



Chapter 7: Timely and Durable Solutions

This Chapter

- emphasises the need to find **timely and durable solutions** for all refugees and other persons of concern;
- provides an overview of the three major durable solutions available to refugees: **voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement**;
- highlights the role of UNHCR, countries, and other partners in ensuring that these solutions are available to all refugees.



7.1 Introduction

A **durable solution** is one that ends the problems associated with displacement and allows people to resume their normal lives in a safe environment. The international community has a shared responsibility to find lasting solutions for uprooted persons. Assisting them with this task is one of UNHCR's most important functions.

Women, men, girls and boys of all ages and backgrounds — not just community leaders — must be consulted and encouraged to participate in the process of finding the most appropriate durable solutions.

The three traditional durable solutions — voluntary repatriation, resettlement and local integration — complement each other. A combination of all three used at the same time may answer the needs of a particular community effectively.



Box P



The Three Traditional Durable Solutions

- Voluntary repatriation occurs when uprooted people return to their homes after making a free and informed decision to do so.
- Resettlement occurs when refugees are offered and take up permanent admission in a third safe country to rebuild their lives.
- Local integration occurs when refugees rebuild their lives in the countries where they sought asylum.

7.2 Voluntary repatriation

Most refugees return home as soon as circumstances permit, generally when a conflict has ended, a degree of stability has been restored, and basic infrastructure is being rebuilt.

The return of refugees must be **voluntary** — free of physical, psychological or material coercion to return. It must also take place in conditions of **safety** and with **dignity**. Each individual — even individual members of a family — should be allowed to make this choice.

Refugees must be provided with accurate information about the prevailing situation in their home country so that they can make an informed decision about if and when to return. This information should be provided in a manner that will make it easier for them to make a decision.

Specific needs of individual persons — such as unaccompanied and separated children, the disabled, single parents or survivors of torture and trauma — should be carefully considered and addressed in the context of repatriation.



Box Q



The concept of safety consists of three key elements:

- **physical safety:** such as freedom from the risk of persecution, unlawful detention, discriminatory treatment, and sexual violence – including domestic violence – and other forms of exploitation.
- **legal safety:** legal systems are in place to deliver justice, and there are no legal barriers preventing people from returning to and reintegrating into their countries, and where they will be given a legal status. Marriages, births and education that took place in the country of asylum should be recognised by their country upon their return. They should also not be discriminated for any reason because they left their country.
- **material safety:** returnees have access to a means of livelihood and basic services, such as potable water, sanitation facilities, health care, and education.

Dignity implies that the human rights of the individual, including the right to life, liberty, freedom of movement, and the unity of the family, are respected at all times.

Box R



UNHCR's involvement in voluntary repatriation

- UNHCR and its partners can promote voluntary repatriation when conditions in the country of origin are considered safe and stable. To encourage repatriation, UNHCR and its partners usually provide reintegration assistance to returnees.
- When conditions are not completely safe, but people still wish to return home, UNHCR and its partners may facilitate their voluntary repatriation.
- Uprooted people may also return home with little or no support from UNHCR and its partners. This is known as a spontaneous return. In such circumstances, UNHCR tries to monitor their return and also tries to ensure that they have access to assistance.

7.2.1 Ensuring a successful repatriation

To ensure that uprooted people can return home and live in safety and in dignity, UNHCR monitors the repatriation and reintegration processes to the greatest extent possible. Returnee monitoring is a crucial activity that assists in ensuring the long-term sustainability of return.

UNHCR, its partners and development agencies assist countries in ensuring that returning refugees have equal access to resources. These include food, land, housing, and such services as education, health care, potable water and sanitation. Over time, returnees should become self-reliant. Successful repatriation fosters economic, cultural, and social stability and reduces the risk of new conflicts erupting.

7.3 Resettlement

When returning home or remaining in the country of asylum is difficult or impossible, refugees can sometimes be granted lawful admission to a third safe country where they can enjoy permanent residence. This is known as resettlement.



Box S



Resettlement is:

- a protection tool, to provide a safer environment for refugees who face threats to their safety in the country of asylum;
- a timely and durable solution; and
- a responsibility-sharing mechanism to allow more countries to help protect refugees rather than just neighbouring countries that uprooted people can easily access.

Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom and United States have established resettlement programmes with a set number of places for UNHCR submissions each year. A number of other countries have also engaged in resettlement with a limited number of places for resettlement, including: Argentina, Benin, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Chile and Iceland.



7.3.1 Criteria for resettlement

Resettlement is an option that can be made available to a number of refugees. For instance, refugees whose human rights are not respected or are at risk of being violated can be considered for resettlement. For instance, individuals who are at risk of being *refouled*, or who are at risk of facing physical violence including sexual abuse can be resettled.

Survivors of violence and torture can also be considered for resettlement. Women, children and the elderly whose specific needs cannot be addressed

in the asylum country may also benefit from this solution. Resettlement can also help in facilitating family reunification. Those who do not have access to any other durable solution in a timely manner should also be considered for resettlement.

7.4 Local integration

Sometimes returning home is not a viable option. In such cases, refugees may be allowed to remain permanently in the country where they have found safety. They are encouraged to integrate into local communities and, over time, they may obtain permanent residency or citizenship and cease to be refugees.

The ability of refugees to gradually support themselves rather than depend on humanitarian assistance is important to ensure that they successfully integrate with their host community. To be **self-reliant**, they should have access to jobs, education, health care and other basic services. They must also be able to integrate socially and culturally within the local communities.

UNHCR and humanitarian and development agencies often support developing countries in setting up integration programmes.





Further Reading





Electronic copies of these documents in English have been provided in the accompanying Protection Induction Programme CD-ROM. Click on the 'Library' button to access them.




General

-  *Framework for Durable Solutions for Refugees and Persons of Concern*, UNHCR, May 2003.
-  *UN Development Group (UNDG) Guidance Note on Durable Solutions for Displaced Persons (Refugees, Internally Displaced Persons and Returnees)*, UNDG October 2004 (IOM/080/2004-FOM/082/2004).





Repatriation and Reintegration

-  *Voluntary Repatriation Handbook*, UNHCR, 1996.
-  *Handbook for Repatriation and Reintegration Activities*, UNHCR, May 2004.

Resettlement

-  *Strengthening and Expanding Resettlement, Today: Dilemmas, Challenges and Opportunities*, Global Consultations on International Protection, Fourth Meeting, document EC/GC/02/7, 25 April 2002.
-  *Resettlement Handbook*, UNHCR, November 2004.
-  *Resettlement: A Guide to Reception and Integration*, UNHCR, September 2002.

Local Integration and Self-Reliance

-  *Voluntary Repatriation*, Global Consultations on International Protection, Fourth Meeting, document EC/GC/02/5, 25 April 2002.
-  *Local Integration*, Global Consultations on International Protection, Fourth Meeting, document EC/GC/02/6, 25 April 2002.
-  *Handbook for Planning and Implementing Development Assistance for Refugees (DAR)*, UNHCR, January 2005.
-  *Handbook for Self-Reliance*, UNHCR, February 2005.