From Strategy to Action: Implementing the Route-Based Approach

August 2025 Edition

Dear all,

We are pleased to share UNHCR update offering key highlights from August 2025 on the implementation of the route-based approach. This issue showcases progress across regions through dialogue with States and other stakeholders, policy engagement, operational responses, inter-agency collaboration, and capacity-building efforts to better address the challenges of mixed and onward movements of refugees and migrants. This update forms part of our ongoing efforts to inform stakeholders and partners of developments, opportunities and issues on priority mixed movements routes. UNHCR collaborates closely with States, IOM, UN agencies, refugee-led organizations, civil society and other stakeholders on the operationalization of the route-based approach.

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Key Engagement with States and Otehr Stakeholders

- **Addressing the route-based approach during the 9th Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD 9)**

During his participation at the TICAD 9, the Assistant High Commissioner for Operations spoke at a side event on Migration and Human Security in Africa (21 August), where he highlighted the route-based approach as a practical framework to address protection risks and provide solutions along mixed movement routes, stressing its close connection with sustainable responses.

- **Global NGO consultations on protection and assistance in the context of mixed movements**

On 28 August, UNHCR, IOM, and ICVA held the third global NGO consultations on the route-based approach focused on addressing immediate protection and assistance needs. The discussion emphasized the protection of children in mixed movements, with contributions from Save the Children, KIND, and others. Participants shared good practices, identified priority areas, and explored opportunities for joint actions. Regional NGO consultations are also planned, including in the EHAGL region (3 September) and Asia Pacific (mid-September).

- **Asia-Pacific: capacity building on protection-sensitive entry systems under the Bali Process**

On 14–15 August, UNHCR and the Bali Process Regional Support Office provided capacity building for Indonesian and Malaysian officials on the Andaman Sea route, focusing on legal frameworks linking protection at sea, trafficking, and smuggling. The session also introduced the joint Screening and Referral App, expected to be piloted in selected Member States from 2025 onwards.

- **Panoramic/route-based approach featured at the Asia Dialogue on Forced Migration**

At the Asia Dialogue on Forced Migration (21–22 August), UNHCR and IOM presented the approach as a framework for coordinated responses, with elements proposed for the meeting's outcome recommendations.

Route Level Highlights

- **Implementation of the new Standard Operating Procedures for the Disembarkation in Mauritania**

Following the recent adoption of the SOPs for the Disembarkation and Care of Migrants, on 27 August, UNHCR and IOM supported the authorities with their implementation in practice following a shipwreck of two boats. The effective use of these SOPs enabled a coordinated response, including screening of survivors and the provision of immediate assistance by UNHCR, IOM, and the Red Cross.

- **Senegal: advancing cooperation to address the needs of expelled refugees and migrants**

In Rosso, a joint mission between UNHCR, IOM and the NGO CIAUD took place on 17-19 August. The mission identified urgent needs in the accommodation centre for refugees and migrants in mixed movements paving the way for coordinated humanitarian responses to support those expelled from Mauritania.

- **Sudan: new border monitoring tool**

In Sudan, UNHCR launched an enhanced Border Monitoring Tool, moving beyond profiling to capture risks, needs, and onward movement patterns, strengthening data for planning and advocacy.

- **Djibouti: study highlights reliance on smugglers and unmet needs**

Preliminary results of a joint UNHCR–MMC study confirmed high onward movement intentions towards Saudi Arabia, widespread reliance on smugglers, and critical unmet needs. The findings underscore the importance of expanding information provision and services through Multi-Purpose Hubs along the routes.

- **Southern Africa Route: mapping unprecedented mixed movements**

The UNHCR Regional Bureau updated its mapping of mixed movement corridors, reporting unprecedented levels of movement, particularly into the DRC. Partnership with MMC delivered new qualitative research in Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, while in South Africa, UNHCR expanded asylum system capacity with new Surge staff and initiated work on a Practitioners' Handbook on Refugee Law.

- **The Americas: new transfer agreements**

The U.S. formalized transfer agreements with Honduras, Guatemala, and Paraguay, while discussions are ongoing with other countries in the region. In this context, UNHCR proactively engaged with governments to promote adherence to international standards and to provide support in core areas including reception, asylum, documentation, and solutions

- Agreement Between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Republic of Honduras for Cooperation in the Examination of Protection Requests
- Agreement Between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Republic of Guatemala Relating to the Transfer of Nationals of Central American Countries to Guatemala
- Signing of a Safe Third Country Agreement with Paraguay

Research, Data and Guidance

- **Guidance on the lawful transfers of refugees and asylum seekers**

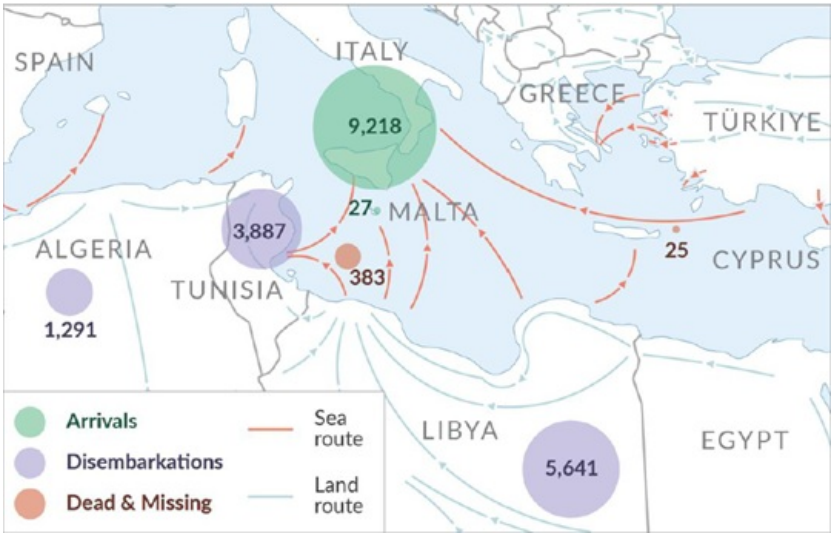
UNHCR continues to advance work on policy options with publishing a guidance on the lawful transfers of refugees and asylum seekers to clarify the conditions under which international transfer agreements can be consistent with international law. The International Agreements for the Transfer of Refugees and Asylum outlines the legal basis, scope, and safeguards necessary to ensure that transfers are conducted in line with international protection principles and standards, and in a manner that advances responsibility sharing, solidarity and sustainability. It stresses that persons already recognized as refugees by the current host State should not be transferred, and that agreements must guarantee access to fair and efficient asylum procedures, lawful stay, and core rights in the receiving country. In line with its mandate, UNHCR may play a role in advising States on the design of transfer agreements, monitoring their implementation, and ensuring adherence to protection standards, while continuing to underscore that such measures must complement, not replace, State asylum responsibilities.

- **Regional Guidance Note on Returns Issued by R4V and REDLAC**

The R4V and REDLAC Inter-Sector Coordination Groups issued a guidance note on International and Regional Standards Applicable in the Context of Returns. The note clarifies terminology, outlines applicable safeguards, and provides recommendations for stakeholders involved in return procedures. It was initiated by the Regional Protection Sector in March 2025, following requests from members, in light of new deportation modalities affecting several countries in the region. (see here)

- **Central Mediterranean Route Report Highlights Shifts in Departures and Profiles**

As part of operationalizing UNHCR's analytical framework on mixed and onward movements, colleagues begun producing regular route-based reports. In August, the Central Mediterranean Route Q1 2025 Report was published, documenting a reduction in overall sea departures compared to last year, with most departures concentrated in Libya and a sharp decline from Tunisia. The report highlights shift in profiles of arrivals, with more people coming from conflict-affected countries with clear protection needs. It underscores urgent protection risks and calls for strengthened asylum and border management, expanded search-and-rescue capacities, and broader safe and regular pathways (see here and here).



- **Second quarterly joint UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP and partners Mixed Movements Monitoring Report**

Since 2023, more than 42,000 interviews were conducted in eight countries, providing harmonized data on drivers, risks, and needs. The Q2 report confirmed major shifts in mobility dynamics: northbound flows sharply declined, with U.S. border encounters down 89% compared to 2024 and irregular crossings through the Darién Gap nearly ceasing. At the same time, southbound or reverse movements have grown, with significant returns reported in Colombia and Honduras, often under high-risk conditions. Mexico overtook the U.S. as the most cited intended destination, reflecting changing mobility patterns. Despite reduced overall numbers, protection risks remain high, with more than half of respondents reporting incidents en route. The findings underscore the need for strengthened regional responses and information provision along routes, in line with the hemispheric approach. The full report is available here.

Acknowledging support for the Route-Based Approach

UNHCR extends its sincere appreciation to donor governments and partners who already contributed to the implementation of the route-based approach. Their support enables concrete protection- and solutions-focused programming along key mixed movement routes.

UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

This email was sent by: The Division of International Protection (DIP)
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