

Unlocking Complementary Solutions for Syrian Refugees

Introduction

The refugee emergency generated by the conflict in Syria since 2011 has escalated rapidly and shown no signs of abating. During the High-Level Segment of the Executive Committee on Solidarity and Burden-Sharing with Countries Hosting Syrian Refugees, held in October 2013, it was agreed that the crisis has gone far beyond requiring only humanitarian assistance. At that meeting, Member States reaffirmed their support for the host countries in the surrounding region, and many announced special quotas for resettlement or other forms of admission for Syrian refugees.¹

It is vital that we maintain the momentum generated by that meeting by further exploring ways to expand opportunities for solutions for Syrian refugees. As this crisis escalates, and the emergency continues, we must find ways to provide solutions to the refugees who are most in need of protection. UNHCR has called upon States to provide for up to 30,000 of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees² to find solutions through resettlement or other forms of admission by the end of 2014. To date, more than 18,400 places³ have been offered by 20 countries, and there are indications that the goal of 30,000 will be met by the end of the year. At the inaugural meeting of the Core Group on Resettlement of Syrian Refugees (“Core Group”) on 12 December 2013, UNHCR further invited States to consider increased multi-annual commitments for Syrian refugees over the next few years.

What we must now consider is how the Core Group can be instrumental in meeting this challenge. It is one that recognises that new, innovative approaches are needed to respond effectively to this humanitarian crisis. It invites us to broaden our focus to consider how resettlement may be part of an array of solutions that can ensure urgent and effective protection in the immediate term as part of the emergency response. Such solutions could include resettlement, expanded opportunities for family reunification, humanitarian admission, medical evacuation, humanitarian evacuation, temporary protection, private sponsorships, labour mobility and investor schemes, student scholarships, and fellowships for academics, to name but a few.

Objectives

A broadened approach to solutions could accomplish three key objectives in the Syrian refugee crisis:

- *Secure protection for Syrian refugees as part of the emergency response:* Large-scale resettlement has traditionally been used to help resolve protracted refugee situations. This Core Group presents an opportunity for States to consider how large-scale resettlement combined with a number of other solutions, can also help ensure protection for the most vulnerable refugees in the context of an ongoing conflict and humanitarian emergency.
- *Prevent dangerous onward movements of refugees:* Refugees travelling by sea or with human smugglers not only risk their lives, as witnessed so recently in the Lampedusa tragedy,

¹ A number of States expressed their willingness to also receiving Palestinian refugees who fled Syria.

² Including Palestinian refugees who fled Syria, where possible.

³ Plus an open-ended number to the USA.

but also may face exploitation and violence during their attempted journey to safety. Resettlement and other solutions can provide safer ways for refugees to access the protection that they need. Greater opportunities for solutions can translate into lesser incentives to use human smugglers or other dangerous methods for onward movement.

- *Pave the way for widened protection space and solutions opportunities within host countries:* The Core Group's dialogue with Host Countries will enable the strategic use of resettlement and other solutions outside of the host countries to leverage greater opportunities for solutions for refugees who remain within these countries. For example, increased opportunities for regional scholarships or employment programmes may become available as a larger array of solutions are identified for Syrian refugees.

Ensuring protection in solutions

The purpose of an expanded approach to solutions in the Syrian refugee crisis is foremost to secure protection for refugees in the context of a humanitarian emergency. To ensure the protection purpose is achieved, all solutions should provide protection and assistance consistent with core international principles of protection. These solutions should at a minimum:

- Include a commitment to receiving an identified number of Syrian refugees under the solution within a specified timeframe, with a particular focus on receiving Syrian refugees with vulnerabilities and serious medical needs.
- Demonstrate flexibility in requirements for certain kinds of identity documentation or credential verification, in recognition of the emergency nature of the displacement.
- Ensure the preservation of family unity, including opportunities for separated dependent family members to reunite, and flexibility in definitions of family members.
- Guarantee non-*refoulement*, provide an appropriate legal status and documentation, and recognize fundamental civil rights and dignity as persons before the law, having freedom of movement, and enjoying access to courts and administrative authorities.
- Where solutions do not offer permanent residence, ensure that Syrian refugees have opportunities to extend their stay for as long as return to Syria cannot be accomplished in safety and dignity, including the right to apply for asylum and a designated time period in which they may opt to regularise their status should the crisis become protracted in Syria.
- Provide access to basic services and psychosocial and medical care, and facilitate the identification of adequate accommodation that protects the refugees' well-being.

Next Steps

- Assess States' current programmes and legislation to determine where potential opportunities exist and may be expanded and where protection safeguards are ensured.

- Strategise ways to jointly and collaboratively build upon solutions schemes, mobilise greater State support, and involve NGOs and partners in implementation and facilitation of solutions.
- Ensure that solutions form part of the global strategy and multilateral efforts to support socio-economic development and strengthened infrastructures within host countries.

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11 February 2014