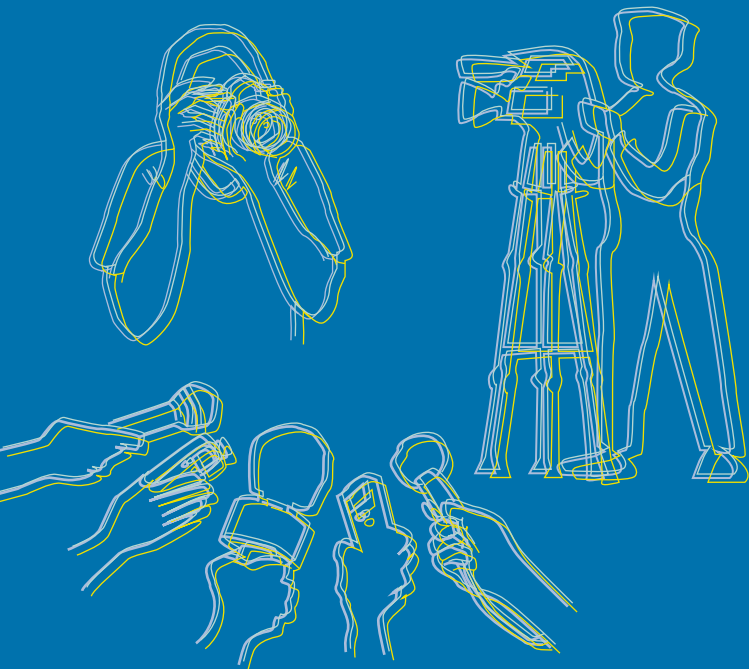


# POCKETBOOK

*for journalists*



**UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency

**70** YEARS  
PROTECTING PEOPLE  
FORCED TO FLEE

Multi-Country Office Panama

2021

*This pocketbook was produced by the UNHCR's Multi Country Office in Panama, based on publicly available information, in September 2021.*

Our work under the  
**Multi Country Office Panama**  
so far in 2021\* is thanks to the support from our donors



Private donors, including Private Donors Spain, Australia, Republic of Korea,  
Japan, Sweden, Italy and Germany.

*\*Updated to 12 October 2021*

## **Introduction**

This pocketbook seeks to offer journalists tools and recommendations to cover situations of forced displacement in their countries, regions, and the world.

It also provides specific guidance on the relevant wording, concepts, and approach, in line with international standards and human rights.

## **Why your work matters**

Communications and media play a key role in conditioning how refugees and other forcibly displaced people are received. Through the contents published by journalists and editors, the wording, titles, concepts, and narrative, among others, have a direct influence over public opinion and how it interacts with people forced to flee.

We believe journalists are professionals committed to helping shape inclusive communities, where xenophobia and discrimination have no place, and where people forced to flee are represented respectfully.

We invite you to follow this pocketbook and help us build a world more open to refugees.

# 5 things you should consider

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## Number 1

# What is UNHCR?

UNHCR, the **UN Refugee Agency**, is a global organization with the mandate to **safeguard the rights and well-being of people who have been forced to flee**. For 70 years, UNHCR has helped millions of people uprooted from their homes.



We work in **132 countries** across the globe, including in the Americas, Europe, Asia, and Africa.



We have presence or support remotely **countries across the Caribbean**, through the Multi-Country Office based in Panama.

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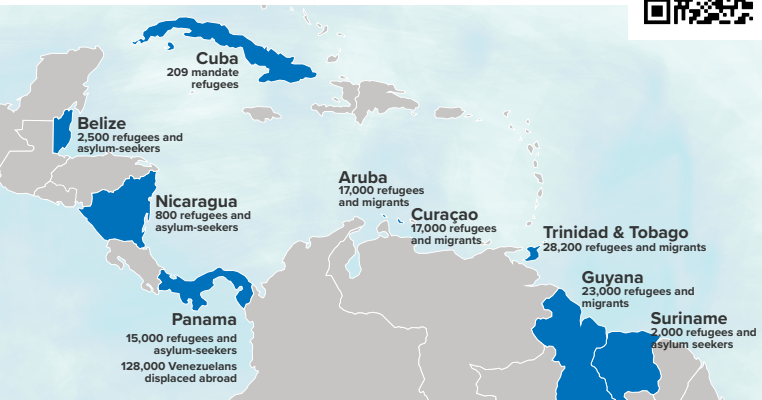


## The UNHCR Multi-Country Office in Panama

UNHCR has presence or works remotely to support refugees, asylum-seekers, stateless persons, and other forcibly displaced people in the Caribbean. This pocketbook was developed by the Multi-Country Office (MCO) in Panama, covering nine countries: Aruba, Belize, Cuba, Curaçao, Guyana, Nicaragua, Panama, Suriname, and Trinidad & Tobago.

In all, the MCO Panama covers countries hosting over 230,000 refugees, asylum-seekers, and other forcibly displaced people.

Find details of each operation [here](#)



## ***Main challenges in the operations***

The past years have seen **complex forced displacement dynamics** across the Americas, with **increasing numbers of people in need of international protection**, including countries covered under the Panama Multi-Country Office.

2021 remains with high levels of uncertainty over the post COVID-19 recovery, amid **shrinking solidarity, and a decreasing protection and asylum space**.

In this complex context, and despite border closures, people in the region continue to **desperately flee violence, persecution, insecurity, and the lack of access to basic services** in their countries, embarking on dangerous journeys alongside migrants.

Host communities across all countries under the MCO Panama are **already overstretched** and, without support, will continue to struggle in coping with the increasing pressure over their socioeconomic systems.

UNHCR and partners continue **supporting host communities and persons of concern** from Nicaragua, Venezuela, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and others from Asian and African countries across the area of coverage.





## ***How does UNHCR support?***

We make sure people in need of international protection have access to the right to seek asylum. We support governments across countries under the MCO Panama to help forcibly displaced people find safety and rebuild their lives in new host communities.

With other partners, we strive to save lives and give forcibly displaced people the chance to find renewed hope through interventions focused on



**Education**



**Community engagement and capacity building**



**Health**



**Public information and advocacy**



**Mental health and psychosocial support**



**Registration, RSD and resettlement**



**Food assistance**



**Cash based interventions**

## The UN Refugee Convention

The Refugee Convention — or the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees — and its 1967 Protocol are the cornerstones of the protection of refugees worldwide. 149 States are currently parties to either or both.

The Convention and its 1967 Protocol are the only global legal instruments explicitly covering the most important aspects of a refugee's life. According to their provisions, refugees deserve, as a minimum, the same standards of treatment enjoyed by other foreigners in a given country and, in many cases, the same treatment as nationals. The 1951 Convention also recognizes the international scope of the refugee problem and the importance of international solidarity and cooperation in trying to solve it.

The core principle is non-refoulement (*see the section on definitions*). This is now considered a rule of customary international law.

UNHCR serves as the 'guardian' of the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol. According to the legislation, States are expected to issue relevant legislation for the protection of refugees and to cooperate with UNHCR in ensuring that the rights of refugees are respected and protected.

**Read more about the  
Refugee Convention  
and its 1967 Protocol.**



## Additional regional instruments and frameworks

**The Cartagena Declaration:** A non-binding regional protection instrument, adopted in 1984 by a group of experts from several Latin-American countries convened to discuss the legal and humanitarian problems affecting those displaced by conflict and violence in Central America. It expands the classic refugee definition to protect people *“who have fled their country because their lives, security, or freedom have been threatened by generalized violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, massive violation of human rights, or other circumstances which have seriously disturbed public order.”*

[Read more](#)



**The Regional Comprehensive Protection and Solutions Framework (MIRPS):** The MIRPS is a pioneering initiative in the application of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) and a concrete contribution to the Global Compact on Refugees. The MIRPS encourages regional cooperation between countries of origin, transit, and destination to foster responsibility-sharing on matters related to prevention, protection, and durable solutions.

[Read more](#)



**The Quito Process:** Regional technical workspace created in 2018 at the initiative of Ecuador, with the support of UNHCR and IOM. It seeks to develop coordinated responses to the flows of Venezuelan refugees and migrants.

[Read more](#)



## Number 2

# Who do we help?

For 70 years, UNHCR has helped millions of people who fled to restart their lives in safety. They include **refugees, returnees, stateless people, the internally displaced, and asylum-seekers.**

**82 million** forcibly displaced people in the world<sup>1</sup>

Refugees (under UNHCR's mandate)

**20.7M**

Palestine refugees (under UNRWA\*'s mandate)

**5.7M**

Internally displaced people<sup>2</sup>

**48M**

Asylum-seekers

**4.1M**

Venezuelans displaced abroad<sup>3</sup>

**3.9M**

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<sup>1</sup> UNHCR Global Trends 2020

\*The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees

<sup>2</sup> IDMC

<sup>3</sup> Number excludes Venezuelan refugees and asylum-seekers, who are included in the general refugee and asylum-seekers figures.



## Number 3

# Definitions you should know

Refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced people, or the forcibly displaced **are not** migrants.

Here we explain why and what it means when they are used interchangeably.

The terms **“refugees”** and **“migrants”** are often used interchangeably in media and the public discourse. However, the two terms have distinct and different meanings, and confusing them can have serious implications in how protection is provided to both populations under international law.

Remember

**It is everyone’s duty to communicate responsibly about people, particularly people who are looking for international protection.**

## ***Who is a refugee?***

Refugees are people who flee their countries to protect their lives from situations like conflicts, war, or persecution.

Refugees are defined and protected in international law. The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, as well as other regional legal instruments, remain the cornerstone of modern refugee protection. One of the most fundamental principles laid down in international law is that **refugees should not be expelled or returned** to situations where their life and freedom would be under threat.

The protection of refugees has many aspects. These include safety from being returned to the dangers they have fled; access to asylum procedures that are fair and efficient; and measures to ensure that their basic human rights are respected. States bear the primary responsibility for this protection. UNHCR therefore works closely with governments, advising and supporting them as needed to implement their responsibilities.

## ***Who is an asylum-seeker?***

An asylum-seeker is someone who identifies himself or herself as a refugee, but whose claim for international protection has not yet been assessed by a competent government authority or, where necessary, by UNHCR. They must not be expelled or returned to situations where their life and freedom are at risk. Seeking asylum is a fundamental human right, and people claiming to be in need of international protection should have access to a fair and timely procedure to study their claim.

## ***Who is an internally displaced person?***

Internally displaced people (IDPs) have not crossed a border to find safety. Unlike refugees, they are on the run inside their country.

They remain under the protection of their government, even if that government is the reason for their displacement. Because they often move to areas where they are less likely to be found, the delivery of support is difficult and they are among the most vulnerable populations in the world, despite making up the majority of the forcibly displaced population globally.

## ***Who is a stateless person?***

A stateless person “is not considered as a national by any State under the operation of its law”. Simply put, a stateless person does not have a nationality from any country. Some people are born stateless, but others become stateless.

Statelessness can occur for several reasons, including discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity, or religion; the emergence of new States and movements across existing States; and gaps in nationality laws. Children whose births are not register can be at risk of statelessness. Whatever the cause, being stateless has serious consequences for people in almost every country and in all regions of the world.

## **Who is a migrant?**

There is no universal, legal definition of ‘migrant’. Simply put, migrants choose to move not by threat, but mainly to improve their lives by finding work, or in some cases for education, family reunion, or other reasons. Migrants would in principle be able to return home without their lives being in danger or them being at imminent risk of harm.

The rights of migrants are enshrined in international human rights law, including the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, and those related to vulnerable migrants. [\*To find out more:\*](#)



## **Why are they different from refugees and other displaced people?**

All people, including migrants, are protected by human rights law — their rights, regardless of the status of a person, must be upheld. However, refugees and people forced to flee violence, persecution, and human rights abuses and have crossed borders, have additional and special safeguards under international law. They are also specifically defined under international law, with a set of rights, including that of not being returned where their lives and freedoms are at risk.

Choices of words matter. Choosing an incorrect one can have implications over the person we are interviewing and the many others in their same situation. Choosing the right one makes for better and fairer representation of the person entrusting their story to us.



## ***What about Venezuelans?***

Based on reports received by UNHCR and its partners, as well as reliable information in the public domain from a wide range of sources about the deteriorating situation in Venezuela, UNHCR considers that for a number of profiles, international protection considerations are likely to arise under the 1951 Convention/1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees depending on the circumstances of the individual case.

In addition, UNHCR considers the majority of Venezuelan nationals, or stateless persons who were habitually residing in Venezuela, to be in need of international protection under the criteria of the Cartagena Declaration. This means people whose lives, security, or freedom are under threat resulting from the events that at present seriously disturb public order.

Venezuelan refugees, like many others in mixed movement situations, move along the same routes as migrants, and have similar pressing needs. Because of the vulnerable nature of the Venezuelan displacement, the most correct terminology is to refer to them as ‘Venezuelan refugees and migrants’, not one or the other. If speaking of an individual, you can use ‘Venezuelan’.

## ***Other important definitions***

### **Host community**

A host community refers to the country, city, town, and/or community where refugees or other forcibly displaced people find a safe place to rebuild their lives.

### **Mixed movements**

Mixed movements are flows of people travelling together, generally in an irregular manner, over the same routes and using the same means of transport, but for different reasons. They are comprised of many profiles of people, including asylum-seekers, refugees, stateless people, victims of trafficking, unaccompanied or separated children, and migrants in an irregular situation.

### **Local integration**

In cases where repatriation is not an option, finding a home in the country/community of protection and integrating into the local society could offer a durable solution and the chance to build a new life. Local integration is a complex and gradual process with legal, economic, social, and cultural dimensions.

### **Resettlement**

Resettlement is the transfer of refugees from an asylum country to another State, that has agreed to admit them and ultimately grant them permanent residence. They are refugees who cannot return home and the current host country cannot address their specific needs.

## Voluntary repatriation

Millions of refugees dream of going home, and voluntary repatriation is the durable solution of choice for the largest number of refugees. This return must be informed and voluntary in conditions of safety and dignity, and requires the full commitment of the country of origin to help reintegrate its own people.

## Non-refoulement

The principle of non-refoulement, or of no return, is an essential protection measure under international human rights, refugee, humanitarian, and customary law. It prohibits States from transferring or removing people from their territory when there are substantial grounds for believing that he or she would be at risk of irreparable harm upon return, including persecution, torture, illtreatment, or other serious human rights violations. Refugees and asylum-seekers are both protected under this principle, and there are circumstances where migrants are also protected from return to their countries.

## Unaccompanied and separated children

Separated children are those separated from both parents, or primary care-giver, but not necessarily from other adult family members. Unaccompanied children have been separated from both parents and other relatives, and are not being cared for by an adult who is responsible for doing so.

## **Number 4**

# **Responsibility to protect**

Interviews | Photography | Videos | Confidentiality

Obtaining good content — including interviews, photographs, and videos — is crucial to tell stories about forced displacement and its impact on people. Strong, timely content helps humanize a distant conflict or humanitarian situation and call attention to the plight of civilians in need of protection and life-saving assistance to audiences in your countries.

Good and quality content helps raise awareness of the rights and needs of refugees and other forcibly displaced people, as well as of the support needed by the communities welcoming them in their homes.

Journalists and media houses are key in this endeavour, as they are often some of the first to arrive to a developing refugee or humanitarian situation.

Nobody chooses to be a refugee. By principle, refugees are people forced to flee their homes to save their lives. Many flee from targeted persecution and have witnessed or suffered terrible acts of violence.

In this line, we must always remember these are individuals, and as such they must be treated with respect and dignity — and most importantly, in a manner that puts their protection first.

Hence, journalists have a responsibility to protect their sources from harm, especially when they are entrusting their story — often of traumatic events.

When interviewing people forced to flee, make sure to:

**1. Explain in a manner that they will understand where and when their stories will be made public.** They should always be made aware their identity might be made public.

**2. Always, always ask if he or she or their family have a specific protection concern.** This means whether they would be at risk if their real names and faces are made visible. Insist on this, as they may not be aware at first.

Make sure you give them the option of changing their names and hiding their faces if they have protection concerns.

**3. Be respectful of their stories and feelings.** Telling the stories of refugees should never be about clickbaiting, but about humanizing a harrowing reality of millions of people.

**4. When in doubt, ask the right sources.** UNHCR has a team of communicators and spokespeople around the world who can answer your questions, if you ask.

**5. Be mindful of the time.** Ensure you plan for sufficient time for the interviews, do not rush your interviewee as it might take time to build trust.

**Number 5****Our top 5 recommendations**

**Ensure truthfulness and a balanced coverage of the story**

**Be empathetic. Stigma helps no one**

**Get to know the correct terminology and relevant concepts**

**Represent all voices**

**Question the language**

## ***Ensure truthfulness and a balanced coverage of the story***

When reporting on the impact of forced displacement in communities, it is especially important to be transparent and just. We recommend journalists thoroughly review their work to ensure it reflects impartiality and is based on facts.

## ***Get to know the correct terminology and relevant concepts***

Asylum-seeker, refugee, migrant worker, etc. Getting to know the concepts and avoiding language that can be confusing is paramount when reporting on forced displacement. Understanding and using the correct terminology is key to be able to articulate the facts, definitions, and the information for our audiences.

## ***Be empathetic. Stigma helps no one***

Remember we are talking about human beings. It is vital to practice ethical journalism, avoid revictimizing, or oversimplifying complex situations.

## ***Represent all voices***

As journalists, evaluating if all the groups involved in the situation are represented with equanimity is always prudent. Including the voices of refugees and migrants in our reporting is important.

## ***Question the language***

Words matter. Using the language wisely allows us to respect the dignity of refugees, asylum-seekers, and migrants. Avoid using terms that could lead to stereotypes or misinformation, that imply negative meanings, or dehumanizing metaphors. The use of this type of language could promote hate speech and prejudice.



## Sources

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Somos lo Mismo Inter-Agency Campaign

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Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration

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