



United Nations Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement (ATCR)

April-June 2020

Overview

The Settlement Council of Australia (SCoA) recently represented the settlement sector at the United Nations Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement (ATCR). The purpose of the ATCR is to explore innovative options for refugee resettlement, and provide a mechanism for cooperation between global governments, NGO's and the UNHCR around resettlement. The 2020 ATCR meetings were hosted by the Government of Canada, the Canadian Council for Refugees and the UNHCR. Unlike previous years, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the ATCR was held virtually over a series nine meetings from late April to June 2020.

The 2020 ATCR meetings primarily focused on resettlement needs, the impact of COVID-19 on resettlement, and complementary pathways.

Key relevant trends and impacts

1. Global resettlement trends

There are more than 1,440,408 refugees estimated to be in need of resettlement in 2021. This is an increase from the previous year. The majority of those requiring resettlement come from Africa (674,599 people) and the Middle East and North Africa (625,397 people).

Unfortunately, while the need for resettlement has increased, global resettlement places have reduced in recent years. A large contributor to the reduction is a significant reduction in the US intake. The US was traditionally the largest resettlement location, settling a historic average of 95,000 people. This reduced to just 30,000 places in 2019. This has a significant impact on the number of refugees resettled globally, with just 63,600 refugees departing for resettlement countries with assistance from the UNHCR in 2019.

More comprehensive information on global resettlement statistics and needs can be found on the Refugee Council of Australia's website, at the following links:

- <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/global-resettlement-statistics/>
- <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/global-resettlement-needs/>

2. Impact of COVID-19 on resettlement

COVID-19 has significantly impacted all components of refugee resettlement globally. The UNHCR has been working closely with countries to provide protection for those who urgently require it, and adapting resettlement activities including counselling and communication so they can continue where possible, despite new challenges in logistics.

The UNHCR is also working hard to ensure that cases are as 'travel ready' as possible, so that they can travel as soon as restrictions and logistics permit. In addition, they are in discussion with some governments about rolling over unused settlement places so that these places are not forfeited. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) advised the ATCR that thousands of departures had been cancelled, but they continue to work with a focus on urgent cases.

Government representatives from countries provided an update on their approach to COVID-19 at the ATCR meetings. In Australia, like many countries, COVID-19 has significantly diminished the ability to undertake processing, and border closures have remained a challenge. Australia's 2019-2020 offshore program targets will not be met due to COVID-19. However, applications are being processed as extensively as possible so that once restrictions are lifted next steps can be taken. Emergency rescue visas are still being granted for the most urgent cases.

3. Complementary pathways

The expansion of complementary pathways was a key focus of many of the meetings. The UNHCR's *Three Year Strategy (2019-2021) on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways* aims to increase access for refugees to other pathways that provide protection solutions (i.e. making use of alternative visa options).

In recent years, several countries have piloted and explored avenues for admitting refugees through complementary pathways. The meetings provided an opportunity to reflect on the challenges and successes of complementary pathways and exchange learnings.

Some of the Australian initiatives in this space were highlighted, such as Talent Beyond Boundaries, which matches skilled refugees with companies in need of their skills and facilitates them accessing skilled migration pathways.

Canada's longstanding private sponsorship initiative was discussed, as well as emerging programs in other participating countries. Canada shared that privately sponsored refugees had benefited from smoother transitions to employment and quicker English language acquisition (even accounting for demographics) due to the close links fostered with their private sponsors.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted progress in this space, it also provides an opportunity to invest in the development of further initiatives that expand complementary pathways.