



# Strategy on strengthening national asylum systems (2025-2030)

© UNHCR/Eugene Sibomana

## CONTACT US

Asylum Systems and Determination Section  
Division of International Protection  
Email: [acsg@unhcr.org](mailto:acsg@unhcr.org)



This document is for general distribution. All rights reserved.  
Reproductions and translations are authorized, except for commercial purposes, provided the source is acknowledged.  
© United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2025

## Contents

|    |  |          |
|----|--|----------|
| A. | Introduction.....  | 1        |
|    | <b>Context .....</b>   | <b>1</b> |
|    | <b>Theory of Change on Asylum Capacity Development.....</b>                                | <b>4</b> |
| B. | Objective and strategic areas of engagement.....   | 5        |
| 1. | <b>Strategic area – Supportive law and policy frameworks.....</b>                          | <b>5</b> |
| 2. | <b>Strategic area – Performing institutions.....</b>                                       | <b>6</b> |
| 3. | <b>Strategic area – Effective implementation of differentiated asylum procedures .....</b> | <b>8</b> |
| 4. | <b>Strategic area – Capacitated workforce.....</b>   | <b>8</b> |
| 5. | <b>Strategic area – Accessible information and legal assistance .....</b>                  | <b>9</b> |
| C. | UNHCR’s engagement in Asylum Capacity Development .....                                    | 11       |
| D. | UNHCR priority actions and enablers .....  | 15       |



## A. Introduction

The right to seek and enjoy asylum from persecution and the principle of non-refoulement are at the heart of the international refugee regime. Having in place fair and efficient asylum procedures is central to a State's ability to ensure the full and inclusive application of the international protection system to identify those who are refugees, others who may be in need of international protection as well as those who are not. For refugees, fair and efficient asylum procedures are essential to attain protection, enable inclusion in national service delivery systems and advance durable solutions. Efficient procedures that function with integrity also reduce the demands on reception capacity and facilitate the safe, dignified and rights-based return of those found not to be in need of international protection.

This strategy sets out UNHCR's objectives and priority strategic areas of engagement to strengthen the fairness, efficiency, adaptability and integrity of national asylum systems until 2030. It provides clarity on UNHCR's role and contribution, the immediate actions the organization will take to achieve these goals, and the requests to others. The strategy emphasises strategic programming centred around State ownership and sustainability through implementation of the capacity development methodology. Given the multi-faceted challenges faced by national asylum systems, achieving these objectives will require leadership and active engagement from a range of stakeholders through strengthened burden- and responsibility-sharing at national, regional and global levels.

For the purposes of this strategy, a **national asylum system** refers to the structures, functions, capacities and processes through which a country manages its asylum procedures leading to a decision on refugee status, including laws, regulations, policies, practices and plans, data systems, institutional structures and mechanisms for decision-making, participation, representation, oversight and accountability.<sup>1</sup> Asylum procedures are a central function of national asylum institutions dedicated to asylum-seekers and include registration, status determination and identity management and documentation procedures.<sup>2</sup> The national institutions engaged in asylum procedures differ per State but can cover a range of rule of law actors, dedicated administrative or legal entities as well as the judiciary.

This strategy is grounded in the international legal framework relevant to the protection of refugees, the [Global Compact on Refugees \(GCR\)](#) and [UNHCR's Strategic Directions 2022-2026](#), in particular the focus area of safeguarding international protection, including in the context of mixed movements. It aligns with the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), especially [goal 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions](#). This strategy fulfils a need identified in the [UNHCR Asylum Capacity Development Evaluation](#), the findings of which shaped its development.

Fairness, efficiency, adaptability and integrity are characteristics of quality national asylum systems. The characteristics require stakeholders involved in asylum systems to uphold due process standards, optimize timeliness and resources, respond to changing circumstances, and ensure quality control and accountability based on the rule of law and good governance. The four characteristics are closely linked and equally important in quality asylum systems. Improvements aimed at one characteristic should be balanced to ensure that others are not negatively impacted.

## Context

New and existing displacement situations worldwide have forced people to seek international protection in increasingly greater numbers. In 2023, 3.6 million new individual asylum applications were lodged

<sup>1</sup> The term national asylum system is, in some contexts, used more broadly to include the totality of strategies, laws, policies and action plans, in combination with adequate resources and institutions, that form a State's response to asylum-seekers and refugees. See for example UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *A guide to international refugee protection and building state asylum systems, Handbook for Parliamentarians N° 27, 2017*, <https://www.refworld.org/reference/manuals/unhcr/2017/en/120593>.

<sup>2</sup> For definitions of key terms see UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *UNHCR master glossary of terms*, <https://www.unhcr.org/glossary>.

globally. In the first six months of 2024 there were 1.9 million more new applications lodged, a 22 per cent increase from the same period in 2023. In addition, refugee or temporary protection status was granted through group-based approaches to 2 million people in 2023, as well as 0.8 million in the first half of 2024. 1.4 million and 400,000 people received substantive decisions on their individual asylum applications in 2023 and the first half of 2024 respectively. By mid-2024, 8 million asylum-seekers awaited a decision on their refugee status.

Rising forced displacement worldwide is caused by an interplay of factors without immediate prospects for improvement. Conflict, violence and discrimination remain significant drivers forcing people to flee. Deteriorating human rights situations, political instability and ongoing insecurity also contribute to displacement. Poverty, inequality and climate change intersect to push vulnerable populations to flee and seek refuge. The pressures on national asylum systems further increase in countries where those not in need of international protection use the asylum channel as a means to obtain temporary legal stay in situations where legal migratory options are insufficient, inadequate or absent. In order to respect refugees' rights, identifying those on the move who meet the criteria for international protection is important albeit complicated as refugees and migrants use similar routes, means of transport and/or facilitators.

National asylum systems across the globe face significant capacity challenges, at the law and policy, organizational, and individual capacity levels, to implement asylum procedures. Some of these issues are more acute in low-income countries, which host a disproportionately large share of the world's forcibly displaced, both in terms of their population size and the resources available to them. Recent statistics indicate that low- and middle-income countries, host 71 per cent of the global refugee population and the 45 Least Developed Countries provide asylum to 22 per cent of the global displaced population.

### **Route-based approach: reinforcing asylum systems in the context of mixed movements of refugees and migrants**

The recent rise in asylum applications presents significant challenges, especially in scenarios involving mixed movements of refugees and migrants. These mixed movements not only strain asylum systems but also lead to increased vulnerability, trauma, and loss of life for those on the move. They complicate effective border management and heighten public concern and anti-refugee sentiment in communities along the route.

To address the challenges of mixed movements more effectively and predictably, a broader, whole-of-route approach is necessary. This approach involves comprehensive, targeted, and coordinated interventions by States, UNHCR, IOM, and other stakeholders. A key element of this approach is the strengthening of asylum systems. Quality asylum systems identify people in need of protection early after displacement, thereby helping to avoid dangerous journeys. This strategy guides and supports States and UNHCR in implementing the asylum strengthening aspect of the route-based approach in the most effective and comprehensive manner, as part of a holistic response.

*For further information, see UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), A Route-Based Approach: Strengthening Protection and Solutions in the Context of Mixed Movements of Refugees and Migrants, June 2024, <https://www.refworld.org/policy/strategy/unhcr/2024/en/148087>.*

Public opinion support granting asylum to those in need, with overall 73 per cent of people agreeing that those fleeing war or persecution should be able to seek safety in other countries, including their own.<sup>3</sup> However, public opinion about asylum has been negatively impacted by narratives of chaotic,

<sup>3</sup> Ipsos, World Refugee Day Global Attitudes towards Refugees, June 2024, <https://www.ipsos.com/en/unhcr-ipsos-survey-shows-enduring-public-support-refugees-alongside-stark-variations-attitudes>



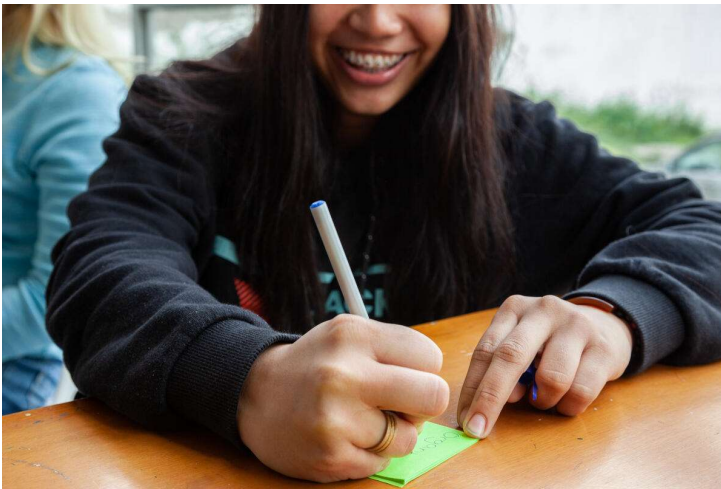
irregular or mass arrivals, abuse of the asylum system and perceptions that States have lost control of their borders. Asylum procedures have encountered challenges relating to inadequate reception capacity, increasing asylum backlogs and concerns about the effectiveness of return procedures of those found not to be in need of international protection. These factors are reinforced by concerns, about the impact of refugees on security, public services, labour markets, national economies and the way of life notwithstanding studies which challenge these narratives.

States have responded in different ways to the continued high numbers of new arrivals. Some States have stepped up and reinforced their asylum procedures. Other States have moved away from quality procedures, restricted access to procedures, adopted restrictive asylum policies and measures resulting in unfair negative decisions, or attempted to shift to other States their responsibilities under international law.

The 8 million asylum-seekers waiting for a decision on their refugee status translates to long, sometimes multi-year wait times. For those eventually found to be in need of international protection, the length of the determination process will have significantly delayed their ability to obtain secure legal status, recognized identity documentation, as well as the degree of stability which enables their full inclusion into national service delivery systems, self-reliance in the host countries and accessing socio-economic rights. This can have longer-term economic consequences, as the wait impedes refugees' longer-term integration into the labour market.<sup>4</sup> For vulnerable refugees this delay can further have profound impact on their protection and care, including care arrangements in the best interest of unaccompanied

*And another crucial point is the need — especially in industrialized countries — for an honest conversation about establishing proper, legal, substantive migration pathways to keep economies and social systems going, and to provide proper entry points for migrants without overburdening the asylum channel.*

Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees



© UNHCR/Diana Díaz

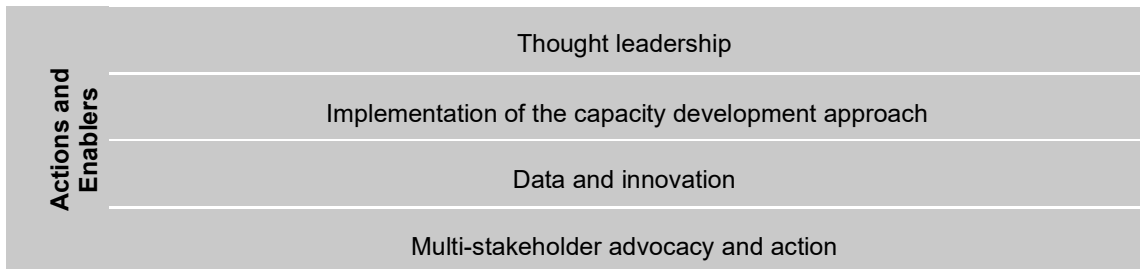
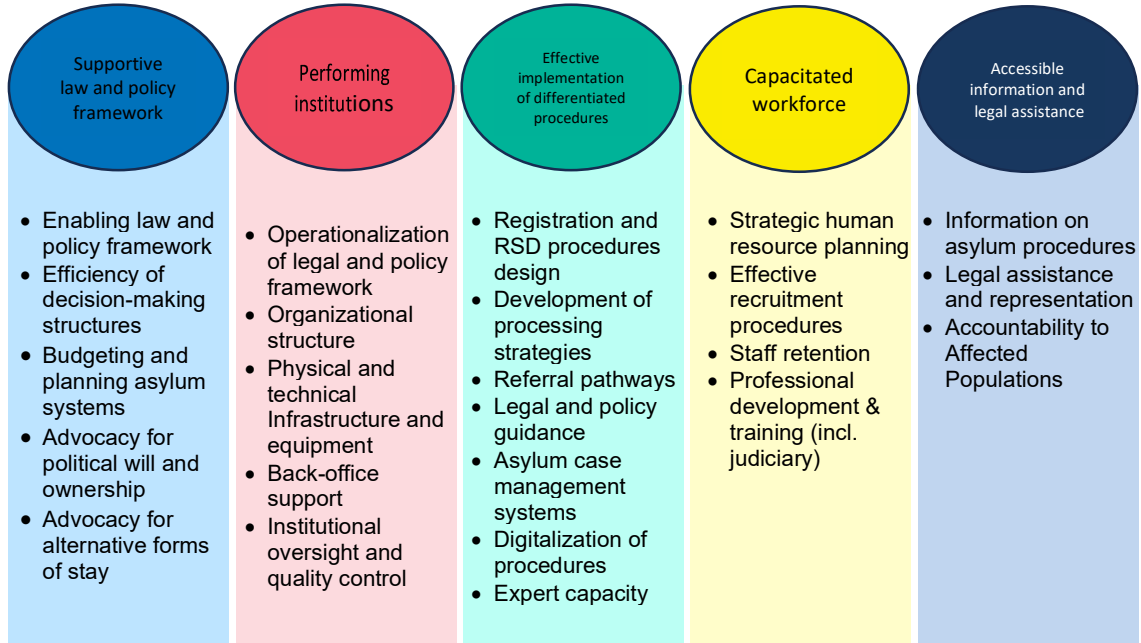
children, access to education and emotional wellbeing. For States the delays in reaching decisions increases the cost of reception arrangements as well as the facilitation of safe, dignified and rights-based return of those found not to be in need of international protection.

<sup>4</sup> World Bank. 2023. World Development Report 2023: Migrants, Refugees, and Societies. Washington, DC: World Bank, p. 219.

## Theory of Change on Asylum Capacity Development

By 2030, a larger proportion of asylum-seekers receive decisions on their asylum applications through fair and efficient national asylum systems.

### Strategic areas of engagement

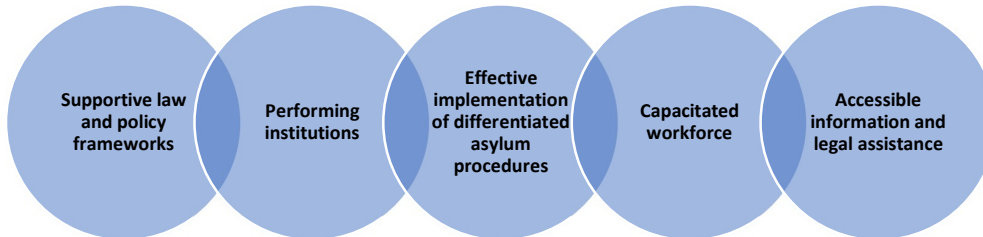


## B. Objective and strategic areas of engagement

UNHCR's strategy on strengthening national asylum systems is centred around one key objective:

*By 2030, a larger proportion of asylum-seekers receive decisions on their asylum application through fair and efficient national asylum systems.*

To realize the objective and make progress towards addressing the challenges facing asylum systems, UNHCR, working jointly with stakeholders, will focus on **five strategic areas of engagement** to strengthen the fairness, efficiency, adaptability and integrity of national asylum systems:



The following sections describe these areas, the current situation and what success would look like.

### 1. Strategic area – Supportive law and policy frameworks

**Where we are now.** 149 of 195 States are party to the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and/or its 1967 Protocol (1951 Convention) while 46 UN Member and Observer States have not yet acceded.<sup>5</sup> 154 Countries and territories have primary laws in place protecting refugees and asylum-seekers.<sup>6</sup> For numerous States with operational asylum systems, the law and policy framework contains structures and processes which are not optimized to promote quality, or which do not adequately support the issuance of related documentation in a manner that facilitates socio-economic inclusion by ensuring linkages with national ID systems. Common structural problems include inefficient decision-making structures, with decision-making either spread over multiple layers beyond what is required for integrity, or based on decision-making models which are centralized, involve non-professionalized decision-makers or committees. Too frequently, law and policy frameworks restrict the ability of asylum systems to adapt to evolving situations, including the ability to introduce processing modalities which enhance efficiency while maintaining fairness. In the context of mass influx or mixed movement of refugees and migrants, many States also do not have adequate legal migration pathways available or mechanisms in place to provide for other, protection sensitive, legal entry or stay arrangements that complement the asylum procedures, to prevent excessive strain on asylum procedures.

At the level of the policy framework, a number of national asylum systems are funded largely or exclusively through humanitarian funding, operating in parallel to centralized government budgeting and planning. At a strategic level, asylum institutions are frequently not included in national development plans.<sup>7</sup> The use of humanitarian funding, while effective and necessary in some contexts, is unpredictable and not sustainable in the medium-long term as it impacts the ownership and integration of asylum institutions in government structures and decision-making. Asylum institutions which are funded through the national budget are also not without financial challenges. Regularly, these institutions do not receive the funding envelope required to implement fair, efficient and adaptable asylum procedures with integrity.

<sup>5</sup> 48 out of 55 African Union Member States are party to the 1969 OAU Convention governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa.

<sup>6</sup> For up-to-date information on the global legal protection environment see UNHCR's Refugee Treaty and Legislation Dashboard, <https://rimap.unhcr.org/refugee-treaty-legislation-dashboard>.

<sup>7</sup> See further: OECD/UNHCR, "Refugees and internally displaced persons in development planning: No-one left behind?", OECD Development Policy Papers, No. 47, 2023, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/08c021b0-en>.



**Where we want to be.** Success in this area would mean more States are acceding to the 1951 Convention, its 1967 Protocol and the 1969 OAU Convention, withdrawing their reservations to these instruments and enacting and implementing asylum laws and policies aligned with international and regional standards. It would also mean States with law and procedures already in place reviewing their existing legal frameworks to enhance the fairness, efficiency, adaptability of asylum decision-making by simplifying procedures, enhancing due process and accessibility, improving decision-making structures, and including adequate safeguards and sensitivities in asylum procedures for groups with specific needs (e.g. children). In States that are not yet ready to accede to the Conventions, strategies would be implemented based on human rights norms that take steps towards developing an asylum system. Legal frameworks on identity management would include refugees and asylum-seekers and recognize refugee documentation to ensure access to national systems and services in order to be self-reliant, including access to banking, financial and telecom services. Pressures on existing asylum procedures would be alleviated by laws and policies providing for alternative forms of legal stay in particular refugee situations, and adequate migration pathways to apply to persons not in need of international protection. States would further establish and operationalize frameworks to facilitate the safe, dignified and rights-based return of those found not to need international protection.

#### **Protection-oriented stay arrangements for refugees**

UNHCR encourages States to consider protection-oriented arrangements when adapting existing asylum systems to address potentially large numbers of claims for profiles in need of international protection. Protection-oriented stay arrangements thus provide a response to humanitarian crises. Such stay arrangements protect refugees and asylum-seekers against refoulement and provide minimum standards akin to international protection status. Protection-oriented stay arrangements could include other forms of international protection under International Human Rights Law, or Temporary Protection. The requirements and procedures for protection-oriented stay arrangements for refugees need to be defined and articulated under national law. Implementation of such arrangements is without prejudice to the right to seek asylum, notably in expulsion or deportation proceedings or in the case of non-renewal of residence permits. Fair and efficient asylum systems provide a necessary safety net to ensure that individuals with international protection needs are recognized as such and are protected from refoulement.

See: UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Guidelines on Temporary Protection or Stay Arrangements*, February 2014, <https://www.refworld.org/policy/legalguidance/unhcr/2014/en/74916>

In addition to enhanced legal frameworks, there would need to be a corresponding increase in national policy support for, and ownership of, asylum institutions, demonstrated by having both the budgeting and planning processes comprehensively incorporated into government planning or predictable long-term funding mechanisms enhancing responsibility-sharing, sufficiently prioritized and reflected in national development plans. To realize national ownership, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, additional technical and financial support would be required to strengthen asylum institutions.

## **2. Strategic area – Performing institutions**

**Where we are now.** Asylum institutions globally are performing unevenly in implementing asylum procedures. While there are positive examples, some States have not operationalized all, or part of, their law and policy framework related to their asylum procedures or are applying it inconsistently or not in line with relevant provisions. In other States, geographic and procedural limitations, mean that asylum procedures are not accessible to all asylum-seekers equally. For example, asylum procedures may not be fully accessible for applicants with disabilities, as procedural accommodations, such as safety procedures for specific groups, are lacking. Additionally, referral mechanisms to other services such as organisations working with survivors of torture are often insufficiently developed.

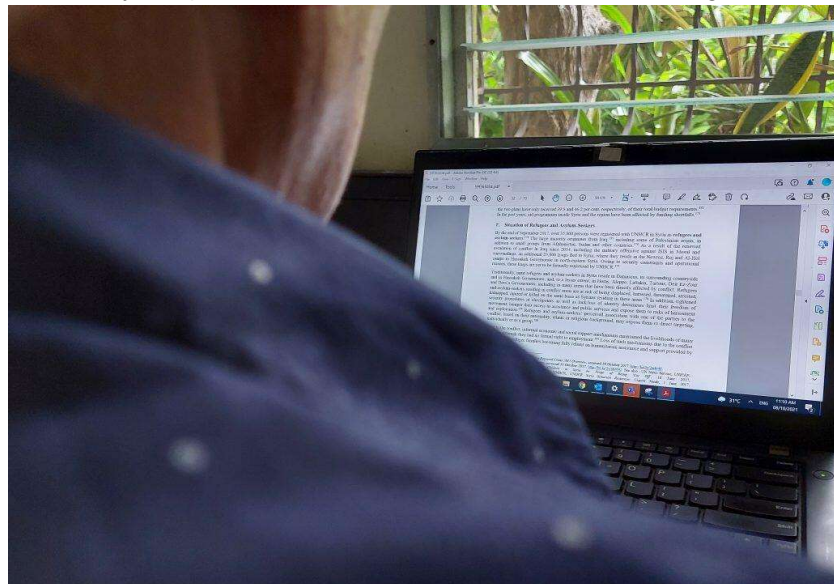
Operational asylum systems are frequently hampered in their effectiveness by weak supporting processes and functions, such as administration, supply and procurement. Linked to weak support functions, many asylum institutions, including in some high- and middle-income countries, lack appropriate infrastructure and equipment for asylum procedures including office spaces, necessary IT infrastructure, reception facilities, and appropriate interviewing spaces, including for children of different ages and/or persons with disabilities.

In some contexts, the effective management of asylum institutions is challenged due to a lack of the strong and empowered leadership necessary to plan and strategically represent the asylum institutions in whole-of-government processes. These challenges regularly impact the cooperation between different government institutions supporting asylum matters, most notably immigration and law enforcement agencies. In addition to leadership challenges, the organizational structures of asylum institutions are not always aligned to the system's objectives, with insufficient collaboration between registration and status determination functions and, commonly, gaps in expert functions or units functioning as resources for decision-makers. Examples of such expert functions would include expertise on country of origin information, particular claim types or expertise in assessing claims by children, or persons with mental health conditions, psychosocial and intellectual disabilities. In some States, asylum procedures are challenged by a lack of focus and funding as asylum institutions have expanded their service provision into services non-specific to forcibly displaced persons including health, education services which operate, unsustainably, in parallel to the national systems.

Some of the institutional weaknesses stem from a lack of technical capacity, institutional processes, or knowledge management. Others are a product of these institutions not being (sufficiently) prioritized for financing, whether by governments or by donors. Asylum capacity support provided often focuses on quick fixes, including short-term training interventions, not resulting in sustainable change and improvement.

**Where we want to be.** To have performing institutions would require that States refocus their asylum institutions' activities to prioritize the performance of core functions. It would require the operationalization of all parts of asylum procedures and effective collaboration with government

institutions which support the asylum procedures. States would decentralize asylum systems, or certain stages of the asylum procedure, to border areas and other critical locations where refugees arrive or reside. In some contexts, parts of asylum authorities would be restructured to ensure efficiency, quality and sustainability, including by enhancing collaboration between technical functions, the



introduction or strengthening of expert units, complemented with an oversight mechanism for quality assurance. States that face challenges in back-office and support processes would strengthen these, including administration, IT systems and personnel management, in order to enhance fairness and

efficiency on the asylum procedures. To effectively perform, more asylum institutions would also have in place the necessary infrastructure and equipment required in the performance of their role and objectives, including to support applicants with specific needs. The strengthened institutions would have leadership that is better able to strategically engage, manage change, implement policy to continuously improve the institutions' performance and seek investments in innovation.

### 3. Strategic area – Effective implementation of differentiated asylum procedures

**Where we are now.** Asylum procedures should be designed to be as efficient as possible for different claim types and for different age, gender and diversity characteristics of applicants without compromising fairness or integrity.<sup>8</sup> Many States have taken steps to implement differentiated asylum procedures, including group processing; other States have not prioritized the simplification of procedures because of a lack of capacity, support systems, or because of political decisions to respond to inflows through other, often regressive, policies.

Group processing approaches such as prima facie are some of the best-known differentiated approaches, which are particularly useful for addressing situations of mass influx of refugees. With 891,000 refugees recognized in 2023 and 373,400 in the first half of 2024 through prima facie approaches, group approaches are effectively used in certain regions, predominantly in parts of Africa and some countries in South America.<sup>9</sup> However, outside these regions their use is limited even in States that have the possibility in their current legislative framework. Moreover, some States in Africa and South America have recently reduced its use, citing security or other concerns, rather than adjusting procedures to address these issues.

Some States have made progress in differentiating their asylum procedures by putting in place strategies to triage applications into different types of simplified and accelerated procedures. Implementation has been facilitated by practices such as frontloading data collection, online registration systems, referral mechanisms, triaging of applications, paper-based decision-making without interview as well as strong guidance on referral for more detailed processing.<sup>10</sup> States that have embarked on implementing differentiated asylum procedures have however regularly faced challenges due to inadequate data or data quality, ineffective case and file management procedures, and insufficient country of origin information research capacity.

**Where we want to be.** Success in this area would mean that additional States effectively implement differentiated procedures to enhance efficiency while maintaining fairness, in particular maintaining procedural guarantees, including data privacy, through appropriate use of prima facie approaches, simplified and accelerated decision-making among others. To facilitate this, more States would have in place the key components facilitating differentiation, including higher quality data through sufficiently robust registration datasets, well designed registration systems and processes, and technology for digitization of processes and case management systems. States already implementing differentiated approaches would further reinforce these through enhancing technology and innovation.

### 4. Strategic area – Capacitated workforce

**Where we are now.** Asylum institutions commonly face obstacles in developing the capacity of their workforce related to strategic human resources planning, recruitment procedures, retention strategies and developing staff skills and competencies. Asylum institutions regularly face shortages of qualified

---

<sup>8</sup> For an analysis of practices of differentiation of asylum procedures see UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Effective processing of asylum applications: Practical considerations and practices, March 2022, <https://www.refworld.org/policy/opguidance/unhcr/2022/en/124059>

<sup>9</sup> [Update from Santiago Declaration and Plan of Action once adopted]

<sup>10</sup> For further information see: UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Effective processing of asylum applications: Practical considerations and practices, March 2022, <https://www.refworld.org/policy/opguidance/unhcr/2022/en/124059>.

staff because of limited strategic workforce planning and lack of flexibility, or resources, to align human resources to the needs of the asylum procedures. Alignment of staff between the different stages of the asylum procedure and an appropriate balance between substantive and support functions, including interpretation, is regularly missing. In periods of increased arrivals and emergencies, many institutions lack adaptive human resource strategies to scale up suitably qualified staff. A further cause of capacity gaps for some asylum systems relates to recruitment procedures, which are sometimes insufficiently robust to identify and attract the most suitable candidates.

Compounding these challenges is the high turnover of staff in several asylum institutions. High turnover is often attributed to several factors, including internal policies, staff well-being issues and the predictability and attractiveness of contractual arrangements. Additionally, adequacy of compensation and remuneration, career prospects, in particular when staff is not included in the civil service, and work environment concerns play significant roles. Secondary trauma and the strain resulting from interviewing asylum-seekers who regularly have experienced trauma also impacts staff retention.

The availability of systems for induction and professional development is uneven for asylum institutions globally. Some States have well developed induction and professional development programmes that cover expertise on interviewing, handling claims by specific groups of applicants (e.g. unaccompanied children, survivors of gender-based violence, and persons with disabilities), decision-making and knowledge of law and asylum case management, that they can implement independently, with occasional expert support. Other States lack internal training capacity and rely on UNHCR or other partners to provide for induction training and continuous learning for the variety of functions in the asylum process.

**Where we want to be.** To increase workforce capacity, national asylum institutions would need to plan human resources effectively and ensure staff with the appropriate qualifications, knowledge and skills are recruited and retained on predictable regular contracts following government staffing rules and regulations. States would empower asylum institutions to implement effective human resource planning practices, risk identification and mitigation measures. At the locations where asylum procedures are implemented staff planning would be aligned sustainably to the effective needs while adaptable approaches would be provided to address surge staffing needs. Asylum institutions would identify and take steps to address human resource challenges such as high staff turn-over and staff well-being.

Sustainable and iterative learning and skills development for all personnel, at all stages in the asylum process, including the judiciary, and on all aspects of asylum procedures, would be made available to achieve its important impact on the asylum decision-making quality, in particular poorly reasoned decisions and improper denials of claims. States would have increased training capacity of asylum institutions through local solutions or engagement of national or regional partnerships ensuring longer term sustainability. Well-trained staff would be well-supervised and well-equipped to implement robust and cost-effective asylum procedures.

## 5. Strategic area – Accessible information and legal assistance

**Where we are now.** Almost all asylum institutions are taking measures to provide legal information to asylum-seekers. However, challenges to the accessibility of information remain, as information is often provided only at central locations and in-person during procedures, in limited languages, in a format that is not easily accessible to specific groups of individuals, including asylum-seekers with low literacy levels. Many asylum institutions are only at the initial stages of making robust information available online or using popular communication technology, such as social media. In addition, due to their decision-making role, asylum institutions are not always trusted to provide impartial information, particularly in States where the public debate is more hostile towards refugees. Some States have engaged third parties trusted by asylum-seekers, such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including (para-) legal aid and refugee-led organizations but also UNHCR, to play a role in enhancing

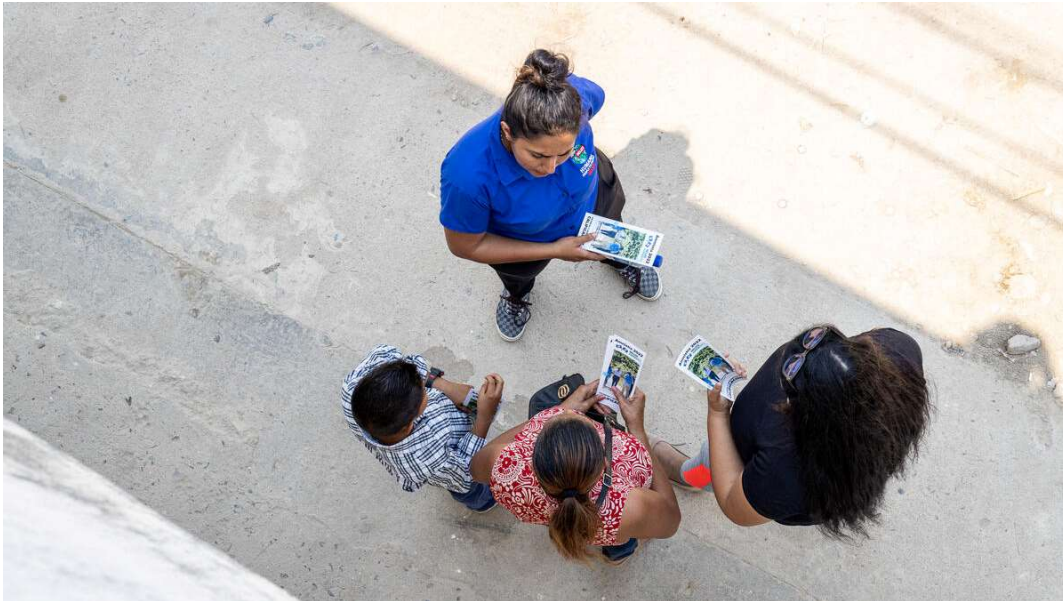


information accessibility and addressing misinformation and disinformation, while others could invest more resources in this area.

Despite its key role in making asylum procedures fairer and more efficient, few asylum-seekers have reliable, and high-quality legal aid services, covering information, assistance and representation adapted to their age, gender, disability, and other diversity characteristics throughout the process. While most States allow legal assistance and representation in asylum procedures, in only a few countries is it provided free of charge while the cost of such services are prohibitive for the majority of asylum-seekers. Where free of charge legal aid arrangements are in place, they are commonly faced by overwhelming demands, funding constraints, and capacity gaps.

**Where we want to be.** Success in this area would mean that more asylum-seekers have quality and accessible legal information tailored to their needs and in their languages, and legal assistance, and as needed legal representation, throughout their asylum procedure to reinforce the quality of the national asylum procedure. States would diversify channels of communication to align with the preferred methods of communication of asylum-seekers, including through technology adoption. States would further ensure that messages and procedures are tailored to target those of different ages, genders, disabilities and other diverse characteristics, including children and those with vulnerabilities to leave no-one behind. States would make deliberate efforts to collect feedback from asylum-seekers on the quality of information to ensure regular updating.

States and strategic trusted organizations, including refugee led organizations, working with refugees and asylum-seekers would scale up their collaboration on communication to improve legal information accessibility and combat misinformation and disinformation. Enhanced accessibility of reliable and high-quality legal assistance and representation would require a significant increase in the provision of State-subsidized services by independent legal aid providers. For countries where inclusion of asylum into national legal aid programmes is not feasible, local legal aid providers would be resourced to scale up their services and adequately trained to empower more asylum-seekers to better articulate their claim and more effectively participate in the asylum process. States and legal aid partners should engage strategically to increase the efficiency of interventions considering the use of data and technology and supporting learning and knowledge management.



© UNHCR/Aida Escobar



## C. UNHCR’s engagement in Asylum Capacity Development

Within the international legal framework for refugee protection, States have the primary responsibility to determine who is, and who is not, a refugee. The framework leaves it to States to establish the most appropriate procedures but provides for key procedural and due process standards. Many States have set up the institutions and procedures required to implement these obligations, but others have yet to do so. In line with its mandated responsibility to provide international protection and to seek solutions for refugees and its supervisory responsibility under the 1951 Convention, UNHCR supports the creation and strengthening of national asylum systems through a range of activities and actions that aim to increase States’ capacity to implement and manage such procedures, to improve their quality and enhance their sustainability and ownership.<sup>11</sup>

In its efforts to strengthen the capacity of national asylum institutions, UNHCR follows the capacity development approach adopted by the United Nations Sustainable Development Group.<sup>12</sup> This approach ensures engagement that enhances the ownership of authorities and aims at sustainability. The approach to capacity development is context specific, iterative, people-centred, focused on clear objectives and engages multiple stakeholders. Capacity development projects can range in scope and level of capacity targeted, requiring a different engagement from UNHCR – from advice and technical assistance to a more comprehensive capacity development engagement. As part of its capacity development objectives/activities, UNHCR has regularly supported asylum institutions in the implementation of quality assurance projects. Although named differently, such quality assurance projects align with the capacity development approach in relation to the emphasis placed on needs assessment and gap analysis, but also the activities implemented in the response.<sup>13</sup>

UNHCR advocates for accession to the 1951 Convention, its Protocol, the 1969 OAU Convention the withdrawal of reservations to these instruments as well as the incorporation of relevant legal standards into domestic laws and policies. However, depending on the context, UNHCR will also provide capacity development support in anticipation of an eventual assumption of responsibility for asylum procedures as well as other assistance to help these States fulfil their obligations related to the principle of non-refoulement, their obligations under human rights conventions as well as to further protection and solutions for refugees in these countries, including through alternative stay arrangements.

Asylum capacity support provided by UNHCR, including quality assurance projects, targets three levels of capacity focussing on the enabling environment, the institutional and individual level. The activities differ per situation for the different levels as depicted in the table.

|                               |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| <b>Enabling environment</b>   | Advocacy and advice (on laws, policies, administration and implementation)<br>Legislative and judicial engagement                |
| <b>Institutional capacity</b> | Institutional support (processes, procedures, structures)<br>Infrastructure and systems support (technical, financial, material) |
| <b>Individual capacity</b>    | Individual capacity development (training and mentoring)   |

In considering its engagement with asylum capacity development and defining the approach in a specific context, UNHCR conducts an analysis of enabling factors, opportunities and risks internal and external to the asylum system. The

<sup>11</sup> UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Note on the Mandate of the High Commissioner for Refugees and his Office, October 2013, <https://www.refworld.org/policy/legalguidance/unhcr/2013/en/94483>

<sup>12</sup> <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/capacity-development-undaf-companion-guidance>

<sup>13</sup> UNHCR equally implements RSD procedures under its mandate in the absence of a fair and efficient national asylum system, where there is a protection benefit in so doing, either for the individual involved, a particular group or for the larger protection environment.

objectives of any initiative, including capacity elements requiring strengthening; the sustainability and ownership of the targeted changes; as well as the availability of resources and UNHCR's capacities are further considerations to define an engagement.

For example, in the context of a country receiving a sudden influx of new applications, where the authorities are, after a joint capacity assessment, seeking to implement differentiated procedures UNHCR might, based on the comprehensive analysis of risks and opportunities, support developing simplified procedures, strengthening the case management systems, and providing staffing capacity for a finite period to help support the implementation of the new procedures. In contrast, in the context of a country where there are demonstrated concerns about the fairness of asylum procedures, UNHCR might not provide capacity development support to increase efficiency of these procedures, which may just exacerbate the concerns. However, if the project could be restructured so as to also have a positive impact on fairness, the support might be reconsidered.

**Factors for consideration in an analysis:**

**Internal elements**

- Institutional setup
- Governance arrangements
- Funding and budget arrangements
- Strategic direction adopted by the asylum authorities
- Issue(s) identified in the asylum procedures
- Volume and nature of the asylum applications

**External elements**

- Challenges faced by the national authorities
- Engagement of the strategic partners
- Broader protection environment

When planning and implementing asylum capacity development interventions, UNHCR engages with stakeholders that are involved both directly and indirectly with asylum procedures through a whole-of-society approach. The expertise of these partners is critical for the efficient implementation of asylum capacity development. The main partner, as entities that implement the asylum procedures, are national asylum institutions who as the leader in the change process have a direct interest, both financially and operationally. The engagement with the Ministries and government entities that support the asylum system more indirectly, for example the Ministry of Finance or immigration institution, is further of importance to ensure the wider ownership and sustainability of interventions.

UNHCR considers that it is essential that asylum-seekers are at the centre of a protection response. In line with its age, gender and diversity policy, UNHCR seeks to engage asylum-seekers and refugees of different age, gender and diversity characteristics as constant stakeholders in planning, implementing and evaluating asylum capacity development. Their perspective as end-users, including through interactions with refugee-led organizations, is of key importance to ensure the effectiveness of changes to asylum procedures while guarding for their accessibility at an equal footing.

Regional organizations and platforms have progressively taken an important role to bring States and other stakeholders together to strengthen asylum procedures and coordinate interventions across regions. Regional initiatives have proven effective in finding regional solutions to key issues facing asylum institutions as well as to promote minimal standards for asylum procedures. For this reason, UNHCR engages regional organizations and platforms in advocacy, policy setting and supports them in their convening role. Further, UNHCR in line with the GCR established the Asylum Capacity Support Group (ACSG) as a global mechanism that aims to increase the availability and effectiveness of asylum capacity support to States.

The **European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA)** is an agency of the European Union mandated with supporting Member States in applying the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). The Agency has a comprehensive mandate aimed at fostering convergence of asylum practices across EU Member States in line with EU obligations. It provides training, information, operational and technical assistance and monitoring to EU Member States and offers support to other European countries taking part in the CEAS, EU candidate countries and countries outside Europe. Currently, the EUAA provides capacity development support to the Western Balkans (WB) region, Turkey and some countries in the Middle East and North Africa within the frameworks of 'Roadmaps' for cooperation and EU-funded regional programmes.

UNHCR supports regional approaches and agencies, such as EUAA, which bring together States for collective action and support which enhance the protection space. UNHCR will continue to expand engagement with regional stakeholders in strengthening asylum systems while continuing to provide complementary support as may be needed to countries covered by such regional approaches in line with its mandate.



© UK for UNHCR/Ioana Epure

RomExpo Integrated Service Hub for refugees established in Bucharest by UNHCR, serves as a one-stop-shop for various services available for refugee - free of charge. On a daily basis, approximately 500-600 refugees from Ukraine are assisted with various services at RomExpo.

UNHCR engages with UN agencies to ensure protection in States that have not acceded to the refugee conventions, to achieve specific objectives and in specific situations such as onwards and mixed movements of refugees and migrants. This includes advocacy and interventions on prevention against refoulement, inclusion and coordinated engagements in the route-based approach to reinforce asylum systems in the context of mixed movements of refugees and migrants.

UNHCR has increased its engagement with development actors and international financial institutions, including to strengthen aspects of asylum procedures. Building on the complementary mandates of these partners and UNHCR, common interventions aim to realign the service delivery of asylum institutions to focus on core activities, which includes asylum procedures, while other services for refugees and asylum-seekers are mainstreamed in relevant national programmes. In addition, these partners and UNCHR share a common interest in the cost-effectiveness and efficiency of asylum institutions to secure their sustainable and effective inclusion into national systems as a means to achieve SDG goal 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions. For refugees and asylum-seekers the benefit of common interventions in fair and efficient asylum procedures are related to enabling their

economic and social inclusion and achievement of self-reliance which is critical to achieve poverty reduction targets.

NGOs have consistently been key stakeholders in supporting asylum systems to operationalize protection and ensure respect for due process and the rule of law. UNHCR recognizes the expertise that NGOs have in providing essential legal assistance and information and supports this aspect of the work of NGOs in its capacity development activities whenever possible. Other key areas where UNHCR engages with NGOs is strategic litigation and policy engagements for systemic change to laws, advocacy on practices relating to asylum procedures, while assessing the strengths and weaknesses of an asylum system, and during the implementation of capacity development.

UNHCR regularly engages in strategic partnerships with a variety of other actors depending on the issue targeted in the capacity development activities. These include partnerships with parliamentarians, rule of law actors, national human rights institutions, public defence offices, universities, ombudspersons, independent inspectorates on immigration, academia, the judiciary, bar associations as well as private sector organizations such as law firms. All of these stakeholders bring unique expertise and experience and can support in advancing objectives related to the five strategic areas of engagement.

## D. UNHCR priority actions and enablers

UNHCR will implement high-impact global priority actions and enablers through its Country Operations, Regional Bureaux and Headquarters to support States and other stakeholders to achieve the strategy's objectives and strategic areas of engagement. UNHCR will reinforce its role as a catalyst, facilitator, and protection expert in asylum procedures to enhance the quality of asylum systems to facilitate the protection, effective inclusion and durable solutions for refugees and enable a swift response for those not found in need of international protection. Prioritization of these actions in-country will depend on the operational context and political will to implement a quality asylum process.

UNHCR will strengthen its role as a **thought leader** on national asylum systems. UNHCR will ensure that enhanced support for asylum procedures and institutions is clearly positioned as a core response to challenges facing asylum, including in the context of mass arrivals and mixed movements, mobilizing others in these efforts. In line with its mandate and leveraging its extensive experience and expertise in supporting national asylum systems and implementing mandate RSD, UNHCR will enhance its role as provider of guidance and expertise on asylum systems by improving the availability of key guidance and tools on aspects of asylum procedures, addressing new and emerging concerns, including innovative approaches in the context of the route-based approach. This will include technical advice on differentiation of procedures, country of origin information, and the communication and engagement of asylum-seekers in procedural adjustments.

UNHCR will promote the exchange of expertise among stakeholders through global, regional and local events and activities. States and other stakeholders will be encouraged to share their experiences and learning on the five strategic areas of engagement to benefit other States. UNHCR will strengthen access to the results of monitoring and learning exercises through knowledge management to create a sound body of knowledge on approaches, surveys and particular solutions to dilemmas in implementing the asylum capacity development approach in asylum systems through the ACSG portal.

UNHCR will enhance the **implementation of the capacity development approach to strengthen national asylum systems**, focusing on law and policy frameworks, asylum institutions, procedures, and systems. This approach will ensure holistic capacity development at all applicable capacity levels to achieve sustainable, effective change through ownership. UNHCR will strengthen its expertise in institutional aspects of asylum systems to bolster the strategic areas of engagement and enhance the technical assistance and other forms of support the organization provides. To facilitate this, UNHCR will reinforce the skills and knowledge of its personnel as well as the guidance and tools available. In reinforcing the effectiveness and sustainability of interventions to strengthen national asylum systems, UNHCR will prioritize strengthening the engagement of available multi-stakeholder capacities and evidence-based assessments of capacity needs. The engagement of multi-stakeholder capacities will particularly include the meaningful participation of asylum-seekers and refugees in key decisions around asylum procedures in recognition of their capacities and to identify the main risks, threats, needs and concerns in making asylum applications. Additionally, UNHCR will advance the availability and implementation of an evidence-based assessment to identify and address capacity needs based on best practice methodologies to form the basis for interventions.

Enhancing the use of **data and innovation** is a core action and enabler for UNHCR in the implementation of the strategy. Scaling up the early collection and protection-sensitive use of data is crucial for asylum systems to implement effective, high-quality processing approaches for large-scale and mixed movements of refugees and migrants. UNHCR will reinforce its support and advice to asylum systems in addressing such challenges, including through the identification of best practices. UNHCR will further engage in data and evidence generation, including on user experience, research on the



impacts of delayed asylum decisions and refugees' contributions to host communities, for purposes of impactful advocacy in policy discussions.

UNHCR aims to leverage technology and innovation to support the workflows of national asylum procedures to the extent possible. To this end, UNHCR will explore innovative approaches and the use of technology in procedures to enhance efficiency while maintaining quality, in particular focussing on enabling triaging, facilitating implementation of procedures, monitoring results, and facilitating automation and digitalization of processes. UNHCR will reinforce accountability to affected people by supporting improved information provision and access to data, enhancing feedback and response mechanisms, including through UNHCR's Digital Gateway and similar initiatives which are compliant with data protection and privacy standards.

UNHCR will prioritize **multi-stakeholder advocacy and action** to strengthen national asylum institutions. This comprehensive engagement will span global, regional and local levels, leveraging expertise on asylum procedures and facilitating cross-fertilization. By strategically utilizing its leadership and coordination role, UNHCR aims to engage additional stakeholders in influencing positive change in asylum systems and in activities that enhance asylum capacity. Leveraging the expertise of different stakeholders is essential to address the challenges facing asylum systems currently and achieve the quality improvement objectives. These various actors will also play a critical role in addressing public perceptions of asylum-seekers and addressing potential resistance from local populations.

The Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (better known by its Spanish acronym **MIRPS**) promotes greater responsibility sharing to address forced displacement in Central America and Mexico. Through regional cooperation, Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and Panama are strengthening protection responses and durable solutions. MIRPS includes a technical team/working group on reception, admission and case processing. The working group has held round tables and a regional twinning meeting focusing on strengthening of asylum systems focusing inter alia on establishing technical units to collect country of origin information, facilitate merged and other differentiated processes, inter-institutional coordination and strengthening of mechanisms for orientation, assistance and free public legal representation. The MIRPS Support Platform was set up to further bolster the efforts of MIRPS countries seeking to mobilize technical, material, and financial support from the widest possible range of stakeholders.

In line with its localization strategy, UNHCR will prioritize engagement with stakeholders at the national level. At a government level, this includes broadening the range of stakeholders involved in strengthening national asylum systems, particularly those who influence the enabling environment. UNHCR will further reinforce the independent monitoring role of NGOs to ensure that asylum procedures comply with refugee law and human rights standards. Through a whole-of-society approach, UNHCR will enhance the strategic engagement with civil society stakeholders for legislative, policy and judicial engagement to advance legal frameworks.<sup>14</sup> Their technical advice and expertise will further be sought to improve procedural aspects, data systems, institutional structures and mechanisms for decision-making, participation, representation, oversight and accountability.

At the regional and global level, UNHCR will step up its efforts to leverage the ACSG and expand engagement with regional organizations and platforms to support States' efforts to strengthen asylum systems and increase the availability and effectiveness of asylum capacity support to States. Their support will be sought to advance discussions, knowledge exchange, and mobilize support and political commitment to strengthening of national asylum systems. UNHCR will also reinforce the connection

<sup>14</sup> UNHCR's Rights Mapping and Analysis Platform (RIMAP) will provide for mapping and analysis of existing domestic laws and policies on access to rights for forcibly displaced and stateless persons and identify the current protection gaps both in law and practice.

between asylum systems and development, to ensure the inclusion of asylum systems in development plans, government priorities and national budgets, which may also open up additional opportunities for funding. Furthermore, UNCHR will enhance multi-stakeholder advocacy and action through engagement with United Nations sister agencies via interagency coordination forums, leveraging their expertise to achieve the strategy's objectives and areas of engagement.



© UNHCR/Socrates Baltagiannis  
Kurdish refugee Nidal, 20, on the steps of the town hall in Heraklion, the capital of the Greek island of Crete. Nidal has been receiving advice under the UNHCR legal aid programme co-funded by the European Union. "I got a lot of psychological support," he said. "I owe my positive asylum decision to my lawyer."