



A new chance for EU leadership on resettlement

Recommendations for a first step towards an ambitious, humanitarian and sustainable EU response to displacement

IRC Briefing – July 2019

The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) estimates that 1.44 million people will be in need of resettlement in 2020. Resettlement is suggested for refugees who cannot return home nor be appropriately supported in the country that has initially offered them protection. It is therefore a vital protection tool for the world's most vulnerable refugees that can, if applied well, also be an important demonstration of international solidarity with countries bordering crisis and conflict affected regions, which currently host the majority of the world's refugees. It is also a practical, achievable and essential first step for the EU to put in place a more managed, predictable response to global displacement. Without safe and legal routes to access asylum, people in need of protection have no choice but to put their lives at risk through desperate and dangerous journeys.

The number of those in need of resettlement has steadily increased as international displacement continues to rise and has become more protracted.¹ However, the places offered by the international community do not correspond to this reality. In fact, between 2016 and 2017, the number of refugees resettled fell by over 50%. Last year that number fell by a further 15% to 55,680 – a mere 4% of the 1.4 million estimated to be in need in 2018. Recent news from the United States indicates that this number may fall further, should the previous world leader in resettlement in fact reduce its admissions to zero.

EU resettlement numbers have risen in recent years and currently, due to the dramatic decrease in U.S. resettlement, represent around 40% of global resettlement. However, this does not provide grounds for complacency. On the contrary, at 22,631,² EU resettlement places continue to represent only 1.6% of global needs and remain far below the capacity of the EU as a wealthy region and major international humanitarian actor. In 2016, the European Commission proposed a Union Resettlement Framework, a piece of legislation which has the potential to support a continued rise in the quantity and quality of EU resettlement. The European Parliament and Council reached an agreement on the text in June 2018 which would have guaranteed an ambitious, humanitarian and sustainable framework. However, negotiations have since stalled as a consequence of a political stalemate on the reform of the Dublin system which determines which member state is responsible for processing an asylum claim.

The IRC calls on the European Parliament and Council to come to a swift agreement on a Union Resettlement Framework which reflects the agreement reached in June 2018 in word and spirit, guaranteeing an ambitious, humanitarian and sustainable approach to future EU resettlement.

Under the leadership of the Finnish Council Presidency, we urge EU member states, with the guidance and support of the European Commission, to increase EU resettlement places to at least 30,000 in 2020, and to make a collective pledge to this effect at the Global Refugee Forum in December 2019.

We believe the EU has the capacity to resettle at least 250,000 refugees by 2025. Such a commitment would send an urgently needed signal of international solidarity and demonstrate that EU member states and institutions are serious about protecting the most vulnerable, implementing the Global Compact on Refugees and doing their fair share to address displacement.

¹ UNHCR defines Protracted Refugee Situations as situations where 25,000 refugees or more have been in exile 'for 5 years or more after their initial displacement, without immediate prospects for implementation of durable solutions' (UNCHR ExCom, 2009). Based on this definition, 15.9 million refugees were in protracted situations at the end of 2018, or 78% of all refugees, compared with 66% the previous year. No protracted refugee situations were resolved in 2018, and nine additional situations became protracted (including for example the displacement of South Sudanese refugees in Kenya, Sudan and Uganda; Nigerians in Cameroon and Niger; refugees from DRC and Somalia in South Africa; Pakistani refugees in Afghanistan; and Ukrainian refugees in the Russian Federation).

² All resettlement figures in this briefing relate to UNHCR assisted resettlement and are drawn from UNHCR's [resettlement data finder](#). Official government statistics may differ due to differences in the definition of resettlement or reporting timeframes.

What can the EU do?

The IRC believes that the EU has the capacity and the moral obligation to resettle at least 250,000 refugees by 2025, and to make a collective pledge to this effect at the Global Refugee Forum in December 2019. This is a realistic and achievable number, with a modest annual increase of 10,000 spread over 27 countries: overall numbers have been above 22,000 for the past two years with an increase of 9,700 already achieved between 2016 and 2017. Pledges should be gradually scaled up, beginning with at least 30,000 arrivals in 2020 and leading up to at least 70,000 in 2024.

The UK currently contributes around 5,000 resettlement places which will no longer be counted as part of any future EU pledge – nevertheless, an EU-wide increase of 7,369 to 30,000 in 2020 would mean an average increase of only 273 refugees per remaining member state if all countries participated. An increase proportionate to current resettlement numbers (arrivals in 2018) in existing resettlement countries would mean that the three largest remaining resettlement countries, France, Sweden and Germany, would resettle 6,774, 6,456, and 4,266 refugees; an increase between 1,000 and 1,500 each. Countries like Estonia, Lithuania and Bulgaria would need to resettle fewer than ten additional refugees. In practice, these moderate increases will likely be further reduced by countries re-starting previous programmes and others increasing their caseloads more significantly. In the future, the adoption of the Union Resettlement Framework and ongoing capacity building initiatives in new and emerging EU resettlement countries should also mean that these countries can contribute a far larger share than is currently the case. Proportionate increases in the years 2021 – 2025 should therefore be more equitable.

30,000 constitutes just 2% of the 1.44 million in need of resettlement in 2020, and even presuming that global needs remain the same rather than continuing to rise, 250,000 would only constitute 17% – less than the EU's GDP and overall wealth would suggest its capacity to be. While every improvement is of the utmost importance to those in need, increasing resettlement to this degree cannot therefore be enough – alongside reforming the Common European Asylum System, the EU must also continue to support the expansion of complementary pathways that offer an equal degree of protection, including through funding and advocacy.

Why should the EU act now?

In 2017, the EU Commission called upon member states to resettle 50,000 refugees over two years. The implementation of this scheme has been slow and will come to an end in December 2019. Pending the adoption of a Union Resettlement Framework, a new interim pledge will ensure there is a continued incentive for member states to resettle and prevent a gap in EU commitments. Furthermore, EU institutions, member states and civil society have invested significant resources in capacity building for resettlement in recent years. These efforts must bear fruit and be evidenced by a significant increase in places made available to refugees in order to remain justifiable.

The Global Refugee Forum in December provides an excellent opportunity to demonstrate that the EU is serious about the international responsibility sharing which member states committed to as part of the Global Compact on Refugees, by making an ambitious collective resettlement pledge. With global displacement remaining at a record high, global resettlement numbers continuing to fall and new arrivals in the EU down to pre-2014 levels, the EU should now send a strong signal of international solidarity with refugee hosting countries in order to remain a credible humanitarian actor. In this way the EU would also make an important and timely contribution to UNHCR's three year resettlement strategy, which has called for 1 million resettlement places by 2028.³

Inaction is not an option: already vulnerabilities are increasing and regions are becoming more instable as a result of the lack of EU leadership. Countries hosting the majority of the world's refugees are threatening to expel refugees as a direct consequence of lacking support from the international community. Durable solutions for refugees are moving into the ever more distant future as displacement becomes more protracted, resources and political will in hosting countries become increasingly scarce, and global resettlement numbers continue to fall.

³ UNHCR: The Three-Year Strategy on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways, June 2019, available [here](#).

The IRC recommends:

- As the implementation of the 50,000 scheme comes to an end in December, **the European Commission should encourage member states to make at least 30,000 resettlement places available in 2020**, and ensure that EU funding is available to financially incentivise this, rather than making an increase in available budget under AMIF depend on member state pledges.
- **Member states should commit to an ambitious number of resettlement places which represent an increase from 2018 and amount to at least 30,000 arrivals in 2020.** Governments should indicate their capacity to contribute to the Commission at their earliest convenience and in any case by the requested deadline on 15 September.
- **Pledges should be implemented within the year – 30,000 refugees should in fact arrive in the EU by 1 January 2021, and 250,000 should arrive by 1 January 2025.** This is important to be able to track and compare real progress towards achieving durable solutions for refugees, which should remain the primary goal of resettlement to the EU.
- **We urge the EU, led by the Finnish Presidency and the European Commission, to make a collective pledge at the Global Refugee Forum in December 2019** to increase EU resettlement to 30,000 in 2020 and to resettle 250,000 refugees by 2025. This would send a crucial signal of international solidarity and responsibility sharing, contributing to peace and stability at a time when displacement remains at a record high yet the international humanitarian system is faced by a number of threats.
- **The Finnish Council Presidency should prioritise re-starting the negotiations on a Union Resettlement Framework** and should encourage member states to come to a swift agreement with the European Parliament which reflects the word and spirit of the June 2018 technical agreement, which met the criteria for an ambitious, humanitarian and sustainable resettlement framework.
- **We encourage the European Parliament to consider splitting the Union Resettlement Framework from the remaining Common European Asylums System package to allow finalisation of this file**, which is near completion and would send an important political signal on the intention of the EU to protect refugees and contribute to international responsibility sharing.
- **EU resettlement should be diverse in the countries of asylum, the nationalities and profiles of the refugees offered protection.** The Commission should encourage and incentivise member states first and foremost to prioritise countries of asylum in line with UNHCR's global needs assessment. Within these needs, resettlement should be increased in particular from countries hosting protracted displacement situations and those where resettlement, strategically used, can help improve the protection situation for refugees and asylum-seekers ineligible for resettlement.
- Tracking progress on EU resettlement remains a challenge, with different figures reported depending for example on whether or not resettlement is UNHCR-assisted or takes place within an EU or national scheme; not always taking into account the modality of arrival and the status awarded; and with pledges not necessarily corresponding to arrivals within a particular year or unfulfilled pledges being 'recycled'. **The European Commission should resume regular reporting on resettlement as was previously the case with relocation and resettlement schemes. Member states and UNHCR should agree a unified reporting format which allows for comparable data collection, and should disaggregate data to allow for tracking of arrivals through humanitarian admission and resettlement, including the status awarded in each case.**

The IRC and resettlement

The IRC's experience offers us a unique perspective on conditions for refugees and the challenges and opportunities available as global displacement levels remain at a record high. Founded in 1933 at the request of Albert Einstein when refugees were fleeing Europe, today we work in over 40 countries, giving us a real understanding of the causes of displacement.

Resettlement in the United States

The IRC is the largest of nine non-profit resettlement agencies partnering with the U.S. Government in a unique public-private partnership known as the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) that was established in 1980. The IRC resettles refugees across a network of 23 offices in 15 states and has welcomed more than 400,000 people from 119 countries over the past four decades. In recent years we have supported around 35,000 refugees annually on their path to permanent integration and citizenship, including through language and cultural orientation programmes, access to health, education and social services, and early employment support. Refugee integration in the U.S. is focused on helping refugees to rebuild their lives and become self-sufficient: in 2018, for example, over 87 percent of IRC's clients enrolled in an early employment program known as Matching Grant were self-sufficient within just six months of arrival.

The IRC manages the Cultural Orientation Resource Exchange (CORE), which provides cultural orientation information, materials and training to all partners engaged in providing pre- and post-arrival support to refugee newcomers, to help them acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to adapt and thrive in the U.S.⁴ The IRC has also been active in large-scale overseas U.S. resettlement processing since 1977, when the U.S. Department of State turned to the IRC to establish the first office in Bangkok. IRC subsequently managed USRAP overseas processing operations in Sudan, Sierra Leone, Germany, France, Austria, Italy, Spain, and Croatia. The IRC, through a cooperative agreement with the US Government, currently operates the Resettlement Support Center (RSC) for Asia with offices in Thailand and Malaysia, assisting thousands of refugees whose applications are under consideration by U.S. officials for resettlement in the United States. Since 2006, IRC has supported the departure of over 175,000 refugees from the region.

Global Technical Assistance

Drawing on decades of practical experience, the IRC has provided capacity building support to civil society and government stakeholders in 18 emerging resettlement countries in Europe and South America, with the aim of growing resettlement.

Through the European Resettlement and Integration Technical Assistance (EURITA) programme, initially funded by the U.S. Department of State and now by the EU's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), the IRC shares experiences in refugee resettlement and integration with practitioners in European States developing resettlement and integration programs. Working closely with UNHCR and IOM on the Emerging Resettlement Countries Joint Support Mechanism, IRC provided workshops in South America and is a key contributor to training modules on community engagement and post arrival services.

Each workshop is tailored to the participating country's specific context and requested needs, based on an individualised assessment. Workshop participants will together create measurable action plans and tools designed to enhance the development and implementation of resettlement and integration strategies in their home country.

IRC's U.S. programmes have hosted over 17 international delegations in the past few years, with the most recent visit including a 14 participant delegation from Brazil that visited IRC's Seattle and Salt Lake City offices to learn more about community engagement and agricultural programming for new arrivals. The IRC is also providing open-source resources through its EURITA.org website as well as conducting webinars and exploring other ways to continue virtual support.

Furthermore, IRC works closely with UNHCR and other partners engaged in advancing the Three Year Strategy on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways. One initiative the IRC is actively engaged in is the creation of a self-sustaining, revolving fund capitalised by a blend of public and private finance that shoulders the upfront costs of resettlement and is replenished through the economic returns refugees generate once resettled. In partnership with the Center for Global Development and interested countries and in partnership with Social Finance UK, the IRC aims to structure, pilot, and scale a fund that will help resettle all refugees in need of resettlement.

Countries engaging in IRC's TA services

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| Argentina | Latvia |
| Armenia | Lithuania |
| Brazil | Montenegro |
| Bulgaria | Portugal |
| Chile | Romania |
| Croatia | Serbia |
| Estonia | Spain |
| Greece | Slovakia |
| Ireland | Uruguay |
| Italy | |

⁴ Find out more about CORE at <https://coresourceexchange.org/>

Resettlement and integration in Europe

With a focus on strengthening the capacity of integration practitioners to deliver post-arrival cultural orientation and to engage the communities in which they work, the EURITA project seeks to improve the integration of refugees resettled in EU member states. Integration experts facilitate both online introductory and in-depth in-person training on topics to facilitate refugee inclusion. These topics include; Information Sharing and Cultural Orientation, Interpretation and Language Access, Case Management Strategies, Economic Empowerment and Community Engagement. EURITA activities also include the development and sharing of resource materials, and collaboration on promising practices through web-based sharing and learning. Together with partners Conselho Português para os Refugiados in Portugal, Fundatia Schottener Servicii Sociale in Romania and Accem in Spain, the EURITA team has worked and continues to work closely with other EU-funded projects seeking to build EU resettlement capacity, including the EU-FRANK, COMMIT, LINK-IT and SHARE projects.

The IRC also supports the integration of asylum-seekers, refugees and vulnerable migrants in the EU through its programmes in Germany and Greece. In Germany, the IRC began working with local partners in mid-2016 to respond to the needs of refugees and vulnerable migrants. A particular focus is placed on training teachers, improving access to jobs and promoting the safety of children, parents and young men. A key priority for IRC Deutschland is to support refugees and migrants in vulnerable situations to integrate into the German labour market through a bundle of services that provides clients with information about job opportunities, time to engage in income-generating activities (by providing child care) as well as market-relevant skills and the networks and connections to access those opportunities.

In Greece, the IRC began providing emergency cash to refugees to meet their most basic needs in 2015. As the crisis persisted, and more refugees moved to cities in Greece, the IRC has focused on interventions to prepare refugees, asylum-seekers and vulnerable Greek people to access sustainable livelihoods. The IRC works in partnership with local community organisations to deliver training and support services to help clients become (self-) employed, an approach which ensures the sustainability of programmes. We provide technical support to partners, including through the training of trainers, sharing tools and curricula, and providing guidance on best practices for project implementation. In close collaboration with the Athens Municipality, the IRC also co-chairs the Livelihoods Committee of the Athens Coordination Center for Migrants and Refugee issues (ACCMR) to provide co-ordination among NGOs and community organisations.

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Read more about the IRC and Europe's role in refugee resettlement and integration in our reports [Rescuing Futures](#) and [Forging a Common Path](#).