

## **Update on UNHCR operations in Europe**

### **A. Situational update, including new developments**

Europe hosts an estimated 18.7 million forcibly displaced and stateless people (16 per cent of the global total), including 11.8 million refugees, 1.5 million asylum-seekers, 5 million internally displaced and some 440,000 stateless people<sup>1</sup>. European countries and the European Union provide significant humanitarian funding and play an important role on issues critical to global security and the international refugee protection regime. UNHCR engages with European States to promote protection and solutions, and to inform discussions on asylum and migration policy. Two major displacement situations – the Syrian Arab Republic and Ukraine – continue to shape the region’s political and operational landscape.

In Ukraine, ongoing hostilities and the onset of harsh winter conditions have exacerbated humanitarian needs. In 2025, intensified fighting and increased aerial strikes on critical infrastructure resulted in substantial civilian casualties and further displacement, which will continue to shape the operational and protection environment in 2026. At least 2,600 civilians were killed last year – the highest number of civilian deaths since 2022. Systematic strikes by the Russian Federation on Ukraine’s energy infrastructure since early winter have significantly impacted the country’s power, heating and water supply. These disruptions have resulted in prolonged outages amid freezing temperatures, further aggravating conditions for the civilian population, particularly in urban areas. The 2026 Ukraine Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan estimates that 10.8 million people require humanitarian assistance inside Ukraine, many of whom have experienced repeated displacement.

UNHCR is one of the largest humanitarian actors in Ukraine, working within the United Nations inter-agency response in support of the Government and local authorities to provide life-saving assistance. At the same time, UNHCR is helping war-affected communities in their recovery, assisting displaced people to pursue durable solutions and promoting sustainable reintegration, in particular for eventual voluntary refugee returns.

By December 2025, the war in Ukraine had displaced some 9.6 million people, including 5.9 million registered refugees worldwide. Of these, some 5.3 million are in Europe, where States continue to demonstrate solidarity through the provision of temporary protection and inclusion support within national systems. However, amid significant budget reductions, sustaining support for refugees and host communities is increasingly challenging as needs grow with prolonged displacement. While most refugees still intend to return to Ukraine when conditions permit, ongoing hostilities and concerns about access to housing, employment and basic services remain significant obstacles to return. In this context, UNHCR welcomes the European Union’s decision to extend temporary protection for Ukrainian refugees until March 2027 as well as its commitment to a coordinated and rights-based transition to alternative solutions thereafter. The European Union’s recent adoption of recommendations for a common transition framework marks an important milestone in this process.

In the Syrian Arab Republic, the events of December 2024 prompted many Syrian refugees to voluntarily return from neighbouring countries. As of 31 December 2025, some 556,000 Syrians had voluntarily returned from Türkiye alone, which continues to generously host 2.3 million Syrian refugees. UNHCR monitored the voluntary repatriation from Türkiye of over

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<sup>1</sup> UNHCR Refugees Data Finder

440,000 Syrians and provided cash assistance to some 25,000 voluntary returnees through a programme launched in October 2025, which will continue through 2026. However, notwithstanding positive developments in the Syrian Arab Republic, significant challenges and uncertainties remain. Ongoing reports of security incidents in certain areas and limited access to basic services discourage many refugees from considering return in the near term.

Mixed movements along the Mediterranean and northwest African maritime routes towards Europe decreased by 22 per cent in 2025, mainly attributed to a decline in arrivals in Greece and the Canary Islands (Spain). Nevertheless, the scale of movements remained significant with over 155,000 arrivals recorded. The central Mediterranean maritime route towards Italy and Malta remains the most active with 66,300 arrivals recorded in Italy in 2025, figures which were largely consistent with 2024. Arrivals from Libya to Crete in Greece increased to nearly 20,000 people, many of whom were Sudanese. Their increased use of the eastern and western Mediterranean routes reflects the compounded impact of conflict in the Sudan. Sea crossings along the western Mediterranean maritime route continue to shift, with a notable rise in arrivals from Algeria to the Balearic Islands (Spain) and 454 Sudanese arrivals in Ceuta (Spain) through Morocco. Mixed movements across the English Channel surpassed a record 41,000 arrivals to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. These trends reflect persistent drivers of displacement and underscore the need for comprehensive, protection-focused responses along all routes.

The challenging financial situation continues to significantly affect the presence and response of UNHCR in Europe, resulting in the reduction or termination of 75 per cent of all partnership agreements last year, the discontinuation of over 500 staff positions and a significant reduction of the operational footprint in over 10 countries. These measures impacted the delivery of assistance, threatening localization gains and reducing the Organization's ability to engage along mixed movement routes and with regional organizations. Nevertheless, in locations with reduced presence, UNHCR maintains the capacity to respond to short-term needs and implement mandate-driven activities as funding becomes available.

## **B. Progress and challenges by impact area in 2025 and plans for 2026**

### *Attaining favourable protection environments*

The European Union's Pact on Migration and Asylum will reach a milestone in June 2026, with the entry into force of new rules governing the common European asylum system. In preparation, UNHCR is providing technical assistance to European Union institutions and Member States to support the comprehensive implementation of the Pact and the tools to manage national asylum systems, including during periods of migratory pressure. It is critical that the Pact's implementation results in effective protection guarantees, including fair asylum procedures, respect for non-refoulement, dignified reception conditions in line with international and European Union law, and returns for those not in need of international protection, thereby preserving the integrity of the asylum system.

UNHCR continues to engage with States on lawful policy options to address the challenges they face due to mixed and onwards movements towards Europe, while seeking to mitigate risks encountered by refugees and migrants along the journey and safeguard access to asylum in Europe. It urges support for a whole-of-route approach in countries of origin, asylum, transit and destination to effectively address the root causes of irregular movements and expand regular pathways that offer alternatives to dangerous journeys and contribute to responsibility-sharing.

The instrumentalization of people on the move – including refugees and asylum-seekers – remains an area of concern. UNHCR has repeatedly condemned any actions that force, encourage or facilitate movements to other countries, which expose people to grave risks and exacerbate their suffering. All States must uphold international refugee and human rights law, including the right to seek and enjoy asylum from persecution, access to fair and efficient procedures, respect for the principle of non-refoulement, as well as their right to return voluntarily to their country of origin.

While the European Union's temporary protection for refugees from Ukraine has been extended until March 2027, concerted efforts will be needed in 2026 to transition to other legal frameworks. UNHCR will support the European Union and host States to ensure a coordinated,

rights-based approach. Clear and accessible information will be essential for refugees to decide about their return. UNHCR will provide impartial guidance through online platforms, including ‘Ukraine is Home’; the Regional Contact Centre offering toll-free telephone helplines; counselling and legal support. UNHCR continues to advocate for a flexible approach towards temporary visits to Ukraine that inform decisions on return, emphasizing the importance of safeguarding the legal status of refugees in host countries in the interim.

#### *Realizing rights in safe environments*

In 2025, UNHCR delivered over 1,254,000 multi-sectoral services to internally displaced and war-affected people in Ukraine. Over 594,000 people received protection, counselling, legal aid and psychosocial support, 98,500 people received essential items, while 333,400 were supported with cash, 203,300 received emergency shelter, and 25,000 people accessed services in collective sites. The UNHCR winter response for people in frontline areas of eastern and northern Ukraine is part of a larger United Nations inter-agency response plan complementing the Government’s efforts. So far, over 200,000 people have accessed multi-sectoral services, 23,000 people have used home insulation assistance, and 178,000 people have received winter cash assistance from UNHCR. Post-distribution monitoring of the 2024-2025 winter response shows that recipients consistently view cash assistance as the most useful form of aid.

UNHCR continues to support government-led responses in refugee-hosting countries, including through coordinating the Regional Refugee Response Plan for the Ukraine situation. In 2026, the plan will mobilize 190 partners across 10 neighbouring countries to support continued protection efforts, particularly for the most vulnerable, and inclusion in national systems. The response will focus on access to legal status, rights and services as well as addressing vulnerabilities in protection, health, education, inclusion and social cohesion. As 2026 is the last year of the regional response plan, it will be critical to ensure sustainability of the response, consolidation and transition of coordination mechanisms to the governments and local civil society, where appropriate. In 2025, the regional response plan was only 33 per cent funded, threatening the provision of services and the ability of local and refugee-led organizations to operate.

Developments in the Syrian Arab Republic after December 2024 have reshaped protection and solutions dynamics for Syrian refugees. UNHCR remains engaged with host governments to support informed and voluntary return decisions by Syrian refugees, while ensuring continued access to international protection and assistance for those in need. UNHCR will continue providing country of origin information, legal guidance, operational engagement and counselling, while underscoring the importance of avoiding premature movements that could undermine reintegration prospects or place undue pressure on local capacities in the Syrian Arab Republic.

#### *Empowering communities*

Violence against women and girls remains a major concern across the region, particularly since women and girls represent a significant proportion of Ukrainian refugees and internally displaced people. In 2025, over 11,000 individuals accessed violence prevention and response services. Over 18,000 people benefited from risk-mitigation and awareness-raising initiatives, while 1,100 women and girls participated in empowerment and life-skills programmes. Community-based protection efforts strengthened 58 refugee-led and women-led organizations through tailored mentoring, funding and support to enhance safe, inclusive and survivor-centred services within their communities and local authorities across Poland, the Republic of Moldova Spain and Ukraine.

Mental health and psychosocial support is essential to dignity, inclusion and durable solutions, yet critical needs remain across Europe. In 2025, UNHCR facilitated 100,000 mental health and psychosocial support consultations for forcibly displaced and stateless people. UNHCR continues to strengthen national systems and partner capacities through targeted training and cross-sectoral, community-based approaches. Regional good practices included trauma-informed trainings in Ireland and scalable psychological-intervention trainings for over 100 mental health and psychosocial support providers in Bulgaria, Italy, Romania and Ukraine.

UNHCR continues to ensure accountability to affected populations through the Regional Contact Centre and other digital platforms, which enable access to timely information, remote protection services, and the submission of feedback. In 2025, Regional Contact Centre

coverage was extended to Azerbaijan, Slovakia, Slovenia and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, while new Arabic-speaking operators have rendered the helpline more accessible. The Regional Contact Centre was integrated into the “Ukraine is Home” website via a “click-to-call” feature for internet-based calling. In 2026, this feature will be integrated into the “Syria is Home” website and UNHCR HELP pages to strengthen cross-regional information on returns. Through “click-to-call”, the Regional Contact Centre can be deployed anywhere in Europe within a matter of days.

UNHCR remains committed to improving child protection standards and the prevention of statelessness, advocating for the inclusion of at-risk children into national child protection systems. Projects in Italy and Spain strengthened reception and protection systems for unaccompanied children, while in northern France, UNHCR continues to call for stronger safeguards for children in mixed movements.

#### *Securing solutions*

Despite a largely favourable legal framework, refugees across the region continue to face challenges to socioeconomic inclusion, including unemployment, underemployment, poverty and persistent barriers to social protection and education. To improve self-reliance, the UNHCR regional Refugee Employment Platform initiative will scale private sector engagement, job matching and employability support. At present, 10 national platforms are in place, with feasibility assessments underway in four additional countries.

Strengthening the evidence base will remain central to promoting inclusion of refugees and stateless people in national systems. Efforts include conducting a regional study on the return on investment of hiring refugees, published research on access to social protection, and continued collaboration with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, the Expert Group on Refugee, Internally Displaced Persons and Statelessness Statistics, and the Statistical Office of the European Union and national counterparts to advance statistical inclusion and generate data on socioeconomic inclusion.

With reduced resources across UNHCR operations and among partners, maintaining the capacity for effective and sustainable responses is a priority in 2026. Efforts will focus on strengthening inclusion through tailored support and training of government and civil society partners, joint fundraising efforts, and fostering high impact partnerships with public and private sectors, development actors, refugee-led organizations and civil society to address existing barriers.

In 2026, UNHCR will continue efforts to broaden access to third-country solutions through resettlement and through complementary pathways. The European Union maintains its focus on expanding legal pathways. The first Union Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Plan for 2026-2027 was adopted at the end of 2025, with nine Member States offering 10,430 resettlement spaces, representing a reduced commitment compared to previous years. Additional contributions under national programmes are to be confirmed. At the end of 2025, a total of 9,789 refugees were resettled to Europe, of whom 8,182 to European Union Member States. Skills-mobility programmes that support refugee opportunities while helping to address shortages in the European Union are being developed in an increasing number of countries. However, further advocacy is needed to ensure the inclusion of refugees in labour mobility agreements between Member States of the European Union and third countries.

UNHCR remains committed to addressing statelessness in Europe in close cooperation with civil society, regional organizations and individuals with lived experience of statelessness. The Global Alliance to End Statelessness has already garnered support from several European governments and stakeholders. The European Union Pact on Migration and Asylum offers an important opportunity to strengthen identification and protection of stateless people, including through statelessness determination procedures. UNHCR will continue prioritizing the prevention of childhood statelessness, guiding advocacy through a joint compilation of good practices with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. It will also maintain its support to authorities in improving access to birth registration and identity documentation, and will work with civil society, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the Council of Europe and the European Migration Network Platform on Statelessness, to advance awareness and solutions.

## C. Financial information

In 2025, the Executive Committee at its seventy-sixth session, adopted a budget of \$942 million for 2026 for the Europe region. This represents a 24 per cent decrease for 2026 compared to the 2025 budget of \$1,247 million.

The three largest operations account for \$744 million, or 79 per cent of the total budget for Europe. These are Republic of Moldova (\$64 million, 7 per cent), Türkiye (\$210 million, 22 per cent) and Ukraine (\$470 million, or 50 per cent).

In 2026, “securing solutions” becomes the impact area with one of the highest budget allocations, amounting to \$303 million (32 per cent), up from 25 per cent or third-largest impact area in 2025. This reflects a continued shift from humanitarian assistance towards sustainable responses focusing on inclusion, self-reliance and protection. The impact area “realizing rights in safe environments”, requires \$305 million (32 per cent), closely followed by “attaining favourable protection environments” at \$302 million (32 per cent). Requirements for “empowering communities and achieving gender equality” amount to \$32 million, representing three per cent of the Europe budget.

As of 31 January 2026, 33 per cent of the region’s 2026 financial requirements were funded, taking into consideration the indicative allocation of unearmarked and softly earmarked contributions.

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