



SAFE PATHWAYS FOR REFUGEES

**OECD-UNHCR Study
on third country solutions for refugees
2019 Update**



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© Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development,
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, December 2019

Cover photo: Germany. Seven-year-old Anmar and her cousin Abeer, 11, are finally reunited in the northern German town of Lensahn after three years apart.

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Canada. Amelie Fabian (centre), former refugee from Rwanda, was admitted to Canada in 2017 through the Student Refugee Program managed by the World University Service of Canada (WUSC). She is now a dual master degree candidate at Sciences Po school of Public Affairs and the Mink School of Global Affairs. © UNHCR/Michelle Siu

BACKGROUND

As part of the [Global Compact on Refugees](#) (GCR) and the 2016 [New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants](#), States (together with civil society, international and national NGOs, the private sector and others) committed to expand access to third country solutions, including resettlement and complementary pathways for safe admission of refugees to third countries. Various stakeholders have thus agreed to make a broad array of opportunities, complementary to the long-established approaches to third country solutions, such as resettlement, available to refugees. This commitment was further elaborated in the GCR's [Three-Year Strategy on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways](#) launched in July 2019, which provides guidelines for the multi-stakeholder / multi-sectoral approach to expanding complementary pathways for admission, strengthening the existent ones and making them more accessible, reliable and predictable.

Availability of data on the use of regulated and safe pathways by refugees is key to inform this process, as underlined in the Three-Year Strategy. Its growing importance is also recognized in the GCR indicator framework, which includes a specific indicator to this effect.¹ Enhanced analysis and evaluation of data related to the use of regulated and safe complementary pathways by refugees will assist in the development of policy and programmatic responses and through that, improve access to complementary pathways of admission for refugees. In December 2018, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), International Migration Division, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Division of International Protection released a joint report covering the period 2010-2017, which was the first systematic attempt at gathering and analysing data on the use of complementary pathways for admission to third countries in the OECD region.² The report focused on non-humanitarian complementary pathways, such as family reunification and education and employment. The current brochure provides an update on the report to include data for 2018 while both organizations continue to work on the release of the next comprehensive report in 2020.

¹ *Global Compact on Refugees Indicator Framework*, available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/5cf907854>

² *Safe Pathways for Refugees: OECD-UNHCR Study on third country solutions for refugees: family reunification, study programmes and labour mobility*, available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/5c07a2c84>



Ireland. The Kharita family reunited under the Travel Assistance Programme. Since 2007, the programme, operated by UNHCR, the Irish Red Cross, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has reunited over 480 people with their families. © UNHCR/Andrew McConnell

METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of consistency and comparability, the data presented in this update mirrors the methodology applied in the initial joint report. Similar to the report released last year, the update focuses on nationals of Syria, Eritrea, Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia, entering OECD countries with permits linked to complementary pathways for admission to third

countries. These nationality groups together account for more than half of the world's refugees under UNHCR's mandate in each of the years covered by this data collection (2010-2018) and they have relatively high asylum recognition rates, ranging from over 55% to 100%. Where possible, the data used for the report is based on **first-time permits** issued during the period 2010-2018. This report does not reflect the full scope of refugees' access to complementary pathways globally.

Table 1. Worldwide refugee population by country of origin (end-year figures)

| Country of origin | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Afghanistan | 3,054,709 | 2,664,436 | 2,586,152 | 2,556,468 | 2,593,291 | 2,666,254 | 2,501,457 | 2,624,266 | 2,681,269 |
| Eritrea | 222,460 | 251,954 | 285,371 | 308,224 | 363,036 | 411,342 | 457,262 | 486,217 | 507,267 |
| Iraq | 1,683,579 | 1,428,308 | 746,206 | 401,289 | 369,672 | 264,107 | 316,063 | 362,542 | 372,342 |
| Somalia | 770,154 | 1,077,048 | 1,136,719 | 1,121,750 | 1,105,991 | 1,123,052 | 1,012,326 | 986,397 | 949,652 |
| Syria | 18,452 | 19,931 | 729,022 | 2,468,207 | 3,882,670 | 4,872,585 | 5,524,515 | 6,308,655 | 6,654,386 |
| Other | 4,800,331 | 4,963,127 | 5,014,487 | 4,843,341 | 6,065,434 | 6,784,087 | 7,373,704 | 9,173,270 | 9,195,646 |
| Total | 10,549,686 | 10,404,804 | 10,497,957 | 11,699,279 | 14,380,094 | 16,121,427 | 17,185,327 | 19,941,347 | 20,360,562 |
| % of 5 groups in total refugee population | 54% | 52% | 52% | 59% | 58% | 58% | 57% | 54% | 55% |

Note: All figures exclude Palestine refugees under UNRWA mandate.
Source: UNHCR

For the purpose of this study, first-time permits mean any authorization issued by an OECD country to a foreign national to enter or stay lawfully for family reunification, work or study purposes. Data does not cover refugees or asylum-seekers that apply for asylum directly in one of the OECD countries. Permit renewals or status changes in the destination country are also not covered.

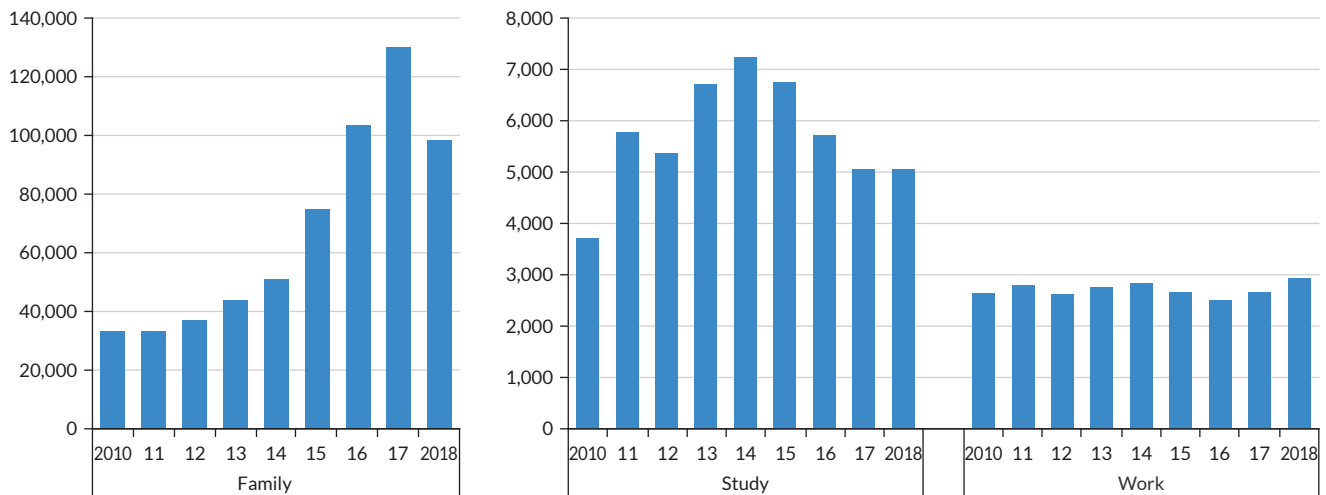
Data on family permits includes family reunification with beneficiaries of international protection (Convention refugees or those who have been granted temporary/subsidiary protection) or with other legal residents/

nationals with whom the person has family ties and who may have not been prioritized for resettlement or humanitarian admission programmes. It also potentially includes, in some rare cases, accompanying family members of labour migrants or students. Data on **labour migration** covers mostly temporary foreign workers permits, but may also include, in some cases, people who have been granted permanent residence in the context of skilled settlement programmes or other types of visas for economic reasons. Data on **students** refers to permits granted for study reasons and visas for academic scholarships, including secondary and tertiary education.



Canada. Nabil Maati was the first refugee to be placed in Toronto for training as part of a project run by Talent Beyond Boundaries (TBB), connecting skilled refugees with global employers. © UNHCR/Chris Young

Figure 1. First-time permits granted by OECD countries to nationals of Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq, Somalia, and Syria by permit type, between 2010 and 2018



Source: National statistics.

Over the period 2010-2018, **680,700** first-time residence permits were granted by OECD countries to nationals of Syria, Eritrea, Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia for family, work or education-related reasons. In the same period, **about 1.7 million** persons of the same nationalities were recognized as refugees or granted a complementary form of protection. This provides for an approximately **3:1 ratio** of asylum-related entry and stay visas compared with non-humanitarian complementary pathways for refugees, and demonstrates the crucial importance of a fair and efficient asylum system. During the same period, **405,800** persons from the five populations concerned arrived in OECD countries through **resettlement programmes**.

Family permits make up 89% of all family, work and study permits granted to the five populations over the period considered. More than half (55%) of permits granted to the five populations for family reasons were in the last

three years (Figure 1). In 2017, OECD countries issued a total of 1.7 million permits for family reasons, excluding family members of foreign workers (OECD, 2019)³. Hence, in 2017, the five populations mapped for this exercise accounted for 8% of all family permits issued by OECD countries for family reasons.

The number of **permits** granted for work reasons **increased by 10% in 2018 compared to 2017** while the number of permits granted for **education remained stable**. In contrast, the **number of permits** issued for family reasons **decreased by 24%**. When comparing the number of permits issued in 2017 and 2018, we notice an **overall decrease**. However, the number of non-humanitarian permits delivered in 2018 exceeds the average observed in the preceding years, with the total number of permits issued in 2018 reaching **106,400 (as compared to the previous average of 71,800 permits in 2010-2017)**.

³ International Migration Outlook 2019, OECD Publishing, Paris, available at: <https://www.oecd.org/migration/international-migration-outlook-1999124x.htm>

Table 2. First-time permits granted by OECD countries to nationals of Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq, Somalia, and Syria by permit type, between 2010 and 2018

| Destination | 2010-2017 annual average | | | | 2018 | | | | 2018/ 2010-17 av. change (%) |
|-----------------|--------------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|---------------------------------------|
| | Family | Work | Study | Total | Family | Work | Study | Total | |
| Australia | 2,663 | 88 | 194 | 2,944 | 3,232 | 118 | 57 | 3,407 | +16 |
| Austria | 166 | 10 | 40 | 216 | 294 | 10 | 22 | 326 | +51 |
| Belgium | 2,282 | 13 | 20 | 2,314 | 3,623 | 15 | 18 | 3,656 | +58 |
| Canada | 307 | 51 | 171 | 528 | 935 | 83 | 279 | 1,297 | +146 |
| Chile | 1 | 27 | 1 | 28 | 1 | 35 | 0 | 36 | +27 |
| Czech Republic | 95 | 32 | 62 | 189 | 32 | 42 | 88 | 162 | -14 |
| Denmark | 2,320 | 22 | 27 | 2,368 | 1,148 | 25 | 73 | 1,246 | -47 |
| Estonia | 5 | 1 | 4 | 10 | 13 | 0 | 5 | 18 | +82 |
| Finland | 1,292 | 26 | 15 | 1,332 | 1,973 | 141 | 16 | 2,130 | +60 |
| France | 474 | 66 | 309 | 848 | 316 | 46 | 193 | 555 | -35 |
| Germany | 18,173 | 271 | 1,198 | 19,642 | 40,344 | 242 | 857 | 41,443 | +111 |
| Greece | 278 | 48 | 19 | 346 | 291 | 52 | 21 | 364 | +5 |
| Hungary | 121 | 30 | 122 | 272 | 236 | 30 | 400 | 666 | +145 |
| Iceland | 4 | 0 | 2 | 5 | 12 | 1 | 3 | 16 | +212 |
| Ireland | 105 | 26 | 65 | 196 | 51 | 82 | 97 | 230 | +17 |
| Israel | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | - |
| Italy | 754 | 127 | 145 | 1,025 | 904 | 15 | 138 | 1,057 | +3 |
| Japan | 238 | 117 | 113 | 468 | 277 | 115 | 103 | 495 | +6 |
| Latvia | 8 | 1 | 2 | 11 | 23 | 10 | 2 | 35 | +222 |
| Lithuania | 10 | 12 | 7 | 29 | 21 | 3 | 18 | 42 | +45 |
| Luxembourg | 10 | 1 | 0 | 12 | 17 | 6 | 3 | 26 | +124 |
| Mexico | 7 | 9 | 4 | 21 | 15 | 8 | 16 | 39 | +88 |
| Netherlands | 1,600 | 13 | 58 | 1,671 | 5,400 | 35 | 67 | 5,502 | +229 |
| New Zealand | 242 | 20 | 8 | 270 | 291 | 11 | 11 | 313 | +16 |
| Norway | 3,146 | 10 | 8 | 3,165 | 2,872 | 12 | 9 | 2,893 | -9 |
| Poland | 47 | 110 | 148 | 305 | 90 | 221 | 819 | 1,130 | +271 |
| Portugal | 21 | 2 | 17 | 41 | 66 | 0 | 18 | 84 | +107 |
| Slovak Republic | 31 | 34 | 14 | 78 | 36 | 29 | 42 | 107 | +37 |
| Slovenia | 5 | 2 | 2 | 9 | 14 | 1 | 4 | 19 | +114 |
| Spain | 224 | 41 | 90 | 355 | 211 | 53 | 106 | 370 | +4 |
| Sweden | 15,848 | 904 | 71 | 16,822 | 24,324 | 1,051 | 158 | 25,533 | +52 |
| Switzerland | 351 | 22 | 24 | 397 | 488 | 31 | 19 | 538 | +36 |
| United Kingdom | 6,823 | 365 | 1,803 | 8,991 | 6,571 | 345 | 847 | 7,763 | -14 |
| United States | 5,652 | 191 | 1,039 | 6,881 | 4,315 | 74 | 545 | 4,934 | -28 |
| Total | 63,301 | 2,689 | 5,797 | 71,787 | 98,436 | 2,942 | 5,054 | 106,432 | +48 |

Source: National statistics.

In line with the Three-Year Strategy's commitment to expand in the area of capacity building of stakeholders potentially engaged in the development and implementation of complementary pathways for admission to third countries programmes, OECD and UNHCR stand ready to work with States and other partners to:

- Collect and disseminate lessons learnt and recommendations on data collection methodologies to support States newly engaging in complementary pathways work.
- Broaden the data coverage by calling upon non-OECD countries to be included in the future updates and reports.
- Review relevant methodologies in order to issue a full-fledge report in late 2020 that will account for fluctuations and changes in the dynamics of asylum and third country solution trends.

Interested parties should contact: OECD, International Migration Division at migration.contact@oecd.org and/or UNHCR, Division of International Protection at diprscp@unhcr.org.

