

Summary: **Selection Criteria in Refugee Resettlement: balancing vulnerability and future integration in eight settlement countries**

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AUTHOR: Jan-Paul Brekke, Erlend Paasche, Astrid Espegren, Kristin Bergtora Sandvik

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REVIEWED BY: Jane North, JD Student Fellow, Refugee Law Research Team & Eliza Bateman, Senior Research Analyst

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Selection Criteria in Refugee Resettlement: Balancing vulnerability and future integration in eight resettlement countries

Topline Points

- This report compares refugee resettlement programs in eight countries: Norway, Australia, United Kingdom, Canada, France, Germany, Sweden, and the Netherlands.
- The study highlights the similarities and differences across the programs, using Norway as the central focus of the analysis.
- The study examines how each country determines their selection criteria for UNHCR resettled refugees and how they balance the consideration of **future integration in the host society** against the **humanitarian goal of protecting the most vulnerable refugees**.
- The study then contrasts each country's selections criteria and practices with Norway's and provides recommendations for Norwegian authorities to implement on the basis of this analysis.

Overview of Key Findings

- All 8 countries worked closely with the UNHCR to identify refugees for resettlement.
- From 2003 – 2020 (the assessment period for the study) these 8 countries resettled “nearly one-third of the roughly 1 million UNHCR-referred resettlement refugees, departing to 45 resettlement countries, with Canada and Australia resettling 12% and 9%, respectively, and the rest resettling 1–3%.” (at 39).
- UNHCR plays a key role in deciding which refugee situations, regions, and nationalities should be prioritized.
- Given UNHCR's role in protecting the humanitarian aspect of resettlement, it has urged resettlement states not to use “integration potential” as the basis for resettlement selection.
- However, all eight countries struggled to balance their intent to resettle the most vulnerable refugees with their own mandate to consider refugees' future integration and ability to cope in the host society.
- Germany, the Netherlands, Canada, and Australia all identify integration potential as an **explicit consideration** for refugee resettlement, while Norway, Sweden, France, and the United Kingdom do not.
- For specific nationalities or resettlement of groups, all countries except France applied integration potential as a consideration to resettlement **to some extent**.
- At the individual level, Germany, Norway, the Netherlands, Canada, and Australia applied integration potential as a consideration to resettlement, whereas Sweden, the United Kingdom, and (in most cases) France, did not.
- The authors conclude that, there is a clear need for new research exploring how resettled refugees themselves experience the selection process, subsequent resettlement, and long-term integration.

France

- In the past eight years, France has resettled **16,000 UNHCR refugees**.
- France is the only country in this study that does not use ‘integration potential’ as a selection criterion for refugees at a group level, and in most cases does not use it as a selection criterion at the individual level.
- France does not refuse refugees based on a lack of education, familiarity with the language, professional experience, income, or health conditions.
- At the individual level, French values are relevant, however refugees are not asked whether they agree with French values; a refugee’s connections to France are also relevant, but not a criterion.
- At a group level, France does not consider the integration potential of a particular nationality.
- France does not set quotas for cases involving people with special needs.

Canada

- In the past eight years, Canada has resettled **73,000 UNHCR refugees**.
- Canada also has a private sponsorship model in which communities, NGOs and groups of individuals can sponsor refugees. This system secured protection for **280,000 people by 2020**.
- The Canadian government agreed to export the private sponsorship model to interested states after the 2016 UN Summit in 2016; the United Kingdom and Germany have since piloted similar programs (among others) and sponsorship has met with some success in new contexts.
- Canada uses integration potential as a relevant criterion in selecting its refugees to resettle this is a formal requirement.
- In cases where an immigration officer finds an “urgent need for protection” or where the applicant is particularly vulnerable there may be exceptions. Generally, the more vulnerable the refugee claimant, the less heavily Canada will weigh their integration potential.
- Canada prioritizes refugees with medical needs, survivors of violence and torture, women at risk, children, and the elderly.

Australia

- In the past eight years, Australia has resettled **42,000 UNHCR refugees**.
- Australia has piloted a community sponsorship model; however, it did not meet refugee advocates’ expectations, and was heavily criticized as a profit-making initiative.
- Australia includes integration potential as a relevant criterion in selecting refugees to resettle.
- At an individual level, the Australian government considers several factors including the capacity to settle the refugees, the likelihood for successful integration, the applicant’s connection to Australia, and the capacity of the host community to provide permanent resettlement.
- At a group level, integration potential is also considered. The government considers how previous arrivals of that group have coped in Australia; if a particular group has been well integrated, the government may be more willing to accept refugees from that group.
- Australia prioritizes vulnerable women, children and dependents, survivors from violence and torture; unaccompanied humanitarian minors are eligible, with no specific sub-quota.

Sweden

- In the past eight years, Sweden has resettled **24,000 UNCHR refugees**.
- Sweden does not explicitly use integration potential as a criterion in selecting its refugees to resettle, but in practice does appear to do so at a group level.
- At the individual level, the Swedish Migration Agency merely assesses the need for protection in each case, according to the *Swedish Aliens Act*, based on prevailing world conditions where the need for resettlement is greatest. In cases where integration seems very unlikely, Sweden occasionally talks to the UNHCR, and the UNHCR withdraws that person from the list.
- At the group level, however, Sweden does consider integration potential. When certain nationalities have been difficult to integrate, that group has been removed from the following year's quota.
- Sweden does not prioritize any specific sub-categories.
- Sweden has recently tested robotic automation to improve aspects of its resettlement process such as receiving and registering requests from the UNHCR, generating travel itineraries and bookings.

Germany

- In the past eight years, Germany has resettled **20,000 UNHCR refugees**.
- Germany does include integration potential as a relevant criterion in selecting refugees to resettle. Their main goal is to secure integration for those who come, as well as bring benefits to the German society.
- On an individual level, Germany specifically considers factors such as family links within Germany, education level, job skills, language skills and age; these criteria are applied by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees during interviews, and then used to evaluate integration potential to inform a final decision.
- Those who are unwilling to integrate into German society and legal order can be denied refugee resettlement. It is not clear whether Germany is still able to meet the UNHCR's humanitarian objectives for its resettlement program.
- Germany prioritizes survivors of violence and torture, medical cases, women and girls at risk, children and adolescents at risk and unaccompanied children.

Netherlands

- In the past eight years, the Netherlands has resettled **8,000 UNHCR refugees**.
- The Netherlands includes integration potential as a criterion in selecting refugees to resettle.
- This criterion is introduced based on feedback from municipalities and resettled refugees themselves based on practical experience.
- At an individual and group level, the Netherlands assesses whether the refugee would risk a situation of increased vulnerability after resettlement, and whether resettlement would pose a risk to Dutch society, the Netherlands views future non-integration as a risk to Dutch society.
- The Netherlands prioritizes high-profile cases such as journalists, political leaders, academics, and human rights activists.

The United Kingdom

- In the past eight years, the United Kingdom has resettled **26,700 UNHCR refugees**.
- The United Kingdom does not use integration potential as a criterion in selecting refugees to resettle but they do limit the number of large and/or complex cases based on capacity of local authorities.
- Authorities will ask whether resettlement is in the best interest of the refugee. In this sense, integration potential may be a factor.
- The United Kingdom prioritizes urgent emergency cases, medical cases with no specific sub-quota, survivors of violence and torture, women at risk, unaccompanied children, and refugees with close family ties in the United Kingdom.
- The United Kingdom has piloted the public-private partnership model and is waiting for an evaluation in 2021.

Norway

- In the past eight years, Norway has resettled **16,000 UNHCR refugees**.
- Norway does not use integration potential as an explicit criterion in selecting refugees to resettle; however, it is considered when assessing resettlement for single males or females, or couples without minor children. It is also considered when assessing whether the refugee demonstrates a willingness or potential to accept mainstream Norwegian norms.
- Norway can reject refugees based on the refugee's unwanted behaviors and attitudes, or lack of settlement capacity in municipalities.
- Norway emphasizes that the protection needs of resettled refugees should not differ from asylum seeker's protection needs; this may be a ground for exclusion.
- Norway prioritizes families with children under 18, women at risk, and LGBTQ+ community-members, medical cases, and persecuted Christian, Ahmadiyya and Yezidi refugees.

Quota and Composition of Norway's Refugees

- The Ministry of Justice and Public Security has the overall responsibility for Norway's resettlement program. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has a say in the quota, and who should be prioritized.
- Based on the priorities of the UNCHR, the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) and the Norwegian Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi) send a suggested quota based on input from NGOs. This suggestion is forwarded to the Ministry of Justice and commented on by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- Norway tries to strike a balance between achieving humanitarian principles, and successful long-term integration.
- To assess whether to resettle a refugee, Norway considers (1) the refugee's need for protection, (2) the host-country's need for burden sharing, (3) cooperation with UNHCR at the local office, and (4) assessment of the refugee group and whether it consists of special priority groups.

- In recent years, there has been a decrease in the number of resettled refugees with higher education and an increase in refugees with an undocumented education level.

Norway's Resettlement Structure

- Norway mixes new resettlement groups with established groups.
- Refugees are then assigned according to two separate processes:
 1. The national authorities, namely the IMDi, requests and suggests the number of refugees to be resettled in each municipality. The municipality then accepts, rejects, or adjusts this number.
 2. The IMDi presents individual families and refugees for acceptance to the municipalities through the assignment and dispersion process.

Recommendations for Norway

- The study led to tangible recommendations for Norway:
 1. Norwegian authorities should consider testing an **adapted version of a private sponsorship model** after reviewing the results and experiences of pilot/programmes in the UK and in Germany (through formal program evaluations).
“There is now substantial innovation in Europe, where seven of the twelve refugee private- and community-sponsorship pilot programs can be found (also called community or private sponsorship, or humanitarian corridors).” (at 112).
 2. Norwegian authorities should consider **implementing direct communication between refugees and the host municipality after they are approved**, but before they arrive. The IMDi should also secure personal contact options to complement the centralized system.
 3. Norwegian authorities should commission a study to analyze the experiences of resettled refugees in Norway
 4. The Norway Directorate of Immigration should produce an annual report on resettlement to improve transparency and long-term sustainability, modelled on Sweden’s report.
 5. Norwegian authorities should consider assessing the extent to which their resettlement program has created positive humanitarian effects.
 6. Norwegian authorities should improve secure communication lines between IMDi and the municipalities on resettlement matters.
 7. Norwegian authorities should include cross-cultural medical competence on its missions.
 8. Norwegian authorities should ensure that refugees are fully informed about the process of resettlement so they can make the best choices for their interests.