



# 10 things to know about global displacement and EU refugee resettlement

An analysis of the latest annual reports from the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR)<sup>1</sup>  
Recommendations from the IRC, July 2020

## Amid rising displacement and vulnerabilities exacerbated by global upheaval, resettlement is needed more than ever

### 1. Resettlement needs have dramatically increased in the past decade and continued to rise in 2019.

- In 2019, the number of people forcibly displaced grew by 8.7 million to 79.5 million individuals, an average of 24,000 people forced to flee their homes every day. Approximately 1% of humanity is now displaced, increasing to 1 in 97 people from 1 in 159 in 2010 and 1 in 174 in 2005.
- Of these individuals, 20.4 million are refugees, driven from their homes and across borders. UNHCR estimates that almost 1.45 million are in need of resettlement, an increase by more than half since 2010.<sup>2</sup> These individuals are particularly vulnerable and unable to either integrate in the country where they have sought asylum, or to return home.
- As forced displacement crises continue to unfold at unprecedented levels, the COVID-10 pandemic presents a tragic new obstacle to seeking safety and has had debilitating effects on refugee protection in the EU. EASO statistics show that in March 2020, asylum applications dropped by 43% compared to February. In the first quarter of 2020, only around 3,900 refugees were resettled to the EU, posing severe challenges to the EU's commitment to resettle over 30,000 refugees this year.

*Resettlement is fundamental to refugee protection.*

### 2. For more than ten years, the world's poorest countries have shouldered the greatest responsibility.

- 85% of the world's displaced are hosted in middle and low-income countries, 80% in countries or territories affected by acute food insecurity and malnutrition. This is a persistent disparity: in the last decade, high-income countries never hosted more than 19% of refugees.
- Turkey hosts 3.9 million refugees and asylum-seekers, more than all EU member states combined. Germany is the only EU member state in the top ten of hosting countries, offering protection to almost 1.5 million refugees and asylum-seekers.
- 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 - countries like Lebanon or Jordan now host 134 and 69 refugees per 1,000 inhabitants (1 in 7 and 1 in 15 respectively).

*Resettlement is a pivotal tool for sharing responsibility.*

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise specified, all data in this briefing stem from UNHCR's [Global Trends Forced Displacement in 2019](#) and [Projected Global Resettlement Needs 2021](#) report, as well as the [UNHCR resettlement database](#).

<sup>2</sup> The term "refugee" in this document refers to individuals under UNHCR mandate only and therefore excludes the 5.6 million Palestinian refugees registered by UNRWA who fall outside of UNHCR's mandate and the 1951 Refugee Convention.

### 3. No protracted refugee situations were resolved in 2019, maintaining a persistent trend of extended displacement since 2010.<sup>3</sup>

- Although the number of individuals in protracted refugee situations decreased slightly from 15.9 million in 2018 to 15.7 million, 77% of all refugees remained in a protracted situation by the end of 2019.
- In the past decade, only a small proportion of refugees were able to return home - 3.9 million compared to almost 10 million during the previous decade and more than 15 million two decades earlier - and the rate of new displacement outpaces these returns. Fewer than 323,000 refugees were naturalised in their country of asylum.

*Resettlement is often the only way to ensure a durable solution to displacement.*

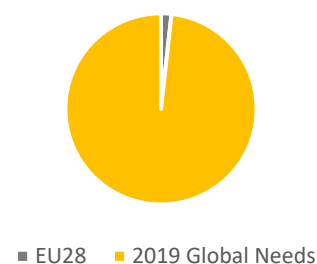
**In the context of this pressing need, only 4.5% of global resettlement needs were met in 2019.**

### The EU has increased resettlement, but key gaps remain

#### 4. Despite a consistent increase over the past ten years, EU resettlement falls far short not only of the overall need, but also of the EU's capacity.

- 25,651 refugees were resettled to the EU in 2019 and five EU countries were in the top ten resettlement countries globally: the UK,<sup>4</sup> Sweden, Germany, France and the Netherlands.
- However, the percentage of global resettlement needs met by EU member states has never exceeded 2% - 2015 was the year when the lowest percentage of resettlement needs were met by member states (at 1%), whilst the highest percentage of resettlement needs were met in 2017 (1.93%).
- Even Sweden, the top EU country in terms of resettlement per capita, resettled only 0.5 refugees per 1,000 inhabitants in 2019.

EU Resettlement vs. Global Needs in 2019



#### 5. There are discrepancies between resettlement arrivals and the countries of origin and asylum in greatest need.

- In 2019, 67% of refugees resettled to the EU were Syrians who have had the highest need for resettlement for five years in a row. However, some other nationalities in high need are at risk of being left behind. For example, refugees from Afghanistan ranked 4th (6.1%) according to total global resettlement needs in 2019, yet they made up only 2.2% of those resettled to the EU (569 refugees resettled).
- According to the projected resettlement needs for 2021, Egypt is 14<sup>th</sup> in the list of countries of asylum in need (16<sup>th</sup> in 2019). However, it was 4<sup>th</sup> amongst countries where the EU resettled from in 2019

<sup>3</sup> UNHCR defines a protracted refugee situation as one in which 25,000 or more refugees from the same nationality have been in exile for at least five consecutive years in a given host country.

<sup>4</sup> In this briefing the UK has been included for the purpose of 2019 EU resettlement statistics. Looking ahead to EU resettlement after 31 December 2020, projections and calculations are for EU-27 unless otherwise specified.

(around 10% of EU resettlement) and had a higher proportion (18.2%) of departures relative to its needs than most top countries of asylum for that same year. Meanwhile, Uganda has consistently ranked second in global needs (153,000 persons in 2019), but only 2,451 refugees were resettled from there to the EU since 2015 and as little as 2.1% of resettlement needs for that context were met in 2019.

## **6. Only nine EU countries resettle from the EU-funded Emergency Transit Mechanism (ETM) in Niger.**

- The Central Mediterranean Route is a priority both for UNHCR and for EU resettlement. In 2019, resettlement needs in 15 countries along the Route increased by 8% and at nearly 350,000 now account for 24% of global needs. Yet only one of the 15 countries (Egypt) features in the top 10 of global resettlement departures in 2019 and only 1,246 refugees were evacuated from Libya and resettled from the Emergency Transit Mechanism (ETM) in Niger in 2019.
- The EU has only resettled around 7,300 refugees from these countries in 2019, including 1,196 refugees from Niger. In addition only nine EU member states have, to this day, pledged resettlement places specifically for the ETM, despite the mechanism being largely EU-funded.

## **7. The UK's departure will leave a big gap in EU resettlement.**

- Between the years 2016 to 2019, the UK welcomed the largest number of resettled refugees compared with other member states, always welcoming more than 5,000 refugees in a single year.
- In addition, the UK's resettlement has consistently represented an average of 26.3% of EU resettlement each year since 2015, never falling below 18% of overall EU resettlement numbers.
- While this will be a big loss in absolute terms, it provides an opportunity for other EU countries to fill the gap and scale up their own resettlement programmes to ensure that the Union continues to contribute to global responsibility sharing in a meaningful way.

## **The EU can and should do more**

### **8. In the past five years, only ten EU countries have resettled refugees every year.**

- Since 2014, the number of EU member states which have welcomed resettled refugees has fluctuated slightly, reaching a peak in 2017 with 21 countries. A core group of 10 member states (Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the UK) has welcomed resettled refugees each year over this period.
- The biggest increase in the number of member states welcoming resettled refugees occurred between 2015 (15 member states) and 2016 (19 member states). However, this increase only translated into a slight increase in the percentage of global resettlement needs being met by member states (from 1% to 1.15%).
- Peer learning exchanges and technical assistance can ensure nascent programmes progress to mature ones which can welcome larger numbers of refugees over longer periods of time, and can also better withstand crises such as COVID-19.

*The EU should continue investing in capacity building for new and emerging resettlement programmes, but should increasingly focus on scalability and sustainability.*

## 9. **The IRC believes the EU has the capacity to resettle at least 250,000 refugees by 2025.**

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- 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 four years with an increase of 9,700 already achieved between 2016 and 2017. Pledges should be gradually scaled up to 40,000 arrivals in 2021 and leading up to at least 70,000 places pledged for 2024.
- Due to COVID-19, the EU will likely struggle to honour the commitment to resettle over 30,000 refugees in 2020 made at the Global Refugee Forum. However, even if resettlement resumes only at the rate of January - March 2020, 8,000 further refugees could easily be resettled in the next six months, bringing the total to at least 12,000 in 2020. The remaining 18,000 places should be spread over the next four years leading up to 2025 to ensure they are not lost.
- Even if resettled all at once, 250,000 refugees would represent only 17.3% of projected global resettlement needs in 2021, a figure far more representative of the EU's wealth and capacity than the current 2%. Broken down into years, this figure would mean that, with at least 40,000 refugees resettled to the EU in 2021, the EU would still only meet 2.77% of needs.

*As part of member states' commitment to implement the Global Compact on Refugees, the EU should resettle at least 250,000 refugees by 2025.*

## 10. **The EU is close to adopting a framework that could increase the quantity and quality of resettlement.**

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- The negotiations on the Union Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Framework have stalled since July 2018, in part because it has been linked with the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) reform package.
- The Framework includes a provision on the strategic use of resettlement. In order to guarantee that EU resettlement is needs-based and protection-oriented, this concept should be interpreted strictly: to ultimately increase the protection space for those unable to be resettled, not to transform resettlement into a migration management tool.

*The European Parliament and German Presidency should make it a priority to adopt the Union Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Framework by the end of the year.*

**Now more than ever the EU should demonstrate global leadership in resettlement.**

**The German Presidency and forthcoming new Pact on Migration and Asylum are ideal opportunities to demonstrate that EU resettlement is a success story built to last.**

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