

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME,
STANDING COMMITTEE 93rd MEETING,
17-19 June 2025

**NGO Statement on durable solutions and complementary pathways,
including implementation of the ExCom conclusion**

Dear Chair,

This statement has been drafted in consultation with a wide range of NGOs, including refugee led organizations (RLOs) , with the objective of reflecting the diversity of views and commonality of purpose within the NGO community.

Over the past two decades, the scale of forced displacement has grown in both scale and complexity, driven by interlinked global crises including protracted armed conflict, the adverse effects of climate change and environmental degradation, in addition to targeted violence and persecution. According to UNHCR, at the end of 2024, the number of forcibly displaced persons had surpassed 122 million people worldwide, including refugees, asylum seekers, stateless people and internally displaced persons (IDPs). Displaced populations face limited access to rights, services, and durable solutions, revealing that traditional approaches are no longer adequate to address the scale of the global refugee situation.

Let's be clear. Resettlement and complementary pathways are in crisis. They are more needed, and yet more scarce, than ever before.

In this context, in October 2024, UNHCR's Executive Committee unanimously adopted Conclusion No. 117 on Durable Solutions and Complementary Pathways. The adoption of ExCom Conclusion No. 117 was an important advancement for refugee protection and an acknowledgement of the simple fact that expanding access to resettlement and making additional safe and regular pathways available to refugees saves lives. The ExCom Conclusion also reaffirmed commitments made in the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), which identified the facilitation of access to durable solutions as one of its primary objectives and recognized that complementary pathways must be made available on a more systematic, organized, sustainable and gender-responsive basis (para 94).

We would like to congratulate UNHCR and its Member States on this important achievement.

At the same time we encourage you, as leaders of our global community, to take more decisive action to overcome the grave challenges we are facing today, moving beyond traditional approaches to durable solutions and embracing more dynamic, long-term, and people-centered approaches that prioritize refugee rights, empowerment and sustainable livelihoods.

Resettlement

First, NGOs continue to emphasize the pressing need to strengthen and expand refugee resettlement. Simply put, traditional resettlement systems cannot keep pace with the global demand for solutions. Meeting this challenge will require stronger political will and collective action, with governments working alongside civil society, refugee led organizations, the private sector, community sponsors, businesses, academic institutions, and other key stakeholders, to significantly grow resettlement over the next decade. This commitment is all the more important as some key actors and traditional champions of

resettlement, including States that have historically resettled the largest numbers of refugees, have all but shut down their refugee resettlement programs, abandoning their international responsibilities. These actions have left hundreds of thousands of refugees already in the resettlement pipeline stranded without a solution. We are deeply concerned for the mental and physical well being of these refugees and we urge UNHCR and all resettlement countries to prioritize finding resettlement places and other immediate durable solutions for them. As a community, we have to make sure that, even with some resettlement states pulling back, our global resettlement community moves forward.

Complementary Pathways

Second, NGOs stress that as protection needs grow more complex, there is an increasing need for more flexible and creative complementary pathways that go beyond conventional resettlement. While not a replacement for asylum or resettlement, complementary pathways—including pathways for family reunification, labour mobility, education, humanitarian admission, and private sponsorship—provide vital avenues for forcibly displaced people to access safety, stability, and opportunity. They also recognize the potential and skills that refugees bring—specifically through labour mobility and education pathways. Over the past decade, complementary pathways have gained momentum, reflecting a shared commitment of States and non-traditional actors alike. Notably, ExCom Conclusion No. 117 was the first ExCom Conclusion to address complementary pathways in detail, including their crucial role as a facilitator of solutions. Strengthening and investing in these solutions is key to overcoming persistent challenges with traditional resettlement programs and supporting better outcomes for both refugees and the communities that welcome them.

Among other things, ExCom Conclusion No. 117 calls upon States to facilitate family reunification as an important pathway to durable solutions, including through adoption of clear, effective and flexible procedures to restore refugees' family unity and enjoyment of their right to family life" (f, iv).

Chair, the right to family unity is a fundamental human right, recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and each of the core international human rights treaties. It encompasses the right of families to live together, to seek family reunification if separated, to have their family life respected and, for children, recognition that family unity is integral to a child's development, protection and safety. In the case of refugees, reuniting separated families helps them to heal from trauma and significantly increases integration prospects in their new home. It can also save lives by preventing refugees from turning to smugglers or resorting to dangerous and irregular journeys to reunite with their loved ones.

During the Global Refugee Forum (GRF) of 2023, member States and other stakeholders committed to take concrete measures to facilitate access to family reunification through a global Multistakeholder Pledge on Supporting Refugee Family Reunification. The Multistakeholder Pledge on Supporting Refugee Family Reunification has the ambitious goal of helping at least one million refugees reunite with their families by 2030.

This pledge is being spearheaded by a Global Family Reunification Network (FRUN), the first global platform devoted to family reunification for refugees and other beneficiaries of international protection. The FRUN provides States and other relevant stakeholders with a common space for sharing good practices and exchanging ideas, promoting State-to-State engagement, capacity building and advocacy for expanded access to family reunification in line with the GCR and UNHCR's Roadmap 2030 on Third Country Solutions for Refugees.

While much has been accomplished since the launch of the FRUN and the global Multistakeholder Pledge on Supporting Refugee Family Reunification, significant gaps remain in order to make these ambitious goals and commitments a reality. In particular:

- **Procedural requirements:** States should streamline processing and ease procedural requirements associated with family reunification procedures, including the need to present birth certificates, passports or other identity documents which many refugees lack, instead utilizing other methods to verify identity and family relationships.
- **Affordability:** States should reduce or remove the costs associated with applying for family reunification visas.
- **Eligibility:** States should broaden the definition of “family” to include relationships of dependency consistent with guidance from UNHCR and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, including people connected by biology, adoption, marriage, or strong emotional bonds, such as adult siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other caregivers. States should also recognize that refugees’ own definitions of family, shaped by diverse cultural norms or by bonds forged through shared hardship or support in exile, may extend to distant relatives or to non-kin who have acted as family in moments of crisis.
- **Accessibility:** States should remove restrictions on who is able to access family reunification, including restrictions based on nationality, age, or socio-economic status. Equally, states should ensure that individuals applying for family reunification have access to free legal information, advice, and representation at all steps of the procedure.

Refugee Participation and Leadership

Finally, NGOs stress that meaningful refugee participation and leadership is a critical cross-cutting foundation to successful durable solutions and complementary pathways. The Global Compact on Refugees underscores the importance of facilitating the inclusion and participation of refugees in decision-making processes. We emphasize the importance of involving refugee-led organizations in these decision-making processes and program implementation in an equitable and sustainable manner. RLOs play a crucial role in connecting the voices and perspectives of refugees, ensuring their meaningful participation in all aspects of our work. In particular, RLOs are well-placed to share information within their communities about durable solutions and to provide supports to refugees navigating them.

In conclusion, as representatives of NGOs committed to advancing durable solutions for forcibly displaced people, we urge States to redouble their commitment to resettlement and complementary pathways, ensuring family unity and the facilitating the important contributions of refugee led organizations. We hope you will consider the recommendations outlined in this statement and we stand ready to support and collaborate with UNHCR and governments to put these recommendations into action.

Thank you.