



**UNHCR**

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees  
Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

Rev.1

## **High-level meeting on global responsibility sharing through pathways for admission of Syrian refugees**

Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland  
30 March 2016

### **Preliminary concept note**

#### **Introduction**

The *High-level meeting on global responsibility sharing through pathways for admission of Syrian refugees* will be convened at the ministerial level by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and opened by the United Nations Secretary-General on 30 March 2016.

Voicing concern about the increasing numbers of refugees and migrants, the United Nations Secretary-General, in an address to the General Assembly on 20 November 2015, announced a progressive roadmap for addressing large movements of refugees and migrants. To address one of the most immediate and urgent displacement crises, he requested the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to convene this ministerial-level meeting on pathways for admission of Syrian refugees. Noting the global nature of displacement, however, he also called for a high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly in September 2016 to address large movements of refugees and migrants. This meeting will take place on 19 September 2016.

The purpose of this first meeting will be to build on the significant efforts already made by a number of States in response to previous calls for increased resettlement and other forms of admission for Syrian refugees in high-level meetings in 2013 and 2014.<sup>1</sup> The meeting will complement a number of other initiatives aimed at comprehensively addressing the Syria crisis and relieving the pressure on countries hosting large numbers of refugees on their territories. This includes the Syria IV conference in London in February 2016, which will seek to mobilize financial pledges towards the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) for the Syrian Arab Republic and the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) in response to the Syria crisis. The World Humanitarian Summit in May 2016 will also be an opportunity to examine more broadly humanitarian financing, and to strengthen the linkages with development cooperation in support of refugees and asylum-seekers in protracted situations.

#### **Background, scope, and objectives**

Unless peace negotiations progress, the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, which has resulted in one of the worst humanitarian and displacement crises in decades, will enter its sixth year by the time this high-level meeting is convened in March 2016. The conflict has already forced over 4 million Syrians across borders and displaced an estimated 6.5 million internally. Neighbouring countries are hosting the largest numbers of Syrian refugees, with some 2.2 million refugees in Turkey, 1.1 million in Lebanon, 633,000 in Jordan, 245,000 in Iraq, and 128,000 in Egypt.

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<sup>1</sup> See UNHCR, *Resettlement and Other Forms of Legal Admission for Syrian Refugees*, updated regularly, <http://www.unhcr.org/52b2febafc5.html>.

Over the past five years, the living conditions for Syrian refugees have come under enormous pressure, despite the continued generosity of refugee-hosting countries and donors. In desperation, many Syrian refugees have moved onwards, particularly to Europe. Of the over 1 million people who have risked their lives crossing the Mediterranean in 2015, Syrians represent the highest percentage (49 per cent as at 31 December 2015).

In light of the magnitude, scope, and complexity of the Syria crisis, and its impact on neighbouring countries as well as those further afield, there is an urgent need for the international community to recommit to the fundamental principle of international cooperation to share more equitably responsibilities for refugees. This principle forms the basis of the international protection regime for refugees and is vital to its continued effectiveness, reflecting the reality that refugee challenges are inherently transnational and cannot be addressed by any one State alone.<sup>2</sup> This is particularly the case for States facing large numbers of arrivals.

One tangible expression of international solidarity with refugee-hosting countries that other States can provide is the acceptance of refugees through pathways for admission elsewhere. These include resettlement, which is used as a protection tool and targets those who are most vulnerable and at risk, complemented by other forms of admission, including humanitarian admission or transfer, family reunification, labour mobility schemes, and scholarships. Currently, for example, the German Humanitarian Admission Programme, Brazilian humanitarian visas, and the Canadian Humanitarian Transfer Programme have all been created to provide pathways for admission of Syrian refugees.

In addition to serving as a concrete expression of responsibility sharing with countries hosting refugees, the provision of safe pathways for admission by third States can help to reduce the need for refugees to resort to irregular onward movements via smugglers. Pathways for admission also allow destination States to put in place proper screening procedures for refugees arriving on their territory, including to ensure that priority is given to the most vulnerable.

Against this background, the purpose of this ministerial-level meeting will be to secure pledges to provide increased opportunities for pathways for admission of Syrian refugees. Despite the generosity of some 30 countries, which have made available more than 160,000 such places to date, the numbers of Syrian refugees and their needs continue to grow. It is therefore vital to mobilize renewed collective action in this direction.

### **Expected outcomes**

The expected outcomes from this meeting will include:

- (a) The opportunity to showcase countries and initiatives already providing pathways for admission of Syrian refugees;
- (b) Pledges by States to provide increased opportunities for pathways for admission of Syrian refugees;
- (c) A chairperson's summary.

*8 January 2016*

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<sup>2</sup> See Recital 4, Preamble, *1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, 189 U.N.T.S. 137, entered into force 22 April 1954.