

# FINAL REPORT



# NOW

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30-31 January 2017

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## Executive Summary

On January 30<sup>th</sup> - 31<sup>st</sup> 2017 about 160 Mayors, experts, local politicians, MEPs, refugees and NGO-representatives from 22 nations gathered in Vienna to discuss the situation of children on the move. At the **Third International Mayors' Conference NOW**, curated by Viola Raheb, 4 panels and 12 workshops offered space to discuss main problems and share solutions in an area which is often overlooked, even though children make up half of all current refugees. In addition, three round tables provided insights into municipal and European perspectives and refugees shared their stories and experiences.

Apart from country-specific contexts, **all children share the same needs for shelter, security and hope**. However, the reality of refugee children is often far from providing any of these. The situations they flee from: war, terror and poor living conditions, have increased their general vulnerability. In this situation, opportunities and perspectives for children and their families need to be ensured, and assistance must not be restricted to basic need response only. Furthermore, refugees face social and economic exclusion, which puts them close to or under the poverty line and extends their vulnerability on multiple levels.

In this environment refugee children are rarely granted their rights as defined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Children born in transit countries like Lebanon for instance, often remain without birth registration and citizenship. As a consequence, they can officially neither enter Syrian territory, nor remain in the hosting country.

If accompanied, the children's protective nucleus would be their family. But in their struggle to survive, families often simply cannot keep their children safe. In this context, the phenomenon of early marriages increases even in Europe. It is linked to poverty and family reunion and often entails sexual abuse of minors. As a consequence of smuggling debts and restricted access to labour markets, economic exploitation increases, and smuggling and trafficking become intertwined. Growing up in such circumstances with an insecure future ahead causes traumatisation. Children need a perspective. Education is an essential basis on which they can build a future. Refugee children need inclusive teaching methods, trauma relief and empowerment in order to support their integration and development to their full potential within society.

***"The main reason children are vulnerable is the war itself. The war itself has caused displacement. It has caused a humanitarian crisis where people don't have shelter, don't have food. This makes people desperate. There are so many families affected by war and by displacement, who would never have dreamt of putting their children in a situation of labour exploitation, of forced marriage or of sexual exploitation, but they're simply struggling to survive."*** (Claire Healy, ICMPD)

### Next steps are required

Children are the most vulnerable members of society and especially those on the move. They have special needs, which have to be met by an integral approach to avoid the emergence of a "lost generation". This goal requires long-term commitment of human and financial resources. As a follow-up to the third NOW-Conference, working groups are being set up to work on the topics of education, exploitation, traumatisation and gender, and a team of Mayors from different countries is working on a toolkit to provide simple and feasible guidelines on the communal level.

**"We pledge to continue developing and sharing our best-practice examples, to stand up for an open society, which shall protect the weakest and welcome those in danger with open arms and an open heart."** - Declaration of the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Mayors' Conference NOW in Vienna 2017

## About the Conference

**“To deprive hundreds of millions of children of a fair chance in life endangers more than the future of these children. The inter-generational cycle of disadvantage, discrimination and poverty endangers the future of our whole societies.”** (Anthony Lake, UNICEF)

This wide topic encompasses the millions of displaced refugee children as well as the disadvantaged children and youth in the receiving countries. Escape and flight are not always synonymous with rescue and protection. Even after successfully escaping from war zones, death and distress, children are exposed to and victims of many dangers: physical, mental and sexual violence, child labour, hunger, trafficking, official arbitrariness, exclusion from education, social exclusion and xenophobia perpetuate their traumata on their long flight right into the receiving countries.

“Children represent a disproportionate fraction of the world’s refugees. They made up less than one-third of the global population, but accounted for 51 per cent of the world’s refugees in 2015. Nearly 1 in 3 children living outside the country of their birth are refugees”.<sup>1</sup>

To date the legal and official provisions for arriving refugees in the neighbouring countries as well as in Europe have failed to dwell on the special situation of these hundreds of thousands of children. Apart from the humanitarian aspect that this most vulnerable group must be bestowed with the utmost care, the best protection and attentive support - this means much more than humane reception and fulfilling physical needs. It means taking responsibility for dependents and striving to ensure that children will not become victims of violence, exploitation, crime and deprivation during and after their flight.

During the two-days conference, about 180 participants - Mayors, experts, civil servants, NGO representatives, affected refugees and local residents - gathered to learn about the realities of refugee children on the move and in the receiving countries, examine the realities and challenges they face, and based on this, develop a broad approach to address the needs, identify areas of interventions and share best practice solutions for a better future of all children.

### The conference aimed at:

- Creating a broad public awareness about the subject and the urgent need to address these issues and find solutions
- Expanding the knowledge base on major challenges concerning children refugees, migrants as well as marginalized children within our own communities.
- Compiling a list of material, experiences, models, recommendations and best practice examples from different countries in regard to the major challenges, to be made accessible to the general public as well as to the policy makers and civil servants and those working in the field
- Contributing to prevent the growing up of a “lost generation” of both refugee and local children and youth
- Recognizing and stimulating the resilience, talents, curiosity, passion for learning of all children for them and for our common future

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<sup>1</sup> UNHCR Report September 2016: “Uprooted: The growing crisis for refugee and migrant children”

## Host & Curator

Viola Raheb, educationalist, theologian, peace and gender equality activist, assistant professor at the Institute for Religious Studies at the University of Vienna and senior fellow of the Bruno Kreisky Forum for International Dialogue

## Conference Design

- In analogy to the previous NOW Conferences, all participants were actively involved in panels and working sessions, the conference was not open to the general public
- Participating stakeholders: Mayors, NGO-Representatives, Members of the European Parliament, Experts and activists working on the issues of the conference, affected individuals (locals and refugees)
- Everyone attending was equal and his/her voices were equally important
- Working language was English, with translations to and from Arabic, Turkish and Italian



## “Absolute Helplessness” - A Report by Robert Misik

The 3<sup>rd</sup> NOW-Conference became a fact-finding mission about the special exposure of children and youth on the move and the particular vulnerability of girls and young women.

Report by **Robert Misik**, journalist, author, curator  
Bruno Kreisky Forum for International Dialogue

Illustrated with impressions from Greek refugee camps captured in December 2016 by **Rishabh Kaul**



Tjark Bartels taps on his baggy jacket pocket. “I go back home with a bunch of useful business cards,” says the District Administrator of Hameln-Pyrmont in Lower Saxony, Germany, who participated for the second time in a NOW Conference, and adds: “I had lots of very, very valuable encounters”.

For the third time in roughly twelve months, mayors, community politicians, experts, top officials, refugees, activists and NGO representatives came together for a NOW Conference. The first conference in January 2016 took place after the first peak of the influx of refugees and was aimed at connecting all those having to shoulder the major tasks related to the migration situation: the Mayors along the migration route, from Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Greece, Italy, Austria, Germany and other countries. A major overview highlighted the various problems, with participants discussing the similarities and the differences of the problems faced by the neighbouring countries, the transit countries and the countries of arrival in Europe. The debate in Austria was also put in a larger context by realizing how our burden seems to pale in the face of countries such as Jordan. The 1<sup>st</sup> NOW Conference was more demonstrative, aimed at raising public awareness for the issue.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> NOW Conference took place in July 2016 in Athens and focused on the situation following the closing of the Balkan route and the EU-Turkey Joint Agreement. Special attention was given to the situation in Greece both on the islands where the refugees had stranded and the mainland where the migrants could no longer be seen as transients, but had to be provided with long-term registration, care and accommodation. The conference was overshadowed by the coup in Turkey, which made it even more topical and politically charged.

Compared to the first two NOW Conferences, which were much more defined by international current affairs, the third conference was slightly more low-key, less of a demonstrative act than a working and networking convention. It was dedicated to a subject which is not in the centre of public attention at present and rather ignored: the specific fate of child refugees: the risks, the threats, the uncertainties, the violence, the exploitation and the sexual exploitation they face – whether girls or boys, unaccompanied minors or children within their families; the traumas and injuries they experience, which accompany them all the way to their country of arrival and have an impact on school and everyday life. Despite all these risks and their special vulnerability, they are “children under the radar”, to which the title of the conference wanted to draw attention.



“31 million children and youth are currently fleeing war, violence and misery,” says the closing statement of the conference, and adds: “Another 17 million are displaced within their own countries.

Among the 1,2 million people who have reached the EU in 2016 there were roughly 300,000 children, out of which 70 % were from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq.” In view of these figures it is all the more disturbing to see the many faces of vulnerability of the most endangered members of society:



Child refugees, no matter if they had to flee with their families or as minors on their own, are traumatised by war and violence and have experienced existential threats. When these children arrive in our countries they all carry their stories and traumas with them. Frequently, upon arrival they suffer new injuries: months, often years of uncertainty in refugee facilities where they are given only very little information on their rights, where women and girls are inadequately protected from abuse and sexual violence. Our greatest obligation as humans must be towards

these children: Towards each and every one of them, with their own individual story.

The first challenge shared by virtually all child refugees is education. They have gaps in their educational biographies, and the neighbouring countries in particular – such as Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey – which host the majority of refugees have great difficulty in providing access to schools. Their refugee camps do not adequate infrastructure. There are ambitious plans, such as for example in Lebanon, to build and open 5,000 classrooms. The refugees there live partially in refugee camps and partially in the cities. In practice this means that some children have no access to education at all, others attend “temporary schools” in the refugee camps and the smallest group has access to regular schools. Some receive education in the language of their countries of origin, others in the language of the host country.

Both approaches come with their own set of problems. In both the cases there is a lack of teachers, in the latter the children must overcome the language barrier as well. Also, there can be significant differences among the various groups of children. Some Syrian children from the cities have had very good schooling which however is often interrupted for many years due to the war. Children from Afghanistan, on the other hand, usually have a poorer educational background, which can lead to tensions if these children visit the same schools in Europe – resulting in a form of hierarchy, with the Syrian children being considered the “smart” ones (and they perceive themselves that way, too) while the Afghan children are considered “poorly educated”, which – of course – inflicts even more pain and burden on them.



Children are often traumatised due to war, because of having to flee their country and the risks involved, the social dislocation and the consequent feeling of absolute helplessness, owing to violence, labour exploitation and sexual exploitation. Many young girls are already pregnant when they reach their “destination”.

Traumatisation has a direct impact on school success. Children who have been exposed to war, violence and permanent fear, wake up from nightmares, hence are tired and unfocused in school, display aggressive and violent reactions, and are often confronted with teachers who are in no way educated or trained to handle such symptoms in adequate ways. Camilla Lodi, education expert from Norway who has worked with children in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, gave an insight into her

experiences, which are now applied in refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon. In cooperation with teachers, children and their parents anti-trauma measures are being implemented, the outcome of which is that children at least manage to sleep through the night again, enabling them to attend school in a productive way.

In the various panels on questions of education, traumatised, human trafficking, cultural conflicts as well as other aspects, many perspectives were addressed, the complexity of which is often unknown even to well-informed experts.

Many of the problems are rooted in the precarious economic and legal situation of refugees. Without a job, the majority of families have no income and at the same time lack proper legal status, therefore are not permitted official employment. This leads to a situation where children are often forced to work to provide for the family, which gives way to the economic exploitation of children. Many refugees, including minors, arrive in Europe with high debts because smugglers brought them over “on credit”, making them easy victims of economic and also sexual exploitation. To pay off the debts they frequently work without pay, are forced into prostitution, or used for peddling drugs. As a consequence, the lack of safe migration routes and legal sources of income for parents increase the exploitation of children. Many children are born on the move, which often makes it impossible to register them. Without a birth certificate or other documents, they virtually do not exist on paper. This makes them especially vulnerable.



Many girls are married off by their families as minors which is frequently seen as proof of backwardness of Muslim culture. However, at a closer look, the families are often simply forced to marry off their daughters as early as possible – for example at 15 or 16 – because they just cannot provide for them.

Economic hopelessness makes children and youth not only vulnerable and poses the threat of falling victims to violence or abuse which can turn them into “perpetrators” themselves. Boys and youth who are forced into armies, militias and terror groups do not go to war voluntarily, but because they have no other choice. Often it is the only way to get hold of regular meals. These “child soldiers” then have a history of violence and corresponding behaviour, but are actually victims rather than perpetrators.



It became very clear on many occasions during the conference that we must rethink the concept of “the refugees”. Refugees come from many different countries, different social settings. Bakhtayar Hadi Hassan, a trauma expert from Iraq, pointed out the various contexts: “We have families from Central Iraq where men have three women and often 25 children with them. This large number of children may make economic sense in Iraq because the children can help work the fields. They are a source of income. On the move, however, from a source of income these children become an economic burden; they can no longer be provided for”.

Barbara Preitler of aid organisation Hemayat referred to another source of traumatised of children on the move: the feeling of absolute existential helplessness. These children, even if they flee with



their parents, get to see their parents in a new role – the role of those who can no longer protect them. These children feel powerless, have very low self-esteem, and it takes a long time for them to stabilise again. According to Preitler whoever experiences such helplessness falls into complete distrust. Because virtually every situation can be a threat and the children live in constant fear. “How are these children supposed to learn how to trust people again?” she asked. Any efforts to make children more stable again must therefore involve their parents, too. They must be strengthened so they can take care of their children.



Often, however, the exact opposite happens. By attending school, children are most likely to integrate themselves in the host countries. They learn the language while their parents sit at home and have no daily structure. As a result, the children become the “parents” of their parents. They are the first ones to know their way around in the new environment. This can lead to children being overwhelmed by the situation and to a shift in family power structures. The parents feel that their authority over their children is waning, and fathers who experience themselves as powerless

often react with violence. At the same time, children may not listen to reason, which can become dangerous especially for boys in puberty. Susanne Stein from Hamburg reported how adults lose their influence over their children, often leading to dysfunctional families.

Women and girls are especially vulnerable. They frequently fall victim to sexual violence, which they try to get away from, but are often drawn back into. The conference examined these topics from various angles. Meera Jamal, a feminist and atheist journalist from Pakistan, reported how she was under double pressure upon her arrival in German refugee facilities. On the one hand, she was faced with religious Muslim bigots who would not accept her non-religious identity, and on the other hand with groups of men who saw her as a target for sexual molestation as she was an unaccompanied woman. “And nobody informed me about the rights I actually have as a woman in Germany. There is no contact person and no information at the refugee facilities,” she said. The blogger Farah Abdulahi from Somalia, who left her home country because she would have never been accepted as a trans woman having grown up as a male, and who started her adventurous journey as a 16-year-old, which led her across many African states until she arrived in Malta, reported about her experiences as a member of a minority who fled due to her gender identity. “You are especially at risk on the move, and at the refugee facilities you – of course – experience the same risks that made you flee your home country,” Abdulahi said.

Among the fathers and brothers in the families, masculine role models still dominate, which is disadvantageous to female self-determination. Also there are very few alternative role models for boys while the girls are vulnerable in many different ways as they are without protection on the move and sometimes in the countries of destination as well. On top of that, there are families who have become dysfunctional because of the journey. Teacher and trauma psychologist Gabriele Siebert reported about a 20-year-old young woman from Chechnya who could barely keep eye contact with the male interpreter and gave very clipped and short answers. It turned out that she had come to Austria when she was 10 years old. Her mother sent her back to Chechnya to marry a man there. Meanwhile, her father had founded a new family and so she was



pushed off to stay with her uncle who sexually abused her for many years. Then she fled back to Austria where her mother also had a new family, which the new partner had already left. And all of this happened to already war-torn souls. The traumatising of the persons involved was virtually a collective one; there was not just a single traumatised person, in fact, everyone involved was affected in one way or another.

Good practice guidelines were exchanged in the various workshops and practical solutions for problems were discussed. As a first point of contact schools are a place where support and information can be offered – for children, but also for parents.

Teachers can integrate the knowledge and skills of refugee families into the lessons. It was also suggested to bring teachers with migration experience into the classrooms.



Schools can be a place where awareness is raised, where exhibitions can take place which, for example, demonstrate that sexual abuse does not have to be tolerated or accepted, and that those affected can seek help.

Another important indication was also that the work of trauma psychologists requires trained interpreters. If the psychologists do not speak the language of their clients, qualified interpreters must “translate” the gestures and emotions as well in order to understand the symptoms adequately.

Moreover, it became very clear how important it is to strengthen the networks of parents, families, friends, teachers and therapists in which children and youth grow up.

Due to their special experiences and needs, child and youth refugees can be adequately supported, cared for and, if required, rescued only in a strong and interdependent network, which must be promoted by society as well as institutions and governments. The aim is to prevent these children from being stuck in their traumas and from being at a disadvantage owing to their origin and history. We must not allow this generation to become a lost one. We must offer these children perspectives and opportunities for a future in a society in which, one day, they can live and participate in as adults.



# Key Findings and Recommendations

## Financing and international cooperation

We have to ensure opportunities and perspectives for children and their families, not restrict assistance to basic need response.

### Recommendations:

1. Long-term solutions going beyond mere humanitarian aid and providing possibilities for sustainable future development for refugee children and their families (who often live in transit countries for years) should be developed, financed and implemented
2. Funding for education in humanitarian response should be increased and sustainable financing should be ensured

## Humanitarian aid and decrease of vulnerability

Refugees face social and economic exclusion, which increases their vulnerability on multiple levels, and puts them on or under the poverty line.

### Recommendations:

1. Basic needs (food, housing, education, training) have to be fulfilled for a healthy and protected development
2. Provide support (social, psychological and economic) to families, in order to alleviate the negative impact of the circumstances of vulnerability on the development of their children
3. Enforce legal and non-legal means combating phenomena of child labour, exploitation, early marriages, etc.

## Legislation

(1) Refugee children are often denied their right to education until they obtain the residence permit, a fact that violates the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. (2) Refugee children born in transit countries, like Lebanon, often remain without nationality, as they cannot be registered. As a consequence, they cannot enter Syrian territory but are also not allowed to remain in the hosting country.

### Recommendations:

1. Children must be granted their full rights regardless of their residency status
2. Birth registrations and the assignments of citizenship for refugee children have to be regulated
3. Children and their families have to be given a legal status as soon as possible
4. Family reunions have to be processed faster

## Protection from sexual violence

The phenomenon of teenage marriages is increasing in Europe. It is linked to poverty and a lack of regulated family reunion, but also covers sexual abuse of minors.

Recommendations:

1. Children and youth must be granted their rights and be given protection from their violation in any from e.g. sexual violence, sexual exploitation and early marriage
2. National child protection systems have to be applied to immigrant children from day 1
3. Authorities need qualification to identify and support victims and recognize and address exploitation of any form
4. Information and support structures for victims need to be created and implemented in order to increase protection of human rights, and especially sexual rights.
5. Boys and men have to be integrated in the process of prevention of exploitation phenomena
6. Data collection on early marriages is mandatory for addressing the issue at its core

## Protection from exploitation

Smuggling and trafficking are more and more interconnected. Exploitation is a result of restricted or no access to official travel and to the labour market.

Recommendations:

1. Support and increase of safe flight routes in order to empower the independence of people from smugglers
2. Provide refugees with legal access to labour markets in order to facilitate their economic and social integration process and prevent exploitation of any form
3. Save smuggle victims from re-entering the vicious circle exploitation e.g. modern slavery / forced labour
4. Raise awareness and teach Human Rights as an exploitation prevention measure

## Education

Refugee children need inclusive teaching methods and empowerment in order to support their full integration within society.

Recommendations:

1. Support an inclusive environment - in and outside school - for learning and social integration (within neighbourhoods)
2. Work towards a school system more adaptive to intercultural contexts and trauma
3. Map knowledge and competences of children
4. Include children, parents and teachers as stakeholders in the education process and provide support according to their potential and needs
5. Support and capacity building (qualification) of teachers and civil servants on trauma
6. Create a platform to share curricula and skill development between transit and receiving countries
7. Provide opportunities for further studies or vocational training after the compulsory school age



## Voices of Mayors

### Participants

**Hassan Alrhaibeh** Mayor, Um Al Jimal, Jordan

**Luigi Ammatuna** Mayor, Pozzallo, Italy

**Andreas Babler** Mayor, Traiskirchen, Austria

**Ali Mattar** Mayor, Sahel El Zahrani, Lebanon

**Lefteris Papagiannakis** Vice Mayor, Migrant and Refugee Affairs, Athens, Greece

**Mustafa Tosun** Mayor, Dikili, Turkey

### Host

**Hannes Swoboda** MEP (ret.), President of The Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies wiiW)– Board Member of Bruno Kreisky Forum for International Dialogue



### Summaries

**Lefteris Papagiannakis** Vice Mayor, Migrant and Refugee Affairs, Athens, Greece



In Athens, we have about 1,300 kids outside of shelters and structures that can accommodate them. That makes it very difficult, but we have many good activities and good practices that are working. I think that we should do something specific for them, not the way we do for adults.

**We had a lot of help from the migrant communities who have been in Athens and in Greece for more than 35, 40 years.** Without them, the management of the increased flow of refugees would be impossible. For example, the Afghan community was present when refugees occupied the central squares of

Athens, public parks, etc, because we didn't have the appropriate space to accommodate them. Without their help, this would have been impossible.

**Luigi Ammatuna** Mayor, Pozzallo, Italy



At the beginning about 150 unaccompanied minors arrived per year, now they are about 300, 400 a year. We have to accommodate them in structures which are adapted to their needs. They are transferred to other municipalities in Italy, which have better politics to integrate them into the public sphere and society.

**Until the situation in their home countries improves, we must of course implement medium and long-term solutions because we have to take in these people, we have to accommodate them, they need our assistance and of course, we're absolutely willing to help, because we understand that they**

**come from very, very dramatic situations.**

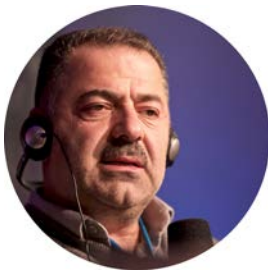
**Hassan Alrhaibeh Mayor, Um Al Jimal, Jordan**



At the end of 2017 we had about one million refugees in Jordan. Among them 145.000 new pupils, which is more than we can cope with. At the moment, we have 100 schools, 89 of them are open day and night to receive them. We invested a lot to get these children into classes. Why? **The real investment in the future is the investment in children.**

We have a plan with the Jordanian government to establish 5,000 classrooms until the end of 2017 to provide a safe environment for these children, so that they can continue their education.

**Ali Mattar Mayor, Sahel El Zahrani, Lebanon**



200.000 youths, pupils and students enjoy education in my country, but at the same time unfortunately there are 180.000 who do not go to school. These high numbers are alarming. International organisations and as well as professional institutions have to provide solutions for this.

Children get abused every day in Lebanon. Healthcare centres are not ready. There is no or not enough support for pregnant and birth-giving women, there are too few vaccines and the health standards that we should be able to provide to children are just not met.

**Refugees are often young people, who could be also engaged to help the society.**

**Mustafa Tosun Mayor, Dikili, Turkey**



In Turkey, there are three million registered refugees, one million are unregistered and one and a half of these four million are children. In the camps, only about 300,000 could be sent to school, but a lot of them do not attend class. One third is enrolled in the school but 70% have educational problems, because they do not go to school.

**And beside this, we have sexual abuse, especially for girls between the ages of 12 and 17. 60% of them are already married. Early marriages are quite usual in countries in this region. 40% of these girls are already pregnant.**

**Andreas Babler Mayor, Traiskirchen, Austria**



We had 2,000 refugee children in my town Traiskirchen. We established the project 'connect', a low-level standard trying to offer young people an alternative for spending their time rather than just sitting around and giving them a kind of valve to vent their energies.

This has resulted in a great deal of creativity. Artists have been stimulated, children played soccer together with amateur teams, we tried to develop an ecological garden project and become part of an ecological cycle that involves schools. We have a textile workshop, a social market, and also long-term

unemployed Austrians found work through this project. **We could show that we help people who need help, no matter whether these people are refugees or Austrians. In this way, we can create more acceptance because the local population sees that they can work together with young refugees.**

## Panel 1 - Educational realities of refugees in the MENAT Region

### Participants

**Thaera Badran** Project Coordinator, Centre for Lebanese Studies, Lebanon

**Catherine Barnett** Coordinator of the “No Lost Generation” Initiative, UNICEF, Jordan

**Lina Farouqi** Regional Director, Middle East Children’s Institute, Jordan

**Lale Hazar** Founder and Project Director, ODGEDER, Turkey

**Camilla Lodi** Education Specialist, Norwegian Refugee Council, Palestine



### Host

**Viola Raheb** University of Vienna, Senior Fellow, Bruno Kreisky Forum for International Dialogue

### Summaries

**Viola Raheb** University of Vienna, Senior Fellow, Bruno Kreisky Forum for International Dialogue



**51% of all refugees are children and in 2013 the UNHCR said that there are 65 million young people between the ages of 12 to 15, who are being denied their right to education. In addition to 59 million children do not have access to primary education, 25 million of them are children who live in conflict zones.**

With the outbreak of the Syrian conflict, one in two Syrians is either displaced or has become a refugee. 3.7 million Syrian children were born after the outbreak of the conflict and 2.4 million are living in the neighbouring countries, which amounts to nearly half of the Syrians living in the MENAT region.

Every second Syrian child today has no access to education whether within Syria, or in the neighbouring countries, or on the move.

**Catherine Barnett** Coordinator of the “No Lost Generation” Initiative, UNICEF, Jordan



We started our initiative No Lost Generation because we really needed to radically reshape the way we look at the Syrian crisis. In 2013 it was treated as a normal humanitarian situation, the so-called basic needs of clean water, access to shelter, food, that kind of thing were prioritized. The whole response was really to get towards a set of short-term solutions and not particularly child-focused. **This is first and foremost a crisis affecting children. The strategic thing here is to think about the long-term and to ensure that we don’t drop the ball on education for children.**

If schools are bombed, destroyed, if children are bullied, if children are in exploitative work conditions, all this means they are not in school and cannot study. It is about safety and child protection, keeping families together, not detaining them as we see in Europe, getting rid of the xenophobic combating attitudes.

**Lale Hazar Founder and Project Director, ODGEDER, Turkey**



ODGEDER is working in one of the most densely populated districts in Istanbul, where there are 40,000 Syrian refugees and 5,500 of them are between the ages of 6 and 18. Unfortunately around 55% do not attend schools.

Our project tries to establish a positive school climate. It should provide a positive and safe space with room for joy. This improves the well-being and co-existence of two communities to live together and cooperate in harmony by means of positive behaviour and intervention support. The focus is on the trauma which was experienced by Syrian refugee children, and on other problematic areas such as anti-social behaviour and depression-

**We support a whole school approach, including the parents, teachers and the students as the stakeholders of education.** As a preventive mental health school policy program, we provide teachers with skills regarding the problematic areas in the schools, about common values that are established, both with the Syrian and the Turkish students, with the school community, with the teaching staff, the principals, even the security guards, up to the support staff.

**Thaera Badran Project Coordinator, Centre for Lebanese Studies, Lebanon**



**When the refugee children arrive in Lebanon, they are placed in schools according to their age and not according to their abilities even though the school system is very different from that in Syria.** Another challenge regarding all children is a lack of resources at schools. For example, in Europe we know there are some welcoming classes that facilitate the integration of the child in the school.

**Camilla Lodi Education Specialist, Norwegian Refugee Council, Palestine**



The Better Learning Program is a school-based intervention, which combines psychosocial and educational approaches and consists of two different components. The first part reaches out to basically all students inside the classroom and provides psychological, educational and coping skills to children. This preventive tool is put into practice by teachers.

The second part is a specialized intervention for those who have chronic symptoms of traumatic stress. We work with children who have from three to five nightmares per week, for a period of over three months, after which they cannot go back to sleep. Of course, this impairs their learning at school. They fall asleep. They have violent reactions. Through a period of two months, master trainers train counsellors and teachers basically through a narrative, exposure therapy and drawings, the results are quite incredible.

After this intervention two thirds of the children go down to having zero nightmares. The remaining one-third also goes drastically down. **Across all children, it improves well-being, so children are less afraid. They're calm, relaxed. They know how to react in stress situations. There is an improved capacity to concentrate, to focus in class and the enjoyment of being in schools. Also, there is a component where parents are made aware of the processes and what is happening to the children.**



**Lina Farouqi Regional Director, Middle East Children's Institute, Jordan**



Our program first focussed on informal education, supporting students who were out of school. We found so many students out of school have no education, have never or barely been to school and then stayed at home for one, two, three years.

We work on non-formal education for students, who were out of schooling for three years, and are not able to return to school. We are working on a program to provide courses for three sessions, each session is eight months, and this will enable them to take an exam at the 10th grade and then 11th and 12th, so then either they go back to school, or go on into vocational - which we also encourage. We need everybody to just help these people to get the education they need.

**The most important thing is to make sure that there are very well qualified teachers.**

## Panel 2 – Diversity and social cohesion in European classrooms

### Participants

**Nihad Bunar** Professor, Child and Youth Studies, Stockholm University, Sweden

**Barbara Herzog-Punzenberger** Director, Education & Migration, Linz University, Austria

**Annette Korntheuer** Researcher, Netzwerk Flüchtlingsforschung, Germany

**Lutine de Wal Pastoor** Researcher, Norwegian Centre for Violence and Traumatic Stress Studies, Norway

**Josef Zollneritsch** Head of department for school psychology and advising, Styrian School Board, Austria



### Host

**Viola Raheb** University of Vienna, Senior Fellow, Bruno Kreisky Forum for International Dialogue

### Summaries

**Viola Raheb** University of Vienna, Senior Fellow, Bruno Kreisky Forum for International Dialogue



Austria has taken in about 90,000 refugees last year and we are definitely not in the position to tell Lebanon with 1.2 million officially registered refugees what is best and how best to integrate refugee children. Just to make this point clear, and the same applies to Turkey and to Jordan. We are here to think together and to learn from the experiences of one another.

In 2016, our schools have taken in 14,200 refugee children in the whole of Austria. 86% of them are either in primary school or in middle school and only 14% are being integrated into high school.

**I think we need to be aware that every child has his or her potentials and we need to pick up every child where he or she is, it is about diversity and social cohesion.**

**Barbara Herzog-Punzenberger** Director, Education & Migration, Linz University, Austria



Austria has during the last 15 years experienced quite an impressive increase of pupils with foreign-born parents and with languages other than German spoken at home.

The availability and the access to Kindergarten is a very important key as are the quality of Kindergarten and the composition of classrooms. It is about socio-economic composition. It is about socio-cultural composition.

Where do you build facilities, how are the regulations, the catchment areas for schools, the selection procedures? We have seen an enormous amount of grade repetition among students with migration background, but if you look at the research results, that doesn't benefit anyone. It doesn't help. It just costs. **The intercultural opening up of schools is a question of organizational development, of developing the personnel and, of course, teaching instruction, didactics. How much do teachers know about anti-racist prejudice sensitive teaching? The initial and advanced education of teachers is probably the first thing to tackle.**

**Annette Korntheuer** Researcher, Netzwerk Flüchtlingsforschung, Germany



In the city of Munich, structures for refugee youth focus on vocational training. Evaluations of these programs show that they are a good alternative for youth with language limitations prior schooling and a high interest for a fast transition into work, but youth with high educational aspirations may perceive these structures as exclusion from higher secondary schools and systemic discrimination.

**Voices of youth show that, in these programs, they may feel set apart and excluded from the regular school system and the whole society.**

In the city of Toronto an inclusive schooling approach offers secondary educational options for refugee youth. Young people with refugee backgrounds can attend high school until aged 21, unlike in Germany where it is limited to ages 15 or 16. Based on multicultural policies, a broad support system is implemented including English as second language classes, settlement workers at schools and a newcomer group. Inclusion in the regular schooling system in Toronto accelerates relations between refugee youth and other groups. It enables the building of bridging networks into the whole society.

**Nihad Bunar** Professor, Child and Youth Studies, Stockholm University, Sweden



**One simple device that we have introduced in the system is to map the previous knowledge of newly arrived students.** Because one big problem has been that we tended to regard these children as if they didn't know anything. They have experiences and we need to take into account this knowledge, those experiences, while we are devising what to offer these kids in our schools.

Teachers in Sweden would like to know more about the educational system in those countries the kids are coming from, about the Syrian Educational System, about Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon. It would be wonderful to develop a platform, a further collaboration where teachers from there can give our teachers what they need in order to prepare a structure of opportunity in education for these kids.

I can never understand why a number of our teachers tend to perceive newly arrived parents as not interested in their children's education. They are the most interested people in their children's education you can meet. They also need to be treated as equals and this turns out to be a problem.

**Lutine de Wal Pastoor** Researcher, Norwegian Centre for Violence and Traumatic Stress Studies, Norway



It is very important that teachers have the competence to deal with psycho-social challenges, they do not necessarily have to be psychologists, but they should be able to identify problems. Maybe they could get expert help outside school. Even though European schools have a broad experience in educating children from minority backgrounds, they have relatively little experience in educating refugees.

There are substantial differences between educating refugees who recently arrived and other migrants who have been born and grown up in the country. I want to emphasize the bearing of the period of short residency in the country of resettlement and often interrupted or incomplete education.

**Josef Zollneritsch** Head of department for school psychology and advisor, Styrian School Board, Austria



As a society, we are not really sure whether we want to assign refugees and migrants a place in our society and the same applies for school. There is a great deal of uncertainty of how to deal with the potential of these, so to speak, new people.

At the moment, we are unable to ensure educational careers for children and youngsters with migration or refugee backgrounds.

**All in all, it is quite difficult in Austria to actually complete your formal education once a person is an adult.** This is not a task of the state, but one of private organizations, which results in certain quality problems. Certain age groups do not seem, from the outside, to develop anymore, but this is not true, because we know that education is dynamic with flexible boundaries, so to speak.

## Voices of Europe

### Participants

**Gerald Knaus** Chairman, ESI - European Stability Initiative

**Ulrike Lunacek** Vice President of the European Parliament

**Rainer Münz** Adviser on Migration & Demography to the EPSC, European Commission

**Michael O'Flaherty** Director, EU Agency for Fundamental Rights

**Kati Piri** MEP and Rapporteur for Turkey, European Parliament

**Josef Weidenholzer** Member and Vice-President of the S&D, European Parliament



### Host

**Hannes Swoboda**, MEP (ret.), President of The Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies – wiiw, Board Member, Bruno Kreisky Forum for International Dialogue

## Summaries

### Gerald Knaus Chairman, ESI - European Stability Initiative



**In the Central Mediterranean last year, we had the highest number of people arriving ever, with 80,000 people. We had the highest number ever of people dying, more than 4,500, on their way to Italy.**

Europe has crazy ideas on the table of detention centres and asylum in Egypt, in Libya and elsewhere, and nobody really has a good answer. The first big problem, the first big challenge is finding an answer to this, because this problem is really acute. Very few people look to the Aegean today. The tension dropped because the numbers have fallen, the number of deaths has fallen,

which is great, but the problems in the Aegean have not been resolved.

Yes, we have a Refugee Convention. But there is one thing that we need politicians for, which is to vote for the resources to implement it. You can have the best asylum legislation in the world. If you have no case-workers, no translators, no legal aid, no reception capacities, the rights will be violated whatever the law says.

### Josef Weidenholzer Member and Vice-President of the S&D, European Parliament



At the moment, officially over 60,000 people are in Greece. The relocation process is still not really working. The number of implemented relocations is about 10%. This is not enough.

**There is also the willingness of some member states to take refugees, like the Portuguese government. They are ready to receive their quota numbers or even more, and this has now been going on for half a year and nothing really happens, due to administration deficiencies.**

There is no support for local communities and this is really a big problem. The second thing is that we need an operational process where communities who want to have refugees, and refugees who want to go there come together. What we would need is to set up a taskforce of interested people trying to accelerate this process.

### Rainer Münz Adviser on Migration & Demography to the EPSC, European Commission



**We in Europe have medium term goals, like making sure that unaccompanied minors who came and who are here go to school, get an education, because otherwise we will produce a lost generation of young people.** That is already in the making, because 25% of the people between 15 and 25 with a migrant background - even people, who did not come as unaccompanied minors but as children together with their parents - are neither in education, nor in employment, nor in training. We create the next generation of young adults for whom there will be no place on the European labour market, if the issue

remains unaddressed.

### Kati Piri Member and Rapporteur for Turkey, European Parliament



When I and other colleagues were pushing our own government to take over more of these children refugees, there was resistance and they said: "Well, if we take a family, at least we know the family is already here and we don't need to do resettlement for other people. If we take a person who is 15-16, unaccompanied, who came here by him or herself, then perhaps there will be their parents, their sisters and brothers, who will have to be brought from either Syria or Afghanistan or from the region."



The psychological impact on a human life when you are this young and had to make that awful journey in order to find safety, rebuild your new life, make friends, find substitutes for your family, is of great concern.

**Michael O’Flaherty Director, EU Agency for Fundamental Rights**



There is a lot that can be done, but I am struck very strongly while speaking to governments around Europe, that there is fantastic rhetoric for children, but it does not deliver. I do not see the concrete actions, I do not see the concrete commitments, and somehow it is this lack of specific actions that will make a difference, sits very comfortably side by side with this marvellously expressed love of children, care for children. There is a disconnection. We have got to bridge it. How do we bridge it?

**Problems get solved locally, and they get solved in local communities. There really has not been enough effort made to have respectful dialogues, in which the local community and the migrant community can speak and engage with each other to figure out together what might be the best solutions.** I promised to speak about the human rights crisis here, we are speaking of a crisis, not only for migrants and refugees, but also for the largely forgotten local communities, be it a village in Austria or an Island in Greece.

We need spaces and my agency is creating such spaces for a better exchange of experience around issues of this kind. Whatever we do, let's remember that human rights, fundamental rights, are not a matter of good will, of niceness, they are a matter of obligation.

**Ulrike Lunacek Vice President of the European Parliament**



Even if there are not that many refugees arriving anymore, it has become unfortunately a topic very much bigger than just human beings seeking refuge. It has become one about religions and about what kind of society we want and I find that is why we also need solutions on the ground. **Coming from the point of view of fundamental rights, I would like to emphasize another principle that we have enshrined in the European Union treaties which is the principle of solidarity, which is the principle the European Union was built on. Or call it ‘cooperation’ instead of ‘confrontation’ and that is what has been lacking**

**over those last two years.**

Maybe ending on a positive note - there are, for example among the Erasmus Plus programs from the European Union, lots of projects already implemented and financed. For example, for the integration of young migrant or refugee kids via sport or music. There are lots of projects that are already on the way and funded.

# Voices of Refugees

## Participants

**Farah Abdulahi** Blogger, Writer and Human Rights activist – Refugee from Somalia based in Germany

**Meera Jamal** Journalist – Refugee from Pakistan based in Germany

**Yamen Hussein** Poet & Journalist – Refugee from Syria based in Germany



## Hosts

**Robert Misik**, Journalist, Author, Curator, Bruno Kreisky Forum for International Dialogue

**Viola Raheb**, University of Vienna, Senior Fellow, Bruno Kreisky Forum for International Dialogue

## Summaries

### Meera Jamal Journalist – Refugee from Pakistan based in Germany



Because my mother was a women rights activist herself, I chose human rights and in particular I work on women rights. Because I have seen what problems women have in our society, I was working as a journalist for women. Being an atheist, I saw the other narrative from the society. That struck me actually, as I was being asked: “You’re a western influenced writer because you’re an atheist and you want to influence the other women in the society and you want them to be free like you.” I thought was a compliment and I continued.

The first registration centre in Europe was the most horrific. It was an isolated sort of a jail. There was a group of Kurdish men. They started stalking me and sexually harassing me. Being naive, not being sure about my rights in Germany, I could not stop them.

I felt so miserable all my life while I was in Pakistan. I was mistreated because I was an atheist. I was punished in school because I would not pray. I was punished in school because of my name and among many other things, because I could not recite the Qur’an. Now in Germany, I have to suffer other consequences because my skin is of a certain colour, my hair looks of certain origin, and no one cares what I feel inside.

**I think what is lacking at the moment is a direct contact between refugees and the local community.** You cannot hear children laughing, you cannot see their tears, you cannot feel their miseries. When seen only in the news you can forget about it the next moment. It is only when you meet people, it is only when you see can them, feel them, touch them that it becomes a reality for you.

**Farah Abdulahi Blogger, Writer and Human Rights activist – Refugee from Somalia based in Germany**



I am a Somali refugee. My family moved to Kenya when I was three years old and I grew up in the Kenyan capital Nairobi. Coming from a middle-class family, I went to some of the best schools in Kenya. When I was five years old, I discovered that I was different. My difference was not taken kindly by my family, by society, by my teachers.

But as a Somali national living as a refugee in Kenya, there was no legal pathway for me to come to the West.

I had to undergo a very difficult nine-month journey from Kenya to Malta where I arrived by boat in November 2012. I was detained in Malta, in a European state, totally neglecting the fact that it is part of the 1951 Geneva Convention. The European Human Rights Court has stated specifically that it is illegal to detain refugees once they arrive, even without documents.

A newspaper editor gave me the opportunity to write about refugee experiences on the island and the difficulties that we dealt with. **That put me in a very weird and good position at the same time because I was speaking for a community that did not agree with who I was, but who were still my community, the refugee community, the Somali community.**

**Yamen Hussein Poet & Journalist – Refugee from Syria based in Germany**



At the beginning of the Syrian revolution, I was a reporter for one of the TV channels in Syria that based its work on propaganda for the government. In 2011, I resigned from my work. I was oppressed from the very sect that I belong to. I was chased and persecuted by my own people. I was exiled within Damascus. I stayed in Damascus for about two years, within a secular group of anti-Islamic radicals. We used to organize demonstrations, protests, campaigns. The end of 2013, Damascus became a big detention camp, there were a lot of security forces and military personnel who subjected people to

killing and sometimes slaughter. In 2014, 110 children were slaughtered with knives, ISIS and Daesh methods. There were militias from Hezbollah, and other militias that came from Iraq to join the fight.

As secular activists, we were unable to do anything. I am an atheist. We could not stay in Damascus, and I could not stay. So, I escaped using three false identity papers. I went to Beirut, to Lebanon, to Turkey, to Germany.

**We are not coming as Syrian refugees. We do not need compassion and sympathy. We need solidarity.**

Being a refugee is not a description of a human being, rather just a state of being. We mustn't be applauded just because we are refugee poets - that's not what we deserve. I wasn't made out of nothing, I didn't come out of nothing. I'm trying to publish my poems in German. This opportunity was given to me by Germany. However, I hope this is as a result because of what I write is good, rather than me being a refugee.

## Panel 3 - Human trafficking and exploitation - daily realities of refugees on the move

### Participants

**Claire Healy** Researcher, International Centre for Migration Policy Development, Austria

**Olivier Peyroux** Sociologist, Migration and Human Trafficking, France

**Barbara Preitler** Psychotherapist, Hemayat, Austria

**Bakhtyar Hadi Hassan** Trauma Educationalist, Jiyon Foundation for Human Rights, Iraq

**Jihane Essaid** Mid-way Houses Program Manager, Gender Equality Programme, ABAAD, Lebanon



### Host

**Helga Konrad**, Former Austrian Federal Minister for Women, Regional Implementation Initiative on Preventing & Combating Human Trafficking, Austria

### Summaries

**Helga Konrad** Former Austrian Federal Minister for Women, Regional Implementation Initiative on Preventing & Combating Human Trafficking, Austria



**Human trafficking is the most globalized criminal business in the world, it is one of the most horrendous violations of human rights and it is not new.**

Human trafficking is about exploitation, very often sexual exploitation, very often labour exploitation. It is domestic servitude, it is human trafficking for begging, it is human trafficking for forced marriages and early marriages, it is human trafficking for trafficking organs etc.

More often than not NGOs and institutions and organizations are dealing with it. We have only very few politicians who care, who really care.

**Olivier Peyroux** Sociologist, Migration and Human Trafficking, France



If we focus on the Lebanese situation, where a lot of refugees are hosted, even living in a tent, most of them have to pay rent and there is very little or no support. Therefore, they need to earn money. But refugees are not allowed to work on the official market, so most of the time, it is easier and not so risky to send children and women to work and earn money. So, we have a lot of labour exploitation.

**In certain countries like Libya, people have to pay smugglers. They need to earn money to pay the smugglers. The boundary between smuggling and trafficking is more and more unclear. And as it is very expensive, most of the people get exploited for a certain time. Even when they are in Europe, some of them still have some debts to pay back. So, they have to work for free to repay their uncle who gave them the money to leave.**



**Claire Healy** Researcher, International Centre for Migration Policy Development, Austria



Boys in particular and young men in many cases are not voluntarily joining armed groups and participating in armed conflict. In Syria, a town was under the control of an Islamist group and families were starving, they had no access to the most basic needs. **The only way to access any kind of food, any kind of supplies was forcing the sons to join this armed group. In this context, we can't talk about people voluntarily joining an armed group.**

The main way in which exploitation and trafficking is taking place in the countries that we look at, is not happening following the popular idea of a sophisticated international criminal network. It takes place at a very low level of family members and acquaintances. In many cases those people exploiting, the perpetrators, are actually in a desperate situation themselves.

**Jihane Isseid** Emergency Safe Housing Program Manager, ABAAD, Lebanon



Every month we have around 100 or 150 new births in Lebanon among the refugee communities, but these kids remain without nationality because they cannot have their births registered. They cannot officially enter Syrian territory or remain in Lebanon. **There is nothing to certify their birth and this is going to open the door to new forms of exploitation down the road.**

There is legislation in the entire Arab world, which enables the family to marry off the victim of sexual exploitation and rape to her abuser in order to “protect her”. Because of the increase in the number of rapes in Syria, among the community of refugees from Syria, we were able to make the Lebanese Parliament aware of the situation in order to adopt new legislation regarding the women's exploitation. Forcing a woman or young girl to marry her abuser and her rapist is definitely a new form of exploitation.

At the moment, and we are seeing an approach now to include men, to talk to men about the dangers of early marriage. The decision is always in the hands of men, be it the father or the man who wishes to marry a younger woman. We have to talk to men, and younger boys.

**Bakhtyar Hadi Hassan** Trauma Educationalist, Jiyan Foundation for Human Rights, Iraq



As a consequence of Daesh approaching Mossul, then moving to the centre of Iraq in 2014 and the following years, we have found ourselves receiving and welcoming half a million refugees from those parts of Iraq as well. We were not prepared to receive such huge numbers of refugees and displaced people.

We know that a lot of brainwashing is taking place. The children and the girls who were in the hands of ISIS subjected to exploitation were forced to think, “Maybe it's my problem. Maybe because I'm a Yezidi girl, of Yezidi origin, I have been abused. The fault is mine.” Those children were forced to become

Muslim, to convert to Islam.

**We have this little booklet regarding the rights of children. This has to be circulated widely. We have done our bit. We have distributed this little booklet in refugee camps, and we have raised awareness. If the young girl knows her rights, I think this is the very important first step.**

**Barbara Preitler** Psychotherapist, Hemayat, Austria



**As a very young person or child, if you are exploited, you are forced to work. You don't want sexual exploitation. You are forced to join military forces. It goes to the deepest point of traumatization. It is about helplessness. I think this is a very central point about trauma to feel totally helpless.**

A consequence is low self-esteem. If I do not see that I have a right as a citizen, I do not have the right to be a child, I have no right to go to school, I am treated as a beggar because I have to do what I am forced to be doing. It means my self-esteem will be very low. I think we have to do a lot for these children, to encourage them, to rebuild their dignity, to teach them that they have human rights.

## Panel 4 – Children’s rights: Conflict between universality and cultural particularity?

### Participants

**Shams Asadi** Human Rights Commissioner & Head, Human Rights Office of the City of Vienna, Austria

**Marjo Buitelaar** Professor of Contemporary Islam, University Groningen, Netherlands

**Majdoleen Hassan** Lawyer and Human rights activist, Syria/Austria

**Barbara Preitler** Psychotherapist, Hemayat, Austria

**Helmut Sax** Key Researcher, Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights, Austria



### Host

**Anna Sporrer**, Vice President of Higher Administrative Court, Vienna

### Summaries

**Anna Sporrer**, Vice President of Higher Administrative Court, Vienna



Concerning early marriages, it is very unsatisfying that we do have some numbers from Germany, but that Austria obviously did not yet look at them. The CEDAW committee has recommended Austria in 2013 “to provide data on forced marriages, disaggregated by age, ethnicity of the victim and the specific measures taken to combat forced marriages.”

**There are some laws prohibiting early marriages, there is an absolute ban on marriages before the age of 16 in Austria. And teenagers in Austria can only marry if they appear mature enough and with the consent of both parents. I think in focus of all of this, the best interest of the child, the victim, the person has to be looked at.**

**Majdoleen Hassan** Lawyer and Human rights activist, Syria/Austria



Early marriages are not banned in Syria in spite of the fact that Syria is a signatory to the International Convention on the Rights of the Child and also is part of the Pact on Civil and Economic Rights.

Legislation must be adopted, and wherever it is adopted, it must be enforced regardless of religion or tradition. Governments must enable young girls to have access to their rights and to supporting networks. We know pretty well that early marriages are also one of the causes that lead to de-schoolarization of young girls. The families - instead of permitting young girls to go to school and

to provide them education - are very often pushing the young girls towards these early marriages because of their economic burdens.

I think that we have to grant young girls their sexual rights because these sexual rights exist and we have to assign young girls the right over their own bodies. Governments, whether they are recipients of programs or initiators, have to uphold certain principles and have to ensure and enforce certain rights.

**I would like legislation in the host country not to recreate the same situation for young girls as the one they have fled from.**

**Marjo Buitelaar** Professor of Contemporary Islam, University Groningen, Netherlands



The term 'child bride' makes it sound, at least in Dutch, even more dramatic than it is in most cases. We usually refer to children in their teens as teenagers or youth. Indeed, Dutch female minors who become mothers are called 'teenage mothers', then why not also speak of 'teenage brides' when referring to married Syrian girls under 18?

Of course, they all need our support, they all need our protection. But we have to take into account that it is not just a matter of cognition. It is very important that they know their rights, that they have education, but surely, coming from

these cultures, they are also very often very loyal to parents.

**So, you may have been forced into a marriage, but you may understand why your parents did that. If you then come into a country where the discourse is very much about "Child marriage is something that we do not do", that is only the very negative perspective rather than also taking into account the reasons, the factors that contribute to it, the ambivalent feelings that these marriage partners themselves may have, that is not going to help their integration. That's not going to help them feel at home, feel that they have the right to belong to the country of residence.**

**Helmut Sax** Key Researcher, Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights, Austria



UNICEF speaks of 700 million women, girls, being affected by child marriage. So, we are not talking about a small minority, and 15 million girls are getting married every year. This is also not only linked to Islam or Muslim cultures. In absolute numbers, I think it is India that has the largest population of married children.

Participation would be also one of my key recommendations - to work with the communities, but also with the children themselves, to give them a possibility to speak about their situation, to explain - in order to make any

measures we take more effective and sustainable. Otherwise children do not see the background to what we expect from them, and then it will not be effective.

**We need an assessment of our child protection systems and not a paternalistic child protection system, but one which respects the rights of children based on the best interest of the Rights of Children principle.**

**Shams Asadi** Human Rights Commissioner & Head, Human Rights Office of the City of Vienna, Austria



**The city of Vienna started a project including all vulnerable groups, whether Austrian children or refugee children, the Rights of Children are valid for everybody in the society.** We help the most vulnerable groups and this is the innovative part of being a Human Rights city because – other than integration or just helping refugees, about which we had a lot of discussion in Europe polarizing society - Human Rights are the highest values in society.

We have therefore started a project, at its core is the Centre of Refugee Empowerment, it is a huge European project and we take a lot of actions in this field.

**Barbara Preitler** Psychotherapist, Hemayat, Austria

**We see one kind of child marriage now, especially young boys, who got married just before they left their home countries. I think, the idea is somehow not to lose the family member, and on the other hand they also hope that a girl can make a safe way to Europe through legal family reunion.**



When we see children, who are already married, who are sexually exploited, who had to come alone all the way from their home countries to here, of course, I see them as teenagers in regard of the age, but they are already much more mature and we have to respect that. Thirdly we also have to understand that very often they have not had enough childhood. So, it very often happens in the therapeutic work that we have to give them motherly, fatherly care because they need it to become healthy adults.



# Workshop Summaries

## Education

### 1) Good practice models on integrating refugee and socially deprived children in the MENAT region

**Hosts:** Rima Doany, Executive Director, Ana Aqura Association, Libanon  
Sabine Larribeau, Director of Psychosocial Services, St. Andrew's Refugee Services (StARS)

- The solutions in place should be adopted.
- Build constructively on the curricula of the hosting countries in order to improve them.
- Create an environment of trust between hosting community and refugees, which leads to intercommunity understanding, peace and inclusion.
- Public-Private-Partnerships are crucial on all levels to ensure the engagement of authorities.

### 2) Good practice models on social cohesion and pluralism in European classrooms

**Host:** Daniel Landau, Education Expert and Teacher, Austria

- Need for training the teachers
- Need for dissemination of knowledge about good practices.
- Value added approach is useful in order to assess which competences students acquire during their education. This would support the policy-making process.
- Student-centered approach would add to the improvement of the educational system and well supported students develop better.

## Children facing violence and trauma

### 1) Support in school environment for traumatized refugee children

**Host:** Gabriele Siebert, Trauma Educationalist, Interface, Austria

- Create cross-sectoral and intersectoral dialogue that aim at the sustainability of policies, partnerships and capacity building
- Train teachers and professionals to deal with traumatized children
- Public advocacy aiming at the awareness and accountability of government and local authorities on addressing the issue of trauma
- Evidence-based, sustainable support programs
- International exchange and networks to learn more about home-countries

### 2) Support in school environment for local children with violence, neglect and deprivation experiences in the receiving countries

**Host:** Ulrike Madzar, Psychotherapist, Director, Oskar Spiel School, Austria

- Create an inclusive environment for all children rather than parallel societies
- Rethink the European school system: Create a good network between schools, families and related institutions

## Intercultural

**Host:** Doris Englisch- Stoelner, Center for Language Development, Vienna School Board, Austria

- Leverage the children's potential (assess it properly) and create tailored programs
- Integrate parents in the process of education.
- Intercultural coaching
- Focus on positive examples, present the competences of refugees

## Masculinity

**Host:** Philipp Leeb, Chairman, POIKA, NGO for Gender Sensitive Boys' Work in School and Education, Austria

- Work in-situ: "finding one's own new language"
- Gender discussion is important for men and women.
- Abolish harming and discriminating language and behavior
- Coeducation is important, sometimes it would be good to split girls and boys at times and then bring them together again, so they can have their own time

## Exploitation

### 1) How to better help and support refugee children and children on the move facing exploitation and violence

**Host:** Geneviève Colas, Expert, Secours Catholique - Caritas France: Trafficking in human beings. Unaccompanied minors, Juvenile justice, France

- Engage with authorities on international, national and local level
- Need for an integrated approach: prevention, intervention, work on a grassroots level
- Make a strong research-based case for investing in interventions with long-term benefits
- Establish International cooperation as an ongoing process
- Assume responsibility e.g. guardianship

### 2) How to better help and support girls and young women facing violence, specifically gender-based violence

**Host:** Brigitte Holzner, Gender Expert and Chair, TAMAR - Counseling Centre for (sexually) abused women, girls and children, Austria

- Need for public recognition for the problem of sexual violation
- Networking on all levels e.g. global database of funders, cooperation between shelters
- Education in the language of the country of arrival to break the barriers
- Education on women rights and sexual awareness
- Train medical staff on rape case management
- Create a protection structure and build a protection system for the whole family in order to include the victims and prevent them from isolation

## Traumatisation

### 1) Accompanying and supporting children and young people with Violence Trauma

**Host:** Ulrike Schneck, Psychological Director, Regional office Tübingen of Refugio Stuttgart, Germany

- Children are in need of safe places, they need to know they will not be sent back
- Children need communication in their new environment, they also need empathy from their parents
- Teach grammar with the stories of children collected and written down by teachers
- Train teachers about the childrens' home cultures and manners to prevent misunderstandings
- Children need help to rebuild their identity

### 2) Accompanying and Supporting Families of Children and Young People with Violence Trauma

**Hosts:** Susanne Stein, Consultant, Author, Germany

Marianne Alkhelewi-Brainin, Psychotherapist, Hemayat, Center for Torture and War Survivors, Austria

- Upscale existing programs for children
- Support and leverage the cultural bridging function of teachers
- Build trust between families and schools
- Inclusive approach: Address trauma as an issue that also affects the environment around the victim e.g. parents, teachers etc.
- Cooperation and sharing of information about trauma

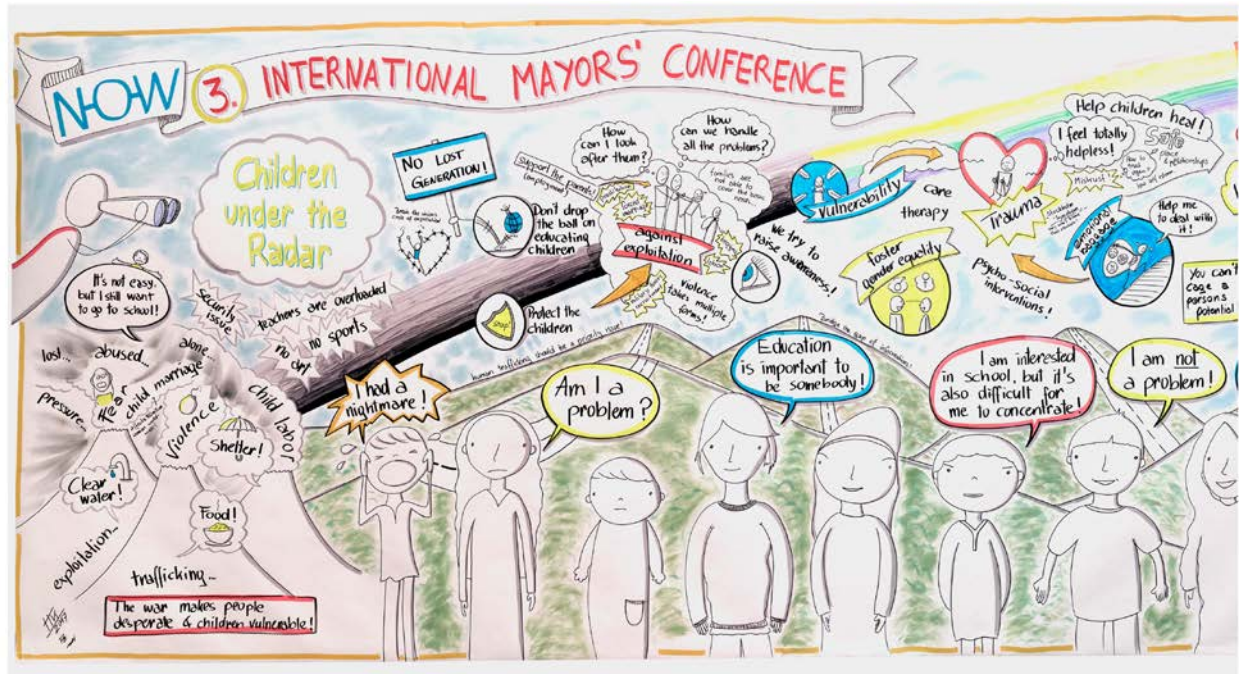
## Mayors

**Host:** George Antoun, Country Director and Regional Program Advisor, Mercy Corps, Lebanon

- It is important to fill the gap in information and transparency within the local communities
- Structural involvement of civil society aiming at creating a public benefit for refugees and the local community
- Create tailored programs or co-create them with civil society/ local community
- Define the political framework in which mayors can operate
- Need for National plans
- Instead of having people wait around, allow them to be involved in the labor market. Municipalities are benefiting from this policy
- The municipalities should be in the center of the chain of command of work addressing the issue, coordinating groups of volunteers and register volunteers and what they can offer
- Create an environment, a space where refugees and the local community can interact with each other aiming at creating intercultural understanding

# Visual Recording

By Harald Karrer





## Concert - Sounds of Hope and Connecting

The initiative of the **Mobile Music School** developed last year as a cooperation between Marwan Abado and NOW and has been conducting several music workshops since. This year, children and youth of diverse - local, migration and refugee – backgrounds, performed together and presented songs from various traditions, instrumental music and Hip Hop dance. The sound of their music connects them and brings hope.



**Initiator and Director:** Marwan Abado

**Partner institutions:** Music School Vienna, Kulturkontakt Austria, UMF Haus Liebhartstal – House for unaccompanied minor refugees, NMS School Koppstraße 110 Ottakring

**Partner artists:** Gudrun Eber, Amirkasra Zandian, Elisabeth Bertel, Mirjam Klebel

**Orchestra:** Pia, Birolin, Lea, Katja, Smithra, Konstantin, Vincent, Florian, Luise, Anastasia, Elina, Felicia, Jakub, Julia, Dario, Katharina, Lilien, Dina, Daniel, Sayen, Julia, Laila, David, Emily, Melanie, Lili, Emma, Mia, Paul, Judith, Kitty, Sisi, Anna, Rob William, Njoud, George

**Choir NMS Ottakring:** Nejrfan, Hasan, Bachir, Yusuf, Karar, Younes, Ahmad, Mohammad, Mohamad, Fairuz, Mohammad, Zakaria, Khalil, Bilal, Rouaa, Almayssa, Ranim, Sakina, Puica

**Dance:** Sidra

**Vocals:** Hania

**Oud – Solo:** Masad

## Final Declaration of the 3rd NOW-Conference:

### Our shared obligation towards children

Children on the move are the most vulnerable victims, defenceless, exploited. But they also are **the greatest chance**. To help them and assure them a future all it requires is clear awareness of the issues.

This is the key message and finding from the 3<sup>rd</sup> NOW International Mayors' Conference in Vienna.

31 million children and teenagers are fleeing from war, violence, or extreme poverty. Further 17 million children are displaced within their home countries. Of the 1,2 million people who came into the EU in 2016, 300,000 are children, 70% of them from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq.

Children and teenagers are affected in many ways by war and displacement and more vulnerable for many reasons, some of them being:

- They are traumatized by war and violence and have experienced existential threats
- They are particularly endangered during their flight – take trafficking as an example
- They are pulled out of school and face years of interrupted education
- They get caught in multiple traps: forced labour, child labour to contribute to family incomes, sexual exploitation, prostitution also in the form of early teenage marriages and many more
- They are forced into militias and armies
- Girls and boys are exposed to different dangers that could overshadow their whole lives. Children with their families are exposed to different dangers than minors on the move alone. What they all have in common is extreme vulnerability to the pitfalls mentioned above. They are innocent victims and if they are not cared for in appropriate ways some may become offenders themselves – not because their families don't care for them but in many cases because they simply cannot take care of them: because they don't have a roof over their heads, no job and therefore no resources to provide for them
- When these children reach our countries, they bring all those experiences and traumata with them
- Unfortunately, it happens that new injuries are added here: they spend months and sometimes years in shelters, receiving little information about their rights and being insufficiently protected from sexual and other violence by fellow refugees

There is no greater humanitarian obligation than towards these children, each one of them, with her or his own personal history.

At our conference, we have exchanged so many great experiences. Mayors, refugees, representatives of NGOs and relief organizations, trauma and education experts have presented and shared their best-practice experiences. They show clearly how much can be done even with limited funds to dispel some of the dark clouds hovering over them and how we can create a brighter future with and for them.

We have heard how Jordan and Lebanon created thousands more classrooms.

We have heard about the successes of psychological support for children with PTSD. Children who have nightmares every night cannot concentrate in school and may show aggressive behaviour – they can be stabilized if sensitive caregivers and teachers receive adequate training and support.

We have heard of the many times children are overburdened by for example becoming the spokespersons of their families, simply because they are the first to have learned the new language –

they become their parents' parents – which in turn is a challenge for the parents. We have also learned how this constellation can actually empower these kids.

**There is no “one solution”. Each child is different, each experience is different, each family is different. We have learned that we have to listen to each child.**

Not only refugee children are at risk. There are not too few children in our countries who are also growing up in stressful environments with low educational, social or income status and few opportunities – in families with and without migration backgrounds.

Our learnings from the past days have given us hope. While noticing a growing rhetoric of xenophobia, being overstretched and ostracism in our political discourse we have seen the enormous chances when dedication and humanitarianism go hand in hand.

We have seen children and teenagers who could start a new life within a few months or years, who have seized the opportunities and realized their potentials where they had been offered. We have seen and heard children who told us about their dreams and their achievements. We have seen children sing. And we have seen children's smiles.

But we have also heard heart-breaking, horrific things. As a next step, we are going to invite representatives of all Austrian parties to a trip to the epicentres of the refugees' reality to enable them to witness themselves what we have collected. We are confident that no one can close his eyes and ears when confronted with the wounds of the most vulnerable.

We, the participants of the 3<sup>rd</sup> NOW Conference

- Mayors from Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Greece, Italy, Austria and Germany
- EU and local politicians
- Scientists, experts and individuals from dozens of countries

**Pledge to continue developing and sharing our best-practice examples, to stand up for an open society, which shall protect the weakest and welcome those in danger with open arms and an open heart.**

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## About Act.Now

<b>Founded</b>	December 2015
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<b>Websites</b>	<a href="http://www.act-n-o-w.com">www.act-n-o-w.com</a> <a href="http://www.now-conference.org">www.now-conference.org</a>
<b>Line of business</b>	We initiate projects for a respectful and appreciative social coexistence internationally with a focus on international conferences.
<b>Who we are</b>	Act.Now is an enterprise based on the private initiative of the founders acting internationally and above party lines. Our office is located in Vienna.
<b>What we want</b>	We want to contribute to a respectful and appreciative coexistence in a time of profound social changes that result in challenges to democratic systems.
<b>What we do</b>	<p>Act.Now supports people to take on more responsibility in their respective environment.</p> <p>Act.Now connects people and initiatives to raise the effectiveness of projects aimed to strengthen social cohesion.</p> <p>Act.Now provides information about social change and its impact on society to promote new solutions.</p> <p>To achieve its objectives Act.Now employs processes that are both cognitively and emotionally effective.</p>

## About NOW-Conferences

### Vienna, January 2017

**Athens, July 2016** The implementation of the EU-Turkey agreement to handle migration flows poses huge challenges for local communities in border regions. Mayors from affected municipalities in Greece, Turkey and Italy met at the second NOW-Conference to assess this agreement, together with representatives of NGOs, members of the European Parliament, experts and refugees. The conference was hosted by Hannes Swoboda, former MEP, and currently a board member of the Bruno Kreisky Forum for International Dialogue in Vienna.

**Vienna, January 2016** The first International Mayors' Conference NOW was held in January 2016 in Vienna. At that gathering, Mayors from local authorities along refugee routes (Middle East, Turkey, Greece, Italy, Austria, Germany), representatives of NGOs and people who had been forced to flee their homeland met for the first time to discuss practical solutions at local level.

For details see: [www.now-conference.org](http://www.now-conference.org)