



# Fresh Eyes on the Refugee Crisis

an interdisciplinary approach

## Summary

With immigration dominating headlines and political agendas across Europe and elsewhere, and increasing numbers of refugees and asylum seekers, the Global Young Academy, the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the Dutch Young Academy decided to explore this agenda through an interdisciplinary lens. Over twenty young scientists – with wide-ranging expertise and hailing from over 10 countries – met in Amsterdam in December 2015 to discuss the refugee crisis<sup>1</sup>, with a particular but not exclusive focus on integration issues in Europe.

The participants concluded that models of integration which respect diversity, democracy and the fundamental European values<sup>2</sup> of human dignity, freedom, equality, solidarity and human rights pose a challenge for the EU and its Member States. There is a clear tension between integrating increasing numbers of refugees ethically and efficiently, whilst satisfying the interests both of refugees and citizens of host countries. The participants identified four distinct areas that require further attention, and to which the global research community can readily contribute:

### 1. Understanding the problem:

*identifying areas where conceptual theory, empirical evidence and better data are required to support policymaking*

The dynamic between refugees and citizens of host countries needs to be better understood:

- a) acknowledging the concept of cultural values within communities and how this can be better utilised in political negotiations;
- b) redefining what the fundamental European value of solidarity means to enhance our conceptual and normative understanding, and ultimately help shape better policymaking.

### 2. Practical actions and interventions: *building on good practice*

- a) encouraging multilateral policy fora (EU, OECD) to commission an international comparative study of job market integration to identify and share best practice;

- b) developing a networking programme to connect young scientists (the Global Young Academy (GYA) can help here) and others in the scientific community to refugees with similar skills in order to help them find appropriate work;
- c) working with civil society to scale up the establishment and connection of trust-based social networks, and sharing of best practice in non-formal education (such as community-led initiatives) – helping refugees to forge their own destiny.

### 3. Reframing the refugee debate:

*informing the public and policymakers objectively*

This requires innovative partnership with influential media agencies to develop an intelligent media strategy. Using traditional and social media, this strategy could help inform the public objectively, influence public opinion and ultimately public policy.

### 4. Addressing the root causes:

*reducing the need for people to flee their countries*

The UN is ideally placed to establish a mechanism for international engagement, coordination and coherence to address the root causes of failed states and why people flee their countries, in order to design appropriate interventions targeted at failed and fragile states.

More generally, there is a distinct role for **science diplomacy** [1] in this agenda. By virtue of the scientific values of rationality, transparency and universality, science/research can help alleviate cultural tensions and contribute to practical, evidence-based solutions.

Recommendations are made primarily to the European Commission, given the focus on Europe. But there are also recommendations for the OECD, the UN, and the global research community to help mitigate and better manage the refugee crisis more widely, in recognition of the fact that Europe is only part of the picture. H2020 – the world’s largest research programme – can potentially help fund some of these recommendations.

## Context

In both European Union and OECD countries, the immigrant population has grown significantly since 2000 [2]. In 2015 alone, over a million refugees and migrants<sup>3</sup> are estimated to have crossed into Europe [3], the majority of them claiming or likely to claim asylum [4]. The UNCHR, the UN Refugee Agency, has called the global migration, currently estimated at 50 million, the biggest refugee crisis since the Second World War [5]. Recognising an ever growing movement of people, the recently formulated UN Sustainable Development Goals include facilitating “orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies”.

Studies under the EU’s 7th R&D Framework Programme have explored aspects of migration policy in Europe [6]. Asylum and refugee policies within Europe are fragmented and differentiated, as well as often decentralised within countries, with a lack of coordination in governance at community, national and regional levels. In his State of the Union address [7], European Commission President Juncker’s called for a “bold, determined and concerted action by the European Union, by its institutions and by all its Member States” to better manage the flow of incoming refugees. Among other factors, the long-term impact of asylum-seekers and refugees depends on the capacity and political willingness of “host” countries and societies to benefit from their human (socio-economic) capital and promote their full integration. [11]

The integration of refugees has been based on systems of differential exclusion, assimilation and most recently multiculturalism. The basis of multiculturalism is that refugees should be

granted equal rights in all spheres of society, without giving up their diversity but at the same time being expected to conform to certain key values of the host society. The diversity of refugees’ nationalities, religions, socio-economic backgrounds and motives for forced migration further complicate this process. In reality, social integration is complex and presents difficulties in conceptual, practical and policy terms.

**With its mission to empower early-career researchers to lead international, interdisciplinary dialogue in order to promote reason and inclusiveness in global decision-making, the Global Young Academy (GYA) [12] identified the social, legal, economic and ultimately political integration of refugees as a priority for urgent attention through “fresh eyes”.** In partnership with the Dutch Young Academy [13], and the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences [14], the GYA convened a two-day workshop [15] in December 2015 to explore some of the complex, interdisciplinary issues around refugee integration in Europe.

The workshop engaged 22 academic experts and practitioners, from different disciplines and over 10 countries across three continents; it also drew on a wider survey of young scientists and of refugee scientists. The participants explored fundamental systemic issues and wide-ranging policy areas, focusing on issues where they felt they could make a genuine contribution i.e. where scholarly knowledge can better serve the needs of European and global policymakers as they grapple with this complex and highly politicised agenda.

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1 The term “refugee crisis” is itself a problem in the way it frames the debate, something picked up later in this paper.

2 As set out in the EU’s Charter of Fundamental Rights.

3 The terms ‘asylum seeker’, ‘refugee’ and ‘migrant’ are often used interchangeably but each has a distinct meaning that carries different international obligations and consequences. The European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) <http://www.ecre.org/refugees/refugees/refugees-in-the-eu.html> and the UNHCR <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c125.html> explain these distinctions.

## Challenges

The participants identified the following challenges, based on their expertise and the results of the GYA survey:

### 1. Understanding the dynamic between refugees and citizens of host countries

#### *The perceptions of citizens of host countries*

- European concern (and at times hostility) stems from the perception that refugees are given special privileges while they themselves are struggling.
- Refugees are sometimes not seen as valuable members of society who can make meaningful contributions to it. They are polarised into two extremes (sometimes paradoxically thought to be coexisting): those taking “our” jobs and those drawing on “our” social welfare.
- The habits and customs of several refugee communities are sometimes at odds with European norms and expectations e.g. women’s rights.
- There is a general lack of trust towards refugees.
- A large – but often not vocal - part of the public do welcome refugees and should not be ignored.

#### *The perceptions and aspirations of refugees*

- The difficulties refugees experience (long waiting times, constant movement, lack of stability, marginalisation and the inability to settle in one place and earn a living) can cause secondary victimization, resentment and may ultimately influence radicalisation processes.
- Resettlement centres do not seem to be working: it takes too long to connect refugees to employment, resources and communities.
- Negative effects of the ‘refugee’ label: refugees need to feel independent and have self-worth: prompt and appropriate access to education, language training and the job market is critical.

### 2. Framing of the refugee issue

The refugee crisis is framed negatively by some media and political parties, with debates tending to be polarised around two extremes – left and right. This shuts down genuinely constructive debate and can compromise appropriate interventions.

### 3. Addressing root causes and risk factors

Refugee policies are reactive. There is a lack of international engagement and coherence in addressing root causes to help mitigate and reduce the scale of forced migration.

## Tackling these challenges

### 1. Understanding the problem

The reciprocal and intrinsic relationship between refugees and citizens, especially those less affluent, requires better understanding. National and local administrations need to be able to accommodate the tensions between those they are trying to include (refugees) and citizens who do not necessarily feel included (in spite of their citizenship). Two areas require particular attention:

#### *a) Understanding cultural values*

Cultural (sometimes called “sacred”) values are a category of values that are claimed to be absolute – whether political, religious or personal – and cannot be compromised. They are at the heart of socio-political negotiation and, if not properly understood, can build reticence, intransigence and ultimately hatred.

**Cultural values are at play with both refugees and host citizens. They need to be better understood and used to open up conversations and facilitate negotiation.** This necessitates understanding why they are different to pragmatic values, ones that have some leeway and can be used as symbolic concessions.

#### *b) Redefining solidarity*

Solidarity is a fundamental European value included in the EU’s Charter [16], shared by Member States as a core underlying principle. Solidarity

enforces a sense of social cohesion amongst EU citizens, but is in conflict with nationalism, self-interest and xenophobia. Labelling newcomers as asylum seekers, migrants or refugees does not create a sense of belonging or inclusiveness, irrespective of their legal status. If excluded, people tend to adapt and find new groups of belonging, fuelling marginal and possibly radicalised groups.

**The concept of solidarity needs to be revisited as a vital concern for society to reframe the refugee crisis. Member States have a responsibility to champion solidarity and facilitate inclusion, thereby taking into account societal concerns and the fears of all parties.** This may require relatively small changes in the refugee integration system to make it more responsive, such as tasking refugees and local groups to work together on concrete issues defined by local level communities and to which all have a stake.

### 2. Practical actions and interventions: building on good practice

#### *a) Job market integration*

Quickly obtaining work is of major importance for the integration of refugees for two main reasons:

1. it gives refugees a sense of independence, self-worth and dignity, and
2. it has economic and public-finance benefits for the host country (with concomitant impact on public perceptions).

Conditions for accessing the labour market vary significantly across countries. In some, labour market access can be granted almost immediately, whereas in others the waiting period can be many months, even years [17]. Furthermore, refugees will only realise their full potential if their skills are appropriately job-matched, and whilst many are highly skilled, refugees are typically overrepresented in low paid jobs.

**The European Commission and/or OECD should undertake a comparative international study of job market integration across Member States and elsewhere to help identify best practice, and inform a more coordinated and comprehensive policy response at the EU and Member State level.** This could include assessing the impact of waiting times on job market

access; identifying best practice in the evaluation of refugees’ qualities and competences; distinguishing between short and long-term solutions; mentoring and alumni programmes; and facilitating temporary infrastructure e.g. job centres, and the provision of trained trainers. **Universities, Higher Education Institutes and national science academies have a role to play here, in helping to support proper accreditation of foreign qualifications and developing a better understanding of the Higher Education landscape in source countries.**

Recently launched by the EU Commission, the Science4Refugees [18] programme aims to help refugee scientists and researchers find suitable jobs that both improve their own situation and put their skills and experience to good use in Europe’s research system. In a similar vein, the science community can help mentor refugee scientists: young scientists, drawing on the networks provided by global and national young academies, for example, should explore how they can further develop this role.

#### *b) Scaling up examples of best practice*

General interventions, designed to **build social capital by integrating refugees into trust-based networks**, closely linked to culture, include:

1. convening “encounter and exchange” fora for incoming refugees, resident citizens, NGOs and community groups to better understand each others’ perspectives and needs;
2. “coupling” refugees to appropriate professionals in the labour market; and
3. using faith communities as bridge builders and thought leaders.

There are other examples of good practice that could practicably be scaled up in the field: small experiments that can provoke new ways of acting, for example in non-formal education. These include **“MakerLabs”, “Hackerspaces” and “Fab Labs”: community-led initiatives designed to teach refugees 21st century skills – such as coding, visual thinking, critical thinking and 3D manufacturing. Set up in refugee camps, these mobile facilities provide cross-disciplinary, chaotic spaces designed to fuel creativity, innovation and entrepreneurial skills, complementing more traditional forms of education.** Built in conjunction with schools

in refugee camps and partnering with schools in local communities, these types of projects, with alumni and mentoring networks, could be highly rewarding enterprises for both refugee and local communities. There may also be opportunities to develop distance learning programmes for refugees.

**The OECD is presently conducting an analysis of local challenges and practices, in order to provide policy guidance for local authorities and national governments [19]. These non-formal education models should form part of that analysis.**

### 3. Reframing the refugee crisis: a media strategy

Some politicians and elements of the media tend to frame refugee debates around two polarised positions – far left and far right: being radical and sensationalist draws attention and readership. But objective, dispassionate reporting is required for a balanced account of this highly emotive and increasingly politicised issue, tailored to specific audiences. Learning lessons from already constituted journalist organisations, like the DART Center for Journalism and Trauma [20], may prove fruitful.

Science can help with this messaging by providing a robust evidence base; for example, navigating big data and presenting clear visual information (facts, figures) to inform wider audiences. Encouraging young scientists to engage with journalists and policymakers could help move this agenda forward: the GYA and the national young academies are potential conduits for mobilising scientifically-literate and committed citizens and refugees.

- Using traditional media: factual, apolitical messages to reach a variety of audiences through newspapers, television, radio and celebrities
- Using social media: YouTube, video logs, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, mobile apps to reach the younger generations and potentially activist audiences.

**An intelligent and bespoke media strategy would help challenge existing narratives and inform the public, influencing public opinion and ultimately public policy.**

### 4. Addressing the root causes of refugee-ism

Politicians have huge challenges in responding to influxes of refugees and their impact at regional, national and local levels. But there is a **lack of international engagement and coherence on addressing the root causes of refugee-ism**, especially between the most influential countries (for example, in the case of Syria: the US, Russia, Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia [21]). These root causes include conflict, climate change, socio-economic marginalisation, political instability and oppression – which will inevitably generate further crises if not addressed. Prevention is better than cure, and **policymakers are not utilising risk factors to enable proactive diplomatic, economic and educational engagement in failed and fragile states**. The evidence base from, for instance, genocide prevention studies, migration studies, international relations, conflict studies, economics, public health, climate science and post-colonial history are rich but underutilised. They provide examples where science can contribute to practical evidence-based solutions in politically charged environments increasingly termed „[science diplomacy](#)“.

**Under UN leadership, actions could include: proactive interventions (diplomatic, economic etc) – especially a concerted effort by the most influential countries - to minimise the number of failed and fragile states; promoting a wider definition of “security” in a globalised world with porous borders; exploring opportunities for science diplomacy and strategic partnerships in science in affected countries/regions; instigating research to strengthen the existing evidence base; and developing metrics for success.**

## Recommendations for key actors

### For the EU

- Relevant European Commission Directorates - DG Migration and Home Affairs, DG Research and Innovation, DG Justice, and DG Employment and Social Affairs – should ensure that integration objectives and indicators are central to the Commission’s policies on refugees, employment, education and social inclusion. Policy initiatives should proceed in a participatory way, where practicable, in consultation with refugees, so that proposed reforms reflect their experience.
- Encourage the European research community – under H2020 and relevant national programmes - to revisit the concept of solidarity and explore cultural (“sacred”) values, to assist policymakers in navigating these difficult subjects.
- Encourage and incentivise Universities, Higher Education Institutes (HEI) and national science academies to play their part in supporting proper accreditation of foreign qualifications and developing a better understanding of the higher education landscape in source countries.
- In cooperation with the OECD, conduct an international comparative study of job market integration to identify and share best practice.

### For The OECD

- Include trust-based social networks, non-formal education and entrepreneurial programmes as exemplars in their ongoing review of best practice projects, and invite funders in the public and private sector to finance their scale up.

### For the UN

- Set up a temporary, interdisciplinary, specialist advisory council within the UN (similar to the UN Secretary-General’s Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation) to explore root causes and identify, promote and target risk factors, in order to design targeted and coherent interventions in failed and fragile states.

### For the global research community

- Work with media industry leaders to design and implement an intelligent media strategy that reports refugee issues objectively and innovatively.  
See <http://bit.ly/1RnfPuC>.
- Work through the global networks of (national and young) science academies, the International Council for Science (ICSU), relevant UN agencies, the European Commission and the EU High Level Expert Group to secure funding to further develop this agenda. The research community can make a valuable contribution by
  1. raising the awareness amongst policymakers of relevant and established research that is not being (sufficiently) utilised to inform policy;
  2. identifying and plugging knowledge gaps;
  3. contributing to professional mentoring / networking schemes and new programmes designed to mobilise the research community e.g. Science4Refugees, and incentivising innovative partnerships in science in affected countries/regions; and
  4. demonstrating the value of science diplomacy.

## Hyperlinks

- [1] [http://www.aaas.org/sites/default/files/New\\_Frontiers.pdf](http://www.aaas.org/sites/default/files/New_Frontiers.pdf)
- [2] <http://www.oecd.org/migration/Is-this-refugee-crisis-different.pdf>
- [3] <http://migration.iom.int/europe/>
- [4] [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum\\_quarterly\\_report](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum_quarterly_report)
- [5] <http://www.unhcr.org/53a155bc6.html>
- [6] [http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/pdf/project\\_synopses/ki-na-27-592-en.pdf#view=fit&pagemode=none](http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/pdf/project_synopses/ki-na-27-592-en.pdf#view=fit&pagemode=none)
- [7] [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_SPEECH-15-5614\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-15-5614_en.htm)
- [8] [http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/pdf/policy\\_reviews/ki-04-15-841\\_en\\_n.pdf#view=fit&pagemode=none](http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/pdf/policy_reviews/ki-04-15-841_en_n.pdf#view=fit&pagemode=none)
- [9] <http://globalyoungacademy.net/>
- [10] <http://dejongeakademie.nl/en>
- [11] <https://www.knaw.nl/en>
- [12] <http://globalyoungacademy.net/fresh-eyes-on-the-refugee-crisis-an-inter-disciplinary-approach/>
- [13] [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text\\_en.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text_en.pdf)
- [14] <http://www.oecd.org/migration/How-will-the-refugee-surge-affect-the-European-economy.pdf>
- [15] <http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index.cfm/jobs/science4refugees>
- [16] <http://www.oecd.org/regional/call-local-refugees.htm>
- [17] <http://dartcenter.org/>
- [18] <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-23849587>

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## Disclaimer:

This document represents the views of the participants at the aforesaid young scientists' workshop (participants are listed in the Appendix) and is not a formal position of the organisers, funders or participating guests.

## ANNEX A: Delegates and delivery team

### 1. Delegates:

| NAME                    | NATIONALITY  | POSITION / AFFILIATION  | EXPERTISE   |
|-------------------------|--------------|---|---|
| Abdeslam Badre          | Morocco      | Associate Researcher, Mohamed V University of Rabat, Morocco; (Global Young Academy)  | Media and Gender Studies                                      |
| Amos Saurombe           | South Africa | Associate Professor, University of South Africa, Pretoria; (South African Academy of Young Scientists)  | Human Rights, International Relations, Conflict Processes     |
| Behnam Taebi            | Netherlands  | Assistant Professor, Delft University of Technology; Research Fellow at Harvard Kennedy School's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs (De Jonge Akademie KNAW) | Energy, Ethics, Philosophy                                    |
| Conny Rijken            | Netherlands  | Professor of Victimology, Tilburg Law School, The Netherlands   | European Law, Criminal Law and Victimology                    |
| Daniel Flecknoe         | UK           | Specialty Registrar in Public Health, UK. Faculty of Public Health, APHA Working Group on the Primary Prevention of War, Médecins Sans Frontières.                            | Public health, humanitarianism, global health & human rights. |
| Eva Alisic              | Netherlands  | Senior Research Fellow, Trauma Recovery Lab, Monash University, Australia; Children's Hospital Zürich, Switzerland; Co-Chair, Global Young Academy                            | Psychology, Mental health                                     |
| Jeffrey Stevenson Murer | UK           | Lecturer on Collective Violence, at the University of St Andrews (Young Academy of Scotland)  | Politics and Qualitative Sociology                            |
| Jo Anne Schneider       | USA          | Principal, Chrysalis Collaborations and Associate Research Professor in Anthropology, George Washington University (AAAS)   | Social Science  |
| Marieke van den Brink   | Netherlands  | Associate Professor Organization Studies, Radboud University Nijmegen/ Member Royal Netherlands Young Academy of Arts and Sciences (De Jonge Akademie KNAW)                   | Gender & Diversity in organisations                           |
| Memet Ünsal             | Turkey       | Programme Director, InnoCampus  | Entrepreneurship, Robotics-FabLabs                            |
| Nafees Hamid            | France, UK   | Research Fellow, ARTIS International  | Radicalization  |
| Nanda Oudejans          | Netherlands  | Assistant Professor in Legal Philosophy, Tilburg law School, Tilburg University, The Netherlands  | Legal and Political Philosophy; Asylum                        |

|                    |             |  |  |
|--------------------|-------------|--|--|
| Raeli Bronstein    | Israel/UK   | Research Fellow, Department of Social Policy and Intervention, University of Oxford  | Social Science                         |
| Rianne Letschert   | Netherlands | Professor International Law and Victimology, Tilburg Law School; Director INTERVICT; Chair, Royal Netherlands Young Academy of Arts and Sciences. (De Jonge Akademie KNAW)   | International Law and Victimology      |
| S Karly Kehoe      | UK          | Canada Research Chair in Atlantic Canada Communities, Saint Mary's University, Nova Scotia, Canada; (Global Young Academy, Young Academy of Scotland)  | Humanities<br>History                  |
| Thomas Spijkerboer | Netherlands | Professor, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam  | Migration Law                          |
| Tomas Martini      | Netherlands | Public Affairs Adviser, Netherlands Red Cross  | Public Affairs and Political Relations |
| Udi Sommer         | Israel      | Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Tel Aviv University; International Envoy and Director of the Cyber Leaders' Forum, Blavatnik Interdisciplinary Cyber Research Center, Tel Aviv University<br>Israel Institute Visiting Professor, Columbia University of New York 2016-7; (Israel Young Academy) | Political science                      |
| Verena Balz        | Germany     | Researcher, Chair of Spatial Planning and Strategy, Department of Urbanism, Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment, Delft University of Technology, The Netherlands   | Urbanism<br>Spatial Planning           |
| Verina Wild        | Germany     | Senior researcher at Department of Philosophy, LMU Munich and Institute of Biomedical Ethics and Medical History, University of Zurich   | Migration, Health & Ethics             |
| <b>Guests</b>      |             |  |  |
| Elisabeth Lipiatou |             | Head of Unit 'Open and Inclusive Societies'; DG Research & Innovation: European Commission   | Research & Innovation                  |
| Giuliana Urso      |             | Scientific/Technical Officer, Joint Research Centre, European Commission   | International Relations                |

The organisers would also like to thank the young scientists and refugee scientists who contributed to the Global Young Academy survey on refugees, who are listed in **Annex B** (online at <http://bit.ly/1oAS1Kc>).

## 2. Delivery team

### Leads:

Eva Alisic (Co-Chair Global Young Academy, GYA) and Rianne Letschert (Chair, Dutch Young Academy)

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### Images:

**Title Image:** Refugees waiting near the ferry terminal in Lesbos, Greece. © Tom Turley



**GLOBAL  
YOUNG  
ACADEMY**



**KONINKLIJKE NEDERLANDSE  
AKADEMIE VAN WETENSCHAPPEN**

