



# **“Getting started in a new country”**

**Refugee Guide Program Norwegian Red Cross**

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at the Metropolis Conference  
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## “getting started”

- .... getting a job
- .... getting a house
- BUT – lot of experience tell us: - a refugee or an immigrant need something more...
- .... to learn and practice the new language
- .... to “get started” in the local neighborhood,



# REFUGEE GUIDE

.....is all about

- - a Red Cross volunteer  
guiding a newly arrived  
refugee or immigrant into  
his or her new local society



# REFUGEE GUIDE

.....is an arena to

- practice the new language
- meet people / neighbors
- start building network
- understand the local “coeds”



## How it started

- A local community contacted the Norwegian Red Cross and asked us, as a NGO, to assist them with the integration of refugees.
- Three main targets: language training, social studies and preparation for studies or for employment.
- Realized that this could not be done within regular working hours, and not only by public officials.



## Today

- 1.500 volunteers regularly meet with refugees.
- Started up in some 100 municipalities in Norway.
- The refugee guide program recruits and trains volunteer guides and then establishes compatible matches between them and settled refugees of all ages.
- The matching criteria can be age, family situation, hobby, profession etc.



## What are they doing?

Guide and refugee meet for two hours a week for 9 to 12 months.

- Practice Norwegian language.
- Learn how to build a social network in Norway and to gain a circle of acquaintances.
- Be guided around in the local society where they are settled.
- Participate in activities that encourage confidence and independence.



## “ordinary” Norwegians

- Our volunteers are not, and should not be, experts in refugee issues, Norwegian language, social science or politics.
- They are ordinary Norwegians that share their experiences and knowledge about the daily life in their local community.

But – very important – the activity is founded on equality and respect





## But still experts!

Through their experiences and knowledge from the local school or from their place of employment, they are experts on volunteer “work” and know what refugees need to know to find their way into the educational system or labour market – how to get into the Norwegian society.



## Basic everyday knowledge

- Refugees need basic everyday knowledge that any Norwegian can teach them.
  - Where is the post office.
  - What is expected from parents with children in school.
  - What to do when invited to “dugnad”.
  - How to dress when it is ten degrees below freezing.
  - Norwegians know these things!



## Why a volunteer organization?

- A volunteer offers something else. They are there for the refugee without being paid. With different backgrounds, professions etc.
- Volunteer organizations are the experts of recruiting volunteers.
- Volunteer organizations are an important part of the social life in Norway.



## Cooperation

- The refugee guide program is a close cooperation between the local authorities and employed facilitators.
- The municipality informs the refugees about the possibility of having a guide.
- The employed facilitator recruits, train and match volunteers with the refugees that want a guide.



## An important supplement

Our volunteers can give refugees the nuances where their teachers in school teach the statistical picture.

- In the school setting they can listen to descriptions of the family structures in Norway.
- In dialog with their guide they can meet an example of a Norwegian family life, ask questions and find Norwegian words for their own experiences.



## Why the Red Cross?

Red Cross is experienced in work with refugees nationally and internationally.

Red Cross is known by volunteers in Norway and by refugees, and have their trust.

Red Cross is a neutral partner that can be a natural link between different religious, political and social differences.



# REFUGEE GUIDE

....is an **added value** in the integration process.

Added value to the government program

.... is an important addition ..to get started.



## Facts and figures - 2003

- Norway's total population 4,5 millions
- Immigrant population of 349.000 / 7,6 %
  - 25 % from western countries
  - 17% born in Norway
- 100.000 had refugee background





## Facts and figures - 2005

- 5.366 persons applied for asylum in Norway
- 3.997 Rejections
- 2.480 Recognitions / granted a permit to stay
- 322 Unaccompanied minors
- 13.057 family reunifications
- 5.000 refugees were settled in 283 different Norwegian municipalities



## A small country!

Related to its population, Norway received the second largest number of asylum seekers, according to the figures collected by the UNHCR in 2003.

The city of Vadsø – close to the Barents sea settled 94 persons - which is 1,5 % of the total population.



## The immigrant population, and social inclusion

- 6 % higher unemployment rate than Norwegians.  
(9,7 % - 3,7 %, 2004)
- 7 out of 10 immigrants say they want more contact with Norwegians. (1996)
- 4 out of 10 immigrant say they feel lonely often or from time to time (1996)



# Settlement

- When settled in a local society they will be given an introductory programme.
- The introductory programme is “a full time job” for two years and gives participants right to introductory allowance.
- Other groups are offered training in language and social studies.



Røde Kors  
FLYKTNINGE  
GUIDE

## The pilot project

Two years pilot project from 1999 to 2001 – today a permanent activity offered to all refugees settling in this community.

Their aim is that 70 % of the target group is either in work or education after two years.