

# Summary

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Initiative

## TEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL RELOCATION

### Perspectives of Managers and Participants

A vibrant and functioning civil society needs spaces to express itself in a variety of ways and opportunities to unfold. However, shrinking civic spaces are more and more to be traced. Many groups such as human rights activists and artists are affected and the declining of pre-political spaces takes many forms. To assist these activists an increasing amount of protection programmes have been developed in recent years. The underlying study examines protection programmes from different angles in order to formulate the challenges of these initiatives and to seek solutions for an increasing effectiveness.

#### I. **Managing temporary international relocation** by *Martin Jones, Alice Nah and Patricia Bartley*

##### *Background on temporary international relocation initiatives*

In recent years, there has been a significant growth in the practice of relocating abroad individuals who are at risk because of having sought to enjoy their fundamental human rights. Although this practice has a long and distinguished history, a growing number of stakeholders are developing new programmes of relocation to provide international sanctuary to individuals at risk. These “temporary international relocation initiatives” (TIRIs) have been identified by the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders as a good practice in protection and now offer a wide range of types of protection to various groups of individuals at risk, including human rights defender, journalists, artists and other creative professionals. Although TIRIs represent a small element of a much larger “multi-level protection regime” for those at risk, the sanctuary provided by temporary relocation can mean the difference between life and death and between an individual continuing their struggle for human rights or abandoning it.

This report sought to better understand the practice of temporary international relocation, including its effectiveness and impact. It is based upon 51 interviews conducted in late 2018 with coordinators / managers of temporary international relocation initiatives, individuals who are or have previously been relocated as part of such initiatives, and other stakeholders in relocation (including funders and senior human rights practitioners). A longer version of the report is also available.

The oldest still operating identified TIRI is the Council for At-Risk Academics (CARA), which grew out of the Academic Assistance Council, which began in 1933 by giving refuge to German scientists and educators fleeing the Nazi regime. With the modern growth of the human rights movement, many international human rights organisations developed ad hoc programmes of support for activists “in exile”, though most prioritised support for preventative and in-country interventions. An overwhelming majority of relocation initiatives post-date the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders (1998) and many of the smaller relocation initiatives have been founded within the past decade.

Recent years have also seen a significant expansion of relocation activities in the Global South. European based networks of relocation initiatives, including ICORN and Justice and Peace’s Shelter City programme, have established a growing number of local host cities in the Global South, including Central Asia, Africa, and Latin America. In addition, other regional human rights organisations such as Forum Asia have sought to formalise and expand their ability to protect human rights defenders from within their region. Defend Defenders (previously the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project) and the Pan-African Human Rights Defenders Network have devoted growing levels of attention to temporary relocation, culminating in its recent launch of the Ubuntu Cities project whereby defenders at risk can be hosted in sub-regional hubs. Albeit in a more limited manner, the artistic community over the last decade has turned its attention towards the relocation of artists at risk, in large part due to the pioneering work of freeDimensional (reborn as ArtistsSafety.net) and Freemuse.

However, large parts of the Global South remain underrepresented in the community of practice, notably Asia and the Middle East. This may be a product of geography-specific factors (such as the lack of a common regional language in Asia, creating a barrier to easy relocation) and the difficulty of securing protection in neighbouring states (the relatively few stable, accessible states with sufficient civic space in each region).

A significant development in recent years is the emergence of networks of relocation initiatives, perhaps not surprising given the network-based practices of early actors such as CARA. ICORN and Shelter Cities have emerged as large, increasingly global actors in temporary relocation. The former has more than 70 sites of relocation in Europe and the Americas. The latter has 14 sites of relocation in Europe, Central Asia, Africa and the Americas. The development of networks of TIRIs has also supported the development of a broader community of practice, bringing together and facilitating collaboration between practitioners and allowing for the more rapid development and spread of good practices.

Despite the expansion of capacity globally in the international relocation of defenders and artists at risk, much relocation is self-organised outside of all of any formal TIRI. The United Nations has observed that many of the people on the move who have been displaced and counted amongst the world's 25 million refugees are human rights defenders. Even within the support available to human rights defenders at risk, a majority of funding is provided for self-directed "emergency" grants which in many cases are used for self-planned relocation, both within and outside of a defender's country.

The management of relocation brings with it a range of considerations concerning the staffing and support required for relocation; the selection of participants in relocation; the logistics of relocation; and, the well-being of participants during and after relocation. A consequence of the lack of a single model of relocation is significant diversity within the community of practice; this necessarily makes it impossible to suggest "best" practice – although good practice will be identified, wherever possible.

### *Staffing and support*

While there may be a larger number of individuals who are involved in the provision of programming and support, the main responsibility for organising the relocation, from application process through to hosting to return, often falls to one or two individuals. Relocating individuals to a new, foreign, distant location (such as during relocation) has the potential to increase the demands they place upon any support systems; individuals at risk may already have suffered mistreatment and trauma and may have a reduced capacity to deal with any new challenges. The confluence of these two aspects of relocation places heavy and often unexpected demands on those managing relocation and supporting those who have been relocated:

"I think, for me, personally, when I first started on the job, I wasn't really prepared for the stress that it brought with it. I didn't know what it would be like. I didn't really get any support from anywhere. Within [the organisation], you could go to counselling, but I never took that up because I didn't feel I had the time which is typical for all of us. The other thing as well, I thought, 'Are they actually going to understand what I'm talking about?' because ... how can they understand what is effectively secondary trauma?"

Managers expressed an often deeply felt inner conflict between their desire to provide support and their commitment to accompanying defenders and the need to protect their own personal wellbeing. Some of the excessive demands placed upon managers arise indirectly. Managers expressed concern about becoming "heroes" to the participants in relocation and thereby, indirectly, reducing their effective autonomy.

Although the well-being of core staff remains a challenge for all relocation initiatives, older initiatives have both broadened the support base for those in relocation and sought to mitigate the difficulty of relocation. Amongst the innovative means of dealing with the former, is the establishment of a "network of friends" to increase the social support available to those in relocation. Many new and old relocation initiatives have developed programming that addresses the psycho-social wellbeing of those in relocation. A team-based approach, drawing upon both a range of competencies and the possibility of peer-based mentorship and support, has been adopted by some relocation initiatives and has reportedly increased staff well-being and decreased staff turnover.

Although most managers were happy with the availability of funding, almost all managers interviewed expressed concern about the type of expenses funded and the need for continual fundraising for relocation initiatives. With the growth of large programmes of funding (notably from the EU Platform) over the last decade, few managers expressed concern that relocation was "fundable." However, there was a near universal concern expressed by managers that relocation funding was too closely tied to the individual being relocated, without regard for the larger institutional (and infrastructural) needs:

“The general issue we have with funding is that organizations that are happy to fund us are happy to fund the fellows. They're not happy to fund staffing costs, but you can't run a scheme like this without the staffing costs or staffing in place.”

### *Selection for relocation*

The majority of relocation initiatives are targeted at “human rights defenders”. While the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders does not define the term, many programmes have adopted the definition drafted by OHCHR, significantly requiring commitments to non-violence and non-discrimination. Although the definition of human rights defender is very broad, many initiatives adopted definitions that excluded defenders with overt political agendas or activities. Within programmes focusing on artists at risk there was often an overt preference for particular types of artists. Programmes focusing on particular types of individuals (lawyers, journalists, writers) or types of human rights defenders (women human rights defenders) usually require some proof of membership in the particular category. Many relocation initiatives applied a secondary screen based on “fit” with the relocation programme to those candidates who otherwise qualified and were at risk. Being able to benefit from the specifics of the relocation initiative and being able to contribute to the host organisation and community were two frequently cited factors that are considered.

All relocation initiatives surveyed relocated only individuals at risk – though there were varying approaches to the definition of this term. The evaluation of risk often requires initiatives to establish whether individuals fall within often idiosyncratic “sweet spot” of risk. All initiatives surveyed expressed strong views about the urgency (chronic vs. emergency), type (psychological vs. physical), and level (high vs. low) of risk facing individuals. The differing approaches to risk are not always fully described in the material available to individuals applying for relocation. Some initiatives explicitly select individuals working in “attributional” environments and at risk of burnout whereas others require more acute and imminent risk of physical harm. In addition to the existence of risk, there must be a nexus between the risk and the professional activities of the individual as a human rights defender, writer, or membership in another particular category. Many initiatives defined risk at least in part in relation to interference with professional activities: “you have to be individually targeted or persecuted because of your work or silenced and silence can also be anything from being subjected to censorship to being tried”.

A range of other considerations were often brought to bear in the selection of defenders. The ability to continue work during relocation and the larger organisational benefit from relocation for the organisation (of the person being relocated or the host organisation). Some programmes also require that the relocation will mitigate risk – though it is not always clear whether the mitigation must occur during the relocation (the person will be safe during relocation) or as a result of relocation (the person will be safe after the relocation). Language ability, the presence of accompanying family members, and the ability of the person to continue his or her work during relocation were all factors that were considered.

Selection for relocation raises a number of issues of equity. Even within the target populations of human rights defenders or artists at risk, access to relocation is not evenly distributed. Most selection procedures prefer (or require) individuals with established connections to large, international organisations – whether these sponsors be international human rights non-governmental organisations or established art galleries. At the very least, many relocation initiatives require individuals to be working within credible, established human rights organisations or to have an identifiable artistic career as partial proof of the credibility of their risk.

### *Logistics of relocation*

As foreshadowed by the discussion above of the challenges of staffing and resourcing relocation, the logistics of relocation can be considerable. Participants in relocation often need to obtain travel documents and entry (and possibly exit) visas in order to travel. In the host community, accommodation and other features of the settlement of participants in their new communities must also be arranged.

In most instances of relocation, participants require entry (and sometimes residence) visas in order to enter the host State. The notable exception to this requirement of entry visas is regional relocation initiatives which often benefit from the visa-free travel of nationals within the region. The consequence of the need for visas for participants in relocation is both practical (enduring an often lengthy and complex process) and political (internalising anti-migrant discourses within temporary international relocation initiatives). The type of visa received by participants varies and often dictates the length of the relocation. Amongst the biggest problem in obtaining visas is the challenge of establishing that the travel and residence is temporary – a difficult task given the situation of individuals seeking temporary international relocation.

Accommodation during relocation represents both one of the largest costs during relocation as well as, for some initiatives, one of the largest logistical challenges. Relocation initiatives are seldom deliberately located in locations of low cost accommodation. To the contrary, the relative economic affluence, stability, cultural scene, and urban vitality that often give rise to (or support the emergence of) relocation initiatives often entail high cost and limited availability of accommodation. The already high cost of accommodation is driven higher by the short term and urgent nature of the need for accommodation. Finding accommodation is such an on-going and important challenge that one relocation initiative noted that it has (re)structured its programming to minimise the need to source new accommodation every year.

Almost all relocation initiatives offer some programming for participants during relocation. This programming can include social activities and other networking opportunities, general training and capacity building, and targeted interventions addressing risk and psycho-social wellbeing. A challenge noted by one manager of an established relocation initiative is to ensure that the programming does not exceed the capacity (or funding) available.

Although many relocation initiatives select participants based on, in part, their ability to continue their activities while in relocation, there is constantly a tension between relocation as continuity and as disjunction. The practice amongst relocation initiatives is quite starkly divided between those initiatives that support and even require a continuation of activities and those that adopt the opposite position. Structured capacity building activities are often part of the programming of relocation initiatives. This is especially true of relocation initiatives serving human rights defenders, perhaps reflecting the growing trend towards the “professionalization” of human rights work. Programming during relocation of artists at risk is more likely to be ad hoc and tailored to the individual.

Language training is commonly part of relocation programming, both to facilitate local integration during relocation and to broaden the reach of professional activities. English language training, in particular, is offered even in locations of relocation where the local language is not English in order to support the participant being able to communicate with a broader, international audience.

#### *Well-being during and after relocation*

Well-being is an under-discussed issue within both the human rights and artistic communities. As with society at large, illness (or the lack of well-being) is often seen as a weakness and individuals and communities are often hesitant to openly reveal or discuss well-being. This is especially true of mental health (and illness). Beyond issues of stigma, a fundamental difficulty facing both managers of and participants in is the difficulty of accurately assessing well-being.

Many managers expressed the view that mental well-being was linked to physical and creative well-being and could be most easily approached through the encouragement of physical health and creativity. Physical well-being is encouraged through the encouragement of sporting activities and exercise (for example, walking in nature, hiking, yoga, bicycling and other athletic activities) and attention to rest.

Beyond addressing historic trauma and well-being issues caused before relocation, many relocation programmes seek to mitigate any distress and isolation caused by relocation through attention to pastoral care and the creation of communities of support, including from other participants in relocation. The decision to provide communal accommodation is often defended in terms of its effect on well-being and facilitation of peer support. Regular retreats, meetings with other participants in relocation, and development of friendship and support networks within the host communities were all tactics used to improve well-being.

By definition, temporary international relocation initiatives are time limited. While a small number of relocation initiatives relocate individuals as refugees with no intention to return, the overwhelming majority of participants in relocation are relocated for an explicitly time-limited period. Across all relocation initiatives, it is hypothesised that one fifth of participants do not return. Most of these individuals seek asylum, though some enter other relocation initiatives or programmes of study.

#### *Impact and evaluation of temporary international relocation initiatives*

One of the biggest impacts of relocation was on the identity of the participants, validating their identities as a human rights defenders or artists. As one manager noted, “being here has strengthened their identity as human rights defenders because some of them didn't identify themselves as defenders until they saw this program and realised, “I'm a human rights defender.” Participants and managers also noted heightened levels of “introspection” by participants, likely caused by the experience of

relocation itself, disrupting and prompting reflection on existing habits and assumptions and encouraged by some of the programming and interactions during relocation. However, the biggest and most frequent impact of relocation cited by both participants and managers of relocation is the ability and willingness of participants to continue their activities. In the words of one manager: success is “as long as they continue working”.

Beyond participants, managers often cite the impact of relocation initiatives on host communities. Often the act of providing safety by a community becomes part of the local identity, encouraged by labels such as “shelter city” and “city of refuge.” As noted by one manager of a relocation initiative, this impact can be mobilized for self-interest and aggrandizement by local politicians and officials: “if they're clever and good at telling their inhabitants, their citizens that this is a city of refuge, it has impact.” In the context of a much discussed “refugee crisis” facing much of the world, relocation initiatives can humanize risk and migration – often prompting unusual outpourings of support for individual participants in relocation despite contrary prevailing popular opinions about migrants and refugees.

However, the impact of relocation can also be less benign for both the participant in relocation and the host communities. One manager of a relocation initiative for artists at risk noted the fetishisation of risk:

“What I'm arguing to you first and foremost is that there is a hungry market that loves to consume the artist in danger.”

Some managers noted that participants in relocation are often invited to give talks and otherwise participate in events without any thought given to how they benefit from such activities; the participant is seen as a common good (in every sense of the term) to be deployed instrumentally to counter the perceived causes of his or her risk.

The impact of temporary relocation initiatives as a whole is difficult to assess. Coordinators expressed a wide variety of views of the purposes (“theory of change”) of their programme. All coordinators identified the safety and well-being of the participant in relocation as their primary (and sometimes only) consideration. Additional considerations included the ability to benefit from capacity building, networking or advocacy opportunities while in relocation and their ability to make a contribution to the local social or cultural scene. However, while these factors may contribute to both the selection and programming of relocation initiatives, they were seldom measured in any structured way.

Much of the evidence is anecdotal. Few relocation initiatives have embarked upon a systematic, independent evaluation of their programming; only three of the relocation initiatives surveyed had employed an independent, external evaluator to review their programming (and most often as a result of a demand by a funder). While all initiatives provided reports to funders, these were generally descriptive in nature (of the activities and support during relocation) and were not focused on evaluating the programming.

### *Conclusion*

This report consciously uses the term “community of practice” to describe the emerging networks of relocation initiatives. Relocation initiatives share a common domain of knowledge, shared sense of community, and focus on the specific tactics and management of temporary international relocation. The sense of community amongst those involved in relocation was evident at the workshops and meetings attended during this research project.

The identification of the challenges facing managers of relocation of this research should strengthen the ability of the community to develop training material for new relocation initiatives, building on existing resources such as those developed by Shelter Cities, ICORN and various funders. Supporting the learning of (new) managers of relocation is particularly important in terms of dealing with the well-being issues posed by the role – both to better ensure the well-being of participants and to reduce the attrition of individuals from these important roles.

Equally, both sending and host communities need better support to maximise their positive impact on the selection, integration and return of participants in relocation. More research is needed to test the good practices that have been identified and to develop good practices in domains such as well-being which are particularly important to relocation.

The stakeholders in TIRIs participating in this project expressed an enthusiasm for interrogating their practices and sharing their expertise. As new TIRIs continue to be developed and the community of practice further expands and becomes more diverse, a broad commitment to sharing, reflecting on, and critiquing practice, more than any future research, will be key to the strengthening of practice.

## II. Relocation programmes from the perspective of participants *by Stanley Seiden*

This study draws its information from surveys and interviews with dozens of current and former participants in relocation programmes, programme managers and coordinators, and local stakeholders involved in civil society and threatened cultural scenes around the world. Research participants hail from five continents and over twenty countries.

The vast majority of research respondents rated their experience with temporary relocation positively, and expressed support for the continued provision and expansion of temporary relocation programmes. Programme managers and supporters praised the value of relocation programmes in maintaining resilience in activist and artist communities and in combatting burnout among individual actors. Programme participants highlighted a variety of benefits of temporary relocation schemes, including preserving life and safety, offering opportunities for relaxation and recuperation, and facilitating connections with both fellow actors working in similar fields as well as influential organisations and stakeholders in positions to support the work of these participants.

This research also uncovered several areas in which programmes can still be strengthened. Respondents suggested that relocation programmes do more to facilitate exchange between participants and other actors or stakeholders engaged in their field of work or art. Respondents that had access to medical and psychosocial services and support, as well as training in language or other work-relevant skills, expressed immense appreciation for these services, suggesting that such opportunities should be more broadly expanded across relocation programmes. Respondents called on relocation programmes to do more to expand relocation services to more, and more remote, members of target communities.

In terms of enabling a meaningful stay in host countries, research respondents highlighted efforts by programme managers and staff to build personal connections with programme participants, as well as to design safe, restful, and engaging environments in host communities. Respondents also expressed appreciation for opportunities to further develop their work or art, usually in collaboration with other activists or artists in their field. Many respondents highlighted the importance of early planning for return in order to facilitate safe and successful return and reintegration into home communities.

### *Impact of shelter and relocation programmes*

*“Relocation saved my life.” Human rights defender, East Africa*

The most critical contribution of relocation programmes to the continuation of civil-society and cultural scenes is safeguarding the life and freedom of their participants. Many recipients of relocation support leave their countries of origin under immediate threat of arrest, imprisonment, or physical harm. While the source of these threats vary by region, country, and circumstance, they all carry the potential effect of completely removing an activist or artist from their sphere of work, cutting them off from colleagues, family, and support networks, and breaking up the movements they support. Many respondents expressed gratitude to relocation programmes for keeping them alive. Others noted that relocation raised their profile in the eyes of local authorities thanks to their involvement with an international organisation, extending the protective effects of temporary relocation even after their return home.

Despite the high value of the protective element of relocation programmes, the limitations of this protection cannot be ignored. Shelter and relocation as a response to local threats may be most effective when the following criteria are met:

- Threats to an individual are highly specific and localised;
- Short-term relocation out of an applicant’s immediate environment is anticipated to be sufficient to carry the participant past the threats in question;
- Relocation will not lead to new threats or vulnerabilities for an applicant upon their eventual return to their place of origin;
- Relocation will not lead to new threats or vulnerabilities for the applicant’s family or community in their place of origin.

Aside from physical protection, relocation programmes have a tremendous psychological impact on their participants, empowering them with revitalization in their life, work, and movements. Research participants from across the world reported feelings of stress, burnout, intimidation, and exhaustion prior to undergoing relocation. Similarly, many responded that they

spent very little time on self-care or well-being in the course of their work, whether for reasons of intense workload or lack of self-care tools. Temporary escape from threatening or stressful environments proved invaluable for many individuals; some attributed their ability to continue working solely to the invigorating effects of relocation.

On this topic most highlighted the restful nature of relocation programmes, opportunities to focus on health and wellness, athletic, artistic, and cultural activity, collaboration on new projects, opportunities for learning and skill building, and building connections with local communities as well as other stakeholders in their movements.

Apart from personal safety and well-being, relocation participants expressed the immense value of building connections with fellow activists and artists, international organisations, and stakeholders in their fields of work. Strong relationships with international organisations and diplomatic representatives strengthen at-risk individuals' access to support for themselves and their colleagues in their countries of origin. Introduction to donor organisations and funding groups encourage participants' organisational autonomy and capacity to expand and manage their own programmes. Linking programme participants to local organisations working on related issues expands solidarity networks and enables exchange of strategies and information. Connecting artists and content creators to local contributors to cultural scenes similarly encourages idea exchange and collaborative creation. Furthermore, the benefits of these connections extend beyond the conclusion of a relocation process, and some respondents described how their new contacts empowered new projects and activities after their return home.

Finally, almost all respondents mentioned skill acquisition and capacity development as a fundamental benefit of temporary relocation. Study respondents mentioned in particular training in foreign language, project management skills, knowledge of international human rights principles, laws, and mechanisms, enrolment in university courses or study of other academic disciplines, and training in digital and other protection. Respondents also reported the value of bringing these skills with them when returning to their home regions, where they were able to share them with local colleagues and otherwise use newfound capacities to strengthen their work or art.

#### *Improvement of shelter and relocation programmes*

Suggestions for the improvement of relocation programmes can be broken into two categories: operational issues that can be implemented by relocation programmes themselves, and structural issues for which fundamental improvement will require coordinated action by the network of relocation programmes and other organisations supporting HRDs, activists, and artists at risk.

According to surveyed respondents, relocation programmes stand to improve first by continuing to improve in the areas where they already excel. The previous section commended relocation programmes for their strong work protecting, refreshing, connecting, and empowering programme participants. Many respondents encouraged further development in these same areas. Respondents highlighted the need for expanded medical services, including psychological services. While some relocation programmes include medical check-ups and counselling services, many do not. For those programmes that do include medical and psychological services, participants stressed the importance of having a choice of service provider, particularly for psychological counselling. Participants who had received psychological services while in relocation added that counsellors should have some experience or awareness of the work and treatment of activists in their home regions. Programmes should implement systems for obtaining medical services of all types for participants before those services first become necessary, to avoid delays in any emergency situation.

Respondents also encouraged further development of professional opportunities or other opportunities for professional engagement, whether with the host organisation or local organisations. These opportunities both allow relocation participants to feel useful during their time in relocation, but also help them to further expand their professional networks and connect with other like-minded individuals, which respondents reported was also a favourite aspect of the relocation experience. On this note, respondents also suggested that programmes offer more opportunities for collaborative projects or other meetings with fellow programme participants or other actors engaged in the participant's area of art or activism.

Regarding skill building and training courses, participants suggested that they should have greater autonomy over their programme of study or training. In some cases, densely packed schedules made it difficult for programme participants to fully absorb content. Others stressed the importance of scheduling training on certain topics, such as digital protection and security planning, early in the relocation period. Some relocation programmes schedule these trainings for the end of the relocation period, leaving insufficient time for questions or follow-up discussions on training topics.

Finally, some respondents requested increased communication with relocation programme staff, particularly in regard to planning and logistics of the relocation process and return therefrom. For example, some respondents described reaching the end of their relocation period and feeling like the time had passed so quickly that they had failed to take advantage of certain opportunities. As a remedy, respondents suggested an opportunity to sit down with programme staff at the beginning of their relocation process to develop a more deliberate strategic plan for their months abroad. Other respondents suggested a similar meeting with programme staff to strategize for their return to their home country and new approaches to their work after their return.

Respondents also made several suggestions for the improvement of temporary relocation generally. Several suggestions emphasized the need for greater communication, information sharing, and referral between organisations. As the community of shelter-providing organisations continues to grow the potential for and value of collaboration between these organisations also increases. Such collaboration would allow an applicant to one programme find an opportunity with a second organisation, even if the first should be unable to receive the applicant. Similarly, this collaboration would allow one programme to refer an applicant to a more appropriate programme, or a regionally-based programme, if the second should be more suited to the applicant's needs.

Many respondents felt that the reach of temporary relocation programmes was very limited, often extending only to those individuals most connected to the international community. Relocation programmes should continue to work to expand their services to vulnerable and remote communities. Respondents speaking on this topic highlighted the challenge of reaching illiterate individuals, who may be unable to complete their own application, and grassroots-level civil society actors with no knowledge of international support opportunities. Others also noted that some calls for application provide insufficient time to submit applications, which hinders the abilities of local allies to translate and distribute these calls to more remote communities.

Respondents also suggested certain adjustments to the general structure of relocation programmes. Many respondents wished that relocation programmes could be more flexible with regard to programme duration, some feeling that three months was insufficient time to learn a new language or skill, while others felt that three months was too long to leave family or work. (Others expressed similar frustrations with relocation durations of six or twelve months). While the diverse needs of programme applicants prevent the identification of a universally ideal programme duration, programmes could consider incorporating the applicant into the decision of programme duration.

Other respondents proposed the ability to relocate with either family members or colleagues. Relocation with family members allows individuals to avoid financial and emotional concerns of leaving family or children behind in their home country, and in some cases can also have a positive effect on family dynamics and cohesiveness. Relocation with colleagues allows activist groups to continue their work uninterrupted, and also increases the likelihood of successful skill acquisition and incorporation.

Some respondents suggested that relocation programmes do more to facilitate relocation in a third country. This was a common suggestion by individuals who did not speak the language of their host country, and felt unable to work effectively while relocated. Similar suggestions were made by individuals who were living in exile from their home countries, but in need of on-going professional and financial support for their work in their place of exile. Individuals currently living in exile, but currently hoping to return to their country of origin following political reformation, observed that very few resources exist for people in their situation. These individuals ready to return home to continue their work suggested that organisations supporting relocation should also provide financial assistance for returners.

While some programmes have already begun to implement some of these measures, the majority has not.

#### *Accompanying measures*

Respondents to this research highlighted several aspects that particularly enhanced their relocation experiences. Many respondents noted the importance of the peaceful, supportive, and stress-free environments established by their relocation programmes, mentioning in particular the value of:

- Freedom from appointments, work obligations, and work messages on phones or other devices
- Communication access to family or colleagues at home



- Privacy in living quarters (including cooking space, recreational space, and access to sleeping areas)
  - Ability to receive family, friends, or other guests in country or in a place of residence; rest in a comfortable bed
- Reading, including:
  - “Free reading” of books unrelated to her/his work
  - Reading books on topics related to her/his work
  - Reading on topics of mental health, burnout, and well-being
- Writing/creating, including:
  - “Free writing” on topics unrelated to her/his work
  - Writing on topics related to her/his work
  - Opportunities for artistic expression of any form, both for professional artists and for non-artists
- Sport and exercise, including:
  - Cycling (organisations should consider ensuring that a programme participant has all necessary equipment: helmet, bike lock, reflective vest)
  - Swimming
  - Walking (research respondents referred in particular to walking routes through parks or along water)
  - Gym membership, athletic or sport club participation, or access to other sporting activities
- Cooking/communal eating
  - Access to familiar foods or ingredients for preparing familiar foods
- Group meals with programme staff or other participants
- Counselling/therapy

Others highlighted feelings of welcome and care from their host community, both by programme staff and by neighbours:

- Pick-up and drop-off at the airport
- Introduction to or opportunities to connect with programme/organisation staff
- Invitations to participate in social events or outings with organisation staff
- Invitations to participate in safe, peaceful social demonstrations
- Regular check-ins with participants by dedicated staff
- Opportunities to engage with local community
  - Introduction by staff to local businesses, landmarks, and transportation
  - Staff facilitation of participation in local sports, art, or other recreational activities
  - Orientation to local places of worship
- Opportunities to engage with fellow activists or artists
  - Engagement in local artistic projects (including performance, audial, and visual arts)
  - Engagement with the host organisation or other local organisations on projects relevant to the participant’s work/interests
  - Opportunities for participants to discuss their work with host organisation staff, other organisations, or in academic settings

Respondents expressed appreciation for opportunities for autonomy and industry. While some relocation participants’ greatest need is for a vacation, others intend to use their time away to continue and develop their work. For these, a meaningful stay requires room to design their own daily agendas or courses of study as well as opportunities to work either on their own tasks or in support of the host or other organisations.

Facilitating safe return is one of the greatest challenges for relocation programmes that support threatened individuals. Programmes encountering these challenges should take a broad view in their attempts to safeguard threatened individuals and their movements, including considering alternatives to relocation when threatened persons first establish contact. In general, affecting a safe return begins with and centres on thorough dialogue with the programme participant. In many cases, affecting a safe return may also involve collaboration with local actors or organisations in the participant’s home region.

While there is no way to guarantee that an individual will be able to return home safely, there are certain steps that relocation programmes can take. First, relocation programmes should begin the conversation about safe return as early as possible, and in some cases even prior to the participant’s departure from their country or origin. For high-risk individuals, there are a

number of steps that a relocation programme can take to protect the individual, particularly if involvement with an international NGO or travel to certain countries might raise the individual's risk level in their home country. For example, relocation programmes can work with sympathetic business, training, or language-focused companies or organisations in the host country to assist in preparing a cover story for the participant. These plans should be made prior to the individual's departure from their home country and aligned with plans for the individual's safe return.

In addition to concerns about physical safety, relocation programmes should also consider other conditions that might make a participant's return to their home country more arduous. Relocation programmes should take special care to address these issues, to ensure that the relocation experience does not unnecessarily complicate or challenge the work of these participants. Creating a plan for return, as proposed above, may be useful in avoiding such outcomes.

When return is impossible, relocation programmes may find themselves forced to support the participant's integration into a host community. This situation can be particularly difficult to prepare for when programmes may face legal restrictions or reputational consequences for such processes. Nevertheless, research respondents noted the importance of family unity, local language acquisition, and financial stability as key requisites for any integration process. Even if these basic needs can be met, many activists still feel frustrated by a perceived remoteness from their home region or areas of interest. To the extent possible, relocation programmes should work to facilitate greater connection between relocated individuals and organisations or individuals of shared interest.

#### *Recommendations for shelter programmes and the broader shelter network*

Below are recommendations on the subject of relocation and shelter programmes. The first five recommendations are targeted at shelter and relocation programmes themselves. The final five recommendations are targeted at the broader network of relocation programmes for actions that they can take in collaboration with one another to better empower and protect those actors that relocation programmes aim to support.

- Inclusion of psychological services. Relocation programme participants who were able to receive psychological counselling sessions all praised this component of their programmes, even when they felt that they did not fully connect with the counsellor providing the services.
- Inclusion of health services. Similar to the recommendation for psychological services, programme participants who were able to undergo medical examination and basic treatment as a component of their programme all responded positively to this feature.
- Pre-planning assistance and programme flexibility. Many respondents to this research expressed frustration that aspects of relocation programme structure, particularly programme duration, were generally inflexible.
- Post-planning for secure return. In the interest of safeguarding programme participant's safe return to their countries of origin, relocation programmes should take more and earlier steps to discuss and plan for safe return with participants.
- Support beyond relocation. Participants in relocation programmes often require additional support related to, but distinct from, their period of relocation.
- Greater networking and integration. The network of relocation programmes comprises a large body of professionals working around the world. Between them, these individuals possess a vast collective expertise in regional challenges, threats to activists/artists/HRDs, and the logistical obstacles to facilitating successful relocation.
- Collaboration on safe return. In the case of a participant unable to return home, relocation organisations should consider collaborative approaches to determining onward support for these participants.
- Better information sharing. Relocation programmes can expand communication with other organisations from participants' places of origin, to better support and protect these participants.
- Advocacy for visa reform. While relocation organisations have little power over immigration or visa policy themselves, as a connected network, the voice of these organisations could be effective in pushing forward long-touted reforms to grant human rights defenders more favourable status in visa application processes.
- Continued expansion of shelter city networks. The existing body of relocation programmes should continue to support the development of similar initiatives in countries around the world.

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## About MRI

The Martin Roth-Initiative (MRI) was founded as a joint project by ifa (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen) and the Goethe-Institut. In close collaboration with a network of national and international (cultural) institutions, the Martin Roth-Initiative promotes and supports endangered art and cultural workers as well as other civil society actors. It protects artists and cultural workers who are committed to freedom of the arts, democracy and human rights in their home country, by enabling them temporary residence and scholarships in Germany or third countries. MRI is also facilitating networking and research on the issue of relocation.

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*Please cite:* Müller, M. (ed), Temporary Shelter and Relocation Initiatives: Perspectives of Managers and Participants (ifa Edition Culture and Foreign Policy - A Martin Roth-Initiative Publication). Stuttgart: ifa Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen, 2019 [ISBN 978-3-948205-00-3]

## Imprint

This study is created within the framework of the Martin Roth-Initiative and is published in the ifa Edition Culture and Foreign Policy.

The Martin Roth-Initiative is funded by the Federal Foreign Office.

The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of ifa.

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Editing: ifa Research Programme

“Culture and Foreign Policy”

ISBN: 978-3-948205-02-7

A joint project of:



Funded by:

