



From the Himalayas to the Lowlands – in Search of Peace and Happiness

Experiences of Bhutanese refugees in the Netherlands

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Colophon:

This research was produced in 2010 by Global Human Rights Defence and VluchtelingenWerk Nederland

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List of Abbreviations

ATCR – Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement
BCN-Bhutanese Community in the Netherlands
CO-Cultural Orientation
COA- Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers
DCFR-Dutch Council for Refugees
GHRD-Global Human Rights Defence
IOM-International Organisation for Migration
UNHCR-Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UAF-University Assistance Fund
WFP-World Food Program

Introduction

In February 2010, Global Human Rights Defence (GHRD) published its report 'Resettlement in the Netherlands' based on interviews with a number of the Bhutanese refugees who had arrived during the first two years of the Bhutanese resettlement programme. This report was based on meetings and interviews with refugees whilst they were still residing at the reception centre AZC Amersfoort. This research investigated their backgrounds, their perceptions of the Netherlands, and of the resettlement programme. In response to this, GHRD and the VluchtelingenWerk Nederland – the Dutch Council for Refugees (DCFR) embarked on follow-up research in the summer of 2010 with both families from the initial report, and new families, in order to ascertain how their lives had developed since arriving in the Netherlands. This research focused on integration and their views on social reception, life, education and work in their new country. The aim has been to obtain a unique insight into the resettlement process in the Netherlands, and to report from the refugees own point of view, in order to advise and inform the relevant authorities. The project was implemented by GHRD head office, The Hague in collaboration with VluchtelingenWerk Nederland. The final result is to be presented to the Dutch national stakeholders involved with resettlement during an expert meeting in January 2011, organized by VluchtelingenWerk Nederland.



Background: Bhutanese Refugees

Following a campaign of human rights violations and ethnic cleansing perpetrated by the Bhutanese Government and monarchy, approximately 100,000 Bhutanese were forced to leave their country in the early 1990s. These refugees are members of the Lhotshampa (predominantly Hindu and Nepalese speaking) minority in the Buddhist autocracy. In 1985, new citizenship criteria were introduced, depriving many of them of their Bhutanese citizenship. In the late 1980s, the government instituted a "one nation, one people" policy. Harsh measures were adopted curtailing their civil and human rights, in order to create a homogenous Buddhist state. After peaceful protests by the Lhotshampa, many were imprisoned, raped and tortured before being given the order to leave, many at gunpoint, and to sign documents renouncing their citizenship.

By the end of 1990, large numbers of Bhutanese refugees were residing around the Kankai River in south-eastern Nepal. In 1992, the Nepalese government requested assistance, resulting in the emergency assistance programme launched by the UNHCR together with World Food Program (WFP) and a number of NGOs. Seven refugee camps hosted the 100,000 Bhutanese refugees: Beldangi 1, 2 and 3 (Beldangi Extension), Khudunabari, Timai and Goldhap in Jhapa and Sanichare in the Morang district in eastern Nepal.

Life in the Camps

Despite the commitment of international organizations¹, life in the refugee camps is for most very hard. Refugees often described the time in the camps as 'extremely difficult', or as a 'state of merely surviving'. With limited options, refugees are forced to survive with what they are given: basic accommodation (simple bamboo huts with plastic roof), without electricity and running water, and limited food rations. The higher educational and professional prospects are limited, and refugee's low social status also makes them vulnerable to discrimination in relation to employment and at risk of violence. Security issues of great concern include political violence. Additionally, the bamboo huts are extremely flammable causing large fires almost every year. Given the frustrating situation, social and health issues are common, with alcoholism and mental health problems often contributing to additional violence. Violence against women and children is widespread: domestic and sexual violence, child abuse, child labour, and trafficking are commonly reported but also underreported issues. The structure within the camps (camp- coordination units) aimed at the protection of women and children frequently fails to provide assistance, and many cases are never reported to the UNHCR or the other international aid organisations. GHRD has met several young refugees, who were abused, beaten, starved and forced into child labour after their care had been entrusted to relatives in the camps. Amongst them, a young girl was trafficked to India by her own aunt, and forced to work long days as an unpaid domestic worker. In particular, orphans are vulnerable, with children suffering in silence for years before being detected and offered any real solution. Another victimized child explained: *"I never said anything to anyone. I had seen how the organizations came to ask others 'how can we help you?' And when they told, then they did not do anything to help them. Then they would get beaten even more, because they had been telling family business to the strangers. Family prestige is very important in our society."*²

¹ Besides the UNHCR and Nepal Home Ministry, there are a range of organizations involved with various aspects of the refugee's life including the resettlement from Nepal. IOM, Association of Medical Doctors of Asia (Nepal); CARITAS (Nepal); Lutheran World Federation are amongst the organizations who have maintained activities.

As Bhutan continues to deny their citizenship, and Nepal objects to local integration, the Bhutanese refugees have been residing in the camps ever since, with children born and raised, and the earlier generation aging and dying inside the camps.

Resettlement

In the early part of this century, a number of resettlement countries offered massive resettlement, while lobbying the Nepalese Government to accept such a procedure. In 2007, the UNHCR launched its largest resettlement programme ever in order to finally give the Bhutanese a permanent home outside of the camps. Since then, a large number of the Bhutanese have found new homes in third countries. The resettlement programme has not been without controversies however. Initially it divided the refugees and was opposed by some of those who still hoped for repatriation to Bhutan. They thus believed that the resettlement programme would prevent this from ever occurring. There were some instances of violence and the UNHCR extended its protection to some of the most vulnerable. There were also rumours spread within the camps, each more outrageous than the last claiming, for example, that resettled refugees would be sold and forced into slavery upon relocation, or even that they would be thrown into the sea from airplanes. As time passed and more success stories arrived from those who went abroad, most of the fear and resistance has dissipated.



As of 30 September 2010, 36,618 had departed to a third country for resettlement, with the majority going to the USA, Australia and Canada.

Departed Bhutanese for resettlement per country:³
(September 2010)

USA	31,133
Australia	2,007
Canada	2,000
New Zealand	468
Norway	373
Denmark	326
The Netherlands	229
The UK	8

69, 827 refugees had been referred to resettlement countries by the UNHCR.

56,649 had formally expressed an interest in resettlement out of the remaining population of 75,671

75,671 (remaining population)
36,618 (departed)
Total: 112,289

As the resettlement programme has proceeded, closures of camps and alterations in camp structures have occurred. Timai and Goldhap are expected to be closed, Beldangi 1, 2 and 3 be merged into one. Khudunabari, which has a larger population, will probably continue for a while longer but eventually, will also be shut and its population shifted to the camps near Damak (Beldangi and Sanischare).

² GHRD Interview with an orphan young refugee woman who suffered for years from beatings, child labour and starvation under the guardianship of her relatives.

³ UNHCR Nepal in UNHCR ATCR newsletter, 2010, nr.5, p.4

The Netherlands and Resettlement

Since 1984, the Netherlands has an annual quota for the resettlement of refugees, through the global UNHCR resettlement programme, which has been set at 500 since 1987. The current quota of 2000 is set for a four-year period to allow more flexibility. Around 400 refugees are selected by three or four selection missions every year. The rest of the quota is filled with dossier-based selection, where the decision is made only based on the dossier of UNHCR. This includes emergency (medical) cases and family reunion. There is a sub-quota of 30 places per year for medical cases. Also, without a specific sub-quota, vulnerable categories of refugees like women at risk or victims of torture are given special consideration. At the same time the Netherlands wants to avoid that the whole quota consist of vulnerable cases and so there is balance within the groups, with individuals who can support the more vulnerable.

The selection missions consist of representatives of the Immigration Service, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and COA, the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers. The COA does a social intake with the refugees during the mission to gather information for the initial reception and introduction period. A doctor will also be part to do a medical check-up.

Before coming to the Netherlands, the refugees who are chosen during a selection mission will receive Cultural Orientation information by COA and IOM in a four-day course. Once in the Netherlands the refugees will at first be accommodated in a reception centre for six months, after which they are housed in the municipalities, often in small groups of around 15 to 20 persons.

For 2011 the government announced a policy change. The reception centre will no longer be used. Resettled refugees will be housed directly in groups in municipalities.

Methodology

GHRD interviewed 29 individuals from 11 nuclear families, in July-August 2010. These individuals ranged in age from 18-71. 14 male and 15 female participants were interviewed. The participants were of various educational and social backgrounds. The interviews were conducted in the home of the participants, who were located in the northern, central and southern Netherlands, both in cities and in towns/villages. The interview of approximately 30 minutes was conducted with a set questionnaire focusing on education, family, health, the resettlement programme and life in the Netherlands. All interviews were typed, transcribed and recorded and finally approved by the participant. Most interviews were conducted in English or Nepalese, and interpreted into English. A few interviews were conducted in Dutch and Hindi³⁹. The Bhutanese refugees who took part in the study had lived in the camps between fifteen and twenty years, mostly arriving in 1992. The participants came from six of the seven camps: Beldangi 1-3, Khudunabari, Goldhap, and Sanichare. For confidentiality reasons, the interviews are numbered and presented only indicating the age and gender of the participant in this report.

³⁹ GHRD would like to thank the translators Anchelita Gowri (GHRD), Yog Khadka, Hem Rizal and Nawaraz Gajmer.

12 of the 29 interviewed arrived to the Netherlands in 2008, the remaining 17 arrived in 2009.

Date of arrival NL	Time in NL (July 2010)	Number
2008		
February	2 years, 4 months	1
April	2 years, 3 months	8
June	2 years, 1 month	2
July	2 years	1
	2-2.5 years	12
2009		
February	1 year, 5 months	12
March	1 year, 4 months	5
	>1.5 year	17
	Total	29

*Arrival of
Bhutanese
Refugees to the
Netherlands,
June 2010*



Profiles

Profile: *Udaya Mainali, Friesland*

About Bhutan

I worked for six years for the government as a policeman. In 1992, my parents had already left, as the army came to our village and attacked and raped the Lhotshampas after the demonstrations. Lhotshampa was discriminated against, there was no respect for us, and also at my work as a police officer, and they inspected us harder than the others. One day I was called by the officials and asked to leave the country. I made an oath to my country that I would work for my country for safety. As a policeman, coming to the camps in Nepal, all my hopes died.

About the Netherlands

The rules and regulations of Holland are very, very good. The safety you get is so good, and this is what every human needs. I have experienced nothing bad, no discrimination, you can do whatever you want, you can have a temple in your house and no-one will say anything.

About the future

When I left Bhutan, I lost all my hopes, but now I see my children, this gives me a lot of hope, they will do a lot. When my children's future is good, my future is good.

I lost everything in Bhutan, my hopes and everything. When the Dutch and Bhutanese governments can agree, and give the permission that people can go back to Bhutan and have a safe and good life, I will go back. But it must be a democratic state, where everyone is safe and has the same rights.

I believe for 10% it is possible, I lived 18 years in Nepal and never imagined that I could come to a country like the Netherlands where everyone is so nice, and now that I live here and see all the possibilities I now have, I think anything could happen. I came from somewhere where there were no human rights; they were zero, now I can see what they are.



*Udaya Mainali
and his family*

*Udaya and
Bhima Devi
Mainali*



Profile: *Bhima Devi Mainali, Friesland*

About Bhutan

I left when I was a child together with my parents, because we were Lhotshampa. My grandparents are in Bhutan, but we have no contact at all, my parents are in Australia, all the rest are in Bhutan. They are living in a very small village, they don't have any telephones so it is difficult to be in contact with them, I love them very much but I cannot be in touch with them. I am worried that they will die soon, they are almost dying, they are very old, and I cannot see them.

About the Netherlands

When we moved to our house, we received a lot of help from our neighbours, all around, to settle in. One neighbour only has one arm, and still he came to help us. My children love Sinterklaas, and they love going swimming. It is very easy to make contact with Dutch people, now that I speak the language, even if my accent is not good, they can understand me, I have a lot of Dutch friends. I love it in the Netherlands, it is very peaceful. This is a country of freedom.

About the future

I came for my children, if I didn't have children, I wouldn't have come to the Netherlands. I think a lot about their future and sometimes I am thinking when they are older, in their late teens, it will be difficult. I am afraid, maybe when they are that age, their friends could be bad, they could smoke and do bad things, so I am little afraid about that.

At first I didn't know what I would do here, maybe take care of elderly people or children. Now I want to get a diploma.

The Khadka family



Profile: Khadka family, Limburg

Mr and Mrs Khadka were agricultural workers with their own land in Bhutan. Their son, was attending university, studying animal husbandry. Mr Khadka was arrested, detained and tortured for seven months in Bhutan. His wife was also beaten by the arresting police and left unconscious without medical attention. Following Mr Khadka's release, their land was seized and the family was ordered to leave Bhutan on pain of death. During their time in the camps, their son married. They suffered three miscarriages due to the poor medical facilities in the camp. The couple gave birth to a healthy son soon after arriving to the Netherlands.

Profile: Akil Bahadur Khadka, Limburg

Life in the Netherlands

I feel at home but at times I feel lonely because of lack of contact with people that understand my language. In Nepal there were many people who could speak Nepali, and there were many religious ceremonies that you could celebrate together, that, I don't have here. Bhutan cannot take us back, that is definite, I had a lot of property that I could not bring from Bhutan to Nepal, so I had nothing in Nepal. There is no system in Nepal to protect me as an old man, and now, I am old, and it is better to live here in the Netherlands forever.

Family Reunion

I was told that they could not help my sons in Bhutan, but that my daughter in the camps, she would come to the Netherlands in a year or two. Then she was told she would have to wait for a long time, and she could go the UK instead. My other daughter was told that she was healthy, so she must go to America that she could not go to the Netherlands. In my culture, when you are old, we want to be close to our family, the one that has the most family around him, is the luckiest person, and now I don't have it.

Profile: *Yog Khadka, Limburg*

Bhutan

I had two years training in veterinary science and animal husbandry. After that, the government asked me to produce a police clearance certificate, a no objection certificate. I couldn't get any help, I went everywhere, and eventually I went to the highest police in Thimpu. He told me to wait for five minutes, that he would come with a register. He showed me a page, but I could not read it. He said simply, you will not get this certificate. It meant I could not get a job. The solution was to stay at home idle. I went home and lived with my mother and younger sister. My father was in prison. I worked in the field, planting ginger. I hoped I could be a rich farmer, even if the government does not give me a job, I would be satisfied then. The government sent a census team. They asked for a certificate of origin. I went with the documents to another district, and they provided me the original certificate. We were placed in category 1, genuine citizens. But when my father was released from prison, the army came and told us if you don't move you will be killed.

The Netherlands

It is peaceful. I never got a night's sleep in the refugee camp in Nepal, there was always fighting and quarrelling, which made me afraid, now I get sound sleep here, I can move freely with my bike. I have never seen people fighting or harsh words. I just wanted to know that I could live a simple life here free from torture. I will get a job, and my child will do better.

Yog Khadka





Separation of Families – Family Reunion

In principal, the same family reunion policy applies to the Bhutanese as for other refugees. This means family reunion can be applied for within the three months after status is granted. This is allowed for family reunion with spouses and minor children as long as they have the same nationality and actually belong to the family unit. For non-married partners, parents and adult children, family reunion is only possible if they are dependent on the person that is granted asylum⁴. It is UNHCR policy to refer the refugee and his or her 'immediate family'. This is normally spouse and children and in certain circumstances other close relatives. This could be parents, single brothers, sisters, or other near family members if they are part of the family unit and dependent. It also includes those who became dependent on the refugee in the country of asylum following, for instance, the death of a sole earner and who are left alone and destitute⁵. According to the Resettlement Handbook efforts should be made to preserve the integrity of family groups in the course of resettlement operations⁶.

"In my culture, when we are old, we want to be close to your family, the one that has the most family around him, is the luckiest person, and now I don't have it"-28 (M/71)

"I feel very lonely. Sometimes I cry a lot at home. My parents are in Nepal, my brother in Australia, I have one sister and she is in the south of Holland." -10 (F/32)

"When we left, they said you can go now, later we will send your families to the Netherlands. Later they were told 'You cannot go to the Netherlands, go to America, you can work, you are healthy'" -7 (M/51)

However, the separation of families as a result of resettlement was undeniably the largest problem encountered and reported amongst the interviewees. The concept of family was often considered broader than the strict concept used in the resettlement procedures establishing the 'nuclear family' (kernegezin). One respondent, asked to define 'family' explained: *"A family is those living together sharing the same feelings and aspiration, the same kitchen. We had that in our land, uncle, aunt, grandparents, grandchildren they are all our family." -3 (M/25).*

Adult siblings who felt very close to each other were often separated, causing sadness and distress for several of the interviewed. Several of the women resettling with their husbands were separated from their parents as a result.

All of the participants had close relatives (siblings or parents) living in Nepal, awaiting resettlement to America or Australia, or already resettled to one of these countries. Considering the often high age of the parents, and the time it could take for a resettled refugee to save up for such a long journey, in practice, the separation for many could most likely be permanent. A young woman, whose family was sent to Australia, expressed a great concern that she would never see her parents again: *"I am worried that they will die soon, they are old, and I cannot see them"-17 (F/26)*

Expectations Regarding Family Reunion

Within the selection missions some combinations of sibling families or adult children with parents did occur. However a majority of the families interviewed wanted to be resettled with (certain) siblings and/or parents, but this did not happen because they were resettled to another country (most frequently the US). In some cases they are still waiting for the resettlement of other family members but it is not clear if they will be resettled to the Netherlands. This depends upon both the willingness of the UNHCR to make a referral for the Netherlands and of the Dutch authorities to accept the referral.

In at least two cases the refugees stated that the UNHCR had said to them to go first and that the other family members would come later, which did not happen. In these cases, but also in other cases, the medical problems of one family member are the reason why the UNHCR would refer them to the Netherlands.

⁴ UNHCR Resettlement Handbook, 2004, Country chapter 'The Netherlands' updated September 2009

⁵ UNHCR Resettlement Handbook, 2004, 4.6 Family Reunification

⁶ UNHCR Resettlement Handbook, 2004, p. IV/30

A number of those interviewed were under the impression that the Netherlands would only take those who were ill, their carers and dependants, and that siblings or parents not suffering from illness would not be able to be settled in the Netherlands.

Key findings and issues

- > 14/29 of the interviewed had wanted to be resettled with other family members.
- > 11 (individuals) of these requested resettlements were in relation to parents.
- > One family interviewed had succeeded in the family reunion of their parents and a sibling who came with a later selection mission.
- > The separation of families as a result of resettlement is common, widespread, and causes serious levels of distress and frustration amongst the Bhutanese refugees.
- > Most refugees have unfulfilled expectations of the possibilities to reunite later with other family members.
- > The resettlement programme appears to be culturally insensitive to the close family ties traditionally found among the Bhutanese community.

Cultural Orientation (CO) Training Prior to Resettlement

Cultural Orientation (CO) is provided by COA with the logistical support of IOM in the camps. The CO training usually takes place several weeks before departure to the Netherlands. On average, the cultural orientation lasted for four days. The refugees are provided with information about their first stay in the reception centre and about Dutch society in order to create a realistic picture of the Netherlands.

The first group (2008) did not receive any information about the Netherlands prior to their travels as they were not selected by a selection mission but came as so-called 'dossier cases'. Most were also unable to conduct any research on their own, living in a bamboo camp with no electricity or internet. The second group (2009) had received CO training prior to the move. Although they had different views and wishes in regards to what the CO training should entail, it was widely considered as 'very important and helpful' in the resettlement procedure.

The majority of the participants considered the information they were given in this short amount of time sufficient. It was also widely considered to be giving a 'realistic picture of the Netherlands'. One person said that the reality was better than had been pictured during the orientation training. None of those interviewed expressed a negative view about the cultural orientation. However, some were critical about the CO in cases when they had the impression something was promised but did not happen. In one case, a refugee was told that he could live close to his brother in the Netherlands - while COA housed him 200 km away from his brother. In another case a refugee was told about the good medical facilities in the Netherlands but it turned out he had to wait a long time for the operation.

Two people had 'forgotten most of the CO'. A large majority emphasized that they learned a lot of 'the rules of the Netherlands' during cultural orientation *"Yes, for 4 days we were taught the rules of the Netherlands."* - 15 (M/43)

"They told us what is the Netherlands, what are the rules. Then I didn't understand so much, when I came to COA, Amersfoort, now I understand more and more." - 17 (F/27)

One person thought that the orientation could have prepared them better for the 'very long' process awaiting them in the Netherlands before they can engage in the labour market and society.

"Orientation was really important because it was like we were really unknown about the country. I really appreciated it even though it was a little bit long." - 3 (M/25)

"First we were not so happy; we did not have an idea of the Netherlands. Then we got the class and it gave us an idea we were happy to go here." - 16 (M/41)



"I had the concept that the land is flat, and I heard about one third is below sea level. That was a kind of fear I had in my mind, I was born in Nepal and lived there for 17 years, and in Bhutan for 22 years and I did not have access to the sea or rivers, and so I wanted to live quite higher than the sea level." - 26 (M/40)⁷

"When I was in Amersfoort, I learnt a little bit of language, got some orientation training. There were many other Bhutanese refugees there, I felt like I was in the camp, which was good"- 8 (F/17)



Key findings and issues

- > Cultural Orientation was widely considered 'very important and helpful' in preparing refugees for the move.
- > There seems to be a lot of emphasis on 'rules in the Netherlands' during the CO as many refugees refer to the content of CO as 'information about the rules and regulations in the Netherlands'.
- > Refugees were critical about the CO in cases when they had the impression something was promised to them what did not happen.

AZC Amersfoort

The COA is responsible for the initial reception facilities in the Netherlands. On arrival the refugees remain in a central reception facility in Amersfoort (asielzoekerscentrum) for several months. According to the government policy, it is supposed to be for three months but in practice refugees stay four to six months, sometimes longer depending on their personal situation. In the centre they can follow an introduction programme and receive Dutch lessons. There were very mixed opinions amongst the interviewed group about their time and stay at AZC Amersfoort. 15 of the 29 felt their stay was too long, or that there were too few options for activities and learning in the centre. Some of the respondents compared the time in Amersfoort with that in the refugee camp in Nepal, but with varying connotations. Some made the comparison in a positive way, referring to the communal and safe feeling of living with family and friends, 'all the Bhutanese together'. Others pointed out the idleness and boredom, that it was a 'waste of time'. However, a stay in Amersfoort was for a small majority (16/29) viewed as preferable to directly moving to the municipality. Given the choice, a third (11/29) of the participants would have liked to move immediately to a house in a municipality. A number of respondents stated that the integration and language opportunities available were the reason for their preference to stay in Amersfoort. One respondent said that were the integration and language facilities which were available to them in Amersfoort available in their municipality, they would have preferred to move directly. It is also noteworthy that several of the respondents who expressed a desire to move directly to a house were amongst the older participants.

⁷ In the Cultural Orientation training a film is used which is part of the Civic Integration Exam Abroad. The exam foreigners have to pass since 2006 if they want to be admitted to the Netherlands as a spouse. This film 'Coming to the Netherlands' gives quite a critical image of the Netherlands and lays a lot of emphasis on a large part of the Netherlands being below sea level.

Key findings and issues

- > 15/29 of the respondents considered the length of stay was too long.
- > 10 of these stayed 4 months - 5 stayed 9 months or longer.
- > 12/29 thought the length was good/sufficient.
- > 2/ 29 thought the stay in AZC Amersfoort was too short.
- > Positive factors cited regarding AZC Amersfoort were the community atmosphere which helped the transition from camp life, the opportunity to learn Dutch, and to learn about Dutch culture and lifestyle.
- > Negative factors included the sharing of facilities, lack of privacy, lack of activities and boredom.
- > The integration and language opportunities available were the reason for a number of participants preference to stay in Amersfoort.
- > The usefulness of the stay in Amersfoort is considered different. Most were happy with their stay and the information received, but some considered it lost time.
- > Most of those interviewed spent four months in Amersfoort. However, one family had spent up to 11 months at the centre.
- > Those who had had the longest stay in Amersfoort were least enthusiastic about it.
- > 1-2 months was frequently cited as a sufficient time in AZC Amersfoort.

Location within the Netherlands

All municipalities in the Netherlands are obliged by law to house a certain amount of refugees each half year. Municipalities offer houses to the COA and COA matches the houses with the refugees. Refugees can look for houses on their own. Actually, around 30- 40% succeed in finding their own houses. However, resettled refugees are such a short time in the Netherlands they are usually not able to find housing for themselves. For the matching by COA the same policy applies as for other refugees. This means that they have no free choice of where to live. COA only takes into account a close family member (parent, spouse or children), work (a contract longer than six months), higher education (which is only possible in a specific town) or medical treatment (which is only possible in a specific town). If there is one of these criteria applicable COA will try to find housing within 50 kilometres of the specific town.

Some resettled refugees feel negative about the municipalities they have to move to. In some cases, refugees refuse to move and COA has had to start legal procedures to end their right to reception in the centre. Although some Bhutanese refugees were at first reluctant to move to, for instance, Friesland (the most northern part of the Netherlands) - they did not refuse to move.

A difference with the housing of other refugees is that resettled refugees are often housed in small groups of 15 or 20 refugees together. This usually happens in municipalities who run behind in fulfilling their legal obligation of housing refugees ("huisvestingstaakstelling"). This could have the effect that resettled refugees are housed in municipalities where not many other refugees live and the integration facilities are not very well equipped.

The Bhutanese refugees are spread out all over the Netherlands. The majority of those surveyed (72%) did have another Bhutanese family living within the same town. Of these, only one family was not related to the other family in the town (i.e. two siblings and their children in the same town). One participant expressed the view that if other Bhutanese were located nearby, it could benefit the integration process. Six of the 29 interviewed had family (siblings) within the Netherlands but were placed at a significant distance from each other (three hours or more travelling time). Visiting each other is also not easy as travelling is expensive.



"The length was not the problem, because you can spend it with other people. My family had no problem, but I heard others who were forced to stay with people from other countries, with different religion and culture for them it was difficult." -10 (F/32) stayed 9 months in the centre.

"We were really new at that time, we did not know the language, we could also not speak English, and the people in Amersfoort helped us." - 25 (M/33) stayed 6 months in the centre".

"I would have prefer to stay in Amersfoort because we learnt a lot there, about the society, supermarket but I would have preferred to stay for a shorter time"- 21 (F/24) stayed 7 months in the centre."

"It is always better to get a house then to stay in the Amersfoort centre, there is nothing to do in the centre, except to speak with people. Here I can work in the garden and in the house, so I would rather have moved directly."-28 (M/71) stayed 4 months in the centre.

"If families are settled nearby I can assist them, I can show them shops, banks, we can give them lots of help, for integration into Dutch society." - 1 (M/39)

"I requested COA to give my sister a house near to my house, it would be better for her and me, I requested many times, but they didn't do it. They sent her to Limburg, and I cannot visit her often" - 10 (F/32 living in Utrecht)

"We thought we would be reunited with my brother who lives in The Hague- we were told this in the camp. But when we came here we were forced to move to Friesland. We asked the case managers repeatedly, but it did not happen. It is far to The Hague." -1 (M/39)

"It is important that at least two families are near each other, so people are not frustrated."- 3 (M/25)

"I must walk 30 minutes to get to a bus. This is difficult because I cannot walk that far, my legs are very weak and sometimes after walking for 5 minutes, my legs just collapse. They told us that I would be placed in a place where there would be a bus just outside of the house, but when I moved here, there is no bus nearby."-28 (M/71)

When considering distance, refugee's limited financial situation must also be taken into account – whilst receiving social benefit it is very expensive to travel across the country.

More recent arrivals surveyed (2009 onwards) tend to have been settled in small, rural towns, predominantly in Friesland and Limburg. Although the majority of those in Friesland were initially unhappy with their location, all but one family have since reconsidered this. Generally, the interviewed families in Friesland were very satisfied with their current situation, their house, the communication with VluchtelingenWerk and the overall integration process.

A number of those interviewed cited the lack of other Bhutanese families nearby as a cause of distress, due to social and cultural needs, and some also cited the inability to perform traditional religious and burial rituals. Specifically, the elderly members, who have been unable to learn Dutch due to illiteracy or infirmity, cited this as an isolating factor which was causing them distress. Younger family members also expressed concern for this in relation to their elder relatives.

Medical treatment could be a criterion to house a refugee in or near a specific town. However other medical issues could be also important in relation to housing. One of those interviewed cannot walk properly but was housed at half an hour distance from a bus stop. Another refugee has epilepsy and wanted to live within convenient reach of a hospital but was placed in a rural village.

Key findings and issues

- > There is a clear dispersion of the Bhutanese refugees throughout the Netherlands.
- > Six of the 29 interviewed had family (siblings) within the Netherlands but were housed at a significant distance (three hours or more traveling time).
- > The location of several Bhutanese families in the same town is important to many in the community. Bhutanese have a close community culture necessary for their religious and burial practices.
- > Refugees are not giving a choice if they want to live near second degree family or other Bhutanese refugees.
- > When finding suitable housing medical issues are not always taken into account.

Social Guidance

Part of the integration programme is social guidance (maatschappelijke begeleiding). Municipalities are obliged by law to arrange this for refugees. It consists of practical information and support to the refugees which in most municipalities is provided by local and regional departments of VluchtelingenWerk and funded by the municipalities. In contrast to past practice⁸ or the situation in other traditional European resettlement countries, municipalities do not receive extra finance for the integration programmes for resettled refugees. While in practice there are differences between the refugees who came as asylum seekers and resettled refugees. Resettled refugees are often the most vulnerable and often have lived for many years in a refugee camp. This is seen particularly with the Bhutanese in this research who lived for 15 to 20 years in refugee camps in very hard conditions (no electricity, or running water, no safety and with little possibility to work). There is also a high occurrence of medical problems for resettled refugees because of the long absence of adequate medical care and as it could be a reason for resettlement.

The refugees who were interviewed for this research live in seven different municipalities. In six of them social guidance is provided by VluchtelingenWerk (actually in the four different municipalities in the north of the country it is done by the same regional department of VluchtelingenWerk). In the other small municipality in the south of the Netherlands the social guidance was done by a regular welfare

⁸Until 2000 every municipality which housed 30 or more resettled refugees would receive extra finance on top of the budget for integration programmes for refugees.

organisation. In total the refugees are living in one large municipality (more than 300.000 inhabitants) two middle-sized (less than 100.000 inhabitants) and four small municipalities (less than 10.000 inhabitants).

There are differences between the social guidance given in the different municipalities. This depends on the organisation that is responsible for the social guidance, but also for a local or regional department of VluchtelingenWerk it depends on how many activities a municipality is willing to finance. In most municipalities there is no extra finance for the social guidance of resettled refugees. They receive in principle the same kind of support as other refugees. However the regional department of VluchtelingenWerk in the north of the country was able with extra funding from the 4 municipalities to start the social guidance with an extra course especially for the Bhutanese refugees with information on safety, health care and finance.

Key findings and issues

- > In two small municipalities, two families mentioned they received apart from the support of VluchtelingenWerk a lot of help from their neighbours of which they were very happy with. Two families in one of the middle-sized municipalities also receive support from the local church.
- > The intensity and the kind of activities of the social guidance are different in the municipalities. In the small and most of the middle-sized municipalities there is a frequent contact (once a week) in the first year with the local department of VluchtelingenWerk through meetings or participation in activities. In the large municipality and the small municipality where the social guidance was done by a regular welfare organisation there was less frequent contact in the first year (once every two weeks or up to once per month or every two months).
- > The social guidance by the regular welfare organisation was relatively short and not very intense. Only one of the respondents was still in contact with the organisation. For the other refugees the social guidance was there only in the first few months. One of the respondents said she received only a 'little bit of help' (F/34 married woman) and another one (M/71) said the contact person did not have much time because of her other activities and that they did not receive much help from her.
- > The respondents were very positive about the social guidance they received from the regional department in the north of the country and much less positive about the social guidance in the large municipality. They were especially critical because they compared it with social guidance other Bhutanese received in other towns. One respondent (M/50) said that they did receive help with 'difficult letters' but that in other municipalities VluchtelingenWerk would be more pro-active and supportive. They would refer refugees to organisations that could help with dealing with the financial difficult situation or for instance finding an allotment⁹.
- > Although the amount of satisfaction of the refugees with the social guidance is not the only indicator if social guidance is successful, it appears that the duration and intensity of social guidance is not sufficient in every municipality. The social guidance performed by the regular welfare organisation even stopped before the integration programme was finished.

"She came to my home on Friday, all the times. She shows what papers we need, what to do. She explains everything. Until now, she helps us, but now she doesn't come in the home, because we can see and understand for ourselves, but if there is something we don't understand she says we can come one day a week to VWN." - 22 (M/23)(two years in the Netherlands)



⁹Small piece of land where you can grow plants or vegetables.

Civic Integration Programme



As soon as they are housed in the municipality the refugees will get an assessment by the municipality to see what kind of integration programme they need. The amount of Dutch lessons and knowledge of the Dutch society a refugee will get can differ between municipalities. Also the duration can differ from 6 up to 18 months. Municipalities are supposed to provide different courses for illiterate people and higher educated people. The government encourages municipalities to provide 'dual courses'. This means that learning the language should be combined with internships and volunteer work. People older than 65 are exempted from the obligation to follow an integration programme. Within 3.5 years after receiving a resident permit a refugee has to pass the Civic Integration Examination. This is also necessary for refugees to obtain a permanent residence which would enable them to become a Dutch citizen.

The group of refugees interviewed had quite different educational backgrounds. Six of them (aged between 43 and 71) had never been to school, although some of them had still learned to a certain standard to read and write. Eight had only primary school. Ten had done at least several years of secondary school and five of them had studied at a college or university. Four participants were exempted from the civic integration programme due to either age (above 65) or illness. The others, except one¹⁰ are still following the civic integration programme, preparing for the State Exam¹¹ or are studying. Two interviewees who came to the Netherlands when they were below 18 are doing MBO (vocational training) of which one next year can continue with HBO (higher vocational training). One refugee (M/40) who has a degree in veterinary science has a scholarship from the UAF (University Assistant Fund) for a pre-course to be able to continue university studies.

The refugees were all quite satisfied with the civic integration programme, although quite a few (especially the higher educated) mentioned the amount of lessons were too few. Most of the civic integration programmes were only 3 hours, 3 days a week. Two mentioned that the groups were too big and that the teacher could not give everyone enough attention.

Learning Dutch

The enthusiasm to integrate was shown by the motivation to learn Dutch as swiftly as possible. Learning Dutch was considered highly important, by all participants, and at the same time the major challenge ahead. It was widely recognized that without Dutch one cannot gain employment, and thus would remain part of the welfare system – which should be avoided. In general, the younger generation (25 and under) had a much better grasp of Dutch than older family members. The younger spoke Dutch daily, during school and with friends. Several of the older respondents were illiterate and despaired of ever being able to learn Dutch. All of the interviewed were watching Dutch TV; and a significant number used Dutch Children's programmes as an additional tool to learn the language. Given the specific situation and background of refugees – several are illiterate, and had never studied prior to resettlement following the integration programme and Dutch courses was particularly challenging. The two participants who were exempted because of illness had requested and been promised home schooling but were still awaiting the teacher (after two months).

"The inburgeringcursus is very important; In Nepal, we have no idea how to live in a house, have cars, electricity, we have only a small little hut." - 14 (F/36)

"It was very important for us to have learned many things, how can we live. It is difficult, very difficult but we are trying. Learning only 3 days, if it is possible, we would like more days." - 1 (M/39)

¹⁰One (F/32 university level in Nepal) had just finished a course of one year, did the State Exam but succeeded only for three of the four parts. She wants to ask the municipality for a continuation.

¹¹The State Exam (Staatsexamen) require a higher level of Dutch than the civic exam. State Exam on level 1 will prepare for lower vocational trainings courses and level 2 for higher education or university. Municipalities can finance courses to prepare for this exam instead of the normal civic integration programme.

Key findings and issues

- > All those interviewed acknowledged the necessity of speaking Dutch in order to live in the Netherlands.
- > 20 of the 29 participants could carry a (basic) conversation in Dutch – though several with difficulty.
- > All but one of the 9 who could not were over the age of 30, and had arrived both in 2008 and 2009. (1.5–2 years in the Netherlands)
- > Several of the older respondents were illiterate and despaired of ever being able to learn Dutch.
- > The younger generation (25 and under) had a much better grasp of Dutch than older family members.
- > All of the interviewed were watching Dutch TV; a significant number used Dutch Children's programmes as an additional tool to learn the language.

“Most people here ask do you speak English? Do you speak Dutch? And then I just say no, and maybe it would be easier to be in contact if you speak, but due to language I cannot be in contact or communicate.”- 28 (M/71)

Participation in Dutch Society

Whereas almost all of the participants used the public transport regularly (e.g. to get to and from Dutch classes) – they never visited restaurants, bars, museums or other recreational or cultural facilities in the Netherlands. Very few also had made real 'Dutch friends'. The inability to communicate due to language difference was the most cited reason for this, next to the cultural differences and social rules for socialization. The Christian Bhutanese had very good relations and help through their church. A number of the Christian refugees had been provided with assistance during their initial time in their new home through the members of their church. Refugees in the small, northern province of Friesland had more social interaction with their Dutch neighbors than those living in the large city. Refugees placed around the larger city were often placed in very multicultural neighborhoods. A few answered that they did 'not have any Dutch nationals in the neighborhood! A couple of the men and one woman were engaged with 'voluntary work' ('stages') which was considered very useful to learn Dutch and engage in society, although the tasks they were assigned usually were outside of their expertise. One exception is a maths teacher who now supports children in learning maths at a secondary school (M/25). Overall children and the younger (16–20s) were much more involved in society and had more Dutch friends than their parents. It was also the view of their parents that their children were doing very well and enjoyed their new life, that they had a bright future.

One married woman, whose husband was engaged in voluntary work, expressed an interest to take part as well. Her husband explained that: *“Only men go for internship, females do not. It is not their choice; it is the choice of the school. Other women do not either, but they would like to.” – 1 (M/39)*

As 'dual courses' are considered very important and much more efficient to learn the language, the amount of refugees actually engaged with voluntary work or internships is remarkable low, especially for the women.

The relatively low degree of participation in the Dutch society after one and a half year is not different compared to other refugees. The Integration Barometer 2009 of VluchtelingenWerk Nederland¹² shows it often takes several years before the language and educational level has improved enough to find a job. The amount of contacts with Dutch people will also improve over the first years.

(Dutch citizenship) “This is what I like the most; I talk about it every day. If I cannot follow the course, I cannot get citizenship, I worry every day. If I get citizenship of this country would be of great pride for me.” – 12 (M/50) (Never went to school).

¹²VluchtelingenWerk Nederland IntegratieBarometer 2009. A study about the integration of refugees in the Netherlands. An English summary is available, see www.vluchtelingenwerk.nl

Akil Khadka with his grandson



The Bhutanese refugees are worldwide recognized for their enthusiasm and strong efforts to integrate into their resettlement countries. Perhaps this notion has also added to the willingness of countries in receiving Bhutanese refugees. The individuals taking part in this study lived up to their reputation. All of the participants considered it 'very important' to become Dutch citizens. All respondents stated their desire to become Dutch citizens; however, this is contingent on achieving fluency in Dutch. As a number of the refugees invited by the Dutch Government are illiterate, it is very hard for them achieving the level of fluency necessary to achieve citizenship.

There is a possibility to get an exemption from the part of the citizenship test concerning the ability to write in Dutch but only if someone is illiterate in his own language and can prove that he made real efforts to try to learn the Dutch language. However this is no reason to be exempted from the test concerning the ability to speak Dutch. For the resettled refugees older than 65 it is especially difficult as they are exempted from the obligation to follow the integration programme and often are not offered Dutch classes, while they still have to pass for the integration exam if they want to become a Dutch citizen. The other possibility to get Dutch citizenship without passing the integration exam is if you are older than 65 and have lived in the Netherlands with a valid permit for more than 15 years.

Key findings and issues

- > Refugees are largely not yet making use of cultural, social and recreational facilities.
- > Refugees also had still a rather limited social interaction with Dutch nationals.
- > Children and the younger generation were having much more interaction with Dutch society and people than the older.
- > The amount of refugees that were doing voluntary work or internships is remarkable low especially amongst women although they are already one or even two years in the Netherlands.
- > All refugees expressed a strong willingness of becoming Dutch citizens. However considering the requirements for Dutch citizenship it will be very difficult or even impossible to become Dutch.

"Those medically needy people should definitely choose the Netherlands, here it is excellent. My brother has saved his life and has a new life. You can have a new life." - 9 (M/37)

Health

In general there is room for twenty medical (emergency) cases in the Dutch quota. In practice there is a high prevalence of medical conditions in the total group of resettled refugees because of the usually long absence of adequate medical care in the country of first reception. In the centre in Amersfoort the refugees will receive a medical intake and first medical care. Once in the municipality they have to arrange a medical insurance like Dutch citizens of which the insurance premium is paid for a part by social services or their employer and for the other part by themselves. They also have to find a local GP ('huisarts'). The local GP can ask for transfer of the medical file from the medical organization in the centre.

The respondents who receive medical care were almost all very positive about the health care they received in the Netherlands. The only critics were in relation to long waiting lists for an operation (2 respondents) and one person who had to pay quite a lot of money for dental care, which he did not expect. Two respondents mentioned explicitly their gratefulness of receiving medical treatment in the Netherlands, as it was not available or not accessible in Nepal. There was a common perception of the Netherlands as only being available to refugees as a place for medical treatment, and that only those with severe medical problems would be invited there. Normally, positive perception to health is an indicator to good health, but in this survey that was not always the case, e.g. a person suffering from an ongoing brain tumor responded that health was 'very good'. Positive perception of health may be due to politeness, or may be a reflection of the perception of good health care.

The perception of the Netherlands as only open to those refugees with a need for medical treatment is a false one. However, some of the refugees feel this is the main reason of the separation of families over different resettlement countries. From this research it is not clear if all the refugees have actually received adequate medical care. It is also not clear if the medical information from the UNHCR, obtained during the selection mission or during the stay in AZC Amersfoort in all cases is available for the medical caregivers when the refugees move to the municipality. A follow up research on this is recommended.

"The family who doesn't need immediate medical need should not come here."- 9 (M/37)

"I really really admired the treatment. If I have to say being one of them using medical facility in the Netherlands, I can say it is the best." - 3 (M/25)



*Sanischare
camp in Nepal*

"The situation now is very good. If later, the government hates the people from other countries, the outsiders, if there is any discrimination, maybe it would be different. But I hope the Netherlands will not reach that position, because the Netherlands is a good country full of human rights."- 3 (M/25)¹³

"I am very happy; I get a new life in the Netherlands. In Nepal, we did not have a good life; we did not have a good future for our children." - 14 (F/36)

"The only problem that I have is the language, if that goes well everything will be fine."- 15 (M/43)

"It is peaceful. I never got a night's sleep in Nepal; there was always fighting and quarreling, which made me afraid, now I get sound sleep here." - 26 (M/40)

"We are safe here; we can have a safe and beautiful life." - 8 (F/23)

"When people meet, they kiss, and I find it awkward, I had never seen that before. I do not think is wrong, but it makes me feel awkward." - 27 (F/34)

"My sister was taken to south, and I cannot see her, so I feel very lonely."-10 (F/32)

Key findings and issues

- > The majority of those interviewed were in the Netherlands for either their own medical treatment, or the medical treatment of a family member.
- > Almost all had been in contact with healthcare in the Netherlands. Dental treatment was mentioned very often but also the GP and specialist or hospital treatment.
- > The majority of participants have a positive perception of their own health. Only 3 out of 30 had a negative perception of their own health.
- > The respondents who receives medical care were almost all very positive about the health care they received in the Netherlands.
- > One respondent mentioned she was afraid to go to the GP because of language problems.
- > There was a common perception of the Netherlands as only being available to refugees as a place for medical treatment, and that only those with severe medical problems would be invited there.

Life in the Netherlands

All respondents were asked to specify 'the best and the worst about their life in the Netherlands'. Generally, life in the Netherlands was considered better than that in the camps. All participants expressed a gratitude to the Dutch government and the resettlement programme as a whole. Health, safety, education, rules and regulations were the most popular things about the Netherlands. Parents often emphasized the positive future for their children. In particular, a number of respondents cited the 'peaceful' nature of the Netherlands. Human rights and democracy were also noted repeatedly.

Responses regarding difficulties with the Netherlands were generally positive, with most of the respondents saying there was nothing they didn't like in the Netherlands. The most reported difficulties were with language, absence of family and friends, and some cultural and social differences. Cultural differences generally involved problems with the more formal structure to socializing in the Netherlands. Cultural differences in burial and greeting procedures were also mentioned by two women. In one case, the respondent was uncomfortable with social physical displays of affection, such as kissing on the cheek as greeting. Another was uncomfortable with the 'red light district' phenomenon. In one instance it related to racially motivated bullying at school. Difficulties with language are a serious problem. The lack of fluency in Dutch means an inability to find work, and to properly socialize and integrate. Most of the other difficulties in the Netherlands, such as delays in finding work, and isolation, can be resolved through this one improvement.

The Best about the Netherlands

- > Health, safety, education, rules and regulations were the most popular things about the Netherlands.
- > In particular, a number of respondents cited the 'peaceful' nature of the Netherlands.
- > Human rights and democracy were also noted repeatedly.

The Worst about the Netherlands

- > Separation from families and friends
- > Isolation and loneliness.
- > Difficulties with language are a serious problem. Lack of fluency in Dutch means an inability to find work, and to properly socialize and integrate.
- > Certain cultural differences in regards to socialization.

¹³ This interview was conducted around the Dutch national elections, in which the anti-immigration party the PVV with frontman Geert Wilders was gaining large support in the Netherlands.

Refugees Recommendations for the Resettlement Programme

All participants were also asked to provide their recommendations to the resettlement countries, the UNHCR and the involved stakeholders. Many of the respondents did not have any recommendations for changes to the programme. Those who did have recommendations focused mainly on the importance of keeping families together, family reunion, the language issue, as well as that of location of the Bhutanese within the Netherlands. Several recommended an intensification of the inburgeringcursus and Dutch language classes. A number also recommended that Bhutanese families be grouped together, so that no one family is left along in any town in order to avoid isolation, and help integration, particularly for older members of the family. One recommended that citizenship be offered to illiterate refugees. One family recommended bringing a Bhutanese Hindu priest with the resettlement programme, in order to enable for the religious to fully exercise their religious practice and rituals. One warned his fellow Bhutanese not to have too big expectations on their new life and country, as this would only cause frustration: "Expect little, and life will be better, and be happy" -3 (M/25)

"The government should help people like my parents, they should live with people of their own community, they become more sick if they worry due to lack of such things!" - 26 (M/40)

Conclusion

There have been several findings, out of which one thing in particular can be certain: 'refugees' cannot be described as a homogenous group. Through this research GHRD has met with young and educated women and men, elderly, illiterate, ill, torture and trafficking survivors - all of whom have their own personal experiences. Their opinions and experiences relating to resettlement and integration have also been dependent upon these factors. One major conclusion that can be drawn is that services aimed at integration and support for refugees must be tailor made and correspond to the diverse and specific needs of refugees. This must be done realistically, as must the expectations placed upon them. However, available services and policies regulating the status of refugees are rather uniform. This has the effect that the social guidance is often too minimal and the civic integration programmes are not diverse enough.

One aspect unites them all: the importance of family. All the Bhutanese refugees in this research have strong family ties and a broad definition of immediate family. The separation of families through resettlement over different countries is of the greatest concern, and the UNHCR and the Dutch government should undertake more efforts in order to prevent the separation of family members which are important to each other. Bhutanese families are also dispersed within the Netherlands, and most of them

"Illiterate people like me, should be given citizenship in the near future, they would be very happy to be citizens of this country". - 11 (F/47)

*Sanischare
camp in Nepal*



expressed the wish to live closer to other Bhutanese families. It would be better to place them nearer to each other to facilitate social support, especially for the elderly to prevent isolation. As resettled refugees are not to be held in the reception centre as of 2011, it will become even more important to settle them near other Bhutanese families for support and help in integration. The importance of immediate and extensive assistance during the initial stay cannot be stressed enough.

Adequate social guidance is crucial for resettled refugees considering their background and the international responsibility for the Netherlands as they have invited them. Relatively many resettled refugees have severe illnesses or are of old age. For these reasons they are exempt from the obligation to pass the integration exam and are not offered an integration programme. However, it is also important for these refugees they can learn the Dutch language and participate in activities to prevent isolation. The majority of the refugees were able to carry out a conversation in Dutch after being in the Netherlands one to two years especially the younger generation (25 and under). Many refugees did not have a high degree of participation in Dutch society yet but this is not very different from other refugees - integration is a process that usually requires a long time. Dutch citizenship was considered very important for all those interviewed. However it is very difficult if not impossible for refugees who have never been to school, or experienced severe persecution to meet the current requirements for naturalization. It is contradictory that on one hand the Dutch government invite refugees to build a new life in the Netherlands, but on the other hand the regulations practically excludes them from citizenship. This is also in contradiction with article 34 of the Refugee Convention which states naturalization should be facilitated for refugees.

All in all, the life of the Bhutanese refugees has undoubtedly improved through the resettlement programme. They are generally happy about the opportunity for a new life and grateful to the agencies involved with the resettlement.

Recommendations

Separation of families-family reunion

- › Bhutanese have strong family ties and a broader definition of immediate family. The separation of families through resettlement over different countries is of the greatest concern for the refugees. Medical problems seem to be a special reason to refer parts of families to the Netherlands. Although separation of family and friends is always a possible result of resettlement, the UNHCR and the Dutch government should undertake more efforts in order to prevent the separation of family members who are important to each other.
- › Communication about the possibilities and impossibilities of family reunion should be clearer.

Cultural orientation

- › Cultural orientation before departing could be helpful to prepare refugees for resettlement. However it seems that the emphasis is very much stressed on the rules and regulations in the Netherlands considering the way the refugees refer to it. It might be more useful to focus on what refugees want to know and to take away unnecessary fears, especially as not much information can be understood considering the so different circumstances where the refugees are in.

Reception in a centre

- › The time spent in the centre in Amersfoort was considered differently by the refugees. Some enjoyed being together as a group while others had difficulties with the lack of privacy and the sharing of facilities with refugees of other nationalities. People were happy with the information they would get, but most find their stay too long with too few options for activities and learning. The decision is already taken that the centre will not be used anymore for resettled refugees in 2011. However if centralized reception for resettled refugees is reconsidered in the future access to support and active training is crucial.

Location within the Netherlands

- > Bhutanese families are dispersed all over the Netherlands. Most of them expressed the wish to live nearer to other Bhutanese families. It would be better to place them nearer to each other to facilitate social support, especially for the elderly to prevent isolation. Existing family links even if they are second degree (siblings) should always be taken into account.
- > As refugees will no longer spend time in a reception centre, it will become even more important to settle them near the other Bhutanese families in order to facilitate socialization and integration.
- > Medical issues, like the ability to walk in relation to the nearness of public transport should be taken into account.
- > The ability of municipalities to organise good social guidance should be part of the decision where resettled refugees are housed.

Social guidance and civic integration programmes

- > Adequate social guidance is very important for resettled refugees considering their background and the responsibility for the Netherlands as they have invited them. Most resettled refugees need more intense and sustained social guidance because of their background (trauma, illness, long stay in refugee camps, illiteracy). Municipalities should receive extra funding for the social guidance of resettled refugees, especially when they are placed directly in the municipality without an initial reception place.
- > Resettled refugees are a diverse group. Their educational background varies from those who have received higher education to the illiterate. This diversity must be taken into account and incorporated into integration programmes so that they are more tailor made. The civic integration programmes should be combined with voluntary work or internships to improve the language skills and facilitate finding jobs. Women should have equal opportunities to engage in internships or voluntary work.
- > Quite a few resettled refugees are exempted from the obligation to pass the civic integration exam because of their old age or illness. However they still want to learn the Dutch language and have more possibilities to participate in the Dutch society. For these refugees an alternative offer should be available to learn Dutch and participate in activities to prevent isolation.

Dutch citizenship

- > For all the interviewed Bhutanese refugees becoming a Dutch citizen is very important. However it is very difficult, if not too difficult, for refugees who have never been to school and experienced severe persecution to meet the requirements for naturalization. It seems a kind of contradiction that on the one hand the Dutch government invite these refugees to build a new life in the Netherlands but on the other hand the regulations practically exclude them from citizenship. This is also in contradiction with article 34 of the Refugee Convention which states that for refugees naturalization should be facilitated. The Dutch government should reconsider these regulations to make it possible for these refugees to fulfil the requirements for citizenship.

Sanischara camp in Nepal



Global Human Rights Defence (GHRD)

Global Human Rights Defence (GHRD) founded in 2003, is an international human rights organization with the objective of promoting human rights for those areas where severe violations have victimized relatively large populations, and where media and international attention has been limited. GHRD has been involved with the plight of Bhutanese refugees both in the camps in Nepal, as well as for those resettled in the Netherlands in recent years. GHRD supports the Bhutanese refugees through capacity building and awareness programmes in the Nepalese refugee camps, through solidarity actions with the Bhutanese Community in the Netherlands (BCN), as well as through reporting human rights concerns to the relevant authorities. GHRD has also monitored the resettlement programme in the Netherlands since its commencement in 2008.

VluchtelingenWerk Nederland

VluchtelingenWerk Nederland (Dutch Council for Refugees, DCFR) is an independent non-governmental organisation. With more than 6.000 volunteers and around 600 paid employees VluchtelingenWerk offer refugees practical support during the asylum procedure and helps refugees to rebuild a new life in the Netherlands. Apart from a national office VluchtelingenWerk has 14 regional departments and around 300 local branches. This makes it possible to be active in around 90% of the municipalities in the Netherlands. VluchtelingenWerk advocates for the improvement of the reception and integration of resettled refugees. In the centre where the resettled refugees are accommodated the first six months works a local department of VluchtelingenWerk, which provides information, advise and support on family reunion procedures for the refugees. In most municipalities were resettled refugees are housed a local department of VluchtelingenWerk is responsible for the social guidance of refugees.



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