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## PARTNERSHIP AND LIAISON

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Complementary to the cooperation with Governments in the countries of refuge and in resettlement countries, UNHCR carries out resettlement activities in cooperation with non-governmental and inter-governmental organizations which are involved in a number of important activities ranging from initial registration and interviews through care and maintenance to pre-departure formalities, travel and post-arrival assistance. The news media is another important facilitator of protection and assistance to refugees by providing an effective way to mobilize support and increase public awareness of the plight of refugees.

The *Agenda for Protection* and the Resettlement strand under the *Convention Plus* initiative act themselves as an indication of recently increased cooperation between UNHR, States, NGOs and other partners within the field of resettlement. The *Agenda* calls on all parties to act separately or together on a number of issues pertaining to resettlement.

### 10.1 Partnerships within the context of the *Agenda for Protection and Convention Plus*

The *Global Consultations on International Protection* were launched by UNHCR in late 2000 to engage States and other partners in broad-ranging dialogue on refugee protection with a view to revitalize the existing international protection regime while ensuring flexibility to address new problems.

The outcome was the jointly owned *Agenda for Protection*, which calls on UNHCR, States, NGOs and other partners to cooperate within a number of activities related to resettlement, e.g. to help expanding resettlement opportunities and to use resettlement more strategically in achieving durable solutions for more refugees.<sup>1</sup>

Under the *Convention Plus* initiative, a Core Group on Resettlement has prepared a Multilateral Framework of Understandings on Resettlement which is to provide a platform for situation-specific multilateral agreements that include a resettlement component.<sup>2</sup> The intention is to strengthen the international refugee protection system through a more strategic use of resettlement for the benefit of a greater number of refugees. The purpose of the 'Framework of Understandings' is to guide parties to situation-specific multilateral agreements in designing comprehensive arrangements which involve multilateral resettlement operations. See Chapter 1 of this Handbook for more information.

The Resettlement Core Group is comprised by UNHCR and interested States (ranging from asylum countries to long time resettlement countries as well as countries that are new to resettlement). It has also included other partners such as IOM and the European Commission. Mechanisms have been established to enable NGOs to feed directly into the process undertaken by the Core Group, and to keep States that are not member of the Core Group informed as appropriate.

## 10.2 Interagency Cooperation

UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) have a long-standing partnership, have forged models of cooperation in many areas and promote integrated policies and comprehensive approaches to displacement.

Founded in 1951 in Brussels, IOM was set up to ensure the orderly movement of persons in need of international migration assistance, and to promote the cooperation of Governments and international organizations in the field of migration.

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 1 of this Handbook for a fuller explanation of *the Global Consultations on International Protection* and its resulting *Agenda for Protection*. Activities relating to resettlement under the *Agenda for Protection* are mainly found under Objectives 3 (*Sharing burdens and responsibility more equitable and building capacities to receive and protect refugees*) and 5 (*Redoubling the search for durable solutions*).

<sup>2</sup> Information on *Convention Plus* is available and regularly updated on <http://www.unhcr.org>.

IOM has received from its Member States a mandate to ensure orderly processes of migration, including organized transfer of refugees. Services which can be provided include pre-screening, counselling, documentation, medical processing, training, transport, reception and integration. According to its Constitution, IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. It acts to assist in meeting the operational challenges of migration, to advance understanding of migration issues, to encourage social and economic development through migration and to work towards effective respect for human dignity and well-being of migrants.

IOM and UNHCR have concluded a Memorandum of Understanding<sup>1</sup>, aimed at facilitating systematic, cooperative action between the two organizations. With this agreement, the two organizations seek to build on each other's recognized expertise and to establish operational cooperation.

IOM has always worked closely with UNHCR to assist with third-country resettlement of refugees, principally with respect to travel, and also in the context of the provision of language training and cultural orientation which can help lay the basis for successful integration. It has also played a significant role in the facilitation of the reunification of refugee families.

### **Transportation**

IOM has negotiated special tariff agreements with the airline industry on a worldwide basis. These special IOM fares benefit all categories of persons assisted under the auspices of the Organisation, allow for considerable concessions on the air tariffs and also provide an increased free baggage allowance.

When travel is not arranged within the framework of an ongoing resettlement operation, individuals should be advised of the possibility to procure air tickets at reduced fares under subsidised migration schemes maintained by IOM. Under these schemes, IOM helps refugees and other persons in need of assistance, in particular through the handling of pre-departure and transport arrangements.

Transport is normally provided on scheduled airline services on an individual basis or on group flights. If so required, and in particular for massive population movements, transportation is also arranged on charter flights. In case of need, IOM may also provide transport by bus, truck, rail or ship.

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<sup>1</sup> UNHCR/IOM/39/97-FOM/44/97 of 27 May 1997 on Co-operation between UNHCR and IOM. This document governs the relations between the two institutions and provides the broad framework for achieving complementarity of the activities world-wide of UNHCR and IOM.

The Co-operation between UNHCR and IOM in the transportation sector was further formalized in May 2000 in “Guidance Note on Co-operation Between IOM and UNHCR in the Transportation Sector”, according to which IOM’s responsibilities are:

- IOM will, at the request of UNHCR, assume responsibility for the timely arrangement of air, sea and land transportation of refugees, returnees and other persons of concern to UNHCR, including secondary transportation as necessary.
- For air and sea transportation, IOM will also assume responsibility for immigration formalities and customs clearance.
- IOM will raise funds for the transportation services cited above, and UNHCR will endeavour to ensure donor recognition of this requirement.
- Upon the request of UNHCR, IOM will provide duty travel arrangements on commercial carriers for accompanying UNHCR and/or implementing partner staff at IOM rates, subject to agreement on administrative costs of this service.

### **Medical processing**

Specific medical examination and documentation requirements exist in most countries that accept refugees for resettlement. Based on agreements with these countries, IOM often performs such examinations or screens the documentation prepared by other medical authorities.

IOM’s responsibilities for medical evacuations include:

- identifying and selecting suitable patients proposed by local doctors;
- forwarding patients files to the country of treatment;
- identifying a suitable country for treatment;
- arranging entry authorisation with embassies;
- arranging transportation of patients to the receiving country for treatment, with nurses or medical escort if needed;
- arranging for a patient’s return when treatment is completed and conditions allow.

## **10.3 Governments and Resettlement Operations**

Cases of individuals in need of resettlement are usually submitted to one of the principal resettlement countries. These countries have established refugee resettlement quotas or ceilings.

Other countries do accept resettlement on an *ad hoc* basis and some maintain special programmes benefiting refugees with special needs.

UNHCR promotes with Governments the establishment of resettlement programmes which are:

- *predictable*, in terms of admissions levels, budgets, and eligibility criteria;
- *diverse*, in terms of the refugee beneficiaries, to include protection cases as well as refugees with special needs;
- *responsive* to emergency needs, emerging needs and appeals for burden-sharing;

*proactive*, in addressing domestic considerations linked especially to budget constraints and problems related to integration. There is a unique challenge for Governments and NGOs to listen to the local municipalities and to take active steps to lead, inform and assist them to make resettlement function properly at all levels;

- “*holistic*” and comprehensive in approach, in using resettlement to ensure protection, a durable solution, and effective sharing of burdens and responsibilities, within the context of a broader refugee policy which addresses needs in countries of origin and first asylum; and
- open to the *strategic* use of resettlement, e.g. through the *group resettlement* as a means of providing a durable solution in protracted refugee situations where prospects for voluntary repatriation in the near future or local integration in the country of asylum are remote.

The “resettlement continuum” ranges from identification and referral in the field, to acceptance and travel, to reception and durable settlement in a third country. The process of consultations with Governments and agency partners allows for the exchange of information to identify and work to resolve problems at every stage of the process. The Working Group on Resettlement comprised of UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration and resettlement countries is meeting in Geneva three times a year. Similarly, the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement, which comprises of the same actors, as well as international NGOs, takes place annually in June. Regional consultations have been held with agencies from Europe, the United States of America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The formal consultation process with Governments and NGOs, which started in October 1995 and June 1996, continues to allow for a regular exchange with a view to developing strategies for meeting resettlement needs in a coherent and transparent manner. The Working Group on Resettlement has gained further impetus due to its prominent role in parts of the protection initiatives of UNHCR over recent years.

For example, it has played an active role in defining the strategic use of resettlement and is explicitly referred to in the *Agenda for Protection* as the designated actor on specific issues.<sup>1</sup>

## 10.4 Non-Governmental Organizations

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a significant role in providing various resettlement services. The role and function of NGOs will vary from country to country, but in many cases these organizations provide a liaison function to the refugee, UNHCR and the receiving Government. In many cases, NGOs are the direct link for UNHCR and by consequence the refugee, with the public at large in resettlement countries. The various NGOs also provide UNHCR resettlement activities with collateral value, since it is often through the work of NGOs and their community volunteers that the public first gets to know about refugees and the work of UNHCR. This aspect of NGO work has a positive impact on fund-raising, advocacy for various refugee groups, and fulfilling public information functions.

NGOs assisting UNHCR as operational partners, or working independently, and like Governments in resettlement countries, must be briefed by UNHCR on the full range of constraints involved in the resettlement process, competing demands for scarce quotas, and the need for co-operation on priority, deserving cases. It must be borne in mind that while Governments and/or NGOs may intervene to promote resettlement of certain groups of specific interest to them, UNHCR must consider resettlement on the merits of the circumstances in relation to refugee protection and durable solutions for refugees.

### Advocacy for refugees

In many resettlement countries, NGOs are in the forefront of advocating for refugee protection and assistance with their Governments, the public, and other organizations. This is evident in the advocacy which NGOs at times undertake for specific refugee groups of concern to their constituencies and communities. This may take the form of public education campaigns on behalf of specific refugee groups that have close ties to the community. In other cases, specific refugee populations are of interest because of historical connections to the countries of origin.

Advocacy takes the form of individual casework for specific refugees, using the tools of public education and contacts with Government officials to expedite the resettlement of specific individuals or families. Efforts are also undertaken by NGOs on behalf of individual refugees under UNHCR's mandate. In other cases, NGOs work more broadly with officials and politicians to promote positive admission decisions and expedited movement of cases.

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<sup>1</sup> Goal 3, Objectives 2 and 6, and Goal 5, Objective 1.

Advocacy in many resettlement countries is also evident in NGO efforts to assure that Governments dedicate sufficient funding for refugee assistance and resettlement activities. This includes support for overall UNHCR identified budgetary needs, as well as support for the national social service budgets with special attention to refugee services. Many NGOs engage in lobbying activities on behalf of refugees, including specific groups needing protection, including resettlement, and assistance.

Such lobbying activities vary with the political systems of each country, but in many cases involve extensive grassroots networks of dedicated activists who respond to calls for action on refugee needs.

In some cases, advocacy activities by NGOs also include lobbying for or against specific legislation, thereby seeking to promote the principles of refugee protection and provision of asylum. Such legislation may be national in character, or may have regional and international implications as Governments seek to harmonise their laws and practices.

NGOs often have an important role not only in the promotion of resettlement cases, but also in policy formulation regarding admission criteria, priorities and quotas. Many Governments maintain a close working relationship with NGOs in the formulation of policy and consult with NGO experts to design and implement new programmes and resettlement strategies. In the same manner, NGOs are in the forefront not only of providing settlement (integration and adjustment) services, but also of designing integration and adjustment programmes at the community level that will assist refugees to start a new life and become productive members of their new societies.

UNHCR frequently works with NGOs to promote specific resettlement needs and to meet public education and information needs. Care should be exercised by Field Office staff to co-ordinate such needs for advocacy with UNHCR Headquarters and the appropriate Field Office in the resettlement country.<sup>1</sup> In the same manner, requests by NGOs lobbying with Field Offices should be co-ordinated with UNHCR Headquarters and other pertinent offices, so that communication is effective and appropriate to the situation. In the spirit of PARinAC, UNHCR and NGOs can effectively help promote the addressing of international refugee protection needs, specific regional solutions for refugee crisis, and specific refugee groups who are in need of resettlement.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The following UNHCR offices cover principal resettlement countries: Regional Office Canberra (Australia and New Zealand), Branch Office Ottawa (Canada), Regional Office Stockholm (Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden), Liaison Office The Hague (The Netherlands), Unit for Switzerland at Headquarters (Switzerland), Regional Office Washington (United States of America).

<sup>2</sup> The foundation for the UNHCR-NGO Partnership in Action (PARinAC) process was laid in Oslo, Norway in 1994 by way of the PARinAC Oslo Declaration and Plan of Action. See also, *Report on PARinAC and Plan of Action 2000*, UNHCR NGO Unit, Geneva, February 2000, according to which the principal contribution of the process has been the inclusion and increased awareness of the potential and responsibility of national NGOs.

UNHCR is guided by Recommendation 32 of the PARinAC Oslo Declaration and Plan of Action agreed in 1994, which states that:

“UNHCR should develop a closer relationship with resettlement NGOs in the area of resettlement needs for vulnerable groups. UNHCR should formalise its co-operation and regularly consult with NGOs in the field, as well as in resettlement countries, to better utilise the annual resettlement needs assessment, as a tool to maintain, increase or target resettlement quotas established by Governments. UNHCR and NGOs should develop a closer consultation mechanism in the design, analysis, and use of the annual resettlement needs assessment document.”

In many countries, resettlement and other NGOs work hand in hand through umbrella organizations or networks to help co-ordinate their activities and public voice. UNHCR often consults with these umbrella organizations and individual members in each of the resettlement countries.

### **NGO services to refugees in countries of asylum**

UNHCR Field Offices will often have well-established relationships with NGOs to help facilitate counselling and assistance to refugees who may be eligible for resettlement. Some resettlement countries, notably the United States of America, utilise NGOs in the pre-screening and processing of cases before the immigration officials determine eligibility of cases for resettlement. This role of NGOs can help facilitate the work of UNHCR Field Offices where applicable, as in many circumstances close co-operation on specific cases and groups can be arranged between the UNHCR Field Office and the NGO (in the context of resettlement in the United States of America, usually the Joint Voluntary Agency, or JVA).

While eligibility criteria and admission requirements are determined by countries of resettlement, and the NGO working to assist in the processing and pre-screening for such cases is bound by laws and regulations in this regard, many resettlement countries give first priority to cases referred by UNHCR. At the same time, there are countries which process and admit for resettlement other groups parallel to UNHCR referrals.

It is important for UNHCR Field Offices to work closely with NGOs and diplomatic representations (missions, etc.) of Governments to understand the specific and unique features of each country's resettlement programme in order to encourage the movement of UNHCR priority cases. NGOs entrusted by their respective Governments with pre-screening and processing can, in this role, often help to advocate for specific groups or individuals.

In some countries of asylum, NGOs work as UNHCR's implementing partners to help screen cases needing resettlement, as well as to provide counselling services to refugees needing assistance. In many cases this involves smaller and more diverse "urban" refugee populations, as compared to larger refugee populations in refugee camps. In other circumstances, specific refugee groups within a camp population are identified as in need of resettlement, based on considerations such as their ethnic background, social composition, or religious affiliation. NGOs can sometimes help Field Office staff in the early assessment and identification of potential resettlement cases, as well as in the processing of documents needed to constitute a resettlement dossier. It is envisioned that NGOs be included in resettlement operations under UNHCR Group Methodology, see Chapter 7 of this Handbook.

### UNHCR-ICMC Resettlement Deployment Scheme

The UNHCR-ICMC Resettlement Deployment Scheme began in 1997 and was initiated to provide additional support to UNHCR in fulfilling its mandate as it relates to the resettlement of refugees as a tool of protection and as a durable solution. The Deployment Scheme constitutes a mutually beneficial means for both UNHCR and the resettlement countries to respond to the needs of refugees. The two primary goals of the Deployment Scheme are:

- To increase the capacity of UNHCR to refer refugees for resettlement consideration; and
- To increase the understanding between UNHCR and its NGO resettlement partners.

The Deployment Scheme offers an opportunity to bring skilled people from a variety of NGO as well as Government backgrounds into the UNHCR organization. Their temporary placement to a UNHCR field office provides deployees with an increased understanding of how the UNHCR resettlement program functions within the context of finite resources, and local and international partnerships. In turn, UNHCR benefits from the experience of people grounded in community work in refugee-receiving countries. After their assignment, deployees return to their home community, Government or NGO context and are able to use their new experiences and insights to increase awareness of UNHCR's resettlement work, and the participation of NGOs and governments in it.

### NGO services to refugees in resettlement countries

In many resettlement countries, NGOs are the primary providers of services to the arriving refugee. These services are usually funded by the host Government and/or local resources raised independently by the NGO. Depending on the system of social welfare services in each country, NGO services to refugees may encompass addressing comprehensively the needs of the resettled refugee, including services relating to language training and search for employment. NGOs usually provide a counselling role for refugees, often working with specific communities to provide language and culturally-sensitive help.

NGOs often co-ordinate the contributions of volunteers and direct private donations to refugees who have been resettled. These contributions are an added value to the services to which refugees are eligible in each country of resettlement. Most important, NGOs not only contribute in cash and with in-kind donations to the resettlement of refugees, but help the refugee and family make new friends and contacts necessary for the successful integration. Usually termed “sponsorships”, such arrangements utilise local resources of religious groups, community organizations or business associations to help meet the needs of refugees and their families.

NGOs are often in the forefront of culturally-sensitive mental health and specialised adjustment services. Working in close co-operation with professional associations, universities, hospitals and health centres, NGOs seek to assure that special needs of refugees (e.g. trauma due to torture or rape, etc.) are addressed. In some cases such services are provided free of charge, on sliding fee basis, or funded by governmental and non-governmental sources. UNHCR Field Offices should always consult with Headquarters when specific questions arise on specialised mental health and medical needs for specific refugees.

In some resettlement countries, NGOs are also the primary provider of training services related to employment. Many innovative services have been designed to include direct partnerships with large and small employers, who look upon newly resettled refugees as an important resource in the labour market. In some resettlement countries, there are incentives for refugees to quickly enter into the labour market. UNHCR Field Offices should let refugees know that there will be high expectations on resettled refugees to enter the job market at any available level, including early employment into positions which may be below their professional training and qualifications.

NGOs also help resettled refugees get reunified with their families still abroad. The practice of NGOs in this field varies significantly among countries, and NGOs will be bound in their family reunification work by the laws and regulations of each resettlement country. In particular, when special cases arise that are outside normal immigration or refugee resettlement procedures, NGOs may still be able to facilitate family reunification under temporary protection schemes, specialised “leave to remain” programmes, and other forms of humanitarian admissions. UNHCR offices in resettlement countries should be contacted when such cases arise to activate NGO networks.

## **10.5 The Media**

### **Responding to the media**

The news media are an important facilitator of protection and assistance to refugees. News media provide an effective way to mobilize support and increase public awareness of the plight of refugees.

Used effectively, co-operation with the media can have a positive impact on public and Government support to refugees, and can help promote understanding of UNHCR, its protection concerns, and its mandate. In turn, this can spark essential funding for refugee programmes.

UNHCR's public information policy permits and encourages staff members to speak to the press. However, in some situations, it will not be appropriate to air in public some specific concerns, particularly when individuals may be at risk. For this reason, if there are any doubts about potential implications, staff should consult with senior colleagues or with the Public Information Section based at its Headquarters.

### **The refugee story**

It is the nature of the news media to be at least as interested in the details of a personal story as they are in facts and figures. Focusing on a refugee's personal story can be beneficial to that person, to UNHCR and to the work of the Resettlement Section. This media interest can bring with it enormous advantages; but it can also warrant sensitive protection considerations.

Resettlement work is about moving the individual refugee directly from the overcrowded refugee camp, the detention centre, and the dangers, misery and suffering of the first asylum country to a safe third country removed from such risks. In many countries, particularly developed countries which are distant from major crisis areas and which directly receive few asylum-seekers, contacts with resettlement workers and resettled refugees represent virtually their only direct exposure with refugee issues and UNHCR. In the words of one Government representative, resettlement represents "a window to UNHCR". Interest along these lines should be encouraged. Every effort should be made to provide an accurate and positive view through that "window".

### **Sensitising the media without losing the story**

In order to minimise the risks associated with publicising individual refugee problems, every opportunity should be taken to encourage journalists to respect the confidentiality of certain information and, where possible, to avoid releasing the individual's identity, or details which could permit identification, such as specific references to the refugee's political involvement in the country of origin and dates and places where political activity took place. While the publication of photographs may complement a story, this should not occur without the agreement – on an informed basis - of the refugee.

## Being protection-minded

Resettlement involves the processing of individual refugee cases, and it is therefore important to be protection-minded when dealing with this information and the media. The first priority of UNHCR is the protection of the individual refugee. The particulars of personal experience which individual refugees have provided to UNHCR are privileged information and should not be shared with persons who are not authorised by UNHCR unless the refugees have specifically agreed to that information being released.

It is important to be aware that the publication of detailed personal information from the refugee's story, such as the names, age, sex, family situation, villages/cities of origin, or the political activities of refugees might increase the vulnerability of the persons concerned or of members of the family still in the country of origin. It may increase the risk of retaliatory measures by national authorities, either in the asylum country or in the event the refugee decides to repatriate. If the media requests an interview which will highlight a refugee's story, the refugee should be fully counselled as to the purpose of the interview and advised that he or she has the right to refuse it or to use an assumed name.

Careful consideration should also be given to the emotional and psychological well-being of the refugee and his or her family before they are encouraged to relate and repeat stories of violence, rape, torture or other atrocities. Remember that the first concern must be for the safety and best interests of the individual sharing the story. A UNHCR officer should offer to be present during media interviews, if the refugee so wishes. The media should be discouraged from interviewing refugee children, particularly when they have undergone trauma. Likewise, the media should, and UNHCR staff should advise the media and refugees as needed toward this end.

If the outcome of the story is unfavourable or inaccurate or if the journalist failed to respect clearly stated ground rules, do not immediately complain to the journalist concerned or the editor. Instead, inform the Representative or the Public Information Section at UNHCR Headquarters as soon as possible.