

Zambia

Multi-year Strategy 2025 – 2028



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1.1 Executive Summary

UNHCR Zambia's multiyear strategy 2025 to 2028 is ambitious and aims to bring positive changes in the protection and solutions prospects of forcibly displaced and stateless people. Central to this ambition is harmonization of Zambia's legal and administrative frameworks related to refugees with Zambia's National Refugee Policy of 2024. Strengthening and expanding partnerships, gaining more support from international development and national stakeholders to sustain asylum space, improving protection and finding local solutions for refugees is the overarching focus.

While Zambia has shown a commitment to develop policies and improve legal frameworks that support and include forcibly displaced/ stateless people in Zambia, there are considerable obstacles to address if these policies should result in tangible, sustained benefits for those affected. These include implementation gaps, insufficient resource allocation, poor coordination. Difficulties displaced people and hosts face accessing services are exacerbated by their isolation, poor delivery of social services in rural areas, and economic barriers.

Particularly concerning are the hurdles some face to access asylum. Reports of refoulement, unjust detention, lack of due process, discrimination against some, are a concern. Disagreements within government on how existing laws affecting asylum and refugee management should be implemented compound protection gaps. There is a need for the revision of laws to better align them with recent progressive policies and strengthen social service provision to support the rights and protection of forcibly displaced persons and hosts.

Therefore, the strategy outlines measures to advance local solutions that can lead to the integration of displaced and stateless people in Zambia. The emphasis is on safe access to employment, documentation, healthcare, and full cycle education. These are critical to reduce aid dependency and build self-reliance. The strategy emphasizes collaboration with local communities, government agencies, UN/ international partners for inclusive development and effective use of the resources that are provided. This approach aims to foster an environment that promotes cohesion and economic collaboration between forcibly displaced and host communities.

Using donor support, government financing for inclusion, IFI and private sector partnerships, the financial component too reflects multi-partner collaboration. This budgeting approach will allow support to the most vulnerable and sustainable

programming that improves socio-economic conditions for forcibly displaced communities and their integration in national development plans.

Given the impact of mixed movements on asylum space, key pillars of the route-based approach are included in the strategy. It addresses challenges and opportunities along the mixed-movement routes that affect Zambia, focusing on interventions that capacitate government to use a protection-sensitive methods.

Joint plans/initiatives implemented with organizations present in refugee districts and advocacy with donors providing budget support to government will be a focus. Updated, reliable statistical and socio-economic data/information on forcibly displaced persons to support inclusive development is incorporated.

Overall, the strategy aspires to protect and economically empower displaced individuals to be net contributors to Zambia's development. The strategy seeks to support Zambia create a more inclusive, open society where everyone, can contribute. If successful, with UNHCR's support, Zambia will include its forced displacement response within its overall governance structures.

1.2 Situation Analysis

Zambia maintains a tradition of peace and social cohesion between communities and has been relatively stable in comparison with its neighbours. The Government's goals are democratic reforms, economic development, social justice, good governance, and infrastructure development. These progressive goals and the overall social and political stability create an environment with the potential to improve the protection environment and opportunities for long-term solutions for forcibly displaced and stateless people in Zambia.

Recent policy advancements, such as the introduction of the National Refugee Policy in 2024, signify Zambia's efforts to enhance the legal and administrative frameworks for refugees and stateless individuals. UNHCR plays a crucial role in advocacy, coordination, and partnership-building to support the implementation of the Policy and align this with development initiatives. UNHCR is advancing strategic engagement with government entities, UN agencies, IFIs, the private sector, and NGOs to advance protection and solutions objectives.

Translating policies into tangible outcomes requires addressing implementation gaps, emphasizing integration, and mitigating climate-related risks that can set progress back.

Despite Zambia's commitment to refugee protection, challenges persist in ensuring the full implementation of inclusive practices, adequate resource allocation, and effective coordination mechanisms to support forcibly displaced and stateless populations in achieving durable solutions and self-reliance.

Challenges persist in the asylum process with discrepancies between policy and implementation. While asylum access is theoretically available, certain vulnerable groups, such as those facing persecution based on sexual orientation or gender identity, encounter obstacles. Additionally, security agencies involved in screening procedures are reportedly refouling individuals.. Moreover, about 76% of the known forcibly displaced population are mandated by the Minister of Home Affairs, using his powers in the Refugees Act, to reside in one of the three rural settlements in the poorest districts in the country. Exiting these settlements necessitates permission from COR with the issuance of a temporary mobility pass. However, upon venturing outside, refugees risk arrest and detention by law enforcement personnel who refuse to acknowledge their documentation and generally fail to notify COR of their detention. Consequently, COR and UNHCR are forced to allocate already limited financial and staffing resources towards monitoring correctional facilities to secure refugees' release. Regrettably, it is not uncommon for refugees to languish in detention for weeks or even months without reprieve. Refugees running small businesses or employed in temporary/informal jobs face exploitation in the form of extortion by police and immigration officials in order to maintain their places of business or stay in employment. The same exploitation is experienced by those seeking to extend or obtain their mobility. Structured and recorded protection monitoring of these protection risks is required by UNHCR to evidence these rights abuses and bring about changes in administrative practices. The monitoring by UNHCR needs to extend to our Government partner, the Office of the Commissioner for Refugees in the Ministry of Home Affairs and Internal Security. Lack of effective coordination between different government agencies is a significant protection risk that UNHCR will be monitoring more closely.

Additional challenges include limited access to quality services due to remote settlement locations, economic barriers, and movement restrictions, exacerbating vulnerabilities among displaced populations and hosting communities. Where there is poverty, there is increased gender-based violence. COR is unable to effectively engage and influence the appropriate government authorities when refugees allege a broad range of low-level security challenges. Improved access to justice – legal representation, access to court systems, better understanding in judiciary of refugee issues – will strengthen safety and security. Security is further compromised in the settlements by lack of electric power. Electrification and solarization projects, funded by donors, UNHCR and the government, offer opportunities to introduce sustainable green energy solutions. These are part of broader efforts by government, with the support of donors including the anticipated World Bank IDA 20 WHR grant of USD30 million, to modernize refugee documentation and improve facilities in refugee settlements. The government's will to prevent overcrowding of urban areas in Zambia provides an

opportunity for investment into rural areas and established settlements, including where refugees and their host communities live.

As a land-linked country that shares its borders with eight other countries, it is a country of origin, transit and destination for trade, migrants, and refugees in the region. All of which impact its socio-economic, diplomatic and security posture. It is both a refugee and migrant receiving, transit and destination country on the Southern route. The Ministry of Home Affairs and Internal Security through the office of the Commissioner for Refugees (COR) is responsible for the management of the asylum system – registration, status determination and is the government entity primarily responsible for the coordination of government agencies supporting the provision of protection, assistance and security for forcibly displaced people in Zambia. However, COR experiences significant hurdles in fulfilling its core responsibilities due to constraints in budget, staffing, influence and geographical coverage. Moreover, these functions are perceived by other government entities as solely COR's mandate funded by UNHCR, while external stakeholders often regard the asylum process as exclusively humanitarian in nature, divorcing it from considerations of sustainable development and good governance. Consequently, the national asylum system development process frequently falls outside the scope of eligibility for various sources of support.

Zambia's political stability is expected to endure, with smooth electoral processes anticipated. However, escalating forced displacement inside and out of neighboring countries, compounded by economic challenges resulting from the climate crisis, may lead to an increase in growing numbers of new arrivals. Economic strains, such as high fiscal deficits and rising poverty levels, are likely to exacerbate vulnerabilities, affecting public services and fueling incidents of gender-based violence and social unrest. Nevertheless, the government's pledge to prioritize residence permits for former refugees, coupled with initiatives aimed at addressing legal barriers, offers hope for local solutions. Plans for emergency responses will be activated if displacements exceed expected levels, emphasizing the importance of proactive contingency planning and stakeholder engagement.

Opportunities for strengthening protection and solutions in Zambia lie in its progressive policy environment, collaboration with development actors, and international support for sustainable development goals.

1.3 Vision and Strategic Orientation

UNHCR Zambia's strategy is anchored on the following vision which in turn is based on the Global UNHCR Strategic Directions 2022 – 2026, i.e.: UNHCR Zambia and its partners establish a government-led progressive and solutions-oriented national asylum and refugee protection management system, in the context of a wider protection-sensitive immigration system, that by 2028 will see the country's forced displacement

response included in its national planning and budget with targeted support from its international partners.

Guided by this vision and employing the main findings of the situation analysis, UNHCR will pursue the following strategic priorities for solutions, self-reliance and improved protection and asylum practices for forcibly displaced and statelessness people in Zambia.

Strategic Priorities:

1. Facilitate Government action to operationalize the National Refugee Policy focusing on harmonization of legal frameworks, review and revision of the Refugees Act of 2017 and administrative practices.
2. Advocacy with government and civil society for action on local solutions for specific groups of forcibly displaced people in Zambia and support the government to deliver on its 2023 pledge to locally integrate 50% of the refugee children born in Zambia. Facilitate voluntary repatriation, increase opportunities for complementary pathways and maintain a protection-based resettlement programme.
3. Promote long-term and sustained inclusion of refugee hosting areas in socio-economic development programmes of development actors, particularly UN agencies and international development organizations, and refugees' access to decent work and livelihoods opportunities.

By end of the multiyear strategy, it's envisioned that forcibly displaced people will enjoy human rights comparable to the host communities through a strengthened and well-coordinated Government response including strengthened social protection and welfare and enhanced economic independence and resilience.

Progress on the strategic priorities requires that UNHCR support the government to initiate action on its stated commitment to put in place a progressive asylum and refugee management system that employs a whole of government approach for refugee inclusion in national services, local solutions for those eligible and improvements in refugee rights. This support will be provided in the context of wider immigration reform which will focus on the need for protection-sensitivity, particularly in the context of mixed movements. Strategic alliances with development actors will be a focus as will the provision of updated and reliable statistical and socio-economic information on forcibly displaced people to support government and other development actors to effectively and sustainably include forcibly displaced people and their hosts in their development programmes and plans.

1.4 Fair Access and Representation

UNHCR-Zambia will strengthen community-based protection emphasizing age, gender, and diversity. The operation will seek to support forcibly displaced people and their host

communities to organize effective community structures that target women and youth, in particular, to help mitigate protection risks and encourage self-reliance. UNHCR and partners will promote active community participation in identifying and prioritizing protection concerns through volunteer efforts and more local engagement.

The operation will also focus on awareness-raising, information provision, and mobilization of communities through varied channels, including outreach sensitization exercises, digital platforms like help.org, and telephone services like Lifeline/ChildLine. UNHCR will collaborate, guide and support, in partnership with other UN agencies and development actors, the relevant line Ministries and local departments whose function it is provide state services, with a view to strengthening the quality and reach of state services including for refugees and their host communities.

UNHCR will advocate for the sustained inclusion of refugee hosting areas in national and international development programs, emphasizing social protection, gender equality, and access to justice. This will help address, inter alia, the impunity often enjoyed by perpetrators of gender-based violence (GBV) and promote the economic empowerment of women and girls.

The response to the specific challenges faced by LGBTQI+ refugees will continue, with targeted protection interventions, establishment of safe spaces, resources mobilization and advocacy efforts aimed at securing a minimal protection space for individuals facing discrimination based on their sexual orientation or gender identity.

UNHCR will also enhance support for Persons with Disabilities (PwD) amongst the displaced populations by partnering with the Zambia Agency for Persons with Disabilities and other relevant actors. This collaboration will focus on developing inclusive programs and ensuring that community resources and services are accessible to all PwD.

The organization's Age, Gender, and Diversity (AGD) approach will also play a critical role from the reception of new arrivals. It aims to improve data collection and analysis, thus enhancing the overall protection and assistance response. Regular updates to the mapping of community structures and services will aid in identifying priorities and addressing protection risks more effectively. This will also include support for nascent refugee and community-led organizations to boost their capacity for self-protection and resilience.

2. Impact Statements

Impact statement

Forcibly displaced and stateless persons in Zambia enjoy improved international protection from strengthened laws, policies, and practices and non-discriminatory and inclusive essential social services and self-reliance opportunities

Impact area: Attaining favourable protection environments

Outcome statements

Continued access to territory with quality reception and comprehensive registration-incl birth registration and legal identity documentation- that supports inclusion and self-reliance.

Outcome area: Access to territory, registration and documentation

Zambia provides non-discriminatory access to a fair, efficient, and adaptable asylum procedure, (characterized by integrity and full access to legal remedies, with all processes well-documented in proGrees v4).

Outcome area: Refugee status determination

By the end of 2028, the Government of Zambia adopted, amended, and aligned all relevant domestic laws pertaining to forcibly displaced and stateless individuals in line with international standards, thereby facilitating the implementation of comprehensive policies and action plans

Outcome area: Protection policy and law

By the end of 2028, Zambia has strengthened legal and social frameworks that ensure forcibly displaced and stateless persons are protected from detention based on legal status, have increased access to GBV services and legal remedies, and receive inclusive child protection and psychosocial support.

Outcome area: Safety and access to justice

New arrivals and targeted vulnerable persons have access to basic needs and essential services

Outcome area: Well-being and basic needs

Community engagement and empowerment mechanisms strengthened to facilitate forcibly displaced persons and their host communities to be less dependent on aid and more resilient to shocks

Outcome area: Community engagement and women's empowerment

Impact statement

50% of forcibly displaced persons and their host communities achieve sustainable self-reliance and refugees and former refugees equipped to achieve durable solutions, incl. voluntary repatriation, resettlement or local solutions.

Impact area: Securing solutions

Outcome statements

Forcibly displaced persons have equal access to economic rights for sustainable income supported by local development schemes

Outcome area: Self-reliance, economic inclusion and livelihoods

By the end of 2028, forcibly displaced persons and host communities show marked improvements in self-reliance and integration, evidenced by socio-economic resilience, long-term legal status, secure housing, access to the full cycle of education, primary healthcare, and inclusion in national social protection.

Outcome area: Local integration and other local solutions

UNHCR collaborates with partners to support voluntary and dignified return for all refugees expressing a desire to return.

Outcome area: Voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration

The efficiency and scope of resettlement for forcibly displaced persons are substantially improved, with higher number of admissions through complementary pathways.

Outcome area: Resettlement and complementary pathways

3. Zambia 2025 Indicators and Targets

Country	Results Level	Result Area	Indicator	Population Type	Baseline	Target 2025
Zambia	Impact	IA1: Protect	1.1 Proportion of people seeking international protection who are able to access asylum procedures	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100%	Not applicable
Zambia	Impact	IA1: Protect	1.2 Proportion of people who are able to move freely within the country of habitual residence	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	3%	Not applicable
Zambia	Impact	IA2: Respond	2.3 Proportion of people with access to health services	Others of Concern	100%	Not applicable
Zambia	Impact	IA2: Respond	2.3 Proportion of people with access to health services	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	75%	Not applicable
Zambia	Impact	IA3:	3.2a Proportion of children and	Refugees	77%	Not

		Empower	young people enrolled in primary education	and Asylum-seekers		applicable
Zambia	Impact	IA3: Empower	3.2b Proportion of children and young people enrolled in secondary education	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	41%	Not applicable
Zambia	Impact	IA4: Solve	4.1 Number of refugees who voluntarily return in safety and dignity to their country of origin	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	772	Not applicable
Zambia	Impact	IA4: Solve	4.2a Number of people who departed on resettlement	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	878	Not applicable
Zambia	Impact	IA4: Solve	4.2b Number of people who departed through complementary pathways	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	4	Not applicable
Zambia	Impact	IA4: Solve	4.3a Number of stateless people for whom nationality is granted or confirmed	Stateless Persons	0	Not applicable
Zambia	Impact	IA4: Solve	4.3b Number of refugees for whom residency status is granted or confirmed	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	0	Not applicable
Zambia	Outcome	OA1: Access/Doc	1.1 Proportion of refugees and asylum seekers registered on an individual basis	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100%	100%
Zambia	Outcome	OA1: Access/Doc	1.2 Proportion of children under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority	Others of Concern	45%	70%
Zambia	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	35%	70%
Zambia	Outcome	OA1: Access/Doc	1.3 Proportion of people with legally recognized identity documents or credentials	Others of Concern	45%	70%
Zambia	Outcome	OA1:	1.3 Proportion of people with	Refugees	100%	70%

		Access/Doc	legally recognized identity documents or credentials	and Asylum-seekers		
Zambia	Outcome	OA2: Status	2.1 Average processing time (in days) from registration to first instance asylum decision	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	30	30
Zambia	Outcome	OA2: Status	2.2 Proportion of people undergoing asylum procedures who have access to legal representation	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	50%	100%
Zambia	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%	85%
Zambia	Outcome	OA3: Policy/Law	3.1 Extent national legal framework is in line with the 1951 Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol	None	Broadly aligned: ≥90 points	Progressing towards alignment: 70-89 points
Zambia	Outcome	OA3: Policy/Law	3.2 Extent national legal framework is in line with the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness	None	Not yet aligned: ≤69 points	Progressing towards alignment: 70-89 points
Zambia	Outcome	OA4: GBV	4.1 Proportion of people who know where to access available GBV services	Others of Concern	100%	100%
Zambia	Outcome	OA4: GBV	4.1 Proportion of people who know where to access available GBV services	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100%	100%
Zambia	Outcome	OA4: GBV	4.2 Proportion of people who do not accept violence against women	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	90%	90%
Zambia	Outcome	OA4: GBV	4.3 Proportion of survivors who are satisfied with GBV case management services	Others of Concern	100%	100%
Zambia	Outcome	OA4: GBV	4.3 Proportion of survivors who are satisfied with GBV case management services	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100%	100%

Zambia	Outcome	OA5: Children	5.1 Proportion of children at heightened risk who are supported by a Best Interests Procedure	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100%	82%
Zambia	Outcome	OA5: Children	5.3 Proportion of unaccompanied and separated children who are in an alternative care arrangement	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	89%	50%
Zambia	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
Zambia	Outcome	OA7: Community	7.2 Proportion of people who have access to safe feedback and response mechanisms	Others of Concern	100%	100%
Zambia	Outcome	OA7: Community	7.2 Proportion of people who have access to safe feedback and response mechanisms	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100%	100%
Zambia	Outcome	OA7: Community	7.3 Proportion of women participating in leadership/management structures	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	1%	50%
Zambia	Outcome	OA8: Well-being	8.1 Proportion of people that receive cash transfers and/or non-food items	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	93%	100%
Zambia	Outcome	OA10: Health	10.1 Proportion of children aged 9 months to five years who have received measles vaccination	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	24%	90%
Zambia	Outcome	OA10: Health	10.2. Proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	97%	80%
Zambia	Outcome	OA11: Education	11.1 Proportion of young people enrolled in tertiary and higher education	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	3%	3%
Zambia	Outcome	OA11: Education	11.2 Proportion of children and young people enrolled in the national education system	Refugees and Asylum-	51%	78%

				seekers		
Zambia	Outcome	OA12: WASH	12.1 Proportion of people using at least basic drinking water services	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	92%	100%
Zambia	Outcome	OA14: Return	14.1 Proportion of returnees with legally recognized identity documents or credentials	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100%	100%
Zambia	Outcome	OA15: Resettle	15.1 Number of refugees submitted by UNHCR for resettlement	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	3,100	To be confirmed
Zambia	Outcome	OA16: Integrate	16.2 Proportion of people covered by national social protection systems	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	8%	20%