Route Based Approach

From vision to impact – the Route-Based Approach in 2025

Context

In 2025, UNHCR, working closely with IOM and partners translated the Route-Based Approach (RteBA) from concept into practice along major mixed-movement routes. Progress was made across all six pillars, supported by stronger data analysis, closer partnerships, targeted advocacy, engagement with governments, other UN entities, civil society, communities and refugee-led organisations, and more strategic resource mobilization.

The Route-Based Approach has become not only a programmatic framework, but a critical entry point for political dialogue on protection, responsibility-sharing, and solutions along routes.[1] This summary describes some of UNHCR-lead activities, unless otherwise indicated.

AT A GLANCE

10
Routes monitored with regular updates

14
Multi-Purpose Hubs in place

42
Publications and events on the RteBA leveraged

74
Refugee-led, Statelessness-led, and Community-based Organisations, NGOs engaged in the RteBA Reference Groups

On **data and analysis**, UNHCR published 8 route-level reports, 3 of them with the Mixed Migration Centre to generate key data and analysis on various routes. Additionally, with the endorsement of the EU INPTA project in 2025, UNHCR and IOM will embark on a 2-year project to strengthen enhance data interoperability and harmonization of analytical frameworks in the context of mixed movements.

UNHCR strengthened **partnership and coordination,** starting monthly meetings with more than 30 NGOs and organized together with IOM; a regional level workshop with States and other stakeholders for the Western and Central Africa and Eastern Horn of African and Southern Route

Advocacy for protection and rights were achieved at global and local levels such as UNHCR's contributions to the European Parliament's Report on Migrant Smuggling, and engagement in the development of the UN Secretary General's third report on the implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

UNHCR strengthened its **engagement with communities** by establishing a Refugee-Led Organizations (RLO) Reference Group under the RteBA, creating a structured platform for refugee-led actors to inform protection priorities and operational challenges along routes. This engagement culminated in an in-person exchange with RLOs during the Global Refugee Forum Progress Review, reinforcing the value of refugee leadership in shaping protection responses.

In 2025, UNHCR intensified **resource-mobilization** along mixed-movement routes, securing at least USD 87 million despite global funding constraints. The RteBA is uniquely positioning to explore additional sources of funding, across migration and development spectrums. To maximize impact, UNHCR strengthened synergies across protection, solutions, and coordination efforts and deepened collaboration with IOM, including aligned priorities, coordinated activities, and joint donor engagement.

Capacity-development remained central to operationalising the RteBA. In Mauritania, UNHCR trained over 50 government and community actors through two workshops, strengthening their ability to apply legal frameworks, uphold protection standards, and identify needs at key points along routes. Through its partnership with the International Institute of Humanitarian Law in Sanremo, UNHCR also delivered a course on protection in mixed movements, equipping 64 officials and NGO/IO representatives with practical skills to translate route-based approach concepts into protection practice.

[1] UNHCR released the interactive platform **Routes Monitor**, which consolidates several years of mixed movement data in a global, route-level picture of movements. The platform is accessible here: https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/route_based_approach

Making Impacts Across the Six Pillars

UNHCR made substantial advances on the route-based approach implementation along all its **six pillars** with some examples showcased below.

Protection-sensitive entry and admission

UNHCR worked with States to strengthen early identification and referral of people with international protection needs. In Morocco, cooperation with authorities advanced the Humanized Border Management system, strengthening frontline capacity to identify and refer people with international protection needs and expanding access to national refugee status determination. In Sudan, UNHCR and IOM supported border monitoring and community-based early warning and referral mechanisms, assisting more than 700 victims of trafficking since September 2025.

Strengthening asylum systems and rights-based migration management

In Brazil, group-based processing using the expanded refugee definition of the 1984 Cartagena Declaration enabled large-scale recognition, with over 150,000 people granted refugee status. In Mexico, the government continues to implement simplified and differentiated asylum procedures applied for applicants from countries with high recognition rates so people in need of protection receive decisions more quickly.

Addressing immediate protection needs and trafficking and smuggling

In Mauritania, multi-purpose hubs delivered integrated services, including access to asylum procedures, temporary shelter, basic assistance, medical care and specialised case management, including for victims of trafficking. In Bangladesh, UNHCR's first workshop for Bangladesh Coast Guard officials on maritime response and refugee protection strengthened their ability to safeguard refugees at risk of trafficking and smuggling during sea journeys.

Protection and rights-centred options (inclusion and development)

In Mali, a joint task force brought together national and international actors to design inclusive, locally anchored responses. In Thailand, a new Cabinet resolution granted long-staying refugees from Myanmar the right to work, enabling opportunities to foster self-reliance for some 81,000 people. In Chad, 1,489 students from neighbouring countries were included into tertiary education through scholarship schemes, enabling them to pursue opportunities in the country of asylum.

Safe regular and complementary pathways

The Government of Uganda has begun issuing birth certificates to refugee children, with approximately 151,000 already issued, and is working on improving interoperability between the national and refugee registers to facilitate access to family reunification for eligible individuals. Australia has funded a regional Train-to-Hire initiative currently in the design and consultation phase, jointly implemented with IOM, which will provide investment in skills and livelihood opportunities in host countries, as well as other skills-based mobility schemes.

Safe and dignified returns, readmission, reintegration and voluntary repatriation

In Syria, since December 2024, more than 1.2 million Syrians have voluntarily returned from neighbouring countries, with UNHCR supporting conditions and reintegration. In West and Central Africa, over 42,000 refugees returned in 2025, bringing total returns since 2021 to more than 272,000, mainly to Nigeria and the Central African Republic, guided by return intention surveys.

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