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Countries must do more to resettle refugees, UN agency says



An Iraqi boy on his way to a new home in Germany

6 July 2010 – With more than 800,000 refugees estimated to require resettlement in third countries in the coming years, the United Nations refugee agency is calling for countries to allow in more people – who cannot return to their home nations – to begin new lives.

At present, only a small number of countries are participating in the resettlement schemes of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)), and the number of available resettlement places has not kept pace with increased submissions to the agency.

For this year, UNHCR predicts that 747,000 people worldwide need to move to third countries, while that number surpasses 800,000 – a record high – for 2011.

However, the annual quotas set by nations offering to resettle refugees have remained unchanged at 80,000 slots.

“We need to act,” [said](#) High Commissioner António Guterres. “I strongly hope more countries will establish resettlement programmes or increase resettlement opportunities.”

He stressed that “this is all the more important since new crises continue to displace more people while old conflicts are failing to resolve.”

UNHCR said that for many refugees, starting their lives anew in third countries is the only way to find lasting safety and a permanent home. Although voluntary repatriation remains the preferred solution among most of refugees, protracted conflict or fear of persecution prevent them from returning to their home countries.

A UNHCR [report](#) released last month found that with major conflicts in Afghanistan and Somalia among those showing no signs of being resolved, the number of refugees voluntarily returning to their home countries last year plummeted to their lowest levels in two decades.

More than 80 per cent of the world's refugees live in developing countries where many cannot remain safely and have no possibility of integrating into the local population.

This year's annual talks on resettlement bringing together governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and UNHCR kicked off today in Geneva.

Sweden tops the list of 13 European countries taking in refugees in need of resettlement, with an annual quota of 1,900. Last September, UNHCR welcomed the European Commission's proposal to set up a Joint European Union Resettlement Programme.

Currently, 90 per cent of all refugees resettled every year are accepted by the United States, Canada and Australia, while only 6 per cent go to Europe.

Last year, UNHCR presented the cases of more than 128,000 refugees who were in need of resettled, of whom the agency assisted 84,000 start new lives in third countries.

According to national statistics, 19 countries reported that they had admitted 112,400 resettled refugees either with or without UNHCR's help. The US took in the largest number at 80,000.

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