



# GLOBAL RESPONSIBILITY SHARING

## THROUGH PATHWAYS FOR ADMISSION OF SYRIAN REFUGEES

“ *Syria is the biggest humanitarian and refugee crisis of our time, a continuing cause of suffering for millions which should be garnering a groundswell of support around the world... A tragedy of this scale demands solidarity beyond funding. Put simply, we need more countries to share the load by taking a greater share of refugees from what has become the biggest displacement crisis of a generation.* ”

Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees  
15 March 2016



# Introduction

The conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic has resulted in one of the worst humanitarian and displacement crises in decades, forcing more than 4.8 million Syrians across borders and displacing an estimated 6.6 million internally. Countries in the region, including Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, continue to host the largest numbers of Syrian refugees. With no current opportunity for safe and sustainable return to the Syrian Arab Republic, the exhaustion of personal resources, and the deterioration of living conditions in host countries after five years of conflict, many Syrian refugees have moved further afield, particularly to Europe. In 2015, Syrians represented 49 per cent of the over 1 million people who risked their lives crossing the Mediterranean. Resources are also increasingly strained in host countries where the majority of refugees still remain.

In November 2015, the United Nations Secretary-General announced a progressive roadmap to address the continued pressures on host countries and the range of humanitarian concerns entailed by the onward movements of refugees. As part of this roadmap, and with a view to addressing the Syrian refugee crisis, the Secretary-General requested that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees convene a ministerial-level meeting to garner increased support for refugees as well as host countries through concrete pledges for resettlement and other forms of admission of Syrian refugees. This event will feed into a High-Level Plenary Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly on Addressing Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants, which will be held in New York on 19 September 2016, and which is intended to secure global commitments to addressing humanitarian needs of refugees and migrants from a range of countries of origin.

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Najah, 10, a refugee from Deir Ez Zour in Syria stands in her family's tent in an informal settlement in Saadnayel, near Zahle in Lebanon. She said: "I would like to go to school and to learn...so I can become someone. There is a school here but it's for little children, I can't go to it and it's not formal." ©UNHCR/Sam Tarling

# Scope and objectives

The primary objective of the event on 30 March 2016 will be to secure pledges for increased opportunities for admission of Syrian refugees. Such pledges would build on the significant efforts that have already been made by a number of States, and the meeting will showcase innovative initiatives that have been developed to provide pathways for the safe and dignified admission of refugees.

## AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND, STATES MAY PLEDGE TO:

- 1 Create or expand humanitarian pathways for admission, which are specifically designed to provide protection to refugees with compelling needs. Humanitarian pathways for admission may include resettlement, humanitarian admission, private sponsorships, humanitarian visas, and medical evacuation.
- 2 Facilitate access to additional pathways for admission, by creating or expanding opportunities for Syrian refugees to access safety and protection through family reunification, academic scholarships, study opportunities and apprenticeships, skilled migration and labour mobility schemes, or by relaxing or removing legal barriers or administrative requirements for admission.

Building on existing pledges, the target is to secure pathways for at least 10 per cent of the Syrian refugee population over the next three years.

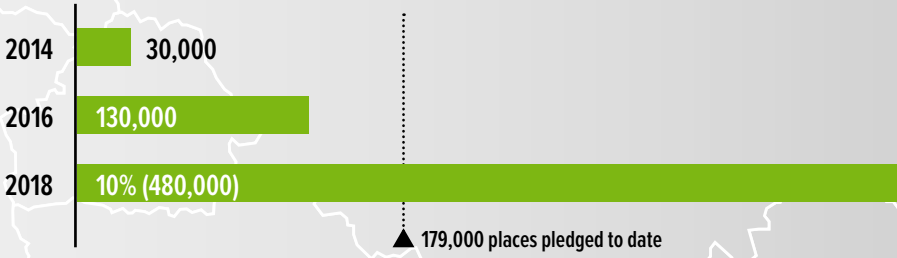
There is an urgent need for the international community to re-commit to the fundamental principle of international cooperation to share responsibility for refugees more equitably. Resettlement is the traditional procedure through which UNHCR identifies and assists refugees with specific needs and vulnerabilities to move from host countries to other States. While resettlement can help to shoulder a portion of the responsibility falling on host countries, which typically provide protection to large numbers of refugees, there are other mechanisms to facilitate protection and solidarity. Pathways for admission may include any mechanism which allows for legal entry to and stay within a third country. In addition to serving as a concrete expression of responsibility sharing, humanitarian and additional pathways for admission can reduce the need for refugees to resort to irregular and dangerous onward movements and can help refugees to retain and gain the skills and experience necessary to support eventual solutions. Such pathways also allow destination States to put in place proper screening and facilitation procedures for refugees arriving on their territory.



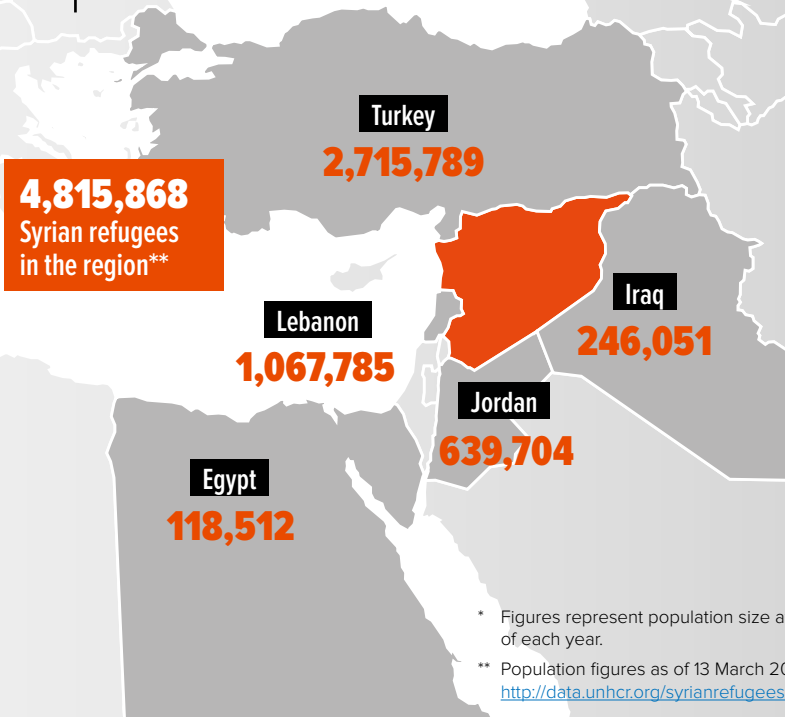
Bathoul, 19 years from Dara'a, Syria, came to Jordan in March 2015. She was arrested in Syria and imprisoned for 3 months after being caught with a blood pressure monitor which was part of her pharmaceutical studies, accused of supplying medical equipment to armed groups. In June 2015 she left Jordan for Germany after being granted a visa to reunite with her brother who was granted asylum. © UNHCR/Christopher Herwig

In response to UNHCR's previous calls, some 30 countries have generously made humanitarian pathways for admission available to more than 179,000 refugees to date. However, the conflict continues unabated, Syrians continue to flee their country, host communities are overstretched, and the living conditions for Syrian refugees have further deteriorated. Given these circumstances, the 10 per cent target for the provision of pathways for admission should not be viewed as the final goal. Rather, it is an important milestone to be secured over the next three years. Furthermore, such pathways should benefit all civilians fleeing Syria who are in need of international protection, including stateless refugees.

## Milestones for resettlement and other forms of admission for Syrian refugees



## Syrian refugee population globally\*



\* Figures represent population size at the end of each year.

\*\* Population figures as of 13 March 2016, <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>



Approximately 560,000 Palestine refugees displaced from the 1948 Arab Israeli war were residing in Syria prior to the Syrian conflict. Today, it is estimated that 450,000 Palestine refugees remain in Syria of which 280,000 have been internally displaced, and some 95% are in need of humanitarian assistance. Of those Palestine refugees who have managed to flee to other countries in the region, the vast majority are in an increasingly precarious and vulnerable situation. Palestine refugees fleeing further afield face many of the same challenges as other refugees from Syria. © UNRWA/Taghrid

## What are pathways to admission

Humanitarian pathways, such as resettlement and other humanitarian admission programmes, private sponsorship programmes for individuals in humanitarian need, some special humanitarian visas, and medical evacuation, are designed to provide protection and solutions for refugees at risk.

Additional pathways may not specifically address the protection risks faced by refugees, but can advance protection and solutions for refugees and serve as an important expression of solidarity. Such pathways may include family reunification, including for extended family members, skilled migration, labour mobility schemes, and academic scholarships and apprenticeships.

The following section contains a non-exhaustive list of pathways for admission, which States could consider implementing to provide safety and protection for Syrian refugees.

## HUMANITARIAN PATHWAYS

### 1. Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission

Resettlement and humanitarian admission programmes are crucial for refugees whose life, liberty, safety, health, or other human rights are at risk, and resettlement in particular is one of the durable solutions that UNHCR traditionally pursues in cooperation with States. Resettlement and humanitarian admission entail the transfer of refugees from a State in which they have sought protection to a third State that has agreed to admit them either permanently or on a temporary basis. Under these programmes, States ensure protection against *refoulement* and provide refugees with access to civil, economic, social, and cultural rights similar to those enjoyed by nationals, as well as, where appropriate, the opportunity to become a citizen in accordance with national laws. Refugees referred for humanitarian admission may benefit from expedited processing by States. Depending on national legislation, humanitarian admission may be provided to specific categories of refugees, such as socio-economically vulnerable persons, family members, individuals with previous links to a country, or persons with medical needs.

### 2. Humanitarian Visas

Humanitarian visa programmes, such as those introduced by Argentina, Brazil, France, and Switzerland, provide Syrian refugees with access to a third country and/or the opportunity to apply for asylum. Those who travel to a third country on a humanitarian visa may be granted asylum-seeker or refugee status upon arrival. They may also be provided with access to expedited asylum procedures. Humanitarian visas, which are issued at the discretion of individual States, have proven useful in assisting extended family members who would not otherwise qualify for family reunification, and for other vulnerable refugees.

### 3. Private Sponsorship

Private sponsorship programmes draw on private and community resources to enable refugees to be resettled with the support of private citizens, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or other interested groups, such as local authorities or faith-based groups. Under these programmes, refugee applicants are identified directly by their sponsors. Private sponsorship programmes, such as those implemented by Australia and Canada, can create bonds between refugees, community-based organizations and receiving communities, and can be implemented alongside or in conjunction with government resettlement programmes. Private sponsorship can also enable refugees to reunite with extended family members who may not otherwise



## REFUGEES SUBMITTED BY UNHCR FOR RESETTLEMENT OR HUMANITARIAN ADMISSION

Since 2013, in total UNHCR has submitted more than 82,000 Syrian refugees for resettlement or humanitarian admission consideration (numbers as of 29 February 2016). UNHCR has primarily implemented resettlement programmes for Syrian refugees in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey.

UNHCR works closely with resettlement and humanitarian admission States to prioritize the most vulnerable, including women and girls at risk, children and adolescents at risk, refugees with legal or physical protection needs, survivors of violence or torture, refugees with medical needs or disabilities, refugees at risk due to their sexual orientation or gender identity, vulnerable older refugees, and refugees in need of family reunification. Vulnerable refugees are identified through registration data and community outreach by UNHCR and its partners.

Graph: UNHCR Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Submissions of Syrians, 2013-2015



qualify for family reunification. Sponsors may take responsibility for some of the costs associated with resettlement, reception, and integration support in the community, extending the country's capacity to support refugees.

### 4. Medical Evacuation

Medical evacuation procedures provide for the admission of refugees with urgent medical needs that may be successfully treated in a third country. Medical needs can give rise to protection challenges as families must balance the costs of medical treatment against other essential needs such as food, rent, and education. The admission of those with serious medical conditions is also a concrete expression of responsibility sharing with host countries. Medical evacuation programmes may facilitate the admission of refugees with medical needs as part of resettlement, humanitarian admission, humanitarian visa or other programmes, along with their families who are a key source of support.



Syrian chef Mahmoud and his wife Rasha pose with their four young children at a local park in the Jordanian capital Amman. The father of four used to own a popular restaurant with his brother in Homs, but in late 2011 as the fighting in western Syria intensified, he was forced to close down and flee to neighbouring Jordan. Life as refugees for the past four years has been hard for Mahmoud, 36, and his young family. Unable to work legally, he has struggled with financial hardship and lost hope that their situation will improve. "We're not doing well. It's not a stable life for the children, and we don't see a future here," he says. After a process that has lasted more than two years, the family will be resettled to their new life in Memphis, Tennessee.

© UNHCR/Charlie Dunmore

## ADDITIONAL PATHWAYS

Through the use of additional pathways, UNHCR hopes that existing migration programmes and systems can be made more accessible to refugees and their families, while ensuring compliance with basic refugee protection principles. With this in mind, some changes to existing visa and migration regimes could strengthen international protection overall while retaining the integrity and objectives of national systems. The following are some areas to consider for action in order for general migration or settlement programming to become more accessible to refugees:

## INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION SAFEGUARDS IN THE CONTEXT OF ADDITIONAL PATHWAYS

- **PROTECTION AGAINST REFOULEMENT:** Provisions must be made to ensure protection against refoulement for recognized refugees who enter under non-humanitarian programmes;
- **THE RIGHT TO SEEK ASYLUM:** Individuals should have the right to apply for asylum, regardless of the pathway used to enter or stay in a third country. Legal safeguards should be introduced to ensure that refugees can benefit from work or education opportunities without jeopardising their refugee status in the country of asylum, as well as their right to seek international protection or family reunification in a third country;
- **NON-DISCRIMINATORY APPLICATION PROCESSES:** Programmes should be reviewed to consider the extent to which some visa classes or processes might structurally discriminate on the basis of gender, sex, age, ethnicity, statelessness, age and other factors and how changes could facilitate the take-up of pathways by refugees who are marginalized in countries of origin and in countries of asylum. For example, refugees could be exempted from regulations requiring visa applications to be made within countries of origin;
- **PREVENTION OF STATELESSNESS:** Safeguards should be in place for the prevention of statelessness, such as accessible birth registration systems and acquisition of citizenship for children born on territory and for those who are unable to acquire another nationality.

## STREAMLINED AND ACCESSIBLE PROCEDURES

- Administrative processes should be adjusted to facilitate the use of existing systems by refugees, for example through deferred or waived fees for refugee applicants; facilitated access to embassies and consulates; online and simplified application portals; targeted administrative assistance; reduction of processing times; reduced or alternative documentary and other administrative requirements and targeted information sharing to address rumours and mis-information.

## 1. Family Reunion

Family reunion allows for the admission of relatives of refugees who are already residing in a third country. Within displaced communities the presence of nuclear and extended family members reduces protection risks, and family groups are likely to settle and integrate faster once all family members are known to be safe. Relatives who do not fall within the scope of existing family reunification criteria often face obstacles reuniting with their family members abroad.

### KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

#### FAMILY REUNION

- **ELIGIBILITY:** Criteria should be expanded to permit refugees to be reunified with extended family members. Where possible, family reunification criteria should allow for the admission of relatives of Syrian refugees regardless of the type or duration of the root family's visa/legal stay arrangements. Length of residency or place of application requirements should be removed as a precondition for family reunification.
- **ACCESSIBLE PROCEDURES:** The burden of proof in establishing family relationships should be reviewed in situations where documents have been lost or destroyed and duplicates are not available.
- **TRAVEL:** States may consider introducing a travel fund to assist with the travel costs for the admission of relatives, or the delayed payment of fees.

## 2. Skilled Migration and Labour Mobility Opportunities

Skilled migration and labour mobility opportunities provide for the authorized onward movement of Syrian refugees to third countries to pursue employment. They may form part of traditional migration channels or may be established specifically for Syrian refugees. Access to employment facilitates the re-establishment of a normal life following displacement, and helps refugees to live in dignity and attain an adequate standard of living. Work also provides refugees with the possibility of contributing to the development of their host country and community, as well as to their country of origin. If strategically planned and managed, skilled migration and labour mobility schemes can help States to meet their labour market needs and foster innovation and skills transfers. In establishing such schemes, States and employers need to ensure that Syrian refugees are not disadvantaged due to their specific situation, such as lack of documentation, the need for accreditation of their qualifications, or fear of exploitation, fear of loss of work and thus legal residency.

### KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

## SKILLED MIGRATION AND LABOUR MOBILITY OPPORTUNITIES

- **ELIGIBILITY:** Criteria could be widened through the expansion of eligible nationalities, categories of workers and sponsoring industries; similarly, review of connections between skills and entry and stay arrangements could facilitate the entry of refugees with demonstrated potential whose study or work experience was interrupted by flight.
- **ACCESSIBLE PROCEDURES:** Flexibility should be applied to requirements related to documentary evidence to establish skills and education, and copies in lieu of original documents should be accepted. Partnerships with industry and recruitment sectors may be used to support skills and accreditation.
- **EFFICIENT AND MORE INCLUSIVE PROCEDURES:** Refugees could travel more quickly if eligible candidates with family in the third country were prioritised for case processing. Support to regional entities, employer groups, chambers of commerce and others could support the increase of refugee inclusion in existing non-humanitarian programmes.



Syrian refugee Hanan Dacka (center), 12 years-old, does classroom work alongside newly-made Brazilian friends Maria Luiza de Sousa, 12, Julia Vanderlei, 12, and Andressa Rabasco, 12, at the Duque de Caxias Municipal School, in the Glicerio neighborhood of downtown Sao Paulo, Brazil, on February 25, 2016. Hanan arrived in Sao Paulo with her mother, Yusra Bakri, in early 2015 and was recognized as a refugee by the Brazilian government in September of that year.  
© UNHCR/Gabo Morales

### **3. Academic Scholarships, Study and Apprenticeship Programmes**

Academic scholarships, study and apprenticeship programmes provide a mechanism for eligible Syrian refugees to study or to continue their education or vocational training. Such programmes, similar to those in Canada, the Czech Republic and Germany, can involve universities or polytechnic institutions, governments and civil society working together to develop and fund relevant arrangements. Academic scholarship and apprenticeship programmes need to take into consideration the specific challenges that face refugees, including lack of documentation and academic certificates.

## KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

### ACADEMIC SCHOLARSHIPS, STUDY AND APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMMES<sup>2</sup>

- **ELIGIBILITY:** Work with educational institutions could provide processes by which refugees whose education was interrupted by flight could have their potential evaluated. Adult education and bridging programmes could facilitate the acquisition of skills and training that would otherwise bar refugee applicants from accessing established programmes.
- **STREAMLINED AND ACCESSIBLE PROCEDURES:** Partnerships with industry, educational institutions, on-line testing systems and flexibility with regard to original documents could support expedited processing. Documentary requirements for admission into scholarship and apprenticeship programmes could be relaxed or waived for refugees whose documentation is not readily accessible, for example where documents were left behind or destroyed in the country of origin.
- **TRAVEL:** Refugee students could be assisted to obtain valid travel documents as well as access to lawful travel through formal channels.
- **FINANCIAL SUPPORT:** Funding should be available to refugee students for the duration of their studies and cover direct and indirect study costs including the cost of living, medical fees, and language courses and other essentials. Students could also be granted work permits for holiday periods so as to facilitate their stay and financial contribution to their studies.
- **LEGAL PROTECTION:** Refugee students should have the right to legal stay throughout the duration of their studies and related learning opportunities, such as post-degree internships and fellowships. It is of utmost importance that students do not find themselves in situations of expired residency, destitution or forced return to their countries of origin as a result of pursuing studies abroad. Clear provision should be made for the options available to refugee students post-graduation, including by outlining a pathway to legal employment, residency and family reunification in the receiving country when possible.

<sup>1</sup> For further details please refer to UNHCR's *Higher Education Considerations for Refugees in Countries Affected by the Syria and Iraq Crises* <http://www.unhcr.org/568bc5279.html>



## Steps taken to mobilize increased opportunities for admission and a wider range of solutions opportunities

### SYRIA CORE GROUP

To pave the way for further State commitments, a Core Group on resettlement of Syrian refugees, comprised of 27 States, the European Union, the International Organization for Migration, and UNHCR, was established in 2013. The Core Group aims to: (1) secure increased opportunities for resettlement, acceptance rates, and flexible application of criteria; (2) increase cooperation and support for streamlined resettlement processes from identification to departure; and (3) foster dialogue with host States to demonstrate solidarity and support the resettlement and protection of refugees.



Abdullah, 53, a refugee from Aleppo province in Syria talks with boys outside his tent in an informal settlement in Saadnayel, near Zahle in Lebanon. Abdullah is unable to work because he suffers blindness due to years of diabetes and has limited mobility after suffering a stroke.  
© UNHCR/Sam Tarling

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The Core Group has conducted field visits to Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey to meet with host Governments, UNHCR staff, and Syrian refugees. These visits have helped to familiarize States with the operational contexts, provided opportunities to liaise with the host Governments, and laid the groundwork for increased resettlement and humanitarian admission opportunities for Syrian refugees. The Core Group has been invaluable in garnering State cooperation, consensus, and support for enhanced and expedited resettlement procedures for Syrian refugees; sharing information and best practices; and mobilizing larger and longer-term commitments.

The High-Level meeting in March 2016 is an expansion of the efforts that the Syria Core Group has made in the advancement of additional pathways for Syrian refugees through innovative approaches and in partnership with UNHCR. The Syria Core Group has also been an important forum to address issues related to integrity and security, which has enabled States to move forward with simplified resettlement procedures addressing the needs of the Syrian population.

## **HOST STATES RESETTLEMENT WORKING GROUP**

The Resettlement Working Group (RWG) is comprised of the Geneva-based Permanent Missions of the host States in the region, including Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. The RWG has been meeting regularly with UNHCR and the Syria Core Group Chair in Geneva to exchange information and feedback on humanitarian admission and resettlement for Syrian refugees.

The host States all have welcomed the efforts to secure larger commitments for resettlement, humanitarian pathways and additional pathways to admission, and have asked resettlement States to consider the complex environments in which they are operating when planning and implementing these programmes.

## UNHCR's strategy for the upscaling of resettlement and other pathways for admission

In response to increased places for Syrian refugees, UNHCR's objective is to increase access to resettlement and other pathways for admission, and to enhance the efficiency of resettlement while maintaining the integrity of procedures. This will also increase solidarity with host States and improve UNHCR's capacity to assist refugees remaining in the region.

A focus on effective and efficient identification of the risks and needs of refugees, including through protection-sensitive registration and community-based protection activities, is critical. Moreover, there is a need to complement increased resettlement with greater efforts to expand pathways to protection and solutions. Strengthened protection-based registration data will support effective targeting to ensure all available pathways to admission and solutions are fully utilized. With a greater understanding of refugees' capacities, coping strategies and a proactive approach to the use of non-traditional pathways, there is scope for UNHCR and partners to contribute to a wider range of solutions opportunities. UNHCR is working to providing guidance and overall operational capacity for the long-term provision of increased pathways to admission and solutions, including through the facilitation of new programmes. In this regard, States are encouraged to pursue the possibility of working together in partnership to further develop such programmes and the lifting of obstacles to refugees' autonomous use of existing channels.

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Abdullah, 42, a refugee from Deir Ez Zour stands outside of the tent in which his family lives, in an informal settlement in Saadnayel, near Zahle in Lebanon. Abdullah said: "The challenge we face here is how to survive. Problems of debt. On top of the situation of my children who need an operation and who need care, I can't find work. I owe the supermarket \$3000, if I go to him now and ask to take bread he will say no. I want to work so I can feed my children. So we can live. So I can pay all my debt. In Syria we used to work and didn't have a problem in the world. But today I am sitting here without work, any Syrian here without work, 95 percent of us have been affected psychologically by this." The Syrian civil war, which entered its sixth year, has forced more than 4.8 million Syrians to flee the country, 1.07 million of whom are currently registered by UNHCR in Lebanon. © UNHCR/Sam Tarling





Due to the war in Syria, 9-year-old Mahmoud Farid and his family fled to the Beit Al Aila neighbourhood in 6th of October City outside of Cairo, Egypt. Mahmoud and his family, who are originally from Aleppo, have been living in Torsby, Sweden for a year. © UNHCR / J. Bävman