The number of refugees in need of resettlement far exceeds the available number of resettlement places – and has done so for many years. For 2016 the number of refugees estimated by UNHCR to be in need of resettlement for the first time exceeds one million.

With this number in mind, NGOs continue to call on States to introduce sizeable and quality resettlement programmes or significantly increase the quota of existing resettlement programmes. States have the capacity to collectively ensure that resettlement needs are met.

NGOs strongly call upon States to increase their pledges at the upcoming US-led high level meeting on the refugee crisis on 20 September. Also, States should aim towards the goal to support the Global Compact on Responsibility-Sharing for Refugees called for by the Secretary General in his report for the UN General Assembly meeting of 19 September, in particular increasing their resettlement pledges with a view to collectively aiming towards the goal of “providing resettlement spaces or other legal pathways for admission to at least 10 per cent of the global refugee population annually.”

The conflict in Syria is now in its sixth year and there are unfortunately no signs that it will end any time soon. Out of over five million Syrian refugees, UNHCR estimates that 480,000 are in need of resettlement and this number keeps growing. The outcome of the 30 March high-level meeting has been disappointing in terms of pledges.

NGOs strongly condemn the EU-Turkey deal that has made resettlement of Syrian refugees from Turkey to the EU conditional on individuals being returned from Greece to Turkey. This deal results in a shameful one-for-one trading in human beings and implies large-scale returns between countries that do not ensure refugee protection. NGOs are also extremely concerned that this deal creates a precedent of using resettlement as a reward to states for introducing deterrence measures – something that NGOs strongly condemn. Resettlement is a humanitarian, life saving tool and a durable solution which should be offered irrespective of political agendas. NGOs caution against the EU-Turkey deal setting a precedent for other States to follow.

Syrians are not the only group of refugees in need of resettlement. Other groups of refugees such as Somalis, Afghans and Rohingyas who are in protracted refugee situations should not be overlooked when it comes to opening up resettlement places. Also in other regions of the world such as the Africa region (particularly Chad, Kenya, Ethiopia and Tanzania) and South West Asia (predominantly Iran and Pakistan) resettlement needs remain high. Access to resettlement should be equitable – reaching refugees in need regardless of location or degree of media attention.

The recent announcement by the Government of Kenya to close the camps is of deep concern and will no doubt lead to tragic consequences if carried through. Far greater commitment is needed from resettlement countries to support hosting States in Africa, such as Kenya. As such, NGOs strongly echo UNHCR’s appeal for a wider number of resettlement States to engage in Africa, noting that the United States and Canada between them received 92% of all refugees resettled from Africa.
In South East Asia, a much sharper focus on the strategic use of resettlement could be critically important in finding durable solutions for many of the region’s 300,000 refugees, especially now that political change is occurring in Myanmar. States which remain committed to resettlement could bring the region’s States together to explore options for dignified and voluntary repatriation to Myanmar while increasing pressure for better protection of refugees who remain in countries of asylum.

Timely resettlement must remain a priority. States need to achieve consensus on and put in place less time-consuming and more expedited procedures to process refugees for resettlement. Combining refugee status determination (RSD) and resettlement interviews is one way to do this. Otherwise delays will only force vulnerable people into the hands of smugglers and traffickers.

Given the current global need, States should provide alternative or complementary pathways beyond resettlement and humanitarian admission programmes. Other pathways include extended family reunification, medical evacuation and also humanitarian visas, labour mobility schemes, work visas, student scholarships and private sponsorships. These pathways can be crucial for refugees who are unable to access resettlement, providing them with a route to safety so they are not compelled to embark on life-threatening journeys in the hands of smugglers.

While NGOs strongly encourage the increase of resettlement and the opening up of alternative pathways, it is crucial that quality integration programmes, that support refugees to rebuild their lives, always remain an integral part of resettlement programmes and alternative pathways. Moreover, specialist integration services should always be available to all refugees, regardless of how they arrived. Integration into their host community is critical if refugees are to contribute to the society that has provided them with protection.

For European resettlement countries, it is a worrying development that resettled refugees are not necessarily receiving a permanent legal refugee status as the EU-Turkey deal leaves states the possibility to provide only a temporary permit for one year and some states have already shortened permits for resettled refugees.

Public support for the settlement of refugees is a crucial part of the provision of durable protection. Being an active part of civil society, NGOs contribute to strengthen public support. NGOs call upon States to actively contribute to promoting a welcoming society for refugees.

NGOs play an invaluable role in making resettlement and other pathways work. NGOs are active in all phases of resettlement from identification to the successful settlement of refugees. At a time when we are facing the worst humanitarian crisis since the Second World War, strengthened and new partnerships are necessary among all actors, at all levels. That will help to ensure that greater numbers of refugees are successfully resettled and lives continue to be saved.