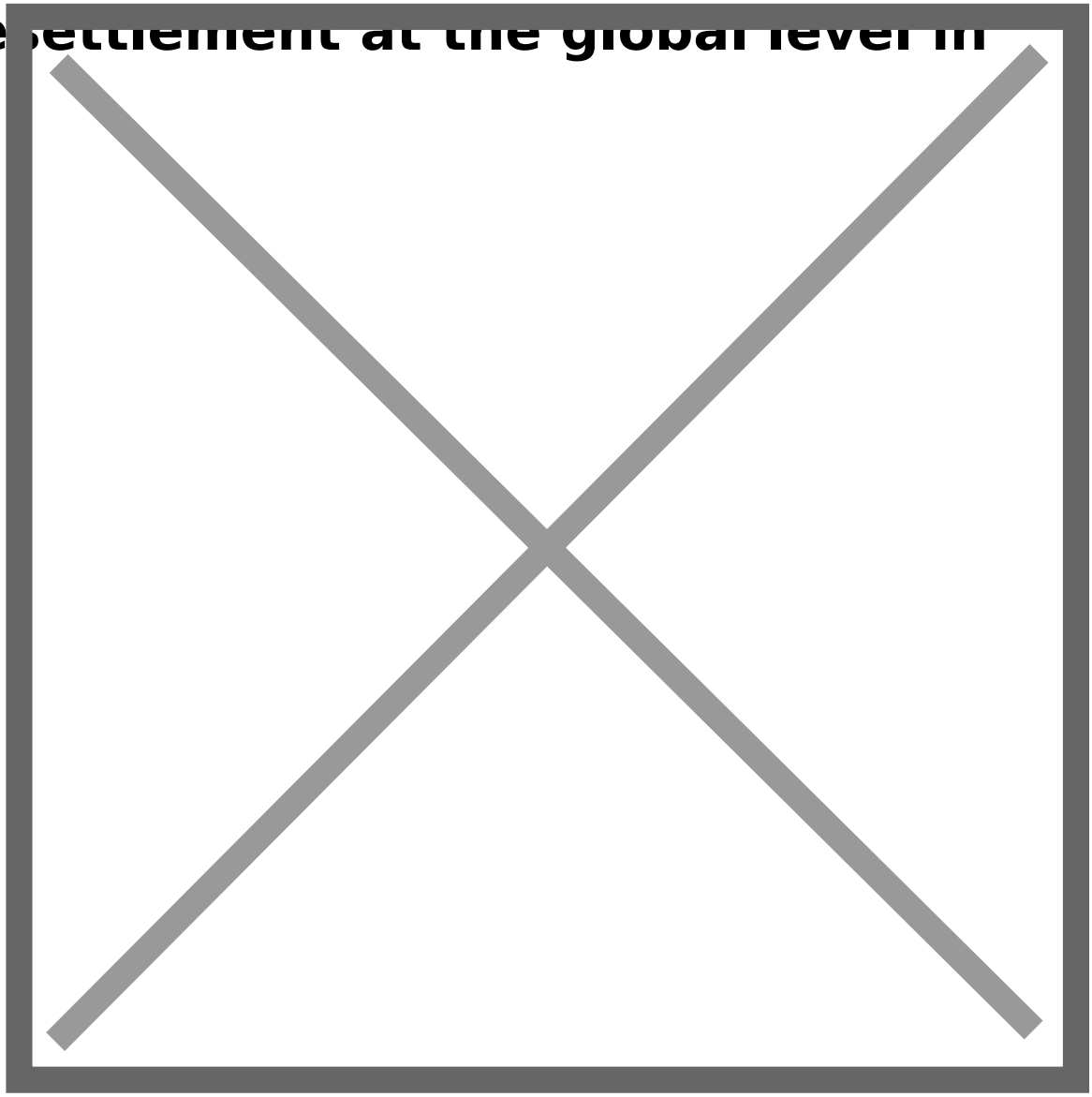
Please cite as: EUAA, '1.2 Resettlement at the global level in 2020' in *EASO Asylum Report 2021*, Gennaio 2022.

1.2 Resettlement at the global level in 2020



Resettlement is one of the durable solutions for refugees who cannot return home because of continued conflict and persecution. At times, emergency resettlement – through emergency transit facilities (ETFs) – may ensure the security of refugees who are threatened by refoulement to the country of origin or whose physical safety is under threat in the country where they sought refuge. [38]

UNHCR defines resettlement as “the transfer of refugees from an asylum country to another state that has agreed to admit them and ultimately grant them permanent residence”. Not only is it an act of responsibility-sharing and solidarity with countries that host large numbers of refugees, it also has the potential of offering refugees a new life in a safe environment, where they can be organic members of the new societies. Importantly, resettlement and other complimentary pathways can provide legal and safe alternatives to perilous onward movements that may threaten the physical and psychological well-being of refugees.[39]

Resettlement is an elaborate process that largely comprises the following six steps:

Identification

Individuals or families must first meet preconditions, that is, they need to have been determined as refugees [iv] by UNHCR and, upon an assessment of all possible pathways, resettlement must be identified as the most appropriate solution. They also need to fall under at least one of the seven resettlement submission categories: individuals with legal and/or physical protection needs; individuals with medical needs; women and girls at risk; individuals seeking family reunification; children and adolescents at risk; and individuals for whom no alternative durable solution is foreseeable. When cases are referred for resettlement, staff from UNHCR field offices or affiliated NGO staff conduct an assessment interview and a registration form is prepared.[40]

Selection

Countries that have agreed to host resettled refugees agree to consider a certain number of submissions by UNHCR each year. Through an established consultation process, countries determine the size and composition of their resettlement programmes and assess the resettlement registration forms submitted by UNHCR. While some states make the selections based solely on the registration forms (‘dossier selection’), others perform face-to-face interviews by government officials who travel to the country of asylum to meet the candidates.[41]

Pre-departure assistance

Refugees selected for resettlement are offered orientation programmes on the journey and life ahead in the new host country. NGOs and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) collaborate with governments, local authorities and reception and integration authorities to ensure a successful resettlement. Candidates undergo a pre-departure health assessment to ensure that they are fit to travel and receive sufficient assistance if required.[42]

Travel

Travel documents need to be obtained from the embassies and consulates of the resettlement country. To help refugees prepare for the journey, pre-embarkation briefings and checks are organised. Transportation and passenger assistance are arranged for embarkation, transit and arrival.[43]

Reception

Upon arrival in the country of resettlement, refugees are offered a set of reception conditions

provided by central government agencies, regional/local authorities and civil society organisations. Sometimes resettled refugees are accommodated in centralised reception facilities before moving to long-term accommodation in the community. Post-arrival orientation sessions assist refugees in their transition to the country of resettlement, by providing information on the local area and agencies which can provide support and assistance. The reception phase may also include a health assessment of newly-arriving refugees to verify the information received prior to arrival and, if needed, further medical care can be arranged.[44]

Integration

As refugees adapt to the new surroundings, they become more independent and self-sufficient. Receiving societies can facilitate the process by providing a supportive environment. Integration is a multi-level process which requires the involvement of various social constituencies to foster cohesive and equitable societies, including a secure legal status, language-learning, employment and education, in addition to a feeling of ownership and belongingness.[45]

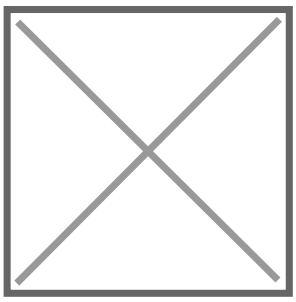
Throughout all steps of the resettlement process, the IOM plays a paramount role in the coordination and implementation of activities.[46] EU countries, both at the national level and in the context of European Resettlement Programmes, have been consistently key contributors to resettlement efforts, accounting for 40% of all resettlement pledges worldwide.[47]

While resettlement is an important tool for providing protection, there has been a widening gap between the number of people in need of resettlement and the number of available places.[48] Overall, an estimated 1.44 million globally are in need of protection,[49] but only a small part of this population has the opportunity for resettlement.

In 2020, resettlement processes were disrupted due to COVID-19-related emergency measures and restrictions in international travel. By June 2020, the departure of 10,000 refugees to resettlement countries had already been delayed.[50] UNHCR, the IOM and partner organisations continued to process and counsel refugees, while resettlement countries adapted their working methods. In this context, a number of emergency and urgent resettlements still took place.[51]

Despite these efforts to continue resettlement programmes during the pandemic, the number of resettled refugees in 2020 was the lowest in almost two decades. Out of the total resettlement target of 70,000,[52] only 22,800 refugees were actually resettled during the year.[53] These developments highlighted that resettlement as a durable solution needs to be expanded to provide broader coverage and effective protection to those in need. It also became evident that resettlement processes can be resilient even through a pandemic and can be managed effectively with the necessary adaptations and digital tools.

For more information on resettlement, see resources produced by the European Resettlement Network and the UNHCR Resettlement Handbook. For information on EU efforts in the area of resettlement in 2020, see Section 2.



[iv] In exceptional cases, resettlement is considered for non-refugee stateless persons or for non-refugee dependent family members for the purposes of family reunification.

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