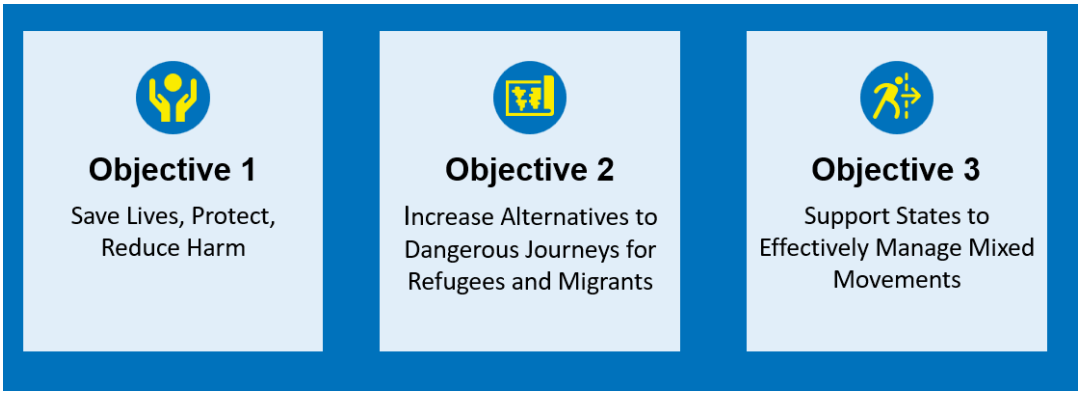
Route-based approach to the mixed movements of refugees and migrants

Strategic overview

1. What is the route-based approach?

The route-based approach is a comprehensive, strategic, cross-border framework developed by UNHCR and IOM along with other actors to respond to the challenges relating to the mixed movements of refugees and migrants. It supports protection-sensitive asylum and migration systems along key displacement and migration corridors by addressing protection risks and operational challenges jointly and across borders, enabling early, coordinated, and solutions-oriented interventions. The overall objectives of the route-based approach are saving lives and reducing harm; increasing alternatives to dangerous journeys for refugees and migrants; and supporting States to effectively manage mixed movements.



2. Why is it needed?

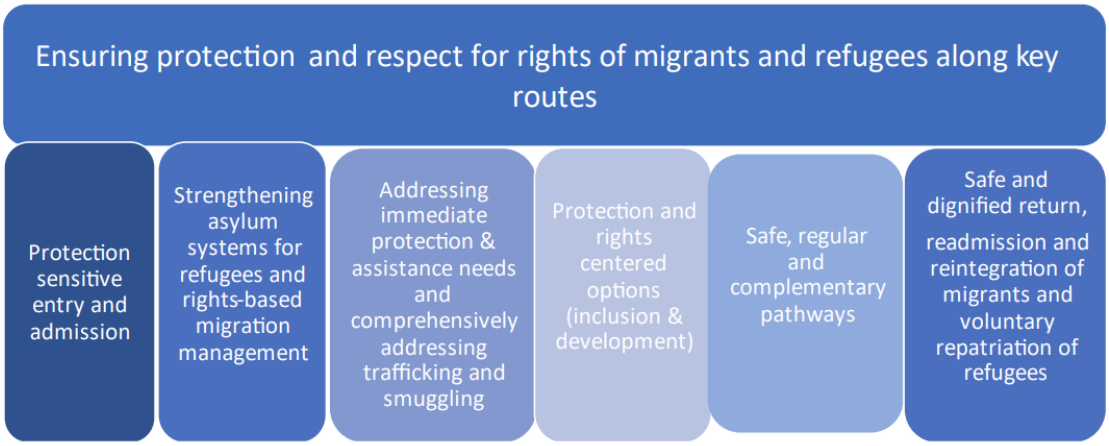
There is an urgent need for more coherent, coordinated, and protection-sensitive responses to mixed movements. Current responses often fail to frontload interventions and strategic investment earlier along the route. They remain fragmented and insufficient, lacking the predictability and systemic coherence needed to address the challenges confronted by States and individuals, particularly those facing heightened vulnerability and loss of life. The route-based approach enables the critical shift that are needed to respond to the realities of displacement today by offering comprehensive, protection-sensitive response that supports both displaced populations and host communities, promoting early intervention, regional cooperation, and durable solutions.

3. What interventions should be implemented as part of the route-based approach?

The route-based approach reimagines how protection and solutions are delivered to people on the move. It recognizes that displacement and migration are not static events, but dynamic journeys that unfold across borders and over time. The route-based approach responds to this reality by anchoring interventions along key routes, ensuring that protection is not confined to a single location but is sustained throughout the journey.

It begins at the point of **entry and admission (pillar 1),** where individuals often arrive in precarious conditions, sometimes by sea, sometimes across remote land borders. As individuals move forward, the focus shifts to **asylum systems and migration management (pillar 2)**. Throughout the journey, people face

a range of protection risks—some visible, others hidden. The route-based approach places a strong emphasis on **protection and assistance (pillar 3)**, particularly for those most at risk: children, survivors of gender-based violence, and victims of trafficking. But protection is not only about responding to immediate needs—it is also about building futures. This is why the route-based approach invests in **inclusion and development (pillar 4).** Recognizing that not everyone can or should remain in their country of asylum, the route-based approach also promotes safe, regular, and complementary pathways **(pillar 5).** Finally, the route-based approach ensures that **return, voluntary repatriation, and reintegration (pillar 6)** are prioritized where the conditions are met.



4. What are the enablers of the route-based approach?

The route-based approach is supported by a set of key enablers and cross-cutting elements that are essential to its effective implementation. These include:

- **Data, analysis, research, and route** mapping – Robust evidence and route-specific insights are foundational to informing strategic planning and targeted interventions.
- **Partnership and collaboration** – Sustained engagement with States, UN agencies, regional bodies, and civil society ensures coordinated and complementary action along the route.
- **Advocacy for protection and rights** – Leveraging UNHCR's convening power to promote rights-based approaches and uphold protection principles across all contexts.
- **Strengthened engagement with communities and people on the move** – Ensuring that responses are informed by the perspectives, needs, and capacities of affected populations.
- **Resource mobilization** – Securing predictable and flexible funding to support cross-border programming and multi-country initiatives.
- **Capacity development** – Building the skills and systems needed across stakeholders to implement the approach effectively and sustainably.