

Joint NGO Statement on International Protection

This statement was drafted through consultation with a wide range of NGOs, including organisations led by forcibly displaced and stateless persons.

Today, we see multiple challenges faced by forcibly displaced populations globally. The landscape of displacement is more complex and precarious than ever, demanding our unwavering resolve and concerted action.

The Refugee Convention and its Protocol have protected millions of people from persecution. A terrible reality is that today's global crises and mass displacements overwhelmingly stem from the failure of Member States to commit or adhere to human rights and humanitarian conventions and other international laws. At this critical time, we call on states to work together, with civil society, to strengthen - and reject efforts to undermine - the treaties and norms that protect people from persecution and other human rights abuses. We must celebrate and affirm support for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, human rights treaties and the Refugee Convention and Protocol and recognise their benefits to human lives, peace and stability.

We call for a renewed commitment to international protection and adherence to international human rights and refugee law, urging an end to forced displacements, mass deportations, pushbacks, and externalisation of asylum processing that undermine basic human rights. We also call for urgent actions to expand third-country solutions based on humanitarian and protection needs, address declining resettlement opportunities, significant cuts to humanitarian assistance funds, lack of safe pathways, and to combat anti-refugee policies, hate speech, misinformation, and disinformation.

There is an alarming **global trend of states implementing restrictive policies** that are in violation of the internationally recognised right to seek asylum, and their absolute obligation to *non-refoulment*, as enshrined in the **1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, its 1967 Protocol, and universally binding principles under customary international law.**

Durable solutions too, are in decline. Resettlement, both a durable solutions and key protection tool, despite record numbers seen in 2024, has significantly dropped in 2025, with quotas at their lowest since 2003. Many refugees have to wait in limbo as major resettlement programs are indefinitely paused, including more than 120,000 refugees unable to move forward with resettlement due to the United States' ongoing refugee ban. This is widening the gap between the number of people in need of protection and available opportunities for resettlement as the main pathway to safety.

The protracted nature of displacement of forcibly displaced populations demands a **renewed focus on durable solutions which provide much needed protection. Scaling up of resettlement and other third-country solutions**, such as humanitarian corridors, visas and community sponsorship must be a main priority and are the only viable and scalable option for many of the most vulnerable refugees who cannot return home or integrate locally. Apart from protection-based resettlement, **expansion of complementary or temporary pathways**, based on education, labour mobility, and family reunification, **is a great step to address the increasing need.** The

integrity of third-country solutions must be preserved, and countries must urgently increase their resettlement quotas, facilitate family reunification, and expand access to sponsorship, labour, education and humanitarian and other complementary pathways by easing restrictions and expanding eligibility in particular for the disadvantaged and marginalised groups. We must recall that these too, provide lifesaving protection.

Harmful and unlawful actions like **pushbacks or summary expulsions of asylum seekers** across borders without an individual assessment of their protection claims are widespread and systematic, as documented by human rights organisations and courts across different regions. Examples include reports that **Croatian police regularly push back asylum seekers and migrants** to Bosnia and Herzegovina; and unlawful **pushbacks from Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland to Belarus**, particularly in the context of what the EU refers to as "instrumentalised" migration. The European Court of Human Rights has repeatedly condemned and declared unlawful these pushback practices, including in a case against **Italy**, where its coastguard intercepted a migrant boat and returned its passengers to Libya; and against **Greece**, for its summary expulsion conducted along the Turkish border. **In the Americas, pushbacks have been a significant concern at the US-Mexico border. Greece has recently imposed a 3-month suspension on the making of asylum applications** for people arriving in Greece from North Africa, ordering their immediate deportation without registration, as well as detaining migrants for up to two years if they enter irregularly, while unregulated migrants who have been in Greece for seven years will no longer have the right to legalise their status. Those found guilty of illegal entry will be fined €10,000. Finally, asylum seekers who have their claims rejected and do not leave the country within 14 days face prison terms of two to five years.

The forced **mass expulsion of Afghans** from **Iran and Pakistan** serves as a stark example of large-scale forced returns that happens in other regions too. Following decades of hosting Afghan refugees, both governments are pushing hundreds of thousands of people back to Afghanistan, where an already heavily strained humanitarian infrastructure is facing additional pressure. Many of the returnees arrive in dire conditions, lacking access to essential services such as food, safe shelter, clean water, and medical care. Groups at heightened protection risk, particularly women, children, people with disabilities, and older people, are at risk of exploitation, malnutrition, and illness upon arrival. Afghan refugees also face deteriorating access to protection and human rights elsewhere, including in **Türkiye** where pushbacks to Iran persist, along with continued reports of denial of access to asylum procedures, particularly for single men, and of ill-treatment in detention centres.

Furthermore, there is a growing trend amongst states to seek to **externalise asylum processing** and avoid their asylum responsibilities, often entering into agreements with third countries to host asylum processing centres or to accept returned asylum seekers. This trend can be seen with the highly alarming reform of the Common European Asylum System, as well as in the Americas, where asylum seekers are being deported with little to no security and without meaningful support. This practice, often justified to deter irregular migration, raises serious safety and human rights concerns.

States must **uphold their obligations under International Human Rights Law and refugee law** by ensuring asylum procedures are equitable, efficient, and available to all without discrimination, and do not allow arbitrary detention. This involves guaranteeing access to territory and to the asylum procedure for all who seek it, providing clear, accessible information about the process, ensuring that asylum seekers are not subject to arbitrary or prolonged detention, and enjoy the due process safeguards including access to procedural accommodations for those with disabilities, safeguards of the best interest of the child and the child's right to be heard, individualised and gender-sensitive assessments, and the right to appeal.

The global rise of xenophobia, racism, and discrimination against asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants is a growing threat to social cohesion and human dignity. States must have clear strategies and work with communities and civil society to actively combat hate speech, misinformation and disinformation, promote positive narratives about refugees, and invest in programmes that foster mutual understanding and acceptance within host communities.

Displaced populations are not a homogeneous group. Specific protection risks are faced by **women and girls** who are at a heightened risk of sexual and gender-based violence, exploitation, and early marriage; **children**, including unaccompanied and separated children, who are vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation, **youth and adolescents** who often face barriers to access education, youth-sensitive healthcare and limited opportunities to participate in decision-making, **persons with disabilities** who often face barriers to accessing information, health care and assistive devices, **stateless persons** who often fall between the cracks of protection responses, as well as **LGBTIQ+ individuals** who may be at risk of persecution, isolation and violence in both host, home countries, and in transit. All responses must adopt age, gender, disability, and diversity approaches, ensuring equal access to justice, protection, and services for all and to enhance opportunities for their meaningful participation.

The recent Halifax Declaration from the International Refugee and Migration Health Conference stresses the imperative for all stakeholders, including governments, to guarantee that **all displaced persons, regardless of their legal status, have equitable access to health services**, including mental health, reproductive health, infectious diseases, primary care, and child and adolescent health.

Legal support is a cornerstone of refugee protection. Many asylum seekers and refugees lack the resources to navigate complex legal systems. Provision of legal aid, including assistance with obtaining and renewing essential documentation such as identity cards, birth certificates, travel documents, and disability certificates, which are crucial for accessing services, navigating legal pathways, and securing rights, must be prioritised. We urge states to advance their provision of legal aid to asylum seekers and refugees, especially those from vulnerable and marginalised groups, including stateless populations, and refrain from hindering civil society organisations providing legal aid from reaching, informing, and representing clients, ensuring asylum seekers and refugees secure their rights and access services.

The increasing number of climate displacements, as recognised in the International Court of Justice's recent advisory opinion, means that the international community must honour their non-refoulement and international protection obligations for those forced to move due to climate impact. Climate impact multiplies existing vulnerabilities and exacerbates other displacement drivers, which are well-recognised under international law to qualify for asylum and refugee protection. States should invest in specific, coherent policy actions to address climate displacements, including through targeted funding to enable UNHCR's full implementation of the Strategic Plan for Climate Action 2024-2030, and pathways for climate-displaced populations.

We must also hold states accountable for the commitments made at the **Global Refugee Forum (GRF)**. The pledges made were a beacon of hope, and it is the responsibility of every state to operationalise these promises into tangible actions. Central to this is ensuring the meaningful **participation of refugees** in the design, implementation, and evaluation of policies and activities that affect their lives.

Finally, the recent funding cuts by donors to humanitarian assistance are very concerning, significantly contributing to enhanced protection risks for refugees and asylum seekers. This should be reversed urgently. **We call for allocation of adequate funding for refugee responses and for enhanced coordination among all actors—including refugee- and women-led organisations, NGOs, states, UNHCR, and the private sector.** Furthermore, the need to invest in durable solutions for safe and dignified returns are needed more than ever. We call on all states and other international actors to work to ensure permanent peace in contexts that drive displacement. Let us work together to build a world where all displaced people are treated with protection, dignity, and hope.

Thank you.