

Refugee Resettlement

What is refugee resettlement?

Resettlement is an invaluable protection tool to meet the specific needs of refugees whose life, liberty, safety, health or fundamental human rights are at risk in the country where they have sought refuge. For almost seventy years, UNHCR has used resettlement to provide millions of refugees with protection and the opportunity to build new lives for themselves and their families.

Resettlement is a process which results in a third country solution for refugees who have no option to integrate locally or return to their home country. UNHCR identifies and refers refugees for resettlement in accordance with established submission categories based on heightened protection risks, after determining their eligibility for international protection. Resettlement States then decide who to admit. Resettlement can only be achieved through collaboration with various partners, in particular resettlement States, other international organisations and especially critical, civil society.

According to the UNHCR Resettlement Handbook *“Resettlement involves the selection and transfer of refugees from a State in which they have sought protection to a third State that has agreed to admit them – as refugees – with permanent residence status. The status provided ensures protection against refoulement and provides a resettled refugee and his/her family or dependants with access to rights similar to those enjoyed by nationals. Resettlement also carries with it the opportunity to eventually become a naturalized citizen of the resettlement country.”*

What are the objectives of resettlement?

Resettlement has three functions¹: (i) resettlement is an important **protection tool** to meet the specific needs of refugees whose fundamental rights are at risk in the country where they sought asylum; (ii) resettlement offers refugees a **long term solution** by ending their displacement, and (iii) resettlement is an international **responsibility sharing mechanism** because it signals support for countries hosting large refugee populations.²

How is refugee resettlement part of UNHCR’s mandate?

UNHCR has been entrusted by the United Nations General Assembly with the mandate to provide international protection to refugees and, together with States, to seek solutions to refugee problems.³ ⁴ Resettlement is therefore an essential element of the international

¹ <http://www.unhcr.org/46f7c0ee2.pdf> UNHCR Resettlement Handbook p3.

² The expansion of resettlement and complementary pathway as a tangible mechanism for burden and responsibility sharing is one of the central objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) http://www.unhcr.org/gcr/GCR_English.pdf.

³ UNHCR’s Statute, adopted by the General Assembly in 1950 and extended by subsequent UN General Assembly Resolutions, states that UNHCR’s functions are to: Provide international protection to refugees and Assist governments to find durable solutions for them.

⁴ UNHCR’s Statute and subsequent resolutions from the United Nations General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) **mandate the Agency to provide international protection to refugees and other persons of concern** to the Office and – as a consequence – to **seek permanent or durable solutions** to their problem. Resettlement plays a vital role in achieving both of these objectives.

protection regime. UNHCR leads the development of global resettlement policy⁵ and partners with resettlement States to coordinate and deliver resettlement programmes that offer protection and solutions to refugees facing heightened protection risks.

As UNHCR plays a central role in the resettlement process, its well-established structures at Headquarters and in the field are key to strengthening resettlement capacity, improving access to resettlement for those refugees in need, and implementing consistent operational standards to deliver coherent and predictable resettlement programmes that address refugees' needs with fairness, diligence, integrity, transparency and accountability.

The Resettlement Continuum



⁵ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *UNHCR Resettlement Handbook*, 2011, July 2011, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4ecb973c2.html>.

The Stages of the Resettlement Continuum

1. Each year UNHCR maps the Projected Global Resettlement Needs (PGRN)⁶ for the following year based on the protection assessments of national offices. UNHCR presents the global needs to States and NGOs at the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement (ATCR) and advocates for those refugees requiring resettlement based on their protection needs in host countries as well as regional and global priorities. Resettlement often forms a part of comprehensive protection and solutions strategies.
2. UNHCR's country operations identify individuals for resettlement through a range of tools and methods including the registration database, networks of protection partners and community engagement, according to resettlement categories; women and girls at risk, survivors of violence and/or torture, children and adolescents at risk, and refugees with legal and physical protection needs or medical needs.
3. UNHCR assesses those identified to be satisfied that they are eligible for international protection and meet the criteria for resettlement. This process includes interviews, through which the protection needs of individuals are carefully assessed. In cases where refugee status is not already recognized, this process may also include a determination of refugee status under the UNHCR mandate.
4. Although refugees do have the right to decide whether or not they wish to be resettled they cannot choose which country UNHCR will ask to consider their case.
5. Personal data including names, biographic information, biometric data and the reasons why refugees are considered to be in need of international protection are processed and shared in accordance with [UNHCR's Policy on the Protection of Personal Data of Persons of Concern](#).
6. Resettlement States undertake their own thorough screening and review processes, including identity and national security checks. The final decision on whether to accept refugees for resettlement lies with States.
7. Resettlement States work with partners to deliver pre-departure orientation and counselling, medical screening and departure arrangements to prepare refugees for travel.
8. Upon arrival, Resettlement States, NGOs, communities and sponsors provide reception and integration support.
9. UNHCR, States and NGOs come together bilaterally every year to review the progress of the global resettlement programme at the ATCR. Data and evidence are used to review the impact of resettlement as a protection tool, durable solution and responsibility sharing mechanism.

⁶ <http://www.unhcr.org/protection/resettlement/5b28a7df4/projected-global-resettlement-needs-2019.html>

1. UNHCR maps Global Refugee Resettlement Needs and advocates with States

UNHCR maps the PGRN⁷ each year based on the protection assessments of national offices. UNHCR presents the global resettlement needs to States and NGOs at the ATCR and advocates for those refugees requiring resettlement based on their protection needs in the country of asylum.

Resettlement is one aspect of UNHCR's work to provide international protection to refugees. The identification and analysis of resettlement needs is an integral part of UNHCR's holistic approach to protection, as part of both national and regional protection and solutions strategies. When used strategically, resettlement not only benefits those who are resettled but also brings protection dividends to the rest of the refugee community, for example resettlement opens up possibilities for self-reliance and helps to convince countries of first asylum to maintain open borders.

UNHCR is uniquely situated to understand and analyse resettlement needs and the impact of resettlement across countries and regions of asylum due to its global presence and mandate to provide protection and solutions for refugees. UNHCR country offices worldwide use a standard approach to determine the role and scope of resettlement within the overall protection and solutions strategy considering the protection environment and availability of other durable solutions (local integration or voluntary repatriation). UNHCR is also well situated to work with host countries to ensure support for resettlement, identify situations and ways that resettlement can have a positive impact on the protection environment in those countries, as part of comprehensive refugee responses.

The current resettlement landscape is marked by an increasing gap between resettlement needs and available places. On average, less than 1% of the world's refugee population benefit from resettlement. It is critical that those refugees most in need of resettlement can benefit from the limited number of opportunities. Systematic identification of resettlement needs across the world, based on consistent, fair, objective, and protection focused methodology, is therefore paramount to ensuring that resettlement achieves its intended objectives.

UNHCR systematically maps and compiles the global refugee resettlement needs each year in accordance with the categories defined in the Resettlement Handbook. UNHCR is able to consistently apply these categories globally, through the work of national offices who have detailed knowledge of refugee populations, networks with national partners, regular interactions with refugees and information contained in registration databases related to the specific needs of refugees (see point 2 below for details).

The annual **UNHCR PGRN** document contains details of the protection environment and refugee profiles in need of resettlement in UNHCR operations globally - traditionally over 60 country chapters are included. The PGRN is used to raise awareness and advocate for those refugee populations who are most at risk and which are recommended for resettlement by UNHCR. It serves as the primary reference document for dialogue on resettlement needs,

⁷ <http://www.unhcr.org/protection/resettlement/5b28a7df4/projected-global-resettlement-needs-2019.html>

priorities, likely gaps and challenges in programme delivery, allowing informed decisions on quota and resource allocations.

UNHCR distributes the PGRN each year during the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement (ATCR) which is the primary vehicle for collaborative efforts between UNHCR, governments, NGOs, refugees and other stakeholders.

The ATCR is a tripartite forum (UNHCR, States and Civil Society), which promotes partnerships reflecting the variety of stakeholders engaged in the resettlement process. Through the ATCR, partners develop resettlement policy and procedures, advocate for the establishment and expansion of resettlement opportunities, build capacity and share best practices, enhance global resettlement delivery, share data and evidence on the availability and impact of resettlement, and shape joint strategies on resettlement. The Working Group on Resettlement (WGR) supports the work of the ATCR through smaller and more targeted consultative forums to discuss specific policy and operational aspects of resettlement - topics for WGRs have included simplification and integrity of procedures, and integration.

The **UNHCR Resettlement Handbook**, which is the cornerstone of global resettlement policy was developed in consultation with the ATCR community, in response to the need for coherent and consistent policy and procedures on resettlement. The ATCR community has also worked with UNHCR to establish **Core and Contact Groups** to address priority situations for resettlement, including the resettlement of refugees from Bhutan, Syria, Colombia, Afghanistan, the Great Lakes and the Central Mediterranean Situation. The Core Group model is recognized as a good practice of resettlement States and UNHCR, serving as an effective vehicle to advance the strategic use of resettlement, the development of innovative processing modalities, and responsibility sharing with host countries.

UNHCR's Resettlement and Complementary Pathways Service plays a critical role in supporting the ATCR process through policy guidance and data, as well as through organisational support to the ATCR which is chaired by a rotating State and NGO co-chair every year.

States with established refugee resettlement programmes agree to consider a certain number of cases submitted by UNHCR. The Resettlement and Complementary Pathways Service coordinates engagement with resettlement States holding regular meetings to discuss ways to respond to specific populations in need of resettlement, and to support States in the development of programmes that are best able to respond to the identified needs of refugees.

In particular, UNHCR has observed a greater need for more flexible and diverse resettlement programmes that are not tied to a particular region or population and can be used to respond to protection needs arising in any location, including emergency cases. UNHCR also advises Resettlement States to avoid consideration of perceived integration potential in their selection criteria (e.g. age, language abilities, education or skills). State resettlement programmes should also adhere to humanitarian principles, and not discriminate on the basis of nationality, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or other factors which are not related to the protection needs of refugees.

The UNHCR assessment of global resettlement needs and priorities assists States to target their programmes and bilateral discussions with States are an opportunity to discuss specific needs that can be met by individual States depending upon the nature of their programmes and available services.

UNHCR urges all States to be guided by the Office's internationally recognized categories on eligibility, global needs and priorities. UNHCR continues to advocate that resettlement allocations be made primarily with reference to individual protection needs faced by refugees, and that programmes remain diverse, non-discriminatory and flexible, reflecting the global distribution of needs.

2. UNHCR identifies individuals for resettlement based on protection criteria

UNHCR's operations identify individuals for resettlement through a range of tools and methods including the registration database, networks of protection partners and community engagement and according to categories of vulnerability including, women and girls at risk, survivors of violence and/or torture, children at risk, and refugees with legal and physical protection needs or medical needs.

Ensuring fair and transparent access to the resettlement process is a UNHCR priority. The most vulnerable refugees are sometimes the least visible and vocal, and UNHCR's identification and referral mechanisms concentrate on proactively ensuring access to the resettlement process for those most in need. Since it was established, UNHCR has developed a range of tools and methodologies to identify the resettlement and other protection needs of refugees. An objective, efficient and protection-based identification process is critical to decrease potential for the fraudulent use of the resettlement system, abuse and exploitation as well as perceptions of arbitrariness in resettlement decision making.

The identification of individuals potentially in need of resettlement is an integral part of UNHCR's ongoing protection activities. UNHCR's identification processes are based on a range of available tools as well as the operations detailed knowledge and understanding of the refugee population and of their specific needs and vulnerabilities.

UNHCR's Registration Tools:

UNHCR's registration data assists to protect the integrity of resettlement, as it is a reliable and continuous source of information related to individual refugees and their specific needs, increasingly strengthened by the creation of a biometric identity for individuals above five years of age. The primary registration system used by UNHCR, and sometimes by host governments, is *proGres*, which contains entries for millions of individuals. *proGres* is continuously updated when refugees and/or partners report protection problems, and contains detailed biodata and photographs of individuals, information on family composition, and information on specific needs (based on over 70 specific needs codes). Biometric data including fingerprints and/or iris scans is also collected in many countries where UNHCR is responsible for the registration of refugees, using either Biometric Identity Management System (BIMS) or IrisGuard, in accordance with [UNHCR Guidance on Registration and Identity Management](#).

Registration data is not only an important integrity tool, but the information can also be filtered to allow UNHCR to objectively identify those individuals within an existing population that may be in need of resettlement.

Networks of Protection Partners:

UNHCR works closely with external partners to gather important information that can support the identification of those at risk and in need of protection interventions.

In some contexts, UNHCR uses humanitarian assistance management databases, to identify vulnerable households who may be in need of resettlement. In the Middle East and North Africa Region, a web-based assistance management platform (RAIS) is used by UNHCR, partners, and donors to ensure effective tracking of assistance and has enhanced capacity to identify households who are likely to face protection risk. It is now the main coordination tool for country operations of the Syrian refugee response (Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, and Iraq) and is used by over 200 partners with over 7 million assistance records corresponding to 1.5 million beneficiaries.

Vulnerable cases are also identified for resettlement through protection referrals from partners and community-based protection teams operating in countries of asylum. Consultation with partners helps UNHCR gain insight into a refugee's particular challenges and risks in the country of asylum and provides access to additional data on vulnerabilities and needs. Community-based protection teams and partners who provide support and services to SGBV survivors, children, refugees with disabilities, older people and the LGBTI community also directly refer individuals to resettlement where appropriate.

UNHCR operations worldwide have case management systems that incorporate mechanisms for the identification of resettlement needs through internal and external sources. These extensive networks help ensuring the identification for resettlement of those refugees whose protection needs are the most urgent.

Community Engagement and Participatory Assessments:

Continuous dialogue with refugee communities is paramount to provide effective protection. UNHCR uses community-based approaches to strengthen protection through empowering communities to obtain their rights safely and with dignity. A community-based approach implies that communities, through consultation and participation, engage meaningfully and substantively in all aspects of programmes that affect them, and play a leading role in change. UNHCR works with numerous community structures including Refugee Welfare Councils (RWCs), community activists, gender-taskforces, SGBV activists, child protection committees, youth groups, etc. These structures are generally complemented by community outreach workers/volunteers living within the community.

Additionally, UNHCR uses the participatory assessment methodology, a process of building partnerships with refugees through structured dialogue, to gain an even deeper insight into communities. Participatory assessments conducted using an age, gender and diversity sensitive approach provide important information about the needs of refugees and the challenges they experience. This information can support the identification of refugees at risk.

Through its multi-faceted engagement with refugees, partners, communities, and host governments, UNHCR not only has a unique understanding of the needs of refugees and can identify individuals at risk, but also relationships of trust with communities which leads to the sharing of insights, needs and expectations.

Resettlement Categories

Resettlement is only available to refugees who have a continued need for international protection, and meet one of seven resettlement submission categories, which are inclusive and may overlap:

- Legal and/or Physical Protection Needs of the refugee in the country of refuge (this includes a threat of *refoulement*);

- Survivors of Violence and/or Torture, in particular where repatriation or the conditions of asylum could result in further traumatization and/or heightened risk; or where appropriate treatment is not available;
- Medical Needs, in particular life-saving treatment that is unavailable in the host country;
- Women and Girls at Risk, who have protection problems particular to their gender;
- Family Reunification, when resettlement is the only means to reunite refugee family members who, owing to refugee flight or displacement, are separated by borders or entire continents;
- Children and Adolescents at Risk, where a best interests determination supports resettlement;
- Lack of Foreseeable Alternative Durable Solutions, which generally is relevant only when other solutions are not feasible in the foreseeable future, when resettlement can be used strategically, and/or when it can open possibilities for comprehensive solutions.

Resettlement submissions are prioritized according to the urgency of the case. Most resettlement submission categories relate to specific individual protection needs, for example, where the physical or legal security of a refugee is at stake or where specialized services (e.g. psycho-social or medical) are required that are not available in the country of asylum. The use of resettlement as a tool for international protection generally requires the identification of particularly at-risk people within a much larger group of refugees. However, the resettlement of an entire refugee group in a country may be warranted in some situations, either to ensure international protection or to provide a durable solution in a protracted refugee situation.

The processes for identifying and prioritising individuals for resettlement are complex, not least because of the scarcity of resettlement opportunities. UNHCR has significant practice and expertise in the consistent application of established criteria over the years. UNHCR is also in a position to manage the expectations of individuals who do not meet the criteria and provide counselling on support available within the country of asylum, thus minimizing the potential of security and integrity risks associated with resettlement processes. Further information on the categories and processes for resettlement can be found in UNHCR's Resettlement Handbook.

3. UNHCR assesses those identified and refers suitable cases to Resettlement States

After an individual is identified for resettlement consideration, UNHCR caseworkers undertake one or more interviews and assessments of those identified to decide if a case should be prioritized for submission to a resettlement State. UNHCR assesses these individuals through processes based on objective and consistent global categories to determine suitability for resettlement. This involves a confirmation of refugee status, which includes an assessment as to whether a person is excluded from refugee status under Article 1F of the Refugee Convention for committing certain serious crimes and/or heinous acts. The assessment also confirms the resettlement needs of the refugee.

Specifically, through the interview and assessment process, UNHCR verifies the refugees' biodata and family composition, confirms their international protection needs, and gathers information related to the specific needs and protection risks.

As a result of this process, some individuals may be found not to be eligible for resettlement. For example, anyone who has committed a serious crime or for whom there are indications that they may pose a threat to others would not be referred for resettlement in another country.

UNHCR caseworkers are experienced at interviewing refugees and follow standard operating procedures to ensure that only those refugees in need of resettlement are referred based on the consistent application of resettlement categories and case prioritization. During the interviews the existence of family members in other locations globally is examined in an effort to maintain family unity, and issues related to child protection that may require [Best Interests Procedures](#) to be carried out.

The information gathered by UNHCR is analysed and summarised in the Resettlement Registration Form (RRF), which goes through a review process before it is shared with resettlement states using a harmonized format.

UNHCR determines the country of submission based on a number of factors including the urgency of the protection needs, the availability of quotas, family links and the existence of services to address refugees' specific needs in the country of resettlement. In addition to the preparation of the RRF, throughout the resettlement process UNHCR staff provide refugees with counselling on resettlement processes and manage expectations.

UNHCR has since its foundation been an operational actor and applies consistent standards globally to ensure transparency in resettlement processing. UNHCR understands and shares the desire of States to ensure the integrity of resettlement programmes, since systems that protect the integrity of the resettlement process also serve to protect refugees. It is on account of UNHCR's well-established and globally consistent procedures for resettlement identification and referral that resettlement States are assured of the eligibility of refugees for international protection and are able to initiate their consideration of cases for resettlement.

4. Resettlement States screen and decide which refugees to accept

Resettlement States undertake their own thorough screening processes, including identity and national security checks, and decide whether to accept refugees for resettlement.

After resettlement States determine the overall size and composition of their resettlement programmes, UNHCR recommends individuals and groups of refugees identified according to global needs and priorities and refers these individuals for resettlement consideration. Resettlement States assess individual referrals made by UNHCR and decide whether or not to admit refugees according to their policies, laws and regulations. While some resettlement States interview refugees before making the decision to admit them, often through selection missions in host countries or remote interviews by video-conference, other States accept refugees for resettlement based on the referral (dossier) submitted by UNHCR.⁸

⁸ For further details of Resettlement States Programmes and Procedures please refer to the Country Chapters which are annexed to the Resettlement Handbook.

UNHCR supports Resettlement States in their decision-making process through support during selection missions or in case a State's adjudicators have further questions on specific cases. At the same time, UNHCR continues to extend its services and provide protection to refugees until departure to the Resettlement State.

5. Partners offer pre-departure orientation, medical screening, and other logistics

Resettlement States work with partners to deliver pre-departure orientation and counselling, medical screening and departure arrangements to prepare refugees for travel.

A number of considerations and arrangements need to be in place before a refugee is in a position to travel to the country of destination. These include pre-departure orientation where refugees receive practical information on the resettlement country and have an opportunity to reflect upon their upcoming resettlement and raise questions regarding the integration process. Additionally, some States conduct pre-departure health assessments to ensure they are prepared to respond to possible health issues upon arrival of refugees as well as pre-embarkation checks, which are a last-minute effort to assess refugees' fitness to travel. These services are regularly provided by the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Throughout these processes, UNHCR continues to extend its services and provide protection to refugees until departure to the Resettlement State.

6. Resettlement States, NGOs, communities and sponsors provide reception and integration support

Upon arrival, Resettlement States, NGOs, communities and sponsors provide reception and integration support.

Resettlement goes far beyond the relocation of refugees to a third state; it involves a process of being received and integrated within a new society. Governments, NGOs, volunteers, the local population, and the refugees themselves all contribute to the integration process. With the support of receiving communities, resettled refugees are able to begin a new life with dignity and respect.

Whilst there is no agreed upon definition, integration is understood as a mutual, dynamic, multifaceted and on-going process with three interrelated dimensions: legal, economic and social-cultural.⁹ Integration is a complex and gradual process with legal, economic, social and cultural dimensions. It imposes considerable demands on both the individual and the receiving society. In many cases, acquiring the nationality of the country of asylum is the culmination of this process. From a refugee perspective, integration requires a preparedness to adapt to the

⁹ Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme, Conclusion on Local Integration No. 104 (LVI) - 2005, 7 October 2005, No. 104 (LVI), available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4357a91b2.html>. See also p. 13 UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Refugee Resettlement. An International Handbook to Guide Reception and Integration, September 2002, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/405189284.html>. "From a refugee perspective, integration requires a preparedness to adapt to the lifestyle of the host society without having to lose one's own cultural identity. From the point of view of the host society, it requires a willingness for communities to be welcoming and responsive to refugees and for public institutions to meet the needs of a diverse population"

lifestyle of the host society without having to lose one's own cultural identity. From the point of view of the host society, it requires a willingness for communities to be welcoming and responsive to refugees and for public institutions to meet the needs of a diverse population.

Through its country offices worldwide, UNHCR works closely with States, host communities and refugees to prepare a welcoming environment and to ensure that structures and services are available that facilitate the successful integration of resettlement refugees.

7. UNHCR, States and NGOs review the progress of the global resettlement programme

UNHCR, States and NGOs come together to review the progress of the global resettlement programme at the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement (ATCR). Data and evidence are used to review the impact of resettlement as a protection tool, durable solution and responsibility sharing mechanism

Each year, as part of the ATCR Resettlement, the resettlement community comes together to review achievements and strategise for the future.

Up to date comprehensive data on UNHCR's resettlement activities is shared on a monthly basis through [UNHCR's Resettlement Data Portal](#). The availability of consistently gathered and published resettlement data allows stakeholders to review and discuss challenges and opportunities related to resettlement delivery.