



# UNHCR PROJECTED **GLOBAL** **RESETTLEMENT NEEDS**

| 2025 |

**Cover Photo:**

*Hanaa is one of the many Syrian refugees forced to leave their homes and seek safety in Lebanon. She is also a skilled farmer and eager to share her knowledge with other Lebanese and refugee women. In this way, she helps preserve tradition and enable self-sufficiency within communities faced with a crippling economic crisis and increasing hardships in Lebanon. © UNHCR/Houssam Hariri*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>INTRODUCTORY REMARKS BY THE REFUGEE ADVISORY GROUP</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>9</b>
THE GLOBAL REFUGEE FORUM AND RESETTLEMENT	10
<b>SUMMARY OF UNHCR'S ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2023</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>URGENT AND EMERGENCY RESETTLEMENT PROCESSING</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>RESETTLEMENT AND THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>THE AMERICAS</b>	<b>26</b>
OVERVIEW OF THE PROTECTION ENVIRONMENT IN THE REGION	26
RESETTLEMENT WITHIN PROTECTION AND SOLUTIONS STRATEGIES	30
PROJECTED RESETTLEMENT NEEDS IN THE REGION IN 2025	31
REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES IN 2023	34
PERSPECTIVES: COSTA RICA	36
PERSPECTIVES: PERU	37
<b>ASIA AND THE PACIFIC</b>	<b>39</b>
OVERVIEW OF THE PROTECTION ENVIRONMENT IN THE REGION	39
RESETTLEMENT WITHIN PROTECTION AND SOLUTIONS STRATEGIES	40
PROJECTED RESETTLEMENT NEEDS IN THE REGION IN 2025	44
REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES IN 2023	48
PERSPECTIVES: INDIA	49
PERSPECTIVES: IRAN	50
<b>EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA AND GREAT LAKES</b>	<b>52</b>
OVERVIEW OF THE PROTECTION ENVIRONMENT IN THE REGION	52
RESETTLEMENT WITHIN PROTECTION AND SOLUTIONS STRATEGIES	54
PROJECTED RESETTLEMENT NEEDS IN THE REGION IN 2025	57
REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES IN 2023	60
PERSPECTIVES: ETHIOPIA	61
PERSPECTIVES: TANZANIA	62

<b>EUROPE</b>	<b>64</b>
OVERVIEW OF THE PROTECTION ENVIRONMENT IN THE REGION	64
RESETTLEMENT WITHIN PROTECTION AND SOLUTIONS STRATEGIES	66
PROJECTED RESETTLEMENT NEEDS IN THE REGION IN 2025	67
REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES IN 2023	68
<b>MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA</b>	<b>69</b>
OVERVIEW OF THE PROTECTION ENVIRONMENT IN THE REGION	69
RESETTLEMENT WITHIN PROTECTION AND SOLUTIONS STRATEGIES	74
PROJECTED RESETTLEMENT NEEDS IN THE REGION IN 2025	75
REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES IN 2023	80
PERSPECTIVES: KUWAIT	81
PERSPECTIVES: YEMEN	82
<b>SOUTHERN AFRICA</b>	<b>83</b>
OVERVIEW OF THE PROTECTION ENVIRONMENT IN THE REGION	83
RESETTLEMENT WITHIN PROTECTION AND SOLUTIONS STRATEGIES	85
PROJECTED RESETTLEMENT NEEDS IN THE REGION IN 2025	86
REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES IN 2023	89
PERSPECTIVES: MALAWI	89
PERSPECTIVES: ZIMBABWE	91
<b>WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA</b>	<b>93</b>
OVERVIEW OF THE PROTECTION ENVIRONMENT IN THE REGION	93
RESETTLEMENT WITHIN PROTECTION AND SOLUTIONS STRATEGIES	95
PROJECTED RESETTLEMENT NEEDS IN THE REGION IN 2025	99
REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES IN 2023	102
PERSPECTIVES: CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC	104
<b>IDENTIFYING RESETTLEMENT NEEDS: GOOD PRACTICE FROM UGANDA</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>IDENTIFYING RESETTLEMENT NEEDS: KEY ROLES PLAYED BY NGOs</b>	<b>107</b>

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Resettlement is a process that enables refugees to relocate to another country with a legal status ensuring international protection and ultimately permanent residence. Through the Projected Global Resettlement Needs, UNHCR estimates the number of refugees who require resettlement in the following year, provides an overview of the humanitarian and protection contexts that lead to those needs and describes how resettlement is linked to regional protection and solutions strategies.

In order to estimate resettlement needs, UNHCR uses existing data, the availability of or prospects for other durable solutions as well as its knowledge of refugee populations, operating contexts and protection environments. Resettlement serves to address acute protection needs and vulnerabilities. At the same time, if used strategically, resettlement can be leveraged to achieve broader protection strategies such as preserving the asylum space and enhancing refugees' access to rights and services. For 2025, UNHCR has looked in particular at the strategic value of resettlement in connection with a route-based approach and the effects of climate change.

In a context where mixed movements of refugees and migrants have become increasingly common, UNHCR asks States and other actors to consider how resettlement can—together with improved asylum systems, targeted development investment in hosting areas, and complementary pathways—offer alternatives to refugees who would otherwise take up irregular movement. Regional chapters speak to how a route-based approach can help refugees find protection and solutions in countries closer to their places of origin.

Furthermore, refugees are often hosted in the most climate-vulnerable areas where they are highly exposed to climate hazards like floods, drought, storms and heatwaves. An increasingly limited access to natural resources not only reduces livelihood options and the means to economically and physically prepare for, withstand and recover from the impacts of climate change, but can also cause further deterioration of an already fragile protection environment. In this context, resettlement may offer a response to individual protection needs compounded by climate change. It can also be used strategically, responding to the needs of refugees and their host communities, by easing some of the increasing pressure on natural resources and mitigating tensions that may have escalated between refugees and host communities.

UNHCR estimates that approximately **2.9 million refugees** will need resettlement in 2025. Resettlement needs continue to grow year by year. They are expected to increase by approximately half a million compared to 2024, and more than double compared to 2021.

- The **Asia and Pacific region** continues to have the largest resettlement needs globally, with 776,500 refugees, an increase by about 6 per cent compared to 2024. This reflects the high resettlement needs of Afghan refugees (over half a million) as well as of Rohingya refugees, two increasingly protracted situations.

- Resettlement needs in the **Middle East and North Africa region** increased by about 50 per cent, now reaching 703,700, due to growing economic challenges and increased protection risks such as child labour, exploitation and deportation. The needs in 2025 are marked by a notable increase of resettlement needs in Lebanon by approximately 200,000 refugees.
- In the **East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes region**, 601,300 refugees are projected to be in need of resettlement, as countries of asylum are facing increasing pressure caused by new forced displacement, climate change, and economic shocks.
- The outbreak of the new crisis in Sudan has led to a significant increase of resettlement needs in **West and Central Africa** by almost 60 per cent, reaching 178,900 refugees in need.
- Resettlement needs in the **Americas** (179,600) also sharply increased, by 70 per cent, a reflection of the unprecedented level of forced displacement in the region, particularly through movements from South America to northern countries, crossing the Darién Gap.
- UNHCR also projects that 350,600 refugees will need resettlement from **Europe** (in Türkiye).
- In the **Southern Africa region**, 125,300 refugees are projected to need resettlement, mostly from the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Syrians continue to be the largest refugee population in need of resettlement, with close to 933,000 refugees, followed by refugees from Afghanistan (558,000), South Sudan (242,000), Myanmar (226,000), Sudan (172,000) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (158,000).

Resettlement activities are enabled and supported by a multiplicity of organizations, partnerships and platforms that bring together UNHCR, national, regional and local governments as well as civil society. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play an important role in identifying vulnerable refugees in need of protection and referring them to UNHCR for further assessment. In some cases, NGOs are authorized by States to make direct referrals to resettlement countries. The Equitable Resettlement Access Consortium (ERAC), for example, is constituted of NGOs which are eligible to make resettlement referrals to the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), and contributed to this publication through a section dedicated to its work. NGO referrals to States complement UNHCR submissions, particularly when made from locations without permanent resettlement programmes or where specific refugee populations face barriers to accessing traditional resettlement pathways.

In 2023, UNHCR offices around the globe made resettlement submissions for 155,486 refugees located in 96 countries of asylum, to 24 resettlement States, and thereby increased UNHCR's submissions by 33 per cent compared to 2022. Among those, 1,485 submissions were made under the global unallocated quotas, which are provided by some States without predetermined geographical location, and offer expedited processing so that refugees facing severe protection risks or with critical medical conditions across the globe find a safe solution promptly.



During 2023, 96,311 refugees departed on resettlement, a notable increase by 65 per cent compared to 2022, close to the target of 100,000 set in the [Third Country Solutions for Refugees: Roadmap 2030 \('the 2030 Roadmap'\)](#). The scale, accessibility and impact of resettlement, however, continues to be hindered by increasingly restrictive criteria imposed by some States, limited flexibility to use remote processing methodologies, limitations to reception capacity partly as a result of the ongoing crisis in Ukraine and Afghanistan as well as the ongoing political and security situation in several parts of the world leading to, for example, selection mission cancellations.

In December 2023, the international community met in Geneva for the Global Refugee Forum (GRF), the world's largest international gathering on refugees. On this occasion, States, NGOs, international organizations and other key stakeholders made 92 pledges that are specific to resettlement, and thereby reaffirmed their support to this solution. The Forum also demonstrated the commitment by many actors to strengthen meaningful refugee participation.

As highlighted in the [the 2030 Roadmap](#), a meaningful response to the growing resettlement needs requires predictable and scalable resettlement programmes, including places for urgent and emergency cases, as well as the engagement of more resettlement countries. The 2023 GRF provides a new momentum for the growth of resettlement. UNHCR therefore calls on all stakeholders to take the necessary steps leading to the materialization and sustainability of these pledges, to work collaboratively with likeminded partners, while engaging forcibly displaced persons as active and able participants in resettlement processes and platforms.

Further information on the 2025 Projected Global Resettlement Needs is available by country of origin and country of asylum [here](#).



*In January 2024, more than 10,400 new Sudanese refugees arrive in Kalma in the province of Sila, Chad. © UNHCR/ Eugene Sibomana*

## **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS BY THE REFUGEE ADVISORY GROUP**

*During the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, High Commissioner Filippo Grandi celebrated the presence of over 300 refugees and, importantly, recognized our core role in advancing a solutions-first multilateralism. He stressed that harnessing the leadership and technical skills of refugees transcends good policymaking; it represents an underutilized mechanism for catalysing improvements throughout the humanitarian protection ecosystem, especially within the scope of resettlement operations. Critically, his remarks also underscore a profound shift towards recognizing refugees not just as beneficiaries, but also as active agents of innovation in addressing global displacement challenges.*

*The UNHCR Refugee Advisory Group serves as a body of regional, national, and global refugee experts that advises UNHCR on policymaking and programmes related to resettlement and complementary pathways, in addition to helping organize the annual Consultations on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways (CRCP), formerly the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement (ATCR). We believe resettlement is a cornerstone of the international protection system, offering a lifeline to the most vulnerable while fostering global solidarity and responsibility-sharing. In an era where displacement crises continue to escalate, with over 100 million people forcibly displaced worldwide, the imperative for robust resettlement programmes has never been more acute.*

*The most immediate and compelling rationale for greater investment in scaling up resettlement lies in its humanitarian imperative. Vulnerable populations, including women at risk, unaccompanied minors, survivors of torture and violence, and individuals with medical needs that cannot be met in their host countries, depend on resettlement for immediate safety and well-being.*

*Resettlement also plays a crucial role in promoting international solidarity. Currently, the disproportionate share of responsibility falls on low- and middle-income countries, which host over 75 per cent of the world's refugees. By expanding resettlement programmes, destination countries can demonstrate their commitment to sharing responsibility while easing economic and resource pressures on host countries, fostering a more proportionate and cooperative response to address complex displacement crises in a unified manner.*

*As we grapple with the staggering number of refugees who need resettlement, the humanitarian protection system also requires greater sustainability, predictability, and scale. To that end, we believe that the international community can meet the demands of the moment in a few ways: (1) resettlement countries can commit to defined quotas, enabling fairer distribution of support and more predictable allocation of resources to improve the integration of refugees. (2) by developing processes that enable more efficient collaboration between UNHCR, states, and civil society to streamline resettlement operations and share best practices. (3) by strengthening commitments from states with low historical participation in resettlement efforts.*

*Confronting today's challenges demands principled leadership and foresight to ensure that resettlement continues to both serve as a beacon of hope, and a moral and legal pillar of the international response framework to displacement. As individuals who have experienced resettlement firsthand, we are dedicated to collaborating with UNHCR and the international community to extend the same protection and opportunities to all forcibly displaced persons.*

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*The Refugee Advisory Group*



# INTRODUCTION

Resettlement is a process that enables refugees to relocate to another country with a legal status ensuring international protection and ultimately permanent residence. It offers individuals and families a unique and meaningful chance to rebuild their lives in an environment where their rights are protected and where access to naturalization and citizenship promise an end to years of displacement.

The ongoing conflicts and insecurities as well as the failure to address their root causes in countries of origin continue to prevent many from returning home in safety and dignity. At the same time, enjoyment of rights and access to services are often limited, preventing refugees from becoming self-sufficient or from locally integrating in the countries where they sought protection. Resettlement is a tool that addresses specific needs of refugees whose life, liberty, safety, health and other fundamental rights are at risk in the country where they have sought refuge. It also serves as a durable solution, particularly for those who have been in a refugee situation for years, and as a tangible expression of international solidarity with countries which are hosting large numbers of refugees. Thus, with growing numbers of forcibly displaced persons across the world, resettlement remains an essential tool for the international community to provide much needed protection and solutions.

Through the Projected Global Resettlement Needs UNHCR estimates the number of refugees who require resettlement in the following year, provides an overview of the humanitarian and protection contexts that lead to those needs, and describes how resettlement is linked to regional protection and solutions strategies.

In the past years, resettlement needs have not only grown; they have also consistently exceeded the opportunities that are made available by States. For 2025, UNHCR estimates that, among the 29.4 million refugees under UNHCR's mandate, approximately 2.9 million are in need of resettlement.

Resettlement is a cornerstone of multilateral protection and solutions efforts which have been promoted in the [Global Compact on Refugees \(GCR\)](#). It however exists alongside other legal pathways for third country solutions which include humanitarian admissions, family reunification, named sponsorship by communities as well as skill-based pathways including education and labour opportunities. Each of these pathways serves its own purposes in line with the refugees' potential and circumstances. When complementary and additional to resettlement, such pathways are part of these multilateral efforts and can significantly contribute to an expansion of third country solutions.

As highlighted in the [Three-Year Strategy on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways](#) as well as in its successor, the [Third Country Solutions for Refugees: Roadmap 2030](#), a meaningful response to the growing resettlement needs requires predictable and scalable resettlement programmes, including places for urgent and emergency cases as well as the engagement of more resettlement countries.

## The Global Refugee Forum and Resettlement

The 2023 [Global Refugee Forum \(GRF\)](#) took place from 13 to 15 December in Geneva, Switzerland. Held every four years, the GRF is the world's largest international gathering on refugees, designed to support the practical implementation of the GCR's four objectives which are to: ease pressures on host countries, enhance refugee self-reliance, increase access to third country solutions and improve conditions in countries of origin. As a demonstration of solidarity among States, global civil society, refugees and others, resettlement offers a way of sharing burden and reducing the impact of large refugee situations on host countries. In support of the objective of increasing access to third country solutions, the GCR calls on States to establish or enlarge the scope, size, and quality of resettlement programmes.

The 2023 GRF garnered over 1,600 pledges. Approximately 15 per cent of those are related to third country solutions, 92 of which were specific to resettlement. 69 pledges were linked to the [Resettlement Multistakeholder Pledge](#). By making over half of resettlement-related pledges, States reaffirmed their leadership and their support to this solution.

### GRF AND THE FRIENDS OF RESETTLEMENT NETWORK

Ahead of the GRF, the Friends of Resettlement Network was created to build a diverse multistakeholder initiative that would support and consolidate GRF pledge ideas relating to resettlement. It led to the [Multistakeholder Pledge on Resettlement](#). This Multistakeholder Pledge aims to obtain support on funding and other infrastructure to support global resettlement activities, to improve policies and practices to promote equitable, needs-based access to resettlement, to promote innovation, and to increase meaningful refugee participation to improve resettlement processes and outcomes.

The Network's second purpose was to organize a [“Parallel High-Level Event on Resettlement”](#) during the GRF. The event was a major success. It recognized commitment to resettlement by the major resettlement countries and highlighted the positive impact of smaller programmes and emerging resettlement countries. In addition, it explored and demonstrated the value of resettlement from a variety of perspectives as well as the role played by a broad range of state and non-state stakeholders including refugees in making resettlement a success.

The pledges made at the GRF showed a clear wish from various stakeholders to grow and improve resettlement by engaging new and smaller resettlement countries, increasing quotas, strengthening equitable access to resettlement, committing to predictable, responsive and sustainable resettlement as well as increasing opportunities for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ+) refugees. Concrete examples of such pledges include commitments to use flexible and remote processing methods as well as funding for resettlement activities.



*Madiha Ali Changezi, member of the Refugee Advisory Group, announces the Multistakeholder Pledge on Resettlement at the Global Refugee Forum 2023. © UNHCR/Baz Ratner*

Furthermore, pledges were also made to improve post-arrival settlement and integration as well as to support specific refugee populations including Rohingya, Syrian and Afghan refugees.

In addition to that, a key take-away of the Forum is the commitment by many actors to strengthen meaningful refugee participation. Accordingly, substantive steps should be taken on all sides to engage displaced persons as active and able participants in resettlement and complementary pathways processes and platforms.

Most importantly, it is essential, in the wake of the GRF, to ensure the tracking, follow-up and efforts made on all sides, to materialize resettlement-related GRF pledges. Resettlement stakeholders, in particular resettlement States, are encouraged to work collaboratively with likeminded partners on the implementation of their resettlement-related pledges, inter alia as part of the [Consultations on Resettlement & Complementary Pathways](#) (CRCP, formerly known as the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement).

Further information on the [2025 Projected Global Resettlement Needs](#) is available by country of origin and country of asylum here:



# SUMMARY OF UNHCR'S ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2023

In 2023, UNHCR offices around the globe made resettlement submissions for **155,486 refugees** located in **96 countries of asylum**, to **24 resettlement States**, and thereby increased UNHCR's submissions by 33 per cent compared to 2022. This represents the second highest number of submissions in decades (2016 so far being a record year). This was achieved thanks to strong collaborations and partnerships, the use of innovative tools and approaches as well as the valuable support of resettlement countries including through earmarked funding which strengthened UNHCR's capacity to identify, assess and submit refugees for resettlement and to ensure necessary operational support. In particular, the resettlement deployment scheme, assisted 43 operations, allowing them to strengthen their resettlement processing capacity swiftly.

During 2023, **96,311 refugees** departed on resettlement, a notable increase by 65 per cent compared to 2022. The USA, Canada and Germany received the largest numbers of UNHCR facilitated resettlement departures during the year.

Below are a few highlights from 2023:

- The Safe Mobility Offices initiative (SMO) was launched and consolidated in **Colombia, Guatemala, Costa Rica and Ecuador**. The initiative provides a “one-stop shop” for expedited refugee resettlement and facilitation of access to other lawful pathways in strategic locations, as an alternative for people who may be considering dangerous journeys across the region. In collaboration with IOM and the government of the United States of America (USA), UNHCR developed new tools for the SMOs such as an online self-onboarding portal also used for enhanced communication with communities.
- The new group resettlement was launched in **Thailand, Bangladesh and Ethiopia** enabling a large-scale processing of refugees who meet the pre-determined profiles for resettlement.
- In **Türkiye**, a notably high number of refugees (13,924) departed for resettlement in 2023. The operation also submitted 16,802 refugees to 19 resettlement countries, which is the highest number of resettlement submissions and of States taking UNHCR submissions from an operation in 2023. Türkiye prioritized for resettlement refugees impacted by the devastating earthquake in March, with thanks to the States which responded to the needs of refugees swiftly and with flexibility, including through the use of remote interviews or by making decisions on dossier basis.
- The **Middle East and North Africa region** saw the highest number of departures in the region since 2016. The operations in Iraq and Jordan demonstrated their flexibility by absorbing additional quotas, making 900 and 700 submissions respectively on top of their targets, often within short timeframes and at times with reduced staffing capacity.

- In the **Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)**, UNHCR resumed resettlement activities despite a challenging operating context, including security concerns and resulting difficulties in accessing refugees.
- **Chad** became the largest resettlement operation in West and Central Africa, with 1,712 submissions in 2023 and nearly 1,000 departed to the USA.

As in previous years, in 2023, UNHCR maintained five priority situations, namely the Syria Situation, the Central Mediterranean Situation, the Venezuela Situation, the Rohingya Situation and the Afghan Situation. The continuous advocacy for these five situations resulted in increased quotas for three of them: the Rohingya, the Venezuela and the Central Mediterranean Situations. The resettlement quotas for Rohingya refugees increased threefold while those attributed to Venezuelan refugees increased four times. Meanwhile the quotas for Syrian and Afghan refugees slightly decreased.

UNHCR welcomes the fact that the number of refugees resettled in 2023 (96,311) is very close to the target of 100,000 set in the [Third Country Solutions for Refugees: Roadmap 2030](#) and offers hope to reach the ambitious target of resettling 1 million refugees by 2030. It however also notes that this represents less than 5 per cent of the two million refugees who were in need of resettlement in 2023 and calls on States and all other stakeholders to redouble their efforts in ensuring that those who need resettlement the most have access to it.

Limitations to reception capacity in resettlement countries, partly as a result of the ongoing crisis in Ukraine and Afghanistan, continue to hinder the increase of quota allocations by several States, have led to interruptions of resettlement programmes, and at times create delays in departures. Furthermore, the ongoing political and security situation in many parts of the world has had a major impact on resettlement activities during the year. The crisis in Sudan and in the Middle East as well as the coup in Niger led to several selection mission cancellations, the need to withdraw already submitted cases and to reallocate quotas from one operation to another, all of which caused additional strain on very vulnerable refugees. Despite the needs and the avowed commitment of all parties to increase resettlement out of Pakistan, the reintroduction of exit fees for Afghan refugees in Pakistan impacted the offer of quotas for the population and drastically delayed resettlement departures from the country.

UNHCR noted that in 2023 very few resettlement countries have maintained or adopted flexible processing methods such as remote interviews and dossier processing which were successfully introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic. UNHCR continues to advocate for the use of flexible processing modalities, noting that the use of such methodologies is not only a way to enable faster and more efficient case processing in locations where resettlement countries are unable to undertake missions, but also the only way to allow refugees' access to resettlement. The limited options for remote State processing have had a particular impact on refugees located in countries such as Lebanon, Niger, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Chad, where in-person interviews are currently rarely undertaken by resettlement countries.

UNHCR is also observing an increase in restrictive admission criteria introduced by some States that are not material to the refugee claim or to national security concerns.





*Jane, a refugee from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, works in the office at Eli's Cheesecake Company in Chicago, USA. The company partners with refugee resettlement agencies in the Chicago area and has been employing refugees for more than 30 years. © UNHCR/Jeoffrey Guillemard*

Those are often characteristics that are not related to protection needs, are perceived to indicate integration potential (such as family composition, gender distribution or language skills) and seriously hinder the ability of UNHCR to make submissions for refugees with pressing resettlement needs.

During the year, UNHCR concluded a data-sharing agreement on resettlement with Australia in addition to existing agreements with Norway and the USA and started to work on similar agreements with key NGOs in 2024. These agreements further the cooperation with the resettlement States and others in the community through the development of systems' interoperability for more efficient case processing. As UNHCR develops new digital tools as part of its Population, Registration and Identity Management Ecosystem, including a Digital Gateway, data-sharing agreements will allow for greater flexibility and will serve family reunification and complementary pathways as well as resettlement.

The revised [Resettlement Handbook](#) was released in May 2023 to replace the 2011 version. The Handbook offers comprehensive operational guidance on the various steps involved in resettlement processing and provides updated Resettlement Country Chapters. It also incorporates best practices from different countries to improve processing efficiency while maintaining and strengthening protection and integrity measures.

UNHCR remains dedicated to ensuring the integrity of resettlement programmes, and operations are continuously engaged to maintain their sustainability and credibility. UNHCR is placing a particular focus on its engagement with States and other stakeholders involved in resettlement, particularly through the Priority Situations Core Group. Guidance on fraud prevention approaches is also included in the revised Resettlement Handbook. Operations have dedicated Anti-Fraud Focal Points and Anti-Fraud Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) with complaint mechanisms and complete an annual fraud vulnerability checklist.

Many operations also monitor social media and other channels to identify potential exploitation schemes. The regular outreach and communication with communities through a variety of methods and platforms enabled UNHCR to disseminate key anti-fraud messages, while combatting the misinformation, misunderstanding, and rumours which frequently circulate through social media and word of mouth.

In West and Central Africa, for example, a three-year anti-fraud and digital communication campaign finished in December 2023, after having reached 167,000 forcibly displaced persons in seven countries of the region. The campaign conveyed four key messages covering fraud prevention, identification and response in multiple languages, using several digital platforms. Additionally, UNHCR's integrity capacity in the region was enhanced through dedicated staffing in Cameroon and Chad. The biometrics registration, now rolled out in all operations in the region, constitutes an important safeguard and limits the opportunities to engage in fraudulent activities.

Similarly, in the East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes region, the continuation of systematic mechanisms for biometric identity management and verification of registration data mitigates the risk of identity and document fraud in the resettlement context. These mechanisms and verifications ensure that registered individuals retain a unique digital identity following onward movements. Biometric identity verification is used by UNHCR personnel and by authorized partners during resettlement case processing and prior to departure.

# URGENT AND EMERGENCY RESETTLEMENT PROCESSING

Resettlement quotas without predetermined geographical location are referred to as “unallocated quotas”. When made available by States, they represent a small portion of a country’s resettlement quota and are a vital part of the global resettlement programme. These quotas contrast with the allocated quotas which are granted after consultations between the resettlement State and UNHCR based on projected resettlement needs of larger populations and aligning with the resettlement State’s policy priorities.

The importance of the unallocated quotas is underlined in the GCR, which calls for States to dedicate at least 10 per cent of resettlement submissions as unallocated places for emergency or urgent cases identified by UNHCR.

Unallocated quotas offer expedited processing mechanisms, ensuring refugees facing severe protection risks or critical medical conditions across the globe can find a safe solution promptly. Furthermore, unallocated quotas also offer access to resettlement for vulnerable refugees who are in locations where there are no or very limited allocated quotas. This is for example the case in countries where resettlement States cannot conduct selection missions due to unstable security or environmental conditions. These quotas, therefore, play a crucial role in global refugee resettlement efforts.

To effectively address the needs of refugees with imminent protection risks or life-threatening medical needs, unallocated quotas need to offer greater flexibility compared to the allocated quotas, in particular through accelerated State decision-making enabled by adjudication based on file reviews or occasionally remote interviews as well as by the use of UNHCR’s Emergency Transit Centres.

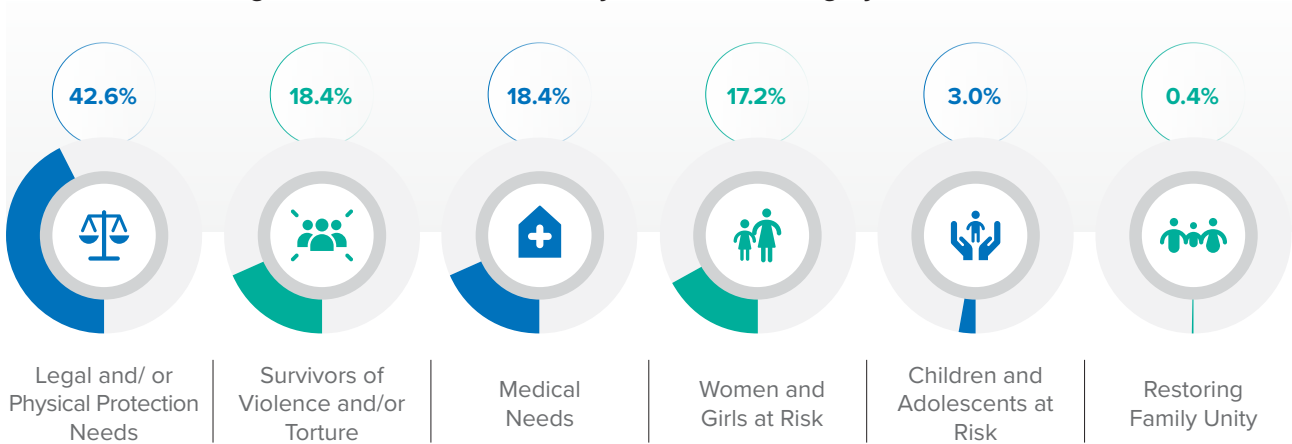
The unallocated quotas provide solutions to refugees who are exposed to severe and immediate risks in their asylum countries. This includes political activists and human rights defenders under threat of severe violence; refugees in prolonged detention facing significant refoulement risks and refugees with life-threatening illnesses that require treatment either unavailable or inaccessible in their asylum country. It also includes survivors of gender-based violence who are facing abuse and further violence. In particular, these quotas can provide swift solutions to specific refugee profiles, such as members of the LGBTIQ+ community who often experience serious protection concerns.

While acknowledging the significance of the unallocated quotas, it is crucial to also underscore that the increasingly restrictive trends in State policies and admission criteria (often related to factors such as sex, age, family size, marital status, nationality, language ability or location) can seriously undermine the effectiveness of these quotas. These trends pose challenges in providing protection and solutions to the refugees most in need.

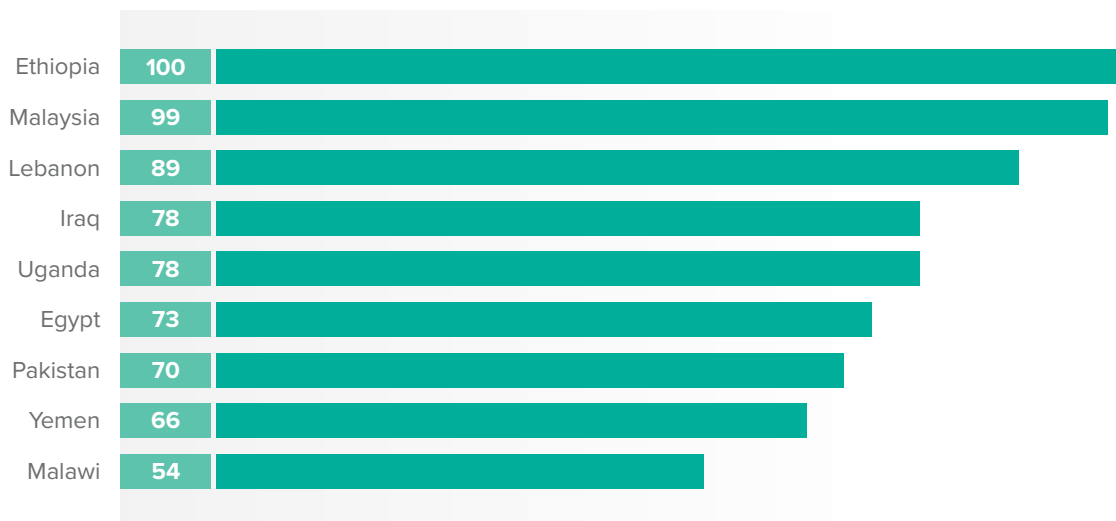
UNHCR has noted a marked decrease in the number of available places for refugees with medical needs, in addition to restrictions on the medical conditions that resettlement States will consider. As a result, these quotas currently offer only a very limited number of opportunities for refugees with serious medical conditions. This remains a serious challenge for UNHCR. Furthermore, in regions where families are naturally larger compared to others, a cap on family sizes disadvantages some of the most vulnerable refugees.

More flexible processing methods, such as the use of innovative solutions to address challenges in processing cases in certain locations where resettlement States have limited or no diplomatic representation, would enhance the impact of the unallocated quotas. Furthermore, eliminating restrictive admission criteria that are not pertinent to the refugee claim or national security concerns, would allow for more equitable access to these quotas. This would ensure vital solutions are provided more swiftly and efficiently to refugees with urgent resettlement needs, regardless of their sex, age, family size, marital status, nationality, language ability or location.

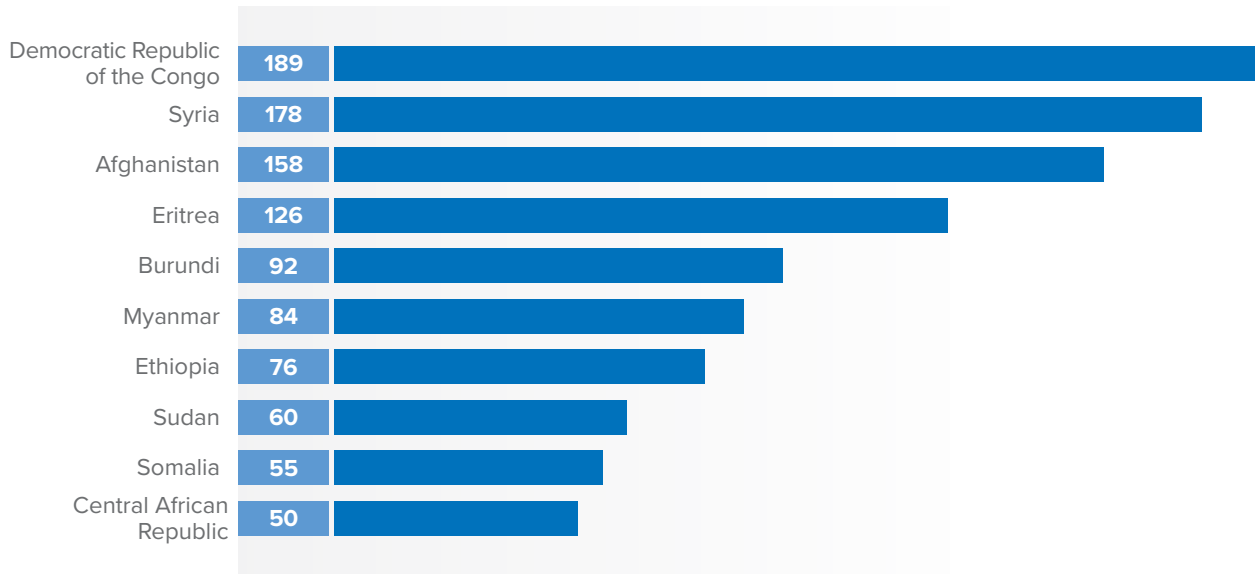
**Figure 1: 2023 Submissions - By Submission Category**



**Figure 2: Submissions by Country of Asylum (Individuals) - Top 10 Countries**



**Figure 3: Submissions by Country of Origin (Individuals) - Top 10 Countries**



*In Lebanon, Aisha, young Syrian refugee girl stands in front of her tent with flooding at the entrance of her house.*  
© UNHCR/Houssam Hariri





Below are a few highlights in 2023:

- UNHCR submitted a total of **1,485 refugees** globally from **48** different countries of origin, in **71** different countries of asylum under the 2023 unallocated quotas.
- **34 per cent** of these submissions were made for emergency cases, while **43 per cent** were urgent.
- The majority of the cases benefiting from the unallocated quota were submitted from the **Middle East and North Africa region**. A quarter of those were made for women and girls at risk.
- In the **Asia region**, the majority of the cases were submitted under the category legal and physical protection needs, reflecting a tenuous protection environment, as more than half of the countries in the region have not signed the 1951 Convention.
- In the **East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes region**, operations such as Eritrea, Somalia, Djibouti and South Sudan largely depend on the unallocated quota, as they have no or only modest allocated quotas. In 2023, the region was responsible for nearly a quarter of submissions under the unallocated quota.
- In **West and Central Africa**, in the aftermath of the 26 July 2023 coup in Niger, many countries are unable to process resettlement cases locally and many States no longer have a representation in Niamey. Thanks to the flexibility of some countries, a handful of unaccompanied minors evacuated from Libya under the Emergency Transit Mechanism (ETM) could be processed under unallocated quotas in 2023 and departed in a timely fashion.
- In **Southern Africa**, the unallocated quotas played an important role for this region where over half of the submissions made were for refugees with urgent medical needs that could not be effectively and promptly addressed in their country of asylum.
- In **the Americas**, the availability of the unallocated quotas is particularly critical for refugees in the Southern Caribbean region, where they generally face limited access to rights and protection from refoulement and due to a lack of allocated quotas for certain operations.

# RESETTLEMENT AND THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE

The global climate crisis is driving displacement and making life even harder for those already forced to flee their homes, exacerbating environmental degradation and dangerous conditions in areas of origin and refuge. Refugees are often hosted in climate-vulnerable areas where they lack access to resources and the economic and physical means to prepare for, withstand, recover and be protected from the impacts of climate change and natural hazards, including a lack of access to disaster response services. This often exacerbates refugees' pre-existing vulnerabilities and exposes them to new protection risks. When climate change and climate-induced disasters occur in an asylum context, they affect host communities as much as they do refugees. An increasing scarcity of natural resources not only reduces livelihood options but can also lead to intercommunal tensions and anti-refugee sentiments that pose a further threat to an already fragile protection environment. Furthermore, it is expected that many areas which are currently hosting refugees will become increasingly uninhabitable as a result of climate change.

In this context, resettlement may offer a response to individual protection needs compounded by climate change, particularly for the most vulnerable refugees. It can also be used strategically, particularly when implemented at large scale, to respond to the needs of refugees and their host communities by easing the pressure on natural resources that results from climate change and by mitigating the resulting tensions that could affect the peaceful co-existence among refugees and host communities. The below paragraphs provide examples of how resettlement can serve as a response to various effects of climate change in different regions across the globe.

In the **East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes (EHAGL) region**, millions of forcibly displaced persons are currently living in climate “hotspots”, where they typically lack the resources to adapt to an increasingly inhospitable environment. Six countries in the region are identified as priorities in the [UNHCR Focus Area Strategic Plan for Climate Action \(2024-2030\)](#): **Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, and Uganda**. Forcibly displaced persons in these countries and elsewhere in EHAGL are frequently located in peripheral, rural, or peri-urban locations, and often rely on agropastoralism as their primary source of subsistence, complemented to some extent by food rations and humanitarian assistance distributed in camps and settlements. They lack social protection safety nets and access to loans to diversify income sources as well as access to sufficient, good quality land for agriculture-based livelihoods. Competition over access to water, land, pasture, forests, and other natural resources essential for food security, energy needs, and climate-sensitive livelihoods undermine protection and solutions for displaced populations in the region.

To address these challenges, UNHCR has formed a coalition of partners across the humanitarian-development-climate-security nexus, to leverage climate adaptation and resilience investments in support of areas hosting forcibly displaced populations.

UNHCR will also strengthen its operations to meet the protection and assistance needs exacerbated by the climate crisis, within the framework of the [Regional Climate Action Plan \(2023-2028\)](#). Resettlement will be used strategically to find third country solutions for some of the most vulnerable refugees in EHAGL.

In the **West and Central Africa region**, the effects of climate change are also having a significant impact, particularly in the **Sahel region**. Tensions over resources have greatly intensified, leading to increasing confrontations and a more precarious protection environment, which in turn place refugees at heightened risk. In the Sahel zone of **Eastern Chad**, the water table continues to fall, making access to water extremely difficult. The significant influx of new arrivals from Sudan in the last year, particularly in the Ouaddai region, has put a huge strain on already limited resources, including firewood. Refugee women and girls are now having to travel much further from camps and sites to collect wood and are becoming vulnerable to serious protection incidents, notably gender-based violence. Increasingly, refugees are trying to access resources that Chadian nationals equally struggle to obtain, thereby heightening the risk of intercommunal confrontation. In contrast to the depleting water table, increased flooding is also being observed. In Goz Amir refugee camp, in the Sila region of Chad, major flooding in 2022 led to half the camp being covered in water. Flooding is expected to be a recurrent issue and has also been observed in the Lac area of **Western Chad**.

While climate change is having a significant negative impact in Chad and other countries of the Sahel region, resettlement has proved particularly effective when used as a response to individual protection needs compounded by climate change, including to address the needs of vulnerable refugees, particularly women and girls, who have survived or are at risk of gender-based violence. The effects of climate change are however also an amplifying factor of the growing resettlement needs in Chad, and contribute to onward movements, to which resettlement can provide a strategic response, if made accessible in meaningful numbers and if integrated in a route-based approach. UNHCR is integrating climate-related risks into the risk and impact analysis and assessments that it conducts at the onset and throughout emergencies.

The **Middle East and North Africa region** faces some of the most severe water shortages globally, with climate change also significantly impacting energy, food security, and ecosystems in general. It is noted that 15 of the 25 most water-stressed countries are found in the MENA region. This includes Lebanon which has the highest resettlement needs in the region. Urgent governance, development and humanitarian challenges resulting from the Syria crisis are worsened by environmental degradation, growing water insecurity, desertification and rising temperatures. These phenomena will negatively impact natural resources, health, and infrastructure, exacerbated by challenges including population growth, increases in multi-dimensional poverty, and the impact of displacement. Looking ahead, climate change will continue to be a key driver of heightened needs, vulnerabilities, and potential tensions among and between refugees and host communities—further compounding the existing protection needs in protracted refugee situations. In this context, resettlement may serve as an important protection tool, particularly for the most vulnerable.



*Refugee children share a meal after having been displaced by floods at Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya. They were evacuated to Tarach Pre-School, a safe zone in the Kakuma 1 area of the camp. © UNHCR/Eric Bakuli*

The North African countries are also impacted by the Sahel situation, which is characterized by movements induced by both conflict and climate change. Furthermore, in 2023, Morocco was affected by an earthquake, and Libya by extensive flooding. Such situations put additional strain on local communities and governments and had a significant impact on refugees and asylum-seekers. Expedited processing by and departure to some resettlement countries helped to respond to the urgent needs of refugees who were affected by the earthquake in Morocco and who were submitted for resettlement due to pre-existing protection risks.

In the **Southern Africa region**, the countries most exposed to recurring climate hazards are the DRC, Mozambique and Malawi. Many refugees cannot go home because of continued conflict, war and persecution, and yet once more climate change is making life harder by disproportionately impacting their safety, security and well-being. At the same time, climate impacts are also aggravating multiple causes of forced displacement. This is confirmed by various [reports including the report of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\)](#) stating that extreme weather is “increasingly driving displacement”.

In 2023, Cyclone Freddy hit Mozambique and other countries, resulting in loss of life, massive destruction of infrastructure, affecting 1.2 million people, including refugees in need of basic assistance. Furthermore, in 2024, the DRC’s worst floods in 60 years gave rise to a cholera outbreak and resulted in 2 million people, including refugees, in need of humanitarian assistance. Severe droughts caused by El Niño in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe left millions of people in food insecurity, pushing national authorities to declare a national disaster state.

Many refugees living in these countries have been seriously impacted by climate-related and other natural hazards. Many of them have specific needs and require assistance including health care, food, education, and psychosocial support. Most of these countries of asylum are already experiencing enormous difficulties in meeting the needs of their citizens and are calling on the international community to ease pressure on host countries and to share the burden of responsibility.

It is in this context that UNHCR intervenes to offer resettlement to refugees who meet the criteria. The multiple impacts of climate change on state infrastructures, including health, education and social services, deprive refugees of access to assistance that meets their needs. UNHCR prioritizes people in situations of acute vulnerability, including those living with severe disabilities, the sick who need care that is unavailable in the country of asylum, female heads of household in extremely precarious situations and women exposed to survival sex or gender-based violence. In such circumstances, resettlement may provide a way to allow refugees to enjoy their rights.

**Countries in the Americas** are prone to the increasingly severe effects of climate change and disasters, aggravating the situation of displaced populations and communities at risk of displacement, exacerbating their vulnerability, and increasing the risk of further displacement. Through innovation, partnerships, and engagement with national and local governments, organizations, and communities, UNHCR will upscale its effort to address climate risks by enhancing the response capacities and resilience of displaced populations and host communities. UNHCR will also promote the recognition and inclusion of displaced people, their needs and contributions regarding sustainable development, climate change adaptation, and disaster risk reduction policy, plans and programmes.

Argentina introduced a new humanitarian visa programme in 2022 to assist individuals displaced by “socio-natural disasters” from Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean. This visa programme offers an initial three-year residency period, with the option to apply for permanent residency thereafter. It caters to both internally and cross-border displaced persons, regardless of their migratory status in their current country of residence. The programme covers displacements caused by sudden onset hydrometeorological events (such as hurricanes, tornadoes, extreme rainfall, and floods) and/or geophysical events (such as earthquakes, tsunamis, landslides/rockfalls, and volcanic emissions).

The **Asia Pacific region** is home to many of the most climate-vulnerable countries in the world. Drought and water scarcity, resulting from reduced precipitation and increased temperatures related to climate change, have led to water shortages in areas hosting Afghan refugees. This has made the livelihoods of refugees working in agriculture less sustainable. Pakistan, consistently ranked among the top ten countries most affected by climate change, is at high risk of irregular rain patterns, weather shifts, reduced water levels and catastrophic flooding, as experienced in 2022 when more than one-third of the country was under water. Refugee-hosting areas in the country are frequently the worst hit by irregular rainfall and resulting flash flooding, with communities in remote rural areas being the most affected. In these remote areas, heavy reliance on traditional fuels such as firewood and charcoal by refugee and host communities, and reduced water levels place pressure on limited natural resources which can result in tensions between refugees and host communities.



Refugees in urban environments in the region live in precarious conditions with poor quality shelter and water, sanitation and hygiene conditions, making them more vulnerable to extreme weather events such as dangerous temperatures, extended wet and dry spells during the monsoon seasons, and dangerous levels of air pollution. Urban refugees in Asia and the Pacific region frequently live in low-lying areas which are at high risk of flooding, adding to their existing vulnerabilities. In a crowded urban environment, this can exacerbate anti-refugee sentiment and thereby negatively impact the overall protection environment.

In this context, resettlement provides a response to individual protection needs of refugees compounded by climate change. Identification methodologies can take into account increased individual protection needs due to elevated vulnerability to climate change.

## Perspectives: | Bangladesh

### When resettlement offers a strategic response to climate change

The Rohingya people have faced decades of systematic discrimination, statelessness and targeted violence in Rakhine State, Myanmar. Persecution has repeatedly driven Rohingya refugees across the border into Bangladesh. Forced displacement peaked following escalations of violence and widespread human rights violations in Rakhine State in 1978, 1991-92 and 2016-17.

Refugees who sought protection in Bangladesh find themselves in a region which was already highly disaster-prone and climate-vulnerable. Cox's Bazar is regularly exposed to cyclones, torrential rains, landslides, flash floods, storm surges and extreme temperatures.<sup>1</sup> In this context, the mass influx of refugees has inevitably led to a further impact on the natural environment and resources shared by refugees and the host communities, leading to additional disaster risk and climate vulnerability. Climate events in Cox's Bazar district have impacted the safety and well-being of both the refugees and host communities. This has resulted in the need to have innovative approaches to ease some of the pressures resulting from climate change, preserve and rehabilitate the natural environment shared by host communities and refugees.

At the 2023 GRF, the Multistakeholder Regional Pledge for Rohingyas yielded a significant expression of commitment from the international community including towards strengthening the resilience of Rohingya refugees and the host community to withstand and adapt to the impacts of climate change and expanding durable solutions.

UNHCR and its partners have been working on climate change adaptation and preparedness by reducing the risk of flooding and landslides caused by monsoon storms that have devastating impacts on both refugees and host communities. Efforts include planned relocations of refugees within the camps.

<sup>1</sup> For more information, please see [Strengthening Disaster Risk Management and Community Resilience in Cox's Bazar | United Nations Development Programme \(undp.org\)](#).

A scaled-up and strategic use of resettlement and other third country solutions will contribute to decongesting the extremely crowded camps and thus allow for reforestation of the vacated areas. While voluntary repatriation to Myanmar remains the preferred durable solution for the majority of refugees, substantially scaled-up multi-year resettlement programmes will allow for increased numbers of refugees to leave the camps, thereby reducing the environmental impacts of their protracted presence. Mitigating the impact on and improving the natural environment and resources will also contribute to improving the public perception towards Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

*In Bangladesh, Rohingya refugee woman makes rice for the family lunch in a UNHCR fuel efficient pot. © UNHCR/ Susan Hopper*



## THE ROUTE-BASED APPROACH

The approach aims to address the mixed movements of refugees and migrants, taking into account the full spectrum of situations people find themselves in. To better support States addressing such movements, we have developed this approach to ensure refugees and migrants find protection, solutions and legal pathways including resettlement in countries closer to places of origin, reduce

human suffering on dangerous journeys, and help States to manage the challenges around irregular movements in line with their international obligations. This covers among others access to territory for asylum-seekers, respected as a fundamental right and as an obligation of States globally. It equally incorporates safe and dignified returns for those who are not in need of international protection.

# THE AMERICAS

The [Regional Bureau of the Americas](#) provides strategic guidance, oversight, coordination, and support for resettlement activities in **Aruba**, the Republic of Colombia (**Colombia**), the Republic of Costa Rica (**Costa Rica**), the Republic of Cuba (**Cuba**), **Curaçao, the Dominican Republic, and North Caribbean region**, the Republic of Ecuador (**Ecuador**), the Republic of El Salvador (**El Salvador**), the Republic of Guatemala (**Guatemala**), the Co-operative Republic of Guyana (**Guyana**), the Republic of Honduras (**Honduras**), the United Mexican States (**Mexico**), the Republic of Panama (**Panama**), the Republic of Peru (**Peru**), and the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (**Trinidad and Tobago**).

## Overview of the protection environment in the region

The Americas region continues to face unprecedented numbers of displacement and mixed movements, with people fleeing violence and persecution alongside those seeking to escape poverty, a lack of opportunity and the adverse effects of climate change and natural disasters. As of June 2023, more than 22.1 million forcibly displaced and stateless persons were hosted in the region, including some 4.6 million refugees and asylum-seekers in addition to nearly 5.3 million other people in need of international protection as well as 7.7 million internally displaced persons. Protection-oriented legal stay arrangements and similar national protection schemes, such as the temporary protection regime in Colombia for Venezuelans and the implementation of humanitarian visas in various countries, play an essential role in ensuring protection.

Asylum-seekers from Latin America and the Caribbean accounted for approximately one-third of all new individual asylum applications registered worldwide, with the majority originating from Venezuela, Cuba, Colombia, Nicaragua, and Haiti, seeking protection primarily in the United States of America (USA) and Mexico. Despite the growing number of refugees and migrants travelling northward in mixed movements, the bulk of displaced populations in the Americas continue to find protection in Latin American countries.

In 2024, there was a significant increase in the number of individuals participating in mixed movements across Central and North America. Notably, irregular movements across the Darién doubled to 520,000 persons, compared to 248,000 in 2022. Mixed and onward movements continue to be intricately linked to persistent or escalating root causes of displacement, including insecurity, violence, inequality, and human rights violations; exacerbated by increasing xenophobia. Among those undertaking these perilous journeys are individuals fleeing violence and persecution who are in need of international protection. The impact of climate change and natural disasters has aggravated the situation of displaced populations and communities at risk of displacement, further deteriorating their vulnerabilities and increasing mobility.

Solidarity from host countries has played a crucial role in facilitating the protection and inclusion of refugees and others in need of international protection, including through asylum and other legal stay arrangements.

These mechanisms, such as humanitarian and other residence categories, not only facilitate access to legal residence and documentation but also ensure basic socioeconomic rights. However, despite these efforts, a significant proportion of refugees and others in need of international protection still face significant hurdles in accessing basic needs and rights across Latin America and the Caribbean.

Overall, it is expected that forced displacement in the region will continue to increase, as the root causes remain unaddressed and aggravated by the combined impact of deteriorating security contexts, social unrest, fragile institutions, the adverse impact of climate change and deep-rooted inequalities.

### Venezuela Situation

According to the [Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela \(R4V\)](#), co-led by UNHCR and IOM, as of September 2023, there were over 7.7 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants worldwide, of whom 84 per cent (6.5 million) are in Latin America and the Caribbean. By mid-2023, there were over 300,000 recognized refugees, and almost 1.2 million asylum-seekers.

Cross-border displacement and mixed movements from Venezuela continue, despite a low-level increase in spontaneous return movements. Pendular movements along border areas are expected to continue as Venezuelans seek to address basic needs temporarily in neighbouring countries. However, a lack of viable options in some hosting countries drives many to move onward in search of a more stable future.

Movements of refugees and migrants between host countries, including northbound movements, have significantly increased and are expected to continue as Venezuelans and other affected nationals with heightened vulnerabilities seek sustainable protection and integration solutions. In the first nine months of 2023, over 400,000 people (63 per cent of them Venezuelans) moved north through Panama's Darién jungle, an almost threefold increase compared to the same period in 2022.

In the context of dynamic population trends involving outflows, returns, deportations, cross-border pendular and onward movements, UNHCR works across the region to support Venezuelan refugees and migrants, focusing on protection, socioeconomic integration, and multisectoral assistance, including education, health, shelter and water, sanitation and hygiene.

Recent trends continue to be characterized by the dominant northward movements, not only in Central America but also across South America. The unprecedented trend of onward movements, often through difficult terrain and conditions, exposes the Venezuelan population to significant dangers along these routes, including risks of human trafficking, exploitation and abuse.

Countries in the Americas region, including Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay, have granted asylum and implemented legal stay arrangements facilitating access to documentation and basic socioeconomic rights.





*The Darién region in Panama, the epicenter of the displacement crisis, shows the magnitude and complexity of the movement of people in the continent. © UNHCR/Melissa Pinel*

Despite efforts towards protection and stabilization, limited access to registration, documentation, basic services and livelihoods opportunities, and rising xenophobia continue affecting increasing numbers of Venezuelans who remain at heightened vulnerability, resulting in resettlement as the most viable and durable solution for many of them.

Furthermore, while a substantial number of Venezuelans apply for asylum in the region, the asylum systems have insufficient capacity to respond to the current demand resulting in further vulnerability and precarious conditions for the Venezuelan population.

The main hosting countries of Venezuelans in the Americas are Colombia (2,8 million), Peru (1,5 million) and Ecuador (480,000). Resettlement programmes are implemented in the three countries and are mainly focused on the Venezuelan population.

### **Central America and Mexico**

By the end of 2023, reported figures revealed a staggering 2.2 million forcibly displaced persons in and from Central America and Mexico. Among them, approximately 593,000 refugees and asylum-seekers from countries in northern Central America have sought international protection, while an additional 581,000 individuals were internally displaced within El Salvador, Honduras, and Mexico.



According to a Global Protection Cluster Analysis Update for 2023, countries in Northern Central America experienced a surge in violence and insecurity, affecting thousands of individuals. Indicators of violent deaths continue to report alarming figures, with Guatemala reporting a rate of 17.3 per 100,000 inhabitants, and Honduras registering 30.8 per 100,000 inhabitants. On the other hand, El Salvador witnessed a 70 per cent decrease in violent deaths, reporting a figure of 2.4 per 100,000 inhabitants.<sup>2</sup>

Homicides, gender-based violence, which encompasses violence against women and the LGBTIQ+ community, alongside forced recruitment of men and adolescents, kidnappings, and extortion, continue unabated. These issues, compounded with weak state institutions, political instability, and pervasive corruption, have led to some countries in the subregion being recognized as among the most violent in the Americas. People with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and/or sex characteristics (SOGIESC) are often unable to secure durable solutions due to pervasive discrimination and homophobia.

Due to widespread insecurity, individuals who have sought protection in Central America and Mexico after escaping violence and persecution in their home countries remain at risk and urgently require third country solutions including resettlement.

### **Nicaragua Situation**

As of the end of 2023, the Americas region was hosting 15,000 Nicaraguan refugees and over 265,000 asylum-seekers from Nicaragua. Costa Rica stands out as the primary host country for Nicaraguans, accommodating a total of 8,000 refugees and 173,000 asylum-seekers.

Nicaraguans who have endured violence and/or torture during protests, detention or imprisonment for political reasons in their country of origin encounter barriers in accessing mental health services in Costa Rica and other host countries. These challenges stem from inadequate national coverage and lack of documentation, leaving Nicaraguans in need of international protection grappling with specific medical and psychological needs resulting from their experience in their country of origin.

Many LGBTIQ+ people have reported leaving Nicaragua due to persecution, violence, structural discrimination and threats to their physical security in the country of origin and have also reported to continue facing threats and violent harm in countries of asylum in the region.

The proximity and porous border between Nicaragua and Costa Rica contribute significantly to heightened protection risks for Nicaraguan individuals. Many have reported to UNHCR that their attempts to seek protection through national authorities were often ineffective, not followed up on, or simply went unanswered. Violent attacks targeting Nicaraguans residing abroad have been reported in Honduras and Costa Rica.

<sup>2</sup> For more information, please see <https://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/protection-issues> and <https://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/publications/1682/reports/protection-analysis-update/quatemala-protection-analysis-update>.

## Colombia Situation

Colombia has one of the largest internally displaced populations in the world, standing at 6.9 million at the end of 2023, with over 1 million new displacements since the signing of the Peace Agreement in 2016. The region currently hosts 104,000 Colombian refugees and 154,000 asylum-seekers of Colombian nationality.

Resettlement as a durable solution for the Colombian population is mainly implemented in Ecuador, at a larger scale, and Peru, on a smaller scale, and plays a crucial role in providing protection and long-term solutions to Colombians who are in a protracted displacement situation due to armed conflict and violence exacerbated by economic hardship.

Over the years, many displaced Colombians have also been separated from their families during the conflict, and resettlement and family reunification programmes in Ecuador and Peru often allow them to rebuild their lives together in a safe environment.

## Resettlement within protection and solutions strategies

The expansion of resettlement opportunities in the Americas region has become over the course of the years a key component of protection and solutions for affected populations, and contributes to the prevention of irregular and hazardous mixed and onward movements.

The Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection (the Los Angeles Declaration) underscores the critical need to prioritize the expansion of protection, resettlement and complementary pathways for asylum-seekers, refugees, and stateless persons. This initiative aims to foster safe, orderly, humane, and regular migration while enhancing cooperation frameworks within the hemisphere. Within this regional context, there exists a fertile ground for novel approaches to broaden third country solutions, particularly for individuals in need of protection. The Los Angeles Declaration represents a hemispheric framework spearheaded by the USA and endorsed by 21 countries in the region. Notably, a specific action package on resettlement has been established to address the escalating challenges associated with human mobility in the Americas.

Within the framework of regional efforts aimed at a comprehensive approach to address the complexities of human mobility across countries of origin, transit and destinations, the expansion of resettlement opportunities and other safe pathways assumes a key role among the prioritized actions for a route-based approach.

In line with this approach, in the face of an unprecedented situation of displacement and mixed movements in the Americas region, the USA government in close collaboration with governments in the region, UNHCR, IOM, Spain, Canada and other partners launched the Safe Mobility Offices (SMO) initiative in June 2023. The SMOs provide a “one-stop shop” for expedited refugee resettlement and facilitation of access to other lawful pathways in strategic locations, as an alternative for people who may be considering dangerous journeys across the region. The SMO pilot was launched in Colombia, Guatemala and Costa Rica, and a few months later in Ecuador, targeting persons from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador.

During its initial pilot phase in Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Guatemala, the SMO initiative has already facilitated increased access to resettlement opportunities and demonstrated its potential as a scalable model capable of significantly broadening the range and reach of available solutions. Initiatives like the SMOs are essential complements to other components of the multi-pronged, comprehensive approach in the region.

In addition, In-Country Processing (ICP) programmes in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras continue to represent an essential protection solution as well as a life-saving mechanism for the most vulnerable individuals exposed to high risk of persecution, violence, threats and forced recruitment by gangs. UNHCR cooperates with a variety of stakeholders, including public institutions, NGOs, protection/field units and consortiums, to identify and refer such cases for possible resettlement considerations.

In addition to resettlement, the establishment and expansion of other safe pathways—including for education, labour and family reunification—can contribute to reduce the impact of mixed movements on border management and strained asylum systems. Named sponsorship models also hold potential for increasing availability of complementary pathways for refugees.

## Projected resettlement needs in the region in 2025

Projected resettlement needs in the Americas region are anticipated to significantly rise compared to the previous year. For 2025, UNHCR projects a figure of **179,600 individuals** in need of resettlement in the region (versus a figure of 106,450 in 2024).

*In February 2022, Raúl from Venezuela received the Temporary Protection Permit for his toddler in Bogotá, Colombia.*  
© UNHCR/Daniela Camargo



Such increase is related to the unprecedented level of forced displacement in the Americas region. 2023 saw the record figure of more than 400,000 individuals who crossed the Darién Gap moving from South America to northern countries fleeing persecution and human rights violations. Due to widespread regional insecurity, many of those who have sought protection in South and Central America after fleeing violence and persecution from their home countries continue to be at risk in neighbouring countries. Others, including people with diverse SOGIESC, are unable to obtain a durable solution because of generalized discrimination and homophobia. Specifically, the Central America region is characterized by structural violence leading to unequal distribution of resources, limited access to essential basic services (education and health), social exclusion based on ethnicity, gender, and social class. Amidst this challenging context, gangs and narco groups continue to be responsible for driving high levels of widespread violence across the region, including extortion, murders, kidnappings, drug and human trafficking, and forced recruitment.

Refugees from Venezuela, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua and to a lesser extent Cuba and Haiti will be the main populations considered for resettlement from the region.

In **Aruba and Curaçao**, UNHCR projects that there will be resettlement needs for **2,900 persons**, mainly Venezuelan refugees. In a context where the number of displaced individuals compared to the overall population in the country of asylum is significant, many Venezuelans face serious legal and physical protection concerns as a result of increased xenophobia and discrimination, coupled with the fact that they are largely undocumented, do not have access to basic rights, and have limited protection from refoulement.

In **Colombia**, UNHCR estimates that **30,000 refugees** will be in need of resettlement in 2025, primarily from Venezuela. The main resettlement profiles are individuals perceived as opposing the national authorities, survivors of torture and/or violence, persons in professions or positions susceptible to extortion, survivors of gender-based violence, individuals with diverse SOGIESC, women facing extreme economic and social hardship, human rights defenders, journalists, and individuals with life-threatening medical conditions. These refugees often have acute resettlement needs, including severe physical and psychological health issues, barriers to accessing employment and entrepreneurship opportunities, health care and education services, security risks and high levels of discrimination and xenophobia.

Resettlement needs in **Costa Rica** are expected to reach **30,100 refugees** in 2025, most of whom are from Nicaragua, followed by Venezuelans and other nationalities. Refugees in need of resettlement for example include persons facing protection risks due to the presence of criminal groups, women and girls with limited or lack of family or other support networks, including survivors of gender-based violence and women at risk of trafficking, persons who experienced violence and/or torture for example, during protest, detention or imprisonment for political reasons, or children who are at risk due to an inadequate protection environment. LGBTIQ+ refugees are also one of the most vulnerable groups and face significant protection risks, especially transgender people.

In the **Dominican Republic**, **11,500 refugees** are projected to be in need of resettlement. Most of them originate from Haiti and include refugees at risk of detention or deportation as well as persons who face specific legal and/or physical protection needs on account of xenophobia and discrimination, followed by Venezuelans and other nationalities.





*In Ecuador, Jhon is a Colombian refugee who discovered his passion for cooking during the pandemic. "I used to think I would study engineering. But during the pandemic I learned to cook and now I dream of having my own business and learning how to become a better Chef in France." © UNHCR/Diana Diaz*

UNHCR projects that **48,000 refugees** will require resettlement in **Ecuador**. In a context marked by gang violence, refugees face extortion, forced recruitment of children and youth by local gangs with links to transnational organized crime and other forms of violence as gangs fight for control of territories and communities. Colombian and Venezuelan women and girls are often exposed to harassment, indecent sexual proposals, human trafficking, forced labour, and sexual exploitation, including by gang members, and are often not able to turn to state protection. Venezuelan and Colombian survivors of violence and/or torture are often battling with ongoing physical or mental health difficulties and require psychosocial support, access to which is limited for refugees and asylum-seekers in Ecuador. LGBTIQ+ refugees have often suffered grave human rights violations before their flight, exacerbated by homophobia in the country of asylum.

In **Mexico**, UNHCR estimates that **1,500 refugees** are projected to be in need of resettlement in 2025. This includes primarily refugees from Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua in addition to other nationalities.

In **Panama**, it is projected that **2,800 refugees** will need resettlement, most of whom are from Nicaragua, followed by a diversity of nationalities including Colombia, El Salvador and Venezuela.



This includes refugees who, given the proximity to their respective countries of origin, continue to be at risk of former persecuting agents, for instance, survivors of intimate partner violence or of political and gang violence in the countries of origin and those who have endured violence and other protection issues on their journey to Panama, particularly through the Darién Gap.

In **Peru**, it is anticipated that **28,400 refugees** will require resettlement, primarily Venezuelan nationals. Persons who are particularly at risk include women who face exposure to trafficking, physical abuse, exploitation and further gender-based violence as well as other vulnerable individuals such as LGBTIQ+ refugees who face security incidents in the country of asylum, many of whom are confronted with additional obstacles in a challenging socioeconomic context, for instance in obtaining documentation or accessing the necessary public services.

UNHCR estimates that in **Trinidad and Tobago**, **2,500 refugees** will be in need of resettlement, many of whom are vulnerable Venezuelans, including government opponents whose lives would be at risk if refouled, as well as women and children who are victims of abuse and trafficking, in addition to other nationalities such as Cubans and Jamaicans.

Individuals from **Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador** facing compelling protection needs will continue to benefit from the ICP programme. The total resettlement needs in 2025 for these three countries, including nationals and refugees are: **Guatemala (14,600 persons); Honduras (3,000 persons); and El Salvador (4,200 persons)**. The ICP and resettlement programmes in the three countries represent a lifeline and durable solution for people fleeing or fearing violence at the hands of gangs and other organized criminal structures, threats, extorsions, sexual violence, forced disappearances, forced recruitment, gender-based violence, forced prostitution and trafficking of girls and women. In addition to the worrying levels of violence and insecurity reported in the region, structural factors such as poverty, inequality, conflicts over natural resources and natural disasters, continue to be major causes of displacement in and from countries in the north of Central America. Specific profiles, such as youth, women and LGBTIQ+ persons, continue to be exposed to heightened risks.

## Regional highlights, achievements and challenges in 2023

In recent years, UNHCR has significantly escalated resettlement submissions from the Americas. In 2022, the organization submitted 9,500 individuals, a number that surged to over 24,000 in 2023, with projections soaring to an ambitious figure of 80,000 in 2024. These figures underscore the need of resettlement as a protection and solutions tool for the region.

Major refugee populations who benefited from the expansion of resettlement in the Americas were Venezuelans, followed by Central American populations, namely from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua. These nationalities have also been prioritized, together with Cubans, Haitians and Colombians, for the launch of SMO initiative in 2023.



*At the Paso Canoas border community, refugees and migrants wait for the bus service that will transport them through Costa Rica and to the northern border with Nicaragua. © UNHCR/Natalia Diaz*

Innovative characteristics of resettlement through the SMO initiative that allowed to overcome some of the main challenges characterizing resettlement from the Americas region include:

- **The online self-onboarding portal for registration and triage:** Collaborating closely with IOM, UNHCR introduced an innovative online Safe Mobility portal. This platform streamlines the registration process and triages cases, enabling UNHCR to identify individuals eligible for resettlement, while assisting IOM in identifying candidates for alternative pathways.
- **Communication With Communities (CWC) and outreach:** UNHCR established country-specific WhatsApp ChatBots in multiple languages to answer frequently asked questions and set up an SMO Regional Contact Center to provide real-time guidance, portal troubleshooting and case updates. UNHCR and IOM are also utilizing regular field presence in host countries to provide direct guidance and support.
- **Streamlined screening and referrals:** Physical SMOs are set up for in-person screening, allowing for two-way referrals between UNHCR and IOM. Individuals who are not eligible for any pathways are counselled about in-country options and services. UNHCR's process includes an in-person protection screening to assess international protection needs and potential inadmissibility.
- **Streamlined UNHCR referral mechanisms** involved the initial implementation of abridged Resettlement Registration Forms (RRFs) for SMO operations, which were later expanded and adopted by non-SMO operations across the region. By the end of 2023, the abridged RRF was replaced with the implementation of the Identification Based Methodology System (IBMS) in the three selected SMO operations (Colombia, Ecuador and Costa Rica).

- **Expansion of other legal pathways for applicants to SMOs:** IOM is leading the complementary pathways components of SMO initiative offering access to family reunification, parole and other regular pathways to USA for applicants. This joint initiative between UNHCR (resettlement) and IOM (legal pathways) have allowed the expansion of accessibility of persons of interest to benefit from third country solutions other than resettlement.

## Perspectives: | Costa Rica

### Safe Mobility Office in Costa Rica: Hope for a new beginning

Someone said that airports are places that make us shake. The emotional charge between farewells and welcomes makes us feel more intensely the fragility of life and during 2023, many people from Nicaragua and Venezuela, most of them with protection risks and necessities, boarded a plane for the first time in their lives.

In just two suitcases they carried their stories, experiences, and dreams. Some were nervous, others felt calm, excited, anxious and, why not, also nostalgic, and grateful for everything that Costa Rica gave them and for the new opportunity that they thought would never come.

Until it happened! Thanks to an agreement between the Governments of Costa Rica and the USA, the Safe Mobility Office programme was implemented, allowing thousands of women, men, children and adolescents to move to a third country, full of hope and with the faith of starting a new life in a place where they can continue be part of the community while contributing to development and society.

“I’m happy”, said Carmen. “I never thought that me and my family could be selected”, expressed Jose. “I feel excited because they are giving us a new opportunity to sleep peacefully and I haven’t had that in years”, shared Jessica. “I want to contribute and give a better future to my children”, declared Carlos. “I am afraid of the unknown, but I trust that they will support us throughout this process”, said Claudia. And the stories that these refugees shared are only a small reflection of the feelings from thousands of people who left last year to “The States”, as they call them, and also Spain.

International cooperation is saving and transforming lives in an unprecedented context of different humanitarian crises unfolding simultaneously. Although what is happening in Latin America and the Caribbean often does not make the headlines, Safe Mobility Office is a successful response that makes it easier for individuals to arrive in a safely, regular, and lawful way in a new country.

**Carolina Fuentes**

Associate Communications Officer, UNHCR

### **Esaúl and Nestor\*: an example of love and struggle for rights and dreams**

In the vibrant city of Las Vegas, Esaúl (33) and Nestor (30), two Venezuelan refugees, have found solace and hope. Their journey took a poignant turn with the celebration of their wedding, a heartfelt exchange of vows symbolizing their shared dreams of living together for life. This marked the fulfilment of a longing that began for both long ago, when they lived in Peru, the first country that welcomed them after they were forced to leave their homeland.

Their arrival in the USA allowed them to get married—a feat impossible in Peru due to the absence of laws recognizing unions among LGBTIQ+ couples—and rebuild their lives. Since then, they have been diligently working to integrate into their new community.

With an entrepreneurial drive and a determination to contribute to their new home, Esaúl and Nestor aspire of starting their own business and enriching the community that embraces them. “I’ve always dreamed of opening a café; having our own business is something I know we can achieve here.” Both are focused on learning English to bolster their career prospects and social integration while pursuing their respective professional fields.

Their new life in Las Vegas is a testament to their resilience and determination. Today they envision growing old together and achieving their life projects, and they are determined to turn this opportunity into a springboard for a promising future.

However, their journey to the USA was not devoid of challenges; rather, it was propelled by a desire for safety, security, and freedom. Former political activists in Venezuela, Esaúl and Nestor fled their homeland in 2017 seeking protection and opportunities in Peru.

While they speak fondly of their time there and the friendships they cultivated, they acknowledge the discrimination and hardships they encountered as refugees and members of the LGBTIQ+ community.



*Esaúl and Nestor enjoying a walk in Las Vegas, USA. Thanks to resettlement, they have found hope in a new home. (Photo courtesy of Esaúl and Nestor)*

Despite facing difficulties in finding opportunities and enduring prejudice, they worked as waiters and janitors while endeavouring to practice their professions—Esaúl, a qualified public accountant with a master’s degree in finance, and Nestor, a gas engineer.

Their story epitomizes the resilience of the human spirit and shows how love can help overcome adversity. As they continue their journey in the USA, Esaúl and Nestor are determined to seize the opportunities before them and to build a life filled with hope, happiness, and success.

In July 2022, after a waiting time of less than six months, Esaúl and Nestor’s application was submitted and they were granted the opportunity to resettle in the USA, a significant milestone in their quest for security and stability. Recognizing the challenges faced by LGBTIQ+ individuals, including the risk of persecution and lack of social support, UNHCR underscores the importance of resettlement as a durable solution. It not only offers individuals like Esaúl and Nestor with a chance to rebuild their lives but also grants them hope and resources to pursue a future of possibilities and prosperity. It offers a crucial opportunity for integration into a society that respects their rights, especially when returning to their country of origin or fully integrating into the first country of asylum is not feasible.

\*Names have been changed for protection reasons



# ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

The [Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific \(RBAP\)](#) provides oversight, coordination, and support for protection activities in 45 countries and territories covered by 12 UNHCR country offices and three multi-country offices (covering 25 countries) throughout Asia and the Pacific, including the Islamic Republic of Iran (**Iran**), the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (**Pakistan**), the People's Republic of Bangladesh (**Bangladesh**), the Kingdom of Thailand (**Thailand**), **Malaysia**, the Republic of Indonesia (**Indonesia**) and the People's Republic of China (**China**).

## Overview of the protection environment in the region

Asia and the Pacific hosts 15.7 million forcibly displaced and stateless persons, including 7.5 million registered refugees, people in refugee-like situations and asylum-seekers, 6 million internally displaced persons and some 449,000 internally displaced returnees; 219,000 others of concern; and 2.5 million stateless persons (representing over half of the world's stateless population). The latter figure includes 1.3 million Rohingya who are both stateless and either refugees or internally displaced.

While operations in Asia are host to a diverse mix of nationalities and ethnicities, individuals from Afghanistan and Myanmar remain the largest displaced populations in the region. There are 5.8 million individuals from Afghanistan living as refugees or in a refugee-like situation, primarily in the major host countries of Pakistan and Iran. Over 1.3 million refugees from Myanmar (including over 1.1 million Rohingya refugees) reside throughout the region, but primarily in **Bangladesh** and **Malaysia**.

*In Bangladesh, Minara, a mother of two and refugee from Myanmar, is among the lucky few who is growing some vegetables with the support of UNHCR and its partner. © UNHCR/Fahima Tajrin*



Only 20 of the 45 countries and territories in the region have acceded to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. Many refugee-hosting States in Asia do not have a domestic legal or administrative framework covering the legal status and rights of refugees. As a result, refugees and asylum-seekers often fall under national immigration laws and, if they enter irregularly or when they overstay visas, are considered to be “illegal immigrants”, regardless of UNHCR status or documentation. Due to the lack of legal status in host countries, refugees and asylum-seekers live a fragile and tenuous existence in Asia. Displaced individuals are often unable to work legally; are subject to arbitrary arrest, indefinite detention, and deportation; may be confined to congested camps or immigration detention facilities without freedom of movement; are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse; have limited access to national health, education, justice mechanisms; and have minimal opportunities for engagement, advancement, and growth. Vulnerabilities that existed prior to their displacement, trauma experienced before and during their flight from their country of origin, and protection concerns that arise in the country of asylum may be exacerbated by the precarious nature of their displacement. In a region which includes some of the most climate-vulnerable countries in the world, with large refugee populations hosted in areas particularly prone to sudden onset events such as flooding, cyclones, temperature extremes and seismic activities, climate change is increasingly driving new protection needs and exacerbating existing ones for forcibly displaced and stateless persons across Asia and the Pacific, especially where access to resources to build the climate resilience of refugees are limited.

The tenuous protection environment in host countries and the limited solutions available have led to risky onward movement for an increasing number of refugees and asylum-seekers. The Asia region saw an increase in land and sea movements in 2023, with nearly 4,500 Rohingya refugees embarking on perilous sea journeys (an increase of 21 per cent from 2022). More than two-thirds of those who embarked were women and children seeking safety and protection, family reunification and access to livelihoods opportunities. Those who disembarked highlighted significant suffering, widespread physical abuse, including gender-based violence, while on board these vessels, and nearly 570 individuals died or went missing while at sea in 2023, an increase of 63 per cent from 2022. In addition to sea movements, around 2,000 Rohingya refugees are known to have undertaken land movements in 2023, with the vast majority reporting detention by authorities or other protection risks along the land routes. Despite an awareness of these risks, individuals continue to board vessels and undertake desperate journeys overland in search of safety and opportunities, underscoring the challenges faced as refugees.

## Resettlement within protection and solutions strategies

The regional protection and solutions strategy seeks to: a) strengthen inclusive protection and assistance in countries of asylum in order to empower refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons and others of concern and ease pressures on host communities, fostering resilience and self-reliance; b) pursue innovative solutions, based on the diverse profiles and needs of various populations in both protracted situations and emergencies; and c) expand and diversify partnerships for a broader base of support and more equitable responsibility-sharing, with a focus on strategy development, advocacy, operational complementarity, enhanced data collection and analysis, and resource mobilization, as well as localization and sustainability.



*Iranian artist and refugee in Malaysia makes sense of the world through his paintings. © UNHCR/Ted Adnan*

Within this strategy, resettlement is key to maintaining protection space, in a context where the protection environment is increasingly deteriorating in many countries in the region. The strategy also recognizes the crucial role host countries play in protecting refugees and asylum-seekers and the need for substantive support to host governments and communities that contribute to the wider response. UNHCR operations in Asia work with governments, host communities, partners, and forcibly displaced and stateless persons to seek solutions where possible and to improve the quality of life for those who remain in displacement, including through the inclusion of forcibly displaced and stateless persons in national health, education, judicial, and social systems and in activities that enable self-reliance.

All host countries in the region with an active resettlement programme—including **Iran, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, India, and China**—utilize resettlement as part of a comprehensive protection and solutions approach, in line with the GCR and building on outcomes of the 2023 GRF. Resettlement is used as a tool to provide a solution to individuals with more complex needs, vulnerabilities, and protection concerns; to share responsibility with host States; to resolve specific long-standing situations; and to open space for engagement and advocacy with host countries that will strengthen the protection environment for the wider refugee population, including through opportunities to enhance self-reliance and inclusion in national systems.

Across the region, resettlement programmes create space for constructive dialogue with host governments around access to asylum, registration, refugee status determination, the protection of women and children, and specific needs amongst refugees, leading to opportunities to strengthen the protection environment and to enact measures that improve UNHCR's protection programme for the benefit of the wider refugee population. In addition, highlighting the ways in which access to self-reliance, skills-building, and educational opportunities inside host countries helps enable successful solutions outside host countries opens space to advance programmes for the capacitation, empowerment, and resilience of the refugee population in countries of asylum.

Throughout the region—but particularly in the region's largest host countries of **Pakistan, Iran, Bangladesh, Malaysia, and Thailand**—hosting governments have repeatedly highlighted the need for responsibility-sharing and tangible contributions to the refugee response. While resettled refugees from host countries represent a sliver of the total population and needs, engagement by third countries to support and receive those most in need among the population is recognized and appreciated by host governments and opens space for UNHCR to engage on broader protection issues. Resettlement is an important element in the application of a route-based approach in Asia and the Pacific particularly with respect to refugees from Myanmar who frequently move along maritime and land routes in search of effective protection in other countries in South-East Asia. Within this approach, resettlement contributes to interventions in countries of first asylum which seek to reduce the increasing onward movements and related human suffering and offer alternatives to dangerous journeys, while also helping States to manage the challenges around irregular movements in line with their international obligations.

The solutions strategic pillar of the route-based approach includes resettlement among other interventions, and seeks to leverage the outcomes of the GRF Rohingya Multistakeholder Pledges, in partnership with States and civil society. It reinforces the other strategic pillars of the route-based approach which are: i) resilience and development, ii) anti-trafficking and addressing urgent needs along the route, iii) enhanced data collection/analysis & information outreach, iv) protection at sea, v) prevention of statelessness and addressing root causes.

### **Myanmar Situation**

Since early 2021, political upheaval, continued conflict, and deterioration of the security situation in Myanmar have resulted in an increasing number of individuals displaced within the country and seeking protection in other countries in the region. These factors, combined with challenges to access, impacted opportunities for the creation of conditions for sustainable return of forcibly displaced populations. The new displacement adds to the already protracted situation of refugees from Myanmar throughout Asia which includes over one million Rohingya refugees in the region, particularly in Bangladesh, Malaysia and India as well as the over 190,000 Karen, Karenni and other ethnic minorities from Myanmar in Thailand, Malaysia, India and elsewhere in the region. In this context the [2024 Joint Response Plan for the Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis](#) was launched under the leadership of the Bangladeshi authorities, bringing together 117 partners, in a call for international solidarity.



Large-scale group resettlement programmes from **Bangladesh and Thailand** will continue to benefit two extremely protracted refugee populations from Myanmar in 2025 and will serve as a tangible example of responsibility-sharing to governments and communities that have hosted a significant number of refugees from Myanmar for decades. Group resettlement of a protracted Rohingya caseload in Bangladesh will remain anchored within a larger protection and solutions strategy and is expected to help enable other opportunities and areas of engagement for the much larger Rohingya population that remains in Bangladesh. Group resettlement of primarily ethnic minority groups from Myanmar hosted in Thailand for decades will enable camp consolidation and camp closure along the Thai Myanmar border. Both programmes will help end a refugee caseload and situation that has persisted for years and for which no alternative solutions have materialized.

### Afghan Situation

The continuing instability and deteriorating human rights situation in Afghanistan have significant consequences for the most vulnerable among the population. Some 3.2 million Afghans remained internally displaced due to conflict. **Iran and Pakistan** alone are hosting more than 5.7 million Afghan refugees and Afghans in a refugee-like situation as of the end of 2023.

*Afghan refugees and Pakistani trainees are attending a computer class at the Women Welfare & Development Center in G-7, Islamabad, Pakistan. © UNHCR/Asif Shahzad*





The expansion of resettlement opportunities for Afghans hosted across the region, particularly in Iran and Pakistan, will continue to open avenues for advocacy and engagement on broader protection issues between host governments, UNHCR, and resettlement States.

## Projected resettlement needs in the region in 2025

UNHCR estimates that in 2025, there will be approximately **776,500 refugees** and asylum-seekers with resettlement needs in Asia. As the majority of forcibly displaced and stateless persons in the region reside in countries that are not signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention and do not have a domestic refugee legal framework, refugees reside precariously in host countries, often with limited access to work, education, health care, and other services and opportunities for growth. In addition, their lack of legal status in the host country impacts freedom of movement and places them at heightened risk of arrest, detention, and deportation on immigration-related charges.

The vast majority (94 per cent) of refugees and asylum-seekers in the region originate from Afghanistan or Myanmar, countries from which individuals have fled seeking international protection for decades. Recent de-stabilizing events in those countries have resulted in increased internal and international displacement and eroded opportunities to voluntarily repatriate for many. The increasingly protracted nature of the refugee caseloads in the region, the limited alternative durable solutions in the foreseeable future and the significant barriers in host countries to self-reliance and opportunities for growth and advancement create extremely challenging conditions for refugee populations in the region. The resulting instability, risks, and limitations for refugee populations in many host countries in Asia necessitates expanded third country solutions including resettlement.

In **Bangladesh**, UNHCR has determined that approximately **119,300 individuals** are in need of resettlement in 2025. The estimated figure includes 20,000 refugees who have been registered in Bangladesh since the early 1990s after fleeing Myanmar due to serious human rights violations, with no ability to return, and who have not yet been submitted under the group resettlement modality. There is also a significant number of female-headed households, women at risk, survivors of violence and torture including survivors of gender-based violence and separated children within this long-staying refugee population.

Among the profiles of refugees in need of resettlement are female-headed households in the refugee camps in Bangladesh, who are particularly vulnerable as they lack traditional support mechanisms and their situation may increase their risk of exposure to gender-based violence. Due in part to the densely populated camps, the environment creates increased risks of exposure to abuse, harassment and sexual assault for women and girls.

With safety and security deteriorating in the camps, increased violence between gangs and increased incidence of serious crimes carried out by criminal groups, UNHCR will prioritize refugees with serious legal and physical protection needs.

There are also significant numbers of refugees living with disabilities or serious medical needs who are not receiving the appropriate treatment, adequate care, or access to services that would either improve their condition or assist them or their families to lead a more integrated and productive quality of life.

UNHCR estimates that **250 refugees** in **China's mainland and Hong Kong SAR** will be in need of resettlement in 2025. Persons identified with particular vulnerabilities or specific needs are prioritized for resettlement consideration, such as women and girls at risk, survivors of violence and/or torture, individuals with specific physical or mental health concerns, refugees with diverse sexual orientations, gender identity, gender expression and/or sex characteristics (SOGIESC), refugees with religious claims, and those in protracted displacement. Refugees in need of extended family reunification will also be considered. While the forcibly displaced population in Chinese mainland and Hong Kong SAR consists of various nationalities, most refugees who fall within the criteria described above are from Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria, Somalia, and Pakistan.

UNHCR **India** estimates that **6,300 refugees** will be in need of resettlement in 2025. Refugees with resettlement needs include Afghans, Rohingya and Chin from Myanmar, Yemenis, Somalis and other African refugees such as Cameroonians, Sudanese and Congolese, as well some Iranian, Iraqi, Palestinian and Syrian refugees. Profiles of refugees to be submitted for resettlement include: a) refugees who have been in India for an extended period of time and do not have any prospects for return or local integration, as most refugees are not able to obtain visas or work in India; b) individuals facing legal and physical protection needs, such as refugees in administrative detention or at risk of arrest for immigration-related issues, including refugees at imminent risk of deportation and refoulement such as those who have received "Leave India Notices" from the immigration authorities; c) those facing immediate threats to their physical safety; d) individuals whose mental health well-being has been affected by their protection situation; e) victims of trafficking; and f) LGBTIQ+ refugees at heightened risk. Other priority profiles will include women and girls at risk who have suffered severe trauma including gender-based violence and face protection risks related to their gender; survivors of violence and torture who face further traumatization or heightened risk in India; and children with serious protection needs or at heightened risk of abuse, exploitation, or prolonged or indefinite detention.

In **Indonesia**, UNHCR has determined that **2,500 refugees**, the majority of whom are from Afghanistan, are projected to be in need of resettlement in 2025. These include the following profiles: refugees with specific protection needs or serious physical and mental health conditions; women and girls at risk; single parents with underage children; unaccompanied and separated children; the elderly; LGBTIQ+ refugees; and persons with immediate relatives in third countries where family reunification options are not available. Additionally, refugees living in a protracted situation is also one of the groups identified in need of resettlement, given the heightened risk associated with the prolonged stay and limitations to local integration. In addition to specific needs and vulnerabilities, refugees in Indonesia may be identified for resettlement due to heightened protection risks in the country of asylum, such as refugees who face xenophobia and discrimination due to their specific race and religion, resulting in threats to their physical safety.



*Rohingya refugee, Jannatara, with her baby Shukutara at a temporary shelter in Banda Aceh, Aceh, Indonesia. © UNHCR/Amanda Jufrian*

With the increase in Rohingya boat disembarkations in late 2023, the exacerbated anti-refugee sentiment targeting Rohingya has also impacted the wider refugee population and created a higher risk of physical harm. Homelessness and high levels of stress, anxiety and frustration are common amongst refugees in Indonesia, as are medical and mental health needs. Single refugee women and girls face additional economic and security challenges in Indonesia and the lack of effective familial protection can put single women at even higher risk of discrimination, violence, and possible abuse. Unaccompanied children continue to be at risk due to limited access to national child protection systems and shelters.

In **Iran, 363,600 refugees** or those in a refugee-like situation are projected to be in need of resettlement in 2025. The vast majority are from Afghanistan, with a small number of refugees from Iraq also projected to have resettlement needs. Refugee women and girls will be prioritized for resettlement as they are particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation in Iran. Many are forced to stay in abusive relationships to preserve their families' honour or enter in temporary relationships for survival. Widows and divorced women without effective male support struggle to sustain themselves and their families and are forced to resort to negative coping mechanisms. Child labour and withdrawal from school are common due to the deteriorating economic situation, as many can no longer afford transportation or basic costs to keep children in school. Amongst new arrivals, many women and girls experienced gender-based violence prior or during flight and those who had remained under Taliban rule had commonly experienced or witnessed violence in Afghanistan.

Yet, they are only allowed to temporarily stay in Iran and lack a safe and stable environment to recover from their trauma. Same-sex sexual activity is criminalized in Iran, therefore LGBTIQ+ individuals are generally not accepted in Iranian or Afghan communities and are at risk of marginalization, harassment or even killing, resulting in the need for resettlement.

In **Malaysia**, it is estimated that **23,900 refugees** will be in need of resettlement in 2025, with 83 per cent of the needs estimated for those originating from Myanmar. Other groups with resettlement needs include refugees from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen, among other countries of origin. Refugees and asylum-seekers in Malaysia are regarded as “illegal immigrants” and are at risk of arrest, detention and deportation. UNHCR’s access to immigration detention centres to assess the international protection needs of asylum-seekers continues to be impeded. As such, vulnerable individuals, including children, are subjected to prolonged detention and at high risk of deportation. Refugees remain unable to work legally and have limited access to quality education, health care, and social protection services. Given the situations in Myanmar and Afghanistan, voluntary repatriation remains an option for a small number of refugees from other countries. Within this context, resettlement remains a critical protection tool for refugees in Malaysia, particularly those with heightened protection needs and/or requiring imminent solutions, taking into account the specific protection needs and vulnerabilities of families.

In **Pakistan**, UNHCR estimates that approximately **178,200 refugees** and asylum-seekers, almost all from Afghanistan, may be in need of resettlement in 2025. Individuals with heightened needs are those living with medical conditions or disabilities that may not be easily treatable or who lack access to national specialized service providers. Persons with disabilities are often isolated and stigmatized and do not have access to adequate services. There is also a significant number of children at risk, including those who work daily to support their families and therefore cannot attend school. Often this work exposes them to exploitation and physical risks and impedes their cognitive and emotional development. Additionally, there are high numbers of women at risk and/or single parent households that lack adequate protection and the means to support themselves. Female-headed households are particularly vulnerable and struggle to be self-reliant given the overall protection environment, lack of access to the formal labour market and limited family or community support. Gender-based violence is largely under-reported due to social norms, cultural stigma and the lack of an effective complaint mechanism. Female survivors who do report are often placed in safe houses to avoid retaliation from alleged perpetrators or the wider community. Despite some legal mechanisms related to the protection of transgender individuals, refugees with diverse SOGIESC are often discriminated against and marginalized within their communities. Given the overall development status and socio-economic situation in Pakistan, many refugees face challenges becoming self-reliant. For those that are the most vulnerable, protection risks are exacerbated by poverty and limited non-exploitative livelihoods opportunities.

In **Thailand**, it is estimated that **82,500 refugees**, mainly from Myanmar, will be in need of resettlement in 2025. This reflects the entire verified population of primarily Karen, Karenni and Burmese refugees from Myanmar living in camps along the Thai Myanmar border (approximately 82,000 individuals) due to their prolonged stay in the country and the lack of solutions options for this population as well as a small percentage of the urban refugee population.

Refugees with specific needs and heightened protection concerns will be prioritized for resettlement, with special attention paid to survivors of violence and/or torture, women and girls at risk, LGBTIQ+ profiles, unaccompanied and separated children and refugees in prolonged detention at immigration detention centres and/or at heightened risk of refoulement.

## Regional highlights, achievements and challenges in 2023

Third country solutions for refugees in Asia and the Pacific were significantly expanded in 2023, including through strengthened resettlement programmes for the most vulnerable refugees living in protracted situations in the region's largest host countries: **Bangladesh, Malaysia, Thailand, Iran and Pakistan**. In 2023 UNHCR submitted over 39,600 refugees for resettlement consideration, surpassing targets that had been allocated to the region and marking a significant increase from 2022 when some 21,300 refugees were submitted for resettlement and from prior years where UNHCR averaged about 5,000 submissions per year from the region. Resettlement departures from Asia and the Pacific also significantly increased in 2023 to more than 12,900 from 5,700 in 2022.

Resettlement programmes benefitting Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran continued to grow in 2023 with increased commitments and efforts to address the high needs of this population following the de-stabilizing events in 2021 and continued uncertainty in Afghanistan. Resettlement departures from Pakistan were disrupted in 2023 when the Government dissolved the exit permit mechanism established in 2005 which had exempted refugees departing on resettlement from fines related to overstaying their visa or irregular entry. All foreigners without valid Pakistani visas, including refugees, departing to a third country would be subject to exit-related fines. Advocacy to reinstate a free-of-charge exit permit mechanism for refugees is ongoing.

Similarly, resettlement for those most in need amongst the one million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, which resumed in 2022 following the suspension of this programme in 2010, grew significantly resulting in more than 20,000 Rohingya refugees submitted for resettlement in 2023 from the region. In addition, following the approval of large-scale group resettlement processing for primarily ethnic minority groups from Myanmar hosted in Thailand for decades in camps along the border area, more than 4,000 refugees from Myanmar were submitted for resettlement from Thailand. As resettlement opportunities opened up from these countries, resettlement teams have been strengthened and capacitated, case processing modalities are well established, and supporting systems to enable the processing of resettlement cases have been put in place.

In addition to utilizing the quotas allocated to country operations, UNHCR at both bureau and operation level utilized unallocated dossier submissions as well as discreet complementary pathways to provide solutions for individuals experiencing heightened and acute protection risks, individuals with sensitive profiles as well as those seeking assistance in countries without a UNHCR presence. Resettlement and complementary pathways continue to provide forcibly displaced and stateless persons in Asia essential and life-saving solutions, as well opportunities to use their education, skills, and experiences to benefit their families and their new communities.



UNHCR welcomed the important commitments from countries within Asia and the Pacific region on resettlement and complementary pathways made at the 2023 GRF, which will support increased opportunities for forcibly displaced and stateless persons in the region to access third country solutions. These included commitments from several stakeholders to support third country solutions under the Rohingya Situation Multistakeholder Pledge, demonstrating the comprehensive approach that links third country solutions to enhanced work on resilience.

## Perspectives: | India

### **Holding on to her belief in humanity: the story of an Afghan women's rights activist**

Samira was only 10 years old when she decided that she would get herself educated despite all hurdles. After school, she pursued law as she was inspired by the women lawyers who were fighting to give young Afghan girls like her a better chance in this world. The legal education she received set her on her journey as a women's rights activist in Afghanistan with the NGO, Intelligent Youth Social and Civil Organization in Kabul.

Already a young mother at the time, she persisted with the support of her family. Along with her colleagues, she led protests for equal opportunities and organized literacy drives to make women self-reliant.

After making significant progress in Kabul, Samira and her colleagues moved to Baghlan province in Afghanistan to help rural women. In Baghlan, new challenges emerged, pushing them to adapt to newer ways. They would always wear a burqa to hide their identities and hold meetings in secret, fearing retaliation. "It was difficult, but we were able to convince families to send their daughters to school, encouraged them to reject child marriage, and allow young women to work," Samira recalls.

"It was a challenging time for us. We were often harassed by men, and sometimes women themselves accused us of misleading them. My family received several threats from local Taliban members calling our work unislamic. But nothing prepared me for what would happen next," says Samira.

One day, while Samira was on her way to intervene and stop a child marriage, she was stabbed in the abdomen by two assailants on a motorbike. Despite being seriously injured, she could not be taken to the hospital due to fear of another attack. This incident prompted Samira to seek asylum elsewhere, fearing for the safety and well-being of her family. Her pursuit for safety led her to India.

By the time Samira reached India she was suffering from depression, anxiety, and insomnia. Her life in India was not any easier. She struggled to find housing, employment, and education for her children. Due to lack of officially recognized legal documentation in India, she found it difficult to access health care services.

After spending five years in India, Samira was considered for resettlement to Canada under its programme for human rights defenders. When Samira was informed that her application was accepted by Canada, she had mixed emotions about starting a new chapter.

Samira and her family reached Canada on 1 December 2023. She attends English classes now with her husband, while her children have already made friends in their school. The support she has received in Canada empowers her to plan for her life in hope of a better future. Samira also feels gratitude and believes that UNHCR's work recognizes the efforts of people like her who put their lives at risk to support others. "We have to help each other as humans; if I stand up for a woman today, someone will surely stand up for my daughter when the time comes," says Samira as she is gearing up towards restarting her activism once again.

*Samira and her family in their new house in Canada. Through resettlement, the family can restart their life in safety (Photo courtesy of Samira)*



### **Nadiyeh and Masoumeh, two Afghan sisters looking forward to a better life in a new country**

Nadiyeh has a bachelor's degree in English literature. The life of a refugee is not easy, and she always had problems finding a job as an English teacher. She was not able to work in any institute or school in Iran, although she is competent and was interested to teach.

Besides, she is eager to learn architecture, but she never had the opportunity to participate in any training course in Iran due to financial problems and challenges she faced as an Afghan refugee woman.

Her sister Masoumeh trained for 11 years in Kyokushin karate in a private association, and she would like to become a professional athlete. She also dreams of working as a coach. Masoumeh is keen on painting and has a certificate in oil painting. While in Iran, she had received a few painting orders and earned a little money. But she could not pursue her dream to be an accomplished artist due to many challenges related to being an Afghan refugee woman.

UNHCR submitted the two sisters for resettlement, they were accepted by the Italian government under its resettlement programme and they have just arrived in Italy. When they were informed about their positive decision, they were so thrilled! Masoumeh wants to continue painting in Italy and believes that she can further develop her sport and artistic skills in the new country offering her opportunities to grow.

For them this is a great chance to have their dreams come true. With their talents in art and sport, resettlement to Italy can provide them with great opportunities to flourish and acquire new skills.



*Example of Masoumeh's oil paintings (Photo courtesy of Masoumeh)*

# EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA AND GREAT LAKES

The [Regional Bureau for East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes \(EHAGL\)](#) provides strategic direction, oversight, coordination, and dedicated operational support for resettlement activities in the Republic of Burundi (**Burundi**), the Republic of Djibouti (**Djibouti**), the State of Eritrea (**Eritrea**), the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (**Ethiopia**), the Republic of Kenya (**Kenya**), the Republic of Rwanda (**Rwanda**), the Federal Republic of Somalia (**Somalia**), the Republic of South Sudan (**South Sudan**), the Republic of the Sudan (**Sudan**), the United Republic of Tanzania (**Tanzania**), and the Republic of Uganda (**Uganda**).

## Overview of the protection environment in the region

As of February 2024, the EHAGL region hosted more than 5.2 million refugees and asylum-seekers and over 17.5 million internally displaced persons, amounting to 22.7 million people in total. Millions have fled conflict, persecution and human rights violations in Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) as well as floods and droughts exacerbated by climate change. The region continues to deal with multiple protracted displacement crises in parallel to emergency responses, amid difficult political transitions, and insufficient funding for humanitarian assistance and development—despite many positive and refugee-inclusive political commitments by host States. Soaring food and energy prices meanwhile contribute to a prohibitive cost of living, disproportionately affecting forcibly displaced persons.

Climate change increasingly causes displacement as well as the onward movement of people already forcibly displaced for other reasons, and environmental challenges often create or aggravate conflict triggered by food insecurity and competition for water and other natural resources. UNHCR is responding to mixed movements within and from the EHAGL region in all directions: towards West and North Africa and the Mediterranean; eastwards across the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden; and via different routes to Southern Africa. The dynamics and driving factors for these movements, often within the EHAGL region, are many and varied, and include barriers to access family reunification and named sponsorship programmes for admission to third countries, or fair and efficient asylum procedures.

UNHCR continues its close engagement with the African Union and Regional Economic Communities such as the East African Community (EAC) and the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) as well as the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) to promote human mobility and a wider inclusion of forcibly displaced persons in regional and national initiatives for social protection and development. With Somalia becoming a full member of the EAC on 4 March 2024, there is even greater momentum to find local solutions within the region to situations of both new and protracted displacement.



Regional actors play a vital role in supporting comprehensive responses to forced displacement. An [EAC-IGAD Ministerial Meeting in June 2023](#) led to the adoption of the Munyonyo Declaration on Durable Solutions for Refugees in the East and Horn of Africa, with States committing to work together on addressing the drivers of forced displacement while maintaining asylum space in accordance with the rights of refugees. An [IGAD Policy Framework on Refugee Protection](#), endorsed in November 2023, proposes key areas for harmonization at the regional level including responses to the increasing trends of onward movement driven by reduced assistance, conflict and insecurity, climate change, and variations in the accessibility of asylum and durable solutions.

The EHAGL region is characterized by rapidly growing and urbanizing populations, and governments struggle to provide adequate social services and infrastructure. Limitations in health care systems, insufficient resources to deliver education as well as practical barriers to enrolment and regular school attendance, limited employment opportunities, and widespread environmental degradation affect human and economic development. Women and girls face varying levels of gender discrimination, often preventing their participation in decision-making and access to justice, finance, land ownership, and opportunities. In situations of forced displacement, they are at heightened risk of gender-based violence.

*Sudanese refugee, Osman, runs a small business selling ground nuts, dried okra and fresh onions at the Doro refugee camp in Bunj, South Sudan. © UNHCR/Samuel Otieno*





Prima facie recognition of refugee status has often been granted in the region in accordance with Article 1 (2) the 1969 Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, and six countries (Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, and Uganda) have adopted a Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) as envisioned in the [2016 New York Declaration and 2018 Global Compact on Refugees](#). However, national asylum procedures for individual refugee status determination are struggling to keep pace with a rising number of newly displaced people in need of international protection. Political will to recognize refugee status on a prima facie basis for certain caseloads has declined, resulting in long backlogs and delayed access to assistance and solutions, as national asylum systems become increasingly overburdened.

## Resettlement within protection and solutions strategies

The Regional Bureau has adopted a situational approach to advance protection and solutions, with the aim to ensure coherent planning and programming across five key situations: Burundi, Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan, and Sudan, and with reference to cross-cutting considerations arising from a route-based approach and other strategic priorities. Resettlement is also a fundamental component of the [DRC Regional Refugee Response Plan](#) and related planning for Congolese refugees at the country level.

### Burundi Situation

Burundi is one of the most densely populated countries in the region, with 70 per cent of the population living below the poverty line. The effort to rebuild the country is being supported by the international community through debt relief and socioeconomic stabilization programmes. In this spirit, UNHCR has moved from facilitating the voluntary return of Burundian refugees to the promotion of their voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration. Refugees will continue to return to Burundi from the **DRC, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda** and elsewhere with UNHCR assistance and longer-term support from the government and development partners. UNHCR has emphasized the principle of non-refoulement, noting that some Burundian refugees with a continued need for international protection will warrant third country solutions in 2025, including resettlement.

### Ethiopia Situation

In Ethiopia, the Amhara, Oromia, Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella and Western Tigray regions have potential to generate further displacement, aggravated by insecurity, intracommunal tensions, conflict, climate change, and food insecurity affecting the Ethiopian population but also refugees from Eritrea, Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, and Yemen. The preservation of asylum space to receive an influx of Sudanese refugees and other new arrivals from Sudan since April 2023 and the provision of protection and assistance in Ethiopia remain UNHCR priorities, particularly in the context of a route-based approach to mixed movements and forced displacement.



*Aden (left), a refugee from Gedo, Somalia, who fled the conflict in 2009 helps his sister Dhol, with her homework in their shelter at Bokolmayo refugee camp in Bokolmayo, Ethiopia. © UNHCR/Tiksa Negeri*

Regional analysis by UNHCR of onward movement trends involving refugees and asylum-seekers in Ethiopia as well as those transiting through Ethiopia indicate that family separation, lack of timely registration, inconsistent access to fair and efficient national asylum procedures, limited opportunities for third country solutions, and insufficient resources to address humanitarian needs are among the key driving factors. Increased resettlement opportunities for refugees in protracted displacement, especially those most affected by the 2020 conflict and/or multiple experiences of forced displacement, will be critical in 2025 in parallel to making family reunification more practically accessible.

Progress on implementing the CRRF stalled following the conflict in 2020 however UNHCR will build on existing partnerships with the World Bank Group, the African Development Bank Group (AfDB), the European Commission's Directorate-General for International Partnerships (EU-DG INTPA), the Netherlands-funded [PROSPECTS](#) partnership and others to support the inclusion of refugees and their hosts in national systems. UNHCR and partners will work to strengthen urban programming and freedom of movement. Resettlement will have a strategic role in protection and solutions for refugees in camps which may become unviable to maintain in years to come, including locations where the effects of climate change are most acute.

### Somalia Situation

Somalia's admission to the EAC, the lifting of the arms embargo, debt relief, and the development of a security sector roadmap have put the country on a positive trajectory. However, climate change, ongoing conflict, and food insecurity remain significant challenges. Violence continues in Laascaanood and surrounding areas, which saw the rapid, large-scale displacement of Somali civilians to Ethiopia in February 2023. Al-Shabab remains a threat to peace and stability, although in locations where the Federal Government exercises control there are opportunities to pursue solutions for Somali returnees and internally displaced persons.

In 2025, UNHCR will catalyse support from the international community, including development actors and private sector entities, to help the government implement its policies in a way that tangibly improves people's lives through investments in education, vocational skills, and diversified livelihoods. Conditions are not yet conducive for the majority of Somali refugees hosted in neighbouring countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya, Yemen, Uganda, and Djibouti to return home, however, and resettlement will consequently remain an important durable solution for this population.

### South Sudan Situation

With over 2.2 million South Sudanese refugees in neighbouring countries, predominantly **Uganda, Ethiopia, and Kenya**, and two million internally displaced as of 29 February 2024, the country is caught in a web of fragile governance and security, economic stagnation, and instability. Extreme levels of acute food insecurity persist, and incidents of violence as well as major flooding and heat waves exacerbate a dire situation. Despite these challenges, over 527,000 South Sudanese refugees returned in self-organized movements in 2023, the majority from Sudan in particularly adverse conditions.

In South Sudan, collective efforts will focus on creating the enabling conditions for solutions, wherever and whenever possible. UNHCR will enhance coordination between humanitarian and development actors to seek durable solutions and avoid further displacement, using area-based approaches. UNHCR will invest in quality returns monitoring and cross-border coordination on data to inform the response, with a focus on building the self-reliance and resilience of South Sudanese refugees, returnees, and their host communities. Given the scale of forced displacement, however, and challenges to effectively meet humanitarian needs, the resettlement of South Sudanese refugees remains a strategic priority for UNHCR.

### Sudan Situation

As of 17 March 2024, an estimated 8.4 million people had been forcibly displaced since the onset of fighting between the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in April 2023. While most remain in Sudan, over 1.7 million have crossed into neighbouring countries such as **Chad, South Sudan, Egypt, and Ethiopia**, among many other countries. These movements comprise Sudanese nationals as well as South Sudanese, Eritreans, Ethiopians and other foreign nationals previously residing in Sudan including refugees and asylum-seekers.

Besides widespread threats to the protection of civilians in Sudan, including gender-based violence, human trafficking, and other human rights violations often with an ethnic dimension and targeting communities among the refugee population in Sudan as well as Sudanese civilians, UNHCR and partners are struggling to generate adequate funding for the humanitarian response including food assistance, owing to disruptions to trade and agricultural activities. The war has also damaged water supplies and critical infrastructure for fuel, energy and telecommunications, while destroying most health care facilities and interrupting the education of millions of children.

With hundreds of thousands of Sudanese refugees already forcibly displaced prior to April 2023, the resettlement of those in a protracted situation facing heightened protection risks and increasingly the resettlement of new arrivals from Sudan including Sudanese, Eritrean, Ethiopian, South Sudanese, and other refugees will represent an important opportunity to show solidarity and share responsibility with States which have kept their borders open.

### THE EMERGENCY TRANSIT MECHANISM (ETM) IN RWANDA

The ETM provides life-saving interventions to evacuees from Libya who have been exposed to a range of egregious human rights violations, including torture, witnessing extra-judicial executions, rape, slavery, extortion, and other forms of exploitation as well as illegal imprisonment. Prior to evacuation from Libya, many refugees had experienced arbitrary

detention. Since the establishment of the Rwanda ETM in September 2019 until the end of March 2024, a total of 2,242 refugees and asylum-seekers have been evacuated from Libya on a voluntary basis to the Rwanda ETM and 1,623 have departed to resettlement countries.

## Projected resettlement needs in the region in 2025

UNHCR estimates that **601,300 refugees** located across eight of the 11 countries in the EHAGL region will need resettlement in 2025, an increase of 6 per cent compared to 2024 (559,791). This estimate does not include refugees hosted in Djibouti and Eritrea, where refugees may be identified and prioritized for resettlement on the basis of specific protection needs and submitted under the unallocated quotas provided by some few States. It also excludes refugees in Sudan, where new submissions have been necessarily suspended since 15 April 2023 while UNHCR, IOM, and resettlement States work to establish safe arrangements for post-submission processing; movements within Sudan; and departure to third countries for cases already advanced in the resettlement process. UNHCR is unable to quantify the resettlement needs in Sudan in 2025; overall population figures are extremely fluid due to the scale and unpredictable dynamics of the ongoing conflict, large numbers of South Sudanese returning in adverse conditions from Sudan to South Sudan and the rapid pace of displacement.



In 2025, refugee resettlement needs are anticipated to remain high in the EHAGL region. Countries throughout the region are facing growing pressure prompted by new forced displacement, climate change and economic shocks. Needs are driven by ongoing, protracted and complex conflicts in countries of origin against the backdrop of a sharp rise of instability and dwindling resources in many host countries which inhibit the effective implementation of sustainable, comprehensive solutions.

In **Burundi**, UNHCR estimates that approximately **19,300 refugees** will be in need of resettlement, the greatest majority of whom are from the DRC. This includes refugees facing protection concerns related to gender-based violence, severe symptoms of trauma and serious medical needs which cannot be treated in Burundi as well as refugees who are legally and/or physically at risk as a result of their sexual orientation or diverse gender identity.

In 2025, the greatest resettlement needs in the region are assessed to be in **Ethiopia**, with **265,500 refugees** expected to be in need, mostly from South Sudan, Sudan, Somalia and Eritrea. This includes refugees who faced displacement after their flight, within Ethiopia, due to the conflict in the country and are therefore legally and physically particularly at risk to harm such as human trafficking and/or have experienced severe violence in the country of asylum. In this context, survivors of violence and/or torture, women and girls at risk and persons with legal and/or physical protection needs will be prioritized for resettlement.

UNHCR anticipates that about **66,200 refugees in Kenya** will need resettlement, primarily from Somalia, South Sudan, the DRC, Ethiopia and Burundi. This includes urban and camp refugee populations residing in Dadaab, Kakuma, Kalobeyei, Nairobi and other locations, including women at risk, unaccompanied and separated children, survivors of violence and/or torture and people with disabilities, among other groups with specific needs.

*Evariste from Burundi came to Kakuma, Kenya in 2017. In response to some of the challenges he found in the camp, he formed a group to collect plastic and sell it as a way of earning money. © UNHCR/Charity Nzomo*





UNHCR notes the heightened resettlement needs of some LGBTIQ+ refugees. The protracted displacement of many refugees in Kenya, with some having sought international protection as long as 30 years ago, is also an important factor in the assessment of resettlement needs.

In **Rwanda**, UNHCR determined that **26,800 refugees** will be in need of resettlement, mainly Congolese refugees with specific needs and in protracted displacement, including a significant number of female-headed households, survivors of sexual abuse, violence and torture, and unaccompanied or separated children. UNHCR will also consider for resettlement a smaller number of Burundian refugees with specific needs who have refugee claims linked to their political opinions, notwithstanding the promotion of returns to Burundi for a majority of the refugee population.

UNHCR also estimates that **200 refugees** in **Somalia** will need resettlement in 2025, mainly from Ethiopia and Yemen.

UNHCR projects that about **40,000 refugees** in **South Sudan** will need resettlement, most of whom originate from Sudan and the DRC and present specific risks and vulnerabilities, such as survivors of gender-based violence, persons with diverse sexual orientation or gender identity and victims of trafficking. Access to justice remains challenging in South Sudan, while limited livelihood and self-reliance opportunities and the forced recruitment and abduction of children also contribute to resettlement needs.

In **Tanzania**, projected resettlement needs are expected to be **23,000**, primarily from the DRC, as well as Burundian refugees who are in continued need of international protection and have particular protection needs such as children and adolescents at risk or LGBTIQ+ refugees. UNHCR will continue to consider refugees from the DRC with a lack of foreseeable alternative durable solutions under a group-based methodology as well as on an individual basis when they are particularly vulnerable and/or face serious protection risks.

UNHCR estimates that **160,300 refugees** in **Uganda** will be in need of resettlement in 2025. The generous protection space in Uganda has been stretched by a constant influx of new arrivals, including the onward movement of many refugees and asylum-seekers previously hosted in Sudan and limited resources, which have had implications for livelihood opportunities and contributed to protection risks arising from socioeconomic destitution. Refugees' flight to Uganda from the DRC, Sudan and South Sudan is often characterized by mass violence; refugees arrive exhibiting visible, and often invisible, physical and psychosocial effects of conflict. Gender-based violence continues to pose a threat particularly to women, girls, and refugees with diverse sexual orientation or gender identity. In this context, refugees with experiences related to trauma, torture and violence, disabilities and unmet medical needs as well as children at risk are in particular need of resettlement.

UNHCR will continue to promote fair and equitable access to resettlement based on objective needs and protection priorities in recognition of the diversity of refugee communities with non-discriminatory and broadly inclusive selection criteria.



*Alice, a Congolese refugee, fled her home in 2012 and has been living in Kigeme refugee camp ever since. In April 2022, she received a grant of \$800 from World Vision as part of the Poverty Alleviation Coalition (PAC) project in Rwanda. © UNHCR/Lilly Carlisle*

## Regional highlights, achievements and challenges in 2023

In 2023, UNHCR resettlement submissions from the EHAGL region to 13 different countries offered real hope for a durable solution and protection to 35,754 refugees in total, including 24,645 Congolese refugees from the DRC. Resettlement submissions in 2023 were the highest in decades for the region. Total departures through UNHCR programmes in the EHAGL region saw 27,993 refugees resettled in 2023, of whom 23,443 were Congolese refugees from the DRC. The number of resettlement departures in 2023 more than doubled in comparison to 2022 (13,347).

Exit permits for resettlement departures in some locations and in certain circumstances presented challenges in 2023, although more so for third country solutions outside of UNHCR resettlement programmes, notably named sponsorship pathways.

While the growth in complementary pathways for admission to third countries is encouraging, in step with the [Third Country Solutions for Refugees: Roadmap 2030](#), their success and sustainability will depend on consultation with actors directly involved in Refugee Response Plans at the country level as well as host States.

## Perspectives: | Ethiopia

### Eritrean refugees who fled from Sudan get a chance for a new life in Canada

December 15, 2023. Anticipation, and excitement was visible on the faces of some Eritrean refugees at the Gondar Airport enroute to a fresh start in Canada through Addis Ababa. Their plight has been enormous as these refugees on secondary displacement finally found hope after much despair.

“I still feel like I am dreaming,” said Sara. For many years, 23-year-old Sara has been a refugee and in the pursuit of family reunification to join her family in Canada. “I already had my flight ticket bound for Canada in April 2023 when the war started in Khartoum. Flights were suspended, movements were almost impossible, and I could not travel as planned. I had no other option than to flee to Ethiopia. I thought all hope was lost for me.”

The war in Sudan has led not only Sudanese into forced displacement but has also pushed refugees from other countries like Eritrea and South Sudan, into secondary displacement. The recent conflict outbreak in Sudan saw many dashed hopes for these refugees who were in the resettlement, family reunification and other complementary pathway processes.

Like Sara, Filmon and his family of six are also part of the refugees heading to Canada. After seven years in Sudan as a refugee, and eight months in Metema, Ethiopia, he finally gets a lifeline for a better life. “I see myself going back to school and getting a regular job in Canada” he says.

Their story reflects the lives of thousands of Eritrean refugees who had fled Eritrea for safety in Sudan. 224 Eritrean refugees with pending resettlement processes initiated in Sudan found a durable solution in Canada.

Resettlement and complementary pathways remain one of the most viable solutions and offer a path to safety.

While 224 Eritrean refugees have been lucky to get this opportunity, more than 2,000 Eritreans were recorded in Metema with pending resettlement cases and in need of a solution.

### **Child protection in resettlement: a beacon of hope for a brighter future**

Nyarugusu refugee camp is situated in Kasulu district, Kigoma region, northwestern Tanzania, hosting refugees mainly from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi. This is where I am based and supporting unaccompanied and separated children as a Child Protection Associate. I conduct Best Interests Determination (BID) and Best Interests Assessment (BIA) reports for these children to facilitate their resettlement process to third countries with their caregivers. Preparing these reports involves traveling to the camp, interviewing the children and their caregivers to gather their views, conducting home visits, and participating in inter-agency BID expert panel meetings where the reports are deliberated and recommendations are made in the best-interests of the children.

Working with unaccompanied and separated children in resettlement is both rewarding and a privilege. Children in Nyarugusu refugee camp are confronted with a myriad of challenges from limited opportunities to access tertiary education to inadequate access to menstrual hygiene material for girls.

It is because of such limited opportunities that children are lured into child labour, child pregnancies, and early marriages. Children express their fear of returning to their war-torn countries of origin, even though some of them have never set foot on their homeland's soil, having been in a protracted refugee situation since birth.

The most encouraging and uplifting part of my work is seeing that these children still have dreams and ambitions despite their plight and are holding on to them hoping that resettlement will grant them an opportunity for a better-quality education and a better future. Even those who have dropped out of school or become mothers or fathers are eager to re-enrol in school once resettled. Resettlement provides unaccompanied and separated children with a safe haven and an opportunity to restart their lives anew.

According to a 17-year-old Congolese expectant child, life is very hard in the camp, with decreasing food rations. The man who was responsible for her pregnancy ceased all communication with her after she informed him about her situation. She has had to drop out of school and is worried about the dwindling food assistance and about her future and that of her unborn child.

Central to my work is a simple, yet profound realization that I am in a position to make a difference in the lives of the unaccompanied and separated children in Nyarugusu refugee camp. Through resettlement, I take part in positively impacting the lives of many children in situations similar to that of Neema and joining them in their journey to restore their hope from a situation of despair.





*Sophia, Child Protection Associate at UNHCR Tanzania, in a counselling session with refugees in the Nyarugusu refugee camp. © UNHCR Tanzania*

And yes, I do it with so much pride, determination, and unwavering commitment; drawing strength from their resilience and adaptability. As I delve deeper into the realm of child protection, I am constantly reminded that my journey working with unaccompanied and separated children is nothing short of transformative and impactful.

**Sophia Majura**  
Child Protection Associate



# EUROPE

The Regional Bureau for Europe provides oversight, coordination, and support for resettlement activities in The Republic of Türkiye (**Türkiye**).

## Overview of the protection environment in the region

In 2023, the situation in Ukraine was still the source of massive population displacement in Europe. As of early 2024, there were 5.9 million Ukrainian refugees in various neighbouring host countries and some 3.7 million internally displaced persons within the country. The temporary protection regime established by the European Union (EU) in favour of the Ukrainian refugee population as of March 2022 has ensured effective and swift protection of this refugee population. Temporary protection has been renewed since then, but alternative protection arrangements are being discussed by EU Member States and institutions. In 2023, the number of asylum-seekers in the EU region reached some 1.1 million persons, compared with 966,107 in 2022. Asylum-seekers come mostly from Syria and Afghanistan. Applications were mostly made in Germany, France, and Spain.

The increased number of asylum applications and challenges faced by most countries, including as regards reception, access to services and asylum procedures, have reinforced previous tendencies. In 2023, to prevent mixed movements, some European countries have maintained strict control of their borders, whereas a few EU members states have also reintroduced internal border controls within the Schengen area. Negative public narratives regarding arrival and reception of asylum-seekers have remained prevalent in some countries, and the development of externalization initiatives has continued.

The route-based approach, of which resettlement is a key component, supports States in better managing the challenges that arrivals of mixed movements pose. As Europe is a major destination of refugees who, along migrants, engage in dangerous journeys which for instance begin in East and Western Africa, resettlement offers a viable alternative to such irregular mixed movements.

### Türkiye

Türkiye continues to be the country hosting the largest refugee population in the world with approximately 3.5 million refugees and asylum-seekers, mainly from Syria as well as Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, and other countries.

Türkiye maintains temporary protection for Syrians, in view of the prevailing situation in Syria. While voluntary returns have been taking place, large-scale movements can still not be envisaged as Syrians remain in need of international protection. Asylum applications made by asylum-seekers from other countries are assessed through a national refugee status determination procedure since September 2018.



*In Türkiye, Syrian earthquake survivor Hassan in front of rubbles. © UNHCR/Can Bildik*

Applicants originating from outside Europe are granted “conditional” refugee status and may remain in Türkiye legally pending the identification of a durable solution outside of the country. This situation stems from the geographic limitation that Türkiye maintained in ratifying the 1951 Refugee Convention and results in limited access to local solutions.

Economic challenges have negatively impacted the condition of all the population in Türkiye, including that of refugees and asylum-seekers, who were also affected by the earthquakes of early 2023. These earthquakes affected the lives of approximately 4 million Turkish nationals and 1.75 million refugees. Massive damage occurred, particularly in the shelter sector. The national and regional environment led to increased onward movements of refugees towards Europe and reliance on harmful coping mechanisms.

### **South-eastern Europe**

The subregion was still characterized by mixed movement flows which have strained the reception capacities and asylum systems of some of the concerned countries. Destination and transit countries affected by these mixed movement flows have introduced internal border control measures, visa requirements to align with EU policies and further development cooperation with neighbouring countries with a view to responding to the situation.

## Ukraine Situation

The war in Ukraine that erupted on 24 February 2022 followed eight years of conflict in eastern Ukraine, which left millions of people in need of humanitarian assistance. As of early 2024, over 3.6 million people remained internally displaced within Ukraine and 5.9 million refugees from Ukraine were recorded across Europe. For those in need of humanitarian assistance inside Ukraine, the delivery of life-saving aid has been challenging due to the lack of safe and predictable humanitarian access in areas with ongoing fighting. In March 2022, the European Union triggered the [Temporary Protection Directive](#) for the first time since its adoption in 2001. This measure provided immediate protection and socioeconomic inclusion for refugees, including access to accommodation, to the labour market, and to social and health care services.

## Resettlement within protection and solutions strategies

**Türkiye's** refugee response remains based on a comprehensive legal framework backed by a policy of inclusion and harmonization in which the Government of Türkiye includes refugees and asylum-seekers in services provided by public systems at national, provincial, and local levels. Over the years, various ministries have taken steps to adapt their administrative and regulatory frameworks and enhanced their capacity in key services, such as health, education, and social services. However, due to the scale of the population, which is dispersed across the country, there are challenges regarding coherent practical implementation across the local contexts, support capacities, and practices in the 81 provinces.

The legal framework also forms the basis of UNHCR's and other agencies' work in Türkiye, aimed at supporting the Government to implement the framework effectively and coherently across all provinces. UN agencies and NGOs work to enhance the response capacity of the authorities and address gaps, serving both refugees and the host communities. This is done through the [Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan \(3RP\)](#), which is a platform for strategic consultations, coordination, and fundraising, along with a monitoring and evaluation framework. Concerted efforts to support refugees and their hosts, including through broader partnership (private sector, academics, municipalities, international financial institutions), are also undertaken in the spirit of the GCR.

Resettlement remains essential to preserve the asylum and protection space in Türkiye as well as a key responsibility-sharing mechanism that eases the strain on Türkiye's infrastructure and resources, which is needed now more than ever in view of the 2023 earthquakes. UNHCR is therefore also focusing its attention on resettlement of earthquake-affected refugees, which include refugees with disabilities resulting from the earthquakes, refugees suffering from chronic health problems who cannot receive treatment due to the impact on the health care system in Türkiye, and other refugees whose lives have been severely affected by the earthquakes.

## Projected resettlement needs in the region in 2025

UNHCR estimates that in 2025 **350,600 refugees** are projected to be in need of resettlement in **Türkiye**. The vast majority are from Syria, followed by Afghanistan and Iraq.

In addition to survivors of the earthquakes, other refugee groups in need of resettlement include children and adolescents at risk, as many refugee children in Türkiye are out of school, engaging in child labour (often hazardous) or at risk of early marriage as a result of the socioeconomic vulnerability of their families; refugees with legal and physical protection needs, such as individuals or families who face discrimination or physical threats because of their profile or personal circumstances; refugees who have experienced serious trauma involving physical and/or psychological harm in countries of origin affected by conflict; and refugees suffering from serious medical conditions or living with disabilities who may require medical intervention or specialized support, which is either not available in Türkiye or too costly for refugees to access.

*Ali and his wife Zahida attend Spanish language classes at a Refugee Reception Centre, in Seville, southern Spain, after having been resettled from Türkiye. The classes are free and form a vital part of their integration process in Spain. © UNHCR/Marc Rovira*



## Regional highlights, achievements and challenges in 2023

In 2023, the **Türkiye** operation made the highest number of resettlement submissions globally, totaling 16,802 individuals. During the year, 13,827 persons departed on resettlement from Türkiye.

In line with the [Third Country Solutions for Refugees: Roadmap 2030](#), UNHCR called on EU Member States to welcome at least 40,000 refugees through resettlement in 2023. In addition, UNHCR also called on EU Member States to resettle 8,500 Afghan refugees, in accordance with the call to consider 42,500 Afghan refugees over the next five years. Despite recognition of the need, EU Member States committed to resettle 15,897 persons in 2023. In addition, EU Member States pledged to receive 13,260 persons under the humanitarian admission scheme.

By end of 2023, 12,355 refugees were resettled to 15 European countries. The Ukraine crisis, which started in February 2022 and led to the arrival of a high proportion of refugees from Ukraine in the Europe region, partially explains the lower number of resettlement arrivals compared to countries' commitments. The Ukraine crisis has had lasting effects on the reception capacity in Europe, in particular in the area of housing, and was cited in the decision of a few European countries to suspend their resettlement programmes or slow down arrivals.



# MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

The [Regional Bureau for the Middle East and North Africa \(MENA\)](#) provides oversight, coordination, and support for resettlement and complementary pathways in the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria (**Algeria**), the Kingdom of Bahrain (**Bahrain**), the Arab Republic of Egypt (**Egypt**), the Republic of Iraq (**Iraq**), the State of Israel (**Israel**), the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (**Jordan**), the State of Kuwait (**Kuwait**), the Lebanese Republic (**Lebanon**), the State of Libya (**Libya**), the Islamic Republic of Mauritania (**Mauritania**), the Kingdom of Morocco (**Morocco**), the Sultanate of Oman (**Oman**), the State of Qatar (**Qatar**), the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (**Saudi Arabia**), the Syrian Arab Republic (**Syria**), the Republic of Tunisia (**Tunisia**), the United Arab Emirates and the Republic of Yemen (**Yemen**). The MENA Bureau also maintains functional oversight of the Republic of Türkiye (**Türkiye**) operation for the Iraq and Syria regional responses.

## Overview of the protection environment in the region

The MENA region remains characterized by sustained and significant forced displacement, comprising new and protracted refugee and internally displaced person populations, in the context of challenging political and security environments.

Globally, countries have been affected by an economic slowdown, high food and energy prices and a tightening of financial conditions, including high inflation. The MENA region has not been immune to this, with many countries facing significant economic and social distress. For many countries in the region, the governance, security, and economy are not stable nor resilient to these changes, placing significant strain on authorities and populations. Across the region, this has fostered greater opposition to foreign elements, including refugees and asylum-seekers, for example in Lebanon and Tunisia.

The limited State-based protection that was available to forcibly displaced and stateless persons has been shrinking. Across the region, there is a lack of functioning national asylum systems and limited national refugee or asylum legislations, policies or procedures. In this vacuum, under its mandate, UNHCR is conducting registration, refugee status determination and, in most countries, issuing documentation. Inclusion of refugees and asylum-seekers in national services and systems is limited, and UNHCR is not able to comprehensively fill the protection gaps. This leaves the forcibly displaced across the region—for the most part—highly vulnerable and in need of third country solutions.

2023 marked a significant deterioration in the protection space for many countries across the MENA region, increasing the needs and number of refugees requiring third country solutions. As operations across the region advocate for greater protection space, respect for the principle of non-refoulement and international protection for refugees all along their routes, significant and reliable resettlement quotas and increased access to complementary pathways will be critical to leveraging change from host countries in MENA.



*Ibrahim leaves Libya and looks forward to build a new future together with his family. © UNHCR/Ziyad Alhamadi*

### The Mediterranean Situation

The Mediterranean Situation expands across the West, Central and North African continent; for the MENA region it includes Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt.

The shrinking protection space is ever so apparent across the countries in **North Africa**. Significantly marked by being both destination and transit countries and due to new or continuing conflicts in neighbouring regions, the North African countries saw high numbers of people in need of international protection entering their territories. In 2023, 208,000 newly arrived asylum-seekers were registered by UNHCR in the North Africa region (75 per cent of whom are Sudanese, mostly registered in Egypt) which however only represents a fraction of those who arrived.

Low-middle income countries, such as **Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco**, have been hit hard by high energy prices while they are facing difficulties to manage a rising number of arrivals. While Algeria and Libya were buffered from high energy prices, increased arrivals of both refugees and migrants had a serious impact. Foreigners across these locations, including refugees and asylum-seekers, were used as scapegoats in response to the deteriorating economic situation.

In response to these large numbers of arrivals, States in North Africa have imposed new restrictions on access to their territory and saw an increase of arbitrary arrests, evictions and detentions by which refugees and asylum-seekers are particularly targeted as well as instances of deportations. In 2023, the Government of **Egypt** imposed restrictions on the entry of Sudanese nationals, while an increase of deportations was seen in **Algeria, Libya and Tunisia**, and refugees and asylum-seekers in **Libya** continued to face movement restrictions and/or refoulement. While in the past UNHCR documentation was a means of protection from expulsions, there were recorded instances of refugees and asylum-seekers holding UNHCR documentation being deported.

In this context, foreigners, including refugees and asylum-seekers, are often the target of blame and xenophobia, being held responsible for a deteriorating economic situation. Refugees and asylum-seekers in **Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and Algeria** are facing greater discrimination, racial vilification and violence.

Refugees and asylum-seekers in the region are increasingly struggling to meet their basic needs. In **Egypt**, UNHCR estimates that approximately 59 per cent of refugees and asylum-seekers live below the national poverty line. Approximately 78 per cent of the refugees and asylum-seekers receiving cash assistance from UNHCR in Egypt need to complement this assistance, often having recourse to harmful coping strategies such as borrowing money, moving to lower quality shelters or reducing the number of meals per day.

Refugees moving alongside migrants into North Africa are particularly at risk of human rights abuses and vulnerable to abuse, violence including gender-based violence, detention and exploitation which often result in severe trauma. This includes, for example, women, girls and individuals with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and/or sex characteristics (SOGIESC) arriving in **Tunisia** who have faced rape along their diverse journeys to Tunisia, and men and boys who are victims of forced labour.

For most refugee populations in **Egypt, Algeria, Libya and Tunisia**, there are persistent barriers to access to national services. Refugees in **Morocco**, and some nationalities in **Algeria** and Egypt (Syrians in particular), have had some space for accessing national services, however the current situation also impedes these refugees' and asylum-seekers' access. For example, in Morocco, xenophobia, discrimination and language barriers are limiting refugees' access to some basic services. In Algeria, Syrian, Palestinian and Yemeni refugees, previously benefiting from a more favourable protection situation, are increasingly facing new barriers to accessing their rights and fulfilling their basic needs.

Faced with an increasingly precarious protection environment across North Africa, many refugees and asylum-seekers continue to choose to move onwards along the Mediterranean route and towards Europe. In 2023 alone, approximately 1,900 refugees and migrants died along the Central Mediterranean route, about half of whom died during sea crossings from Tunisia.

## Syria Situation

Thirteen years since the outbreak of the Syrian armed conflict, the **Syria Situation** remains the largest displacement situation in the world with over 5.6 million Syrian refugees registered in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Türkiye. UNHCR and partners continue to work in an environment where long-term solutions for Syrian refugees remain extremely limited. Across the Syria response countries, the lives of refugees and those in host communities have become more challenging, exacerbated by high inflation rates and limited access to social services and economic opportunities as well as by new and existing crises in the region. The armed conflict in Gaza has impact across the region, particularly in Lebanon where over 80,000 persons have been internally displaced as of the end of February 2024.

Syrian refugee-hosting countries have shown incredible hospitality for over a decade. Yet they are suffering from layers of crises which have led in some countries to an increasingly challenging protection environment with heightened negative sentiments towards refugees and worrisome pressures leading to involuntary returns to Syria. At the same time, international support for Syrian refugee-hosting countries is declining.

Consequently, the protection space for Syrians is deteriorating. During 2023, the Government of **Lebanon** increasingly applied restrictive measures against Syrian refugees, impacting their access to labour and accommodation as well as limiting their movements, while detention and deportations increased. In **Iraq**, while positive steps have been taken in the development of a national asylum law, in Federal Iraq, Syrians who arrived after 2019 are considered ineligible for refugee status and are therefore at risk of detention and deportation. In **Jordan**, refugees who arrived after 2019 also continue to face constraints in accessing international protection.

*In Lebanon, young boys and girls at the informal refugee settlement gathered up outside their tents enjoying their time and smiling at the camera. © UNHCR/Nour Tarabay*





It is estimated that nine out of ten Syrian refugees face difficulties in meeting their basic needs. In **Lebanon**, four out of five refugees cannot afford electrical expenses. Accumulated debt among refugee families has risen fourfold during 2023, and constantly increasing rental costs result in growing numbers of evictions, exposing refugees to exploitation, abuse and homelessness. In this context, refugees are reporting much higher levels of anxiety and stress across the country. The prevalence and impact of harmful coping mechanisms have been particularly striking among children, persons with diverse SOGIESC and women. Regular vulnerability assessments conducted by UNHCR in **Jordan** testify to the growing destitution among refugees who increasingly face challenges in terms of health, shelter, food security, debt levels, income, child labour and gender inequities.

This context is characterized by a growing negative public discourse against Syrian refugees. This is particularly apparent in Lebanon, in its fifth year of a worsening economic crisis, where strained resources at community level have further aggravated already existing social tensions.

While UNHCR continues to advocate for the inclusion of refugees in national services, the prospects for local integration are non-existent. Achievements made for inclusion at the national level have varied between countries, with Jordan and Iraq aiming for or taking important strides towards inclusion of Syrian refugees. While there has been some limited success in Jordan with work permits for some refugees of specific profiles and access to some services including health services, rising costs of health care means that many refugees are reducing the number of medical visits.

### **Israel, Syria, Yemen and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries**

Refugees and asylum-seekers in **Syria** and **Yemen** face heightened risks due to the ongoing conflicts in both countries. In **Syria**, the security situation in parts of the country remains unpredictable, and the economic situation is increasingly dire. Refugees and asylum-seekers have limited rights, and most protection services are provided by UNHCR. In **Yemen**, the ongoing violence, demarcation of the country and separate governance and response to individuals with international protection needs continues to expose refugees to serious harm.

While the Government of **Israel** assumes national asylum responsibilities, there are significant limitations to the protection that is provided, and most individuals with international protection concerns remain without refugee status. The impact of the war in Gaza has also significantly affected the protection space and the economic situation in the country. With an overall lack of basic rights, including health care and social safety net, many asylum-seekers face a continued struggle against destitution.

**The GCC countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates)** are migration destinations with a significant number of individuals coming from refugee-producing countries such as Syria, Yemen and Afghanistan. Individuals seeking international protection often encounter severe restrictions accessing public services, health care, education and the labour market. Access to those services continues to be contingent on legal stay through work permits.



Without a permit, individuals are at risk of arrest, detention and deportation. Local efforts at labour nationalization and the rising cost of residence permits further restricts the already limited protection space for refugees in the region.

## Resettlement within protection and solutions strategies

The **MENA Regional Bureau's multi-year strategy** flows down from [UNHCR's Strategic Directions 2022-2026](#) to include, protect, respond, empower, and solve. UNHCR aims to develop and implement effective emergency responses, alongside a focus on protracted situations (notably the Syria Situation), where the key is to maintain or enhance protection space and advance solutions. Across these priorities, UNHCR strengthens the use of existing data to ensure that advocacy and operational responses are in line with current realities on the ground and with the views and needs of forcibly displaced persons. In the context of the current global economic situation, UNHCR aims to further refine operational priorities in line with capacity and resources and work to innovate in case processing strategies that can maximize efficiencies and protection outcomes.

Through its strategy for the region, UNHCR takes a multi-year vision, aiming at providing forcibly displaced and stateless persons with greater access to a diversity of solutions informed by their needs and ambitions while incorporating integrity safeguards. UNHCR's core objectives for the region are to ensure that a) solutions are an essential element within the broader protection strategy both in operations and at the bureau; b) solution opportunities are achieved based on a realistic analysis of how resettlement, complementary pathways and voluntary repatriation can contribute to maintaining the protection space; c) the coordination of well-established and emerging in-country opportunities is improved to scale-up solutions, while promoting refugee self-agency; and d) relevant anti-fraud policy components and procedures are systematically and consistently operationalized across the region.

Resettlement and complementary pathways therefore remain a critical part of the broader protection strategy, in particular for the protracted refugee populations in the Syria Situation, for highly vulnerable refugees in the GCC countries as well as for refugees in mixed and onward movements in North Africa.

Thirteen years after the beginning of the Syrian crisis, UNHCR continues to work to maintain or enhance the protection space for Syrians and other refugees affected by the **Syria situation**, including through advancing solutions. Overall, most Syrian refugees still hope to one day return to their home country, despite the current challenges inside Syria. However, according to the [May 2023 Eighth Regional Survey on Syrian Refugees' Perceptions and Intentions on Return to Syria](#), only 1 per cent of respondents indicated an intention to return in the next 12 months while 54 per cent expressed hope to return within the next five years. Refugee respondents in **Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan** fear a lack of safety and security, lack of livelihood/work opportunities, inadequate basic services as well as lack of adequate housing. The need for continued and increased resettlement among Syrian refugees is particularly apparent in **Lebanon**. The economic collapse, coupled with the persistent negative rhetoric around Syrian refugees, makes their situation extremely challenging.

Refugees are targeted for abuse and exploitation by the host community, local and national government, media and other parts of society. Refugees in Lebanon are now more at risk of arrest, detention and deportation.

Mixed and onward movements affect the entire region, most notably in **North Africa**. In this context, UNHCR works with different actors to operationalize the route-based approach in order to strengthen State-based protection and advocates for inclusion in national services, developing realistic operational footprints and protection responses, and increasing access to diverse solutions. At the core of this approach is a shift towards more humane and effective responses, concrete actions to counter smuggling and trafficking, and delivering better outcomes for those on the move, affected communities and States alike. This requires coordination with a variety of stakeholders such as States, UN agencies, civil society partners, migrant and refugee organizations to improve the availability and quality of protection responses for persons along the main routes in the countries of origin, transit and destination. Access to diverse solutions is a key element of the route-based approach, not just for the North African countries but also further south in transit countries in West and Central Africa. For North Africa, cementing increased and reliable resettlement quotas, alongside greater access to complementary pathways, is critical to provide life-saving responses and safe and legal alternative solutions for refugees.

In some **GCC countries**, increased resettlement opportunities in 2023 have bolstered the local authorities' confidence in UNHCR and expanded the protection space. This has enabled UNHCR to implement various activities, including livelihood projects and assistance to undocumented refugees. In this context, resettlement thus serves both as a strategic tool and as a life-saving mechanism for those at risk of refoulement within the population whose status becomes irregular and who are then subject to removal, including on the basis of health status (for example HIV status). Resettlement is also used in situations where refugees are in transit in international airports after having been refouled from other countries and require an urgent protection intervention in order to prevent a return to their country of origin. Given the success UNHCR has had in leveraging resettlement in 2023, maintaining meaningful resettlement quotas for the GCC countries will enable the organization to continue its advocacy for an increased protection space.

Alongside resettlement, UNHCR coordinates and leverages established and emerging in-country opportunities for forcibly displaced persons to build their resilience through education and livelihood programmes which may also in turn enhance their capacity to access third country solutions through complementary pathways. In this way, UNHCR works to strengthen accountability to affected people, and an age, gender and diversity approach that ensures that solutions are inclusive.

## Projected resettlement needs in the region in 2025

UNHCR projects that **703,700 refugees** in the MENA region will be in need of resettlement in 2025. There has been a significant increase in the projected resettlement needs based on overall deteriorating protection space across the region, however, most significantly in Lebanon, where projected needs now include those refugees known to be in Lebanon but not registered with UNHCR.



*Nadifa, a midwife and refugee from Somalia and mother of 11 children, was forced to flee to Yemen in 1992. Having worked as a midwife in Somalia for nearly 10 years, Nadifa began working at the UNHCR-supported health centre in Kharaz Refugee Camp. © UNHCR/Gregory Doane*

Refugees who will be prioritized for resettlement in 2024 include but are not limited to the below:

**Refugees with diverse SOGIESC who** have specific legal and physical protection needs across the MENA region. Many of them are formally excluded from government regularization procedures because of their sexual orientation or gender identity and continue to face physical threats and serious security concerns by the host community as well as by their own community. Same-sex relationships are criminalized in the region, as such, refugees with diverse SOGIESC remain vulnerable to arrest, detention, prosecution, discrimination, and social stigmatization. They also face difficulties in accessing services. For those refugees, urgent and emergency resettlement is the only viable durable solution, in light of their immediate and specific legal and physical protection needs.

**Refugee children** are at a heightened risk of neglect or abuse due to stressful home environments resulting from the experience of war, prolonged displacement, and limited access to education, given their socioeconomic vulnerability. The capacity of most national systems in the region to provide specialized child protection services remains limited, particularly with regard to Best Interest Procedures (BIP) and provision of psychosocial support services which leaves a gap in child protection response.

Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) needs have surged due to prolonged displacement, economic hardships, earthquakes, increased discrimination, and xenophobic violence, raising risks of mental health issues. Stigma, misconceptions, and a general lack of specialized services in host countries can exacerbate these risks, with cases of increased self-harm and suicidal behaviours especially among children.

**Refugees with serious medical and health conditions:** Since the COVID-19 pandemic erupted, the MENA region witnessed a sharp decline in the available medical slots by most resettlement countries. The longevity of the scarcity of medical slots throughout the previous years has added risks for refugees with serious medical and health conditions, some of whom have chronic illnesses, while others required immediate life-saving interventions. Throughout most of the region, access to health care and medication remained challenging, due to both cost and supply barriers. To exemplify, in a survey that was conducted in 2023, 84 per cent of Syrian refugees in Lebanon reported difficulty accessing needed medication. In the same survey, over half of Syrian refugee households in Iraq reported barriers to access health care.

Resettlement is also an immediate protection tool **to halt deportation and refoulement**. In different countries in the region, some individuals come to the attention of UNHCR as they are detained at the airport on arrival or are identified by the authorities for possible deportation. Among them are refugees identified by the authorities as persons living with HIV+ who are often only given a few days to leave the country of asylum.

The MENA region has seen an increasing number of individuals at risk of harm in their host countries due to their profile and activities as **human rights defenders**. They are often extremely vulnerable where they are and continue to face risks linked to the very reasons for which they fled their homes. Often individuals need to stay in safehouses and take extreme precautions to guard their safety, making their resettlement process and eventual departure on resettlement both difficult and sensitive. Among them, **women human right defenders** face unique challenges due to their identity as activists and as women. These individuals advocate for justice, equality, and human rights, often at great personal risk. However, they also encounter gender-specific risks including gender-based violence, discrimination and challenges in balancing family responsibilities with activism, limited access to resources, online harassment and health risks. Discrimination compounds when women human rights defenders belong to marginalized groups; SOGIESC, ethnic minorities and others.

In **Algeria**, UNHCR projects that approximately **1,200 individuals** will be in need of resettlement in 2025, primarily Syrian refugees. Resettlement remains the only means for responding to the urgent and emergency protection needs, including risks of arrest and deportation. In this context, resettlement is a critical protection tool providing a life-saving response. Resettlement is also used strategically, being positively viewed by the local authorities, and can support advocacy efforts towards enhancing the protection space for refugees and reaffirm UNHCR's role and mandate.

UNHCR **Egypt** projects that **70,000 refugees** will be in need of resettlement in 2025, a significant increase compared to 2024 due to the growth of the registered population as a result of the Sudan influx and stronger identification mechanisms.

Among those, most are refugees from Syria, Sudan, South Sudan and Eritrea. Approximately 25 per cent of all asylum-seekers and refugees registered with UNHCR have been identified as vulnerable based on their specific needs. Women and girls continue to face serious protection risks, compounded by instances of discrimination, harassment and gender-based violence. There are also high levels of assault and rape reported amongst the refugee communities. Refugees and asylum-seekers representing the LGBTIQ+ community are particularly at risk in Egypt and are frequently exposed to gender-based violence coupled with severe protection risks stemming from familial threats.

In **Iraq**, resettlement is reserved for the extremely vulnerable individuals whose protection risks cannot be addressed in the country of asylum and when it is a life-saving intervention. UNHCR has determined that about **27,600 refugees** will need resettlement in 2025. The reduction from 2024 is in line with the operation's focus on inclusion.

In **Israel**, UNHCR and partners regularly identify refugees living in extremely precarious circumstances. In 2025, approximately **6,900 refugees** are projected to be in need of resettlement, most of whom are from Eritrea. This includes single parents of small children, individuals with disabilities and those with chronic illnesses who cannot access treatment in Israel. There is a particularly high prevalence of survivors of torture and trauma among refugees and asylum-seekers arising from their dangerous journeys to reach Israel. Resettlement has also greatly impacted the protection space in Israel, as a large proportion of the initial asylum-seekers have already departed the country through resettlement.

Resettlement remains the primary durable solution for refugees in **Jordan** where **111,300 refugees** are projected to be in need of resettlement in 2025, mainly from Syria. Refugees below the national poverty line, who are resorting to emergency and crisis livelihood coping strategies and/or have specific needs (women at risk, children at risk, individuals with disabilities and medical needs) are considered to be in need of resettlement. Such profiles are exposed to protection risks which are amplified due to their lack of earning potential and inability to provide for their basic needs. Gender-based violence continues to pose a severe threat to all refugees in Jordan, with women, girls and refugees with diverse SOGIESC disproportionately affected.

In **Kuwait**, **65 persons** are projected to be in need of resettlement in 2025, primarily vulnerable refugees from Syria and Somalia.

In **Lebanon**, **468,700 refugees**, mainly Syrian, are projected to be in need of resettlement, a significant increase by about 200,000 compared to 2023. After over four years of a worsening economic crisis, soaring inflation and long-lasting political instability, refugees are, in spite of their resilience, facing extreme socioeconomic precarity and therefore increasingly resorting to negative coping strategies compounded by discrimination, leading to serious legal and physical protection needs. Women and girls are often disproportionately affected by this shrinking protection space. In this context, resettlement also has significant strategic importance and represents a means of international burden-sharing, which is recognized by the authorities in Lebanon.



In **Libya**, over 70 per cent of the population registered with UNHCR is considered to be vulnerable. UNHCR estimates that, among those, **6,800 refugees** will be in need of resettlement in 2025. Approximately half of them originate from Sudan, followed by refugees from Eritrea, Syria, Ethiopia as well as other nationalities.

In **Mauritania**, it is estimated that approximately **300 refugees** of various nationalities will be in need of resettlement. UNHCR's primary focus has been on facilitating the inclusion of refugees and to a certain extent asylum-seekers and, hence, prioritizing local solutions in the country of asylum. At the same time, in light of the severe risks that can arise for specific groups of refugees, in particular those with diverse SOGIESC, survivors of gender-based violence and individuals with serious medical conditions, UNHCR is progressively pursuing resettlement as a life-saving and durable solution.

In **Morocco**, UNHCR expects that there will be **380 refugees** who are particularly vulnerable and will require resettlement in 2025. This includes refugees originating from the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Syria, Sudan as well as other nationalities.

For refugees living in **Syria**, resettlement and complementary pathways remain an integral part of UNHCR's response as a protection tool for the most vulnerable, given Syria's current socioeconomic context. UNHCR projects that **1,200 refugees** will be in need of resettlement in 2025. However, since the beginning of the crisis, resettlement opportunities for refugees in Syria have sharply declined largely due to insecurity in Syria and lack of consular access but also likely due to the complex political environment. As a result, resettlement can currently only be used to address the most serious protection risks.

*Khalid and his family are refugees in Azraq camp, Jordan, where they have lived since 2016. The family's shelter recently caught fire while they were out, destroying all their belongings during the cold winter. © UNHCR/Claire Thomas*



UNHCR projects that, in **Tunisia**, approximately **2,700 individuals** will require resettlement in 2025, primarily refugees from Sudan and Syria, in addition to other nationalities. The threefold increase from 2024 is related to the increase in arrivals of those with protection needs, particularly as a result of the crisis in Sudan, and the vastly deteriorated protection situation in Tunisia. Resettlement from Tunisia constitutes a lifeline for refugees who are at significant risk of being detained, forcibly relocated to remote border areas or expelled. Resettlement also serves to alleviate pressure on host communities and national systems, a benefit which is increasingly recognized by the Tunisian Government, and, in the Tunisia context, plays an important strategic role for the application of a route-based approach.

In the **UAE**, **900 refugees** are projected to require resettlement in 2025, most of whom are from Syria, followed by Iraq and other nationalities. Given a very limited protection space in the UAE, UNHCR will prioritize for resettlement refugees with serious and imminent protection concerns, including refugees who come to UNHCR's attention as they are detained at the airport on arrival or are identified by the authorities for possible deportation.

Resettlement from **Yemen** remains a much-needed protection tool and a durable solution for refugees with heightened protection risk in the absence of local integration or self-reliance opportunities. It is estimated that **4,800 refugees** will be in need of resettlement in 2025. In a conflict-torn environment and its resulting dire humanitarian situation, the internationally recognized government in Aden and the de facto authorities in the north of the country can only provide asylum and meaningful support to a limited number of individuals, while funding for humanitarian assistance is continuously decreasing.

UNHCR also estimates that **900 individuals** in **Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman, and Qatar** will be in need of resettlement.

## Regional highlights, achievements and challenges in 2023

In 2023, UNHCR made resettlement submissions for 25,733 individuals from MENA. Resettlement departures from the MENA region were at their highest since 2016, with 27,012 refugees resettled. Solid identification systems, well-established partnerships with NGOs and partners as well as its well-trained resettlement staff supported the high number of submissions.

The MENA region has long been marked by protracted and emerging conflicts; this trend continued in 2023. Alongside this trend, with some resettlement States being seemingly unable to conduct remote processing, resettlement options for a number of operations, including Lebanon, Libya, Yemen and the Syria operation, continue to be impacted. During 2023, Lebanon particularly had several selection missions cancelled or postponed, impacting on the uncertainty that many refugees already face. All operations in the MENA region have in place modalities to allow remote processing. Continued resettlement from operations facing insecurity or access issues is extremely important to ensure affected refugees have access to solutions.

### Completing the picture piece by piece

A Syrian family in Kuwait, unable to return home, found comfort and patience through art.

Ruba met Belal when they were young students. The couple later fell in love and she moved to Kuwait to be with him after marriage. Little did they know, they would not be able to return home due to the conflict that erupted in Syria.

Ruba, Belal and their five children continued to live in Kuwait after the war broke out in Syria, while hearing about the situation back home from family and friends. Almost 10 years after the war, Belal lost his job as an interior designer.

Unable to return home, the family approached UNHCR for support and in search for solutions. During the processing of their case, and with the stress of an uncertain future, Ruba found herself in need of a hobby. “I wanted to find anything to do at home, you know? It wasn’t because I want to work exactly, but I just want to do something,” she said. It was then that Belal suggested she creates something with small stones that they had bought to decorate the balcony.

Ruba, who used to spend her time drawing as a child, created an image made of stones. “I did my first piece with stones, and I liked it. It was a first step, an experiment. Now it’s been years and I have my own style with it. I also have a lot of ambitions” Ruba said. In 2021, Ruba started an art piece with the goal to submit it to the Guinness Book of World Records; now she is focused on improving the quality of her art.

Ruba wishes each person to interpret her art from their own perspective. For her, art is all about feelings. “Feelings about love and peace. That are embodied by the woman and the mother. All these things, these feelings, this is what is embodied in my paintings.”



Example of Ruba’s artwork (Photo courtesy of Ruba)

Ruba’s art and Belal’s passion for poetry and music inspired their children to follow suit. “A few years after I started, it gave my kids a positive push”, she said. Her children were no longer able to attend school, so they turned to music: “This was a motive for them to go in that direction.” Just like Ruba, the children are self-taught, learning from videos online.

Art plays a big role in Ruba's family: "Of course it helped us because it was a lot of pressure and waiting," she added. "It was our only outlet. They [her children] wanted to do something in life."

Currently the family is in the final stages of their resettlement process to Canada and are looking forward to finding stability and a fresh start. "Ambitions are there with or without resettlement. This helps us to give and start afresh and we are waiting. This will also help us as refugees, to have a home to settle in and start anew."

Ruba is especially excited about going to Canada as she's learned it supports art and individual efforts. "There is support given to the citizens and what they can provide to the country and the exchange between the citizen and the country. It helps us give more."

## Perspectives: | Yemen

### Undaunted: Fadila's Journey from Persecution to Promise

Fadila's story represents tenacity and hope in the face of adversity. Born into a family that experienced persecution in Ethiopia, Fadila's early years in Yemen were marked by her family's relentless pursuit of safety and security. Tragically, her father's passing compounded their challenges, leaving her mother, Antu, to navigate the complexities of raising children in a foreign land on her own.

As a teenager, Fadila found work in the clothing industry as a model, driven by the need to support her family amidst financial hardships. However, this decision exposed her to significant societal and personal risks. She faced harsh criticism, ostracization, and physical threats. These incidents took a toll on her safety, emotional well-being and education, illustrating the devastating impact of displacement on young lives.

Amidst these struggles, the warm embrace from Finland provided Fadila and her family with an opportunity for a fresh start. Their journey from the brink of despair to a land of safety and opportunity underscores not only Fadila's resilience but also the crucial role of international solidarity and support in transforming lives. Through resettlement, families like Fadila's can find stability, security and the chance to envision a future filled with possibilities.



*Fadila and her family in Finland. Resettlement remains a lifeline for refugees, giving them the chance to restart their lives in safety. (Photo courtesy of Fadila)*



# SOUTHERN AFRICA

The [Regional Bureau for Southern Africa](#) oversees the protection and solutions strategies for asylum-seekers and refugees' populations hosted in 16 countries and covered by eight Country Representations in the Republic of Angola (**Angola**), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (**DRC**), the Republic of Malawi (**Malawi**), the Republic of Mozambique (**Mozambique**), the Republic of the Congo (**RoC**), the Republic of Zambia (**Zambia**), the Republic of Zimbabwe (**Zimbabwe**), and the South Africa Multi-Country Office that covers nine countries including the Republic of Botswana (**Botswana**), the Union of the Comoros (**Comoros**), the Kingdom of Eswatini (**Eswatini**), the Kingdom of Lesotho (**Lesotho**), the Republic of Madagascar (**Madagascar**), the Republic of Mauritius (**Mauritius**), the Republic of Namibia (**Namibia**), the Republic of Seychelles (**Seychelles**) and the Republic of South Africa (**South Africa**).

## Overview of the protection environment in the region

By the 31st of December 2023, the Southern Africa region hosted 801,618 refugees and 179,347 asylum-seekers, primarily from the DRC, the Central African Republic (CAR), Rwanda, Burundi, Somalia, and Ethiopia. The region is illustrated by a protracted refugee situation for more than 20 years including in Angola, Botswana, Malawi, Namibia, the RoC, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe as well as complex emergencies in the DRC and in Mozambique. In addition to a decreased protection space that limits socioeconomic rights and freedom of movements of refugees, continuous forced displacements and mixed movements are observed and caused by various drivers including conflicts and the adverse impact of climate change. Consequently, challenges continue to increase in scope, scale and complexity.

The main characteristics of the region are marked by restrictive legislations and policies, including encampment with restriction on movement in five countries (Botswana, Malawi, Namibia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe) as well as reservations made by 11 States to 17 provisions of the 1951 Refugee Convention, all of which seriously impact fundamental rights and freedoms of refugees and hinder their access to asylum, employment, social protection schemes and sustainable solutions, including for persons with LGBTIQ+ profiles. Moreover, withdrawal from the 1951 Refugee Convention to introduce reservations by South Africa might exacerbate the protection challenges faced by refugees and asylum-seekers. Four States from the Indian Ocean (Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius and Seychelles) do not have asylum laws and systems to adjudicate asylum claims, while others with asylum capacity decline to adjudicate asylum cases, especially for persons with LGBTIQ+ profiles.

In 2023, UNHCR in the region recorded 2,200 cases of detention (including 360 children) and 54 cases of refoulement in 12 countries. By the end of 2023, the region faced a backlog of asylum applications for 187,600 asylum-seekers, some of which have been pending adjudication over the past two decades.

Despite the above-described environment, law and policy reforms are being considered by Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe as part of their commitments at the Global Refugee Forums in 2019 and 2023, while the RoC is progressing with the inclusion of refugees in the social protection scheme, with the support of the World Bank Group.

The region is known for its enforced encampment policies. There are 26 refugee camps in nine countries. Of these, five countries made formal reservations to article 26 of the 1951 Refugee Convention relating to the freedom of movement. These countries, in addition to two others, have gradually tightened restriction of movements. The encampment policies and reservations have thus restricted access to education, employment, and self-employment as well as inclusion in national systems in many countries.

Xenophobic attacks and discrimination have continuously been reported in the past years, resulting in losses of life and properties for refugees and migrants in many countries. Initiatives by some States to review legislations, including citizenship, immigration and asylum laws, risk reinforcing the anti-foreigner sentiments and further restrict space for asylum.

Persons with LGBTIQ+ profile in need of international protection are persona non grata in three countries (Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe) in the region, while others with official open-door policies see LGBTIQ+ persons de facto exposed to social discrimination and stigmatization. Four countries in the region (Malawi, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe) criminalize same-sex relations.

*In Zambia, Nathan, a Congolese refugee who is a captain of his football club and a skilled defender of the team, fled violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) with his family in 2004. © UNHCR/Hélène Caux*



## Resettlement within protection and solutions strategies

In line with the GCR, the region is guided by its 2020-2024 Multi-Year, Multi-Partner Protection and Solutions Strategy. The Strategy's vision aims to create an enabling legal and socioeconomic environment that promotes access to international protection, prevents and reduces the risks of statelessness and ensures early and coordinated stakeholders' engagement in situations of forced displacement including the promotion of solutions.

Key priorities for the region include: a) improved national asylum capacity and systems to reduce refugee status determination backlogs and safeguard international protection; b) ensuring the effective implementation of the GRF pledges to facilitate solutions to forced displacement; c) enhancing data collection and analysis for strategic planning and partnership with development actors and ensuring integrity of information; d) preventing and responding to gender-based violence and child protection; and e) enhancing community engagement to protection through a strengthened Accountability to Affected People (AAP) approach, in addition to expanding access to solutions.

While the majority of countries in the region have maintained an open-door policy, asylum capacity development remains a priority for UNHCR to ensure fair and efficient processing of asylum backlogs and new claims as a starting point for international protection and a path to solutions. UNHCR will continue to support States, the Southern Africa Development Community, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean Commission to establish and improve national asylum systems through technical assistance and partnership with development actors to implement States' commitments. The strategic use of mandate refugee status determination will continue to be promoted in countries without asylum systems and for persons with specific profiles such as LGBTIQ+ persons facing heightened protection risks.

The inclusion of asylum-seekers and refugees in the national registration systems and the issuance of documents (birth certificates, ID cards and travel documents) will continue to be pursued so as to enable access to national services, social protection and livelihoods opportunities.

Reliable data for planning remains a priority for humanitarian and development actions as well as a means to target refugees for solutions. UNHCR continues its efforts to conduct initial registration and verification and advocates with countries such as South Africa, Angola and Mozambique where refugee data is partially communicated or registration is suspended to ensure availability and accuracy of data for planning and decision-making.

Congolese, Somali and Burundian refugees are the main populations considered for resettlement in the region.

In the **DRC**, the country strategy envisages strengthening of resettlement and complementary pathways with a focus on refugees from the CAR, Burundi, and South Sudan on the ground of legal and physical protection needs and gender-based violence.

Voluntary repatriation and reintegration remain solutions for refugees in those three countries only in accessible areas, as the caseloads are scattered in various locations with some not being accessible due to armed conflicts in North and South Kivus or to poor infrastructure such as roads (Gbadolite, Libenge, Yakoma and Aru).

In **Mozambique**, efforts to fulfil the GRF pledges on solutions are confronted with reservations made by the country to the 1951 Refugee Convention, which limit their progress. A strategy on local integration is under development as part of UNHCR's effort to support the implementation of the pledges. With limited opportunities for voluntary repatriation and local integration for refugees from Rwanda and the DRC, resettlement remains the main viable solution for refugees who face heightened protection concerns.

In the **RoC**, the strategy focuses on local integration as the main durable solution for refugees from the CAR and the DRC. Resettlement is therefore limited to refugees with heightened protection needs who are unable to voluntarily repatriate.

In **Zimbabwe**, UNHCR's strategy aims at enhancing livelihoods for self-reliance. However, the current socioeconomic environment marked by inflation, international sanctions and reservations has resulted in a protracted situation for refugees that has led to resettlement being the most viable solution for many. Further, most refugees in Zimbabwe are from the eastern DRC and are not able to repatriate due to the increased insecurity in their areas of return.

In **Zambia**, UNHCR's strategic objective is to build an enabling legal, socioeconomic and administrative environment that promotes protection and solutions. However, resettlement continues to be used to address the needs of refugees from the DRC, Rwanda and Burundi in protracted situations with limited integration opportunities and those with specific profiles, including LGBTIQ+ refugees who are not tolerated in the country.

In **South Africa**, discrimination and xenophobia are the major concerns. Moreover, the government is planning to withdraw from the 1951 Refugee Convention, with the possibility to re-join with reservations on access to territory and socioeconomic services. Therefore, UNHCR considers resettlement as an important tool to ensure refugees with serious protection concerns can achieve a solution.

## Projected resettlement needs in the region in 2025

UNHCR projects that in 2025 approximately **125,300 refugees** will need resettlement in the Southern Africa region. This represents an increase of 98 per cent compared to the estimated needs in 2024. The significant increase is attributed largely to improved data collection on refugees in the DRC who represent 52 per cent of the refugee and asylum-seeker caseloads in the region. The refugee populations in need of resettlement will originate from the DRC, the CAR, and Burundi. Resettlement needs in the region are also assessed in light of the route-based approach, which aims at providing protection and solutions closer to the refugees' countries of origin.



In the **DRC**, UNHCR estimates that **79,900 refugees**, primarily from the CAR, Burundi and South Sudan will be in need of resettlement. This includes those who are facing acute protection risks particularly due to discrimination and harmful practices, suffer from serious medical needs, are survivors of violence and torture or are women at risk. Given the continuous insecurity in their countries of origin, many refugees in the DRC have lived in a protracted situation without prospects of obtaining permanent residency or citizenship of the DRC, and without having seen their economic condition improving against the background of the economic hardships in the country of asylum. In this context, resettlement does not only constitute a vital protection tool but also a necessary durable solution.

UNHCR anticipates that approximately **14,000 refugees** will be in need of resettlement in **Malawi**, where the restrictive legal framework poses significant challenges to the protection of refugees, particularly for vulnerable groups. The majority are protracted refugees from the DRC with high protection needs. This includes a large number of single-headed households and individuals who as a result of limited economic opportunities are forced to resort to negative coping strategies such as survival sex and teenage pregnancies as well as persons who are exposed to human trafficking.

In **Mozambique**, UNHCR expects that approximately **350 individuals** will need resettlement, most of whom originate from the DRC and Rwanda. Refugees who face particularly heightened risks include individuals who have been denied access to national asylum procedures and can only remain in Mozambique for a limited period, persons who are at risk of refoulement, persons who are at risk of abduction as well as other vulnerable profiles such as women and girls at risk, children at risk and survivors of violence and/or torture.

*Wilondja is a Congolese (DRC) refugee who arrived to Maratane, Mozambique, in October 2010. He is fully enrolled in the INS program of Maratane's secondary school where he teaches French to a class. © UNHCR/Lara Bombers*



In **Namibia**, UNHCR expects that about **1,100 refugees** will require resettlement, mostly protracted refugees from the DRC who face strict encampment policies. As most refugees from the DRC originate from the eastern parts of the country, many of those identified for resettlement have experienced extreme violence in their country of origin and often suffer from latent trauma.

In the **RoC**, UNHCR determined that approximately **2,200 refugees** will require resettlement, more than half of whom are expected to originate from the CAR, in addition to, among others, refugees from the DRC. UNHCR will prioritize refugees who are identified with a disability, chronic illness or the physical and emotional trauma of sexual violence, and who are some of those who are the least able to attain socioeconomic self-sufficiency, a prerequisite for local integration. Female heads of household, children separated from their parents and elderly people without social support are also least able to cope and are at risk of exploitation and will therefore be considered for resettlement.

In **South Africa**, it is estimated that **5,900 refugees** will need resettlement, mainly from the DRC and Somalia. The main groups at heightened risk in South Africa and requiring resettlement intervention are survivors of repeated xenophobic attacks; women and girls at risk; survivors of violence and/or torture; LGBTIQ+ persons and asylum-seekers (including many from the Kivu provinces) at risk of refoulement.

In **Zambia**, UNHCR projects that approximately **16,000 refugees**, most of whom originating from the DRC, will need resettlement. Resettlement will offer a response particularly for vulnerable refugees who have lived in a protracted situation as well as for individuals of specific profiles with urgent protection needs that cannot be addressed in the country of asylum. These include LGBTIQ+ refugees, high-profile refugee dissidents, human rights activists who are at risk.



*Refugees on their way to go and clean areas of Tongogara refugee camp, Zimbabwe, as part of regular cleaning activities organized every first Friday of the month. © UNHCR/Hélène Caux*

In **Zimbabwe**, UNHCR projects that **5,900 refugees** will need resettlement, in particular, individuals from the DRC who constitute 85 per cent of the refugee population in the country of asylum. Approximately 50 per cent of the Congolese caseload are survivors of violence and/or torture, mainly from the Kivus and adjacent areas.

## Regional highlights, achievements and challenges in 2023

By 31 December 2023, the Southern Africa region submitted 9,095 refugees for resettlement to 13 countries. Some 3,600 people departed to resettlement countries, with more departures expected in 2024.

As part of the efforts made to improve refugees' access to resettlement in the region, UNHCR restarted resettlement activities in the DRC, prioritizing the capacity building of staff undertaking resettlement identification, assessments and other related case management activities.

Resettlement consideration particularly for persons with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and/or sex characteristics (SOGIESC) was hampered in several countries in the region due to restrictive asylum legislation and a high risk of rejection for this profile of asylum applicants. In this context, strategic use of mandate refugee status determination procedures ensured eligible asylum-seekers accessed safe and fair status determination procedures and where eligible were processed for resettlement.

### Perspectives: | Malawi

#### Slipping through my fingers (Dzaleka camp, Malawi)

It is 7:30 am on a Friday morning, the Senior Protection Assistant and I are rushing to leave Lilongwe for Dzaleka camp to assist 52 refugees who are headed for resettlement to the USA. We are stopped at the airport and their departure is suspended following a directive from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship Services.

This was the first time UNHCR country team in Malawi was experiencing something of this sort.

Upon arrival in Dzaleka, we find an anxious group of these refugees waiting for us. When we invite them into the boardroom, one of the women instead of sitting on a chair, sprawls herself on the ground, crying. She is visibly shaking. She tells me that she is so anxious that she wishes she could die.





*A service point at Dzaleka camp, Malawi. (© UNHCR Malawi)*

“I have been a refugee in this camp for over 15 years, we suffered back in the DRC and that’s what prompted our flight. Life in Dzaleka has not been easy either, as my son who was previously working in Lilongwe had to come back to Dzaleka when the government enforced the return to camp policy. We have suffered, and just when there was light at the end of the tunnel, my hope for a new life is slipping through my fingers as I watch helplessly.”

We engage in a brief conversation, and I manage to convince her that all will be well. She finally rises and sits on the chair as Lizzie and I counsel and reassure them that both the Malawi Government, UNHCR, IOM and the office of the UN Resident Coordinator are involved in discussions to ensure they leave.

Amongst them is a very sick lady who needed medical escort. For her, this is the second time her departure was suspended. Her child tells me that he fears people would start looking at them as a bad omen, although the first suspension for this case happened due to other reasons and only affected their family. Our counseling session takes longer than anticipated but, in the end, the refugees are happy we had a conversation.

In the days that follow, we maintain close contact with this group of refugees, updating them of the ongoing discussions between UNHCR and the government of Malawi. Several days later, while in the camp for a different programme, I meet a refugee woman who tells me:

“You may not remember me, I’m one of the refugees whose travel was temporarily suspended, IOM has contacted us and we have a travel date now.”

This lady narrates to me how she and her family have suffered in the time they have lived in Dzaleka, a refugee camp which was meant to house 10-12,000 refugees but at the time had over 50,000 refugees. She talks to me about the insecurity they have experienced in the camp, about how her children cannot go to school because the available camp school is overcrowded and how the money she and her family receive from WFP is barely enough “We are thankful for Malawi that has given us refuge, but it’s a tough life living as a refugee, especially with the return to camp policy. We are very excited to be leaving soon but my heart goes out to those we’re leaving behind. My friends and neighbours, my heart goes out to them.”

A good number of refugees in Malawi come from the Kivus, a region in the Democratic Republic of the Congo which has remained volatile over the years. There is no anticipated safe return to this area soon as reiterated in UNHCR position on returns to north Kivu, South Kivu, Ituri and adjacent areas (2022).

These are the stories that as workers in Dzaleka, we hear, see and sometimes feel, day in day out. The stories of women engaging in harmful coping mechanisms to care for their children. The stories of children and young adults unable to access education due to overcrowded institutions in the camp. Stories of children dying of malnutrition. Like many operations, the budget of UNHCR in Malawi has been reducing over the years and this is not expected to change soon. UNHCR continues to work with the Government of Malawi to review the Refugee Act, which will then hopefully amongst other things, enable refugees to work outside the refugee camp.

The resettlement needs in Malawi continue to increase. Although the Government of Malawi continues to work together with UNHCR in different ways with the hope of making refugees’ lives better in the long run, funds are essential. In a world where there are so much economic hardships on all fronts, this may delay the completion of some of these processes which would in turn mean continued suffering for the refugee population. Resettlement remains the rainbow in the sky for most refugees, that light at the end of the tunnel of hardships and a torturous past that most wish they could forget.

In a world where we can be anything, be the sunshine in someone’s sky—let hope shine and never let it slip through your fingers. When hope is lost, then all is lost.

**Beryl Oduor**  
Associate Integrity Officer



**Tongogara Refugee camp, Zimbabwe**

When I joined UNHCR operation in Zimbabwe in September 2022 as a Resettlement Expert deployee, I found that the operation was working towards meeting the US resettlement quota. This was my third deployment and this deployment presented the challenge of lacking enough caseworkers to meet the quota. However, we all worked as a team to meet the quota.

One of the refugees who struck me was Jean, a Congolese refugee with seven dependants. I first encountered this case when I was presented with his file in early 2023. One of Jean's children suffers from a severe gastro-intestinal condition and recurrent constipation that required them to use a catheter. Thus, the child was under weight as per the age and height and needed a special diet. This condition had also made the child vulnerable to other mild conditions. Although the diet is occasionally funded by UNHCR partner, Terre des Hommes (TDH), the child's condition had placed an additional burden on the family's limited resources. Furthermore, the child's condition had exposed them to discrimination from peers and this had stunted the child's social development and forced them to drop out of school.

Together with my colleagues, we decided that the case should be submitted to the USA under urgent due to the child's medical condition and the lack of adequate treatment available or accessible in the country of asylum depriving the child of a normal life.

After the case was submitted in September 2023, UNHCR managed to schedule Jean's case for onward processing during the prescreening and adjudication missions in December 2023. Jean thanked UNHCR for finally submitting his case. This experience moved me and rekindled my dedication to refugees.

At the end of 2023, the Zimbabwe operation met and surpassed the USA, Australia, and Canada quotas of 1,300 individuals. As well, 746 individuals departed Zimbabwe for resettlement countries. Through our interventions and dedication to persons we serve, we gave refugees hope away from home.

# WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

The [Regional Bureau for West and Central Africa](#) provides oversight, coordination, and support for resettlement activities in **Burkina Faso**, Cameroon Multi-Country Office [covering the Republic of Cameroon (**Cameroon**), the Republic of Equatorial Guinea (**Equatorial Guinea**), the Gabonese Republic (**Gabon**) and the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe (**Sao Tome & Principe**)], the Central African Republic (**CAR**), the Republic of Chad (**Chad**), Cote d'Ivoire Multi-Country Office [covering the Republic of Benin (**Benin**), the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire (**Cote d'Ivoire**), the Republic of Ghana (**Ghana**), the Republic of Liberia (**Liberia**), the Togolese Republic (**Togo**)], the Republic of Mali (**Mali**), the Republic of the Niger (**Niger**), the Federal Republic of Nigeria (**Nigeria**) and Senegal Multi-Country Office [covering the Republic of Cabo Verde (**Cabo Verde**), the Republic of the Gambia (**Gambia**), the Republic of Guinea (**Guinea Conakry**), the Republic of Guinea-Bissau (**Guinea-Bissau**), the Republic of Sierra Leone (**Sierra Leone**), the Republic of Senegal (**Senegal**)].

## Overview of the protection environment in the region

West and Central Africa (WCA) remains one of the most unstable regions in the world. Political instability and the increasing spread and intensification of armed conflict, both new and protracted, persist and continue to be the main drivers of displacement in the region. Growing competition for significantly diminished resources, often exacerbated by the effects of climate change across many parts of the region, are compounding humanitarian needs together with the additional impact of poverty and inflation.

As of January 2024, there were 13.4 million forcibly displaced persons within the region, of whom 2.3 million are refugees and asylum-seekers and 7.9 million are internally displaced persons. There has been a 41 per cent increase in the refugee and asylum-seeker population in the region compared to 2023, which is largely attributed to the recent displacement induced by the conflict in Sudan. The seven largest countries of origin of refugees in the region are Sudan, the CAR, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Mali, Cameroon and Chad, accounting for 96 per cent of the total refugee population. Sudan alone makes up 42 per cent of the overall refugee population, followed by the CAR (21 per cent).

There are four significant situations (forced displacement caused by a particular conflict or emergency) within the region: The Sahel Plus Situation (which includes the **Gulf of Guinea countries of Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Benin, in addition to Algeria, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger**), the Central African Republic Situation, the Sudan Situation, and the Lake Chad Basin Situation. These four situations currently account for approximately 74 per cent of all forced displacement in the WCA region. It is notable that **Chad, Cameroon and Niger** host 83 per cent of the overall refugee population and all fall within multiple situations. Working in a context of overlapping crises places significant strain on operations' response capacities. These three countries also operate the largest resettlement operations in the region.



*In Adagom refugee settlement in Nigeria, Cameroonian refugee, Anabel (right), volunteers to help other refugee women develop their computer skills. © UNHCR/Lucy Agiende*

In the countries of the Sahel Plus Situation, the progressive deterioration of the security and humanitarian situation in Burkina Faso continues to generate refugee movements towards the coastal countries of **Benin, Ghana, Ivory Coast and Togo**. As of January 2024, the number of asylum-seekers arriving in the northern regions of these four countries had risen to 87,000, of which 89 per cent were from Burkina Faso. UNHCR established a consolidated multi-country office in Abidjan in January 2024 to ensure greater proximity to the areas of intervention. A Level 1 Emergency was declared for the Central Sahel Situation in February 2024.

The ongoing crisis in Sudan has led to the flight of hundreds of thousands to **Chad** and the **CAR**. As of January 2024, Chad had received over 542,000 Sudanese refugees, displaced by the conflict, bringing the total number of Sudanese refugees being hosted by Chad from past and present conflicts in Sudan, to 1.1 million. Meanwhile, the CAR has received 22,600 Sudanese refugees in addition to 6,150 Central African returnees since the latest conflict in Sudan began in April 2023.

Because of the prevalence of conflict in many parts of the region, in certain situational contexts, forcibly displaced and stateless populations who have fled one conflict situation often find themselves in another one within a neighbouring country. This is illustrative of an increasingly observed cycle of displacement where internally displaced persons become refugees, who subsequently become returnees, only to become internally displaced, again, and back once more to refugees.

WCA is also a region of origin, transit and destination for mixed movements, with flows towards coastal countries and towards North Africa and Europe. Significant increases were recorded over the last year in the number of persons seeking to access Italy through the Central Mediterranean route and those accessing Spain through the Northwest African maritime route. Mali, Burkina Faso and Sudan were among the top 10 countries of origin arriving in Europe through the Central Mediterranean route. The route-based approach seeks to ensure that refugees and migrants are able to find protection, including solutions and legal pathways, along the route in countries closer to places of origin. The **Chad and Niger** operations are both fully engaged in the implementation of this approach in the Sahel Situation.

Complex protection challenges persist as a result of the predominantly conflict-driven nature of the crises in the region, including an increase in the number of reported instances of gender-based violence, as well as growing levels of serious malnutrition, which continue to be compounded by the negative impact of climate change, rising inflation and extremely limited livelihood opportunities.

Against these enormous challenges, UNHCR continues to focus its efforts on strengthening protection monitoring and response, responding to arising emergencies, access to rights and seeking long-term solutions. This approach is widely reflected within the operations' protection strategies, especially within those operations covering a specific situation, as set out below.

## Resettlement within protection and solutions strategies

The WCA region is experiencing unprecedented levels of forced displacement within a precariously diminished humanitarian space. While the level of hospitality extended to refugees by countries of the region remains exceptional and stands firm, the conditions within many of these countries are increasingly challenging, and the basic needs of the refugee populations may often not be met. Chad, Niger, and Cameroon face overlapping crises and multiple large-scale displacements, which place a significant strain on national capacities and available assistance in these countries.

In this current context, resettlement remains a critically important, and often life-saving, protection tool, one that remains widely integrated into the protection strategies of UNHCR operations across the region.

### Sahel Plus Situation

The Sahel Plus Situation covers **Algeria, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and the countries of the Gulf of Guinea**. The severe humanitarian and protection crisis facing countries of the central Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger) has already forced over four million people from their homes and is expected to further deteriorate in 2024. Intensification of conflict, particularly in the **central Sahel**, persists and armed groups continue to make indiscriminate use of violence against the civilian population, including torture such as rape as weapons of war.

Between 2022 and 2023, a 24 per cent increase in the number of civilians killed as a direct result of the conflict in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger was recorded.

UNHCR aims to establish a solid coordinated emergency and protection response for affected populations, which responds rapidly and effectively to new displacement and prioritizes interventions at the community level to reinforce resilience and facilitate inclusion and peaceful coexistence, thereby fostering solutions from the start.

Within this situation, resettlement is proving to be a very effective protection tool for the most at risk and vulnerable refugees, among them survivors of violence in all its forms, and particularly for survivors or those at risk of gender-based violence, which is one of the principal consequences of conflict and forced displacement in the Sahel Plus Situation, affecting mainly women and children. Against a backdrop of increasingly restrictive legislation and a shrinking protection space, both resettlement and complementary pathways provide a lifeline for LGBTIQ+ refugees, who are particularly vulnerable in the Sahel Plus Situation, and for those who advocate for them.

As of January 2024, the forcibly displaced populations in the Sahel region had reached 4.7 million, including 1.7 million refugees and asylum-seekers. The majority of refugees from countries within the Sahel Situation are submitted for resettlement under the survivor of violence or torture, or women and girls at risk categories, with a smaller number submitted under the legal and physical protection needs category.

**Niger** used to be the main resettlement operation in the central Sahel region particularly since the inception of Emergency Transit Mechanism in 2017. The decline of resettlement quota for Niger became more precipitous following the July 2023 coup d'État.

Given the continued deterioration of the security and humanitarian situation in the Sahel region, and notably within the central Sahel, continuation of resettlement from Niger is strategically important for both the local refugee population and those evacuated from Libya through the Emergency Transit Mechanism (ETM) in Niger.

### **Sudan Situation**

The Sudanese refugee population in **Chad** has doubled in size since the outbreak of the latest conflict in April 2023 drove 542,000 Sudanese to seek refuge in the country. UNHCR anticipates a further 250,000 Sudanese will arrive in 2024.

Due to limited resources, humanitarian assistance to protracted refugees in Chad has been decreasing year after year and, while UNHCR is continuously strengthening development activities and partnerships to promote self-reliance and inclusion for forcibly displaced populations in the country, resettlement is becoming an increasingly important protection tool to address the needs of vulnerable and at risk refugees.

The situation of the protracted Sudanese refugee population has become more challenging. The huge influx of new arrivals has had a very significant impact on an already precarious physical and protection environment and, along with the impact of climate change on access to basic resources, has exacerbated an already high level of protection risks.



These include a very high incidence of gender-based violence affecting women and girls from both the protracted and recently arrived Sudanese refugee populations. Among the new arrivals, other categories at risk include individuals with human rights defenders' profiles and minority ethnic groups.

### Central African Republic (CAR) Situation

As of January 2024, there were half a million Central African refugees and asylum-seekers in WCA, representing the second largest refugee population in the region, accounting for 22 per cent (501,327) of its 2.3 million refugee population. Most of the CAR refugee population is hosted in **Cameroon** (354,523) and **Chad** (133,495).

While efforts continue to ensure access for returns to areas considered safe in several government-controlled localities and returns of internally displaced persons and refugees to these areas have been observed, these activities continue to be undertaken cautiously. Armed groups, although weakened, remain active and conditions are not conducive to large-scale returns due to the prevailing insecurity in many areas outside of the government's control.

*Registration of newly arrived Sudanese refugees in Am Daffock. Awa, mother of 4 children, fled her hometown Nyala to find refuge in Am Daffock in CAR. © UNHCR/Stella Fatime*



Resettlement will continue to play a crucial role in addressing the needs of the most vulnerable Central African refugees, without compromising UNHCR's regional strategic priority to identify and pursue more localized durable solutions in this situation. This strategic priority includes the dedicated [Central African Republic Solutions Support Platform](#), seeking, with the concerned governments and stakeholders, to mobilize the necessary support to secure durable solutions both in the countries of asylum and in the CAR.

As with the Sahel Plus Situation and the Sudan Situation, the conflict-driven nature of the displacement has given rise to a high prevalence of survivors of gender-based as well as other forms of violence. Survivors of violence and torture and women and girls at risk remain the two most frequent resettlement submission categories in this context. Resettlement remains central to both the protection strategies in Cameroon and in Chad.

### Lake Chad Basin Situation

The long-standing humanitarian crisis in the Lake Chad basin affecting **Chad, Cameroon, Niger and Nigeria** and driven by the Islamic State West Africa Province/Boko Haram conflict, as of January 2024, has forced the displacement of 3.6 million people, 284,349 among them now hosted as refugees in neighbouring countries, representing 12 per cent of the region's refugee population.

Conflict, including ongoing indiscriminate attacks and kidnappings by non-state armed groups on the civilian population as well as poverty and inequitable access to socioeconomic resources, continue to drive new displacement in Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Northeast Nigeria, greatly hindering solutions for those in protracted displacement.

Among the many protection risks facing refugees within the Lake Chad Basin Situation, women and girls are at particular risk. A high incidence of gender-based violence, including survivors of rape, and the kidnapping of young girls by non-state armed elements has been observed.

The response to such incidents is frequently hindered by the limited humanitarian access associated with the precarious security situation. The ongoing unrest is expected to fuel new displacements in 2024, which may seriously exacerbate pre-existing protection risks.

Resettlement is already being used effectively as a protection tool for vulnerable refugees in the Lake Chad Basin Situation, most notably for Nigerian refugees in the Diffa region of **Niger** who have fled armed group incursions in the northeast of Nigeria. As of January 2024, there were 116,310 Nigerian refugees hosted in the Diffa region. Although Niger continues to be faced with a persistent and volatile security situation linked to the activities of non-state armed groups, the identification of vulnerable Nigerian refugees in Diffa for resettlement continues to be prioritized.

In **Chad**, identification of vulnerable Nigerian refugees with resettlement needs in the Lac region of the country started in 2023 and the operation plans to begin making submissions from this population in the course of 2024.

## THE EMERGENCY TRANSIT MECHANISM (ETM) IN NIGER

The ETM in Niger is a key protection tool for persons in urgent need of protection in Libya. Since opening in 2017, the ETM has provided a life-saving opportunity for 4,242 refugees previously detained in Libya. It has constituted a critical platform to address the acute needs of a highly vulnerable evacuee population, many of whom are survivors of violence and torture, and therefore remains a

priority for UNHCR. In response to challenges in the security context in Niger and Libya, the UNHCR office in Niger is able to facilitate remote processing by resettlement countries conducting virtual interviews at the ETM whenever required. However, only a very limited number of resettlement countries currently offer a quota for ETM Niger.

## Projected resettlement needs in the region in 2025

UNHCR estimates that in 2025, **178,900 refugees** will be in need of resettlement from the WCA region. Given a significant growth of resettlement needs within a year, primarily caused by the displacement resulting from the Sudan Situation, UNHCR is advocating for a sustainable increase of resettlement quotas for the region, particularly for protracted and new refugee populations in Chad.

In **Burkina Faso, 7,400 refugees** are projected to be in need of resettlement in 2025. Malian refugees represent 99 per cent of the refugee population in the country, about 77 per cent of whom are living in the Sahel and North regions of Burkina Faso, zones that remain heavily impacted by the ongoing armed conflict. Women and girls at risk as well as single women-headed households and unaccompanied or separated children are among the most vulnerable refugees identified. Many Malian refugees are from ethnic minorities that face significant discrimination in the country of asylum. Accessing the refugee population based in the Sahel and North regions of Burkina Faso remains a significant challenge due to the volatile security situation.

In **Cameroon, 42,000 refugees** are projected to be in need of resettlement in 2025. Of those, approximately 75 per cent are from the CAR and 24 per cent from Nigeria, while 1 per cent is from other nationalities, including, but not limited to, the DRC, Chad, Burundi and Rwanda. A large proportion of the refugees in need of resettlement are survivors of violence and/or torture or women and girls at risk. The needs and vulnerabilities that they present are closely linked to the severe violence they have experienced in their countries of origin, including gender-based violence and violence based on religious and ethnic grounds, which are often exacerbated by the protracted nature of their displacement. Due to the size and the protracted nature of the CAR refugee situation, the ongoing instability in the country of origin and the continued lack of tangible local integration prospects, resettlement remains a critical and durable solution for this refugee population.





*Refugee women from Cameroon making fans and other handicrafts they learn in Guilmeys site in the outskirts of Ndjamena, Chad. © UNHCR/Hadja Lalla Sy*

Nigerian refugees in need of resettlement are almost exclusively those who have fled due to Boko Haram and have experienced violence or torture. Refugees with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and/or sex characteristics (SOGIESC) face particularly high risks.

In **Chad, 110,900 refugees** are projected to be in need of resettlement in 2025. The main populations are Sudanese, based in the east of the country and Central African refugees, based primarily in the south. Many refugees have been in protracted situations for over 20 years. The ongoing influx from Sudan since April 2023 has doubled the population of Sudanese refugees in Chad. Resettlement remains a key protection tool to address the needs of an increasingly large refugee population facing progressively heightened levels of hardship. Among the prevalent protection risks observed, women and girls face a significant risk of gender-based violence, including rape, abduction and forced marriage. Children with disabilities face acute isolation, with most having no access to education facilities and in the absence of any infrastructure to support their needs, are unable to live in dignity. Refugees with diverse SOGIESC face particularly high risks, as do refugees identified or suspected as having activist/human rights defenders' profiles among the newly arrived population.

The Côte d'Ivoire Multi-Country Office (MCO) was opened in January 2024, provides oversight, coordination and support for resettlement activities in **Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Liberia and Togo**, and was created to ensure an effective response to forcibly displaced persons fleeing the ongoing conflict in Burkina Faso.

The Côte d'Ivoire MCO estimates that **750 refugees** in these countries are projected to be in need of resettlement in 2025. The main nationalities identified for resettlement are the CAR and Sudan, with smaller numbers of other nationals, including exceptionally Burkina Faso for recently displaced very vulnerable refugees for whom resettlement is the only durable solution available. Many of the profiles for consideration belong to minority groups with legal and/or physical protection needs, including vulnerable LGBTIQ+ refugees facing severe difficulties with integration and/or accessing national asylum procedures, women and girl survivors of gender-based violence, children at risk of exploitation or abuse (including early marriage), and survivors of violence or torture with limited or no access to the appropriate services.

In **Niger, 15,000 refugees** are projected to be in need of resettlement in 2025. The Niger resettlement programme focuses on both the Emergency Transit Mechanism (ETM), which provides life-saving opportunities to refugees evacuated from Libya, as well as on providing much-needed resettlement opportunities for vulnerable, Niger-based (non-ETM) refugees, many of whom reside in very precarious locations. Although the July 2023 coup d'État had a serious impact on resettlement activities in Niger and led to a reduction of its quota in 2023 and 2024, resettlement remains a critical protection tool that will continue to be used both within the framework of the ETM (provided that the mechanism continues its operation) and for the growing local refugee population, many of whom are extremely vulnerable. The local refugee population includes mainly Malian and Nigerian refugees, most of whom are survivors of religious, ethnic or gender-based violence, often perpetrated by non-state armed groups. It also includes small numbers of highly vulnerable refugees from the LGBTIQ+ community. Niger remains a crossroads for mixed movements and continues to receive asylum applications from persons beyond the subregion, including from Sudan and South Sudan. As a component of the route-based approach, the resettlement programme in Niger offers a safe, legal pathway that can effectively mitigate the risk of highly dangerous onward movements being undertaken as well as help contribute to the reduction of smuggling and trafficking activities.

In **Nigeria, 1,200 refugees** are projected to be in need of resettlement in 2025. The majority are identified from the Cameroonian refugee population, displaced by the ongoing secessionist conflict in Northwest/Southwest Cameroon, which has driven close to 65,000 people to seek refuge in Southeast Nigeria. The resettlement profiles under consideration in the context of this crisis are principally women and girls at risk, refugees with compelling medical needs, survivors of violence and torture, including survivors or those at risk of gender-based violence, and persons with legal and physical protection needs. Vulnerable refugees are being identified from the mixed urban refugee population.

The Senegal Multi-Country Office (MCO) provides oversight, coordination, and support for resettlement activities in **Cabo Verde, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Senegal, and Sierra Leone**. The Senegal MCO estimates that approximately **570 refugees** will be in need of resettlement in 2025 in its region of coverage. The main refugee nationalities are Senegal, the CAR, Gambia, and the DRC. Many of those in need of resettlement face legal and physical protection needs, and difficulties integrating due to their heightened vulnerabilities. Among the most prominent at risk profiles considered for resettlement are women and girls who have survived or are at risk of gender-based violence, children at risk of exploitation and early marriage, and refugees and asylum-seekers with diverse SOGIESC, the majority of whom are survivors of violence and torture.





*In Niger, Lawli, a refugee from Nigeria lives with disabilities affecting his legs which do not allow him to walk on his own. Despite the many challenges he faces he's determined to go to school. © UNHCR/Antonia Vadala*

In most countries under the Senegal MCO coverage, access to asylum procedures for asylum-seekers with diverse SOGIESC is limited or refused, and recognition by the authorities on SOGIESC grounds extremely rare. As local integration for identified members of this community is exceptionally difficult, resettlement remains the only viable durable solution in the region for this group and the most effective protection tool for this caseload.

## Regional highlights, achievements and challenges in 2023

In 2023, the WCA region submitted 4,104 individuals for resettlement to seven different resettlement countries a slight increase from 2022. This reflects the impact of the continuous investment made by operations in the region since 2021 to develop a more stable and sustainable resettlement capacity.

This was achieved by the strengthening of UNHCR's national resettlement staff capacity, with the support and oversight of international resettlement and protection positions. A further notable contributing factor was the decentralization of critical resettlement activities and resources away from the regional bureau towards the region's largest operations, which began with Chad in July 2023 and is set to continue in 2024 with Cameroon, allowing for greater accountability and efficiency at the level of operations. At the close of 2023, the regional acceptance rate had reached 98 per cent, the highest recorded for the WCA region.

UNHCR, with the support of its partners, is maximizing the precious opportunities being extended by resettlement States to vulnerable refugees in the WCA region, through their respective quota allocations.

UNHCR's strategic priority of building small sustainable resettlement capacity in several situational contexts, including Burkina Faso and Mali in the central Sahel, has proved to be a life-saving intervention for a small number of refugees. In Nigeria, it is being used in response to the needs of highly vulnerable, women and girl refugees displaced by the northwest/southwest Cameroon crisis, who have survived or are at risk of gender-based violence. It also continues to prove very effective in addressing the needs of specific sensitive profiles, including persons with diverse SOGIESC, particularly in many of the countries covered by the Senegal MCO and the newly established Cote d'Ivoire MCO. The continuity of these small programmes, which have been developed since 2021, is crucial to ensure that even in some of the most challenging contexts in the world, resettlement will continue to remain readily available as a critical protection intervention.

The prevailing precarious security environment will continue to present significant challenges to the successful implementation of resettlement programmes in 2025. Nevertheless, all stakeholders have regularly proved throughout 2023 their willingness to explore pragmatic and creative solutions to overcome these challenges, so that critical resettlement opportunities remain available to vulnerable refugees in the region. In the aftermath of the July 2023 coup d'État in Niger, some key resettlement States were no longer able to implement their programmes in this country, yet resettlement countries remained willing to engage to find solutions for the affected refugee populations and the eventual loss of some quota was partially compensated by offers of new quotas (and complementary pathways opportunities) from other States.

Another significant challenge is access to refugees. In many parts of the region, the main refugee populations are located in isolated, rural areas, which are of very distant from urban centres. Refugee populations may also find themselves in unstable security zones, where access can be unpredictable and intermittent. Volatile climactic conditions also affect accessibility and the implementation of activities. Finally, diminishing resources and the excessively high cost of logistical commodities continue to impact the regularity of UNHCR's presence in some of the more remote locations.

UNHCR operations however continue to adapt to the rapidly changing circumstances within which they carry out their resettlement activities. Despite enormous challenges, thanks to the support of key donors and resettlement States, older resettlement structures and capacities have been rebuilt and strategically important new situational capacities introduced, and these are working very effectively to ensure wider access to this critical protection tool within WCA.

Resettlement needs in the WCA region remain extremely high compared to available resettlement opportunities. With conflict situations continuing to spread throughout the region and the number of forcibly displaced persons reaching new heights, including a 41 per cent increase in the number of refugees in the last year, resettlement opportunities are increasingly critical for refugees who are vulnerable and at risk. UNHCR therefore welcomes increased quotas to respond to the rapidly growing needs in the region.

### Building a new life in Sweden: the journey of a refugee nurse from Cameroon

My name is Jean-Brice and I am a refugee and a qualified nurse from Cameroon. For much of my adult life I have faced rejection and discrimination, including from my own family, because I identify as transgender.

Life was very difficult for me in Cameroon. Nobody wanted to be near me. I had a lot of problems with my neighbours, the local community, and the police. I started to work in a small association helping people from the LGBTIQ+ community in Douala, but I was arrested and detained after the association was targeted. After spending several months in detention, I was released and fled Cameroon with one of my friends from the association.

We travelled to Libya but we were detained for three months by rebels wanting ransom money from our families. We faced very traumatic and violent incidents during this time. After our release, I left Libya and travelled to the Central African Republic. Being homeless, it was very difficult for me to survive there. I found a job in a restaurant serving and cleaning but was asked to leave by the owner because I was considered too effeminate.

I was physically attacked a number of times while I was in the Central African Republic, and I was also arrested and detained three times by the police because they would not recognize my documents. Eventually, I contacted IOM who put me in touch with UNHCR which considered me for resettlement and my case was submitted to Sweden.



*After three years in Sweden, Jean-Brice feels he has regained much of his strength and is eager to give back to his community. (Photo courtesy of Jean-Brice)*

When I learned that I had been accepted for resettlement, I was overjoyed. I finally had the chance to be somewhere where I would be accepted for who I am. When I arrived in Stockholm in 2021, I was so relieved and happy. It was another world: the way people spoke to me kindly and welcomed me warmly.

The support I was given on arrival in Sweden was amazing. After everything I had lived through, I felt very vulnerable when I arrived here. Sweden not only gave me an opportunity for a new life but also the help I needed to recover, and I am so very grateful for that.

It was not easy at first. A new language, a new environment, making new friends. And the weather can also be hard sometimes, compared to what I was used to. After almost three years here, I feel I have regained much of my strength and confidence and things now are wonderful. I feel my integration is going very well. I have gradually learned the language and I am now working as a nursing assistant. I also help out whenever I can in two Swedish LGBTIQ+ associations. This is a cause I feel very strongly about, and I am grateful for being able to continue to extend my support to the community in whatever way I can.

## IDENTIFYING RESETTLEMENT NEEDS: GOOD PRACTICE FROM UGANDA

The identification of resettlement needs is part of UNHCR's ongoing protection and assistance activities. Over several decades, UNHCR has developed policies, procedures and tools to enhance efficiency in the identification of refugees, in line with the resettlement categories defined in consultation with resettlement countries. UNHCR uses a combination of diverse case identification methodologies, including protection referrals, the strategic use of its database (proGres) or by leveraging the existence of other relevant data. Complex environments in which UNHCR operates have continuously put these tools and methods to the test. An objective, non-discriminatory and consistent case identification methodology for resettlement promotes trust in the system, ensures UNHCR's accountability to affected people and upholds integrity standards. UNHCR continues to refine its tools to strengthen the ability to reach out to the refugees in need of this solution. A recent example of such an initiative is found in Uganda.

In Uganda, UNHCR complements protection referrals with a new model known as **Humanitarian Response Identification (HRI)** for a strategic resettlement prioritization of refugees who are most reliant on humanitarian assistance. UNHCR rolled out this approach successfully across all locations in Uganda in early 2023.

The HRI uses an algorithm of relevant protection, socio-demographic and vulnerability indicators for all registered households based on the data collected and verified continuously by partners while providing humanitarian assistance. The HRI algorithm can be adapted to varying contexts within the country, adjusted for fluctuations in the number of resettlement opportunities and the selection criteria of resettlement countries and indexed to the permutations of funding for the Refugee Response Plan, while providing a coherent rationale to estimate resettlement needs for planning and advocacy which integrates resettlement within a broader country-level strategy for protection and solutions.

The introduction of the HRI for resettlement identification has been a success, as 70 per cent or more of the refugees identified through this tool have been recommended for resettlement consideration. This innovation has significantly increased the efficiency of resettlement needs assessments, with the most reliable data available, while helping to make resettlement more accessible to more refugees.



It has also enabled UNHCR to make better use of limited staffing and financial resources for the processing of resettlement cases.



*Emmanuel from Bunagana, DRC. Together with his family, they have been living in Rubondo, Nakivale Refugee Settlement in Uganda since September 2022. © UNHCR/Esther Ruth Mbabazi*

# IDENTIFYING RESETTLEMENT NEEDS: KEY ROLES PLAYED BY NGOs

Resettlement activities are enabled and supported by a multiplicity of organizations, partnerships and platforms that bring together international, regional and local governments as well as civil society. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play an important role in identifying vulnerable refugees in need of protection and referring them to UNHCR for further assessment. In some cases, NGOs, are authorized to make direct referrals to resettlement countries. The Equitable Resettlement Access Consortium described below is an example of such an initiative.

## **The Equitable Resettlement Access Consortium**

The Equitable Resettlement Access Consortium (ERAC) was formed to expand the global network of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) eligible to make resettlement referrals to the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). The consortium is comprised of HIAS, RefugePoint and the International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP), three NGOs with extensive and specialized experience in facilitating direct resettlement referrals to UNHCR, the USRAP, and other countries. ERAC bridges gaps between global resettlement needs, State quotas and resettlement stakeholders' submission capacity; and gaps in resettlement access caused by geographic isolation, demographic distinctions or funding challenges.

ERAC identifies and partners with NGOs providing humanitarian assistance to refugees to create a long-term pipeline of NGO submissions that address the emerging needs of at risk populations and make access to resettlement more equitable. ERAC currently operates in select countries in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and Europe.

Resettlement access currently varies across regions, countries, and locations within countries. NGO referrals increase access for refugees in geographically diverse and underserved areas. Many localized NGOs provide a range of services and have established relationships in refugee communities where they work, affording them a holistic view of the needs of these communities. This positions them well to assess the suitability of resettlement as a durable solution. Particularly vulnerable populations may feel safer or more comfortable approaching community-embedded NGOs and disclosing details of persecution based on sensitive characteristics. Additionally, NGOs may work in communities where larger actors do not have a presence or lack the resources to support resettlement activities.

ERAC programming complements and builds upon UNHCR's resettlement work by expanding NGO referrals to locations without existing permanent resettlement programmes, where resettlement quotas or capacity do not meet needs or where specific refugee populations face barriers to accessing traditional resettlement pathways. Local, regional, and global collaboration with UNHCR has been crucial to ERAC's success in planning and implementing NGO referrals. Coordination ensures that case identification and submission pathways are complementary and uphold the integrity standards that sustain successful resettlement programming.

**HIAS, RefugePoint, and IRAP**





*In Ecuador, refugee children and youth find hope in inclusive schools nationwide. © UNHCR/Jeoffrey Guillemard*



[2025 Projected Global Resettlement Needs](#)



**Resettlement and Complementary Pathways Service**

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