

Transforming Refugee Response: RefugePoint's Impacts

Vol. 3: Building Networks of NGOs Engaged in Third Country Solutions

Quick summary: *RefugePoint has contributed to expanding access for refugees to third country solutions by being a lead contributor building networks of NGOs engaged in refugee resettlement and complementary pathways. These networks have led to increased collective capacity of the field, making access points to third country solutions available to more refugees in more locations.*

Systems change description

RefugePoint has contributed to expanding access for refugees to third country solutions² in part by being a lead contributor building networks of NGOs engaged in refugee resettlement and complementary pathways. These networks include the Third Country Solutions Identification and Referral Network (TIRN), the Global Family Reunification Network (FRUN), and the Equitable Resettlement Access Consortium (ERAC). These networks have fostered new relationships and collaborations between the stakeholders involved. Established in 2021, the TIRN brings together NGOs involved in identifying and referring refugees for resettlement and other third country solutions to share learning and resources and pursue joint policy and operational solutions. The FRUN was launched in 2020 to bring together key stakeholders, including NGOs, to promote and facilitate greater access to family reunification. ERAC is a three-year, U.S. Department of State-funded collaboration³ launched in 2022 to capacitate NGOs to submit refugee resettlement referrals directly to the U.S. government. RefugePoint sought to convene and engage other NGOs in third country solutions work from early in its existence. Early efforts to convene NGOs and build their capacity in targeted ways included creating and leading the NGO Referral Network in 2010 and the UNHCR-NGO Informal Network for Child Protection in Africa (2011-2012). What differentiates these newer networks are a marked expansion of the number of organizations involved, the use of dedicated federal funds for a sustained effort to capacitate new partners (in the case of ERAC), and/

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 [Third country solutions](#) are defined by UNHCR as "pathways for refugees to relocate from a State in which they have sought protection (host country) to a third State (receiving country)". They include [resettlement](#) and [complementary pathways](#) (e.g., labor, education, family reunification).

³ ERAC is a collaboration between RefugePoint, HIAS and the International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP).

or a broadening of focus from refugee resettlement to additional third country solutions.⁴

The expansion of networks reflects growing interest in, and is helping change mindsets about, the role of NGOs in identifying refugees for third country solutions. These newer networks have been successful in engaging new NGOs in this work. For example, ERAC has engaged 18 new organizations that have been approved or for whom approval was pending as of the time of writing for making direct referrals to the U.S. Both the TIRN and FRUN include organizations that have not been involved with resettlement referrals but have started to engage in complementary pathways, including labor mobility, education pathways, or family reunification.

Need for change

Prior to establishing these networks, there were very few NGOs engaged in case identification and referrals for third country solutions. Historically, these activities were seen as the sole purview of UNHCR and governments, which tended to be skeptical of the ability of NGOs to successfully manage this sensitive work with the proper safeguards. There were no formal coordination mechanisms for the few NGOs engaged in this work, making it difficult to share learning, build collective advocacy, and attract more NGOs to gather momentum. Many NGOs, including RefugePoint, considered that greater NGO engagement in this work could result in expanded and more equitable access to these solutions for refugees. Creating these networks of NGOs was a practical way to bring more of them into this work, build their capacity to do it well, and ultimately create more access for refugees to resettlement and other third country solutions.

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.⁵ The evaluation identified the following as the most important levers used by RefugePoint to help bring about a change in the system.

Convening partners and stakeholders: RefugePoint takes a collaborative approach, convening NGOs and other stakeholders, often working behind the scenes. The TIRN emphasizes improvement through collaboration, offering a forum where partners can be candid with each other and share best practices and information related to their work in third country solutions. It also serves as a landscape assessment forum where participants piece together their knowledge of gaps and populations in need. More generally, convening stakeholders has been a part of



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RefugePoint’s strategy for several years to build and improve systems. A partner described this: “*They’re really good coalition builders...they’re working on the system. It’s not about RefugePoint; it’s about these systems as a whole. And they do a really nice job of bringing others along and capacitating others, and building an ecosystem to do this work.*” (Becca Heller, IRAP)

Testing out new ideas: Over the years, RefugePoint has acquired a reputation for high quality direct services in resettlement referrals, which has built its standing to promote other NGOs doing similar work. This has been a gradual process, but RefugePoint staff have seen a shift in mindsets from their continuous promotion and interaction with others about NGO engagement in third country solutions. One staff member recalled the surprised reactions some stakeholders would voice upon hearing that NGOs were involved in this way: “*It’s kind of amazing how many times we would tell people that we’re doing this work, and have been for many years, and they would say, ‘that’s impossible; only UNHCR does that.’ It was really hard to get the message across and to convey that other NGOs could do it too.*” (Amy Slaughter, RefugePoint) Similarly, regarding family reunification, in partnership with UNHCR and IRAP, in 2019 RefugePoint began testing new approaches for reuniting children and youth at risk along the Central Mediterranean migration route with relatives in Europe. This helped spark the creation of the FRUN and the expansion of the approach through RefugePoint’s Family Reunification Initiative.

Building capacity of others in the sector: Capacity building is a key goal of these NGO networks RefugePoint has helped set up. This is visible in the aims of the TIRN, including sharing practices and improving

⁴ The TIRN focuses on all third country solutions and is facilitated through private funding. FRUN focuses on family reunification and each member funds their own participation. ERAC focuses on resettlement and is funded by the U.S. Department of State.

⁵ Meadows, D. (2015). “[Leverage points-places to intervene in a system.](#)”

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“I think RefugePoint has been a very critical partner in all of this. We wouldn’t have been able to stand up the network without RefugePoint...Having the two organizations together, bringing that policy systems perspective which, of course, RefugePoint also has a lot of expertise in, but with that operational practical view of things has enabled us to...lead really engaging conversations, and to draw those points of commonality and themes out of the meetings.”

Ania Kwadrans, Pathways International

operations across NGOs, providing thought leadership, and engaging in global discussions about third country solutions.⁶ RefugePoint also provides technical assistance directly to new organizations engaged in this work through funding, operational support and training,

all present in the ERAC program. RefugePoint draws on a long track record of providing capacity-building support to others in the sector before the launch of networks like the TIRN, FRUN, and ERAC. Earlier engagements involved organizations like Asylum Access, AMERA, St. Andrew’s Refugee Services, and IRAP, as well as co-hosting a resettlement training in Nairobi for NGOs from across Africa in 2009 with UNHCR and HIAS.

RefugePoint’s contribution

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,⁷ the evaluation found that RefugePoint has been a **lead contributor** in pushing for the establishment of NGO networks described in this case study, coordinating the approach, testing new approaches, and organizing with partners to advance shared goals, although other partners shared the work of setting up and sometimes co-leading each individual network. For example, RefugePoint co-founded and now co-leads the TIRN with Pathways International. It is a leading member of the FRUN and also serves as the FRUN Secretariat. RefugePoint is one of the leading organizations of the ERAC consortium, along with IRAP and HIAS. A co-leading partner of the TIRN described RefugePoint’s contribution as follows: “I think RefugePoint has been a very critical partner in all of this. We wouldn’t have been able to stand up the network without RefugePoint... Having the two organizations together, bringing that policy systems perspective which, of course, RefugePoint also has a lot of expertise in, but with that



Gada Wakodire, an Ethiopian refugee, sits with her two young daughters outside of their one-bedroom home in Nairobi, Kenya. Photo by Tobin Jones

⁶ The Third Country Solutions Identification and Referral Network’s aims include the following: a) “Allow civil society organizations acting as referral partners to connect, exchange practices and improve respective operations, increasing the overall quality and effectiveness of the front end of 3CS.” b) “Provide thought leadership to conceptualize, design, and develop policy and operational solutions for the front end of 3CS pathways.” c) “Publicly engage in relevant global fora, such as conferences.”

⁷ Coe, J., & Schlagen, R. (2019). “No Royal Road. Finding and Following the Natural Pathways in Advocacy Evaluation.” Center for Evaluation Innovation.

operational practical view of things has enabled us to... lead really engaging conversations, and to draw those points of commonality and themes out of the meetings.” (Ania Kwadrans, Pathways International)

These newer networks of NGOs build on RefugePoint's earlier work convening NGOs. In 2010, the agency established the NGO Referral Network with fifteen organizations participating. This forum aimed to share information and best practices among NGO members to support UNHCR resettlement efforts, expand access to resettlement for those who need it, maximize NGO referral quality, and capitalize on NGOs' abilities to improve refugee protection environments. RefugePoint also convened the UNHCR-NGO Informal Network for Child Protection in Africa (2011-2012), which focused on child protection as part of resettlement referrals. This network held virtual meetings, mapped gaps in capacity to complete Best Interest Determinations needed for resettlement across UNHCR Africa operations, met with UNHCR on ways to address gaps, and culminated in a conference on the topic in 2012.

Relevance for refugees

The work that RefugePoint and others have done over the years helped broaden access to third country

solutions, creating more opportunities for refugees to benefit from both resettlement and complementary pathways. An interest in complementary pathways rose after their inclusion in the Global Compact on Refugees and as the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program contracted significantly in 2017-2020,⁸ and the networks RefugePoint helped establish have further enabled the shift to expand third country solutions to include complementary pathways. In particular, the TIRN and FRUN enabled stakeholders to come together around third country solutions in new ways to support and promote the expansion of complementary pathways. These networks are continuing to engage key stakeholders on how to further expand opportunities for those in need to access third country solutions. A RefugePoint staff member described how RefugePoint and others were ready and able to innovate: *“It was complementary pathways in some ways that opened the door to the idea of greater and greater NGO involvement in third country solutions. I think that we, with partners, with TIRN, elsewhere, too, have managed to take advantage of that opportunity to normalize the idea of NGO engagement, not just in other pathways but in resettlement, too. It's all the work...for over a decade at RefugePoint that put us in a position to be able to do that.”* (Martin Anderson, RefugePoint)

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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.

⁸ See [Migration Policy Institute](#) for information on reductions in the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program.