

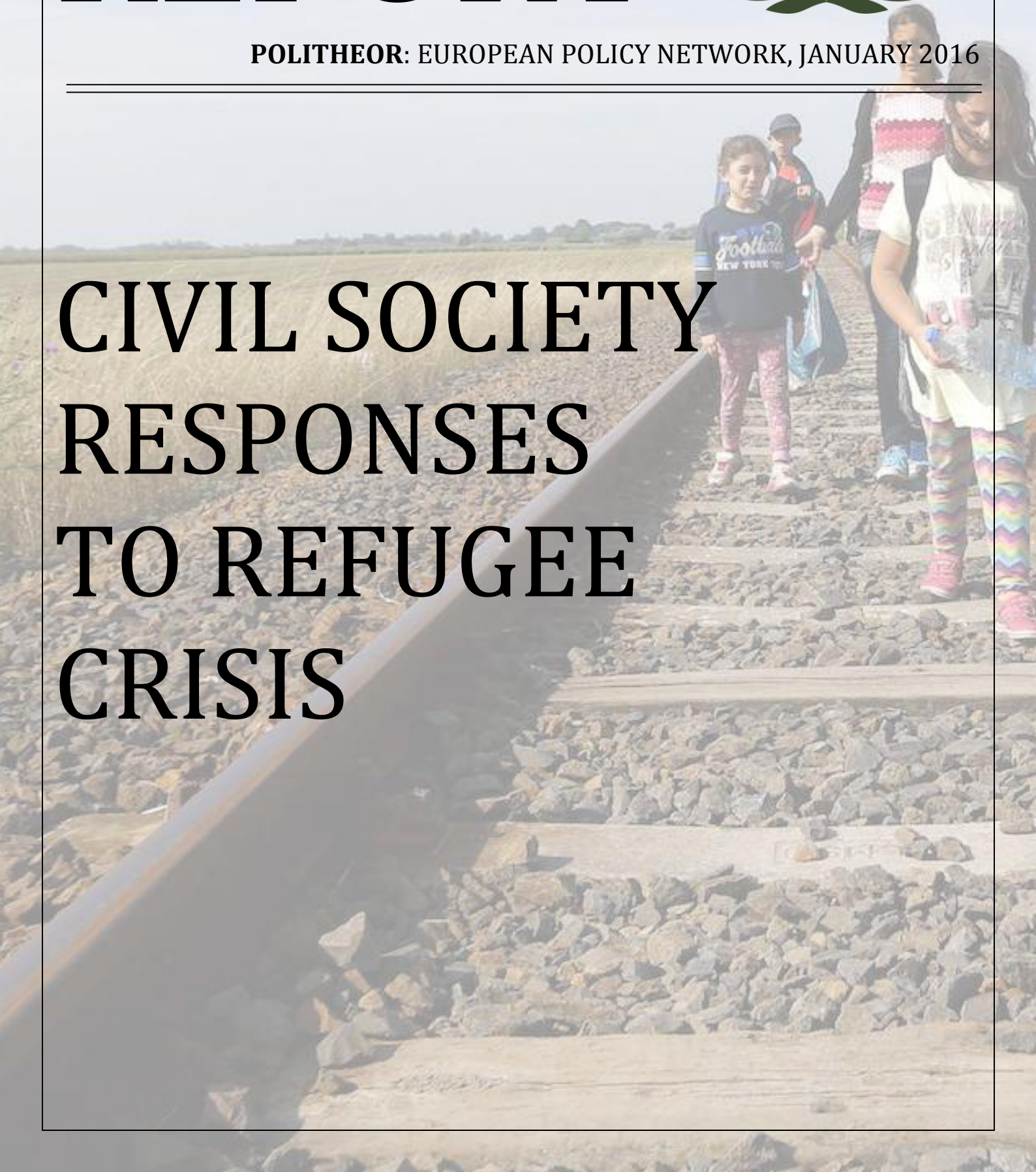
# SPECIAL REPORT



POLITHEOR: EUROPEAN POLICY NETWORK, JANUARY 2016

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## CIVIL SOCIETY RESPONSES TO REFUGEE CRISIS



# Special Report on the civil society responses to refugee crisis

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# INTRODUCTION

*Jakov Bojovic*

*Editor of the Special Report*

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*The refugee crisis that European leaders are currently trying to find a sustainable answer to has reminded us of at least two important characteristics of our day and age. First, we live in a connected World and if globalization means that citizens of developed countries can buy cheap products made by workforce of third-world countries, it also must mean that people escaping from war-struck demolished societies have a human right to be protected and integrated by the developed countries. No matter how many people fleeing war and death arrive, this is an obligation that the developed world must fulfill.*

*The second characteristic is that our societies are marked by stark contrasts. Today in Europe, a real crisis we face is the spreading radicalization against Muslims and refugees in Germany, Hungary, Poland and elsewhere. But, we also see an enormous number of people volunteering and welcoming the refugees to their societies through civil society initiatives. This Special Report is about them. It is also a call by young university graduates for governments and international organizations to provide more support to these initiatives and follow-up with more integrative policies towards refugees, instead of building walls and re-installing borders inside the EU.*

*This Special Report presents five opinion articles sharing best practices of civil society initiatives and providing recommendations to governments; one story-report from the Dunkirk refugee camp in France, and a photo story about refugees in transit through Serbia and volunteers that help them. It is a very special Special Report about special people who give us hope that hypocrisy is not all that's left of the developed part of our connected World.*

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**Irene Zugasti** is a journalist and a political scientist from Madrid holding an MA in International Relations and Diplomacy of the Diplomat School of Spain, where she focused her research on gender and IR studies. Nowadays she works in the Government Office for Gender Based Violence in Spain. In this Special Report Irene brings us an **overview of different civil society responses** to refugee crisis across Europe. However, it is emphasized that “the potential of this solidarity cannot substitute the work of institutions and organizations”.

**Camila Azavedo** is a Master of Science in International Development and Management

from Lund University, Sweden. Camila has four years of professional experience in program management support, communications, research, marketing and education. Originally a journalist, she is interested in the intersection of communications and development, especially concerning policy, communications, research and advocacy services. Camila contributed with an opinion piece about the **reaction of civil society to refugee crisis in Sweden**. A very worrying development, Camila points out, is the new law which will allow the government to issue temporary instead of permanent residency permits to asylum-seekers, jeopardizing the refugees' integration process.

**Stephen Treacy** is a graduate of Human Geography at the University of the West of England, Bristol. His research interests span across the field including, but not limited to national identity, xenophobia, clandestine migration, globalisation and urban Geography. Stephen is engaged in voluntary aid work and research within the **Grande Synthe refugee camp** in Dunkirk, France. He brings us a story about the reality of this camp, where “refugees are denied even the most basic of human necessities, whilst aid agencies face a seemingly futile battle to keep their heads above the water”.

**Simon Marijsse** holds both a Master’s degree in Public Policy and one in Philosophy (from Ghent University and KU Leuven). After having worked as post lauream researcher at the Jean Jacobs Institute in Bologna, he chose to specialize in Conflict & Development Studies at Ghent University. In his opinion piece Simon writes how central and local governments in the EU should take an empowering stance towards **refugee diaspora groups** in order to support the successful integration of refugees.

**Beatrice Mumbi**, a Kenyan national currently pursuing an MA in Public Policy and Administration, currently works with an international refugee-serving organization in Kenya as a regional advocacy officer. Beatrice writes about the **civil society responses in**

**Eastern African countries**, where CSOs supported by UNHCR and foreign governments have taken to themselves the provision of vital services to refugees, due to inability of the states to react. That is why the fact that as foreign funding is quickly dwindling and projects are downsizing presents a big problem for refugees in Eastern Africa.

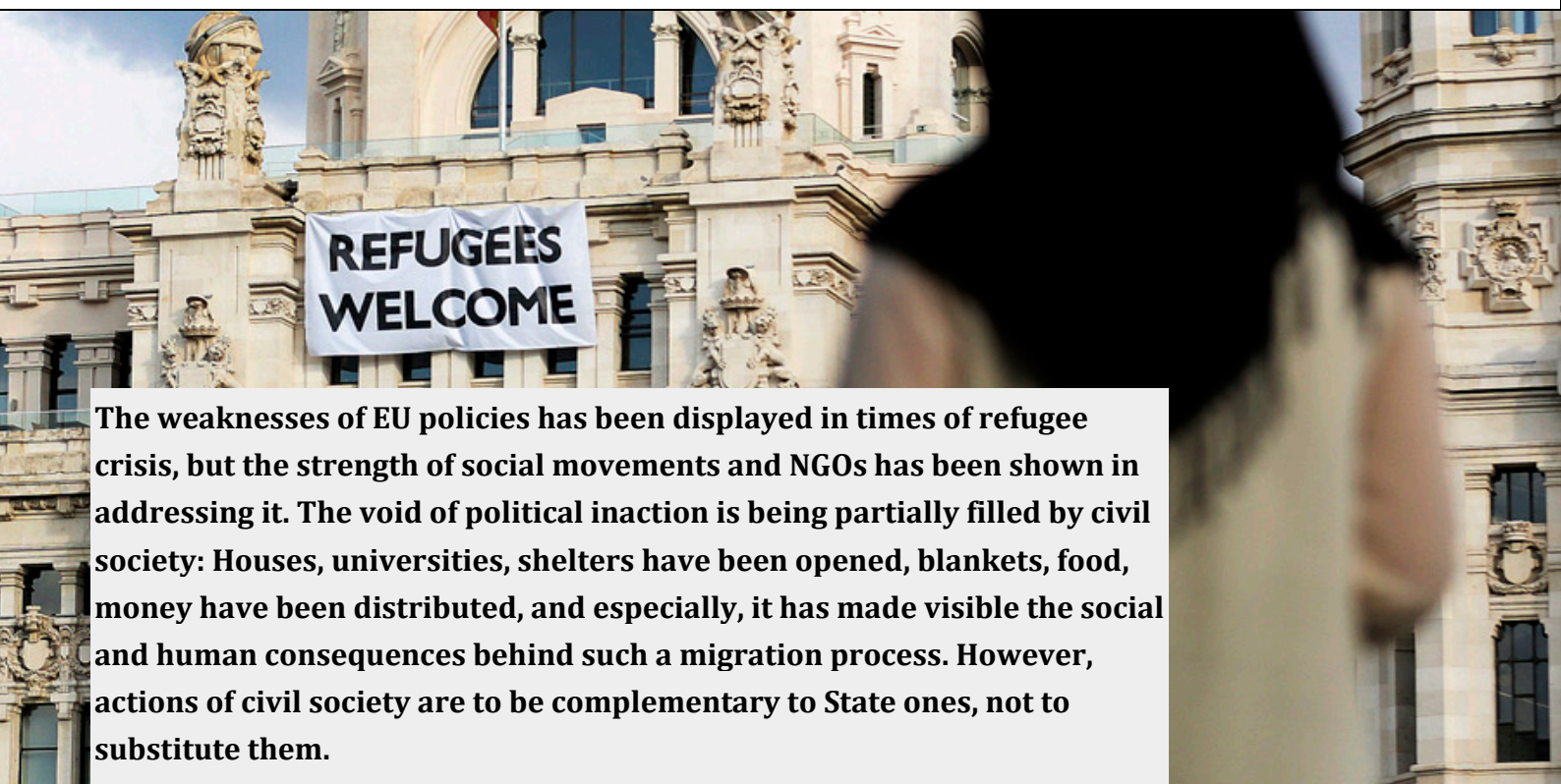
**Karina Oborune** is a young expert in education policy, currently a PhD Candidate in Political Science at University of Latvia. Before, she was employed as a research assistant at University of Oxford and in 2013 and in 2014-2015 as a researcher at University of Latvia and at University of Lucerne. In May 2014 she was employed at EU-Vox project and in 2012-2013 worked at the headquarters of ESN as a researcher at ESNSurvey team. Her contribution is about different **European universities’ responses** to the refugee crisis and a call for the EU to provide more centralized support to these initiatives.

**Mikael Grunwaldt** is a young photographer from Bochum, Germany. He arrived to Serbia in November 2015 to volunteer and shoot a photographic documentary about the path of the refugees through Serbia. His pictures and texts in this Special Report give us an idea of how their life looked like during transit.

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# *To Welcome or not to Welcome: what civil society does for Refugees?*



The weaknesses of EU policies has been displayed in times of refugee crisis, but the strength of social movements and NGOs has been shown in addressing it. The void of political inaction is being partially filled by civil society: Houses, universities, shelters have been opened, blankets, food, money have been distributed, and especially, it has made visible the social and human consequences behind such a migration process. However, actions of civil society are to be complementary to State ones, not to substitute them.

*Author: Irene Zugasti*

The word "refugee" was *googled* around 27 million times during 2015. Google's report "[A Year in Search](#)", reflects that migration events inspired trillions of questions worldwide. At the top of questions trends was "*What happened to Aylan Kurdi?*" the [kurdish child](#) dead in Turkey's shoreline. The top question on 'migration' in Italy was "*How to adopt a Syrian orphan child?*", while in Germany was "*How to volunteer to help migrants?*" Sometimes, those questions do not get an answer as fast as the times we are living in require. It is then, in the middle of uncertainty, when people with empathy decide to act. **And it makes a difference.**

In early September 2015, few weeks after media started to spread the crowding images of refugees at European borders, [Madrid City Hall](#) decided to hang an 8x4 meters banner on its central facade, in the Cibeles Palace, displaying "**Refugees Welcome**". According to council sources, the phones saturated those days due

to calls from citizens who wanted to assist refugees, who by then had not even been able to access Spain. However, there were voices saying that the initiative had political purposes or questioning its superficiality.

Given the slowness of the institutions on taking concrete measures, some people decided to get down to business: The platform "[Refugiados Bienvenidos](#)", (*Refugees Welcome*) was created last September on the initiative of a group of citizens from different regions of the state. It has registered, just in these last three months, 969 housing available to people seeking asylum in Spain with only 26 permanent workers, financed through micro-donations.

Zofia Jaworowska, from [Refugees Welcome Poland](#), knows what it means to work in a hostile environment. After months of harsh debate, Poland's Government has said that up to [400 refugees](#) will be relocated to this country in 2016: a radical, but influential

rhetoric, perceiving refugees as a potential threat to European values, identities and security. When asked for their work on a daily basis, she says, *"We are mostly working on matching refugees with apartment owners, keeping in touch with other organizations and working with volunteers, refugees and Poles."* Despite constant virtual –and not so virtual– attacks, they delete any negative comments they get, and keep on moving.

Discourses against refugees are gaining popularity in Europe: the platform ["We don't want Islam in Czech Republic"](#) is a good example of situation. With dozens thousands of *likes* on social networks, and holding severe demonstrations in [Prague](#) and other Czech cities, this movement, directly inspired by Pegida in Germany, is leading the political claims against the policies of welcome and integration, basing their reasons in the rejection of Islam. A weird fact, considering that less than 0,1% of Czech population is Muslim. However, it is even considering turning into a political party. On the other hand, the refugee crisis has also stirred a wave of solidarity in the Czech Republic. Filip Sykora, journalist in Prague, tells that many organizations are informal, although they usually collaborate with established NGOs. He highlights *"Iniciativa Hlavák"*, an initiative run by volunteers which offers assistance in land to refugees that come from camps, often without money and wandering confused around Prague. Many Czech volunteers have also taken part in helping on land on border crossings in Serbia, Croatia and Hungary, forming an informal "Czech Team".

Migszol, in Hungary, a civil network with no office, neither paid workers that runs since 2013, is not so concerned about housing, blankets or food but about political pressure and political will. Their goal is to end the humanitarian crisis and make visible in Europe their rejection of domestic policies towards refugees, which even [UN had to reproach](#). In

UNCHR own words, Orban's government was **"Portraying those fleeing war and conflict as criminals, invaders and terrorists"**.

There had been previous moments in Europe that have required an immediate response as the current one. The *'crisis of Cayucos (canoes)'* in 2006, with the arrival of 30,000 people from central Africa to Canary Islands in one year, attracted international attention and re-orientated political actions for a migratory context in transformation. However, that situation did not lead to a significant backlash against immigration: but those were the shiny happy years before economic crisis, when the country needed thousands of foreign hands to work on the prosperous construction industry.

**What seems to make a difference** with the current situation is that nowadays it is interdependent and globalized: it has relevance across the whole continent, requiring a coordinated, multidimensional approach that –at last! - understands that migration crisis, as Syrian one, have global motivations and consequences that shake us all. Donald Tusks recently warned the European Parliament, that unless the EU could make progress on the issue, Schengen would collapse.

Acknowledging the important role of civil society in the immediate response to human rights crisis one should bear in mind that society should not be a crutch for the states nor the EU. Many Europeans have given a lesson of solidarity to their politicians and their own fellow citizens, but the potential of this solidarity cannot substitute the work of institutions and organizations. From small, local level actions as Madrid's, to the highest European bodies, this experiences of solidarity and community work must be an inspiration for the adoption of measures that translate this spirit of fraternity into policies of cooperation, integration and coexistence. Otherwise, those who are for the difference, the intolerance and the ignorance may divide... and conquer.

# *Dealing with uncertainty: CSOs and government responses to the “refugee crisis” in Sweden*



Many in Sweden believe the Scandinavian country is facing the hardest “refugee crisis” in a long time. According to [Migrationsverket](#), the official Swedish migration agency, more than 160.000 asylum seekers have arrived in Sweden in 2015, mostly from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. What are the responses of civil society and the State authorities in the response to crisis and are they conducive to successful integration of refugees in Swedish society?

*Author: Camila Azevedo*

[In 2014, Sweden was one of EU’s largest receiver of non-EU asylum-seekers](#) in relation to its population, second only to Germany. Year 2015 was marked by an intense but often shallow debate on the “refugee crisis” in the media. [The latest public opinion poll](#) commissioned by a major Swedish newspaper reveals that more than half of the population wants the government to take fewer asylum-seekers in contrast to attitudes expressed in previous months. Compounding the scenario, support for the far-right *Sverigedemokraterna* party has been on the rise. Yet the political climate is probably not that different in other EU countries. Likewise, it is not as bleak either. Civil society in Sweden has shown much strength and compassion in supporting newcomers throughout the country.

Scene one: Stockholm central station. Basic medical care is offered to weary men and

women who have just stepped in Sweden for the first time. [Vård på Centralen](#) (“Healthcare at the Central Station”) is the name of the project started by a young Swedish woman of Iraqi Kurdish descent. More than 250 healthcare volunteers have joined the initiative, which has grown to be an official civil society organization.

Scene two: asylum-seekers already established for a couple of years in Sweden are still waiting for the official decision on their status. [For some, the moral sinks along with the lack of prospects of a meaningful life.](#) It is to *Rödakorshuset* (“The Red Cross House”) that these people have turned, not in search of help, but rather to help others as volunteers. A little outside Stockholm, *Rödakorshuset* is the Swedish Red Cross arm created in order to provide migrants a place where they can carry out ordinary tasks such as doing laundry and



showering. In *Rödakorshuset*, the volunteer asylum-seekers on the wait are able to work and perhaps have hopes of a better life in the future.

Scene three: in a small town in the middle of the forest in southeastern Sweden called *Eksjö*, new asylum-seekers and Swedes gather every week to chat over a cup of coffee and cookies. The organization *Tillsammans Eksjö* ("Eksjö Together") arranges this and other activities in an attempt to foster the integration of migrants into a more open Swedish society.

Such initiatives are commendable and necessary. Apart from helping to build social cohesion, they fill gaps that the state cannot. In order for them to have a desired long-lasting effect, there must be strong support from the policy environment. However, the social-democratic coalition government has been struggling to find a way of dealing with the increasing numbers of refugees amid public fears played by the far-right and the conservatives. An official discourse of lack of capacity to take in more asylum-seekers has come to the fore, and the government announced a new package of policy measures affecting the asylum system so that Sweden would have "room to breathe".

Good news in the [package](#), is that the government wants integration to start when asylum-seekers are still waiting for a definitive answer on their status; rules to be simplified so that integration happens faster; more seats to be created in schools and many other measures. The best news for civil society organizations is the planned disbursement of 200 million Swedish crowns (around 21 million euros) to support their activities. Bad news, on the other hand - and there are a few - is that many propositions are a little vague, as is usual with politics today. Policy making in uncertain circumstances is definitely work in progress, but the vagueness of some intentions is a problem.

Meanwhile a very concrete measure is also cause for concern. The government has decided to start issuing, for the next three years after becoming law, temporary instead of permanent residency permits for asylum-seekers, with the exception of unaccompanied minors, [resettlement refugees](#) and families with children. Civil society organizations such as Amnesty International are [highly critical of the new measures](#), arguing that temporary permits are a disincentive for people to integrate effectively. After all, how can somebody learn the language and make plans when they are so concerned about their own insecure future? It is only logical to conclude that a temporary permit, which warrants a more precarious status, will make things harder.

As it stands now, the future law will also hold that a permanent permit would be granted when the temporary runs out if a person can prove to have enough tax-deductible income to support oneself. Alternatively, a permanent permit would be granted if there should still be a need for protection after three years. Even if this measure would be economically sound for the country, it is a tad cruel and unrealistic when it is well known how hard it is for non-EU migrants to break into the Swedish labor market. Moreover, the establishment of border controls between Sweden and Denmark is also proving very polemic.

What does all of this mean for civil society efforts in helping asylum-seekers? It is still too soon to know. *Tillsammans Eksjö* has already demonstrated against border controls. Those waiting asylum-seekers who found solace in working as volunteers in *Rödakorshuset* might find they have an even more uncertain future. The work in *Vård på Centralen* has already decreased significantly since border controls, and the organization is considering going mobile. But one thing is certain: civil society initiatives will likely be somewhat undermined by disabling policies, despite the financial resources committed to them.



# ***REPORT: The dark reality of Dunkirk's refugee camp***



**Refugees in Dunkirk are denied even the most basic of human necessities, whilst aid agencies face a seemingly futile battle to keep their heads above the water.**

*Author: Stephen Treacy*

Amongst the marshy, coastal French Flanders lies a town once famed for its historic part played in the Second World War. The city of Dunkirk is one of France's major port towns, with direct connections to the United Kingdom by ferry, and it lies mere kilometres from the border with Belgium. Whilst the city's era of Nazi occupation confines itself further into late modern history, a new humanitarian crisis looms, and with a great human cost. The borough of Grande-Synthe now hosts a staggering number of Refugees, part of a growing narrative of conflict and civil unrest in the Middle East. Estimates from independent camp surveys, Medicines Sans Frontiers (MSF) and the French Government point the total figure at anywhere between 1700 and 3000 refugees - mostly male - but with a startling presence of women and children. Over the 2015 Christmas period, the camp appeared to be growing by as many as 70 to 100 new arrivals each day, all with the ambition of better living conditions and greater prospects of seeking Asylum in the West, specifically the

United Kingdom. Whilst the general focus of the Western media has highlighted the plight of Syrian refugees, most camp dwellers in Grande-Synthe identify as Kurdish, or Iraqi Kurdish alongside a small population of Persians and Vietnamese.

On arrival into the camp - either through the discreet forest entrances or the main entrance checkpoint, fronted by the armed French Gendarmerie - the smell of burning plastic, unavoidable quagmires and the constant brushing of shoulders with men, women and children, often clad in worn out shoes and asking for the most basic of items, grants a glaring insight into the scale and nature of this crisis. Rows of battered, uninsulated tents, often of smaller births than family sized, line the slushy, makeshift pavements, whilst sporadic clusters fill the neighbouring marshlands. Covered in battered tarpaulin and with the occasional pieces of cardboard or scrap wood pieced together for some foundation against the unforgiving land, the tents seem only a temporary solution to the

blistering cold and battering coastal winds, yet they must provide an indefinite source of shelter. With only eight clean water taps for the entire camp, and as few as 20 toilets, sanitation is a crucial concern, with conditions such as scabies and severe chest infections on the increase.

Whilst international law is patchy with regards to the standards for a refugee settlement, the camp falls far below the 2011 Sphere Project handbook standards for humanitarian response. Frequently, international

journalists visiting the camp describe it as the worst they have reported. But what of the civil response? At the time of writing, the site is maintained by merely a handful of permanent aid workers (those staying permanently on a day to day basis, or on a rotating schedule). Volunteers over the 2015 Christmas period stretched as far as an estimated 40-50 volunteers for the entire camp, however there is a regular presence of MSF, Salam and Medicines du Monde on site. A men's distribution centre, camp kitchen and women & children's distribution tent are all staffed by permanent volunteers, yet their storage and staffing are not sufficient for the constant growth of the camp, especially during

*Hindrances to the relief efforts are undoubtedly numerous, and mainly come top down from the French authorities, but also breed within the camp's chaotic framework of aid distribution.*

the unforgiving winter period. Whilst speaking to new arrivals on the camp, the mention of discrimination between different nationalities in these centres was all too frequent, regardless of the fact that the centres are always staffed by refugee volunteers. Smaller organizations, such as the Bristol based Aid Box Convoy, endeavour

to personally distribute aid to those who cannot access these centres, but are hindered once again by a sheer lack of manpower. Most organizations appear to work on a "help them to help themselves", grass routes development model, often incorporating

refugees into their workforce and integrating with the communities, treating everybody as equals and building strong relationships in the camp.

Nevertheless, hindrances to the relief efforts are undoubtedly numerous, and mainly come top down from the French authorities, but also breed within the camp's chaotic framework of aid distribution. An infamous source of conflict are the Gendarmes. One can directly experience an inhumane and seemingly sadistic engagement, simply by arriving at the camp with a collection of useful aid, such as tents, blankets and wood. Unless direct permission from the mayor is granted (and even said





permission is no guarantee), these items are prohibited from being brought on site. All too frequently, shipments of donated blankets and tents brought from far-flung places such as The Netherlands, Switzerland and Scotland are bluntly refused on site and the distributors are asked to clear the area. Further accounts from volunteers have claimed certain Gendarmes occasionally laugh at refugees and aid workers, whilst they are breaking down scrapped, wooden pallets into fragments deemed suitable for firewood, and not for construction. Regulations appear to change on an hourly basis, with a change of guard resulting in a complete shift as to who and what is allowed on camp. One of the greatest mockeries experienced by refugees and volunteers was the introduction of a compulsory "sign-in" sheet at the gate. Scribbled onto this rain soaked piece of paper were Kurdish written names of celebrities, rock stars and inflammatory statements, as a form of protest by those refugees wishing to remain anonymous. It is not uncommon for non-white volunteers to be asked to sign the register, despite having no known obligation to do so. The tear gassing on New Year's Eve of family areas in the nearby Calais "Jungle" suggest that relations with the local police could deteriorate further.

Whilst the government, condition of the camp and climate all compete to impede aid workers as much as possible, one unforeseen hindrance to relief is aid distribution itself. Since the camp has no top down structure with regards to aid agencies, it is the task of each individual aid worker or organization to understand the larger picture, and work side-by-side with conflicting projects. This, however is by no means limited to those working regularly on the camp. External relief efforts from both large organizations and small, independents can cause more trouble than their worth. Day trippers with vehicles travelling from far and

wide often arrive insufficiently prepared and unannounced on site, with aid that is either disorganized, or items completely useless to the current condition. Inevitably and often combined with unfortunately untrained members of the public, once kind-hearted donation efforts turn into nightmarish distribution situations, putting stress on local workers, refugees and sanitation, with packaging, food and clothing often littered around the area of distribution. These situations are frequently picked up by journalists and government officials, painting a skewed, xenophobic reality of the crisis. Scenes of scrambling refugees, seemingly ravaging trucks full of aid are merely the result of individuals falling short of prior planning, careless distribution and lacking in patience. These conditions span into much larger

*Scribbled onto this rain soaked piece of paper were Kurdish written names of celebrities, rock stars and inflammatory statements, as a form of protest.*

organizations, such as the Red Cross. One relief effort on their behalf consisted of an articulated truck arriving on site, immediately blocking any other distribution efforts. Tens of volunteers then conducted a line style distribution of backpacks,

filled with items quoted directly from refugees as "useless", such as hats, gloves and toiletries, which at the time were already in abundance on site. The sheer financial cost of such reckless distribution is unfathomable. Aid requirements at the camp change on a daily basis. Relief convoys should check with workers and organizations on the ground before travel (At the time of writing, contact Care4Calais or Aid Box Convoy for details).

The contemporary situation in Dunkirk is crying out for a shake up of government policy with regards to the immediate and long term survival of those dwelling in the camp. With the local government currently planning to reduce the population of the nearby Calais Jungle to a mere 2000 (with the population currently estimated to be above 6000), pressure is going to be drastically increased on the exponentially


expanding Dunkirk camp. Police forces are refusing to allow even the most essential items onto the camp, and at the time of writing, the climate is growing increasingly inhospitable, and combined with the natural flooding of nearby rivers, hypothermia is an impending crisis. A structure imposed from the ground up must be imposed on the government, as well as aid organizations and individuals wishing to contribute to relief efforts. Without a thorough understanding of how the camp continues to function and communication falls short of understanding the correct aid for the ever fluctuating day-to-day life in the camp, efforts will continue to struggle, and the situation

could become victim to civil apathy under the seemingly futility of humanitarian efforts. As one aid worker quipped whilst slogging around the camp; “if you stand around in one place for too long, you get totally stuck in the mud”. Those working on the ground must have the correct tools at their disposal to reach out of the progressively fortifying walls of the camps to local and National governments, and expose European policy for the fatal disregard it currently poses, and mobilize those officials into securing the lives of the men, women and children currently struggling in those liminal, timeless spaces on our very own doorsteps.





# *Refugee diaspora groups: Bridges between civil society and the state*



REFUGEES  
WELCOME!

What type of government or society do we imagine when confronted with a problem as dire and encompassing as the refugee crisis? Recently, the OECD urged the European member states to scale-up and adapt to the refugee crisis. Yet it remains unclear and opaque what this adaptability should look like, how it should take form and what the role of civil society might be. What is clear is that instead of pointing fingers at other states, governments should take an empowering stance towards their own civil society and refugee diaspora groups.

*Author: Simon Marijsse*

In the Netherlands a group of six NGO's advanced the [manifest](#) "save their souls" mobilizing the Dutch population. The same activism is visible in Belgium, where grass root initiatives like [#Welcome The Refugees](#) and [Civil Platform](#) demonstrate how the refugee crisis solicits a tremendous effect in terms of global citizenship and cross-culture solidarity. It is a popular belief that interprets this rise of collectivism and horizontal networking as a direct reaction to the supranational institutions and states that are lagging behind. It's a silver lining to a lack of policy capacity. Yet is this 'fill the gap' approach the best way to envision the role of civil society?

The idea of a rigid divide between the state and civil society traces back to the French statesman and political theorist Alexis de [Tocqueville](#). According to him, a self-emancipative civil society could only appear when the state does not interfere, when it

advocates freedom instead of democratic levelling, homogenisation and, concomitantly, an increase of isolation. He stated that "the more it [the governing state] stands in the place of associations, the more will individuals, losing the notion of combining together, require assistance." Analogous to the refugee crisis, collective action then only appears when the elite remains silent and out of sight.

I do not subscribe to such an antagonistic reading. It is flawed because it ignores the enabling function a state should have. The ignorance is most apparent when media reporting reduces solidarity to a mere 'national', almost competitive, solidarity. In doing so, they occlude the bridging role [refugee diaspora groups](#) play. A recent [study](#) shows that "refugee groups and individuals can support long-term development in the countries of origin, as well as immediate support for other displaced populations." This

is already the case in Germany where these groups help “people fleeing Syria through humanitarian admission and private sponsorship programmes.” Though some academics indicate that government policies can also inhibit the progress of these organizations, the majority leans towards the consensus that state intervention is paramount to supporting and helping develop diaspora groups in civil society.

At the launch of the 2015 [Migration Outlook](#), Secretary General of the OECD Angel Gurría stated that: “[National] integration programmes need to be scaled-up and adapted to ensure refugees successfully integrate as quickly as possible in their new homes.” It remained tragically unclear *how* or in *what* form this adaptability should take place. One thing is sure. It does not lie in pointing the

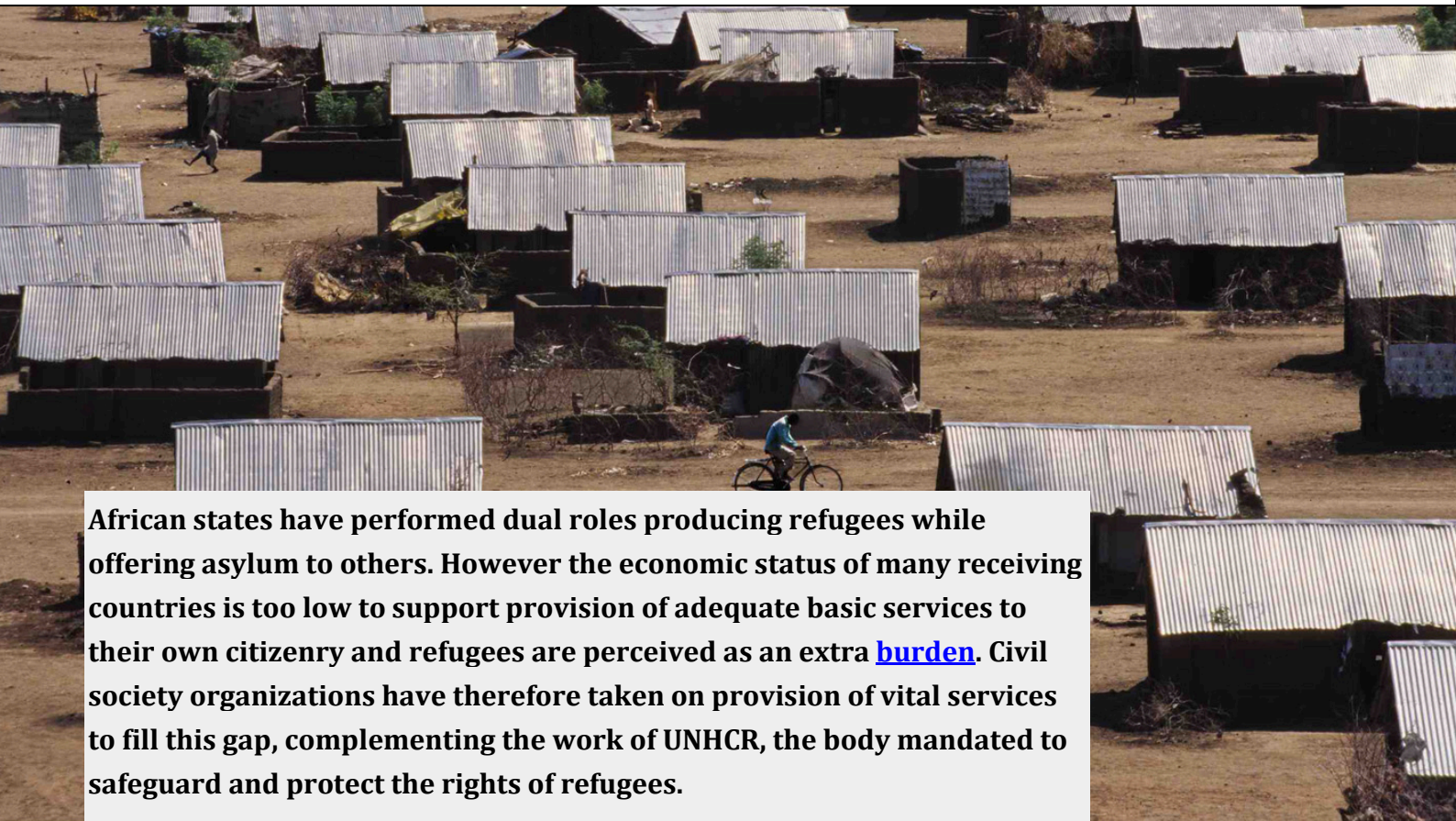
finger at what other European member states don’t do, as Belgian secretary of state for asylum policy and migration [Theo Francken](#) did. Instead of a negativistic stance towards the EU, a more active stance towards their own civil society is needed. I believe the key lies in a structural symbiosis where civil society and the state partner up. Not as opposites, but as mutual benefactors.

One way both central and local governments can trigger this is by taking an empowering stance towards refugee diaspora groups. Not only does it prove a government to be something more than an instantiation of public policy measures cut off from its electorate, it’s also a necessary step in changing public opinion and perceptions of these groups and the refugees themselves.

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# *Filling the gaps: Contribution of CSOs in the management of refugee affairs in Eastern Africa*



African states have performed dual roles producing refugees while offering asylum to others. However the economic status of many receiving countries is too low to support provision of adequate basic services to their own citizenry and refugees are perceived as an extra [burden](#). Civil society organizations have therefore taken on provision of vital services to fill this gap, complementing the work of UNHCR, the body mandated to safeguard and protect the rights of refugees.

*Author: Beatrice Mumbi*

At the moment, the number of asylum seekers comprising of refugees and other persons of concern in eastern African have surpassed the two million mark and still counting. The largest numbers are found in Ethiopia and Kenya with over [600,000 registered in Ethiopia and over 500,000 in Kenya](#). The number is certainly increasing as the [Yemeni](#) and [Burundi crises](#) continue to deteriorate producing more refugees.

Receiving States especially Kenya and Ethiopia have over the years responded to the increased influx of asylum seekers with policies that promote management of refugees through [confinement in camps](#), with a small number residing in cities and other urban areas. In addition, the same states have made reservations to articles of the [1951 convention](#) on the Status of Refugees, specifically limiting the refugees' right to gainful employment. It is

ironical to imagine even former university professors are wasting away in refugee camps!

The long and short of these policies is that refugees have to be provided with everything they need to sustain their lives. Civil society organizations have mobilized resources mainly from foreign governments and donors to provide access to life-saving services for refugees. The list is long but one vital service stands out – education.

When a country experiences conflict, the first sector that often suffers is education. This is has been the case with South Sudan and Somalia which have not known peace for many years. Before South Sudan gained independence in 2011, she had been locked in a long-drawn civil war with the government of the day, while Somalia descended into anarchy in the early 90's. As a result, entire generations

of refugees originating from these countries have never had any formal education; therefore adult illiteracy rates are very low.

In the camps Kenya, Kakuma and Daadab; Gambella and Dollo Ado in Ethiopia, and in the settlements in Northern Uganda, civil society organizations have responded with unique educational services that respond to the needs of the different age groups. These range from language classes, early childhood and primary education, provision of [scholarships](#), and vocational training and alternative learning for adults.

Positive spillovers of these services to host communities leave a lasting impact especially in locations that are far from government reach. I had an experience of this one time in the remote Maban county of South Sudan where a group of local elderly men were learning English courtesy of an organization that was serving refugees. When I asked them why they were learning English, they retorted that they had never had any chance to undertake any formal learning. Incidentally, the country has also made a policy decision to use English in place of Arabic as its official language.

It is important to note that educating refugees has both short-term and long term benefits. In the short-term, it eases their integration in the host countries while a long-term benefit is that it prepares them to positively contribute to their own countries once they return. A case in point is South Sudan whose civil service has a number of senior staff who benefited from education scholarships obtained in countries they had sought asylum in before they repatriated after independence in 2011.

Another important contribution has been advocacy for favorable legal and policy frameworks in the region. Kenya's Refugee Act of 2006 was a culmination of many years' of concerted efforts by agencies serving refugees in the country. Subsequently, the civil society has managed to tame use of unfavorable policies by government to some extent. While the same cannot be said in some of the other countries due to policies restricting advocacy work, the continued presence of civil society organizations is a testimony of their valued contribution to those countries.

However, all is not rosy anymore as foreign funding is quickly dwindling and projects are downsizing. UNHCR's [budgets](#) have also in the recent past experienced huge deficits too. New innovative funding strategies must be found otherwise refugees will be left without vital support.

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# Universities' Response To Refugee Crisis in Europe

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**As an increasing number of refugees started arriving to Europe, this issue has been high on the EU agenda and created commitments for Member states. Nevertheless, in recent months, the EU has been extensively criticized for inability to deal with Europe's largest humanitarian crisis in the last decades. The Commission as well as Member States received negative cover because of dedicating financial resources to border protection rather than integration of refugees.**

*Author: Karina Oborune*

Enrollment figures for Syrian tertiary education had been climbing steadily upward. [According](#) to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, in 2002 college-age population was 12%, rising up to 26% in 2012. From the onset of the armed conflict in Syria in 2012, half of the 22 million people living in the country have been forced to leave their homes. Having the statistics in mind, it is safe to say that a lot of these people are students, who need to continue their education – but for that they need the EU's support.

This op-ed describes how the Commission and universities across Europe could work together to integrate refugees in the EU's societies.

The EU has three potential reasons to create special higher education schemes for refugees: first, to integrate them into the society, second, making use of their talent and education they received in their own countries, third, creating a new elite which would one day return to their

home countries and spread ideas of peace and democracy.

Since pre-second world war universities have provided help to refugee-scientists and refugee-students, many of them later became Nobel Laureates. Universities have resources to provide information on educational opportunities and necessary language teaching, they can help student and scientist refugees gain qualifications and enable them to seek employment. On the other hand, the Universities would profit as well. In short-run, integration of refugees will help universities to internationalize their student campuses and be involved in more social engagement and volunteering. Besides, such integration of refugees in the long-run would contribute to European economies by attracting talented juniors and seniors from the refugee circles.

To provide a couple of examples of the current engagement of universities, [STAR](#), and [Council for At Risk Academics](#) (CARA) in the UK, [SAIH](#)

in Norway, [Refugees Welcome](#) in France, [DAAD](#) in Germany, [EP-Nuffic](#) in the Netherlands, [Central European University](#) in Hungary and [Aarhus University](#) in Denmark - volunteers and campaigns for refugees, facilitates university placements and offers support with visa and transfer costs, provides fellowships and counselling to traumatised students and their families by providing help to rebuild their lives and career.

When refugees want to enter higher education, they often lack the previous education records and even when refugees are able to provide the required documentation, tuition is often out of their price range. But in the past few months, some British universities have been reaching out to refugees by offering free tuition. For example, as asylum-seekers in the UK are not allowed to work and have no right to grants or loans that would help them pay the hugely expensive university tuition fees normally paid by international students, the University of Sussex offered 50 scholarships to Syrian refugees covering tuition fees and living costs; the University of Warwick announced it will offer 10 student scholarships for the academic year 2015-16 and will continue to offer 10 more in 2016-17; the University of East London has offered 10 scholarships to Syrians in refugee camps. On the other hand, the idea of offering higher education online to refugees could be worth thinking about too. In Berlin an online university for refugees - [Kiron](#) - is launched offering free higher education to more than 1,000 students.

Also other universities in Western and Eastern Europe have provided financial and other support. University of Barcelona has set up a special refugee support programme including the creation of a crowd-funding website that will allow Syrian students affording study-

derived costs, for example book purchasing, offering rent-free apartments, scholarships that covers full tuition fees, free 40-hour courses of culture and language, legal advice on procedures for granting refugee status etc. University of Leipzig created a [webpage](#), which helps refugee scientists gain access to German universities. The University of Gothenburg has encouraged employees to donate money to help refugees. Prague's Charles University offers free studies for refugees, who have been granted asylum and can legally stay in the Czech Republic are given the opportunity to study free of charge in study programmes in English and accommodation for these students is provided on the university campus.

Specific programmes for refugee students can have profound and lasting benefits for academia and society, even if these benefits can be hard to quantify. When it comes to the EU - for example, European Union's established programme [Science4Refugees](#), matches refugees with universities and these universities can get a badge as "refugee-welcoming organizations". However, such initiatives are limited in number because universities have gone already a step further than the Commission, by organizing these programmes themselves.

Therefore, the EU should follow-up with a more centralized and fully financed system, for example, dedicating separate scholarships for refugee students or including them in Erasmus+ budget. Also universities should be a powerful lobby in order to support refugees. As University of Hamburg's Prof. Dr. Dieter Lenzen has stated: "Education is not a luxury. It is a fundamental need and should not, therefore, be the last link in the integration process for those coming here."



# PHOTO STORY: Refugees in Serbia



**I am Mikael Grunwaldt, 27, a photographer from Bochum, Germany. I came to Serbia in November 2015 to volunteer and shoot a photographic documentary about the path of the refugees through Serbia.**

*Author: Mikael Grunwaldt*

In the first days I helped and took photos at the Miksaliste distribution center in Belgrade. From there, I hit the train to Dimitrovgrad, a city near the border to Bulgaria where the situation was far different compared to the well organized and calm camp in the Serbian capital.


On the one hand, a lot of refugees were arriving illegally and in really bad shape during the nights; a governmental camp providing almost no help for the never ending stream of refugees, criminals supervising each single step of the volunteers, limiting the provided help and ripping off the last cents of the refugees.

And on the other hand: volunteers from all over the world providing hot drinks and soup, fruits, clothes, new shoes and medical help 24 hours a day, not frightened by the permanent presence of the taxi mafia, the border police or the bitter cold during the nights.



*Dimitrovgrad is not only the first stop in Serbia, it also means the end of torture and brutality by the Bulgarian police to the travelling crowd. All of them seem to be happy to at least feel like a human being again.*



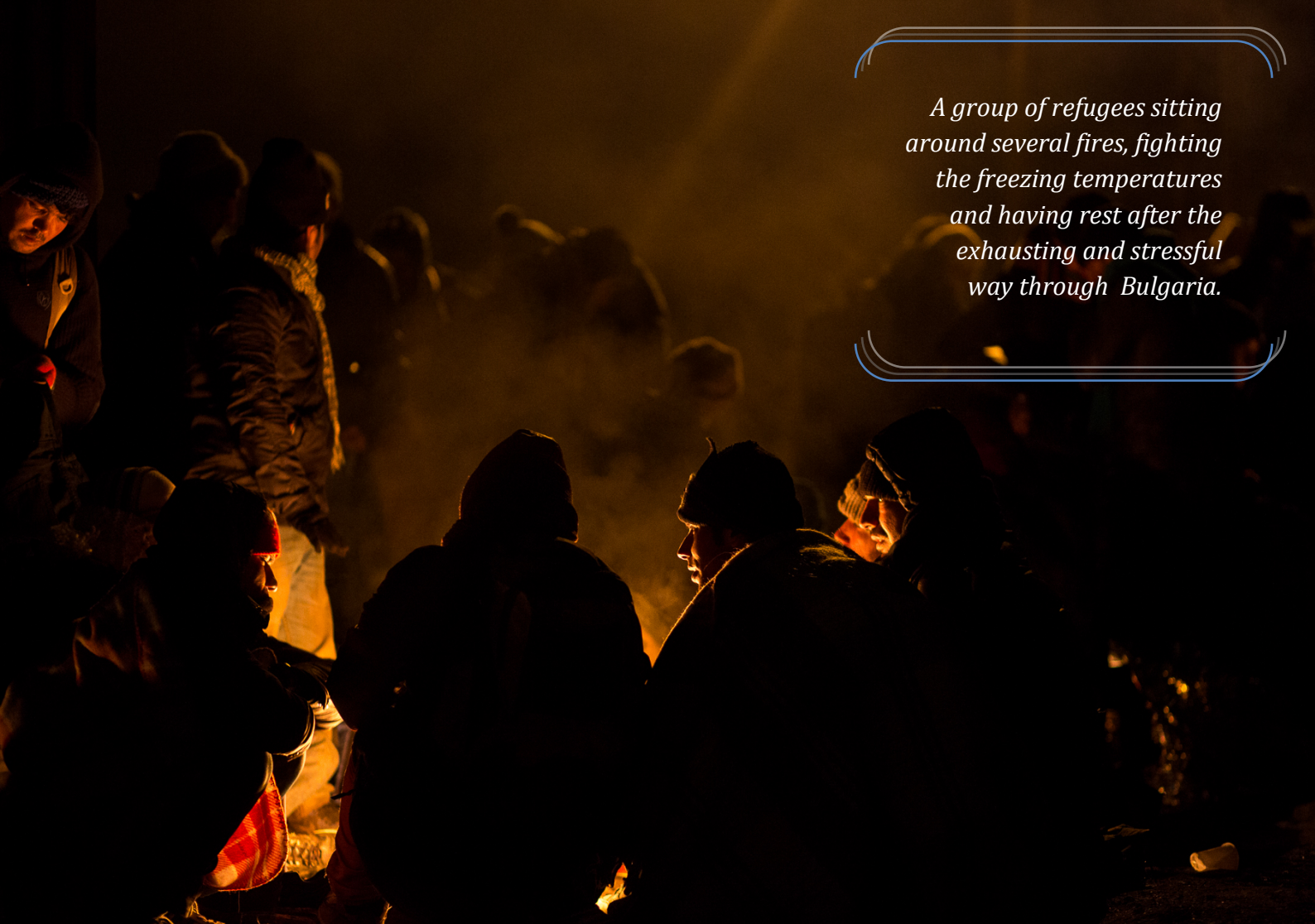
A man wearing a red knit beanie and a grey blanket is sleeping in front of a metal fence. The scene is outdoors, with a building visible in the background under a clear sky.

*A man tries to sleep directly in front of the governmental camp in Dimitrovgrad.*

*After criminal structures shut down the tent out of which the volunteers provided food, drinks and clothes, just small plastic bags filled with bread, jam, tuna and chocolate were handed out.*







*A group of refugees sitting around several fires, fighting the freezing temperatures and having rest after the exhausting and stressful way through Bulgaria.*

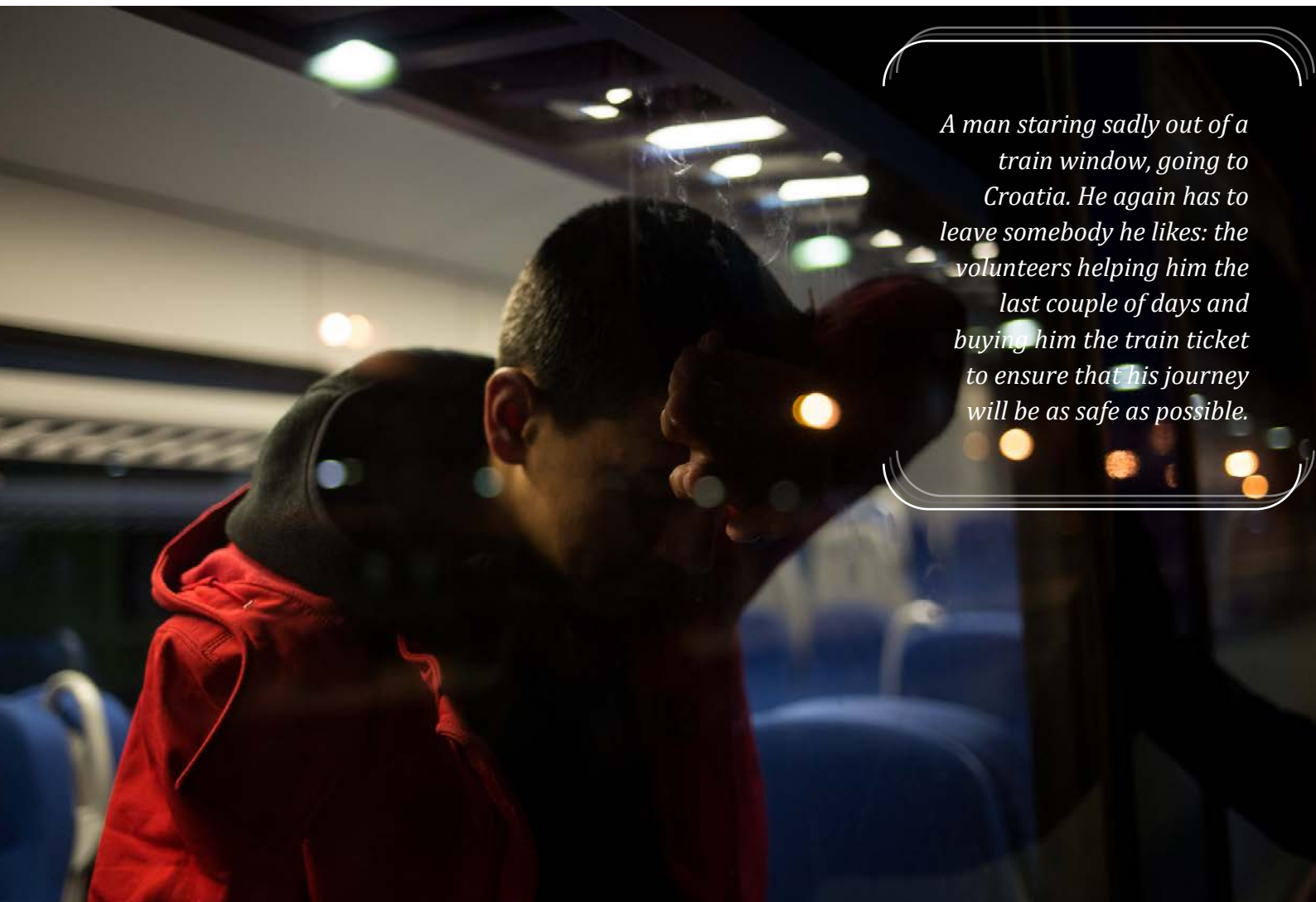
*Early in the morning, some men and women wake up with the first sunlight. The fires of the night are still burning, it is cold and wet like the days before.*







*A small girl leaving with her family by bus, next stop - Belgrade. Almost all refugees take the expensive buses because they are not informed that a cheap public train leaves Dimitrovgrad station every evening.*



*A man staring sadly out of a train window, going to Croatia. He again has to leave somebody he likes: the volunteers helping him the last couple of days and buying him the train ticket to ensure that his journey will be as safe as possible.*



