

# Relocated and Resettled Persons Report



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CH-1214 Route de Pré-Bois 1  
Switzerland

Telephone: +41 22 730 4222

Telefax: +41 22 730 4200

E-mail: [secretariat@ifrc.org](mailto:secretariat@ifrc.org)

Web site: [www.ifrc.org](http://www.ifrc.org)

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Action of Red Cross on Integration

# Relocated and Resettled Persons Report

2019

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## INTRODUCTION

Established in 2017, the “Action of Red Cross on Integration of Relocated and Resettled Persons”, or ARCI, project set out to do exactly that; support the integration of refugees and asylum seekers arriving in the EU under relocation and resettlement schemes.

Implemented through the German, Bulgarian and Croatian Red Cross National Societies, funded by the EU’s Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), and managed by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the project sought to apply participatory approaches to supporting people who were newly arrived in the EU, with a focus on providing clear, useful, tailored information.

As well as sharing facts and advice in relevant languages and through appropriate channels, the ARCI project also offered skills and language training, along with support in accessing education, the job market and basic health services, and aimed to boost social cohesion by bringing new arrivals and host communities together for activities and events.

Research for this report was carried out in July 2019, as ARCI entered its final few months, to capture best-practices and learning to apply to future projects, and highlight key policy and advocacy opportunities to support refugees and asylum seekers, host countries and host communities.

## RELOCATION AND RESETTLEMENT

*Resettlement* is a globally established practice enabling the legal movement of people in need of international protection from one country to another, with resettlement schemes facilitating transfer from an initial safe country—often one hosting large numbers of refugees—to destination countries offering permanent refuge.

In the EU, resettlement specifically refers to the legal transfer of refugees residing in a country outside the EU to an EU-member country.

Under EU resettlement schemes, member states voluntarily agree a target for the number of people to be resettled within a set time period.

Under the current EU resettlement scheme, 20 Member States have pledged to accept a combined total of 50,000 people by October 2019, with more than 22,500 people resettled between 2015 and 2017.

Since 2015, the majority of people in need of international protection resettled in EU countries have been transferred from Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon.

Discussions have been ongoing since 2016 to set-up a permanent EU Resettlement Framework as part of the reform of the Common European and Asylum System.

Launched in September 2015, the *EU Emergency Relocation Scheme* aimed to facilitate the transfer of asylum seekers between EU countries—namely from Greece and Italy, which at the time were both seeing large numbers of arrivals, to other less-affected EU countries.

Application for relocation was only open to nationalities with an overall asylum recognition rate of 75% or higher in EU Member States, limiting the scheme to people from Eritrea, Syria, Yemen, the Bahamas, Bahrain, Bhutan, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates.

Although there was an initial target to relocate around 120,000 people, by 2017 little more than a quarter of that number had been transferred. This was due in part to the low number of

people eligible for relocation under the rules, but also a large fall in the number of people arriving in Greece, particularly from Turkey, following a March 2016 EU-Turkey Statement declaring that all new irregular migrants crossing from Turkey to the Greek islands would be returned to Turkey, that for every Syrian returned to Turkey from the Greek islands another would be resettled from Turkey to the EU, and that all routes for irregular migration from Turkey to the EU would be blocked.

The EU Emergency Relocation Scheme formally ended in September 2017, though relatively small numbers of people continue to be transferred under bilateral relocation agreements.

Under both resettlement and relocation schemes, preselection of people to be resettled or relocated is carried out, based on agreed criteria, prior to transfer. On arrival in the receiving country, people transferred under resettlement—having already been granted some level of international protection in the country they are being transferred from—typically undergo a fast-track process to receive formal refugee status in their new country, while those transferred under the EU Emergency Relocation Scheme entered the receiving country's normal asylum system.

**What is AMIF?**—the EU's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) was established by the European Commission to provide funding from 2014 to 2020 for activities promoting the efficient management of migration, and the implementation, strengthening and development of a common Union approach to asylum and immigration.

AMIF is focused on four specific objectives:

- Strengthening and developing the Common European Asylum System
- Supporting legal **migration** to the EU and promoting the **integration** of non-EU nationals
- Delivering improved, fair and effective return strategies
- Ensuring that EU States most affected by migration and asylum flows can count on solidarity from other EU States.

## RED CROSS RESPONSE TO THE MIGRATION CRISIS

Making up the world's largest humanitarian network, Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies have been at the forefront of supporting people affected by recent increases in migration into the EU. From providing immediate humanitarian lifesaving and life-protecting assistance to vulnerable people in departure countries, en-route, and on arrival in the EU, to supporting the orientation and integration of refugees as they establish their new lives, to working with governments and the EU to ensure fair, effective policies enabling safe, legal movement of people seeking refuge, Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies have been there every step of the way. <https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/what-we-do/migration/>



### ■ Bulgaria

Of all the partners in the ARCI project, the Bulgarian Red Cross Society arguably faced some of the toughest challenges.

Often cited as the poorest country in the EU, situated at the start of established routes leading towards central and western Europe, home to one of the least-spoken national languages on the continent, and with the fastest-shrinking population in the EU, for many Bulgaria has long been considered a transit point rather than somewhere to settle.

However, having as a country volunteered to receive relocated and resettled refugees, the Bulgarian Red Cross Society committed through the ARCI project to assist people arriving with information and assistance to support their integration into Bulgarian society.

### Ongoing Exodus

Having initially signed up to accept more than 1,300 people from Greece and Italy through relocation, plus a further 110 under the resettlement programme, by early 2019 only 60 people had arrived in Bulgaria through the relocation programme, and four families through resettlement.

By mid-2019 of those who had arrived through relocation only one was still in Bulgaria.

Three of the four resettled families had also left.

Despite this seemingly relentless exodus, the Bulgarian Red Cross Society has remained committed to supporting refugees and asylum seekers for as long as there is need.

“We help with almost everything,” explains Bulgarian Red Cross Society ARCI programme manager Violeta Galabova.

“Legal support, health, education – enrolling children in school and kindergarten, accompanying people to hospital, registering with GPs, these are all things where our staff, social mediators and translators play a role.

“We’ve delivered trainings for peer-to-peer mentoring in schools, held cultural events, and produced an information brochure as well—it’s in three languages and has information about Bulgaria.

“We have a map of how to get to various other useful organisations, information about the health system, how to enrol for Bulgarian language courses.

## case study

### MJ



MJ came to Bulgaria as a refugee from Syria four years ago. He now works for the Red Cross teaching language skills to pass the Bulgarian driving theory exam.

“Before sitting the practical driving test, people need to go through a theoretical exam first, so I help people learn the theory.

People often don't initially understand the different laws and regulations here in Bulgaria.

I've already passed the exam and been through the process myself, so I'm familiar with what people need to learn, what challenges they might have, I speak Arabic, and I'm from the same background as the people I'm helping so it's easy for me.

Sofia is a big city and sometimes people need to have a licence for work, some families need a car for getting their children around, and sometimes people can find work as drivers.

When we announced that we would do a driving licence language course, we had room on the course for 15 and 40 people applied. Two women have already passed the exam and three more people will sit the exam next week. Hopefully we'll do a repeat course, because the demand is there, I have people calling me up asking if they can do the course.

The Red Cross has basic language courses too, but there is a need for this kind of specialised, practical course.

I learned Bulgarian through a Caritas mentorship programme which paired Bulgarians together with refugees and we had meetings once a week. As a refugee, finding opportunities to connect with Bulgarian people can be really hard, so these regular meetings were really helpful, but it doesn't happen in one step.

Bulgaria doesn't have such a culture of community groups so it can be hard to introduce people into Bulgarian society.

The most problematic thing for me was finding an apartment and a job, registering with the health service, all the bureaucratic things you have to go through. Accessing medical services is hard, you need to have someone with you to translate and interpret. I had to take my mum to the hospital and I was struggling to understand what the doctor was saying. There are social mediators who do accompany people but for them it's not possible to go everywhere with everybody.

In the beginning when we arrived, for years it was very difficult to get information but now I know the language and where to ask it's easy. NGOs have realised it's something they need to focus on so there is more and more information available. It's got better, but again it's the language barrier that is the biggest problem.

I realised that I could have Bulgarian friends and be a functioning part of culture and society when I met Bulgarians who were studying Arabic language and culture.

That wasn't part of the mentorship programme, it just happened randomly through another Arabic-speaking friend. The most important things are contact with people and the language.”

“We shared the brochure with the State Agency for Refugees to take to Turkey with them and give to people there who might come to Bulgaria.”

## Identifying the Basics

Focussing on basic steps which could enable new arrivals to establish sustainable lives in their new country, much of the Red Cross work supporting refugees and asylum seekers has concentrated on the brass tacks of language and employment.

Recognising that, despite widespread demand for labour, many people arriving in the country struggled to find jobs that could enable them to stay – and with asylum seekers in Bulgaria legally allowed to work after three months in the country—the ARCI project organised an employment fair to match employers to refugee and asylum seeker job-seekers.

“We contacted potential employers and invited them to present at an event to engage with potential employees,” explains Galabova.

“We helped people write their CVs and advised refugees which jobs might be suitable for them.

“Around 60 refugees and asylum came looking for work, there were eight employers, and about 20 people found jobs working in hotels, restaurants and factories.”

With the success of that first event, a further job fair is planned for Plovdiv, Bulgaria’s second city, to cater to refugees and employers there, while volunteers and staff in Sofia continue to research job opportunities, approach potential employers, and support job applications in the capital.

## Language Barrier

On the language front, Bulgarian Red Cross scored an early coup by gaining recognition from the government for its language courses, meaning it can certify students attending its classes and sitting exams up to intermediate (B1) level—the only non-governmental organisation able to do so.

“It’s great that the we are recognised by the state,”

says Yoana Argirova who manages the information integration centre for refugees where language classes are held.

“It saves a lot of messing around with administration for people to sit exams at a separate centre, and means people can gain recognition for achieving the grade when they reach it without having to wait to take the exam externally.”

Classes run to 120 hours over two months, a big ask for people in terms of achieving the required level in a short time, but enough to give people a start towards finding sustainable employment.

“Language really is the biggest barrier for people when they arrive here,” Argirova explains.

“It’s possible for people to find work on the black market without it, but there’s no progression, the money is low, and people are very open to being exploited.

“If people don’t speak any Bulgarian it’s very hard to find a job that pays enough to cover rent and living costs, so hopefully the language they learn with us here can help give people a bit of a foothold at the start, but even with the language things are hard.

“People will stay if they can see there are opportunities, that it is possible for them to do so,” she adds.

## Socio-Cultural Mediation

Key to providing effective support to people, says Argirova, has been the role of Bulgarian Red Cross social workers, many of whom have backgrounds in the countries where refugees and asylum seekers are originally from.

“Everything relies on our social workers, they are our link to the refugee community,” says Argirova

“The relationships and trust they have built with people are a real example of best practice.”

Despite the close relationships established, Argirova says it is important people understand it is not a friendship and they cannot rely on the Red Cross or social workers for everything.



## case study

### VLADIMIR

A Social Worker with the Bulgarian Red Cross, Vladimir Panov's Arabic language skills have been vital in his role as a Social Mediator working with refugees in Sofia.

"I do translation, accompany people to appointments, help communicate with state institutions, things like that. Sometimes it's just about explaining refugees' rights. Often people working at institutions think refugees don't have any right to services.

UNHCR held workshops with institutions about the rights of refugees and now there is a lot more awareness, but people can still be a bit wary.

There are not big numbers of refugees here and generally people don't even notice, but if anyone talks about refugees publicly the reaction is almost universally negative.

It's ignorance and populism really. They're an easy target, and there are parties that exist solely on these issues – they only talk about migrants or Roma people, apart from that they don't have anything.

This is one reason resettlement has been a problem in Bulgaria.

Core provision should be accommodation, language courses, and some family allowance. This is what was in place until the end of 2013, it existed, but it wasn't renewed and now it has all stopped.

Integration is really a benefit for the communities refugees arrive into, not just the refugees themselves, but people don't see that.

There are two municipalities that have agreed to take refugees through resettlement, which is good progress. For them it is probably a financial decision, there is some money attached.

The money comes from AMIF so the money for the refugees is not coming out of the municipal budget but a lot of people don't understand that—they just see refugees getting support that most Bulgarian people don't.

Hopefully things will go well with these two municipalities and encourage others to do the same.

But we need the government to move things forward.

The state agency for refugees is responsible for processing refugees when they arrive, but they are not responsible for integration afterwards.

Refugees arriving can't speak Bulgarian, but they may well have other useful vocational skills.

Unfortunately, it is a bureaucratic nightmare to get those existing skills recognised and certified.

There was a government plan, which was a good one, for language courses, followed by vocational training, and then subsidised work experience.

But the language courses didn't happen, without Bulgarian nobody could qualify to do the vocational training, and employers wouldn't take untrained refugees who didn't speak Bulgarian.

Most of the refugees who stay in Bulgaria, it's at least partly because they have been able to find jobs.

More and more there is a need for Arabic speakers and refugees are working in Bulgarian businesses and international companies – about half are working in call centres and others in private businesses.

The salaries are not great, but they are just enough to live on."

## case study

## MOHAMMED

Mohammed\*, his wife and four children fled Syria and found refuge in Turkey for four-and-a-half years before being accepted by Bulgaria under the EU resettlement initiative. Five months after they were approved for resettlement, the family flew from Istanbul to Sofia in February 2019. After a month in a reception facility while their documents were processed, the family then moved to an apartment in Sofia, in one of the few municipalities with an integration support programme providing resettled refugees with accommodation for their first 12 months in the country.

“When we moved to this flat Sami, the Red Cross cultural mediator, was helping with the process for me to be able to have surgery on my hands, which were injured in a bombing in Syria.

We had several medical consultations to investigate the damage and see what could be done. One hand now is much better, it improved a lot after the surgery, but I still need another operation to activate the other fingers.

In Turkey it wasn't possible to have the operation, but almost as soon as we arrived in Bulgaria we could see the doctor.

I have been working for the last two months, operating a sewing machine in a clothes factory, and my wife has been working in a restaurant close to our home.

Sami has helped a lot with finding jobs and making sure we have the paperwork we need.

We like Bulgaria very much. The kids all feel very good in school, they speak Bulgarian and also Turkish because they were in school in Turkey before.

To start with we had private Bulgarian classes with another family in the community centre, funded by ARCI.

The people here are very friendly, we don't have any problems with neighbours or at school.

In Turkey it was very difficult to find work because of my injuries, but I managed. We lived in a rented flat which my wages helped pay for, but we also got an allowance from the government. What I earned was not enough to support the family so it was good to get some additional help.

Unfortunately, the pre-departure information about Bulgaria provided in Turkey described a much better situation than we discovered when we arrived.

At the moment the arrangement is that the municipality covers the rent and utilities for a period of one year.

This is good, but we had been told that every month we would get some subsistence allowance too, and actually that's not the case – we got a one-off initial grant of 500 lev (approx. €250).

Together, my wife and I bring in around 1,500 Lev (approx. €750) per month. If we stay on these salaries there's no way we can live. We can't pay the rent and feed our children.

For six of us it costs about 1,000 Lev (approx. €500) each month just for food, that's cooking at home every day. The rent for this flat is 1,200 Lev (approx. €600) not including bills. We also need to buy clothes for the children and things for school so it's just not enough to get by.

Sami and colleagues from UNHCR helped us apply to the social welfare system for some financial support, but even if we are approved it will only be 372 Lev (approx. €190) once per year, so it's still not much.

The uncertainty of what happens next after this one year is a huge worry, nobody is able to tell us

## case study

what will happen. The expectation is that after one year we'll be able to support ourselves, but from our experience that's just not possible.

For basic expenses, not including clothes and shoes, the minimum, minimum we need is 1,800 Lev (approx. €900) per month. The kids come back from school and ask us why they don't get pocket money.

When we were in Turkey, the money I received from working, plus the money from the government, allowed us to live more like a normal family.

We were so happy to be coming to an EU country, we were expecting so much, but things are actually much more difficult here.

When we arrived the Red Cross and the municipality were helping us every day.

They came with us to the hospital, to get the ID cards, to pay the health insurance, to help with enrolment at school. The state agency for refugees was very supportive too.

Our kids have made friends, they have settled well. We have felt very welcomed here.

We want to stay, but we need to make 2,000 Lev (approx. €1,000) per month for the family to live safely and that's just not realistic.

I have a Syrian friend in Germany with his wife and two children. They are in a flat paid for by the authorities, they are not allowed to work because they are still in the asylum process, and they get €450 per month to cover food and living costs, which is enough for the family of four to live on.

If provisions here were similar to Germany or other European countries, or if the salaries were

comparable, then we and others like us would never think to leave.

If it's not financially possible to live here, people will go to other countries to find somewhere they can.

No one will remain if there are no options for employment that will cover costs, or more support from the government to make it sustainable.

Without that, the next family will move on too and the family after that, like the families before all left.

We realise it's hard for everybody – even for Bulgarians it's hard if you have more than two children. But families need to have more financial and legal support, and for long enough until they can learn the language and find well enough paid jobs to have a decent life.

I feel good here and the family feels good here.

But I fear what will happen when the integration contract expires, it bothers me every day, we're not able to cope alone and we're really reliant on other people.

I hope there is some chance for a better job or additional financial assistance so we can afford to stay here, otherwise we will have to look for ways to go somewhere else. We have no idea what will happen, we just want to have a good life for our children."

Mohammed and his family left Bulgaria in September 2019.

*\*Name has been changed.*

It's a view echoed by Mohamed Ala Eddin, a Palestinian who has lived in Bulgaria for almost 30 years and worked with the Bulgarian Red Cross as a social worker and translator for the last two.

"We are trying to raise people's awareness of their rights, that they have a right to these services, it's not because we are the Red Cross and we are doing them a favour," he says.

"People often arrive not knowing much about their rights in general so they assume they don't have a right to anything - it's our job to help people to know their rights, help empower them, and to help them claim them."

**“The situation of the journey here has been very tough for them so it's good to have some events that are fun, when they can enjoy being kids.”**

The information integration centre, Ala Eddin says, has also provided an important function as an opportunity for people to socialise.

"We've had many women coming here for the language classes," he says. "It's great that they can meet some Bulgarians here and also people from their own societies."

## Social Integration

Specific social events have also been organised by Bulgarian Red Cross Society to support integration, with activities ranging from bread-making sessions, to museum visits and a trip to historical sites in Plovdiv.

Involving refugees and asylum seekers, Red Cross staff and volunteers, and people from local host communities, these events have been aimed at bringing communities together, supporting integration and hopefully providing some respite and escape from the difficult realities people find themselves in.

"The children especially need these kinds of events," says Galabova.

"The situation of the journey here has been very tough for them so it's good to have some events that are fun, when they can enjoy being kids."

But despite these best efforts to provide some level of normality, and a platform from which to build from, for the vast majority of refugees and asylum



seekers arriving in Bulgaria their presence in the country remains tenuous.

One of the families who came to Bulgaria through relocation and subsequently left - but who have since been deported back to Bulgaria from western Europe - explain the reasons for their departure.

“We were [originally] relocated from Greece, they said they would take us to a country in the EU and provide support for us,” explains the mother of the family, who asks not to be named.

“We stayed in the reception camp in Bulgaria for four months, after that they gave us papers but told us we were on our own - no housing, no health care, no education.

“Everyone else who arrived at the same time as us in the relocation programme, they all left because of that.”

Having been back in Bulgaria for one year, the family are trying to get by as best they can, but things remain far from stable.

“The last year has been difficult, it’s not easy because our life is complicated – sometimes we have work, sometimes we don’t, we’re trying to learn the language,” says the mother.

“We are renting a flat in Sofia, but we don’t get any support with that.”

The Red Cross and other NGOs, she says, provide vital practical support.

“If I’m not well, the social mediator from Bulgarian Red Cross will come to the hospital with me, it’s always the same social mediator which is better because when we see the same person I’m more comfortable with them.”

The keys to her family’s future in Bulgaria, she insists, are employment and language.

“If we have work we can live anywhere. We’re learning the language so hopefully we’ll have some more opportunities, for me and for my kids the main thing is just to be able to have a good life.”

## Long Term Solutions

This necessity for the Red Cross and others to fill humanitarian gaps is a symptom of wider policy failings, says Nikolay Todorov, Bulgarian Red Cross head of international operations, programmes and projects.

“Once people receive protection, within two weeks they have to leave the reception camp,” he explains.

“People leave the camp and they have no money, they are homeless, there is no government support, and people have to rely on NGOs – it’s only natural that people try to move on somewhere else.

Todorov says Approximately 100,000 people have passed through Bulgaria, but it is estimated that less than 2,000 refugees remain in the country; only around 2% of all those who come to Bulgaria stay.

The Red Cross and others, says Todorov, have an important but currently impossible role.

“We have a degree of trust and standing with refugees because they recognise the Red Cross, maybe they are looking for services we don’t have but we do what we can, we do our best.”

And while some activities with refugees are effective - and critically important - at the individual level, they cannot make up for an overarching lack of comprehensive national strategy for integration.

“There needs to be a strategic long-term commitment at government level to provide people with language training, vocational training, support for housing and health and living costs,” he explains.

“There are plenty of jobs available that refugees could be doing, but there is no coherent integration programme.

“There is some support for social services, but it is not a coherent whole, it’s not long term, and without that long-term approach, integration for refugees here in Bulgaria will be a never-ending challenge.”

## case study

## KINA

Kina Sabeva is chair of the Bulgarian Council on Refugees and Migrants, which was founded in 2005 as Bulgaria approached EU membership. Founded and supported by the Bulgarian Red Cross, the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, and Caritas, the Council plays an advocacy and capacity building role, bridging between Civil Society and the government, as well as coordinating and promoting the role of civil society organisations in supporting refugees and migrants. They can be found online at <https://bcrm-bg.org/en/>

“Until three years ago our main role was advocacy at national level but our role for advocacy has changed to be more focused on integration.

Integration used to sit with the State Agency for Refugees, but it has been passed to the municipalities

There is a great need to share relevant information, and to raise awareness of the rights of refugees at municipal level.

So, we decided our advocacy efforts should shift from national to municipal level.

We wanted to do something practical and helped the municipalities by developing our website ([www.refugee-integration.bg](http://www.refugee-integration.bg)) which explains people’s rights and obligations, and hosts user-friendly resources to help facilitate the work of municipal staff and others working with refugees.

We got a very positive reception. Staff at the municipal level don’t have the time to go through and know the legislation line by line.

Our approach is to ask people what would help them, what will make things easier for them, and we try to provide data and information based on the feedback people give – things like databases and maps of relevant organisations and service

providers ( [www.database.refugee-integration.bg](http://www.database.refugee-integration.bg), [www.mapping.refugee-integration.bg](http://www.mapping.refugee-integration.bg) ).

Until 2013 there was an integration programme for newly recognised refugees, financed by the state and implemented by the State Agency for Refugees (SAR).

The programme supported integration for one year including housing, subsistence, transport, language courses and access to education. After 2013 there were greater numbers, the SAR limited its responsibilities, and targeted integration efforts basically stopped.

Legally, people with refugee status have the same rights as Bulgarians (with some small exceptions), but in reality for newly recognised refugees there are a lot of barriers to actually exercising these rights.

And the Bulgarian social system does not provide a safety net even for Bulgarians.

While people are in the asylum process the state provides for them—once they have refugee status, no integration support package is provided.

Importantly, the transfer of responsibility for integration to municipalities did not come with any additional funding.

There is money available for integration, but the municipalities can’t directly access it.

AMIF has a minimum threshold, and if there are seven refugees in your municipality the amount the municipality would apply for is too small to qualify.

We can’t have 240 municipalities applying for 10 people each. The administration would be too much, and municipalities don’t know two years in advance how much they need to apply for.

## case study

Ideally the Ministry of social affairs should receive funding for integration and make grants to municipalities according to the number of people they take.

If you want Bulgaria to move from being a transit country to a settlement country, there needs to be integration support for at least a year. To do that municipalities need to be able to easily access EU funds for integration, and at the moment they can't.

Supporting refugees is not a vote winner, and refugees don't have the right to vote, so there needs to be more advocacy about the positive impact the integration of refugees can have.

What refugees can bring to local communities, how the local community can benefit. Mayors have started thinking differently, or at least expressing themselves differently, once they have seen the potential benefits.

But people arriving do need targeted support after getting status, to see them through the initial stages while they are learning the language and

getting established. It is not enough to just provide language classes if people have nowhere to live, and no subsistence support.

People may object and say 'refugees are being given everything', but look at who also sees the benefits. For Bulgarian language classes, the money goes to Bulgarian teachers and schools; money for rent goes to Bulgarian landlords; money for health care goes back into the Bulgarian health system; education and vocational training enables Bulgarian companies to access the skills and labour they need; if refugees are working they are paying taxes, which go back to the government; if refugees get cash support for basic necessities like food, they spend that money in local Bulgarian shops.

Money to support integration is available from the AMIF for this purpose, but it needs to be made more accessible to municipalities.

When the refugees are here and being supported, there is significant benefit to the local Bulgarian economy. By helping refugees more we really would be helping our existing communities too."



## ■ CROATIA

Situated along one of the main migration routes through the Balkans, Croatia experienced at first hand the challenges of mass population movement in 2015/16 when tens of thousands of people passed through the country.

After Croatia's government signed up to receive people through the EU's emergency resettlement and relocation programmes, there was an opportunity for the Croatian Red Cross Society (CRCS) to support integration through involvement with the ARCI project, providing information and practical support to people arriving through these formal mechanisms.

Initially intending to focus on working with people arriving under the relocation programme, CRCS' approach was swiftly stymied by the winding-up of relocation virtually before the ARCI project even began.

Necessitating an early pragmatic pivot towards the resettlement programme, it was a situation which also enabled the Croatian ARCI team to display the kind of flexibility that would be needed throughout the project ahead.

From conducting information needs assessments to the design and production of communication materials, and from orientation events to life-skills training (to name just a few of the CRCS' activities under ARCI), flexibility, adaptation and evolution have remained themes throughout.

### Information Materials

"To develop information materials, we interviewed people who came to Croatia through the resettlement and relocation programme," says Lana Vučinić, from the Croatian Red Cross Asylum and Migration Department.

"We made a questionnaire asking people about their information needs—what kind of information they felt was useful and in what format."

Based on responses to the questionnaires, two main needs were identified: a general guide to living in Croatia, and a handbook on more technical information and rights relating to being a refugee in Croatia.

Although the Ministry of the Interior already produces an official manual, people found the book too large, and the detailed information too complex, for it to be quickly and easily accessible.

"We wanted to put the main information relevant to refugees into a pocket guide," explains Vučinić.

"This has short information about refugees' rights, important contacts and other practical information."

Having researched and examined existing materials, with the mindset of wanting to build on rather than duplicate what already existed, and informed by feedback from refugees with direct experience of the resettlement process, Vučinić and the ARCI team quickly realised anything they



## case study

### AYMEN

Ayemen Abas is an Iraqi national working as a translator and cultural mediator with the Croatian Red Cross.

“I’ve been in Croatia for more than five years. My husband came to Croatia from Iraq before me in 2012, he gained refugee status and then applied for family reunification, and after a year-and-a-half I was able to join him here in Zagreb.

I speak Arabic, English, and Croatian, and I’ve been working with the Croatian Red Cross since 2015.

I started when the migration crisis began, in a camp in Slavonski Brod, initially as a volunteer and then I became a full-time employee.

Most refugees coming to Croatia speak Arabic so every day there is work to do.

More people are arriving now as families, we need to help children enrol in school and kindergarten, to prepare paperwork for college – there is a lot to do for each family.

Many of the families have health issues so that is a focus, to help people get hospital appointments, to help translate with the doctors, to help negotiate the health system.

We also have projects like ARCI where we are helping to organise activities and workshops, particularly with women.

There are some big cultural differences for people when they arrive, and we want to help women feel empowered here in Europe.

We cover things like how to find a job, what kind of work they could do, and how as women they can find a role in society here.

Sometimes people ask what the benefit of the activities will be—it’s not about money or something tangible, it’s education, it’s experience, it’s a

chance for them to learn about society in Croatia, about how they can integrate and try to build a stable life here.

I think I can relate to people arriving here better because of who I am.

People recognise that I am a woman from Arabic culture, and people know I have a refugee background too, they recognise that maybe I understand their situation better than somebody who doesn’t have that experience themselves.

When people come to our office, particularly if it’s a woman, they might feel safer or more comfortable talking with me than with somebody else.

We are Arabic women, we understand each other, we have some shared experiences and culture, and I do as much as I can.

Sometimes it’s very hard because we can’t help, we want to be able to do more but we have our limits.

I am here to do my job, I’m here to help people and I have to be professional—I do as much as I can, but I can’t do more just because people see me as a friend, and I need to make sure people understand that.

In 1991 I went to the Red Cross office in Baghdad and applied for a job there.

I wanted to work with them in Iraq but unfortunately at the time they didn’t need me.

I like helping people, I don’t care who it is, so when I was in Croatia and saw I could help I was really happy to finally work with the Red Cross—I had to leave my home country but I was able to fulfil my dreams. I really feel I belong with this organisation.

Humanity doesn’t have any borders and helping people in need is just a natural reaction, whoever they are.

produced would need to be practical, simple, clear and concise.

“We asked what form people wanted to have the information in,” continues Vučinić’s colleague Ana Markulin.

“70% to 80% of people said they needed something short because the information and processes are so complex.

“The pocket guide is something people can carry with them all the time—a useful, practical companion to the more comprehensive materials the ministry of the interior provides people with.”

Translating the materials from Croatian to English, Farsi and Arabic—the languages most widely spoken by refugees arriving in the country—has proven time consuming, not least due to graphic design challenges brought about by Arabic script running in the opposite direction to its English and Croatian counterparts.

But even this apparent stumbling block, resulting in the later-than-intended delivery of materials, has a silver lining in the resulting improved tailoring of content to fit its audience.

**“The pocket guide is something people can carry with them all the time—a useful, practical companion to the more comprehensive materials the ministry of the interior provides people with.”**

“Our translators have refugee backgrounds,” explains Markulin. “There are a lot of illustrations and pictures so the translators needed to sit with the designer to make sure everything is right, but by working with the materials at this level they have been able to advise a lot on how we can make them even better.”

As well as the Red Cross using the new materials in their own workshops and trainings, the Ministry of the Interior has said it too will adopt the publications for use during briefings with refugees, potentially putting the updated information into the hands of every newly arrived refugee entering Croatia.

Response to the new materials has been overwhelmingly positive so far, but a formal review will be carried out once they have been in active service for a few more months, collecting feedback on people’s practical experiences to inform any necessary revisions.

### Classes, Workshops and Events

Alongside the development and production of materials, events supporting integration such as socio-cultural orientations, life-skills classes, and workshops for female refugees have also been held.

Campaigns engaging primary schools in Zagreb have been organised too, promoting awareness and understanding of migration and refugee issues to local children.

As with the design and production of information materials, events have been structured to be as practical as possible.

“The socio-cultural orientation is about getting to know Croatia,” explains Markulin. “It covers cultural traditions, adjusting to a new environment, housing, living in a neighbourhood, employment and money management, healthcare, and home and family safety, and at the end is a small plan which people can fill in setting out their goals and ways to achieve them.

“We combined this with life skills sessions focusing on some things in more detail, such as how to find work, where to look for jobs online, and how to prepare a CV and cover letter.

“We followed this with a small roleplay, acting out job interviews, to get people used to what questions to expect, as well as dos and don’ts, and managing expectations for what is realistic in

## case study

### DRAZEN

Dražen Klarić is Country Director for Jesuit Refugee Services in Croatia, an organisation which has been working with refugees in the country since 1993.

“In Croatia, language is such a key thing. You can’t start integration if people don’t know the language.

But most of the time official classes have not been organised, or they were very badly organised and attendance was low.

In the labour market at the moment it should be easy to find work, but most refugees don’t speak Croatian, so employers are not interested.

We have a programme with the employment office to help people become employable. People get language and vocational training and at the end they have exams to pass.

After the formal training, there is practical experience; most people go to a company for that and then stay on afterwards as employees.

We are trying to work directly with employers because they have a strong voice so could be an avenue for moving things forward.

For integration, things are much better than they used to be, but there is still no functioning end-to-end system, there are a lot of holes that NGOs are trying to fill. A lot of time is spent on individual cases and there is a lot of improvisation, meaning there is a lot of wasted energy.

The best integration is in primary schools and kindergartens, all children up to 15 are included in schools, most of the children aged three to six are going to kindergarten.

There are a still lot of problems with health though, and this year there will be a big issue with housing.

People granted international protection have the right to an apartment for two years with the rent paid for them. There are 200 people whose rent agreements run out this year, they are still reliant on social welfare and it won’t be enough to cover their rents. It looks like a lot of people will lose their homes, and it’s crucial to see how the government handles this.

For healthcare, in theory people granted international protection have the same rights as Croatian citizens. But they have to fill in different forms and it’s a long process which a lot of doctors don’t want to go through.

A coherent system is vital: people need an apartment as soon as possible, language classes need to start immediately, vocational training and a process to recognise existing qualifications should follow as standard, then there should be support to find employment, access to healthcare, and extra support for vulnerable people.

Above all there needs to be a recognition that people arriving here can be an asset for the country, not just a cost. Setting up the right programmes to make sure we make the most of these assets shouldn’t be so hard.”

terms of employment if people don't have qualifications or lack documentation.

"We also cover organising a monthly budget and get people to practice based on their actual costs and income."

Sessions have included examples of actual documents used by government and employers such as pay slips, including explanations of the various deductions, such as tax, that people will see.

To encourage people to feel more comfortable and engaged with Croatian society, less formal workshops have also been organised, giving people the chance to get to know Zagreb better and understand and experience Croatian life.

"Everything is developed based on the participants' needs and suggestions," explains Vučinić. "We ask people what they would like the workshops to be and what subjects or activities they want to cover and then we organise things based on that."

One event, held in a public library, was particularly popular.

"The workshop in the library was good because people were able to bring their children," says Vučinić. "Before some people couldn't come because it's hard to find childcare."

"We've tried different activities—things like sewing and crochet—and sometimes we have more formally educational workshops with the employment service or Open University to talk about vocational training and working culture."

"We've also had informal meetings for people to get together and discuss what they would like to do next—now its summer people have said they would like to visit somewhere so we're planning to go somewhere in Zagreb."

"It's important to keep it simple, be responsive to what people want, and be flexible, because then people will keep coming back."

But sustainability has been a challenge for the workshops, with participants apparently lacking confidence to follow up on activities independently.

"It's been hard to encourage people to be engaged on their own without us organising an event," Vučinić explains.

"People enjoyed the event in the library, where mothers and children went together—but it actually happens every Wednesday and people could go on their own, but we asked the library and people haven't been back."

"If we organise an event and call people then they will come, and people do enjoy it, but they are reluctant or lack the confidence to attend things independently, so that's something we need to look at and see if there's anything we can do differently to encourage people to engage socially without us there to help them."

## Institutional Awareness

Another challenge identified by the project has been the gap in awareness and understanding of refugees rights and needs among people working in institutions refugees rely on.

Training to raise awareness and understanding of refugees' rights and relevant administrative processes, as well as promoting positive interaction and engagement, was first held for personnel at Red Cross branches, followed by a second training for primary and high-school teachers and staff.

A third training for kindergarten teachers and health officials has already been arranged, again seeking to target people who in many cases may have daily contact with refugees and whose understanding of their rights, and appropriate handling of cases, can be critical.

"People coming to these workshops really recognise that the content is useful to them," says Markulin.

"People really want to attend, they have lots of questions relating to challenges they may face, and no one else is offering training like this."

Often considered a transit country for refugees and migrants heading for the EU, so far Croatia has little in the way of established refugee or diaspora communities.

This lack of long-term presence creates a double barrier to integration: civil servants and other key workers are unfamiliar with the rights of refugees unintentionally fuelling alienation on an administrative level, while at the same time, newly arriving refugees do not find the same family ties, support networks, or cultural links many rely on for informal assistance and encouragement elsewhere.

“Refugees here don’t have the same communities here that they have in other countries,” explains Mandana Amiri of UNHCR in Zagreb.

“This means they lack a support network, and they have to rely on the government and NGOs.

“There needs to be a first generation of refugees to stay here and create it, and then the next generation might settle here too.

“There needs to be a will for people to stay and build lives here.”

## Language Classes

Language learning too is widely recognised as one of the key barriers to integration, with the Red Cross supporting buddy programmes enabling people to practice Croatian language, as well as producing a series of language learning YouTube videos.

The issue however remains plagued by superficial ‘chicken or egg’ arguments over whether people leave the country because they aren’t adequately supported and encouraged to learn the language, or people consciously choose not to learn because they already know they will move on elsewhere.

Despite this over-simplified debate—a huge number of factors affect language learning, not least the difficulty of learning Croatian for people who have Arabic as their mother tongue, people’s ages, and their opportunities to interact with local Croatian speakers - there is broad recognition that current provision of language classes for refugees in Croatia is inadequate, something acknowledged by Kristina Toplak from Croatia’s Ministry of the Interior.

“Croatian language courses are the most important thing relating to integration,” she emphasises.

“They should be offered to everybody who is a refugee, they are an obligation under the law but they just aren’t happening.

“I don’t think the lack of language classes is the main factor for people moving on,” she adds, “but it’s certainly one of them.”

## case study

### MARIJA

A retired nurse, Marija Kalinić works part-time as a health officer in the Migrant Protection Department of the Croatian Red Cross, supporting refugees to access the healthcare they need.

“I’m a medical nurse, retired, and I work here with the Croatian Red Cross for 4 hours per day. I help people who need connections with the hospital. Now we have a case who is the father of two children who are deaf - a girl and a boy. We are trying to support getting Cochlea Implants for them. It’s a long process but I hope the children can get them.

When people get status in Croatia they need a family doctor and specialists for specific health issues. It is my job to call the hospital and help arrange things.

Another girl is 17. She is blind and she’s going for rehabilitation at the therapy centre. We help organise the transport and everything.

I worked in Libya for 9 years and the Arabic I learned then is coming back to me through my work with the refugees.

I follow all the patients—unfortunately we lost one woman who had cancer. I spent a lot of time with her.

With some hospitals and ambulances, it’s much better than it was a year ago. The first barrier is administration, then the nurses, and then the doctors.

Proof of who will pay is always a problem.

But I have a solution. I know the chiefs of all of the health centres in Zagreb, so if I lose a discussion with the nurses or the doctors, I can speak to the boss.

It’s the last option but I always have this up my sleeve.

There are problems with the pharmacies too. In Zagreb there are maybe only one or two pharmacies that will give medicines to refugees. We are happy that refugees have access to two good pharmacies—two is better than none—but really it is not enough.

The main thing is to keep fighting for every person. Every day we have more than enough work to do, but if it’s a difficult case we always go to the hospital with the client to help them.

If people are coming as refugees, they don’t have paper records or documents and it’s really difficult. For vaccinations, for records of diagnosis and treatment, for qualifications, it’s really complicated.

We will see but, for the two children who are deaf, hopefully the operation will go ahead.

When the children get the implant there will be a lot of rehabilitation and it will be important for the children to stay and complete that. It would be very unfair if the family were to move to another country before the children are ready.”

## GERMANY

As a national society in a country already hosting large numbers of refugees, and with a long recent history of working in migration, the German Red Cross took on a unique role in the ARCI programme.

Charged with researching people's experiences of the relocation programme, a plan was drawn up to interview 50 people across the country who had come to Germany under the emergency EU procedure.

Combining these with an additional 15 interviews from experts working in various areas of migration, researchers would build an understanding of how experiences of people in the relocation programme differed from those of people arriving through other, more established, mechanisms.

This initial plan quickly ran into challenges: the numbers of people arriving through relocation were far below those originally envisaged, and those who relocation did bring to the country were quickly assimilated into the standard asylum process, making it impossible to identify relocation cases from other asylum seekers without approaching each person individually.

Capitalising on German Red Cross links with voluntary and NGO-sector partners across the country, researchers were able to identify a clutch of people who had arrived through relocation, but with no new cases arriving - and the increasing passage of time since relocation effectively ended—the decision was taken to expand research and interviews to include the larger cohort of people arriving through resettlement.

Despite only reaching a small sample of ten people who arrived in Germany through relocation, researchers were still able to identify some key best practices and issues, many of which were backed up by the experiences of the 33 additional people interviewed who came through resettlement.

### Relocation Reboot?

Although acknowledging its application was deeply flawed, the concept of relocation—recognising the

need to transfer people from hotspots to other EU countries—was cited as a key best practice by research-lead Yasemin Bekyol, the German Red Cross ARCI Project Manager.

“Relocation was, and would still be, a good thing,” she says. “But the process established was just too ad hoc, it was only just established and then it closed down.

“Most people I spoke to in Germany involved with receiving refugees only found out about relocation when they had somebody in front of them who had arrived in the country under the scheme—before that they had no idea it existed.

“We had cases of officials who didn't believe that people had arrived legally in Germany by plane from Italy or Greece.

“Relocated people's lawyers had to tell the authorities it was an official EU programme.”

And this pervasive lack of clarity and awareness had additional impacts.

“For refugees themselves it was extremely confusing,” explains Bekyol. “Interviews and assessments were carried out in Greece for registration into the relocation programme and people thought that this process was their asylum claim.

“It was a shock for people when they arrived in Germany and they found out they were still asylum seekers not recognised refugees, and they could still be rejected and returned.”

But despite these and other failings—including a lack of clear vulnerability-based criteria spelling out exactly who qualified for relocation—there is a strong feeling that relocation's time has not yet passed.

“Personally speaking, I think relocation is still needed. There are still people that need to be relocated and now there is an opportunity to do it better, based on past experience” insists Bekyol.

“It would help relieve pressure on reception countries, enable other countries to demonstrate

## case study

## MBEON

German Red Cross policy officer Elena Lukinykh is responsible for the society's support to mbeon (<https://www.mbeon.de>)—an app providing two-way discussion between migrants and trained advisors, and where migrants can find information about living in Germany.

Funded by the Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community, the programme is implemented by a four-member consortium including the German Red Cross, Caritas, Federation of Expellees (Bund der Vertriebenen), and the German Equal Participation Welfare Association (Der Paritätische Gesamtverband).

“There is a long-term programme in Germany called MBE (Migrationsberatung für erwachsene Zuwanderer)—“Migration Advice Service for Adult Immigrants”—that provides face-to-face consultations to help migrants settle in Germany.

The advisors support migrants and provide information on all kinds of topics like language learning, housing, education, work, and health.

Unfortunately, because of travel time, work, or classes for example, not everyone can make it to the face-to-face meetings.

We knew people were looking online for information, and often accessing very unreliable sources, so we thought ‘how about online consultations?’, and that’s how mbeon came about.

On the app people can access reliable, accurate information about life in Germany, and can also reach out to advisors directly. For vulnerable groups of migrants particularly, the app provides a channel to ask questions and access information which otherwise they might not have.

It’s free, clients can seek advice anonymously and they can filter advisors by language or location,

which makes it easier to find the right person to talk to.

We have 155 advisors across the country, between them speaking 15–20 languages, and the app itself is available in four written languages (German, English, Russian, and Arabic), so there is a good chance a client can find an advisor suitable for them.

It’s not a replacement for face-to-face interaction, and often formal face-to-face meetings occur after contact is made through the app.

Some questions and issues require face-to-face meetings - it’s entirely up to clients how they want to proceed. Clients can try different advisors or keep in touch with the same advisor even if they move around the country. The clients are in control and they can always rethink it, readjust it and even end it, if that what they want.

Knowing there is a real, caring person at the end of the line is extremely important, and the chats often continue over months, with questions changing during the various stages of clients’ integration.

For women particularly, the app provides a channel to ask questions and access information which otherwise they might not have.

We have some cases of women who use the app or set up face-to-face meetings to not only get the information they need, but also as an opportunity to practice German at the same time with a person they trust.

So far mbeon has been downloaded more than 5,000 times and we’re constantly working to make it more user-friendly and accessible.”



solidarity, and provide an additional legal pathway for vulnerable people in need of protection.”

## Reception and Information

While a lack of clarity and information provided to refugees and asylum seekers, authorities, and administrators, were issues regularly picked up by the research, key good practices in resettlement and relocation were also evident.

“**Most people preferred to discuss issues about schools and integration face-to-face.**”

The strategy followed in Germany of bringing all those arriving through resettlement through a single centre in Friedland, and the process there with people briefed for a few days and having time to briefly rest and acclimatize before being dispersed to longer-term accommodation, was repeatedly held up as good practice.

Following dispersal from Friedland, the reception process in the city of Wuppertal particularly, supported by Caritas, was also praised.

Many of the positives focused on the outstanding efforts made to provide information, with maps and orientation packs distributed to all new arrivals, alongside face-to-face sessions explaining the services and support available and how these could be accessed.

In tandem with this, each person arriving was allocated a specific social worker for at least their first six months in Germany, meaning people had a single contact they could talk to about any issues and build trust with.

As well as making things easier for refugees, this also enabled social workers to establish a better understanding and rapport with the people they were allocated to support.

Interestingly, researchers found that people preferred different information channels and approaches depending on the nature of the subject involved.

“Most people preferred to discuss issues about schools and integration face-to-face,” explains Bekyol.

“For more legalistic issues, like housing and the asylum process, people I interviewed wanted to have access to information online first, before any face-to-face meetings took place.”

## case study

### OLIVIJA

Olivija Music, head of the Marienfelder Refugee Centre, has been working with migrants for 15 years, and at Wohnheim Marienfelder Allee – a centre where vulnerable refugee families are accommodated in apartment blocks - for the last eight years.

“For people who are newly arrived, accessing medical services is very complicated. It takes 4–6 weeks for people to get medical insurance, and doctors won’t usually treat people without it.

There is a woman arriving here soon who has multiple sclerosis, she only has medicine for another few days and needs more. Another man is arriving who has had cancer and still needs medicine. Somehow we have to help them access the medicines they need before they run out.

People arrive without health insurance and without money. They have to go to the job centre and the job centre has to tell the health insurance system that they will be covering their costs, but that can take eight weeks.

There are some groups funding services for people who fall outside the system which we can sometimes access, but it’s not intended for refugees with legal status—if we access it we are using up funds and resources intended for others.

There are little things which could make a difference - if people’s papers were translated earlier, they could access healthcare earlier.

It is particularly hard for vulnerable people to access services. At the job centre the process is just too slow and people who are newly arrived don’t have the knowledge and skills to assert their rights and complain.

Each case is so different it feels like we always have to find a new path. It’s always a lot of work

and generally it’s not a regular problem, because our clients are not “regular” German citizens. It’s very hard to get the answers that we need.

The resettlement programme doesn’t have a lobby to support change and the system is the same for all refugees regardless of whether they have special health or other needs.

It feels like we’re missing a voice in the political arena, to connect to the political system and see that changes are made to the structure and the way we approach this.

It’s a good feeling if we manage to solve some problems and help people. If we need a doctor for a family on a Friday for example, it’s a great feeling to be able to help them. The families and people are great to work with; people are friendly and the hospitality they offer is amazing.

Working through the systems with people, making progress. Seeing people progress through their lives, move out, find jobs, get married, it’s great to be a part of enabling that to happen.”

Housing was another area where Wuppertal received praise, accommodating people in apartments within communities rather than in reception centres, which were felt to be crowded, lacking privacy, in some cases unhygienic, and a backward step for many families - particularly those arriving through resettlement who may have been living in apartments in Turkey for years before coming to Germany.

## Dispersal, Needs and Capacities

The provision of, and access to, healthcare was something the vast majority of people arriving in Germany were happy with, although there were some concerns over the provision of translation support without which people struggled to successfully access medical and other services such as employment, housing and social welfare.

A related practical issue highlighted by researchers concerned the dispersal system, through which people are allocated to different areas of the country after their arrival in Friedland, and the practical capacities of towns and regions to meet the specific needs of vulnerable people.

Whether these are fully taken into account when deciding where refugees will be dispersed to, is a point picked up by Salome Gunsch who succeeded Bekyol as ARCI Project Manager.

“When people are dispersed, authorities need to bear in mind people’s existing needs and the capacity of the places they are sent to to meet those needs,” Gunsch explains.

“The authorities are usually aware of existing health conditions well before people arrive, so it is not coming as a surprise—there is no excuse for then sending people to places unable to provide the healthcare we already know they need.”

Gunsch also identified continuing information gaps around work, schooling, medical issues and asylum, as further evidence of the need for ongoing access to and provision of practical information after arrival, such as through the mbeon information app ([www.mbeon.de](http://www.mbeon.de)).

## Education and Mental Health

People’s experiences of schools and language classes were largely very positive, but concerns were raised for people in their late teens who fall outside statutory education.

“People who arrive just beyond school age face probably the most difficulty because they do not go into the school system, but they don’t have the language skills or qualifications to enter further training or education, or get a job immediately,” says Gunsch.

“People arriving at that age may also be on their own, without any family, which again makes things harder for them.”

Mental health and expectations for integration were also issues which stood out for Gunsch, with people arriving in Germany typically highly motivated on arrival, but losing energy when disappointments mounted.

“Over time people often become depressed because things are not working out how they expected,” she adds.

“Eventually people feel integrated when their lives are going well, but that might take three, four, or five years once they speak the language and have a job and a place to live.”

This extended period of time necessary to reach a comprehensive level of integration - where people feel they are active and full members of society - is something many, including refugees themselves, underestimate.

A specific factor in this is mental health, with the trauma people go through during their experience of becoming a refugee requiring long-term support.

A shortage of mental health services and long waiting lists, however, mean people often cannot access the help they need when they need it most.

Without addressing mental health, Gunsch argues, effective integration is virtually impossible, while mental health issues themselves

are often exacerbated by systems and processes which create uncertainty and, in many cases, appear deliberately designed to prevent families being reunited.

Many people granted protection receive documents with an official expiry date a year or two beyond their date of issue.

In reality this nominal end date marks a point by which time the case should be reviewed and, in the vast majority of cases, protection will be extended, but the perception of an ever-approaching expiry generates a huge amount of stress.

“For people who have experienced trauma, stability is really important, so putting people through more instability is particularly troubling,” says Gunsch.

“There’s a big information gap with people thinking that at the end of their status they will be automatically sent home.

“In the vast majority of cases it will be extended but some people are thinking they will have to go home when the current date of their asylum status expires, creating stress and encouraging short-term thinking.”

Family reunification—a step regarded by many as key for normalising people’s situation and facilitating integration—remains what Bekyol describes as a “bureaucratic minefield”.

“It is very unclear who can apply for reunification, how to apply and what the process should be, it’s very complicated and confusing,” she says.

“Often people have to apply for family reunification within the first three months of their arrival in an EU country, but they might have to wait most of that time to even get an asylum application interview, which is where they are told about the time restriction—by the time they find out it’s already almost too late.

“Integration for people without their families is extremely hard because for as long as they are separated they are focussed on being reunited

with their loved ones, the longer this goes on and the more difficult it is, the less able people are to engage with normal life: education, learning the language or finding a job.”

## Listening and Learning

One key message that comes through loud and clear is the need to better include and engage with the people the policies and systems are supposed to support.

“In projects like this it is important to bring refugees themselves into the project design and implementation,” says Gunsch.

And while ARCI research is helping inform the production of tailored information materials for people arriving in the country, German Red Cross has also drawn on ARCI findings to guide new migration activities.

A Community Sponsorship programme called NEST—where people work together to sponsor and support refugees arriving into German communities - is currently at the pilot stage but has been influenced by learning from ARCI.

“The ARCI research helped shape our thinking and provided evidence for our arguments,” says Sabine Heck, German Red Cross migration policy officer working on the Community Sponsorship Programme.

“The interviews carried out by ARCI and the feedback they collected was really important when we were talking to government about the new programme because we could back up our points with clear evidence from refugees themselves.

“We could see that accommodation was key, and that language support was also a priority, so we’re making sure people volunteering as sponsors commit to addressing those issues, as well as considering mobility needs and how refugees will access services and activities in their neighbourhoods.”

## case study

### IRMGARD

Irmgard Mminele is head of the German Red Cross department of refugees, migration and integration in the rural area of Bitburg-Prüm, about 130km south of Cologne and close to the border with Luxembourg.

“We’re in a very rural area and that can make it hard for people to settle, especially if they’re coming from a large city.

The local town has 1,500 people, but some people might end up in villages with around 300 people. There are very limited buses, everything is in German, and it’s very hard for people to know what to do.

The local social office contacts us when a new person or family is coming and we visit them and help them access schools and other services.

Having local volunteers is vital, without them our work in rural areas would be impossible.

The volunteer could be the only person the family knows in the village so they can end up helping with anything and everything. People get a big bureaucratic slap in the face when they first arrive, and it’s very hard, particularly if you don’t speak German.

Without civil society groups the system would not work, we are able to provide support to people when they arrive in a way the government cannot.

In rural areas everyone knows each other. When we have problems with the authorities we can call them and have a discussion and find practical solutions, and in cities I’m not sure that is really possible.

In villages it’s obviously much harder for refugees to find people with similar cultural backgrounds and who speak the same mother tongue. It’s very

hard when people first arrive, but it can also push people to contact their German neighbours and improve their language skills and start a network with German people.

In urban areas people arriving under resettlement who have refugee status would not be referred to the Red Cross or other Civil Society organisations, they are simply clients of the job centre and might never come to us. Here, because we’re a small community, people will always find their way to us.

We’ve learned a lot over the last five years, I’m extremely positive about how the Germany has created solutions. Many of the problems have been addressed and most people want to address the additional problems that come up.

But the issue of family reunion remains key. To see the difference between the happiness when people first arrive to the despair when they realise how long it will take before they can see their families again is awful. Integration simply can’t happen if families can’t be together.”







# The Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

**Humanity** The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

**Impartiality** It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

**Neutrality** In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

**Independence** The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

**Voluntary service** It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

**Unity** There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

**Universality** The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.