

75th Anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention

A Year of Dialogues

Throughout 2026, the 75th anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention will be marked by a series of national, regional and global dialogues designed not as a commemorative exercise alone, but as a practical process to renew commitment to refugee protection and solutions in today's context. These dialogues aim to bring together States, refugees and stateless people, local authorities, civil society, governments, UN partners, development actors, private sector and other stakeholders to reflect on how the international protection system can respond more effectively to rising displacement, pressure on asylum systems, shrinking protection space and increasingly complex movements.

The discussions will be structured around **ten actions** that frame the core areas where stronger political commitment, practical cooperation and more consistent implementation are needed. Each action is accompanied by **guiding questions** to help focus the conversations on concrete challenges, opportunities and examples of progress. Together, these are intended to support meaningful, forward-looking dialogue grounded in experience from different regions and contexts.

The dialogue process will culminate in the **High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection in early December 2026**, which will bring together key themes, priorities and emerging recommendations from across the year. These outcomes will inform the new **Agenda for the Future of Protection and Solutions**, to be published in early 2027, aiming to help shape renewed action on protection and solutions. In turn, this process is intended to help build momentum towards the **Global Refugee Forum at the end of 2027**, ensuring that the anniversary year contributes to a broader, sustained agenda for implementation, responsibility-sharing and tangible progress for refugees, stateless people and host communities.

Across all contexts, the test should be simple: do the dialogues strengthen refugee protection in practice, and do refugees, stateless people and other affected communities feel they were meaningfully included - and able to see the results of their engagement in the conclusions and follow-up?

Practical guidance for protection-centred dialogues

There are four notes in this package that focus on areas where stronger design can materially improve the quality, legitimacy and follow-up of the dialogues:

1. Meaningful participation of refugees and other affected communities
2. City and local government engagement
3. Faith-based actors and interfaith engagement
4. Parliamentary engagement

1. Meaningful participation of refugees and other affected communities in the 75th Anniversary Dialogues

This two-pager provides practical guidance for UNHCR Bureaux and Operations to design and run the 75th anniversary country and regional dialogues on the 1951 Convention *with* refugees, asylum-seekers, returnees, stateless persons and host communities as equal partners, not merely consultees.

What “meaningful participation” means in this process

Meaningful refugee participation occurs when refugees from diverse backgrounds have sustained influence in all fora where decisions, policies, and responses that impact their lives are being designed, implemented, and measured.¹ For the 75th anniversary dialogues, this means:

- **Participation across the full dialogue cycle:** refugees and other affected communities are engaged in a timely manner in setting priorities, designing the dialogues, participating in discussions, validating conclusions and monitoring follow-up.
- **Power to shape outcomes:** there are clear avenues for their inputs to change the framing, priorities, recommendations and language of the dialogues and the future Protection and Solutions framework.

Designing the dialogues with refugees and other affected communities

- **Co-design from the start:** Involve refugees, host communities and their organizations in shaping the discussion themes, drafting guiding questions, and selecting preferred format for dialogues (plenary, breakouts, safe space sessions).
- **Ensure complimentary spaces:** Integrate refugees into multi-stakeholder dialogues alongside States, NGOs, UN entities and civil society; complement these with **standalone refugee/RLO dialogues** to enable open and safe discussion on sensitive issues.
- **Be inclusive:** Proactively include persons of all ages, genders and diverse backgrounds, particularly persons with disabilities, older persons, youth, minorities, and persons with diverse SOGIESC. Consult with these groups and their trusted organizations to assess the need to organize separate discussions.
- **Ensure outreach:** Use multiple outreach channels (through RLOs, community leaders, digital platforms) to ensure participation is not limited to “usual suspects” or formal structures.
- **Integrated expertise:** Ensure that engagement with refugees and RLOs recognizes and leverages their technical expertise and capacities, along with their lived experiences.
- **Prioritize safety and protection:** Apply a “do no harm” lens throughout the dialogue, and conduct a light protection risk assessment for each dialogue, with attention to groups at heightened risk.

¹ Refugees Seeking Equal Access at the Table (R-SEAT): <https://www.refugeesseat.org/>

Before the dialogue:

- Provide briefings, coaching or pre-dialogue support as needed to ensure refugees can participate equally.
- Plan to address participation barriers identified by refugees, including accessibility, transportation, connectivity, language.
- Plan for discussions, panels, groups in a way that refugee participants can contribute to policy and operational proposals, not only testimonies or personal stories.

During the dialogue:

- Engage experienced refugee and community leaders as cofacilitators, moderators, rapporteurs or thematic leads, not only as numerators.
- Define, from the outset, what decisions, agenda items, or outputs refugee participants can influence, and communicate these clearly.
- Use structured facilitation methods that prevent dominant voices (including institutional actors) from overshadowing refugee-led contributions.

After the dialogues:

- Document and review lessons learned - what worked and what didn't - in relation to participation, representation, safety, and influence.
- Debrief refugee participants on how their contributions were reflected in outcomes and how they will influence the future Protection and Solutions framework.
- Support refugee leaders and RLOs to share summaries of the dialogues back with communities through diverse channels.
- Involve refugees in validating draft reports and recommendations before submission to the High Commissioner's Dialogue.
- Act quickly on issues that require immediate follow-up.
- Involve RLOs and community structures in monitoring progress through joint review meetings, or periodic check-ins.

Quick check: tokenism vs meaningful participation

Use this as a rapid test when planning or reviewing a dialogue:

- Were refugees and other affected communities **involved from the start** in setting priorities and designing the process?
- Are they present in **multiple roles** (co-designers, co-facilitators, analysts, rapporteurs), and **capacities**; not just as storytellers or "one refugee speaker on a panel", but as thematic experts?
- Is **diversity real** (women, youth, persons with disabilities, minorities), or are the same individuals repeatedly invited?
- Have **barriers to participation** (costs, language, accessibility, care responsibilities, digital divide) been concretely addressed?
- Are **risks identified** and mitigated, especially for groups who may face stigma or violence?
- Is there a clear, **communicated feedback loop** showing how refugees input shaped conclusions and next steps?

If the answer to any of these is "no", the dialogue design should be **adjusted** before proceeding.

2. City and local government engagement in the dialogues

For many refugees, protection, inclusion and solutions are experienced - or denied - at the local level. Cities and municipalities are often where refugees seek access to services, documentation, education, health care, livelihoods and community life. They are also where pressures on social cohesion and public trust become most visible.

Are cities in the room - or shaping the discussion?

- Are city and local government actors engaged early enough to influence the agenda?
- Are we involving the right mix of political leadership and technical counterparts?
- Are municipalities being treated as actors who shape protection, inclusion and local solutions for refugees?

If city actors are present but not shaping the substance, the dialogue may miss the level where refugee protection is often made real - or denied.

See guidance: <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/compact-action/stakeholders/cities-and-municipalities>

City and local authorities are not only service providers. They are planners, conveners, regulators and political actors who often shape whether refugees are included in local systems or left at the margins. Their participation can help ensure that the dialogues are grounded in implementation and lead to practical, locally relevant outcomes.

Discussions should be anchored in practical local realities: access to education, health care, housing, livelihoods and other local systems; local responses to discrimination or xenophobia; service delivery pressures in refugee-hosting areas; and opportunities to strengthen social cohesion and local planning.

After the dialogue, the emphasis should be on translating outcomes into local action - whether through municipal commitments, practical pilots, stronger links to local planning, or continued city-to-city exchange.

What would useful local follow-up look like?

- Could this dialogue lead to a concrete municipal commitment, pilot or policy shift?
- Are there local barriers to refugee inclusion in services, documentation or planning that the dialogue could help address?
- Is there a realistic link between local discussion and national follow-up?

The strongest city engagement will connect Convention principles to practical improvements in refugees' daily lives.

Possible areas for action

- stronger inclusion of refugees in local systems and services;
- improved local coordination and planning in refugee-hosting areas;
- initiatives to strengthen social cohesion and counter xenophobia;
- more practical links between local realities and national refugee policy.

3. Faith-based actors and interfaith engagement in the dialogues

At a time of shrinking protection space, rising hostility toward refugees, and growing pressure on asylum and inclusion, faith-based actors can be important allies in helping protect the social and moral space in which refugee protection remains possible.

Are faith-based actors being engaged strategically?

- Are we engaging faith-based actors because they can help protect social space for refugees?
- Are we involving actors with real community trust, local reach and a commitment to dignity, inclusion and non-discrimination?
- Does the dialogue make space for practical proposals, not only values-based statements?

Faith-based engagement is most effective when it strengthens protection for refugees in practice.

See guidance: <https://www.unhcr.org/handbooks/rcm/sites/rcm/files/2024-10/UNHCR-Guidance-Engagement-with-Faith-Based-Organizations.pdf>

[Religious leadership, institutions and inter-religious dialogue networks | The Global Compact on Refugees | UNHCR](#)

Faith leaders and faith-based organizations are often among the most trusted actors in local communities. They can influence public attitudes, mobilize solidarity, counter harmful narratives, and support practical action that sustains dignity and inclusion for refugees.

The discussion is ideally to include inter-faith representation and to be anchored in themes that connect faith-based engagement directly to refugee protection in practice: dignity and welcome, social cohesion, solidarity with refugees, resistance to exclusionary narratives, and community support for inclusion.

After the dialogue, the emphasis should be on whether the conversation leads to something practical: joint messages, local initiatives, stronger links to community structures, or continued collaboration that supports refugees more effectively.

What could faith-based follow-up achieve for refugees?

- Could faith leaders help counter xenophobia or harmful narratives about refugees in this context?
- Could faith networks widen access to services, community support, or local inclusion?
- Is there scope for a joint interfaith collaboration, message, initiative, or local action plan?

The value of faith-based engagement lies in whether it helps create more space for asylum, dignity, solidarity, and inclusion for refugees.

Possible areas for action

- stronger public narratives of dignity, solidarity and welcome for refugees;
- community-level action to counter xenophobia, misinformation and exclusion;
- practical support for refugee inclusion and access to services through faith networks;
- broader community ownership of refugee protection and inclusion.

4. Parliamentary engagement in the dialogues

Parliamentarians help shape the legal, political, and public environment in which refugee protection either holds or comes under pressure. Through law, oversight, budgets and public discourse, they can strengthen - or weaken - asylum space, access to rights and national ownership of refugee responses.

Are we engaging parliamentarians for influence - or for optics?

- Are we engaging parliamentarians who can influence law, budgets, oversight or public discourse?
- Are we clear what parliamentary action we are actually seeking?
- Is the discussion focused on concrete legal, policy, or budgetary issues affecting refugees?

Parliamentary engagement is most useful when it creates a path to concrete action.

See guidance: <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/compact-action/stakeholders/parliamentary-networks>

Parliamentary engagement can therefore help ensure that the dialogues move beyond general endorsement of refugee protection and toward more concrete legal, policy and budgetary follow-up.

The discussion should be anchored in the practical implications of the 1951 Convention: access to territory and asylum procedures, non-refoulement, access to rights, inclusion in national systems, gaps between legal commitments and lived reality, and the political or budgetary barriers that prevent more effective implementation.

After the dialogue, the emphasis should be on whether the conversation leads to concrete parliamentary action: hearings, debates, oversight, budget follow-up, legal reform or stronger public advocacy.

What parliamentary follow-up would matter most for refugees?

- Is there a realistic opening for legal reform or stronger legal alignment with the 1951 Convention?
- Could the dialogue lead to a proposed law, hearing, inquiry, debate, or stronger oversight?
- Are there budget issues affecting refugee protection or inclusion that parliamentarians could influence?

The strongest parliamentary outcomes are those that help defend refugee protection in law, policy, budgets, and public debate.

The 75th anniversary is an opportunity to reaffirm that the 1951 Convention must be defended not only in principle, but in law, policy, budgets and public debate.

Possible areas for action

- stronger legal alignment with the 1951 Convention;
- improved access for refugees to asylum, documentation, rights and national systems;
- better budget support for refugee protection and inclusion;
- stronger oversight of refugee-related laws, policies and implementation.