

21/22 January 2016  
Vienna

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## MEDIA INFORMATION

### Refugees: International Mayors' Conference in Vienna discussing solutions

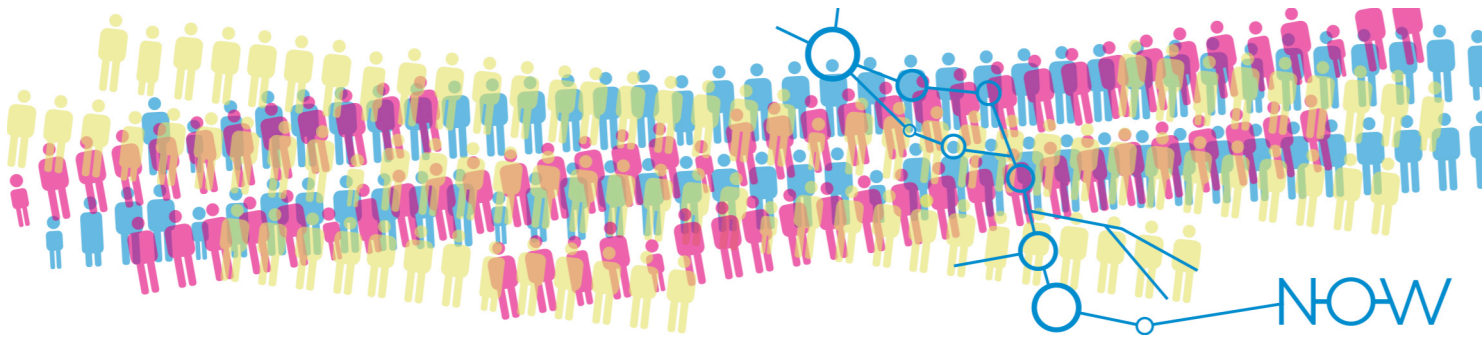
**Mayors from ten countries – from Lebanon, Turkey and Macedonia to Austria and Germany – met for the first time yesterday and today in Vienna to discuss, with experts, feasible solutions for living together with refugees in their towns and cities. The mayors exchanged their experiences and presented examples of successful local projects. All participants agreed that the successful integration of refugees requires language courses and meaningful occupations, to be offered them from day one.**

Vienna, 22 January 2016 – At the International Mayors' Conference N-O-W, participants developed new approaches to a responsible and balanced refugee policy, based on communities' experiences.

Some 20 mayors from towns and cities along the refugee routes (from Amman to Passau) worked to the theme "listen / ask / learn / answer" on specific guidelines, to be applied mainly at the local and regional, but also at the country and European levels. They received support from 30 national and international NGOs, more than 50 experts from Europe and the Arab region, and from refugees. A total of 150 participants from Germany, Greece, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Macedonia, Sweden, Switzerland, Sudan, Turkey, and Austria, as well as more than 50 media representatives gathered for this event in a 1,000 sq. metres assembly hangar of the Austrian Railways.

"Hundreds of millions of people, from Syria to Sweden, find themselves in completely new life circumstances. For the most part, these lives take place in communities. And the mayors whom we invited as their representatives bear a great responsibility," said Patricia Kahane who, as President of the Karl Kahane Foundation, initiated the Mayors' Conference together with multimedia artist André Heller and Andreas Babler, the mayor of Traiskirchen, the home town of Austria's largest refugee camp. "My experience with large projects of this kind is that they tend to shrink towards their realisation. This time we are all happy to see that the results by far surpassed our expectations," Heller said in an initial assessment.

Spyros Galinos, the mayor of Lesbos, Greece, appealed in a media briefing not to blank out the human tragedies of the refugees: "We have to ask ourselves what makes parents put their ten-year-



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old child alone in a rubber dinghy, without knowing whether he or she will arrive at the destination.  
How desperate must they be?"

Despite often very difficult conditions – some of the mayors are responsible for camps with up to 90,000 refugees – the participants all showed a great willingness to help. As Michael Chalupka, Direktor of the Diakonie Österreich relief organisation, said in a panel discussion: "Nobody in this room said they were overstrained – they all said 'please help us to help'."

Andreas Babler, mayor of Traiskirchen and a co-initiator of the conference, summarised the common concern of the participating mayors in the sentence: "Please don't leave us alone." He announced that there will be follow-up activities to the N-O-W initiative, in order to strengthen the contacts that were established at the conference.

A summary of the conference results will be available some time next week on the website  
<http://www.now-conference.org>.

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