



GOOD PRACTICES

ON LINKING
PRE-DEPARTURE
AND POST-ARRIVAL
SUPPORT



Facilitating the integration of resettled refugees
in Croatia, Italy, Portugal and Spain

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I. Introduction

The COMMIT project aimed to enhance pre-departure orientation and link pre-departure and post-arrival measures, while strengthening integration support, by encouraging citizens' commitment to the integration of resettled people and fostering welcoming communities. It was designed both to support the work of central and local authorities and that of their partners (including reception centres and NGOs) and to leverage the added value of structured and coordinated volunteering for sustainable integration at the community level.

The countries covered by COMMIT – Croatia, Italy, Portugal and Spain – are relatively new resettlement countries, with diverse approaches to reception and integration. COMMIT aimed to contribute to a more holistic approach to the sustainable integration of resettled refugees in their new communities in these countries. The project was informed by IOM's protection-oriented and holistic resettlement support, with a range of services provided along the resettlement continuum. The objective was to ensure a joined-up approach to pre- and post-arrival support that recognizes the role of refugee agency and the two-way nature of the integration process.

COMMIT focused on a number of specific areas to achieve this objective:

- 1) *Enhancing pre-departure orientation (PDO)*, including by mainstreaming vulnerability in PDO curricula, strengthening PDO trainers' knowledge about reception contexts, and enabling contacts with reception community members beginning in the pre-departure phase;
- 2) *Systematizing community support*, including through building the capacities of key stakeholders in receiving communities and piloting community mentorship schemes with specific attention on supporting vulnerable groups; and

- 3) *Fostering transnational exchanges* between newer and more experienced resettlement countries to identify and disseminate lessons learnt and best practices beyond the project's geographical scope.

The underlying assumption behind the COMMIT project was that integration is necessarily both a gradual and a two-way process, requiring investment, participation and cooperation on the part of both resettled refugees and the country of resettlement and host communities.

COMMIT was therefore built around multi-stakeholder partnerships between international organizations, central and local authorities, civil society organizations, migrant and refugee groups and associations, and academic partners across the project countries. It relied on a participatory approach that involved refugees, host communities and relevant stakeholders in the integration process and leveraged different but complementary backgrounds, expertise and skills. It also fostered 'welcoming communities' by actively engaging citizens, including those with a migrant/refugee background.

This report provides an overview of the key good practices identified in the context of this COMMIT project.

II. Good Practices

ENHANCING PRE-DEPARTURE ORIENTATION (PDO)

Throughout the project, the COMMIT project team and national resettlement programme stakeholders engaged in conversations to build on experiences in the different countries and exchange good PDO practices. A wide range of entities and individuals (professional and volunteer) working with beneficiaries provided valuable insights about refugee experiences of adapting to and integrating in their new societies, as well as practical suggestions for improvements to services. These exchanges also stimulated reflection around, and produced input for, the fine-tuning of PDO materials. This was one of the key ways the COMMIT project linked support between the pre-departure and post arrival phases. Incorporating new material and/or improving content and methods of the PDOs helped to reinforce key messages for resettlement beneficiaries all along the resettlement continuum, helping to manage their expectations and preparing them better for resettlement.

As part of this work, the COMMIT project actively encouraged discussions around strategies to improve support for resettled refugees in the process of integration, including through the involvement of local communities and professionals providing daily support for these refugees. The multi-level and multi-stakeholder approach directly supported the regular fine-tuning of PDO materials conducted in the framework of each national resettlement programme, enabling the circulation of best practices and diverse feedback.

Developing targeted PDO materials to address the specific needs of resettling refugees

In addition to that, three PDO handbooks were developed to promote a targeted approach to PDO training that takes into consideration gender, psycho-social and age-related needs of resettling refugees; namely:

COMMIT TOOLS



MAINSTREAMING GENDER IN PRE-DEPARTURE ORIENTATION SESSIONS GUIDELINES FOR PRACTITIONERS

These [Guidelines](#) have been developed to guide users in the implementation of a comprehensive gender-sensitive approach to PDO training. They include good practice examples in gender mainstreaming from existing IOM PDO (and post-arrival) training sessions, which have also inspired the development of recommendations.



TRAINING REFUGEE YOUTH: PRE-DEPARTURE ORIENTATION YOUTH

This [Handbook](#) aims at supporting the delivery of pre-departure orientation sessions for young refugees being resettled. The Handbook addresses themes ranging from building friendships in school, bullying and classroom etiquette to freedom of religion and expression, culture and money management skills. Based on a learner centric, participatory and interactive methodology, the Handbook promotes the creation of a positive learning space where young refugees do not only feel comfortable but also are empowered to share their opinions, thoughts and feelings.



MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT FOR RESETTLED REFUGEES

These [Guidelines](#) aim to support resettlement actors practitioners in understanding and addressing the mental health and psychosocial needs of refugees throughout the resettlement cycle, from pre-departure to post-arrival. The first section of the guidelines covers the phase of first asylum to help understand the experience and responses of refugees immediately prior to resettlement and explores the possible psychosocial reactions of refugees to events and adversity. The second section describes each phase of the resettlement process and related psychosocial impacts, providing key recommendations and resources for all resettlement actors and host communities on improving mental health and psychosocial support for resettled refugees throughout the resettlement process. The five annexes provide more detail on basic psychosocial skills that can be used by all resettlement staff.

Improving national PDO programmes and practices to strengthen the link with post-arrival support

In **Italy**, the regular update of PDO materials was bolstered by a broader focus on potentially vulnerable people – notably young refugees and refugee women – and links between the pre-departure and post-arrival phases were strengthened. The revision of the Italian PDO curriculum was undertaken alongside the development of the manual. It therefore incorporates perspectives and experiences typical of young refugees and women, and aims to encourage the participation of women and young refugees in PDO sessions.

PDO sessions in Italy now include video conference call between PDO participants, representatives of the Italian reception/integration authorities and the IOM Resettlement Unit. These calls reinforce PDO messages about the support to which resettlement beneficiaries are entitled. They also encourage the process of trust-building between beneficiaries and the Italian authorities by giving refugees the opportunity to raise their concerns and ask questions directly to the authorities. Many of the most frequently asked questions during these calls have been incorporated into the PDO curriculum.

In addition, a family that was to be resettled from Sudan was put in touch, before their departure, with the mentor assigned to them in Italy (with support from reception staff). Such calls proved extremely beneficial in providing refugees with a wider overview of the reception context and supported the parties in getting to know each other prior to the refugees' arrival. It is now planned to replicate the exercise for as many individuals/families as possible, which will not only support them in their integration but also provide further inputs for the improvement of PDO materials and strengthen the link between the pre-departure and post arrival phases.

In **Portugal**, updates to the PDO curriculum and training materials were the result of meetings and consultations with national stakeholders. These updates took place more regularly during the COMMIT project, thanks in part to a new feedback mechanism for the evaluation of PDO exercises. The existing post-evaluation questionnaire was modified to better address refugees' needs and be more inclusive. New feedback-collection activities were introduced, including a video call between IOM Portugal staff, PDO participants, IOM PDO trainers and – whenever possible – hosting institutions. These calls facilitated collaboration among the different actors involved in the resettlement process and helped

trainers to identify relevant information and strategies for each group attending PDO sessions. Post-arrival interviews were also conducted with resettled refugees and hosting institutions.

In 2019, IOM Portugal organized visits for Cultural Orientation Unit staff to the IOM offices in Cairo and Istanbul, enabling in-person discussions and meetings that improved procedures and communication channels.

The PDO programme in Portugal was finetuned as follows:

- The curriculum, including key messages, was fine-tuned and reorganized based on feedback gathered through the evaluation mechanism.
- The PDO leaflet in Arabic was updated with practical information and a list of contacts for times of need.
- Sections of the curriculum focusing on women and young refugees were updated, including with a wide range of specific situations and related information as well as specific tools, particularly for skills development.
- The supporting materials were also fine-tuned, with information and activities adapted to the Portuguese context, and made more inclusive to help trainers tailor sessions to the specific needs of different groups of beneficiaries (who may vary in terms of background, education and experiences).
- The post-PDO and post-arrival questionnaires were reformulated with a more gender-sensitive and inclusive vocabulary and replacing words/sentences with symbols whenever possible (for non-literate participants).
- Video calls were facilitated between institutions operating reception centres and those PDO participants to be hosted in those centres.
- Specific training in Portugal was held for IOM trainers from Turkey and Egypt on mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) in PDO, to empower trainers to address difficult emotional situations that may occur during PDO sessions. The trainers also virtually met different reception staff and exchanged information and knowledge with key integration actors, strengthening both the PDO and the links between pre-departure and post-arrival.

In **Spain**, the Ministry of Employment, Migration and Social Security and IOM discussed potential updates in person and via email in order to ensure that different points of view were taken into account.

- The updated materials include a much greater range of information.
- Nine annexes provide innovative and stimulating activities to complement the curriculum and encourage the active participation of participants.

- A video about Spain (with English subtitles and audio narrative in Arabic), originally developed by IOM for refugees being interviewed by the Spanish authorities as part of the selection process, will now also be shown as part of PDO. This will help to reinforce consistent messages throughout the resettlement continuum. It is also a key first step to strengthening the direct involvement of Spanish reception entities in PDO sessions.
- A short-animated video addressing frequently asked questions is under development.

Linking PDO with post-arrival support in those contexts has allowed to ensure the following:

- Consistent messaging: designing PDO and post-arrival support in tandem helps ensure consistent messaging for both refugees and host communities, which in turn improves information retention.
- Connecting refugees with host institutions/individuals before departure helps to reinforce the messages provided during PDO, including managing expectations; builds trust; and contributes to stress alleviation
- Early engagement with both refugees and host communities improves ownership of the process and helps identify dynamics and needs early on in the process.

Evaluating the effectiveness of PDO

Monitoring & Evaluation initiatives are a critical component of successful and sustainable programmes, which goes beyond the demonstration of results, reporting and accountability towards donors. First and foremost, they are a key step towards learning and improving programming represent an opportunity for critical analysis, and may help to identify challenges, address them early on and draw lessons for future activities, whether in the same or in other contexts. Evaluations are instruments of change, and avoid a perspective exclusively centered on the single intervention or action, in favour of the exchange of experiences and towards the creation of added value.

In order to respond to the core functions of evaluation and continue working towards improving PDO programmes and outcomes across Europe and beyond, the COMMIT project developed a PDO toolkit that can be used and applied to assess the effectiveness of PDO programmes; and on that basis, to improve them beyond the project's lifetime.

The toolkit to designed under the COMMIT project provides the context for evaluation; practical suggestions for the administration of evaluation questionnaires; and a guide to analysing and using the data gathered. It includes a number of questionnaires that can be used/adapted at the end of sessions and at a later date (in the country of resettlement) to measure both the immediate and longer-term impacts of the training.

FOSTERING WELCOMING COMMUNITIES

COMMIT sought to build and systematize community support to help resettled refugees transition from short-term integration services (i.e. services provided upon arrival for a specific period of time) to long-term self-sufficiency and full participation in their host communities. Related activities implemented under COMMIT involve building an enabling environment – or welcoming communities – by working with members of host communities and refugees to increase mutual understanding. This can be done in and for groups or through one-to-one mentorship schemes.

These activities can be implemented before resettled refugees arrive (for example, by preparing communities for arriving refugees) or, more often, following their arrival and during the integration process. Following arrival, activities can be targeted towards specific subjects (e.g. MHPSS) or groups (e.g. teachers) as needed in each context.

COMMIT based activities on good practices and lessons learned from existing resettlement or humanitarian schemes, which stress the value of peer support and the social involvement of volunteers – and aimed to further enhance these.

SENSITIZING THE HOST SOCIETY ON THE RESETTLEMENT OF REFUGEES AND PROMOTING SOCIAL MIXING

A major COMMIT objective was to foster welcoming communities. In Portugal, Croatia and Spain, sensitization and training activities were carried out to build the capacity of local stakeholders in receiving communities to conduct integration activities and to mobilize community support for resettled refugees. The sessions were designed in line with local contexts and needs to ensure they

were appropriate and targeted. The project targets of 10 sessions per country were exceeded, with 40 sessions reaching 1,349 people.

In **Croatia**, activities targeted several groups: school and university students; their parents; and people working with resettled refugees.

For students and their parents, the aim was to increase awareness of the conditions of resettled refugees in Croatia and of opportunities for local communities to facilitate their integration, including through volunteering. Following these activities, a large number of students wished to volunteer with resettled refugees. Most participants also recognized the opportunities for local communities to assist in the integration of both resettled and non-resettled refugees.

The activities for professionals aimed to enhance their integration capacity, while involving local-level NGO stakeholders (particularly those with strong volunteer networks), in order to address the multiple needs of refugees. These activities targeted teachers, other educational, employment and local authority staff, social workers and others working with resettled refugees, such as NGO staff. The sessions were very positively evaluated by participants and had real benefits in increasing practical and intercultural knowledge. The elements most valued by participants included: sharing of experiences from a wide variety of job sectors; concrete information on opportunities for the integration of resettled refugees and on their needs (including psychosocial well-being, education and employment); and networking opportunities, which will help participants to coordinate their daily work with resettled refugees.

In **Portugal**, the sensitization sessions aimed to increase knowledge about the psychosocial well-being of refugees and mobile populations; deconstruct myths about refugees' mental health; and raise awareness about what communities can do to promote refugees' resilience and psychosocial well-being. They included practical considerations related to psychosocial support and the promotion of mental health, and were tailored to the needs and profiles of each group of attendees. Target participants included professionals who work with refugees on a regular basis (including in reception facilities), those who are involved in the provision of care and/or who interact directly with migrants and refugees and/or those who work in key areas of integration (education, employment, health, social support, vocational training, reception and policy). The feedback from participants – particularly on the opportunity to share experience between attendees from different fields of work and expertise – was so positive that additional sessions were implemented.

In **Spain**, the sessions were designed to bring together refugees and members of host communities to encourage empathy and the sharing of experience and to promote mutual understanding, respect and cultural sensitivity. They also raised awareness about the migration situation in Spain. These elements strengthened support networks and interpersonal relationships and paved the way towards initiating community mentorship groups. The sensitization activities achieved high levels of visibility, thanks to support from Spanish civil society organizations. They included a concert, gastronomic and cultural workshops, visits to cultural sites, and an intercultural day. The consensus was that the activities achieved their aims and had a positive impact in strengthening links between host communities, resettled refugees and professionals working in reception and integration.

Lessons learned

A number of key lessons were learned during the implementation of sensitization sessions in Croatia, Portugal and Spain, which were translated into recommendations for future sessions or similar endeavours in other countries:

- The sessions were largely carried out by local civil society organizations, which was very effective. Reaching target populations will be further improved by involving local organizations that have already established relationships and trust with these populations.
- Activities that did not require particular competencies/prior knowledge (such as art workshops, sport games, musical events etc.) are very effective in connecting refugees and host community members, particularly in situations where there are language barriers and no interpreter is available.
- More frequent workshops should be provided for professionals working with refugees, starting prior to the arrival of the refugees and continuing throughout the integration process.
- In order to address bias against non-resettled refugees (who arrive in Europe spontaneously), when dealing with participants with no specific knowledge on asylum/reception/integration, it is recommended to provide information on the international protection system and different statuses (for example as an introduction to the workshop).
- All external factors that may hinder participants' active engagement in activities should be taken into account during the organization phase. Suggestions include keeping these sessions separate from other events and limiting the duration and amount of information provided, to avoid information overload and ensure engagement and retention.

- Video materials, didactic exercises, personal stories from refugees and other tools that enliven discussions should be incorporated into the sessions, to stimulate participants' interest and enhance their level of attention.
- The capacity-building dimension of sensitization sessions for professionals and local stakeholders dealing with refugees should be increased, with concrete/practical/technical information particularly valued by participants for helping to develop useful skills for their day-to-day work.
- Teaching/awareness-raising methodologies should be tailored to the age and knowledge of participants. Child-appropriate methods include storytelling, role-play, drawing, interactive discussions help engage students with difficult themes (e.g. non-violent conflict resolution, intercultural awareness etc.).
- Students/children should always have the choice to opt in or out of proposed activities touching on sensitive topics.
- During sessions aimed at professionals who work with refugees, the diversity of participants (in terms of age, sector, level of experience etc.) ensured accumulation of different experiences, knowledge and skills which contributed to the quality of the discussions and identification of solutions. Diverse participation is recommended for future workshops.

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**PEER-TO-PEER MENTORING AS AN
EFFECTIVE MECHANISM TO FOSTER
REFUGEES' INTEGRATION IN HOST
COMMUNITIES**

A number of countries and organizations have introduced mentorship schemes for resettled refugees, for example in Denmark, Italy, Poland and Slovakia. These are designed to *complement* rather than *replace* national resettlement schemes, and to create multiple impacts: practical support for resettled refugees; wider networks and community integration for refugees; and benefits for the mentor, including increased empathy, awareness and skills. The COMMIT mentorship focus aimed to leverage volunteering cultures in host countries and recruit volunteers to act as 'social bridges' between newcomers and the host population while providing tangible support for refugees in their daily lives. It also recognized that volunteer activities are most effective when embedded in institutional frameworks to avoid duplication of efforts and ensure accountability.

Mentorship creates opportunities for communities to participate in the integration process, promotes dialogue and exchange and helps to demystify bias and manage mutual concerns and expectations. With a focus on individuals – the mentee and

the mentor – greater space is available for both parties to grow, with particular benefits for mentees in terms of increased self-reliance, self-confidence and resilience (and reduced dependency on external service providers).

COMMIT TOOLS



PATHS TO INCLUSION: TRAINING FOR COMMUNITY MENTORS COMMUNICATION, INTERCULTURAL AND SOCIAL SKILLS

The [training manual for mentors](#) is designed for use by organizations wishing to establish mentorship schemes for resettled refugees. It provides an introduction to mentoring, followed by modules covering: the roles of a mentor (alongside official integration support); the ethics and responsibilities of mentoring; training and activities to improve communication skills, including intercultural communication; and practical guidance for specific situations (including language practice for mentees). It also provides self-reflection, self-care and support tools for mentors.

The aim is to ensure that mentorship schemes operate within an ethical and supportive framework and to the benefit of both resettled refugees and mentors themselves, in order to create links within communities and promote successful integration.

The training manual is already in use in Italy and Croatia.



GUIDELINES FOR PILOTING MENTORSHIP SCHEMES

In addition to the training manual, COMMIT produced guidelines for [piloting mentorship schemes](#) for resettled refugees. These provide practical tools for those wishing to establish such schemes and are designed for use with the training manual – but can also be used in other contexts. The guidelines cover the basic steps for piloting mentorship schemes (from planning to implementation) and include templates for the required documents.

PROMOTING EARLY LABOUR-MARKET INTEGRATION

Being employed improves material and personal well-being; can increase participation in communities and mutual respect between newcomers and hosts; builds resilience and self-confidence; and decreases the burden of support on the resettlement country.

The COMMIT project aimed to broaden the focus to other areas of integration – mental health support, community mobilization, specific needs and populations – including through a more holistic approach to labour-market integration. Related

measures should take into consideration the specific needs of different populations, as well as the numerous barriers faced by resettled refugees that may make it harder for them to join the job market. These measures should also be linked to wider initiatives within communities to ensure that both peers and employers are part of a welcoming environment that can reduce or eliminate such barriers. Finally, refugees themselves should be supported *before* arrival in the resettlement country to prepare them for the reality (good and bad) awaiting them.

COMMIT TOOLS



LABOUR-MARKET INTEGRATION OF RESETTLED REFUGEES IN THE EUROPEAN UNION: GUIDELINES FOR PRACTITIONERS

The [guidelines on labour-market integration](#) were designed for all actors involved in the pre-departure and post-arrival phases of resettlement – namely PDO trainers, hosting institutions, social workers and community mentors – as well as for other potential stakeholders in resettlement countries: employers, public and private service providers, civil society organizations and others .

They provide the context for labour-market integration, including the barriers faced by refugees in accessing employment markets in host countries. They also provide specific and practical information and tools to help resettlement actors to support resettled refugees in defining and implementing employment objectives and related job-seeking strategies. The guidelines include recommendations on the need to include related information and advice in PDO.

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PROMOTING REGIONAL EXCHANGES TO SCALE THE APPLICATION OF GOOD PRACTICES

In the context of the COMMIT project, webinars were organized to promote the tools developed and practices adopted under COMMIT. These webinars which were attended by a variety of stakeholders provides a forum for discussions and conversations around the tools and good practices to foster resettled refugees integration in their host communities. As with other aspects of the COMMIT project, the purpose was multiple: not only to ensure resettlement actors knew about the tools, and how to use them, but also to foster networking and exchange between them – and with refugees themselves. These connections should be made not only between different actors *within* contexts (e.g. within countries or within a specific phase of resettlement), but also *between contexts*: across the different phases of the resettlement continuum.

- COMMIT Final Event: Facilitating the Integration of Resettled Refugees (Thursday, 29 April 2021)
- Labour Market Integration Promoting the Employment of Refugees in Europe (Tuesday, 30 March 2021)
- Mainstreaming Gender along the Resettlement Continuum: Towards an inclusive integration approach (Wednesday, 21 October 2020)
- Preparing Refugee Youth for Resettlement: The Role of Predeparture Orientation (Tuesday, 09 June 2020)

Recordings of all four webinars and the final event can be found [here](#).

Using the COMMIT tools

The COMMIT tools are designed for use by any resettlement country. The idea is that they can be adapted for use in any context, and for all actors. They can be used as is, or as a starting point for the adaptation of existing materials.

PDO designers and trainers can use the tools – particularly, but not only, the gender and youth guidelines – to review curricula and delivery methods. Those working in resettlement countries can use the guidelines, as well as training manuals, to promote understanding and increase skills. All actors should take what they need from the tools, and what they can use in their context – recognizing the importance of maintaining the links between pre- and post-arrival support.

The tools are just one part of the COMMIT strategy. It can be used as an example, or as the basis to plan and implement future work. It is designed not only to provide practical advice, examples and guidance, but also an ethos; a way to design a holistic resettlement strategy that recognizes and builds on the synergies between different parts of the resettlement continuum and its actors and beneficiaries. It is designed to be replicated.

III. Conclusions: Lessons learnt and recommendations

The COMMIT project successfully brought together previous lessons learned and practical innovations in a holistic package that can be used by resettlement countries – old and new – to improve services for resettled refugees. This success in both development and implementation serve to demonstrate further the value of linking pre-departure and post-arrival support.

Pre-departure orientation is an integral component of successful resettlement – and it is most effective when linked closely to reception and integration actors and activities in the country of resettlement. Integration support after arrival is more successful if it continues a process begun prior to departure. Consistency and planning are key to helping both refugees and host communities prepare. Improving links and networks between actors who might not normally interact between PDO trainers and mentors; between social workers and administrators in countries of first asylum; between refugees and their case worker on arrival can also bolster other aspects of resettlement programming and implementation, increasing mutual understanding, knowledge and skills.

The COMMIT project and good practices developed in that context has also shown that successful integration requires the active participation of all stakeholders and the promotion of engagement: community engagement, between resettled refugees and resettlement actors; and between resettled refugees and members of host communities. PDO, alongside sensitization and awareness-raising sessions and mentorship programmes proved to be excellent practices to ensure all

stakeholders can engage in resettlement programmes. Active participation improves ownership, improves knowledge, improves skills, promotes the creation of networks, and helps to ensure sustainability.

Finally, continuing to foster and create opportunities to exchange experience and good practices is a good practice in itself that is key to improving resettlement programmes – at all stages of the continuum.

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Facilitating the integration of resettled refugees
in Croatia, Italy, Portugal and Spain