General considerations on refugee protection in the COVID-19 pandemic
Protection Environment

- We are all vulnerable, the virus does not discriminate, but many refugees are at heightened risk
- Government-imposed restrictions to prevent/contain C19 now almost universal
- Border closures, restrictions on access to territory and to asylum procedures
- Disruptions in access to lifesaving assistance and services as well as to income generating activities
- Restrictions on access to asylum seekers/refugees due to movement restrictions
- Suspension of face-to-face protection activities
- Suspension of voluntary repatriation programmes and of resettlement departures
- A crisis within the crisis
- Positive trends: inclusion, documentation, reception of asylum seekers
Protection risks and concerns

- Access to asylum and risks of refoulement
- Returns under adverse conditions
- Xenophobia, stigma, scapegoating and targeted attacks
- Concerns that asylum seekers and refugees are not coming forward for COVID-19 testing and treatment for fear of being deported
- Gender-based violence (domestic violence) and child abuse, as a result of containment policies, loss of income and livelihood activities, closure of schools and activities for children and youths
- Evictions of persons of concern who have lost access to income
- Psychosocial needs, isolation, increased levels of anxiety and stress
- Longer term socio-economic impacts of the pandemic
Key protection messages and strategies

- States can and should ensure access to asylum while also protecting public health
- Reception of asylum seekers and the processing of asylum claims should continue
- Restrictions on freedom of movement should not be arbitrary nor discriminatory
- Restrictions on rights should be maintained for no longer than necessary
- Equal access to national health services
- Preparedness efforts should continue (emergency response and business continuity)
- Accessible, accurate information and risk communication with refugees
- Community engagement with refugees and host communities
- Adapting the operational protection response
- Support to inclusion of refugees in national response
- Addressing the immediate and longer-term socio-economic impact of the pandemic