



2025 UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award Winners' Profiles

Established in 1954, the UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award is presented each year to an individual, group or organization that has taken extraordinary action to protect or assist forcibly displaced or stateless people. Since 2017, UNHCR has also recognized several regional winners each year.

SHORT BIOS:

Martin Azia Sodea is the Chief of Gado-Badzéré village in eastern Cameroon and the 2025 UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award Global Laureate. He has shown exceptional dedication and leadership. Together with the people of Gado-Badzéré, he welcomed over 36,000 refugees from the Central African Republic. He and his family donated land for housing and farming, turning their village into a hub for fresh produce and self-reliance. Chief Sodea has established support networks for refugee women and youth, regularly resolves disputes, and has created a safe, thriving community.

The four regional winners to be honoured this year are:

- **Pablo Moreno Cadena (Americas)**, a private sector leader who champions refugee inclusion in Mexico. As a senior executive at MABE, a major appliance manufacturer in the country, he led the company to become the first employer in Mexico to actively recruit and integrate refugees into its workforce.
- **Proliska (Europe)**, a Ukrainian organization working on the front lines for over a decade, delivering life-saving aid in the most dangerous and hard-to-reach areas.
- **Negara Nazari (Asia-Pacific)**, an Afghan refugee who co-founded the Ariana Learning Centre in Tajikistan, giving access to education to over 1,200 refugee and Tajik children.
- **Taban Shores (MENA)**, founder and CEO of The Lotus Flower, a non-profit organization that supports conflict survivors in Iraq to heal and rebuild their lives.

GLOBAL LAUREATE:

Chief Martin Azia Sodea, the UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award's 2025 Global Laureate, is a visionary leader who has touched thousands of lives with his humanity and generosity. When 36,000 refugees from the Central African Republic arrived in their village, the people of Gado-Badzéré in eastern Cameroon did not turn them away. Instead, led by Chief Sodea and his family, they gave the newcomers the chance to rebuild, offering land, shelter and farming to enable them to become self-reliant.

He has brought together youth volunteers to assist newcomers and help them to acclimatise and formed a women's group to address the specific needs of refugee women and children. He has resolved over 1,000 disputes and leads a joint refugee-host community committee to ensure peace.

But his influence extends beyond Gado-Badzéré. He has also inspired other traditional leaders to support refugees, sparking a regional shift in how refugees are welcomed and proving that empathy can be a powerful force for change. His message is simple yet profound: *"We are all human beings, and we have to take care of each other."*



AMERICAS:

Pablo Moreno Cadena, the UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award's 2025 Regional Winner for the Americas, is a business leader in Mexico who has become a trailblazer for refugee inclusion in the country.

A senior executive at MABE, a major appliance manufacturer, he encouraged the company to actively hire and integrate refugees into its workforce. Refugees from Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala, many of them fleeing violence and instability, have found not just jobs, but dignity, security and purpose within MABE. By offering formal employment, the company also ensures that refugees gain access to social protection and opportunities for long-term professional growth – critical lifelines in contexts where they often face legal and economic barriers.

What sets Pablo apart is not only the scale of his impact but the depth of his conviction. He consistently champions the idea that refugees are not a burden but an asset – people whose strength and perseverance enrich the communities and companies they join. His leadership has helped shift mindsets across the business community and redefined what it means to be a responsible employer in a time of global displacement, inspiring more than 650 companies in Mexico to adopt inclusive hiring practices.

By combining business strategy with empathy, he has helped create a future where refugees are seen, valued and given the chance to thrive. He stands out as a powerful and transformative figure for the region: a private sector leader who demonstrates that refugee inclusion is not only possible but also a driving force for social cohesion and economic growth.

EUROPE:

Proliska, the UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award's 2025 Regional Winner for Europe, is a Ukrainian organization providing life-saving aid to more than 3.2 million people, often in the most dangerous and isolated areas.

In the aftermath of air strikes and shelling, Proliska is often among the first to respond through their dedicated staff. When attacks happen at night or in remote areas, Proliska quickly deploys teams to ensure no one is left behind. They are one of the few humanitarian actors authorized to operate alongside municipal emergency responders during active emergencies – trusted, present and essential.

Proliska's rapid deployment and protection-first approach ensures that the most vulnerable – including older people, people with disabilities, and families with few resources – are not forgotten. For those unable or unwilling to flee the front line, Proliska continues to deliver essential aid, including providing food, water, medical care, psychosocial support and other critical supplies.

ASIA & PACIFIC:

From Refugee Scholar to School Founder

Negara Nazari, the UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award's 2025 Regional Winner for Asia-



Pacific, is an Afghan refugee and co-founder of the Ariana Learning Centre in Tajikistan.

A former DAFI scholar with a degree in economics, Negara chose a path rooted in compassion and action. Instead of pursuing a corporate career, she decided to build a school for young Afghan refugees who were unable to access education. Ariana Learning Center (ALC) was launched in 2020 with just two classrooms and three instructors teaching 20 students. With its pay-what-you-can model, ALC today serves over 1,200 young learners, filling an urgent need for quality, affordable education for Afghan refugee and Tajik children.

They offer classes in languages, technology, mathematics, computer science and the arts, as well as psychological counselling and leadership programmes. They have opened two satellite branches, including a kindergarten attended by 220 children. The centre also provides leadership and management training programmes for Afghan women refugees.

ALC is more than a school; it is a safe haven. A place of learning and healing, and a powerful symbol of hope, bringing an entire community of Afghan refugees and Tajiks together.

MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA:

Taban Shores, the UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award's 2025 Regional Winner for the Middle East and North Africa, is an aid worker, women's rights activist and founder of The Lotus Flower, a women-led organization that supports conflict survivors in Iraq.

A genocide survivor, Taban was inspired by her own experiences to make a real difference in the lives of displaced women and girls in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. Many of the survivors supported by The Lotus Flower have lost their homes and families and suffered rape, torture, trafficking and slavery.

Starting out with just two staff members in 2016, The Lotus Flower now employs a team of 150, who work at the grassroots to empower women and girls to fully participate in their communities and drive social and economic change. The organization runs projects in education, sports, skills development and livelihoods. They also provide mental health support and advocate against gender-based violence and sexual abuse. To date, they have supported over 105,000 people.

The Lotus Flower strives for a world where women and girls are free from violence and can heal, learn and grow.

BACKGROUND:

The UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award (originally the 'Nansen Medal') was established in 1954 in honour of Norwegian humanitarian, scientist, explorer and diplomat Fridtjof Nansen. This prestigious honour is given annually to individuals, groups or organizations in recognition of outstanding work to help refugees, internally displaced people and stateless people. The first Nansen laureate was Eleanor Roosevelt. Often, though, the award recognizes the work of lesser-known figures; unsung heroes whose work offers hope away from home.



NANSEN REFUGEE AWARD

Famous for landmark achievements in a range of fields, Nansen was appointed in 1921 as the League of Nations' High Commissioner for Refugees. The following year, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize "for his leading role in the repatriation of prisoners of war, in international relief work and as the League of Nations High Commissioner for refugees" assisting people forcibly displaced by World War I. Among his signal achievements was the "Nansen passport", which served as both an identity document and a travel permit for refugees and stateless people.

The Nansen Refugee Award honours a Global Laureate and, since 2017, several regional winners. This year, each will receive a certificate of recognition for their outstanding service and dedication, as well as financial or material support for their programmes to help sustain and strengthen the work for which they are being recognized.

CEREMONY

The 2025 UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award ceremony will take place at the Bâtiment des Forces Motrices (BFM) on 16 December. The event will bring together State delegations, private-sector leaders, UN and international organization representatives, non-governmental organizations and refugee-led organizations to celebrate the exemplary work of the Global Laureate and the four regional winners.

The programme will showcase the winners' achievements and feature live artistic performances. The ceremony is by invitation only; however, a recording will be available on UNHCR's YouTube channel after the event. The event is open to all journalists who are registered with the Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland. Please contact nansen@unhcr.org for more information.

FEATURED ARTISTS

Cate Blanchett – Goodwill Ambassador [not available for interviews]

Cate Blanchett was announced as a Goodwill Ambassador for UNHCR in 2016. Since then, she has become one of UNHCR's most dedicated advocates, supporting the organisation through high-level advocacy, fundraising and campaigns. Cate has met with refugees in countries across the globe including Egypt, Brazil, South Sudan, Niger, Jordan, Bangladesh and Lebanon, helping to amplify refugee voices and working to ensure the human stories behind the figures are heard. Beyond her visits, she has addressed the European Parliament and US Congress, calling for continued support for refugees. She's an Academy Award-winner and a humanitarian, and continues to use her platform to promote understanding, inclusion and solidarity with people forced to flee.

Master of Ceremonies

Leanne Manas - Goodwill Ambassador

Leanne Manas was appointed as a Goodwill Ambassador for UNHCR in 2019. Since then, she has travelled with UNHCR to Kenya, Mozambique, Malawi and Lebanon, using her platform to advocate for the protection, dignity, and empowerment of refugees around the world. A multiple award-winning senior news anchor, Leanne is one of South Africa's most respected media figures. For over two decades, she has anchored the South African

Broadcasting Corporation's (SABC) flagship morning news programme, Morning Live, which reaches millions of viewers across Africa and beyond. In recognition of her outstanding contribution to journalism and humanitarian work, Leanne was awarded the honour of Knight of the French National Order of Merit. Beyond television, she is also an accomplished radio host, keynote speaker, and MC, admired for her professionalism, warmth and ability to connect with audiences across diverse platforms.

Ahmad Joudeh – High Profile Supporter

Ahmad Joudeh is a dancer and choreographer born in Damascus in 1990 as a stateless refugee and was raised in Yarmouk, a Palestinian refugee camp. From a young age, he pursued his passion for dance despite strong opposition from his community. During the Syrian civil war, he lost his home and five family members, yet he continued to pursue dance as a symbol of hope and resistance. After his story aired on Dutch television in 2016, the Dutch National Ballet invited him to the Netherlands through The Dance for Peace Fund. He later settled in Amsterdam and became a Dutch citizen in 2021. His story inspired the Emmy Award-winning documentary and memoir *Dance or Die*. He's a member of the Golden State Ballet company in San Diego and was awarded the Fair Saturday Award at the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao in October 2025.

Tusse – Ambassador for Sweden for UNHCR Tousin "Tusse" Chiza is a musician and singer who was born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Tusse fled to neighbouring Uganda at age five together with his aunt. After spending three years in a refugee camp in Uganda, he was resettled to Sweden. In 2021, Tusse represented Sweden at the Grand Final of the Eurovision Song Contest with the powerful song "Voices". Tusse openly shares his experience in overcoming challenges of settling in and adapting to new situations, helping empower young people facing similar difficulties. He has been an Ambassador for Sweden for UNHCR since 2021.

Maria Sur – Ambassador for Sweden for UNHCR

Maria Sur is a 20-year-old Ukrainian singer and performer who fled her hometown of Zaporizhzhia in 2022 following the Russian invasion. Before the war, she took part in Holos Krainy, the Ukrainian version of The Voice, but her career in Ukraine was cut short when she and her mother were forced to flee in search of safety. Now based in Sweden, Maria has continued her musical journey, performing in the Swedish qualifications for the Eurovision Song Contest. As an ambassador for Sweden for UNHCR, she draws on her personal experience of displacement to raise awareness and empathy for refugees around the world.

SUMMARY OF KEY THEMES:

Theme	Global Laureate	Americas	Asia-Pacific	Europe	MENA
	Cameroon	Mexico City	Tajikistan	Ukraine	Iraq
Inclusion	✓	✓	✓		✓
Solutions	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Shelter	✓			✓	
Health/Mental Health					✓
Education	✓		✓		✓



NANSEN REFUGEE AWARD

Livelihoods	✓	✓	✓		✓
Children	✓		✓		✓
Women and Gender	✓		✓	✓	✓
Whole of Society	✓	✓	✓		✓
Emergencies support				✓	