



## **IOM'S SUPPORTING ROLE IN PRE-DEPARTURE ORIENTATION**

### **Context:**

Over the past 25 years, IOM has conducted pre-departure orientation courses for over 350,000 refugees accepted for resettlement at over 60 refugee-processing locations around the world.

In Europe, IOM works closely together with the Norwegian, German, Dutch, UK and Belgian governments to implement pre-departure cultural orientation training for quota and dossier-based refugees. IOM has also carried out orientation for other destination countries, including Finland and France. The Austrian, Spanish and Swiss governments have recently expressed interest in IOM's pre-departure orientation programmes, while France has renewed its interest. Consequently, orientation for Swiss, Austrian and French caseloads will begin taking place in Lebanon for Syrian refugees.

At a time where refugee advocacy groups in several European countries together with UNHCR have successfully called upon their governments to create more opportunities for resettlement and humanitarian admission - in particular due to the Syrian Crisis - it is time for Europe to go one step further. Within the framework of the Union Resettlement Programme and individual EU MS efforts, the aim is to increase resettlement and resettlement-related opportunities for refugees as well as enhance the quality of the existing resettlement programmes by introducing more tailored pre-departure orientation components. The establishment of a Union Resettlement Programme under the Asylum and Migration Fund 2014-2020 put forward by the EC is a clear incentive for EU Member States to work together towards both a quantitative increase in current resettlement figures and a qualitative strengthening of the European dimension of resettlement.

### **WHY CULTURAL ORIENTATION?**

Cultural orientation prepares refugees by providing practical information on the country of destination, and assists refugees in developing the skills and attitudes needed to succeed in their new environment. These tailored sessions are designed to assist refugees to develop realistic expectations and prepares them for their initial resettlement period, as well as facilitates their integration while helping them to become self-sufficient more quickly. It provides an opportunity for refugees' concerns and question to be addressed.

### **IOM's added value**

"Courses by IOM's multi-lingual, multi-ethnic trainers help refugees anticipate integration challenges and facilitate their transition into the receiving society." Pindie Stephen, 2014

### **Long standing history of pre-departure cultural orientation programmes**

At the request of the Australian, Canadian and US governments, IOM has been implementing robust orientation programs over the past 25 years; these include the [Australian Cultural Orientation](#), [Canadian Orientation Abroad](#) and [the US Cultural Orientation](#).

In Europe, IOM has long standing programmes with the Norwegian government and The Netherlands, both of which

include innovative approaches, with a significant emphasis on linking overseas and domestic orientation and managing expectations both of the refugees and receiving communities.

The Norwegian Cultural Orientation ([NORCO](#)) team makes use of cross-cultural trainers and includes regular information seminars with municipalities and receiving communities in order to increase the flow of information between overseas and domestic programming. With the Netherlands Cultural Orientation ([NLCO](#)) programme, IOM carries out the initial pre-departure orientation programme for cases<sup>1</sup> selected on dossier basis, often in remote and hard-to-reach locations. Information flow between pre- and post-arrival phases is ensured through a social intake conducted at the start of the NLCO-training which measures participants’ existing knowledge about the Netherlands and collects practical biographical information in particular on schooling and medical needs to be shared on a need-to-know basis with the partners on the receiving end in the Netherlands, with due regard for IOM’s data protection principles.

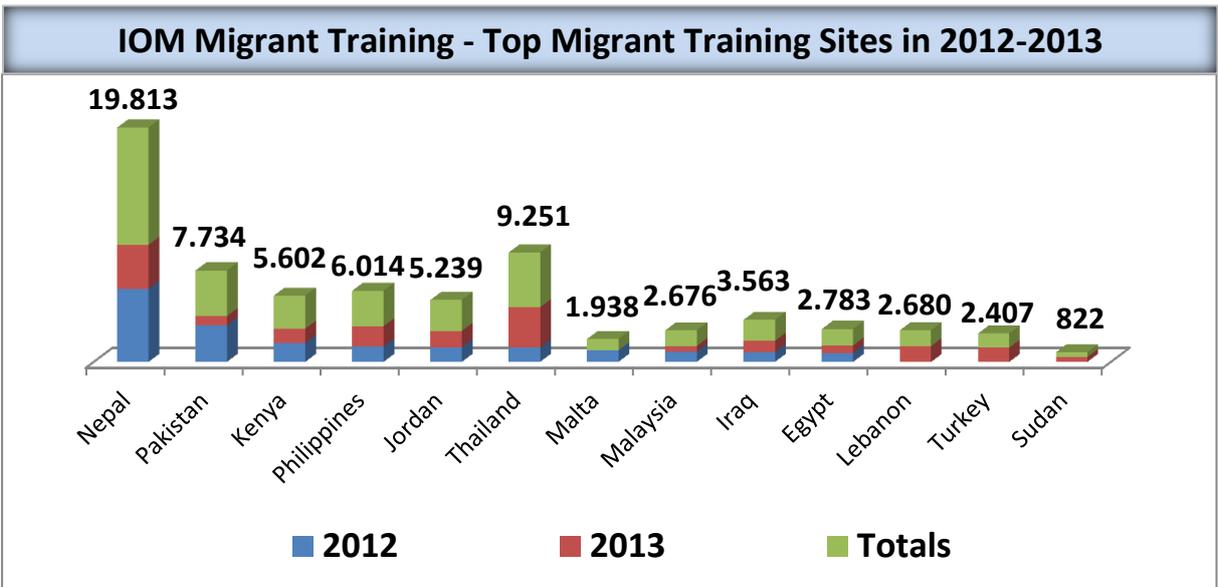


IOM works closely with governments to identify the key priority messages and values that are critical for refugees’ successful resettlement. Topics addressed in the orientation include, but are not limited to, housing, health, money management, settlement services, public transportation, education, cultural adaptation, rights and responsibilities, and functional language training.

Upon request, IOM also carries out information campaigns, conducts needs assessments and produces cultural profiles of new refugee

populations designed to help settlement service providers better understand potential integration challenges these refugees may have, and better plan for their arrival.

Picture: ©IOM Lebanon, participants receiving their certificates after a CO training for German HAP.



<sup>1</sup> Dossier cases are selected by resettlement countries solely on the basis of a review of the UNHCR case file

### Core objectives:

- Providing refugees with accurate information about the resettlement process and life in the country of destination
- Helping refugees develop realistic expectations about settlement services they will be eligible to receive
- Assisting refugees to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for successful adaptation to their new society
- Addressing refugees' concerns and questions.

“The CO session was very useful and rich in information, and all our questions and concerns were addressed. The trainer was very patient and fielded all questions in a trusting manner.” NLCO participant

Pre-departure cultural orientation forms an integral part of the suite of resettlement services IOM can provide and ensures that integration starts at the earliest opportunity. IOM recognizes that orientation not only empowers migrants, fully informing them of their rights and responsibilities, but also reflects an investment in their future.

### Opportunities, requirements and challenges for pre-departure orientation programmes in Europe:

#### Opportunities

- In light of the Syria Crisis, **build on the encouraging dynamics** reflected in Europe's response to the call for increased resettlement places and other protection alternatives.
- **Enhance the quality** of resettlement and humanitarian admission programmes by including pre-departure orientation components.
- Recognize and build on the **positive role diaspora can play** through reaching out to community based and diaspora organizations to provide positive examples through role models of migrants/refugees who have already integrated in the destination country.
- Building **welcoming communities**, refugees should be made to feel valued for their rich cultural background and experiences and, conversely, receiving communities should be made aware of the positive contributions that refugees offer, including social, economic and cultural contributions.
- IOM works closely with governments to identify the **key priority** messages and values that are critical for refugees' successful resettlement. Resulting from years of experience gained from working with a variety of destination countries, IOM has developed a solid understanding of the topics which need to be covered in order to effectively help refugees anticipate integration challenges and facilitate transition into their new society. **Topics** covered include: housing, health, money management, role of settlement service providers, education, cultural adaptation, rights and responsibilities, and others.

#### Requirements:

- Develop trainings in close dialogue with destination countries and future hosting communities to ensure the link between pre-departure and post-arrival activities;
- Provide orientation in refugees' native language and address content, skills and attitudes, including pro-activity, self-sufficiency and resourcefulness;

- Ensure that there is an open, respectful, non-threatening and secure learning environment in which gender equality is promoted whereby all participants are shown respect. Given that many refugees have little or no formal education background, trainers should take this into account together with their cultural background when delivering orientation.
- The development of tailored orientation by receiving countries sends a strong signal that these countries value these new arrivals, recognize their social, cultural and economic capital, and paves the way for future social interaction and learning opportunities where participation of all genders is not only encouraged but expected.

**Challenges:**

- Ensure that pre-departure orientation goes beyond just sharing of information about receiving countries; it should also address the psychosocial well-being of participants, taking into account the social, anthropological, cultural and the psychological aspects of resettlement. As such, it is vital to develop pre-departure courses which are holistic and address the concerns of participants. Topics include cultural adaptation, culture shock, communication, family dynamics, gender, and cross-generational issues among others;
- Ensure that trainings are participatory and learner centered; and that activities are designed to cater to a variety of adult and children's learning styles;
- Maintain realistic expectations of refugees and receiving communities through well-managed reporting and communication strategies.

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