Resettlement and Complementary Admissions Pathways for Refugees

Presentation at the GMG multi-stakeholder interactive panel on ‘Strengthening Responsibility-sharing for Refugees’ in advance of September 19th UNGA Summit on Refugees and Migrants

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What is resettlement?

• Selection & transfer of refugees from host country where they’ve sought protection, to third country that agrees to admit them as refugees;
• With guarantees of protection against forced return to the home country and access to civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights similar to those enjoyed by nationals or permanent residents;
• Most resettlement programs:
  • give permanent residency status at arrival or in a short time-frame;
  • allow the opportunity for family reunification;
  • provide a pathway to eventual naturalization as a citizen.
• UNHCR identifies refugees for resettlement using needs-based criteria and resettlement countries select/admit based on UNHCR referrals;
• 15 countries have standing resettlement programs;
• Another 11 countries have recently signaled their intention to participate in the program;
• Less than 0.5% of refugees have access to resettlement each year.
What is being sought at the Summit?

Collective commitment to use resettlement to ensure that UNHCR can meet the resettlement needs of 10% of the world’s refugees, achieved through:

- Expansion of existing resettlement programs

- More states establish resettlement programs; existing resettlement countries offer assistance, technical advice

- Use by states of complementary pathways to admit refugees, in addition to traditional resettlement

- Innovations in resource-mobilization, public-private partnership, engagement of receiving communities (e.g. private sponsorship)
What is meant by ‘complementary admissions’ pathways?

As compared to traditional UNHCR resettlement, complementary admissions programs might (or might not):

- Apply different criteria to qualify
- Employ different mechanisms for processing applications
- Be temporary or permanent in nature
- Convey different legal status upon arrival
- Lead to different pathways to a permanent solution
- Involve different forms of public and/or private financing
- Convey different post-arrival benefits and services
- Involve UNHCR in identification & referral to greater or lesser extents

1. Humanitarian-based
2. Labor-based
3. Education-based
4. Family-based
Examples of ‘complementary admissions’ programs

- Humanitarian admissions
  - admission with temporary protected status
  - lifting visa requirements or humanitarian visas, adjustment of status upon arrival
  - humanitarian evacuation programs
- Refugee access to:
  - temporary labor migration programs
  - permanent immigration thru existing immigration categories
- Expanded family reunification programs
- Medical evacuation programs
- Student visas, refugee education scholarship programs
What minimum safeguards apply to ‘complementary admissions’ outside of traditional resettlement?

- Non-refoulement guarantee;
- Enjoyment of other rights under int’l refugee instruments;
- Preservation of family unity whenever possible;
- Avoidance of statelessness of children born in territory;
- Appropriate identity and travel documents;
- Re-admission guarantees with 1st country asylum if admission is temporary;
- Reasonable timeframe for having access to a permanent solution, whether in original host country or third country;
- Specific measures to address refugees’ particular vulnerability to labor exploitation, especially in the case of temporary labor mobility programs.
Do resettlement & complementary admissions make any real difference in the context of overwhelming need?

• life-saving measure for many refugees

• Because traditional resettlement benefits special needs and vulnerable cases, it meets needs that are difficult or costly to meet in host country, easing strain on humanitarian aid systems

• can be an important source of remittances

• may be the only means to preserve family-unity

• creates a viable alternative to irregular onward movements

• most visible proxy for responsibility-sharing
Thank you for your attention!

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