
Rui Tavares

RESETTLEMENT OF REFUGEES – A NEW LIFE

The adoption of a legal act
on the European Refugee Fund
and the way forward to a joint
European Resettlement Programme



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EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT 2012

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Introduction

The legal act on resettlement of refugees that the European Union (EU) will now adopt was the result of more than two years of work among our three institutions — Commission, Parliament and Council — and also with United Nations agencies such as the High-Commissioner for Refugees and his office in Brussels, or NGOs working on the field. All those are represented in these pages, as are the two reports that the European Parliament voted in May 2010, and whose aim is to increase resettlement of refugees in Europe, both in quantity and quality.

By approving these new rules, MEPs are ensuring the EU is better equipped to play a more positive role in assisting refugees and alleviating the impacts of crises in critical regions in the world. Despite no shortage of rhetoric, member states do not really live up to expectations: the EU takes in only around 4,500 of the 200,000 refugees that need resettling in the world each year. By comparison, the US resettles around 80,000, and even countries like Brazil and Chile have done a lot in the past few years. Europe needs to remember where it came from — we once also produced large numbers of refugees — and contribute its fair share of this global effort.

Refugees are probably the most vulnerable population in the world, and the refugees to be resettled are maybe the most vulnerable of the refugees. The text that follows — “Among refugees, in Syria” — tries to portray the life of refugees in Syria, from the glimpse that I could have while leading and participating in an EP delegation there in March 2010. I can only hope that the people we have visited are safe and the new EU laws will help us get them resettled. The field notes I have taken on spot and then compiled into a short essay are here, to represent — via the examples of the people that we then met — the plight of the refugees everywhere in the world

Cecilia Malmström

European Commissioner for Home Affairs

In a world that is torn by the man-made horrors of war, persecution and famine, many are forced to flee their homes and to ask for help and international protection. The European Union, founded on the values of respect for human dignity and human rights, needs to do more to promote these values in its relations with the wider world. The Joint EU Resettlement Programme provides the EU and its Member States with a new important tool that will allow us to demonstrate our commitment to those values. It will facilitate resettlement as a durable solution to those refugees that have no opportunity for voluntary return or local integration in the country of first asylum. The establishment of the Programme gives us the possibility to take action towards the most vulnerable among refugees in third countries calling for our help, action that can in most cases mean the difference between life and death.

I therefore very much welcome the Joint EU Resettlement Programme and will promote its rapid application. We must pool our resources and make a true difference in a spirit of solidarity by increasing refugee resettlement to the EU.

The agreement reached on the Joint EU Resettlement Programme is a clear demonstration that the European Parliament and the Council can find workable compromises. I would like to thank all Presidencies that have been involved in the negotiations and in particular the Rapporteur of the European Parliament, Mr. Rui Tavares for his strong commitment to get this through. 2012 is the deadline set by the European Council for setting up the Common European Asylum System. Like they have done on resettlement, I count on all Member States and the European Parliament to show their true commitment to reach also that target.

Among refugees in Syria

FIELD NOTES FROM
A PARLIAMENTARY DELEGATION
TO DAMASCUS AND THE AL HOL
CAMP IN MARCH 2010.

Rui Tavares

Imagine that you are in a refugee camp, not able to return to your home, which probably does not exist any more, and not able to return to the life you had before. Imagine that returning to your country is no longer possible. As a matter of fact, it is not even possible to return to your country in your imagination. You might have been persecuted for having been born into an ethnic or religious minority. Maybe one of your relatives was kidnapped or murdered. Maybe you yourself were victim of torture or other forms of physical violence and you got scared – really scared – to return. Maybe a militia had left a message for you that next they would go after your closest family. You packed up and left. And you had the luck of finding an open border.

If you are no longer in a refugee camp, you could be in any neighbourhood of a city, in a neighbouring country. In your home country, you were (for example) a university student, but now you do not have the documents to prove it. In your home country, you worked, but in this country that has yet to sign the 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees, work is prohibited for people like you. In your country, your family had possessions and property, but now they are selling off

everything, and when it is all gone, what to do? Work and risk deportation? Put your young children to work, simply because it is harder to deport them? All around you, you have heard stories of petty crimes, documents falsified in order to get out, women and children fallen into prostitution to survive.

Around you there are thousands of refugees with similar stories. Some were victims of torture, others saw a close relative die, others are elderly or sick. A mother fled with her disabled son and is alone. Wherever you turn, your story is not even the worst. How do you think you would react? Probably you think that you would be apathetic, disoriented and confused. Probably you would not be able to do anything. In this case, let me give you some news: perhaps your reaction would be more energetic than you might imagine. In spite of losing everything, you will not give up the fight. You come to the conclusion that the only thing you have now is the education you can provide for your children. Before you had a thousand worries, now you have just this one. What is more, there are thousands of people around you in the same situation or worse.

Why do I say this? Recently I visited refugees in a number of places — in urban environments or in refugee camps — in particular in Syria, while I was the European Parliament's rapporteur on the issue. And what most surprised me is that the refugees do not stop. Courage is the last thing that they can lose. So they cling to it. Real refugees were very different than the refugees that in my mind I was expecting to meet.

HELP AND EXAMPLES OF STRENGTH

I hope I can do justice to their strength with this description. The majority of refugees in Syria are Iraqis who fled from their country after the invasion of 2003. Some escaped American bombing, others insecurity, and perhaps the majority escaped sectarian violence between Iraqis. For this reason, ethnic and religious minorities are over-represented. One day, at the headquarters of the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), I met a couple of Iraqi women who work as volunteers alongside refugees in the urban environment. They too are refugees and cannot

The neighbourhood of Jarramana, Damascus.



Jepp Tranhom-Mikkelsen

**Ambassador
Permanent Representative
of Denmark to the European Union**

Resettlement has been an integral part of the asylum policy in Denmark for many years. It is therefore a particularly great pleasure for me that the Council and the European Parliament could finalize the discussion on the decision establishing common EU resettlement priorities for 2013 and providing new rules concerning the financial support for EU Member States during the Danish Presidency. This achievement not only has a great value for relevant Member States in itself, but has also reintroduced the issue of resettlement at the EU agenda. The strong commitment of Mr. Tavares has been crucial to the conclusion of this agreement and I would therefore like to thank Mr. Tavares for his time and effort.

work (Syrian law does not allow it) so they opt to use their time to do whatever they can for their misfortunate peers.

Maya, with a Bachelors degree in business, lived well in Iraq before the war, but is of the Sabian religion. The Sabians (and Mandeans) are neither Christian nor Muslim, they say they believe in St John the Baptist, and the angels. They practise rites of purity with water and give extreme importance to baptism. They were persecuted by fanatics after the invasion of Iraq.

Dahid was a physics teacher. He is Shia Muslim, but married to a Sunni. This gave both of them problems. Ezra is Sunni, and even lived in a Sunni region, but he had a problem: he was a journalist. And Zohad and Haída are both Christian. Zohad speaks and cries, but cannot keep quiet. With her facial features, clothes and her way of being, should could pass from my home village in Portugal. She is troubled because she cannot provide clothes for her children to attend mass — the stupidest idea right now, she herself says — and she starts crying again. Haída was driven out of Iraq simply because she worked for Caritas — they said she was working for the Americans. The strength of these

women, and of their stories, is not something that required much mediation. It was evident for the colleagues from Parliament with me, from the left or from the right, Finnish or Greek.



A community center in the neighborhood of Jarramana, in the Syrian capital. On the walls, the drawings and compositions of the kids who attend class there. A text about Shakespeare next to another by Robert Louis Stevenson, author of *Treasure Island*. The colors on the walls are vibrant, boys and girls study together; in one little classroom, kids with learning disabilities have an educator working with them one-on-one.

In conversation with those who frequent the centre we discover that they are Shia and Sunni Muslims, Christians who proudly wear crosses on their necks, Sabians and even the uncommon Yazid.

Together they attend classes in drawing and art, Arabic language, sewing, hairstyling, computing – and all that they can. They want to keep occupied between each asylum request, each telephone call home, each moment of loss of hope for a solution. When they leave there, they only talk about the things they have learnt.

I tell them that we are a delegation of the European Parliament with the objective of improving European refugee law. And I am in charge of writing the two reports on the matter, one with concrete measures, and the other with the concept for a European refugee program. This here is my Greek colleague, who belongs to a centre-right party, and has worked with me as a shadow-rapporteur. The others are civil servants or European advisers: a Polish man, a German man and Finnish woman. We have worked on this for months, but it is the first time that we speak with people of flesh and blood.

Please understand that we did not come here to resolve any one individual's problem; this is not an interview to grant you the right to asylum. If we return with good ideas to improve the law, these could even benefit you; ultimately, they could help people in other parts of the

world who have similar stories. All say they understand why we are there. We could not have given them false hope. And we did not give them false hope. It is a relief and a frustration at the same time.

MEETINGS, VEILS AND SHAME

Damascus is close to the border with Lebanon and close to the sea, from which it is only separated by a mountain range. But to visit to a refugee camp it was necessary to go to the other side of Syria, in a province called Al-Qamishli, which is like a kind of nook between the borders of Iraq and Turkey. During the flight – in a Tupolev that has as a security measure an “escape cord”, and don't even ask me what this means – what one sees is the desert, hours of smooth desert with small warts which are villages abandoned due to the drought which has lasted over seven years. Upon landing, we still have to travel by car to the empty land where the camp of Al Hol sits, right next to Iraqi territory.

However, the inhabitants of the camp are not Iraqis. They are Palestinian, two times driven out from their houses and villages in the Israeli-Arab wars of 1948

Dag Hartelius

**Ambassador
Permanent Representative
of Sweden to the European Union**

Ambassador Dag Hartelius congratulates the European Parliament, the Danish Presidency and the Commission for their efforts which have now resulted in the long awaited successful adoption of the EU joint resettlement program. Sweden, with a long standing tradition as a resettlement country, has supported the proposal since it was presented during the Swedish Presidency in 2009 and has pushed for an agreement ever since.

The agreement is an important first step and will provide an incentive for Member States to start with or increase resettlement activities. We have already seen positive steps during the last years with more Member States involved in resettlement. The agreement will hopefully lead to that the number of resettlement places increases and that the EU will become an important contributor when it comes to resettlement.

António Guterres

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

Mr. Guterres welcomes the Joint EU Resettlement Programme as an important humanitarian move:

"I hope to see strengthened EU solidarity at a global level. Resettlement is a critical protection tool for the most vulnerable refugees and the most concrete demonstration of willingness to share responsibility with refugee-hosting countries elsewhere. Let us not forget that the large majority of the world's 10.5 million refugees are in developing countries. These countries often show a generosity that is well beyond their own means. They do not have the capacity to manage this pressure on their own. Nor should they have to. Countries in the developed world can and must show more solidarity. Resettlement is a tangible expression of this much needed solidarity amongst states, and of concrete support to bring new life and hope to the most vulnerable among the refugees. The Joint EU Resettlement Programme will help to increase resettlement quotas and thus save more refugees who find themselves in desperate situations."

am Hussein, where some lived for over half a century, in a state of what was sometimes called tacit favouritism. With the fall of the dictator the bashing did not take long; some communities who felt disadvantaged – especially the Shia – attacked the Palestinians, assaulting, kidnapping and murdering them. A talkative woman explained how she began to use a green veil as a way of confusing herself with the Shia, who she nevertheless does not blame. According to what everybody here says, it was the ministers of government and party leaders who organised the infamous Shia militias who terrorised them in Iraqi cities.

I have lost track of the number of meetings I have been to in my life. But I never saw a meeting that, before it began, had tissue packets strategically placed on the tables and chairs. Those people knew that, if they were to tell their stories, they would cry. Just like the Iraqis, these Palestinians coming from Iraq could not work in Syria. But unlike the Iraqis, they are stranded here in the camp.

I meet a man with a girl and I call the interpreter to chat with them. Ashamedly, he tells me that the only thing he wants is to leave with his wife and child for a



country that can give them life. Even more ashamedly, he tells me that he already tried: he paid traffickers to take him by boat to Cyprus. The money was stolen from him, he and his family were apprehended by Turkish maritime police, and his daughter stopped talking for months with fright. I tell him that he should not try to enter Europe in a clandestine way. He shrugs and points to his daughter with his eyes. I know that if I were in his place, I would have done the same.

THE END OF PRECONCEIVED NOTIONS

From any perspective, there is something wrong with a system that

makes people who have already risked their lives run the risk again to arrive at a safe port. And people who are given the right to asylum by the conventions on refugees that we sign end up mixed up in human trafficking networks. This should not make sense to the left, to the centre or to the right. My Greek colleague and I disagree about many things, but we agree that there must be a way to put the 27 countries of the European Union to work receiving refugees, giving a new life to these people (currently, only 10 countries do this, among them Portugal). Giorgios Papanikolaou – this is his name – is a man of emotions: he says that he cannot get a phrase of his head, from a Palestinian girl who received us at the camp saying “You in Europe even treat animals well; can't you think just a little about us?”

Each of us have our way of digesting the stories that they tell us. Each of us brings our preconceived notions. But not one of us leaves there with these same notions. I expected despondency, distrust, even a certain pettiness and atrophy among refugees. A pessimistic view has us used to thinking that, in difficult situations, humanity gets difficult. I learnt it does not have to be this way. It

could also be that people take on a kind of "beatitude" like in the sermon on the mount, when those who are “hungry and thirsty for justice” become “pure of heart”. Instead of asking us for help, it is they who tell us that they are happy to help us and that they think we will do good work. For a while I walk away. I go off alone, silent. They smile at us, helping each other, taking care of the grass that they have been able to grow in front of their temporary homes, in the middle of the desert.



The Al Hol camp, in the Al-Hasakah governorate, northern Syria.



Computer classes in the Jarramania refugee community center in Damascus.

Georgios Papanikolaou

Member of the European Parliament
Shadow rapporteur
Group of the European People's Party (EPP)

The adoption of a Joint European Resettlement Program (JERP) is a very significant development. Through the adoption of a JERP the EU is showing its solidarity to some of the most vulnerable populations in the world. This tangible action of responsibility-sharing will enhance the credibility of EU's external action.

Resettlement is one of the durable solutions for refugees and can be a valuable component of a comprehensive solution strategy. It can help unlock alternative durable solutions, such as protection in the region of origin by creating conditions conducive for dialogue with a host country. Moreover it has the potential to reduce the influence of trafficking and smuggling and ensure a safe and managed access for those in need of protection.

Coordinating our efforts and pulling resources at EU level will bring an added value to initiatives that a number of Member States have undertaken so far on an individual basis. In addition, a regular, voluntary EU resettlement scheme with a common infrastructure will allow the EU and its Member States to respond efficiently and in a timely manner to a refugee crisis situation, in which they need to engage. The JERP is a positive step forward to the adoption of a comprehensive strategy in engaging with third countries. I strongly believe that the common resettlement scheme which provides a legal avenue to Europe for those in need of protection is of utmost importance and sincerely hope that Member States will contribute to the establishment of the EU as an international protection actor.

Antonio Masip-Hidalgo

Member of the European Parliament
Shadow rapporteur
Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists & Democrats (S&D)

There are few permanently resettled refugees in Europe. My country, Spain, has just begun its experience. The cases are, nevertheless, of urgent necessity. My colleagues confirmed it on the spot in their visit to the refugee camps of Iraqis with a Palestinian background in Syria in 2010.

Another aspect, more institutional, is the balance of power between the Parliament and the Council. Our rapporteur, the courageous Rui Tavares, has fought in favour of the new competences the Parliament has gained after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009.

I cannot forget the constant help of the UNHCR without whom the final success would not have been possible. UNCHR has made us all conscious of the urgency of the approval of the report to let the funds be used as soon as possible, especially now that they are in so much need.

Iraqi refugees tell their stories in the Jarramania refugee community center.



Nadja Hirsch

Member of the European Parliament
Shadow rapporteur
Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)

The adoption of the resettlement file is no less than a historic event in European asylum policy. Best practices from pro-resettlement grassroots movements have found their way into European legislation. From now on, whenever Member States resettle asylum-seekers from outside the European Union they will receive higher funds to integrate them in their society. The most vulnerable - e.g. unaccompanied minors and victims of torture - can now hope to leave the degrading conditions in overcrowded refugee camps in Africa and elsewhere and find a better future in the EU.

Yet, we must not rest on our laurels. The compromise found today only covers the year 2013. The negotiations for the next period starting in 2014 are already on the horizon. I hope that resettlement will remain a consensual cross-party issue in the European Parliament. At the same time Member States must show the same level of determination to lend a hand to people in desperate need as in the last months.

Kyriacos Triantaphyllides

Member of the European Parliament
Shadow rapporteur
Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left
(GUE/NGL)

The EU joint resettlement programme has been long enough on the table for us to know very well by now how important it is but how it was worth the time.

The Resettlement programme, and the degree we will further engage into it, reflects in a concrete manner the value of our words about human rights respect and solidarity towards the most misfortunate. Because we know that the EU have not done much in this respect so far and we believe this might change and this must change.

Along with the development of the Common European Asylum System, resettlement is the tool that can give durable solutions to refugees and that will facilitate member states to offer these solutions. We hope that this practical evolution will go hand in hand with the increasing recognition of resettlement's role, since after all this is a voluntary mechanism and actions must go beyond a symbolic nature to answer the ever increasing global needs.

So it is indeed challenging times where the EU joint resettlement programme can be a visible expression of solidarity and I would like to sincerely thank and congratulate our rapporteur Rui Tavares for his work and efforts on this file!



Palestinian refugees coming from Iraq tell their stories in the Al Hol camp in northern Syria.

Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs Parliamentary Committee

Secretariat of the European Parliament
(LIBE)

In September 2009 the Commission came forward with its Communication on the Establishment of a Joint EU Resettlement Programme, and its legislative proposal to amend the European Refugee Fund accordingly. Negotiations among the Spanish Presidency and Parliament quite soon revealed that on the substance of the Programme no major controversies were detected. However, the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty on 1 December 2009 introduced delegated acts to be used in case the Commission adopts measures of general application to amend or supplement certain non-substantial elements of a legislative act. The setting of the common annual EU priorities for resettlement was considered by Parliament to include a strategic choice and consequently to be adopted by delegated acts. The other Institutions were not at the same line. Parliament adopted its first reading position on 18 May 2010 with a majority of 512 votes in favour and confirming that resettlement and the safeguard of the prerogatives of Parliament within the context of delegated acts are core to our institution.

After persistent and continuous efforts of the Rapporteur and the Commission during the almost 19 months the file was in Council for first reading, the Danish Presidency made it part of its priorities. For the second time though this Act revealed to co-host another core concern for Parliament: the legal nature of Article 80 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union on Solidarity amongst the Member States in the area of Asylum, Migration and Borders. And again no agreement on the use of Article 80 as possible legal basis could be found between the two co-legislators. As time was precious due to organisational reasons related to the deadline of 1 May 2012 for the 2013 pledges by Member States, a compromise between the Institutions was reached allowing eventually on the one hand to set up the Joint EU Resettlement Programme for 2013 and on the other hand safeguarding any further use of Article 80 TFEU as a legal basis in other legislative Acts. In the European Parliament, Article 80 TFEU called and today calls even more for further exploration...

European Council on Refugees and Exiles

The European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) welcomes the adoption of a Joint EU Resettlement Programme for 2013, a decision that has major political value as a gesture of solidarity with refugee hosting countries and that is the first fundamental step towards a fully functioning Union Resettlement Programme in the future.

ECRE calls on EU member states to embrace this decision and join their efforts to offer more places for 2013. ECRE welcomes the common priorities and believes that, together with the Regional Protection Programmes and vulnerable categories identified by UNHCR, they cover a broad range of refugee groups in need for resettlement for the next year, including from regions that are the Union's strategic priorities.

ECRE also wishes to highlight the importance of including NGOs in the European resettlement. Being present throughout the resettlement cycle, NGOs play an important role in regions of origin and in resettlement countries. They have valuable knowledge about the different refugee groups and populations and their resettlement experience in Europe. In the field, NGOs help identify refugees in need of resettlement, support referral and submission, facilitate pre-departure procedures and assist with family reunification through resettlement. Upon arrival in the Member States, NGOs are the main actors helping the refugees start a new life, through reception and integration programmes in collaboration with local authorities and host communities. A European Resettlement Programme should therefore involve NGOs wherever possible. The establishment of priority groups to be resettled should be made through dialogue with UNHCR and NGOs to ensure that decisions are rooted in refugee realities. NGOs can also play an important role in monitoring and evaluating integration measures to ensure that refugees receive adequate and appropriate support.



A family near the fence of the Al Hol camp.

Hairstyling classes in the Jarramania refugee community center.



International Catholic Migration Commission

With the European Parliament's vote on March 29th, the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) congratulates the European Union on adopting a formal framework for welcoming refugees in need of resettlement to Europe, and expressing its commitment to human rights, refugee protection and solidarity with those most in need. UNHCR estimates that a global total of 92,000 refugees in need of resettlement will not have access to a resettlement place in 2012. Significant efforts from both EU governments and civil society are therefore required to ensure that the financial incentives offered through the Joint EU Resettlement Programme will indeed find practical realisation in an increased number of resettlement places. That Europe is practically and logistically capable of resettling higher numbers is beyond discussion. What is needed now is the will and commitment to do more.

Focusing solely on numbers can sometimes distract us from the stories of vulnerable refugees, whilst the scale of global needs can seem daunting to some actors who want to engage in resettlement but are not sure how to. Success, however, will breed success, and the positive experiences and stories of a government, country, a local municipality or a single citizen or refugee can inform and support those of another. Exchange of experiences and practice will thus pave the way for community engagement in resettlement and refugee integration in host communities. At ICMC, we work to facilitate exchange, information sharing and mutual learning about resettlement processes, including integration, amongst civil society, local governments, regions and other actors, building towards a European resettlement network.

We welcome the framework for increased cooperation and solidarity that the Joint EU Resettlement Programme provides, and hope that its establishment and joint government –civil society partnerships will mark the beginning of an increase in both the quantity of resettlement places and quality of support and integration programmes offered by Europe.

Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe

The Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME, the European umbrella organisation of churches and related agencies in 19 European countries) has over the last decade argued for a stronger role of the EU and its member states in resettlement, stating that Europe should and can do more to protect the most vulnerable among the world's refugees. CCME has expressed concern about the so far extremely limited efforts by EU member states in resettlement, particularly if compared to countries like the US, Canada or Australia.

CCME has in this context welcomed the plans for a common EU resettlement programme and the proposal to agree on a number of third countries from where refugees' resettlement would be supported in a joint priority effort by EU member states. The provision of financial support through the amended ERF would be an important factor in these priority efforts.

While common priority areas and priority groups for resettlement among the EU member states could have better results in resolving the most dramatic refugee situations globally, CCME believes that a true impact will only be achieved if EU member states provide substantially more places for resettlement and more member states get on board permanently. CCME in this context stresses that churches and other civil society actors are willing to support those efforts to make a meaningful EU contribution to resettlement a reality. IN CCME's view, regular platforms of exchange and sharing of competences between UNHCR, member states and civil society both nationally and on EU level will also contribute to a success of a reinvigorated EU resettlement effort.



Palestinian refugees from Iraq in front of UNHCR's infrastructure in the Al Hol refugee camp.



Special one-on-one classes in the Jarramania community center.



Walking alone in the Al Hol camp, Northern Syria.

Title:
RESETTLEMENT OF REFUGEES – A NEW LIFE
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Fund and the way forward to a joint
European Resettlement Programme

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International Catholic Migration Commission;
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Janet Gunter

**European Parliament
Brussels
2012**

Thanks to:
Ana Moura Gonçalves
Cláudia Oliveira
Gei Fernandes
Evalina Dias
Christine Sidenius
Anje Bultena
Emilio De Capitani
Antoine Cahen

Special thanks to:
Chiara Tamburini
Patricia van Peer

IN MEMORIAM
Steffania Pasquetti