



## **Working Group on Resettlement (webex)**

**Opening remarks 24.02.2021**

**Miriam Behrens, Swiss Refugee Council**

Thank you very much, Vincenzo Mascioli, for your kind introduction.

Dear Colleagues, dear ATCR Community,

A very warm welcome also from my side. My name is Miriam Behrens and I am the Director of the Swiss Refugee Council.

I hope you and your families are doing well in these challenging times; thank you so much for your interest and for joining this Workshop.

We are delighted to co-chair the ATCR this year, together with the State Secretariat for Migration, UNHCR and the Refugee Steering Group. As NGO focal point, we are fully committed to collaborating with all stakeholders, to represent and integrate the very dedicated NGO actors and to help strengthen refugee participation at this year's events. We are especially pleased to have the Refugee Steering Group on board for the first time to support and advise our planning of the various sessions. In the same spirit we have integrated an important number of presenters and moderators with lived refugee experience and are pleased to see refugees within various country delegations.

As many of you might not be familiar with the Swiss Refugee Council, let me kindly introduce our organization to you:

The Swiss Refugee Council is an umbrella organization. Our members are the various Swiss refugee and aid organizations that carry out the

operative work such as legal advice, integration or the accompaniment of resettlement refugees. Together we advocate for the right to protection from persecution and the expansion of legal pathways into Switzerland.

With regard to the ATCR we are now also setting up a national focal point to coordinate civil actors who deal with resettled refugees. This also includes refugee-led organizations.

As Vincenzo Mascioli, my colleague from the State Secretariat for Migration, already pointed out, the COVID-19 pandemic has drastically impacted global resettlement operations. Since last spring many selection missions had to be postponed or cancelled and departures for resettlement and complementary pathways almost came to a standstill. At the same time, due to the pandemic, refugees need access to durable solutions more urgently than ever. With the 2021 ATCR-cycle we would like to address these issues, enable the exchange of information on best practices and promote mutual learning on how best to cope with the pandemic. We are confident, that together we can strengthen capacities and find durable solutions to mitigate the effects of COVID on resettlement in order to ensure that the most vulnerable refugees find safe access to third-countries even or especially in these challenging times.

I hope you share our enthusiasm for the program for the following four days and wish you an interesting and inspiring meeting with many new ideas and new contacts for the way ahead.

I would like to use this opportunity to also thank the previous NGO focal points, especially the Canadian Council for refugees and Caritas Germany for their excellent handover and their help and support which enabled us to take on this co-chairmanship.

Thank you all for your kind attention. I now hand the floor to my colleague Joseph Youhana from the Refugee Steering Committee.