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

Seventy-five years after its adoption, the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees remains the cornerstone of international protection, underpinning access to asylum, non-refoulement, access to rights, and durable solutions. Today's displacement context is marked by growing humanitarian needs, politicization, restrictive practices, and a severe funding crisis. These factors are placing additional pressures on asylum systems and endangering the lives of refugees. This year's note on international protection highlights the ongoing relevance of the 1951 Convention to contemporary displacement challenges, providing a strong foundation upon which UNHCR, States and partners can continue to rely in strengthening protection and facilitating durable solutions to displacement. It underscores the importance of emergency preparedness and response as well as measures to address mixed and onward movements. The note also emphasizes that in the current environment, transitioning away from humanitarian assistance to inclusion in national systems is critical and must be underpinned by adequate financing and support for host countries. Finally, it underscores the pressing need for solutions to internal displacement, while advocating further progress on ending statelessness in the sixty-fifth anniversary year of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

## I. Introduction

### A. Context

1. Seventy-five years after its adoption, the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees remains a living and indispensable instrument that saves lives. It helps States individually and collectively address challenges and fulfil their international legal commitments to refugees. It establishes the core principle of non-refoulement, sets out the parameters for refugee status and the rights of refugees, and embeds concepts of durable solutions in international refugee law. The Convention is flexible and pragmatic, translating a universal and collective obligation to protect people fleeing risks of harm into workable legal standards.

2. Working closely with States and other stakeholders in all regions, UNHCR operationalizes the Convention's principles through its mandate work, supervising the application of international refugee law, providing protection and seeking solutions. The Convention has inspired other international and regional instruments and frameworks, including the Global Compact on Refugees, which offers a practical blueprint for addressing contemporary displacement challenges. Since affirmation of the Global Compact of Refugees by the General Assembly in 2018, States have reiterated their firm commitment to refugee protection principles, including through pledges made at the Global Refugee Forums in 2019 and 2023.

3. Application of the principles of the protection framework, nevertheless, remains uneven and inadequate. In many contexts, polarization and short-term political considerations are posing obstacles to protection and solutions to displacement. Externalization, pushbacks and deterrence measures taken to restrict asylum are eroding established legal obligations and undermining protection, dehumanizing those fleeing conflict, and ultimately costing lives. Such measures are pushing many people into onward dangerous movements. UNHCR regularly receives reports in all regions of the world of refugees and asylum-seekers dying or going missing because borders are closed, safe and regular pathways are obstructed, and people are returned to territories where their lives and wellbeing are at risk.

4. Prospects for voluntary, safe, and dignified return are closely linked to stabilization efforts, reintegration support and area-based assistance. However, in the current environment, fragmented and insufficient international support is impeding and delaying the conditions for return and other durable solutions. Financial constraints have reduced protection capacity and disrupted essential services, creating gaps that heighten risks and prolong displacement. These pressures are acutely felt by host countries with limited resources, underscoring the need for burden- and responsibility-sharing, adequate financing, and cooperation grounded in international law. Currently, there are over 129 million people displaced worldwide, with the majority of refugees trapped in protracted displacement and dependent on humanitarian aid.

5. In this context, some have questioned the Convention's relevance in the face of today's challenges, including large mixed and onward movements, inefficient asylum systems and large numbers of refugees living in protracted displacement. However, these dilemmas are not due to the shortcomings of the refugee law regime. They are instead the result of the failure of the international community to effectively implement the Convention, manage migration and asylum systems, and bring an end to conflict, violence and persecution. Reopening the Convention would not address these challenges and only serve to undermine a framework that has proven its enduring value and adaptability through time.

6. In order to address these challenges, UNHCR works closely with States to strengthen asylum and foster durable solutions, including through sustainable responses. For example, UNHCR's work on the route-based approach provides lawful and practical tools to support early identification, fair procedures, and protection-sensitive responses, including pathways to solutions. Meanwhile, UNHCR is encouraging a transition from short-term humanitarian assistance toward longer-term, inclusive responses that strengthen national systems and promote refugee self-reliance. The effectiveness of these approaches depends on sustained

political and financial commitment. It is also important to underscore that the governance of international protection and solutions must remain rights-based, non-discriminatory, and sensitive to vulnerabilities, respecting State sovereignty while placing human dignity at the centre of the response.

7. There are currently 149 States party to the 1951 Convention or the 1967 Protocol, which represents over three-quarters of United Nations Member States. Promoting accession and the withdrawal of reservations to the Convention and Protocol remains integral to strengthening protection frameworks. UNHCR supports States with legal and procedural advice, engages parliaments, and leverages multi-stakeholder platforms and human rights mechanisms to support this objective. The multi-stakeholder pledge framework of the Global Refugee Forum offers a platform from which to mobilize support, share responsibilities, pair technical and financial assistance with government commitments, and encourage progress in this domain.

## **B. Displacement in emergencies**

8. In 2025, displacement continued to rise amid ongoing conflicts, new hostilities and disasters, placing exceptional strain on the humanitarian system in a context of a funding crisis. Despite this, UNHCR sought to effectively respond to new and escalating crises by continuing to invest in preparedness and early action. It strengthened early warning and risk analysis, monitored developments that could trigger or worsen emergencies, and ensured that operations facing high risks had contingency plans in place to prepare for and deliver timely operational responses. These measures were undertaken in close cooperation with national authorities and humanitarian partners.

9. Staff and specialist expertise were mobilized from internal rosters and standby partnerships to reinforce leadership, protection delivery and coordination at critical moments, while emergency training for UNHCR staff included capacity-building for protection in emergencies. UNHCR sought to improve efficiencies and sustainability, including through local sourcing of humanitarian assistance where feasible. The organization prioritized investments in high-risk operations, not only through preparedness and emergency planning but by expanding partnerships across humanitarian, development and private sector partners and by promoting flexible funding to ensure a timely response to new emergencies. Nonetheless, funding shortfalls, insecurity and restrictions on humanitarian access limited these efforts and delayed longer-term support for recovery and solutions.

10. Meanwhile, security challenges remained acute. Humanitarian personnel faced persistent threats due to conflict, instability, criminality, new technologies in warfare and increasing disregard for distinctions between civilian and military objects. UNHCR reinforced its security risk management framework, enhanced training and duty-of-care measures, with particular attention to locally-recruited and female staff. Cooperation through the United Nations Security Management System and with external partners helped secure access and enable operations in high-risk contexts.

## **C. Climate and displacement**

11. Climate-related disasters and environmental degradation compound conflict, poverty and weak governance, increasing protection risks for displaced and stateless persons, most of whom live in countries that are highly exposed to climate-related hazards. Floods, droughts, extreme heat and slow-onset events such as desertification erode infrastructure and disrupt services. They undermine livelihoods, reduce prospects for durable solutions, including safe and sustainable return, and heighten vulnerability. Given the direct implications on protection and solutions, UNHCR has integrated climate considerations into its protection, solutions and operational work, supporting climate-resilient systems for water, shelter and energy, and area-based approaches that benefit both displaced and host communities. Flood mitigation and early warning in Bangladesh and Yemen, climate-smart irrigation and livelihoods in Ethiopia's Somali region, ecosystem restoration around refugee settlements in Cameroon and Chad, and the inclusion of refugees in national climate planning

in Somalia and Uganda demonstrate that inclusive, protection-centred climate action can reduce vulnerability, support self-reliance and social cohesion, and advance solutions. Nevertheless, persistent gaps in climate financing continue to impede these endeavours.

## II. Asylum and mixed movements

### A. Asylum systems

12. The right to seek and enjoy asylum ensures non-discriminatory access to international protection 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. Fair and efficient asylum systems enable States to give practical effect to international protection by ensuring access to procedures, safeguarding rights, and advancing solutions. Today, many asylum systems are under strain, with a high number of complex claims alongside the misuse of asylum channels by people not in need of international protection. In 2025, there were 2.8 million new individual asylum applications, and 873,500 people received refugee status through group procedures, including in Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. Meanwhile, at the beginning of 2026, some 9 million people worldwide were awaiting an asylum decision.

13. In response to high numbers and concerns about misuse of the asylum system, some States have sought to employ restrictive practices, limiting access to territory or procedures for some groups, and measures to externalize asylum responsibilities. Others have shown a lack of willingness to invest in necessary reforms and strengthen their capacity to effectively manage their asylum systems.

14. In October 2025, UNHCR issued a new framework entitled, "Strategic approach to strengthening national asylum systems",<sup>1</sup> which includes practical steps for States and other stakeholders to take to reinforce system integrity and efficiency. It also provided practical guidance to States on processing manifestly unfounded asylum applications. The Asylum Capacity Support Group, under the Global Compact on Refugees, supported this initiative by working to address procedural design, guaranteeing due process and the referral of applicants at heightened risk or vulnerability. The Asylum Capacity Support Group also published a good practice note on the meaningful participation of refugee-led organizations in strategic decision-making around asylum.

15. Country guidance remains a key tool for UNHCR and States to support consistent, evidence-based and protection-centred asylum decision-making. It helps decision-makers assess claims more efficiently and fairly, strengthens system integrity, and provides a clear basis for policy engagement and operational responses as conditions evolve. In 2025, UNHCR started issuing country guidance on countries that generally do not produce refugees but from which there may be significant numbers of asylum applicants. Such country guidance supports the swift processing of unfounded asylum claims, while ensuring those in need of international protection are recognized. In addition, UNHCR issued country guidance on key refugee producing countries, including Afghanistan, Eritrea and the Syrian Arab Republic.

16. UNHCR conducted refugee status determination under its mandate in countries without fair and efficient national asylum systems, where this has a tangible protection impact. However, UNHCR's capacity to implement mandate refugee status determination has been negatively impacted by funding constraints and a reduced operational presence. This has led to a reduction in the number of countries where UNHCR determines claims under its mandate from 51 in 2024 to 42 in 2025. In this environment, UNHCR prioritized mandate refugee status determination activities which focus on ensuring quality procedures and efficiencies through differentiated asylum processes.

17. Despite some troubling trends, States advanced reforms to strengthen domestic asylum laws, policies and procedures, including in countries such as Iraq, Malawi, Mauritania

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.refworld.org/policy/strategy/unhcr/2025/150734>.

and South Africa, alongside regional initiatives in the European Union, the Economic Community of Central African States and the Economic Community of West African States. UNHCR supported these efforts by providing technical assistance to legislatures and policy-makers to strengthen laws, improve institutional performance and human resource practices, reinforce differentiated case processing, and enhance decision-making. In Egypt, UNHCR continued to support implementation of the 2024 national asylum law and its May 2026 executive regulations, promoting consistency with international standards and the transition to a State-led system. UNHCR also expanded information and legal assistance to asylum-seekers, including in Armenia, Chad, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Fiji, Nigeria, Somalia, and Uruguay. Under its supervisory responsibility, UNHCR provided legal guidance to courts and worked with judicial networks and civil society to advance consistent application of international refugee law. UNHCR further engaged with international human rights mechanisms, including the Human Rights Council, the Universal Periodic Review and United Nations treaty bodies, to promote normative coherence and protection for displaced and stateless persons and, together with Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, supported the Platform of Independent Experts on Refugee Rights.

18. The principle of non-refoulement was undermined or violated in numerous countries, including through large-scale or individual removals, extradition, land-border pushbacks, maritime interceptions with disembarkation in unsafe territories, and use of transfer and removal arrangements that sought to shift asylum processing or responsibility for refugees to third countries. While international law allows transfers of asylum-seekers to countries that are safe, where international protection and solutions are effective and accessible, and in ways that enhance burden- and responsibility-sharing and international cooperation, these requirements are often not met in practice. UNHCR has issued guidance to help States ensure that international transfer arrangements comply with international law and do not shift responsibilities.<sup>2</sup> In many contexts, transfers took place from high-income to middle- and low-income countries, where receiving States had fragile or under-resourced asylum systems, or lacked functioning State-led procedures altogether. Contrary to UNHCR's guidance, transfers were sometimes concluded without binding public international agreements, unregulated under domestic law, or without the effective involvement of national asylum authorities. Procedural safeguards were often weak or absent, creating a heightened risk of arbitrary detention and refoulement, including onward removal to countries where people are at risk of harm. Limited transparency meant that some transfers occurred with little or no notice or access to lawyers, UNHCR, and independent monitors. As a result, and at variance with international law, screening, access to asylum procedures, lawful stay, and protection against arbitrary detention were not consistently ensured. Many individuals reported receiving inadequate or misleading information about their destination and rights, undermining their ability to challenge transfer decisions or effectively seek protection.

19. UNHCR and partners strengthened cross-regional coordination to address refoulement risks more systematically and to link individual case interventions with broader advocacy. Engagement focused on reinforcing the responsibility of States to assess safety in law and practice, to ensure access to effective remedies prior to transfer, and to suspend agreements where standards were not met. Targeted interventions helped improve access, transparency, and dialogue with States, demonstrating that sustained, protection-focused engagement can generate wider protection dividends beyond individual cases. Experience confirms that preventing and responding to refoulement requires principled and consistent action. This includes investing in national asylum systems, ensuring transparency and timely information-sharing, safeguarding access for lawyers, and sustaining advocacy for access to asylum and protection against unlawful removal.

## **B. Mixed and onward movements**

20. Refugees and migrants frequently travel along the same routes due to inadequate protection and assistance in first and subsequent places of stay, straining asylum systems and

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<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.refworld.org/policy/legalguidance/unhcr/2025/150357>.

reception capacities amid funding shortfalls. Responses are too often restrictive and fragmented, emphasizing border and migration control to the detriment of access to rights, and they fail to ensure strategic interventions along routes where the risks are highest. Through its route-based approach, UNHCR and partners operationalized a cross-border methodology linking data and analysis, early warning, coordinated case management, and coherent engagement with States along mixed movement routes. Acting early where risks emerge and people's needs are most acute helps address immediate protection concerns and create viable opportunities for stay. During the reporting period, UNHCR published route-level analyses; engaged systematically with refugee-led organizations; produced targeted child-protection guidance; built the capacity of authorities and non-governmental organizations; and launched the Routes Monitor, a global analytical platform supporting route-based analysis of mixed movements.<sup>3</sup> In the Americas, UNHCR co-led the Issue-based Coalition on Human Mobility and, together with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme, and others, produced quarterly mixed-movements analyses that tracked regional trends and profiles to support evidence-based responses by United Nations Country Teams.

21. Positive rights-based practices along mixed movement routes were identified in several regions. Morocco advanced a "humanized border management" approach, balancing national security with fighting trafficking and the protection of human dignity. In the Sudan, monitoring and community alerts put in place by UNHCR and International Organization for Migration supported more than 700 victims of trafficking in persons. In Mauritania, multipurpose hubs delivered integrated services, including for trafficking survivors. In Bangladesh, UNHCR trained Coast Guard officials on lifesaving maritime responses and refugee protection. UNHCR and IOM, together with the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel and partners, convened the Governments of Chad, Mali, Mauritania, the Niger, and Senegal to build momentum for a comprehensive cross-border response addressing protection, development and security.

### **III. Protecting refugees**

#### **A. Registration and identity management**

22. Registration and identity management are foundational protection tools. They help ensure displaced people are known to authorities, their needs are identified early, and they can obtain documentation, reducing risks of arrest, detention, family separation and refoulement, while enabling freedom of movement and access to essential services and State-led systems. However, progress has been constrained by funding shortfalls, reduced field presence, and insecurity and access restrictions, which impede registration and documentation, especially in emergencies and in low-connectivity settings. Digital registration and service platforms can extend reach and efficiency. In Egypt, since August 2024, new arrivals can initiate their registration online through a digital gateway, reducing the risk of arduous travel to registration sites while decongesting registration centres. Since then, the digital gateway has expanded to Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Pakistan and Thailand, reaching nearly 230,000 users. While beneficial, digital registration and service platforms inadvertently risk excluding people who lack connectivity, devices or digital skills, and must be paired with outreach and in-person assistance options.

23. In some countries, including Ethiopia, Jordan, and the Sudan, refugees are included in national digital identity systems, with preparations underway to include Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, and Mauritania in 2026. This enables refugees to receive identity credentials from competent national authorities that are recognized by private service providers, providing access to socio-economic and self-reliance opportunities. However, in many host countries, refugees are not systematically included in national digital identity systems and where inclusion does occur, it does not consistently incorporate adequate legal and other safeguards. Though refugees receive registration certificates from UNHCR, these are often regarded by

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<sup>3</sup> See <https://data.unhcr.org/en/working-group/496?sv=117&geo=0>.

governments and private service providers as functional identity documents rather than as nationally recognized credentials. Sustaining progress in this area requires predictable resources and close cooperation with national authorities.

## **B. Accountability to affected people**

24. Accountability to displaced and stateless persons and equal access to rights are essential to protection and solutions. Funding gaps and staff reductions weakened meaningful participation, feedback systems, and programmes responsive to the needs of persons with disabilities and women and girls. Social norms and other factors limited the engagement of women and girls, persons with disabilities and marginalized groups in decision-making, alongside their ability to safely raise concerns. UNHCR took steps to address this. Digital participatory assessments were rolled out, and artificial-intelligence solutions were tested to speed analysis. Two-way communication was expanded through secure online communication platforms, reaching millions of users worldwide. Over 60,000 people interacted with UNHCR's WhatsApp chatbot, exchanging messages on rights and services.

25. UNHCR advanced gender equality by strengthening the leadership and participation of women and girls, for example in community structures, improving their access to documentation, services and assistance needs, including cash assistance. UNHCR also prioritized partnerships with women-led organizations at national and local level, reinforced implementation of the United Nations Secretary-General's System-Wide Gender Equality Acceleration Plan and adopted the United Nations Gender Equality Marker to mainstream gender considerations across programmes. UNHCR sought to advance funding to organizations led by displaced women, including through pooled funding mechanisms such as the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund. Despite these efforts, harmful gender norms and underfunding continued to constrain women's agency and reduce access to services in some contexts, underscoring the need for sustained funding and continued advocacy.

## **C. Child protection**

26. As of mid-2025, children represented around 40 per cent of all displaced people. They faced separation from family members, violence, exploitation, trafficking, detention, and death. Critically low funding levels for their protection<sup>4</sup> severely impacted child protection. In Afghanistan, services were discontinued for an estimated 1.6 million children, while caseworker-to-child-at-risk ratios in Uganda rose to one for every 155 children, far above the recommended standard of one for every 25 children.

27. UNHCR and partners, together with States, made concerted efforts to keep children safe, including through implementation of a jointly issued UNHCR-UNICEF guide on cross-border case management. About 1.4 million children and caregivers received child protection services in 69 operations and about 72,000 children at heightened risk were supported through best interests procedures across 26 operations, including in Egypt, in cooperation with Save the Children and Plan International, and in the Sudan. Inclusion in national systems also delivered results, with Rwanda achieving birth registration for almost all refugee children under five years of age and Ethiopia integrating refugee children into the national digital identity programme, improving safe access to services. In Bangladesh, community structures reunited 275 children with parents or caregivers and over 8,300 parents joined positive parenting programmes. In Spain, support to child protection officials strengthened the identification of children's international protection needs, enabling earlier detection of vulnerabilities and improved access to asylum.

28. UNHCR provided child protection expertise through additional surge capacity. Child-protection specialists were deployed from the Danish Refugee Council to numerous operations including Bangladesh, Burundi and Uganda. Measures by States to facilitate access to territory, child-sensitive asylum processes and birth registration, together with

<sup>4</sup> In 2025, child protection was only 15 per cent funded on average across UNHCR operations, and early 2026 analysis shows an 80 per cent gap.

investments in national child protection systems, can have a significant impact on child protection and benefit host community children as well. Urgent, predictable funding is essential to support these efforts.

#### **D. Protection from violence against women and girls**

29. Displacement continues to heighten exposure to gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence, trafficking for sexual exploitation, and intimate partner violence. Women and girls fleeing conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Sudan report widespread sexual violence by all parties to the conflict. Technology-facilitated abuse, including online harassment, limits safe access to digital spaces and raises offline risks. In many contexts, funding shortfalls have impacted access to life-saving services in this area and left displaced women and girls at further risk of violence. In 2025, at least 140 safe spaces, which provided women and girls with psychosocial support and access to vital services, were closed including in Niger, South Sudan, the Sudan, Uganda, and Yemen.

30. Despite these challenges, UNHCR and partners provided critical life-saving prevention and assistance, reaching over 1.5 million people in 76 countries in 2025. This included over 130 safe spaces, specialized gender-based violence case management, legal aid, health care, and emergency cash. Awareness-raising reached over 122,000 people during the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence campaign, and 11 specialists were deployed to operations such as Bangladesh, Burundi, Chad, Ukraine and Uganda.

31. Dedicated programming for adolescent girls had positive impact where it could be implemented. In Nigeria, 86 per cent of participants reported stronger peer support after completing the Girl Shine programme, an initiative to protect and empower adolescent girls. This model is being implemented in countries such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, the Republic of Moldova and Yemen. Nearly 20,000 women and older adolescent girls, including in Bangladesh and the Sudan, could earn income and faced lower risks of violence following integrated livelihood and gender-based violence prevention interventions. Men and boys were mobilized as allies to address gender-based violence within their communities. In Bangladesh, 63 per cent of male participants reported taking action to prevent violence in their communities. Early access points, survivor-centred programming, and dedicated safe spaces reduce delays in accessing services and further harm, while localized partnerships build trust and extend reach. For UNHCR, States and partners, future priorities must include sustaining and expanding safe spaces and services where needs are greatest; protecting and resourcing women-led organizations as first responders; and advancing strong national systems.

#### **E. Community-based protection**

32. Community-based protection places people at the centre of protection and solutions, recognizing displaced and stateless people as protection actors, supporting their capacities and mobilizing resources to identify and address their protection risks. It aims to empower communities, without absolving other accountable actors of their protection responsibilities.

33. Funding gaps affecting UNHCR field presence, restricted humanitarian access and the complexity of mixed movements have made community-based protection increasingly challenging. UNHCR's new operational guidelines promote the principle of "people protecting people" and advocate enhanced support for community structures and local actors. In many operations, this approach has shown tangible results, particularly where UNHCR and partners presence is limited. In 77 operations, community-based structures supported by UNHCR served as critical protection mechanisms, identifying and referring individuals at risk, delivering lifesaving services, and creating safe spaces for peer support and social cohesion. In 2025, community-based mechanisms reached more than 8.2 million people, including in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Guatemala, Lebanon, Nigeria, the Sudan and Ukraine. In Egypt, community mentors supported unaccompanied and separated children, with more than 1,900 children in 2025 gaining better access to rights and services. In the Syrian Arab

Republic, 72 community centres, 84 mobile units, and 1,790 outreach volunteers reached more than 1.3 million people, particularly Syrian returnees, with counselling, assistance and referrals. In Bangladesh, community centres provided safe spaces for social interaction, learning and psychosocial support for 626,000 people, while community volunteers reached almost 1 million people with awareness-raising on protection, peaceful coexistence, and psychosocial well-being.

34. Where access to communities was limited, or UNHCR capacity was insufficient, outreach methods were adapted. In Thailand and Tunisia, community volunteers kept information flowing and referrals active. In Poland, Romania and Trinidad and Tobago, refugee-led and community-based organizations helped sustain remote engagement, protection monitoring and peer support. In Lebanon, a one-stop-shop model in community centres offered protection services and referrals for refugees. In Mauritania, community protection networks helped sustain protection activities and foster social cohesion. In Chad, a mapping of 350 refugee-led and community groups with support from the Mastercard Foundation reinforced the Sudanese emergency response.

35. UNHCR expanded partnerships with organizations led by displaced and stateless persons and with community-based groups. Nearly 230 grant agreements in some 40 operations channelled \$1.8 million to refugee-led organizations to build their capacity and sustain services. In Ukraine, UNHCR supported a network of 750 civil society entities, including councils of internally displaced persons and community-based organizations, to strengthen community-led protection services and complement the efforts of local authorities, reaching over 200,000 people. A global advisory board of 17 organizations led by displaced and stateless persons advised UNHCR on good engagement practices, gaps and the impact of the funding crisis on community-based and refugee-led organizations. Practical “how-to” guidance on working with refugee-led and women-led organizations complemented UNHCR’s localization guidance, which offers tailored considerations to address the specific barriers faced by these actors, and a refugee-led organization toolkit was launched in Europe to improve technical support. Some 260 displaced and stateless people (55 per cent women) participated in the Global Refugee Forum Progress Review under the Global Compact on Refugees. Direct support reached frontline groups. UNHCR recognized these organizations as critical protection agents in their communities. This approach works because it builds on existing capacities and social networks. It keeps services close to people at risk, expedites referrals, anchors responses in local systems and supports inclusion.

#### **IV. Sustainable responses**

36. The 1951 Convention sets out obligations to ensure that refugees can access rights and services through national laws. It also recognizes that international protection and solutions may impose undue burdens on some States and affirms that responsibilities must be shared through international cooperation. In a context where displacement continues to rise, and most refugees are hosted in low- and middle-income countries where national systems are under strain, humanitarian assistance may provide temporary relief but is not enough. Sustainable responses, which can serve to provide international protection and facilitate durable solutions, involve nationally-led strategies that align protection, humanitarian assistance and development efforts and that strengthen national systems to meet the needs of both refugees and citizens.

37. In many countries, restrictions on freedom of movement, lawful residence, access to trusted legal identity credentials, and rights to decent work hinder access to rights and services. These limitations curtail economic opportunities; heighten the risk of exploitation, smuggling and trafficking; prolong displacement; and increase dependence on shrinking humanitarian aid and national social assistance.

38. Several States adopted laws and policies that facilitate access to rights and strengthen inclusion in national systems. Examples include Ethiopia’s directive on the right to work for recognized refugees and asylum-seekers under the Makatet roadmap; Thailand’s resolution enabling lawful work for long-staying refugees from Myanmar; and Kenya’s social protection policy that builds on the Shirika Plan and regulations under the Refugees Act. Initiatives that

illustrate how inclusive policies strengthen self-reliance and cohesion include Chile's protocol on social benefits and recognition of educational qualifications, Kazakhstan's use of refugee certificates to issue individual identification numbers, South Sudan's extension of the validity of Convention Travel Documents, Mauritania's financial inclusion strategy, Cameroon's inclusion of refugees in development planning, Zambia's national refugee policy and implementation plan, Iceland's comprehensive long-term integration policy, and Scotland's refugee integration strategy.

39. Sustainable responses require international cooperation to support the transition from parallel humanitarian systems to national service delivery, benefiting refugees and host communities alike. Collaboration with the World Bank and regional development banks has expanded multi-year financing aligned with national priorities, including through concessional financing for refugee-hosting countries. These investments support social safety nets, infrastructure and economic inclusion. Facilitating access to civil documentation can also help expand access to labour markets and financial services. The integration of refugees in national data and statistical systems is another important factor that can help improve evidence-based planning and policy-making, demonstrating the positive contributions that refugees can make to their host communities. However, gaps persist in nationally-produced data, which may deepen with funding cuts, especially in areas related to inclusion. While legal, administrative and capacity constraints remain, evidence shows that the early and systematic participation of refugees in national systems reduces dependency on humanitarian assistance, supports self-reliance and prepares and enables access to durable solutions. Sustainable responses demonstrate that inclusion in national systems has the most positive impact when humanitarian, development and peace actors work together under national State leadership.

## **A. Education**

40. For refugee and stateless children and adolescents, education is a fundamental right and a critical source of protection, stability and hope. Displacement continues to disrupt learning and place pressure on national education systems in refugee-hosting areas. Overcrowded classrooms, qualified teacher shortages, and language and curriculum barriers constrain access, retention and learning. For stateless children, these challenges are frequently compounded by the lack of nationality and civil documentation, which can impede school enrolment, examination registration and certification. These pressures are exacerbated when financing is unpredictable. The funding cuts that have compelled many humanitarian actors to suspend their support for educational programmes can rapidly reverse progress and deepen vulnerability.

41. UNHCR works with ministries of education, local authorities, communities and partners to advance access to State-led education systems, in line with the 1951 Convention and the Global Compact on Refugees as well as the humanitarian–development–peace nexus. This includes support to integrate refugee learners into national curricula, examinations and education management information systems, and to sustain safe learning spaces during emergencies. Rwanda enrolls refugees in public schools, allowing them to follow the national curriculum, and strengthening continuity and certification. Ecuador's policy framework has reduced documentation barriers to schooling for refugee children. In Kenya and Uganda, government-led approaches, supported by partners, have expanded access to education, teacher deployment and infrastructure. In Chad, 1,500 tertiary scholarships were offered to refugee students. In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, refugees have free access to national primary and secondary schools, complemented by catch-up and language classes to facilitate entry and progression.

42. These measures have contributed to stronger participation, continuity, and learning outcomes for refugee learners, while highlighting areas where further efforts are needed. The transition to secondary education remains a critical challenge, particularly for girls facing social, economic, and protection barriers. National systems which help ensure that refugee learning is recognized, certified, and transferable have seen positive results, reducing the fragmentation associated with parallel provision. This, in turn, strengthens longer-term prospects for refugee children and youth by supporting skills development, social inclusion, and self-reliance.

43. The 1951 Convention and the 1954 Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons provide an essential normative basis for ensuring access to public education for refugees and stateless persons. These instruments support efforts to reduce documentation-related obstacles and help open the door to enrolment and certification. Both Conventions reinforce the foundation for State-owned responses, with targeted support from the United Nations and other partners, and strengthened education systems for refugee and stateless children and youth alongside those from host communities.

## **B. Economic participation and social protection**

44. Access to the labour market and national social protection programmes are integral to providing international protection and advancing durable solutions. Enabling refugees and stateless persons to work lawfully and access livelihoods, financial services and social protection reduces vulnerability and dependency, strengthens dignity and agency, and can mitigate onward movement driven by lack of prospects in countries of asylum. When refugees participate in local economies and access basic services, reliance on humanitarian assistance decreases and host communities benefit through stronger local markets, tax revenues and more resilient service delivery. For example, Nicaraguan refugees play a vital role in Costa Rica's economy, helping offset an ageing workforce with their tax contributions that surpass the costs of hosting them. More than 3,000 refugees relocated in Mexico to cities with more formal employment prospects through Mexico's local integration program is having similar effects. Conversely, long-term exclusion from lawful work, documentation, mobility and financial systems entrenches poverty, increases protection risks and prolongs displacement, representing an even greater burden for host countries and communities.

45. Progress in this area remained uneven, reflecting legal, administrative and capacity constraints alongside funding shortfalls. Restrictions on documentation, movement or access to the labour market limited economic participation, particularly for women, youth and persons with disabilities, while limited recognition of qualifications and other barriers constrained access to decent work.

46. Social protection is a critical complement to economic participation and an important protection instrument in contexts of protracted displacement. Where feasible and supported, access to national social protection systems for refugees and stateless persons can provide predictable assistance and reduce dependence on emergency support. UNHCR expanded cooperation with States and partners to align humanitarian cash assistance with national programmes, support eligibility measures, and strengthen data and delivery systems, although these approaches require adequate capacity, financing and political commitment. In Peru, the identification of families eligible for social protection was changed from income-based to an expenditure or consumption-based model, better capturing the vulnerability of Venezuelans in the country. In Kenya, over 110,000 refugee households have been included in the national enhanced single registry for enrolment in social protection programmes.

## **V. Durable solutions**

### **A. Voluntary repatriation and return**

47. In 2025, nearly 4.4 million refugees returned or repatriated voluntarily to their countries of origin. Voluntary repatriation remains a vital durable solution, which is viable only when it is fully informed and voluntary and where conditions in countries of origin are safe, dignified and sustainable. In many countries of origin, insecurity, limited access to basic services, and weak governance structures continue to constrain the feasibility of large-scale voluntary repatriation. Where stability has improved, regional initiatives and joint efforts among States, humanitarian and development partners, and other relevant actors, can strengthen the conditions conducive to voluntary repatriation and support broader efforts towards sustainable peace.

48. Despite ongoing conflict in the Sudan, 614,000 Sudanese refugees returned from Egypt, with additional returns from Chad (82,000), Ethiopia (1,000), Libya (2,500), and South

Sudan (215,000), countries which have hosted Sudanese refugees in large numbers for years, and which continue to need international support in the spirit of burden and responsibility-sharing. Many refugees have returned in safety and dignity, while some have returned under adverse circumstances, as insecurity, lack of access to protection and inadequate conditions and standards of treatment made it untenable for refugees to stay in their host countries, resulting in some instances in refoulement. Approximately 152,000 South Sudanese returned from the Sudan. In Burundi, improved stability enabled close to 18,000 refugees to voluntarily repatriate in 2025, while 315,000 remain displaced in the region. However, some Burundian refugees were compelled to return under adverse circumstances. In March 2026, a comprehensive solutions roadmap for Burundi was endorsed, committing States and partners to work towards voluntary repatriation and other solutions for Burundian refugees with the aim of bringing this protracted refugee situation to an end.

49. In West and Central Africa, UNHCR facilitated voluntary repatriation in other protracted situations. In 2025, 50,000 refugees returned across the region, including 21,400 to the Central African Republic. Since 2017, 74,000 Central African refugees have voluntarily repatriated, with another 60,000 expected in 2026. To advance the recommendations of the Yaoundé Declaration on Solutions, the Central African Republic Solutions Support Platform is transforming Baoro, a town where Central African returnees from Cameroon are hosted, into a resilient economic hub. Refugees in the Democratic Republic of the Congo returned to the Central African Republic (7,000), Rwanda (7,000) and Burundi (3,500). Government-facilitated returns to Nigeria from Chad and the Niger totalled 26,700 refugees. UNHCR continues to advocate robust legal frameworks, including tripartite agreements, to ensure that returns are voluntary, safe and dignified.

50. Between December 2024 and April 2026, an estimated 3.4 million Syrians returned to their areas of origin. Ensuring these returns are sustainable requires predictable and substantial investment in the country. During the 2025 Global Refugee Forum Progress Review, the Syrian Government pledged to facilitate voluntary repatriation in cooperation with UNHCR and other international partners. Nevertheless, the Syria displacement situation remains one of the world's largest, with 3.81 million refugees in neighbouring countries and 7.1 million internally displaced persons. While many Syrians indicated a desire to return, only 14 per cent said they planned to do so within a year, with the large majority adopting a "wait-and-see" approach as conditions evolve. Security remains fragile, with localized violence, criminality and extensive explosive ordnance. Since the escalation of violence in the Middle East in early 2026, UNHCR witnessed increased returns of Syrians from Lebanon.

51. More than 5 million Afghans have returned from neighbouring countries since 2023. Among these, 2.9 million Afghans returned from the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan in 2025, and 530,000 in the first four months of 2026. Many returns took place under adverse circumstances, with some amounting to refoulement. In Afghanistan, the population faces a highly fragile protection environment, with many humanitarian, economic, and human rights challenges. The August and November 2025 earthquakes further increased humanitarian needs, especially in high-return areas, while the military escalation between Afghanistan and Pakistan has triggered new and secondary internal displacements, particularly in southern and eastern Afghanistan. Growing restrictions on women and girls, including the September 2025 ban on Afghan women working for the United Nations, increased protection risks and sharply reduced access to essential services, while disrupting the delivery of humanitarian assistance and requiring alternative modalities to reach women and girls. UNHCR prioritizes protection and life-saving assistance for returnees and is advancing integrated, area-based programming in priority locations, with reintegration efforts focussing on civil documentation, services for women and girls, community-based protection, solutions, sustainable housing, livelihoods and cash grants.

52. Sustainable return and reintegration depend on early recovery efforts, complemented by broader development investments that strengthen national services and institutions, and support the economy. These efforts will enable returnees to rebuild their lives, ensure stability in areas of origin, foster social cohesion and create the conditions for further returns.

## B. Resettlement and complementary pathways

53. Resettlement and complementary pathways represent a form of international cooperation, help refugees realize their rights under the 1951 Convention and facilitate access to durable solutions. Resettlement is a lifeline for refugees facing acute risks, while complementary pathways expand access to economic and social opportunities. Access to resettlement declined in 2025 as States reduced quotas, suspended programmes, or applied narrow selection criteria. Domestic political pressures and fiscal constraints contributed to these decisions, alongside security concerns, despite resettled refugees being among the most thoroughly-vetted visa recipients. This meant prolonged uncertainty for refugees, left urgent protection needs unmet and extended the strain on host countries. Several countries, including Australia, Canada, France and Norway, set lower quotas for 2026, while others, including Belgium and the United States of America, have suspended resettlement. UNHCR supported timely submissions and programme integrity in some countries. In 2025, 19 States offered more than 30,000 places, and departures exceeded 37,000 individuals. Several States also offered unallocated quotas to meet urgent needs. Nevertheless, overall departures dropped, and the needs vastly outpaced available places.

54. States, development actors, civil society and the private sector sustained efforts to advance labour mobility, educational pathways and community sponsorship. Efforts were made to strengthen skills development, documentation and information in countries of asylum. Skills-based programmes, including the newly-launched IOM-UNHCR train-to-hire labour mobility project, Australia's education pathway scheme, and a sponsorship programme in Brazil, continued in 2025. Investments in complementary pathways remain vital to addressing global displacement.

## C. Local integration

55. Many refugees, including those who cannot safely repatriate to their countries of origin, find solutions in the form of local integration, involving a secure legal status and access to rights in countries where they have received protection. As foreseen in the 1951 Convention, acquiring the host country's nationality can offer such a durable solution, particularly for refugees in protracted situations and children born to refugees in countries of asylum when voluntary repatriation is not possible. In April 2026, the Zambian Constitutional Court held that requiring refugees to hold a residence permit to qualify for citizenship is unconstitutional, removing a legal barrier and affirming that refugees and their children who have lawfully resided in Zambia for the requisite period may request citizenship without meeting immigration-status conditions.

56. The *jus soli* principle, enabling children born to refugee parents in countries of asylum to receive the nationality of the host country, was applied in several places across Latin America, reducing reliance on derivative refugee status for children and facilitating local integration for their families if they so choose. States like Chile and Colombia adopted targeted measures to ensure access to nationality for children born to asylum-seeking parents. In many cases, such an approach supports access to longer-term residence and work rights for the parents and may, over time, permit them to pursue naturalization. Data on refugees acquiring the nationality of their host countries, and no longer requiring international protection, remains limited, underscoring the importance of improving data collection and strengthening interoperability between national civil registry, immigration, and asylum information systems.

## VI. Internally displaced persons

57. UNHCR works on protection and solutions for internally displaced persons under relevant General Assembly resolutions, the Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement and accountabilities within the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. UNHCR also serves as a "solutions champion", alongside IOM and the United Nations Development Programme, and leads the global protection cluster. In October 2025, the organization convened its third Cross-Regional Law and Policy Forum, bringing together policymakers

from national and municipal levels across 10 countries working on legislation to strengthen rights and advance solutions for internally displaced persons.

58. Between January 2025 and May 2026, 48 laws on internal displacement were adopted across 18 countries, many with support from UNHCR. In Nigeria, the President approved legislation domesticating the African Union Convention, for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa strengthening national systems to prevent displacement, enhance protection and assistance, and support safe, voluntary and sustainable solutions for internally displaced persons. In Ukraine, UNHCR worked with social protection authorities to introduce State funding for programmes that link social services and accommodation support for internally displaced older people and people with disabilities. In Ethiopia, the authorities issued 50,000 national identity cards to internally displaced persons across four regions, improving access to services and rights. In December 2025, Colombia adopted a national durable solutions policy for internally displaced persons, introducing an approach that strengthens coordination between the national government and local authorities and partners in areas affected by conflict and displacement. It also emphasizes the active participation of internally displaced persons and host communities. The accompanying action and monitoring plan foresees about \$2.5 billion for implementation. In Guatemala, official statistical information on internally displaced persons was released for the first time in decades.

59. Protection cluster consolidation advanced under the humanitarian reset with the aim of increasing efficiencies amid reduced capacity. UNHCR provided protection coordination and leadership in emergencies and promoted area-based solutions that align national services and local delivery. Through the global protection cluster, UNHCR led 20 out of 22 protection clusters at the national level, issued 25 protection analysis updates. The 2025 Global Protection Forum brought together 1,600 participants from 113 countries to reinforce protection priorities and agree on how protection could remain central in a landscape of hyper-prioritized responses.

60. UNHCR operations faced heavy demands with fewer resources. The global protection cluster recorded a rise in requests for support from country clusters, including on coordination, advocacy, planning, and analysis. It adapted toolkits, issued new guidance and organized workshops with partners aimed at strengthening protection outcomes in the context of negotiations and protection strategies for humanitarian country teams. It also conducted support missions to Afghanistan, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Ukraine. Annual reporting confirmed sharp deterioration in protection environments in the Gaza Strip, as well as in the eastern parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar and the Sudan, underscoring the need for sustained protection support, planning and advocacy.

## **VII. Stateless persons**

61. Statelessness deprives people of their fundamental right to a nationality and inherently recognition of their existence. Because nationality provides a gateway to other human rights, stateless people often face barriers related to freedom of movement, education, healthcare, marriage, work, and other rights and services. While 4.4 million people in 101 countries were reported in mid-2025 as stateless or of undetermined nationality, the real number is likely much higher.

62. The past year saw some encouraging progress in addressing statelessness. In Thailand, with one of the largest stateless populations globally, implementation of the 2024 Cabinet Resolution to accelerate nationality and legal status applications for long-term stateless residents and children born in its territory commenced. Over 17,000 individuals were granted Thai nationality and over 99,000 permanent residence status. North Macedonia became the first country in the region to resolve all known cases of statelessness linked to the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia. Burkina Faso adopted a comprehensive reform through its new Code of Persons and the Family, improving access to civil registration, strengthening safeguards for foundlings to acquire nationality, establishing a statelessness determination procedure, and introducing facilitated naturalization for stateless persons.

Mali adopted a new law that provides stateless persons with fundamental rights, protects them from penalties due to lack of legal documentation and provides pathways to Malian nationality.

63. Canada and Viet Nam amended their nationality laws to restore nationality for citizens overseas, and Hungary provided access to healthcare for stateless children. Peru introduced amendments to the nationality law to ensure nationality for adopted children. In Chile, legal counselling from UNHCR and partners supported children born to Venezuelan parents to confirm Chilean nationality. In Colombia, the Government continues to facilitate access to Colombian nationality at birth for thousands of children born in the country to Venezuelan parents. In Kenya, a bill to amend the Citizenship and Immigration Act, containing important provisions that facilitate solutions to statelessness, was published, paving the way for its introduction in the National Assembly.

64. At the regional level, the Pan-African Parliament, supported by UNHCR, conducted consultations with representatives of civil society and regional and subregional organizations on a model law on the right to nationality and statelessness. This was an important step in moving the model law, which mirrors the African Union Protocol on the Right to Nationality and Eradication of Statelessness in Africa, towards adoption by the Pan-African Parliament.

65. UNHCR, together with the Peter McMullin Centre on Statelessness, developed draft recommendations on nationality and statelessness in the context of climate events. While climate-related hazards increase the risk of loss of nationality and statelessness, these linkages remain largely unexplored. The recommendations aim to address this and guide governments and other actors to ensure those affected can retain or acquire a nationality and that stateless people are protected as climate impacts intensify. The recommendations, drawing on expert consultations, are expected to be published in 2026.

66. Marking the sixty-fifth anniversary of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, UNHCR undertook research on the implementation of Article 1 of the Convention. Article 1 is key to preventing statelessness at birth and reducing statelessness being passed down generationally, providing for the granting of nationality to children born on the territory who would otherwise be stateless. The research investigated practices in several countries and will be followed by a guidance note containing identified good practices, outlining gaps and highlighting normative standards.

67. The Global Alliance to End Statelessness has grown to 189 members, including 28 governments, five United Nations entities, 12 regional intergovernmental organizations, and 122 civil society organizations, including 32 stateless-led organizations. Dedicated working groups advanced work on these thematic priorities: preventing childhood statelessness, eliminating gender discrimination in nationality laws, and protecting the rights of stateless persons.

68. Despite notable progress, there were also worrying regressive developments, including arbitrary deprivations of nationality, in some contexts on a large scale. UNHCR's diminished resources severely constrained operational engagement, including the provision of legal aid to stateless persons and the ability to advocate with and provide technical guidance to governments to address statelessness.

## VIII. Conclusion

69. The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees remains the foundation of international protection and durable solutions for refugees. It provides a solid framework for addressing today's displacement challenges. Its strength lies in combining clear legal standards with practical flexibility, allowing States to collectively respond to displacement in lawful and effective ways. While many States continue to uphold the principles outlined in the Convention, persistent gaps in providing access to asylum and rights, together with inadequate financing, prevent legal commitments from yielding consistent protection outcomes. Initiatives that facilitate solutions to displacement and the prevention of statelessness can reduce protracted displacement and reliance on humanitarian aid, while strengthening national systems and social cohesion.

70. Experience consistently shows that durable solutions are achieved through peace, investment and access to rights. As seen in the Syrian Arab Republic, refugee returns occur when conflict ends and conditions permit voluntary, safe, and sustainable repatriation. Until such conditions are met, investing in asylum system integrity and quality and in the capacity of host countries to provide international protection as well as education, employment, and essential services is both a protection imperative and a pragmatic choice. These investments reduce irregular onward movements, support self-reliance, and help create conditions for solutions. As the 1951 and 1961 Conventions mark 75 and 65 years respectively, they continue to serve as both compass and catalyst. With principled leadership, responsible financing, and measurable results, the multilateral system can deliver protection and solutions at scale, for people forced to flee, and those who are stateless, to the benefit of the States and communities that host them.

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