



# WELCOME, SUPPORT, PLEDGE, RESETTLE

Responsibility sharing in the Global Compact on  
Refugees

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In 2018, less than 5% of those identified as needing resettlement by UNHCR were resettled – just 0.2% of the global refugee population. Four-fifths of refugees live in neighbouring states. The 2019 Global Refugee Forum offers an opportunity for states to live up to their commitment to equitable and predictable responsibility sharing. There is no single formula for responsibility sharing. This paper sets out a menu of policy options available to governments as they gather in Geneva. It calls for refugees to be meaningfully included in discussions and decisions about their future, and for higher-income countries to do their fair share by increasing their commitments to resettlement, humanitarian admissions and family reunification.

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For further information on the issues raised in this paper please email [advocacy@oxfaminternational.org](mailto:advocacy@oxfaminternational.org).

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Front cover photo: Richard (middle), a refugee and pastor at the Imvepi refugee settlement in Uganda, meets an old friend in the settlement's market. Credit: Coco McCabe/Oxfam.

Back cover photo: Fatem, Khalil and their son Mohamad, hosted in Italy as part of a humanitarian visa programme. Credit: Pablo Tosco/Oxfam Intermón.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

At the ‘Obama Summit’ in New York in September 2016, the leaders of 193 governments committed to more equitable and predictable sharing of responsibility for refugees as part of the New York Declaration.<sup>1</sup> Their commitment to collective action was reaffirmed by 176 governments through the Global Compact on Refugees<sup>2</sup> (GCR) in December 2018. The 2019 Global Refugee Forum (GRF) is a high-profile opportunity at the global level for states to demonstrate meaningful action on their commitment. This is an opportunity that must not be missed.

Refugees arriving at a state’s border cannot be returned to their country due to the prohibition on *refoulement*. While this is essential for protecting refugees, it also creates an imbalance, whereby neighbouring states are expected to absorb refugees with no obligation from the rest of the international community to support them. In the absence of a global responsibility-sharing mechanism, there is no single formula for determining how to ensure that global responsibility is shared equitably and predictably. However, there is a clear set of principles from which states can and should act, and a menu of policy options available to ensure equitable responsibility sharing.

First and foremost, **refugees need to be meaningfully included in discussions and decisions about their lives and futures.** This means that diverse and representative voices are part of the process at every level and in every relevant forum, and that they can exert influence on decision-making processes that affect their lives. It also means acknowledging and addressing the additional hurdles that women refugees face in participating in decision-making processes. To this end, Oxfam calls on all participants to support the Global Refugee Network Refugee Participation Pledge:<sup>3</sup>

*My government/institution/organisation/company/me individually, pledge(s) to meaningfully engage refugees themselves in all processes and decisions which affect them, and pledge(s) that the meaningful engagement of refugees will underpin and enforce every contribution or pledge my government/institution/organisation/company/I, etc will bring to or announce at the first Global Refugee Forum, to be held on 17 and 18 December 2019 in Geneva.*

*My government/institution/organisation/company/me individually, furthermore pledge(s) to share experiences on the implementation of this pledge at subsequent Global Refugee Forums and/or high level officials’ meetings.*

Secondly, responses to forced displacement must be humane and rights-based. **People who have been forcibly displaced must be treated with dignity, be protected without discrimination and have their fundamental rights respected** – in line with international human rights and refugee law.<sup>4</sup>

*‘The Global Compact on Refugees intends to provide a basis for predictable and equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing among all United Nations Member States.’*

Global Compact on Refugees

Thirdly, **all states should do their fair share to provide international protection for the women, men and children who have been forcibly displaced** by conflict, injustice, violence and disaster. There must be a concerted shift away from the current situation where it is mainly geography that decides where most refugees end up, with predominantly low- and middle-income neighbouring countries hosting four-fifths of the world's 25.9 million refugees, often for protracted periods.<sup>5</sup>

Top five refugee-hosting countries <sup>6</sup>	
Turkey	3.7 million
Jordan	2.9 million
Lebanon	1.4 million
Pakistan	1.4 million
Uganda	1.2 million

UNHCR (2019) *Global Trends in Forced Displacement 2018* and UNRWA (2019) *In Figures 2018–2019*.<sup>7</sup>

## 2 FAIR RESPONSIBILITY SHARING

A global response is required to meet the needs and protect the rights of the world's refugees, but there is no one-size-fits-all approach to responsibility sharing. Each country has its own complex mix of social, economic and political challenges as well as resources that can be brought to bear for the global good. Some are on the front lines, especially neighbouring countries. Others are insulated by geography and, increasingly, heavily securitised borders, with some even 'externalising' their own borders to keep asylum seekers in other countries. Over the past two decades, the US, the EU and Australia have erected physical and bureaucratic barriers that drastically limit the ability of refugees and others seeking protection to reach or cross their borders, resulting in thousands of deaths in the Mediterranean Sea, along the US-Mexico border and elsewhere.<sup>9</sup>

Despite high hopes at the outset of the negotiation of the GCR, we are a long way from its stated aim of a single, global mechanism for equitable responsibility sharing. However, the Global Refugee Forum offers an opportunity for countries to step up and do their fair share, both in funding for refugee responses and in offering third country solutions such as resettlement, humanitarian admissions and other safe and legal routes. The pledges countries make at the first GRF must start from the recognition that each person has fundamental rights that do not change depending on when and how they seek international protection, and that

*'Host-country governments and the wider international community should promote national, regional, and international multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder dialogues to find innovative ways to facilitate equitable responsibility sharing that is capable of responding to the specific needs of each host state and/or region.'*

Recommendation of the International Refugee Congress<sup>8</sup>

these rights must be protected and promoted. Further, those pledges must not reinforce the current approach where some higher-income countries use aid and very limited resettlement places as a substitute for living up to their obligations to provide international protection.

Since the adoption of the GCR, global discussions around responsibility sharing have often focused on funding. This is perhaps unsurprising given the 43% funding gap UNHCR faced in 2018,<sup>10</sup> together with chronic underfunding to local and international NGOs. The consequences of this shortfall have disproportionately fallen on refugees themselves, in the form of reduced services, and on host countries' national public budgets. Without international support, people who have already fled violence and persecution will not receive the help and protection they desperately need.

However, funding alone is not enough. As governments gather in Geneva in December 2019, higher-income countries must commit to other measures, including more tangible forms of responsibility sharing such as third country solutions, including resettlement and humanitarian admission in proportion to needs. More innovative approaches that seek to increase the fiscal space available to hosting countries must also be explored. This paper will explore the policy options for more equitable responsibility sharing of refugee hosting. It calls on all countries to do their fair share in responding to the global challenge.

## RESETTLEMENT

In 2018, **less than 5% of those identified as in need of resettlement by UNHCR departed their first country of asylum to be resettled – just 0.2% of the total global refugee population.** This is the lowest number in five years,<sup>11</sup> but current levels of resettlement are by no means an exception; historically, resettlement has benefitted less than 1% of the total global refugee population.<sup>12</sup>

In July 2019, UNHCR estimated global resettlement needs for 2020 at around 1.5m places worldwide for refugees under their mandate – just over 5% of the global refugee population.<sup>16</sup> But instead of growing in line with need, and despite the commitment made by 176 countries in the GCR, the number of resettlement places offered is declining. This means more survivors of violence and torture will not get protection they need, more women and girls at risk will be left in unsafe situations and more children will grow up in limbo.

*‘Civil society actors, UN agencies, and others working to support resettlement should identify new actors and build a global coalition to increase the number of countries that currently accept resettlement submissions.’*

Recommendation of the International Refugee Congress<sup>13</sup>

Top five Resettlement countries (by number of departures) in 2018	Total <sup>14</sup>	Government resettlement <sup>15</sup>
Canada	28,100	7,704
United States of America	22,900	17,112
Australia	12,700	3,741
United Kingdom	5,800	5,698
France	5,600	5,109

Resettlement sits alongside integration and return as one of three traditional durable solutions, but it is also an essential component of responsibility sharing. It is particularly vital for refugees who are in a vulnerable position or who have special needs, for whom resettlement is often the only means to a safe and dignified life. Traditionally, a small number of countries have provided the bulk of resettlement places, but these have consistently fallen well short of need. In 2018, only 27 countries accepted refugees for settlement, with 12 of those offering safe haven to less than 100 people. Only 10 countries offered more than 1000 resettlement places. These numbers are wholly inadequate.

The solution is simple: more countries need to do their fair share by working with UNHCR to offer a greater number of resettlement places. We call upon states attending the GCR to set a goal of resettling 10% of the 20.4 million refugees under UNHCR's mandate.<sup>17</sup> The UNHCR Three-Year (2019–2021) Strategy on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways, which is one of the 10 high-level outcomes of the GRF, aims to grow resettlement places, advance complementary pathways and promote welcoming and inclusive societies. Only together will the global community be able to meet the global need in 2020 and beyond.<sup>18</sup>

Oxfam has developed a straightforward methodology for establishing a country's fair share of refugee resettlement places.<sup>19</sup> It is rooted in the principle that a country's fair share is proportionate to its wealth. The simple formula is based on share of gross national income (GNI); this can be used to calculate each country's fair share of the 2.04 million resettlement places needed. **All countries should work towards accepting their fair share of refugees in need of resettlement.**

While the primary drivers for resettlement are and must remain the protection and fulfilment of peoples' rights, perceptions of resettlement as a burden for states and societies are misplaced. There is a strong and growing body of evidence showing that refugees contribute positively to the societies and economies in which they settle.

#### **Economic benefits of resettlement to host countries**

In Australia, recent modelling looked at the economic impact of progressively increasing the country's annual refugee and humanitarian intake from a base of 18,750 to its fair share (based on current calculations) of 44,000 by 2022–23.<sup>20</sup> The findings are unequivocal: **increasing Australia's annual intake to a fair share level would increase the size of the Australian economy by AU\$37.7bn** in today's dollars over the next 50 years.<sup>21</sup> The increase would sustain on average an additional 35,000 full-time equivalent jobs in the Australian economy every year for the next 50 years, and increase demand for Australian goods and services by AU\$18.2bn in today's dollars.<sup>22</sup>

The analysis also showed that, compared to the broader Australian population, a higher share of first-generation refugees and humanitarian migrants are employed in the healthcare and social assistance sectors. Australia's ageing population and the expansion of large-scale health sector programmes mean that there will be additional demand for people with the right skill set to fill caring positions. This highlights the opportunity for refugees and humanitarian migrants to fill potential skills shortages in the health sector in the future.

## CLOSING SPACE FOR SPONTANEOUS ARRIVALS

Resettlement is only one part of the solution and is not a substitute for respecting the fundamental right to seek and enjoy asylum, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.<sup>23</sup> The GCR reiterates the obligation on all states to provide protection for those in need who arrive at their borders. The Asylum Capacity Support Group (ACSG) – which will be launched at the GRF – is being established to support states in developing and strengthening fair, efficient, adaptable national asylum systems as part of their comprehensive refugee response. In recent years, we have seen examples from many, often low- and middle-income countries, such as Bangladesh, Uganda, Ethiopia and Sudan, doing just that, while higher-income countries have externalized their responsibility for protection to prevent people from claiming asylum. The criminalization of people on the move is forcing them to travel dangerously and irregularly – often with smugglers.<sup>24</sup> The first GRF is an opportunity for states to reaffirm their commitments by pledging to dismantle the restrictive policies put in place to prevent people from claiming asylum, including:

- Overly restrictive visa regimes;
- The (de facto) detention of asylum seekers;
- Push-back policies; and
- Linking development assistance to cooperation on migration control.

Instead, countries should look to facilitate humanitarian visas (as seen in Argentina, Brazil, France, Italy, Sweden and Switzerland), as well as other complementary pathways. Humanitarian visas allow people to travel safely to claim asylum in third countries.<sup>25</sup>

## Refugees welcome in Uganda

Uganda has been a safe haven for many people escaping violence, war and persecution from South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi. The number of refugees in Uganda currently stands at 1.36 million, and in some districts in Northern Uganda there are now more refugees than Ugandan nationals.

Refugees entering Uganda generally experience unhindered access, with South Sudanese and Congolese nationals receiving refugee status on a *prima facie* basis. Uganda grants refugees the right to work and relative freedom of movement. It is also progressively including refugees in its general social service provision and in national and local development planning. In settlements, refugees receive monthly food rations, household items and access to services. They are also provided with a plot of land for housing and farming, as part of Uganda's commitment to supporting their self-reliance.

Oxfam's interventions in Uganda all work to build the resilience of the refugee and host communities. In the past four years, Oxfam has also invested in helping more than 30 local and national organizations to build up their capacity to respond to humanitarian emergencies.

Strengthening the capacity of these actors ensures that they are better and more cost-effectively prepared, and can respond more quickly, when new refugees from neighbouring countries seek protection in Uganda.

VS

## Fortress Europe

Preventing people in need of international protection from arriving irregularly in Europe is a central objective of the EU's approach to displacement. To this end, the EU and its member states have increasingly externalized the responsibility for receiving and hosting refugees. This has culminated in, among other agreements, the EU-Turkey deal of 2016 and the EU-backed Italy-Libya deal of 2017. Both have led to incredible suffering, human rights abuses and the avoidable deaths of women, men and children.

Another objective of the 'Fortress Europe' approach is to stop people who arrive spontaneously at Europe's borders from moving any further, by setting up various legal and physical barriers. Year upon year, political disagreement between the member states has stalled any progress on sharing responsibility for addressing the needs of refugees. As EU member states keep pointing their fingers at each other, thousands of people are left at the borders of Europe in unacceptable, inhumane and dangerous conditions. Women and girls are particularly exposed to violence and abuse.

It is critically important that one of the richest blocs of states in the world shows solidarity with countries in the Global South and keeps its doors open for people in need of international protection spontaneously arriving at its borders. If the EU and its member states keep dodging this responsibility, they will further undermine their commitments under international law and international processes such as the GRF. They will also incentivize other countries in much more difficult contexts, who have welcomed refugees for decades, to close their borders.

## OTHER SAFE AND LEGAL ROUTES

Resettlement and welcoming spontaneous arrivals are critical forms of global responsibility sharing, but there are other policy options which states can and should use to do their fair share. Humanitarian admissions, private or community sponsorship schemes and family reunification policies form a basket of complementary pathways which sit alongside resettlement as part of a holistic response to forced displacement. They offer greater flexibility to governments and refugees than formal resettlement programmes. However, because they do not



automatically afford people the same legal status and protection, they are not a substitute for regular asylum procedures or resettlement.

## Humanitarian admissions

Humanitarian admissions allow governments to admit certain groups from vulnerable refugee populations into their country to provide (mostly) temporary protection. Humanitarian admission programmes (HAPs) can be described as government-initiated emergency mechanisms that allow large number of refugees to enter quickly, safely and regularly in a receiving country.<sup>26</sup> Germany, for example, has initiated three HAPs for refugees from Syria between 2013 and 2016, allowing nearly 20,000 refugees to travel safely to Germany. Refugees admitted under a HAP are normally issued a residency permit for a limited number of years, with the possibility of extension – based on the context in the countries of origin and asylum. Under Germany's HAP, refugees can work and access social support immediately. They also receive integration courses.

The legal status of refugees under a HAP varies from country to country, and refugees are often not allowed to apply for family reunification. They may also not have access to the labour market or integration support. In addition, their stay is often temporary, with regular short-term renewals, even when these refugees have come from a protracted crisis. So, while humanitarian admission programmes should play a part as one of the tools to share responsibility, they are not a substitute for resettlement.

## Family reunification

Separation from family is an 'almost universal consequence of refugee experiences'<sup>27</sup> and has 'devastating psychological, economic and social impacts.'<sup>28</sup> In the UK and Australia, research shows that family unity is an important factor in the successful resettlement of refugees and humanitarian migrants, with those people experiencing family separation having a higher probability of mental illness and post-traumatic stress, and less likelihood of engaging in study or job training.<sup>29</sup> The settlement experience is gendered, with the effects of family separation being greater for women.<sup>30</sup> Many refugees and humanitarian migrants working hard to integrate into new societies find their hearts and minds remain with their family members who are struggling to survive. Conversely, there are numerous examples of successful resettlement where that success has been at least partially attributed to settlement as family units – with partners, children and elderly relatives.<sup>31</sup>

Family reunion is therefore an important aspect of refugee and humanitarian migration policy. It has been recognised as a key complementary pathway to safe and legal settlement for refugees. Both the New York Declaration and the GCR identify the expansion of complementary pathways as a vital element to increasing international sharing of responsibility for global displacement.<sup>32</sup> Yet, to date, state signatories to these commitments have not taken adequate action to increase the options for family reunion within migration policy. States

should establish dedicated pathways within their migration programmes for refugee and humanitarian family reunion. These annual intake commitments for the complementary pathways should be additional to intake commitments for refugees referred by UNCHR.

## Private and community sponsorship

Through private or community sponsorship, private citizens, civil society organizations, churches and even entire communities can engage directly in refugee resettlement efforts. They receive refugees in their local communities and provide them with financial, social and/or emotional support, while governments facilitate the entry of these refugees into the country. Sponsorship schemes are thus a joint effort in which governments work closely together with civil society and citizens. Involving the host communities in welcoming and integrating refugees is of vital importance, both for the success of refugees' integration and for creating a sense of cross-geographical solidarity and support within receiving communities.

In Italy, civil society organizations have come together to promote a private sponsorship scheme called 'humanitarian corridors'. Organizations linked to three churches (the Catholic, the Waldensian and the Evangelical churches) are the main drivers of this project. As a partner of one of these organizations, Oxfam is responsible for the reception of a number of refugees in Italy. In total, 1,000 people will benefit from the humanitarian corridors. These corridors provide an alternative to the perilous journeys, human trafficking and sometimes even death that refugees face trying to reach safety. The project focuses on Syrian refugees who are residing in Lebanon.

Khalil and Fatem and their infant son Mohamed fled to Lebanon from their hometown of Raqqa in Syria in 2013. They learned about the humanitarian corridor project through a neighbour and were selected for the programme in 2017. The journey to Italy took 24 hours, starting at 4am in Beirut and ending in the city of Cecina in Tuscany. There, two Oxfam Italy social workers took them to their new home, where they received support with language classes, applying for asylum and finding jobs over the next six months.

'Of course we will go back to Syria when the war ends,' says Fatem. 'But we mostly just want a future for our children. That is why we are willing to learn a new language and adapt to different customs. If my children feel established here, we will only go back to Syria to visit. The stability of our family comes first.'

In some countries, private and community sponsorship has a long and proud history. Canadian citizens have been welcoming refugees through sponsorship schemes for more than 40 years, offering a new home to over 200,000 refugees. Other countries, mostly in Europe, have been experimenting in the past few years with different forms of sponsorship. However, the total number of refugees that have been resettled through this complementary pathway remains quite limited.

Increasing the number of countries that encourage and support their citizens to welcome refugees into their communities through sponsorship schemes is an essential step towards securing more safe and regular pathways for refugees. This is also reflected in the New York Declaration and the GCR, in which countries expressed their intention to 'expand the number and range of legal pathways available for refugees to be admitted to or resettled in third countries'.<sup>33</sup> These measures should complement resettlement and family reunification. Countries should not leave it to just their citizens to welcome refugees through sponsorship – there remains a responsibility with states to continue their involvement in resettlement schemes.

## SUPPORT TO MAJOR REFUGEE HOSTING COUNTRIES

Urgent improvement in resettlement and other safe and legal routes is needed but, given the geography of current humanitarian crises, even if this is achieved the bulk of refugee protection will continue to fall disproportionately on neighbouring countries, which are primarily low- and middle-income. While this remains the case, increasing and improving the support given to these countries in a manner that enables them to sustainably host refugees remains critical.

Even on the limited estimate of needs represented by UNHCR's funding targets, refugee responses have always been historically underfunded and neither bilateral nor multilateral official development assistance (ODA) contributions have been sufficient. The multiple challenges with estimating the costs of hosting refugees notwithstanding, it is clear that the full costs greatly exceed those estimated by the international community.

As such, it is critical that governments continue to meet their aid commitments and increase their long-term, multi-year, predictable funding in a conflict- and gender-sensitive manner so that refugee hosting countries can respond adequately to the needs of both refugees and host communities. A greater proportion of this funding must also be channelled via local actors with deeper knowledge of local contexts and priorities, in line with commitments made during the World Humanitarian Summit.<sup>34</sup> Both refugees and host communities, and their organizations, should be meaningfully engaged all levels of decision making about the use of this funding.

More innovative forms of support to major refugee-hosting countries, which help to expand the fiscal space available to host governments to support refugees, should also be urgently explored. This may require collaboration between hosting governments and international financial institutions to identify strategies for improving the macro-economic conditions in hosting countries, and increasing employment creation and labour market integration.

These forms of support to major refugee-hosting countries are not a substitute for, but an essential complement to, other forms of responsibility sharing such as those outlined above, as per the objectives of the GCR.<sup>35</sup>

## 3 CONCLUSIONS

The words of the GCR are only meaningful if they result in improvements to the lives of refugees and host communities and allow them a significant role in shaping their own future. This will only be achieved through political will and the implementation of concrete, actionable commitments, particularly on equitable and predictable responsibility sharing. This means high-income countries need to welcome more refugees than they have done up until now, while continuing to support countries that host large numbers of refugees. The first Global Refugee Forum, taking place in December 2019, is an opportunity for states to live up to their promises so that all refugees are able to live in safety and with dignity. It is an opportunity that cannot be missed.

### Pledge, resettle, welcome and support

- **Pledge:** December is a key opportunity to make pledges to realise the goals of the GCR. **Oxfam calls upon each government, in close consultation with refugees, local authorities, civil society organizations and refugee-led organizations to commit to supporting refugees and host communities**, both in their own counties and internationally. For those who are unable to make substantial commitments by December, we encourage them to continue in the process and to submit a plan of action by 2021.
- **Resettle:** Resettlement is at the very heart of responsibility sharing and is a crucial way of providing tangible assistance to refugees and countries of first asylum. All countries should increase the places they offer to meet the goal of 10% of registered refugees being resettled. At present only 10 countries offer more than 1000 resettlement places yearly, but more countries must rise to this level. **To meet the ideals of solidarity and responsibility sharing espoused in the GCR, all countries should step forward to increase their resettlement places.**
- **Welcome:** The ability to apply for refuge at the borders of a state is crucial to the protection of those fleeing war and persecution. **States must put in place the necessary measures to welcome spontaneous arrivals of asylum seekers** rather than seeking to close their borders, forcing people to turn to smugglers and to take unnecessary risks. We call on all states to reaffirm their commitments in the GCR by pledging to **dismantle the restrictive policies put in place to prevent people from claiming asylum**, including:
  - The (de facto) detention of asylum seekers;
  - Push-back policies; and

- Linking development assistance to cooperation on migration control.
- States should also explore **other safe and legal routes** for welcoming refugees, including **humanitarian admissions, family reunification** and through **private and community sponsorship**. Such programmes should, however, be in addition to government-assisted resettlement, and ensure that refugees' rights and interests are central to the programme.
- **Support:** While equitable responsibility sharing through resettlement and other safe and legal routes is the first priority, the **financial support to host countries remains essential**. Governments must meet their aid commitments and **increase their long-term, multi-year, predictable funding** in a conflict- and gender-sensitive manner so that refugee-hosting countries can respond adequately to the needs of both refugees and host communities. A greater proportion of this **funding must also be channelled via local actors**. More innovative forms of support to major refugee-hosting countries, which help to expand the fiscal space available to host governments to support refugees, should also be urgently explored.

# NOTES

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