

The ACTR/WGR
Newsletter

Issue 8, July 2012



**ACTR
WGR**
ANNUAL TRIPARTITE CONSULTATIONS
and WORKING GROUP ON RESETTLEMENT



One
refugee resettled
many lives
protected

Please note:

This APCR/WGR newsletter was compiled by the Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship, with welcome contributions from UNHCR, States and NGOs. The views in this publication do not necessarily represent those of the Australian Government or all of the newsletter contributors.

Welcome

Geneva, June 2012

We are pleased to welcome you to Issue number eight of our Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement (ATCR) Newsletter, the second one to be posted by the current Australian Chair.

This issue brings together contributions from a variety of resettlement actors – policy makers, researchers, practitioners, staffers, activists and refugees – to provide views and perspectives on their involvement with resettlement and how resettlement makes a fundamental difference to the lives of refugees.

Resettlement continues to bring new lives and hope to refugees the world over. The resettlement experience for refugees is a very personal one, and UNHCR is pleased to be a partner to bring about this solution for those who are eligible to benefit from it. A number of UNHCR staff contributed to this Newsletter, sharing their perspectives, namely, from Timisoara, Quito and Brussels. Their experience and insights in their respective fields of work stresses the importance of resettlement as a fundamental protection tool, whether through use of the Emergency Transit Centre, or out of a need to provide greater support to host governments which are bearing the burden of large numbers of refugees. The perspectives of colleagues from Brussels on UNHCR's joined efforts with IOM and ICMC to organize a successful European Union Skills Share Day, shows that there is always room for resettlement countries to learn and benefit from one another's resettlement models and experiences.

In addition, this also brings the news that our 2012 ATCR is approaching. UNHCR, the Australian Chair and the Australian NGO Focal Point have not been intimidated by the time zone difference between Geneva and Canberra to work closely together to bring you a comprehensive agenda, that flows from updates on the current priority situations for refugee resettlement, discussions on how to overcome new and persisting challenges to resettlement processing, to novelty ideas and practices on how to make resettlement effective through successful and sustainable integration in resettlement countries.

An innovative aspect brought by Australia to the ATCR this year is the possibility for States and NGOs to nominate refugees to participate at the ATCR as part of their official delegations, formalizing and recognizing the existing practice and fundamental contribution that refugees' voices continue to bring to this global forum. UNHCR believes that this will certainly improve and enhance the ability of the ATCR to genuinely serve as a global forum, where all those concerned with refugee resettlement can have a voice.

Last, we wish you a happy and enjoyable reading and look forward to seeing you soon in Geneva.

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NGO Focal Point's Reflections on Preparations for ATCR

The 2012 Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement (ATCR) will build on the ideas and information shared at the two Working Group on Resettlement (WGR) gatherings held in the past year - the discussions on pre-departure planning and issues in Geneva last October and on post-arrival support in Melbourne in February.

The Melbourne WGR was an important event for the Australian NGOs which played a role in welcoming the 65 delegates from 18 countries who visited Australia. It was the first opportunity for Australia to host a tripartite gathering of this kind and for Australian agencies to meet international counterparts to share knowledge on approaches to receiving resettled refugees. For those who came to Melbourne, I was pleased that the southern summer weather was as good as my bold predictions at the 2011 ATCR. However, I do apologise that the palm-fringed beaches I promoted were about 2500 km further away from the meeting venue than I might have led people to believe.

The NGO contribution to this year's ATCR will be significant, with 50 NGO representatives from 17 countries of resettlement and seven international NGOs registered to attend. At least 25 of them will be participating as presenters or chairs of breakout group session discussions. I am pleased that we will have a number of designated refugee representatives participating as well, providing greater opportunities for the perspectives of resettled refugees to be brought into our discussions.

To achieve greater international commitment to refugee resettlement, we need to advocate and promote dialogue on many levels with elected officials, governments and civil society. It was a great opportunity for me to attend the EU Resettlement Skills Share event in Brussels in May and to see the positive focus on the campaign to increase EU resettlement to 20,000 places by 2020.

The 2012 UNHCR NGO Consultations, to be held the week prior to ATCR, will devote more time than in previous years to discussing resettlement, as NGOs associated with the ATCR (led by Refugee Council USA) have worked together to increase the focus on resettlement at this important global gathering of NGOs working with refugees. We will hear briefly about both the EU event and the NGO Consultations at the ATCR.

I look forward to seeing NGO, government, UNHCR, IOM and other colleagues in Geneva for what is shaping up as another very valuable forum to discuss resettlement issues and to share ideas on programs and procedures.

Paul Power
Chief Executive Officer, Refugee Council of Australia
NGO Focal, 2011-12 ATCR-WGR

EU Resettlement Skills Share Day May 2012

On 14 and 15 May 2012, the first EU Resettlement Skills Share Day took place in Brussels. The EU Resettlement Skills Share Day marked a key moment in the development of the EU Resettlement Network, which is one of the main aims of the second joint IOM, ICMC and UNHCR project "Linking-In EU Resettlement".

The Skills Share Day brought together some 200 policy makers and practitioners in refugee resettlement from 26 countries, including the EU Commissioner and the Director General for Home Affairs, representatives from European governments as well as representatives from Australia, Japan, Thailand and the US, international organisations, regions, cities and NGOs. Refugees who were resettled from across the world to the EU played an important role in the conference, sharing their first-hand experience of this important protection tool and solution for tens of thousands of refugees every year. The EU Resettlement Skills Share Days offered a forum to share good practices and expertise, through both plenary sessions and smaller workshops. It also aimed to engage existing and new actors to contribute to the further development of the EU Resettlement Network.



Opening in plenary

The highlight of the Skills Share Days was the resettlement marketplace, an interactive event showcasing innovative resettlement practices from across the EU. Governments, municipalities, international organisations and NGOs presented good practices in thematic areas reflecting the different stages of the refugee journey, from identification and selection to reception and integration. In the marketplace, participants were invited to take part in activities such as mock resettlement interviews in the UNHCR tent, using the refugee identity everybody was given in the "travel document" made for the conference.

The participants could also participate in a resettlement interview by video-link with the Dutch government officials in The Hague, who have been doing resettlement by the video-link tool over the past years. Short cultural orientation sessions by an IOM bi-cultural trainer from Burma or a Swedish municipality were also on offer for the participants to take part in.



Tent at the Market Place

Representatives from NGOs and municipalities shared their good practices in the reception and integration of refugees at the local level and a Czech mayor offered a home-made drink to the public as he had done when he welcomed a Burmese family resettled to his town last year.



The Market Place



The Market Place - 3rd stage of refugee journey: reception and integration

The market place was rounded off by a film screening in which producers, directors and resettled refugees presented and discussed excerpts from different resettlement films. "Moving to Mars", deals with the resettlement of Burmese refugees from a camp in Thailand to Sheffield. "Coming soon: Refugees" addresses refugee resettlement to the Netherlands and stars refugees interviewing politicians, refugee-skeptics, as well as the High Commissioner for Refugees. The final film "Life on Hold" was shown in its entirety, as it is a short film starring a Somali minor waiting for resettlement in Shousha refugee camp on the Libyan-Tunisian border. On the second day of the event, expert workshops were held covering the essentials of resettlement, including creating welcoming communities for refugees, mobilising volunteers, preparing refugees for their new lives through cultural orientation training and on EU funding to support such activities.

A group of NGOs also launched the "Resettlement Saves Lives -2020 campaign" that aims for EU member states to offer 20,000 resettlement places every year by 2020. The campaign was launched together with the new EU Resettlement Network website on www.resettlement.eu. Currently, the website offers already information with regard to resettlement to the EU, the 2020 campaign, the Linking-In EU Resettlement project and in the coming weeks a short film, photos and presentations given at the EU Skills Share Days will be posted there as well. The website will be further developed over the next few months, and will play a central role in the Linking-In EU Resettlement project.

Covering 17 EU Member States, the Linking-In EU Resettlement project aims to strengthen the expertise of European practitioners in all stages of the resettlement and integration process by exchange of good practices and lessons learned. The project particularly focuses on the reception and integration of resettled refugees at the local level and on linking the pre-departure and post-arrival phases in order to make resettlement more effective and successful. In the longer term the project will develop an EU Resettlement Network of practitioners, policymakers and other resettlement stakeholders. The EU Resettlement Network enables national, regional and local governmental authorities, NGOs and civil society representatives to connect, share knowledge and exchange best practice in resettlement. The website will offer both a source of information and an online forum for practitioners to meet and exchange good practices.

In the coming weeks we will use the website to post a film of the EU Resettlement Skills Share Day, photos taken at the event as well as presentations given. We invite all of you to regularly visit the website to remain updated about the Linking-In Project.

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This article contributed by UNHCR, ICMC and IOM Brussels

Working Group on Resettlement – Melbourne – February 2012

Last February, the Working Group on Resettlement meeting in Melbourne focused specifically on the reception and integration of resettled refugees.

Government and NGO representatives from eighteen countries participated in a rich and inspiring program of site visits to a range of service providers – including to NGOs, refugee community groups, schools and a radio-station – and shared their observations of good practices and lessons learned during discussions in the plenary sessions.

Below are some of the delegates' impressions:

"I was particularly impressed by the leadership of the Young people from the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) during our site visit to Dandenong, Victoria. The young people we met had all been resettled from Refugee Camps, and had lived in Australia for some years. They spoke of their shared experiences stemming from the lack of information available to them pre-departure, as the majority of the cultural orientation had been delivered to their parents, along with the challenge of wanting to integrate and take on board many more aspects of Australian culture than their parents were perhaps comfortable with, which could often lead to inter-generational conflict. Despite these challenges the young people had formed their own support group and demonstrated a remarkable level of confidence, ambition and a willingness to embrace every opportunity open to them. I came away feeling incredibly inspired by each and every one of them."
(<http://www.cmy.net.au/>)

Andy Hewett, British Red Cross

"The initiative that drew my attention the most was the Stepping Stones Program, hosted by the Brotherhood of St Laurence. One of the reasons is that we, the Bulgarian Red Cross, are implementing similar programs aiming to support refugee initiative and self reliance. I liked the core component of this program - to assist the inclusion of refugee and migrant women in small business, where they could develop their skills and earn for the family. Such an initiative shows integration in action and positions them in society as an equal and reliable citizen of the host country." (<http://www.bsl.org.au/Services/Refugees-and-migrants/Settling-in-Australia>)

Dr Nadezhda Todorovska, Bulgarian Red Cross

"I was impressed with the Victoria Arab Social Services VASS, as they have gone beyond the logic of organising into refugee community groups serving only a small and limited constituency. Instead, VASS regrouped all ethnic and religious groups coming from 22 Arab countries into one organisation. The organisation is successfully implementing projects of social integration and welfare for a diverse constituency and has become an important partner for Federal, regional and local government and it plays an important role in shifting the patterns of discussion on young Australian of Arab background in media and the public."
(<http://www.vass.org.au/>)

Torsten Moritz, Christian Churches for Migrants in Europe

"One of the most interesting approaches I saw in Melbourne was the high rate of employment of former resettled refugees by the service providers engaged in the support of the settlement of refugees. The advantages of this concept could clearly be seen e.g. in the context of the so-called community guides, who help refugees to take the first steps in their new environment. The motivation of community guides or other employees with refugee background appears to be very high as they want to pay back what they have also received." (<http://www.ames.net.au/media/docs/Unsung%20Heroes.pdf>)

Christian Klos, Immigration Law Unit, Federal Ministry of Interior, Germany



Feedback from other delegates also indicated that the experience of the site visits had greatly enhanced their understanding of Australia's approaches to settlement and highlighted the level of collaboration between different levels of Government, NGOs, volunteers and communities in supporting refugee settlement. Many remarked that they were impressed by seeing first hand how the strong volunteerism traditions in Australia underpin settlement services and how beneficial it is to have former refugees assist in the settlement of new arrivals.

The comment was made that alongside the positive features, it had been valuable to see that Australia faced a number of challenges relating to settlement/integration common to all resettlement countries. It had been especially interesting for delegates to see some of the innovative approaches taken to address these challenges.

All agreed that the inclusion of site visits at the February WGR meeting had been very worthwhile and had stimulated thoughtful and meaningful discussions at the plenary sessions.

A study tour by delegates from Argentina and Romania to regional centres in Australia took place immediately following the Working Group on Resettlement meeting. This study tour was part of the twinning partnership between Australia and Argentina and Australia and Romania. Delegates were pleased to meet with a range of settlement service providers, case workers and former refugees and were impressed by the collaborative approach adopted by various levels of government, the service providers and the refugees themselves in the provision of settlement services.

Adapted from an article which appeared in the EU Resettlement Network Newsletter, March 2012, (<http://www.resettlement.eu/newsletter/newsletter-march-2012>), with permission to be used here.

Australia — Rural Employment Assistance Program

Supporting refugee settlement through business, government and community partnerships

In 2009 Australian NGO [ACCES Services Inc.](#) (ACCESS) received funding from the Australian Government to implement the Rural Employment Assistance Program (REAP). REAP is a pilot project aimed at relocating newly arrived migrants and refugees from those areas in south east Queensland experiencing high levels of unemployment (Logan City and South Brisbane) to rural areas of Queensland facing significant labour market shortages in particular industries (Biloela and Rockhampton).



As part of the REAP project, employer brokers are recruited to engage with employers in a skill or labour shortage industry, or a specific location, to broker solutions that meet employers' needs and to co-ordinate and target the efforts of Employment Services Providers to matching the needs of job seekers with the labour requirements of employers.

One such case is in Central Queensland's Banana Shire, namely the town of Biloela. Duncan Downie, general manager of the local Teys Australia abattoir, said that because of the mining boom, basically everyone in the area who was employable had already found work in the mining industry, so he had to employ foreign labour in order to keep his plant in operation.

Under the REAP project and through the combined efforts of Teys Australia and ACCES, a link was set up for a group of Burmese refugees to work full-time in Biloela. ACCES representative Ataus Samad visited the town numerous times before the arrival of the 39 Burmese people in order to educate the community about the newcomers.

He met with the council, schools, hospitals, the police, church groups and other community organisations, which as a result ensured a smooth integration of the arrivals. Mr Downie described the process as quite slow, with the workers arriving between July 11 and October 6, 2010. "They didn't want to just grab them and dump

them in the town and then run away to leave them fend for themselves," he said.

Group Human Resources Systems Manager of Teys, David Mathews, ensured the refugees were well prepared for their employment, giving presentations on the meat industry and the work they would be undertaking.

He said providing full-time work to the refugees meant they were able to save and buy cars, send their children to school and properly integrate into the community. Mr Mathews also said the work ethic of the group is 'beyond reproach.' "With training these people have saved the Biloela site, because if we did not have them then there could be questions about the viability of the plant going forward," he said.

Teys Australia is the largest single entity employer in Biloela, with a staff of more than 400, the economic impacts of its closure would have been disastrous to the community. Mr Mathews says the wages paid at Teys are in excess of \$35 million annually, most of which is spent in the Banana Shire.

The Burmese are mostly Christian and have been welcomed into the Biloela Baptist church, where local farmers, Jeff and Marie Austin have donated a patch of land on their property for the refugees to farm.



All photos supplied courtesy of Access Community Services Ltd



The REAP project has provided a successful model for relocating refugees from an area with high unemployment and limited job prospects to a rural location facing significant employee and skills shortages. It has been a success due to the selection process of participants, the well planned service model which has involved securing accommodation and employment and co-ordinating relevant services and agencies and the commitment and involvement of key staff from ACCES Services Inc.

Another key factor in the REAP Project's success was that it focused not only on providing job seekers with jobs in rural areas but also putting in place long term strategies that retain that target group and support them and their families. This involved organising school for dependants, secondary employment for workers and linking people into social and church networks so they feel accepted into the community.

Article contributed by Louise Olliff, Refugee Council of Australia.

Below is one of several articles which appeared in local newspapers regarding the settlement and employment of Burmese in Biloela, Australia.

Headline news

Finding a new home

Burmese refugees settle into Biloela lifestyle

By **RUSSEL GUSE**
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THE smiles on the faces of Burmese refugees Rinkimi Bithang and Lal Rin Mawi show that Biloela has become their home over the past six months.

The two young women moved here under a Rural Employment Assistance Project funded by the Federal Government.

Rinkimi and Lal Rin said they loved their jobs at Woolworths, which they said had helped them settle in to their new life in rural Queensland.

"It has been hard sometimes as English is not our first language," Lal Rin said.

"Everything is good compared to our country."

Lal Rin said they lived in a hut back in Burma.

Lal Rin works part time and is in Year 11 while Rinkimi works full time.

The two women said they have been welcomed to the town by wonderful residents.

"They're friendly, kind and caring," Rinkimi said.

"People have asked us where we are from."

Another of the refugees, Robinson Bithang, showed he had



NEW WAY OF LIFE: Burmese refugees Rinkimi Bithang, Rimmel Bithang and Lal Rin Mawi are glad to have made Biloela their home.

PHOTO: RUSSEL GUSE

made Biloela his home, with his wife having their second child, a son named Brandon Bithang, two weeks ago.

"We're very happy," Robinson said.

Robinson works night shifts at the meatworks, and he returned to work this week after time off helping his new arrival settle in.

He said he had found a lot of differences since moving here, but showed he was a very quick

learner.

"I say g'day to people," Robinson said.

He said he had received a lot of support from the Baptist Church, where many of the refugees go.

"I'd like to thank the Biloela people for their kindness," he said.

Robinson and his entire family, including his parents and sisters, escaped Burma's oppressive military regime, flee-

ing across the border to India.

Robinson and his family spent five years in India, applying through the United Nations High Commission to settle in Australia as refugees.

The family had to wait a year to hear they could start a new life in Australia, but Robinson had to leave his pregnant wife Zahau Mawi in India.

Robinson lived in Logan for almost two years before Zahau and his 15-month-old daughter Jennet Roluahmawi joined him.

REAP co-ordinator Ataus Sama from Access said 35 Burmese people had relocated to Biloela.

Access director of economic participation and development, Michael Krafft, said the future of REAP would be dependent on funding applications submitted to the Federal Government to continue the project for another year.

He said they were working with three more families to move to Biloela.

"Given the overwhelming positive response from the Biloela community, I envisage that word of mouth will encourage more families to relocate," Mr Krafft said.

Australia's Twinning partnerships with Romania and Argentina

At the July 2011 APCR meeting in Geneva, the Australian Government entered into twinning arrangements with Romania and Argentina.

Linking established resettlement states such as Australia with emerging resettlement countries is strongly supported by UNHCR, and serves to reinforce UNHCR's global strategic objectives, as well as providing learning opportunities for both partners.

For the first stage of Australia's twinning program with Romania and Argentina, two government and one NGO representative from each country were funded for travel to Australia to attend the February 2012 WGR Melbourne meeting and associated site visits. This was followed by a three-day study tour to the regional cities of Coffs Harbour (for the Romanian delegation) and Wagga Wagga (for the Argentinian delegation).

In Wagga Wagga, the Argentinian delegates met with the service provider contracted by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship to deliver services to refugees settling in the region. They also met with other settlement stakeholders more broadly and, importantly, with resettled refugees themselves.

In a visit to a local meatworks facility, delegates observed an excellent example of how the government and private enterprise work together. Resettled refugees are proving to be a vital source of labour for the meatworks, and for their part, the refugees have access to sustainable employment and skills development from a supportive employer. Providing secure employment opportunities for refugees is a key challenge for all resettlement states and is an important factor in the integration process. Employment for refugees is also an important part of maintaining public support for refugee settlement and helps refugees become active members of their new communities.

The delegates observed many other critical settlement processes in action – including health care programs, English language training, the preparation of an on-arrival home, and visited community meeting areas where established refugee communities can meet and support new arrivals.

The visit to Wagga Wagga provided a good example of how successful settlement in regional centres can be assisted by the interest and involvement of a very broad spectrum of government, non government and community organisations.

The Romanian delegates' tour of refugee settlement in Coffs Harbour was also interesting. The department has been settling refugees in this regional centre for several years. There are now a number of established communities – Burmese being the most recent.

The service provider in Coffs Harbour arranged for the delegates to experience first hand what it feels like to arrive in Australia as a refugee! The delegates were greeted at the airport by their "caseworker", who held up welcome signs in Romanian. They were taken to their "short-term accommodation" and provided with further orientation – for example, how to use a stove, where rubbish should be kept and so on. They were then taken to a bank and to welfare and health service agencies, where new arrivals would normally register to receive services. They also attended English classes that are provided to all refugees and migrants.



The representatives from both delegations experienced how the various tiers of Australian government work together in a case-management approach to resettlement. Delegates also saw how government and NGO service providers work as partners to ensure refugees receive the best possible service and settlement outcomes.

After their trip to the regional centres, the two groups then came together in Sydney for a very positive report-back session, before departing for their respective countries.

The second stage of the twinning process will see Australian government and NGO representatives travel to Romania and Argentina in late June 2012 to conduct consultations and training with Romanian and Argentinian colleagues on issues such as case management, working with NGOs, effective partnerships and with volunteers.

We welcome this opportunity to share some of our unique settlement programs with our twinning partners and to also learn more about the programs offered in Romania and Argentina.

France — Listening to resettled refugees

Terre D'Asile

Resettlement needs as estimated by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have increased dramatically in recent years, from 54,000 people in 2006 to 805,000 in 2011. This steady increase in demand imposes an ever greater commitment on the part of States. It is in this context that in 2008, France joined the list of new resettlement countries. Based on sound expertise in the hosting and integration of newly arrived populations, France terre d'asile has been running the "Resettlement Integration Network" project since 2010. The project aims to accommodate and support these new populations, whose characteristics are more particular than those of traditionally welcomed refugees, on their pathway to self-sufficiency.

It is against this background that in December 2011, a new initiative brought together resettled refugees currently or previously receiving assistance through the project in order to share their experiences of the integration process and discuss the challenges encountered and ways to overcome them. The meeting, entitled "Listening to resettled refugees: accounts of the integration process in France," was held at the town hall of the 10th arrondissement of Paris and brought together 32 project beneficiaries.

Challenges in accessing housing and employment

In discussing their experiences, participants noted in particular the barriers to accessing housing and the long waiting times. A resettled refugee from Uzbekistan stated: "It took us ten months to find housing. We did not have jobs, but the prefecture had to take into account the enrolment of my daughters at the Ecole des Beaux Arts." In this case, access to housing was facilitated because firstly, the two girls needed to be close to their university, and in addition, they were receiving

scholarships, which ensured a minimum of income for the family. Today in the Parisian region, having a job is becoming a precondition for access to social housing. Referring to the situation of a resettled refugee with whom she worked, a social worker said: "Having a job and being the head of the family allowed him to access housing much faster than other families who also lodged an application at the same place but who, without employment or an exemption from employment, still have nowhere to live."

However, the job search is often an obstacle course. Having raised the economic situation and its impact on the labour market, a number of participants noted the problem of over-qualification, but also the burdens and impasses of the French administrative system that discourage many of them initially. Some well-qualified people therefore accept positions that do not match their skills. Others fail to find a job despite their training and youth, as Mrs K. explained, talking about her twenty-five year old son: "He can either get a job off the books, or he gets nothing. And we want a job that is above board. This means that getting that first job in France is a nightmare. I don't know what to do. It's a vicious circle: if we don't work, we won't get public housing."

Faced with the prohibitive rental prices of the private market and the saturation of the public market in the Parisian region, some families have the choice of moving to the provinces. A resettled refugee supported through the program in Paris said: "My family is too large to find two apartments in the Parisian region. So to facilitate living together, we decided to go to Rouen." Pointing out that "in Rouen, the wait for social housing is a maximum of six months, while in Paris, it can exceed ten years," the social worker for this family can only agree with the strategy: "The children's education and quality of

life will also be easier than in Paris."

Integration – a personal investment

A beneficiary of the project also explained that "in order to integrate into France, you have to forget what you lost in your home country – you have come here to rebuild your life, and to achieve this, you have to learn the language, you have to study, and most of all you can't stand around doing nothing. You have to make an effort." Thus, issuing from the discussions, the examples of best practice came from the beneficiaries themselves, who repeatedly noted the need to invest personally in each of the integration processes offered by the social workers, in line with the pathways to self-sufficiency developed in partnership with the families.

Welcoming the families' commitment to the integration process, the coordinator of the Resettlement Integration Network concluded the first day of discussions by noting: "We have encountered a lot of challenges and problems, but we have also seen through today's accounts that there are many positive outcomes, concrete results, and that in persevering and being patient ... results are visible on the horizon and the prospects are encouraging." This demonstrates an optimistic outlook for the future of the project and for the families supported through the Network.

À l'écoute des réfugiés réinstallés

Les besoins de réinstallation estimés par le Haut Commissariat des Nations unies pour les réfugiés (HCR) ont considérablement augmenté ces dernières années, passant de 54 000 personnes en 2006 à 805 000 en 2011. Cette augmentation constante demande un engagement toujours plus important de la part des États. C'est dans ce contexte qu'en 2008, la France est venue s'ajouter à la liste des nouveaux pays de réinstallation. Se fondant sur une expertise solide en matière d'accueil et d'intégration des populations primo-arrivantes, France terre d'asile conduit depuis 2010 un projet intitulé " Réseau pour l'intégration des réinstallés " visant à héberger et accompagner dans leur parcours d'autonomisation ce nouveau public qui présente des caractéristiques encore plus spécifiques que celles des Réfugié traditionnellement accueillis.

C'est dans ce cadre qu'en décembre 2011, une initiative inédite a permis de réunir des réfugiés réinstallés bénéficiant ou ayant bénéficié dudit projet afin de témoigner de leurs parcours d'intégration et d'échanger sur les difficultés rencontrées et les moyens de les dépasser. La rencontre intitulée " À l'écoute des réfugiés réinstallés : recueil de témoignages sur des parcours d'intégration en France " s'est tenue à la mairie du 10^e arrondissement de Paris et a rassemblé 32 bénéficiaires du projet.

Les difficultés de l'accès au logement et à l'emploi

Au travers de leurs expériences, les participants ont notamment discuté des entraves à l'accès au logement et de la longueur des délais d'attente. Un réinstallé originaire d'Ouzbékistan témoigne ainsi : " Nous avons mis dix mois pour obtenir un logement. Nous n'avions pas de travail mais la préfecture a dû prendre en compte l'inscription de mes filles aux Beaux Arts. " Dans

ce cas précis, l'accès au logement a été facilité car, d'une part les deux filles avaient besoin d'être proches de leur université, d'autres part, elles bénéficiaient de bourses, permettant d'assurer un revenu minimum à la famille. Aujourd'hui, en Île-de-France, l'occupation d'un emploi tend à devenir une condition d'accès au logement social. En évoquant la situation d'un réinstallé qu'elle a accompagné, une intervenante sociale affirme: " Le fait d'avoir un emploi et d'être un chef de famille lui a permis d'accéder à un logement beaucoup plus rapidement que d'autres familles qui ont également déposé une demande au même endroit mais qui, n'ayant ni emploi ni dispense d'emploi, n'ont toujours pas de logement. "

Toutefois, la recherche d'emploi constitue souvent un véritable parcours du combattant. Après avoir évoqué la conjoncture économique et ses conséquences sur le marché du travail, plusieurs participants sont revenues sur la notion de déclassement professionnel, mais aussi sur les lourdeurs et blocages de l'administration française qui découragent beaucoup d'entre eux au départ. Certaines personnes, qualifiées, acceptent ainsi des postes ne correspondant pas à leurs compétences. D'autres ne parviennent pas à trouver un emploi malgré leur formation et leur jeune âge comme l'expliquait Madame K. au sujet de son fils âgé de vingt-cinq ans: " Ou bien il trouve au noir, ou bien il ne trouve pas. Et nous souhaitons un emploi qui soit déclaré. Cela signifie que le premier emploi en France, c'est un cauchemar. Je ne sais pas quoi faire. C'est un cercle vicieux : si nous ne travaillons pas, nous ne trouverons pas de logement social. "

Face aux loyers réhabilités du parc privé et à la saturation du parc public sur la région Île-de-France, certaines familles ont le choix de la mobilité vers la province. Un réfugié réinstallé pris en charge sur Paris confie ainsi : " Ma famille est trop élargie pour trouver deux appartements en Île-de-France. Donc pour faciliter leur emménagement, nous avons décidé de partir à Rouen. "

Soulignant qu'" à Rouen, le délai d'attente pour le logement social est de six mois maximum alors qu'à Paris, il peut dépasser dix ans ", l'intervenante sociale chargée d'accompagner le ménage ne peut que conforter ce projet : " Quant à l'éducation des enfants et la qualité de vie, ce sera également plus facile qu'à Paris. "

L'intégration, un investissement personnel

Un bénéficiaire du projet explique par ailleurs que " pour pouvoir s'intégrer en France, il faut oublier ce que vous avez perdu dans votre pays d'origine, vous êtes venus ici pour reconstruire votre vie, et pour arriver à cela, il faut apprendre la langue, faire des études et ne surtout pas rester les bras croisés. Il faut faire des efforts ". Ainsi, au fil de la discussion, les bonnes pratiques ont émergé des bénéficiaires eux-mêmes, qui n'ont cessé de rappeler la nécessité de s'investir personnellement dans chacune des démarches d'intégration proposées par les intervenants sociaux, conformément au projet d'accompagnement à l'autonomie élaboré conjointement avec les familles.

Saluant l'engagement des familles dans le parcours d'intégration, la coordinatrice du " Réseau pour l'intégration des réinstallés " s'est félicitée de cette première journée de témoignages en concluant : " Nous avons abordé beaucoup de difficultés et de problèmes, mais nous avons également vu à travers les témoignages d'aujourd'hui qu'il existe beaucoup d'issues positives, de résultats concrets et qu'en persévérant et en étant patient...les résultats se profilent à l'horizon et les perspectives sont encourageantes. " Une belle leçon d'optimisme quant à l'avenir du projet et celui des familles prises en charge au sein du Réseau.

Scoping Mission to Ecuador

Immigration New Zealand participated in a scoping/familiarisation mission to Ecuador from 16-19 April 2012. There were participants from ACNUR (i.e. UNHCR) Ecuador who hosted and facilitated the mission, the Swedish Migration Board, the Swedish Embassy Bogota and the Canadian Embassy Bogota. The purpose of the scoping mission was to discuss the asylum/protection environment in Ecuador, to meet with refugees, and implementing partners to see what services they offer to refugees, and to learn from the refugees what challenges they face to enable resettlement countries to respond appropriately to the needs of the refugees being resettled to their respective countries.

The scoping mission came about as a result of work done at the ATCR in July 2011 and at the WGR in October 2011 where the UNHCR proposed the establishment of an informal information-sharing group on the Colombian situation to promote as a priority the strategic use of resettlement for Colombians. New Zealand and Canada agreed to co-chair this network information-sharing group and facilitate the information flow by electronic means as well as meeting in the margins at the ATCR and WGR in Geneva.

Between the years 2003-2012, the main countries which have resettled Colombian refugees from Ecuador are: Canada (1436 people), Sweden (527), USA (462), Brazil (328), The Netherlands (157), and a number of other countries who have accepted smaller caseloads. New Zealand has been resettling Colombian refugees from Ecuador since 2007. The total number of Colombian refugees resettled in New Zealand is 309. Sweden informed the delegation that they had ceased resettling Colombian refugees from Ecuador in 2006. However, they initiated the scoping mission to Ecuador to gather information to enable them to become familiar with the protection environment. They plan to recommence in late 2012 the resettlement of Colombian refugees from Ecuador. They will consider a case load of approximately 100 individuals.

The scoping mission enabled delegates to learn more of the protection environment in Ecuador. ACNUR stated that Ecuador hosts the largest number of refugees in Latin America, and approximately 98 percent of the recognised refugees are Colombian citizens who fled their country over the last few years due to the internal conflict. Approximately 60 percent of the refugees live in urban areas and 40 percent in rural areas. To gather a robust impression of the asylum conditions in Ecuador, the scoping mission delegates travelled to Quito, Lago Agrio and Esmeraldas. In these locations, visits took place to ACNUR offices where comprehensive information was shared about the asylum conditions in each region, to refugee's homes, to a Women's federation/shelter, to a Women's Centre, to newly arrived asylum seekers, to a fishing community, to the Esmeralda Ombudsman, and the Directorate for Refugees, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Refugees reported that they encountered many safety issues due to the Colombian conflict spilling over the border. The scoping mission delegates visited refugees who live in close proximity of the border. They have no choice but to reside there as they cannot afford to rent land to farm in any other region. Roughly 48 percent of the refugees in Ecuador are women – female heads of households. Many young children remain at home alone when their parent[s] go out to work and are thus vulnerable to exploitation and/or gender based violence. Many of the refugees reported to the delegates they face much discrimination due to their gender. Discrimination against Colombians is generally a problem and may result in unequal access to employment, health care, education and legal discourse; Afro-Colombians face further discrimination and have more difficulties than other groups. Additionally, despite having free access to all public schools, refugee children often do not have the opportunity to study due to the fact that limited school spaces are given to Ecuadorian children. The Directorate for Refugees, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stated that approximately 60 percent of the Colombian refugees do not have primary education and are

pre-illiterate. Capacity for integration is therefore limited.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported on the 2009-2010 enhanced registration process which allowed large numbers of refugees to make themselves visible and register with the government. This process is no longer taking place, and asylum seekers and ACNUR report that the refugees are not financially able to travel to the Directorate for Refugees Offices to register, and lack adequate documentation to pass through military and police check points while commuting. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported that they do not see the situation in Colombia improving soon and there will continue to be large numbers of people fleeing Colombia due to the internal conflict. ACNUR estimate that approximately 1,500 refugees entered Ecuador every month during 2010 and 2011.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and ACNUR state that approximately 155,000 asylum seekers are registered in Ecuador and approximately 55,000 are recognised; of these 28,000 were recognised through the enhanced registration process which was completed in March 2010 (ran for one year).

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported a lack of resources to cope with the large flow of refugees crossing the border to Ecuador. They have limited staffing capacity and cannot adequately fund increases to the protection space within Ecuador. There are many asylum challenges in Ecuador and the majority of refugees resettled to third countries have physical protection needs and/or are women at risk cases. In 2011, ACNUR reported that Colombian refugees located in Ecuador departed to nine resettlement countries: Canada (202 individuals), New Zealand (118 individuals), USA (23 individuals), Brazil (20 individuals), Chile (10 individuals), Paraguay (9 individuals), Argentina (8 individuals), Uruguay (4 individuals) and Sweden (3 individuals).

[Article & photos contributed by Karen Read, Immigration New Zealand and Andrew Lockhart, Refugee & Protection, Department of Labour, New Zealand.](#)

Scoping Mission to Ecuador



Kindergarten - Esmeraldas



Visit to the riverside community Lago Agrio



Women's Federation – Lago Agrio



Fishing Community – Esmerelda's area

When safety isn't enough: local integration challenges in Ecuador

Contributed by UNHCR Ecuador

"I am grateful to this country for taking us in, and I am grateful that my children don't have to suffer the violence and danger of Colombia. But it is hard here. After five years we have nothing, nothing at all, not even a bed to sleep on. No one will hire us, no one will rent to us, and some days we don't even have money to buy food. I tried to go back to Colombia, out of desperation, but I got close to the border and I got too scared, I couldn't go back. Now I don't know what to do. There is peace here, but there is no future." –Colombian refugee.

Fleeing the violence and turmoil in Colombia, refugees arrive with only the clothes on their backs and a few possessions—all that remains of families, livelihoods and lives they left behind. Most of those fleeing Colombia seek refuge in Ecuador, which hosts the largest growing number of recognized refugees in Latin America.¹ While return to Colombia is generally not considered viable by UNHCR and most refugees², the focus turns to local integration and resettlement. Nevertheless, obstacles to effective local integration or self-reliance still persist and as a result, resettlement becomes increasingly important as a durable solution for Colombian refugees in Ecuador.

Those fleeing to Ecuador find relatively open borders, as well as the opportunity to seek refugee status, documentation, permission to work, access to medical care and education. Yet despite the appearance of comparatively favorable reception conditions, life in Ecuador is far from easy. Among the main difficulties for the integration of refugees are the legal and administrative obstacles to access employment and social security, which discourage employers from hiring refugees and asylum-seekers altogether. As a consequence, exposure to survival sex and labor exploitation are among key concerns for refugees and asylum-seekers.

These challenges, against the backdrop of pervasive discrimination, *de facto* hamper refugees' enjoyment of their rights. Afro-Colombians, families with many children, individuals belonging to ethnic minorities, LGBTI refugees, and single women and children face particular discrimination. Colombians are refused employment, housing, banking services and access to justice when attempting to exercise their rights under Ecuadorian and international law. Stereotypes and negative perceptions about Colombians are also used and nurtured in the media, by politicians and opinion leaders, and have been documented in several reports and studies.³

The combination of these factors creates an almost untenable situation for many Colombians, and makes the idea of meaningful local integration seem even more distant. While many refugees feel integrated in Ecuador, this is often times by accepting that their integration requires them to lower their expectations in terms of self-reliance, economic stability, food security, access to rights, etc. Other refugees, after having traded the violence of Colombia for uncertainties in Ecuador, see resettlement as their only chance at a future. But resettlement is not without its challenges: the resettlement needs of a large urban refugee population scattered across the country are difficult to assess; individuals frequently move within and among cities for security, economic and personal reasons; and the context of Colombia produces refugees who may not be among the priorities for some resettlement countries, despite their great resettlement needs. Some communities, particularly near the border with Colombia, even express a fear of travelling in general, of leaving Colombia so far behind, and a fear that they will face even greater discrimination and rejection in an even more foreign country. But for every refugee unwilling to leave, many more see resettlement as their chance for a new life in a new country, and they are willing to accept the challenge. The challenge for the international community is to make it possible.

Since 2003, 4,000 refugees have been resettled to third countries, primarily to Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Iceland, Netherlands, New Zealand, Paraguay, Uruguay, Sweden and United States of America, with the welcome addition of Denmark and Norway in 2012. UNHCR expects to submit 1,800 refugees for resettlement consideration in 2012, against projected needs of 5,976. For 2013, UNHCR projects 11,152 persons will be in need of resettlement.

¹ As of December 2011, the Ecuadorian government reported 55,092 refugees in Ecuador, of whom some 28,000 were recognized through the Enhanced Registration process run by the Government, with the support of UNHCR, between March 2009 and March 2010.

² According to a recent study on urban refugees in the two main cities of the country, Quito and Guayaquil, published in 2011 by the FLACSO (Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales – Latin-American Faculty of Social Sciences) (hereafter 2011 FLACSO Survey), 84% of them do not consider repatriation to Colombia as a viable option. See: FLACSO, *Refugiados Urbanos en Ecuador*, February 2011, pg. 11, available at:

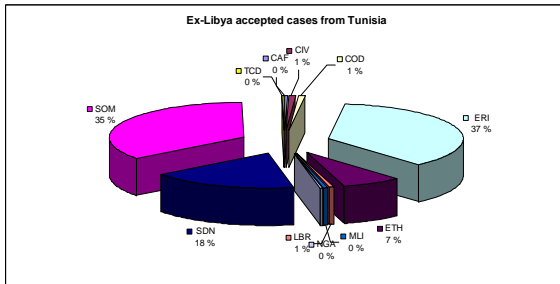
<http://www.acnur.org/biblioteca/pdf/7530.pdf?view=1>

³ Refugees International, *Colombians Tell Stories of Discrimination & Injustice at the World Social Forum*, October 2010, available at: <http://www.refugeesinternational.org/blog/colombian-stories-discrimination-andinjustice-world-social-forum>. These experiences are also reflected in the 2011 FLACSO survey, FLACSO, *Refugiados Urbanos en Ecuador*, February 2011, pg. 27, available at:

<http://www.acnur.org/biblioteca/pdf/7530.pdf?view=1>

Norway's response to the Ex-Libya situation – one year after

Tonje Øyan, Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) and Katrine Vidme, Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi)



"(...)we need to do our utmost to help Tunisia to keep its borders open for everybody, including those who may arrive without any valid document. He said the North African country could not bear the burden alone." (UNHCR chief returns to Tunisia to meet refugees from Libya, 17.06.2011.)



Soon after UNHCR's Regional Flash Appeal for the Libyan crisis in March 2011, several Norwegian government agencies started looking into ways to respond to UNHCR's appeals.

At the end of May, the quota was increased with 250 places. The first selection mission to Zarzis took place at the end of June and since then, 479 persons have been accepted for resettlement to Norway from Tunisia. Among those are 45 UAMs accepted in November. The majority arrived in January 2012.

One of those accepted 479 persons is the Sudanese refugee, 29 years old *Iman (pink veil)*. She was interviewed in July and arrived in her municipality mid-September together with her mother and siblings. Iman will hopefully join us at this year's ATCR. Iman represents one of the 257 women/girls who were accepted (54 %) and the third largest nationality (Sudanese). Like many other refugees from this group, Iman was also born and grew up in Libya. Her receiving municipality, Drammen, has an immigrant population of 18 % and has a well established settlement programme



for resettled refugees.

Unlike Iman, most of the refugees accepted from Tunisia arrived in smaller towns/rural areas all over Norway. In total, 83 municipalities have received refugees from the Ex-Libya situation. Support from local municipalities and news agencies in Norway, both on the national and local level, made it possible to settle refugees within an average time of 2.9 months from decision to arrival in Norway. During this period, IOM in Oslo conducted Cultural Orientation (CO) with bicultural trainers. Despite 11 different nationalities represented and many more languages, CO was successfully completed.



Looking back one year, our experiences with resettlement in an emergency situation like the ex-Libya situation are so far good.

Receiving municipalities and local communities responded well and swiftly to the challenge. They ensured that selected refugees could arrive in Norway as early as possible.

One key factor contributing to this success, in our view, has been the media strategy.

The Norwegian Broadcasting (NRK) and two news agencies, NTB and Scanpix, also joined the selection missions to Tunisia. While local media has focused on 'their municipalities taking responsibility', national media focused more on the need for international protection of this group of refugees, in particular children.

Even NRKs news for children (NRK Super) brought the story about 12 years old Ramadan (picture from the documentary below). You can watch the mini-documentary 'A new home in Norway' here:

<http://nrksuper.no/super/megafon/nytt-hjem-i-norge/>.

The Directorate of Integration and Diversity also blogged from one of the selection mission to Tunisia, aiming at the receiving municipalities:

<http://maritonamission.blogspot.com/>



UK resettlement programme: developments in visa processing and documentation

The UK Border Agency Refugee Team is pleased to report that our 2012/13 gateway resettlement programme is off to a good start with the return of our mission team from a very wet and power-erratic Kigoma in Tanzania from where we will resettle Congolese refugees – and the departure of a team to Kenya from where we will resettle Ethiopians from Kakuma and Nairobi.

These missions are the first under our new arrangements for collecting visa biometrics, and for providing the UK biometric residence permit (BRP) to the refugees concerned.

The UK has been collecting biometrics using mobile kits for about four years and that has been very successful in enabling cost effective use of our mission teams when also interviewing and delivering cultural orientation at remote refugee camps – such as Kigoma and Kakuma. But - as a result of our need to utilise our public visa application website as part of the process - we have faced a number of difficulties matching visa application data to the biometrics.

So we are very pleased to report that the Refugee Team has now been established as a mobile UK Visa Application Centre (VAC) which provides us with easier input of the refugees' biographic data into the visa issuing process – and gives us more flexibility about the order and timing of matching to the biometrics.

When these refugees arrive in the UK they will also be the first resettled refugees to benefit from the UK BRP. The credit card sized polycarbonate document will facilitate integration by making it easier to evidence identity and immigration status, and in demonstrating a right to work and to access other entitlements. Refugees will also carry the same card as all other categories of non-EEA migrants.

Because of its quality and technical standard, the BRP also provides greater protection against fraud and abuse, and is easier to check validity – all of which should give the refugee greater confidence as they begin their new life in the UK.

Contributed by Dave Atkinson, UK Border Agency



Kakuma refugee camp, Kenya © DIAC / A.Watters

Updates on and Achievements of the Solidarity Resettlement Program in Latin America

Overview

The Solidarity Resettlement Program in Latin America is one of the pillars of the Mexico Plan of Action (MPA) and focuses on the strategic use of resettlement as a tool of protection and regional solidarity, in particular through resettlement within countries in the region.

The MPA, signed by 20 Latin American countries in 2004, gave governments and civil society and other relevant organizations an updated strategic and operational framework to address the main challenges to the protection of refugees and other persons in need of international protection today in Latin America.

Since 2005, about 5,500 Colombian refugees with specific protection needs have been resettled to third countries; about 20% were resettled to countries in the Southern Cone and Brazil, particularly in Argentina since 2005, Brazil since 2002, Chile since 1999 and recently Paraguay and Uruguay since 2009 and 2010 respectively. Among the most common criteria used for resettlement are: i) Legal and Physical Protection Needs; ii) Survivors of Violence and Torture; iii) Women at Risk; iv) Lack of Foreseeable Alternative Durable Solutions, and; v) Unaccompanied minors or medical cases.

Favorable context and conditions for local integration

Since the start of the Resettlement Program, States have confirmed their commitment in sharing responsibilities and in generating a favourable institutional framework for refugees. In this sense, refugees enjoy access to public basic services at no cost. In all countries refugees enjoy the same rights as nationals (except political rights).

Resettled refugees either can apply for permanent residency after two (Argentina), three (Paraguay) or four (Brazil) years of residence in the country or receive it automatically upon arrival (Chile and Uruguay). They have the possibility to obtain citizenship after 2 to 8 years, depending on the country. They do not face discrimination and have the right to work. Another crucial aspect for resettlement and integration is the context given by cultural similarities within the region. As a result, most refugees can speak their language (except in Brazil).

The Program has also made institutional arrangements with Governments to adjust the conditions for receiving and integrating other resettled groups with particular needs such as women at risk and resettled refugees from other continents, including Palestinian refugees to Brazil and Chile (116 in Chile and 107 in Brazil). Moreover, Argentina, Brazil and Chile implement special programs for women at risk with about 150

beneficiaries so far. Recently, Uruguay has joined this initiative as well.

In addition, Brazil became the first country in the region to establish a fast track procedure for resettling refugees with legal and physical protection needs. Approximately 20% of its refugee population has resettled through fast-track submissions.

Another major achievement is the expansion and consolidation of protection networks to facilitate the integration of resettled refugees to the Southern cone. As a result of a decentralization strategy, an increasing number of regional and municipal governments are joining the resettlement program, thereby expanding the options available to refugees. Several regional States and 31 Brazilian cities have received resettled refugees so far. In Argentina there are solidarity agreements in place with the cities of Rosario and Buenos Aires, and the provinces of Mendoza, Cordoba and San Luis. In Uruguay, the first agreement was signed with Montevideo. In Chile, UNHCR has signed two "Ciudades Solidarias" agreements with La Calera and San Felipe.

Role of solidarity in strengthening reception and integration mechanisms.

In all receiving countries, the participation of State agencies starts from the reception phase. The induction program in all Solidarity Resettlement Countries includes workshops on the role the government plays in the process, as well as guidance and support on how to access public services.

In Brazil, the language training program for refugees is critical to their integration. Additionally, specific support mechanisms for resettled refugees have also been set up. In Cordoba, Argentina, inter-ministerial mechanisms have been established to promote access of refugees to public and private assistance and integration programs through the provincial government that implements the local solidarity resettlement program with the support of the implementing partner. This is a promising innovative model and there is much interest by all actors to expand this experience to other regions of the country. In Chile, there are various multi sectorial committees and working groups dealing with the most vulnerable cases. In Brazil, these coordination mechanisms play a key role in sensitizing public opinion and promoting specific public policies to improve the access of refugees to public services.

At the local level, the Committee for Refugees of the State of São Paulo has a strategic role in integration issues and there are plans to replicate this committee format in other parts of the country. In Uruguay, there is great interest among all actors to explore new forms of resettlement in order to be able to respond to the needs of a greater number of refugees in Ecuador.

Therefore, the development of a rural resettlement program is being considered. In Paraguay, the National Committee for Refugees (CONARE) has the support of partners working on issues of integration and assistance.

Access to sustainable and dignified housing and income generation are two major daunting challenges faced by resettled refugees in their integration process. To alleviate this situation, several countries are developing innovative programs and practices. In Brazil, the first resettled persons have access to the housing program Minha Casa, Minha Vida; however, refugees are yet to effectively benefit from the program which remains a challenge. In Paraguay, the National Secretariat for Housing and Habitat (SENAVITAT) provides housing for the resettled refugees during the first year. Afterwards, houses can be acquired through reasonable monthly instalments, subsidized by the government. In Chile the whole Palestinian resettled population received public subsidies from the government to acquire houses and since the new Refugee Law (April 2010), all resettled refugees are entitled to apply for public housing subsidies upon their arrival.

Another emerging good practice in all resettlement countries through partners of the program, is access to vocational training, orientation on labor market, and on job searching at no cost or a reduced fee.

Emblematic in the region is Argentina's foray into formal partnerships between UNHCR, the private sector and the implementing partners. Since 2009, they have implemented a solidarity program with local business firms, where refugees are referred to formal

employment in companies that give them internal training.

In Chile, mandatory labour market workshops are implemented for the resettled population and individual follow up for each case during the first year. As a result, employment rates among the resettled population have reached an 80%.

There has also been an important effort in monitoring and assessing the performance and outcomes of the Solidarity Resettlement Program, including in making adjustments and improvements, particularly in the provision of better access to social services toward self-sufficiency.

In order to learn from and share best practices on resettlement and local integration, particularly from traditional resettlement countries, several "twinning" meetings were held in the region, which have been sponsored by the government of Norway. Currently, twinning arrangements are being put in place between the USA and Uruguay and between Australia and Argentina.

Strategic use of solidarity resettlement

One of the most outstanding features of the Solidarity Resettlement Program in the region has been its role in improving the situation of the overall refugee population. This achievement is due to the involvement of numerous state agencies in the implementation of the program. States have progressively assumed their responsibilities as receiving countries providing support through their central and local bodies by offering their basic services and benefits to the resettled population and by extension to the rest of the refugee population.

On the whole, the experience has been highly positive and the involvement of new resettlement countries in the region such as Uruguay and Paraguay is very encouraging.

[Report from UNHCR Americas Bureau / BO Buenos Aires, Argentina](#)

Sweden

Many children among the quota refugees accepted for resettlement in Djibouti

A delegation from the Swedish Migration Board has for the second year been in Djibouti on the Horn of Africa, to offer, in collaboration with the UNHCR, 100 refugees a safe haven in Sweden. Sweden has accepted 103 refugees –mainly Somalis but also Eritreans and Ethiopians.

“The refugee situation in Djibouti is somewhat reflective of the difficult situation in Somalia. Through resettlement programmes, we can contribute to a positive change in some of the most difficult refugee situations in the world,” says Oskar Ekblad, Head of Department at the Migration Board.

Djibouti has a growing refugee population

The Migration Board is monitoring the situation in Somalia closely as Somalis are one of the largest groups of asylum seekers in Sweden today. The majority of the Somali refugees are however in the countries around the Horn of Africa.

Djibouti is a small country but with a growing refugee population. At the end of 2009, there were more than 12,000 registered refugees in Djibouti and the UNHCR estimates that the number today is more than 20,000. The majority of the refugees are Somalis. Ethiopians and Eritreans make up other large groups. Over 70 per cent of the refugees are women and children.

Continued commitment to the countries around the Horn of Africa

Sweden’s desire to contribute to solving protracted refugee situations and the wish to use strategic resettlement programmes has meant that in recent years, the Horn of Africa has been a priority area for Sweden. The UNHCR urges more countries to become involved in the situation in Djibouti.

In 2011 and for the first time, the Migration Board undertook a selection mission to collect mostly Somali refugees in Djibouti. The UNHCR has wanted Sweden to continue its involvement by collecting a small group of refugees from Djibouti even in 2012.

- ✿ The first time we traveled to Djibouti we expected the working conditions to be very difficult, says Helena Kullberg who is coordinating the Swedish Resettlement Program. But everything went well; the selection team has in roughly two weeks been able to conduct interviews as well as produced both travel documents and permanent residence cards. Even a short cultural orientation program was conducted during the refugee’s short stay in Djibouti Ville.
- ✿ A portable photo-station with all the peripherals for the capturing of complete biometric data, such as fingerprint reader and camera was brought from Sweden. Internet was required so the team did not bring the equipment to Ali Adeh Camp. Instead, upon completion of the interviews, the refugees were transported from the camp to Djibouti Ville by bus. Even the few refugees who are in detention were given permission to temporarily visit IOM’s office to leave biometrics. There were a few problems, but none that could not be solved, says Anja Snellman, Head of the Swedish selection team in Djibouti.

Resettlement programme and preliminary settlement information

The delegation has accepted 103 refugees for resettlement, of which more than half will be children.

Each year the Swedish Parliament allocates money to a Swedish refugee quota. The quota is a way for Sweden to support refugees. Each year, the government has given the Migration Board the assignment to resettle quota refugees to Sweden.

Sweden is the fourth largest recipient of refugees in the world. Within the EU, Sweden is the country that receives the most quota refugees. A total of 1,900 people will be helped out of difficult refugee situations during 2012 within the framework of the Swedish resettlement programme.

Contributed by the Swedish Migration Board

Quota refugees preparing for life in Sweden

As part of the annual Swedish refugee quota, 200 Afghan refugees have recently been collected in Tehran in cooperation with UNHCR. New for this year is that the refugees have been able to begin their preparations for resettlement in Sweden immediately, through participation in a so-called Sweden program.

The selection of 200 quota refugees is part of a Swedish resettlement plan, which is twice the size and in turn forms a part of a long-term UNHCR initiative to resolve the protracted refugee situation in Iran. Of the one million Afghan refugees in Iran, UNHCR estimates that over 80,000 are in need of resettlement to another country. The total for the Swedish initiative is 400 Afghan refugees, half of which have already been collected based on UNHCR's presentations and personal files.

Coordination with the Sweden program saves time and money

In addition to the Migration Board's Selection Delegation, a Sweden program delegation has been in place, ready to start the preparatory program for refugees that are to be resettled immediately following their collection. The Sweden program is led by the Migration Board together with representatives from both the host municipalities and the Swedish Public Employment Service.

"The majority of the refugees are living in other parts of Iran but we have met them all in Tehran," says Sara Åhman, who led the Selection Delegation. "For the first time, the Selection Delegation has been coordinated with the delegation that is implementing the preparatory Sweden program. That way we save both time and money and the refugees do not have to make many needless journeys to Tehran", says Sara Åhman.

For some of the quota refugees it has meant that they were able to have the investigatory discussion on the first day we met them. And on the following day they received a decision as to whether or not they had acquired a place on the quota enabling them to start the Sweden program.

Contributed by the Swedish Migration Board

200 refugees in Tunisia have been selected to reside in Sweden

After a special appeal by UNHCR to Sweden, the withdrawal of 200 refugees expelled from Libya was at an early stage included in the Migration Board's resettlement programme for 2012. In Tunisia there are approximately 3,000 people in the camps between Tunisia and Libya following the unrest that impacted on the region the previous year.

"Many of these people have been on the run for more than a year, and the outside world has reacted rather slowly in providing them with help. Sweden began work to assist the refugees via the Migration Board in March 2011, travelling to the country's border with Egypt to collect the refugees there. These refugees have been in various Swedish municipalities since last summer and have started their new lives there," says Oskar Ekblad, Head of Department at the Swedish Migration Board.

Primarily Eritreans and Somalis

The Board's first trip of the year went to the Choucha camp, near the Libyan border, where primarily Eritreans and Somalis have been collected but also individual refugees from Chad, the Congo and Morocco as well as a few other countries. The Board hopes that the refugees will have been transferred to Sweden before the end of April .

The Board's participation in their resettlement is helping to prevent the refugees' situations becoming long-drawn-out, or even permanent, and is supporting UNHCR in its work. In total, the Board will be helping 1,900 people out of difficult refugee situations around the world within the framework of the 2012 refugee quota.

Contributed by the Swedish Migration Board

Women at Risk – analysis of the caseload in Sweden

An evaluation conducted by the Swedish Migration Board found that there were not any systematical indications that women-at-risk cases are subject to fraud. The result of the evaluation was not a surprise to the Swedish Migration Board, which has not shared the view that several such cases in fact have partners, and that shortly after the women have been resettled they apply for family reunification.

The evaluation covers 584 cases concerning women at risk who were granted residency by Sweden between 2005 and 2010. Out of these 584 cases, 120 figured as reference persons in family reunification cases where the applicant was listed as a partner, which is less than 20 %. Out of these 120 cases, 81 cases were accepted on the basis that they were the husband or the partner of the referent. In 25 cases the applicant was the same husband as mentioned in the submission and in 56 cases the applicant was a new husband or partner. In 14 of the 38 declined cases, the applicant's name was the same as the woman had mentioned in her submission. These cases were mainly declined because they lacked proper identification. The number of accepted and declined family reunification cases are too few and thereby this clearly demonstrates that there is no trend that woman at risk cases "put themselves" in situation which make them more eligible for this specific submission category.

More surprisingly, however, was to find that many cases which looked like fraud cases at first glance, when looked at more carefully turned out to lack some vital information or the information was unclear about the relationship status. We cannot, for example, define a case as fraud just because the woman has met a new partner shortly after being resettled. The issue is much more complex and we, within the resettlement community, need to be much more aware of the social and cultural aspects and norms defining the concept "relationship". There is especially a need to discuss the different marital statuses which are being used. The status "widowed" and "single" is often used when a husband is in fact missing or it is a question of a common law husband. Moreover, we need to discuss how we can communicate – in a much better way – with the refugees and with each other when it comes to their relationship status to be able to uphold the transparency and credibility of the resettlement programs.

Contributed by the Swedish Migration Board

Iran Contact Group

During ATCR in 2010 it was agreed to start a Contact Group for Strategic Resettlement of Afghan Refugees in Iran and that Norway would chair the group. The Swedish Embassy in Tehran has replaced Norway as chairman of the local Contact Group. Today the group is comprised of Sweden, Norway, Finland, Germany, Australia, Japan and Brazil. Currently, four of these countries resettle Afghan refugees from Iran; Sweden, Norway, Australia and Finland while Brazil, Germany and Japan more have status as observers.

The objectives of the Contact Group in Iran are to: enhance resettlement opportunities, protect the livelihood of Afghan refugees in authorized areas of residence, and foster opportunities for sustainable voluntary repatriation and effective burden-sharing activities for host communities.

The group has during the Swedish chairmanship focused on resettlement and support to the refugee programs in Iran. As a part of this, the group has during the past year also been active in spreading information about the Geneva Conference about Afghan refugees by organizing a mini-seminar for the diplomatic community in Iran. Among the participating countries only a few are working with resettlement but all participants actively support Afghanistan in various ways. By organizing this seminar the Contact Group wanted to take a holistic approach to the refugee situation as we believe that the refugee situation has to be put in a wider context. Thus, all participants were invited to present their various programs in Afghanistan. The Contact Group shared information about resettlement in general as a means to attract more interest from countries which do not yet engage in resettlement. For obvious reasons the focus of the Contact Group is the resettlement of Afghan refugees, although for the Iranian government the only long-term solution for the refugees is repatriation.

One of the major achievements of the Contact Group was to provide assistance in ensuring health insurance for the registered Afghan refugees in Iran. This insurance is not only important for the Afghan refugees but it also sends an important signal to Iran that the Contact Group is committed in its support to the refugees. Another important part of strategic resettlement and a way to show commitment is to resettle vulnerable groups such as female-headed households and refugees with serious illnesses to relieve the heavy burden this imposes on Iran.

Finally, the Contact Group is doing its best to find ways to cooperate with the Iranian government, in particular with its migration authority – BAFIA (Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Migrants Affairs) – in areas where such cooperation is possible. One important area is to participate in field trips to refugee camps, and thereby gather more information about the refugee situation and the living conditions for the Afghan refugees. Another sphere of work is to continue to inform the Iranian government about the current resettlement programs, while at the same time underlining that all repatriation has to be voluntary.

Contributed by the Swedish Embassy in Tehran

A New Horizon for Refugees in need of Resettlement – Central Europe

One of the first refugees out of Libya to reach Europe was Genet, a teenage girl, whose safety was under imminent threat in the Shousha camp, Tunisia, a reception site built by UNHCR during the early stages of the North African crisis to receive the initial influx of refugees and foreign migrants escaping violence and seeking shelter and protection in neighbouring Tunisia. It took no more than eight days of Genet's stay in the UNHCR-administered Emergency Transit Centre for refugees in Timisoara, Romania, to achieve the impossible: the unification with her mother, a refugee in a European country. Her father, a political activist like her mother, had been killed during the war of independence. All the young refugee needed was to reach the Embassy, but that would have been a world away from Shousha, as her file had been shredded during the Embassy's evacuation from Tripoli. Today, Genet is a school girl, and the memories of near death in the desert, being attacked for her skin colour, fears of being lost in the sea of other refugees in the vast tented camp, are starting to be replaced by happier experiences.

Rachiel spent most of her life as a refugee, first fleeing with her husband to Sudan and later to Libya. A victim of female genital mutilation - also known as FGM - which compromised her fertility, she has been a vocal activist against this practice and has provided support and coaching to many underprivileged women throughout her refugee life journey. Arriving to Timisoara from the Shousha camp, she again set out to help and educate others. Accepted on resettlement by Sweden, her private dream is coming true as she has got an opportunity to undergo assisted fertilization treatment. She is also hoping to achieve needed credentials to continue supporting other women, and spread knowledge about harmful practices affecting millions in the developing world. In her recent letter from Sweden she says, "I am proud to be part of Sweden, and I want to do everything for Sweden to be proud of me".

Eritrean refugees, evacuated from a country that held them in detention, arrived in the ETC with nothing but one blanket donated by UNHCR. Palestinian refugees from Iraq, in transit through the ETC, were shocked and moved, and together with all other temporary residents of the transit facility immediately and without hesitation started organizing a collection of clothes in a collective effort among refugees to participate in helping this special group.

These are just a few of the different situations UNHCR staff has observed during the most recent months of activity in the Emergency Transit Centre located in Timisoara, Romania.

The Emergency Transit concept was inspired by a number of *ad hoc* experiences, where UNHCR was required to provide urgent or emergency protection to refugees in need of resettlement. In 1999-2002, an evacuation to Romania was arranged for over 4,500 refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia, who were relocated to Timisoara for resettlement processing during the crisis affecting the former Yugoslavia. This situation was repeated in 2005 and 2006, when the Romanian authorities collaborated with UNHCR to evacuate 450 Uzbek refugees from Kyrgyzstan. In 1999 and 2000, approximately 1,500 refugees, at risk in the Democratic Republic of the Congo were evacuated to Benin and Cameroon, where they remained while interviews were

conducted by resettlement countries. The refugees were all ultimately resettled to other countries.

These emergency responses operations, while successful, clearly highlighted the challenges faced by UNHCR to evacuate or resettle refugees at immediate risk, and UNHCR set out to define a more predictable, systematic and expeditious mechanism to both complement and supplement resettlement under the Emergency priority, which would allow the transfer to safety of refugees who would otherwise not receive the protection they need in a timely manner.

UNHCR responded to the need by presenting an Information Note to States and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) at the 2007 Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement (ATCR) which outlined UNHCR's objective of establishing temporary transit facilities for refugees in need of resettlement and encouraged States to engage in responsibility sharing by participating in this venture.



Refugees arriving at Timisoara Airport, on the way to the Emergency Transit Centre. [Photography by Mugur Varzariu©]

Two models of temporary transit facilities have been established – an Evacuation Transit Centre model, as in Romania and the Slovak Republic, that have physical facilities in which evacuated refugees are housed and an Evacuation Transit Mechanism such as that in the Philippines where there is no facility per se and where refugees are housed in a variety of types of public housing.

Through the emergency evacuation mechanism, UNHCR and its partners have been able to give well over one thousand refugees a chance to be considered by a resettlement country alongside other refugees. Since the establishment of the Emergency Transit concept, more than 1,200 refugees have departed to 11 different resettlement countries, representing 15 nationalities that have been evacuated from 18 different countries.

[UNHCR Regional Representation for Central Europe](#)

Religious needs as an important aspect of the social integration of resettled refugees - a lesson from the Czech Republic

When the Czech Republic decided to join the UN Resettlement Programme in 2008 and to resettle Burmese refugees in its pilot programme, the importance of the religious aspect of refugees seemed to have been somewhat underestimated. Although religion was one of the main selection criteria for refugees in the programme, and Burmese refugees of Christian faith were predominantly chosen, official institutions and supporting organizations had little information about the religious life and practices of those refugees.

The Czech Republic, after a long era of communism between 1948 and 1989, now has a more secular society than in some neighbouring countries. According to official statistics, there was a tremendous decrease in people of faith from 1991 to 2001 (43.9% of population in 1991 and 32.1% in 2001) in the Czech Republic. The majority of religious individuals are affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church. The latest numbers from 2001 showed that Czech Baptists number slightly more than 3,600 across the country. Most of the nearly 100 Burmese refugees resettled so far in the Czech Republic are Baptists, who are used to different ways and practices - such as religious fellowship and communal praying sessions - than in other parts of Europe.

Due to the limited possibilities of the Czech government to provide housing for refugees in one central place, it was almost impossible to fully adjust the religious needs of refugees with other essential parts of their integration such as housing, employment, or health care. Resettled Burmese refugees are now accommodated in several municipality-owned integration flats across the country. This particular support was primarily focused on securing appropriate housing for differently sized refugee families in flats with "regulated" rent that is more affordable for refugees, and to provide the necessary social assistance during the first months of their "independent" life. Meanwhile, the religious aspect was left to local religious communities to support on a voluntary basis.

The Czech NGO Burma Center Prague (BCP) has played an active role in providing support for the social integration of refugees in the host country, particularly in raising the awareness of the receiving communities and providing support for better employment for the refugees. BCP has also helped the refugees get engaged in local religious communities, still knowing that there are differences in denominations and it is not sufficient to meet all the religious needs of the refugees. BCP, however, considers that an understanding on the part of the receiving communities of the refugees' background and the governmental resettlement programme would facilitate the primary contact and communication of refugees with these communities. We also hoped that, due to the shared religion between refugees and Czech Christians, the refugees' first steps towards social integration would occur via local churches. And so in close cooperation with the Diaconia of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren (DECCB), BCP has since 2008 organized a series of awareness-raising events in the receiving communities, in particular for local church members.

BCP also cooperated with the International Baptist Theological Seminary (IBTS) in Prague, which provided a wide range of support, such as spiritual and financial, to refugees at several events organized by BCP or IBTS's own initiatives. IBTS also provided consultations to BCP on the specific needs of those of the Baptist faith.

Contributed by Sabe Amthor Soe, Burma Centre Prague

United States – Episcopal Migration Ministries

Employment "Boot Camp" Starts Refugees Off on the Right Foot

There are many immediate needs that refugees have to address when they arrive in the United States. For those who don't speak English, language is often the most critical priority. At the same time, finding employment and a means of self-support are never far from a new American's mind.

In Denver, a program at Emily Griffith Technical College is helping refugees develop their English while also building the vocational and interpersonal skills required to thrive in an American workplace.

The program is called the Work Intensive Skills Camp (WISC), and it is just one part of Emily Griffith's progressive English curriculum for refugees. Participants in the one-month program receive English instruction that centers on the vocabulary of the working world, and they receive training in the sectors of the labor market most likely to offer them a job, fields like food service and hospitality.

Emily Griffith partners with EMM affiliate [Ecumenical Refugee and Immigration Services](#) and other refugee resettlement agencies in Denver to serve more than 1,000 refugees each year.

Instructor and curriculum designer Kate Goodspeed said the WISC program — which she affectionately refers to as "employment boot camp" — is a critical step to sustained employment success for her students.

"It touches on a lot of different things you'll find in the workplace. The programs last one month and the last week is job shadowing," Goodspeed said. "That's a very valuable experience for them."

The classroom at Emily Griffith is set up like a lab, with stations replicating the workspaces refugees will encounter in kitchens, hotels and factories. So-called "soft skills" like following a work schedule, determining job duties from assignment boards, and even using a combination lock in the locker room may be foreign to many newcomers.

In addition, behaviors like making eye-contact when speaking and smiling — even when you're not especially happy — are norms that perplex many refugees. To address that challenge, Goodspeed said the WISC program centers on American workplace culture as much as on technical skills.

From a teacher's perspective, Goodspeed said the most gratifying aspect of the job is seeing refugees thrive in the new lives they find in Denver.

"I find our students are just sort of awesome. They're very positive in the face of some very difficult experiences," she said. "One woman was hired as a housekeeper, and she got employee of the month six months later. Sometimes we wonder if people will be able to succeed, but they can prove themselves. They do prove themselves."

After-school program blooms into holistic resource for refugees

Jill Blackman is a social worker and the director of the family resource and youth service center at two schools in Lexington, Kentucky. She is also a valuable friend to the refugee community in Lexington.

Blackman and ELL teachers at Cassidy Elementary, along with partners at the University of Kentucky, started an after-school tutoring program for students in elementary and middle schools about five years ago, when they identified a critical mass of refugee kids who needed academic and cultural support as they adjusted to life and school in the U.S.

From that program grew an effort to serve not just the children, but their families and the rest of the Lexington community. Blackman and her colleagues expanded their tutoring time, creating a program called FACE Time, short for Family and Community Education.

Through an extended school day, refugee children, parents, and community volunteers began gathering for activities designed to support the students and to address other challenges faced by refugees as they integrate into the community.

Today, the program includes eight-week after-school programs in the spring and fall, and a four-week summer camp at the school, along with regular

stakeholder meetings where refugees, social service providers, and other community members can gather to communicate and plan.

In addition, a refugee community garden and family literacy nights help provide educational and cultural adjustment opportunities for children and parents. Local artists have also worked with refugee students on an art project and the students' creations have been on display at an art museum in Georgetown.

The idea behind all of this: healthy families enable children to learn without the barrier of stress at home.

"[Kentucky Refugee Ministries] does so much initially, but it's hard for refugees to carry on over the long term," Blackman said. "From one after-school program, this has grown into a lot of different things that offer support."

The program has received some support from a federal grant through the Office of Refugee Resettlement, but during its initial years, it got its legs through the dedication and will of planners. Today, it's an example of collaboration and creative problem solving that's making the transition better for refugees and the whole Lexington community.

[**Contributed by Episcopal Migration Ministries, USA**](#)

Young Doctor Restarts Career, Finds Normalcy in New Community

As a young physician in Iraq during the height of the chaotic violence that occurred in that country after the U.S. invasion in 2003, Ahmed* saw many of the worst consequences of war firsthand.

"Nobody can handle the numbers of patients we had. It was emotional; even for the physician it was crazy," Ahmed said. "Crazy to the degree where a lot of people quit or run out."

A difficult situation quickly got much worse for the first-year doctor. Ahmed was threatened by a militant group and barely survived an attempt on his life; he says that doctors were commonly targeted by insurgents during the direst periods of the war.

Ahmed fled to Jordan, where he attempted to continue his professional development in relative safety. Three months after leaving Iraq, he got the tragic news that his father, a prominent intellectual in Iraq, had been assassinated in Baghdad. Ahmed's mother, brother and sister were forced to leave everything behind and join him in Amman.

After one year, the family applied for resettlement in the U.S. and were, with only a few days notice, informed they'd be relocating to Boston. Once in the U.S., they were assisted by Ruth Bersin, Director of EMM affiliate, Refugee Immigration Ministry (RIM), along with a core group of volunteers from local faith communities.

"When we arrived here, Ruth and a volunteer met us. They're honestly great people," Ahmed said. "Everything was there, even the minor things. We went to their house and had dinner with them. And we love them still like members of our family."

In two years since arriving, Ahmed and his family have

made tremendous strides in rebuilding their lives and finding a sense of normalcy in their new community. Ahmed's sister is an honors student at her high school, his mother has a job in a nursing facility, and Ahmed is on his way to resuming his career as a physician.

Through RIM, Ahmed found work as a case manager at Boston Children's Hospital, and he's passed two of three exams required to resume practicing medicine. It's been a challenging process, but one that Ahmed credits with helping him move on with his life.

"When I did my first exam it was crazy, I was sleeping only two or three hours a day. You have to pay the fees (for the exams) and they're very expensive. But what's sleep? Give me coffee. It's not easy, but at the same time it's not something impossible," he said.

"You need to stand on your feet. You need to build your future. You need to be involved in this community, and you have to help other people again."

Ahmed said he is focusing on immersing himself in his new community, leaving behind the mindset of being a refugee while helping his family find peace.

"For my family, I hope to buy them a house and settle them. And like any other human, I want to enjoy my life. Everyone is looking for that," he said.

"When we came here we put in our minds there is no going back to Iraq. I don't want to think about that. I don't want to bring back my memories again. It was a lot of psychological trauma. It was crazy. It was awful. But that's it. You have the chance and you need to start again."

**Client's name was altered to protect his privacy*

Contributed by Episcopal Migration Ministries, USA

Young refugee focused on education, thankful for new friends in Minnesota

On his first day in the United States, Sharmake Muse stood in the bathroom of his Minneapolis apartment and listened while a caseworker showed him how to use the shower.

The caseworker, who works for the [Minnesota Council of Churches](#) (MCC), an Episcopal Migration Ministries affiliate, pulled back the curtain and turned the nozzle, causing water to gush from the spout. At that moment, Sharmake said the difference between life in the U.S. and life in a Kenyan refugee camp became starkly clear.

"In the refugee camp you wake up early and go to wait for water. It may happen that you wait in line until night and come back without water for your family. Sometimes it would happen that people will fight and

kill and lose their life for the sake of getting water," he said. "Here water is available and there, there is no water at all. It's really different."

Sharmake, now 27, spent nearly 20 years living in refugee camps. His father was killed in the violence that broke out in Somalia in 1991 at the outset of the long civil war, and Sharmake was forced to flee the country with his mother and sister.

In 2009, he learned that his family was heading to the U.S., and in March of 2010 they arrived in Minneapolis. Sharmake said he now feels hopeful about the future, thanks in large part to the assistance of MCC, and to the help of an unexpected friend.

Linda O'Malley is a volunteer with MCC and a member of St. Clement's Episcopal Church in St. Paul. Over the years, co-sponsorship teams from her parish have participated in the resettlement ministry, but last winter Linda sought to deepen her personal involvement with refugees.

The staff at MCC asked her to mentor Sharmake, and in the time since she's introduced him to many aspects of American life.

Linda has taught Sharmake about the postal system, found a donated bike to help him get around, assisted with enrolling his mother and sister in English classes, shown him how to secure a money order to pay bills, and enlisted her husband to teach him how to drive. It's a partnership that both speak of warmly.

"He's just so independent, and I've learned so much from him," she said. "I always think, what if my son was in this strange country? I just hope someone would help him."

Sharmake said that Linda has shown him ways to continue his education and improve his English skills,

two goals to which he is unwaveringly dedicated. Sharmake has enrolled in adult education classes, and is building on his experience as a nursing assistant in the refugee camp. He hopes to attend medical school and become a doctor in the years ahead.

And he credits Linda with helping him find the right path in his critical first months in Minnesota.

"With Linda O'Malley, it was good, really. When we came here, she helped us. She really showed me the ways of the United States," Sharmake said. "I am thanking her; I am giving her thanks."

Like many refugees, Sharmake is grateful for those who have helped him and optimistic about the incremental progress he's making. He's even gotten comfortable with using his shower.

"I have now adapted," he said, laughing. "But whenever I take a shower, I remember those people [in the camp] and the lack of water."

Contributed by Episcopal Migration Ministries, USA



Karen refugee children pay attention during a first-grade math class in Mae La Oon refugee camp © UNHCR/J.Redfern

US–UNHCR Biometrics Pilot Project – Kenya

In February 2012, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) deployed two officers to Kenya under the auspices of a joint DHS-UNHCR biometric verification pilot. This initiative was designed to 1) confirm whether fingerprints currently captured at registration by UNHCR in ProGres could be used to verify the identity of refugee applicants prior to their resettlement interview; and 2) inform UNHCR's efforts to develop a global repository capable of establishing a unique identity for each refugee registrant. The pilot was developed to advance the discussions held at the Expert Working Group on Resettlement in Washington, DC in which representatives agreed that that by introducing biometric features, UNHCR and member states would be better equipped to address humanitarian interests around the globe more swiftly, effectively and with integrity, provided that the fundamental principles governing the protection of personal data and information are not compromised. Enhanced use of biometrics will not only help deter individuals from using multiple identities to gain resettlement and immigration benefits in multiple countries but can better protect refugees from abuse and exploitation.

The joint pilot in February featured identity verification exercises in both Nairobi and Kakuma Refugee Camp so that the verification capability could be assessed in an urban and rural environment. DHS observed UNHCR staff as they fingerprinted applicants prior to their refugee resettlement interviews with the United States. UNHCR was then able to compare the newly acquired data against biometric information that was captured at the initial UNHCR registration of the applicants. Preliminary findings indicate the pilot was successful, but DHS is still finalizing its formal report and recommendations, and will report on the pilot at the ATCR. UNHCR and DHS are discussing an expansion of the pilot to further assess the capability with other populations and locations (likely in Uganda and Lebanon) later this summer.

Contributed by Barbara Strack, US Government