‘Protecting and Welcoming Refugees in Europe: Responding to an unprecedented refugee crisis’

Report of the SHARE Network Final Conference, held in Brussels on 20 October 2015

In the framework of the SHARE project, International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) Europe hosted, together with support of the Committee of the Regions, the European institution representing the interests of regional and local authorities, the conference titled “Protecting and Welcoming Refugees in Europe: responding to an unprecedented refugee crisis.” Over 140 representatives from 20 European countries, including regional and local authorities, cities and municipalities, civil society organizations, citizens’ initiatives, previously resettled refugees and international organizations gathered in Brussels on Tuesday 20 October, 2015 to discuss experiences and lessons learnt about resettlement and integration of refugees in Europe in the three and a half years since the establishment of the SHARE Network.

Context
The recent large influx of refugees from Syria, Eritrea, Afghanistan and Iraq to Europe forces our society to reaffirm its commitment to solidarity, the protection of human rights and the right to asylum. The lack of legal routes to access protection in Europe, including resettlement opportunities, has left hundreds of thousands without any prospect of building a dignified future for themselves and their families. As arrivals continue to increase and new mechanisms to receive refugees are discussed, the role of European towns and cities in providing reception, welcome and integration for the many refugees arriving to Europe becomes ever more crucial.

Since 2009, ICMC Europe has, in the context of the SHARE Network, collaborated with numerous cities and local partners and stakeholders from across Europe to strengthen refugee protection, advocate for more and better refugee resettlement, and promote planned reception, coordination and integration. Creating local awareness of and support for refugees, resettlement, integration and protection have been important parts of this work, particularly at a time when such definitions and notions have become increasingly blurred in the public debate.

The SHARE Network has become a platform for European exchange on building a culture of welcome and hospitality in communities receiving refugees, and promoting good practices and the full involvement of authorities and citizens in reception, protection and integration. This work has been timely for the many countries new to the process of receiving refugees, particularly those in Central, Eastern and Southern Europe. In many of these countries, cultures of welcome and community involvement are less well-developed. In spite of the often negative public and political discourse concerning refugees and migration, in recent months, a burst of welcoming initiatives has spread across Europe in a positive expressions of citizens’ support for refugee protection.

As the second phase of the development of SHARE drew to a close, ICMC organised a one-day SHARE Network Conference ‘Protecting and Welcoming Refugees in Europe: responding to an unprecedented refugee crisis’. The objective of the conference was to build on this groundswell of support for welcoming refugees to Europe through presentations by the main actors and networks that are supporting reception and integration as well as debates and interventions from actors across Europe working on initiatives to build awareness and welcome refugees.

Bringing together over 140 participants representing European regional and local authorities, civil society organisations and networks, previously resettled refugees, national governments, international organisations and European institutions, the conference programme:

- Provided an update on the new resettlement and relocation measures and, to the extent possible, reflected on the operational measures to implement them.
- Discussed planning for sustainable reception and integration arrangements in the context of current relocation and resettlement proposals.
- Presented the learning and resources generated by the SHARE Network, and the activities of SHARE partners and stakeholders in refugee reception, protection and integration in Europe.
- Highlighted the many grassroots, citizen-based initiatives to welcome refugees and asylum seekers to Europe and explored potential synergies with regular reception systems for refugees.
- Enabled partners, participants and stakeholders of the SHARE Network to endorse the ‘SHARE Statement of Principles on Reception & Welcome’.

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Anne Dussart – President, ICMC Europe opened the panel by expressing her gratitude for dedicating the event to the topic of new welcome initiatives and citizens engagement that respond to current challenges in times of increased arrivals. She called on participants to reflect, during the course of the day, on how one can mobilize action to create adequate reception and integration measures and welcoming communities.

The SHARE project, launched in March 2012, created a network for local resettlement actors. Ms. Dussart stated that notwithstanding large influxes of migrants to Europe, resettlement remains crucial because we should not forget those still in camps.

She gave an account of her experience during the start of the Belgian resettlement programme and explained how ICMC and SHARE were a big help in getting the programme started. In particular, ICMC and SHARE were able to provide support and learning opportunities to local authorities by including them in the SHARE and ERN Networks. She ended her talk by pointing out that there are still barriers to integration in Belgium and Europe, often driven by discrimination, namely regarding housing and access to the labour market. Ms. Dussart stressed the need to change opinions and called for a holistic approach providing tailored solutions for housing, social security, access to education and labour market opportunities.

Stephen Ryan – Deputy Head, Asylum Unit, Directorate General Migration & Home Affairs, European Commission outlined the plans formulated in the European Commission’s May 2015 ‘A European Agenda on Migration’. He started off by pointing out that the EU is facing major challenges with regard to numbers of arrivals on a scale that the continent has not experienced in recent decades. At this point, the EU receives more currently 6 million people are displaced of which 86% are hosted by developing countries. Mr. O’Sullivan pointed out, that even though there is a crisis in Europe due to unprecedented numbers of arrivals, one should also acknowledge the challenges of first asylum countries.

UNHCR sees the greatest challenges in the EU in the Mediterranean, the entry point by boat crossing of 635,000 migrants as of the end of September 2015. The deployment of hotspots is warmly welcomed by UNHCR. In terms of credibility for success, the UN agency sees the need for adequate reception services at the points of entry; therefore additional funding to those hosting countries should be made available. In the framework of the Special Mediterranean Initiative, UNHCR will work closely with the European Union and its Member States to deliver, build on and expand some of the measures being implemented in response to the human tragedy unfolding in the Mediterranean, as proposed in the May 2015 European Agenda on Migration.

He further pointed out that resettlement has come a long way in Europe, where today, 28 Member States are engaged in resettlement, of which 27 are within the EU scheme. However, he reminded the audience that resettlement won’t be the sole solution to the refugee crisis. UNHCR calls for other forms of admission: private sponsorship, enhanced family reunification and humanitarian visa schemes should become more permanent features of the European landscape, not just ad-hoc measures but permanent and complementary to existing resettlement programmes. Mr. O’Sullivan stressed the fact that in the context of the plans set out in the European Commission’s May 2015 ‘A European Agenda on Migration’, and the subsequent Justice & Home Affairs Council Conclusions of July 2015, 11 Member States will resettle for first time. “Establishing qualitative reception and integration measures are key to their success otherwise their efforts will be undermined.” According to him, this is precisely the niche of the SHARE project. It is important to get local communities involved because integration won’t succeed if newcomers don’t feel welcome in their communities.

**“RESSETLEMENT, RELOCATION & MANAGING REFUGEE ARRIVALS IN EUROPE: A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR PROTECTION IN A GLOBAL CRISIS”**

Moderated by Petra Hueck – Head of Office, ICMC Europe

Peter O’Sullivan – UNHCR Office in Brussels

Praised the work of the SHARE project with regard to introducing new local actors to the existing resettlement network. He introduced recent figures indicating that

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.
refugees than other parts of the industrialized world. This situation requires courageous measures, in the long- and short-terms.

He introduced the measures proposed by the EC, namely to address root causes, deal with humanitarian tragedies in the Mediterranean and ensure handling of arrivals in a humane way. The EU will address its responsibility regarding global needs, not just in terms of resettlement, but also in terms of other solutions to provide help to those in need.

Mr. Ryan referred to the progressive agenda on migration released by the EC in May. In September, further initiatives were announced. The Justice & Home Affairs Council took decisions with regard to increasing quotas for relocation. In addition, significant measures in terms of assistance to countries neighbouring Syria, have been proposed.

With regard to relocation, in September the EC increased its pledges to 160,000 over a period of 2 years. The proposal ultimately to engage in relocation, notwithstanding a small number of dissenting Member States which oppose the compulsory nature of the measures, was driven by the recognition that the current situation is unsustainable and to show solidarity.

Relocation to other Member States will be realized by the means of Hot Spots in Italy and Greece. These Hot Spots should ensure better management of new arrivals with the help of agencies that are mandated by the host Member States, specifically in terms of identification, screening and doing referrals. While the programme has started, Mr. Ryan said it’s crucial to keep up the pace. In reality, the process on the ground is difficult, particularly in terms of explaining new measures to refugees who have heard different narratives from smugglers, Diasporas and networks. Mr. Ryan acknowledged that it will indeed be a challenging process to relocate people to countries that don’t yet have experience in protecting and integrating refugees. He pointed out that relocation does not require the consent of the person being relocated, but preferences and integration potentials should and will be taken into account. It is clear that supply and demand will not be perfectly matched. Some refugees will be relocated to Member States that they would not have chosen. Mr. Ryan commented that in the near future, a reform of the Dublin II system will be the only solution to the problem of ensuring a fairer distribution — admitting that the system is not sustainable as it currently operates. In March 2016, the Commission will come forward with a proposal for a revised system.

The EU’s resettlement scheme foresees the resettlement of 20,000 individuals over the coming 2 years. In order to ensure a more collective approach to resettlement, Member States that have so far not engaged in resettlement should become involved. The EC proposes a more permanent resettlement framework, but plans collective decision-making on priorities for resettlement schemes. In terms of infrastructure and expertise within the EU, Mr. Ryan encouraged the process of sharing good practices between states that have experience in resettlement and those that do not.

Lastly, he stressed the fact that integration is critical to the success to these relocation initiatives. The EC sees this as a particularly important issue. In order to ensure that refugees stay in the Member States to which they have been relocated, they must be integrated. He acknowledged this challenge and pointed out that the success of integration is important to ensure the long-term sustainability of the protection policy to which the EU aspires.

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.

Michael Diedring
– Secretary General,
European Council on Refugees & Exiles
shared how ECRE members - the 90 organisations across Europe - responded to the EU’s new resettlement and relocation measures. With regard to the current situation, he stressed the lack of legal routes which has led hundreds of thousands to risk their lives on the dangerous trip to Europe, resulting in chaos and loss of lives. These outcomes are neither in the interest of the Member States nor the refugees. He argued that in response, Member States are deterring people from coming rather than giving the opportunity to
access international protection. Mr. Diedring argued for safe and legal routes for refugees to come to Europe and sees it as a responsibility of the Member States to make this possible.

With regard to the current situation and the EU’s response, he highlighted the need to discuss the operational planning of relocation. Tasks need to be clarified such as, who will support refugees, who will provide information, legal aid, assistance? He stressed the point that all this can be provided by NGOs and will be provided by them if we are properly included in the process. It is important to involve civil society in the process, in order to make sure that the EU’s relocation scheme becomes a sustainable solution. He explained that ECRE members are concerned about discrimination against certain nationalities in terms of protection needs that might cause rivalries, the identification of refugees vs. regular migrants, lack of current mechanisms to identify vulnerable people and use of detention. All these could jeopardize the success of the programme and onward movement will be the logical result of poorly planned initiatives. Those countries with less experience could be guided by peers if funding is made available. He suggests a model in which NGOs and authorities of one country would be twinned with another Member State to learn from each other.

According to Mr. Diedring, Member States can do more. The conflict in Syria has shown that Europe can do more if it is necessary. He acknowledged the progress and efforts that have been made – “but regarding the current needs and urgency with which people are fleeing right now this is simply not enough.” With regard to ECRE and its members’ position that Member States should increase resettlement quotas from the hundreds to the thousands, he said, “it is absolutely realistic and it would make a difference in people’s lives”. But proper planning for the EU resettlement programme still needs to be discussed. The current situation and new programmes provide an opportunity to develop true partnerships between Member States, UNHCR and NGOs – to ensure that there is a commitment by Member States, local authorities and NGOs to work together and to develop regular joint planning and systems of implementation.

He highlighted the importance of creating more integration services, both in quality and quantity. The commitment to quality needs to be clearly spelled out. Mr. Diedring argued that more money alone is not sufficient, services must be tailored to actual needs and support sustainable results. It is vitally important that relocation plans contain strong integration support services so that the people relocated realize they have been given an opportunity to build new lives for themselves and their families.

He ended his talk addressing recent citizens’ initiatives. Mr. Diedring welcomed the fact that in recent months citizens have demonstrated solidarity with and compassion for those in need. There have been many positive and spontaneous actions particularly at the grass-root levels. It is important to capitalize on citizens’ support and make it sustainable. Those initiatives should not be left alone or substituted for reception and social services, rather, refugee assisting organisations should guide citizen efforts to support a welcoming environment. Based on these positive actions, he sees a great potential to have citizens support private sponsorships for providing safe access to Europe. According to Mr. Diedring, if people would step forward and donate their own funds to support legal access to Europe they would send a strong message to their neighbours and to their elected politicians.

"OFFERING RECEPTION, SERVICES & WELCOME TO REFUGEES IN EUROPE: EXPERIENCES, LEARNING & RECOMMENDATION FROM THE SHARE NETWORK"

ICMC Europe: Rachel Westerby – Senior Policy & Programme Manager and Magdalena Boehm – Programme Officer

As an introduction to the SHARE Network, Ms. Westerby and Ms. Boehm presented the partners, tools, activities, and resources, which have positively enhanced the “local capacity and local commitment” for refugee resettlement, protection and integration.

Within the wider ICMC, UNHCR and IOM European Resettlement Network, they addressed the evolution of SHARE since its launch in March 2012, in response to the lack of available places for refugees at a local level.

They highlighted the partnership with EUROCITIES, which gave a platform and expertise to develop the SHARE network. In addition SHARE partners, including cities, NGOs and other civil society actors were key in developing and facilitating the network. Significant
Network activities included, the **City Exchange Visit Programme** with 8 visits and 73 participants from 9 countries, the work on housing with the SHARE expert housing group, the ‘Sharing through Mentoring Programme’ and the **SHARE Resettlement Ambassador Programme**.

They addressed the current refugee situation in Europe with the announcement of the **SHARE Network Policy Statement** as an outcome of the final conference. The objectives of the statement are to celebrate the achievements of the SHARE network, emphasize advocacy and learning, and capitalise on the strong support of welcoming, by inviting organisations and cities to sign and endorse the recommendations of the statement.

In conclusion they showed how the SHARE programme and related policy statement, have ensured that the experience, knowledge, and skills of local level resettlement actors is voiced in bigger European and national level discussions. In addition, they have created a sustainable network for the future context of reception and welcome of refugees.

(Click [here](#) to access Ms. Westerby and Ms. Boehm’s full presentation)

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**“GOOD PRACTICE IN PLACEMENT, COORDINATION & PARTNERSHIPS: NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS, CITIES & CIVIL SOCIETY”**

*Moderated by Petra Hueck – Head of Office for ICMC Europe*

**Nadine Camp – Director of International Development & Advocacy, Forum Réfugiés**

announced the launch of the Forum Réfugiés report on resettlement of refugees in France on the SHARE website, undertaken with France Terre d’Asile and other partners, as part of the SHARE II programme.

She explained that the aim of the report was to implement partnership strategies and measures, and the methodology was a questionnaire addressed to 74 households of refugees who arrived between 2013 and 2014.

Ms. Camp emphasised the importance of the report’s findings, especially in the context of the French government resettlement programme of 100 cases a year beginning in 2008, and the reception programme for Syrian refugees. She concluded that while France is able to host refugees effectively, there is a pressing need in the French resettlement programme for national level coordination rather than an individual case perspective. Access to the presentation here:

(Click [here](#) to access Ms. Camp’s full presentation, in French)

**Eva Lutter – Caritas Friedland, Germany**

started by introducing their new project of June 2015, named resettlement.de, which is “strengthening communication and support structures within the reception process of refugees who came by in the humanitarian programme or by resettlement”. The project partners are Caritas Friedland and Caritas German Association.

Ms. Lutter outlined three main goals of the project: to strengthen the capacity of local actors, provide local actors with early notification of refugees before their arrival, and provide opportunities for refugees to benefit from the experiences of previously resettled refugees.

She also highlighted how Caritas Friedland normally has a capacity of 800-900 refugees, yet it now has around 4,000 asylum seekers and refugees in its reception centres.

(Click [here](#) to access Ms. Lutter’s full presentation)

**Sabir Zazai – CEO, Coventry Refugee & Migrant Centre, UK**

**Charlotte Cooke – European Projects Manager, Migration Yorkshire, UK**

Mr. Zazai began with his own story as an asylum seeker. He explained how he arrived in the UK 15 years ago with an emphasis on the welcome he received. In relation to Coventry, the Refugee & Migrant Centre “helps to support refugees so they feel welcomed and can start to rebuild their lives in safety and in dignity”.

He said the Centre is a partner in the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme, working with the local authority. Coventry is also becoming a part of the City of Sanctuary, and a part of the welcoming culture and movement in the UK.

Mr. Zazai listed the programme’s partners - the city council, Coventry Citizen’s Advice Bureau, Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre, and the Law Centre.

Lastly Mr. Zazai discussed the programme’s refugee centre approach, which ensures that refugees have access to good quality advice and legal support and advocacy. He also highlighted their 12 month integration support package which ensures a complete approach to the initial needs of refugees.
Charlotte Cooke - European Projects Manager, Migration Yorkshire, UK

representing

Migration Yorkshire, a local authority city led migration partnership, outlined their involvement in Leeds and the northern cities with the Syrian vulnerable location scheme, especially in light of the UK announcement that it will accept 20,000 Syrian refugees over the next few years. They aim to work with 22 local authorities in the regions on regional responses to refugee resettlement, to provide the home office with one point of contact, offer strategic response and oversight, act as a central hub for cases to link houses across the region, and support the setup of new schemes. Ms. Cook stressed the benefits of a central hub to respond quickly and efficiently, and partnerships with voluntary centres to ensure support is offered throughout the region.

Michaela Kauer, Office of the City of Vienna, EUROCITIES Executive Committee

Miriam Schulte – Holty & Dolly Abdul Karim, Diakonie Vienna

They highlighted new developments in the programme which grants refugees permanent status in Austria, namely that refugees are immediately assisted with the registration procedures, are part of a voluntary buddy system, and are eligible to receive benefits within 1-2 weeks of arrival. Significantly, by working with a private real estate housing company, refugees are able to move into housing immediately even if they cannot afford the rent or security deposit.

In relation to the Austrian Humanitarian Admission programme, Ms. Schulte and Ms. Karim outlined the working group, Caritas Red Cross Austria, and Diakonie Vienna, responsible for the integration of thousands of refugees - 600 identified by UNHCR, of which 350 have already arrived in Austria.

SHOWCASE PANEL 1: Strengthening public & political awareness of refugees

Moderated by Richard Williams for MigrationWork

MigrationWork is a not-for-profit consultancy set up to help communities, practitioners and policy-makers to respond to migration. MigrationWork played a key role as a partner of EUROCITIES within the Implementing project, helping cities support one another to improve their approach to the integration of migrants and achieve the aims set out in EUROCITIES’ Integrating Cities Charter. MigrationWork will act as an expert consultant in the context of SHARE II, contributing their experience to SHARE peer exchange on refugee resettlement and integration.

Manfred Hagedorn - city of Dortmund, Germany & Ingrid Kramer - Walter Blüchert Foundation

Presented the joint initiative - “Arrived to your city” (“Angekommen in deiner Stadt”) – a collaboration between the Walter Blüchert Foundation, Ministry of Education and Training of North Rhine-Westphalia and the city of Dortmund. The initiative offers education and social support to young refugees and new arrivals between the ages of 16 and 25 at 9 vocational schools in Dortmund with all-day classes. Support is structured in two ways: individual support to obtain a degree and vocational training with continuous support and assistance for durable solutions also after school/training has finished. The programme was launched in Dortmund, in the near future will be implemented in Münster and has received further requests from cities in North Rhine-Westphalia.

(Click here to access Mr. Hagedorn’s and Ms. Kramer’s full presentation)
Sabe Soe – Burma Center Prague, Czech Republic

talked about activities offered by Burma Centre Prague to support community preparedness in the Czech Republic. One hundred and twenty-five Burmese refugees have been resettled since October 2008 to small- or medium-sized towns participating in the Czech resettlement programme. The Burma Center Prague supported the reception and integration process by providing social assistance and counselling to refugees, interpreting and vocational training. To increase awareness about protection needs and build public support, Burma Center organises public awareness raising activities (such as lectures, film screenings and school debates), hosts social events (Burmese-Czech Days and cooking nights) and provides socio-cultural trainings for Czech officials and social workers. The organisation has also released three editions of the publication “Focus on Burma”.

(Click here to access Ms. Soe’s full presentation).

Maciej Fagasinski – Refugee. pl Foundation, Poland described their awareness-raising activities on the protection needs of refugees, including an infogramme campaign aiming to explain the term refugee and the protection needs of refugees to the general public. To conquer fears of a massive influx to Poland, another infogramme illustrates the actual numbers of arrivals in relation to commonly known figures such as space in the Warsaw football stadium. The NGO also aims to educate the general public on the origins and migratory routes of the refugees and explained in pictograms what the responsibilities of both host society and refugees are with regard to integration processes (infographic example pictured below).

Mariana Stoyanova – Red Cross Bulgaria shared good practices from Bulgaria where the 28 regional branches of the Red Cross organize awareness raising activities throughout the country. The organisation facilitates peer-to-peer training in secondary schools and organises open lessons for tolerance and joint initiatives for refugee children such as summer camps. For the general public, intercultural events and sport initiatives are held in Sofia. The Red Cross also designed a multicultural map of Sofia for local citizens to facilitate contact and educate about foreigners residing in Sofia.

(Click here to access Ms. Stoyanova’s full presentation).

Julian Roskams – Malvern Town Council, UK first described how Malvern became involved with refugee resettlement and protection in light of the ongoing war and conflict in Syria. Mr. Roskams said they mobilised 1,000 citizens across the town. To begin the campaign, they focused on the history of Malvern which took in 500 Belgian refugees who fled when the German armies occupied Belgium. He emphasized the benefits of taking in refugees and stressed the importance of setting up a Facebook page and twitter account to coordinate citizens’ involvement. Despite the challenge of keeping the issue in the public spotlight, they were able to build up the skills and resources necessary to make it possible for a small community to take in refugee families. In this light, Mr. Roskams announced Malvern plans to give sanctuary to refugees.

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.

Mauricio Vallente – Municipality of Madrid & Áliva Diez – Spanish Commission for Refugee Aid presented the city’s Declaration Commitment Statement for Refugees “Madrid, city of asylum” based on the “Do no harm” principle. The refugee assisting organisation CEAR proposed that the city council adopt a Commitment Statement for Refugees “Madrid, city of asylum”, which was ultimately approved in a Plenary Session on 16/09/2015. As a symbolic act, the city council hung up a “Refugees welcome” banner at their city hall sending a message that Madrid is a city that warmly welcomes refugees. By endorsing the commitment and displaying the banner to its local citizens, the municipality is taking a stance in regard to the refugee crisis.
and actively participating in refugee reception in Spain. Ms. Diez explained that civil society in Madrid welcomed and supported the initiative and is organising various solidarity initiatives to welcome refugees to the Spanish capital.

**SHOWCASE PANEL 2: COMPLEMENTING MAINSTREAM SERVICES: A NEW ROLE FOR VOLUNTEERS, LOCAL CITIZENS & FAITH-BASED ORGANISATIONS**

Moderated by Belinda Gallup – Sheffield City Council

George Gabriel – Citizens UK introduced the British initiative National Refugees Welcome Board (NRWB) – a platform supporting the country’s major civil society institutions to mobilise the resources and participation of their members and networks on national and local scales to support the successful delivery of refugee resettlement programmes by the state and their contracted agents, and to engage in supporting those seeking sanctuary in the UK more widely. The platforms will initiate or strengthen existing local committees with their work on welcoming refugees, mobilising resources and building long-term local groups and relationships to sustain public engagement and support. The platform aims to engage national civil society organisations, leading private sector voices and key public sector institutions as coordinating partners.

Roberto Guaglianone – Consorzio Communitas Italy outlined the Italian initiative -- A refugee in my family (“Rifugiato a casa mia” and “Rifugiati in famiglia”) coordinated by the organisations Caritas Italiana, Consorzio Communitas onlus, Ciac Onlus and the Italian federal Protection System for Asylum Seeker and Refugees (Italian acronym – SPRAR). The project supports families offering accommodation in their homes to both refugees and asylum seekers. Host families and the accommodation they can offer are screened before their participation, and 40 beneficiaries took up accommodation through the project pilot in 2013. The project aims to use the capacity of a family setting to assist refugees to live more independently, relying less on mainstream services and institutional support, and to build their own networks and connections. Caritas Italy hopes that both host families and beneficiaries will share this direct, personal and positive experience of welcome and solidarity with those in their wider networks and communities. (Click here to access Mr. Guaglianone’s full presentation)

George Joseph – Caritas Sweden outlined Sweden’s resettlement programme. Mr. Joseph said they expect between 100,000 and 150,000 refugees in Sweden in 2015, including over 17,000 unaccompanied minors (the largest in Europe), and that 2,000 people a day are seeking asylum. The refugee crisis, or as he put it crisis for the refugees, is being met by civil society efforts including church/welfare organisations, and volunteers, who are mobilising support and services for refugees who arrive. Examples of current initiatives include refugee guides, language education schemes, information on how Swedish society functions, and initiatives of youth groups. In spite of stark opposition, Caritas Sweden has experienced an overwhelming amount of support, and continues engaging faith organisations and civil society, to be guardians for refugees arriving in the local communities.

Éodie Francart – Citizens Platform to Support Refugees in Brussels introduced the Citizens Platform to Support Refugees in Brussels – a loose collective led by private citizens who want to support refugees, asylum-seekers and undocumented migrants arriving in the Belgian capital. The group coordinates citizen initiatives focused on an informal refugee camp in a park in the city. The platform works with NGOs based in Brussels such as SamuSocial, the Red Cross and Doctors Without Borders. Volunteers are recruited and coordinated through social media and

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*Images and logos related to refugee support initiatives.*
participate daily in various activities and tasks at the camp operation, including: management of donations, waste collection, sanitary services, receiving refugees, interpretation for medical examinations, cooking, animation/activities and general monitoring and social support at the camp. Ms. Francart was accompanied by a refugee from Syria who arrived in Brussels 3 before and who shared his gratitude for the support he has received from many Brussels-based volunteers during his time in the camp at Maximilien Park.

David Zistl – Refugee Welcome, Austria

presented the Austrian branch of the pan-European initiative Refugees Welcome (“Flüchtlinge Willkommen”). A project that started in Berlin in November 2014 and has now rolled-out to other countries, features a website on which private citizens can sign up their flat if they have an available room in their house or apartment and want to be matched with a refugee flatmate. After somebody signs up, an external organisation which works with refugees in the city will help find a suitable flatmate. They will put both parties in contact, so that they can get to know each other. If they get along, the refugee will move in shortly after. The coordinating team helps find solutions to finance the rent by assisting individuals to set up micro-donations or crowd-funding. After the new flatmate has moved in, the coordinating team and local refugee organisation provide support during an initial period and are available for questions. In addition to Germany and Austria, the initiative has been implemented in 6 other European countries.

“FOSTERING INTEGRATION & PARTICIPATION IN EUROPEAN TOWN & CITIES: A REFUGEE-FOCUSED APPROACH”

Moderated by: Petra Hueck – Head of office for ICMC Europe

Bert Kamphuis – City of Alderman, Municipality of Sittard Geleen

introduced the city of Alderman, with a population of 95,000 people. Mr. Kamphuis described an increase in refugees in their small city, with an expected 250 refugees next year. Mr. Kamphuis described the current situation as “chaotic”. Cities are doing their best to cater to the influx, but refugees are being moved around different cities, and left to stay in temporary accommodation such as sports centres, longer than the normal period of 72 hours.

Overall, Mr. Kamphuis made two recommendations, namely, a better emergency reception system with more centres and higher quality accommodation available, and better integration systems in place as soon as the refugees arrive, so that they are able to get jobs and commence language training.

Pierre Henry – France Terre d’Asile
described the current French system which is based on national legislation, and under which 65,000 asylum seekers and stateless people have come to France over the last few years. Of these, 30% have received a positive decision and were granted asylum..

Mr. Henry outlined how it takes 16-19 months for one case to be reviewed which he suggested is quite long. Despite legislation involving all actors and stakeholders, he emphasised the importance of strengthening the legislation to allocate more funds and manpower to support current asylum programmes. He also alluded to the situation in Calais as an example of issues specific to France within the broader European-wide problem.

France has relocated 700 people, but there is a need for hosting centres, registration centres, and centres for the relocation of refugees. Mr. Henry also suggested that hosting refugees should be a long-term solution, as the situation in Syria is worsening. Integration should be at the forefront with language learning and employment services, and a national programme to sponsor refugees.

He concluded that the great challenge is hosting huge numbers of people without the resources or the means to do so, when the legal system impedes their efforts, and in an atmosphere of increasing hostility toward refugees. Nonetheless, France has achievements in offering to host refugees across the nation’s 36
communes, which was exemplified in a letter to the city mayors calling for greater solidarity.

Filmon Ghebrehiwot - SHARE Resettlement Ambassador

shared his experiences as a resettled refugee from Eritrea. Mr. Ghebrehiwot arrived in Belgium with his family in July 2011, with the help of UNHCR, IOM and the Belgium government under the Refugee Resettlement Programme. He described that with “dark images in his mind” of the past, it was very difficult to adjust to his new life, in the beginning.

However resettlement soon became a turning point in his life due to numerous factors such as the help of organisations such as Caritas International, ICMC and Atlas, which assisted with his integration and Dutch language classes. Importantly, he was able to find work in Antwerp as a driver for elderly and disabled people for one year, he volunteered with Caritas International and he followed an online programme with ICMC. Eventually, he got a new job with Atlas as a teacher of social orientation in Tigrinya language.

Mr. Ghebrehiwot said the answer is simple –“integration provides a bridge, helps refugees to self-realise and make a difference in their lives”. He also stressed that solidarity is key to accepting, supporting and welcoming refugees.

Marijan Bilic – Counsellor for Integration Service of the city of Antwerp

worked as a case manager for Atlas in the integration office in Antwerp, where Filmon followed the integration programme. Mr. Bilic congratulated Mr. Ghebrehiwot on his recent job, and then described the context of the integration programme which aims to help newcomers integrate into society. The Flemish government has developed a policy to incorporate this integration programme into legalisation, and make it mandatory for a large number of cities.

The programme consists of four parts: a Dutch language course, social orientation, career orientation and counselling. The goal of the integration programme is to make refugees feel like they can fully participate in society, and able to do things independently with knowledge and tools.

(Click here to access Mr. Bilic’s full presentation)

Hilde Scheidt – Deputy Mayor, city of Aachen

After recognizing the SHARE Network’s achievements, Ms. Scheidt explained that the city of Aachen has a long tradition of welcoming refugees and is supportive of people in need. Aachen can receive up to 300 - 400 refugees a week, on two hours’ notice. Within two hours refugees will find everything ready for them and their needs met.

In her recommendations, Ms. Scheidt emphasized the importance of communicating within a city before taking action for example, informing the public what the plan is for the sports hall, letting people know who it is that is coming and why they can’t return and explaining why we should not build a wall as a solution. As in Aachen, this communication creates a feeling within the city that integration is possible. She stated that there are over 1,000 volunteers registered, their special skills and talents help integrate refugees in Aachen and complement the support refugees receive from the city.

In addition she said that building housing is important, as is ensuring that housing is mixed so that everyone can have equal access to the city. She concluded that for now the crisis is being managed as refugee resettlement, but due to its scope there needs to be enough money available for education and employment, in order to give refugees in Germany a positive future.

“TOWARDS A WELCOMING EUROPE: MOBILISING SUPPORT FOR FUTURE ACTION”

Luc Van den Brande – Former President of Committee of the Regions

reflected on the topics of the conference, not as items, nor issues, but “societal change”. He outlined that this phenomenon is immediate, but in no means new on this scale. The three pillars of democracy, rule of law, and human rights, underlined his speech in which he also highlighted the current lack of these pillars in countries such as Syria and Libya.

Using the example of Antwerp and Belgium in general, he highlighted the necessity to be prepared, create more jobs, and consolidate the social and economic situation in
order to provide a positive welcome to refugees. This, he stated, should not be seen as an obligation but as an opportunity. However, he suggested we must be realistic in terms of what can be achieved.

Mr. Van den Brande concluded that without a doubt, it is about human dignity and respect for human needs. Finally, in reference to the SHARE Network policy statement’s recommendations, he stated that there is huge responsibility on mayors, cities and volunteers to ensure active citizenship, empowerment, and solidarity for local and tangible interventions necessary to overcome the societal shift.

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.

Cecilia Wikström – Member of the European Parliament

highlighted the concerning issue of the vast majority of people still in countries of severe conflict, or in neighbouring countries with overcrowded refugee camps such as in Lebanon or Turkey. She said that the rhetoric of flooding, or millions of people coming to Europe, is nonsense. In the current context, she urged that walls should not be built in Europe, aggravating our fears. “If you build a 5 metre wall someone will make a 5 metre high ladder”, thus she stated Europe must improve efforts to help refugees and “turn challenges into opportunities”.

According to Ms. Wiström, central to integration is how refugees are viewed. Integration will be easier if Europeans perceive refugees as people who want to contribute to society and better their lives, rather than threats. In conclusion, in a plea for solidarity, she emphasized that integration begins with every actor in civil society, as a key driver of change.

Sir Peter Sutherland – President, ICMC & UN Special Representative for International Migration

Mr. Peter Sutherland pointed out that the history of our time will be judged by our treatment of the great crisis of migration. The moral issues that underpin this are already challenging in Europe. Political responses have been less than adequate and those responses have sometimes been driven by xenophobic and nationalistic forces one might have hoped had been left behind.

He continued, by emphasizing that the role SHARE and ICMC play in this time is an important one. “Either we set about setting up the systems of integration across Europe which enable the migrants to become part of the communities to which they wish to belong or we will have tension and we will have further growth of the type of xenophobic and often racist policies that some fringe parties in Europe seem to advocate.” While some have suggested that the acceptance of refugees might be tied to their religion, Mr. Sutherland pointed out that this runs contrary to the fundamental standards of the United Nations and European Union which profess to believe in the dignity of man and equality of man as foundational principals.

The SHARE Network has brought together cities, towns, municipalities, churches, communities, universities, migrant associations and others to promote and coordinate a real response to the fundamental need to integrate migrants and above all refugees. Mr. Sutherland recognized that the first year after arrival is vital. A successful integration process will enable refugees to become part of communities and not to live in a way which is separate from mainstream society. He stressed that the idea of refugees spending long times in closed reception facilities is contrary to the idea of becoming part of society and that labour market access, language skills, and
recognition of qualifications are all important aspects of becoming a part of the community you aspire to join.

In summary Sir Peter Sutherland made two clear points. First, there needs to be a collective EU response with a significant resettlement component, and second, there should be a sharing of responsibility across the EU so that countries, such as Sweden and Germany, do not carry the whole burden. He stressed the point that each Member State must drive the proper political responses but do so in a way that is consistent with the values which we all claim to espouse. Lastly, he concluded, ICMC has a leading role, and will continue to play a vital role, in all activities in the area of integration that have arisen as a result of the crisis.

(You can watch Peter Sutherland’s full address on ICMC’s Youtube channel)

### PROTECTING AND WELCOMING REFUGEES IN EUROPE

A joint statement issued by ICMC Europe on behalf of the SHARE Network, on the occasion of the SHARE Network Conference

SHARE - the network of cities, regions and local actors committed to offering protection and welcome for refugees resettled to Europe – calls for a multi-stakeholder engagement to ensure a durable integration of refugees in times of the largest displacement crisis in Europe since World War II. This includes coordination, information-sharing, awareness-raising and citizen support for countries and municipalities welcoming people in need for international protection.

The number of forcibly displaced persons around the world has now reached approximately 60 million, around a third of whom are refugees. Europe has seen an unprecedented level of refugee arrivals, and numbers continue to increase on a daily basis. It is essential that European responses continue to uphold international obligations to protect refugees in this context of multiple refugee crises, including refugees fleeing both Syria and the many other refugee-producing conflicts and situations across the globe.

An effective European response requires sustained solidarity and cooperation, both amongst European countries, and between the EU and the countries currently hosting the vast majority of those who are displaced. It will require increased and sustained support for these countries, the realisation of internal EU protection mechanisms such as relocation, and expanded safe and legal avenues - complementary to existing refugee resettlement programmes - that enable refugees to enter and seek protection in Europe.

To ensure the solutions offered to refugees and those seeking protection in Europe are truly durable, this reformulating of European policies and frameworks must include a renewal of approaches to reception and integration. This requires engaging actors in local communities, particularly in countries with little previous experience of receiving refugees, and continued advocacy at the political level to counter xenophobia and improve the level of understanding amongst the European public about the need for refugee protection.

### Welcoming newcomers in European cities and towns

**Direct contact and interaction with local citizens in receiving communities** can counter isolation, improve language skills, foster a sense of belonging, and assist in the understanding of local cultures and systems. Citizens can be engaged in supporting refugee integration through volunteer programmes focused on refugees’ immediate needs post-arrival, or accompanying refugees through the integration process towards their full independence.

**Citizen-led initiatives can supplement but cannot replace refugee reception and social services, and/or integration programmes.** In this way, citizens can build support for refugee integration from all sections of society, and continue
to make a substantial contribution to offering a broad and inclusive welcome for newcomers in European towns and cities.

Integration is a complex, two-way process of mutual adaptation that does not happen overnight. In addition to standard components of integration, such as language-learning, children's access to education, health services and employment support, planning for partnerships that will facilitate integration should address the specific needs of particular refugee groups, such as those related to trauma and periods spent without access to basic healthcare. Partnerships should also include grassroots, citizen-led initiatives, which have a central role to play in extending local capacity to provide a welcoming environment.

To ensure European countries can receive larger numbers of newcomers, new and innovative partnerships must be developed amongst governments, local authorities, civil society organisations and other service providers, which should in turn engage with a broader set of stakeholders such as churches, migrant and diaspora associations, employers, universities and others.

**Recommendations: What Europe can do?**

1. Integration is what will come next for Europe, and needs to be the main priority for action under the European Agenda on Migration. EU emergency programmes must be part of future decision-making.

2. National AMIF programmes need to include more funding for integration, whereas defined part must be dedicated specifically to refugee integration.

3. Cities, in consultation with civil society partners and local populations, must be able to determine integration priorities and target groups, as they know best what is needed in terms of integration. Direct access for cities to AMIF integration funding would ensure that European funding for integration reaches the local level and supports effective, locally developed integration measures and priorities.

4. Volunteering and active citizenship initiatives should be supported, endorsed and celebrated at the European, national and local levels - including through the development of inclusive policies, funding for coordination, and tools to recruit, manage and support volunteers.

5. European funds take too long to be processed and allocated by Member States. Cities and their partners are frontline service providers, with proven capacity to respond urgently to humanitarian crises.

6. Coordination and information-sharing on integration can be improved. Countries with experience of receiving refugees should share practices with those with less history of doing so, and national authorities to local actors.

7. Actors at all levels should prioritise awareness-raising on refugee protection and solid communication on legal rights and integration support measures, including by incorporating both in anti-discrimination policy and programmes.