

Background note

**Enhancing resettlement
through private sponsorship
programmes – an increased
role for civil society in
Switzerland?**

Roundtable

Bern, 11 December 2017

Background

Resettlement and other legal pathways enable refugees to reach safety without having to embark on hazardous journeys. They are globally recognized as important tools for the resolution of large refugee crises. In the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2016, UN Member States expressed their intention “to expand the number and range of legal pathways available for refugees to be admitted or resettled in third countries”.¹

Switzerland has been engaged in resettlement since the 1950s and has since then successfully resettled and integrated many refugee groups. More recently, Switzerland has set up three consecutive programmes for the resettlement of refugees of the Syrian conflict. The latest of these three programmes will end in 2019.

Given the significant shortage in resettlement places available worldwide, a continuation, augmentation and institutionalisation of the Swiss resettlement programme would be key. While there seems to be interest in a continuation of the programme, concerns are voiced by some relating to the high costs and challenges of integration.

Civil society as well as interested local communities could play an important role through advocacy to get the necessary political consensus for a continuation of the resettlement programme. In addition, building on the longstanding experience they have in volunteer work, concrete and active support for overcoming the identified challenges of the existing programme could also be decisive for its continuation.

So-called private sponsorship programmes could provide a vehicle for offering for such support. These are civil society initiatives which commit private resources to complement government responsibilities in resettlement programmes. The area for which private resources are used can vary depending on the programme. All such initiatives are, however, in one way or the other engaged in the local integration of legally admitted refugees. Thus, they create positive dynamics at local level, improve integration outcomes and build relationships between refugees and the host communities.

¹ *New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, A/RES/71/1, 19th September 2016, para 77, available at <http://www.refworld.org/docid/57ceb74a4.html>.*

Objective

The roundtable will

- inform about the UNHCR resettlement programme and global needs for legal pathways;
- inform about private sponsorship programmes;
- discuss whether and how private sponsorship programmes could help to continue and institutionalise the Swiss resettlement programme.

Convener and Host Organisation

UNHCR Office for Switzerland and Liechtenstein.

For any questions, please contact

Ms. Tina Zumbühl, zumbuehl@unhcr.org, +41 (0) 22 739 78 67.

Venue and Date

The roundtable will take place on 11 December 2017 from 10h30 - 17h30 at Vatter Business Centre (room Adrian Frutiger), Bärenplatz 3 Bern (<https://www.vatter.ch/business>).

Participation

Selected civil society organisations or initiatives practically engaged in the integration of refugees, and representatives of churches, will be invited to participate. Please send the registration form before **1 December 2017** to Tina Zumbühl (zumbuehl@unhcr.org).

Languages

Presentations and discussions will be held in either German or English, interpretation will be offered in each of these two languages, respectively. Please indicate your needs on the registration form attached.

Agenda

- 10h00 – 10h30 *Arrival of participants and coffee break*
- 10h30 – 10h45 *Welcome and introduction*
Anja Klug, Head of the Office for Switzerland and Liechtenstein, UNHCR (German)
- 10h45 – 11h15 *Enhancing resettlement through private sponsorship programmes*
Christof Portmann, Resettlement Officer, UNHCR Resettlement Service HQ (German)
- 11h15 – 11h45 *Private sponsorship globally and in Europe*
Petra Hueck, Head of International Catholic Migration Commission ICMC Europe (English)
- 11h45 – 13h00 *Practical examples*
Private sponsorship models in Canada
Caroline Guimond, Minister Counsellor (Migration), Canadian embassy in France (English)
Sabine Lehr, Private Sponsorship of Refugees Manager, Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria (English/German)
The UK Sponsorship Scheme
Gordon East, Christian Help & Action for Refugees in Somerset, CHARIS (English)
- 13h00 – 14h00 *Lunch break*
- 14h00 – 14h15 *Input Swiss State Secretariat for Migration (SEM)*
Barbara Loos, Head of Resettlement Unit, and Regula Zürcher, Head of Integration Unit (German)
- 14h15 – 15h00 *Supporting the integration of resettled refugees in Switzerland – civil society initiatives*
Input of 4 successful (voluntary) integration projects
- *Silvana Menzli*, Scientific Assistant, Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches (SEK) and *Diane Barraud*, Pastor protestant church of the canton Vaud
 - *K. Wolf*, Parish Administrator, Roman Catholic Church, Küsnacht-Erlenbach
 - *Alice Portenier*, volunteer coordinator Red Cross Youth, SRK Aargau
 - *Vincent Baumgartner*, Co-Founder, Project Integration Geneva

15h00 – 16h00 *Working groups – a private sponsorship programme for Switzerland?*

Points for discussion:

- What kind of support could be offered by civil society? For how long?
- Which actors could be engaged as sponsors? Who could help?
- How can actors be convinced to get involved? How can the support of the population be ensured? How can NGOs proceed? How can additional actors be convinced?
- Which support do the sponsors need?
- What would be the best distribution of responsibilities between UNHCR, federal/cantonal authorities, local communities and civil society?
- Which private sponsorship model could be appropriate for Switzerland?
- Next steps?

16h00 – 16h15 *Coffee break*

16h15 – 17h15 *Reporting back the results of the workshops to plenary group and discussion*

17h15 – 17h30 *Closing remarks and end of workshop*

Anja Klug, Head of the Office for Switzerland and Liechtenstein,
UNHCR (German)