

CCME Press Release of 19th May 2009

Refugee resettlement to Belgium: local actors ready, but political coordination needed

Round table in Brussels discusses local involvement in reception and integration

A debate on refugee resettlement to Belgium on 18th May 2009 brought together some 30 representatives of municipalities, political parties, the UN refugee agency UNHCR and civil society organisations from different parts of Belgium in Brussels.

The debate was the third of a series of debates on refugee resettlement, which the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) organises in 2009 with partners across the EU.

The round table, which was co-organised by the NGO Flemish Refugee Action, took place in anticipation of the arrival of a group of 50 resettled Iraqi refugees from Jordan and Syria in August/September this year. It in particular looked at the role of local actors in reception and integration of resettled refugees in Belgian society. Their role will be of particular importance not only for the group of Iraqis arriving in Belgium later this year, but also for future resettlement operations. The debate took also stock of the current planning for the arrival of these 50 resettled refugees, which has been declared a "pilot project" by the Belgian migration minister Turtelboom.

Representatives of the Swedish migration board and the local council of Bolton (UK) explained how a well-planned and adequately resourced partnership between central government, local authorities and NGOs in their long-year experience is key in their effort to empower resettled refugees to rebuild their life.

Representatives of local authorities and NGOs highlighted their eagerness to contribute experience and existing resources to assist the first group of resettled Iraqi refugees. Many also expressed hopes of a more continued Belgian engagement in refugee resettlement. All attendees however voiced a strong concern that there was so far no clarity about the structure and additional financing of the Belgian resettlement "pilot project" and the role of different actors in it. A plea to the Federal government for a clear policy was therefore formulated.

Pieter de Gryse, Director of Flemish Refugee action, summarised the discussions: "it is obvious that local authorities have a key role for the success of resettlement to Belgium. Today's debate shows that they have the potential to make it happen. However there still is a clear need for a coherent policy plan in Belgium. We cannot just use these 50 Iraqi refugees as a test case, but need to plan beforehand to empower them for a new start" he commented after the event.

Note to editors:

Refugee resettlement is the process by which refugees who have to flee their home country and find initial, but insufficient or temporary protection in another country, are resettled into a third country and find permanent protection and a durable, sustainable solution there. While around one hundred thousand refugees are annually resettled to the US, Canada and Australia, resettlement is since the 1960ies scarcely used in Europe: currently only eight EU member states carry out resettlement, resettling around 4.000 refugees annually. The Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) is since 2004 actively promoting resettlement as an additional tool for refugee protection in Europe.

For more information contact CCME at Tel. +32 2 2346808 or info@ccme.be



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The views expressed and information provided by the project and the partners involved do not necessarily reflect the point of view of the European Commission and do in no way fall under the responsibility of the European Commission.

The Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) is the ecumenical agency on migration and integration, asylum and refugees, and against racism and discrimination in Europe. Members are Anglican, Orthodox and Protestant Churches and Councils of Churches as well as church-related agencies across Europe. CCME formally cooperates with the Conference of European Churches and the World Council of Churches.

CCME- 174 Rue Joseph II – B-1000 Brussels

Tel: +32 2 234.68.00 - Fax: +32 2 231.14.13 - e-mail: info@ccme.be