

## **Update on UNHCR operations in Europe**

### **A. Situational analysis, including new developments**

The crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic that began in 2011 forced over 6 million Syrians to flee their homes, with 2.9 million seeking protection in neighbouring Türkiye and a further 1.3 million across Europe. Recent developments in late 2024 brought hope to many Syrian refugees who saw the opportunity to return home for the first time in more than a decade. Some 80,000 are reported to have voluntarily returned from Türkiye as of the end of January 2025. Should the conditions for return evolve positively, larger numbers of Syrian refugees are expected to voluntarily return home from Türkiye and other countries of asylum in the course of 2025.

The international armed conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine is entering its fourth year, with widespread hostilities and insecurity continuing to threaten civilian populations. The [Ukraine Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan for 2025](#) underscores the breadth and severity of the situation, with 12.7 million people estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance. While the total number of those in need of assistance has modestly declined, many families continue to face a dire situation, with household savings depleted, rents increasing and critical local services overstretched. Some 200,000 people were forced to evacuate from front-line areas in 2024, including a high percentage of older people and those living with disabilities. The newly displaced are highly vulnerable, having withstood conflict in their areas of origin for several years. With the increase in hostilities in recent months, the demand for emergency shelter support has surged.

Over 6.8 million refugees from Ukraine have sought safety worldwide, of whom 6.3 million are in Europe. European States continue to demonstrate solidarity and their support for Ukrainian refugees, including through measures to include them in national systems and services. In some countries, refugees also continue to contribute significantly to their host communities in economic terms, while refugee-led organizations are supporting the vulnerable members of refugee and host communities. Most refugees and internally displaced persons continue to express hope to return home one day. Improvements to the security situation inside Ukraine, along with livelihood opportunities and the availability of housing, remain the most important prerequisites. A significant increase in the number of voluntary returns is likely should a ceasefire agreement materialize.

Elsewhere, mixed movements along the three maritime routes towards Europe decreased in 2024, with less than 200,000 refugees and migrants arriving on European shores. This represents a 26 per cent decrease compared to the previous year. Nearly 3,000 people were reported dead or missing along the three Mediterranean and northwest Africa maritime routes, though this figure is likely to be a significant underestimation. The northwest African maritime route towards the Canary Islands saw a 165 per cent increase in arrivals since 2023, overtaking the Mediterranean routes as the primary sea pathway towards Europe. Expulsions, violent pushbacks and maltreatment continue to be reported by people attempting to reach Europe.

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

### *Attaining favourable protection environments (protect)*

The European Union's Pact on Migration and Asylum will reach a key milestone in June 2026, when the new rules governing the common European asylum system will come into effect. UNHCR continues to support European Union institutions and member States as the deadline for the implementation of the Pact approaches. In this endeavour, advocacy and technical support will focus on supporting the systematic identification of vulnerable individuals in the asylum system; promoting protection safeguards in the implementation of border procedures; supporting independent national monitoring mechanisms to oversee compliance with human rights obligations; and ensuring the provision of effective legal counselling and assistance to persons seeking asylum in Europe.

UNHCR recognizes the complex challenges that States continue to face as a result of irregular and mixed population movements towards Europe, as well as the serious risks to refugees and migrants posed by these journeys. To combat protection risks and preserve access to asylum in Europe for individuals in need of international protection, engagement with States regarding lawful policy options that address the challenges posed by mixed and onwards movements will continue. Working with relevant stakeholders, UNHCR will continue to advocate a whole-of-route approach to mixed movement challenges in countries of origin, arrival and destination in order to effectively address the root causes of irregular movements and identify regular pathways that offer alternatives to dangerous journeys. Given planned discussions on the European Union Return Directive, UNHCR will continue to offer its technical advice in support of the effective return of individuals found not to be in need of international protection.

Developments inside Ukraine will be carefully monitored, while UNHCR continues to advocate that refugees be provided with legal status and access to rights in host countries until they are able to return home safely and with dignity. Continued support to refugees in reaching fully informed decisions on whether to remain in host countries or return home will remain a priority. "Ukraine is Home", a digital information platform launched in July 2024, provides refugees with information regarding their rights and legal status in host countries, as well as providing both refugees and internally displaced persons with information about their eligibility for services, government entitlements and other assistance available in their places of origin. Given the importance of short-term visits to Ukraine in informing the decisions of refugees to return, UNHCR urges that host countries maintain a flexible approach towards temporary travel to Ukraine, along with the safeguarding of legal status and access to rights in the meantime.

### *Realizing rights in safe environments (respond)*

In 2024, UNHCR delivered assistance to some 1.7 million internally displaced and war-affected individuals in Ukraine. Currently, UNHCR is focused on contributing to the government-led inter-agency winter response. To date, 225,000 people have been reached with winter cash assistance, while distributions of thermal kits and heaters, along with repairs on homes and collective centres and the distribution of essential winter items have benefited more than 50,000 individuals. Support to government efforts to respond to energy shortages resulting from increased aerial attacks has also been a priority, with the distribution of generators and portable power banks. In 2025, UNHCR will continue to provide life-saving emergency assistance and facilitate access to essential services for the most vulnerable war-affected people, with a focus on those newly displaced and closest to the frontline. Subject to adequate funding in 2025, UNHCR will provide 1.1 million individuals with multipurpose cash assistance to provide quick and efficient support to households in need. Elsewhere in Ukraine, where conditions allow, support to government-led early recovery efforts continue. In support of durable solutions, and eventual safe and dignified returns, UNHCR will support repairs to civilian housing and infrastructure, with the aim of reaching 365,000 individuals with emergency shelter, home repairs and housing solutions.

In countries neighbouring Ukraine, UNHCR supports government-led responses including through its coordination of the [Regional Refugee Response Plan for the Ukraine Situation](#). In 2025, the plan brings together over 260 partners across 11 countries. The joint action of

UNHCR and partners seeks to support host governments in the protection of refugees from Ukraine, with an emphasis on the most vulnerable and their inclusion in national systems and services.

Recent developments in the Syrian Arab Republic have significantly impacted UNHCR's operational engagement in Türkiye in 2025. UNHCR is working closely with the Government of Türkiye to prepare for and to eventually facilitate voluntary returns, in line with UNHCR's operational framework for the voluntary return of Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons. UNHCR will continue to co-lead the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan in response to the needs of Syrian refugees and ensure that all return-related activities are fully coordinated within this framework. Across the region, UNHCR will support Syrian refugees to make fully informed decisions with respect to their return home and will advocate a flexible approach towards short-term visits to the Syrian Arab Republic, allowing refugees to retain their legal status and associated rights in their country of asylum.

#### *Empowering communities and achieving gender equality (empower)*

The Regional Contact Centre, established in 2023 in the context of displacement from Ukraine, will continue to offer vital information to refugees and asylum-seekers on access to assistance and services. The Regional Contact Centre will also broaden its geographic and linguistic coverage in 2025, with an emphasis on providing information to Syrian refugees, who are facing a rapidly changing landscape and require accurate, up-to-date information to support their decision-making regarding voluntary return.

The prevention of gender-based violence and implementation of survivor-centred responses, remain a priority across the Ukraine situation response. To strengthen community-based protection mechanisms, UNHCR will support capacity-building initiatives for national authorities and local actors, including women-led organizations. The Office will prioritize robust community-based protection, placing the voices of survivors at the centre of decision-making processes. It will also seek to systematically address gender-based violence, exploitation, trafficking and abuse across the region. Child protection will also remain a priority area of focus within the refugee response, particularly for children separated from their families or those without parental care. UNHCR and partners are working to promote the inclusion and protection of Ukrainian children in national child protection systems. These efforts aim to mitigate the heightened risks associated with displacement by safeguarding vulnerable children from harm and supporting their well-being.

The mental health and psychosocial support needs of forcibly displaced people across Europe remains of critical concern. UNHCR will support the provision of services that are culturally appropriate and address the needs of all refugees and asylum-seekers. This will involve strengthening the capacity of governments, humanitarian partners and civil society actors to deliver such services. Emphasis will be placed on empowering community-based providers through targeted training and the provision of necessary resources, thereby fostering sustainable and localized support systems.

Disability inclusion remains a critical aspect of the refugee response across Europe. In 2025, efforts will focus on ensuring the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in decision-making and community leadership processes. Equal access to information, feedback and complaint mechanisms for persons with disabilities and their inclusion within national systems are to be prioritized to promote their full and equitable inclusion.

#### *Securing solutions (solve)*

While the current school year saw encouraging increases in refugee children and youth (particularly those from Ukraine) enrolled in host country educational systems, enrolment rates remain below the national average across most European host countries. UNHCR continues to support the inclusion of refugee children in national education systems and initiatives which allow children to maintain links with the education system in Ukraine. Improved data collection on education for refugees from Ukraine will inform targeted advocacy efforts to address legal, administrative and financial barriers that limit access. Furthermore, the Ukraine Regional Refugee Response Plan supports enrolment assistance, language and psychosocial services, extracurricular activities and measures to mitigate infrastructure deficiencies and teacher shortages.

Promoting the effective inclusion of refugees in national systems and enhancing self-reliance through access to decent work remain key priorities across the region. The Refugee Employment Platform initiative will be further expanded with the launch of a regional website with information for the private sector on the hiring of refugees across Europe.

Despite the commitment of many municipalities to integrate refugees into local services, significant obstacles remain, particularly in securing adequate financing, developing affordable housing solutions and ensuring effective stakeholder coordination. To address these challenges, a virtual community platform will be established to provide municipal actors with practical resources to support their efforts. Furthermore, enhanced collection of socioeconomic data and strengthened collaboration with national statistics offices will enable governments, development actors, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and UNHCR to design and implement more targeted and impactful interventions.

European States continue to demonstrate commitment to third-country solutions, with 12 European Union Member States offering 60,700 places between 2024 and 2025 (31,000 resettlement places and 29,700 admissions on humanitarian grounds). In 2024, Europe resettled approximately 14,200 refugees, with almost 11,000 individuals resettled in European Union member States. UNHCR will continue to support States in their efforts to meet their resettlement targets. UNHCR welcomes the Union Resettlement Framework Regulation adopted in 2024, which will allow for more predictability, strengthened funding and harmonized admission programmes across Europe.

UNHCR remains committed to addressing statelessness in Europe. This commitment is realized through close collaboration with civil society, regional organizations and individuals with lived experience of statelessness. It is further strengthened by the newly established Global Alliance to End Statelessness, which has already garnered support from several European governments and key stakeholders. The European Union Pact on Migration and Asylum provides an important opportunity to strengthen the identification and protection of stateless persons, including through the establishment and enhancement of statelessness determination procedures. Combating childhood statelessness will also remain a priority, with initiatives to be undertaken to address this issue, such as a joint compilation of good practices to end child statelessness within the area of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. In countries where birth registration is not universally accessible, UNHCR will continue supporting authorities to improve access to birth registration and identity documentation.

## **C. Financial information**

In October 2024, the Executive Committee approved a budget of \$1,247.1 million for the activities of UNHCR in Europe. This figure is 14.9 per cent lower compared to the 2024 budget (\$1,466.2 million), reflecting a transition from humanitarian assistance towards sustainable responses in some contexts, with a focus on inclusion, livelihoods and protection priority areas.

The six largest operations, accounting for \$1,030.3 million, or 83 per cent of the budget for Europe, are: Ukraine (\$550.0 million); Türkiye (\$280.0 million); the Republic of Moldova (\$80.3 million); Poland (\$42 million); and Romania and Greece (each with \$39 million).

The two impact areas with the highest budget allocations are “respond: realizing rights in safe environments” (amounting to \$484.6 million, or 39 per cent) and “protect: attaining favourable protection environments” (amounting to \$436.2 million, or 35 per cent). The impact area “solve: securing solutions” has the third highest budget allocation, reaching \$235.4 million or 19 per cent; this impact area focuses on socioeconomic inclusion and integration programmes. The requirements for the impact area “empower: empowering communities and achieving gender equality” amount to \$90.9 million, or 7 per cent of the total budget for Europe.

As of 31 January 2025, 14 per cent of the region’s 2025 financial requirements were funded, taking into consideration the indicative allocation of unearmarked and softly earmarked contributions.