

2015 was the year that put refugees and the movement of people back on the global and European agenda. Europe saw the biggest refugee flow since World War Two, many crossing over from Turkey into Greece. They flee from ongoing armed conflicts and mass killings in countries such as Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan and South Sudan. So long as these conflicts are not resolved there is no end in sight to the refugee flow. Following border closures throughout Europe, increasing numbers of refugees are finding themselves stuck in Greece, which is under pressure to cope. Humanitarian NGOs are trying to support the efforts of local civil society and authorities to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in Greece and elsewhere, but in a difficult political environment, are concerned about the humanitarian principles and maintaining standards.

Kicking off this issue of VOICE Out Loud, the Danish Refugee Council describe the difficulty of upholding **humanitarian standards** in the midst of this humanitarian crisis. Complementing the basic needs of people in open air refugee camps in Greece is a challenge which Secours Islamique France addresses in its article on **needs assessment**. The Doctors of the World International Network highlights **the best and worst in the European crisis** facing migrants. Looking at the humanitarian principles in the context of the Europe Refugee Response, the Norwegian Refugee Council compares operations before and after **the EU-Turkey Deal**. SOS Children's Villages draws lessons from the Balkan Route with an eye on **children's protection** in the European migration crisis.

In a 'View from Turkey', Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe explains how it uses **partnerships** to support refugee protection and assistance in South-Eastern Turkey.

The 'View from the EU' section contains an interview with Catherine Woollard, Secretary General of the **European Council on Refugees and Exiles**. She shares her views on the EU's response to the refugee crisis, the key issues with the EU-Turkey deal, and the recently adopted Communication on Forced Displacement and Development. We also hear from CARE on the additional challenge that **humanitarian financing** poses in this EU refugee crisis.

**VOICE**

VOICE stands for 'Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies'. VOICE is a network of 82 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) active in humanitarian aid worldwide. VOICE is the main NGO interlocutor on EU humanitarian affairs and disaster risk reduction and it promotes the values of humanitarian NGOs.

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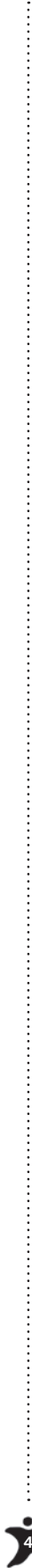
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## FROM THE VOICE PRESIDENT



Returning from Istanbul, attending the first ever World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), (which I sometimes felt like calling the 'World Goodwill Jamboree'), I reflect that following the hopes and expectations, we now need to get to the very serious business of following through on the commitments made and knuckle down on advocating for those issues where the commitments were too few and too weak. Indeed it is now clear that the Summit has not been the destination point that the word usually means in common (and political) language but may be the reference point of actions to come. After the enormous amount of energy engaged in the worldwide consultations, it is rather disconcerting that the Summit is perceived as bringing us to the starting blocks rather than to the finishing line, but such is the situation. The process showed a true degree of engagement from NGOs and other actors. There were some positive signals in relation to humanitarian financing: major donors and aid agencies agreed to a set of commitments, the 'Grand Bargain'.

But despite those positive elements, the Summit has not yet achieved what it was initiated for... humanitarian aid is only a response to humanitarian needs; not a solution. There don't appear to be any truly significant new commitment from states linked to conflict resolution and peacebuilding, maybe some timid attempts to invest a bit more on conflict prevention (hopefully not at the cost of humanitarian action...).

The Summit won't for instance provide more hope for a better management of the refugees and migrants wishing to come to Europe either. After the amply reported, more than 850,000 men, women, girls and boys that had crossed the sea from Turkey to Greece by the end of 2015- over 90% were fleeing conflict in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan – and despite worsening weather conditions, a further 152,000 continued to arrive during the first few months of 2016. Greece was not a destination country, but a transit country, with most refugees and migrants continuing their journey through the Western Balkans and onwards to Northern Europe. Now people are increasingly again attempting a more dangerous route to reach Italy as the events of past weeks show.

... The EU is failing to properly address the protection needs of tens of thousands of people fleeing conflicts. As you will see in this issue, the EU-Turkey deal is of great concern to humanitarian actors. The situation in Greece is worrying; refugees stuck in the Balkans because of fences and severe border control management, and is leading to acts of desperation. The conditions are such that humanitarian NGOs' standards are being challenged, and once again, we see that the more the environment becomes politicised, the greater the adherence to the humanitarian principles by NGOs becomes important.

In response to the European and global dimensions of this displacement crisis, the Commission has adopted a new facility for Turkey, a new policy on forced displacement and development and a funding instrument for emergency action inside the EU. That financial resources of such a magnitude (promising to become greater than those at ECHO's disposal for its original humanitarian mission) can be made available in a matter of weeks, draws ones attention, and begs a few disturbing questions...

Within VOICE we will keep on advocating for respect of international conventions; and for humanitarian action to remain principled and needs-based. The WHS may provide only a little hope in relation to concrete engagement for refugees and migrants in the next months but at the very least humanitarian actors, donors and policy makers have realised the burning need to work differently in protracted crises and address the needs of refugees in a more dignified and efficient way. May the high-level meeting on addressing large movements of refugees and migrants to be held in September build on the Sustainable Development Goals and WHS outcomes and ensure states translate their engagement into concrete actions for displaced people to simply be able to pursue their rights: to apply for asylum and to a safe and dignified life.

**Nicolas Borsinger**  
VOICE President

## TRYING TO UPHOLD STANDARDS IN THE MIDST OF A HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

THE ISSUE – HUMANITARIAN NGOS AND THE EUROPEAN 'REFUGEE CRISIS'

★ In 2015, over one million refugees and migrants entered Europe via the Mediterranean, creating a political and humanitarian crisis in Europe. The situation highlighted short-comings in the European migration and asylum policy, and resulted in insufficient efforts to receive, register and assist those who arrive. The humanitarian crisis that we are witnessing within the EU's borders is unnecessary on a continent where resources, capabilities, and a strong legal framework encompassing human rights and asylum procedures are in place.

Greece has been in the midst of the flow of sea-arrivals and has understandably been struggling with the provision of services and humanitarian support for the overwhelming number of arrivals, particularly during 2015 and the first quarter of 2016. The border closures by many European States, and the insufficient relocation efforts<sup>1</sup> have resulted in more than 50.000<sup>2</sup> people now stranded in Greece. Despite the significant decrease in arrivals following the EU-Turkey deal, refugees and migrants continue to arrive on the shores in numbers still surpassing the capacity of the relevant authorities to register and process the cases. While the EU and its Member States are providing assistance and support in terms of logistics, materials and expertise, more is needed to ensure an appropriate and dignified response in accordance with humanitarian standards.

### ★ PROTECTING REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS ALL THE WAY

To DRC, the situation in Greece reflects a global crisis in demand of a holistic and comprehensive response. DRC delivers protection-focused programmes all along the displacement route from the regions of origin in the Middle East, Central Asia, Horn of Africa, and West Africa, to the transit areas in Turkey, Libya, Tunisia and South-Eastern Europe, as well as in Denmark as one of the destination points in Europe.

DRC launched its operation in Greece in November 2015 with an initial focus on the island of Lesbos and the capital Athens. Due to the implications of the EU-Turkey deal and the transformation of the Moria reception site into a closed facility, DRC's activities on Lesbos were downscaled significantly. DRC has remained on the island however, with a limited set-up, focusing on protection monitoring and referral

of vulnerable individual cases. Responding to increasing needs in the mainland, DRC has expanded its presence there, in the Attica and Northern/Central regions, with the overall objective of facilitating a protective environment and safeguarding human dignity.

Our interventions are designed in a flexible manner which enables a rapid reorientation of resources. This ready-to-go, adjustable structure is crucial in the current context in Greece, considering the recurrent changes to the displacement dynamics. The new Council Regulation for emergency support within the European Union<sup>3</sup> has provided a much needed funding framework, which allows for adaptation to the rapidly changing context, and also enabled a strengthened engagement in the humanitarian response by NGOs.

### ★ NEED FOR CLEAR INFORMATION

A key challenge for the humanitarian response in Greece is the continued unclear implications of the EU-Turkey agreement for both refugees and migrants currently stranded in Greece, as well as for the new arrivals. Another is the insufficient and inefficient asylum system that is struggling to cope. In combination, these challenges further exacerbate the vulnerabilities of the refugees and migrants and make meeting humanitarian standards demanding.

From a right-based perspective, the rapid launch of the EU-Turkey agreement has been highly problematic. In line with the agreement, the Greek Parliament passed a new law that re-organizes the Greek asylum and reception system<sup>4</sup>. The more than 100-pages long law came into force immediately, and left most actors uncertain as to the implications of the changed legal framework, and more specifically how to appropriately inform, advise and support the people of concern.

While some returns have taken place, the insufficient capacity to handle and process asylum claims, and the lack of a functioning appeal system, means that the full extent of the implementation of the agreement has yet to be seen. For the refugees and migrants stranded in Greece either on the islands in closed or open facilities, or in one of the many informal or formal sites on the mainland, the uncertainty in terms of legal process and perspective is a cause for much preoccupation, anxiety and tension. Scarce access to legal counselling and representation further exacerbates this.

*'More is needed to ensure an appropriate and dignified response in accordance with humanitarian standards.'*

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*'A key contribution from NGOs is the support to the Greek authorities in protection-sensitive, needs-based, culturally appropriate, and environment friendly management of reception and accommodation sites that meet humanitarian standards.'*

Providing clear and specific information for the people of concern is a core protection activity. As part of the holistic approach to the refugee situation, the DRC operation in Greece has been staffed with a high number of Arabic, Farsi, Dari, Pashto and Kurdish speaking personnel from existing DRC operations in Afghanistan, Jordan and Lebanon from the outset of the operation. In addition, Arabic, Farsi and Kurmanji speaking legal advisors from DRC's HQ Asylum Department continue to be deployed in support of the operation. This has enabled DRC to have regular daily presence on-site of much needed field protection staff with relevant language skills, and legal expertise. While this has been an important element in ensuring a protective environment for the refugees and migrants, the lack of clarity in terms of the implications of the EU-Turkey agreement is making the provision of clear information challenging. DRC is working closely with the local legal aid NGO AITIMA<sup>5</sup> to provide legal counselling to those in need, and also cooperates closely with UNHCR and others in coordination with the responsible ministries to encourage more comprehensive information campaigns. In general, close cooperation and support to the Greek authorities are key to an adequate response. Currently secondments to relevant authorities are being planned as part of DRC's intervention.

### ★ MUCH MORE THAN JUST A ROOF OVER THE HEAD

Inadequate reception capacity is another key concern in the current environment in Greece. Because of insufficient capacity, the closed facilities are overcrowded, with little or no separate spaces, and some of the open sites across the country lack access to adequate services for protection, food and appropriate accommodation. The Greek Government requires more support in order to expand and improve services in cooperation with humanitarian actors as new sites are being prepared across the mainland. With the aim of ensuring more dignified accommodation the government has repeatedly encouraged people to move from the informal sites to less crowded – but largely unfinished - sites elsewhere in Greece. Recently, non-voluntary relocation has been announced as a last resort. Combined with the insufficient level of information, the lack of adequate sites and the unclarity of legal procedures and prospect of asylum, non-voluntary relocations risk to contribute negatively to the situation of refugees and

migrants, and - in the absence of a clear understanding of future options - make people more at risk of smuggling and human trafficking. If appropriate facilities are not available and constant dialogue is not opened with the affected population, they are more likely to make desperate choices.

A key contribution from NGOs to the humanitarian response to the crisis in Greece is the support to the Greek authorities in protection-sensitive, needs-based, culturally appropriate, and environment friendly management of reception and accommodation sites that meet humanitarian standards. This is at the core of the expertise of the humanitarian INGOs. Community mobilization approaches and the use and coordination of volunteers engaged to act as focal points for protection, site management support and social activities are some of the many examples of good practice applied in our operations in Greece. They also include the use of bio-degradable containers for the distribution of meals to reduce the environmental impact of the humanitarian intervention; and a recycling scheme of high-thermal blankets with a local industrial grade cleaning company.

Despite efforts of the Greek authorities to live up to the overwhelming task, the humanitarian response in Greece will continue to be inadequate without sufficient resources, more solidarity from the EU and effective responsibility sharing between European member states, as well as full compliance with international and European human rights and safeguards as enshrined in the European asylum acquis, the European Convention of Human Rights, the 1951 convention and international law relating to the principle of non-refoulement. The response to the European refugee and migrant situation must be solutions-oriented and aim to ensure that the affected population are informed of their rights, and can access them in a non-discriminatory and dignified manner.

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<https://drc.dk/>

1. Communication from the Commission: Third report on relocation and resettlement (COM(2016) 360 final)

2. <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/country.php?id=83>

3. COUNCIL REGULATION (EU) 2016/369

4. LAW 4357/2016

5. <http://www.aitima.gr/index.php/en/>

## ASSESSMENT: COMPLEMENTING PEOPLE'S BASIC NEEDS IN GREECE

THE ISSUE – HUMANITARIAN NGOS AND THE EUROPEAN 'REFUGEE CRISIS'

*'The legacy of today's refugee populations is a lost generation which lacks education, economic prospects, and participation in political life.'*



*"We need education for our children. We left Syria because of the war, crossing countries and the sea, facing the dangers and now are blocked in Greece. We cannot continue our trip to central Europe. The Greek people are very generous, we do not lack a hot meal and a shelter to sleep, but we dream of a better future for our children where they can have access to a school as they did in Syria before the war."*

This is the wish of a Syrian refugee from Aleppo currently stuck in the Saouda camp on Chios Island with his family. Like him, many other refugees are wondering about the future of their children who have had no access to a school since the beginning of the war in Syria.

On 18 February 2016, the Balkan route to the EU was closed and reinforced by the Europe-Turkey agreement signed on 20 March. As a result, many refugees find themselves stranded in Greece, resulting in the challenging task of hosting them. A major factor that will play an important role in the programming of the humanitarian response in Greece is the integration of these populations in the Greek community. This means giving refugees access to basic rights such as education, social services, health and child protection. As long as these basic services are not guaranteed, integration remains an illusion.

A month after the implementation of the new migration policies in Europe, particularly in Greece, SIF was able to assess the current situation of people in need. Camps originally designed for a quick transit do not have the capacity to address the needs of a population during a prolonged stay.

Our explorative mission in the field has shown that generally the ongoing humanitarian response provides basic needs such as shelters, food, and sanitation facilities. However, there is a high discrepancy in respect of humanitarian standards, and quality and quantity of services provided between one location and the next. From direct observation and discussions with different stakeholders and refugees/migrants it becomes apparent that protection services for women and children, and informal education (recreational and learning opportunities) and services for people with special needs, are limited or lacking.

Given the extent of the current humanitarian needs in Greece, we will scale up our intervention within the framework of regionalisation of our activities in favour of refugees. Concretely, we will give access to informal education to the most vulnerable: children and adolescents. They currently experience acute vulnerability that exposes them to a deterioration of their physical and mental health due to violent situations experienced in their countries as well as forced displacement. The separation from their families, the need for a protected environment and the interruption of their education further exacerbate their vulnerability.

The legacy of today's refugee populations is a lost generation which lacks education, economic prospects, and participation in political life. As a humanitarian NGO, SIF will contribute in Greece and elsewhere to improve refugees' conditions and promote the fundamental rights of the "Convention on the Rights of the Child": children's right to play, identity, health, participation in education and protection.

But humanitarian aid is only a response to humanitarian needs, not its solution. Policymakers need to address the major conflicts that are the principal drivers of forced displacements, invest in conflict prevention, and prevent the political, economic, and development failures that could turn into extreme violence.

States also have a responsibility to support humanitarian action; not only via financial support but also by providing an enabling operating environment, promoting and adhering to international conventions defining rights for refugees and vulnerable groups in conflict affected areas, in areas of displacement or in the European Union.


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## EUROPE'S MIGRATION CRISIS: THE BEST AND THE WORST

THE ISSUE – HUMANITARIAN NGOS AND THE EUROPEAN 'REFUGEE CRISIS'

*'In Greece, but also in other European countries, an extraordinary solidarity movement immediately started.'*

 Mid-August 2015, the island of Lesbos with its total population of 86,000 inhabitants, saw over 22,000 people waiting to be registered or for a boat to continue their migration route. That is the equivalent of 400,000 migrants arriving in Paris.

As an international network operating in 79 countries, including eleven European ones, we witnessed different trends and movements that emerged in reaction to the so-called migrant crisis. At Doctors of the World (Médecins du Monde), we prefer to call it a European solidarity crisis.

In Greece, but also in Slovenia, Austria, Germany and other European countries, an extraordinary solidarity movement immediately started. Groups of people organised to bring first help to the arriving migrants, providing shelter, food and clothes.

In Greece, this went alongside a slow but real decline of extremist groups' attacks against migrants whereas they had been very present before the "mass" inflows. The same didn't happen in other countries such as France, Germany or Sweden, where we saw an increase in criminal activities by extremist groups. The intense Greek solidarity and hospitality, even though Greeks were living through their fifth year of social and economic crisis, probably didn't leave any space for extremism.

At Médecins du Monde (MdM), we witnessed rising needs from the Greek population in relation to healthcare services and scaled up our domestic programmes to respond to the increase of patients coming to our clinics. Additional mobile units were set up following the closure of many health structures, especially in villages and islands. Since 2012, MdM Greece also implements specific programmes offering health services to refugees and migrants in Lesbos, Chios, Tilos, Athens and alongside the main migrant routes, as well as on boats from Chios and Lesbos to Athens and Kavala.

In 2015, the MdM Network was mobilised to support our Greek Chapter by raising funds and recruiting staff including nurses, doctors, interpreters and logisticians. Above all we showed our own solidarity and upheld our colleagues' efforts.

This international response wasn't easy to set up: many of our volunteers feared to be useless if they didn't speak Greek as our local teams could not integrate them without interpreters. The workload proved to be extremely exhausting.

Lately, a coordination unit at MdM Greece Headquarters was set up to facilitate the international solidarity (in human resources and funding).

On the ground, while the number of arrivals tends to stabilise, the conditions changed very quickly, creating new challenges. First people arrived in the middle of the night, stayed a few hours and crossed the border the same night. Since March 2016, over 12,000 people are stuck in the mud and burning sun without proper facilities – in Idomeni alone<sup>1</sup>. They have no hope of succeeding in their migration plans, leading to desperate acts that include some sewing their lips and another setting himself on fire.

There is no lack of organisations trying to remedy the problem. Since September 2015, hundreds of organisations have arrived in Greece, especially in the islands, in a true outpouring of solidarity. Yet one of the biggest challenges today remains unanswered: how can we succeed in organising this impetus to serve the best the interests of migrants without crushing existing groups of inhabitants?

The large influx of international organisations also poses challenges of its own, mainly of coordination between "big" NGOs and smaller ones. There are some attempts in the field to improve collaboration: recently the mayor of Lesbos organised meetings between different actors, but the promised coordination lasted only a few hours. Often, inhabitants and small organisations end up feeling ignored by the big players.

A further problem has been the political response that doesn't fall in line with the intense solidarity expressed by EU citizens. Many European decision-makers took the decision to build offensive razor-blade fences to keep the migrants away, and refuse the first European plans made to share the reception capacities. We lost a good part of our European souls and hopes in this crisis, crushed away by fences and anti-migration policies.

But we believe there's one thing to take away from this crisis: the genuine solidarity expressed by many all over Europe and particularly in Greece. This is the value we wish to build on.


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1. At the time of writing, the Idomeni refugee camp hosted 22,000 refugees. As of 23 May, Greek riot police began to clear the camp, ordering approximately 8,500 residents to move. *The Guardian*: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/24/idomeni-greek-riot-police-move-in-before-dawn-to-clear-out-refugee-camp>

## HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES AND THE EUROPE REFUGEE RESPONSE: OPERATIONS BEFORE AND AFTER THE EU-TURKEY DEAL

THE ISSUE – HUMANITARIAN NGOS AND THE EUROPEAN 'REFUGEE CRISIS'

*'While European leaders repeatedly failed to devise collective plans, the humanitarian response on the Greek islands was relatively immune to the increasingly politicised nature of the European response to the migration crisis.'*

 The refugee response on the Greek islands has been unique for humanitarian actors in many respects. Confronted with a sharp increase in the number of refugees and migrants crossing the Mediterranean to seek asylum in Europe in 2015, many humanitarian agencies rushed to the main reception islands in the Aegean Sea to support the response efforts. The chaotic scenes that were witnessed as many thousands of refugees arrived on the shores of the Greek islands during the summer of last year brought into sharp focus the humanitarian consequences of a global displacement crisis which showed little sign of abating.

European countries were unprepared to deal with the scale of the refugee flow and the response lacked clear and effective leadership from the start. Greece was left to deal with the problem with limited support from other EU countries. The borders of the Western Balkan countries remained open as a matter of necessity to alleviate pressure on those countries facing a significant influx of asylum seekers. European leaders became increasingly concerned with devising means to halt the flow and failed to deliver a coordinated humanitarian response to the crisis. European summit meetings were hastily convened as part of frantic efforts to reach consensus quickly on an appropriate political solution.

Yet, while European leaders repeatedly failed to devise collective plans, the humanitarian response on the Greek islands was, for the large part, relatively immune to the increasingly politicised nature of the European response to the migration crisis. In the absence of European leadership, frontline response actors started to successfully mobilise resources and deliver a humanitarian approach to assist and support arriving and transiting refugees and migrants.

Local communities, national and international volunteers, NGOs and the Greek local authorities worked around the clock to establish an alert and response system that would help save lives and provide a dignified reception to those arriving on the Greek islands. Search and rescue patrols were organised and coordinated with the Greek Coastguards; local municipality workers and community groups quickly set up emergency reception sites at landing points along the beaches to ensure supplies of dry clothes, food and blankets could be stored and readily distributed.

Volunteers, NGOs and local civil society set up WhatsApp communication groups to coordinate and plan the delivery of clothes, meals and hygiene kits for mothers and children. Greek and international medical organisations agreed rota schedules to ensure 24/7 medical support coverage across the islands. Gradually, reception and registration systems were coordinated and functioning to ensure that the most vulnerable arriving refugees and migrants could access the services they needed.

There were undoubtedly gaps and challenges in the response. Coordination was frequently chaotic and services were not always available when they were needed. The reception arrangements and conditions for the refugees and migrants arriving on the Greek islands were often far from ideal, frequently falling short of minimum standards. The protection environment was inadequate, with a lack of attention provided to assisting those with special needs. But, nevertheless, it was a response characterised by compassion and a shared commitment to alleviating suffering and supporting the most vulnerable arriving on our European shores. Refugees and migrants were received, as far as possible, in conditions of dignity and treated as humanely as possible. This response was organised and delivered because of a common humanitarian purpose.

The nature of this response changed starkly after 20 March 2016 following the implementation of the provisions of the EU-Turkey Agreement. Under this landmark political deal, brokered by European leaders just two days prior, all refugees and migrants arriving in Greece will now be sent back to Turkey if they don't apply for asylum or if their claim is rejected. In return, Turkey is promised substantial financial assistance, as well as political assurances for a new visa scheme. In addition, for every Syrian returned to Turkey, the EU committed to resettling a Syrian refugee living in a Turkish camp.

While it was expected that the EU would deliver a blunt policy instrument to stop the flow of refugees to the Greek islands, the speed at which the provisions of the new deal came into effect took many in the humanitarian community by surprise. The significant humanitarian implications of the deal very quickly became apparent.

Overnight, a previously transitory refugee population assisted by humanitarian actors in open

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sites was transformed into a static refugee response operation. The open 'hotspots' on the islands became closed detention facilities – effectively return processing centres – fundamentally altering the operating environment for all humanitarian agencies involved in supporting the refugee response.

Prior to the deal, my own agency, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), was leading on the provision of site management support functions, including direct distribution and the maintenance of water and sanitation services, at the Vial 'Hotspot' on the island of Chios. It was very quickly evident that our ability to deliver these humanitarian services was now severely compromised.

Arriving at Vial on the morning of 20 March, we encountered a markedly different atmosphere. Heavy police presence now guarded the locked gates of the 'Hotspot', reinforcing the prison-like facilities in which all newly arrived refugees and migrants, including families and children, were now held in mandatory detention. Chaotic scenes rapidly unfolded as Greek First Reception Service staff, responsible for the running of the Hotspot, struggled to understand their role and mandate under the terms of the deal. With absolutely no instructions or directions provided to the police, local authorities and municipality workers to accompany the implementation of the provisions of the EU-Turkey deal, it was wholly unclear how registration procedures would be undertaken in the context of these new mandatory detention arrangements.

In the following days, due to the lack of guidance, the situation dramatically worsened. Faced with immediate overcrowding, the conditions in the centre were quickly deteriorating and tensions rising fast. It was clear that the service needs of many vulnerable asylum seekers were not able to be met.

Against this backdrop, NRC, along with many other humanitarian NGOs, had to reassess our own role and function within this new political context. It became readily apparent that the delivery of sufficient humanitarian services was simply not possible. Despite clear humanitarian needs, our ability to respond to those needs was compromised by the fact that access to the refugees and migrants was no longer regular, adequate or secure. NRC staff would require police permission to access areas of the Hotspot and only be able to deliver assistance in

accordance with the terms decided by the authorities.

The reception conditions in the centre were also already falling far short of accepted standards, with little provision for vulnerable groups and individuals. With pregnant women, children, elderly and disabled refugees and migrants already sleeping on concrete floors, NRC became concerned that our humanitarian role would be perceived differently if we continued to operate as before and assist in supporting the running of this now-closed detention centre. We simply were no longer able to positively influence changes to the hosting situation of the refugees and migrants at the 'Hotspot'.

Ultimately, it was important for humanitarian agencies such as NRC to be seen to take a clear stand and position in order to oppose the EU-Turkey deal, particularly the policy of mandatory detention and returns, and to publicly raise concerns about the flagrant dismissal of refugee and human right standards.

The decision to suspend humanitarian activities is one no humanitarian NGO takes lightly. In the context of Chios 'Hotspot', where needs were great, such a decision for NRC was doubly challenging. Yet, to continue operating as before wasn't possible. While NRC determined to maintain a protection presence at the 'Hotspot', it was decided that direct distribution activities would be suspended and site maintenance services handed over to the responsible authorities.

The interface of humanitarian assistance and political agendas is not new, nor surprising. Yet, reasserting humanitarian principles and assessing their application in the context of new political circumstances is never less important. The EU-Turkey deal manifestly changed the response environment on Chios for NRC and for other humanitarian NGOs working across the Greek islands. It also served as a salient reminder how politically charged the Europe refugee crisis had become - to be complicit in its implementation just couldn't be an option.

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*'Despite clear humanitarian needs, our ability to respond to those needs was compromised by the fact that access to the refugees and migrants was no longer regular, adequate or secure.'*

## LESSONS FROM THE BALKAN REFUGEE ROUTE: AN EYE ON CHILDREN'S SPECIAL PROTECTION NEEDS

THE ISSUE – HUMANITARIAN NGOS AND THE EUROPEAN 'REFUGEE CRISIS'

### ★ TWO SCENARIOS - CHILDREN ON THE BALKAN ROUTE

On the Balkan route, there are two main scenarios: there are those people who have stopped temporarily and those compelled to keep moving. The most desperate are those who can't stop: often in the hands of smugglers, they can take almost nothing. Babies are born in our mobile centres and Child Friendly Spaces, their exhausted families returning to the road within hours to avoid any legal complications. Only the smallest of cuddly toys will stay in these children's hands, to remind them about play, imagination and sweetness of childhood on their journey.

Since last year, SOS Children's Villages runs a specific Emergency Programme focused on the Balkan Route. It complements our operations run by national associations in countries of origin (throughout Africa, in Syria...) and of settlement (such as Jordan and Lebanon), the first transit in Europe (typically Greece or Italy, then Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary) and "countries of destination" (including Austria, Germany, and Finland). "When the children just pass through," says Katerina Ilievska of SOS Children's Villages Macedonia, "we don't get the chance to build up anything. Our main emphasis in Child Friendly Spaces lies on responding to basic needs. Many children who arrive here are dirty, wet and cold. We give them clean clothes, nappies and milk and play with them so they can be a child again, if only for a short time."

Now that walls are built, borders are closed and maritime crossings reversed, the human flux on the Balkan Route has slowed considerably. We are dealing with more children whose families have stopped migrating, at least momentarily. Some because they don't have resources to move further and remain in camps such as the Preševo camp in Serbia or in Gevgelija and Tabanovce in Macedonia; others because they are unable to make another crossing, trapped in camps in no man's land.

In these camps, SOS is partnering with other humanitarian actors to respond to the particular needs of children beyond the basics.

Our experience shows that when youngsters are deprived of the basic care usually taken for granted – regular schooling, a place to play and caring adults – this dramatically increases the trauma and emotional strain of conflict and

dislocation. Younger children in particular may be frightened and traumatised. Our Regional Emergency Response Coordinator, Irma Hajro says, "It is important to take their minds off their ordeal. We are able to provide the basic services, but we also have all-day activities, schooling and play days for children. Activities for adults are important too, especially for women, whose mental health also affects children's abilities to cope."

Children without parental care and those at risk of family separation need our special attention. The needs of Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC) are further challenged by the fact that young male teenagers self-identify as independent adults. They often run away if they get identified as children and sent to asylum centres. Reports show that children have burned or scratched their fingerprints off to make it difficult for the authorities to register them<sup>1</sup>, a practice also seen in adults.

To adapt to these circumstances we set up "youth corners" outfitted with computers. Our mobile team of doctors and intercultural mediators provides services in existing centres ranging from psychosocial support to culturally sensitive conflict prevention and training of care professionals dealing with unaccompanied children. When they finally reach the EU, SOS Children's Villages in 10 countries provide appropriate accommodation, psychosocial support and integration programmes, including preparatory education and language learning, giving them security and stability while their asylum requests are processed.

### ★ FORGETTING THE CRISIS?

SOS Children's Villages was already in Serbia and Macedonia before this wave of refugees, and is not going anywhere. But with the lower numbers of migrants now able to transit this region, the media has turned away from the Balkan Route towards other crises – and with it many other aid agencies. We will stay in Greece, and in Serbia, our partners handed us their part of the Child Friendly Space, because we will continue to work here as long as it's needed. For the children finding their way to and through Europe, it's not over yet.

**Samantha Chaitkin**  
Representative for EU External Affairs  
SOS Children's Villages International  
<http://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/>

*'When youngsters are deprived of the basic care usually taken for granted – regular schooling, a place to play and caring adults – this dramatically increases the trauma and emotional strain of conflict and dislocation.'*

1. The ENOC Children on the Move Taskforce 2016

## PARTNERSHIP TO ENSURE REFUGEE PROTECTION AND ASSISTANCE IN SOUTH-EASTERN TURKEY

### A VIEW FROM TURKEY

★ The Turkish Government reports to be currently hosting over three million refugees from many different countries and regions, of which 2.8 million are Syrians - making them the largest refugee hosting country in the world. The local municipalities, the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD), the Turkish Kızılay/Red Crescent, along with numerous international and national NGOs, have been responding to the most urgent humanitarian needs during the last five years. The host communities, especially in local neighbourhoods, have also demonstrated valuable efforts to host and support refugees.

Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe's (DKH) long standing strategic partner "Hayata Destek" - "Support to life" (STL), based in Istanbul, is a prominent Turkish NGO, which has been implementing programs to provide assistance and protection to Syrian and Iraqi refugees since they started arriving in Turkey. With funding from DG ECHO, the German Government, and other donors, DKH has contributed to STL's efforts since 2012.

#### ★ ONGOING SUPPORT IN AND AROUND DIYARBAKIR

Besides the large urban agglomerations like Istanbul or Ankara, many of the Syrian and Iraqi refugees reside in proximity to the border with Syria and Iraq. In Diyarbakir, a city of around one million inhabitants in the south-east of Turkey where political tensions are recently on the rise, there are more than 29,000 refugees<sup>1</sup> from Syria and Iraq, mainly hosted among the local population. Further, since 2014 around 2,000 Yezidis from Iraq live on the grounds of a former holiday park outside the city. In comparison to cities like Gaziantep, Sanliurfa and Hatay with larger refugee populations, the region receives less attention from humanitarian actors.

To contribute to the food security of the most vulnerable refugee households STL/DKH have set up a cash-transfer program. Based on the good market structures there, the refugees receive monthly 62TL (18EUR) per person, which with other aid modalities supports them to buy main food commodities and address other needs such as hygiene items at pre-identified supermarkets through an electronic cash-card system.

For the Yezidi camp, the municipality of Diyarbakir has been the main provider of basic food items. However, as they experience financial difficulties to continue their support, STL's assessment found that over 85% of the camp population is considered as being 'at risk' in terms of food

security, and have consequently included the entire population in the Cash Assistance program. STL also runs a mental health and psychosocial support program in the camp, offering children, youth and women a wide range of activities, ranging from pre-school education, life skills for adolescents, skills development trainings for youth and adults to gardening activities.

Some of both refugee groups experience challenges in accessing state run services for various reasons. Among others, they lack information on necessary procedures (e.g. birth registration), the logistical capacities (e.g. money for transport to health centres), or language skills. Through a case management/Special Needs Funds Program, DKH/STL provides counselling and escort in order to facilitate the contact with the authorities and access to services.

#### ★ NEW FUNDS – NEW CHALLENGES?

The announced allocation of an extra one billion Euro from the European Commission (ECHO) in support of humanitarian assistance and Protection efforts in Turkey is expected to affect the situation of the refugees and shape the humanitarian response of the local, national and international actors.

Some of the following issues will be important for consideration: First of all, it will be important to see how programs can be set up to target the currently less recognized people in need, like refugees from Afghanistan, as well as migrants from Pakistan, Iran and Bangladesh. Secondly, some of the funds should be used to attempt to support refugees in establishing livelihood activities, which are important for building resilience and preserving dignity for the families. Thirdly, it needs to be ensured that government and civil society efforts run in complementarity with each other. As the World Humanitarian Summit just confirmed, actors from among civil society have an important added value in humanitarian response. They are flexible providers in targeting specific vulnerabilities and protection concerns of refugees. Finally, given a likely fast increase of available funds and significant implementation pressures, it will be important to support these actors and strengthen their capacities and structures, in order to avoid negative implications for them, the beneficiaries, and principled humanitarian action.

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*'Over 85% of the camp population is considered as being 'at risk' in terms of food security.'*

1. There are 29.096 officially registered Syrian refugees in Diyarbakir. See [http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/gecici-koruma\\_363\\_378\\_4713\\_icerik](http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/gecici-koruma_363_378_4713_icerik)

## HUMANITARIAN FINANCING: AN ADDITIONAL CHALLENGE TO RESPOND TO THE EU REFUGEE CRISIS

### A VIEW ON THE EU

*'Reduced availability of funding and unpredictability not only have a direct impact on humanitarian actors' capacity to respond but also affect the relationship built with other actors, including the communities to whom NGOs are accountable.'*

For the last five years the Syrian conflict has generated immense needs. In the absence of political solutions to conflicts and in the face of increasing natural disasters, the humanitarian system is excessively challenged in its capacity to respond and finance the response to the growing needs worldwide. But the Syrian crisis is the biggest one in terms of required funding<sup>1</sup>.

In 2012 ECHO started funding humanitarian operations inside Syria and its neighbouring countries to address the needs of the Syrian population fleeing the conflict. In 2014 ECHO partners were alarmed when it was announced that due to a liquidity problem, ECHO had to reduce its funding by 50% for the year, with a hope but no guarantee to top-up funding later in the year. The overall scale, quality and scope of EU humanitarian aid were severely compromised, and NGOs of all sizes had to deal with increasing uncertainty. This liquidity crisis further demonstrated that reduced availability of funding and unpredictability not only have a direct impact on humanitarian actors' capacity to respond but also affect the relationship built with other actors, including the communities to whom NGOs are accountable. For instance, when funding is suddenly cut, beneficiaries experience a direct impact on their ability to cope and survive, while this situation can also lead to tensions among affected populations, host communities, and with humanitarian agencies, whom they feel have let them down.

The regional situation got more complex when over 1 million people made their way to the EU, either escaping conflict or in search of better protection and economic prospects. Poor policy choices by Western States worsened the crisis: border closures, denial of asylum and other rights did not succeed in their aim of preventing population movements, and undermined the EU moral leadership globally. CARE<sup>2</sup>, like other NGOs, provided assistance in countries of origin, and where possible along the displacement route and in countries of destination. But the organisation also had to adapt to a funding reality in disconnection with the needs and root causes of the refugee influx. Many States<sup>3</sup> decided to redirect resources away from overseas assistance towards helping refugee arrivals in their own countries, which automatically worsens conditions in so-called "refugee-producing regions"<sup>4</sup>. In August 2015 for example, faced with a massive shortage of funds, the World Food Programme adopted severe cuts to rations in the Syria region, which

further depleted refugees' resources, increased food insecurity and in turn increased incentives to move to Europe.

In early 2016, in light of the refugee situation in Greece and the inadequate European response, the Council finally requested that the European Commission (EC) set up a new instrument for the EU to provide humanitarian assistance within its borders<sup>5</sup>. Although the humanitarian needs are not exceptional and are eminently manageable, the political realities around the 'crisis' are challenging. Based on the EU Consensus for Humanitarian Aid, it offers implementing agencies flexibility to adapt to changing needs and recognises the existing partnership between ECHO and the main European humanitarian actors. However, such a measure should remain exceptional and specific. It remains to be seen whether Member States and the European Parliament will not deprioritise external humanitarian aid for internal action in future budget negotiations. The core EU humanitarian budget and the credibility of the Union as a global humanitarian actor are here at stake.

The controversial EU-Turkey agreement also further challenges the capacity of the EU to maintain its status as a defender of human rights globally. Basically the EU is outsourcing its responsibility for refugee protection by returning all asylum-seekers, with as a carrot, the Refugee Facility<sup>6</sup>. This deal demonstrates to countries around the world that have hosted refugees for years that refugee protection is something you can buy your way out of. For example, Kenya has now said it wants to close the world's largest refugee camp, Dadaab, where over 300.000 Somali refugees have been hosted since 1992 (!). At the same time, funding humanitarian operations to alleviate refugees suffering in Turkey is hugely needed. As programming via the Facility is on-going, it will be crucial to ensure accountability for its use, and that refugee rights are fully respected by all parties concerned.

For humanitarian actors, predictable, flexible and principled humanitarian funding remains key for the acceptance and ability to operate on the ground in often complex political and security contexts.

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1. The total 2016 UN appeal is \$3.2 billion

2. [https://www.care.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Einsatz/Europa/Balkan/Projektinfo\\_Europa\\_Serbien\\_EU.pdf](https://www.care.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Einsatz/Europa/Balkan/Projektinfo_Europa_Serbien_EU.pdf)

3. including Austria, Norway, Sweden and Italy

4. According to OECD-DAC, donor refugee costs represented 9.1% of ODA in 2015 (12 billion\$), up from 4.8% in 2014, and this will only increase further in 2016

5. Financing decision on Emergency support: the instrument will channel €700 million over the next three years

6. It is worth €3 billion now, to be topped up by an additional €3 billion

## A VIEW ON THE EU:

Interview with Catherine Woollard,

Secretary General of the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE)

### A VIEW ON THE EU

ECRE is a pan-European alliance of 90 NGOs protecting and advancing the rights of refugees, asylum seekers and displaced persons. It promotes the establishment of fair and humane European asylum policies and practices in accordance with international human rights law. Norwegian Refugee Council, Caritas, International Rescue Committee and Danish Refugee Council are members of both ECRE and VOICE.

*This interview by Celia Cranfield (VOICE) took place in Istanbul on 23 May.*



#### **What would you say has characterized the EU reaction in the last year, dealing with people arriving in the EU through the Mediterranean?**

Panic. Fear. Competition. The behaviour of EU leaders has often been shameful. Some few Member States (MS) have been admirable in the number of people they have been willing to welcome. There is a positive story too though: ordinary people's hospitality. For ECRE's members, while there is serious concern about the situation and the overall response, they have more volunteers and supporters than ever before.

#### **NGOs have expressed serious concerns about the recent EU-Turkey deal. What are the key issues here from your perspective?**

ECRE considers this deal as illegal, unethical and unworkable. First, Turkey is already doing enough, hosting 2.7-3 million refugees. Protection is always difficult with such numbers. The notion of exchange is highly problematic: resettlement on condition of return of people who are actually entitled to apply to stay – and are currently living in harsh conditions, is morally repugnant. We are arguing for extensive large scale resettlement.

The deal also rests on the assumption that Turkey is a safe country for refugees. Our recently published analysis does not come to the same conclusion<sup>1</sup>. From a protection perspective the situation is also highly problematic in Greece where it is not necessarily safe either.

EU-Turkey relations are already highly complex and taking the step of entangling them with refugee protection is unworkable. The deal may unravel: Member States have to accept visa liberalisation by qualified majority and this is unlikely. It is also wrong to judge "success" by the number of people denied access to international protection. It's not just the deal; other measures have also stemmed arrivals, such as border closures. Finally, all these measures just displace the smuggling of people to other, more dangerous, Mediterranean routes. It doesn't mean that fewer people attempt to reach Europe, rather, more drown en route.

#### **As a network with expertise regarding EU asylum and refugee protection policies, how would you evaluate the recently adopted Communication on Forced Displacement and Development?**

The overall approach is good. It marks a welcome

shift away from an approach to displaced persons as victims to self-reliance, inclusion and integration. This is the same approach as we see in preparation for the September UN high level meeting on migrants and refugees and in the two compacts proposed<sup>2</sup>.

Currently, what the EU does in third countries is undermined by what happens here. Its credibility is now in doubt and it serves as a negative example, as we see in the recent decisions by Kenya regarding Dadaab refugee camp.

In the Communication, the language on prevention is helpful, but it is thin in concrete preventive actions, especially important when EU and MS activities sometimes contribute to conflict and displacement. It is interesting that the policy takes such a comprehensive approach, although this might be of concern to humanitarians. Increasing the involvement of the development sector and finally implementing LRRD<sup>3</sup> are longstanding demands. Will the development sector be able to respond though? Development funds are being cut across the board, including with assistance shifted to refugee support in Europe.

We are concerned with the implementation of the Communication, since in parallel there is an increasing focus on containment in countries of origin and transit. This outsourcing of responsibility by the EU is highly problematic. The use of funding, particularly through Trust Funds, should not be based on containment. More could have been said in the Communication on Europe's role in global efforts. The EU needs now to get behind the two Compacts for the September Summit.

#### **What would be the three things EU decision makers really need to do in the coming months?**

The European asylum system should be defended. If the proposals to revise EU asylum laws progress, elements that involve the violation of people's rights must be removed. If there are new proposals, they must be based on continued protection of refugees' rights. Politicians and institutions need to resist the pressures and policies of the extreme right.

There should be European support to constructive global solutions to migration, displacement and refugee protection, particularly large-scale resettlement.

The EU must be exemplary and support integration and inclusion of those who arrive in Europe.

1. <http://www.asylumlawdatabase.eu/sites/www.asylumlawdatabase.eu/files/ald/files/turkeynote%20final%20edited%20DCR%20ECRE.pdf>

2. The UN Secretary General's Report 'In safety and dignity: addressing large movements of refugees and migrants' proposes a 'global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration' and a 'global compact on responsibility sharing for refugees'

3. Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development

## HUMANITARIAN ISSUES AT EU LEVEL

## VOICE AT WORK

✧ **Global humanitarian financing**

The VOICE network responded to the High-level panel report on humanitarian financing with a [paper](#) highlighting the need for NGOs to be involved in the implementation of the report recommendations. VOICE was happy to coordinate with other NGO networks at global level to contribute NGO positions to the negotiation of the 'Grand Bargain' (GB) ahead of the World Humanitarian Summit. VOICE will engage at EU level with the Commission and Member States to provide NGOs' input to the implementation of the 10 commitments taken by GB negotiators and will advocate for the benefits of the GB to be passed on to frontline implementers.

✧ **VOICE study on donor conditionalities**

In 2015, VOICE finalised a [study on EU Humanitarian donors' funding and conditions for working with NGOs, building evidence for simplification](#). Thanks to great contributions from VOICE members and the FPA Watch Group, the study has proven to be really appreciated both by NGOs and donors, including some COHAFA members. This study was particularly useful for NGO contributions on donors' conditions during the GB negotiations.

The report contains:

- An overview of selected donors' humanitarian funding and funding architecture
- The analysis of four donors' conditionalities through a matrix that maps the requirements of each donor.
- NGO perspectives on donor funding requirements
- VOICE findings and advocacy recommendations

Since its publication, the study was presented in France, Germany, Italy and Brussels. VOICE members at national level have facilitated these presentations and exchanges with NGOs and governments representatives. Follow-up actions are now underway; using the good practices captured in the study and the recommendations developed to simplify the administrative burden on NGOs, including for the next steps for the GB.

✧ **VOICE at the World Humanitarian Summit**

VOICE was very much involved with the preparatory process leading up to the WHS in Istanbul. VOICE's work facilitated 77 members to be represented at the Summit. VOICE President, Nicolas Borsinger made a [statement to the plenary](#) and spoke in the special session on humanitarian principles. The VOICE secretariat was happy to support the preparation of the NGO statement during the closing ceremony.

Leading up to the Summit VOICE organised a roundtable with the EU Presidency in the Netherlands. The membership also took part in four roundtables organised by NOHA with DG ECHO on the WHS; a great opportunity for dialogue with relevant academics and think tanks. The Secretariat also briefed members of the EU delegation and shared views with member states regarding the EU Council Conclusions.

✧ **VOICE contribution to new EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy**

The EU's High Representative/Vice-President for Foreign Affairs, Ms. Mogherini, will publish a new EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy in mid-June. Ahead of its publication consultations with member states, specific Commission services and various civil society bodies have been ongoing.

Thanks to good cooperation with other NGO networks, VOICE made a written [contribution to the Global Strategy focussing especially on conflict, resilience, and international humanitarian law](#). This draws on members' reflections and on previous VOICE positions including on the EU Comprehensive Approach to external conflicts and crises. VOICE looks forward to continuing dialogue with the EU institutions.

✧ **Policy recommendations following adoption of Sendai framework**

The VOICE Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) Working Group published its [policy recommendations for the European Commission's upcoming Staff Working Paper](#) following the adoption of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR). Ahead of the annual EU resilience forum on 16 June, VOICE briefed Commissioner Stylianides' cabinet, stressing the importance of resilience building at community level.

✧ **News from members**

- In January ahead of a big conference on Syria, 120 NGOs including many VOICE members, signed an [appeal to end the suffering in Syria conflict](#). Several NGOs published individual reports on the conflict, including [CARE: Women, work & war: Syrian women and the struggle to survive five years of conflict](#)
- The Norwegian Refugee Council launched a new [risk management toolkit](#) which contains examples of practical steps to help address challenges and risks associated with counterterrorism measures, focusing on situations of armed conflict.
- Members' commitments for the World Humanitarian Summit are still coming in. You can see them on the members' publications page of the VOICE website: [www.ngovoice.org](http://www.ngovoice.org)



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*VOICE out loud*

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