

Malaysia

Multi-year Strategy 2025 – 2027



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1.1 Executive Summary

The protection environment for refugees in Malaysia is likely to remain challenging in 2025, as the lingering socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and global economic uncertainties continue to disproportionately affect refugee communities. UNHCR's primary focus in Malaysia will be pursuing the implementation of an inclusive national policy and legal framework for refugees. This could have significant ramifications for their access to legal work, healthcare and education, as well as the detention of forcibly displaced and stateless people for immigration offences.

Although Malaysia is not expected to become party to international refugee and statelessness conventions in 2025, efforts to address the refugees' situation in Malaysia will likely be implemented through a national security prism and will be contingent on the social and political landscape, as well as the discourse on refugees. Within this context, opportunities for UNHCR to engage with authorities on developing an inclusive national policy and legal framework for refugees will be accelerated. UNHCR will work with authorities to incrementally enhance their leadership role in the registration processing of refugees, while continuing to process asylum claims in a way that best protects those most in need. With Malaysia assuming Chairmanship of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in 2025, opportunities for stronger advocacy on refugee issues at the regional level will be created.

In the immediate term, UNHCR will seek to improve refugees' access to national services, justice and social protection mechanisms. A community-based protection team will establish and train a network of volunteers and NGO partners to act as first responders in accurately and efficiently addressing refugees' diverse protection needs. They will also receive training on how to implement survivor-centred approaches to child protection and gender-based violence. This approach will expand UNHCR's reach beyond its physical presence in Kuala Lumpur, ensuring timely and effective responses.

In line with the sustainable responses and whole of society and government approaches, UNHCR will cultivate new partnerships with local authorities, civil society, academia and the private sector. UNHCR will form strategic partnerships with the private sector to create legal job opportunities and improve access to financial and digital services for refugees. This approach aligns with the Global Compact on Refugees' call for broader engagement and builds on the strong interest shown by civil society in supporting refugees since the pandemic. UNHCR will also seek new partnerships to prevent and reduce statelessness, building on momentum from recent

court decisions and government commitments to eliminate gender discrimination in nationality laws.

UNHCR will continue submitting refugees for resettlement consideration while these opportunities exist. It will advocate for greater responsibility-sharing, more inclusive policies and increased asylum space. In tandem, it will pursue complementary pathways for refugees with education, employment or family link prospects in third countries, particularly within the region. Such pathways will not only help secure durable solutions for refugees but also advance UNHCR's regional strategy for the Myanmar situation through more inclusive measures in Malaysia.

1.2 Situation Analysis

Malaysia has experienced social and political changes in recent years, including a general election in 2022 and state elections in 2023. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and economic uncertainty compounded by the conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East are expected to continue disproportionately affecting refugee communities. The unpredictable situation in Myanmar and Afghanistan will likely cause further forced displacement into Malaysia, where 88% of the 191,832 refugees and asylum-seekers registered with UNHCR in Malaysia as of September 2024 are from Myanmar.

The Malaysian Government's approach to refugee issues is unlikely to change significantly in 2025 with no expected accession to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1954 Convention relating the Status of Stateless Persons. Currently, refugees and asylum-seekers, particularly new arrivals, have limited or no access to justice or detention alternatives. Without legal status, refugees and asylum-seekers will continue to face difficulties accessing their basic rights and services. While some form of access to legal work may be considered for refugees, most asylum-seekers and refugees will continue to rely on informal work, and children of forcibly displaced and stateless people will remain unable to enrol in government schools and access to other public services will stay limited.

In light of this difficult landscape, UNHCR will continue to advocate more inclusive refugee policies while simultaneously pursuing resettlement opportunities and other responsibility-sharing mechanisms such as complementary education and employment pathways. With new arrivals expected from Myanmar, efforts to improve the protection environment and develop more inclusive policies will remain crucial.

Statelessness is another significant challenge in Malaysia with no expected accession to the 1954 Convention and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. This will make it harder for stateless people to acquire nationality. However, recent court rulings have challenged the legality of gender discriminatory nationality laws and the Government has committed to addressing this issue through a constitutional amendment.

In line with the Global Compact on Refugees and the UN sustainable development goals (SDGs), UNHCR's approach in 2025 to protecting and securing solutions for refugees and asylum-seekers in Malaysia will focus on reinforcing community-based protection mechanisms to uphold refugees' rights and enhance their resilience. It will ensure access to specialized services for diverse groups with specific needs such as access to quality protection services for children and young people and greater access to quality survivor-centred services while preventing and mitigating gender-based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse risks.

With meaningful two-way communication with communities and community-based complaints mechanisms already in place, UNHCR will continue refining its communication to bolster accountability to affected populations using an age, gender and diversity approach. In 2025, UNHCR will prioritize its work with the government, judiciary, parliament, civil society and other partners to implement a roadmap toward a national asylum framework. This framework aims to protect refugees against refoulement, grant access to basic rights and services and offer alternatives to detention. Until such a framework is in place, UNHCR will use registration, refugee status determination and resettlement case processing approaches to safeguard forcibly displaced and stateless people.

UNHCR will emphasise emerging evidence around refugees' contributions to the Malaysian economy and advocate for their access to national social protection mechanisms, in line with the UN SDGs and the Global Compact on Refugees. It will also support basic protection and assistance, moving toward strategic partnerships rather than direct implementation. It will prioritize securing access to work and affordable healthcare for refugees, highlighting the mutual benefits for refugees and Malaysians alike, as demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the interim, UNHCR will build the capacity of NGOs and civil society to support primary and secondary healthcare (including for HIV), education in refugee learning centres, child protection case management, and access to justice through legal aid and rights awareness programmes as well as continued engagement with judicial mechanisms. It will seek support from local authorities and the private sector while providing cash assistance to those with increased protection needs. UNHCR will also focus on the strategic processing of forcibly displaced people to ensure that those with heightened protection risks have access to protection and solutions.

UNHCR will monitor developments in Myanmar, enhance early warning capacities, and advocate for access to territory, including predictable and safe disembarkation for sea journeys. It will also support Malaysia's engagement in regional and ASEAN's efforts to address the root causes of displacement, including statelessness in Myanmar. As part of this effort, UNHCR will utilise data from the UN's mapping of undocumented populations in Sabah to prevent and reduce statelessness in the years ahead.

Lastly, UNHCR will offer technical support to policymakers and civil society, advocating for the alignment of citizenship laws and policies with international protection standards and addressing gender inequality in nationality laws. It will also highlight the negative economic and development implications of statelessness, advocating for comprehensive reforms.

1.3 Vision and Strategic Orientation

Developments in the operational context have led UNHCR to reorient its 2023-2025 Multiyear Strategy and focus on breaking the cycle of human mobility or displacement through effective access to rights and meaningful life options across all prioritized population groups.

To achieve this, UNHCR will pursue a holistic and collaborative approach, interconnected across Impact and Outcome areas, with a focus on advancing the triple nexus in favour of at-risk and affected populations. This approach will require UNHCR to work directly with, and strengthen the capacities of, key institutional counterparts and communities. Furthermore, the strategy requires close coordination with other humanitarian and development stakeholders across the UN System, NGOs and civil society, as well as academic and private sectors. UNHCR will also leverage its coordination leadership and co-leadership roles – such as the Protection and Shelter/Energy/NFI clusters, as well as working groups related to Human Mobility and Reintegration, Disaster Risk Reduction, and Partnerships and Financing – while actively participating in the coordination spaces led by other actors.

Within and across each component of the results framework, the revised strategy pursues simultaneous and complementary advances to: i) prevent or mitigate risks and vulnerabilities associated with human mobility and displacement; ii) strengthen the protection environment and response capacity for displaced people and other population groups at heightened risk; and iii) prepare the groundwork, or advance on existing opportunities, for durable solutions amid a fluid and dynamic context.

Based on the above, the intended impacts of the revised strategy and results framework include:

1) People with and for whom UNHCR works meet their basic needs while their exposure to protection risks is reduced. Through awareness-raising, as well as technical support for preparedness and mitigation, it is intended that risks can be reduced, if not prevented. The development and implementation of contingency and response protocols will have the specific objective of maximizing the efficiency and effectiveness of response when emergencies or other situations requiring immediate assistance occur. To that end, UNHCR will invest in institutional and community capacity-building opportunities as well as stakeholder coordination and complementarity.

2) Affected populations have increased access to, and enjoyment of, fundamental rights. UNHCR aims to improve access to rights through awareness-raising, information and orientation, capacity-building, as well as the direct provision of complementary services in coordination with key stakeholders. Intended impacts include increased access to documentation, improved prevention and response to gender-based violence, as well as strengthened protective environments for children and adolescents.

3) Affected populations become self-reliant and reintegrate, and those with international protection needs access local integration, voluntary repatriation and resettlement. Intended impacts related to solutions will be pursued on multiple fronts, including: i) facilitating meaningful life options for people returning to, or at risk of, departing from Venezuela; ii) removing barriers to local integration for asylum-seekers and refugees as well as; iii) supporting voluntary repatriation for refugees who voluntarily opt to leave the country.

UNHCR's strategy is aligned with other strategic and response frameworks, such as Objectives 1-3 of the HRP, Strategic Priorities 1-3 of the UNSDCF which itself is aligned to the National Development Plan (Plan de la Patria), and Objectives 1, 2 and 4 of the GCR. In line with the Global Compact and UN SDGs, UNHCR will take a holistic approach to cultivating a more favourable protection environment for refugees, reinforcing the need for a national policy and legal protection framework to uphold refugees' rights and improve their access to basic protection, livelihoods, healthcare and education. This will include advocating for access to legal work and inclusion in national social protection mechanisms. By enhancing resettlement and enhanced community-based programmes, UNHCR seeks to bolster refugees' self-reliance, promote social cohesion and ease pressures on host communities. As part of the Myanmar situation, UNHCR will work to implement a regional comprehensive solutions strategy while reviewing contingency plans based on developments in the country.

UNHCR's strategic priorities in Malaysia centre on effective case management, robust advocacy, expanded partnerships and placing communities at the heart of its response. This entails building synergies between refugee and host communities and strengthening engagement with government entities at all levels, civil society, NGOs

and the private sector. Underpinning these engagements are community-based protection approaches and stronger mechanisms to communicate with communities.

Efforts to develop a comprehensive national policy and asylum framework will continue, alongside establishing a formal data sharing agreement to facilitate joint refugee registration. UNHCR will also work with partners to secure legal stay arrangements for refugees, coupled with access to legal employment. It will develop parliamentarians' understanding of how refugees' inclusion in national systems and the economy can contribute to Malaysia's pursuit of the SDGs.

In parallel, UNHCR will provide essential protection and assistance, focusing on documentation and addressing refugees' specific needs based on age, gender and diversity (AGD) factors. Rather than directly implementing activities, UNHCR will empower partners and communities to take on greater roles as first responders. Cash assistance will continue to provide a safety net for those most in need and will remain essential to UNHCR's programming in Malaysia.

Within the UN country team, UNHCR will work towards including refugees in development planning and actively contribute to the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, including on climate-related issues. A priority will be advocating for access to civil registration for refugees and nationality documents for stateless people as well as enhancing access to justice. Simultaneously, UNHCR will advocate for forcibly displaced and stateless people to have greater access to basic protection, health and education services by promoting their inclusion in national social protection mechanisms.

In 2025, UNHCR will use resettlement and complementary pathways to expand the protection space. Strategic approaches to processing resettlement applications will provide more effective protection for the most vulnerable refugees and maximise new resettlement opportunities for longer-term sustainable solutions. To foster more positive public discourse on refugees and asylum-seekers, UNHCR will implement a communications strategy aimed at mitigating xenophobic rhetoric, emphasising refugees' contributions to Malaysian society and accurately representing the realities for people seeking asylum.

1.4 Fair Access and Representation

In line with UNHCR's strategic objectives and its commitment to ensuring equitable support for forcibly displaced people, regardless of their age, gender, or diversity (AGD), UNHCR Malaysia will build on past initiatives and enhance communication with communities. UNHCR will continue to expand and improve its communication with communities, information sharing and feedback mechanisms through a wide range of

channels, including social media, digital platforms, in-person meetings with communities, call centres, SMS systems and outreach volunteer networks.

Alongside regular consultations with refugee leaders, UNHCR and partners will step up dialogue with young people, women, older people and people with disabilities to better understand, identify, and respond to their specific needs. These consultations will empower different segments of the community, encouraging their active involvement in addressing protection challenges and advancing solutions. UNHCR will also strengthen engagement with women and their active participation in leadership and community management structures.

To mainstream AGD considerations throughout the programming cycle, UNHCR will build the capacity of its technical units and key partners on adopting rights and community-based approaches. Integral to the implementation of this approach will be reciprocal feedback and reporting systems, which will strengthen data collation for organizational learning and adaptation. This will help ensure refugees are able to access relevant, quality assistance, protection and solutions.

Efforts to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse will be enhanced to ensure accessible, safe and confidential community-based reporting mechanisms. In line with the leave no one behind principle, and the framework of the United Nations country team, UNHCR in Malaysia will prioritize including refugees in the implementation of the UN SDGs.

2. Impact Statements

Impact statement

By 2025, asylum-seekers will have access to territory and asylum procedures, refugees will enjoy access to basic rights, and stateless people will access nationality procedures

Impact area: Attaining favourable protection environments

Outcome statements

By 2025, refugees benefit from wider access to protection and durable solutions through the strategic application of refugee status determination, while advocacy for a national asylum policy/framework continues

Outcome area: Refugee status determination

By 2025, the quality of reception, registration, documentation and profiling for 65,000 people is better and access to territory is maintained annually

Outcome area: Access to territory, registration and documentation

By 2025, the risks related to the arrest and detention of asylum-seekers and refugees, including children, are fewer with greater access to justice and legal assistance

Outcome area: Safety and access to justice

By 2025, laws and policies on refugee protection and nationality acquisition are established and strengthened

Outcome area: Protection policy and law

Impact statement

By 2025, more refugees can exercise their rights to meet basic needs and affordable healthcare, either under a national policy framework that grants refugees access to legal work and national protection systems (including healthcare) or, until such a framework is in place, through a more robust network of alternative assistance, protection services and healthcare providers

Impact area: Realizing rights in safe environments

Outcome statements

By 2025, access to affordable comprehensive health services has improved through stronger multi-sectoral collaboration, capacity building and expanded strategic partnerships

Outcome area: Healthy lives

By 2025, refugees and asylum-seekers with heightened risks can access support services that provide timely assistance to meet basic and essential needs

Outcome area: Well-being and basic needs

Impact statement

By 2025, more refugees will have opportunities for growth and self-reliance, and are protected from violence, exploitation, and abuse, through strengthened and expanded community-based feedback and support mechanisms and outreach interventions

Impact area: Empowering communities and achieving gender equality

Outcome statements

By 2025, there is a framework that includes provisions for legal work opportunities and for improved livelihoods prospects

Outcome area: Self-reliance, economic inclusion and livelihoods

By 2025, community mobilization is strengthened and expanded through the establishment of trained community volunteers and the expansion of outreach centres and mobile community outreach services. This will lead to greater participation of women and young people, reinforcing UNHCR's commitment to a multi-faceted approach to accountability to affected people

Outcome area: Community engagement and women's empowerment

By 2025, the risk of sexual and gender-based violence is reduced and the response to survivors is strengthened through enhanced community-based approaches and quality, survivor-centred services

Outcome area: Gender-based violence

By 2025, children protection is enhanced through tailored individual and community-based services with increased access to national social protection

Outcome area: Child protection

By 2025, education opportunities have expanded with sustained support, and efforts continue to include asylum-seeker and refugee children in the national education system

Outcome area: Education

Impact statement

By 2025, refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless people will have access to sustainable solutions, through voluntary repatriation, resettlement, complementary pathways, nationality procedures, and inclusion in national social protection mechanisms

Impact area: Securing solutions

Outcome statements

By 2025, refugees and asylum-seekers expressing interest to voluntarily return to their country of origin benefit from information and individual counselling

Outcome area: Voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration

By 2025, refugees identified with heightened vulnerabilities and resettlement needs are submitted for resettlement consideration in a timely manner, while others are assisted to access complementary pathways initiatives

Outcome area: Resettlement and complementary pathways

3. Malaysia 2025 Indicators and Targets

Country	Results Level	Result Area	Indicator	Population Type	Baseline	Target 2025
Malaysia	Impact	IA1: Protect	1.1 Proportion of people seeking international protection who are able to	Refugees and Asylum-	10%	Not applicable

			access asylum procedures	seekers		
Malaysia	Impact	IA2: Respond	2.2 Proportion of people residing in physically safe and secure settlements with access to basic facilities	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	52%	Not applicable
Malaysia	Impact	IA2: Respond	2.3 Proportion of people with access to health services	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	91%	Not applicable
Malaysia	Impact	IA3: Empower	3.1 Proportion of people who have the right to decent work	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	0%	Not applicable
Malaysia	Impact	IA3: Empower	3.2a Proportion of children and young people enrolled in primary education	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	42%	Not applicable
Malaysia	Impact	IA3: Empower	3.2b Proportion of children and young people enrolled in secondary education	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	31%	Not applicable
Malaysia	Impact	IA3: Empower	3.3 Proportion of people feeling safe walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	40%	Not applicable
Malaysia	Impact	IA4: Solve	4.1 Number of refugees who voluntarily return in safety and dignity to their country of origin	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	135	Not applicable
Malaysia	Impact	IA4: Solve	4.2a Number of people who departed on resettlement	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	6,674	Not applicable
Malaysia	Impact	IA4: Solve	4.2b Number of people who departed through complementary pathways	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	1,572	Not applicable
Malaysia	Impact	IA4: Solve	4.3a Number of stateless people for whom nationality is granted or confirmed	Stateless Persons	2,964	Not applicable
Malaysia	Outcome	OA1: Access/Doc	1.1 Proportion of refugees and asylum seekers registered on	Refugees and	82%	100%

			an individual basis	Asylum-seekers		
Malaysia	Outcome	OA1: Access/Doc	1.2 Proportion of children under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	91%	94%
Malaysia	Outcome	OA1: Access/Doc	1.3 Proportion of people with legally recognized identity documents or credentials	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	98%	94%
Malaysia	Outcome	OA2: Status	2.1 Average processing time (in days) from registration to first instance asylum decision	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	140	270
Malaysia	Outcome	OA2: Status	2.2 Proportion of people undergoing asylum procedures who have access to legal representation	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100%	100%
Malaysia	Outcome	OA2: Status	2.3 Proportion of people undergoing asylum procedures who have access to an effective appeal mechanism after first instance rejection of their claim	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100%	100%
Malaysia	Outcome	OA3: Policy/Law	3.1 Extent national legal framework is in line with the 1951 Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol	None	Not yet aligned: ≤69 points	Progressing towards alignment: 70-89 points
Malaysia	Outcome	OA4: GBV	4.1 Proportion of people who know where to access available GBV services	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	56%	60%
Malaysia	Outcome	OA4: GBV	4.2 Proportion of people who do not accept violence against women	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	97%	100%
Malaysia	Outcome	OA5: Children	5.1 Proportion of children at heightened risk who are supported by a Best Interests Procedure	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	32%	50%
Malaysia	Outcome	OA5: Children	5.2 Proportion of children who participate in community-	Refugees and	17%	40%

			based child protection programmes	Asylum-seekers		
Malaysia	Outcome	OA5: Children	5.3 Proportion of unaccompanied and separated children who are in an alternative care arrangement	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	39%	50%
Malaysia	Outcome	OA7: Community	7.1 Extent participation of displaced and stateless people across programme phases is supported.	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	Extensive: ≥70 points	Extensive: ≥70 points
Malaysia	Outcome	OA7: Community	7.2 Proportion of people who have access to safe feedback and response mechanisms	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	To be confirmed	90%
Malaysia	Outcome	OA7: Community	7.3 Proportion of women participating in leadership/management structures	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	30%	50%
Malaysia	Outcome	OA8: Well-being	8.1 Proportion of people that receive cash transfers and/or non-food items	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	1%	1%
Malaysia	Outcome	OA8: Well-being	8.2 Proportion of people with primary reliance on clean (cooking) fuels and technology	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	94%	94%
Malaysia	Outcome	OA10: Health	10.1 Proportion of children aged 9 months to five years who have received measles vaccination	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	67%	100%
Malaysia	Outcome	OA10: Health	10.2. Proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	99%	100%
Malaysia	Outcome	OA11: Education	11.1 Proportion of young people enrolled in tertiary and higher education	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	1%	3%
Malaysia	Outcome	OA11: Education	11.2 Proportion of children and young people enrolled in the national education system	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	0%	10%

Malaysia	Outcome	OA13: Livelihood	13.1. Proportion of people with an account at a bank or other financial institution or with a mobile-money-service provider	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	13%	15%
Malaysia	Outcome	OA13: Livelihood	13.2. Proportion of people who self-report positive changes in their income compared to previous year	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	4%	6%
Malaysia	Outcome	OA13: Livelihood	13.3 Proportion of people (working age) who are unemployed	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	4%	3%
Malaysia	Outcome	OA15: Resettle	15.1 Number of refugees submitted by UNHCR for resettlement	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	11,578	To be confirmed