



## WHO WE ARE

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is a global organization dedicated to saving lives, protecting rights and building a better future for refugees, forcibly displaced communities and stateless people. We work to ensure that everybody has the right to seek asylum and find refuge from violence or persecution.

Created in 1950, during the aftermath of the Second World War, to help millions of Europeans who had fled or lost their homes, we had three years to complete our work and then disband. Today, over 70 years later, our organization is still hard at work.

For over half a century, UNHCR has worked to safeguard the rights and well-being of people who have been forced to flee.<sup>1</sup> We have helped millions of people to restart their lives including returnees, stateless people, the internally displaced, asylum-seekers, as well as refugees. We also strive to secure lasting solutions.

Specifically, we work to ensure the protection of people forced to flee, strengthen access to education and livelihoods, provide life-saving support like shelter, water, food and health care, and advocate towards national political, economic and social structures to bring policies, practices and laws into compliance with international standards. UNHCR partners with governments, non-profit organizations and private-sector companies to support forcibly displaced people and the communities hosting them.

In our lifetime, we have helped over 50 million refugees. UNHCR has over 17,000 personnel working in 135 countries around the world.

### The Refugee Convention

The 1951 Refugee Convention<sup>2</sup> and its 1967 Protocol are the key legal documents that form the basis of our work. With 149 State parties to either or both, they define the term 'refugee' and outline the rights of refugees, as well as the legal obligations of States to protect them.

The core principle is *non-refoulement*, which asserts that a refugee should not be returned to a country where they face serious threats to their life or freedom. This is now considered a rule of customary international law.

## WHO WE HELP

**REFUGEES:** The 1951 Refugee Convention defines a refugee as "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion." Refugees are defined and protected in international law, and must not be expelled or returned to situations where their life and freedom are at risk.

**ASYLUM-SEEKERS:** An asylum-seeker is someone whose request for sanctuary has yet to be processed. National asylum systems are in place to determine who qualifies for international protection. However, during mass movements of refugees, usually as a result of conflict or violence, it is not always possible or necessary to conduct individual interviews with every asylum-seeker who crosses a border. These groups are often called 'prima facie' refugees.

<sup>1</sup> For the latest information on global forced displacement, please see UNHCR's annual Global Trends report here: <https://bit.ly/3uVmOnf>

<sup>2</sup> Read the Refugee Convention here: <https://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10>

**INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE (IDPs):** IDPs stay within their own country and remain under the protection of its government, even if that government is the reason for their displacement. IDPs have not crossed a border to find safety. They often move to areas where it is difficult to deliver humanitarian assistance and as a result, these people are among the most vulnerable in the world.

**STATELESS PEOPLE:** The international legal definition of a stateless person is “a person who is not considered as a national by any State under the operation of its law”. A stateless person does not have a nationality of any country. Some people are born stateless, but others become stateless.

**RETURNEES:** Over the years, UNHCR has managed numerous voluntary repatriation programmes. We also assist with small-scale and individual repatriations and monitor the reintegration of returnees to ensure that their repatriation was a sustainable solution.

## The Global Compact on Refugees

On 17 December 2018, the United Nations General Assembly affirmed the Global Compact on Refugees<sup>3</sup>, after two years of extensive consultations led by UNHCR with Member States, international organizations, refugees, civil society, the private sector, and experts.

It provides a blueprint for more predictable and equitable responsibility-sharing and support for refugees and host communities, recognizing that a sustainable solution to refugee situations cannot be achieved without international cooperation.

The Global Compact on Refugees reaffirms but does not replace the existing international legal system for refugees – including the 1951 Refugee Convention – and constitutes a unique opportunity to transform the way the world responds to refugee situations, benefiting both refugees and the communities that host them.

<sup>3</sup> Read the Global Compact on Refugees booklet here: <https://www.unhcr.org/5c658aed4>

<sup>4</sup> For up to date information about UNHCR’s financial needs, please visit our Global Focus website: <https://bit.ly/3yXartS>

## HOW WE ARE FUNDED

UNHCR is funded<sup>4</sup> almost entirely by voluntary contributions, with 86 % from governments and the European Union. Three % comes from other inter-governmental organizations and pooled funding mechanisms, while a further 10 % is from the private sector, including foundations, corporations and the public. Additionally, we receive a limited subsidy (one %) from the UN budget for administrative costs, and accept in-kind contributions, including items such as tents, medicines and trucks.

## UNHCR IN BELGIUM

UNHCR has been present in the Belgian capital Brussels since 1952 – the office was established one year after the Refugee Convention came into force. UNHCR works to ensure that the principles of refugee protection are respected in Belgian legislation and asylum procedures. UNHCR also informs refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless people about their rights and obligations. We also work to inform the general public about UNHCR’s role and the situation of refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless people in Belgium and worldwide.



For more information, visit: <https://www.unhcr.org/be/>

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