

# CONACTION CONFERENCE

2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> of October 2017  
Berlin, Germany

DOCUMENTATION FOR PARTICIPANTS



## DEAR PARTICIPANTS

This document serves as a documentation of results of all workshops and the Fishbowl discussion that were held during the first ConAction Conference, 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> of October 2017, Berlin.

Representatives of the invited organisations have been allocated to the workshops depending on their field of action in order to share their experiences and concerns. They were then joined by the rest of the conference participants. Each workshop had space for 20 participants. There were ten parallel workshops. This document states the results of each workshop. The task of the workshop sessions was to identify a detailed description of the problems on the ground, formulation of demands and desired effects.

Delegates from each workshop collected the results and presented them during the Conference to the Newsdesk Editors Anna Antonakis and Majid Al Bunni, who wrote the main version of the documentation from the information, which was given to them.

Further editing and lay-out was done by Mara Suter, Johanna Scherf and Dagmar Albrecht from the ConAction team.

The Fishbowl discussion has been transcribed and summarized by Liv Colell from the ConAction team. The introduction of the speakers is authored by Michaela Paech.

The documentation will be sent to the ConAction Conference participants and selected supporters.

A compact version of this documentation has been created in form of the ConAction Special Issue Conference Newspaper and will be sent to relevant stakeholders, politicians of the German and the European Parliament, the media and representatives of the European Commission.



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# COMMUNITY CENTERS

## EMPOWERMENT

**Newcomers arriving in Greece and Turkey are left in difficult situations. They are missing daily structure whilst having to overcome traumatic experiences.**

Learning what new arrivals need and providing them with a tool to build up/use their own capacities and experiences will absolutely push the empowerment process forward. This will create a mutually trusting connection and skill exchange between those working at community centers and the new arrivals being served by it, thereby improving new arrivals' situations. It is important to use a certain language and specific terms to impart a feeling of comfort to the newcomers such that they feel like skilled individuals, or even guests, and not burdens. Centers should strive to create conditions where newcomers are able to communicate and apply their own skills. Sensitivity towards traumatic experiences as well as reflecting on possibly unvoiced expectations from both sides should be taken more into consideration.

## BUREAUCRACY

**Complicated procedures hinder the work of community centers in helping newcomers. The centers need professional and legal assistance. Selling the products of NGOs is a consistent problem.**

Finding partner NGOs in other countries, such as Germany, would help small-income NGOs in advertising and selling their handcrafted items, thereby generating more sustainable yields for their projects.

Volunteers from abroad are an added value, because they are able to avoid certain bureaucratic obstacles faced by, for example, Turkish citizens.

## UNMET NEEDS

**New arrivals have needs like legal advice, access to health care and psychological support, access to formal education, which community centers cannot always meet. The lack of knowledge of what other NGOs or centers are doing makes it even harder to determine what to provide to new arrivals, to avoid looping their services and products. For example, one NGO might not know if others are providing legal information and advice.**

A solution would be to foster the work of the community centers by creating an umbrella organisation allowing them to lobby, consolidate the support and services they provide. Such an organization could then forge connections with governments and politicians in order to request better services for health care, education, and adequate logistical facilities.



# INDIVIDUAL CASE WORK

## VOLUNTEERS

**More qualified, skilled and long-term committed volunteers are needed!**

To achieve this, requires a stronger network between case workers and a sharing of expertise. A potential solution would be to create **a manual for volunteers, training workshops for outgoing volunteers, as well as a map of reachable experts in their relevant fields.**

Moreover, a **standardized survey** should be developed to assess volunteer skills and motivations. The desired outcome of these actions would lighten the workload of the case workers by allowing them to delegate more responsibilities. They can then better concentrate on fundraising and political lobbying.

## PUBLIC AWARENESS

**We need to raise more public awareness about the realities on the ground! This also impacts fundraising. There are huge gaps between representations in the media and individual cases. The refugee crisis does not exist anymore in public discourse even though there were almost 5000 new arrivals in Greece in September 2017. In individual case management, the stories shared are sensitive and confidential, which complicates fundraising. This is the dilemma: individual stories need to be shared in order to raise awareness, however, individual identities should be protected.**

One possible solution would be to work together with artists to (anonymously) depict these stories. In this case, drawings would replace photographs. In general, any decision made in these matters would depend on the level of need and responsible assessment on a case-by-case basis.

## ASSISTANCE IN GREECE

**Individuals arriving in Greece either after the relocation program closed or who were rejected by it will need assistance to deal with the situation of living in Greece.**

It is important to build up closer relationships with locals, show respect, and find a common ground. NGOs can function here as facilitators, simplifying the integration process (for example, by helping to pinpoint work opportunities). Furthermore, new arrivals should be included more often as case workers themselves. Language classes are a key and are not available enough – especially those suitable for women with children need to be made much more available.



# SEA CROSSINGS & BOAT LANDINGS

## HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS ON WATER ARE PREVALENT

**Pushback problems include the following: Greek authorities such as coast guard boats are rejecting boats from Turkey on the water. The Greek coast guard brings people onto coast guard boats, but returns them to the Turkish coast guard. Pullbacks includes: Turkish authorities enter Greek waters and pull back refugee boats; Frontex and Greek authorities observe these pullbacks but do not respond. There is insufficient documentation and evidence of both push- and pullbacks. There is also a lack of information and transparency on what is happening on the Turkish side.**

Official complaints must be lodged by NGOs and legal groups. An **ombudsman is needed in Greece**. Greek officials need to be monitored and illegal actions must be reported. **These violations must be brought to court in strategic cases using standardized data sheets and media collected by NGOs, refugees, and volunteers.**

The UNHCR and other large agencies should be questioned, as they appear to have an amount of funding disproportionate to their actions. For example, their protocol should be transparent and they should cooperate with NGOs on the ground.

Data collection: **A common data sheet needs to be distributed among grassroots NGOs and others to report in a standardized way what they have witnessed.**

Grassroots initiatives must **create a joint task force** to address the authorities and governments and create more pressure. The EU Commission is an important actor in this case, and should be informed about these human rights abuses each time they happen.



# SEA CROSSINGS & BOAT LANDINGS

## RACISM, THREATS & MEDIA COVERAGE

**There is a lack of media coverage and incorrect, sensationalist coverage on sea rescues, with a perceived, deliberate lack of interest on the part of the media regarding refugees, who are still coming and dying.**

**The impetus for this might include manipulation and advertising, with media business interests hampering proper coverage.**

**Different forms of racism are encountered: On the structural level (institutions, police violence against refugees and volunteers, arbitrary arrests), everyday racism, and racism in the media.**

**Volunteers are receiving abuse, threats and hate-speech online and offline.**

News coverage must focus more on people. Demand: Newspapers should print retractions in the same format as headlines. Grassroots teams need to speak with one voice, and **a common platform should be created to share information on what is happening at sea.**

Volunteers who experience abuse and threats need to be supported by the rest of the volunteer community. Data about it needs to be collected and the media needs to help expose the abusers.

Better expose and highlight racism and educate the public on racist structures, i.e. truthful portrayal in the media.

## OVERALL DEMANDS

On both the Greek and Turkish sides, it appears that refugees are treated in an arbitrary manner. **The criminalisation of those helping at Sea has to stop.** The most important demand is **to create political pressure on European governments to adhere to human rights laws.**

# § LEGAL SUPPORT

## FAMILY REUNIFICATION

Family reunification has become more and more difficult for refugees residing in different EU countries.

**Status Quo in Germany:** for example the law § 104 para. 14 of the German Residency Act, which has been issued on 16th of March 2016, suspends the family reunification for asylum seekers whom were granted only the subsidiary protection status (and not the privileged refugee status) for a period of 2 years.

At the same time, the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) changed their decision practice and started to grant people from Syria and Iraq the subsidiary protection status with uprising tendency.

A prolongation of the suspension time for further years is already put on debate. A further suspension would violate the prohibition of retrospective legislation and would stand against the decision of the German Federal Constitutional Court from 1987, which stated that a waiting time for family reunification of three years is not a reasonable period of time.

At least the last of these three factors could be enhanced in **developing and strengthening the human recourses and institutional capacities** in these diplomatic missions. There is a need for political pressure to provide sufficient, qualified human resources, e.g., in embassies and migration offices.

## FAMILY REUNIFICATION – GERMAN-GREEK DEAL

A deal between Germany's Federal Minister of Interior and Greece's minister of migration to cap or slow down family reunification under the EU Dublin III regulation is another highly problematic issue. Although people have the right to family reunification, in reality they are greatly hindered.

The procedures of family reunification as it consists of take charge requests, replies and transfers, are not accomplished within the legal terms and conditions.

As the people affected in Greece are not allowed to travel to their family members on their own, they are forced to wait until their transfers for a period of at least half a year or longer, often under the most deplorable conditions.

The practical procedure of family reunification needs to be evaluated and administrative bottle-necks need to be identified. The prolonged waiting period only for the transfer from Greece to Germany needs to be changed and faster travel possibilities must be established once all papers for reunification are cleared.

There needs to be an immediate end of the limitation of Dublin transfers in the case of family reunifications from Greece to Germany.



# § LEGAL SUPPORT

## FAMILY REUNIFICATION – MISINFORMATION & LACK OF EXPERTISE

**There is substantial misinformation about family reunification and the asylum procedure and a lack of expertise and experience in terms of how to achieve family reunification among displaced persons and sometimes even among lawyers, counselors and volunteers.**

**Grassroots initiatives are trying to tackle this problem by printing notes and flyers offering correct information. However, sometimes this printed information can raise more questions than answers. There is a huge lack of lawyers and legal representatives before authorities in courts in Greece and Turkey.**

**In Turkey, the political situation and negative pressure on lawyers creates a lack of motivation to represent displaced persons in court and in front of authorities. Lawyers, who do engage with displaced persons in Turkey, are realistically concerned about facing government oppression.**

**In Greece, there is also a great lack of proper investigation, and displaced persons have no access to justice without a lawyer. Further there is a lack of governmental capacity, incorrect policies, and a lack of organisation in the asylum procedure.**

**In Turkey, people held in removal centers or camps rarely have access to a lawyer. As it is sometimes impossible for refugees to claim certain rights on their own, it is of highest priority that they have access to legal counsel. This is extremely problematic in the so called hotspots in Greece and Italy.**

Unfortunately, there is no clear solution at this time, but support for Turkish lawyers willing to represent refugees, in form of political pressure on the EU main actors, as well as providing advocacy and financial aid for these lawyers.

Not only national and international lawyers associations, but also the governments should support the effort for refugees to have access to legal counsel. There should be more training in human rights law. There is a need for more strategic litigation on an international and European level. Very important is individualised and comprehensive legal support by well-trained lawyers, especially provided by local stakeholders. For the development and efficiency of the work done, it is of great importance that a **network of mutually supportive international advocates is created and used.**

One solution would be face-to-face counselling. This should be done by well-trained legal counsels and lawyers. The training of lawyers (especially local lawyers at hotspots) and counsellors who do not have sufficient knowledge in migration and asylum law, is of utmost importance to guarantee the quality and effectiveness of individual counselling procedures. Some NGOs are already attempting to alleviate the situation by offering workshops or codifying information. There are also NGOs providing legal information by face-to-face means on the ground. This effort should be increased. In each case where the family reunification process involves two countries, the partner organisations in each of those countries should work together to assist the family members in question.

# § LEGAL SUPPORT

## FAMILY REUNIFICATION – OTHER ISSUES

**The foreseen relocation measures are not an alternative way to rebuild family links as it is barely functioning and includes also a very long wait.**

**Further, the definition of family is too narrow as it does not include extended family members, e.g. children who have already turned 18 or grandparents who were always living with the core family members.**

The definition of family in respect to family reunion needs to be looked at again and extended.

Relocation cannot substitute family reunification for extended family members. Greater consideration needs to be given to the meaningful links that asylum seekers may have to EU Member States and for them to have a voice on where they are to be received.

The separation from parents has been found to produce more long-lasting, harmful effects than the exposure to aerial bombardments per se ( "War and Children" , Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham (1943), Ernest Willard, New York )

## GREEK-GERMAN AGREEMENT

**In December 2016, there was a common agreement on the EU commission level stating that refugees, who arrived in Greece after the 15th of March 2017, should be returned to Greece. It was agreed that there are no systemic failures in the Greek asylum procedure anymore which was until then a reason to suspend deportations back to Greece. Nevertheless, the German constitutional court decided that a general decision of deportation to Greece would not be in alignment with the present law and an individual assessment is needed for every case where a deportation is considered.**

In the matter of legally challenging restrictive policies, it is equally important that a network of workers as well as clients is created, the varying conditions in various countries (especially Turkey, Greece, Italy and Hungary) are documented and reported and a proper risk assessment is implemented.

In this sense, protection must be provided on the ground - all the more when the country responsible is failing in providing such.

# § LEGAL SUPPORT

## EU-TURKEY DEAL

The EU-Turkey-Deal, which was a statement launched by the members of the European Council together with their Turkish counterparts on the 18th of March 2016, foresees that all new irregular migrants crossing from Turkey into Greek islands as from 20 March 2016, who do not apply for asylum in Greece or whose application has been found unfounded or inadmissible, will be returned to Turkey.

This practice does not stand in line with neither of the most basic principles of migration and asylum law, as for example the non-refoulement-principle. Even the nature of this 'deal' and the problems of its recourse to the courts is highly problematic.

Asylum seekers, who arrived later than the 19th of March and whose applications were decided as inadmissible, had pending cases before the Greek courts. Two of these cases were decided by the High Council, which is the highest administrative court in Greece on the 22nd of September 2017. In this legal precedent, it was outruled that Turkey can be considered a safe third country for Syrians and that therefore deportations were reasonable.

It is important to emphasize that Turkey cannot be taken as a safe third country as it is in the state of emergency since the coup attempt and is reigned with arbitrary decrees issued solely by the Turkish government. Not only human rights defenders based in Turkey face serious threats and risks to their personal safety but also new legislation has been already introduced, which would allow to send Syrians and Afghans back to their countries of origin.

## OVERALL DEMANDS AND SUGGESTIONS

**We refuse to accept that Europe has become a “fortress” with closed borders, closed internal routes and lacking legal avenues and safe routes**, with systematic incarceration, pushbacks and unreliable political partners violating human rights standards and international law

**NGOs** working in different countries **need to coordinate and communicate better** to tackle political issues. There is a need for better exchange of knowledge and expertise. More collective awareness at a grassroots NGO level is also needed. To achieve this, **NGOs should build strategic alliances**, share information with as many people as possible, and organise plenary sessions in different languages.

Further activism must be mobilised inside the EU to advocate for the improvement of the factual and legal situation of refugees.

**More legal avenues and safe routes** must be created and legislation should be introduced, which stands in alignment with present human rights standards and international law.



# CAMP MANAGEMENT

## ISOLATED LOCATIONS

**Camps are geographically isolated, leading to a lack of access, services, community, education, and healthcare. The local economy also misses an opportunity to benefit and integration is stifled.**

**Some solutions** to these issues would include: the ability of grassroots initiatives to sponsor licensed refugees to obtain EU drivers' licenses, and the founding of a bus service, which pays local drivers, that would run between the camp and nearest town center. Larger NGOs and governments should be supportive of these recommendations. In the long run, all isolated locations should be replaced with shelters that are more accessible.

## INVISIBILITY OF GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATIONS

**Grassroots organisations are often “invisible,” making it challenging to get funding and find volunteers. Grassroots organisations also often have ambiguous legal status, making it difficult to get grants or recognition. With this also comes the fact that they often lack the capacity, knowledge, or resources to tackle these issues.**

To address these, they need recognition from larger NGOs and governments. Grassroots organisations themselves should consistently track data of their actions and share it to raise public awareness of what they are doing.

Joining forces with other smaller NGOs could help to raise more public awareness, sharing staff and resources could help in terms of fundraising, general admin and PR work.

Misrepresentation of the camps is a problem in the media, which makes the organisations cautious about engaging with the media. There is no clear solution to that last problem at this time.



# COMMUNICATION & INFORMATION

## RACISM & DISCRIMINATION

**There is a lack of information among the broader public about the situation on the ground in Greece and Turkey. Additionally, racism and discrimination are enforced by disproportionate representation in the media. This impacts the work of refugees trying to organise amongst themselves, in particular when they do not speak required languages. Consequently, a lot of useful information cannot be disseminated to a wider public. There is a lack of counselling services, where racist or sexist incidents can be reported.**

Providing access to counselling services, legal action, psychological support and mental health care, a place where evidence can be collected in order to provide “hard data” to counter racism and discrimination is crucial.

Inclusion in the media requires more translation services. People, who come from the areas being written about, should be the ones doing the writing.

More workshops for volunteers are needed, providing “diversity training” and critical race theory.

## COLLABORATION

**There is a lack of collaboration between small and large organisations.**

**Small organisations need to be more accepted as working partners by bigger organisations. More often than not, the exclusion from information, the denying of permits to either enter or work in camps, the sheer oversight or ignorance by bigger organisations concerning the knowledge of smaller organisations only lead to more suffering for the people, who should receive any help possible. Though in some areas regional meetings for all NGOs working in the field are held, they often do not result in much collaboration. In Greece, the registration and acceptance process for NGOs working with volunteer takes too long with various administrative obstacles.**

Bigger organisations need to have clear instructions and guidelines to fully cooperate and support smaller NGOs where appropriate and called for. **All organisations should push for quicker and easier local registration procedures.** Representatives from smaller and bigger organisations should have meetings not only on the ground concerning immediate issues, but also on a CEO level to establish ground rules for collaboration and cooperation. Bigger organisations need to find a way to pass on such ground rules to local staff, so that the collaboration succeeds and is not left to a possible cooperative or not cooperative staff member on the ground. Smaller organisations need to have their demands clearly formulated and find a way to speak more in one voice to avoid a climate of favouritism. **Crucial information to help those in need should not be withheld or ignored.**

# COMMUNICATION & INFORMATION

## KEEPING INFORMATION UPDATED

**More often than not, it is difficult for groups working on the ground to have access to updated and correct information about new asylum procedures in different countries, administrative local regulations, new EU policies, or even information about local services or the work of other NGOs.**

It is difficult to tackle this problem, as the resources and possibilities for volunteer-run organisations are limited. There are groups experimenting with Micro SD Cards to disseminate information to those, who do not have regular internet access. More ideas like this need to be developed and supported to find a better way to get information to the people who need it. More cooperation is needed between bigger and smaller organisations to quickly distribute information among each other. Rumours and misinformation need to be better identified.

## OVERALL THOUGHTS

Online platforms and mapping should be able to identify gaps in services.  
Feedback can be used for data collection.

Needs assessment: Emergency versus long-term commitments need to be identified. The needs assessments have to follow a clear and standardized methodology. Overlooked geographical areas for example with wild camps, undocumented people, which have not been reached sufficiently or not all by aid organisations, should be mapped.

Depression is a common mental health problem among refugees, lessening the creative impetus. In order to stimulate this creativity, there should be access to materials, instruments, artistic work, and teachers. The workshop was very much about the place of art in communication and healing.

“It is imperative that we talk about a “right” wherein ordinary citizens can get information as an entitlement, and not as a favour.”

Frank William La Rue UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression, 2008-2014



# SMALL INCOME PROJECTS

## INDIVIDUAL EMPOWERMENT THROUGH OWNERSHIP

**There need to be sustainable, profitable ways to support the helpers and the helped.**

The lack of a platform that bundles and provides small projects with necessary information indicates a need for such a platform, which will provide, for example, training and information on how to build a business, and will connect entrepreneurs with potential customers. Many groups by now create a range of crafted products. Customers who might be interested to purchase them, need to be provided with an easy online access. A website which combines shops from many groups would benefit everyone.

## TRANSITION FROM DONATIONS TO PROFIT MAKING

**Small income NGOs face a lack of financial sustainability – they more often receive short-term donations, which is insufficient to support their work in the long term.**

A new profit concept/prototype would help NGOs demonstrate or offer added value (like social impact of environmental benefit) as well as an improved financial outlook. International training workshops could help NGOs make that transition while bringing them together with experienced professionals from social enterprises. An online platform to exchange best practises could help with knowledge transfer from more experienced NGO to less experienced.

## TARGET GROUPS, MARKETING & DISTRIBUTION

**There is a lack of insight into what potential customers of small income NGOs would be interested in and would be willing to spend money on.**

A standard is needed to determine if the groups targeted by the NGOs benefit from what they offer. Subsequently, their customers will also know whether their purchase was or was not worth its value. The solution lies in finding a product with a story, and to train those who are involved in making it, to professionally provide such a product. These products will be set at sustainable price points. To achieve this, staff and volunteers from those projects could benefit from training workshops run by facilitators to help them in identifying their areas of expertise, help with marketing and accounting and understand the place of story-telling in selling products with a cause.

## OVERALL FEEDBACK and OPEN QUESTIONS

### **Overall Feedback:**

The groups in this workshop discussed methods of finding sustainable, profitable ways to support the helpers and the helped. The question at the root of the workshop was how to find a solution where everybody benefits, long-term, in terms of income.

### **Open questions:**

What does sustainability mean? What does integration really mean? Most of these NGOs are moving toward self-sustainability, which makes defining the targeted groups and their needs and aspirations even more important and necessary.



# HEALTH CARE

## BUREAUCRACY

**Working with volunteer medical staff is problematic. Such staff members need an officially translated document proving their credentials to the Greek authorities (cost: 200€); in each region in Greece a different one is needed.**

**This lack of a unified document requires redundant procedures. There is no substantial support to empower and protect these volunteers. In order to legally work in Greece, the bureaucratic process is prohibitive and very long.**

The national health ministry should be the **sole government entity** in charge to grant the needed document for volunteer health care workers.

Exceptional action should be taken - in order to speed up medical staff registration, emergency offices **focusing on accreditation of medical staff** should be established in Greece.

One possibility would be to introduce a **“medical passport” provided by European ministries**. Doctors should be assisted by relevant authorities as they take each step toward support missions in Greece, refugee routes, and other hotspots.

## MENTAL HEALTH

**Mental health care is a very complex issue to deal with within the refugee community. There are cultural differences that are hard to overcome. Depression is worsened by lack of action in too many areas affecting a refugee’s life by European institutions, which will have a long-term impact.**

**Volunteers themselves are often facing a risk to be co-traumatized. Many return home with burn-out syndrome and are unable to talk about their experiences.**

The **capacities of refugee communities need to be improved** such that mental health issues can be addressed in their own language. Workshops and special trainings are one means of achieving this.

**Debriefing and follow-ups for volunteers need to be provided.** NGOs should be supported to gain access to psychologists and supervisors to help with the debriefing process of their volunteers back home. Regional reflection and debriefing meetings need to happen for ex-Volunteers. Grants need to be given to organize such meetings and facilitate personal encounters to exchange experiences.





# HEALTH CARE

## GENDER & HEALTH ISSUES

**Gender and health issues need to be taken more into consideration.**

**In terms of women's health, there is inappropriate or inadequate care after childbirth. Caesarean sections or induced labour are forced due to time constraints.**

**There is no follow-up education on breast-feeding. Instead, so-called "easy" solutions like infant formula are too often promoted.**

**Medical treatment by public doctors in Greece is neglectful to the point that it can be called a human rights violation (one volunteer noted that "everything is treated with Paracetamol"). Dignified access to health care is needed.**

Safe areas for women need to be created in each refugee shelter, camp, hot-spot. Information material on pregnancy and childbirth need to be displayed and distributed in different languages.

Bathroom and shower facilities have to be clean and safe and in some cases (like Moria) possibly guarded, so women feel safe to use them.

There should be continuous access to water rather than a few hours a day. Neglectful behaviour by Greek public doctors or UNHCR has to be followed up upon. More documentation of human rights violations is needed.

## DENTAL HEALTH

**70% of the refugee population in Greece has dental problems. There seldom are enough sterile environments for dentists to practise. There are not enough dentists on the ground.**

The dental health situation within the refugee community needs to have more public awareness and more funding. Dentists should be provided with sterile environments – these have to be created automatically near any larger camp. More dentist volunteers should be encouraged to be joining the NGOs temporarily.

## OVERALL DEMANDS

**Dignified access to health care is needed.**

- **Mobility is key.** Teams should be supported and equipped with "mobile clinics" as refugees sometimes live very spread out.
- **Provide an online platform** both virtually and physically, where doctors can interact and share information to exchange their experiences.
- **Doctors should be assisted in the accreditation** as they take each step toward support missions in Greece, refugee routes, and other hotspots.



# SCHOOL & EDUCATION

## CONSISTENCY & QUALITY OF TEACHING

**Consistency in teaching children is key, but one major problem is that volunteers do not stay for long.**

**Furthermore, (inter-)cultural communication needs to be assured. There is all too often a lack of empathy towards different approaches to learning or even a lack of empathy in general by teaching staff.**

**Too many or too few workshops happen based on volunteers' skills rather than on specific needs of the present children in different age groups.**

**Hierarchies, bureaucracy, low societal participation, few qualified facilitators, and decreasing trust from refugees are further problems on the ground.**

**The children need to build up trust before they can concentrate on their education.**

A solution to these problems should be all-inclusive and include partnering among refugees, volunteers, locals, and staff (all of which should be regarded as roles, not facts, and are thus fluid and changeable), all contributing and finding common ground.

It was discussed that refugees don't stay long enough for example on the islands, so they are not to be planned for as "sustainable teachers." Locals in Turkey and Greece can take up the role of teaching basic maths and the Latin alphabet.

Creating safe spaces and trust is the biggest goal. The desired effects would include open communication, more empathy, learning of essential life skills, and inclusion.



# SCHOOL & EDUCATION

## FUNDING

**There is no income for staff, which is problematic because volunteers cannot contribute their work continuously. There are not enough donations in most NGOs to provide for regular teaching staff, and there usually is no income flow for this need specifically.**

**Donations** should be directed **to specific needs**, there should be **long-term donations for staff salaries**, and connections could be forged with larger international organisations for long-term funding.

Governments and foundations also need to **fund grassroots groups** providing schools and education to refugees as long as the refugee children are not included in the regular school systems.

NGOs should also be made self-sufficient through their own programs in the long run.

## INTEGRATION IN LOCAL SCHOOL SYSTEMS

**A further problem is that existing local institutions are often unfit and unsustainable for integration. There is dysfunctional access to information, policy regulations and laws concerning schooling of refugee children in the country they are living in at any one point.**

**There is insufficient and limited access to psychological support.**

**There is also no co-creation of knowledge with refugees and the local educational community, like the inclusion of cultural heritage in the syllabus.**

Systems need to adapt and NGOs, the public, governments, and the refugee as well as the local community should network and lobby for a common goal, define needs together, to create understanding and awareness.



# BRIDGES FROM GERMANY

## POLITICAL LOBBYING

**Political lobbying: The lack of a platform or umbrella to bring together all the working NGOs in the field of humanitarian assistance for refugees weakens the political power to demand what refugees really need to restore and guarantee their dignity as a human being.**

A foundation of an NGO-based veto mechanism would create an independent tool to formulate humane demands from their work in this humanitarian field. That includes providing more networking and visibility, especially for small initiatives and NGOs (for example, in the areas of family reunion, relocation and resettlement).

## NETWORKING

**The exchange of information among NGOs regarding what each of them needs and provides, has been accomplished sporadically, as an addition on top of other work. Thus, there is a need to separate the task of networking as a sole mission presented by a platform where these NGOs can swap information in a structured, accessible way.**

It would be helpful to have professional coordination or facilitators in order to connect and present NGOs to each other and to help initiators from abroad to know how they can help. This will reduce barriers to information and will create more accessible, reliable information, which will help NGOs find more effective support.

International meetings need to be set up in order to develop ideas about different practical formats of such a common platform or umbrella organisation.

## LOGISTICS

**Efficiency in terms of logistics, finances, and materials is a great need for all NGOs working in Greece and Turkey. The question was how to support NGOs working in the field, both in Germany and in the countries they passed through on their journey to Europe.**

**Winter is coming, demands are pressing.**

No final answers to this demand were formulated, only that there needs to be even better coordination for goods to travel from A to B. More brainstorming on this subject is needed urgently. Again - coordination is the key here - and access for NGOs on the ground to connect with NGOs in Germany, Holland, UK or NGOs in other countries, who are providing or would like to provide logistical support.



# BRIDGES FROM GERMANY

## PROFESSIONALISATION

**There often is an absence of needed skills and know-how among emerging initiatives. This creates unnecessary disturbances with each new arrival of another volunteer to join their group.**

**Due to a lack of resources usually NGOs have limited documentation on what is expected from volunteers, who want to join them. Job descriptions vary, and preparatory trainings are mostly logistically not possible. Therefore, resources from more experienced volunteers on the ground are stretched, who have to explain procedures and behaviour codes over and over.**

**NGOs often work next to each other but nevertheless there is a lack of exchange of best practises and resources.**

This situation has necessitated the **creation of an open-source and internet-based platform and database** that helps these NGOs/initiatives structure themselves. Establishing this database will help them provide training for volunteers and organisers, and will facilitate an experience and knowledge exchange between big and small NGOs. There also need to be international meetings with representatives of NGOs working in the same area to create a **volunteer manual and collective workshops for outgoing helpers.**

## FINANCES

**The lack of sustainability in funding makes it difficult for NGOs to follow up on their strategies and planned activities.**

**Their funds need to be flexible and based on their visions, not specific, or limited to certain fields.**

Small initiatives need to find reliable and flexible stakeholders, diversifying the sources of funding to their projects, for example by getting in touch with representatives of companies.

Employing some people would enhance their work and sustain their projects longer.

Moreover, if a common platform of smaller NGOs is founded, existing and potential donors can be informed and educated about the activities and needs of these organisations.

Best practices on how to get public funding, or grants need to be better shared within the volunteer community across countries.

For this, an online platforms to distribute information would be extremely helpful.

Events and conferences could take place to form partnerships and have a chance for knowledge exchange on the subject of fundraising.

## FISHBOWL SPEAKERS

**Houssam Aldeen** is a political scientist who worked as a journalist and correspondent with foreign media in Damascus, Syria. In 2013, Houssam fled to Germany. In Berlin, together with friends from Syria, he founded Salam e. V. The association promotes peace and self-help among Syrian refugees. Houssam also works with Schlesische27 on arts and education projects involving refugees.

**Efi Latsoudi** is a psychologist and activist from Greece. In 2012, together with civil society activists she set up PIKPA, an open, self-organised welcome centre hosting refugees in Mytilene. PIKPA provides humanitarian aid to at least 150 people. The centre is ran by volunteers and financed through collective funding. Since 2016, Efi is a member of Lesvos Solidarity, a network promoting interaction between locals and refugees in Mytilene. In 2016, Efi was awarded the Nansen Refugee Award for her selfless help for the displaced.

**Ghias Aljundi** worked a journalist and human rights defender in Tartus, Syria. In 1998 he fled to the UK, where he today works as a human rights consultant. Ghias holds extensive expertise in human rights and freedom of expression on the MENA region, which he employs to train NGOs and human rights advocates. He also leverages his vast network and a sense of humour to build bridges between people. Ghias has been supporting rescue efforts on the Greek islands. To him, resettlements allowing refugees to legally travel to safe countries are of utmost importance.

**Karl Kopp**, a social scientist from Germany, represents Pro Asyl at the European Council of Refugees and Exiles (ECRE). He spearheads Pro Asyl's public relations concerning Europe as well as its Europe-wide networking efforts with human rights and refugee organizations. Karl stands firm on the EU's responsibility to protect those who seek refuge and demands more information, greater transparency, and a revitalization of the public interest in what's happening at Greece's shores to force a change of attitude among politicians towards refugees.

**Annika Klose** is social science Master student and Leader of the Young Socialists "JUSOS", the Youth organization of the SPD, in Berlin, Germany. In September 2017, Annika spent two weeks aboard the private sea rescue operator Sea-Eye, helping its team to save migrants at distress at sea. As a politician, Annika sees her role in mobilising support for a European sea rescue mission. Together with the Young socialists, Annika works to improve the situation of refugees in order to achieve a fair, solidly-linked and democratic society.

Michaela Paech  
Facilitator Fishbowl

## FISHBOWL SUMMARY

The fishbowl included different perspectives on the question “Where to from here?”, bringing together activists from Greece, Germany and Syria as well as German political representatives and Syrian refugees now living in Germany/the UK respectively.

Topics discussed varied widely from the current humanitarian situation on the Greek islands and in Turkey to the legal framework of the situation throughout Europe, the current political discourse in European countries, human rights violations committed by police and authorities as well as different possible strategies to handle the situation.

An important topic is the family reunification programme, which theoretically obliges European countries to give refugees the possibility to reunite with their families and loved ones. Yet, the statutes of the programme are not met, making the unwillingness of European authorities to comply with their own standards tangible. Possible strategies of NGOs and other actors are legal actions (suing governments or authorities for not complying with European law), political campaigning on a partisan or face-to-face level, as well as public campaigns for raising awareness of the issue and creating public pressure. Also, there is the question of how different NGOs might cooperate and organise themselves between each other in order to create more political leverage and facilitate fundraising.

Essentially, European governments are forsaking their mandate to safeguard the human rights of the refugees on European soil and in European waters, systematically neglecting their duties and responsibilities toward both refugees and volunteers. Strategies to deal with the situation are as diverse as the actors and people behind them.

## MAIN TOPICS

Refugee experiences in their host countries – current developments of the situation on the Greek islands and in the Mediterranean – the EU-Turkey deal – police violence and human rights violations in Greece and Turkey – family reunifications – legal frameworks of the situation – current political discourse in Europe, right-wing populism – possible strategies: legal strategies, political strategies, civic engagement – female refugees – Afghanistan – Syria

## FISHBOWL TRANSCRIPT

The fishbowl discussion begins with an introduction of all participants by the host, Michaela Paech. The overall topic of the discussion: “Where to from Here?” means to shed a light on possible strategies to cope with the current situation and manufacture sustainable change. As possible aspects of this question, Michaela Paech names the current changes in the “black box” Turkey where NGOs are increasingly criminalised, the approaching winter and the increasing racism and right-wing populism all over Europe.

The method of the fishbowl discussion aims to include the audience and gives the opportunity for one person at a time to step forward into the panel and pose a question or give a statement.

Paech begins the discussion with a question to **Houssam Al-Deen**, asking him about what he as a refugee thinks are the necessities of refugees and what is needed to change the situation. In his answer, Al-Deen narrates his own experience from working with Iraqi refugees within Syria to becoming a refugee himself in Bavaria, Germany. He compares the reaction of the local population in Syria with that of Germany and stresses the differences between their attitudes toward the refugees: whereas people in Syria looked upon the Iraqi refugees as fellow human beings in need, refugees have a bad reputation in Germany and are looked upon as potential criminals and people of a bad background. From his experiences with the different groups within the refugee community, Houssam realised that the different groups bring along diverse experiences, perspectives and needs. He started his initiative Salam as a small NGO following German procedures in law to provide an anchor to refugees, listen to their stories and give advice.

Following up on this question, Paech turns to **Efi Latsoudi** and asks specifically about the changes in the situation in Lesbos over the last two years. Latsoudi states that changes are plenty – while, at the same time, some aspects of the situation remain inexcusably the same. She sketches diverse experiences, oscillating between successes such as the first rescue mission on the Mediterranean Sea in 2015 and the pan-European solidarity following the extreme humanitarian crisis to the deal between the EU and Turkey in 2016, which she describes as similar to turning back time: continuing interceptions of FRONTEX on the ocean, criminalisation of volunteers and NGOs in both Turkey and Greece, and an ever declining humanitarian situation in camps such as Moria where refugees are systematically deprived of their human rights, under the eyes of Greek and European authorities.

**Ghias Aljundi** picks up on this topic and draws a picture of the violations of the refugees’ human rights on many different levels, every day. He as well puts the “infamous” deal between the EU and Turkey at the centre of the problem as it brought police violence against refugees, volunteers and helpers to the surface. Not only in Moria and Idomeni where the behaviour of the military and police against refugees is to be called brutal at best, but also in Italy and Spain excessive force is being used against the refugees.



## FISHBOWL TRANSCRIPT

He then focusses on the topic of family reunifications as a prism of the human rights violations against refugees. While many legally have the right to reunite with their families, EU Member States deny these rights systematically. He cites the example of Germany with German chancellor opening up the borders in 2015 but then closing up again and denying families that were split the right to live together – which Aljundi sums up as “guaranteeing half of the human rights” as he puts it. He also stresses the role of German bureaucracy in this process, systematically putting refugees out of their rights and tormenting them with regulations they cannot possibly comply with.

Broadening the topic of human rights, **Karl Kopp** is asked about the legal frameworks of the situation in Europe. He differentiates between the systems at work “on paper” – that is, the common European asylum regulation and the Dublin regulation – and how they play out in reality, where they are largely dysfunctional. No European country wanted to accept the refugees as a long-lasting reality, states were offering to work as transit countries along the way, at most. Interestingly, even in countries where there are no refugees, they are still at the top of the political agenda: the refugee has long ago become a discursive figure to justify political decisions.

De facto, European countries are focussing on the “deal” in terms of refugees, not on the law itself – as shows in the reunification program which is simply not being executed. In the political discourse, humanitarian arguments have lost their influence and given way to power calculations. Within the EU, we still refer to human rights frameworks and the Geneva Convention, while they have ceased to be a reality put into practice. Meanwhile, both sides of the discourse seem to separate ever further without an answer to the humanitarian problem. To sum it up: given the sum of people still arriving and the deaths in the Mediterranean, it’s not about the right to asylum anymore – it’s about the right to live.

**Annika Klose** then speaks about her experience on the ship Sea Eye, involved in rescue missions on the Libyan coast. She describes the frustration about the Libyan military and coast guard hindering the missions and endangering lives, the lack of resources and know-how on the ship and the general feeling of helplessness. Being a young political leader in Germany, she decided to make use of her personal resources and contacts to raise awareness on the issue in German politics. Within her own Social Democratic Party (the German SPD), the results did not play out as she had hoped. The only ones really paying attention to the issues were right-wing activists and Neo-Nazis showering her with threats and verbal abuse.

## FISHBOWL TRANSCRIPT

This made her realise how well organized the right-wing scene is in Germany and that they have grown into a serious political problem that German politics need to address. The humanitarian crisis in Greece and Turkey, she says, also has political reasons and thus must be tackled on a political level. It is the responsibility of governors to safeguard the lives of the refugees and their human rights.

After these opening statements of each panellist, Michaela opens the discussion to the audience and different aspects and solution strategies for the problem are discussed. Questions raised include **legal strategies** such as suing European governments for not complying with the relocation program – a strategy that Ghias has already put into practice. He has put several cases of reunification before the court in Strasbourg against the German government. Still, Efi Latsoudi argues against this strategy as it cannot be the responsibility of the jurisdictional system alone to solve the problem, but a political solution has to be found including the general public.

Ghias then broadens the picture by saying that a combination of different strategies is needed to succeed. Even if working and negotiating with governments and politicians is tiresome and frustrating, it is necessary to find a sustainable solution. Also, populist and untruthful rhetoric about the refugees must be called out consequently by “naming and shaming”, to not give over the political discourse to the right. He also calls for unity between the different NGOs and actors fighting against the humanitarian crisis and for the human rights of the refugees. Even though perspectives and approaches might be diverse, these actors have a common goal that should unite them in their struggle instead of hindering one another.

Another issue brought up is **the situation of female refugees** that has thus far not been addressed separately by the panel. Attention is drawn to the daily struggles of female refugees, issues of physical and mental health as well as personal hygiene and the dangers of rape and abuse female refugees go through. The speaker also calls out the problem of distribution of governmental funding between NGOs, which is sometimes prioritized by bigger NGOs, leaving the smaller ones without support. Efi Latsoudi points out that even though these issues are a reality that must be addressed, it cannot be the solution to “prioritize” between different groups of people. She cites the example of cases where women and children were given priority, leaving the men alone in the camp and sometimes even separating families. That, she says, cannot be the solution as it creates more problems than it solves.

Then, the **EU – Turkey deal** is once more put on the table. While so far in the discussion the EU has been criticized for striking the deal with Turkey, we now focus on the problems within the country itself.

## FISHBOWL TRANSCRIPT

Human rights violations and erosion of democratic institutions is not criticized sufficiently within the EU as European countries are afraid of the “flood” of refugees Turkey could unleash when seriously pressured. How can this mutual problem be solved and how can we develop solutions within European countries for this problem?

Also, Turkey is not a “safe” third country anymore as the situation has become very difficult for refugees, volunteers, human rights activists and journalists.

Karl Kopp points out that in Germany, the position towards Turkey has become almost schizophrenic. While the left is criticizing the deal for putting refugees in danger and tolerating apparent human rights violations, right-wing parties and politicians are criticizing the amount of money spent on Turkey. Also, while the German Ministry for Foreign Affairs warns German and European tourists against travelling to Turkey, it is labelled as a “safe” country for refugees – making no sense at all.

At the same time, different NGOs such as Amnesty International are campaigning strongly against the situation both in Turkey and in different European countries, Ghias points out.

A similar case is that of **Afghanistan**, recently named a “safe” country by German authorities while some time ago, even the German embassy closed its doors in Kabul. Afghan refugees are getting almost no support in Germany and live in danger of deportation, as a Afghan refugee from the audience points out. As a matter of fact, Afghanistan was never officially labelled a safe third country, Karl Kopp explains. But as the situation evolves, lines are pushed and redrawn step by step, giving more importance to imagined, discursive truths than to the actual facts about these countries.

The last question raised from the audience again focusses on **Syria**. While the German decision to open the borders in 2015 is widely seen as positive – was it really the right decision? Isn't it over-covering the involvement of German and European forces in the conflict itself?

This question is discussed between the different members of the panel. While Germany is not directly involved in the conflict officially, as Annika states, German companies have been selling weapons to Syrian forces as early as 2014 (Ghias) → if the conflict could have been contained earlier on or not, is left open for discussion. The conflict cannot be solved by one country or the European countries alone – but they have to accept their responsibility in this context.

The last thought open for discussion is an idea discussed in several workshops during the day: **creating an umbrella organization** for the different NGOs involved in the field, making it easier to fundraise and do political lobbying than with many different small organisations. The point is not delved into deeper due to time constraints.

# THANK YOU!



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