

Regional Update for Asia and the Pacific

NGO Collective Statement – Written Statement

This statement has been drafted in consultation with a wide range of NGOs.

The total number of people displaced by conflict, violence and persecution in the Asia-Pacific Region continues to steadily increase, and reached over 16 million in late 2023. Moreover, in the region people are displaced – mainly within their countries – due to disasters and the impact of climate change: most of the disaster displacements recorded globally have taken place in Asia and the Pacific over the past decade. In this context, refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and stateless populations across Asia continue to face a multitude of protection risks, as well as a dwindling ability to access durable solutions. Within the current global environment, fraught with instability, conflict, attacks on international law and humanitarian principles, perspectives for the years to come are grim. NGOs therefore highlight the following dynamics and recommendations:

1) On Afghan displacement:

Over 22 million Afghans remain in need of humanitarian aid in 2025, 53% of whom are children and 25% women.¹ Increasing restrictions on women and girls, including the December 2024 reiteration of a ban on female humanitarian aid workers, continue to hamper aid reaching the most vulnerable. Women and girls also face heightened protection risks including Gender-Based Violence. Notwithstanding the shrinking operating space, humanitarian organisations have managed to continue their vital work supporting Afghans, particularly through negotiation at local level, demonstrating the importance of engagement with authorities for the benefit of the Afghan population.

The NGO community reiterates its calls to States to engage with Afghan authorities, including through the Support Platform for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR). We also urge the international community to not use the news of additional restrictions by the authorities as cause for withdrawal of necessary support for humanitarian organisations and the Afghan people.

Moreover, persisting humanitarian and relief efforts will not be sufficient to respond to the population's needs. Durable solutions should be meaningfully prioritised, including providing access to third country solutions. Without sustained investments, Afghans remain trapped in a vicious cycle of emergencies.

¹ [Afghanistan HNRP 2025](#)

Reintegration of returnees requires longer-term programming and cannot be left to humanitarians alone. Once again, the NGO community appeals to States to effectively support nexus programming in Afghanistan, lifting restrictions on programming for (amongst others) resilience, urban planning, and capacity building.

In the region, Iran is hosting over 4.5 million Afghans with various legal statuses and over 3.1 million are in Pakistan.² The NGO community commends the Governments of Iran and Pakistan for hosting Afghan refugees and invites host governments to maintain their generous policies.

In September 2024, Iran announced plans to deport two million Afghans. Since then, thousands have been forced to return to a country with low conditions for reintegration and lack of opportunities given the economic situation in Afghanistan. In February 2025, the Government of Pakistan announced plans to resume returns, with thousands of vulnerable Afghans at risk, including Afghan nationals bound for third-country resettlement but affected by the recent suspension of the US Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). Since September 2023, over 815,000 Afghans have been forced to leave Pakistan. The government of Pakistan has also engaged in efforts to relocate Afghan nationals from Islamabad and its twin city, Rawalpindi, by March 31, 2025, raising further concerns.³

International human rights law guarantees all refugees and asylum seekers, regardless of their documentation status, the right to due process and protection against forced return. Returns to Afghanistan must be safe, dignified and voluntary. Afghans who have no hope of sustained access to water, food, shelter, health services and education in their home country will not be willing to remain – fuelling a vicious cycle of vulnerability and circular movements. The NGO community calls on the Governments of Iran and Pakistan to halt compulsory returns of millions of vulnerable Afghans. Persisting uncertainty regarding the status of millions of undocumented Afghans is concerning. The NGO community encourages host Governments to continue allowing vulnerable Afghans to obtain legal status since Afghanistan is still unfit for returns, as highlighted in [UNHCR's non-return advisory](#).

Despite pledges at the Global Refugee Forum, funding is not proportionate to needs and vulnerabilities of Afghan refugees in the region: the 2024 Refugee Response Plan had a 72% funding gap. We call on States to maintain and step up their support for displaced Afghans.

2) On the Myanmar situation:

In 2024, escalating conflict and violence in Myanmar has led to significant increases in casualties and displacement in the country and across borders. Displacement, especially of young people, has been exacerbated by the enactment of the February 2024 compulsory conscription law, all leading to the new displacement into neighbouring countries, especially with at least 65,000 Rohingya crossing into Bangladesh.

The situation within Myanmar remains dire, with over 3.5 million internally displaced people, including Rohingya, Karen, Shan, and Chin communities, facing escalating conflict. Humanitarian

² [UNHCR Operational Data Portal, Afghanistan Situation](#)

³ [Joint Statement: UNHCR and IOM concerned about recent developments requiring Afghans to leave Pakistan's capital | UNHCR Pakistan](#)

access is severely restricted, worsening food insecurity and health crises. Reports also highlight limitations on UN's and NGOs' operations.

In Bangladesh, the year was marked by the upheavals over the Summer and the appointment of an interim government, which has committed continued support to Rohingya and called for increased responsibility sharing. However, Rohingya still face precarious security conditions with escalating levels of forced recruitment and gender-based violence. This is compounded by restrictions on mobility, limited access to education and income-generating activities, as well as minimal prospects for durable solutions. All this contributes to Rohingya turning towards perilous migration pathways for lack of other viable alternatives in their search for safety and solutions.

The continued enforcement of pushback policies, combined with gaps in regional coordination, communication, and preparedness resulted in the Andaman Sea route becoming one of the deadliest in the world, [with 656 people reported to have perished or gone missing](#). Misinformation, disinformation and hate speech is also an increasing factor in the negative trends. Other routes through Indonesia and the Pacific are also emerging. Smuggling networks and trafficking risks are escalating, with increasing reports of abuse and extortion.

The NGO community looks forward to the upcoming 'High-level conference on the situation of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar' and expresses hope that this can be an opportunity for mobilizing concrete and substantive commitments by member states for coordinated regional action that expands access to solutions and improves protection for refugees and minorities in Myanmar by:

- Securing commitments from regional governments including Bangladesh, Thailand and India, to respect the principle of non-refoulement and provide non-discriminatory access to territory, asylum, and humanitarian assistance for people fleeing Myanmar. This is in line with the [UNHCR Guidance Note on the International Protection Needs of People Fleeing Myanmar](#).
- Adopting regional standard operating procedures on disembarkation and search and rescue, the pre-emptive identification of safe and dignified hosting sites, sustained engagement and inclusion of civil society actors in regional and national coordination structures, and concerted efforts to address root causes.
- Ensuring regional institutions realize the urgency of improving maritime search and rescue capabilities and include forced displacement in the work plan of the ASEAN Community 2045 Vision. NGOs have also identified the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) as a relevant entry point for constructive ASEAN engagement⁴ and highlight the need to review the Five-Point consensus approach, which has shown limited effectiveness in the current context.
- Mobilizing improved access to rights and support for medium to longer-term hosting arrangements for regional host countries through increased provision of psychosocial/health, access to recognized legal status, work, and education and other essential services.

UNHCR and other relevant actors should also work to gather data on young people who left Myanmar since February 2024, to identify their condition and support their protection and access to services in host countries.

⁴ [A guide for NGOs: Utilising ASEAN to promote solutions for Rohingya communities](#)

3) On durable solutions and barriers to statelessness:

Facing repeated and protracted displacement crises, the region still requires long-term investments in durable solutions, through increased access to third country solutions as well as legal statuses, documentation, essential services and self-reliance options. Essential services must include access to legal information and representation. In this context, NGOs are particularly concerned about the implications of the new US Administration's decisions on humanitarian funding, resettlement and complementary pathways. Those are likely to cause grave harm to refugees seeking protection in the region and the impact is already felt by those whose resettlement processes have been halted. NGOs encourage the Administration and US Congress to work in a bipartisan manner to expand and improve safe, orderly and legal pathways to protection and reinstate funding for refugee responses. We call for concerted and coordinated mitigation and adaptation measures to explore interim funding solutions and ensure uninterrupted humanitarian aid. NGOs also call on other donors to increase their share of responsibility and cover existing gaps, as they did in the past, to avoid a drop in available hosting resources and third country solutions options.

Across the region, statelessness remains an issue of concern, with low ratification of key international conventions. Stateless persons are unable to access fundamental rights including education, the right to vote, identification documents, or formal employment. NGOs encourage States to protect everyone's right to nationality and to develop enhanced regional coordination mechanisms to improve responses to displacement and statelessness.

To conclude, in today's climate of reduced resources, it becomes even more imperative that Global Refugee Forum's pledges be fulfilled. In December, the High-Level Officials Meeting will be an important accountability moment. We also remind stakeholders that pledges can be made on an ongoing basis, even in between GRF meetings, which represents a path for continued responsibility-sharing. The current global situation also represents a major test for the Global Compact on Refugees' architecture and mission. Its arrangements should be mobilized to generate concrete solidarity and fill critical gaps.

In the current context, NGOs also look forward to engaging with UNHCR during this year's Regional Consultations on access to asylum and international protection and would welcome further details on plans.