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UNAOC Fellowship Report – MENA Group 2015

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“Asylum Procedures & Integration Process: Cases of EU and USA”

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We are ready to hear your feedback and hopefully to cooperate in the future UNAOC events

The Case of Ahmad

I would like to start my report by unveiling you a concrete and hearth breaking story of a Syrian asylum seeker registered with UNHCR; His name is Ahmad coming from Idleb who crossed legally to Lebanon with his 3 daughters and wife since the crisis erupted in Syria not to forget that he lost of his daughters because of the brutality of the war. On December seven I conducted a preliminary interview with Ahmad for Resettlement purposes; to give you a glimpse of his story Ahmad is now residing illegally in Lebanon because he doesn't have the financial means to renew his residency permit. He is unable to find work due to the harsh circumstances and since he is scared to move around because of his residency permit and if he was caught he would be arrested; therefore in order not to keep his daughters starving he had to visit a hairdresser with his daughters and have his three young daughters cut their hair. Probably you will ask if he doesn't work how he will provide the haircut. But necessity is the mother of all inventions; so Ahmad had to sell his three daughters' hair (the hair would be used as hair extension) When Ahmad was telling me his story I was barely able to survive and make myself emotionally stable.....

The story of Ahmad is one of the one point two million refugees Registered in Lebanon, the reason why I am starting with his story is just to tell you a glimpse of what is occurring in the countries where you find refugee populations.

¹ Note that for the purpose of this report we have changed the name of the people.

Introduction:

The Theme chosen for this report is the difference of asylum seeking procedures in EU and the US and how is integration occurring in those countries.

Part One:

1- Difference between a Refugee and an Asylum Seeker

Both refugee and asylum seeker are intertwined and most of the time they are used interchangeably, however to speak legally each one has its own definition. The 1951 Geneva Convention clearly sets forth the legal terminology. According to article 1A(2) of 1951 Convention a refugee is a person who “owing for a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a social particular group and is unable to avail him of the protection of that country, not having a nationality and being outside the country of former resident and is unwilling or unable to return to his/her country of origin because of fear and violence”² An asylum seeker is a person who has applied for asylum seeking under the auspices of 1951 convention and the claim is still under study and the person has to wait till the claim for being considered as a refugee is verified.

2- Comparing Asylum systems between Europe and US

(a) Asylum in Europe : Case of Berlin and Brussels

UNAOC fellowship team for the MENA group was migration and integration for they are topics that Europe and United States are facing day by day after the exodus of refugees either legally or illegally to their territories but specially in Europe as we see waves of refugees arriving daily. We had the pleasure to visit to two EU countries: Germany and Belgium and in both countries we paved a visit to refugee camps.

In brief: the 1951 Geneva Convention is the Godfather of all the countries dealing with refugees and in admitting the person as a refugee.

The Asylum Procedure Act (AsylVFG) regulates the asylum seekers' from reception until the claim is verified. The responsible federal agency for dealing with asylum seeking procedures is the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees; where the asylum seekers receive their residency permit in Germany. The office has trained caseworkers who interview and decide on individual cases.³ Note that the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) is the only EU state that took the initiative to suspend the Dublin Agreement; whilst becoming the only EU state abiding by the international principle of non-

² <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49da0e466.html>

³ http://www.bmi.bund.de/EN/Topics/Migration-Integration/Asylum-Refugee-Protection/Asylum-Refugee-Protection_Germany/asylum-refugee-policy-germany_node.html

refoulement. The refugee distribution in Germany is the following: Bavaria, 15.3 percent, Hamburg, 2.5 percent, Hesse, 7.3 percent. At the moment, the quotas are only roughly correct -- according to current calculations, Hamburg has taken in 4,500 too many refugees, while the eastern states (Saxony, Brandenburg, Thuringia, and Saxony-Anhalt) have together accepted almost 10,000 too few⁵. Nevertheless, the German government was the first state who accepted to share the refugee burden and grant international protection for asylum Syrian asylum seekers under the Humanitarian Admission Program (HAP- an expedited form of resettlement) where it took around five thousand between 2013 and 2014⁶, so this is one of the reasons which makes the refugees eager to set feet into Germany.

Probably you would like to know what is the Dublin agreement in brief; it was altered several times by EU states and in 1990 was signed in Dublin, it is the law that regulated the state responsibility and which member state is obliged to take the responsibility of registering the refugee/asylum seeker who is already outside that country. The states that this convention is binding are the EU member states, Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and Denmark, whereas it does not apply to the Balkan countries especially to Greece and Hungary.

In Belgium the agency responsible for verifying asylum claims is Fedasil, as soon as the individual arrives to Belgium he/she can launch an application to the Immigration Office and after that Fedasil is the responsible entity starting from reception, briefing the person of concern regarding the social benefits and whether the individual is in need for international protection or not is studied by Fedasil the law governing Fedasil is the 1980 immigration law of course under the auspices of the 1951 convention⁸. The EU states operate under social welfare procedures when dealing with refugees where the refugee receives food stamps, health and educational services.

(b) Asylum Seeking in the US

Probably the asylum process in the US is much more complex than Europe. In the US the Department of Homeland and Security is the Federal body very single individual has to fill an asylum application and have an indebt interview with the asylum officers after the

⁴ <http://www.euractiv.com/sections/global-europe/germany-suspends-dublin-agreement-syrian-refugees-317065>

⁵ <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/germany-shows-signs-of-strain-from-mass-of-refugees-a-1058237.html>

⁶ <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/search?page=search&docid=523076919&query=resettlement%20in%20germany>

⁷ <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/17/world/europe/europe-refugees-migrants-rules.html? r=0>

⁸ <http://fedasil.be/en/content/asylum-belgium>

interview the status of the individual is mailed to him/her, either the person gets a positive valid immigration status or “NOID” – Notice of Intent to Deny. Each asylum seeker has to file an application within one year or else their application would be declined. After being granted a person may apply for a Green Card⁹.

When you are granted asylum then you will have the right to apply for a work permit¹⁰.

Regarding the resettled refugees to the US the resettlement agencies are the Federal agencies are the ones who are in charge of receiving them from the airport and helping the refugees to integrate inside the society, however the Federal assistance is only for several months.

3- Different ways of Migration

Recently, Europe and US have been experiencing a wave of asylum seekers/migrants eroding to their territories. It is very important to know that there are two different patterns one is through resettlement and the other is the illegal crossing of the borders.

Unfortunately, world’s less than one percent is admitted to resettlement where they are transferred to another country as a durable solution for their situation being met the refugee criteria under 1951 convention as well as the admissibility criteria’s of UNHCR. Here the person is granted the refugee status by UNHCR and is transferred to a country that has agreed to grant him a permanent status where after certain period of time the resettled person would apply for the citizenship of that country. On the opposite, the majority of the people arriving nowadays to Europe and US are illegally.

Part Two

Migration Integration

I tried to define “immigration integration” but I could not do it better than the Migration Policy Institute which defines it as: Immigrant integration is the process of economic mobility and social inclusion for newcomers and their children. As such, integration touches upon the institutions and mechanisms that promote development and growth within society, including early childhood care; elementary, postsecondary, and adult education systems; workforce development; health care; provision of government services to communities with linguistic diversity; and more. Successful integration builds communities that are stronger economically and more inclusive socially and culturally.

We all know that the most important thing for the people who are migrating is not integration. Those people are the people who are running away from a corrupt political system, war, poverty and so on. They think that the most important thing is to have shelter,

⁹ <http://www.immigrationequality.org/get-legal-help/our-legal-resources/asylum/applying-for-asylum/>

¹⁰ <http://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-asylum/refugees>

food and peaceful life. The question is does the host community think the same as those migrants?

The question could be answered in two different ways. Yes, they do think the same because we are all human beings and we have basic needs like food and shelter to survive. We as humans feel each other's pain and that leads us to help others. No, because the host community always has the fear that the people who migrate to their country do not want to integrate. The fear of not socializing with a migrant neighbor because they do not want to learn the language, the fear of changing the education system and the fear of so many other things that affects locals and migrants directly and indirectly.

A Short comparison between the process of integration in Europe and USA:

We personally, as a part of the UNAOC fellowship, have not been to all the European countries or all USA. This is why our report is based on our visits to Germany, Brussels, New York and Washington DC. We have to also admit that this report has not been based on any readings or realistic statistics. It is more based on our experience and the seminars, workshops, events and discussions that we have had.

We would like to start with an example. In the 19th Century a lot of Jewish people came to northern Iraq. People started to give them food and shelter, as is happening today in Germany and other countries who are welcoming refugees in Europe. After a short time local people started to complain and said those immigrants should learn the language and integrate with us and our culture in order to be able to build a strong community. For example, when the Armenians ran away from the most horrible genocide where? And when? To Lebanon and to other countries in the Middle East, they were all expected to integrate with those societies in order to be able to build a stronger community economically and to be inclusive socially and culturally. Now the direction of immigration is towards Europe and America. They are also expecting same things as we were expecting many years ago.

Based on our trip, immigration integration was a very hot topic in Germany and Belgium. Every organization, institute and government departments that we visited, was focused on how they can bring all the migrants and locals together to function in one system. How can they convince both migrant and local children to sit in one class together to be educated? There were also a lot of other important unanswered questions. We experienced both societies thinking very hard of how can they accomplish that. They are using different methods such as cooking classes, education courses, child friendly spaces, hiking... etc. What was more worrying is that women did not have a big role in that process as they should. We are aware that those women are coming from a very oppressed and male dominant society. But that does not mean we should ignore them and let them be.

We asked one of the women who was working in the camps in Belgium. She has told us that women would not participate in language courses or any other courses as much as men or children. She also said that we could not force them to take part in those activities. This ultimately means if those people get asylum then for the next ten to fifteen years half of those people will be women who will not speak the language, won't work and won't be educated. This is not just about women but it is about the future of society together. This will also be true for the men and children who are not willing to integrate.

We hope this does not sound arrogant but along with other people in those societies we, in the UNAOOC fellowship, felt that the process of integration has failed. Germany has a big population of Turkish and Kurdish migrants who came to Germany after the Second World War. As they said they have failed in bringing them all together. Instead they have got a very segregated society. Belgium and France have got a lot of people from North Africa and also other parts of Africa and Asia but as in Germany they too were very unsuccessful in bringing all those different communities together.

We do not want to be like the Media. What we are saying does not mean that there are not good examples of integration. We have seen a lot of people on our trip who have migrated to those countries. They have a big role in managing those societies and they have been contributing enormously. The biggest question is Europe is welcoming millions of refugees and they will all need housing, food and education...etc. with the global economic crises will they be able to bring everyone together and build a strong society as they are hoping for? We believe these will be the questions that all of the NGOs, Institutions and governments will be asking and will be searching for the answer for the next upcoming decades.

The US is different. As we said in Europe people are trying and working very hard to make it happen but as we understood because US is an immigrant country and it was founded by immigrants it is easier for people to come together. Which basically means when people migrate to US there is no need for anyone to work or bring other together, people will come together naturally. Even people themselves from the US were proudly talking about how they are one of the most integrated societies in the world. They have not worked for that very hard. It is just the nature of the foundation of the US. Based on what they said we could steal the notion of the "Invisible hand" from Adam Smith and use it for the integration process in the US, "invisible migration integration".

We have to say what we experienced was different. As part of our fellowship we met a lot of groups, NGOs and Officials in the US. We have understood that despite having really successful migration integration systems, US society is very segregated. A very good example for that was New York. The population of New York is 8 million. $\frac{1}{4}$ of the population does not speak the language and the city is much divided. We have been to a lot of neighborhoods or towns inside New York which are represented by different minorities, nations and religions. They speak in their language and have their own restaurants and market. We know that this makes New York City very beautiful and diverse but it does not help the integration process.

The same question that we asked for Europe could be true for the US too. It will be a global question. There are many conferences, dialogues, talks, seminars and discussions about how can we integrate better to build a stronger economy and society. Those activities will be continuing for a very long time and we also see ourselves part of those activities to find a solution of how to integrate better.

UNAOC Fellowship Report- MENA Group 2015
By: Nayef Al khawaldeh, Rouba Mhaissen

Migration and integration: the challenges of radicalization and xenophobia

Background and Main Problematic

This report is largely based on meetings and conversations with a range of local NGOs and international actors, as well as young leaders and policy makers in both Europe (Sarajevo, Berlin and Brussels) and the United States (New York and Washington D.C.). Throughout these conversations, a recurring theme and a cross-cutting issue in both those settings was that of integration. Despite governmental and civil society efforts to integrate migrants and immigrants, those efforts are still not fully successful. In those settings, migrants still experience alienation, institutional and structural barriers to integration, as well as racism in the form of anti-Muslim sentiments and anti-African sentiments, among various types of discrimination, whether outspoken, or invisible.

Reflecting on the barriers to integration facing refugees and immigrant communities in Europe and USA, the goal of this report is to understand the *implications* of such barriers for Syrian refugee communities in the EUNA region and what public policies can be taken to address these challenges.

The discussion we had around the theme of integration can be classified into four areas: (a) understanding the barriers to integration, (b) the link between integration and radicalization, (c) Integration & EUNA refugee resettlement policies (Europe vs. USA), and (d) examples of civil society initiatives to promote integration in the EUNA region. The format of this report as follows: Since this report is a reflection on the visits and meetings (and is not research-based), we first summarize the take away messages in each dimension and we then conclude with providing recommendations or implications for Syrian refugee communities whether in EUNA or MENA regions.

Key Words: Integration, Institutional Racism, Invisible Racism, Anti-Muslim sentiments, Anti-African sentiments, Racism, Radicalization, Migration, Refugees.

A. Understanding the Barriers

- The first issue of concern from the meetings was how participants understood the concept of “Integration.” “Integration” as a social phenomenon is difficult to define and measure. It is even more challenging to evaluating “Integration” policies or to come up with agreed set of “integration” indicators.

- Who are we targeting (target groups for “integration” policies)? There are different groups including: migrant workers, asylum seekers, humanitarian and political refugees, undocumented migrants, ethnic migrants (e.g. ethnic German), indigenous communities, stateless persons, etc. Considering the nature of this report and that fact that there are specific issues facing each group, the goal is to draw general lessons about the barriers facing what we would call “ethnic minorities” which include all the previous groups. Another challenge is identifying the “other,” they are referred to as “natives” in some reports or “host communities”. However, what about “indigenous communities?” For simplicity, we will refer to them as “the majority populations”.
- The importance of identifying the nature of barriers in order to understand the kind of public policies or interventions to be undertaken: In almost every meeting we had, there was a debate whether barriers are societal/individual or institutional. Barriers can take several forms such be linguistic, educational, and internal (related to individual’s motivation and willingness). However, there was a general tendency to look at the barriers faced by ethnic minorities in the EUNA region as a function of institutional discrimination or racism. A research by the German Institute for the Study of Labor (IZA, 2008) reports that “discrimination” is perceived to be the single most important integration barrier throughout EU-27. The report also indicates that ethnic minorities lag behind the majority population in all arenas, as “they tend to have higher unemployment rates, lower occupational attainment and wages, a looser labor market attachment, and are least able to find and hold good jobs. Worse, mobility remains slow or nonexistent across generations (2008, p.2).” This underscores that fact that existence of structural barriers to integration makes it difficult to break the cycle of “disadvantage.”
- Access to the labor market: economic integration is often seen as important vehicle to enhance social cohesion and to address other challenges facing minorities. According to the IZA study of 2008, minorities identified access to labor market and paid employment as the area of priority where changes are most desirable. The European Monitoring Center on Racism & Xenophobia lists in its annual reports several cases of discrimination in the labor market based on the name of job applicant. In one of the experiments, 150 CVs were sent to several companies in a European country (half carried a traditional “Dutch” name, and half a foreign/Islamic-sounding name), the majority of people with Dutch-sounding names were invited to interviews (69 out of 75), and 51 on of them ended up getting the jobs. For people with foreign-sounding names, 33% were invited to the interview and only two got the job (EUMC, 2006, P.48). Another study by Buijs (2009) as cited in Holtgraves (2012) gives evidence of the labor gap in the Netherlands, as an instance of a phenomenon common in European countries, where unemployment rate among Moroccans is at 22 % and only 6% for native Dutch citizens. Despite having more flexible labor policies, the labor gap also exist in the USA according to literature and participants in meetings. There was also a view that that is an issue of an “economic

model” that reinforces gaps and introduces barriers to entry especially for historically disadvantaged minority groups.

B. Barriers to Integration & Radicalization

- Giving the current international political climate, the discussion around “integration” has always led to parallel discussion on “radicalization” in the EUNA region. One of the most recurring views is that failure of multiculturalism in host communities can lead to isolation, resentment, sense of victimization, and radicalization. While debated, the Social Control Theory (Hirsche, 1969) does provide justification or understanding of the link between alienation and radicalization as it suggests that people are more likely to engage in deviant behavior if they lose social bonds with the society or feel detached.
- The importance of addressing root causes of radicalization: This also requires the importance of addressing the radicalization of people from ***all*** backgrounds, religions, and ideologies. Hence, radicalization as a human experience is unique to *every* individual or group of people. The Complexity of radicalization and its roots require multi-dimensional approaches. This has often not been the case, as anti-radicalization policies and programs often address the ethnic minority community rather than the whole of the population. Additionally, these policies are often limited in nature, and lead to increasing radicalization as they do not address the root causes but push people who are targeted by them into more isolation.
- Other issues raised during meetings in relation to radicalization and integration: media coverage, political polarization, far-right wing parties, the rise of nationalism in Europe, dictatorship and lack of democracy in MENA, EUNA actors’ involvement in Muslim world, credibility of EUNA actors, freedom of expression and hate speech. All those lead to an environment more susceptible to radicalization.
- EUNA countries have different political context and priorities and employ different policies, making it hard to generalize or create a ‘one size fits all approach’ to solve those problems. However, there is a concern that the focus is more on countering terrorism than combating radicalism. Counter-terrorism strategies view the problem as a primarily “security threat” which requires actions such as: counter-intelligence, coercion, revoking citizenships, racial profiling, bombing areas where extremists operate, programs focused on people showing signs of radicalization, torture, etc. Unfortunately, these types of intervention don’t address the root causes of the problem and won’t break the cycle that leads to violent radicalism (especially when terrorism is viewed as the violent form of radicalism).

C. Integration & Europe Vs. USA Refugee Resettlement Policies

- Based on the meetings and observations from the visits, “ Integration” seems more of a serious issue for Europe compared to USA: Elaborate more / identity politics, nation-state model, rise of nationalism in Europe, the nature of USA society
- Stark differences: (a) procedures, (b) role of state vs. role of civil society, (c) the idea of reception centers.
- The EU region has been affected much more by the recent refugee crisis than the NA region, for reasons relating to geography and access. The procedures for resettlements and integration are more complex in the NA region.
- The role of civil society in the EU region is more stark compared than in the US, although this should not be the case because in the US, the state is much more distant from programs of integration. In the US, refugees are not provided with full support once they arrive, but are left to find their way in the labour markets, etc. much more than the EU where they are catered for and supported for several years.

D. CSO Initiatives to Enhance “ Integration”

We have visited a range of CSO in the EUNA region, dealing with a broad variety of themes. The themes below show the wholesome nature of the visits which allowed for broader reflection and the design of the policy recommendations in the following section:

- Fulfilling the first hand needs of refugees as well as legal resettlement and rights issues of migrants: Stop the War Worldwide (Germany), Fedasil (managing the asylum procedure in Belgium instead of UNHCR), Foyer (fostering a positive approach to diversity through hosting and working with a broad variety of refugees, and the Migration Policy Institute.
- Governmental and Policy making bodies: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Germany (working on refugees and migration issues, transformation partnerships in the Arab World, and Intercultural Dialogue), EEAS in Brussels (discussing models of communication, cultural diplomacy, radicalization, among other issues), NATO (Brussels), the Mayor office of Immigrants Affairs (New York), the OIC, the UN headquarters, and the US State Department.
- Introducing host communities to minorities culture: cooking initiative (Germany), pocket stories (breaking stereotypes /promoting intercultural dialogue by changing the perception of people to migration through linking it to tourism), Taswir and Deutsche Plus (working

on German integration laws), House of One (a concept of integration between religious backgrounds, focusing on commonalities between the Abrahamic religions), the Jewish Muslim Association (building inter-faith dialogue).

- Civic education tailored to fit the needs of immigrant students: Dialogue at school (a German NGO working with the migrants in schools to enhance dialogue and diversity and create a model with mediation and intercultural understanding in the schools), The European Endowment for Democracy (a demand driven organization, working on the needs of CSO organizations in the MENA region), Alpha Fraternity (working with African American communities in the US), the Institute for International Education (supporting disabled students and higher education through crises),
- Monitoring Media & racism reports (Alumni Ali Aslan dealing with issues of integration through the German media, example from the center in Belgium), ENAR (working on mapping crimes against refugees, among a broad variety of issues), the IOM and UNAOC partnership (working on integration and intercultural dialogue through media and migration),

Recommendations & Lessons Learned

- An important observation noted during the trip is that the clash seen (but mostly unseen) in those settings is not a clash of cultures, or civilization, but rather an outcome of inequality, lack of structures to accommodate difference, legislative gaps, outcome of political polarization. Any policy to try to deal with radicalization and integration needs to deal with the root causes of the problems rather than
- EUNA countries have problems of their own, like unemployment, lack of institutional capacity, and other structural issues. Therefore, the resettlement and integration of Syrian refugees will not be easy, and policy makers, activists and organizations working on the MENA side, which is one of the gaps that this fellowship fills by building a bridge between these actors, should understand this.
- Given their nature, addressing barriers to integration requires intervention at both the community level and the institutional level. This means also additional cooperation between those levels as not to have incoherent policies at each level.
- CSO initiatives and intercultural activities are important to enhance integration. These initiatives can be replicated to address integration of Syrian refugees in host communities in the MENA region. However, those initiatives need to incorporate more people from minority communities in their design as not to build euro-centered policies that lead to an increased isolation of those who they are targeting.

- Paradigm shift: Prioritizing combating radicalism over counter-terrorism approaches. This includes the incorporation of human development approaches to deal with radicalism.
- Europe's capacity to address the refugee crisis & its credibility (human rights, democracy, giving turkey 3 billions)/ Countries are overlooking border control in order to escape the responsibility to host refugees/ Providing safe and legal routes for the refugees to enter Europe is not only important from a human and rights based sense, to ensure safe access into Europe. It is also important because it is a main determinant in the narratives and lived realities of the refugees in their new environment. Pushing for legal routes will help in eliminating the sense of injustice and inequality and will prevent feelings of lack of belonging, which can build into the integration process of refugees.
- The asylum seeking process is not necessarily a safe and good solution for life for the refugees. For instance, refugees in Germany will receive asylum for three years, after which their case will be re-assessed for instance whether or not their country is still at war, or whether or not they will be granted an additional three years (protection rights for three years but not subsidiary protection). Certain countries do not provide refugees with cash, but only with material support such as food, lodging, and services. Acknowledging that those refugees might be in this category for years, this might breed a deep sense of inequality and an inability to start their lives or to integrate into society. A lot of the refugees lived experiences and narratives about how they got to a certain country, how they were treated and the services that they were offered plays a big role into how they feel towards the country they are hosted in. This means, that the narratives and subjective experiences of refugees should not be undervalued as a way to increase integration.
- Linking to the previous point, the refugees who arrive through a resettlement plan often feel more integrated into the society. Often times, families who arrive into the 'registration centers' end up for a reason or another staying there for years on end. This can vary between a few months and ten years. At times, due to lack of capacity of buildings, refugees are separated from their family members, according to sex or to age. This is counterproductive for the process of integration and for addressing any form of PTSDs that refugees face. Often times, language is a real barrier for refugees upon arrival. This includes lack of volunteers, or material/ information in the refugees' language. There must be cooperation and collaboration with organizations working with refugees in their countries of departure, as to provide refugees with information with regards with the policies and procedures of the countries that they are escaping to, and a recognition that in fact, the benefits of the asylum may not be what they are expecting.
- Push governments into increasing resettlements rather than humanitarian admission, or asylum upon arrival. Ensure there are proper and available spaces to cater for family structures in the way that respects the tradition of the countries in hand. A lot of the

refugees themselves speak the languages, and linking to policy recommendation number three, a lot of those refugees can be employed by the governments to translate and assist other newly arrived refugees. Although employment may not be permitted in the first months, cash for work or voluntary schemes may be made available. In case this is not possible, volunteers and recruited specialists need to be catered for.

UNAOC Report by Souad Ahmadoun and Zain Tayyeb

Migration, Refugees and Intercultural Challenges

The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations Fellowship Program 2015 took place from October the 27th to November the 12th 2015. It started in Sarajevo and ended in Washington DC passing by Berlin, Brussels and New York. The fellows had the chance to meet with several official, individuals, organizations and institutions during the trip and have discussions about issues related to migration, refugees and intercultural dialogue as well as having the chance to exchange multiple experiences.

The stop of the fellowship was in **Sarajevo**, where for the first time in the history of the program the cohorts from the MENA region had the chance to meet with their cohorts from EUNA and interact about their experiences during the EUNA group trip in Morocco, Egypt and Qatar as well as the MENA group expectations from the fellowship.

The first day took place Wednesday, October 28th and started with an introduction session between both cohorts as mentioned, followed by a short presentation and discussion with several Bosnian and international activists working in different project related to after conflict peace building and transitional justice in Bosnia and the different challenges for a real reconciliation between the different parts of the society after the war the 90s. During the discussion, the fellows had an in depth insight in to the political system that has been imposed in Bosnia after Dayton agreement and its impact on the social level. In the evening the fellows had a workshop on rhetorical self-defense and countering hateful speech especially how to debate with someone you don't agree with, focusing on the speaker method of "PLEASE" (P: pause, L: listening, E: empathy, A: analyze, S: speak, E: expectation) with the goal of finding a common ground that we share with different people and engage them as well as learning how to control our own emotions

The second day in Sarajevo started by a panel about the role of youth and local communities in interfaith reconciliation followed by a presentation of the project "Ordinary Heroes" and the closing session of the first stop Thursday, October 29th.

The trip included also a guided historical tour of the old city and a visit to Franz Ferdinand Museum and another tour to the Tunnel of Hope with a briefing about Sarajevo siege during the war as well as dinners with Alumni of the program from Bosnia Herzegovina.

The second stop of the trip started in **Berlin** the 31th October with a meeting at Amnesty International exchanging ideas with a Policy Officer about German refugee politics and Human rights issues related to this subject. The second day the fellows met with "Pocket Stories" and "Uber den Tellerrand Kochen" (cooking outside the box) where they had the chance to learn about the project of "Travel Faraway At Home – By Migrants for Travellers", which is a project designed to unite migration professional to re-think human mobility in order to find creative integration solution to celebrate migration. They also participated in cooking session with migrants.

The morning of the following day was reserved to a meeting with the German Federal Office to discuss three relevant topics that are the main priorities for the Cultural Department in the Federal Office: the refugees and migration, the transformation and partnership with the Arab countries and the intercultural dialogue. During the lunch, the fellows met with Ali Aslan, a program alumni and a major media activist working on the integration of Muslim communities. The second meeting was with the intercultural project “Deutsch Plus”, a German association looking to foster debate about diversity and integration by spreading knowledge about migration and the diverse lifestyles that exist in modern Germany. Its members are actively involved in politics, administration, economy, science, culture, media and civil society, and aim to use their civic resource to shape the present and the future of Germany as an immigration society. After that a meeting with “Dialog Macht Schule” (“Dialogue with school”) which is an association that helps schools promote democratic awareness to encourage students to develop into self-determined individuals, guided by their own strengths and in collaboration with others. November the 3rd, the last day in Berlin’s stop started by a meeting with the “House of One” a project that together, Jews, Christians, and Muslims want to achieve, by bringing a synagogue, a church, and a mosque under one roof. The three separate sections will be linked by a communal room in the center of the building. This will serve as a meeting place, where worshippers and members of the public can come together and learn more about religions and each other. The afternoon the fellows met with UNAOC Chief de Cabinet and Spokesperson to UNAOC High Representative and UNAOC Intercultural Innovation Award Alumni which is a partnership between the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) and the BMW Group that aims to select and support the most innovative grassroots projects that encourage intercultural dialogue and cooperation around the world. The journey of Berlin also included a visit to the Berlin Wall and dinner with alumni.

The third stop of trip took place in **Brussels** from the 4th until the 6th of November. It started by a visit to the European External Action Service where the fellows had a briefing and a discussion with several officials about multiple issues related to the current crisis of refugees and migration in Europe, the Syrian crisis, the radicalization and other topics related to the MENA region. In the afternoon the fellows met with FedAsil, a Belgian organization responsible for the reception of asylum seekers and other target groups and guarantees high-quality reception and conformity within the various reception structures. The FedAsil activists accompanied the fellows in a visit to a migrant center where they had a briefing about the different services the refugees are having, the numbers, nationalities and different challenges and struggles of refugees and migrants.

The second day the fellows had a visit to the NATO, where they had a briefing about different security issues related to the MENA region from the European perspective. After that they visited the European Endowment for Democracy, an independent private law foundation that seeks to advance and encourage “deep and sustainable democracy” in transition countries and in societies struggling for democratization, with initial, although not exclusive focus, on the European Neighborhood. After that the fellows met with the European Network Against Racism which is the only pan-European antiracist network that

combines advocacy for racial equality and facilitating cooperation among civil society anti-racist actors in Europe. And finally a meeting with the nonprofit Organization Foyer, that is active on the municipal, regional and international levels, focusing on the integration of people of immigrant background.

The next stop of the program was **New York** from the 6th to the 9th of November, started with a meeting with the New York City Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, where the fellows had a briefing on the migration situation in the city of New York, the different challenges and the integration programs. The following meeting in the next day was with the New York Immigration Coalition which is an umbrella policy and advocacy organization for nearly 200 groups in New York State that work with immigrants and refugees and a meeting with Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity for African American Men. The fraternity Alpha has long stood at the forefront of the African- American community's fight for civil rights through leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Thurgood Marshall, William Gray, and many others and since its founding on December 4, 1906 has supplied voice and vision to the struggle of African Americans and people of color around the world.

Monday the 9th November, the meeting with UNAOC and International Organization for Migration where the fellows had the chance to raise the important experiences they were exposed to in the previous meetings during the trip and exchange ideas about the role of the Media in the refugee crisis as well as the migrant's inclusion. The next meeting was with the International Institute of Education that has a mission of advancing international education and access to education worldwide. It aims at accomplishing this by managing scholarships, training, exchange and leadership programs, conducting research and facilitating, policy dialogue on global higher education, protecting scholarship around the world.

After that the fellows had a briefing at the UN on Migration Issues and a reception at the Permanent Mission of the Mission of the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation to the UN. In New York, the fellows had a visit to Ellis Island Museum of Immigration and Statue of Liberty and the United Nations Headquarter.

The last stop was in **Washington DC** from the 10th to the 12th of November. It started with a meeting with the State Department Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, followed with a meeting with the United State Institute of Peace and a meeting with the Special Representative for Religion and Global Affairs.

The next day started with a meeting with the Migration Policy Institute and the Greater Washington Muslim-Jewish Forum and finally the closing session for the MENA cohorts and departure.

In Washington the fellows had visited the National Mall and the National Museum of American History and attended dinner with alumni.

The program was a great opportunity for the participant to meet with different actors from the civil society and officials and to be a part of a wide network of alumni and activists. They learned more about the best practices for community engagement to build sense of inclusion among immigrant communities including Arab and Muslim communities. The sessions were very productive and participants shared interesting experiences and projects that have worked

in their countries and examined the role of government in collaboration with academia, religious groups and civil society to reduce hate speech against refugees and religions.

It was an important personal experience as well in terms of the new friendships between them; the group is amazing, so many great people, inspiring stories and amazing jobs.

Our program has ended today but our mission will continue

- *Topics of interest that were discussed during the visit with different actors, and comparison between the Western and eastern context (MENA context).*

This report aims at identifying the outcomes of migration and integration as foreseen in Europe and North America. In our visit, we noted that migration might strongly affect the countries of Europe and North America, with all the diversities of religion, ideology, language, and ethnicity. As a result, migration is a good indicator on how the host countries' acceptance is. Most of the organizations we have been to refer to migration as a global issue, they mainly classify the youth as a top priority when it comes to mutual tolerance and respect. According to the Federal Foreign Affairs Official in Germany, Mr. Michael Reiffenstuel¹¹, Germany has experienced major waves of migration and continues to be a destination for many international migrants from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and other countries. As long as there is border opening and free movement, new issues grow, yet all the transformation partnerships play a major role in strengthening civil society and interface dialogue. As stated by Amnesty International, the journey of migrants and refugees, particularly Syrian refugees is extremely difficult, and there is an evident lack of solidarity from the surrounding states. Amnesty International send volunteers to provide all kinds of assistance to the arrivals from Greece to Germany¹². It is worth to mention that Amnesty International independent of any political ideology, economic interest or religion. Most of the organizations have shown a great deal of condemnation towards the European countries which closed their borders to refugees from the Middle East because they strongly believe that those migrants will be a major threat to the national identity. Unlike the other European countries like Germany and Belgium, where they see that the integration of those migrants is a good chance to develop new cultural identities and to change the decision making processes of European states.

In the United States, and according to the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, 40% of New York's population are immigrants. The office promotes the well-being of immigrant communities by integrating them into the civic, economic, and cultural life of New York.

For us, as new emerging young professionals, it was a good chance to learn more about those host countries, their culture, and history of migration. We were able to compare the asylum procedures, the educational assistance, and the integration measures they follow with those applied in the MENA region. We came to know that in Europe and North America, the

¹¹ Michael Reiffenstuel is the Director for Cultural Relations Policy and Deputy Director – General Culture and Communication. The meeting took place at the Federal Foreign Office on November 2nd, 2015

¹² <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2015/09/volunteers-help-refugees-survive-while-europes-leaders-still-search-for-solutions/> Accessed 23rd Nov 2015

government is the platform for funding most of the organizations working on migration. In addition, the government provide the migrants with access to education services, youth facilities, healthcare, and other entities. As well as providing shelter and establishing refugee camps for hundreds of refugees. As for the MENA region, the situation is much different, the MENA countries are acknowledged to have very poor resources, so the governments work closely with international organizations, agencies, and donors to support the status of refugees and migrants in terms of shelter, food assistance, education, healthcare, and other services. However, it is important to note that the absence of assistance from Gulf countries continues to be a question mark for everyone.

Despite some challenges linked with the integration of migrants in some countries, it was crucial to comprehend the cultural diversity of Europe and North America, and to appreciate the promotion of human rights, respect, and intercultural dialogue to fight racism, intolerance, islamophobia, and xenophobia. And since this program is mainly about the diversity and international dialogue, it is definitely a start to decision-making for the upcoming future.

- *Success stories and highlights of the visits*

One of the main highlights of this program was bringing together the MENA group and the EUNA group in Bosnia, where all the exchange of ideas took place in order to develop the concept of intercultural dialogue. There has always been an issue with the interpretation of the word “Dialogue”. As underlined by UNAOC Director, Matthew Hoes, dialogue does not necessarily mean agreement, but rather a conversation between two or more people. Almost all fellows have a solid background in terms of the intercultural learning and understanding, the purpose for our meeting was to breakdown stereotypes and prejudices and instead focus on understanding of other cultures and promote the common values amongst the youth.

In our visits to new-born and grassroots organizations, we noted a great success towards spreading values of respect, peace, and solidarity. We were exposed to one of the most unique projects in the world; The House of One in Berlin, where Jews, Christians, and Muslims are planning to build a house of worship – one that brings a synagogue, a church, and a mosque together under one roof. The three separate sections will be linked by a communal room in the center of the building. This will serve as a meeting place, where worshippers and members of the public can come together and learn more about the religions and each other. The fundraising for this project is still ongoing, and still needs few years to be implemented. However, such an idea can definitely help combat islamophobia, xenophobia, and other negative stereotypes.

We have been extremely fortunate to visit two refugee camps in Europe. One of the refugee camps was in Berlin, with a capacity of 300 refugees coming from Syria, Kurdistan, and Iraq. The tented shelters in this camp were well-structured. Refugees are provided with food assistance and healthcare, there is a play area, a food court, and WASH facilities inside. One of the Syrian refugees we met explained how staff is friendly, she added “the place is okay but it is secure, I can sleep at night without the fear of losing my children if I close my eyes”.

We are able to see one of the walls where there are many drawings of children most of which represent their love towards their home countries¹³.

The other camp we visited was in Brussels, it used to be a military base and then was turned into a camp to host up to 800 refugees from Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria. With many services inside, and food coupons given to every refugee.

Another highlight was the organizations that focused on youth programmes. One of those organizations is Foyer youth centre in Brussels. The main goal is to focus on the integration of youth of immigrant background. They provide a variety of activities for children, youth, and women to build their skills, promote dialogue, and raise awareness about diversity in the society. A different example was Dialog macht Schule, which is a new German education programme. The programme focuses on personal development, civic education and integration of university students with immigration background.

The overall observations show that mobility of young migrants inside Europe and the United States highly contribute to intercultural learning and dialogue which result in the development of the individuals and countries in this critical period.

▪ *Obstacles and challenges:*

One of the challenges we observed during our visit to Bosnia was the hatred towards the international UN agencies and NGOs. People of Bosnia are still wounded by the loss they suffered during the War, and they still believe that the UN is held accountable for the damage of their country. In addition, we highly noted the lack of solidarity from the surrounding states, the absence of tolerance which hold negative implications on the country.

According to the refugees in Europe and USA, and as identified by the officials and organizations specific to migration in those countries, refugees are mainly concerned by the following issues:

- Asylum procedures: It was noted that there is still difficulties with the registration process for the refugees. According to Fedasil, the Asylum procedure is not easy and the refugees can get a refusal because of credibility issues.
- Language barriers: refugees, particularly from the MENA region, have difficulties with language, particularly in Germany and Belgium. Due to the Syrian crisis, and the influx of refugees to Europe, the preparedness of the existing programs and capacity remains a big issue. Despite the current language programs, there are many refugees who still do not have access to such programs.
- The upcoming winter: For all the refugees living in the camps and rural areas in Europe, and the U.S, they are about to experience and suffer a very harsh winter. This issue can only get worse with the increased numbers of refugees.
- Discrimination, Islamophobia, and racism: The more terrorist acts take place, the bigger the challenge gets in dealing with Islamophobia, racism, and discrimination. In this sense, the need of strengthening intercultural dialogue is highly crucial to promote and protect the rights and values of migrants and refugees. The absence of democracy, tolerance, solidarity can lead to social exclusion, racism and xenophobia.

¹³ See Annex (a picture of drawings of some children in the refugee camp in Berlin)

- Youth integration: the youth need more tools of integration and expression, they have significantly witnessed political, demographic, and cultural change. These elements are major implications on their values and identity. In such a context, they can either use these factors to develop their skills and contributions or they can remain distant behind the closed doors. The lack of youth participation in the integration programs and intercultural dialogue are the biggest contributors to marginalization that can grow to become a global issue.

The issues dealt with in this report show that the investment of youth of immigrant backgrounds pays the best interest in the contribution to intercultural dialogue and breaking down the false stereotypes. However, there should be a needs assessment carried out for all the Youth in order to understand and establish more programs that meet with their needs.

Annex:

Picture (1): Drawings and paintings by the children in a refugee camp in Berlin. (31st Oct 2015)



UNAOC Fellowship
Migration –Integration and Intercultural Dialogue
2015-MENA Cohort

Syrian Refugees’ Integration in the German Society:
A view on the long-term implications on both refugees and the host
community

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Introduction

As part of UNOC fellowship programme, a cohort from the Middle East had the opportunity to visit Bosnia-Herzegovina, Germany, Belgium and US. As part of this intercultural experience that focused on integration and immigration for the MENA cohort, we present this report that examines one of the issues we came across. Our visit took place in October 2015, a time when Europe has decided to step in providing protection and asylum for Syrian refugees, after 4 years from the onset of the Syrian conflict and millions of destitution and suffering stories. Germany by its own presents a standalone case on integration and immigration by declaring its willingness to receive hundreds of thousands refugees, while other EU countries have settled with couple of thousands, and others have built their physical and legal fences to hinder attempts to enter their countries.

In Germany the meetings were made with different agencies, from government institutions such as the Federal Foreign Office, civil society associations to local non-governmental organizations working in education, art and community engagement sectors. These meetings exposed us to the current discourse regarding the Syrian refugees. Government’s institutions are overwhelmed with the large number of Syrian refugees flow, striving to leverage their human and technical capabilities to accelerate the registration process, on the other hand nongovernmental organizations and members of the civil society are tackling the issue of integration on their own way and own pace, either through their long term programme directed toward pushing the German society to recognize and endorse the rights and the humanity of other ethnicities, or by delivering instant relief services, motivated by their personal passion to alleviate the suffering of refugees residing in camps in the

German context. In the meeting with the Federal Foreign Office representative, the MENA members attempted to take the discussion from what Germany is technically able and willing to offer Syrian refugees in particular, to shed the light on other crucial aspects. One of these aspects is the social and cultural long term integration of refugees. The feedback from the Federal Office highlighted the importance of such progressive steps to handle the situation, but the current capacity of the government to absorb a large number of refugees, and the precarious external and internal political situations cannot afford the space for long term planning. This triggered the basis of our report to examine more Germany's readiness and willingness to integrate refugees into their society.

The media highlights on the Syrian child drawn in the sea in September 2015 has brought an intensified resentments among humanitarian actors, fears for host communities, opportunities for the aging population in Europe (Fargues, 2004) and new hopes for desperate refugees where their country has been sunk into the darkness of wars, conflict as well as greed. The recent lopsided discourse around hosting Syrian refugees is driven by the eagerness for quick solutions obliterating a dedicated discussion to inform policies on how refugees can rebuild and sustain their livelihoods in a new culture. Most of the Syrian refugees have fled the war in their country, if they have not experienced a personal trauma/torture/killing, they at least witnessed one. They left their properties that are most probably stolen or burned, and came to Germany, with no or few savings. Reaching the strongest economical and by far political institutions in the EU with rooted history of generational identity, pride of European culture and institutionalized secularization predicts a new way of life that come across some shared values and discord with many Arab and Islamic based ones majorly espoused by Syrian refugees. This raises several legitimate questions. How much will the asylum system be able to absorb these big numbers of refugees in the German society? How much will these refugees be able and willing to assimilate and integrate in the new society? Will those refugees have an impact on the social norms and system of values? If yes, to what extent will they be able to make change? What are the opportunities, constraints and challenges of receiving refugees in Germany?

The Political Context for Receiving Refugees in Germany:

On the European level, there is no agreement on how to share the refugee burden but very recently the EU has reached a deal with Turkey to stem the flow of refugees to Europe in exchange for restarting Turkey's EU accession negotiations, and an initial 3 billion Euros assistance package for refugees. This is supposed to abate the refugee crisis in Europe. However, the political debate in Germany would continue. Some politicians have argued that Germany should completely abolish the right to asylum within its territory. Meanwhile, other politicians acknowledged the right to seek asylum in Germany but they feel that the government has lost control over the influx of migrants and refugees to the country.

According to observers and journalists, German Chancellor Angela Merkel's policies were not questioned or subject to criticism during her decade of uninterrupted reign. However, Merkel's open-door policy regarding welcoming refugees has sparked a controversial political debate not only with opposition parties but also within her ruling coalition. Merkel faced mounting public discontent and growing repudiation over the issue

from within the ranks of her own Christian Democrats, with MPs demanding that Germany halt the “uncontrolled influx” by closing its eastern borders (Paterson, 2015). Merkel was always known for her caution and unerring sense for political reality. So, why did she take such a high-risk step of opening Germany’s doors wide for refugees? During the trip, we had the chance to meet analysts who tried to explain Merkel’s position with four points. *First*, Merkel has a personal migration experience she migrated with her Kasner family when she was young from Hamburg, West Germany to Templin, East Germany when her family converted from Catholicism to Lutheranism. *Second*, Merkel wanted to give her country a positive image in Europe and worldwide, particularly after her dispassionate approach to the Euro crisis. “Germany has suddenly become an image of openness, generosity and solidarity, a total change from the egotistical and hard image the country acquired during the Greek crisis” (Godin, 2015). Merkel also realized that Germany can be a leader in solving the migration crisis that needs a global approach. In the same context, Merkel wanted to change negative stereotype about Germans as being xenophobic after a series of attacks on asylum seeker centers. *Third*, Merkel tried to face the situation from a realistic point of view. Some analysts suggest that Merkel took the lead at the right time in order to avoid an imminent humanitarian disaster on the EU's rim. In addition, the German moderate public and civil society seemed ready to back her for the moment with movements and NGOs willing to help refugees. *Fourth*, the German economy needs more people as workers or young consumers due to the fact that the country’s population is aging.

Integration framework

It is necessary to clarify what is meant by integration between refugees/immigrants and the host community. The definition will serve as a point of reference based on the academic work in this domain. Harrell-Bond refers to integration as “a situation in which host and refugee communities are able to co-exist, sharing the same resources – both economic and social – with no greater mutual conflict than that which exists within the host community” (Scottish Refugee Council (2010) . Bernard adds to this integration concept the importance to preserve refugees’ original cultural identity and ethnicity (ibid). In this regard, Threadgold and Court highlight ‘key indicators’ to achieve an equitable integration: housing, health and social care, child welfare, safety, interaction and community cohesion, employment training and lifelong learning, and education. They also highlight cross cutting issues required to facilitate integration, although these are made in reference to the UK context, they still can be dragged to our discussion due to the similar inferior positions of refugees in host communities and the prejudices found in them. These aspects are: “combating poverty and deprivation; providing translation, free English language teaching and ‘cultural mediation’; education of the receiving communities and support for them in adapting to the new incomers; and combating of negative attitudes and media coverage begins and ends and when integration processes begin; the need to deal with racism and xenophobia in host communities to encourage the desire of refugees to be included; recognition of the gendered nature of current policy; the need to take account of the effects of trauma in the country of origin; the effects of the asylum process; the effects of interrupted schooling and work; the

effects of prolonged exclusion of minority communities in the UK; and finally the need to ensure consultation with refugee communities”(ibid).

These broad guidelines of integration are meant to inform policy makers on how to approach integration for safer and equitable society. Germany has a multi ethnic population from Europe, Africa and Middle East and for the last 50 years it developed plans to integrate other nationalities within its own identity and heritage. Moving from the rotation scheme for economic immigration in the 1960s, citizen law in 2000, to the recent National Integration Plan (NIP) adopted in 2007 developed under Chancellor Angela Merkel. Although the NIP received criticism of forcing the European values, it sets a new base for a more progressive integration laws. NIP ‘...takes a holistic perspective on integration, detailing priorities and efforts in 10 areas of society: improvement of integration courses; German language acquisition; better access to education, vocational training, and employment; better opportunities for women and girls; the role of local communities in integration efforts; intercultural competence; integration through sports; cultural diversity in the media; civic participation of immigrants; and promoting the worldwide exchange of ideas’(Wegmann, 2014). With such purported outcomes and vision, the NIP promises a better integration for immigrants in Germany and promotes a new image for its own culture and values.

The Legal Framework for Receiving Refugees in Germany:

The fundamental right of asylum enjoys constitutional status in Germany that is a state party to the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. Article 16a of the country’s Basic Law grants victims of political persecution an individual right of asylum. However, the significant increase in the number of asylum seekers in Germany led that country to reform its asylum laws. The right of asylum is excluded in the event of entry to Germany via a safe third country or who come from “safe countries of origin.” A 'safe' country is one “where the legal situation, the application of the law and the general political circumstances justify the assumption that neither political persecution nor inhumane or degrading punishment or treatment takes place.” As Germany is surrounded by states deemed "safe," in theory no person entering Germany by land has the right to asylum in Germany (Mateen and Tittlemore). In response to the refugee crisis in Europe, Germany has ceased applying the rules of the Dublin system to Syrian asylum requests. All deportations to other EU countries have been halted as a consequence.

Co-Existence in Germany

In Germany there are around 3.5 Muslim immigrants and 400,000 to 500,000 Arab, 80% of them do not have German citizenship. The relationship between German, Arab and Muslim immigrants are highly polarized and fragmented. Religion and culture are the main denominators underpinning this antagonistic relation. The perception of Islam and Arab between what is real and what is politically maneuvered, is among other factors for such a precarious relationship that impedes a proper integration. In the last 15 years this perception has been heightened along with “dramatic events such as 9/11, attacks on Spanish and British railways, and the murder of the Dutch film maker Theo van Gogh” (Klandermans et al., 2008).

For Syrians, not most of them are Muslims but also Arab, two intertwined aspects in the formulation of their identity, values, beliefs and attitudes. Such an identity intensifies the nebulous perceptions of Muslims and pushes the western countries and their populations to approach the Syrian refugees file with apprehension. "Fear of the East in the West" study delineates some of these perceptions. The survey shows that social cultural integration roadmap still has a long way with serious needs to reconsider its basis. In response to one of the questions, "Do you think tensions in relations with Muslims will grow in Germany in the near future and should we be worried about it," nearly half of all Germans (48%) answered "yes". Also relative 47% of Germans rejected the notion that Muslims are part of the German society. Another study shows that "61% of Germans believe their relations with Muslims are bad." On the other hand the study resulted that 72% of Germans believe Muslims in their countries do not want to integrate; and that 79% of Germans believe Islam is "the most violent" religion. And more than two-thirds of Germans fear Islamic extremists in their country. Another survey found that 55% of Germans believe that Arabs are "unpleasant" (Kern, 2012).

These surveys expose Germans' rejection to Arabs and Muslims and their fear on the implication of integration on their way of life and sense of stability and solidarity. However during the UNOC fellowship programme we came across governmental and local initiatives that are eager to forge intercultural dialogue. For example the "House of One" is a promising project, supported by the German government to acknowledge the world different religions, break misconception and move toward sense of unity across all different religions by stressing on the notion of humanity. Also, on the state level, German politicians are recognizing Islam as a formal religion. Hamburg state has endorsed a "historic treaty" with Muslim communities offering them 'new rights and privileges but does little to encourage their integration into German society' (Kern, 2012). This brings fear of what type of ideological political integration is adopted, but also instills confidence that the ground is fertile to achieve higher outcomes for the benefit of both the refugees/immigrant and host communities in Germany.

The implication of Germany's Institutional Integration on Syrian Refugees

Looking at the current integration structure, immigrants are expected to assimilate with the current German culture. In school children need to learn the German language in order to continue their education and facilitate their integration in the society. Studies show that children from migrant background score less than their counterparts. The poor academic performance of immigrant students in Germany highlights a serious barrier to integration efforts and the wellbeing of immigrant families (Wegmann, 2014). Yet having the chance to learn the German language skills at an early age comes as a privileged endowment as opposed to their parents and grandparents. This will be a challenge for Syrian refugees where children will have the opportunity to catch up with the new language through the formal education system while their parents will be on their own to learn the language. This might affect and influence the relation between the older generation and younger one and burden refugees with new cultural challenges. Studies showed that children whom their parents don't speak the language have a poorer academic achievements than other students. Further and

beyond academic achievement, this differences in master the German language between generations might impede parents' capacity to up bring their children and prepare them to deal with life challenges as well as opportunities.

Catching the German language is only one dimension to facilitate the integration. The introduced intercultural dialogue approaches and teachers' interaction with students are another core milestones in the integration process. Although during UNOC fellowship trip we visited several local organizations like "Pocket Stories", "Deutsch Plus" and "Dialog Macht Schule" where they are trying to promote for integration, civic education and the need for diverse ethnic schools, empirical evidences paint another picture of the German's integration reality. There is no unified approach across all states for integration in schools. While some states adopt inter-culturalism within their educational curriculum, other conservative states focus on teaching culture from a singular European perspective described as "Eurocentric pedagogy. It focuses on the cultures existing within the traditional concept of Europe" criticized of being "racist and ignored the religious, ethnic, and cultural diversity that characterizes modern Europe"(Wegmann, 2014). It was also found that some discriminated behaviors were practiced by German teachers. For example by telling German students they will be "impotent" if they eat 'Muslim food' and mocking the way that immigrants speak German in class. These teaching practices have been found to have serious impact on students' psychological and physiological status and their academic performance (Wegmann, 2014).

The Impact of Refugees on the German Society:

There is no doubt that the large number of newcomers will affect the German society in one way or another but there was always a question about the consequences that this entails. There is always a debate on how much change they can make and whether this change can be tolerated by the German society that may have a different system of values. Since it is a two-way process, the question is whether the new arrivals refugees will be affected more by the German society in the process of integration or whether they will challenge this process and hence they will have a bigger impact on it.

Media reports indicate that German politicians and commentators are concerned that the huge numbers of refugees currently arriving in the country could disrupt societal balance because the new comers are bringing with them different cultures, traditions, principles and values. In addition, German authorities fear the rise of radicalization among young Muslim migrants and refugees who may ruin the German society. The recent Paris attacks intensified these fears against migrants streaming into Europe because one of the suicide bombers is claimed to have travelled into the European Union via Greece as a refugee. The far-right movements and parties in Germany and Europe have found this an opportunity to rise and to incite hatred and violence against migrants tapping on into ordinary people's concerns regarding economic and cultural consequences (Connolly, 8 October 2015). Some refugee-related media reports are hitting in the news and causing resentment such as: forcing a youth community project to move out to build an asylum shelter instead, or asking a woman living in local authority housing to downsize so that her flat could be used by refugees (Connolly, 3 September 2015). Discussions with ordinary people in Berlin and Brussels also reveal that

they are somehow affected by the cost of welcoming refugees in their countries. Extra-spending related to the refugee crisis means for them more taxes, higher prices, and more pressure on social and health-care services.

Conclusion

Adding hundreds of thousands of people of different coming from different culture to the population of any country certainly poses economic, social and political challenges for both host and refugees communities. The economic burden consequences for Germany may include: recruiting new school teachers for the large numbers of new pupils, bringing police officers out of their retirement for security services, providing shelter and allocating accommodation for refugees, in addition to integrating refugees into the labor market. Yet reading in the refugee literature, it can state assertively that if the host country empowers refugees they can positively contribute to the existing economic context (Fakih and Ibrahim, 2015). Reading Germany context raises a positive point of view that sees integrating young and energetic refugees in the German society would solve its problem of an aging population and could help to keep the economy (Carrel and Barkin, 13 September 2015). Another point of view stresses that migration is “neither a significant gain nor drain for the public purse” (Hüttl and Leandro, 19 October 2015). Despite the costs related to welcoming migrants and refugees, reports indicate that the German budget surplus will rise from 0.3% to 0.6% of GDP in 2015 because this spending stimulates internal demand in Germany.

Germany shows proactive steps to host refugees, but the existing integration plans are still far to achieve a win-win integration that can benefit from refugees skills and competences without exposing them to inequality and exploitation experiences. And between refugees hopes to continue their lives, find safety and a trustful community to rely on and embark on the available social and economical opportunities within the existing fear of Islamophobia by the host communities seeing refugees as a potential threat, this might generate the feeling of resentment, agitation marginalization among refugees and widen the misconception between refugees and German citizens. Language remains a challenge for refugees’ adults that can be addressed by fostering and scaling up institutionalized German language courses. A serious consideration needs to be directed to school teaching methods, how they are approaching the issue of integration and how teachers are treating students. It is recommended to start evaluating the new dynamic in Germany, reassess the existing integration plans and accordingly set a long term plan to mitigate the imminent impact of hosting and to promote a stronger intercultural dialogue ground. Following Threadgold and Court framework (As mentioned in the integration framework section) can set the basis of proper integration plans that Germany can benefit from. And as the European Commission’s Handbook on Integration promotes adopting two processes’ to improve immigrants’ status through “the elimination of inequalities, and the acquisition of competence... The ‘second challenge’, the acquisition of competencies, “calls upon each individual to engage in process of lifelong learning” (Scottish Refugee Council , 2010).

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**UNAOOC Fellowship (MENA – 2015):
Migration, Integration & Intercultural Collaborations
Final Report
Integration of MENA immigrants and New Refugees to the EUNA**

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1. Executive Summary:

UNAOOC Fellowship (MENA – 2015): Migration, Integration & Intercultural Collaborations

This research highlights the integration of MENA immigrants to the EUNA countries as part of the UNAOOC 2015 Fellowship program. It is developed in accordance with the objectives of the program as well as its addendum, taking into consideration the outcomes of the fellowship on the theme of Migration, Integration and Intercultural Collaboration.

2. Introduction and Background

The challenges of integration of Muslims in EUNA societies

For a long period, there have been a number of common features between Western countries, such like high quality of life, coherent legal system, democracy and many others. Indicators reflect the popular culture of acceptance and tolerance with the others in the majority of the western civil societies. Factors encouraged immigrants; those seek a better place for life to select EUNA as a target place, where they can resume their life in peace, respect ,and guarantee better life for their children.

It is so true that the EUNA is still an attractive destination for immigrants from MENA countries which tend to undergo economic and political instability, the thing which straps

these immigrants to swarm to Europe seeking for the best conditions and high standards of life in this continent.

The history of immigration from MENA region to EU is casted back to hundred years. The modern migration flow started in the mid-of 60s by Turkey and Morocco and, to lesser extent, Algeria, and then Tunisia. The first arrivals from Morocco to Belgium were to work in coal mines, their journey was to be temporary, many of them ended up settling, a process which was accompanied by a large scale family reunification, and later of course by family-formation migration as a consequence of new marriages.

There is a huge presence of immigrants from MENA countries (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt) in Europe, particularly in Belgium and Germany which are basically two preferable destinations for these immigrants. While Germany hosts big percent of immigrants from Middle East, France and Belgium are equally the biggest host to those from North Africa especially Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. Hence, this report traces the roots immigration and integration in both countries and frames a general picture of the common issues related to Migration and Integration faced by the two EUNA countries visited during the trip.

Turks have a huge presence in Germany, those whose immigrated to after the World War II has contributed in positive role in reconstruction of Germany. On the other hand, Turkish immigrants got a chance to improve their quality of life. It is easy to notice the second and third generation of those immigrants who could achieve an advance level of integration in the German society, are contributing successfully in various social and economic aspects.

It is equally important not to forget the so Called Arab Spring and its impact on the escalation of migration to Europe which has lately witnessed a huge wave of migrants fleeing from zones of conflict notably Syria. A considerable proportion of them is endured by Germany which had to pay the tax of being the most developed and solid country in the EU. Notwithstanding, these unexpected waves of immigration deluging Europe has steadfastly caused a flounce in the whole continent mainly with the way of dealing with this problems. The number of asylum seekers is increasing, thus settling the migrants is still a real challenge facing Belgium and Germany specifically due to their limited capacities to take care of a myriad of asylum seekers coming to their territories.

In response to a series of questions directed to some representatives from EU in a meeting held in Brussels, the general consensus was that immigration is number one concern for EU foreign and security policies. It is perceived as a big challenge because of the pressure on its borders due the geopolitical turmoil. Luckily, the EU agenda with respect to immigration outlines an immediate response to come up with a solution for the whole crisis that lies in rescuing, relocating, resettling, assisting, and setting out long term steps to handle migration in all its aspects through a strong common asylum system.

The current failing state and state of affairs in several MENA countries, chiefly the Syrian civil war and the ramifications of dictatorship regimes are among the pushing factors of immigration flow to Schengen zone. In such situation, the question of integration becomes hot topic and debatable among all those embarked in the field of EU politics and policy-making. Moreover, the latest terrorist attack in Paris raised again the question of integration as well as spurred Islamophobia and Xenophobia with the EU states.

« What was tended to be temporary becomes permanent, and from the first generation migrants to the fourth one. »

It seems to be that the integration concept is still not achieved, what happened in Paris responded to this failure of achieving it. Yes, it is true that what happened in Paris cannot be a scale to measure integration, but since we continue talking about it we have to admit that it is not achieved.

During the trip, most of the meetings with institutions especially those in Europe mentioned the theme of integration as being seen as a challenging subject to deal with and therefore we can say that even the official institutions failed to address the subject of integration, and all related discussions are based on security obsession and are still unable to find common ground approach to launch a new strategy toward achievement of integration, and of course why not to move toward the concept of contribution of people with migration background because the integration may make them feel foreigners in spite of whatever thing they do.

“What makes things worse is when we relate the failure of integration with the terrorism threats”, as one mentioned.

In the same trip, we noticed some local NGOs are trying to play a positive role for integrating immigrants in the local society, since they worked on individual and community level by spreading the public awareness about acceptance, values of tolerance, using social tools like making events and activities to approach and breaking ice between the different cultures.

Other local NGOs played other good role of managing cases of immigrants, providing consultation, conflict resolutions when needed, and improving skills and knowledge of immigrants, which enable many of them to solve their problem and succeed.

However, Paris suffered the worst terrorist operations witnessed by Europe since World War II. This leads to a differentiation in addressing the tragic event of this size between political, security and social and even strategic effects, some of which in the short term and some other may extend in time. On this last point, the main victims of these bombings are the co-existence on two levels, the Islamic communities in the West, and the return of promotion to the ghost of ideological confrontation through bilateral West and the East on the religious and cultural backgrounds.

This reality poses the challenge of the problematic of integration failed so far and the coexistence of Muslims amid European societies and between the West and the East- Islamic world- and mainly Arab world has equally failed with it. The current terrorist is one of the same immigrants who is usually immersed in crimes such as theft and drug smuggling due to the failure of integration concept and suddenly turn into an Islamic extremist movement and being prepared to carry out terrorist operations, including suicide, as shown Paris bombings proved.

Current time, EUNA have a serious challenges regarding to the tension between Muslims and non-Muslims, and the huge wave of refugees

3. Tension between Muslims and non-Muslims in EUNA

Human rights and anti-racist organizations have documents several incidents of attacks against refugees as individuals, centers and busses. Violations extended to target Muslim citizens, and mosques. While European officials themselves showed deep concern about the

increase of percentage of violations against refugees. Germany for example, the government documented 104 crimes including 53 of making fire, which means triple times of violations in comparison with 2014.

3.1 The extreme rightist parties and movements

observing the political map in the Western countries, we find that the influence of the liberal tide that prevailed Europe during the past decades, began to shrink in favor of growing the influence of extreme rightist parties and movements in all these countries. but this factor varies from country to another. This kind of parties and movements has become the ruling parties in some countries such like Czech Republic, Poland and Denmark. And they remained as opposition parties and movements in other countries such as Germany, Belgium, and Norway, with noticeable increase in their influence among the civil societies. Also, the influence of the extreme rightist movements has arrived in the United States and found its way to be displayed in the shape of a movement, in order to break the dominance role of the two parties, by leaking into the Republican Party.

These parties and movements, play a role in inciting the public, using a radical speech against every different race or religion. Muslims are the most affected by these parties, because of the majority of Muslims are different from the majorities in their countries in race and religion. In addition they are considered as the largest migration group to the Western countries in the current period. According to the formal records of the Federal Office of Germany for 2014, since Germany received about 173,000 refugees coming from several countries, Syrian refugees come in the first place 39,332 individual as 22.7%, while 9.9% came from Serbia, 7.6% from Eritrea. 12.8 from Bosnia, Iraq, Somalia and Macedonia.

Out of Syrian refugees, Muslims are 82.6%, Christians are 4.9%, Azidi are 5.2% and 7.2 are not identified.

The extreme rightist parties and movement call in open media to not to accept Muslim refugees depending on fear of terrorism activities as an excuse, and created an assumption that Muslims will create a threat the identity of the Western countries by changing the demographic structure in the Western countries that already have Muslim citizens. However, their assumption is not true. According to the commission of EU, I am quoting "Only 4% of Syrian refugees are in Europe, primarily in Germany and other Northern countries, such as Sweden".

These extreme rightist parties and movement play a big role to ignite and use what so called "Islamophobia". To justify their actions, Slovakia says it will only accept Christians when it takes in Syrian refugees under a EU relocation scheme. Interior ministry spokesman Ivan Netik said Muslims would not be accepted because they would not feel at home.

The same example happened in the US when the majority of congress voted against receiving refugees Nov 2015.

The United Nations criticized on Monday (November 23 2015) politicians who want to stop receiving Syrian refugees after the Paris attacks, stressing that this "speech" shows a lack of respect and there is no place for discrimination in this area. "Stephane Dujarric"

The continuation of such parties and movement will lead in the future to an inevitable result, which is targeting all different ethnic and religious minorities in the future.

As a result of this incitement, we have started seeing some hostile actions and crimes against Refugees and even against Muslim citizens. These acts even if classified as individual acts, but the impact will be increased.

Although they seem acting against Muslims, they will target other religious and ethnic minorities in future.

3.2 The extreme Islamist groups in EUNA:

Muslims in the western societies originally came from several countries and different backgrounds. This led to occurrence of untrusted and unknown leaders and creation of small groups easier. Some of religious leaders and groups specially the extremists could play a negative role by inciting Muslims against the rest of society's components, using their own religious vision, declarations of some politicians, conservative party's leaders, individual behaviors and media to amplify events due convincing Muslims that they are targeted. And incite them against the rest of component in their countries.

This perception has been inculcated in minds by the September 11th bombings against the United States and was actually in the beginning by virtue of the advent of all the terrorists involved in these attacks, which touched New York and Washington from the outside and exactly from the Middle East. Yet, the subsequent major bombings suffered by Europe, namely Madrid on January 11, 2004, and London on July 7, 2005, and then Paris twice January 7 to 9 and November 13, 2015 emanated from the implementation of a European youth of the Arab and Muslim world assets, but mostly second and third generation of immigrants, who were born in European territories. Logically, we cannot rule out the causes of terrorism suffered by Europe, which can exactly be limited to two main factors: intellectual reason which is linked to the content of some Arab satellite extremists' channels-extremist digital sites on the Internet which aimed at attracting immigrants intellectually and rehabilitate them to become Jihadist. The second reason is, however, to move some European Muslim youth to areas of conflict in the Middle East to fight in the ranks of extremist movements and training and return to sow terror. But external causes do not hide reality that all the extremists who have carried out terrorist operations belong to communities with migration backgrounds residing in Europe because it's found over time that some of them have never visited training camps in the Middle East or the Sahel, and also have not visited any Arab or Islamic country since their birth in European capitals such as Paris, Amsterdam, London or Brussels. This makes the strategy that dominated the center of the intelligence services for many years «next threat from the south» vulnerable to «internal risk» in Europe.

If we take for instance Charlie Hebdo Attack or any other act in the name of religion, we find that all these acts were committed by European citizens with migration backgrounds: Abdelhamid Abaaoud, the mastermind of Paris terror attack, was born and grown up in Belgium. Consequently, that European perception and implementation of integration becomes undisputed.”

On the other hand, the rule that EUNA plays in MENA, has played a negative impact, especially in Syria and Iraq, since the EUNA countries pay their deep focus on the terrorists, ignoring the huge crimes and violations that conducted by the Syrian and Iraqi regimes with support of other countries and multinationals militias against civilians.

“This topic requires a deep research.”

4.Recommendations:

- There are more than 150 anti-racist organizations in Europe. And many similar organizations in the United States. These organizations are doing their best to monitor and follow up the racist acts, but they need more political support, media coverage and stronger judicial response all work to criminalize the racist acts. Example of NGOs “European Network Against Racism”.
- EUNA governments to increase their support to the social organization that playing a positive role and provide creative ideas due integrating migrants with the local communities. In Germany for example ”Deutsch Plus”, “Dialog Macht Schule”,” Uber den Tellerrand Kochen”.
- Media has an important role in the formation of social consciousness, where it can produce purposeful and directive programs, movies and songs in term of increase the rapprochement between the community’s components. Reflect and focus on the positive role of Muslims in the western countries, and to Convince Muslims and Non-Muslims that Muslims are an equal part in the community.
- Support the moderate religious leaders and movements.
- Provide opportunities for social advancement for its members like the rest of the members of the community in which they reside. It is a test in which EU countries have failed irrespective of the dozens of promises and vowing slogans in this regard.
- Create programs to encourage Muslims to receive more education and technical trainings that provide them the required skills and career path, which enable them to increase their positive participation in the economic and society.
- Strengthening the role of Muslim citizens and to involve them more in the local political parties and decision-making circles, making them feel themselves equal with other citizens, not a marginal group. And they can better understand the needs and challenges of their countries, and responsible for improving the situation and solving the problems of the country.
- Increase the collaboration with the reputable Muslim and non-Muslims religious and society leaders, to solve the problems and increase awareness.
- Support the local society organizations to play a role of integration between societies, such like “the Greater Washington Muslim-Jewish Forum”. And encourage creating similar societies in other places.
- Develop foreign policy, takes in account the concerns of MENA people. Especially in Syria and Iraq that facing brutal crimes and discrimination by the dictators Syrian and Iraqi governments.

5. The crisis of the Syrian refugees

After five years of war in Syria, the increase in the number of victims and the injuries. Patience of Syrians has begun implemented. Syrians have concerns for their safety and

security for several reasons, including the aerial shelling using indiscriminate weapons and other war crimes that conducted by the regime of Bashar Al-Assad; the daily clashing, presence ISIL in some areas; poor essential or lacking services like water and electricity in addition of the bad economic situation.

All of these elements are pushing Syrians to flee from Syria, seeking new life in somewhere provide them protection, Crossing the sea to go to EU risking their lives.

- Estimated number of people in need of humanitarian assistance inside Syria: 13.5 million. In hard to reach/besieged areas: 4.5 million. The estimated number of internally displaced: 6.5 million (UNOCHA).
- Number of refugees - registered & awaiting registration: 4,289,792. Lebanon: 1,075,637. Turkey: 2,181,293. Jordan: 633,644. Iraq: 244,765. Egypt & North Africa: 127,681. (UNHCR)

The largest number of the Syrian refugee whose arrived to EU, are settled in Germany and Sweden, which caused confusion to these countries, because they were not prepared enough to receive this numbers of refugees due lacking of trained staff whose can handle the registration procedures and monitoring. In addition of the difficulties of providing housing service for these numbers of refugees. These factors making both countries in response to the humanitarian situation more difficult and cause in length Registration procedures and reunion and the housing where the German government began to develop the new refugees in the camps for more than two months until securing homes and which may cause the biggest problem in the winter.

The European Union and its Member States collectively are leading the international response. More than €4.4 billion have been mobilized for relief and recovery assistance to Syrians in their country and to refugees and their host communities in neighboring Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Turkey and Egypt, while the US is considered as a second donor in term of response.

US and Canada don't face of the same impact of refugees because of the far distance and limitation of the NA governments due accepting refugees.

US generally doesn't provide service such as housing, medical and financial support to refugees as same as EU countries. This fact comes back to the economic philosophy of US that depends more on capitalism, with lacking for proper social assistance to US citizens themselves.

The problem that facing the Syrian refugees:

Risk their lives by crossing the sea, Exploitation by smugglers, facing racism of the radical and extreme parties and movement, the length of the procedures for registration and housing in some European countries, difficulties of learning language and skills and finding jobs.

With increasing of the domestic and international complexities, specially the recent Russian intervention in the conflict in favor of the Assad regime, mainly targeting areas under the control of the moderate opposition.

With the case of no hope for solution to end the regime and ISIL, Syrians will the will keep fleeing from Syria to EU countries.

Recommendations:

- Western countries to take an initiative to receive refugees legally through their embassies or UNHCR or other agencies that operate resettlement programs such like IRC.
- Contribution of the rest western countries especially US, UK, Australia and Canada to receive refugees to decrease pressure on the most affected countries such as Germany and Sweden.
- Increase the support for refugees in the surrounding countries.
- The surrounding countries to provide the needed documents to Syrians.
- Coordination with the surrounding countries to provide work permits to Syrians and enable them to earn nationality in future.
- Western governments to increase their trained staff to handle the registration of refugees and follow up their needs.
- EUNA governments to support and encourage the local NGOs that play a positive role due supporting refugees on community based, for example NGOs such as “Stop war worldwide” a local community organization work in Berlin and “New York Immigration Coalition” in US.
- Developing programs aim to encourage the refugees to learn the local language as well as vocational and technical trainings commensurate with the needs of the labor market.
- Developing programs create jobs for the refugees, in accordance with the needs of the local economy.
- Quick judicial reaction on those who commit racist crimes.
- Find a mechanism to stop the war and refer all those who committed war and crimes against humanity to justice. Which encourage many people to feel safe to come back to Syria.

Final Report
UNAOC Fellowship 2015
By Sally Ashour DhiaOtay

*"The reality can no longer be ignored,
 That we live in an interdependent world
 Which is bound together to a common destiny"*
Nelson Roliblabla Mandela

Prologue

The 2015 MENA region participants were honored to be involved in the UNAOC program which resulted in a unique intercultural dialogue experience. Meeting the EUNA cohort in Sarajevo added a special dimension to the program, where in the brief time together we were able to identify common challenges and describe our respective experiences of the current crises.

Seeing that our cohort's topic of focus was migration and integration, this report and its suggestions will reflect these topics, adding intercultural cooperation and dialogue as an important objective.

Background

The flow of immigrants from MENA region to Europe is not a recent phenomenon. However, the prolonged instability and conflict in the Middle East, as well as the wars in Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq have contributed to the mass refugee flow in the past year, resulting in a 'refugee crisis' that has left Europe largely unprepared. Without a coherent and united European Union policy on receiving, allocating and distributing refugees throughout the Union, the refugees were left facing mixed messages – from closed borders and barbed wire fences in Hungary, to German initial open arms welcome. With largely volunteer effort and hard work of non-governmental and international organizations on the ground, the refugees travel towards their destination countries (Germany, Sweden) has been facilitated – but there is continued urgent need for organized governmental response and personnel, aware of and educated about intercultural and interreligious sensibilities.

During our stay in Europe, and thanks to the planning efforts of the UNAOC team, we had the opportunity to meet high ranking officials from the German government, the European Union, Belgian government, and the NATO, the discussion with these official stakeholders was very important for all the group members, in our effort to understand the governmental policies, the conditions, reasons, and threats that may have compelled different EU countries to make the current choices. We also had the opportunity to meet local NGO activists, who are working on both providing help to immigrants, and on their integration on their host countries.

With regard to integration of refugees and immigrants from MENA region to their new homes in the EUNA, we discussed the tensions between the concepts of integration and assimilation. Despite the fact that the Western culture is very rich and open, containing both religious fundamentals and universal human rights concepts, in reality recipient society do exhibit a feeling of threat by immigrant and refugee populations. This fear of a 'different' culture leads Western societies to insist and pressure immigrants to adapt to the Western culture. This requirement to adapt can clash in many cases with refugees and immigrants' religious beliefs, traditions and values, and create a kind of resistance within, focused on defending and preserving such beliefs, traditions and values.

We need to maintain awareness of the fact that refugees and migrants leave their countries for various reasons, some fleeing their homes in order to save their lives, and others seeking a better life. Their ages, attitudes and life experiences vary. When met with unfamiliar behavior, beliefs, values and rules in their recipient societies, this likely results in a cultural ‘shock’ of a certain kind, and one which is not assisted or managed by a supportive and understanding network (such as family and friends, the likes of which the refugee/migrant had, back home).

Throughout this situation, immigrants are required to undergo a lengthy and difficult process to receive the legal status in the recipient state, which is conditioned upon learning then new language, finding employment and a place to live. During our UNAOC study trip, it was obvious that migration policies, regulations and laws implemented by many governments were focused getting migrants to achieve the legal status. On the surface level, there were many requirements and demands that needed to be fulfilled – but on the societal level, there was a predominant cultural expectation for immigrants to adapt themselves, explain and defend their religion or behaviors, preferences, beliefs and values. This process is overwhelming, exacerbated by the fear of not being accepted by their recipient societies – which generate the dilemma of identity congruence, maintenance and cultural adaptation.

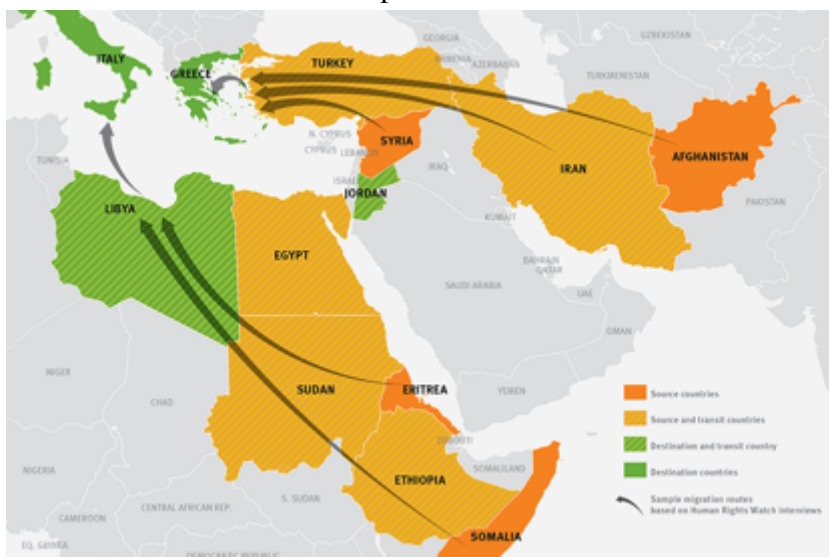


Figure1: immigrants and Asylum seekers routes that have crossed the Mediterranean in 2015, Source: Human Rights Watch

Status Quo

Within European Union, different countries have their own backgrounds and traditions that influence governmental policies and citizen attitudes towards refugees and migrants. The current situation is made worse by security issues and the heightened terrorism activities. The appearance of so called “jihadist groups”, which are promoting violence, extremism, and a depraved understanding of Chariaa (the Islamic law), places security as a dominant concern when considering the question of immigration.

On the national level, each country is facing the problem of integration of the immigrants. We learned during our study trip that there are two established models of integration, the French model, based on the assimilation of the culture of the immigrants in the French culture and society, and the

British model which exclude any assimilation but allows immigrants to keep their own culture. In addition, the German attempt to build a national model of integration is inspired by the American so called “melting pot” model. However, according to all the German stakeholders that we had the opportunity to meet, there is much work and components missing before one could state with certainty that a ‘German model of integration’ in fact exists.

The US is facing the same issues, but they are adopting a centralized approach, based on a national security policy which promotes more security restrictions, and control of all related activities, especially for people coming from the MENA region. However, in the US the local NGOs are able to provide help and assistance to immigrants effectively, especially those coming through the desert borders with Mexico.

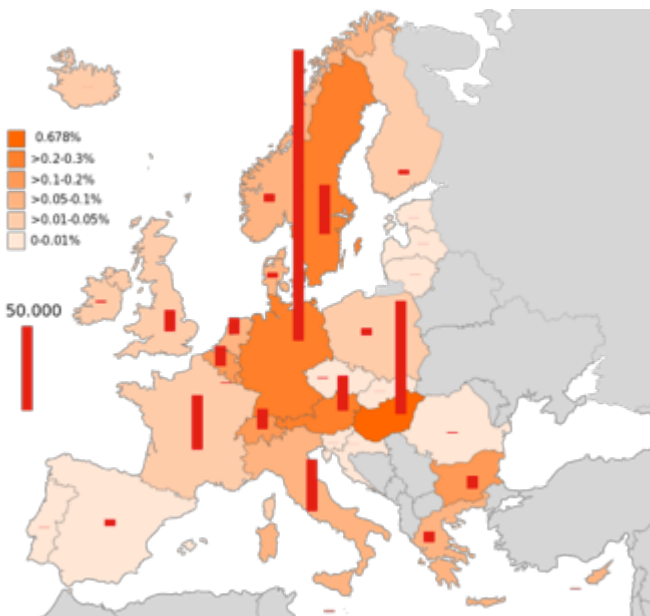


Figure 2: European Migrant Crisis 2015/ Refugees number per country, Source: Eurostat

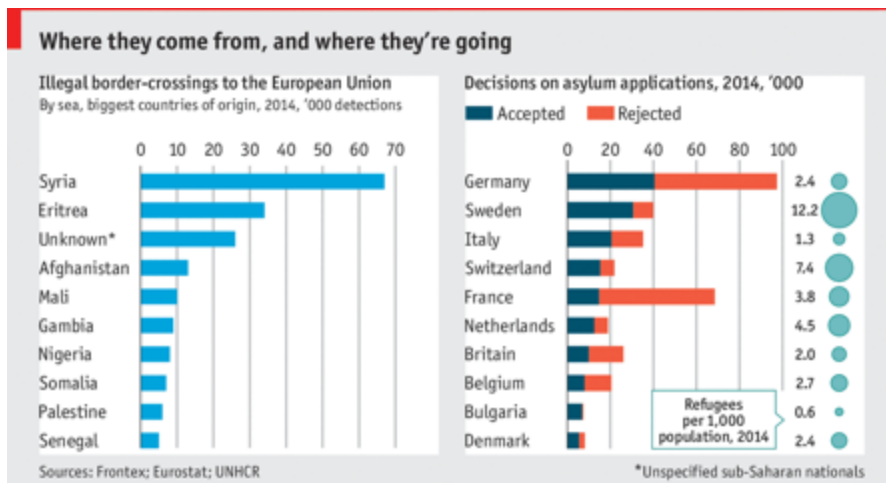


Figure 3: Illegal border-crossing / Decisions on Asylum applications, EU 2014 Source: Frontex, Eurostat, UNHCR. Published by The Economist UK, 2015

Problem Statements & Key Concerns

How do we work on finding a common ground between different religious beliefs and traditions between the Western culture fundamentals and the religious beliefs and values of incoming refugees and immigrants?

How can we approach the integration process through a framework of common understanding between the immigrants and recipient countries' citizens? How can this understanding be facilitated?

How can governments strike a balance between the need to provide humanitarian help response, and security and geopolitical issues in the other hand?

How could we enhance the UNAOC Alumni involvement in adequately responding to these issues, especially in the climate of rising extremism, xenophobia, Islamophobia in the EUNA region, and increased terrorism and radicalization in the MENA region?

Recommendations

There are many misconceptions and prejudices that exist between MENA and EUNA regions, and the two cohorts of the UNAOC fellowship that had the chance to meet in Sarajevo could constitute a starting point for setting up an *intercultural task force* whose objective will be to design and help improve the current refugee assistance and integration efforts by providing a better understanding of their needs, cultural specificities, special cases requirements, and political, ethnic and religious backgrounds. This intercultural task force would connect with other intellectuals, in a joint effort of addressing extremism and stereotypes through non-confrontational positive rhetoric. Its members would also work with educational institutions, to educate about the common ground between Islam and Catholicism, dispelling and neutralizing in the process the misconceptions that currently exist.

Seeing that a substantial number of extremists is coming not from the MENA region but from marginalized districts of major Western cities, we need to accept that this reflects a deep failure of integration in the recipient societies. Coming from second or third generation of immigrants, these young people face an identity crisis and stereotypes that block their further integration in these societies, a fact further aggravated by the rise of racist and neo-Nazi groups in Western and Central Europe. This facilitates the work of fanatic and extremist groups that promote violence and terrorism and generates instability, and insecurity, in both MENA, and EUNA regions. This is why there is an urgent need to set up *a program that enhances appreciation of diversity, and prevents the radicalization of youth*. These programs should be implemented on the local level and designed by keeping in mind the specifics of failed integration efforts, while being kept in harmony with the local cultural, religious and ethnic sensibilities.

In a time where media hampers rather than assists the building of intercultural bridges and understanding, UNAOC Alumni – especially those working in or with media – should work on setting up an *awareness campaign designed to enhance intercultural dialogue*. This campaign would be designed to counter stereotypes, reduce prejudices and facilitate the integration of refugees in the host societies, by promoting appreciation of diversity, and putting forward success stories and similarities that exist between the groups. The campaign would be positive in nature, exploring and advocating the potential and expected positive impact of immigration to recipient societies.

Finally, UNAOC Alumni network could contribute to the outlined problems and challenges by ***mapping out all NGOs (national and international) that currently work in the field of intercultural or interfaith dialogue***, and explore the role that each of them could play according to their mandate and activities. This map would assist both the UNAOC and UNAOC Alumni in identifying potential partners and allies in our common objective of building a world with increased intercultural understanding and decreased intercultural conflict.

The UNAOC Alumni network consists of many successful individuals who work in CSOs and NGOs, on a variety of projects similar to these outlined above. These UNAOC Fellows, if coordinated and assisted by the UNAOC HQ team, would be able to raise funds and implement the projects in line with objectives outlined above. UNAOC support and guidance is required and appreciated throughout the entire process, from project design, to fundraising, through implementation, and finally evaluation.

We hope that this paper can provide useful ideas, to help resolving the disastrous situation, of migrants, through an intercultural dialogue, and understanding; it was done, thanks to the kind help and efficient framing of the UNAOC personnel, and the precious assistance of our mentor Maja Nenadović.

