



ConAction Special Issue Conference Newspaper

About the Conference

These appeals and recommendations are the result of 10 Workshops in the frame of the ConAction Conference in Berlin in October 2017, which was attended by more than 40 grassroots initiatives providing humanitarian aid to displaced people on the ground in Greece and Turkey. For more information, please contact:

INFO@CONACTION-CONFERENCE.COM

Borders and Human Rights Violations on the Sea

On both the Greek and Turkish sides, it appears that refugees are treated in an arbitrary manner. The most important demand is to exert political pressure on European governments to adhere to laws related to refugees and respond to international standards.

Human rights violations on water are prevalent. **Pushbacks:** Greek authorities, such as the coast guard, rejecting boats from Turkey at sea; the Turkish coast guard entering Greek waters; the Greek coast guard bringing people onto coast guard boats, only to return them to the Turkish coast guard. **Pullbacks:** Turkish authorities entering Greek waters and pulling back refugee boats. Frontex and Greek authorities observe these pullbacks without responding. Meanwhile, there is **insufficient official documentation** and evidence of these push- and pullbacks. **Demands:** An **ombudsman is needed in Greece**. Greek officials have to be monitored, and illegal actions must be reported. These violations must be brought to court in strategic cases using **standardized data sheets** and media reports collected by NGOs, refugees, and volunteers. The **UNHCR and other large agencies should be officially questioned**, as they appear to have an amount of funding that is disproportionate to their actions. **Perceived shortcomings of these organisations must be made transparent. Legal avenues and safe routes must be created. The criminalization of those helping at sea has to stop. Legislation, which stands in alignment with present human rights standards and international law, should be applied.**

Cut Back on Paper Work:

Time Matters

Family Reunification? – Families torn apart.

In theory people have the right to family reunification, in reality they are often not allowed to accomplish this or are hindered in doing so in due time. The procedures are extremely difficult to follow, with reunification granted in an inconsistent manner.

The bureaucratic jungle requires **more legal assistance, and specialized lawyers in Greece and Turkey**. The definition of family is too narrow and does not include extended family members, e.g. children who have turned 18 or grandparents who had formerly co-habitated with these family members. Practical procedures of family reunification need to be evaluated and administrative bottlenecks to be identified.

„This situation is jeopardizing the whole process and undermines the right of asylum seekers to family reunification, as provided by Dublin III Regulation and violates further their right to family life as stipulated in article 8 of the European Convention for Human Rights as well as article 7 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.“ (Open letter by ECRE & others to UNHCR & others, 26/7/17)

More than saving lives

Medical passports for doctors needed. Mobile clinics must be supported and equipped.

For efficient support provided by doctors from outside Greece, mobility is key.

The flexible deployment of doctors should be facilitated with **“medical passports”** by European ministries, making it possible for them to circumvent bureaucratic barriers - doctors working on the ground in Greece, for example, need to obtain a certificate in Greek on their own accord. The translation cost of 200€ and the fact that this certificate needs to be renewed in every region of the country is a deterrence for voluntary doctors. The national health ministry should be the sole government entity in charge to grant the needed documents for volunteer health care workers. **Exceptional action should be taken in order to speed up medical staff registration, emergency offices focusing on accreditation of medical staff** should be established in Greece.

Need for a Volunteer Manual

Let's not reinvent the wheel for each new volunteer arriving. For a stronger network and more efficient matching of human resources.

Inhumane conditions for refugees are still reality on the ground. As a result, many volunteers still have to fill the gaps left by governments and bigger aid agencies.

The willingness of volunteers to assist those in need has to be organized better, in order to facilitate more efficient outcomes. More qualified, skilled, and long-term committed helpers are needed on the ground. A stronger network between case workers themselves, and a platform for them to share their expertise, must be created. One potential solution would be collective workshops for outgoing helpers.

Another solution would be the creation of a **volunteer manual** along with a map of accessible experts in their relevant fields.

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Volunteers' skills and motivation could be assessed in a standardized way for a better (self-) allocation to specific projects. A more efficient organisation of volunteer work would also allow case workers to focus on long-term strategies, such as political lobbying and fundraising.

Mental Health

Asylum regulations should not pose a risk of increased mental health problems.

Beyond the most pressing, on-the-ground health assistance in terms of first aid, other longer-term health care issues must also be addressed. It is safe to say that the psychological stress for newcomers is immense, yet dealing with the issue of health care at Europe's borders is a very complex issue. The current European asylum regulations are making this situation even worse. Forcing people to put their lives on hold for years will have long-term impacts on their mental health. Also, there are cultural differences that need to be taken into consideration when providing treatment. Therefore, first, **more multi-lingual doctors and psychologists need to be deployed on the ground**, doctors need to be better trained to navigate these differences. Secondly, the refugee communities' own abilities to address mental health issues, in their own languages, should be expanded via **targeted training workshops and certifications**.

Gender and Health

Where is the safe space?

In terms of women's health, there are reports of inappropriate care, including sexual abuse in after-labor care, forced caesareans, forced childbirth for reasons of timing. Instead of offering follow-up care for breast feeding, "easy" solutions such as powdered milk are too often applied.

Furthermore, women who have been raped in transit or in the camps require more special assistance, as do survivors of domestic violence, an issue which is reportedly on the rise due to the stressful living conditions within newcomer communities. More **safe spaces for women** need to be created and **abusers have to be persecuted immediately and relentlessly**.

Schools and Education for Kids

Let's talk common goals. Long term teachers are needed. Overcoming cultural challenges.

NGOs, the public, governments, and communities should network and agree on a common goal, because long term solutions are needed to assure the education of the future generation. A safe and stable environment is key for children's education. As volunteer fluctuation is high and the education sector is underfunded, locals in

Turkey and Greece can take up the role of teaching basic subjects. Creating safe spaces and trust is the biggest challenge right now. An environment in which open communication is encouraged, using art to process traumatic experiences, learning of essential life-skills and more language courses would induce better integration and inclusion. A **combination of local and volunteer teachers as well as teachers from the refugee community** is needed to help with the educational aspects of children in camps. Funding should be provided - so teachers can stay longer to provide trust-based and thus more efficient learning conditions for the children.

Better Deals for Everyone

Protecting human rights while creating beneficial solutions for everyone involved .

States should find a compromise where all parties involved in the issue can benefit. Politics should protect, not overcome, human rights. The EU-Turkey-Deal launched on the 18th of March 2016 foresees that all new irregular migrants crossing from Turkey into Greek islands who do not apply for asylum in Greece or whose application has been found inadmissible will be returned to Turkey.

This practice does not stand in line with the most basic principles of migration and asylum law as for example the non-refoulement-principle.

It can and will be more beneficial to match the needs of those who are on the move with the needs of the countries they pass through, as well as in the countries of their destination.

Would You Live in these Camps?

Tents are no humane solution for long-term accommodation - especially not in winter.

The situation in Greek and Turkish camps falls appallingly short of human rights standards. Especially the situation in Moria on Lesbos and Vial on Chios is a disgrace - even more so considering that this is happening in Europe. **Where has the money gone which apparently has been provided for these hotspots?** There are no safe spaces for women and children are placed in an inappropriate environment. Water supply is unreliable. Camps are often overpopulated and situated in isolated locations. People are staying far longer than they are supposed to in these camps. No precautions were taken for the coming winter. **Demands:** People who are currently in the camps on these islands should immediately be moved to the mainland where there is a **wider range of facilities**.

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Family reunion and relocation cases are to be dealt with in **fast procedures, more administrative staff** needs to be employed. Volunteers and media teams require better access to the camps. Free internet connections should be supplied. Shuttle services and assisting newcomers in obtaining drivers licenses or bicycles would increase their mobility.

An Umbrella Organisation for the Forces in Action

Thoughts on creating a joint task force with which to address the authorities and governments to exert more pressure.

Insufficient knowledge about what fellow NGOs and/or community centers are doing sometimes makes it hard to determine how to coordinate the most important services for newcomers. The information system in place is rudimentary. In order to foster cooperation between initiatives, an **umbrella organisation could be formed to facilitate lobbying and consolidate the support and services provided by member organisations.** Forging a connection between such a platform and governments, politicians and bigger organisations would increase visibility, strengthen the demands and empower such a group of NGOs.

A Greater Lobbying Power

The lack of an overarching platform bringing together NGOs working in the field of humanitarian assistance has weakened their political voice. This platform would include providing **more networking and visibility**, especially for small initiatives and NGOs. Thus, a foundation of an **NGO-based veto mechanism** would create an independent tool to formulate demands based on humanitarian standards of which these NGOs know best.

While NGOs work together and share information, particularly about individual case work, newcomers' rights to privacy must be respected. The stories told in individual case management are sensitive and confidential. The dilemma, therefore, is that on one hand, these stories should be publicised in order to raise awareness, but on the other hand, people's identities must be protected.

Legal Support

Individual and comprehensive legal support by well-trained lawyers is utterly important. For the development and efficiency of legal support, **a network of mutually supportive international advocates** should be part of a wider umbrella.

Funding and Sustainable Solutions

Small volunteer organisations are mostly confronted with only short-term donations. This makes it hard to plan sustainably and in long terms - even if situations call for exactly that.

Possibilities to counter this lack of funding, in all sectors, would be to **join forces in applying for bigger EU grants**; to organise **international meetings** and exchange knowledge on crowdfunding, grant applications, and to create contacts to possible sponsors as a group of NGOs rather than as one small grassroots organisation. Connections between smaller and larger international organizations could be forged to provide long-term funding.

Small Income Projects as a Way to Survive

A new concept providing added value to projects on the ground would be to allow NGOs to operate small income companies (e.g. with social impact or environmental benefit). In their transition from "donation-based" to "profit-making", a **common (online) platform** should then allow these initiatives to **share best practices, provide assistance to small businesses, and connect these projects with potential customers.** The international market for (often upcycled) products made by refugees trying to survive in their new environment by handcrafting items would be huge - if potential customers had better online access to the many organisations via one website. Finding partner NGOs in other countries, such as Germany, would help small-income NGOs in Greece and Turkey to advertise and sell their products.

The Many Faces of Racism

A Call for more public awareness about the realities on the ground.

At this point in time, neither people fleeing their home countries nor catastrophes at sea appear to be part of the European public discourse, even though there were almost 5000 new arrivals in Greece in September 2017. Coverage is often sensationalist. In general, racism and discrimination are enforced by representations in the media. Political parties have exploited the so-called "refugee crisis" for political gain. Misrepresentations of the situation on the ground with regards to sea rescues, stereotypical portrayals of "the refugees" and of the situation in the camps have also made helpers and newcomers refrain from interaction with media. A lot of useful, first-hand information cannot be disseminated to the wider public, because refugees trying to organise this effort themselves often do not have the language skills necessary to do so. More diversity in European media personnel is needed to assure improved media literacy.

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Growing Right Wing Movements in Europe

Countering racism and empowering the affected.

Newcomers encounter both institutionalized and public racism. In an environment where right wing politics gain strength, newcomers are experiencing racist attacks on- and offline. There is a correlation between experiencing discrimination and diminished mental health. Additionally, volunteers and (local) politicians are facing increased pressure and intimidation for their humanitarian stance, including death threats from organized movements. There is a lack of counseling services, where racist or sexist incidents can be reported. **Official sides have to take responsibility to protect the ones who are exposed to racism and abuse.** Grassroots teams need to speak with a united voice. Volunteers who experience abuse and threats are to be supported by the rest of the volunteer community. Data collection on cases of abuse and racism is crucial. This data has to be made public with the help of mass media outlets.

#SafePassage



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Conference Organiser:

Joliba - Interkulturelles Netzwerk in Berlin e.V. - Registered Charity

Editorial Team - Newsdesk at Conference:

Anna Antonakis Majid Al-Bunni

Further Editing Work:

Johanna Scherf, Moritz Timm, Mara Suter, Dagmar Albrecht

Layout:

Moritz Timm and Mara Suter

info@conaction-conference.com

www.conaction-conference.com

Summary of Key Demands

A list of key demands, derived from this newspaper's articles.

Speed up family reunifications.

Develop a volunteer manual.

Establish medical passports and emergency offices to accredit medical staff.

More multi-lingual doctors and psychologists.

Establish medical training workshops for refugee communities.

Create safe spaces for women; persecute abusers immediately and relentlessly.

Increase diversity in teaching staff with a combination of local and volunteer teachers as well as teachers from the refugee community.

Create documentation of all push- and pullbacks at sea crossing, set up ombudsman in Greece, develop standardized data sheets of violations.

Call for more transparency in allocation of UNHCR funding. Perceived shortcomings must be made public and be basis for further action.

Provide humane accommodation. Camps of tents are no long-term solution, especially in winter.

Create legal avenues and safe routes. Legislation should be introduced which stands in alignment with present human rights standards and international law.

Decriminalize the actions of those helping at sea.

Move people from islands to the mainland.

Constitute a more efficient legal support systems through a wider network of mutually supportive international advocates.

Launch common (online) platform for small income projects.

Translate reports from first-hand information and distribute them to media.

Demand responsible action from official sides to protect the ones who are exposed to racism and abuse.

Join forces: Form an umbrella organization to facilitate lobbying, applying for bigger EU grants, strengthen network and visibility through international meetings and conferences.