‘EU-Turkey Civil Society Dialogue on Volunteering for Refugee Protection: Strengthening refugee assistance services in Turkey’

Local Roundtable meeting (14-15 July 2016)

Context

Following SHARE Network activities in the field of volunteering for refugees, ICMC Europe and project partner Human Resource Development Foundation (HRDF) are partnering in the project entitled the Refugee Protection and Service Delivery Dialogue – Strengthening Partnerships to Respond to Syrian Refugee Needs (referred to herein as the “Refugee Service Delivery Project”). The project is part of the EU-Turkey Civil Society Dialogue programme, bringing together civil society organisations from Turkey and the EU, to exchange knowledge and experience, and to facilitate an ongoing dialogue between organisations.

As a result of the situation in the region and its generous open-door policy, Turkey is now hosting the world’s largest community of Syrians forcibly displaced by the ongoing conflict in their country. According to UNHCR estimates, Turkey’s Syrian refugee population was more than 2.733.044 million (registered) as of end-June 2016. The Migration Management Provincial Unit of Eskisehir has indicated that the city currently hosts 1.732 registered Syrians refugees and 5.552 non-Syrian refugees (predominantly Afghan, Iranian, Iraqi, Somali, Congolese and Nigerian).

In order to facilitate harmonization of Syrians under the temporary protection regime and to equip them with the knowledge and skills to be independent actors, free from dependency on third parties in Turkey, resettlement countries or Syria upon return, the Directorate General Migration Management (DGMM) is charged with overseeing harmonization activities implemented by public institutions, local authorities, non-governmental organisations, universities and international organisations. According to the DGMM, harmonization activities include introductory courses on political structure, language, legal system, culture and history of Turkey as well as on foreigners’ rights and obligations. Activities should aim to promote access to public and private goods and services, education and economic activities, social and cultural interaction, and primary healthcare services.

The Refugee Service Delivery Project, supports the setting up of volunteering programmes for refugee groups (Syrians under temporary protection status and other refugees); promotes the exchange of best practices to strengthen refugee protection and harmonization in Turkey; and provides a platform for all actors involved in organising harmonization activities to network, exchange ideas and build relationships to support durable solutions for refugees in Turkey and the European Union.
A first roundtable meeting was held in Eskisehir 14-15 July, co-organized and hosted by the Human Resource Development Foundation (HRDF) Istanbul and Eskisehir branches. A European delegation, headed by ICMC Europe, participated in the meeting together with 40 local and regional actors (including European and Turkish NGOs, foundations, central and local government authorities and local service providers).

Objectives
The 1.5-day meeting programme, included a series of expert presentations and panels, break-out discussions and a site visit to the refugee assistance programme of the Turkish project partner HRDF and Red Crescent Eskisehir to:

- support planning and coordination of Turkish civil society organisations' volunteering programmes;
- develop an understanding of the priorities, strengths and challenges of individual regional and local contexts, through site visits, research and intensive dialogue with relevant actors; and
- provide a platform for participants to network, exchange ideas and build relationships to assist in the future development of durable solutions for refugees in Turkey and the European Union.

Participants

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DAY I

**Petra Hueck - Director, ICMC Europe**

opened the event by stressing the importance of capacity building for refugee reception, integration and best practice exchange in the region and complimented the Turkish government, civil society and local municipalities for their efforts in hosting enormous numbers of Syrians and other refugees. She called for increased responsibility-sharing between European countries and the international community to lift the burden that has been placed on Turkey, referring to the need of increasing European resettlement programmes and offering new legal channels for protection in Europe to Syrians and other refugees currently residing in Turkey. Ms. Hueck gave an introduction to the **SHARE Network**. SHARE is a European resettlement network of regions, cities and their civil society partners to promote refugee protection and refugee resettlement, a culture of welcome and increased capacity to plan and coordinate refugee reception and integration programmes in cities and regions across Europe. Drawing on experience learned from SHARE, The Refugee Service Delivery project seeks to strengthen partnerships between cities and civil society in refugee protection and integration in Turkey and promote volunteering on the local level.

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The International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) serves and protects uprooted people – refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants - regardless of faith, race, ethnicity or nationality. Since its creation in 1951, ICMC has identified and accompanied over one million refugees for resettlement. Additionally, ICMC provides expert resettlement personnel to UNHCR field operations through the ICMC-UNHCR Resettlement Deployment Scheme. The ICMC Europe office in Brussels works to promote resettlement in Europe, developing the European Resettlement Network (www.resettlement.eu) with its partners IOM and UNHCR, and building European resettlement capacity and expertise.
Introduction to the EU - Turkey Civil Society Dialogue

Magdalena Boehm - Project coordinator and Project development officer, ICMC Europe

Ms. Boehm presented an overview of the Refugee Service Delivery Project led by ICMC Europe and HRDF. As part of the EU–Turkey Civil Society Dialogue programme, the project aims to bring civil society organisations from Turkey and the EU together, to exchange knowledge and experience, and to facilitate an ongoing dialogue between organisations.

The specific objectives of the Refugee Service Delivery project are to:

- initiate, widen and strengthen the cooperation and exchange of best practices between Turkish and European stakeholders;
- increase the quantity and quality of services and assistance offered to refugees in Turkey to ensure their protection and promote integration;
- pilot the establishment of a volunteering programme engaging citizens in delivering NGO services and in supporting referral systems;
- raise awareness about refugee protection and create durable solutions for refugees at local levels by engaging universities and local authorities in Turkey; and
- mobilize support in Europe for responsibility-sharing with Turkey by offering resettlement places and other legal pathways for refugees to stay in Europe.

(Click here to access the full presentation)

Refugee protection in the city & region of Eskisehir

Murat Aslan - Eskisehir Provincial Directorate of Migration Management (DGMM)

Mr. Aslan’s presentation highlighted the competences, operational structure and responsibilities of the DGMM under the new Turkish Law on Foreigners and International Protection (Law No.6458). The DGMM has 18 provincial offices. Mr. Aslan represented the office in the region of Eskisehir at the roundtable meeting.

In his talk, he explained the different types of status determination according to the DGMM. Besides the status refugee (person fleeing from events in Europe), conditional refugee (person fleeing from events outside of Europe) and subsidiary protection (foreigner or a stateless person who does not meet the first two types but cannot return out of fear of
violence, death or persecution), he referred to Article 91 of the new law which creates an immediate temporary protection status for persons forced to leave their country, who are unable to return and whose international protection requests cannot be taken under individual assessment. The Temporary Protection Regulation was published as a response to increased mass influxes from Syria in October 2014. Syrians residing and registering at a municipality in Turkey who are recognized as having temporary protection have the same rights and obligations as citizens. The initial registration process is undertaken by the national police. As of 30 June 2016, 1,732 Syrians were registered in Eskisehir. Mr. Aslan showed an image of the new ID card for registered Syrian refugees providing them with access to health and education.

The DGMM has developed policies on how to better engage cities and local actors in the harmonization of Syrians without compromising the group’s cultural ties and customs. This is seen as of particular importance since, from the experience of the DGMM, Syrian refugees in Turkey hope for an end to the conflict and to be able to return to their homes. With regard to labour market inclusion and temporary work permits, Mr. Aslan referred to the Council of Ministers’ Temporary Protection Regulations on work permits, allowing Syrians to work in the areas of agriculture and livestock. He explained that the Ministry of Labour has granted Syrians swift access to these trades but points out that they can apply for a work permit in any other field of work.

Mr. Aslan describes Eskisehir as a welcoming city that has offered various forms of support to refugees over the last 2 years. For example, the city and its citizens permit education for foreigners within international education programmes (Erasmus+ etc.), offer language courses, local students have shared their university allowances with Syrian students to enable them to study. On several occasions civil servants have organised donation schemes for newcomers in need. The local private sector has offered employment to Syrians in formal and informal ways.

Addressing questions from the audience concerning housing, available data and statistics on Syrians and other groups in Eskisehir, Articles 71 and 94 were referenced. Other than the 26 official camps which host approximately 10% of Syrians in Turkey and which are managed by the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) no government housing is made available to Syrian refugees. Article 71 deals with the...
newcomers’ accommodation arrangements and registration obligation at the municipality. An applicant of temporary protection must fulfil certain administrative requirements such as notifying the accommodation provider of the stay’s duration. Article 94 lays out the privacy policy concerning the applicant’s personal files, stating that all information and documents pertaining to applicants and international protection beneficiaries shall be confidential. Local service providers stressed the fact that in order to plan activities and services for foreigners residing in the city, they lack available data about the foreign population such as age, gender, employment rates and places of residence.

(Click here to access the full presentation)

HRDF refugee service provision in Eskisehir & Piloting a volunteering programme for refugee integration in Istanbul: the state of play

Tuba Dündar - HRDF Istanbul & Mahir Dogan - HRDF Eskisehir

Ms. Dündar provided an overview of HRDF’s work for Syrian and non-Syrian refugees in its offices in Istanbul, Ankara, Bilecik, Eskişehir, Kütahya, Aţr and Van. The refugee programme was established in 1999 and, as of 2015, had provided 70,000 consultations for their beneficiaries. Ms. Dündar explained the particular challenges of involving volunteers in their services for refugees. Within the frame of the Refugee Service Delivery Project, project partner HRDF has piloted a volunteering programme at their service centre for Syrian refugees in the Esenler district (Istanbul). Also HRDF Eskisehir has started working with volunteers, namely engaging university students and professionals in their recreational and creative activities. HRDF experience is that volunteers tend to become too involved, she stresses the need for sensitivity training on refugee topics as well as boundaries.

Mr. Dogan gave an overview of the HRDF Eskisehir office which opened in 2007 and consist of two social workers providing legal advice, information about access to services (health, education, social assistance), counselling and psycho-social support, support for child participation in educational activities and awareness-raising activities. Their work is supported by the help of interpreters (French, Arabic and Farsi). Mr. Dogan elaborated on the inter-correlated challenges faced by refugees and asylum-seekers in Eskisehir who often struggle having basic human needs met such as nutrition, shelter and clothing. Their precarious financial and economic situation, characterized by high levels of unemployment and unaffordable
housing, poses challenges to their lives in Turkey. Many refugees suffer from health problems and psychological disorders such as PTSD, depression and insomnia, caused by experiences in the country of origin and often exacerbated by uncertainty regarding their stay and legal status in Turkey. Syrian refugees have access to general health care and social insurance if they register at a municipality where they reside.

A major problem for local NGOs and service providers that give support to refugees, is the insufficient number of interpreters in the city. HRDF has started working with volunteers and seeks to explore opportunities to engage university students and refugees as volunteer interpreters during interviews and counselling sessions.

HRDF Eskişehir works in partnership with the municipality and other local stakeholders such as Volunteer foundation, Solidarity foundation, Humanitarian Aid foundation and Protestant Church foundation (view a list of all partners in the presentation slides available to download below).

Lastly, Mr. Dogan stressed the fact that field research, on numbers of refugees in the region and needs identification, is urgently needed in order for NGOs to plan and coordinate their efforts to address local challenges.

(Click here to access their full presentation)

Refugee service provision & access to rights

Pınar Celik Arpacı - Eskişehir Bar Association Women’s Commission
gave an account on the particularly dire situation of refugee women in Turkey. Empirical research on refugee populations residing in camps in Turkey indicates increased vulnerability of female newcomers. Beginning with their migratory journeys, refugee women are more likely to fall victim to rape, trafficking and kidnapping. Upon arrival in Turkey, refugee women (especially single women) are vulnerable to rape and violence within the domestic context and the host community. For this reason, many young girls are married by their families before reaching adulthood in the hope of securing their protection. In addition, refugee women face increased social and economic problems. Research shows that they have little access to resources, are often exploited as cheap labour and are lacking language and educational skills.
The Bar Association Women’s Commission provides legal advice and supports refugee women during court trials. Ms. Arpacı reports similar challenges, as her NGO colleagues, with regard to ensuring qualitative interpretation during interviews and court cases. Even in court, refugee women face disadvantages due to the insufficient number of qualified and unbiased interpreters who are available in the city and greater region.

Volunteering for refugee integration in Eskisehir

Zekiye Dogan - Dervis Baba

Ms. Dogan introduced the grass-roots volunteering foundation Dervis Baba that provides help to citizens, including refugees and asylum-seekers in Ankara, Eskisehir, Istanbul and Izmir and is solely run by volunteers. The movement started with a café in Istanbul that offered a meeting space for people, is funded by members’ donations and organised by volunteers. Striking to most participants was the loose structure and absence of any hierarchical order within the association. Ms. Dogan explained that volunteer work is coordinated through a national Facebook group (3,000 members) and local Whatsapp groups, whereby volunteers meet during the weekend and plan activities and assign tasks for the coming week. Depending on the local volunteer group, activities range from organising creative/recreational activities, helping furnish houses for families in need, teaching Turkish as foreign language, providing tutoring to refugees who intend to take university entrance exams and organising awareness-raising initiatives.

In Istanbul, the association expanded, to reach over 1,000 active volunteers who established three cafeterias and an arts centre that was entirely funded by members’ donations and built by volunteers. In Eskisehir, the organisation’s services for refugees consist of providing monthly food aid

Roundtable participants at a Dervis Baba cafeteria in Eskisehir after conference close.
and cleaning supplies to 25 families; offering four hours of Turkish lessons, four times a week, to 30 families (including 35 children); providing 150 families monthly with diapers; and clothing drives such as a collection of clothes for 63 refugee children during the month of Ramadan.

(Click here to access the full presentation)

How to establish and strengthen local partnerships for refugee reception & integration?

Albanese Daniele – Communitas Consortium (Italy)

provided an overview of the Italian refugee situation, in terms of numbers of boat arrivals, capacity of reception centres and total number of foreigners. Mr. Albanese talked about misconceptions among European citizens, illustrating by means of Eurostat statistics, that in many countries, the general population often overestimates the actual number of migrants residing in their country. His region, Piemonte, hosts 9,258 asylum-seekers (7% of the national total), mostly from East and West Africa (Eritrea, Gambia, Guinea, Côte d’Ivoire, Nigeria, Somalia and Sudan). The most recent statistics show that by May 2016, 1,343 negative (70%) and 573 positive (30%) decisions have been issued. He explained the difference between the Italian CAS, the Emergency Reception Centres, and the regular SPRAR reception system that offers integrated services, not only for refugees and is implemented by the municipality.

Mr. Albanese introduced three examples of successful local partnerships from his region. Firstly, in the field of language provision, in order to ensure that refugees receive the legally mandated 10 hours per week of Italian language instruction, the adult education centre CPIA works in partnership with a managing NGO and the Volunteer organisation ODV to provide supplemental classes on top of what is offered by the public schools. In cooperation, partners facilitate needs identification, provide materials, trainings and monitoring.

Secondly, community services are being organised in partnership of various local actors: the NGO (selects refugees, provides materials, trainings and insurance payments), the Prefecture (responsible for supervision, coordination and external communication), the Territorial Center for Volunteers CTV (founded by 12% budget of bakery foundation to coordinate volunteer organisations all over Italy in all fields, provides support and legal frameworks) and the local municipality (identifies public utility work, offers coaching and public space).

Lastly, Mr. Albanese presented a partnership example from Piemonte region in the area of volunteering. The cooperation includes public schools, civil society organisations, public institutions, the Ministry of Culture and Education, the private sector and the Bank foundation. The aim of their joint work is to
include refugees as volunteers in mainstream volunteering services for youngsters, animals, elderly, environment and sports. As a result of this cooperation, the migrant organisation Migr’Action was established.

With regard to strengthening local partnerships, he stressed the importance of creating stability through working with legally recognized representative entities, clear roles through formal agreements and defined communication structures, including regular meetings.

(Click here to access the full presentation)

Integration services for urban refugees - collaboration and joint activities

Mariana Stoyanova – Red Cross Bulgaria

spoke about the refugee context and current challenges encountered by Bulgaria vis-à-vis being a transit country for large numbers of refugees and migrants, with the biggest groups coming from Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Pakistan and Iran. She reported that by summer 2016, the country had witnessed 23,801 attempts of irregular entrance compared to 95,641 attempts in the full year 2015. Bulgaria has six reception and three detention facilities. As challenges, Ms. Stoyanova mentioned refugees’ lack of motivation to settle in Bulgaria. This is a result of, but also perpetuates, the absence of a national integration programme for refugees.

She reported a growing concern for unaccompanied minors (UAMs), as the majority of these children disappear from the centres after registration. A new programme was recently established, compromising 6 reception facilities with an “open regime” implying that minors are allowed to leave until 22:00. As children also disappear during the day, NGO actors have voiced their concern and even advocated for placing minors in detention centres that prevent them from leaving on their own. In reality and due to limited capacities, UAMs are often being placed in the same facilities as regular asylum seekers which has also been criticised by civil society.

To decrease language barriers during service provision, the Red Cross works with refugees volunteering as interpreters. They have also started to approach universities, namely the Arabic studies department, to try to engage Arabic students as volunteers to accompany refugees. The Red Cross places announcement at the beginning of the academic year and the practice has been successful in engaging students as volunteers and at the same time, promoting refugees’ social inclusion.

In Bulgaria, social benefits are not sufficient to sustain independent living. The RC sees this as

The Bulgarian Red Cross (BRC) is a volunteer organisation, which is a part of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and is guided by its fundamental principles: humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality. Through its network of volunteers in the whole country, the BRC provides assistance to the vulnerable people in disaster and crisis situations.

The BRC has been involved in refugee assistance and protection since 1993. For the time being it is the main non-governmental organisation offering social services to and facilitating the integration of the refugees in Bulgaria. The Refugee-Migrant Service (RMS) of BRC was established in 1997 as a separate administrative and operative body within the National Committee. The RMS has branches in the BRC regional committees in the cities of Haskovo, Sliven, Burgas, Blagoevgrad, Vidin. In cases of emergency it works closely with the rest 25 regional branches throughout the country.

In Bulgaria, social benefits are not sufficient to sustain independent living. The RC sees this as
an opportunity for refugees to quickly learn to adjust and mobilize strength to access the labour market. In the 28 branches of the RC, the established modus operandi is to nominate refugees to private sector actors that are in need of staff. Through now, the RC has organised six job fairs for refugees together with the Ministry of Employment and private sector stakeholders. Civil society support in the field of labour market integration is crucial, as the government does not provide assistance for foreign diploma validation but facilitates vocational training and skills recognition for low-skilled workers.

Many Syrian students are not able to continue their academic education in Bulgaria as their academic background does not correspond with the Bulgarian curriculum. For Syrians who want to continue their studies, the RC has started to engage students as volunteers to help with preparation for university entrance exams. Other volunteering activities at the RC include interpretation, assistance with and transport to health care appointments, social service providers and institutions, finding housing, language teaching, vocational training, leisure activities, child care (while parents have to go to institutions or attend courses), homework support and awareness-raising.

A future collaboration between the Turkish Red Crescent and RC Bulgaria envisions a partnership to jointly implement border activities such as food distribution and in-kind contributions.

(Click here to access the full presentation)

How to start up a local volunteer group?

Bárbara Oliveira - Portuguese Refugee Council

provided insights into the work of the Portuguese Refugee Council and their experience in engaging volunteers in the integration and reception of refugees arriving in Portugal. While the total number of arrivals (872 asylum-seekers in total in 2015 and 305 by June 2016) might seem small in
comparison to other Member States, by July 2016, Portugal pledged a total of 1.642 places for asylum-seekers relocated from Italy and Greece. The country has pledged a total of 5.000 places within the European relocation scheme due to arrive over a period of 2 years. Ms. Oliveira described the experience of CPR in starting up local volunteering groups supporting work in reception centres, kindergartens and the country’s legal bureau. She stressed the importance of local needs identification, defining a volunteer profile and working together with local authorities, for instance by making use of the commune’s local volunteer bank. In terms of recruitment, it is important to target a specific profile, create a communication channel to receive applications and organise open days for potential volunteers. CPR conducts training for volunteers with thematic modules assigned to each specific area of work. The organisation provides certificates for training participants which is highly valued by their volunteers. In order to keep volunteers motivated, CPR tries to assign rewarding tasks with tangible results.

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How to integrate refugees in the labour market with the help of volunteers?

Karin de Bruin – Dutch Council for Refugees

shared the approach of the DCFR with regard to coordination of volunteers to assist refugee labour market inclusion. Ms. De Bruin coordinates the project VIP (abbreviation for Refugees Invest in Participating) with the main aim to help refugees find a job and integrate sustainably into Dutch society. Currently, the project prepares 1.500 beneficiaries to find a job by themselves with the support of volunteers and the DCFR. The training programme compromises eight meetings with a personal job coach (volunteer), organised visits to companies and a two months internship (in the private sector, at schools or volunteer organisations). The project is run by one national project manager, five regional managers, five coordinators, five trainers and 400 volunteer job coaches.

Ms. De Bruin talked about the motivation of Dutch citizens to get engaged in her project, explaining that volunteers are motivated by personal values and the opportunity to make a difference in someone’s life. The typical volunteer profile at the VIP project is highly educated (at least Bachelor degree), has good communication and coaching skills, has an affinity for working with refugees, and is flexible and knowledgeable in recruitment and the Dutch labour market. To get engaged in her project she explains that it’s important to be a team player but at the same time, be able to work independently.

(Click here to access the full presentation)
DAY II

Site Visit to the Red Crescent Eskisehir: activities & premises
Following an intensive day of discussions and best practice sharing, conference participants spent the second day of the Roundtable meeting visiting the premises of the Red Crescent and HRDF’s Refugee Service Centre in Eskisehir.

The local Red Crescent branch coordinates the EU-Turkey Civil Society Dialogue project ‘Saving Lives Changing Lives’ with the aim of raising awareness among Turkish youth about the importance of donating blood. Participants were introduced to project objectives and local activities involving volunteers by project coordinator Cafer Yildirim. Additionally, a representative from the Red Crescent Headquarter in Ankara presented the organisations’ national activities for refugees in the areas of volunteering, humanitarian aid and harmonization.

Serkan Yilmazkurt – Red Crescent Ankara

Mr. Serkan Yilmazkurt presented the Turkish Red Crescent Migration & Refugee Services Department, founded to run all migration-related programmes and activities in Turkey, in coordination with key ministries and institutions.

Red Crescent Ankara is engaged in programmes including border relief activities and delivering donated humanitarian relief items along the Turkish-Syrian border across 12 border points. This support began in August 2012 in line with the increased need for basic humanitarian necessities inside Syria. Food represents the majority of the items sent at 55.45% and donors are largely international at 58%.

Another notable programme is the KIZILAYKART Programme. It features an in-camp dimension and has been implemented in 11 camps, reaching 148,044 beneficiaries since October 2012. The off-camp implementation began in July 2015, covering 5 cities and counting 130,658 beneficiaries. The KIZILAYKART Programme also includes a free of charge Info-Line in Arabic and Turkish.

The Child Protection project as part of the Syria Emergency Response started in May 2013 and covers 132,613 minors between the ages of 4-18. The aim is to provide safe and supportive activities for all children, including those with disabilities. The activity extends to over 22 camps with the help of 1,430 Syrian youth leaders (volunteers).

Finally, the Community Center Project was initiated in 2015 in coordination with IFRC and UNICEF. The aim is to provide psychosocial support, education and referral services to Syrian adults and children residing in urban areas of Turkey.

(Click here to access the full presentation)
Site Visit to the HRDF Eskisehir refugee service centre

European and Turkish participants were introduced to HRDF’s work in the areas of psycho-social support, legal advice and referral at site. The office is run by two social workers, supported by three interpreters (Arabic, French and Farsi) and several volunteers, including General Practitioners (GPs), health care providers, students and other professionals. The center receives on average around 1,000 individuals per month. Social worker Özlem explained that volunteer GPs offer their help to refugee patients after their regular office hours. In emergency cases, HRDF staff makes an appointment for their clients with a GP who pass by their office during the evening. The local HRDF branch also engages refugees as volunteers as most interpreters supporting their counselling work have a refugee background themselves.

For more information on the Refugee Service Delivery project visit our webpages or contact Project coordinator Magdalena Boehm (ICMC Europe) at boehm@icmc.net.