Operational Tools for Resettlement

EUROPEAN UNION AGENCY FOR ASYLUM

Practical guide for planning and conducting resettlement interviews

2022

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Introduction to this tool

Information presented in this tool is by no means exhaustive but represents a compilation of guidance and practical tips on planning and conducting resettlement interviews (1). The objective has been to support Member States of the European Union and Associated Countries (EU+) in their operational work with resettlement.

What is the purpose of this tool?

This practical guide is intended as a brief guidance and checklist to accompany resettlement case officers in the preparation and implementation of selection interviews. The purpose is to contribute to increased knowledge about how to manage and address resettlement cases and to equip case officers with an adequate tool to prepare for the resettlement interviews.

Why was this tool created?

There are a number of existing publications concerning resettlement, and these are invaluable tools for emerging and existing resettlement countries. Some of these publications are listed below. In addition to these, this practical guide seeks to complement existing documents by providing detailed and practical information on less well-developed aspects of resettlement practices. This includes how to prepare for a resettlement interview and how to conduct it during a selection mission.

What is in this tool?

This practical guide provides an overview of commonly used procedures when examining resettlement cases via interviews in a country of first asylum. It builds on the assumption that interviews are planned and carried out in cooperation with UNHCR. It consists of four sections designed to help resettlement case officers to prepare for and conduct interviews and to overcome related challenges. Advice is given in the form of checklists and guidelines to assist throughout the various steps by presenting key issues, recommendations, and practical tools related to selection interviews.

Who should use this tool?

This guide is primarily intended to support resettlement case officers when preparing for a resettlement interview in a country of first asylum. It can be considered useful for both case officers with no or limited experience with resettlement selection missions, as well as for case officers with resettlement experience who could use it as a reminder in their work. It can be seen as a tool for self-evaluation or quality assessment, and it may be of interest to any actors involved in preparing for or conducting screening of resettlement cases.

(1) This tool was originally developed within the framework of the *Facilitating Resettlement and Refugee Admission through New Knowledge* (EU-FRANK) project. The project was funded by the European Asylum Migration and Integration Fund lead by the Swedish Migration Agency. As part of the handover process from EU-FRANK, the European Union Agency for Asylum has conducted a quality assurance exercise of the resettlement operational tools developed in this project.

Which other training tools and sources can also be used?

This guide should be seen as a complement to other available tools, such as the Practical Guide for Planning and Implementing Selection Missions and the checklist on the same topic. Further reading may also include:

- EUAA, Practical guide on personal interview, 2014, www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/public/EASO-Practical-Guide-Personal-Interview-EN.pdf
- UNHCR, Field Handbook for the Implementation of UNHCR BID Guidelines, 2011, https://www.refworld.org/docid/4e4a57d02.html
- Chapter 7, UNHCR Resettlement Handbook, 2011, www.unhcr.org/protection/ resettlement/3d464ee37/unhcr-resettlement- handbook-chapter-7-basic-procedures-follow- processing.html
- UNHCR, Managing the Stress of Humanitarian Emergencies, August 2001, www.refworld.org/docid/4905f1752.html
- UNHCR, RLD4 – Interviewing Applicants for Refugee Status, 1995, RLD4, https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ccea3304.html

Practical guide for planning and conducting resettlement interviews

When UNHCR has identified refugees in need of resettlement and submitted their cases to a re-settlement country, the decision of whether or not to accept the refugees for resettlement is taken by the authorities of the resettlement country. Some countries carry out selection missions in the country of first asylum, while others examine cases via dossier selection or remote interviews. Some countries use a combination of these modalities. During a selection mission, interviews with refugees are carried out on site in the country of first asylum. A selection mission in general requires careful planning, and these aspects are described in the Practical Guide for Planning and Implementing Selection Missions. This practical guide focuses mainly on the principal component of any selection mission, namely the selection interview. It intends to describe the necessary considerations to keep in mind while preparing for a selection interview and while conducting the interview in the country of first asylum.

SECTION 1. PREPARING FOR SELECTION INTERVIEWS – A BRIEF GUIDE

Selection interviews

The purpose of a selection interview is to examine factors related to the need for international protection and the need for resettlement. Some countries may have additional criteria framed by their national contexts. Factors such as medical or specific needs and vulnerabilities can also be further explored in the interview, as well as confirmation of family composition and background information such as place of residence. There may also be the necessity to examine issues related to exclusion. A part of the interview might also cover the sharing of expectations and an opportunity for the refugees to ask questions.

Resettlement countries can have different aims with their selection interviews. Some countries use the selection interview as an opportunity to gather information that might strengthen the integration capacities of the receiving community in supporting refugees with specific needs and vulnerabilities. Some resettlement states also assess aspects related to the ability or willingness of the refugee to integrate into a new country. It is important that the format, content, and scope of the selection interviews should be clarified, and protocols governing the conduct of such interviews should be agreed upon.

UNHCR will submit a case most commonly in the form of a Resettlement Registration Form (RRF), which contains nine sections, including biodata, information on the refugee claim, and information on the need for resettlement. The main objective of the interview is often to establish the refugee's claim and need for resettlement.

States have different practices regarding the content of their resettlement interviews. They can consist of different parts, such as:

- one part during which questions related to the need for international protection are asked (personal background of the refugee, facts about persecution, fear upon return, etc.);
- one part during which questions are asked about the individual circumstances and needs that might be relevant for future life in the resettlement country (level of education,

work experience, health situation, medical needs, etc.).

Some resettlement countries spend a good part of the interview discussing expectations, both on the part of the refugee and on the part of the resettlement country. The outcome of such discussions can influence both the refugee's and the resettlement country's decision on whether or not to proceed with resettlement.

Because the objectives of a selection interview in the context of a resettlement mission may differ from the aims of a personal interview in the context of a national asylum procedure, it is important to give clear instructions to the interview team on how to conduct the interview and what kind of information to collect.

Importance of good preparation

Good preparation is generally the key to a high-quality interview. This is particularly important for a selection interview in the context of resettlement, taking into account that selection missions often are conducted within a limited timeframe and sometimes under basic conditions. Because the interview can be an intimidating process for the refugee, a well-prepared case officer will be better equipped to create an atmosphere that allows the refugee to feel at ease and to convey the most relevant and accurate information. The better the preparation, the more efficient the interview will be. Good preparations can minimalise the need for obtaining extra information after the interview because it becomes easier to identify what information might be missing, incomplete, contradictory, or unclear and to address such issues directly in the interview.

Most countries screen the cases before they conduct interviews. A qualitative pre-screening will allow for insight into the material facts of a case and a better understanding of important details for the practical arrangements around an interview. For example, it allows the right amount of time to be allocated to the selection interview, a balanced distribution of the cases among case officers within the team, an informed choice of a female or male interpreter or case officers for specific cases, or the need for staff with specific expertise. In some resettlement countries, an initial pre-screening of cases referred by UNHCR could also lead to a case being screened out and replaced with a new submission. This increases the efficiency of the process because the cases interviewed have a higher chance of being accepted. It also avoids that refugees are called to interviews when their prospects of being resettled are limited, hence risking creating unrealistic expectations among these individuals. If cases can be replaced with others before the mission, it is advisable for a resettlement country to agree on specific deadlines with UNHCR. This is to allow UNHCR sufficient time to prepare and submit replacement case(s), thereby leaving sufficient time for the resettlement country to prepare for the replacement case before the mission takes place.

General considerations to keep in mind

One of the considerations to keep in mind is that each interview location and resettlement operation presents a unique set of challenges, largely differing from mission to mission and from place to place. Although interviews are generally conducted on the premises of UNHCR or IOM, or in embassies, they might also be carried out in hotels or refugee camps. Other influencing factors could be environmental challenges such as difficult climate, isolated locations, lack of electricity, internet, or Wi-Fi connections, etc. The latter might be important since some countries work in a closed IT environment or require well-functioning internet access on site.

Importantly, it is worth emphasising that refugees submitted for resettlement by the UNHCR are not a homogeneous group but a variety of individuals with diverse educational background, age, gender, family composition, knowledge of the world, and social network. They live in different situations and contexts. Access to technical solutions or services such as internet, telephone or even electricity and other practical circumstances differ from group to group and from individual to individual. Some may have lived for a long time in refugee camps and have partly or completely been cut off from a functioning social life, while some live in urban areas, have a good knowledge of other countries, and may be experienced in travelling and visiting different parts of the world. These and many other factors create differences in how individuals handle the interview situation and how they receive and interpret information. This impacts on what issues become relevant in the communication with them and how the mission team sets the framework for good communication. Given this, it is important to adapt the setting as well as content of the information and the way questions are asked as much as possible to the background of the individuals.

Conducting interviews for resettlement can also be demanding for the case officers. Selection missions can be hectic, working days are long, and resettlement interviews are sometimes conducted with tight time constraints and under basic working conditions. Listening to refugees recounting acts of persecution, loss, human rights abuses, violence, and even torture they have experienced can also be emotionally burdensome for resettlement case officers, especially if the interview schedule is full. A well-prepared case officer will be better prepared to cope with these conditions. Practical as well as mental preparations can reduce personal stress and help case officers to better handle unforeseen events that may arise during a selection mission.

Case familiarization

The Resettlement Registration Form (RRF)

Prior to a selection mission, the RRF is made available by UNHCR to the resettlement country. Other available supplementary documentation is most often provided upon request. The RRF serves as a primary tool at UNHCR's disposal to present the needs of individual refugees to a resettlement country. A high-quality RRF is essential to ensuring a high level of acceptance of resettlement cases.

The RRF is often the main or only available documentation in a resettlement case. A single RRF is completed for each resettlement case, and it includes details of all members of a family that are to be resettled together. Each RRF or submission indicates who is to be seen as the Principal Applicant (PRA) and who are family members or dependents of this person. The information in the RRF includes, among other things, details on the refugees' background, family composition, refugee claim, and any elements related to exclusion and specific needs. It also contains UNHCR's analysis of the need for resettlement and a comprehensive outline of both the refugee claim and the Refugee Status Determination (RSD) that has been made by the UNHCR. Through the RRFs submitted to resettlement countries, governments have the opportunity to closely scrutinise and assess the material facts of the case and to prepare for a personal interview.

In certain operational contexts and in order to process larger caseloads in an expedited manner, UNHCR has merged the refugee status determination and resettlement procedures into one. This has resulted in a new simplified form of referral mechanism called the Identification Based Methodology (IBM). The IBM is currently being used by UNHCR in the Middle East (e.g. Turkey) and the North African (MENA) region. An IBM form sometimes replaces the RRF.

Gathering identity documentation and other documentary evidence

It is important to check and review all copies of identity documents and other supporting documents if they were shared by the UNHCR with the referral. Regardless of this, the refugees should be asked by the UNHCR or IOM to bring all their supporting documents to the interview. This can be instructed to operational partners by the government when planning the selection mission.

Screening the case

Language

Having a good view of the language skills of the person submitted is important to ensure that correct interpretation can be provided on the interview day. If possible, each individual submitted should be able to speak their preferred language. To simplify translation, many resettlement countries perform the interviews in English, with an interpreter translating between English and the refugee's language.

Age

Elderly refugees and refugee children are inherently vulnerable in situations of forced displacement, and it is important to pay particular attention to any sensitivities linked to an individual's age. Cases concerning children may require specially trained interviewers, and resettlement countries should ensure that safeguards are in place. Regarding elderly people, the resettlement officer may want to consider whether special care and support will be required. For example, the interviewing resettlement officer could consider whether special assistance is needed to help individuals if they have limited mobility.

Nationality, ethnicity, and religion

Apart from the general context of the country of origin or the country of asylum, particular attention may need to be paid to any other sensitivities mentioned in the RRF with links to, for instance, national, ethnic, and/or religious belonging. Refugees from minorities and indigenous groups are usually in a non-dominant position in the society in which they live. This can place them at risk of marginalisation, discrimination, and abuse, which in turn may be exacerbated in a situation of forced displacement.

Level of education

Resettlement officers may also want to adjust the interview to the educational level of the refugee in order to ensure that the refugees can fully understand and respond adequately to the questions.

Family members in the submitted case

It is important to take into consideration the family status of a person. List any close relatives of each family member included in the PRA's case. The case file usually includes spouses, dependent children (including foster children and stepchildren), siblings, and parents.

Linked cases

Sometimes separate families can be related and linked to each other even if they have different RRFs. If this is the case, it should be mentioned in their respective RRF. Therefore, it is important to keep track of and list all family links. Be aware that there may be families who have taken in and cared for other individuals such as unaccompanied children or elderly neighbours with whom there is no blood relation but a dependency relation that may need to be established. The RRF should clearly indicate whether the persons concerned have relatives in the country of resettlement, and if so, state their names, the degree of kinship, their place of residence, and, to facilitate identification, give as many personal details as possible. These are important in several respects, e.g. for security checks and credibility assessments of an individual's claims, as well as for preparations/choice of housing and integration services in the resettlement country.

BIA and BID

Regarding unaccompanied, separated and other children at risk and who are being considered for resettlement, make sure that either a best interests assessment (BIA) or a best interests determination (BID) is available in order to ensure the optimal implementation of the best interests principle in actions affecting individual children. A BID describes the formal process with strict procedural safeguards designed to determine the child's best interests for particularly important decisions affecting their life. It should facilitate adequate child participation without discrimination, involve decision-makers with relevant areas of expertise, and balance all relevant factors in order to assess the best option. Both BIDs and BIAs are conducted by UNHCR prior to resettlement selection and should be attached to the RRF. The BID is an important part for a resettlement country to take into consideration when identifying the protection needs of an unaccompanied child or assessing questions of child custody in the resettlement country. In cases involving child custody issues, and under certain circumstances, UNHCR may submit a BID to determine whether resettlement is in the best interests of the child. UNHCR will always submit a BID for cases involving a child accompanied by one parent only when the other parent refuses to provide consent to travel. For resettlement countries, the BID is the main reference besides the personal interview with the child or the relevant caregiver.

Material facts

Based on the information available in the RRF, the case officer should identify in their preparation the material facts, i.e. facts related to the core of the refugee claim. If necessary, a superior should be consulted. However, the case officer should keep an open mind and take into consideration that new facts might emerge during the resettlement interview.

Exclusion

Exclusion issues are carefully examined by UNHCR, and eligibility for international protection under UNHCR's mandate is confirmed before an individual case is submitted for resettlement. The exclusion clauses form part of the refugee definition (contained in Article 1 1951 Refugee Convention), and consideration of their applicability is an integral component of the procedures to determine an individual's eligibility for refugee status. Detection of potential exclusion issues can take place at any stage during the resettlement process. There might be cases where exclusion considerations were examined by UNHCR. In these cases, the RRF would include the relevant facts as well as the legal assessment that resulted in UNHCR's finding that exclusion was not applicable. Although exclusion issues are carefully examined by UNHCR and eligibility for international protection under UNHCR's mandate is confirmed before an individual case is submitted for resettlement, exclusion issues could still appear at a later stage in the resettlement process. Such issues can be detected during the national screening phase based on the information in the case file (RRF) provided by UNHCR and/or based on other available information obtained during the screening phase, such as information provided by the security services and/or info obtained after screening social media. In some cases, indication of potential excludable acts would not appear before the personal interview.

In order to detect exclusion cases as early as possible, all involved in the management of resettlement cases are advised to pay attention to possible indications. It is advisable to gather as much information as possible on the person including their background, residence and employment history, family members, military service (if applicable), political affiliations, group membership, travel routes, and other relevant information. Use reliable country of origin information (COI) for comparison and reference. For further reading or support around exclusion, consult the EUAA practical guide on exclusion. Some reference is also made to exclusion assessments in the checklist provided further on in this document.

Check available databases

Information available in databases or on social media (Facebook, etc.) may be relevant for the assessment of a case. In particular, additional information or documents linked to a person's identity, nationality, family situation, personal circumstances, former residence region, and migration history may be available. While it is important to treat information obtained via social media sources with caution, such information may confirm statements made with the UNHCR, which will then help to build confidence and to conduct the interview in a more efficient way. It might also be that open source information undermines the credibility of some aspects of the resettlement case, which then needs to be examined more closely.

Consult relevant COI and relevant national guidance

General knowledge about the up-to-date situation in the person's country of origin, including general political circumstances, security situation, and respect for fundamental rights is important to properly prepare the interview, to ask specific and targeted questions, and to properly assess the need for international protection.

It might also be necessary to take into account the situation in the country of asylum, as situations might have occurred relevant to the individual assessment of the need for international protection and resettlement needs.

In addition to the COI present in the RRF, precise and up to date COI can be obtained from a variety of sources such as the national COI unit, EUAA (EUAA COI Portal), or other relevant human rights organisations. If necessary and if possible, ask your national COI unit for additional information.

Special needs

Identify special procedural needs of the particular circumstances of submitted refugees when reviewing case files and preparing for interviews. Some of these are gender, age, medical conditions or physical, mental, or psychological disability. For detailed guidance on the identification of persons with special needs, you can consult the EUAA IPSN tool.

Medical needs

An individual's medical needs might be of relevance for conducting the interview and should be noted, for example, when someone is disabled, pregnant (advanced pregnancy or immediately post-partum), suffers from a mental disorder, etc. If a case is submitted under the Medical Needs category, a Medical Assessment Form (MAF) will be added to the submission. Check whether the information in the MAF is sufficiently recent and up to date. Note that information about medical needs must be treated with respect for the individual's integrity and should only be addressed or noted when relevant for the resettlement procedure (e.g. impacting on ability to fly or to access the interview site or is necessary to know about to prepare adequately for the interview).

Special interviewing skills

Try to anticipate where special interviewing skills may be needed to help overcome communication barriers. Prepare for interviewing particularly vulnerable persons in the family, including survivors of violence (e.g. of sexual or gender-based violence, (SGBV)) because sensitive questioning may occur. It is important to address such issues in a culturally respectful, gender-sensitive, and age-appropriate way. Case officers should be prepared to interview family members separately, and with caution.

Confidentiality

Pay attention to confidentiality between family members. For reasons of confidentiality, persons are normally interviewed separately.

Practical arrangements

Officer and interpreter

To maximise efficiency, all linked cases should, if possible, be interviewed by the same caseworker. This should also happen on the same day if possible, although this procedure may be subject to variation.

Every effort should be made to enable the applicant to provide a full and accurate account by assigning a case officer and interpreter who do not make the applicant feel threatened or uncomfortable. This can, for instance, mean choosing a person of a specific gender. Requests for case officers / interpreters of a particular gender should be accommodated whenever possible. Special sensitivity should be applied in the cases of LGBTI persons and where the individual has been a victim of rape or sexual abuse.

Individual interviews

It is recommended to interview each adult person separately. It might also be a legal obligation or advisable in a certain case to interview minors. Some resettlement countries conduct a joint interview with all family members. Keep in mind, however, that it is possible that a person within the family, e.g. a woman who is part of a family unit and who is not considered the PRA for refugee status, might have been the target of persecution and/or have specific resettlement needs that may be different from the PRA or other family members. With this in mind, the interviewer should make every effort to ensure that all members of a family unit, including spouses and dependents such as mature children, are provided an opportunity to be interviewed separately. Only in this way can the interviewer determine whether individual members of the family have an independent claim for international protection alongside the PRA.

Interview length

The length of the interview should be estimated depending on the complexity of the case.

Pre-formatted protocol

Pre-formatted questions can be useful for conducting selection interviews because this way of working guarantees that all relevant questions are asked. There should, however, always be sufficient flexibility to ensure that the case officer can attend to and adapt the interview style according to the dynamics of any particular family. This is a particularly important issue when the interpretation is in a language that is not the first language of the team.

Schedule plan

The schedule plan should allow time for breaks if the interview is going to be long. It is important to keep in mind that interviewing can be an emotionally draining and intense exercise for all parties. In particular, it is necessary to provide breaks for the interpreter and the refugee. In addition, the interviewer must take regular breaks in order to perform effectively.

Note taking and completeness

Defined protocols will help in note taking. Interview time is precious for both the selection teams and the refugees, and high and consistent standards of note-taking are critical. A structure for note-taking ensures that all necessary questions are asked and that all answers are received. The structure should show a clear distinction between the questions asked and the answers given.

Consistency between interviews

Consistency between interviews is important in general. In some resettlement operations there are cross-departmental teams. If this is the case, cross- checking with colleagues conducting further interviews with the same applicants will allow the consistency of the statements to be verified or might trigger the need to clarify possible contradictions or inconsistencies.

Other practical matters to consider

Other practical matters related to selection interviews to be agreed on prior to the mission are described in the handbook Preparing and Implementing a Selection Mission.

SECTION 2. TEMPLATE FOR SCREENING/PREPARATION OF A SELECTION INTERVIEW

This template is an example of a tool that can be used to pre-screen a resettlement submission. It will enable the case officer to prepare the selection interview by identifying in a comprehensive way the most important data of a case, the material elements of the refugee claim, the specific needs of the refugee, and possible exclusion triggers. This screening will enable you to list the points that need further clarification during the interview. It can also be useful for preparing the interview schedule. A data overview is also useful when conducting a pre-screening, particularly when conducting frequent missions.

Please note that an assessment must be made by your organisation on what data are necessary – and allowed – to keep and how such data should be handled in accordance with internal standards and national and international law (e.g. General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)). This template is primarily intended as an internal working document and not as an official document, but it is still important to reflect upon integrity issues and only keep data that are necessary for the resettlement process Such data also need to be stored and shared with caution.

This tool is to be filled out per case submitted. Where relevant, specify information for different members of the case.

Date of screening

....

Screening by

....

Details of the case			
UNHCR case number			
Case size			
Family name(s) + First name(s)			
Date and place of birth			
Nationality			
Other relevant personal information			
Knowledge of languages	Mother tongue		
	Other languages		
	Language of choice for the interview		
Family members in the case	**Relationship**	**Name**	**Reference Number**
No/yes, if yes: details			
Linked cases	**Relationship**	**Name of PRA**	**Reference Number**

Details of the case	
Relatives in resettlement country no/yes, if yes: details (full names, contact information including social media contacts for security screening purposes).	
Education level	
Identity and other documents	
Passport	☐ Yes ☐ No
Other available documents (with copies provided)	
Other available documents (without copies provided)	
Summary of refugee claim	
Social media screening	
Social media profile found	☐ Yes ☐ No
If yes, any problematic indications	
Exclusion assessment	
Indications of possible exclusion grounds identified	☐ Yes ☐ No

DETAILS OF THE CASE

<table>
<tr><td colspan="4">If yes, please specify:
☐ crimes against peace, war crimes, and crimes against humanity
☒ serious non-political crimes committed outside the country of refuge prior to the person's admission as a refugee acts contrary to the principles and purposes of the United Nations
☐ serious crimes (subsidiary protection only)
☐ constituting danger to the community or to the security of the Member State other crimes/ indications</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Specific needs for the interview</td></tr>
<tr><td>☐ Appropriate case officer and interpreter</td><td colspan="3"></td></tr>
<tr><td>Medical needs
List here only medical needs that are relevant for the conducting of the interview (e.g. disabilities)</td><td colspan="3"></td></tr>
<tr><td>Other (e.g. child, elderly, victim of torture, trauma, etc.)</td><td colspan="3"></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Points of attention and points to clarify during the interview</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4"></td></tr>
<tr><td>Number of persons to be interviewed</td><td colspan="3"></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Estimated duration of the interview(s)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">☐ Normal</td><td colspan="2">☐ Average</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">☐ Exceptional</td><td colspan="2">☐ More than average</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4"></td></tr>
</table>

SECTION 3. CONDUCTING THE RESETTLEMENT INTERVIEWS

A resettlement interview differs in some aspects from a typical personal interview. However, they still share a number of characteristics. As mentioned earlier, it is important to note that resettlement countries have different aims for the resettlement interview. While some resettlement countries assess the refugee's claim only after the interview, others rely on the already existing information and assessment by UNHCR. General advice is to strive to establish an atmosphere of trust in order to set the basis for a well-functioning interview.

Structural plan of the interview

Every interview is unique. However, it is useful for all interviewing team members to have a common structural plan on which the interview can be based. This plan can include the following issues, some of them depending on national regulations:

- introduction: welcome the refugee and present all involved;
- explain confidentiality aspects;
- explain the role of the interpreter and interpretation during the interview
- explain the nature and purpose of the interview;
- clarify the refugee's personal data;
- supplementary questions regarding the person's refugee status claim;
- educational background (if necessary, ask supplementary questions);
- work experience (if necessary, ask complementary questions, for example, specifying prior experience and future employment hopes and expectations);
- discussion on refugee's present situation as regards work, including whether minor children are in employment, housing, income, children's educational opportunities, hobbies, etc.;
- motivation to integrate and openness to societal participation (if this is a part of national regulations);
- health, unless this is assessed in a separate interview or procedure;
- an opportunity for the refugee to raise any additional points not yet discussed and to ask questions;
- provision of information about the selection process and maintaining contact with UNHCR;
- closure of the interview.

Guidelines – contextual checklist of an interview

In order to conduct a good interview, the case officer should address the main aspects of the case and plan the interview in such a way as to concentrate on the areas where there are omissions or contradictions. The list below contains some suggestions on what to address. It is not exhaustive, and it is advisable to be used together with the EUAA practical guide on personal interviews.

- Verify the identity – check the photograph, name, identity documents, etc.
- Obtain original documents rather than photocopies. If original documentation is not presented, the person can be asked whether it is available and, if not available, they should be asked to provide an explanation.
- If the person has provided documentary evidence, you should assess its relevance, its source, and the way these were obtained and whether the use of false documents has an impact on the credibility of the person. You should also compare documentary evidence for

internal and external consistency. In some instances, you may obtain medical reports. Again, these should be assessed in relation to the statements of the person and the compatibility of the reports with the claim.

- Elicit detailed family and case composition (be conscious of BID and/or BIA if necessary), i.e. is the family composition indicated in the case file still the same?
- If any changes occur in family composition (e.g. marriages, divorces, births, or deaths), make sure this information is registered and forwarded to UNHCR so that an updated RRF can be provided if appropriate.
- Elicit information that is not available in the RRF.
- Ask your follow-up questions accordingly. It could be of help to provide a brief summary of the key material facts presented in the RRF and to verify/confirm that you have a correct understanding of the main claims for asylum. Make sure the information is correct and up-to-date.
- Assess the plausibility (if relevant) and credibility of the individual's story and the eligibility of the asylum claim followed by an assessment of exclusion grounds.
- Identify any special needs that the person may have that are important for the resettlement country.
- If applicable, obtain the individuals' consent for further processing, for example, sharing information with relevant national partners in the resettlement country.
- If applicable, collect other supporting documents that will enable the resettlement country to assess the individual's need for resettlement.
- pplicable, cross reference the personal data of family members already residing in the resettlement country.

Content of the interviews

Personal data

The interview presents an opportunity to verify the accuracy of the personal details and family names of the applicant and dependents. Spending time confirming personal details with the refugee is important.

Interviews usually start with questions concerning the names and dates of birth of the refugees. The correct ways of spelling the names of all the family members can be checked (keeping in mind the differences in transliteration) as well as the precise dates of birth (from birth certificates, passports, etc., if available). It may be good to be aware that age can be interpreted in different ways. Depending on the refugee's nationality, the calendar they use may be Gregorian, Hindu, Islamic or Jewish. In addition, some cultures count the date of birth as the first birthday.

It is important to use the interview to determine to the greatest extent possible the potential for future family reunification applications. Therefore, emphasise the regulations concerning family reunification so as to avoid unrealistic hopes of reuniting with all the mentioned relatives in the new country. Selection mission teams should also be prepared for meeting refugees from cultures with polygamous marriages. In such situations, the refugees should be fully informed as to which family members would be eligible for family reunification.

It is advisable to check the presence of relatives, friends, and other connections in the resettlement country. If a person with such ties is selected for resettlement, some resettlement countries will try to resettle this person to a locality where their contacts already reside in order to make the integration process easier.

Interviewers also need to be aware of child marriages and should be able to inform the refugees on national regulations in this regard. Because child marriage has no legal standing under international law and is widely treated as a form of SGBV, UNHCR does not, in principle, submit cases of refugees under the age of 18 years old who are married. Normally the processing of these cases and those of their parents can be suspended until the concerned child reaches the age of 18. However, there are situations where a resettlement submission for a married refugee child together with their spouse may be warranted due to compelling protection needs or vulnerabilities in the family. UNHCR has an assessment tool that might be helpful as a reference on child marriages.

Refugee background (i.e. the substance of the claim for refugee status)

The details concerning the refugee's refugee status determination is set out in the RRF prepared by UNHCR. The refugee claim in the RRF serves as a basis on which to build the interview structure. It might be necessary to ask supplementary and probing questions. The aim of such supplementary questions is to satisfy the selection team as to the accuracy of the refugee claim and the determination set out in the documentation. If sensitive topics are discussed, children should be excused from the room.

An extensive review of a refugee's refugee claim is necessary only where the RRF is unclear or ambiguous.

It is important to also ask questions about the refugee background of the spouse of the PRA for resettlement. They might have a different or sometimes even stronger refugee claim than the PRA.

Closure protocols

Given the sensitivity of the interview, appropriate closure is important. At the end of the interview, allow the refugee to ask questions about the selection process and the resettlement procedures in general, or any other general queries they may have. It is important that refugees are invited to add further information to what has already been said (e.g. 'Is there anything you would like to say that we have not talked about and which you feel would be useful in considering your application?'). Furthermore, it is advisable to inform the refugees about what will happen during the period up to the notification of the decision. For example, that they have to notify UNHCR of any change in family composition, address, contact information or any other information that could influence the resettlement process. The refugees should be informed about how long it will take to communicate the decision on their resettlement submission.

As regards practical matters, the refugees should be reminded to take back all relevant documents from the interview when they leave. If a selection team retains any documents, the refugees have to be informed of the details regarding the return of the documents. Ask the refugee for their consent and give a written document, signed by the interviewer or relevant responsible person, listing all the documents the refugee has handed over stating how and by when they can retrieve the documents. Finally, repeat reassurances about the confidentiality of matters discussed during the interview and then close the interview with a goodbye that is consistent for all interviews.

General comments on interview techniques and intercultural communication

Selection interviews are normally influenced by many factors, e.g. cultural differences between the interviewer and the refugee, their different personalities, and the sensitivity of the given situation.

The interview can be stressful for the refugee for many reasons and the officer should try to reduce or minimise any stress. For example, the refugee may:

- view the case officer as an authority figure representing a government;
- be uncomfortable addressing gender issues;
- have difficulty recounting a story of persecution;
- suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, etc.

In light of the above, it is important to strive to create a dialogue between the parties rather than an atmosphere of interrogation. A confidential and safe atmosphere makes the interview quicker and easier. It may also be useful to bring paper and pencils or other playthings for young children.

Be aware of the importance of greetings and strive to design them to put everyone at ease. Adapt yourself, if possible, to the culture of the refugees. For example, in some cultures, men do not shake hands with women. It is advisable that the selection team considers and, if possible, follows the practices and culture of the persons who are being interviewed.

It is crucial that after the interview all the family members feel that their participation was important and their experiences were valued. If a whole family is interviewed together, pay attention during the interviews not only to the answers given but also to the behaviour and conduct of the family members and their relationships. Many little details illustrate the situation in the family, such as in what order the family members take their seats, how others react to crying or otherwise restless babies, and if everybody gets the chance to answer questions. If somebody seems to be sad, quiet, or withdrawn, maybe that person does not want to be resettled with the others? Maybe there is a fiancé that that does not want to be left behind? It is important that interviewers are familiar with inter- cultural communication issues and to be aware of the risks of misinterpretation caused, for instance, by non-verbal messages.

SECTION 4. USING INTERPRETERS IN THE SELECTION INTERVIEWS

Selection interviews are usually performed with the assistance of an interpreter. Some resettlement countries use their own interpreters, but the most common option is that interpreters are provided by UNHCR or IOM (when agreed upon in advance of the selection mission). Irrespective of which interpreters are used, it is important to recall that language interpretation is an essential and crucial link between the refugee and the case officer. Therefore, a careful consideration is necessary regarding the role of the interpreter, and this section focuses on some of them. For further consultation and guidance on this subject, go to the Guiding note for communication via interpreters. Some considerations to keep in mind are highlighted below, but for best effect they should be read together with the abovementioned tool.

Considerations to keep in mind

If the resettlement country uses interpretation services provided by UNHCR or IOM, it is worth keeping some of the following considerations in mind:

- Interpreters are provided by other partners, thus the resettlement country is not familiar with the recruitment process and the quality of the interpreters' skills.
- Interpreters are not used in a resettlement country's national process and may not be familiar with country-specific regulations.
- Interpreters work for different resettlement countries with different practices.
- The language between the case officer and the interpreter may be in English or French.
- Interpreters might belong to the refugee population. If so, it would be important to check if interpreters might be from the same nationality but from different ethnic origins, particularly where the two ethnic groups have a history of conflict in the country of origin.

Preparing the interpreter for a selection interview

An important first step in conducting a selection interview is to prepare the interpreter and to provide them with guidance on how to perform the role effectively. For the protection of the refugees being interviewed, it is necessary that the communication between them, the interviewer, and the interpreter functions well. To avoid unintended harm caused by misinterpretation or breaches of ethical boundaries in confidentiality and neutrality, it is vital to prepare interpreters before commencing with an interview.

It may help if the case officer explains how they intend to conduct the interview and what type of questions will be asked. In addition, some explanations of the commonly used terminology may be helpful, and guidance should be provided regarding the code of ethics the interpreter is expected to follow. It is particularly important to insist on the confidentiality of all information concerning the refugee.

The role of the interpreter is that they must remain neutral and objective during the interview process, and should limit the translation to what is said in the interview. The interpreter has to understand that everything the interviewer and refugee say must be interpreted. It is not sufficient to summarise or embellish what is being said through filling in missing information. Nor should the interpreter try to improve on the words or phrases of the applicant in order to make them sound more coherent, credible, or educated. Any names of persons or places must be spelled out so that they are clear. The interviewer or the refugee can always ask for clarification when necessary. The interpreter should refrain from giving any comments or expressing any opinions.

Challenges with interpretation standards

If a case officer in not satisfied with the interpreting arrangement, it should be possible to determine if the interview should proceed or whether changes need to be made to correct the situation. For example, such a situation may arise if the interviewed person does not fully understand the interpreter due to differences of dialect. Or, in a situation where refugee interpreters are employed, an interpreter should not be engaged if they are closely related to the applicant through family ties. It is important to recall that the relation between the refugee and the interpreter might have an impact on their ability and willingness to communicate. Interpreters should not interfere or influence decision-making or interfere in sensitive or confidential national procedures. For further support in communicating through interpreters, see Guiding Note for Interpretation through Interpreters.

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