

**Strategy
of the
Reformed Church in Hungary
on
Mission among Refugees**

Context of Refugee Mission

1. The refugees come from Asia, Africa, the Middle East and former Yugoslavian states; with cultures and languages significantly different from ours. A considerable proportion of them have a Christian background.
2. Hungarian society, which is said to be homogeneous, is generally characterised by a fear of “otherness”, as well as a lack of mobility.
3. On a state level, there has been a significant lack of preparedness for handling the refugee situation, including a lack of infrastructure and legal background regarding refugee, labour, etc. policies.

Directions of Refugee Mission

1. The church, with its special perspective, can set an example for society. The state has not developed a comprehensive refugee integration strategy yet.
2. The Refugee Mission is first and foremost the church’s helping hand to refugees: it is our task to reach and help them.
3. It is just as important that we have a mission that concerns our congregations: shaping attitudes regarding mission, presenting the mission’s activities and providing support in taking in and hosting refugees.

Objectives:

Aware of the uncertainty and vulnerability of being a refugee, we deem it important to provide help in the following areas:

1. Providing support for establishing a basic, independent life, which requires the following:
 - a. ability to speak Hungarian
 - b. finding housing (moving out of camps),
 - c. seeking employment and career counselling,
 - d. and the school integration of secondary-school-age youth (with the aim of teaching them Hungarian and preparing them for the labour market).
2. Amid uncertainties and failures, these refugees are in need of support; therefore their pastoral care is also important.
3. The professional quality of such care can be maintained:
 - a. through cooperation with
 - i. Hungarian and foreign denominations;

- ii. Hungarian and international organizations that support refugees;
 - b. through the professional development of our colleagues.
4. Keeping in touch with congregations, shaping attitudes regarding mission, providing support in taking in and hosting refugees.

Principles:

1. Following the example of Christ and expressing our gratitude to the Lord, we undertake to support refugees. We do this with joy and love despite being aware of the fact that not all of them will be integrated into the community of Christians.
2. Supporting refugees is a long-term spiritual investment, with benefits a hundred times greater than the original investment. This means that refugees do not remain dependent on the state forever, but become self-supporting members of our society.
3. We do our best to teach refugees to become independent, and to contribute to their own integration. We will not do anything for them that they themselves are able to do.
4. Whenever we start working with a refugee, we also meet a dozen Hungarians – they, too, are targets of the mission.
5. The practice of mutual support and cooperation with other non-governmental organizations are a part of our professional learning and development.

Methods

1. Pastoral care of refugees: Several refugees require psychiatric or psychological help to be able to deal with the traumas they have experienced. At later stages, it is personal pastoral care and a welcoming community that can provide support to them. We can perform such activities in cooperation with other non-governmental organizations and congregations.
2. Promotion of the school integration of secondary-school-age youth: It is especially difficult to reintegrate teenagers who have been outside the education system for a long period. This transition is facilitated through teaching Hungarian as a second language in small groups, providing tutoring in various school subjects, and supporting social workers. This age group is on the border of childhood and adulthood, therefore there is a real danger that they leave the school system without graduation, and later suffer the consequences in the labour market.
3. Assistance in achieving independent life: Refugees require personal support to be able to establish an independent life in Hungary. The methods of such support are determined by current needs as well as the legal and financial circumstances. It is crucial for refugees to learn Hungarian at least on an intermediate level, to be able to access the necessary information and find employment. Once they find employment, they will be able to cover the costs of their housing, but as a first step, they must move out of the camps. Our activities of support are enhanced by the cooperation with congregations, other non-governmental organizations and local councils.
4. Cooperation (discovering projects of similar nature, exchange of best practices): Working with refugees requires professional competence, awareness of relevant information and cooperation with other organizations. These can be achieved through the flow of information; through developing professional relationships and strengthening communication.

5. Keeping in touch with congregations: We wish to promote our mission as widely as possible within congregations through personal meetings and newsletters.
6. Professional development of our colleagues: In order to develop the professional and spiritual competence of those working with refugees, we organize regular advanced training courses, and provide personal evaluation as well as pastoral care.
7. Training: We would like to be present in the training of pastors in the form of seminars and lectures, presenting the theological issues concerning the Refugee Mission, practical experiences in our mission, and the cooperation with other relevant fields of study.

Impact:

1. Creating a society that is more open and less prejudiced depends on personal experiences. The situation in which members of Hungarian society and refugees live in close proximity provides great opportunities to gain experiences, leading to the fading of prejudices and the building of multicultural connections.
2. Our congregations can also become more open and inclusive communities if they take in refugees and serve among them.
3. Encountering different cultures and other types of Christian traditions strengthens the identity of Christian communities as well as that of individuals, and also the sensitivity towards the needs of society in general.
4. When the refugees who arrive in Hungary learn the language, find out about our culture and the system of everyday administration, they can start a new life here, calling Hungary their home and becoming independent and valuable members of our smaller communities.
5. Our housing programme underlines the realization that resolving the issue of housing is not enough in itself to achieve independent life. Instead, there is a need for a complex support system in close cooperation with state and non-governmental refugee experts.
6. The multicultural teaching method and complex integration programme applied in the school integration programme can become a model for other schools in Hungary, in order to support the integration of refugee children into the Hungarian public education system. There are impacts expected on another level: refugee children pass on their experiences to their refugee peers, further promoting this studying opportunity which facilitates integration. On the other hand, their Hungarian peers also share their experiences gained in a multicultural context with their Hungarian micro-communities, which contributes to the wider society becoming more open.