

Home Office Quota Resettlement Scheme

The UK government has agreed to establish a resettlement scheme which will allow a specific number of refugees, up to 500 in 2003-4, to enter and settle in the UK. This program is an extension of the many existing resettlement schemes operated by countries throughout the world, in conjunction with UNHCR, which provide durable solutions for refugees in particularly vulnerable situations, and where resettlement in a third country is the preferable solution for their circumstances.

Candidates for resettlement will have been classified by UNHCR Field Offices as refugees, and using UNHCR resettlement criteria are identified as:

- not able to integrate locally;
- nor able to return to their countries of origin;
- and who have pressing humanitarian or security needs.

Candidates so identified by UNHCR Field Offices, are referred to countries of resettlement, including the UK, for consideration for inclusion in their national resettlement scheme.

It is important to note the following points:

- Refugees cannot “apply” for resettlement, either from within the UK nor in other countries.
- Candidates are identified by local UNHCR Field Offices on a humanitarian basis from existing refugee caseloads outside the UK.
- UNHCR Branch Office London has no role in “selecting” those eligible for the scheme.
- The UK Home Office makes the decision on who to accept under the program, not UNHCR.
- Refugees in the UK interested in having family members reunified in the UK are advised to contact the British Red Cross.

More information is available from:

www.homeoffice.gov.uk

www.unhcr.ch

www.redcross.org.uk

Background

1. What is resettlement?

Despite the best efforts of countries of asylum to help people who have fled their homes and country, the trauma and suffering of refugees doesn't simply disappear. They are rarely able to simply pick up everyday activities in a new setting and live and work as they did before. Sometimes the threats that caused refugees to leave their homes in the first place are present also in the country of refuge. There may be a risk that refugees be forced to repatriate before they're willing to, or new sources of danger for individuals with special needs or parts of the refugee community.

When individual refugees are at risk, or when there are other reasons to help them leave the region, UNHCR attempts to resettle them in safe third countries. With voluntary repatriation and local integration, resettlement is one of the three long-term solutions UNHCR works for on behalf of refugees.

Through resettlement, refugees gain legal protection - residency and often eventually citizenship - from governments who agree, on a case-by-case basis, to open up their communities to new members. The task of receiving and settling refugees requires that UNHCR works closely with central and local authorities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and religious and social welfare groups.

The UNHCR Resettlement Handbook, available at www.unhcr.ch, sets clear standards for referring individuals to prospective countries. States may accept or reject cases referred by UNHCR, and may also decide to admit refugees under resettlement programs who have not been referred by UNHCR. Once a refugee arrives in a resettlement country, it is that government which takes him or her in hand.

Following World War II, hundreds of thousands of Hungarian, Chilean, Ugandan, Vietnamese and Bosnian refugees have been resettled in a succession of large operations. Today, ten countries have significant annual resettlement programmes or quotas: Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States of America. In addition to these traditional countries, eight emerging resettlement countries have started to implement resettlement programmes in co-operation with UNHCR. These countries are: Benin, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Chile, Iceland, Ireland, Spain, Argentina and the UK. Other countries accept cases on an ad hoc basis. UNHCR has encouraged more governments to extend resettlement opportunities to refugees in need.

While the criteria which States use to determine eligibility for resettlement vary, like the numbers of refugees they accept, all programs recognise the range of compelling circumstances, including protection cases, family reunification, refugees with special needs such as women at-risk, handicapped refugees or serious medical cases.

UNHCR promotes resettlement within the context of broader policies which strive to address the causes of flight at the outset, and strengthen the principal of asylum. The ability to resettle refugees in need remains an effective way of offering refugees both protection and a lasting solution to their dilemma.

History of resettlement

Although the concept of resettlement was not clearly articulated until the mid-1960s, it had been undertaken in one form or another from the outset of the system of international protection for refugees. Between the two World Wars, resettlement was used as the principal or partial solution for a number of refugee situations. During the early 1920's, for example, some 45,000 White Russians who had fled to China after the Russian Revolution were subsequently resettled elsewhere. In the 1930's, successions of international refugee organisations were charged with resettling Jews and others who were fleeing Nazi persecution.

Resettlement evolved in the context of the Cold War. The historical effort to help displaced people in the aftermath of World War II matched the desire of Governments to facilitate the movement of certain people for foreign and domestic policy reasons. When the United Nations replaced the League of Nations in 1947, it established a new body, the International Refugee Organisation (IRO). The IRO's mandate was to protect existing refugee groups and one new category - the 21 million or so refugees scattered throughout Europe in the aftermath of World War II. Initially, the IRO's main objective was repatriation, but the political build-up to the Cold War tilted the balance instead towards resettlement of those who had "valid objections" to returning home. Such "valid objections" included "persecution, or fear of persecution, because of race, religion, nationality or political opinions". Over a period of five years, from 1947 to 1951, the IRO resettled well over a million people (four-fifths of them outside Europe), while repatriating a mere 73,000.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) replaced the IRO in 1951. By that time, international protection was firmly enshrined as the new organisation's principal *raison d'être*. The Statute of UNHCR, adopted by a General Assembly resolution in December 1950, outlines the responsibilities of the Office. The most important of these responsibilities are to provide international protection and to seek permanent solutions for the problem of refugees.

Similar to IRO, UNHCR, during its early years, made extensive use of resettlement as a means of clearing the European refugee camps after World War II. Over the next three decades, voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement enjoyed equal status as durable solutions, depending on the circumstances. The Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 resulted in 200,000 refugees fleeing to Yugoslavia and Austria, many of whom were later resettled in other countries.

In 1972, President Idi Amin of Uganda expelled most of the country's Asian minority, many of whom had lived there for decades and had no other country to go to. With the help of UNHCR, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), some 40,000 Ugandan Asians were resettled in a matter of a few months in a total of 25 countries.

Following a coup d'état in Chile in September 1973, another resettlement programme was launched. Refugees from neighbouring countries were faced with a hostile regime in their country of asylum and, fearing *refoulement*, sought sanctuary in churches and embassies. The High Commissioner addressed an appeal to the Chilean Government that refugees in that country be adequately protected and on no account expelled to

their country of origin. Assurances were subsequently received from the Government to the effect that the provisions of the 1951 Convention and of the 1967 Protocol, to which Chile is a party, would be fully respected.

Given the human rights record in the region, resettlement was the only option. Once again, the international community responded, first by extending diplomatic asylum in their embassies and subsequently by offering resettlement places. The authorities agreed to the establishment of “safe havens”, run by a National Committee which included representatives of the churches, where refugees who wished to leave the country could receive the necessary assistance and protection pending their departure. From there they could emigrate to a number of countries of second asylum which had generously responded to the High Commissioner’s appeal for help. By March 1974, nearly 5,000 people had been resettled to a total of 19 countries. Resettlement, mainly to other countries in the region, continued to play a prominent role in Latin America throughout the 1970’s and in Central America in the 1980’s.

The idea of a sanctuary where persons seek asylum is of course not new in history, but the establishment of “safe-havens” which was also applied to non-citizen Asians under expulsion order in Uganda before their departure from that country is an entirely novel device in the practice and experience of international protection as distinct from diplomatic asylum which is based on the inviolability of the diplomatic premises or rests on the basis of reciprocity and the consent of the host State.

The largest and most dramatic example of resettlement in modern times occurred in South East Asia. A massive exodus from Viet Nam followed the collapse of the Saigon regime in 1975. The many that crossed the perilous seas of South East Asia became known as the “boat people”. By 1979, a major protection crisis had developed as certain asylum countries refused to accept more refugees, prevented boats from landing and in some cases towed them out onto the high seas. At the same time, over 200,000 refugees were languishing in camps in the region. Confronted with this political and humanitarian crisis, the international community decided at the first conference on refugees from Indo-China, held in 1979, that Vietnamese boat people arriving in first asylum countries in South East Asia would be allowed to land in the region but would then be resettled in other countries. In the years that followed, nearly 700,000 Vietnamese were resettled.

When resettlement countries grew reluctant to continue open-ended resettlement of all boat people, a backlog of those who did not meet increasingly restrictive resettlement criteria started to accumulate in camps. Nevertheless, the overall number of refugees in first asylum camps gradually declined.

In 1986, the situation changed dramatically as a result of a sudden and massive increase in clandestine departures from Viet Nam. The number of boat people in camps leapt from 31,694 at the beginning of 1986 to 65,349 by early 1989. Since there had not been a significant deterioration in the human rights situation in Viet Nam, it was clear that the exodus, while retaining a refugee dimension, was increasingly driven by economic factors.

In 1989, when blanket resettlement for Indo-Chinese refugees had ceased following the introduction of the Comprehensive Plan of Action, the major focus of resettlement activity shifted to the Middle East. In 1992, UNHCR sought to resettle some 30,000 Iraqis from Saudi Arabia after efforts to explore possibilities for voluntary repatriation

and local integration had failed. Between April 1992 and June 1997, approximately 21,800 Iraqis had been accepted for resettlement. This effort is now drawing to a close as almost all the refugees have found new homes.

Resettlement efforts in Africa in the first half of the 1990's continued to focus on countries of the Horn. With civil strife and ethnic warfare widespread, resettlement for especially vulnerable refugees in Africa - including women-at-risk, survivors of torture and disabled refugees - remains a serious concern for UNHCR.

Another major challenge arose in 1992 with the need for resettlement of inmates from places of detention in Bosnia and Herzegovina. An emergency operation started on 1 October 1992 with the help of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) who transferred detainees to a UNHCR centre at Karlovac in Croatia. By early July 1993, 22 countries had offered temporary protection or resettlement to the ex-detainees and their families and over 11,000 people had left for third countries. By June 1997, UNHCR had been directly involved in the resettlement of some 47,000 refugees from former Yugoslavia. History has shown that when the needs are compelling, and the political will exists, resettlement can be arranged quickly and efficiently.

As in the case of the million and more Indo-Chinese who have been resettled in Australia, Canada, France and the United States of America, third country resettlement often entails taking refugees from their country of first refuge, transporting them thousands of miles across the world, and helping them to adapt to societies where the culture, climate, language and social structure are unfamiliar. In spite of all efforts, refugees may face problems adapting to such different circumstances. Nevertheless, it is the experience of many Governments and non-governmental organisations that the overwhelming number of refugees successfully overcome such challenges in order to establish themselves in their new country and community. Many resettled refugees, particularly younger family members, have made an astonishing success of their new lives.

There is a growing recognition of the need for a more comprehensive approach to refugee problems that involves helping different groups of refugees to find appropriate solutions to their plight, according to their individual circumstances, aspirations and the opportunities available. Resettlement is an essential element in a comprehensive strategy of refugee protection.

The history of resettlement in the United Kingdom

The UK has a long history of resettling refugees, if only on an *ad hoc* basis. The following is a chronological listing of the groups and the number of arrivals that have been formally resettled since the end of the Second World War.

• Polish Second World War exiles and dependants, 1940-50: 210,000

Polish refugees fleeing the war included those directly fleeing the Nazi invasion, the escape of Polish servicemen from Nazis controlled France, and refugees resettled from camps in the British zone of post-war Germany. The Polish refugees integrated into the United Kingdom successfully, finding both employment and housing with relative ease, in part due to the entitlements they received as part of the 1947 Polish Resettlement Act. It was during this flow that dispersal mechanisms and basic reception centres were used for the first time.

- **Hungarians fleeing popular uprising, 1957: 20,000**

This refugee group precipitated from the Soviet occupation of Hungary, and Imre Nagy's removal from government. Two agencies oversaw the refugees' resettlement from camps in Austria into the United Kingdom – the British Council for Aid to Refugees (now the Refugee Council) and the National Coal Board.

- **Ugandan Asians expelled from Uganda, 1972-4: 42,000**

The Ugandan Asians, forcibly removed by the government of Idi Amin, travelled to the United Kingdom initially not as refugees but on British travel documents. Local charities were informally responsible for a significant amount and range of service provision and the Ugandan Asians were dispersed to many parts of the UK and have achieved great success in their new communities.

- **Chileans escaping a military coup, 1973-9: 3,000**

Chileans selected for resettlement in the United Kingdom were assisted by a conglomerate of small voluntary organisations organised under the title of the 'Joint Working Group for Refugees from Chile'. These local organisations were central to the reception process, organising accommodation and language training and employment placements.

- **Vietnamese displaced persons, 1979-92: 22,500**

The Vietnamese population resettled in the United Kingdom was equally drawn from North and South Vietnam, and nearly one-fifth of the group was ethnic Chinese. Many ethnic Chinese initially fled to camps in Hong Kong, only to be later resettled in the United Kingdom.

- **Kosovan Evacuation Programme, 1999: 4,000+**

The Kosovan programme was offered as a form of temporary protection to those fleeing ethnic violence in the former Yugoslavia. Indeed, many of those accepted by the UK government in 2000 under the terms of this programme have left the United Kingdom after the expiration of their status. Evacuees were dispersed to 33 reception centres in Northwest England, Yorkshire, the East Midlands, and Scotland.

Countries of resettlement

(See also the "Easy Guide" to resettlement Programs - attached)

USA

The United States has a long tradition of granting refuge to those fleeing persecution. Since the Second World War, more refugees have found permanent homes in the United States than in any other country. Admission of refugees of special humanitarian concern to the United States as well as admission of those for the purpose of family reunification are important tenets of the U.S. refugee resettlement programme. In recent years the U.S. Government has modified its resettlement focus to give priority to cases identified by UNHCR, for example, in Africa and the Middle East.

Resettlement remains one of the three durable solutions available to refugees. Resettlement to the US accounts for 50% of UNHCR's resettlement efforts. In the US resettlement enjoys a long history, and continues to be a prominent part of its overall response to refugees. Most national voluntary agencies dealing with resettlement



predate UNHCR, and they remain active partners in supporting refugee matters, and issues of concern to UNHCR. In the past quarter century, more than 2.5 million refugees have arrived in the US, the vast majority through resettlement.

Australia

Australia is a long standing resettlement country, making available each year a quota of resettlement opportunities for refugees who have not found a viable asylum elsewhere. Applicants seeking resettlement in Australia are considered on a case by case basis by Migration Officers located in Australian overseas missions. Senior Immigration Officers determine emergency cases in the central office in Canberra.

Canada

Canada's resettlement program is administered by the Department of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). Canada has a long history of providing humanitarian assistance to people fleeing persecution in their homeland or displaced by conflicts. Since World War II Canada has resettled over 700,000 Convention refugees and persons in refugee-like situations.