



CWS

The Future of Refugee Resettlement & Complementary Pathways:

Strengthening Sustainable and Strategic Humanitarian Solutions for Refugees

Executive Summaryⁱ

One of three durable solutions traditionally available for refugees, third-country resettlement is an important part of the international commitment to refugee protection and support. This commitment has been reaffirmed in recent years in the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees, the first-ever 2019 Global Refugee Forum, and UNHCR's Three-Year Strategy (2019 – 2021) on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways (3YS). Yet many of the estimated 1.4 million refugees in need of resettlement as a durable solution in 2020 are unlikely to be resettled. In 2019, only 63,727 (4.5%) of the total 1,428,011 refugees in need of resettlement were resettled.

What is next for refugee resettlement given these unprecedented challenges?

This paper argues that resettlement can and should be a humanitarian program to (1) find protection for individuals, and (2) strategically contribute to the resolution of situations of forced displacement. However, achieving these goals will require political, structural, and operational changes.

Resettlement must be re-imagined to be better:

- led, with power more widely distributed amongst refugees and civil society;
- organized, through enhanced coordination among all actors;
- funded with predictable, and sustainable commitments;
- and operated be more efficient and effective for those who need it most.

The following summary presents the paper's key cross-cutting recommendations followed by a summary of recommendations in each operational area.

Cross-Cutting Recommendations

In order to bolster resettlement as a humanitarian solution for the future, all resettlement partners should:

- **Promote Holistic Solutions**

The current scale of global displacement provides an opportunity to revisit resettlement as a tool for providing solutions not only to the refugees who are able to access resettlement, but also to incentivize and open space for other meaningful solutions to entire groups of refugees. Examining the current operation of resettlement reveals opportunities to test, evaluate, and strengthen resettlement's strategic objectives.

- **Share Authority in Resettlement Operations**

Discussion of the role of UNHCR vis-à-vis resettlement states and civil society reveals an opportunity to better share authority in resettlement operations. Civil society should continue and grow its leadership role within international resettlement practice. The design and operation of resettlement must involve meaningful input and feedback from refugee communities at all levels.

- **Use Data to Improve Outcomes**

Better, more coordinated data collection and analysis by all resettlement actors would improve the efficiency and equity of refugee resettlement. Improved data collection and analysis could reveal ways to improve programmatic quality and efficiency.

- **Employ Multi-Year Commitments**

Unpredictability in refugee resettlement makes it difficult and more expensive to plan and execute, further exacerbating its many challenges. The annual nature of resettlement planning and funding undermines the effectiveness and efficiency of resettlement; annual rather than multi-year or sustainable funding causes delays by UNHCR and resettlement countries alike to begin operating each year, sometimes resulting in months of lost productivity. Furthermore, the unpredictability and lack of sustainable funding makes maintaining resettlement capacity and infrastructure very difficult. In light of these challenges, a new approach to resettlement planning and funding is required. Resettlement actors should consider not only alternative sources of funding, but also new approaches to financing explored by the broader humanitarian community.

Recommendations

I. Identification, Access, and Submission

- Power within resettlement operations should be renegotiated to clarify the role of UNHCR, elevate the role of civil society, and strengthen the authority of refugees.
- Resettlement funding and planning for identification, access, and submission activities must be divorced from annual resettlement commitments.
- The approach to identifying resettlement needs must be evaluated against the humanitarian principles and reimagined to ensure that resettlement serves the refugees who need it most. People who continue to face urgent or acute threats to their lives or rights in places of asylum should be prioritized for resettlement submission.

II. International Resettlement Processing

- All resettlement actors – UNHCR, states, and civil society – must take responsibility for the efficiency of international resettlement processing.
- In order to further achieve this efficiency, international resettlement processing must be rebuilt on a foundation of coordination among resettlement countries; resettlement countries must not operate in isolation.
- All resettlement partners must systematically introduce opportunities for refugees to exercise their authority within international resettlement processes.

III. Complementary Pathways

- Led by UNHCR, the international community and traditional resettlement partners must better distinguish between the purposes of resettlement and complementary pathways.
- At the same time, UNHCR, states, civil society, and the private sector must intentionally coordinate efforts to increase refugees' access to complementary pathways.
- UNHCR, states, and civil society must better understand refugees' desires for, and experiences of, complementary pathways and ensure that complementary pathways are free from exploitation.
- All actors must take a long-term approach to designing and funding initiatives to promote complementary pathways.

i. Summary of CWS/Katherine Rehberg (2020), "The Future of Refugee Resettlement & Complementary Pathways: Strengthening Sustainable and Strategic Humanitarian Solutions for Refugees." Available at: <https://cwsglobal.org/reports/the-future-of-resettlement-and-complementary-pathways>.