

NO ESCAPE III

Displaced voices

from the frontlines of the climate crisis

UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

FOREWORD



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The climate emergency continues to wreak havoc across the world. It is an immediate protection crisis unfolding before our eyes. Its impact on frontline communities – refugees and their hosts – grows by the minute.

Today, three in every four displaced people live in countries facing high-to-extreme exposure to climate hazards. Millions of people flee war seeking safety and dignity only to see their shelters flooded, wells dried up, or farmland scorched. This reality is compounding rapidly as a historic Super El Niño drives severe droughts, erratic rains and extreme weather, pushing already vulnerable communities to the brink.

The impacts of climate change are also undermining long-term solutions, making it harder for displaced people to rebuild their lives, integrate locally, or safely return home. Over half of all refugees who returned home in 2025 went back to highly climate-vulnerable countries, putting them at serious risk of being displaced all over again.

This report brings empirical evidence and frontline testimonies together. It shows how floods, drought, extreme heat and sea-level rise threaten the safety and well-being of refugees, stateless people, and the communities hosting them.

And yet, they are not passive bystanders. From community reforestation and regenerative farming to rainwater harvesting and climate-resilient living, refugees and host communities are pioneering practical, scalable solutions every day. What they need now is real partnership and sustained investment.

Short-term relief saves lives in an emergency, but long-term climate and development finance secures futures. Investing directly in frontline adaptation and innovation protects livelihoods, strengthens local integration, and ensures that returning home remains viable and safe.

I urge leaders at COP31 to heed these findings, listen to these voices, and invest in our shared future.



Wenyen Gabriel

UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador

Professional basketball player and former refugee from South Sudan

Climate change is everywhere, but how you experience a flood, a storm, or a heatwave depends on who you are and where you live. Refugees and the communities hosting them are among those hardest hit.

I know displacement personally. My family once fled violence in South Sudan searching for safety and opportunity. They ended up in Khartoum, where I was born. When things became too dangerous there, they fled to Egypt, from where we were resettled to the US. Today, surviving conflict is only half the battle.

South Sudan contributes next to nothing to global carbon emissions, but my homeland is among the most vulnerable countries to climate change and is paying one of the highest prices. We are living through year after year of catastrophic flooding and extreme heat. I have seen the devastating impact with my own eyes. Along our northern borders, nearly everyone depends on farming and livestock to survive. Now, people are fleeing bombs and war in neighbouring Sudan, only to find the places where they sought safety completely underwater.

That is why evidence and stories from the frontline matter. They show not only what refugees are enduring, but what they are already doing to respond. They are not just people with needs: they are builders, leaders and innovators. In Uganda, refugee teams regenerate degraded land to feed their communities. In South Sudan, women and youth run climate-smart farming businesses and reinforce dykes to protect their villages from extreme flooding.

They need investment, opportunity, and the tools to protect their families. We cannot continue locking frontline communities out of climate finance and decision-making. We need to recognize their leadership, back their solutions with resources, and let them lead the way.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND CONTRIBUTING PARTNERS

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Lastly, thanks go to Andrew Harper, Special Advisor on Climate Action to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, a tireless advocate for refugees and those who host them.

Cover image:

A member of the women's association in Farchana, eastern Chad, waters plants at the community Agro project, which united refugees from the Farchana refugee camp and host community. March 2025.

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Partners: (in alphabetical order):

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PART I

THE CURRENT REALITY



Children walk on a footbridge over the mangroves in the Pescador neighbourhood of Turbo, Colombia. Through the "Guardianes del Mangle" (Guardians of the Mangrove) initiative, local fishers and internally displaced people are restoring the mangroves, which protect their community from flooding and storms. UNHCR supports the initiative through its Environment and Climate Action Innovation Fund, helping participants build new skills and livelihoods.

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CLIMATE CHANGE, CONFLICT AND DISPLACEMENT



Meher, a Rohingya refugee and volunteer with a community-based emergency response team, holds a photograph of a recent disaster response training in Kutupalong refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

© UNHCR/Santi Palacios

"If anything happens, like rain or a cyclone, we go to vulnerable people, such as pregnant women, people who are blind, and people with mobility issues, to raise awareness. We tell them an emergency or disaster is coming, and they need to move. If they cannot move, we help them relocate,"

says Meher, 30, who lives in Kutupalong camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Kutupalong is one of the most hazard-prone refugee camps in the world, with bamboo shelters and infrastructure facing year-round risks from heavy monsoon rains, strong winds and fires during the dry season.

As a volunteer with a community-based emergency response team, trained by UNHCR and partners such as ACTED, Meher is often among the first to act. With few sturdy structures in the camp, refugee volunteers guide families to temporary safe zones. As a woman, Meher can also reach women who might otherwise be left behind. "Our female volunteers are important, so we can support the women ourselves," she says.

For Kutupalong refugee camp and other refugee settlements, the challenge is far from over. Forecasts suggest that this year's Super El Niño will drive severe droughts, floods and extreme weather through late 2026 and into 2027.

Yet how these impacts are experienced depends on who you are and where you live. For refugees and other displaced people, climate hazards often intersect with conflict, displacement and other crises, amplifying existing vulnerabilities. At the same time, displaced people often have fewer resources and opportunities to prepare, adapt and recover.

As of mid-2026, three-quarters of refugees and other displaced people live in countries with high-to-extreme exposure to climate-related hazards.[1] Many live in fragile and conflict-affected countries where climate risks are high, infrastructure and public services are under pressure, and institutions have limited capacity to respond. Within these countries, many refugee settlements are located in remote, environmentally fragile or hazard-prone areas, and often experience harsher weather conditions than their host countries overall, including greater heat, more variable rainfall and more intense precipitation.

Displacement can also erode the assets and support systems that help people withstand shocks. Families may have lost their homes, savings, livelihoods and social networks. Restrictions on movement, work or land use can further limit opportunities to rebuild them. In many displacement settings, people rely on climate-sensitive livelihoods, live in inadequate shelters and have limited access to essential services, education, social protection, financial services and early warning information.

The consequences are not experienced equally. Age, gender, disability, health, legal status, and documentation all shape people's exposure and their ability to respond. For example, people with disabilities may face barriers to receiving warnings or evacuating safely. People without recognized documentation or legal status may be excluded from national services, social protection or disaster assistance. Women and girls may face heightened protection risks, including gender-based violence, when water or firewood become scarce, and they are forced to travel greater distances to access essential resources. Children may see their education disrupted by floods, cyclones or extreme heat. **In 2025 alone, more than 171 million students globally, or around one in ten school-aged children, experienced disruptions to their education due to climate-related hazards**.[2] For refugee and displaced children, who often already face barriers to education, such disruptions can have lasting consequences for learning, wellbeing and future opportunities.

SUPER EL NIÑO: A CRISIS ON TOP OF A CRISIS

A historic Super El Niño is expected to drive extreme weather through late 2026 and into 2027, amplifying existing climate risks in many refugee-hosting countries. Already, in sub-Saharan Africa, 62 per cent of rural populations depend on stressed ecosystems for food, water, and energy.[3] Now, across the Sahel, drought and flooding, compounded by conflict, could intensify competition over scarce resources, disrupt essential services, increase disease risks, and drive further displacement. In East Africa, extreme flooding could displace millions, with Somalia and Kenya facing the greatest risks. In Southern Africa, drought is threatening crops, livestock, and water supplies, further undermining the livelihoods and resilience of displaced communities, increasing the likelihood of harmful coping strategies.

Across Latin America, water stress and declining agricultural production are worsening food security and livelihood pressures. In Asia, persistent droughts, combined with heightened flood and cyclone risks, threaten lives and livelihoods, increasing protection concerns.

For people already forced from their homes, these climate shocks deepen vulnerability, increase protection risks and make recovery even more difficult. As climate extremes intensify, we must strengthen preparedness, protect the most vulnerable, and ensure that displaced communities are not left behind.



EXTREME HEAT

Monira Bahraldin in Farchana refugee settlement, eastern Chad, where she has lived since fleeing El Fasher, Sudan, in June 2023.

© UNHCR/Ala Kheir

"The peak of the dry season in Chad is much hotter than in Darfur, and the journey to fetch water becomes even longer, just as the family's demand for water increases,"

says Monira Bahraldin, who fled El Fasher, Sudan, in June 2023 and has lived in Farchana refugee settlement in eastern Chad ever since. Farchana ranks among the top 10 refugee settlements in Chad most at risk of climate impacts due to the ongoing drought situation and persistent conflict.[4] Monira spends much of her day fetching water. "The nearby wadis also become extremely dry, forcing us to walk even further to find alternative water sources."

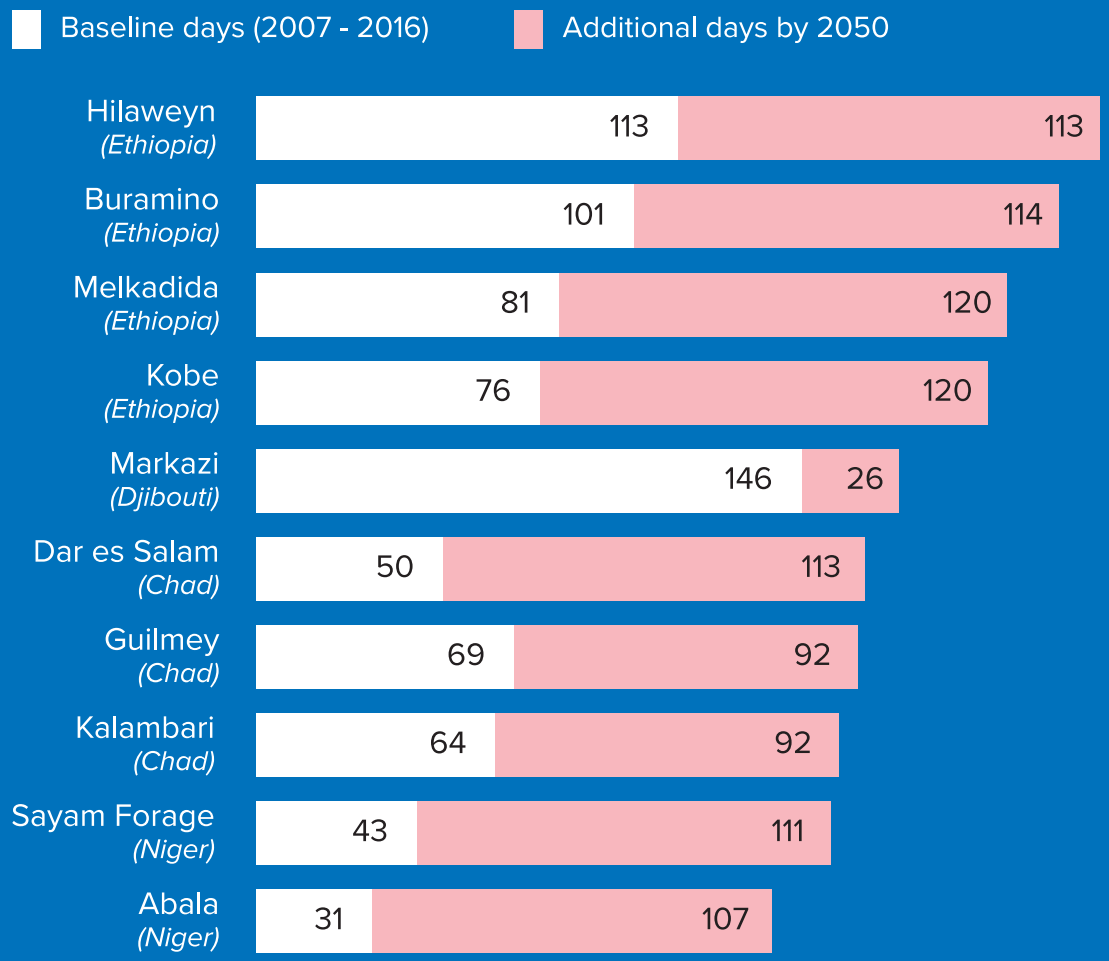
Like many refugee settlements in sub-Saharan Africa, Farchana sits in an area where extreme heat is becoming longer and more intense. Even outside the hottest months, water is scarce. "Sometimes we go for an entire week without any water," she says. "We try to boil it, but we still desperately need safe water."

Extreme heat is emerging as one of the most significant and widespread climate risks facing displaced people, returnees and their hosts. Monira's story highlights how, as temperatures rise and heatwaves become more frequent, intense and prolonged, daily life is becoming more dangerous in many refugee-hosting areas and areas of return.

Extreme heat is also becoming a persistent health threat, not just an occasional hazard. **By 2050, most refugee settlements and camps are projected to experience around twice as many days of dangerous heat each year.**[5] Prolonged heat exposure affects health directly, increasing the risk of dehydration, heat exhaustion, heatstroke, and premature death while exacerbating cardiovascular, respiratory and kidney conditions. These risks are compounded by inadequate shelter, limited access to safe water and cooling, and already stretched health systems in refugee-hosting areas. More broadly, climate-related changes in temperature and rainfall, including flooding, can alter and increase the risk of certain infectious and vector-borne diseases, like malaria and cholera.[6] Beyond health, extreme heat can make it harder for displaced people and their hosts to work, learn and secure an income, while placing growing pressure on water supplies and undermining food security and well-being.

HOTTEST REFUGEE SETTLEMENTS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA BY 2050

Top 10 formal refugee settlements by total dangerous heat days in 2050 [7]



IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA, BY 2050[7]:

100+ days
of **dangerous heat** per year
in every 1 in 3 refugee settlements

50+ additional days
of **dangerous heat** per year
in more than half of all refugee settlements

200+ days
of **dangerous heat** per year
in some settlements in Ethiopia, including Hilaweyn

Heat does not end when the sun sets. Rising night-time temperatures reduce opportunities for recovery, making prolonged heat episodes increasingly dangerous. Homes, schools and clinics may continue to retain heat long after sunset, particularly as cooling, ventilation and reliable energy are often limited in refugee settings. In some contexts, people may sleep outdoors in search of relief from extreme indoor temperatures, exposing them to additional health, safety and protection risks. For refugees and host communities that depend on agriculture or pastoralism, warmer nights can also reduce crop yields and agricultural productivity, pushing them further towards poverty and negative coping mechanisms. For women, this may mean an increased likelihood of being forced into transactional or survival sex, and for children, early or forced marriage.

The impacts of heat are felt across camps, settlements, areas of return and urban neighbourhoods. As most refugees now live in towns and cities, urban heat is becoming an increasingly important displacement challenge. Dense built environments, limited green space and poor-quality housing can trap heat and increase exposure, particularly for low-income and marginalized communities. Refugees often have limited access to cooling, water and reliable energy, making it harder to escape dangerous temperatures.

Without urgent action, dangerous heat is projected to become increasingly common across many refugee-hosting areas and areas of return, placing growing numbers of displaced people and host communities at risk.

NEW, REPEATED AND ONWARD DISPLACEMENT

"In my country the climate situation contributed to the conflict, and here I am again affected by the climate,"

says Fatima Kofolo, 33, who fled Cameroon for Chad after water scarcity triggered clashes between herders and fishing communities. "I saw people killed, children fleeing alone and others burned," she says. In Chad, she rebuilt her life, working as a pharmacist and starting a family.

In September 2024, heavy rains pushed the Chari River in Chad to dangerous levels. The government built a dyke near her home, then had to raise it as the water kept rising. "It's very stressful. I don't know where we will go if the water breaks through the wall," she says. Having fled one climate-related conflict, Fatima now faces the risk of being displaced again.



Fatima Kofolo holds her baby, Weideing, beside the dyke protecting their home from the rising Chari River in Mbayam, near N'Djamena, Chad.

© UNHCR/Andrew McConnell

As Fatima Kofolo's story illustrates, for many displaced people, displacement is not a single event. For people who are already displaced, repeated climate-related disasters can make it harder to recover, rebuild and achieve lasting stability. Over time, this can increase the risk of repeated, onward and prolonged displacement.

Climate shocks can also contribute to new displacement. **Over the past decade, more than 255 million weather-related internal displacements were recorded worldwide, equivalent to nearly 70,000 displacements per day.**[8] **This represents nearly a 5 per cent increase compared to the ten-year average through the end of 2024.** While many of these movements are temporary, with people returning once conditions improve or following pre-emptive evacuations, some result in longer-term displacement, particularly where people face recurring hazards, high vulnerability or limited opportunities to rebuild their lives. These risks are often most acute in fragile and conflict-affected settings.

In some contexts, climate impacts may also contribute to tensions over scarce natural resources, particularly where communities already face social, economic or environmental pressures. While climate change is not the sole driver of conflict, it can exacerbate existing drivers of conflict and insecurity, including competition over land, water and livelihoods, and may prolong or intensify tensions in complex, context-specific ways.



4 Internal Displacements



are triggered by

weather-related disasters



every

5 seconds[8]



In East Africa, forecasts suggest that severe flooding linked to the current very strong El Niño could displace between some 770,000 and 3 million people in Somalia, Kenya, South Sudan and Uganda by the end of the year, depending on how conditions unfold.[9]



In July 2026, severe monsoon rains, flooding and landslides in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, affected more than 52,000 Rohingya refugees and displaced over 13,000 refugees.[10]

DURABLE SOLUTIONS



"We have nothing prepared for winter. I have gathered a little firewood. If we had a heater, we could use it, but we don't. If someone helps, we can manage. If no one helps, we have nothing,"

says Haji Mohammad Shafi, who returned to Afghanistan with his family after 44 years in Pakistan. The family now lives in a makeshift shelter in Kabul Province, with plastic sheets covering the windows and stones filling gaps in the walls. They rely on occasional assistance and small cash support to cover basic needs such as food, fuel and clothing.

Afghanistan is among the countries most exposed to climate-related hazards, such as drought and temperature extremes. These place further strain on livelihoods, shelter and resources in communities already facing displacement, poverty and limited economic opportunities, making it harder for returnee families to rebuild. “I have no warm clothes for my children. No proper windows. Nothing to protect us from the cold," Mohammad stresses.

Haji Mohammad Shafi outside his family’s makeshift shelter in Kabul Province after returning to Afghanistan from Pakistan.

© UNHCR/Oxygen Empire Media Production

For many displaced people, returning home is only the beginning of a long recovery process. As Mohammad's story illustrates, returning families often come back to communities struggling with poverty, damaged infrastructure, limited services and growing climate pressures. **Over two in three refugee returnees in the first half of 2026 returned to highly climate-vulnerable countries.**

Safety and dignity remain the foundation of voluntary return. Yet even where security conditions improve, climate impacts and environmental degradation can make it difficult to rebuild livelihoods, restore essential services and create the conditions needed for sustainable return. Droughts, floods, extreme heat and environmental degradation can damage homes, strain water supplies, reduce agricultural production and undermine livelihoods. In countries already affected by conflict and displacement, these impacts can make it harder for returnees to rebuild their lives and increase the risk of renewed displacement.

Climate impacts can also affect prospects for local integration and self-reliance. In many refugee-hosting areas, growing pressure on land, water, natural resources and public services can place additional strain on host communities already facing significant social and economic challenges. Without adequate support, these pressures can undermine inclusion, limit livelihood opportunities and prolong dependence on humanitarian assistance.

Climate action is therefore becoming an increasingly important component of the search for durable solutions. Investments in climate-resilient infrastructure, sustainable livelihoods, ecosystem restoration and basic services can support self-reliance and recovery, reduce the risk of renewed displacement, and help communities withstand future shocks. Achieving UNHCR's 50 by 35 vision will depend not only on expanding opportunities for voluntary return, local integration and self-reliance, but also on ensuring that these pathways remain viable in a changing climate.

UNHCR'S 50 BY 35 VISION

Long-term displacement has become a defining feature of the global refugee situation. By the end of 2025, 70 per cent of refugees and other people in need of international protection under UNHCR's mandate were living in protracted situations, having spent five years or more in exile without immediate prospects for a durable solution.

In response, UNHCR launched its **50 by 35: Dignity and Solutions** initiative, which aims to halve, by 2035, the number of refugees and others in need of international protection living in protracted displacement who are unable to meet their basic needs without humanitarian assistance. Expanding opportunities for voluntary return, local integration, self-reliance and other durable solutions, while maintaining protection, are at the heart of this initiative.



Women farmers in a sorghum field in Al Jabalain, White Nile State, Sudan. In the face of climate change and displacement, solar-powered irrigation from the Nile is bringing dry land into production, giving refugees, displaced people and host communities a way to feed themselves and rebuild their livelihoods.

© UNHCR/Antonia Vadala

DEEP DIVE ON SYRIA: CLIMATE-RESILIENT RETURNS AND RECOVERY

As Syria emerges as one of the world's most important return contexts, the sustainability of return will depend not only on reconstruction, but also on whether recovery efforts account for growing climate pressures. Since 8 December 2024, an estimated 1.8 million Syrians have returned from neighbouring countries, alongside over 2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) who returned to their areas of origin.[11]

The Government's recovery priorities focus on rehabilitating infrastructure in villages, towns and heavily damaged urban centres, including Aleppo, Deir ez-Zor, Dar'a and Homs. At the same time, the planned closure of remaining IDP camps by the end of 2027 is likely to place additional strain on Aleppo and Idlib cities and peri-urban areas, which are expected to absorb many displaced households. According to ODI population scenarios, Aleppo and Rural Damascus could account for 21.2 per cent and 19.2 per cent of Syria's population respectively by 2030, partly due to return movements.

This comes at a time when infrastructure and essential services remain under significant strain. Water security illustrates the challenge. In Aleppo, water treatment plants, pumping stations and piped water networks suffered extensive damage during the conflict, while groundwater tables are declining by an estimated 1.75 metres per year as reliance on private wells increases. Nearly two-thirds of these wells are unlicensed. Water availability is also affected by pressures on the Euphrates, a critical source of water for Aleppo and Deir ez-Zor. Meanwhile, Damascus and Rural Damascus continue to rely heavily on groundwater resources that were already under stress before the conflict, with demand exceeding natural recharge rates.

Climate-related hazards are already affecting communities across Syria including the livelihoods and living conditions on which sustainable reintegration depends. Returnees and communities in return areas face increasingly variable rainfall, drought and flooding, alongside degraded agricultural land and damaged water, irrigation and sanitation infrastructure. Flooding along the Euphrates River in Deir ez-Zor in 2026 damaged homes, disrupted livelihoods and displaced more than 3,600 people, illustrating how extreme weather events can compound existing humanitarian and recovery challenges.





Climate change is expected to amplify these challenges. Since 1979, average temperatures during the hot season have increased by approximately 0.42°C per decade across much of Syria. Looking ahead, average seasonal maximum temperatures are projected to rise by an additional 1.1°C to 2.0°C during the 2030s and 2040s. Hotter temperatures and greater evaporation will increase electricity and water demand, as households will likely invest in cooling and further private wells, if the government is not able to expand water infrastructure and manage water resources.

These trends highlight why climate-resilient recovery is essential to durable solutions. Decisions taken today on housing, water systems, energy infrastructure, public services and climate-smart livelihoods will shape not only the success of reconstruction efforts, but also whether returnees, internally displaced people and host communities are able to rebuild their lives in safety and dignity over the coming decades.[12]

Flooding along the Euphrates River in Deir ez-Zor in May 2026 displaced thousands of people, damaging homes and livelihoods. Working alongside government authorities and humanitarian partners, UNHCR has provided urgent assistance and protection to families affected by the floods.

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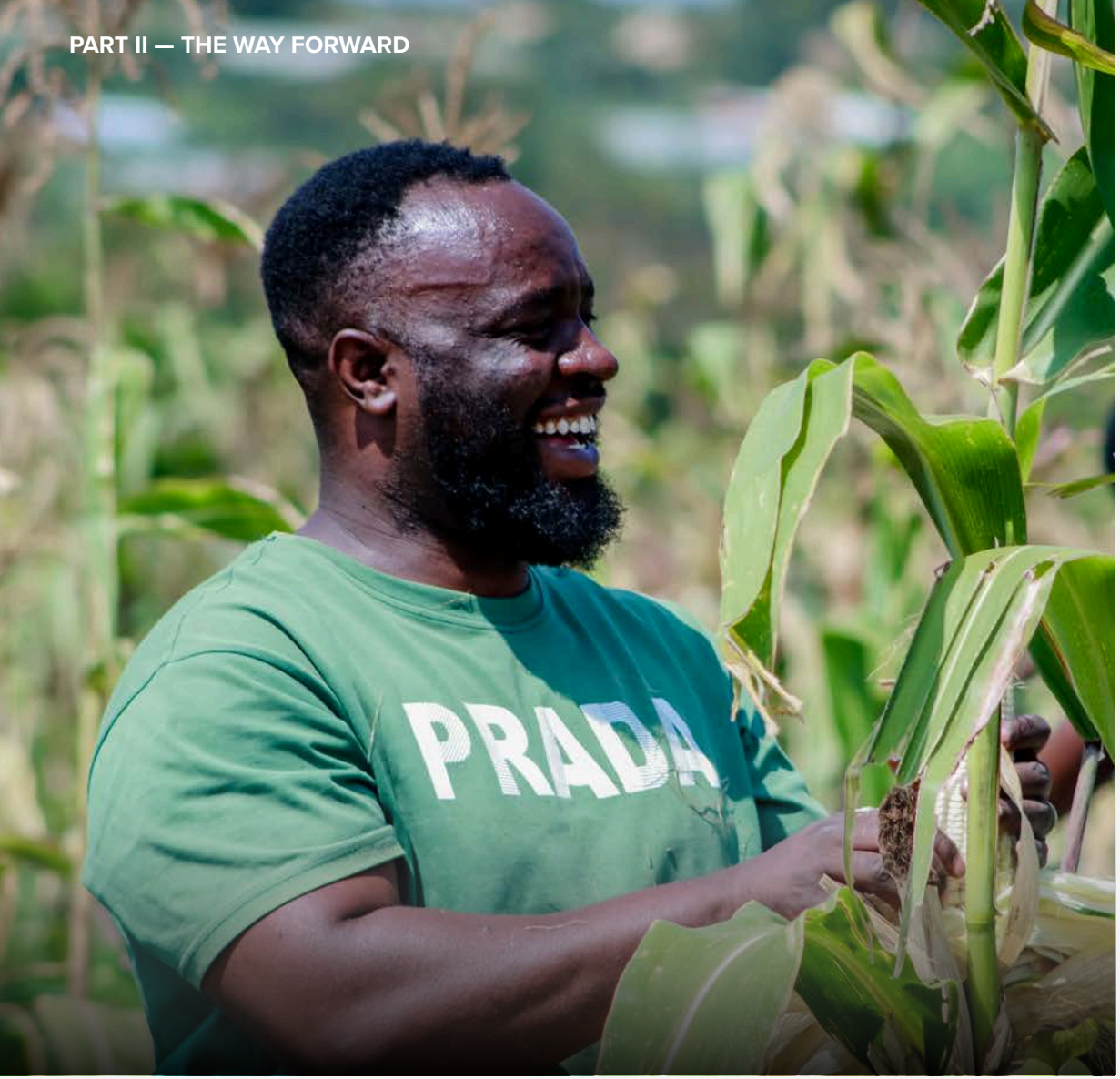
PART II

THE WAY FORWARD



UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador Theo James visits south-eastern Mauritania to spotlight the challenges Malian refugees are facing due to the impact of the climate crisis (Aghor village, Bassiknou, Mauritania).

© UNHCR/Caroline Irby



Paulinho Muzaliwa, a Congolese refugee and entrepreneur, harvests maize in one of UNIDOS's food forest demonstrations in Nakivale Refugee Settlement, Uganda.

© UNIDOS Social Innovation Centre

LOCALLY LED ACTION

"Refugees are not only people with needs. We are also farmers, innovators, trainers, leaders, and problem-solvers. Back refugee-led innovation. Invest in locally led solutions. And, most importantly, let communities lead,"

says Paulinho Muzaliwa, a Congolese refugee entrepreneur. He founded UNIDOS in Nakivale Refugee Settlement, Uganda, to help refugees and host communities restore degraded land and grow their own food. "We are not just waiting for someone to help us," he says.

With support from UNHCR Innovation in 2023, UNIDOS trained local trainers in regenerative farming so the community could carry the work forward. When the funding ended, it kept growing, with farmers adapting what they learned and sharing it with others. "The support we received wasn't huge, but it went a long way because it invested in people, knowledge, and local ownership," Paulinho says.

The knowledge and capacities that displaced people and their hosts possess are essential for effective and inclusive climate action. As Paulinho's story demonstrates, they are already designing and implementing solutions; the challenge is how to ensure these solutions receive the support they require.

These actors have trusted community relationships and remain present long after emergency funding cycles end. The solutions they develop and the projects they implement often bring co-benefits and contribute to social cohesion. However, while locally led climate solutions deliver transformative results, critical funding and technical assistance remains beyond reach of the hardest hit communities.[13]

When we partner with refugee-led and community-based organizations, and include them in climate systems and adaptation efforts, we can help scale up innovations and bring about lasting change. Paulinho Muzaliwa's UNIDOS is just one example among many.

Refugee leaders and community-based organizations need direct, flexible and multi-year funding that reduces administrative barriers and enables them to sustain or scale locally developed solutions, rather than repeatedly having to rebuild around short project cycles. Additionally, as recommended by refugee-led organizations during recent consultations, this funding should be paired with cross-border connections to subject experts, professional networks, markets, links to private sector partners, investors, and other stakeholders that can help solutions mature and achieve long-term sustainability and impact. We need to back refugee leaders and community-based organizations and invest in their institutional, technical and financial capacities, to enable their access to opportunities – financing and otherwise.

When it comes to adaptation plans, project governance and monitoring, we need to create meaningful decision-making roles for affected communities. In the past year alone, several more countries have included references to refugees and displacement in their national adaptation plans, from Brazil to Lebanon. In Uganda, Refugees International and UNHCR held consultation workshops with refugee-led organizations, government officials and other partners as part of national adaptation planning. Continued advocacy is needed to ensure that these examples become the rule, not positive outliers.

If we are serious about leaving no one behind — and about implementing solutions that actually work — refugees and host communities must be involved in setting priorities, shaping programme design, informing funding decisions and assessing results, not simply be consulted after key decisions have already been made.

LOCALLY LED ACTION IN UGANDA

The "Climate-Resilient Living Pod" project, led by Safe Home Africa in partnership with UNHCR Innovation, seeks to build 30 houses that support rainwater harvesting and climate-smart food production in Nyumanzi Settlement in Uganda. This pilot aims to demonstrate that an integrated approach can increase climate resilience, household self-reliance, and livelihood security among refugees, while providing a scalable model for climate adaptation in displacement settings.

Through the "Sow Hope" project in Pagirinya 2 and Maaji refugee settlements, Uganda, the Youth Empowerment Foundation worked with 100 refugee and host community farmers on water conservation, irrigation, soil improvement and drought-resilient farming. With funding from UNHCR Innovation, the Youth Empowerment Foundation helped farmers continue producing food, such as onion, aubergines and okra, throughout the year, despite increasing climate pressures, demonstrating how relatively small investments in climate adaptation can translate into tangible improvements in food security and self-reliance.

CLIMATE FINANCE



Akong Garang Mayen Lual Ayai, 39, outside her new shelter in Barniyuing returnee settlement, Aweil Centre County, Northern Bahr el Ghazal State, South Sudan.

© UNHCR/Peter Louis Gume

"In the grass shelter I could not sleep at night. The rain came through the roof and if a flood hit, we would not have been safe,"

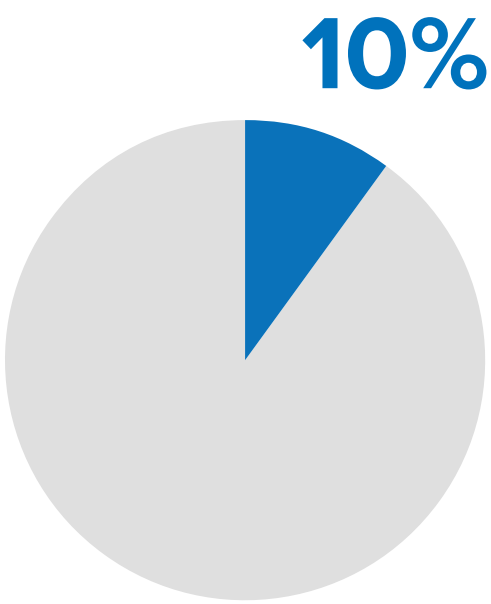
says Akong Garang Mayen Lual Ayai, 39. “I am alone with my two daughters, and anyone could have come inside. This house is strong, with brick walls and a zinc roof. When the rain comes now, we stay dry. I lock the door at night, and we sleep.”

Akong was born and grew up in Sudan. In 2024, the war forced her to flee with her two daughters to South Sudan, and she has not been able to reach her husband since. Today, they live in Barniyuing returnee settlement in Northern Bahr el Ghazal, an area exposed to recurrent floods.

Her shelter is part of a Japan-funded UNHCR project helping 26,000 people in Northern Bahr el Ghazal and Warrap adapt to floods through climate-resilient shelters, early warning systems and solar-powered water points. Japan's contribution co-finances a wider US$50 million Green Climate Fund programme to strengthen the resilience of some 1.7 million people to floods, drought and food insecurity.

Akong's story shows what climate finance can deliver when it reaches communities affected by both displacement and climate change. But examples like hers remain too rare.

Fragile and conflict-affected countries receive only around **10 per cent** of global climate finance[14]



Climate finance is a strategic investment in human security. When deployed effectively, it reduces humanitarian needs, supports long-term development gains and fosters stability in fragile contexts. But contrary to needs, **fragile and conflict-affected countries receive only around 10 per cent of global climate finance, despite being home to many of the people most vulnerable to climate change**.[14] Many of these countries also host large numbers of displaced people – who are frequently excluded from climate finance and adaptation efforts.

Governments must ensure that displacement considerations are embedded in national data systems, climate planning and investment priorities, so that refugees and their hosts remain visible. If they are excluded, this limits their access to climate investments and overlooks their potential to contribute to locally led climate solutions. Political, institutional and operational barriers can further limit investment in some of the most climate-vulnerable areas, particularly those affected by conflict and displacement. Addressing these barriers requires a deliberate effort to prioritize underserved settings and develop financing approaches adapted to their specific contexts.

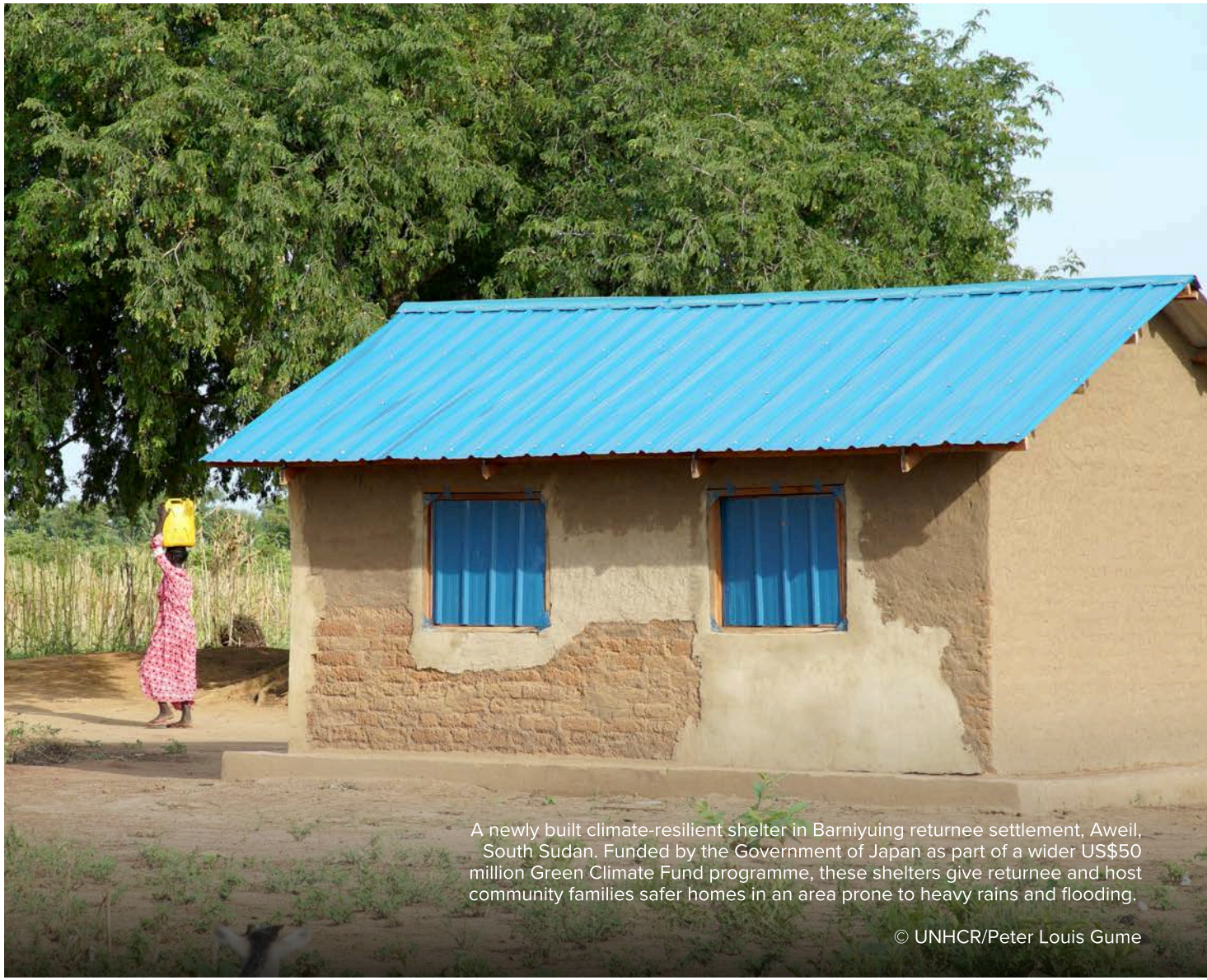
Not only do we need to ensure climate finance reaches displaced communities and their hosts, but the way that finance is provided also matters. Debt-constrained countries and those considered high-risk need greater access to grants – that avoid adding to heavy debt burdens – and highly concessional finance, alongside instruments that can mobilize additional investment without transferring costs and risks onto already vulnerable communities. **Currently, only 6 per cent of climate finance flows are in the form of grants.**[15]

Climate, development and humanitarian financing should work together, with humanitarian funding responding to immediate needs. Humanitarian funding may save lives, but is no substitute for sustained adaptation, development and climate-resilient public systems. **And humanitarian funding is not commensurate with needs, with official development assistance (ODA) declining by 23 per cent from 2024 to 2025**.[16]

This calls for a fundamental shift in how the international community finances responses to protracted displacement and escalating climate risks. Through its 50 by 35 vision, UNHCR

advocates for a transition from recurrent humanitarian expenditure towards large-scale, government-led investments that address underlying vulnerabilities, strengthen national systems and foster self-reliance. By investing in sustainable solutions today, governments and their partners can build long-term resilience, reduce future humanitarian needs and costs, and progressively lessen dependence on humanitarian assistance. Achieving this transformation requires climate finance to move beyond short-term funding cycles and integrate displacement-affected populations and areas into mainstream climate investments.

Above all, climate finance must reach the frontlines. Local and refugee-led organizations need clearer routes to access funding directly, or through simplified and accountable intermediaries, so that resources can reach the communities already developing and delivering solutions. Their meaningful participation in identifying priorities, designing investments and implementing solutions is essential to ensuring that climate finance responds to local needs and delivers sustainable results.



A newly built climate-resilient shelter in Barniyuing returnee settlement, Aweil, South Sudan. Funded by the Government of Japan as part of a wider US$50 million Green Climate Fund programme, these shelters give returnee and host community families safer homes in an area prone to heavy rains and flooding.

© UNHCR/Peter Louis Gume

INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION



Haredho Mohamed, a Somali refugee, in Ifo refugee camp, Dadaab, Kenya.

© UNHCR/Mohamed Maalim

"Our animals died because of the drought and insecurity forced us to leave our home,"

Haredho Mohamed, 50, fled Somalia in 2011 after prolonged drought and insecurity destroyed her livelihood. "We lost everything when we fled Somalia," she says.

She settled in Ifo refugee camp in Dadaab, where she now cares for her six children and the six orphaned children of her late sister. Ifo is part of the Dadaab refugee complex that hosts over 430,000 refugees and asylum seekers and is at very high risk due to climate impacts, mostly related to drought.[17] "Life here is not easy, especially with many children depending on me," says Haredho.

Her family has been identified as one of the most vulnerable households, making it eligible for cash assistance. Haredho hopes to use it to start a small business. "My dream is to see them go to school and have a better life than the one we had back in Somalia," she says.

As Haredho's story shows, safety means more than surviving the journey. Rights and protection remain essential as climate pressures reshape why people move and whether they can safely return.

People affected by climate impacts must continue to have access to territory, fair asylum procedures and individual assessment of their protection needs, including where climate impacts interact with conflict, persecution, violence, discrimination or weak governance. It is a complex picture that calls for a nuanced response.

The relationship between climate change and human rights is increasingly recognized in law. International refugee law may apply where climate-related impacts combine with persecution, conflict, violence or events seriously disturbing public order. In 2025, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and International Court of Justice imposed binding obligations on States, to respect the principle of non-refoulement, where life-threatening conditions resulting from climate change may lead people to seek safety in another country. Now, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights is developing its own Advisory Opinion on the Obligations of States with Respect to the Climate Change Crisis.

Legal and policy pathways also need to respond to situations where people cannot safely return because climate-related impacts combine with other serious risks. Protection against return to harm should be applied consistently, alongside complementary forms of protection when there is a real risk of serious harm. Domestic law may also provide for protection based on compassionate or humanitarian considerations.

UNHCR guidance on international protection in the context of climate change and disasters supports decision-makers and practitioners on presenting and assessing claims for protection.[18]

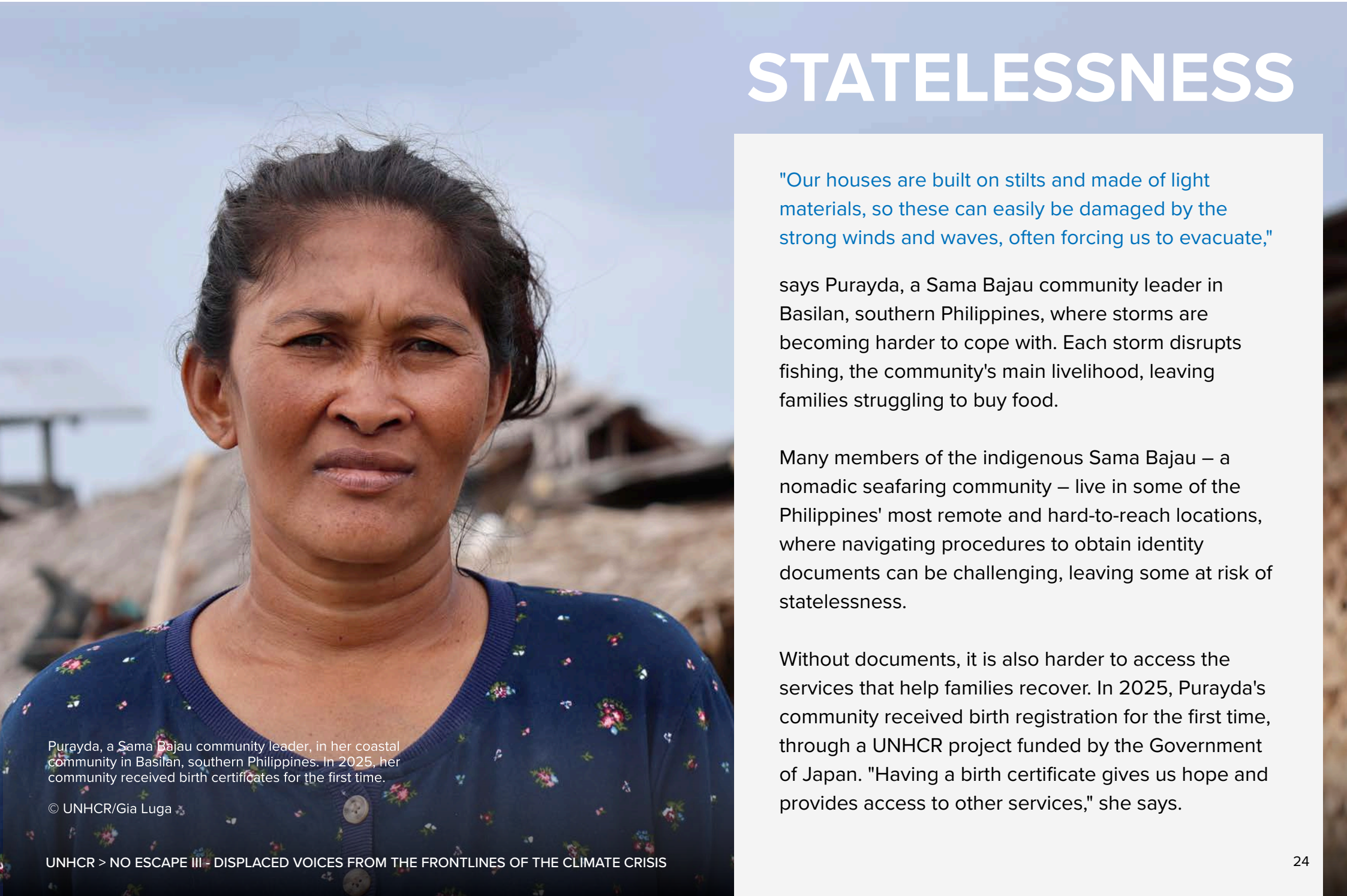
These tools provide a practical basis for identifying international protection needs where climate impacts interact with persecution, conflict, violence and serious human rights risks — and for ensuring that people who need protection can access it.

In its seventy-fifth anniversary year and as climate pressures intensify, the 1951 Refugee Convention remains as relevant as ever.[19] The challenge is to ensure that existing protection frameworks, such as the Refugee Convention, are applied effectively to the complex and overlapping risks people face.



Ajier Deng Kuor, 20, shelters from the intense sun under the shade of a tree at a settlement for internally displaced people in Jalle, near the city of Bor, Jonglei State, South Sudan. In South Sudan, heavy rains and flooding have caused further displacement, damage to agriculture and deaths among communities already facing a dire humanitarian situation.

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Purayda, a Sama Bajau community leader, in her coastal community in Basilan, southern Philippines. In 2025, her community received birth certificates for the first time.

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STATELESSNESS

"Our houses are built on stilts and made of light materials, so these can easily be damaged by the strong winds and waves, often forcing us to evacuate,"

says Purayda, a Sama Bajau community leader in Basilan, southern Philippines, where storms are becoming harder to cope with. Each storm disrupts fishing, the community's main livelihood, leaving families struggling to buy food.

Many members of the indigenous Sama Bajau – a nomadic seafaring community – live in some of the Philippines' most remote and hard-to-reach locations, where navigating procedures to obtain identity documents can be challenging, leaving some at risk of statelessness.

Without documents, it is also harder to access the services that help families recover. In 2025, Purayda's community received birth registration for the first time, through a UNHCR project funded by the Government of Japan. "Having a birth certificate gives us hope and provides access to other services," she says.

For those who are already stateless, and those at risk of statelessness, climate shocks can increase the risk of being excluded from assistance, documentation, services and recovery.

Nearly 90 per cent of the 4.7 million people known to be stateless today live in countries highly exposed to climate hazards, such as heatwaves, droughts, and floods.[20] As the new Global Recommendations on Nationality and Statelessness in the Context of Climate Change highlight, stateless people are particularly vulnerable. Without recognized nationality or documentation, people may struggle to access social protection, formal work, land, housing, banking, education and other services that support recovery and adaptation. They may lack the identity documents that are required to access assistance or be included in early warning, evacuation or reconstruction support. And when they are not included, they are by default excluded.

Climate change can also exacerbate existing risks of statelessness, particularly where displacement disrupts birth registration, civil documentation or access to nationality procedures. In some contexts, repeated disasters and mobility can leave people even less visible to the institutions meant to protect them. The result is a dangerous feedback loop: those already excluded are less able to prepare for, withstand and recover from climate shocks, while those shocks can in turn increase the risk of statelessness.

Climate action and disaster responses need to reach people regardless of nationality or documentation. Early warning, evacuation, emergency assistance and recovery systems should include accessible procedures and safeguards so that stateless people are not excluded simply because they are missing from official registries or cannot produce identity documents.

Stateless people must also be visible in climate policy and planning. National Adaptation Plans, Nationally Determined Contributions, disaster-risk strategies, social protection systems and loss-and-damage assessments should identify the specific risks facing stateless people, and include them in both planning and implementation.

At the same time, climate-related displacement and disasters must not create new risks of statelessness. Birth registration, civil documentation and access to replacement documents need to be protected and strengthened, alongside safeguards in nationality laws and procedures. Where statelessness already exists, pathways to nationality remain the strongest protection against the compounding effects of climate change.

CONCLUSION

Refugees, returnees, stateless people and host communities are on the frontlines of climate change. Their crops are being destroyed, their shelters damaged, and their families forced to move time and again. But they are not waiting for solutions. As the stories here show, they are already adapting, innovating, organising, responding and supporting one another.

While their experiences differ, they point towards similar priorities: a future where we move beyond protracted, onward and recurring displacement, a future where affected communities can rebuild their lives or return in dignity and enjoy their rights, with the capacities to withstand and adapt to the growing impacts of climate change.

To achieve the 50 by 35 vision, together with partners, we must enhance resilience, support adaptation, and ensure that climate impacts do not close off choices, deepen dependency or trap people in cycles of vulnerability and displacement. But we cannot talk about building resilience and adaptation without talking about climate financing. This report has set out the devastating needs and what needs to change, but change will require climate finance that is accessible, affordable and responsive to the realities of displacement.

We must continue to anticipate climate shocks to minimize their impacts on displaced people – especially in the context of the ongoing Super El Niño. And humanitarian assistance remains critical when crises strike. Preparedness and anticipatory action save lives and help protect dignity, but they require predictable, pre-arranged financing to be effective. At the same time, emergency approaches must be complemented by sustained investment in adaptation, public services, livelihoods and resilient infrastructure, helping communities manage current risks while reducing future vulnerabilities.

Above all, the way solutions are designed and financed will matter. If we are to leave no one behind, we must ensure that affected communities are included in financing decisions, climate policies and plans – and granted meaningful roles in decision-making and implementation.

The voices here show that the knowledge, ideas and determination already exist. The way forward must be grounded in inclusive, practical solutions that reflect the realities on the ground. The challenge now is to ensure that protection mechanisms, climate finance, policies and partnerships support, scale and learn from the solutions already emerging on the frontlines.

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