

UNHCR Discussion Note: The effective use of resettlement places -trends and concerns related to the capacity of the global resettlement program.

Resettlement in a Global Context

From 2004 to 2009, UNHCR observed an encouraging increase in the offer of resettlement places, which has risen from less than 50,000 in 2004 to almost 80,000 in 2009. However, despite this expansion, since 2009 the number of resettlement places made available for UNHCR submissions continues to stand at some 80,000 places every year. Considering current resettlement needs, which for 2013 alone are estimated to be for 181,000 refugees¹, UNHCR will need to continue working towards rectifying this imbalance, in particular by advocating with States to expand their resettlement programmes and quotas.

Table I. Historical Trends – Global Resettlement Capacity

Year (Jan-Dec)	Global Resettlement Places being made available to UNHCR ² (individual places)	UNHCR Resettlement Submissions (individuals)	Resettlement Departures ³ Recorded by UNHCR Offices (individuals)
2004	50,000	39,509	42,008
2005	50,000 -	46,260 ↑	38,507 ↓
2006	50,000 -	54,182 ↑	29,560 ↓
2007	50,000 -	98,999 ↑	49,868 ↑
2008	70,000 ↑	121,214 ↑	65,859 ↑
2009	79,000 ↑	128,558 ↑	84,657 ↑
2010	79,000 -	108,042 ↓	72,914 ↓
2011	80,000 ↑	91,843 ↓	61,649 ↓

↑: indicates an increase in comparison to the previous year; ↓: indicates a decrease in comparison to the previous year.

Over the same period (2004-2009), and in parallel to the expansion of resettlement countries, the number of UNHCR resettlement submissions was increased. Since 2006 the number of UNHCR submissions has

¹ UN High Commissioner for Refugees, *UNHCR Projected Global Resettlement Needs 2013*, July 2012.

² The number of resettlement places indicated reflects the quotas and ceilings offered by resettlement countries to UNHCR. They refer solely to resettlement quotas available to UNHCR and exclude other intake modalities offered by different resettlement countries' domestic legislation.

³ Departures indicated in the table relate to resettlement departures initiated by a UNHCR resettlement submission. The indicated number excludes other departures to resettlement countries on the basis of humanitarian considerations, family reunification procedures or private mechanisms to sponsor refugees' travel.

constantly exceeded the available places, ensuring a healthy continuity of the global resettlement programme. In 2009 the high number of submissions contributed to the highest number of resettlement departures registered in the 2004-2011 period.⁴

However, during 2010-2011, there were no major increases in the annual quota numbers, and most worrying, there was a significant decline in the number of resettlement departures, leaving precious resettlement places unused. The level of departures decreased to 61,649 in 2011, compared to 84,657 in 2009 and 72,914 for 2010 (see Table I). This left almost 20,000 places unused in 2011 alone, despite the fact that UNHCR submissions continued to exceed the number of places available.

The global resettlement programme is currently not fully utilized, despite increasing global needs. The fact that almost 20,000 resettlement places were not filled in 2011 has to be carefully assessed and effectively addressed. UNHCR believes that besides the need to continue addressing the persistent gap between available resettlement places and global resettlement needs, resettlement countries and other partners should redouble their efforts to ensure the effective use of all resettlement places available.

Factors for Reductions in Resettlement Departures

Based on discussions with concerned resettlement countries, partners and staff, UNHCR has identified the following factors contributing to reductions in resettlement departures.

I. Lengthy resettlement processing.

UNHCR notes that lengthy resettlement processing - primarily the result of the introduction of various security screening requirements, delays in the preparation of reception facilities in some resettlement countries or the time involved in processing complex cases - has contributed to lower departure rates, and an increasing backlog of resettlement submissions.

UNHCR is working closely with States to identify and address these challenges. States have taken measures to mitigate the negative impact of lengthy security clearances on the expeditious processing of resettlement submissions, and added resources to selection missions. UNHCR has developed an abridged Resettlement Registration Form (RRF) template, which decreases the required time for preparing submissions. UNHCR has also engaged in discussions with resettlement countries on electronic data sharing possibilities, efforts to expedite security clearances and arranging for simplified departure procedures.

In addition, UNHCR, in consultation with resettlement countries, NGO partners and service providers, is addressing the need to make available reception and integration arrangements in a timely fashion in order to avoid delays in departures.

II. Lack of physical access to refugee populations in need of resettlement.

The volatile political and security situations faced by certain countries hosting a substantial number of refugees considered for resettlement have undermined the management of resettlement processing,

⁴ This was mainly possible following the adoption of methodologies for the resettlement of groups in Asia, in addition to the situation faced by Iraqi refugees in the Middle-East and the generous additional offers that were at the time made by resettlement countries and other States for *ad hoc* resettlement places.

prevented the deployment of selection missions and seriously reduced resettlement departures. As a consequence, growing inventories of cases are being created as resettlement countries are unable to process them due to the lack of physical access to the refugee populations.

In order to address such difficulties, States, with the support of UNHCR, have increasingly made use of video conferencing⁵ to facilitate distance interviews. UNHCR is also encouraging States to make effective use of the Emergency Transit Facilities for resettlement processing.

UNHCR and resettlement countries also continue to engage with host countries to ensure that selection missions are granted visas and access to refugees to be interviewed for resettlement, including refugees in detention or border areas.

III. Lower acceptance rate for dossier/emergency submissions, submissions under the medical category and submissions of refugees of certain nationalities.

UNHCR has observed that in 2011 alone, while the global average acceptance rate⁶ was 93.3 per cent, only 72.7 per cent of UNHCR emergency priority submissions received positive decisions. Acceptance rates for dossier submissions have also been lower than the global average. This disproportionately low acceptance rate of emergency priority submissions – when compared with the global average – has been identified by UNHCR and resettlement countries as a common concern resulting in emergency places made available to UNHCR being left unfilled.

Table II. Comparative acceptance rate for emergency submissions

Year	Total number of resettlement submissions	Total number of emergency resettlement submissions	Average acceptance rate for UNHCR emergency submissions		Global average acceptance rate for all UNHCR resettlement submissions	
	Individuals	Individuals	per cent	Individuals	%	Individuals
2009	128,558	1,022	67.3%	688	88.3%	113,516
2010	108,042↓	625↓	76.8%↑	480↓	92.2%↑	99,614↓
2011	91,843 ↓	749↑	72.7%↓	544↑	93.3%↑	85,689↓

↑: indicates an increase in comparison to the previous year. / ↓: indicates a decrease in comparison to the previous year.

One of the factors contributing to the low acceptance rate of emergency submissions is the submission of cases on a dossier basis, without the possibility for resettlement countries to interview the refugees in person. Another factor is resettlement countries' preference for emergency submissions with strong refugee claims, whereas the emergency nature of the submission is often provoked by a compelling resettlement need. These factors have a considerable impact on the lower acceptance rate for emergency submissions.

⁵ See the Draft UNHCR Operational Guidance Note for conducting resettlement interviews through videoconferencing. July 2012

⁶ Acceptance rates are based on resettlement decisions reported by resettlement States. A negative decision by a resettlement country may not necessarily mean that the case is ineligible for resettlement re-submission according to UNHCR policy.

UNHCR plans to increase its joint monitoring with resettlement countries offering special quota or mechanisms to process emergency submissions⁷. Some welcome initiatives have been taken by resettlement countries to analyze the processing and outcomes of emergency submissions. This has led to a better evidence-based understanding of the trends in UNHCR’s emergency submissions and resettlement countries’ responses.

The lower acceptance rate of UNHCR submissions made under the Medical Needs category, when compared to the overall global acceptance rate for all UNHCR resettlement submissions, is also of concern. UNHCR intends to review resettlement countries’ expectations around the use and quality of the Medical Assessment Form (MAF).

Table III. Comparative acceptance rate for resettlement submissions under the Medical category.

Year	Total number of resettlement submissions	Total number of UNHCR submissions under the Medical Needs category	Average acceptance rate for UNHCR submissions under the Medical Needs category		Global average acceptance rate for all UNHCR resettlement submissions	
	Individuals	Individuals	%	Individuals	%	Individuals
2009	128,558	3,896	79.5%	3,097	88.3%	113,516
2010	108,042↓	3,456↓	86.8%↑	2,999↓	92.2%↑	99,614↓
2011	91,843 ↓	2,869↓	77.7%↓	2,229↓	93.3%↑	85,689↓

↑: indicates an increase in comparison to the previous year. / ↓: indicates a decrease in comparison to the previous year.

Submissions under the Women and Girls at Risk and Children at Risk resettlement categories also suffer from relatively low acceptance rates. While cases submitted for resettlement under the category of Legal and/or Physical Protection Needs showed an acceptance rate of 90.3 per cent, only 77.7 per cent of the cases submitted under the Women and Girls at Risk category and 69.8 per cent of the Children at Risk category were accepted for resettlement in 2011. UNHCR intends to jointly assess with resettlement countries these trends with a view to adopting remedial measures.

Acceptance rates are also influenced by the country of origin of refugees. For instance, while in 2011 refugees from Bhutan and Myanmar benefitted from an average acceptance rate of 99 per cent, refugees from Somalia and Afghanistan present an average acceptance rate of only 81 per cent. Given that all four of these refugee populations are resettled from priority situations for the strategic use of resettlement, such discrepancies in acceptance rates contribute to resettlement places being not filled.

IV. The end of group and large-scale processing in a number of operations.

While processing challenges and acceptance rates account for most of the current underutilization of annual quota, the effective use of resettlement places is also impacted by a decline in the level of UNHCR resettlement submissions.

⁷ The following countries have a special quota or mechanism in place for receiving and assessing resettlement dossier/emergency submissions made by UNHCR under an emergency priority: Australia, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, Finland, New Zealand, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United States.

As seen in Table 1, submission levels have declined since reaching a record level of 128,558 in 2009.⁸ In 2011, 91,843 refugees were submitted for resettlement. This constitutes a decrease of some 15 per cent from 2010 submission level. Decreases occurred across all regions, including all four major refugee populations in need of resettlement, namely Bhutanese (40 per cent decrease), Iraqis (26 per cent decrease), Somalis (23 per cent decrease) and Myanmar (16 per cent decrease). It is notable that these four nationalities account for close to 80 per cent of all departures in 2011.

A significant development which has contributed to a substantial decrease in the number of submissions since 2011 is the completion or suspension of group and large-scale processing in a number of operations. Over the past years through 2010, large-scale expedited processing and group processing took place in a number of operations, particularly in Africa (e.g., Somalis in Dadaab, Kenya), the Middle East (Iraqis in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria) and Asia (refugees from Bhutan in Nepal, and refugees from Myanmar in Thailand and Malaysia). Many of these large scale processing operations are at present winding up or have come to an end, whereas others had to be suspended due to the volatile security situation in host countries. The large numbers cannot be sustained through individual referrals, which are much more time and resource intensive.

The decreasing level of resettlement can also partially be attributed to the UNHCR's decision – in close consultation with resettlement countries - to re-align its submission levels to the actual processing capacity of resettlement countries, in order to prevent the creation of unmanageable backlogs in certain regions.⁹

However, a declining number of UNHCR submissions has the potential medium to long-term effect of leaving an increasing number of resettlement places unfilled. UNHCR therefore wishes to increase its submission levels yet at the same time ensure that the gap with departure levels is not widened.

While UNHCR continues to address these resettlement challenges in Asia and the Middle East, the situation in Africa is the most urgent, as submission rates have decreased more sharply as recently as during the first quarter of 2012. UNHCR has established a Task Force and adopted an Action Plan to urgently address this situation.

V. Complex refugee profiles being considered for resettlement.

The lower levels of submissions from certain operations is also due to the increasing complexities of specific and residual caseloads (Iraqis in Jordan and Lebanon, refugees from Bhutan in Nepal and from Myanmar in Thailand), which require dedicated time and resources to manage, including issues related to complex case composition, fraud and exclusion.

Complexities observed by UNHCR include issues of family composition, married children, families engaged in polygamous marriages and refugees that have preferred to wait for refugee registration of their family members before being submitted for resettlement, such as in Nepal and Thailand.

⁸ UN High Commissioner for Refugees, *UNHCR Projected Global Resettlement Needs 2012*, June 2012, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4ff149472.html> [accessed 4 July 2012]

⁹ UNHCR experience shows that long periods of uncertainty about departure dates create anxiety among refugees and risks to seriously undermine refugees' abilities to maintain minimal levels of self-reliance while waiting for a durable solution.

Suggested way forward

Given that resettlement is by definition a partnership activity, it is vital to optimize cooperation with all relevant stakeholders to better address these needs. The following suggestions are aimed at optimizing this cooperation:

First, UNHCR will:

- (a) Continue to improve procedures and mechanisms to increase resettlement opportunities by enhancing identification and referral mechanisms, expediting submissions and enhancing the quality of Resettlement Registration Forms (RRFs), including in emergency cases;
- (b) Make sure adequate resources are available and are duly utilized, and
- (c) Continue building the capacity of operations – including those of NGO partners in regard to identification methodologies, Best Interest Determination and Best Interest Assessment activities, as well as mechanisms to monitor the integrity of the resettlement process.

Second, UNHCR calls on resettlement States to:

- (a) Expedite resettlement processing and decision making, in particular for newly identified groups of refugees;
- (b) Maximise the use of the abridged Resettlement Registration Form (RRF);
- (c) Expedite departure procedures;
- (d) Consider the use of innovative methods for resettlement processing, including in relation to interview requirements, such as videoconferencing;
- (e) Make effective use of available Emergency Transit Facilities (ETFs) and;
- (f) Continue to support resettlement operations through enhancing Best Interests Determination (BID) procedures.

And, third, UNHCR encourages NGOs to:

- (a) Strengthen their role in the identification and referral to UNHCR of refugees in need of resettlement;
- (b) Look at further opportunities to work together with UNHCR to develop partnerships for case identification and responses;
- (c) Engage with UNHCR in capacity-building in Best Interests Determination processes and mechanisms.

Resettlement Service

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