Bridging Refugee Youth & Children's Services

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ATCR/WGR Newsletter: Issue #5
November 2010

By Annual Tripartite Consultations (ATCR) and Working Group on Resettlement (WGR)

BRYCS is a project of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops/Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS)
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The ATCR/WGR
Newsletter

UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency | ATCR WGR
ANNUAL TRIPARTITE CONSULTATIONS and WORKING GROUP on RESETTLEMENT

Issue #5 November 2010

SAVE THE DATES !

WGR
January 25-26, 2011
Palais des Nations
Geneva

ATCR 2011
July 4-6, 2011
ILO
Geneva

From the U.S. Chair

Welcome to this first newsletter under the U.S. Chair. We are pleased to be working with UNHCR, other member governments, and NGO partners in continuing to expand the number of resettlement places for refugees, promote the strategic use of resettlement, and improve the quality of integration outcomes in resettlement countries. For those who have recently joined as new resettlement countries or pledged to increase existing programs, we commend you. For other countries, we hope you will seriously consider expanding resettlement places in the coming year to allow more refugees an opportunity to begin new lives. It is fitting that in this year in which we celebrate the 60th anniversary of UNHCR we work to expand opportunities for those we serve – refugees who cannot return to their countries and have little hope of integration in countries of first asylum. We hope this issue will provide information upon which you might continue to expand and improve your resettlement programs.

Our year as the Chair got underway shortly after the ATCR when we hosted the Expert Group on Resettlement Fraud meeting in September. Under the leadership of the Department of Homeland Security/USCIS, countries met to share anti-fraud practices and discuss future directions. This issue contains a report of this meeting. We are now engaged with the U.S. NGO focal point (RCUSA) and UNHCR in planning the WGR meeting, scheduled for January 25-26 in Geneva. We will be sending more information on this meeting as content is determined. WGR members should, however, fix these dates on your calendar and begin planning your participation.

We look forward to continuing the strong collaboration among resettlement partners and welcome input from resettlement colleagues during the coming year.

Larry Bartlett, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
U.S. Department of State

Darfuri refugees settle in to the Abeche Transit Center prior to interviews for the U.S. Resettlement program, *See story page 17.*

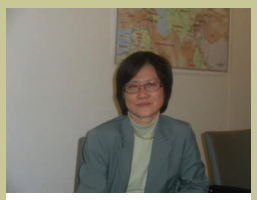
Photo: Kendra Rinas

Reflections from new Head of Resettlement Service

Wei-Meng Lim-Kabaa takes over for Vincent Cochetel as the new Deputy Director of the Division of International Protection for Pillar III-Comprehensive Solutions and Head of the Resettlement Service.

"Building on past achievements, I have every confidence that together we will make considerable strides in the year ahead."

Wei-Ming Lim-Kabaa



Wei-Meng Lim-Kabaa

Arriving in Geneva in July to take over my new functions, I had the opportunity participate in this year's Annual Tripartite Consultation on Resettlement (ATCR). That occasion enabled me to meet with a broad range of resettlement actors, and to familiarise myself on a vast multitude of resettlement challenges. I take this opportunity to share a few thoughts at the start of the Chairship of the United States.

Over the past couple of years, resettlement has made significant progress in a many areas, assuming dimensions that were unimaginable only a few short years ago. The number of resettlement states has doubled, UNHCR's capacity to identify and refer individuals has sharpened and increased, and resettlement has become a crucial strategic tool to expand protection and durable solutions space in a number of contexts.

These achievements should serve to boost further efforts, and encourage us to reach even higher goals. I would like to highlight a few key areas where I believe continuing efforts will be needed.

First, the exponential expansion of resettlement countries would need to be complemented by a more comprehensive and systematic review of where we stand in relation to integrating those who have been resettled. Many emerging resettlement countries are either short in resources to manage programs sustainably or else lack the knowledge and expertise to cope with issues which straddle across government structures and require crucial interface with receiving communities and civil society groups. I believe that UNHCR could play a facilitating role, including supporting focused studies where quantitative and qualitative data could be helpful, and establishing a community of practice where knowledge and good practices can be shared. Traditional resettlement states may also wish to respectively take a critical look at where integration stand in their local contexts, in all its dimensions, economic, social and legal, and explore where improvements could be made.

Second, despite an increase in number of resettlement countries, resettlement places have not grown in ways to match resettlement needs. For 2011, some 170,000 refugees would need resettlement because of their immediate vulnerable situation. In the coming year, as UNHCR heads into its sixtieth anniversary, we invite governments to help more refugees find durable solutions and burden- share with countries hosting large refugee populations, through increased refugee quotas/ ceilings, or through establishing resettlement programmes and offering resettlement places. The international community needs to step up to the plate to meet global resettlement needs. It is also equally important that we continue to reinforce resettlement needs assessment methodologies as well as processing tools and criteria which would enable resettlement processing systems to respond more flexibly and effectively to urgent resettlement needs.

Third, there is great potential for using resettlement more strategically. Whether to bring about other durable solutions to protracted refugee situations, improve protection environment and enhance livelihoods opportunities in host countries, or to engage a wider

range of durable solutions partners both internationally as well domestically, the strategic use of resettlement could be expanded. In this context, the further use of core/contact groups, and better linkages between the forum of the ATCR and ExCom could be explored to allow more effective engagement of countries of asylum to amplify the strategic benefit of resettlement.

Finally, the important role being played by the NGO community in supporting resettlement work need to be highlighted. Without their tireless efforts to help in assessing resettlement needs at field level, partnering with UNHCR in deployment schemes, or helping states receive and settle arriving resettled refugees, the global resettlement scheme will not work. The role NGOs play is critical to overall burden sharing, and we need to continue to explore how best to maximise the resources and expertise the NGO community could bring to enhance the global resettlement system.

Building on our past achievements, I have every confidence that together we will make considerable strides the year ahead. I look forward to working together will all our resettlement partners.

—Wei-Ming Lim-Kabaa

Expert Group on Resettlement Fraud Holds 4th Meeting

The United States hosted the 4th Meeting of the Expert Group on Resettlement Fraud at the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services office, in Washington, D.C., on September 21-23, 2010. First established in 2007, the Expert Group provides a forum for sharing information on fraud patterns and trends, as well as initiatives to strengthen the integrity of resettlement processes for the future. The broad objectives of the Expert Group on Resettlement Fraud are to:

(1) promote a greater exchange of information and best practices;

(2) enhance collaboration and partnership in anti-fraud efforts among members at the field, regional, and capital levels; and

(3) provide a venue to develop tools, techniques, and methods that better detect, address, and deter fraud.

The primary theme of this year's meeting was "Biometrics: Tools to Enhance the Integrity and Security of Refugee Resettlement Systems." A total of 28 representatives from eight countries - Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and United States, as well as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), attended the meeting. The meeting provided an excellent opportunity for resettlement partners to learn more about the biometric technologies currently available and used by several resettlement partners and consider the wider use of biometrics to improve identity management for refugees throughout the protection life-cycle.

In addition, presentations from a host of U.S. government agencies, UNHCR and resettlement countries addressed a wide variety of security and anti-fraud related topics including: iris scanning; DNA challenges and benefits; facial recognition; intelligence community partnerships to address national security issues; biometric information sharing to identify fraud and forum shipping; language analysis and fraudulent document detection.

In general, the Group agreed that by introducing biometric features, UNHCR and member states will be better equipped to address our humanitarian mandate around the globe more swiftly, effectively and with integrity, provided that the fundamental principles governing the protection of personal data and information are not compromised. A final report outlining the specific recommendations developed at the meeting will be distributed in early November.

-DHS/USCIS

Resettling Refugees from Bhutan: At what Cost and for what Benefits?

Photo: UNHCR

Photo: UNHCR

Photo: UNHCR

Every activity generated by human beings has its rules, codes and magic or mysterious words or expressions. Resettlement is no exception. Here the magic expression is "strategic use of resettlement", partly and firmly rooted in practice and common sense, but also partly clouded in mystery. My understanding of the "strategic use of resettlement" concept is that resettlement should at least serve two purposes beyond offering a durable solution to the refugees concerned. Firstly, it should be used in a way which helps not only those leaving but also those staying behind. In other words, resettlement should help create a better climate, a healthier environment in the country of first asylum, which in turn will benefit the remaining and future refugees. The second purpose is that resettlement, if strategically used, can contribute to the redesigning of the protection map and hopefully "reenergize" the protection dynamics. In that sense, resettlement countries and other resettlement actors are becoming shareholders in a locally registered branch of an international company called "Refugee Protection".

The resettlement of the refugees from Bhutan, who have been accommodated in seven camps in Eastern Nepal for close to twenty years, is a good and rare example of a refugee situation where the international community has come to the rescue of the front line stakeholders and turned a classical "protracted refugee caseload" into a model of burden sharing and international solidarity. If someone had asked the refugees from Bhutan about their fate in the early 2000's, they would have publicly expressed their strong desire and hope to return to Bhutan. But in private, they would have probably been very pessimistic and mentioned the likelihood of "dying in the camps". At that time, everything seemed to be stalled. Bhutan had consistently been in a state of denial and Nepal was opposed to any form of local integration. As to resettlement, it was at best science-fiction.

Then things changed in the mid-2000's when a number of resettlement countries not only decided to offer massive resettlement, but also lobbied the Nepali authorities to obtain their consent. Nepal was initially opposed to resettlement, believing that the only durable solution to be promoted was voluntary repatriation to Bhutan. The problem is that such a principled approach, initially supported by the overwhelming majority of the refugees, was based on the wrong assumption that Bhutan would eventually become more flexible. The visit to the camps by the then US Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees and Migration in late 2007 was probably the determining factor to overcome the Nepali Government's final hesitations.

Believe it or not, 18 months later, Nepal would become the largest resettlement operation (before Thailand and Syria) in the world. As at 30 September 2010, 69,827 refugees from Bhutan had been referred by UNHCR to resettlement countries. 36,618 had departed[1] and 56,649 persons - out of a total remaining population of 75,671 persons – had formally expressed an interest to be resettled. In the coming years, many more will be willing to be resettled. It is probably not exaggerated to say that by 1 January 2015, whatever remains of the camps may have less than 10,000 persons, as compared to some 110,000 seven years earlier.

In addition to the numbers which are impressive – some 100,000 persons resettled in seven years – it is also essential to highlight that the refugees from Bhutan have been extremely popular with resettlement countries. As a rule, they have done everything and more to integrate and adapt to their new environment. After close to twenty years spent in camps without electricity and running water, the refugees from Bhutan have showed incredible resilience, adaptation and fighting spirit to adjust to big cities, post-industrialized life or even sometimes to very isolated communities in a totally foreign country.

In light of the above, it may be worth spending some time to look at what have been the pluses and minuses of such a large scale resettlement operation and what protection and other dividends we have been able to reap. Firstly, for the thousands and thousands of refugees involved, it is definitely better – from a self-respect and dignity standpoint - to be productive members of society rather than people without right to work and access to

[1] 31,133 to the USA, 2,007 to Australia, 2,000 to Canada, 468 to New Zealand, 373 to Norway, 326 to Denmark, 229 to the Netherlands and 82 to the UK.

electricity or proper housing. Can one imagine thousands and thousands of children "programmed" to be idle and hopeless for the rest of their life being suddenly offered a real future with challenges and opportunities?

The second obvious benefit is the legitimate pride of the resettlement countries which are helping Nepal, which has generously hosted the refugees for almost one generation, and UNHCR to close the chapter. At a time when so many refugee situations remain protracted, this is no doubt good news. With a rapidly declining population, the government of Nepal and UNHCR will be able, hopefully starting in 2011, to scale down the operation, close a majority of the camps and strengthen joint services and infrastructure benefiting both the refugees and host communities.

Thirdly, the resettlement programme has been an eye-opener as well as an opportunity to tackle with more vigour and knowledge entrenched protection problems in the camps. Every candidate to resettlement must be interviewed by UNHCR, a unique occasion to uncover issues which may have otherwise remained buried, often in the name of "tradition". Through these interviews, gender-based, domestic violence and psychosocial issues, though already known and partly addressed, came to the fore, which enabled UNHCR to massively invest in a prevention and response programme.

Fourthly, the resettlement operation has created a real synergy and an equally real bond between UNHCR and the diplomatic missions of the resettlement countries in Kathmandu. Refugee protection has become a shared concern and ambassadors have felt empowered and proud to speak on behalf of the refugees. Traditionally, UNHCR is often seen as a "loudspeaker" through which the refugees' voice can be heard. With the ambassadors' active support, the refugees' voice has become louder, clearer and more articulate than ever before. Resettlement countries accepting refugees from Bhutan have formed a "Core Group" supporting Nepal, UNHCR and IOM, both in Geneva and Kathmandu. The Core Group is not only a forum for exchanging information but also a platform to discuss responses and strategies.

This unique approach differs from countries where the resettlement process is in the exclusive hands of experts based in the capitals or forming a separate unit, co-located in the embassies, but usually quite independent and detached from the political and development services in the embassy and with a loose reporting line to the ambassador. The direct involvement by the ambassadors presents many advantages for the refugees, UNHCR and the countries they represent. As mentioned earlier, selected and well-targeted interventions on behalf of refugees by key ambassadors have much more weight and are likely to be more effective than isolated representations by UNHCR.

A resettlement programme – especially if it is large-scale – is a very significant support to the well-being of the host nation. It often helps resolve both political and developmental problems. Though refugees often make positive contributions to the asylum country and local communities, their presence nevertheless creates political tensions and seriously taps into local resources. Therefore, resettlement is as valuable as development projects or bilateral cooperation. The problem is that it is rarely presented that way by resettlement countries which are too modest and shy about their achievements. I fundamentally believe that resettlement should be seen as a co-substantial part of the "assistance package" offered by a donor country, along with education, health, roads for the local population, etc. It is even more important that the diplomatic mission appears as both the frontline and the key interlocutor of both the government and UNHCR. The ownership for resettlement should not remain with the specialists but should be part of the global humanitarian / development policy of any country.

Fifthly, the resettlement operation in Nepal is contributing to maintaining a protection space in the country. By alleviating Nepal's major refugee related burden, i.e. the impact of the seven camps on the local infrastructure and the environment, the international community is sending the strong message that refugee situations are not intractable and solutions can be found. This is an encouragement to Nepal to "leave the door open" to today's and tomorrow's refugees. In that sense, it is easier for Nepal to leave the entry door open when it knows that the exit gate, thanks to the resettlement countries, is also widely open. Let me explain why I consider that resettlement has so far played a role in maintaining the protection space for present and future refugees. While Nepal has generally been respecting the principle of *non-refoulement* for other refugees, this has not been translated into formal or legal protection, but rather into a tolerated presence. Further, it remains to be seen whether closing the chapter of the refugees from Bhutan will further encourage Nepal to continue to adhere to international protection standards.

The final question concerning the strategic use of resettlement is directly linked to the current resettlement programme for the refugees from Bhutan. It is one of the questions most frequently asked by the refugees themselves. Will the massive resettlement programme finally unblock both other durable solutions, in particular voluntary repatriation to Bhutan, or will it be a rather unique scenario[2] where resettlement will remain the only solution, the international community, and not Bhutan, assuming all the responsibilities? In all honesty, this question is the most difficult one to respond to. But I remain optimistic that with smaller numbers the equation and the mindsets may well change. This is why it is imperative for the resettlement programme to continue in its current speed and with the same level of success and enthusiasm.

Stephane Jaquemet
UNHCR Representative in Nepal
October 2010

[2]Most of the time, resettlement is a solution for a small minority and comes as a complement to the other durable solutions, in particular voluntary repatriation

Japanese Resettlement Pilot Program Kicks Off

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In September and October of this year, 27 Karen refugees arrived in Tokyo, opening a new chapter in Japan's longstanding support for the cause of refugees.

On September 28 2010, after spending up to 25 years in a refugee camp in Thailand, three Karen families from Myanmar arrived in Japan to begin new lives. Two other families stayed behind due to medical issues. By October 13 all 27 refugees had arrived in Japan. Selected to participate in Asia's first resettlement program (apart from Australia and New Zealand), when they touched down at Tokyo's Narita Airport, they opened a new chapter in Japan's longstanding support for the cause of refugees. Awaiting them was a warm welcome from government officials, civil society representatives, international organizations, community members and other Karen refugees that had preceded them years before to Japan.

The arrival of these refugees marked the culmination of the collaborative efforts among numerous actors. The central government has spearheaded these efforts and in addition to utilizing support of UNHCR and other agencies such as International Organization for Migration (IOM) they have capitalized on their many years of experience in settling the Indo-Chinese refugee experience. In a fashion befitting UNHCR's second-largest donor country, Japan transitioned its 30 year old asylum system scarcely welcoming asylum seekers to one that aims to provide refugees in protracted situations in other countries (in the pilot project context, 90 refugees from Mae La camp in a 3-year-period) , with a durable solution

This new focus took shape as a pilot program when first announced by the Japanese Prime Minister in December 2008. Japan has joined 11 other countries resettling Myanmar refugees from Thailand and will accept thirty refugees from Mae La camp annually for three years starting September 2010. As the pilot project properly develops, UNHCR hopes that Japan will further develop its program and joining hands with other resettlement countries by regularizing its procedures and increasing the number and geographical diversity of resettled refugees.

For the refugees that were resettled into Japan recently, the process has been—and probably will continue to be—a long one. It began when the UNHCR, in cooperation with refugee representatives and other organizations that work in the camp, identified eligible refugees. A Japanese governmental selection mission was dispatched to the camp to conduct interviews and identify the first batch of resettled refugees. The government then engaged with IOM to develop and implement a pre-departure process that included medicals and an orientation program that included language and cultural preparation courses.

Once their activities in Mae La completed, the refugees traveled to Bangkok and then to Tokyo. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, through the Refugee Assistance Headquarters (RHQ), has provided the refugees with a week-long initial orientation, to be followed by a six-month series of comprehensive sessions includ-

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Japan has joined 11 other countries resettling Myanmar refugees from Thailand and will accept thirty refugees from Mae La Camp annually for three years starting September 2010.

ing language courses, cultural orientation skills training and job referral services. The refugees will be also provided with housing for the first six months. The refugees were welcomed to their temporary homes by local neighborhood associations and refugee communities.

This short-term assistance should eventually be linked with medium- and long-term coordinated support if the refugees are to integrate well within their Japanese communities. The refugees, through the facilitation of the Japanese government, will be introduced to potential employers; like other Convention refugees, they will also have the freedom to settle and to work anywhere in Japan. Further tailored program will be necessary, however, if the refugees are to secure and enjoy durable access to employment, education, and social services.

Such assistance program does not necessary have to be always provided through the central government services. Rather, the support and resources of local governments, as well as of non-traditional stakeholders including religious communities, local neighborhood committees and refugee communities can be mobilized and coordinated. Like similar programs already in place in other countries, these local actors can be the practical bridge to facilitate the resettled refugees toward their ultimate goal: sustainable self-reliance and self-sufficiency.

For, notwithstanding their awe at Tokyo's tall buildings and wide roads, it is their quest for safety, better life and education for their children, and independence that motivated these families to leave Mae La. The *Japan Times* reported that one refugee, on arriving in Japan, stated simply that "I want to grow rice and vegetables." Another spoke of his desire to travel, while a third hoped for a good education for his children.

The Japanese government and its wide range of partners in this endeavor share the refugees' hopes. Should this pilot program be successful, it may serve as a model for larger-scale operations in Japan and perhaps for other potential resettlement programs across Asia. In this spirit, - despite the myriad challenges ahead – the Karen refugees remaining in Mae La, the countless refugees elsewhere, and all the ACTR's membership are no doubt wishing Japan's resettlement pilot project and these refugees well.

Daniel Alkhal
Satoru Miyazawa,
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UNHCR Tokyo

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Australia welcomes Rohingya from Bangladesh and Somalis from Eritrea

In 2009–2010, Australia welcomed two new refugee communities under the Humanitarian Program, Rohingya from Bangladesh and Somalis from Eritrea.[1] While there is a small existing Rohingya community in Sydney, and various Somali communities residing in most major centres around Australia (most came to Australia via Kenya, Ethiopia or Egypt), both of these groups were regarded by our resettlement program as 'new' caseloads given the specific vulnerabilities associated with their refugee profiles.

Both the Rohingya from Bangladesh and Somalis from Eritrea are classified as protracted refugee situations by UNHCR and regarded by Australia as distinct groups and uniquely homogenous as refugee groups in terms of settlement needs. This assessment is based on their confinement in harsh refugee camps, in some case, for decades. They were unable to return to their homelands and not permitted to integrate locally. Both groups were largely invisible for a very long time. Many of the younger children were born in the camps or were too young to remember either a 'normal' existence, or the original terrifying departure from Somalia or Burma.

Given the length of time in the camps, the personal losses they suffered, and the all too common history of severe trauma, it was expected that the new arrivals would need the full complement of refugee settlement services, and in all likelihood, extra services such as torture and trauma counselling and Complex Case Support services, which deliver specialised and intensive case management where pre-migration experiences, such as severe torture and trauma and/or significant medical conditions present significant barriers to successful settlement. There was great interest to see how well the groups were settling, and it was decided to conduct a series of interviews with the new arrivals in May-June 2010 to find out how they were coping with life in Australia. More than seventy Somalis and thirty Rohingya were interviewed.

The Australian Cultural Orientation program was provided to both refugee caseloads prior to their departure for Australia. This represents the beginning of the settlement process and aims to prepare the refugees for travel, (most of those interviewed had never been on a plane before). The course also provides information about life in Australia and teaches some of the skills they need to manage the initial challenges ahead of them. Most of those interviewed were very positive about this program, but added that nothing could really prepare them for the reality of arriving in Australia. The Somalis were settled in Brisbane, Townsville and Cairns and most of the Rohingyas were settled in Brisbane.

Prior to the arrival of humanitarian entrants, the refugee settlement service providers [2] have a great deal of work to do. In the case of the Somalis heading for Townsville, the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS) provider and the refugees were able to engage in a teleconference prior to departure from Africa, which proved to be a very valuable exchange of information and helped the IHSS provider prepare more effectively for the arrival of several large family groups. The families were met on arrival at the airport and with the aid of interpreters welcomed to Australia. They were settled in temporary accommodation, and in the days that followed underwent an initial orientation program as they began the daunting process of settlement. [3] The adults interviewed several months after their arrival were, for the most part, consistently positive about their new lives in Australia. Many of those who settled in Cairns and Townsville thought that settlement in regional Australia was probably easier than it might had been had they been settled in metropolitan areas. They repeatedly expressed gratitude for the protection offered by UNHCR, who they regarded as their eventual saviour in the camps. They were deeply grateful to be 'safe in Australia' and eager to make a contribution to their new country. One young man even declared 'he would die for Australia.' Australia had rescued

[1] An article on the initial arrival of the Rohingya from Bangladesh was published in Issue 3 of the ATCR Newsletter.

[2] The Department of Immigration & Citizenship (DIAC) is the federal government agency with responsibility for settlement services. Federal, state and local government agencies, non-government organisations and community groups are all involved in the delivery and provision of services. Services are delivered under the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS) by service providers contracted to DIAC. Volunteer groups also work with service providers to support entrants and assist them to settle into the local community.

[3] Refugee entrants are provided with extra clothing, bedding, furniture and groceries to begin their life in Australia which included an introduction to the various social

them from the terrible privation and hopelessness they and their children had endured for so many years in the camps.

The women, in both groups, were especially reflective and thoughtful about the profound changes they had experienced leaving the camps. Most, with large families to care for, demonstrated a quiet resilience, determination and willingness to endure the initial challenges and difficulties of settlement in what was for them, a very strange and unfamiliar environment. Their hopes were firmly focused on the future. They were ambitious for their children, keen to learn English and eager to become independent as soon as possible.

The interviews revealed some areas of concerns, especially among young Somalis attending high school. They expressed an impatience to become fluent in English [4], and were frustrated by the obstacles they faced negotiating the demands of school, fitting in with their peers and the difficulty of obtaining the 'essential' trappings of Australian popular culture, such as ready access to the internet, I-pods and 'cool' clothes and mobiles (not dissimilar to most teenagers). Mobility was a huge issue for these young people eager to fit in as new Australians. A number of young people spoke positively of future professional plans in Australia.

The Rohingya in Brisbane have a dedicated settlement officer to help the community and this person is available at all times to help with problems - big and small. This appears to be a very effective tool in the settlement process for a group such as this, coping with what is a highly sophisticated, technological society that is very different from their own mainly rural background and culture, let alone the primitive conditions of the camps.

There were no major physical health concerns to report, although some of the adults reported feeling worried about their relatives, were distressed and unable to sleep, eat or study. Some of those interviewed were clearly suffering the ill effects of their past experiences and present painful longing for loved ones. While apparently aware that counselling was available they are still coming to terms with understanding how or why speaking about their past experiences will help.

In spite of this cultural conundrum, many of them are accessing torture and trauma services. The torture & trauma counselling services report that the current services on offer have coped so far with the issues arising as the settlement process progresses. Family reunion emerged as the most pressing issue. They were anxious for extended family left behind in camps, many of whom lived in fear of their lives and at the mercy of corrupt camp officials and police. For them to have their loved ones with them, they said, would solve their current suffering and pain. While most of the Somali groups appear to have arrived with their families intact, for many of the Rohingya, family reunion with relatives still in the camps will go a long way to ensuring that people settle well.

Though the interview results are yet to be fully analysed and presented, the responses to the interviews provided valuable information about both groups and allowed immediate attention to be focused on urgent practical issues that were in most cases fairly easily solved. It is clear there are more difficult issues to address and both the Rohingya and the Somali groups are in need of a great deal of support as they become established. The challenge will be to ensure that our refugee settlement services address the need for targeted support services to help vulnerable youths and young adults with the challenges of education and integration into their peer group. In some cases there may be a need to consider the provision of more specialized services among the Rohingya and the Somalis to ensure they settle successfully and get on with the business of building a future in Australia for themselves and their families.

-Department of Immigration & Citizenship Australia

[4] The Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) provides refugees with little or no English with in excess of 510 hours of basic English language tuition. English for the workplace training is also a further skill that is available. Interpreter services are provided freely as needed during the initial settlement period.

Urban Refugees Workshop

As more of the world's population is drawn to urban areas, it is no surprise that these trends are reflected in refugee populations.

Almost half of the world's 10.5 million refugees now reside in cities and towns, compared to one third who live in camps. Large number of refugee women, children and older people are also found in urban areas, facing with a range of protection risks: the threat of arrest and detention, *refoulement*, harassment, exploitation, discrimination, inadequate and overcrowded shelter, as well as vulnerability to sexual and gender-based violence, HIV-AIDS, human smuggling and trafficking. Recognizing the need to address the issue of urban refugees in a more comprehensive manner than had been addressed in UNHCR's previous 1997 policy statement on refugees in urban areas, and based on the principle that urban areas should be a legitimate place for refugees to enjoy their rights, including those stemming from their status as refugees as well as those that they hold in common with all other human beings, UNHCR introduced its comprehensively revised policy on refugee protection and solutions in urban areas (hereinafter referred to as "Urban Policy") in 2009.[1]

As part of its efforts to enhance implementation of this urban policy, UNHCR organized a "Launch" workshop on 19 and 20 July 2010, bringing together colleagues from six of the seven pilot sites[2] with sector specialists from Headquarters to discuss specific challenges and targets for the implementation of this policy. The workshop was highly participatory, featuring both targeted discussions and interactive exchange during the workshop's sessions and at the "fair", where participants were encouraged to circulate and visit different booths representing each sector. The aim of the workshop was fourfold: to agree on what it means to be designated as a pilot site; to allow for feedback on the new urban refugee policy; to identify technical and other support required from Headquarters; and contribute to setting in place a community of good practice in urban areas. In addition to producing a detailed Action Plan, the workshop also highlighted a number of concrete recommendations to be taken in respect to a proactive approach to solutions including resettlement, and reinforced the need for concerted effort on behalf of urban refugee populations.

The vastly varying contexts exemplified by these pilot sites – from Cairo's 38,000 refugees and asylum-seekers concentrated in one city, to the potentially uncounted 100,000 in across several of Kenya's urban areas or the small populations but tight protection space in Moscow and St. Petersburg – require tailored approaches. The Action Plan describes very concrete efforts to surmount the specific difficulties or issues in the areas of registration, profiling and mapping, refugee status determination, livelihoods, community outreach, health, education, and durable solutions, including resettlement. The mutual influence of these areas requires a holistic approach and also encourages more intensive and more effective collaboration with partners involved in provision of services in these fields.

When developing comprehensive durable solutions in urban contexts, the specific recommendations of the Action Plan regarding resettlement reflect this holistic approach in several areas. First, it is imperative that resettlement is considered as part of a comprehensive approach, such that voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement are mutually reinforcing and not mutually disruptive. Providing accurate information about resettlement prospects and procedures as well as extending outreach to the community are crucial to mitigate unrealistic expectations and the security problems that they can generate within the refugee community. Second, solutions must reflect the differing needs within and among refugee populations without appearing to favour one group, and solutions strategies must not neglect the needs of long-stayers. Improving identification of refugees in need of resettlement is particularly important when refugees live scattered across and at the outskirts of large cities, through strengthened partnership with NGOs and outreach to community groups. Finally, the strategic potential of resettlement, in addition to its function as a tool of international protection, provides crucial support to efforts in other areas such as livelihoods, health and education as well as broadening the protection space.

As urban populations become the norm rather than the exception, the associated challenges and specific protection risks require the kind of fundamental change in thinking represented by this policy and at the workshop. Not only are these populations and contexts complex, dispersed within and across urban areas, and facing considerable difficulty in securing livelihoods and security, they are also increasingly finding themselves in protracted situations. As the Workshop emphasized, here in particular resettlement has the potential to make a considerable impact, but only if efforts and capacity are dedicated to better identifying and processing individual cases, and only if increased resettlement places dedicated to urban populations are forthcoming. A concerted and collective effort will leverage our collective ability to help refugees in urban areas obtain safety, security and dignity.

-UNHCR

[1] UN High Commissioner for Refugees, *UNHCR Policy on Refugee Protection and Solutions in Urban Areas*, September 2009, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4ab8e7f72.html

[2] The selected pilot sites are: Cairo, Egypt; Moscow and St. Petersburg, Russian Federation; Desamparados, Costa Rica; Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; Kenya; and Tajikistan. A representative from Tajikistan was unable to attend the workshop.

School Impact Program Helps Refugee Youth Prepare for Classroom

Lutheran Social Services of Michigan

Starting school can be a challenge for any child. For young refugees resettled in the United States, the adjustment to American schools is all the more difficult. Language barriers, new teaching styles and a general lack of familiarity with American-style classrooms are a lot to overcome.

Lutheran Social Services of Michigan (LSSM), an affiliate of Episcopal Migration Ministries and Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service in Detroit, is helping refugee children and their parents who have been resettled in the area prepare for all of these issues, through a school impact program funded with a grant from the Office of Refugee Resettlement.

The program, which began in 2007, serves about 250 children and their families through the "Refugee ESL Summer Learning Academy." The day-long summer sessions provide English tutoring, creative projects and lessons, and cultural orientation designed to make young people ready for an American classroom.

"We model it as a classroom setting. They have to follow a schedule that's the same as it will be when they go to school," said Jessica Cotton, who oversees the program.

During the past five years, the Office of Refugee Resettlement has funded 185 school impact programs through school districts, ethnic community-based organizations, and refugee resettlement agencies in 36 states. The programs have been open to all refugee children in the past, but will begin focusing on children who have been in the United States for fewer than three years. The School Impact program also receives technical assistance from Bridging Refugee Youth & Children's Services (BRYCS).

While children attend the program at LSSM, their parents attend English and computer classes in the same building. The lessons for both groups coincide to help refugee parents understand what their children will experience in school, and to help define their role in their child's education.

Young refugees in Detroit also receive support and guidance during Saturday programs while school is in session, and their parents attend monthly workshops on topics like the U.S. school system, financial literacy, and child discipline in an American context.

In addition, school impact staff members serve as liaisons between schools and parents, helping to resolve any issues that require special experience working with refugee populations.

By the time children finish the program, Cotton said they understand the basic social and study skills they'll need to function in school, which makes it easier for teachers and school administrators to help them learn and integrate into their new community.

"We had some kids who were having a hard time, so I'm glad they're able to go through this before starting school," Cotton said. "We're preparing them for the future."

Episcopal Migration Ministries
United States
http://www.episcopalchurch.org/emm

Iraq War Stories in the UK: collecting personal history

Iraqi refugee contributor and Project Curator at the National Imperial War Museum
Photo credit: Refugee Action

Over the last two years Iraqi refugees have been resettled in Greater Manchester on the Gateway Protection Programme. Some of these were formerly locally engaged staff who had worked for the coalition forces in Iraq and had been targeted by insurgents in Iraq due to their work.

On being resettled, many reported feeling frustrated at their treatment and perceived a lack of recognition and appreciation for their roles during the Iraq conflict amongst not just the public, but also national government departments. Several of the refugees began to show an interest in telling their stories and sharing their experiences, and were particularly keen for these stories to be heard by a British audience.

Refugee Action had an established partnership with the Imperial War Museum–North, which expressed an interest in recording the refugees' stories as oral histories. The Imperial War Museum is a national collection of museums devoted to the history of modern warfare and conflict (www.iwm.org.uk). It can be difficult for the museum to access this perspective on recent conflicts and Refugee Action played a key role in bringing together the organisation together with those who had the desire to tell their stories. The museum has a clear ethos that its purpose is to educate the population on the impact of war with a view to preventing future conflict around the world.

It intends to ask the participants in the Iraq War Stories project to comment on installations related to the Iraq conflict already on display at the museum and to be interviewed for a conflict resolution project giving them a chance to talk about why they left Iraq, how they were affected by the conflict and their opinions on how the conflict can be resolved. They will also have the chance to record their full oral histories, which will be kept in the archives alongside stories from many past and present conflicts, and used for particular events and future exhibitions on topics such as women and war, conflict resolution and Refugee Week. Participants will also get the opportunity to share their stories with groups of local schoolchildren via the museum's existing outreach programme and to be involved in a filming project related to stories of the impact of war.

A bomb-destroyed car from Baghdad will arrive at the museum early in 2011 to become part of an installation to bring attention to the civilian cost of war. This will offer further opportunities for the Iraqi refugees to influence exhibitions through their own comments on the car itself and the effect of the conflict on Iraqi civilians. The museum will collate comments from the public as well as participants in this project for inclusion on a blog related to the car artefact.

The aim of this work is to support the Iraqi refugees to contribute their unique personal perspective to how the conflict in Iraq and its aftermath is portrayed in the UK. It facilitates a means through which they can channel their frustrations at the war and the personal cost and consequences of working with the coalition armed forces for a positive purpose. The project also aims to build self confidence by helping refugees to learn new skills and aid their integration: having their stories displayed in a national museum will raise awareness and understanding of refugees in the UK and help develop respect and understanding in their new local host communities in Greater Manchester.

Refugee Action/The United Kingdom
http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/

Refugee Services Aotearoa New Zealand Implements Pathways, a New Comprehensive Resettlement Plan for Former Refugees

On 13 August 2010 a new group of former refugees left Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre, the arrival point for all refugees resettling in New Zealand through the UNHCR quota system, to begin their lives in areas around country. What made their initial settlement different from families who arrived before them is that they were the first group to be part of the implementation of Pathways, a new Comprehensive Resettlement Plan developed by Refugee Services, the primary resettlement agency for refugees in New Zealand. The new resettlement plan addresses, in a more specific and targeted way than had been done previously, the individual goals and needs of each former refugee and family as they aim to successfully resettle in their new home.

From the beginning of the plan's implementation, Jill Conway, Refugee Services Manager of National Resettlement, was encouraged by the positive responses from the newly arrived families and from other former refugees involved in the development of the new initiative. "The families are now being even more empowered to take ownership of their own pathways towards settlement and independence," she reports.

Pathways has been developed to provide incoming families and individuals with a framework to guide them through the initial stages of resettlement in New Zealand and into the longer term aspects of their settlement journey. With a focus on the hopes and aspirations of both families and individuals, Pathways helps clients set goals that will enable them to identify and celebrate their progress and achievements. The Pathways initiative is divided into two segments, a Pathway to Settlement and a Pathway to Employment, and is designed to remain flexible enough to respond to individual needs whilst providing realistic goals based on services and support available to clients in their settlement location.

Additionally, Pathways has been designed to include active participation of former refugees working for Refugee Services in Cross Cultural Worker and Case Worker roles, alongside social work support. "This is the real strength of Pathways," says Jill, "former refugees being actively involved in sharing their own knowledge and experiences to guide newly-arrived families along the pathway towards independence."

All incoming families are introduced to the Pathways concept during their six-week orientation programme at the Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre. Each family is given a concertina file briefcase, which holds all the important documents they collect over the six-week period, and during this time Refugee Services staff talks with each family, going over and collating the information that will prepare them and provide the foundation for their settlement once they are in their new homes.

An important feature of New Zealand's Pathways plan is inter-agency collaboration. All refugee support agencies working at the Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre come together to contribute to the families' plans. The Pathways file includes important documents such as their Certificates of Identity, education portfolios, medical notes, assessments undertaken, financial information and their housing documentation. The collaboration between the different agencies then continues out in the community, under the guidance of Refugee Services, as the agencies unite to work alongside families to support and encourage their progress. Even after the families have begun integrating into their new communities, Refugee Services continues to work with them to develop their Pathway plans, meeting with them at regular intervals, guiding them towards becoming contributing members of their new community and encouraging their financial independence.

A Refugee Services Client arriving at the Wellington Airport with his Pathways portfolio.
Photo credit: Yussuf Ahmed, Refugee Services Aotearoa New Zealand

The recent implementation of the Pathways initiative is a very exciting step for Refugee Services staff and the refugee background clients with whom they work. Now that clients are actively participating in the programme, Pathways is able to enter a new stage in its development, evolving and adjusting based on practical feedback received by Refugee Services and other refugee support agencies in New Zealand. "The success of the initiative is dependent on interagency collaboration and feedback from service providers, refugee communities and the families themselves," says Jill. "We are developing culturally appropriate evaluation processes to ensure that we are capturing all feedback and that Pathways continues to develop and evolve to support the needs of former refugees, providing them with a clear and workable plan for the future."

Teresa Bass and Jill Conway,
Refugee Services Aotearoa New Zealand

Originally printed in: Refugee Services' "A Place to Call Home" Newsletter, September 2010 Issue

ICMC serves and protects uprooted people: refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants regardless of faith, race, ethnicity or nationality. We advocate for rights-based policies and durable solutions through a worldwide network of member organizations.

Enlarging the Resettlement Family
Czech Republic, Romania and What Next for Central Europe?

Out of the 84,657 refugees that were resettled in 2009 only 10.07% were resettled to Europe.[1] This was an increase for Europe from last year, largely due to Germany showing an exemplary first time commitment by resettling 2064 refugees within one year. Although progress is slow, it is still the ambition of the European Union that all 27 European Member States will eventually contribute, with varied numbers to a significant European quota that can assist in resolving some of the major protracted refugee situations in the world.

As part of this exercise the European Commission, UNHCR and other stakeholders have made great efforts to extend resettlement to Central and Eastern Europe, whose countries have relatively low asylum figures. Two of the latest countries that have joined the resettlement family, introducing quota programmes are Romania and the Czech Republic. However with their lack of strong social support structures, these countries in many ways have had to start from scratch when it comes to resettlement.

The Czech Republic

The Czech Republic resettled 85 Burmese refugees over 2008 - 2010 [2] as part of a three year pilot programme. Upon arrival the refugees stay for their first 6 – 8months in a so called 'integration and asylum centre' (a block of housing where refugees live together) in Northern Bohemia, where they receive intensive language classes and social and cultural orientation to their new country. After this phase, the first group have been successfully welcomed into accommodation in 9 different Municipalities, mostly in Southern Moravia.

So how was the experience of resettling Burmese refugees for the first time? Ludmila Bobysudová, Deputy Director of the Organisation for Aid to Refugees (OPU) (the main NGO working with the resettled refugees in the Czech Republic) commented "*For us the big success is that most of the refugees have found paid employment and although it may not be their ideal vocation, they are able to provide for their families*", many of the refugees jobs are public beneficiary jobs with the local municipalities, whilst others have now found regular paid employment. The biggest challenges for the refugees have been learning the Czech language, dealing with their expectations of resettlement and gaining employment more suited to their qualifications. Beyond providing safety for Burmese refugees, resettlement in the Czech Republic has strengthened local communities and enhanced partnerships between the different actors involved. As Bobysudová, says "*we are working much more closely with different municipalities and churches, the co-operation is much deeper, and these partnerships will be invaluable for our future work*". The Burmese refugees have proved to be active participants in their local communities especially through the Baptist churches, who have welcomed their new neighbours.

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[1] In 2009 8531 refugees were resettled to 15 different European countries. This resettlement number is greater than previous years for Europe due to the additional ad hoc resettlement programmes in 2009 as a result of the Council agreement to resettle 10.000 refugees from Iraq.

[2] October 2008 23 Burmese refugees were resettled, February 2009 14 persons, July/August 2010 48 Burmese refugees resettled.

Romania

Romania followed suit of the Czech Republic and on the 1st June 2010 Romania resettled 38 ethnic Kachin refugees from Burma, as part of an annual quota set by the Romanian Government to resettle 40 refugees. The refugees will need to reside in an asylum accommodation centre in Galati, Eastern Romania for up to one year until they can access housing in the community, which will be challenging to obtain. Support is being provided by the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) and Save the Children Romania and all are receiving language and cultural classes. The refugees have encountered challenges in accessing interpreters and they have also been struggling with unrealistic expectations about life in Romania. For those refugees who gave birth in Romania soon after arrival, accessing interpretation for health appointments proved difficult. As a response Romanian language classes were adapted to teaching more conversational basic skills, to enable more useful daily communication. Recently a Burmese interpreter and cultural mediator has been recruited from Norway to assist the groups with communication and understanding.

Resettlement to Romania has had positive knock on effects by strengthening partnerships between the government, both central and local and NGOs, and providing a valuable learning curve for stakeholders involved in the process. As Stefan Leonescu of JRS in Galati remarks "*there have been many beneficiaries along with the resettled refugees, also the Romanian society, the Immigration office, UNHCR and the NGO's have really developed expertise in this area, and also been able to raise further awareness with Local Authorities who otherwise would not have been involved in refugee integration programmes*". As they say every journey begins with one small step and now Romania has made these steps, and overcome some of the challenges, it is hoped they will use this experience for future programmes.

And how bright is the future for engaging other new resettlement countries in Central Europe? Regardless of the financial crisis, Hungary recently announced on the 14th October 2010 that they will participate in a future annual quota programme to resettle refugees. Bulgaria also recently announced a pilot resettlement programme to start in 2011. The details for both are as yet to be defined, as in how many and when? But this is promising news and not to be taken lightly.

In addition capacity building efforts are ongoing in Poland and Slovakia to prepare for future resettlement. During October this year in both countries there have been roundtables on resettlement, exploring further resettlement with various stakeholders, chaired by ICMC and UNHCR respectively.

Engaging new countries in resettlement is an important and vital task. Yet just as vital is ensuring that the right preparations pre arrival are made, and the correct services are in place to give refugees the tools to be independent and integrate with dignity into their new community. It is a great step forward that governments begin to realize that resettlement is not only about selection but that reception and integration needs are the real challenges to be overcome.

Leaving the restaurant after the JRS sponsored celebration, is one of the families who first signed the asylum papers: (L-R) Kyaw Ko Thein Lahpai , age 25, his wife Seng Ra, age 35, with their daughter, Su Myant, age 2. (photo: Don Doll, S.J. - JRS)

Solidarity Resettlement Programme in South America

The Mexico Plan of Action adopted in November 2004 comprises three pillars that address urban displacement (Cities of Solidarity Pillar), protection in the sensitive border areas (Borders of Solidarity Pillar) and resettlement (Solidarity Resettlement Pillar).

The Solidarity Resettlement Pillar is a regional responsibility-sharing programme. It is intended to benefit refugees who face protection risks in their countries of asylum. Since 2004, more than 500 Colombian refugees have been resettled in Argentina, Brazil and Chile. Uruguay joined the Programme in 2009 and it is expected that soon Paraguay will also join the Resettlement Solidarity Programme. In addition, Brazil and Chile have resettled Palestinian ex-Iraq refugees. The integration of these refugees is in progress.

The implementation of the Solidarity Resettlement Programme is possible with the financial and technical assistance provided by experienced resettlement countries, notably Canada and Norway, to the emerging resettlement countries in the South Cone since 2004. Canada has provided technical support for capacity building activities, while Norway, through twinning arrangements, has been providing technical advice and financial contribution for the implementation of selection missions, cultural orientation, and the establishment of reception and integration measures.

On August 25-26, 2010, a meeting took place in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre. The meeting sought to promote the exchange of best practices and strategies to overcome common challenges faced by both traditional and emerging resettlement countries. Sponsored by the Norwegian Government, the meeting also counted on the support of the Canadian Embassy in Brasilia, which supported the participation of a representative of a Canadian NGO.

The meeting included the participation of government representatives and NGOs from Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay. UNHCR was represented by staff from its offices in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, and Ecuador, and staff from the Regional Bureau for the Americas and the Resettlement Service from UNHCR Headquarters. The Government of Norway was represented by staff from the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI).

The participants in the meeting agreed on the need to jointly seek ways to ensure financial commitment to increase the sustainability of the Solidarity Resettlement Programme, including alternative funding sources and to explore the possibility of implementing private sponsorships resettlement initiatives in the region. The participants also agreed on the need to increase the visibility of the resettlement programmes so that the public would become more aware of the benefits of a regional common resettlement response to protection needs. It was also agreed that the resettlement programme could benefit from the good practices generated in the implementation of the Cities of Solidarity Pillar in each of the resettlement countries in the region, in particular with respect to measures adopted to facilitate the access of refugees to housing and job opportunities.

The Solidarity Resettlement Programme is a good illustration of how a regional strategic approach to resettlement brings benefits not only to resettled refugees, but also to opening protection space for the majority of refugees in first asylum countries such as Ecuador and Costa Rica.

October 2010
Resettlement Service
Division of International Protection
UNHCR Headquarters

Can European Governments Work with NGOs in Resettlement?

Should governments work together with civil society organisations in resettling refugees? If so, how would this work in practice, what are the advantages and risks involved? Moreover, what are the costs of doing so and how can these organisations add value to what the government is already doing?

In North America the answer to these questions is yes, with a long track record of successful government and civil society collaboration on resettlement. In Europe the picture is more diverse. The instinct to reach out and work with civil society in the resettlement process is not as well developed within some European governments. This environment however, is changing and we are seeing new and exciting forms of collaboration emerging.

To help keep track of what is happening and where civil society – government collaboration has worked, the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) has recently published a guide entitled "NGO involvement in resettlement: Good Practices". The guide is organised around the different stages of the resettlement process, from pre-departure services in refugee camps, to vocational and language training in the host society.

In each section, the guide outlines the issues being addressed, the advantages of civil society – government collaboration and offers a number of practical examples of where this has worked.

The section on integration to the host society is particularly rich in outlining innovative approaches civil society organisations can undertake.

Resettling refugees is a challenge for any government. This guide shows how that challenge can be shared, creating positive synergies with government programmes.

To link to "NGO involvement in resettlement: Good Practices", go to: http://www.ecre.org/resources/Policy_papers/1620

Martin Watson, Director of Advocacy and Communications, European Council on Refugees and Exiles, EU
http://www.ecre.org/

Halima Abdalrahman Yaya Ramadine cuts cucumbers with her daughter, Bakhita, in the Abeche Transit Center
Photo: Kendra Rinas

DARFURIS IN CHAD PREPARE FOR RESETTLEMENT

Since the conflict in Darfur began in 2003, an estimated 300,000 persons have died and 2.7 million have been forcibly displaced, including more than 250,000 Darfuris who have sought refuge in neighboring Chad. Despite the presence of international peacekeepers, the refugees' daily lives in Eastern Chad are marked by security threats, theft, physical and sexual violence, abductions, and scarcity of such essentials as food and water. Families live in huts constructed of wood, mud, tarp and brush, with only the most basic of belongings.

The constantly evolving conflict in Darfur presents significant challenges to humanitarian protection and a durable solution for the refugees, for whom there is little opportunity of local integration or return to their homeland.

To address this need, during the past three years, partners in the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) have been laying the groundwork for increased resettlement out of Eastern Chad. This would offer the most vulnerable Darfuri refugees an opportunity to consider resettlement to the United States, where they would have an opportunity to rebuild their lives. Through pilot resettlement activities, 146 Darfuri refugees resettled from Chad to the United States in 2009, a figure that is expected to increase significantly in the coming years.

Among these initial steps, the Overseas Processing Entity (OPE) in Nairobi, administered by Church World Service, is conducting information sessions on the resettlement process for Darfuri refugees. The goal is to help them make a more informed decision about whether to apply for resettlement to the United States.

While resettlement appears to be the most viable durable solution for the most vulnerable refugees, few Darfuris have had any exposure to what life is like in the United States, and many are hesitant, even fearful, of moving to a far-off country they know nothing about. One refugee considering entering the resettlement process expressed the dilemma well when he asked an OPE staff member, "We know some of those who have already traveled to the U.S., but we have not heard from them after they left. How are they doing? Are they okay?"

Through photos and drawings, posters and videos, CWS/OPE-Nairobi seeks to respond to these and other questions, and to provide illustrative stories of those refugees who have already traveled to the United States, so that refugees who are considering resettlement can better understand both the opportunities and challenges that it may bring, and be prepared for the process.

Information about resettlement is provided to refugees along a continuum, beginning with information sessions conducted in the camps for individuals UNHCR has identified as potential candidates for resettlement. These information sessions are jointly conducted by CWS/OPE-Nairobi, UNHCR, IOM and CNAR, the Chad government refugee agency.

Each step of the application process, from initial interview through medical exams, is used as another opportunity for education. Refugees who are approved for resettlement to the United States – a decision made by an officer of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security – receive five days of intensive cultural orientation that helps to them to prepare for their resettlement to the United States. Cultural orientation training is experiential and picture-based, and includes air travel to the United States, U.S. housing, and basic financial literacy. Participants are introduced to key English words that they will need to use after arrival, such as "money," "job," "apartment" and "toilet."

"While the resettlement challenges will be significant both for the Darfuri refugees and those who welcome them, U.S. resettlement agencies report positive experiences with Darfuris resettled via Ghana and other countries."

Bahkita (18 mos old) clings to her sister Awatif Djouma Moussa Mohammed, 11, as they eat cucumbers.
Photo: Kendra Rinas

Kendra Rinas (OPE coordinator) and Jeremie Dingambe (UNHCR Resettlement Clerk) describe the USRAP process to a group of refugees in Chad.

In Chad, a separate cultural orientation training for children (ages 6-11) and youth (ages 12-17) will also be provided and will include such topics as education, making friends, managing peer pressure, safety, transportation, personal hygiene and cultural adjustment – mimicking, as much as possible, an American public school setting.

As a majority of the Darfuri will be unfamiliar with U.S. housing, a model will be constructed near the IOM Transit Center where the refugees stay. This model will include many of the amenities that refugees will encounter in the United States including a stove/cooker, refrigerator, and flush toilet. Participants will learn about the safe use of these appliances, and how to clean and care for them.

During pilot cultural orientation activities conducted in 2009, participants asked numerous questions about opportunities for education. Children and adults alike who are approved to travel to the United States are excited to learn English, and eager to try out new phrases with any passing resettlement staff. A young girl awaiting travel to the United States who has never attended school asked a CWS staff member, "America, I go, when?"

The Darfuris also are fascinated to see what the average U.S. home, school and city look like. However, most find the information difficult to take in, and it is likely that many may initially be overwhelmed by their new environments. It is likely that Darfuri refugees will need a great deal of support from local resettlement agencies and community-based volunteers in order to undertake everyday activities that will be completely new to them.

The Darfuris cannot be defined by the previous experiences of the Lost Boys, nor are they similar to other refugee groups from the Horn of Africa. To help prepare U.S. communities to welcome the Darfuri, CWS/OPE-Nairobi, in coordination with other U.S. partners, has already conducted a number of presentations to U.S. refugee service providers.

CWS/OPE-Nairobi has also worked with the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL), the agency which provides technical assistance on cultural orientation, to prepare standard background information about the Darfuri refugees in Chad. A backgrounder should be ready soon for distribution to government and non-governmental service providers. This intends to help local agencies better prepare for Darfuri arrivals by covering such topics as:

- Medical and psychosocial needs of Darfuri refugees, which may be acute, especially in the first groups to arrive. Service providers are advised that many Darfuri have lived through rape, trauma and violent attacks but do not often openly express these experiences.

- Descriptions of the extended family units in which Darfuri live and work together, and how the resettlement process may pose difficult changes for them, especially if not all extended family members choose or are qualified to be resettled.

- Work and livelihood experiences of Darfuri. Local agencies are advised that Darfuri are experienced in farming, cattle-rearing, trading and various skilled trades such as carpentry, sewing and shoemaking. As few have had formal employment, efforts to assist Darfuri to find jobs should identify work where English is not a requirement and where employers and other employees can work with a culturally unique group. A strong work ethic and positive attitude toward education are identified as assets that many Darfuri refugees will bring with them to the United States.

- In the camps, all refugee children have access to primary education; however, female school attendance remains at very low levels. Western Darfur has not had a stable, institutionalized educational system for the last 30 years and the Darfuri population in general has an access rate to secondary education well below 40 percent. These factors will need to be considered in supporting Darfuri children and parents to access public education in the United States.

- Basic information on languages and ethnic diversity among Darfuri refugees. Most speak (Western) Sudanese Arabic, although many can communicate with speakers of other forms of Arabic; local agencies in the United States will need to plan accordingly in order to provide adequate translation. Each ethnic group has its own language, which is considered an important aspect of their individual and community culture; Fur, Massalit and Zaghawa are noted as the most commonly spoken ethnic languages. Less than five percent of refugees have basic English skills.

- Cultural factors that may present challenges to integration in the United States include: difficulty for people from different age groups in working together, encouraging participation in group activities, getting the participants to give feedback and think about things as individuals, and encouraging women to speak up. Facilitators anticipate the self-segregation of women, men and age groups.

While the resettlement challenges will be significant both for the Darfuri refugees and those who welcome them, U.S. refugee resettlement affiliates report positive experiences with Darfuris who have resettled to the United States via Ghana and other countries.

Chris George, Executive Director of Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services in New Haven, Conn., commented that one Darfuri client volunteered to work in IRIS's new thrift shop, seeing it as an opportunity to practice English.

Elizabeth Kaznak, Executive Director of Kentucky Refugee Ministries in Louisville, Ky., reported, "We have had some people and they have done well for us in adjusting. They have been through so much and are very grateful for the opportunity to be out of that situation.

"What stands out for me," she said, "is their humility, graciousness and gratitude. When asked about their experience, it is usually met with tears because they have all suffered personal losses. It is a privilege to work with them."

Church World Service/Immigration and Refugee Program
http://www.churchworldservice.org/site/PageServer?pagename=action_what_assist_main

Kendra Rinas shows photos of Darfuri refugees who have resettled in the U.S. to a group of applicants.

Photo: Khamis Nassan Djime

THE ATCR | WGR
NEWSLETTER
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ATCR WGR

ANNUAL TRIPARTITE CONSULTATIONS and WORKING GROUP on RESETTLEMENT

The Next Issue

The next issue of the ATCR/WGR Newsletter will be distributed in February 2011. If you would like to submit news regarding resettlement activities underway by your state or organization, please send suggested text and pictures by February 1, 2011 to the U.S.