

Title of Event: The Future of Resettlement: A Lifesaving Protection Tool

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Toplines:

- Resettlement saves lives, prevents refoulement, breaks cycles of displacement, supports stability, and enables refugees to integrate, gain citizenship, and contribute to the economy
- Global commitments since 2016–2018 have strengthened resettlement as a life-saving, shared responsibility, but only a small fraction (as low as 1 in 20) actually access it.
- Treating resettlement as charity makes it politically expendable; it must be understood as a core protection mechanism within the international system, or cuts will continue and risks will shift to dangerous migration routes.
- Strong community engagement (e.g., sponsorship models in countries like Canada and Brazil) drives welcoming environments and integration success, but sustained political commitment and funding are critical to scale and maintain resettlement programs.
- Complementary pathways like labor mobility and family reunification can broaden access to protection, but resettlement must remain the active primary life-saving pathway.

Presenter(s):

- Reshma Adatia, ICVA
- Jackie Keegan, UNHCR
- Basmaa Alawee, Refugee Congress
- Mustafa Alio, R-SEAT
- Sasha Chanoff, RefugePoint

Key Points:

Reshma Adatia – Introduction

- In 2016, resettlement gained significant global attention, reflected in the United Nations New York Declaration, which aimed to strengthen international responses.
- The 2018 Global Compact on Refugees further reinforced commitments to expand resettlement and complementary protection pathways.
- Despite these commitments, an estimated 2.5 million refugees will need resettlement by 2026, while key countries such as the United States have reduced available resettlement spaces.
- Resettlement is intended as a durable, life-saving protection tool and a shared international responsibility. The majority of people globally support protecting refugees, including through resettlement.

- Civil society plays a critical role in advancing resettlement by driving advocacy, building local political will, and supporting refugee integration.

Basmaa Alawee – Gap Between Public Support and Political Will

- Global displacement is at a historic high, with roughly 1 in 16 people worldwide forced to flee, yet resettlement reaches only a small fraction of those in need.
- Current political retrenchment on refugee protection is out of step with public sentiment, as many communities continue to support principles of protection and solidarity.
- Drawing on lived experience, Basma Alawee emphasized that resettlement is not an abstract policy but a life-changing pathway to safety, having provided critical protection for her and her family.

Jackie Keegan – Resettlement as a Durable Solution for all Stakeholders

- Resettlement provides refugees with a pathway to rebuild their lives in a new country, ensuring protection against refoulement and offering opportunities for long-term stability, including eventual citizenship.
- In the aftermath of World War II, large-scale resettlement efforts involved dozens of countries, demonstrating its historical role as a collective international response to displacement.
- As one of the three durable solutions advanced by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, resettlement addresses the need for lasting outcomes and helps break cycles of displacement across generations.
- It benefits both refugees and host societies, as those resettled gain protection and opportunities to contribute, while easing pressure on countries of asylum and supporting communities that continue to host large refugee populations.
- By providing safe and regular pathways, resettlement reduces reliance on dangerous, irregular movement and helps relieve strain on overburdened systems in developing regions.
- At the state level, resettlement reflects international solidarity, strengthens cooperation between countries, contributes to regional stability, and reinforces credibility by aligning global commitments with domestic action.

Sasha Chanoff – Resettlement is a Life-saving Tool

- Refuge Point works in partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to identify refugees in urgent need of resettlement at the earliest stages of the process.
- Resettlement is demonstrably life-saving, as illustrated by cases such as the Gatumba massacre, underscoring the risks faced by refugees without access to protection.
- Unlike other complementary pathways, resettlement is unique in that it is designed around protection from the outset, rather than being driven primarily by the economic or demographic needs of receiving countries.
- The UNHCR has set an ambitious goal of reducing the number of people in need of protection by 50%. Achieving this target requires focusing on both self-reliance and durable solutions for displaced populations.

- Expanding access to sustainable pathways, rather than only managing immediate needs, is central to meaningfully lowering long-term protection needs.

Mustafa Alio – Resettlement as Protection and Shared Responsibility

- The core purpose of resettlement has been obscured in policy discussions and public discourse, and reducing it to numbers risks losing sight of the human realities behind those figures.
- Resettlement should be understood as a protection mechanism, not charity. It is an integral part of the international protection system and a form of responsibility-sharing. When framed as charity, it becomes politically vulnerable to funding cuts.
- Even if global targets of 200,000 resettlement places are met, this would reach only about 1 in 20 people in need, compared to a peak of 1 in 13 in 2014, underscoring the scale of the gap.
- A longer historical perspective is needed as resettlement emerged in response to mass displacement in Europe, and countries now associated with producing refugees were once hosts themselves.
- Complementary pathways should expand access to protection but not replace or diminish resettlement's central, life-saving role.
- Reductions in resettlement do not reduce risk, but instead, they shift the burden onto displaced families, often forcing them toward dangerous and irregular routes to seek safety.

Q&A

1. **What actually makes a system welcoming and sustainable, and how do a strong integration system translate into a stronger public and political support?**

Jackie Keegan, UNHCR:

- A truly welcoming and sustainable resettlement system depends on host societies that are willing and eager to include refugees in everyday life, demonstrated by examples such as:
 - Brazil, where community sponsorship models are expanding protection pathways,
 - As well as Canada and Australia, where communities play a central role both culturally and in funding and enabling resettlement processes.
- Political will is also essential, as government commitment and adequate funding are needed to prevent resettlement places from shrinking.

Sasha Chanoff, Refuge Point:

- There is a growing groundswell of civil society engagement that can sustain and expand refugee protection pathways, evidenced by community sponsorship in the United States where over 2 million people have expressed willingness to support refugees.
- Host communities are increasingly recognizing that refugees make strong social and economic contributions, including supporting local economic development and community resilience.

- Public and civil society support must now be translated into sustained political will, with Spain serving as an example of a country continuing to treat refugee protection and resettlement as an important and valid policy solution.

Mustafa Alio, R-SEAT

- Spain is the leading example of a country aligning refugee reception with broader economic and demographic needs. As one of Europe's fastest-growing economies, it recognizes the value of welcoming refugees not only as a protection measure but also as a contributor to labour markets, population renewal, and economic growth.
- Canada also serves as an example of a country where broad public engagement has helped normalize refugee support across political lines. Research from McGill University indicates that approximately 1 in 8 Canadians has been directly or indirectly involved in supporting refugees.
- In the Canadian context, resettlement and sponsorship are increasingly understood not just as policy tools, but also as part of national tradition and identity, rather than isolated or temporary protection mechanisms.

2. On complementary pathways, how do we expand those pathways without weakening resettlement itself? What does the right balance look like?

Sasha Chanoff, Refuge Point:

- Global displacement has exceeded 120 million people, with roughly one-third being refugees who have crossed international borders. Displacement is also increasingly long-term, often lasting 5, 10 or 20+ years, requiring a stronger focus on durable solutions.
- Resettlement remains the most predictable protection pathway, with over 3 million people having accessed it over time, and this predictability creates a foundation for responsibly expanding complementary pathways.
- Complementary pathways such as labour mobility initiatives (including those advanced by organizations like TBB) and family reunification mechanisms (such as those supported by FRUN) are important contributors to longer-term solutions.
- However, the primacy of resettlement as a life-saving protection tool must be preserved, ensuring that new pathways expand access rather than replace or dilute existing resettlement systems.

Jackie Keegan, UNHCR:

- Complementary pathways must first be understood as supporting both resettlement and onshore asylum systems. There is a need for clearer communication on what asylum is, and how it functions as a fundamental right within the international protection system.
- Refugees must also be understood not only as people in urgent need of protection today, but also as individuals who can later contribute to and support their host communities, similar to any other population group over time.
- UNHCR is working to reduce barriers that prevent refugees from accessing opportunities, but communities and institutions also have a role in expanding access, such as by improving

travel documentation, credential recognition, and other practical enablers of mobility and integration.

- Refugees are people with the same aspirations and needs as anyone else, and there is an urgency to consider what they need to access the same resources and opportunities afforded to other individuals. UNHCR is looking for long-term solutions for people in need of protection to live normal lives like everybody else.

3. How do we carry these lessons forward and advocate for resettlement at this moment?

Mustafa Alio, R-SEAT:

- We must continue funding and including Refugee-led organizations (RLOs) in policy spaces, who play a critical role in protection systems, often identifying risks and exclusion patterns earlier than formal institutions, and understanding which individuals may not trust or be reached by official systems.
- RLOs have already contributed to the development of complementary pathway pilots, including labour mobility initiatives (such as those emerging from Lebanon) and programs like Refugee Talent in Australia, demonstrating their role in shaping practical solutions.
- RLOs are still insufficiently included in formal coordination spaces, such as the CRCP, which limits their ability to act as equal institutional partners and weakens efforts to strengthen resettlement systems overall.

Sasha Chanoff, Refuge Point:

- RLOs are often the first responders in displacement contexts, bringing deep local networks and contextual knowledge that are essential for identifying needs and supporting protection efforts on the ground.
- While there is frequent rhetorical support for “localization” in the humanitarian sector, RLOs still face significant structural barriers, including limited funding and resources that constrain their ability to operate effectively at scale.
- There are emerging efforts, such as initiatives supported by Refuge Point and the Hilton Foundation, to invest in locally led refugee responses and strengthen the capacity of RLOs.
- Bringing refugee voices into formal governance and decision-making spaces, including participation on boards of organizations working in refugee protection, can contribute to a broader shift toward more inclusive policy design.

Basma Alawee, Refugee Congress:

- In her role as a refugee advisor, she emphasized ongoing advocacy to ensure that refugee voices are meaningfully included in shaping agendas, discussions, and program design, rather than being treated as symbolic participants.
- Creativity and intentional communication are important in this sector, and the progress already made in refugee protection systems should not be lost or “restarted from scratch,” but instead built upon and strengthened over time.

Jackie Keegan, UNHCR:

- There may be a need for a continued and deeper policy conversation on asylum, refoulement, and repatriation, as these deeply interconnected issues warrant a further dedicated discussion to address them.
- Refugee engagement has evolved significantly, with many organizations now involving refugee advisors who have transitioned from people with lived experience into professionals within the refugee protection sector.
- Despite a budget reduction of approximately one-third to one-half for UNHCR, the proportion of partnerships with locally led organizations and refugee-led organizations (RLOs) has increased. However, certain challenges remain, such as in engaging and working with non-registered groups doing impactful work.
- The Brazilian Welcome Program serves as an example of community-driven innovation, where limited initial resources have evolved into structured sponsorship funding mechanisms aimed at strengthening local welcome capacity. Crowdsourced funding pool to support community groups is now being worked on by the UNHCR with support from Ed Shapiro.
- This year also marks the 75th anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention, which continues to be relevant. There will be an upcoming series of dialogue beginning on July 28, aimed at gathering input from civil society and communities to help shape a renewed protection and solutions agenda in 2027.