

The Three-Year Strategy (2019-21)

On Resettlement and Complementary Pathways

*Discussion Paper
for Consultations on
the next phase
(October 2021)*

WHAT COMES NEXT?

Maintaining the Momentum on Third-Country Solutions



The Three-Year Strategy on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways was mandated in the Global Compact on Refugees. It was elaborated by a broad reference group of states and other partners and launched in June 2019. The Strategy has a double timeline: a three-calendar year set of goals, strategic priorities and enabling actions is twinned with a vision statement setting out numerical objectives over a ten-year horizon. The Strategy was supplemented by an evergreen Global Action Plan in March 2020. The first Global Refugee Forum was held six months after the launch of the Strategy, with the result that the two processes are only partially integrated. Decisions now need to be taken as to how best to build on the work already accomplished, capitalize on recent momentum, and reinforce the multi-stakeholder partnerships constructed during the first phase.

The Current Strategy

Vision

-  **Third country solutions for refugees are expanded so that by end of 2028, 3 million refugees benefit from effective protection and solutions through resettlement (1 million) in 50 resettlement countries and complementary pathways (2 million)**

Goals and Priorities

1. Grow Resettlement: new resettlement countries and more places
2. Advance Complementary Pathways: improve access and develop opportunities
3. Build the Foundation: promote welcoming and inclusive societies

The three goals, or pillars, of the [Strategy](#) are supported by strategic priorities and elaborated in a series of fifteen Enabling Actions. See Annex A. These actions were further articulated by concrete projects in a [Global Action Plan](#), issued in March 2020 and updated subsequently.

Where We Are

Launched in mid-2019, the Three-Year Strategy was actually 2.5 years in duration. The sequence of work was further compressed, in practical terms, by the advent of the Covid pandemic in early 2020. Just as the Global Action plan was taking shape, with 104 concrete activities by 21 partners, confinement and border closures were spreading across the globe, placing many initiatives on hold, and stopping movement toward safe homes in third countries. These realities, when combined with the 10-year objectives, are central considerations for the next phase.

The first Global Refugee Forum was held in December 2019, shortly after the launch of the Strategy and before finalizing the Action Plan. This meant that although both derive directly from the Global Compact on Refugees, the advocacy work and tracking of commitments related to the two initiatives were similar, often overlapping, but not fully integrated.

In collaboration with partners, a monitoring and evaluation framework, with an accompanying theory of change to account for shifting realities, has been put in place. This framework will help guide any forward planning for 2022 and beyond.

Progress in Spite of Covid

While the pandemic halted most travel and many planned actions and case processing, the new ways of working enforced by Covid enabled and catalyzed the formation and deepening of global networks and communities of practice. A number of actors have developed or expanded new case processing methods. Thematic convenings that did not occur to the same extent prior to the pandemic contributed to advocacy and expertise dissemination - and solidarity - in areas ranging from education and employment pathways, to family reunification, to resettlement processing and integration innovation, to community sponsorship. That said, moving from agreement to action, from ideas to implementation, from casual contacts to persuasive relationship-building, was more difficult. Covid, some would say, made it easier to begin, but harder to finish.

An [Interim Report](#) issued in December 2020 summarized accomplishments and challenges to the mid-point of the Strategy.

Important points included:

- Resettlement targets being met in 2019, but not in 2020 and unlikely in 2021 due in large part to covid, but positive trends for 2022.
- No increase to date in the number of resettlement countries.
- Continued evidence of large scale, but difficult to count, legal movement by nationals of refugee-producing countries into OECD countries via labour, education, and family-links.
- Implementation of the Sustainable Resettlement and Complementary Pathways Initiative (CRISP) in 2020.
- Establishment of the Global Task Force on Third Country Education Pathways, in 2020.
- Establishment of the Global Family Reunification Network, in 2020.
- Launch of additional community sponsorship programs in Spain and Belgium, EU dedicated funding, and new EASO working group on sponsorship.
- Creation of the Refugee Advisory Group within the ATRC structure to ensure systematic input by those with lived refugee experience.
- Publication in 2021 of updated and enlarged OECD-UNHCR study of 3rd country solutions data in OECD countries via family, work and study permits up to 2019.
- Completion of global mapping study on resettlement and complementary pathways opportunities
- A meta-research study on the outcomes and impacts of resettlement.
- Development of new or expanded labour-mobility programs by Canada, Australia, UK, and AMIF-funded pilot projects under development in several EU states.
- Launch of task force on labour pathways led by Canada planned in late 2021/early 2022.

Building Forward

These developments are characterized by the centrality of partnerships as reality, not rhetoric. The putting in place of substantive new global multi-stakeholder consortia –composed of actors at all levels, from local sponsors, private individuals, philanthropic foundations, cities, employers, educational institutions and umbrella groups, economic development bodies, humanitarian NGOs, national and international chambers of commerce, international organizations—all dedicated to growing resettlement and other third country solutions, *obliges* us, as a community, to nourish the seeds planted, to maintain momentum, and further elevate the profile of these efforts in our respective organizations and beyond.

And, most importantly, to build structures providing access to influence, so as to convert potential into much greater quality and quantity of protection via safe pathways. Prior models for third-country solutions were the result of energetic good will and generosity—but remain inaccessible to many refugees.

Issues for Discussion

- 1) *Should there be a successor process for the Three-Year Strategy? If so what?*

- 2) *Should the numerical objectives of the Strategy be revised?*
- 3) *What should the timeline be for the next phase?*
- 4) *What structure(s) should follow the next process?*
- 5) *Can host countries be meaningfully engaged?*

Initial conversations on the future of the Strategy were held at the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement, including a dedicated break-out session. A summary of those discussions is found at Annex A and informed the development of the issues for discussion here.

1. Should there be a successor process for the Three-Year Strategy? If so, what?

The Strategy implies its continuation in some form after 2021 but makes no reference to future steps after the elaboration of the Global Action Plan except via a reference to measuring progress at key milestones, including at the end of 2021 “and at the second Global Refugee Forum in 2023.” Early conversations with several actors have noted the advantages of full alignment with the GRF: aligned stocktaking, communications of priorities, linkages with other solutions platforms, physical convening spaces, and so forth.

Priorities and Enabling Actions: Should the Strategy’s Content be Revised?

The current strategy has four layers: the three Goals, nine Strategic Priorities (three per goal), 15 Enabling Actions, and a fourth stratum of 2-3 Expected Outcomes associated with each Strategic Priorities and 60 activities underlying the Enabling Actions.

Early discussions suggest that most partners and stakeholders feel that continuity is important given both the 10-year set of numerical objectives in the Strategy, and the foundational and unchanging nature of the core goals. Major changes may be disruptive and inefficient. However, gaps in the original Strategy certainly exist, or have emerged due to changing circumstances. For instance, data gaps in quantifying complementary pathways numerical objectives .the Strategy

Three options for reviewing the content of the Strategy, on a spectrum from major overhaul to light-touch revisions could be:

- a) *Revise the 3 core goals*, leading to subsequent changes to Strategic Priorities (and expected outcomes) and Enabling Actions;
- b) *Leave the 3 core goals intact, and focus on revisiting the Strategic Priorities*, leading to subsequent changes to Enabling Actions;
- c) *Leave the core goals and Strategic Priorities intact, and conduct a review to adjust Enabling Actions*, with the expectation that some would be confirmed as completed, some deleted and some added.

A pragmatic hybrid approach could be to pursue option c) with a focus on the sub-activities where most adjustments are likely needed, and an openness to an exceptional decision to add or adjust a Strategic Priority.

2. *Should the numerical objectives of the Strategy be revised?*

a) Resettlement objectives

The numerical objective for resettlement spaces is expressed both as annual goals (60,000 in 2019 [met] stepping up by 10,000 spaces per year to 150,000 in 2028), and an overall objective of 1 million third-country solutions via UNHCR-referred resettlement over the span of 2019-28.

Progress stalled in 2020-21 due to the combination of reductions to the US program, only modest increased goals elsewhere, and the inability to meet even those goals in 2020, and likely in 2021, due to Covid. This significant shortfall may, however, be offset in 2022-23 by historically high objectives occurring simultaneously in the US, Canada, and Europe, which may be further augmented by UNHCR-referred portions of new targets related to Afghan nationals. Barring new travel restrictions related to Covid, there is the potential to significantly exceed the Strategy's targets of 90,000 in 2022 and 100,000 in 2023—though major capacity building and other challenges remain.

A question that must be addressed during the consultation period is whether to change the end-goal during the 10-year timeline or focus on documenting success or failure while of course retaining the ambition to exceed the target if possible (such ambition could be incorporated explicitly into the Strategy's successor document).

The numerical objective for the number of resettlement countries

Consistent with broadening the base for third-country solutions by engaging a broader range of actors, the Strategy seeks to increase the number of resettlement countries from the 2018 baseline of 29 to 50 by 2028. (The number has varied from 22 to 35 over the past 20 years.) The social and economic dislocations of covid were particularly damaging to this goal; the number of countries accepting resettlement referrals from UNHCR decreased to 25 in 2020 and will not increase in 2021. The target of 50 countries by 2028 is likely one of the most difficult—or, unrealistic, depending on the point of view. New approaches are clearly needed in 2022 and beyond. Views are sought on whether or not to formally modify the target.

The numerical objective for 'complementary pathways'

The Strategy calls for a parallel to resettlement growth for other legal pathways to third country solutions, progressing from a baseline of 120,000 in 2019 to 300,000 in 2028. The ability to measure progress to measure the objective is primarily through indicative data from [the joint](#)

[OECD-UNHCR analysis](#) of work, family and study permits issued to nationals of states with very high refugee status recognition rates.

The report covers permits issued in 2019 and calculates 156,000 issuances, lower than 2018 but higher than the 10-year average, and above the Strategy's goal of 120,000. The report analyses in detail the likelihood that these numbers over- or undercount refugee third country solutions. On the one hand it is not known what portion of these individuals would be considered persons of concern to UNHCR were an assessment to be made of their circumstances. But at the same time, the data cover only nationalities representing 2/3 of the current refugee population and legal entries into only OECD countries (plus Brazil).

While there is not space for a detailed discussion of the issues here, key considerations/issues include:

- If Three-Year Strategy targets are already being met, at least in indicative data, is there a case to be made for increasing the targets?
- On the other hand, with data not yet available for 2020-21, the scale of the negative impact of covid is not yet quantified; this would suggest changes to the target are premature.
- There is a very large gap between these volumes and the number of refugees known to have moved under a safe, intentionally designed pathway with protection safeguards, monitoring, and evaluation mechanisms and so forth. Arguable, closing that data gap is more timely as an objective than changing the targets themselves.

3. *What should the timeline be for the next phase?*

It is important that *outcomes*, and not process, are the driving focus of precious time, resources, and advocacy bandwidth. One key consideration is finding the balance that best achieves that.

A successor process could be:

- A second Three-Year Strategy, "phase 2", 2022-24. This has the inconvenience and potential inefficiency of begging the same question again for the period of 2024-28 and would be off cycle with the GRF.
- A *two-year "addendum" to the Strategy, 2022-23*, to bring the work dedicated to third-country solutions onto the same cycle as the GRF, given both are mandated by the Global Compact. This pro may be offset by the downside of requiring another review of what comes next a year and a half from now and may be or be seen to be a lack of long-term commitment and planning.
- A *"roadmap" for the entire period of 2022-28*, with stocktaking and a review of action items aligned to the GRF schedule, thus occurring in late 2023 and 2025.
- A *third-country solutions roadmap to 2030*, by adding one calendar year to the Vision of the Strategy so that it ends in Dec 2029. Rationales for this approach would include the extent to which the need for long term focus on an unchanging goal (and the risks of picking up then setting down various initiatives) has been demonstrated; the fact that

given the 2.5-year length of the original strategy and the impact of covid an additional 12 months to achieve objectives seems justified; alignment with the 2030 end-date of the *Global Development Goals* and UNHCR's **15by30** education strategy

4. *What structure(s) should follow the successor process?*

The first phase of the Three-Year Strategy functioned as an informal coalition of partners, who contributed activities to further the goals. A reference group--with UNHCR playing a secretarial role--composed of those engaged to develop the strategy with some additions, was used to track initiatives via the Global Action Plan and to hold discussions on an evaluation framework.

For UNHCR, the Strategy was not so much new areas of work as the compiling and systematizing of longstanding functions, but with significant additional investments in enhanced advocacy, the catalysing and development of the task forces mandated by the Strategy for additional legal pathways for refugees (education, employment, family reunification), and in internal guidance and training and external partnership development in those areas plus community sponsorship and humanitarian pathways and visas. In addition, the government of Canada provided a full-time position via a senior official deployment for a period of three years.

Developments in all of these areas means that the partnership ecosystems are much larger and more complex than they were in 2018. But at the same time new structures have also been put in place to fill much of the need noted above the Family Reunification Network, the Global Task Force on Third Country Education Task Force, the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative and the Priority Situations Core Group and the forthcoming Global Task Force on Refugee Labour Mobility. Any needed adjustments to these structures will depend on how the first three questions above are answered.

5. *Can Host Countries be meaningfully engaged?*

There are no mechanisms proposed in the Strategy to *engage* host countries directly in the goals and actions of the Strategy. The strategy has only very brief references to the role of host countries, and they are unclear. There is a sub-reference under the Enabling Action of creating a complementary pathway working group to developing 'complementary pathways compacts' between host and receiving countries that refers to both refugees and nationals (raising many issues indeed), and two suggested contributions by host country governments ("facilitating access to complementary pathways," and "supporting the integration of resettlement and complementary pathways."). Views would be helpful as to whether in a next phase of the Strategy this issue needs to be addressed, and appropriate mechanisms for doing so.

Summary of *The Three-Year Strategy*

Guiding Principles:

- Protection
- Durable Solutions
- Responsibility-Sharing
- Additionality of Complementary Pathways
- Non-Discrimination
- Family Unity

Goal 1: Grow Resettlement

New Resettlement Countries and More Places

Target: Over one million departures 2019-2028. Target of 60,000 in 2019, growing by increments of 10,000 to 90,000 in 2022, 100,000 in 2023, and 150,000 by 2028.

Strategic Priorities:

- Additional countries establish successful resettlement programmes
- Resettlement programmes are scaled up and sustainable
- Resettlement programmes are responsive to the identified needs and have maximum protection impact

Goal 2: Advance Complementary Pathways

Improve Access and Develop Opportunities

Target: Two million departures 2019-28. Target of 120,000 in 2019, growing by increments of 20,000 to 180,000 in 2022, 200,000 in 2023, and 300,000 by 2028.

Strategic Priorities:

- Complementary pathways for admission are developed
- Complementary pathways for admission are accessible to refugees
- Complementary pathways include protection safeguards and are solutions-oriented

Goal 3: Build the Foundation

Promote Welcoming and Inclusive Societies

Strategic Priorities:

- Initiatives promoting welcoming and inclusive societies are supported
- Refugees are able to successfully integrate in their societies
- Resettlement and complementary pathways foster inclusive societies

ANNEX B

ATCR June 2021

Breakout session 2: Three-Year Strategy on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways: Where do we go from here?

22 June 2021

Moderators:

1. *Gideon Winward, Head of Refugee Resettlement Policy, Home Office, UK*
2. *Gaida Dirar, Member of the Refugee Steering Group RSG and of the British Refugee Advisory Group RAG*
3. *David Manicom, Special Advisor on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways, UNHCR, Geneva*

Theme: The Three-Year Strategy on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways will end in December 2021. The Strategy both laid out objectives for three years, and numerical goals over ten years, to 2028. What processes, goals, and structures should follow the end of the Strategy?

Discussion and Outcomes

- The group was largely in agreement that fundamentals of the strategy as it stands are still valid i.e., growing resettlement and complementary pathways, promoting welcoming and inclusive societies, as well as most or all of the Enabling Actions outlined in the Strategy.
- The strategy remains important for developing a framework all can get behind and be held to account -- to use to drive change. There is need to combine long term strategic objectives with shorter term deliverables to drive progress in the near term and to focus minds through a concrete action plan with deliverables and timelines.
- There was also wide recognition that this needs to be adjusted to the realities of COVID-19, for example the points about the missed opportunities that can occur, particularly in the education space for refugees, and the need to catch up on what's required upon resettlement.

Recommendations for next steps

Individual participants suggest:

- Develop a short-term action plan which should be in some way tied to the Global Refugee Forum which also runs on a two-year cycle. For the long-term strategic objectives there is need to focus on global stakeholders in the development of these with a 10-year plan envisioned.
- Focus more effectively on building welcoming communities, particularly post COVID, where there are a number of risks, and possibly reduced appetite and willingness to do resettlement going forward, and the importance of communities to that effort.
- Work on involving first countries of asylum in the process.
- In terms of structure, work on having a central secretariat function to tie some of the different initiatives together i.e., the workaround the strategy, the Priority Situations Core Group and the GRSI as well.