

UNHCR Europe NGO Consultation 2017 Regional Workshops – Northern Europe

Promoting the Inclusion of Beneficiaries of International Protection Across Europe

Title of the session

Strengthening Strategic UNHCR/NGO Cooperation to Facilitate Refugee Inclusion and Family Reunification in Northern Europe

Date: 16 October 2017

Time: 11:30-13:00 and 14:00-15:30

Countries (as per UNHCR organisational structure)

Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden

Focal points / Moderators

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Speakers / Panellists

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Background

Integration is at the forefront of national debates in Northern Europe. The successful implementation of integration policies is not only a necessity for all beneficiaries of international protection but also a *sine qua non* condition for maintaining the asylum space in the region.

While Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have invested in developing national integration programmes, the low level of support, the lack of long-term integration prospects, and the level of xenophobia and racism despite an improvement in public attitudes (particularly amongst young people) continue to cause secondary movements towards other countries, and undermines both real integration prospects for beneficiaries of international protection and governmental efforts.

Nordic countries are in the process of adjusting their integration policies to the significant number of children and youth among the population of beneficiaries of international protection, as well as adults in need of basic education or with skills inadequate to Nordic labour markets. The durable inclusion of low-skilled beneficiaries of international protection, and in particular women, will depend on the efficiency of recent measures, as well as the degree of involvement of relevant national and local stakeholders (including municipalities and private sector) in the coming years.

At the same time, the strong or emerging civil society mobilisation for welcoming refugees and good initiatives at local level in all countries in the region constitute a real opportunity to boost social inclusion. Strong alliances, including with new stakeholders in this field, will be key in the coming years to maintain the asylum space and promote long-term durable solutions for beneficiaries of international protection.

The restrictive policies many countries (excluding Iceland) have adopted (e.g. the growing distinction between Convention refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, restrictive family reunification policies, cuts in social benefits, obstacles to long-term residence permits) are of particular concern.

This workshop will particularly look at family reunification. The Nordic countries have recently made considerable changes to legislation and rules governing the conditions required for family reunification. Those changes have a major negative effect on the lives of refugees granted protection as they prevent refugees from getting reunited with their family members.

In addition to legal obstacles, UNHCR observes many practical obstacles in the family reunification process, leading to prolonged separation, inter alia extremely lengthy procedures (several years), significant procedural costs and no realistic possibility of success. This session will therefore address the need to specifically identify both legal and practical obstacles to family reunification in order to establish a common strategy of addressing these challenges in all Nordic countries. To identify the best strategies, UNHCR plans to collect detailed information related to the family reunification process, procedures and administrative practice and considers an operational involvement in cooperation with partners.

As part of its five-year strategy, the UNHCR Regional Representation for Northern Europe (RRNE) has identified a number of key priorities and objectives in the field of integration and family reunification (see background paper), and is currently in a consultation/validation process with a number of partners and stakeholders.

This workshop aims to explore and clarify how UNHCR and NGOs can work more closely together on these issues. Conclusions will be fed into ongoing discussions with RRNE and regionally, and concrete action points will be taken forward by the group.

Objectives: Integration

- » NGOs and RRNE agree on what are the main integration priorities and objectives for the coming years in Northern Europe.
- » RRNE's role and added value in the field of integration (including support to civil society) is clarified.
- » A number of common areas of work where cooperation between RRNE and NGOs is envisaged, as well as concrete suggestions as to how this collaboration should take place, are identified.

Guiding questions: Integration

1. Regardless of organisations' current activities / priorities, do NGOs share the same views with regard to integration priorities and challenges in the region as identified by RRNE in its strategy (see background paper)?
2. Given RRNE's limited presence in the region, the complexity and the diversity of stakeholders' active in this field (particularly in Nordic countries), how NGOs see RRNE's role and added value in supporting design and implementation of integration strategies and policies, in which specific area (except family reunification), and at what level (national/regional)?
3. Are there important areas not covered by NGOs?
4. On what areas (except family reunification) can we work together, and/or how can we divide the work?
5. What forms could this cooperation take, at what level, and what type of actions should be envisaged?

Objectives: Family reunification

- » Exploring possible/continued (operational) collaboration with NGOs to facilitate family reunification in Northern Europe, MENA region and beyond.
- » Explore establishing/strengthening cooperation on advocacy/litigation for family reunification in the region to address legal and practical obstacles in the family reunification process.

Guiding questions: Family reunification

1. How can NGOs and RRNE work together to operationalise family reunification in Europe and beyond, including in the Dublin III context (division of roles, capacities and added value)?
2. How to strengthen political advocacy, litigation and capacity-building?
 - a. Is there a need for qualitative assessments / review of legal and administrative obstacles and practice in order to develop evidence based strategies?
 - b. How to better coordinate litigation before the CJEU and ECtHR, by means of submitting similar applications, or by intervening as a third party in each other's cases?
3. What forms could this cooperation take, at what level, and what type of actions should be envisaged?

Both sessions will be a mix of open discussions with participants in plenary session and breakout sessions into small groups.

Agenda

11:30-11:35 – Introduction

Opening remarks: [Karin Davin](#), [Eglé Samuchovaité](#)

11:30-13:00 – Integration

11:35-11:45 – UNHCR RRNE multi-year multi-partner Protection and Solutions Strategy for 2018 to 2022 and key questions regarding Integration to be discussed during the workshop: [Wilfried Buchhorn](#), [Anne Bathily](#)

11:45-13:00 – Plenary discussion moderated by [Karin Davin](#), [Eglé Samuchovaité](#)

11:45-12:15 – Main integration priorities in Northern Europe and RRNE's added value. Participants provide feedback on RRNE's integration priorities in Northern Europe.

12:15-13:00 – Strengthening RRNE/NGO cooperation in the region. Based on the previous session, as well as on NGOs' own priorities and foreseen activities, participants per countries will identify a number of common areas work where cooperation (including support to civil society) should/could be envisaged, as well as concrete suggestions for next steps.

Lunch

14:00-15:30 – Family reunification

14:00-14:20 – Operationalising family reunion in the MENA region and selected EU countries in order to facilitate the family reunification application process and address practical obstacles (information, counselling, access to embassies, application, and documentation): [Wilfried Buchhorn](#)

14:20-15:30 – How to strengthen political advocacy, litigation and capacity building? Discussion with organisations moderated by [Olivia Mocanasu](#), [Eglé Samuchovaité](#)