



High-Level Officials Meeting Summary of the Roundtable on Solutions

02 December 2021 (14:00-17:00 CET)

Executive Summary

A virtual roundtable on solutions was held in the lead-up to the [High-Level Officials Meeting \(HLOM\)](#). It was opened by the Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, Ms. Gillian Triggs, and was followed by three panel discussions. The first panel, moderated by Ms. Fiona Kendal, Advisor, European and Legal Affairs, FCEI-Mediterranean Hope, discussed resettlement and complementary pathways. The second, moderated by Mr. Jerome Elie, Head of Forced Migration, International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), elaborated on good practices related to local integration. The third, moderated by Ms. Manisha Thomas, Geneva Representative, Women's Refugee Commission, focused on voluntary repatriation and reintegration. Additional content shared by stakeholders during the roundtable is available in the virtual space for the HLOM [here](#).

The roundtable highlighted that more collective efforts and actions are needed by States and other stakeholders to attain durable solutions for refugees in both new and protracted situations. Many highlighted that refugees contribute significantly if provided with enabling environments and can bring their skills and resilience to contribute to their host communities, while recognizing that the support provided by host countries is significant. The importance of the whole-of-society approach to finding solutions was underscored in all three panels. More States were encouraged to demonstrate leadership and provide resettlement and complementary pathways. More needs to be done to improve access to third country solutions through applying flexibility as well as removing some of the procedural barriers in place to allow, for example, meaningful access to family reunification and other regular pathways. More predictable collaboration between humanitarian and development actors was urged in order to bring integrated development approaches to local integration as well as voluntary return and reintegration in countries of origin. The roundtable also re-affirmed the importance of mobilising and engaging persons of concern and affected communities in attaining durable solutions.

Summary of Discussion

Opening remarks by Ms. Gillian Triggs, Assistant High Commissioner for Protection

Ms. Triggs opened the roundtable by sharing some of the key findings from the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) indicator report as they related to solutions. Overall, more refugees received a durable solution between 2016 and 2020 as compared to the previous five years. However, a continuous declining trend in the annual number has been observed since 2016 reaching historically low levels.

Between 2016 and 2020, 1.4 million refugees accessed third-country solutions, again more than the previous five years. However, less than one per cent of refugees now has access to third-country solutions. The year 2017 witnessed the first drop of 48% in resettlement, which mostly continued to decrease until 2021. Whilst resettlement fell with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic due to border closures and travel restrictions, the decline was also the result of lower quotas allocated by States for resettlement. The number of countries receiving UNHCR resettlement submissions declined from 35 in 2016 to 22 in 2021 with ten countries receiving 90 per cent of submissions. Therefore, the huge gap between resettlement needs and resettlement departures is widening further with 1.4 million refugees in need of resettlement. On the other hand, complementary pathways including family reunification, labour mobility, and education programme, show great promise. Four refugees are admitted through complementary pathways for every one refugee admitted

through resettlement with UNHCR assistance. However, following a peak in 2017, we have seen a progressive decline in complementary pathways.

Data about the local integration of refugees remains elusive, and naturalisation is used as a proxy measure of local integration. Since 2016, 2.8 million refugees have locally integrated—435,000 more than in the previous five years.

Three-quarters of solutions accessed by refugees were voluntary returns. Returns were highest with 3 per cent of refugees (552,000) returning in 2016 but declined to 1 per cent in 2020. While the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the trend with border closures, obstacles including conflict, insecurity, human rights violations, and the absence of essential services continue to influence decisions on return. Official Development Assistance (ODA) provided in support of refugee returnees also decreased. The total ODA decreased by 26 per cent from USD 784 million in 2018 to 584 million in 2019, coinciding with the decrease in the number of refugee returnees by 39 per cent.

Key Outcomes and Recommendations

Panel 1: Resettlement and complementary pathways

The first panel focused on resettlement and complementary pathways and particularly examined the three-year strategy envisioned in the Compact. The panellists included Mr. Nhial Deng, Member of the Refugee Education Council, Global Affairs Canada; Mr. Mark Hetfield, President and Chief Executive Officer, HIAS; and Mr. Michael Shotter, Director of Directorate C, Migration Asylum and Visa, European Commission.

The Three-Year Strategy (2019-2021) on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways translates the GCR's vision into a global plan for action. It aims to increase the number of resettlement and complementary pathways spaces, expand the number of engaged countries and actors, and improve the availability and predictability of third-country solutions for refugees. While the Strategy constitutes a roadmap from 2019 to 2021, it will continue to provide a blueprint to advance third country solutions beyond 2021 – reaching 3 million refugees by the end of 2028. Multi-year planning and funding are critical to laying the groundwork to achieve this.

In order to confront the global refugee crises through burden and responsibility sharing, the panel called for more leadership and collective action by States and other stakeholders, including civil society, faith-based and grassroots organisations, and business leaders, to reverse the declining trend of resettlement since the New York Declaration, which was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. It was recognised that refugees need not be a burden; they indeed contribute to the communities and local economies where they are resettled according to some studies. Providing the example of efforts by the European Union to engage more Member States in resettlement and promote complimentary pathways, the panel urged broader participation and more countries around the world to provide resettlement and complementary pathways. For resettlement to be an effective protection tool for refugees who are most at risk, the panellists recommended that States need to work closely together with partners such as UNHCR and NGOs to ensure that resettlement procedures, including vetting processes, become more transparent and efficient. Long processing prevents refugees from finding solutions for a longer periods of time. It was particularly highlighted that more efforts need to be made to expedite family reunification, as nothing can hinder refugee integration more than separated families. States were encouraged to provide more complementary pathways for admitting family members of beneficiaries of international protection through humanitarian admission programmes, such as family-based sponsorship schemes.

There continue to be barriers to labour and education pathways preventing many qualified refugees from accessing them. To increase access to education programmes and initiatives, the panel recommended that

process to become less cumbersome and information be more readily available, taking into consideration structural and logistical barriers such as remote locations, internet connectivity, application fees, etc. The panel recognised that community sponsorship creates meaningful connections between local communities, sponsors, refugees, and resettlement programmes, which is key to their success and reflects the 'whole of society' approach in line with the GCR. Learning from the Canadian model of private sponsorship, the community sponsorship programmes in the US are an inspiring example of States and civil society working together translating the GCR in action, which should be promoted. Recognising substantial levels of entrepreneurship amongst refugees, the Skilled Refugee Pilot Labour Agreement launched in Australia in 2021 is a strong example of how business and business leaders can harness the talents of refugees to address skills shortages.

Panel 2: Local integration

The second panel elaborated on local integration and other local solutions through concrete examples. The speakers included Mr. Adrien Kambale Malemo, Refugee Entrepreneur, Malemo Food Company Ltd (Uganda); Mr. Abdon L. Mawere, Commissioner for Refugees, Ministry of Home Affairs, Zambia; Mr. Ryutaro Murotani, Senior Director, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA); Mr. Andrés Alfonso Ramírez Silva, Coordinator General, Mexican Commission for Assistance to Refugees; and Ms. Sybill Schulz, Head of the Coordination Office for Refugee Management, Senate Administration for Integration Labour and Social Affairs, Germany.

Through the examples from Mexico, Berlin (Germany), Uganda, and Zambia, efforts towards local integration were elaborated. The importance of documentation was underscored for refugees to access labour markets and other public services. In Mexico, the whole-of-society approach was recognised as a contributing factor to successful refugee integration where the extensive participation of a wide range of stakeholders, including all relevant ministries, UNHCR, and civil society, was highlighted. Similarly, in Berlin, through development of a comprehensive concept of integration and participation of refugees, a participatory approach was applied (e.g. 40 women refugees from different countries and ages considering living conditions) where government authorities, civil society, and refugees are collaborating. Mr. Malemo, a refugee entrepreneur in Uganda who has created his own company, is an exemplary example of refugees successfully integrating, living self-sufficiently, and contributing to host communities. This was made possible by the enabling environment created by the Government of Uganda. Zambia's experience in supporting local integration of refugees, particularly those who came from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda, highlighted challenges such as lack of documentation (e.g. national passports), the need for more collaboration with countries of origin, and inadequate resources to support social-economic inclusion. To this, the engagement of JICA as a development agency in host countries including Zambia, Rwanda, and Uganda underscored the importance of engaging across the humanitarian, development, and peace (HDP) nexus in supporting local integration and providing solutions. In these efforts, mobilising and working with refugees and local communities are vital to responding adequately to acute needs and ensuring social cohesion as part of a long-term development process.

Panel 3: Voluntary return and reintegration

The third panel examined voluntary return and reintegration. The speakers included Mr. John Dabi, Deputy Commissioner for Commission for Refugees Affairs, South Sudan; Mr. Evariste Hakizimana, Refugee/Returnee Representative; Mr. Sylvestre Kpan Lansson, Legal Adviser, Directorate for Refugees and Stateless Persons, Côte d'Ivoire; and Mr. Luca Renda, Head of Recovery Solutions and Human Mobility, Crisis Bureau, United Nations Development Programme.

The panellists reaffirmed that voluntary repatriation is often the preferred solution by many refugees and requires intensified and coordinated efforts to mobilise more resources by the international community to support and enable refugees to return voluntarily in safety and dignity. It was highlighted that support is

needed even when returns are taking place spontaneously, as they are motivated by the strong desire by refugees to return home and restart their lives. Upon return, reintegration is a crucial component to ensure returns to countries of origin are sustainable and returnees can fully exercise social, economic, civil, political, and cultural rights and find durable solutions. Through the examples of Côte d'Ivoire and South Sudan, the strong political will demonstrated by governments, coupled with legal and policy framework, needs commensurate support and resources by the international community, particularly when countries of origin often face daunting socio-economic challenges and limited basic services. Regional frameworks and efforts, such as regional support platforms, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Nairobi process, and South Sudan and Sudan Solutions initiatives are examples of where regional and international actors can play a pivotal role in attaining solutions through returns and reintegration. Mr. Lanson, a returnee in Burundi, cited many of the challenges faced by returnees, including lack of housing, navigating different school systems, finding jobs, etc. With the example of the World Bank, more integrated development approaches to reintegration and a greater engagement by development actors, such as international financial institutions (IFIs), were emphasised as important contributions. In this context, more predictable collaboration amongst humanitarian and development partners was also sought. UNDP, as a development agency, provided the examples of its engagement that has been scaled up in over 40 countries to support reintegration programmes in the communities of origin, including in the areas of access to justice, strengthening the capacity of local governments, and access to work and self-reliance. Through an integrated approach, development actors can support in creating the environment to reintegrate returnees meaningfully. The panellists all noted the importance of bringing the voices of those who are affected to the process and engaging them in decision-making in order to provide opportunity for persons of concern to find solutions and live in dignity so that they can rebuild their lives.