

## Summary: ‘Improving Stakeholder Coordination in Refugee Resettlement’

PUBLICATION REVIEWED: Skodo, A, & Belen, M. (2023). Improving stakeholder coordination in refugee resettlement. *Migration Policy Institute*.

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ORGANIZATION: Migration Policy Institute

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DATE OF PUBLICATION: 2023/06

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LINK: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/coordination-refugee-resettlement>

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DATE OF SUMMARY: 2024/01/25

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Book     Journal Article     Website     Report     Other (specify):

KEYWORDS: Refugee resettlement, Sponsorship, Coordination, Stakeholders

# Improving Stakeholder Coordination in Refugee Resettlement

## Executive Summary

- Drawn upon interviews with stakeholders from five countries, this study explores the multilevel partnership in the refugee resettlement process and the importance of communication and consultation between stakeholders with different motivations.
- In the face of a growing scale of displacement worldwide, refugee resettlement programs struggle to keep pace.
- The global pandemic resulted in a drastic reduction of resettled refugees in many countries, and the war in Ukraine has shifted resources from resettlement to meeting emergency response programs.
- The main challenges in effective communication and coordination between multiple stakeholders are divergent goals, political shift and capacity:
  - *Divergent goals:* Different communities might have different motivations for engaging in the resettlement process. Even if there is coordination between multiple stakeholders, aligning the divergent interests could be challenging.
  - *Political shift:* Changes in political dynamics can lead to shifts in resettlement program priorities. Sudden increases or decreases in resettlement numbers can negatively impact local trust in national authorities and support for resettlement efforts.
  - *Capacity challenges:* Even with political will and multilevel consultation, not all stakeholders will have the resources and knowledge to participate.
- Multistakeholder communication and consultations would be beneficial at the following stages of resettlement processes:
  - *Informing programme priorities and scaling up protection efforts:* To increase the participation of subnational authorities in refugee admission decisions, countries can implement formal consultation and communication mechanisms.
  - *Anticipating and addressing capacity challenges before refugees arrive:* Effective communication between pre-arrival and post-resettlement actors is crucial for providing necessary services to vulnerable individuals.
  - *Streamlining post-arrival support and service provision:* Effective coordination and centralized service provision are essential in environments with multiple actors to assist in the reception and integration of refugees.
- Improved communication and consultation between subnational, national and international organizations and decision makers would lead to more effective resettlement program delivery with better outcomes for communities and resettled refugees.

## Introduction

- This report explores the resettlement system's multistakeholder nature and the importance of robust coordination in the process.
- The report is drawn upon interviews with local, national and international resettlement stakeholders in Argentina, Finland, Germany, Spain and Sweden.

- Although only 2-5% of people deemed in need of protection by UNHCR are resettled, refugee resettlement is an essential pathway in finding durable solutions and mitigating the number of asylum seekers who take dangerous paths to protection.
- There are several challenges on admission and scaling up resettlement programs, such as changes in political will, the COVID-19 pandemic and emergency crises like Ukraine that diverge resources from the resettlement programs.
- The success of resettlement programs depends on close collaboration between multiple stakeholders with different priorities.
- National authorities make important decisions such as setting annual quotas, screening and placement, while local authorities are responsible for providing services to resettled refugees in their localities.
- Lack of coordination between different stakeholders could result in setting unrealistic quotas and placement and a mismatch between local capacity and willingness and the integration and reception services required.

### Resettlement Programme: State of Play

- Resettlement-based sponsorship is a partnership or agreement between local actors, civil society organizations and the government. Mechanisms and financial responsibilities vary among actors and in different contexts, but the key factor is the active involvement of private individuals and their role in the integration process.
- 22 countries participated in the resettlement process in 2022, out of which seven countries (the U.S., Canada, Germany, Sweden, France, Australia and Norway) welcomed about 88% of the resettled refugees.
- Pledges made by countries to receive refugees often does not always correspond to the actual number of refugees they receive. Various political and social factors play a hand in final refugee admission.
- In recent years, factors like COVID-19 have severely reduced the number of admitted refugees. Countries like the United States and Sweden witnessed political shifts, leading to much lower refugee admittance rates compared to what they had admitted previously for many decades.
- In 2022, only 4% of refugees identified by the UNHCR in need of protection could resettle in a third country.
- Syrian refugees' mass arrival in 2015 and 2016 created additional opportunities for sponsorship and resettlement on top of pledged quotas in some countries. In others, the Syrian refugee wave was counted as fulfilling their quotas.
- The recent crises in Afghanistan and Ukraine led to temporary protection programs and pathways, like supporting those who worked with the U.S. military and civil mission in Afghanistan and the "Uniting for Ukraine" programme.

### How Do Resettlement Partnerships Work and What Are Their Challenges

- Resettlement programs are complex and require a lot of coordination between different subnational and national policy-makers and national and international organizations that might have different agendas and priorities.

- In many countries, actors have no formal communication and coordination mechanism. While some have more localized approaches (e.g., Finland and the U.S.), others have a more centralized process (e.g., Spain and Sweden).
- While decisions about quotas and what categories of refugees (e.g., nationality) to be admitted are taken at a national level, some countries (e.g., the U.S.) have formal mechanisms in place for subnational authorities to provide input.
- Most countries follow a mandatory reception model in which local authorities must accept refugees placed in their communities by the national authorities. Some other countries (e.g., Finland and the U.K.) require the local authorities' consent prior to the placement of refugees.
- While a mandatory approach ensures the national quota is met and refugees are dispersed evenly across the country, a voluntary approach ensures the local ownership and successful integration of refugees.
- IOM and the national organizations of resettlement countries are involved in pre-departure assistance and orientation programs. Sponsorship groups may communicate with the sponsored refugees and inform them about the communities where they will settle.
- Certain factors are involved in deciding how many actors are involved in designing resettlement programs. The same factors also play a role in the effectiveness and scalability of refugee protection efforts.
- Different stakeholders might have different reasons and motivations in the resettlement process. While national authorities set quotas and consider other goals like humanitarian considerations, local authorities are concerned with their capacity and resources.
- For subnational authorities, other reasons like public opinion, economic issues and demographic concerns play a role in supporting or not supporting refugee resettlement.
- Political shift at the national level to increase or decrease the number of resettled refugees might affect subnational authorities' trust as they could not plan or adjust resources accordingly.
  - After the Trump administration drastically reduced the number of resettled refugees, it was difficult for the reception agencies to pull back resources as the numbers increased under the Biden administration.
- Even when there is political will for coordination, clarifying the details of responsibilities could prove challenging given the different motivations.
- Time and resources are important considerations in whether or not to bring multilevel stakeholders into the consultation process and whether it would be sustainable to so.
- Lack of clarity and vagueness around the effectiveness of consultations could also discourage subnational actors from engaging in discussions and priority-setting processes.

### Fostering More Inclusive and Effective Partnerships

- Although setting resettlement priorities remains in the hands of national authority, subnational authorities could interject and inform the process and how it plays out.
- Integrating information and input from subnational actors into national resettlement decision-making and programme operations can improve the decision-making process around setting the quotas and priorities through different direct and indirect channels. The input need not be binding but provides a sense of local ownership.

- Creating subnational programmes that complement national resettlement efforts could be costly. Still, there are some examples in Germany and Spain that have their own annual quota and intake criteria which operate in addition to the national resettlement programs.
- Capacity-building assistance for stakeholders in receiving communities is helpful for municipalities to have a good understanding of what is expected of them so that they manage their resources accordingly.
- Enhanced coordination between pre- and post-arrival actors helps efficient service delivery to resettled refugees and avoid duplication (e.g., in medical check-ups). Such links will prevent miscommunication and ensure municipalities are aware of any special circumstances of the resettled refugees.
- Coordination around post-arrival support is the phase in which the widest array of local and national (and, at times, international) stakeholders converge. For example, if national agencies are responsible for employment support for resettled refugees, it will intersect with the subnational organizations providing most integration responsibilities. This requires vertical and horizontal coordination that could include the following approaches:
  - Peer-to-peer networks for exchanging best practices help local stakeholders address operational challenges by learning from each other. For example, the Finnish Pohmako Network, representing various local organizations, meets monthly to discuss refugees' integration process and challenges.
  - Coordinated integration support to newcomers can tap into synergies between different organizations' work which often overlap and strengthen the accessibility and quality of the support provided to refugees.

### Conclusion and Recommendation

- Invest in awareness raising, training and guidance for local actors to ensure they have the knowledge and resources to become genuine partners in resettlement.
  - It will help subnational stakeholders to gather the necessary skills and confidence to engage more effectively in the resettlement process.
- Establish local–national communication channels to facilitate the meaningful exchange of knowledge, concerns and feedback.
  - A trusted communication channel between national and local stakeholders would ensure that local-level concerns and input are transmitted timely and efficiently to the national authorities, which could shape their decisions.
- Build stronger links between resettlement stages, partners and protection pathways through better information-sharing. National authorities and international organizations should foster relationships linking different actors or resettlement stages to improve the broader protection system.
- Secure sufficient funding to get multilevel partnerships off the ground and bolster local resettlement involvement. Funding is necessary to ensure all relevant stakeholders improve their pre-arrival and post-arrival services.
- The uncertainty surrounding resettlement underscores the importance of communication and coordination between stakeholders to pull their resources, knowledge and expertise.
- Better multilevel coordination can help build trust between national and subnational actors that would contribute to the program's sustainability and better outcomes for communities and resettled refugees.