

Dear Chair, Distinguished Delegates,

This statement was drafted in consultation with a range of NGOs including refugee-led organisations across multiple regions. Hence, we speak as forcibly displaced people and refugee leaders who continue to live the reality this statement describes.

We welcome the intention behind the route-based approach, especially its aim to protect and save lives. But, there are risks that evidence demands we name. This approach should remain focused on protection and solutions, not drift into an exercise of movement management.

At all costs, the route-based approach should not become deterrence-driven. Its objectives, funding, and indicators should not prioritise preventing movement over protecting people. The priority is to ensure that the approach does not inadvertently contribute to containment, externalization, or the erosion of the right to seek asylum.

People are not moving through irregular routes because they prefer it. They move because conditions in countries of origin, asylum, and transit often make staying impossible. Encampment, documentation barriers, exclusion from lawful work, declining services, insecurity, and the absence of durable solutions continue to drive onward movement. At the same time, resettlement numbers continue to decrease, while complementary pathways remain too limited and inaccessible to function as genuine alternatives.

This is why the route-based approach must be more than cooperation at borders. Its value lies in linking protection, inclusion, pathways, and durable solutions. It should not neglect the conditions that compel people to move. Access to legal status, livelihoods, essential services, and reliable information is not a secondary concern. It is protection infrastructure.

This is particularly important in discussions on return and reintegration. Return is only a durable solution when conditions of safety, dignity, voluntariness, and sustainability are genuinely met. The success of return should be measured by the ability of people to rebuild their lives and remain safely over time.

Evidence from Syria, for example, demonstrates that many people are returning not because conditions have substantially improved, but because conditions in host countries have become increasingly difficult to sustain.

Refugee-led organisations should be recognised and treated as operational partners in implementation, monitoring, accountability, and early warning systems, not only as informants.

Refugee-led, disability-led, and community-led organisations hold critical expertise on protection risks, misinformation, smuggling dynamics, and the realities driving onward movement. They are often the first to identify emerging protection concerns and the first point of contact.

We acknowledge steps taken by UNHCR to include refugee-led organisations, through online consultations and the Call for Expression of Interest for a Route-Based Approach Grants. These initiatives reflect positive efforts to recognise and resource refugee leadership. However, we must move, together, towards meaningful inclusion in governance and decision-making. Visa restrictions, limited funding, language barriers, and unequal access to decision-makers continue to shape who enters the room and whose perspectives influence outcomes.

Dear Chair, we close with three requests.

- First, measure protection outcomes, not arrivals prevented, with accountability to people and communities along routes.
- Second, address the conditions that generate onward movement inside host, transit, and urban communities, not only at borders.
- Third, treat refugee-led organisations as protection infrastructure. Fund them directly, include them in governance and oversight and as operational partners, and ensure they can physically access the rooms where policy is made.

When in-person global policy discussions take place, they should always facilitate for refugee-led participation.

The communities behind refugee-led organisations are not asking for charity. They are asserting rights that belong to them. We ask this Committee to stand with them.

Thank you.