



## GLOBAL COMPACT ON REFUGEES

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CONCEPT NOTE



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# The Multistakeholder Pledge on Supporting Refugee Family Reunification

GLOBAL REFUGEE FORUM 2023

## CALL TO COLLECTIVE ACTION

Based on the right of family unity, family reunification is the most relied upon third country solution for refugees.<sup>1</sup> Despite legal frameworks and support services enabling successful reunions, documented administrative and practical hinderance prevent many others from accessing family reunification.<sup>2</sup>

Increasing access to safe pathways for regular migration, in particular family reunification, saves lives. Research suggests that a significant number of persons embarking on dangerous cross-border journeys do so seeking to reunite with family in the intended destination country.<sup>3</sup>

When fleeing their home, refugees are often separated from family members. This separation, particularly for prolonged periods and when involving children, [can have devastating consequences](#) on psychological wellbeing, and negatively impact integration, prospects for economic self-sufficiency, and relationships post-reunion.

Thus, maintaining and restoring family unity underpin the success of all third country solutions and, more broadly, amplify self-reliance in all countries of asylum.

Recognizing the enormous potential of family reunification to secure the rights of refugees, save lives, provide a durable safe solution and promote the wellbeing and self-reliance of refugees, the Global Family Reunification Network (FRUN) is mobilizing pledges in support of effective and accessible family reunification for refugees.

## MULTISTAKEHOLDER PLEDGE GOAL

Using the platform of the Global Refugee Forum (GRF), the Global Family Reunification Network (FRUN) intends to galvanize commitments under Objective 3 of [The Global Compact on Refugees](#) (GCR) and Recommendation 16 of the [High Level Officials Meeting 2021 Outcome Document](#), to expand access to third-country solutions, including family reunification. This commitment was reaffirmed by the global consortium of stakeholders under [Goal 2 of the Three-Year Strategy on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways \(2019-2021\)](#) and its successor document, [Third Country Solutions for Refugees: Roadmap 2030](#). Family reunification also helps to enhance refugee self-reliance in pursuit of Objective 2 of the GCR.

The Multistakeholder Pledge on Supporting Refugee Family Reunification aims to mobilise actors towards the overarching goal of ensuring every refugee can exercise their right to family unity and attain family reunification. This Multistakeholder Pledge will promote synergies between pledging entities, share best practices, aggregate resources, and ensure tracking and accountability related to the family reunification procedures.

Pledge commitments will contribute to ensuring that in design and implementation State policies facilitating family reunification are evidence-informed and protection-centred, and that refugee families can access reliable information and holistic support throughout the process.

Additionally, the Multistakeholder Pledge will identify a small number of focus countries, where key actors will champion family reunification through comprehensive efforts to address structural barriers and pilot integrated support systems.

Aligned with the goals of The Roadmap, the Multistakeholder Pledge on Supporting Refugee Family Reunification aims to help at least 1 million refugees reunite with their families by 2030, through addressing legal and policy barriers, providing practical supports to overcome administrative and logistical hurdles, and gathering data and evidence on the need for and impact of family reunification.

<sup>1</sup> Indicative data suggests that family reunification visas comprise more than 60% of all first-time permits issued for complementary pathways, numbering more than 1.2 million in OECD countries from 2010 to 2021 ([Joint OECD-UNHCR Safe Pathways Dashboard](#)).

<sup>2</sup> See for example, [Summary Conclusions on the Right to Family Life and Family Unity in the Context of Family Reunification of Refugees and Other Persons In Need Of International Protection](#), December 2017.

<sup>3</sup> See research conducted in 2022 by the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) in partnership with the UNHCR Office of the Special Envoy for the Central Mediterranean on [Understanding the role of family reunification within mixed movements in Sudan](#) and [Understanding the role of family reunification within mixed movements in Tunisia](#)

## PLEDGE PILLARS

Supporters commit to taking specific actions under one or more of the following pledge pillars:



### Law and Policy

Implement or advocate for policy changes, administrative leniencies and/or procedural flexibilities to support entry and exit and ensure effective access to family reunification procedures.



### Data and Evidence

Address knowledge gaps related to needs and movements to improve the evidence base.



### Support and Facilitation

Build support systems of direct service providers from country of departure to receiving country.

## PLEDGE CO-CONVENERS AND PILLAR CO-LEADS


The Multistakeholder Pledge Supporting Refugee Family Reunification is co-convened by the Global Family Reunification Network (FRUN) Advisory Group consisting of UNHCR, IOM, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Red Cross and Red Crescent Family Reunification Working Group (represented by the British Red Cross), the International Rescue Committee (IRC), RefugePoint, the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), Leiden University, and the International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP).

This core convening group draws together actors sharing a commitment to highlight the importance of family reunification and secure high-quality pledges ahead of the 2023 GRF. For each of the three pillars to this pledge, two Co-Leads will facilitate pledge development.

## LAW AND POLICY

**Pledges will commit** to implementing or advocating for policy changes, administrative leniencies and/or procedural flexibilities to ensure law and policy frameworks support entry and exit for the purposes of family reunification and effective access to family reunification procedures. Recognising that family members of a refugee sponsor/petitioner, who are outside of their country of origin, are highly likely to also be refugees (either on their own merit or through entitlement to derivative status), law and policy frameworks of States should adhere to the 1951 Refugee Convention protection principles. In design and implementation, the requirements and procedures necessary to exercise the right to family unity must not place the family at risk and must accommodate the particular situation of refugees.


**Pledging contributions may include** adjustments to existing frameworks, commitments to the issuance and/or acceptance of civil status documentation and/or machine-readable travel documents, cooperation arrangements and/or contracting third party agencies for visa services, mainstreaming family reunification into existing asylum and reception structures, and waiving/reducing exit fees or expediting exit procedures of non-citizens for the purposes of family reunification.<sup>4</sup>

 **GOAL:** Promote adjustments to legal and administrative frameworks to improve access to family reunification procedures for refugees. By 2027, at least 10 States — with the support of relevant stakeholders — commit to adapting specific elements of legislation and/or policies, or the implementation of those.

## SUPPORT AND FACILITATION

**Pledges will contribute** to building sustainable, coordinated and holistic support systems for families from country of departure to receiving country, through the direct engagement of all relevant service providers, identification of gaps, capacity boosting and enhanced coordination. Context dependent, service provision may include information provision, identification and referral mechanisms, case management, legal assistance and reception and integration support. This integrated systems approach will engage stakeholders with different areas of expertise. A critical element to the efficacy and sustainability of such systems is the engagement of Refugee-Led Organisations (RLOs) in design and implementation, through service provisions and partnership.

**Pledging contributions may include** direct service provision, engaging capacity building with partners (including RLOs) through trainings and/or seconded expertise, providing legal expertise and oversight to organisations including law firms offering pro bono hours to family reunification cases, participating in the creation of a network to enhance coordination, cultural orientation and reception/integration support, and resourcing partners involved in the pledge for a multi-year term or assisting organisations to develop sustainable funding models for this work.<sup>5</sup>

 **GOAL:** Build integrated and sustainable support systems in at least four focus countries and share lessons learnt and good practices to inform the creation of similar mechanism globally. By 2027, coordinated support mechanisms will exist in at least 4 countries, bringing together all relevant stakeholders, including RLOs.

## DATA AND EVIDENCE

**Pledges will seek** to address information gaps related to the need for and impact of family reunification through the provision of tools, expertise, and disaggregated data, to improve the evidence base for the planning, programs, and policymaking of all stakeholders.

**Pledge contributions may include** developing tools/systems for data collection on family ties in countries of asylum (including self-service), analysis and publication on global needs, building State

<sup>4,5</sup> Kindly refer to the [Family Reunification Pledging Framework](#) for more examples of possible pledges in support of this pillar of the Multistakeholder Pledge.

capacity to systematically collect and report on applications (including data on application, decisions, arrivals and reasons for holds) in a standardised format to allow for comparative analysis and reporting of family reunification data.

**GOAL:** Expand quality data and evidence to promote effective policies and programmes that integrate refugee needs. By 2027 at least two States — with the support of relevant stakeholders — commit to the systematic collection and reporting on family reunification outcomes, including as a minimum application, rejections, processing times, approvals and arrivals.

For more information on multistakeholder pledging and to access the Family Reunification Pledging Framework, visit the [Global Compact on Refugees Digital Platform](#).

A dedicated FRUN website with additional information on this Multistakeholder Pledge Supporting Refugee Family Reunification will be launched in September 2023.



**Red Cross and Red Crescent**  
Family Reunification Working Group



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