



Key issues: Resettlement programmes and the UK

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Refugee resettlement has recently received attention as a once neglected, now effective mechanism for **international refugee protection**. The UK's history of providing a safe haven for vulnerable peoples provides the context in which a new **resettlement programme** is being developed.

There are distinct challenges to the development of this programme; not least how it will co-exist with managed migration strategies and fluctuating flows of spontaneous asylum seeking. This Factsheet identifies some of the issues that resettlement programmes raise and provides links to further reading and projects.

What is resettlement and how does it work?

Resettlement involves the organised movement of selected refugees from their first country of asylum to a third country for settlement and integration. Resettlement is not the same as seeking refugee status through the asylum system; the two are complimentary tools to provide protection for those with a well-founded fear of persecution.

The mechanism is one of the tools used by the [United Nations High Commission for Refugees](#) (UNHCR) to aid refugees. Resettlement provides protection for those whose safety is at immediate

risk and provides an opportunity for them to rebuild their lives in a third country when the possibility of return to their country of origin is unlikely and when safety or support cannot be guaranteed in the first country of asylum. It also presents an opportunity for states to share responsibility for the world's refugees.

The process has two distinct phases: overseas processing and third country integration, which together can take several years. Overseas processing is normally conducted by the UNHCR¹ and those most at risk and least able to be repatriated or resettled locally are selected for resettlement. The cases are then referred to third countries that often implement their own screening process. Historical, cultural and language ties with the third country determine which cases are submitted where.

Who resettles refugees?

Ten traditional countries: USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Switzerland and the Netherlands

Nine new ones: Argentina, Benin, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Chile, Iceland, Ireland, Spain and the UK.

¹P The USA, Canada and some other states carry out their own processing

Third country integration attempts to return independence to resettled refugees and provide them with the capacity to build a positive future in the receiving society. Before the refugees arrive, the host government will co-ordinate with voluntary and refugee organisations to provide the necessary services and provide the public with information about the new arrivals. They are often received in designated centres and provided with vital information about living in their new society. Upon leaving reception facilities, resettled refugees are provided with affordable housing and other vital support to aid their integration.

Legal aspects to resettlement

The resettlement process is not defined in the Refugee Convention or in UK law, yet espouses the intentions of both in terms of protection and assistance of refugees. The [Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002](#) provides the legal context for resettlement and the UK. Section 59 indicates that the government may 'participate in a project which is designed to...arrange or assist the settlement of migrants'.²

The Home Office White Paper [Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity \(2002\)](#)³ announced the development of an annual resettlement programme to the UK, known as the Gateway Protection Programme. A number of refugees from West Africa and South East Asia were resettled under this programme in the UK in 2004. The programme, operated by bodies within the Home Office, initially took most referrals from the UNHCR centre in Accra, Ghana and aimed to resettle 500 people by April 2004. As the programme has developed, the Home Office has

begun to include other locations where UNHCR is in operation.

Home Office caseworkers address each individual's criteria for resettlement based on whether the applicant's human rights are at risk in the country of refuge or, where there is no immediate risk, whether resettlement can provide a durable solution for long term protection needs. The applicant is required to co-operate with UK officials and be committed to supporting himself or herself in the UK.

Useful documents

UNHCR (2004) *Resettlement Handbook*, 2004 edition. Geneva: UNHCR.

UNHCR (2004) *Integration Handbook: Refugee Resettlement*, 2004 edition. Geneva: UNHCR

Refugee Council (2002) *Principles for a UK resettlement programme*. London: Refugee Council

An applicant can be turned down if he or she has committed a crime against peace, a serious non-political crime or has been guilty of acts contrary to the aims of the UN. Applicants referred by the UNHCR and then accepted by the UK are normally granted indefinite leave to remain allowing them free rights to live, work and claim benefits in the UK and travel abroad other than to the country they are seeking refugee from. After five years of living in the UK continuously resettled refugees will be able to apply for citizenship.

²P Home Office (2002) Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act. London HMSO.

³P Home Office (2002) Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity. London: HMSO.

What is the UK's experience of resettling refugees?

The UK has a long history of resettlement, yet it has largely been on an ad hoc basis. Some examples include:⁴

- **210,000 Polish** Second World War exiles came to the UK from 1940 to 1950, fleeing the Nazi invasion. Their integration was successful as they found both housing and employment with relative ease.
- **42,000 Ugandan Asians**, expelled from their country by Idi Amin, were resettled in Britain in 1972-4. The main focus of the resettlement strategy was to find the Ugandans mainstream housing, though many found their own accommodation through informal networks.
- **22,500 Vietnamese** displaced persons arrived in the UK from 1972. The Joint Committee for Vietnamese Refugees coordinated a number of charities to carry out the operational details and service provision for this programme. An absence of a pre-existing ethnic community contributed to high unemployment rates and significant secondary migration for this community.

There are two other refugee assistance programmes (although they do not constitute formal resettlement programmes). The first is the 'Mandate Refugee Programme', which allows individuals to claim asylum whilst overseas and the second is the 'ten or more plan', which assists refugees with disabilities or a serious medical condition.

⁴P More detail on the UK's history of resettlement can be found in **Robinson, V.** (2003:3) 'An evidence base for future policy: reviewing UK resettlement policy' in Gelsthorpe, V. and Herlitz, L. (eds) *Listening to evidence: the future of UK resettlement. Conference proceedings.* London: Home Office.

A service provider's experience

Sandy Buchan, Chief Executive of Refugee Action, ran a residential centre in the 1980s for Vietnamese refugees in Osterley. It hosted a number of policy experiments:

- fast-track education for refugee children enabling them to gain 'O' levels
- social work training to build capacity within the Vietnamese community
- a reception model made up of 'learning villages' and high levels of Vietnamese staffing

Lessons from this programme were used in developing the strategy for the Bosnian and Kosovan programmes.

From personal interview conducted for **Esterhuizen, L** (2004) *Making better use of refugee data and information.* London: ICAR

While resettlement is not synonymous with 'temporary protection', the Bosnian Evacuation Programme and the Kosovan Humanitarian Evacuation Programme can help understand the development of targeted service for groups evacuated to the UK. Bosnian refugees were dispersed in 'clusters' in order to form ethnic communities.⁵ Similar strategies were used with the Kosovan programme and both were seen as relatively successful in integrating the refugees in UK society. These programmes have provided opportunities for learning for future resettlement programmes.

⁵P **Robinson, V. and C. Coleman** (2000) 'Lessons learned?: a critical review of the government programme to resettle Bosnian quota refugees in the United Kingdom'. *International Migration Review* 34 (4) pp. 1217-1244

Challenges for resettlement

The first phase of resettlement, overseas processing, faces a number of obstacles and examples include:

➤ Interpretation of refugee definition

There is often a discrepancy between how the UNHCR and nation-states define a refugee, which means that some refugees referred by the UNHCR are not accepted by some states as a refugee.

➤ Selectivity

There is a tendency among some states to 'hand-pick' refugees by imposing additional criteria for those to be resettled, often accepting people with greater integration potential and leaving behind refugees at greater risk.

➤ Resources

UNHCR cares for over seventeen million displaced people. To prepare cases for resettlement is incredibly time-consuming and the organisation is unable to cope with an expanding resettlement programme.⁶ There is a need for states offering increased resettlement opportunities to provide UNHCR with more funding.

The second phase of the resettlement process is third country integration and a number of lessons have been learnt about overcoming obstacles from previous programmes. Examples include:

➤ Front loading

Previous programmes to resettle large numbers of people in the UK have been characterised by 'front loading', which involves focusing on providing all the information and integration 'tools' refugees

need when they first arrive. This has been balanced with a desire for the reception stage to remain short-term to avoid protracted welfare reliance. Consequently, in the past, resettled refugees have suffered from an absence of assistance beyond reception.⁷ The structure of the Bosnian and Kosovan programmes learnt from this and provided mid-term support teams in dispersal areas and improved interaction with mainstream services.

➤ Employment readiness

A focus on housing provision in many resettlement programmes has made it more difficult for refugees to find employment. Research suggests that dispersal strategies have not been based on thorough analysis of the local labour market. This is in contrast to other resettlement countries, where employment readiness is placed at the core of refugee independence.

➤ Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs)

When resettled refugees leave reception facilities, RCOs can act as a social buffer and information translator in a receiving community. They also offer a bridge between the refugees' private and public spheres. In past refugee programmes there have been examples of locating clusters of resettled populations near to pre-existing ethnic communities. There is debate as to whether this actually fosters community development or in fact creates situation of resource competition between RCOs.⁸

⁶P United States Committee for Refugees (2003) 'UNHCR faces funding cuts.' *Refugee Reports* 24 (1)

⁷P Hale, S. (1993) 'The reception and resettlement of Vietnamese Refugees in Britain.' In V. Robinson (ed) *The international refugee crisis: British and Canadian responses*. London: Macmillan

⁸P Kelly, L. (2003) 'Bosnian refugees in Britain: questioning community'. *Sociology* 37 (1) pp. 35-49

➤ **Increase refugee engagement**

Service provision within resettlement programmes has been primarily organised on a top-down basis. Research suggests that when services are delivered as part of a national programme they can sometimes be unresponsive and unable to adjust to local needs. This organisational schema does not appear to engage with refugees and their experiences in the process of their own integration. Research on Bosnian refugees in Italy show that resettled refugees can develop meaningful social networks to aid their own integration.⁹

The Gateway Protection Programme

This programme has endeavoured to learn from the difficulties of previous resettlement programmes and forms the basis future resettlement policy in the UK.

The Home Office maintains a central co-ordinating role in this programme but responsibility for its practical implementation has been delegated to a range of organisations. Also, criteria for the areas to which resettled refugees are dispersed now include more than just the availability of housing: local NGO involvement, racial tolerance, employment opportunities and the presence of existing RCOs are some of the extra factors taken into account.

P⁹P **Korac, M.** (2001) HU [Presentation at 'Bridging the information gaps: a conference of research on asylum and immigration in the UK'](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs/irssconf21301.pdf)UH, 21 March 2001, London. Available at HU <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs/irssconf21301.pdf>UH

Resettlement Inter-Agency Partnership (RIAP)

A group of NGOs make up the RIAP, which is responsible for service delivery under the Gateway programme:

- British Red Cross;
- International Rescue Committee;
- Migrant Helpline;
- Refugee Action;
- Refugee Arrivals Project;
- Refugee Council;
- Refugee Housing Association; and
- Scottish Refugee Council.

Many of these agencies have been involved in previous programmes and so their involvement builds on expertise and relationships developed in previous initiatives.

A development of the Gateway programme has been for refugees to participate in a four-day cultural orientation programme prior to departure to the UK. Also, on arrival refugees are no longer accommodated in large-scale sites but more frequently in hotels near airports, where further orientation sessions are provided.¹⁰

Responsibility for settlement and support of refugees resettled under the Gateway programme differs according to the area concerned, with organisations such as the Refugee Council and Refugee Action being responsible for specific areas. Refugees are

P¹⁰P The four day sessions are run by the HU [International Rescue Committee](#)UH; The HU [Refugee Arrival Project](#) UH and [Migrant Helpline](#) organise the further orientation sessions

supported by a combination of mainstream welfare provision and individualised settlement plans. The level of provision is more intensive early in the resettlement, but is provided for at least the first twelve months. Housing is provided by the local resettlement agency and in their first few weeks, refugees are referred to the Job Centre Plus and assisted in registering with a GP and opening a bank account.

Initial findings from a Liberian group resettled in Sheffield found that after six weeks the majority of the children were attending school, most adults were also attending language and computer courses, and all had been able to access health services.¹¹

The Home Office is conducting longitudinal research into settlement and integration experiences of gateway refugees through the Immigration Research and Statistics Service (IRSS). This consists of regular interviews with resettled refugees over the age of sixteen. It is intended that the findings will inform future programme development and wider integration strategies. The Home Office also intends to carry out a preliminary evaluation of the Gateway programme in 2005.

Resettlement statistics

Resettled refugees are not included in UK asylum statistics as they do not go through the asylum system. Every year, around 310 individuals are typically admitted under the Mandate Refugees and Ten or More programmes. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates that in 2000 and 2001 the UK received 429 and 420 refugees and family members through these

¹¹P Home Office (November 2004) *Understanding Gateway: the Gateway Protection Programme for refugees*. London: Home Office

UNHCR programmes and other IOM facilitated arrangements.¹²

Examples of international figures

Below are selected statistics from the UNHCR's basic programme information. They are indicative of the complications involved in international comparison.

- **Australia** Quota for July 2003-June 2004 was 10,991. At the end of January 2004 4,255 visas for these programmes had been granted. In 2002/2003 11,656 visas for these programmes were granted.
- **Canada** Quota for 2003 was 10,400-11,700 (inclusive of government assisted programmes) and 10,762 refugees were accepted in that year.
- **Finland** Quota for 2003 was 750 and 748 refugees were accepted of which 562 had arrived in the country (yet 482 were from the 2002 quota).
- **New Zealand** Quota for July 2003-June 2004 was 750 and 196 were accepted.
- **Sweden** Quota for 2004 was 1,700 and by the end of February 2004 300 had been accepted of which 35 had arrived.
- **United States of America** Quota for October 2003-September 2004 was 50,000 (with 20,000 reserve places). By end February 2004 14,403 had arrived. In the 2003 fiscal year 28,455 refugees were accepted

From **UNHCR** *Easy guide on refugee resettlement programs 2003/2004*

¹²P IOM (2003) HU'Global trends in resettlement: comparing the UK with other countries'UH in ' in Gelsthorpe, V. and Herlitz, L. (eds) *Listening to evidence: the future of UK resettlement. Conference proceedings*. London: Home Office. Available at <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/resettlement.pdf>.

The quota for the Gateway Protection Programme offered a maximum of 500 places in fiscal years of 2003/2004 and 2004/2005. At the end of June 2005, 121 refugees had been settled in Sheffield (Liberian and Burmese) and 81 refugees had been settled in Bolton (Congolese and Liberian).

Making international comparisons of resettlement data is a difficult task. Each resettlement country operates a number of different schemes, some through the UNHCR, some autonomously. As a result, a number of organisations collect resettlement data but it is difficult to aggregate as different countries use different procedures to collect the data. For example some countries collect data across the fiscal year and others across the calendar year. Also, some countries focus on their annual quotas rather than the actual number of arrivals.

Resources

A full discussion of these issues and concepts is provided in ICAR's **Navigation guide to resettlement and the UK** available at: www.icar.org.uk/navigationguides

The navigation guide includes a full list of resources and projects. Some examples of additional resources to those already listed or highlighted elsewhere in the Factsheet are given below.

Gelsthorpe, V. and Herlitz, L. (eds) (2003) *Listening to evidence: the future of UK resettlement. Conference proceedings*. London: Home Office.

Hale, S. (1993) 'The reception and resettlement of Vietnamese Refugees in Britain.' In V. Robinson (ed) *The international refugee crisis: British and Canadian responses*. London: Macmillan.

Home Office (November 2004) *Understanding Gateway: the Gateway Protection Programme for refugees*. London: Home Office.

Kerrigan, S. (2003) 'Resettling Refugees' *InExile*, issue 28, November 2003.

Refugee Council (July 2004) [*The Gateway Protection Programme: Refugee Resettlement in the UK*](#). London: Refugee Council.

Resettlement Inter-Agency Partnership (RIAP) (October 2004) *Welcome to the UK - A first step*. London: Refugee Council.

Robinson, V. (1999) 'The evolution of refugee resettlement policy in post-war Britain', in V. Robinson (ed.) *Migration and Public Policy*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Robinson, V. and C. Coleman (2000) 'Lessons learned? A critical review of the government programme to resettle Bosnian quota refugees in the United Kingdom'. *International Migration Review* 34 (4) pp.1217-1244.

Spack, T. (2001) 'Global Overview: refugee resettlement and integration models and methods', from the International Conference on the Reception and Integration of Resettled Refugees, Sweden.

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