
**Executive Committee of the
High Commissioner's Programme**

Distr.: Restricted
17 June 2021
English
Original: English and French

**Standing Committee
81st meeting**

Solutions

Summary

This paper provides an update on UNHCR's efforts to achieve solutions for refugees and other persons of concern to the Office since the conference room papers on resettlement and complementary pathways (EC/71/SC/CRP.10); voluntary repatriation (EC/71/SC/CRP.11); and self-reliance and inclusion (EC/71/SC/CRP.12) were presented at the seventy-eighth meeting of the Standing Committee in July 2020.

Contents

	<i>Paragraphs</i>	<i>Page</i>
I. Highlights of the progress and challenges in achieving solutions	1-16	3
A. Voluntary repatriation.....	2-7	3
B. Integration and other local solutions.....	8-10	4
C. Resettlement	11-13	4
D. Complementary Pathways	14-16	5
II. Inclusion and access to national systems.....	17-24	5
III. Conclusion	25	6

I. Highlights of the progress and challenges in achieving solutions

1. Seeking solutions from the onset of a displacement crisis, and continuing to do so despite multiple challenges, remains a core responsibility of the High Commissioner in the pursuit of his mandate. The objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and the outcomes of the Global Refugee Forum (GRF) underpin this work. The three support platforms, which were launched at the GRF in 2019, continued to strengthen regional responses to forced displacement in the Afghanistan situation as well as in Central America¹ and East Africa – in partnership with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). As an innovative approach set out in the GCR, the support platforms help bring focus and foster broad partnership towards finding solutions for some of the largest and most protracted refugee situations worldwide, including through developing a regional joint comprehensive plan on solutions in South Sudan and the Sudan, addressing the root causes of displacement in Central America and investing in the priority areas for return and reintegration in Afghanistan.

A. Voluntary repatriation

2. By the end of 2020, some 250,000 refugees had returned to their countries of origin, a decrease of 21 per cent compared to 2019. Returns were hampered by the outbreak of the new coronavirus disease (COVID-19), which also caused the suspension of voluntary repatriation operations as a result of border closures. Furthermore, obstacles in many countries of origin, including ongoing conflict, persistent insecurity, impunity for crimes and human rights violations, as well as the absence of essential services, had a significant influence on the decision of refugees about whether to return or not.

3. Nevertheless, some refugees were able to return during the reporting period. Since voluntary repatriation operations started in September 2017, around 120,500 Burundian refugees have returned, including over 40,700 in 2020 from the United Republic of Tanzania (30,636), Rwanda (7,896) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (1,946). Results from recent monitoring in return areas in Burundi indicated some improvement in the ability of returnees to access services and reintegrate: nearly 79 per cent of returnee households reported having access to primary health care; 82 per cent to land and 72 per cent reported having obtained civil status documents.

4. In 2020, returns to Afghanistan dropped by over 70 per cent compared to 2019. This was largely due to a suspension of voluntary repatriation as a result of the pandemic, coupled with the worsening security situation in the country and a lack of basic services and economic opportunities. Under the framework of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR), the Government of Afghanistan committed to double the number of priority areas for return and reintegration from 20 to 40. Supporting the priority areas is a key component of UNHCR's collaboration with the Government and includes strengthening essential facilities and services for communities in return areas. In 2020, UNHCR and partners assisted more than 900,000 returnees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and host community members in the priority areas.

5. A decrease in returns was also observed in the Middle East, where information collected by UNHCR showed that some 38,000 Syrian refugees returned spontaneously in 2020. This constitutes a 60 per cent decline compared to the trends between 2016 and 2020, when a quarter of a million Syrian refugees returned. Ensuring that voluntary, safe and dignified return remains an option for those who choose it is a central consideration in UNHCR's approach to solutions for Syrian refugees and IDPs.

6. Some 135,000 refugees returned to the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria and South Sudan, both spontaneously and with UNHCR's assistance. In South Sudan and the Sudan, UNHCR continued to monitor conditions in return areas and provide support

¹ The Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (known as MIRPS by its Spanish acronym) is essential for promoting a coordinated response to forced displacement in Central America and Mexico.

to returning refugees and IDPs, including community-based projects focused on peacebuilding efforts. The approach taken by South Sudan and the Sudan in their respective national peace processes provides a robust foundation for increasing the prospects for sustainable returns. In this context, UNHCR, together with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), provides support to Sudan's Peace Commission for the implementation of the Juba Peace Agreement.

7. Globally, UNHCR continues to promote all viable prospects for creating the conditions conducive to return. With this in mind, the Office strengthened cooperation with the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) which has played an instrumental role in advancing the broad objectives of sustaining peace and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in supporting the United Nations Country Teams to address the needs of returning refugees and IDPs. The PBF is financially supporting several solutions-related projects, including in Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and the Sudan, in line with its [2020-2024 strategy](#).

B. Local integration and other local solutions

8. The integration of refugees in their country of asylum is a complex and gradual process. It requires enabling policies, interest from the refugees and support to host communities. Building on the momentum generated by the GCR and subsequent pledges announced at the GRF, UNHCR continued to pursue self-reliance outcomes for refugees in 2020. This was done through advocacy with government stakeholders, the coordination of support for accessing services and referrals, and strategic assistance for the inclusion of refugees in national systems.

9. In some countries, refugees were granted long-term legal status, while in others, they benefited from long-term stay arrangements and were allowed access to education opportunities and labour markets. In 2020, over 620 refugees were naturalized in Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Guinea-Bissau. In Albania, Azerbaijan, Ghana and Namibia, more than 2,000 refugees were able to renew their long-term residence permits, allowing them to access employment and ultimately become eligible for naturalization. Frameworks were established to facilitate the legal integration of refugees in the Philippines, in collaboration with the Special Committee on Naturalization. In Mexico, an innovative programme has helped thousands of refugees relocate in the country and restart their lives in new communities, with support to access temporary housing, cultural orientation, vocational training, school enrolment and job placement. After two years of permanent residence, relocated refugees can apply for naturalization.

10. Furthermore, progress was observed in the implementation of some of the local integration pledges made at the GRF. The Democratic Republic of the Congo advanced on its commitment to provide ten-year residence permits to 200,000 Rwandan refugees who have opted to stay in the country after cessation of refugee status. In Chad, all newly arrived refugees were integrated into host villages in an effort to pursue a solutions-oriented approach from the outset.

C. Resettlement

11. As the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbates protection risks for refugees and places further strain on host countries, resettlement is more critical than ever as a protection tool and a durable solution, as well as a tangible demonstration of burden- and responsibility-sharing. Nonetheless, resettlement places remain limited. In 2020, resettlement opportunities decreased and the implementation of UNHCR's "Three-year strategy on resettlement and complementary pathways", which anticipated the resettlement of 70,000 refugees in 2020, suffered a setback due to COVID-19. Some 22,800 refugees departed for resettlement to 22 countries, a 64 per cent decrease compared to 2019. Recent developments, however, indicate the potential for more positive resettlement trends in the future, including through the efforts of UNHCR and partners to promote the involvement of a greater number of countries, in line with the three-year strategy.

12. UNHCR submitted over 39,500 refugees for resettlement to 25 countries. The Office continued to advocate an increase in resettlement opportunities given the global resettlement needs of an estimated 1.44 million refugees in 2021. Priority situations for resettlement include: the central Mediterranean situation, the Syria situation and countries that are applying the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework approach. The emergency transit mechanisms (ETMs) in Niger, Rwanda and Romania continued to provide a life-saving solution for some refugees, with 533 persons transferred from Libya to these temporary locations. However, the lengthy processing of submitted cases by some resettlement countries, due in part to constraints related to COVID-19, impeded resettlement departures from the ETMs in Niger and Rwanda. This backlog in departures hampered further evacuations from Libya.

13. In the context of the pandemic, UNHCR worked with partners to ensure the continuity of operations and essential programmes, ensuring the protection of those most at risk. The Office encouraged States to use flexible and innovative modalities to conduct interviews and process visas. Furthermore, UNHCR engaged with States and other key stakeholders with a view to strengthening partnerships, including through the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement (ATCR), the Priority Situations Core Group and the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative. A refugee steering group was established, with support from the ATCR co-chairs and UNHCR, to strengthen the participation of refugees in this process and ultimately form a global refugee advisory group by 2023. Moreover, the Sustainable Resettlement and Complementary Pathways Initiative (CRISP), which UNHCR co-leads with the International Organization for Migration, has proven a valuable tool in the implementation of the three-year strategy, supporting States to strengthen their capacity to establish or expand third country solutions.

D. Complementary pathways for admission of refugees to third countries

14. The pandemic also had an adverse impact on the admission of refugees to third countries through complementary pathways. The suspension of visa services, appointments and new applications particularly affected refugees with pending family reunification applications. The economic slowdown in many parts of the world affected labour mobility opportunities, and many scholarship programmes for refugees were temporarily halted.

15. At the same time, multi-stakeholder partnerships aimed at expanding complementary pathways increased, enabling actors to share good practices and advocate greater access to solutions for refugees. UNHCR led the creation of the global task force on third-country education pathways, which is supported by the CRISP. The Office also launched a global family reunification network and worked on the creation of a global refugee labour mobility task force. The three initiatives constitute important milestones aimed at maintaining the momentum for and advancing the implementation of the three-year strategy.

16. UNHCR and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) updated the study "[Safe pathways for refugees II](#)" with data from 2019 with a view to strengthening the evidence base for the availability and use of complementary pathways. The report showed that nearly 156,000 first-time residency permits were issued in 2019 for study, work and family purposes in OECD countries and Brazil to nationals from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Somalia, the Syrian Arab Republic and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

II. Inclusion and access to national systems

17. UNHCR continues to work on the operationalization of GRF commitments for the inclusion of refugees and other persons of concern in national socioeconomic systems, with the aim of strengthening their self-reliance and ensuring their equitable access to protection and rights. Building on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, UNHCR promoted the inclusion of refugees and persons of concern in national development planning, including through its engagement in the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework process.

18. The inclusion of refugees and other persons of concerns to UNHCR in national systems and strategies, as well as in the approaches of development partners, is particularly critical in the context of the COVID-19 response. With this in mind, UNHCR redoubled its advocacy efforts in support of the inclusion of refugees and host communities in national assessment plans. The Office also expanded partnerships with multilateral development banks, bilateral development agencies and peace-building entities, advocating the inclusion of persons of concern across all areas of work in relation to the COVID-19 response. For example, in Uganda, UNHCR provided comprehensive datasets on educational and health facilities operated by humanitarian partners in order to inform the dialogue between the Government and the World Bank on the inclusion of refugees in the national resource allocation formula for services delivered by local authorities.

19. Colombia's landmark decision to grant temporary protection status for a ten-year period to Venezuelans in the country, announced in February 2021, gives some 1.7 million Venezuelans access to national services, including health care. This initiative will provide them with documentation and allow them to work, which will reduce their dependence on humanitarian assistance and give them an opportunity to contribute to the well-being of the communities that host them.

20. The pandemic significantly impacted the access of refugees to education. Building on existing partnerships, UNHCR promoted the inclusion of refugees in national planning and roll-out of educational responses, including with respect to distance-learning and digital learning programmes. In Uganda, UNHCR expanded the access of refugee students to a digital learning platform named Kolibri. Moreover, significant progress was made on the inclusion of refugees in national education systems in West and Central Africa. In addition, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad and Mali included refugee children in their respective national education sector plans.

21. Refugees in vulnerable situations were included in national health insurance schemes, for example in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Rwanda. In line with the GCR, UNHCR continued to advocate the inclusion of refugees in national health systems through policies, strategies, planning and service delivering. This was coupled with the provision of support for the national COVID-19 response, including for the isolation and treatment centres as well as intensive care units. A survey which was conducted by UNHCR in 48 refugee-hosting countries found that 89.6 per cent of refugees living with HIV/AIDs were able to access antiretroviral treatment through national systems, and 96 per cent of these host countries offered primary health care services under equivalent conditions as nationals.

22. The pandemic brought to the fore the needs of refugees, returnees, IDPs and stateless persons and benefits of including them in health and social protection systems. UNHCR advocated equitable access for all persons of concern to COVID-19 vaccines. Jordan was one of the first countries to include refugees in their national vaccination campaigns, and many others have since followed suit. Nevertheless, a more equitable and effective distribution of COVID-19 vaccines is urgently needed to enable host countries to advance the vaccination of their nationals and refugees in an efficient manner.

23. Building on efforts prior to the pandemic, a number of countries in Europe as well as Brazil, Cameroon, the Congo (Republic) and South Africa included refugees in cash or in-kind assistance within national social protection programmes as part of the COVID-19 response. Moreover, 11 countries across Africa and Asia are planning to do the same, with funding from the World Bank under the refugee and host community sub-window of the International Development Association (IDA18).² UNHCR is also working with governments and partners to support the continued access of refugees to health insurance schemes in a number of countries, including Ghana, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Kenya, Rwanda and the Sudan.

24. Engagement and advocacy aimed at strengthening the economic and financial inclusion of refugees and promoting their self-reliance has increased. In this context, in South

² The list of the countries that were deemed eligible to access financing under the IDA18 sub-window for refugees and host communities may be found here: <https://ida.worldbank.org/replenishments/ida-18replenishments/ida18-regional-sub-window-for-refugees-host-communities>.

Africa, refugees were included in the national policy framework, “An Inclusive Financial Sector for All”. In other countries, including Brazil, Ecuador, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Peru, Rwanda and Uganda, financial service providers have taken actions to support refugee clients with the restructuring or refinancing of loans, introducing a loan repayment moratorium and promoting digital services. In Brazil, the implementation of an innovative employment-based modality, in collaboration with the private sector, has enabled access to employment for over 4,000 refugees and migrants since 2018. This modality is a component of the “interiorization strategy” of the Government of Brazil which facilitates the relocation of Venezuelan refugees and migrants from the border states of Roraima and Amazonas to other cities in the country. In addition, following the launch of the “[Empresas.com Refugiados](#)” platform, over 60 job opportunities were created in 2020 for refugees.

III. Conclusion

25. The pursuit of durable solutions for refugees is a core part of UNHCR’s mandate. Achieving solutions on a scale commensurate with the needs of refugees requires the sustained commitment of States and all stakeholders. The GCR and the Global Refugee Forum offer new avenues for increasing the number of refugees worldwide who are able to attain a viable solution, live productive lives and contribute socially and economically to society.
