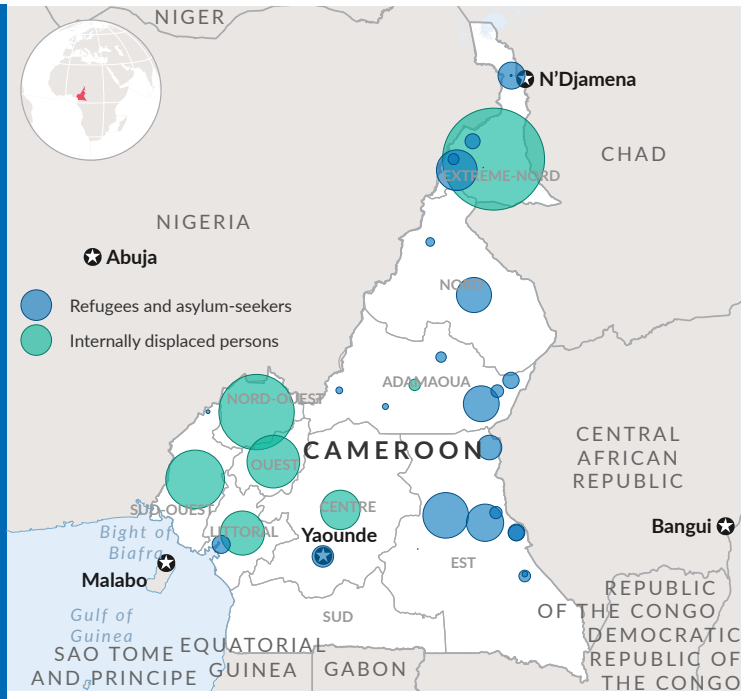
UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

# Country Summary as at 30 June 2023
(Update of Summary as at 30 June 2020)

## REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON

As of 30 June 2023, Cameroon provides protection to 477,845 refugees and asylum-seekers from 30 countries (+53,121 increase since the June 2020 baseline). The increase in refugee numbers is mostly attributed to the continuous arrivals of individuals from Central African Republic (CAR) and Nigeria to rural areas combined with the recognition as refugees of a significant number of asylum seekers whose applications had been pending for months. Most refugees are from CAR (350,428) and Nigeria (116,183) and have fled widespread violence and ongoing conflict with Boko Haram respectively. The internal crisis in the Southwest and Northwest Regions of Cameroon continued to result in internal displacement, estimated at 1,066,254 individuals (+64,975 increase since June 2020). Despite these challenges, Cameroon has maintained an open-door policy for refugees fleeing violence in neighboring countries.




Most of the refugees have continued to live in remote border regions, which are among the poorest in the country. 96 per cent of CAR refugees live in the seven planned settlements ("managed sites") in the East, North and Adamawa regions, as well as in 300 host villages scattered over a large geographical area. A very small minority of refugees have been living in the urban centres of Douala and Yaoundé, mainly in rented accommodation. Since June 2020, 14,500 Nigerian refugees have settled in the northwest and southwest regions, while 117,738 have remained in the Minawao camp in the Far North Region. Thanks to the 2019 tripartite agreement between Cameroon, CAR and UNHCR, more than 5,000 refugees repatriated to CAR during the period under review. Security and ongoing instability in the countries of origin, as well as limited reintegration programs, are the major constraints to repatriation.

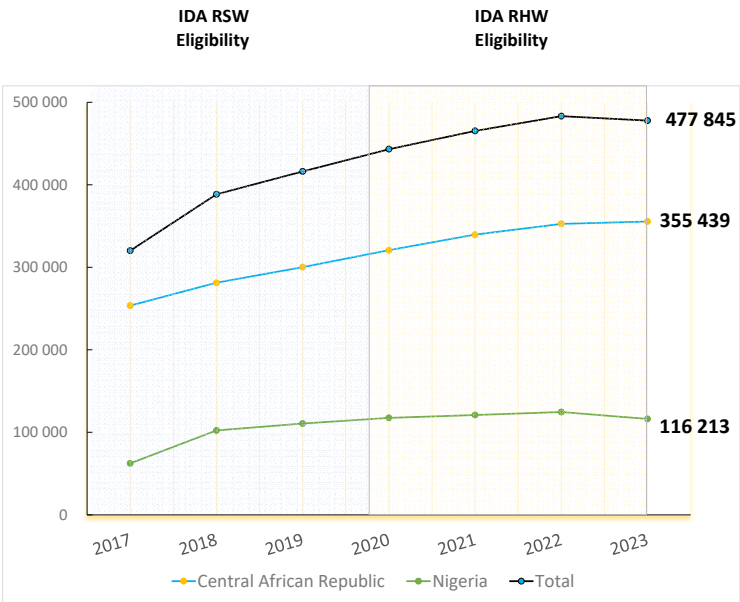
### KEY POPULATION DATA (as of 30 June 2023)

**469,276**
**Refugees**

**8,569**
**Asylum-seekers**

**1.7%**
**of the total number of local population (estimated at 28,000,0000) are refugees and asylum-seekers**

**1,066,254**
**Estimated number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)**




**IDA18 RSW/IDA 19 WHR**
**Eligibility: September 2017**

# POLICY DIMENSIONS

(as of 30 June 2023)

## 1. Host Communities

### 1.1 Support for communities in refugee-hosting areas

Since June 2022, there has been no change in Cameroon's national, fiscal, and budget policies or mechanisms for timely additional financial transfers from national level to refugee-hosting areas.

The allocation of national budget to the regions is still not based on indicators that take into account the presence of refugees.

Nevertheless, in line with the decentralization process, refugees' needs and concerns are progressively taken into consideration in local planning in spite of prioritization and implementation challenges. Refugees and IDPs will be recruited in the construction work of the Mora - Dabanga - Kousseri road. Those living along that road including host communities will benefit from the community infrastructure.

The 2017 National Social Protection Policy (PNPS) that established the policy objective of social safety nets for all Cameroonians, including the host communities, remained unchanged. The World Bank-financed Social Safety Net Project (Projet Filets Sociaux – PF), which started in 2013 and was expanded in 2018 (Social Safety Nets for Crisis Response), ran until the end of 2022. The expansion phase, which was partially funded under the IDA 18 Refugee Sub/Window (RSW), targeted 40,000 households including 5,000 refugee households.

### 1.2 Social cohesion

Applicable national policies that help identify, prevent, and mitigate potential social tension and risks of violence in refugee-hosting areas have remained unchanged. In addition to policies, Decree no. 78/263 of 03 September 1978 also sets out the procedures for settling agro-pastoral disputes. Under the 2005 Cameroonian Refugee law, refugees can also take legal action in case of an agro-pastoral dispute.

In practice, conflict resolution mechanisms put in place by local authorities in rural areas involving both refugees and host community members continue to manage issues that arise, including agro-pastoral conflicts between refugee cattle keepers and national farmers in pastoral areas. Applicable national policies that formally protect refugees from discrimination remained unchanged.

Building on the decentralization law N ° 2019/024 of dec 24, 2019, the government has supported urban refugees' freedom of association through the creation of a committee for refugees (*Arrêté No. 000639/A/MINAT/SG/DAP/SDLP/SA/CBA du 9 mai 2023*) with branches across the 12 municipalities of Yaoundé (7) and Douala (5). On the strength of the official recognition by MINAT, the Committee aims at representing the refugees in their dealings with the authorities, promoting community support for the most vulnerable ones, working towards strengthened solidarity, and defending the rights and interests of refugees in all circumstances in Cameroon.

In practice, the high level of interaction between refugees and host communities has persisted, and the political discourse on refugees and asylum has remained favourable. Over the years, projects and programs developed by the Government and other actors have increasingly benefited both refugees and host communities, thus contributing to peaceful coexistence.

Many refugees share the same language and cultural and ethnic affinities with the host communities which contributes to peaceful coexistence even though some localized issues relating to land, resource-sharing

and co-habitation continue to arise. However, as a general rule, pre-emptive efforts by administrative and traditional authorities, as well as NGOs, ensure that disagreements are managed in a peaceful manner, as illustrated by a July 2020 study on refugees' access to land in the East and the Adamaoua regions - Etude sur l'accès des réfugiés à la terre dans les arrondissements de l'Est et de l'Adamaoua.

However, some refugees, particularly in urban areas, complain of discrimination in employment, negative use of language and occasional harassment by law enforcement officials.

### 1.3 Environmental management

The applicable national policies to mitigate the environmental impact of refugees in host areas remained unchanged. No law in this sector referring directly to refugees and/or host communities has been passed during the period. In practice, there are still material and financial challenges in the implementation of environment-related policies.

The issues of resilience, sustainability and environmental health in host areas are complex and comprise cultural, ecological, economic, social and political elements. Consequently, despite many organizations working in refugee-hosting landscapes, the persisting challenge is to achieve long-term, holistic, and sustainable solutions. In refugee settings, the objective is to transform at least 50 per cent of diesel-powered water infrastructure into renewable energy, especially solar hybrid systems. Access to water, sanitation infrastructure and services remain characterized by water scarcity in a context of cholera outbreak and low hygiene measures.

The effects of climate change are perceptible and greatly affect the lifestyles and production activities of the host and refugee populations (notably in the areas of agriculture, livestock, water, and resources).

### 1.4 Preparedness for refugee inflows

During the prescribed period, Cameroon's National Contingency Plan (2011), developed by the Civil Protection Directorate (DPC), has remained the applicable policy that provides the basis for a national preparedness framework. However, there has been no progress on setting up the institutional mechanisms that are meant to respond to increased or new refugee inflows in ways that minimize short- and medium-term socio-economic impacts.

In practice, regional contingency plans continue to be developed in collaboration with regional authorities and humanitarian organizations in refugee-hosting areas. In 2023, the contingency plans in the Eastern and the Far North Regions were updated. While involving relevant ministries and regional authorities, such contingency plans continue to be mainly led by international actors and only partially integrated into the national institutional structures.

## 2. Regulatory Environment and Governance

### 2.1 Normative framework

In addition to international and regional instruments, Law No 2005/006 of 27 July 2005 on the Status of Refugees (the 2005 Refugee Law) and Implementing Decree No 2011/389 dated 28 November 2011 (the 2011 Decree) continued to provide the national legal framework for the protection of refugees in Cameroon. Both texts have not been amended.

UNHCR continues to observe 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.

There has not been any progress made in transferring Refugee Status Determination (RSD) procedures to the Government. As of June 2023, the National Eligibility and Appeal Commissions, in charge of RSD and tasked to take decisions on asylum applications at first and secondary level, are still not operational, reportedly due to the lack of financial and human resources.

Additional challenges include the lack of a dedicated and financially independent government structure in charge of displacement and refugee issues. Nevertheless, it is expected that the transfer of responsibility to the Government for the registration and RSD processes will be completed in 2024.

## 2.2 Security of legal status

The policy framework regarding the security of legal status of refugees (2005 Refugee Law) has remained unchanged during the reporting period. There continues to be no policy limitations, such as deadlines or renewal/extension requirements. During the reporting period, there were no known cases of unlawful termination of refugee status by way of cancellation, revocation or cessation, and no case of recognized refugees being expelled on the grounds of national security or public order.

There are however still occasional reports of asylum seekers and refugees being arrested for illegal immigration by law enforcement officials because their identification cards issued by UNHCR are not identical to the national ID cards. Nevertheless, since the issuance of more than 4000 ID cards by the Government, no arbitrary arrest has been reported by those holding such documents.

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 updated the Gender Based Violence (GBV) National Strategy (2022-2026).

## 2.3 Institutional framework for refugee management and coordination

The institutional framework for refugee management, as provided by the 2005 Refugee Law and the 2011 Decree, has not gone through any change. The main institution remains 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 have kept silent on other institutions' responsibilities and on broader refugee management coordination responsibilities. The full implementation of the national refugee policy drawn up by MINREX would require greater collaboration between the various sectoral ministries and other national institutions on the day-to-day management of refugees, the provision of assistance or socio-economic issues.

Through its National Development Strategy 2020-2030 (NDS 30), the Government intends to develop and implement a disaster prevention and management strategy, strengthen crisis and disaster coordination and management at national, regional and local levels, and develop mass information and education programs on civil protection. In addition, the authorities undertake to strengthen the humanitarian response and to promote the reintegration of internally displaced persons.

To date, refugees have been excluded from Cameroon's national population census, which was last conducted in 2005.

Steps have been taken to include refugees in administrative data collection systems. Refugee data has remained part of the national health programs (malaria, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and immunization) and in the national nutritional surveys. However, the Education Management Information System (EMIS) is under development in Cameroon. Indeed, the national Education Reform Support Program (PAREC - Programme d'Appui à la Réforme de l'Education au Cameroun) has signed a collaboration agreement with UNESCO to help finalize the EMIS. EMIS is to form an integral part of the new 2023-2030 education strategy, which is being finalized.

Refugees have continued to participate in village development committees that contribute to elaborate the local development plans.

While MoUs have been signed between UNHCR and a growing number of States institutions and international organizations, Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training (MINEFOP-IL), Central Bureau for Census and Population Studies (BUCREP), Ministry of Health (MINSANTE) and collaboration with key ministries such as Ministry of Social Affairs (MINAS), Ministry for the Promotion of Women and the Family (MINPROFF) and Ministry of the Youth (MINJEC), much is yet to take place to formalize this commitment to ensure that refugees are effectively included in the respective plans and programs of the technical services of these entities.

## 2.4 Access to civil registration and documentation

The legal framework relating to refugees and asylum-seekers' documentation remains unchanged; however, progress has been observed with regards to the issuance of refugee documentation. Since July 2022, the Government issued 4,258 biometric ID cards to refugees out of the 200,000 who need them through the national security services (DGSN, Délégation Générale à la Sûreté Nationale). This issuance is the pilot phase of a broader undertaking that requires additional funding. These biometric documents not only facilitate the movement of refugees but also ease their access to basic services and the completion of numerous administrative formalities.

In the meantime, the Government has continued to issue non-machine Convention Travel Documents (CTDs) to refugees that are not compliant to International Convention Aviation Organization (ICAO) standards.

Refugees have continued to access civil documentation services. The same challenges in terms of accessing such services in remote areas, the lack of knowledge and capacity of the civil registrars and the lack of resources constraints continue to be observed. Most civil registration centres are still not digitized, making the production of global data almost impossible.

As per the National Civil Registration Bureau (BUNEC), the national birth registration rate for children aged 5 and under has not been updated since 2014. At the time, it was 66 per cent with wide regional disparities in the Far North Region (42 per cent), the North Region (60 per cent) and in the East Region (58 per cent).

## 2.5 Justice and security

The security levels enjoyed by refugees have seemingly remained the same. This is however based on general observations, not any specific research or study. Access to the Northwest and Southwest, which are refugee-receiving areas, has not been possible since March 2022 as a result of the ongoing conflict and generalized violence.

In practice, access to justice has remained limited both for refugees and host communities, due to capacity and resource constraints, limited legal aid and the physical distance of law enforcement actors. More accessible traditional dispute resolution mechanisms have continued to operate.

In May 2021, an agreement was reached between UNHCR and MINSANTE to enable all refugees in rural and urban areas to access the services of the Cameroonian health system, whose prevention and response objectives cover all forcibly displaced persons, including refugees, asylum-seekers and IDPs. A mapping of all the GBV stakeholders is being drawn up.

The implementation of GBV policies and effective access to services for refugee and host communities continue to be hampered by capacity and resource constraints, particularly in rural areas There are no data available to measure the actual progress made in terms of GBV prevention or to assess the efficiency and quality of the response mechanisms. Since February 2021, Cameroon has had a Country Gender Profile, which is used as a reference framework for gender equality and women's empowerment in the implementation of the National Development Strategy 2020-2030, and which addresses the gender inequalities issues.

# 3. Economic Opportunities

## 3.1 Freedom of movement

In practice, refugees and asylum-seekers do avail themselves of the right to move freely, although certain limitations exist. 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 is still in force in some locations. It was generally instituted by the authorities with the massive arrival of refugees from Central African Republic in 2013 and 2014 in order to control movements. The non-possession of this document continues to expose refugees to increased scrutiny from security forces during routine identity checks. There are ongoing reports of law enforcement officials extorting money from nationals and refugees during routine checks on public transport. Nevertheless, the issuance of biometric ID cards has globally contributed to easing the movements of refugees across the country.

## 3.2 Right to work and rights at work

The right to work for refugees has remained unaltered in law (2005 Refugee Law).

During the reporting period, Cameroon made progress in the implementation of the 2019 Global Refugee Forum (GRF) pledge on defining a framework of collaboration with UNHCR and the International Labour Organization (ILO) to reduce unemployment rates for refugees. The Minister of Employment and Vocational Training (MINEFOP), UNHCR and ILO signed a partnership agreement on 24 February 2021 to facilitate access to decent employment for refugees living in Cameroon. Valid for five years, this partnership has defined as its priority objectives the inclusion and integration of refugees in the Cameroonian labour market through access to training, apprenticeships and professional integration. The implementation of this collaboration framework may, as necessary, call on other employment and labour stakeholders, such as the Ministry of Labour and Social Security (MINTSS), Cameroon's employers' organizations (GICAM - Groupement Inter-patronal du Cameroun) and workers' organizations.

Refugees remain entitled to work in the public sector but only on a contractual basis. There are no known cases of refugees having been effectively recruited as contractual civil servants. Few refugees are actually able to obtain formal employment or set up a formal business. In collaboration with UNHCR, ILO is developing a guide on the formal establishment of enterprises, which will be published in November 2023.

Refugees who hold diplomas recognized by the competent authorities in Cameroon may exercise a liberal profession. However, in practice, very few of them have the required professional profile to do so. The number of refugees with relevant professional profiles and able to exercise a liberal profession has remained marginal.

Among urban refugees, there are ongoing reports of some employers refusing occasionally to accept the refugee card as evidence of their entitlement to work. Refugees in search of employment continue to seek UNHCR recommendation letters for certification of their refugee status and their right to work.

Less than five per cent of the refugee population are reportedly engaged in formal employment. This outdated estimate is not supported by any official data. Access to work for refugees remains difficult because of limited job opportunities, a high unemployment rate among nationals and a generally constrained socio-economic environment. All these challenges in accessing formal employment result in a significant number of refugees entering the informal labour and business market. However, there is also no official data on the number of refugees working in the informal sector.

The applicable legal framework for the protection of working refugees has remained the same, ensuring equal treatment as nationals. However, there are ongoing reports of employers taking advantage of the

precarious socioeconomic situation of refugees and refusing to provide written work contracts.

## 3.3 Land, housing, and property rights

The legal provisions and practical modalities for refugees to access land have not changed. The low purchasing power of refugees means that it remains extremely difficult for them to buy a plot of land. In the meantime, access to land for farming purposes continues to be governed by community and traditional leaders who can allow refugees to access such plots for periods of three years. In the Eastern regions, some 40 mixed groups of refugees and host communities have been able to access land for renewable periods of three years. The plots have been made accessible by mayors or villages leaders against a share of the harvest profit.

There are, however, recurrent challenges during harvesting periods which can result in conflicts between refugees and host communities. They are most often resolved through a mediation dialogue among the concerned parties and community leaders, which UNHCR can facilitate. A technical working group on Housing, Land and Property (HLP) has been established in the Far North and Western regions thanks to Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and another one is foreseen in the Eastern region in 2024. One of the objectives of such working groups is to inform the local population about refugees' HLP rights.

Refugees have continued to be entitled in law to purchase, lease or use housing and immoveable property on par with nationals but very few in practice exercise their right to purchase due to their dire economic situation. In urban centres, refugees generally continue to lease or use housing based on formal or informal agreements.

While the national housing policy and the social housing program have been validated with the construction of 10,000 social housing units and the development of 50,000 plots of land, UNHCR is not aware of refugees benefiting from the program.

## 3.4 Financial and administrative services

The applicable law governing the banking and the credit sectors in Cameroon has remained unchanged. In practice, refugees are gradually gaining access to financial services. However, mainly those living in urban areas with stable employment have bank accounts and can possibly access credit facilities. The possession of biometric cards providing a national identity card number in the same format as nationals has somehow facilitated access to financial services, in particular the opening of bank accounts. However, this applies to a small proportion of refugees. Most continue to be deprived of bank accounts and financial services because some financial institutions do not accept the refugee card issued by UNHCR as a means of identification, and because they are unable to provide guarantees to obtain loans, or to present viable projects or their ability to repay.

Refugees have continued to register SIM cards and use mobile money services with mobile operators, despite facing technical challenges. Thanks to advocacy and better awareness of identity documents, all operators now accept UNHCR ID cards for SIM card subscription. MTN, one of the largest phone companies in Cameroon, specifically mentions in its guidance to vendors the refugee identity card as a means of identification. Almost all financial transactions carried out by refugees are made via mobile money.

# 4. Access to National Public Services

## 4.1 Education

The legal framework entitling refugees to the same treatment as nationals in terms of access to education at all levels and applicable fees has remained in force.

As part of the development of the 2022-2030 Government national education strategy and related plans and budgets, a chapter dedicated to crises has been included in the Status Report on the National Education System (RESEN), which serves as the basis for the new education strategy currently being finalized. Ensuring sustainable and predictable refugee-inclusive budgeting is a key aspect of the future strategy. It is expected that a guidance note, or a national refugee education strategy will be developed to contribute to a comprehensive implementation of the national education strategy.

Despite persisting challenges, such as a lack of infrastructure and learning materials, high teacher/student ratio, the unaddressed capacity of teachers, building needs and the legal requirement of a birth certificate to sit for exams, the Government of Cameroon has been increasingly committed to plan and respond to the education needs of refugees and asylum-seekers. It has also made progress on the 2019 education related GRF pledge, which aims to ensure that refugee pupils have the same access to free primary education as nationals.

All refugee children living in Cameroon continue to have the same access to education as nationals, and to benefit from government programs such as PAREC and Education Cannot Wait – Multi-Year Resilience Programme (ECW-MYRP).

## 4.2 Health care

Refugees have continued to benefit from access to public health-care services on an equal footing with nationals. The National Health Sector Strategy, covering the period 2016-2027, remained valid. A Strategic Plan for integration of refugees into the national health system was developed by the Government for the period 2021-2025, in line with the pledge made at the Global Refugee Forum in 2019 to include refugees in national health strategies and plans.

In May 2021, an agreement was reached between UNHCR and MINSANTE to enable all refugees in rural and urban areas to access the services of the Cameroonian health system at the same level as the host population. It stipulates that MINSANTE and UNHCR will respectively cover 30 per cent and 70 per cent of the healthcare costs.

In 2022, 91 per cent of refugees had access to health services. Despite this achievement, there are still financial barriers for both refugees and nationals to freely accessing health services, especially in urban areas.

Refugees continue to be included in national health surveys and programs (malaria, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, nutrition, sexual and reproductive services etc.) in the same way as the host population.

In refugee hosting areas, the host population enjoys ongoing access to health facilities set up for refugees.

There has been no progress with regards to the development of a public health insurance scheme. The Universal Health Coverage system (UHC) is being gradually implemented and the process of enrolling refugees is underway.

## 4.3 Social protection

The applicable legal framework has remained the same over the period (Article 9 of the 2005 refugee law stating that "refugees have the right to 'public and social assistance' within the limits of the rights granted to nationals"). The December 2017 National Social Protection Policy (PNPS), that specifies levels of assistance to persons with specific needs and includes refugees as potential beneficiaries of specialized services, has not been amended. The World Bank funded Social Safety Net program has been implemented throughout the period to facilitate the integration of refugees into existing national social protection systems.

The contributory social protection scheme managed by the National Social Insurance Fund (CNPS), which provides basic family and old age benefits as well as protection for work-related accidents, has remained in force. Thanks to biometric cards, refugees can now register with the CNPS. Nonetheless, the benefits of this scheme remain limited to individuals working in the formal sector and declared by their employer, consequently very few refugees benefit in practice.

Work with MINSANTE is being pursued to ensure refugees are included in the upcoming Universal Social Coverage and for the implementation of the 2021 Health Convention.

In practice, UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations continue to provide basic levels of assistance to refugees with specific needs. At the same time, the services of MINAS and MINPROFF have remained available to refugees for social action and rehabilitation, mainly in urban areas, but were limited to counselling, psychosocial support and mediation. Refugees with disabilities are still not entitled to the invalidity cards available to nationals, which give discounts on public transport, for schools and health costs.

No progress has been made in setting up a framework for dialogue between the Government and international partners with a view to gradually aligning external aid for people with specific needs with existing national social protection systems.

## 4.4 Protection for vulnerable groups

In the National Development Strategy 30, the Government intends to empower the capacities of vulnerable people, defined as women in distress, people with a disability, displaced people, refugees, the elderly, indigenous people etc., by setting up reception, care, support, rehabilitation and training facilities. This will be done by supporting the actions of community groups working on behalf of these people and by ensuring that their specific rights are respected. No data is yet available on the number of beneficiaries of these various forms of support.

The National Development Strategy complements national policies, standards and services that have been in place for the protection of vulnerable groups of nationals and which have continuously extended to refugees.

Practical access to these specialized services has remained limited as their availability is often restricted to urban centres. Where they do exist, their capacity to provide effective and quality support is weak. Effective case management services for GBV survivors do not yet exist in the country and they remain highly ineffective for children. Family-based care programs do not yet exist either.

# 5. Cross Sectors

**Characteristics of registered refugees and asylum-seekers in total refugee population**
as of 30 June 2023

**54%** Children

**4%** Older persons

**2.2%** Persons with disabilities

**48%** Men/Boys

**52%** Women/Girls

## 5.1 Gender

The five priority areas most consequential in terms of socioeconomic development include:

a. Women's effective participation in community-based leadership structures to ensure inclusion and empowerment.
b. Limited provision of appropriate services by national authorities and access to quality services which alter the quality of the protection available to women.
c. Unequal access to education and disproportionate rates of drop-out linked to discrimination and early marriage.
d. Power imbalances between men and women and discrimination in the area of housing, land and property rights.
e. Increased risks of exploitation by employers of refugee women in difficult socioeconomic situations, resulting in dangerous jobs and harmful practices such as survival sex.

## 5.2 Social inclusion

The three priority areas most consequential in terms of socioeconomic development are:

a. **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 the government to issue refugee identity documents.
b. **Right to work and rights at work:** addressing refugee perceptions of discrimination in employment and livelihoods due to status, gender and nationality; and crucially, the lack of government-issued refugee identity documents.
c. **Social protection:** supporting inclusion in national social protection schemes and the national social registry for targeted support to refugees with specific needs.