

Resettling Hmong in French Guyana

An original experiment has been conducted by France in the shape of schemes for resettling groups of refugees in a rural environment. This rural resettlement scheme has been introduced in French Guyana in South America. Guyana, with its low population density and its climate relatively similar to that of Southeast Asia, fulfilled conditions favourable to the resettlement of Hmongs in the same living conditions as they had known in their home country of origin.

In October 1977, 500 Hmongs were settled in several stages at the locality of Cacao. The refugees built their houses themselves. A village has been functioning for the past two years, with a daily allowance of

40 French francs per head being paid by the Directorate of Health and Social Action of the département. This allowance has made it possible to provide food, the staff necessary for the centre and part of the expenditure involved in clearing land and putting it under cultivation. The community has in the meantime become self-sufficient in food and in the spring of 1980 it set up a co-operative composed exclusively of Hmongs. In 1981, Cacao had a total population of 618 persons including 118 young children born since 1977.

A second settlement of 400 Hmongs was established at Mana in Guyana in October 1979. During the initial phase, some houses, an infirmary

and an infant school were built. A building to house the co-operative is in the process of construction. An initial crop of rice was harvested in 1980, and the local community has attained self-sufficiency in fruit and vegetables.

In 1979, Cacao harvested as much rice as the whole of Guyana. The two villages will shortly be able to feed the entire population of this département which used to import more than 95% of its food.

(From Council of Europe, July 26, 1982, Steering Committee for Social Affairs. CDSO. "Social Situation and Social Measures Concerning People Seeking Political Asylum or Having Status in the Member States of the Council of Europe," by Reinhard Lohrmann.)

Refugee Resettlement in Europe

Excerpts from a report for the Council of Europe¹

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In Europe it is generally speaking the governments which meet the financial costs involved in the reception and resettlement of refugees. The majority of countries place refugees in provisional accommodation centres for periods of 3 - 12 months; in other cases the Canadian pattern is utilized — after only a few days refugees are directed to their final destination to flats or to private sponsors until independent housing is found.

Switzerland

In Switzerland, the social bodies responsible for the reception of refugees and the initial measures to resettle them call upon the services of groups of four to ten voluntary workers to assist the refugees in the resettlement process and maintain regular contacts with them. It is the primary task of these groups of voluntary workers to help refugees find independent accommodation, settle into it, find a job and enrol their children at a school and at the same time to introduce them to their neighbours and to the administrative authorities with which they will have to deal.

Does this seem similar to the proposals to integrate government-assisted resettlement and private sponsorship?

Denmark

In Denmark, refugees enjoy rent-free accommodation from the moment of their arrival, in the same conditions as Danes who are temporarily without earnings.

Federal Republic of Germany

In the Federal Republic of Germany 6 months after their settlement in independent housing, the refugees will be entitled to subsidised housing.

As soon as they arrive, refugees can attend free courses in German.

Foreign refugees who wish to work immediately after completion of a language course will receive during their linguistic training (nine months) maintenance assistance, training fees including materials, commuting expenses, health and accident insurance, and, in the case of any non-local accommodation necessary, also the cost of lodging and extra cost of board.

Foreign refugees who do not wish to work (housewives, pensioners, etc.) are paid the cost of the linguistic training and of commuting during the period of the language course (300-800 hours).

Foreign refugees up to 35 years of age who wish to begin an educational or vocational training course after completion of the linguistic training receive the same allowances as under (a) during the period of the language course (up to 48 months).

Netherlands

The Netherlands Government spends each year an average of Fl 32,000 per refugee for help and resettlement (more than 65,000 French francs or \$13,000 Canadian dollars). A certain proportion of new dwellings must be allocated to refugees.

Sweden

In Sweden, children who had to interrupt their schooling when fleeing their countries are given an opportunity to continue their education The national system of leave for study is also available to refugees.

Belgium

In Belgium, UNHCR representatives appraise the legitimacy of the motives of asylum-seekers after the Ministry of Justice decides on admissibility.

Austria

Austria does not allow access to the labour market for asylum seekers. (There were 5,627 cases in 1979.)

Europe in General

In order to forestall the many abuses of the rules on asylum for persons persecuted on political, religious and racial grounds, it is proving necessary for European countries to take all appropriate steps to reduce the chances of misuses and thus to protect and indeed reinforce the right of asylum for those who are in the most urgent need.

1. Social Situation and Social Measures Concerning People Seeking Political Asylum or Having Refugee Status in the Member States of the Council of Europe. (Activity 6.50.2) July 1982.

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Unaccompanied Minors in
Canada.**

