

# Ten Years with Refugees

Fast Retailing has been supporting refugees and internally displaced people through its global partnership with UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, since 2011.

In July 2021, we interviewed Mr. Filippo Grandi, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, to discuss the current situation facing people being forced to flee and the importance of Fast Retailing's contribution. This is a summary of his response.




**FAST RETAILING**

Many refugees and internally displaced people who were forced to flee their homes due to conflict and persecution need not only assistance through the donation of goods and clothing, but also support to become self-reliant. Fast Retailing has been working with UNHCR to support self-reliance assistance programs for refugees, such as refugee employment opportunities in global UNIQLO stores, educational programs, skill acquisition training, and clothing donations in refugee camps. (Left top photo: Colombia, 2018) Since 2020, Fast Retailing has been supporting MADE51, the global brand of handicrafts produced by refugees using their own local craftsmanship. (Right bottom photo: Egypt, 2020)

## The refugee situation: an important lesson from the COVID-19 pandemic

At the end of 2020, there were approximately 82.4 million refugees and displaced people: people fleeing war, conflict, violence, discrimination and persecution. This is the ninth year in a row in which this figure is increasing. These increasing figures mean old conflicts never get resolved and new conflicts emerge. Look at what's happened recently in Ethiopia, for example. The Syria crisis is 10 years old; in Afghanistan, the conflict is over 40 years old. These are very worrying signs of a world that has difficulty building peace. So unfortunately, if you look at the geopolitical context, you cannot be too optimistic. You have to be realistic. This figure may continue to rise again in the next few years.

The COVID-19 pandemic, dramatic as it may have been and continues to be, has taught us a very important lesson. That these global challenges, such as coronavirus and climate change, cannot be resolved country by country. They cannot be resolved by closing borders. If we go back into our cocoons, we won't be able to face the collective challenges that impact everyone, from presidents and prime ministers to everyday people.

Throughout the pandemic, we've seen people come together. Let's hope that this is an accelerator for change and solidarity, because when it comes to people who are being forced to flee, we need unity. We need solidarity. We need to continue to come together to find solutions, either for people to return home or to be received in other countries, and in the meantime, to continue to help them in a sustainable way.

### About Fast Retailing's support

More than **46.19** million pieces of clothing

We collected clothing that was no longer needed by customers and donated them to refugees and internally displaced people, collaborating with UNHCR and other NPOs and NGOs around the world from 2006 to the end of August in 2021. During the pandemic, we have donated more than 3 million AIRISM masks to people who were forced to flee, to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

**120** people in **8** countries

UNIQLO has been promoting employment opportunities for people who were forced to flee their home countries since 2011. At the end of April 2021, there were 120 displaced people working in UNIQLO stores across eight countries in Japan, US and Europe.

Building self-reliance for **19,000** people

From 2016 to 2019, Fast Retailing contributed \$5.5 million to UNHCR to support self-reliance assistance programs for refugees. This supported approximately 19,000 refugees across five Asian countries, through programs such as employment training for skills needed locally and assistance to become self-reliant.

### Sustainable support for people forced to flee their home countries

In 2011, Fast Retailing became the first Asian company to sign a global partnership with UNHCR. This year, we celebrated the 10th year of sustainable support for displaced people. I myself have seen many refugees and internally displaced people benefit from receiving clothing through this partnership, which has helped bring warmth and dignity to those in need.

There has been an immediate humanitarian value in these donations, but I would also say that we, UNHCR and Fast Retailing, must continue to focus on "How can we make refugees more self-reliant?" We live in a world where a refugee crisis lasts 10 years, 20 years, and sometimes, like in the case of Afghan refugees, more than 40 years—you cannot simply limit the response to humanitarian distributions of food or medicine or tents. You must give sustainable responses to the crisis. And this is where the diversity, the depth of cooperation that we have with Fast Retailing is very important and serves as a model for other similar partnerships in the private sector. It would be great if this model can be replicated by other companies in Japan and around the world, because with these opportunities, people forced to flee can go on to build a brighter future for themselves and their communities.



**Filippo Grandi**

Elected by the General Assembly, Filippo Grandi became the 11th UN High Commissioner for Refugees on January 1, 2016. He leads UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, which operates in 135 countries providing protection and assistance to more than 82 million refugees, returnees, internally displaced people, as well as stateless people. Mr. Grandi, an Italian national, has been engaged in international cooperation for 35 years and holds degrees in modern history and philosophy, as well as an honorary doctorate from the University of Coventry.

