



NOVAMIGRA

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Attaining Durability in the European Resettlement Regime: The Role of Norms and Values

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Introduction

The Policy Research Alert presented here is a companion piece to a longer report titled *Attaining Durability in the European Resettlement Regime: The Role of Norms and Values*.² In our study, we have analysed ideas, practices and actors within what we call the *European resettlement regime*. This is a system that involves the different actors and phases of resettlement – from selection in first countries of asylum to the reception of resettlement beneficiaries and their integration in receiving municipalities. Our analysis is based on interviews and participant observation with actors involved in all steps of resettlement to Germany and Sweden and with local and international organizations in countries of first asylum (Lebanon and Turkey), as well as on comparative insights from the USA. Our research has been done within the Horizon 2020-funded project *Norms and Values in the European Migration and Refugee Crisis* (NOVAMIGRA), which asks whether and how the large arrival of asylum seekers in 2015 has had an impact on European norms and values.

Ideas, Practices and Actors of Resettlement to Europe – a Durable Solution?

In the end it is about refugee protection, it is about solidarity between states and resettlement is in my opinion an important component.

– Representative, UNHCR Germany

It is about agency and the first step is listening to the beneficiaries.

– Programme officer, resettlement and family reunification, IOM Finland

With the rising number of international refugees worldwide in the recent decade, protracted situations of extended exile are becoming increasingly more common, with more than 79,5 million forcibly displaced people in 2020. Almost 64,000 persons started their life anew in a third country through the United Nations Refugee Agency's (henceforth the UNHCR) resettlement programs in 2019. Resettlement has also received increased attention among EU policy makers and practitioners in the wake of the 2015 refugee reception crisis³ in Europe. To promote resettlement as a response to the crisis, the EU commission recommended a joint European resettlement scheme aiming to resettle 20,000 people in need of international protection in 2015 and provided financial support to member states who engaged in it.⁴

The UNHCR promotes resettlement as one of three *durable solutions* for the international protection of refugees.⁵ It is a system in which internationally displaced refugees are selected from countries of

² The full report is available online: I.J. Ramsøy, F. Böhm & I. Kujawa, 'Attaining Durability in the European Resettlement Regime: The Role of Norms and Values', NOVAMIGRA, Deliverable D3.5, (2021), DOI [10.17185/dupublico/74425](https://doi.org/10.17185/dupublico/74425).

³ By refugee reception crisis we are referring to the arrival of hundreds of thousands of displaced people in the EU in 2015 and the political turmoil in its aftermath, such as the EU's reception policies and border management, which has increased this humanitarian crisis further. Refugees are not the crisis; the lack of protection is.

⁴ European Commission, *Commission recommendation of 8.6.2015 on a European resettlement scheme*. C(2015) 3560 final (Brussels: European Commission, 2015).

⁵ The other two durable solutions are local integration or repatriation.

first asylum for direct settlement in third countries. Prior to settling in the receiving states, resettlement is orchestrated mainly through international organizations such as UNHCR and IOM (International Organization for Migration). The motivation for states to participate in resettlement differs, though it is regarded by many as a humanitarian pathway and instrument of global solidarity to deal with the growing number of people displaced by conflict, wars, and natural disasters across the world and the increased pressure on countries of first asylum (usually in the Global South) to receive them.⁶

We consider resettlement durability to be an important tool through which Europe can commit to humanitarian values. We regard the durability of resettlement as dependent on international law and receiving states granting formal rights (such as citizenship) to those who are resettled. Moreover, and as is our focus in the report, our research material shows that formal rights are not enough to ensure durability. Rather, durability in resettlement is about making sure that each step of the process is conducive to resettlement beneficiaries' ability to and opportunities for engaging actively and long-term in the receiving society. This entails to be able to participate in public debates and in society on their own terms. Based on the best practices observed in our research material we provide recommendations that we deem conducive to a more holistic and humanitarian approach to resettlement.

Our main arguments in the report align with key findings from the NOVAMIGRA project, particularly the project's recommendation of steering the EU towards a more cosmopolitan future by anchoring the union's development in a moral commitment to humanitarian values.⁷ Considering that values and norms impact all aspects of social interaction, including political processes, they are also key in resettlement.⁸ Resettlement is introduced by the EU as a humanitarian pathway to refugee protection and so examining the extent to which the norms and values transmitted in each step of the resettlement process are indeed humanitarian is relevant to assessing the viability of resettlement as a durable solution.

Steps and key actors in the international resettlement system

The process of resettlement to Europe consists of a series of steps. These steps constitute encounters between different actors in the resettlement regime, and they are moments where values and norms become salient in different ways. As a rule, the steps are as follows:

- receiving states' **selection** of refugees to be resettled
- the information and training resettlement beneficiaries receive prior to travelling to their new country of residence, through **pre-departure orientation**
- refugees' **reception** upon arrival and their **integration** in the receiving society
- additionally, some receiving states employ programs of **community sponsorship** to promote both higher numbers of resettlement and better integration.

⁶ For some states, the possibility of migration governance may be the convincing factor rather than the humanitarian aim, for a detailed discussion see N. Hashimoto, 'Refugee Resettlement as an Alternative to Asylum', *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 37, 2 (2018) 162-186.

⁷ NoVaMigra (Norms and Values in the European Migration and Refugee Crisis), *Norms and Values in the European Migration and Refugee Crisis: Final Report*, (Essen: University of Duisburg-Essen, 2021), DOI [10.17185/dupublico/74245](https://doi.org/10.17185/dupublico/74245).

⁸ For a more detailed discussion on values in European policy making, see A. Dimitriadi & H. Malamidis, 'Talking of Values: Understanding the Normative Discourse of EU Migration Policy', NoVAMIGRA, Deliverable D2.1, (2019), DOI [10.17185/dupublico/49360](https://doi.org/10.17185/dupublico/49360)

A Holistic Approach to Integration and Resettlement Durability

The starting point for our investigation has been an ambition to contribute to continued and growing support of resettlement and the humanitarian values it stands for. Our research material has shown that the EU's fundamental values – mainly the respect and protection of human dignity and human rights – are interpreted in strongly diverging and even contradictory ways within the various member states with regard to the treatment of refugees.⁹ To ensure that resettlement be, in fact, a *durable solution* for the international protection of refugees, it matters if and how these humanitarian values are practiced throughout the regime.

Our report has examined ideas, practices, and actors of resettlement and asked how these contribute to safeguard resettlement as a durable solution. By 'durable' we are alluding to the UNHCR's promotion of resettlement as one of three ways to ensure protection for refugees. Included in this approach are the humanitarian values by which UNHCR abides and on which the 1951 Refugee Convention is founded, such as solidarity and equality. The three general themes that we have identified in our material – (1) the significance of context-specific approaches to integration, (2) the promotion of resettlement beneficiaries' agency, and (3) the importance of streamlining messages and building communication channels/methods that aim to dismantle power hierarchies and 'othering' long-term – serve as food for thought in how to approach resettlement durability from within the regime. Below we summarize these themes.

A context specific and holistic approach to integration and resettlement

Durability goes hand in hand with what we call a holistic approach to integration. Achieving durability in resettlement thus means considering all parts of the regime: the country of first asylum; the receiving state and society; and the refugees themselves and the lives that are made possible for them through the resettlement process. Relatedly, we emphasise the importance of discerning how integration is understood and practiced within different receiving states. We regard integration as a long-term process that happens through encounters, over time, and through mutual trust.

A central factor in constructing an integrated society is thereby to have the general population, not only newly arrived refugees, participating in integration processes. Community-based sponsorship schemes are one way to transmit humanitarian values and contribute to a durable solution. However, in all approaches to integration, reflecting upon the values they transmit to ensure that they are, in fact based on humanitarian ideas of solidarity, equality, and respect for differences remains important to ensure durability.

Furthermore, 'integration' is in itself a multifaceted concept which is interpreted and practiced in various ways by different actors in different contexts. Integration, and resettlement, will necessarily be organized according to how each society is organized (on national, regional, and municipal levels) and according to which values and principles steer this organization. To establish how integration is best approached in a particular place, we must ask how it is defined and understood in relation to that

⁹ A. Facchi et al., 'Values in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights – A Legal-Philosophical Analysis with a Focus on Migrants' Rights', (Torino: G. Giappichelli Editore, 2019); M. Göbel, 'Toward a Cosmopolitan Europe: Normative Requirements for EU Refugee Policy in the Light of Empirical Possibilities and Constraints', NOVAMIGRA, Policy Research Alert No.8 (D4.2), 2020, DOI [10.17185/duerpublico/72834](https://doi.org/10.17185/duerpublico/72834).

specific context, and which practices within integration work support the overall societal aims and values.

Our material thus shows that resettlement and integration are intrinsically connected, so that the entire resettlement regime must be organized towards providing the best possible starting conditions for refugees in their destination communities. A holistic approach to both integration and resettlement, therefore, entails considering how integration is understood within each specific receiving context and which values shape how one can become a member of the respective society. In practice, ensuring the durability of resettlement thus entails connecting the information and messages that reach beneficiaries prior to and after their arrival in the destination countries.

Invaluable support through community-based sponsorship in Germany

One result that the pilot project NesT might bring with it, is the awareness of how important and valuable the mentoring concept is. – Coordinator, Caritas Friedland

The pilot community sponsorship program *Neustart im Team* (Newstart in a team, NesT) has been up and running since 2019 as part of the national resettlement system in cooperation with civil society organisations.

The project aims to resettle an additional 500 people to Germany, beyond the national quota, and provide individual integration support through mentor groups. Refugees and mentors that have been part of NesT so far say they profited from the programme, especially in the initial phase of organising their new lives, interacting with state institutions (regarding legal status, social services, access to employment and education) and receiving help with language barriers.

According to integration practitioners, the value of individual integration support is unparalleled. Providing mentoring for all resettled refugees would thus be beneficial. While there are some NGOs and civil society organisations who facilitate such support in particular municipalities, this has yet to become institutionalized nationwide.

Agency, trust, and societal membership

Trust is key for newcomers to engage actively with the receiving society *and vice versa* and is thus a central component in designing approaches to integration and resettlement that are conducive to durability. To build trust, however, our material has shown that enabling beneficiaries' *agency* within the resettlement process is important, and that this ought to be a central aim of such processes.

In her ongoing work, contributing project partner from the USA, Galya Ben-Arieh,¹⁰ recognizes that approaches to integration in the USA have changed over time, but that citizenship and the notion of self-sufficiency through early employment remain paramount. However, Ben-Arieh also observes that many civil society organizations and NGOs shift away from centring integration efforts around self-

¹⁰ Galya Ben-Arieh, Northwestern University, USA, has done extensive research on the impacts and outcomes of refugee resettlement in the USA.

sufficiency and towards focusing on building refugees' agency. Such an approach helps safeguard the humanitarian principles of the resettlement scheme and is more likely to make more people self-sufficient in the long run.

Much of the integration work we have observed in Europe also allows room for agency, as expressed for instance in the often-repeated interest in building trust between refugees and receiving societies through open communication. However, recognizing that agency is key to resettlement durability, continuously building the agency of refugees throughout the resettlement process (and not only after arriving in the receiving state) is key: it should be in focus from when beneficiaries are selected, to the PDO (pre-departure-orientation) curriculum and pedagogy, and to the different encounters between beneficiaries and the receiving society upon arrival.

What does a holistic approach entail? Communication for trust and collaboration

As implied above, the European resettlement regime is in many ways dependent on trust. Refugees' trust for the institutions and general society of the receiving state must be encouraged from the start of the resettlement process, while actors employed within the resettlement regime must also be able to trust those same institutions in supporting them in the tasks their jobs entail. Common to both versions of trust is that it is built through a feeling of being heard and seen – through communication. Understanding integration as a multi-directional process, makes both refugees and all members of society a part of integration strategies.

Sweden's new PDO: a holistic approach through multi-actor expertise

In September 2019, the Swedish Migration Agency (SMA) held a new yearly stakeholder conference to collect feedback from actors across Sweden working with resettlement – the dire need for a new *pre-departure orientation* (PDO) was one of the key points made. During 2019-21 SMA outsourced the PDO development to international experts in two stages. First, the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) in Brussels mapped Swedish PDO needs and results were discussed at a national stakeholder meeting in spring 2020 (online), giving a solid starting point for PDO development resonating strongly with most stakeholders. Second, IOM was contracted to develop and implement the new PDO.

A pilot version of the new PDO was carried out in Uganda in December 2020 by *cross cultural facilitators* recruited especially for Sweden on direct demand from SMA: Facilitators must have experience from living in Sweden and speak the same languages as the resettlement beneficiaries they will provide orientation to. Having a refugee background is also considered a major asset. Communicating and discussing without the need for translation nor (extensive) cultural mediation has been deemed essential to effectively manage refugees' expectations towards resettlement and build the foundation for integration.

One significant best practice example in resettlement found in both the Swedish and German contexts, is the employment of integration workers who have relevant linguistic and cultural knowledge, or personal refugee experience. A common language alleviates communication, while shared cultural knowledge or a common experience of migration can increase trust and put newly arrived refugees

more at ease in a new context and a difficult life transition. Meeting people with respect and openness allows the resettlement regime and receiving state to learn from beneficiaries and consider what they can contribute with as members of society. Furthermore, communication and exchange of knowledge between actors across the system is paramount to ensuring a holistic approach as well as drawing on the expertise in place within the different steps in the resettlement process.

Concluding Remarks: Centring Durability as a Value in Resettlement

As shown, our findings revolve around the notion of integration, questions pertaining to the resettled refugees' agency, and ensuring a functioning and durable resettlement system as a whole through communication and trust.

The stated aim of resettlement is to provide a *durable solution* for refugee protection. While supplying this is something that the EU and its member states have committed to, we argue for further centring durability as a value within the European resettlement system. This means consolidating efforts to focus on durability in all aspects of the resettlement regime: durability must be a central aim in the ideas, practices, and actors that make up the regime, some of which transmit values explicitly, others more implicitly. What is clear from our research is that policy makers must pay attention to how – and which – values are conveyed through resettlement, in every step of the system, as these transmissions are arguably reflective of European migration and integration politics at large and the power relations that exist between Europe and the world beyond its borders. When it comes to the European resettlement regime, we see that these values are multiple and that the resettlement system can thus develop in different directions, depending on the foci chosen by policy makers and practitioners in different states.

We argue that for integration to be successful and resettlement to be durable, access to opportunities that permit newcomers a fair chance at societal membership and a dignified life must be made available. This includes facilitating spaces for resettlement beneficiaries' agency throughout the regime, for 'eye-level' encounters of mutual respect between the actors involved, and for thinking long-term and holistically about integration as an intrinsic part of resettlement. As reflected in the report, when such access is available, resettlement can indeed function as a durable instrument for refugee protection and it embodies an indispensable pathway for those in need of protection.¹¹ Considering the global need for resettlement, the EU and member states can contribute by both making more places available and ensuring durability by shaping policies through a holistic perspective that considers integration a central element of resettlement.

Ultimately, we argue that centring durability in the different processes of resettlement can serve as a way for the EU to commit to the humanitarian values at the core of international refugee protection. Below we provide a list of recommendations based on the best practices analysed in our report and with particular focus on practices conducive to promoting durability as the key aim in resettlement.

Policy Recommendations

¹¹ The provision of protection through resettlement should continue to function as complementary pathways as laid out by UNHCR and not substitute the right to seek asylum which is anchored in international law.

Based on interviews and fieldwork with actors from every step within the European resettlement regime we provide a selection of policy-relevant recommendations that serve to guide resettlement work towards the aim of durability and the humanitarian values that are at the centre of the resettlement regime. These specifically address two spheres of the resettlement regime, namely issues related to beneficiaries themselves and issues pertaining to the resettlement system and the work done by the actors within it.

TARGET THE NEEDS OF RESETTLED REFUGEES:

Meet basic needs according to the specific vulnerabilities

- ◆ Which basic needs are regarded as most pressing can be context dependent. Housing, support networks, and mental health issues are prerequisites for other integration efforts, such as language learning. Meeting basic needs is key to building a durable resettlement regime with a long-term perspective, enhancing durability especially for the receiving societies and resettlement beneficiaries.

Target children's needs directly

- ◆ Children make up their own target group when it comes to all services provided to beneficiaries throughout the resettlement regime. Ensuring that children partake in shaping these services so that their needs are met, and monitoring what their needs are over time, will establish the basis for good (mental) health and adaptation to their new places of residence.

Streamlining information and strategies between pre-departure and post-arrival

- ◆ Connecting the information provided to beneficiaries upon selection and during the PDO to the information shared by integration services in the different receiving countries is essential. Such information should be as context specific as possible and be sure to transmit the same message throughout the resettlement regime. This will aid in 'managing expectations' – an important part of integration work.

Create spaces and opportunities for agency

- ◆ How encounters between beneficiaries and resettlement/integration workers are set up matters. All encounters should be based on mutual respect and meeting each other on 'eye level'. This can entail giving beneficiaries the opportunity to make their own choices, whenever this is practically possible. It can also mean prioritizing pedagogical approaches over amount of information given in e.g., PDOs, and to employ trainers and integration workers with relevant language skills and refugee experience. Such an approach will build beneficiaries' trust in both the resettlement regime and the receiving state, in turn benefiting the integration process.

TARGET THE SYSTEM AND OPTIMISE RESETTLEMENT AND INTEGRATION WORK:

Rely on local and international expertise to develop processes and practices

- ◆ We encourage knowledge sharing between different resettlement actors, experts, and projects. The Swedish Migration Agency's use of MPI and IOM to develop their new pre-departure orientation program serves as one successful example, as well as their communication with former refugees and practitioners for informing the process. Furthermore, any project should include evaluation processes to determine their efficacy, for which the use of experts is particularly relevant.

Employ people with relevant personal experiences, linguistic and cultural knowledge

- ◆ In both Germany and Sweden, employing former refugees or others with relevant linguistic or cultural knowledge as integration practitioners is becoming more common. This not only enhances communication with resettlement beneficiaries, in that information can be provided in a common language and through similar cultural codes. It also facilitates building beneficiaries' trust in the system and provides potential role-models for newcomers. This approach is beneficial throughout the entire regime, not only after arrival.

Involve the public and civil society in integration and resettlement

- ◆ Integration is (at least) a two-way process and cannot be built solely on activities and services targeting refugees. Civil society at large must also become engaged in integration and resettlement processes. One example of efforts made to such an end are the community sponsorship programs seen in Germany and Sweden, which actively create spaces for refugees to meet with peers in the receiving community for mutual exchange.

Fund research on resettlement

- ◆ Continuous funding of resettlement related research will allow the academic community to monitor how the European resettlement regime develops over time. Such research can identify not only the degree to which durability remains a central value in resettlement processes but can also help policy makers and practitioners keep up to speed with needs and shortcomings within the system.

Apply a long term, holistic approach to integration as part of the resettlement system

- ◆ Ultimately, resettlement and integration go hand in hand. Open communication and collaboration across the regime are important, allowing all actors to feel heard and seen, while centring the experiences of the refugees. A holistic approach further entails considering the long-term effects of practices in place in every step of the resettlement process, learning from the best practices of actors in the different steps, and finding a balance which serves to safeguard the humanitarian values that the resettlement system is built on, the rights of refugees, and a sustainable society based on all members' active participation.

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About NOVAMIGRA

Several, partly interconnected crises have profoundly challenged the European project in recent years. In particular, reactions to the arrival of 1.25 million refugees in 2015 called into question the idea(l) of a unified Europe. What is the impact of the so-called migration and refugee crisis on the normative foundations and values of the European Union? And what will the EU stand for in the future?

NOVAMIGRA studies these questions with a unique combination of social scientific analysis, legal and philosophical normative reconstruction and theory.

This project:

- Develops a precise descriptive and normative understanding of the current “value crisis”;
- Assesses possible evolutions of European values; and
- Considers Europe’s future in light of rights, norms and values that could contribute to overcoming the crises.

The project is funded with around 2.5 million Euros under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme for a period of three years.

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