

Humanitarian Europe?

Report on a roundtable meeting on the humanitarian and policy responses to the 2015 refugee and migrant movements through Lesvos, Greece and into the European Union

**9th December 2015
ODI meeting room
London**



Kara Tepe 'camp' for Syrians and other Arabic speakers, Lesvos September 2015 © Fotini Rantsiou

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Background

During 2015 more than one million refugees and migrants made the perilous journey across the Mediterranean to seek safety and a better life in Europe in what constitutes one of the largest movements of displaced people through European borders since the Second World War. Most made the crossing on board dangerously inadequate vessels provided by 'people smugglers' charging one to two thousand Euros per person. In the process over 3,771 people are believed to have drowned. One in four of those making the crossing were children. The vast majority of those making the crossing were fleeing conflict and persecution - just under half (48%) were Syrians, one in five (21%) were Afghans and one in ten (9%) were Iraqis. According to UNHCR, 84 per cent of these arrivals came from ten of the world's top refugee producing countries.

Of the one million just over 850,000 arrived and, for the most part transited, through Greece - an EU member state and member of the Schengen 'open borders' area. Because of its close proximity (10-15kms) to the Turkish coast, the Aegean Island of Lesbos became a dominant route. During 2015 500,000 refugees and migrants (fully 50% of the total number arriving in Europe) landed on Lesbos. The vast majority spent just a few days on the island to register with the Greek police and continue their onward journey by ferry to Athens and then through the (non-EU) Balkan countries to Austria, Germany and other EU countries. The dramatic increase in the flow of people to and across Lesbos created suffering and humanitarian needs that were the subject of intense international media attention from around July 2015 onwards.

The purpose of this 'roundtable' meeting was to bring together a mix of humanitarian agencies and volunteers, refugee, asylum and human rights organisations and academics in order to better understand the nature of the 'crisis', the challenges faced by those responding to it and possibly to identify ways in which the overall response, including in terms of policy, might be improved. The meeting was held under Chatham House Rule to ensure free and frank exchange. The programme for the meeting and the supporting Discussion Paper was designed to move from an initial focus on the humanitarian response in Lesbos to the humanitarian response to the wider migrant/refugee situation throughout Europe with a particular focus on the protection crisis and the role of humanitarian agencies in advocacy. In this way it was hoped to ensure that the wider discussions were informed by the specific case of Lesbos and that the response in Lesbos could be understood in its wider context. See Annex B for the programme for the meeting).

The meeting was organised by three individuals, acting as volunteers, giving their time freely in the hope of improving the response. Each had been moved by the slow, inadequate and at times inept response by national governments, EU institutions and UN and INGO humanitarian actors. Much of the response to the humanitarian needs during the first months of the crisis was by local and international volunteers who continue, even now, to play a key frontline role in the humanitarian response. **Fotini Rantsiou** is a Greek humanitarian worker with 17 years of international experience who took leave of absence from her role with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Action (OCHA), and following a visit to the island in July, moved to Lesbos in August to work as a volunteer. **Norah Niland**, a long-time humanitarian aid worker and former UN staffer is currently a freelance consultant/researcher and Research Associate with the Centre on Conflict, Development &

Peacebuilding at the Graduate Institute, Geneva. **John Borton** is also a freelance consultant/researcher in the humanitarian sector worked for 11 years at the Overseas Development Institute where he is currently a Senior Research Associate with the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) and also an Honorary Lecturer at the Humanitarian and Conflict Response Institute (HCRI) at the University of Manchester. As a result of his relationship with ODI, the meeting room, lunch and refreshments were provided by ODI and the Humanitarian Practice Network (HPN).

In welcoming participants John Borton spoke of his feelings of dismay and anger at the TV coverage often from Lesbos, shown night after night through the summer and early autumn in which humanitarian agencies were being shown to be failing to respond effectively to the death, suffering and hardship being experienced by refugees and migrants moving from Turkey to Greece and then on to Germany and other countries. In September he had met Fotini at a conference on Humanitarian Effectiveness in Manchester and in October Norah Niland had undertaken a short volunteer stint on Lesbos in support of Fotini her friend and former colleague. An email by Norah, written on her departure from Lesbos expressing her dismay at the level of distress and unmet humanitarian need, had been widely circulated and had resulted in the formation of an email group that decided to organise this meeting. John, Norah and Fotini had volunteered their time to organise the meeting. In developing the invitation list the three co-organisers had deliberately sought to bring together a mix of organisations and individuals with a range of perspectives on the situation in Lesbos, the UK and Brussels. (See Annex A for the list of participants). As the meeting was to prove, this 'rich mix' of participants led to lots of useful exchanges and insights. One participant commented that it was a meeting of the 'unusual suspects' and it inspired her to start planning a similar mix of participants for a meeting in Brussels to be held in early 2016.

Session1: The Response in Lesbos

Fotini Rantsiou's presentation highlighted the following points:

- The importance of understanding the political and severe financial constraints that have hampered the Greek Government's ability to act effectively in responding to the dramatic increase in the flow of refugees and migrants. In the six years of its present economic crisis Greece has had five elections, one referendum, six prime ministers and nine ministers of finance. For a month before the 20th September national elections (a key period in terms of the situation in Lesbos) Greece was being run by a Caretaker Government that was unable to take decisions to facilitate the response to increased numbers arriving on Lesbos and the other islands.
- Though the refugee/migrant flows increased dramatically in the summer of 2015 they certainly did not begin then. For many years Greece has been a main entry point for refugees and migrants seeking a better life in Europe. Between 2006 and 2010 the figure of 'illegal entries' steadily increased and reached 135,000/year. Up until 2010 most of the refugees and migrants travelled through the land border with Turkey (Evros region) but in 2011 and more so in 2012, the building of the fence in Evros and doubling of the number of police guarding the border led to a decrease to 43,000 and the main flow from Turkey gradually moved to the islands of the Eastern Aegean. In 2014 Greece recorded 77,000

sometimes just a few metres from the shore. Until July most boats arrived under cover of darkness so as to avoid detection by Turkish, Greek and Frontex border patrols but from August onwards most boats arrived during the daytime. Until July most arrivals were taken to Moria or the port by coast guard buses but as the number of arrivals grew, most had to walk the 50-70kms to Moria in the hot sun, often sleeping overnight beside the road, in the region of Kalloni. Because of anti-smuggling laws it was illegal for locals to transport the arrivals - though some did. Local groups of volunteers formed to provide water and snacks to those walking along the road. As word of the desperate situation spread, international volunteers began arriving to help and for months the key frontline roles were played by volunteers.

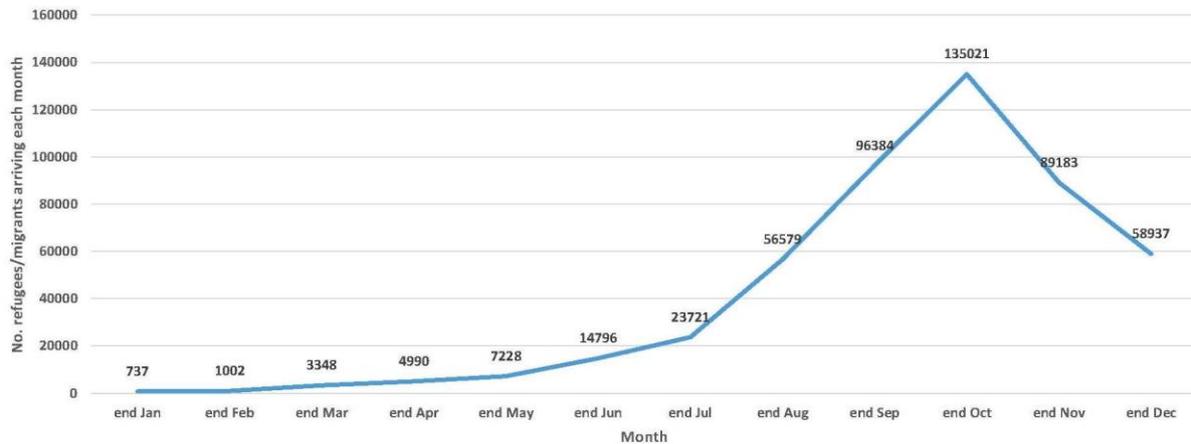


*Figure 2. Syrian refugees walking on the road to Mytilini July 2015
© Laura Padoan UNHCR.*

Much of the water, food and health care provided during the critical months of July, August and September was provided by local, independent and subsequently international volunteer groups. Though some international agencies had begun programmes in these months it was not until October that the international response began to catch up with the scale of needs. Whilst some agencies announced a presence on the island in August, in some cases this related to assessment missions rather than actual operations, or it took them several weeks to build-up the effectiveness of their programmes. Many of the vital tasks (helping people off boats, providing them with previously sorted shoes and clothing, providing hot food and water) were labour intensive and even now that international agencies have ramped-up their programmes, there is still a significant reliance upon volunteers for many of these types of task. The significant and valuable role played by volunteers raises a number of issues about coordination, accountability and effectiveness and the relationship with the host community that needs to be explored.

Figure 3. Lesvos 2015 - Refugee/Migrant Arrivals by Month

Source date from <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean>



The response by the Government in Athens was very slow due to their preoccupation with ongoing 'bailout' negotiations with the EU and IMF and the institution of a caretaker government in the month leading up to the 24th September Election. One result of this slowness was the delay in sending additional police to the island to assist with the registration process which led to a huge backlog in early September when an estimated 40,000 people were on the island with most waiting to be registered to enable their onward travel to Athens. Belatedly, additional police were drafted in from Athens and registration moved to the stadium in Mytilini.

Fotini concluded by highlighting a number of outstanding challenges including:

- The plight of the non-Syrians, Iraqis and Afghans who were now being turned back at the Greek border with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)
- The lack of funds to support the refugees in their onward journey.
- The high level of in-kind donations arriving from abroad in support of the work by volunteers was creating issues of storage space on the island. It would be better if items could be purchased locally. She noted that one of the reasons why local volunteer groups are establishing themselves as Foundations (such as the Starfish Foundation) was so they could receive cash rather than in-kind donations and handle it legally rather than having difficulties with the Greek tax authorities.
- There should be greater recognition of the contribution by the people, local authorities and the Government of Greece and greater investment in the Greek infrastructure that has borne the brunt of the influx – coastguards, health system, etc., and programmes for the vulnerable and deprived in Athens and Thessaloniki that were now also catering for refugees and migrants who were becoming 'stuck' in Greece.
- With so many volunteer groups now working in Lesvos there were problems of coordination and accountability. As a result there was increased concern and questioning of ALL humanitarian groups by the local community.

Maria Karpodini then spoke about her experience working as a volunteer on Lesvos with the two local groups 'Village of All Together' and 'Human Social Kitchen'. She had originally gone to Lesvos to volunteer for one week but had decided to stay and help and had been working there for the last four months. The volunteer group she worked with provided services, such as shelter, food and non-

food items at a site that had capacity for 120 people who were deemed to be vulnerable cases by MdM and MSF who brought the people to the site. They are staying some days as being vulnerable they are not able to move quickly through as is the case with the majority of the refugees and migrants arriving in Lesvos. Some stay longer having decided to ask for asylum in Greece. The volunteer group called Social Kitchen had originated five years before in Athens providing meals cooked for and together with those severely affected by the economic crisis in Greece. The approach therefore is more than just food provision, it is a way of giving agency and social contact and support to those in need. Social Kitchen set up a programme on Lesvos because the NGOs were focussing (at least until November) on the needs of those inside the camps/sites such as Moria. Those refugees and migrants outside the camps (such as those waiting around the port for several days to get a ferry ticket) were not being provided for and were left to their own devices. The kitchens operated from 11am to 6pm providing hot fresh 'home cooking' style meals for maybe 2000 people a day. The involvement of the refugees and migrants in preparing the food helped overcome the feeling that the people were reduced to begging. For the last three weeks Social Kitchen has been permitted to operate one day a week inside Moria camp where they are supported by other NGOs such as Oxfam and Save the Children.

As someone who was new to relief work she had been surprised that once the NGOs began operating most of their frontline work was actually being done by volunteers. In the beginning some NGOs came across as being quite arrogant, effectively saying "we are here now and we are going to operate everything" even though local people had been providing many of the services as best they could for months before the NGOs appeared. Communication with the local population and existing volunteers had been poor. Coordination was poor too. There were now many coordination meetings taking place but it didn't feel as though coordination was actually happening,

The numbers arriving has reduced significantly since the peak of September and October when it had felt quite chaotic. Now the situation feels more regularised and controlled

Discussion

The discussion following Fotini's and Maria's presentations shed light particularly on the significance and implications of a crisis in public management that has largely defined the situation on Lesvos over recent months. A number of interacting factors have played a part in this:

The domestic political and policy context in Greece has fundamentally hampered the mobilisation of an effective collective response. Although no one would dispute that the government should be primarily responsible to lead a major humanitarian response of this kind, the very challenging political and economic situation in Greece – with severe austerity measures, political turbulence and elections preceded for one month by a caretaker government – has resulted in a general lack of political leadership, ownership and accountability in respect of the humanitarian response across all parts of government. No clear lead agency or other national-level response structures were established by the Greek Government during the critical period between July to October, and in the resulting institutional vacuum, different actors and constituencies have been able to play out their different political positions and interests against the fast-changing situation. Foot-dragging by the Government with seeking additional EU funding for the refugee response (such as from DG Home's Civil Protection mechanism) and a lack of relevant experience and policies within key national

ministries also contributed to the slow and poorly coordinated response within Greece. International agencies trying to get established and step up their operations in Greece have faced crippling bureaucratic obstacles – such as difficulties with NGO registration and employment regulations – and a highly inflexible domestic policy environment with little willingness on the part of the Greek authorities to (for example) relax visa restrictions for non-EU nationals, that were preventing agencies from deploying experienced international humanitarian personnel or to suspend legal stipulations that criminalise the local transport of refugees and migrants prior to their formal registration.

National austerity measures and the associated financial controls in place in Greece have created additional difficulties for humanitarian responders trying to scale up their operations on the ground. These have included the limits on bank withdrawals (at the level of just €60/day), which severely constrained the ability of responding organisations to quickly procure goods and services at the scale that the situation called for. One representative of a large humanitarian agency talked about how their staff were having to withdraw cash daily from their own bank accounts to buy bottled water and biscuits to give out to refugees; another organisation talked about how they had resorted to flying cash in and buying supplies in supermarkets to deliver to refugees. While the local authorities on Lesbos were extremely cooperative and as helpful as they could be, they too were significantly affected by the austerity measures, including a recruitment freeze, and were unable to access any additional resources. It was noted also that the capacity of some national non-governmental organisations was limited because of their commitments to existing programmes assisting Greek nationals affected by the austerity programme. It was suggested that the debt crisis probably also inhibited the government's resolve to try to leverage emergency funding from Brussels to support refugee assistance within Greece; at the same time, political sensitivities around the national austerity programme and its impacts on the Greek population had possibly deterred early mobilisation of the START Network.

Lack of preparedness on the part of international humanitarian organisations was also highlighted as a key problem. A number of representatives of international agencies commented that their organisations were slow to recognise that the international humanitarian system had a role to play because of the location of the crisis in a developed EU member state with (it was assumed) national and/or EU capacity to implement an effective response. The fact that most international organisations were not already formally registered in Greece contributed to the delays in the larger humanitarian NGOs getting mobilised. Many humanitarian personnel arrived expecting some kind of coordinated response to be up and running and were slow to realise that the kinds of coordination that they would normally expect to find in a humanitarian emergency context were all but absent. Even now at the time of the meeting UNHCR is the only UN agency with an operational presence in Greece. The government had neither mobilised its own coordination structures nor requested international help with coordination, so although the multilateral organisations have been actively engaged in supporting the response in a number of areas – including protection work, provision of core relief items, funding buses transporting refugees and migrants on the island, funding accommodation for volunteers and setting up mobility tracking mechanisms – they have nevertheless been stymied as regards taking on any formal coordination role. Those NGOs that were already legally registered in Greece (mainly local and national organisations but with a couple of international NGO exceptions) have been overwhelmed, both in terms of their own response

capacities on the ground and by requests for partnership by other organisations that were not registered to operate in Greece. The extent to which the frontline response on Lesbos has been largely undertaken (indeed dominated during the June to October period) by volunteers and the important role played by the local authorities on Lesbos, has been striking and deserves greater recognition and appreciation by the formal humanitarian system. However, with so many volunteers and other actors involved, coordination has been a major problem up to this point. The high mobility of the refugee and migrant populations moving through Lesbos and other parts of Greece has also created particular difficulties for humanitarian agencies in terms of undertaking vulnerability and needs assessments and providing food, medical assistance and other help, as many people have been spending only a day or two on the island before moving on.

Lack of funding and personnel to support humanitarian efforts was also highlighted as a major problem affecting the refugee response on Lesbos and elsewhere in Greece. It was noted that some Greek NGOs – already running programmes to support Greek nationals affected by the country’s economic austerity programme – lacked both the funding and the national staff to scale up programmes on Lesbos. It was noted that social networking has been used very effectively by local organisations and international volunteers to mobilise funds. The formal humanitarian system has been remarkably slow to mobilise significant funding however. On the positive side, UNHCR has mounted a US\$128 appeal; with \$45.2 million already received it is supporting a winterisation operation including the provision of thermal blankets and other assistance. However, ECHO is not mandated to support humanitarian operations within an EU member state, other EU funding controlled by DG Home can only be accessed by EU member governments to support their own programmes (largely for border control purposes) and cannot directly fund operational agencies on the ground. It was reported that over the summer DFID had resisted calls to provide funding support to NGOs and it was only in mid-November that it made a significant contribution to the START Network. British-based international NGOs had not mounted a DEC appeal to raise funds directly from the UK public, in part it seems because of the fear of competition between fundraising for assistance for refugees and migrants reaching Europe and support for ongoing humanitarian programmes in Syria and the neighbouring countries. It was also suggested that some DEC agencies felt they lacked the capacity in Europe to usefully absorb significant sums of money and that initial individual agency fundraising efforts for the European refugee crisis had not attracted significant support and this had reduced the motivation to press for a major collective public appeal. One of the consequences of not mounting a DEC appeal has been an absence of coordinated advocacy between the UK NGOs of the kind that would usually accompany a joint appeal of this kind. Overall, there appears to have been a somewhat baffling contradiction between, on the one hand, some agencies unable to respond effectively because of a lack of funding, and, on the other, agencies’ reluctance to step up their fundraising efforts for this crisis.

Institutional structures and funding procedures at EU level were also highlighted as a key impediment to the mobilisation of a timely and effective humanitarian response on the ground. The EU’s relocation scheme was described by one participant as a “disaster”, having, by mid-December, only relocated 30 people from Greece and having only 2,000 places committed to by Member States out of the 160,000 places pledged and provision for only 66,000 people to be relocated from Greece over the next two years. The EU’s funding to support action on behalf of refugees and migrants is administered by DG Home which, it was suggested, lacks the kind of expertise and funding

procedures needed to support a major humanitarian response of the kind that, in humanitarian crises outside of the EU, ECHO would normally take the lead on. The EU funding procedures that can support assistance to refugees and migrants within the EU assumes member states leadership of national programmes and member states applying to Brussels for funding. It was suggested that the fact this system hasn't supported a timely and appropriate response in Greece exposes a lack of understanding and capacity within DG Home to quickly scale up support for a major humanitarian response when this is required within an EU member state.

Session 2. The principal challenges being faced by humanitarian agencies responding to the movement of refugees and migrants through Europe

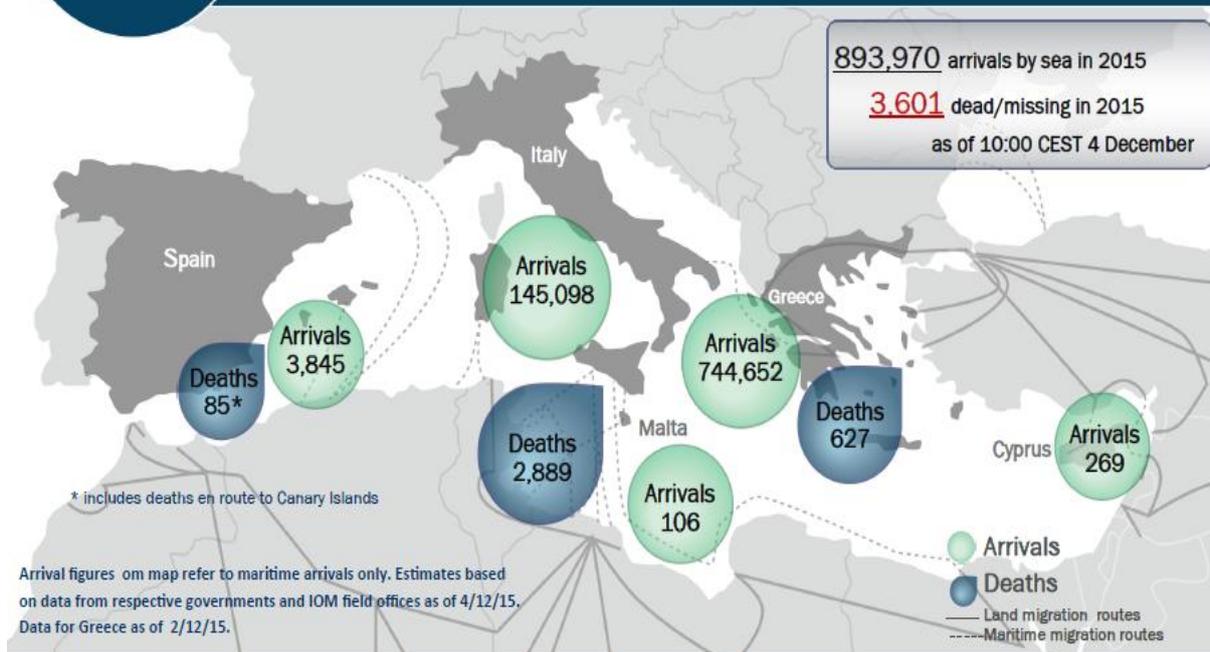
Professor Heaven Crawley explained how she was leading an international research project 'Unravelling the Mediterranean migration crisis' (MEDMIG) which was focussing on four countries (Italy, Greece, Malta and Turkey) and in the process of interviewing 500 refugees and migrants and 100 stakeholders. Her presentation today was intended to provide some context on the wider situation across Europe. She started with a resume of some of headline statistics:

- According to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) 893,970 refugees and migrants had arrived in Europe by sea by 4th December 2015, but exact numbers are unclear [NB. By the end of December the level of 1 million arrivals by sea during 2015 was officially exceeded.]
- Numbers increased dramatically in October 2015 when 210,000 arrived by sea (increase of 3,000% on October 2014)
- Although not all migrants claim asylum over 700,000 have done so, according to the EU statistics agency Eurostat
- Germany has continued to be the most popular destination for refugees and migrants arriving in Europe and has received the highest number of new asylum applications, with 331,000 applications at end of October (but shift to 'subsidiary protection')
- Large number of people are now in transit through the Balkans
- Hungary has moved into second place, as more refugees and migrants have tried to make the journey overland through Greece and the Western Balkans, 143,000 applications by the end of October
- An estimated 3,601 refugees and migrants are thought dead/missing in the Mediterranean, but this is almost certainly an underestimate as it is only when bodies are discovered that deaths are counted.
- Estimated numbers are based on arrivals detected: there is very little counting going on in the countries of departure.



Mediterranean Update

Migration Flows Europe: Arrivals and Fatalities



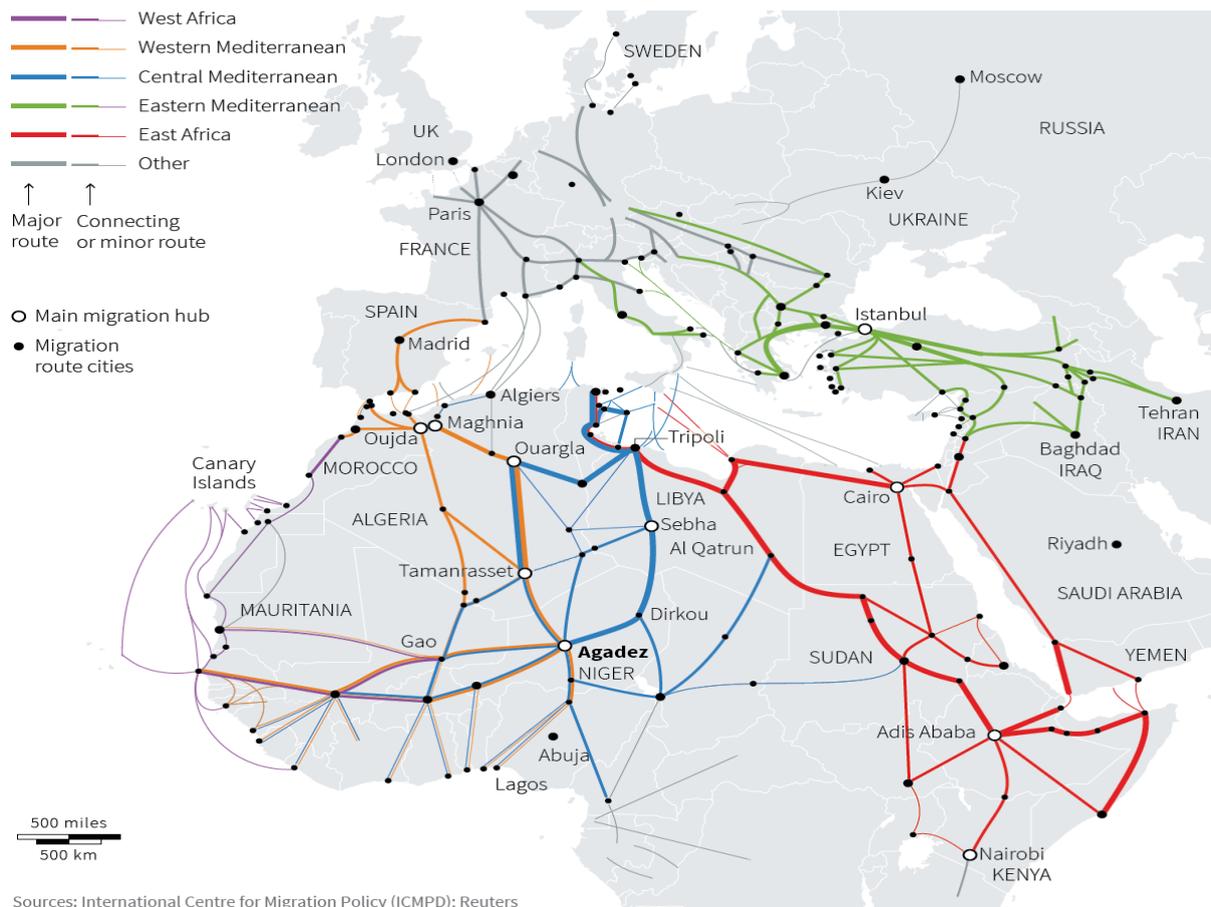
Heaven explained that while there is a lot of uncertainty about the numbers, it is clear that the arrival of refugees and migrants has become very significant in scale, even if it remains unclear precisely what kind of crisis this has triggered – hence keeping ‘crisis’ in parenthesis. In October, many people were thinking that the numbers would start to diminish, but in fact what we saw was a 3000% increase on the number of arrivals previously seen in October 2014. This was probably partly explained by people’s anxiety about borders potentially closing down or shutting off. Angela Merkel had announced in September that Germany wouldn’t limit the numbers seeking asylum in Germany, but those still in Turkey were probably aware of discussions taking place between Turkey and the EU that might lead to a deal that would hinder people from leaving Turkey in the future.

Heaven emphasised the high level of mobility of the population arriving in Lesbos and in Greece more generally. The majority have sought to move on as swiftly as possible, on to Athens and, if they have sufficient funds, onwards from there. However, the onward journey from Greece is being made more difficult by national policy changes across Europe. While most recently very large numbers have been in transit through the Balkans, some are being sent back to Athens, and those in Athens have been anxious about progressive border closures, such as Macedonia’s periodic closure of its border at Idomeni. The hard-line approach taken by President Orban in Hungary has received a lot of attention, but even Angela Merkel, under a lot of domestic political pressures, has begun to rein back some of her previous promises. This includes Germany moving its asylum policy towards ‘subsidiary protection’ rather than full refugee status to Syrians, and some asylum-seekers have been returned to Hungary from Germany and from there to Greece.

As borders close, the dominant patterns of movement change, but the constant sense of onward movement is important. With the recent closure of the FYROM border, there was a shift towards a potential route through Albania to Italy. It is possible that the tightening of policing in Turkey in response to Turkey’s recent discussions with the EU will lead to more people attempting routes from Libya. For this reason, it is very hard for humanitarian actors to know where to focus their resources. And researchers have reason to be concerned about how their intelligence about people’s movements might be used, potentially driving political agendas affecting the direction of flows.



There is also a larger and long-standing African migration picture, with a complex set of routes and situations that are driving movement. While this is not a new phenomenon as such, what is new is that the dynamics have shifted recently for a variety of reasons. Heaven explained that her research shows that people’s actual movement does not follow clear routes between places: the routes they follow are very messy, reflecting the extent to which people adapt to the local situation and to new information. Social media is playing a very important role in providing people with immediate information from others already en-route that people on the move then use to shift their own journeys.



In terms of the causes of the 'crisis', Heaven emphasised that conflict is the biggest single reason for increased population flows. Although the popular media in Europe will often portray the majority as economic migrants, in fact, according to UNHCR data, 85% are those trying to reach Europe are from the top ten refugee producing countries. Among those arriving in Greece, 93% are from these ten countries, all of which are characterised by war, conflict and persecution – with the vast majority (around 90%) currently arriving on Lesbos coming from Syrian, Afghanistan and Iraq. The populations following the Libyan route into Italy are a different, more mixed composition, including people from Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan, West African countries and Asia, including Pakistan and Bangladesh. Although some of these people may have originally left because of their inability to make a livelihood (particularly among those coming from West and Central Africa), once they are on the move, people's categorisation as economic migrants or refugees becomes increasingly problematic. There is a continuum, with people moving in a mixture of circumstances and shifting in and out of sometimes arbitrary categories, e.g. Hazaras from Iran who fear persecution but also cannot make a living because of discrimination, or Syrians moving on from camp contexts or from Turkey and therefore not necessarily moving from a zone that is directly affected by conflict.

And, of course, most don't come to Europe at all: millions of Syrians are being hosted by Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon, and across the world there are refugee crises that are much larger in scale and longer in duration than the current crisis in Europe. One is led to question whether Europe is facing a migration crisis, or more a crisis of solidarity. Heaven compared the UK Government's commitment to take in 20,000 Syrian refugees over a 5 year period with Lebanon, a country of just 4.5 million which was already hosting nearly 1.2 million refugees from Syria.

It is not the large-scale movement of people *per se* that is the challenge for Europe. Heaven noted that half a billion tourists visit the EU each year and they can move around freely. It is the irregular arrivals of people without visas or from contexts in which it is not possible to gain visas who want to enter for protection that has brought serious challenges to the idea of a common asylum system and the free movement of peoples within Europe. At root, it is the lack of safe and legal opportunities to enter the EU which is the major problem. A person cannot enter Europe for protection or for work if they are coming from certain contexts and countries. This has led to huge pressures on control systems, not just at the EU's external border controls, such as between Greece and Turkey, but on internal borders within the EU, as reflected in the near suspension of the Dublin Regulation and cascading border closures, such as we saw with Hungary's border closures in mid-September followed by Croatia's moves to close its borders a month later. This has significantly contributed to the humanitarian crisis, not least because humanitarian agencies are having to second-guess where to put their resources as people's movement is shifted from one route to another.

Heaven emphasised that Europe has been on the back foot in terms of migration and asylum for decades, and that the current crisis is symptomatic of a system that is at least ten years out of sync, with the realities of the 'age of migration' in which we live (as Steven Castles would call it).¹ The realities of migration, of movement, of social communication networks are entirely at odds with how Europe thinks about these things in policy terms. This was reflected in the shock and surprise that greeted the idea that 40,000 relocation places might be created, and yet it very clearly became obvious that this was not enough, and the figure was upped to 160,000, of which only 2,200 places have been allocated. These numbers are tiny in relation to the need, which is probably much closer to 1 million over the course of 2015 for those arriving in Europe, not to mention the additional people who would need protection under any kind of resettlement programme. The gap between the 'talk' and the 'walk' on migration and asylum issues at EU level is quite striking. It is a fundamentally political problem, and continuing discussions between the EU's member states have failed to move things closer to any kind of meaningful resolution. The Valetta Migration Summit, for example, was intended to focus on long term solutions, but in the end it focused almost exclusively on border controls and how to tie funding to readmission agreements. It reflects a crisis of politics and solidarity, and brings into question the very foundations of why the EU was established in the first place, as essentially a project to create solidarity between European countries that had been fighting one another. Member states are now unable to agree on anything, and if they do agree, they don't deliver on what they have agreed. It is a crisis of solidarity coming from the top, and people volunteering on the ground are left with trying to cope with the consequences.

Discussion

The discussion following Heaven's presentation focused initially on hearing from the humanitarian agencies represented at the meeting about the challenges they have faced in responding to such a fluid situation in other parts of Europe as people have moved northwards. Key challenges and concerns that were highlighted include:

¹ Castles, S., et al. (2014). *The Age of Migration: international population movements in the modern world*. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.

Challenges associated with the mobility of the refugee and migrant populations arriving and travelling through Europe:

The fluid nature of the migrant and refugee populations in Europe has exacerbated many of the challenges that might be seen in other humanitarian situations. Agency representatives explained how difficult it has been to identify and respond to people's needs when they are constantly moving. Agencies' responses to this challenge have included focusing resources and support at bottleneck sites where people might spend a few hours or stay overnight or longer, such as ports and reception centres. Some have also sought to make their own resources more mobile and try to anticipate the location of needs according to how people's migration routes are shifting as a consequence of border closures and other factors, although this has proved difficult to do as the locations of bottlenecks have been unpredictable and fast-changing. Others have adopted systems for relaying information about people's needs on to the next country of destination so that they can be assisted more effectively in accordance with their profile. The dissemination of information among highly mobile refugees and migrants – much of it changing very rapidly – has posed particular problems, forcing agencies to think of more innovative ways of communicating information to people, such as including leaflets with distribution packs and as using online platforms in multiple languages that point people towards services, onward transportation and the like. Some agencies have also had to invest a considerable level of resources in transport services – particularly buses – to help people move safely.

Identifying and responding to people's priority needs:

Protection activities were highlighted as a particular challenge, related to the chaotic and dangerous conditions in which people are moving. A particularly important cause of trauma among refugees and migrants in Lesbos and other arrival sites in the Mediterranean region is among parents who have been separated from their children and fear that they have drowned, as well as separated or unaccompanied children. Hence family tracing and restoring family links, and child protection, have been a particularly important area of activity for some agencies. While the mobility of the refugees and migrants presents challenges for all forms of health assistance, responding to trauma and people's mental health needs was identified as a particular problem, given the very short time that most agencies are in contact with people before they move on. The importance of agencies establishing contacts with local authorities in destination countries and preparing for people's longer-term mental health and integration needs was stressed.

Lack of local and regional coordination:

The lack of a joined-up regional strategy, with each transit and receiving country largely pursuing its own policies, has inhibited the development of a regionally coordinated humanitarian response. Communication across borders has been weak, so it has been difficult to reduce or avoid duplication in assistance efforts.

Preparedness and capacity challenges among humanitarian agencies:

A number of agency representatives underlined the importance of preparing for next year, given the likelihood that the number of arrivals will escalate again after an expected drop in numbers during the winter months. Many agencies have been scaling up their presence along migration routes and some have been working to improve their own coordination mechanisms and are establishing partnerships with local and national organisations. But these responses have been slow overall up to

now, and meanwhile, in some of the most affected arrival and transit locations, volunteers are increasingly fatigued, so the longer-term sustainability of some response operations is in question. It was also noted that agencies should be preparing for people being returned involuntarily to countries both inside the EU, such as Hungary, and to non-EU countries such as Serbia. There is a risk of a sudden increase in numbers in some transit countries as a result of returns from EU member states, and it is not clear that there is any planning in place at the European level to prepare for this and the problems inherent in *refoulement*.

Challenging political and policy context and lack of humanitarian space:

Several participants stressed that this is a crisis of Europe's own making, caused by governments not allowing refugees any legal and safe ways of seeking protection in Europe. There is a concern that decision-makers in Brussels are not sufficiently informed about the evolving situation on the ground, and regardless of humanitarian needs, they have little interest in helping people. Indeed, the primary priority for the EU is to try to keep people away and to avoid creating a 'pull' factor by providing assistance or ensuring improved conditions. This remains a very significant problem in Greece. The policy context is not helped by people located in different countries being subject to different laws and policy approaches, and by the lack of regional analysis that incorporates the changing contexts in countries of origin, transit and destination. Overall, there is very little humanitarian space for refugees and migrants and the agencies seeking to assist them in Europe. Politicians are running scared of their electorates, and humanitarian voices are being drowned out by anti-immigrant movements. Humanitarian agencies need to make the arguments for humanitarian space more forcefully, just as they are accustomed to doing in seeking humanitarian access in other crisis contexts. There have been some important pleas made for a better managed, realistic and humanitarian response to the crisis, such as from François Crépeau, UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants and Bruno Maçães former Portuguese European Affairs Minister. Otherwise the risk is of a brutal 'Calais-type' response writ large across the EU. Some agencies have been advocating for European governments to introduce humanitarian passports to allow people needing protection to travel in safety, as has been mooted in discussions connected with the 2016 Humanitarian Summit. France and Brazil have reportedly used humanitarian visas in a very limited way. However, whereas, historically, comparable schemes might have helped address the specific problem of statelessness of particular refugee groups in a context in which they could otherwise expect to find protection, in the current European context, protection options are minimal or absent for the majority of refugees. The lack of humanitarian space in the context of Europe's refugee and migration crisis is fundamental to responses at local, national and EU levels, and so promoting and expanding humanitarian space in Europe is a key challenge for humanitarian actors in the current context. There is a need for a systematic campaign to improve the perception of refugees and migrants, and for coordinated advocacy approaches among humanitarian actors. Although there is considerable advocacy activity in Brussels and Geneva, it was suggested that this could be better linked up with NGO advocacy at national level. It was also noted that NGOs are finding it difficult to come together with specific recommendations for policy-makers.

Discussion in the second session also included some consideration of the historical context to the current movements of refugees and migrants across Europe. Compared with Europe's large-scale refugee and other population movements of the past, such as those that immediately followed the Second World War, the current situation involves comparatively very small numbers, and thus, not

only globally, but in terms of Europe's own experience, they cannot be seen as exceptional in terms of overall scale. It should be remembered, however, that Europe's history of responding to refugee flows is not a very positive one. Moreover, the economic and political context of population movements is always of paramount importance, and in the current situation, difficult economic conditions in Greece and other transit and receiving countries is a key part of the crisis context. As well as understanding the local context, it is crucial to understand the wider context of policy and legislation. In the current situation, the crisis is unfolding in the context of a crippled and unravelling EU, an entirely inadequate 1951 UN Refugee Convention, and powerful domestic political forces that politicians fear threatening a backlash if they do not deliver on the controls that electorates, or parts thereof, are demanding. Also very significant is the context of the humanitarian system, with competition and weak coordination between different organisations that so often causes dysfunction and failure in international humanitarian responses.

**** Lunch ****

Session 3. Protection and the role of humanitarian agencies in advocacy

Dr Cathryn Costello began the afternoon session with her presentation 'Understanding the European Refugee Crisis: Lesbos as Milestone & Microcosm'. She had visited Lesbos in the summer and seen the humanitarian efforts underway and engages with humanitarian agency personnel as a result of her role in running the Refugee Studies Centre's International Summer School in Forced Migration. She had often been struck by the disjuncture between asylum and international refugee law and humanitarian practice with its clear moral and ethical mandate. She suggested that humanitarian actors need to be very mindful of legal principles and rules for sometimes it is the law itself that creates problems and dilemmas for humanitarian actors.

Legal & Institutional responsibilities

From a legal perspective, Greece has been in breach of both EU and human rights law for years in its (harsh) treatment of refugees and this could be seen as a case of 'pervasive state failure' particularly on reception conditions. This needed to be also seen in the context of the shortcomings and failings of the 'Dublin System' (comprising the Dublin Regulation and EURODAC, the European fingerprint database for identifying asylum seekers and 'irregular' migrants). Though designed to speedily assign responsibility for the processing of asylum applications so as to avoid the phenomenon of 'asylum shopping' and 'refugees in orbit', the Dublin system places most of the burden for processing and caring for asylum seekers on countries like Greece in the east and south of the EU, where refugees and migrants first enter Europe and are supposed to make their asylum claims. The Dublin system also creates perverse incentives. For instance governments of 'frontline states' may be tempted to make themselves as unwelcoming as possible in the hope that refugees and migrants will seek asylum elsewhere. Also refugees and migrants have an incentive to break the EU rules by delaying making their asylum claims until they have arrived in wealthier, more welcoming countries, such as Germany.

There exist decades of human rights concerns and case law in the EU context. A key case challenging the practice under the Dublin System of transferring asylum applicants back to the country of first entry under the Dublin Regulation had been the 2011 finding by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in the 'M.S.S. v Belgium & Greece case'. The Court found that the removal of an Afghan asylum seeker from Belgium to Greece under the Dublin II Regulation was a violation of the prohibition of ill-treatment, and the right to an effective remedy as laid out in the European Convention on Human Rights on account of detention conditions for asylum seekers in Greece, deficiencies in the Greek asylum procedure, and inadequate reception conditions. The idea that refugees and migrants should be held in Greece or that asylum seekers should be returned there from other EU countries was deeply problematic. Though the Dublin system is claimed to be a 'cornerstone' of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), it is not fit for its intended purpose and is definitely part of the problem.

Understanding the interactions that take place between EU institutions and Member States is critical but such information is often hard to access. It can also be hard to understand why humanitarian issues don't seem to be considered in the decisions taken. For instance in designating Moria as a refugee screening 'Hotspot' on Lesbos in October 2015 why did nobody consider where the thousands of refugees and migrants were going to sleep while awaiting their registration? Though the designation of Moria was ultimately a Greek decision, the Greek government was implementing a Commission decision and so responsibility for its outcome should be a shared responsibility between Greece and the Commission. EU institutions such as EASO (the European Asylum Support Office based in Malta) and Frontex (the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union based in Warsaw) do not have refugee protection as a primary function. This raises significant questions about the appropriateness of the expertise mix within European institutions that are at the 'frontline' of the current crisis. It is also important to be aware of the different interests of member states and the way that these interact. For instance Germany's interests are very different from those of Greece which was quickly faced by a humanitarian crisis and, thus, an interest in allowing the refugees to pass through as quickly as possible.

Why irregular journeys?

The introduction of mandatory visas, carrier sanctions and other border control measures since the 1990s have created a situation where the only way to claim asylum is to take unsafe and illegal routes, often facilitated by smugglers. It is a paradox that as the demand for asylum increases so the options for achieving it are closed down. This is well illustrated by the number of Schengen visas issued to Syrians dropping as a result of the development of the war in Syria from over 30,000 in 2010 (before the start of the civil unrest) to almost zero in 2013 (as illustrated in a 2015 report by the EU's Fundamental Rights Agency (EUFRA) 'Legal entry channels to the EU for persons in need of international protection: a toolbox'). This paradox is the result of a combination of EU Member States closing down diplomatic representation, not issuing visas because of the fear of overstay and the difficulty for a persecuted individual actually being able to get into an embassy of an EU member state in a highly policed area of Damascus. It is the lack of legal and safe routes to seek asylum in the EU that lies at the root of what has been happening. In Cathryn's view there is now a much wider appreciation of the fact that refugees are forced to expose themselves to risks and pay smugglers simply because they lack access to safe and legal routes to seek asylum.

Why are irregular journeys so dangerous?

Faced with the barrier of controls that prevent the use of normal modes of transport (airlines, ferries, trains and buses) refugees have been forced to take unsafe and illegal routes. Turkey actually has two land borders with the EU – with Greece and with Bulgaria - but their fortification over recent years has served to deflect refugee flows from the crossing of land borders to the crossing of sea borders. The sea route is facilitated and controlled by smugglers in what, during 2015, became a business worth hundreds of millions of euros a year. The risks to life are significant. Over 3,500 people died during sea crossings of the Mediterranean so far during 2015. To reinforce the point that it is not an issue of numbers but of safe and legal routes, Cathryn cited Heathrow airport which handles 201,000 arrivals and departures every day and 73.4 million passengers every year. Issuing humanitarian visas to enable refugees to use normal travel modes to cross borders would make it safer not only for the refugees themselves but also for the receiving countries which would be able to receive and process them at established facilities.

A key policy response by the EU led by Chancellor Merkel who visited Ankara in October was the 'EU-Turkey Action Plan' agreed by EU Heads in November aimed at 'stemming the flow of migrants to Europe'. The deal involves Turkey increasing naval patrols and border checks in exchange for the EU providing €3 billion over 2 years for Syrian refugees in Turkey and the offer of restarting talks on Turkey's possible accession to the EU. Cathryn's perspective was that the EU had failed to use the opportunity to leverage increased protection for refugees in Turkey, particularly in relation to the right of refugees to work in Turkey. Something had apparently been promised on this and may emerge over time.

Onward journeys in Europe

A feature of the 'Balkans route' is that it involves leaving Greece, an EU Member State, and crossing non-EU states (Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia) before entering the EU again through either Hungary or Slovenia). The legal responsibilities and practices of the EU in allowing and managing this movement are complex and questionable. There had been a moment at the end of the summer when it might have been possible to have reframed the relocations from Greece as a 'humanitarian evacuation' but this did not happen.

The other key policy response by the EU to the dramatic increase in refugee and migrant arrivals in 2015 had been the September proposal to relocate 160,000 people in clear need of international protection from Italy, Greece and Hungary under Article 78(3) of the Treaty, with €780million being provided to support the scheme primarily in the receiving countries but also in the three sending countries. At a conceptual level this proposal had been exciting in that it proposed genuine responsibility sharing beyond the first countries of entry, in effect saying 'asylum seekers in Greece are our responsibility'. The first relocations had taken place in October involving a group of 19 asylum seekers relocated amid much publicity from Italy to Sweden. But regrettably the policy is simply not working - as of early November only 116 people had been relocated – but as yet the reasons for this poor rate of implementation are not clear.

What are the alternatives?

Alternative avenues include: resettlement; humanitarian admission programmes; humanitarian visas; simplifying visa requirements for certain nationalities and groups; more generous use of family

reunification rules; and the use of existing channels for regular migration. There is an argument that Member States have a legal duty to issue humanitarian visas under the Schengen border code but so far this has not been taken up, partly because the political environment is not conducive. Paths not yet taken in the current crisis include orderly departure programmes, the provision of safe passage once refugees have reached the EU (to avoid the hazards and hardships of the overland Balkans route) and invoking the EU Temporary Protection Directive. The Syrian Donors Conference to be held in London in early February offers some potential for large scale-resettlement from the main host countries (Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey).

Rethinking smuggling prohibitions

The 2004 UN Protocol against the 'Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air' forms a key component on the prohibitions on people smuggling. During 2015 these prohibitions were reinforced and militarised by EU decision to launch an EU military operation in the southern central Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR MED) and Security Council Resolution 2240 on migrant smuggling and human trafficking into, through and from the Libyan territory and off the coast of Libya. Interestingly the UN Protocol only talks about smuggling in terms of an activity undertaken for financial gain so under this particular definition a humanitarian agency transporting refugees by boat so long as they don't take any money for it may not be 'smuggling'. However, some national laws are overbroad and criminalise other forms of assistance to irregular migrants. Cathryn reminded participants that the International Refugee Organisation (the temporary specialised agency that was a precursor to UNHCR in the period 1946-52) had had its own ships to transport refugees. It had been taken for granted then that refugee transport was part and parcel of its remit for refugee protection.

Cathryn chose to end on a high note referring to the Supreme Court of Canada's recent finding that the anti-smuggling provisions in Canada's 2001 Immigration and Refugee Protection Act were unconstitutional on the grounds of their suppression of humanitarian welfare and the punishment of asylum seekers making use of smugglers services. A lapel badge worn by Canadian campaigners states 'Proud to Aid and Abet Refugees'.

Norah Niland then added a few points drawing on the Discussion Paper but also additional points arising from Cathryn's presentation.

- She questioned the EU's recent strategy of using Turkey as a 'gatekeeper' to stem the flow of refugees. What will be the implications of this for the many and often contradictory agendas within Turkey and between Turkey and its allies, such as the contradiction between US support for the Kurds in confronting ISIS/Daesh and Turkey's conflict with the Kurds?
- Precedents were being set not just in terms of refugees but also in terms of values. Many other countries have long hosted far larger numbers of refugees often with only limited financial support from the EU but now that the EU, with a population of 500 million, is facing an influx of refugees, it is with some notable exceptions, behaving badly. Other countries around the world will be watching and may well alter their own behaviour towards refugees in the future.
- What are the narratives that are forming public opinion and how have these emerged? The overarching narrative appears to be 'keep them out' and terms such as 'illegal migrants', and

'smugglers' are freely used. Such terms and soundbites are corroding the rights of those in need of asylum.

- The reality is that with conflict and instability affecting so many parts of the Middle East, Afghanistan and Africa people will keep coming to Europe wanting to seek asylum and a better life. European countries have played a role in many of these conflicts either through their foreign policy or direct military intervention. Europe should be examining its role in contributing to the generation of refugees.

Discussion

The discussion following Cathryn's presentation and Norah's additional points focussed on four main themes: Turkey; Coordination; Narratives and Public Opinion; and Collaboration and Advocacy.

Turkey

Turkey has been hosting Syrian refugees since 2012 and currently there are 2.2 million Syrian refugees in the country. Whilst the scale of Turkey's contribution was recognised and praised, the status and rights of Syrian refugees in the country was a concern for several participants. Up until 2013 Turkey had maintained a geographical reservation on the 1951 Refugee Convention so that most non-European asylum seekers were not entitled to stay in Turkey even after gaining recognised refugee status. The 2013 Law on Foreigners and International Protection brought much of Turkish law in line with international and European standards. Nevertheless, non-European refugees – including Syrians - are issued with temporary protection status that precludes permanent settlement in Turkey. Though the administrative and legal response is evolving, the reality is that many Syrian refugees live outside established camps in urban areas, are not registered, do not have work authorisation and are, therefore, obliged to work in the informal sector or in unacceptable conditions at very low wages. The risk of undercutting Turkish workers was only serving to increase resentment towards the Syrians. The difficult conditions in Turkey were felt to be an important factors motivating Syrian refugees to try to reach Europe.

The EU-Turkey Agreement was criticised for not having leveraged stronger commitments from the Turkish Government on improving the rights of Syrian refugees to access formal employment and health care in Turkey. Undertakings had apparently been given but it was unclear whether and when they would be met.

Several participants shared the concern about Turkey's new role as a 'gatekeeper' for refugees to the EU. The relationship between Greece and Turkey has been openly hostile for much of the period since 1832 when Greece achieved independence from the Ottoman Empire, though the last 25 years have seen efforts by both sides to reduce tensions and increase trade. The ability of smugglers to operate off the coast around Izmir has often been mystifying and the relationship between the smugglers and the Turkish police is at best unclear. It is widely believed that smuggling gangs pay-off the Turkish Coastguard and Police in order to operate. Turkey can exercise control over the flows when it wants – for instance in the well-publicised arrest of hundreds of smugglers and irregular migrants (presumably including many refugees) in the period following the EU-Turkey agreement in November. The view was that the EU-Turkey Agreement will change the situation in some ways but it is very unlikely that it will stop the flows.

That more agencies were not working on the Turkish side of the Aegean in order to provide greater protection for refugees was commented on by a number of participants. An organisation that is doing so said that for a combination of reasons it was necessary for agencies to keep a low profile as smuggling gangs made it a dangerous context for the agencies as well as for the refugees.

Coordination

Coordination, whether at the operational, national, regional and EU-wide levels, was a recurrent theme in the discussions.

Regarding coordination at the operational level on Lesbos, many participants felt that UNHCR was clearly the agency that should be coordinating the response. Though the agency has had a national staff presence on Lesbos since 2010 and within the Moria First Reception Centre since 2013 and had supported many response efforts during the summer of 2015, its performance in terms of coordination and leadership had clearly not been sufficient. Representatives of the agency contended that its role is always to work in support of the host government and not to lead the response. Acknowledging the weakness of the Greek Government's leadership and coordination, particularly at the Athens level, and recognising the challenges faced by the Government as a result of the severe austerity measures, some participants suggested the secondment of experienced personnel from UNHCR, IOM and international NGOs as a way of strengthening the Government's capacity to manage the crisis. The precedent for such secondments has already been established on Lesbos where some agencies were in discussions to second staff to the local authorities to help strengthen their capacity. It was pointed out that agency personnel working on Lesbos often forgot that they were working in Greece and needed to involve Greek authorities in their operational and coordination discussions. For instance, it was pointless to organise meetings to discuss registration to which the police on Lesbos had not been invited.

Coordination was needed across the Aegean as well as on the Greek side of it. The lack of humanitarian agencies working with refugees along the Turkish coast came up at different points in the discussion. Agencies needed to be active in order to enhance the protection needed by refugees and migrants planning to attempt the sea crossing.

Coordination was also lacking within the EU. Officials in Brussels were often ill-informed about the situation on the ground and those agencies present in meetings in Brussels sometimes found themselves having to provide briefings and updates. DG Home's unfamiliarity with working with NGOs and the lack of flexible funding mechanisms was a real challenge. Here also the suggestion was made that DG Home should be strengthened – possibly through the secondment of experienced personnel from ECHO. Because of the EU context there was an urgent need for stronger EU coordination – the creation of an EU Supremo to coordinate the overall management of the flows was suggested. With regard to the particular challenges of refugees and migrants passing through the non-EU countries (principally FYROM and Serbia), it was suggested that agencies should take the initiative of forming their own 'Safe Passage Working Group'.

Narratives and Public Opinion

It was recognised that, regrettably, the predominant narrative in the UK media and amongst large sections of the public, is one that is unwelcoming and increasingly hostile towards refugees. This had

only worsened since the November 13 attacks in Paris. The term 'migrant' is too often being used to describe people, the majority of whom are fleeing conflict and persecution and have clear rights to asylum and protection. Also present is the language is the notion of 'queue jumping'. The UK Government's announcement in September that it would take Syrian 20,000 refugees from the camps in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey over the next five years had introduced a sort of 'humanitarian offside rule' into the debate – the idea that if you stay in the region you are eligible for resettlement but if you try to get into Europe you disqualify yourself in the eyes of the UK Government.

On the other hand there were significant sections of the public and civil society that were not only welcoming refugees but prepared to volunteer to help them. The willingness of ordinary people to offer accommodation in their homes or to take relief goods to Lesvos and work as a volunteer on the island (or nearer to home in the camps in Calais and Dunkirk) or to send money to volunteer groups and agencies responding to the needs of refugees and migrants was to be welcomed and embraced. It proved a strong counter to the dominant narrative and should be given greater prominence and built upon.

Some participants viewed established humanitarian agencies as being too slow in recognising the potential benefits of the strong volunteer ethos. Small groups of well-meaning, but inexperienced and sometimes misguided, volunteers could take up an agency's time and be difficult to work with. But in many cases they were providing much-needed services and, as shown by events in Lesvos over the summer, had actually substituted significantly for established agencies at a critical juncture. In their view the 'volunteer phenomenon' presented a significant opportunity for the formal humanitarian system and should be embraced. UNHCR itself recognises the contribution of volunteers and has supported them by covering accommodation costs. An alternative view was that there were now too many volunteer groups on Lesvos that were proving difficult to coordinate and that, given the anti-refugee policies being adopted by some EU member states and increasingly hostile public attitudes towards refugees, it would be helpful if some volunteers remained at home and focussed their efforts on changing those policies and attitudes. How to channel the 'volunteer phenomenon' from action on the ground to advocacy back home was an important challenge for agencies - whether humanitarian or refugee/asylum agencies.

That this more generous and welcoming section of public opinion could be mobilised for the good was shown by the change in the UK Government's approach in September. Before then, approaches to the Home Office for an increase in the number of refugees being offered asylum in the UK above the annual level of 500-700 had been politely but firmly rebuffed. The campaign #RefugeesWelcome involving organisations such as City of Sanctuary and Citizens UK that had organised marches in London and other cities changed that. The Prime Minister began to think his leadership and the media might be out of sync with the British public and in September there was the announcement that 20,000 Syrian refugees would be admitted to the UK. It didn't go far enough but it represented a very significant shift. Interestingly, public opinion polling on attitudes to refugees did not change much during this period. What seemed to happen was that the 'pro-refugee' voice suddenly got stronger in the August/September period and more notice was taken of it.

Despite this success, it was noted that there haven't been many 'big voices' talking about migration and our obligations to refugees in a constructive way. There is a sense that some of the

organisations and personalities that might want to speak out and head-up such a debate are keeping their heads down because of the negativity of much of the public debate – the ‘toxic narrative’. The view was expressed that some of the larger humanitarian NGOs may be keeping their heads down because of their reliance on government funding via DFID. Though DFID personnel probably sympathised with their agency counterparts, the fact that the political leadership thought differently and that the Home Office and other Departments were ‘pulling in the other direction’ meant that agencies were reluctant to be seen criticising and campaigning against government policy. Nevertheless this was the reality of the situation and the *realpolitik* that has to be engaged with.

Collaboration and Advocacy

There was broad agreement that more collaboration was needed within the overall NGO community, particularly between humanitarian NGOs and those working on refugee and asylum issues, if EU and national policies were to be improved and the ‘toxic narrative’ challenged. Differences in NGO mandates and in their relative capacities and strengths means that it is difficult for them to speak out on certain issues even though they might want to. NGOs need to be collaborating with each other if all the issues are to be worked on and spoken out on.

In the UK a Refugee Crisis Working Group co-chaired by the British Refugee Council and IRC had been formed in 2015. Made up of humanitarian, human rights and refugee and asylum NGOs it discusses advocacy and policy work. It is currently working on a letter to the UK Prime Minister to be published in the New Year calling for a stronger response by the UK Government across a range of areas. The Working Group has also aligned itself with, and has been working with, other groups that have been publically vocal about the crisis – including a group of over 300 lawyers that had written a letter to the Prime Minister in October and a group of Bishops that had sent a letter to the Prime Minister in September. In a week’s time IRC was also holding a public meeting in the House of Commons chaired by a former Supreme Court Judge and a panel including senior MPs, a leading immigration lawyer, a Bishop and a senior IRC staff member.

Another agency spoke about the benefits of linking up with local organisations, volunteer groups and lawyer’s networks in Belgium. The Belgian Government’s policy was not to provide accommodation until asylum claims had been processed and a backlog in processing asylum claims meant that currently over a thousand asylum seekers were being forced to live rough without protection. For a period the agency had used its office space to provide accommodation for hundreds of asylum-seekers which had made working conditions interesting! Just recently an advocacy group supported by the agency had won a legal case against the Belgian Government in which the Government’s policy was declared illegal. Humanitarian agencies would need to get used to working on, or at least supporting, such legal challenges.

It was pointed out that one of the most effective advocacy strategies was to mobilise members of the public to encourage/put pressure on their local MP to engage with the issue. The people that politicians listen to most are those that vote for them and especially those who go and talk to them about the issue. Organisations need to provide information and create the opportunities to enable constituents to meet with their MPs to raise these issues. There is a serious lack of political leadership on this issue. Such local level work coupled with national campaigns such as #RefugeesWelcome helped to create and expand the ‘political space’ for the issue. Agencies working together have a stronger voice and be more effective at creating this political space. There are

politicians willing to speak out on this issue but they need the space and the support to help them to do so. Groups such as City of Sanctuary and Citizens UK are proving effective in mobilising the public in this way.

Effective advocacy is also needed at the EU level. A group of five operational humanitarian agencies has been formed in Brussels and is planning a first meeting in January. Currently two documents are being prepared – an exposé of what has been going on in Lesvos and a collective policy document on what needs to change in terms of EU and national policies. IRC was in the process of expanding its Brussels staff in order to scale up its advocacy and policy work in Brussels and had recently encouraged a special meeting of the LIBE committee (on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs) to discuss the ‘Hotspots’ policy and how poorly it was working on Lesvos.

A number of opportunities for advocacy work during 2016 were identified including:

- the Syrian Donors Conference hosted by Britain, Germany, Norway, Kuwait and the United Nations to be held in London on 4th February 2016
- the process within the EU to develop a successor to the Dublin 111 Regulation with the Commission’s proposals to be published in March 2016
- A ‘High-level meeting on global responsibility-sharing through pathways for admission of Syrian refugees’ organized by ICVA to be held in Geneva on 30th March 2016
- the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) to be held in Istanbul on 23-24 May 2016
- the UN Summit on Addressing Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants, to be held in the General Assembly in September 2016

There was broad support for calls for advocacy to focus on the humanitarian aspects of the current situation and ensuring that humanitarian standards applied elsewhere in the world were also applied and adhered to within Europe. Good advocacy in a fast moving world required the capacity to respond quickly to developments. For instance, immediately after the recent UK Parliament vote to extend bombing of ISIS/Daesh from Iraq to Syria it would have been quite appropriate for humanitarian agencies to have made clear statements to the effect that ‘OK you have taken that decision but it will have humanitarian implications including people moving out of the areas being attacked and seeking sanctuary elsewhere – quite probably in Europe.’ The need to develop shared advocacy positions on issues such as humanitarian visas and enabling asylum-seekers to access visa-issuing mechanisms in embassies was also suggested with the example of Brazil being cited. Since 2013 Syrian refugees have been able to apply for special ‘humanitarian’ visas at Brazilian consulates in the Middle East. The visas facilitate their travel to Brazil where on arrival they can then register their asylum claim. So far 8,000 Syrians have been granted these visas.

Cathryn’s suggestion that agencies should consider ‘humanitarian smuggling’ as a way of making a high profile point with particular European Member States was discussed. It was not regarded as entirely fanciful (indeed it was understood to have been actively considered for a while by a particular humanitarian agency) but was likely to be regarded as illegal.

Session 4. Conclusions and next steps

John expressed his gratification that the dismay and anger that had motivated Norah, Fotini and himself to organise the meeting had found a positive channel. The 'rich mix' of people brought together by the meeting had facilitated useful and rich information exchange and discussions. The three co-organisers were keen that the meeting should lead to more than just a report on the meeting. It should be followed up in some way, but despite the rich discussions, he was unclear as to what sort of follow-up would make sense. He wanted to hear participant's thoughts on what sort of follow-up might usefully be undertaken in order to complement 'what was already out there'. The ensuing discussion made a number points.

Networks and platforms for policy work and advocacy already exist at the EU level in Brussels. The European NGO Platform on Asylum and Migration (EPAM) had been in existence for over 20 years and was the main meeting place for European NGOs and networks seeking to contribute to the development of asylum and migration policies in the EU. It regularly held meetings covering many of the same topics discussed today. Another network based in Brussels is the Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies (VOICE) which brings together and represents European NGOs active in humanitarian aid around the world. Both networks are well established.

However, they do not work closely together and consequently the many humanitarian NGOs do not participate as actively as they might within EPAM. There was certainly a case for greater collaboration between the two communities and EPAM and VOICE would be key in ensuring this and would endeavour to work more closely together in future.

Other weaknesses of the current structures were identified:

- The existing networks and platforms at the EU level comprised established organisations. Because of their organisational membership structures these networks and platforms were not readily open to the rich community of volunteer and solidarity groups that had developed during 2015 and they would need to adapt if they were to reach-out to, involve, collaborate with and exploit the potential of such groups.
- Lawyers and academics were not represented directly in such networks and platforms. Member agencies worked with lawyers and academics by commissioning inputs and studies and presenting the results in such fora, but currently organisations representing lawyers and academics were not members of such networks and platforms.

Some participants felt that the 'rich mix' of today's meeting was lacking in the existing structures in Brussels and also at the UK level and that a new, loose but more inclusive network would usefully complement the existing structures by bringing together volunteers, lawyers, researchers, academics, as well as the humanitarian and refugee and asylum organisations. Perhaps such a loose network could organise a series of meeting to reflect on what is happening and exchange ideas on how to improve the situation.

At the UK level attention was drawn to the collaborative group Migration Exchange (formerly known as Changing Minds). This initiative had been established in 2010 by a group of independent funding organisations (such as the Barrow Cadbury Trust, the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, the Oak Foundation and the Open Society Foundation) to promote *inter alia* an effective and humane immigration system that treats people with dignity and respect, is fair to both migrants and established residents, and which has public confidence and consent.

It was explained that the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) is a research institute and think tank and not an advocacy organisation. A cross-institute programme of work had recently been initiated

on the issue of migration with different teams within ODI focussing on particular aspects of migration. As part of this programme a meeting, jointly organised with the foreign policy think tank Chatham House, had taken place in November on 'International Mobility, Migration and Refugees'. A number of research and dissemination products would be published by ODI starting in early 2016. The Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) is participating in the cross-institute discussions but so far has not identified clear areas of work. The outcome of today's round table meeting would be read with interest by HPG. The Humanitarian Practice Network forms part of HPG and is planning a special issue of its widely read Humanitarian Exchange publication on the European Refugee Crisis in September 2016. This was partly why it was supporting the food and refreshment costs of today's meeting. HPN's publications were often launched at public events at ODI making use of online streaming facilities. Six hundred people had registered to view a recent HPN public event (the High Level Panel Report on Cash).

Some participants felt that there was a clear case for HPG and other humanitarian research organisations to engage with the humanitarian issues raised by the refugee and migrant movements into Europe. If humanitarian research groups did not engage with such issues then they would be reinforcing the ideas that humanitarian issues and the humanitarian system only responds 'somewhere else' outside Europe. For those that were still of the mind-set that the humanitarian system didn't have a role to play in Europe, it was important that they realised the interconnectedness of the world – what happens here matters there and the precedents that are now being set here in Europe, particularly in relation to protection, will have direct implications for the functioning of the humanitarian system in Africa, Asia and the Middle East and elsewhere. It was also argued that research groups like ODI have a role to play in opening up the issue of 'root causes' and the way that donors and politicians frequently use this phrase as a 'get out clause' helping to justify current measures in an effort to make them appear acceptable.

Others spoke of the need to breakdown and bridge the distinctions frequently made in the discussions between 'ECHO' and 'DG Home' and between 'DFID' and 'the Home Office' as another reason for humanitarian research groups and others to engage with these issues. Similarly the idea that long term refugee encampments were somehow positive as currently being presented in the UK needed to be tackled – the fact was that they represented a failure of refugee protection.

It was suggested that humanitarian organisations had fallen into the trap of hearing the perspective and analysis of donors and then reflecting it back to them. Listening to the people affected by crises and relaying their voices to donors accompanied by the language of rights is what agencies should be doing. Rather than putting humanitarian 'boots on the ground', agencies should be supporting communities and national organisations to respond and to enhance their capacity to be welcoming to refugees.

In her final contribution to the discussion, Norah Niland said that it was clear that there were significant differences between the national contexts of many EU Member States and it was therefore critical for advocacy and policy work to be tailored to the different national context and needs. At the same time there was a need at the Brussels-level for the existing platforms to ensure that the humanitarian perspective was properly integrated into the EU-wide advocacy and policy work. This pointed to an EU-wide network that linked national platforms and EU-wide platforms. Such a network would enable national groups to share experiences, such as on legal challenges or

the implementation of the EU Relocation Plan, and support each other and use the example of the more open and amenable member states to leverage change in the less amenable member states.

In closing the meeting John Borton said that the co-organisers would reflect on the points and suggestions made and would come back to participants with their own proposals for how the meeting might be followed up. He thanked participants for their frankness and high level of engagement which had produced rich discussions. He also thanked HPN for its support and ODI for the use of the meeting room.

Postscript

As undertaken made during the meeting the co-organisers subsequently developed a set of follow-up proposals and ideas. The document 'Follow-up to the Roundtable Meeting: Some proposals' can be obtained from John Borton johnborton@ntlworld.com

Annex. List of Participants

Name	Role	Organisation
John Borton	Co-organiser	Freelance consultant with associate/honorary roles with HPG, ODI and HCRI, University of Manchester
Norah Niland	Co-organiser	Freelance consultant and Research Associate, Graduate School, Geneva.
Fotini Rantsiou	Co-organiser	Independent Volunteer on Lesvos
Maria Karpodini	Volunteer on Lesvos	Volunteer on Lesvos with Village of All Together/Human Social Kitchen
Wendy Fenton	Coordinator	Humanitarian Practice Network, ODI
Sarah Collinson	Freelance/HPG Research Associate	Humanitarian Policy Group, ODI
Laura Purves	Emergency Response Officer	CAFOD
Josephine Liebl	Humanitarian Policy Advisor	Oxfam GB
Melanie Ward	Associate Director, Policy and Advocacy	International Rescue Committee UK
Daniela Reale	Lead, Child Protection and Children on the Move	Save the Children
Marinella Bebos	Operations Adviser	Save the Children
Laura Padoan	External Relations Associate	UNHCR UK
Leonard Zulu	Senior Legal Officer	UNHCR UK
Jessica Reinisch	Historian of population movements in postwar Europe	Birkbeck College, London
Nicola Dahrendorf	Visiting Senior Research Fellow	Kings College, London
Louise Roland-Gosselin Muamba	MSF Task Force on Refugee Crisis	MSF-Brussels
Martin Dawes	Communication and Advocacy Adviser	CDAC
Kate Robertson	Director	CARA - Council for At-Risk Academics
Cathryn Costello	Andrew W Mellon Associate Professor in International Human Rights and Refugee Law, Refugee Studies Centre, Oxford	Refugee Studies Centre and Faculty of Law, University of Oxford
Heaven Crawley,	Professor of International Migration, Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations (CTPSR)	Coventry University
Elisabeth Kirtsoglou	Lecturer in the Department of Anthropology	University of Durham
George Tsimouris	Co-Investigator on 'Transitory Lives' research team	Panteion University – Athens.
Raymond Apthorpe	Visiting Professor	LSE and Cambridge
Magali Mourlon	Programme Coordinator	VOICE Brussels
Gareth Walker	Head, International Department	MdM/Doctors of the World UK
Melissa Pitotti (by Skype)	Senior Policy Officer on Forced Displacement	International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), Geneva
Jennifer Dew	Project Coordinator	IOM UK
Mallory Carlson	Senior Project Support – Resettlement	IOM UK
Jon Featonby	Parliamentary Manager	British Refugee Council
Kate Latimir	Humanitarian affairs and protection specialist	British Red Cross

Marta Foresti	Director, Governance, Security and Livelihoods	ODI
Aspasia Papadopoulou	Senior Policy Officer	European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE)
Nick Cullen	Notetaker	Masters student, Cambridge University