

Resettlement Selection Criteria and ID – practices: challenges and current dilemmas

EMN Cluster Meeting organized by NO EMN NCP Thursday 11 June 2015

Report

The Agenda for the meeting is Annex 1 and Annex 2 is a list of participants.

Cindy Horst (PRIO): Based on her own research among Somali refugees in Kenya she pointed out that many of the issues related to resettlement and integration are still valid when using potential for integration as a selection criterion for resettlement. How this relates to other possible selection criteria, such as the risk for continued harassment also at the refugee camps, being in particularly vulnerable positions (single parents with handicapped children, unaccompanied minors/children, abused women, physically or psychologically handicapped), or having particular ties to the selecting country, etc. It is important that the programs for introducing the resettled refugees into the host community are tailored to their background and resources, as well as to the particular circumstances leading to their selection.

Vincent Cochetel (UNHCR): Reviewed the history of resettlement processes and selection criteria, starting with refugees from Hungary in 1956. Language skills and religion were then mentioned but met with opposition as possible selection criteria. Stressed that the quality of the integration assistance capacity in the host community are as important as the characteristics of the selected individuals, for their successful adaptation to the new circumstances. This has been demonstrated by a number of studies in different host countries. In many communities the initial experience with resettled refugees often has a long-term impact on the attitudes towards hosting resettled refugees. He also stressed the importance of pre-departure programs to prepare the selected individuals for their new circumstances, including some basic language and cultural training, as well as introducing them to the peculiarities of everyday living (e.g. labour market and working conditions, shopping, public transport, housing, media, social services). He suggested that some form of ‘integration contract’ is needed, i.e. a mutual understanding between the resettled refugee and the host authorities concerning the need to respect the individual’s and the host community’s culture and norms.

The discussion following these two introductions raised a number of related issues, with contributions from NO, FI, LT, DE and SE.

Among the additional issues raised in the discussion were:

- the possibilities for host countries to learn from each other’s experiences and practices,
- the importance of retaining family bonds,

- the need to respect a community's capacity to service and integrate the settled refugees,
- the fact that some candidates during the selection process express attitudes and values which are strongly opposed to those of the host community (e.g. with respect to women's education or participation in the labour market),
- the possibility of the resettled refugees to have an explicit or implicit 'integration contract' with the host community,
- the history of terrorist or criminal acts and/or the selling and/or use of drugs;
- the impact on those remaining in the refugee camp/community where the selected persons have been living (e.g. that tensions may be eased if those selected and removed have a certain ethnic profile).
- that the country where the UNHCR camps are located may impose restrictions on the UNHCR's possibilities for nominating candidates for resettlement.

The selection process conducted jointly by officials from the NO immigration and integration agencies was explained. This starts with an evaluation of the need for international protection and the need for resettlement of the candidates that have been nominated by UNHCR as fitting the pre-defined profiles of those to be selected (e.g. that priority is given to certain nationalities/ethnic groups and that at least 60 percent should be women), and then many of the factors mentioned above may be considered, as well as the potential for future criminal behavior, i.e. whether any previous criminal activities were actually minor and possibly committed a long time ago. The host communities' coping/serving capacity may be an important consideration for certain groups of vulnerable persons. DE, FI and SE participants described similar selection processes.

To better establish the identity of the candidates for resettlement the NO selection process for Syrian refugees now involves identity interviews by police experts as well as fingerprinting to ensure that the selected person is the one who actually arrives in the country. The 'identity' that one aims to establish during the interview and from any ID-documents is that which reflects the date and place of birth as well as the parentage, while the 'life history' is used to verify the credibility and the 'qualifications' of the candidate. It is recognized that some persons will not know their date and place of birth or their parentage, that even genuine official documents may contain incorrect information, and that the same person may have had several names during their life for perfectly acceptable reasons. FI reported that they have introduced fingerprinting for the same reason as NO, but for other countries the ID-concerns seems to be less urgent.

Annex 1: Agenda

13.15 – 13.30: Welcome and presentation of participants

13.30 -16.30 with a coffee break at about 15.00:

- Vincent Cochetel (UNHCR)- Intervention
- Cindy Horst (PRIO) – prepared comments
- Questions
- National perspectives and practices: challenges and dilemmas, current development
- Round the table presentations and discussion

Annex 2: List of participants

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