

Notes UNHCR Monthly online Consultations with NGOs

Date	3 November 2021
Session Title	Resettlement and Complementary Pathways
Speakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • David Manicom, Special Advisor, Resettlement and Complementary Pathways, UNHCR • Martin Anderson, Director of International Programs & Geneva Representative, RefugePoint • Michelle Alfaro, Senior Resettlement and Complementary Pathways Coordinator, UNHCR
Moderator	Jérôme Elie , Head of Forced Migration, ICVA
Participants	70+, mostly NGOs and UNHCR staff
Executive summary	
<p>The consultations focused on solutions for refugees and current access challenges linked to the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent humanitarian emergency in Afghanistan. The consultations also drew on the Three-Year Strategy on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways (the Strategy), mandated in the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), with 10 years objectives and the vision that third country solutions will be expanded with by late 2028, with 3 million refugees benefitting from effective protection and solutions through resettlement (1 million) in 50 resettlement countries as well as complementary pathways (2 million). Additionality, quality, quantity, equity, transparency, and accountability of third country solutions were the key elements that shaped the exchanges between UNHCR and NGOs.</p>	
Major points arising from speakers	
<p>UNHCR – David Manicom</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The combination of reductions in the United States (the U.S.) resettlement targets under the previous administration and the COVID-19 pandemic, led to sharp reductions in solutions available, notably via resettlement. However, a foundation building was accomplished and at the end of the initial three-years of the Strategy, there is a much stronger ecosystem in place, with new initiatives starting to bear fruit and the prospect of significant growth in numbers in 2022. • While the pandemic halted most travel and planned actions, the new ways of working enabled and catalyzed the formation and deepening of global networks and communities of practice. Several actors have developed new case processing methods, including remote interviews, likely to facilitate future efficiencies. Thematic convenings that did not occur to the same extent than prior to the pandemic contributed to advocacy and expertise dissemination—and solidarity—in areas ranging from education to employment pathways, family reunification, resettlement processing, integration innovation, and community sponsorship. • In 2019, under the Strategy, the resettlement target of 60,000 was surpassed and the indicative data in the OECD-UNHCR joint study of work, study, and family permits suggest legal movements of persons from key refugee-producing countries of about 150,000, surpassing the Strategy’s target of 120,000. • In 2020, however, as resettlement numbers dropped to the lowest level in decades, the Strategy’s target of 80,000 will not be met. 2020 data for complementary pathways will be available in early 2022 but will likely be much lower due to the pandemic. In 2021, the prospects for meeting the objective of 90,000 are, however, much better. • On adding new resettlement countries, no real progress was made, and it should be a priority for the next phase of the Strategy. To note the increased resettlement commitments by the U.S., Canada, Finland, and the prospects for higher, sustainable levels, consistent with the goals in 2022-2023, are promising. • Although listed as a complementary pathway in the GCR, UNHCR and NGOs stressed that family reunification is a rights-based process. Despite many administrative and logistical hurdles, it is the most-relied on pathways—equaling about two thirds of all non-resettlement entries to OECD countries. • The Strategy calls for the creation of multi-stakeholder pathway-specific task forces, e.g. to drive family reunification expansion. Hence, the Family Reunification Network was launched last year, the first global platform dedicated to family reunification, and connects a new community of focal points from States, NGOs, International Organizations, Civil Society, and Academia to jointly advocate for flexible, protection-oriented eligibility criteria, and the reduction of administrative and other barriers. 	

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- **Education pathways** is a third country solution closely linked to the overall UNHCR Education Strategy. International education is a \$50 billion industry and yet financing remains one of the big challenges and an organized effort to grow global effort for education pathways is a new area. The potential is large with States best practices to leverage such as from Portugal, Italy, Canada, as well as new education corridors in France and ambitious work in the U.S. through the President's Alliance.
- The new Global Task Force on Third Country Education Pathways (called for in the Strategy) is now in place and co-chaired by Open Societies University Network and the World University Services of Canada, including States and ever larger and more influential organizations and networks such as the European Commission and the European University Association.
- On **employment and labour mobility**, the huge scale of legal cross-border flows for employment makes it likely that this path represents the greatest long-term potential. Benefits are self-evident: integration outcomes, refugee self-agency and self-respect, mutual benefits for receiving societies, and building a narrative of refugees as contributors. Given demographic pressures and labour shortages across many economies and sectors, there is a momentum building on the narrative of refugees as contributors. Nonetheless, this is also the area of greatest legal, political, and policy design complexity. New structures and new relationships are needed to maximize current potential.
- Labour mobility pilots as planned pathways have been implemented the last three years in Australia, Canada, and the UK, and are under consideration and development in other countries (e.g. Italy, Ireland, Belgium, Portugal) with EU support and funding. Canada, after some delays due to the Afghanistan emergency, will launch a global task force on refugee labour mobility in 2022.
- **Community sponsorship** can reinforce the three pillars of the Strategy by expanding resettlement, increasing the quality and quantity of reception and integration capacity, and building welcoming communities through deep engagement and empowering private citizens and community groups of all sorts. It can make responsibility-sharing and solidarity with countries of first asylum very direct and real.
- During the period of the Strategy, community sponsorship has been increasingly mainstreamed in Europe with strong policy and financial support. New programs are now in place in the UK, Ireland, Germany, Argentina, Belgium, New Zealand, Spain and under development or a planning stage in countries including Brazil, Portugal, the U.S. but the challenge remains to make these new programs larger in scale to significantly contribute to the Strategy's goals.
- There are numerous thematic developments to cover under the Strategy, but to quote one of them, the Strategy also identifies the CRISP (the UNHCR-IOM Sustainable Resettlement and Complementary Pathways Initiative) as a platform to build capacity for new and existing programs. For example, the CRISP allowed to target training for government officials/practitioners and key stakeholders and to update [UNHCR's Integration Handbook](#) to guide reception and integration of resettled refugees, launched with support from NGOs, States, and other partners.

RefugePoint – Martin Anderson

- Immediately after the completion of the Strategy, all stakeholders were invited to contribute to the Strategy's [Global Action Plan](#) for implementation issued in 2020.
- Most of the activities RefugePoint undertakes are about piloting new complementary pathway programs.
- First, there is the Economic Mobility Pathways Project, a partnership led by the Government of Canada, along with UNHCR, Talent Beyond Boundaries, RefugePoint and other partners. RefugePoint's role is to identify refugees in Kenya who may be eligible for jobs in Canada; help individuals apply for those jobs; and then work with any successful candidates to help them navigate the lengthy and complex immigration process. Currently, the economic mobility program has helped nearly 100 refugees in Kenya to apply for jobs in Canada. Most of them are still in various stages of the recruitment process, but more than 30 have received job offers, while most refugees are still in various stages of the immigration process, 4 have recently arrived in Canada.
- RefugePoint had an enormous initial learning curve, in part linked to the assumption that economic mobility would be a lot like resettlement. In some ways it is, but in other ways, RefugePoint found it to be quite different: resettlement eligibility is determined by vulnerability, and most interactions are about documenting vulnerability. For economic mobility, it is the opposite, it is about documenting skills and qualifications, reminding all of us about the importance of dignity and personal agency in third-country solutions programs and processes.
- Second, RefugePoint has a role in family reunification programs too. In partnership with UNHCR, the International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP), as well some *pro bono* legal support, the NGO role has been to use staff

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deployment to work in countries of asylum, primarily along the Central Mediterranean migration route, to identify refugees who may be eligible for family reunification with relatives already in destination countries in Europe and elsewhere. Once identified, RefugePoint then refers the cases to IRAP, which takes on the legal work needed to hopefully lead to an approved family reunification application. This is the first program designed to proactively identify potentially eligible refugees in countries of asylum and then support them and their relatives through the application process to date 900 refugees have been helped to pursue family reunification and over 100 have already been reunited with their families.

- Drawing from RefugePoint contributions to the Strategy and its action plan, two important lessons learned should be emphasized. First, with family reunification, there is growing recognition that framing it as “one pathway among many complementary pathways” significantly diminishes its unique importance as the only rights-based pathway. RefugePoint suggested allowing NGOs and UNHCR a do-over, to isolate and elevate family reunification and give it the place it deserves, rather than simply lumping it in with other pathways. Without suggesting a hierarchy, it is still helpful to think of various pathways in terms of categories: economic mobility and education visas are qualifications-based pathways; resettlement and humanitarian visas are needs-based; and family reunification is a rights-based pathway.
- Second, a helpful way of thinking about growing complementary pathways programs is in terms of **removing the barriers** refugees face when trying to access many of them. In theory, refugees have always been able to apply for jobs, scholarships, family reunification, and other pathways to destination countries around the world. However, their unique situation as refugees has made it nearly impossible for so many of them. Important barriers are documentation, as many refugees forced to flee do not have time to grab a passport, or diploma, or marriage certificate, and should not be penalized for not having documentation. Then, except for resettlement, there are often prohibitive costs associated with pursuing any other type of immigration visa. These range from the many fees for various steps in the process to the flight’s cost and the much higher cost of living upon arrival.
- Family Unity: In various ways, resettlement generally allows for a much broader conception of family than most other pathways, which focus only on the narrowest nuclear family interpretation. This poses a challenge for many refugee families, which are in general more likely to be larger and include non-nuclear family members.
- Support Services: Resettled refugees generally have access to a range of support services upon arrival that are not necessarily available to immigrants arriving through other pathways. However, just because a refugee may have job skills, or a scholarship, or a sponsor does not mean she/he does not need additional integration supports.
- Finally, today there is a lot of focus on complementary pathways. The evacuations from Afghanistan have amplified the trend, as States have reacted with impressive initiative and innovation to meet new needs. However, the central importance of resettlement as a durable solution for refugees in need of protection cannot be overlooked. In short, complementary pathways must be in addition to resettlement.

UNHCR – Michelle Alfaro

- The [Projected Global Resettlement Needs](#) have reached 1,47 million persons in 2022, with three priority situations, Syria, CRRF countries, Central Mediterranean and now additionally Afghanistan.
- From January to September 2021, 34,000 resettlement submissions took place, a 10% increase from 2020. 26,000 departures happened, a 70% increase from 2020 but departures remain low, as the pandemic and Afghanistan have contributed to the slowness in departures. UNHCR has been advocating with countries to speed up departures.
- Currently, 74 UNHCR operations are submitting cases and 23 States accept UNHCR submissions. The primary countries processing resettlement are the U.S., Canada, Sweden, Germany, and Norway.
- UNHCR continued to encourage States to provide additional resettlement places and some programs remain inactive due to the pandemic and some States have also made no resettlement commitments yet.
- UNHCR made a recommendation to the EU to resettle 36,000 persons in 2022 and the EU came back with about 30,000 places, a positive sign.
- Regarding the Afghanistan situation and access to solutions, UNHCR has been advocating for additional resettlement places for Afghans. In terms of the overall population, globally there are 2.6 million Afghan refugees, although the number is much higher, but it is the number either registered through a country or with UNHCR. 2.2 million of those refugees are in Iran and Pakistan.
- In 2021, 1’280 Afghan refugees were resettled, not in response to the current Afghanistan situation.

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- Currently, there is no quota for Iran and Pakistan as a result that UNHCR has no dedicated staffing in these countries to process resettlement but can only proceed on an *ad hoc* basis for individual cases. So, UNHCR is building up processing capacity in Iran and Pakistan as a top priority.
- UNHCR's proposal related to the current emergency has been to resettle 85,000 Afghan refugees over the next five years and asked the EU to take about half of those, i.e., 42,000. These places for Afghans would be in addition to the 2022 quota requested from the EU.
- 96,000 Afghans are estimated to be in need of resettlement as per the 2022 Projected Global Resettlement Needs and it would probably be higher.
- UNHCR stressed several key messages on Afghanistan, first for States to distinguish evacuations from resettlement, which are two distinct programs. Evacuations are an *ad hoc* emergency measure implemented directly by States for persons known by them, who have worked and collaborated with them. Resettlement is a more labour intensive, time-consuming and it has a different set of processes involved.
- Given the current overall profile of the Afghan refugee population, many of whom have been in asylum countries for years, most of those in need of resettlement belong to a protracted refugee population. UNHCR is therefore advocating for States to establish quotas regardless of arrivals in countries of asylum.
- Resettlement slots need to be preserved for those who are the most at risk in the country of asylum and are waiting for years with high resettlement needs.
- UNHCR highlighted the need for increased access to family reunification, making it easier and more accessible to expanded families or other dependents that might be part of the family.
- UNHCR recently issued a [statement calling on access to family reunification for Afghan refugees](#) where States are urged to adjust their procedures and requirements through expedited processing, flexible processing methods such as remote interviewing and flexibility regarding documentation.
- With the Afghanistan situation, there is more than ever a need to expand complementary pathways for refugees including through humanitarian, labor, and education pathways, e.g., many students and scholars may be eligible for education opportunities.
- UNHCR is encouraging States to establish humanitarian visas as another complementary pathway, especially for persons who are known to them or have strong links to their countries.
- UNHCR also encourages States to establish or expand community sponsorship programs, which have many benefits, to help increase reception and integration capacity in receiving countries.
- At the 7 October EU High-Level Meeting on providing protection to Afghans at risk, there were two events, a high-level meeting with our High Commissioner, interior ministers, ministers of foreign affairs and a meeting at senior officials level. The meeting objectives were to discuss how to provide protection to Afghans at risk, for different categories of persons receiving support, and identify concrete commitments that could be made. The objective of this meeting was also to continue the discussions on partnerships and collaboration with EU Member States and associated States. The EU, the U.S., Canada, and the UK were also invited to participate in working together on providing protection for Afghans.
- The key messages highlighted by UNHCR included calling on the EU to resettle 42,000 Afghans over a five-year period, demonstrate solidarity with countries hosting Afghan refugees for many years, and the importance to provide access to asylum for Afghans at the EU borders.
- The European Commission expressed the need to do more for Afghan refugees and stressed the goal to have more resettlement, in addition to the requested resettlement quota of 30,000 that the EU asked Member States to admit. So far, very few firm pledges for additional Afghan resettlement places have been made despite major announcements from Canada and the UK.
- The European Commission stressed the need to not only look at short-term for evacuations but also to medium- and longer-term solutions like resettlement and humanitarian admissions.
- Additionally, the European Commission announced a Multi-Annual Support Plan for Afghans at risk with funding support and through its agencies. A task force will be established to advance the Multi-Annual Support Plan.
- EASO announced an Expert Platform on Afghanistan under the EASO Network on Resettlement and Humanitarian admission with the participation of EU Member States, the U.S., Canada, UK, UNHCR, IOM, and ICMPD. An inaugural meeting already took place on 21 October and worked on terms of reference.

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- One of the key concerns for UNHCR is for States to not use evacuations in lieu of resettlement places, to not create competition between existing cases; that is why the concept of additionality is paramount.

Major points arising from discussions

- Participants agreed that States must consider humanitarian protection mechanisms as **additional** to resettlement quotas and acknowledged that pathways must provide rescue.
- Increased access to resettlement also means **equity** access during a humanitarian emergency, bearing in mind that quantity and quality are not mutually exclusive.
- Equity is also about gender as suggested by New Women Connectors. In Afghanistan, some women are in high danger because of domestic violence, sexual orientation, and there are very limited solutions options for them.
- Related to equity, all the emphasis seems to be on pathways for skilled refugees' and attention must also be paid to the potential for protection-sensitive labor pathways for unskilled and semi-skilled refugees.
- UNHCR and NGOs argued that **monitoring, clear data, and reporting** are crucial. Mechanisms must be adequately funded to monitor and evaluate resettlement and complementary pathways programs and facilitate accountability to affected populations. UNHCR's work on the **GCR Indicator Report** will be publicly available and a transparent way to evaluate resettlement and complementary pathways [*since this meeting, the Indicator report was released and accessible [here](#).*]
- Before the escalation of the humanitarian emergency in **Afghanistan**, several NGOs issued a joint [statement calling for at least 36,000 refugees to be resettled by the EU in 2022](#), very much in line with UNHCR recommendations. Then, ahead of the October High-Level Forum, 25 NGOs issued a joint [statement urging the EU to expand access to pathways to protection from Afghanistan](#), a critical statement in particular because of the securitized and concerning framing of the crisis by European leaders.
- UNHCR and NGOs emphasized that States have been very reluctant to make public commitments to resettle refugees from Afghanistan and instead prefer *ad hoc* evacuations. However, European States are well-positioned to make ambitious resettlement pledges for 2022 and beyond to start investing in a sustainable increase of resettlement efforts and also to ensure that pledges are implemented promptly. The significant delays in the past years have increased rather than reduce the burden on countries of asylum.
- The International Rescue Committee and several other NGOs continue to call for a targeted resettlement scheme and an urgent expansion of safe pathways from Afghanistan and the region. It is crucial to make sure that people at risk can safely leave the country, for States to make use of all available pathways to safety while providing secure and predictable legal status upon arrival, which is not something applied in all cases.
- States must also ensure that in the medium-term, responsibility for offering protection does not remain primarily with neighboring countries such as Iran and Pakistan that already host 90% of recognized Afghan refugees, not only as a sign of solidarity but also to encourage those countries to continue offering protection and enable border crossings.
- HIAS proposed to analyze lessons, invest in **emergency preparedness for pathways** as the Strategy was drafted prior to the pandemic and the current emergency in Afghanistan. The impacts of these situations have raised questions about how certain pathways are affected by an emergency. This pushes to take a closer look at innovations, new systems, capacity, and escalation processes to enable certain pathways to be viable to response mechanisms in emergencies.
- HIAS also acknowledged that for the small percentage of refugees gaining access to durable solutions, the process is stressful: needs for mental health and psychosocial support throughout the resettlement process cannot be ignored.
- Caritas Internationalis shared **examples of complementary pathways** such as the emergency transit mechanism that allows refugees from Libya to arrive in Italy, the education pathways developed under the [University Corridors for Refugees](#) in which Italian universities grant student status to refugees. Started in 2019 the project now includes 24 Italian universities for about 45 scholarships available in Italy. Finally, Caritas shared that an upcoming new agreement with the Italian government may open a humanitarian corridor for Afghan refugees in Iran and Pakistan.
- Along with NGOs, UNHCR, and States roles, PILnet focused on **the importance of lawyers' role** in facilitating access to complementary pathways, including in the current Afghanistan situation. This is an area where lawyers can play a very valuable role and help through supporting applications and related processes, also in cases where unfortunately those in need are not able to access refugee status determination processes. There is always space for strengthening existing

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complementary pathways and developing new ones. Developing long-term *pro bono* projects, despite greater needs and capacity limits and more collaborative *pro bono* projects such as with the private sector, are PILnet priorities.

- **Looking forward and planning for the next phase of the Strategy**, UNHCR initiated a discussion at the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement (ATCR). A discussion paper was also circulated and UNHCR is conducting a series of small-group discussions with NGOs, States, and other partners in November. A related spotlight session is planned at the High-Level Officials Meeting on 16 December [*more information on the programme and the Meeting* [here](#)].

Follow-up/Action points

To UNHCR & NGOs:

- Continue calling for additional resettlement places including for Afghan refugees and not in lieu of evacuations and complementary pathways.
- Taking into account, in light of COP26, that refugees are disproportionately impacted by climate change, as is the availability and the need for solutions.

To NGOs:

- Engage in the High-Level Officials Meeting in December 2021 to advance third-country solutions.
- Contribute to the planning of the next phase of the Strategy through inputs into the ongoing consultations.

Background documents/reports/guidance/websites

- [The EU must truly stand by the Afghan people](#), Caritas Europe, September 2021
- [The EU Cannot Shirk Its Responsibilities Towards Afghans in Need of Protection](#), Joint NGO statement, September 2021
- [EU/Afghanistan: High level meeting must deliver Afghans to safety](#), Amnesty International, October 2021
- [Human Rights Watch Letter to Members of the EU Justice and Home Affairs Council](#), October 2021, Human Rights Watch
- [Launch of the Sponsor Circle Program for Afghans](#), Press statement, U.S. Department of State, October 2021
- [Refugee Resettlement and Complementary Pathways: Opportunities for Growth](#), Migration Policy Institute & UNHCR, September 2021
- [Preserving the Humanitarian Nature of Resettlement](#), June 2021, RefugePoint
- [The Future of Refugee Resettlement & Complementary Pathways: Strengthening Sustainable and Strategic Solutions for Refugees](#), Church World Service, October 2020
- [Global Compact on Refugees Indicator Report 2021](#), UNHCR, November 2021
- [Three-Year Strategy on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways, Interim report](#), UNHCR, November 2020
- [Three-Year Strategy on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways](#), UNHCR, June 2019
- [University Corridors for Refugees](#) website, UNHCR
- [Global Refugee Forum Legal Community Pledge Matching](#) portal, PILnet