

Practical considerations for effective resettlement

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Certain essential elements of resettlement programming benefit both refugees and the states undertaking to receive them. IOM believes that this holds true regardless of the type of resettlement scheme, the destination country or the profile of the refugees being assisted.

Resettlement is a vital tool for international protection and a durable solution for some of the most vulnerable people in the world. Though not an option for the vast majority of refugees, resettlement gives real hope and a chance to begin life anew to many who would otherwise have neither home nor country to call their own.

The number of persons resettled annually is on the rise, yet the number of places being made available is vastly disproportionate to global needs. States are therefore increasingly considering other pathways to provide protection to refugees who have compelling needs for international protection. Beyond classic refugee resettlement, more states are interested in or are carrying out humanitarian admissions, private sponsorship and other options such as academic scholarships and labour mobility schemes.

Since 1951, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has worked closely with governments, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), civil society and other partners to prepare refugees to resettle and prepare states to receive them. While IOM supports the development of alternative pathways, it believes that all such schemes should not only provide and safeguard legal protection but also foster refugees' integration and economic participation in new societies, whatever the legal nature of the scheme.

On the basis of sixty-five years of experience with resettlement, IOM recommends exploration of two broad approaches: refugee-centric programming, and planning and preparation. Underpinning both is the ever-present need for close, regular consultation with all concerned, and strong, informed partnerships; resettlement is complex and resource-intensive and must involve the synchronised actions of many partners within and outside the state.

Refugee-centric programming

Successful resettlement programmes are refugee-centric and have protection as their main driver. Resettlement programming should include a range of pre-departure and post-arrival services, and be designed and implemented to support refugees and counterparts at every phase of the resettlement process. This means ensuring that refugees move in a safe and dignified manner and that they are empowered, well informed and properly prepared for third-country resettlement and integration into welcoming communities.

The need to involve, empower and prepare refugees applies whether states are resettling one hundred people or one hundred thousand people. Refugees are eager to learn as much as they can about the resettlement process and what awaits them in resettlement countries (those countries offering to resettle refugees) with or without the intervention of official resettlement actors. This means that people seeking to be resettled can and do misconstrue or pick up inaccurate information which may influence their decision to undertake resettlement. Providing refugees with accurate, objective information about the resettlement process and the country of destination can help refugees to participate actively in the process and make an informed decision about resettlement.

Planning and preparation

Careful programming before departure lays the foundation for successful integration. During the planning phase, resettlement countries should engage with refugee-hosting countries early on to gain their support for programme objectives and should consult with appropriate parties to set realistic time frames and to develop a predictable and manageable refugee departure and arrival

pipeline. Government officials in resettlement countries should coordinate closely with receiving communities to ensure that sufficient reception capacity is available.

At some point – and better earlier than later – all stakeholders will need to consider the needs and concerns of each refugee, their health and well-being, arrangements for their safe travel, and the prospect of their meaningful integration.

States need to ensure timely, high-quality processing of resettlement applications. Hallmarks of successful case-processing services include: adherence to standard operating procedures; strict confidentiality and data protection standards; multi-level quality assurance controls; and robust anti-fraud measures. Case processing should also include information sharing with relevant settlement parties to provide them with an accurate account of refugees' skills, capacities and desires, and potential contacts in the receiving communities. This information can help the resettlement agency place refugees in a location which offers a better chance of successfully integrating.

Health assessments in the pre-departure phase of resettlement are increasingly recognised as an important tool for public health promotion and disease prevention. Health checks prior to resettlement and addressing refugees' health needs early on can also be cost-effective in reducing the demand for domestic health or social services in the destination country. Health-related assistance before, during and after travel is a key requirement to ensuring a safe and dignified journey for refugees with medical conditions or other health needs. Referrals for additional investigations or stabilisation treatment prior to departure, special travel arrangements and the provision of medical escorts are all important components in mitigating risk during travel. The efficient, timely exchange of medical information also allows resettlement agencies to prepare adequately for the arrival of refugees and ensure continuity of care.

Pre-departure orientation goes far beyond simply sharing information about the receiving country; it prepares refugees by helping them to develop the skills and

attitudes they will need in order to succeed in their new environment. It also addresses the psychosocial well-being of refugees, taking into account the social, anthropological, cultural and psychological aspects of resettlement. Orientation must address the real concerns of participants, and emphasise cultural adaptation, inter-generational communication, gender roles, changing family dynamics and other challenges.

Innovative approaches to pre-departure orientation can be used to reinforce the linkages between refugees before they leave and people in receiving communities. For example, the use of video-conferencing before arrival can add a reassuring human touch to the process by introducing social workers or previously resettled refugees who can act as mentors for refugees going to that same country. It builds trust between people and can help in managing expectations of refugees and address any fears they may have. In addition, the time between selection and departure can best be used to improve refugees' prospects for labour market integration by building their confidence, preparing them for interviews, identifying transferable skills and encouraging them to pursue both language and vocational skills training after their arrival.

Ensuring the safe and dignified movement of refugees is central to any resettlement operation. Many refugees are new travellers with little, if any, experience of air travel, and they require close assistance to find their way through formal procedures in preparation for travel, during transit and upon arrival at their final destination. IOM's experience is that moving individuals or groups, especially from remote and sometimes dangerous locations, requires a large network of experienced operations staff attuned to the needs of vulnerable travellers in order to guide and monitor movements in real time from take-off to landing.

Conclusion

The resettlement community is at a watershed not only because an increasingly large number of refugees are in desperate need of a third country solution but also because

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the current international response is gravely inadequate. There is an urgent need for more reliable funding, more resettlement countries, larger and more predictable quotas and wider inclusion of beneficiaries.

IOM is pleased to see resettlement once again in the limelight. In the wake of the Leaders' Summit on Refugees in September 2016 and given current work to develop global compacts on refugees and migrants, IOM continues to urge states to exercise leadership with compassion, and generosity toward

refugees and vulnerable migrants in need of protection, including through resettlement.

Ultimately, resettlement is not about programming, processes or procedures; it is about providing sometimes life-saving but always life-changing international protection to fellow human beings in need. As resettlement practitioners, we need to do our best to help their lives change for the better.

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