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**Sustainable responses, including an update on  
measuring the impact arising from hosting,  
protecting and assisting refugees***Summary*

This paper presents progress toward sustainable responses to address forced displacement, supporting the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees and UNHCR's strategic ambition over the next decade to help reduce by half the number of refugees in protracted displacement who remain dependent on humanitarian assistance (50 by 35), including through pledges made at the Global Refugee Forums. It highlights advances in supporting conditions for voluntary repatriation and reintegration and in expanding third-country solutions and regional cooperation. It also discusses ongoing efforts to strengthen inclusion and self-reliance in countries of asylum alongside developments in strategic partnerships, data and evidence, and the measuring the impact initiative.

## **I. Introduction**

1. Sustainable responses to forced displacement gained momentum in 2025 and 2026 through nationally-led approaches across countries of asylum, countries of origin and third countries. Refugee-hosting States and communities provided protection and access to territory, expanded access to national systems and advanced initiatives that benefit refugees and host communities. Progress was made to strengthen financing and development cooperation, with the objective of advancing durable solutions – though this remains uneven, and further efforts in this direction are needed. More predictable and equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing, in line with the Global Compact on Refugees, is also essential.

2. The High Commissioner has set UNHCR’s strategic ambition over the next decade to help reduce by half the number of refugees in protracted displacement who remain dependent on humanitarian assistance. This 50 by 35 initiative is an opportunity for States and partners to join forces and help reduce long-term dependence on humanitarian assistance through approaches aligned with national priorities. Durable solutions, including voluntary repatriation and reintegration, as well as resettlement and complementary pathways, will be critical to achieving this target. Where displacement persists, supported efforts to strengthen self-reliance and inclusion in national systems, can gradually shift refugees from dependency to opportunity.

## **II. Progress in implementation**

### **A. Supporting conditions for voluntary repatriation and reintegration**

3. Returns occurred on a significant scale in 2025, particularly to Afghanistan, South Sudan, the Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic. Nearly 4.4 million refugees returned to their countries of origin, the highest level in more than a decade, and nearly three times the 2024 figure. Most returns took place in adverse or fragile conditions, driven by host-country policies, economic hardship or reduced assistance, leaving refugees with limited alternatives. Smaller numbers returned under more conducive conditions, including to the Central African Republic, Nigeria and Rwanda. Ensuring that returns are voluntary, informed, safe and dignified remains vital.

4. Early planning, development financing and private-sector investment in areas of return are critical to support voluntary returns, reintegration and local recovery. In the Syrian Arab Republic, UNHCR and partners are supporting area-based reintegration planning through service mapping and early investments in education, health, livelihoods, shelter and water, while recognizing that conditions remain fragile, with security concerns and documentation challenges. In the Central African Republic, development hubs identified under the national strategy for sustainable solutions are helping align investments in services, livelihoods and local recovery, supported by the African Development Bank, the World Bank and the Islamic Development Bank’s Global Islamic Fund for Refugees. In Burundi, returnee data has been integrated in national planning to guide investments in health, education and social cohesion. For the Sudan situation, while conditions do not currently allow facilitated voluntary repatriation, partners are supporting recovery planning, should conditions permit.

5. Favourable political developments, peace processes and regional cooperation can create opportunities for voluntary return and reintegration. Planned voluntary repatriation from the Democratic Republic of the Congo to Rwanda is underpinned by the 2025 Washington peace agreement and Doha Framework for a Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

## **B. Expanding third-country solutions and regional cooperation**

6. Resettlement and complementary pathways remain important components of protection, solutions and international burden- and responsibility-sharing. Alongside resettlement for refugees facing acute risks, pathways for work and study can expand opportunities for self-reliance. In Malaysia, an International Organization for Migration–UNHCR train-to-hire labour mobility project has been launched to prepare refugees for employment and facilitate their recruitment by employers in Australia. In Uganda, the introduction of an online application process for machine-readable refugee travel documents has enabled over 270 refugees to obtain documentation and pursue educational opportunities across the eastern and southern Africa region.

7. Support arrangements under the Global Compact on Refugees — including the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (known by its Spanish acronym, MIRPS), Cartagena+40, the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development Support Platform, and the Central African Republic Solutions Support Platform — are advancing more equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing by galvanizing political commitment, mobilizing financing, and aligning humanitarian and development efforts. Regional cooperation is also advancing protection and solutions. In West Africa, the 2025 Lomé Declaration on Security and Refugees committed Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana and Togo to strengthen cross-border cooperation through a subregional protection and solutions strategy for 2026–2030.

## **C. Enhancing self-reliance in countries of asylum**

8. Experience from a growing number of countries demonstrates that enabling refugees to participate in local economies can generate benefits for refugees, host communities and local economies. In Mexico, the Government-UNHCR local integration programme has supported more than 160,000 refugees and asylum-seekers since 2016, of whom over 50,000 were relocated to areas where they could access formal jobs with more than 650 partner companies. Within their first month in the programme, 94 per cent of working-age participants secured formal employment, and 60 per cent of families exited poverty within a year, contributing an estimated \$15 million annually to the national economy. In Kenya, the Kakuma-Kalobeyei Challenge Fund is mobilizing private investment in refugee-hosting areas, directly supporting over 1,500 jobs, indirectly supporting 10,000 jobs, and expanding access to goods and services for more than 250,000 people. In Uganda, a blended finance programme has expanded access to credit for more than 130,000 refugee and host-community entrepreneurs since 2019, attracting additional investment and supporting local economic activity. Realizing these gains at scale not only requires enabling policies, but also crucially sustained and predictable financial support from the international community, including development financing, and private sector engagement

9. Recent developments also show how access to work can be expanded in practice. In Ethiopia, the right to work directive expanded economic opportunities, with 48,300 residence permits, work permits and business licences issued by March 2026. Evidence indicates that such inclusion can reduce annual humanitarian assistance costs by approximately \$200 per capita.<sup>1</sup> In Thailand, a 2025 cabinet resolution granted long-staying refugees access to legal employment, an initiative

<sup>1</sup> Socio-Economic Survey of Refugees in Ethiopia (SESRE) 2023, conducted by Ethiopia’s Refugees and Returnees Service, the Ethiopian Statistical Service, UNHCR and the World Bank Microdata Library.

that is being supported by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Finance Corporation-UNHCR joint initiative.

10. Progress, nevertheless, is uneven. In 2025, 88 of 110 reporting countries indicated that more than three-quarters of refugees had freedom of movement, while 63 of 101 reported the same for the right to work. In 64 countries with data, 46 per cent of refugees and asylum-seekers held an account with a bank, financial institution or mobile money provider. In some contexts, limitations related to legal stay, trusted identity credentials, freedom of movement and access to work continue to constrain participation in labour markets and financial systems.

11. Agriculture remains a key pathway to self-reliance in many refugee-hosting areas, particularly in Africa, where 86 per cent of refugees reside. There are 61 Global Refugee Forum pledges on land allocation, policy reform and agribusiness, complemented by \$119 million in agribusiness investment through the World Bank's Window for Host Communities and Refugees in Chad, Ethiopia, Jordan, Uganda and Zambia.

#### **D. Access to health, education, social protection and sustainable human settlements**

12. Governments are increasingly strengthening national health systems in refugee-hosting areas, including through the incorporation of refugees in national health plans and regulatory frameworks. By 2025, 39 of 45 surveyed countries reported having taken such measures. Partnerships with the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Bank, the ILO and private-sector partners are supporting governments to strengthen health financing, insurance, workforce capacity and service delivery. In South Sudan, 13 of 15 health facilities serving refugee-hosting areas have been transferred to the Ministry of Health. In Kenya, legislative reform enabled more than 72,000 refugees to enrol in the national health insurance scheme, while in Mauritania, the transfer of health services to the Ministry of Health reduced consultation costs from \$47 to \$9. Building on this progress will require sustained investments and partnerships to reinforce national health systems.

13. Access to education for refugee children is expanding through national education systems, supported by policy reforms, partnerships and multi-year financing. Yet globally only around half of refugee children are enrolled in school, underscoring the scale of the challenge and the importance of continued investment in national education systems. In Rwanda, refugees are enrolled in public schools under the national curriculum and examination system. In Ecuador, national policy supports access to public education, reducing documentation barriers. In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, free access to primary and secondary education is provided, supported by accelerated learning and language programmes that facilitate students' integration in national systems.

14. The Global Partnership for Education has invested \$1.37 billion in 21 refugee-hosting countries, mobilizing additional co-financing to strengthen national systems. The Inclusion Support Programme for Refugee Education, led by the World Bank with support from the British Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, has helped shape more than \$440 million in education financing while strengthening national capacity. Finally, the Mastercard Foundation has supported access for almost 2 million learners in displacement-affected settings. Sustained investment aligned with national education priorities remains essential to expanding access and strengthening national systems.

15. National social protection systems are gradually including refugees, improving predictable access to basic needs through nationally-led delivery. By the end of 2025, of 149 country operations reporting, 19 recorded full inclusion, 77 partial, and 53 limited or none. In Mauritania, more than 10,000 refugee households

benefit from the Tekavoul programme through the national social registry, while in Peru, an expenditure-based methodology has strengthened the identification of vulnerability among the displaced. Development partners are increasingly investing in social protection as a key response to displacement and fragility. In 2025, led by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, a high-level panel on social protection in fragile and conflict-affected settings set out a catalytic agenda calling for stronger investment in national social protection systems in fragile, conflict-affected, and displacement settings. BRIDGE, an inter-agency facility supported through the PROSPECTS partnership of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, brings together the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), UNHCR, the ILO and the World Bank to support governments and United Nations country teams on social protection and economic inclusion for forcibly displaced persons and host communities.

16. Governments are advancing more inclusive approaches to human settlements, with refugees and host communities increasingly included in the same planning frameworks, services and local governance structures. In Kenya, the Shirika Plan is transitioning major refugee-hosting areas towards municipal governance, while in the Niger, government policy supports the integration of refugees within existing villages, emphasizing shared services and local economic opportunities.

### **III. Strategic partnerships and enablers for sustainable responses**

#### **A. Development cooperation**

17. Development engagement is critical to advancing sustainable responses but faces a constrained financing environment. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development projects a further 5.8 per cent decline in official development assistance in 2026, following a record 23.1 per cent drop in 2025.

18. Despite these pressures, development partners are stepping up their engagement to help address forced displacement. The World Bank, through the International Development Association’s IDA21 Window for Host Communities and Refugees and the Global Concessional Financing Facility, is prioritizing projects that advance inclusion and self-reliance, including in support of the High Commissioner’s 50 by 35 target. The African Development Bank, in collaboration with UNHCR, has published a joint study on development investment in forced displacement, informing the Bank’s priorities and financing decisions in displacement contexts. Its operations, including through the Transition Support Facility, strengthen self-reliance and inclusion outcomes. The Islamic Development Bank continues to support its member countries affected by forced displacement and is exploring fenced financing under its new Concessional Fund.

19. Bilateral development partners are also making significant contributions to improving refugee self-reliance and inclusion in national systems. Germany is transitioning its Special Initiative on Displacement into a permanent financing instrument. The PROSPECTS partnership, supported by the Kingdom of the Netherlands, continues to deliver multi-year programming across protection, education, employment, and social protection. At country level, development engagement is increasingly focused on strengthening national systems rather than replacing them. The Japan International Cooperation Agency project in Burundi illustrates a “solutions from the start” approach, leveraging development investment to support early strengthening of national systems. The Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany, through the German Agency for International Cooperation and the German Development Bank, has supported government-led coordination and refugee inclusion in education, social protection, and economic systems, alongside investments such as the Refugee Water, Sanitation

and Hygiene programme in East Africa, which shifts water delivery from emergency trucking to local utilities. Looking ahead, ensuring predictable, multi-year financing for refugee-hosting countries will require sustained political commitment and enhanced coordination.

## **B. Participation, local engagement and strategic partnerships with United Nations entities**

20. Through the United Nations Common Pledge 2.0, launched at the Global Refugee Forum 2023, UNHCR works with the United Nations Development Coordination Office and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to help host States reflect refugees in national development planning. By June 2025, 65 of 69 United Nations Country Teams in refugee-hosting countries had incorporated refugee analysis in their common country analysis, and 71 per cent included a funded refugee-specific output in the Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. The launch of the United Nations Development Programme-UNHCR Joint Collaboration Framework (2026–2030) reflects a shared commitment to align protection and development efforts in support of self-reliance and nationally-led responses. Efforts across the United Nations system also included the World Food Programme on acute refugee situations, the ILO on economic inclusion, including a skills mapping of more than 5,000 returnees in the Syrian Arab Republic under the PROSPECTS partnership, and UNICEF and WHO on refugee inclusion in national services.

21. In 2025, UNHCR strengthened its partnerships with local and national actors. By year-end, they accounted for 87 per cent of UNHCR-funded partners, receiving 59 per cent of partner funding and 26 per cent of programme expenditure, continuing a steady upward trend since 2022. Multilateral collaboration also deepened: the multistakeholder pledge on advancing localization reached 48 signatories, pledging over \$105 million and supporting more than 920 local organizations. UNHCR also linked its protection functions with localization by supporting community-based structures and initiatives led by women, youth, persons with disabilities and other marginalized groups, providing critical protection mechanisms and safe spaces for more than 8.2 million people. Operations consulted 217,000 people in 107 countries through participatory assessments, anchoring programming in the priorities of affected communities.

## **C. Private sector engagement**

22. The private sector increasingly helps expand economic inclusion and the self-reliance of refugees through employment, access to finance, market linkages and support to refugee-led enterprises. As illustrated by Kenya and Mexico above, private sector engagement at scale requires sustained relationship-building, enabling regulatory frameworks and de-risking through blended finance mechanisms and targeted skills development of refugees to meet market demands. The joint International Finance Corporation-UNHCR initiative continues to strengthen private sector engagement in contexts of forced displacement. Its work ranges from mobilizing private sector interest and partnerships to helping companies extend services and operations. In the Central African Republic, a private sector event in 2025 convened development and corporate partners around economic opportunities for refugees, returnees, internally displaced persons and host communities, leading to offtake agreements with cooperatives that include both displaced and host populations. In Nigeria, a blended risk-sharing facility supported by Sterling Bank, the African Development Bank and UNHCR is enabling small agribusiness enterprises to access formal lending at viable rates. The forthcoming UNHCR Private Sector Council will further strengthen structured corporate engagement.

## IV. Data, evidence and measuring impact

23. The “measuring the impact” initiative, jointly pursued by UNHCR and the World Bank, has established a comparable evidence base on the costs of delivering health, education and subsistence support across displacement contexts. The findings consistently show that delivery through national systems is more cost-effective than parallel humanitarian structures, giving Member States and partners clearer insight into the fiscal implications of inclusion and the potential efficiency gains over time. The initiative has now moved to country-level costing, supporting governments and partners to develop the investment cases needed to advance sustainable responses and drive momentum toward the High Commissioner’s 50 by 35 target.<sup>2</sup>

24. Data and evidence are increasingly informing nationally-led planning, strengthening accountability and supporting implementation towards the High Commissioner’s 50 by 35 target. By generating credible, comparable and policy-relevant information on the socioeconomic conditions, vulnerabilities and capacities of forcibly displaced, stateless and host populations, data helps shift responses away from parallel humanitarian systems towards inclusive national planning and delivery. Integrating forcibly displaced and stateless persons in national statistical systems is central to this shift. With more than 100 Global Refugee Forum pledges on inclusion in national statistical systems and surveys, an increasing number of countries are including displaced populations in censuses, household surveys and administrative systems, strengthening national ownership and reflecting displacement in core planning and budgeting.

25. Through the World Bank–UNHCR Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement, 25 countries (13 in Africa, 6 in Latin America, 3 in Asia and 3 in the Middle East and North Africa) included forcibly displaced populations in national surveys in 2025, up from 18 the previous year. Momentum was sustained by the renewal of the mandate of the Expert Group on Refugee, Internally Displaced and Stateless Persons Statistics (2026–2030) of the United Nations Statistical Commission in March 2026. In Peru, a nationally-led socioeconomic and poverty analysis of Venezuelans has informed dialogue on employment. In Chad, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mauritania, Uganda and Zambia, collaboration with development partners and UNHCR has been shaped by data and evidence. Where full statistical inclusion remains a challenge, complementary instruments such as the UNHCR Forced Displacement Survey, aligned with national standards, provide interim evidence to inform programming, identify barriers to inclusion, and support dialogue with governments and development partners, serving as a bridge towards full integration in national systems rather than parallel mechanisms. At the global level, the Global Compact on Refugees Indicator Report, central to the Compact’s follow-up and review, measures progress toward its four objectives through 16 indicators grouped under eight outcomes, highlighting both achievements and gaps in implementation. Developed through broad multistakeholder consultations, the biennial report integrates humanitarian, development and peace perspectives, supporting more cohesive responses and stronger cooperation among United Nations entities and partners.

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<sup>2</sup> See [measuring the impact of hosting, protecting and assisting refugees](#).