

Mounting global needs call for renewed European leadership on resettlement

As the world is confronted with several humanitarian and protection challenges, it is vital that European Union (EU) member states take a forward-looking approach to global refugee protection needs. Commitments to expand refugee resettlement and complementary pathways should not be forgotten, in view of the 1.5 million people in need of resettlement worldwide.

In response to the more than 6 million refugees fleeing Ukraine in the past months, EU member states and citizens have displayed commendable solidarity and political will to support people in need of protection. NGOs and humanitarian organisations have greatly welcomed these efforts, and several of our organisations are directly providing support in Ukraine and in neighbouring countries. At the same time, we stress that other refugee protection needs and resettlement commitments cannot be overlooked. **Investments and preparations must be urgently made so that resettlement programmes are not placed on hold or inadvertently delayed, downscaled, or suspended** as a result of the pressure on EU reception and asylum systems and a lack of long-term planning of reception capacity or resettlement programming.

At a time of mounting humanitarian and protection needs worldwide, the EU must lead by example, act on its commitment to expand safe and regular pathways for people in need of protection, and take steps to **safeguard this vital protection tool and durable solution for refugees in vulnerable situations**. After COVID-19, already reduced resettlement efforts must not take a further hit. Rather, the positive momentum and solidarity expressed in welcoming people fleeing Ukraine must lead to strengthened refugee protection and dignified reception for all refugees, regardless of their country of origin.

Resettlement commitments are out of step with global needs

At two High-Level Forums in [July](#) and [October 2021](#), **European leaders firmly stressed the importance of resettlement** as a [crucial tool](#) for protecting refugees who face extreme vulnerability in the countries where they first received asylum, as well as an expression of solidarity that can alleviate pressure on major refugee-hosting countries. Low- and middle-income countries have long hosted the [vast majority](#) – as many as 86% – of the world’s refugees. **However, EU resettlement efforts remain far below needs and, despite important progress in previous years, are now falling short of the commitments made.**

It is in particular disappointing that the EU never fulfilled its pledge at the 2019 Global Refugee Forum to resettle 30,000 refugees in 2020,¹ even after carrying over this pledge into 2021. According to [UNHCR data](#), only 8,314 refugees were resettled in the EU in 2020, less than half the previous year (approximately 20,000 resettled refugees in 2019) and representing only 0.6% of global resettlement needs. After a second year of the COVID-19 pandemic, despite ongoing efforts and the many solutions available for flexible and innovative resettlement processing, **most European resettlement programmes have not yet returned to their normal scale**. Only 15,660 refugees were resettled to 12 EU states in 2021.

As of June 2022, no new EU resettlement pledges have been officially published for 2022, although the Commission indicated in [December 2021](#) that 15 member states had agreed to resettle 20,000 refugees in 2022, in addition to admitting 40,000 Afghans at risk between 2021-22. As of the end of April, **only 4,075 resettled refugees have arrived in EU countries since the start of the year**. However, the lack of clear reporting on member states’ resettlement and humanitarian admission pledges, and the opacity of publicly

¹ These pledges initially included the UK. Arrivals cited here refer to the EU27 member states, excluding the UK, and are all according to the UNHCR Resettlement Data Portal. Including the UK, the total number of refugees resettled into the EU28 are 25,651 in 2019, 9,143 in 2020, and 17,255 in 2021.

available data on humanitarian admissions, makes it difficult to monitor states' actual implementation of recent commitments.²

Global needs are at record level in 2022

This decrease in Europe's engagement in resettlement stands in stark contrast to the **rapidly rising number of refugees in need of resettlement globally**. As UNHCR recently warned, the number of people forced to flee conflict, violence, human rights violations and persecution has now [exceeded 100 million](#) for the first time on record. **As many as 1.47 million people were projected to be in need of resettlement in 2022, which is expected to increase substantially in 2023.**

Recent delays and shortfalls in resettlement efforts have **gravely impacted refugees' lives and left many in limbo**, with people fleeing Syria, Afghanistan, the DRC, South Sudan or Eritrea having to wait years for a chance to be resettled. It has also increased, rather than reduced, the pressure on countries in other world regions that have long hosted the vast majority of the world's refugees, amid domestic challenges.

These growing needs are further exacerbated by COVID-19, ongoing conflicts, climate change, and increasing inequality. In addition, the humanitarian consequences of the conflict in Ukraine are being felt across the world, with food insecurity reaching catastrophic levels due to disrupted grain exports and rising fuel and food prices.³ Urgent humanitarian and protection needs across countries of origin and first asylum remain pressing. For example:

- In countries neighbouring **Syria**, the Ukraine conflict's impact on food exports and rising energy prices is exacerbating political pressure, food insecurity and poverty. This is further **negatively impacting the protection situation for refugees**. In **Lebanon**, [nine out of ten refugee families](#) live in extreme poverty, with 90% of its 1.5 million Syrian refugees needing humanitarian aid. Food inflation since 2019 exceeds 400%, and rising household costs and shortages risk increasing instability in the country. In **Jordan**, which hosts 674,000 registered Syrian refugees alongside other refugee populations, [83% of Syrian refugees](#) residing outside camps live below the poverty line.
- In **Afghanistan**, [over 700,000 people](#) were forced to leave their homes last year, adding to the 5.5 million people already displaced in recent years. Over 90% of registered Afghan refugees continue to be hosted in Iran and Pakistan. Whereas EU states made positive efforts to evacuate or admit 27,000 Afghans at risk in 2021 and early 2022, **this has not yet been matched by long-term plans to resettle refugees from the region**, in line with UNHCR and civil society's calls.
- In **Libya**, [over 2,000](#) refugees and asylum seekers remain trapped in arbitrary detention in horrific conditions, and others continue to be denied access to services and protection or exposed to [human rights violations](#). Against this backdrop, **long-term solutions and pathways to safety are urgently needed**. UNHCR's Emergency Transfer Mechanisms (ETMs), providing evacuations for vulnerable refugees to Rwanda and Niger with a view to their onward resettlement to Europe or local integration, are a vital tool. However, only 6,162 refugees have been resettled to the EU from Libya or through these ETMs between September 2017 and April 2022, according to UNHCR.

² Despite the announcement of the pledge in December 2021, the division between these pathways and by member state is not fully clear, and the 40,000 places for Afghans appear to include the evacuations already conducted surrounding the change in government in Afghanistan in August 2021, and thus are not new protection places.

³ According to the [World Food Programme](#), up to 323 million people could become acutely food insecure in 2022. Threats to global food security are especially [concentrated](#) in the world's crisis zones. Over 7 million children under the age of five are suffering acute malnutrition in the Sahel region, of which 30-50% of wheat imports also come from Ukraine or Russia. Over 13 million are already at risk of acute food insecurity in the Horn of Africa; Somalia could be worst impacted by the conflict in Ukraine, depending on the region for 92% of its wheat imports. Yemen, which has endured 7 years of conflict that has left over 19 million people in need of food assistance, relies on Ukraine or Russia for 46% of its wheat imports. Lebanon, which has faced multiple political, economic and financial crises in recent years and hosts 1.5 million Syrian refugees, imports 96% of its wheat from Russia and Ukraine.

Time to mobilise the EU's commitment to resettlement

In response to rising needs worldwide, **EU states must urgently reaffirm their commitment to refugee resettlement and prevent programmes from shrinking further.** Experience from the US shows that, once resettlement systems are allowed to shrink or dismantle, it is costly, complex, and time-consuming to rebuild them. Instead, the EU must continue to foster the significant expertise, networks, and local engagement around resettlement that have developed across the continent in recent years.

Moreover, while the impact of displacement from Ukraine on European reception, protection and integration systems has been substantial, the swift response has also highlighted that honouring and expanding its modest resettlement commitments remains well within the EU's ability. **This is a pivotal moment for states to invest into durable, multi-annual, resilient, and ambitious resettlement programmes, mobilising the unprecedented solidarity towards refugees from Ukraine and building on the investments already made into the emergency response.** On 1 July 2022, the kick-off meeting for the next pledging exercise for resettlement and humanitarian admission will take place. This provides a key opportunity for EU member states (MS) to deliver on these commitments.

Against this backdrop, we call for:

- **EU MS to promptly and transparently implement their current commitment to resettle over 20,000 refugees in 2022, and to fulfil their pledges to admit nearly 40,000 Afghans at risk between 2021-22,** minimising delays and the risk of backlogs and the formation of bottlenecks.
- **EU MS to commit to continuously expanding their resettlement programmes in the coming years,** in the spirit of growth agreed by state signatories to the Global Compact on Refugees. As a priority, in the upcoming pledging cycle, **we urge member states to commit to resettling at least 40,000 refugees in 2023,** on top of the pledges made for 2021-22.⁴ **Pledges should take into account priority situations identified by UNHCR,** including committing to resettle 42,500 Afghan refugees from the region in the coming five years.
- **EU MS to expand reception capacity and explore alternative arrangements to support the reception and integration of all refugees,** including community sponsorship and other citizen-led initiatives. The limited reception spaces have been a significant challenge in Europe in recent years, including in the response to arrivals from Ukraine. It is essential that MS strengthen adequate reception and integration measures to build a sustainable foundation for resettlement programmes and the EU's long-term capacity to protect and support refugees. Multi-year funding should also be facilitated to this end.
- **EU MS to report on pledges regularly and transparently.** Monitoring, regular reporting, and transparent data on the implementation of resettlement and humanitarian admission pledges is needed to enable civil society and the European Parliament to monitor and support states' fulfilment of their commitments, including pledges for 2021-22. The Commission should develop detailed guidelines for this reporting in consultation with NGOs, UNHCR, IOM and the EU Asylum Agency.
- **EU institutions to encourage MS to increase resettlement commitments and strengthen implementation.** The European Commission should maintain political and financial support for increased resettlement and ensure that EU funds allocated to resettlement are not depleted or redirected to other responses. EU institutions should continue to encourage member states to make full use of the available EU funding and capacity-building support provided by EU agencies, UNHCR,

⁴ This would reflect the commitment to continuously expand resettlement expressed in the multi-stakeholder [Three-Year Strategy on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways](#). In 2021, UNHCR and NGOs had called on EU states to commit to resettle 36,000 refugees in 2022, in addition to a bespoke scheme to resettle and admit Afghans at risk from the region.

IOM, and civil society. Innovative processing modalities trialled during COVID-19, which can make resettlement faster, safer, and more cost-effective, should also be maximised.

- **EU MS to, in parallel, increase and expand access to complementary pathways** - including labour mobility, education pathways, and humanitarian visas - **while noting that these must remain additional to refugee resettlement pledges and that funding for resettlement must remain safeguarded and distinct from humanitarian admissions or other pathways.**
- **The European Parliament and Council of the EU to swiftly adopt the Union Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Framework (URF)**, to establish a more structured, predictable and longstanding EU policy on resettlement. The position in the provisional agreement between the Parliament and the Council in 2018 should be maintained.
- **EU MS and EU institutions must, at the same time, uphold the right to seek asylum in Europe, which refugee resettlement cannot substitute.** Resettlement must remain a protection and responsibility-sharing tool, and should not be instrumentalised and used as a migration management tool to reduce access to asylum in Europe.

Signatories

International Rescue Committee

Amnesty International

Caritas Europa

Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME)

European Council on Refugees and Exiles

International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) Europe / SHARE Network

Red Cross EU Office