

# French resettlement policy

Slow steps towards more  
international solidarity

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# The national resettlement programme

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- Framework cooperation agreement between France and UNHCR signed on February 2008
- UNHCR submits a hundred cases each year to the Ministry of Interior Affairs:
  - Only refugees under the 1951 Geneva Convention or under the strict mandate of UNHCR;
  - No specific criteria under the agreement or under Parliamentary process; medical, emergency and vulnerable cases (women and girls at risk, unaccompanied minors) accepted;
  - no selection mission; only dossier based selection.

# The national resettlement programme

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- Up to January 2013, 459 cases (1 332 persons) submitted by UNHCR
- Up to January 2013, 226 cases (668 persons) selected by French authorities
- Up to January 2013, 548 persons (181 cases) arrived on French territory
- More than 20 nationalities concerned: Ethiopians, DRC, Somalis, Rwandese, Afghans, Russians, Palestinians (ex-Iraq)...

# **The resettlement process: from cultural orientation to integration**

All stakeholders involved: Ministry of Interior Affairs, UNHCR, IOM, French Office of Immigration and Integration (OFII), French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (OFPRA) and NGOs.

- Pre-departure arrangements: travel and medical exams organised by IOM, information booklet delivered, orientation sessions for group of more than 10 persons (Iraqis in Jordan and Syria).
- Initial reception and accommodation in transit reception centres in Paris and Lyon.

- Until September 2011, resettled refugees were accommodated in reception centres for asylum seekers (CADA):
  - CADAs are not fit for purpose of accommodating resettled refugees. Different needs than asylum seekers and spontaneous refugees mean different legal and social assistance.
  - Quick integration pace: accommodation and social assistance ends after three or six months. Access to housing and employment is illusory within that timeframe.

- Since September 2011, new scheme implemented based on facilities and integration assistance tailored for resettled refugees:
- NGOs (France terre d'asile, Forum réfugiés, Entraide Pierre Valdo, Isard Cos) provide ca 100 housing places to resettled refugees in Paris, Deux-Sèvres, Rhône, Haute-Loire, Pyrénées-Atlantique). All projects are supported by the European Refugee Fund.
- Empowerment of refugees within a year is the main objective.

- Same status and rights as spontaneous refugees:
  - Access to permanent residence permit and to the same rights as nationals (except political rights).
  - Access to social housing under the same condition as nationals.
  - Signature of the reception and integration contract: language classes, civic training, employment and qualification assessment.
  - Citizenship can be requested as soon as refugees status is granted if they demonstrate their assimilation in French society.

# 5 years of resettlement: assessment and perspectives

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- Lack of information prior departure
  - No information or misinformation about the reception in France especially regarding accommodation and housing.
  - Disappointment, denial of realities, lack of trust in service providers, refusal of housing proposals.
- Lack of information of service providers on arrivals and their needs, including medical needs.

- Lack of coordination, planning and transparency by the authorities
- Resettled refugees have to fill up an asylum application upon arrival: not understandable for refugees and delays access to social rights (residence permit, integration programme...).
- Delays in accessing French classes under the national integration programme.
- The working group on resettlement (Ministry of Interior Affairs, UNHCR, IOM, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, OFII, OFPRA, Forum réfugiés and France terre d'asile) only met twice the last three years.

- No cooperation with social services and local authorities.
- High rejection rate without reasoned decision.
- Long waiting period before arrival due to lack of housing capacities.
- Lack of involvement at international and European levels (ATCR in Geneva, practical cooperation with EU Member States).

➤ Some positive aspects

- Effective access to state health system and schools.
- More non governmental actors involved in resettlement since 2012.
- A couple of positive commitments made in February 2013 during the last working group meeting: improving the information booklet delivered before departure, speeding up the grant of the refugee status, speeding up the access to French classes.
- Renewal of the agreement with UNHCR but no higher quota despites the global needs (ex. the Choucha camp in Tunisia).

# How to involve municipalities in the resettlement programme?

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- No competences in immigration, asylum and integration issues.
- No knowledge about resettlement.
- Some cities are implementing policies towards foreigners, e.g. Paris or Nantes.
- Cities can play a role in housing, schooling, access to rights...
- Developing the sense of belonging (Advisory Boards, Welcoming ceremonies...).

## The forthcoming Syrian refugees programme: an opportunity to improve the French resettlement programme?

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- The President of Republic announced the settlement/humanitarian admission of 500 Syrian refugees on 17 October 2013.
- No information about who, when, where and how.
- Need to learn from our mistakes (e.g. the Iraqis programme) and to overcome the current lack of coordination.
- Opportunity to better involve French municipalities in the reception and integration of refugees?

Matthieu Tardis

Head of Secretariat General

France terre d'asile

Tel.: +33.1.53.04.40.96

[mtardis@france-terre-asile.org](mailto:mtardis@france-terre-asile.org)

