

**Executive Committee of the
High Commissioner's Programme**

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Update on UNHCR operations in Asia and the Pacific**A. Situational analysis, including new developments**

UNHCR remains committed to pursuing inclusive protection, sustainable responses and innovative solutions for the 15.9 million refugees and other forcibly displaced and stateless people in Asia and the Pacific. By mid-2024, the region was home to 7 million refugees (and people in refugee-like situations), 393,400 asylum-seekers and 35,500 refugee returnees; 6.6 million internally displaced persons and 367,800 internally displaced returnees; and 2.5 million stateless people.

Despite the challenging context, UNHCR will continue efforts to support forcibly displaced and stateless people, build resilience and identify solutions for them and affected communities in Asia and the Pacific in 2025. This means maintaining emergency preparedness and response capacity across the region, providing lifesaving protection and assistance to those in need, while continuing to encourage and facilitate the implementation of pledges made by States and other regional stakeholders at the Global Refugee Forum held in December 2023. This work is urgent and necessary as the number of people under the mandate of UNHCR in the region continues to rise, while solutions – namely sustainable peace and the removal of obstacles to return – remain elusive in many places.

The lack of solutions also continues to drive an increase in irregular maritime movements in the region, putting more lives at risk and underscoring the need for stronger, collective responses. Last year alone, 9,200 Rohingya refugees undertook dangerous sea journeys, 74 per cent of whom were women and children, who face an increased risk of sexual and gender-based violence and abuse. In 2024, nearly 660 individuals were reported dead or missing in the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal. These trends are expected to continue in 2025 amid a deteriorating situation in Myanmar. UNHCR will work to implement a panoramic approach to asylum and migration management, centred on close collaboration with States, civil society and United Nations partners, especially the International Organization for Migration (IOM). This approach seeks to support the development of policies that assist host States and their communities in addressing the needs of refugees and asylum-seekers in a sustainable manner, while also working with refugee communities to raise awareness and prevent unsafe irregular movements.

Asia and the Pacific remains disproportionately impacted by droughts, floods, tropical storms and other extreme weather events and disasters, with significant human consequences. Recognizing the considerable challenges, UNHCR will strengthen its efforts to enhance the coping mechanisms of refugees and other displaced people in the region. This includes strongly advocating their inclusion in policies and instruments on early warning and disaster risk reduction, as well as reducing vulnerability and strengthening climate resilience.

Innovative and sustainable responses present strategic opportunities across Asia and the Pacific to address challenges of forced displacement in collaboration with host countries and communities. UNHCR will continue its efforts to mobilize support for inclusion of refugee children into national education systems and expanding access to higher education, while pressing the international community to provide greater support to these public services.

Health inclusion surveys conducted by UNHCR in 2024 across the nine largest refugee-hosting operations in the region – Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan and Thailand – show that refugees have varying

levels of access to national health systems across all nine of the region's largest refugee-hosting operations. Four of these – Bangladesh, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Pakistan – formally include refugees in national plans and regulatory frameworks. UNHCR will enhance collaboration with governments, including relevant ministries and development actors, to reinforce those systems and promote greater and more sustainable access for refugees.

The growing use of digital channels has provided UNHCR with opportunities to expand its reach to the most vulnerable individuals in a region at the forefront of technological innovation. However, digital engagement has also increased risks to online information integrity, prompting ongoing efforts to strengthen regional capacity to address and counter the rise in online hate speech, disinformation and misinformation targeting refugees and stateless people. UNHCR will continue expanding digital gateways to online services and leveraging strategic partnerships, while seeking to mitigate the impact of misinformation on protection space in Asia and the Pacific.

Afghanistan situation

As of mid-2024, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Pakistan host 3.8 million and 1.6 million Afghan refugees, respectively. This includes individuals in refugee-like situations in addition to some 2.2 million Afghans of other statuses. Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Pakistan continued to provide Afghans in the country with access to national health services, with UNHCR working with the Government of Iran (Islamic Republic of) to extend secondary health care to the most vulnerable refugees in the country. Education services were also available in these two host countries, critically important for Afghan refugee girls and to livelihoods. In 2024, the authorities in Pakistan deported some 8,600 undocumented and other Afghans to Afghanistan. To date, over 813,300 Afghans, including some 38,700 deportees, returned to Afghanistan from Pakistan since the start of the Government of Pakistan's "Illegal foreigners' repatriation plan". The Government of Iran (Islamic Republic of) also deported over 764,000 undocumented Afghans in 2024. UNHCR continues to advocate for the establishment of national asylum systems and to advise against the involuntary return of Afghans in view of the deteriorating human rights and humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, which disproportionately impacts women and girls. Moreover, inadequate resources are hindering returns, as the capacity to absorb and support those in need is limited.

The arrival of Afghans in neighbouring countries since 2021 continues to strain the resources of host countries, which now host some 7.3 million Afghans. The [2024-2025 Refugee Response Plan for the Afghanistan Situation](#) seeks to assist some 6.9 million people, including 4.4 million Afghans and 2.5 million host community members. It aims to ensure that basic needs are met, while advancing solutions through coordinated humanitarian-development-peace nexus programming that reinforces local and national systems in host countries. In 2025, the plan strives to achieve a more predictable response and more opportunities for mid- to long-term solutions, focusing on the two major Afghan refugee-hosting countries – Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Pakistan – where 90 per cent of Afghan refugees worldwide reside.

Approximately 3.2 million Afghans remained internally displaced within the country. There was no new conflict-induced internal displacement recorded in the past year. In coordination with other United Nations agencies and stakeholders, UNHCR continued to work towards sustainable return through an area-based approach in priority areas of return and reintegration.

In Afghanistan, UNHCR is prioritizing protection and assistance for returnees and pursuing more sustainable responses, particularly cash-based interventions, shelter and livelihoods, and with an emphasis on women and girls. In 2024, UNHCR assisted over 1.7 million people in Afghanistan, 52 per cent of whom were women and girls. UNHCR delivered protection monitoring, including at the borders, and provided cash-based assistance, protection services, psychosocial support, shelter and legal assistance, including on civil documentation and housing, land, and property rights. In line with the recommendations of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, UNHCR

continues to advocate for the uninterrupted and non-discriminatory delivery of humanitarian assistance, as well as for the protection of women and girls' rights, especially in the areas of education and livelihoods.

Myanmar situation

The Myanmar situation accounts for 5.2 million people of concern to UNHCR, including 1.75 million forcibly displaced and stateless Rohingya. Conflict across Myanmar triggered over 1.4 million new internal displacements in 2024 and brought the total number of internally displaced persons to an estimated 3.5 million people as of January 2025. More than 142,800 refugees have also fled to Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand since February 2021. UNHCR urges governments in the region to continue to provide access to territory and safety for newly arriving refugees.

Despite insecurity and access constraints, UNHCR maintains its field presence in multiple locations across Myanmar and works with partners to assess protection needs and alleviate urgent needs of affected communities. Core relief items and multi-purpose assistance were distributed to 603,000 persons in 2024, including in the hardest-to-reach areas. While implementation of community-led projects in Rakhine State, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and local partners, was delayed in 2024 due to the escalation of the conflict, UNHCR continues to advocate for predictable access and continues to explore opportunities to create conditions conducive to voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable repatriation and reintegration.

In late 2024, the interim Government of Bangladesh approved the use of biometric identification for new arrivals for provision of humanitarian assistance. As refugees continued to feel the consequences of natural hazards and disasters, the Government of Bangladesh also approved the use of materials for safer shelters. Since 2021, some 295,000 refugee students have gained access to primary and secondary education, with Rohingya students following the Myanmar curriculum.

By end of 2024, the number of serious security incidents in the camps decreased, although concerns about a spillover of violence from Myanmar persisted amid reports of continued forced recruitment. The interim Government of Bangladesh has intensified law enforcement efforts, with UNHCR providing technical support for protection-sensitive and community-responsive policing. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme and UNHCR, along with other humanitarian partners, provided support to the national authorities and partners in addressing the humanitarian needs of some 36,000 refugees relocated to Bhasan Char.

UNHCR continues to engage in bilateral and multilateral efforts to mobilize resources and advance solutions for refugees from Myanmar, among them the more than one million Rohingya refugees hosted by Bangladesh. Expanding transferable skills, education and livelihood interventions for Rohingya refugees in the camps as well as in host communities remain a priority. At the end of 2024, the Joint Response Plan in Bangladesh, amounting to \$852.4 million, was 64.3 per cent funded.

In alignment with the United Nations General Assembly resolution A/RES/79/182 and Security Council resolution S/RES/2669, adopted in 2024 and 2022 respectively, a comprehensive regional approach aims to expand solutions for Rohingya refugees and sustain support for host countries, with a focus on safeguarding the right to return. The United Nations General Assembly has agreed to hold a high-level conference in 2025 that will explore lasting solutions to the crisis, including the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return of Rohingya refugees to Myanmar.

UNHCR will continue engaging with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and support Malaysia, its Chair in 2025, in efforts to ensure safety and security for all communities in Myanmar, including in the Rakhine State. The Office will also work closely with ASEAN member States to assist in their responses to displacement from Myanmar. The steadfast commitment of ASEAN to ending the violence in Myanmar and advancing a peaceful resolution is critical for addressing the root causes of displacement and restoring stability in the region.

B. Progress and challenges by impact area in 2024 and updated plans for 2025

Access to protection and strengthening asylum capacities

Challenges to accessing protection and asylum in Asia and the Pacific, including restrictions on movement, border closures and the lack of national asylum systems, have contributed to large-scale as well as isolated incidents of refoulement, deportation, pushbacks at sea, arrest and detention. This includes individuals who fled Afghanistan and Myanmar, for whom UNHCR continues to advise against involuntary returns. UNHCR continues to advocate for alternatives to detention and for adherence to the principle of non-refoulement, while also advancing multi-stakeholder discussions on protection at sea and counter-trafficking.

UNHCR supports countries in the region with developing and improving their asylum systems in line with international standards through technical advice, legislative comments, amicus curiae briefs to courts and by fostering collaboration between national authorities to strengthen refugee status determination procedures and protection systems. With a view to implementing pledges made at the Global Refugee Forum in December 2023, UNHCR collaborates with countries including Australia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines and Thailand to enhance access to protection, strengthen asylum capacities and develop alternatives to detention.

UNHCR facilitated participation of judges from the region in the Asia Pacific Chapter conference of the International Association of Refugee and Migration Judges, encouraging the exchange of good practices amongst judiciaries to advance the rights of refugees, asylum-seekers and others in need of international protection.

To enhance accountability to affected populations, a centralized feedback and response system that allows refugees to provide feedback to UNHCR has been expanded to include Bangladesh and Pakistan. Discussions with authorities are ongoing to roll out the system elsewhere.

Expanding solutions for protracted situations

UNHCR continues to address barriers to voluntary repatriation and reintegration support in areas of return. However, ongoing instability and the human rights situation in Afghanistan and Myanmar have hindered large-scale voluntary return.

In the Asia and Pacific region, UNHCR recorded more than 5,100 departures to third countries through complementary pathways, a decrease from 2023 due to fewer private sponsorships. However, a 50 per cent increase in departures for employment opportunities has been recorded in 2024, the majority to Canada. In 2025, UNHCR will continue to expand partnerships to facilitate labour mobility, enhance cooperation on family reunification and support new pathways for education.

UNHCR will also lead advocacy efforts and investments in skills-building, livelihoods, and economic inclusion. In Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Pakistan, UNHCR is collaborating with national vocational training organizations to implement programmes designed to address gaps in the labour market. In Afghanistan, UNHCR promotes the development of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises through trainings on starting and expanding businesses, especially for women and youth.

In 2024, UNHCR submitted more than 42,100 cases for resettlement from the Asia and Pacific region and more than 18,300 refugees departed to resettlement countries – an increase of 40 per cent compared to 2023. The resettlement of Afghan refugees from the region continued to expand in 2024, with a rise both in the submission of resettlement cases and the availability of slots, leading to more than 8,300 cases submitted and over 5,700 departures recorded. Similar progress was made with regard to resettlement of Rohingya refugees from the region, with more than 19,500 cases submitted for resettlement and more than 6,400 departures recorded – almost double the number when compared to 2023.

Efforts continue to advance solutions for Sri Lankan refugees living in a protracted situation in India, with a focus on inclusion or the provision of reintegration support for individuals who wish to return voluntarily to Sri Lanka.

Protection and solutions for internally displaced persons

In Afghanistan, there were 3.2 million internally displaced persons as of mid-2024. UNHCR supports the United Nations Country Team in finding solutions to internal displacement, placing emphasis on basic human needs, economic opportunities, resilient livelihoods and social cohesion. In Myanmar, internal displacement increased to more than 3.5 million by January 2025. UNHCR continues to prioritize life-saving assistance and community-based protection activities in the country, providing shelter, livelihoods and support for solutions, wherever possible.

In the Philippines, UNHCR is implementing a joint IOM, UNDP and UNHCR project funded by the United Nations Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund, which aims to operationalize the humanitarian-development-peace nexus to seek sustainable solutions for internally displaced persons through legal and policy frameworks. This project also aims to support the implementation of the newly approved bill on the Rights of Internally Displaced Persons of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region, while continuing to advocate for the passage and implementation of national legislation on protection for internally displaced persons.

Addressing statelessness

With support from UNHCR, States in the region continue to make significant progress on preventing and reducing statelessness. In September 2024, Turkmenistan became the latest country to resolve all known cases of statelessness in its territory. This historic milestone was followed by Turkmenistan convening a Ministerial Conference attended by Central Asian States. The conference culminated in the adoption of the Ashgabat Declaration on Ending Statelessness in Central Asia by Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, which reaffirms these States' shared commitment to resolve statelessness.

In Thailand, the Government adopted a Cabinet Resolution in November 2024 to accelerate a pathway to nationality for nearly half a million stateless people. UNHCR is offering logistical and technical assistance to the Government to support the launch and implementation of this ambitious initiative, which aims to provide permanent residency status to 335,000 long-term stateless residents in Thailand and extend nationality for 142,000 children born in Thailand.

As part of the Regional Steering Group for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN-ESCAP), UNHCR continues to advocate for universal birth registration and for the inclusion of forcibly displaced and stateless people in national civil registration systems. In 2025, UN-ESCAP and UNHCR will co-sponsor the Third Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, which seeks to adopt a Regional Ministerial Declaration that prioritizes the inclusion of forcibly displaced and stateless people in national civil registration systems.

Several States in the region joined the Global Alliance to End Statelessness, namely, Australia, the Philippines, Thailand and Turkmenistan, with the Philippines also serving as a Solutions Seeker State that has developed an ambitious National Action Plan to End Statelessness. As part of this Plan, the Philippines is actively implementing legislation that serves as a global model, such as its Foundlings Recognition and Protection Act, which has resulted in over 8,000 previously undocumented persons at risk of statelessness being registered and confirmed as citizens since the law's adoption in 2022. Cooperation with UNICEF has been instrumental in improving birth registration for hard-to-reach populations and regions, particularly conflict-affected and internally displaced children and families in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, which has the lowest birth registration rates in the country.

C. Financial information

The Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme approved the 2025 budget of \$957.9 million for Asia and the Pacific. The breakdown of requirements by impact area for 2025 is as follows: "respond: realizing rights in safe environments", \$426.3 million; "protect: attaining favourable protection environments", \$236.4 million; "empower: empowering communities and achieving gender equality", \$192.8 million; and "solve: securing solutions", \$102.3 million. As of 31 January 2025, the Asia and the Pacific region was approximately 14 per cent funded, taking into consideration the indicative allocation of flexible funding.
