Summary (1 para.)

The number of refugees resettled by national authorities does not meet the demand and need for resettlement. Although politics at the national level may make expansion of resettlement programs unlikely, cities may be willing and able to offer additional resettlement opportunities. Sponsoring cities could be paired with cities in countries of first asylum that are currently hosting large numbers of refugees. States may be willing to increase overall resettlement numbers if cities commit to funding placement and settlement costs. The Zolberg Institute on Migration and Mobility would be interested in working to support a Mayoral Forum initiative to develop and pilot a city-to-city refugee resettlement project.

Context:

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) leads the global refugee resettlement program, in partnership with 37 national governments that admit, and eventually grant permanent status to, a select number of refugees. On an annual basis, states determine the quota of their refugee admissions for the year, and assess the recommendations of caseloads for resettlement made by UNHCR. However, less than 1% of the world’s refugees benefit from the program, and the scope of resettlement services remained uncertain in 2017, given shifts in the United States’ level of involvement in the program.

Complementary models to this structure exist, and are gaining increased attention as the growing numbers of refugees in need of resettlement outpace resources of state-run programs. The Canada model is perhaps the foremost initiative to supplement the traditional resettlement structure. Since the late 1970s, the Canadian government has allowed private citizen groups to participate in its resettlement efforts, empowering individuals to provide the financial support and service provision required for a refugee’s first year in the country. In 2016, in collaboration with academic and institutional partners, Canada launched the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative (GRSI), an advocacy campaign to educate other countries on their framework. Leading academic experts are pushing the GRSI forward, including University of Ottawa’s Jennifer Bond. Investment by the Open Society Foundation, which has a substantial history of supporting research private sponsorship of refugee resettlement, has also been crucial to

the initiative. As Canada seeks to export their model, other nations have expanded their own community sponsorship programs as well, including Australia and New Zealand.

A city-to-city resettlement initiative represents another model, which combines elements of both national and private schemes: it would be program of public sponsorship but one that would not incur costs for the national treasury. In connecting urban areas hosting significant refugee populations with cities interested in resettling refugees, it would expand the overall number of refugees resettled globally. Costs would be absorbed entirely by the resettling city, and the city would equally be responsible for the provision of services for the refugee’s arrival and placement. Resettling cities would be required to follow the appropriate entry laws of their respective national agencies.

While new, the city-to-city resettlement model is not untested. In March 2016, the local governments of Athens and Barcelona agreed to coordinate a pilot plan that would relocate 100 refugees from camps in the Greek capital to the Spanish city.

Recommendations

The Mayoral Forum should support establishment and piloting of a city-to-city resettlement initiative. The below recommendations outline the proposed next steps necessary to move this initiative forward, and create a new mechanism for resettlement.

- **Adoption of Initiative:** The Mayoral Forum could endorse and announce the initiative and seek to build a coalition of core members interested in participating.

- **Identification of Cities:** The Mayoral Forum could provide a “clearinghouse” function, matching hosting and resettlement cities.

- **Research on National Laws:** Once cities have been determined, research is required on existing national laws and legal frameworks as related to refugees and immigration. City-to-city resettlement will need to be complementary to existing policies, and align with relevant screening and security procedures.

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Advocacy Strategies: National governments will need to be persuaded on allowing a new model of refugee resettlement, and advocacy strategies unique to each national context should be devised and implemented.

To discuss these steps at a more detailed level, the Zolberg Institute would be willing to convene representatives from interested cities in New York during Fall 2017. Further, should the Mayoral Forum require additional support, the Zolberg Institute would be pleased to provide advisory services, including the necessary research and advocacy consultations required for the initiative’s development.