

# Migration

## “Looking at life from a different side”

How the Red Cross and Red Crescent is changing the dialogue on migration



Volunteer homework assistance at an asylum centre in Denmark.

### Overview

In August 2011 a couple fled their apartment in Bialystok, Poland, after the door to their apartment was set on fire in an apparent racist attack. The husband is a Pakistani immigrant who has lived in Poland for 11 years and had reported prior incidents in which he was verbally abused, harassed, and violently assaulted. Three months earlier, ultranationalist supporters assaulted Muslims gathered for the Friday prayer at the Banya Bashi mosque in Sofia. The attackers were reportedly shouting “Turks, get out” and throwing eggs at the believers. At least one person was injured in the incident.

Worryingly, violent attacks like these two incidents appear to be on the rise. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), migrants “are more and more targeted as the scapegoats for all manner of domestic problems facing societies today, particularly unemployment, crime, drugs, and even terrorism.”<sup>1</sup> As noted by the

United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants: “This is especially true in the case of migrants who are undocumented or in irregular situations, including victims of trafficking.”<sup>2</sup>

At the end of 2009, it was estimated that there were 15.2 million refugees worldwide<sup>3</sup> and more than 200 million people were living outside their countries of birth.<sup>4</sup> Despite many initiatives and serious attempts from different stakeholders, discrimination, exclusion and violence remain major humanitarian challenges that cause suffering to millions of migrants around the world. Recent studies suggest that discrimination on the grounds of ethnic origin remains widespread in housing and employment, and that perceived competition over scarce resources is being exacerbated by the economic crisis.

It is important to acknowledge that discrimination is not solely a migrant issue but one that impacts on millions of other lives around the world. However, migrants are often particularly vulnerable to discrimination because, as well as being scapegoats and the subjects of hostility, they may not speak the local language, have the support of familiar social networks, or be well informed about available assistance. Without these resources, migrants can find themselves living in the shadows of society, unable to get their voices heard. This is particularly true in the case of irregular migrants or victims of trafficking who, because of their

1 Cited in *Working Far from Home – Migration and Discrimination*, World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (2001)

2 Ibid

3 The Office for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2009 *Global Trends: Refugees, Asylum Seekers, Returnees, Internally Displaced and Stateless Persons* (2010)

4 United Nations Development Programme, *Overcoming Barriers: Human mobility and development*, Human Development Report (2009)

legal and administrative status, sometimes are too scared to come forward and use the legal avenues usually available to uphold basic human rights.

## Why social inclusion? The importance of "belonging"



Young girl studying at a Belgian Red Cross centre.

Social exclusion is a phenomenon that affects all societies. The breaking of social and familial ties which result in persons living in the margins of society. This is particularly the case with displaced persons, and in particular migrants far from home and without their normal support mechanisms.

Social inclusion, on the other hand, is about strengthening connections between groups of people and enabling individuals to fully participate, contribute and benefit from a society. The process of integrating migrants into a host country is often described as a two way process a mutual commitment from newcomers and the citizens of their host nation to respect and accept one another. Successful integration can also help build more secure, vibrant and peaceful communities. Helping migrants regain their confidence and dignity, and promoting inclusion

and changing attitudes in our society is an integral part of Red Cross Red Crescent work underlined by our core fundamental principles of humanity, independence and neutrality.

According to the European Commission, legal and well managed migration (recognising the rights of the individual and the benefits of migration) can also help address challenges caused by an ageing population, longer life expectancies and a declining working-age population by maximising the use of the labour force and skills already (and potentially) available and improving productivity of the economy.<sup>5</sup>

The recognition of the positive aspects of migration and ensuring the rights of all migrants are respected will also address "false impressions" of migrants and ensure that their contribution to their host society is valued.

## Perception versus reality

Governments and the media play an important role in communicating opinions, reporting trends and framing migration discourse. In public rhetoric, migrants are often represented as "strange" or "other", described using metaphors of invasion and flood and an "us and them" divide. Newspaper headlines such as "Halt the tide of EU migrants – HIV children bringing time bomb" and "the bitter truth about foreigners and benefits" draw on these images with the aim of evoking emotions of fear and anger amongst their readership.

These media representations can, in turn, shape public views about the impact of migration. For example, the annual survey "Trans-Atlantic Trends" reported that in 2010, Italians perceived the percentage of migrants in Italy to be around 25 percent, when in reality it is around 7 percent. As the World Migration Report 2011 suggests: "misinformation and misperception can trigger a vicious cycle which influences government policy, and in turn, perpetuates negative attitudes in mass media and the community at large. Policies and political discourse can therefore play a major role in shaping

<sup>5</sup> European Commission, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions* (2011)

the image of migrants in home and host societies.” This interlink between government policy and public perception is evident in examples of State responses to migration of members of Roma populations over the past few years where countries have introduced policies to restrict or remove Roma people which have coincided with a series of vigilante attacks and fatalities.

## The Red Cross Red Crescent response

The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies (IFRC) believes that respectful dialogue as well as improved communication and education tools are powerful means of tackling negative attitudes towards migrants, and thereby tackling xenophobia and discrimination. By providing accurate, impartial information and facilitating dialogue between local communities and migrants, we seek to counter misconceptions and address exclusion by encouraging people around the world to understand where others come from and respect their right to be different.

We are therefore committed to ensure that our work with migrants along the migration trails, in origin, transit and destination countries, encompass the following:

- initiatives to understand better trends that fuel intolerance, violence, discrimination and lack of respect for diversity and actions that can combat these trends;
- promoting respect for diversity and the promotion of non-discrimination;
- dialogue and advocacy on tolerance and respect for diversity at national and international levels

Many Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies deliver innovative programmes and public awareness campaigns to combat xenophobia and racism with regard to migrant communities. The Armenian Red Cross, for example, has a campaign called *Don't Judge by the Cover*. Its aim is to raise awareness about the benefits of diversity and to challenge negative public perceptions of migrants. Other National Societies running similar campaigns to improve the dialogue on migration include Cape Verde, Mauritania, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Egypt.

National Societies' initiatives also facilitate an engagement between local communities and migrants. The *1001 Strengths* programme in the Netherlands actively involves migrant women and pairs them with local elderly individuals to encourage social interaction that promotes intercultural dialogue and social inclusion. Veronique Stevens, diversity advisor for the Netherlands Red Cross, explains: “We organise meetings and activities to inform the women about what the Red Cross can do both for themselves and for others around them, and even more about what they could do as a Red Cross volunteer.” “We are really happy with the results so far. To date, we have reached over 1,500 women and encouraged more than 600 women to get actively involved in volunteer work. We realise that there is a great challenge ahead. Dutch society is becoming more and more diverse. Our experience is that people are really enthusiastic to participate in the work of the Red Cross. This gives us inspiration to continue our work.”

A particular focus of our work is engaging and educating young people. Many National Societies are now implementing the *Youth as Agents of Behavioural Change* (YABC) initiative which aims to empower young people to help change mindsets, attitudes and behaviours within their local communities. For example, in North Africa, the YABC approach has been used to train young volunteers assisting migrants and refugees on the Tunisian / Libyan border. The YABC work in the region is being carried out as part of a wider campaign to raise awareness about migration issues using a range of creative approaches, including the production of over 1,000 colouring



“Don't Judge by the Cover” campaign poster in Armenia.



Flyer of the North African awareness campaign to appeal to the promotion of diversity and non-discrimination. The campaign “Let us live our humanity. It is for us to act” was a joint initiative from the Algerian, Libyan, Tunisian and Moroccan Red Crescents.

books about a young boy from Niger living in Morocco, which have been handed out at schools throughout the region.

Supporting migrants to integrate into host countries is also an important means of fostering social inclusion. The Spanish Red Cross *Integration Plan for Immigrants* includes different projects that share the objective of promoting access to the job market of immigrants (both self-employed and employed). Similarly, the Austrian Red Cross together with the Austrian Youth Red Cross is actively supporting the integration and public acceptance of migrants by implementing projects which aim at presenting positive examples of well-integrated migrants to young people in schools.

## Red Cross Red Crescent case studies

### Positive Images Campaign



Malta Red Cross volunteer during a Positive Images workshop

The *Positive Images* project aims to promote positive attitudes towards vulnerable migrants, and raise awareness on humanitarian issues relating to migration amongst young people. Established by the British Red Cross in 2009 with the aim of reaching 3 million school children in three years, the project has since been successfully piloted by EU Red Cross National Societies in Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Greece and Malta.

*Positive Images* employs a diverse range of methods for engaging young people spanning youth-led activities such as peer education and youth action, empathy-building activities such as role playing and creative activities through the creation of newspapers, quizzes, cartoons, educational resources, street interviews and exhibitions.

One key strength of the project is that at least half of the *Positive Images* volunteer teams are from migrant backgrounds. As a result, *Positive Images* enables young people to learn directly from migrants' own experiences, whilst offering volunteers the chance to build their confidence, communication and youth work skills. As one volunteer reflected; "We're out there, teaching young people about migration, changing perceptions. It's very motivating." *Positive Images* has enabled the Red Cross to reach out to thousands of young people across the EU. At an event run by the Hellenic Red Cross in Athens, young people wrote over 3,000 welcome messages to migrants and a hotline for young people in Austria, which enabled young migrants to act as advisors, received over 9,000 calls in 2009. Feedback from participants also suggests that *Positive Images* is helping to change perceptions.



Positive Images activity: wall display in the shape of a parrot, where students have written on the feathers their answer to the question “should people have labels and why?” The parrot challenged the analogy that a parrot only repeats what it hears.

As one young person who had taken part in a *Positive Images* event reflected: “Thank you for teaching us about migrants and how life looks from a different side. I really enjoyed the ‘push pull’ activity because it makes us think about people that have been through a lot in life.”

## Comic books in the Democratic Republic of the Congo



Image from the “La-bas... Na poto” comic book.

The Belgium Red Cross and the Red Cross of the Democratic Republic of Congo have joined forces with Congolese artists to produce comic books on the realities of migration to Europe. An innovative aspect of the project is the fact that the comics have been produced as educational resources for teachers and young people in both countries, with a unified aim of stimulating debate on migration and raising awareness about the difficulties that migrants can encounter along their journey. The “La-bas... Na poto” comic book illustrates the gap that often exists between the migrant dream and the realities of the migrant journey and life in a new country. Its aim is to ensure that young people in DRC are better informed and prepared when they make choices about whether to migrate. With the help of 10,000 volunteers, 125,000 copies have been distributed throughout the

country since the project began in 2007. Meanwhile in Belgium, a comic book has been produced as a teaching tool to raise awareness amongst school children about the realities of migration and to challenge negative stereotypes of migrants.

## Integrating migrants in rural Finland

The Finnish Red Cross is taking an innovative approach to address the needs of migrants in a non-urban setting in its *YES project*. The project targets asylum seekers and people with residence permits living in a rural reception centre and waiting for a residence in a municipality. The rural environment, new to the phenomenon of immigrant diversity, can prove to be challenging for migrants and asylum seekers. The project aims to develop a 4-step programme for better integration, increased employment and intensified settlement in rural areas and to create a model to be used in other reception centres, thus preventing marginalisation, improving cultural exchange and interaction.

## Harmony Awards in Australia

Harmony Day is celebrated around Australia on 21 March each year. It celebrates the cultural diversity of a country where nearly a quarter of the current population was born overseas and more than two million Australians speak a language other than English at home. Harmony Day was founded in 1999 and since then organisations, including the Australian Red Cross, have staged more than 25,000 events in support of the day. The Australian Red Cross plays an active role in marking the occasion by hosting the *Red Cross Harmony Awards*, a competition which encourages schools, youth organisations and community groups to enter projects with the aim of promoting tolerance and the message that everyone belongs. Entries have included community gardens, indigenous literary projects, road side clean ups and refugee week projects.



Harmony Day mural at a Primary School, Australia.

## First Contact Program in Canada

The Canadian Red Cross runs the “First Contact” Program which provides general support to migrants. This support includes providing information on how to find affordable housing, process a refugee claim, secure employment, as well as how to apply for legal aid or social assistance.

## Campaign “Act! Reject discrimination and celebrate diversity” in Ecuador

The Ecuadorian Red Cross organized a campaign called “Act! Reject discrimination and celebrate diversity” in the provinces of Loja, Calvas, Catamayo and Paltas. Under the slogan “Diversity is our best option” the Ecuadorian Red Cross initiated this campaign to promote a culture of non-violence and respect for diversity. It is worth noting that migrant Red Cross volunteers from many different nationalities were proactively involved in this initiative.



The campaign was developed together with the local municipalities and communities.

## The Ubuntu initiative in southern Africa

Ubuntu is a multidimensional concept which represents the core values of African culture: respect for all human beings, for human dignity and for human life, collectivity and sharing, humility, solidarity, caring, hospitality, and interdependence. The Red Cross’ Ubuntu Initiative for southern Africa is a five-year flagship programme which aims to address the humanitarian needs of vulnerable migrants and work with migrants and host communities towards respect for diversity and social inclusion. The initiative is being carried out by National Societies in Lesotho, Mozambique, South



Africa, Swaziland and Zimbabwe as well as the regional offices of the IFRC and the ICRC.

**The Ubuntu initiative builds on the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's traditional strengths in community based health and first aid, community based disaster management, and organisational capacity development.**



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