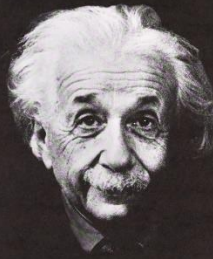




MEMORANDUM ON

THE STATE OF REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS IN ZAMBIA

**A bundle of belongings
isn't the only thing a refugee
brings to his new country.**



Einstein was a refugee.



United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNHCR is the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Our job is to co-ordinate the world-wide efforts to solve refugee problems. To protect the basic human rights of refugees. The right to work, to education.

Freedom of religion. Travel documents. Legal protection. We do not ask your help to support refugees for ever and ever. We need your help to make refugees self-sufficient. Living a useful, peaceful and happy life somewhere in the world. Just as you do.

SUBMITTED TO THE

COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AFFAIRS, HUMAN RIGHTS AND GOVERNANCE

January 2026

“A JUST ZAMBIAN SOCIETY GUIDED BY FAITH, WHERE EVERYONE ENJOYS FULLNESS OF LIFE”

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1. ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND

The Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR), a faith-based research, education and advocacy Centre established in 1988 under the Ministry of the Society for Jesus. JCTR is concerned with equity, social and economic justice to enable Zambia make significant strides where human and pro-poor national development remain key. The Centre works to generate evidence and undertake analysis of pertinent and topical issues to advocate for pro-poor policies, programmes and practices aimed at promoting good governance and economic development that address poverty and inequalities in Zambia. JCTR having been instrumental in seeing the cancellation of Zambia's debt in the early 2000s, has continued to undertake and lead advocacy work at both local and national level aimed at addressing transparency and accountability regarding debt contraction, debt management, illicit financial flows, tax evasion, domestic resource mobilisation and promotes prudent use of public debt resources. Interventions that we hope will contribute towards seeing Zambia attain a long-term objective of being a prosperous middle-income nation by the year 2030.

2. INTRODUCTION

On the 11th December 2025, JCTR received an invitation from the National Assembly of Zambia (NAZ) to produce a detailed memorandum on the state of refugees and asylum seekers in Zambia. The key focus of the detailed memorandum hinges on the adequacy of the policy and legal framework, the administration and implementation of refugees and asylum seekers in Zambia, efficacy of institutions involved in refugees and asylum seekers in Zambia and the challenges encountered by the institutions mandated to deal with refugees and asylum seekers in Zambia.

The detailed memorandum commences with highlighting the brief history of Zambia's management of refugees and asylum seekers. This section extrapolates Zambia's long standing commitment to creating a safe home for refugees and asylum seekers since the 1940s, viewed from a human rights perspective with the key principle of human dignity. Thereafter, the detailed memorandum analyses the adequacy of the policy and legal framework in the. This section argues that the policy and legal framework is not adequate, as it does not provide for automatic citizenship to children born of refugees legally residing in Zambia. After analysing the policy and legal framework, the detailed memorandum elucidates the administration and implementation of the refugees and asylum seekers.

This section highlights the processes, structures and systems involved. Following the section on administration and implementation, the detailed memorandum delves into enumerating the challenges. Some of the key challenges include centralised office of the commissioner for refugees, distance between the entry points and office of the commissioner for refugees, lack of awareness among law enforcement agencies on the difference between asylum seekers and illegal immigrants as well as regular migrants. The detailed memorandum ends with the recommendation section. Some of the key recommendations include revising and amending the citizenship act to allow children born of refugees who are legally residing in Zambia to be given an automatic Zambian citizenship.

2.1 BRIEF HISTORY OF ZAMBIA’S MANAGEMENT OF REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

Zambia has a long history of hosting refugees and asylum seekers dating back to the 1940s when the country gave refuge to asylum seekers from Poland displaced as a result of World War II². Since then, the country has hosted refugees from Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Eritrea, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Somalia, South Africa, Zimbabwe, among others¹.

Being one of the most stable countries in the region, Zambia has played a significant role in providing a safe haven to displaced persons from Rwanda, Angola and the DRC. Between 1999 and 2002 Zambia hosted up to 250,000 refugees, mainly from Rwanda and Angola. At the height of the refugee influx, the country had five major refugee camps and settlements in Nangweshi (Western Province), Ukwimi (Eastern Province), Kala (Luapula), Mwange (Northern Province), Mayukwayukwa (Western) and Meheba (North Western). All of the camps were closed except for Meheba and Mayukwayukwa camps and the recent conflict in the DRC, which led to the establishment of a new settlement at Mantapala (Luapula Province). Over the last decade, the population of refugees and asylum seekers has grown. Zambia continues to keep its borders open and currently hosts over 113,000 refugees and asylum-seekers as of late 2025².

¹https://globalcompactrefugees.org/sites/default/files/2019-12/Zambia%20CRRF%20Best%20Practices%20Report_FINAL.PDF.

² <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/zmb>

Zambia has demonstrated tremendous generosity to refugees and all displaced persons that have sought asylum within its territory. This hospitality has been shown by government at national and local levels, by the chiefs and traditional authorities in the hosting areas as well as with the ordinary citizens, particularly those in the host communities who have gladly shared their resources albeit within the context of poverty in these hosting areas. And additionally, the refugees and asylum seekers continue to have access to Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR) like education, health care services, clean water, improved sanitation etc. Often, these amenities are accessed from the same facilities where indigenous citizens access the services.

2.2 Refuge and Asylum as a Fundamental Human Right

Seeking refuge and asylum is a fundamental human right rooted in the inherent dignity and worth of every person. Throughout history, individuals and communities have been forced to flee their countries due to persecution, armed conflict, violence, environmental disasters, or systemic human rights violations. The right to seek asylum provides protection for those whose lives, freedoms, and safety are threatened, and it represents a core principle of international human rights and humanitarian law. Recognizing asylum as a human right affirms the global responsibility to protect vulnerable populations and uphold justice beyond national borders.

2.2.1 Legal Foundations of the Right to Seek Asylum

The right to seek asylum is firmly established in international law. Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states that “everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.”³ This principle is further reinforced by the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, which define who qualifies as a refugee and outline the legal obligations of states to protect them. A key component of these legal frameworks is the principle of non-refoulement, which prohibits states from returning individuals to countries where they face serious threats to their life or freedom. This principle is widely regarded as customary international law, binding on all states regardless of whether they are signatories to refugee treaties.

³ <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

Together, these instruments establish asylum not as an act of charity, but as a legal and moral obligation grounded in human rights. Equally, Zambia has domesticated these international instruments into national documents like the constitution of Zambia.

2.2.2 Human Rights and Human Dignity

At its core, the right to seek asylum is about protecting human dignity. Individuals who flee persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, gender, or membership in a particular social group are exercising a survival mechanism, not violating laws or norms. Treating asylum seekers with respect, fairness, and compassion reflects a commitment to universal human rights, including the rights to life, liberty, security, and freedom from torture or inhuman treatment.

Denying access to asylum procedures, criminalizing irregular entry, or subjecting asylum seekers to degrading treatment undermines these rights and erodes the moral foundations of the international human rights system. A human-rights-based approach requires that asylum seekers be given access to fair procedures, legal assistance, and humane living conditions while their claims are assessed.

2.2.3 State Sovereignty and International Responsibility

While states have the sovereign right to control their borders, this authority must be exercised in accordance with international human rights obligations. Sovereignty does not absolve states of their duty to protect individuals fleeing persecution. Balancing border management with human rights protection is a central challenge of modern migration governance. International cooperation and responsibility-sharing are essential, particularly given that refugee flows often place disproportionate pressure on neighbouring or less-resourced countries. Upholding asylum as a human right requires global solidarity, equitable burden-sharing, and long-term solutions that address the root causes of forced displacement.

2.2.4 Contemporary Challenges

Despite clear legal standards, the right to seek asylum faces significant challenges today. Restrictive immigration policies, pushbacks at borders, prolonged detention, and rising xenophobia threaten the protection of asylum seekers worldwide. In some contexts, asylum

systems are politicized, leading to narratives that portray refugees as security threats rather than rights-holders. Additionally, emerging issues such as climate-induced displacement expose gaps in existing legal frameworks, as many displaced persons may not meet the traditional definition of a refugee. From a traditional understanding, it is mainly assumed that to be a refugee, one must be fleeing from realities like war, conflict, persecution etc. However, in modern day realities, even climate induced realities like drought are forcing people into economic refugees. These challenges highlight the need for stronger commitment, legal reform, and innovative approaches to ensure that the right to seek asylum remains meaningful and effective.

3.0 CHALLENGES FACING REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS IN ZAMBIA

Zambia is a signatory to the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol that defines who is a refugee, their rights and member states' obligations. However, Zambia has made reservations, among other reservations, to Articles 17 (2) and 26 of the 1951 Convention which, respectively, limits refugee rights to paid employment and to freedom of movement within the country. With regard to employment, refugees are treated like other foreigners seeking paid or self-employment who, according the immigration law are required to apply for a work permit which costs ZMW24,000.00 with a supporting letter from the Office of the Commissioner for Refugees, a Department under the Ministry of Home Affairs responsible for refugees' affairs in the country⁴.

The Immigration Department, the Department of Labour and the Zambia Development Agency (ZDA) further require refugees and other non-nationals who wish to pursue self-employment as private sector investors have to demonstrate proof to invest up to USD 250,000 if they are starting a new company and USD 150,000 if they are joining an existing company in Zambia. These are restricting, inhibiting and limiting conditions for most refugees to meet, given the fact that most of them left their respective home countries under unplanned and very difficult conditions. To ameliorate the situation, Zambia Immigration Department, through administrative action, have moderated the minimum investment threshold for refugees to, at least, K150,000, even though this

⁴ <https://www.zambiaimmigration.gov.zm/for-residents/pricing-page/>

still remains a high figure for people fleeing from their home countries because of conflict, climate change, economic hardships etc⁵.

Zambia's reservations to article 26 of the 1951 Convention means that all refugees are required, under the Refugees Control Act, to reside in designated refugee settlements. Refugees in such designated sites (refugee settlements) must obtain a time-restricted gate pass (3 months) from the Refugee Officer for them to legally move freely in the country. If a refugee relocates from the designated settlements to urban areas without formal authority, they are subject to detention and prosecution if found by immigration authorities. The restriction on the freedom of movement is one of the primary sources of discontent among the refugees' communities, as it limits their access to essential goods, sources of income and education opportunities. Refugees are allowed to live in urban areas only if they are granted medical, study or work permits by the relevant authorities. This policy tends to adversely affect young refugees' (children born of refugees) who are keen to advance their human capital credentials through tertiary and vocational training that is often located in urban areas.

Additionally, local integration of refugees has posed significant challenges especially for former Rwandese refugees. The cessation clause was invoked in 2011 to end the refugee status of residual groups of Rwandan and Angolan refugees leading to a legal limbo for those who had not found a durable solution. Local integration was aimed to facilitate legal integration of eligible former refugees through the issuance of long-term residence permits, and derivative citizenship for some and the issuance of identity documents and passports. The local process consists of the screening of applications, obtaining national passports from the country of origin, issuance of Zambian Aliens' Card and the issuance of Residence or Temporary Residence Permits. Once in possession of a Residence Permit, the former refugees can settle wherever they wish in Zambia. However, possession of National passport for the country of origin has posed challenge as many refugees particularly Rwandese view acquiring a Rwandan government passport puts them under Rwandan government surveillance and control which they see as a danger to their security, and that of their

⁵ https://www.unhcr.org/africa/sites/afr/files/legacy-pdf/58b9646b4_0.pdf

families at home which is the reason for seeking asylum in the first place. This same reluctance to take Rwandan government passports is expressed by most Rwandan exiles throughout the region.

Furthermore, Under Zambia's current constitutional and legal framework, children born within the territory to refugee parents do not acquire Zambian citizenship at birth, as the country applies a citizenship-by-descent principle rather than citizenship by birth on the basis of territory. The Constitution confers citizenship by birth only where at least one parent is a Zambian citizen at the time of birth, thereby excluding children of refugees and other non-citizens regardless of their place of birth or length of residence in Zambia. Consequently, such children are generally classified under their parents' nationality or refugee status, even when they have been born and raised entirely in Zambia and may lack effective ties to any other state. While pathways to citizenship through registration or naturalisation exist in law, refugees and their children face significant legal and administrative constraints, including the requirement of "ordinary residence," which is often not applicable to refugee populations. This legal position has generated policy and human rights concerns, particularly regarding the risk of prolonged legal uncertainty or statelessness, and its implications for social inclusion, access to services, and long-term national integration.

4.0 LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK GOVERNING REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS IN ZAMBIA

The legal and policy framework governing refugees and asylum seekers in Zambia is founded on the Constitution of Zambia, Chapter 1 of the Laws of Zambia, which guarantees fundamental human rights and freedoms applicable to all persons within the country, including refugees and asylum seekers. This framework is further reinforced by Zambia's international obligations under the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951 and its 1967 Protocol, as well as the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, which collectively establish standards for refugee protection, asylum, and the principle of non-refoulement. Domestically, these obligations are implemented primarily through the Refugees Act No. 1 of 2017, which provides for refugee status determination, rights and duties of refugees, and the institutional mandate of the Office of the Commissioner for Refugees. Additional legislation, including the Immigration and Deportation Act, and laws governing employment, education, and

civil registration, also influence the treatment and protection of refugees and asylum seekers, forming a comprehensive legal and policy framework that balances national sovereignty with international human rights commitments.

4.1 The adequacy of the Policy and legal framework governing refugees and asylum seekers in Zambia

The legal architecture governing refugees in Zambia is built on international commitments and domestic legislation. Internationally, Zambia is party to the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, its 1967 Protocol, and the 1969 OAU Convention on Refugees. These instruments establish foundational principles, including the right to seek asylum, protection against refoulement, and access to fundamental rights. Domestically, the Refugees Act No. 1 of 2017 serves as the principal legal instrument, codifying refugee status determination procedures, defining institutional roles (particularly the Office of the Commissioner for Refugees), and outlining both rights and obligations. The National Refugee Policy (2023) complements this framework by emphasising socio-economic inclusion, self-reliance, and integration into national development planning, aligning with the Global Compact on Refugees.

The current framework provides several meaningful protections. The Refugees Act prohibits the expulsion or returning of any person to territories where they face persecution or threats from external aggression or civil unrest, and bars prosecution for unlawful entry provided asylum applications are submitted promptly. Recognised refugees are guaranteed fundamental rights including life, security of person, protection from inhuman treatment, and freedoms of conscience, religion, expression, and association.

On socio-economic dimensions, refugees have free access to courts on equal terms with Zambian citizens, are entitled to primary education without permits, and may obtain work or study permits for higher education and gainful employment. The Act also permits self-employment in sectors such as agriculture and commerce, whilst specific provisions protect vulnerable groups, particularly women and children, including obligations to assist in family reunification for unaccompanied minors. The Anti-Human Trafficking (Amendment) Act, 2022, provides additional immunity from prosecution for trafficking victims regarding acts committed whilst being trafficked. A dedicated Refugees Fund is established to finance relief aid, settlements, and welfare programmes.

Despite these provisions, the framework exhibits significant limitations that undermine comprehensive protection. Most notably, the principle of non-refoulement, whilst applied in practice, is not explicitly codified in the Refugees Act itself, creating potential vulnerabilities. Discretionary powers granted to government authorities in refugee status determination processes can compromise procedural fairness and consistency.

Zambia's reservations to the 1951 Convention restrict several freedoms essential to integration. Freedom of movement is heavily constrained, with most refugees required to reside in designated settlements and obtain movement passes for travel within Zambia. This significantly limits economic participation and self-reliance. Access to formal employment, whilst theoretically possible through permits, remains practically difficult. Rights to immovable property (land ownership) are "subject to any written law," which typically prevents refugees from establishing permanent agricultural or commercial operations. Travel document issuance remains limited, restricting cross-border movement even for legitimate purposes.

Additionally, the Citizenship Act of 2016 does not mention refugees in the whole document, thus it does not explicitly give pathways for citizenship for refugees or their children. It largely only focuses on ordinary resident permit holders as defined under the Immigration and Deportation Act, which also has no mention of refugees. This focus on ordinary residents is echoed in Article 37(1)(c) of the constitution. A review of our citizenship laws and pathways to citizenship needs to be undertaken.

4.2 The administration and implementation of refugees and asylum seekers in Zambia

The administration of refugee affairs is led by the Office of the Commissioner for Refugees (COR), under the Ministry of Home Affairs and Internal Security. COR is responsible for registering refugees and asylum seekers, facilitating protection services, and coordinating settlement management. The Refugee Status Determination Committee evaluates asylum claims and recommends refugee recognition, while the Refugee Fund supports operational activities and service provision. Partnerships with the UNHCR and non-governmental organizations play a critical role in supplementing government efforts, particularly in service delivery, protection, and capacity-building.

Zambia's refugee framework offers several notable strengths. Legal protection is well-established, with the principle of non-refoulement ensuring refugees are not returned to danger. Refugees have access to education, healthcare, and social services, and the National Refugee Policy emphasizes livelihood opportunities and participation in local development initiatives. The policy also provides for durable solutions, including local integration, voluntary repatriation, and resettlement, ensuring comprehensive protection mechanisms.

Despite these strengths, significant challenges remain. Socio-economic integration of refugees is limited, with many facing barriers to formal employment, land access, and entrepreneurship opportunities. COR often operates under resource constraints, affecting registration, monitoring, and service delivery. Additionally, awareness gaps persist, with both refugees and host communities sometimes lacking information about rights, responsibilities, and available services. Urban refugees face particular vulnerabilities, as existing policies largely focus on settlement-based populations.

4.3 The efficacy of institutions involved in refugees and asylum seekers in Zambia

Zambia has established a relatively effective institutional framework for managing refugees and asylum seekers, combining government leadership, UN support, and NGO involvement. The Government of Zambia, through the Office of the Commissioner for Refugees (COR) under the Ministry of Home Affairs, implements the Refugees Act (2017) and coordinates refugee integration into national services such as education, health, and livelihoods. Coordination is strengthened through the Inter-Ministerial Steering Committee and the CRRF National Steering Committee, ensuring alignment with national development priorities. The UNHCR and other UN agencies provide operational support, protection, and sector-specific programs in water, sanitation, nutrition, and food security, while NGOs fill service gaps and offer community-level initiatives, especially in livelihoods and protection. While Zambia's approach is commendable for its legal framework, policy alignment, and multi-sectoral coordination, challenges remain, including limited operational capacity, resource constraints, protection gaps in asylum procedures, and service access difficulties in remote settlements. Overall, Zambia's institutions demonstrate a progressive and inclusive approach, effectively integrating refugees into national systems, but continued support and strengthened coordination are necessary to fully meet the needs of all refugees and asylum seekers.

Despite Zambia's progressive policies and institutional framework for refugees, several challenges limit the effectiveness of service delivery. Government agencies often face limited operational capacity, with staff shortages and inadequate training affecting health, education, and protection services. Resource constraints and dependence on international funding restrict infrastructure development, leaving many settlements with insufficient water, sanitation, schools, and healthcare. Protection and legal gaps persist, including delays in asylum processing and difficulties for vulnerable groups, such as women, children, and people with disabilities, to access justice. Coordination between government, UN agencies, and NGOs is sometimes weak, resulting in service overlaps or gaps, while geographical barriers in remote settlements further hinder access to essential services. These challenges highlight the need for strengthened capacity, funding, and coordination to fully meet the needs of refugees and asylum seekers in Zambia.

4.4 The challenges, if any, faced by institutions mandated to deal with refugees and asylum seekers in Zambia and make recommendations on the way forward.

In Zambia, institutions mandated to manage refugee and asylum seeker protection, including the Office of the Commissioner for Refugees (COR) under the Ministry of Home Affairs, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and a range of supporting non-governmental organizations (NGOs), play a pivotal role in ensuring humanitarian assistance, legal protection, and long-term integration. Despite significant efforts, these institutions face multifaceted challenges that hinder the effective delivery of services and the realization of refugee rights. Administrative and procedural barriers, such as delays in Refugee Status Determination (RSD) and restrictive freedom-of-movement policies, leave many asylum seekers in legal uncertainty, delaying access to essential services and undermining their protection. Furthermore, inadequate access to legal aid, translation services, and procedural information exacerbates vulnerability, particularly among marginalized groups including women, children, and persons persecuted based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

Institutional capacity and coordination limitations constitute another significant challenge. COR, UNHCR, and partner organizations often contend with limited staffing, insufficient logistical support, and resource constraints, particularly in remote settlements, which restrict their ability to

provide comprehensive services. Coordination gaps between government agencies, UN bodies, and NGOs can result in service duplication, inefficiencies, and gaps in protection delivery. Service provision remains constrained, with refugees frequently encountering limited access to quality education, healthcare, and vocational training. Economic exclusion is pervasive due to restrictive employment policies, inadequate livelihood programs, and limited access to financial services, undermining refugee self-reliance and increasing dependency on humanitarian assistance. Additionally, infrastructure deficits, including limited access to water, electricity, roads, and community facilities, compromise living conditions in settlements, while social and cultural barriers, including occasional tensions with host communities, language differences, and stigma, impede integration and social cohesion.

To address these challenges, a comprehensive, multi-pronged strategy is required. Streamlining and standardizing the RSD process, simplifying bureaucratic procedures, and providing legal aid and translation services would enhance access to protection and reduce delays. Full implementation of the 2023 National Refugee Policy, including reforms on freedom of movement and socio-economic inclusion, would strengthen the legal and policy framework governing refugee protection. Institutional capacity should be enhanced through staff training, improved coordination mechanisms, and strategic allocation of resources to enable more efficient and effective service delivery. Expanding access to education, healthcare, vocational training, and livelihood programs, coupled with integration into national social protection systems, would promote self-reliance and socio-economic inclusion. Investment in settlement infrastructure, including water, electricity, roads, and community facilities, is essential to improving living conditions. Finally, fostering social cohesion through community engagement, public sensitization campaigns, and evidence-based planning would strengthen relations between refugees and host communities, reduce stigma, and facilitate sustainable integration.

While Zambia has demonstrated a commitment to refugee protection through policy development and collaborative institutional frameworks, the effectiveness of its response remains constrained by administrative, institutional, socio-economic, and resource-related challenges. A coordinated and evidence-driven approach that addresses legal, operational, and social dimensions of refugee

protection can significantly enhance the well-being, self-reliance, and integration of refugees and asylum seekers, while contributing to national development and regional stability.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Zambia has demonstrated a long-standing commitment to providing refuge and protection to displaced persons, underpinned by both international obligations and domestic legal frameworks. The country's policies, including the Refugees Act (2017) and the National Refugee Policy (2023), provide a solid foundation for safeguarding refugee rights, ensuring access to basic services, and offering durable solutions such as local integration, repatriation, and resettlement.

However, significant challenges remain. Legal restrictions on freedom of movement and employment, administrative delays in refugee status determination, limited socio-economic opportunities, inadequate infrastructure in settlements, and coordination gaps among institutions all constrain the effective protection and integration of refugees. Moreover, children born to refugees face legal uncertainties due to citizenship limitations, and urban refugees remain particularly vulnerable.

To fully realize Zambia's commitment to refugee protection and human rights, reforms are needed to strengthen legal safeguards, improve institutional capacity, expand socio-economic inclusion, and foster social cohesion between refugees and host communities. Addressing these challenges will not only enhance the well-being and self-reliance of refugees but also contribute to national development, regional stability, and Zambia's vision of a more equitable and prosperous society.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Government should enhance capacity-building and sensitization programs for law enforcement institutions, particularly the Zambia Police Service and the Department of Immigration, to strengthen understanding of the legal distinction between asylum seekers and irregular migrants. This should include structured training on national asylum laws, international protection obligations, and standardized procedures for the identification, screening, referral, and handling of asylum seekers. Improved institutional knowledge and

coordination will reduce the risk of arbitrary arrest and detention of asylum seekers and ensure compliance with Zambia's legal and human rights commitments.

2. The Government should decentralize the Office of the Commissioner for Refugees (COR) and other relevant refugee protection agencies to key entry points, including Mpulungu, Nakonde, Kipushi, and Nchelenge. Establishing a permanent or semi-permanent presence at these locations will strengthen early identification, registration, and protection of asylum seekers, improve inter-agency coordination, and ensure timely access to asylum procedures upon entry into the country.
3. Facilitate refugees' rights to work and freedom of movement by relaxing existing restrictions, even prior to the removal of Zambia's reservations to the 1951 Refugee Convention. This would enable refugees to engage in productive livelihoods and contribute to the national economy. Additionally, harmonize refugee law with labour, social protection, and immigration legislation to remove legal contradictions and administrative bottlenecks.
4. The Government should review and strengthen local integration policies to expand access to permanent residency and long-term integration pathways for refugees, particularly former Rwandan refugees who are unwilling or unable to obtain national passports from their countries of origin. Policy and administrative frameworks should ensure that the absence of a foreign passport does not undermine their legal status, protection, or enjoyment of rights, including the ability to work, access services, and participate fully in Zambia's social and economic life.
5. Consider revising the Citizenship Act or the Constitution to grant automatic Zambian citizenship to children born in Zambia to refugee parents who have legally resided in the country for a specified period. This measure would help prevent statelessness and bring Zambia's legal framework in line with international human rights standards.
6. Amend the Refugees Act No. 1 of 2017 to explicitly codify the principle of non-refoulement, ensuring that refugees are not returned to countries where their life or freedom may be threatened.

7. The Immigration Department, in collaboration with the Department of Labour under the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, should ensure that qualified and competent refugees are granted the right to work without restrictive regulation of work permits. Refugees should enjoy the same working conditions as Zambian nationals, including fair remuneration, benefits, and labour protections. Furthermore, employment of refugees within government institutions should be pensionable, providing long-term social and economic security.
8. Consider extending the validity of refugee gate passes from the current 3 months to 12-month periods per issuance, with automatic renewal for individuals who pose no security concerns. This measure would reduce administrative and transaction costs for both the state and refugees, while providing refugees with sufficient time to establish and manage livelihood activities across the country.

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