



Australian Refugee Rights Alliance

"No Compromise on Human Rights"

Draft Discussion Paper

**The Refugee Perspective
Preparing Refugees for Resettlement-
Softening the Landing**

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Comments Invited

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Background

The world refugee crisis shows little sign of abating. And, while the plight of refugees and their resettlement issues are becoming more widely understood and supported, there remains work to be done in this arena.

Refugee issues that need urgent attention include safety, security, education and health. It is encouraging that some of the issues concerning women and gender (women at risk) are currently being addressed. However, the existing challenges are as confronting and as critical as they ever were. Support in resettlement and funding are making a significant difference, however further effort is required.

In Africa, conflicts continue to rage and refugees pour into neighbouring countries on a daily basis. Africa has one of the largest populations of refugees and internally displaced people in the world. The majority of these people are from Burundi, Rwanda, Sudan, Somalia, Angola, Uganda, Ethiopia, Eritrea, D'jibouti and Sierra Leone.

Australia has a large community of African refugees, predominantly living in Melbourne and Sydney. Many of these are from Horn of Africa countries and all are rebuilding their lives after spending time in refugee camps.

Issues

During a visit to a refugee camp in Sudan, the author met a man who had all the burdens of his life reflected in his exhausted body and staring eyes. He told the author that he did not see a future in life for his children. He said he continually asked himself why he was born in the first place. This man and his haunting words, in many ways, represent the missing mother, father, brother and/or sister of most resettled refugees.

Scenarios like this highlight the profound despair of these individuals and their families – and the challenges faced in helping them achieve safety, security, education, and good mental and physical health require significant effort.

It is reassuring that the UNHCR rigorously collects data about the world's refugees – facts, figures – that strongly communicate the enormity of this situation. To take this one step further, these numbers truly come to life when they are expressed by members of one of these refugee groups, who have experienced first hand the suffering, challenges, hopes and aspirations and eventual success that their fellow countrymen still in the camps dream of experiencing themselves.

The following is a snapshot of the urgent issues that currently exist, however it is far from the full picture.

Safety and Security

Safety and security are basic human needs and rights. For some individuals, the concept of feeling safe and secure is a distant memory. Refugees who have travelled across dangerous terrain in search of a safe haven have experienced a journey that features hardship and physical and emotional trauma. It is the journey where there is nowhere safe to sleep, the risk of rape is high, and where the fear of imminent danger is unrelenting.

Individuals who have experienced these conditions require care and support through their vulnerability as they rebuild their lives, and there are a number of areas that can be explored within this issue:

- ***Location of camps***
The location of some camps, particularly in border areas like Jumani in Uganda, are in constant danger of infiltration by militia and non-refugee groups. This situation compromises the security of those who genuinely need protection. The UNHCR has an opportunity to influence outcomes by reviewing the locations and accessibility of such camps. For example, Masindi camp is located in central Uganda, far from the border area and provides a suitable environment, where its refugees are not in constant fear for their safety.
- ***Recognition of UNHCR documentation***
Raising the profile and authority of the UNHCR in some host countries needs to be addressed, to ensure holders of UNHCR documents are given appropriate consideration and recognition. If this can be achieved, fewer refugees will be subjected to arrest or detention by authorities as they travel within a host country.

Health and Education

Health is major concern for many refugees in camps, specifically for women and children. Availability of ongoing medical care and supplies is not always guaranteed. This, coupled with conditions where good hygiene is difficult to maintain due to factors including contaminated water, pose ongoing threats of disease and infection.

- ***Education***
Health programs in camps that educate refugees about ways to maintain good health under these conditions will go a long way in improving refugees' chances of survival and consequent resettlement opportunities.
- ***People with a disability***
In addition to broader health issues, the UNHCR has an opportunity to work more closely with host and resettlement countries to ensure people with a disability are protected from discrimination and offered equal opportunity in accessing resettlement programmes.

Resettlement Preparation

Resettled refugees share issues including the pressures of adjusting to a new environment, limited access to information, disrupted lives and schooling opportunities for children, poor health and difficulty in accessing affordable housing, and difficulty in securing suitable employment. In fact, it would be fair to say that refugees are totally preoccupied with survival in an alien society.

When a country accepts refugees, the country is satisfying its cultural, spiritual values and ideals and, at the same time, meeting its international commitments and human rights obligations.

Refugees must not be seen as a burden; they are not in the country to compete or take over the jobs and positions of others. Refugees resettle into a country as victims of war, torture, political instability and discrimination. While many are qualified and experienced in their vocations or professions and have been valued for their contribution to society, others may have had limited opportunities for formal education due to the conditions of their homelands. These individuals all need support and assistance. As refugees, these resettled individuals want to enjoy the same human rights as their fellow citizens.

- ***Preparing refugees for resettlement***
UNHCR has an immediate opportunity to help prepare refugees for resettlement by working with host and resettlement countries to address problems that will confront refugees on resettlement or repatriation. These include vocational training, education and language acquisition. Efforts such as these can help ensure refugees are able to address their barriers, ensuring they are not permanently locked into disadvantage in their new homelands.
- ***Sharing experiences amongst UNHCR and host countries***
Shared experiences help build understanding and awareness in an effective way. The UNHCR and host countries may consider exploring the possibility of introducing a program of internships or exchanges to allow staff working in resettlement agencies to develop a better understanding of the issues, experiences and realities of refugees in camps and in home countries.

Funding and Staff

- The NGO community is concerned about ensuring that UNHCR funds allocated for camps are reaching the target groups at the appropriate time, and that rations are adequate to meet the basic needs of different family sizes.

Conclusion

The author, like many other migrants and refugees, came from a background of constant war, persecution and deprivation. She uses her experiences as a leader in working to help refugees, particularly from the Horn of Africa, as they resettle in Victoria, Australia.

New arrivals do not want the stars – they simply want to enjoy the same human rights as their fellow citizens. And, they want support and guidance so they too can become full citizens and make positive contributions to life in their new countries.

Pre-arrival planning and preparation is essential for successful resettlement.