





CHAPTER 2.2

Welcoming and Receiving Resettled Refugees

GOALS FOR INTEGRATION (SEE CHAPTER 1.3)

-  **ONE** To restore security, control and social and economic independence by meeting basic needs, facilitating communication and fostering the understanding of the receiving society.
-  **TWO** To promote the capacity to rebuild a positive future in the receiving society.
-  **THREE** To promote family reunification and restore supportive relationships within families.
-  **FOUR** To promote connections with volunteers and professionals able to provide support.
-  **FIVE** To restore confidence in political systems and institutions and to reinforce the concept of human rights and the rule of law.
-  **SIX** To promote cultural and religious integrity and to restore attachments to, and promote participation in, community, social, cultural and economic systems by valuing diversity.
-  **SEVEN** To counter racism, discrimination and xenophobia and build welcoming and hospitable communities.
-  **EIGHT** To support the development of strong, cohesive refugee communities and credible refugee leadership.
-  **NINE** To foster conditions that support the integration potential of all resettled refugees taking into account the impact of age, gender, family status and past experience.

 The focus of this Chapter

 To keep in mind

Chapter 2.2

The First Weeks and Months: Reception Arrangements



RECEPTION

This Chapter defines the basic elements of a program for welcoming resettled refugees and for supporting them prior to their placement in the receiving community. More detailed information on these elements (e.g. orientation, social support) are described in other Chapters of this Handbook.

While the emphasis in this Chapter is on reception arrangements for resettled refugees funded by government, many of the principles and processes described in it apply equally to resettled refugees received by private sponsors or proposers (see Chapter 2.3).



CHECKLIST

Welcoming and receiving resettled refugees

Think about:

- ✓ airport reception and transit arrangements;
- ✓ reception accommodation;
- ✓ basic practical orientation;
- ✓ linkages between reception care and settlement support;
- ✓ arrangements for identifying resettled refugees with intensive needs, in particular, acute health problems.



Welcoming and reception as resources for rebuilding

While the first weeks and months in a receiving society have the potential to be among the most overwhelming for resettled refugees, they can also be a time when the foundations are laid for positive and successful resettlement.

On arrival, resettled refugees may be suffering the effects of their recent experiences of trauma, displacement and loss. At the same time, knowing little about the receiving society, they may be anxious about their future and how they will cope. The reception period is also one of intense adjustment to an unfamiliar environment, a time when resettled refugees will be coming to terms with a range of changes, from different climatic conditions and daily routines to new foods, shopping conventions and currency.

Given the circumstances surrounding their migration, many resettled refugees will not have family and friends in the receiving society, nor access to the basic resources required for day-to-day survival.

This is also a time when resettled refugees must undertake a range of practical tasks such as opening a bank account, registering for income support and health care, and enrolling children in school.

It is on the basis of their first days and weeks that resettled refugees form their first impressions of the receiving society. To the extent that these impressions are long lasting, they will have a bearing on the course of the integration process.



When I arrived here, I first had a feeling of security, relief, peace in general, that permitted me to be calm in the first place, to be calm psychologically. I am grateful for this, I must be grateful.

Resettled refugee



The reception phase provides resettlement countries with their first opportunity to welcome resettled refugees and to assist them in re-establishing a sense of safety and security.

While volunteers and refugee communities have an important role in refugee reception, it is typically funded by government as an integral part of an integration program (though often delivered by non-governmental agencies).

Issues to consider in planning welcoming and reception

Defining the elements of the reception process

While reception processes differ, common elements include:

- meeting resettled refugees at the airport. As well as serving obvious practical purposes, this is an opportunity to welcome refugees. In some countries, among them Sweden and Iceland, volunteers and members of refugee communities are engaged in this process. These countries have found that this not only enables resettled refugees to communicate directly in their own language, but enhances their sense of safety and security. However, caution should be taken not to overwhelm resettled refugees, many of whom may be suffering the effects of a long journey;
- transit arrangements between the airport and either reception accommodation or the first placement community.

In some countries (such as Norway and Sweden), the reception phase is very short, with resettled refugees being placed in permanent housing in the community within days of their arrival. They are linked with municipal support providers who are responsible for conducting assessment in co-operation with the resettled refugee and for providing both immediate and long term resettlement support.

More commonly, however, the following is also included as part of the reception phase:

- temporary accommodation until such time as permanent accommodation can be arranged;
- basic practical orientation including orientation to banking systems, registering with relevant government programs (e.g. income support, health care, public housing) and school enrolment;
- initial assessment and the establishment of linkages with a resettlement agency to provide ongoing settlement support.



RECEPTION

How can you describe how it feels to leave hell and enter paradise? Living in a small room and then being able to walk out into the sunshine and meet people.

Resettled refugee



The advantages of supported reception accommodation arrangements

A SUPPORTED reception accommodation arrangement can:

- provide a safe environment in which resettled refugees can deal with the immediate tasks of resettlement. If permanent housing takes some time to secure, this can create considerable

instability at this time;

- allow other services such as health care and basic orientation to be delivered more efficiently before resettled refugees settle in the wider community;
- allow resettled refugees to play a more active role in choosing permanent housing, as they are able

to draw on their experience of the resettlement country;

- allow permanent housing to be selected taking work-travel arrangements into account (in circumstances where employment is obtained in the reception period).



The reception process may also be utilised to:

- offer post arrival health care (see Chapter 2.10);
- begin to provide language instruction;
- provide more intensive orientation.

How should reception be organised?

As indicated above, most countries have a period during which resettled refugees are offered temporary accommodation and early practical support, prior to settling in the community. This period can range from several weeks to up to 12 months. There are a number of advantages in this approach (see box).

However, supported reception housing arrangements have the potential to foster dependency and resettled refugees may be reluctant to leave them for permanent housing; alternatively, delay in finding housing can be a source of anxiety. Active support to secure long term housing is therefore important at this time.

In those countries where reception housing is provided in institutional settings such as reception centres and hostels, they are readily identifiable to the wider community. This may in turn lead to the stigmatisation of resettled refugees. Where resettled refugees spend an extended period in a reception centre with others from their community, their day-to-day opportunities to connect with the community and to practise the language of the receiving country are limited. For these reasons, a number of countries have established smaller individual reception houses in the general community.

INTEGRATION IN PRACTICE



RECEPTION

Easing the way in Spain, New Zealand, Australia and Denmark

IN SPAIN , resettled refugees are met at the airport by representatives of the UNHCR, government and the main resettlement non-government organisation. The Spanish Red Cross is responsible for transporting them to a reception centre where they are offered accommodation, medical care and basic orientation.	Service offers immediate social support and links resettled refugees with specially trained volunteers for longer term resettlement support.	In DENMARK , four municipalities have recently trialed a program involving former refugees in the reception process. Former refugees prepare new arrivals' accommodation with food and flowers, welcome them and in the following weeks take them on guided tours of the city to introduce them to basic facilities and services (e.g. health clinics, the post office). The volunteers impart informal local knowledge, such as where cheaper retail or traditional food outlets can be found. They also play an important role in explaining and 'interpreting' Danish society. This program was planned on the basis of meetings with former refugees to ascertain, from their experience, what could be done to enhance the reception and orientation process. The program complements the roles of municipal officers who retain primary responsibility for the reception process. It has been effective in relieving the pressures on municipal officers, enabling them to provide more personalised and intensive support to newcomers.
In NEW ZEALAND , resettled refugees spend their first six weeks in a refugee reception centre where they are offered a comprehensive medical and dental check-up and psychological support, where required, by personnel from the Ministry of Health. The New Zealand government funds the Auckland University to coordinate an adult English language training and orientation program and a special program for children and young people to prepare them for entry into mainstream schooling. The Refugees as Survivors Centre provides a trauma counselling service as well as therapeutic activities for children and adults. The Refugee and Migrant	In AUSTRALIA , resettled refugees are met at the airport by an Initial Information and Orientation Assistance Contractor (funded by the Australian government). If the refugee does not have temporary accommodation of their own, for instance with relatives, they are referred to an Accommodation Support Contractor whose role it is to provide initial accommodation and to assist them to secure longer term housing. The Initial Information and Orientation Assistance Contractor is responsible for conducting a comprehensive assessment of their resettlement needs and for coordinating resettlement support in the first six months following their arrival. All resettled refugees have access to specialist support to access health services and, where required, trauma and torture counselling, for the first 12 months in Australia.	



WELCOMING AND RECEPTION ARRANGEMENTS



I had mixed feelings, but I was happy. When we arrived at the airport I knew my friends were waiting outside.

Resettled refugee



A SOUND INTEGRATION PROGRAM WOULD:

- have arrangements in place to ensure that resettled refugees are met and welcomed on arrival at the airport;
- provide resettled refugees with temporary accommodation until permanent accommodation has been secured;
- provide resettled refugees with assistance in securing longer term accommodation;
- have arrangements in place for basic practical orientation as part of the reception process;
- have sound linkages between reception support providers and services providing longer term resettlement support;
- have measures in place for the identification and treatment of health problems;
- have measures in place to identify and offer additional support to resettled refugees with complex needs.

RECEPTION SERVICES WOULD:

- be provided in the language of the resettled refugee, or arrangements made for interpreters.