

This publication is produced by ICMC Europe, together with the North West Gateway Resettlement Partnership of the UK and the Expert Housing Group of the SHARE Network. It is produced in the framework of ICMC's SHARE Project – 'Cities that Care, Cities that Share - A European Resettlement Network Engaging Cities and Regions'. SHARE is a part of the European Resettlement Network (www.resettlement.eu), an inclusive network that supports the development of resettlement in Europe.

SHARE is co-funded by the Pilot Project on Resettlement (2011) of the European Commission. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the European Commission.

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A Place to Live, A Place to Stay

**A Good Practice Guide for
Housing in Refugee
Resettlement**

What is ICMC?

The International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) serves and protects uprooted people – refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants – regardless of faith, race, ethnicity or nationality. Since its creation in 1951, ICMC has identified and accompanied over one million refugees for resettlement. Additionally, ICMC provides expert resettlement personnel to UNHCR field operations through the ICMC-UNHCR Resettlement Deployment Scheme. Through its Turkey and Lebanon offices, the ICMC Refugee Support Centre (RSC) processes refugees for resettlement to the United States. The ICMC Europe office in Brussels works to promote resettlement in Europe, develop the European Resettlement Network (www.resettlement.eu) with its partners IOM and UNHCR, and build European resettlement capacity and expertise.

What is the UK North West Gateway Resettlement Partnership?

The UK's refugee resettlement programme – the Gateway Protection Programme – was established in 2004. The UK government is committed to receiving 750 resettled refugees each year, and works with 3 city and regionally based resettlement programmes to make this commitment a reality. The North West Gateway Resettlement Partnership, made up of the NGO Refugee Action and 6 local authorities – Manchester, Bolton, Bury, Oldham, Tameside and Stockport – operates the largest of these resettlement programmes. The Partnership receives 470 resettled refugees, or just over 60% of the national quota, every year. Since its participation in the Gateway Programme began in 2008, the North West Partnership has welcomed resettled refugees from a diverse range of countries, including Burma, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Bhutan, Iraq, Somalia and Palestine, to the region.

What is SHARE?

SHARE is a 2-year programme, led by ICMC Europe, to build a European resettlement network of regions, cities municipalities and their civil society partners involved in or with a commitment to refugee resettlement, integration and protection. The SHARE Network creates sustainable relationships, disseminates best practice, builds capacity, creates partnerships and strengthens commitments to refugee protection. SHARE Network activities offer structured dialogue, exchange of practices and networking between cities, regional actors and NGO partners and between experienced resettlement countries and countries planning or considering resettlement.

Contents

- 02** Foreword
- 06** Introducing the publication and the SHARE Expert Housing Group
- 08** What is refugee resettlement?
- 10** Understanding housing for refugee resettlement in Europe
- 14** Implementing resettlement quotas: National, regional and local cooperation for placement
- 20** Finding housing for refugee resettlement
- 21** Experience: Renting properties to refugees in cooperation with the Belgian NGO Convivial
- 26** Experience: The housing journey of a Liberian refugee resettled to the UK
- 28** Housing introduction, integration support and welcoming communities
- 33** Experience: Building bridges in Ljusdal, Sweden
- 34** The Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (2014–20): Funding opportunities for housing for resettled refugees and related actions

A Place to Live, A Place to Stay

A Good Practice Guide for Housing in Refugee Resettlement

Foreword

Providing shelter and welcome for resettled refugees

The International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) and the North West Gateway Resettlement Partnership of the UK are delighted to present to you 'A Place to Live, A Place to Stay: A Good Practice Guide for Housing in Refugee Resettlement'. This publication is the result of 12 months of research and consultation with partners and stakeholders of the SHARE Network, supported by the SHARE Expert Group on Housing. This work aimed to identify and structure creative, innovative and successful approaches to providing housing for resettled refugees, to make recommendations for developing this area of work and – ultimately – to strengthen local refugee reception and integration programmes to bring about more and better resettlement in Europe. ICMC and the North West Partnership sincerely hope that this publication will contribute to the further expansion of the SHARE Network and to a renewed invitation to regions, cities, municipalities, civil society organisations, housing actors and local citizens that may find it of interest.

Whilst refugee resettlement has grown steadily in Europe, with regular programmes now in 13 EU Member States, the total annual number of resettlement places Europe offers for refugees in need of protection is only around 5,500. This low share of the approximately 80,000 resettlement places that are available worldwide each year is far too modest given actual needs, in particular those of the more than 2 million people forced to flee Syria to neighbouring countries due to the current crisis there. UNHCR has asked for immediate action to offer protection to the most vulnerable Syrian refugees, requesting that the global community offers a total of 130,000 places to receive Syrian refugees by the end of 2016.

Since the establishment of the SHARE Network in early 2012, ICMC's discussions with European cities and regions have demonstrated their strong commitment to protecting and upholding the human rights of those who are persecuted, their willingness to express solidarity with those in need, and their readiness to offer safety to some of the most vulnerable of the world's refugees via participation in resettlement. At the same time, the global financial crisis continues to present several fundamental challenges to the ability of European regional and local authorities to meet the multiple needs of local citizens, asylum seekers and others, including in relation to housing.

However, regional and local resettlement actors in Europe continue to overcome obstacles to housing resettled refugees by implementing creative and innovative solutions. The expression 'where there is a will, there is a way' certainly applies to the work of the North West Gateway Resettlement Partnership, co-authors of this publication, where a collaborative regional approach underpinned by strong local authority-civil society partnerships has enabled the region to provide housing for refugees resettled to the UK. The North West is a welcoming and diverse region that is home to many different local communities. Essential to the work of the Partnership has been the ongoing support provided by volunteers – including previously resettled refugees – who give their time, energy and expertise to assist newly arriving refugees to settle and integrate.

As SHARE has shown, in order to fulfil national resettlement commitments it is crucial to engage new actors to offer housing for resettlement. Additionally, it is clear that refugees need not only a house but also to feel at home in their new local communities. For refugees who have fled their countries, it may have been many years since they have had a place where they can feel safe, secure and able to focus on the future. Housing is a central and necessary first aspect of regaining autonomy, but resettled refugees also require support to navigate surrounding services, build friendships and be confident in their status as community members. The focus of our research and of this publication therefore reflects the crucial and foundational role of housing in the wider integration process.

Both ICMC and the North West Gateway Resettlement Partnership are delighted to bring you this publication at a time when the European Commission has announced continued co-financing support for the SHARE Network during 2014-15. The success of European resettlement depends on the continued commitment of European regions, cities, municipalities and their civil society partners, and the growth and strengthening of European regional and local resettlement capacity on the practical tools and opportunities for exchange that the SHARE Network facilitates.

At a time when increasing global protection needs are calling on resettlement states and actors across the world to develop robust and timely humanitarian responses, it is our strong belief that this publication can contribute to the primary function of resettlement as a lifesaving tool. Together, we hope that this publication will provide new ideas, approaches and impetus for local and regional actors in Europe to continue making their humanitarian commitments a reality through the provision of shelter and welcome for resettled refugees.

**International Catholic Migration Commission (Europe), in cooperation with
the lead partners of the UK North West Gateway Resettlement Partnership:
Refugee Action
Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council
Bury Council**



Courtesy of Claudia Jbnke

Resettled refugees in the UK

Introducing the publication and the SHARE Expert Housing Group

How can the issue of housing for refugee resettlement be addressed in a way that enables national resettlement quotas to be filled on an annual and ongoing basis? What role does housing play in ensuring resettled refugees are able to settle, integrate and thrive in their new cities and municipalities? What good practice can we identify in housing for resettled refugees at the local, regional and national levels across Europe? How can we share it?

In 2013-14, these questions led ICMC, together with our SHARE Network partners and stakeholders, to undertake a programme of research and evaluation to identify and record innovative and creative approaches to housing for resettled and other refugees. Our research focused on eight experienced and new European resettlement countries and one country currently without a resettlement programme¹. To further develop our understanding of practices identified during initial desktop research, we subsequently conducted 41 qualitative interviews with housing practitioners and policymakers across Europe.

In early 2014, the SHARE Expert Housing Group was established to assist in finalising this work. On February 20-21 2014, ICMC convened a 1.5-day seminar and visit programme in Brussels, at which the SHARE Housing Expert Group developed the recommendations you can find, together with selected practice examples, in the substantive chapters of this publication. To combine theory with practice, the Expert Group also visited housing projects and initiatives for refugees in Brussels, implemented by the Belgian NGOs and SHARE partners Caritas International and Convivial.

We would like to extend our gratitude and thanks to all those who were interviewed during the course of this work, and to the membership of the SHARE Housing Expert Group, listed to the right, for their ongoing support and expert input.

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Courtesy of ICMC

SHARE Housing Expert Seminar, Brussels, February 2014

¹ Experienced and new countries – Belgium, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK. Non-resettlement country – Austria.

What is refugee resettlement?

What is resettlement?

Resettlement is one of three durable solutions available to refugees, alongside repatriation and local integration in the country of asylum. Resettlement involves the selection and transfer of refugees from a state in which they have sought protection to a third country that admits them – as refugees – with a long-term or permanent residence status. Resettlement generally carries with it the possibility for refugees to become naturalised citizens of that country in the future.

Why resettlement?

Resettlement is a tool of international protection for individual refugees whose life, liberty, safety, health or other fundamental rights are at risk in the country where they have sought refuge, and an expression of international solidarity with the developing countries that host the majority of the world's refugees.

The resettlement process

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is the international agency mandated to protect refugees and look for durable solutions. UNHCR identifies refugees in need of resettlement, and proposes that governments accept them for resettlement in their countries. State participation in resettlement is voluntary, and it is governments that select which of the refugees referred to them will be offered permanent places of residence in their countries.

The majority of refugees accepted for resettlement receive information about their resettlement country before they travel, through organised briefings and/or printed information known as pre-departure Cultural Orientation. National governments work with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to organise exit clearances, pre-departure health assessments and travel. Local authorities, NGOs and other organisations working with resettled refugees in resettlement countries continue this process of orientation in local communities after refugees arrive.

Who is resettled?

Of the 10.5 million refugees of concern to UNHCR in the world, only around 1% are submitted for resettlement.

Courtesy of UNHCR/O.Laban-Mattei/December 2013



A Syrian mother and her children arrive at the dilapidated basement where they are staying in the Jordanian capital, Amman

Understanding housing for refugee resettlement in Europe

European resettlement programmes take many different approaches to providing housing for the refugees they receive. Whilst some programmes adopt a standardised national approach, others vary their approaches according to decision-making and competences at the regional and local level. The table on pages 11 and 12 profiles the housing models and approaches in use in the eight experienced and new European resettlement countries this publication focuses on.² It covers approaches to placement, reception models, housing providers, tenancy arrangements and the housing and integration support offered to resettled refugees post-arrival. It should be read together with the glossary of terms provided on the opposite page. Although the practice examples presented in the following chapters include practices and programmes for asylum seekers, refugees exiting asylum procedures and newly arrived migrants in general, the information presented in the table overleaf focuses solely on housing for resettled refugees.³

² Austria does not currently operate a regular refugee resettlement programme, although has participated in ad-hoc resettlement exercises in the past, most recently receiving 30 Christians from Iraq in a humanitarian action in cooperation with the Austrian Integration Fund and the Catholic Church in Austria. For 2014-16, the Austrian government has offered 1,500 humanitarian admission places for Syrian refugees. Humanitarian Admission is the process by which countries admit groups from vulnerable refugee populations in third countries so as to provide temporary protection on humanitarian grounds.

³ Content presented draws on research completed for the July 2013 edition of ICMC's 'Welcome to Europe: A comprehensive guide to resettlement' publication, consultation with SHARE Network partners and stakeholders and input from the SHARE Expert Housing Group.

Glossary of terms

Placement is the process by which resettled refugees are distributed or located on the national territory of the receiving country. Approaches to placement vary across European resettlement programmes, including placement according to voluntary participation of municipalities, mainstreaming placement for resettlement into existing asylum or refugee distribution systems, and the use of both mandatory and negotiated regional/local distribution keys.

Centralised reception refers to programmes that receive resettled refugees into a central, generally collective, accommodation facility where they stay for a defined period before moving to municipalities.

Direct reception refers to programmes that receive refugees into individual housing in municipalities immediately after they arrive.

Social housing has no commonly agreed definition at the European level. In this publication, we use the term to refer to housing owned by municipalities or owned and/or managed by public housing companies.

Private rented housing refers to housing owned by private individuals or companies that is rented for profit on the open market to individual or organisational tenants.

Transitional accommodation is short-term accommodation provided for resettled refugees for a limited period of time prior to their moving to more permanent accommodation. Transitional accommodation can be provided in shared facilities or as individual housing, and is generally used to create time to find more permanent housing options. In some programmes, transitional accommodation can be converted into permanent housing, depending on factors such as landlords' willingness to extend rental agreements or refugees' long-term housing choices.

Tenancy agreements are the legal contracts that designate temporary possession of accommodation or housing for use by a tenant for a defined period. In some European resettlement programmes, resettled refugee tenants are direct signatories to rental agreements, while in others an organisational third party will act as the signatory on their behalf.

Social welfare refers to payments made to refugees to enable them to pay their rent. **'Mainstream social welfare'** is used where refugees receive the same social welfare benefits as other residents of the resettlement country, while **'non-mainstream social welfare'** refers to introductory benefits paid solely to refugees and/or other migrants new to the country.

Housing and integration support is provided to resettled refugees post-arrival by all European resettlement programmes, albeit in a number of different ways. Some resettlement countries mainstream post-arrival integration support into wider provision for other refugees and/or third-country nationals, while others provide specialised programmes specifically for resettled refugees. In most European resettlement countries, integration programmes include information and assistance related to housing.

Housing for Refugee Resettlement in Europe

An overview of 8 European countries (March 2014)

Resettlement country		Belgium	Czech Republic	Finland	France	Germany	The Netherlands	Sweden	UK
Annual resettlement quota Ongoing quota commitments and additional places for Syrian refugees during 2014		100	32	750 (300 additional places for Syrian refugees in 2014)	Consider 100 dossier cases per year (250 additional places for Syrian refugees in 2014)	300 (5000 additional Syrian refugees in 2014)	Approximately 500 per year (4-year flexible quota providing 2000 places)	1900	750
Placement	Municipality involvement in resettlement	Voluntary	Voluntary	Voluntary	Placement according to capacity in five regional programmes	Quota distribution key at the federal level; approach to municipality participation varies across federal states	Regional quota distribution key; voluntary municipality participation	Voluntary	Voluntary
	Centralised/direct reception?	Centralised (6 weeks)	Centralised (6 months)	Direct	Mixed	Centralised (average 14 days)	Direct	Direct	Direct
Housing model & provider	Lead agency for housing	Local welfare agencies	Municipality	Municipality	Mixed (varies across regional programmes)	Mixed (varies across federal states)	Municipality	Municipality	Local authority
	Private rented or social housing?	Mixed	Social housing	Mixed (varies across municipalities)	Mixed		Social housing	Social housing	Mixed (majority private rented housing)
	Transitional or permanent housing?	Transitional (option for permanent tenancy in some cases)	Permanent	Permanent	Transitional (option for permanent tenancy in some cases)		Permanent	Permanent	Transitional (option for permanent tenancy in some cases)
Tenancy arrangements	Tenancy agreements	Refugees as direct tenants	Refugees as direct tenants	Refugees as direct tenants	Mixed	Mixed (varies across federal states)	Refugees as direct tenants	Refugees as direct tenants	Mixed
	Rental payments	Mainstream social welfare	Mainstream social welfare	Non-mainstream social welfare	Mainstream social welfare		Mainstream social welfare	Non-mainstream social welfare	Mainstream social welfare
Housing & integration support	Lead service provider(s)	NGOs and local welfare agencies	Municipality	Municipality	5 NGOs operating regional programmes	Mixed (varies across federal states (includes municipalities, NGOs, integration service providers contracted at national level and others)	Dutch Refugee Council	Swedish Public Employment Service; municipality	NGOs British Refugee Council, Refugee Action & Horton Housing; selected municipalities
	On-arrival housing introductory briefing?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes
	Integration support duration	2 years	12 months	3 years	Variable		12 months	2 years	12 months

Implementing Resettlement Quotas: National, Regional and Local Cooperation for Placement

This chapter includes practices and methods applied in states' implementation of resettlement quotas, focusing on:

- placement strategies;
- information-sharing and multi-level cooperation;
- engaging new municipalities;
- resourcing resettlement at the regional and local level; and
- preparing refugees pre-departure.

The availability of social housing and low-cost rented accommodation has broadly declined in European countries during recent years. It is more often available in 'low demand' areas, where employment and educational opportunities are comparatively limited and which may be more remote or isolated. This dynamic creates a need to balance housing availability and integration conditions within approaches to placement.

There is a mismatch between European housing stock and the size of many resettled households. Resettled refugee families are often larger than their European counterparts, and accommodation for larger families is therefore limited. Additionally, housing for single people is often both high demand and relatively expensive, presenting challenges for availability and affordability.

In the majority of European resettlement countries, the participation of local and regional authorities in resettlement is voluntary. The willingness of regional and local authorities to offer places for resettled refugees therefore strongly influences placement strategies.

Resettled refugees arriving with specific health needs may require accessible and/or adapted housing and to live in proximity to specialist services, thus narrowing placement options. The capacity of regional and local services to meet the needs of resettled refugees is a crucial consideration and challenge for placement decision-making.

Providing appropriate accommodation for resettled refugees depends on local actors receiving full and accurate information on the needs of individual refugees in relation to housing. The resettlement process involves many different actors in the collection and communication of this information, and local/regional actors often identify inadequate information as a challenge for arranging housing.

In some resettlement countries, pre-existing structures to facilitate cooperation between national, regional and local actors and levels of government can be utilised for the benefit of resettlement. In countries where these do not exist, successful implementation of resettlement quotas may require the development of new mechanisms for multi-level stakeholder collaboration, information exchange and finding case-specific solutions.

Resettled refugees arrive into Europe with a wide array of experiences in relation to housing, including both long and short periods spent in refugee camps or urban settings. Their expectations of and familiarity with the type of housing that is available in European countries can therefore vary greatly. Including information on housing in pre-departure Cultural Orientation programmes, and determining the nature and extent of the information to be included, is a key consideration in managing refugees' expectations, building knowledge and providing a positive context for reception and integration.

The North West Gateway Resettlement Partnership in the UK

The North West Gateway Resettlement Partnership, co-author of this publication, is made up of 6 local authorities and the NGO Refugee Action that together operate a regional resettlement programme receiving 470 resettled refugees every year. The UK's national resettlement programme operates via central government grant funding, drawing on European resettlement funding, via a Call for Proposals issued every three years.

The North West Partnership programme makes use of both social housing and private rented accommodation, sourced in participating local authority areas according both to availability and the needs and profiles of incoming refugee groups. The Partnership receives information on incoming refugee groups and individual households from the UK Home Office a minimum of 6 weeks ahead of their arrival. Housing is provided for a period of 12 months after arrival, after which municipalities assist refugees to find accommodation either within or outside of the local authority area, depending on availability, need and individual choice.

Housing is re-used, once vacant, to provide accommodation for subsequent new resettlement arrivals. This housing model ensures a minimal need to procure new housing for each arrival group, that services for new arrivals can be developed over time in specific neighbourhoods, and that refugees can choose where they would like to live based on knowledge acquired during the first 12 months.

Implementing Resettlement Quotas: Practice examples and SHARE Housing Expert Group recommendations

A. Placement strategies

The Swedish Public Employment Service (*PES/Arbetsförmedlingen*) coordinates placement in municipalities of refugees exiting the asylum procedure. PES staff meet with refugees to carry out an assessment covering areas including employment experience, educational background, skills, needs/vulnerabilities and future plans and aspirations. The PES central housing department uses assessment outcomes to place refugees in municipalities that provide the best available context for their integration, particularly in relation to prospects for employment.

Regional ELY Centres in Finland act as points of liaison between national authorities and municipalities. Municipalities provide the relevant centre with basic criteria for the refugees they would like to receive, including household sizes that match locally available housing stock and any medical needs that local services are able to support. National authorities present potentially suitable cases to municipalities via ELY Centres, which then negotiate reception arrangements with municipalities.

Recommendations

1. Placement strategies should consider both housing availability and other aspects of integration, where possible seeking to incorporate factors such as employment and educational opportunities into decision-making on national placement and the distribution of resettled refugees.
2. Placement of emergency/medical cases and refugees with particular health or mental healthcare needs should be guided both by the availability of housing and the capacity of local services appropriate to their needs.

B. Information-sharing and multi-level cooperation

In Belgium, the two central government authorities responsible for resettlement invite NGOs, local welfare organisations and other resettlement stakeholders to biannual national multistakeholder meetings. Meetings present updates on refugee situations and selection missions, profile refugee groups and facilitate exchange on reception planning.

In the UK, national operational meetings bring together service providers and policy-makers to discuss programme management and resourcing, the integration of previously resettled refugees and arrival planning. In the Netherlands, some regions organise operational meetings to allocate cases selected for resettlement amongst municipalities, based on refugee needs and local service capacity.

In 2011, the Rhône-Alpes resettlement programme implemented by the NGO Forum Réfugiés-Cosi became the first regional French programme to implement direct reception. From 2014, Forum Réfugiés-Cosi has provided a list of available apartments to the Ministry, thus facilitating placement based on housing availability.

In the UK cities of Sheffield and Hull, local health and education service providers and police are directly consulted on local placement, meaning placement decision-making takes account of factors such as the availability of school places, the capacity and expertise of local services and intelligence on previous incidences of racial or other harassment.

Recommendations

1. In the course of planning resettlement programmes, national authorities should inform local and regional actors involved in providing housing for resettlement about the groups and situations from which they plan to select refugees for resettlement, and seek their feedback on placement strategies and local/regional capacity to meet their needs.
2. International organisations and national governmental authorities should ensure that accurate information on refugee needs affecting housing is collected during resettlement submission and selection processes, and communicated to relevant regional and local actors within a pre-agreed time period before arrival.

3. To address pre-arrival queries and requests for additional information on refugees selected for resettlement, national governments and international organisations should together provide a liaison function for local and regional actors. Local/regional actors should raise any queries or requests as promptly as possible following receipt of initial case information.

4. Local/regional resettlement programmes should involve relevant service providers, such as those working in health, education and employment/training, in planning local placement and arrangements for reception.

C. Engaging new municipalities

In 2005-6, the UK housing association Bolton at Home collaborated with central government to visit municipalities potentially interested in receiving resettled refugees. Visits were structured both to engage political support for resettlement and to provide practical advice for local authority staff.

In the Czech Republic, staff from the Ministry of the Interior personally visit potential resettlement municipalities. The expertise of experienced Czech resettlement municipalities is made available to those

establishing new programmes via national resettlement stakeholder meetings. In the UK city of Sheffield, central health and education services support healthcare providers and schools in neighbourhoods receiving resettled refugees to develop relevant expertise and capacity.

Recommendations

1. Where possible, placement in localities with no experience of receiving refugees should be accompanied by capacity-building of local services, for example via input from expert services working with refugees elsewhere on the national territory. The development of new or strengthening existing services and infrastructure should be undertaken in a manner that maximises benefits for the wider community, and communication on resettlement at the local level should highlight these benefits.
2. Consideration should be given to involving municipalities already engaged in resettlement as ambassadors to promote resettlement to new municipalities, including by communicating both good practice and successful and unsuccessful approaches based on their experiences.

D. Resourcing Resettlement at the regional and local level

In late 2012, in response to the decreasing number of resettlement places offered by Finnish municipalities, the national Ministry of the Employment & the Economy established the VIPRO Project. The second phase of this project aimed to simplify both the system for reimbursing costs incurred by municipalities in their resettlement activities, and the processes by which refugees are placed in municipalities. VIPRO produced an updated national reception strategy, a new reimbursement system and a new national Resettlement Handbook.

Recommendations

1. National governmental authorities should provide a framework to identify accurate 'real' costs incurred by regional/local actors via involvement in resettlement, and operate transparent mechanisms both to reimburse costs and identify financial contributions required from regional/local actors additional to those that are reimbursed.

E. Preparing Refugees pre-departure

Many national resettlement programmes include housing information in pre-departure Cultural Orientation programmes. The Czech NGO Burma Centre Prague produced a pre-departure video featuring previously resettled refugees in their homes, while in the Netherlands, pre-departure information developed by the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers and Refugees (COA) includes photos of typical municipality housing.

The Swedish county of Gävleborg participated in Project Landa, which aimed to improve the pre-departure 'Sweden Programme' delivered in refugee camps by the Swedish Migration Board. In addition to developing municipality-specific information, including information on housing, in 2009-10 Gävleborg representatives travelled to refugee camps to participate directly in the delivery of several Sweden Programmes.

Recommendations

1. Actors providing housing for resettlement should contribute locally specific information – including on housing, neighbourhoods and social welfare – to pre-departure Cultural Orientation programmes for resettled refugees. To take account of changing local circumstances, this information should be regularly reviewed and updated via consultation with local and regional actors and stakeholders.

Courtesy of The Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic



Personal welcome by the mayor in a Czech municipality

Finding Housing for Refugee Resettlement

This chapter explores practices and approaches to finding housing for refugee resettlement, focusing on:

- engaging new actors;
- transitional accommodation;
- rental contracts and agreements;
- housing for refugees with specific needs and profiles; and
- furnishing and equipping housing.

As referenced in the previous chapter, the availability of social housing and low-cost rented accommodation has broadly declined in European countries during recent years. At the local level, this has resulted in an increased demand for low cost housing, creating challenges for securing housing for refugee resettlement.

The subsequent need to engage new housing actors not previously involved in refugee resettlement, such as private landlords, requires both an increase in their general awareness of resettlement and the presentation of housing for resettlement as a viable commercial opportunity.

To ensure housing is available immediately post-arrival, resettlement programmes that receive refugees directly into municipalities must ‘block’ housing before refugees arrive. In addition to resourcing rental payments during pre-arrival periods, including where arrivals are delayed, direct reception models also rely on the willingness of housing providers to rent accommodation in the absence of refugee tenants.

To facilitate arrival planning and the ‘recycling’ of housing for use by subsequent resettlement arrivals, many European resettlement programmes make use of transitional accommodation.

In addition to providing adequate support for refugees to move on to more permanent housing at the end of periods of transitional residency, programmes face challenges in preventing institutionalisation and/or delays to longer term integration that this type of approach can potentially create.

More general challenges for many local resettlement programmes lie in resourcing rent deposits and/or guarantees necessary to secure accommodation, and furnishing and equipping housing to provide for basic needs while also enabling some degree of choice by incoming refugee tenants.

To prevent delays in rental payments and subsequent problems for tenancies and tenant-landlord relationships, it is necessary for local resettlement actors to work creatively with mainstream administrative structures to ensure welfare benefits from which refugees make rental payments commence in a timely fashion.

Local resettlement programmes that commit to receiving large resettled families, single people and refugees with specific medical needs (including emergency cases) face a number of challenges in finding housing of appropriate size, affordability and location in relation to local services with appropriate expertise and capacity.

Experience

Renting properties to refugees - a landlord based in the city of Brussels

“”

Renting properties to refugees has really taught me a lot. Over the past 7 years I have been in touch with people from 18 different countries, which has been a very rewarding experience. Of course refugee tenants' lack of experience of the Belgian housing market, and general cultural differences in relation to housing, can be very challenging. How, for example, do you explain that shoes in the common hallway contravene Belgian fire safety regulations if tenants have been taught that shoes in the apartment are unsanitary? An organisation that has experience in working with refugees, like the NGO Convivial with whom I work, can work in the background to help landlords and tenants overcome any initial hurdles and build a understanding relationship based on trust and effective communication. This is really indispensable.

Some of my expertise as a landlord, developed based on my long experience, no longer applied when it came to working with refugees. For example, a person avoiding eye contact I may interpret as trying to hide something, but for refugees it might be a sign of trauma. Similarly, refugees trust independent organisations much more than a landlord when it comes to explaining technical aspects of renting and payments. I have definitely noticed prejudice and fear amongst neighbours and other landlords, but what they need to know is that refugees need someone to give them a chance. How are they supposed to get a job if nobody lets them rent an apartment? I have received so much respect and friendship from refugees, and together we have built social bonds that go beyond legal contracts.

Finding Housing for Refugee Resettlement: Practice examples and SHARE Housing Expert Group recommendations

A. Engaging new actors

Regional authorities (*Préfectures*) across France are obliged to reserve a proportion of social housing for socially excluded groups experiencing difficulties in accessing accommodation. To implement this obligation, the Préfecture for Rhône-Alpes signed a cooperation agreement with social landlords in the region⁴, in which refugees are included as one of the groups able to access this reserved accommodation. As a result, 200 apartments are reserved for use by refugee clients (including resettled refugees) of the NGO Forum Réfugiés-Cosi each year.

The Belgian NGO Caritas International has established a list of ‘good owners’, or reputable landlords willing to rent accommodation to refugees. ‘Good owners’ are those who deal promptly with maintenance issues, accept non-cash

rental deposit guarantees and are flexible in instances where initial rental payments are delayed through late receipt of social welfare payments. To engage new landlords, Caritas proactively explains refugees’ legal status in Belgium, and outlines their role as a point of information for landlords during the initial tenancy period.

In the UK city of Sheffield, the local authority engages new landlords by enabling those already involved in resettlement to share their experiences with others, and visits mainstream landlord meetings and events to promote the local resettlement programme. The local authority offers landlords a contractual guarantee that their property will be returned to them in the same condition as they provided it at the end of the tenancy period, and acts as a point of liaison for landlords for the first six months after refugees arrive. Twelve months after arrival, resettlement tenancies are transferred to the city’s mainstream Private Rented Solutions service, ensuring continued support for landlords and refugee tenants.

The Belgian NGO Convivial operates a scheme that enables local citizens to deposit savings which it then uses to loan refugee tenants funds for rent deposits and first rental payments. Individuals usually deposit around €1000, and can request repayment of the full amount at any point. Refugee beneficiaries are obliged to repay loans to Convivial within 10 months of receipt, and all loans are officially registered with a national bank to enable follow-up of any non-payment.

In Rhône-Alpes, a regional organisation (*Association Collective d’Aide au Logement*) providing targeted assistance to low-income households finances rental insurance for the first year of tenancies for refugee clients of the NGO Forum Réfugiés-Cosi. The NGO also offers tenant-landlord mediation services for a period of 18 months after refugee households take up tenancies.

⁴ The *Accord Collectif départemental d’attribution (ACDA)*, in place for the period 2012-15

Recommendations

1. Reception and integration programmes should include specific housing mediation support services for refugee tenants and landlords. Mediation should be oriented toward dealing with administrative issues impacting on housing, and resolving any disputes and/or misunderstandings between tenants and landlords. Mediation should ultimately aim to facilitate an independent relationship between refugee tenants and landlords over a defined period of time.

2. Landlords should be guaranteed regular rental payments for a defined period after refugees arrive, for example through organisational underwriting of rental payments or rental insurances.

B. Transitional Accommodation

The German city of Leipzig implements a three-stage transitional housing scheme for asylum seekers that aims to move beneficiaries into independent accommodation as soon as possible. Asylum seekers spend an initial period in a centralised accommodation facility, where the outcomes of a needs assessment are used to guide future housing options.

Those able to live independently are provided with individual housing, while accommodation in smaller centralised facilities is provided for individuals in need of additional support.

The Belgian NGO Convivial provides individual apartments in ‘transit houses’ for refugees assessed as particularly vulnerable, including for example single women with children, the elderly or those with disabilities. Refugees sign a 6-month transitional occupation contract, and during this period receive assistance from Convivial to search for independent accommodation and complete administrative procedures such as registering with the commune and securing health insurance.

In the Belgian resettlement programme, local welfare agencies provide transitional independent housing for the first year after arrival. Resettled refugees are informed of the requirement to move on at the outset of the tenancy period, and are assisted in their search for longer term accommodation by both local welfare agencies and NGOs.

Recommendations

1. Where possible, transitional accommodation should be provided in individual independent housing and not in collective or centralised facilities. Collective transitional accommodation facilities should be considered solely for highly vulnerable cases requiring intensive daily support.

C. Rental contracts and agreements

In the resettlement programmes of Sweden and Finland, central government reimburses costs incurred by municipalities in ‘blocking’ housing before refugees arrive. In both countries, municipalities and central government authorities negotiate the ‘blocking’ period for which costs can be reimbursed, and municipalities use the pre-arrival period to renovate (where necessary), furnish and equip accommodation in preparation for refugees’ arrival.

In the Czech Republic, municipalities provide resettled refugees with 5-year rental contracts. To lessen the impact of rental payments on refugee household budgets, municipalities set low rental rates fixed for the entire contract period.

In the Swedish municipality of Ljusdal, municipality social workers directly accompany resettled refugees throughout the process of signing their tenancy agreement. Similarly, in the UK city of Sheffield, agreements between refugees and landlords are signed during the first week after arrival in the presence of support workers. To ensure timely access to social welfare payments, groups of resettled refugees attend the local Sheffield office of the national welfare service by pre-arranged appointment in the first few days after arrival.

Recommendations

1. Where possible, resettled refugees should always be direct tenants within rental contracts, and should receive the support and information necessary to ensure they understand the contractual arrangement they are entering into and are acting as ‘informed tenants’.

2. Welfare benefits that enable resettled refugees to pay for their housing should be made available as soon as possible after arrival, and where possible arranged pre-arrival.

D. Housing for Refugees with specific needs and profiles

Ahead of the arrival of resettled refugees with identified medical needs, the City Council in the Finnish city of Oulu informs the local hospital of the planned arrival and selects accessible housing. The appropriateness of the selected housing is reassessed after arrival, and housing is adapted if necessary. In exceptional cases where housing cannot be sufficiently adapted to meet needs, the City Council sources alternative accommodation. Costs for adaptations or finding new housing are reimbursed to the municipality.

In the Dutch province of Limburg, placement of refugees with medical needs is based on the availability of housing appropriate to specific physical needs and its proximity to specialist service providers. Where housing that meets specific refugees’ needs is not available, the Dutch Refugee Council negotiates the reimbursement of costs from central government to adapt existing housing, for example for use by persons with disabilities, and manages the adaptation process.

In the North West regional resettlement programme in the UK, housing larger families has presented a consistent challenge due both to a lack of larger properties and to social welfare restrictions that effectively limit the welfare amount that can be provided to a single household. Larger resettled families are therefore sometimes split over neighbouring or nearby properties. Families are advised of the proposed housing arrangements and asked to provide explicit consent for them prior to their departure for the UK.

To overcome the high cost of individual housing for single people, the UK city of Sheffield makes use of shared accommodation for which each refugee tenant signs an individual rental agreement. Integration support for tenants in shared facilities incorporates advice and assistance on living in and managing a communal household.

Recommendations

1. Organisations providing housing for resettled refugees with specific medical needs and/or disabilities should engage relevant health and medical services in the selection of appropriate housing, and seek their advice on aspects such as accessibility, adaptations and the location of accommodation in relation to their services. Reception programmes should incorporate the possibility to reassess housing needs post-arrival, and include resources to facilitate further adaptation or reallocation to more suitable accommodation as needed.

E. Furnishing and Equipping Housing

Housing for resettled refugees must conform to mainstream quality and safety standards for all housing in resettlement countries. In several European countries, resettled refugees can access mainstream financial assistance available for other low income groups to purchase basic furniture and household equipment, such as ‘installation grants’ in Belgium and loans in Sweden. In Belgium, as accommodation for resettled refugees is generally furnished pre-arrival, installation grant amounts are often placed in savings accounts for refugees to make use of when moving to longer term accommodation.

Recommendations

1. Standards for accommodation provided for resettled refugees should be included within or equivalent to those in place for other low income households moving into new accommodation.

2. Where resettled refugees arrive directly into individual housing (transitional or longer term accommodation), basic furniture and household equipment should be provided pre-arrival.



Intercultural gardening project in Leipzig, Germany

Courtesy of Leipzig City Council

Experience

The housing journey of a Liberian refugee resettled to Sheffield with his family in 2004

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I had no real expectations of our house in the UK because we'd lived in tents in a refugee camp in Cote d'Ivoire for 12 years. So I just thought about having a roof over our head. When we first arrived the house was smaller than for some others in the programme, but it was good as the nursery and, later, the school for my son were close by.

The most challenging thing for me in my new house was electronic equipment, although as I spoke some English I was able to adjust. A housing support worker was available – I didn't need this as much as others who were not literate or didn't have any English, but it was sometimes difficult if we had a problem or question outside of working hours.

In our first neighbourhood, the main issue was a lack of awareness of resettlement. We were part of the first resettlement group to arrive into the city and people didn't really know why we were there. Also the area was predominately white, which made us as Liberians very visible. We introduced ourselves to the neighbours, although I could see they felt awkward asking us questions like "where are you from?".

Our group was housed in different neighbourhoods around the city, which was a big adjustment as we had all been used to being close in the camp. So we had to move around the city a lot to visit our friends, which in the beginning was quite exhausting. We eventually moved to a different area by approaching a housing association that provided a house for us. In the new neighbourhood the first year was tough – I think people were irritated that we were new and we could afford a house and a car so soon. It got better over time though, as people became more aware of the programme. In 2010, we bought our own house here. As well as security, paying the mortgage is actually cheaper than renting, so for us it made sense.

*Overall I think housing is really personal – some people like a quieter life on the outskirts of the city, whilst some prefer living in the centre. I would say to those working with resettled refugees that they should understand the housing situation in their city. Is appropriate housing available in neighbourhoods that are welcoming? Can the programme adapt to meet the needs of, for example, growing families? Do support workers really understand where people have come from, the expectations they have and the challenges they face? That said, and although housing is one of the major issues in resettlement, **the absolute first priority for resettled refugees is finding protection.***



The Lord Mayor of Sheffield greets Liberian refugees at the Town Hall

Courtesy of Sheffield City Council

Housing Introduction, Integration Support and Welcoming Communities

Housing is a first, and essential, component of the integration process for refugees. Additionally, successful integration requires that refugees feel welcome and secure in their new neighbourhoods and communities, and many resettled refugees will need support to develop the skills and knowledge to live independently.

This chapter therefore encompasses practices and approaches in the areas of individual integration support for refugees, and initiatives to build welcoming communities in the localities in which housing for refugees is located, focusing on:

- housing introduction programmes;
- housing support services; and
- engaging local communities.

As referenced earlier in this publication, resettled refugees arrive into Europe with a wide array of experiences in relation to housing. Camp-based refugees in particular may have a limited knowledge of modern housing, often compounded by lack of ability in the language of the resettlement country and in basic skills such as household budgeting, maintenance, utilities and social welfare. Some may find living more autonomously, generally some distance away from friends and/or family, to be an unsettling and unfamiliar experience. Additionally, resettled refugees from any background may have unrealistic expectations of the type of housing that will be available to them in 'rich' European countries.

Providing integration support that promotes independence can present challenges for those working with resettled refugees after their arrival into local communities. Resettled refugees are from many different backgrounds, requiring flexible integration interventions that respond effectively to their specific needs without creating dependence.

The participation of new municipalities in resettlement can increase the overall number of places available for national programmes. However, municipalities with no experience of receiving refugees and/or with no existing refugee or migrant communities can sometimes present less welcoming contexts, in which resettled refugees are highly visible and may be viewed with suspicion or trepidation.

Courtesy of Canopy Housing Project, UK



Canopy volunteers at work

Building skills and communities by renovating empty properties

Canopy Housing Project, Leeds (UK)

The Canopy Housing Project sources unused buildings in need of substantial repair and renovation, and supports beneficiaries and volunteers from the local area to complete the works. Future tenants of the refurbished houses are those identified as homeless or at risk of homelessness, who approach the project independently or are referred by partner agencies.

Landlords often lease their buildings to the project for a 'peppercorn' – or very low – rent, because they benefit from the value that refurbishment brings to their properties. Renovations and furnishings are determined both by local housing regulations and future tenants' wishes.

In 1999, Canopy established a specific project to include refugee households at risk of homelessness in their work. Canopy's refugee clients are those granted status through the UK asylum system, not resettled refugees.

Canopy's houses are usually situated in areas with several empty properties. The first property to be renovated is used as a community centre, providing a common resource accessible to the wider neighbourhood. Renovation visually improves neighbourhoods and attaches positive connotations to the arrival of refugees into the community. For refugees, meeting and working with volunteers enables them to develop friendships with those in their local community.

Canopy volunteers and tenants develop new skills and build confidence. Half of the staff now employed by the Canopy Project began as volunteers, and refugees who are not tenants have joined the project as volunteers.

Integration and Welcoming Communities: Practice examples and SHARE Housing Expert Group recommendations

A. Housing Introduction Programmes

In Belgium, content of the 6-week post-arrival orientation programme provided to resettled refugees by staff at centralised reception centres is explicitly linked to that of the Belgian pre-departure Cultural Orientation (CO) programme. The housing element of the programme continues after refugees arrive into municipalities, where NGOs and local welfare agencies provide an initial housing introduction briefing and subsequently introduce more complex topics such as household budgeting and waste disposal.

The city of Sheffield adopts a similar approach by providing essential information on arrival, with more detailed topics covered during subsequent follow-up support.

A housing introduction briefing delivered on the day of arrival by the municipality and the NGO British Refugee Council focuses on safety in the home, with more detailed briefings, including on household equipment, recycling, energy bills and orientation into the local neighbourhood, provided during the first week of residence.

Recommendations

1. Newly arrived resettled refugees should receive a housing introduction briefing that includes essential information on household security, safety and the use of household appliances. Less essential information should be included in subsequent briefings.

2. Introductory information on housing, household security and safety, budgeting and administrative issues should be communicated in refugees' native languages.

B. Housing Support Services

Both the city of Newcastle in the UK and United Care Cutting Edge (UCCE), a welfare service provider based in Hume, Australia, make use of mainstream national funds to resource housing support programmes for refugees. Newcastle's 'refugee move-on service' supports individual refugees exiting the asylum system to find longer term

accommodation in the social housing or private rented sectors. UCCE adapted a mainstream housing information session to meet the needs of newly arrived refugees, and involved both mainstream housing actors and bilingual workers from the local Afghan community in its delivery.

In the French region of Île-de-France, the NGO France Terre d'Asile includes guidance on how to access long-term housing in the individual integration plans they develop with their refugee clients. Integration plans outline goals and measure progress, including steps taken toward finding housing.

In Sweden, the municipality of Ljusdal employs a previously resettled refugee who speaks several common refugee languages as a 'housing host'. This specialist role provides flexible housing-related support to both refugee tenants and landlords.

The Belgian NGO Convivial proactively recruits refugees into its workforce offering work placements for those following integration programmes, volunteering opportunities and direct employment.

Recommendations

1. Integration support, including housing-related support, should focus on providing refugees with the information and skills to live independently and to make informed decisions about their lives. Agencies providing support should make clear that it is time-limited, inform refugees how and when support can be accessed and clarify the nature and extent of the support role.

2. Agencies supporting resettled refugees should provide information on tenant rights and responsibilities, the local housing market and other relevant housing-related topics, within the first few months after arrival. This information may be provided via group briefings or training sessions, ideally in cooperation with mainstream housing actors.

3. Agencies supporting resettled refugees should make use of the skills and experience of previously resettled refugees to develop content and methods for post-arrival reception and integration programmes, including housing-related introduction and support.



Housing introduction in the Czech Republic

Courtesy of The Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic

C. Engaging Local Communities

In both Ljusdal and the Czech municipality of Bzenec, local authorities and their partners inform residents about the planned arrival of resettled refugees through local media features and at social and community events. Ljusdal also delivers information sessions on resettlement at schools and tenant organisations.

In the North West region of the UK, the NGO Refugee Action focuses on community development work in neighbourhoods receiving resettled refugees, supporting projects and initiatives benefiting both resettled refugees and local residents.

To prepare local service providers, the resettlement team of the NGO British Refugee Council in the city of Hull convene half-day local multistakeholder meetings – known as ‘Insight Days’ – just prior to refugees’ arrival. Participants include health and education service providers, private landlords, local police, mainstream social services and community associations working in areas such as sports and the arts. Sessions include presentations on the incoming refugee groups, often delivered by previously resettled refugees, information on the local programme and points of contact.

In the German city of Leipzig and the Austrian region of Tirol, the NGOs Leipzig Refugee Council and the Austrian Red Cross facilitate schemes enabling local volunteers to introduce refugees to their new neighbourhood, explain local and national culture and behavioural norms, and assist in areas such as language practice and understanding the local education system. Volunteers in Leipzig also support refugees in their search for independent housing. In both contexts, NGOs provide volunteers with an intensive and ongoing training programme.

Recommendations

1. Information on resettlement should be included in mainstream awareness-raising and educational initiatives concerning diversity, asylum and migration, anti-discrimination or other related areas.
2. Local authorities should always be informed of planned resettlement arrivals, so as to engage mainstream service providers in offering essential support to refugees and to lead on building support for resettlement amongst local communities.
3. Where possible, resettlement programmes should make use of the skills and knowledge of local residents by providing opportunities for them to act as volunteers. In relation to housing, volunteers can assist in areas such as housing introduction and orientation into local neighbourhoods. Volunteer support should be an additional resource for resettlement programmes, accompanying but not replacing professional integration services and support.

Courtesy of Caritas International Belgium



Learning about waste disposal in Belgium

Experience

Building bridges in Ljusdal, Sweden – Akbal Ghulam (municipality housing host)

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In terms of support needs, I would say there are two different resettled refugee groups – those with experience of living in a modern environment and those without.

Here in Ljusdal we use a hands-on approach to teach essential knowledge. An introductory session includes issues such as maintaining the apartment, taking care of apartment keys, acting considerately toward neighbours and how to pay the rent. The most common questions have been ‘how do I find a job to support my family?’ and more everyday questions such as ‘how do I find the kind of food I am used to?’ or ‘how do I use the water appliances?’

The majority of the time, relationships between refugees and their neighbours work well. I organise barbecues in the neighbourhoods and sometimes approach neighbour – locals as well as immigrants – to inform them about planned refugee arrivals.

My language skills have been quite essential in facilitating effective communication between refugees and housing companies, and in answering questions. Some refugees do have high expectations in relation to housing if they think their housing was better in their country of origin, or think of Sweden as ‘the rich country of Europe’. Some have quickly moved to bigger cities to find employment although we advise them to think more long-term, to educate and prepare themselves for integration in Sweden. An apartment of appropriate size, that is close to schools, supermarkets and hospitals, as well as to those of a similar background, can really support this goal.

The Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (2014-20): Funding opportunities for housing for resettled refugees and related actions

The Asylum, Migration & Integration Fund (AMIF) is one of two new EU funds to support activities in the area of home affairs. The AMIF is implemented as part of the overall programme of funding known as the Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF) for 2014-20. The AMIF combines the previous European Refugee Fund, European Return Fund and European Integration Fund implemented during 2007-13.

Based on the outcomes of the policy dialogues between Member State authorities and the European Commission (EC) held in autumn 2013, Member States are now preparing their national AMIF programmes for the next 7 years. Scheduled to be adopted by the EC in autumn 2014, these will elaborate the priorities of each Member State and make clear which AMIF priorities will be possibilities for funding in each Member State.

Article 19(1)(b)

Within national programmes, Member States shall set up and develop integration strategies to be implemented at national, regional and/or local level, as appropriate. Strategies shall address the integration needs of third-country nationals at regional/local level, and develop effective partnerships between relevant stakeholders.

Recital 19

Integration strategies should be implemented mainly by regional/ local authorities and non-state actors, particularly where Member States' administrative organisation or shared national-regional/local competence for integration so requires.

Where Member States indicate resettlement and/or other ad-hoc humanitarian admission programmes (HAP) as funding priorities, the following four provisions offer possibilities to develop programmes to house and support refugees arriving via these routes.

Article 7 (b)

To establish appropriate infrastructure and services to ensure the smooth and effective implementation of resettlement and HAP, including the creation of conditions conducive to the long-term integration of resettled refugees.

Article 5

To improve and maintain existing accommodation infrastructure and services for asylum seekers and refugees, including resettled/HAP refugees.

Article 9(b)

To fund advice and assistance for third-country nationals, including refugees, in areas such as housing.

Article 10(e)

Practical cooperation and capacity-building, focused on using experiences and best practices from elsewhere to develop sustainable organisational structures for integration and, where appropriate, the pooling of resources between governmental and non-governmental bodies for more effective provision of services to third-country nationals.

Article 16 (1) and Annex II (3)

Joint integration initiatives among Member States to improve coordination of policies between regional and local authorities.

The following provisions offer funding possibilities for EU-level actions on refugee resettlement and the provision of emergency assistance through HAP:

Article 20(2)(a)

Transnational actions to further EU-level cooperation on sharing best practice in the field of asylum, including resettlement, including networking and information exchange on integration.

Recital 46

Where appropriate, additional AMIF support to address emergency situations of migratory pressure in Member States or third countries through emergency assistance, including ad-hoc humanitarian admission programmes aimed at allowing temporary stay on the territory of a Member State. So as not to undermine the European Union resettlement programme's provision of durable solutions for persons in need of

international protection, Member States are not entitled to receive lump sum payments for persons granted temporary stay via humanitarian admission.

Acknowledgements

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