



Unlocking frozen futures: Recommendations for an ambitious, humanitarian and sustainable Union Resettlement Framework

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Today, the UN considers some 1.2 million refugees worldwide to be in need of resettlement, yet the EU's commitments to date have been far below its capacity. The International Rescue Committee (IRC) therefore regards the proposal to establish a Union Resettlement Framework as a golden opportunity for the EU to save lives and rescue futures. This legislation is long overdue: the creation of safe routes to protection is the missing piece in the EU's asylum and migration policy. We further welcome the ambitious timeline for agreement on the Framework proposed by the European Commission in its Roadmap on the Comprehensive Migration Package. With global displacement at a record high and the recent withdrawal of the United States from its international commitments, the time is now for EU leadership on resettlement.

However, we must get the details right. Resettlement is a humanitarian tool designed to offer protection and durable solutions to the most vulnerable refugees, regardless of their country of origin or asylum. Resettlement under the Framework should therefore be based on need, not short-term political objectives. Using resettlement as an incentive to secure the cooperation of third states on migration control is unlikely to work and risks undermining the EU's role in sustainably alleviating the humanitarian crises that contribute to irregular migration. Resettlement is also one of only three durable solutions for refugees in protracted displacement situations, such as the nearly one million Somali refugees hosted in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Yemen. Ignoring pressing needs in such locations in favour of those of short-term political interest may lead to the creation, exacerbation or spill-over of crises with longer term consequences for the EU. **If the EU is to make a genuine contribution to addressing global displacement, it must increase resettlement from locations where the need is greatest, in partnership with third countries and established resettlement actors.**

In order for the new Framework to represent a meaningful contribution to existing global resettlement efforts, it should lead to an overall increase in EU resettlement numbers. As negotiations between the Parliament and Council begin, we therefore call on Member States to support the inclusion of an ambitious target linked to UNHCR's annual global needs assessment. This would be an important signal of political will that demonstrates that the EU is serious about making a significant contribution to global resettlement efforts. While we applaud the 19 Member States that have pledged to make available around 40,000 places between now and 2019, this still represents just a fraction of the places needed. This undermines the EU's values and credibility, and risks contributing to a global race to the bottom – the EU cannot legitimately ask third countries such as Uganda and Bangladesh to continue hosting and protecting over 1 million refugees each while it does not take on a fair share. **We therefore call on these 19 Member States to use their voice in the Council to encourage others to join them and to make sure that the EU passes an ambitious, humanitarian and sustainable Union Resettlement Framework.**

We urge EU Member States to ensure that resettlement remains a humanitarian and sustainable protection tool. In particular, the Framework should include ambitious targets linked to UNHCR's global needs assessments, to encourage all Member States to step up and resettle a fair number of refugees relative to their size and wealth. While this cannot be achieved overnight, we call on Member States to gradually scale up resettlement efforts to reach at least 540,000 over five years, and to support the inclusion in the Framework of the Parliament's target for the EU to meet 20% of global needs.

We also welcome efforts to promote the use of humanitarian admission. More ambitious safe and legal pathways to protection in Europe are urgently needed. However, we believe that **an increase in humanitarian admission must not be achieved at the expense of resettlement.** The Framework should incentivise resettlement, for example by differentiating the funding available for each admission procedure, by stipulating distinct targets and setting a quota for resettlement within the overall number of admissions. Member States should also agree minimum common EU standards for humanitarian admission that ensure a meaningful and sustainable contribution to addressing global displacement.

Background

The IRC provides urgent humanitarian assistance in high refugee-producing countries including Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, and in countries currently hosting high numbers of refugees including Greece, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. The IRC also has extensive operational experience of, and policy expertise on, resettlement. As both a leading international humanitarian aid organisation and a resettlement agency, we call on the EU and its Member States to:

1. Guarantee that the Framework constitutes an ambitious contribution to global resettlement efforts by gradually scaling up EU-wide resettlement numbers to at least 540,000 refugees over the next five years.

Given the EU's capacity as a wealthy region, we support the replacement of maximum numbers with an ambitious target that takes into account UNHCR's annual assessment of global resettlement needs (1.19 million in 2017 and 1.2 million in 2018). The IRC believes that the EU as a whole has the capacity to resettle at least 108,000 refugees per year – despite efforts by the European Commission to increase Member State pledges to 50,000 over two years we are still a far cry from reaching that number, and agreement on an ambitious target in the Framework could provide the necessary impetus as well as clearly demonstrate much-needed EU leadership in global resettlement efforts.

1.2 million particularly vulnerable refugees are in need of resettlement, and a European target for resettlement should not be diluted by allowing Member States to count other, non-defined admissions that do not fulfil the same purpose, follow the same procedures or meet the same standards as those agreed for resettlement. EU action on humanitarian admission is crucial – but should proceed with the same care and attention as is rightly being afforded to resettlement under the Framework, or else risk a duplication of efforts and a decrease in protection standards for refugees. A separate target should be established for each admission procedure, with a quota of overall admission places reserved for resettlement. For the purpose of reporting progress under the Framework, data collection should clearly distinguish between the admission procedure used and the status awarded in each case.

2. Safeguard the humanitarian essence of resettlement as a safe and legal route to protection for the most vulnerable refugees, and reject its use as a political bargaining chip.

Resettlement must be based on need. We support the strategic use of resettlement to improve the protection capacity of refugee hosting countries and to benefit refugees themselves ineligible for resettlement – but this should be clearly differentiated from attempts to make resettlement conditional upon the fulfilment of EU foreign policy objectives. The Framework constitutes a golden opportunity to take a step away from short-term political ambitions and towards a longer-term, common and comprehensive approach to global displacement. It is therefore vital that countries and regions for resettlement under the Framework are chosen based on need, for example in protracted displacement situations, and not according to their potential to create leverage in the context of so-called migration management.

3. Ensure that the Framework adds value, not limitations, to national resettlement programmes.

Coordinated EU resettlement should facilitate and add to existing national efforts. Refusal by one Member State to resettle a refugee should not preclude others from considering that individual's application for resettlement, especially where refusal is linked to context-specific factors such as integration potential.

The establishment and expansion of national resettlement programmes should be incentivised and benefit from EU funding even where resettlement takes place from regions outside of EU priorities: a distinction in funding under the Framework should be made according to admission procedure, in favour of resettlement, rather than on the basis of geographical focus.

4. Align the Framework with long-standing resettlement concepts and procedures, and strengthen the role of established resettlement actors in EU resettlement.

In order to add value, EU resettlement should build upon existing global expertise. We therefore support a primary role for UNHCR in identification and referral, as well as the alignment of the Framework with UNHCR procedures. The Framework should include a clearly defined admission procedure for refugees whose security or medical condition requires emergency or urgent resettlement, requiring that resettlement is expedited and finalised as soon as possible after submission, and in any case within six weeks. Where, as may be in the case of humanitarian admission, actors other than UNHCR submit cases, the Framework should also stipulate a maximum time between identification and submission.

Reflecting the tripartite nature of resettlement, UNHCR, IOM, EUAA and relevant civil society organisations should be permanently represented on the high-level resettlement committee, which should have a clearly defined advisory mandate and should procedurally align with existing structures such as the ATRC.

5. Recognise the role of resettlement as a durable solution and support the integration of resettled refugees.

In order for resettlement to be a sustainable durable solution, there must be certainty for refugees that they will be welcomed as a permanent member of the society of their new home. Resettled refugees should therefore be granted refugee status and the Framework must allow Member States to grant permanent residence permits. Provision of information and cultural orientation both pre-departure and post-arrival should be a mandatory part of the Framework. Although integration rests with Member States, the EU has tools and standards at its disposal – such as the Action Plan on Integration and sections of the proposed Qualification Regulation – that should be clearly referenced.

Context

The IRC and resettlement

The IRC's experience offers us a unique perspective on conditions for refugees and the challenges and opportunities available as Europe and its neighbours struggle to cope with historic levels of displacement. Founded in 1933 at the request of Albert Einstein when refugees were fleeing Europe, today we work in some 40 countries, giving us a real understanding of the causes of displacement. As one of nine non-profit resettlement agencies partnering with the U.S. Government to receive refugees, we have resettled more than 370,000 people from 119 countries across the U.S. over the past four decades. In recent years we have supported around 10,000 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. The IRC runs the U.S. Government's Resettlement Support Centre for Southeast Asia in Bangkok and manages the Cultural Orientation Resource Exchange (CORE), which provides cultural orientation information, materials and training to all partners engaged in providing pre- and post-arrivals support to refugee newcomers, to help them acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to adapt and thrive in the U.S. We are also providing technical advice on resettlement and integration in a number of European countries including Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia.

Arguments for structured resettlement in the EU

The IRC has long advocated for a permanent EU resettlement framework. Resettlement programmes currently vary greatly among Member States, with some Member States not resettling at all. We believe that a significant commitment to resettlement, coordinated and facilitated by the EU, will:

- Ensure the protection of vulnerable refugees whose needs according to UNHCR cannot be met in first countries of asylum;
- Save lives by providing an alternative to dangerous journeys and diminishing reliance on smugglers;
- Help stabilise fragile situations in the countries surrounding Syria and assist in alleviating the current, immense pressure on hosting countries; and
- Facilitate better integration into host societies.

A fair and achievable European resettlement commitment

The EU should resettle at least 108,000 refugees each year, or a minimum of 540,000 refugees over the next five years. This is a fair and achievable minimum commitment for a new European resettlement programme which takes into consideration the rapidly increasing challenge of global forced displacement as well as the capabilities of European states and the UNHCR resettlement system.

As the EU accounts for around a quarter of the world's nominal Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the IRC believes it has the resources and capacity, over the next five years, to resettle at least a quarter of those refugees that UNHCR has identified as being in need of resettlement globally. This would mean working with UNHCR and others to resettle around 300,000 refugees from around the world over the next five years. In recognition of the moral and legal imperative placed on Europe by huge numbers of Syrian refugees fleeing violence to Europe, the IRC believes the EU should also resettle at least half of the 480,000 Syrians in need of resettlement. This would amount to 240,000 Syrian refugees over the next five years.

Rescuing futures through integration

Our experience shows that, done right, resettlement yields enormous benefits not only for resettled refugees but also for the societies that host them. Refugees bring key skills and diversity, which can enhance local economies and promote innovation and creativity. If Europe is to realise the many benefits of resettlement, it must not only increase the numbers of refugees it resettles, but also focus its resources on providing them with timely and accurate information, permanent legal status and opportunities for economic self-sufficiency. While integration is the responsibility of Member States, the EU is in a position to develop indicators for minimum common standards, and to assist Member States in strengthening their integration capacity. Flanked by such measures, the Union Resettlement Framework presents a golden opportunity to turn the crisis into an opportunity for refugees and for Europe.

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Read more about the IRC and Europe's role in resettlement in our reports [Rescuing Futures](#) and [Pathways to Protection](#).