



Resettlement Newsletter

Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe

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*For I was a stranger,
and you
welcomed me.*

Matthew
25:35b



Refugee mother and child, happy to be together in safety, source: (UNHCR/B. Szandelski/2009)

Resettlement in the EU: Time for Common Action!

Welcome the new volume of CCME's Resettlement Newsletter!!!

...once again we will keep you updated on news regarding resettlement towards the member states of the European Union. Our edition comes after the European Commission's Proposal on the Establishment of a European Resettlement Programme, as well as while the finalisation of the Stockholm Programme is underway. As Annette Bombeke, Advocacy and Policy Officer at ECRE, points out, the Commission's proposal does have the potential to eventually increase resettlement places in the EU and thus share the responsibility with the mostly poor countries which are hosting the majority of the world's refugees. Furthermore, in the latest draft of the Stockholm Programme more stress has been placed in promoting joined EU resettlement efforts, a fact that highlights Member States' willingness to expand their efforts in the area of resettlement.

Against this background, CCME, with the assistance of the Church of Sweden and the Swedish Council of Churches, convened an EU-wide conference on resettlement during one of the first working weeks of the Swedish presidency. The conference brought together some 55 governmental and non-governmental actors in order to debate around the EU Resettlement Programme.

In addition, CCME and the Portuguese Refugee Council organised a debate-event in the Portuguese National Parliament that addressed the challenges regarding the process of selection of cases, reception and integration, as well as the challenge of creating new opportunities for resettled refugees.

Another important initiative in establishing Europe as a significant resettlement actor is the setting up by UNHCR and the Romanian Government, of an Emergency Transit Centre in Timisoara, Romania.

At this stage, it is important to push forward the final adoption of the policy proposals. However, more crucially it is time for governments, UNHCR and civil society to join forces and work out the details for the realisation of these ambitious commitments into action.

Enjoy the reading!

Best regards,

Torsten Moritz & Lilian Tsourdi

The Emergency Transit Centre in Romania (ETC) : Bringing refugees to safety

How the ETC came into being

According to the Statute of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner or Refugees (UNHCR), the organization's functions are to provide international protection to refugees who fall under its mandate and to work with governments and other partners to find permanent solutions for refugee problems. The three possible solutions are voluntary repatriation, local integration or resettlement to a third country.

(continued in page 2)

The Emergency Transit Centre in Romania: Bringing refugees to safety

Resettlement may be the only viable solution when there are no prospects for refugees to return to their home countries or to integrate in their first country of asylum. Indeed, in some cases refugees face serious and immediate risks to their security and well-being in the first country in which they sought refuge, and resettlement to another country becomes urgent. More information on refugee resettlement can be found at <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/4a16b1676.html>

With this reality in mind, the Emergency Transit Centre, located in Timisoara, Romania, was set up for the specific purpose of providing temporary accommodation to refugees in need of evacuation from their first country of refuge, pending their onward resettlement to a country of permanent settlement. Evacuation may be needed to assure the physical safety of refugees, to protect those threatened by refoulement and to meet the needs of especially vulnerable individuals.

In addition, it is sometimes the case that refugees in need of resettlement are located in places that are inaccessible to States for reasons related to safety and the security of officials of the resettlement country. It may also be that the authorities of the country where the refugees are located are not willing to allow access to the refugees. This is frequently the case when the refugees are being held in detention. Thus, even when a resettlement country is ready and willing to engage in resettlement on an urgent basis, it may not be possible to carry out the necessary procedures in the places where the refugees are located. The ETC was inspired by a number of past experiences. In the 1980s, in South-

east Asia, a standby arrangement for the disembarkation and resettlement of Vietnamese boat people rescued at sea was developed and implemented. In 1999 and 2000, some 1,500 Tutsi refugees who were at risk in the Democratic Republic of the Congo were evacuated to Benin and Cameroon for interviews by resettlement countries. Also in 1999-2002, a first evacuation to Romania took place, when over 4,500 refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia were moved to Timisoara for resettlement processing by other countries. Some years later, in 2005 and 2006, the Romanian authorities again offered to host a particularly vulnerable group of refugees and enabled UNHCR to transfer 450 Uzbek refugees to Romania from Kyrgyzstan. All were resettled to other countries. More recently, in 2008, just before the formal opening of the Centre,³⁸ Eritrean refugees who had been detained in Libya were transferred to Romania for resettlement processing.

These ad hoc operations revealed the need for a more predictable and systematic mechanism. The

past experience of successful collaboration between Romania, UNHCR and IOM made it possible to envisage addressing an acute protection gap through the establishment of a standing arrangement in Timisoara for the temporary stay of refugees with emergency needs pending resettlement to a third country. Thus the ETC was born.

The Romanian authorities chose Timisoara for this humanitarian operation because of the city's international airport, its tolerant, multicultural and cosmopolitan population, as well as its dynamic economy and active civil society. Moreover, the Timisoara facilities offer good living conditions for refugees, and the staff had already gained valuable experience in this field over the years.

The Tri-Partite Agreement

On 8 May 2008 the Tri-Partite Agreement establishing the Emergency Transit Centre (ETC) in Timisoara was signed by Romania, IOM and UNHCR. It entered into force on 21 November 2008. The text of the agreement is available at <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4a7c221c.html>. The full title of the Agreement refers to the "temporary evacuation to Romania of persons in urgent need of in-

Al-Waleed camp in Iraq
— soon to be closed
thanks to the ETC ?

(source: UNHCR Iraq,
2009)



The Emergency Transit Centre in Romania: Bringing refugees to safety



New playground founded by private donour (source: UNHCR/B. Szandel-ski/2009)

ternational protection and their onward resettlement." The Agreement outlines the roles of the Parties. UNHCR is responsible for identifying the persons in need of evacuation, providing certification of their refugee status, and securing their onward resettlement. In addition, UNHCR is to provide the resources needed to cover the costs of food and domestic items, psycho-social support, educational and recreational activities, as well as language training and necessary medical care. For the implementation of most of these activities UNHCR cooperates with a local NGO partner, Generatie Tânara (Young Generation).

IOM handles the transportation of the refugees to Romania and from Romania to their resettlement countries, as well as health screenings on arrival in situations where the health status was not assessed prior to the evacuation journey, medical examinations for resettlement purposes and brief pre-embarkation medical checks before the final departure. During the stay at the ETC, IOM provides cultural orientation

programmes to help the refugees prepare for resettlement.

The Government of Romania provides the premises for accommodation in Timisoara, issues identity documents for the refugees who are transferred to the ETC, and is responsible for maintaining order at the Centre. While UNHCR identifies the refugees in need of evacuation, the Romanian Immigration Office (RIO) has the final say on whether to allow their entry to Romania, giving its answer within seven working days which brings speed and predictability to the process. According to the Romanian law ratifying the Agreement, the refugees transferred to the ETC may enter Romania without visas.

The Agreement sets an upper limit of 200 refugees who may be accommodated at the ETC at any given time. The maximum period for refugees' stay in Romania is six months, although individual exceptions may be made for up to 20 refugees when necessary.

Candidates for transfer to Romania are persons who are considered by UNHCR to be in urgent need of evacuation in order to ensure their

international protection. This includes the following categories:

- ✓ Refugees at immediate risk of refoulement or facing other acute, life-threatening

situations;

- ✓ Refugees who are held in detention in another country solely because they entered or are staying without authorization, and who will be released only if they are able to depart from the country;

- ✓ Refugees whose cases are particularly sensitive or high profile;

- ✓ Refugees for whom resettlement processing cannot be completed in the first country of asylum, for instance due to security threats;

- ✓ Refugees for whom the resettlement country or UNHCR has decided not to disclose the resettlement destination to the first country of asylum.

Arrangements for missions from resettlement countries

In most cases, a resettlement country which has agreed in principle to resettle refugees from the ETC will wish to visit the ETC to conduct interviews and other resettlement-related formalities. In such a case, the resettlement country will inform UNHCR and IOM staff working at the ETC of the planned arrival of personnel responsible for the resettlement procedure, and the related information. UNHCR informs the Centre management in writing to ensure that the officials will have access to the Centre and that no time is lost.

Space is allotted in the Centre for officials from resettlement countries to conduct interviews, and to photograph and fingerprint refugees as needed. Where required, the ETC offers interpretation services from a pool of available interpreters. UNHCR is planning to establish facilities for

The Emergency Transit Centre in Romania: Bringing refugees to safety

involved in resettlement since the 1940s and 1950s, the devoef **The European Union and the ETC**

The EU plays an active role in implementing responsibility-sharing policies in the area of refugee protection. While some EU Member States have been involved in resettlement since the 1940s and 1950s, the development of resettlement at an EU level is only very recent. An important occasion in EU resettlement was the presentation of the European Commission Policy Plan on Asylum in June 2008. The Policy Plan set a 2009 timeline for proposals on a common EU resettlement scheme, Protected Entry Procedures and Regional Protection Programs. Since the issuance of the Policy Plan, resettlement has entered into mainstream discussions in the EU and increasing interest of EU Member States in resettlement has been witnessed. At present, the following EU Member States have active resettlement programs: the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Sweden and the UK. In 2008, EU Member States collectively resettled around 4,400 refugees (or 6.7% of the global total of resettled refugees). In the last year, more EU

countries have shown interest in resettlement.

The European Asylum Support Office (EASO), which is in the process of being established, is likely to play an important coordinating role regarding practical cooperation on resettlement, based upon a Communication for a Joint EU Resettlement Scheme expected in September 2009.

In anticipation of the establishment of a joint EU Resettlement Scheme, IOM will implement a project, together with UNHCR and the International Catholic Migration Commission, funded under the European Refugee Fund, which aims at promoting further practical cooperation between EU resettlement countries. While the project will cover all phases of the regular resettlement process, the project aims in particular at enhancing and coordinating resettlement activities of EU member states by making use of the ETC.

The ETC is located in one of the EU's newest Member States and presents a new model of active role in refugee resettlement, open to cooperation with other EU Member States. The ETC offers opportunities for coordinated resettlement

CCME resettlement factsheets

As a response to the need to explain resettlement in an easily digestible format, CCME has produced a series of „resettlement factsheets“:

The factsheets contain concise information on various aspects of resettlement :

- what is resettlement
- what is Europe' s role in resettlement
- who are the actors in resettlement
- what are the different steps of resettlement
- the personal story behind resettlement

Printed copies are still available in English, French and German,(5 A4 pages per language, each printed on both sides).

Pdf.-files with the Czech, Dutch , Italian and Spanish translations are also available. (see: <http://www.ccme.be/secretary/NEWS/index.html>; enquiries at: info@ccme.be)



Palestinian refugees at the Emergency Transit Centre in Timisoara, Romania, participating in the "Who is from the UK?" lesson (source: IOM Romania, 2009)



The Emergency Transit Centre in Romania: Bringing refugees to safety

activities to make selection of refugees more efficient and cost-effective, e.g. by using video links for interviewing refugees, centrally organized medical assessments, cultural orientation and in case of larger groups, language classes. The ETC can also form a platform of practical cooperation and mutual learning among project participating EU Member States, enabling the development of coordination mechanisms in resettlement.

Looking Ahead

The establishment of an Emergency Transit Centre is a significant contribution to refugee protection. The Parties to the Tri-Partite Agreement are grateful for the financial support, in particular from the United States of America, which made it possible to launch the operation of this Centre. Further support will be needed for 2010 and beyond.

The ETC allows the transfer to safety of persons who would otherwise not receive the protection they need in a timely manner. It enables UNHCR and IOM to provide assistance to refugees who are in the most precarious situations, particularly those whose life, liberty or integrity are at risk

in their first country of asylum.

The ETC gives refugees a chance to live a normal life while awaiting resettlement. For the resettlement countries, the Centre offers the possibility of carrying out resettlement procedures in optimal conditions. These procedures include cultural orientation courses and language classes which help refugees to prepare for life in their new countries.

The Parties to the Agreement encourage other countries to participate in this unique venture by resettling refugees from the ETC. They also hope that other governments will follow the example of the Government of Romania and, consistent with the principles of international solidarity and responsibility-sharing, work with UNHCR and IOM to establish similar facilities in other parts of the world.

(Extracts from a publication that has been produced by UNHCR, the Government of Romania and the International Organisation for Migration. The publication has been produced with the assistance of the European Union. The contents of the publication are the sole responsibility of UNHCR, the Government of Romania and the International Organisation for Migration and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union.)

Why should Europe resettle more refugees?

- 1) Resettlement can provide protection to those in greatest need: the most vulnerable and those in protracted refugee situations.
- 2) Resettlement is a way for Europe to demonstrate its solidarity and take its share of its responsibility in the provision of this durable solution to the world's refugees.
- 3) Resettlement provides access to Europe for refugees.
- 4) Resettlement provides the opportunity for good, co-ordinated and quality reception and integration programmes to be developed.
- 5) Resettlement is an important means of facilitating public understanding of all refugees, their plight and the situations they flee.

(CCME, based on ECRE's "Way forward")



Refugee children playing in the snow for the first time

(Source: UNHCR/F. Chiu/2009)

CCME EU-wide conference paves the "road ahead" towards a European Resettlement Scheme



Group photograph of conference participants with Mr. Tobias Billström, Swedish Minister for Migration and Asylum Policy and Ms. Erika Feller, UN Assistant High Commissioner for Refugees.

(source: SKR)

European Resettlement Scheme. The discussions focused around the necessity of EU states' (increased) involvement in resettlement, the added value of an EU scheme, the strategic use of resettlement and the need of coherence between EU policies. In addition, more specific aspects of the resettlement process, such as: selection, pre-departure information and integration in the resettling state, were the object of debate. Furthermore, participants witnessed resettlement in practice through a visit at a local municipality.

CCME, with the assistance of the Church of Sweden and the Swedish Council of Churches, convened a European conference in Stockholm-Sigtuna, from the 25th until the 28th of August, which discussed the process "towards the common EU resettlement scheme". The conference was part of the current project ASPIRE ("Assessing and Strengthening Participation In refugee Resettlement to Europe", co-funded by the European Refugee Fund, Centralised Actions 2007). It brought together some 55 participants, who are experts from relevant government departments, UNHCR offices, NGO's and churches in EU Member States.

The Swedish Minister for Migration and Asylum Policy, Tobias Billström, the UN Assistant High Commissioner for Refugees, Erika Feller and the Commissioner for Justice, Freedom and Security, Jacques Barrot, all addressed the opening panel of the conference and underlined, each from his own perspective, the importance of resettlement. In his opening statement Minister Billström set out the ambition of his government to prioritise resettlement during its EU Presidency. He also called for a clear distinction between resettlement of refugees from third countries to the EU and recent ideas concerning a "relocation" mechanism, by which refugees and asylum seekers would be transferred between EU Member States. The UN's Assistant High Commissioner for Refugees, Erika Feller underlined the importance of refugee resettlement. "Resettlement matters" Feller said "for the refugees, for the

community, for the host countries, but also receiving countries". Against this background, the international community was placing high hopes in increased EU efforts to protect refugees through refugee resettlement. The Vice President of the European Commission and Commissioner for Justice, Freedom and Security, Jacques Barrot expressed his wish to "congratulate CCME for organising this conference on resettlement of refugees in Europe". In his message to the conference Barrot underlined: "European citizens (need to) feel able to support these programmes of resettlement. And of course the churches have an essential role to play". "They can educate people's minds and activate their hearts" he added.

During the four days of the conference participants discussed the current developments regarding resettlement in Europe and deliberated on the details around an emerging

In conclusion, the debate revealed that there is a need for enhanced co-operation and a desire for more coordination at EU level, while at the same time maintaining a certain degree of flexibility in order to ensure the effectiveness of resettlement as a durable solution. Regarding the resettled refugees themselves, as Richard Williams appointed listener pointed out in his summary: "Undue expectations should not be made of resettled refugees' in terms of economic contribution: some of those 'rescued' will need time before they are ready to work; some may never be able to. Perhaps the most interesting lesson from North America heard at the conference however, was that refugees are able to integrate more rapidly in countries of immigration like Canada because they are seen as resources, potential contributors to society. The lesson for Europeans may be that we need to have more faith in refugees".

(Lilian Tsourdi, Project Assistant, CCME)



The opening panel of the conference, from right to left: Mr. Bjarte Vandvik-General Secretary of ECRE, Mr. Tobias Billström-Swedish Minister for Migration and Asylum Policy, Ms. Erika Feller- UN Assistant High Commissioner for Refugees, Ms. Doris Peschke-General Secretary of CCME and Rev. Lennart Molin. Associate General Secretary of the Christian Council of Sweden.

Interview with George Joseph and Marie-Christine Eidem, CARITAS Sweden (NGO Focal Point Annual Tri-Partite Consultation on Resettlement 2009-10)

Many persons have heard or read about the ATCR, but what, in your view, makes it such an important event for NGOs?

We look forward to a fruitful cooperation between UNHCR, governments and NGOs as we work towards finding lasting solutions for our fellow human beings. The ATCR is such an important event for NGOs as it is a unique opportunity for all the involved actors to meet together and make progress in the area of resettlement. The ATCR covers a wide range of policy and operational issues and serves as a forum for information exchange on best practices and ways to improve resettlement outcomes for refugees. Approximately 60 NGOs participated in the ATCR in Geneva in 2009 and we hope to continue this ongoing dialogue and discussion, to facilitate the exchange of information into the ATCR process so as to find durable solutions for refugees around the world. As NGO Focal Point, we hope to be at the service of NGOs to facilitate in bringing forth the experiences, knowledge and ideas of civil society to promote resettlement, not only in numbers but also in quality and sustainability.

How can involvement in the ATCR help you with your work at home, in the field?

Resettlement of refugees is one of the main areas of concern for Caritas, and Caritas promotes refugee resettlement through advocacy, policy analysis, networking and information exchange in Sweden and internationally. The Caritas network has the potential to make a real difference through advocacy to create support and political will and also through actively participating on an operational level in preparation and welcoming resettled refugees. This is not something we can do on our own. The ATC provides an opportunity to work together in partnership with other NGOs, including CCME and ICMC, ECRE and American, Canadian, and South Pacific NGOs as well as with UNHCR in advocating resettlement to be an integral part of refugee policy. As part of this, we support further strengthening of the existing structures of the WGR and ATCR, making the voice of all the partners involved in resettlement heard in order to reach constructive solutions. NGOs have an important role in resettlement, in many parts of the world on an operative level, as well as influencing public opinion to create support as well as increasing and strengthening the capacity of the government to welcome more resettled refugees. In this, working together can only strengthen the effort and increase results.

Every ATC chair has its specific thematic focus. Sweden has now suggested the issue of sustainable and qualitative growth of resettlement places., but also 'Enhancing commitment and capability for global resettlement' as a cross-cutting theme- what can we expect more exactly?

The Chair hopes that the issue of enhanced commitment can be discussed with a strong focus on the strategic dividends from resettlement. The Swedish Chair hopes to expand the number of states accepting refugees for resettlement and strengthen the involvement of NGOs at all levels in the process. The Chair also hopes to develop practical tools for implementing the theme such as the use of 'core groups', the broadening the base 'toolkit, which is a process map for engaging states that was developed by the WGR under the Danish Chair in 2004-2006 in order to identify tools to be used at each stage of the resettlement process, as well developing the use of twinning guidelines. Not least, in these areas, the Chair encourages constructive and active involvement in order to expand resettlement in sustainability and quality. The March WGR is to be in Timisoara, Romania, to facilitate discussions on emergency resettlement and increased humanitarian space for vulnerable refugees.

The Swedish chairmanship of the ATC comes at a time when there is some movement on a European level after presentation of the draft on a EU resettlement scheme – do you think your ATC leadership can boost some European dynamic?

Yes, definitely, the Swedish chairmanship of the ATCR comes at the time when Sweden has the EU Presidency and is the driving force in the process of developing a EU resettlement scheme. This proposal will hopefully encourage non-resettlement member states to start resettlement on an annual basis. The Swedish chairmanship at the ATCR is indeed timely and can hopefully add to the momentum for developing a European approach to resettlement, which should be maintained and used to reach the goal of more resettlement places. The external dimension of a common asylum system for Europe includes the prospect of increased resettlement to the Union. As part of the civil society, together with governments, we must work to increase public awareness and support of the plight of the refugees in order to move towards expanding the resettlement capacity.

"MORE DETAILED INFORMATION ON HOW RESETTLEMENT IN SWEDEN LOOKS FROM A LOCAL PERSPECTIVE IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF THE CCME RESETTLEMENT NEWSLETTER !"

Resettlement in Portugal: Challenges and Opportunities



During the conference of the 27th of May, at the Portuguese Parliament. From the left: *Mr Rui Pereira, Minister of Internal Affairs; Mrs Teresa Mendes, Board President of CPR; Ms Margarida Moura, ACIDI; Mr Jar-mela Palos, DG Aliens and Borders Service; Ms Monica Goracci, IOM Chief of Mission, in Portugal*. (source: PRC)

tion between national entities such as Social Security and the Santa Casa da Misericórdia. Both are strong and important organizations in the field of integration.

Although there is an open interest of the Portuguese authorities to promote a resettlement programme, as well as UNHCR willingness to provide all the support prior to arrival, too many operational obstacles (namely long-term processes and lack of coordination between UNHCR and the Portuguese government) are found along the way that hamper the resettlement programme to become effective.

The history of resettlement in Portugal is quite recent. It was only in 2006, that Portugal received the first two groups of refugees under a resettlement ad-hoc programme, 17 persons, altogether. They were all recognised as refugees by the Portuguese Government and issued, accordingly, refugee cards.

After this reception, the Portuguese Refugee Council (CPR) believed that conditions were gathered to successfully implicate Portugal in resettlement programmes. From this period and after, this NGO started a constructive process of enhancing knowledge, information and public debate on policies as well as practice of resettlement.

As a result, in 2007, the Portuguese Government took a further step in engaging Portugal as a resettlement country by establishing through Resolution of the Council of Ministers nr 110/2007, 12th July, an annual quota of a minimum of 30 refugees to be resettled in the country. Two groups of refugees were resettled in Portugal during 2007 under UNHCR mandate, with a total of 16

persons. To these groups was granted subsidiary protection (residence permit for humanitarian reasons/article 8 of Asylum Law).

The Portuguese Refugee Council was not involved in the pre-departure resettlement process and intervene only after-arrival of the resettled groups in Portugal. CPR provided lodging at the Reception Centre (CAR) during six months, which represents a larger period than the one provided to the "spontaneous" asylum applicants (of two months) to better prepare their integration.

Starting from this point, CPR has engaged in promoting a strong coopera-

Taking into account the above mention reasons, CPR considered essential to engaged in a European Project – The ASPIRE Project, due to its capacity to share existing information on resettlement policy and practice, stabilize support in countries which have recently committed to resettlement, which is the case of Portugal, and encourage the involvement of all stakeholders in this thematic.

Under the scope of this project, CPR engaged in a set of consultations, with the main stakeholders of the refugee resettlement process, in Portugal. CPR promoted three thematic meetings, which occurred in the months of March and May, 2009, with the pur-

Group picture of the participants of the International Conference:

"Resettlement in Portugal: Challenges and Opportunities" (source: PRC)



Resettlement in Portugal: Challenges and Opportunities

pose of identifying the main problems in the implementation of the resettlement programs and how to create a dynamic process that could hold responsible the stakeholders in their intervention.

1st thematic meeting of the ASPIRE Project

The first specialized meeting of the ASPIRE Project had the purpose of, on one hand, stimulate the discussion on resettlement in particularly the processes of pre-selection, selection and operationalization of the arrival in Portugal, and, on the other hand, advocate resettlement with the main Portuguese stakeholders. Several entities participated in this meeting, namely, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, UNHCR, the Aliens and Borders Services, IOM, and the Portuguese Refugee Council.

2nd thematic meeting of the ASPIRE Project

This second meeting had the main purpose of analyzing issues around reception policies, social, legal, educational and health support to resettled refugees, namely, vulnerable groups, unaccompanied minors, refugee children. Once again, this specialized meeting addressed

Refugees that have been resettled to Portugal from Iraq and Liberia share their experiences during the International Conference at the Portuguese Parliament. (source: PRC)

the needs of resettled refugees, engaging different stakeholders in the process. Present at this meeting were the following entities:

Association "Immigration and Health Group", Municipalities of Loures, Lisbon, and Odivelas, Parish of Bobadela and S. João da Talha, Social Security Institute, Training Centres, Portuguese Institute of Training and Employment, Regional Direction of Education, Hygiene Institute of Tropical Medicine, and the Portuguese Refugee Council.

3rd thematic meeting of the ASPIRE Project

This third and last meeting was planned as a consultative meeting with resettled refugees. 15 resettled refugees, from 6 different groups, participated in this meeting that took place in CPR's Reception centre and counted with the presence of the Social Security, Aliens and Borders Service, Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Lisboa, and the Portuguese Refugee Council.

International Conference "Resettlement in Portugal: Challenges and Opportunities"

The main findings of the above mentioned specialized meetings

were presented and discussed in the International Conference, under the theme "Resettlement in Portugal: Challenges and Opportunities" which was held in the Portuguese Parliament, on the 27th of May, 2009.

Mr Rui Pereira, Minister for Internal Affairs, Mr José Magalhães, Deputy State Secretary and State Secretary for Internal Affairs, Mr Armando França and Mrs Ana Gomes, Members of the European Parliament, Mrs Celeste Correia, Member of National Parliament (Commission for Rights, Liberties and Civil Warranties), Mrs Jennifer Ashton, Senior Resettlement Coordinator in Geneva (United Nations High Commissioner for the Refugees), Mr Torsten Moritz, ASPIRE (Assessing and Strengthening Participation In Refugee resettlement to Europe) Project Coordinator - Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME), and Mrs Maria Teresa Mendes, Board President of the Portuguese Council for Refugees, resettled refugee's testimonies (Iraq), among others, participated in this conference.

With the main purpose of ensuring that resettlement leads to a durable solution, this conference addressed, in an effective manner, the challenges regarding the process of selection of the cases, reception and integration, creating new opportunities for refugees.

More than 90 persons participated in this event which was seen as good practice, due to its capacity to involve the main stakeholders of the Portuguese Resettlement Program, including refugees that were able to confront the authorities present with their concerns.

*(Monika Frechaut-
Portuguese Refugee Council)*



A joint EU Resettlement Programme: First step taken, more steps needed!



Ms Annette Bombeke, Policy and Advocacy Officer at ECRE, during her presentation on the latest developments on the European Resettlement Scheme at the CCME EU-wide conference on resettlement that took place in Stockholm-Sigtuna.

The last edition of the Resettlement Newsletter carried the hopeful title: "EU resettlement Scheme: time for a courageous, imaginative proposal!" On 2 September 2009 the Commission presented the long-awaited proposal for a joint EU Resettlement programme. So...is it courageous? Is it imaginative? Will it result in more resettlement places in Europe, thus increasing the current 6,7 % share the EU takes of the global total of resettled refugees?

When the proposal was officially presented, some of the media articles on the topic highlighted the point of view that a joint European resettlement programme would help to combat illegal immigration and stop people from placing their lives in the hands of people smugglers. Ignorance, or a meagre attempt to 'sell' the joint Resettlement programme? Of course, it is highly unlikely that a European Resettlement programme will stop people from risking their lives by undertaking dangerous journeys on un-seaworthy vessels. To address the problems with regard to the mixed flows in the Mediterranean, a more comprehensive approach is needed.

The proposal does however have the potential to eventually increase resettlement places in the EU and thus share the responsibility with

the mostly poor countries which are hosting the majority of the world's refugees. The principal objective of the joint EU action as stated by the Commission is to involve more Member States in resettlement as well as to provide for an orderly access to EU Member States. Furthermore the Commission rightfully points to the fact that resettlement should be clearly distinguished from intra EU relocation -but unhelpfully still speaks about internal vis-à-vis external resettlement. The topic of Intra EU relocation as such is not a part of the Proposal, and will be addressed separately in the coming months. Participation in the Programme will remain voluntary. Furthermore the programme should be flexible with a view on adaptation to changing circumstances and pursuing resettlement in a strategic way.

How does the Commission envisage to reach the goals as mentioned above? Concretely, the proposal consists of a communication to the European Parliament and the Council introducing the Programme and of a proposed amendment to the European Refugee Fund (ERF).

The proposed mechanism allows for the setting, annually, of EU-wide common resettlement priorities. Those priorities would be established by means of a Commission decision. Priorities can apply to geo-

graphic regions and nationalities as well as to specific categories of refugees, including emergency cases. Member States will, after the priorities are adopted, inform the Commission through the pledging exercise of the numbers they plan to resettle under the adopted priorities.

Under the current ERF, a Member State can ask for a fixed amount of 4,000 euros per resettled refugee, if this refugee falls under one of the following specific categories: persons from an RPP country or region, unaccompanied minors, children and women-at-risk, particularly from psychological, physical or sexual violence or exploitation or persons with serious medical needs that can only be addressed through resettlement. The Commission has proposed to amend the ERF so that Member States can -only- get additional financial assistance of 4,000 euros for every refugee resettled who falls under a EU priority.

How will the EU resettlement priorities be adopted? The Commission has proposed to formalize the concept of the ad hoc Resettlement Expert Group to turn it into a body, which meets on a regular basis. All Member States are expected to participate, as well as other stakeholders like UNHCR, IOM and NGOs like ECRE. This Resettlement Expert Group will not only discuss EU resettlement priorities, but also exchange information on quantitative targets as set out by Member States and discuss specific needs with regard to resettlement, such as activities aimed at encouraging Member States which are not yet engaged in resettlement. After this preliminary work of the Resettlement Expert Group the Commission will eventually decide upon the priorities on the basis of consultations in the management committee of the general Programme 'Solidarity

A joint EU Resettlement Programme: First step taken, more steps needed!

and Management of Migration Flows, including the ERF.

Of course resettlement, by nature, has a strong 'external dimension' component. Therefore it is of major importance that there will be a strong coordination with the EU's external policies, also with a view of the strategic use of resettlement on a EU level. Resettlement should be coherent with external policies, development policies and human rights policies.

Identifying common EU Resettlement priorities

Although the proposal is to be welcomed as a good first step, some aspects remain unclear. For instance with regard to the priorities: how many priorities can be adopted annually? In theory if all Member States just hand in their resettlement priorities for next year they could all be adopted as EU priorities, which would weaken the idea of joint priority groups which could be used in a strategic way. Furthermore this could overstretch the ERF-envelope for resettlement. It is important that the forecasts by UNHCR will be leading in the adoption of priorities so as to ensure that those in most need of resettlement will be adopted as common EU priorities. A joint EU programme should be kept flexible, but at the same time multi-

annual priorities should be adopted as well with a view on strategic use of resettlement.

Of course, the proposal is a first step, and we have to keep in mind that the joint EU approach to resettlement is incremental. It is however important to keep a focus on developing fully-fledged national programmes, which look at the full spectrum of aspects which makes resettlement a success. When engaging new Member States in resettlement the aim should be to develop programmes that have the potential to grow over the years, as quickly as reasonably possible and as slowly as is needed to develop a solid resettlement basis in the Member State and public support for resettlement. NGOs should be involved in the different stages of resettlement. The same applies to refugees themselves, since they are very well placed, for instance, to assist in managing expectations of refugees who are to be resettled, but also to support the integration process.

The structural exchange of information on resettlement should be strengthened on a European level. It is advisable to use existing structures rather than invent-

ing new structures so as to provide a platform for stakeholders where they can hold discussions in an informal setting.

More steps needed!

It is clear that we're not there yet: it will be key to discuss the proposal more in-depth in the coming months to see how we can make the joint EU resettlement work, and secure that an EU programme will actually have an added value to already existing resettlement programmes. The first step has been taken, but more courage and imagination will be needed to ensure that the EU will take a fairer share of the global responsibility for the world's refugees through sustainable resettlement programmes of high quality.

(Annette Bombeke, Advocacy and Policy Officer, ECRE)

Useful Links for more information on the European Resettlement Programme:

1. Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the Establishment of a Joint EU Resettlement Programme:

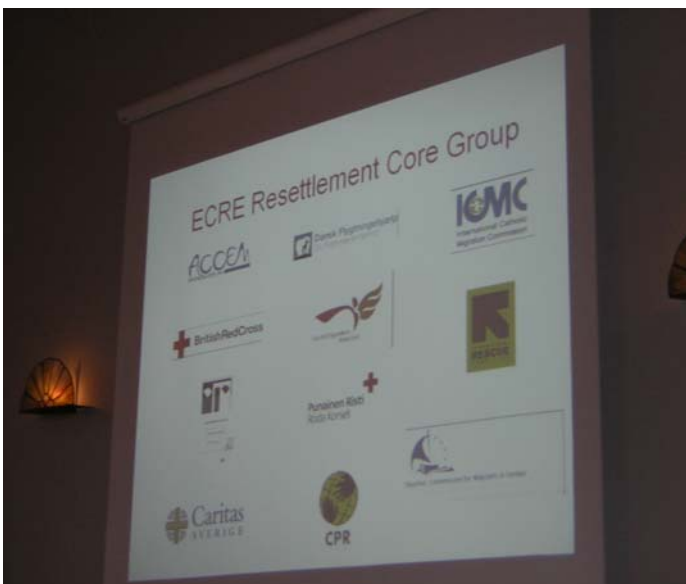
http://ec.europa.eu/prelex/detail_dossier_real.cfm?CL=fr&DosId=198553

2. CCME, Twelve Arguments and Seven Proposals for the European Resettlement Scheme:

<http://www.ccme.be/secretary/NEWS/090629%20RR%20CCME%20considerations%20and%20recommendations%20EU%20RR%20scheme%20FINAL.pdf>

3. ECRE Press Release– Towards More Resettlement Places in Europe:

http://www.ecre.org/resources/Press_releases/1430



ECRE's Core Group on Resettlement is instrumental in advocating for a joint EU Resettlement Programme.



Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe

Commission des Eglises auprès des Migrants en Europe

Kommission der Kirchen für Migranten in Europa

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CCME office (red building on the left) in front of the European Commission Headquarters (Berlaymont)

FAQ—frequently asked questions...

1) What is CCME?

CCME, the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe, is the ecumenical agency on migration and integration, refugees and asylum, and against racism and discrimination in Europe. CCME members are Anglican, Orthodox and Protestant Churches, diaconal agencies and Councils of Churches in presently 19 European countries. CCME is in the process of becoming a commission of the Conference of European Churches and cooperates with the World Council of Churches.

2) What is ASPIRE ?

The ASPIRE project ("Assessing and Strengthening Participation In refugee Resettlement to Europe") enhances knowledge and political debate in EU member states to engage in refugee resettlement - as an additional instrument of refugee protection.

It includes activities to

- Analyse in which member states debates suggest an openness towards resettlement
- Promote existing policies and best practice in these member states (through sharing of materials and knowledge)

- Bring governmental and non-governmental actors in member states with a recent interest in resettlement into debate with one another on selected issues on resettlement
- Provide continued updated information on resettlement to non-specialised public which is generally interested in refugee protection
- Provide a forum of discussion and exchange for governmental actors, civil society actors and UNHCR to explore the role, structure and added value of a European resettlement scheme

3) What is Refugee Resettlement?

It's one of the 3 traditional durable solutions for refugees, along with the local integration in the country of asylum and repatriation. Basically, it's a transfer of refugees from their country of first asylum to a third country that has agreed to admit them with a long term or permanent resident status. Resettlement provides protection for refugees whose safety is immediately at risk and it is a tool of international protection in a context of burden sharing among states.

4) What Resettlement is not...

Resettlement is not the same as

seeking refugee status through the asylum system, nor is it a more legal process for accessing asylum rights and can never substitute a spontaneous request of asylum.. Resettlement is not synonymous with "Temporary protection" classifications.

Resettlement cannot become a system of profiling refugees in accordance to their nationality or religion in order to create more or less valuable categories of refugees. Resettlement is based exclusively on the protection needs of the refugees.

5) Which are the Resettlement countries?

The countries that traditionally host resettlement programs are : Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, and USA. Those countries are called the "traditional ones". Countries such as Argentina, Benin, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Chile, Iceland, Ireland, Portugal and UK have in recent years started programmes. Others, among them several EU member states, are currently considering or starting them...

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
General info on resettlement
<http://www.unhcr.org/protect/3bb2eadd6.html>



ERF-CA 2007

The ASPIRE project "Assessing and Strengthening Participation In refugee Resettlement to Europe" project is co-financed by the European Refugee Fund -Centralised Actions 2007 of the European Commission . The views expressed and information provided does not necessarily reflect the position of the European Commission.