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

Distr.: Restricted
10 June 2025

Original: English and French

Standing Committee
Ninety-third meeting

Note on international protection**Note by the High Commissioner***Summary*

This note on international protection, covering the period from June 2024 to May 2025, emphasizes the critical need for enhanced international cooperation on a larger and more globally-balanced scale to address unprecedented levels of displacement and international protection needs in a context of sharply reduced financial resources that are insufficient to adequately respond. It highlights the importance of fair and efficient asylum systems, the inclusion of displaced and stateless persons in national frameworks and strengthened protection for people in vulnerable situations. Additionally, it underscores the imperative of increasing opportunities for durable solutions – including voluntary repatriation, local integration, resettlement and other legal pathways to protection. To uphold the principle of burden- and responsibility-sharing and to strengthen the international protection framework, the note calls for sustained political and financial support from the international community. This support is indispensable for enabling UNHCR to fulfil its mandate and respond effectively to the global displacement and statelessness challenges.

I. Introduction

1. In a world characterized by intersecting political, economic, humanitarian and security crises, a shared commitment to addressing displacement is more important than ever, as solutions represent a crucial foundation for lasting peace and global security.
2. Seventy-five years ago, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established against a background of war and destruction that drove millions to seek safety outside their homeland. Since then, the number of people displaced by conflict, violence and persecution, left stateless, or otherwise in need of assistance from UNHCR has grown to over 129 million. Meanwhile, the international humanitarian aid system is facing a funding crisis, which compels UNHCR to significantly reduce its global field presence and which will only exacerbate hardship and suffering.
3. Against this background, building inclusive systems to underpin international protection and enable solutions is in the interest of all States. This requires enhanced solidarity, international cooperation and equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing, including with respect to the costs associated with supporting inclusion as well as measures to ensure access to territory, protection and solutions for displaced and stateless people.
4. Through the authority vested in the High Commissioner and his Office, UNHCR is entrusted by the international community with responsibility to protect and find solutions for displaced and stateless people. At the same time, addressing the magnitude of today's challenges requires effective coordination and collective efforts – as recognized in the multi-stakeholder approach underlined in the Global Compact on Refugees. Partnerships with a range of actors, including development organizations, international financial institutions and the private sector, are pivotal to the work of UNHCR.
5. Over the past year, pervasive violence, escalating conflict and serious human rights violations continued unabated in many countries, resulting in large-scale displacement, destruction and death. In the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, insecurity, sexual violence and human rights abuses displaced millions of people. The conflict in the Sudan has become the world's largest displacement crisis, displacing one out of every three Sudanese. In Europe, the war in Ukraine, now in its fourth year, continues to cause civilian casualties and destroy infrastructure. Many refugees continue to live in protracted displacement, with nine countries having hosted over a million refugees for five years or longer – and several having done so for decades. Although turning points were also visible, such as in the Syrian Arab Republic, where an estimated 1 million people have returned since December 2024, more needs to be done to create conditions for sustainable large-scale return.
6. The organization's emergency preparedness and response capacity was crucial to swiftly and effectively support the efforts of governments and host communities to protect and assist displaced populations. Often at great risk to its frontline humanitarian workers, UNHCR responded to 43 emergencies in 25 countries.

II. Asylum and mixed movements

A. Asylum systems

7. Fair and efficient asylum systems are crucial to ensure non-discriminatory access to asylum and for States to fully comply with international legal protection principles. This includes ensuring access to international protection where needed for people at risk of persecution because of the practice of their faith, conscientious objection to military service, sexual orientation or gender identity, or their ethnicity, among other grounds.
8. Strong and efficient asylum systems facilitate the identification and protection of refugees and their inclusion in national systems, while advancing durable solutions. They also help States manage asylum challenges more effectively, reducing pressure on reception capacity and other national systems, and facilitating the return of those not in need of international protection.

9. In 2024, global asylum applications rose, with 3.1 million new individual applications received and 1.6 million people granted refugee status, including through group-based decision-making. Against this backdrop, many asylum systems faced challenges, compounded by the increasing complexity of the drivers of displacement and onward and mixed movements of refugees and migrants. In response, some countries introduced restrictive measures that limited access to territory or asylum procedures or sought to externalize their asylum responsibilities. In the context of these developments, UNHCR issued guidance on access to territory and asylum in situations where people are ‘instrumentalized’, a term referring to movements of people that are forced, encouraged or facilitated with the aim of disrupting essential State functions. While some countries extended or established temporary or other legal stay arrangements for specific populations, others ended such arrangements despite ongoing conflict and persecution in countries of origin. This put affected people at risk of forced return, which may be at variance with the principle of non-refoulement. Hundreds of thousands of Afghans, many of them undocumented, were returned despite ongoing safety concerns in Afghanistan. UNHCR advises against the involuntary return of Afghans in view of the deteriorating human rights and humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, which disproportionately impacts women and girls.

10. Restricting access to territory and asylum procedures, externalizing responsibilities and deporting refugees and asylum-seekers to unsafe countries violate the principle of non-refoulement. Non-refoulement is a norm of treaty and customary international law and the cornerstone of the international protection framework. Over the past year, and together with partners, UNHCR successfully prevented the removal of many refugees and asylum-seekers to unsafe countries. However, with incidents of threatened or actual refoulement documented across all regions, this lifesaving work remains vital.

11. Some States addressed challenges around increased arrivals by strengthening cooperation, particularly at the regional level, to better equip asylum systems to adapt and respond effectively. A strong example of regional cooperation was the adoption of the Chile Declaration and Plan of Action by 24 States in the Americas in December 2024, coinciding with the fortieth anniversary of the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees. The plan seeks to strengthen asylum systems, focusing on improving screening procedures, data management and technological innovation. In West and Central Africa, countries are working on strengthening the efficiency and quality of their asylum systems. Such initiatives were also pursued through regional bodies such as the East African Community, the Economic Community of Central African States, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the Southern African Development Community. In Europe, Member States of the European Union developed national action plans in preparation for activation of the Pact on Migration and Asylum in mid-2026.

12. Several countries improved the effectiveness of existing partnerships. In France, the National Asylum Court and UNHCR agreed that the financial and administrative management of some 180 UNHCR-nominated judges would be passed to the court, while maintaining and strengthening the protection role of UNHCR by broadening joint training and coordination. Some countries, such as Benin, Zambia and Zimbabwe, revised their national asylum frameworks, while others, such as Egypt, passed national asylum laws for the first time. UNHCR is working with the Egyptian Government on implementation of the new law to ensure consistency with international standards and facilitate transition to a State-led system.

13. Promoting accession to international instruments that protect the rights of refugees and supervising their application is a core competency of UNHCR. This role is underpinned by the obligations of States to cooperate with UNHCR in this work and provide it with information and statistical data on domestic laws and policies and on the situation of refugees. UNHCR contributes to law reform in many countries and regions, reinforcing their ability to address challenges in line with international standards. Support was provided to Belize, Chile, Colombia, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Iraq, Madagascar, Malawi, Peru, Qatar, Somalia, South Africa, and the United States of America, as well as to the Economic Community of Central African States, the European Union, and the Southern African Development Community, among others.

14. Efforts to strengthen national asylum systems reflect the organization's commitment to sustainable responses. Consultations with external stakeholders were held and new tools developed, including the "Asylum Capacity Self-Assessment: How-To Guide". Complementing regional initiatives, such as the comprehensive regional protection and solutions framework (known by its Spanish acronym MIRPS) and the Quito Process technical meeting with the national refugee commissions, the Asylum Capacity Support Group Dialogue Platform convened events on legal representation in asylum procedures and enhancing efficiency through improved case management.

15. UNHCR continued to issue country guidance, including on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan, the Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic, to support national asylum decision makers. UNHCR improved the usability and functionality of the Refworld website, allowing swifter access to law and policy information. Further updates were also made to the Refugee Treaty and Legislation Dashboard and the Internally Displaced Persons Law and Policy Dashboard, which are part of the Rights Mapping and Analysis Platform.

16. UNHCR conducted refugee status determination under its mandate in approximately 45 countries where it can have a tangible protection impact for refugees and asylum-seekers. To improve the quality and efficiency of its procedures, UNHCR issued internal guidance on strategic engagement in mandate refugee status determination, including workforce planning and the effective use of differentiated case processing modalities. Due to funding cuts, UNHCR is compelled to end support for legal assistance to refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced persons in the East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes, and may need to cut back in other regions.

17. UNHCR recognizes that the return of people not in need of international protection is critical to the effective functioning of the international protection regime. When opportunities for migrants to regularize their stay are limited and return systems are inefficient, asylum systems are more likely to be misused by people without international protection needs seeking to regularize their stay. This leads to backlogs, delays and increased costs, which can make it even more difficult to return rejected applicants who have spent years establishing themselves in the country while awaiting a decision on their asylum application. By contrast, fair and efficient asylum procedures, and prompt removal after an unfounded asylum application is rejected, reduces the incentive for those not in need of international protection to claim asylum. This also enhances public confidence in the integrity of asylum systems. The implementation of fair and efficient asylum procedures, along with the return of persons not in need of international protection, are fundamental pillars of a comprehensive, route-based approach to addressing onward and mixed movements.

B. Onward and mixed movements and related challenges

18. Along the route, refugees and migrants are at heightened risk of abuse. To save lives, reduce harm, promote alternatives to dangerous journeys and support States in effectively managing the challenges of onward and mixed movements, UNHCR has developed a route-based approach. This aims to reinforce protection at all points along key routes in different regions, in close collaboration with States and partners. The International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Mixed Migration Centre and UNHCR documented the risks, violations of rights and extreme forms of violence faced by refugees and migrants along routes across Africa leading to the Mediterranean coastline. Their findings led to a call for the expansion of a programmatic and strategic "whole-of-route" approach to address the drivers of irregular movements. Furthermore, UNHCR published a mapping of protection services for people on the move along the central and western Mediterranean routes, highlighting gaps in service provision and opportunities to strengthen protection for refugees and migrants. Regional dialogues were convened among States, UNHCR and other partners to discuss challenges and develop responses to mixed movements, including in West and Central Africa, southern Africa and the East and Horn of Africa.

19. Refugees continued to undertake perilous journeys across various regions alongside migrants in mixed movements. Risks for people moving by sea intensified, particularly along the North-West Africa and West Atlantic maritime routes and in South-East Asia, as well as

for those moving over land, particularly through the Sahara in Africa. However, insufficient data hampered humanitarian responses. To address this, UNHCR partnered with the Mixed Migration Centre to conduct research on trends, routes, key risks and intentions to undertake such journeys along the North-West Africa and along Western Indian Ocean routes. IOM, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, the Foundation for Humanitarian Action at Sea, and UNHCR issued a statement on distress at sea, reminding States of their international obligations to rescue people in distress, uphold human rights, put in place safeguards and ensure accountability for human rights violations at sea.

20. In 2025, UNHCR launched a project entitled “Protecting Lives, Strengthening Systems: Operationalizing a Route-Based Approach to Manage Mixed Movements along the West Atlantic route”, funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency. Aimed at delivering coordinated, protection-centred responses across Mali, Mauritania, and Senegal, a high-risk route to Europe, the project supports life-saving services, national capacities to manage movements, and voluntary return and reintegration. With support from the Italian Government, IOM and UNHCR established a multi-purpose hub in Tine, eastern Chad, delivering route-based protection for refugees and migrants. It responds to the protection needs of people arriving at the Chad-Sudan border from the Sudan, as well as those moving north toward Libya. Services include asylum registration, case management and referrals, mental health and psychosocial support, assistance for survivors of gender-based violence, and anti-trafficking interventions.

21. UNHCR supported protection measures for persons moving by sea and facilitated dialogue among key stakeholders, including the International Maritime Organization and the International Chamber of Shipping. At disembarkation points, where permitted, UNHCR ensured that refugees and other vulnerable persons received assistance and facilitated access to asylum procedures. UNHCR assumed a monitoring role to ensure compliance with international standards in the implementation of a protocol between the Governments of Italy and Albania to share responsibility for those rescued or intercepted at sea.

22. Refugees and asylum-seekers, including children, were subject to immigration detention in many countries. Increasingly, restrictions on the liberties of refugees and asylum-seekers amount to detention. This includes, for example, when reception centres are closed facilities, as acknowledged by the Sub-Committee on Prevention of Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Serious concerns persist regarding the inadequacy or absence of domestic laws regulating detention, the lack of procedural safeguards, barriers to legal assistance and representation, poor detention conditions and the practice of prolonged or indefinite detention periods. Additionally, many domestic laws permit the detention of children for immigration-related purposes, compounding these concerns. The European Court of Human Rights and the United Nations Human Rights Committee recently issued landmark decisions recalling the obligations of States and the prohibition of arbitrary and unlawful detention.

23. UNHCR called on States to undertake legal and policy reforms to halt the arbitrary detention of refugees and asylum-seekers for immigration-related reasons, while promoting State practices that offer alternatives to detention. To advance these reforms and practices, UNHCR contributed to the development of “Guidelines on Alternatives to Detention” by the European Union Agency for Asylum, as well as “Good Practices on Alternatives to Detention in return procedures” by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX). UNHCR also issued an advocacy brief, calling for an end to immigration detention for refugees and asylum-seekers. UNHCR additionally published legal guidance to support States in the effective and good faith implementation of their obligations under Article 31 of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, which prohibits the penalization of refugees and asylum-seekers for irregularly entering or staying. Respect for these obligations is key to ensuring that refugees who meet applicable requirements can access international protection without being penalized for breaching immigration laws.

24. Displaced and stateless people remain at heightened risk of human trafficking, with women and girls particularly vulnerable. Child trafficking and trafficking for sexual exploitation, often perpetrated by non-State armed groups and criminal networks operating

with impunity, has devastating consequences. Many victims are unable to access protection and support, while funding cuts are undermining humanitarian efforts in this area. A report from the United Nations Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence called for stronger preventive efforts and a survivor-centred approach to ensure access to services, justice and reparations, as well as for the meaningful participation of survivors in responses. At the regional level, the European Union took a significant step by revising its directive on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting victims, which entered into force in July 2024. This directive obliges Member States of the European Union to strengthen coordination between asylum authorities and anti-trafficking actors and to ensure that victims have access to assistance and protection.

III. Inclusion and assistance

A. Inclusion and access to rights

25. The inclusion of refugees in national systems strengthens international protection and facilitates durable solutions, as reaffirmed in the conclusion on international protection no. 117 on durable solutions and complementary pathways, adopted by the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme in 2024.

26. To ensure access to rights for displaced and stateless persons, inclusive legal frameworks are essential. These should guarantee identity, civil and travel documentation, freedom of movement, access to education, labour markets, financial systems and national health systems. While Bangladesh, Brazil, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Pakistan, Rwanda and Uganda included refugees in public services, national plans and regulatory frameworks, Angola, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Mauritania, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe facilitated the issuance of civil and identity documentation to refugees. Inclusive laws across various sectors benefit displaced and stateless populations, as well as host communities. This is exemplified in the health sector by the findings of the "Progress report: Measuring the impact of hosting, protecting and assisting refugees" by the World Bank, UNHCR and the Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement. Achieving inclusion in national systems requires sustained support from partners, as demonstrated through initiatives in Ethiopia and Kenya, supported by Denmark, Germany and Japan, among others.

27. Inclusive State systems are in line with the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol, regulating access to standards of treatment in a context-specific way. The Global Compact on Refugees underscores the commitment of States to inclusive legal protection standards and provides concrete recommendations for multistakeholder engagement. Out of over 3,300 pledges – spanning economic inclusion, social protection, education, health and third-country solutions – made by a wide range of stakeholders at the Global Refugee Forums in 2019 and 2023, some 520 have been fulfilled. The high-level officials meeting in December 2025 will take stock of progress made against the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees and the impacts achieved.

28. UNHCR explored the responsible use of artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies to enhance access to protection services and solutions and to facilitate communication with concerned communities, while ensuring adherence to rigorous data protection safeguards. One such innovative tool is the Digital Gateway, which allows refugees to be in control of their own data, enter and update their information securely, and interact with UNHCR online. The Digital Gateway comprises various components, including remote registration, case status tracking, feedback mechanisms, digital identity documentation management and data on skills, language capacities and family composition. This eliminates the need for repeated in-person visits, reduces processing times, minimizes travel risks, enables faster, more efficient and transparent service delivery, and improves access to skills-based pathways and family reunification. In Egypt, it enabled Sudanese refugees to schedule their registration appointments online, reducing crowding at registration centres and increasing accessibility.

29. In 2024, regional support platforms, as foreseen in the Global Compact on Refugees, enabled context-specific support for refugees and host countries. In Latin America, the MIRPS support platform is helping to strengthen asylum systems and local integration by promoting the inclusion of displaced populations in national data systems to inform policy-making. In East Africa, the IGAD support platform promotes solutions, including in South Sudan, and the inclusion of refugees in environmental rehabilitation plans. The Central African Republic support platform contributed to sustainable solutions for displaced Central Africans, including refugees, internally displaced persons and returnees. In Asia, the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees platform seeks to enhance access to education, health, self-reliance, protection services and resettlement, though its capacity to do so depends on ongoing support in the context of reduced resources.

B. Child protection

30. Approximately 400 million children, or around one in every five of the world's children, are refugees or live in conflict zones. Some 47 million have been forced to leave their homes. UNHCR and partners addressed critical protection needs for displaced children, providing core protection services to at-risk children and their parents and caregivers in over 70 countries. Unaccompanied and separated children were supported through best interests procedures, case management and initiatives to strengthen the role of children, families and communities in addressing child protection risks.

31. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and UNHCR intensified efforts to promote inclusion for refugee children in national child protection systems. The child protection index supported these efforts by evaluating the extent to which national child protection systems were inclusive of refugee children. UNHCR also contributed to training for national social service workforces, in cooperation with UNICEF, the International Social Service and academic partners, enhancing knowledge and skills regarding protection needs, including for refugee children in mixed movements. However, funding reductions will hamper efforts to assist vulnerable children – including with mental health and psychosocial support in Lebanon, and rapid responses to violence, neglect and abuse in the Republic of Moldova.

32. UNHCR helped address protection risks associated with child marriage. In partnership with Plan International, it provided remote and in-country support in 13 countries, focusing on context-specific advocacy and community-driven prevention and response. UNHCR also promoted child-friendly approaches to registration, refugee status determination, durable solutions and family reunification for at-risk and married children, while advocating secondary education as a strategy to prevent child marriage.

C. Protection from violence against women and girls

33. Conflict and displacement increase the risk of gender-based violence, including sexual exploitation, particularly for women and girls. Displaced Sudanese women reported high levels of sexual and physical violence perpetrated by armed actors in the Sudan, while also facing risks after fleeing to Chad. UNHCR and partners continued to prevent, mitigate and respond to the risk of violence against women and girls. In 2024, programmes addressing gender-based violence, including the provision of lifesaving support, reached over 1.6 million people in 86 countries, including nearly one million refugees in Bangladesh, South Sudan, and Uganda. Specialists were deployed to ten emergencies to establish or strengthen programming, including in Chad, Lebanon, Mauritania, Panama, South Sudan and Yemen. Targeted initiatives, such as the Girl Shine programme, helped address the needs of adolescent girls. That programme was rolled out in Bangladesh, Kenya, Malawi, Pakistan, South Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Zimbabwe, as well as Curaçao.

34. Funding cuts are having a devastating effect on many initiatives to prevent and respond to gender-based violence. Programmes aimed at preventing violence against women in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, Mali and Nigeria were

drastically reduced. In South Sudan alone, 80,000 women and girls at risk of violence will have reduced access to medical care, legal assistance and economic support.

D. Community-based protection

35. Engaging displaced and stateless communities is key to achieving sustainable responses and embodies the concept of “people protecting people”. Across its operations, UNHCR works closely with communities, recognizing their agency and empowering them to shape protection responses. Over the past year, UNHCR and partners have consulted with affected populations, collecting and analysing information to better understand and respond to their risks and needs. The standards for collective feedback mechanisms of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), to which UNHCR contributed, provide a comprehensive framework for managing community feedback in humanitarian settings and help partners align their approaches to gathering, analysing and acting on feedback.

36. Digital tools are indispensable to engaging with displaced and stateless people and to enhancing communication and participation. UNHCR concluded research on online safe spaces to ensure humanitarian responders can create secure digital environments to engage with communities. As this presents unique risks and challenges, particularly in displacement contexts where vulnerabilities are heightened, the research provides practical guidance on safe use. This research reflects the organization’s commitment to building trust with communities. It also complements ongoing work to manage misinformation, disinformation and hate speech. In Bangladesh, the organization’s new centralized automated information processing platform is changing the management of refugee feedback and complaints. The platform, covering all camps in Cox’s Bazar and Bhasan Char, unifies data from helplines, emails and face-to-face interactions, ensuring that feedback is tracked and acted upon.

37. Another key pillar of community-based protection is meaningful engagement with refugee-led organizations, which significantly enhances the effectiveness and sustainability of protection and solutions. These organizations often serve as frontline responders in humanitarian crises and play a vital role in development. UNHCR will continue supporting refugee-led organizations by facilitating networking opportunities and ensuring their participation as equal partners in decision-making. In 2024, 42 women-led organizations across the globe participated in the global consultations with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), co-organized by the International Council of Voluntary Agencies and UNHCR. The consultations emphasized the importance of including women-led organizations in humanitarian responses and development work to promote inclusion in national systems, social cohesion and equal access to economic opportunities. UNHCR also supported the establishment of the Global Network of Refugees with Disabilities to enhance inclusive environments and equal opportunities.

E. Education

38. Education is essential for equipping refugees with the skills and knowledge needed for self-reliance, while preventing negative outcomes for young people. A safe learning environment provides stability, normalcy and hope, particularly in emergencies. Schooling provides essential numeracy and literacy skills, which are key to the realization of rights. UNHCR leads a newly-formed inter-agency steering group on higher education in emergencies, which aims to strengthen coordination.

39. Early education interventions for refugees play a critical role in building long-term resilience, by addressing mental health, promoting life skills and supporting socio-emotional needs. Of the 14.8 million school-aged refugee children worldwide, approximately 49 per cent are out of school. Together with partners, UNHCR promotes a rapid return to learning and sustainable inclusion in national education systems, including through connected education and digital learning. In the Kurdistan region of Iraq, the Refugee Education Integration Policy allowed for the enrolment of refugee children in public schools. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Kenya, Mozambique, South Sudan and the United Republic of Tanzania, the Instant Network Schools programme, a collaboration with

the Vodafone Foundation, reached more than 100,000 students and close to 2,000 teachers in 2024. In Europe, UNHCR worked with States and partners to support the inclusion of hundreds of thousands of refugee children and youth from Ukraine in national education systems. Unfortunately, funding cuts threaten to reverse the progress made and leave hundreds of thousands of refugee children without access to schooling.

40. Despite progress in expanding access to primary education for refugee children, access to secondary education and the retention of girls in school remain limited. A major contributing factor is the lack of resources. Predictable, multi-year financing is essential to promote refugee inclusion in education, particularly in lower- and middle-income countries. However, a significant gap remains in meeting the World Bank's estimated annual requirement of \$9.3 billion to include all refugees in national education systems.

41. UNHCR works with development actors and other partners to advance higher education opportunities. Through the "PROSPECTS" partnership – funded by the Kingdom of the Netherlands, and together with the International Finance Corporation, the International Labour Organization (ILO), UNICEF and the World Bank, UNHCR is implementing a refugee-led academic guidance programme to facilitate transitions from secondary to higher education. The World Bank's Inclusion Support Programme for Refugee Education, a technical assistance facility funded by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, is leveraging financing for education in Burundi, Chad, Ethiopia and South Sudan.

42. Girls face significant barriers in accessing and staying in education. To address these challenges, UNHCR piloted a range of initiatives including establishing childcare centres in Ethiopia to enable young mothers to attend school; creating adolescent clubs in Iraq to address life skills and provide educational motivation; and providing travel stipends and accelerated learning programmes in Pakistan. These initiatives provide good practice examples to overcome barriers. Collaboration between education and child protection sectors has helped promote physical and psychosocial well-being, social inclusion and cohesion in schools. One such initiative is the sport for protection approach implemented in countries such as Ethiopia, Malawi, South Africa and the United Republic of Tanzania.

F. Economic inclusion and social protection

43. Economic inclusion, access to decent work and social protection are beneficial to refugees and their host communities. Advancing sustainable economic inclusion entails increased investment, legal and policy adaptation, innovative financing solutions, enhanced data and evidence collection and analysis, economic development strategies and private sector partnerships. Several regional and national governments have taken meaningful steps in this direction. Morocco removed national employment preferences that disadvantaged recognized refugees, allowing them to register with the national employment agency. In Scotland, the New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy was updated, advancing a rights-based approach to the integration of displaced and stateless persons. In Brazil and Mexico, local relocation and tailored integration programmes were implemented to advance employment opportunities for refugees. Meanwhile, the "PROSPECTS" partnership expanded access to employment and social protection for displaced and host communities in countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda.

44. Cooperation between UNHCR and the World Bank continued to drive policy changes aimed at fostering the inclusion of displaced people in national systems, expanding economic opportunities and promoting solutions. Through its refugee policy review framework, UNHCR found that while many national legal frameworks support inclusion, refugees face significant barriers to accessing services and the labour market. These are often linked to the lack of identity documentation, difficulty in obtaining work permits, administrative obstacles, restrictions of movement and limited investment in job creation. At the annual meeting of Identity for All in Africa, participants emphasized that digital identity could drive socioeconomic progress for displaced and stateless persons in Africa and beyond. In partnership with governments, the private sector and development actors, UNHCR is expanding economic opportunities for refugees through agricultural business transformation in Cameroon, Ghana, Malawi, Nigeria, Zambia and Zimbabwe, shifting from small-scale

livelihood projects to larger initiatives that boost productivity, food security, market access and job creation. In Mexico, more than 50,000 refugees have found employment through private sector partnerships, and in Kenya, Peru, Poland and Uganda, private financing, supported by development funding, is helping refugees access loans and savings.

45. UNHCR strengthened partnerships to advance inclusion in social protection systems. In 2024, the Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board, comprising States, the United Nations and NGOs, endorsed common principles on extending social protection to displaced persons and migrants. UNHCR promoted training initiatives for staff and partners, cooperating with the International Training Centre of the ILO, the World Bank and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Building on the strategic collaboration framework between UNICEF and UNHCR as well as the “PROSPECTS” partnership, a study was conducted to assess knowledge and gaps in capacity that limit access to social protection.

IV. Internally displaced persons

46. UNHCR supported protection and assistance for internally displaced persons in over 30 countries, in line with the Secretary-General’s Action Agenda on Internal Displacement. It also contributed to the development of a new United Nations system-wide approach, which builds on existing structures and fosters connections across humanitarian, development and peace pillars. In this context, the High Commissioner committed to serve as a Solutions Champion to advocate sustained support for country-level solutions. UNHCR also developed a protection risk assessment tool for United Nations country teams and led the update of the IASC’s Policy on the Protection of Internally Displaced Persons. At the same time, funding cuts have led to the reduction or closure of vital protection activities for this population, including community-based interventions, responses to gender-based violence, child protection, legal aid, and mobile outreach. This has increased exposure to violence, exploitation and other protection risks.

47. UNHCR supported States to develop, amend and implement legal, policy and institutional frameworks to prevent and address internal displacement, including in Cameroon, Colombia, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Ukraine, as well as the Mexican States of Michoacán and Oaxaca. In these processes, UNHCR ensured that displaced communities were consulted. It also monitored implementation to ensure existing frameworks effectively translated into better protection for the displaced.

48. As of May 2025, 45 laws on internal displacement had been adopted across 18 countries. In the Philippines, the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao adopted the first rights-based law on internal displacement in South-East Asia, and over 15 municipalities passed ordinances on internal displacement. With the participation of affected communities, UNHCR supported the development of regulations in Chad and Honduras that were essential for the effective implementation of laws on internal displacement.

49. UNHCR supported capacity-building for governments, national and local partners, and internally displaced persons, including in Honduras and Mexico. In collaboration with the Protection Expert Group for Internally Displaced Persons and the International Institute of Humanitarian Law, UNHCR organized a Cross-Regional Forum on Implementing Laws and Policies on Internal Displacement in Africa, marking the fifteenth anniversary of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa. The event brought together 13 African countries to discuss ways to overcome challenges to implementing laws and policies on internal displacement, including through domestication of the Convention.

50. UNHCR launched a new “Global Report on Law and Policy on Internal Displacement”. Drawing on recent law and policy developments related to prevention, protection and solutions for internally displaced persons in 15 countries, the report presents lessons learned and good practices to strengthen implementation of existing frameworks.

51. Under the Global Protection Cluster, UNHCR led 28 out of 32 protection clusters and cluster-like mechanisms. Through its field support desk, the Global Protection Cluster provided tailored support to country operations and responded to over 500 requests for guidance. UNHCR, InterAction and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) co-established a community of practice on the Centrality of Protection in Humanitarian Action in July 2024. This initiative supports collective action to address priority protection risks in humanitarian emergencies. UNHCR also proposed measures, within the Humanitarian Reset, to simplify the humanitarian architecture, reduce bureaucracy and foster greater joint action with protection at the centre of the response.

V. Stateless persons

52. Statelessness denies individuals the right to a nationality and recognition of their existence – a standing frequently overlooked. Without nationality, stateless people face barriers to exercising their human rights, including freedom of movement, education, health care, marriage and work. An estimated 4.4 million people in 95 countries are stateless or of undetermined nationality. The actual number is believed to be significantly higher, as approximately half of all countries do not report data on statelessness, despite being known to have stateless populations, while others only report partial figures, capturing a fraction of those affected.

53. The year 2024 marked the completion of the 10-year #IBelong Campaign to end statelessness. The campaign and its accompanying Global Action Plan to End Statelessness catalysed significant progress in all regions and saw many positive legal and policy developments for stateless people.

54. Building on progress made under the campaign, the Global Alliance to End Statelessness was launched in October 2024 during the high-level segment on statelessness at the seventy-fifth plenary session of the UNHCR Executive Committee. The Global Alliance is a multi-stakeholder platform aimed at building a world free from statelessness, where everyone enjoys the right to a nationality without discrimination. The initiative is part of the United Nations Secretary-General's "Our Common Agenda" and aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals. It currently has over 140 members from governments, intergovernmental organizations, the United Nations and stateless-led organizations.

55. Several countries took decisive action to end statelessness. In Thailand, with one of the world's largest stateless populations, the Government approved a Cabinet resolution to accelerate nationality and legal status applications for long-term residents and children born on its territory. The resolution simplifies procedures and significantly shortens processing times for nationality and permanent residency applications, expediting solutions for more than 480,000 registered stateless persons. Turkmenistan announced that it had officially resolved all known cases of statelessness on its territory, having granted citizenship to more than 32,000 persons, including refugees and stateless persons, in the past two decades. Turkmenistan has also established a statelessness determination procedure and included safeguards in its nationality law to prevent statelessness in the future. Nevertheless, global progress on the reduction of statelessness remained limited.

56. Malaysia took a significant step toward achieving gender-equal nationality rights, following the passing of a constitutional amendment to allow Malaysian women to confer nationality on their children born abroad. The amendment grants women equal rights to men to confer nationality to children. UNHCR encourages retroactive application of the amendment to address previous exclusions and that it includes safeguards for granting nationality to stateless children born in Malaysia and to foundlings. Once the reform takes effect, the number of countries discriminating against women in their ability to confer nationality to their biological children will decrease from 24 to 23.

57. A joint study by UNHCR and the World Bank in Kenya provided compelling evidence on the socioeconomic benefits of granting citizenship to stateless individuals. This study, focusing on the Shona community, compared their socioeconomic situation before and after the granting of citizenship. It presents data on the transformative effects of legal recognition and serves as a best practice example. Also in Kenya, over 2,000 individuals from the

stateless Rundi and Rwandan communities were captured in community-led self-registration initiatives and verified by Government officials, with the objective of advancing nationality opportunities for them.

58. In a significant step toward addressing statelessness, South Sudan acceded to both the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. Slovenia also acceded to the 1961 Convention, reinforcing its commitment as a party to the 1954 Convention. As a result, 99 and 82 States are now party to the 1954 and 1961 statelessness conventions, respectively.

59. Several countries strengthened their laws and policies to improve the enjoyment of rights for stateless persons. In Colombia, the Government issued a resolution regulating the statelessness determination procedure, which is in line with the “Draft articles on the protection of stateless persons and the facilities for their naturalization” published by UNHCR to support States. Montenegro amended the Law on Free Legal Aid, advancing access to legal assistance for stateless persons on social issues and child protection.

60. Efforts to ensure access to birth registration, identity documentation and civil status registration continued across all regions, with support from UNHCR. Regional entities also reinforced their commitment to addressing statelessness. The League of Arab States launched the Arab Declaration on Belonging and Legal Identity to strengthen birth registration systems and advance legal identity rights, particularly for women. In the Americas, the Chile Declaration and Plan of Action 2024–2034 was adopted, with States reaffirming the right to nationality and committing to concrete measures to prevent and resolve statelessness. Moreover, the Latin American and Caribbean Council of Civil Registry, Identity and Vital Statistics adopted the São Paulo Declaration, emphasizing universal birth registration and the right to identity.

VI. Solutions

61. International protection should be a temporary measure, until a sustainable long-term solution can be found. Both the Statute of UNHCR and international law emphasize the importance of finding solutions for displaced people, whether through voluntary repatriation to their country of origin or long-term residence or citizenship in a new country. However, the resources needed to support solutions, particularly voluntary repatriation, have been sharply reduced and are expected to decline further. This trend presents serious challenges for refugees and host countries in many regions. Achieving lasting solutions is a collective responsibility of States, UNHCR and other partners, requiring political will and financial resources. A promising example can be seen in Belize, where residency cards were issued to asylum-seekers under an amnesty programme, marking a significant step towards citizenship and local integration as a solution.

A. Voluntary repatriation

62. Since 2020, over 3.71 million refugees have returned to their countries of origin. This includes 1.6 million who returned in 2024, with 92 per cent of these returns occurring to Afghanistan, South Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Ukraine. However, sustainable return is most effective when accompanied by peacebuilding and recovery efforts, as premature returns can lead to renewed conflict and instability. In this context, UNHCR and the Danish Refugee Council published preliminary findings from the “Aspiring for Peace and Inclusion Research” project, which examines ways in which South Sudanese refugees in Kenya and Uganda contribute to peaceful coexistence and conflict mitigation measures in their communities. This 15-year, refugee-driven research project, funded by the European Union, explores the use of customary and other informal conflict resolution mechanisms, providing strong evidence in support of locally-led approaches to peacebuilding and reintegration.

63. The situation in the Syrian Arab Republic has brought cautious optimism for rebuilding, with many internally displaced persons and refugees expressing a desire to return home. While UNHCR is facilitating voluntary returns, it cautions that years of protracted

conflict have devastated the country's infrastructure and economy. Humanitarian needs remain immense, with 16.5 million Syrians requiring assistance. Ongoing sporadic clashes between armed groups, the presence of unexploded ordnance and persistent security challenges continue to pose risks to humanitarian operations and civilians. In this uncertain context, UNHCR calls on States to uphold the right to seek asylum, allow civilians fleeing the Syrian Arab Republic to access territory and ensure the principle of non-refoulement is respected. It urges the international community to maintain support for host countries in the region, while investing meaningfully in the Syrian Arab Republic to create the conditions for voluntary, safe and sustainable returns. As of mid-2025, some 400,000 Syrians were able to return voluntarily, including with support from UNHCR and partners. However, financial support for return and reintegration from neighbouring countries has been impacted by funding cuts. The ninth Brussels Conference on the Syria situation highlighted the objectives of mobilizing humanitarian and financial support for Syrians inside the country as well as for refugees and host countries in the region, while also urging support for a comprehensive, credible and nationally-led political solution to the conflict, in line with United Nations Security Council resolution 2254. This historic moment presents an opportunity to end one of the world's largest displacement crises. However, achieving sustainable peace and stability demands urgent and continuous international commitment.

64. There were also opportunities for solutions in West and Central Africa. In the Central African Republic, progress has been made toward recovery from a protracted crisis, following the implementation of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation and the restoration of security in certain areas. As a result, an increasing number of refugees and internally displaced persons are deciding to return home – despite ongoing insecurity and severe weather events that continue to drive displacement. In October 2024, a tripartite agreement was signed by the Central African Republic, Chad and UNHCR to facilitate the return of Central African refugees. To support this, a survey was initiated in early 2025 to assess the intentions, needs and challenges upon return of the 138,000 refugees in southern Chad. Voluntary repatriation and sustainable return require that returns are based on free and informed decisions, while ensuring that those choosing to remain in the host country are included in national systems. The Central African Republic solutions support platform contributes to these objectives, including by promoting the issuance of identity documents to facilitate access to rights, enhancing livelihood opportunities and strengthening local capacities to sustain both returnees and host communities. However, recent cuts in funding will impact projects that support the sustainability of returns.

65. In 2024, many Cameroonian refugees returned home, with most receiving cash assistance from UNHCR as part of the return programme. In Nigeria, the States of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe adopted strategies or action plans on durable solutions to displacement. However, continuous international support remains essential to finance efforts that ensure the sustainability of returns. The private sector also plays a key role, as highlighted during the 2024 Africa Roundtable on Private Sector Solutions to Internal Displacement, co-organized by UNHCR, the Nigerian Government and the Special Adviser on Solutions to Internal Displacement.

66. In the East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes region, refugees – primarily from Burundi and South Sudan, but also from Ethiopia, Rwanda, Somalia and Sudan – returned to their countries of origin. While the reintegration of returnees has the potential to stimulate economic growth and foster political stability, it requires greater support and resources, particularly in countries with overstretched capacities such as Burundi and South Sudan. Returns often occur in complex conditions, requiring a comprehensive approach that integrates stabilization efforts, livelihood opportunities, good governance and access to services, alongside security measures. The Special Adviser on Solutions to Internal Displacement led the United Nations in supporting the Governments of the Central African Republic, Chad, the Niger and Nigeria in these efforts.

67. In Asia, the displacement of Afghans since 2021 continues to strain the resources of the neighbouring asylum countries, which host some 7.3 million Afghans. Following recent large-scale deportations back to Afghanistan, UNHCR and partners, the majority of which are national NGOs, are providing support to the returnees who are facing an uncertain future in their homeland. Upon return, families are confronted with pervasive poverty and soaring

unemployment – major hurdles to reintegration – compounded by prolonged droughts, gaps in essential public services and limited access to safe drinking water. Inadequate resources are hindering reintegration, as the capacity to absorb the returns and support those in need is limited.

B. Resettlement and complementary pathways

68. Resettlement remains crucial to ensuring durable solutions and protection for refugees at heightened risk, particularly in emergency cases, where lives are under immediate threat. In 2024, UNHCR submitted more than 203,700 resettlement cases to 23 countries – the highest number since the 1990s. However, only some 116,500 refugees departed to their resettlement countries. Unfortunately, resettlement places have dramatically declined, while some States have prioritized considerations such as foreign policy objectives and integration potential over immediate protection risks and vulnerabilities. The gap between the number of refugees in need of resettlement and available places is widening. States are reminded of the importance of resettlement as a means of burden- and responsibility-sharing. A positive development was the entry into force of the Union Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Framework Regulation, adopted by the European Union in May 2024. While this marks a positive step forward, far more is needed to meet the global resettlement needs.

69. Skills-based pathways and family reunification enable refugees to move safely from a first country of asylum to another country – to work, study or reunite with family. These pathways empower refugees to make their own choices and lead safe, dignified and productive lives, while providing viable alternatives to dangerous onward movements. They are thus a key component of the route-based approach. UNHCR released operational and legal guidance on family reunification for displaced persons and advocated refugee inclusion in global migration frameworks. Together with IOM, UNHCR developed a train-to-hire project in Asia, facilitating refugee labour mobility in Australia. Similarly, Italy created a safe labour pathway, enabling refugees trained in countries of asylum (including Egypt, Jordan and Uganda) to relocate on work visas and join the national workforce. New skills-based complementary pathway programmes were also launched in Australia and Slovenia. Such programmes are catalytic for refugees to access solutions and secure their own future through labour migration or other legal pathways.

70. States are reminded of their obligations under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1969 Organisation of African Unity Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa to provide refugees with identity and travel documents. However, many refugees are unable to travel outside their asylum countries, as just over half of countries worldwide issue machine-readable travel documents. To address the policy and implementation gaps in the issuance, accessibility and recognition of refugee travel documents, UNHCR has worked with the University of Essex on a multi-stakeholder initiative, with support from the International Civil Aviation Organization. This initiative aims to provide recommendations to States and other stakeholders, including on updating and developing guidance on international standards; increasing operational support and capacity-building; strengthening research and the evidence base; expanding multi-stakeholder engagement; and enhancing advocacy for the broader issuance and acceptance of travel documents, including but not limited to Convention Travel Documents under the 1951 Convention.

VII. Conclusion

71. The international protection system is under unprecedented strain from escalating conflicts, multifaceted emergencies and complex displacement crises. Some meaningful progress has been made in strengthening asylum laws and processes, promoting inclusion and addressing the needs of displaced and stateless persons. However, greater resources are critical to support targeted programmes that can address the acute and complex needs.

72. The scale and complexity of displacement necessitate robust international cooperation and equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing to provide protection, find solutions and

help host countries manage challenges. Sustained political and financial support from donor countries remains crucial to uphold the international protection framework. The growing engagement of development actors and the private sector has provided valuable additional resources and expertise. Nevertheless, chronic underfunding – particularly for protracted and less visible displacement situations – has long hindered progress. Recent far-reaching funding cuts will further exacerbate the challenges and deepen the hardship faced by displaced and stateless people in 2025 and beyond.

73. UNHCR remains committed to efficiency and innovation. However, greater political and financial support is required to allow UNHCR to deliver on its State-conferred mandate of providing protection and solutions in the current context of growing displacement and the organization's reduced presence, structure and resources. Given the complexity and diversity of today's protection challenges, genuine and effective international cooperation and adherence to international legal standards are more important and urgent than ever.
