



Transforming Refugee Response: RefugePoint's Impacts

Vol. 2: Expanding Access to Resettlement through Staff Deployments to UNHCR

Quick summary: Acting as a lead contributor, RefugePoint has helped expand equitable access to resettlement by deploying staff to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and opening the door for other NGOs to do the same. This has contributed to increased capacity and broadened access to refugee resettlement.

Systems change description

RefugePoint has contributed to expanding equitable access to resettlement and complementary pathways for refugees, in part by boosting the resettlement staffing resources of UNHCR and helping to expand the UNHCR's resettlement deployment scheme to engage in new relationships with other NGOs. Through the scheme, new NGO partners have further strengthened UNHCR's resettlement capacity by hiring and deploying professionals who work in UNHCR operations as resettlement experts fully integrated in the UNHCR teams.²

Need for change

In 1995, the United States shifted its resettlement policy, giving preference to UNHCR-submitted resettlement referrals "of any nationality," instead of relying primarily on identifying specific groups of refugees that could directly access the U.S. resettlement program. U.S. policy shifts have an outsized impact on refugee resettlement globally because the U.S. has historically been by far the largest recipients of resettled refugees. In the years following 1995, UNHCR simply did not have enough staff capacity to identify and refer enough refugees to fill all the available resettlement slots.³ The deployment scheme was launched as a way to expand that capacity by establishing new working relationships with NGOs that could provide qualified staff to work with UNHCR resettlement staff around the world, including in locations where resettlement services had not previously been available.

ABOUT THIS SERIES

RefugePoint partners with refugees to access life-changing solutions and transforms how the world supports them. This series showcases examples of how RefugePoint contributes to systems change, which we understand as changing one or more of the factors that keep existing refugee response systems from serving refugees adequately and equitably. These factors include policies, practices, resources, relationships between actors, distributions of power, and mindsets (beliefs and ideologies).¹ This brief presents the results of an externally-led, participatory evaluation that draws on extensive interviews with RefugePoint partners, colleagues, and other stakeholders, participatory sense-making activities with RefugePoint staff, and document review. The brief summarizes what has changed, why change was needed, how change came about, RefugePoint's unique role, and the relevance of the change for refugees.

¹ Kania, J., Kramer, J., & Senge, P. (2018). "The water of systems change."

² See UNHCR's Resettlement Handbook for more information on the resettlement deployment scheme [here](#); see also Slaughter, A. (2017). "How NGOs Have Helped Shape Resettlement." Forced Migration Review, (54).

³ Slaughter, A. (2017).

Since the 1990s, UNHCR's deployment scheme has evolved from a partnership with just one NGO to three, including RefugePoint.⁴ UNHCR has shifted from individual arrangements and procedural documents for each partnership to a set of standardized agreements, demonstrating its recognition and codification of multiple deployment partners as the norm. The goals of deployments have also multiplied, from a sole focus on resettlement casework to include expertise in child protection, family reunification, and other complementary pathways.⁵

Levers of change

Levers of change are relatively small changes that actors such as RefugePoint can make that can bring about a bigger change in the overall system.⁶ The evaluation identified the following as the most important levers used by RefugePoint to help bring about a change in the system.

Leading by example: RefugePoint has built trust with UNHCR and other key stakeholders in part by consistently providing what stakeholders describe as high-quality services. Setting the example of an NGO providing high-quality work enabled UNHCR to scale back its own investment in areas where RefugePoint works, demonstrating the impact that NGOs doing high-quality work can have on resettlement systems and infrastructure. A UNHCR representative articulated this idea: “[RefugePoint] worked in areas where we were then able to pull back because it’s an adult, mature partner. We don’t need to invest as much in the places that they have been ... we maintain a certain level of capacity, [but] it tends not to be dedicated capacity.” (Jackie Keegan, UNHCR)

Developing and deploying staff capacity for impact:

RefugePoint deployment staff bring the organization's ethos and focus on systems change to the work they do while deployed, while doing direct service work with refugees as well as training and other capacity building with UNHCR and partners. Through advocacy and private funding, RefugePoint has placed staff where it felt there was the greatest need and opportunity for impact. At the same time, staff experiences in those locations uncovered key gaps within resettlement they then advocated to address. “*The fact that we were on the ground meant we had staff in all these locations who could see for themselves what the gaps were and figure out how to fill them. It wasn’t an academic exercise. It was really responding to needs on the ground.*” (Amy Slaughter, RefugePoint staff). The management staff used what they learned from field staff (regarding needs and gaps) to design program interventions and for

advocacy purposes, compounding the impact of each deployment.

Leveraging private funding: Private unrestricted funding enabled RefugePoint to negotiate deployment placements for its staff, focusing on locations where it saw the greatest need for resettlement, even when UNHCR had other deployment priorities. As a former staff member explained: “[Private funding] provided a flexibility ... that helped increase numbers to help fill gaps, to potentially go into new locations because it wasn’t taking away from what UNHCR was planning and needing when they were initially distributing the work among the partners.” (Johanna Babb, former RefugePoint staff). Private funding also helped position RefugePoint as an operational partner with fewer stipulations on activities than an implementing partner.⁷ Furthermore, private funding gave RefugePoint a seat at the table for policy discussions as a thought leader in a way that NGOs relying exclusively on government or UNHCR funding did not have. Sasha Chanoff, Founder and CEO of RefugePoint, recalled a conversation with a UNHCR representative describing the organization as a “legitimate player at the table.” He went on to say, “And what he meant by this was, ‘You bring your own private funds and your ideas to the table as an equal partner with UNHCR and governments.... I think that ability to be an equal partner at the table with UNHCR and governments has helped us to transform things in positive ways.’”

RefugePoint's contributions

What unique role did RefugePoint play in pulling the levers that helped bring about this change? Drawing on a typology of roles actors can play in advocacy work,⁸

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4 The Danish Refugee Council, International Catholic Migration Commission, and RefugePoint are partners as of 2024. Church World Service and HIAS were partners in previous years.

5 See information on UNHCR's webpage [here](#).

6 Meadows, D. (2015). “[Leverage points—places to intervene in a system.](#)”

7 Operational partners are organizations that do not receive UNHCR funding but play a major role in operations. Implementing partners are organizations funded by UNHCR to carry out specified activities.

8 Coe, J., & Schlagen, R. (2019). “[No Royal Road. Finding and Following the Natural Pathways in Advocacy Evaluation.](#)” Center for Evaluation Innovation.



A woman poses for a photo at a refugee camp in Burkina Faso.
Photo by Nancy Farese

the evaluation found that RefugePoint has played a **lead contributor** role, working closely with UNHCR and other partners and bringing new ideas, resources, and skills to expand equitable access to resettlement through deployments. Staff and external stakeholders both emphasized this approach and the use of private funds to act on RefugePoint's goals and priorities. RefugePoint's creativity and innovative approaches to resettlement and complementary pathways stand out in

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Zack Gross, RefugePoint

this field, as articulated by a UNHCR representative: “It's rare to see an organization that is both entrepreneurial and very principled. They are expanding in directions that make sense for their principles.” (Jackie Keegan, UNHCR) RefugePoint encourages deployed staff to be flexible and creative to meet the specific needs of the operations it supports, with an eye toward strengthening the system. “We don't restrict our staff to do certain work because we know that it will lead to more numbers. We encourage our staff to invest in building tools, procedures, and systems, even if we know that's not going to lead to a lot of numbers [of refugees assisted] right away. In the end, that will probably lead to a healthier system. We're comfortable with investing in those types of deployments.” (Zack Gross, RefugePoint) For example, RefugePoint has been forward-thinking on capacity-building, setting aside funding and encouraging its Experts to train partners and UNHCR staff on resettlement identification and referral policies and procedures, which is unique among deployment partners.

Some stakeholders interviewed felt RefugePoint had also played a role in expanding UNHCR's deployment scheme from a sole partner (ICMC) to multiple partners. As a U.S. Department of State Official put it: “UNHCR has for a very long time, as long as I can remember, had a deployment scheme where they provide funding to NGOs to supply them short-term staff... For a long time they had only one partner ... and I feel like RefugePoint may have influenced UNHCR to diversify the pool of NGOs that were participating in the deployment scheme.” RefugePoint staff described several examples of UNHCR reaching out to request partnerships for deployments, expanding RefugePoint's

initial deployments in Kenya to include other locations in Africa and leading RefugePoint to inspire other NGOs to pitch in. UNHCR staff interviewed also noted other factors that helped drive expansion of the deployment scheme to include other partners, notably the pressure to fill available resettlement slots.

Relevance for refugees

Stakeholders interviewed noted the importance of UNHCR's expanding deployment scheme in opening up resettlement support for refugees in new countries and locations, where such support had not previously existed or had not been widely available. Beyond expanding equitable access in global refugee resettlement, RefugePoint's involvement with UNHCR's deployment scheme also helped broaden the profile of the staff serving refugees to include professionals from the same regions of the world, including some with personal experiences of forced displacement. A UNHCR staff person noted the effect this has had: *"I find that because of the way they recruit people from the same region, it sends a strong message of empowerment and inclusivity... It is their comprehensive approach of*

looking at different aspects and implementing that in their programs that sets them apart." (Inge De Langhe, UNHCR)



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Attribution

Elizabeth Frank conducted and authored this evaluation. Patrick Guyer and Amy Slaughter served as editors and convenors of the evaluation.