

## 1. What is refugee resettlement?

### ***Resettlement is a tool for the protection of refugees***

It is a process by which a refugee, who has fled his/her home country and found temporary shelter in another country, is settled further on – “re”settled – into a third country, where s/he will find permanent protection.

This means that refugees, who are resettled, have like other refugees, fled from persecution – be it by the state, civil war or militia, may it be because of their ethnicity, religion, gender or political views.

Resettlement becomes vital for these refugees because they cannot find adequate protection in the country to which they fled and also cannot return to their home country, as they would face persecution. Therefore they have to be settled onwards to a third country where they can stay permanently and be safe from persecution.

### ***Lack of protection in country of first asylum***

A lack of protection in the country of first asylum can be the result of a variety of factors:

- In some cases the country of first asylum does not offer any legal recognition of refugees, for example, if it has not ratified the Geneva Convention of 1951. This may mean that the refugees are not sent back to their home country, but kept under deplorable conditions, sometimes even locked up – and essentially expected to leave the country.
- Some countries of first asylum will not be able to offer permanent protection as they are organisationally or financially not in a position to do so.: Very often fairly poor countries host large number of refu-

gees. The governments of such countries often feel that they cannot allow refugees to settle permanently amongst the native population as this would put an additional strain on an already fragile infrastructure.

- In cases of persons fleeing armed conflict, host governments might feel that they are “inviting” the conflict into their country if they allow refugees fleeing from this conflict to settle permanently.
- Another factor contributing to a lack of safety might be conflicts within the refugee population, for example one group of refugees staying together in a camp might be in conflict with another group and make their lives intolerable. Very often the authorities of the country hosting the refugees or the administration of the camp (e.g. UNHCR) might not be in a position to stop such conflicts and can therefore not provide effective protection.

### ***Resettlement: a way out of a desperate, often protracted, situation***

In all of the cases described above, refugees are “stuck” in a situation – with no feasible option for further development where they are and no chance to return home. It is in such cases that resettlement becomes important. In the language of the UN Refugee Agency UNHCR the refugees find themselves in a “protracted” situation.

The reality of the life of millions of the world’s refugees is that there is no way out of these desperate situations – some of them have been living in the country of first asylum for in excess of a decade. For such refugees, resettlement is the only chance to truly rebuild their lives.

### ***What resettlement is NOT:***

Resettlement should not be confused with return or repatriation – which both happen (back) to the country of origin, either voluntarily or forced.

As outlined above, resettlement also is not replacing other forms of refugee protection such as asylum, but is complementary to it. However, the starting points of the processes are different. Resettlement is a programme through which states decide in advance whom they can help, selecting individuals whose protection they can guarantee after arrival. Contrary to popular myths, countries with resettlement programmes still accept asylum cases. Both resettlement and asylum can offer humanitarian protection and may form complementary elements in an overall refugee protection framework. Resettlement and asylum serve the same purpose: to protect refugees.

Resettlement offers a durable solution in protracted refugee situations and should be a tool for the managed arrival of refugees whose status is determined in advance of their travel.

Resettlement is not a tool of managing general migration, for example of migrant workers, but is specifically and exclusively aimed at the protection of refugees.

### ***The aims of resettlement***

There are three traditional and equal goals of resettlement: protection, provision of durable solutions, and sharing of responsibility with host countries. Protection and the provision of durable solutions are directly in the interest of the refugee who is resettled. While it is clear that resettlement will only directly help a limited number of refugees; it can,

in complex refugee situations, send a signal to the host country that other countries are willing to share the responsibility for the refugees. Resettlement can therefore also help those refugees who are urgently in need of protection in the region and will remain there, by making local integration more likely for them. Through this “strategic” use, resettlement operations help both the refugees who are resettled as well as those who remain in the region.

## 2. What are the different steps in resettlement?

### ***Determination of “protection need”***

The first step in resettling refugees is determining that the refugees in question are actually in need of resettlement; is there a “protection need”? First and foremost, this means that they are refugees according to UNHCR’s mandate and that they are not adequately protected in their current situation. It is, generally speaking, UNHCR which identifies that certain refugees/refugee groups are in need of protection and could best be protected through resettlement: UNHCR compiles an annual overview of resettlement needs or – particularly in more urgent cases – calls for emergency operations. Often UNHCR will establish that particular groups of refugees are, as a whole, in need of resettlement. The calls for resettlement offers are communicated to the member states of the UN.

### ***Selection: based on dossier or interview***

The countries accepting refugees for resettlement conduct a selection process. Countries are working with two methods of selecting refugees for resettlement: one is dossier-based, the other one interview-based – some countries work with a combination of the two. Increasingly, NGOs and local partners also play a role in the initial referral.

Dossier-based selection means that the decision for resettlement is undertaken exclusively on the basis of dossiers compiled by UNHCR. These dossiers have been compiled when UNHCR identified a refugee as needing resettlement. They include general information on the refugee and the specific protection needs. Selection through dossier can be quick, happen at almost any point in time and is relatively inexpensive, since no travel from the

future host country is involved in the selection process. However, as no individual interview is conducted, resettlement countries are less and less likely to accept refugees based on dossiers alone. The argument for selection missions is that they ensure that the national resettlement policy is correctly applied. Resettlement countries also often argue that only selection missions can really identify the needs for resettlement and the needs for integration after resettlement. It has also been argued that selection officers do develop personal knowledge of the situation in regions of origin, which is indispensable in making appropriate resettlement decisions.

The other option consists of resettlement countries sending selection missions to the protracted refugee situations or having staff located in the regions. Often those refugees invited for an interview have been identified on the basis of a UNHCR dossier. In some cases, NGOs or other local partners will have referred refugees for resettlement or refugees might – e.g. when they learnt about a selection mission coming to their refugee camp – even have come forward and applied themselves for resettlement. In any case, individual interviews give refugees the ability to make their own case for resettlement and allow the resettling countries to select cases based on their officials’ own judgment.

On the downside, a significant number of those refugees identified by UNHCR are regularly refused by selection missions. In any case, refugees understandably associate a lot of hope with their potential resettlement. Any negative decision – be it based on a dossier or on an interview – is very disappointing. There is even greater disappointment and sometimes suspicion if those who were suggested by UNHCR are not accepted for resettlement.

### ***Pre departure training and transfer***

Once a refugee has been selected his/her transfer will be prepared by the future hosting country, often in cooperation with UNHCR. In most resettlement countries, it is the International Organization for Migration (IOM) which organizes the practicalities of the transfer. The time between selection of a refugee (group) and their departure can be lengthy –from a few weeks to a few months. It is important to make productive use of this time, preparing refugees for their new life - in a variety of ways. This is often done in “pre-departure” training, which can include some general cultural orientation about the future host country or an initial language course.

The two main questions associated with the arrival of refugees in their resettlement country are basic immigration procedure and legal status on arrival. The status of resettled refugees on arrival determines the rights within the country and to travel documents. Resettled refugees are likely to have met broad refugee criteria of UNHCR mandate, but not necessarily to be refugees in line with the country’s interpretation of the 1951 refugee convention. It is however general practice in resettlement countries to issue convention travel documents or national identity documents and give resettled refugees a status similar to refugees recognized under the 1951 convention.

### ***Integration/starting anew***

After arrival in the host country, the rebuilding of lives begins. It is already important by whom resettling refugees are met on arrival, e.g. if a support NGO is present or if refugees from the same community can welcome the newly arrived. Arrival arrangements should also include the transportation of the refugees to either temporary or permanent housing.

More long-term and complex challenges lie ahead after the initial arrival: finding a job, permanent housing, new friends and a community. In most countries civil society plays an important part in this endeavour. The assistance provided by NGOs, churches and others - either as volunteers or as service providers - will often consist of the provision of social services, but civil society organizations also are important as a group of social interaction with the host society. They also serve as guides through the first phases of their new lives. Alongside welcoming groups of refugees, members of civil society often develop a more personal relationship with individual refugees or refugee families, befriending them and becoming mentors of their start into a new life.

### 3. Who is involved in resettling – and how can you contribute?

#### ***The refugees***

The central persons in any resettlement are those refugees whose life and safety is to be protected by resettlement. Often they have fled war, persecution and torture without finding adequate permanent protection. They need the chance to rebuild their lives.

#### ***What you can do...***

In most debates of our times, refugees are seen as a burden or a challenge. Making the story behind each individual visible and sympathising with refugees is therefore important. No matter whether refugees arrive through resettlement or they arrive by themselves asking for asylum, extending a hand is important. Befriending refugees and supporting them in overcoming their problems will help them to rebuild their lives.

#### ***UNHCR***

The United Nation's High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is the central UN agency concerned with the protection of refugees. Bound by the Geneva Convention of 1951 in the task to look for durable solutions for refugees, UNHCR is the UN agency championing the rights of refugees.

#### ***What you can do...***

UNHCR needs support to do its work. First and foremost UNHCR needs public opinion to support its mandate: to help refugees, based on their need for protection. UNHCR also needs financial support – an issue that needs to be raised in public debate with policy makers – also in your country. In some cases, UNHCR can be supported by drawing UNHCR's atten-

tion to refugees, who are in need of protection or might be in need of resettlement.

#### ***Countries of first asylum***

Countries of first asylum are providing a first safe haven for refugees. Often those countries are situated in the immediate neighbourhood of conflicts, which made the refugees flee. This means they are often already affected by the turmoil of problems in the region: politically, economically and socially. While it may seem disappointing that these countries do not open up possibilities for local refugee integration, they are indispensable in providing initial protection.

#### ***What you can do...***

Countries of first asylum need support and encouragement if they are to remain a first safe haven. You can advocate for them in your country: be it for financial support – here countries in Europe can play an important role. Resettlement in itself can be an important element of support: the fact that countries outside the region are supporting countries of first asylum by taking in the most vulnerable is important to signal that countries of first asylum are not left alone in their responsibility to protect refugees

#### ***Resettlement countries***

Resettling countries make decisions if, when and whom to resettle. They are therefore essential in determining if resettlement becomes an option for refugees to get out of misery. In addition, they can support countries of first asylum to keep an "open door" for refugees. They determine whether it is really the most vulnerable among those refugees who will benefit from resettlement.

### ***What you can do...***

Advocacy for resettlement is important: at the moment only seven out of 27 EU countries engage in resettlement and the total number of resettled refugees to Europe is small. Advocacy therefore in most cases needs to be the call for your country to commit itself to regular resettlement; in case your country already does resettle it is important to make sure that the quota, to which it has committed, is fulfilled or increased. It is important to get in touch with responsible government officials, members of parliament and media to explain why resettlement is important and how it works, and in particular how it has helped refugees. A point to highlight might be that resettlement should serve those most in need and that your country should see how it can use its particular competence (e.g. competence in dealing with torture trauma, medical needs, etc) to assist those most vulnerable.

### ***NGOs, churches and other civil society organisations***

In resettlement countries, civil society organisations play a major role: often they will be the ones responsible for the local integration of resettled refugees, helping them to navigate their way in their new homes. In countries such as Canada, NGOs and citizens initiatives actually “sponsor” refugees, i.e. they assume financial responsibility for their start into a new life. In countries of first asylum, civil society organisations are increasingly becoming important in referring cases, i.e. drawing the attention of UNHCR or resettlement countries to individuals or groups in need of protection through resettlement. In those countries not yet resettling civil society is proactive in the advocacy for resettlement.

### ***What you can do....***

Joining a civil society organisation will often help you to be more powerful in helping with resettlement. Together with others, you will be able to assist refugees in rebuilding their lives. In a group, you can become responsible for welcoming and hosting those newly arrived.

By joining a civil society organisation that supports resettlement you can start to become active in making a coordinated and strategic advocacy for resettlement. Getting your country to start resettlement of refugees can make a difference for those refugees most desperately in need of protection.

## 4. What is the specific role of EU countries in global refugee resettlement?

Europe is not currently playing a strong role amongst those countries active in the resettlement of refugees. Whilst the global number of resettled refugees reaches some 80,000-100,000 annually thanks to resettlement efforts of countries such as the USA or Canada, resettlement to EU member states barely reaches a total of 4,000 resettled refugees.

This is surprising, given that resettlement was very widespread in Europe until the early 1980s. A coordinated European effort on resettlement could today make a meaningful contribution to global protection of refugees.

### ***Current European resettlement countries***

The five Nordic countries Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Sweden, and Norway have over the last decades been together accepting between 2,000 and 3,000 persons for resettlement each year on the basis of a fixed quota – often among them persons with special needs, e.g. the need for long-term medical treatment – refugees, which other resettlement countries were often reluctant to accept.

Except for the Nordic countries, the Netherlands is the only EU country with a continuing annual commitment to resettlement over recent years. Other EU countries have recently started to accept refugees for resettlement, with the United Kingdom and Ireland committing to annual quotas in recent years.

### ***Europe's history in resettlement***

Refugee resettlement from and to Europe has been an important part of responding to the refugee crisis in Europe and globally in the decades after World War II. A substantial number of those millions which were dis-

placed as a result of the war were resettled to the Americas, but also Western Europe.

Refugees fleeing Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 as result of the Soviet invasions were resettled from countries including Austria and Yugoslavia, where they had found initial protection. In the 1970s, many European countries accepted refugees fleeing from dictatorships in other world regions - such as Uganda during the rule of Idi Amin and Chile after the military coup in 1973. The last substantial resettlement operations to Europe took place in the late 1970s/early 1980s when European countries accepted several ten thousands of those “boat people” fleeing from Vietnam. Some countries also offered resettlement to refugees from the wars in ex-Yugoslavia, though most countries in Europe only offered temporary protection.

### ***Recent encouraging developments across Europe...***

In a number of EU countries, discussions on refugee resettlement have been progressing in recent years. Most notably, in June 2007 Portugal committed to an annual quota of 30 resettled refugees. Romania has created a legal basis for resettlement to Romania and in addition offered to act as “transit hub” for emergency resettlement operations. Countries such as Belgium, the Czech Republic, France or Germany have repeatedly accepted emergency cases which were referred to them by UNHCR. Several EU member states have engaged in de facto resettlement operations, for example during the times of the wars in former Yugoslavia.

A number of other EU countries can be considered as emerging resettlement countries;

Hungary has, for example, created the legal provisions to allow resettlement. Other countries have signalled their willingness to respond positively to appeals of UNHCR on a continued basis. In several EU countries, such as Spain or Italy, proposals are being discussed which in the next years might turn their ad hoc quota into permanent quotas.

### ***...with potential added value for a European approach to resettlement***

As more and more EU countries are active or interested in becoming active in the resettlement of refugees, a coordinated policy on an EU level has been highlighted as one of the areas of closer cooperation between EU member states. Some stakeholders, including leading NGOs and academia, have argued that such cooperation would fill the missing part of a common European asylum policy. The European Commission has since 2000, in several policy documents, highlighted the potential of resettlement as an additional tool of refugee protection and argued in favour of coordination. A feasibility study commissioned by the European Commission in 2003 outlined the possibilities of developing a joint EU resettlement scheme.

Some of the possibilities outlined in the study and later policy discussions were:

- the possibility for different EU member states to conduct joint selection missions
- to have an EU institution act as a “clearing house” for making common EU pledges to UNHCR and for allocating resettled refugees to different EU countries

- to agree on common criteria for resettlement and – in the long run – on a common quota
- to identify how member states could contribute their specific competence, e.g. in assisting special needs cases

While these discussions have so far not led to any conclusions, it is obvious that a joint approach of EU member states would have a strong added value. This would not only be for those refugees resettled but also for the countries of first asylum and the credibility of the EU as an actor on global level.

### ***Why should Europe resettle more refugees?***

- 1) Resettlement can provide protection to those in greatest need: the most vulnerable and those in protracted refugee situations.
- 2) Resettlement is a way for Europe to demonstrate its solidarity and take its share of its responsibility in the provision of this durable solution to the world's refugees.
- 3) Resettlement provides access to Europe for refugees.
- 4) Resettlement provides the opportunity for good, co-ordinated and quality reception and integration programmes to be developed.
- 5) Resettlement is an important means of facilitating public understanding of all refugees, their plight and the situations they flee.



## **5. Refugee resettlement: the stories behind the policy**

While policy on resettlement is important, the real benefits of resettlement can be seen best by looking at some stories behind the policy and figures.

### **Arrival in the new home country...<sup>1</sup>**

One of the most recent groups of newly arrived refugees in the Netherlands were 47 Congolese and Burundese refugees who landed at Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport on 1st August 2007. They had lived in refugee camps in Tanzania, such as Kigoma and Nyarugusu, for almost 10 years.

Members of the group, which included women – some with babies – men and teenagers, had undergone great difficulties. "Life in the camps was very difficult; we had a lot of problems", Jonathan<sup>2</sup> explained. Local integration was not an option in Tanzania and these refugees also did not have any foreseeable prospects of voluntary repatriation. "I am very happy to be in the Netherlands," said Eduard, another refugee upon arrival.

The group of refugees had, upon the recommendation of UNHCR, been accepted for the Dutch resettlement programme. Their way out of misery started in April 2007 when a Dutch resettlement selection mission went to Tanzania to select candidates for resettlement. After being accepted the refugees could already learn about their new home: COA, the Dutch government's refugee reception agency, organised a cultural orientation course in Tanzania to familiarise them with the Netherlands and Dutch society. They watched a video on daily life in the Netherlands; many had practical questions about topics ranging from the weather to housing, from the use of washing machines to health care services, from cycling to access to work.

"It was useful because we learned about life and our rights in the Netherlands," remembered teenage boy Matthew, who attended the course. At the end of the training each participant received a certificate. After their arrival at Amsterdam airport, all refugees first transferred to the AZC Amersfoort, a reception centre where resettled refugees live until housing is allocated in a Dutch municipality.

In November, they will receive a formal identity card, a bank account and a house in a Dutch municipality. Even after moving to their own house, refugees will stay in touch: the Dutch government began placing refugees in groups based on two main criteria: the refugees have the same nationality and come from the same camp.

While rebuilding life will be complicated, the general mood was upbeat: "Now I am here," concludes Jonathan with a smile, before getting on the bus taking him to the reception centre, "The future will be good."

### **...and rebuilding lives**

From an interview with Samuel Nhialluak, Sudanese refugee resettled to Finland

Q.: How was your first contact with the Finnish community?

A.: Everybody was expecting us to come, but the meeting with the Finnish community was very difficult, first of all we did not know the language and they did not know ours. Few people spoke English and even them, I think, they were told not to speak English with us so we could learn the language quickly. In few days we had to know how to introduce ourselves, how to say thanks, how to greet during the morning, how to greet during the day and so on... We had to learn that quickly

because this was part of the daily relationship with other people and in this way we opened some kind of connection with these other people... The positive thing is that if they see that you are interested to learn the language they encourage you.

It was difficult but after all it was for our benefit, in fact, we learnt the language quickly and in few months, before the language courses started, we were able to introduce ourselves, to buy things by ourselves.

Q.: Do you consider yourself integrated into the Finnish society?

A.: Well, in a process of being integrated. For me integration is to find your own place in the society. You can feel part of the society when you understand how people live, their standard of life and their culture. At the same time a crucial point is how they can also understand how we think and what our culture is about. I see integration as a two-way process. In some places we have the "family friends", people whom you can spend time with: Women can learn what women do in Finland and the same happens for men. I think this is the best way for integration, learning from the daily life. Nevertheless it is something that should not be planned but it should be automatic. Unluckily, this does not happen everywhere.

Q.: What do you think about resettlement?

A: I would say that it is good to give to other people in need the opportunity to live another kind of life somewhere else, in a peaceful place. The kind of resettlement we have in Finland is a good one, because it is done by the authorities and officials and in this way

everybody is equal, everybody has the same privilege, although there are some differences if you are in the small or big cities.

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<sup>1</sup> based on a report of Ilse Griek for UNHCR News

<sup>2</sup> For reasons of privacy protection, the names have been changed

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