



## **'A City says Yes! Welcoming resettled refugees in Europe'** **Report of the conference held in Brussels, May 8th 2013**

*'The title of today's meeting - 'A City Says Yes!' - is very relevant because it bears witness to the determination of local communities to show their solidarity, and respect for human dignity and human rights, in a very concrete way.'*

**Mayor of Lisbon, Mr Antonio Costa**

On May 8<sup>th</sup> 2013 in Brussels, in the framework of the **SHARE Project**, **ICMC Europe** and the **Committee of the Regions** co-hosted the conference **'A City Says Yes! Welcoming resettled refugees in Europe'**. This report details the interventions of speakers, panellists and moderators, and summarises the key themes raised during interventions and subsequent discussions.

### **What is SHARE?**

The **SHARE Project** is an 18-month, Europe funded programme led by **ICMC Europe** to build toward a network of European regions, cities and municipalities, and their civil society partners, with a commitment to refugee resettlement, protection and integration. Although national governments are responsible for the selection of resettled refugees, regional and local authorities and local civil society actors play a central role in offering reception and integration support once refugees have arrived. The success of national refugee resettlement programmes – and the future Joint EU Resettlement Programme - thus depends on the commitment, ability and partnerships of cities, municipalities and regions.

The **SHARE Project** offers opportunities for structured dialogue, exchange of practice and networking between cities and regional actors, and between experienced and emerging resettlement countries planning or considering resettlement.

### **'A City Says Yes!' - the conference**

**'A City Says Yes! Welcoming resettled refugees in Europe'**, chaired by the Mayor of Lisbon and chair of the CIVEX Committee at the Committee of the Regions Mr. Antonio Costa, explored the role of local and regional authorities and their civil society partners in mobilising support for refugee resettlement amongst citizens, and influencing resettlement and integration policy at national and European levels.

Speakers included Rui Tavares MEP, Deputy Mayor of Aachen Hilde Scheidt and representatives of ICMC, PRO ASYL, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the City of Sanctuary movement, UNHCR, the EUROCITIES network, the lead **SHARE** city of Sheffield, Portuguese Refugee Council, the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) and others. The event was attended by over 90 delegates from European institutions, international organisations, civil society organisations, networks and European regions and cities.

### **Launching the new SHARE publication - 'A City Says Yes! Reflections on the experiences of the Save Me campaign to promote refugee resettlement in Germany'**

The event launched the SHARE and PRO ASYL publication **'A City Says Yes! Reflections on the experiences of the Save Me campaign to promote refugee resettlement in Germany'** that captures the successful tools and approaches of the German **'Save Me' campaign**. **Save Me** is a grassroots, city-based campaign begun in early 2008 in the city of Munich that mobilises local support for refugee resettlement, promotes the involvement of local people in supporting resettled refugees, and lobbies municipal and city councils across Germany to declare their support for resettlement and for establishing a local resettlement programme. In 2013, 7000 volunteers have pledged their support, local Save Me campaigns are now present in nearly 60 German towns and cities and 51 local councils have passed resolutions in support of refugee resettlement.

PRO ASYL and the Save Me movement are partners in the **SHARE Project**, and **'A City Says Yes! Reflections on the experiences of the Save Me campaign to promote refugee resettlement in Germany'** seeks to disseminate the successful practices and approaches of Save Me to a European audience. [Click here](#) to download a copy of the publication.

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For more information about the **SHARE Project**, please visit the SHARE webpages at [www.resettlement.eu/page/share-project](http://www.resettlement.eu/page/share-project) or contact Rachel Westerby, City Coordinator at ICMC Europe at [city.coordinator@icmc.net](mailto:city.coordinator@icmc.net).

**Antonio Costa - Mayor of Lisbon and Chair of the CIVEX Committee at the Committee of the Regions**



*opened* the event with an appeal to EU Member States to maintain their commitment to solidarity and responsibility sharing within and across national borders, and to recognise the important role of regions, cities and local communities in this regard. The success of

national resettlement programmes, and particularly of integration, depend on the commitment of cities and regions. Successful integration requires that local and regional government raise citizens' awareness of the importance of providing protection to those in need, and that civil society seeks to influence local and regional government to provide the services and support they require. He shared his city's experience of extending protection to unaccompanied minors in Lisbon, and

concluded that *'even in times of economic crisis it is still possible to be generous. It is still possible to share responsibility, and to support what are unchanging values.'*

([Click here](#) to read the full transcript of Mayor Costa's intervention)

The **Committee of the Regions** is the EU institution representing local and regional authorities in Europe. It takes a consultative role in the EU legislative process. The **Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional & External Affairs (CIVEX)** coordinates the Committee's work with regard to justice and home affairs, fundamental rights and freedoms, citizenship and a broad range of issues connected to the Union's external affairs.

**Teresa Tito de Morais - Director, Portuguese Refugee Council (CPR)**

*shared* CPR's experience of supporting asylum seekers and refugees in Portugal. She praised the Portuguese government for maintaining the national resettlement programme, which provides 30 resettlement places each year, at a time of severe financial and economic crisis. She described the innovative partnership between CPR, the city of Lisbon (led by Mr Costa), the Ministry of the Interior and the company Swatch International, to open the first reception centre for unaccompanied minors in the country, in Lisbon. She also reported that reception conditions for refugees in Portugal have in general deteriorated since the onset of the economic crisis, and asked that the national government recognise the important role of local governments and civil society in maintaining the success of Portugal's national resettlement, protection and integration programmes.

The **Portuguese Refugee Council (CPR)** is an NGO that works in partnership with UNHCR and the Portuguese government to promote the protection of asylum seekers and refugees. CPR operates a reception centre for asylum seekers in the municipality of Loures, provides legal and employment advice, language classes and training for social workers, and is engaged in advocacy work at local, national and European level.

([Click here](#) to read the full transcript of Teresa Tito de Morais' intervention)



**“WHAT IS RESETTLEMENT, WHY IS IT NEEDED & WHY SHOULD CITIES ENGAGE?”**

**Madeline Garlick - Head of Unit, Policy and Legal Support at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)**

*provided* an overview of the global resettlement process and current resettlement needs. She emphasised how moving toward the goal of the 'Resettlement Saves Lives/2020' campaign, which aims for Europe to provide 20,000 resettlement places each year by 2020, would be a concrete expression of Europe's solidarity with countries of first asylum and close the gap between the number of places offered by the US, Canada and Australia and the comparably small resettlement offer of the EU to date. She appealed to representatives of local and regional authorities, stating *'we need you, and resettled refugees need you, to make the promise of protection a reality for them.'*



Established in 1950, **UNHCR** is mandated to lead and coordinate the international protection of refugees and the resolution of refugee-related situations. Resettlement is one of three durable solutions for refugees that **UNHCR** is mandated to implement together with states. Within the resettlement process, **UNHCR** is responsible for identifying refugees in need of resettlement, submitting refugees for resettlement consideration by states and bringing together resettlement actors and stakeholders to plan global resettlement activities.

**Johan Ketelers - Secretary General, International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC)**

*echoed* UNHCR's appeal to cities and regions and described how acknowledging the crucial role of local and regional authorities was the basis for ICMC's **SHARE Project**. He highlighted three crucial lessons drawn from ICMC's long experience in global refugee resettlement - the absolute requirement to provide resettled refugees with the long-term and secure status that will enable them to build their lives in their receiving communities, the need to ensure policy responses have real impacts for actors at the local level, and the need for effective networks between all actors and stakeholders in the resettlement process. *'SHARE is a verb, not a noun. It is about our communities today and about our further community-building - locally, regionally and internationally. It is about social cohesion, essential for the future of our societies, and essential for every individual.'*



([Click here](#) to read the full transcript of Johan Ketelers' intervention)

Since 1951, **ICMC** has identified and accompanied over one million refugees for resettlement in Europe, Southeast Asia, the Balkans and the Middle East. Each year, **ICMC** identifies and processes hundreds of refugees for resettlement to the United States, providing assistance with security clearances, cultural orientation, medical screening exams and check-up. Additionally, **ICMC** provides expert resettlement personnel through the **ICMC-UNHCR Resettlement Deployment Scheme** to support UNHCR resettlement activities in field offices around the globe.

### Nathalie Guri - Project Manager, EUROCITIES

Founded in 1986, **EUROCITIES** is the network of major European cities. **EUROCITIES** membership currently comprises over 130 of Europe's largest cities, and 40 partner cities. Through six thematic working groups, and a wide range of projects, initiatives and events, **EUROCITIES** works to ensure EU legislation enables local government to meet strategic challenges at the local level

**described** the mutual learning between cities facilitated by the EUROCITIES network, and how this process forms the basis of EUROCITIES role as a central partner in the **SHARE Project**. At 2013, 27 European cities were signatories to EUROCITIES *Charter on Integrating Cities*, which aims to encourage cities to implement the Common Basic Principles on Integration developed by the European Commission. The charter sets out a cross-cutting approach to integration and diversity, focused on the role of cities as policymakers, service providers and employers.

## PANEL 1: LOCAL INITIATIVES TO WELCOME REFUGEES

Moderated by **Bernd Hemingway - IOM Regional Director for the EU.**

The **International Organisation for Migration (IOM)** is an inter-governmental organisation providing services and advice to governments, NGOs and individuals in 151 member states, with the aim of facilitating humane management of all forms of migration. In resettlement, IOM is involved in case processing, medical assessments, pre-departure cultural orientation programmes, and movement and travel operations.

### Karl Kopp - Director of European Affairs, PRO ASYL

**launched** the new **SHARE Project** publication 'A City Says Yes! Reflections on the experiences of the Save Me campaign to promote refugee resettlement in Germany'. He described the work of the more than 50 local Save Me campaigns now present in cities and towns across Germany in promoting a resettlement in Germany and directly supporting the integration of resettled refugees. He shared PRO ASYL's experiences before and since Germany's resettlement programme was established,



outlining their role in building awareness amongst politicians and civil society in the lead-up to the 2012 implementation of the annual German resettlement quota.

Founded in 1986, **PRO ASYL** is an independent human rights organisation based in Frankfurt, Germany. **PRO ASYL** advocates for the protection of refugees in Germany and in Europe, and for a humane and effective European asylum policy. **PRO ASYL** also provides legal advice, and campaigns to raise awareness of refugee issues and situations amongst the general public and civil society in Germany.

### Hilde Scheidt - Deputy Mayor, city of Aachen



**described** the resettlement programme of the city of Aachen, launched through unanimous decision of the city council in 2012, and the city's role as an associate partner in ICMC's **SHARE Project**. She underlined the importance for

successful integration of building political consensus around refugee protection at the local level, and stressed how political support relies to some degree on the availability and allocation of adequate funding - from the city, national and European levels. She also underlined the value of mutual learning between cities involved in or planning refugee resettlement, such as the exchange between Aachen and Sheffield facilitated by the city visit programme of the **SHARE Project**.

### Abdulkareem Abdulkareem - Iraqi engineer resettled to Munich, Germany, in late 2009

**provided** the audience with an insight into his experiences of resettlement in Germany. He described the difficulties he and his family encountered on their arrival at the reception centre in Germany, and later when they had moved to Munich, particularly in terms of finding housing suitable for the family's needs. He referenced the indispensable work of the local Save Me campaign and its volunteers in assisting his family to settle in Munich, as well as the challenges he continues to face with regard to finding employment in his profession. *'We knew later that we were an experiment and, of course, with every experiment there are many mistakes. We accept that but we hope that better things are coming for other people who are following us on that road.'*



([Click here](#) to read the full transcript of Abdulkareem's intervention)

Following the 2008 call by European Union for Member States to resettle **10,000 Iraqi refugees**, the German government responded by resettling 2501 Iraqi refugees from Syria and Jordan during 2009-10. The refugees were given a 3-year, extendable residence permit. Abdulkareem and his family arrived into Germany as part of this programme.

## PANEL 2: MOBILISING CITIZENS FOR WELCOMING COMMUNITIES

Moderated by **Rachel Westerby - City Coordinator, ICMC Europe.**

### Tiffany Allen - National Coordinator, City of Sanctuary (UK)

**shared** her experience of working with City of Sanctuary groups in cities and towns across the UK. She contrasted the decline of some refugee organisations in the context of the current financial crisis with the increasing

The **City of Sanctuary movement** is a grassroots, city-based initiative, established in the lead **SHARE** city of Sheffield and now present in 30 UK towns and cities. The movement creates coalitions of local organisations willing to make a public commitment to providing sanctuary to those in need of protection, and to engage in establishing a culture of hospitality within their communities.

commitment to the City of Sanctuary movement, with over 30 local groups now active. She emphasised the role of volunteers as a central driver of this continued commitment - *'it is something that is grounded in the lives and the enthusiasm of local people'* - and described City of Sanctuary's core work of raising awareness about refugees and asylum seekers amongst local populations: *'We would like to let you know the truth about refugees, the truth about asylum seekers, why they come, who they are.'*

**Els Keytsman - Director, Flemish Refugee Action**



**gave** an insight into Flemish Refugee Action's Welcoming Communities campaign initiative. Begun in 2012, the initiative aims to promote a positive attitudes toward refugees and asylum seekers amongst the Flemish public, including by awareness-raising measures as

poster campaigns linked to local elections, direct mailings and using social media. Inspired by the City of Sanctuary movement, the ultimate goal of the campaign is to create a culture of hospitality in Flemish municipalities.

**Flemish Refugee Action** is an Belgian NGO that works to promote the rights and meet the needs of refugees and asylum seekers in Flanders, in partnership with over 40 member organisations and numerous volunteers. It raises awareness through media and public information campaigns, monitors policy-making processes and supports programmes providing assistance to refugees and asylum seekers.

**Sabe Soe - Director, Burma Centre Prague**



**introduced** the work of the centre in the national resettlement programme of the Czech Republic, established in 2008. The centre acts as a 'bridge' between NGOs, municipalities and refugees, addressing gaps in integration provision for resettled refugees, and assisting municipalities and refugees to secure adequate housing, access the labour market, learn Czech

and raise awareness of refugees and resettlement amongst the Czech public. It aims to promote a hospitable environment for resettled refugees in the towns and cities in which they are received, working with churches, municipalities and other NGOs to hold information events, discussions, debates and film screenings customised to particular local contexts. She expressed her concern with the generalised integration policy of the Czech government which sometimes does not take account of the specific needs of resettled refugees.

**The Burma Center Prague** is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation founded in 2006 which is mainly led by Burmese living in the Czech Republic. The mission of the centre is the improvement of living conditions of both, the Burmese population as well as Burmese living in exile, with the main area of activity in capacity building and information activities in the European public.

**'RESETTLEMENT SAVES LIVES'  
STRATEGIES TO INCREASE RESETTLEMENT  
PLACES IN EUROPE**

**Belinda Gallup - Service Manager, Sheffield City Council**

**described** her experiences in establishing and operating the local resettlement programme in the city of Sheffield. Sheffield, the lead city partner in the **SHARE Project**, currently receives 90 resettled refugees each year as its contribution to the 750 received by the UK. She described how the city, working in partnership with the NGO British Refugee Council and health and educational service

providers, has been provided effective reception and integration programmes for resettled refugees. She highlighted the distinct but complementary roles of cities and national governments in the resettlement process, and recommended that other cities extend their partnerships with civil society, national governments and local actors. She emphasised the importance of flexibility, creativity and early planning in the success of local resettlement programmes, and how each city must find a model for resettlement that fits its particular local context. She described how cities have a crucial role to play in achieving the goal of the 'Resettlement Saves Lives/2020' campaign - *'if just 50 additional European cities made the same annual commitment as Sheffield, then 4,500 additional resettlement places would be available every year.'*

([Click here](#) to read a full transcript of Belinda Gallup's intervention)



**Michael Diedring - Secretary General, European Council for Refugees and Exiles (ECRE)**

**underlined** ECRE's conviction that resettlement is a concrete expression of European international solidarity and the protection of human rights. He described how increasing the number of resettlement places offered by Member States, notably through the provision of European funding for Member States' resettlement activities, must be coupled with *better* resettlement in the form of sustainable and individualised integration programmes. In the context of current discussions on the Asylum and Migration Fund for 2014-20, including the proposed resettlement component, he called for an extension of European funding for resettlement, to incentivise the participation of more Member States.



The **European Council for Refugees and Exiles (ECRE)** is a pan-European alliance of NGOs involved in refugee assistance. It advocates for refugee and asylum policy that promotes human dignity and rights, and works to strengthen networking activities and institutional capacities amongst its membership.

**Rui Tavares - MEP and European Parliament Rapporteur on resettlement**

**gave** an insight into the current debate within the European Parliament concerning refugee resettlement. He stressed his optimism that the 'Resettlement Saves Lives/2020' campaign target could be achieved, but cautioned the barriers that could be encountered - financial constraints, political will and human resources - in the course of achieving the target.



**Pascal Reyntjens - Chief of Mission, IOM Belgium and Luxembourg**



together with Petra Hueck of ICMC Europe, launched the new 'Resettlement Saves Lives/2020' campaign materials, available to order at [www.resettlement.eu](http://www.resettlement.eu).

## LEARNING FROM SHARED EXPERIENCE

### Cities and regions in resettlement - report on conference discussions

*'Together with civil society organisations, cities and regions are the concrete actors that pave the best and easiest way to integration - in terms of pre-arrival preparation, in terms of mentality change and in terms of establishing local programmes to facilitate integration and reduce social tension.'* (Johan Ketelers - Secretary General ICMC)

**Integration as a two-way process** is the key concept of the EU policy framework on integration. It reflects the idea that successful integration is facilitated through a process of mutual accommodation between refugees and receiving communities in European regions, cities and municipalities.

The idea of a 'welcoming community' has become prominent in debates on integration of newcomers. A detailed definition of a 'welcoming community' was outlined at the conference Els Keytsman of the Flemish Refugee Council. Developed in the context of the organisation's Welcoming Communities campaign initiative, the definition includes the following five key elements:

- A welcoming community provides **integration services at the local/municipal level**.
- A welcoming community is aware of and supports **the work of volunteers**.
- A welcoming community provides **adequate reception measures** and **timely and appropriate housing**.
- A welcoming community is characterised by **awareness-raising activities** in all areas of society.
- In a welcoming community, **social institutions** - such as schools and youth organisations - **are open to refugees and asylum seekers**.

A welcoming community functions at all levels of local society - political authority, local civil society and individual citizens and residents.

A common feature of all projects and initiatives presented at the conference was the **twofold nature of a welcoming community**, in which 'functional' elements such as housing and financial assistance are equally as important as the **'human factor'** of welcome and understanding extended to newcomers by local residents.

*'The human factor is very important. If these people got a wonderful job and beautiful housing but the community is not welcoming, it will not be successful.'*

#### Sabe Soe of the Burma Centre Prague on the role of local communities in the Czech resettlement programme

Many conference speakers noted **the crucial role of volunteers in building welcoming communities and promoting successful integration**. Volunteers offer individual refugees opportunities for friendship and social connections in the receiving community, and volunteer-led campaigns can communicate communities' willingness to receive refugees to local, regional and national governments. As Abdulkareem noted, volunteer support is flexible and can fill gaps that may exist in mainstream reception and integration programmes with respect to the needs of resettled refugees. In Abdulkareem's case, support

from Save Me volunteers included locating suitable housing and sourcing a wheelchair for his severely disabled daughter.

Many speakers noted how, at a time of financial crisis affecting many integration-related service provision, the involvement of volunteers in resettlement has continued to increase. Although volunteers are thus a valuable resource for local resettlement programmes, Abdulkareem cautioned against overreliance on volunteers in place of adequate local provision:

*'But the bright side from this... was the Save Me campaign. They were the only ones, and they held all the burden alone. We felt that there was no official support for them at all. They were individuals and not supported officially, and they were working extra time until eleven o'clock at night trying hard to relieve what we were suffering. We do appreciate what they've done.'*

#### Abdulkareem on his experiences during his resettlement to Munich, Germany

Many speakers identified challenges for the integration of resettled refugees related to the local and national contexts within which they were working, such as a lack of employment opportunities and reductions in welfare assistance. Many civil society organisations had therefore chosen to develop initiatives to raise awareness about refugees and resettlement amongst the wider public and political authorities, both to create a more welcoming environment for refugees and to promote support for good quality, sustainable integration programmes and services at a time of scarce resources.

Resettlement was unfamiliar in many contexts, and information used in campaigns was therefore sometimes very basic:

*"It is some sort of sending people back to their country of origin and resettling them in the place they came from, something to do with voluntary return" - that is what people thought.'*

#### Karl Kopp of PRO ASYL on introducing resettlement into the political and public debate in Germany

Furthermore, many of the conference participants shared their experience that standardised nationwide integration policy was often insufficient to provide for the successful integration of resettled refugees. Both, the Save me campaign and the Cities of Sanctuary were built on a decentralised programme which left room for cities and communities to determine their own context, needs and capabilities with regard to the integration of migrants and refugees in particular.



*'I can offer some recommendations based on what has worked for us in my city. Partnerships with civil society, where there is often extensive experience of refugee support and resettlement. Partnerships with local health and educational services. Resettlement enables existing local partnerships to be strengthened and new partnerships to be developed. And partnerships with national government, to enable sharing of information ahead of arrivals, involvement in planning and evaluation, and opportunities to influence planning at the national level.'*

**Belinda Gallup of the city of Sheffield on recommendations for European cities beginning resettlement programmes**

Conference speakers emphasised the crucial importance of **partnerships** in regional and city refugee resettlement programmes. Global resettlement is a partnership activity involving UNHCR, IOM, states and NGOs, and speakers attested to how resettlement at the local level is successful when built on partnerships between local and regional authorities, NGOs, other civil society organisations, local communities and resettled refugees themselves:

*'Resettlement is an interactive relationship between the government and the people who are handling the resettlement programme and the refugees. Always learn from the resettled people. What they are facing, what their problems are, and how to make things better for them.'*

**Abdulkareem Abdulkareem on the role of previously resettled refugees in developing local programmes**

Positive, sustainable partnerships between local authorities and civil society organisations, of the kind created by long-term engagement in refugee resettlement, can benefit both refugees and the local communities in which they settle:

*'The partnership of CPR with local authorities in protecting refugees in Portugal has also spread to the town of Loures..which has worked together with the CPR in setting up a whole series of initiatives aimed at making the public of the town more aware of the vulnerability of refugees and actively promoting their integration into the local community. Since October, initiatives like school teaching or visits to the town services, vocational training and mediation have come into being.'*

**Teresa Tito de Morais on the Portuguese Refugee Council's partnerships with local authorities**

Many speakers outlined how civil society organisations play an important role in fostering political support for and engagement in refugee resettlement and integration at the local and national level. Local and regional authorities have made public statements of support and passed motions in favour of their city providing sanctuary or receiving resettled refugees, such as in the UK via the City of Sanctuary movement and in Germany via local council decisions in support of the Save Me campaign. Such a visible presence of willing city partners can encourage national governments to begin or expand national resettlement and integration programmes.

Political representatives noted how securing political support and resources for refugee resettlement and integration at the local level can sometimes depend on factors specific to a particular local political and economic context:

*'This is part of the game of politics, you've got to have good arguments, you've got to get them on your side and you've got to tell them if you don't give me that for refugees I am going to tell them how much you gave to that insolvent football club.'*

**Hilde Scheidt - Deputy Mayor of the city of Aachen**

Constraints and challenges presented by the current financial crisis were referenced by many speakers throughout the conference programme. Whilst several speakers expressed regret about deteriorating services and situations for refugees and asylum seekers in their home country, all agreed that the effects of the financial crisis do not exempt European Member States, cities or regions from their responsibilities toward refugees and asylum seekers. The financial crisis has instead emphasised how important it is that resettlement continues to be implemented via partnerships between stakeholders at the international, European, national, the regional and local levels.

*"In light of the urgent social circumstances that I have described to you, I don't think the government can afford not to include those who are the most committed to the protection of the refugees in our country."*

**Teresa Tito de Morais on the role of cities, regions and local governments in the resettlement process**