OUTCOME REPORT

UNHCR Regional Workshop on Operationalizing the Route-Based Approach (RBA) in Asia and the Pacific

📅 27–28 November 2025 | 🌐 **Location:** Hybrid (Bangkok & Virtual)

BACKGROUND

As a follow-up to the 2025 UNHCR Regional Consultations with NGOs in Asia and the Pacific in September and building on earlier discussions to advance the Route-Based Approach (RBA), the UNHCR Regional Workshop in November 2025 convened 50 participants representing 39 organizations. These included NGOs and networks, refugee-led, migrant-led, and stateless-led groups, faith-based actors, academic institutions, humanitarian organizations, and UN agencies.

The primary objective was to foster a shared understanding of the RBA and identify priority actions for its operationalization along two key onward and mixed movement routes: the South and South-East Asia (SSEA) Route[1] and the South-West Asia (SWA) Route.[2] These routes present complex and evolving mobility patterns, requiring coordinated, multi-stakeholder responses to address protection risks and enhance solutions.

Over two days, participants engaged in in-depth discussions on six mutually reinforcing pillars and cross-cutting enablers designed to strengthen protection, inclusion, and solutions along these routes.

This report consolidates the key outcomes, priority areas, and proposed next steps, structured by day and pillars for clarity and ease of reference. The agenda of the UNHCR Regional Workshop on Operationalizing the RBA in Asia and the Pacific is annexed.

[1] Covers movements from Myanmar and Bangladesh branching into two corridors: one through Mainland and Insular South-East Asia (Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia) and, to a lesser extent, onward to Oceania (South-East Asia Sub-Route); and another to India and, to a lesser extent, Sri Lanka (South Asia Sub-Route).

[2] Covers movements from Afghanistan to Pakistan and Iran, and to some extent to Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, onward to Europe.

DAY 1- DISCUSSION OVERVIEW

RBA Conceptual Framework & Principles

The morning session on Day 1 emphasized core principles guiding the RBA. First, the **humanitarian imperative** was reaffirmed, with protection and solutions identified as central to all interventions, regardless of operational or political constraints. Responses must uphold humanitarian principles and safeguard rights and dignity throughout the journey.

Second, **collaboration** was highlighted as a critical enabler for impact. Stronger coordination across agencies and sectors, combined with meaningful inclusion of refugee and migrant-led and community-based organizations, was considered essential for designing responsive and context-specific interventions. These actors provide frontline support and unique insights into the realities of people on the move.

Finally, discussions underscored the importance of **incremental progress** and the need to **avoid containment approaches.** Operationalization of the RBA should build on existing frameworks and good practices, allowing for pragmatic steps that deliver tangible results over time. At the same time, policies or practices that restrict mobility were cautioned against, with emphasis placed on recognizing movement as a potential protection strategy and ensuring that responses offer safe and regular pathways rather than forcing dangerous journeys.

Case Studies and Good Practices

Session 2 highlighted practical models and tools within and beyond the Asia-Pacific region that demonstrate how the RBA can be operationalized. The examples showcased innovative solutions for delivering protection and assistance, leveraging data for informed decision-making, and strengthening frontline capacities. The good practices presented illustrate approaches that could potentially be adapted and scaled across the Asia-Pacific region and informed the forthcoming pillar specific discussions:

I. Humanitarian Service Points (IFRC)

Safe, neutral spaces offering multi-sectoral services at key points of vulnerability. The IFRC model provides material support, dignity, and continuity of care along mixed movement routes. These physical hubs facilitate access to health, psychosocial support, and essential services, and present opportunities for linkages with Multi-Purpose Hubs and Migrant Resource Centers.

II. Data-Driven Protection – Migration Risk Mapping (MMC)

The Mixed Migration Center introduced the *Pathways to Protection (P2P)* initiative, emphasizing evidence-based approaches to strengthening protection systems. This model leverages robust data and analysis on mixed movements, highlighting non-linear mobility patterns and promoting peer-to-peer engagement, layered communication strategies, and tailored responses.

III. Screening & Referral Toolkit (UNHCR/Bali Process RSO)

A mobile application designed for frontline officials to support protection-sensitive entry and referral processes. The toolkit provides multilingual, illustrated guidance for screening, vulnerability identification, and referral pathways, enabling timely and appropriate responses at border points and reception facilities.

Key themes emerging from discussions

- *Strengthening Refugee-Led and Community-Based Organizations*
  Participants highlighted the critical role of refugee-led and grassroots actors in delivering frontline assistance and shaping context-specific solutions. Proposals included targeted capacity-building, sustained funding, and formal inclusion in coordination platforms.
- *Improving Coordination and Real-Time Referral Networks*
  The need for timely, accurate referrals was underscored as essential for protection-sensitive entry and continuity of care along routes. Suggestions included developing interoperable referral systems, leveraging digital tools, and linking local mechanisms to regional structures.
- *Advocacy Against Pushbacks and Securitization*
  Concerns were raised about restrictive practices and security-driven responses that undermine humanitarian principles. Collective advocacy with States and donors was proposed to ensure access to territory, uphold non-refoulement, and maintain protection space. The need to advocate for the application of international refugee law, international human rights law and customary international law was seen as important for achieving protection gains in the diverse legal contexts of the two sub-regions.
- *Mapping Services and Pathways; Empowering People with Accurate Information*
  Service mapping and pathway identification were identified as priorities to reduce risks and enable informed decision-making among refugees and migrants. Participants stressed the importance of multi-channel communication strategies and community engagement to disseminate accurate and up-to-date and reliable information.

- *Research for Evidence-Based Policy Change*
  Evidence generation was recognized as a cornerstone for influencing policy and operational frameworks. Recommendations included collaborative research initiatives to document mobility trends, protection gaps and advocacy for protection gains, and the impact of interventions.
- *Coordination Through a Bottom-Up Approach*
  A broad concurrence emerged on linking local referral networks to regional coordination structures. This approach aims to ensure inclusivity, reflect realities on the ground, and promote adaptive, context-driven responses.

Deep Dive – Priorities & Challenges for RBA Pillars 1-3

The session focused on translating the RBA into actionable priorities across the first three RBA pillars, while identifying operational challenges that need to be addressed.

Under **Pillar 1: Protection-Sensitive Entry, Screening & Admission**, participants emphasized the urgency of safeguarding humanitarian principles at borders and disembarkation points. Advocacy with States and donors was seen as critical to prevent pushbacks and ensure access to territory.

Challenges and Gaps:

Persistent securitization of borders and restrictive practices continue to undermine access to territory. Pushbacks and prolonged detention remain common at entry points, compounded by poor information on rights and laws and weak referral networks. Limited humanitarian presence and inadequate coordination between agencies further exacerbate these issues, while political sensitivities around irregular entry complicate operational engagement.

Priority Activity Areas:

To address these challenges, participants proposed a set of practical actions:

- Strengthen advocacy with States and donors to uphold humanitarian principles and prevent pushbacks at borders and disembarkation points.
- Establish SOPs for screening, triage, and onward referrals, supported by interoperable, real-time referral systems to ensure continuity of care.
- Map and reinforce referral networks for health, GBV/child protection and legal aid at coastal and border locations.
- Enhance frontline capacity through peer learning exchanges between States and civil society actions and tools such as mobile screening applications and multilingual guidance.

- Draw on community systems and engage border actors to promote humane reception practices.
- Maintain monitoring of denial patterns (pushbacks, detention) and share findings to improve reception standards.

For **Pillar 2: Strengthening Asylum Systems and Rights-Based Migration Management,** discussions focused on the need to move beyond fragmented and siloed approaches toward integrated systems that link asylum and migration management. Participants emphasized that inconsistent and ad hoc responses often result from treating these domains separately. A joined-up approach was considered essential to streamline procedures, reduce duplication, and ensure predictability for both states and affected populations.

Challenges and Gaps

Current systems remain fragmented, with legal frameworks varying widely across countries and limited ratification of international instruments. This lack of harmonization leads to inconsistent practices and delays in processing, leaving individuals vulnerable to protection gaps. Resource constraints and insufficient institutional capacity further compound these challenges, while siloed structures prevent effective coordination between asylum and migration management. Participants also noted weak linkages between local referral networks and national systems, resulting in missed opportunities for timely case management and continuity of care.

Priority Activity Areas Proposed by Participants

- Supporting States in establishing quality asylum systems (fairness, efficiency, sustainability and integrity) with relevant case processing modalities to manage asylum responses, and in developing rights-based migration management governance to enable timely and appropriate migration responses.
- Progressively integrate when appropriate asylum and migration systems, noting that abrupt changes may be politically sensitive.
- Capacity-building plans to close gaps over time, including child-sensitive procedures and alternatives to detention (ATD).
- Seek system synergies between asylum and migration management to reduce possible duplication and improve predictability for specific components (in relation to reception, registration and identity management, as well as referral pathways across asylum and migration channels).
- Linking local referral networks to asylum systems to ensure timely case management.

- Harmonized referral protocols and interoperable data systems to strengthen coordination and information sharing across borders.
- Evidence-based advocacy and research to support policy reform and operational improvements.

Under **Pillar 3: Addressing immediate protection and assistance needs and comprehensively addressing trafficking and smuggling**, discussions focused on ensuring rapid, life-saving assistance for refugees, asylum-seekers, stateless persons, and migrants, while maintaining dignity and continuity of care. Participants emphasized that immediate protection measures must go beyond basic relief to include accurate information flows, community-led interventions, and linkages to longer-term solutions. The aim is to stabilize households quickly and reduce exposure to exploitation and harm during onward movement.

Challenges and Gaps

Participants noted persistent gaps in service delivery at reception points and along routes. Limited resources and fragmented coordination often result in delays in providing essential services such as protection, core relief (non-food) items, and health care. The absence of standardized referral protocols and weak linkages between local and regional systems hinder protection interventions. In addition, lack of accurate, timely information leaves refugees and migrants vulnerable to misinformation and unsafe decisions. These challenges are compounded by heightened risks of trafficking and exploitation during onward journeys.

Priority Activity Areas Proposed by Participants

- Accurate information flows through layered communication strategies and community engagement to enable informed decision-making, complemented by data collection and research to inform interventions and advocacy.
- Rapid protection led by refugee, migrant and community-based organizations, including community-level screening to accelerate referrals.
- Livelihood linkages by embedding life-saving livelihood options—such as emergency cash-for-work—into immediate assistance packages to stabilize households quickly.
- Community-oriented management of reception and transit sites leveraging humanitarian service points and multi-purpose hubs to ensure continuity of care, complemented by integrated services aligned with other response pillars.

- Strengthened referral networks linking local actors to regional structures for timely case management and multi-sectoral support, with peer-learning opportunities to share good practices.

DAY 2- DISCUSSION OVERVIEW

Deep Dive – Priorities & Challenges for RBA Pillars 4-6

The session focused on translating the RBA into actionable priorities across pillars 4-6, while identifying operational challenges that need to be addressed.

Discussions under **Pillar 4 – Protection and Rights-Centred Options** focused on advancing inclusion and rights-based approaches to reduce vulnerability and promote social cohesion. Participants emphasized that access to national services and legal identity are fundamental for stabilizing and supporting populations and enabling long-term solutions. Regional frameworks (e.g. Bali Process and ASEAN) and bilateral exchanges were highlighted as practical entry points for progress.

Challenges and Gaps

Formal integration into national systems remains limited in many contexts along both routes, leaving refugees and migrants reliant on ad hoc or humanitarian-led services. Xenophobia and misinformation continue to undermine social cohesion, while weak partnerships between refugee and migrant-led organizations and national civil society and other actors restrict advocacy and service delivery. Resource constraints and the absence of pooled funding mechanisms further hinder efforts to scale inclusion initiatives.

Priority Activity Areas Proposed by Participants

- Facilitate access to national services, including education, health, and social protection.
- Promote legal identity and civil registration to reduce vulnerability and enable rights.
- Support community engagement and social cohesion to counter xenophobia and misinformation.
- Strengthen partnerships between refugee and migrant-led organizations and national civil society for advocacy and service delivery.
- Build inclusion tracks through regional declarations and commitments
- Consider pooled funding to reinforce service provision where formal integration lags.

- Map service providers and identify connectors (local CSOs, National Societies, private sector); promote frontline exchange and training across routes.
- Pilot new or expand existing bilateral exchanges and peer-learning initiatives to advance alternatives to detention (ATD) and work rights where politically feasible.

For **Pillar 5 – Safe, Regular Pathways for Refugees and Migrants**. Participants highlighted the urgent need to expand safe and regular pathways to provide accessible and viable alternatives to dangerous irregular journeys. Labour mobility, education visas, and family reunification were identified as priority areas, alongside advocacy for humanitarian admission and resettlement. The discussion stressed the importance of accurate information and documentation to make these pathways accessible and scalable.

Challenges and Gaps

Current pathways remain extremely limited in volume and scope, with high costs and complex eligibility requirements. Family unity provisions are often absent, and scalable models are lacking. Inconsistent information and documentation gaps further restrict access, leaving refugees and migrants vulnerable to relying on irregular movements.

Priority Activity Areas Proposed by Participants

- Expand labour mobility schemes, education visas, and family reunification programmes.
- Map existing pathways and address barriers to access; produce country-specific maps and improve information accuracy through orientation services and call centres.
- Engage private sector and universities for skills development and job matching e.g. Talent Beyond Boundaries (TBB).
- Ensure travel-ready documentation and implement skills certification with universal curricula aligned to third-country schemes.
- Promote employer engagement and job matching models similar to TBB to link skills with opportunities.

Discussions on **Pillar 6 – Safe and Dignified Return, Readmission and Reintegration of migrants (and Voluntary Repatriation) of refugees** focused on creating conditions for voluntary, safe, and dignified return while ensuring reintegration support. Participants emphasized that return strategies must be rights-based, context-sensitive, and complemented by measures to strengthen local integration and self-reliance for those unable or unwilling to return.

Challenges and Gaps

Political instability, conflict and insecurity in countries of origin remain major barriers to safe return. Risks of premature or involuntary returns were highlighted, alongside the lack of clarity on rights and entitlements post-return. Fragile governance structures and limited access to services further complicate reintegration efforts. Participants highlighted that conditions are overall not conducive for return to many countries of origin in the region, especially with respect to refugees where the protection standards for voluntary repatriation are not met.

Priority Activity Areas Proposed by Participants

- Develop voluntary, safe, and dignified return frameworks with reintegration support.
- Strengthen local integration opportunities and self-reliance programmes for those remaining in host countries.
- Coordinate cross-border health and social data sharing to support reintegration.
- Enhance protection monitoring and service mapping in countries of origin; design return roadmaps with preconditions (safety, services, governance) and post-return monitoring.
- Prioritize legal identity, civil registration, and access to rights for returnees; embed livelihoods through early cash-for-work and gender-responsive programming.
- Address social dynamics and trust-building in fragile contexts; promote job creation and income generation.
- Use Track II dialogues to explore realistic prospects of return and consider differentiated approaches for Rohingya and other Myanmar nationals, acknowledging cyclical movements.

Collaboration Framework & Coordination Modalities

Session 8 of the UNHCR Regional Workshop on RBA Operationalization focused on how to coordinate effectively and operationalize the RBA across the Asia-Pacific region. Participants examined global models, regional structures, and practical options for collaboration, aiming to identify principles and next steps for a fit-for-purpose coordination mechanism.

Key Discussion Points

Levels of Coordination

Participants emphasized that there are different levels of coordination—local, national, bilateral, regional, and global—each important to the operationalization of the RBA. Stronger coordination currently exists at the local level, while regional and cross-country

mechanisms remain weak. A bottom-up approach was widely seen as essential to ensure local realities inform regional structures, while acknowledging that engagement at State and multilateral forum levels was essential to move forward.

Rigid versus Adaptive Models

The trade-off between structured and flexible coordination was discussed. While rigid models offer predictability and accountability, they risk being slow to adapt. Flexible, contextualized models allow responsiveness but can lack consistency. Adaptive, inclusive structures with clear terms of reference and regular reviews were recommended.

Stakeholder Mapping and Inclusivity

Mapping stakeholders along the routes was identified as a priority. Inclusivity—particularly of refugee and migrant-led and community-based organizations—was emphasized as essential for legitimacy and effectiveness.

Existing Mechanisms and Gaps

Participants noted that current regional platforms (e.g., ASEAN, SSAR, Bali Process) are not fully fit for purpose for route-based coordination. While these mechanisms can be leveraged, gaps in harmonization and mandate alignment require attention. Lessons from global models such as R4V (Venezuela Situation) and 3RP (Syria Situation) were considered, with caution given to resource constraints and political sensitivities.

Ownership and Accountability

Clear roles and responsibilities are needed to avoid duplication and ensure accountability. Coordination should balance inclusivity with efficiency, allowing actors to engage at varying levels of commitment.

Recommendations and Next Steps

The final session of the UNHCR Regional Workshop on RBA Operationalization focused on translating two days of dialogue into actionable steps for operationalizing the RBA. Discussions emphasized the need for practical, inclusive, and adaptive coordination mechanisms that reflect local realities while aligning with regional priorities. More specifically, the following actions were proposed as a potential way forward which were approved by the participants:

- *Establish an Interim Regional Consultation Group*
  A representative body tasked with drafting Terms of Reference, identifying priority workstreams, and exploring coordination options. Membership should be focused, while seeking to attain broad and diverse inclusion of representatives from refugee and

migrant-led organizations, NGOs, CSOs, UN agencies, humanitarian organizations and other stakeholders.

- *Create a Field Reference Group*
  Comprising the maximum possible breadth and diversity of actors engaged in strategic, advocacy and programmatic delivery to persons on the move, with emphasis on those working closest to delivery points, to provide practical insights and ensure that coordination models reflect operational realities. The group will support and provide feedback on TORs and proposed activities proposed by the Interim Regional Consultation Group.

- *Immediate Actions*
  - Map existing coordination platforms and stakeholders.
  - Define priority activities under each RBA pillar for short- and medium-term implementation.
  - Develop TORs outlining roles, responsibilities, and communication lines between regional and field levels.

- *Short & Mid-Term Milestones*
  - Circulate draft TORs for consultation (Q1 2026).
  - Convene first meeting of Interim Regional Consultation Group.
  - Develop roadmap for operationalization with clear priorities and timelines.

Acknowledgements and Appreciation

UNHCR extends its sincere appreciation to all participants of the workshop. Your time and expertise were central to shaping the outcomes of this event.

Disclaimer

This summary report was prepared following the UNHCR Regional Workshop on Operationalizing the Route-Based Approach (RBA) in Asia and the Pacific, held in a hybrid format on 27–28 November 2025. The non-exhaustive content captured in this summary reflects the discussions and inputs shared by participants during the event.

END