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1.3. Scaling up sustainable, long-term protection solutions

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icon for sustainable and long term solutions

The ultimate goal of an effective international protection system is the provision of durable solutions to those in need.20 Durable solutions comprise voluntary repatriation, local integration in the host community, and resettlement and complementary pathways to protection. To facilitate voluntary repatriation, the international community works towards improving conditions in the country of origin, including addressing the root causes of displacement.21

Local integration involves efforts to boost the self-reliance of recognised refugees and facilitate personal and social development, including access to education; increasing skills, employability and entrepreneurship; being aware of rights and services that are available to refugees; and fostering meaningful interactions between refugees and local communities, so that refugees become an organic part of the social fabric in the country where they live. For displaced persons who cannot return to their country of origin, resettlement or other alternative pathways to protection, such as humanitarian visas, community sponsorship, study programmes or channels used for labour migration, may provide a viable way ahead. Alternative pathways to protection are not only an expression of solidarity with countries that host large numbers of refugees, but they also provide legal and safe ways for displaced persons to live safely when otherwise they could resort to perilous onward movements.

Durable solutions are clearly complex processes that require time and cooperation across multiple stakeholders; their complexity makes them difficult to operationalise and attain. UNHCR reported that since 2016 the number of refugees accessing durable solutions has gradually declined.22 The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the pursuit of durable solutions23 by severely limiting access to relevant services. The number of voluntary repatriations remains low, mostly due to protracted conflicts in countries of origin. Resettlement processes have gradually resumed, yet the number of places offered do not suffice to cover existing needs. And prospects for local integration have narrowed with growing barriers for refugees to access education, employment, social services and psychosocial support, in addition to an increase in stigmatisation and xenophobia against refugees during the pandemic.24

As a result of measures put in place by countries to address the challenges *(see In focus 2),*

resettlement processes started to climb compared to a near standstill in 2020. As a result, the number of persons resettled increased from 22,800 in 2020 to approximately 40,000 in 2021.25 Still, this figure is lower than the number of resettled refugees prior to the pandemic (approximately 64,000 in 2019).26 Practical impediments to access flights, the additional cost of adapted arrangements and complex travel requirements still make it challenging to fully reactivate relevant programmes.27 These numbers cover the needs of only a fraction of the total population in need of resettlement, which UNHCR estimates at more than 1.4 million for 2022.28 (*For information on resettlement efforts by EU+ countries in 2021, see Section 4.16. The section also includes information on evacuations and humanitarian admissions of Afghan nationals following the Taliban surge to power.*)

As witnessed in 2021, areas which continue to need sustainable solutions for people in need of protection include:

- More efforts are needed to address underlying causes and conditions of displacement, including through development initiatives, to create an environment that facilitate the voluntary repatriation of refugees.
- Additional support is needed for local integration by fostering self-reliance in refugees and assisting host communities.29 The majority of refugees live in protracted displacement which means that local integration is the most accessible durable solution. Other measures to foster sustainable living and decrease dependence on humanitarian aid include working with local authorities to include refugees in public services rather than sustaining a parallel humanitarian system; supporting localised responses that cater to the needs not only of the refugees but also of the host communities; and empowering refugees to sustain themselves and contribute to the social and economic development of their new societies.30
- Governments need to scale up resettlement efforts to provide safe routes to protection to as many people in need as possible.31 Closer operational coordination across resettlement states would increase efficiency at all stages of the process.32 Access to complementary pathways could be increased through scaling up community sponsorship, family reunification, and labour market and study opportunities.33 This could be attained by diversifying the actors involved in the provision of safe and legal pathways to protection to include local authorities and communities, employers, educational institutions, civil associations and faith-based groups.34, 35 Multiplying the involvement of more stakeholders can also catalyse better integration into resettlement countries. In addition, including previously-resettled refugees in the design and implementation of resettlement activities may be beneficial, both in ensuring that the processes cater effectively to the needs of the people they target and in increasing integration prospects.36

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