



Summary

The Cultural Orientation Programme for Norway-bound Refugees provides integrated pre-arrival cultural orientation (CO) classes for refugees accepted for resettlement to Norway. IOM Oslo, in close coordination with IOM offices in countries where refugees are temporarily residing, gives training for selected target groups of refugees, aged 8 years and above, on the practicalities of living in their new country. The primary objective of the programme is to promote the smooth integration of the refugees to Norwegian society by preparing them for the initial period after arrival in Norway, addressing unrealistic expectations, and limiting the culture shock.

The cultural orientation programme also provides the receiving Norwegian municipalities with relevant and current information about the resettling of refugees and their situation prior to their arrival to Norway.

IOM IS COMMITTED TO THE PRINCIPLE THAT HUMANE AND ORDERLY MIGRATION BENEFITS MIGRANTS AND SOCIETY.

AS AN INTERGOVERNMENTAL BODY, IOM ACTS WITH ITS PARTNERS IN THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO:

ASSIST IN MEETING THE OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES OF MIGRATION;

ADVANCE UNDERSTANDING OF MIGRATION ISSUES;

ENCOURAGE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT THROUGH MIGRATION; AND

WORK TOWARDS EFFECTIVE RESPECT OF THE HUMAN DIGNITY AND WELL-BEING OF MIGRANTS.



Liberian women discussing gender issues.

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IOM Cultural Orientation Programme for Norway-bound Refugees

WHY IS CULTURAL ORIENTATION (CO) NEEDED?

Many refugees are resettled in their countries of destination without being given accurate information about their new country or sufficient preparation to easily adapt to life there. The result is often an extended period of adjustment, during which the newcomer suffers personal difficulties. The recipient municipalities also point out that too little or wrong information about Norway and Norwegian society often gives resettling refugees unrealistic expectations about their new community. This often leads to increased need for follow-up compared to other groups of refugees who have received CO before arrival, placing

added stress on the social services of the recipient country and the local community.

Increasingly, the many countries receiving refugees see the benefits of pre-arrival cultural orientation. Not only does it make the actual travel to the new country less stressful for the refugees, but it also eases the initial resettlement period. The result of lowering the culture shock for the refugees also has a positive side effect on the recipient society in terms of resources.

Norway in the past had, when possible, given pre-arrival CO to refugees. This had typically been a one-day introduction given by UDI (the Directorate of Immigration) personnel at the place of departure. The need for a more com-



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prehensive introduction course led to the establishment of the current IOM CO project in year 2003. During the first two years of implementation the number of beneficiaries exceeded 1000 refugees and over 60 receiving municipalities also benefited from information dissemination.

IOM EXPERTISE ON CO

Institutionally, IOM has many decades of experience in the implementation of migrant training programmes worldwide. As early as the mid-1950s, it had established language and vocational training operations in Europe for national migrants and refugees bound for various immigration and resettlement countries in the Americas and Oceania. Over 12 million individuals have already been assisted directly by IOM, and a large portion of that number received cultural orientation, pre-departure training or language training. In addition to the Norwegian CO, IOM is also implementing CO for migrants and refugees bound for Australia, Canada, Finland, UK and USA.

OBJECTIVES

By increasing the refugees' knowledge of Norway, this project will contribute to the overall empowerment of refugees to cope with their immediate needs on arrival, enhance their ability to become self-sufficient sooner and facilitate their integration into Norwegian society.

Through the CO programme, refugees can

- Develop a realistic picture of Norway and understand its culture and values.
- Develop an understanding of the receiving municipalities' expectations of them.



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Cultural Orientation for Norway-bound Refugees

Geographical Coverage:	Norway and transit countries
Project Management Site:	IOM Oslo
Funding Source:	Directorate of Immigration
Target Group:	Norway-bound refugees
Project Duration:	1 year (March 2005 – February 2006)

- Develop problem-solving skills.
- Feel in control and reduce their anxiety.
- Learn about common problems that they may encounter in the resettlement process, understand that these are normal, and thus help reduce any negative impact.

TARGET GROUP

The programme is organizing CO classes for 750 Norway-bound quota refugees over the age of 8 who originate from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Indonesia and Myanmar.

ELEMENTS OF THE CO TRAINING

The pedagogical base of the CO programme is the bi-cultural trainer. A bi-cultural trainer is a person who has an origin or background similar to the refugee group in question and who also has a solid background from and living experience in Norway. He or she speaks the language of the CO participants thus eliminating the need for an interpreter.

Each course consists of 20 hours intensive CO training given over a period of 4 days for adults aged 15 and above. Additionally, a CO for children is also organized. Children aged 8

to 14 years receive 2 days, a total of 10 hours, of CO training. The use of the refugees' own language as the language of instruction maximizes effective learning.

The curriculum is based on combined experience of many actors. Special attention is given to local customs of the accepted refugees that could be misunderstood or problematic in European/Norwegian culture. Such topics include gender issues, reproductive health issues and domestic violence. Additionally refugees receive information on topics like the resettlement process in Norway, climate, history, geography, housing, education, health care, employment, and other public services.

IOM, in cooperation with UDI and receiving municipalities, continuously updates the curriculum and the training materials to suit the needs of each refugee group and to reflect changes in Norwegian society. Training materials have been translated into the languages of the CO participants.

The CO classes emphasize a participatory approach, are learner-centred, and combine discussions, visual teaching aids, theatre-for-development and learning through dialogue and case studies. Video material has been produced to supplement the training sessions.

Besides providing cultural orientation classes to Norway-bound refugees, the project is also offering information seminars to recipient municipalities and relevant service providers in Norway.

An evaluation is envisaged towards the end of the project culminating in a one-day seminar among all stakeholders.

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The programme is funded by the Directorate of Immigration (UDI). It is implemented by IOM Oslo in close partnership with UDI, IOM and UNHCR offices in the training site countries. The training site countries for fiscal year 2005-2006 are in Thailand, Malawi, Zambia, and Malaysia.