

Update on UNHCR operations in Asia and the Pacific

A. Situational analysis, including new developments

At the end of 2024, there were 17.3 million people who were forcibly displaced, stateless, returnees or others of concern to UNHCR in the Asia and the Pacific region. This included 6.8 million refugees and people in refugee-like situations, 445,400 asylum-seekers, 365,200 refugee returnees, 6.9 million internally displaced persons, 556,400 internally displaced returnees and 2.5 million stateless persons.

While the number of displaced persons in the region has increased, funding constraints have significantly impeded the delivery of essential support for some of the most vulnerable, including cash assistance for families in Afghanistan and cooking fuel for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

At the same time, solutions for displaced persons in the region have stalled, with resettlement significantly reduced from more than 42,000 submissions in 2024 to an anticipated 10,000 submissions in 2025. However, in a positive development, with increased access to skills-building opportunities in host countries and significant labour shortages around the world, it is anticipated that the number of forcibly displaced and stateless persons able to access skill-based pathways will continue to grow.

Irregular maritime movements continued to put more lives at risk, with nearly 660 individuals reported dead or missing in or around the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal in 2024, representing a 55 per cent increase over 2023. This alarming trend continued unabated in 2025, with an estimated 457 lives lost during the first six months of the year, mostly on routes towards Indonesia and Malaysia. There was also a significant number of cross-border movements by boat across the Naf River into Bangladesh, as people fled violence in Myanmar.

Extreme weather and disasters continued to disproportionately affect the region, with severe flooding in Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand and elsewhere during 2025, as storms and monsoon rains destroyed infrastructure and displaced families. In response, UNHCR worked with partners to strengthen the resilience of refugees and other displaced persons, advocate their inclusion in national systems and disaster risk reduction plans, and ensure financing reached vulnerable communities in fragile contexts.

Afghanistan situation

As of the end of 2024, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Pakistan hosted 3.8 million and 1.6 million forcibly displaced Afghans. 2025 has been characterized by the large-scale deportations and returns of Afghans in adverse circumstances from both Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Pakistan, following shifts in government policies. In March 2025, the authorities in Iran (Islamic Republic of) adopted a return and regularization scheme, resulting in the return of some 1.8 million Afghans as of 15 September 2025. In Pakistan, the Government announced that, in addition to Afghan Citizen Card holders, Proof of Registration cardholders must return to Afghanistan, affecting some 750,000 and 1.4 million persons respectively and resulting in the return of some 600,000 Afghans from April to 15 September 2025.

In view of the human rights and humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, UNHCR considers that certain Afghans are likely to be in need of international protection who should not be forcibly returned, and encourages caution with any involuntary return of Afghans, particularly those with acute needs and vulnerabilities. UNHCR also calls for enhanced support from the international community for the host countries, while emphasizing the need to expand regulated migration pathways for Afghans.

Despite these developments, UNHCR and partners continued to support Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Pakistan, including via the 2024-2025 Refugee Response Plan for the Afghanistan Situation, through which partners provided essential services to over 3.7 million people in 2024. Meanwhile, the Support Platform of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees remained a vital mechanism for keeping Afghan displacement high on the international agenda and mobilizing collective action.

In Afghanistan, during 2025, UNHCR is prioritizing protection and assistance for returnees at the border and pursuing more sustainable responses, particularly cash-based interventions, shelter and livelihoods, and with an emphasis on women and girls, in areas of return. In 2025, UNHCR has assisted 770,000 people as of 15 September, 51 per cent comprising women and girls, including at borders. It provided cash assistance, shelter, livelihoods support, and psychosocial and legal assistance. UNHCR continues to advocate the uninterrupted and non-discriminatory delivery of humanitarian assistance, as well as the protection of rights for women and girls, especially in the areas of education and livelihoods.

Myanmar situation

The Myanmar situation accounted for 5.6 million people with and for whom UNHCR works in the region, including 1.8 million stateless Rohingya, by the end of 2024. Conflict continued to escalate in Myanmar, exacerbating the humanitarian and protection situation, and triggering new and secondary displacement. An earthquake in March 2025 killed at least 3,800 individuals and caused widespread destruction, stretching an already underfunded humanitarian response. As of 15 September 2025, despite some countries maintaining or introducing closed border policies, over 272,000 refugees had fled to Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand since the military takeover in February 2021, of which more than 130,000 have fled in the last 12 months. Meanwhile, the people displaced internally in Myanmar stood at 3.6 million as of 15 September 2025.

Civilians in Rakhine State continue to be caught up in the conflict, while others face grave protection concerns and elevated intercommunal tensions. Rohingya in Rakhine State, the vast majority of whom are stateless, continue to experience significant restrictions on movement, difficulties in obtaining documentation and limited access to livelihoods and basic services, while also being targeted for forced recruitment, forced labour and arbitrary detention.

Despite insecurity and access constraints, UNHCR and partners have been working to assess and alleviate some of the most pressing humanitarian and protection needs of affected communities in Myanmar, including those impacted by the 2025 earthquake.

As of 15 September, Bangladesh hosts some 1,156,000 Rohingya in the world's largest refugee community in Cox's Bazar and on Bhasan Char, an island in the Bay of Bengal. The security situation in the camps remains tenuous, with refugees coming under pressure from organized groups to support the fighting in Myanmar's Rakhine State and reports of forced recruitment. In this challenging context, UNHCR continued to bring security concerns to the attention of the national authorities in Bangladesh. The Government approved the use of safer shelter materials to improve safety in the camps, though implementation was limited due to funding constraints.

With the humanitarian response coming under critical pressure due to growing needs and reduced funding, to mobilize political support, generate attention and propose a plan to facilitate a resolution of the crisis, the United Nations General Assembly held a high-level conference on the situation of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in September 2025. In the lead up to the conference, the Government of Bangladesh organized a stakeholders' dialogue in Cox's Bazar at which it announced a seven-step action plan that included the

safe, voluntary, sustainable and dignified return to Rakhine, a sustained response to the refugee situation and an end to violence in Rakhine State.

Since the launch of the multi-stakeholder pledge on expanded resilience and enhanced solutions for Rohingya refugees at the Global Refugee Forum in 2023, pledging entities have reported a 56 per cent implementation rate of the 45 commitments made to provide political, financial and technical support.

B. Progress and challenges in achieving the 2024 plan for the Asia and Pacific region – by impact area

Attaining favourable protection environments

The protection environment in the region remains challenging with numerous incidents of pushbacks, push-ins, deportations and other incidents, many of which likely represent instances of refoulement affecting refugees and asylum-seekers. This includes countries hosting refugees from Afghanistan and Myanmar, the two largest refugee situations in Asia and the Pacific. Return policies and plans and an environment of discrimination, harassment and intimidation in some countries, with risks of arrest, detention and removal, have led many refugees feeling compelled to return to their country of origin in adverse conditions.

At the same time, many States continue to host and offer protection and inclusion to millions of refugees and asylum-seekers, including Iran (Islamic Republic of), where registered Afghan refugees are able to access the national health and education systems. Since 2024, Bangladesh has biometrically enrolled 130,000 new arrivals fleeing the uptick in violence in Rakhine State and will begin a pilot project to issue mobile SIM cards to 10,000 refugees, paving the way for financial inclusion through mobile money. Thailand adopted a resolution allowing 81,000 long-term refugees the right to work, reducing their dependence on shrinking levels of aid and improving their inclusion in society and also confirmed the withdrawal of Thailand's reservation to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in support of the inclusion of refugee children in national systems. In Malaysia, UNHCR partnered with the country's largest integrated fintech provider to include refugees and asylum-seekers in a range of digital financial services, underscoring the critical role of the private sector in supporting self-reliance and protection, and achieving long-term solutions.

Empowering communities and achieving gender equality

To support sustainable, impactful and locally-led initiatives to prevent and respond to gender-based violence, small grants were provided to women-led organizations in India, Indonesia and Malaysia. Similarly, the Girl Shine programme was implemented in Pakistan to empower adolescent girls, while in Bangladesh, skill-building initiatives focused on challenging gender stereotypes and strengthening community resilience through community-led projects.

Securing solutions

UNHCR continued to address barriers to voluntary repatriation through integrated programming in areas of return, including working in priority areas of return in Afghanistan to support sustainability, despite limited resources. While UNHCR has sought to scale up its work in other countries of origin, challenges, including but not limited to conflict, have inhibited large-scale voluntary return in the region.

With the overall reduction of resettlement quotas in 2025, UNHCR has been working with partners to expand third-country solutions for refugees from Myanmar, building on innovative models from within and beyond the region. Steps to expand self-reliance opportunities were taken in several countries in the region to increase access to skills-based complementary pathways.

Papua New Guinea naturalized several long-term refugees in 2025, while efforts to advance solutions for Sri Lankan refugees in India are ongoing. In India, the focus is on local inclusion and pathways to citizenship for those eligible, as well as the continued provision of reintegration support for individuals who wish to return home voluntarily.

Protection and solutions for internally displaced persons

As of 15 September 2025, there were over 334,000 internally displaced returnees in the region, primarily in Myanmar and the Philippines, with smaller numbers returning to their places of origin in Afghanistan.

In Myanmar, during 2025, UNHCR prioritized life-saving assistance and community-based protection activities based on needs and access, reaching over 667,000 people as of 15 September.

In the Philippines, UNHCR continues to work in support of the local authorities in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, which in September 2024 passed a long-awaited bill on the rights of internally displaced persons. In July 2025, UNHCR and partners convened the second national conference on the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, during which a multi-stakeholder campaign to pass the bill was launched.

Eradication of statelessness

Significant progress to prevent and eradicate statelessness continued in the region. In Thailand, following the approval of the Cabinet Resolution to accelerate pathways to nationality and permanent residence for nearly half a million stateless persons in October 2024, a regulation to implement the Cabinet Resolution was officially issued in June 2025, facilitating access to nationality and permanent residence for eligible individuals. In September 2024, Turkmenistan became the latest country to successfully resolve all known cases of statelessness on its territory, while in December 2024 Malaysia passed a constitutional amendment to allow Malaysian women to confer nationality on their children born abroad.

Significant progress was achieved at the regional level in partnership with intergovernmental organizations. In June, UNHCR supported the preparation and adoption of the 2025 Ministerial Declaration on a Decade of Action for Inclusive and Resilient Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, a new regional framework endorsed by all 62 member States of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. This ministerial declaration reaffirms the commitment of these States to work individually and collectively to achieve universal birth registration and provide legal identity for all persons in the region, a critical foundation for preventing and reducing statelessness.

Notwithstanding this progress, the vast majority of Rohingya in Myanmar and displaced in the region remained without access to nationality, signaling the need for concerted advocacy.

C. Financial information

In October 2024, the Executive Committee approved the 2025 budget of \$957.9 million for the Asia and the Pacific region. The current 2025 budget for the region remains unchanged at \$957.9 million as of 31 August 2025.

The breakdown of the requirements by impact area, as of 31 August 2025, is as follows: realizing rights in safe environments (\$425.6 million); attaining favourable protection environments (\$233.8 million); empowering communities and achieving gender equality (\$195.1 million); and securing solutions (\$103.4 million).

As of 31 August 2025, 37 per cent of the financial requirements for the Asia and Pacific region were funded, taking into account the indicative allocation of flexible funding.