

Resettlement can't wait!

Ahead of the publication of the new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum on 23 September and the Resettlement Forum on 9 October, we appeal to the EU institutions and member states to urgently revive and increase resettlement efforts.

After necessary travel restrictions brought resettlement to a standstill for several months this year, international travel is restarting and both IOM and UNHCR have relaunched their resettlement activities.¹ **However, the temporary hold on resettlement travel led to the cancellation of departures of some 10,000 refugees waiting for resettlement. Since then, EU resettlement has only slowly resumed.**

At the same time, the need for resettlement is more pressing than ever. **Even before the pandemic, UNHCR identified almost 1.45 million refugees as particularly vulnerable and in need of resettlement – a figure that has almost doubled since 2010.**² Since then, the situation in several countries of origin and asylum has become increasingly challenging:

- In **Lebanon**, where some 900,000 refugees are hosted among 6.8 million nationals³ and half the local population lives below the poverty line,⁴ a severe economic and financial crisis had already massively hampered the integration prospects of refugees. Exacerbating this dire situation, COVID-19 and the deadly explosion in Beirut harbour on 4th August have crippled the health system and left 300,000 people homeless.⁵ Devastating for all affected, these developments have left refugees particularly vulnerable due to their lack of local networks.
- In **Uganda**, which hosts 1.4 million refugees – including over 125,400 in need of resettlement – UNHCR and the World Food Programme announced a 30% cut to food rations in refugee camps in April as funds were reallocated to the COVID-19 response.⁶
- The escalation of the armed conflict in **Libya** over the last months has once more demonstrated the urgent need to evacuate and resettle vulnerable refugees via the Emergency Transit Mechanisms (ETMs) in Niger and Rwanda.⁷ Without the ETMs, refugees trapped in Libya either continue to face bombings, violence and abuse, or are forced to attempt the often-deadly sea crossing to reach Europe. This year, at least 424 people have lost their life trying to cross the Central Mediterranean in a desperate attempt to reach safety.⁸

¹ <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2020/6/5eeb85be4/joint-statement-un-refugee-chief-grandi-ioms-valorino-announce-resumption.html>

² For more information please see UNHCR's latest resettlement needs report:

<https://www.unhcr.org/protection/resettlement/5ef34bfb7/projected-global-resettlement-needs-2021.html>

³ UNHCR, Global Trends in Forced Displacement 2019, <https://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2019/>

⁴ <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200820-more-than-half-of-lebanon-living-in-poverty-says-un/>

⁵ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/beirut-explosion-death-toll-latest-lebanon-port-homeless-victims-damage-a9656396.html>

⁶ <https://www.wfp.org/news/unhcr-and-wfp-warn-refugees-africa-face-hunger-and-malnutrition-covid-19-worsens-food>

⁷ Resettlement needs in 15 countries along the Central Mediterranean Route increased by 8% last year and at nearly 350,000 now account for 24% of global needs.

⁸ IOM, https://missingmigrants.iom.int/region/mediterranean?migrant_route%5B%5D=1376

These snapshots illustrate the urgency of the situation. Resettlement cannot wait. It is more needed than ever.

Low- and middle-income countries have hosted the majority of the world's refugees for more than a decade and continue to do so despite a multitude of domestic challenges and additional hardships.⁹ Several studies show that the social and economic consequences of COVID-19 in these countries will make an already difficult situation worse for refugees and host communities alike.¹⁰

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU showed a clear understanding that a global approach and solidarity were necessary to face the multiple challenges posed by the virus. However, this ambition has not been matched in its approach to resettlement to date. Member states have the power to address the current inequity in global responsibility for hosting refugees, the resulting gap in protection and in the EU's external response to COVID-19 by urgently increasing resettlement numbers.

We therefore appeal to the EU institutions and EU member states to do their utmost to reach the target of resettling 30,000 persons of concern in 2020, as pledged at the Global Refugee Forum in December 2019. In addition, and in the spirit of growth agreed to by state signatories to the Global Compact on Refugees and the associated Three-Year Strategy on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways, at least 35,000 more refugees should be resettled to the EU in 2021. Resettlement is a tool for global solidarity and responsibility sharing and as such should be additional to and separate from efforts to share responsibility for asylum-seekers among EU member states.

We appeal:

TO EU MEMBER STATES:

- To urgently pick up on resettlement pledges made in 2019 and allow those waiting for resettlement to enter EU countries according to COVID-19 measures equal to those of returning citizens.
- To start or reinvigorate tri-partite arrangements with civil society, UNHCR and partners to allow for good resettlement and integration outcomes.
- To jump-start resettlement processing and minimise the risk of COVID-19 complications by promoting dossier-based referrals as well as innovative remote interview modalities as efficient methods of selection for resettlement.
- To make a new and additional pledge of at least 35,000 places for 2021, taking into account priority situations identified by UNHCR and increasing resettlement from the largely EU-funded ETMs. Currently a small number of EU countries are responsible for the majority of EU resettlement: other member states should significantly step up their commitments.

⁹ In 2019, low- and middle-income countries hosted 85% of the world's refugees. Turkey hosts 3.9 million refugees and asylum-seekers, more than all EU member states combined. Not a single EU state is in the top ten of hosting countries when comparing the size of a refugee population to the national population – whereas countries like Lebanon or Jordan host 134 and 69 refugees per 1,000 inhabitants respectively.

¹⁰ For more information please see: <http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/the-impact-of-coronavirus-covid-19-on-forcibly-displaced-persons-in-developing-countries-88ad26de/>

TO THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION:

- To encourage member states to substantially address the resettlement backlog before the end of the year through political leadership and targeted management of financial support.
- To facilitate the immediate operational cooperation of member states in all phases of resettlement, directly and in collaboration with EASO, UNHCR, IOM and civil society partners, allowing for speedy processing and economies of scale.
- While explicitly safeguarding the right to seek asylum, to take the opportunity of the new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum to frame resettlement and other safe and legal avenues to protection as a key priority for the EU.

TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT:

- To closely monitor the progress of resettlement pledges and activities of the Council and Commission, underlining the pressing need to kickstart resettlement.
- To ensure that sufficient financial support is available to encourage resettlement efforts by member states. Resettlement and complementary pathways such as family reunification, education and labour pathways and humanitarian corridors should be considered in the discussions on the seven-year Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and Recovery Package (NGEU). We would welcome the continuation of the lump sum system of 10.000 Euro per resettled person as well as clarification regarding the future funding for the ETMs.
- To provide a long-term, predictable and protection-oriented framework for EU resettlement by urgently adopting the Union Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Framework together with the Council, while maintaining its position in the 2018 provisional agreement.

