



# Pre-departure Orientation for Resettled Refugees

## A Guide



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# INTRODUCTION

This document is a brief guide to Pre-departure Orientation for resettled refugees. It was developed as part of the MOST Project, a transnational project (Modelling of Orientation, Services and Training related to the Resettlement and Reception of Refugees) a transnational project funded under the Community Actions Strand of the European Refugee Fund. It was led by the Ministry of Labour in Finland and also involves partners from Sweden, Ireland and Spain. The overall purpose of the project was to develop comprehensive models for quicker and better integration of refugees, who come directly from crisis situations or refugee camps to the European Union. Under the project, Ireland sought to review and pilot new forms of pre-departure and post-arrival orientation programmes in order to assist those selected to be better informed of the realities of living in Ireland and to give them more control and say over their own destiny. A full report of the review of these programmes and forms of community assistance has also been published as part of the project and this may be useful for those interested in more detailed information on the resettlement process.

This guide is intended to be used for countries who are new to the UNHCR resettlement programme or who are considering joining it and would like assistance in developing pre-departure orientation programmes. It may also be used by those who have been involved in resettlement for a longer time and are interested in reviewing their practices. It was developed through conducting a comprehensive review of Ireland's original pre-departure programme and the piloting of two new models in Thailand and Uganda. Details on these two pilots are included in the case studies provided here.

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## 1) What is pre-departure orientation?

When refugees are offered a chance of resettlement from the country of first asylum, the country offering resettlement often undertakes a selection mission to that country where they interview the refugees that are being considered for resettlement. As part of this process, pre-departure orientation training may be delivered to the refugees, either during the selection mission or may be carried out at a later stage by a cultural orientation team. In some cases it is delivered only to those who have been selected and in other cases it is delivered to the whole group and may include those who are not chosen for resettlement to that country.

The orientation usually gives a brief overview of the country to which people may be resettled, including basic information on topics such as geography, climate, political situation, education, work, cultural norms, gender relations etc. The content of the programme varies according to each country and may also be tailored to the specific needs of the group of refugees to be resettled.

## 2) What are the reasons for doing it?

Pre-departure orientation training demands various resources and is sometimes very difficult to undertake due to logistical constraints (e.g. in the case of dossier selection, emergency cases, medical cases etc.). There are however many valid reasons for undertaking such training and the review of pre-departure orientation in Ireland showed that its impact is quite strong and many of the participants expressed a desire for further training. The reasons for doing it include the following:

- It helps to alleviate stress and trauma for the participants, particularly relating to the journey
- It provides people with an opportunity to prepare for their new life and may encourage people to seek further information where possible
- It allows the receiving country impart information on realities of life in the new country

- Whilst many positive aspects are conveyed, it can also be an opportunity to pay attention to some potential negative aspects
- It allows for more relaxed and personal engagement between the participants and officials from the receiving community, unlike the interviews where the atmosphere may be more formal

### 3) What potential drawbacks exist?

Whilst in most cases, it makes sense to carry out pre-departure orientation, there are also a few potential drawbacks that need to be borne in mind.

- There can be a number of logistical and resource constraints. It works best with group resettlement, but may need to be more limited in cases of dossier selection or other special cases.
- Resettlement can be a very stressful process for some refugees and they may not be fully receptive to the information. Both the Irish and Swedish consultation processes showed that for many the emphasis was on leaving a bad situation behind and not on where they were actually going.
- If too much information is delivered at this stage, it can be off-putting and defeat the purpose of providing clear and basic information.
- It is important to pay attention to who actually delivers it and in some cases where international organisations or local NGOs are used, they may have very little actual experience of the country and may convey an incorrect message.
- It can be difficult to assess its long-term impact in terms of integration as this will ultimately depend on so many other factors. It has been shown however that having access to relevant and correct information is an important factor.

### 4) Who should deliver it?

It makes most sense for the orientation to be delivered by someone who has experience of living in the receiving country and a good knowledge of its structures, processes and culture. It helps also if that person has a good understanding of inter-cultural issues and who may have experience of living in a different culture and the difficulties that may arise. Where feasible, the orientation can also be carried by or with the assistance of a person with a similar cultural background to that of the refugee group and who has also lived in the receiving country. That person could then act as both interpreter and cultural mediator.

If possible, the orientation should be carried out by someone who is not on the selection team and who the refugees will not necessarily associate with the interviews. This person should be neutral in terms of the selection process and this should be made clear to the participants (especially where the orientation is delivered prior to the final decision being made).

### 5) When should it be delivered?

The ideal timing is when the selection process has been completed and the training is then carried out with the group who have been selected and notified of that decision.

Logistical difficulties may make this difficult, but in all cases it should always be carried out after the interviews as it may influence the interview process and people may be too focused on the interviews and therefore not able to absorb information and participate in the training.

### 6) How long should it last?

The actual length of the training will depend on a number of factors such as:

- The specific needs of the group and their exposure to Western society/education levels etc.
- The resources allocated to the training
- Logistical constraints in bringing the refugees together for the training and other factors such as provision of childcare, catering etc.

- The specific training methods used
- The type of information that the receiving country wishes to impart.

In the case of Ireland, two models were tested, one which lasted one day (Uganda) and another of one week (Thailand). The one week training was an exception and was due to the specific needs of the group.

A general recommendation is that the training should last at least one whole day and should include sufficient time for discussion and questions.

## 7) What topics should be included?

The topics to be included will vary according to the needs of the receiving country and the refugee participants. In countries where the language is very unfamiliar to the participants, it is advisable to also spend some time introducing a few key phrases of the language. The list of topics to be covered should be flexible and there should be scope for participation and the inclusion of new topics. The topics that could be covered include the following (the list is not exhaustive):

- Hopes and fears about moving to the new country
- Political/legal and administrative structures
- Law and order and the role of the police
- Climate, landscape, geography (and how to prepare for the climate)
- The journey and the first few days
- What you can expect when you arrive
- What kind of work/training you can do (and potential difficulties in accessing labour market)
- Education opportunities for children and adults
- Housing and accommodation (important to include photos)
- Health issues and maintaining good health
- Food
- Traditions and festivities
- Religion
- Marriage systems and traditions
- Gender relations & equality issues
- Women & reproduction issues (may be done separately with women)
- The role and value of children
- Transport and travel
- Communication and greetings

## 8) What should not be included?

There is no topic that should absolutely not be included, but it is important to bear the following in mind:

- Keep the information simple and do not provide too much detailed information on any topic.
- Information on Government/political/legal systems should be kept very brief and simple.
- Do not include long lists of names of agencies, programmes etc. The focus should be on getting some the principles across and not on small details (e.g. there is no need to name all the agencies that provide support to refugees).

## 9) What training methods work well?

A number of training methods were piloted by the Irish Office of the Minister for Integration and it was concluded that the following methods work well:

- Visual aids such as photos, drawings, films. These can also be used to stimulate discussion e.g. ask people to look at photos in small groups and comment on what they see. Short videos or photos/

stories from refugees already resettled in the country can also enhance the process and provide a more real picture.

- Participatory methods that allow for interaction and encourage people to engage in the training and to ask questions or raise issues/concerns. This can include small group work where time and logistics allow for it.
- Whilst PowerPoint presentations can be used and can be useful for displaying photographs etc., there should not be too much emphasis on written text, unless it is clear that the participants can read and understand the text. If written text-based presentations are being used, the trainer should also make sure that everything is explained and understood by the participants.
- It is important to allow for sufficient breaks during the training and to make sure people do not become tired/thirsty/hungry.
- In cases where children are also in the room, it is important to provide some activity for them such as colouring books and crayons.
- Participants should be fully briefed at the beginning about the purpose of the training, confidentiality and its separateness to the selection process. They should be encouraged to ask questions in a non-intimidating and relaxed atmosphere.
- It helps to include some humour as this lightens the atmosphere.

## Case Study I: 1 week Cultural Orientation for Karen Refugees in Thailand

### Overview

A one week cultural orientation programme was undertaken in August 2007 in Ban Don Yang refugee camp on the Thai – Burmese border with a group of 'ethnic Karen' refugees, who were already accepted for resettlement in Ireland. The training programme was conducted by an official from the Integration Unit of the Office of the Minister for Integration and a former resident of a camp along the Thai- Burmese border who is now an Irish citizen.

The experience from the selection mission interviews carried out in June 2007 suggested that the 'ethnic Karen' that were accepted for resettlement to Ireland had little idea of what to expect upon arrival, relatively low education levels and a very different culture. It was therefore decided to pilot a one week training programme that would allow sufficient time to address a wide range of issues and allow plenty of time for discussion around each of the topics. The primary objective of the cultural orientation programme was to provide a realistic picture of Irish life and society, whilst emphasising rights and responsibilities. The group of refugees had been living in the camp for over ten years, where they had no right to work and received their food in rations.

Training was held with two groups each day, with each session lasting ca. two hours. Each day concentrated on specific topics and included a revision activity from the day before and a brief discussion on another topic not in the programme. The training was delivered jointly by the Irish official and the cultural mediation worker, who also provided interpretation. He also gave examples from his own experience of moving to Ireland, which was found to be very beneficial.

Whilst there was a list of topics to be covered, participants raised other issues which they wanted covered including contraception, women's issues and avenues available to persons who feel that their rights have been denied.

Training methods were varied and participatory and there was sufficient time to use methods such as role plays and demonstrations. Photographs and other visual aids were also used to stimulate discussion.

## Review/Learning Points

A self-evaluation was conducted by the trainers and the following points were noted:

- The revision exercises showed that people were more receptive to information that had been demonstrated (e.g. queuing, using cutlery).
- Some of the information was interpreted in a simplistic way and some nuances were not understood.
- Despite the time spent during the orientation, it was still difficult for people to form a really realistic picture of life in Ireland, but it did introduce some basic principles and prepare people.
- The use of the inter-cultural worker was found to be invaluable and the group was very interested in hearing about his experiences and he was also able to explain things in way that was more easily grasped and had a better understanding of people's fears and expectations.
- No topic appeared to have been taboo or off limits, including discussions about the role of women and domestic violence, older children (particularly girls) moving out of the family home, children and child protection.
- It was very useful to carry out the cultural orientation programme in the camp. It was on the group's own territory and they were in familiar surroundings. It was also easier for the trainers to relate what people's lives in the camp would be like compared with their life in Ireland.
- At the end of the training people were asked about how they now felt about moving to Ireland. Many expressed a sense of relief, excitement and alluded to specific points they had learnt during the training.
- The trainers found it very useful to use a person's own life and experiences as a starting point and to relate the information back to that.
- Small group work was an effective method for stimulating discussions.
- A week was seen to be a long time and people appeared tired by the fifth day.

## Case Study 2 Cultural Orientation for Sudanese Refugees, delivered in Kampala

### Overview

In September 2007 the Irish Office of the Minister for Integration undertook a selection mission to select Sudanese refugees, currently living in various camps in Uganda. Once the interviews were completed, a pre-departure orientation programme was delivered by a consultant working with the OMI and co-ordinating the MOST Project. A representative of the Garda Síochána (Irish police force) also delivered some of the training relating to law and order and the role of the police, emphasising their role in assisting people. Training was held with two groups on two different days, with each training day lasting 5-6 hours, including some breaks. The training used a combination of small group exercises, formal presentation and general discussion on the topics. As the time was limited and a large number of topics were to be covered, there was not a large amount of time available for group work etc.

At the beginning of each day the participants were asked to discuss in pairs their hopes and fears about coming to Ireland and to raise any issues they would like to discuss during the training. Many of the topics they raised were to be covered in the training and other topics were then included as required (e.g. dowry system, family reunification).

There were ca. 20 participants in each group as well as a number of children who attended some of the training and local interpreters were used. There was a higher number of females in each group.

Some of the questions/issues asked by the participants surprised the trainer such as whether they would still be allowed to have children in Ireland, our dowry/bride-price system and whether they could return home if they were unhappy. They also placed a lot of emphasis on food and whether they could cultivate their own crops/vegetables.

## Review/Learning Points

A self-evaluation was conducted and the following points emerged:

- Despite the same format and content being used in the two groups, the reactions were very different, with one treating many of the issues in a more light-hearted way and the other having some more negative reactions (e.g. about our lack of dowry system) and overall appearing to have a more negative attitude.
- The participants were very relieved to hear that all the topics would be covered again in greater detail during the post-arrival orientation programme.
- At the end of the day the participants seemed to have a better understanding of the practicalities of travelling to Ireland, the initial stages and what they could expect in terms of training, schools, employment possibilities etc.
- The participants realised that there are cultural differences between what they are used to and Irish culture. In some cases this does not mean people giving up their culture, but they were made aware that in certain circumstances they would be required to make some compromises and they would not be able to practise certain cultural traditions.
- Some seemed relieved at the end of the training and certain fears they had might have been alleviated e.g. knowing that they could still have children in Ireland.
- It also gave the trainer an opportunity to find out what were some of the pertinent issues facing the group and could be useful in planning for services when they arrive.
- In a few cases, the training may have caused people to consider whether they really want to move to Ireland and how they could adapt to such a different culture. Whilst it is unlikely that it will cause anyone to withdraw their application, it may help in preparing to deal with certain issues.

A few limitations/drawbacks of the training included:

- The time period of one day was relatively short and did not allow for any in-depth group work or revision.
- It was sometimes difficult to achieve a balance between promoting a positive view of resettlement and preparing for potential negatives.
- Communicating through an interpreter (and in one case two interpreters) can have its limitations in terms of making sure that the correct message is understood and can also cause concentration difficulties as people may not pay attention when another language is being spoken.
- As the training took place before the participants had a final decision on their resettlement application, some were a little apprehensive and this may have affected their ability to participate fully.





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