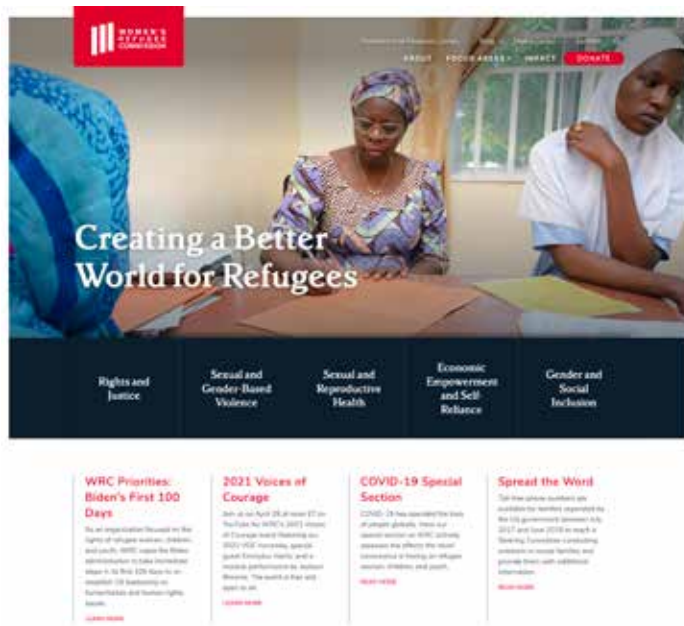
VOICES OF COURAGE GOES VIRTUAL

When New York City went into lockdown in March 2020, we were just weeks out from our annual Voices of Courage Awards Luncheon. We quickly pivoted, and instead of celebrating in person, we gathered online. Our honorees—an obstetrician and gynecologist from Nigeria; the cofounder of an organization that develops and runs community centers for Syrian refugees in camp and urban settings in Lebanon, Turkey, and Kurdistan; and the co-founder of the first US-based organization led by stateless people—participated in a lively panel. Grammy Award-winning artist Lila Downs performed an indigenous song from her home in Mexico.



A NEW WEBSITE TO CREATE A BETTER WORLD

In FY2020, we were proud to launch our new [website](#). Visit regularly to learn about our impact and latest news.



RESILIENT. COURAGEOUS. CAPABLE.

For World Refugee Day on June 20, we produced a short video illustrating the resilience, courage, and capabilities of refugee women and girls.



OUR GENEROUS DONORS – FISCAL YEAR 2019: OCTOBER 1, 2019 – SEPTEMBER 30, 2020*

\$1,000,000+

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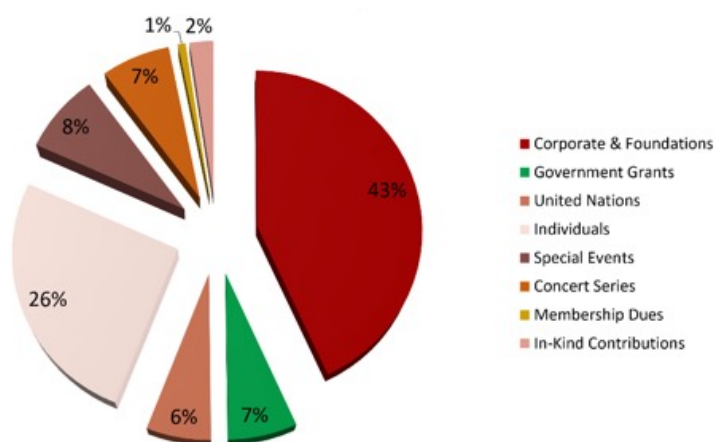
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FINANCIAL REPORT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2020

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 2020 are available on our website.

FY 2020 REVENUE

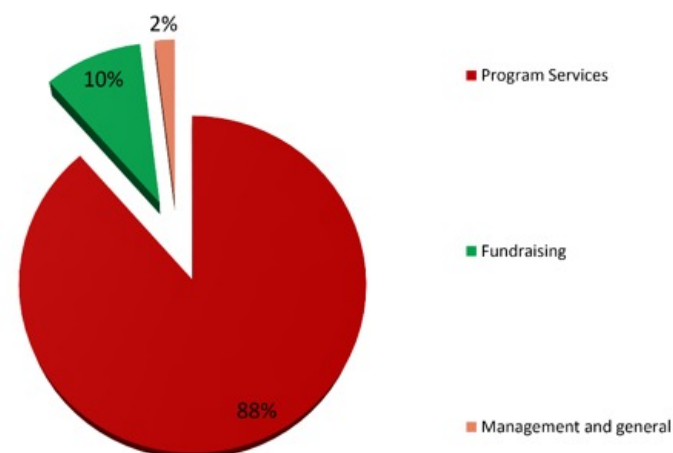
TOTAL REVENUE: \$4.7 million*



**In FY2018 and FY2019 we received several multiyear grants. Revenue from these grants was reported in the fiscal years in which they were received and expenses are reported in the fiscal year in which they are incurred.*

FY 2020 EXPENSES

TOTAL EXPENSES: \$9.7 million



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 or contact us at info@wrcommission.org to join our mailing list and stay up to date on ways you can be involved.

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(As of September 2020)

THANK YOU

The board and staff of the Women's Refugee Commission thank Martha Gallo for her 10 years of dedication to the organization and her leadership as co-chair of the board of directors from 2013 to 2020. We salute her unwavering efforts to improve the lives of refugee women, children, and youth around the world, and appreciate her continuing service on the board.



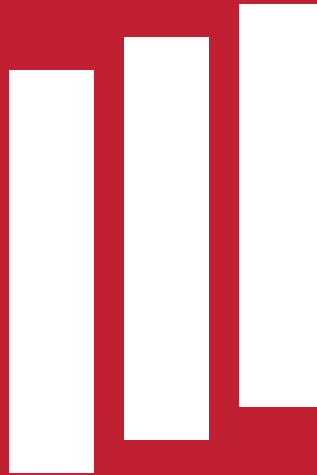
IN MEMORIAM JENNIFER SCHLECHT

The Women's Refugee Commission remembers and celebrates our colleague and friend Jennifer Schlecht, and pays tribute to her transformative impact on the rights of women and girls in humanitarian settings.

During her seven years at WRC and beyond, Jenn conducted pioneering work investigating child marriage in conflict settings and led global efforts to ensure that women and girls affected by crises can access contraception. She spearheaded global efforts to include sexual and reproductive health as part of emergency preparedness and disaster risk reduction at international, national, and community levels.

Her legacy will continue to guide those working in the field of sexual and reproductive health and women's and girls' rights. It will benefit thousands of women and girls in crisis for generations to come.





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