



International Conference on the Reception and Integration of Resettled Refugees

25-27 April 2001, Norrköping, Sweden

ICRIRR: Principles

***“You can’t feel grounded until you belong.
You can’t belong until you’re accepted.”***

Preamble

Refugees strengthen societies through their cultural diversity and the contributions, which they bring. We affirm that resettlement of refugees works. Most refugees integrate successfully into their host communities and most of the support and services provided by governments, refugee communities, non-governmental organisations and the public makes a difference.

Resettlement is an important tool of refugee protection and a durable solution for many refugees. It is not a substitute for asylum, but rather a complementary way of providing protection to people in need. Resettlement offers refugees the possibility to begin new lives and to become fully participating members of society. Given global needs and the success of resettlement as a durable solution, we believe that the use of resettlement should be expanded in the future.

The challenge for states and for UNHCR is to ensure that resettlement selection is carried out in a fair, transparent, and equitable manner based on refugee needs for protection and for durable solutions. A particular challenge for states is to be inclusive in their resettlement criteria and not automatically to exclude groups or countries from consideration. While we acknowledge that resettlement may not be appropriate in every situation, it should be seen as an integral component of a comprehensive international response.

Experience with resettlement varies from country to country. Some countries have long resettlement histories while others are new to the process. But all resettlement countries are committed to facilitating refugee integration, to nurturing a hospitable environment for refugees, and are willing to learn from one another. While integration occurs within a framework of national policy and in a particular cultural context, it is fundamentally a personal process through which refugees develop a sense of belonging, make friendships, and enjoy mutual respect in their new society.

The following general principles will serve as a guide to our efforts to promote refugee integration.

Integration

1. Integration is a mutual, dynamic, multi-faceted and on-going process. “From a refugee perspective, integration requires a preparedness to adapt to the lifestyle of the host society without having to lose one’s own cultural identity. From the point of view of the host society, it requires a willingness for communities to be welcoming and responsive to refugees and for public institutions to meet the needs of a diverse population.”¹
2. Integration is “multi-dimensional in that it relates both to the conditions for and actual participation in all aspects of the economic, social, cultural, civil and political life of the country of resettlement as well as to refugees’ own perceptions of, acceptance by and membership in the host society.”²
3. Opportunities for resettled refugees to become citizens and to enjoy full and equal participation in society represent an over-arching commitment by governments to refugee integration.
4. Family reunification is crucial to refugee integration. Similarly, relatives and ethnic community networks can play key roles in successful refugee integration.
5. A multi-dimensional, comprehensive and cohesive approach that involves families, communities and other systems can help refugees to restore hope and to re-build their lives.

Refugees at the Centre

6. Refugees bring resources and skills to the countries in which they resettle. Host societies are strengthened and enriched by the contributions of refugees.
7. Refugee participation and leadership are essential in the development, implementation and evaluation of both refugees’ own individual settlement and integration programmes.
8. Underlying the practical, tangible needs which refugees have are more fundamental needs for dignity, security, social connectedness, and identity. Both these more fundamental needs and immediate material needs must be addressed.
9. Enabling refugees to use their own resources and skills to help each other is a priority.
10. Responding to the range of needs specific to the refugee experience will improve resettlement programmes and enhance integration.

¹ Adapted from the European Council on Refugees and Exiles, “Policy on Integration,” 1999.

² ECRE, “Policy on Integration,” 1999.

Strengthening Receiving Communities

11. Building community capacity for equitable partnership in refugee reception and integration involves all sectors of the community.
12. Refugees integrate themselves. The responsibility of the public, private and community sectors is to work alongside refugees as facilitators to create an environment in which people can be empowered.
13. The public should receive accurate and timely information about refugee situations. Receiving communities require additional specific information in preparing for the arrival of refugees in their communities. In both cases, the media have an important role to play.

Strengthening Partnerships

14. Multi-faceted partnerships need to be continually developed and strengthened among governments, refugees, communities, non-governmental organisations, and volunteers.
15. Strengthening relationships between those working to identify refugees in need of resettlement and the communities where they will be resettled is important to the resettlement process.

(28/04/01)