# 10 ACTIONS to advance complementary pathways

Complementary pathways are the systems that refugees can use to find work, study, reunite with their family and access other opportunities outside their countries of origin or asylum.

UNHCR's overarching role in complementary pathways is to mobilise support, act as a bridge between partners, and broaden horizons around solutions for displaced persons.

We advocate for lifting legal, administrative and political obstacles in host and receiving countries to unlock opportunities. UNHCR builds partnerships and networks, supports coordination efforts, and helps to build a stronger evidence base.

Below are **10 Actions that could help advance complementary pathways and family reunification.** Not all Actions will be relevant to specific country contexts. Representatives are encouraged to use this tool as applicable to their operational reality.

## ACTION 1
Establish and adjust frameworks to support entry, exit and right of return

## ACTION 2
Issue and accept machine-readable travel documents that protect against refoulement

## ACTION 3
Ensure more effective access to consular services

## ACTION 4
Secure funding

## ACTION 5
Improve data and evidence base

## ACTION 6
Support the issuance and acceptance of alternative forms of documentation

## ACTION 7
Foster skill development opportunities for refugees

## ACTION 8
Include pathways in integration and support structures, and offer relevant training

## ACTION 9
Mainstream pathways into ongoing partnerships and programmes

## ACTION 10
Develop a communications plan for pathways

ACTION 1

## ESTABLISH AND ADJUST FRAMEWORKS TO SUPPORT ENTRY, EXIT AND RIGHT OF RETURN

### What can I do?

- **Explore** existing legal options for pathways to flourish.
  For countries of asylum, this entails understanding components of the legal system related to status, documentation, including credentials and relationship confirmation, exit requirements, visas and fees;
  For countries on the receiving end, a study of the existing legal option which requires administrative adjustments to allow entry.
- **Advocate** with States for:
  - designing and launching pilot programmes for pathways and pathway hybrids (education and labour for example) using the most appropriate visa framework to ensure non-refoulement and access to rights;
  - waiving and/or being flexible around certain documentary requirements that are impossible for displaced people to meet – such as civil registration documents, travel documents, certifications and accreditations, including proof of language skills;
  - creating a stream/department to address refugee family reunification exclusively;
  - waiving and/or lowering financial requirements, including visa fees and proof of income;
  - ensuring pathways beneficiaries have the right to return to their countries of asylum;
  - establishing expedited visa processing using innovative means such as remote visa processing techniques where UNHCR can support with identity confirmation and BIMS data sharing;
  - ensuring that the principle of family unity is centred in program design, and pathways do not lead to the permanent separation of families;
  - waiving or reducing exit and overstay fees and expediting departure procedures.

ACTION 2

## ISSUE AND ACCEPT MACHINE-READABLE TRAVEL DOCUMENTS THAT PROTECT AGAINST REFOULEMENT

Host and receiving States should take legislative and administrative measures to ensure refugees and asylum seekers are issued machine-readable travel documents, such as Convention Travel Documents, regional travel documents, non national passports and others, in line with ExCom recommendations and global standards.

### What can I do?

- **Advocate** for the issue and acceptance of such documents with the right to return to current country of asylum, that protect against refoulement with validity periods for 5 years and are extendable at the embassy of the previous country of asylum in the receiving country or remotely;
- **Advocate** with States so that such travel documents are not limited to formally recognised refugees;
- **Advocate** with States to financially support the availability and issuance of such documents, and for law and policy change such as through contracts with commercial document providers.

## ACTION 3

## ENSURE MORE EFFECTIVE ACCESS TO CONSULAR SERVICES

States should not require refugees to cross international borders to access diplomatic services. To require them to contact officials of their country of origin is incompatible with the object and purpose of the 1951 Convention, namely, the protection of refugees. In-person presence for visa/document issuance at the embassy of the country of the receiving end is currently required in almost all jurisdictions.

### What can I do?

- **Advocate** for the use of consular representation of one state present on the ground for issuance of visas and documents to another through state collaboration/proxy embassies approach;
- **Advocate** for innovative diplomatic services such online submission modalities, remote interviews and visa processing/extensions, and remote visa/mail services;
- **Advocate** with countries of first asylum to extend consular services for document extension at the consular representations to the destination countries; allow for other acts of civil registration etc. at the consular premises on the ground;
- **Advocate** with countries of first asylum to allow/facilitate refugee's return (if desired) to these countries on family visitation or other reasons.

## ACTION 4

## SECURE FUNDING

### What can I do?

- **Create, expand and fund** cross-border loan and grant schemes, crowdfunding campaigns and other means of alternative funding available directly to refugees and/or communities;
- **Offer** bilateral or multilateral financial support to States to support policy changes and operational pledges (ex. to finance the purchase, set up of a biometric travel document machine, of the template and first run of 21st Century Nansen documents);
- **Engage** private sector and corporate partners, philanthropy, publicly available funds, financial agencies, foundations;
- **Ensure** clear prioritisation of pathways and family reunification in UNHCR's country budget to allow for AOL budget space for absorption of funding;
- **Engage** funders as potential employers, supporters and champions of pathways;
- **Engage** high profile personalities amongst refugee beneficiaries/Goodwill Ambassadors to amplify the messaging and encourage wider visibility;
- **Collaborate** with OECD country members to identify country champions to lobby the Secretariat of DAC to advocate for wider interpretation of development requirements under ODA to include pathways components such as language training, links to education, access to vocational training, pre-departure assistance, support to sourcing NGOs and civil society groups etc.

## ACTION 5

## IMPROVE DATA AND EVIDENCE BASE

### What can I do?

- **Create and share** tools and surveys, such as KoBo, for UNHCR operational data, to ensure knowledge of the population as far as languages, skills, family links are concerned. Ensure verification exercises regularly include this data, and that departures and steps on the way of achieving the departure are well recorded in proGres v4;
- **Implement** innovative ways for refugees to assume ownership of their data such as self-reporting kiosks like KASI/AIM, and develop and launch self-service modules in corporate tools;
- **Ensure** partner data is reflected in /interoperable with ProGres v4;
- **Advocate** with OECD and its Member States to systematise data collection to allow for comparative reporting and the disaggregation of refugee admissions from the regular migration framework. Data points such as individual legal status, country of departure, asylum applications, acceptance rates, rejections and reasons for, and in situ applications need to be recorded to more accurately capture trends and progress;
- **Advocate** with States to ensure that disaggregated by AGDM and procedural stages data is available for refugees seeking family reunification to understand the scope and complexity of the issue and develop subsequent response strategies and partnerships;
- **Develop** a methodology for governments and project partners to systematically monitor and evaluate the outcomes of pathways programs to improve effectiveness and develop lessons learned.

## ACTION 6

## SUPPORT THE ISSUANCE AND ACCEPTANCE OF ALTERNATIVE FORMS OF DOCUMENTATION

### What can I do?

- **Advocate** with States to implement the UNESCO Qualification Passport initiative, European Qualifications Passport for Refugees and to continue developing innovative means of credentials confirmation outside of the formal transcripts and diploma availability;
- **Advocate** for and develop alternative forms of documentary evidence as proof of qualifications and/or family links including interviews, photos, testimonies, etc.

## ACTION 7

## FOSTER SKILL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR REFUGEES

### What can I do?

- **Include** pathways specific requirements and needs into the partnerships between international development and local actors to identify skills and linguistic gaps that preclude refugees from qualifying for skills-based pathways;

- **Identify** relevant actors well-suited to provide such services on the ground or remotely (including apprenticeships and online traineeships/work opportunities);
- **Advocate** with host governments for refugees' right to work which would allow for the relevant work experience requirement of many work-related pathways programmes to be fulfilled;
- **Partner/liaise** with current partners offering language study and credentialing to ensure uninhibited access to both for pathways applicants;
- **Partner/liaise** with language tuition partners to offer language training programmes in the local language of the potential country of destination (other than English, where applicable) to facilitate integration;
- **Work** with local partners to develop internship opportunities for graduates to obtain relevant work experience.

**ACTION 8**

## INCLUDE PATHWAYS IN INTEGRATION AND SUPPORT STRUCTURES, AND OFFER RELEVANT TRAINING

Individuals and families arriving through pathways need the same kinds of support as those integrating upon seeking asylum or arriving on resettlement.

### What can I do?

- **Advocate** with States so that reception and accommodation, integration, information provision, access to social support and welfare, housing, health services and other services already provided through asylum support and resettlement support agencies are extended to pathways beneficiaries;
- **Support** actors new to refugees (universities, academic networks, employers, governments, communities and others) in receiving countries build their capacity and improve their literacy on refugee protection and needs;
- **Provide** training and capacity building to universities, employers, communities on components most relevant for refugees' situation and integration needs.

**ACTION 9**

## MAINSTREAM PATHWAYS INTO ONGOING PARTNERSHIPS AND PROGRAMMES

Pathways-related work is notably similar to the activities undertaken by both UNHCR staff working on education and livelihoods or protection; as well as that of partners engaged in education or livelihood support to refugees.

### What can I do?

- **Ensure** pathways are included in the TORs of relevant staff and existing partnership agreements;
- **Identify** the right partners per pathway and consider including pathways and family reunification specific activities into existing PPAs or cooperation agreements;

- **Work** with partners to identify training and capacity development needs and develop and provide relevant trainings;
- **Support** partners with fundraising strategies and appeals to ensure pathways work remains within their capacity;
- **Assign** pathways coordination to protection colleagues, well suited to be the bridge between solutions, education, livelihoods and legal staff this work applies to and adjust the TORs of relevant UNHCR staff to reflect these.

**ACTION 10**

## DEVELOP A COMMUNICATIONS PLAN FOR COMPLEMENTARY PATHWAYS

### What can I do?

- **Use** existing communication platforms to elevate visibility around ongoing work. This includes, for example, highlighting initiatives and developments at the State level, and/or new partnerships and pilot programs; stories about pathways beneficiaries; and supporting improved literacy amongst UNHCR colleagues on complementary pathways;
- **Develop** products such as videos, pamphlets, articles, social media content and more to showcase pathways for various audiences including refugees, high level officials of the government, academia, private sector, philanthropy, and others;
- **Develop** Communications with Communities strategies to share information and opportunities with persons under UNHCR's mandate, and to involve them in the design and feedback process of program development;
- **Include** pathways and family reunification in talking points and presentations to the governments, civil society, UN, private sector, academia, others;
- **Develop** clear information materials on pathways, family reunification procedures, rights and integration options and supports for refugees;
- **Engage** with diaspora to disseminate information, identify potential beneficiaries/support needed for family reunification, seek out supporters and funders, as well as employers amongst these communities.
- **Increase** understanding of pathways value and awareness of ongoing work internally with UNHCR staff to encourage synergies and support.

# COMPLEMENTARY PATHWAYS AND FAMILY REUNIFICATION FAQ

## What are complementary pathways?

Complementary pathways are the systems that refugees can use to access work, study and other opportunities outside their countries of origin or asylum. They let refugees apply for work, study, reunite with family and other visas just like any other person wishing to migrate, but they take into account a refugee's need for protection against forced return, or refoulement. They also offer the opportunity to find protection and/or solutions via named sponsorship and humanitarian admission.

They are complementary to asylum, which is a right exercised during flight, and to resettlement, which is a tool used by UNHCR and States to offer protection and solutions to the most vulnerable. Family unity is a human right so, although the processes are similar, we don't refer to family reunification as a complementary pathway, but as a protection tool like asylum and resettlement.

Eligibility for complementary pathways is based on a refugee's ability to get a job, or gain acceptance to a school or university, or another programme such as sport or art fellowships that can support a visa application process.

## Are complementary pathways solutions?

Not necessarily. Where complementary pathways are purpose built – like pilots currently underway in Canada, Australia and the US – they often come with permanent residency and can be a way to access nationality and thus the cessation of refugee status. Those pathways can result in a solution in one step.

Other complementary pathways offer short-term opportunities for refugees to learn, work, and demonstrate their capacities. Refugees who use them to build lives in safety may discover that they are able to forge their own future through establishing residency and eventually nationality in a country to which they were able to migrate thanks to their skills and potential.

## Why are they relevant to UNHCR's protection activities?

The Global Compact on Refugees emphasizes the need to make pathways available to refugees on a more systematic basis. UNHCR's Strategic Directions 2022-2026 affirm the need to expand, pursue and adapt complementary pathways.

Goal 2 of Third Country Solutions for Refugees: Roadmap 2030 focuses on increasing refugee access to family reunification and complementary pathways, developing a strong evidence base, and designing coordinated systems involving all relevant partners whilst promoting refugee self-agency. Complementary pathways form a central part of UNHCR protection strategies at global, regional and country levels.

## Who are the key actors?

Complementary pathways are driven by refugees and their employers, schools and other champions. Of the many roles and responsibilities needed in pathways, most of these do not require UNHCR's case processing support. Program design, candidate identification, selection, transfer, entry, and post-arrival support are managed by partners, which can involve State authorities, the corporate sector, universities, faith-based organisations, non-governmental organisations and civil societies, local communities, other UN agencies, refugee and diaspora groups, public sector services, donor organisations, philanthropists, and private entities.

## What is the objective for complementary pathways and how can we get there?

The 2030 Roadmap sets a vision of 3 million refugees benefiting from protection and solutions – 2 million through complementary pathways and 1 million through resettlement.

Complementary pathways are not about creating parallel systems, but about making existing ones more accessible. They do not require a heavy investment of UNHCR's resources. If streamlined properly, many activities can be undertaken in the course of our day-to-day protection work.

## How does UNHCR engage with complementary pathways?

Pathways can be streamlined into existing protection teams and work. Engaging with complementary pathways **does not need to carry resource implications.** Much of the work requires higher level lobbying as part of the Office's overarching advocacy strategy.

Among other things, this may involve:

- including complementary pathways in communication with communities;
- increasing understanding of pathways amongst UNHCR and partner staff;
- identifying partners in host and receiving countries and acting as a bridge between them;
- developing population data;
- integrating pathways work under relevant internal functions (education, livelihoods, or protection and solutions);
- advocating with our partners for systems change; and
- providing training and support to partners who do not have the needed capacity.

This is part of a longer-term vision, which involves sustained efforts to support the growth of partnership networks and systems while advocating for the removal of obstacles over time. In the interim, while these structures are being put into place, UNHCR plays a temporary coordinating and capacity building role.

## Tips

- Regular meetings with government counterparts can be harnessed as opportunities to raise key advocacy points.
- Regular taskforce and interagency meetings, as well as partner update meetings, can be used as opportunities to elevate the profile of complementary pathways and to identify opportunities for partnership and collaboration.
- Complementary pathways can be included in training needs and plans, and brown bag events can bring in partners and other UNHCR operations to share their experiences.
- Colleagues can use verification exercises, participatory assessments, community forums, and individual protection or counselling sessions as opportunities to collect pathways-specific population data and information.
- Use existing communication structures to share information and opportunities around complementary pathways with communities.
- Look to existing PPAs and operational partnerships as ways of developing complementary pathways, and support partner organizations with fundraising and elevating visibility around ongoing work.
- Include complementary pathways in UNHCR communications strategies to elevate their visibility and UNHCR's work.