



PUTTING  
PRINCIPLES  
INTO PRACTICE

PART ONE  
**Putting  
Principles  
into  
Practice**





# CHAPTER 1.1

## Why offer a Refugee Resettlement Program?

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## Why Offer a Formal Refugee Resettlement Program?

### The origins of refugee resettlement

Contemporary refugee resettlement programs have their origins in the aftermath of the Second World War when many thousands of people affected by conflict in Europe were offered refuge in countries across the globe. However, prior to the 1950s, distinctions were rarely made between refugees and displaced persons and immigrants.

Following the Second World War, it became increasingly apparent to the international community that many people lived under the threat of various kinds of persecution and would not be protected if left to the mercy of their own governments. A number of international legal instruments were subsequently developed with a view to securing a concerted and cooperative international response to human rights problems.

Significant among these were the 1951 *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* and its 1967 *Protocol*. One hundred and forty four countries are now signatories to one or both of these instruments. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established in January 1951 with a mandate to provide international protection to refugees and seek durable solutions to their plight.

A refugee is defined in the 1951 Convention, as someone who has left his or her country and is unable or unwilling to return to it 'owing to a well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion'.

### REFUGEE ACHIEVEMENTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

**1830** Polish composer Frederic Chopin performs his last concert in Warsaw before going into exile in Paris.

**1933** Acclaimed scientist Albert Einstein is accused of high treason by the Third Reich in Germany. He seeks refuge in Belgium, Great Britain and finally the United States.

**1941** Peter Lorre, actor and refugee from Hungary, is cast in a starring role in the film, *The Maltese Falcon*.

**1942** Austro-Hungarian refugee Paul Henreid plays a resistance leader in the film *Casablanca*.

**1944** Dr Anita Donaldson is born to Latvian parents in a children's refugee camp in Germany. In 1993 she becomes the Dean of Performing Arts at Adelaide University, Australia.

**1947** Jewish-German refugee W. Michael Blumenthal arrives in San Francisco with sixty dollars in his pocket. In 1977 he is sworn in as the 64<sup>th</sup> USA Secretary of the Treasury under President Carter.

**1950** Hungarian Refugee Samuel "Billy" Wilder directs Academy Award winning film *Sunset Boulevard*. >



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## REFUGEE ACHIEVEMENTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

**1950** Joe Schlesinger is admitted to Canada as a displaced person from Czechoslovakia. He goes on to become head of CBC TV News (Canada's national broadcaster) in the late 1960s and later the network's chief political correspondent.

**1954** Film director and producer Otto Preminger, in exile from Austria, produces the first film with an exclusively African-American cast, *Carmen Jones*.

At the start of the new millennium, it was estimated that there were around 12 million refugees and 20–25 million internally displaced persons around the world. Early in 2002, the number of people of concern to the UNHCR was 19.8 million, roughly one out of every 300 people on Earth<sup>1</sup>. Over 70% are women and children<sup>2</sup>.

Refugees come from many countries, with refugee movements constantly changing in response to events around the world. In the post-war period, people fleeing Communist Eastern Europe constituted a large proportion of the world's refugees. In the 1960s and 70s, many refugees were fleeing political turmoil in Central and South America and Africa. In the latter part of this period and into the 1980s, there were large numbers of refugees from conflicts in Indo-China. Following the end of the Cold War, refugee flows resulted from a new series of conflicts, including those in the Balkans, Asia and Africa. The global refugee population has become increasingly diverse, with the UNHCR currently providing protection and assistance to refugees from over 50 different countries.



**Table One:**  
**What countries do refugees under UNHCR's mandate come from? (Top 10 countries)**

Country-of-origin	Refugee Population End 2001
Afghanistan	3,809,600
Burundi	554,000
Iraq	530,100
Sudan	489,500
Angola	470,600
Somalia	439,900
Bosnia Herzegovina	426,000
Democratic Republic of Congo	392,100
Vietnam	353,200
Eritrea	333,100

Source: UNHCR, *Refugees by Numbers*, 2002



**Table Two:**  
**Selected major refugee-hosting countries**

Country	End 2001
Pakistan	2,199,000
Iran	1,868,000
Federal Republic of Yugoslavia	777,000
Tanzania	691,000
Democratic Republic of Congo	367,000
Sudan	354,000
China	295,000
Zambia	285,000
Kenya	252,000
Uganda	201,000

Source: UNHCR, *Refugees by Numbers*, 2002

## Durable solutions

In partnership with the international community, the UNHCR promotes three durable solutions to the plight of refugees:

- voluntary repatriation to the country-of-origin, in conditions of safety and dignity;
- local integration in the host country;
- resettlement in a third country.

Resettlement has a critical and complementary role in the system of international protection, offering both protection and a durable solution to those refugees for whom neither voluntary repatriation nor local integration is possible.

Resettlement is the concrete expression of a commitment to refugee protection and to the promotion of human rights. It is also a practical manifestation of international responsibility-sharing.

## Voluntary repatriation

Most refugees hope to return to their countries-of-origin and to be able to rebuild their lives in a familiar environment<sup>3</sup>. The UNHCR and its international partners support voluntary repatriation through the establishment of protective legal frameworks and activities to safeguard and assist refugees to return and reintegrate into their countries-of-origin. These activities are undertaken with a view to ensuring that refugees are not subject to further persecution and discrimination after return and that their right to national protection is restored.

## Local integration

However, for many, circumstances in their countries-of-origin are such that safe return is unlikely to be possible at least in the foreseeable future. Others may have experienced such extreme trauma and persecution, that they cannot reasonably be expected to return.

Some refugees without voluntary repatriation prospects are able to settle in their country-of-refuge. They are granted asylum; have access to the resources to rebuild their lives (including access to education and the labour market, housing, medical care and social services) and enjoy basic human rights such as freedom of movement, the right to marry, practise their religion and own property. Once they are granted citizenship of their country-of-refuge, they no longer require the protection of the international community.

**1955** Julius Rundel becomes Director of the New York City Opera having arrived in the USA in 1938 as a refugee from Austria.

**1956** The first shopping centre to be fully enclosed opens in Minneapolis, USA. It has been designed by architect and Austrian refugee Victor Gruen.

**1957** Judit Korner arrives in Australia from Hungary. Today she is the Director of a group of companies, which includes five beauty training colleges and numerous salons.

**1961** Hungarian refugee Judy Cassab wins Australia's Archibald Prize for portraiture.

**1965** Brazilian refugee and jazz musician Gilberto Passos Gil Moreira has a breakthrough in his musical career with the recording of his song *Louvaniao*. He goes on to make 32 albums in 29 years.

**1968** South African refugee and jazz musician Hugh Masakela's song *Grazing in the Grass* tops the charts and sells four million copies worldwide.

**1972** Yasmin Alibhai-Brown flees Uganda following Idi Amin's rise to power. Twenty five years later she becomes a Research Fellow at the Institute of Public Policy Research.

**1973** Max Frankel is awarded the Pulitzer Prize for his unique coverage of Richard Nixon's visit to China. A refugee from Germany, Frankel will go on to be the executive editor of *The New York Times* from 1986 to 1994. >



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### REFUGEE ACHIEVEMENTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

- 1974** Congressman Sam Gejdenson becomes the first child of Holocaust survivors elected to the USA House of Representatives.
- 1975** Ethiopian Alem Desta is granted asylum in the UK. Later, in the Netherlands she establishes and becomes president of the Refugee Organisation Netherlands, an umbrella organisation for 230 local and national refugee support organisations.
- 1975** Czechoslovakian refugee Milos Forman receives accolades for his direction of the film *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.
- 1977** Sir Gustav Nossal, renowned scientist and refugee from Austria, is knighted. He will later be appointed Australian of the Year for his work in medical research.
- 1981** Eleven year old Nyamko Sabuni arrives in Sweden with her mother and six siblings from the Democratic Republic of Congo following time in exile in Burundi. In 2002 she plans to run as a candidate in the Swedish Parliamentary elections.
- 1981** Estonian refugee Ennio Hallek becomes a professor of painting at the Art Academy of Stockholm. His murals adorn the University of Stockholm and the Astrid Lindgren Children's Hospital. In 1989 he returned with a delegation to Estonia to give advice on the restoration of churches.

### Third country resettlement – contributing to international protection and durable solutions

There are many refugees for whom neither repatriation nor local integration in their first country of asylum is possible. For these refugees, permanent resettlement in a third country may be the most appropriate, and in some cases the only, durable solution.

In recent years the opportunities for local integration in first countries of asylum have become more limited. Some countries are not signatories to international instruments designed to protect refugees. Others may only offer protection on the condition that refugees are resettled elsewhere within a specified time frame.

Countries may have difficulties absorbing large numbers of refugees without generating economic, social or political instability. In some cases, refugees risk attack by hostile groups or arrest and detention. Clearly, in these circumstances, resettlement in a third country may be required both as an instrument of international protection and as a durable solution.

Refugees may also face conditions in their initial countries of asylum which seriously undermine their prospects for long term integration. For instance they may be excluded from employment owing to their status as refugees; denied the right to practise their religion; suffer social exclusion or be denied access to education. In such cases resettlement in a third country may be the only durable solution.

Third country resettlement may also be the most appropriate option for refugees who are at particular risk or have special resettlement needs which cannot be met by their country-of-refugee owing to prevailing economic and social conditions. Among these are unaccompanied children and young people, refugees with serious disabling conditions, refugee elders, refugees with special medical needs, women-at-risk and survivors of trauma and torture.

### International responsibility sharing

Refugee resettlement programs are also an important way to ensure that the responsibility for addressing refugee problems is shared among countries across the globe and between the developed and developing world.



Currently a disproportionate share of this burden is borne by some of the world's poorest nations, with refugees often seeking asylum in neighbouring countries, many of which have low levels of economic and human development. For example, in 2001, nearly two thirds of countries identified by the UNHCR as the main countries receiving refugees were also among those 40 countries identified by the United Nations Human Development Program as the poorest in the world<sup>4</sup>. Already struggling to meet the needs of their citizens, many of these countries can ill-afford to offer long term, local settlement prospects to those seeking refuge within their borders.

Providing refuge is a generous step taken by many governments and is fundamental to the success of the system of international protection. If responsibility for refugees is not shared, however, there is the very real risk that both the practical capacity and commitment to offer asylum will be compromised in some countries.

There are a number of ways in which countries can and do contribute to global responsibility sharing, both within and outside of their formal partnership with the UNHCR. Among these are diplomatic efforts to promote the safe return of repatriated refugees and financial and in-kind contributions to humanitarian assistance, local settlement, and reconstruction and development programs. A formalised resettlement program complements these efforts, allowing countries to ease the pressures on countries of first asylum and to share responsibility for refugees in need of a durable solution.

**1981** Makau Matau flees Kenya for the USA following arrests and detention for student activism. He is now a Professor of Law at the State University of New York.

**1983** Kim Dae-Jung, South Korean in exile in the USA, works as an advisor at a centre for survivors of torture in Minnesota. In 1997 he is elected President of the Republic of Korea and in 2000 is awarded a Nobel Peace Prize.

**1984** The writing of Czech in exile in France, Milan Kundera, comes to prominence in the Western world with the publication of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*.

**1984** Cambodian refugee Haing Ngor wins an Academy Award for his role in the portrayal of the Cambodian genocide, *The Killing Fields*.

**1987** Soviet writer in exile in the USA, Joseph Brodsky, is awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature for *The Condition We Call Exile*.

**1989** A refugee from Nigeria 15 years earlier, Philip Emeagwali, wins the Gordon Bell Prize, computing's Nobel Prize, for solving a problem classified as one of the 20 most difficult in the computing world.

**1990** Maria Guadalupe Garcia Hernandez, a Guatemalan refugee then aged 28, founds *Mama Maquin*, a human rights organisation which today promotes sustainable development projects, women's human rights, and provides literacy and health education. >



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**1991** Feminist writer and activist Nawal El Saadawi accepts a teaching position at Duke University in North Carolina following many years of repression in Egypt.

**1991** A South African in self-exile in the USA, writer Nadine Gordimer, is awarded a Nobel Prize for Literature.

**1991** Batulo Mohamed Essak arrives in Finland as a refugee from Somalia. She now works as a translator and assists Somali women to integrate in the Finnish community.

**1992** Guatemalan refugee Rigoberta Menchu Tum accepts the Nobel Peace Prize in the name of all indigenous people.

**1993** Cambodian refugee Niborom Young records an oral history project featuring the testimonies of ten Cambodian refugee women which is now stored at the New Zealand National Archives.

**1993** Sonia Pressman Fuentes, a refugee from Germany, retires after having served as the first woman attorney in the United States General Counsel's Office at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and also as the founder of the USA National Organisation for Women.

**1994** Formerly Education Minister of Mozambique, Graca Machel, who had spent many years in exile in Switzerland and later Tanzania, is appointed to chair the UN Study on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children. In 1995 she was awarded the UNHCR Nansen Medal for her outstanding contribution on behalf of refugee children.

## Enhancing overall capacity and diversity of durable solutions

Increasing the number of states willing to resettle refugees helps to strengthen the position of resettlement in the system of international protection and as a durable solution. It not only increases the number of places available to the UNHCR for re-settling refugees under its mandate, but also provides a more diverse range of resettlement options.

Increasing the diversity of states accepting refugees for resettlement enables the UNHCR to match those who have particular needs with appropriate resettlement programs.

Countries in the process of establishing a resettlement program may not have the integration infrastructure other countries have developed in the course of many years of involvement in refugee resettlement. Nor, if they are developing economies, may they be able to commit the same level of resources to integration as their developed counterparts.

Nevertheless many of these countries have other, often less tangible assets. These may include, for example, a broad understanding of what constitutes 'family', a strong tradition of welcoming and extending hospitality to newcomers, or a high level of commitment to assisting others whose human rights have been violated, in some cases born of their own histories of conflict and persecution.

For example in Chile, resettled refugees who are survivors of trauma and torture are offered assistance through some of the same programs established to support nationals affected by persecution in the context of the military coup in that country in 1975.

Some non-traditional resettlement countries have developed expertise through their involvement in the informal local integration of refugees from neighbouring countries. Much of this expertise is readily transferable to the task of developing a formal resettlement program. Such countries may also have economic characteristics which match the attributes of particular refugee groups. For example, resettled refugees with certain professional qualifications (e.g. medicine) may have better employment opportunities in developing countries where their credentials may be more readily recognised and there may be a demand for their particular skills.



## Enhancing receiving communities

While countries resettling refugees are motivated by humanitarian concerns, they also believe that refugee resettlement, along with their general migration programs, enrich them as societies.

No two refugee populations are alike. There are also differences in the extent to which policies and practices of receiving countries enable refugees to realise their full potential. While very little contemporary research on immigration distinguishes between refugees and migrants, overall, it indicates that resettlement and migration offer net benefits<sup>5</sup>.

Refugees generally have a high level of motivation not only to rebuild their own lives but also to make a meaningful contribution to the receiving society. The fact that they have survived often horrific experiences is testimony to their resilience. In their countries-of-origin many lived lives distinguished by a commitment to achieve high standards in their workplace and community. Many refugees come from cultures in which particular value is placed on personal industriousness and enterprise.

**1996** Together with his fellow East Timorese countryman Bishop Carlos Belo, Jose Ramos Horta is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his dedication to human rights.

**1997** Phan Thi Kim Phuc, a Vietnamese refugee resettled in Canada, is appointed goodwill ambassador for the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

**1998** Renowned poet, writer and artist from the former USSR, Tatyana Mamonova, receives the USA World Heroine Prize for her contributions as a founder of the Russian Women's movement.

**1998** Tan Le, aged 21 years, is awarded the Young Australian of the Year, having fled to Australia from Vietnam in 1981. Today she is the Chief Commercial Officer of a telecommunications company.

**1999** Romanian refugee and writer, Ana Maria Narti, is elected to the Swedish Parliament.

**1999** Adrienne Clarkson becomes the first overseas born person to be appointed as Canada's Governor General. She had arrived in Canada as a refugee from China with her family in 1941.

**1999** Vaira Vike-Freiberga is sworn in as the first President of Latvia after spending 44 years as a refugee in Canada. She is the first female head of state in post-communist Eastern Europe. >



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**1999** Following the opening in Kiev, Ukraine of the first social centre for refugees, Afghani refugee Akbar Khurasani begins teaching art to local Kiev and refugee children. His paintings can be found in private collections all over the world.

**2000** Community educator, Spokesperson for the USA Campaign for a Landmine Free World and Cambodian refugee Loung Ung has her book, *First they Killed My Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers*, published.

**2000** Gao Xingjian becomes the first Chinese National to receive the Nobel Literature Prize for *One Man's Bible*.

**2000** Argentinian pianist, Miguel Angel Estrella, in exile in France, receives the Nansen Refugee Award for his extraordinary work in support of refugees.

**2000** Ugandan refugee Lesley Akora is employed as a Community Services Settlement Officer in a Migrant Resource Centre in Perth, Australia having arrived only nine years earlier.

**2000** Fazil Kawani, Iraqi refugee, works as the Communications Director at the Refugee Council in London.

**2002** The work of picture archivist and German refugee Otto Bettman is recognised as a vital source of picture material for editors, designers and multi-media specialists all over the world.

Refugees contribute a wealth of personal attributes and skills to the social and economic fabric of receiving societies.

Refugees can also make an important economic contribution by creating new businesses and jobs, filling labour market gaps, and helping to improve productivity<sup>6</sup>. Indeed, both refugee resettlement and general migration are now recognised as critical factors in the economic success of a number of industrialised countries. As the populations of these countries age, migration and resettlement will help to maintain their revenue base and to meet labour force demands<sup>7</sup>.

The social benefits of refugee resettlement are much harder to quantify and measure. However, experience suggests that refugees have made a significant contribution to the growth of intellectual, social and cultural capital in receiving countries<sup>8</sup>. Having been offered a refuge from persecution and the opportunity to build a new life, resettled refugees have a high level of motivation to 'give back' to receiving societies. While for some this has been through exemplary achievements in the arts, science, industry and public life, many others have contributed through their day-to-day participation in communities, families, workplaces and social institutions.