

Establishment of a joint EU resettlement programme

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PURPOSE: to propose the creation of a "Joint EU Resettlement Programme" in order to develop resettlement within the EU into a more effective instrument to give protection to refugees, providing for closer political and practical cooperation among EU Member States.

BACKGROUND: the great majority of refugees worldwide find themselves outside the EU, in developing countries in Asia and Africa. Global resettlement needs are much greater than the resettlement places which are available worldwide. The UNHCR estimates the **global resettlement needs at about 747 000 persons**, including populations where resettlement is envisaged over a period of several years. On the basis of prioritisation, UNHCR estimates that out of this number, for 2010 alone, 203 000 persons will be in need of resettlement. According to the UNHCR, in 2008, 65 596 refugees were resettled worldwide. Of these, 378 refugees, or 6.7%, went to one of the EU countries. The numbers of refugees resettled in the EU contrasts sharply with the numbers taken in by many other countries in the industrialised world. At the same time, the EU receives a proportionately greater number of 'spontaneous' asylum seekers than other parts of the developed world. Furthermore, a majority of EU countries has no resettlement programme at all and would need to engage in capacity-building activities in order to be in a position to regularly engage in resettlement. There are at present ten EU Member States which participate annually in resettlement (Sweden, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Portugal, France, Romania and the Czech Republic). Some other Member States have provided resettlement on an ad-hoc basis. Member States set resettlement priorities nationally without prior consultation and coordination at the EU level. Resettlement has been receiving significant financial support under the [European Refugee Fund \(ERF III\)](#) since 2008. The principal objective of **joint EU action on resettlement** should therefore be to involve more Member States in resettlement activities and to provide for an orderly and secure access to protection for those resettled. At the same time, it should serve to demonstrate greater solidarity to third countries in receiving refugees. The programme should, in particular:

- strengthen the EU's involvement in resettlement activities with a view to raising the Union's effectiveness and credibility in international affairs generally;
- adapt the structures and procedures for coordinating resettlement policy in the EU to enable closer cooperation among Member States and more effective coordination of resettlement activities at the EU level;
- lower the economic costs associated with resettlement in the EU through closer cooperation among Member States.

A clear distinction should be made between **resettlement of refugees from outside EU territory to a Member State**, which is a humanitarian measure and an expression of solidarity by the EU vis-à-vis third countries, and intra-EU resettlement of refugees, which is carried out primarily for the purpose of burden sharing among Member States. The latter issue is not addressed in the Communication. This Communication and the accompanying proposal to amend the ERF Decision for the period 2008-2013 address the issue of solidarity with third countries in dealing with refugees.

CONTENT: the Commission proposes to create a joint EU resettlement programme with the following objectives: (1) to increase the humanitarian impact of the EU by ensuring that it gives greater and better targeted support to the international protection of refugees through resettlement; (2) to enhance the

strategic use of resettlement by ensuring that it is properly integrated into the Union's external and humanitarian policies generally, and (3) to streamline the EU's resettlement efforts so as to ensure that the benefits are delivered in the most cost-effective manner.

The programme is based on the following **guiding principles**:

- **participation by Member States in resettlement should remain voluntary.** Member States will remain free to decide whether they want to resettle at all, and if so, how many refugees they wish to resettle;
- **the scope of resettlement activity in the EU should be widened** by familiarising as many Member States as possible with resettlement, and enhancing their required experience and capacity to carry out resettlement;
- **the mechanism which is established should allow for adaptability to changing circumstances.** In order to use resettlement strategically it should be possible to review and revise resettlement priorities annually. Adaptability is required also in order to respond to evolving needs with respect to practical cooperation on resettlement between Member States;
- **actors other than Member States governments, who play a key role in resettlement, should also participate.** The most important actor in this respect is the UNHCR, because of its international mandate and the pivotal role it plays in resettlement worldwide. The involvement of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) is also important ;
- **the development of a common EU approach to the resettlement of refugees from third countries should be incremental** and, with experience, the scope of the programme could be further developed.

In practical terms, the Programme will primarily consist of a **mechanism which allows for the setting of common annual priorities on resettlement** and **more effective use of the financial assistance** available through the ERF "pledging" exercise. This will be complemented by strengthened practical cooperation, enhanced effectiveness of external asylum policies and a regular evaluation of the Joint Resettlement Programme. Priorities could apply both to geographic regions and nationalities as well as to specific categories of refugees to be resettled, including emergency cases. In order to identify these priorities, the current ad hoc Resettlement Expert Group will be developed into a body which meets on a regular basis. The Group will also exchange information between Member States on quantitative targets set by Member States and discuss specific needs with respect to resettlement, such as activities aimed at encouraging Member States which are not yet engaged in resettlement. Together with the European Asylum Support Office which should be operational in 2010, the Group will also be in a position to identify current needs for practical cooperation in the field of resettlement.

The Commission will continue to support practical cooperation projects. In order for the EU programme to be successful - both with respect to the identification of common priorities as well as practical cooperation activities - it will be important to cooperate closely with the UNHCR. The consultations between Member States, the

Commission and UNHCR concerning resettlement will therefore need to be intensified. There is also a need to provide structurally for an **integrated approach between resettlement, other components of EU external asylum policies and EU external policies as a whole.** In particular, coherence with the EU Global Approach to Migration should be ensured.

The Commission is accordingly proposing that an amendment be made to the ERF III Decision, as set out in the legislative proposal accompanying this Communication.