

The New Pact on Migration and Asylum: a chance for much needed legal pathways to the EU?

Brussels, 19 June 2020 – Ahead of World Refugee Day, the Red Cross EU Office calls on the EU and Member States to increase safe, legal migration channels for protection seekers to the EU. As many borders remain closed in response to the COVID-19 public health crisis, the already scarce possibilities for people to seek protection have substantially reduced.

In the meantime, global protection needs have skyrocketed, not least due to the urgency of evacuating refugee camps to counter the virus' impact in densely populated areas. As stressed by the European Parliament in a letter to the European Commission in April, the upcoming Pact on Migration and Asylum is an opportunity for the EU to re-balance its approach to migration management by enhancing legal pathways to Europe – Member States must join forces to urgently address the specific needs of asylum seekers and refugees.

European governments promised to strengthen resettlement and complementary pathways in the Global Compact on Refugees as an expression of solidarity with refugees and host communities. With most refugees currently hosted in developing countries where health systems are already overwhelmed, it is now time to translate this commitment into concrete policy. The EU and Member States should ensure that people fleeing violence, persecution, and human rights violations are protected and treated with dignity. Increasing and implementing resettlement pledges through a well-functioning Union Resettlement Framework, facilitating family reunification, or exploring modalities for an EU-wide humanitarian visa scheme, are just some of the ways in which this could be done.

Despite some progress in providing resettlement opportunities to Europe, the numbers fall far short of a meaningful contribution to addressing global protection needs. Consequently, many refugees continue to live in overcrowded camps, where they lack adequate access to health services, clean water, and sanitation. Furthermore, resettlement proceedings have been put on hold during the pandemic, but the need for protection has not stopped with the spreading of the virus or border closures. While COVID-19 has understandably disrupted resettlement operations, the EU has the capacity to pioneer innovative submission mechanisms and practical modalities to resume resettlement programmes. For example, operations plans could be adapted to allow for necessary health precautions, such as testing and quarantine measures.

It is crucial that the upcoming Pact on Migration and Asylum establishes an ambitious EU resettlement roadmap, which shares responsibilities and genuinely supports hosting countries, regardless of their efforts to prevent migration to the EU. This should be complemented by other legal pathways like family reunification, which is essential to implementing the right to family unity. Reviewing family reunification procedures to make sure that they are truly accessible to protection seekers should also be a priority. Besides being instrumental in supporting integration and social inclusion, family life is a fundamental right.

In these uncertain times, protection seekers deserve predictable, durable solutions like resettlement and complementary pathways. Partnerships with civil society and other stakeholders are decisive in safeguarding their accessibility. European Red Cross Societies have substantial expertise in facilitating safe, dignified migration and stand ready to support their governments in the implementation of such programmes. We urge the EU and Member States to take the opportunity of the new Pact to honour their commitments and guarantee effective access to international protection.

[Learn more about the work of the Red Cross towards asylum seekers and refugees.](#)

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