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# The importance of legal counsel

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**At each stage of the resettlement process, the presence of counsel – legal advocates – can help refugees to present their complete cases efficiently and avoid unnecessary rejections. This provides benefits to decision makers as well.**

Legal advocates are particularly well suited to compile a refugee's narrative and explain why the facts of the individual's case demonstrate that the individual should be considered for resettlement. At each step of the resettlement process, legal advocates can assist and counsel individual refugees in how to present their narratives clearly – which also benefits those

officials, whether from the UN or resettlement states, making the decisions on refugees' cases. They can in addition provide input for ways to improve refugee processing.

The benefits of legal assistance in refugee status determination (RSD), the first step towards resettlement, are well established. Refugee advocates can operate in refugee

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communities and build trust with vulnerable refugees, encouraging them to disclose the narrative of the entire refugee claim in advance of adjudication in their case.

If a case moves forward to resettlement consideration, advocates can also help refugees to assemble supporting documentation, evidence and Country of Origin Information. In preparing for adjudications, legal representatives can help refugees to understand the information and documents that adjudicators need to decide their cases, leading to more efficient processing. Moreover, advocates can advise refugees on timelines and next steps. This also benefits adjudicators, since refugees without a clear sense of when they can expect further information or processing may request frequent updates. And by providing competent and qualified legal assistance, advocates can limit the number of those seeking to exploit or misguide refugees in their applications.

Finally, counsel can provide legal advice and personal reassurance to refugees, and a refugee who knows what to expect is less likely to find the process re-traumatizing. Highly vulnerable refugees may not be able to access UNHCR offices because of serious medical or safety concerns, and advocates who are active within refugee communities can identify and refer these cases for consideration of resettlement.

The resettlement state's processes may include complicated legal analysis. The assistance of counsel is crucial for highly vulnerable refugees, especially where in-person interviews are required. If an individual's case is rejected, counsel is then essential to preparing precise appeals, applying a client's facts to a set of legal criteria, and presenting evidence and arguments to support a refugee's credibility.

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