

SOCIAL SECURITY FOR REFUGEES: A HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE



In 2022, the number of forcibly displaced people globally passed 100 million people for the first time in history.

Approximately 27 million are refugees who have either been granted asylum in a foreign country or are in the process of seeking it. Worsened by the armed conflicts in Ukraine and Syria, Afghanistan's crisis and the South Sudan emergency, protecting the human rights of refugees around the world has never been more pressing.

Violations of human rights are a leading cause for mass exodus and internal displacement. Refugees are an extremely vulnerable group, both during the migration journey from their home to their host country, and during the asylum-seeking process upon arrival, which puts them at risk of grave human rights transgressions. They face, among others, economic, housing, health and social insecurity, and numerous legal, cultural and systemic barriers to obtaining security.

Unsurprisingly refugees report experiences of discrimination, material deprivation, and precarity.

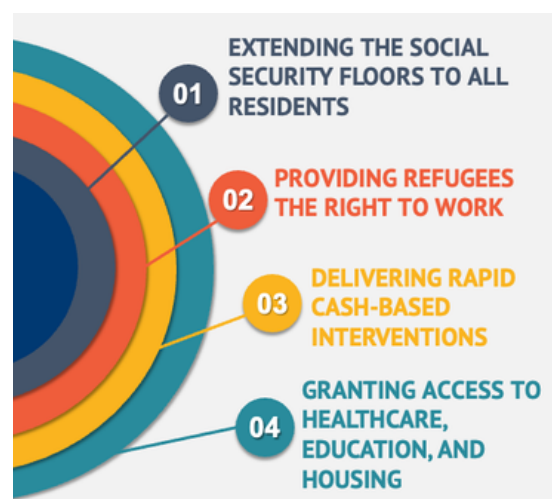
Social security is a fundamental human right under Article 22 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Establishing universal, lifecycle-based social security for all is critical to ensure the needs of the most vulnerable people in society are met, and can therefore play an instrumental role in protecting the rights of refugees.



In line with ILO Recommendation 202 and its commitment to non-discrimination, integrating refugees into national systems can provide them with the essential support they require. It also constitutes a move away from reliance on charitable assistance and towards human rights-based approaches to social security.

A crucial step towards ensuring refugees can access social security systems is to eliminate barriers to the labour market, allowing them to participate in paid and regulated employment. Many host countries have contributory social security systems that require periods of formal employment to be eligible, forcing many refugees into informal or hidden employment and locking them out of earnings-related entitlements. In addition, extending tax-financed social security guarantees not just to citizens, but to all residents of a country, ensures refugees not in paid employment still have basic security.

Cash-based interventions are a vital element of any effective, human rights-based social security response, but complementary social security provisions - such as health care, education, or affordable housing - are also necessary to protect the human rights of refugees. Reducing access barriers and upholding the right of refugees to participate in both contributory and non-contributory schemes can reduce poverty, boost economic growth, and encourage their inclusion in their host country's social and economic life.



Steps to integrating refugees into national social security systems

Under the EU's Temporary Protection Scheme, many European countries are already taking the first steps to incorporate Ukrainian refugees into their national coverage, like Ireland, Slovakia, or Spain.

Looking forward, it is critical that all governments commit to building inclusive, universal, lifecycle social security systems to ensure the human rights of those most vulnerable are respected, protected and fulfilled.