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Inter-organizational decision-making in Norwegian refugee resettlement

How three agencies shape refugee selection

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How do three Norwegian agencies with different mandates collabroate in refugee resettlement?

What happens when their organizational perspective conflict?

- 123 million people displaced in 2024
- 37 million of these are refugees
- Less than 1% of refugees are resettled.

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Norwegian resettlement policy contains built-in conflicts that are managed through discretion, not eliminated by policy

Protection vs economic sustainability

Humanitarian care vs. immigration control

Vulnerability vs. integration prospect

Photo/ demaerre/ istock

SLOs – mediators of conflicting politics and ambiguous policies, balancing conflicting objectives

In resettlement – dynamics manifest most prominently in inter-organizational encounters

Discretion is shaped by institutional factors, which define specific spaces for agency and discretion.

- what decisions can be made
- who is authorized to make them.

UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

POLITIET
POLITIETS UTLENDINGSENHET

UDI
Utlendingsdirektoratet
Norwegian Directorate
of Immigration

IMDi
Integrerings- og
mangfoldsdirektoratet

Competing interpretations of the same person

The Case: a refugee with a master’s degree and strong labor market skills

IMDi sees: an ideal integration candidate who can sustain the resettlement system

UDI finds: Credibility issues in education timeline – potential security risk – REJECTION

Same person, opposite conclusions

Different institutional mandates produce different epistemic perspectives and incompatible knoweldges

Conflict resultion through hierarchy not consensus

- **UDI has final authority** → Protection & security concerns override integration prospects
- **Police provide information only** → UDI decides if concerns are significant
- **Multiple criteria, unclear priority** → Resolved through institutional power, not policy clarification

Take aways

Policy

Clarify priorities instead of hiding tensions

Design the role of each agency with conflicts in mind

Practice

Recognize organizational silos

Increase transparency

Research

Recognize street-level bureaucracy as multi-organizational

Trouble cases

Comparative perspective

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