

## 'Refugee Resettlement: Partnerships for a durable protection and reception in France, Belgium and the UK: an exchange of experiences between France, Belgium & the UK'

World Refugee Day, June 20 2013 - city of Lyon, France

On the occasion of World Refugee Day on June 20 2013 and in the framework of the International Catholic Migration Commission's [SHARE Project](#), ICMC, the city of Lyon, Grand Lyon and the NGO Forum Réfugiés-Cosi co-organised a half-day conference in the city of Lyon entitled, '[Refugee Resettlement - partnerships for a durable protection and reception in France and the United Kingdom.](#)'

The conference brought together experts from regional and city authorities, civil society organisations and housing organisations from France, Belgium and the UK to exchange experiences and debate the role of regional and city authorities and their civil society partners in providing shelter for refugees. The conference formed a crucial step in building the [SHARE Network](#) and continuing the SHARE process of increasing the capacity and ability of local and regional actors in Europe to receive resettled refugees.

Conference attendees participated in the city of Lyon's [World Refugee Day Umbrella March](#), organised by Forum Réfugiés-Cosi as an expression of Lyon's solidarity with refugees around the world. The umbrella march has taken place every year in Lyon since 2004, and the city's example has inspired many others across Europe to express their solidarity by also holding World Refugee Day umbrella marches. ICMC, the city of Lyon, Grand Lyon and Forum Réfugiés-Cosi are delighted that conference discussions on the role of cities in providing shelter for refugees took place in this context. (Videos of the conference interventions can be accessed [here](#).)



### Opening remarks

**Hubert Julien-Laferrière, Councillor (city of Lyon)**

welcomed the conference participants on behalf of the mayor of Lyon. He reminded participants of the historic humanitarianism in Lyon, and of the work of the multitude of associations involved in humanitarian action in the city. Many of these associations have recently celebrated their 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, among them Forum Réfugiés, which Mr Julien-Laferrière thanked for their commitment to translating the legal obligation to provide refuge into supportive action in Lyon

([Click here](#) to read a full transcript of the intervention.)

**Petra Hueck, Head of Office, ICMC Europe (Brussels)**

Since 1951, ICMC has identified and accompanied refugees for resettlement in Europe, Southeast Asia, the Balkans and the Middle East. Additionally, ICMC provides expert resettlement personnel to support UNHCR resettlement activities in field offices around the world via the ICMC-UNHCR Resettlement Deployment Scheme. ICMC Europe, together with its partners, follows the policy-making and legislative process in asylum and migration and advocates with the European Commission and European Parliament for rights-based policy development and implementation.

outlined the role of the event and of the broader [SHARE Network](#) in extending European resettlement expertise and building local support for resettlement, both through sharing of experiences at the European level and promoting resettlement as an opportunity for European cities and regions to show international solidarity with refugees and countries of first asylum. Ms Hueck explained how partnerships between governmental authorities and civil society are essential to ensuring the success of resettlement at all stages of the process, including in reception and integration at the local level in areas such as housing, social services, language tuition, cultural orientation, employment, access to education and

health services. Resettlement is an instrument which is offered to only 1% of the worldwide refugee population, and although the numbers are small, she emphasised that *"it is still an instrument that saves lives and as the saying goes, he who saves one life saves the entire world."*

([Click here](#) to read a full transcript of the intervention.)

### Refugee resettlement: a global issue

**Philippe Leclerc, UNHCR Representative in France,**

stressed the importance of resettlement in the context of current refugee emergencies around the world. He provided an overview of the most recent UNHCR statistics, according to which there are currently approximately 15.2 million refugees worldwide (not including those who have recently been displaced due to the Syrian crisis). 800,000 refugees around the world are currently judged by UNHCR in need of resettlement. Mr Leclerc welcomed initiatives such as the French quota programme that considers 100 refugee cases for resettlement each year, and the German decision to grant humanitarian admission to 5,000 Syrians. Nevertheless, he pointed to the need to extend existing capabilities not only for the immediate protection of refugees but also to find durable solutions for those for whom a return to their home country is not an option. *"It is essential that the persons arrive relatively quickly in the resettlement countries,"* he explained *"and that they do so*

Established in 1950, **UNHCR** is mandated to lead and coordinate the international protection of refugees and the resolution of refugee-related situations. Resettlement is one of three durable solutions for refugees that **UNHCR** is mandated to implement together with states. Within the resettlement process, **UNHCR** is responsible for identifying refugees in need of resettlement, submitting refugees for resettlement consideration by states and bringing together resettlement actors and stakeholders to plan global resettlement activities.

*under reception and integration conditions which allow for a durable and dignified settlement in the resettlement country.”* In 2012, 86,400 people benefited from resettlement programmes in 22 different countries around the world.

([Click here](#) to read a full transcript of the intervention.)

## The French resettlement programme

**Brigitte Frenais-Chamaillard, Head of the Asylum Service at the French Ministry of the Interior,**

outlined resettlement activities in France (see box opposite). Parallel to the quota resettlement programme, the French government has also participated in the relocation of refugees within Europe in 2009-10, and received a group of 1,200 Iraqi refugees outside the quota in 2008-9. Mme. Frenais-Chamaillard outlined several areas that the government intends to improve in the near future, the first of which is to minimise the time period between approval for resettlement and arrival into France. She explained the current causes of the delay as a lack of reception capacity, caused in part by the lack of move-on accommodation options for refugees in initial reception accommodation. The French government also intends to make improvements to pre-departure information for refugees travelling to

**Resettlement to France** began in 2008 with the signing of a Framework of Understanding between UNHCR and the French government. The French government committed to examining 100 dossier submissions per year (approximately 300 persons). The French Office of Immigration and Integration (OFII) distributes refugees to one of the five regional/local resettlement programmes. Each programme provides resettled refugees with transitional housing and assistance to find more permanent accommodation and intensive integration support.

France by producing a new pre-departure information guide, and to facilitate faster access to language classes. Mme. Frenais-Chamaillard expressed her confidence in the benefits of the exchange of experience facilitated by the conference, and welcomed the opportunity for the French government to interact more closely with local actors and co-develop tools and approaches to improve the resettlement, reception and integration processes in France.

([Click here](#) to read a full transcript of the intervention.)

## Practices in Rhône-Alpes

**Cécile Dindar, Prefecture Rhône,**

presented current resettlement activities in Rhône-Alpes. The region’s tradition of welcome, dynamic economy and extensive experience and competence of actors working in asylum and refugee related-activities together present a favourable environment for the reception and integration of resettled refugees. Nevertheless, the last few years have seen the evolution of

**Lyon & Rhône-Alpes** is a French region accounting for close to 6 million inhabitants. Although the region has a positive net migration rate, about 75% of its inhabitants are locals. Between 2011 and 2012, the number of asylum seekers arriving in Rhone has grown by 67%, amounting to an overall 3400 individuals.

The region provides one of the five reception and integration programmes for the French resettlement quota led by the NGO Forum Réfugiés-Cosi. Since 2011, 43 households were under the care of the programme.

several obstacles in this area, not least the economic crisis, pressure on the housing market and a rising number of asylum seekers in the region. As a result, 1000 asylum seekers are currently accommodated in hotels or hostels with a further 500 waiting for reception places. 220 refugee households are currently waiting for housing in Rhône-Alpes, an increase of 57% in the past year alone. Mme. Dindar explained that improving reception conditions for resettled refugees in this context is extremely challenging. For the future, she sees it as vital to extend the number of countries involved in European resettlement, whilst also improving practice amongst actors involved in existing programmes.

([Click here](#) to read a full transcript of the intervention.)

## Testimony from a refugee resettled to Lyon

**Mustafa Maurufi**

The 19-year old Afghan was resettled to Lyon from Ukraine with his mother and siblings in April 2013, after having fled Afghanistan several years earlier. Mustafa talked about his life after leaving Afghanistan, including periods spent in both Pakistan and the Ukraine, and described the difficulties of maintaining a livelihood for his family and dealing with relatively widespread racism. Mustafa expressed his gratitude to everyone involved in his family’s resettlement process, and described how the allocation of an apartment in Lyon means he can now concentrate on learning French, look for employment and continue his education.



([Click here](#) to read a full transcript of the intervention.)

## The SHARE Project & housing in the European resettlement context

**Rachel Westerby, City Coordinator, ICMC Europe,**

provided an introduction and overview of the activities and achievements of the [SHARE Project](#). She stressed the importance of city-civil society partnerships in local and regional resettlement programmes, and introduced the growing SHARE Network and SHARE activities such as the [City Exchange Visit Programme](#). Housing, she explained, is a core determinant of the long-term integration of resettled refugees. Within Europe, the availability of housing for refugees has been adversely affected by general pressures on housing supply, in particular for social housing, but also by the politicisation of housing in relation to refugees and migrants.

([Click here](#) to read a full transcript of the intervention.)

The **SHARE Project** is an 18-month, European funded programme led by **ICMC Europe** to build toward a network of European regions, cities and municipalities and their civil society partners involved in and/or with a commitment to refugee resettlement, protection and integration. Although national governments are responsible for the selection of resettled refugees, regional and local authorities and their civil society partners play a central role in offering reception and integration support once refugees have arrived. The success of national refugee resettlement programmes – and of the joint EU Resettlement Programme - thus depends on the commitment, ability and partnerships of cities, municipalities and regions.

The **SHARE Project** offers opportunities for structured dialogue, exchange of practice and networking between cities and regional actors, and between experienced and emerging resettlement countries planning or considering resettlement.

## Roundtable ‘Reception & protection in the city – local partnerships in action’

Moderated by **Belinda Gallup**, Service Manager, Sheffield City Council:

The expert roundtable was comprised of representatives of local authorities and NGOs from the cities of Sheffield, Lyon, Manchester and Bradford, and of an NGO working in the reception of resettled refugees in Belgium. Participants outlined their respective local programmes focusing particularly on housing arrangements, and discussed the challenges they had faced or were facing in terms of providing appropriate housing for resettled refugees. The roundtable concluded with contributors’ suggestions for improving existing housing programmes and increasing the amount of accommodation currently available for resettlement.

### Summary of roundtable presentations:

([Click here](#) to watch a video of the roundtable discussion.)

*The city of Sheffield's resettlement partnership was represented by **Belinda Gallup** (Service Manager, Sheffield City Council. [Click here](#) to read a full transcript of her intervention.*

- The resettlement housing model used in the city of Sheffield has changed considerably since the programme began in 2004.
- When the programme began, Sheffield City Council sourced accommodation predominantly from social housing stock in the city. As social housing became generally less available, the Sheffield programme turned increasingly to the private rented sector to accommodate resettled refugees.
- The city has always consulted with health and educational services on local housing placement decisions within the resettlement programme. To ensure refugees are placed in welcoming local communities, Sheffield City Council tends to locate housing for resettled refugees in areas of the city with more diverse populations.

*The Accelair city-civil society partnership was represented by **Jean Francois Ploquin** (Forum Réfugiés-Cosi) and **Olivier Brachet** (Grand Lyon. [Click here](#) to read a full transcript of their interventions.*

- Within resettlement, it is always important to build strong partnerships with different actors, including those in the social housing sector. There are approximately 160,000 persons listed as waiting for a social housing place in Grand Lyon. Social housing providers are increasingly responsible for housing groups with particular needs and/or vulnerabilities (recently released prisoners, Roma, refugees and so on), and it is important to acknowledge that they face challenges in terms of prioritising available housing.
- In 2003, the Préfecture du Rhône signed an agreement with 26 social housing providers to provide 200 properties for refugees (including resettled refugees) each year for a period of 3 years.
- All available places in the allocated accommodation are filled each year. Places in refugee centres are freed by refugees being able to move to allocated accommodation, thus creating capacity to within the national refugee reception system.
- A particularly successful element of the partnership with social housing providers has been the joint work undertaken by Forum Réfugiés to increase the awareness and understanding of resettlement and of resettled refugees as a client group amongst representatives of the city, landlords and local communities.
- Forum Réfugiés was already involved in the reception of asylum seekers and refugees when the French resettlement programme was implemented in 2008, and so was able to offer reception and integration support to resettled refugees via their Accelair programme, established in 2002.
- In 2011, Forum Réfugiés implemented the direct reception of resettled refugees (arriving directly into housing rather than spending time at a central accommodation facility). While this model can support more rapid integration, it requires planning, and specialised assistance and support particularly focused on the period directly after arrival.

### Resettlement in the city of Sheffield

In 2004, the city of Sheffield became the first UK city to begin receiving resettled refugees. Sheffield currently receives 90 resettled refugees each year, and to date has resettled over 700 refugees from Liberia, Iraq, Somalia, Bhutan, Sudan, Eritrea and Burma.

Sheffield City Council is responsible for sourcing housing for resettled refugees, and consults with health service providers and the city's educational service on local housing placement decisions. Specialist integration support for resettled refugees is provided by the NGO British Refugee Council during the first 12 months after arrival.

Refugees are received directly into housing in the city after their arrival into the UK. British Refugee Council staff provide an introduction to the property and the surrounding area within the first week after arrival, and Sheffield City Council provide housing support including assistance with repairs and mediation with landlords.

Refugees sign shorthold tenancies of up to 12 months in duration directly after they arrive, similarly to others renting properties in the UK, which may be extended indefinitely after the initial tenancy period.

### Reception of resettled refugees in Grand Lyon (France)

Grand Lyon and Rhône-Alpes host one of the five reception programmes for resettled refugees in France, implemented by the NGO Forum Réfugiés-Cosi. Resettled refugees benefit from the Accelair programme, a 12-month integration programme for refugees that provides support in language training, education, integration into the labour market and finding suitable accommodation.

In 2003, national and local authorities and housing agencies of Rhône-Alpes signed an agreement detailing a commitment to supply 200 properties for refugees (including resettled refugees) registered in the Accelair programme each year, thus providing Forum Réfugiés-Cosi with access to the region's social housing stock.

Forum Réfugiés-Cosi furnishes apartments prior to resettled refugees' arrival, and informs the national government when new rental contracts are signed. Resettled families are received directly into their accommodation on their arrival into France,

The Belgian resettlement programme was represented by **Anne Dussart** (Caritas International). [Click here](#) to read a full transcript of her intervention.

- Belgium began a resettlement programme in 2009. Initially, housing in municipalities was not been secured prior to refugees arriving - NGOs were responsible for finding accommodation for resettled refugees in municipalities, engaging social welfare agencies in municipalities where the accommodation was found, and assisting refugees with necessary administrative procedures.
- Municipalities and OCMWs/CPASs were initially very reluctant to offer housing because of existing pressures on supply. There was also not a great awareness of resettlement, and resettled refugees were largely viewed as asylum seekers.
- To try to overcome these challenges, at the end of 2012 the Secretary of State wrote to all 500 municipalities to introduce the programme, provide information on available funding, and request that they participate in the programme by making housing available.
- This communication did not prompt massive involvement in the 2013 programme - just 5 municipalities in Flanders finally received the 30 Burundi refugees resettled to Belgium during this period. Caritas worked at the local level in all receiving municipalities to build awareness of resettlement and ensure refugees are able to access mainstream services to support their integration.
- Belgian NGOs have generally remedied the lack of social housing offered for the resettlement programme by sourcing housing from the private sector on a case-by-case basis, although this is extremely challenging.

The Bradford resettlement programme was represented by **Hiron Miah** (city of Bradford) and **Soyful Islam** (Horton Housing Association). [Click here](#) to read a full transcript of their interventions.

- Bradford is very close to Sheffield, although smaller and with a far higher proportion of the population from black and minority ethnic populations.
- The majority of dwellings in the city (70%) are owner-occupied, with a further 15% social housing and 15% private sector rentals.
- In terms of social housing, and despite the high percentage, only around 2,500 properties are available to let each year and there are 15,000 individuals on the social housing waiting list in the city. So the local authority is under severe pressure in terms of housing all those who are in need. The local authority does not own any social housing, and instead delivers housing assistance through partners such as Horton Housing Association.
- By comparison, the private sector has more availability - there are around 8,000 empty properties that are privately owned.
- Horton Housing have always used a combination of social and private rented sector housing within the Bradford resettlement programme. Currently, housing for the programme is approximately 60% private rented sector and 40% social housing, and the share of private rented sector accommodation is consistently growing as social housing becomes less available.
- Private landlords are more willing to work the programme the more they understand it. They are motivated largely by financial gain and reliable lettings, which Horton Housing can assure them of in the framework of resettlement in Bradford.
- Finding adequate housing for larger families is a particular challenge.
- Political support for the programme is very important - whilst the city of Bradford does not directly operate the programme, Horton Housing and the city work closely together to ensure the strategic suitability of the programme for the city.

#### Housing resettled refugees in Belgium

The participation of Belgian municipalities in receiving resettled refugees is voluntary. Placement of refugees in Belgium is largely driven by local branches of the social welfare service (CPASs/OCMWs) making housing available before refugees' arrival or before they leave the reception centre where they spend 4-6 weeks after arrival into Belgium.

The NGOs Caritas and Convivial have been active in sourcing alternative housing options from the private sector, and work with OCMWs/CPASs to provide integration support - including housing-related support - for refugees during the first 12 months after arrival.

NGOs run group information sessions based at the reception centres that include housing-related information, and accompany refugees during the move from the reception centres to permanent housing.

#### Horton Housing Association - city of Bradford

Bradford began receiving resettled refugees in 2008. The city now receives 100 refugees each year, and arrival from Burma, Iraq, Ethiopia, Sudan, Congo and Tanzania have all included large family units. Horton Housing Association implements the resettlement programme in Bradford, providing housing, reception measures and 12 months integration support.

Housing is sourced from both social and privately owned housing, some owned by Horton, and the procurement process begins when information on the incoming group is received from central government 6-8 weeks before arrival. As in Greater Manchester, Horton incorporates factors such as availability of school places, training opportunities for adults and possibilities for religious worship into their decision-making on local housing placement.

On arrival, resettled refugees are welcomed at the airport and accompanied to a hotel for one night. On day two, Horton Housing, together with educational and health service providers, provides a briefing on what to expect in the first few weeks of resettlement. The families are then taken to the properties, which are fully furnished ahead of their arrival, and introduced the housing, household management, the local area and public transport. Dedicated integration support is provided by Horton Housing Association for 12 months after arrival. Resettled refugees sign standard rental tenancy agreements for their properties, which may be extended after the initial 12-month support programme has ended.

The programme was represented by **Tim Griffiths** (city of Manchester) and **Jeremy Bernhaut** (Refugee Action). [Click here](#) to read a full transcript of their interventions.

- The Greater Manchester housing model incorporates direct entry into accommodation, temporary accommodation for a period of 12 months and assistance to find permanent accommodation.
- In the previous 2 decades, the amount of housing stock retained by local authorities has dramatically reduced as part of an ongoing transfer of stock to external management vehicles and/or independent housing organisations.
- The experience local authorities in the region gained as a result of their involvement in the national asylum dispersal programme (began 2001) has been invaluable to resettlement, particularly in terms of housing placement, partnerships and stakeholder engagement.
- Resettled refugees are effectively given a licence to live in the property for the first 12 months after their arrival, after which they are supported to find permanent accommodation. In some local authority areas, refugees may be able to stay in the original property, whilst in others properties are 'recycled' for use by subsequent arrivals.
- The housing model is thus extremely flexible, both in terms of the prevailing regional housing market and the particular circumstances in each local authority area. The programme also provides some element of choice for refugees about where they want to live in the longer term.
- Direct reception is an extremely important element of the way the regional partnership conceives of integration, as it enables Refugee Action to work with refugees to settle into their neighbourhood and town/city from the moment they arrive.
- Support is 'front-loaded', and particularly intensive in terms of introducing how a modern household functions, household safety and payments for household utilities.

### The Greater Manchester Gateway Accommodation Model (UK)

The North West Resettlement Partnership (the city of Manchester, the NGO Refugee Action and 7 local authorities in the Greater Manchester region) has developed a housing programme for resettled refugees, that has been in use for approximately 9 years. The partnership's resettlement programme currently receives 470 refugees per year.

Refugees are received directly into their accommodation on arrival into the UK, and are responsible for rental payments and other household expenses (supported by social welfare payments). Housing is comprised of a mixture of privately owned and social housing.

When finding accommodation, the city considers the availability of school places and health services in the local area, and any special needs of individuals or family units. The families sign a rental contract permitting them to stay in the accommodation for 12 months, after which they are assisted to find permanent accommodation. Refugee provides dedicated integration support for resettled refugees for the first 9 months of their stay in the UK, and works with local authorities to provide move-on housing support in the following 3-month period.

Integration support is particularly intense at the outset of the 12-month period, focusing on basic knowledge and orientation, and progressively reduced as the support period progresses in order to

### **Roundtable discussion: challenges and responses in housing for resettled refugees**

Roundtable participants were asked to describe challenges they had encountered in housing resettled refugees, and the solutions they had developed in response to them. A summary of their contributions is included below:

- **A general decline in the availability of social housing** across many European countries was identified as a major challenge for housing provision for local resettlement programmes. Many programmes have responded by diversifying their provision through the use of accommodation from the private rented sector - in some cases, housing for particular local programmes is now entirely drawn from the private sector.
- **Limited school places** in areas of cities where programmes have traditionally sought to house refugees has created a need to source housing in alternative neighbourhoods. Some of these are not as diverse in terms of population, and can lack amenities and facilities that are important to some refugee groups such as mosques or halal butchers. Neighbourhood-based services in new housing areas may also lack expertise in working with migrant populations, and will hence require support and information about refugee resettlement ahead of refugees' arrival.
- **Integration** is two-way in the sense that it involves both refugees and receiving communities, and the interests and priorities of both should be balanced, including through local housing placement decisions for resettlement. It may seem sensible for refugees' integration to house one arrival group altogether in the same area, for example, but this can also create a high degree of visibility for the group in the local area, which may not always be welcome, and also risks creating pockets of economic inactivity or disadvantage.
- **Political support** for resettlement needs careful and ongoing management. In some cities and regions, keeping resettlement low profile - 'doing it and not talking about it' - is the best approach to enabling programmes to continue. Politicians are accountable to electorates and so need to be supported to 'sell' migration-related programmes to the general public. They must also be kept fully informed about the activities of local programmes, so they can advocate for and defend them if needed. Involving politicians in activities such as those carried out by the **SHARE Project**, specifically enabling them to meet their peers in other European cities receiving resettled refugees, can also help them to understand more about resettlement and to manage the public presentation of resettlement programmes.
- **Realistic funding** for local resettlement programmes is crucial, both to 'sell' programmes to politicians and the general public, and to operate programmes to a high standard. Future funding for resettlement from the European level is currently a little unclear, but even if funding is reduced it is very important that resources are channelled to the local level and that European-national-local funding arrangements and mechanisms are transparent. Cities may be keen to support humanitarian programmes, but cannot do so without the resources to operate them.
- **Finding housing that meets the needs of larger resettled families** is a major challenge. Solutions include splitting larger families between neighbouring properties which, whilst not an ideal solution, can work if managed well. In the North West resettlement programme in the UK, the partner agencies ensure that refugees are informed about the housing arrangements planned for their family prior to their departure from the country of asylum. As well as managing expectations and avoiding surprise on arrival, this also helps to clarify any issues - such as a younger family member having caring responsibility for an older relative - that might make the planned housing unsuitable for a particular family. Splitting families across 2 properties on the same street but several houses apart does not work so well, as neighbours can become unhappy with people constantly going from one household to the other.
- **Public perceptions of housing for resettlement** are very important. In contexts where social housing is scarce and local waiting lists are long, any public perception that resettled refugees are 'jumping the queue' can be very damaging for resettlement. Providing clear information about resettlement can reassure the general public, as can making deliberate use of mixed social/private housing stock for resettlement.
- **Different refugee groups have different needs related to housing** according to their background and experiences, and it is crucial that support is tailored to specific groups and no assumptions are made. Those who have been resident in refugee camps for very long periods may be completely unfamiliar with modern housing, and those who are not literate and/or do not have any experience of the Roman script may not be able to recognise the numbers on buildings or doors and so struggle to find their house. Support in these cases would need to be intensive and focus, in the first instance, on basic tasks and orientation. Researching refugees' background pre-arrival is extremely important - the North West programme in the UK, for example, received both Ethiopian refugees from camps in Kenya and Ethiopian refugees from urban settings in Egypt. The former required assistance with tasks such as locking and unlocking the door, whilst the latter were very familiar with modern housing, heating systems and so on.
- **The contexts presented by different cities vary a great deal**, even within the same country. Local resettlement partnerships must bring together those actors that are best placed to work on resettlement in that particular city, and must also analyse the local/regional opportunities that exist for resettlement, including options for housing.