



Resettlement Newsletter

Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe

Volume III Issue II

March/April 2009

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For I was a stranger, and you welcomed me.

Matthew
25:35b



Welcome to the first group of Iraqi refugees resettled to Germany
(picture: reporters.be)

Resettlement to Europe: how sustainable is the progress made ?

Welcome the new volume of CCME' s Resettlement Newsletter

...once again we will keep you updated on news regarding resettlement towards the member states of the European Union and beyond.

This edition comes at a time when global economic crisis has taken its toll on states' willingness to commit to resettlement or to expand their national resettlement quota. However, positive developments in the European field must not be overlooked. The first Iraqi refugees have arrived in Germany, thus beginning to make the commitment of European states to resettle 10.000 vulnerable Iraqi refugees a reality. New EU Member States have emerged as European resettlement actors, with the Czech Republic resettling refugees from Burma and Romania setting up an Emergency Transit Centre.

CCME hopes that more European states will establish resettlement programmes as well as that the Council decision of November 2008 to resettle 10.000 refugees will constitute a step on the way to establishing a joint European Resettlement programme rather than remaining a "one-off" initiative.

In this edition, see comments about the UNHCR resettlement working group (p.5) as well as the course towards a European Resettlement Programme (p. 7), find information about Switzerland as a European resettlement actor (p.3-4) and learn about resettlement efforts in the new EU Member States (p 5,6) and the resettlement of the first Iraqi refugees in Germany (p. 1-2)

Enjoy the reading!

Best regards and wishing you a nice spring and blessed Easter time

Torsten Moritz & Lilian Tsourdi

Iraqi refugees leave Jordan, Syria in first resettlement to Germany

The first group of Iraqi refugees destined for Germany from Syria and Jordan left on March 19th on a specially chartered plane from Damascus. The 122 people were selected following a swift decision made by the German Interior Minister's conference in December 2008. Priority was given to refugees from persecuted minorities, vulnerable cases with specific medical needs, traumatized victims of persecution as well as female-headed households who have family in Germany.

Every family that was resettled on 19th March had faced persecution in Iraq in the past three years. Among those who left were a man who survived a kidnapping, a family targeted for their moderate religious views and a young mother who has been living alone in Syria for the past year after her husband was abducted and never heard of again. She will be reunited with her parents who are now living in Germany; they will help to take care of her young children.

(continued on page 2)

Iraqi refugees leave Jordan, Syria in first resettlement to Germany (cont.)

Germany was responding to a decision by the Council of the European Union on 27 November 2008 that encouraged the resettlement of up to 10.000 Iraqi refugees in 2009. The government is offering 2.500 places for Iraqi refugees – 2.000 from Syria and 500 from Jordan. UNHCR expressed appreciation of the speed of the response by the German government; with the first plane-load of refugees departing only three months after the decision was made by the German Interior Ministers Conference on 5th December. Some countries can take years to resettle refugees.

This is the first time Germany has initiated such a programme since the early 1980s, when Vietnamese boat people were resettled. Germany is joining 15 other countries that have offered resettlement to Iraqi refugees since 2003. UNHCR supports a humanitarian resettlement program which responds to the needs of

the most vulnerable individuals.

Germany is providing a very positive example, which UNHCR hopes will inspire other European countries to consider resettling Iraqi refugees during 2009. UNHCR estimates over 60.000 Iraqi refugees need resettlement from Iraq's neighboring countries, the majority in Syria and Jordan.

Last year 17.770 Iraqi refugees were resettled to third countries, mostly in the west. It is hoped a much larger number will be accepted and resettled this year.

There is huge pressure from the Iraqi refugee community for resettlement, as is seen every Tuesday morning when the UNHCR Damascus office conducts resettlement counseling sessions. For the past year, there have never been less than 2.000 refugees at these counseling days.

(Source: Ron Redmond UNHCR spokesman at UNHCR briefing of 20th March 2009)

First group of resettled Iraqi refugees arriving in Germany
(picture: reporters.be)



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.

(CCME, based on ECRE's "the way forward: towards a European resettlement programme")

Switzerland as a reliable resettlement partner?

By Simon Röthlisberger



FSPC Council President Thomas Wipf shows his support for resettlement in an asylum symposium in January 2009 (picture: SFH/Bernd Konrad).

Up to the middle of 1990s Switzerland accepted groups of refugees. A wide range of actors in migration policies have again put the topic on the political agenda. The Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches has also composed a statement on this. It has not yet been decided whether and when a reliable resettlement policy will again be adopted.

Between 1950 and 1995 Switzerland took part in the resettlement actions of UNHCR and accepted contingents of refugees. For example groups of refugees were accepted from Hungary, Tibet, Chile or in the 1990s from Somalia, Iraq, Iran, Vietnam and Bosnia Herzegovina. Sometimes hundreds of contingents of refugees a year were accepted.

In 1995 the wars in the Balkans rapidly increased the number of asylum-seekers in Switzerland and the Federal Council resolved to put a stop to the "refugee quota

("Kontingent") policy. Although the situation has clearly settled down since then, the existing refugee quota policy remains. Switzerland accepted small groups, thus at the end of 2008, 24 Iraqi refugees at the request of UNHCR. But against what background of asylum policy is the topic of resettlement to be seen?

The context of asylum policy in Switzerland

In Switzerland, time and again reference has been made to the "humanitarian tradition". Nevertheless the tougher laws on asylum and foreigners were clearly approved in 2006 in a national plebiscite. Only a year after the two laws came into force, the Federal Council is proposing a new revision which tightens them up in a partly effective, partly more symbolic way. For example, conscientious objectors are no longer to be regarded as refugees and merely receive provisional acceptance.

Because of the low numbers of asylum-seekers, in recent years the

possibilities of housing them have been drastically reduced and the asylum procedure has increasingly been moved to reception centres on the frontiers. The capacity for housing refugees has been set at an estimated 10,000 asylum-seekers per year. When there was recently a clear rise in asylum-seekers in the second half of 2008 this caused the authorities serious problems in housing them. Granted, in 2008 more than 50% more asylum seekers were expected than in the previous year, but the total number of them is still slightly under the average for the last eight years. Moreover we can start by assuming that the tense situation will relax in the course of 2009.

What are the arguments in favour of resettlement?

At the beginning of 2009 the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches (FSPC) published a document arguing in favour of resettlement. In it, among the debates of the time about the difficulty of housing asylum-seekers and the proposed tightening of the asylum law the real core question of the asylum policy was brought into the centre: what can be done to offer reliable protection for the persecuted?

Also taking up the preliminary work of the Churches Commission for Migrants, the FSPC sees the main arguments for the resumption and further development of the resettlement policy in Switzerland as follows (see http://www.sek-feps.ch/shop/product_info.php/info/p392_Zukunftsperspektive-f-r-Verfolgte.html)

1. Switzerland has a humanitarian tradition. Time and again the churches have spoken out on the humanitarian tradition and on human dignity, which is closely bound up with it: "Respect for the human dignity of every person, regardless of his or her race, language, religion,

UNHCR resettlement working group: global financial crisis - or global refugee crisis?

by Torsten Moritz

The bi-annual working group on resettlement met in Geneva 24-25 February for this year's first meeting. In the tradition of tri-partite meetings (including states, UNHCR and NGOs), the February working group is the one which NGOs are invited to attend.

The general mood seemed fairly gloomy: a number of countries had been or were reconsidering their quota due to problems related to the financial crisis. UNHCR itself was clear that its capacity for referring cases for resettlement would at best remain stable due to resource limits.

It was against this background that positive developments seemed to be almost overlooked: A general "tour de table" on the one hand signalled important progress with several new countries, such as the Czech Republic, having started resettlement programmes or, like Belgium or Germany, being newly involved in ad hoc resettlement operations. Mr Akoi Bazzie, one of the first Liberians refugees resettled to the UK, also contributed to the more upbeat moments of the meeting, sharing his story from how he was resettled and later on became a collaborator in the services of the UK Refugee Council

The ongoing discussion on "integration potential" as an element of identifying refugees for resettlement was deepened by an UNHCR discussion paper "Measuring resettlement outcomes by looking at integration indicators". A surprising observation during the discussion of the paper was that most resettlement countries – including those which place emphasis on integration potential criteria – had no mechanism in place to monitor integration (indicators) of resettled refugees. Given that most countries also underlined that it was not

planned to establish such monitoring mechanisms, one was left wondering if the debate on integration potential was happening out of concern about integration or for more propagandistic reasons.

The UK border agency as the working group chair had in consultation with UNHCR and the UK Refugee Council given substantial space to working group sessions, in which NGOs and governmental actors co-presented. Taking stock of existing good practice was at the heart of the session on labour market integration, while the session on vulnerable cases focused on refugees from Iraq.

A particular focus was on twinning as a means to involve new countries in resettlement. Presentations from members of the ECRE core group very much underlined the need for a "twinning a la carte", which would carefully map and respond to specific capacity building needs rather than doing a "copy and paste" exercise between only two twinning partners. A particular concern for governmental delegations seemed to be how twinning could be done with little resources and how it could help to do resettlement more cheaply. While a concern for cost efficiency is certainly legitimate, many NGO delegates were left wondering if a political commitment to resettlement without an appropriate financial commitment could be a good basis for high quality resettlement programmes.

Welcome reception by the UK representation in Geneva



Sudanese refugees evacuated from Iraq arrive in Romania

A group of 42 Sudanese refugees arrived in the Romanian city of Timisoara on 27th January after being evacuated from a makeshift camp in the desert in Iraq. The refugees, who have been provided with winter clothing, are staying in the new Emergency Transit Centre set up by the Romanian government, UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to provide a temporary haven for refugees pending final resettlement in a third country.

They are joining another group of Sudanese who arrived last December. A total of 138 Sudanese refugees are now in the Centre, including 40 children. They will stay in Timisoara until their applications for resettlement in the United States are processed.

The centre, the first of its kind in the world, has been used for refugees - like these ones- facing acute danger and in need of immediate evacuation.

In Iraq, the Sudanese refugees suffered abuse, blackmail, eviction and assault by militias following the 2003 downfall of the Saddam Hussein regime. A total of 17 Sudanese were killed between December 2004 and February 2005.

Because of this targeting, the refugees tried to flee Iraq but became stranded in the Al Anbar desert in the K-70 camp outside Al Rutbah town, some 75 km east of the Jordan-Iraq border. Conditions in the tented camp were very harsh, with desert sandstorms, soaring daytime temperatures and freezing weather at night.

(Source: UNHCR briefing notes of 28.1.2009)

Czech Republic is the Pioneer of Resettlement to Central Europe

"I am happy that my baby has the chance to start a new life in this safe and friendly place", said Angel, a young refugee woman, upon her arrival at Prague airport on Thursday 13th February.

Angel is one of 14 Myanmar refugees who have been transferred to the Czech Republic under the country's pilot programme on Resettlement. In Prague the groups will be reunited with 23 fellow refugees who have already been transferred last October.

There are eight countries in Europe which run full resettlement programmes. The first new EU Member State that has already started a pilot programme on resettlement is the Czech Republic," says UNHCR's Regional Representative for Central Europe, Gottfried Köfner. "We are promoting resettlement in these countries because it is an efficient way to provide protection to refugees and integrate them in new societies.

Over the past years, the annual number of asylum seekers in Europe has practically halved, from an average of 400.000 new arrivals in 2002 (in today's 27 EU Member States) to an average of 200.000 in the past three years.

In an attempt to prevent illegal migration, the EU has tightened its control of land and sea borders and pre-departure checks of air passengers so much that it has become very difficult for refugees as well, to gain access to the EU directly. "Europe is where the concept of asylum originated two thousand years ago," says Köfner. "Now that fewer and fewer refugees manage to arrive spontaneously, we need to introduce additional ways. Otherwise Europe is going to forfeit one of her finest humanitarian traditions, that of being a safe haven for the persecuted."

UNHCR is proactively promoting resettlement

In UNHCR's view, resettlement serves several purposes. It is a durable solution for those who are in need of international protection and a mechanism for international burden- and responsibility sharing. Traditional resettlement States are the United States, Canada, Australia and the Scandinavian countries.

In 2007 nearly 80.000 refugees were resettled worldwide, out of those less than 4.000 in Europe. Therefore, UNHCR has started to promote this concept proactively within all EU countries.

For the refugees from Myanmar, there was no other way out of Malaysian refugee camps than resettlement. "We are so happy that our ordeal is over after ten years," says Soloman, a middle-aged man who came with his wife and two sons. He is wrapped in a winter coat and, for the first time in his life, is bracing himself for temperatures below zero.

Among the new EU Member States, only the Czech Republic has embarked on a pilot resettlement scheme so far. In other Central European countries, UNHCR has started advocating for resettlement a year ago, organising conferences and facilitating twinning projects with experienced resettlement countries.

"Resettlement is a complex endeavour," says UNHCR resettlement expert Areti Sianni. "It encompasses legal, social, logistical, medical and psychosocial aspects. Starting from a screening process prior to the refugees' departure, and complex travel arrangements including the provision of travel documents, it is leading up to structured reception and integration programmes upon arrival.

The latter part is maybe the most

demanding for the new EU Member States and one of the reasons why most of them still shy away from commitments, but there is progress

Central Europe to follow Czech example soon

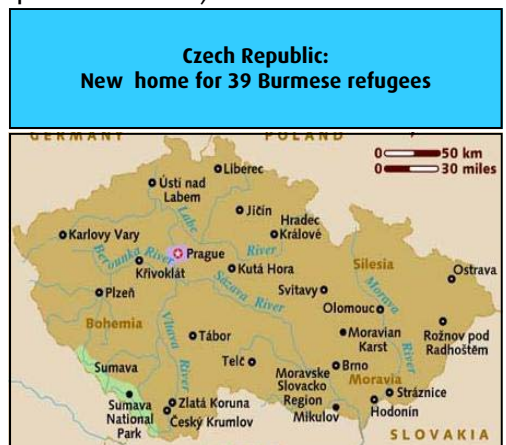
In Romania, an Evacuation Transit Centre has been established in Timisoara where refugees evacuated from dangerous situations can be accommodated for up to six months. During that period, UNHCR is seeking durable resettlement solutions for them. However, Romania is also interested to accept resettled refugees to its territory permanently and has adopted a legal framework to this end.

Hungary and Slovenia have introduced resettlement legislation and plan to establish governmental working groups. Slovakia intends to follow in 2010, while in Poland and Bulgaria UNHCR has initiated some discussions on resettlement

For the time being, the Czech Republic is still the pioneer of resettlement to Central Europe and the newly arrived refugees are happy to be here.

"I am eager to learn the language they speak here. Now we can start a new life," says Angel hugging her baby as she mounts the bus that is taking her to the refugee protection centre in Straz.

(source: Melita H. Sunjic, UNHCR Budapest 13.2.2009)



Towards a European Resettlement programme

By Annette Bombeke

This year, according to UNHCR, there will be approximately 560.000 people in need of resettlement. Last year European countries only made available 5.810 resettlement places, a mere 6% of the total of resettlement places made available worldwide. Currently nine European countries are running a formal resettlement programme, other states are starting on an ad hoc basis or have demonstrated interest.

It is clear that Europe can and should do more to resettle refugees. The past years, UNHCR and NGOs have done a lot to get more European countries to start a resettlement programme or increase already existing quota, like for instance the current CCME-run ASPIRE project. On a European level some steps have been taken as well. Last November, the Justice and Home Affairs Council decided that the EU should resettle 10.000 vulnerable Iraqis. This conclusion and the fact that a concrete number was mentioned were rather revolutionary in the history of JHA Council conclusions. Now it's up to the Member States to deliver on the conclusions and make sure that there will be a durable solution in Europe for the situation of those 10.000.



Furthermore the European Commission is currently drafting a proposal for a European Resettlement Programme. What would be the benefits of a European Resettlement programme (ERP)?

First of all, through increasing resettlement Europe can show its solidarity and take its share of its responsibility in the provision of this durable solution to the world's refugees. For States, taking part in an ERP could create more cost effectiveness and efficiency as a result of economies of scale, for instance joint missions would reduce the number of missions field operations must host. This can also help facilitate States who do not feel able to establish fully-fledged national resettlement programmes to offer some resettlement places. Although it is important that States carry part of the costs of resettlement, even in times of a financial crisis, there should also be a collective funding mechanism to support resettlement. For an ERP, this could usefully be a new separate European Refugee resettlement Fund, or a specific part of the existing ERF.

Of course it is key that the 'classic' concept of resettlement as elaborated by UNHCR is used for resettlement via an ERP. Resettlement should always be based on the protection needs of the person concerned and not on his or her expected ability to integrate well in the resettlement country. Also important is that the resettled person is offered a permanent legal status, so that after a long period of suffering without any hope the resettled person can finally start a new life without the fear of having to leave again. They should not be made subject to additional requirements on which status can be made conditional.

If different Member States take part in an ERP, there is also an opportunity for determining which state is best placed to resettle a specific group of refugees. An inventory of specialist competences of Member States in the area of recep-

tion of certain groups could be developed and used to identify which Member State is best placed to receive a certain caseload and also to encourage practical cooperation between Member States so that Member States lacking specialist competences can develop them over time. Emergency resettlement should also be part of an ERP, which could also result in cost-effectiveness in the case of dossier cases

NGOs play an important role in resettlement because they are involved in the different stages of the process, in regions of origin as well as in resettlement countries. The consistent use of partnerships with NGOs by resettlement countries around the world demonstrates that the expertise and experience of NGOs (international as well as European) in all different stages of the resettlement process is invaluable. A European Resettlement Programme therefore should involve NGOs where possible. Resettled refugees themselves are an oft-neglected partner in the resettlement process, although their experience makes them very well placed to support certain stages of the resettlement process. They should be given a role in the resettlement process, for instance with regard to managing expectations of resettled refugees.

The European Commission will present its proposal for a European Resettlement Programme this summer. Let's hope that the future European Resettlement Programme will play a significant role in making Europe a significant player on the world's resettlement stage.

(Annette Bombeke is Advocacy Officer at ECRE)



Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe

Commission des Eglises auprès des Migrants en Europe

Kommission der Kirchen für Migranten in Europa

EDITOR:

CCME

Rue Joseph II, 174

B-1000 Brussels

Belgium

Tel. +32 2 234 68 00; Fax +32 2 231 14 13

Email: info@ccme.be



CCME office (red building on the left) in front of the European Commission Headquarters (Berlaymont)

FAQ—frequently asked questions....

1) What is CCME?

CCME, the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe, is the ecumenical agency on migration and integration, refugees and asylum, and against racism and discrimination in Europe. CCME members are Anglican, Orthodox and Protestant Churches, diaconal agencies and Councils of Churches in presently 19 European countries. CCME is in the process of becoming a commission of the Conference of European Churches and cooperates with the World Council of Churches.

2) What is ASPIRE ?

The ASPIRE project ("Assessing and Strengthening Participation In refugee Resettlement to Europe") enhances knowledge and political debate in EU member states to engage in refugee resettlement - as an additional instrument of refugee protection.

It includes activities to

- Analyse in which member states debates suggest an openness towards resettlement
- Promote existing policies and best practice in these member states (through sharing of materials and knowledge)
- Bring governmental and non-governmental actors in member

states with a recent interest in resettlement into debate with one another on selected issues on resettlement

- Provide continued updated information on resettlement to non-specialised public which is generally interested in refugee protection
- Provide a forum of discussion and exchange for governmental actors, civil society actors and UNHCR to explore the role, structure and added value of a European resettlement scheme

3) What is Refugee Resettlement?

It's one of the 3 traditional durable solutions for refugees, along with the local integration in the country of asylum and repatriation. Basically, it's a transfer of refugees from their country of first asylum to a third country that has agreed to admit them with a long term or permanent resident status. Resettlement provides protection for refugees whose safety is immediately at risk and it is a tool of international protection in a context of burden sharing among states.

4) What Resettlement is not...

Resettlement is not the same as seeking refugee status through the asylum system, nor is it a more legal process for accessing asylum

rights and can never substitute a spontaneous request of asylum.. Resettlement is not synonymous with "Temporary protection" classifications.

Resettlement cannot become a system of profiling refugees in accordance to their nationality or religion in order to create more or less valuable categories of refugees. Resettlement is based exclusively on the protection needs of the refugees.

5) Which are the Resettlement countries?

The countries that traditionally host resettlement programs are : Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, and USA. Those countries are called the "traditional ones". Countries such as Argentina, Benin, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Chile, Iceland, Ireland, Portugal and UK have in recent years started programmes. Others, among them several EU member states, are currently considering or starting them...

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

General info on resettlement

<http://www.unhcr.org/protect/3bb2eadd6.html>

On the CCME project

<http://www.ccme.be/secretary/NEWS>



ERF-CA 2007

The ASPIRE project "Assessing and Strengthening Participation In refugee Resettlement to Europe" project is co-financed by the European Refugee Fund -Centralised Actions 2007 of the European Commission . The views expressed and information provided does not necessarily reflect the position of the European Commission.