



EASTERN PARTNERSHIP

Panel on Migration and Asylum

Expert Meeting on Resettlement and Other Forms of Admission of Persons in Need of International Protection

2-3 June 2016, Stockholm

CONCEPT NOTE

In times of the current migration crises, large groups of refugees worldwide are in need of durable solutions and effective access to protection. As border controls increase for security reasons and for the sake of maintaining control over mixed migration movements, resettlement, humanitarian admission and relocation offer instruments to provide asylum seekers and refugees with orderly managed paths for legal entry and stay outside their country of origin.

Despite the fact that an increasing number of Member States have participated in resettlement in recent years, Europe's contribution to global resettlement has remained approximately the same - 7.9 per cent of the total number of refugees resettled in 2007 and 9 per cent in 2013. So while Europe has created more resettlement places, the rate of their creation has not kept pace with that of other resettlement countries around the world. Globally, the number of people currently in situations of forced displacement has reached 59.5 million¹, the highest figure recorded by UNHCR in the post-World War II era. Of these, 19.5 million are refugees, of whom UNHCR estimates almost 1.15 million people are in need of resettlement².

With numerous political initiatives to increase the European Union's response to migration crises, the momentum on increasing resettlement to the EU is building up and it also offers valuable knowledge to share with partners outside the European Union.

¹ By the end of 2014, 59.5 million individuals were forcibly displaced worldwide. An updated figure is not presently available but as the number of refugees, asylum-seekers, and internally displaced persons worldwide continued to grow in 2015, it is likely that this figure has far surpassed 60 million. <http://www.unhcr.org/56701b969.html>

² UNHCR Projected Global Resettlement Needs 2015



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Towards the turn of the millennium, the EU began to reflect on including resettlement policies within the external dimension of its asylum policy. The 1999 Tampere Conference asserted the political direction for developing the EU as an ‘Area of Freedom, Security and Justice’, and produced Member State agreement on the development of a Common European Asylum System (CEAS). Asylum and migration were included as key elements in the external relations of the EU, and resettlement was acknowledged as an organized mechanism by which refugees could enter the EU without resorting to traffickers or precarious and dangerous journeys.

In May 2015, the European Commission launched the European Agenda on Migration as a response to the migration crises. The establishment of resettlement and relocation schemes was prioritized among the immediate actions in the Agenda. Following the European Commission Recommendation of 8 June 2015 on a European resettlement scheme, 27 Member States (all except Hungary) together with Norway, Iceland, Switzerland and Liechtenstein agreed on 20 July 2015 to resettle through multilateral and national schemes 22,504 displaced persons from outside the EU who are in clear need of international protection.

In order to ensure a fair and balanced participation of all Member States and to share the responsibility for large numbers of refugees and asylum seekers among Member States, the EU agreed on a temporary relocation scheme for persons in clear need of international protection from Italy and Greece. The relocation scheme is based on such criteria as GDP, size of population, unemployment and past numbers of resettled asylum seekers and refugees.

Many European countries established formal resettlement programmes in partnership with UNHCR from the 1970s onwards: European resettlement has expanded considerably since the turn of the century, with ten additional Member States having established programmes in that time, though many with relatively small numbers. Some countries have Protected Entry Procedures (PEPs) in place. PEPs enable non-nationals to approach a country outside of its territory with a claim for asylum or other forms of international protection, and to be granted an entry permit in cases of a positive response to the claim. In addition, several European countries have received beneficiaries of international protection through Humanitarian Admission Programmes (HAPs).

Yet, the challenges remain to a great extent unsolved. The global total of 140,000 resettlement places offered by resettlement countries around the world provides for less than 15 per cent of global resettlement needs. A vastly improved European resettlement commitment is therefore more necessary than ever.

As the conflict in Syria deepens and the violence worsens, several actors expect that growing numbers of civilians will continue to need and to seek safety and assistance across international borders. Likewise, as the number of displaced people grows, so does the strain on the capacities of



communities hosting refugees in the region. UNHCR has encouraged the international community to show solidarity with countries hosting Syrian refugees in the region by offering opportunities for resettlement or other forms of admission for at least 480,000 Syrian refugees. These interventions are particularly critical for the most vulnerable refugees who are in urgent need of safety and protection.

On 18 March 2016, the EU and Turkey agreed on a statement which aims at ending the irregular migration from Turkey to the EU. The statement targets smuggling networks and aims at removing the incentive to seek irregular routes to the EU. All irregular migrants, including asylum applicants, whose applications were dismissed either as unfounded or as inadmissible and who have arrived in Greece from Turkey since 20 March 2016 will be returned to Turkey. For every Syrian returned to Turkey, another Syrian will be resettled from Turkey to the EU, on the basis of existing commitments. The existing commitments enable resettlement of up to 72,000 Syrians from Turkey to the EU out of which 18,000 are remaining places for resettlement. 136 persons were returned to Turkey on the basis of this agreement and around 40 Syrians have been resettled from Turkey to EU Member States according to the 1 for 1 principle. The UNHCR has requested access to people returned from Greece to ensure that people can benefit from effective international protection and prevent risk of refoulement.

The level of experience in and knowledge about resettlement varies between countries and the capacity to engage in resettlement depends on several internal and external factors. In order to establish a functioning framework it is of crucial importance to gain knowledge about the concept and the practical tools for engaging in resettlement. Some of the Eastern Partnership countries have already resettled small groups of refugees previously, while some still lack such experience. Several Eastern Partnership countries have already significant experience of hosting refugees. For example, Armenia has accepted about 20,000 refugees from Syria, making them the third largest recipient of Syrian refugees in Europe on per capita basis. In light of the global migration crises, it will be even more important for States to have tools and knowledge at their disposal for effective resettlement policies.

The next meeting of the Eastern Partnership Panel on Migration and Asylum will therefore focus on the main concepts and practical measures for offering legal channels of protection.

The expert meeting will evolve around four main sessions:

- Session I will focus on the global overview with the aim to frame the concept and understand the global challenges in terms of refugees and others in need of sustainable solutions. This session will also elaborate on the global and European framework for resettlement and the options available for responding to the current migration crises. The national practices of the participating EU and EaP states



will be presented, highlighting the different and common approaches. Not least, this session will provide insight into the most important part of resettlement: the human real life story of a resettled person.

- Session II will present to the participants the different concepts and tools available such as resettlement, humanitarian admission and private sponsorship with input from states on national experiences and practices. After presentations there will be a panel discussion in which the different forms are debated and highlighted from different perspectives. In the second part of the session the EU framework of relocation will be discussed, in particular how the relocation mechanism enhances European solidarity and the challenges it is faced with in the implementation.
- Session III will provide a deeper understanding of the process of resettlement: from pre-departure arrangements to the reception and integration process. It will elaborate on the issue of how to establish a national resettlement programme and will answer many of the practical questions countries are faced with, especially when lacking previous experience in this area. Finally it will also present how training and awareness raising can be facilitated in the national administrations.
- Session IV will be devoted to the needs, priorities and available options for the Eastern Partnership countries for resettling refugees. The local context of the different countries will be taken into due account in the form of a panel discussion with all six Eastern Partnership countries represented.

The expert meeting will offer a platform for discussion and exchange of views between the EU and the Eastern Partnership, with the involvement of several experts from academia and international organisations among others. Prior to the meeting a discussion paper will be disseminated to serve as a comparison between the participating states and also to formulate questions for further discussion.

