

# Unit 8

## UNHCR REFUGEE IDENTITY DOCUMENTATION



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Layout & Design: BakOS DESIGN

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## 8.1 General Principles

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The issuance of identity documents for refugees is primarily the responsibility of the authorities of the host country/country of asylum. UNHCR Offices should advocate with the Government of host country/country of asylum for national authorities to issue refugee identity documents with the same design and specifications applied to identity documentation issued to nationals. This is with a view to ensure formal recognition of refugee status, as well as facilitate access to rights, protection and services in the host country/country of asylum.

**Where identity documentation is not issued by, or jointly with, the Government of the host country/country of asylum, UNHCR Offices should provide necessary identity documentation to every individual who is determined to meet the criteria for refugee status under UNHCR's mandate, including family members and/or dependants of a recognized refugee who are determined to be eligible for derivative refugee status (see also § 3.3 – *Identity Documentation for Registered Asylum-Seekers*).**

UNHCR Offices should determine, based on the operational environment and in consultation with the host Government as appropriate, the type of identity documentation to be issued to refugees recognized under UNHCR's mandate. While the issuance of a refugee identity card (ID card) is generally recommended, other identity documentation, such as UNHCR Refugee Certificates may also be issued.

The UNHCR refugee identity documentation should attest to the fact that the individual named in the document is a refugee, and as such, is a person who should *inter alia* be protected from forcible return to a country in which he/she would face persecution.

UNHCR Offices should undertake any necessary **demarches with the relevant authorities in the host country/country of asylum** to explain the form and significance of identity documentation issued by UNHCR to refugees and to promote recognition and acceptance of the identity document, as well as access to rights and services, in the host country/country of asylum.

## 8.2 Procedures for Issuing UNHCR Refugee Identity Documents

### 8.2.1 Form of UNHCR Refugee Identity Documents

Insofar as possible, UNHCR-issued refugee ID cards should follow the design, format and content of national identity documents in the host country/country of asylum. Refugee ID cards should generally contain the following information:

#### STANDARDS & GUIDELINES

##### UNHCR ID CARDS

- ▶ The type and title of the identity document;
- ▶ Name and logo of UNHCR;
- ▶ Unique document number;
- ▶ The name by which the refugee is registered with UNHCR;
- ▶ Other basic biodata (such as the date of birth and sex of the refugee);
- ▶ A photograph of the refugee;
- ▶ Date of issuance and expiration (where applicable);
- ▶ A general statement of rights associated with the document.

When UNHCR Refugee Certificates are issued instead of UNHCR refugee ID cards, they should be issued in the standard format (**Annex 8-1**). In addition to the attestation of the individual's status as a refugee, referred to in § 8.1 above, the document should generally contain the following information:

#### STANDARDS & GUIDELINES

##### UNHCR REFUGEE CERTIFICATES

- ▶ The name by which the refugee is registered with UNHCR and other core bio-data including the date and place of birth, sex and nationality;
- ▶ The UNHCR registration number of the refugee;
- ▶ A photograph of the refugee to whom the UNHCR Refugee Certificate is issued;
- ▶ The unique document/reference number under which the document was issued by UNHCR;
- ▶ The date of issuance and, where applicable, of expiration of the UNHCR Refugee Certificate;
- ▶ The signature of a UNHCR staff member who is authorized to sign UNHCR Refugee Certificates;
- ▶ The UNHCR logo and address and contact information for the UNHCR Office that issued the document.

For all UNHCR-issued refugee identity documents, it is recommended that the following information is not included:

- ▶ Biodata that may give rise to protection risks in the host country/country of asylum, such as ethnicity and religion;
- ▶ Information about the Applicant's family composition and size, or data relating to family members.

UNHCR refugee identity documents should be issued in the language of the host country and the main working language of the UNHCR Office.

If the UNHCR refugee identity document has a limited period of validity, the refugee should be informed of the procedures for renewal at the time that the identity document is issued.

## 8.2.2 Oversight and Controls

UNHCR refugee identity documents should be prepared by **designated UNHCR staff** who should work under the **direct supervision** of the Registration Supervisor or another designated Protection staff member.

Access to **templates for UNHCR refugee identity documents** and related materials, and circulation of UNHCR refugee identity documents during preparation and review procedures should be strictly controlled (i.e. through numbering and logging procedures, restricted access to and secure storage of templates and other materials, etc.). All efforts should be made to avoid misuse or theft of identification documentation materials and data.

Procedures for preparing and issuing UNHCR refugee identity documents should include **effective review/quality check mechanisms** to ensure that the information they contain is accurate, and that they are issued only to individuals who have been found to meet the criteria for refugee status under UNHCR's mandate. Each UNHCR refugee identity document should be reviewed/checked for accuracy by the Registration Supervisor or another designated Protection staff supervisor before it is issued. Where responsibility for review is delegated or rests with another Protection staff member, the Registration Supervisor should conduct regular and random reviews of UNHCR refugee identity documents to monitor the effectiveness of supervision and controls. UNHCR refugee identity documents should be stamped or carry an electronic signature of the Head of Office or a Protection staff member designated by the Head of Office, as applicable.

Each UNHCR Office, in consultation with UNHCR Headquarters as necessary, should employ the most effective techniques available to prevent fraudulent production or tampering of UNHCR refugee identity documents, including using carefully controlled security paper, embossing, bar codes, or dry seals (see also § 8.4 – *Fraudulently Obtained and Fraudulent Use of UNHCR Refugee Identity Documents*).

As a general rule, refugee documentation should be issued by UNHCR even if registration is conducted by implementing partners on behalf of UNHCR. However, refugee documentation may exceptionally be issued by such partners provided that the necessary fraud prevention safeguards are in place.



### 8.2.3 Replacement of Lost or Stolen UNHCR Refugee Identity Documents

**Replacement of lost or stolen UNHCR refugee identity documents** should be carried out pursuant to established procedures. As a general rule, refugees who are seeking replacement of a lost or stolen UNHCR refugee identity document should be required to attend **in person** at the UNHCR Office and should be asked to provide a written and signed explanation of the circumstances of the loss, as well as an undertaking to return the original document to UNHCR if it is recovered. Where, exceptionally, refugee documentation is issued by an implementing partner on behalf of UNHCR, replacement of lost or stolen refugee identity documents may also be done by the same implementing partner. The guidance and procedures set out in this section are relevant and should inform the replacement of refugee identity documents by implementing partners.

Before issuing a replacement UNHCR refugee identity document UNHCR staff should take necessary measures to confirm the identity of the individual making the request and their status as persons who have been determined by UNHCR to be eligible for refugee status. Standard procedures should require the retrieval of the registration record of the individual making the request, including the individual's photograph and biometrics, as well as the Office record of the original UNHCR refugee identity document (see § 8.3 – *Maintaining Office Records of UNHCR Refugee Identity Documents*). The individual making the request should also be asked to present any identity documents in his or her possession.

Replacement of UNHCR refugee identity documents should be subject to **effective review and approval procedures** by Protection staff who are designated to supervise the issuance of UNHCR documents.

In any case where the identity of the individual making the request, or their status with UNHCR, cannot be confirmed by the UNHCR Office, or where there are reasons to doubt the legitimacy of the purpose for which the replacement UNHCR refugee identity document is sought (e.g. repeated requests for replacement of lost refugee identity documents), the request should be referred to the Protection staff member who is responsible to supervise the issuance of UNHCR Refugee Certificates.

### 8.2.4 Retrieval of UNHCR Refugee Identity Documents

In the interest of maintaining the integrity of identity documentation issued by UNHCR to recognized refugees, UNHCR Offices should **take all feasible steps to retrieve valid UNHCR refugee identity documentation**, including UNHCR Refugee Certificates, issued to individuals whose refugee status has been ceased, cancelled or revoked (for further guidance, see § 10.6 – *Withdrawal of UNHCR-issued Refugee Documents in Cancellation or Revocation Procedures* and § 11.5 – *Withdrawal of UNHCR-issued Refugee Documents in Cessation Procedures*). In so far as possible, UNHCR Offices should also make efforts to retrieve valid UNHCR refugee identity documentation of deceased recognized refugees. Where retrieval is not possible, the Office's central record of identity documents should be updated to reflect that the particular document is no longer valid (see § 8.3 – *Maintaining Office Records of UNHCR Refugee Identity Documents* below).

## 8.3 Maintaining Office Records of UNHCR Refugee Identity Documents

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A copy of each UNHCR refugee identity document issued to an Applicant and any accompanying family member/dependant should be **retained on the appropriate individual file**.

Each UNHCR Office should maintain a **central record of all UNHCR refugee identity documents** issued by the Office, including retrievals and replacements of lost or stolen UNHCR identity documents. The central record may be maintained as part of the UNHCR case management database. The guidance on the information relating to UNHCR asylum-seeker identity documents that should be recorded is also applicable in respect to UNHCR refugee identity documents (see § 3.3.7 – *Maintaining Office Records of UNHCR Asylum-Seeker Identity Documents*).

## 8.4 Fraudulently Obtained and Fraudulent Use of UNHCR Refugee Identity Documents

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Fraudulent use or fraudulent acquisition of refugee identity documents include situations where an individual has made or knowingly used a fake document, or where an individual has used another's person identity document.

Procedures relating to UNHCR-issued refugee identity documents should include appropriate measures to prevent, detect and respond to the fraudulent use or acquisition of refugee identity documents in accordance with UNHCR's policy and guidance for addressing fraud by persons of concern. Such measures may include, for instance, the use of unique security paper for refugee identity documents, as well as counselling for asylum-seekers and refugees on the risks associated with fraud and mechanisms to report incidents of fraud (see also § 8.2.2 – *Oversight and Controls*).

Established procedures should also include measures to confiscate and, where necessary, appropriately dispose of UNHCR identity documents used by persons other than the individual to whom they were issued. Misuse of UNHCR identity documents by refugees to whom they were legitimately issued should be dealt in accordance with UNHCR's policy and guidance for addressing fraud by persons of concern and established procedures.

Any incident of suspected fraudulent production or use of UNHCR refugee identity documents should immediately be brought to the attention of the UNHCR Office **Anti-Fraud Focal Point** designated by the Representative in accordance with UNHCR's policy and guidance for addressing fraud by persons of concern. The Anti-Fraud Focal Point should take the necessary measures to address the situation, in consultation with DIP and other relevant entities in Headquarters as necessary.



# Annex: UNHCR Refugee Certificate

Government Logo

Refugee Certificate



Document Reference Number ABC/20/0012456

UNHCR Registration Number 000-00001234

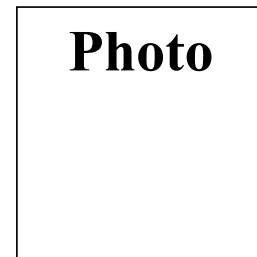
Name XXXXX, XXXX

Sex XXXXX

Nationality XXXXX

Date of Birth 01 Jan 1980

Place of Birth XXXXX



## To Whom It May Concern

This is to certify that the above-named individual has been recognized as a refugee by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, pursuant to its mandate. As a refugee, this individual should be protected from forcible return to a country where they would face persecution. Any assistance accorded to this individual would be most appreciated.

Questions regarding the information contained in this document may be directed to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees at the address mentioned.

Government Authority

Address

Signature of authorizing  
Officer

UNHCR:

UNHCR Office Address

Signature of authorizing Officer

Date of Issuance 03 Jan 2020

Date of Expiry 02 Jan 2021







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