

UNHCR GUIDELINES REGARDING SURGICAL TREATMENT AND
NON-ROUTINE MEDICAL INVESTIGATIONS FOR REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT CANDIDATES

Introduction and Statement of Policy

1. During recent years diplomatic missions of several resettlement countries have requested UNHCR's field offices or its operational partners or IOM offices to refer refugees from camps and urban areas to hospitals and private clinics. Through such referrals more sophisticated and in-depth medical investigations have been sought with a view to upgrading the health conditions of refugees, through costly surgery at the expense of UNHCR, prior to, or even after, arriving at decisions on resettlement acceptance. However, even after these measures have been taken, some resettlement countries have rejected resettlement candidates or retained them for unacceptably long periods in their country of asylum, owing to the refugee's condition still being judged unsatisfactorily upgraded. Such a practice cannot be justified either from a policy or a financial standpoint.

2. With effect from issue of the present guidelines, resettlement candidates should not undergo surgical treatment unless it is proven, through objective expert medical evaluation, to be imperative for the preservation of life or vital functions, or to prevent severe deterioration of health. However, under no circumstances should surgery or sophisticated investigations be undertaken as a pre-condition to resettlement acceptance, when these could safely be delayed until after arrival in country of resettlement.

Procedure for Requests for Sophisticated Medical Investigations

3. With regard to requests for non-routine, sophisticated medical investigations for determination of fitness to travel, UNHCR should be adequately informed by embassies, consular offices or others with reasonable notice prior to the intended referral. After careful consideration and consultation with the UNHCR medical adviser or medical teams assigned to the area, UNHCR field offices will decide as to whether the referral is justified. Field offices without an assigned medical officer or medical team to assist in this decision should consult with national hospitals for an objective evaluation. In case this proves to be impossible, field offices should consult UNHCR Headquarters.

Procedure for Requests for Surgical Treatment

4. Sometimes the results of investigations, such as those referred to in paragraph 3 above, may lead to a request for health upgrading through surgery. A copy of the request, accompanied by a complete dossier of the refugee concerned, including Resettlement Registration Form (RRF) and EDP biodata sheet for Southeast Asia and detailed medical report, should be sent to UNHCR Headquarters by the fastest possible means. The Medical Officers of Technical Support Service and the Resettlement Officers will examine the case and advise the field office concerned.

5. All requests for surgery from embassies or consular offices, should be addressed through UNHCR field offices to UNHCR Headquarters and no longer to IOM or other UNHCR operational partners. UNHCR Headquarters alone will decide as to whether the surgery recommended is imperative for one or more of the purpose specified in paragraph 2.

6. In the event of a decision to proceed with surgery, field offices should charge expenditure to the appropriate care and maintenance or resettlement project. Headquarters will give alternative instructions for the charging of the expenditure to be incurred in those cases where respective field offices do not have an appropriate care and maintenance or resettlement allocation in their country programmes.

7. Prior to or after resettlement acceptance has been announced by those countries for which UNHCR pays the travel expenses, it should be ensured that any medical investigations or surgery undertaken at UNHCR expense, has been authorised by UNHCR and that the acceptance and/or departure does not hinge upon a satisfactory outcome of such investigations or surgery.

8. In all instances when the resettlement country will be paying for resettlement travel it must be made clear to all parties that, should the country concerned or IOM require any form of surgical treatment and/or additional medical investigations prior to travel, or escort during travel, this will not be the financial responsibility of UNHCR.

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