

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

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Standing Committee
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**Durable solutions and complementary pathways,
including implementation of the Executive
Committee conclusion**

Summary

The paper provides an update on the progress made and challenges encountered in pursuing solutions and complementary pathways for refugees since the update presented at the eighty-seventh meeting of the Standing Committee in June 2023 (EC/74/SC/CRP.13) and the adoption of Executive Committee conclusion no. 117 (LXXV) on durable solutions and complementary pathways, in October 2024.

I. Overview of progress and challenges in achieving solutions

1. Executive Committee conclusion no. 117 on durable solutions and complementary pathways reaffirmed the importance and the interconnectedness of solutions and the crucial role of international cooperation and partnerships in enabling them. The conclusion highlighted the need to link traditional solutions with broader changes in the protection environment and confirmed the necessity for key shifts to expand opportunities for solutions, including through complementary pathways. These pathways are seen as integral components to a comprehensive, inclusive, and forward-looking approach to refugee protection and solutions, including within the framework of the route-based approach.

2. In 2024, some 116,000 refugees were resettled, the most departures recorded since 2016. In contrast, resettlement opportunities dropped sharply in 2025, with greater eligibility restrictions on existing quotas. In terms of returns, over 9.8 million forcibly displaced people returned home by the end of 2024, including 1.6 million refugees. In the Syrian Arab Republic, the events of December 2024 constituted a significant political milestone in opening up prospects for returns of refugee and internally displaced persons in the coming years.

3. In keeping with the Global Compact on Refugees and the sustainable responses approach, States adopted measures to facilitate the inclusion of refugees in national systems, including through changes to national laws and policies. Socioeconomic and legal inclusion efforts, particularly in identity management, education, employment and health care, continued through the implementation of pledges made at the Global Refugee Forum in 2023.

4. The Global Compact on Refugees and Executive Committee conclusion no. 117 emphasize the importance of collective action, particularly through regional leadership. A notable example of such collective action is the reaffirmation by the Steering Committee of the Central African Republic solutions support platform, in February 2025, to advocate for protection, inclusion and voluntary repatriation of forcibly displaced Central Africans.

II. Voluntary repatriation

5. In 2024, over 571,000 refugees returned to the Syrian Arab Republic, including over 259,000 refugees who returned following the transition in government. According to the intentions survey conducted by UNHCR in 2025, 27 per cent of Syrian refugees in the region expressed a willingness to return to the Syrian Arab Republic within the next 12 months, marking a significant increase from the 1.7 per cent reported in 2024. UNHCR estimates that around 600,000 internally displaced persons could also return within the next six months, primarily to areas with limited capacity to absorb large-scale returns.

6. These developments underscore the urgent need to strengthen conditions for sustainable return to the Syrian Arab Republic, where 90 per cent of the population remains dependent on humanitarian assistance. To support recovery and reintegration, several United Nations Member States and the European Union have initiated the easing of sanctions on specific sectors. UNHCR contributes to these efforts by disseminating information on return conditions, delivering protection services, and advocating for sustainable reintegration. As part of inter-agency efforts, UNHCR also facilitates needs assessments, supports community-based recovery planning and early recovery interventions.

7. Notable progress was observed with regards to returns to the Central African Republic, following years of protracted crisis. In 2024, UNHCR and partners supported the return of 150,000 internally displaced persons and nearly 20,000 refugees. The Internal Displacement Solutions Fund continues to support the implementation of the 2024-2028 national strategy for sustainable solutions, with a focus on social cohesion through local peace and reconciliation committees. These efforts are also being supported by the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund to operationalize the national strategy, prevent violence and foster community resilience. In addition, UNHCR and partners have provided assistance to the Government to rehabilitate administrative buildings, hospitals and schools. In October 2024, two tripartite agreements were signed with UNHCR to facilitate the return of Central African and Nigerian refugees from Chad to their respective countries.

8. UNHCR also supported the return of over 20,000 Burundians, although rising inflation and limited access to services continued to deter many from returning. Since January 2025, Burundi has also received nearly 70,000 refugees fleeing conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, further straining the country's limited response capacity. To inform the engagement by development actors and to support reintegration planning, UNHCR undertook reintegration mapping across eight provinces, surveying over 1,400 households comprising over 25,000 returnees. The exercise gathered data on access to essential services and household demographic profiles. As part of the repatriation operation, UNHCR facilitated the recognition by Burundian authorities of identification documents issued to refugees in countries of asylum, including birth certificates, thereby supporting the civil reintegration of the returnees.

III. Resettlement and complementary pathways

9. In 2024, resettlement activities surpassed the target set under the Third Country Solutions for Refugees: Roadmap 2030, with 90 UNHCR operations submitting cases for 203,500 refugees to 23 resettlement countries. This represents the highest figure recorded in over 30 years and reflects a 31 per cent increase compared to 2023. The global deployment scheme further supported these efforts by deploying 227 resettlement experts to 52 operations. Resettlement efforts were increasingly aligned with the route-based approach, with more States allocating resettlement quotas that were aligned with regional plans and priorities.

10. Resettlement commitments declined significantly in 2025, as many countries reduced their quotas and imposed stricter eligibility criteria. While some countries resumed resettlement programmes, others suspended their programmes, further limiting the already scarce number of available places. Funding shortfalls continued to constrain the operational capacity of UNHCR, resulting in measures such as closure of field offices and reduction of protection staff and critical services, including registration, which are essential for identification and preservation of procedural integrity.

11. The annual joint UNHCR-Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Safe Pathways report, reflecting on data from 2023, indicated a continued increase in issuance of permits by countries, suggesting enhanced autonomous access by refugees to family reunification, sponsorship, education and employment pathways. According to the report, 285,000 people were issued permits in 2023 compared to 215,000 people in 2022. The number of people receiving permits has the potential to grow with more sustained efforts to remove barriers through the recognition of skills, improved access to skills development or relationship certification, training and upskilling opportunities in refugee hosting areas, provision of travel and identity documentation and inclusion of refugees in broader migration frameworks that facilitate cross-border mobility for workers and students.

12. New and expanded skills-based pathways were launched in Australia, Italy and Slovenia. Notably, the Italian labour mobility framework is the first in the world to include refugees in the existing migration channels, thereby enabling scalable and autonomous access by refugees. In Australia, a collaborative initiative involving the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UNHCR aims to integrate refugees into a skilling-to-hire framework, representing a sustainable model of inclusion within existing pathways. Malawi and Zimbabwe resumed issuance of refugee travel documents, a critical tool for accessing regular migration pathways. The ongoing collaboration of UNHCR with States, academic institutions, law firms and the private sector continues to advance the sustainable inclusion of refugees within the existing legal pathways.

13. Efforts to expand sponsorship pathways have significantly increased opportunities for refugees. Initiatives such as the Global Sponsorship Fund, which aim to expand financing for sponsorship, hold considerable potential but will require a sustainable strategic approach and broad-based stakeholder commitment to achieve scale and impact.

14. The Executive Committee conclusion no. 117 underscores the need for cooperation to make systemic changes to the admissions frameworks. This principle is reflected in the UNHCR operational guidelines on complementary pathways issued in December 2024, and

was further exemplified during the 2024 Consultations on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways. Hosted by the Government and the Refugee Council of Australia, the consultation convened over 300 participants, including representatives of States, civil society, the private sector, refugees and other actors highlighting broad-based commitment to advancing sustainable solutions.

IV. Supporting solutions through resilience and inclusion

15. The Executive Committee conclusion no. 117 recognizes that inclusion and self-reliance can contribute to durable solutions. It is equally important for the broader framework of international protection as both inclusion and self-reliance facilitate the provision of justice, education, health, employment and social protection, as well as support national authorities in safeguarding other fundamental human rights.

16. In 2024 and 2025, several host countries advanced national strategies that link inclusion of refugees to broader development planning, legal identity, financial access and integrated service delivery.

17. Building on these national efforts to promote inclusion and resilience, regional strategies have also been developed to strengthen solutions for displaced populations. One such initiative is the UNHCR Sahel+ Strategy – a comprehensive regional framework that simultaneously addresses urgent humanitarian needs while building resilience among displaced populations and host communities. Central to the strategy is a shift towards community-level interventions and the expansion of strategic partnerships to strengthen synergy with development and peace actors. These efforts are reinforced by continued advocacy to ensure inclusion of forcibly displaced people in national development plans and welfare systems, thereby promoting the sustainability of solutions.

18. Such strategies are grounded in robust data systems. Djibouti's co-leadership of the Global Refugee Forum multi-stakeholder pledge on statistical inclusion together with the Expert Group on Refugee, Internally Displaced Persons and Statelessness Statistics and the World Bank-UNHCR Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement is reflected in the third edition of the General Population and Housing Census, which incorporates statistical standards for both refugees and internally displaced persons.

19. National foundational identification systems enable States to issue trusted identity credentials which are essential to access national services and systems. In Chad and Ethiopia, refugees were issued nationally recognized identity credentials with unique identification numbers. This was achieved through a two-way interoperability between the refugee data systems and the Government-led digital identity management platforms. Such interoperability, governed by appropriate data protection safeguards, facilitates secure data sharing and enables refugees to access essential public services, financial systems and services and formal employment opportunities.

20. Since 2020, the Government of Rwanda has advanced the integration of civil registration and national identity systems, ensuring that all children, including refugees, receive a unique identification number at birth. This number serves as the foundation of their legal identity within the country's digital identity ecosystem. Upon reaching the age of 16, individuals are issued an identity card, granting them access to public and private services and inclusion in national systems on an equal footing with Rwandan nationals. Refugees have the right to work, freedom of movement, and the ability to own property, including land, and to enter in business and land-lease contracts. As business owners and employees, refugees are subject to the applicable national tax obligations.

21. Kenya, Mauritania, Mexico, Uganda and Zambia made significant progress to advance the inclusion of refugees into their national economic and social services, as well as in regional and thematic planning frameworks, often in collaboration with the private sector. In Colombia and Ethiopia, the issuance of work and business permits has improved the access of refugees to livelihood opportunities and economic participation. In other contexts, while the right to work is enshrined in refugee law, access to the labour market remains challenging for refugees due to time-consuming and costly procedures. Also, the successful obtention of

work permits often requires multiple prerequisite documents and is limited to recognized refugees. UNHCR is working with countries around the world to explore the opportunities and challenges associated with the right to work. This includes addressing policy gaps that limit access to employment and self-reliance opportunities by refugees.

22. Effective inclusion of refugees in national systems requires a “whole-of-government” approach. In Uganda, under the “PROSPECTS” initiative and with support from the Netherlands (Kingdom of) in 2024, localized case management systems were piloted for urban refugees and host communities through the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development and the Kampala Capital City Authority. Building on the success of this pilot, UNHCR is scaling up the model to three additional refugee-hosting districts, underscoring the commitment of Uganda to deliver sustainable and locally-led protection and services.

23. Inclusion of refugees and stateless persons in national systems not only addresses their immediate protection and assistance needs but also builds resilience and empowers them to pursue durable solutions. Efforts to facilitate access to regular migration pathways for refugees and stateless persons date back to the introduction of the “Nansen passport”, formally known as the Certificate of Identity for Refugees, in 1922. However, based on the latest assessment, only 45 per cent of 167 countries surveyed provide machine-readable refugee travel documents in line with the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) standards. UNHCR and partners, including the University of Essex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (commonly known as FRONTEX), ICAO and IOM, private sector stakeholders and States including Australia, Canada and New Zealand, are working to support more predictable inclusion of refugees and stateless persons in national systems that issue compliant travel and identity documents.

V. Conclusion

24. The progress outlined in this paper affirms that, even in the face of global challenges, meaningful change is achievable when States, civil society, and international partners act in concert. The implementation of Executive Committee conclusion no. 117 offers a strategic framework to guide this collective effort – anchoring protection within broader systems of inclusion, resilience, and sustainable development.

25. As displacement becomes more complex and protracted, solutions must evolve to be equally adaptive and forward-thinking, to anticipate future challenges and opportunities, and plan proactively and creatively to achieve long-term, sustainable outcomes. This requires embracing innovation, fostering regional leadership, and ensuring that displaced and stateless persons are not only protected but empowered to contribute meaningfully to their host communities. The way forward calls for sustained political will, equitable responsibility-sharing, and a collective commitment to solutions that are inclusive, rights-based, and oriented towards the future.

26. Displaced and stateless communities continue to demonstrate remarkable resilience. Their inclusion in the opportunities available through the global migration system not only enables them to pursue their own solutions but also allows them to contribute to their new community while supporting family members remaining in countries of asylum or returning home. At the same time, with resettlement quotas declining and eligibility criteria becoming more restrictive, sustained and equitable responsibility-sharing remains essential to preserve resettlement as a life-saving solution for individuals facing heightened risks, including refoulement, violence, or urgent medical need.

27. To sustain and build on these gains, the coming months must focus on translating pledges into practice, particularly in the lead-up to the 2025 High-Level Officials Meeting. This includes reinforcing national systems that facilitate inclusion, ensuring that returns are safe, voluntary, and dignified, as well as investing in data systems, legal identity frameworks, and cross-sectoral partnerships that bridge the humanitarian and development nexus.