

Sheffield resettlement run smoothly

Every year, the British city of Sheffield takes in 100 refugees. Resettlement is well-organised and integration is therefore relatively easy.

From our editor Sheila Kamerman

Sheffield. Tibeso UkaWoyedo, 27, should be happy. He has his own apartment with a kitchen, a washing machine and a separate bedroom. The flat is tiny, but still. Every month he receives some money in his account. Not much, but still. He also has a residence permit.

Tibeso Uka Woyedo is indeed quite happy, although it was difficult to settle into his new life. Every year, Sheffield 'invites' about 90 refugees to come and live in the English city, and he's one of them. And, after five years, they can obtain British nationality. They are rescued from an often hopeless life, often in an overcrowded refugee camp. Tibeso Uka Woyedo fled from Ethiopia to Kenya where he lived in a slum.

The UN refugee agency UNHCR asks European countries to take in several dozens of refugees every year. The Netherlands receives five hundred 'invited' refugees annually, and the UK receives 750. Many countries do so with great reluctance. They have enough trouble with public opinion about immigration and the political disquiet about refugees that 'come in uninvited' and those who only partly qualify for refugee status. Late last week the UNHCR reported a global total of 45.2 million refugees during 2012, the highest number since 1994. These people flee from wars or natural disasters.

In 2004, the city of Sheffield decided that refugees are welcome and so around one hundred are invited every year. Today, almost a thousand invited refugees live in Sheffield, a medium-sized city of around 550,000 inhabitants. They are assisted with the transition from a refugee camp to an English city. Or, in Tibeso Uka Woyedo's case, with the move from a slum in Kenya to a flat in Sheffield.

These refugees have often been living in camps for years and can definitely not return to their home country. Vulnerability is an important selection criterion. Single mothers with children, families with young children, displaced people who are sick, people who are at greater risk than others. Young women, and sometimes young men.

With almost ten years experience, the intake of refugees runs smoothly in Sheffield. On arrival a furnished house is available. Belinda Gallup from the municipality of Sheffield explains what people can expect when they arrive. 'The first week is a crash course on England, focusing on the most important aspects: where to go when you're sick, how to enrol children in school, where to do your shopping, and how about English classes? But also - how does a microwave work, what is an iron, how do you use central heating, how do you take money out? Many refugees who lived in camps for years have no idea.'

After that there is a drop-in advice session weekly, or sometimes more often, and some help with finding a job - even though the financial crisis has made that even more difficult. 'They often don't speak English at all, or speak poor English, so they really need help', says Belinda Gallup.

This long-term assistance is provided by NGOs and previously resettled refugees, a tactic that has proved to be golden. These earlier refugees know exactly what one encounters. They know more or less what people have been through and they sometimes speak the same language. There's a whole network of experienced care takers.

Annemiek Bots from *VluchtelingenWerk Nederland* (Dutch Council for Refugees) would like to have the same in the Netherlands. Bots and journalists from different European countries are invited by the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) to go to Sheffield and see how the asylum procedure works. The objective is that other cities, also in the Netherlands, learn from this example and overcome their fear of offering a refugees a home.

We meet the refugees at *the Circle Building* in the city. There are Iraqis, Burmese, Bhutanese and Somali. A young man from Burma tells about a board in a camp in Kenya that weekly shows the names of the refugees that can go to Europe. It's called the 'happy board'. He often gazed at it, full of hope, until suddenly his name appeared. Exciting and frightening. Two men from Liberia in three-piece suits were in the first group to arrive in Sheffield in 2004 and now feel completely integrated. An Iraqi man proudly tells of his three children who speak fluent English and don't remember their homeland.

Older refugees have difficulties. An Ethiopian man says he had a great opportunity in Sheffield, but that it has been traumatic as well. 'I'm happy, but I was forced to leave many people behind in the camp. I often think about that.'

A group of women from Bhutan meet weekly to sew, knit and talk in an empty classroom. The Refugee Council provides this for the first year, including a supervisor. After that, they have to organise it themselves. There's not much enthusiasm. 'We also meet at the market.' The Bhutanese women wear colourful clothing and serve Bhutanese snacks and English cake. They come from different camps in Nepal, where they had fled to from Bhutan many years before. They prefer Sheffield, but find it very cold. 'At first I felt like I was on a different planet, I was completely disoriented', says one woman. They find it difficult to learn English. Nobody in the group has a job. A young woman from Bhutan who has been in England for some time translates for the other women.

Back to Tibeso UkaWoyedo in his flat. He is an Oromo, the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia. They are suppressed by the ethnic Tigre-dominated authorities, he says. He was a teacher at a primary school and being a highly educated man, he was in more danger than others. He was arrested several times, and finally fled to Nairobi in Kenya. But he wasn't safe there either, he says. He was harassed repeatedly. With the help of the UNHCR he got on the list to go to England and he will make the best of it, he says.