

COMPREHENSIVE PROTECTION AND SOLUTIONS STRATEGY

A ROADMAP TO ADVANCE
RESETTLEMENT AND
COMPLEMENTARY
PATHWAYS IN THE SYRIA
CRISIS

April 2018

INTRODUCTION

The conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic has resulted in one of the worst humanitarian and displacement crises in decades and the largest refugee crisis in modern times. With fighting and mass displacement continuing in many parts of Syria, there are over 5.6 million Syrian refugees across the region and some 6.6 million Syrians internally displaced. Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey have shouldered the largest burden in hosting Syrian refugees. While showing astounding generosity, the sheer size of the Syrian refugee population has placed immense strain on these countries' national systems, putting at risk development gains for their own citizens. The international community's response has also been significant: \$13b has been channeled through the UN-led inter-agency appeals for the regional refugee response since 2012¹, and more has been provided in bilateral aid and other funding modalities to host countries.²

UNHCR's support to Syrian refugees is anchored in a comprehensive protection and solutions strategy that seeks to: i) support host country resilience; ii) ensure refugee protection, well-being and enable their self-reliance; iii) expand access to resettlement and other safe pathways (complementary pathways) to a third country; and iv) plan for voluntary repatriation of refugees to Syria when conducive conditions are in place.

This paper focuses on the third strand of this comprehensive strategy: to expand access to resettlement and other complementary pathways.³

Resettlement is arguably the most tangible and direct form of responsibility-sharing by the international community. It is a key intervention that provides an effective solution to refugee men, women, girls and boys who face particular vulnerabilities⁴ in the country of asylum. In parallel, it eases the burden on strained national and humanitarian systems, such as for healthcare or cash assistance. This in turn makes it more likely that asylum space will be maintained, and positive refugee policies on access to services and national systems will be applied.

Host countries in the region have been vocal in calling for increased resettlement for both Syrians and other refugees. The neighboring countries have all called for the international community to demonstrate its commitment in this manner.⁵

However, despite earlier commitments of States to provide access through resettlement and complementary pathways — including pledges made during the 2016 UN Summit for Refugees and Migrants in New York — these opportunities are diminishing. Global resettlement allocations have in fact reduced.

What is Resettlement?

Resettlement is the transfer of refugees from an asylum country to another State that has agreed to admit them as refugees and ultimately grant them permanent settlement. UNHCR is mandated by its Statute and the UN General Assembly Resolutions to undertake resettlement as one of the three durable solutions. Resettlement is unique in that it is the only durable solution that involves the relocation of refugees from an asylum country to a third country.

The objective of the Syrian resettlement programme is to serve as an immediate protection response for refugees who have compelling protection needs and vulnerabilities, such as survivors of torture or violence, women/girls at risk, children/adolescents, persons with legal and physical protection needs and persons with medical needs and/or disabilities.

Refugees accepted for resettlement receive, upon arrival in the third country, guarantees of protection against refoulement and access to civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights similar to those enjoyed by nationals or permanent residents, and will ultimately have a pathway to eventual naturalization. Resettled refugees also generally receive integration assistance addressing their vulnerabilities.

¹The primary inter-agency appeal from 2012 to 2015 was the UNHCR-led Refugee Response Plans (RRPs). From 2015, the RRP transitioned into the Refugee and Resilience Response Plans (3RP), co-led by UNHCR and UNDP. For more information see <http://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/>

² See Supporting Syria and the Region: Post-Brussels conference Financial tracking, report four available at https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/23917/supporting-syria-and-the-region_post-brussels-conference-financial-track.pdf

³ See also Comprehensive Protection and Solutions Strategy: Protection Thresholds and Parameters for Refugee Return to Syria, February 2018. Other chapters in this series are under development.

⁴ Resettlement is based on agreed global resettlement criteria, which includes Legal and Physical Protection Needs, Survivors of Violence and/or Torture, Women and Girls at Risk, Children and Adolescents at Risks, Medical Needs and Family Reunification, UNHCR Resettlement Handbook, 2011, available at <http://www.unhcr.org/46f7c0ee2.pdf>

⁵ UNHCR Standing Committee, MENA State interventions, Geneva, March 2018.

What are Complementary Pathways?

Complementary pathways are other migration avenues that may not necessarily focus on vulnerability but on other criteria that might qualify a refugee for entry into a third country.

Humanitarian visas provide Syrians with a means to access a third country for the purpose of applying asylum. They may also provide access to expedited asylum procedures. They can also be useful in the context of addressing family reunification requests for members of extended family.

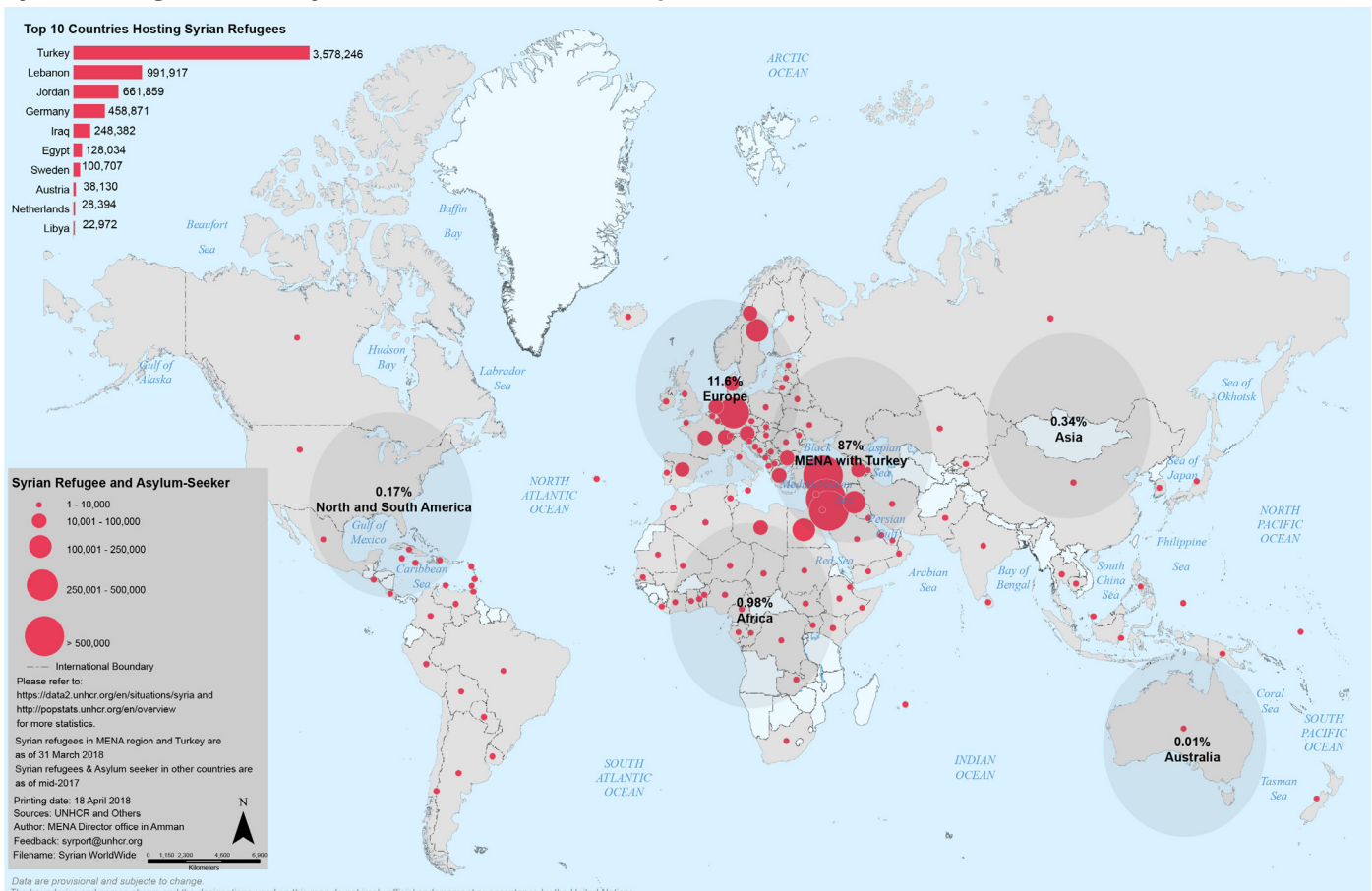
Third country scholarships offer opportunities for continuation of education and skills training, which maintain hopes for the future and acts as a catalyst for the recovery and rebuilding of post-conflict Syria.

Family reunification recognizes the right to family unity and the fundamental importance of family life, protect children and those who are separated from their families.

With over 80 per cent of refugees living below the poverty line in Jordan and Lebanon, and cash assistance programmes only reaching a fraction of these, reducing resettlement quotas undermine an important means of finding alternative solutions for vulnerable refugees. If the international community falls short in terms of solidarity and responsibility-sharing, the result could be more restrictive policies towards refugees in host countries. This in turn could create additional pressures on refugees to return to Syria prematurely, which would be a disaster for the families affected, and could further destabilize the situation inside Syria.

Since 2013, UNHCR and States have ensured resettlement of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees while developing additional opportunities via complementary pathways. This paper highlights that current resettlement efforts are not sufficient and outlines a strategy building on the good practices to date while identifying untapped opportunities in collaboration with existing and new partners.

Syrian Refugees and Asylum seeker Worldwide Population:



Resettlement and Responsibility-Sharing

As a result of the unprecedented humanitarian crisis, UNHCR, in collaboration with international partners, began the resettlement of Syrian refugees in 2013.

UNHCR and partners developed platforms such as the Core Group for the Resettlement of Syrian Refugees and various pledging conferences to encourage States to take part in responsibility-sharing by pledging increased resettlement places and opportunities.

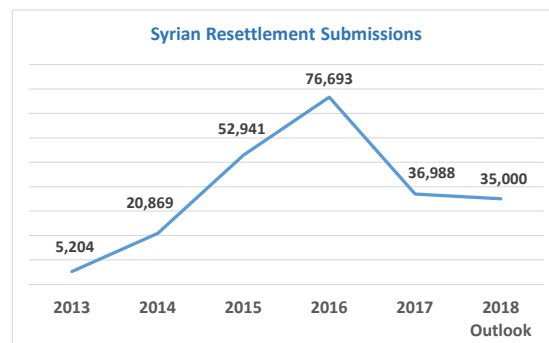
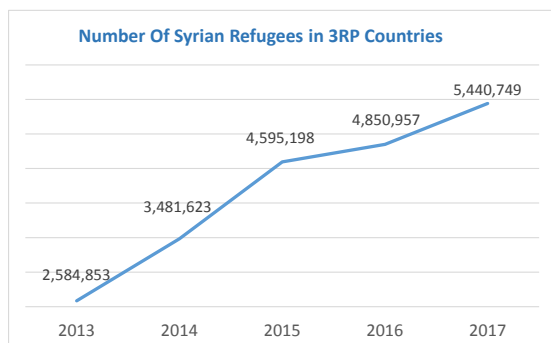
With the crisis escalating, reduced funding and limited access to education, health and livelihoods in some host countries compelled many Syrian refugees to make the dangerous journey to Europe. The subsequent reinvigoration of the international community’s commitment to support refugees and host countries in the region resulted in a number of crucial interventions. The London and Brussels Conferences, European Compacts with Lebanon and Jordan, the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey (FRIT), the Madad Fund, and World Bank Concessional Financing Facility (CFF), as well as increased bilateral support, represented a dramatic step forward in terms of international responsibility-sharing. While not all of the targets have been met, there has been a significant shift in the potential to ensure improved access to services and livelihoods for some refugees, while also addressing the needs of host communities.

Syrian resettlement submissions between 2013 and 2017 ⁶	
Turkey	44,070
Lebanon	67,314
Jordan	66,484
Iraq	4,196
Egypt	10,631
Total	192,695

Syrian resettlement departures between 2013 and 2017 ⁶	
Turkey	21,580
Lebanon	42,807
Jordan	28,928
Iraq	1,188
Egypt	4,585
Total	99,088

Submission figures represent less than three per cent of the current Syrian refugee population having been referred for resettlement during the last five years.

Moreover, and worryingly, 2017 saw a drastic reduction of resettlement places made available to Syrian refugees. The main cause of this decrease was a global drop in the number of resettlement places available paired with a shifting of quotas to other priority situations. Only 36,988 resettlement submissions were made in 2017 – less than half of that of the previous year. The outlook for 2018 forecasts a continuing downward trend while the Syrian refugee population continues to grow, and become yet more vulnerable.



This reduction sends a very negative message to host governments. The five main countries hosting refugees in the region will perceive the decrease in resettlement opportunities as the international community not living up to previous commitments to shoulder some of the burden.

⁶ UNHCR Resettlement Data Portal, available at: rsq.unhcr.org

The Way Forward

On 30 March 2016, the UN Secretary General and the High Commissioner for Refugees convened the High-Level Meeting on Global Responsibility Sharing through Pathways for Admission of Syrian Refugees in Geneva. UNHCR called for the pledging of resettlement and complementary pathway places for at least 10 percent of the Syrian refugee population (480,000 refugees) from neighboring host countries.

Since 2013, over 30 traditional and emerging resettlement countries have pledged more than 300,000 places for resettlement and complementary pathways for Syrians. Up to 2016, resettlement quotas steadily increased, allowing UNHCR MENA and Turkey to submit 192,695 vulnerable Syrian refugees for resettlement by end 2017. However, both pledges and actual submissions – 303,000 and 192,695 since 2013 – fall well-short of the target of 480,000 total admissions.⁷

The following **three strategic objectives** should guide to reach the target of 480,000 Syrian Refugees to be resettled or admitted under complementary pathways called for during the High-Level Meeting on 30 March 2016.

1. Assist States to provide more resettlement and complementary pathway opportunities.
2. Enhance collaboration with 3RP Partners to advocate for more places, while improving identification and referrals.
3. Expand complementary pathways.

1. Assist States to provide more resettlement and complementary pathway opportunities

To meet the short-fall of 177,000 pledges, states are requested to review and expand their current allocation of resettlement places for Syrian refugees from the region, effectively increasing their global quotas. Pledges need to then be converted into actual resettlement places or quotas, against which UNHCR can make submissions. UNHCR stands ready to support States during this process.

From its initial stages, the Syria resettlement programme was characterized by a spirit of multilateralism and collaboration. The Syrian resettlement programme has attracted over 30 traditional and emerging resettlement states. However, 90% of the resettlement places comes from just 10 countries.

With the aim to encourage more states to provide greater commitments, UNHCR calls on state partners to step up advocacy within their own government and with their peers in order to share the responsibility for expanding resettlement quotas.

UNHCR recommends that states utilize Core and Contact Groups as a means to advocate for solutions in a multilateral manner.

Core Group for the Resettlement of Syrian Refugees

The Syria Core Group has exemplified principles that are now set out in the New York Declaration and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework. In practical terms, some 30 different States work together as an alliance that continually shape the resettlement process for Syrian refugees. The Core Group has also promoted the various pledging conferences organised between 2013 and 2016 that encouraged States to contribute to international responsibility through resettlement and complementary pathways for Syrian refugees.

In this challenging time, marked by decreasing resettlement places and increasing resettlement needs, it has never been more important to maintain the Syria Core Group and its multilateral approach towards galvanizing States in their response to the needs of the Syrian refugee population.

The Core Group can continue to be an important forum for sharing technical expertise and providing guidance on Syrian resettlement processing for new and emerging countries to support them in their efforts to contribute to the resettlement of Syrians.

⁷ Resettlement **pledges** are the commitments States make regarding the number of refugees they intend to accept for resettlement. Resettlement **quotas** are pledges translated into concrete slots allocated by each State on a year to year basis. Resettlement **submission** are the referrals – following assessments in each individual case – that UNHCR make to States. Resettlement **departures** are signifying those refugees who have physically departed the asylum country for resettlement in a third country.

Contact Groups

While the Syria Core Group focuses upon advocacy and sharing technical expertise, Contact Groups in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey provide a forum where host country counterparts, embassy staff, NGOs and UNHCR can discuss and operationalize activities and solutions.

Although the Contact Groups are in an infancy stage compared to the Syria Core Group, they have key roles to play in operationalizing the work plan developed by the Core Group. This includes removing barriers to solutions and working with host country officials to overcome challenges such as facilitating exit permits from countries of asylum, assisting refugees to access embassies and consulates for visa issuance and interviews, and providing information that can inform refugees on their solution options.

The Contact Groups also have potential for initiating and expanding complementary pathways activities. For example, Contact Groups may be used to spearhead pilot projects with respect to family reunification, which may be evaluated and adjusted for wider implementation.

Through the Core and Contact Groups UNHCR and States can:

- **Maintain the Syria Core Group** as an effective multilateral forum to coordinate resettlement activities, and galvanize support from the international community.
- **Attract new resettlement states** by sharing technical expertise, guidance and capacity to new resettlement countries.
- **Overcome barriers** for refugees to **access resettlement and complementary pathways.**
- **Collaborate** on pilots and projects to **increase access to complementary pathways.**

2. Enhance collaboration with 3RP partners to advocate for more places, while improving identification and referrals

The Syria Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) framework has created a space for UN agencies, NGOs and national authorities to work together to bring attention to particularly vulnerable profiles and to highlight the need for durable solutions for these refugees.

Opportunities within the 3RP fora

To advocate for resettlement places and opportunities for the Syrian refugees, UNHCR will collaborate with partners in the 3RP fora, such as the Durable Solutions Working Groups, to tailor protection responses and highlight challenges and needs to donors and civil society.

Evidence-based identification and referrals

Together with 150 partners, UNHCR have developed common vulnerability tools that assess vulnerability across a broad range of protection and socio-economic indicators, such as coping strategies, education, livelihood, food consumption, security, health and shelter. Using these assessments, UNHCR and partners have been able to target assistance and protection in a more efficient and equitable manner. This system also aids UNHCR in identifying resettlement for the most vulnerable refugees.

UNHCR will collaborate with partners and further expand the utility of the assessment tools in order to identify characteristics (such as family links in a resettlement country, skills and education qualification) that would enable refugees to access complementary pathways.

3RP Partnership Opportunities

The “No Lost Generation” campaign highlighted the vulnerability of refugee children from Syria and the need for the international community to do more for children in host countries. Simultaneously, UNHCR advocated to utilize the “Children at Risk” resettlement submission category to allow these children to benefit from resettlement, and therefore resume their education in resettlement countries, free from exploitation and abuse.

A resettlement country subsequently created a specific Children at Risk programme and other countries are considering the development of similar initiatives.

UNHCR and 3RP partners can:

- Continue **collaboration** to highlight protection needs and risk profiles in a multi-agency manner.
- Continue to **identify the most vulnerable** refugees for resettlement.
- Adapt current resettlement identification assessment tools to spur **identification for complementary pathways**.

3. Expand Complementary Pathways

While resettlement targets the most vulnerable refugees, complementary pathways can offer solutions for refugees who may or may not meet the same vulnerability criteria. While some complementary pathways such as private sponsorship and humanitarian visas may be based on protection and vulnerability criteria, other complementary pathways that support work, study and family reunification can facilitate refugees' acquisition and retention of skills, stability, family unity and self-reliance. These pathways can allow refugees to regain normalcy in life, integrate into their local communities and pursue secure and sustainable futures, including returns to Syria once the conditions are conducive.

However, refugees face legal, administrative and practical barriers in accessing complementary pathways. These include:

- Access to information and clarity of procedures;
- Credibility of information and the risk of fraud/exploitation schemes;
- Inability to meet eligibility criteria due to the lack of required documents;
- Lack of financial resources; and
- Language barriers.

To overcome these challenges, UNHCR will continue to provide information, counsel refugees and engage in the facilitation of the departures of refugees travelling on complementary pathways. UNHCR will also work with education and labor providers or partners to assist in the identification of suitable candidates. UNHCR will partner with states actors in the receiving countries to ensure legal safeguards are in place to protect the rights of refugees, including against refoulement.

UNHCR will seek to work more with traditional and new partners on a systematic operational approach to complementary pathways, focusing on expanding opportunities and breaking down barriers that impinge upon these potential solutions.

Expanding existing and seeking new alliances

UNHCR will seek to re-engage public attention towards the Syrian crisis, and engender a strong level of public support towards resettlement and complementary pathways programmes.

Civil society, academia and concerned individuals can work together with UNHCR to enhance nuanced and positive stories of refugees in third countries. UNHCR will build on media campaigns emphasizing the importance of resettlement and the benefits that refugees bring to the resettlement countries.

Engagement with partners – such as faith based groups, local municipalities, NGOs and businesses – can cultivate more community support and ownership as well as enhance possibilities to promote new initiatives, such as community sponsorship programmes.

Civil society have enormous means to reach out and identify opportunities, such as private sponsorships, scholarships, apprenticeships and trainee programs. UNHCR will work with these civil society partners to provide protection sensitive guidance and assist in the dissemination of accurate information on these opportunities.

Interested institutions and private donors can also support refugees through the provision of funds and assistance before and after departure from countries of first asylum including fees, transportation, subsistence, and other social/community engagement. This is an opportunity for society at all levels to work together for good integration outcomes.

As complementary pathways are a ‘newly promoted’ solution, a community of practice — including NGOs, academia, civil society, other UN agencies and UNHCR — is being established. This community of practice will ensure that diverse stakeholders can engage and share knowledge and technical expertise, with the aim to improve complementary pathways. A ‘whole of society’ approach to resettlement and complementary pathways is very much in the spirit of the principles set out in the New York Declaration, and will provide for successful experiences from the initial stage of identification all the way through to the integration of a refugee in a new country.

Partners such as:

Academic institutions can work with UNHCR to develop scholarship programmes that address refugee protection concerns to the greatest extent possible; provide information and training related to their university admission criteria; and advise on documentation requirements, selection and implementation.

Humanitarian NGOs and civil society can facilitate contacts between refugees in third and host countries to re-establish family ties; coordinate with State partners and UNHCR on complex or urgent cases; support advocacy efforts by illustrating impacts of family separation and family reunification; provide support to refugees before and after departure; and enable social/community engagement.

Recruitment agencies, trade unions, businesses and other enterprises can identify potential labour needs where refugees can fulfil market sector gaps; and work with UNHCR and States to ensure programmes designed for refugees will meet protection safeguards.

States can provide information on family reunification procedures; work with UNHCR to simplify procedures and facilitate access for refugees; adapt scholarships and labour mobility visa programmes; waive application costs; and allow programmes that, over time, allow refugees to be eligible for permanent residence and citizenship.

In doing so, it is essential that all partners:

- Collaborate with UNHCR to disseminate information regarding the plight of Syrian refugees for all spectrums of society in order to **bring the crisis into the mainstream**.
- Work together to further complementary pathways for refugees **as a complement to resettlement** in a more **systematic and sustainable** way through joint advocacy, identification of opportunities and provision of practical assistance to refugees.

Should you wish to find out more information or to engage, please contact UNHCR at:

MENArst@unhcr.org