

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE
HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME
STANDING COMMITTEE
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NGO Statement on Resettlement and complementary pathways

Dear Chair,

This statement is delivered on behalf of a wide range of NGOs and echoes the recent ATCR NGO statement.

In our last Standing Committee statement on resettlement, in 2017, NGOs applauded concrete commitments made the previous September when States pledged to double annual resettlement quotas to 360,000. Yet, in 2019, only 17% of that number were resettled, just over 63,000 refugees, while resettlement needs to be increased to nearly 1.5 million in 2020.

Much has happened since 2017, of course, including the widely celebrated affirmation of the Refugee Compact, which set as an objective for the international community to expand access to third-country solutions and described resettlement and complementary pathways as integral parts of burden- and responsibility-sharing.

The Compact mandated the development of a Three-Year Strategy on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways, a process that led to a 10-year vision of 3 million refugees benefiting from resettlement and complementary pathways programmes. A multi-stakeholder comprehensive Global Action Plan now supports the Strategy and actors have started reporting on progress to date.

The Global Refugee Forum was meant to be a rallying point for mustering commitments towards that shared vision. Unfortunately, pledges on resettlement and complementary pathways were disappointing. Very few, if any, of them established new programmes, financial contributions, or quotas. Collectively, they fell far short of requirements to achieve the Strategy's vision.

To meet those goals, robust and successful complementary pathways programmes must be developed. Through the Compact, States have committed to expanding the number and the range of legal pathways available for refugees, such as family reunification, education visas, labour mobility, and humanitarian visa programmes. NGOs are already working with States and UNHCR on successful examples, and we are eager to capitalize on accomplishments and help grow and improve complementary pathways. In doing so, we must ensure programmes maintain appropriate protection safeguards – including AGD sensitivity – and guarantee access to a true, durable solution.

Critically, the growth of complementary pathways must be in addition to, not at the expense of, resettlement. Beyond numbers, additionality also means preserving resettlement as a humanitarian, needs-based program, free from the qualifications-based selection criteria used for many complementary pathways. Even if the number of refugees accessing

complementary pathways is additional to those benefiting from resettlement, the distinction is meaningless if similar criteria are used for both programmes.

Indeed, as articulated in the Strategy, resettlement programmes must be responsive to refugee needs and have maximum protection impact. Yet there is a concerning trend of resettlement States prioritizing refugees with certain language skills, educational background, employment experience, and other selection criteria. Some States prioritize resettlement from host countries willing to cooperate on other migration policies, which may be in conflict with the humanitarian nature of resettlement. Others choose to prioritize large populations of easily accessible refugees, emphasizing processing efficiency over refugee protection. As a consequence, UNHCR may be unable to refer the individuals identified as being most in need of the few and decreasing resettlement opportunities.

Speaking of closing space for third-country solutions, we are pleased to note that some States have responded flexibly to the global pandemic. Some urgent cases have continued to travel, and modified processing has also continued, though at a reduced pace. The pandemic nevertheless represents a major challenge at a time when many systems were already struggling. Yet upholding the Compact's values is important now more than ever. There should be no distancing from commitments made. All efforts must be made to sustain resources so that programmes can resume normal processing as quickly as possible, allowing refugees to travel. Systems should remain in place to respond to the protection needs of particularly vulnerable groups. For example, the unaccompanied and separated minors in the Emergency Transit Mechanisms in Niger and Rwanda remain in urgent need of a durable solution and should be prioritized for departure.

Critically, States must do everything possible to rollover any unused numbers to their quotas for next year. Moreover, stakeholders should think creatively about how to mainstream the many adaptations currently being utilized to sustain processing – like remote interviewing and dossier submissions – thus ensuring the system becomes more responsive in the future. The current crisis could become our opportunity to modernize a system stifled for many years by increasingly heavy bureaucracy.

As we see the bonds of multilateralism straining, a trend amplified by the pandemic with border closures and travel restrictions, we witness the consequences of heightened xenophobia. We hear, repeatedly, the suggestion that refugees are security threats, although evidence shows that resettled refugees are usually the most vetted immigrants.

Fortunately, we also see numerous reports highlighting that refugees are positive contributors to their communities, and we see communities in more and more countries embracing and promoting this perspective, in the form of a growing number of sponsorship programmes. There is wide recognition of the value of welcoming refugees, not only for the sake of humanitarianism but for all that refugees can and do contribute to our societies.

To achieve robust and sustainable resettlement and complementary pathways programmes, we must make this point loudly, clearly, and repeatedly. We must incorporate it into our policies, practices, and principles. While national governments (at all levels) must lead policy changes, to be successful they also require the involvement of UNHCR, NGOs, and other parts

of civil society, including local and faith communities as well as, critically, resettled refugees. By engaging the whole of society, we complement and amplify our argument that refugees strengthen societies through long-term positive impacts.

Lastly, NGOs reaffirm their pledges made on third-country solutions at the Forum. NGOs are integral contributors to nearly all parts of the resettlement and complementary pathways system. We remain ready to do our part to grow resettlement, advance complementary pathways, and promote welcoming and inclusive societies.

A detailed version of this statement is available at icvanetwork.org.

Thank you, Chair.