



Summary

The Comprehensive Cultural Orientation Programme for Finland-bound refugees provides integrated pre-arrival cultural orientation (CO) classes to refugees accepted for resettlement in Finland. IOM Helsinki extends training to selected target groups of refugees over the age of 15 on the practicalities of living in their new host country. In close cooperation with IOM offices in countries hosting refugees, the programme's objective is to give the refugees factual knowledge and realistic expectations about their new lives in Finland. The training also helps them to become self-sufficient as early as possible, as well as minimizing cultural shock and promoting integration into Finnish society.

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

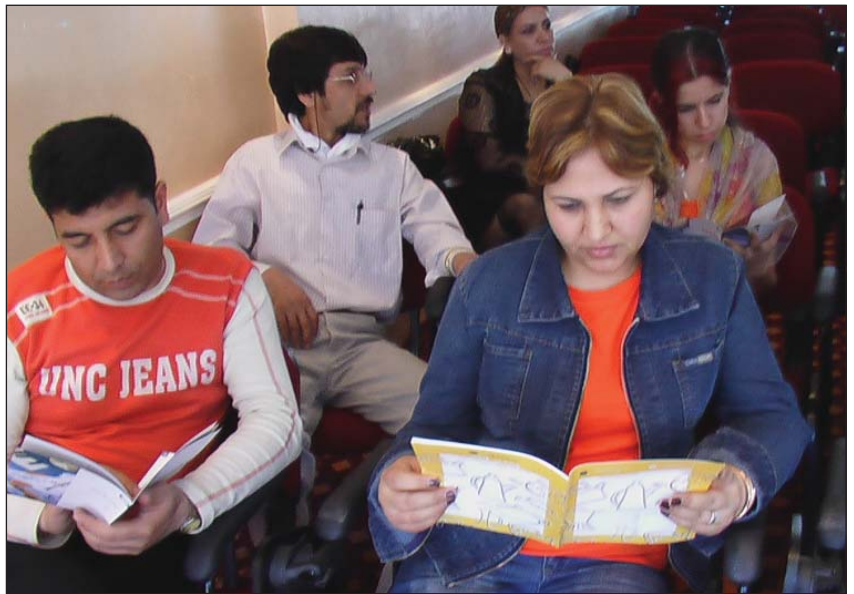
AS AN INTERGOVERNMENTAL BODY, IOM ACTS WITH ITS PARTNERS IN THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO:

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.



Different materials were provided to CO participants, Turkey.

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Cultural Orientation Programme for Finland-bound Refugees

Background

Anyone moving to a country where culture, tradition, and practices are different from their own can be expected to undergo an adjustment period of variable duration and difficulty. Refugees accepted for resettlement in third countries often come directly from refugee camps and have little, if any, knowledge of the social and economic practices of a modern western society. Many refugees may have unrealistic and perhaps inaccurate expectations of life in the new country. If not corrected, these expectations will not only cause stress to the newcomers upon their arrival, they will also cause undue pressure on the social service providers of the host community as they work to help the newcomers adjust.

IOM Helsinki's programme is based on IOM's worldwide experience in providing CO classes, as well as on the practical experience gained during previous CO projects for Finland-bound refugees. IOM Helsinki works in close cooperation with the Finnish Ministry of Labour (FMoL), resettling municipalities, and IOM offices in the countries where Finland-bound refugees are currently residing. Close coordination with these partners ensures that IOM Helsinki has up-to-date information, particularly about individual-receiving communities in Finland, so as to optimize the effectiveness of each CO training session. Between 2001 and 2005, IOM conducted CO classes in Iran, Egypt, Lebanon, and Turkey through locally based IOM offices. The target group for these CO sessions was Afghan, Kurdish, Iranian and Sudanese refugees.



IOM International Organization for Migration



For more information please contact :

International Organization for Migration
Regional Office for the Nordic and Baltic States and the European Neighbourhood countries (East)
Unioninkatu 13, 6th Flr • P.O. Box 851 • FIN-00101 Helsinki • Finland
Tel: +358.9.684 11 50 • Fax: +358.9.684 11 511 • E-mail: mrhelsinki@iom.int
Internet: <http://www.iom.fi>

Essential elements of cultural orientation

The CO training programme focuses on various aspects of Finland and Finnish society, including geographical, cultural, and other practical issues in order to prepare the refugees for the surprises and differences they will encounter upon arrival.

IOM Helsinki designs and organizes each of the CO classes for different refugee groups in coordination with the FMoL, resettling municipalities, cultural associations, and organizations familiar with the cultural background of given refugee groups. Various training tools, such as multi-media training materials, role-plays, group work, debates, and games are used to maximize the impact of the information shared and to enable refugees to assimilate the message.

Special attention is given to local customs and traditions in the European context that could be misunderstood or problematic. The Finnish CO classes pay particular attention to gender and on-site childcare is provided to maximize female participation.

A team of multicultural and multilingual IOM Helsinki trainers conducts each of the CO classes. They continuously keep up-to-date on the Finnish resettlement process, facts about life in Finland, and the latest CO teaching methodologies. Local interpreters are used at the CO classes when necessary.

Project activities

IOM organizes three-day CO sessions, lasting a total of 15 to 20 hours each, for refugees 15 years old and above. CO trainers from IOM Helsinki facilitate the classes with the assistance of local IOM offices. IOM's experience has demonstrated that it is preferable to organize CO before the refugee departs for Finland, but CO sessions can also be coordinated upon arrival if needed.

The teaching methods and material used in the training session are based on curriculum developed during previous CO projects. In cooperation with the FMoL, refugee and cultural associations, and resettling municipalities in Finland, IOM Helsinki continuously updates the curriculum to suit the needs of each refugee group and to reflect changes in Finnish society or the services accessible to refugees.

Cultural Orientation Programme for Finland-bound Refugees

Project Category:	Pre-Arrival Cultural Orientation
Geographical Coverage:	Finland and countries where quota refugees re residing (Ex: Turkey, Egypt, Lebanon, Thailand, Cambodia, and Iran)
Project Management Site:	IOM Mission with Regional Functions Helsinki
Target Group:	Finland-bound refugees (15 years old and above)
Funding Source:	Finnish Ministry of Labour, Finland
Project Duration:	1 November 2004 to 1 November 2007

Project results

By increasing the refugees' knowledge of Finland, pre-arrival CO contributes to the empowerment of refugees. It helps them to cope with their needs on arrival, enhance their ability to become self-sufficient and facilitates their smooth integration into Finnish society. This is achieved by providing the participants with factual information about the resettlement process, housing, education, healthcare, and other services. It offers a comprehensive overview of Finnish society and provides a realistic picture of what refugees can expect to encounter in Finland.

For further information, please contact:

International Organization for Migration
 Regional Office for the Nordic and Baltic States and the European Neighbourhood countries (East), Unioninkatu 13, 6th flr.,
 P.O. Box 851, 00101 Helsinki, Finland
 Tel: +358-(0)9-684 11 50,
 Fax: +358-(0)9-684 11 511
 E-mail: mrfhelsinki@iom.int
 Web-site: www.iom.fi



Clockwise from top: Various types of materials were distributed in participant's native language during cultural orientation in Beirut, 2004; Participants studying information material during cultural orientation in Beirut, 2005; Trainees were asked to write down their expectation about their new home country in Cairo, 2004 ; Children with the social worker during cultural orientation classes in Lebanon, 2004.

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