# Beyond ‘mass movement’: Understanding the dynamics of migration into Greece

**Crawley, H**

# Special feature

# Refugees and vulnerable migrants in Europe

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**Cover photo:** A family of Kurdish refugees from Aleppo walk towards the village of Idomeni on the border between Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)
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Overseas Development Institute 203 Blackfriars Road, London SE1 8NJ United Kingdom.

Tel. +44 (0) 20 7922 0300; Fax. +44 (0) 20 7922 0399

HPN e-mail: hpn@odi.org.uk
HPN website: http://www.odihpn.org

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## Contents

# Editorial

This edition of *Humanitarian Exchange* is dedicated to the humanitarian response to the influx of refugees and vulnerable migrants into Europe over the past year. One of the most notable features of the European response, as Pamela DeLargy notes in her lead article, is the central role volunteers have played – in stark contrast to the much slower response of international agencies and donors. Laetitia de Radigues and Ludovico Gammarelli give an overview of the European Commission's response. Key findings of research led by Coventry University on the complex picture of migration into Greece are summarised by Heaven Crawley, while Jessica Hagen-Zanker and Richard Mallett highlight the limitations of deterrence policies in determining people's migration choices. Amelia Stoenescu and colleagues report on International Organisation for Migration (IOM) data and information-sharing systems to track movements in the Western Balkans, while Gareth Walker discusses the challenges of addressing the health needs of mobile populations.

Returning to the issue of volunteerism, John Borton reflects on the potential implications for humanitarian action, while Emma Eggink and Melinda McRostie give a first-hand account of the evolution of the Starfish Foundation, a grassroots volunteer initiative on Lesvos. The contribution of Hellenic Red Cross volunteers is highlighted by Kate Latimir, and Rachel Erskine and Katie Robertson outline RedR's training programme for volunteers. In a pair of articles, Elodie Francart, Michaël Neuman and Angélique Muller reflect on Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)'s experience in Brussels and northern France in engaging with NGOs, volunteer groups, municipal officials and political activists. Alexandre Le Clève, Evangeline Masson-Diez and Olivier Peyroux underline the predicament of unaccompanied children in camps in northern France and along the Channel coast, while Minh Tram Le and colleagues highlight the importance of infant and young child feeding for refugees stranded in Greece. The edition ends with articles by Emily Whitehead and Theo Hannides and colleagues reflecting on the findings from an independent evaluation of the Start Network's collaborative response and the findings of Start-funded research on the information and communication needs of refugees in Greece and Germany.

**Editorial photos:**
Left: A boat full of refugees from Syria and Afghanistan is helped by volunteer life-guards, after reaching the island of Lesvos, Greece.
*©UNHCR/Achilleas Zavallis*

Top: The new Grande Synthe camp near Dunkirk, France.
*©MSF*

Middle: A pile of discarded lifejackets in Lesvos, Greece.
*©Mary Finn*

Bottom right: A UNHCR staff member helps a cold and wet refugee child on Lesvos, Greece.
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As always, we welcome any comments or feedback, which can be sent to **hpn@odi.org.uk** or to the **HPN Coordinator, 203 Blackfriars Road, London SE1 8NJ**.

*Volunteers help a Syrian refugee ashore on Lesvos, Greece.*

*©UNHCR/Achilleas Zavallis*

# Refugees and vulnerable migrants in Europe

## Europe's humanitarian response to refugee and migrant flows: volunteerism thrives as the international system falls short

**Pamela DeLargy**

In May, the World Humanitarian Summit brought governments, the UN, NGOs and the private sector together for wide-ranging discussions on how to improve humanitarian response through innovative thinking, better coordination and stronger participation. Yet even as leaders were pledging their commitment to humanitarian principles and standards, families from Aleppo were sitting in the hot sun in Greece, many without even basic shelter. These people were emphatically *not* 'participating' in the planning for their well-being or being 'empowered' in their relationships with local authorities. Child refugees travelling alone were left to fend for themselves in Athens, Paris, Rome and Calais, exploited and abused. Across Europe, the birthplace of modern humanitarianism, women who had suffered egregious sexual exploitation and violence in Libya were labelled economic migrants, not refugees, and thus deemed not eligible for either asylum or humanitarian assistance. Although some European states offered asylum and a future to those arriving, many others did not.

Europe's actual humanitarian response must be judged a failure in many respects; basic needs have not been met and vulnerable people have not been protected. The lack of agreement about 'burden-sharing' in the region, rising xenophobia and Islamophobia, fear of terrorism and the demonisation of refugees and migrants have all played a role in creating this chaotic situation. Meanwhile, poorer countries in regions that host the great majority of the world's refugees are asking why they are expected to respect humanitarian standards and refugee law when wealthy Europe has chosen not to.

### A sudden surge – but a predictable one

The numbers were big, and sudden, but not entirely unpredictable: there had been a steady movement of refugees and migrants into Europe for decades, but from summer 2015 the numbers taking the Balkan route increased dramatically. Over a million people sought refuge in just a few months. Yet this should not have been a complete surprise. Flight to Europe, after all, is linked to humanitarian challenges elsewhere. Insufficient funding for the Syrian regional humanitarian appeal meant a loss of services for more and more Syrians in the region. Combined with restrictions on employment and the depletion of savings, this prompted many to look for a more secure future elsewhere. Afghans, cut off from traditional routes east due to the draconian sea interception policies adopted by Australia, joined Syrians on the Balkan route to Europe. Lack of employment and educational possibilities for urban Eritrean refugees in Sudan and Sudanese refugees in Egypt led young people to risk the route through Libya to Italy. War in Yemen pushed long-settled Somali refugees back across the Red Sea to became part of the flow of people from the Horn of Africa to Libya and Italy. Thus, the flight to European shores reflected not only the pull of greater long-term security in Europe, but also the failure of the international humanitarian community to meet basic needs in other places.

### State responses

European governments varied widely in their willingness to provide humanitarian support. Many simply failed to respond, whether out of inexperience, lack of resources (Greece) or outright hostility to the refugees (sometimes on religious or cultural grounds). Some states even exacerbated the crisis by purposely making movement as difficult as possible by closing borders or forcing people to walk long distances (when it would have been relatively simple to provide transport) or by punishing refugees with detention, family separation and sometimes physical violence. In short, state responses often made the humanitarian situation worse, either as a reflexive hostile response to what was seen as an 'invasion' or as a policy justified as a deterrent to new arrivals. In fact, deterrence has been a persistent theme in European policy discussions. Politicians across the continent have defended all manner of security responses as deterrents, including suggesting that expanding maritime search and rescue operations would only encourage more people to come. The refusal to provide basic humanitarian support to refugees and to have them suffer on the streets has even been claimed as a 'humanitarian' policy since it might prevent more people from risking their lives on dangerous sea crossings.

### Humanitarian challenges

The demographics of the movement to Europe have changed constantly, along with the routes, meaning that it has not been easy to profile humanitarian needs at any one point in time.

Earlier movements on almost all routes were composed of young men, with few families, but this changed quickly on the Balkan route in the summer of 2015 when women and children joined. More recently, the Libya–Italy route has seen a dramatic increase in young women, and the numbers of unaccompanied children have also increased substantially. Not knowing who was where and not predicting migration patterns impeded humanitarian response planning, and data and information systems to track arrivals had to be developed.

Another important factor has been people's constant mobility. In many humanitarian settings, people flee seeking safety and arrive somewhere where they stay for a while (even for years), and basic services can be established and humanitarian assistance delivered in a relatively stable setting. Humanitarian agencies are very familiar with the delivery of camp-based services, but the refugees arriving in Europe have been extremely mobile, and often determined to keep moving to a particular further destination. Humanitarian responders – established humanitarian groups as well as volunteers – had little experience designing responses for transient populations. Traditional humanitarian actors also had limited experience in the European context and no presence in affected areas. The international humanitarian system, largely designed to deal with displacement in other, poorer regions, was blindsided by the sudden arrival of a million refugees into Europe.

Most international humanitarian organisations had no operational agreements with European governments, no presence in refugee-affected areas, no funding lines for European activities and no ways to mobilise resources for a response in Europe. Many also feared getting involved. After all, if an agency is dependent on, say, UK government funding, it might not be a good idea to be seen to be helping out in Calais. There was great dithering about mandates for action. The international humanitarian system – so often led by European NGOs and funded by European states and the European Union (EU) – faltered when it had to be mobilised on European territory. Agencies with long experience negotiating humanitarian access in places like Sudan, Myanmar or Syria seemed to have no idea how to negotiate with the mayor of Calais. Médecins du Monde (MDM) was the first of the big humanitarian agencies (and the only one) to establish a presence in summer 2015 in the Calais 'jungle', but struggled to find funding from any traditional donors. Many of the traditional agencies took time to establish programmes in Greece and still do not work in the rest of Europe. National and local Red Cross societies performed heroically in some countries and communities, but did nothing at all in others.

## The role of volunteers

While the big agencies debated and traditional donors delayed funding, individual citizens and community groups across Europe started providing for humanitarian needs. The role of volunteers in the European response has been truly remarkable, as 'everyday' humanitarians responded in dozens of ways: collecting and sorting clothes or food for distribution, providing first aid, building shelters, rescuing people from the sea, cooking, setting up laundries, starting libraries and language courses, digging drainage ditches and putting in water pipes. You name it, volunteers have done it. In transit sites such as Budapest, volunteers greeted exhausted refugees with snacks, blankets and medical care. In Greece and Italy, fishermen rescued people from the sea and local villagers fed and clothed them. In Calais, volunteers came to help the small French community organisations that for years had been struggling to provide assistance and advocate on behalf of refugees. They not only built shelters and brought supplies, they also organised themselves into sectors – water and sanitation, shelter, health – replicating the cluster system common to emergency responses throughout the world. Volunteers began to do professional needs assessments. A team from Birmingham University, appalled at conditions in Calais, conducted a hygiene and sanitation assessment which was eventually used in the French courts to force the municipality to provide improved water and sanitation. Many early Calais volunteers moved on to help in Greece as Syrians began arriving on the islands. They helped local communities to rescue and care for refugees for months before any of the major humanitarian agencies began to respond. Even today, volunteers – both Greek and from elsewhere in Europe – bear the brunt of the humanitarian response in Greece. Thousands more are a lifeline for refugees all over Europe.

While the vitality of the humanitarian spirit in so many Europeans is reassuring, the heavy dependence on volunteers also presents challenges for humanitarian action. Although volunteers have tremendous energy and a can-do spirit, many are untrained and inexperienced; this can lead to uncoordinated and sometimes ill-advised responses and also to their own burn out. Another consequence of depending on volunteers is that where humanitarian standards are not being applied (or are not even known), humanitarian response can be compromised. The role of volunteers in the European response deserves serious research, not only as a way to understand and improve the response but also to help in other regions where local responders are becoming more and more important components of humanitarian action.

## Information, communication and social media

As usual, refugees themselves have been creative, resilient and their own best advocates and information providers. While the EU came up with plan after (mechanical) plan for the 'fair' relocation of refugees within EU Member States (which many members flat out rejected), states debated national immigration and asylum policies and humanitarian agencies debated their roles, refugees took action to seek their own solutions and find their own protection. They used their own means of information sharing and lesson learning to get access to basic services.

Many observers have noted the importance of mobile phones in the European migration (though too many foolishly ask whether a 'real' refugee would have a mobile phone, implicitly

highlighting the stereotype of the deserving refugee as someone far away and very poor). Indeed, the constant sharing of information on route closures and means of transport, and the regular updates to family and friends, have been a prominent aspect of this population movement. The use of social media like Facebook and WhatsApp has been an important feature of the communication patterns among refugee groups (as well as smuggling networks). But social media has also been absolutely critical for the recruitment and organisation of volunteers. There are hundreds of Facebook sites where volunteers share information. Although some groups and governments have begun to recognise the importance of social media for reaching refugees and migrants, the main focus so far seems to be establishing campaigns to discourage people from migrating, such as the new Italian campaign featuring refugees and migrants sharing their negative experiences and disappointments about migration. Much more could be done to support refugees using social and other media.

## So, what now in Europe?

Understanding more about what has happened in Europe, including the distinctive aspects of the humanitarian context, can be a start towards improving the situation. But it is clear that the problems are not primarily logistical or organisational. The primary impediment to effective humanitarian action in Europe right now is the lack of political will on the part of European governments and the inability of the EU to achieve a consensus on migration and refugee policies. The humanitarian community cannot remain isolated from the larger political debates about migration policies because these policies are largely determining the humanitarian space in Europe.

Day after day, policies adopted across Europe undermine or violate humanitarian principles. What do neutrality and impartiality mean when some people are provided with protection or assistance simply because of their nationality? Or when some are demonised and discriminated against based on their religion? What does independence mean when the Red Cross in one country is a major humanitarian responder, but in another is inhibited from assisting people labelled as 'illegals' or 'alien invaders'? And what about humanitarian standards? Should it not be shocking that a displacement camp in Darfur has better sanitation, nutritional support, shelter, health care and protection programmes than the places where refugees are staying in Greece or France?

Much of Europe is focused on stopping migration and asylum-seeking, not on protecting people and ensuring human rights. The EU agreement with Turkey in March 2016, though marketed in humanitarian terms, was primarily designed to stop the inflow of refugees into EU territory through Greece by returning new arrivals to Turkey in exchange for taking selected refugees directly from Turkey. The agreement also provides for up to €3 billion for refugee support in Turkey and the elimination of visa restrictions for Turkish citizens travelling to Europe. It is so flawed that Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) decided to refuse EU funding rather than compromise its positions on human rights and refugee law. Dozens of other NGOs have also condemned the agreement as a violation of non-refoulement in refugee law, and some have decided not to work in Greece given the conditions. EU initiatives with African governments after the Valletta Summit on African–European migration in late 2015 have focused on limiting migration by strengthening African border controls and security, as well as providing assistance with job creation in an attempt to discourage out-migration. Agreements with countries such as Sudan, Ethiopia and Niger are also worded in humanitarian language, but based on questionable assumptions about migration decision-making, at the very least. Many observers see all of these agreements as an attempt to pay others to stop people from moving to Europe, no matter the human rights implications. Whether motives are mixed or not, it is clear that the resources devoted to attempts to control migration – whether on security and border controls or deterrence and 'incentivisation' efforts – dwarf the resources being allocated to actual humanitarian response.

The greater the investment in security and border controls, the more dangerous the journey to Europe becomes, and the more lives are lost. Establishing safe, regular and orderly means of seeking asylum is crucial. Acceptance of greater numbers under the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) third-country resettlement programme could be part of such an effort. At the UN in September, European countries join the rest of the world in pondering how to deal with the global migration challenge, and to determine how refugees and others can be protected. Better policy based on better thinking is urgently needed.

**Pamela DeLargy** is on loan from the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) as Senior Advisor to the UN Special Representative for Migration. She is also a Visiting Fellow at the Institute for Global Affairs at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE).

# Applying the European Commission's humanitarian expertise to respond to needs inside Europe

**Laetitia de Radigues and Ludovico Gammarelli**

The European Union (EU) is the main humanitarian donor worldwide. The European Commission, through its Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO), has over the past 25 years provided funding and expertise to address needs caused by natural disasters and conflict. The Treaty of Lisbon underpins the EU's commitment to provide assistance, relief and protection to victims of natural or man-made disasters around the world, and to support and coordinate the civil protection systems of its Member States. The humanitarian model established in the Treaty therefore identifies a clear role for European humanitarian aid to respond to needs outside of the EU. Today, however, the EU faces an unprecedented humanitarian emergency inside its own territory, raising new challenges for the European Commission.

## EU humanitarian assistance and refugee response

Between January 2015 and February 2016, over 1.1 million people made their way to the EU, escaping conflict and poverty in their countries and seeking a better and safer life. The majority of these people used the Western Balkan route, reaching the Greek islands by boat from Turkey, continuing on to the mainland and the northern border of Greece and crossing into the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) and then onwards to Central and Northern Europe.

EU humanitarian aid has been active in countries of origin (Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan) and in countries of arrival and transit, including Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, FYROM and Serbia. Globally in 2015, the European Commission allocated almost three-quarters of its annual humanitarian aid budget (over €1 billion) to projects helping refugees and internally displaced people. The Commission supports refugees in Turkey who have fled violence in both Syria and Iraq, with particular emphasis on vulnerable people living outside of camps. Since the beginning of the Syria crisis in 2011, the Commission has provided a total of €455 million in assistance in Turkey, including humanitarian aid and longer-term assistance. In November 2015, the EU set up the Refugee Facility for Turkey, through which EU institutions and Member States have committed to funding up to €3 billion.

EU humanitarian funding in the non-EU countries along the Balkan route (FYROM and Serbia) assists refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants in need and contributes to the provision of emergency assistance in places with high concentrations of refugees, including borders and registration points. Funding of over €21m is enabling nine partners to provide people in need with key essentials such as temporary shelter, food, health services and protection, in particular child protection.

## Establishing a new humanitarian instrument

Migration is not a new phenomenon in Europe, and European institutions have over many years developed a series of tools to address the needs faced by people on the move. To tackle the current migration crisis, the European Commission, through its Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME), mobilised two main instruments, the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and the Internal Security Fund (ISF) and the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) through its Regional Policy Directorate General (DG REGIO).

When the borders along the Western Balkan route were closed in March 2016, more than 55,000 people were left stranded in Greece. To support the Greek authorities as well as international organisations and NGOs operating in Greece in managing the refugee crisis, the Commission has awarded over €345m under these instruments since the beginning of 2015. This emergency funding comes on top of the €509m already allocated to Greece under the national programmes for 2014–2020. Greece itself responded generously to the needs of refugees, both through informal private groups of volunteers and with a significant effort by the Greek government to coordinate relief efforts and provide direct assistance. In December 2015, when the situation in Greece stretched available resources beyond their limit, Greece appealed to other European civil protection agencies for help. Through the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM), coordinated by the Commission, in-kind support such as shelter, hygiene materials and medical supplies was provided to help Greece cope with the increasing number of arrivals. This request is still open, and some civil protection agencies continue to provide materials and expertise today.

The magnitude of needs made it clear that an exclusive response by national authorities was not sufficient, despite the tremendous efforts made by the Greek authorities, assisted by local initiatives, to organise the reception of hundreds of thousands of refugees. The presence and engagement of humanitarian NGOs and international organisations provided national first responders with technical capacity, but lacked the necessary financial support. With their role becoming more and more important, funding and coordination became crucial requirements to ensure a more flexible and timely response.

On 19 February 2016, the European Council called for urgent and concrete proposals from the Commission to 'put in place the capacity for the EU to provide humanitarian assistance internally'. The Commission responded immediately with a

Two young girls walk through a makeshift camp near the village of Idomeni in Greece.

*©UNHCR/Achilleas Zavallis*

proposal for a new Regulation to provide emergency financial support for humanitarian relief operations, to support Member States and complement their actions. The Council adopted the Regulation on 15 March.

Following a needs assessment to determine funding priorities, on 19 April, just five weeks after the adoption of the Regulation, European Commissioner Christos Stylianides announced a first allocation of €83m to eight organisations: the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Oxfam, the International Rescue Committee, the Danish Refugee Council, Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund Deutschland, Save the Children and Médecins du Monde (MDM). At the time of writing (August 2016), an additional allocation of up to €115m is under discussion to address four operational priorities:

1. Shelter: 'winterising' existing sites, potentially opening new sites and upgrading some sites in line with plans designed by the Greek authorities.
2. Multi-Purpose Cash Transfer: developing full coverage of needs including food and non-food items, transport and phone communication.
3. Education: supporting plans developed by the Greek Ministry of Education.
4. Unaccompanied Minors: providing residential options, including care, case management and psychosocial support.

## Challenges

For an institution used to funding humanitarian aid outside the EU, providing emergency assistance within the Union was not without challenges.

The Emergency Support Instrument (ESI) mirrors the practice of EU humanitarian aid provision outside the EU, which is provided based on needs and on the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality and neutrality. Impartiality requires that humanitarian aid must be provided solely on the basis of need, without discrimination between or within affected populations. Given that Greece has been suffering from a deep economic crisis, Greek nationals in need could also have been included in the target population. The general assessment of the Commission's humanitarian aid partners, and of the Greek authorities, was that refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants lacking access to services and family networks were in most need. Services provided with this new funding would not cover the local population, which could be supported by other EU-funded instruments. In terms of operational priorities, the ESI would not be involved

in relocation, resettlement and return schemes, which are funded by other Union instruments.

Independence refers to the freedom of humanitarian objectives from political, economic, military or other objectives, and ensures that the sole purpose of humanitarian aid is to relieve and prevent the suffering of victims of humanitarian crises. In this sense, in order to preserve the independence of humanitarian partners it is important to distinguish between the support provided by the European Commission to the management of migration politics and the funding of emergency relief operations for the benefit of refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants. Humanitarian aid is not a crisis management tool.

One illustration of this is the operational decision to exclude the so-called 'hotspots' from the funding provided through the ESI. After the EU–Turkey Statement of 20 March, these 'hotspots' became closed centres with a prominent function in the management of asylum processes, and hence instruments of a migration and asylum policy that is not the primary objective of the ESI. As such, despite being fully coordinated with the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), Frontex, the Greek Asylum Service and other actors operating inside the centres, the ESI does not fund operations in them, although should needs require the expertise of a humanitarian partner the ESI could be activated to support this.

Another prerequisite was to find the additional financial resources required without having a detrimental effect on levels of humanitarian assistance provided outside the territory of the EU. This has been resolved by using funds exclusively earmarked for internal use. However, with €83m already contracted and up to €614m more budgeted in 2016–18, the response to the emergency in Europe might look high when compared to other humanitarian crises outside of the EU. Two points are worth making: first, a humanitarian crisis affecting a Member State of the EU is a whole new theatre of humanitarian operations, requiring a much higher initial investment in the development of infrastructure, partners' capacities and coordination models; and second, such a crisis calls for a much higher commitment from the EU budget compared to crises where other donors are also actively involved.

Funding humanitarian assistance in a Member State for the first time might have challenged the principle of impartiality. In fact, most EU-funded policies are implemented through Member States. However, mirroring the practice of humanitarian aid outside of the EU, the ESI preserved partners' independence by excluding the national authorities as a potential operational partner. In doing so attention must be paid to the need to ensure good coordination between humanitarian partners and the authorities, which remain in charge of the overall response. In the case of Greece, a regular coordination meeting allows dialogue and the exchange of views between the humanitarian partners, DG ECHO, and the Greek authorities.

## Conclusion

Facing the largest refugee movement in Europe since the Second World War, the EU has succeeded in mobilising fresh resources to address the needs of these people, aiming to show solidarity, both towards refugees and towards the Member States that find themselves on the front line. Maintaining humanitarian principles as the common theme for its action, the Commission's efforts have focused on its traditional role of addressing human suffering, with particular attention to the most vulnerable.

The support provided so far has allowed more than 40,000 refugees and migrants to access basic medical services; 30,000 to benefit from psychosocial support; improved water and sanitation facilities, including gender-adapted facilities, for 37,000 people; and put in place child-friendly spaces. As needs evolve, the Commission and its partners will have to demonstrate flexibility and the capacity to intervene in a continuously changing context, which may include opening new operations in other Member States should the need arise.

**Laetitia de Radigues** and **Ludovico Gammarelli**, European Commission, Directorate General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO). Responsibility for the information and views set out in this article lies entirely with the authors.

# Beyond 'mass movement': understanding the dynamics of migration into Greece

**Heaven Crawley**

In 2015, a million refugees and migrants crossed the Mediterranean to Europe in search of safety and a better life. The vast majority (84%) of these people arrived by sea to Greece, crossing the Aegean from departure points dotted along the Turkish coast. In the last four months of 2015 the narrative of Europe's 'migration crisis' – which had been dominated by the stories of hundreds of people drowning in the Mediterranean between Libya and Italy earlier in the year – came to be defined instead by stories of hundreds, sometimes thousands, of people arriving every day on the Greek islands of Lesvos, Kos and Chios. Images of boats carrying desperate men, women and children landing on the beaches, to be met


A man lifts his son in the air after reaching Lesvos, having crossed from the coast of Turkey to Greece.

*© UNHCR/Achilleas Zavallis*

by volunteers who had travelled to Greece to assist with the humanitarian effort, and of celebrities and politicians visiting to see what was happening for themselves, filled newspapers around Europe and across the world.

But these stories of 'mass movement' into Greece conceal a much more complex picture. Migration policy is currently driven by moral and political panic, patchy knowledge and broad assumptions about the people at the heart of the story: refugees and migrants themselves. Understanding the dynamics of migration across the Aegean provides an insight into the needs, fears and aspirations of those on the move, enables a more effective humanitarian response and challenges political and media representations of refugees and migrants as an undifferentiated mass.

Since September 2015 a team of researchers led by Coventry University has been examining the dynamics, determinants, drivers and infrastructures underpinning recent migration across, and loss of life in, the Mediterranean.[1] Our research in Greece took place between September 2015 and January 2016, when arrivals reached their peak. During that time we interviewed 215 refugees and migrants in Athens and Lesvos, and 28 stakeholders from government, international organisations and civil society. We were also able to observe events as they unfolded, including political and policy responses at the local, national and international levels. This article provides an overview of what we found, focusing on the reasons why people are on the move, the complex array of factors that shape the journeys they make and the need for safe and legal access to protection.

## Why people move

According to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), 90% of those arriving in Greece in 2015 came from just three countries, Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. When we asked our respondents to explain why they had decided to leave their home countries or the countries in which they were living, the vast majority (88%) cited conflict, persecution and human rights abuses. The circumstances under which people have been forced to leave vary considerably by both country of origin and in relation to the individual, familial and group characteristics of our respondents. Some people have been targeted for their involvement in conventional political activity, or the activities of family members. Others, the majority of those from Syria, left because the violence had become intolerable and because they

1 The MEDMIG project is funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Department for International Development (DFID). Further information about the project can be found on our website: www.medmig.info.

feared for their safety and that of their families. Often caught between competing forces (the Assad regime, the Free Syrian Army, the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK), Islamic State (IS) and others), and subject to almost daily barrel bombings, sniper fire and other attacks, many had left to find a future and a better life, particularly for their children.

Syria is not the only country in conflict: indeed, there is a striking similarity in the experiences of those from Iraq and Afghanistan, many of whom described situations of both generalised conflict and violence targeted at specific groups, often based on religion or ethnicity. In addition to these general experiences of conflict, three key issues affected a significant proportion of those interviewed, namely IS, kidnapping and forced conscription. More than a quarter (28%) of respondents talked about the impact on their lives of the arrival of IS, particularly in Syria but also in Iraq, Afghanistan and Yemen. Many respondents described experiencing detention and torture and being forced to witness beheadings. They expressed grave concern for the safety of their families, particularly women (wives, sisters, daughters) who were perceived to be non-compliant with strict Sharia laws concerning their dress and behaviour. Respondents from Syria and Iraq in particular also described kidnapping as an increasingly common threat to their safety and that of their families. In Eritrea, Syria and Iran, forced conscription into the government army, militia or rebel force was a major factor underlying the decision to leave. Eritreans in particular described military conscription as a form of forced or slave labour, with poor working conditions, low or no salary and no prospects of release.

Conflict has a huge impact on people's ability to make a living by killing primary breadwinners, destroying businesses and making it impossible to travel to work. It also has a major impact on the economic infrastructure of a country, significantly increasing the prices of basic goods and commodities. In Syria, price increases have been exacerbated by internal displacement and the movement of large numbers of people to some of the safer cities. Many of those who leave situations of conflict find themselves in very difficult economic circumstances in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey as a result of limited rights, exploitation by employers and discrimination in the labour market (and beyond). These circumstances propel them onwards. A third (34%) of respondents had moved on for what might typically be understood as economic reasons: they were running out of money, found it impossible to secure employment or were working long hours for very little pay. With the passage of time and in the absence of a resolution to the conflicts in their home countries, respondents told us that they had grown increasingly concerned about the impacts on their families, and especially their children, many of whom had been out of school for many years or had health issues.

It is clear that the drivers of migration to Greece are multi-faceted, and there is often overlap between 'forced' and 'economic' factors. This poses a significant challenge, both for policy-makers – who need to find ways of squeezing complex human experiences into a series of narrowly defined categories – and for those providing humanitarian assistance, who find themselves working with people who may have been on the move for years, living in poverty and fear, and lacking access to even basic healthcare and education.

## Journeys and decision-making

Media coverage of the arrival of refugees and migrants in Greece gives the impression of a linear, uninterrupted movement of people heading towards Europe. This is often represented through graphics depicting arrows from North Africa and the Middle East into Greece and Italy.[2] This representation is, however, grossly misleading. Our research instead indicates complex movement in terms of the routes taken, the number of countries crossed, the mix of regular and irregular movement within the whole journey and the points in the journey at which the services of a smuggler are engaged. Migration into Europe is made up of distinct 'sub-flows' from many countries and regions, and includes individuals and families with diverse trajectories. These flows merge in Turkey and Libya, explaining, in part at least, the magnitude of arrivals in Greece and Italy in 2015. There are Syrians coming directly from Syria and from the Gulf countries, where they had been labour migrants, and others were living as refugees in Lebanon or Turkey. Afghans may come directly from Afghanistan, but also from Iran or from other countries where they have been living for many years, or may even have been born.

It is clear from our research that the process by which refugees and migrants make decisions about where to go is highly complex and contingent on a range of variables. The asylum and migration policies of different European countries appear to play a relatively minor role: refugees and migrants have only partial information about migration policies in particular countries, and more than a fifth (22%) of those we interviewed in Greece told us they did not know which country they wanted to go to or were heading to 'Europe'. This was particularly the case for those with limited education, some of whom were unaware that Europe comprises different countries. For them, as for the majority of respondents, the most important priority was to reach a country in which they felt safe. Where specific migration policies were cited as influencing decisions, these were more often related to securing refugee status and opportunities for family reunification than welfare benefits or support. In fact, we found that the single most important factor above all others shaping and informing the decision about where to go is the presence of family members or other social contacts (friends, acquaintances) in European countries. Nearly two-thirds (59%) of those who mentioned a preferred

2 See, for example, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-35486655 in the UK and http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/01/world/europe/a-mass-migration-crisis-and-it-may-yet-get-worse.html?_r=0 in the US. Many more examples can be found through a simple google search of 'migration to Europe'.

destination had connections in specific European countries, and said that this was an important factor influencing their journey. This was particularly evident among Syrian respondents, many of whom maintained almost daily contact with relatives and friends (by telephone, Facebook, WhatsApp and Viber), but could also be seen among Afghans (travelling both directly from Afghanistan and from Iran) and Iraqis.

## The need for safe and legal routes

The situation in Greece has changed dramatically in the period since we conducted our research. By the end of July 2016, there had been just over a quarter of a million arrivals by sea to Europe, the majority (62.5%) crossing to Greece. However, although more people arrived in the first seven months of 2016 than in the same period in 2015 (160,000 compared to 130,000), the vast majority arrived in the first three months of the year. Since then, only 8,770 refugees and migrants have crossed the sea to Greece, compared with 117,662 in the same period in 2015, a fall of 93%.

The reasons for the dramatic fall in arrivals to Greece since March 2016 lie not in improvements in the countries from which refugees and migrants originate (in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan the situation has arguably deteriorated over recent months) but rather in the introduction of policies at the national and European Union (EU) levels designed to contain refugees and migrants in Turkey and Greece, thereby stemming the flow into other parts of Europe and, in turn, reducing the political crisis with which migration across the Mediterranean has come to be associated. It is not only increased security introduced as part of the EU–Turkey deal which has made the difference. Many of those who had been intending to travel to Europe from Turkey have decided not to make the dangerous journey across the Aegean for fear of being trapped in Greece, with the prospect of detention, no jobs and limited access to asylum.

Given the limitations of space it is not possible to explore these developments in detail here. The interface between refugee and migrant flows and the policies of EU Member States is a focus of our final report. Nonetheless, the evidence presented here on the drivers, decision-making and destinations of those who crossed the Aegean to Greece in the final months of 2015 suggests that the pressures that propel people forward on their journeys are likely to increase rather than decrease with the passage of time.

Whilst conflict, human rights abuses and persecution continue to drive people from their homes, efforts on the part of the EU to significantly expand the opportunities for refugees to access protection through safe and legal routes have met with limited success. In May 2015 the Commission presented a comprehensive European Agenda on Migration which recognised the need to prevent those fleeing conflict and in need of protection having to resort to the criminal networks of smugglers. Yet since then just 8,268 people have been resettled, mainly from Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan.

The European Commission has acknowledged the need to significantly increase the scale and speed of resettlement, and on 13 July announced that a new EU Resettlement Framework would be established to ensure orderly and safe pathways to Europe for people in need of international protection. It remains to be seen whether this will be delivered in practice, but even if it is the scale of resettlement is likely to be insufficient to address the considerable, and growing, need. Around two-thirds of the people crossing the Aegean to Greece in 2016 are women and children seeking to join male family members (husbands, brother, sons) who successfully made the journey to Europe in 2015. As of the end of July, 57,182 people were stranded in Greece, many of whom have been unable to access procedures for asylum or family reunification. By mid-June, the refugee relocation scheme, which the European Commission has explicitly described as an act of European solidarity and responsibility-sharing, has relocated just 1,503 people from Greece, 2.2% of the 66,400 originally agreed.

The evidence presented here sheds light on the complexity of migration flows across the Aegean from Turkey to Greece. Contrary to the dominant political and media narratives, which have presented this movement as a single, linear flow, our research reveals significant variations in terms of the drivers of migration and the factors that inform refugee and migrant decision-making, as well as their preferred destinations. The extent to which policies designed to deter refugees and migrants can have the effect that is intended or assumed is challenged by the ad hoc and dynamic decision-making processes of people on the move. To address such diverse and composite flows requires a coherent policy response that is also nuanced, tailored and targeted. Deterrence and containment policies aimed at immobilising people in countries of origin or transit without resettlement or humanitarian assistance will only deepen the human suffering. The absence or slow realisation of safe and legal access to protection (most notably resettlement and family reunification) simply increases the demand for smugglers, pushing people into taking ever more risky routes into and within Europe.

**Heaven Crawley** is Chair in International Migration for the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations at Coventry University.

# On the limits of deterrence

**Jessica Hagen-Zanker and Richard Mallett**

Is it possible for European governments to put people off the idea of migrating?[1] This is the question we set out to answer in the summer of 2015, at the height of the so-called 'migration crisis' – the height, at least, as defined by the extent of media coverage around the time. Our research was motivated by a desire to interrogate the assumption among European policy-makers and politicians that it is within the power of states to stop people from coming to Europe.

In the broadest sense, the European response to mass population movements has been guided by strategies of containment, restriction and deterrence. Rather than welcome, settle and integrate the new arrivals, European Union (EU) member states have largely sought to drive them away from their borders through increasingly restrictive migration policies. We have seen the construction of border fences, the militarisation of frontiers (accompanied by violence towards refugees and migrants), increases in aid to 'regions of origin' and countries deemed powerful enough to contain flows, and the intensification of information campaigns designed to convey the risks in journeys to Europe, as well as the lack of support upon arrival.

Each of these measures are geared towards deterring migration and are in one way or another premised on the idea that regulation occurs by changing people's minds: make the journey (appear) more difficult or the destination more unwelcoming and people will think twice about selecting that option; instead, they might take their chances elsewhere or stay put. To put this to the test, we talked to people who did make the journey to Europe, most of them through irregular means. We carried out 52 interviews with Eritrean, Senegalese and Syrian respondents recently arrived in four European cities – London, Manchester, Berlin and Madrid. In these interviews, we spent time going through people's journeys in great detail, homing in on their decision points at key moments of the process. We asked why they left when they did, how they got from place to place and their reasons for ending up where they have. For the purposes of this article, we focus on the forced migration of interviewees from Syria, and to a lesser extent on the journeys of Eritrean

Refugees at the border between Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM).



1 This article is based on J. Hagen-Zanker and R. Mallett, *Journeys to Europe: The Role of Policy in Migrant Decision-making*, Insights Report (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2016). Some parts of it draw directly on the original report.

respondents. Given that the experiences of the Senegalese in our sample are characterised by a non-humanitarian form of migration, we do not include them in the analysis.

## Information drives movement, but *trusted* information is what really matters

In one sense, the policy-makers have got it right: people act on the basis of the information available to them. This squares with the logic of sending signals that intend to deter migration, such as the adverts taken out in Lebanese newspapers paid for by the Danish government highlighting the tough regulations awaiting any would-be asylum-seekers from the Middle East, or the messages on the Norwegian government's Twitter page threatening Afghans with deportation back to Kabul should they try to enter the country without documents. Of course, there are other versions of deterrence policy at play: visa regulations and carrier sanctions are one, as is the securitisation of international borders, including those beyond European territory. But both of the above 'messaging' cases nonetheless exemplify a long-popular approach, where 'new' pieces of information might be considered, by their architects, powerful enough to change people's minds. The problem with such an approach is that it essentially operates out of context. The information these messages contain might be perfectly credible; to many of us, knowledge about a certain country's asylum policies or a particular route's precariousness would appear useful. Under certain circumstances, however, there is not a great deal of value or meaning in their content. Testimonies from Syrians and Eritreans suggest that they were actually very aware of the risks awaiting them in transit – but years of exposure to violence at home had rendered those risks acceptable. In other words, a dangerous migration became preferable – indeed, became a more rational choice – than staying put.

The question of whether to cross an international border is ultimately a subjective one: migrations are driven as much by people's perceptions of their circumstances ('how safe do I feel here?'; 'do I think I would fare better elsewhere?') as they are by the objective characteristics of those circumstances (the onset or intensification of conflict, a deteriorating labour market). Given that such decisions are so intensely personal, it perhaps comes as little surprise that external information campaigns have little effect.

Not all information is equal: information does influence the decision to migrate, but to be meaningful it first needs to be trusted. Our research suggests that information becomes trusted or credible when it comes through known personal connections. Almost everyone we interviewed recalled making key decisions on the basis of other people's advice. More often than not, these people were members either of our interviewees' closest social circles – parents, siblings, good friends – or of their wider communities. For Syrians, it seems that some of the most trusted information regarding routes and options came through Facebook and Whatsapp groups shared by fellow Syrians who had already made the journey. This was particularly the case for those moving through the Balkans route. Likewise with the choice of smuggler: Syrians transiting through the Balkans tended to work with smugglers who came recommended by personal contacts. When it comes to changing someone's mind about migrating, it seems that the messenger is as important as the message.

## Jobs and education: two things that offset deterrence policy

Migration policies, and deterrence policies in particular, can potentially shape people's decisions on where to go and how to get there. Just as some pieces of information matter more than others, so too different kinds of policies exert different degrees of influence over a person's thinking. For young people and those with children – and even for those without, but who were thinking long term – education was central in shaping decisions on destinations. People were interested in finding places with a decent school system. In one focus group with five Syrian women recently arrived in Berlin, this was the most influential factor driving their movement towards Germany. Amin, also from Syria but currently in Madrid, summed it up: 'When you have children, you need good places'. For people escaping conflict and oppression, education must also be seen in the context of lost schooling: migration then becomes a way, for those affected by chronic humanitarian crises, of recapturing foregone human capital. It is also part of an attempt to restore a stronger sense of human dignity and to re-establish some order and autonomy over daily life.

Work is another key factor driving people towards particular places. Many of those we interviewed expressed a desire to find work in the countries they had ended up in, and talked about this as one of the things that drew them there originally. Abdu, 29, arrived in the UK in 2015 after a year-long journey from Eritrea. When we talked to him last summer, he explained he was 'not waiting for benefits. I'm not here for that. I want to help myself. I don't want to stay in my home every day'. At the time of our interview, Abdu was spending his days either at the job centre or simply going from one warehouse to the next, trying to find out if any work was going. While this search for decent work might often take people to Europe, it does not always start off that way. Several Syrian interviewees talked about how they initially had no inclination to spend a small fortune getting to Germany or Spain, planning instead to reassemble their lives just across the border in Turkey or Lebanon. But as Nabil's story in the accompanying box illustrates, the challenges associated with doing so, particularly finding a place in the labour market, often compel onward movement.

Aside from the presence of family and friends, our interviews suggest that education and employment are the two most important factors influencing people's thinking about where to go. Following this, it is theoretically possible for European governments to put people off coming – but only by sending their countries' education systems into decline and collapsing their economies.

## Box 1 Nabil's story

Nineteen-year-old Nabil was living with his family just outside Aleppo when the actions of ISIS fighters made their home unliveable: 'executions every week, parading decapitated heads in the central square'. Prior to ISIS, Nabil explained, he had no intention at all to migrate. But now more than 90% of his community have left. In January 2015, Nabil fled to Gaziantep in Turkey, a city not too far from the border. Once there he tried to find work on construction sites. But after three months, he was yet to find anything. It was this inability to scrape a half-decent living across the border which drove Nabil onwards towards Berlin, where his older brother had arrived a few months previously.

## Diversion is more likely than prevention

The factors that compel people to migrate in the first place do not appear to be significantly offset by European countries' deterrence policies. This seems to be because the influence is marginal to the range of other forces governing migration decision-making (trusted information, perceptions of opportunity and dignity abroad). Yet, while we found that deterrence policies don't stop people from coming to Europe, they can influence people's decision on where to go and how to get there, and, as such, shift migration flows from one country to another. Hungary provides a clear example of this. In justifying the decision to build a border fence, Prime Minister Viktor Orban claimed that Europe had 'sent out invitations to the migrants', and that these fences were key to protecting Hungarians against the 'brutal threat' of mass migration. One government spokesperson put it more directly: 'This is a necessary step … We need to stop the flood'.

Through our interviews, we tried to get a sense of how effective such controls are at changing people's minds about coming to Europe. When we posed this question to a group of Syrian men in Berlin, they told us fences were unlikely to affect people's journeys: 'Syrians will find a way. It may be harder and more expensive, but they will find another route'. This was clearly illustrated last summer. Although Hungary (partially) managed to keep migrants and refugees out once they had built the fence, at the same time this did not stop people coming to Europe. Instead, they re-routed themselves through Croatia and Slovenia. More recent evidence suggests that, with the latest EU–Turkey deal (deporting people back to Turkey who had previously entered Greece through irregular means), a decline in Aegean crossings has been accompanied by a rise in flows through the central Mediterranean.[2]

2 'Migrant Influx into Italy from Libya Resurging: IOM', Reuters, 15 April 2016.

There are two related points here. First, alternatives usually always exist, and routes perceived as unusable at one point in time can later emerge as possibilities depending on how wider circumstances develop. Second, and as mentioned above, harder or more expensive journeys are often not in themselves enough of a deterrent to absolute mobility. When your 'home' is consumed by a humanitarian crisis, the level of risk presented by departure – usually very well understood by the Syrians we talked to – may be deemed acceptable.

## The need for a coordinated European approach

Governments believe they can control refugee flows. Our evidence suggests this may be possible in some senses but not in others. Preventive policies, particularly those concerned with deterrence, appear to matter little. At best, direct controls like border fences and detention can divert flows, essentially passing the buck from one country to the next, but do not appear capable of preventing movement in the first place. Thus, while such measures might alleviate individual countries' concerns, at the regional EU level they make no difference.

Of course, research focusing either on people in transit or on those still deciding whether to travel might reveal a different picture. It is perfectly possible that some kinds of people are put off more by deterrence than others – and that it might play a preventive role in certain circumstances. This is important further work to be done, which researchers at ODI will be engaging in this year. But in our study we find that migration trajectories are influenced less by restrictive migration policies and more by things like information transmitted through close social networks, perceptions of 'welcoming-ness', labour market opportunities and access to education.

At its core, this is a regional crisis. Policy-makers should be stepping away from unilateral policy-making towards a more coordinated European approach. Given that there is an inevitability to certain types of (forced) migration, and that barriers and disincentives to travel are not necessarily effective, the clear response is to manage it better. Improving the safety of transit, implementing better European reception systems and strengthening integration policies are three obvious measures to that end.

**Jessica Hagen-Zanker** is a Research Fellow in the Overseas Development Institute's social protection team. **Richard Mallett** is a Research Fellow at ODI, where he works primarily on the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium project.

# Applying information management tools to detect and address vulnerabilities in the context of mixed migration

**Amelia Stoenescu, Ivona Zakoska, Daniel Szabo and Debora Gonzalez Tejero**

*Text message: We don't have any news if usual schedule of 4 trains (max 940 migrants) in 24 hours will be changed. For now, only one train is announced for 8.00 PM.*

In 2014, the majority of Europe's mixed migration flows passed through the Central Mediterranean route, with Italy as the first point of arrival. By contrast, 2015 saw a significant increase through the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkan route, which includes Greece, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Serbia, Croatia and Hungary. From the beginning of 2015 to the end of June 2016, more than a million refugees and migrants arrived in Greece, including vulnerable groups such as unaccompanied and separated children, pregnant women and people with disabilities. National authorities relied on the International Organization for Migration (IOM) information-gathering and -sharing systems to identify risks and coordinate the humanitarian response. This article outlines how early warning networks and the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) helped make regularly updated data available on migrant routes, numbers and protection risks.

## Information gaps in an evolving emergency

For Europe's increasing mixed migration flows, the lack of consolidated information-sharing mechanisms, and the absence of data on specific risks such as trafficking, soon became apparent. Considering the scale and speed of migration flows, traditional counter-trafficking approaches – initial screening and in-depth interviews – struggled to keep up. Countries in the region already employed various counter-trafficking measures, but these identification and assistance mechanisms were quickly overwhelmed in a context where thousands of people were crossing borders each day. To contribute to a better-targeted response and more timely identification of needs, IOM introduced three systems for information collection and dissemination on mixed migration flows in the Western Balkans region: an early warning information-sharing network; a Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM); and counter-trafficking surveys.

### The Early Warning Information Sharing Network: the first step in coordinated action

During the peak days in the latter part of 2015, more than 5,000 migrants and refugees crossed the border from Greece to FYROM each day.[1] The unprecedented number of people moving across state borders prompted the FYROM government to declare a state of emergency in August. With initial support provided through its Migration Emergency Funding Mechanism (MEFM), IOM rolled out the Early Warning Information Sharing Network (EWISN). EWISN is an informal structure for real-time information exchange between IOM staff, national authorities, other service providers and civil society organisations providing assistance. The Network provides 24-hour instant messaging-based communication between IOM staff regarding mixed migration flows at transit points throughout the Balkan route. Staff at different points on the route send texts containing information on migrant arrivals, migrants on the move and time of departure from one point, with estimates of when the group will reach the next point on the route. When, in November 2015, the number of crossings into FYROM from Greece reached its peak of 102,776 cumulative arrivals a month, the Network was fully operational and allowed for effective coordination of activities between IOM staff and institutions, international relief organisations and civil society organisations active at local level.

*Text message: IOM Greece (Athens) to IOM Skopje (October 2015): 1,379 migrants expected to arrive in mainland between 06:15 and 09:40. The first group is expected to reach the border after 19:00.*

In its initial implementation, EWISN included the Greek islands, FYROM and Serbia. As mixed migration flows increased significantly, other countries, such as Croatia and Hungary, were added. Information received was disseminated by focal points to an array of service providers. Through the Network, IOM staff communicated relevant information, for instance on migrants and refugees with mobility difficulties, helping national authorities to organise specific transportation to the next transit point.

Whilst the Network proved highly beneficial in sharing rapid-action information, it was only the starting point in understanding the complex journeys of migrants and refugees. To gain better insight into the structure and profile of people on the move, and the assistance they required, a more in-depth data collection intervention was required.

### The Displacement Tracking Matrix and Flow Monitoring Surveys: fostering a deeper understanding of mixed migration flows

*Text message: IOM Skopje to IOM Belgrade (October 2015): Today a train with 8 wagons (app. 1,050 migrants) left at 12.15. Please confirm when train arrives, if field staff is present at entry point.*

1 According to IOM and UNHCR estimates just over 10,000 migrants entered FYROM on 18 October 2015, while the highest numbers were registered on 9 November the same year, when some 11,500 migrants and refugees crossed the border from Greece.

Vulnerable migrants in Gevgelija, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, catching a train to the northern border with Serbia.

*©Caroline Haga/IFRC*

> *Text message: IOM Skopje to IOM Belgrade (November 2015): Train departing 9.40 a.m. (575 migrants) among which 11 with disabilities and 7 pregnant women (observed).*

IOM began rolling out Flow Monitoring Surveys (FMS), a component of its Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), comprising a comprehensive data collection methodology and standardised questionnaire to be used along the Western Balkans route. The FMS offer a way of observing and better understanding trends in mixed migration flows over time through structured data collection and analysis and interviews with migrants and refugees. Flow monitoring was implemented at entry, transit and exit points in Greece, FYROM, Serbia, Croatia, Hungary and Slovenia. The surveys capture data on the socioeconomic background of respondents, their country of origin/habitual residence, reasons for leaving their country of origin/habitual residence, the routes they have taken to reach the Western Balkans, who they are travelling with and their intended countries of final destination. A standard set of questions is applied across the route to ensure a basis for cross-reference and analysis.

According to the survey findings, the top five transit countries outside the Western Balkan route are Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Lebanon and Bulgaria. Data gathered through the surveys in the Western Balkans up to 30 June 2016 shows that, of migrants interviewed, the most common profile is a 28-year-old male who had achieved, up to the point of departure, a secondary education. Generally, he travels with a group fleeing armed conflict or political persecution. He usually pays between an estimated $1,000 and $5,000 for his journey.[2]

While the Flow Monitoring Surveys and the Network captured important data on the journeys of migrants and refugees, they did not shed light on the dangers migrants faced during their journey. The limited opportunities for legal migration created a favourable environment for trafficking. IOM staff operating at different points of the migration route, including on the EWISN and FMS implementation, increasingly came across reports of trafficking and exploitation. To address growing concerns about this phenomenon, a counter-trafficking survey was added to the FMS.

## Counter-trafficking surveys: gauging the extent of trafficking in mixed migration flows

> *Text message: IOM Skopje to IOM Belgrade (December 2015): No trains today. We got info on 460 migrants, however train has not been sent. Apparently they are waiting for at least 600, to arrange transportation.*

2 At the time of writing, 11,089 surveys had been conducted with migrants and refugees travelling through the Western Balkan route.

*Text message: Field Data Collector to IOM Skopje Counter Trafficking Focal Point (March 2016): There is a 16 year old girl from Nigeria in the last group and is traveling alone and with clear signs of distress. She declines to talk with male colleagues.*

One significant difficulty facing Western Balkan countries affected by migrant and refugee movements was recognising and identifying trafficked or exploited people, or people potentially at risk. Given the short-term nature of migrants' stays in many transit points, as well as reluctance among survivors or those at risk of trafficking to seek help and protection, identifying and addressing trafficking proved an immense challenge. Generally, there is a shortage of reliable, consistent and user-friendly primary data concerning many aspects of trafficking.

During counter-trafficking surveys, IOM staff at transit points on the Western Balkan route note information on the presence of predatory behaviour, trafficking and other exploitative practices, ranging from forced or unpaid labour to captivity and offers of arranged marriage. Given that all surveys conducted by IOM are entirely anonymous, the aim is not to identify and refer trafficking survivors as such – though staff do have a standard procedure on how to handle situations where individuals come forward to report an incident. The findings of the counter-trafficking survey are intended to provide an indication of the likely prevalence of trafficking, and improved understanding of the circumstances in which human trafficking can occur.

The survey analysis and findings present clear and compelling evidence of predatory behaviour, including abuse, exploitation or practices which might amount to human trafficking. Based on collected data, out of 4,528 respondents surveyed, 6.5% answered 'yes' to at least one indicator of trafficking and exploitative practices, based on personal experience.[3] An additional 1% of respondents said that, even though they had not directly experienced similar situations, a member of their family travelling with them had. Among the 4,528 respondents, 0.5% said they knew of cases during their journey where someone had been offered cash in exchange for giving blood, organs or a body part. In the majority of cases, these people were friends or relatives of the respondents.

Nationals from Afghanistan, Cameroon, Iraq, Pakistan and Syria had the highest percentages of positive responses to indicators of trafficking or other exploitative practices. Single people or people whose marital status was unknown, men, people travelling alone and young adults between 20 and 30 years of age were more likely to answer 'yes' as well.

The results of the counter-trafficking surveys have led some of the countries along the route to examine existing indicators for identifying survivors of trafficking and exploitation. Consequently, new indicators have been developed that are better able to detect risks of predatory behaviour in the context of mass mixed migration flows.

## Ways forward

*Text message: IOM Skopje to IOM Belgrade (March 2016): - This morning there's no entry at the border. No news when people will be allowed to cross the border. There are 82 people inside the center*

The creation of an information-sharing network filled information gaps between national authorities, and among national authorities, local service providers and civil society organisations. The surveys deepened understanding of the factors determining these flows and the profiles of the migrants and refugees who comprise them. The integration of a counter-trafficking module in the survey sets a positive example for humanitarian emergencies more generally, and forms a solid basis for future counter-trafficking programming in different humanitarian contexts.

The work done in the Western Balkans is part of IOM's on-going effort to collect information on displacement in crises and emergencies. In 2014–15, 14 million displaced people were tracked worldwide through DTM. The breadth and depth of the collected data mean that IOM is in a unique position to correlate information in the country of origin with the information provided by the migrants surveyed en route.

Following the EU–Turkey deal in March 2016, flows in the Western Balkans have decreased significantly. Nevertheless, movements at borders are still closely followed by IOM staff as there is potential for the situation to change over time. Concurrently, IOM staff have refocused their efforts on the situation of stranded migrants by implementing a more in-depth Flow Monitoring Survey. Throughout 2016, IOM rolled out projects in the countries of origin of migrants and refugees in order to further understand the complex nature of mixed migration flows.

**Amelia Stoenescu**, **Ivona Zakoska**, **Daniel Szabo** and **Debora Gonzalez Tejero** are Displacement Tracking Matrix support team members. This article has been drafted with the support of their Assistance to Vulnerable Migrants Unit colleagues. For more information on migration flows to Europe see: http://Migration.iom.int/europe.

3 Six questions in the counter-trafficking survey seek information on the respondent and whether they have during their journey: worked or performed activities without getting the payment they expected; been forced to perform work or activities against their will; been approached by someone offering employment; been approached by someone offering to arrange a marriage (for the respondent or someone in his or her family); been kept at a certain location against their will; or been aware of instances where migrants/refugees en route had been approached by people offering cash in exchange for blood, organs or other body parts.

# Local, dynamic, flexible: healthcare provision in the refugee response

**Gareth Walker**

For Doctors of the World (DOTW) – also known as Médecins du Monde (MDM) – the response to the increase in refugee arrivals in Europe has effectively been a massive expansion of the work we already do with vulnerable people on the continent. As such, DOTW has seen refugees and migrants to Europe in our projects for many years. DOTW France has had a support and advocacy project in Calais for over a decade. However, as the number of people arriving in Europe started to rise significantly, the MDM network mobilised to support specific responses, in Greece especially (Lesvos, Chios, Piraeus, Athens, Idomeni and on ferries between islands and the mainland), in addition to starting new projects supporting local organisations or at registration centres in Serbia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Croatia and Slovenia. Today, the response has grown to 18 sites in Greece, primary health support in Belgrade and on the Serbia/Hungary border, partnerships with local organisations in Slovenia and Croatia, a growing medical support programme in Calabria, Italy, and mobile clinic or support operations in Calais, Dunkirk, Caen and Dieppe in France, and Oostende and Zeebrugge in Belgium. We are also seeing refugees in our clinics in Belgium, France, Germany and the UK. This article highlights some of the distinct but related lessons we have learnt from the response.

## Health provision

Health needs among the refugees are not particularly remarkable. However, our teams noted several observations in Greece and Calais. In Greece, roughly 36% of the patients seen were children, which correlates with estimates that one in three refugees arriving in Greece is under 18. Incomplete immunisation, inadequate safeguarding, lack of health promotion and lack of health screening, for instance for congenital conditions, is a major concern for this group. The combination of incomplete immunisations and cramped living conditions results in susceptible refugees developing diseases such as measles and varicella (chicken pox), a particular threat given their high incidence in some regions of the European Union (EU). Measles immunisation is often seen as a high priority in refugee settings due to the potential for immune-related complications such as pneumonia and diarrhoea. However, in this instance it took a long time for this to be organised, eventually being carried out largely by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), but also by state and other non-state actors.

It is worth considering why it took so long for vaccination to become a clear health action. The first, clear reason is that, until the EU–Turkey deal, we did not have the static population that would normally trigger a vaccination campaign due to the threat of outbreaks. However, we did have camp conditions where diseases would be present. Second, it is difficult to immunise a mobile population properly as coverage rates are difficult to confirm and double immunisations likely. However, without a static population and the risk of outbreak, it can be considered irrelevant to base operations on considerations of coverage. We are not vaccinating against an outbreak, but providing the individual with protection.

The most notable difficulty in health provision has been mental health support. The need for it is clear – not only are people leaving situations of extreme threat and the possibility of trauma, but the journey itself is full of stress and trauma. The ability to treat mental health problems is severely hampered by ongoing, uncertain movement. Incomplete or partial treatment could also risk causing further harm. Since the implementation of the EU–Turkey deal, in Greece and, for a longer period, in Calais, we have seen more profound issues as a result of the journey being halted, with an increase in aggressive behaviour, depression and suicide attempts. It is entirely predictable that, once people's journey has been stopped, they lose hope unless they are engaged in some other form of action for their benefit. The slow process of asylum in Greece has led to feelings of frustration and powerlessness, while the conditions of camp life lead to boredom and loss of agency. Many organisations in Greece are now offering psychosocial interventions, including group discussions, art therapy and counselling, along with significant efforts by Internews especially to try to address some of the causes of frustration through better communication with and from camp residents. However, this is still a massive gap in the response, with wide-ranging implications for the asylum process and, if asylum applications are successful, for how well people are able to adjust to their new conditions.

Irrespective of the route taken, deprivation during the journey, poor living conditions and lack of adequate hygiene have increased vulnerability to respiratory conditions, gastrointestinal illness and skin diseases. Unsurprisingly, DOTW data from Northern France, the last barrier for many, shows that around 63% of health problems were related to living conditions and almost a quarter were musculoskeletal injuries. This is of course most concerning for patient groups with particular vulnerabilities – children, pregnant women, the disabled and those with existing conditions such as diabetes or other non-communicable diseases. Lack of access to, or perceived time to access, healthcare will result in increased morbidity and mortality. However, more also needs to be done to call on states to address terrible living conditions, in Northern France especially.

## The value of local knowledge and presence

DOTW has run operations in Greece for the last 25 years and manages a network of five polyclinics across the country (in

Volunteer doctors for Doctors of the World treat refugees in Lesvos, Greece.

*©Kristof Vadino*

Athens, Perama, Thessaloniki, Chania and Patras). These are primarily for the local vulnerable Greek population, but all are welcome, and services are free. The polyclinics operate with volunteer doctors of different specialties (internists, paediatricians, surgeons, gynaecologists, dermatologists, cardiologists, ophthalmologists, orthopaedic surgeons, radiologists, pulmonologists, ENT, psychiatrists, neurologists), nurses, psychologists and social workers. DOTW Greece also runs social programmes, mobile clinics and research projects. The response to the increasing numbers of refugees arriving in Greece therefore grew from a well-established operation, and has been able to gain access to situations that other, larger INGOs could not through established relationships with local authorities or government ministries.

Having this backbone of polyclinics and established networks within the Greek medical community also allowed flexibility. Existing relationships with secondary care facilities and staff meant that DOTW was able to expedite referrals despite the need for translation and a lack of resources in the health system. As DOTW needed to scale up its work, our reputation locally made it easier to identify staff who also knew what DOTW did and the way that we work. This meant that we were able to recruit effective, inducted and informed teams quickly as temporary concentrations of people developed, particularly in Athens. The vast majority of staff, clinical and non-clinical, are Greek volunteers.

In Calais and Dunkirk the challenges were different. Our long-term programme there has involved assisting vulnerable people, often migrants or refugees, to obtain health care within the French national system. Our presence increased from a small team of seven or eight to over 40 volunteers as the Calais camp grew. Our services also developed to include running a clinic providing primary health care and referral support along with psychosocial assistance and information and cultural advice. Surge support was provided by volunteers from France and the UK. As in Greece, DOTW was able to negotiate access and action with local authorities where some larger INGOs could not because of the long-standing relationships it had established. However, it should be noted that we did not protect this relationship at the cost of access: following severe vandalism and destruction of our clinics by suspected far right groups, DOTW changed tack and successfully pursued legal action against the French authorities for failing to provide basic services to refugees and migrants. Winning this legal battle has been instrumental in improving basic conditions in Calais.

## Dignity

One of the worst aspects of the situation in Europe has been the systematic dehumanising of the refugee population. This has manifested itself in many ways, most noticeably in politicians' talk of 'swarms' and the development of policies that are designed to offer help, but only in distant places (with

notable exceptions). In on the ground operations this can manifest itself in different ways. For DOTW, one noticeable issue has been the use of face masks and protective overalls. It has been our experience that many actors in Europe feel the need to protect themselves from a perceived risk of contamination. We have seen this on rescue boats in the Mediterranean and in registration facilities all along the Balkan route. This is an entirely unnecessary precaution, but one that strongly contributes to the narrative of 'them and us': a separation based on negative imagery of infection or contagion, that refugees are not people like us and that we need to take precautions, even when 'helping' them. (In fact, the risk is probably the reverse – refugees risk contracting vaccine-preventable diseases that the local population is immune to.) Quite apart from the effect on the public perception of refugees that media images present, DOTW is also very concerned about the psychological effect that presenting assistance in this form can have on the refugees themselves. Encouragingly, we were able to change this practice on a local level in Slovenia, where local health staff agreed to abandon face masks. We would encourage all humanitarian agencies to be vigilant for small actions such as this, in addition to higher-level policy advocacy.

## Keep moving, at all costs

Most refugee or IDP responses tend to be mounted in places where the population will remain, or at least stop for a reasonable period. One of the major challenges when working with refugees along the Balkan route, at least until the change in circumstances brought about by the European Union (EU)–Turkey deal in March, was that agencies were trying to intervene while people were still on the move.

Trying to assist people while they are on the move makes provision of services difficult for several reasons. From a health perspective, it makes continuity of care virtually impossible because the primary concern for refugees is to keep moving and there is no time for follow-up appointments or referrals. This has resulted in people walking out of consultations if they receive a message that a border may open, or people missing follow-up appointments. More seriously, we have also seen situations where parents would not allow a child to be referred to hospital, as the opportunity cost of spending time in hospital is perceived to be too high. This is not to imply that people are ignorant of the importance of healthcare; indeed, refugees have repeatedly told us how much they value it. The point is that it is less important than completing the journey. This is also apparent when you consider the other risks to life that people have been willing to accept, from being smuggled across the Mediterranean to hanging on to the bottom of trucks in Calais.

DOTW responded to this problem by analysing people's situation at different points along their journey. Although the context was always changeable, we searched for particular times when refugees considered themselves at rest, and with no need to move. Finding these periods would allow refugees to engage with a service more, enabling us to deliver a more compassionate response of higher quality. Rather than expecting that refugees would avail themselves of services at the cost of their onward movement, this approach changed the way we considered where services should be established.

However, the list of suitable intervention points under these criteria was startlingly short. Even when going through registration processes or waiting for transport, refugees were constantly looking for any opportunity to move on. One intervention point that DOTW did identify was the ferry journey between the Greek islands and the mainland. Despite only being an overnight trip, providing services to people on the ferries was more effective, and provided a markedly different environment in which to manage both clinical and psychosocial consultations. Catching people when they were at rest, and providing services to them in this state of mind, allowed a measure of dignity in the process that other sites would not have made possible. Individual interaction was much easier, and people were more willing to open up. Providing time to talk about problems resulted in greater awareness of chronic conditions and the impact of lack of access to primary health care, along with getting an idea of people's mental state.

Contrast this with the situation many hundreds of miles away, in Calais and Dunkirk. Here, we repeatedly see people who have not moved for months, but are very resistant to anything that may tie them down for any time at all, including hospitalisation for severe conditions. We manage to refer patients for injuries that will prevent them from moving on, such as a broken leg, but face refusal for potentially more serious conditions that are not immediately so debilitating. Despite being in a position where they have not moved for months, we repeatedly see evidence that taking time to address health needs which could cost an opportunity to move on is a risk people are not willing to take. Opportunity costs count for this population.

**Gareth Walker** is International Programme Manager at Doctors of the World UK.

# The humanitarian impulse: alive and well among the citizens of Europe

**John Borton**

In December 2015, a British firefighter was volunteering on the Greek island of Lesvos with the Swedish volunteer group Lighthouse Relief, operating a search and rescue and medical services team based at Korakas lighthouse on the island's north shore. Visiting Molyvos to buy medical supplies, he went to a restaurant to eat and found himself sitting next to a man wearing a Red Cross shirt. 'Are you working for the Red Cross?' he asked. 'Yes, I am.' 'Well, where are all the rest of you?' asked the volunteer. 'We don't need more of us here because you volunteers are doing such a good job' came the reply. Even if meant to be humorous, the reply contained a telling truth, for a remarkable feature of the humanitarian response to the movement of refugees and vulnerable migrants in Europe has been the scale and range of the response by volunteers and civil society groups.

Greek fishermen have rescued or assisted thousands of refugees and vulnerable migrants travelling in overloaded and unseaworthy boats and inflatable dinghies. Local people in Greece, Italy, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Serbia, Hungary, Croatia, Slovenia and other countries along the main transit routes have provided water, food, shelter, shoes, clothing and other forms of assistance to people walking past their homes or gathered in their hundreds at railway stations in Budapest, Vienna, Hamburg and other cities. Across Europe, tens of thousands of people have contributed their time to collect and sort donated clothes and shoes, load and despatch trucks and organise fundraising events. Thousands have taken extended breaks from their jobs to work in search and rescue teams, manage transit camps, run field kitchens, provide legal advice and offer accommodation and support to refugees and asylum-seekers.

Based on private research, including interviews with ten selected volunteers, this article provides a preliminary indication of the scale and characteristics of the volunteer response, identifies the events and motivations that contributed to it and briefly reflects on the 'volunteer phenomenon' and its potential implications for humanitarian action.

## Assessing the scale of the overall volunteer response

A Provisional Inventory compiled as part of the research for this article has identified 216 volunteer groups across Europe as having participated in, or contributed to, the response. Of these, 180 were formed during 2015 or early 2016. This list, drawn from the Inventory, is indicative of the range of groups involved:

- Berlin Refugee Help: providing support to arriving refugees including language phrasebooks for use by refugees and by German volunteers.
- Bezirk Jennersdorf – Flüchtlingshilfe: an Austrian group coordinating aid to refugees at Jennersdorf near Austria's border with Hungary.
- Dirty Girls of Lesvos: providing industrial-scale laundry services for refugees (blankets, bedding etc.) on Lesvos and mainland Greece.
- East Midlands Solidarity: a British group (with subgroups in Derbyshire, Leicester and Nottingham) providing clothes, supplies and funding to refugees and vulnerable migrants in northern France, Greece and Syria.
- Information Point for Refugee Legal Information Volunteers: an information-sharing forum for lawyers and legally trained volunteers providing legal services to refugees.
- ProActiva Open Arms: a Barcelona-based group that provided search and rescue services around Lesvos in 2015, and is in the process of expanding its work to the central Mediterranean.
- Rastplatz Project: a Swiss group providing food and general support to refugees along the Balkans route; it also runs the main food kitchen in Dunkirk.
- Refugee Rights Data Project (RRDP): a UK-based group undertaking censuses and surveys to support policy-making, starting with a major survey in Calais in February 2016.
- Sitchting Bootvluchteling/Boat Refugee Foundation: a Dutch group providing search and rescue services, supplies and a medical mission on Lesvos, Leros, Kos and Samos, and in Athens and on the Greek mainland.
- Urgence Réfugiés Calais, Lille et environs: collecting material donations (food, clothing, building materials, fire extinguishers, carpets) as well as funds for refugees in Calais, Dunkirk and Lille.

It is a common, if rather crude, practice within the humanitarian sector to gauge the size and scale of a humanitarian programme or organisation by its overall budget and staff numbers. However, for most of the groups listed in the Provisional Inventory such measures are not meaningful. Even where expenditure data is readily available, most of the goods and services provided are privately donated and so do not have a measured monetary value. Volunteers give their time gratis, either funding themselves or through crowdfunding sites such as GoFundMe, JustGiving and MyDonate. Moreover, actual time inputs vary widely – from evening and weekend contributions by home-based volunteers to full-time contributions of 12 months or more in directly operational roles in other countries. Whilst sorting clothes and loading trucks are essentially low-skilled tasks, a significant number of doctors, lawyers, logisticians,


Depot for donated material for refugees at Röszke, Hungary, set up UNHCR and staffed by volunteers.

*©UNHCR/Mark Henley*

accountants and other professionals have contributed their specialist skills to volunteer groups.

## Events and motivations contributing to the scale of the volunteer response

Against the backdrop of growing numbers of refugees and vulnerable migrants arriving in Europe through 2015, and the associated media coverage, especially from July onwards, particular events stimulated the interest of those who became volunteers and spurred them into action.

The most influential event was undoubtedly the publication and global dissemination of images of three-year-old Alan Kurdi, whose body was washed ashore on 2 September near Bodrum in Turkey following the sinking of the dinghy in which his family were trying to cross to the Greek island of Kos. It is no coincidence that many groups in the Provisional Inventory were set up during September 2015. Some volunteers also refer to the earlier drowning of over 1,200 migrants and refugees in the central Mediterranean in a single week in April 2015.

As well as such tragic events, it appears that the use of pejorative terms by politicians also spurred people into taking voluntary action. On 30 July, when asked about the refugee and migrant situation in Calais, which was causing travel delays for British tourists, British Prime Minister David Cameron spoke of a 'swarm' of people wanting to come to the UK. Over the following 24 hours the Facebook group Calais People to People Solidarity – Action from the UK increased its followers from around 100 to 600. According to the administrator of the group, 'David Cameron was responsible for an explosion of interest by British people wanting to help the camp residents in Calais'. Also apparent from the testimonies of volunteers is the critical role of social media in facilitating and expanding the volunteer response. Immediately following Cameron's 'swarms' comment, a young English woman, Jaz O'Hara, her brother and two friends living in Tunbridge, Kent, decided to drive an hour and a half to Calais to see the refugee and migrant camp for themselves. At that point Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and Médecins du Monde (MDM) were providing limited medical services to camp residents, and a very small number of volunteer groups were struggling to provide other forms of assistance. Conditions were appalling, but Jaz and her friends were given a hospitable welcome by camp residents. Returning home they established CalAid, a grassroots group providing food and clothing to the camp. Jaz wrote an informative, passionate Facebook post to her friends on 6 August that went viral and, in the space of just a few days, was shared over 60,000 times. Within days, vanloads of clothes had been donated and £132,000 raised – some of which was used by her brother to make a documentary film of the camp. Subsequently the group formed another grassroots organisation, The WorldWide Tribe, to raise awareness of migration and displacement issues.

A similar story was repeated in London towards the end of August when three well-connected friends, Lliana Bird (a DJ with Radio X), Dawn O'Porter (a writer and TV presenter) and Josie Naughton (a former manager with the band Coldplay), launched a social media campaign #helpcalais to raise funds and collect goods to take to Calais on a truck scheduled to depart on 17 September. The public response was huge and, following the death of Alan Kurdi, became overwhelming. Soon #helpcalais became Help Refugees. As well as sending several trucks to Calais, Help Refugees helped lead efforts to improve the logistical operations of the volunteer groups working in Calais and replace tents in the camp with insulated shelters, and began supporting volunteer groups in Idomeni, Lesvos and other Greek islands. The founders' connections, combined with innovative approaches to donations using online purchasing of pre-selected goods (sleeping bags, jackets, shoes) provided by a commercial company, which then delivers directly to the warehouse in Calais, has enabled Help Refugees to raise over £2 million in funding and provide £1m of new donated goods. The group has also provided significant funding and support to other volunteer groups working in France and Greece, including MDM.

Such spontaneous outpourings of voluntary humanitarian action took place across Europe. At the end of August 2015 in Zagreb, Croatia, a musician and his wife, Luka and Lejla Juranica, were moved by TV news coverage showing refugees and vulnerable migrants crossing into Croatia from Hungary at Roszke. They collected food and other items and, with a group of friends, drove to the border crossing, where the only support being provided was in the form of medical services from MSF. Returning to Zagreb they organised a concert called 'Are You Syrious?' – a name that was subsequently adopted for their grassroots organisation. Using money from the concert they took a truck with enough food for 4,000 people to Tovarnik, another entry point to Croatia from Hungary. Subsequently they established a supply station between Bapska on the border with Serbia and the camp set up by the Croatian authorities 17km away at Opatovac. No agencies were present at Bapska at that point. At the height of the flows 7,000 people a day were crossing the border.[1]

The absence, or at the very least perceived absence, of other humanitarian actors was an important motivating force for many volunteers and voluntary groups. In early September Gabriela Andreevska, who was organising the purchase and distribution of water and food in the small town of Gevgelija in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) (just across the border from the Greek town of Idomeni), stated her motivations clearly: 'I am doing this work because I have never been close to so many people sleeping rough in the streets on cold concrete – pregnant women and babies and sick old men – and nobody is helping them!'[2] In a similar vein the website of UK Action for Refugees, a grassroots organisation set up in 2015, states:

> *We began as a group of like-minded individuals who realised that the governments and main NGOs seemed unable to respond to a humanitarian crisis that was happening in their own backyard. What we could never have imagined was that there were thousands of other people who felt exactly the same way, disempowered and desperate to help, but unable to figure out how. Through the power of social media we reached out and they reached back, and through our combined efforts we have been able to become an organisation that can and does make a difference.*[3]

## Some initial reflections

Faced with a dramatic increase in the number of refugees and vulnerable migrants arriving and transiting Europe during 2015 and early 2016, national authorities were either reluctant to respond or struggled to do so in ways that were timely, effective and comprehensive. The formal humanitarian system also struggled to operate effectively in a context that was legally, politically and operationally challenging. Consequently, there were significant gaps in humanitarian provision which in many areas were met, or at least partially met, by a remarkable outpouring of humanitarian support by volunteers and civil society groups. Even now, several months after the March 2016 EU–Turkey deal sharply reduced the flow of refugees and vulnerable migrants through Greece and the Balkans, volunteer groups continue to provide a wide range of services in many European countries.

Social media, notably Facebook, and free messaging services such as WhatsApp played a critical role in facilitating the 'volunteer phenomenon', enabling individual volunteers to link up with each other and form effective groups. These 'new' media also allowed volunteer groups to receive information from representatives on the ground and, coupled with their flexible, trust-based funding arrangements, enabled them to adapt rapidly to changing conditions and needs.

Much more study is needed to objectively assess the scale of the contribution and benefits provided by this 'volunteer phenomenon'. Such research would help answer questions around the quality of services provided by volunteers, the effectiveness of their ad hoc but often creative coordination mechanisms, their ability to adequately safeguard children and vulnerable people in their care, the degree of protection afforded to refugees and migrants through the volunteer groups' on-the-ground, round-the-clock presence, and the

1 Nathan Miller, 'The Story of "Are You Syrious?" a Refugees Aid Organisation', 23 November 2015, http://nathanmiller.co/the-story-of-are-you-syrious-a-refugees-aid-organisation-3/#sthash.kuuYBYJ5.dpbs.

2 'One Woman's Strength Is Helping Refugees in Macedonia', Al Jazeera English, 8 September 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V79iNNmBJe8.

3 See http://www.ukactionforrefugees.com/about-us.

effectiveness of the working relationships between volunteer groups and international humanitarian agencies. Nevertheless, even before more detailed study is undertaken, it is patently clear that, in the absence of such an outpouring of popular humanitarian action, many more refugees and vulnerable migrants would have died in the Mediterranean and Aegean, on the overland routes through Greece and the Balkans and in the unregistered camps in Calais, Dunkirk and other areas of Europe. Clearly, the humanitarian impulse is still alive and well in Europe.

**John Borton** is a Senior Research Associate with the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) at ODI. Between November 2015 and June 2016 he undertook self-funded research on the humanitarian response to the refugee and migrant flows in Europe.

# The Starfish Foundation: a local response to a global crisis

**Emma Eggink and Melinda McRostie**

Of the 500,000 refugees and vulnerable migrants who transited through Lesvos in 2015, over 200,000 passed through the small town of Molyvos. I arrived in Molyvos in July 2015 to take part in a summer school at the University of the Aegean, which is based on Lesvos, and became involved with the grassroots volunteer initiative providing assistance to arriving refugees that three months later was formally established as the Starfish Foundation. Faced with a delayed and patchy response by the government and professional humanitarian agencies, coupled with resistance among sections of the local community to the idea of supporting the refugees, local and international volunteers decided to take the provision of relief into their own hands.

## The early days of a local response

The collective of volunteers from which the Starfish Foundation was established began to form in the summer of 2010, when small numbers of refugees and vulnerable migrants, mainly from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, began arriving on Lesvos. The group consisted of a variety of people from Molyvos, including shop and restaurant owners, pensioners and teachers. They came together at irregular intervals to provide assistance to refugees arriving either on the shores in small boats and rubber dinghies, or brought into Molyvos harbour by the Greek coastguard.

Molyvos is a small town with a year-round population of about 1,000. It lies on the north coast of Lesvos, just six miles from Turkey. The coastguard office responsible for the northern coast is situated in Molyvos, which meant that refugee boats intercepted by its patrol vessels were usually brought into Molyvos' picturesque harbour, alongside some of the busiest restaurants in this popular tourist town. Like the rest of Greece, Molyvos had suffered a severe economic downturn and there were no funds available for the coastguard, police or municipality to put in place formal structures to receive the sporadic refugee arrivals. Hence, as was the case on other Greek islands, locals provided assistance each time a boat was brought in.

In early 2015, an increase in the number of refugees arriving in Molyvos prompted the volunteers to start operating a more fixed structure: using a schedule, having set shifts and renting storage space close to the harbour, where sandwiches were made and emergency supplies stored. This more fixed group operated from a restaurant in the harbour owned by the Starfish Foundation's current director, Melinda McRostie, and her husband Theo Kosmetos.

By the spring, what had been a quiet phenomenon that local volunteers had been fairly successfully addressing escalated into a crisis that was extremely disruptive to a municipality dependent on tourism, and with no formal structures in place to deal with the situation. In particular, it became apparent that a reception site would be necessary to receive people in a fair and dignified way. Refugees were arriving mainly in the north of the island, and the lack of a central site and local law forbidding the transport of non-registered refugees to the official registration location in the south of the island meant that large numbers of people had to make their way on foot. There was only one location along the route where people could find shelter, run by the local charity Aggalia. The German NGO Borderline Europe proposed setting up a reception facility in the north of the island, but when this proposal met with fierce local resistance the Molyvos volunteer group took matters into their own hands, renting a small plot of land next to the harbour where they established a small transit site where people rescued by the coastguard could wait for a bus to take them to the registration site.

## Responding to an evolving crisis

In August 2015 the number of people arriving in Lesvos increased substantially. In less than two weeks, the number of arrivals passing through Molyvos daily went from about 150 to around 1,000. However, the relief effort was not coordinated and there were still no formal provisions in place to receive people and transport them to the south. After protests from islanders, the law was changed in June to allow private individuals and a handful of buses, run first by MSF and then the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), to transport non-registered migrants from a car park in Molyvos. It was, however, evident that more needed to be done. As international NGOs were not providing an adequate response, volunteer groups assumed greater responsibility. On the beaches, volunteers

Volunteer assisting with the registration of refugees rescued by the coast guard in Lesvos, Greece.

*©Marcus Q Rhinelander*

were coordinated by local resident Eric Kempson and his family. From there, refugees walked to the car park in Molyvos, before travelling on to the registration centre in the south of the island. Increasingly, tourists and international volunteers started helping the local volunteer team by providing clothes and water, and ensuring that the few available buses were loaded peacefully. For some local volunteers, the coordination and logistics involved in providing food and other supplies and arranging for sufficient buses to transport people arriving in the car park was becoming a full-time occupation.

Despite the fact that the majority of refugees were arriving in the north, NGO activities were concentrated in the camps at Moria and Kara Tepe in the south of the island. In part this was down to local resistance: whereas in the south the mayor had welcomed the help offered by international organisations, in Molyvos the creation of a semi-permanent transit site for refugees was opposed by members of the local community, who feared that it would attract more people and develop into a permanent camp. There was particular concern that Molyvos might become one of the 'hotspots' the European Union (EU) was considering setting up. Limited access to information (including in Greek) from the media and organisations such as UNHCR was a key factor in fuelling suspicion and fear.

## Becoming humanitarians

Towards the end of August, tensions in the town led to a vote by the local council to close off the car park where the refugees were gathering, leaving the volunteer team without a site to distribute relief items and load refugees onto buses. Refugees were stuck at the entrance to the town, with no shelter, little assistance and no transport. Although the International Rescue Committee (IRC) came to an agreement with the Tourism Association and the Molyvos Municipality that allowed it to open a camp along a rather inaccessible road far from any villages, local volunteers recognised that a short-term solution for the reception of refugees was urgently needed.

In mid-September, the owner of the OXY nightclub agreed that the team could use his car park. A few gazebos were put up and IRC started running more buses in the large space now available. Over the following three and a half months, between mid-September and Christmas, at least 150,000 refugees passed through OXY. When daily arrivals started exceeding 3,000 in late September, we were unable to load everyone for transport to the south of the island during daylight hours, and OXY became an overnight camp. The site was designed and run entirely by volunteers from the Starfish team, with site managers and rotating teams responsible for a ticketing system, crowd control, loading buses, the distribution of food and clothes, logistics between warehouses and the site and the scheduling and training of volunteers. In late October some 85 trained volunteers were working on our team. Some of the refugees passing through the site also helped out, or even returned after obtaining their registration papers in the south of the island.

At OXY we learned what it meant to work as humanitarians. The absence of formal government or UNHCR reception sites and the arrival of more international NGOs on the island during September meant that many organisations were willing to provide relief, yet could not set up something sustainable. The OXY site provided a space in which they were able to offer their services. Soon after OXY opened, the French NGO Women and Health Alliance International (WAHA) began providing medical services, and UNHCR provided us with our first big rub hall, able to accommodate 200 people. IRC provided buses and protection staff for the site. The increasing number of volunteers and partner organisations working at OXY meant that the site became more difficult to manage for a small and rapidly evolving team that still consisted entirely of people with no previous camp management experience. We had to learn quickly on the job, while managing the response to a crisis that was becoming more severe every day. On the plus side, we were able to respond quickly and dynamically as we were not weighed down by bureaucracy.

From practical experience the team realised that, to continue to respond to the accelerating crisis, we needed to professionalise further. Our efforts relied entirely on donations from tourists and volunteers, who brought clothes and groceries or left money at local supermarkets and pharmacies to pay our ever-increasing bills. To continue our work, it became necessary to set up a legal foundation and a bank account so that we could accept donations from abroad. We also started providing salaries to build capacity and retain those volunteers who had taken on responsibility for managing funds, media work and managing other volunteers. In mid-October, the Starfish Foundation was officially established as a non-profit organisation.[1]

As a young organisation we benefited from the guidance of established NGOs. Some offered training on frameworks and principles in the humanitarian sector, psychosocial support and field security. The Danish Red Cross provided training for the board and psychological support for volunteers, and helped us to create a phased plan for the physical development of the OXY site and manage the increasing number of NGOs working at the site. Other invaluable support from humanitarians and other professionals included guidance on grant writing and the development of evaluation procedures and simple reporting systems to feed back to donors and supporters.

At times there was friction between professionals and volunteers, mainly arising, I believe, from the tension between volunteers' eagerness to respond to needs rapidly, while professionals worked on setting up systems that would enable an efficient response in the long term. Among volunteers, I sometimes sensed dissatisfaction with criticism of their work from the professionals, who sometimes failed to recognise that the systems in place were born in the midst of a crisis, and had developed precisely because the large NGOs had been absent. To ensure that we all had the same aims and perspectives, we obliged everyone working at the site, whether volunteers or seasoned humanitarian workers, to attend our induction session. Many people, but not all, recognised that it was useful to become familiar with our philosophy and working systems, the design of the site and the people working on our team.

## Future outlook

By Christmas 2015 the influx of refugees had decreased drastically. As the OXY site was only intended as a temporary expedient, and the IRC had since opened Apanemo camp close to Molyvos, the team decided that it was time to hand over responsibility for the reception of refugees and start closing OXY down. In the months that followed, our volunteer team worked in various locations on the island, including Moria camp and several reception facilities for unaccompanied minors. The changing situation and the uncertainty surrounding the EU–Turkey deal, under which all new arrivals are detained and processed in closed camps managed by the Greek government, have required us to be extremely flexible and to think hard about our mission and our future. The core team has discussed in depth whether we should shift our long-term focus to evolving needs in education, psychosocial support and legal assistance, both here and on the mainland. Our organisation was, however, born out of a local need. The team was stepping in to address an urgent situation unfolding on our doorstep. Now, as the situation in northern Lesvos is no longer urgent, we have decided to return to our initial intent. Starfish will continue to operate on a much smaller scale, focusing mainly on rebuilding the local community, which has lost its main source of income following a significant drop-off in tourism. We are still supporting various camps with food and clothes.

The Starfish Foundation is an example of a 'pop-up' grassroots relief phenomenon. Organisations like ours can perform functions that NGOs have to spend longer deliberating on. Strengthened by our knowledge of the local context, we were able to respond much more rapidly and effectively to needs as they arose. The potential of grassroots organisations in emergency response can be stimulated, supported and guided by NGOs. When this is done adequately – with clear information and lines of communication with the local community and local organisations, and a willingness to protect local livelihoods and foster relations with those within the local community who know how to navigate sensitive local issues – the potential of grassroots organisations is huge. In fact, many former members of our own volunteer team have used the experience they gained in Lesvos to continue to work elsewhere in the refugee response, either professionally or with other volunteer teams.

**Emma Eggink** helped found the Starfish Foundation, for which she has been working as a volunteer and then as a Programme Manager since July 2015. Special thanks to Melinda McRostie and Elena Michael for their extensive input and insightful remarks during the drafting of this article.

1 The official legal form of the Starfish Foundation is known in Greek as ΑΣΤΙΚΗ ΜΗ ΚΕΡΔΟΣΚΟΠΙΚΗ ΕΤΑΙΡΕΙΑ (AMKE), which translates as 'non-profit organisation', requiring a board and statutes.

# National volunteers in an international crisis: the view from the inside

**Kate Latimir**

Volunteers have been at the heart of the migration response in Greece. They are often the first faces seen by refugees on Greece's beaches, and a reassuring presence delivering food parcels, health care, psychosocial support and family tracing services in temporary camps, informal settlements and detention centres. They are being drained emotionally, physically and personally, yet they remain dedicated to supporting these vulnerable people.

The Hellenic Red Cross (HRC) and its network of over 1,000 volunteers has been at the forefront of the refugee crisis in Europe, working tirelessly to ensure access to services and support for hundreds of thousands of migrants in and around Northern Greece, the islands (Lesvos, Kos, Samos, Chios, Rhodes, Crete) and Attica. The experience of Red Cross volunteers offers an excellent example of local people mobilising in response to a humanitarian crisis unfolding before them.

The extraordinary response of international volunteers in this crisis has rightly received much coverage. Yet research and policy focused on the crisis has yet to engage with the experiences of local volunteers. Understanding the complex motivations and specific needs of local volunteers and how they can best be supported is crucial to sustaining the response in the long term, and ensuring positive relations between Greeks and refugees. It also provides an interesting example of national humanitarian action, albeit in a developed context. As such, a number of interviews and focus group discussions were held by the British Red Cross with HRC volunteers in late May 2016, exploring the challenges they face and their reflections on the response to date.

## National humanitarian action

> *'We had seen scenes like this on the TV, but nothing prepares you for the reality … the mission is now in our country'*
> (Vagelis, HRC volunteer, Thessaloniki)

Volunteer action has been part of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement for over 150 years and is one of the seven fundamental principles that bind the National Societies, the International Committee and the Federation. The 1,000-strong HRC volunteer workforce carry out their specific roles – which range from search and rescue to first aid, family tracing support and social welfare – on a part-time basis. Many are retired or unemployed, whilst others combine their volunteer role with paid work. Unlike the profile of international volunteers involved in the refugee response, which tends to be young and mixed gender, often providing short-term assistance in-country, HRC volunteers are predominantly female, with the vast majority over the age of 40. Almost two-thirds have served in the organisation for over a decade.


Hellenic Red Cross volunteers bring relief items to a reception centre on the island of Lesvos, Greece.

*©Stephen Ryan/IFRC*

The injection of international funds for the response has enabled the National Society to expand its operations, workforce and volunteer numbers, particularly among university students and young people. Gabriel, a new volunteer recruit in Lesvos, explains: 'Last August I was on the beach with a few friends trying to assist refugees who had just arrived, but we were not prepared or trained to deal with what confronted us. We were so relieved when we saw HRC volunteers coming to support us – from that day on I wanted to volunteer for the Red Cross'. Most volunteers are positive about this expansion, although for some long-standing volunteers, with ten or more years of service, the scale, pace and staff turnover characteristic of an international response has proved challenging. Many volunteers say they are aware of the existence of other humanitarian organisations, but have little interaction with them. Volunteers commented that their focus is necessarily on the specific task at hand, and they therefore have limited understanding of external coordination mechanisms or of the entirety of the response.

Certainly, changes in the leadership and coordination of the international response are a problem for volunteers. In response to the refugee arrivals in Greece, the Red Cross Movement

increased its support to the HRC, which included international emergency appeals for funding, deployment of emergency rosters to support WASH and health among other sectors, as well as the deployment of international staff to provide support in a range of areas, from cash-based responses to community engagement. As is typical in an international emergency response, the Red Cross Movement and other humanitarian agencies have experienced high turnover among staff brought in to coordinate and manage different elements of the response. Volunteers noted the difficulty in developing and maintaining relationships within the international humanitarian community as a result of this constant flux. Significantly, the arrival of international humanitarian aid workers in a developed context with high unemployment has left many Greek volunteers frustrated, particularly given the chaotic scenes that marked the initial stages of the response.

Many national volunteers who have worked principally with their local communities have found it difficult to understand the specific needs and vulnerabilities of refugees and migrants with different cultural and religious backgrounds. Due to the spontaneous nature of the response and the need for rapid expansion, many volunteers received little practical training to prepare them for working with a number of different nationalities. A majority of the volunteers interviewed cited cultural sensitivity as their main challenge, having learnt much of what not to do through trial and error. As such, there have been numerous requests for training on the ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds of refugees.

In parallel, volunteers report receiving daily requests for information on asylum from migrants, and felt ineffectual if they were unable to provide advice or refer people to an appropriate service. Although the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) provides a short briefing in the initial stages of their training, many volunteers felt that they would benefit from a deeper understanding of referral mechanisms, indicating a clear desire to participate and coordinate more effectively in the overall humanitarian response.

Having worked in fire-fighting mode since the onset of the crisis, the volunteers have had little time to develop their knowledge of the wider context and skill set, which may make it harder for them to take a more active role if (or when) the international community exits. The longevity of the Red Cross volunteers' engagement, as opposed to the temporary nature of international staff deployments and international volunteering, underscores the importance of supporting national volunteers to become more central to the response so that it can be sustained in what is now becoming a protracted crisis.

## Volunteering: a bridge between different communities

> *'We all live under the same sun … we need to appreciate the things we have in common'* (Pascalia, HRC volunteer in Lesvos)

A striking characteristic of the response has been the remarkable mobilisation of Greek voluntary organisations and individuals providing aid to migrants despite facing unprecedented levels of unemployment and poverty themselves. The HRC reports that applications to volunteer have increased by over a third since the start of the crisis, with 350 new recruits joining the organisation. Nevertheless, the HRC's response to the crisis has at times been perceived to be to the detriment of vulnerable Greeks. Prior to the crisis, the HRC focused on supporting local communities and the elderly through social welfare programmes, first aid and emergency response to earthquakes and wildfires. A greater focus on support for 'outsiders' has not always been welcome. As one HRC volunteer in Thessaloniki put it, people 'don't have much knowledge of the situation and assume that the refugees are carrying diseases and weapons … People are concerned'.

When asked how they deal with adverse reactions to migrants and their work, volunteers are quick to refer to a self-imposed responsibility beyond the delivery of services: that of providing a link between the migrants and their own communities. Many feel that their personal contact and experiences working with migrants have helped foster improved understanding and developed social cohesion. One 19-year-old Red Cross volunteer remarked: 'I relate the stories I hear to my friends and family which helps build bridges and understanding. My experience has inspired others to volunteer and lessened the fear some people had of the refugees'. Volunteers' efforts to ease anxiety and encourage relations between the host and migrant communities are recognised and promoted by the National Society. For example, HRC is currently exploring education campaigns in schools and universities as a way of encouraging a new generation into volunteerism and sensitising these groups on the situation of migrants in their country.

As the context shifts from the humanitarian needs of people on the move to the needs of people in camps and detention centres, the role of volunteers as advocates for migrants is becoming ever more important. Volunteers note that their communities are increasingly concerned about the long-term nature of the crisis, with the fate of over 53,000 refugees entangled in the wider politics surrounding the deal between the European Union (EU) and Turkey[1] as well as the wider socio-political crisis in Greece: 'my neighbours are sceptical about the future – we are a poor country and there are not enough jobs. The majority want to help with what they can, but we are all uncertain about what the future holds – this situation is not sustainable'. The lack of proximity of local communities and migrants now confined to camps and detention centres, combined with the increased international funding being provided to address their long-term needs, will only serve to increase the distance between migrants and local communities, underlining the key role of volunteers in

1 Under the deal, new migrants arriving in Greece who are found not to be in genuine need of asylum are returned to Turkey. In exchange, the EU will take a Syrian in Turkey who has been declared in need of asylum.

bridging this divide. Ultimately, it is clear that the humanity and solidarity expressed in the act of volunteering has a tangible impact on those receiving assistance, those providing it and society more broadly.

## Volunteer support

> *'There are volunteers who are unemployed and yet continue to volunteer … we see problems that are bigger than our own and we want to help'* (Dimitris, HRC volunteer, Athens)

In witnessing this crisis, many volunteers will experience significant trauma themselves. Factors such as support from field coordinators, access to adequate equipment and training, the types of roles being undertaken by volunteers (for example providing psychosocial support to migrants) and length of working hours were also cited as having a strong impact on mental wellbeing. It is therefore vital that we invest more in providing care and assisting in the recovery of volunteers to avoid burn-out and loss of capacity in the future.

This includes comparatively simple measures such as ensuring adequate funding for equipment and travel costs, or fostering a sense among volunteers that their organisation cares for their wellbeing. Due to the urgent nature of the migration response in its early phase, the HRC was initially unable to meet volunteer needs. However, with the change in context to a more static situation, greater efforts are being made to strengthen capacity across a variety of sectors, including psychosocial support, hygiene promotion and cash transfer programmes.

The international community has arguably underestimated the contribution of Greek volunteers, including within the HRC. With more deliberation, investment and utilisation of their skills, the part that national volunteers are already playing could be extended and enhanced. Recognition and greater development of their vital role in bridging the divide between migrant and host communities is essential, particularly as the context changes from people on the move to people trapped in a country crippled by mass unemployment, a failing economy and an increasingly frustrated population. It is therefore crucial that capacity strengthening support and investment in volunteers and national organisations is made now. The HRC and its volunteers will continue to play a pivotal role in supporting both the local population and migrants, long after funding has dried up and the international community has moved on.

**Kate Latimir** is Humanitarian Policy Adviser at the British Red Cross.

# Adapting approaches: training volunteers responding to the refugee crisis

**Rachel Erskine and Katie Robertson**

During 2016 more than 240,000 refugees and vulnerable migrants have arrived in Europe after crossing the Mediterranean Sea. A further one million made the same journey in 2015.[1] For RedR staff, the parallels were striking: 35 years previously, Peter Guthrie's experiences of working in a Malaysian refugee camp during the Vietnamese boat people crisis moved him to set up the organisation. Since then, RedR has worked to ensure that those responding to humanitarian crises have the skills to do so safely and effectively, by providing training and technical support to aid workers, NGOs and first responders all over the world.

## How it started

The scale of new arrivals in Europe was met by an outpouring of public goodwill. In many cases this took the form of European volunteers taking practical steps to help. Where the formal humanitarian system was slow to respond to the crisis, these volunteers were able to launch their own responses to the situation. Emerging grassroots initiatives in the UK were very quickly engaged in everything from collecting clothes and shoes to cooking meals and opening their doors to people needing shelter.

Impressive as these initiatives were, volunteers quickly began to feel overwhelmed. Very few had experience of, or formal training in, humanitarian work. For a range of reasons, these volunteers were operating outside the existing humanitarian system. While the desire to remain independent was key to their approach, it also meant they were unable to benefit from the experience or support of existing structures. Moreover, many were unaware of the vast array of resources available to humanitarian workers, often open source and free of charge: tools like the Sphere standards, HPN materials and guidance produced by ALNAP. They were working passionately, and in many cases effectively – but were in obvious need of support.

The need for a RedR response was clearly felt amongst the organisation's staff. Through contact and communication with volunteers, mainly via existing professional and personal networks, we were gaining an increasing understanding of how volunteer groups were operating and, crucially, an awareness of the 'mistakes' these groups were making, and how these mirrored lessons the humanitarian sector has learnt in the

1 See http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php.

past. Chief among these were the importance of coordination, and how wrong things can go in its absence – a realisation which underpins the UN Cluster system, for example – and the need for generally accepted standards. There were reports of newly created organisations struggling to process the volume of donations they were receiving, distributions igniting tensions and volunteers experiencing burnout.

## What we did

Unable to secure funding through standard channels, RedR raised over £3,000 from staff fundraising activities including cake, craft and book sales, a pub quiz and donations collected through the BT MyDonate platform. Using these funds and time donated by RedR staff and trainers, we developed a one-day training course to address the challenges identified by the volunteers. The course was designed to help participants view the response at a range of levels, from big picture to individual, as well as from the perspective of the people affected. Following an overview of the situation, sessions covered specific issues, such as needs assessment, coordination, distributions and security. Sphere standards, accountability, protection and vulnerability were introduced, with a focus on 'do no harm', before a final session encouraged participants to maintain and promote their own well-being. The course was delivered three times in September and October 2015, twice in London and once in Cardiff, reaching 64 volunteers. With wide-ranging backgrounds, most had experience of volunteering in Calais while others had concrete plans to go there. None was a humanitarian professional. All wanted to use their existing skills to improve the situation, but required guidance as to how to apply these skills. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with all the participants rating the course as good or excellent. 'I think it's fantastic that you stepped in to build the capacity of communities like mine, and to share learning' said Joy Cherkaoui, a volunteer with the Dumfries and Galloway Refugee Action group.

## Enabling factors

The willingness of our staff to go over and above their existing work commitments enabled us to design, develop and deliver an appropriate training course quickly, and in line with the needs identified. We were able to draw on material from existing RedR courses, specifically those aimed at new and aspiring aid workers. Time donated by our freelance trainers to design and deliver the course pro bono meant the training could be offered cost-free to participants. Existing partners also helped: the Sphere Project donated copies of the Sphere handbook and InterHealth delivered the session on well-being without charge.

RedR's unusual position in the humanitarian sector also proved to be an enabling factor. As a second-tier organisation – one that supports and facilitates the frontline provision of aid, rather than delivering it directly – RedR is slightly removed from the system. Similarly, our low public profile, while challenging at times, proved to be an advantage in this case. RedR was not among the 'household name' agencies perceived to be failing to respond effectively: we were free to connect with the community and gather information from those on the ground, through social media and one-to-one contact. As a result, we were able to go some way to bridging the gap between the 'official' humanitarian system and the grassroots response.

Volunteers attending a training session run by RedR UK

*©Amy Murrell for RedR UK*

We also drew on the expertise of those operating in Calais, including established INGOs and new organisations. Solidarités International and Médecins du Monde (MDM) shared their on-the-ground experiences in northern France, and CalAid provided vital insight into the grassroots response. This ensured that the training facilitated learning, and was not just a direct transfer from trainer to participant.

## Adapting our model

A defining feature of RedR's work is that we engage with humanitarian responders at all levels. Throughout its history, RedR has worked to build the humanitarian knowledge and skills of non-humanitarians. This includes work with the private sector, with first responders including teachers and local government, and the training of National Health Service (NHS) and Foreign Medical Team healthcare workers during the Ebola response. In each case, we have had to adapt our operational model to best meet the needs of the audience.

This can also have implications for the way we communicate with the target group in question. This was a case in point: the grassroots movement was not an audience that could be reached through our typical channels of communication. With this in mind, we turned to social media, where volunteers were mobilising and organising. On the night of 15 September we advertised our first training session on the Facebook group

'Calais – People to People Solidarity – Action from UK'.[2] The reaction was unprecedented. By the next morning, RedR staff had been contacted by dozens of volunteers interested in attending the training: we received 54 email requests overnight, and almost as many Facebook enquiries. There were calls for additional dates and training events in other parts of the country. Our concerns that suggesting training was necessary would be seen as a criticism of the work volunteers were doing appeared to be unfounded. 'Thanks RedR UK for offering this invaluable training' said one member of the Facebook group. 'Many volunteers are eager, willing and ready to learn.' We also tweeted prolifically, posting targeted tweets and asking followers to retweet us. One follower commented: 'Great to see pros donating tech expertise … It's a smart idea! Lateral thinking, and support to a great civil society movement that could use technical skills'.

More recent social media posts have been similarly well received. At this stage, it is hard to know whether the warm response to this very specific and time-sensitive initiative will result in greater awareness of RedR's wider work. But this new, less rigid approach to communications certainly helped us to connect with a new community, respond to a clear and pressing need and transform a groundswell of good feeling into practical action. Our connection with the community also enabled us to develop training content based very closely on the needs identified by the volunteers. The speed and breadth of communication through social media meant that, in the space of a few days, volunteers communicated the challenges they were facing, and RedR designed and delivered training to address them.

The three one-day training sessions in autumn 2015 were delivered free of charge. Globally, RedR's open training programmes usually operate on a cost-recovery basis – participant fees are calculated to cover the costs incurred by running the training event. Over the last 35 years, we have learned that it is important that participants make an investment in training – be this a financial investment, a time investment in pre-course learning, or both. This helps to ensure the right participants attend the course, and that they are fully engaged. In the case of the staff-funded refugee response training, it was felt that the target audience were already investing so many of their own resources in their response activities that it would not be appropriate to use the usual cost-recovery model.

In practice, drop-out rates were unusually high. While it has been difficult to fully understand the reasons for this, given the difficulties in gaining feedback from those who did not attend, anecdotal evidence suggests a leading cause was volunteers' belief that they could not afford to take time out from their response activities to attend the training. In response to ongoing demand for training, a paid-for course was scheduled in late November 2015, after the staff-raised funds had been exhausted. The course had to be cancelled due to a lack of sign-ups, suggesting that indeed the volunteer audience could not pay for training. Subsequently, a nominal registration fee has been used for future iterations of the course in 2016. Drop-out rates amongst those who have paid this fee remain low, indicating that course fees should reflect overall investment in the training by participants.

## Ongoing response

The success of the initial RedR response attracted the attention of other organisations. In January 2016 we received support from the Humanitarian Leadership Academy (HLA) to expand the course into a two-day training session run in London, Calais, Belgrade and Lesvos. Between April and June 2016 a further eight courses were run in partnership with HLA, drawing on the expertise of pro bono trainers from other INGOs now involved in the response, and reaching additional locations in Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) and Slovenia. In addition, RedR was supported by the Stanley Thomas Johnson Foundation to deliver ten training courses in key locations across Europe before coordinating a lessons-learnt workshop in London in September 2016.

RedR's response recognises that volunteers are filling a gap in the humanitarian response to the refugee crisis. Aware that these highly motivated individuals were committed to continuing their activities, we set out to help them do so in a more effective and safer way. Feedback from participants suggests that this objective has been achieved.

'One of the key things I took away from the training is about accountability', says Dan Teuma, who was trained by RedR in September 2015 while working for CalAid. He has since gone on to establish The Worldwide Tribe, working in Greece and Turkey. 'I am now far more conscious about the impact of my and others' actions with regards to delivering support and aid: making sure that I also look at the bigger picture and not just the immediate impact of our actions.'

The evolving situation on the ground has required RedR to keep adapting and updating our response. In recent months, we have expanded the range of options we are offering, including tailored consultancy support, free online resources on well-being and self-care and mentoring. Perhaps the biggest lesson we have learned, as an organisation, is the need for flexibility. We have had to adapt our operational model – and keep adapting it as the crisis evolves: from the initial staff-led funding drive to a different way of communicating with our audience, a more rapid and frequent process of course design and review and an alternative approach to investment in learning through free or highly subsidised training. In many ways, RedR's response mirrors that of the volunteers – people passionate about the cause, donating their time and employing their existing skills to contribute to improving the situation of refugees across Europe.

**Katie Robertson** is a Programme Manager in RedR UK's Europe and Global Initiatives department. **Rachel Erskine** is RedR UK's Communications Coordinator.

# Responding to the needs of refugees and vulnerable migrants in Europe

**Elodie Francart with John Borton**

In September 2015 several thousand refugees and vulnerable migrants arrived in Belgium. The Belgian government imposed limits on the daily number of asylum request registrations, leaving asylum-seekers sleeping outside without any support and in legal limbo. This 'pre-registration period' between the arrival of the asylum-seekers and their submission of an asylum request generally lasted for between two and ten days. A camp rapidly developed in Maximillian Park in central Brussels, growing quickly to around 1,200 people; meanwhile, a citizen platform was formed calling on the Belgian population to support asylum-seekers forced to live on the street, and to put pressure on the government to relax its stance.

The response was remarkable. The Citizen Platform to Support Refugees Facebook page attracted 30,000 followers in its first month, and hundreds of volunteers came forward to provide support to residents of the Maximillian Park camp. On average 300 volunteers were present in the camp on weekdays and 500 over the weekends. Several humanitarian NGOs were also present: Médecins du Monde (MDM) supported volunteers in the provision of medical assistance, Oxfam provided advice on sorting and organising the distribution of donated clothes and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) (Belgium) focused on providing logistical support for shelter, water and sanitation.

Coordination with these NGO actors was a key concern within the Citizen Platform. In many cases a designated NGO would carry out a short assessment and follow-up decisions would be taken by the Citizen Platform. In terms of organisation, the Citizen Platform comprised a General Assembly bringing together working groups on topics such as finance, communications and advocacy. Representatives of each working group met once a week with a central coordination group, and volunteers responsible for the day-to-day running of the camp held daily coordination meetings. The camp in Maximillian Park operated for a month until the Belgian government gave in to pressure and opened a new accommodation centre in Brussels, at which point the camp was closed.

## The Civil Society Networking Project

The Brussels experience demonstrated that a collaborative approach between citizens' groups and NGOs is possible and could provide an effective response for people in need. Each considered the other as a valid actor, which had not always been the case in the past. In addition, the Citizen Platform showed that it could mobilise public opinion and bring pressure to bear on the government to change its policy. For its part, MSF viewed such civil society initiatives as a way of developing new forms of operational response and creating new alliances with citizens (potentially across Europe) to oppose restrictive state policies.

To understand where and how these groups of volunteers are working, and how MSF could better cooperate with them, MSF Belgium launched a 'Civil Society Networking Project'. The main aim was to improve the relationship with civil society and to see how a large NGO such as MSF could support these groups with logistical and technical help. The first phase of work aimed at understanding the different profiles, perspectives, needs and relationships among the large number of volunteer groups established in Europe. With the support of MSF Belgium, four activists from the Citizen Platform travelled around Europe for four and a half months, engaging with a wide range of citizen initiatives. Two main types of civil society initiatives were identified: operational initiatives working directly with refugees, and information-sharing initiatives between volunteers, and between refugees and the host population.

We found that, whilst the principal strength of many civil society initiatives is their flexibility, informality, commitment and self-organisation, fragility and instability are an inherent part of their make-up – in effect two sides of the same coin. This instability derives from fluid and unpredictable staffing, in terms of the numbers of volunteers present on any given day and their lack of specific training; unpredictable and often precarious funding; and the reality of volunteering and its impact on volunteers' physical and psychological health. Yet despite this, volunteer groups remain vital actors in the humanitarian response. Even now, a year after many of them were established – itself an indicator of their stability as a community, if not necessarily as individual entities – volunteer groups continue to play key frontline roles across Europe, from Greece to France and from Italy to Sweden. Irrespective of the advantages and disadvantages that come with their citizen and voluntary nature, helping refugees and vulnerable migrants and responding to their needs defines their outlook and actions, and is an objective they are not ready to give up on despite all the obstacles they face. Civil society initiatives have their own identity and their own particular forms of 'stability' and continuity, and have to be taken as such, without trying to mould them into the more conventional forms of organisation that NGOs are used to working with. The conclusion of the first phase of the project was that the unpredictability present in many volunteer groups should *not* be a reason for NGOs not to engage and collaborate with them, because it is an inherent part of their make-up and something which, for the most part, they are able to manage.

The second aspect of the Civil Society Project has involved operational support. Usually, links between NGOs and volunteer


A refugee camp beside the Paris metro, France.

*©Mary Finn*

groups on the ground are absent: volunteers don't know who to talk to within NGOs, what they can ask for or which kinds of support they can expect. To help with this, in March 2016 MSF created a Focal Point for Volunteers in Idomeni in Greece. At the time, Idomeni was the largest refugee camp in Europe; many international and Greek volunteers were involved in providing assistance, and as such it was an obvious place to strengthen cooperation. Efforts focused on supporting the volunteers logistically, and helping them share information and develop a common strategy. Although the impact of the role has not been formally evaluated, many of the NGOs and volunteer groups involved felt that it had helped improve the quality of the relationships and level of trust between the two groups of actors, and thereby contributed to improved coordination. Since the closure of the Idomeni camp in May 2016, the Civil Society Project has continued to support efforts to improve communication and trust between volunteer groups and NGOs in Greece and other countries, and to broaden the project to include volunteer groups working in destination and reception countries, including Norway and the UK.

## Networkin' Europe

During the period of the refugee camp in Maximillian Park and prior to the start of the Civil Society Project, some of those involved in the Citizen Platform organised a meeting to which representatives of volunteer groups in other European countries were invited. The objective was to establish links between the volunteer groups forming across Europe. A second, larger, two-day meeting was held in Berlin in February 2016 with support from the Civil Society Project. A third meeting was held in Brussels at the end of May 2016. The meeting room and facilities were provided by MSF and the schedule included an evening meeting hosted by the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (EUL/NGL) group within the European Parliament. From these three meetings a group has been formed comprising 45 volunteers from 18 European countries. Currently the group operates under the name Networkin' Europe, though this is likely to change as it finalises its communication and networking strategies. Communication within the group is principally through a closed Facebook Group, but a website is planned in the near future. The group is largely self-funded, with occasional support from MSF (Belgium).

## Reflections

NGOs are grappling with how best to engage and collaborate with the many volunteer and civil society groups that sprang up across Europe in 2015 and early 2016. MSF's experience with its Civil Society Project has been positive, demonstrating the benefits of a conscious effort to engage with and support volunteer groups.

As the situation has evolved from supporting refugees and migrants in transit to one of closed borders and 'stranded' populations, so too have the opportunities for collaboration.

Political statements and advocacy by humanitarian NGOs are not having much impact on European policies towards refugees and vulnerable migrants, and NGOs are facing challenges to their principles, for instance by requests from governments to work inside state-run camps and asylum processing facilities. In this evolving context volunteer groups offer NGOs the ability to engage with and support citizen groups grounded in their local societies. Collaborating with citizen groups enables NGOs to reach a wider public and demonstrate that not everybody is against refugees and vulnerable migrants coming to Europe.

Despite their fragility and inherent instability, volunteer groups frequently work with a longer-term perspective than is usual among humanitarian NGOs. Besides meeting basic needs, civil society groups are helping refugees to better understand and integrate into the societies they find themselves in, including through the provision of language classes and multicultural events. Volunteer groups also offer NGOs a means of aligning more closely with civil society in a context where state policies towards refugees and vulnerable migrants have, in many countries, become decidedly callous and inhumane. For their part, volunteer groups have much to learn from NGOs and the best practices that they have developed over decades.

There are of course challenges and limitations in this collaboration as each actor needs to be able to keep their identity and independence. Questions that need to be considered include how NGOs can retain their neutrality when collaborating with groups with strong political opinions; how to cope with administrative demands whilst not undermining the spontaneity of volunteer groups; how to avoid being held responsible for mistakes made by partners; and how to sustain a critical voice regarding their governments' policies. Many of these questions are not new, either to NGOs or volunteer groups, and sharing each other's perspectives and experience might offer a way of resolving them to the benefit of both.

**Elodie Francart** worked as a volunteer in the Citizens Platform. Since October 2015 she has been a member of the Civil Society Project Team and served as the Focal Point for Volunteers in Idomeni.

# Temporary palliatives to an ongoing humanitarian need: MSF's intervention in Dunkirk

**Angélique Muller and Michaël Neuman**

Many towns and villages in northern France, including Calais and more recently Grande-Synthe, have provided shelter since the mid-1990s to migrants on their way to the UK. With the arrival of migrants transiting from North Africa and Turkey, their numbers rose sharply during 2015 – from several hundred in Calais in March 2015 to over 6,000 by the end of the year, and from a few dozen to more than 2,000 in Basroch camp in Grande-Synthe. This increase should have come as a surprise to no one, particularly anyone following developments in the Syrian conflict or studying migration flows, but the French government's state of denial led to yet more hardship for people reduced to living in deplorable conditions.

## From quagmire to 'humanitarian camp'

Grande-Synthe in France's Nord Department has a population of 22,000. Like many others in the region, this former industrial town is undergoing a painful process of economic regeneration. Nevertheless, the local council was determined to provide decent living conditions and assistance to migrants (whose numbers fluctuated between 50 and 80 prior to June 2015) in the Grande-Synthe area. Damien Carême, who was a member of the Socialist Party before joining the Green Party, became the town's mayor in 2001. Among his achievements has been his contribution to establishing a 'Réseau des Elus Hospitaliers' (Network of Hospitable Mayors) to facilitate the hosting of migrants in the Nord Pas-de-Calais region.

While migrants had been seeking shelter in the Basroch woods since the 2000s, summer 2015 saw a considerable increase in new arrivals, culminating in a surge by the end of the year. At the end of 2015, over 2,500 people were living in Basroch, mostly Iraqi Kurds, but also Syrians, Afghans, Iranians, Vietnamese and members of Kuwait's Bedoon community.[1] In October 2015, alerted by reports of increasing numbers of migrants and the poor health and sanitation situation, associations and volun-teers from the UK (Aid Box Convoy, Humming Birds and Refugee Community Kitchen), Belgium (Solidarity for All), Switzerland and the Netherlands (Rastplatz) joined local organisations working in the area, including Médecins du Monde (MDM), Carrefour Solidarités, Emmanüs, AMIS, Salam and Terre d'Errance.

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) deployed in Grande-Synthe in September, but we knew little about the actors involved, how they interacted with each other or what had been done in the past. MSF also found it no easy task negotiating its way among the numerous stakeholders on the ground, and navigating the intricacies of the French administration was unchartered territory. Relations with the volunteers, some of whom were unwilling to accept the vertical organisation favoured by MSF,

1 Quite literally stateless, this community of several hundred thousand people did not acquire Kuwaiti citizenship after the country became independent in 1961. They have no political rights whatsoever.

A woman and child at the old Grande-Synthe camp site near Dunkirk, France.

*©MSF*

were at times tense. Alternating with MDM, MSF delivered primary health care three days a week, provided logistical support to voluntary associations and endeavoured to improve the camp's atrocious and steadily deteriorating sanitation. People smugglers commandeered and imposed a charge for showers installed by the town council, and, until January 2016, there was just one standpipe. The weather worsened rapidly, foretelling a sodden and muddy winter. The migrants put up small camping tents to provide some shelter.

The mayor of Grande-Synthe, Carême, received no response from the government to his increasingly frequent appeals for help with rehousing the migrants. Prime Minister Manuel Valls did not deem it necessary to answer or indeed even acknowledge receipt of letters from the town council appealing for assistance. This lack of response typified the government's lack of concern for these 'undesirables', and its refusal to either acknowledge the problems the town hall was experiencing trying to cope with the influx or attempt to find a solution to the migrants' predicament. In November, in view of the lack of government action, the mayor asked MSF for help with building a new camp on a nearby site. Carême and MSF also scheduled a press conference to announce their plans for the new camp, but the day before it was due to be held the mayor received and accepted an invitation to discuss the situation with the Minister of the Interior. This was considered a major breakthrough, as the government had consistently refused to contemplate long-term accommodation for the refugees.

By now it was the beginning of January. Many viewed Basroch as the 'Calais Jungle, but worse'. Their tents flooded, people slept in a muddy quagmire in a camp that had by now come to resemble a gigantic rubbish dump. Illnesses caused by the cold (respiratory infections) and lack of hygiene (scabies and skin infections) were difficult to treat. People were living in inhuman conditions, driven by their only ray of hope – getting across the Channel. Far more migrants arrived than departed, with a few succeeding in getting to the UK and others relocating to temporary reception centres set up across France.

Thanks to the groundswell of solidarity from many associations and volunteers from all kinds of backgrounds, no lives were lost. There were over 40 mostly voluntary associations working in Basroch camp. Coordination was practically non-existent, with the exception of medical services organised by the Ministry of Health. For the most part, basic items and services, such as food, blankets, tents, heaters, fuelwood and schooling, were largely managed by volunteers. The lack of organisation, unplanned donations and control exerted by people smugglers led to real difficulties. At weekends, hundreds of people would arrive at the camp and distribute items as they saw fit, leaving others – including MSF, who would spend hours collecting rubbish on Mondays – to clean up the mess. To many at MSF, the waste was all the more unacceptable as the camp was less than 30 metres from a modest but well-maintained housing estate, a third of Grande-Synthe's population lived below the poverty line and unemployment was almost 30%.

While MSF staff and others took care of day-to-day tasks in Basroch camp, construction began on a new camp several kilometres away, on a site known as La Linière. Soon an entire village designed to accommodate 2,500 people began to take shape. Long and narrow, and sandwiched between a railway line and a motorway, the site was far from ideal. Furthermore, MSF had no particular experience of setting up refugee camps, let alone in France. Tents or wood cabins? Should heaters be installed? How much space should be given over to communal areas? Should the camp be viewed as the foundation of a future village? How could ties be established with Grande-Synthe? How could architectural aspects be taken into account when speed was of the essence? The hesitations were as many as the U-turns.

Once construction began, the priority was to inform the migrants about their upcoming relocation. Meanwhile, Carême, the mayor of Grande-Synthe, insisted that the old site be razed to the ground. Despite its unease, MSF never spoke out clearly about this, saying instead that people could only be moved on a voluntary basis. Meanwhile, the government set up a Temporary Reception Centre (Centre d'Accueil Provisoire, or CAP) just outside the camp in Calais to accommodate some of its inhabitants. The centre's use of palm print recognition technology and other harsh constraints highlighted the contrast with what was being accomplished in Grande-Synthe.

After seven weeks of construction and meetings, the camp at La Linière was ready to receive people from Basroch. The move itself began on 7 March and lasted three days. It was supervised by around 100 volunteers from various associations and 25 MSF staff. Using buses hired by the town hall, around 900 people were relocated on the first day, and by the fourth Basroch was empty. No police intervention was necessary. Over 1,300 people (numbers had decreased as some had gone to emergency accommodation and others to CAOs or to the UK) were now installed in the new camp in wood cabins with access to basic services such as toilets, showers and meals. Carême appointed volunteer service provider Utopia 56 to manage the site. Irony of ironies, a few days after the move Carême received an injunction requiring him to bring La Linière camp 'up to standard', as the government considered that the safety of its residents was at risk. In the meantime, the authorities had begun razing the southern – and busiest – part of the Calais 'Jungle', leaving its inhabitants either to go to the CAP or to the northern part of the camp, or leave Calais altogether.

## Conclusion

The successful logistical operation to relocate the residents of Basroch to La Linière camp enabled – and was only possible because of – an improbable coalition of elected representatives, municipal officials, political activists and humanitarian workers. The episode demonstrates that the construction of a dignified space that includes congenial communal areas to accommodate and address the basic needs of refugees is achievable at reasonable cost. And who knows, it could even be an indication of the shape of future collaborative initiatives to foster the local integration of migrants in other French and European towns.

The neighbouring town of Téteghem, which for many years has also had to cope with migrants in transit, is a good example of how very hard it is for elected representatives to resist pressure from the national authorities and the public to remove migrant camps. In November 2015, at the behest of the town's mayor and after a court ruling, the camp in the town, which was supported by volunteers and associations and accommodated 200 to 250 migrants, was flattened because of tensions and suspicions of trafficking related to clandestine immigration. However, shortly after the successful setting up of the La Linière camp, the mayor, an elected member of the Les Républicains party, expressed his regret at having razed the camp and praised his neighbour's courage and perseverance.

The La Linière camp is a barometer of the power of public discourse and the ability to overcome fears regarding public opinion. Although it is difficult to gauge the views of Basroch's inhabitants on the continuing presence of migrants in transit in their town – even more so as their numbers grew – we can attest to the incomprehension and resentment felt by some local people. That said, little or no violence against migrants has been reported, nor have militias been formed as they have in Calais. We believe that this is in part due to the efforts of the mayor to communicate both his determination to tackle people-smuggling and his compassion for the refugees, an appropriate police presence and the relationship established between the authorities and the migrants.

La Linière has resolved little, apart from enabling 1,000 people to escape the cold and mud. Thanks to the impetus and actions of numerous partner associations, a degree of social and collective life has begun to emerge. Nevertheless, residents' sights remain resolutely set on the UK and there is still a great deal of tension – among the migrants themselves, between people smugglers and migrants, and at times between migrants and aid organisations. As for the migrants' prospects, their options are more than limited. In a context where the countries of Europe continue to ignore the consequences of their actions, and their migrant policies are confined to erecting fences, the Grande-Synthe camp can only be a solution that is as much makeshift as it is inadequate.

**Angélique Muller** was MSF project coordinator at Grande-Synthe between January and April 2016. **Michaël Neuman** is director of studies, MSF – CRASH.

# Neither safe nor sound: unaccompanied children on the coastline of the English Channel and the North Sea

**Alexandre Le Clève, Evangeline Masson-Diez and Olivier Peyroux**

Since January 2015, some 1.2 million people have made the perilous journey across the Mediterranean in an attempt to reach Europe. One striking feature of this mass movement of people has been the growing number of children among those reaching Europe's shores. In June 2015, one in ten of the refugees and migrants was a child. By the end of December it was one in three. Today, children make up 40% of the refugees and migrants stranded in Greece. The majority come from countries in war and conflict: Afghanistan, Sudan, Iraq and Syria. Others travel from zones of economic and social breakdown. Throughout their journeys, refugee and migrant children suffer terribly – stranded at borders, forced to sleep in the open, exposed to rain and heat, left without access to basic services and easy prey for smugglers and traffickers.

Unaccompanied and separated children are at particular risk. Once they reach France they have limited access to hygiene facilities and food and no access to education. Threats to their safety are incessant: they don't benefit from protection mechanisms, and the current procedures of family reunification are far from effective. The situation in other European countries is similar. In an effort to understand the situation of unaccompanied refugee and migrant children in Northern France, Unicef France commissioned the organisation TRAJECTOIRES to undertake a study to bring out the human stories of some of these children. The study was carried out between January and April 2016 across seven sites along the French coast (Calais, Grande-Synthe, Angres, Norrent Fontes, Steenvoorde, Tatinghem and Cherbourg). Through these children's testimonies, we learned about their journeys.

## A children's crisis in Europe

Data on the number of unaccompanied children in the region are unreliable, but based on attempted censuses by various organisations we estimate that around 2,000 have passed through the seven sites in our study since June 2015. Based on our sample, the average duration of their stay in the 'jungle' was five months; some had been on the coast for nine months and one had been there for over a year. On most of the sites included in the study, an 'entry fee' is levied by the traffickers before the children are allowed to stay there. Unaccompanied children who are unable to pay find themselves forced to perform laborious tasks for the adults: searching for water, queuing for

Child refugees in the Grande-Synthe camp.

*©UNHCR/Federico Scoppa*

the showers on behalf of adults, doing the cleaning around shelters and reselling food collected during distributions at the informal night-time market in the Calais 'jungle'.

All the children we interviewed complained of cold and fatigue. The most vulnerable were living in shelters exposed to the elements and had difficulty in accessing meals and showers. None has access to regular schooling, despite the fact that this is mandatory. Many told us that they cannot stand the ongoing inactivity that they must endure whilst waiting to attempt to cross into the UK each night, which can lead to nervousness and symptoms of depression. Some unaccompanied children spoke of mental breakdown and aggressive and violent episodes (directed towards themselves or other young people). Fights between migrants are becoming more and more commonplace, particularly in Calais, and especially since the southern part of the 'jungle' was evacuated. Children are among those at greatest risk from these types of violence. The main fears expressed were violence by the police, civilian militias and traffickers. Sexual assault against both girls and boys is a constant threat. Young people exchange sexual services for the promise of passage to the UK or to pay for their journey. Rape and sexual violence is a significant concern: our study found children being regularly sexually abused, often by traffickers and their friends under the influence of alcohol. Several cases of Vietnamese children being exploited on cannabis farms in the UK, in Strasbourg and in the greater Paris area have also been recorded.

## Risks along the journey

Most of the children interviewed used traffickers.[1] In order to reach France they are charged anything between €2,700 and €10,000. The routes taken differ according to the person's financial means. For the more affluent unaccompanied children, the journey is organised and paid for before they leave their country of origin. A guide paid by the traffickers (referred to as 'uncle') takes over in each new country they cross and escorts the children to the border. Unaccompanied children from poorer families must get by using their own means and negotiate with local traffickers in each country. This difference between 'guaranteed' passage and what is achieved on a country-by-country basis explains the widely varying durations of children's journeys, from 15 days to seven months.

Regardless of the chosen method, the route remains highly dangerous. Several children told us that they had been held by a number of different criminal groups and a ransom demand had been sent to their family. Some had to work under near slave-like conditions for months to pay for their journey. Others were detained by the local authorities. Relations with the 'uncles' were rarely benevolent. We heard accounts of children who walked too slowly being abandoned. In many cases, the sea crossing between Turkey and Greece or Libya/Egypt and Italy has been traumatising. Sexual abuse also appears to be commonplace during the journey.

As different points of passage (such as parking areas for lorries or trains) have been secured by the authorities, it has become practically impossible to cross over to the UK without help from traffickers. The cost of crossing the English Channel has never been higher: between €5,000 and €7,000 per person. This forces unaccompanied children to take significant risks in order to pass through without paying (by hiding themselves in refrigerated lorries or inside containers, for example).

## The protection system

The protection of unaccompanied children is a state obligation, as laid out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In France, departmental councils are the leading agency with respect to child protection. Each department creates its own intervention plan, but this approach is too fragmented to benefit young people from a wide range of backgrounds, who are vulnerable and mobile and who move from one department to another or stay regularly in Paris. The Pas-de-Calais Departmental Council has implemented a system, managed by the organisation France Terre d'Asile (FTDA), which attempts to deal with the issue of unaccompanied children to some extent. Over 80% of the unaccompanied children integrated into this system have been contacted by the organisation. FTDA teams visit the Calais 'jungle' almost every day, as well as occasionally visiting the sites at Norrent Fontes and Tatinghem. Charitable organisations are also active, and have regular contact with unaccompanied children. There is no specific system in place in the Manche and Nord departments and no form of intervention on the sites there has been implemented. Across all the sites in our study, getting young people to speak on a confidential basis is extremely difficult; the constant presence of adults from their community and the lack of privacy in the camps make it almost impossible to form a bond with the children, hampering efforts to help them.

Alternative accommodation and reception systems, such as those at the Jules Ferry Centre and the temporary reception centre managed by La Vie Active, do not have the required authorisation or possess the necessary framework to receive and house unaccompanied children. Those dedicated state-run sites that do exist are full, and there is a desperate lack of accommodation. To be awarded a place in an accommodation centre, unaccompanied children are forced to declare themselves adults or must come forward accompanied by an older 'cousin' or 'uncle', which puts them at greater risk of being manipulated by malicious adults.

Unaccompanied children living in the 'jungles' of Calais, Grande-Synthe and the other sites are often viewed as young people in transit, with an 'unwavering determination to cross

1 Children spoken to during the course of the study did not always differentiate between a smuggler (where the purpose of moving or harbouring a child is solely monetary) and a trafficker (where the purpose is exploitation); as such the term 'passeur' was used in the French version, which has subsequently been translated to 'trafficker' in English given the nature of the testimonies provided by children.

the English Channel', making it impossible to propose a project that will offer them protection in France. Only the family reunification process, as described by the EU Regulation of 26 June 2013 known as 'Dublin III', which establishes the deciding criteria and mechanisms by which the responsible member state is to assess an application for international protection, can be suggested to them. This process, which provides a restrictive interpretation of the term 'family', is lengthy, complex and poorly controlled, and has been rarely used. Between the beginning of 2016 April, 52 referrals were submitted, 24 decisions were made (22 approvals, 20 of which related to children) and 20 transfers were carried out.

Although some unaccompanied children are under the influence of exploitation networks, all find themselves in a dangerous situation due to their isolation and living conditions. Changes to the child protection system are urgently needed to enable unaccompanied children to access effective means of protection which respect the rights of the child, no matter what their migration plans may be. Faced with greater and greater risks of violence and exploitation on account of their longer stays and more difficult journeys, it is essential that new solutions are found. A secure and sustainable framework must be in place for the children who will arrive over the coming months so that they are able to avoid situations which increase their vulnerability.

*Neither Safe Nor Sound: Unaccompanied Children on the Coastline of the English Channel and the North Sea* was published in June 2016. It is a joint publication: of Unicef France and Unicef UK, and is available at http://www.unicef.org.uk/Latest/Publications/Neither-Safe-Nor-Sound. The study was written by **Alexandre Le Clève**, **Evangeline Masson-Diez** and **Olivier Peyroux** of TRAJECTOIRES.

# Infant and young child feeding in Greece: Save the Children's experience

**Minh Tram Le, Claudine Prudhon, Anne-Marie Mayer and Megan Gayford**

The youngest children are the most vulnerable during emergencies. Risks associated with malnutrition and disease increase and child mortality can soar up to 70 times higher than average. Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) is key to reducing the morbidity and mortality of children. Breastfeeding is the single most effective intervention to save children's lives and could prevent 13% of all deaths among children under five years, while appropriate complementary feeding could prevent another 6% of deaths.[1] This paper discusses Save the Children (SC)'s Infant and Young Child Feeding in Emergency (IYCF-E) response in Greece, through the opening of mother and baby areas in Kara Tepe and Moria camps on Lesvos and in Idomeni transit camp on the border with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM).

## The IYCF-E intervention

IYCF-E encompasses a range of key actions to support safe and appropriate feeding practices for infants from 0 to 11 months and young children aged 12 to 24 months:

- Protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding.
- Assessment of feeding practices and needs.
- Support for the non-breastfed infants and management of breast milk substitutes (BMS) such as infant formula.
- Support for timely, safe and appropriate complementary feeding for children from six months old.
- Support for pregnant and breastfeeding women.

SC launched a rapid assessment following the sudden arrival of more than 50,000 people on the Greek islands in July 2015. As the assessment team did not observe any visible signs of wasting or an alarming health or food security situation, and in the main countries of origin (Syria and Afghanistan) wasting levels are not critical, systematic screening/identification and wasting treatment programmes were not warranted. However, there was a critical need to protect optimal feeding practices: women reported reducing or discontinuing breast-feeding because of the lack of privacy and time and the stress they faced during their journey, and a misplaced belief that, because they were not eating well themselves, they did not have enough milk. Support to non-breastfed infants also appeared urgent due to the increased risk of diarrhoea related to the use of infant formula in camps where hygiene conditions were poor and access to drinking water was inconsistent. Facilities and equipment to safely prepare infant formula were limited, and some caregivers were observed feeding infants with undiluted powder milk or cow's milk, not measuring water to be added to infant formula and using dirty bottles. A large number of unsolicited distributions of breast milk substitute (BMS) were also reported, in violation of the International Code of Marketing of BMS.

The primary goal of the IYCF-E intervention in Greece was to support breastfeeding and non-breastfeeding caretakers in mother and baby areas (MBAs), where they could rest, feed and

1 G. Jones et al., 'Child Survival: How Many Child Deaths Can We Prevent This Year', *The Lancet*, 362, 2003; N. C. Rollins et al., 'Why Invest, and What Will It Take To Improve Breastfeeding Practices?, *The Lancet*, 387, 2016.

A mother and child in a Save the Children mother and baby area at a refugee camp in Lesvos, Greece.

*©Anna Pantelia/Save the Children*

play with their children, bath their babies and receive nutrition and psychosocial support. The MBAs were established in the same compound as the child friendly spaces (CFS) run by SC, enabling caretakers and children to safely circulate between the sites and to access a comprehensive package of services. Orientation on feeding practices was offered by skilled counsellors, using communication materials in appropriate languages. In-depth counselling was possible depending on the presence of interpreters in the camps, though this was limited given the challenges facing the women and their urgent desire to continue their journey. Infants requiring BMS were referred for provision of infant formula and safe preparation kits within the programme or through a medical partner.

Two MBAs opened in October 2015 on Lesvos, after an interim period where SC provided IYCF-E support through medical partners and the CFS, while the site to be allocated to the MBA was confirmed by the camp authorities. Another MBA was subsequently opened in Idomeni, though this site faced a number of challenges, including regular damage, temporary and unpredictable closures of the camp by the authorities and limited access for NGOs. When a nearby petrol station was turned into accommodation for the excessive number of people arriving at the border, a mobile unit was set up to cover a larger number of children.

In February 2016 a survey of caretakers of children below 24 months was conducted on Lesvos to quantify IYCF practices and identify priority needs. At this point, in the depths of winter, the daily number of arrivals had decreased and the situation was calmer. In total, 148 children were included in the assessment. The results confirmed the serious situation regarding IYCF practices and the general wellbeing of children and caretakers: breastfeeding patterns were far from optimal and the majority of mothers reported difficulties in breastfeeding. Around 30% of the caretakers were feeding their children infant formula that they had bought or received from charities. A majority of caretakers were using bottles but could not reach cleaning facilities. Feeding frequency was insufficient and dietary diversity poor due to the lack of fresh food during the journey, lack of money and distress of the mother and the child. Before the EU–Turkey deal in March 2016, NGOs and volunteers' associations were the only ones providing food assistance, distributing more than 10,000 meals per day in some locations.

Since March 2016, the government has opened more than 50 formal camps, and in July 2016 SC was running eight MBAs covering 16 camps in FYROM, Attica, Lesvos and Chios. Between October 2015 and June 2016, IYCF activities reached approximately 11,000 children and 10,900 caregivers.

## Coordinating IYCF activities

While a large number of humanitarian organisations are present in Greece, few are supporting nutrition. SC receives financial support from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and, more recently, technical support from Unicef, but remains the main nutrition actor in the response. Individuals and

volunteer organisations were predominant from the outset of the emergency, and some volunteers' associations, such as Project Nurture International, have started to focus on IYCF-E, improving the coverage of services.

In Lesvos, a health and nutrition working group led by UNHCR began meeting regularly from the end of summer 2015. Many humanitarian and non-humanitarian actors were not aware of international guidance on IYCF-E, and SC conducted several sensitisation sessions to protect breastfeeding practices and reduce untargeted distributions of BMS. It has not been possible to quantify the impact of the sensitisation sessions on reduced untargeted distributions of BMS. At the national level, health working group meetings covering nutrition issues started in February 2016. At the global level, international NGOs and UN agencies conducted bi-weekly calls, co-chaired by SC and UNICEF, to share relevant information, materials and resources, promote consistency in the application of global guidance and identify areas needing additional guidance. The platform was also used to highlight IYCF-E needs in the West Balkan countries.

## Difficulties in implementation of IYCF-E interventions

A number of challenges specific to this crisis arose. First, people were moving rapidly, allowing only a limited time (from a few minutes to a few hours) for caretaker and child assessment, support and referral. The number of refugees arriving in transit areas varied greatly day by day, making forecasting and staffing of interventions difficult. Moreover, no demographic data for children less than two years was available. Second, a wealth of nationalities was represented and cultural mediators were urgently required. Their limited availability, the lack of people trained in IYCF and legal constraints on non-EU passport holders working in Greece markedly affected the quality of the intervention. Third, the high proportion of infants dependent on infant formula before the start of their journey led to frequent requests for BMS, while service coverage was too low to ensure prior counselling and suitable preparation. Lastly, there was insufficient attention to ensuring adequate complementary feeding by all responders and volunteers: the food distributed was either not suitable for young children (i.e. too hard) or consisted of jars of baby food unfamiliar to caretakers, and with no information in the appropriate language or confirmation that it was a halal product. Despite efforts in coordination and capacity-building, untargeted donations and distributions of BMS and bottles, by actors unaware of international guidance on IYCF-E interventions were regularly reported.

## The response after the EU–Turkey deal

Following the implementation of the EU–Turkey deal in March 2016, programmes across Europe have been adjusted. Most of the former reception sites on the Greek islands have been turned into detention centres, and the government now manages more than 50 camps, with the support of UN agencies, international and local NGOs and volunteers.

Recent assessments highlight the persistent lack of coverage of IYCF services and the need to reinforce some aspects of interventions. Collaboration with the various ministries and key decision-makers involved is being developed by food security, health and nutrition working groups to prioritise IYCF, and provide appropriate food assistance for the most vulnerable, including the elderly and people with health conditions. In terms of IYCF, the main priority actions remain:

- The establishment of safe environments for caretakers with young children, along with strengthened outreach activities.
- Reinforcement of the screening of caretakers and children and support to breastfeeding and non-breastfeeding caretakers, with counselling adapted to a population no longer on the move (e.g. re-lactation support and maternal health activities and messages).
- The provision of adequate complementary food for children over six months to reduce risks of undernutrition and morbidity in a population entirely dependent on food assistance.
- The integration of IYCF-E within all services, but specifically protection and psychosocial support, to help reduce distress among caretakers and children.

## Conclusion

The rapidly changing situation, high numbers of refugees and migrants and the specific transit context stretched the capacities of organisations and volunteers to respond effectively, indicating a need for better preparedness and coordination in a European context generally unknown to many of those involved. The presence of a larger number of organisations with nutrition capacities could have increased the coverage and effectiveness of IYCF-E interventions. Greater involvement by donors to advocate for IYCF interventions could have enabled more agencies to get involved in the crisis, while the IYCF-E sector itself still represents a challenge and a new area for many organisations, as seen in other crises including Syria, Lebanon and Jordan.

The difficulties inherent to this specific context have highlighted the need to revise and adapt IYCF-E guidelines to enable the quick provision of operational assistance. Lessons are currently being documented and analysed by global IYCF experts to inform existing guidelines and ensure that knowledge and practices gained during these past months can inform future programming.

**Minh Tram Le** is Nutrition Coordinator for the European Refugee and Migrant Crisis, Save the Children International. **Claudine Prudhon** is Researcher – Infant and Young Child Feeding in Emergencies, Save the Children UK. **Anne-Marie Mayer** is an independent consultant. **Megan Gayford** is Senior Humanitarian Nutrition Advisor, Save the Children UK. We would like to thank Mardjan Abidian and Nisrine Jaafar for their great work as interpreters during the infant and young child feeding assessment in February 2016.

# Voices of refugees: information and communication needs of refugees in Greece and Germany

**Theo Hannides, Nicola Bailey and Dwan Kaoukji**

Since 2015, more than a million women, men and children have undertaken perilous journeys to reach northern European countries, using unofficial migration routes across the Mediterranean and South-East Europe.[1] Not all of them have reached their preferred destination, and many have died or gone missing on the way. These people reflect diverse nationalities and languages and varying levels of literacy, income, social status and access to technology. But findings in a recent BBC Media Action research report show that many have one key thing in common: they require information to make decisions about their next steps, to remain safe and meet their minimum survival needs. And yet, even in this age of digital technology, they often cannot get the reliable information they need due to a lack of online or mobile connectivity and limited consistent information that they trust.

The research study was commissioned and funded by UK aid from the UK government through the Start Network European Refugee Response Programme and the CDAC Network to help humanitarian agencies understand the priority information and communication needs of refugees. Field research, conducted by BBC Media Action in partnership with Development and Humanitarian Learning in Action (DAHLIA), provides a snapshot of refugees' experiences regarding communication and information at different points on their journey: on the route, in 'transit' camps in Greece and, for those who have managed to reach it, in Germany.[2] In-depth interviews with humanitarian actors in Greece and Germany were also conducted to capture their understanding of refugees' communication needs, and the challenges they faced in trying to meet them.[3]

The research was carried out in April 2016, just weeks after the closure of the Western Balkans route left more than 46,000 people stranded in camps in Greece.[4] Despite being 'static', almost all of the refugees interviewed considered themselves to be still on a journey – either back to their country of origin or on their way to their destination country – and believed that things could change at any moment.


A Red Cross billboard giving information on family tracing services and Internet access at Gevgelija transit camp, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM).

*©Caroline Haga/IFRC*

## Refugee needs

The findings from this research highlight refugees' overarching need for critical information about their current and future situation, as well as their broader communication needs: to be listened to; to be able to tell their stories; and to participate in dialogue that provides them with physical, social and psychosocial support. Many refugees also need trauma counselling.

The research found that refugees had one overriding communication need, both throughout their journey and when static in camps: timely and reliable information on how to get to their next destination safely, quickly and without being detained. Unfortunately this was a need that humanitarian actors were often not able to fulfil, either because they did not know the answers or because they were restricted in what information they were able to provide.

> *'We need someone to translate for us, to communicate our needs and give us answers to our questions.'*

Despite determined work by agencies on the ground, refugees interviewed in Greece tended to be confused about their status and legal rights – not knowing what point they had reached in the asylum process, often holding papers in languages they didn't understand, and frustrated by an application process that they perceived as unfair. Some said their journey to Europe and experience in the camps was worse than living in a war zone, since at least then they knew where they were and had a home, even if their lives were at risk. Refugees living in shelters in Germany, for whom life was often much harder than they

1 UNHCR, *Refugees/Migrants Emergency Response – Mediterranean*, 2016, http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php.

2 A total of 66 refugees from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq participated in the study in formal and informal camps in Greece. An additional 13 interviews took place in Germany, along with 16 focus group discussions.

3 A short film inspired by the research, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m1BLsySgsHM, has had almost 950,000 views on Facebook and YouTube.

4 As of 11 April 2016: Amnesty International, *Trapped in Greece: An Avoidable Refugee Crisis*, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur25/3778/2016/en.

had expected, had no official rights to live or work there, no knowledge of whether they would be allowed to stay, and were confused about their rights and asylum status.

## Refugees wanted to know: what was next for them?

Aside from questions about their rights, their options and their status, refugees in formal and informal camps in Greece said that they needed basic information about the logistics of daily living, including how to stay safe and where to find healthcare, but often had no common language to communicate with service providers. They voiced concerns about a lack of translators – especially Farsi/Dari-speakers – to liaise between them and agencies, and also expressed mistrust of translators used in asylum interviews.

Trust was a key theme from the research: who could refugees trust for information? Often they did not have a choice, and had to put their 'trust' in whoever could supply relevant information when they needed it most. Faced with an information vacuum or low confidence in official sources, which they perceived to be unreliable, they often sought help from people smugglers, who could provide information about alternative options, even if it turned out to be untrue.

The study showed that refugees who stay in regular contact with other refugees and who have wide communication networks of family members and friends (via mobile networks and social networking sites such as Facebook and WhatsApp) were likely to be more resilient than those who were less connected. The latter, particularly Afghan refugees, tended to rely more heavily on smugglers and their travel group for information on their journey, and were often cut off from contact with family and friends.

> *'We need access to the internet to find information and communicate with our family at home.'*

## Challenges for humanitarian agencies

Chief among the challenges facing humanitarian agencies in meeting refugees' information and communication needs was that they did not know when and whether borders would open to allow the refugees to continue their journey. While they wanted to share helpful, accurate information, agencies knew that the situation could quickly change and was outside their control. In April 2016, humanitarian agency staff in Greece reviewed the research findings at a workshop in Athens. They discussed initiatives which were already under way, alongside possible ways to better meet refugees' information and communication needs. Since the research was conducted, humanitarian agencies have explored new initiatives to communicate effectively with refugees in appropriate languages, in an attempt to improve the daily reality for the diverse groups of people who remain static in Greece.

## Box 1 Suggestions from refugees and humanitarians

1. Have focal points within the camps who speak the right languages, can communicate people's needs and concerns to agencies, and provide answers.
2. Have more legal advisers in the camps (with translators), who can consider people's individual cases and advise them on their options.

   *'We need one-to-one appointments with legal advisers, to help us understand our rights and our options.'*
3. Hold regular meetings within the camps to update refugees on the current situation, preferably led by EU/government officials.

   *'They could gather everyone together in meetings to share important updates.'*
4. Improve connectivity. Although free wi-fi is available in some camps, all camps need it to enable people to connect to their families and other sources of information.
5. Improve face-to-face communication between humanitarians and refugees, via people who speak the right language.
6. Strengthen the capacity of responders (NGO, volunteer, government) to communicate complex information on rights and asylum in a simple, accurate way.
7. Share critical information about refugee needs and legal issues between agencies.

**Theo Hannides**, **Nicola Bailey** and **Dwan Kaoukji** are researchers from BBC Media Action. This article is amended from the Executive Summary of the BBC Media Action research report *Voices of Refugees: Information and Communication Needs of Refugees in Greece and Germany*, published in July 2016. The content of the report is the responsibility of BBC Media Action. Any views expressed in the report should not be taken to represent those of the BBC itself, or any donors supporting the work of BBC Media Action. BBC Media Action is the BBC's international development charity. It is not funded by the BBC licence fee but is supported by grants and donations from a range of institutions, foundations and individuals.

# The Start Network European Refugee Response: trialling a collaborative approach to a regional crisis

**Emily Whitehead**

In October 2015, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) allocated £16 million to the Start Network in response to the refugee and migration crisis in Europe. Seventeen humanitarian agencies were selected to implement projects in five countries along migration routes from Turkey to Germany and other European destination countries. The first phase, carried out over 5–6 months, consisted of a variety of humanitarian assistance and protection activities.[1] This article critically reflects on the response, explaining how it was established and the range of projects implemented, and concludes with the main findings of an independent evaluation.

## The Start Network

The Start Network is a network of 39 NGOs focusing on crisis response and preparedness.[2] Over the last three years, the Network has shown that aid can be channelled to those in need within 72 hours of an emergency for short 45-day life-saving responses through the Start Fund mechanism. In 2015, the Network began piloting an alternative funding mechanism designed to encourage greater communication, cooperation and coordination between members. Initial pilots of such 'collaborative responses' include supporting refugees in Cameroon and helping governments and communities in West Africa prevent and prepare for possible disease outbreaks.

## A collaborative response to the European refugee and migrant crisis

On 29 July 2015, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) submitted an alert to the Start Fund after an assessment of the situation in Lesvos earlier in the month. The Start Fund was unable to approve funds due to a clause in its guidelines stating that the money could not be used in OECD countries, and the context demanded a larger-scale response than the Start Fund's 45-day project cycle mechanism could support.

A refugee from Iraq rests with his family in an Oxfam shelter after arriving in Greece by boat from Turkey.

*©Pablo Tosco/Oxfam*

1 Phase 2 ended on 31 August with an additional £5m from DFID.

2 Start Network members: http://www.startnetwork.org/the-network.

## Table 1 Activities per agency and country

| Agencies | Countries of operation | Sectors |
|---|---|---|
| ACAPS/MapAction | Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, FYROM, Greece | • Provision of information and communicating with communities |
| ActionAid | Greece | • Provision of information and communicating with communities<br>• Protection and referral of vulnerable groups |
| CARE | Croatia, Serbia | • Improving WASH |
| Christian Aid | Serbia | • Cash transfer programmes |
| Catholic Relief Services | Serbia, FYROM, Greece | • Provision of information and communicating with communities<br>• Protection and referral of vulnerable groups<br>• Camp management and shelter |
| Doctors of the World | Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, FYROM, Greece | • Protection and referral of vulnerable groups<br>• Access to medical care |
| Danish Refugee Council | Serbia, Macedonia, Greece | • Provision of information and communicating with communities<br>• Protection and referral of vulnerable groups<br>• Improving WASH<br>• Food security<br>• Camp management and shelter |
| International Medical Corps | Greece | • Improving WASH<br>• Access to medical care |
| International Rescue Committee | Greece | • Protection and referral of vulnerable groups<br>• Improving WASH<br>• Camp management and shelter |
| Mercy Corps | Serbia, FYROM, Greece | • Protection and referral of vulnerable groups<br>• Food security<br>• Cash transfer programmes |
| Norwegian Refugee Council | Greece | • Protection and referral of vulnerable groups<br>• Improving WASH<br>• Camp management and shelter |
| Oxfam | Serbia, FYROM, Greece | • Protection and referral of vulnerable groups<br>• Food security and livelihoods |
| Samaritan's Purse | Croatia, Greece | • Distribution of NFIs for winterisation<br>• Improving WASH<br>• Camp management and shelter<br>• Cash transfer programmes |
| Internews | Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, FYROM, Greece | • Provision of information and communicating with communities |
| Save the Children | Croatia, Serbia, FYROM, Greece | • Protection and referral of vulnerable groups<br>• Distribution of NFIs for winterisation<br>• Improving WASH<br>• Food security |
| Translators without Borders | Croatia, Serbia, FYROM, Greece | • Provision of information and communicating with communities |
| World Vision | Serbia | • Protection and referral of vulnerable groups<br>• Distribution of NFIs for winterisation |

After consultations with DFID a £5m funding envelope was announced, shortly followed by an additional commitment of £11m. Although the funding came at a critical time, the consultation process was lengthy, with funding finally approved by DFID on 26 October 2016.

The Start Network European Refugee Response (ERR) used the 'collaborative response' approach trialled in Cameroon and West Africa. A call for proposals was released in early November 2015 and two project selection committees were convened. Start Network member and non-member

agencies were represented at country and HQ level. The process for project design, locations, sectors, priorities and decision-making was completed in two weeks. Seventeen Start Network member and non-member agencies were selected to implement projects in Greece, Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Slovenia and Serbia. Despite the challenges – including several adaptions in response to the decision to close borders along the Western Balkan route on 9 March and the EU–Turkey agreement on 20 March – the ERR implemented a wide variety of projects across multiple borders and countries along the Western Balkan route, addressing the needs of almost 1.2m refugees and migrants.

## Evaluation of the ERR

The first phase of the ERR ended in April 2016, and an independent evaluation was commissioned. The evaluation, conducted by Groupe URD, is framed around the criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and collaborative advantage.

### Relevance and appropriateness

*Relevance.* A substantial amount of funding came at a critical time to respond to the needs of migrants and refugees along the Balkans route just before the winter, providing ERR agencies and their local partners with much-needed resources to scale up their assistance. Nevertheless, advocacy with European donors, institutions and other stakeholders was a significant gap, particularly on protection issues.

*Coverage.* The range of programmes and agencies funded through the ERR meant that needs were broadly covered, including an innovative 'communicating with refugees' component. However, the lack of communication and coordination between agencies resulted in some overlaps and gaps, and there was no 'whole of route' vision or a regional approach to support cross-border coordination.

*Adaptability and responsiveness.* Given the fast-changing context, flexibility and adaptability were undoubtedly the main strengths of the ERR, and agencies rated the brokering role of the Start Network very highly compared to traditional modes of donor interaction (particularly the rapidity of the decision-making process). The relevance of ERR activities essentially relied on the professionalism and expertise of the individual agencies as far as programming and needs assessments were concerned. Despite attempts, the Start Network was not in a position to set up or promote any mechanism for joint needs assessments or coordinated programming.

### Effectiveness

The limited timeframe, as well as delays to the start of implementation and an inability to obtain no-cost extensions for activities, had a negative impact on the effectiveness of the response. This was particularly the case when agencies based their decisions on the criterion of rapid disbursement, rather than on the reality of needs.

Some efforts were made to work with local authorities and populations in the different countries. Coordination with local NGOs and authorities was particularly successful in FYROM, where NGOs provided local knowledge while ERR agencies contributed additional funding and skills. Some agencies invested significant amounts of money in camp maintenance and improving infrastructure in anticipation of a lengthy crisis.

### Efficiency

Allocating funds through the Start Network allowed DFID to 'outsource' programme management and monitoring at short notice. This delegated allocation process lightened administrative procedures and allowed a high degree of flexibility in programme management.

Although a variety of products and communication channels were used, the information circulated by the Start Network did not reach the vast majority of operational staff in ERR agencies (this is probably linked to the lack of a permanent field presence by Start Network staff during most of the programme). The wide range of monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) products (situational reports, learning workshops, monitoring visits, case studies, peer reviews) provided a good overview of the projects, but did not include crisis management or situational analysis, which could have guided crisis response and strategic positioning.

Communication and coordination were strengthened at a later stage of the response (around February–March 2016), thanks to field coordination meetings and closer ties between ERR agencies. No formal mechanism for coordination among the ERR agencies was set up, with priority given to 'all agency cooperation and coordination' rather than specific collective action among ERR agencies.

### Collaborative mechanism

The use of the term 'collaborative response' raised expectations. There was no clarity or consensus about the principles and practical feasibility of a collaborative approach, and no joint programming (agencies were unwilling to agree an overall framework of outcomes and outputs). Among the key ingredients of a collaborative response are the presence of Start Network focal points in the field and the decentralisation of selection processes.

## Recommendations for future collaborative responses

Groupe URD proposed six key recommendations to the Start Network at a time when the Network was evaluating the collaborative response mechanism as a whole. In collaboration with member agencies, the Start Network team facilitated the development of standard operating procedures for a modified collaborative response model, putting the recommendations from Groupe URD into practical solutions for the future. The recommendations are outlined below, with responses to explain how they will be addressed by the Network.

### Recommendation 1: Before the implementation of any collaborative response, the Start Network and the agencies involved should build a shared and collective vision

Start Network response: Collaboration will be facilitated at three key stages: crisis alert and donor negotiation, programme design and programme implementation. There will be a particularly strong focus on collaboration during programme design.

After the initial crisis alert and negotiations with donors, Start Network members will work with other stakeholders to map out gaps in humanitarian provision and collectively design a response plan to form the basis for the call for proposals. The process from needs assessment to the call for proposals will include member representatives, donors and other relevant external actors (UN agencies, local NGOs, sectoral experts). This will involve active engagement in person, through a collaborative mapping and strategic planning workshop of 1–2 days in country.

### Recommendation 2: The Start Network should identify the appropriate set-up (in terms of processes, structure and outputs) in order to achieve collectively defined objectives

Start Network response: Member representatives will agree the model and degree of collaboration at the collaborative mapping and strategic planning workshop. Once member agencies have received confirmation of funding, a 'start-up workshop' will be held in country to provide an opportunity for organisations to agree collaborative activities. Not all partners are required to be involved in all collaboration initiatives; collaboration should only be pursued where appropriate, and where it will add value to the response.

### Recommendation 3: The Start Network should review the current structure of ERR management and MEL services, including field presence, to inform future collaborative responses

Start Network response: For each response, a Programme Management Unit will be established with clearly defined and communicated roles and responsibilities. The Unit will consist of at least three people: a Programme Manager, Finance and Awards Officer and a Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) Officer/Coordinator.

### Recommendation 4: The Start Network should review and design an optimal coordination system, taking into account the number of agencies involved and the context

Start Network response: The dedicated Programme Manager will be based in country and will coordinate in person with implementing agencies, as well as within wider humanitarian coordination mechanisms. Internal coordination systems will be designed during the start-up workshop, based on the context.

### Recommendation 5: Strengthen the operational benefits of MEL services

Start Network response: MEAL will be carried out by a Start Network member selected by open tender every two years. Each response will have a MEAL framework, with an increased focus at the project/agency level, standardised indicators and clearer guidance on sources of information and frequency of collection. MEAL will also identify issues of common interest (strategic, operational, advocacy) to be further addressed through commissioned studies or during workshops and coordination meetings.

### Recommendation 6: The Start Network should establish a robust communication and information management system

Start Network response: As soon as a Start Response alert is triggered, a Box Folder (a cloud-based platform) will be opened to ensure that information is available to participating agencies. All proposals and reports should be uploaded to the Folder, with documents saved in a specific format. Each response will also include a coordination/collaboration envelope within response budgets for communication and information management, covering costs such as online or mobile technologies, workshops and meetings.

## Conclusion

The ERR provided an alternative model for NGOs to respond collectively to a regional humanitarian crisis. While the approach was innovative and ambitious, the evaluation has highlighted some of the obstacles that continue to plague attempts to create more collaborative responses. However, there is the appetite amongst humanitarian organisations to create processes which allow resources to be utilised in a more effective, collective and collaborative manner. The Start Network does not claim to have found the key to revolutionise the humanitarian sector; rather, we are trying to open up a space for experimentation and learning, building on examples of good coordination and collaboration. Both the successes and challenges of the ERR will now be reflected on and will be fed into the processes and practices implemented for the Network's next major humanitarian response.

**Emily Whitehead** is Collaborative Responses Programme Manager at the Start Network.

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**Humanitarian Practice Network (HPN)**
Overseas Development Institute
203 Blackfriars Road, London, SE1 8NJ
United Kingdom

**Tel:** +44 (0)20 7922 0300
**Fax:** +44 (0)20 7922 0399
**HPN e-mail:** hpn@odi.org.uk
**HPN website:** www.odihpn.org

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