

# Values and Organizing Principles in the Swedish Resettlement System: Exploring the Benefits of an Ethnographic Regime Approach

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## *Abstract*

*Resettlement has received increased political and mediatic attention in recent years as a safe pathway for refugees. It is also seen as a way for receiving states to manage migration while abiding by the UNHCR's humanitarian ideals. This parallel track of keeping migration at bay and aiming to help the most vulnerable demands further exploration. Here I examine values and principles found in the Swedish resettlement process through an ethnographic regime approach. In previous scholarship such aspects of resettlement have received little attention, and, if considered, been approached with a focus limited to one or two actors of the resettlement system. Discussing the resettlement system as a regime helps explore how values and principles are shaped by a plurality of actors, and – in turn – shape the structures that make up resettlement as a durable solution for refugee emplacement.*

*Keywords: resettlement, regime, values, principles, Sweden*

## **Introduction**

Resettlement as a *durable solution* for the international protection of refugees has received increased scholarly, political, and mediatic attention in recent years. At the same time, resettlement as a system where individuals are selected in a first country of asylum (often in the Global South) to settle in another (often in the Global North), is very limited in scope, lacking the capacity to meet the needs of the vast majority of those deemed eligible for this pathway for protection. Resettlement thus entails continuous prioritizing, both when it comes to the selection of beneficiaries and to the allocation of resources. Considering the glaring disproportion between people in need of a *durable solution* and the places available through resettlement, understanding which principles and values steer the different systemic practices and decision-

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making processes that resettlement entails is becoming increasingly more urgent. Hopefully, a scholarly push for paying attention to the role of values and principles can help instigate the urgent political reshaping of resettlement as an instrument for humanitarian protection worldwide.

As is explicit both within the international system(s) of resettlement and in the academic literature (Gordon/Donini 2015), humanitarian values and principles, and particularly the notion of vulnerability, are central to how resettlement is construed. This is, amongst others, visible in the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) use of vulnerability as a principle for establishing people's eligibility for refugee status. It is through their expanded interpretation of Article 1 of the 1951 Refugee Convention, that people qualify (or not) as *vulnerable enough* to be considered for resettlement. As is well established, refugees' rights and human rights are often perceived to go hand in hand both in legal text and practice (Chetail 2014). As such, understanding the extent to which humanitarian values are in fact organizing principles when it comes to refugee resettlement is important. This must also be seen in relation to the use of resettlement as a policy tool for *migration management* (Hashimoto 2018; Suhrke/Garnier 2018), which can arguably endanger the integrity of humanitarian principles, such as *impartiality* or *neutrality* (Gordon/Donini 2015), within the system.

As will be argued here, some important aspects of resettlement as a system remain underexplored. The foci of recent research, as well as the approaches employed for that research, remain largely oriented towards particular parts or actors within the resettlement system, and to a lesser extent address the ways in which resettlement as a system involves a multitude of actors who in turn communicate and interact with each other. This produces different practices and processes of meaning-making in which values, ideals, norms, and principles are shaped, transmitted, and cemented. Addressing the resettlement system as a whole, including the various actors and their channels of communication thus seems highly pertinent.

As this article will show, organizing principles and values come to matter in the resettlement system in different ways. Both migration and refuge in general, as well as resettlement in particular, are issues of increased political salience. They are thus highly contested within most receiving states, and – as findings from the *Norms and Values in the European Migration and Refugee Crisis* (NoVaMigra) project have shown (Herrmann/Langer/Gördemann 2021) – the debates surrounding them render visible the extent to which values and principles carry weight in political action towards refugees and other migrants. On a global level, resettlement was included in, for instance, the Global Compact on Refugees (United Nations 2018), which expresses the political will of many states to increase their resettlement pledges. The compact identifies resettlement both as a 'tool for protection of and solutions for refugees' and as 'a tangible mechanism for burden- and responsibility-sharing and a demonstration of solidarity' between receiving states (United Nations 2018:36). In Europe, the interest in resettlement has grown in the wake of the European refugee reception crisis of 2015. The European Commission's *New Pact on Asylum and Migration* (launched 23 September 2020), for instance, suggests increasing EU resettlement places to protect *the most vulnerable refugees* (European Commission 2020:22) while also including funding to support member states' integration efforts. Resettlement as an international system of refugee protection hence inherently entails negotiations and assessments that involve values and principles of different actors on different levels.

Schneider (2021) approaches resettlement as multi-level governance, while Garnier, Sandvik, and Jubilut (2018) point out that it is also a form of humanitarian governance with both care and control as governing principles. Gaining a holistic understanding of how the balance between these principles is struck in different parts of the resettlement system(s), as well as what other principles come to matter, can allow for a broader and more in-depth understanding of how decisions are made within this system(s) and by whom. I suggest that a holistic ethnographic approach – which includes the multiple level of governance of the system but focuses more on its relational aspects – can help us uncover such principles and be instrumental in exploring the intersecting power dynamics at play between different actors. This, in turn, allows for exploring how, for instance, race, gender, class, or sexuality (cf. Menetrier 2021) can come to matter in the inclusion and exclusion of beneficiaries, as well as in the racialized sociopolitical construction of refuge (Kyriakides/Taha/Charles/Torres 2019).

To explore what I in this article call *organizing principles* of resettlement, I suggest approaching the resettlement system through a regime lens. I draw on methodological ideas from so-called ethnographic regime analysis, which suggest analyzing systems/networks of practices and ideas by considering its different parts and their relation to each other (Tsianos/Karakayali 2010). I do so by discussing the Swedish resettlement system as an example. Such an approach serves to investigate the interconnectedness between the different actors involved in resettlement – from international organizations, such as the UNHCR, to the teams responsible for integration in small municipalities in Sweden. I argue that this approach helps us observe which practices and narratives are at play within the *regime* and gain a deeper understanding of which principles and values guide processes within the resettlement regime and thereby their outcomes. These are factors which ultimately can influence both who becomes resettlement beneficiaries, as well as what happens to beneficiaries once they are in the system.

The empirical material used here was collected through the Horizon 2020 project NoVaMi-gra mentioned above. The material discussed specifically relates to resettlement and integration efforts in Sweden. It includes interviews with actors from different parts of the Swedish resettlement system, as well as participant observation among integration workers. While the Swedish resettlement system serves as an empirical case, this is a system deeply embedded in practices and legal structures on both European and international levels. The case of the Swedish resettlement regime is thus one *chapter* of a larger regime involving different states, NGOs, and international organizations. When it comes to exploring organizing principles, the case of Sweden proves especially relevant due to its explicit centering of vulnerability as the sole selection criteria in use within the state organized resettlement system. However, the exploratory analysis below elucidates the presence of other principles as central to the regime itself, and to the channels of communication inherent to it.

In this paper I thus ask: what can a *regime approach* yield in our understanding of the values and organizing principles of the international resettlement system? The case of resettlement to Sweden is an example through which to explore benefits and pitfalls of this approach, and to discuss how it aids us in looking beyond declared principles of humanitarianism when looking at empirical material gathered among different actors within this *regime*.

The paper is organized in the following way: I start by briefly outlining central concepts employed in my analysis, before discussing relevant literature on principles and values in resettlement. Thereafter, I supply an introduction to the ethnographic regime lens as a methodological approach, and, finally, I employ this lens on my research material, before concluding the paper with a discussion of my findings.

### **Values and Principles as Guideposts in Social Systems**

In order to discuss how values and principles operate within systems I first delineate here what these are. Values are key components of social life, including that which takes place within systems of policy implementation, such as resettlement. They are general ideas about how something should be, providing incentives and guidelines for human action and decision making (cf. Jaspers 2016; Rokeach 1973). Since values impact all aspects of social life, they are intrinsic to how norms develop, decisions are made, and social relations are (re)produced between individuals, within organizations, and in society at large. Hence, they are part and parcel of the *organizing principles* of receiving countries – principles which are arguably transmitted not only within local and national institutions and contact points between reception/integration workers and resettlement beneficiaries, but also beyond state borders, through the international networks that make up global resettlement (and asylum) systems. As will be discussed below, in the case of the Swedish resettlement system, this means that certain values and principles are presented to resettlement beneficiaries early in the resettlement process, even before they have indeed arrived in Sweden.

So, if values can be employed as principles for social interaction in different contexts, what are *organizing principles*? When I in this paper refer to the organizing principles of resettlement, I do so by drawing on Polanyi (2001 [1944]) and Björklund Larsen (2018). In *The Great Transformation*, Polanyi (2001 [1944]) argues that different forms of societies organize their economies around different principles, such as reciprocity or redistribution. Björklund Larsen (2018) conducts an interrelated analysis in her book on the role of reciprocity in the Swedish taxation system; as an organizing principle and value which structures both institutional organizations and sociocultural relations. In a similar vein, I here argue for understanding systems through which policies are implemented (such as the resettlement system), in view of the social relations that (re)produce them. Such an approach recognizes that discourses, reflected in values and principles, travel through social relations, and have implications for all actors involved. Such actors include *frontline workers* (Lipsky 2010) of resettlement (e.g., bureaucrats, NGO workers, volunteer workers, and other practitioners), politicians on different levels, the police, and potential and selected resettlement beneficiaries. Analyzing what these actors communicate and how they carry out their work can give us insight into which values serve as organizing principles of the resettlement system (or regime) of different receiving countries. As this paper argues, this insight can give us a more in-depth understanding of both intersectional power relations at hand in the same system, as well as the practices and processes that take place in the everyday interactions within it.

In other words, by employing a methodology that seeks out which values are communicated and (re)produced relationally within a particular system, we can get closer to an understanding

of what, indeed, are the foundational starting points for courses of action within that system. As will be argued below, in the case of the Swedish resettlement system, the research material shows, for instance, that the *vulnerability* principle is arguably less pivotal than what is declared by many of those working within the system. Rather, much of the resources and labor of resettlement actors goes towards promoting the value of *self-sufficiency* among resettlement beneficiaries. As is the aim of this paper, I will discuss how an ethnographically informed regime lens is useful to acquire such insight.

### **Values and (Organizing) Principles in the Resettlement Literature**

Scholarship on the systemic processes and interactions within resettlement systems, as well as on the values and principles that guide these, have both been sparse. Schneider (2021) has recently pointed out the need for a common framework for understanding the multiple levels and interconnections of local, national, and international actors of these systems. She suggests employing multi-level governance (MLG) as a lens through which to understand the diversity of these systems, as well as to get away from the common focus on only one or a couple of actors at a time. In a recent literature review (Böhm/Jerve Ramsøy/Suter 2021), colleagues and I found that in addition to the lack of scholarship on resettlement-as-systems, we saw that studies of norms, values, and principles in the organization of and practices of these systems are relatively few and limited in scope. Below I discuss these gaps in the literature and emphasize the need for further research into how these multiple levels of governance communicate with each other and – in this communication – reveal which principles and values are at stake in decision making processes and practices. Building on Schneider’s (2021) proposal of an MLG lens, I suggest that an ethnographic regime approach (ERA) can aid us further in doing so.

In our literature review (Böhm et al. 2021), the perhaps most prominent value related theme found was that of receiving states’ selection criteria for potential beneficiaries. This research showcases several aspects which reflect key principles of societal and social organization within different receiving states, that in turn are transmitted through their respective resettlement systems in the selection process and the resources offered to resettlement beneficiaries. The focus on the selection process includes sub-themes, such as the importance of the vulnerability criteria, as well as explicit and implicit integration criteria that states employ, including overarching global trends in the management of refugees and other migrants (Bose 2020). Furthermore, the values transmitted in pre-departure orientation (or cultural orientation programs) have received some attention (Muftee 2014). A last central theme when it comes to values and principles in resettlement is one that often does not explicitly refer to resettlement beneficiaries specifically, but rather includes immigrants and/or refugees at large, namely the ways in which integration and reception processes on both national and local levels reflect values (see e.g., Schinkel 2018). This theme is more extensive and goes partially beyond the scope of this paper. However, as I argue below, including reception and integration efforts in our analysis of the resettlement regime is paramount, one reason being that it renders evident central national principles that shape the encounters between resettlement beneficiaries and the receiving states and communities.

*Selection criteria: vulnerability as a humanitarian principle in resettlement?*

On state level, resettlement is generally seen as an instrument of global solidarity for managing the increasing number of people displaced by conflict, wars, and natural disasters across the world, and the consequent demand on countries of first asylum to receive them (cf. Hashimoto 2018). In contrast to the many dangerous routes pursued in individual quests for asylum in Europe (amongst other places), resettlement is also seen as a humanitarian pathway for refugee migration. States opt for resettlement for various reasons (Suhrke/Garnier 2018). However, as seen in Welfens' (2021) work, and as Bose (2020) argues, it is often national interests and concerns regarding security threats, economic costs, and integration that take primacy over the humanitarian values that are proclaimed as the basis for international resettlement efforts. Moreover, such concerns are negotiated within national and international contexts where xenophobia and racism serve an imperative role in politics (Bose 2020; Kyriakides et al. 2019).

Lindsay (2017) has also found that most receiving states engage in some sort of reasoning regarding who may settle (or not) in the country, beyond the vulnerability criteria of the UNHCR. Hashimoto (2018) argues further that states' selection criteria can be understood along an axis of vulnerability versus an axis of *integration prospects*. Although how integration prospects are defined varies over time and geographical context (Kohl 2015), Hashimoto (2018) purports that such criteria generally reference health, education and vocational skills, knowledge of language, cultural background, religious belonging, as well as existing ties with the receiving country. Common to all receiving states, however, is the criteria of vulnerability. While this criterion can in many ways be considered the sine-qua-none of both refuge at large and resettlement more specifically, it is not as conceptually neutral of a territory as it is often conceived of in the media, among practitioners, or in policy documents. Since the aim of the resettlement system is to protect the refugees most in need (cf. UNHCR 2018), it excludes numerous people on account of their degree of vulnerability. In our literature review we found that vulnerability shows up in contrast and connection to several other values and considerations within resettlement (Böhm et al. 2021). So, while vulnerability can be understood as an organizing principle of the international resettlement system on account of UNHCR's standpoint of vulnerability and need as the basis for beneficiary selection, this principle seldom works alone, neither in selection, nor beyond.

On an individual level, vulnerability is a *label* which increases people's chances of protection through resettlement (Bjørkhaug 2017; Sandvik/Lindskov Jacobsen 2016). However, in practice this label is not distributed neutrally, as individuals belonging to certain groups, such as women, children, or disabled persons, are more likely to be classified as vulnerable and thus receive protection (Albertson Fineman 2008). Welfens and Bekyol (2021) also show that the notion of vulnerability can serve as a discretionary tool for selecting resettlement beneficiaries already conceived of as belonging to the political category of *the vulnerable*. In other words, deciding who belongs or not in this category is a matter of politics. As any other value or principle, the interpretation of vulnerability must thus be seen in regard to intersecting forms of social categorization, one example of which being that men are far less likely to be considered vulnerable in comparison to women and children.

Furthermore, while the *vulnerability label* favors the individual when it comes to the selection process, Garnier et al. (2018) show that within international and national policy, focusing

on refugees' vulnerability arguably reproduces a narrative of them as a *burden* that ought to be distributed equally between states in the name of international solidarity. Armbruster (2018) also gives an example of how the juxtaposed narratives of refugees as victims and refugees as potential threats were negotiated in the UK in response to the so-called refugee reception crisis. She shows how the selection of Syrians to be resettled in the UK was by media and politicians depicted as a process in which an exceptional and small group of Syrian refugees were deemed worthy of entry to the country as a way to foster compassion by the public, while also appeasing the anti-immigrant climate present in post Brexit UK. This included prioritizing the depiction of women and children in need, rather than men. Vulnerability as a principle of resettlement is thus neither neutral nor without peril when it comes to the repercussions for the individual. It is, moreover, highly gendered and racialized (ibid.; cf. Kyriakides et al. 2019).

Another important aspect of understanding the tensions regarding vulnerability and resettlement lies in receiving states' voluntariness of engaging with resettlement in the first place, and their power to determine the conditions for their engagement. The UNHCR emphasizes that unlike the right of refugee status determination, resettlement is not anchored in international law, and most of the selection process and criteria are left up to receiving states to decide (Hashimoto 2018). The system is thus dependent on political will in each receiving state, and, by extension, also on popular support (ibid.). Welfens (2021), reminiscent also of Bose's (2020) argument about the US and Canada, highlights an important aspect in this regard, namely that shifts in international and political environments seem to intercept the grounding on which the refugee admission programs to Germany is based, so that the *orders of worth* used to steer the program has shifted from mainly humanitarian prior to 2015, to a combination of humanitarian and security based foci thereafter.

The vulnerability criterion is hence not the only factor directly steering the resettlement process – it also depends heavily on which concerns receiving states decide to consider (cf. Bose 2020). As Hashimoto (2018) has shown, such criteria vary, but often focus on perceptions of beneficiaries' perceived ability to integrate in the receiving state and of the economic and systemic resources available for reception and integration. Important examples of countries where such criteria are made explicit is Denmark (Kohl 2015) and Germany (Schneider 2021). Security concerns related to specific countries of origin are also key (cf. Kohl 2015). Receiving states' risk and migration management are thus central when it comes to understanding which principles come to organize resettlement efforts to different states. As Haddad (2003) notes, the resettlement system is continuously balancing an intrinsic tension between safeguarding the inclusive spirit of the international human rights framework and states' right to exclude individuals not deemed fit for membership. Moreover, the resettlement system's humanitarian basis runs the danger of purporting a reductionist idea of refugees as (solely) victims. In order to strengthen the system's commitment to human rights and humanitarian values, such dynamics ought to be explored further, both in terms of the decision-making taking place within and between organizations (cf. Schneider 2021), but also in the practices of the individuals and groups working within the system. Approaching the resettlement system from the bottom-up through an ethnographic lens, can thus shed light on aspects otherwise unseen.

*An intersectional look at vulnerability: values and principles shaping resettlement practices*

Even when they are not framed as explicit criteria, values and principles play important roles in the resettlement practices, including selection (cf. Böhm et al. 2021). For instance, values and norms greatly affect the lives of queer potential resettlement beneficiaries in Turkey, Koçak (2020) shows. In these individuals' experience, their degree of *deservingness* is continuously being assessed by the UNHCR, and people therefore integrate into their daily life their interpretation of what it takes to be deemed vulnerable enough. This is done in part by juxtaposing themselves against the *fake cases* – those only pretending to be LGBTQI. In the case of vulnerability based on sexual identity, a feedback loop between UNHCR vulnerability assessment and refugee practices and narratives is created, in which norms of deservingness, sexuality, and gender are reproduced. Menetrier (2021) also presents a case in which values and principles involving sexuality are negotiated and made to matter. She describes how gay and lesbian persons from one African country seeking asylum in a neighboring country, strive to obtain access to a safe pathway to Europe through UNHCR on account of the first country of asylum's anti LGBTQI laws. Values and principles of the national and international actors involved in the resettlement system can become a matter of life and death for the individuals negotiating their entry into the system, while they in this case also are the factors instigating these asylum seekers' displacement in the first place.

Welfens and Bonjour (2021) provide another example of how sociocultural values of the receiving state can impact resettlement. They suggest that in Germany hegemonic ideas of what a family is implicitly shape the selection process. German authorities' understanding of what the proper way of *doing* family is, is connected to who is seen as assimilable, and gendered and sexualized ideas of vulnerability. The authors show that for women refugees, not having a family is regarded as a vulnerability, and thus gives grounds for admission, while for men it's the opposite. In Luxembourg, families are also prioritized, as they are considered easier to integrate than single persons (Sommarribas/Petry/Marcus/Nienaber 2016). In Canada, a similar discourse has been detected in government sponsored resettlement, for which single men are generally not selected (Hyndman/Payne/Jimenez 2017), and Turner (2017) highlights the challenges faced by Syrian men in other Middle Eastern countries, showing that similar ideas circulate in resettlement states beyond Europe.

Ideas about who can and cannot be vulnerable also shows up in Danish resettlement practices, where weakness, for some refugees, ultimately means being interpreted as a risk factor (Kohl 2015). Prior to Denmark's 2005 reform of the resettlement system, where integration criteria were introduced as part of the selection process, those deemed *weak*, such as injured or sick persons, were prioritized for resettlement. The reform, however, has meant reconstruing such individuals as *troublesome* risk factors instead of vulnerable, which in the intersection with other normative, and e.g., gendered or religious aspects, has meant that, again, families are far more likely to be selected than single men are. So, while family norms are not an official part of the selection criteria in many receiving states, they nonetheless shape countries' bordering practices and understandings of who will be able to integrate.

Importantly, all these interpretations must be seen in light of the West's overarching racial construction of refuge, within which who is deemed deserving and undeserving of humanitarian assistance is entrenched in a historical (re)production of the colonial subject and the *other*

(Kyriakides et al. 2019). What is more, these cases also show that resettlement systems are shaped by the sociocultural context of the receiving states and that national values and principles therefore ought to be considered in discussions of resettlement systems. While previous scholarship has, as shown, indeed revealed examples of how national sociocultural values influence particular parts of the resettlement process – especially selection – I argue that a regime lens can give us a more holistic understanding of this important factor.

### *Values and principles in reception and integration processes*

From what has been discussed above, it is evident that integration considerations in resettlement do not only appear in (some) receiving states' selection criteria. Different understandings of what it takes for resettled refugees to *become integrated* are intrinsic parts of the resettlement process. Beirens and Fratzke (2017) argue that considerations of resettlement beneficiaries' high degree of vulnerability often get lost when states evaluate integration *success*. The focus is usually, rather, on the economic aspects of integration, giving primacy to aspects such as education, employment rates, and (economic) self-sufficiency. The stated humanitarian motivations of most receiving states can thus be said to misalign with common ideas of successful integration, such as becoming autonomous members of society and financially self-sufficient (cf. Böhm et al. 2021).

Ultimately, both selection and integration processes within different resettlement systems must be seen in light of the larger national policy framework tied to migration and integration within each national context (cf. Lindsey 2017; Muftee 2014). Assessments of who are allowed to resettle in any given country (and who are not) – whether tied to explicit selection criteria or not – are always connected to a larger political and discursive framework on local, national, and global level (cf. Bose 2020). Moreover, UNHCR's definitions of vulnerability and understandings of *deservingness* are interpreted and employed within these frameworks and are used to pursue particular political and social aims. Finding ways to discern the values and principles that circulate as part of resettlement systems and politics is therefore crucial. Schneider's (2021) proposal of using a multi-level governance approach to better understand decision-making dynamics and lines of power within different resettlement systems, while also gaining a comparative perspective between them, is one way of reaching for such an aim. It can shed light on values and principles that are particularly tied to the organizational level, and thereby the discourses that are circulated with organizations as a vantage point. However, as I suggest below, employing an ethnographic regime approach (ERA) can add another layer to the recognition of the roles that values and principles play in resettlement systems, in that the focus on such an approach lies more on social interaction and the practices of groups and individuals. Furthermore, implicit and explicit power relations attached to the intersecting identities of both resettlement beneficiaries and those making decisions about their lives within the system matter and become more visible when it is practices that are under study. In other words, an ERA approach offers an on-the-ground perspective on how values and principles come to matter in resettlement as a systemic practice and in the relationships within this system.

## A Relational and Holistic Understanding: Exploring Principles and Values Through an Ethnographic Regime Lens

The literature review above renders evident that when it comes to exploring principles and values intrinsic to systems and processes of decision making, it is paramount to consider how these principles and values are continuously transmitted between the actors involved. In other words, values and principles do not exist in a vacuum, they are socially reproduced through communication and the way actors go about their daily practices as functionaries of a system. Values and principles thus travel through systems from somewhere/someone to somewhere/someone else. A regime perspective can prove useful to include positionalities and their inherent power relations in analyses of social networks and systems.

Tsianos and Karakayali (2010) employ an ethnographic regime approach in their paper on the border regime located in South-east Europe. They have defined a regime as made up of “principles, norms, rules and decision making procedures” and as something that is “defined as institutionalized forms of behavior in the handling of conflict that are guided by norms and rules” (2010:376). The system through which beneficiaries are selected, prepared for, transported, received and *integrated* in a third country through resettlement is a good example of what such a regime can look like. The authors (*ibid.*) further propose what they call an ethnographic regime analysis (ERA), which can trace how “different actors, discourses or technologies [create] new webs and relations of power” (*ibid.* 2010:375). Doing this ethnographically commonly means interacting and communicating with actors both formally and informally, undertaking participant observations, and advanced hanging out (Gottlieb 2006) so as to understand social practices within a particular context.

One property of this regime is its inherent *raison d'être*. Tsianos and Karakayali draw on Mezzadra (2007) in pointing out that the aim of a border regime is “not to hermetically close the borders of the *rich countries*, but to build up a system of barriers, that ultimately serves to produce an active process of inclusion of migrant work through their clandestinization” (Mezzadra 2007:183, in Tsianos/Karakayali 2010:377). While the resettlement regime is in many ways characteristically different than the (more physical/geographical) border regimes that these authors have scrutinized, it is enlightening to consider how also the resettlement system serves to border the receiving states involved. Resettlement involves direct regularizations of migrants, not their clandestinization, but as will be visible in the case of Sweden below, economic interest – through the promotion of particular forms of integration and economic self-sufficiency – is also an important bordering factor of this regime.

Another aspect of the regime approach highlighted by Tsianos and Karakayali is that of recognizing the role and effect of all actors within a regime. In their case, this means accounting for how migrants and their mobility impact e.g. states and international organizations' decision-making and course of action. In other words, through their mobility strategies and actions, migrants shape the border regimes that states employ as governance tools. It is the actions of everyone who has a stake in the regime, including disenfranchised refugees, that mold the system, while how it is (re)produced and upheld is dependent on the system's intrinsic power relations.

While principles and values are transmitted from actor to actor through different forms of actions, practices, and communication, how this is done thus depends on the actors' different

positions (cf. Suter, Jerve Ramsøy & Böhm 2020). This, in turn, means that which values and principles seem more salient can vary within different parts of a regime, and, certainly, between different regimes of the same *kind* (such as different states' resettlement systems). In the empirical case that I present below I have therefore paid close attention to who the actors (institutions, organizations, and individuals) are in this system, their different roles, and how they are positioned within power relations. The regime discussed here consists of actors and practices that take part in resettling refugees to Sweden. Some of these actors and their practices are similar to those of other states' resettlement systems (for instance, UNHCR's involvement in the selection process and the implementation of some sort of pre-departure orientation), while some are different (e.g., municipalities' key position in the reception and integration phase and Sweden's pronounced use of vulnerability the only selection criteria). Exploring the Swedish system through a regime lens elucidates different power relations and renders visible the prevalence of values and principles beyond that of *protecting the vulnerable*.

Due to the COVID-19 restrictions in place during the time of fieldwork for the case discussed here, the research material consists mostly of recorded interviews. These were done with actors from the Swedish Migration Agency (SMA), representatives from the UNHCR and IOM Nordic (International Organization for Migration), a researcher from Migration Policy Institute (MPI) involved in planning Sweden's new pre-departure orientation (PDO), and, especially, public servants/integration workers on regional and municipal levels. Resettlement beneficiaries, with whom I would have met in the planned on-site fieldwork, are unfortunately not represented in the research material here.

Prior to the pandemic some on-site fieldwork was conducted, including participant observation at a national stakeholder convention for practitioners and stakeholders involved in the Swedish resettlement system. During the pandemic, I also attended several online meetings held to inform receiving municipalities of the status-quo of resettlement reception in Sweden, as well as discussion meetings regarding the structure and processes of the Swedish resettlement system to plan Sweden's new pre-departure orientation program. The main on-site fieldwork – an organized trip to Jordan and/or Lebanon together with Swedish resettlement practitioners, was cancelled repeatedly due to the pandemic. The material presented below thus lacks (with some exceptions) the further depth which ethnographic on-site participant observation would have provided. However, the analytical approach employed here remains ethnographic, in that it aims to understand this regime inductively and holistically. As seen below, this has meant considering the roles of different actors and processes at hand in relation to a larger whole, namely the Swedish resettlement system.

### **Empirical Case: Applying a Regime Lens to the Swedish Resettlement System**

Below I discuss what a methodological *ethnographic regime approach* yields when it comes to exploring the principles and values that a system is built around and practiced through. I first present which actors the Swedish resettlement regime consists of, before using the interview material to examine the principles and values that shape how the actors make sense of the processes within this system. Through this discussion I suggest that, while representatives from

one part of the system (the Swedish Migration Agency) underscores the Swedish state's commitment to vulnerability as an organizing principle of resettlement to Sweden, their multifaceted role vis-à-vis both beneficiaries and municipal level reception and integration actors, reveals the prevalence of both security and integration concerns as pivotal in this system. Self-sufficiency, connected to reciprocity – an organizing principle of Swedish society at large (Björklund Larsen 2018) – is arguably as significant a principle as is vulnerability when it comes to organizing and structuring the Swedish resettlement system.

### *Steps and actors of resettlement to Sweden*

The Swedish regime fits the common mold of a resettlement system, which generally consists of several steps: from receiving states' selection of beneficiaries, pre-departure orientation, travel from country of first asylum, reception, to, finally, integration efforts in the receiving society. In most cases it is the UNHCR and IOM who orchestrate procedures taking place prior to the beneficiary leaving the first country of asylum, as well as the travel arrangements. Reception and integration, however, is largely organized by public and civil society actors in the receiving state, on national and local levels.

In Sweden, selection is done based on UNHCR dossiers that go through an extensive screening process. This includes potential beneficiaries' belonging to UNHCR's submission categories which reflect the various grounds for which a person is considered vulnerable (UNHCR 2018), as well as their family relations and how they have fled. It is the Swedish Migration Agency (SMA) who processes the UNHCR dossiers, while all potential beneficiaries are also screened by the Swedish Security Police. Some countries of origin are in themselves considered a security risk factor, and candidates with such backgrounds (around half of all beneficiaries to Sweden) are therefore screened through an interview process. With others, the dossier-based process is sufficient for the SMA to make their decision. Already in these first steps of selection can we perceive the prevalence of two central principles found in previous scholarship, namely that of *vulnerability* as the humanitarian basis for the resettlement system and of *security* as a concern which most receiving states pour extensive resources into when it comes to managing migration.

After selection, beneficiaries heading for Sweden must attend a so-called pre-departure orientation (PDO). This is, as of 2020, carried out by IOM. The SMA has, in collaboration with Swedish receiving municipalities, the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) in Brussels, and IOM themselves, developed a three-day course which beneficiaries attend. The aim of this orientation is to prepare them for their transition to life in Sweden, both when it comes to practical issues and to sociocultural aspects of living in a new place. As will be discussed, this orientation provides a first encounter in which beneficiaries are met with the expectations of becoming self-sufficient and of adapting the dynamics of social life in Sweden.

Lastly, the reception and integration phases of the resettlement system in Sweden are by and large one single process, coordinated and carried out by the municipalities where beneficiaries are settled directly upon their arrival in the country. The process can vary significantly between municipalities depending on the actors involved. In some places, civil society plays a fundamental role in these processes, in other places less. Collaborations between civil society, private, and public actors also differ from context to context. However, in most interviews with actors

belonging to this phase, the notion of *self-sufficiency* and of beneficiaries being able to act in accordance with their *rights and obligations* were touched upon. In other words, a concern for newcomers developing a reciprocal relation with Swedish society was often brought up in different ways. Below I use my interview material to further delve into the circulation of these values and principles: vulnerability, security, self-sufficiency, and reciprocity.

### *Organizing principle? Selecting the most vulnerable for resettlement to Sweden*

*We do think that this work is enormously important, because we really do reach... not always, but in many cases... the most vulnerable refugees. But then again, the places [available in Sweden] don't go a long way. 1.4 million refugees who are in need of resettlement and we only provide the opportunity for 5000 people to come here, so... It's not many [individuals], but it is still a signal – both to refugees out in the world and to the countries of first asylum that have a lot of refugees. We do relieve their systems with only a few individuals, but I think it is still better than nothing.*

The quote above, from an operational expert at the Swedish Migration Agency, alludes to a number of central aspects of the notion of vulnerability within the Swedish resettlement regime (Jerve Ramsøy, Böhm & Kujawa 2021). First, protecting the most vulnerable is arguably the most explicit organizing principle of this regime, as it closely follows the Refugee Convention and is key to Sweden's international commitments. Furthermore, saying that Sweden aids in protecting *the most vulnerable* refugees, implies the existence of a scale of vulnerability and that Sweden contributes with taking care of those who are on the bottom of this scale.

Second, the interviewee speaks of an assumed signaling effect of the actions of the Swedish state; Sweden's commitment to this principle can be understood not only as a pledge to help, but also as spreading awareness of resettlement as an option for refugee protection, urging other countries (especially in the EU) to follow Sweden's example. The quote also points to the reason for why setting this example is important, namely the vast discord between potential resettlement beneficiaries and the placements available in receiving states. Arguably, then, the Swedish government and the SMA sees the resettlement system as a tool not only for alleviating the plight of those individuals who are deemed vulnerable enough, but also for sending certain messages to other relevant actors.

And what do these messages convey? The quote indicates that Sweden seeks to communicate that it is there to help, particularly when it comes to refugees themselves and to the countries that first receive them. However, from a regime perspective, which considers the different roles of the SMA, as well as its interaction with other actors within the system, we can see that the Swedish system arguably also sends other messages. In essence, that resettlement is also a system which serves to control migration – it serves to thoroughly vet those who are allowed to arrive as vulnerable enough, but also as *not dangerous* to Swedish society. As such, resettlement is thus also about bordering (cf. Tsianos/Karakayali 2010). As we shall see when it comes to the Sweden's pre-departure orientation program, this bordering does not only happen through the selection process (in excluding the vast majority of potential beneficiaries from access to Sweden) – it happens also in the messages communicated to selected individuals before their departure to Sweden, as they are introduced to the message of what becoming a Swedish resident

ought to mean to them. Furthermore, the same interviewee underscored that the selection work the SMA does is in no way based on so-called integration criteria that can be seen in other European countries.

*No such [integration] criteria exist. When we have agreed with the Government on which persons we will select during a year, what the distribution will look like, and the UNHCR is on board, then what we focus on is only the need for protection. That is, is the person a refugee or in need of protection, and nothing else.*

The interviewee underlined that it is up to the Government if any changes are to be made when it comes to such criteria. Nonetheless, as seen in the literature review above, how the criterion of vulnerability is interpreted and practiced varies, and, as a criterion it seldom *works alone* (Böhm et al. 2021). In the selection process of different countries, friction occurs between vulnerability and other considerations. In Sweden, the potential security threat a new resident can pose is the only aspect that can have a direct influence on potential beneficiaries' selection. As mentioned, all potential beneficiaries must be vetted by the Swedish Security Police. Depending on country of origin, they are also interviewed by the SMA selection missions to countries of first asylum. Vulnerability can thus potentially be intercepted by national identity or citizenship. This is reminiscent of both Bose (2020) and Welfens' (2021) analyses, showing how national interests – in this case notions of (in)security – intercept the humanitarian values on which selection is based.

Seen through a regime lens, we can perceive how decision-making around selection is informed by politics beyond those solely concerning resettlement in itself. The interviewee recognizes that how the SMA carries out its assigned duties sends a message; to potential beneficiaries, international actors, and countries of first asylum – that Sweden is taking decisive action and thus somehow granting hope to a selected few. By extension, a message is also, arguably, sent to other receiving states and the system at large of who Sweden regards as *resettlable*. Through selection (or the lack thereof), the Swedish state is participating in an international discourse that at times juxtaposes refugee protection and national security (cf. Bose 2020; Welfens 2021).

### *The multiple roles of the SMA*

Selection is but one step of the resettlement regime. Important in this regard is what was noted in conversation with several SMA representatives, namely the Swedish Government's recent (re-)expansion of SMA's assignments, as explained below:

*The SMA's assignment regarding resettlement is actually two-fold, the second assignment having been given to us [in 2020]. The first is to organize the selection of resettlement beneficiaries, which in part includes granting residence permits and transferring them [...] to Sweden. And the new assignment is to also prepare beneficiaries for life in Sweden, prior to departure.*

In other words, as of 2020, the SMA is involved both in selection and in pre-departure orientation (a mandate which the SMA was also in charge of until 2016 when the past PDO was suspended). While the first assignment centers vulnerability as an organizing principle of its practices, the second is concerned with paving the way for beneficiaries' *integration* in Sweden. The role of the SMA and the people working for this organization thus becomes both about ensuring

protection of the most vulnerable, while at the same time communicating a message through direct contact with resettlement beneficiaries about what is expected of those who live in Sweden, as well as what they should expect from society and the welfare state. From an ERA perspective we can perceive that the SMA, in its double role, to a certain extent embodies the juxtaposing discourse of vulnerability/protection versus security risk that previous scholarship has pointed to. There is also a further juxtaposition – between that of gatekeeper for the vulnerable and door opener for the selected few. In straddling these juxtapositions, the principles organizing the work exercised through the system inevitably become multiple.

### *Pre-departure orientation (PDO): the start of integration*

Muftee (2014:31) explains that pre-departure orientation (or cultural orientation programs) aims to connect the pre-departure with the post-arrival phase of resettlement. Building a foundation of knowledge about what to expect in the country of reception provides a solid starting point from where reception and integration services can continue to build after arrival (Fratzke/Kainz 2019). While PDOs vary significantly depending on factors such as the resources available in the receiving country, as well as geographic and political contexts (Muftee 2014), the quote below from an IOM officer in charge of PDO development, alludes to the key notion repeated throughout the Swedish resettlement regime, namely to *manage expectations*.

*Well, we can say that integration starts already before they are resettled, it starts through this PDO which is very much like providing preliminary tentative information and preparing for what is coming ahead, what the integration process entails. So, that they would have realistic expectations and that they would have the correct attitude and willingness for what is coming. (PDO coordinator, IOM Nordic)*

The quote also signals that there is a *correct* way of expecting and that this it is up to the individual to adjust to this way. This includes a willingness to accept the conditions that you will encounter once you arrive in Sweden. When seen in connection to the SMA's double mandate, the quote shows that the SMA both decides who can transgress Swedish borders, as well as how they should be transgressed. From an ERA perspective, then, it is clear that the organizing principles of the Swedish resettlement system are multiple and layered.

On a practical level, beneficiaries' mindset towards their future is addressed through the four themes of the recently developed course curriculum for the Swedish PDO: 1) practical information about travel and the initial post arrival period, 2) everyday life in Sweden, 3) rights and responsibilities, and 4) values and core principles in Swedish society. The interviewee above explained that these themes are designed for *ensuring continuity between the PDO and post arrival service provision and enhancing mental preparedness*, as well as *providing accurate information and developing realistic expectations about life in Sweden*.

From a regime perspective, it is worth noting the process through which the current Swedish PDO was generated. SMA invited the MPI to gather information on the Swedish resettlement system through interviews with actors from across the *regime*. IOM then used this material to produce course material for Sweden's PDO. The process in itself arguably reinforced channels of communication between the SMA, regions, and receiving municipalities, as did the COVID pandemic for which consecutive informational meetings were held online. These communication channels are an important component of executing the different roles within the system.

Seen through an ERA lens, it is through channels such as these that values and principles are circulated throughout the resettlement system.

*Reception and integration work in Sweden: self-sufficiency and reciprocity as central aspects*

The post-arrival phase of resettlement to Sweden gives further insight into how values and principles are indeed relational. Here, the expectations and values addressed in the PDO become part of the encounter between beneficiaries and their new place of residence. But what are these expectations and how are they addressed at different systemic levels? According to an integration worker in a rural municipality in Sweden, one aspect of expectation management is confronting rumors that circulate online reaching refugees prior to selection:

*We have experienced that some resettled refugees can be disappointed and say, “you brought us here from the refugee camp and we don’t have it better”. So, they think that Sweden is a country of dreams – some think they will be given a house, some think they will be given a job. [...] I mean, they have really high expectations.*

In other words, expectations that need to be intercepted are preconceived ideas of what one might be *owed* upon arrival in Sweden, which is in line with the role of reciprocity as an organizing principle in Swedish society, as pointed to by Björklund Larsen (2018). This principle entails giving in order to receive, but also that exchange is an act that connects people and serves to build relationships over time. When it comes to resettlement beneficiaries, who are often unable to *give* to society when they first arrive, one approach can thus be to counter *unrealistic* expectations before and upon arrival.

When they arrive, beneficiaries are received by staff from the municipality in which they will be resettled, who accompany them to their pre-arranged housing facilities. This encounter marks the beginning of the two-year *establishment program*, a period in which beneficiaries are offered a series of services and assistance from the authorities. Some, such as language and civic orientation courses, are obligatory to attend in order to receive economic assistance. One interviewee, an SMA officer intrinsically involved in the development of the new Swedish PDO, underscored the importance of streamlining the pre-departure training to *match* the content of the civic orientation (CO) courses of the establishment program. One aspect of this is using the same terminology in the PDO as in the CO. One such term, often mentioned in interviews across the regime, is that of *rights and responsibilities*. The SMA interviewee further underscored which responsibilities are the most prominent in their discussions with stakeholders and in reports on the system in Sweden:

*[...] there is a lot about this [aspect of] that you are expected to become economically self-sufficient – and that you are expected to participate [in society].*

The same narrative is mirrored in the interviews with integration workers on municipal level. One person from a small town in the north of Sweden explained how part of their job consists of clarifying early on what rights residents in Sweden have, but that this also means that society expects something in return:

*I explain that, yes, this is what it looks like, but that means this as well – that you also have a personal responsibility to actually work to get a job, or to learn Swedish. That things just don’t come falling into anyone’s lap.*

The interviewee underscores that in their experience most resettlement beneficiaries are *nice* to deal with, and their narrative renders clear that these expectations of self-sufficiency are also often an aim of the beneficiaries themselves. Which *rights and responsibilities* are regarded as important in integration work are thus reflected in the resources spent on helping newly arrived immigrants become part of general society, and, importantly, of the labor market.

The notion of managing expectations can direct us to explore which ideas of boundary making operate within the resettlement system – what does it take for beneficiaries to become *part of society*? One aspect of this being contributing to society and the welfare state by becoming economically self-sufficient. Put differently, even if integration criteria are not part of resettlement selection to Sweden, *integration factors* still represent a social border to cross for those who are indeed selected, and this is communicated to them throughout the resettlement process. Visible in the narratives of municipal integration workers above, it is once again the value of reciprocity (Björklund Larsen 2018) and self-sufficiency that are transmitted (for a further discussion on how integration practices and scholarship can contribute to *othering* in European receiving societies, see Schinkel 2018). Ultimately, this brief presentation of research material reflects how different concerns, principles, and values intercept the well-established principle of vulnerability in the Swedish resettlement system.

### **Concluding Discussion**

In the introduction I asked what an ethnographic regime approach can yield in our understanding of the values and organizing principles of the international resettlement system. The explorative analysis above of narratives collected in the Swedish resettlement system, reveals that there are several benefits to such an approach. As Tsianos and Karakayali (2010) purport, a regime approach focuses on what is communicated to whom and how, underlining that all actors have a stake in producing and reproducing the structure of the regime. Doing so from an ethnographic perspective also means striving to gain a holistic understanding of this system – or regime – through scrutinizing parts of its whole. One question that arises is thus what sort of system is created and upheld. The ethnographic component of the present analysis has given us the contours of the ways in which values and principles are conveyed by the different actors in the Swedish regime. This is a system reproduced everyday by what people do and say to each other. While more extensive on-site ethnographic fieldwork, including with resettlement beneficiaries, would have generated further insight about everyday practices within the regime, applying an ERA lens to the research material has proven informative in several ways.

For one, when it comes to selection, and the reverence of the humanitarian principles of the UNHCR and the Refugee Convention, a regime lens renders evident that these are but one part of the puzzle. As other scholars have discussed previously, several criteria are both explicitly and implicitly salient in the selection process. But, more importantly, resettlement as a system is about much more than its selection procedure. The regime approach also shows that while focusing on selection criteria and the humanitarian values and ideals on which resettlement builds, the system's many actors influence the outcome of its processes and practices. They are its processes and practices. From street level bureaucracy to stringent securitization procedures – all these practices have a say in determining who gets to become resettlement beneficiaries

and of those who do – whose resettlement can be regarded as *successful* or not – against the parameters chosen both politically, ideologically and on a personal level in the meetings between beneficiaries and different reception and integration workers. As such, a regime lens allows us to also see the different bordering practices of the resettlement system.

Secondly, we can see that there are narratives, values, and principles that permeate the whole system, while others might be more present, rather, with one particular actor. As discussed above, the resettlement literature has tended to focus on different parts of the system separately, often separating the pre-arrival and the post-arrival phases of resettlement. Looking at the system as a regime can help us connect the dots and see how meanings travel across the system. As such, it can also shed further light on the different aspects of, precisely, the central notion of vulnerability, in that it can serve to recognize what happens to individuals' statuses, labels, and experiences of vulnerability as they move through the resettlement system. The regime approach can thus provide a novel angle for readings of previous studies.

In the Swedish case, the principle of vulnerability is declared as the system's *sine-qua-non*, but when observing the practices of the full range of actors within the system, values such as self-sufficiency and reciprocity might be equally important for the day-to-day (re)production of the regime. We can thus appreciate how values and principles are not only communicated from the top down – even if it is the Swedish government who communicates mandates to different actors within the system. What is arguably visible in the material above is how different actors have a stake in deciding which values and principles are communicated to recipients both prior to and after their arrival in Sweden. These values and principles, in turn, are informed by the larger sociocultural context in Sweden (cf. Björklund Larsen 2018).

A third strength of the ERA lens is thus that it allows us to recognize the salience of specific principles or values in the regime at large, and thereby grant us a more holistic perspective of the system. We can observe how ideas, values, and principles travel between different actors. While the Swedish Government, through their mandates to the Swedish Migration Agency, look to UNHCR and the Refugee Convention for anchoring their organizing principle of vulnerability, they also reflect discourses present on Swedish political and bureaucratic scenes. This is arguably done in that integration – and especially values such as self-sufficiency and participation – is centered in SMAs expanded assignment of developing and organizing the Swedish pre-departure orientation program. The SMA, in turn, continuously communicates with regions and municipalities, and has relied heavily on these actors' experiences and expertise when developing the new Swedish PDO together with IOM. A key concern has been streamlining the messages transmitted to beneficiaries pre-departure and post-arrival. Meanwhile, municipalities strive to ensure the integration of beneficiaries in their new communities, always within the context of the continuously shifting politics of integration and migration in Sweden and beyond.

Ultimately, the regime approach helps us pay attention to values and principles and the role they play in the resettlement system. While other lenses such as the multilevel-governance approach proposed by Schneider (2021) can be fruitful in uncovering the declared principles at work within the organizations that take part in the resettlement system, the ERA approach grants us the opportunity to delve deeper into the relational aspects between both organizations and individual actors and contemplate the role each of them holds in (re)producing the norms

of the regime. While a full-fledged ethnographic regime approach is arguably resource intensive when it comes to the collection of empirical material, the lens in itself has proven useful. So, while empirical snippets presented here do not provide for an exhaustive analysis of the Swedish resettlement regime, they nonetheless reflect how discourses and meaning making are social processes that involve both crisscrossing lines of communication and knowledge transmission, as well as complex webs of power relations. Raising awareness of the explicit and implicit organizing principles at large in the system, might make the task of meeting the concerns and demands of different stakeholders easier, including the safeguarding of the humanitarian principles the resettlement system builds on. As such it is a potent tool to scrutinize, perhaps especially, systems in which bureaucracy on different levels (international, national, and local) plays a central role for people's lives. When it comes to resettlement, the stakes are high. It is the survival and lived lives of over 1.4 million people on the line.

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