



**UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency

# PROTECTION BRIEF INDONESIA

# Operational Context

Indonesia is host to 12,779 refugees and asylum-seekers (7,236 families) residing primarily in urban areas throughout the Indonesian archipelago. Almost half of all refugees and asylum seekers are from Afghanistan, followed by Myanmar, Somalia, and 50 other countries. UNHCR has a country office in Jakarta and field offices in Aceh, Medan, Makassar, Pekanbaru, and Tanjung Pinang.

While Indonesia is not signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, there are provisions for refugee protection embedded within domestic law (including the 1945 Constitution, the 1999 Human Rights Law, and the 2016 Presidential Regulation on the Handling of Refugees) and Indonesia generally respects the right to seek asylum and the principle of non-refoulement. UNHCR continues to work to advance opportunities for refugee inclusion and participation in Indonesia, including by seeking to improve access to self-reliance and to national education, health, civil registration, and social systems.

The management of refugees in Indonesia is largely assigned by the Indonesian Government to UNHCR<sup>1</sup> and IOM, the latter through a Regional Cooperation Agreement (RCA) established between Indonesia, the Government of Australia, and IOM in 2000. Through the RCA, approximately 47% of the refugee population in Indonesia is residing in IOM-managed accommodation centers throughout the country. 43% of the refugee population – largely those who arrived in Indonesia after 2017 – are residing in independent accommodation and, with the exception of the most vulnerable, do not receive financial support for food, rent, and basic needs. 10% of the refugee population is comprised of Rohingya refugees who arrived recently by boat and are living in temporary shelters in Aceh and North Sumatra.

Indonesia’s National Refugee Task Force, established in 2019, remains an important Government entity in the management of refugee affairs. Deputy V in POLHUKAM is the head of the National Refugee Task Force and members include the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and a wide range of security-focused actors. Several local refugee task forces operate in provinces hosting refugees and remain active and important counterparts. UNHCR also works with a range of partners in Indonesia, particularly IOM, Church World Services (CWS), Catholic Relief Services (CRS), and YKMI in several areas of protection and assistance. In addition, UNHCR works with non-governmental, civil society and refugee-led organizations, as well as other UN agencies working with and advocating for the rights of the refugee population in Indonesia.



<sup>1</sup> UNHCR has a host country agreement with the Government of Indonesia since 1979.

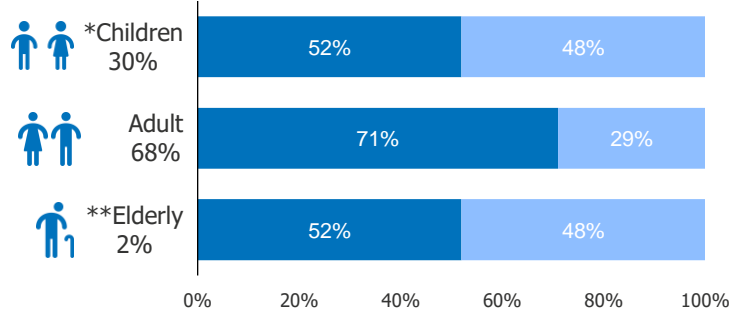
# Protection Brief in Graphics



**Total Population:**  
**12,779 Individuals**  
**(7,236 Cases)**

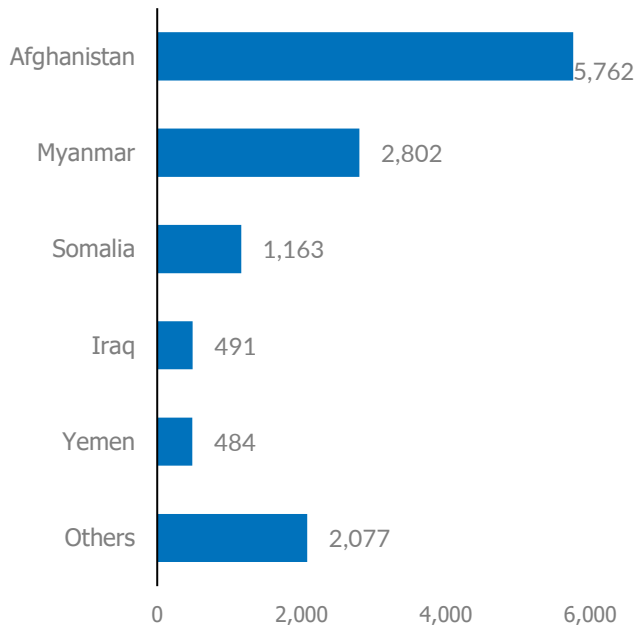
## Population based on Age and Gender

■ Male ■ Female

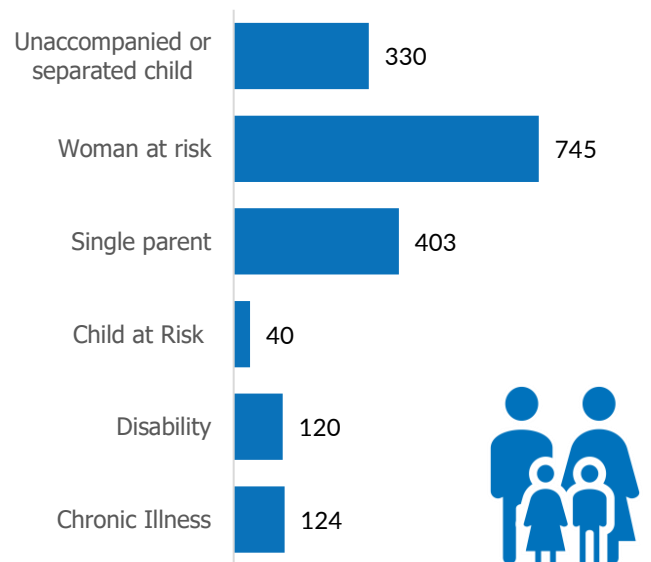


\*Between 0-17 years old \*\* Above 60 years old

## Population based on Country of Origin



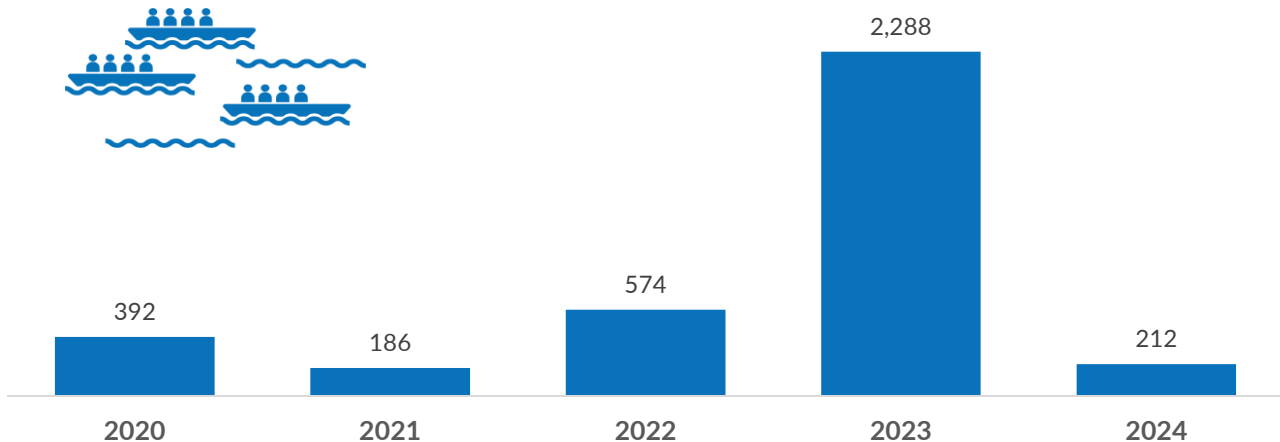
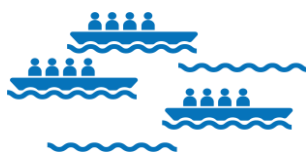
## Vulnerabilities\*



\*One individual may have multiple specific needs

## Rohingya Boat Arrivals Trends

### Pre-registration figures



# Key Protection Work

## Registration and Documentation

UNHCR Indonesia undertakes registration of persons seeking asylum in Indonesia on behalf of the Government of Indonesia and issues identity documentation. Registration interviews are primarily conducted in-person for verification of biometric data and relevant records. Most registration interviews take place at the Reception Center in Jakarta or during accommodation visits/missions by the respective field team for individuals residing in remote locations. In 2023, 2,547 individuals (1,324 cases) were registered by UNHCR Indonesia, which includes 1,225 Rohingya refugees registered during emergency registration missions following boat disembarkations in Aceh in November and December 2023. In 2022, UNHCR Indonesia started a UNHCR ID card distribution programme in field locations in partnership with CRS and Kantor Pos, which significantly enhanced distribution of physical ID cards to refugees in remote locations. UNHCR Indonesia provides continuous registration services to registered refugees and asylum-seekers and maintains updated personal data in our internal database to ensure vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers are identified for protection intervention and solutions.

## Refugee Status Determination

In the absence of comprehensive national refugee laws and national RSD processes, UNHCR undertakes refugee status determination (RSD) directly in Indonesia (“mandate RSD”). As asylum-seekers have access to the same rights and services as refugees in Indonesia, UNHCR uses RSD strategically for individuals with an immediate third country solution which requires refugee recognition (resettlement and some complementary pathways), cases with heightened protection concerns, and cases presenting particular complexities that need to be clarified through the RSD process. UNHCR also conducts RSD as part of its emergency response in the context of Rohingya boat arrivals to quickly identify those needing international protection as opposed to those moving for other reasons. In 2023, UNHCR Indonesia finalized RSD decisions for 439 individuals.

## Child Protection

UNHCR and partners provide case management assistance to support children who are unaccompanied or separated from traditional caregivers or who are suffering from violence, exploitation, and neglect. UNHCR works with partners, including government partners, to assist children with heightened protection needs by providing legal assistance, safety and security, and psychological and health interventions as needed. UNHCR works with CWS, our implementing partner, to provide assistance to unaccompanied children (UAC) in a Semi-Independent Living Care Arrangement (SILCA) through which UAC are accommodated in a rented room and their basic needs are covered. In response to the emergency situation in Aceh, UNHCR has identified 140 UAC, child spouses, and other children at risk and is undertaking Best Interest Assessments (BIA) for these children to better understand their needs and determine a protection approach that best addresses those needs.

## Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

UNHCR conducts case management support for survivors of gender-based violence and refers them to support services with their consent. Assistance may include medical care, psychosocial support, temporary safe accommodation, assistance to report to police and in any legal process, and interventions to protect impacted children, if required. UNHCR and CRS run a GBV hotline that can be accessed by survivors of GBV 24 hours/day. Since July 2023, UNHCR has conducted a GBV prevention program that seeks to increase awareness of the root causes of GBV and to build the capacity of the community to prevent and respond to GBV by Engaging Men in Accountable Practices (EMAP).

## Legal Support

UNHCR provides support to refugees and asylum seekers experiencing legal protection concerns, including individuals seeking international protection at air and sea borders who are unable to access Indonesian territory, individuals at risk of deportation/refoulement, individuals who are victims or accused perpetrators of crimes in Indonesia, and those with other legal concerns in the country. The Legal Protection Hotline is available for individuals experiencing an emergency in Indonesia, particularly when they are at risk of refoulement, arrest, and detention.

## Financial Assistance

UNHCR assists a small number of extremely vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers with cash support to help meet basic needs. Together with partners, UNHCR conducts a socio-economic assessment of cases that have been identified as requiring financial assistance. Those cases that have heightened needs are presented to a Socio-Economic and Health Panel (comprised of CRS, CWS, JRS, and UNHCR) for a determination of inclusion in the cash program. Those who qualify receive up to six months of cash assistance, following which a re-assessment is required to determine continued needs. In 2024, UNHCR is providing cash assistance to 408 households (1199 individuals). The cash program ranges from approximately IDR 1,305,000 (80 USD) for single individuals up to a maximum of IDR 3,165,000 (211 USD) for families of six and above.

## Economic Empowerment

Refugees are not legally permitted to work in Indonesia. UNHCR advocates for refugees to be given access to livelihoods opportunities and works with partners to create community empowerment and self-reliance programs that benefit Indonesians and refugees. These programs include vocational trainings and entrepreneurship that also promote economic development in Indonesia, including a Ready4Business project with ILO, an organic farming project, and an IT/digital marketing workshop. At the first Global Refugee Forum (GRF) in December 2019, the Indonesian Government pledged support to refugee productivity and empowerment activities. This commitment was confirmed in the second Global Refugee Forum in December 2023. In September 2023, the Ministry of Manpower issued a Circular Note allowing refugee participation in skills training programs at government training centers. The Circular and GRF commitment will serve as pivotal entry points to advance economic empowerment in 2024.

## Education

The Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology issued a Circular Note in 2019, with amendments in 2022, allowing refugees and asylum seekers to access formal and informal education, from primary level to secondary level, in the national education system. Enrollment in local schools requires a valid UNHCR document and competency in Indonesian language. UNHCR and our partners provide preparation classes, covering Indonesian language and basic skills (reading, writing, and math), as well as additional support (tuition fees, transport allowance and school supplies) to assist children to access local schools. IOM similarly supports refugee children living in IOM accommodations. Challenges to increase enrolment rates among refugee children include limited interest on the part of refugee children to learn Indonesian, financial barriers, resettlement expectations, the inability to obtain official documentation certifying completion of school (due to the lack of an Indonesian identification number), and inadequate physical space within classrooms to accommodate non-Indonesian children. As a result of these and other challenges, as of 2024, only 960 refugee children (of 3,035 school age children) are enrolled in accredited national schools.

## Health

UNHCR is committed to ensuring that refugees and asylum seekers have access to improved lifesaving and life-sustaining health services. To achieve this, UNHCR continues to advocate with the Ministry of Health for the inclusion of refugees in the national health system, working towards the achievement of SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being). All registered asylum seekers and refugees have access to low-cost primary health care at the local Community Health Centers (PUSKESMAS), managed by the Government of Indonesia. Individuals requiring emergency or advanced health treatment may be financially supported by UNHCR, through our health partner Church World Service (CWS), within the parameters of established guidelines and budgetary restrictions. UNHCR coverage is limited to critical interventions, mental health services, immunization, natal care, and pediatric care. From January to March 2024, a total of 1,201 healthcare requests were made by refugees, including outpatient, inpatient, psychiatric, counseling, and antiretroviral therapy (ART) needs. Out of these, 650 cases were granted assistance, leaving a gap of 551 unmet requests.

## Solutions - Resettlement

UNHCR Indonesia continues to identify and submit refugees for resettlement consideration. In 2024, 1,000 resettlement spaces have been made available for refugees in Indonesia. UNHCR seeks to ensure the most vulnerable refugees are prioritized for resettlement consideration, assessing heightened specific needs and protection concerns, as well as length of stay in the country, when identifying cases for submission.

## Solutions - Complementary Pathways

UNHCR Indonesia is working to expand access to complementary pathways for refugees in the country and provides information and guidance to refugees who may be eligible for these programs. Solutions through complementary pathways have increased in recent years, from no individual departures on pathways in 2020 to over 300 departures in 2023. UNHCR recognizes and amplifies the link between access to education, skills building, and empowerment activities in Indonesia with improved access to education and labour mobility pathways in third countries. In this way, continued success with these pathways also serves to reinforce and enhance advocacy with Indonesian authorities on the importance of access to opportunities while in Indonesia. Since mid-2021, UNHCR has collaborated with Talent Beyond Boundaries (TBB) and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) on a project that matches refugee candidates in Indonesia with employers in Australia and Canada to offer employment and a pathway to residency through labour mobility. In 2023, 328 individuals departed on a sponsorship pathway, eight refugees departed to a third country on family reunification, and seven refugees departed to Canada and Australia on labour mobility programs (another 18 were accepted in 2023 and pending departure at the end of the year).

## Solutions - Voluntary Repatriation

UNHCR facilitates voluntary repatriation for refugees and asylum seekers who request to return to their countries of origin, with arrangements often made in close cooperation with IOM through its assisted voluntary return program. During the course of 2023, 95 refugees repatriated voluntarily from Indonesia. Voluntary repatriation is impacted by ongoing conflicts and human rights violations in countries of origin, which renders many unable to safely return home and limits interest in repatriation.

# 2024 Protection Challenges

## Access to Territory

From mid-November 2023 to date, 13 boats carrying 1,964 Rohingya refugees (73% of whom are women and children) have landed in Aceh and North Sumatra, Indonesia. According to information provided to UNHCR by the new arrivals, the increase in the number of individuals undertaking the sea journey in recent months has been driven by a number of factors, including increasing insecurity in the camps in Bangladesh; a decrease in the cost of the sea journey; continued instability in Myanmar; and a lack of progress in creating conditions that would enable return to Myanmar, including addressing the root causes of Rohingya displacement.

While many Indonesians remain supportive of and sympathetic to the challenges facing Rohingya refugees, the most recent boat arrivals have met unprecedented resistance in Indonesia. Some boats were initially prevented from disembarking, some of those disembarked have been met with rejection by local communities, and many of those who have disembarked have yet to be allocated an adequate shelter by Indonesian authorities. As a result, hundreds of refugees who have disembarked in recent months are currently living in extremely perilous, overcrowded, and substandard conditions in which the protection and assistance response is compromised.

With partners, UNHCR continues to advocate with the Indonesian government at all levels and works to strengthen relationships with coastal communities to ensure boats in distress at sea are rescued and able to disembark in Indonesia and that adequate sites are designated to host refugees who arrive by sea.

In addition to arrivals by sea, UNHCR remains concerned about access to territory for individuals seeking international protection who arrive to Indonesia by air and indicate a desire to seek asylum at the border. There have been several situations in recent years in which individuals indicating a need for international protection at the international zone of Indonesian airports have been denied entry and returned to the locations from which they came.

## Transit Narrative

The refugee population and the host government continue to characterize Indonesia as a “transit country” – a way station prior to the realization of a solution in a third country. The Regional Cooperation Agreement (RCA) model and disproportionately high resettlement opportunities from Indonesia have only served to perpetuate this narrative. The pervasive and persistent misconception regarding the extent to which refugees are entitled to resettlement and the belief that, with time, resettlement will be accessible for all refugees in the country has a negative impact on the refugee population and the protection space in Indonesia.

While there have been some important advancements in refugee inclusion, the characterization of the refugee experience in Indonesia as a transient one creates little impetus for policy makers to develop comprehensive and inclusive protection policies. For refugees, resettlement expectations have discouraged engagement in constructive experiences in Indonesia, including education, training, skills building, and self-empowerment opportunities; fostered a sense of unfairness, anxiety, and frustration; led to a deterioration in mental health; and eroded trust in UNHCR and partners. UNHCR’s efforts to work with and for the refugee community are also undermined by the unique focus on resettlement in the country, impacting outreach and communication efforts, the prioritization of human and financial resources, staff security, and programming.

## Lack of Access to Work Opportunities

Refugees are unable to work legally in Indonesia, creating economic vulnerabilities and compounding protection risks for the refugee population. In addition to economic insecurity, lack of access to formal work impacts refugees in a number of ways: informal work experiences may render refugees vulnerable to exploitation and abuse by employers; refugees are more prone to engage in income-generating activities that are harmful to them; the stress and pressure of economic insecurity within the family may lead to a deterioration of mental health and resulting protection incidents within the home, including physical and sexual abuse and neglect; children are kept from school due to difficulties paying for incidental school expenses; refugees have limited opportunities to productively engage in Indonesia by developing and utilizing skills and capacities in an employment setting, impacting both the quality of their experience in the host country and opportunities to access a third country solution through labor mobility; barriers to accessing the workplace also limit opportunities to meaningfully interact with Indonesians, impacting social cohesion between refugees and their hosts; refugees are unable to make positive contributions to the Indonesian economy while residing in the country; etc.

## Smuggling and Trafficking

Refugees access Indonesia through the air and sea, often requiring the assistance of more knowledgeable individuals to facilitate their travel to reach asylum. As a result, many refugees in Indonesia, particularly Rohingya arriving by boats, travel to the country with the assistance of agents. In previous years, many Rohingya who arrived to Indonesia by boat – approximately 80% - departed soon after arrival to Malaysia, where a large Rohingya community resides and more robust employment opportunities, albeit informal opportunities, exist. UNHCR is increasingly concerned about information that some refugees in Indonesia – particularly Rohingya in Aceh and North Sumatra – are being victimized by traffickers during their journey to Indonesia or during onward movement after arrival in the country. Refugees have reported numerous protection incidents that took place during their movement to, through, and from Indonesia, including gender-based violence, physical abuse, exploitation, harassment, intimidation, and extortion. UNHCR monitors the movement of refugees to assess trends and identify protection risks, to engage with Indonesian authorities to respond to reports of trafficking, and to counsel on the risks of onward movement.

## Ensuring Protection with Resource Limitations

Indonesia is host to a relatively small number of refugees and asylum seekers, but they reside over a wide geographical area in a country of 17,000 islands. While approximately half of the refugee population lives in Jakarta and the surrounding areas, the other half is spread throughout the archipelago. In addition, half of the population receives accommodation, basic assistance, and other support from IOM, through the modalities put in place by the Regional Cooperation Agreement. The UNHCR operation in Indonesia is a small one, both in terms of staffing and resources, and the distribution of refugees across this large territory creates unique challenges in ensuring UNHCR is responsive, available, and accountable to the refugee population in the country. Noting the geographical restrictions, UNHCR's current financial challenges, and the existing IOM program, UNHCR continues to assess how the organization can best prioritize efforts and resources where they will be most impactful both in supporting refugees who are most in need and in advancing the protection environment in the country.



# 2024 Opportunities

## Improved Protection Environment

While it is not a signatory to the Refugee Convention, Indonesia generally respects international and domestic refugee law, particularly the principle of non-refoulement, and has demonstrated critical humanitarian leadership in the region by consistently stepping forward to disembark boats carrying Rohingya refugees. 2024 presents important opportunities to further advance the protection environment in the country, including the planned revision of a key domestic refugee law and the new policies and priorities of recently elected national leaders.

The National Refugee Taskforce has initiated inter-ministry discussions on the revision of Presidential Regulation 125 of 2016. This Regulation provides the foundation for ensuring refugees' access to asylum and assigns UNHCR a key role in the management of asylum claims and solutions. UNHCR's recommendations for consideration in the revision have focused on the need for clarifying and expanding the decree's scope to ensure a strong refugee protection framework in Indonesia, including protection safeguards that ensure entry to safe territory through channels other than the sea; increasing joint activities with the Government, particularly in registration and documentation; and advancing inclusion efforts in the country.

Indonesia elected a new president and vice president in March 2024. This new government offers an opportunity to renew and expand Indonesia's humanitarian leadership on refugee issues. The country is a regional and global power – the fourth largest country by population in the world, the largest majority Muslim country in the world, the largest economy in southeast Asia, and recent leadership roles as the President of the G20 and the Chair of ASEAN. Advocacy efforts will seek to ensure Indonesia does not solely embrace political, economic, and military leadership, but that the country also showcases independent humanitarian leadership – particularly on refugee issues.

## UN Common Pledge

The UN Common Pledge offers new opportunities to strengthen the protection environment in Indonesia. At the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, several agencies in the UN Country Team (UNHCR, IOM, UNFPA, WHO, UNDP, ILO, UNICEF, FAO, and UNESCO) pledged to provide guidance, technical support, and advocacy to enable refugee inclusion in Indonesia in four key areas: education, health, self-reliance, and birth registration. UNHCR will work closely with these agencies in 2024 and beyond to secure inclusive policies and an enabling protection environment in the country.

## Enhancing Engagement with Refugees

UNHCR will continue to expand the ways in which we engage with refugees in 2024. A cornerstone of these activities is the rollout of the Digital Gateway, a corporate self-service tool being piloted in Indonesia that will address many of the concerns of the refugee community, as well as the geographic challenges in Indonesia, by providing a platform through which refugees can remotely communicate with UNHCR, view their bio-data, update contact information, book appointments for services, and obtain updates on case processing status.

In addition to the Digital Gateway, UNHCR is strengthening tools of engagement and communication with the refugee community following several years of more limited engagement resulting from COVID restrictions and security challenges in the field. These initiatives include re-instituting walk-in counseling at the UNHCR reception center; revitalizing the UNHCR HELP website; expanding refugee Town Halls to respond to queries and share information; undertaking regular outreach missions to

meet refugees where they are living; and engaging refugee Outreach Volunteers to identify and refer protection concerns and serve as conduits of information to and from the refugee community.

### **Verification Exercise**

UNHCR will undertake a country-wide verification exercise in 2024. The project, which will take place from May-December in refugee-hosting areas throughout the country, will enable UNHCR staff to systematically connect with and update registration data for every refugee and asylum seeker in Indonesia. UNHCR protection/registration teams will update family composition and record information on specific needs and vulnerabilities, skills, work experience, education levels, and family connections outside Indonesia. The information collected will provide a clean and accurate set of data that will enable UNHCR to better develop and target programming for the refugee population and will assist in identifying individuals who may qualify for solutions outside Indonesia.