

A WELCOMING EUROPE

EXPLORING LOCAL SOLIDARITY WITH REFUGEES

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Local justice on a global scale

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Local justice on a global scale

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TERMINOLOGY

For the purpose of this publication, the term ‘forced migrant’ is used to include refugees, asylum seekers and all those displaced by conflict, natural disaster or poor economic conditions.

COUNTRIES

The nine countries showcased in this publication are representative of the Working Group members. While they are presented as ‘frontier’, ‘transit’, or ‘destination’ countries to present geo-political insights, these labels are by no means fixed and interchangeable according to each forced migrants’ journey. In addition, some countries are not considered - notably Italy, France, Hungary and Germany, among others - as they are not represented in the Working Group.

DATA

All figures used are from UNHCR and national government databases. Where no recent data could be found, figures date to 2016.

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WHO WE ARE

WORKING GROUP ON MIGRATION AND HUMAN RIGHTS

This publication is the culminating work of Justice and Peace Europe's Working Group on Migration and Human Rights. As a collection of inputs from various European Justice and Peace commissions, its contributors represent the countries of ***Greece, Malta, Spain, Austria, Czech Republic, Switzerland, Sweden, Scotland and the Netherlands.***

With this publication, the members of the Working Group offer an opportunity to learn from the challenges and solutions of their representative countries. As such, the Working Group shows the capacity of European society to integrate forced migrants and makes the case for a European asylum policy in which the human person, solidarity and hospitality remain central.

JUSTICE AND PEACE NETHERLANDS

For 50 years, Justice and Peace Netherlands has brought people and organisations together to improve human rights, both worldwide and in the Netherlands. Our method is to show people that they have the power to be change-makers and provide them with the means to strengthen both human rights defenders worldwide and the integration of forced migrants through local solidarity.

INTRODUCTION

Local solidarity initiatives are often some of the first and last providers of aid in times of crisis. In the particular case of migration governance crises, civil society - committed as individuals or groups - react in spontaneous outpourings of time, skills and aid in supporting forced migrants. As crises develop and become more sustained and complex, so too do grassroots and local responses. They evolve into sophisticated initiatives and projects, tailoring their roles towards the precise needs of forced migrants in contrast to standardised government support mechanisms. Such responses, rooted in local communities, are true reflections of the historical European values of hospitality and solidarity.

Yet, while inspiring stories unfold of forced migrant and host community cohesion, counter narratives also continue to grow in Europe. Governments, in the name of border protection, tighten their quotas and erect higher fences. Media outlets give voice to a minority wave of polarising, anti-migrant discourses. Tensions are rising - either between European governments or between citizens - and in the meantime, those European principles are seemingly forgotten. When not acknowledging the growing movement of local

solidarity taking root in Europe, it seems as if Europe is experiencing its own crisis of solidarity.

The Working Group hopes to contribute to changing this narrative. By examining nine European countries, we highlight the extent and diversity of local initiatives founded on the principles of solidarity and fellowship with forced migrants. Not only do grassroots collaborations provide specific solutions to the challenges faced by forced migrants, they also cultivate more inclusive and welcoming communities.

While the majority of forced migrants cannot benefit from local support yet, these stories show that the state of local solidarity in Europe is a force to be reckoned with.

An untapped well of potential, we call for the institutional support and recognition of solidarity movements by state actors. Their ability in achieving smooth integration and returning a sense of autonomy to the lives of forced migrants are excellent models from which to draw inspiration. Forced migrants and civil society are worth investing in and a solidarity-based approach is a key way forward.

THE WORKING GROUP COUNTRIES

The members of the Justice and Peace Working Group on Forced Migration and Human Rights represent nine European countries: ***Greece, Malta, Spain, Switzerland, Austria, Czech Republic, Sweden, Scotland and the Netherlands.***

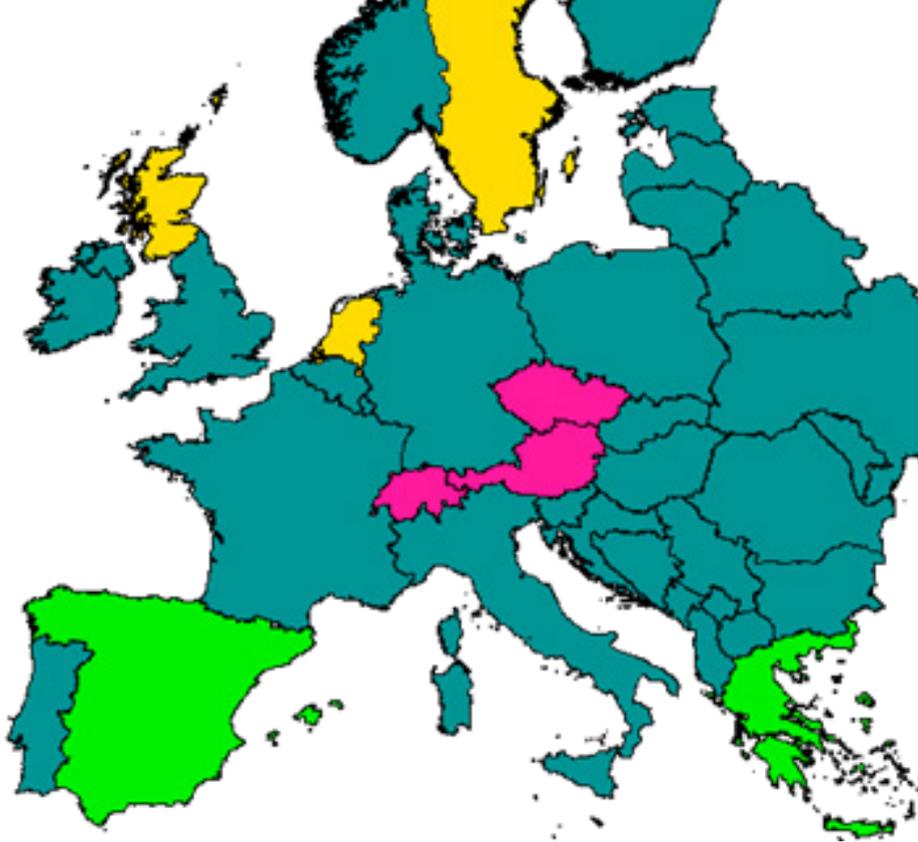
These countries present a dynamic overview of the role of local solidarity initiatives in Europe. Although the challenges faced by forced migrants and national governments are shared across borders, these nine provide geo-political insights in respects to their position along European migratory routes. For the sake of structuring this publication, we present them from their positions as so-called 'frontier', 'transit' or 'destination' countries. These divisions, however, are not fixed and do not indicate that any one country is exempt from following the 1951 Refugee Convention.

'FRONTIER'

Placed at Europe's most southern and external borders, Greece, Malta and Spain fall within the range of 'frontier' states of the so-called refugee crisis. Receiving some 1.5 million forced migrants since January 2015, governments and civil society are initially faced with providing immediate aid. Today, with the enforcement of the Dublin Regulations, local solidarity initiatives adapt to changing policies and needs.

'TRANSIT'

Switzerland, Austria and Czech Republic can be viewed as so-called 'transit' countries as they geographically stand in the way of other 'destination' countries. Caught between providing temporary assistance and closing its borders altogether, many so-called transit countries' leaders were initially divided in their obligation to provide any assistance. Governments and local communities are thus increasingly focused on the needs of relocated forced migrants from frontier countries.



'DESTINATION'

Moving further north are Sweden, the Netherlands and Scotland (as part of the United Kingdom) which have historically attracted large numbers of asylum applications. Here, community action is directed towards the long-term integration of forced migrants and reforming local and national government policies to create sustainable integration programmes.

In the next nine chapters, we delve into greater detail of how each Working Group country takes steps to meet its challenges through local solidarity responses. As governments adapt to accommodate forced migrants, so are solidarity initiatives in their desire to welcome Europe's newest arrivals.

GREECE

Greece is home to some of the largest and strongest movements of independent activists, local communities and NGOs responding to the large number of sea arrivals from 2015. From the volunteers dotting the shores of Lesbos to the anarchist neighbourhoods in Athens, Greece boasts a colourful network of social centres, solidarity kitchens and squats to support the thousands of forced migrants waiting in Greece. Yet, more than a year after the Balkan border closures and the EU-Turkey deal, over 60,000 forced migrants remain stranded in Greece and without access to local support.

Of that figure, half make up women and the majority remain in government run detention centres and hotspots. Conditions there have been deemed

deplorable to dire. Exposure to the elements, overcrowding, poor quality food, low hygiene standards and lack of police protection have created atmospheres of instability. Women and girls are at constant risk of gender-based violence.

Forced to live in shelters unfit for long term habitation, families and individuals are then faced with an additional temporal challenge in which they must balance the need for routine and normalcy in an environment that normalises prolonged states of transit. Yet in that undetermined amount of time of permanent temporariness, opportunities for access to dignified shelter, education or income are limited. Forced migrants must instead live in limbo until their applications are fully processed.

“Suha is a young Palestinian widow who fled Syria with her four children (aged two to fourteen) after her husband was assassinated by ISIS. After four attempts, Suha and her children made it to Greece days after the EU-Turkey Deal entered into force. From the Moria hotspot in Lesbos, Suha and her children were quickly transferred to Kara Tepe’s facilities for vulnerable families. It was here that they underwent an interview with Caritas and were transferred to a comfortable hotel, five minutes from the sea. There they felt safe. They could

participate in English and Greek lessons, drawing and swimming classes. Suha was also able to work as a hairdresser, mostly for free, both in the hotel and at Kara Tepe. Eventually, UNHCR relocated Suha to Athens where she was helped by many organizations. NOSTOS found her new accommodation where they could live as an independent family.

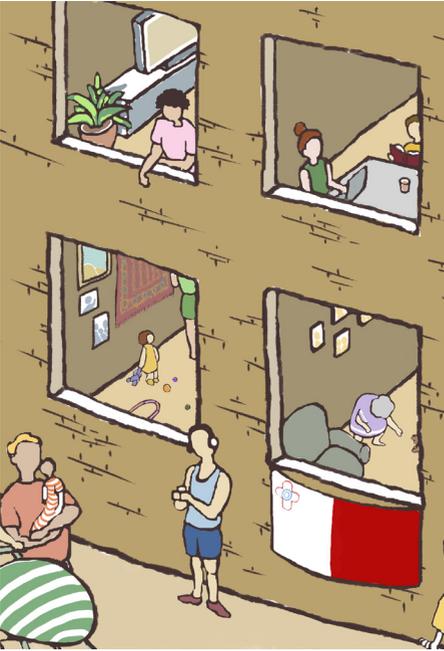
Their social worker enrolled her children in a Greek State school. Caritas Athens provided supermarket coupons and a lawyer from HIAS to help with her family's asylum request. Today, Suha is learning Greek and continuing her work as a hairdresser with the Melissa Network. Her biggest dream? To keep her family safe and continue this routine where she can maintain a steady income and her children can finish their education."

The story of Suha is just one example of the collaborative effort of volunteers and NGOs providing invaluable support to forced migrants beyond government frames. For Suha, help in finding shelter and an opportunity to resume work allowed for a sense of normalcy to return in the life of her family. While the organisations mentioned in Suha' story helped cover some crucial needs, the ***Melissa Network*** in particular is one worth mentioning in greater detail.

While female migrants flee persecution for many of the same reasons as male migrants,

women are at a higher risk of further persecution or erosion of their rights. The Melissa Network recognised this danger and opened its doors to migrant women whilst they rebuild their lives in a foreign place.¹ With the name meaning 'honey-bee' in Greek, the platform acts as a metaphor for the hive these women have created, bustling with new stories, talents and hopes. With female forced migrants in the lead, Melissa provides language lessons, childcare, art therapy and psychological support in the hopes of easing integration and building trust with their new communities.

MALTA



Malta is one of the smallest and most densely populated countries in Europe. As a result, Malta had some of the highest numbers of forced migrants compared to its national population. Averaging at 3,989 applicants per one million inhabitants, it stood just behind Germany, Greece and Austria in 2016.³ However, despite the potential for developing social cohesion, studies reveal a very different picture. Beginning with the difficulty in moving out of 'open centres' and facing discrimination in the Maltese housing and job markets, many forced migrants live isolated from their Maltese neighbours.

Local solidarity initiatives in Malta are faced with a strikingly different context when compared to Greece. UNHCR Statistics placed the number of forced migrants in Malta at 8,850 for the end of 2016 - a lowly figure in comparison to other frontier countries.² As a result, the Maltese government and civil society have a unique opportunity to curate specific projects, in smaller formats, to target the needs of Malta's newest arrivals.

A study by JRS Malta, Aditus Foundation, Integra Foundation and UNHCR in which 80 forced migrants were interviewed in their homes, further highlights the limited interaction with the Maltese. Combined lack of financial means and information about local events has resulted in growing dependencies on their own communities as the primary support network.

For many, this reliance has been negatively associated with feelings of insecurity and a lack of individual autonomy.⁴ Such social isolation and lack of cultural exchange has a major effect on the younger generation. Not only is unemployment an issue among young people in Malta, young forced migrants face additional challenges concerning racism and discrimination.

A number of local solidarity initiatives in Malta have recognised this challenge and the need to empower young forced migrants. Combatting perceptions of social exclusion and marginalisation felt by many youth, several initiatives have been established to prevent young people from becoming targets of violent radicalisation.

The Aditus Foundation has initiated a project titled **Youth, Not Status** specifically targeting young forced migrants. Organised around a series of workshops and an annual camp, young people of all backgrounds are brought together to become agents of

inclusive societies within their communities. They discuss sustainable strategies with policy makers on the topic of preventing marginalisation and radicalisation.

Encouraging intercultural dialogue and political participation amongst Malta's youth, Aditus' project hopes to support youth led policy that promotes the inclusion of forced migrants.



SPAIN

Since the onset of the so-called 2015 refugee crisis in Europe, Spain has been perceived as a 'forgotten frontier'. Despite it being the sole European country adjoined to the African continent at the enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, the number of forced migrants in Spain remains the lowest of all southern frontier countries.

However, Spain has been faced with the arrival of forced migrants from Sub-Saharan far earlier than 2015. As sea arrival figures reached as high as 31,600 in 2006, Spain initiated its Strategic Plan for Citizenship and Integration (PECI) the following year. Initiated at the regional and municipal level, the central government financially supported health, education and cultural programmes.⁵ Nevertheless, not immune to the budget cuts

following the economic crisis, funding for the PECI programmes was terminated by 2012.⁶

Meanwhile, as attention is turned towards the situation in Italy and Greece, there has been a steady growth of migrants reaching the Iberian Peninsula. Figures have doubled in the last year, reaching up to 15,858 as of November 6th, 2017.⁷ With many looking for alternative routes, the IOM believes that Spain may become more popular than Greece.^{8/9}

Calling for a return to values of hospitality and human dignity, the Spanish local church community has been at the forefront in recognising these changing realities. In 2014, Caritas Spain, the Spanish Bishops Conference's for Migration, CONFER (religious congregations network) and

"Migration movements are now a structural reality, and our primary issue must be to deal with the present emergency phase by providing programmes which address the causes of migration and the changes it entails, including its effect on the makeup of societies and peoples."

Pope Francis, World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2016.

Spain's Justice and Peace commission created the **Red Migrantes con Derechos** or Network of Migrants with Rights.¹⁰ Red Migrantes con Derechos is working hard to formulate a common action strategy to confront the root causes of forced migration and the lack of asylum and integration programmes in host countries. Made up of various working groups on the topics of migration legislation and integration, the network

and integration, the network regularly hosts conferences and meets with policy makers to share their recommendations and make the voice of the church heard. ***Their most recent publication 'Hospitality and Dignity' demands a restructuring of forced migration policy that safeguards the dignity and well-being of individuals.***



AUSTRIA

"A and R met at the University of Baghdad. He was 21 and she, 18. Both wanted to become teachers. One day in 2005, on their way home from university their bus was stormed by a masked man, kidnapping all those who identified as Sunni. The kidnapped young people never returned. A and R were shocked. At that time neither knew what the difference was between Sunnis and Shiites.

Scared, A left the university and started working in his father's roofing company. Several years later, he married R and started working as an Arabic-English interpreter for the US Army. A and R were hopeful for their future and happily awaited the birth of twins. Then, the political situation in Iraq worsened. A's brother, also a translator, disappeared, leaving only a note warning that it was no longer safe for translators. The next day, A and R attempted to flee but their car was attacked, injuring A and R and killing their long-awaited twins.

They continued their journey towards Europe but when they arrived in Austria, asylum authorities did not believe their story. A and R were traumatised. They had no documents to prove their accident or pregnancy. They were desperate. Finally, through with the help of volunteers, all the documents from the Iraqi police and hospital were gathered. Their application was soon after accepted. A human rights lawyer coordinated their accommodation, German language courses and additional social support from the authorities. At last, with their new friends, A and R had a new dimension of hope."

While most solidarity projects are active in meeting the immediate needs of forced migrants upon their arrival or integration, there is a great need for volunteer assistance during the complex and confidential asylum application process. Credibility assessment tests are a core element of these procedures. In some cases, like the

story of A and R above, applicants may need to support their claim with supporting evidence such as birth and death certificates or medical records. Depending on the provision and validity of these documents, authorities may determine whether the applicant holds a well-founded fear or risk of persecution if returned to their country of origin.¹¹ Although providing these documents is crucial, as it determines their futures in Europe, retrieving them can be very difficult.

Austrian solidarity groups and local communities have thus targeted some of their assistance towards facilitating these processes through legal advice. While a legal advisor is required by Austrian law, forced migrants are often in need of supplementary support or mediation. ***Guidance on interview preparation, clarification on legal documents or assistance in obtaining necessary proof of evidence documents are just some examples in how volunteer lawyers can help.*** Further information on relocation, family reunification and

the risk of deportation are some of the most pressing concerns.¹²

The Austrian organisation ***Flüchtlingsprojekt Ute Bock*** acts as this point of contact for all forced migrants, regardless of their status, based in Vienna. Initially a space for housing, Ute Bock today provides additional assistance in translating and advising on legal documents as well as mediating directly with the asylum seeker's legal representative.

Most importantly, Ute Bock addresses a crucial but often overlooked challenge that forced migrants face. With some having recently arrived in Austria with no form of official residence or home address, Ute Bock provides a postal address to ensure regular correspondence with legal advisors and national asylum authorities. The community at Ute Bock are then able to maintain contact with their family members who remained in their country of origin as well as easily receive and send documents to their legal advisors.

CZECH REPUBLIC

The Czech Republic has historically been regarded as a country of emigrants without substantial immigration. With only 4% of its population estimated as foreign, Czech society was caught relatively off guard when hundreds of thousands of forced migrants passed through its borders in 2015. Even after the Balkan border closure, local solidarity initiatives steered their missions towards addressing both the long term needs of the Czech Republic's newest arrivals as well as changing the Czech public's attitudes towards forced migrants.

The terrain in which volunteers and NGOs work is a difficult one. Aid providers report being victim to violent threats and hate speech by right-wing extremists. NGOs are regularly barred from entering government detention centres to provide legal counselling.¹³ Such reactions are reflective of the highly polarised political and public debate concerning the integration of forced migrants into Czech society. Pointing to cultural incompatibility, Islamophobic and anti-migrant groups have gained popularity. The radical group Block Against Islam evolved from a popular social media petition into a registered political party compared to the likes of Germany's Pegida. Beyond the rising xenophobia, the Czech government, together with the Visegrad countries of Slovakia, Poland and Romania, has been at the centre of an infringement procedure concerning the EU's Emergency Relocation Mechanism. The binding decision that issued compulsory fixed-quotas to relocate eligible persons from Greece and Italy, has instead resulted in the acceptance of 12 refugees out of a quote of 2,691.¹⁴





Nevertheless, the spirit of solidarity continues to resonate across the Czech Republic. The online database ***Pomoc Pro Uprchlicky*** or 'Assistance for Refugees' initiated by the Czech Bishop's Conference and Caritas Czech Republic calls for citizens of Europe to step up alongside states and politicians. The online register allows individuals and organisations to submit the financial, material or volunteer assistance they can offer to support existing groups which assist forced migrants. It lists centres that accept clothing donations as well as a list of agencies providing free language classes, legal advice and temporary job opportunities.¹⁵ Such a register places the once

hidden or little-known local solidarity movements into one comprehensive database for all concerned citizens to see.

The platform is also committed to informing public perception and reducing the fear of the unknown.¹⁶ Acknowledging the difficulty in discussing migration in Czech society, the joint-exhibition ***'Stories of Refugees'*** displays photos and excerpts of the lives of refugees who have recently been resettled in Germany. ***By sharing these individuals' life stories as well as their new experiences in Europe, exhibitions like these put the human person at the forefront of integration narratives.***

SWITZERLAND

The term *wirtschaftsflüchtling* or 'economic refugees' carries a pejorative meaning in Swiss public discourse. Interchanged with *elendsflüchtling* (a refugee driven by distress) or *armutsflüchtling* (a refugee driven by poverty), any asylum seeker coming to Switzerland to make a living for themselves and their families does not have a substantial claim to asylum.¹⁷ These individuals are instead seen as having left their country of origin voluntarily and not, on the basis of seeking protection.¹⁸

"My name is Florence, I am from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Because of political reasons my husband was forced to leave the country. He lived in exile in Switzerland and asked for asylum. When he fell ill, I took our children to reunite with my husband. With the help of a smuggler, we arrived in Switzerland in 2000 and asked for asylum. One year later we had our third child, and a little bit later my husband died. My application for asylum was refused. The authority ordered us to leave the country, but because of the future of my children I never considered to go back voluntarily.

We lived in fear of being checked by the police and deported back to DRC. I became desperate. I was most supported by Swiss people in my community. From the church, I got moral support which gave me the power to hold the family together. This is very essential when someone feels lonely and isolated. In addition, through the church my children could take part in leisure time activities – like all the others did. This was positive for their integration at school and they didn't feel excluded.

At the beginning, I urged my kids to get good results at school and to get integrated for getting a better chance of residence permit. At the time, they didn't understand why they needed permission to stay in Switzerland, while they spoke Swiss German fluently, their friends were Swiss and the youngest of

them was born here. Later, my kids encouraged me to learn German and to try the Swiss food. Without these odds and ends I wouldn't have come out of this crisis. Eventually in 2016, by means of an advocate, I was at last given permanent residency, allowing me and my family to look towards our new future."

This distinction often results in the rejection of applicants like Florence and others coming from Eritrea, Afghanistan or Sudan.¹⁹

Rejection, however, does not imply enforced removal resulting in many living clandestinely and away from the gaze of the Swiss government. Today, the number of sans papiers - 'without papers' - is estimated to range between 100,000 and 250,000.²⁰ Without a residence permit, most are forced to work low paying jobs and have limited access to basic rights like healthcare and education.²¹ Life for sans papiers in Switzerland can quickly become incredibly isolating.

As a result, a number of organisations and activists are fighting for a recognition of rejected asylum seekers or sans papiers and the erosion of their rights. ***Following behind the 'Sanctuary Cities' programme of the United States and Canada, cities across Switzerland are embracing the concept of 'urban citizenship' and***

hospitality in the city as a solution for protecting the rights of sans papiers.

Through the distribution of a 'city card', all residents of a city would be given a municipal identity card or passport, regardless of their residency status in Switzerland. While it does not give the right to vote, it would allow for sans papiers to fully participate in the life of their city. This would simplify activities such as interacting with police, opening a bank account, accessing confidential medical care and renting an apartment. Such plans are being pursued in cities across Switzerland including Zurich, Basel, Geneva, Neuchatel and Bern, all in the name of solidarity with sans papiers. Today, the Zuri City Card initiative is selling a 'support card' to garner widespread public support while the We are all Bern campaign is calling for a city-wide adaptation to the changing realities of migration today.^{22/23}

SCOTLAND

Given that Scotland enjoys devolved powers from the central government of the United Kingdom, Scotland stands in a unique position when receiving forced migrants. In the past year, Westminster has been heavily criticised by civil society for its policy approaches that deter more asylum applications.²⁷ Its strict border control methods, refusal to accept unaccompanied minors from Calais and silent issuing of a 'safe return review' after five years are just a few examples.²⁸ However, when compared to its British counterparts, the Scottish government and public has shown markedly less opposition towards migration, calling instead for an open-door approach.²⁹

In its 2013 white paper on the case for independence, Scotland proposed more humane policies

that promoted a longer-term and more comprehensive integration programme than the current UK policy.³⁰ Although it did not achieve independence to do so, the Scottish National Party argued that Westminster's deterrent policies towards forced migrants was not aligned with Scottish values. Subsequently, in March 2017, every Scottish local authority had agreed to participate in a resettlement programme for more than 3,500 Syrians. In doing so, it pledges to accept the largest share of Syrians in comparison to any other region in the UK.³¹

This grassroots reaction from Scotland has indicated a greater enthusiasm about accommodating forced migrants than the Westminster government had initially believed. Organisations

"My name is Yasmin. I'm originally from Iran but I now call Glasgow home. When I moved to Scotland I got out of the habit of drinking tea. But recently I was out running with my friend, and when we got back to her place she offered me a cup of herbal tea. I absolutely loved it; it was so comforting. It was actually a feeling that reminded me of being in my own country." – Yasmin, Scottish Refugee Council

SWEDEN

"My name is Leila and I will interpret for my mother, Sahrjan. We are Kurdish and used to live in Kabul. It was in 2009 that my father was approached by the local Pashtun tribe. They claimed that the land belonged to them. When my father resisted, he was murdered.

My youngest brother was 10 days old at the time. As a widow and without any land, it was not easy for my mother to support us as a family. To escape the cultural expectations and pressures that were put on my mother she fled, taking us to Iran. When we arrived, we were considered illegal, without the right to asylum. Life was not easy here and in 2013 my oldest brother left Iran to go to Europe.

When the situation got worse, my mother paid smugglers to get us to Turkey and then on a boat to Greece. My mother wanted to get to Sweden as my brother was in Malmö. It was her driving force. We travelled via Macedonia, Croatia, Serbia, Austria, Germany and Denmark to Sweden. I can't remember all the countries, but I know it was 11 in total that we went through. We walked, went by bus, by train and sometimes car.

We finally came as a family to Malmö and stayed in a refugee camp for 5 days. We were then moved to different refugee centres - in Gävle, Uppsala, Kramfors, and Ystad and finally we are in the refugee accommodation, here in Tyringe."

Migration separates families. For many hoping to reach Europe, one parent or the eldest child will often travel ahead, leaving families behind. Their hopes then lie entirely in their right to family reunification. Although it is a basic human right to

enjoy and protect family life, Leila and her family were one of the last to have been granted permanent residency after their reunification in Sweden. In June 2016, Sweden enacted a temporary asylum law that saw the end to permanent residency status as well as severe

restrictions on family reunification. Without a permanent status, individuals cannot apply for family reunification, forcing many separated family members - especially children and women - to pursue dangerous paths to reach Europe.

However, the law was accepted with hesitance by both Swedish government leaders and civil society.²⁴ Known for its welcoming culture and generous migration laws, Sweden has long been an attractive destination for forced migrants, largely due to the possibility of family reunification. By 2016, nearly a third of the residency permits granted in Sweden were for family reunification.²⁵ Organizations and volunteers are thus very active across Sweden in defending forced migrants' right to family life.

The **Swedish Red Cross**, and its many volunteer-enforced branches, is at the forefront in helping separated family members through their *Restoring Family Links* programme. They provide legal and administrative assistance as well as help individuals track

down, restore contact and reunite with separated family members. In 2016, the Red Cross Societies also deployed large groups of volunteers, across Europe to provide on the ground assistance for contacting family members already in Europe or missing relatives.²⁶ In addition to remaining confidential and free of charge, volunteers would also offer free access to phones and Wi-Fi to allow individuals make contact. Such access could also bring them to the online platform *Trace the Face* which compiles an inventory of photos of individuals in need of assistance whose information would then be transferred on to other people approaching the Red Cross.

A coordinated volunteer work force such as this one is just another example of how local solidarity can manifest itself. While an organisation such as the Red Cross may not be locally rooted, national or city branches provide the grassroots and local community the opportunity to participate as much needed volunteers.

THE NETHERLANDS

Following a November 2015 governmental agreement, social support for forced migrants resettled in the Netherlands has been increasingly transferred to the hands of municipal governments.³² As a result, greater collaboration has grown between municipal governments and local, citizens-driven initiatives. With the arrival of some 52,000 forced migrants into the Netherlands between January 2014 and April 2017, local solidarity initiatives have taken a crucial role in providing creative solutions to concrete integration challenges.³³

One of the greatest of these challenges is the integration of forced migrants into the Dutch labour market. While initially entitled to a package of pre-integration resources, access to employment opportunities are

restricted until after the first six months of asylum applications. Following this, they can look for temporary work in which a certain percentage goes towards financing the costs of their reception. Beyond these restrictions, further challenges arise from the unfamiliarity with the job market, lack of professional networks or language barriers.³⁴ Nevertheless, city-based initiatives are active in designing innovative strategies to eliminate these obstacles.

Justice and Peace Netherlands' initiative *Haagse Huiskamer* or The Hague Living Room is doing so by harnessing the growing energy of both the new arrivals settled in The Hague and civil society. In recognising the needs of the 1600 new refugees relocated to The Hague, *Haagse Huiskamer* is a creative platform in which Dutch





organising a welcoming reception of forced migrants. Tackling some civil society organisations and residents can come together in of the biggest challenges such as finding employment, Haagse Huiskamer connects forced migrants with local stadsmakers – or ‘city makers’ – and existing initiatives to coordinate potential partnerships and projects.

By providing a space for these initiatives, concrete projects are designed and put into action. One example is the idea of Paul Driest and Marcel Kleizen to establish an electricpedicab company managed by Eritreans. As of October 2017, Eritreans made up the second largest nationality of all forced

migrants in the Netherlands. The project, titled ***Eritrea Fietst*** or Eritrea Bikes, wants to welcome this large community by embracing a common link between Eritreans and Dutch people – a love of cycling. Intended to start in March 2018, Eritreans will be both the drivers and the managers of the project and provide both a source of employment and autonomy. ***Haagse Huiskamer hopes to spread the message that by valuing the will and talents of forced migrants, cities can only benefit. Cities are vibrant hubs of socio-economic activity and should continue to lead by example by further engaging citizens driven initiatives into municipal integration strategies.***

CALL TO ACTION

In outlining the extent and diversity of local solidarity initiatives active in the nine Working Group countries, we hope to have depicted an inclusive and welcoming Europe. Whether tackling restrictive government policies or deconstructing negative public discourses against the reception of forced migrants, there remains a crucial local dimension. Manifested in the form of independent activists, special interest or faith-based groups, local municipalities or established NGOs engaging with its volunteer base, the movement of local solidarity is well rooted in the values of European citizens.

Nevertheless, our publication does not purport to reveal anything radically new. Rather, by highlighting a few of these initiatives, we reveal the developed capacity and will of local communities to step in where governments have not.

Unlike government action that is driven by legal obligations, local and grassroots responses are born out of a shared sense of solidarity and compassion for the human person.

However, it remains the case that the vast majority of forced migrants in Europe do not have access to the support provided by these initiatives. Whether it is because they live in closed detention centres or are simply unaware of the existing network, there is vast potential to create a wide-reaching system of local support. With a growing figure of 65.6 million forcibly displaced persons worldwide, there will only develop a greater need and support for grassroots-designed efforts in and well beyond the European context. We therefore call upon you, as reader and active citizen of Europe, to participate in our call to action.

IDENTIFY:

The existing solidarity scene in your local community as well as the gaps in existing support for forced migrants.

ENCOURAGE:

Others in your community to join the movement and for initiatives to start a dialogue in sharing their best practices.

ADVOCATE:

For the advantages and capacity of local solidarity initiatives and for greater collaboration on the part of governments and institutions.

The responsibility to receive and integrate forced migrants into host communities is as much the responsibility of local communities as it is the governments'. We have made it clear that local communities have the capacity to meet the specific protection needs of forced migrants as well as advocate for their rights. We therefore call for policy makers to fully embrace this wave of local solidarity and maintain the crucial local dimension in all reception and integration strategies. The time for structural change and close cooperation between forced migrants, policy makers and local communities is long overdue.

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All over the world there are peaceful change makers fighting for the rights of others. Whether for refugees or for freedom of expression, they are demanding change on the local level.

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“Governments are struggling to handle migration. Most of us want to help people in need and millions have already stood up to help. Now we want to be heard. Together, let’s reclaim a Welcoming Europe!

No one should be prosecuted or fined for offering humanitarian help and shelter. We want the European Commission to stop those governments that are punishing volunteers. Citizens across Europe should have the chance to sponsor refugees. We want the Commission to directly support local groups that provide refugees with life-saving visas, safe homes and a new life.”

- Migration Policy Group, Brussels



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