

# Overview of Global Resettlement and current challenges

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※This contribution does not necessarily reflect the views of UNHCR

*“...the third country resettlement is very very important because here our life is like a journey from our home in search of home – so we need to be in our own home one day in our lives. We hope we’ll have our home, we’ll be citizens of a country. We hope our children would get good facilities, they would get good educations. We expect we can make use of our own educations and our experience in our new countries.”*

*(Amar Singh Subba, a Bhutanese refugee living in Sanischare refugee camp in Nepal, departing to resettlement to the Netherlands with UNHCR<sup>1</sup> assistance)*

## Introduction

Resettlement involves the selection and transfer of refugees from a State in which they have sought protection to a third State which has agreed to admit them as refugees with permanent residence status. While the clear articulation of the concept of refugee resettlement emerged in mid-1960s, resettlement has been undertaken in one form or another from the outset of the system of international protection for refugees. Resettlement was used as the principal or partial solution for a number of refugee situations between the two World Wars. A series of resettlement movements took place, the largest and dramatic example of which being the resettlement of some 700,000 Vietnamese in the late 1970s and 1980s. Policy and practice in relation to resettlement have undergone significant changes over the years. During the 1990s, focus of resettlement became increasingly towards response mechanism for the protection of individual cases. More recently, in recognition of the international community’s renewed awareness of the strategic potential of resettlement, UNHCR has repositioned resettlement as an important protection tool and a durable solution within broader protection frameworks. The evolution of scope and dimension of UNHCR-assisted resettlement programmes presented both new opportunities and challenges.

This article provides an overview of global resettlement and current challenges. The article first outlines scope and recent trends in global resettlement. The article then identifies current challenges facing the key actors involved in resettlement and explores ways to jointly overcome these. Finally, the article briefly touches upon outlook for Japan’s pilot resettlement programme.

## Scope of global resettlement

UNHCR is mandated to provide international protection and seek durable solutions for its persons of concern.<sup>2</sup> Resettlement is one of the durable solutions the Organization pursues, alongside with voluntary repatriation and local integration. Comparatively, resettlement benefits a small number of refugees – a solution which is available to less than one per cent

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR Statute

of 10.4 million refugees who fall under UNHCR's Mandate. During the past 10 years, some 810,000 refugees were resettled, compared to 9.6 million refugees who were able to repatriate.<sup>3</sup> With the number of returning refugees decreasing in recent years,<sup>4</sup> resettlement has become an increasingly applied solution, vital in resolving some protracted refugee situations,<sup>5</sup> creating protection space, and opening up solutions that may have otherwise remained closed.

### *States joining the resettlement efforts*

The pool of resettlement countries offering regular resettlement programmes and places for UNHCR submissions now comprises 25 States<sup>6</sup> worldwide. The addition of 11 new resettlement States in the last five years is a significant progress. The majority of new resettlement States are in Europe (Bulgaria,<sup>7</sup> the Czech Republic, France, Hungary,<sup>8</sup> Portugal, Romania, and Spain), but also in Latin America (Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay) and Asia (Japan<sup>9</sup>). In addition to these 25 States, there are States<sup>10</sup> that contribute to the international responsibility sharing mechanism by receiving a limited number of resettlement submissions from UNHCR without formally establishing resettlement programmes.

The establishment of new resettlement programmes as well as consideration of resettlement submissions from UNHCR on an ad-hoc basis was driven by strong commitments at the regional and national levels (e.g. European Union, Mexico Plan of Action) to respond to appeals for international responsibility sharing by the industrialized countries vis-à-vis countries of first asylum. Indeed, statistics<sup>11</sup> show that developing countries were host to four-fifths of the world's refugees. Pakistan was hosting the highest number of refugees compared to its national economy, 745 refugees per 1 USD GDP<sup>12</sup> (PPP) per capita. The Democratic Republic of Congo came second in line (592 refugees), followed by Zimbabwe (527), the Syrian Arab Republic (244) and Kenya (237). The first developed country was Germany at 26<sup>th</sup> place with 17 refugees per 1 USD GDP (PPP) per capita.

The total number of resettlement places offered by these 25 States for UNHCR submissions are about 80,000 places. The so-called "big three" resettlement States, namely the United States, Australia and Canada make up 92 per cent of overall resettlement places, with the United States providing by far the largest proportion of resettlement places (80 per cent). Despite the welcome addition of new resettlement countries, however, global expansion of resettlement remains limited and has not seen major increase in the past years. The reasons are twofold: some States have yet to operationalize their resettlement activities; and most

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<sup>3</sup> UNHCR, *2009 Global Trends*

<sup>4</sup> 2009 saw the lowest figure of 251,500 returns since 1990 that saw 139,000 returns.

<sup>5</sup> UNHCR defines a protracted refugee situation as one in which 25,000 or more refugees of the same nationality have been in exile for five years or longer in any given asylum country. Based on this definition, it is estimated that some 5.5 million refugees were in a protracted situation by end 2009. These refugees were living in 21 host countries accounting for a total of 25 protracted situations globally.

<sup>6</sup> Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Paraguay, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom, Uruguay and the United States of America

<sup>7</sup> Implementation expected in 2011 onwards

<sup>8</sup> Implementation expected in 2011 onwards

<sup>9</sup> Pilot programmes

<sup>10</sup> Includes Belgium, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and Switzerland

<sup>11</sup> UNHCR, *2009 Global Trends*

<sup>12</sup> Source for Gross Domestic Product (Purchasing Power Parity): International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook Database, October 2009

established resettlement States have not made further significant increases in their annual resettlement targets. Also, while the majority of the resettlement States are in Europe (15 States), the number of resettlement places in Europe remains relatively low, representing eight per cent of all resettlement places.

### *UNHCR resettlement submissions and departures*

UNHCR has steadily increased its identification and submission capacity of refugees for resettlement. The number of refugees UNHCR submitted for resettlement more than doubled over the past 5 years, from 46,000 in 2005 to record high 128,000 in 2009.<sup>13</sup> In parallel, the number of resettlement departures in 2009 (84,000 refugees) more than doubled the number in 2005 (38,500 refugees). In 2009, resettlement submissions of 77 nationalities of refugees were made from 94 countries of asylum to 24 countries of resettlement.

This exponential increase in the number of submissions and departures witnessed over the last five years has, however, become to a halt in 2010. UNHCR submitted some 105,000 refugees<sup>14</sup> for resettlement in 2010 which represents 18 per cent decrease compared to 2009. The departure of refugees for resettlement stood at around 74,000,<sup>15</sup> 12 per cent decrease from 2009.

This shift in trends pertaining to the submission number was expected not least because UNHCR's pace of resettlement submissions over the past two years (2008 and 2009) outweighed resettlement States' capacity to process cases and resulted in a processing backlog in some situations. The level of UNHCR resettlement submissions in 2010 (around 100,000) is considered as satisfactory and reasonable to ensure a healthy pipeline, unless more places are offered by resettlement States.

### *Projected Global Resettlement Needs*

UNHCR estimates some 805,000 persons are in need of resettlement, including populations where resettlement is envisioned over a period of several years. For 2011 alone, UNHCR estimates the resettlement needs to be about 172,000 persons.<sup>16</sup> If available resettlement places remain at the same level in 2011, this represents only about 46 per cent of the identified resettlement needs in 2011, leaving more than 90,000 vulnerable refugees in need of resettlement without any solution. UNHCR has repeatedly alerted States of the gap between the number of refugees in need of resettlement and the available resettlement places.

One of UNHCR's Global Strategic Priorities (GSP) endorsed by its Executive Committee in October 2009 foresees an increase by 10 per cent of resettlement places (including emergency / urgent places) in 2010-2011.<sup>17</sup> Ten per cent in the current context represents 8,000 additional resettlement places. In addition to new resettlement States that announced establishment of resettlement programmes and that have started to implement their programmes, Canada announced increase by 500 of their government assisted refugee quota (from 7,500 to 8,000). The objective will however not be met unless additional resettlement countries offer new opportunities in this respect.

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<sup>13</sup> Highest number in 16 years

<sup>14</sup> Three nationalities made up 68 per cent of all UNHCR-facilitated resettlement in 2010: refugees from Iraq (26,700), Myanmar (24,400), and Bhutan (20,600).

<sup>15</sup> The largest number of refugees resettled with UNHCR assistance departed from Nepal (14,800), followed by Thailand (11,400) and Malaysia (8,000).

<sup>16</sup> UNHCR, *Projected Global Resettlement Needs 2011*, tabled at the 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Tripartite Consultation on Resettlement in Geneva, 6-8 July 2010

<sup>17</sup> UNHCR, *Global Strategic Priorities 2010-2011*, 21 August 2009, GSP 6.3

The challenge in bridging the gap between resettlement needs and capacity is not an issue residing solely with resettlement States. UNHCR also faces with significant gap between the resettlement needs and its capacity to process resettlement cases. Resettlement is labour intensive and entails complex processes. While UNHCR enhanced resettlement positions as part of Protection Capacity Initiative by the High Commissioner, the total number of resettlement positions remains limited having to heavily rely on the affiliated workforce mainly through UNHCR-ICMC<sup>18</sup> Resettlement Deployment Scheme<sup>19</sup> where resettlement experts are deployed in UNHCR resettlement operations mainly in Africa and the Middle East. Without affiliated workforce, UNHCR will be able to address less than half of the projected resettlement needs in 2011.

### **Addressing the gap between projected resettlement needs and State / UNHCR capacity**

In order to address the disparity between needs and capacity, UNHCR will continue to encourage more countries to establish resettlement programmes or consider UNHCR resettlement submissions; and to work with established resettlement States to increase their resettlement intakes of refugees identified by UNHCR.

In recognition of the significant gap between the resettlement needs and the capacity of resettlement States and UNHCR to address them, joint efforts are made to ensure that the most vulnerable and deserving refugees in need of resettlement benefit from available resettlement places and that available places are fully utilized.

Resettlement is a process built upon partnerships and cooperation among actors and key stakeholders including refugees, resettlement countries, NGOs, international and inter-governmental organizations and UNHCR. The meetings of the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement (ATCR) and Working Group on Resettlement (WGR) are the main forum where a number of key policy and operational issues related to resettlement are addressed. ATCR is held annually in June – July with all actors involved, while the WGR usually held twice a year in spring and fall provides discussion forum for UNHCR and resettlement countries with limited NGO participation and support discussions at the ATCR. The process is led by a Chair State on a rotation basis supported by the NGO Focal Point of the Chair country. The 2010-2011 ATCR process has been led by the United States with the main theme of enhanced and increased resettlement capability which was succeeded by the previous Swedish Chair. Enhancing resettlement capability entails both quantitative and qualitative aspects of resettlement: increasing the number of resettlement places and submissions; ensuring expeditious resettlement process; and ensuring effective integration of resettled refugees.

#### *UNHCR's Commemorations*

2011 marks a special year for UNHCR in that it coincides with 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary (28 July 2011) of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary (30 August 2011) of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness as well as 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary (11 October 2011) of the birth of Fridtjof Nansen, First League of Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Objectives of UNHCR Commemorations are threefold: to strengthen the existing protection regime and promote a new protection dynamic, including exploring innovative

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<sup>18</sup> ICMC: International Catholic Migration Commission

<sup>19</sup> UNHCR works to diversify such deployment scheme and sub-agreements have been signed with International Rescue Committee (IRC) and Mapendo for 2011.

ways to address protection gaps; to attain greater support for the Statelessness Conventions, including new accessions, as well as better mapping of the statelessness problem and more effective ways to respond; to raise public awareness and build solidarity with forcibly displaced and stateless persons, through a communications strategy aimed to influence public opinion and expand protection space. The culmination of the series of commemorations events is the Ministerial-level meeting which will be held in Geneva on 7 and 8 December 2011 where pledges by States are expected. The types of pledges envisaged include: ratify or accede to the Conventions, or lift reservations; amend or introduce legislation or policies; share burdens, for example, by setting in place resettlement schemes; resolve refugee or statelessness situations; respond to operational issues and challenges; and address regional challenges. In the context of resettlement, it is hoped that existing resettlement States pledge provision of additional resettlement places, and that the States that do not have resettlement programmes to establish them or consider UNHCR resettlement submissions.

### *Enhancing effective resettlement management*

As part of its efforts to enhance identification of refugees in need of resettlement, UNHCR refined tools to identify refugees at heightened risk such as the Heightened Risk Identification Tool (HRIT),<sup>20</sup> and enhanced use of UNHCR's *proGres* registration database, in addition to the active use of participatory assessments.<sup>21</sup> It is also evident that partnership with NGOs has been pivotal in building effective and systematic identification systems for refugees in need of resettlement.

As resettlement activities are expanding globally, UNHCR is conscious of the need to ensure the integrity of its operations and mitigate risks of fraud<sup>22</sup> occurrences. The UNHCR Anti-Fraud Plan of Action culminated in the establishment of the Expert Group on Resettlement Fraud as well as the development of policy and procedural guidelines on addressing resettlement fraud perpetrated by refugees.<sup>23</sup> A careful balancing of the protection need of the refugee against the seriousness of the fraud committed is sought in the guidelines. Anti-fraud mechanisms were integrated in the majority of UNHCR operations. In addition to periodic training focused on resettlement fraud, anti-fraud is an integral component of the resettlement training for UNHCR staff and its partners.

The Expert Group on Resettlement Fraud was established in 2007 in recognition that ensuring programme integrity is a fundamental and shared responsibility by UNHCR, resettlement States as well as other resettlement partners. The Expert Group is a forum for sharing information on fraud patterns and trends, as well as initiatives to strengthen resettlement processes through development of tools, techniques and methods that better detect, address and prevent fraud. The fourth Meeting of the Expert Group on Resettlement Fraud held in September 2010 focused on Biometrics as tools to enhance the integrity and security of refugee resettlement systems. UNHCR introduced its policy on biometrics in

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<sup>20</sup> The HRIT was first issued in June 2008 and has been used in numerous field operations throughout the world. A special field test of the HRIT involving 20 NGOs from across Africa was undertaken in Nairobi in late 2009 to demonstrate its utility in an urban context. UNHCR issued the second edition of the HRIT in 2010, incorporating a number of improvements to enhance its utility and user friendliness.

<sup>21</sup> UNHCR, *UNHCR Tool for Participatory Assessment in Operations*, May 2006

<sup>22</sup> In this context, fraud is defined as "the intentional misrepresentation or concealment of facts or evidence material to the resettlement process with the intent of obtaining a resettlement". Resettlement activities are particularly vulnerable to fraud because of the benefits they offer.

<sup>23</sup> UNHCR, *UNHCR Policy and Procedural Guidelines: Addressing Resettlement Fraud Perpetrated by Refugees*, March 2008

refugee registration and verification processes<sup>24</sup> to incrementally implement the use of biometrics in support of identity verification exercises among refugee populations, except where no protection or operational dividend is expected to be gained from doing so.

To enhance processing, UNHCR continues to provide regular training and policy guidance to its resettlement staff inclusive of affiliated workforce. A Resettlement Learning Programme<sup>25</sup> (RLP) was developed and successfully implemented in 2009-2010, targeting UNHCR operations in the East and Horn and Great Lakes regions of Africa (first roll-out), as well as Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Eastern Europe and Central / South-West Asia (second roll-out). The self-study modules of the Resettlement Learning Programme are being converted to e-learning platform to make the RLP available to broader audience including external partners.

UNHCR also issued the revised Resettlement Handbook<sup>26</sup> in July 2011. The Resettlement Handbook is the cornerstone of UNHCR's resettlement management and policy guidance, and also serves as a key reference tool for resettlement States and NGOs on global resettlement policy and practice. Since the publication of the latest edition of the UNHCR Resettlement Handbook in November 2004, a number of significant developments in resettlement policy and practice, including new methodologies and tools, have been introduced to strengthen organizational efficiency and resettlement performance, management and accountability. Through the updating of the Handbook in 2011, UNHCR expects several results that will be beneficial to all actors involved in resettlement, from resettlement States to refugees themselves. Those results include strengthened resettlement management and integrity, and strengthened global coherence, quality and efficiency of resettlement delivery. The revised Handbook will be comprehensive, flexible and accessible web-based tool, and printed versions designed to meet users' needs.

#### *Operationalizing Emergency Transit Facilities (ETFs)*

An innovative approach to resettlement process and another form of international responsibility sharing was operationalized in recent years – the implementation of the concept of the Emergency Transit Facilities (ETFs) for persons with acute protection needs, pending their onward resettlement elsewhere. The concept was inspired by UNHCR's past experiences in providing emergency protection by way of evacuation.<sup>27</sup> The evacuation of some refugees to countries providing an ETF would enable UNHCR to submit these cases for resettlement under "normal" conditions and not in the acute context caused by threats of *refoulement* and other serious protection problems. It was initially foreseen that the refugees at risk and in need of evacuation to an ETF would include: refugees at immediate risk of *refoulement* or other acute, life-threatening situation; refugees kept in prolonged detention<sup>28</sup> who can only be released if resettled; sensitive / high profile refugees at risk; refugees in need of resettlement for whom a resettlement country and / or UNHCR requires that their final destination for permanent resettlement not be disclosed to the country of first asylum; refugees who might be survivors or witnesses of concern to the International Criminal Court (ICC) or other international tribunal.

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<sup>24</sup> UNHCR, *UNHCR Policy on biometrics in refugee registration and verification processes*, December 2010

<sup>25</sup> UNHCR, *Resettlement Learning Programme*, revised in October 2010

<sup>26</sup> UNHCR, *Resettlement Handbook*, November 2004

<sup>27</sup> For example, evacuation of Uzbek refugees in the Kyrgyz Republic in 2005

<sup>28</sup> detention not for the commission of a crime / offence

There are currently three such facilities operationalized: Emergency Transit Centre (ETC) in Timisoara, Romania;<sup>29</sup> Emergency Transit Mechanism (ETM) in Manila, the Philippines;<sup>30</sup> and Emergency Transit Centre in Hummené, Slovakia.<sup>31</sup> The models of the facilities differ in that refugees evacuated to ETCs in Romania and Slovakia are accommodated in centres where services such as facilities for children, recreation, medical, basic needs, play ground are provided, while refugees evacuated to ETM in the Philippines live on their own, in hotels or in assisted accommodation with monitoring system in place.

Since the operationalization of the ETFs, some 1,000 refugees have been assisted to move to one of the ETFs for resettlement processing of whom some 800 departed to resettlement States.<sup>32</sup> The processing of these cases by resettlement States steadily improved with experience over time. However, given the complex clearance formalities, coordination and logistic requirements and difficulties to secure travel documents, the average processing time between the requests for evacuation, the decision by the transit State to accept the evacuation and the effective movement to the ETFs has in general been longer than what was initially foreseen. UNHCR carefully assesses the eligibility for resettlement of all cases evacuated to ETFs in order to reduce the risk of having evacuated refugees subsequently not approved by States for resettlement. UNHCR has had to make difficult choices in this respect and only cases provisionally approved for resettlement or assured of resettlement consideration were evacuated to ETFs.

UNHCR will continue to encourage resettlement countries unwilling or unable to establish emergency<sup>33</sup> resettlement programmes to consider UNHCR submissions from ETFs. UNHCR intends to continue using the ETFs primarily for emergency and urgent cases, but may on a case-by-case basis use the evacuation option for refugees in needs of resettlement who are living in places not accessible by resettlement countries. Further, video-conference facilities are being established at evacuation transit locations to enable resettlement countries to undertake resettlement selection interviews with the evacuated refugees by way of video-conference call.

### **Promoting the strategic use of resettlement**

*“We need as well to make more substantial, effective and strategic use of resettlement. It is not only a very important protection tool but a solution itself and a catalyzer of other solutions.”*

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<sup>29</sup> A Tripartite Agreement between the Government of Romania, International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UNHCR was signed on 8 May 2008. The ETC in Romania accommodates a maximum of 200 refugees at any given time.

<sup>30</sup> A Tripartite Agreement between the Government of the Philippines, IOM and UNHCR was signed on 27 August 2009. The facilities provide flexible number of refugees at any given time.

<sup>31</sup> A Tripartite Agreement between the Government of Slovakia, IOM and UNHCR was first signed on 17 July 2009 for the evacuation of a specific refugee group. Another Tripartite Agreement was signed on 22 December 2010 without limitation as to nationalities of refugees. The ETC in Slovakia accommodates a maximum of 100 refugees at any given time.

<sup>32</sup> Figures as of end December 2010. Nine resettlement countries are currently using the ETFs.

<sup>33</sup> UNHCR's resettlement submissions have three priority levels: (i) emergency priority, for cases where the immediacy of security and/or other acute life-threatening situation necessitates removal from the threatening conditions within a few days, if not within hours; (ii) urgent priority, for refugees who have serious medical risks or other vulnerabilities requiring expedited resettlement within six weeks of submission; (iii) normal priority, for all cases where there are no immediate medical, social or security risks that would merit expedited processing. The majority of cases fall within this category. UNHCR expects decisions and departures within 12 months of submission.

*(António Guterres, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Closing Remarks at 2010 Dialogue on Protection Gaps and Responses, Geneva, 9 December 2010)*

With the active involvement of States, refugees and civil society, resettlement can open avenues for international burden and responsibility sharing and, in combination with other measures, can unlock protracted refugee situations.<sup>34</sup> When used strategically, resettlement can bring about positive results that go well beyond those that are usually viewed as a direct resettlement outcome. The strategic use of resettlement has been defined as follows: “the planned use of resettlement in a manner that maximizes the benefits, directly or indirectly, other than those received by the refugee being resettled. Those benefits may accrue to other refugees, the hosting State, other States or the international protection regime in general.”<sup>35</sup>

The *Agenda for Protection*, among other elements, recognized the need to expand resettlement opportunities and to use resettlement more strategically, and thereby achieve protection and durable solutions for more refugees. A number of short, midterm, or sometimes longer-term protection benefits can be associated with the use of resettlement in countries of first asylum, countries of resettlement as well as in regional contexts.<sup>36</sup>

In 2009, the Swedish Chair of the Working Group on Resettlement (WGR) together with UNHCR initiated a discussion on intensifying the strategic use of resettlement in seven refugee situations in Africa, Asia, Europe, and Middle East and North Africa regions. These discussions aimed at specifying strategic protection dividends and developing concrete steps and work methods for initiatives in these situations.

Iraqi and Palestinian refugees (ex-Iraq) in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon is one of the priority situations and where concerted efforts by international community led to the closure of Al-Tanf refugee camp, a makeshift camp located on a narrow strip in no-mans land between the borders of Syria and Iraq. It was set up in May 2006 for Palestinian refugees fleeing persecution in Iraq as no country in the region would accept them. Refugees had to face harsh desert conditions: extreme temperatures, sandstorms, floods and several risks of fire with difficult access to medical services. As a result of joint efforts with the Syrian authorities and resettlement countries, more than 1,000 Palestinian refugees were resettled to third countries,<sup>37</sup> including through the use of ETFs, and the Al-Tanf camp was closed in February 2010.

The resettlement of Bhutanese refugees from Nepal is another example where a protracted refugee situation was turned into a model of burden sharing and international solidarity. 2010 marked the departure of 40,000 Bhutanese refugees for resettlement since the inception of the programme. After close to twelve years spent in camps without electricity and running water, the refugees from Bhutan have showed incredible resilience, adaptation and fighting spirit to adjust in a totally foreign country.<sup>38</sup> Resettlement brought about refugees with opportunity to be productive members of society rather than people without right to work in the country of asylum, the resettlement States with legitimate pride to help the Government of Nepal which has hosted the refugees for almost one generation, UNHCR

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<sup>34</sup> Executive Committee Conclusion 109

<sup>35</sup> UNHCR, 2003 *Standing Committee paper EC/53/SC/CRP.10/Add.1*

<sup>36</sup> See also “UNHCR Position Paper on the Strategic Use of Resettlement”, June 2010

<sup>37</sup> “End of long ordeal for Palestinian refugees as desert camp closes”, UNHCR Media Article February 2010, by Delia Al-Achi in Damascus, Syria

<sup>38</sup> “Resettling Refugees from Bhutan: At what cost and for what benefits?” APCR/WGR Newsletter Issue 5, November 2010, Article by Stephane Jaquetmet, UNHCR Representative in Nepal

with opportunity to tackle entrenched protection problems in the camps, and the Government of Nepal with alleviation of 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.

While protection benefits could be mainly seen in countries of asylum, there are a number of protection benefits that will incur in countries of resettlement. In emerging resettlement countries, it is the opportunity to expand the range and quality of services available to refugees and asylum-seekers when developing an integration programme for resettled refugees. Resettlement could enrich the cultural and socioeconomic diversity within communities and enhance connectivity between communities through the presence and integration of refugees. Resettlement could contribute to reduce xenophobia and foster positive attitudes towards refugees and their plights, and towards the government programme benefiting them. A positive image of resettlement programmes, however, should not diminish the importance of the country's asylum programmes. Resettlement can be a complement but should not be a substitute for protection under the national asylum system.

## **Integration**

Resettlement does not end when refugees arrive in the resettlement countries. Rather, arrival to the new society is the starting point to a path to a truly durable solution. Resettlement involves a process of being received and integrated within a new society.

UNHCR's *Agenda for Protection* calls upon States to put in place policies to ensure that resettlement runs in tandem with a vigorous integration policy. Language training, education, vocational training, employment, support for family reunification – these and many other activities are the building elements of integration. While resettlement is a way of protecting refugees and a tangible sign of responsibility sharing by States, there is no doubt that refugees also make important contributions to their new societies.<sup>39</sup>

The measure of effective resettlement is not only how many refugees in need of resettlement have access to this solution each year, but also the way they are received and supported in the process of becoming full participants in their new communities. It is acknowledged that the resettlement country should ensure protection against *refoulement* and provide a resettled refugee and his/her family access to rights similar to those enjoyed by nationals. The resettlement country should also allow for refugees to become naturalized citizens.<sup>40</sup> While these rights are fundamental to the durability of resettlement, integration is a mutual, gradual and multi-faceted process, with inter-related legal, socio-economic and cultural dimensions.<sup>41</sup> Integration requires receiving countries and civil society to take necessary steps to ensure refugees can achieve long-term economic stability and adjustment to the new society, but must also include fostering a sense of belonging to and participation in their new communities.

In recent year, the ATRC and WGR have discussed integration challenges from a number of perspectives, including the view held by a minority of resettlement countries that refugees

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<sup>39</sup> Ruud Lubbers, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; UN High Commissioner for Refugees, *Refugee Resettlement: An International Handbook to Guide Reception and Integration*, September 2002.

<sup>40</sup> UNHCR, *Resettlement Handbook*, November 2004

<sup>41</sup> UNHCR, *Local Integration and Self-Reliance*, 2 June 2005 EC/55/SC/CRP.1

should have integration potential in order to qualify for resettlement. UNHCR asserts that integration is a process, not a selection criterion and has urged resettlement States to remove discriminatory selection criteria (e.g. integration potential, family size, age, health status, ethnicity, religion and nationality) that undermine the protection foundation upon which resettlement is based.

According to the analysis conducted by Canada's Longitudinal Immigrant Database (IMDB<sup>42</sup>), the economic outcomes of Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) landing in Canada have not changed significantly since the implementation of Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) in 2002. The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) in 2002 removed the previous Immigration Act's requirement for all immigrants (including refugees) that selection should be based on "education, training, skills or other special qualifications" indicating that the applicant will be "likely to be able to establish himself successfully in Canada."

The fact that the economic outcomes of Government Assisted Refugees landing in Canada have not changed significantly before and after the introduction of the IRPA, suggests that attempts to select refugees by integration potential were not successful. Canada has found that the most significant factor is not the refugees' previous "integration potential" but the support provided after arrival. Other resettlement States such as the United States and Sweden join in echoing that refugees are not chosen by education or language, but because of vulnerabilities and protection needs in their resettlement programmes.

#### *Measuring resettlement outcomes*

Integration is a long term process and effectively measuring integration is not an easy endeavour. There are different choices on what is to be measured, at what level and how can entail different results; content of certain indicators can be ambiguous / difficult to define; there are different rules, monitoring systems, economic and other developments, and specific individual circumstances can account for different integration outcomes; integration indicators are less effective in capturing the barriers that resettled refugees confront in accessing socio-economic dimension of receiving society.

UNHCR proposed to the resettlement States at the WGR to undertake a development of a tool to measure the post-arrival outcomes of resettlement, using longitudinal analysis with a series of key indicators to measure both quantitative and qualitative outcomes of resettlement.<sup>43</sup> These integration indicators included: language assistance and training programmes; access to secure an affordable housing; employment and training; welcoming and hospitable communities; and overall feelings of settlement. These indicators were intended not be seen as benchmarks *per se*, but rather measures of practical value in steering efforts to achieve desired outcomes. While all States have some measurements of resettlement outcomes, a common language on outcomes would allow for some coherence between country programmes. A common understanding of resettlement outcomes would also allow the resettlement community to identify specific integration challenges and share good practices.

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<sup>42</sup> "Economic outcomes of government-assisted refugees by country of birth", Research and Evaluation Branch, Citizenship and Immigration Canada. The note provides an analysis of GAR outcomes between 1993 and 2006.

<sup>43</sup> UNHCR, Discussion Paper "Measuring resettlement outcomes by looking at integration indicators", January 2009

Integration is a challenge for both traditional and emerging resettlement countries and an area where progress could be made by increased exchange of analysis and good practices, in particular through twinning arrangements.

### **Japan's Pilot Resettlement Programme**

Japan announced (December 2008 – Cabinet decision) its three year pilot resettlement programme to resettle 30 Myanmar refugees from Thailand annually starting from September 2010 (arrival of first group). This decision is a major development, making Japan the first Asian nation to establish a resettlement programme. The first group of 27 refugees arrived in Japan in September 2010 and the preparation for the reception of the second group of 30 refugees is ongoing. It is hoped that the positive experience by the first group of resettled refugees be conveyed back to the refugees in Thailand to generate further interests among refugees for resettlement in Japan.

The implementation of the pilot resettlement programme in Japan is a clear demonstration of Japan's contribution to international responsibility sharing mechanism. As described in previous sections, resettlement is a long-term and challenging process. Both the traditional and emerging resettlement countries alike are exploring more effective ways to enhance integration of resettled refugees and to measure resettlement outcomes. Japan has a number of strengths that are unique, one of which being its flexibility to absorb knowledge and good practices from other States and adapt to the format that best suit to the Japanese context. This strength could be applied to the third country resettlement - through various consultation forum such as ATRC / WGR as well as twinning arrangements, Japan will be able to establish and further develop the integration programme. There is no one size fits all integration model- integration programme can be unique in each resettlement country. At the moment, Japan is the sole country among Asian nations providing a resettlement programme besides the Philippines that provide Evacuation Transit Mechanism. It is hoped that Japan will play a key role in encouraging other countries in Asia to become resettlement countries and in offering twinning programmes to future resettlement countries, particularly in Asia, to share its unique experiences.

The existence of welcoming receiving society is the pre-condition to any successful integration of resettled refugees. It is hoped that the civil society hosting the resettled refugees to make an exemplary international contribution, hand in hand with the government. For a number of refugees, Japan is their only safe heaven and "home".