



Summary

The International Organization for Migration is the leading organization working with migrants and governments in providing humane responses to migration challenges. Established in 1951 to resettle displaced persons from Europe, IOM has evolved over the years and currently operates in 213 offices worldwide, managing some 1,200 projects in 111 countries. It has 4,100 staff members and a programme budget of over USD 640 million. As of June 2004, IOM has 105 Member States and 27 Observer States. It holds observer status at the United Nations and has formal cooperation agreements with many UN agencies.

IOM works in the four main areas of migration management: migration and development; regulating migration; facilitating migration; and forced migration. The migration of workers, students, professionals, and family members is not only recognized as a defining feature of the world today, but is considered to be a positive one. IOM offers pre-consular support and pre-departure services to migrants and governments not only to make the migration process easier but also to enhance the migrants' chances of succeeding in their new environment. One of these services is pre-departure orientation/cultural orientation (CO).

IOM IS COMMITTED TO THE PRINCIPLE THAT HUMANE AND ORDERLY MIGRATION BENEFITS MIGRANTS AND SOCIETY.

AS AN INTERGOVERNMENTAL BODY, IOM ACTS WITH ITS PARTNERS IN THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO:

ASSIST IN MEETING THE OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES OF MIGRATION;

ADVANCE UNDERSTANDING OF MIGRATION ISSUES;

ENCOURAGE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT THROUGH MIGRATION; AND

WORK TOWARDS EFFECTIVE RESPECT OF THE HUMAN DIGNITY AND WELL-BEING OF MIGRANTS.



Cultural orientation class in Kakuma Camp, Kenya, for Somali-Bantu refugees bound for the United States.

Pre-Departure Orientation / Cultural Orientation

Rationale

Anyone moving to a country where culture, tradition and practices are different from one's own can be expected to undergo an adjustment period of variable duration and difficulty. Refugees accepted for resettlement to third countries often come straight out of camps and have little, if any, knowledge of the societal and economic practices of a modern, capitalistic country.

Migrants, permanent or temporary, may be less vulnerable, considering the more regular and voluntary process they undergo in preparing for such a move. However, many of them, like the refugees and humanitarian entrants, may have unrealistic and perhaps inaccurate expectations of life in the new country. These

expectations will not only cause stress to the newcomers upon their arrival, they can also cause pressure on the social service providers of the host community who work to help the newcomers adjust.

The provision of CO reduces anxiety on the part of refugees and migrants by painting a more realistic picture of what awaits them. It equips them with coping skills to deal with the unfamiliar, and helps them shape attitudes towards life in their new society. In parallel, CO also provides an opportunity to establish links between the country of origin and the country of destination, as well as an opportunity for the receiving community to learn more about the culture and profile of these new members of their society.



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Objectives

IOM provides CO for various countries including Australia, Canada, Finland, Norway, and the USA, currently with a combined programme value of over USD 6.6 million, spread in some 30 countries, and targeting 58,700 participants. Although CO approaches and curriculum content vary according to categories of clients as well as destination country realities and requirements, there are broad themes that are shared and applicable throughout. These themes may be summarized into CO objectives, as follows:

- a) provide participants with factual information about the country of destination;
- b) assist them in developing skills needed to succeed in their new environment, e.g. how to find accommodation, how to get a job, how to access health care facilities; and
- c) explore attitudes necessary for successful integration, e.g. flexibility, open-mindedness, initiative, and self-reliance.

CO empowers participants to adapt more rapidly and successfully to the day-to-day demands of any new environment.

Curriculum Content

CO curricula take into account the facts regarding the country of destination, the settlement realities facing newcomers, and the

cultural factors that may affect this settlement. As such, they are “living” documents that are constantly adapted and updated to the needs and abilities of each client group. Topics covered typically include: general information about the country of destination; community services available to newcomers; housing; education; health; legal systems; employment; money management; and topics relating to cultural adjustment and integration.

Training Methodology

CO sessions are “learner-centred”; the trainers directly involve the participants and ensure that they take ownership of the classes. The training methodology is hands-on, meaning that participants are not simply told about life in their new country, but are given the opportunity to “experience” it through role-plays, case studies, problem-solving activities, games, debates, and other activities that require the full involvement of the participants. Classes are designed to ensure that whatever is presented is actually assimilated by the participants.

Effective CO requires the trainers to know the background of their participants. Trainers draw parallels and connections between a participant’s point of reference and their understanding of the societal expectations and behavioural norms of the country of destination. They are sensitive to the cross-cultural issues that may challenge

the participants’ cultural values and traditions, and create opportunities for open discussions on these topics.

The training lasts anywhere from one to ten days (or 5 to 50 contact hours) depending on the setting (i.e. urban or camp), on the level of need, on practical considerations and on the requirements of the specific country of destination. Delivery of sessions is flexible; sessions can even be scheduled on weekends or in the evenings, to meet the needs of the participants. Class sizes vary, as well as the age range of the participants.

New Directions

Traditionally, participants in IOM’s CO programmes have been refugees and humanitarian entrants bound for resettlement countries. During the last decade, IOM has widened its scope by implementing CO programmes for independent migrants such as professionals, skilled workers, labour migrants, and family members of immigrants. IOM will also continue to develop CO for specialized cases, e.g. the pre-literate, children, and youth. In coordination with governments, IOM is also expanding its CO services into other non-traditional areas, including post-arrival CO. Post-arrival CO seeks to build the capacities of the receiving agencies or the host communities by educating them about the newcomers. IOM will continue to work closely with relevant government agencies to identify further CO programme needs.

Conclusion

By taking advantage of IOM’s CO expertise and global reach, migrants, host communities, and governments benefit: migrants gain through reduced levels of anxiety and increased chances of a smoother integration; host communities gain through a decreased need to support the newcomers and an increased level of respect toward the newcomers on the part of community members; governments gain through decreased costs as newcomers become self-sufficient and productive members of the receiving society more quickly.



Pre-departure orientation class in Manila, Philippines, for skilled migrants bound for Canada.