



Refugee Integration, Relocation of the Social Core

L.S.,

Driven by their determination to survive, today's 22.5 million refugees left everything behind and fled their countries. The human need for safety is so elementary that we are capable of taking enormous risks and are willing to sacrifice almost anything we possess to preserve it. Those who escaped war became homeless, not only materially but above all socially and for this reason rebuilding their lives has turned into a complex struggle. The proverb "home is where the heart is" implies that an emotional center of living is a prerequisite for stability. Hence, in case of refugees, in order to achieve successful resettlement, their social core has to be relocated with them.

Human solidarity is essential to achieve this resurgence. In times of crisis, refugees are fully dependent on other people's willingness to help them by donating food and shelter, which mends only the emergency for physical security. A question remains though whether our moral duty and responsibility extends beyond this level and if we should temporarily or permanently host and sponsor the refugees' re-establishment? Ultimately, if returning to their place of origin is not a feasible short-term option, refugees will still have to live somewhere. Therefore the issue remains where and how to re-settle them.

Refugee support should ideally be determined by the probability and expected time needed till people can return to their countries of origin. Those who will stay indefinitely, obviously, need to fully integrate into the society of their hosting country, but also those who are staying for an extended period of time – waiting to go back – are required to establish a much deeper level of connection to the recipient's community than just an "emergency based" temporary host-guest relationship. Types of assistance – beyond the refugee camp survival – consequently almost always require investment in skills of refugees. Whereas, on one hand, mastering the (often foreign) language of their host country is key to successful integration, preparing for a "future return" may, on the other hand, need prioritization of different abilities. Therefore, from the very beginning a clear estimate about the length of each refugee's stay has to be made and related policies have to be developed and implemented accordingly. The education offered and work experience obtained will thus have to match the selected "stay or return" scenario.

Full integration is the only viable option in case of permanent resettlement. This requires a continuous interaction between the absorbing society and refugees. Refugees will need to adapt and accept realistic assumptions about their, frequently missing, understanding of the host's job market requirements and the disadvantages they are usually starting with. The host society will from their part need to embrace tolerance for cultural differences in order to create conditions which will enable refugees to "relocate their heart". Both sides need to be willing to make concessions and show openness and flexibility towards each other.

Looking at the current European refugee "integration" process, there are still dilemmas on both sides. Integration requires immense financial resources. Just as an example, for the 2016-2020 period the German government plans to [spend](#) nearly a 100 billion Euros on refugee related cost. In spite of this, most of the refugees stay unemployed and remain fully dependent on welfare for an average of five years. Refugees – although supposed to partially assimilate into their host's society – do frequently try to avoid interaction with locals and attempt to primarily rely on a network of compatriots, especially when they have the possibility to join a "parallel society" in big cities. Such attitude is not very beneficial for their integration chances and results in rising tensions regarding each other's expectations.

As a reaction and in order to limit welfare cost, the German government has meanwhile [started](#) to [postpone](#) family reunification, neglecting to notice that family bonds are essential for the refugees' wellbeing and their successful relocation. Although many refugees traveled to Europe alone, they did so under the assumption of being able to more safely reunite with their family within a short period of time. Delaying [privileged](#) reunification for people with subsidiary status – 35% of those who apply for asylum in Germany at the moment – does substantially hinder refugees to re-establish their social core and successfully integrate. Further on, making it relatively hard to later marry a partner from outside of the EU and [bring](#) this partner to Germany is, for many refugees, creating a serious obstacle to start and live a family life in Europe. Since "first generation refugees", due to cultural differences, are less likely to marry European partners, this is a vital issue. It is also important to notice here that for example half of all [asylum seekers in Germany in 2016](#) were between age 16 and 30 and three quarters of this group were male.

Speeding up the conventional integration process would require even more short-term investment and it is very doubtful if the German or European solidarity is strong and willing enough to finance this. The question is whether eventual alternative solutions, offering lower cost and/or faster results, could be available. If less investment is required per refugee, additional people could be helped within the same budget. Refival thinks such "other" option exists and proposes to improve the current practice by [incubating](#) more refugee families in rural European areas and to increase their integration speed by creating Internet -based-jobs and education. Although refugees are currently evenly spread over the German population, this nevertheless implies that a vast majority receives welfare while residing in big cities which, comparing to the countryside, have significantly higher living cost. By disproportionately locating more refugees in countryside areas (which offer substantially lower housing cost) and by investing the achieved cost difference between urban and rural integration in family reunification, education and gaining work experience, relocation of the refugees' social core would receive more acknowledgement and attention. This, naturally, cannot be achieved without increasing rural job opportunities beyond agricultural labor. By [moving](#) Internet based employment to villages, the quality of refugee integration can be enhanced though, while at the same time rural areas can be revitalized.

Since the 100 billion Euros spent by the German government on refugee related cost also can be regarded as a strong economic stimulus and since it in addition creates many jobs for the local population, the question rises where – geographically speaking – this type of investment is needed most. Looking at unemployment figures and demographics of ageing, it is clear that such an incentive can be better located in rural than in urban areas. From a European perspective, it is questionable whether the already very powerful German economy needs such a stimulus package at all, because this can widen the gap between the stronger and the weaker European Union economies. In order to counter such unbalance and find solutions for their own ageing populations, it would likely be beneficial for other European countries to follow the German example. In the same time, if Europe truly strives to become more united and since integration costs differ more between than within countries, a pan-European refugee settlement approach could create great synergy. Finally, from a refugee perspective, an open mind is required to accept the fact that rural, Internet jobs based integration can be a beneficial alternative and would increase investment in their future and thus would lower the threshold of finding employment. Better connection to the European labor market would give refugees improved access to upward mobility, whereas without such "first entry" their European dream of prosperity will never come true. By proposing its [inclusion sourcing](#) approach Refival challenges refugee labor market disconnection. At the same time, being with their families and being fully interactive with the local rural population should enable refugees to create a new social core and hopefully feel home again.

I need your help; my self-funded sabbatical period which was used to develop Refival is meanwhile nearing its end. To continue working on the project I will either need to receive funding or become employed in relation to refugee integration or rural revitalization. In order for Refival to succeed, the initiative needs to achieve its next step: cooperation with private sector partners who are willing to educate people and outsource tasks to them. This step needs to be supported by government policies and funding, and needs to be aligned with refugees and rural communities. If you are passionate about the ideas Refival stands for and are willing to contribute or are aware of organizations that could fund Refival, please contact [me](#).

Kind Regards,

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Further Documentation