

Refugees in Ireland, the EU and Worldwide

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Note 1: the international legal framework and refugees worldwide

This is the first of a series of three Notes concerning Refugees in Ireland, the EU and worldwide. This Note:

- discusses recently published statistics and trends regarding refugees worldwide;
- introduces the main UN agencies that afford assistance to refugees;
- outlines the core international treaties that afford protections to refugees;
- examines the *non-refoulement* (non-return) principle, which constitutes the cornerstone of international refugee law; and
- considers durable solutions for refugees.

The other Notes in the series:

- provide an overview of the legal and policy framework governing the treatment of refugees in Ireland [[Note 2](#)]; and
- examine relevant legal and policy developments at the EU level concerning asylum seekers and migrants [[Note 3](#)].



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Table 1: Glossary and Abbreviations

Term	Meaning
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IOM	International Organization for Migration
OCHA	United Nations (UN) Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OHCHR	UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	UN Refugee Agency
UNRWA	UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees

Summary

This Note is the first of a series of three Notes, which provide information concerning refugees in Ireland, the EU and worldwide. This Note:

- provides statistics regarding refugees and other forcibly displaced persons worldwide;
- offers explanations for key terms;
- outlines the core international treaties that afford protections to refugees; and
- examines the *non-refoulement* (non-return) principle, which constitutes the cornerstone of international refugee law.

The other Notes in the series:

- provide an overview of the legal and policy framework governing the treatment of refugees in Ireland [[Note 2](#)]; and
- examine relevant legal and policy developments at the EU level concerning asylum seekers and migrants [[Note 3](#)].

Key Global Statistics as of mid-2023

- **110 million people** were forcibly displaced worldwide, including:
 - **36.4 million refugees**
 - **6.1 million asylum seekers,**
 - **5.3 other persons in need of international protection,** and
 - approximately **62.2 million internally displaced persons.***
- **More than one in every 73 people** worldwide **were forcibly displaced.** 88 per cent of those forcibly displaced were living in low-income and middle-income countries.
- **52% per cent** of refugees came from just three countries: **Syria** (6.5 million), **Afghanistan** (6.1 million), and **Ukraine** (5.9 million).
- There were **5.9 million Palestine refugees.**
- At least **4.4 million people were stateless.**
- **75 per cent of refugees** were hosted in **low-income** and **middle-income countries.**
- **69 per cent of refugees** were hosted in **neighbouring States.**
- **38 percent** of refugees were **hosted in just five countries:** **Turkey** (3.4 million), **Iran** (3.4 million), **Colombia** (2.5 million), **Germany** (2.5 million), and **Pakistan** (2.1 million).
- Relative to their populations, **Aruba** (1 in 6), and **Lebanon** (1 in 7), hosted the largest number of refugees and persons in need of international protection.
- **404,000 refugees** returned to their countries of origin in the first six months of 2023.
- **59,500 refugees** were resettled during the first six months of 2023.
- The number of refugees and forcibly displaced persons is growing:
 - **19 million more people** were **forcibly displaced** on 31 December 2022, as compared with 31 December 2021, the largest year-on-year increase ever recorded;
 - the number of **refugees worldwide** under UNHCR's mandate, including individuals in refugee-like situations, increased by **35 per cent** in 2022, as compared with 2021, the largest year-on-year increase ever recorded
 - **UNHCR estimates** that the number of forcibly displaced persons worldwide **exceeded 114 million** as of the end of September 2023.
 - **1.6 million new individual asylum applications** were made from 1 January to 30 June 2023, the largest number ever recorded in the first six months of a year.
- Between 2018 and 2022, an **average of 385,000 children were born as refugees every year.**

(Source: UNHCR, see [here](#) and [here](#); and UNWRA, see [here](#))

* There were 62.5 million forcibly displaced persons as of 31 December 2022. UNHCR estimated that this figure had declined to 62.2 million by mid-2023 pending new baseline figures for Sudan.

Introduction

“Human rights are being violated in so many places. But we don’t give up because we know respect for human rights and human dignity is a basic condition for peace.

Conflicts are multiplying - people are suffering. But we don’t give up because we know every man, woman and child deserves a life of peace.”

(UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, 24 October 2018)

Image entitled, ‘UN Secretary-General Guterres’, by Cancillería Argentina, is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic ([CC BY 2.0](#)).



As observed by [UN Secretary General](#), Antonio Guterres, we are “living in a time of turbulence, tension, and turmoil”. There are currently over 110 armed conflicts ongoing worldwide¹ and two billion people, amounting to approximately a quarter of the world’s population, live in conflict-affected areas.²

Armed conflict has a devastating impact on the enjoyment of human rights, even depriving civilians of their lives where they are deliberately targeted in violation of international humanitarian law or become the “collateral damage” of lawful attacks against military targets. War can make life untenable for civilians and their families, causing them to flee their homes and seek refuge elsewhere either within or beyond the borders of their country of origin/habitual residence.

During the 20th century, millions of individuals had to flee their home countries to escape the horrors of World Wars I and II. A number of guidelines and agreements were negotiated by States to guarantee fundamental rights for those displaced.

They were underlaid by an understanding that anyone could find themselves living in a situation of armed conflict and, accordingly, a right to freedom of movement across international frontiers was necessary in such circumstances to protect against persecution.

These efforts to codify international refugee law culminated in the [1951 Refugee Convention](#), which together with its [1967 Protocol](#), still constitute the foremost treaties (binding legal agreements between states) concerning refugee rights. Ireland was one of the earlier States to accede to the 1951 Refugee Convention ([29 November 1956](#)) and the 1967 Protocol ([6 November 1968](#)).

The UN Refugee Agency ([UNHCR](#)) is the primary international body with responsibility for protecting and providing humanitarian assistance to refugees, stateless people and internally displaced persons (IDPs). An IDP is a person who was forced to flee their home due, for example, to a conflict or natural disaster, but who never crossed an international border.

¹ Rule of Law in Armed Conflict (RULAC), ‘Today’s Armed Conflicts’, available [here](#), last accessed 21 November 2023.

² UN Secretary General, ‘War’s Greatest Cost Is Its Human Toll’ (30 March 2022) SG/SM/21216, see [here](#), last accessed 21 November 2023.

UNHCR was established in 1950 and today works in 135 countries.³ In addition to providing humanitarian assistance, UNHCR monitors the implementation of refugee and asylum laws and policies, and generates key statistics concerning refugees, IDPs and stateless persons.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) was established on 8 December 1949 by [UN Assembly Resolution 302 \(IV\)](#) to carry out direct relief and works programmes for Palestine refugees. UNRWA defines Palestine refugees as “persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 War”.⁴ Its website indicates that “the descendants of Palestine refugee males, including legally adopted children, are also eligible for registration”.⁵

Recent Global Trends and Statistics

As of mid-2023, 110 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced, including 36.4 million refugees, 6.1 million asylum seekers, 5.3 other persons in need of international protection, and approximately 62.2 million internally displaced persons.⁶ UNHCR notes that over half of the total refugees worldwide come from just three countries: Syria (6.5 million), Afghanistan (6.1 million), and Ukraine (5.9 million).⁷ 5.9 million Palestine refugees are currently registered with UNWRA.⁸ As has been the case for a decade, Syrians continued to comprise the largest group of forcibly displaced persons (13.3 million) worldwide.⁹

As of mid-2023, 75 per cent of refugees were hosted in low-income and middle-income countries, and 69 per cent of refugees were hosted in neighbouring States.¹⁰ Indeed, 38 percent of refugees were hosted in just five countries: Iran (3.4 million), Turkey (3.4 million), Germany (2.5 million), Colombia (2.5 million), and Pakistan (2.1 million).¹¹ Relative to their populations, Aruba (1 in 6) and Lebanon (1 in 7) hosted the most refugees and persons in need of international protection.¹²

³ UNHCR, ‘About UNHCR’, available [here](#), last accessed 21 November 2023.

⁴ UNWRA, ‘Who We Are’, available [here](#), last accessed 21 November 2023.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ UNHCR, ‘Mid-Year Trends 2023’ (2023), p. 2, available [here](#), last accessed 23 November 2023. There were 62.5 million forcibly displaced persons as of 31 December 2022. UNHCR estimated that this figure declined to 62.2 million by mid-2023 pending new baseline figures for Sudan.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ UNRWA, ‘What we Do’, available [here](#), last accessed 21 November 2023.

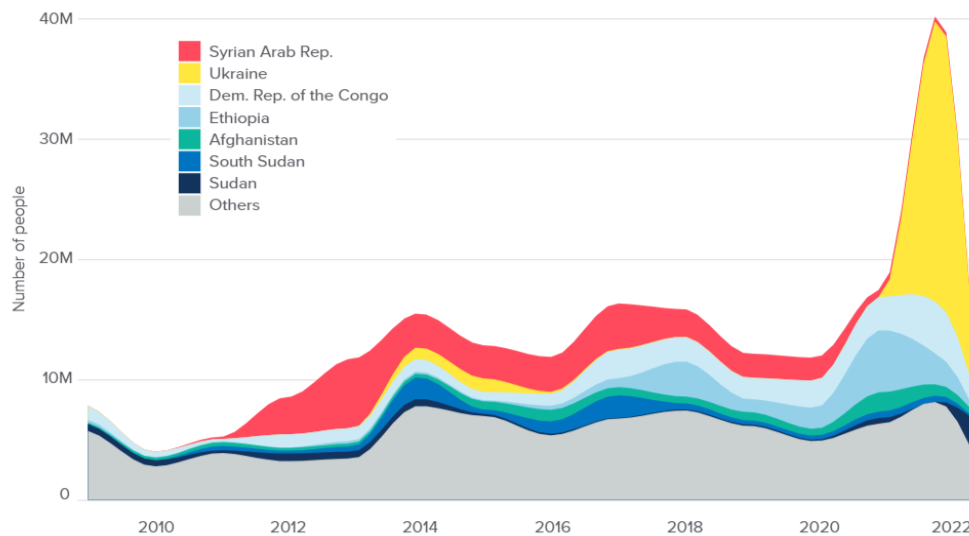
⁹ UNHCR, ‘Mid-Year Trends 2023’ (2023), p. 7, available [here](#), last accessed 23 November 2023.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 2.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

Figure 1: New internal displacements and people forced to flee across borders by country of origin, 2009 – mid-2023¹³

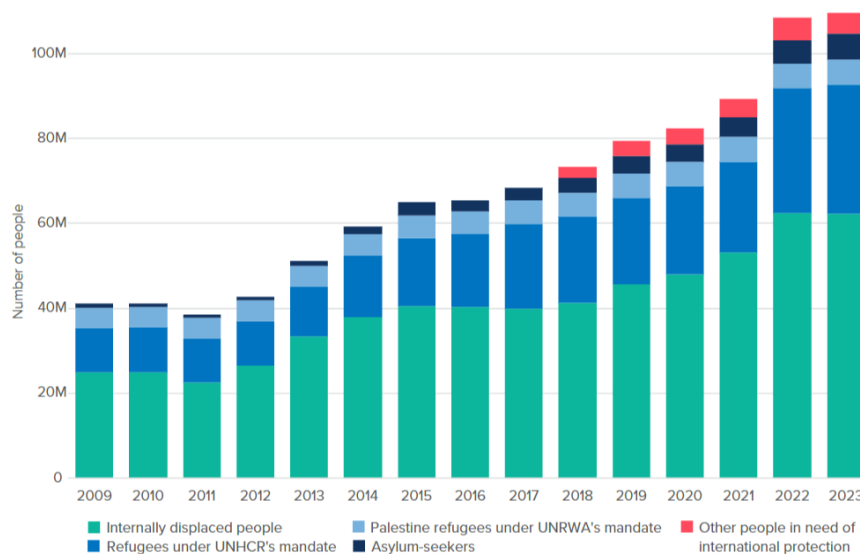


UNHCR notes that during the first six months of 2023, seven major displacement situations together accounted for approximately 90 per cent of new displacement both within countries and across international borders:

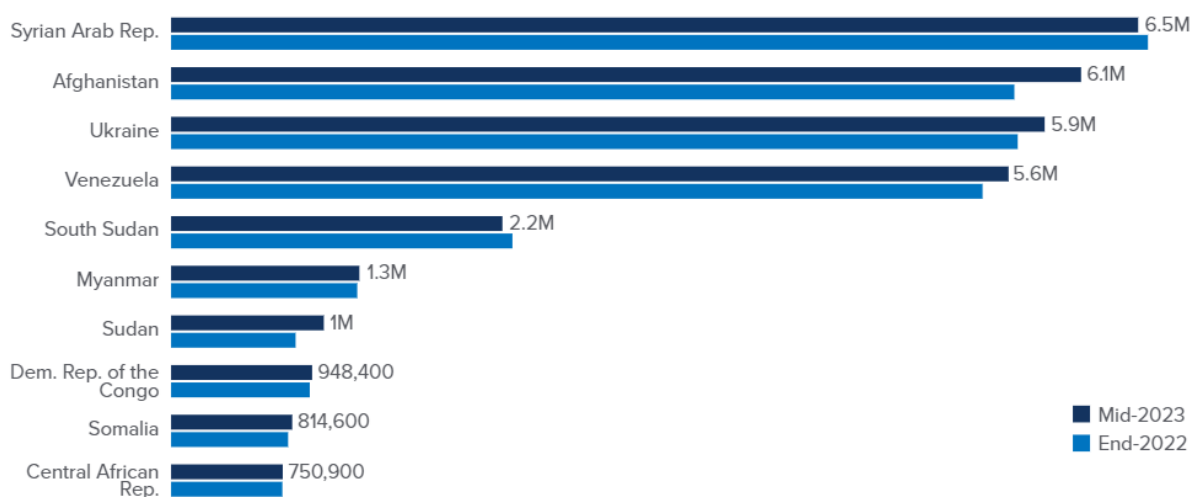
- the armed conflict in **Ukraine** following the February 2022 Russian invasion;
- the outbreak of armed conflict in **Sudan** in April 2023 involving fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the paramilitary Rapid Reaction Forces;
- the humanitarian crisis in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, which has been exacerbated by an offensive in North Kivu Province in 2022;
- the humanitarian crisis in **Somalia**, which has been exacerbated by drought, flash flooding and conflict;
- the humanitarian crisis in **Afghanistan** following the Taliban's takeover in August 2021;
- the deteriorating humanitarian situation in **Myanmar** as the ramifications of the military takeover in February 2021 continued to cause widespread violence; and
- widespread displacement from certain Latin American and Caribbean countries, in particular, **Venezuela, Cuba, Colombia, Nicaragua and Haiti**.¹⁴

¹³ This figure is taken from: *ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 7-9.

Figure 2: People forced to flee from 2009 – mid-2023¹⁵

The global population of refugees under UNHCR's mandate, including individuals in refugee-like situations, grew by 8.9 million (35 per cent) in 2022 whilst the global population of forcibly displaced persons grew by 19 million, the largest year-on-year increases ever recorded.¹⁶ UNHCR estimates that the global population of forcibly displaced persons is likely to have exceeded 114 million persons as of 30 September 2023.¹⁷

Figure 3: Refugees, people in refugee-like situations and other people in need of international protection by country of origin: mid-2023¹⁸

¹⁵ This figure is taken from *ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁶ UNHCR, 'Global Trends Report 2022' (2023), pp. 7 & 14, see [here](#), last accessed 21 November 2023.

¹⁷ UNHCR, 'Mid-Year Trends 2023' (2023), p. 6, available [here](#), last accessed 23 November 2023.

¹⁸ This figure is taken from: UNHCR, 'Mid-Year Trends 2023' (2023), p. 13, available [here](#), last accessed 23 November 2023.

Figure 4: Map outlining the location of Refugees that UNHCR protects/assists as of mid-2023¹⁹

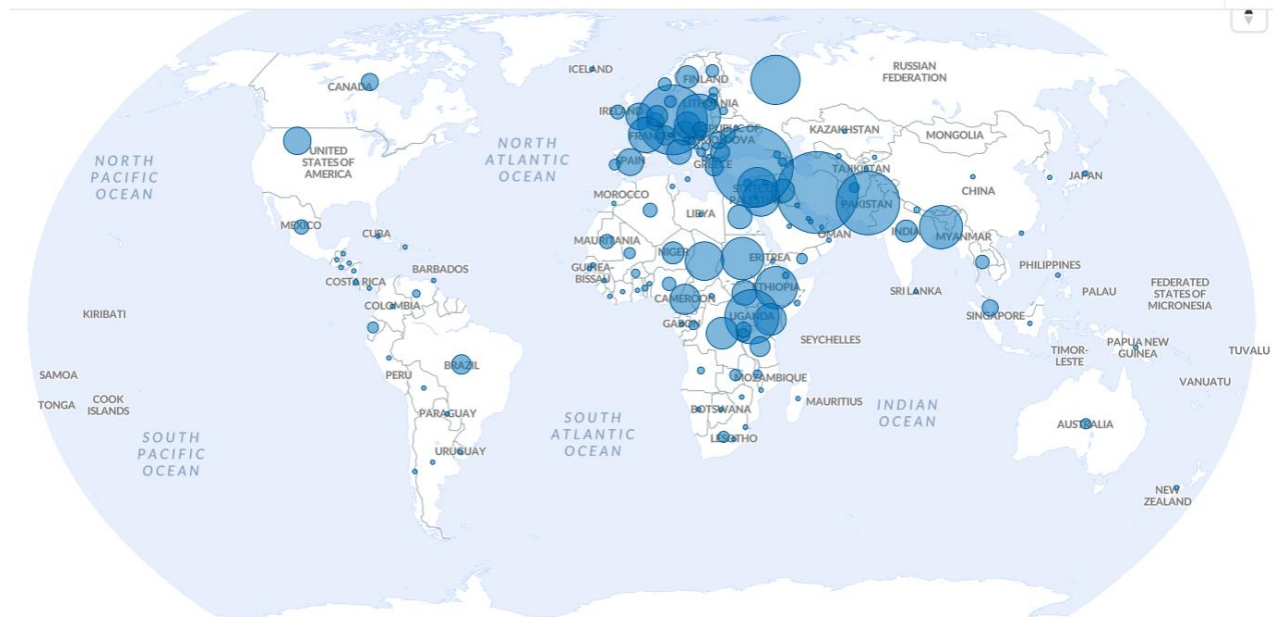


Figure 5: Map outlining the location of Asylum Seekers that UNHCR protects/assists as of mid-2023²⁰



¹⁹ UNHCR, 'Maps of forcibly displaced and stateless persons' (as of mid-2023) available [here](#), last accessed 23 November 2023.

²⁰ Ibid.

An Explanation of Key Terms

A refugee is “**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**” ([UNHCR](#), & Article 1 of the [1951 Refugee Convention](#)).

Certain categories of person are excluded from the definition of “refugee”, including individuals who have committed war crimes, crimes against humanity and/or serious non-political crimes.

An “**asylum seeker**” is a person who is seeking international protection, in the form of refugee status or [subsidiary protection](#),²¹ in a State outside of their country of origin/habitual residence and whose application has yet to be determined by the authorities.

The term “**irregular migrant**” is often used when discussing issues and policies related to refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. However, there is no universally accepted definition of “irregular migrant” under international law. The [International Organization for Migration](#) (IOM), which is the main intergovernmental organisation concerning migration, observes that:

“the term [irregular migrant] is generally used to identify persons moving outside regular migration channels. The fact that they migrate irregularly does not relieve States from the obligation to protect their rights. Moreover, categories of migrants who may not have any other choice but to use irregular migration channels can also include refugees, victims of trafficking, or unaccompanied migrant children. The fact that they use irregular migration pathways does not imply that States are not, in some circumstances, obliged to provide them with some forms of protection under international law, including access to international protection for asylum seekers fleeing persecution, conflicts or generalized violence.”²²

“**Internally displaced persons**” (IDPs) are defined under the [Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement](#) as “persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of, or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border”.

A “**stateless person**” is defined under [article 1 of the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless People](#) as “a person who is not considered as a national by any State under the operation of its law”.

²¹ Where an applicant does not qualify for a refugee declaration, they may nonetheless be afforded subsidiary protection where there are substantial grounds for believing that if they were returned to their country of origin or their country of former habitual residence, they would face a real risk of being subjected to the death penalty or execution, torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, or a serious and individual threat to their life or person as a result of indiscriminate violence during an armed conflict.

²² IOM, ‘Key Migration Terms’, available [here](#), last accessed 21 November 2023.

[UNHCR](#) uses the term “**other people in need of protection**” to refer to people “who are outside their country or territory of origin, typically because they have been forcibly displaced across international borders, who have not been reported under other categories (asylum-seekers, refugees, people in refugee-like situations) but who likely need international protection, including protection against forced return, as well as access to basic services on a temporary or longer-term basis”.

Refugees and the International Legal Framework

Several treaties, most notably the [1951 Refugee Convention](#) and the [1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees](#), afford rights to refugees and impose corresponding obligations on State parties. A State that ratifies or accedes to a treaty becomes a State party and agrees to be bound under international law to give effect to its provisions. The 1951 Refugee Convention was negotiated to afford protection to European refugees who were displaced as a result of World War II.²³

The 1967 Protocol was adopted to remove the geographical and temporal restrictions attached to the 1951 Convention, as originally drafted, and guarantee protection to *all refugees*. As of 15 November 2023, [146 States](#) had ratified/acceded to the 1951 Convention, and [147 States](#) had ratified/acceded to the 1967 Protocol. Ireland has acceded to both.

The 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol guarantee fundamental rights for refugees in areas such as freedom of movement, freedom of religion, housing, employment, social protection, education and access to identification documents. Refugees are entitled to freedom from discrimination and may not be punished for irregularly entering the State (Article 31, 1951 Refugee Convention). The cornerstone of the 1951 Refugee Convention (Article 33) is the principle of *non-refoulement*, discussed below.

The *Non-Refoulement* Principle

The ***non-refoulement principle*** under international refugee law provides that **refugees may not be expelled or returned, in any manner whatsoever, to countries or territories where their lives or freedom would be threatened on account of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion**. (Article 33 of the [1951 Refugee Convention](#)).

The *non-refoulement* principle also applies to asylum seekers as they may be refugees and accordingly, “should not be returned or expelled pending a final determination of their status”.²⁴

The prohibition of *refoulement* (return) is also guaranteed, both explicitly and implicitly, under several international human rights treaties ratified by Ireland, for example, the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment ([Article 3](#)).

²³ UNHCR, ‘About UNHCR: The 1951 Refugee Convention’, available [here](#), last accessed 21 November 2023.

²⁴ UNHCR, ‘Advisory Opinion on the Extraterritorial Application of Non-Refoulement Obligations under the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol’, para. 6, available [here](#), last accessed 21 November 2023.

The principle has an even wider application under international human rights law. It protects all persons, including migrants regardless of their status, against any form of involuntary removal or transfer to a State where there are substantial grounds for believing that they would be at risk of irreparable harm on account of serious human rights violations, including arbitrary deprivation of life, torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.²⁵ The prohibition not only applies in relation to the country to which the person is to be immediately removed, but also to *any other country* to which the person may subsequently be removed.²⁶

At the regional level, in cases such as *Soering v. United Kingdom*,²⁷ the European Court of Human Rights has held that the prohibition of *refoulement* is guaranteed under Article 3 of the [European Convention on Human Rights](#) in circumstances where there is a real risk that the individual, if returned, would be exposed to torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Furthermore, [Article 19](#) of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, which EU Member States are required to uphold when implementing EU law, prohibits the expulsion, removal or extradition of a person to a State where there is a serious risk that they would be subjected to the death penalty, torture or other inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. [Article 19](#) also expressly prohibits collective expulsions with a view to ensuring that all decisions concerning asylum applications are based on individual and specific examinations.

Article 78 of the [Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union](#) requires that any common EU policy on asylum, subsidiary protection and temporary protection must be in accordance with the *non-refoulement* principle, the 1951 Refugee Convention, and the 1967 Protocol. Article 4 of the EU External Sea Borders Regulation ([Regulation EU 656/2014](#)) confirms that the principle of *non-refoulement* applies in respect of persons intercepted or rescued at sea.

UNHCR and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) have indicated that the *non-refoulement* principle, as guaranteed under international refugee law and international human rights law respectively, reflects customary international law.²⁸ Customary international law derives from the general practices of States, which are accepted as being required by law.²⁹ Significantly, customary international law binds *all* States regardless of whether or not they have ratified a particular treaty.

OHCHR asserts that “[a]s an inherent element of the prohibition of torture and other forms of ill-treatment, the principle of *non-refoulement* is characterised by its absolute nature without any exception”.³⁰ UNHCR in turn has indicated that the prohibition of *refoulement* is absolute under

²⁵ Office High Commissioner for Human Rights, ‘The principle of non-refoulement under international human rights law’, available [here](#), last accessed 6 December 2023.

²⁶ UNHCR, ‘Advisory Opinion on the Extraterritorial Application of Non-Refoulement Obligations under the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol’, para. 20, available [here](#), last accessed 21 November 2023.

²⁷ Application No.14038/88, 7 July 1989.

²⁸ See, e.g., OHCHR, ‘The principle of non-refoulement under international human rights law’; and UNHCR, ‘Advisory Opinion on the Extraterritorial Application of Non-Refoulement Obligations under the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol’, para. 15, available [here](#), last accessed 6 December 2023.

²⁹ See: [Statute of the International Court of Justice](#), Article 38(1)(b).

³⁰ OHCHR, ‘The principle of non-refoulement under international human rights law’, available [here](#), last accessed 6 December 2023.

customary international law in cases where there is a real risk of torture or arbitrary deprivation of life.³¹ An absolute obligation cannot be limited or suspended.

Indicative of the importance of the *non-refoulement* principle, it formed the basis for the UK Supreme Court's decision in November 2023 that the UK Government's proposed policy of sending asylum-seekers to Rwanda was unlawful.³² The Supreme Court found:

"...the evidence establishes substantial grounds for believing that there is a real risk that asylum claims will not be determined properly, and that asylum seekers will in consequence be at risk of being returned directly or indirectly to their country of origin. In that event, genuine refugees will face a real risk of ill-treatment in circumstances where they should not have been returned at all...

...asking ourselves whether there were substantial grounds for believing that a real risk of refoulement existed at the relevant time, we have concluded that there were."³³

In its judgment, the Supreme Court explained that the UK's obligation to uphold the principle of *non-refoulement* derived from treaties ratified by the UK, including the Refugee Convention 1951, the UN Convention against Torture, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the European Convention on Human Rights; customary international law; and domestic legislation, including the *Immigration Acts* and the *Human Rights Act 1998*.³⁴

Durable Solutions

In addition to assisting and protecting refugees, UNHCR seeks to find durable solutions that allow refugees to rebuild their lives.³⁵ These solutions can take a number of forms.

Voluntary repatriations or **voluntary returns** arise when refugees return to their homes in safety and dignity based on a free and informed choice. However, as UNHCR notes:

"Successful voluntary repatriation requires a stable political situation in the country of origin to ensure that returnees will be able to find safety and reintegrate. When reintegration is not sustainable, people sometimes decide to leave again. This phenomenon is called "back-flows". Even if refugees want to go home and conditions have changed sufficiently to allow refugees to return, the situation can be extremely difficult. For example, if a war has taken place, destroyed infrastructures and services often need to be rebuilt. Sometimes, returnees become internally displaced within their country of origin, because they don't have a home to go back to."³⁶

³¹ UNHCR, 'Advisory Opinion on the Extraterritorial Application of Non-Refoulement Obligations under the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol', para. 22, available [here](#), last accessed 6 December 2023.

³² *R (on the application of AAA and others) v Secretary of State for the Home Department* [2023] UKSC 42.

³³ *Ibid.*, para. 105.

³⁴ See generally *ibid.*; and Doughty Street Chamber, 'Supreme Court rules that Government's Rwanda policy is unlawful' (15 November 2023), available [here](#), last accessed 27 November 2023.

³⁵ UNHCR, 'Solutions', available [here](#), last accessed 23 November 2023.

³⁶ UNHCR, 'Finding Durable Solutions for Refugees: Background Guide Challenge Topic No. 1' (2022), p. 3, available [here](#), last accessed 23 November 2023.

UNHCR reported that during the **first six months of 2023, 404,000 refugees voluntarily returned** from 63 countries of asylum to 23 countries of origin. UNHCR observed that most of these spontaneous returns “occurred in contexts not entirely conducive to return in safety and dignity, and they may not be sustainable”. [UNHCR 2023, p. 27, see [here](#)]

Resettlement is “the transfer of refugees from an asylum country to another State that has agreed to admit them and ultimately grant them permanent residence”.³⁷ Resettlement is **not a legal right** but may be available to refugees who have a continued need for international protection because their fundamental human rights are at risk in their country of refuge.³⁸ This might arise, for example, when women and girls are at risk of violations.

59,500 resettlement arrivals were reported by 12 countries in the **first six months of 2023**, representing 3 per cent of the 2 million people UNHCR estimated to be in need of resettlement [UNHCR 2023, p. 29, see [here](#)].

UNHCR noted in a 2022 Report that, whilst approximately seven per cent of the global refugee population require resettlement, only one per cent of the refugee population actually have access to resettlement each year.³⁹ Successful resettlement is often contingent upon the provision of effective reception and integration supports, including cultural orientation, language and vocational training, and programmes to promote access to education and employment.⁴⁰

“**Complementary Pathways**” to protection in a third country are “safe and regulated avenues ... by which refugees may be admitted in a country where they can be safe while supporting themselves to potentially reach a sustainable and lasting solution”.⁴¹ They include:

- **humanitarian visas**, which may be used to admit individuals in need of international protection to a third country where they can formally apply for asylum;
- **community sponsorship of refugees**, whereby local citizens and organisations take responsibility for financing and housing resettled refugees;
- **work visas**, where access is afforded to a third country through regulated avenues for employment, with an accompanying right to either permanent or temporary residence; and
- **education programmes**, including scholarships, traineeships, and apprenticeships.⁴²

Family reunification relates to procedures whereby family members apply to join a family member who has already been recognised as a refugee in a third country. UNHCR notes that “[f]amily reunification procedures are based on the legal right to family unity” and that “States have a legal responsibility to put in place legal frameworks that enable family reunification”.⁴³

³⁷ Ibid., p. 4.

³⁸ UNHCR, ‘Resettlement’, see [here](#), last accessed 23 November 2023.

³⁹ UNHCR, ‘Finding Durable Solutions for Refugees: Background Guide Challenge Topic No. 1’ (2022), p. 4, available [here](#), last accessed 23 November 2023.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 5.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ UNHCR, ‘Family Reunification’, see [here](#), last accessed 23 November 2023.

“**Local integration**” is a complex and gradual process with legal, economic, social and cultural dimensions which should ultimately lead to refugees gaining the of their country of asylum.⁴⁴

During the **first six months of 2023**, UNHCR estimated that **20,500 refugees** from 111 countries **obtained citizenship** in 15 countries [UNHCR 2023, p. 29, see [here](#)].

Local integration requires, as a first step, the provision of fundamental rights to refugees.⁴⁵ However, in a 2022 Report, UNHCR noted that 70 per cent of refugees’ worldwide have restricted access to employment, 66 per cent of refugees’ have restricted freedom of movement, and 47 per cent of refugees have restricted access to bank accounts.⁴⁶ The Report asserts that in countries hosting large numbers of refugees for protracted periods, efforts towards local integration are necessary to minimise potential tensions between refugees and host communities over access to resources, employment and services.⁴⁷

“The Contracting States shall as far as possible facilitate the assimilation and naturalization of refugees. They shall in particular make every effort to expedite naturalization proceedings and to reduce as far as possible the charges and costs of such proceedings.”

(Article 34 of the [1951 Refugee Convention](#)).

Article 34 of the 1951 Refugee Convention requires State parties to make every effort to grant citizenship to refugees within their territory as soon as possible. In a 2022 Report, UNHCR estimated that, over the past decade, 1.1 million refugees became citizens in their country of asylum.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ UNHCR, ‘Local Integration’, see [here](#), last accessed 23 November 2023.

⁴⁵ UNHCR, ‘Finding Durable Solutions for Refugees: Background Guide Challenge Topic No. 1’ (2022), p. 6, available [here](#), last accessed 23 November 2023.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

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