



As the Refugee Convention approaches its 75th Anniversary, Global Civil Society Coalition Calls for Strengthened Implementation and Narratives Rooted in Hope and Solidarity, Not Fear and Division

July 28th 2026 marks the 75th anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention, the landmark international treaty that outlines the legal obligation to protect people from being returned to persecution and the rights of those who seek asylum. The Convention and its 1967 Protocol, and the principles underpinning them, have saved millions of lives and aided refugee-hosting communities and States around the world.

The 75th anniversary is not just a commemoration. It is an opportunity to strengthen responsibility and call for renewed action at a time when forced displacement is at historic levels, asylum and resettlement systems face mounting strain, and massive funding cuts are undermining refugee protection around the world. Reaffirming the Convention's principles must translate into adherence to its principles, improved implementation, strengthened national systems, and inclusive approaches that center refugee leadership.

As the world marks this milestone, the global civil society coalition of refugee-led, faith-based, humanitarian, legal aid, academic, and human rights organisations calls on UN Member States, UN agencies, donors, humanitarian actors, and others to advance concrete actions to strengthen adherence to, and implementation of, the Refugee Convention and uphold its principles. In all discussions about refugees and decisions affecting their rights, refugees and refugee-led organisations must be meaningfully included.

We must collectively re-affirm that protecting refugees is a moral and legal imperative and serves the interest of societies themselves. We call for honest, fact-based and principles-based discussions and narratives, rooted in shared values, rights, human dignity and hope rather than fear and division. Disparagements and evasions of international treaties and law subvert the rule of law globally. Dehumanising, fear-mongering narratives spread division and undermine refugee protection everywhere. Proactively countering misinformation and sharing more accurate, hopeful stories about refugee protection are essential to winning and sustaining public support. In these efforts, refugees and refugee-led organizations must be recognised as experts, advocates, leaders, and trusted messengers. We must also amplify the voices of local communities, faith leaders, and others who champion refugee protection and human dignity.

Concrete actions to strengthen adherence to the Refugee Convention include steps to:

1. **Uphold and champion the Convention and its prohibition on refoulement in policies, practices, and public statements.** The principle of non-refoulement is a cornerstone of the Refugee Convention. The legal prohibition against return to

persecution applies to all States, not only those close to displacement crises which host the vast majority of the world's refugees. We are deeply concerned about the proliferation of States' third country arrangements and other externalisation policies that have caused or risk refoulement. In such arrangements, as well as in other border and migration policies, States must respect rights and the principle of non-refoulement. All measures that result in return to danger or deny people a genuine opportunity to seek asylum must be ended. Access to territory and fair and effective asylum procedures are essential to upholding non-refoulement in practice.

2. **Bolster effective, rights-respecting reception and protection capacities** by safeguarding human rights, expanding access to work and education, supporting self-reliance initiatives, investing in humanitarian and development aid, and enabling local integration, permanent legal residence, durable solutions and a sense of belonging, in line with the Convention's protection of refugee rights and call for cooperation among States. These efforts should all be accessible and responsive to people with diverse needs, capacities and priorities.
3. **Substantially scale up and enhance refugee resettlement, community sponsorship, family reunification, education, labour mobility and other complementary pathways**, in line with the Refugee Convention's call for cooperation. This should include expanding the number of States with robust resettlement programmes and ensuring those most at risk have access to resettlement or another permanent pathway to protection.
4. **Strengthen and properly resource prompt, fair, credible and effective asylum systems** that are accessible, protect refugees and ensure due process. States should increase investment in the decision-making capacity of asylum systems, which are often inadequately funded, as well as legal representation and assistance. Support for multi-stakeholder pledges, such as the [Global Legal Community Pledge](#), [Asylum Capacity Support Group \(ACSG\)](#) and other pledges that seek to strengthen asylum systems and the protection of asylum-seekers and refugees, should be expanded.
5. **Facilitate integration and naturalisation** in line with Article 34 of the Convention, by ensuring access to family unity, identity and travel documentation, permanent legal residence and citizenship, and support for such efforts. Constant reviews of refugee status and curtailments of pathways to integration and citizenship undermine stability and the interests of both refugee and host communities.
6. **Support voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable returns** that adhere to law and respect rights, ensuring that any decision to return is taken only when conditions exist that do not undermine the life, integrity, safety and dignity of individuals, and establishing monitoring and follow-up mechanisms for returnees. Premature returns or returns that violate human rights or refugee law must be avoided.

In all discussions and actions relating to the Refugee Convention and the recommendations above, States and other stakeholders should:

- **Advance and resource meaningful refugee participation and leadership** in all decision-making processes that affect their lives and their rights, including through direct and flexible funding and institutional support to refugee-led organisations and global

initiatives that affirm the rights of displaced and stateless people to participate in decisions affecting them, as outlined in the independent declaration on meaningful participation.

- **Commit to genuine responsibility-sharing** that includes maintaining meaningful access to asylum and resettlement in all States, while increasing support for asylum, reception, regularisation and other protection in refugee-hosting and transit countries through funding, capacity building, diplomatic advocacy in support of rights, and expanded resettlement and complementary pathways - consistent with the Global Compact on Refugees. These efforts must focus on genuinely improving protection outcomes, rather than responsibility-shifting or containment.
- **Adopt age, gender and diversity-responsive approaches** across all refugee policies and actions, protecting refugees in all their diversity and ensuring that no one is left behind.

As [117 refugee-led organisations](#) from more than 41 countries wrote last year in an Open Letter to UN Member States:

The erosion of human rights and humanitarian norms leads directly to human suffering, instability, disorder, increased security risks, and renewed cycles of displacement. At this critical moment, the world needs stronger, not weaker, commitment to international law, and urgent action to protect asylum-seekers, refugees, and ultimately, our shared humanity.

History reminds us what is at stake. The right to seek asylum is a fundamental part of human cultural and religious traditions. Many of us who are living today found refuge because States honored their obligations. Prominent examples of indifference, slow response, or inaction have cost millions of lives, those who we abandoned, left to face horrific fates, are a stain on our shared history.

