



## **Community Philanthropy in Europe: A Response to the Refugee and Migrant Situation<sup>1</sup>**

A controversial law proposed by the Danish government which would grant authorities the right to seize valuable assets from refugees in order to help fund their stay when applying for asylum in the country, and which would also postpone reunification for families of asylum seekers, [was debated by Members of the European Parliament](#) in January 2016. Despite heated debate around the draft legislation, the Danish government ultimately passed the law on 25<sup>th</sup> January.

Just a few blocks away at Philanthropy House, community philanthropy practitioners, funders, and philanthropic support organizations were gathering to discuss what might be the unique contribution of community philanthropy in the face of the challenges surrounding the movement of refugees and asylum seekers across Europe. This mass and unprecedented movement dramatically picked up speed over 2015, both in countries of entry, transit as well as destination. An initial discussion and survey on the topic, carried out by the Global Fund for Community Foundations (GFCF) over autumn 2015, indicated several potential roles for community philanthropy organizations (including supporting local civil society; mobilizing volunteers; using multi-stakeholder relationships to engage in discussions around local opportunities and concerns; funding longer-term resettlement and integration needs; etc.). Significantly, the option of “Do nothing” was roundly [rejected by those contributing to discussions](#).

Despite the diversity of experiences represented at the January convening, with participants hailing from 13 EU countries (see Annex A), there were clear cross-cutting concerns expressed about the nature of the values that are taken to underpin European policy-making and the importance of protecting concepts of diversity, human rights and inclusion. Anxieties were voiced about the unravelling of a shared European perspective and dysfunctional crisis management that had been experienced at both the national and transnational levels, with the nearby European Parliament discussions adding a vivid and urgent example of how quickly negative public perception can influence policy. Even in the face of such massive challenges, those present were keen to explore and articulate a distinct role for European community philanthropy.

### **Where to begin?**

Another unifying sentiment amongst participants was that with the overwhelming scale of Europe’s refugee crisis, it was sometimes difficult to know where to begin, or how to make

---

<sup>1</sup> The [European Foundation Centre](#) and [Global Fund for Community Foundations](#) convened a discussion on community philanthropy’s response to the European refugee crisis in Brussels from 26<sup>th</sup> - 27<sup>th</sup> January 2016, with the support of the [Open Society Initiative for Europe](#) and the [Social Change Initiative](#). This report offers an insight into the discussions. A full list of participants is included in Annex A.

an impact. Lack of confidence in designing interventions to meet the needs of refugees and migrants, limited resources and capacity, as well as isolation, seemed to be factors exacerbating this feeling.

But thinking on a micro-level: starting with one individual, one family, or one group before beginning to think on a community-wide level (or beyond) seemed to be key. This also roots all future actions, opinions and decisions in reality: Europe's refugee crisis is not a faceless problem, so should therefore not be treated as one - these are individuals whose lives have been irreversibly affected, and this consideration must rest at the very heart of all responses. Creating links and partnerships with like-minded organizations grappling with the same issues, such as the opportunity presented by the EFC/GFCF January convening, was also noted as being of vital importance.

A [European Foundation Centre \(EFC\) survey on European foundations' response to the crisis](#), also conducted over autumn 2015, received responses from 65 foundations responding to the situation, most of these being foundations with a track record of working on migration and integration. However the gravity, depth, and long-term implications of the crisis seemed to have also prompted a number of foundations that have not previously worked in this area to take action: 46 out of the 65 respondents noted that they were considering new funding programmes, with 37 ready to consider the pooling of resources and 52 interested in working in partnership with other funders. As such, there are certainly opportunities for organizations wishing to partner around, and expand their response to, the refugee crisis - but it's a matter of finding the contextually appropriate entry point.<sup>2</sup>

### **Taking the pulse of current issues**

Drawing from experiences in the room, participants discussed what the current situation and perceptions of refugees were in their regional and national contexts, with broad conclusions surfacing that:

- The media presentation of the numbers of refugees and migrants can harmfully distort local perceptions of the likely impact on communities. This can become particularly toxic where there is also political manipulation of fears.
- The very positive outpouring of volunteer effort across the EU has often not been reflected in the media but offers both new sources of positive activism, as well as an indication of rejection of the negativities of certain politics.
- The refugee and asylum seeker issue is giving dangerous oxygen to underlying racism and xenophobia across Europe, reflected in election returns in a number of countries. Particularly in countries that experienced the impact of austerity measures following the 2008 economic downturn, the pressure of responding to the refugee and asylum situation is often seen as adding an additional challenge to the existing issues of high youth unemployment, lack of housing and increasing levels of poverty. Concerns over

---

<sup>2</sup> The convening also featured presentations from three organizations working in this space, outlining philanthropic interest and potential support available for work relating to refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. This included the Network of European Foundations' [European Programme for Integration and Migration](#), the [New Beginnings Fund](#) managed by the Association of Charitable Foundations and UK Community Foundations, and the [Open Society Foundations](#), which has a long-track record in this area, and is currently funding in all European countries affected by migration movements (largely in support of civil society organizations responding in humane and responsible ways).

increased pressures on already scarce resources are real issues - it was therefore accepted that it is important not to discount the expressed fears of local people about the potential impact of refugee resettlement and broader migration issues.

- There are growing concerns around the increased differentiation within and between refugee, asylum seeker and migrant groups: many countries are relying on the “deserving” and “undeserving” narrative. Again, clarity about facts is important in this context, as well as the ability to share facts in a manner that people will understand.
- The current situation has been made worse by a lack of a unified response at the EU level. Increased fears in the EU around security and terrorism are playing out viciously at various national borders, and at the peril of many individuals’ basic human rights. This is essentially a challenge to the idea of EU solidarity.

### **What’s working in communities?**

Moving to individual community philanthropy organizations’ response to the refugee and migrant situation, participants shared a range of different approaches (in terms of both relief and inclusion) which were identified as having potential:

#### ***Comfort***

Strive to make individuals’ transitions through, or into, new communities, as smooth and comfortable as possible:

- Prepare language-sympathetic welcome packs for incoming families that outline local amenities, services, and places of note.
- Develop initiatives that help newcomers with advice and support to access local administrative systems. Providing translation, particularly in legal services, social services and health and education systems, can often be key. Such an approach first requires an initial mapping of services available.
- Support the organization of local welcome events and programmes, particularly where they are followed up by one-to-one contacts, for example an Italian programme “Look who is coming to dinner?” whereby local families host refugee families for an evening. There is also a growing local “buddy” system, where individuals are partnered with newcomers to help them navigate a new city. In other contexts, local women offer language lessons, and share various ethnic foods, with incoming women and their children.
- Assist in validating/translating/certifying the qualifications of refugees (both academic and professional).

#### ***Convene***

Draw on existing and new networks of partners to advance the work collectively:

- Offer opportunities for local communities to unite around common concerns over and above that of ethnic/religious/national identity, and to propose solutions. There is a danger that the numbers of refugees and asylum seekers involved will be seen as endangering the existing social fabric of society, however where people can be encouraged to work together around issues, attitudes can change. Recommendations could, in turn, be relayed to government institutions to put pressure on them to think through policy differently.

- Seek out unusual allies through convenings to support the inclusion of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. Chambers of Commerce and religious institutions could be particularly important.

### ***Communicate***

- Translate data into relevant, useful information for local community use.
- Record the human story of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants to encourage empathy.
- Publicize the generosity of local people in response to refugee and asylum seeker needs to confront negative stereotypes and put pressure on authorities. A great example of civic engagement is the Airbnb style, [Refugees Welcome](#) website, which proposes flat sharing arrangements for refugees in more than 20 countries.
- Share/coordinate the work of volunteer groups, compiling information about who is doing what and where the public can contribute financial, and other forms of, support.
- Support (financially, with contacts, or with knowledge) NGOs and volunteer groups involved in advocacy on issues relating to refugees, asylum seekers and migrants - particularly where they are trying to raise collective voice around key issues.

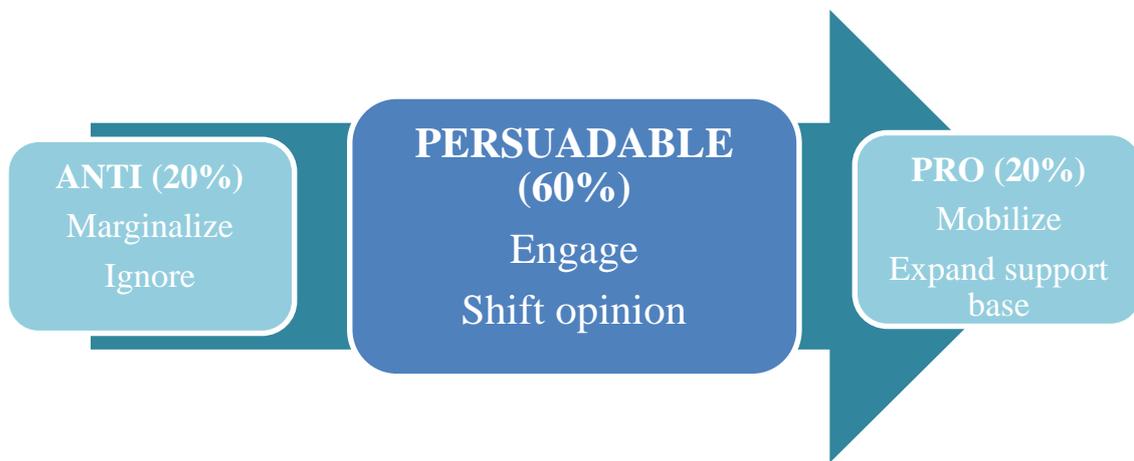
### ***Celebrate***

- Support community festivals that celebrate the benefits and richness of diverse communities.
- Recognize and highlight success: support projects where more settled migrant groups can help new arrivals with peer to peer information. A similar example was a film project whereby children from receiving communities interview children from migrant and refugee groups and try to highlight the positive side of their experience - what are they enjoying in their new life?

## **Messaging and communications**

Drawing on his extensive experience of fighting for immigration reform in the US, Frank Sharry of [America's Voice](#) led a session on messaging and communications. He noted that the US experience suggests that facts matter, but are often not decisive in conversations around refugees and migrants - perhaps because these are emotional conversations, which often tap into deeply rooted opinions and perceptions. What is crucial is how the discussion is framed, and how this narrative chimes with people's values, identity and emotions.

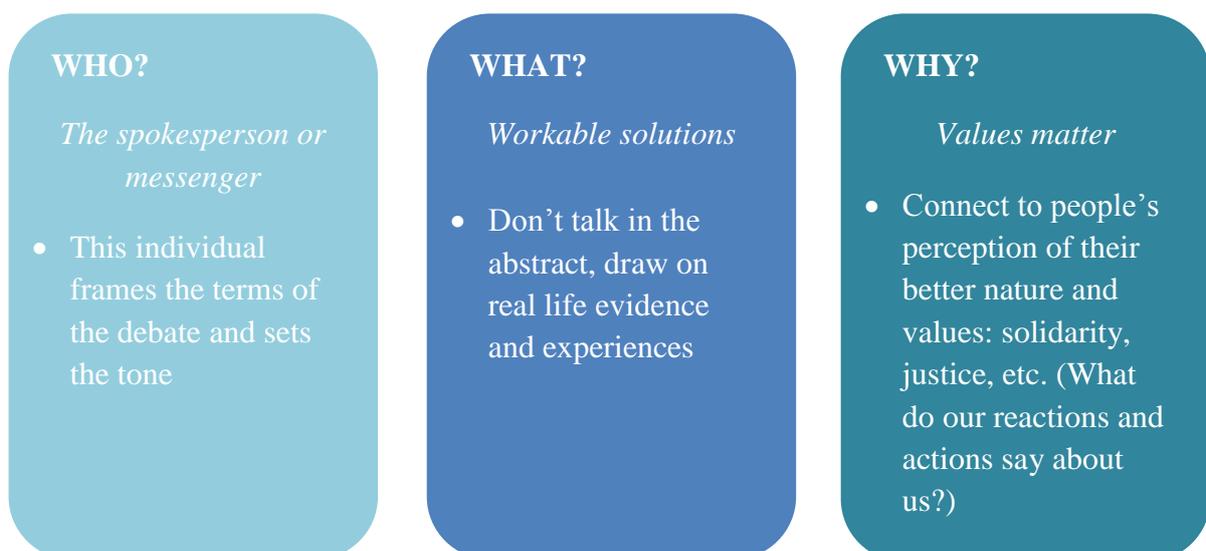
Research conducted by America's Voice has also shown that the public do not simply divide into those that are positive or negative to immigration issues, but instead suggests that: 20% are very supportive of immigrants' rights; 20% are decidedly against immigration; and a further 60% are in the area between the two (with 30% leaning towards positive and 30% hovering in the negative sphere). It is this middle 60% that should be a priority, as they are persuadable (though you should still address legitimate apprehensions of the persuadable middle, without pandering to excess fears). When considering audience, this offers the following scenario:



Considering the following six points before developing messaging helps in creating clear, compelling and succinct communications:

1. **Audience:** Are you trying to reach members of your board? The community? Policy makers?
2. **Local context**
3. **Desired outcomes:** What are you trying to achieve? Be as specific as possible when considering desired outcomes, then work backwards.
4. **Potential allies:** What other organizations/individuals can help in getting the message across? Don't forget to consider unusual allies too.
5. **Where is the positive?** It is important not to be solely responsive to negative messages (but the best way to rebut negativity is with facts and data). Rather, take the initiative to frame the discussion in positive and inclusive terms that seek to "persuade the persuadable."
6. **Who says what to whom, and why?**

To expand further on the sixth and final point (assuming that the "whom" is your persuadable audience):



Other tips included:

- Develop “top line” messages that are simple, clear and speak to people’s values, for example “Citizenship delayed is democracy denied” or “Dignity values more than money.”
- Words matter! When selecting vocabulary think how, for example, migrants in Calais feel when their new home, albeit temporary, is consistently referred to as “the jungle.”
- Be realistic in terms of demands and propose workable solutions through discussion with other interested parties. European community philanthropy organizations are particularly well-placed to explore such solutions given their ability to convene diverse stakeholders, but it may well fall on advocacy organizations to take the public message forward.
- Bring to the fore the stories of those who are most directly affected, i.e. from refugees, asylum seekers and migrants themselves. This reinforces the importance of having access to such stories, particularly in national contexts where the media are dissuaded from reporting empathetic accounts.

### **Community philanthropy’s unique response**

In summary, participants considered what they would be taking home from the two days of discussions - what could be their unique role to play in their own communities across Europe? What is community philanthropy’s added value?<sup>3</sup>

Participants agreed on the importance of small, flexible grants that can respond to needs and opportunities at the very local level, often in order to strengthen local groups that governments, philanthropy and larger aid organizations tend to overlook. Community philanthropy organizations are often uniquely placed to identify, and work with such groups, and to respond rapidly to changing situations on the ground. Grantmaking is an effective and transparent mechanism for devolving resources to the most marginalized, and is also a powerful tool for demonstrating to local donors how their contributions can reach small, off-the-map groups.

The reality that European community philanthropy organizations are long-term institutions - deeply rooted in the communities they aim to serve - was a recurring consideration. This unique vantage point allows them to think and work beyond the immediate crisis, concretely planning for the longer-term inclusion needs of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. The importance of prioritizing existing community needs alongside the specific needs of the incoming groups in order to avert any attempt to blame migration for increasing levels of societal disadvantage, was emphasized.

Given European community philanthropy organizations’ established experiences of working between numerous-stakeholders (those who give money and those who receive, businesses, local and regional governments, etc.) these organizations are naturally collaborative in their long-term approaches; an essential element when attempting to respond to such a massive challenge. European community philanthropy can therefore play a specific role in harnessing its convening power to draw in new and different stakeholders - reaching out to unusual allies

---

<sup>3</sup> Annex B provides one result from a post-convening survey which was circulated in February 2016, and which offers insight into the new ideas and plans participants were taking back to their offices.

was raised several times - in order to build alliances and trust across different sectors and interests.

With these different relationships and networks, community philanthropy organizations are also well placed to act as local knowledge hubs, drawing on their inter-sectoral position to: understand how a community is reacting; identify both gaps and overlapping activities between different actors; and, to play a coordinating role to ensure a more effective response. One specific suggestion was that community foundations might consider preparing a [Vital Signs publication](#) specifically on the theme of refugees, asylum seekers and migration to provide a basis for discussion in their own community.

Continuing to exchange knowledge (particularly about what is working and what isn't at the community level) with like-minded institutions, such as the opportunity offered by the present convening, was also emphasized. This could, in part, contribute to a trans-European vision and approach to community philanthropy's role and responsibility to respond to the refugee situation. One concrete suggestion for linking European community philanthropy work together moving forward was the creation of a European map that would pinpoint all of the community foundations offering services to refugees.

Yet the two days of discussions kept reverting back to the basic point that people are people, no matter where they come from, or what they have been through. So while community philanthropy should not discount many of its important non-financial contributions (community engagement, connections, knowledge, etc.) perhaps what is needed most in this moment is moral leadership. This moral leadership should strive to understand and counter untrue and negative perceptions, seek to serve the most disadvantaged, be thoughtful and humane in its responses, and always bring discussions back to: what do our reactions to the current refugee situation in Europe say about us as people? The fact that all respondents to the 2015 GFCF survey on community philanthropy's response to refugees rejected the option of "Do nothing" indicates that European community foundations are ready and willing to step up to the plate.

And it was, after all, this humanity which was seemingly lacking when (even after heated arguments in the European Parliament 25<sup>th</sup> January) the Danish government ultimately passed the controversial new laws surrounding asylum seekers. So community philanthropy's most important contribution to Europe's current challenges could in fact be in contributing to the re-building of European humanity and solidarity: from the bottom-up.

## Annex A

### Meeting Participants

Name	Organization	Country
Cristina Andreatta	Association of Charitable Foundations	United Kingdom
Gabriella Benedek	Ferencvaros Community Foundation	Hungary
Vittoria Burton	Fondazione della Comunit� del Canavese	Italy
Vera Dakova	Charles Stewart Mott Foundation	United Kingdom
Nadejda Dermendjieva	Bulgarian Fund for Women	Bulgaria
Jan Despeigelaere	Community Foundation West Flanders	Belgium
Daniela Dimitrova	Stara Zagora Community Foundation	Bulgaria
Anne Fleury	Centre Franais des Fonds et Fondations	France
Daniele Giudici	Fondazione della Comunit� del Varesotto	Italy
Kirsty Haasjes	Community Foundation for Wiltshire & Swindon	United Kingdom
Alejandro Hernandez	Fundacion Maimona	Spain
Annie Hillar	Mama Cash	Netherlands
Ali Khan	European Foundation Centre	Belgium
Avila Kilmurray	Global Fund Community Foundations	Northern Ireland
Barry Knight	Global Fund for Community Foundations	United Kingdom
Jana Kuniicka	Healthy City Community Foundation	Slovakia
Rosemary Macdonald	Community Foundation for Wiltshire & Swindon	United Kingdom
Donal MacFhearraigh	Open Society Foundations	Spain
Padraic Quirk	The Social Change Initiative	Northern Ireland
Andrea Pastore	Fondazione della Comunit� Salernitana	Italy
Dejan Peric	Community Foundation Zajecar	Serbia
Monika Pisankaneva	Workshop for Civic Initiative Foundation	Bulgaria
Wendy Richardson	Global Fund for Community Foundations	Belgium
Tina Roche	Community Foundation for Ireland	Ireland
Frank Sharry	America’s Voice	USA
Sarah Sommer	European Programme for Integration & Migration	Belgium
Boris Strecansky	Centre for Philanthropy	Bulgaria
Johanna von Hammerstein	BurgerStiftung Hamburg	Germany
Jayne Woodley	Oxfordshire Community Foundation	United Kingdom
Bitu Zerbes	Cluj Community Foundation	Romania

## Annex B

### Post-Convening Survey Results

In follow-up to the convening, participants were asked (amongst a number of different questions): “What differences has the workshop made to the way you think about the following elements in your work?” The chart below offers interesting insight into the new ideas and plans participants were taking back to their offices.

	<b>A Big Difference</b>	<b>Some Difference</b>	<b>No Difference</b>	<b>n/a</b>
<b>Building alliances and/or partnerships with other organisations</b>	50%	30%	20%	0%
<b>Conducting research on the issue of refugees</b>	0%	70%	20%	10%
<b>Convening groups and individuals on the topic of refugees</b>	70%	30%	0%	0%
<b>Developing a new programme</b>	20%	40%	20%	20%
<b>Grantmaking</b>	0%	60%	20%	20%
<b>Using your knowledge to advocate for policies and practices</b>	60%	30%	10%	0%