

The Constitution of IRO listed its functions as: "the repatriation; the identification, registration and classification; the care and assistance; the legal and political protection; the transport; and the re-settlement and re-establishment... of persons who are the concern of the Organization." These persons fell roughly into two categories: refugees and displaced persons.

With certain exceptions such as war criminals, quislings, traitors, etc., refugees coming within the mandate of IRO were: victims of the nazi or fascist regimes or of the regimes which sided with or assisted them during the Second World War; Spanish republicans and other victims of the falangist regime in Spain; and persons who were considered refugees before the outbreak of the Second World War for reasons of race, religion, nationality or political opinion. Displaced persons within the IRO mandate were those persons who, as a result of the actions of nazi or fascist regimes, or regimes which sided with or assisted them, had been deported from or obliged to leave their countries of nationality or former habitual residence. In this category were persons who had been compelled to undertake forced labour or who were deported for racial, religious or political reasons. The definitions of refugees and displaced persons were complicated, but as the IRO work proceeded the Organization interpreted the definitions liberally in order to assist the largest possible number of persons.

Only a relatively small number of persons who became the responsibility of IRO wished to be repatriated, for they either feared renewed persecution on grounds of race, religion, or political opinion, or they wished to avoid returning to countries under communist domination. Some 73,000 were, nonetheless, assisted to return to countries of origin or former domicile. In contrast, more than a million persons were re-settled elsewhere, under IRO auspices, as immigrants, while others were helped to establish themselves in the countries where they had taken refuge, and were given financial, legal or other assistance.

By 1951 IRO had reduced substantially the numbers of persons under its mandate, and the year was one of gradual liquidation. Nonetheless, during 1951 over a thousand persons were repatriated, and more than 150,000 were re-settled, including more than 30,000 who were admitted to Canada.

One phase of IRO work which required particular attention was the large number of institutional cases, known as the "hard core", for whom normal re-settlement opportunities were not possible. Among the people in this group were the sick, the aged and the crippled, who required institutional care. At one time the number of these persons and their dependants who were the responsibility of IRO was about 32,000. By 1951 the number had been reduced to 11,000, and by the end of the year there were only 362 for whom satisfactory arrangements had not been made.

Nearly all the operations of IRO had been completed by the end of 1951, and the Organization went into liquidation on March 1, 1952 under a liquidator and a board of liquidation composed of representatives of France, the United Kingdom and Venezuela. In addition to supervising the dissolution of IRO, the liquidation board will also supervise the preparation of an official history of the Organization.