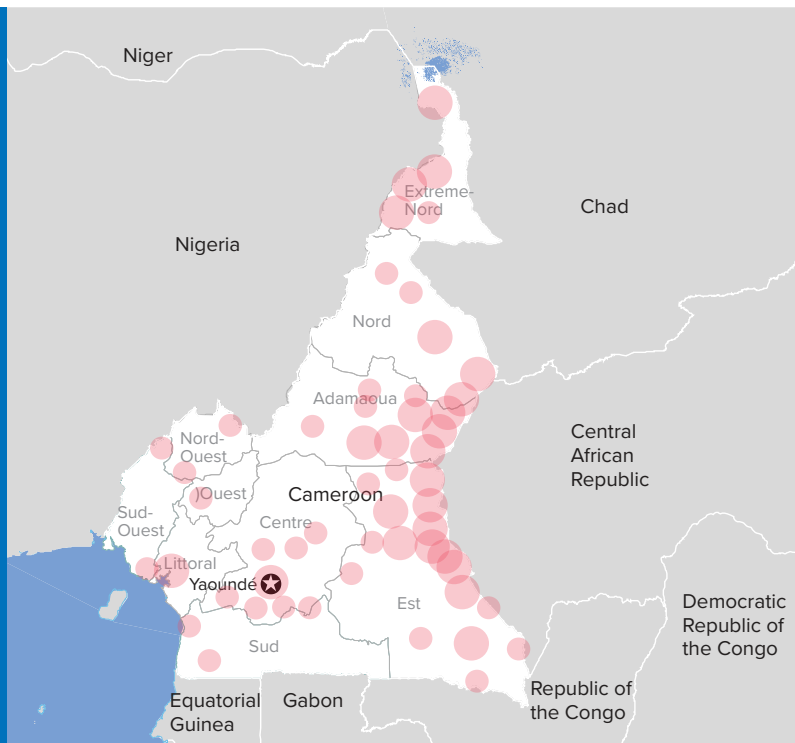


CAMEROON

Cameroon has a long-standing history of hosting refugees and is among the largest refugee-hosting countries in Africa. In 2020, Cameroon provided protection to 424,724 refugees and asylum-seekers from 30 countries, most of whom are from the Central African Republic (CAR) and Nigeria. Most refugees from CAR fled widespread violence from 2013 onwards, with the majority arriving in Cameroon in 2014 and 2015. Most Nigerian refugees arrived in Cameroon from 2014 onwards due to the ongoing conflict with Boko Haram in north-eastern Nigeria. The impact of Boko Haram violence from 2014, as well as the crisis in the South West and North West Regions of Cameroon, has also led to the internal displacement of an estimated 1,001,279 people. Cameroon is a lower-middle-income country with low human development indicators. Despite these challenges, Cameroon generally has an open-door policy for refugees fleeing violence in neighbouring countries.



Overall, most refugees in Cameroon are living in remote border regions that are among the poorest in the country. Most refugees from the Central African Republic live in seven planned settlements (“managed sites”) in the East, North and Adamawa Regions, or in 300 host villages scattered over a large geographical area. Some refugees from the Central African Republic also live in the urban centres of Douala and Yaoundé, mainly in rented accommodation. The majority of Nigerian refugees live in Minawao camp in the Far North Region, with the remainder living scattered in host communities in areas near the border.

KEY POPULATION DATA

414,856
Refugees

9,868
Asylum-seekers

1.64%
of the country’s population (25,876,380)
are refugees and asylum-seekers

IDA 18 RSW / IDA 19 WHR ELIGIBILITY:
SEPTEMBER 2017

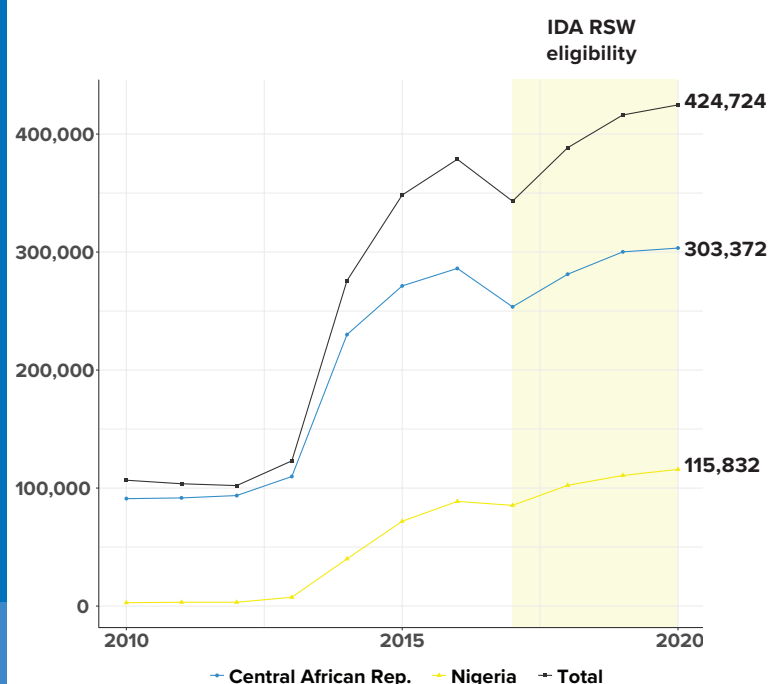


Figure 1: Number of refugees and asylum-seekers of the largest refugee population groups

OVERVIEW OF REFUGEE POLICY ENVIRONMENT (JULY 2017–JUNE 2020)

Cameroon has a long history of providing asylum to refugees. From 2017 to 2020, the Government of Cameroon took several key policy measures at the national level to increase the socioeconomic development and protection space for refugees:

- [Law No 2018/010](#) was adopted in 2018, enabling the **certification of education and skills of foreigners**, thereby making it easier to verify diplomas and certificates obtained abroad and giving refugees the same right as nationals to access vocational training.
- [Law No 2019/024](#) was enacted in 2019 to empower local authorities – including in refugee-hosting areas – to administer their own budgets and resources, which could also come to benefit refugees in the sectors of **education and health**.
- Refugees were included in the Government's [COVID-19 preparedness and response plan](#), especially with respect to education and health, and the Government has continued to cover 30 per cent of **refugees' health-care fees** since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.
- A [National Action Plan \(2018–2020\) for the 1325 Resolution and Companion Resolutions of the UN Security Council on Women, Peace and Security](#) was adopted to improve measures to **protect women and girls – including refugees – before, during and after conflicts**. Cameroon also developed a [National Strategy for the period 2017–2020 aimed at preventing and responding to gender-based violence \(GBV\)](#).
- The National Eligibility and Appeals Commission was sworn in, instituted by Decree No 2011/389 of 2011, in October 2019, representing a step in the progressive and ongoing transfer of **Refugee Status Determination (RSD)** responsibilities from UNHCR to the Government of Cameroon. A **data-sharing protocol** was concluded in March 2019, a prerequisite for the final handover of RSD and registration.
- **Communal Development Plans for municipalities hosting refugees** were also updated by the Government during the reporting period to reflect the presence and impact of refugees in host communities in line with the IDA18 Refugee Sub-Window (RSW) and the Government's 2018 National Participatory Development Programme (PNDP). These plans form the basis of all development-related interventions in the communities and comprise a community participatory approach whereby refugees are included in community consultations.

At the international level, the Government also signed a [tripartite agreement with UNHCR and the Central African Republic in June 2019](#), for the **voluntary repatriation** of refugees living in Cameroon. At the first [Global Refugee Forum \(GRF\) held in Geneva in December 2019](#), the Government of Cameroon reiterated its continued commitment in the areas of education, employment and livelihoods, health, Refugee Status Determination (RSD), the issuance of biometric identity cards to refugees, and Government support to facilitate voluntary repatriation.

POLICY DIMENSIONS (AS AT 30 JUNE 2020)

1 Host Communities

1.1 Support for communities in refugee-hosting areas

National fiscal/budget policies and mechanisms can be applied to provide for timely additional financial transfers from national level to refugee-hosting areas. [Law No 2004/017 of 22 July 2004 on Decentralization](#) and [Law No 2019/024 of 24 December 2019 to institute the general code of regional and local authorities](#) laid down the overall legal framework for decentralization, defining the competencies of decentralized administrative units – municipalities and regions – as well as funding mechanisms to support their extended competencies. Such competencies cover many key areas, including local economic development and certain services and infrastructure. Within this framework, municipalities have local development plans (Plans communaux de développement – PCDs) that can be adjusted to meet changing needs and allow municipalities to allocate development budget through their investment plans. Many refugee-hosting municipalities have adjusted their PCDs to include refugees’ needs (basic services, socioeconomic inclusion opportunities, etc.) and are being used to prioritize activities to be implemented.

However, there are shortcomings in implementing the policies and devolved planning processes due to a lack of financial resources for sub-national government institutions, limited implementation capacities and a slow roll-out of the decentralization process, at both regional and municipal levels.

The allocation of national budget to the regions is not based on indicators that take into account the presence of refugees in a region. According to the government-led Recovery and Peacebuilding Assessment 2018–2022 (RPBA), “the more underdeveloped Northern regions are consistently less favored in terms of public investment per capita. Furthermore, budget allocations are transferred late and are not always aligned with the needs identified in communal development plans. Human resource distribution among communes is highly unbalanced and is not delivered on the basis of need. As a result, development processes are inequitable, and public service delivery is inadequate in these regions.”

The Government has finalized a new [National Development Plan \(2020–2030\)](#) which makes commitments to develop the capacity and role of decentralized territorial units as regards local development. The plan also makes some reference to the inclusion of refugees as a target group for social assistance on the grounds of vulnerability. However, it does not establish a specific institutional framework for providing timely additional financing to refugee-hosting areas.

The [2017 National Social Protection Policy](#) (PNPS in French) establishes the policy objective of social safety nets for all Cameroonians. In pursuit of implementation of this policy, the existing World Bank-financed [Social Safety Net Project](#) (*Projet Filets Sociaux – ‘PFS’*) – which commenced in 2013 and benefited some 482,000 persons in its initial phase – was expanded in 2018 to target another 414,000 persons under an additional phase ([Social Safety Nets for Crisis Response](#)). The PFS targets the poorest and most vulnerable people in participating areas, now including municipalities with a high rate of influx of refugees. The expansion phase, which was partially funded under the IDA18 Refugee Sub-Window (RSW), specifically aims to provide relief to host communities stretched by the massive influx of refugees, in addition to other populations affected by fragility. This includes: (a) alleviating poverty and vulnerability in host communities; (b) exploring avenues for the integration of refugees into national social protection systems and; (c) building peace in fragile regions. The programmes include cash transfers and labour-intensive public works components.

1.2 Social cohesion

National policies can be applied to identify, prevent and mitigate potential social tension and risks of violence in refugee-hosting areas. These include the [2016 Criminal code](#), which applies to all persons present in Cameroon, as well as laws relating to conflict resolution between farmers and pastoralists ([Decree No 78/263 of 3 July 1978](#)). Moreover, there are laws pertaining to the organization and role of

traditional chieftaincies, which can conduct “conciliation and mediation” among their constituents (Article 21) and often play a role in conflict prevention and management in the host communities ([Decree No 77/245 of 15 July 1977 amended by Decree No 82/241 of 24 June 1982](#)). Although these laws do not refer directly to refugees, they can be read in conjunction with [Law No 2005/006 of 27 July 2005 on the Status of Refugees in Cameroon](#) and consequently applied to them and implemented in refugee-hosting areas.

In practice, there is a high level of interaction between refugees and host communities and a political discourse that has generally been favourable to welcoming refugees, although this has at times been severely tested as conflicts in neighbouring countries have spilt over into Cameroon. Refugees have attained some degree of fragile integration into the host communities and UNHCR estimates that approximately 70 per cent of refugees from the Central African Republic live in host communities and that in some villages, refugees outnumber locals. Socially, the length of displacement and the additional demographic pressure from subsequent refugees’ arrivals has triggered some negative reactions from host communities, but nothing on the level of an open conflict. In more rural areas, many refugees share language, cultural and ethnic affinities with their host populations. This facilitates social cohesion, although localized issues do arise relating to land, resource-sharing and cohabitation. However, as a general rule, the pre-emptive involvement of administrative and traditional authorities, as well as support from NGOs in coexistence activities, tend to ensure that disagreements are managed in a peaceful manner (see for example [Etude sur l'accès des réfugiés à la terre dans les arrondissements de l'Est et de l'Adamaoua](#) [Study on land access for refugees in the East and Adamaoua Districts], July 2020). Some refugees, particularly in urban areas, complain of discrimination in employment, negative language towards refugees and occasional harassment by law enforcement officials. Over the years, projects and programmes developed by the Government and other actors have increasingly been taking into account and benefiting both refugees and host communities, thus contributing to enhancing peaceful coexistence.

In rural areas, conflict resolution mechanisms involving both refugees and host community members have been put in place by local authorities to manage issues arising between the communities. Joint protection committees have been developed by local authorities and UNHCR in the Far North region to foster dialogue and peaceful coexistence between refugee and host communities. In eastern Cameroon, village development committees set up by the local authorities to work on local development plans (PCDs) have integrated refugees into participatory planning processes as part of the National Participatory Development Programme (PNDP in French) (See [Community Development Program Support Project Response to Forced Displacement](#), page 20). Furthermore, refugee self-management committees have been set up in villages hosting refugees, in addition to the village development committees, to facilitate interaction with the local authorities. Joint committees that include refugee and host population representatives therefore play a major role in maintaining peace and cohesion.

National policies do formally protect refugees from discrimination. The 1996 Constitution affirms the equality of all persons before the law. Article 9 of the [2005 Refugee Law](#) provides that “all provisions in Chapters II, III, IV and V” of the 1951 Geneva Convention apply to refugees, including non-discrimination. In practice, discrimination may occur in some situations, for instance in relation to gender, nationality, ethnicity and diverse sexual orientation and gender identities.

1.3 Environmental management

National policies exist that can be applied to mitigate the environmental impact of areas hosting refugees. These include [Law No 94/01 of 20 January 1994](#) relating to wildlife, forestry and fishing and [Law No 96/12 of 5 August 1996](#) relating to environmental management. Other laws and policies include [Law No 98/005 of 14 April 1998](#) on water management, Decree [No 2012/2809/PM of 26 September 2012](#) on waste management and the [National Policy on Liquid Sanitation](#). While these laws do not refer directly to refugees and/or host communities, they can be read in conjunction with the [2005 Refugee Law](#) and be applied in refugee-hosting areas to the benefit of both communities.

In practice, there are implementation challenges for all of the above-mentioned policies. The four different ministries overseeing environmental policy face challenges including insufficient material, financial and

human resources. For instance, the percentage of the population that has access to drinking water sources is still relatively low in some regions of Cameroon, including in refugee-hosting areas, with the percentage of households consuming water from an improved source standing between 61 and 76 per cent in the East, Adamawa and Far North regions. Rural communities have much less access than urban centres (Enquête, Institut National de la Statistique, 2018). As for energy, the use of wood fuel by refugee and host communities also poses significant environmental protection challenges.

1.4 Preparedness for refugee inflows

While the Ministry of External Relations (MINREX) traditionally establishes national policy for refugees, this does not extend to preparedness. Cameroon's [National Contingency Plan](#) (2011), developed by the Civil Protection Directorate (DPC), provides elements for a national preparedness framework and makes mention of refugee inflows. However, the plan does not foresee institutional mechanisms to respond to increased or new refugee inflows in ways that minimize short- and medium-term socioeconomic impacts. The plan also needs to be decentralized in order for preparedness and response capacities to be further developed at local level.

Nonetheless, in practice, specific contingency plans have been developed in collaboration with regional authorities and humanitarian organizations in refugee-hosting areas (for example in the East region for refugees from Central African Republic or in the Far North Region in 2019). Whilst involving relevant ministries and regional authorities, such contingency plans are mainly led by international actors and are not fully integrated into national institutional structures.

2 Regulatory Environment and Governance

2.1 Normative framework

Cameroon has been a State Party to the [1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees](#) since 1961. It is also a State Party to the [1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees](#), the [1969 OAU Convention Governing Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa](#) and other relevant [international and regional instruments](#). Cameroon also endorsed the Global Compact on Refugees. These instruments are implemented through, and incorporated into, national law through [Law No 2005/006 of 27 July 2005 on the Status of Refugees](#) and Implementing [Decree No 2011/389 dated 28 November 2011](#). This national law provides a progressive legal framework and expressly refers to the application of the fundamental rights and dispositions set out in the 1951 and the 1969 OAU Convention.

From a formal point of view, the normative framework is consistent with international standards. Indeed, in some respects it exceeds Cameroon's international commitments, with all rights being accorded within the limits of those enjoyed by nationals, rather than the standard of "most favourable treatment accorded to nationals of a foreign country under the same circumstances" which is attached to certain rights in the 1951 Convention. Moreover, Cameroon has long prided itself on welcoming refugees and has positively engaged in several areas such as education and health services, taking measures to contribute to non-discriminatory access within the limits of its capacity. The main challenges involve the implementation of policies.

UNHCR observes gaps in the awareness of applicable refugee policies and procedures among refugees and authorities, including immigration and law enforcement officials, the judiciary, and labour-related authorities. Many refugees also highlight a lack of knowledge on the part of employers regarding their right to work.

[Law No 2005/006 of 27 July 2005 on the Status of Refugees](#) and Implementing [Decree No 2011/389 dated 28 November 2011](#) set out the framework for recognition of refugee status. Article 16 of this 2005 Refugee Law provides for the establishment of a refugee status management body. The supervisory ministry for the refugee status management body is the Ministry of External Relations (MINREX). At the express request of the Government of Cameroon, UNHCR has been implementing registration and

Refugee Status Determination (RSD) since 1982. In the urban centres of Douala and Yaoundé, there are individual RSD procedures. In other regions hosting larger numbers of refugees (Far North, North, Adamawa and East Regions), Central African and Nigerian refugees are recognized on a prima facie basis. The procedures applied, including those of the appeal process, are in line with international and regional standards.

On 1 August 2016, the Government of Cameroon and UNHCR signed a Memorandum of Understanding on the Transfer of Refugee Status Determination Responsibilities and Other Related Activities to the Government of Cameroon, by which UNHCR undertook to support the process of transferring RSD to the Cameroonian authorities. The Technical Secretariat of the Refugee Status Management Body (STOGSR in French) was thus set up in 2016 in Yaoundé, with a view to conducting RSD. UNHCR and the Government of Cameroon also concluded a data-sharing protocol in March 2019, setting up a framework for data protection and sharing. The National Eligibility and Appeal Commissions, responsible for making the definitive status determination and hearing appeals, were sworn in at the end of October 2019. However, as at 30 June 2020, these commissions were not operational, pending the identification of adequate resources and due to the significant turn-over amongst members appointed to the eligibility commissions.

In light of this, a “hybrid” system of RSD is currently being implemented whereby Government staff undertake interviews and produce RSD recommendations in respect of asylum-seekers living in Yaoundé, which are then reviewed by UNHCR. As such, UNHCR still therefore formally determines refugee status pending operationalization of the Eligibility and Appeals Commissions. Additional challenges include the fact that the Technical Secretariat (STOGSR) only covers Yaoundé at present, although there are plans to extend this first to Douala and eventually to regional refugee-hosting areas in which UNHCR is still registering and determining status alone at present. STOGSR is also currently reliant on UNHCR funding, limiting its capacity to fully assume responsibilities according to relevant legislation and to expand geographical coverage beyond the capital.

2.2 Security of legal status

[Law No 2005/006 of 27 July 2005](#) affords asylum-seekers the right to stay in the country for the duration of the Refugee Status Determination (RSD) procedure. There are no policy limitations such as time limits or renewal/extension requirements. Similarly, once refugee status is granted, whether through prima facie or individual RSD procedures, no such policy limitations exist. There are occasional reports of asylum-seekers and refugees having been arrested for illegal immigration by law enforcement officials because their identification cards and other relevant documents had expired. This is mainly due to a lack of awareness of refugees’ rights on the part of some law enforcement officials and such cases are usually resolved quickly.

Article 7 of [Law No 2005/006 of 27 July 2005](#) also provides for the principle of non-refoulement in line with international standards. There has been increasingly open engagement with the Cameroonian authorities to raise awareness of their international obligation with regard to non-refoulement. From early 2019 to 30 June 2020, there were no known cases of refoulement. Moreover, there were no known cases of unlawful termination of refugee status by way of cancellation, revocation or cessation and no cases of recognized refugees being expelled on the grounds of national security or public order. Cameroon has continued to welcome persons seeking asylum during the COVID pandemic. The borders were closed on 18 March 2020 limiting access to the territory. They were reopened on 1 August 2020.

2.3 Institutional framework for refugee management and coordination

The institutional framework for refugee management is set out in [Law No 2005/006 of 27 July 2005](#) and its Implementing [Decree No 2011/389 dated 28 November 2011](#), which provide for the establishment of the Eligibility and Appeals Commissions and the technical secretariat of the refugee status management body under the auspices of the Ministry of External Relations (MINREX). The 2005 refugee law and 2011 Implementing Decree speak specifically of Refugee Status Determination, but remain silent on other institutions’ responsibilities and on broader refugee management coordination responsibilities. Formally,

therefore, MINREX has established a national policy for refugees and status issues in particular, but this mandate does not extend to the day-to-day management and coordination of assistance or socioeconomic concerns, which are spread across different sectoral ministries and other national institutions.

Through administrative [Order No 269 of 13 March 2014](#), the Government established an ad hoc interministerial committee at central level, under the leadership of the Ministry of Territorial Administration (MINAT), to coordinate assistance to address large inflows of refugees from the Central African Republic and Nigeria. This committee has been mirrored to a certain degree at regional level in the main refugee-hosting areas and chaired by Governors. Line Ministries, such as those responsible for education, water, health, agriculture and social affairs, participate in these committees but at times play a limited role in the delivery of assistance due to challenges in terms of capacity. At central level, the ad hoc interministerial committee has been dormant for the last three years, particularly in light of the reduction of inflows of refugees from the Central African Republic.

To fill these gaps, UNHCR has completed agreements with certain key ministries outlining commitments and responsibilities, as with the Ministry of Health in 2016.

In managed refugee camps and settlements, refugee community governance structures have been established with UNHCR assistance, aiming at, inter alia, obtaining refugee input and feedback on decisions affecting them. In the camps, these include Refugee Central Committees, block leaders, elders, peace/conflict resolution committees, community safety groups (*comités de vigilance*), associations for parents and teachers, women and young people, and persons with disabilities, as well as committees on shelter and food. In Yaoundé and Douala community governance is structured around Community Leaders and a system of refugee incentive workers called *relais communautaires*.

These committees are functional and meet with UNHCR, relevant government officials and other national and international partners on a regular basis. They are elected by refugees themselves under the technical supervision of UNHCR and local authorities. Their composition and management take age, gender, diversity considerations into account, although this is not always meaningfully applied. The level of functionality of the other structures may vary from group to group or area to area. In addition, for refugees living outside camps and managed settlements in rural locations, refugee self-management committees have been set up in villages hosting refugees to facilitate interaction with the local authorities.

Refugees have so far not been included in the national population census in Cameroon. The last general census of the population was conducted in 2005. Since 2018, the [Central Bureau for Census and Population Studies](#) (BUCREP) has been planning to conduct another general census of the population and has included the legal status of persons in its data collection tool, including refugees. The general census has not yet taken place. Once complete, it is expected that the results will assist policymakers and development actors in integrating demographic aspects pertaining to the refugee population into Government policies.

Steps have been taken to include refugees in administrative data collection systems. Data on refugees in Cameroon is taken into consideration in national health programmes addressing malaria, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and immunization. Refugees are also included in nutritional surveys organized by the Ministry of Public Health. Regarding education, the development of an education management information system (EMIS) is mentioned in the [Strategy of the Education and Training Sector](#) (2013–2020), but has not yet been implemented. However, since 2018, discussions have been initiated with the Ministry of Education to consider collecting education data relating to refugee children and young people through the up-coming EMIS. A first step was taken with the inclusion of information on refugee children and young people in the national school mapping in 2018.

Village development committees set up by local authorities to develop local development plans (PCDs) have integrated refugees into participatory planning processes as part of the World Bank-financed [Community Development Support Project to Forced Displacement](#), implemented by the PNDP, in the Eastern and Far North regions of Cameroon. PCDs are the basis of development planning at local level and the source of projects undertaken by the Government, municipalities and development partners in a municipality.

2.4 Access to civil registration and documentation

Article 9 of [Law No 2005/006 of 27 July 2005](#) provides that all recognized refugees should be issued with an identity document and a travel document for the purpose of travel abroad. Article 8(3) stipulates that asylum-seekers shall be provided with an attestation. [Decree No 2016/373 of 4 August 2016](#) and [Decree No 2016/374 of 4 August 2016](#) provide for a system to produce biometric identity cards for nationals and foreigners, including refugees. The adoption of these decree setting out the modalities for the issuance of biometric identity cards to refugees has been a significant step forward in terms of policy. They define the operating procedures of the National Centre for the Production of Identity Documents (CNPTI), which is responsible for producing national as well as refugee identity cards. The issuance of biometric identity cards for refugees by the government has not yet been implemented. The Ministry of External Relations also issues refugees with Convention Travel Documents (CTDs) to facilitate international travel.

Currently, UNHCR continues to issue identification cards to refugees following biometric verification of each individual, pending the effective implementation of the legal provisions and regulations. All refugees are provided with appropriate documentation. Identification cards issued by UNHCR are not co-signed by the Government of Cameroon but are officially recognized as a form of identification as per Article 40 of [Decree No 2007/255 of 4 September 2007](#).

There are however some challenges in practice. A recurrent difficulty raised by some refugees, especially in rural areas, is that the card is not systematically given due weight by all police officers and that their freedom of movement can at times be de facto partially limited, with increased risks of arbitrary detention and consequences on their ability to go about regular livelihoods. In addition, some refugees, especially in urban areas, report that certain employers refuse on occasion to accept the refugee card as evidence of refugees' right to work despite the provisions in the 2005 law. Some refugees have also reported facing issues with financial institutions or service providers. Law enforcement agencies and relevant ministries collaborate with UNHCR to undertake regular training and advocacy regarding refugee documentation to enhance recognition of the UNHCR-issued card.

Civil status documentation is covered in the 2005 refugee law as well as in the relevant provisions of [Order No 81/002 of 29 June 1981 on civil status](#). The [National Office for Civil Status Documentation \(BUNEC\)](#), set up in 2011, is responsible for coordinating and modernizing the system. At the 2019 [High-Level Segment on Statelessness](#), Cameroon also committed to regularizing the situation of all persons without a birth certificate living in the country.

Local authorities issue civil status documents to refugees without discrimination, including birth, death and marriage certificates. However, for refugees and for nationals, there are several issues that hamper effective access to these documents. According to the [2014 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey \(MICS5\)](#), the national birth registration rate for Cameroonian children under 5 years of age is 66 per cent with wide regional disparities, particularly in the Far North Region (42 per cent), the North Region (60 per cent) and in the East Region (58 per cent). While similar figures are not available for the refugee population, information from UNHCR monitoring also indicates that some refugee children are not registered at birth, especially in rural areas. Obstacles to birth registration include the remoteness of some populations from the civil registration centres, a lack of awareness about documentation, as well as capacity and resource constraints that can limit access to the relevant services. In addition, for births declared after the legal deadline of 6 months, parents are required to get a court order (*jugement supplétif*) to have the child registered. The costs associated with this procedure are an obstacle to late birth registration.

Finally, on the specific issue of birth certificates for refugee children born outside Cameroon but who were either never registered in their home country or lost their documents during flight, the Technical Secretariat of the Refugee Status Management Body (STOGSR) produces "attestations in lieu of birth certificates" that are widely recognized by administrations and schools, thus facilitating refugee children's access to services.

2.5 Justice and Security

No specific study was identified comparing the security perceptions of refugees and their host communities. Generally speaking, participatory assessments and monitoring conducted by UNHCR indicate that the security situation varies between different refugee-hosting regions. For example, in the East, Adamawa and North regions, refugees and host communities enjoy a relatively peaceful and safe environment, despite some criminality in border areas. In the Far North Region, the situation is more fluid, with the existence of security threats due to the conflict with Boko Haram that affect both communities, particularly in areas along the border with Nigeria.

[Law No 2005/006 of 27 July 2005](#) affords refugees the right of recourse to the courts (*“le droit d’ester en justice”*). In practice, access to justice is limited for both refugees and host communities due to capacity and resource constraints, physical distance to the institutions providing legal aid, formal justice and law enforcement, and so on. Traditional dispute resolution mechanisms are more easily accessible, particularly in regions where refugees share cultural and social affinities with their host communities.

Protection and human security issues are affecting refugees as well as host communities. The situation is challenging, especially for women, who are particularly vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence. Various policies are in place targeting gender-related issues and preventing and addressing sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). These include, among other things, the [National Constitution of 18 January 1996](#), the [Civil Code](#) and [Law No 2016/007 of 12 July 2016](#) relating to the [Criminal Code](#). In addition, Cameroon has a [National SGBV Strategy](#) for the period 2017–2020, aimed at preventing and responding to SGBV. These policies apply to refugee-hosting areas and do not exclude refugees. Moreover, the Ministry of Women’s Empowerment and the Family (MINPROFF), has initiated revision of the national SGBV strategy to explicitly take into consideration SGBV issues relating to the forcibly displaced, including refugees and asylum-seekers.

In practice, there are shortcomings in policy implementation and access to relevant services can be limited at times as a result, inter alia, of capacity and resource constraints, particularly in rural areas. This affects both refugee and host communities. Nonetheless, UNHCR has observed cases of refugee SGBV survivors being referred to and accessing services provided by the Government. In addition, while the law does criminalize SGBV and should in principle not be adjudicated by traditional dispute resolution mechanisms, many refugee and host communities still prefer to use these. These challenges affect refugees and host communities alike.

3 Economic Opportunities

3.1 Freedom of movement

[Law No 2005/006 of 27 July 2005](#) allows refugees and asylum-seekers to move freely within Cameroon and choose a place of residence on a par with nationals, without any restriction. Some 64 per cent of the refugee population live outside camps and settlements, mainly in rural host communities but also in the urban centres of Yaoundé and Douala, where there is also a sizeable refugee population.

In practice, refugees and asylum-seekers do avail themselves of these rights, although certain limitations exist. For example, the administrative practice of requiring refugees to obtain a document from UNHCR called an *‘à qui de droit’* before they can move outside their administrative division (*“département”*) of residence was first instituted by authorities with the arrival of refugees en masse from the Central African Republic, in order to control movements. Although many refugees do move to a different *département* without this document, doing so can expose them to increased scrutiny from security forces during routine identity checks. Moreover, some refugees, especially in rural areas have reported that, although officially accepted as a means of identification, the UNHCR-issued refugee card is not systematically given due weight by all police officers and gendarmes. Also, there have been reports of law enforcement officials allegedly extorting money from refugees during routine checks on public transport. It should be noted that such issues are not limited to refugees, but can also affect nationals. At times this uncertainty has a limiting effect on the free movement of refugees.

3.2 Right to work and rights at work

Articles 9 and 10 (1) of [Law No 2005/006 of 27 July 2005](#) provide refugees with the right to work on par with nationals, with no restriction. Refugees do not have to obtain a work permit. The applicable laws do not however mention asylum-seekers' rights to work.

During the Global Refugee Forum, Cameroon made a pledge on employment and job opportunities. A tripartite agreement between ILO, UNHCR and the Ministry of Labour was drafted with a view to including refugees as applicants for employment with the National Employment Fund.

As regards employment in the public sector, Article 13 of [Decree No 94/199 of 7 October 1994](#) instituting the general statute of the State Civil Service provides that only persons of Cameroonian nationality may be employed as civil servants. While a broad reading of the 2005 refugee law could provide a policy basis for refugee inclusion in this respect, there are no reported cases of refugees working as civil servants in Cameroon.

In practice, relatively few refugees are able to obtain formal employment or set up a formal business. Only around 4.5 per cent of the refugee population is in formal employment, according to statistics from the UNHCR *proGres* registration database. This is due to the limited job opportunities in Cameroon, high unemployment even among the host community and general socioeconomic difficulties in the country. In addition, there have been reports by refugees, especially in urban areas, that some employers have not accepted the UNHCR-issued refugee card as evidence of refugees' right to work, despite the provisions in the 2005 law. This was reportedly due to a lack of awareness or as a pretext to withhold written contracts from some refugee employees. Due to existing challenges in accessing formal employment, a significant number of refugees enter the informal labour and business markets.

[Law No 2005/006 of 27 July 2005](#) provides refugees with the same worker protections as nationals in line with applicable national laws. This includes [Law No 92/007 of 14 August 1992](#) instituting the labour code, which provides for worker protections in the private sector, including equal remuneration, non-discrimination, protection of women workers and prohibition of child labour, and [Order No 17 of 27 May 1969 on child employment](#), which forbids all employment of children under 14 and outlines the conditions for work between the ages of 14 and 18. The minimum wage policy applies to all workers in Cameroon, in compliance with Article 1 of [Decree No 2014/2217/PM of 24 July 2014](#). In practice, refugees' enjoyment of these rights can at times be limited due to challenges in enforcement capacity in the relevant government agencies as well as inadequate recognition of UNHCR-issued identification documents by certain employers. Some refugees have also reported that employers have taken advantage of their precarious socioeconomic situation to refuse to provide written work contracts.

Although [Law No 2005/006 of 27 July 2005](#) does not specifically mention the exercise of liberal professions, its wording fully enacts relevant rights from the 1951 Convention, which therefore includes Article 19 on the exercise of liberal professions. As such, refugees who hold diplomas recognized by the competent authorities in Cameroon can exercise a liberal profession within the limits of rights accorded to nationals. In practice, however, very few refugees have the relevant professional profile to exercise a liberal profession.

3.3 Land, housing and property rights

The State is the guardian of land in Cameroon. Access to land is governed by [Order No 74-1 of 6 July 1974](#) relating to land and state land tenure, [Law No 80-21 of 14 July 1980](#) and Decrees [No 76-166 of 27 April 1976](#) and [No 76-167 of 27 April 1976](#). Article 9 of the 2005 Refugee Law provides for refugees to enjoy the "right to property" within the limits of the rights accorded to nationals. In law, refugees therefore enjoy treatment more favourable than that generally accorded to other foreigners and can be assimilated to nationals in respect of such rights through the operation of the refugee law. In practice, however, refugees can be subject to the laws and procedures usually reserved for other categories of foreigners for the purchase or lease of land, due to a lack of awareness of the relevant provisions of the 2005 Refugee Law.

It should be noted that due to the socioeconomic situation of many refugees, few are in a position to purchase land. In terms of access to agricultural land, negotiations routinely take place with host community leaders for the use of farming land for periods of 3 years. These agreements are usually facilitated by traditional leaders, outside the administrative framework.

Law [2009/010 of 10 July 2009](#) relating to the rental and purchase of property does not contain restrictions on the status of persons who can rent or buy immovable property. As such, read in conjunction with the 2005 Refugee Law, refugees formally have the right to purchase, lease or use housing and immovable property in Cameroon on a par with nationals. In practice, refugees in urban centres lease or use housing based on formal or informal arrangements. Few are in an economic position to purchase immovable property.

The 2005 Refugee Law provides refugees with “the right to housing within the limits of rights accorded to nationals.” According to [Decree No 2012/384 of 14 September 2012](#), the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development is responsible for social housing in Cameroon. The Ministry created an [ad hoc commission](#) in charge of attributing social housing within the framework of the [Government’s National Programme](#) for the construction of 10,000 social housing units and development of 50,000 plots of land. In April 2018, Cameroon held a workshop with different stakeholders aimed at validating the [national housing policy](#) strategy in line with social housing programmes. While there is no mention of refugees (or foreigners) as the target populations of such programmes, there is no provision in relevant laws or policies that specifically exclude them.

Despite the Government’s priority to do more on social housing and its efforts over the past decade(s), in practice, access to social housing is limited, even for nationals, with insufficient capacity to meet demand. Generally, formal housing production is very low (mostly delivered by State-owned enterprises) and social housing often caters to middle- if not higher income classes. This is due to a mix of factors including a big general housing deficit across income groups, the fact that prices are still not affordable for most people (few Cameroonians can afford to buy the cheapest houses on the market; rental prices have also skyrocketed and often require upfront payment of 10–12 months’ rent) and issues associated with governance. Moreover, a [study](#) conducted by the National Institute for Statistics (INS) indicated that only 1 in 8 Cameroonian households can afford the cost of social housing without the Government’s assistance. Access to loans in the social housing programme is open to persons with a minimum monthly income of 376,000 FCFA (around USD 680), a sum that is beyond the reach of the vast majority of refugees and host communities. So far, UNHCR is not aware of refugees accessing the public/social housing schemes.

3.4 Financial and administrative services

Cameroon is a member of the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC) and its banking sector is governed by regulations of the Banking Commission of Central Africa (COBAC). [Law No 2019/021 of 24 December 2019](#) on credit activities in Cameroon also governs access to credit. Although these laws and regulations do not specifically mention refugees, if they are read in conjunction with [Law No 2005/006 of 27 July 2005 on the Status of Refugees](#), they can also apply to them in respect of bank accounts and traditional financial services.

In practice, only a few refugees, mostly those who are urban-dwelling with stable employment, possess bank accounts. Certain banks verify refugee identity cards with UNHCR as a part of their Know Your Customer (KYC) procedures for opening accounts. A pilot programme with the Bank Crédit du Sahel is also being developed to facilitate access to such services more widely. However, most refugees face challenges in accessing bank accounts and financial services such as credit, due to the fact that some financial institutions do not accept the refugee card as a means of identification and the fact that they are unable to satisfy other conditions such as having a work contract, pay slips or minimum deposits. It should be noted that Cameroonians in general also have low rates of access to bank accounts and credit, given the high levels of informal employment (see the 2018 Ministry of Finance Finscope report, cited in [Business in Cameroon](#).)

SIM card registration is mandated by law in Cameroon. The requirements for SIM registration can be found across a number of different texts, including [Law 2010/013 on electronic communications](#), [Decree No 2012/1637/PM](#) and [Decree No 2015/3759](#). These decrees specify that the accepted means of identification include “a residency permit for foreigners or any other equivalent document” or “an identity document that is accepted in Cameroon through the operation of international conventions.” Although refugees are not specifically mentioned in these texts, read together with the 2005 Refugee Law, they can be interpreted to cover refugees in the same way as nationals.

In practice, refugees do register SIM cards and use mobile money services with mobile operators, despite some challenges. Certain operators, such as [MTN](#), specifically mention the refugee identity card as a means of identification. When SIM card or mobile money registration is refused on identification grounds due to a lack of awareness on the part of operators, UNHCR conducts advocacy on behalf of refugees. Refugees also have recourse to informal workarounds when faced with such barriers. (See [Displaced and Disconnected, Country Reports](#), UNHCR 2019, page 18.)

According to Government policy, refugees can obtain key documents, such as formal recognition of foreign academic and vocational qualifications and national driving licences necessary to access employment and other socioeconomic opportunities. [Decree No 2005/142 of 29 April 2005](#) on the organization of the Ministry of Higher Education (MINESUP) provides for a National Commission for the Evaluation of Training Abroad, which meets yearly to certify foreign tertiary degrees. [Law No 2018/010 of 11 July 2018](#) governing vocational training enables the certification of vocational education and skills of foreigners in Cameroon. However, it is not known how many refugees routinely avail themselves of these rights.

Regarding driving licences, the applicable law ([Order No 00406/1/MINT+DTT of 28 April 2000](#)) imposes no restrictions on the nationality of applicants. Moreover, Article 13(1) of [Law No 2005/006 of 27 July 2005 on the Status of Refugees](#) states that refugees have the right to “any document necessary for accomplishing the acts of civil life or in application of domestic law”. Although there are practical obstacles such as cost, UNHCR has observed examples of refugees having received Cameroonian driving licences.

Refugees are registered without restriction in public as well as private training centres, including in centres run by the Ministry for the Promotion of Women and the Family (MINPROFF) and the Ministry of Youth and Civic Education (MINJEC), in line with Article 10(2) of the 2005 Refugee Law, which entitles refugees to the same treatment as nationals in respect of education. It should be noted however that some training structures face capacity and resource challenges, particularly in rural areas.

4 Access to National Public Services

4.1 Education

Article 10(2) of [Law No 2005/006 of 27 July 2005 on the Status of Refugees](#) entitles refugees to the same treatment as nationals in respect of education, including for university admission fees. Cameroon also pledged, at the Global Refugee Forum in December 2019, to ensure that refugee pupils have the same access to free primary education as nationals.

In line with its legal framework relating to refugees, the Government of Cameroon has adopted an inclusive approach whereby refugee children and young people receive the same treatment as nationals in terms of access to education and rights relating to school and university enrolment fees. The [National Education and Training Sector](#) strategy covering 2013–2020 mentions refugees as a target group among those with additional barriers to accessing school. This inclusive approach is also reflected in the education sector diagnosis initiated in 2019, which for the first time includes a specific chapter on education in crises. As such, the country’s new 2021–2030 education strategy that is being developed is expected to take forcibly displaced persons into consideration, including refugees and asylum-seekers. Despite existing challenges – including a lack of infrastructure and learning materials, a high teacher/student ratio, teachers’ capacity-building needs and the requirement to present a birth certificate when taking school exams – this

emphasizes the increased commitment of the Government of Cameroon to plan and respond to the education needs of refugees and asylum-seekers and reflects Cameroon's willingness to materialize its related pledge made at the 2019 Global Refugee Forum.

The above education policies also provide for specialized services. In practice, such services are available in certain areas but are of limited scope; elsewhere, especially in rural areas, they do not exist at all, due to insufficient financial, material and human resources. However, the Government of Cameroon has demonstrated openness in facilitating refugees' inclusion in the national education system and in providing related specialized support where possible, for instance by offering refugee children and young people from the Central African Republic the possibility to benefit from an accelerated curriculum for the reintegration of out-of-school children (*Curriculum accéléré pour la réinsertion des enfants déscolarisés - CARED*) upon their arrival in Cameroon and by opening a bilingual high school in Minawao refugee camp, which hosts Nigerian refugees in the Far North Region. More recently, refugee children and young people have been included in the [National Education Response Plan](#) relating to the COVID-19 pandemic, including for the distance learning programme.

4.2 Healthcare

Refugees have access to public health-care services on a par with nationals, as per Article 9 of [Law No 2005/006 of 27 July 2005 on the Status of Refugees](#). Cameroon has developed a [National Health Strategy](#), covering the period 2017 to 2027. This strategy does not mention refugees per se as one of its target populations but takes into consideration the geographical divisions per region, health district and health area for the general population's access to health services. Cameroon also made a pledge relating to the inclusion of refugees in national health strategies and plans at the 2019 Global Refugee Forum.

The 2016 agreement between UNHCR and the Ministry of Health (MINSANTE) to enable refugees from rural areas to access the services of the Cameroonian health system at the same level as the host population stipulates that MINSANTE covers 30 per cent and UNHCR 70 per cent of the health-care costs relating to Central African refugees in the East, Adamawa and North Regions, as well as to Nigerian refugees in the Far North Region

Data on the numbers of refugees accessing the national health-care system are not available. However, refugees in Cameroon are included in health surveys and programmes (malaria, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, nutrition, etc.) in the same way as the host population. This includes access for refugee women and girls to national sexual and reproductive services, where available. Reciprocally, the host population has access to health facilities that have been put in place for refugees. While health remains a priority concern for refugees as shown through most of UNHCR's participatory assessments, the issues raised tend to be similar to those of Cameroonian nationals.

There is currently no public health insurance scheme operational in Cameroon and as such there is no system in place that can finance refugees' health-care costs in the publicly financed health system. However, the Ministry of Health is currently in the process of developing its [Universal Health Coverage system](#). The possibility of including refugees is being examined in the context of the ongoing discussions.

4.3 Social protection

Article 9 of [Law No 2005/006 of 27 July 2005 on the Status of Refugees](#) sets out that refugees have the right to "public and social assistance" within the limits of the rights accorded to nationals. The [National Social Protection Policy](#) (PNPS in French) of December 2017 prioritizes basic levels of assistance to persons with specific needs, including disabilities and people with mental health issues and older persons without care and support. It also mentions refugees as a beneficiary group of specialized services. There are no further policies providing guidance on how this is to be done.

As mentioned under sub-dimension 1.1, the Government's [Social Safety Net programme](#) received additional World Bank funding under the IDA18 Refugee Sub-Window in 2018, which also aims to integrate refugees

into national social protection systems. Data is not currently available on how many refugees have benefited from this programme.

A contributory social protection scheme managed by the [National Social Insurance Fund \(CNPS\)](#) provides for basic family and old-age benefits as well as protection for work-related accidents. Nationals and foreigners can benefit from this scheme (See CNPS: [Client Guide](#), page 10), although, being contributory, it is restricted to those working in the formal sector who have written contracts and are being declared by their employer. Given the high levels of informal work, relatively few nationals and yet fewer refugees are covered by the scheme.

In practice, UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations provide basic levels of assistance to refugees with specific needs. Refugees can also access the services of the Ministry of Social Affairs (MINAS) and the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family (MINPROFF), in particular those delivered in social action centres, centres for women's empowerment and the family, as well as rehabilitation centres for persons with disabilities. However, these services, mainly relating to counselling, psychosocial support and mediation, are often limited due to the insufficient human and financial capacities of the relevant ministries and are not necessarily available everywhere, especially in rural areas. As of 30 June 2020, refugees with disabilities are not entitled to the invalidity cards enjoyed by nationals who, with these cards, can benefit from discounts on public transport, schools and health facilities. Data and exact numbers for refugees and/or nationals with specific needs that have received assistance through government services are not known.

There is currently no overarching framework in place for dialogue between the government and international partners with a view to gradually aligning external aid and social protection systems and support for refugees and host community members with specific needs, in terms of coverage, targeting and levels of benefits.

4.4 Protection for vulnerable groups

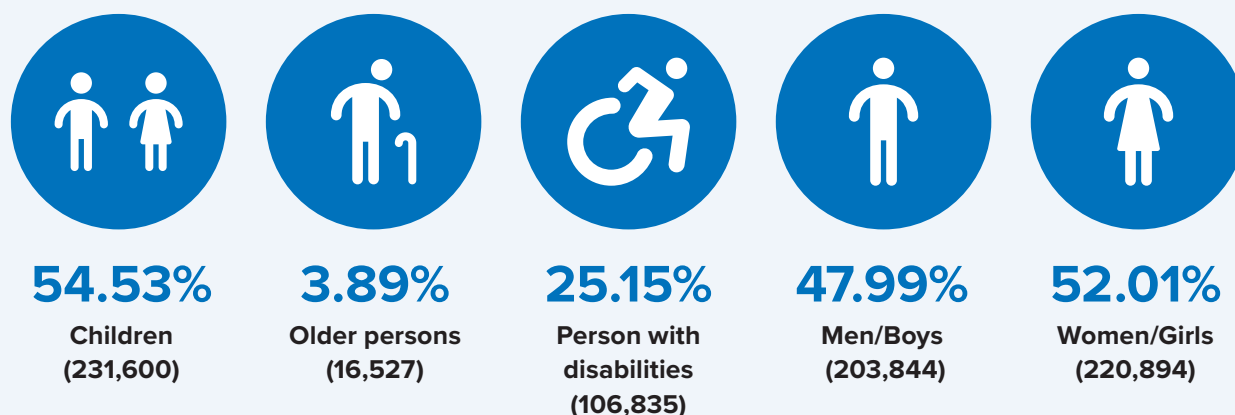
The broad formulation of Article 9 of [Law No 2005/006 of 27 July 2005 on the Status of Refugees](#) provides children, including unaccompanied and separated refugee children, refugee victims of trafficking in persons, survivors of gender-based violence and other refugee groups with specific needs, with formal access to Government-provided care and protection systems in a manner comparable to nationals in the same situation. A range of national policies, standards and services are in place for the protection of nationals in the same situation as the above-mentioned refugee groups.

Although the implementation of these policies is at times limited, refugees, including those with specific needs, can access MINAS and MINPROFF services as mentioned in the previous section. Services are often limited due to insufficient capacities and are not available everywhere, particularly in rural regions. For instance, refugee GBV survivors in the main cities can approach centres offering such services and benefit from counselling and psychosocial support but, like nationals, cannot benefit from proper case management services as the latter are not in place. Child protection services are already limited for Cameroonian children due to insufficient financial and human resources and there is consequently no capacity for providing case management services for refugee children. These services are however included in prevention and response activities implemented by UNHCR and other partners across Cameroon. In some instances, MINAS has provided support to identify appropriate alternative care for unaccompanied children, particularly in institutions. However, they do not have family-based care programmes.

5 Cross Sectors

Characteristics of registered refugees and asylum-seekers in total refugee population*

as at 30 June 2020



5.1 Gender

Gender considerations can generally be improved in all policy sub-dimensions. The five priority areas most consequential in terms of socioeconomic development include:

- i. **Social cohesion**, focusing on the participation of women in community-based leadership structures in a meaningful manner beyond their formal inclusion;
- ii. **Protection for vulnerable groups**, addressing the limited provision of appropriate services by national authorities and access to quality services;
- iii. **Education**, mitigating the risks of drop-out linked to discrimination and early marriage;
- iv. **Housing**, land and property rights, focusing on power imbalance and discrimination;
- v. **Right to work and rights at work**, addressing risks of exploitation by employers and refugees' often difficult socioeconomic situations, which increase the risk of taking dangerous jobs and having recourse to harmful practices such as survival sex.

5.2 Social inclusion

Considerations of refugees' distinct characteristics can generally be improved in all policy sub-dimensions. The three priority areas most consequential in terms of socioeconomic development are:

- i. **Civil registration and documentation**, addressing barriers to civil status documentation for vulnerable refugees and those living in poor, remote communities far from civil status centres, ensuring access for school-age children without birth certificates to facilitate the continuity of schooling and supporting government to issue refugee identity documents.;
- ii. **Right to work and rights at work**, addressing refugee perceptions of discrimination in employment and livelihoods due to status, gender, nationality and particularly the lack of government-issued refugee identity documents; and
- iii. **Social protection**, supporting inclusion in national social protection schemes and the national social registry for targeted support to refugees with specific needs.

* The refugee numbers reported here do not fully match the numbers on the front page because demographic characteristics are not available for all refugees (e.g., pre-registered refugees, etc.).

Annex on Key International and Regional Instruments ratified or adhered to

- [Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 \(Protocol I\)](#)
- [Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 \(Protocol II\)](#)
- [African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, 1981](#)
- [African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child 1990](#)
- [African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa \(Kampala Convention\), 2009](#)
- [African Youth Charter, 2006](#)
- [Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, 1984](#)
- [Convention Governing Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa \(the OAU Convention\), 1969](#)
- [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, 1979](#)
- [Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989](#)
- [Convention relating to the Status of Refugees 1951 \(Ratification date: 23 Oct 1961\)](#)
- [Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons of 1949](#)
- [ILO Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 \(No 105\)](#)
- [ILO Discrimination \(Employment and Occupation\) Convention, 1958 \(No 111\)](#)
- [ILO Employment Policy Convention, 1964 \(No 122\)](#)
- [ILO Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 \(No 100\)](#)
- [ILO Forced Labour Convention, 1930 \(No 29\)](#)
- [ILO Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 \(No 87\)](#)
- [ILO Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 \(No 81\)¹](#)
- [ILO Minimum Age Convention, 1973 \(No 138\)](#)
- [ILO Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 \(No 98\)](#)
- [ILO Tripartite Consultation \(International Labour Standards\) Convention, 1976 \(No 144\), 1976](#)
- [ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 \(No 182\)](#)
- [International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, 1965](#)
- [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights \(ICCPR\), 1966](#)
- [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966](#)
- [Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Organized Crime \(2000\)](#)
- [Protocol relating to the status of refugees, 1967](#)
- [Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, 2003](#)

Reservations/declarations:

- 1 Part II, Articles 22-24 (labour inspection in commerce).