



UNHCR PROJECTED GLOBAL RESETTLEMENT NEEDS 2024

Cover photo: Niger, April 2013. Nigerian refugees and a local woman cross the road in Garin Kaka, a UNHCR-supported 'opportunity village' located 22 kilometres from Maradi city in south-central Niger. The three women work at the Garin Kaka women's cooperative where a collective of 20 refugee and local women produces peanut oil. © UNHCR/Colin Delfosse



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INTRODUCTION

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

At the organization's inception, the United Nations General Assembly mandated UNHCR with the task "of seeking permanent solutions for the problem of refugees". Since then, UNHCR has implemented resettlement programmes as a durable solution in a wide diversity of contexts both as a targeted response to individual protection needs or as a largescale or group-based approach to ending refugee situations for certain groups. The scale, use and focus of resettlement has fluctuated greatly since 1951 and, in the current global context of long-standing and newly emerging conflicts preventing refugees from safely returning and forcing more people to flee, the need for resettlement opportunities is more urgent than ever. In 2024, UNHCR considers that more than 2,420,000 refugees will be in need of resettlement.

Fortunately for refugees around the world, resettlement programmes exist within a growing ecosystem of third country solutions pathways, which include other legal admission pathways for persons in need of international protection such as humanitarian admission, family reunification and named sponsorship by communities, as well as skill-based education and labour opportunities. Additional to and separate from resettlement, these pathways have the potential to significantly boost access to third country solutions and are important components of the Global Compact on Refugees.

Complementary Pathways cannot take the place of protection-driven individual referrals, or of resettlement offered as part of multilateral protection and solutions plans, but they do offer the potential for refugees to chart their own courses and to better contribute to the communities in which they live. It remains important to underscore the unique protection character of resettlement and the responsibility-sharing function of resettlement to which States have made commitments for over 70 years. It is for this reason that resettlement, along with other third country opportunities, is one of the central pillars of the Global Compact on Refugees and of this year's Global Refugee Forum. The strategic use of resettlement, supported by multi-year commitments from resettlement States, has great potential to address strains in countries of asylum and benefit the wider protection environment beyond those refugees who are resettled.

UNHCR collaborates closely with NGO and civil society actors that play a crucial role in identifying and referring refugees in need of resettlement, help facilitate additional pathways, and support settlement and integration after travel. Resettlement and complementary pathways also form an integral part



Republic of Congo, June 2022. Refugees and host communities celebrate peaceful coexistence on World Refugee Day. © UNHCR/Ibrahima Diane

of UNHCR's initiative to strengthen protection and solutions in the reality of increasing onward and mixed movement of people requiring comprehensive route-based responses.

During the global pandemic, UNHCR and resettlement partners strived to find innovative ways to ensure continuation of resettlement processing through remote and other flexible approaches. The most successful of these approaches continue today post-Covid, provide valuable efficiency gains, and strengthen our capacity to continue working in the context of deteriorating security, climate or other conditions, while maintaining the required protection and integrity safeguards.

SUMMARY OF UNHCR'S 2022 ACHIEVEMENTS

In 2022, UNHCR teams globally **responded to increased resettlement quotas**, from operations facing large scale arrivals and/or protracted displacement to smaller operations where resettlement is mostly used on an ad hoc and infrequent basis. During the year, UNHCR made resettlement submissions on behalf of **116,512 refugees** located in **93 different countries of asylum**. This firmly demonstrates the reach of UNHCR's mandate and commitment to work with partners across the globe to leverage every opportunity for resettlement available. The fact that so many operations submitted resettlement cases also underscores the importance of resettlement places and of resettlement countries that offer dossier and emergency processing, since most would not have received selection missions in the course of 2022 or 2023.

2022 submissions equalled more than the total submissions in 2020 and 2021 combined, and are greater than all years since 2009, except for 2015 and 2016, when the global community came together in response to the Syrian crisis. Although the lift of COVID-19 travel restrictions significantly helped the revival of resettlement activities, the 2022 numbers reflect a true collective effort on a global scale.

Below are some highlights from 2022:

- Operations in the Americas almost doubled their submissions, working exclusively in communities and urban areas.
- In Asia, UNHCR **Pakistan, Iran, and Bangladesh** collectively went from 141 submissions in 2021 to 7,712 in 2022.
- In West and Central Africa, the **Cameroon** and **Chad** operations submitted 677 persons together in 2021, and a combined 2,422 in 2022.
- In Southern Africa, UNHCR's offices in **Zambia** and **Zimbabwe** more than doubled their submissions from 2021 to 2022, as did the **Burundi** operation in the East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes region.

During the 2022 ATCR, UNHCR announced a focus on **five priority situations**, as laid out in the [2023 PGRN](#). Continuing with the **Syria Situation** and **Central Mediterranean Situation**, which have been priorities since the [2019 PGRN](#), UNHCR added the **Venezuela, Rohingya** and **Afghan Situations** to its focused advocacy, given the high and growing needs for Venezuelan refugees in the Americas, the largest stateless refugee population from Myanmar, and Afghan refugees, predominantly in Pakistan and Iran.

Advocacy for the three new situations led to significant increases in quota places and resulting submissions for Afghan, Rohingya and Venezuelan refugees in 2022 compared to the previous year. Submissions of refugees from Myanmar increased from 2,352 to 9,006, accounting for eight per cent of global submissions (compared to four per cent in 2021), and an astounding 558 per cent increase in submissions for Afghan refugees from 2021 to 2022 (from 2,212 submissions to 12,346 – accounting for 11 per cent of global submissions in 2022 for this

population alone). Resettlement submissions of Venezuelan refugees more than doubled from 1,132 in 2021 to 2,381 submissions in 2022. The number of states receiving submissions also increased for Venezuelan and Afghan refugees, from five to six and 12 to 15 countries, respectively, from 2021 to 2022.

Submissions of Syrians (under the Syrian Situation) rose from 25,351 individuals to 36,639 in 2022, while submissions under the Central Mediterranean situation grew by more than 50 per cent from 2021 to 2022 (from 9,848 to 15,059 individuals).

Significant earmarked funding for resettlement in 2022 ensured capacity for the resettlement processing continuum in 57 different operations across the globe, through staffing for specific operations as well as through the UNHCR's Resettlement Deployment Scheme. However, the need for multi-year funding commitments remains a key requirement to ensure every resettlement quota is fully used each year.

During 2022, UNHCR also concluded a data sharing agreement with Norway and made progress towards advancing similar agreements with other States. Existing protocols already implemented with the United States of America (USA) were further strengthened by training and technical support for biometric identity verification. In addition, a new tool in UNHCR's proGres database was deployed with technical guidance to collect and analyse data on the inclusion of LGBTQI+ refugees in resettlement programmes.



Iran, January 2023. An elderly Afghan man bought a fresh bread in Semnan refugee settlement, Semnan, Iran. Thousands of Afghan refugees live in Semnan refugee settlement, 220 Kilometres east of the capital, Tehran. © UNHCR/Hossein Eidizadeh

UNHCR continues to strengthen its accountability to refugees, including through integrating age, gender and diversity principles throughout all stages of case identification and resettlement processing, ensuring that refugees from diverse backgrounds may be identified for and are able to access resettlement. UNHCR staff reinforce individual counselling and communication with communities on different aspects of resettlement processing, including to safeguard against rumours and misinformation, especially in the digital and social media sphere, and help refugees take informed decisions about resettlement. Through meaningful engagement with refugees and other displaced persons on their needs, protection risks, current priorities, and future plans, UNHCR ensures that it is [accountable to affected people](#) across the protection delivery spectrum, including throughout the resettlement process.

The integrity of UNHCR's resettlement programme is paramount to its sustainability and credibility. Across the globe, operations continue to implement anti-fraud measures, provide regular training to staff and partners, and undertake reporting, among other activities, to ensure those in need of resettlement will have access to this critical solution. Examples of how UNHCR operations address risks of fraud in the different regions include:

- A large-scale regional anti-fraud digital communication campaign in the West and Central Africa region, focusing on four key messages in different languages via multiple platforms of digital delivery. The campaign has so far reached 70,000 refugees in seven countries across the region, with a target of 200,000 refugees by the time of completion (2021 – 2023).
- In Türkiye, displaced communities are involved in fraud initiatives through focus groups discussions and regular community engagements. During such engagements, UNHCR colleagues gather information on prevalent types of fraud and provide counseling and guidance about fraud in the relevant languages. Fraud issues are highlighted during meetings held with the operational protection working group, which includes other UN agencies and NGOs.
- In the East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes region, the introduction of systematic mechanisms for biometric identity management, oversight, and control has significantly mitigated the risk of identity fraud in the resettlement context while also helping to ensure that registered individuals retain a unique digital identity following onward movements and in situations of secondary displacement. Biometric identity verification is increasingly used by UNHCR personnel and by partners during resettlement case processing and prior to departure.
- Operations in Asia regularly monitor social media and other channels to identify rumors and exploitation schemes and dispel any misinformation.



*Guatemala, March 2023. A refugee girl is cared for by health personnel in new and improved facilities.
© UNHCR/Victor Sánchez Mejía*

Despite the increase in resettlement quotas offered by States in 2022, these opportunities remained far below the 1.47 million refugees in need of resettlement. Evacuations of Afghan nationals and strained reception capacity in Europe responding to the Ukraine crisis impacted the expansion of third-country solutions, with existing structures and capacity being diverted to respond to these emergencies. Less than four per cent of refugees in need were able to access resettlement in 2022, with resettlement departures at 57,483 persons. This was significantly below the 90,000-target set by the [Third Country Solutions for Refugees: Roadmap 2030](#) – although a welcome 46 per cent increase from 2021 (when departures were at 39,266 persons). The largest number of UNHCR-facilitated resettlement departures in 2022 were to the USA, Canada and Germany.

In 2022, UNHCR also continued its advocacy with States to strengthen the support mechanisms and capacity of receiving communities rather than placing a burden on refugees to prove integration potential, which risk undermines the key protection role of resettlement. This will remain a core advocacy point for UNHCR in 2023 and beyond.

PROJECTED GLOBAL RESETTLEMENT NEEDS FOR 2024

UNHCR's Resettlement and Complementary Pathways Service has modified the form and refocused the content of the PGRN this year in line with the recently regionalized and decentralized structure of the organization. With more comprehensive regional chapters, UNHCR aims to link resettlement plans and achievements to regional strategies and approaches, and to demonstrate the role and impact of resettlement in the context of broader regional protection and solutions activities and strategies, as well as comprehensively describe the resettlement needs in the region and the operations they cover. The detailed tables on the projected needs and the previous year's submissions have been removed from the document as UNHCR works on the development of a more interactive and dynamic online tool to view the projected needs, which will allow us to revisit and revise estimated needs should situations arise during the year that may significantly impact our initial calculations, in either direction. The first iteration of this tool can be found here: [2024 Projected Global Resettlement Needs](#).

For 2024, UNHCR operations across the globe have estimated that more than 2.4 million refugees will be in need of resettlement, compared to just over 2 million in 2023. The large increase in needs (20 per cent) reflects [the growing number of refugees worldwide](#), which had its largest yearly increase ever on record (from 27.1 million in 2021 to 35.3 million at the end of 2022), and the concerning trend of new emergencies and protracted refugee situations globally. For the eighth year in a row, refugees from Syria represent the refugee population with the highest needs globally, followed by refugees from Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

The Asia region has the highest estimated resettlement needs of any region in 2024 at nearly 730,000 refugees (30 per cent of the global needs). This number reflects the significant needs of both Afghan refugees (nearly 497,000), hosted mainly in Iran and Pakistan, and refugees from Myanmar (240,993 persons), mostly in Bangladesh (129,000) and Thailand (91,000). Refugees in the East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes Region represent 23 per cent of the global needs at almost 560,000 refugees. The main refugee populations are from South Sudan (242,509) and the DRC (109,461), and the needs in Ethiopia and Uganda account for almost 60 per cent of the region's figure.

With over 464,000 refugees estimated to be in need of resettlement in the MENA region, more than half have been identified by the Lebanon operation. Syrian refugees account for 86 per cent of the region's needs as the Syrian crisis extends to its 13th year.

Of the more than 384,000 refugees in need of resettlement in the Europe region, almost all are hosted in Türkiye and are of Syrian nationality. In the West and Central Africa region, around 112,300 refugees are estimated to be in need of resettlement in 2024, reflecting high needs of Central Africa, Sudanese and Nigerian refugees.

Approximately 106,500 refugees in the Americas region are projected to be in need of resettlement in 2024, with Venezuelan refugees accounting for 75 per cent of these needs. Major host countries include Peru, Colombia and Ecuador. Finally, around 63,200 refugees in the Southern African region are projected to be in need of resettlement in 2024. Almost 60 per cent of the needs are for refugees from the DRC, followed by Central African refugees (17 per cent of the region's needs).

In 2024, UNHCR will maintain its five priority situations and advocate for States to provide quotas to address the needs of refugees amongst these situations:

- [Afghan Situation](#)
- [Rohingya Situation](#)
- [Venezuelan Situation](#)
- [Syria situation](#)
- Central Mediterranean Situation, with over 474,000 refugees estimated to be in need of resettlement across 15 countries of asylum in the [East and Horn of Africa Region](#), [West and Central Africa Region](#) and [North Africa Region](#).

Further information on the [2024 Projected Global Resettlement Needs](#) is available by country of origin and asylum here:



Chad, May 2023. Haweya fled Sudan with her three children after her family was attacked in the middle of the night. Her husband was shot and killed and her six-year-old son was also injured in the attack. The family crossed the border into Chad and took refuge at the Koufroun site in Chad's Ouaddai region.
© UNHCR/Colin Delfosse

URGENT AND EMERGENCY RESETTLEMENT PROCESSING

UNALLOCATED QUOTAS

Resettlement quotas without pre-determined geographical location are referred to as 'unallocated quotas.' In contrast to quotas that are committed to specific country operations and may have parameters such as nationalities and profiles, unallocated quotas provide flexibility to address the resettlement needs of refugees, in particular those requiring urgent or emergency case processing due to imminent protection risks or life-threatening medical needs. They are generally processed on a dossier basis and do not require interviews. The importance of the unallocated quotas is underlined in the Global Compact on Refugees (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.

MANAGEMENT OF UNALLOCATED QUOTAS

Once States have confirmed an unallocated quota within their annual resettlement programmes with UNHCR, RCPS is responsible for the distribution of places among the four Regional Bureaus responsible for making dossier case submissions directly to resettlement States from their respective regions, namely: the Regional Bureau for East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes Region (EHAGL) in Nairobi, the Regional Bureau for West and Central Africa (RBWCA) in Dakar, the Regional Bureau for Southern Africa (RBSA) in Pretoria, and the Regional Bureau for Middle East and North Africa (MENA) in Amman. RCPS maintains a portion of the quota in order to process submissions on behalf of the Asia and the Pacific Region (RBAP) and the Americas Region, as well as on behalf of UNHCR country offices in eastern and south-eastern Europe. In addition, high profile and/or sensitive and complex cases are channeled through the RCPS for submission on behalf of all Regional Bureaus.

To facilitate the effective and appropriate use of the various unallocated quotas, RCPS ensures that resettlement State-specific criteria, information on profiles, together with new or updated instructions on submission protocols, are shared promptly with Regional Bureaus and country operations. Throughout the year, RCPS closely monitors the use of the unallocated quotas and regularly consults with colleagues in the Regional Bureaus to confirm submissions are made in a timely and effective manner. In addition, RCPS also provides guidance on specific cases and submission protocols on a regular basis, to colleagues worldwide.

GLOBAL OVERVIEW OF UNALLOCATED QUOTAS IN 2022

In 2022, the unallocated quotas continued to provide life-saving solutions for refugees requiring swift relocation, particularly sensitive caseloads facing risks of refoulement

or prolonged detention on immigration-related charges, human rights defenders facing threats to safety and dignity among other at-risk profiles. The unallocated quotas also provided solutions for refugees located in countries with no allocated resettlement quotas or no options for expedited resettlement case processing.

However, the number of individuals at imminent risk continues to far outweigh the number of places available within the unallocated quotas. In 2022, about 1.3 per cent of the total resettlement quota was unallocated. The ratio is even less in 2023.

There remains a critical need to increase the number of places made available under unallocated quotas and to apply flexible criteria so that more cases with serious medical needs and those deemed to have high needs by resettlement States, regardless of whether it is an individual or large families, can benefit from such quotas. Expedious processing and expanding the selection criteria would also help ensure a more equitable access to resettlement opportunities for those with acute resettlement needs.



Bangladesh, November 2022. Rohingya refugee Florida Begum with her family in Kutupalong refugee camp, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Florida's daughters Jubaida, 16, and Sumaya, 5, are both living with disabilities and need special care. They are being supported by UNHCR and health partners with rehabilitation services and assistive devices. © UNHCR/Saikat Mojumder

Unallocated quotas generously offered by States provide solutions for refugees in a precarious situation. UNHCR is committed to use unallocated quotas efficiently to maximise their benefits, while also considering the specific requests by States offering such quotas.

GLOBAL TRENDS IN 2022

Under the 2022 unallocated quotas, UNHCR submitted a total of 1,529 refugees globally from 47 different countries of origin and in 70 different countries of asylum. Refugees originating from Syria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi and Afghanistan were among the largest refugee populations benefiting from unallocated quotas in 2022. Submissions during the year were made to nine resettlement countries (Australia, Canada, Finland, France, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom).

More than half or 58 per cent of cases were submitted under the Legal and/or Physical Protection Needs category. Submission under the Medical Needs category comprised 15 per cent of cases or 25 per cent of persons submitted under the unallocated quotas, with the largest percentage submitted by the RBSA Region (32 per cent of the cases RBSA referred in 2022). Overall, 12 per cent of cases were submitted under the Women and Girls at Risk category, with the largest proportion being made by the MENA region (22 per cent of the cases referred by MENA bureau). Overall, 48 per cent of cases submitted globally under the 2022 unallocated quotas were under emergency priority, 40 per cent under urgent priority, and the remaining 12 per cent under normal priority.

The overall acceptance rate for cases submitted under the global unallocated quota was approximately 67 per cent in 2022, which represents a slight decrease compared to the previous year when the combined acceptance rate was at 73 per cent. This figure is an estimate as it does not include those cases submitted in 2022 but are still pending a decision.

EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA & THE GREAT LAKES

The unallocated global quotas provided life-saving opportunities for refugees in the EHAGL region in 2022. They helped UNHCR operations respond to urgent or emergency protection and medical needs, often arising in countries where selection missions are not planned by resettlement States or not feasible owing to insecurity and other factors. In 2022, 362 refugees were submitted for resettlement across the EHAGL region through the unallocated global quotas.

Swift and flexible resettlement processing plays a crucial role in responding to serious protection concerns, including physical threats, heightened risks of refoulement, and timely interventions for life-threatening medical conditions. Given the increasing number of refugees in the EHAGL region with an urgent need to secure a third country solution, the unallocated global quotas represent an essential protection tool. In 2022, places under these quotas provided critical resettlement opportunities in four country operations without allocated quotas on



*Rwanda, November 2022. Refugees from Kiziba camp prepare for resettlement to Norway.
© UNHCR/Lilly Carlisle*

account of insecurity as well as other factors (i.e. Djibouti, Somalia, South Sudan and Eritrea). Besides urgent and emergency protection needs, a considerable number of resettlement cases in EHAGL involve refugees with complex medical conditions in locations where the recommended treatment and health care services are inaccessible or unavailable.

However, the value and effectiveness of the unallocated quotas can be diminished when resettlement States limit submissions from locations with a consular presence or to cases with close family or community links, and/or introduce other restrictions on scope and selection criteria. It can also be challenging to find alternative solutions, in particular for urgent and emergency priority cases, when a resettlement State unexpectedly pauses or reduces their programme.

In 2022, the EHAGL region received a notable increase in denials compared to previous years, due partly to States applying national asylum policies which do not accord with UNHCR guidelines and assessments of eligibility for international protection, or due to taking a different approach to the principle of internal protection alternatives (also known as IFA/IRA), e.g. when adjudicating cases involving Burundian and Congolese refugees.

The EHAGL region also hosts refugee communities with typically large families, and the ratio of young children to adults within a household is often an indicator of heightened protection risks. To ensure equitable access to resettlement opportunities, it is important that more resettlement States are willing and able to resettle large families.

WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

In 2022, 93 individuals (42 cases) were submitted for resettlement under the unallocated quota from 11 countries in the West and Central Africa (WCA) Region.

The unallocated quota remained a crucial tool in addressing urgent protection or medical needs of refugees in a region where increasingly challenging security and political contexts exacerbate the pre-existing vulnerabilities of refugee populations, particularly in countries of the Central Sahel and Lake Chad Basin situations.



Chad, May 2023. Achta Abdallah Abdoulay, 26 years old came from Konga Haraza in Sudan with her three children. She has been living at the Borota site since May 8, 2023. She fled the violence in Sudan to find refuge in Chad. Her husband was killed during the violence. © UNHCR/Aristophane Ngargoune

Expedited resettlement is a life-saving intervention for refugees with legal and physical protection needs or who are at risk of sexual and gender-based violence, which accounted for 55 per cent of submissions from the region in 2022. Among this category, persons of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities are at heightened risk in WCA where most countries have legislation criminalizing same-sex relations and/or strong societal bias against LGBTIQ+ individuals that permeates the public space and community and religious instances. In some countries, LGBTIQ+ refugees face discrimination in even accessing asylum procedures and international protection.

In a region where overall resettlement opportunities remain limited, the unallocated quotas provide access to resettlement to refugees in operations which do not benefit from allocated resettlement quotas, such as Côte d'Ivoire or the Central African Republic.

Delays in obtaining travel documents or medical clearances in certain countries in the region, owing to the absence of a local embassy (e.g. in Chad and Niger) or other services, require increased levels of coordination and have caused significant delays with departures for urgent or emergency cases submitted in 2022. Similarly, the absence of local embassies in certain countries effectively limits refugees' access to certain unallocated quota opportunities (i.e. in Cameroon, Ghana, and countries covered by the Senegal Multi-Country Office).

SOUTHERN AFRICA

In 2022, 232 refugees (78 cases) were submitted under urgent and emergency priority using the unallocated quota. Out of the 78 cases, 25 were submitted under the medical needs category and 39 under the legal and/or physical protection needs category. Cases were submitted by the following country operations in the region: Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Madagascar, Botswana, Zambia, Comoros, Malawi, South Africa, Mauritius, DRC and RoC.

The unallocated quotas are of vital importance for the RBSA region as it is one of the few means of providing a life-saving solution. Cases submitted under the unallocated quotas are often those with more complex profiles and/or urgent resettlement needs that require prioritized decisions and processing. A significant number have been recognized as refugees under UNHCR's mandate due to the sensitivity of their profiles or due to their urgent protection and/or medical needs.

However, lengthy processing times by some resettlement States, in particular for emergency priority submissions, as well as unplanned pauses to resettlement programmes negatively impact the cases needing prompt processing.

THE MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA

The unallocated quota in the MENA region continues to serve a vital role in providing life-saving relief for refugees facing imminent harm. Refugees who benefit from the unallocated quotas in the region are often at immediate risk of

refoulement or facing serious threats to their health and safety. Almost half of the 367 individuals submitted for resettlement under the 2022 unallocated quotas, were presented under emergency priority (i.e. 172 individuals) with many refugees facing severe harm and the grave possibility of being refouled.

Across North Africa and the Middle East, almost every country in the region as well as Türkiye availed of places under the unallocated quotas in 2022, with 16 different operations submitting 367 refugees for resettlement consideration. The unallocated quotas were crucial and provided a needed lifeline for operations throughout the year and particularly when allocated quotas were filled and fewer options were available toward the end of the year. This will be even more true in 2023, as the region has had an overall reduction in places under the allocated quotas.

In 2022, however, it was increasingly challenging to find solutions for individuals with emergency medical needs. While many countries in the region have a high quality of local medical care, the ability of refugees to access services is limited. For some individuals resettlement remained the only life-saving solution. Unfortunately, due to the limited availability of such places, resettlement was not an option for many individuals with emergency medical conditions. This trend has continued into 2023, leading to only a handful of opportunities for refugees with emergency medical conditions, far below the current needs. This has also resulted in the accumulation of refugees with life threatening conditions waiting with no solutions on the horizon.

To help ensure refugees identified at risk of deportation or severe harm at any point in the year have the same access to this important solution, UNHCR in MENA will continue to strategically manage quota allocation to best ensure access to this solution is available to operations in the region throughout the year.

THE AMERICAS

Operations in the Americas referred a total of 61 persons (25 cases) to RCPS for dossier submission under the unallocated quota in 2022. This allowed operations to identify life-saving solutions for refugees in the region, particularly for those operations with no allocated resettlement quota, and benefited some of the most at-risk cases. The need for and use of unallocated global quotas for cases requiring expedited processing and departure will continue in 2023, as it represents a direct and efficient life-saving intervention for those individuals at risk of refoulement, arbitrary arrest or detention, or serious and imminent threats to their lives.

ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Refugees in Asia with compelling needs, particularly those requiring an urgent or emergency solution, benefitted significantly from the unallocated quotas in 2022. A total of 357 individuals (137 cases) from 23 different countries of origin were submitted through RCPS for the consideration of resettlement States during the year.

Of the 45 countries in the region, 25 have not signed the 1951 Convention and many have no domestic legal or administrative framework covering the status and

rights of refugees. Submissions using the unallocated quota helped to address this tenuous protection environment. The expedited processing mechanisms for urgent and emergency priority case submissions enable quick departure and serve to ensure individuals at immediate risk of refoulement, or those facing indefinite immigration detention, find a safe solution in a timely manner.

Operations in the region used the unallocated quota to help refugees facing critical and acute risks in countries of asylum, such as a group of individuals targeted by criminals and threatened with severe violence in the refugee camps; political dissidents who fled their countries following an abrupt change in government; individuals facing extradition requests to countries where their lives are at risk; young refugees facing life-threatening illnesses and requiring treatment that is inaccessible in countries of asylum; and LGBTIQ+ refugees facing abuse and violence in countries of asylum.

The unallocated quotas are an essential life-saving tool for UNHCR in Asia and enable UNHCR operations to respond to highly sensitive situations or to individuals facing particularly heightened or imminent risks.



Pakistan, August 2022. Afghan refugees prepare yarn to be dyed and used in carpet-weaving, at the Kot Chandna refugee village near Mianwali in Punjab, Pakistan. © UNHCR/Asif Shahzad

EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA AND GREAT LAKES

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

OVERVIEW OF THE PROTECTION ENVIRONMENT IN THE REGION

As of 31 March 2023, prior to an escalation of violence in Sudan, the [EHAGL region](#) hosted close to 5 million refugees and asylum-seekers and more than 11 million internally displaced persons as a result of conflict, systemic and widespread human rights violations, climate changes and natural disasters, notably including a [severe and prolonged drought across the East and Horn of Africa](#). These factors often arise in combination and create intercommunal tensions, sometimes leading to violence. As water sources become depleted and livelihood opportunities diminish, displaced people alongside their host communities have been affected by water scarcity as well as rising prices for food and other basic commodities.

A majority of refugees and asylum-seekers in the region were located in [Uganda](#) (over 1.5 million), [Sudan](#) (more than 1.1 million), [Ethiopia](#) (close to 900,000) and [Kenya](#) (almost 600,000), with over 40 per cent originating from [South Sudan](#) and others forcibly displaced from Somalia, [the Democratic Republic of the Congo](#) (DRC), Burundi, Eritrea, Ethiopia and other countries of origin.

Following the outbreak of armed conflict in Sudan on 15 April 2023, large numbers of civilians have been forced to flee, including people who were already internally displaced because of previous conflicts in Sudan and refugees from other countries who had sought safety in Sudan. In addition to new internal displacement, over 150,000 people, including Sudanese refugees and refugees of other nationalities hosted by Sudan, have fled Sudan to neighbouring countries or returned home in adverse circumstances – notably to Chad, South Sudan, the Central African Republic, Egypt, and Ethiopia – as of 15 May 2023 (see [Sudan Situation](#)).

In the region, prima facie recognition of refugee status is sometimes applied in accordance with the 1969 Organization of African Union Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa or the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, and six of the 11 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



Uganda, March 2023. Nyiravumera Janine (left) collects water at a water point in Rubondo, Nakivale refugee settlement. The water she collects has helped her for home use and her young children don't get sick from dirty water as they always have enough clean water from the tanks. © UNHCR/Esther Ruth Mbabazi

determination (RSD) are struggling to keep pace with a rising number of newly displaced people in need of international protection. In recent years, less political will to recognize refugee status on a prima facie basis for certain caseloads has contributed to RSD backlogs as national asylum systems become overburdened, resulting in the onward movement of asylum-seekers in search of State recognition of fundamental rights, protection and solutions. UNHCR exceptionally conducts RSD under its mandate in certain limited circumstances.

Conflict has contributed to community divisions and triggered new displacement, both internally and across international borders. In November 2022, the Government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) agreed to a cessation of hostilities after a two-year war which is estimated to have caused hundreds of thousands of civilian casualties. The delivery of humanitarian assistance and services has since resumed while access to cash, fuel and communications has improved somewhat, enabling some internally displaced people to return home. Conflict in the Benishangul-Gumuz, Somali and Oromia regions of Ethiopia has continued in 2023. (See [Ethiopia: Country Refugee Response Plan](#))

Uganda hosts the largest number of refugees in Africa and received over 146,000 new arrivals in 2022 mostly from troubled regions in eastern DRC and South Sudan. As of 31 March 2023, close to 2.3 million South Sudanese refugees and

asylum-seekers remain displaced around the region. [Chronic under-funding](#) for the humanitarian response in Uganda, Sudan, Ethiopia and other host countries has resulted in reductions to food rations and cash-based assistance and hindered the capacity of States, host communities and humanitarian organisations to provide healthcare, education, water, sanitation and effective protection to address the growing needs. However, with an increase in development partners and private sector investments as well as programmes targeting improvement in refugees and host population educational outcomes and skills development in Uganda, it is anticipated that refugees will be able to access employment opportunities both within Uganda as well as in other countries in the coming years.

In **Somalia**, despite successful presidential elections and intensified government efforts to recapture territory from Al Shabaab, nearly 3 million people remain internally displaced owing to conflict, insecurity and the effects of climate change, such as cyclical droughts and recurring floods, and more than 600,000 Somali refugees endure prolonged displacement in the region. Somalia also hosts almost 35,000 refugees from Ethiopia, Yemen and other countries.

On a positive note, the security situation continued to improve in **Burundi** in 2022 and allowed for some voluntary refugee repatriation, mostly from Tanzania.



Ethiopia, February 2023. Lete Isayas, a refugee from Eritrea, sifts cereals outside her shelter in Alemwach refugee site. Over 20,000 Eritrean refugees were displaced to Alemwach from Tigray region during the Tigray war. © UNHCR/Samuel Otieno

However, sustainable reintegration, socio-economic inclusion, and housing, land and property rights remain challenging in Burundi.

In addition, forced displacement in the EHAGL region triggered by conflict and extreme climate conditions has been accompanied by a heightened risk of human trafficking and other forms of exploitation targeting people on the move, mostly towards North Africa, Europe and the Middle East.

RESETTLEMENT WITHIN PROTECTION AND SOLUTIONS STRATEGIES

Countries in the EHAGL region will be expected to maintain a generous approach to territorial asylum and implementation of CRRF measures. Local solutions for refugees in some countries, such as by inclusion in healthcare systems, education and economic activity, are growing alongside a gradual and welcome shift from camp management to allowing refugees increased freedom of movement with access to livelihoods for self-reliance in countries with an encampment policy. For example, the Government of **Kenya**, together with UNHCR, other UN agencies, donors and development actors are collaborating on an integrated settlement approach known as the “[Marshall Plan](#)”, in which refugees and members of host communities would live together and benefit from humanitarian programmes that support self-reliance and inclusion in national systems that provide access to education, healthcare and other public services. UNHCR will also explore opportunities for refugees to legally integrate in Kenya through citizenship (thus far available only to a small number of refugees) or long-term legal residence.

However, meaningful and effective local integration through the enjoyment of fundamental rights on par with nationals and a pathway to naturalisation is not yet foreseeable as a durable solution for many refugees in the region. Therefore, a renewed commitment by the international community to greater responsibility-sharing with host States by way of refugee resettlement is critical to help mitigate against a regression of positive developments in the regional protection environment.

In **Ethiopia**, resettlement will be a strategic priority for UNHCR as a durable solution for refugees affected by the escalation of violence in 2020 and disruption of humanitarian assistance, particularly those who have experienced secondary or multiple incidents of forced displacement. Refugees in Ethiopia will also benefit from resettlement as a protection tool, including survivors of torture and those who have witnessed or experienced violence and grave human rights violations.

In **Uganda, Ethiopia, Sudan** and other country operations where increasing humanitarian needs are outpacing the capacity of States, host communities and humanitarian organisations, including UNHCR and the World Food Programme (WFP), to respond adequately, UNHCR will seek to use resettlement as a strategic means to alleviate pressure on services and to help ensure the limited assistance available reaches a larger proportion of the refugee population while addressing the protection needs of those currently most reliant on support.

Resettlement across the EHAGL region will continue to play a key role in advocacy and negotiation for local solutions including an eventual conversion of refugee camps with parallel services to integrated urban settlements. To this end, UNHCR will continue to prioritize Congolese, Somali and other refugee populations for resettlement as a tangible demonstration of solidarity with host countries and as a durable solution to their protracted displacement.

Referrals with protection needs will appropriately remain the highest priority for UNHCR resettlement programmes, particularly for survivors of gender-based violence (GBV), torture and other forms of abuse and exploitation, victims of trafficking, people living with a disability, members of socially marginalized communities, unaccompanied children and other children at heightened risk, as well as refugees with specific legal and/or physical protection needs arising from their profile and individual circumstances.

Complementary pathways for the admission of refugees in EHAGL to third countries continue to grow incrementally, through labour mobility and education pilot programmes as well as named sponsorship; however, systemic changes to migration legislation and policies in receiving countries are necessary for solutions on a larger scale. For citizens of the East African Community, UNHCR has identified promising opportunities within the region for labour mobility and education, while host countries in EHAGL have been willing to support the reunification of family members separated as a result of displacement. Improving access to family reunification outside the EHAGL region will remain a high priority for UNHCR, as a fundamental right.

PROJECTED RESETTLEMENT NEEDS IN THE REGION IN 2024

Ongoing conflicts and newly emerging crises, human rights violations and insecurity in the region exacerbated by political transitions, drought and other factors indicate that opportunities for refugees to return home in safety and dignity will remain limited in 2024. For refugees who do repatriate, sustainable and effective reintegration will be equally difficult without further improvements in governance, social protection and access to justice in countries of origin.

UNHCR therefore estimates that **559,791** refugees located across nine of the 11 countries in the EHAGL region will need resettlement in 2024, **an increase of 15 per cent compared to 2023** (485,241). The greatest needs numerically are assessed to be in Ethiopia (192,831) and Uganda (134,936); however, large numbers of refugees in Sudan, Kenya and other host countries in the region are living in equally dire circumstances. 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.

The office in **Burundi** estimates that **19,200** refugees, mostly originating from the DRC, will be in need of resettlement in 2024. The continued political instability, insecurity, human right violations and violence in eastern DRC remains a concern,

limiting the prospects for voluntary return. Some Congolese refugees in Burundi have been living in protracted displacement for more than a decade with no foreseeable alternative durable solution. Many have serious protection needs on account of their age, gender and personal circumstances, including women, children and youth, individuals of diverse sexual orientation or gender identity and survivors of violence or torture, while others with a serious medical condition or disability will benefit from resettlement to address their specific needs.

UNHCR **Ethiopia** projects that **192,831** refugees, mainly from Eritrea, South Sudan, Sudan and Somalia, will be in need of resettlement in 2024. This includes women and girls at heightened risk of gender-based violence (GBV), exploitation and abuse. In addition, survivors of violence or torture, such as many of the refugees in Amhara, Afar, Addis Ababa, Tigray and Benishangul-Gumuz, have resettlement needs associated with multiple displacement and witnessing or experiencing violence and serious violations of human rights in Ethiopia. Nearly 29,000 refugees are registered as unaccompanied or separated children (UASC) in Ethiopia. Children face multifaceted protection risks in Ethiopia, including child labour, harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation/cutting, early and



Kenya, February 2023. A student poses for a photo during an annotation digital learning class in Kakuma. Solidarity Initiative for Refugees is a local community-based organisation established in 2016 by a group of young refugees with the goal of using technology to equip refugees in Kakuma with the skills and tools to create a better future for themselves. © UNHCR/Charity Nzomo



Tanzania, August 2022. Burundian refugee and mother-of-three, Evangelina Bukuru, poses for a photograph with her mother and baby at their home in Nyarugusu refugee camp. © UNHCR/Anthony Karumba

forced marriage, sexual abuse and human trafficking. Furthermore, children living with disabilities are often unable to meaningfully participate in social activities.

The **Kenya** Office estimates that **55,315** refugees will be in need of resettlement in 2024 amongst the camp and urban refugee populations in Dadaab, Kakuma, Kalobeyi, Nairobi and other locations, including women at risk, UASC, survivors of violence or torture and people living with disabilities, among other groups with specific needs. 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.

The office in **Rwanda** projects that **18,850** refugees will be in need of resettlement in 2024. This includes Congolese refugees with specific needs or facing protracted displacement, a significant number of female-headed households, survivors of sexual abuse, violence and torture, and UASC.

The **Emergency Transit Mechanism (ETM)** in Rwanda provides life-saving interventions to the 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 2022, almost 1,500 refugees and asylum-seekers have been evacuated from Libya on a voluntary basis to the Rwanda ETM.

In **Somalia, 1,405** refugees are projected to be in need of resettlement in 2024. Refugees in Somalia face serious protection risks, such as harassment, abuse, discrimination, and exclusion of minority groups from both community affairs and services, with limited access to legal remedies. Protection risks have increased due to the impact of drought and food insecurity, particularly GBV. Refugee populations to be prioritized for resettlement include the following profiles: survivors of violence and torture, single parents and their children, children at risk (including UASC), and persons living with a disability or serious medical condition.

The office in **South Sudan** estimates that **14,509** refugees will be in need of resettlement in 2024. This includes refugees with specific risk profiles, disabilities and other vulnerabilities, or diagnosed with serious medical conditions which cannot be treated in South Sudan. Survivors of GBV generally lack effective protection in South Sudan, among other refugees often in situations of protracted displacement facing challenges with housing, land and property rights, livelihoods, forced recruitment and abduction of children. UNHCR will aim to consolidate and build upon a nascent resettlement programme for refugees in South Sudan in 2023.

Prior to conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) which erupted in April 2023, UNHCR **Sudan** estimated that **83,215** refugees would be in need of resettlement in 2024, the majority from South Sudan and Eritrea and many from Ethiopia. South Sudanese refugees' protection concerns in Sudan include violence and exploitation, low levels of documentation, lack of access to social services and lack of financial inclusion. Many live in dire conditions, lacking access to secure shelter, clean water, healthcare, food, education and gainful employment. Since April 2023, some refugees have returned home to South Sudan and Ethiopia in adverse conditions. The Eritrean population residing in refugee camps in the east of Sudan is characterized by protracted displacement; however, there is also a continuing influx of new arrivals to Sudan notwithstanding the events of April 2023. Many Eritrean refugees have fled to escape forced conscription for indefinite national service. They are particularly prone to a risk of human trafficking, exploitation and physical abuse.

Of the **134,936** refugees in **Uganda** projected to be in need of resettlement in 2024, the majority are from South Sudan and the DRC. Many refugees are survivors of violence, and some have been displaced multiple times by conflict. Traditional social structures have broken down and livelihood opportunities for

self-reliance in Uganda are currently limited. The majority of Congolese refugees originate from the east of the DRC. Some arrived as early as 1994 and more refugees continue to be forcibly displaced and seek protection in Uganda due to conflict and insecurity in the DRC.

The Office in **Tanzania** estimates that 39,530 refugees will be in need of resettlement in 2024, mostly comprising refugees from the DRC. While UNHCR supports the voluntary return of Burundians insofar as repatriation takes place in conditions of safety and dignity, some Burundian refugees with specific protection needs and heightened vulnerabilities are also in need of resettlement to third countries, such as survivors of GBV, female-headed households for whom return and sustainable reintegration in Burundi would be especially difficult, children and adolescents at risk, LGBTIQ+ refugees, and persons living with a disability or serious medical condition.

REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES IN 2022

As movement restrictions, border closures and disrupted resettlement departures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic eased in 2022, accompanied by a welcome increase in the number of places made available by States for new resettlement submissions, UNHCR was able to rebuild and expand its resettlement programmes in the EHAGL region. These programmes included a group-based approach for some Congolese refugees in Rwanda and Tanzania, a model which extends to a similar group in Burundi in 2023 and potentially a newly defined group in Ethiopia, enabling significantly quicker and larger-scale case processing for more refugees with existing personnel and staffing levels.

Challenges included an outbreak of Ebola in Uganda in September 2022, which was brought under control before the end of the year but limited the movements of UNHCR and IOM personnel as well as refugees for several months, with implications on resettlement processing and departures.

With respect to UNHCR resettlement cases involving recognized refugees who have waited several years for a decision from a resettlement State or for confirmation of a departure date, the prolonged delay and uncertainty has created immense frustration, requiring the diversion of human resources for counselling and updates (for example, registering and adding newborn children to resettlement cases post-submission). Such delays have also resulted in an inability to provide a timely solution and/or medical interventions and diminished the value of resettlement as a protection tool.

In 2022, a total of 30,131 refugees were identified and submitted by UNHCR to 13 resettlement States (an 82 per cent increase compared to 2021), exceeding the regional submission target for EHAGL, and 13,347 refugees submitted by UNHCR in 2022 and previous years were able to depart.



Kenya, June 2022. Deng Akuel Kuir is a 28-year-old South Sudanese refugee teacher at Bahr El Naam Girls school in Kakuma. He was born and raised in Kakuma refugee camp and teaches classes 7 and 8. "I love teaching because I get to give back to the society that taught me." says Deng. © UNHCR/Charity Nzomo

PERSPECTIVES

KENYA

FROM A CITIZEN OF NOWHERE TO A CITIZEN OF CANADA: THE INSPIRING STORY OF MOHAMUD ABDI AHMED

Mohamud was born and grew up as a refugee in the Dadaab Refugee Camp in Kenya. He was raised by a single mother together with his siblings and life was tough – living each day as it came with hope and optimism for the future was the only solution. His mother took him to school as a day care option rather than for education. As a young boy, Mohamud’s main motivation to go to school was to get porridge and biscuits and to play with his childhood friends. He attended both primary and high school in Dadaab and performed well.

In 2013, Mohamud was awarded a World University Service of Canada scholarship to study in Canada. He was thrilled at the opportunity. He left Dadaab, Kenya and enrolled at the University of Saskatchewan to pursue an undergraduate course in engineering. He pursued his studies in Canada with excitement and joy, but he had to overcome many challenges. Despite being on a scholarship, he did not have enough finances to manage the comparatively high cost of living in Canada. Additionally, his family in Dadaab was calling frequently and looking to him for financial support.

The long freezing winters in Canada were difficult for Mohamud, and he spent much time indoors. He also had to learn and adapt to new cultural practices. Everything in Canada seemed foreign and he often felt like an outsider. But this did not limit his academic performance and he was able to successfully complete his undergraduate degree in civil engineering. While in college, Mohamud was passionate about supporting new immigrants to Canada. He volunteered with several organizations including the United Church of Canada, and the Open Door Society. He even succeeded, with help from well-wishers and friends, to sponsor his family to join him in Canada.

In 2021, Mohamud came back to Kenya, this time a proud Canadian citizen, a qualified civil engineer, and the head of a non-profit organization he founded to mentor and support young refugees, especially refugee girls, in education and life skills. He is currently working for the US Resettlement Support Center operated by Church World Service in Nairobi and supporting UNHCR through the Africa Regional Deployment Unit.

His passion is to make a difference in the lives of refugees, a majority of whom do not get the opportunities he received.



Kenya, 2023. Mohamud Abdi Ahmed at the UNHCR Country Office in Nairobi, Kenya ©UNHCR/ Mellegers

PERSPECTIVES

TANZANIA

A GLEAM OF HOPE AND RESILIENCE

Nyarugusu Refugee Camp is about 70 kilometres from the rural town of Kasulu in the Kigoma region of Tanzania. Resettlement staff depart from the UNHCR Kasulu field office at 8:00am for a bumpy two-hour bus drive to Nyarugusu, often stopping unexpectedly along the way when stuck in the mud during the rainy season. Some caseworkers listen to their favourite music on headphones or read, while others try to get some rest or catch up on sleep before interviews in the camp. A few are chatting and cracking jokes to entertain each other. However, they are all aware of their common goal: contributing to resettlement and the promise of a better future for refugees in Nyarugusu.

One day I interviewed a woman whose parents were murdered in the DRC by rebels when she was young. Together with her brother, the only other surviving member of her family, she was locked in the house with the dead bodies of her parents for several days until they were rescued by passers-by. In another case, I interviewed a woman who was arrested and forcibly removed from her home because her husband was falsely accused of supporting enemy forces. They killed her husband and demanded information from her. As she knew nothing, to punish her, they boiled oil and poured it on her body.

Volumes of books can be written about the tragedies that refugees have endured. When I look into their eyes, sometimes with tears on their cheeks while they narrate their personal experiences, I ask them how they are and they reply, "I'm fine, Madam!" Such encounters open a whole world of emotions within me. How can someone who has gone through so many tragedies still smile and carry on with life? How can they overcome their dreadful memories after the unspeakable experiences they have gone through? Most of them tell me that they still have hope in changing their lives and it is such a hope that allows them to go through all the difficulties they face in this phase of their lives as refugees. Such a hope can even make them smile! As for me, it is indeed this same hope that prompts me to endure whatever it takes as long as I can contribute to improve their future through resettlement.

Purity Bere

Associate Resettlement and Complementary Pathways Officer, UNHCR Tanzania



Tanzania. January 2023. Refugees in the Nyarugusu Refugee Camp received decision letters from the USA on 13 January 2023. ©UNHCR/Kweka

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 Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and Sao Tome & Principe), Central African Republic, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal Multi-Country Office (covering Benin, Cabo Verde, Gambia (the), Guinea Conakry, Guinea Bissau, Sierra Leone, Senegal and Togo).

OVERVIEW OF THE PROTECTION ENVIRONMENT IN THE REGION

West and Central Africa (WCA) remains one of the most unstable and risk-prone regions in the world. It is characterized by political instability, armed conflicts, and intercommunal competition for increasingly limited resources, worsened by tensions linked to the effects of climate change, which persist in many parts of the region. Overall, armed conflict is spreading and intensifying, with new situations developing.

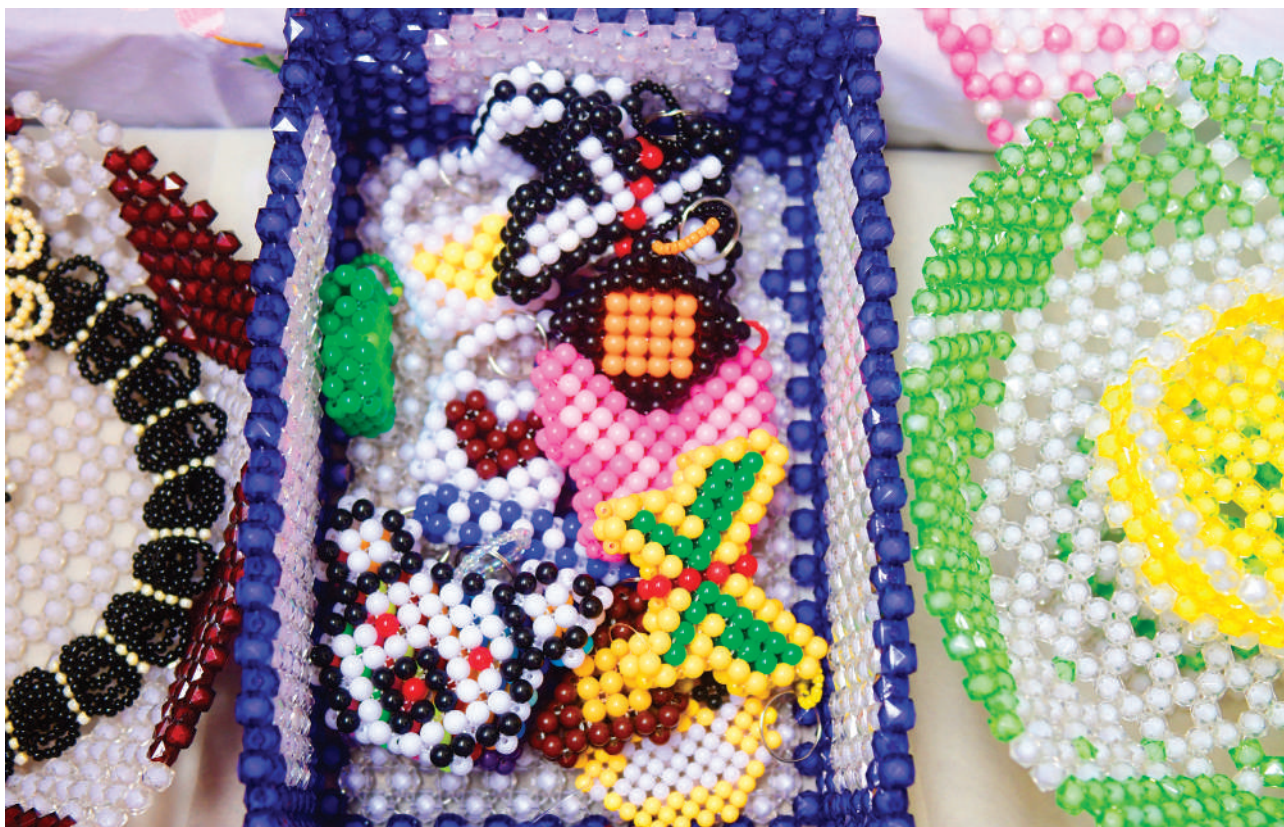
As of 31 March 2023, there were 13.1 million forcibly displaced persons within the region, of which 1.6 million are refugees and asylum-seekers, and 7.8 million are internally displaced persons (IDPs). The six largest countries of origin are Central African Republic (CAR), Sudan, Nigeria, Cameroon, Mali and Burkina Faso, accounting for 97 per cent of the overall refugee population. 87 per cent of the overall refugee population is hosted between Chad, Cameroon and Niger. These three countries also have the largest resettlement operations in West and Central Africa.

There are three significant 'situations' (forced displacement caused by a particular conflict or emergency) within the region: The Sahel situation, the Central African Republic situation, and the Lake Chad Basin situation. These three situations currently account for approximately 67 per cent of all forced displacement in the WCA region.

In addition to these situations, the protracted successionist conflict in the northwest and southwest anglophone regions of Cameroon has led to the internal displacement of over 650,000 persons and the flight of tens of thousands of refugees into neighbouring Nigeria.

More recently, in March 2023, UNHCR declared a Level 1 emergency in the West African coastal countries of Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo following a significant influx of refugees from Burkina Faso. As of the first week of April 2023, an estimated 46,429 individuals had fled Burkina Faso into these four neighbouring countries

The ongoing brutal conflict in Sudan is expected to generate an important outflow of refugees to Chad and CAR. In Chad, 20,000 refugees have already arrived from Darfur in the second half of April 2023, one of the regions of Sudan most affected by violence, which might cause a much larger displacement. CAR may also face, although to a lesser extent, an influx of Sudanese refugees as



Cameroon, June 2022. Crafts made by a Central African refugee woman in Yaounde. 'I am passionate about craft-making. That is why I learned how to make crafts.' Zainabou Abou, 33, trains young women in Cameroon's capital city Yaounde, to make crafts from beads. © UNHCR/Helen Nghoh

well as the spontaneous returns of a significant number of the 24,000 CAR refugees currently in Sudan.

Overall, armed conflict is spreading and intensifying within the region, leading to a steady increase in the number of refugees and IDPs, and shrinking access to displaced populations in certain situations. The predominantly conflict-driven nature of the crises in the region is leading to a greater number of complex protection challenges, including an increase in the number of reported instances of gender-based violence (GBV), as well as growing levels of serious malnutrition, which are compounded by the negative impact of rising inflation, rapidly increasing prices of basic commodities, and limited livelihood opportunities.

Although largely unrecorded, in certain situations a cycle of displacement is developing; from IDPs to refugees, from refugees to returnees, from returnees to IDPs, and back once more to refugees. Furthermore, WCA remains a region of origin, transit and destination for mixed movements, with flows towards coastal countries and towards North Africa and Europe.

Against these enormous challenges, UNHCR is focusing 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 operations' individual protection strategies, especially in operations covering a specific situation, as set out in the next section.

RESETTLEMENT WITHIN PROTECTION AND SOLUTIONS STRATEGIES

In a region increasingly characterized by complex and challenging contexts, where the needs of people displaced by protracted conflicts are growing faster than the humanitarian response can expand, resettlement continues to remain a critical and often life-saving protection tool. Accordingly, resettlement is widely integrated into the protection strategy of country operations and underpins UNCHR's regional protection approach, which is focused on three critical response phases: the emergency response phase, the access to rights phase and the solutions phase. Resettlement may be linked to each of these phases; however, it is central to the solutions phase and is most frequently used to address the needs of refugees with specific needs in protracted situations, without integration opportunities, or prospects of return in safety and dignity to the country of origin.

The levels of hardship and associated protection risks experienced by refugees in the region and the protracted refugee population in particular have grown enormously in recent years. The COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent, global economic downturn, exacerbated by the war in Ukraine, were significant contributing factors, as were the multiple forced displacements, drought, food insecurity, and extensive poverty. In **eastern Chad**, resettlement has without a doubt prevented thousands of refugees from exposure to violence, exploitation, trafficking, and other violations of rights. It has ensured that individual survivors of GBV have been able to access specialist support to assist in their recovery and has prevented children and adults from engaging in dangerous onward movements.

Sahel situation

In the **central Sahel**, where armed groups, particularly in Burkina Faso and Mali, continue to make indiscriminate use of violence against the civilian population (including torture and rape as weapon of war), resettlement is an effective protection tool for survivors and those at risk of GBV. GBV remains one of the main consequences of conflict and forced displacement in the Sahel situation affecting mainly women and children.

The main refugee populations affected by this situation are from Mali and Burkina Faso, and the majority of refugees from countries within the Sahel situation undergoing resettlement are submitted under the 'Survivor of Violence or Torture' or 'Women and Girls at Risk' categories. Resettlement processing activities in this situation continue to be focused primarily on the **Niger** operation. Malian and Burkinabe refugees currently make up 36 per cent (91,751 individuals) of Niger's overall refugee population.

Given the significance of the situation, UNHCR believes it to be strategically important to ensure that small resettlement quotas are available to both the Mali and Burkina Faso operations so that life-changing opportunities remain for those with the most immediate resettlement needs within these countries.

Central African Republic situation

CAR refugees remain the largest refugee population in WCA, accounting for 30 per cent (486,586) of the region's 1.6 million refugee population as of April 2023. While some progress was made to ensure access for returns to areas considered safe in a number of government-controlled localities in CAR and returns of IDPs and refugees to these areas have been witnessed, conditions are not conducive to large-scale returns due to the prevailing insecurity in many areas outside of government control. Increased pressure on resources and living conditions in host communities and host countries, as well as the persistence of intense militia activity and inter-community violence, also continue to hamper humanitarian access and exposes civilians to serious protection risks.

Given the precarity of the situation, resettlement will continue to play a crucial role in addressing the needs of CAR refugees with specific needs, without compromising UNHCR's regional strategic priority to identify and pursue more localized durable solutions in this situation. CAR refugees are mainly hosted in **Cameroon** (255,000 individuals) and **Chad** (142,617), with smaller numbers in Nigeria and other countries of the region.



Chad, April 2023. Ashta, 32, fled Tindelti, in the Darfur region of Sudan with her husband and six children. "In Tindelti, I was growing onions. When a member of our community was killed, we decided to leave town. We arrived in Chad a fortnight ago..." "We took our children and left. The older ones walked, the smaller ones were on the back of our donkey and the baby was on my back. It took us an hour and a half to get here. I'm relieved now, but I still think about what happened". © UNHCR/Colin Delfosse



*Niger, May 2023. Nigerian refugees and host community children benefit of education in Madaoua.
© UNHCR/Antonia Vadala*

As with the Sahel situation, the conflict-driven nature of the displacement has given rise to a high prevalence of survivors of GBV and other forms of violence. ‘Survivors of Violence or Torture’ and ‘Women and Girls at Risk’ are the two most frequent resettlement submission categories in this context. In both Cameroon and Chad, resettlement remains central to the country operation protection strategies.

Given the relative homogeneity of the CAR refugee population in Cameroon and Chad, group processing modalities were tentatively explored in 2021 for both the CAR and Sudanese refugee populations. For CAR refugees, such an approach is currently seen to be incompatible with other ongoing strategic priorities, notably the dedicated CAR Support Solutions Platform, which is seeking, along with the concerned governments and stakeholders, to mobilize the necessary support to secure durable solutions both in the countries of asylum and in CAR. This includes a focus on the voluntary return, in safety and in dignity, of CAR refugees

Lake Chad Basin

The crisis in the Lake Chad basin, driven by the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP)/Boko Haram conflict, affects **Chad, Cameroon, Niger and Nigeria**. As of February 2023, the forcibly displaced population was close to 3.4 million individuals, including 305,892 refugees, or close to 20 per cent of the region’s refugee population. Insurgency and counter-insurgency measures, as well as indiscriminate attacks by non-state armed groups on the civilian population, are expected to continue to fuel new displacements in 2024. These are the cause of serious protection risks, notably, a high prevalence of GBV and other forms of violence, which are further compounded by restricted humanitarian access, as seen in the other situational contexts within the region.

Resettlement has increasingly been used as a critical protection tool for refugees with specific needs in this situation, notably Nigerian refugees in the Diffa region of Niger, where, by the end of 2022, ongoing biometric verification exercises had resulted in the registration of 102,000 Nigerian refugees. Although Niger is faced with a persistent volatile security situation linked to the activities of regional-based non-state armed groups, the operation will continue to prioritize the identification of Nigerian refugees in Diffa for resettlement submission. In Chad, the operation has started the identification of Nigerian refugees with resettlement needs in the Lac region of the country and anticipates making regular submissions from this population in 2024.

Other significant contexts

In **Cameroon**, the conflict for the secession of the anglophone regions continues to be the cause of largescale forced displacement and refugee movements. Neighbouring Nigeria hosts around 87,000 Cameroonian refugees, the majority originating from the anglophone regions. The conflict, which has been ongoing since 2016, has received limited visibility internationally. Since 2021, the operation in Nigeria has benefited from a small resettlement quota, which is providing life-changing opportunities for some refugees displaced by this conflict, including women and children survivors of GBV, for whom access to specialized recovery care remains extremely limited in the country of asylum. Gradually building of a small but sustainable resettlement capacity within the operation would help address some of these needs, without compromising other solutions activities, where these are appropriate.

Other specific groups and profiles

In many countries of the region, **refugees living with disabilities** are among the most at risk. The harsh conditions prevailing in many contexts within the region impede disabled refugees' capacity to lead normal lives and frequently lead to heightened protection risks. Of particular concern are children living with disabilities for whom there are no specialized education provisions. Many miss out entirely on any form of education and remain isolated, further compounding their needs.

Around the region, **asylum-seeker and refugee members of the LGBTIQ+ community** face serious protection risks because of their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics. Societal discrimination towards LGBTIQ+ is widespread and same-sex relations are currently criminalized in 10 countries, with several imposing the death penalty. Arbitrary arrests and detention are common, and most refugees from this community who are submitted for resettlement have been subjected to violence, including sexual violence. Access to local LGBTIQ+ support organizations is limited and, where these exist, most organizations will not operate openly. Because of the perceived risks, few LGBTIQ+ asylum-seekers will openly self-identify. In countries where the national asylum authorities are unwilling or unable to carry out refugee status determination (RSD), UNHCR may exceptionally conduct RSD under its mandate. LGBTIQ+ refugees being submitted for resettlement are usually submitted as urgent or emergency priority cases, with 'Legal Physical and Protection Needs' and/or 'Survivors of

Violence or Torture' as the main submission categories. Most identified LGBTIQ+ refugees undergoing resettlement are from Senegal, Gambia (the), Cameroon and Guinea and are hosted in countries covered by UNHCR's Multi-Country Office in Senegal. Emergency resettlement interventions have taken place in other parts of the region, including notably, in CAR. This group remains one of the most at-risk within the WCA region, resulting in highly compelling resettlement cases, although UNHCR has encountered significant credibility concerns in a small number of individuals presenting as refugees from this community.

The **Emergency Transit Mechanism (ETM)** in Niger remains 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 4,063 refugees previously detained in Libya. The ETM in Niger remains a critical platform to address the acute needs of the evacuee population; many are survivors of violence and torture, and will continue to be a priority for the Niger operation in 2024. The Niger ETM has improved capacity for remote processing, in response to challenges in the security context in Niger and Libya. With improved connectivity and the creation of remote interviewing spaces, the operation is fully capable of facilitating remote processing by resettlement countries, where required

PROJECTED RESETTLEMENT NEEDS IN THE REGION IN 2024

Based on the trends observed in the last five years and noting the developing crisis in the coastal countries of Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo and Benin, as well as the intensifying conflict in Sudan, UNHCR anticipates the number of refugees projected to be in need of resettlement in WCA will continue to grow. For 2024, it is estimated that **112,350** refugees will be in need of resettlement from the region. It is therefore important that resettlement opportunities are sustained and benefit from a small but steady growth, without prejudice to the pursuit of more localized integration solutions and voluntary returns, where these can be undertaken in safety and dignity.

In **Chad, 45,703** refugees are projected to be in need of resettlement in 2024. The main populations are Sudanese refugees, based mostly in the east of the country, displaced by the Darfur situation, and CAR refugees, based mostly in the south. In Chad, resettlement is providing a lifeline to refugees facing extreme levels of hardship, often exacerbated by an absence of livelihood opportunities and increasing levels of protection risk, including serious malnutrition (notably in eastern Chad), exposure to GBV, risk of exploitation and abuse, and heightened levels of criminality linked to a growing inability to afford the most basic commodities. Among those most in need of resettlement are refugees living with disabilities (particularly children), LGBTIQ+ refugees, and women and girls who are survivors of, or at risk of, GBV.

In **Cameroon, 40,700** refugees are projected to be in need of resettlement in 2024. Of those, approximately 70 per cent are from CAR and 29 per cent from Nigeria, with the remaining one per cent representing other nationalities. The needs they present are closely linked to the severe violence refugees have experienced in their countries of origin, including GBV and violence based on religious and ethnic grounds. Due to the size and the protracted nature of the



Cameroon, May 2022. A refugee from Central Africa Republic trains displaced women in craft-making.
© UNHCR/Helen Ngoh

CAR refugee situation, the ongoing instability in the country of origin, and the lack of tangible local integration prospects, resettlement remains a life-saving durable solution for this refugee population. Nigerian refugees in need of resettlement are almost exclusively those who have fled due to Boko Haram and have experienced violence or torture.

The operation in **Niger** projects that **15,460** refugees will be in need of resettlement in 2024. This figure includes evacuees from Libya to the ETM platform in Niger, who have survived human rights violations in Libya and repeated displacement. The majority of this population has survived violence or torture while in detention in Libya or during flight from the country of origin. Refugees who are not hosted in the ETM in Niger and projected to be in need of resettlement are mostly Malian and Nigerian refugees, mainly victims of religious, ethnic and/or gender-based violence. As a crossroads for mixed movements, Niger continues to receive asylum applications from persons beyond the subregion, including from Sudan, South Sudan and Chad. Resettlement will remain an important urgent lifesaving and protection tool, both for ETM evacuees and for non-ETM refugees

In **Burkina Faso**, UNHCR projects **2,335** refugees to be in need of resettlement in 2024. 97 per cent of this figure is made up of Malian refugees, about 80 per cent of whom are living in the Sahel and North regions of Burkina Faso – zones which are heavily impacted by the ongoing violent conflict. Among the Malian refugees, many of those targeted for resettlement are survivors of violence in both the country of origin and the country of asylum, with most having fled the camp area around the town of Dori in the northeast of the country following a series of targeted attacks

by non-State armed groups. As a result of the forced relocation of Malian refugees out of camps towards urban areas, refugees struggle to access the services they require, thereby exacerbating existing needs and heightening protection risks.

The Office in **Mali** estimates that **535** refugees are projected to be in need of resettlement in 2024. Access limitations resulting from the ongoing conflict make identification in the field extremely challenging. Resettlement is nevertheless being successfully used in this context as an emergency intervention for Burkinabe refugees with specific needs. Currently most resettlement activities are being focused on the urban protracted caseload, principally refugees from Democratic Republic of Congo or CAR. The absence of appropriate specialist support systems, particularly for survivors of GBV or other forms of violence requiring specialized support, exacerbates pre-existing vulnerabilities. This is especially the case for female-headed households.

Ghana hosts a small but at-risk refugee population in need of resettlement estimated to be of **500**, mainly from Sudan and CAR. Most are in a protracted situation, having been in Ghana for many years (in some cases upward of 20 years). Despite this, integration remains challenging, notably because of the impossibility refugees have in acquiring permanent residence status. Sudanese and CAR refugees in Ghana to be considered for resettlement are often survivors of violence or torture or have specific protection needs.

The Operation in **Nigeria** projects that **870** refugees, mainly Cameroonian nationals, will be in need of resettlement in 2024. These are primarily Cameroonians displaced by the conflict in the anglophone regions in the northwest and southwest of the country, as described in the previous section. Resettlement will focus on at risk women and girls and survivors of violence or torture. The number of refugees identified with resettlement needs in Nigeria is low compared to many other countries in the region. This is attributable to the ongoing verification exercise that is taking place in the areas affected by the influx from Cameroon, which is expected to provide more up to date information on the nature and extent of any specific needs.

The Senegal Multi-Country Office (MCO) estimates approximately **8,456** refugees are projected to be in need of resettlement in 2024 in **Benin, Gambia (the), Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo**. This includes persons from CAR, the Gambia, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Togo and other countries of origin. Those in need of resettlement frequently face legal and physical protection needs and difficulties related to integration as they belong to minority groups and do not benefit from community support in the country of asylum. This includes LGBTQI asylum-seekers, mainly from the Gambia who are based in Senegal, and from Senegal who are based in the Gambia. The risk of physical harm, detention and destitution are heightened for this group due to the hostile social bias, sanctioned by the State apparatus through legislation criminalizing same-sex activities. In many countries under the Senegal MCO coverage, access to asylum procedures is limited or refused and recognition by authorities extremely rare. As local integration for identified members of this community remains extremely difficult, resettlement is the only viable durable solution as well as the most effective protection tool for this caseload. In addition to LGBTQI+ individuals, CAR refugees with no current

prospect of return to CAR who are survivors of violence or torture and women and girls at risk, as well as for refugees requiring life-saving medical intervention unavailable in the countries of asylum, will also benefit from access to resettlement. Cases with high resettlement needs in the protracted caseload from Mauritania in Senegal or Senegalese in to the Gambia might also be exceptionally considered for resettlement, as may be a very small number of at-risk cases of Burkinabe in Benin and Togo, particularly survivors of GBV or torture and women and children at risk.

REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES IN 2022

In 2022, the WCA region submitted 3,915 individuals for resettlement to 10 different resettlement countries. This was a 124 per cent increase from 2021, when 1,748 submissions were made from the region, reflecting the additional case processing capacity added in late 2021 and 2022. Despite the many challenges, the WCA region surpassed its 2022 resettlement quotas with an implementation rate in the region of 109 per cent and an acceptance rate of 97 per cent. Furthermore, UNHCR in WCA has prioritized building a solid national staff base across its operations in an effort to develop a more reliable and sustainable resettlement capacity, supported by existing international resettlement and/or protection positions.

UNHCR has strategically begun to build small sustainable resettlement capacity in several situational contexts, including **Burkina Faso** and **Mali** in the central Sahel situation, where it has proved to be a life-saving intervention for a small number of refugees in need of critical medical interventions, among others. It is also being used in **Nigeria** in response to the needs of at-risk refugees displaced by the Northwest/Southwest Cameroon crisis, and it continues to prove very effective in addressing the needs of specific profiles, including persons of diverse SOGIESC, particularly in many of the countries covered by the **Senegal MCO**. These small programmes, which have been developed since 2021, represent important steps towards ensuring that even in the most challenging contexts, resettlement will continue to remain readily available as a critical protection intervention.

However, significant challenges remain with the successful implementation of resettlement programmes in the region. In addition to the unpredictable nature of the security situation and regular extremes in climatic conditions that hinder access to refugee populations, the exceedingly high cost of basic logistical commodities, including fuel, have also begun to impact activities and the regularity of UNHCR's physical presence in more remote locations.

Resettlement needs in the WCA region remain very high compared to available resettlement opportunities. For 2023, the quotas offered by resettlement States represent less than three per cent of the overall resettlement needs, while five years ago, in 2019, it represented close to 20 per cent. With improvements made to resettlement structures and capacity in the region, as well as the strengthening of fraud prevention and response mechanisms following the scale up of resettlement activities since 2021, the region welcomes increased quotas to respond to the needs across the different countries of asylum.

PERSPECTIVES

CAMEROON

RESETTLEMENT: HOPE FOR A BETTER FUTURE

Alain*, a 59-year-old refugee from the Central African Republic, sought safety in Cameroon, where he currently stays with his six children and a grandchild. Alain fled from violence and threats to his life in CAR in 2007, separating him from his wife and children. For years, Alain had no news of his family, and they had no news of him, assuming he was long dead and even mourned his death.

Alain was reunited with his family in 2013, thanks to someone he met at the catholic church he attended in Cameroon. In 2019, Alain and his family were identified for resettlement, and their case was submitted to Canada in early 2020. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Alain and his family had to wait until April 2023 to be able to finally depart to Canada.

* Name changed to protect the individual's identity.



Cameroon, April 2023. UNHCR staff accompany Alain's family at the Nsimalen Int. Airport, Yaounde. ©UNHCR/ Helen Ngoh



Cameroon, April 2023. Alain's daughter rejoicing on their resettlement departure.
©UNHCR/ Helen Ngoh

During this long period of waiting, Alain was diagnosed with cancer. With no adequate medical care or financial support, Alain and his family had almost given up – only waiting for his death as his health continued to deteriorate. Life in Yaoundé was extremely difficult for Alain and his family, not only in terms of covering much needed medical care, but also accommodation and schooling. With Alain unable to fully work and support his family due to his health condition, he had to rely on his wife and children for support.

Alain was so relieved when his family's resettlement case was accepted for resettlement – and for this he is most grateful to UNHCR and Canada. He is now happy for the future of his children and grandchildren, that they will have another chance to restart their lives, pursue their education and their career interests.

While Alain's wife and children expressed mixed emotions on the day of their travel from Yaoundé to Canada, they were so glad that finally it was their time to travel. His wife's primary concern continues to be the health of her husband, and she looks forward to her husband receiving the specialized health care he needs. She is also hopeful that they will all lead a better life. Their 24-year-old daughter, who had to drop out of school due to financial challenges, hopes to resume her education once in Canada and eventually work as a health assistant. Their youngest daughter, who is just 16 years old, has a dream to become a basketball player – something that didn't seem possible in Cameroon.

PERSPECTIVES

GHANA

Ilyas, 29, has lived in Maamobi, a suburb of Accra since 2010, when he fled fighting in Korman in North Darfur, where he was living with his parents and five siblings. Ilyas told UNHCR, “I was young when I left Sudan, an adolescent of about 16 years. I schooled at Korman and helped my father on the farm during weekends and vacations. We had no access to electricity, television, phones and other home appliances like I came to know in Ghana. One or two rich men in Korman had generators that they used to generate electricity and I remember how we envied such people. As I grew up, I understood that we did not live in peace in Korman; people of my ethnicity were marginalised and disrespected by the security forces and people in power. There were restrictions on our movements, incidents of harassment, kidnapping, and even killings of members of my tribe by the Janjaweed and the military. Every month, we would receive news of someone being arrested or killed in the neighbouring towns”.

Ilyas recalls with great sadness, “One morning Korman was attacked by a group of heavily armed men, suspected to be members of the Janjaweed and military. They entered the village, looting and burning houses and killing people of the town. My family’s home was located at the opposite end of the town from where the attack had started from, so I was able to flee to the bush. I walked on foot for about 10 hours to get to Al Fashir.

I ended up in neighbouring Chad, alone, where I was assisted by fellow Muslims to go to Ghana. They provided me with food, shelter and some money for transport. When I arrived in Ghana, fellow Sudanese led me to the offices of the Ghana Refugee Board and UNHCR. After I was registered by the Ghana Refugee Board, UNHCR provided me with basic necessities. Having shelter and these basic necessities were essential to restoring my life and dignity.

Today, I am delighted because I never thought that a day will come for me to travel to a resettlement country. Thanks to UNHCR’s support, my dream is becoming a reality as I leave Ghana. I am grateful to Ghana for taking me in, and I am hopeful that I will adapt well in my new resettlement country, the USA. I really hope to find access to a good job, adequate health services, better food, and a good place to sleep.

I am forever grateful to the US government for accepting my case. I am resolved to do my utmost to contribute to the betterment of the country in any way I can.”



*Ilyas standing outside the UNHCR office in Accra, Ghana. Ghana, May 2023.
© Emmanuel Ansu Twum.*

SOUTHERN AFRICA

The Regional Bureau for Southern Africa provides oversight, coordination, and support for resettlement activities in Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Malawi, Mozambique, the Republic of the Congo (RoC), Zambia and Zimbabwe, as well as the nine countries covered by the South Africa Multi-Country Office (SAMCO): Botswana, Comoros, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mauritius, Namibia, Seychelles and South Africa.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROTECTION ENVIRONMENT IN THE REGION

The Southern Africa region hosts around 785,000 refugees and 278,505 asylum-seekers. Restrictive legislation and policies combined with reservations to 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951 Refugee Convention) hinder access to asylum for forcibly displaced persons, including specific profiles such as LGBTQI+ persons, in a number of countries. There have also been instances of refoulement in Zimbabwe, Botswana and Madagascar. Challenges exist in the issuance of documentation (ID cards and convention travel documents) in the DRC, RoC, Malawi and Mozambique. Lack of documentation and local integration prospects for refugees in protracted situations is also common. Furthermore, a deficiency of reliable data poses challenges in planning and programming particularly in Angola and Mozambique. Moreover, limited capacity and resources within the government systems are creating a backlog of asylum processing in the region.

The region is complex in terms of where refugees reside, with populations highly dispersed in rural areas in the DRC and RoC, concentrated in urban areas in South Africa and the DRC, and exclusively in camps in Malawi, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Refugee populations in Mozambique are located in geographical areas vulnerable to climate emergencies, especially cyclones, leading to multiple protection risks, including destruction of shelter, livelihood materials and documentation, GBV and family separation.

The harsh encampment policies and reservations to the 1951 Refugee Convention affect significant numbers of refugees across the region. Most refugees in **Malawi** reside in the Dzaleka refugee camp, which hosts five times more than the 10,000 for which it was designed. This impacts the provision of adequate basic needs and services, including water and sanitation, livelihoods, education, health and protection services. In **Zimbabwe**, the majority of refugees are required to reside in Tongogara refugee camp and, due to the encampment policy and reservations to the 1951 Refugee Convention, opportunities for self-reliance and local integration are limited. In **Botswana**, refugees must live in Dukwi camp according to the national encampment policy and there are also restrictions on the right to work. Due to the challenges related to obtaining work permits, many refugees resort to informal employment, which places them at risk of exploitation and other harmful practices, including forced labour. In **Namibia**, there are restrictions on refugees'

freedom of movement within the country; refugees are required to reside in Osire refugee settlement and may only leave with permission from local authorities.

Many refugees across the region face insecurity or discrimination in countries of asylum in addition to the restrictions on movement. In **Angola**, registration and renewal of identification documentation has been on hold since 2015, leaving refugees subject to risk of deportation, arbitrary detention, harassment, abuse and exploitation. In **South Africa**, there have been several waves of violent



South Africa, November 2022. As part of UNHCR's annual participatory assessments, women are invited to discuss their challenges in accessing national services. Many of the women have been waiting years for a decision on their asylum applications. Mother of two Nadine, from DRC, supports her family since her husband broke his leg and can no longer work. © UNHCR/Laura Padoan

attacks against refugees and asylum-seekers since 2008 which have resulted in a recurrent cycle of displacement, violence and, in some cases, fatalities. In **Namibia**, detention is used for immigration-related offences, including for illegal entry, lack of or expired permits and visa overstays. **Madagascar** lacks a legal framework for governing asylum matters, rendering it difficult for asylum-seekers to access protection. The protection environment in the **Indian Ocean countries** is also restrictive and marred by various abuses, including deportations and refoulement. In **Mozambique**, many refugees have urgent and high legal and protection needs, including risk of refoulement as well as serious physical safety risks such as abductions, disappearances and even murder. LGBTIQ+ individuals are marginalized across a number of countries, face hardship and lack local integration opportunities. For example, in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe, they face criminal penalties on account of their diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.

There are also multiple emergencies in the region, with the **DRC, RoC and Mozambique** struggling with internal conflicts and several countries continuing to experience an influx of new arrivals from the DRC. Many refugees from the DRC already live in a protracted situation in several countries of asylum, having fled from the continued ethnic and political conflict in the DRC over the years. Other refugee populations like those from the Central African Republic (CAR), Ethiopia, Somalia and South Sudan also face continuing conflict in their countries of origin. In Mozambique, there has been recent internal displacement in the refugee hosting areas of the Nampula Province.

Despite the protracted presence of refugees in the DRC and efforts made by UNHCR to increase access to national systems, refugees often remain dependent on assistance from UNHCR and others. A notable exception, UNHCR RoC is focusing on local integration as the main durable solution envisaged for most of the 41,568 refugees hosted in the country due to the favorable legal framework. The policy to include refugees into their socio-economic structures exists since 2017, and refugees and asylum-seekers generally have the same rights to move and work as Congolese nationals.

RESETTLEMENT WITHIN PROTECTION AND SOLUTIONS STRATEGIES

In line with the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), the region is guided by its Multi-Year, Multi-Partner Protection and Solutions Strategy (MYMPPSS). The Strategy's vision is to create an enabling environment (legal, socioeconomic and administrative) that promotes protection, prevents the occurrence of statelessness and forced displacement inducing situations, and offers solutions, such as resettlement. Key protection priorities for the region include the reduction of the refugee status determination (RSD) backlogs of asylum-seekers by 2024, engaging states to adhere to Conventions, the implementation of the 146 Global Refugee Forum (GRF) pledges, enhancement of quality data collection, preventing statelessness, the development of national action plans, and carrying out inventory of the Accountability to Affected People (AAP).



Zimbabwe, March 2023. Tongogara Primary School, at Tongogara Refugee Camp, is implementing together with UNHCR a Profuturo connected education project. The aim is to expand connected education programmes and reach more than 6,000 students from grades Primary 1 to Primary 7.
© UNHCR/Sonia Gonzalez Suarez

In **Zimbabwe**, the operation's Strategy (MYMPPSS) focuses on livelihoods engagements to enhance self-reliance and to support increased access to durable solutions. However, resettlement remains the only viable durable solution implemented for refugees in Zimbabwe. In **Zambia**, the operation's MYMPPSS recognizes the need for responsibility-sharing in providing durable solutions to refugees and other displaced persons. **Malawi's** MYMPPSS places an emphasis on a comprehensive approach to durable solutions, including a focus on resettlement. **SAMCO's** MYMPPSS prioritizes the pursuit of strategic durable solutions and complementary pathways. In the **DRC**, the operation envisages the further strengthening of resettlement and complementary pathways as part of its durable solutions strategy, alongside voluntary repatriation and its efforts to support integration and livelihoods.

RoC's MYMPPSS focuses on local integration as the main durable solution; however, a minority of refugees have resettlement needs because their inclusion into the national system is not feasible. In Mozambique, resettlement will be used to contribute to the protection environment, opening-up space for access to asylum for new arrivals and for local integration.

With prevalent protection concerns across the region, as well as severely restricted movement in a number of countries, and limited opportunities for financial independence, resettlement is applied as a key protection tool. Gender-based violence (GBV) is pervasive and affects boys, girls, women and men, particularly in DRC as well as among the Congolese population residing in other countries. Female heads of household, children separated from their parents, and elderly

people without social support are least able to cope and are at risk of exploitation, with some becoming victims of trafficking or other crimes. In **South Africa**, GBV, including rape and sexual violence, is endemic, yet refugees and asylum-seekers face many barriers in accessing justice. In addition, many refugees from CAR in DRC, especially those arriving with the most recent influx, are survivors of violence and/or torture due to conflict-related occurrences.

Uptake of other durable solutions in the region varies, while resettlement is currently the most appropriate solution in many instances. Scaling of voluntary repatriation is changeable as UNHCR monitors and assesses prospects for refugees to return in safety and dignity. For Burundian refugees in the region, returns will be facilitated where possible, although resettlement may be considered for some. While voluntary repatriation continues not to be feasible for refugees from protracted conflict areas such as the eastern DRC and Somalia, during 2022 around 11,000 Congolese refugees voluntarily repatriated, mainly to Pweto in the Haut Katanga of DRC, as well as over 800 members of the Kasai population.

Local integration prospects are also limited in the region. In **Zambia**, UNHCR is advocating with the Government of Zambia to lift four reservations¹ to the 1951 Convention and for the adoption of the Refugee Policy, which will contribute to economic inclusion for refugees. Similarly, UNHCR in **Zimbabwe** will continue to advocate with the Government of Zimbabwe, which maintains its reservations² that reduce self-reliance opportunities and local integration prospects, to allow for integration opportunities of refugees in protracted situations, refugees married to Zimbabwean nationals, and those possessing particular skills. Stalled registration in **Angola** and the resulting lack of documentation has severely affected the prospects for livelihoods opportunities.³ While UNHCR is supporting the Government of **Mozambique**'s efforts to fulfill the pledge made at the GRF in 2019 on local integration, existing reservations are presenting limitations to progress.⁴

Hence, with opportunities for voluntary repatriation and local integration of refugees in the region limited, resettlement remains an important tool for the protection of refugees most at risk. Operations such as **Malawi, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe** have been capacitated and have strong resettlement programmes in place. In order to ensure a diversification of resettlement quotas for 2024, operations in **Angola, Mozambique, and RoC** are being prioritized for capacity building by the bureau, with trainings and in-depth technical assistance.

- 1 The Zambian Government enacted the 2017 Refugee Act for which it has maintained four reservations. These reservations include restrictions in movement (Section 63 and 71 of the 2017 Refugee Act), access to tertiary education (Section 41 of the Refugees Act) access to wage earning employment (Section 41 of the 2017 Refugees Act) and access to business and investment opportunities (Section 41 and 42 of the Refugees Act).
- 2 The reservations are to the rights to employment (Article 17), public relief (Article 23), social security (Article 24), and freedom of movement (Article 26). The reservations to Article 26 of the 1951 Convention perpetuate the strict enforcement of the encampment policy in Zimbabwe.
- 3 Angola's first refugee law was enacted in 1990 and was only superseded by Law 10/15, which came into force in June 2015. Implementation of the law has been limited, leading to critical restrictions in the asylum space and gaps in management of the national RSD and registration system resulting in heightened protection risks.
- 4 Reservations to a number of articles under the 1951 Convention were made by the Government of Mozambique, including articles 13 (property), 15 (right of association), 17 (wage-earning employment), 19 (liberal professions), 26 (freedom of movement) and 34 (naturalization), although not fully implemented in practice.

PROJECTED RESETTLEMENT NEEDS IN THE REGION IN 2024

In 2024, **63,173** refugees are projected to be in need of resettlement in the Southern Africa region. This is an eight per cent increase from 2023. The largest estimated needs are in Zambia (17,142), DRC (13,693), Malawi (12,000) and SAMCO (7,900). The refugee populations most in need of resettlement mainly originate from DRC, CAR, Burundi, Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan and Rwanda.

While local integration continues to be the main durable solution pursued for refugees in Angola, UNHCR **Angola** estimates that **100** refugees are projected to be in need of resettlement in 2024. Of those projected to be in need are refugees who face legal and physical protection needs or have complex medical needs for which treatment is unavailable in Angola; children at risk; women and girls at risk; and those with complete lack of local integration prospects and other alternative durable solutions.

The operation in **DRC** has determined that **13,693** refugees would need resettlement in 2024. The main profiles are for refugees from CAR with medical conditions, legal and physical protection challenges, survivors of violence and/or torture, and women and girls at risk, predominantly due to atrocities that occurred either prior to or during flight, especially for newly arrived refugees from CAR; South Sudanese refugees who fled the armed conflict in South Sudan, in particular certain ethnic groups (Dinka), GBV survivors, women at risk, unaccompanied or separated minors, and those with legal physical protection needs; and refugees from Burundi with legal and physical protection needs or serious medical needs.



South Africa, November 2022. Young people of Sunnyside Basketball Club in Pretoria, including refugees and asylum seekers participate in a basketball tournament to raise awareness of gender-based violence. © UNHCR/Sbonga Sibiyi

Of the **12,000** individuals estimated to be in need of resettlement in **Malawi** in 2024, the majority are Congolese refugees from South and North Kivus, where conflict continues to ravage. The majority are long stayers, having resided in the extremely overcrowded Dzaleka Camp for an average of seven years, with no access to citizenship or other forms of permanent legal status due to Malawi's restrictive legal framework. Burundian refugees for whom voluntary repatriation is not viable, such as victims of multiple displacement, LGBTIQ+ persons, survivors of violence, and those with serious medical conditions will remain in need of resettlement. In addition, Rwandans not affected by the cessation clause may also be considered for resettlement.

UNHCR **Mozambique** estimates that **350** refugees will be in need of resettlement in 2024. This includes refugees with political profiles and nationalities who face legal and protection risks in Mozambique, including risks of extradition or refoulement to country of origin as well as serious physical safety risks in Mozambique, such as abduction, disappearance or murder. In addition, refugees who have been denied access to the national asylum procedure or have not been recognized as refugees by the Mozambican government but were found to be refugees after status determination under UNHCR mandate will be in need of resettlement as they are only allowed to remain in Mozambique for a limited period (i.e. until they can be resettled). Lastly, persons with medical needs, women at risk, children at risk, survivors of violence and torture will be considered for resettlement.

The operation in **RoC** estimates that **5,318** refugees, mainly from CAR and DRC, will be in need of resettlement in 2024. This includes survivors of sexual violence, unaccompanied and separated children, and women at risk who are without social support as they are among the least able to secure protection or meet their basic subsistence needs in the remote, economically depressed rural locations in RoC. At-risk female Rwandan refugees, exempted from the cessation clause, who fled the genocide in 1994 when they were very young and are survivors of sexual violence or torture in Rwanda or Zaire (now DRC) also have resettlement needs.

UNHCR SAMCO projects that **7,900** refugees will need resettlement in 2024 across the operations under its coverage. The main refugee populations in need of resettlement are refugees from DRC, Somalia and Burundi. This includes refugees in South Africa who are survivors of repeated xenophobic attacks, in particular Somali refugees; women and girls at risk; survivors of violence and/or torture; LGBTIQ+ persons and rejected asylum-seekers (including many from the Kivu provinces) at risk of refoulement. Resettlement needs among the Congolese population in Namibia and Botswana primarily revolve around their protracted situation. Given that much of this population hails primarily from eastern parts of the DRC, many have suffered extreme violence in their country of origin and often suffer from latent trauma. Somali refugees in a protracted situation Botswana as well as Burundian refugee women who are at increased risk of exploitation and GBV in the region have resettlement needs.

The UNHCR **Zambia** operation estimates that **17,142** refugees are projected to need resettlement in 2024. With the ongoing encampment policy adopted by the

Government, Congolese refugees are in an extremely protracted situation with no other feasible durable solution but resettlement. Furthermore, Zambia continues to be a transit country for those enroute to South Africa, particularly for those fleeing Somalia. Therefore, Somali refugees, particularly women and girls who find themselves without male or family support, are also in need of resettlement. Burundian refugees who are not able to exercise their right to return in safety and dignity also have resettlement needs.

Approximately **6,670** refugees are projected to be in need of resettlement in 2024 in **Zimbabwe**. The majority of these with resettlement needs originate from the Kivus and adjacent areas in the DRC, and many are survivors of violence and/or torture. In addition, refugees originating from Burundi who cannot voluntarily repatriate due to compelling reasons arising from previous persecution they faced when they initially repatriated from Tanzania and Malawi will be in need of resettlement.

REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES IN 2022

UNHCR operations in the Southern Africa region submitted 6,864 persons for resettlement in 2022, achieving 106 per cent of its submission target and 122 per cent more than the number of submissions achieved in 2021. Among the 6,864 refugees submitted for resettlement in 2022, 232 refugees (78 cases) were submitted as part of the unallocated quota under urgent and emergency priority.

A total of 3,008 persons departed on resettlement in 2022, which is an increase of 109 per cent compared with 2021. However, this number reached only 44 per cent of total submissions, meaning that a growing number of persons are awaiting the realization of this durable solution – in fact more than 17,400 persons were at some stage of processing by resettlement countries at year end.

While there was a significant increase compared to previous years in submissions and subsequent State selection missions, the needs still far exceed the places offered by resettlement States.

In 2022, the Regional Bureau was able to provide several key training courses to staff on topics such as complementary pathways and strengthening anti-fraud measures. In addition, complementary pathway activities were strengthened and expanded during the year. The Duolingo pilot project for student visas assisted eight students in accessing third country education opportunities and under UNICORE, 27 masters' students benefited. In Malawi, World University Service of Canada supported 16 refugees who were accepted to universities in Canada. In terms of labour mobility, the Bureau secured funding through the Canadian Economic Mobility Pilot for two staff posts in Malawi and South Africa to support the development of complementary pathways. Establishment of labour mobility schemes in conjunction with Talent Beyond Boundaries also began in 2022. As a good practice, operations are assisting countries like Canada and Australia with logistical support so they can complete interviews in the field for the processing of Private Sponsorship or Special Humanitarian visas.

PERSPECTIVES

ZAMBIA

FROM MEHEBA TO SWEDEN: THE STORY OF STRUGGLE, HOPE AND A CHANCE FOR A NEW LIFE!

Antonio Lion was only eight years old when his family fled the conflict in Congo. He arrived in Meheba with his parents and two siblings; his other brothers and sisters were separated as the family was fleeing to safety, luckily all were reunited again.

To put food on the table his parents started to farm and keep goats. Antonio and his siblings went to school in the morning and in the afternoon helped around the house, with the garden and taking care of the animals.

Life in the settlement became more and more difficult and his parents wanted to provide their children with the best education possible, so the family had to separate once again. Antonio's father took him and his siblings to Lusaka while his mother stayed in Meheba to keep farming.



Zambia. Antonio as a little boy in Meheba refugee settlement during the first years when he arrived. © Antonio Lion

The year of 2005 was difficult, Antonio's mother passed away due to a medical condition and his father was killed in an attack. Antonio, only 20 years old at the time, had to become the caregiver for his seven siblings while two of his sisters were only two and three years old, and start providing for them.

Later, Antonio's life started to turn around again, he got married and was working at a good company with his brother in Lusaka. He even got promoted to being a supervisor. However, his success was a thorn in the eyes to his coworkers. Antonio and his brother were brutally beaten with metal sticks, leaving their arms and legs broken. "We were scared, and I was scared for my family, so we decided to return back to Meheba and started farming again," explained Antonio.

The family was then identified by UNHCR as being in need of resettlement. After thorough interviews, many assessments and paperwork, the family got the news, they were going to Sweden! "When I heard the news, I felt amazing, thanking God for my life and the life of my children being changed," Antonio remembers.

One morning in April 2022, on his wife's birthday, the family got on a bus heading from Meheba refugee settlement towards Lusaka Airport. They arrived in a snow-covered Sweden the following day, which was on Antonio's birthday!



Zambia, April 2022. Antonio getting ready to board UNHCR's bus from Meheba to Lusaka to be taken to the airport. © Antonio Lion

They settled in Stockholm with their extended family in nearby towns. “I was surprised how welcoming everyone was...we managed to find friends who showed us where to buy mialiemeal.”

Today, Antonio's children are attending school. Antonio and his wife are learning Swedish, and he is working as a car mechanic. “I am happy, this is my home now and I am going to build a future for my family here,” says Antonio. He is still in touch with the community and his friends in Meheba, trying to help them as much as he can.

“I will never forget the day we travelled, it was my wife's birthday...and the next day when we arrived in Sweden, it was my birthday!”

PERSPECTIVES

ZIMBABWE

TONGOGARA REFUGEE CAMP, ZIMBABWE

Soon after completing my university education, I was fortunate to get my first work experience with UNHCR in 2017 as a Protection Intern at the country office in Harare. That was my initial exposure to the refugee world which I found very interesting, enlightening and fulfilling. I gained skills in conducting protection and resettlement counselling, biometric updates, updating the refugee database proGres and physical files. In no time, my six months tenure was over, and I had to leave, holding on to the hope of one day returning to UNHCR in a more challenging role.

In November 2021, I re-joined UNHCR as a Senior Resettlement Assistant and this time I was based in the Field Office in Tongogara Refugee Camp. I joined the team at a time when resettlement activities had just re-started following the COVID-19 pandemic. Resettlement activities resumed in late 2021 with only three staff members in the resettlement team, including myself. A lot of hope was revived in the refugee camp and the excitement on the resumption of resettlement activities could be felt all around.

One case that stood out for me in early 2022 was of a refugee woman named Emmaculate*. She was a 52-year-old widowed female head of her household and

* Name changed to protect the individual's identity.



Zimbabwe, April 2023. Refugees before final departure from Tongogara Refugee Camp.
©UNHCR Zimbabwe



Zimbabwe, April 2023. Refugees before final departure from Tongogara Refugee Camp.
©UNHCR Zimbabwe

the sole provider and caregiver for her 11 dependents. Emmaculate's case was accepted for resettlement by Canada in 2012. However, the main hurdle stalling her family's departure was that one of her children kept testing positive for chronic tuberculosis each time they did their medical examinations. When I interacted with Emmaculate, I was determined to try and find a way to assist her and her family as she was in limbo over her resettlement case. Together with my supervisor, we contacted IOM about Emmaculate's case and the family was re-scheduled for further medicals. After several more tests for the whole family, Emmaculate and her family were finally cleared to travel. Delivering the news of her family's medical clearance and upcoming departure was one of the best experiences of my life! Emmaculate was shedding tears of joy, thanking UNHCR for its commitment to her case and to the entire refugee community. Emmaculate and her family finally departed for Canada in October 2022, 10 years after their acceptance in 2012! This experience greatly touched me and re-sparked my commitment to assisting refugees, even those with very complex cases.

Later in the same year, the operation hosted a team from the USA conducting resettlement interviews, which resulted in many acceptances. Sharing the approval decision letters together with my supervisor was also a very emotional experience. The room was filled with tears of joy, dancing and expressions of gratitude. Seeing a huge number of happy faces gave me a clear sense of purpose: to continue working towards providing durable solutions to refugees.

With increased quotas in 2023, the resettlement team in Zimbabwe has grown and is more inspired than ever to deliver, as there is no greater reward than being the silver lining of someone's cloud.

CATHRINE KAMUPANDENI

Senior Resettlement Assistant, UNHCR Field Office, Tongogara, Zimbabwe

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region includes operations in Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. The UNHCR Bureau for MENA also maintains functional oversight of the Türkiye operation for the Iraq and Syria regional responses (please see [Europe Regional Overview](#)).

OVERVIEW OF THE PROTECTION ENVIRONMENT IN THE REGION

The protection environment in the region is diverse and covers a number of priority refugee situations for protection, assistance and solutions. This includes, notably the Syria Situation and Syrian refugees and asylum-seekers hosted in the five countries adjacent to Syria (Türkiye, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt), working within the framework of the [Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan \(3RP\)](#), and the [Mediterranean situation](#) of mixed movements by land from Sub-Saharan Africa to North Africa and on then onwards by sea to Europe.

Serious violations of international humanitarian law and related human rights abuses persist in the ongoing armed conflict in [Syria](#). As such, UNHCR continues to characterize the flight of civilians from Syria as a [refugee movement](#) and calls on States not to forcibly return Syrian nationals and former habitual residents of Syria, including Palestinians previously residing in Syria, to any part of Syria, regardless of whether the area is under control of the Government or under control of another State or non-State entity. According to the [May 2023 Regional Perception and Intention Survey](#), only 1.1 per cent of Syrians in the region have indicated an intention of returning within the following 12 months. The wish to reunite with family has become a key motivator overtaking other factors linked to perceived improvements in the security situation inside Syria. Entering the 13th year of the crisis, refugee families increasingly resort to crisis and emergency coping strategies such as reducing non-food expenses, accepting high-risk jobs, adult begging, withdrawing children from school and child begging, meal reduction, and child marriage. The crisis also has had a particular impact on people with needs and risks related to legal status, gender, age and disability.¹

Just over 50 per cent of Syrian refugees are children, and the impact of a lost generation of children and youth with limited prospects for education, work and fulfilling lives creates the risk of inter-generational – and burgeoning – protection and solutions needs. Refugees with no other options increasingly undertake irregular journeys from the region – either via sea routes or to countries in Eastern

¹ [3RP Regional Strategic Overview 2023](#)

Europe – in the hope of reaching somewhere safe where they can rebuild their lives. Host States, dealing with their own domestic challenges, are increasingly placing blame on refugees for socioeconomic or security failings, driving the possibility of wider popular support for increased returns, including forced returns. Moreover, a notable reduction in resettlement opportunities would likely be viewed by host States as a reduction in support from the international community and an implicit endorsement of increasing returns, thus further exacerbating this possibility.

With respect to the **Mediterranean Situation**, between January and December 2022, some 160,100 refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants arrived in Europe via the Mediterranean maritime routes, a 30 per cent increase compared to 2021. In December 2022, arrivals increased by 12 per cent compared to November 2022, and by 54 per cent compared to December 2021.

The lack of protection and available services for those individuals along these routes have produced a devastating human toll and the number of victims who died, were reported missing, or who endured unspeakable violations of their human rights bears witness to this very public and sustained tragedy, with no end in sight. In 2021, 1,153 refugees and migrants were reported dead or missing on the North-west African Maritime Route to the Canary Islands, and 1,924 along the Western and Central Mediterranean Routes. However, accurate data on deaths and missing are difficult to access and data collection and sharing of incidents at sea remain incomplete for these maritime routes.

Furthermore, many refugees and asylum-seekers in the MENA region cannot access minimum standards of protection, encountering restrictions on access to territory, arrest and detention, and risks of deportation and refoulement.

Refugees in **Algeria, Morocco and Mauritania** have no prospect for effective local integration. In some locations, sub-Saharan refugees face regular harassment and racial vilification from some within the local community. Refugees and asylum-seekers do not have access to formal employment overall impacting self-reliance. Lack of official documentation can also expose refugees to internal forced relocation by law enforcement. Challenges such as xenophobia, discrimination and language barriers are also limiting refugees' access to some basic services and further impact their local integration. Laws in these countries criminalizes same sex relationships, thereby endangering individuals of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.

In **Libya**, refugees and asylum-seekers fall under national immigration laws which leads to detention for offences related to irregular entry or stay. The ongoing volatile security situation, coupled with the lack of a national asylum system as well as insufficient service providers, further exacerbates the hardships that many refugees face. Conditions for refugees remain precarious; many who cross the Mediterranean Sea end up being intercepted or rescued at sea by the Libyan authorities. Grave violations of human rights in detention and trafficking or smuggling camps continue to be reported, and the impunity enjoyed by armed groups and criminal networks remains a serious concern.

From 2020 to 2022, there was an increase of around 41 per cent in new asylum applications in **Tunisia**. For 2023 to 2025, UNHCR expects a relatively continuous increase in the number of arrivals of refugees and asylum-seekers into Tunisia, driven by insecurity in neighbouring Libya and in the respective countries of origin, including those from Sudan, Cameroon, Syria, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Eritrea and Yemen. This will continue to impact Tunisia's already limited reception and asylum capacities, as well as service delivery and the search for solutions. Tunisia has been regarded by refugees and asylum-seekers as both a country of destination and a country of transit for irregular onward movements towards Europe. However, the change in the Tunisian Government's approach towards irregular migration implemented in early 2023, compounded by the increased general hostility against migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers, has adversely reduced the asylum space.

For other refugee contexts in the region, such as **GCC, Yemen** and **Israel**, the protection space is limited, and some refugees face acute protection risks such as arrest, detention and risk of refoulement.

Within Syria, the complex humanitarian situation has inflicted immense suffering on the civilian population, including **asylum-seekers and refugees residing in Syria**. More recently, the devastating earthquake in west and north-west Syria, as well as the continued deterioration of the economy, has exacerbated protection needs and vulnerabilities. The combined effects of the earthquake, currency depreciation and soaring prices for food, fuel and basic goods, as well as international sanctions, have triggered new humanitarian and protection needs even in areas less affected by hostilities.

RESETTLEMENT WITHIN PROTECTION AND SOLUTIONS STRATEGIES

In 2023-24, the MENA Regional Bureau is focusing on i) providing support to operations in their efforts to preserve protection space, including access to territory and access to UNHCR; ii) further advancing durable solutions, recognizing the shifts in the region and enhancing the narrative beyond ongoing stay in countries of asylum, while maintaining and expanding resettlement and complementary pathways opportunities; iii) strengthening national legislation to help enhance legal and physical protection of refugees and their access to services; and iv) ensuring adequate capacity of operations, including staffing and other resources, as well as focusing on national staff training and knowledge base.

In line with the above priorities, the MENA Protection Service within the Bureau is working closely with all country operations in the region to strategically analyse the ways that resettlement and complementary pathways can work to preserve protection space in parallel with other solutions and/or open opportunities for other solutions, such as through local integration and access to services. Advocacy for expanded resettlement and complementary pathways across the MENA region is key to emphasize that these third-country solutions comprise one element of an overall protection response, including to mixed movements, in the region.



Libya, September 2022. Sudanese refugee, Aisha, poses for a photograph with her children as they wait for buses taking them to Mitiga airport near Tripoli in Libya to board an evacuation flight. Aisha and her family are among a group of 29 refugees leaving Libya to be resettled. © UNHCR/Mohamed Alalem

UNHCR will use resettlement across the region where it is most appropriate, including but not limited to the following risk profiles: **individuals of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity** who are at risk of arrest, persecution, and physical abuse, and often do not benefit from States' protection in the region due to the criminalization of same sex conduct; **refugee children** at 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; **victims or those at risk of gender-based violence (GBV)**, such as refugee girls at risk of early marriage as well as sexual harassment and domestic violence; **refugees at particular risk of refoulement** to halt deportation and forced return; **persons living with HIV**, who are exponentially affected by stigmatization and are at risk of detention, denial of access to available services or deportation; and **refugees with serious medical conditions**, due to the lack of appropriate medical care in the country of asylum.

The Syria Situation

In a context of continued displacement, economic crisis in hosting countries and lack of prospects for local integration or safe return, resettlement remains the primary durable solution for Syrian refugees. As Syrians become desperate for solutions in view of the continued barriers to safe return to Syria, resettlement offers a viable lifeline and a safe alternative to perilous irregular journeys by sea which expose them to further hardship and exploitation by smuggling and trafficking networks and potential risk of refoulement. Furthermore, the sustainability of the Syrian resettlement programme throughout the previous years has been critical to maintain protection space and show solidarity and responsibility sharing by the international community with the 3RP countries. It is essential to maintain a level of access to safe and meaningful protection and solution opportunities for Syrians and support communities hosting Syrian refugees in the context of a multitude of economic challenges facing many host countries.

In **Egypt**, specific needs among the Syrian population continue to rise, most specifically for women, children and persons with disabilities. Many Syrians have depleted their savings and are unable to sustain themselves. Those who find scarce employment opportunities, mostly in the informal sector, receive lower and insufficient wages. These factors cause many Syrian families to frequently revert to harmful coping mechanisms. Refugees and asylum-seekers originating from sub-Saharan Africa have faced serious protection risks, compounded by instances of discrimination, harassment and gender-based violence (GBV), as well as for some, lack of access to services.

The regular escalation of violence in north-east Syria, from where most Syrian refugees in **Iraq** originate, continues to force people to flee. Refugees, especially in the Kurdistan region of Iraq (KR-I), have attained a high level of integration and have access to public services and livelihoods opportunities. However, most do not have access to long-term residency or naturalization procedures. Some refugees still face protection challenges, for example, those not of Kurdish origin, survivors of GBV, including domestic and sexual violence, forced and child marriage, and LGBTIQ+ persons. Additionally, the security situation in Iraq remains volatile with flare-ups of violence occurring occasionally.

Jordan is among the largest refugee-hosting countries worldwide, on a per capita basis, providing asylum to Syrians and refugees of other nationalities, including Iraqis, Yemenis and Sudanese. Since the beginning of the Syrian refugee response, Jordan has allowed for refugee inclusion in critical areas, yet the general socioeconomic situation for refugees and asylum-seekers in Jordan remains challenging, and destitution among refugees is increasing, with limitations in access to health, shelter, food security, and gainful employment.

Throughout 2022 and the first quarter of 2023, **Lebanon's** economic crisis continued to deepen at exponential rates, impacting both refugees and the Lebanese host community in all sectors. Nine out of 10 refugee families now live in extreme poverty. As humanitarian assistance has also reduced, refugees are compelled to take on greater

levels of debt, with most households now indebted up to four times their monthly income. This trend is expected to continue. With the further breakdown of access to basic services such as education, healthcare and legal services, Syrian refugees have been gravely affected due to lack of economic resources and legal status.

The Mediterranean Situation

Resettlement remains a crucial means for responding to the urgent protection needs that cannot be adequately addressed by UNHCR and partners in **North Africa**. Resettlement also helps to maintain the protection environment and buttress against any further deterioration as it is positively perceived by host governments and relieves pressures on host communities and systems. Resettlement and other protection activities help decrease the likelihood of refugees and asylum-seekers taking **perilous journeys across the Mediterranean Sea**. Resettlement as a third-country solution supports the preservation of search and rescue at sea responsibilities of coastal States and shipmasters, and the continued availability of places of safety for the disembarkation of those rescued at sea. Resettlement also supports advocacy efforts with the local authorities to maintain protection space, through demonstrating the international community's commitment to solidarity and responsibility-sharing. Finally, resettlement supports efforts by UNHCR and partners to seek the removal of certain barriers for refugees in accessing local services by facilitating engagement with central government, local government and community-based entities as partners.



Jordan, April 2023. Amal Al-Azghab, 47 (second from left) with her children outside the apartment they rent in Amman. Amal and her husband Abu Mohammad Harba, 55 (not pictured) are refugees from Homs, Syria, who arrived in Jordan in 2013. © UNHCR/Caroline Irby

Resettlement remains the only means for responding to the urgent protection needs refugees in **Tunisia**. The Government of Tunisia includes the resettlement of refugees out of Tunisia in its own policies, positively perceiving resettlement as a means to relieve existing pressure on host communities and systems. Therefore, when the country is experiencing an increasing number of arrivals of migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers, which has generated a range of challenges, maintaining a minimum level of resettlement is critical.

Other refugee contexts in the region

For the most vulnerable **refugees living in Syria**, resettlement remains the only durable solution and a much-needed protection tool in the absence of opportunities for local integration or self-reliance. Given the limited number of resettlement opportunities available, refugees are identified for resettlement on an individual basis, based on urgent or emergency protection risks and needs. In a similar context, resettlement from Yemen remains a much-needed protection tool and a durable solution for refugees at heightened protection risk in the absence of opportunities for local integration or self-reliance. UNHCR will continue strengthening identification and strategic use of mandate RSD and resettlement as protection tools for refugees with compelling protection. At the same time, UNHCR is committed to supporting and facilitating complementary pathways for admission to third countries, including family reunification procedures.

Across the region, for refugees who are in detention and/or at risk of imminent refoulement, stranded at international airports or with sensitive backgrounds or high profile, UNHCR will use resettlement to advocate for their stay and protection in host countries pending a durable solution. The increase in the number of individuals submitted and departing to a third country will help to increase the confidence of local authorities in UNHCR and improve the dialogue around protection space for such cases in the region.

PROJECTED RESETTLEMENT NEEDS IN THE REGION IN 2024

The MENA Bureau estimates that **464,126 refugees** in the region are projected to be in need of resettlement in 2024.

In **Algeria**, UNHCR estimates that **1,200** refugees, mainly Syrians will need resettlement in 2024. Syrian refugees are at increased risk of detention and expulsion following the end of visa free entry in 2014, and face constraints to access the labour market. Syrian refugees with medical needs, single woman heads of households, and persons with disabilities are particularly impacted by the deterioration of the protection environment, with families resorting to harmful coping mechanisms such as child labour and early marriage. Unaccompanied and separated refugee children (UASCs), mainly from sub-Saharan countries, are at risk of violence, exploitation and hazardous forms of child labour and trafficking, and do not have access to national child protection systems and services in Algeria. LGBTIQ+ refugees also face serious protection risks, as same-sex conduct and diverse gender identity is criminalized in Algeria.

The Office in **Egypt** estimates that around **33,000** refugees are projected to be in need of resettlement in 2024. This includes mostly Syrians but also Sudanese, South Sudanese, Ethiopians, Eritreans, Iraqis, Somalis and Yemenis. Many Syrian refugees were exposed to intense trauma, violence and/or torture during the conflict in Syria and many continue to experience physical or psychological effects in Egypt, in addition to evictions and homelessness, poor health, child labour and high levels of indebtedness as their situation in the country becomes even more protracted. Refugees and asylum-seekers originating from Africa face severe and repeated discrimination, harassment and GBV. Egypt also hosts a large population of UASC, many of whom are living in poor conditions and without adequate support.

In **Iraq**, UNHCR projects that **43,100** refugees will be in need resettlement in 2024, the vast majority of whom are from Syria. At risk groups include single, divorced and other women considered to be diverging from traditional norms and LGBTIQ+ refugees, who face degrading treatment, discrimination, and potential extreme violence and killings. The protracted nature of the Syrian refugee crisis has also exacerbated child protection risks, such as psychological distress, child labour and sexual violence, both in and out of camps. Furthermore, individuals from Iran and Türkiye lack local integration prospects despite having been in Iraq for several years, and Afghan nationals are at risk of detention or deportation as they are unauthorized to acquire permanent residency in KR-I.

UNHCR **Israel** estimates that **7,000** refugees, mostly from Eritrea and Sudan, are projected to be in need of resettlement in 2024. With limited prospects of stable legal status, many are survivors of torture and trauma, which often occurred on their journey to Israel through the Sinai. Also at risk are families and particularly single parent families with children with disabilities or developmental delays, and individuals with serious medical conditions who have no right to access to medical care in Israel. In addition, the Office has identified up to 100 Palestinian asylum-seekers in Israel from the LGBTIQ+ community and survivors of GBV who are excluded from the Israeli asylum system as well as 30 Syrian families in Gaza with severe needs, given the ongoing humanitarian crisis and periodic outbreaks of conflict in Gaza.

Of the **101,884** refugees projected to be in need of resettlement in 2024 in **Jordan**, over 85 per cent are from Syria, followed by Iraq, Yemen, Sudan and Somalia. GBV continues to pose a severe threat to all refugees in Jordan, with women, girls and LGBTIQ+ refugees disproportionately affected. Child protection risks for Syrian, Iraqi, Sudanese, Yemeni and other refugees include early marriage and child labor, exposure to violence, abuse and neglect, family separation and high levels of psychological distress. Furthermore, the protection needs of refugees from Iraq, Yemen, Sudan and other non-Syrian nationalities continue to grow due to restrictive immigration policies, lack of employment, limited humanitarian assistance, protracted stay, and the impact of discrimination and racism.

The Office in **Kuwait** estimates that **60** refugees are projected to be in need of resettlement in 2024. This includes extremely vulnerable refugees from

Syria, Iraq and Somalia who, despite having lived in Kuwait for many years, may suddenly be at risk of refoulement.

UNHCR **Lebanon** estimates that **250,120** refugees (mostly Syrians) will be in need of resettlement in 2024. The high needs of Syrian refugees are a result of the dire economic situation in the country which has forced many Syrian refugees to adopt multiple harmful coping strategies, including child labor and school separation, skipping meals and assuming unsustainable debt, early marriage, engaging in sex work or other high-risk employment. The prevalence and impact of such practices have been particularly striking among minors, persons of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity, and women. Refugees from Sudan and Ethiopia, among other countries of origin, who are at risk of arbitrary detention and deportation given Lebanon's lack of asylum legal framework, are also considered to be in need of resettlement.



Lebanon, March 2023. Syrian refugee and widow Khadra, 50, cleans lentils outside her tent in El-Mina, northern Lebanon, where she has lived in an informal refugee settlement for the past 12 years since the Syria crisis began. She shares a one-room tent with her five children, daughter-in-law and three grandchildren, and has to forage for food in rubbish piles to feed her family. © UNHCR/Joelle Abou Chabke

Approximately **4,500** refugees are projected to be in need of resettlement in 2024 in **Libya**. The majority originate from Sudan, Eritrea, Syria and Somalia and, to a lesser extent, Ethiopia, and have undertaken dangerous journeys to reach Libya. Women and girl refugees are considered to have significant protection needs in Libya; many are alone as their husbands have gone missing in their country of origin, in smuggling or trafficking incidents, or attempted sea crossings; or they themselves may be victims of smuggling or trafficking and as survivors of GBV, forced or early marriage and female genital mutilation. UASCs also have prominent protection concerns, which include separation from parents and caregivers resulting from children moving for different reasons, child labour, sexual violence and sexual exploitation, child marriage, trafficking or smuggling, detention, mental disorders and psychosocial distress.

UNHCR **Mauritania** estimates that **300** refugees will be in need of resettlement in 2024. Refugees with specific protection risks include the LGBTIQ+ refugees, as Mauritanian law criminalizes same-sex relationships, female heads of households, survivors of GBV, children at risk of exploitation and early marriage, as well as refugees in need of medical care, including those who have witnessed or have been victims of violence in their countries of origin as there is no available healthcare and psychosocial support for this population.

In **Morocco**, UNHCR projects **570** refugees will be in need of resettlement in 2024. This includes LGBTIQ+ refugees, mainly originating from Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire and Cameroon, who continue to face physical threats and serious security concerns by the host community as well as by their own communities. Resettlement is also required for female refugees from the Central African Republic (CAR), DRC, Cameroon and Guinea who may be exposed to human trafficking, physical abuse, exploitation and GBV. UASC from Sudan, CAR, Cameroon, DRC and Guinea are also in need of resettlement due to protection risks aggravated by language barriers and lack of appropriate shelter and care, especially for those who suffered violence in their country of origin or during their perilous journeys to Morocco.

UNHCR's Multi-Country Office (MCO) in Saudi Arabia estimates that **8,312** refugees in **Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman, and Qatar** will be in need of resettlement in 2024. The Syrian refugee population is the largest group in need of resettlement given the non-conducive conditions for return. At heightened risk are female-headed households and single women who face discrimination and may be at risk of GBV and exploitation, and children engaged in the child labour. In the MCO countries, LGBTIQ+ refugees and religious converts can face criminal prosecution punishable by the death sentence. Furthermore, refugees living with HIV are likely to be subjected to immediate deportation if their medical condition becomes known to the host government.

It is estimated that **1,300** refugees are projected to be in need of resettlement in **Syria** in 2024. Most refugees in Syria are Iraqis although there is a diverse refugee population coming from about 30 different countries, including Afghanistan, Iran Somalia, Sudan and Yemen. Most refugees fled to Syria after having experienced



Tunisia, June 2022. Refugees and Asylum seekers living in the urban areas of Medenine governorate, Tunisia, came together for a moment of joy in the football Match organized by UNHCR and its partner the Tunisian Council for Refugees, as part of the World Refugee Day celebration. © UNHCR/Hallouli Mohamed Ameur

or witnessed traumatizing incidents in their home country and have been further displaced in the country of asylum. As a result, for many vulnerable refugee families, there is little choice but to resort to harmful coping strategies such as incurring debt, skipping meals, early marriage or withdrawing children from school. Thus, the consequences of exile in Syria have elevated the protection risks and need for resettlement of female refugees and children.

UNHCR **Tunisia** projects that **900** refugees will be in need of resettlement in 2024. This includes GBV survivors and single women with dependent children; children who have often been through traumatic experiences in the country of origin and/or during their journey to Tunisia and who remain at risk of violence, exploitation, hazardous forms of child labour, and trafficking; those who have arrived from Libya where they have been exposed to extreme physical and sexual abuse, exploitation, and prolonged and arbitrary detention; LGBTIQ+ refugees, who are at risk of arrest, persecution, and physical abuse as they do not benefit from state protection in Tunisia; and refugee families with children who cannot enrol in the public education system due to language barriers and/or physical safety concerns and where adult family members do not have access to formal employment opportunities.

UNHCR in the **United Arab Emirates (UAE)** estimates that **6,500** refugees are projected to be in need of resettlement in 2024. The needs represent various populations: Syrians, Palestinian refugees from Syria, Iraqis and Iranians. Given the very limited protection space in UAE, those prioritized for resettlement include individuals at risk of refoulement; women single-headed households, who can be at greater risk of exploitation and abuse; and persons with diverse sexual orientation or gender identities, who already face greater risk of harassment and discrimination as they are not protected by law in UAE; as well as refugees with serious medical conditions, who cannot avail themselves of treatment in the UAE due to their limited access to services.

In 2024, an estimated **5,380** refugees are projected to be in need of resettlement in **Yemen**. This includes refugees mainly from Somalia, Ethiopia, Syria and Eritrea. As same-sex relations are criminalized by law in Yemen, LGBTIQ+ individuals face severe stigmatization, exploitation, and violence. In addition, GBV continues to be a risk particularly faced by refugee women and girls, especially when living alone. Safe disclosure, referrals, and responses for GBV survivors remain challenging due to the socio-cultural environment and restrictive legal framework. With limited functioning health facilities, refugees with disabilities or serious medical conditions and those with physical and mental disabilities receive inadequate support and face an increased risk of discrimination, stigmatization, exploitation and physical violence, have high resettlement needs. Moreover, unaccompanied children remain highly vulnerable to protection risks and are often victims of child labour.

REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES IN 2022

In 2022, 37,148 Syrians were submitted for resettlement, representing 32 per cent of the total global submissions. Additionally, 22,763 Syrians departed for resettlement to third countries, representing 39 per cent of global departures.

The advocacy of the MENA Bureau to maintain certain resettlement numbers for Syrian refugees from the 3RP countries and expand opportunities for complementary pathways to protect Syrians in the region has been validated by resettlement teams across the region through enhanced identification efforts and efficient case processing to meet the targets with high quality submissions. The sustainability of the Syrian resettlement programme over the previous years has been critical to maintain protection space and show solidarity and responsibility sharing by the international community with the 3RP countries. It is essential to maintain the same level of safe and meaningful protection and solution opportunities for Syrians to, in part, help ensure the much-needed protection space in host countries is maintained.

Despite the complex and diverse contexts of the MENA region, based on the needs and the MENA Bureau's protection strategy and vision, the region managed to build and **expand resettlement opportunities to all operations covered by the Bureau**, particularly through the use of the unallocated quotas. UNHCR's MENA operations continue to identify highly at-risk cases and submit them according

to the resettlement criteria, enhancing resettlement and providing protection and lifesaving opportunities for refugees throughout the region. It is essential to build on this momentum and continue increasing quotas and expanding solution pathways. This also requires building and strengthening partnerships with implementing, government and operational partners, both locally and regionally.

The significant impact of resettlement can be seen in **the UAE context** where it is truly a vital protection tool to safeguard refugees at risk of refoulement. In a country where detention and deportation are used for migration-related offences, including irregular entry and visa overstay, resettlement in the UAE has provided solutions for certain refugees stranded at airports and detained pending deportation. During 2022, increased resettlement also helped UNHCR enhance community-based protection and reinforce strategic partnerships with organizations that provide shelter and medical support to refugees considered for resettlement at zero cost. These gains are exceptional in a context where those benefitting from the assistance have no legal residency in the country.

UNHCR Jordan has been able to have a significant impact in the country of asylum by refining their methodology used to estimate needs and identify cases for resettlement and, consequently, enhancing the integrity, diversity and reliability of the resettlement programme. The methodology focuses on refugees with heightened protection needs from all nationalities and in all locations (camp and urban) throughout the operation. Cases are identified by combining and triangulating a variety of objective data sources for individual cases, including partner assessments of socioeconomic vulnerability ratings, extreme and international poverty scores, emergency, and livelihood coping strategies, and UNHCR registration data on specific needs and other case criteria verified operation wide during 2022. In addition, training of different UNHCR staff on resettlement has ensured individual protection referrals are received from staff across protection, health, field and registration teams. As a result, the operation has been able to confidently profile those cases most in need of resettlement and diversify resettlement submissions to ensure equitable and needs based access to the programme. This approach has also helped to guarantee the integrity of case processing and maintain confidence in UNHCR's resettlement programmes from the perspective of refugees, the Government and partners. The MENA Regional Bureau is looking at how it can support other operations to use similar or specific elements of this practice.

The MENA Bureau is also working to unlock a number of challenges, one of which is ensuring swift decisions and departures in resettlement processing. UNHCR is committed to working with all resettlement country partners to reduce any processing backlogs and, in general, the case processing time for cases from the region. This includes using case processing staff, when needed, to address case deferrals and proactively engage in the backlog of cases to identify possible blockages and/or vulnerabilities for prioritization.

Finally, the MENA Bureau is committed to further strengthening its commitment to being accountable to the people for who and with whom we work. Better

linking accountability of affected people, through inclusive of participation and communication with communities in resettlement planning and activities continues to be challenging. However, there remains scope for refugees to be further engaged. The MENA Bureau is seeking to address the challenges with different country operations by implementing a multi-functional approach to better integrate resettlement into ongoing protection activities and outreach. Resettlement States, as key partners in the resettlement process, can also significantly contribute and engage in communication with communities in meaningful ways, such as in the design and planning of future programmes which are more inclusive and reflective of refugees' needs, priorities and aspirations.



Jordan, March 2023. Mohamad, a Syrian refugee from Dara, came to Jordan in 2011 with his family of 11. He has a houseware shop in the informal market in the camp. © UNHCR/Shawkat Alharfoush

PERSPECTIVES

IRAQ

OLIYANA'S STORY: FROM SULAYMANIYAH, IRAQ TO CANADA

At 01:03 in the morning in early 2023, the long-awaited message arrived:

“Movement arrived in Canada. All went well, kid has been admitted to the hospital and health and vital signs are good. Arrival was smooth. Will send you official confirmation tomorrow.”

The message came after months of hard work by several teams in UNHCR, IOM and Canada/IRCC. Oliyana had made it to Canada and would finally receive the lifesaving medical treatment that she needed. Her family was with her. Although the difficulties of arranging (and financing) an air ambulance had seemed insurmountable, against all odds it had been done. Advocating for a field mission to conduct the medical assessment, for a complex medical case to be accepted by the resettlement country and for UNHCR's financing of expensive medical air transport presented numerous bureaucratic hurdles. The message made it all worth it.

The following day came the WhatsApp call from Oliyana's father and some photos 'for the UNHCR Iraq team':

“Thank you. Everything was arranged perfectly; we travelled by air ambulance to Canada. Upon our arrival, an ambulance was waiting for us at the airport to receive Oliyana. She was immediately transferred to the hospital. She is currently receiving medical checks and treatment. I would like to thank everyone who helped us to reach our dream. It was unbelievable and we never had imagined that one day we could travel to Canada and get treatment for my daughter. Today, with all your kind support, our dream became reality. Without your support, we could never have arrived here and treated my daughter.

Our life was very difficult in Iraq due to my daughter's medical condition, but after we were resettled to Canada, I am optimistic we can start a new life. My daughter can get proper treatment and other children can resume their education and enjoy their childhood. I was never able to provide enough support and care for my family due to my daughter's medical condition. However, as Oliyana now receives treatment, I will be able to find employment and support my family without being worried about my daughter's condition. Moreover, if Oliyana receives proper treatment, she can go to school and play with her sisters.”



Oliyana and her family, together with the doctor escorting them to Canada, prior to boarding the air ambulance at Erbil International Airport, Iraq.

PERSPECTIVES

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

THE STORY OF FARAHAT: FROM IMMINENT REFOULEMENT TO RESETTLEMENT

Farahat was an asylum-seeker registered by UNHCR Indonesia. In 2022, the local authorities attempted to refoule Farahat from Indonesia to Somalia. UNHCR Indonesia exhausted all its efforts to stop this refoulement to no avail. Amnesty International released a report addressed to the Indonesian authorities but sadly, the authorities decided to refoule Farahat, who was nine months pregnant, to Somalia where her life would be at imminent risk.

UNHCR UAE was informed that Farahat would transit at Dubai International Airport before boarding her next flight to Somalia. UNHCR UAE successfully managed to halt her refoulement in close coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and authorities at the airport. Farahat was granted a visit visa to UAE. Upon her entry, UNHCR managed to provide her with immediate medical support through its government partner Dubai Foundation for Women and Children (DFWAC). DFWAC covered the cost of her successful delivery and provided her with shelter, medical care and psychosocial counselling during her stay in UAE. UNHCR Abu Dhabi registered her and her new-born son and, completed the refugee status determination and resettlement procedures, and they successfully departed to Canada in December 2022.



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 15 UNHCR country offices and three Multi-Country Offices (covering 24 countries) throughout Asia and the Pacific. Six countries are under the direct purview of the Bureau.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROTECTION ENVIRONMENT IN THE REGION

Asia and the Pacific hosts 14.3 million displaced and stateless persons, including 6.8 million refugees, 233,300 asylum-seekers and 6,900 refugee returnees; 5 million internally displaced persons and 778,600 internally displaced returnees; and 2.5 million stateless persons, representing over half of the world's stateless population (see the [Situation Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific](#) data portal).

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 5.2 million individuals from Afghanistan living as refugees or in a refugee-like situation in the region, primarily in the major host countries of Pakistan and Iran. Over 1.2 million refugees from Myanmar (including over a million Rohingya) reside throughout the region, but primarily in Bangladesh and Malaysia.

Just 20 of the 45 countries and territories in the region have acceded to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees 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 at risk of exploitation and abuse; have limited access to national health, education or justice mechanisms; and have minimal opportunities for engagement, advancement and growth. Specific needs 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.

Bangladesh hosts around 958,000 Rohingya refugees from Myanmar who reside in 33 extremely congested camps in Cox's Bazar District and on Bhasan Char, an island located 60 km from the Bangladesh mainland. The lack of a national asylum framework for refugees and refugees' lack of formal legal status leave them in



Indonesia, January 2023. A boat that carried Rohingya refugees across the Andaman Sea remains anchored offshore after the refugees disembarked at a beach in Aceh, Indonesia on 8 January, 2023.
© UNHCR/Kenzie Eagan

a vulnerable position and limit their access to rights and services, including access to legal remedies, civil administration, certified education, gainful employment or social protection.

According to data received from the Government of the **Islamic Republic of Iran** (GIRI), at the end of 2022, there were around 762,000 refugees hosted in Iran. In mid-2022, GIRI conducted a headcount exercise for undocumented Afghans; around 2.6 million participated and are considered by UNHCR to be in refugee-like situation. Although Afghan refugees holding Amayesh (refugee) cards are included in overstretched national health and education systems, they face discrimination and restrictions. For instance, they cannot travel outside the province in which they are registered without prior permission, or they face arrest and deportation; women are not granted work permits; and access to university education is conditioned on relinquishing refugee status. The majority work in low-paid, menial jobs and, although many have lived in Iran for decades, their integration remains limited.

Pakistan continues to be one of the largest refugee-hosting countries, providing refuge to more than 3 million Afghans. Pakistan is not signatory to the 1951 Convention nor its 1967 Protocol and does not have a national asylum system. However, Pakistan's provision of protection and assistance to Afghan refugees is generally in accordance with international standards and Pakistan's international

human rights obligations. The principle of non-refoulement and the right to asylum is largely respected and UNHCR's role is recognized in the Cooperation Agreement of 1993.

Malaysia is not a state party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol and has no national framework to manage the refugee situation. Refugees and asylum-seekers in Malaysia are regarded as 'illegal immigrants' and may be at risk of arrest, detention and deportation. Notwithstanding ongoing advocacy, UNHCR's access to immigration detention centres to assess the international protection needs of asylum-seekers and the ability to have them released in a systematic manner continues to be impeded, leading to prolonged detention, including for children. Deportations continued in 2022 and large-scale forced returns of Myanmar nationals were widely reported.

Thailand is not a signatory to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol and does not have a national legal framework to manage refugee protection outside the existing nine temporary shelters (camps) on the Thai-Myanmar border. However, Thailand has a decades-long tradition of receiving forcibly displaced persons in need of international protection originating from Myanmar and other countries.

The tenuous protection environment in host countries and the limited solutions available has led to risky **onward movement** for an increasing number of refugees and asylum-seekers. The Asia region saw a dramatic increase in maritime movements in 2022 (an increase of 360 per cent from 2021), when over 3,500 Rohingya, almost half of whom were women and children, embarked on dangerous sea journeys seeking safety and protection, family reunification, and access to livelihoods opportunities. Disembarked passengers highlight significant suffering and abuse while on board these vessels, and nearly 350 individuals died or went missing while at sea in 2022. Despite an awareness of these risks, individuals continue to board vessels 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: i) pursue inclusive protection and assistance in countries of asylum in order to foster resilience, self-reliance and opportunities for refugees and other forcibly displaced persons to grow, engage and contribute while in displacement; ii) expand available solutions, based on the profiles and needs of various caseloads, both in protracted situations and in emergencies; and iii) ensure multi-stakeholder approaches and diverse partnerships for a broader base of support and more equitable responsibility sharing. 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 contributes to the wider response. UNHCR operations in Asia work with governments, host communities, partners and refugees to seek solutions where possible and to improve the quality of life for

those who remain in displacement, including through inclusion in national health, education, judicial and social systems and in activities that enable self-reliance.

Myanmar situation

Since early 2021, political upheaval and conflict in [Myanmar](#) have resulted in an increasing number of individuals displaced within the country and seeking protection in other countries in the region. This new displacement adds to the already protracted situation of refugees from Myanmar throughout Asia. This includes over one million Rohingya refugees in the region, particularly Bangladesh, Malaysia and India, as well as the over 150,000 Karen, Karenni and other ethnic minorities from Myanmar in Thailand, Malaysia, India and elsewhere in the region.

Large-scale group resettlement programmes from Bangladesh and Thailand will benefit two extremely protracted refugee populations from Myanmar in 2024 and will serve as a tangible example of responsibility-sharing to countries, 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 caseload that remains in Bangladesh. Group resettlement of a protracted group 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 of these programmes will help draw to a close 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](#) has significant consequences for those with specific needs among the population. Iran and Pakistan alone are hosting more than 5.1 million Afghan refugees and Afghans in a refugee-like situation as of the end of 2022.

UNHCR is responding to the Afghan emergency in the framework of its regional [Refugee Response Plan \(RRP\)](#) and Afghanistan's Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP). Acknowledging the huge contribution of host countries, the RRP reaffirms the regional multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral approach which aims at strengthening the humanitarian and development response in support of host governments. Coordinated efforts towards durable solutions are conducted within the framework of the [Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees \(SSAR\)](#), whose objectives are i) creating conditions conducive to voluntary repatriation through community-based investments in areas of high return (noting that UNHCR currently maintains a [non-return advisory](#) for Afghanistan; ii) building Afghan refugee capital based on livelihood opportunities in Afghanistan in order to facilitate return; and iii) preserving protection space in host countries, including enhanced support for refugee-hosting communities, alternative temporary stay arrangements for the residual caseload, and resettlement in third countries.



Pakistan, August 2022. Afghan Refugee family benefiting from Energy Efficient Cooking Stoves and Solar lanterns for Short-Term Energy Solution under UNHCR's Global Strategy for Sustainable Energy in Khazaana refugee village, Khyber Pakhrunkhwa. © UNHCR/Mercury Transformation

The expansion of resettlement opportunities for Afghans hosted across the region, but 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.

All host countries in the region with an active resettlement programme – including **Iran, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, India, and China** – use resettlement as part of a comprehensive protection and solutions strategy to provide a solution to individuals with more complex needs and protection concerns; to ease some of the responsibility resting with host States; to resolve specific longstanding entrenched situations; and to open space for engagement and advocacy with host countries that strengthens the protection environment for the wider refugee population, including through opportunities to enhance self-reliance and inclusion in national systems.

Operations across the region stress that resettlement programmes create space for constructive dialogue with host governments around 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 and Malaysia** – 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.

In 2024, activities by RBAP to promote resettlement within the region will include: ensuring coordination and harmonization of resettlement approaches in line with the regional solutions strategy, assisting operations to grow resettlement programming, ensuring the strategic use of resettlement to complement other solutions and to strengthen the protection environment in host countries, direct resettlement processing for a small number of cases in countries with no or limited UNHCR presence, reviewing resettlement submissions by country offices as needed, and ensuring continued engagement on and strengthening of complementary pathways programmes.

PROJECTED RESETTLEMENT NEEDS IN THE REGION IN 2024

Country operations across the region have highlighted almost **730,000** refugees and asylum-seekers with resettlement needs in Asia. The majority reside in countries that are not signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention and do not have a domestic refugee legal framework. As such, individuals reside precariously in host countries, often with limited access to work, education, health care, and other services and opportunities for growth. In addition, lack of legal status in the host country impacts freedom of movement and places them at risk of arrest, detention and deportation on immigration-related charges.

A significant majority (93 per cent) of refugees and asylum-seekers in the region originate from Afghanistan or Myanmar, countries from which individuals have fled for decades seeking international protection. 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 necessitate expanded third country solutions.

UNHCR **Bangladesh** has determined that approximately **129,000** individuals are in need of resettlement in 2024. The estimated figure includes 37,000 refugees who have been registered in Bangladesh since the early 1990s due to serious human rights violations and have no ability to return. Among the profiles of refugees in need of resettlement are female-headed households in the refugee camps in Bangladesh, who are particularly at risk as they lack traditional support mechanisms, and their situation may make them prone to gender-based violence (GBV). Due in part to the densely populated camps, the environment creates risks for abuse and exposure to harassment and sexual assault. Refugees who speak out in the camps are at risk from criminal and radical groups, especially when they are deemed to be supportive of “foreign” and “western” ideologies, such as supporting the LGBTIQ+ community, encouraging the advancement of women’s rights, and discouraging child and polygamous marriages.

UNHCR estimates that **235** refugees in **China’s mainland** and **Hong Kong SAR** will be in need of resettlement in 2024. Persons identified with specific needs will be prioritized for resettlement consideration, such as women and girls at risk, survivors of violence and/or torture, single elderly refugees, individuals with specific physical or mental health concerns, refugees of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, refugees with religious claims, and those in protracted displacement. While the caseload in Chinese mainland and Hong Kong SAR consists of various nationalities, most refugees who fall within the criteria described above are from Yemen, Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia and Pakistan.

UNHCR **India** estimates that **5,020** refugees will be in need of resettlement in 2024. Refugees with resettlement needs include those within the protracted populations such as Afghans, Myanmar Chin, Rohingya, and refugees from Africa and the Middle East. Refugees in administrative detention, at risk of arrest and deportation for immigration-related issues (including those who have received “Leave India Notices” from the immigration authorities); those facing immediate threats to their physical safety; individuals whose mental well-being has been affected by their protection situation; victims of trafficking; and LGBTIQ+ refugees at heightened risk will be considered for resettlement.

The office in **Indonesia** has determined that **3,150** refugees, the majority of whom are from Afghanistan, are projected to be in need of resettlement in 2024. Refugees in Indonesia remain at risk for their physical safety and breaches of their fundamental human rights. Xenophobia exists within the Indonesian society as does societal discrimination against refugees. Particular groups of refugees face added discrimination on the grounds of their specific religion and race, for example those of the Shiah Muslim faith and refugees from sub-Saharan African countries. Refugee women and girls, especially single women, are confronted with challenges such as providing for themselves and the risk of violence and discrimination, including GBV.

In **Iran**, **345,215** refugees or those in a refugee-like situation are projected to be in need of resettlement in 2024. The vast majority are from Afghanistan, with a small number from Iraq also projected to have resettlement needs. Refugee



Bangladesh, November 2022. Lab technologist Mohammed Elahi works on blood tests for Rohingya refugees treated at UNHCR partner Gonoshasthaya Kendra's primary healthcare centre in Kutupalong refugee camp, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Kutupalong is the world's largest refugee camp, with more than 630,000 refugees living in an area of just 13 square kilometres. © UNHCR/Saikat Mojumder

women and girls are particularly at risk of 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 harmful coping mechanisms. Child labour and taking children out of 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 GBV prior to or during flight and those who had remained under Taliban rule had commonly experienced or witnessed violence in Afghanistan. Same-sex 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.

The Office in **Malaysia** estimates that **21,975** refugees are projected to be in need of resettlement in 2024, with 76 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 may be at risk of arrest, detention and 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.

UNHCR **Pakistan** estimates that nearly **134,000** refugees and asylum-seekers, almost all from Afghanistan, will be in need of resettlement in 2024. 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 at risk 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. While GBV is under reported, female GBV survivors who do report are often placed in safe houses to avoid retaliation from alleged perpetrators or the wider community. There is also a significant number of children at risk, including those who work daily to support their families and can therefore not attend school. This exposes them to exploitation, physical risks and impedes their cognitive and emotional development. Additionally, others at heightened risk include LGBTIQ+ refugees, who face discrimination and are marginalised within their communities, as well as individuals with medical conditions or disabilities, as they are often isolated and stigmatized and do not have access to adequate services.

UNHCR **Thailand** estimates that **91,500** refugees, mainly from Myanmar, will be in need of resettlement in 2024. This reflects the entirety of the population in the “temporary shelters”/camps along the Thai-Myanmar border, (approximately 91,000 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 population.

REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES IN 2022

Third-country solutions for refugees were significantly expanded in 2022, including through strengthened resettlement programmes for the most at-risk refugees living in protracted situations in the region’s largest host countries: Bangladesh, Malaysia, and the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan. On average, UNHCR operations in Asia averaged 5,000 individual resettlement submissions per year between 2017 and 2021. However, in 2022, UNHCR submitted over 21,300 refugees for resettlement consideration, surpassing targets that had been allocated to the region.

Resettlement programmes from Pakistan and Iran, countries from which resettlement had effectively ceased over the previous years, were reinvigorated in 2022 due to increased interest and efforts around this population following the de-stabilizing events in Afghanistan in 2021. Similarly, resettlement for those most in need amongst the one million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh was able to re-start in 2022 following the suspension of this programme in 2010. As resettlement opportunities opened up from these countries, resettlement teams were strengthened and capacitated, case processing modalities were established, and supporting systems to enable the processing of resettlement cases were put in place.

Along with 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 emergent 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 essential and life-saving solutions across the region, as well opportunities to employ education, skills, and experiences to benefit their families and new communities.

In addition to resettlement, operations continue to build capacity and engagement around complementary pathways to and from Asia, enabling some of those hosted in the region to benefit from sponsorship, education, labour mobility and family reunification opportunities being offered by third countries. UNHCR has recorded data on over 9,000 departures from host countries in Asia on complementary pathways, though the actual number of refugees who departed is believed to be much higher. In 2022, the Philippines and South Korea piloted small-scale education pathways for refugees hosted in Asia. The regional partnership with Talent Beyond Boundaries, established in 2021 to advance the work of UNHCR around labour mobility pathways, expanded to four countries in 2022. UNHCR proGres data on skills, education, language and family connections continues to be used to seek opportunities for expanded partnerships and to enable pathways for those in the region.



Pakistan, October 2022. Afghan refugees and DAFI scholars Behishta Omari, Zeba Qasimi and Arghawan Adel pose for a photograph outside the UNHCR offices in Islamabad, Pakistan. © UNHCR.

PERSPECTIVES

IRAN

AN AFGHAN MOM AND HER DAUGHTER ARE READY TO SHINE

Zahra cannot wait for her and her daughter's departure to the UK so they can start a new chapter in their lives. Zahra, who is a single mother, wants a different life for 9-year-old Nazanin.

“There have been nights I slept hungry, I borrowed money, but I wanted Nazanin to continue her studies. She is a top student in her class”.

Zahra enrolled Nazanin in English classes two years ago. “At that time, I did not know I might once get an opportunity for resettlement, I just thought this would be good for my daughter to learn a new language and progress in her lessons. I thought she can gain a new skill which can be useful for her future. For example, if Nazanin wants to become a pharmacist, she can read medical prescriptions written in English,” Zahra says.

Zahra was a small child when her parents fled violence and conflict in Afghanistan in the late 1970s and came to Iran. Zahra is not able to return to Afghanistan as she fears as a single mother she would be at risk under the Taliban, and she fears Nazanin would be forced into marriage and could not continue going to school.

Life has not always been easy for Zahra in Iran. She has struggled financially and has not been able to find employment matching her skills as a nursing assistant. Zahra attended school until 5th grade and continued to study on her own until 8th grade, but she could not continue further because her family could not afford the school fees.



Iran, May 2023. Zahra and her daughter at UNHCR in Tehran.
© UNHCR/Hossein Eidzadeh

Zahra is keen to start practicing her English with Nazanin and wants Nazanin to help her step by step: “I want to learn English and see if I can use my skills as a nursing assistant in the UK.” Zahra wants to help others whenever she can. “In Iran in my neighborhood, both Iranians and Afghans know me. I go to people's houses to give medical injections and whenever I see people cannot afford it, I do it for free. If I go to the UK, it does not matter to me whether people around me are Afghan, British or from other countries. Human beings are human beings. Anyone who needs help, this is my duty, I would like to help them. I will be happy if my story makes people learn more about Afghan refugees and our potential.”

PERSPECTIVES

MALAYSIA

CULTIVATING CHANGE AND MAKING AN IMPACT IN A NEW COMMUNITY

Azimah Arkani happily shares her journey from Myanmar to Malaysia to the US, her story only broken by short pauses for breath. So, it comes as a surprise when she says she didn't speak a word of English when she arrived in the US in 2015. "I picked it up quickly in high school," she says proudly, before rushing to start the next sentence.

Born in Myanmar in 2000, she began first grade at a school in her village. But "it was far, and dangerous for girls to get to," she says, "especially for a very young Rohingya girl." Facing persecution in Myanmar due to their Rohingya ethnicity, her family fled to Malaysia while she was still a young child.

In Malaysia she enrolled in second grade in the Rohingya Education Centre, a school for Rohingya refugees. UNHCR helped open the school in 2012 thanks to our partnership with Educate A Child, a global programme of the Education Above All Foundation. Refugee students like Azimah aren't able to enroll in the national school system in Malaysia, so alternative opportunities are necessary to ensure they receive the education they need to thrive in the future.

After four years as a refugee in Malaysia, Azimah's family was resettled to Buffalo, New York, USA. Another new start, in a country half a world away. However, despite not knowing the language and having to adapt to a completely new environment, Azimah continued to thrive. She completed grades 11 and 12 in one year, finishing high school with the third highest grades in her graduating class. While in high school, she also created the Muslim Sisters Club, forming a community in the process.

Azimah is now a student at the University of Buffalo in New York. In addition to school, she is a translator for other Rohingya in the area and helps fellow refugees settle into life in Buffalo. She is the first person in her family to go to college, has won several awards and scholarships, and she has proudly changed her family's perceptions of what girls can and can't do.

She plans to become a nurse, then return to school to become a pediatric surgeon so she can continue to help others, especially Rohingya refugees.

Azimah says her father is so proud of her that he is now actively promoting equality for girls and boys in their Rohingya community. "My dad says, 'If your son can be a doctor, why can't your daughter?'" Her mother, who never went to school, has also been inspired and is now taking English classes.

When asked about the ripple effects of her actions, and how she has become a role model and leader in her community, Azimah downplays her success, simply stating,

"Everyone has potential. They just need opportunities."

THE AMERICAS

The Regional Bureau for the Americas provides oversight, coordination and support to resettlement activities in Aruba and Curaçao, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, and Trinidad and Tobago.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROTECTION ENVIRONMENT IN THE REGION

The Americas is faced with increasing population movements that are unprecedented in complexity and scale. By the end of 2022, the Americas region hosted more than 20 million refugees, asylum-seekers, others in need of international protection, internally displaced persons, and stateless people, as well as returnees facing compelling protection needs. Forced displacement in the region is expected to rise as the root causes of displacement remain unaddressed and are aggravated by the combined impact of deteriorating security contexts, social unrest, fragile institutions, the adverse impact of climate change, and deep-rooted inequalities.

In 2022, a record high number of people in mixed and irregular movements reportedly moved northbound across Central America, exposing themselves to risky and hazardous routes. Some 250,000 individuals entered Panama irregularly in 2022 through the Darién Gap (the jungle that serves as a natural border between Colombia and Panama). Venezuelans accounted for 61 per cent of people moving across the Darién Gap, followed by nationals from Haiti, Ecuador and Cuba. January through May 2023 witnessed the highest number of new arrivals reported through the Darién Gap, with nearly 160,000 individuals, mainly Venezuelan, Haitians and Ecuadorians. Women and children, especially when travelling on their own, are more susceptible to violence and exploitation as they move northward.

Governments in the region have generally maintained open-door policies towards refugees, adopting progressive national refugee frameworks and implementing national asylum systems, as well as promoting the inclusion of refugees into national systems. Despite these efforts, many refugees continue to face obstacles to access asylum and/or other forms of protection, enjoy basic rights and services, and achieve a solution towards local integration into the hosting community.

Venezuela situation

Despite the increase in spontaneous returns, the outflow of Venezuelan nationals in search of protection and assistance to neighbouring countries persists. As of early 2023, there are over 7.1 million refugees and migrants from Venezuela, of whom 84 per cent are hosted in Latin America and the Caribbean. Over 211,000 Venezuelans have been recognized as refugees, and more than a million are registered as asylum-seekers by governments across the region.



ma, February 2023. 24,634 people crossed the Darien Jungle in January 2023, risking their lives in the journey northwards in search of protection and safety. © UNHCR/Melissa Pinel

In addition, 4.2 million Venezuelans have been granted residence permits and other types of regular stay arrangements. Countries such as 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. Despite efforts towards protection and stabilization, limited access to registration, documentation, basic services and livelihoods opportunities, and rising xenophobia continue to affect increasing numbers of Venezuelans who remain at heightened risk.

Colombia situation

The new Colombian Government gives priority to the ‘total peace’ approach, involving formal dialogues with over 30 armed groups, including the National Liberation Army (ELN). The Government has adopted a four-year development plan and efforts to advance the promotion of a comprehensive programme of social reforms are ongoing.

Despite these efforts, confrontations among irregular armed groups have led to increased external and internal displacement that disproportionately affects the indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities. In 2022, over 185,000 new internally displaced persons were reported by the government and Ecuador registered over 4,000 Colombian asylum-seekers.

Central America and Mexico

More than one million people have been uprooted in Central America due to violence, human rights violations, poverty and climate events. In October, tropical storms had a devastating impact in parts of Central America, affecting displaced people and causing transit centers to exceed capacity.

The number of asylum-seekers and refugees from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras has reached over 636,000. Costa Rica and Mexico remain among the top five asylum-seeker receiving countries in the world. Internal displacement also continues in countries in the North of Central America, as well as in Mexico. Furthermore, the introduction of legislative amendments in Costa Rica that restricts access to asylum and enjoyment of rights by asylum-seekers and refugees are resulting in an increase in need for third country solutions.

Nicaragua situation

By mid-2022, over 267,000 Nicaraguans had been forced to flee, with almost 89 per cent seeking protection in Central America, mainly in Costa Rica. In the first half of 2022, the number of Nicaraguan asylum-seekers increased globally from 164,000 to 224,000, and the number of Nicaraguan refugees



Mexico, March 2023. Asylum-seekers from different nationalities enter Mexico from Guatemala after crossing the Usumacinta River at Frontera Corozal. © UNHCR/Nicolo Filippo Rosso

increased from 11,000 to 12,000. Some 138,000 Nicaraguans entered Honduras in a regular manner in 2022, and the majority have joined mixed movement routes northbound.

Caribbean

The Caribbean region continues to be profoundly impacted by the arrival of Venezuelan refugees and migrants. At the end of 2022, more than 200,000 Venezuelan refugees and migrants were hosted in the region. The Dominican Republic remains the largest hosting country of Venezuelan refugees and migrants in the Caribbean region, with over 115,000 individuals. Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Aruba and Curaçao hosted more than 83,000 persons under UNHCR's mandate, the majority of whom were Venezuelans.

A considerable proportion of Venezuelan refugees and migrants in the Caribbean remains unregistered and in an irregular situation, facing increasing risks with limited access to rights and protection alternatives and often turning to negative coping mechanisms. Undocumented Venezuelans are exposed to the risk of detention on charges of irregular stay, sometimes for prolonged periods and in dire conditions.

In Haiti, violence, including sexual violence, kidnapping, looting and roadblocks by armed gangs, and a recent outbreak of cholera have exacerbated an already dire humanitarian situation, marked by acute food insecurity, fuel shortages, and limited health care and sanitation. UNHCR has called on States in the region and beyond to suspend the forced return of Haitians to their country and to provide access to fair and efficient asylum procedures for people seeking international protection.

RESETTLEMENT WITHIN PROTECTION AND SOLUTIONS STRATEGIES

To address the growing displacement and movement trends in the region, the expansion and development of varied and innovative approaches to solutions are dynamic and evolving. UNHCR continues to engage with States and other stakeholders in the region, including civil society, the private sector, and financial institutions, to promote comprehensive and coordinated regional responses to mixed and onward movements. The adoption of the [Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection](#) represents a key step towards a comprehensive response to irregular migration and forced displacement in the Western Hemisphere through the enhancement of protection-sensitive entry systems; access to asylum and other protection-oriented arrangements; efforts to stabilize populations in communities of destination, origin, and return; and expanding pathways for regular migration and international protection, including the expansion of resettlement opportunities for refugees.

Despite efforts in the region to strengthen access to asylum and other protection-oriented legal stay arrangements, UNHCR continues identifying increasing numbers of individuals facing acute humanitarian needs and protection risks, for whom safe return to their countries of origin is not an option.

In a context marked by unprecedented displacement trends and the shrinking of protection space for forcibly displaced and stateless people, the expansion of resettlement opportunities in the Americas region remains a key element in the comprehensive approach to address the challenges of human mobility in the region in line with the objective of the Los Angeles Declaration to promote regular pathways for refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless persons.

In recent years, resettlement opportunities from the Americas have benefited from the generosity of resettlement countries, such as the United States of America and Canada, and the planned quota has increased to 14,995 persons to be submitted for resettlement from the region in 2023. In 2022, UNHCR successfully piloted a resettlement programme targeting Nicaraguan refugees in Costa Rica, a programme that will be expanded in 2023. In addition, the Protection Transfer Arrangement (PTA) continues to be a key in-country mechanism for providing protection for persons at risk in countries in the north of Central America, namely Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. Submissions under the PTA programme represented 50 per cent of all submissions from the region and a similar trend is expected for 2023 and 2024. However, it will be important in the region to ensure expanded resettlement opportunities exist for other nationalities and profiles as well.



Ecuador, March 2023. Venezuelan woman, Desiree, does homework with two of her children Cristian, 7, and Camila, 6, at home thanks to the new internet services installed in the community.
© UNHCR/Santiago Arcos

PROJECTED RESETTLEMENT NEEDS IN THE REGION IN 2024

Projected resettlement needs in the Americas region have increased to **106,450** or by 38 percent compared to 2023 (77,780). The increase in the number of people in need of resettlement is consistent with the growing protection needs and lack of other durable solutions for the most at need individuals among the 20 million refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons, and stateless people living in the region.

Venezuelans in **Ecuador, Peru, Colombia** and the **Caribbean** region continue to be in need of resettlement, in particular those who face security incidents, gender-based violence (GBV), high levels of discrimination and xenophobia, and obstacles to access regular and reliable livelihoods opportunities, health care services, and education. In **Colombia**, the projected needs total **30,000** (mainly Venezuelans). The operation in **Peru** estimates that **30,990** persons, mainly Venezuelans, will have resettlement needs in 2024. And, in **Ecuador**, **12,840** refugees are projected to be in need of resettlement in 2024, mostly from Venezuela but also Colombia with similar at-risk profiles. The lack of psychological care, combined with the ongoing risk of harm in Ecuador, creates significant obstacles to their recovery and integration, resulting in high resettlement needs.

Individuals from **Guatemala, Honduras** and **El Salvador** facing compelling protection needs will continue to benefit from the PTA programme. Both the PTA 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, GBV, 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 a major cause 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. The total resettlement needs in 2024 for these three countries, including nationals and refugees are: **Guatemala (8,970** persons); **Honduras (3,040** persons); and **El Salvador (1,800** persons).

In **Costa Rica**, **3,554** individuals (mainly from Nicaragua but also some from Venezuela and other countries of origin) are estimated to be in need of resettlement next year. The close proximity of and porous border between Nicaragua and Costa Rica, as well as ongoing verbal and physical threats and violence perpetrated by persons considered as informants of the Nicaraguan government or associated with ruling party in Nicaragua and currently living in Costa Rica, resulted in high reporting to UNHCR of heightened protection risks.

As the only country with a land border with Haiti, the projected resettlement needs by the operation in the **Dominican Republic** total **5,210** refugees, representing mainly Haitians. Many claim a fear of return due to gender-based and/or gang-

violence, and present specific needs, including health conditions and psychological trauma. Haitians in the Dominican Republic additionally face specific legal and/or physical protection needs on account of historical racial prejudice, xenophobia and discrimination. Despite UNHCR's call on the suspension of forced returns, Haitians in need of international protection face challenges to access international protection and are exposed to detention and deportation.

The UNHCR office in **Trinidad and Tobago** estimates that **2,380** refugees are projected to be in need of resettlement in 2024. This includes Venezuelans who oppose the government; women and children victims of abuse and human trafficking; Cubans and Syrians at risk of exploitation and detention since they are not formally entitled to work; and LGBTIQ+ refugees and survivors of GBV from Jamaica and Guyana.

3,660 persons, mainly of Venezuelan nationality, are projected to be in need of resettlement in **Aruba and Curaçao** in 2024. The number of displaced populations in proportion to the overall population size in Aruba and Curacao is high, contributing to the increase in xenophobia and discrimination against refugees and asylum-seekers. Many Venezuelans face serious legal and physical protection concerns in Aruba and Curaçao because they are largely undocumented, they do not have access to basic rights, and they have limited protection from refoulement.

The UNHCR operation in **Panama** estimates that **2,380** refugees are projected to be in need of resettlement in 2024, mainly from Nicaragua, Colombia and Venezuela. Considering the proximity to the respective countries of origin, some refugees report being located, threatened, and even attacked by the agents of persecution. This includes individuals who have endured violence and other protection issues on their journey through the Darién Gap. High resettlement needs have also been identified for female refugees who are survivors of intimate partner violence, GBV, and/or trafficking.

In **Nicaragua**, projected resettlement needs for 2024 are estimated to be **850** individuals. This reflects the specific needs of survivors of political and gang violence, often suffered in countries of origin, as the majority are from countries in Central America. Trauma counselling and psychological services are extremely limited for asylum-seekers and refugees in Nicaragua given the limited presence of UNHCR and partners. Furthermore, the restrictive legal environment in the asylum process is not conducive for recovery as it prevents individuals from integrating into society.

For 2024, UNHCR **Mexico** estimates that **700** individuals are in need of resettlement, including refugees from Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala, as well as Venezuela, Nicaragua and Haiti. People arriving from the north of Central America, in particular women and girls, are fleeing extremely violent contexts, including repeated rapes, sexual assault, and violent physical abuse. The situation during transit and upon arrival in Mexico remains harrowing, as they may be at risk of or have faced attempts of kidnapping, trafficking or forced prostitution as well as other forms of GBV, targeted by organized crime networks and cartel. Other



Mexico, March 2023. Allan Ardan, 18, fled Honduras to Mexico with their mother two years ago. He joined the Youth Symphony Orchestra in Jesus Maria soon after arriving in Aguascalientes through UNHCR's relocation and integration programme. He chose to learn percussion. © UNHCR/Nicolo Filippo Rosso

individuals with protection risks include those who continue to be pursued and at risk from their agents of persecution.

UNHCR will continue to use resettlement as a protection and durable solution tool to address the situation of refugees recognized under its mandate in **Cuba**, where **76** refugees are projected to be in need of resettlement in 2024, including individuals from Afghanistan, Syria, Sudan, Haiti, Iran and Palestine, among other countries of origin. As refugees are only allowed to remain in Cuba on a provisional basis under exceptional authorization by the Government of Cuba, they do not receive any legal status or identification cards. Without a defined migratory status, refugees lack access to most rights and services, including the right to work or engage in income-generating activities, and must depend on limited humanitarian assistance to cover their basic needs. Refugees also have limited freedom of movement and must regularly report to immigration police. Despite recognition under UNHCR's mandate, there are no legal guarantees against refoulement.

REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES IN 2022

In 2022, UNHCR operations in the region submitted a record high number of individuals for resettlement. A total of 9,413 persons were submitted, marking a remarkable 109 per cent increase from the 4,912 submissions in 2021. These results have played a pivotal role in enabling UNHCR to strengthen its efforts to find protection and solutions for the refugees in the region. The substantial increase in resettlement opportunities for the Americas in 2022 and 2023 signifies the growing recognition of the needs in the region.

Nationals from the north of Central American countries and the PTA programme

The PTA programme continues playing a significant role in addressing the needs of Guatemalans, Hondurans and Salvadorians, comprising nearly 50 percent of the total submissions from the Americas region in 2022. UNHCR, in collaboration with the authorities and partners in the PTA consortium, a robust protection network, has been identifying individuals at heightened risk within these three countries. In 2022, a total of 4,478 individuals from Guatemala (2,740), Honduras (637) and El Salvador (1,101) were successfully submitted under the PTA programme.

Mexico has emerged as a crucial resettlement operation, providing third-country solutions to refugee populations with specific needs from the countries in the north of Central America. In 2022, a total of 328 individuals were referred to various resettlement countries from Mexico. However, timely resettlement processing and departure is critical to mitigate the risk of onward movement.

Venezuelan Refugees

In 2022, Venezuela became the second-largest country of origin following Guatemala in terms of cases submitted under resettlement out of the Americas. A total of 2,503 Venezuelans were submitted for resettlement consideration during the year. For many at-risk individuals of Venezuelan nationality, resettlement continues to provide crucial protection and a durable solution.

By identifying and prioritizing profiles among Venezuelans in need of resettlement, UNHCR and its partner organizations aim to provide them with the necessary support, protection and opportunities for a better future. Operations in countries such as Ecuador, Peru and Colombia, among others, played a significant role in submitting the majority of Venezuelans for resettlement from the region.

Colombian Refugees

In 2022, 1,250 individuals from Colombia were referred for resettlement consideration. The majority of these referrals originated from Ecuador and Peru. The security context, levels of xenophobia, and discrimination faced by this



Peru, October 2022. Yisely Contreras, (center,) a 16-year-old student and activist from Venezuela, poses for a portrait, flanked by 14-year-old Wilmary del Carmen Camacho Camán, (left,) and 16-year-old María Sarai Contreras Chacón. The three were taking part in an event aimed at raising awareness around issues of gender-based violence, organized by several NGOs. © UNHCR/Nicolo Filippo Rosso

population in host countries have worsened due to the spillover effect of the deteriorating security situation in certain areas of Colombia. Specific profiles within the Colombian refugee population continue to require third-country solutions in order to ensure their safety and well-being.

Nicaraguan refugees

In 2022, UNHCR initiated a pilot resettlement programme specifically targeting Nicaraguan refugees. A total of 597 individuals of Nicaraguan nationality were submitted for resettlement consideration, with the majority coming from the Costa Rica operation. Maintaining the programme as a low-profile activity was a critical aspect to prevent the programme from becoming a pull factor for more refugees to seek resettlement from the neighboring country. The collaboration between UNHCR and partner organizations played a pivotal role in identifying and referring cases effectively.

Haitian refugees

2022 also resulted in a significant scale up of resettlement submission involving nationals from Haiti. A total of 111 Haitians, mainly from the Dominican Republic and, in less measure, from other Caribbean hosting states were submitted for resettlement consideration. The number of Haitian cases submitted under resettlement in 2022 doubled the figure of Haitians referred in previous year from the region. Given the serious deterioration of the humanitarian and human rights situation in Haiti, UNHCR seeks to continue using resettlement as an effective tool to address the protection needs of Haitian refugees at heightened risk.

Strategic impact of resettlement in the Americas

Resettlement represents a key component of the regional protection strategy in the Americas, in line with the Los Angeles Declaration, in order to strengthen the national, regional, and hemispheric efforts to create the conditions for safe, orderly, humane and regular migration and to strengthen frameworks for international protection and cooperation. It continues to represent a tangible protection tool, which opens up asylum space in host countries and allows for sharing responsibilities between host and receiving countries.

While UNHCR has significantly invested in upscaling resettlement capacity in the region, it is not without challenges. The majority of the persons with whom UNHCR works reside in urban areas, requiring more comprehensive processes to ensure accurate identification of individuals in need of assistance and refugee claims, many of whom are affected by gang-related violence.

Overcoming these obstacles requires innovative approaches, increased resources and enhanced coordination among UNHCR, partner organizations and relevant stakeholders to ensure that the most at-risk individuals are fully identified and receive the necessary support to access third country solutions.

Expansion and consolidation of complementary pathways

The Americas region continues to expand and consolidate various complementary pathways programmes. Through the support of Talent Beyond Boundaries and Talentlift, refugees in Central and South America are gaining access to labor mobility programmes. Education pathways in the region include the Habesha Project in Mexico which has expanded to receiving not only refugees students from the region but also Afghan refugee students from Iran and Pakistan. Private and/or community sponsorship programmes have also expanded in the Southern Cone region, with ad-hoc programmes dedicated to Syrian, Afghan and Ukrainian refugees.



Costa Rica, August 2022. María* a 28-year-old asylum-seeker from Nicaragua, poses for a photograph at Vicenta González's cacao plantation in Upala, northern Costa Rica, using a banana leaf to hide her identity. Forced to flee her home with her family after threats were made against them, María is now being supported by Vicenta's AMECUP organization, which was founded in 2015. © UNHCR/Nicolo Filippo Rosso

PERSPECTIVES

ECUADOR

Carlos has both determination and a dream. In 2017, he started his journey from his hometown of Barinas, Venezuela.

Carlos was the victim of a brutal assault on political opponents by the Venezuelan police. The protestors were peacefully demanding recognition of their human rights at a health center when officers started shooting at them. Carlos was hit in the spine by one of the bullets fired by the police and lost movement in his legs as a result. He remained hidden in Venezuela until 2018, when his family was finally able to flee to Ecuador.

The family has been able to begin their recovery and realize many of their dreams in Ecuador. Carlos is now a passionate pioneer of the discipline of para-karate and has won many national competitions. He hopes to one day participate in the Para-Olympic Games.



Carlos Acosta, 33, a refugee who fled Venezuela with his family in 2018 after he was shot in the spine and lost the use of his legs, outside his home in Quito, Ecuador. © UNHCR/Jaime Giménez



*Ecuador, October 2022. Carlos and his family in Quito prior to their departure to the USA.
©UNHCR/Gimenez*

Despite having been able to establish a home and build their lives in Ecuador, Carlos and his family are still heavily affected when they recall the traumatic events they lived in Venezuela. Ecuador's proximity to Venezuela reminds them of their past suffering, and though he tries to remain strong, Carlos is unable to forget the nightmares they have lived. The family has also experienced xenophobia, exploitation and a lack of job opportunities in Ecuador, all of which were worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of these obstacles, UNHCR recognized that Carlos and his family required resettlement to reach a durable solution and achieve their dreams and goals. Two years later, Carlos and his family departed on resettlement to the United States of America, and he is now beginning his next journey . . . to the Para-Olympic Games.

EUROPE

The Regional Bureau for Europe provides oversight, coordination, and support for resettlement activities in Türkiye. Resettlement may also be used as a protection tool from time to time for refugees facing protection risks in other countries of asylum in the region.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROTECTION ENVIRONMENT IN THE REGION

In 2022, the situation in Ukraine dramatically impacted the political context in much of Europe, leading to one of the largest refugee movements in recent history. Within months, more than 7 million Ukrainians crossed international borders seeking protection, while millions were displaced within Ukraine or adversely impacted. At the same time, the arrival of asylum-seekers to Europe from elsewhere in the world increased, as movement restrictions put in place to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic were eased or removed. New trends and routes emerged – with increases along some routes and corresponding decreases recorded on others.

Reports of expulsions and often violent pushbacks of refugees and asylum-seekers along all major arrival routes into Europe remained a serious concern. Within this context, some countries continued seeking to externalize core asylum and protection obligations through the conclusion of bilateral treaties or the adoption of domestic legislation.

Türkiye

Türkiye continues to be the country hosting the largest refugee population in the world with approximately 4 million refugees and asylum-seekers, mainly from Syria as well as Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and other countries.

Syrian refugees in Türkiye continue to benefit from temporary protection and, in view of the prevailing situation in Syria, are likely to remain in need of international protection for an extended period of time. Asylum-seekers from other countries have their protection claims assessed through a refugee status determination procedure, for which the Government of Türkiye has assumed responsibility since September 2018. Those who originate from outside Europe are granted “conditional” refugee status and may remain in the Türkiye legally only until a durable solution is found outside of the country. This situation stems from the geographic limitation that Türkiye maintained in ratifying the 1951 Convention and results in limited access to local solutions.

The economic turndown and the COVID-19 pandemic have negatively impacted the socio-economic situation in Türkiye, including refugees’ access to services and the labor market. This has resulted in increased onward movement and other



Türkiye, February 2023. Collapsed and damaged buildings in Antakya city, Hatay Province, Türkiye. Just two weeks after the devastating earthquakes that struck south-eastern Türkiye and northern Syria on 6 February, a further two powerful magnitude 6.4 and 5.8 earthquakes hit Hatay Province on 20 February, resulting in 6 deaths and some 300 people injured. © UNHCR

harmful coping mechanisms, such as child labour and child marriage. The situation was further exacerbated by the earthquakes that occurred in February 2023 which affected the lives of approximately 5.75 million people including 1.75 million refugees. The earthquakes caused massive damage and particularly impacted access to shelter, food and other basic services for all survivors. National and local capacities and infrastructure have been stretched to the limit, which, combined with socio-economic challenges, have led to changes in public opinion towards refugees and instances of social tensions.

Southeastern Europe

Increased mixed movement trends have been observed in the Western Balkans in 2022, straining the reception capacities and asylum systems of certain European countries because of onward movements. In the last months of 2022, several countries in Europe, among them Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Czechia and Hungary, have raised concerns about increases in mixed migration movements reaching the EU via the Western Balkans Route. Among the Western Balkan countries, Serbia saw the most significant increase of arrivals in 2022, in part due to the existence of visa-free regimes for nationals from Burundi, Tunisia, India and Bangladesh, among others.



Türkiye, February 2023. Search and rescue teams from UNHCR partner SGDD-ASAM (Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants) under the coordination of AFAD (Türkiye's Disaster and Emergency Management Authority) help survivors in Hatay Province, Türkiye, following the devastating earthquakes which struck the region on 6 February. © SGDD-ASAM/Turan Berker Akdevelioğlu

Ukraine situation

The armed conflict 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 2023, over 5.9 million people were internally displaced within Ukraine, and 7.9 million refugees from Ukraine were recorded across Europe, while over 4.9 million refugees from Ukraine had registered for temporary protection or similar national protection schemes in 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 labor market, and to social and health care services.

RESETTLEMENT WITHIN PROTECTION AND SOLUTIONS STRATEGIES

Türkiye

Türkiye's refugee response is based on a comprehensive legal framework backed by a policy of inclusion and harmonization in which refugees and asylum-seekers are included in public services at the national, provincial and local levels. Over the years, various ministries have taken steps to adapt their administrative and regulatory frameworks and enhance 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 the practical implementation across local contexts, support capacities and practices in the 81 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 an evaluation framework. Concerted efforts to support refugees and their hosts, including through broader partnerships (private sector, academia, municipalities, international financial institutions), are also undertaken in the spirit of the Global Compact on Refugees.

Resettlement remains a vital tool to help 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 recent earthquakes. UNHCR is, therefore, focusing its attention on resettlement of earthquake-affected refugees, including refugees who have disabilities as a result of the earthquakes, refugees who have chronic health problems and cannot receive treatment due to the impact on the healthcare system in Türkiye, and other refugees whose lives have been shattered by the earthquakes.

ETC Romania

Since 2008, Romania is host to an Emergency Transit Centre (ETC). The concept of Emergency Transit Facility (ETF) was inspired by a number of ad hoc experiences where UNHCR was required to provide urgent or emergency protection to refugees in need of resettlement at short notice. The ETC allows for refugees with serious protection risks to be transferred and housed in a secure environment pending the completion of resettlement processing and onward movement to a resettlement country. Since its inception, the use of the ETC has expanded to include situations which are not an emergency as such, but where resettlement countries have difficulties with accessing the refugees concerned, whether due to security reasons in the country of asylum, or for political reasons, thereby requiring the refugees to be moved for purpose of further processing. The ETC also offers resettlement countries a stable location in which resettlement procedures such as interviews, cultural orientation courses and language classes may be carried out in optimal conditions. With tailor-made psycho-social and educational assistance

provided at the ETC, refugees are also able to learn new skills during their stay in Romania that may foster smoother integration in the resettlement countries.

In 2022, four resettlement States used the ETC for final processing of 169 refugees from three countries of asylum (Libya, Rwanda and Syria). Since 2008, 3,511 refugees have transited through the ETC before reaching their final resettlement destination.

PROJECTED RESETTLEMENT NEEDS IN THE REGION IN 2024

The total projected resettlement needs from the Europe region in 2024 are 384,190 refugees, most of which is for Syrians in Türkiye.

Türkiye

The Office in Türkiye estimates that **384,070** refugees are projected to be in need of resettlement in 2024. 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 socio-economic vulnerability of their families; refugees with legal and physical protection needs, including those who face discrimination or physical threats because of their profile or personal circumstances; refugees in Türkiye 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 a disability may require medical intervention or specialized support, which is either not available in Türkiye or too costly for refugees to access.

Eastern and Southeastern Europe

Resettlement needs in Southeastern and Eastern Europe in 2024 are estimated to be **120** people, originating primarily from Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Syria and Central Asia, as well as a small proportion from sub-Saharan countries. The protection environment across these region remains relatively fragile, particularly in Ukraine since the beginning of the conflict in February 2022, with certain groups of refugees, such as ethnic and religious minorities as well as LGBTIQ+ persons facing higher protection risks. UNHCR plans to continue using resettlement throughout the region for refugees with specific needs, including those at risk of refoulement.

REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES IN 2022

In 2022, the highest number of resettlement submissions globally was made by the Türkiye operation, totaling 20,406 individuals. During the year 10,075 persons departed from Türkiye to 12 different resettlement countries.

In line with the *Three-Year Strategy on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways* and its successor, [Third Country Solutions for Refugees: Roadmap 2030](#), UNHCR called on EU Member States to welcome in 2022 at least 36,000 refugees through resettlement. 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. UNHCR's call was not completely matched by EU Member States, which committed to resettle 23,600 persons in 2022. These pledges were in addition to 36,600 pledges made for Afghan nationals under the EU's humanitarian admission scheme, most of which constituted evacuations out of Afghanistan.

By end of 2022, European countries resettled 21,350 refugees in total, including 16,700 in 12 of the EU Member States. The continued impact of the pandemic on state adjudication and refugee departures, as well as a focus on the response to the Afghanistan situation with large number of evacuations to the EU have been some of the main challenges affecting resettlement arrivals in Europe in 2022. Furthermore, the conflict in Ukraine, which started in February 2022 and led to the arrival of a high number of refugees from Ukraine in the Europe region also partially explains the lower number of resettlement arrivals compared to the countries' commitments. The Ukraine crisis has had lasting effects on the reception capacity in Europe, as exemplified by the decision of a few European countries to suspend their resettlement programmes or slow down arrivals.



Türkiye, June 2022. UNHCR Türkiye had photography workshops with Turkish and refugee children in Mardin. Over 270 children participated in the workshops, which took 5 months in total. The photos taken by the children were exhibited at the World Refugee Day exhibition in Istanbul. © UNHCR/Bahoz

PERSPECTIVES

TÜRKIYE

DESPERATE FOR A HOME

On 6 February 2023, two large-scale earthquakes devastated the southeast of Türkiye and parts of neighbouring Syria, affecting some 1.7 million refugees in the affected areas of Türkiye. Many of these refugees have been doubly impacted, having fled from the decade long crisis in Syria, only to lose their homes once again due to the deadly earthquakes.

Those impacted – refugees and locals alike – described apocalyptic scenes of devastation. Bushra, a Syrian refugee from Deir Ezzor explained, “Everything collapsed, and my son said to me, mother keep walking, don’t look behind you. There is nothing to look at behind you anymore.” They took refuge with Bushra’s sister, when just hours later, the second deadly earthquake struck. Mere seconds after they ran outside, the family watched her sister’s house collapse in front of them.

Khaled, a Syrian refugee living with his family in Hatay, tragically lost his two young daughters in the quake. He recalls being trapped under the rubble with his wife and five children. He managed to dig himself out of the rubble but couldn’t manage to free his 8- and 10-year-old daughters who remained trapped. “My younger daughter was talking to me until the early evening. Then she stopped responding. ... A few days later I came back to take both my daughters’ bodies to bury them.”

In the wake of the earthquakes, millions of people were rendered homeless. Survivors remain in precarious accommodation even today. UNHCR Türkiye has transferred some of the most vulnerable families to a shelter in Eskişehir, a city in the western part of Türkiye. There, Bushra describes her relief at being able to wash herself and her three children, all of whom have disabilities, after 10 days of sleeping in a makeshift tent in Adiyaman. “I was so happy to get my children clean,” she says.

After burying his daughters, Khaled found himself sleeping in a barn with his wife and his remaining three children. They were exposed to the elements, including freezing rain that made his 5-year-old son very sick. “At least now in Eskişehir we have a bed where he can recover.”

Mohamed, another Syrian refugee who had been living in Şanlıurfa during the earthquake, said he and his family felt relieved they had access to basic necessities in the shelter supported by UNHCR. “Staying here is much better than out in the streets. Here we have beds we can sleep in, and we are offered food.” He explained that his whole family was traumatized from the thousands of aftershocks which are still occurring in the southeast of Türkiye.

The possibility of resettlement gives them some hope for the future and a feeling of safety and relief after what they have been through. When asked about their hopes for the coming months, Mohamed says, “I just want what every father wants, a place where my children can grow up in a peaceful environment where they can continue their education.” Khaled explains, “I already lost two children in this disaster. We just want to be somewhere away from this experience; somewhere where we can psychologically do better.”



Türkiye, 2023. Refugee family who lost everything as a result of the earthquake currently in shelter provided by UNHCR. ©UNHCR Türkiye.

Ethiopia, May 2023. Cousins Museymo and Rayaan pose for a picture in Mirqaan settlement. Their mothers fled violence in Laascaanood, Somalia, and are now single mothers in exile.
© UNHCR/Diana Diaz



[2024 Projected Global Resettlement Needs](#)

Resettlement and Complementary Pathways Service

Division of International Protection
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Case Postale 2500, 1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland

Tel: +41 22 739 8111

<http://www.unhcr.org>

