There is no rigorous evidence on how to improve outcomes for resettled refugees

Little is known about how to best help resettled refugees improve their economic integration or well-being.

What is the aim of this review?
This Campbell systematic review examines the effects of programmes on the economic self-sufficiency and well-being of resettled refugees. The review identified 23 relevant studies but none of these could be included in the analysis due weaknesses in study design.

What were the main findings of the review?

There is insufficient evidence to determine whether programmes to improve the economic self-sufficiency and well-being of resettled refugees are effective or not. This does not mean that these programmes do not have important effects, only that the available evidence does not indicate what these effects may be.

What is the review about?
Over 59.5 million people have been forced from their homes globally of which 19.5 million are classified as refugees. Refugee resettlement programmes are offered to those who have particular needs or who must be moved to countries other than those in which they initially seek protection: 28 countries currently offer UNHCR-registered programmes, including the USA, Canada, and Australia. The USA alone invests $1 billion in resettlement programmes each year.

One aim of resettlement programmes is to facilitate the economic integration of refugees. Support programmes include training, education, and mental health services. But resettled refugees often experience high levels of unemployment and poverty.

This review assesses the effects of programmes to improve the self-sufficiency and well-being of resettled refugees. Outcomes are employment, cash assistance, income levels, ability to keep a job, and quality of life.

What studies were included in the review?
Eligible studies examine outcomes for refugees who have been part of a government resettlement programme and who were between the ages of 18 and 64 years at the time of the programme.

No studies met the inclusion criteria of this review. Twenty-three studies were identified...
which were not included in the review because their design meant that the effects measured could not be clearly attributed to the programmes.

What helps refugees and are resettlement programs effective?
The lack of available evidence means we do not know for sure how to help resettled refugees improve their economic integration or well-being. This does not mean that programmes for resettled refugees do not have effects, either positive or negative. The available evidence is insufficient to determine what the effects of the programmes are. Resettlement programmes also meet their goal in moving refugees and may have many other positive effects not explored here, such as on the safety of refugees.

What do the findings in this review mean?
The lack of knowledge and rigorous research on the impacts of programming for resettled refugees is surprising given the political importance of such programmes, the levels of investment involved, and the number of people affected.

Such weaknesses have been officially recognised by, for example, the United States Government Accountability Office, which admits that little is still known “about which approaches are most effective in improving the economic status of refugees.”

Policy makers are faced with the challenge of having to make decisions without a robust research base to inform them.

There is a knowledge gap about the effects of programmes to support resettled refugees which should be filled by rigorous research. Studies should be informed by clear questions and objectives. Robust methodologies should be used, including appropriate comparison groups and the planned collection of data on key outcomes.