

FINDING DURABLE SOLUTIONS FOR REFUGEES

BACKGROUND GUIDE
CHALLENGE TOPIC #1



The MUN Refugee Challenge is an initiative launched by UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, to encourage students worldwide to shape solutions for people forced to flee their homes.

This guide was drafted to help students prepare for their debates as part of the 2022 edition.

A Syrian family resettled in London, United Kingdom, with local community support.

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THE CHALLENGE



Worldwide, there are 26 million refugees – people who have fled their country to escape war or persecution. Under the 1951 Refugee Convention, they have the right not to be returned to the country where they faced threats to their freedom or security.

But no one wants to be a refugee their whole life. Being a refugee should not be permanent.

Refugees should be able to rebuild their lives as citizens. This is why it is important to advocate for “durable solutions” for refugees. These solutions include: 1) returning back home voluntarily if the situation is safe, 2) being resettled to a third country, especially if they are in danger or cannot return home, or being admitted in a third country through complementary pathways and 3) integrating and becoming citizens of their country of asylum.

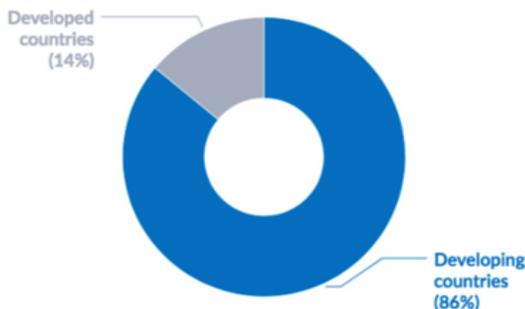
WHY IS THIS ISSUE IMPORTANT TO ADDRESS?

Although refugees are protected under international law, they are often socially and economically excluded in the communities that host them. 86% of refugees live in low- to middle-income countries, which have limited capacity to support them.

As a result, many refugees live in poor urban areas (60% of refugees live in cities) or densely populated camps. Finding long-term solutions is key to sharing the responsibility equally of hosting refugees and helping refugees build better futures.

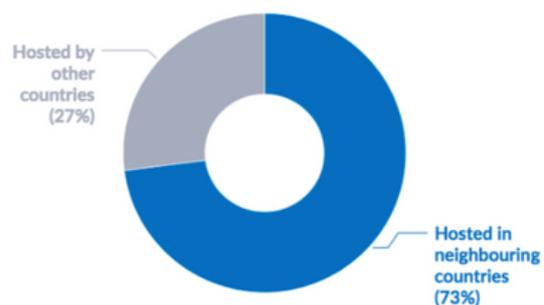
86% hosted in developing countries

Developing countries hosted the vast majority of the world's refugees and Venezuelans displaced abroad.



73% hosted in neighbouring countries

Most refugees and Venezuelans displaced abroad lived in countries neighbouring their countries of origin.



Source: [UNHCR Figures at a glance, 2021](#)



DURABLE SOLUTIONS FOR REFUGEES

Before we delve into more details, here are some examples to help you understand the durable solutions. Take the case of Ali (not a real person), who has fled war in Syria and found refuge in Jordan. In this case, Syria is Ali's country of origin, and Jordan is his country of asylum.

Voluntary repatriation

If the situation back home is safe, Ali might decide to go back home. In this case Ali would leave Jordan, his country of asylum, to return to Syria. He would stop being a refugee since he would be back in his country of origin. He would be considered a "returnee."



Resettlement

If Ali is particularly vulnerable or has little chance of returning home because his life would be at risk, UNHCR might submit Ali's case for resettlement. If for example Canada agrees to resettle Ali, then Ali would leave Jordan, his country of asylum, and travel to Canada, his country of resettlement. He would become a resettled refugee and after some time, he would receive Canadian citizenship and lose his status of refugee.



Ali could also access "Complementary pathways," which are safe and regulated avenues that complement resettlement and by which refugees may be admitted in a third country. For example, Ali might be able to obtain a work visa or a scholarship in Canada.

Local integration

If Ali can neither go back home nor be resettled, the best solution would be for Ali to be integrated locally. This would happen if his country of asylum, Jordan, gives him the same rights as other citizens and ultimately naturalizes him. In this case, Ali would lose his refugee status and become a citizen of his country of asylum.





VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION



73% of refugees fleeing war and persecution in their country find safety in a neighboring country, with the hope of coming back home once the situation has stabilized. For many, returning home concludes an often traumatic time in exile. It may happen months, years or even decades after they left. Refugees who return to their country of origin are referred to as “returnees”.

Over the years, UNHCR has managed numerous voluntary repatriation programmes that have brought millions of displaced people home. UNHCR also assists with small-scale and individual repatriations, and monitors the reintegration of returnees to ensure that their repatriation was a sustainable solution. Some 251,000 refugees were able to return to their country of origin in 2020, either assisted by UNHCR or spontaneously.

Successful voluntary repatriation requires a stable political situation in the country of origin to ensure that returnees will be able to find safety and reintegrate. When reintegration is not sustainable, people sometimes decide to leave again. This phenomenon is called “back-flows”. Even if refugees want to go home and conditions have changed sufficiently to allow refugees to return, the situation can be extremely difficult. For example, if a war has taken place, destroyed infrastructures and services often need to be rebuilt. Sometimes, returnees become internally displaced within their country of origin, because they don’t have a home to go back to.



In 2021, [60,000 refugees returned to Burundi from Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo \(DRC\) and Kenya](#). Many Burundians fled their country in 2015 after a coup attempt sparked civil unrest.



RESETTLEMENT

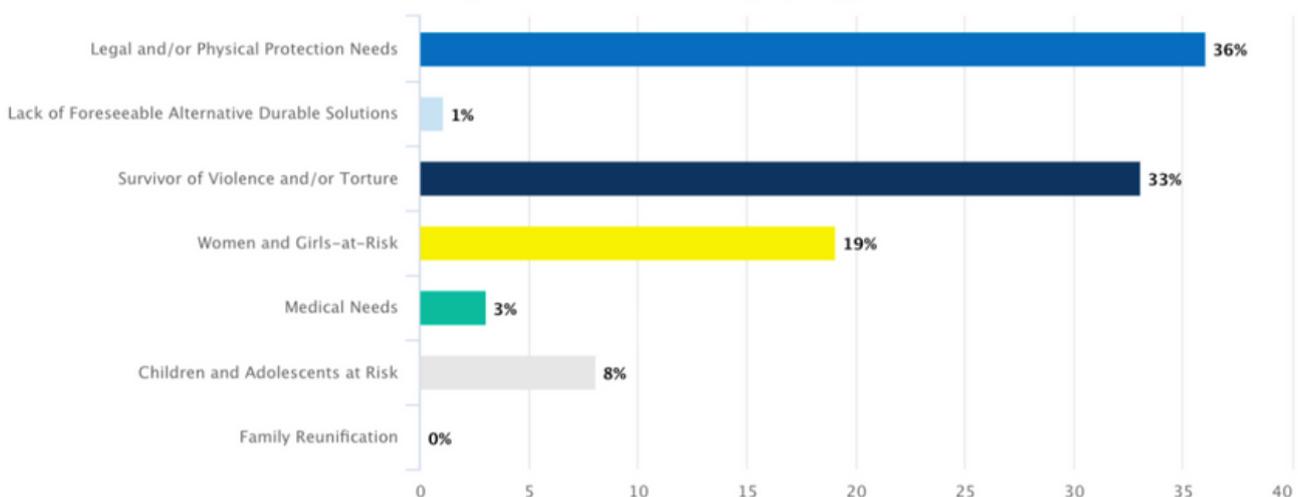
Many refugees cannot go home or have specific needs that cannot be addressed in the country where they have sought protection. In such circumstances, UNHCR helps resettle refugees to a third country. Resettlement is the transfer of refugees from an asylum country to another State that has agreed to admit them and ultimately grant them permanent residence. UNHCR officers identify refugees at risk and submit their applications but the final decision to accept a refugee for resettlement is taken by governments.

Consistently about 7% of the global refugee population is in need of resettlement but only 1% cent of the refugee population has access to resettlement each year. In 2019, [over 63,000 refugees assisted by UNHCR were resettled](#) to 29 countries. Three-quarters of the refugees submitted for resettlement originated from just five countries: Afghanistan, Eritrea, the DRC, Syria, and Somalia, all of which suffer from protracted conflict (lasting for more than five years) or insecurity. Due to Covid-19, [2020 marked the lowest resettlement numbers](#) witnessed by UNHCR in almost two decades.

Refugees are identified as in need of resettlement when they have particular needs or vulnerabilities in their country of asylum, such as women and girls at risk, and cannot return to their country of origin. The chart below shows UNHCR submissions of cases based on resettlement categories further explained in [UNHCR’s Resettlement Handbook](#).

Global UNHCR submissions by category, January – September 2021

Percentage of total submitted cases during reporting period





RESETTLEMENT



Providing for effective reception and integration is essential for both the resettled refugee and the receiving country. Integration can be facilitated by cultural orientation, language and vocational training, as well as programmes to promote access to education and employment.

In addition to resettlement, refugees can also access “[Complementary Pathways](#)” to find protection in a third country. Complementary pathways are safe and regulated avenues that complement resettlement and by which refugees may be admitted in a country where they can be safe while supporting themselves to potentially reach a sustainable and lasting solution.

Pathways include:

- [Humanitarian visas](#), which are often used to admit individuals in need of international protection to a third country where they are given the opportunity to formally apply for asylum.
- [Community sponsorship of refugees](#), through which local citizens and organizations are responsible for financing and housing resettled refugees.
- [Family reunification](#), in cases where a family is separated and at least one member was recognized as a refugee; other family members can then apply to join them in that country.
- [Work visas](#), which allow access to a third country through safe and regulated avenues for purposes of employment, with the right to either permanent or temporary residence.
- [Education programmes](#), including scholarships, traineeships, and apprenticeships.



Since 2013 more refugees have arrived in Canada via [private resettlement schemes](#) than through government resettlement programs. In 2019, just one-third of refugees resettled in Canada received government assistance upon arrival; the rest entered through private or community sponsorship.

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LOCAL INTEGRATION & OTHER LOCAL SOLUTIONS



When voluntary repatriation is not feasible and refugees do not qualify for resettlement, a solution is for refugees to integrate in their country of asylum. Local integration is a gradual process which should ultimately lead to refugees gaining the nationality of their host country. Local integration can provide a realistic alternative to living in refugee camps.

Local integration starts with the provision of basic rights for refugees. This includes the right to work, access financial services, go to school, travel freely, etc. Yet, 70% of refugees live in countries with restricted right to work, 66% with restricted freedom of movement and 47% with restricted access to bank accounts.



In countries that have been hosting large numbers of refugees over protracted periods of time, efforts towards local integration are essential to reduce the tensions that can occur between refugees and host communities over resources, land, jobs and other services.

Once refugees access fundamental rights, States can take steps to facilitate their integration and naturalization (i.e granting of citizenship) of refugees. According to the 1951 Convention, States are encouraged but cannot be compelled to grant nationality to refugees settled in their territory. UNHCR estimates that, over the past decade, 1.1 million refugees around the world became citizens in their country of asylum.

The Contracting States shall as far as possible facilitate the naturalization of refugees. They shall in particular make every effort to expedite naturalization proceedings and to reduce as far as possible the charges and costs of such proceedings.

—1951 Convention, Article 34



WHAT IS CURRENTLY BEING DONE TO ADDRESS THIS ISSUE?



Voluntary repatriation

- UNHCR provides information and organizes visits to make sure that refugees who wish to return make a free and informed choice.
- UNHCR supports the transportation of returnees. For example UNHCR [helps refugees from the Central African Republic \(CAR\)](#) living in the DRC to return home, by truck, boat and plane
- UNHCR helps returnees access justice and housing, and also promotes the participation of returnees in peace and reconciliation activities

Resettlement and complementary pathways

- UNHCR coordinates resettlement needs, develops resettlement criteria, and identifies refugees to be submitted for consideration for resettlement.
- UNHCR advocates for higher resettlement quotas and diversified intake.
- UNHCR works with various partners to develop complementary pathways to third countries (e.g. visas, work permits, scholarships) that will meet the protection needs of refugees.

Local integration

- UNHCR advocates refugees' access to jobs, education and other services in their country of asylum, as well as for refugees' naturalization, especially in protracted situations.
- UNHCR works with partners to help refugees make a living. For example, UNHCR works with ILO and UNDP and NGOs on [micro-finance programs](#) to increase refugees' self-reliance.



“We urgently call on governments to boost their resettlement programs this year, offer more places, expedite the processing of cases and help us save lives of those most in need and at greatest risk”

—UNHCR’s Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, Gillian Triggs.



WHAT IS CURRENTLY BEING DONE TO ADDRESS THIS ISSUE?



GOVERNMENTS

Voluntary repatriation

- Governments of the countries of origin and countries of asylum can enter tripartite agreements with UNHCR, to establish the conditions for the returns of refugees.

Resettlement and complementary pathways

- Governments can increase resettlement quotas. For example, the US Government announced to admit more resettled refugees – up to 62,500 in 2021 and 125,000 in 2022.
- Governments can create private resettlement schemes to encourage their citizens to provide financial, social and/or emotional support to welcome resettled refugees.
- Governments can offer scholarships for refugees to study in their countries, put in place family reunification programs, offer humanitarian and work visas.

Local Integration

- Governments can revise their laws to include refugees. For example in 2019, [Ethiopia's parliament revised its refugee law](#) to enable refugees to obtain work permits and driving licenses, access primary education, and legally register life events (such as marriages).
- Governments can grant citizenship to refugees who have been in their country for a long time. For example, [Panama issued a law](#) valid from 2008 to 2010 allowing people who had been refugees for over 10 years to apply for permanent residency status, which gives the right to apply for naturalization after five years, or less for parents of Panamanian children.



HOST COMMUNITY AND NGOS

Voluntary repatriation

- NGOs can help returnees to reintegrate. For example, the [Danish Refugee Council](#) in Syria supports returnees with shelter and education, reaching over 300,000 people in 2019.

Resettlement

- Local communities can support the integration of resettled refugees. In Denmark, the [Red Cross' Buddy program](#) pairs newly arrived refugees with a buddy to nurture friendships.

Local Integration

- Local communities can help reduce tensions between refugees and host communities. In 2014, [Search for Common Ground](#) supported UNHCR to reduce tensions caused by the arrival in Niger of refugees fleeing Boko Haram.



Questions to Guide the Debate

- How do we convince States to invest more in durable solutions?
- How can we urge governments to expand their resettlement programmes?
- How do we convince citizens to sponsor refugees through private resettlement schemes?
- How do we make sure that resettled refugees are properly integrated in their new country?
- How do we engage civil society to support complementary pathways?
- How to make sure that repatriation programs are safe and voluntary?
- How to convince States to naturalize refugees who have been in their countries for a long time?
- How can we ensure refugees' access to health services, housing and work?
- What role can local citizens play to help refugees integrate both in countries of asylum and resettlement countries?

Useful Resources

General

- [UNHCR Solutions for Refugees](#)
- [UNHCR Global Trends](#)
- [Framework for Durable Solutions for Refugees and Persons of Concern](#)

Resettlement

- [UNHCR Resettlement numbers](#)
- [Resettlement Data Finder \(UNHCR\)](#)
- [UNHCR- What is Resettlement?](#)

Local Integration

- [UNHCR | Integration Handbook](#)
- [UNHCR | Local Integration](#)
- [The forgotten solution: local integration for refugees in developing countries](#)

Voluntary Repatriation

- [UNHCR | Voluntary Repatriation Handbook](#)
- [UNHCR | Returnees](#)

Complementary Pathways

- [Complementary Pathways for Admission of Refugees to Third Countries: Key Consideration](#)
- [Three Year Strategy on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways](#)
- [Complementary Pathways](#)

Contact us

If you have any questions about UNHCR's MUN Refugee Challenge or this background guide, please visit our [webpage](#) or contact hqmunrefugee@unhcr.org.