



Integration – A Fundamental Component in Supporting Diverse Societies¹

When the international refugee protection regime was established over 65 years ago, the international community recognised the potential for certain refugee problems to be resolved by means of local integration.² The current situation in Europe urgently requires a strategy that recognises the proper place of integration and self-reliance in the pursuit of durable solutions.

Integration in the refugee context is the end product of a multi-faceted and on-going process, of which self-reliance is but one part. From the host society, it requires communities that are welcoming and responsive to refugees, and public institutions that are able to meet the needs of a diverse population. Integration also requires a preparedness on the part of the refugees to adapt to the host society, without having to forego their own cultural identity.

As a process leading to a durable solution for refugees in the country of asylum, integration has three inter-related and quite specific dimensions.

First, it is a *legal process*, whereby refugees are granted a progressively wider range of rights and entitlements by the host State that are broadly commensurate with those enjoyed by its citizens. These include freedom of movement, access to education and the labour market, access to public services, the possibility of acquiring and disposing of property, and the capacity to travel with valid travel and identity documents. Realisation of family unity is another important aspect of integration. Family unity can provide essential social, psychological, and economic support needed for effective integration. Over time, the process should lead to permanent residence rights and, in some cases, the acquisition, in due course, of citizenship in the country of asylum.

Second, integration is clearly an *economic process*. Refugees become progressively less reliant on State aid, attaining a growing degree of self-reliance and becoming able to pursue sustainable livelihoods, thus contributing to the economic life of the host country.

Third, integration is a *social and cultural process* of acclimatisation by refugees and accommodation by their local community, which enables refugees to live amongst or alongside the host population without xenophobia, discrimination, or exploitation, and contribute actively to the social life of their country of asylum. It is, in this sense, an interactive process involving both refugees and nationals of the host State, as well as its institutions. Effective integration requires a society that is both diverse and open, where people can form a community and sense of safety, regardless of differences.

Promoting self-reliance and reducing the need for external support is in the best interests of refugees and host States alike. Self-reliance is understood to mean that refugees are able to provide for themselves in terms of food and other living expenses, including housing,

¹ The introductory text to this paper is derived from the *Global Consultations on International Protection*, EC/G/02/6, 4th Meeting, 25 April 2002, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3d6266e17.html>.

² See Article 34 of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, as well as the Statute of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

health services, and education; can cope with unexpected events; and do not need to depend on outside assistance. The process of integration is greatly facilitated by refugees becoming self-reliant, since they are better able to interact with the local population economically and socially, and thereby contribute to local development as an asset rather than being perceived a “burden”.

Self-reliance can, however, only be achieved if there is an enabling environment. This includes a viable economic situation, the availability of affordable housing, as well as receptive attitudes within the host community. Moreover, the skills and capacities of refugees themselves also determine their potential for self-reliance.

In addition, refugee integration, particularly in the labour market, can help to address labour shortage and workforce needs in the context of changing demographics of their host societies.

UNHCR has worked intensively with other partners, including refugees themselves, in developing an improved understanding of integration, which is a priority area for UNHCR’s advocacy and capacity-building activities. This is evidenced by the number of research projects and publications that UNHCR has either led or commissioned over the past number of years in various contexts, and which are outlined in further detail below.

UNHCR would encourage the responsible governmental authorities at all levels and their social partners to build on the experience and recommendations that UNHCR has observed through this work, as well as that of other actors, and to draw upon these findings to further support improved integration.

UNHCR Research and Publications in Support of Increased Understanding of Integration

Regional

Asia

In 2010, Japan became the first country in Asia to initiate a third country resettlement pilot project, admitting 30 Myanmarese refugees a year from Thailand. UNHCR subsequently commissioned official research in 2015 entitled [A Socio-Economic Review of Japan’s Resettlement Pilot Project](#). This research looks at the implementation of the pilot project, which lasted for five years, with a focus on refugees’ integration from a socio-economic point of view. The review highlights that those resettled are well on their way towards economic integration. However, social integration is observed as a much longer path. This research provides a number of recommendations on what is still required to foster a welcoming environment leading to refugees’ successful integration.

Europe

UNHCR’s Bureau for Europe has led the research and development of several reports and publications on integration since 2012. Key to this has been placing refugees at the centre of the research undertaken and speaking directly to them to better understand those primary factors that impact upon their feeling of being integrated. For example, the publication, [A New Beginning: Refugee Integration in Europe](#) examined what are the key factors impacting upon refugee integration, such as flight experience, lack of documentation or family separation, and what may influence integration outcomes vis-à-vis some accepted indicators

like employment, housing, education, health, social inclusion and active citizenship. This represented the overarching report to four individual national research reports produced in the primary countries of focus ([Austria](#), [France](#), [Ireland](#) and [Sweden](#)). This also included reflections from experiences in Germany, the UK and Canada, as well as from a parallel research project undertaken by UNHCR in Central Europe entitled the [Integration Evaluation Tool](#).

The Integration Evaluation Tool, which was developed in cooperation with the [Migration Policy Group](#), focused on access to education, employment, and housing. The overall objective of the tool was to develop integration evaluation mechanisms in each of the four countries involved (Bulgaria, Poland, Romania and Slovakia).

Based on UNHCR's policy, refugees must be at the centre in identifying their own needs and capacities, and in making decisions aimed at enhancing their well-being. In support of this, UNHCR has undertaken Participatory Assessments (PA) with refugees in [Finland](#), [Latvia](#) and [Lithuania](#). Moreover, in order to ensure that all refugees – regardless of their age, gender and individual characteristics – have equal access to rights, services and the enjoyment of protection, such assessments have been conducted in an Age, Gender and Diversity (“AGD”)-sensitive manner.

Participatory Assessment methods include various steps aimed at gathering information, reviewing existing information, mapping diversity, facilitating discussions, and systematizing and analysing information. It is a process of building partnerships with refugee women and men of all ages and backgrounds by promoting meaningful participation through structured dialogue. This includes holding separate discussions (or interviews) with women, men, girls and boys in order to gather information on the specific situation they face, to understand their capacities, and to hear their proposed solutions where there are concerns.

North America

UNHCR in Canada, with the support of the Government of Canada, commissioned an overview and analysis of existing research on refugee integration in Canada entitled, [Research Summary on Resettled Refugee Integration in Canada](#). This reflected three main components, including: 1) a summary of key research findings in sectors indicative of integration in Canada, such as labour force participation and income, housing, careers, official language ability, and social links and practices; 2) the identification of research gaps related to refugee integration, especially as they pertain to age, gender, and diversity mainstreaming (AGD); and 3) proposed areas of potential inquiry for UNHCR in future studies based on the findings. The terms of reference for the work acknowledged the interest for UNHCR in learning more about how refugees are integrating and the benchmarks used to measure integration.

In the United States, UNHCR supported the publication, [The Continuity of Risk: A Three-City Study of Congolese Women-at-Risk Resettled in the U.S.](#), which was undertaken by The University of Texas at Austin and North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University. Although the immediate goal in the resettlement of women-at-risk is to provide protection, the long-term goal is for women to be able to successfully integrate within their new country. However, measurements of integration for women-at-risk remain elusive. In this regard, although programmes may be generally successful in meeting the integration aims of the U.S. resettlement programme, the time-limited focus on employment and self-sufficiency appears to overshadow the benefits of meaningful interpersonal interactions that include strong social and emotional support.

Global

Resettlement gives refugees – whose lives have been shattered and futures placed on hold – renewed hope and the opportunity to rebuild their lives. UNHCR encourages States to establish formal resettlement programmes to increase the number of refugees who can benefit from this durable solution. However, resettling refugees requires advance preparation, planning, and long-term commitment, entailing appropriate investments in their integration. Emphasising this, UNHCR produced [The Integration of Resettled Refugees, Essentials for Establishing a Resettlement Programme and Fundamentals for Sustainable Resettlement Programmes](#) booklet. This guide provides an overview of the essential elements a State must put in place in order to establish a resettlement programme, and the fundamentals that should be developed over the longer-term to ensure that their resettlement programme is sustainable.

In addition, UNHCR commissioned research entitled [The Labour Market Integration of Resettled Refugees](#), which was funded by the Government of Canada. This literature review aims to synthesise what is currently known about the labour market integration of resettled refugees. One aspect, widely acknowledged in the literature, is that a ‘refugee gap’ appears when comparing resettled refugees to other immigrants in terms of labour market integration. This review examines, given the available evidence, the extent to which resettled refugees have been able to integrate into the labour market of the host country, the barriers and resilience factors to labour market integration, and promising practices for improving labour market integration.

APPENDIX OF RESOURCES

Regional

Asia

- [A Socio-Economic Review of Japan's Resettlement Pilot Project](#)

Europe

- [A New Beginning: Refugee Integration in Europe](#)
- [Facilitators and Barriers: Refugee Integration in Austria](#)
- [A New Beginning: Refugee Integration in France](#)
- [Towards a New Beginning: Refugee Integration in Ireland](#)
- [A New Beginning: Refugee Integration in Sweden - It's about time!](#)
- [Refugee Integration and the Use of Indicators: Evidence from Central Europe \(IET\)](#)

Participatory Assessments

- [Speaking for Ourselves: Hearing Refugee Voices, A Journey Towards Empowerment](#)
- [Integration of refugees in Latvia: Participation and Empowerment](#)
- [Integration of refugees in Lithuania Participation and Empowerment](#)

North America

- [Research Summary on Resettled Refugee Integration in Canada](#)
- [The Continuity of Risk: A Three-City Study of Congolese Women-at-Risk Resettled in the U.S.](#)

Global

- [UNHCR's ExCom Conclusion No. 104 on Local Integration](#)
- [Combating Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance through a Strategic Approach](#)
- [The Integration of Resettled Refugees, Essentials for Establishing a Resettlement Programme and Fundamentals for Sustainable Resettlement Programmes](#)
- [The Labour Market Integration of Resettled Refugees](#)

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