



# PERSPECTIVES

from the Humanity in Action Network | Volume II

## THE PLIGHT OF UNACCOMPANIED CHILD MIGRANTS:

United States and European Union  
Asylum Policies and Effects on the Most  
Vulnerable Population

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**M**arlo is a seventh grader from a small town in El Salvador, where he is realizing first-hand that he resides in the homicide capital of the world.<sup>1</sup> With crushing desperation, Marlo's mother has decided that replacing the books and pencils in his backpack with food and water for his upcoming journey is the safest decision for her child. She lost her job at a recently defunct factory and is unable to seek employment beyond neighborhood lines, as crossing gang territory is commonly welcomed with violence. A local criminal gang is now attempting to recruit Marlo, but his mother knows that if he gets inducted, he would be lost to a dismal life of danger and crime. His unwillingness to accept, however, could possibly be faced with fatal retaliation. He is bound northward, into the dangerous migrant trails winding through Mexico, with the hope of reaching the United States (US) border where he will attempt to change his status from migrant, to asylum seeker, to refugee. And so the unaccompanied journey begins.

North America is experiencing a historically unprecedented number of children seeking asylum, overwhelmingly from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras (Central America's Northern Triangle).<sup>2</sup> Europe's child asylum seekers are largely fleeing Afghanistan, Syria, and the Horn of Africa.<sup>3</sup> Marlo's story is

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a composite of the typical situations documented by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in their report “Children on the Run.”<sup>4</sup> The UNHCR asserts that the majority of asylum-seeking children they interviewed are clearly in need of international protection. Human rights protections must be invoked for those fleeing unparalleled violence. This is especially true for the most vulnerable population, unaccompanied child migrants.



## THE DIPLOMACY AND DIVERSITY FELLOWSHIP

Humanity in Action’s Diplomacy and Diversity Fellowship engaged nearly 400 foreign policy experts in discussions on pluralism and human rights from 2014 to 2016. The fellowship sponsored the study and research of 72 graduate student Fellows from the United States and Europe. The Fellows convened in Berlin, Paris, Warsaw and Washington. The articles constitute the original work of Fellows in the 2016 Diplomacy and Diversity Fellowship.

The number of unaccompanied child migrants (UCMs) that crossed the southern US border almost tripled to 68.5 thousand in 2014 from 24 thousand in 2012.<sup>5</sup> In the European Union (EU), about 90,000 unaccompanied children sought asylum in 2015 alone.<sup>6</sup> It is important to understand the root causes that fuel these refugee movements and what major immigration policies in the US and the EU affect this population. EU states and the US must swiftly but effectively address glaring inconsistencies in the implementation of relevant policies and international agreements. There must also be greater cooperation between central and regional state authorities so as to not leave this population struggling in bureaucratic failures and grey zones.

## CURRENT REFUGEE MOVEMENTS – FROM WHERE AND WHY ARE CHILDREN MIGRATING?

### *Migration to the United States*

Due to a sharp increase in asylum-seeking migrants arriving at the US-Mexican border in 2011 and peaking in 2014, the current wave of migration to the US is often referred to as “the surge.”<sup>7</sup> According to the UNHCR, domestic abuse is one of two major patterns that causes children to seek international protection. Of the children interviewed by the UNHCR, 21% reported experiencing violence by their caretakers.<sup>8</sup> The second pattern, violence from criminal organizations, has caused endemic levels of violence throughout the region. El Salvador suffered double the number of homicides in 2014 compared to the year prior, due to a break in a controversial truce



between the country’s two most prominent rival gangs. According to the Institute of Legal Medicine in El Salvador, the country’s 2016 murder rate of 116 per 100,000 placed it 17 times over the global average.<sup>9</sup> Honduras experienced 104 murders per 100,000 in 2014, a 70% increase from the year prior. To put this in perspective, we can look to neighboring Costa Rica, which experienced 10 homicides per 100,000 in 2010.<sup>10</sup> Some organizations, however, have deemed these numbers unreliable due to governments’ underreporting of violent crimes.<sup>11</sup>

It would be remiss to discuss the instability of Central America without acknowledging its history of foreign interventions. Such history is too complex to justly unfold in this space, but it is important to note that in addition to the role of the US in the deposition of democratic government in Guatemala, it was also involved in funding civil wars in both Guatemala and El Salvador.<sup>12</sup> The US was then entrenched in the Iran-Contra affair that spilled over to bases in Honduras.<sup>13</sup> The political vacuums, weak government frameworks, and protracted violence in the region are the results of complicated domestic and international affairs, but the fact remains that US investments in the region’s brutalities have created long-lasting effects.

### *Migration to Europe*

Europe’s refugee numbers are greater, with many more source countries adding to migration flows in the region. In 2015, over a quarter of a million children arrived in Europe by sea. Of the total asylum applications received by EU member states, 23% were filed by UCMS.<sup>14</sup> Causes of the refugee movement on the European side include the protracted war in Syria, decades of war and unresolved conflict in Afghanistan, and unending conflict in Somalia.<sup>15</sup> Within Syria, 6.5 million people have been internally displaced, with an additional 4.9 million registered refugees outside of the country.<sup>16</sup>



## NEWS FROM THE NETWORK

Humanity in Action Denmark’s Chairman and journalist at *Politiken* **Anders Jerichow** along with fellow board member and Senior Researcher at the Danish Institute for International Studies **Cecilie Felicia Stokholm Banke** are working on the project “Before genocide”, which will chronicle civil society in the lead-up to genocide in countries around the world. This will take the form of a conference, a book publication, and a day commemorating the 75th anniversary of the flight of the Danish Jews in 1943. Partnering with the Jewish Community in Denmark, the project is scheduled for the end of September 2018 and will take place in Copenhagen.



Second to Syria in displaced people is Afghanistan, from which Afghans are fleeing over four decades of protracted conflict. Continued activity from the Taliban, ISIS, and militant groups are fueling conflict and taking control of land where the government has failed to keep power. The UNHCR has estimated that about 2.7 million Afghans are registered as refugees, while an estimated 3 million are living within the region without documentation.<sup>17</sup> For many, the histories of violence and turmoil have culminated in their decision to flee – to leave the only home they know in desperate search of refuge.

What happens then, if a child survives the dangerous journey out of their home country in search of their right to apply for asylum? What is reception like in their first country of entry? Where are they detained as they move through the asylum process? Given that we are currently facing two major refugee movements in both hemispheres, it is critical that in addition to being aware of these humanitarian crises, we are learning what policies work and fail on both sides in an effort to better move forward.

## IMMIGRATION POLICIES

### *The United States*

According to the Department of Homeland Security, the number of UCMs that crossed the US border increased by 90% between 2013 and 2014. Although there was a peak in the spring and summer of 2014, the migrant flow dropped by half in the final months of that same year.<sup>18</sup> Such a drastic drop from a record setting inflow raises questions as to how this migration suddenly plummeted. In order to address immigration backlog, President Obama requested 3.7 billion USD in emergency funds to provide much needed resources and to supplement immigration judges.<sup>19</sup> Congress denied this request and instead initiated efforts to further secure the southern US and Mexican borders. Campaigns were funded and installed through the Northern Triangle and Mexico to deter potential migrants from embarking on the journey north. In addition to these campaigns, increased border surveillance at Mexico's southern border was largely the reason for the drop in UCM at the US border. A 2016 report

“It is not that children have stopped coming, but rather that they are being apprehended earlier in their route and returned to the violence they fled.”



revealed that these campaigns are not actually deterring attempts at making the journey.<sup>20</sup> It is not that children have stopped coming, but rather that they are being apprehended earlier in their route and returned to the violence they fled.

In the event that they do arrive, the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA) helps to protect children from being immediately deported without having a hearing. TVPRA makes it so these children are processed by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), which usually places the child with a family member if one is present within the US, while the child awaits hearing. This is in contrast to the process for adults, who await hearings in detention centers criticized for their harsh conditions and abuses.<sup>21</sup> A 2015 report by the Migration Policy Institute found that in 2014, 61% of UCM cases initiated at the start of 2014 were still pending by the end of August of that year. Further illustrating immigration backlog, the 2014 average wait time for an adult’s deportation hearing was 1,071 days.<sup>22</sup>

After ORR resettles them, they are turned over to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS)’s Asylum Offices, where children must represent themselves at their own expense, find non-profit representation, or forego legal counsel. Once they get to their hearing, they are often considered for two forms of protection most commonly applied to this population. The first reflects the United Nation’s Refugee Convention for which a child must show they have suffered past persecution or maintain a well-founded fear of future persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. Individuals who fit this description are eligible to apply for asylum. The second type of visa is called the Special Immigrant Juvenile (SIJ) visa and is reserved for those under the age of 21 who have been abused, abandoned, or neglected by a parent.<sup>23</sup>

In order to illustrate the policies and court procedures that shape a child’s quest for protection, I interviewed former Justice AmeriCorps attorney Alissa Cooley. Cooley worked for the Boyd School of Law’s Immigration Clinic in Las Vegas, where she represented UCMs from 2014 to 2016. It became evident that, even in cases when children do have an attorney, these hearings can be extraordinarily intimidating experiences. In speaking of a 16 year old client, Cooley shared, “he



**NEWS FROM  
THE NETWORK**

As her Action Project, Danish Senior Fellow **Loke Bisbjerg Nielsen** (Sarajevo 2016) is launching the online news platform “Update Europe.” It will give an overview of important socio-political news from the European Humanity in Action countries. The platform is set to launch this summer. Stay tuned!



was shaking, trembling, uncomfortable with the task of appearing before a judge after his traumatic journey. It can take me four or five meetings with a client before I can get them to begin to trust me. I can be working with them for a year and still be learning new things relevant to their asylum case.”<sup>24</sup> The asylum process is marred with difficulties, but attempts have been made to alleviate the experience.

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– *Alissa Cooley*

Cooley appreciates that the system attempts to provide specialized treatment to the more sensitive asylum cases of children. Instead of filing a case with the Executive Office of Immigration Review the way those over the age of 18 do, children’s cases are heard by the US Citizenship and Immigration Services Bureau (USCIS). Cooley shared, “during ‘the surge,’ a policy memo was issued asking judges to create a less adversarial environment and opt for plain dress instead of formal robes, come down from the bench to interact with the children, and enact role-play situations if

needed to help them better express themselves.” These children must prove fear of persecution on the bases of race, nationality, membership in a particular social group, religion, or political opinion. In Cooley’s experience, “it is exceptionally challenging for children to express subjective fear, especially because their families try to shelter them from the specifics of the violence and instability they face.”<sup>25</sup>

Despite these efforts, Cooley stated that in her two years representing children, she never saw these initiatives practiced. Because of the overwhelming ratio of asylum cases to immigration judges, courts initiated “rocket dockets” in an effort to rush through as many cases as possible. Cooley adds, “the nearest USCIS asylum office to Las Vegas is in Anaheim, California, where 56% of overall UCM asylum cases are approved. In the event that a child’s case is determined ineligible by an Asylum Officer, the case is referred to the regular immigration court in Las Vegas. The immigration court in Las Vegas, in comparison to the court in Anaheim, has an abysmal approval rate of 3%. When I began appearing in the Las Vegas court, there were only two judges hearing these cases. After one retired, three more were hired, two of which had no immigration experience.”<sup>26</sup>

In addition to the mounting difficulties a child faces in court, feelings of intimidation, language barrier, and burden to prove individualized fear of persecution, they also have to deal with judges who do not understand immigration



law. Cooley explains, “one of the new judges asked to meet with a few immigration attorneys so we could explain asylum briefs to him as well as how the overall process worked, since he didn’t know.”<sup>27</sup> Beyond pro bono cases taken on by the Boyd Immigration Clinic and groups across the country willing to offer similar services, many of these children are expected to argue their cases without the tremendous benefit of legal representation. For fiscal year 2014, 73% of children with legal representation were allowed to remain in the United States, whereas only 15% of children without legal counsel were allowed to stay.<sup>28</sup>

““For fiscal year 2014, 73% of children with legal representation were allowed to remain in the US, whereas only 15% of children without legal counsel were allowed to stay.”

Another obstacle children face is the difficulty of using gang violence as a sufficient source of fear. The difficulty stems from whether violence is one of the limited reasons recognized in refugee law. Michael Kagan, Director of the William S. Boyd School of Law Immigration Clinic, adds, “the original understanding of the UN Refugee Convention was focused on persecution by strong central governments such as those found in Nazi Germany or the former Soviet Union. The interpretation of the convention evolved to cover those fleeing non-state actors, militias, and domestic violence. The convention’s relevance to migrants fleeing gang violence is a cutting-edge legal issue which is not yet accepted as standard.”<sup>29</sup> This is obviously problematic, in a region rampant with gang and criminal activity.

### *The European Union*

During the summer of 2016, I visited a center aimed at providing support to the female migrant population in Athens. The center, named Melissa after the Greek word for honeybee, is a testament to the resourcefulness of women working together to achieve progress. Melissa provides bus passes to its participants to help them commute to the center from refugee camps in the city. In addition to backpacks stocked with basic essentials, the center also offers language training, classes in poetry, theatre, and dance, homemade meals, and a much-needed respite from daily refugee camp life.

During my visit, I noticed a teenage Afghan participant in an adjacent room, sitting among friends with a journal in her hand. One of the center’s founders asked the young girl if she would be willing to share some of her poetry with us.



She joined us, but with a reticence often seen in children who move from their group of friends to a group of unrecognized adults. As she began to read, her shyness slowly dissipated as a smile began to curl upwards. She was excited to share something that she had created herself, something born of her own experience, creativity, and emotion. She shared sentiments of living an unpredictable life, of her turbulent journey to Greece, of the hostility she felt from some, and of the compassion she felt from others. As she reached the end, she spoke words full of hope and anticipation of a better tomorrow. She remained thankful to those who offered her kindness along the journey.

“You have to understand, that no one puts their children in a boat unless the water is safer than the land”  
– Warsan Shire<sup>30</sup>

My brief time at Melissa showed me how truly impactful their work is, but I also realized that their efforts exist in a neighborhood known for its xenophobic and anti-immigrant sentiments. The neighborhood is alive with the presence of Greece’s Golden Dawn political party, a neo-Nazi, nationalist, and racist organization that calls for the deportation of all “illegal immigrants” without exception.<sup>31</sup>

Melissa, a beacon of humanitarian aid and integration, sitting amongst a neighborhood that rejects it, is symbolic of the state of immigration throughout the EU. It is critical to consider how and why those seeking asylum arrive in places like Athens, how their cases are processed, and, more specifically, how the EU handles the claims of UCMs.

The EU experienced an extremely sharp increase in asylum-seeking minors in 2015, with the number of cases skyrocketing to 96,000 from 13,800 just two years prior.<sup>32</sup> When handling these arrivals, member states are bound by the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). The system stipulates right to asylum and prohibition of refoulement, a principle that prevents the return of asylum seekers to their persecutors.<sup>33</sup> Further, there are six major pieces of EU legislation that apply to these children, but an understanding of a few key directives can help illustrate the UCM experience in Europe.

The Reception Conditions Directive dictates that asylum applicants have access to shelter, food, medical, and psychological care. This directive also draws a major distinction from the US side, as it guarantees children access to free legal assistance. Unfortunately, reports show that a lack of resources and coordination among authorities results in unrepresented children.<sup>34</sup> Further, the directive sets standards for detention facilities, but a variety of issues have been reported in terms of length of stay and conditions within centers. Specifically, Greece has been





criticized for placing children in the same facilities as adults, a practice deemed inappropriate by many human rights organizations.<sup>35</sup>

Another set of EU standards, set by the Asylum Procedures Directive, stipulates the handling of asylum cases.<sup>36</sup> For example, it states that EU countries may use medical examinations to determine the age of UCMs, who should be under the age of 18. This is clearly not applied across the EU, as states have separate standards for how examinations are conducted. In Malta, examinations are visual, and any person appearing to be over the age of 12 is considered an adult.<sup>37</sup>

The Dublin III Regulation establishes which member state will be responsible for the processing of asylum cases. Under the original Dublin Regulation, an asylum seeker would have to submit their application in their first country of entry. This, however, overwhelmed certain countries. Later versions of the Dublin Regulation allow for transfer requests in hopes to lessen the occurrences of irregular movement of asylum applications once they enter the system.<sup>38</sup> Because the original Dublin Regulation required the applicant to file their application in the country of first entry, many disappeared as they continued their journey to resettle in different areas.

After a child is first processed at an EU border, the child can be granted refuge or subsidiary protection status, or can be returned home. Unlike the US, the EU has ratified the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), a human rights treaty which sets standards for the treatment of children. Many states, however, still skirt the responsibilities defined by the CRC and opt for standard immigration policy instead.<sup>39</sup> Given that certain regions experience higher direct responsibility for these children, due simply to geography and migration routes, central state governments tasked with upholding international laws often shirk their responsibilities to regional authority. Inconsistencies of practice between centralized and local governments create processing delays and issues for asylum applicants. The existence of extra-territorial zones, which operate under different legal regimes and standards, is a prime example of this. The Charles de Gaulle Airport transit zone is the most notable. Children are treated as never having entered France and are therefore excluded from central protections.<sup>40</sup>



## NEWS FROM THE NETWORK

United Colors of Sarajevo, an Action Project by Senior Fellows **Elma Bešlić** (Sarajevo 2016) and **Berina Verlašević** (Sarajevo 2016), was implemented with much success in two phases: first with an interactive educational workshop on children's rights in the SOS Social Centre Hermann Gmeiner in Sarajevo, and second with a street action in one of the city's parks. Congratulations!



## ON A PATH MARRED WITH OBSTRUCTIONS, HOW DO WE MOVE FORWARD?

Brett Stark, legal director of Terra Firm, a medical-legal partnership that serves children through service and advocacy, represents UCMs in US federal and state litigation. When asked what the single greatest challenge is to UCMs, he said, “it is the unjust nature of the pursuit of asylum, in which a child suffering some combination of severe emotional, psychological, and physical distress is expected to defend [their case] in court in a language they do not speak without legal counsel. The nature of this process is unrealistic and unjust when a child is seeking refuge from such daunting and perilous conditions.”<sup>41</sup> A report released by the United Kingdom (UK)’s House of Lords asserts that:

“it has become increasingly clear that children, many of them unaccompanied... are in the forefront of this crisis. The implementation of existing EU measures to protect [this population] has been poor... We are concerned that the EU and its member states have lost sight of the plight of unaccompanied migrant children. They face a culture of disbelief and suspicion. Authorities try to avoid taking responsibility for their care and protection. Unsurprisingly, many children have lost trust in the institutions and measures intended to guarantee their rights, safety and well-being.”<sup>42</sup>

In the EU and in the US, a lack of uniform standards in immigration courts works against the goal of consistency. Prolonged detention for European UCMs and hearing times for American UCMs along with unrealizable age exams, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and lack of legal defense are exacerbating the problem. There have been efforts, however, to improve the status quo. For example, the EU established the Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund (AMIF) with 3.137 billion EUR spanning 2014 to 2020. The fund was put in place to “promote the efficient management of migration flows and the implementation, strengthening and development of a common Union approach to asylum and immigration.”<sup>43</sup> It is too early to evaluate the effectiveness of this effort, but it seems like a positive step forward. On the US side, the Obama Administration implemented the Central American Minors Refugee/Parole Program, an in-country processing attempt at alleviating the asylum process. Unfortunately, this program, initiated in 2014, is so extremely limited that no children were accepted until November 2015, almost a year after implementation.<sup>44</sup>

Where the message of humanitarian protection is lost, the public sees these children merely as resource burdens and security threats. It is time that the





# (RE)DEFINING INTEGRATION: The Case of Spain

Jessica Tollette

“I’m happy to sign an integration contract, because we immigrants want nothing more than to be accepted, and that’s what integration means, doesn’t it? (...) But we say, Mr. Rajoy [Spanish Prime Minister], what do you mean by integrating? Which customs, which habits? Are they Andalusian ones or Catalan ones or Basque ones? Do they mean eating a Spanish tortilla, sleeping a siesta? I have no idea...”<sup>1</sup>

In recent decades, migration to Europe has increased exponentially. New migration flows are facilitated by improvements in technology and transportation and, more recently, war, disaster, and economic crises. In 2015 alone, more than one million migrants traveled by land, sea, and air, often risking their lives to make their way to Europe. With the rapid and seemingly untenable level of new migrants, the political focus is on reception and border control, often to the detriment of longer-term solutions.<sup>2</sup>

“The ambiguity of the rhetoric around integration poses a challenge to immigrants who want to feel like a part of the receiving society, but don’t have a clear understanding of what this means in practice.”

While the European Union (EU) scrambles to close borders and process asylum applications, there are thousands of migrants waiting for sustainable integration protocols to be established in their new communities. Indeed, one overlooked aspect

of Europe’s migration “crisis” is that countries are not adequately equipped to integrate migrants into their society. But what do we mean when we say integration?

The above excerpt is a quote from Kamal Rahmouni of the Association of Moroccan Immigrants in Spain, who spoke with reporter Doug Saunders of *The Globe and Mail* to express his frustrations with the Spanish Prime Minister for the lack of clarity around Spanish initiatives to integrate immigrants. These frustrations are very clear, not only for Kamal, but also for Chinyere, Maite,



Fouzia, and countless other immigrants from all around the world who travel to Europe looking for a better life. What Kamal makes clear is that the ambiguity of the rhetoric around integration poses a challenge to immigrants who want to feel like a part of the receiving society, but don't have a clear understanding of what this means in practice.

As migration to Europe increases, there is a greater need for a more comprehensive definition of what integration should look like and how to achieve it. France, England, and Germany set the tone for the post-World War II European reaction to immigration with a range of policies that have either minimized or emphasized ethnic, cultural, and religious differences. These countries are also dealing with the backlash of “failures of integration,” and growing levels of inequality, discrimination, and right-wing politics.

Being more explicit about what we mean when we talk about immigrant integration is a challenge that Europe faces as it continues to receive immigrants from ethnically, culturally, religiously, and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Empowering the voices of immigrants and civil society can help to clarify what we mean by integration and to mobilize constituents to take ownership over the process.

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## DEFINING INTEGRATION

According to the EU, integration is a bidirectional process based on mutual rights and obligations of non-national citizens, who are legal migrants, and the host society, which permits the full participation of immigrants.<sup>4</sup> The EU considers integration to be a shared responsibility between immigrants and the host society. Nonetheless, the way to achieve integration and “mutual adaptation” varies across nations and even regions within nations.

In 2008, the EU worked to further develop notions of integration through the creation and adoption of an “integration toolbox,” meant to improve integration policies. The “toolbox” included information about European values, access to employment, and language training. While developed at the EU-level, European states have autonomy to implement their integration policies at the national level. French Immigration Minister Brice Hortefeux said: “Integration remains a



national issue. The toolbox will therefore not lead to harmonization or constraints (...) It was our ambition to prepare a toolbox. The lesson of our work is that there is no single solution or miracle cure, but a range of practical measures to ensure successful integration.”<sup>5</sup> As Hortefeux points out, the ways to achieve integration vary across nations because of the different contexts at the local level.

The two dominant models of integration in Europe are assimilation and multiculturalism. Assimilation is the process by which immigrants “let go” of customs and cultural practices from one’s native country in favor of adopting the ideals and values of the host country.<sup>6</sup>

This process of “letting go” is often measured by factors such as: language acquisition, educational attainment, or intermarriage between immigrants and native citizens. While some European countries such as France opted for more assimilatory practices, several European countries including the United Kingdom, Finland, the Netherlands, and Sweden pushed for a multicultural model to integration.

If we think about assimilation as abandoning one’s identity to adopt local norms and values, multiculturalism can be viewed as assimilation’s antithesis. Multiculturalism

is an integration model that encourages immigrants to maintain their own unique cultural identity within the context of their new host society. In contrast to assimilation, multiculturalism attaches positive value to ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity and calls for equal recognition of different cultural groups in ways that are supported by state mandates.<sup>7</sup> Societies promote multiculturalism by implementing policies that cater to specific ethno-cultural groups and permit them to maintain distinct cultural customs and practices. For example, in Finland, it is a constitutional right for ethnic minorities such as the Sami and Roma people to maintain and develop their own language and culture.

Previous research on assimilation and multiculturalism in Europe<sup>8</sup> both critique and assess the success (and failure) of these models across different countries. This research also highlights the ways in which integration is complicated, contested, and variable. Within the current frameworks of assimilatory and multicultural integration models, there is no clear success story. This was made explicit during Angela Merkel’s now-famous 2010 speech when she said, “This [multicultural]

**NEWS FROM THE NETWORK**

US Senior Fellow **Zach Neumann** (Paris 2006) launched his campaign for Colorado State Senate as the Democratic candidate for District 32 this May. Learn more and support Zach by visiting his website [www.neumannforcolorado.com](http://www.neumannforcolorado.com).



approach has failed, utterly failed.”<sup>9</sup> Merkel was referring to the challenges to integrating Muslim Turks into German society and a recognition that so long as immigrants are granted the right to maintain separate ethnic enclaves, factors such as language acquisition and educational levels will remain difficult to equalize across groups.

## RE-DEFINING INTEGRATION, EMPOWERING IMMIGRANT VOICES, MOBILIZING CITIZENS

Despite explicit definitions of the concept by the EU, scholars have debated immigrant integration since the EU’s inception. Most research on the topic focuses on how policy makers, political scientists, and sociologists grapple with integration;<sup>10</sup> yet little is known about how immigrants make sense of integration, what it means, and concrete ways to integrate themselves into cultures that are often vastly different than their own. One way to address “the failures of integration” is to understand integration from the perspective of immigrants themselves.

Interviews conducted with immigrants in Spain shed light on a more tangible articulation of integration that comes from the bottom up rather than the top-down approach imposed by government officials. Research looking at Nigerian, Dominican, and Moroccan immigrants in Madrid reveals that immigrants’ definitions of integration vary considerably by factors such as nationality, length of time in country, and cultural proximity to the host nation.<sup>11</sup> The findings suggest that integration programs cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach. Instead, programs should cater to the diverse needs of immigrant groups since language, culture, and religion can serve as factors that drive or deter immigrants from achieving integration.

Chinyere,<sup>12</sup> a Nigerian immigrant living in Madrid, saw language acquisition as the means to achieving integration, “My definition [of integration] would be learning the language of the people if there are differences in language, as in my own case. The integration will include learning the language. Because when you don’t know the language, there’s no way you can integrate.”<sup>13</sup> Like Chinyere, most Nigerians found language acquisition to be the primary, and in some cases, the



### NEWS FROM THE NETWORK

Senior Fellows from the US **Hasher Nisar** (Paris 2014) and **Mohammad Zia** (Amsterdam 2015) launched “Advancing Muslim American Leadership” (AMAL), a platform that supports young Muslim Americans who are pursuing careers in public service. Visit their website [amal-leadership.org](http://amal-leadership.org) to get involved!



only requirement for integration. Nigerians are one of the more recent waves of immigrants to come to Spain and vary from the Spanish not only in language, but also in race and culture. For many of them, integration is about navigating daily life in a host country without being inhibited by linguistic challenges.

Dominican immigrants have a longer history of migrating to Spain. The Dominican Republic is a former Spanish colony and therefore shares a common language and religion with Spanish citizens. For many Dominicans, integration is about adopting the values and cultural practices of the host society. They said things like, “To integrate is to adapt yourself to the host country (...) Don’t pretend to impose your customs that you have in your country on a foreign country.”<sup>14</sup> In this sense, integration is about modifying behaviors and practices to mimic the local culture. For many Dominican immigrants, integration is assimilation.

Moroccans, who differ from Spanish citizens in terms of language, culture, and most importantly, religion, rejected such Dominican notions of assimilation. They find that having rights and a sense of respect between Spanish citizens and immigrants is essential. Fouzia, a Moroccan immigrant living in Madrid, felt that integration was achieved when immigrants and natives were on equal political footing. She said; “First, integration has to work at a municipal level and then a state level with laws that facilitate the incorporation of the immigrant population with the same rights as Spanish people in every regard.”<sup>15</sup> Several Moroccans agreed with her and talked about equal rights and citizenship as central to integration. In this regard, integration is better addressed through policies mandating equal treatment of groups without expectations of behavioral adjustments on the part of immigrants. Their take on integration favors a multicultural model.

For native Spaniards, integration wasn’t so much about a series of actions, but rather a sensation. Although many citizens stated that Islam was a barrier to integration or that learning Spanish facilitated integration, more than anything, Spanish people believed that integration was a sense of belonging. They considered an immigrant to be integrated if they felt at home in Spain. For example, Aurora, a Spanish woman thought that integration was normalcy. She said, “I suppose it’s normalcy. That you go out on the street or speak with whomever, and they don’t perceive cultural differences or linguistic differences (...) You go out on the street and regardless of where you are from, you are one more. I think that it is this. Normalcy.”<sup>16</sup>

Interviews with three immigrant groups and native-born Spanish citizens in Madrid show that different groups have different needs, expectations, and desires for their own integration. While Moroccans favored multicultural practices,





Dominicans felt integration was about assimilating. Nationality, length of time in the country, and cultural proximity to the host nation all shape perspectives on integration. It is important to empower immigrant communities to help craft their own integration pathways, but it is equally important to understand native citizens' visions of integration and the role that they should play in the process.

So often, integration policy is created in a vacuum, mandated by government officials who are out of touch with the everyday needs of immigrant communities. This lack of awareness by the government can alienate immigrants and create a wedge between them and the communities in which they live. Speaking with immigrants and citizens in Madrid drew conclusions about integration from the bottom up, empowering immigrant voices and mobilizing citizens to be more conscious of their role in immigrant integration.

“So often, integration policy is created in a vacuum, mandated by government officials who are out of touch with the everyday needs of immigrant communities.”

If we can conceive of integration as a composite of four broad responses given by Moroccan, Nigerian, Dominican, and Spanish people in Madrid, then we can imagine a “spectrum of integration,” a four-part, sometimes non-linear process of 1) learning the language 2) understanding the culture, values, and customs of a country, 3) obtaining rights, and 4) ultimately feeling at home. By understanding how immigrants with ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic differences understand integration, policy makers, immigrants, and host societies can collectively work towards better outcomes.

## ACHIEVING IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION

Decades of implementing assimilatory and multicultural models with mixed success indicate that integration cannot solely be about relinquishing individual cultural practices in favor of blending into the host society or maintaining ethnic and cultural practices at the risk of exclusion. The “spectrum of integration” concept that I propose makes two contributions to current understandings of immigrant integration in Europe.

First, it shows that much of what Europe is already doing is right. Offering immigrants free or subsidized means to learn the local language is important and echoes the needs of immigrants that come from countries that don't share the same language. Providing resources that allow immigrants to learn about local



culture, customs, and practices is helpful for those who wish to assimilate. Lastly, a commitment to immigrant rights such as creating legal pathways to citizenship is a valuable part of the immigration experience, particularly for immigrants like Kamal who want to be accepted and viewed as equals in their host societies.

However, if we truly understand integration as “bidirectional in nature” as the EU describes, then there should be two vantage points in the immigrant integration process. The first is that of the immigrants themselves and what they are expected to do to adapt to the host country. Above I mentioned learning the language, customs, and values of the receiving society as critical. But what exactly is the role of the host society in achieving immigrant integration?



## NEWS FROM THE NETWORK

Led by US Senior Fellow **Amish Dave** (Berlin 2006), a group of Senior Fellows in the healthcare sector are leading a Health Initiative to develop programming on health issues for Humanity in Action, including two new professional fellowships on health care and housing in Seattle, a health component in the Detroit Fellowship, and a 2018 conference on health and human rights to take place in Seattle.

Here, the notion of a “spectrum of integration” makes an important modification to current practices of integration. Although integration definitions by Nigerians, Moroccans, and Dominicans in Madrid echo integration protocols found within assimilationist and multiculturalist models of integration, interviews with native citizens suggest that integration is not just about what you do, it is about how you feel. Recognizing the importance of a sense of belonging adds a layer of nuance to traditional models of integration and provides an avenue for native citizens to partake in immigrant integration.

Local, regional, and national governments as well as civil society should play an active role in cultivating safe and welcoming spaces for immigrants. To do so, native citizens can challenge their own stereotypes and prejudices by getting to know their immigrant neighbors and colleagues. Rather than mocking immigrants for not knowing how to say something, teach them. When you see someone struggling in the supermarket or at the doctor’s office, explain how to say it in the local language. Most importantly, try to empathize with immigrants’ situation and treat them with respect. By increasing awareness of the circumstances from which many immigrants are migrating, host communities can go a long way in being inclusive and making newcomers feel welcome.



Additionally, creating and designing public spaces for exchange can help to facilitate a sense of community, joint ownership, and shared responsibility to the community. For example, in a multicultural neighborhood in the center of Madrid, the community has built an urban park and garden to be shared and maintained with the cooperation of the community's residents, in which 33% of the neighborhood is foreign-born.<sup>17</sup> There are several other examples of how physically creating space such as community centers or parks can “make room” for interaction, exchange, and shared experiences between immigrants and native citizens.

At the government level, there can be mandatory cultural sensitivity training for medical and public health staff, law-enforcing bodies, and educational professionals. This can be as simple as workshops on the customs and habits of primary sending countries, or learning about the customs and practices of Islam that may affect Muslim immigrants in their workplace or academic environment. Furthermore, there is something essential about the physical organization of a host city or country that can be critical to the success of immigrant integration. This can include government interventions to limit residential isolation of certain immigrant groups who are prone to exclusion. Interventions can range from mandating mixed housing units or creating public housing that has a percentage of occupancy reserved for noncitizens.

## LOOKING FORWARD

Since 2015, Europe has faced unprecedented levels of irregular migration with no clear roadmap of how to address the influx of economic migrants and refugees in a sustainable way. Politicians have scrambled to address reception, humanitarian aid, and border control without an explicit, long-term plan for the socio-cultural integration of immigrants into their new host societies. Longer-term strategies to address immigrant integration must go beyond border control and think carefully about cultivating the complete integration of immigrants who plan to make a home in Europe.

In 2017, there continues to be a lack of clarity around what we mean by integration and what the practical and sustainable solutions might be to failed integration policies. Looking beyond traditional models of assimilation and multiculturalism may provide an answer to this. Empowering the voices of immigrants and civil society to help craft new integration protocols may allow for more effective approaches to bi-directional involvement in immigrant integration.

In speaking to immigrants and locals in Madrid, we can see that immigrant integration in Europe is going in the right direction. Not knowing the language,



understanding the local culture, or having rights are fundamental challenges to integration and many policies at the local, regional, and national level are working to address these. However, data from a diverse group of immigrants reveals that there are differences and divisions across groups as to what integration is and what it should look like.

Taking into consideration the diversity of immigrant populations and their unique needs is critical. Additionally, how you feel is just as important as what you do, and civil society can do more to facilitate a sense of belonging for immigrants. Getting it right may take a few missteps, but learning from mistakes of the past and moving forward with optimism and a level of openness to the new will be critical to reimagining Europe as a more diverse and pluralistic society.

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# EUROPE'S MIGRANT RECEPTION CRISIS, EASTERN EUROPE'S 'CRISIS OF SHAME'

An Interview with Konstanty Gebert conducted on May 17, 2017 by Senior Fellow David Liebers

**DAVID LIEBERS (DL):** Poland's refusal to accept refugees seems founded on the idea that doing so would traduce Polish identity. On those grounds, Britain could have refused asylum to survivors of the (Polish) Anders Army after 1945. What view would Poles have of Britain if it had done so?

**KONSTANTY GEBERT (KG):** If you asked that question in Poland, some people would have the courage to say: "Oh, but we are white!" The polite formulation would be: "the cultural distance was not so great, Poles were willing to assimilate, and we shared a set of values." The bottom line is that most people in Poland think that the British are crazy for letting in so many foreigners.

It goes deeper. It's not just Poland. In Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary, there is a very vicious anti-refugee and anti-foreigner backlash, and in all those countries it is justified by a certain historiosophic vision of the 20th century that goes something like this:

"The twentieth century was a nightmare: millions murdered, tremendous suffering and bloodshed. But it achieved a certain goal of granting us a country in which we are finally only among our own. Of course, nothing is perfect, and there are some foreigners among us, but not significant numbers compared to the eminently multicultural societies that existed before the war. Further, this was accomplished without us sullyng our hands, since our powerful neighbors were responsible for it. It would be criminally irresponsible to undo all that by allowing other foreigners in. We would be spoiling something that millions of people had died for."

I'd just finish with an event from the Polish National Independence Day in 2015 (a day which has been completely hijacked by the extreme right). There was an anti-refugee demonstration in Wrocław that ended with the burning in effigy of a Hassidic-looking Jew. You might think that for the right wing, Jews might be



potential allies. But no. For once, those guys were being consistent. They just didn't want any foreigners, full stop. I think it ties in with what is the fundamental issue for Poland. We as Poles have for years kidded ourselves that we've built a civil society. We've built an ethnic society that masquerades as a civil society. The nature of the bond is blood, not the social contract. Most of the time the difference is academic. But when things start to go bad, then the nature of the boundary is unmasked.

**DL:** Jan Gross wrote an article in Project Syndicate at the outset of the migration crisis—it actually landed him in legal trouble with Poland's new government, for suggesting that Poles killed more Jews than they did Germans during the Second World War. In it he coins the idea of Eastern Europe's 'Crisis of Shame' –

**KG:** I have a problem with that article. I don't think it is cause and effect. Poles are not refusing refugees because they played a role in killing some Jews. They have done both for the same reason, which I tried to explain with the Wrocław story.

His statement that Poles under the occupation killed more Jews than they did Germans is factually correct. But at face value, it explains nothing. First, there were many more Jews to kill than Germans. Second, killing Jews was encouraged, whereas you paid a heavy price for killing Germans. So if the implication is that Poles killed more Jews than Germans, because they saw Jews as more of an enemy, then this is wrong.

**DL:** What Gross is getting at is this: Polish Jews escaped to the West as refugees after the Holocaust, and again in 1968 (though under very different conditions). Gross is upset that Poles feel no guilt about these exoduses, as he believes that taking in refugees might reconcile the recent Polish past.

**KG:** He is legitimately upset, but he is setting his sights too narrowly. Millions of non-Jewish Poles escaped from Poland, too. In the 1980s alone, over a million Polish political refugees escaped the communist regime. Someone took them all in. We have been exporting refugees for generations. We have contracted a debt with the world. And the only way to repay that debt is to help other people in need. The fact that we do not see this correlation is a moral blindness that worries me deeply.

And as for the argument about cultural similarities that I invoked after your first question, Persia took in 120,000 Polish refugees fleeing the Soviet Union during World War II. They were of a different culture, faith, and religion. They were in rags, and disease-ridden. Nonetheless, they were taken in. So the argument about culture distance is a red herring.

**DL:** Arguments about cultural proximity are relative—three years ago, many on the right in Poland were extremely upset about taking in Ukrainians who they



labeled nationalists or Banderites, reminding us of the crimes of Wołyń. Now they use the fact that they are taking in Ukrainians as an alibi for why they cannot take refugees from elsewhere.

**KG:** No, but David, that is a falsehood! The Polish government has used this argument that it has taken in a million or more Ukrainians. The Prime Minister has repeated it again and again. The truth is that over the last three years, Poland has granted political asylum to a grand total of 44 Ukrainians. The Ukrainian ambassador to Poland actually had the bravery to contradict the Polish government and gave the correct figure, after the statement was first made. The larger number refers to the number of visas granted. This is all an obscene lie.

However, unfortunately, it might well happen that we will have to take in hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian refugees, if the war flares up. And then of course, Poland will be screaming to high heaven for European solidarity—the same solidarity we are denying today.

**DL:** In the final analysis, does Poland's refusal to accept refugees mean that it isn't really European in its values, after all?

**KG:** I'm afraid this shows that it is very European in its values—just not the kind of Europe we like to think about. Europe is many things. One of those things relates to all-out nationalism of the kind you find with Marine Le Pen. The difference is that she just wants to cut down refugees to 10,000 per year—an academic difference. Poland simply, though obscenely and in a suicidal way, thinks that this kind of Europe is the way forward.

The reason that Poland was desperate to join the European Union is that for a country between Germany and Russia there is no space for a state with no friends and allies. We're just moving back into that space. It is beyond suicidal, and I am very much worried.

**DL:** Thinking about Poland's arrangements with the European Union, do you think we would be in a better place morally if Brussels started to make certain benefits of the European Union, like the freedom of movement, contingent upon countries agreeing to the refugee policy? Can Brussels shape Polish attitudes in this way without pushing Poland out from under its roof? After all, Poland's refugee policy is very popular.

**KG:** Yes, the opposition is rallying around the government's position.

It would be a mistake to punish individual Polish citizens for the policies of their government, even if it is democratically elected. So I don't think the freedom



of movement should be contingent on the Polish government's acceptance of refugees— freedom of movement is more important than that.

But yes, I think the European Union should impose sanctions on Poland for repeatedly undermining the common refugee policy. The same applies to Hungary. I also think that if for the first time in European Union history a member is sanctioned, it should be done consistently. Next time France doesn't meet its targets on budget deficits it should be sanctioned as well. We need to start taking our laws seriously in Europe. I think Poland is under legal and moral obligation to observe the bylaws of the club that it has agreed to. This would be good for Europe, and good for Poland.

**DL:** Can European civil society play a role in influencing attitudes towards refugees in Poland and elsewhere?

Civil society has had to fall back on the model of the 1980s. People knowing people, personal contacts, trading experiences, all at the grassroots level. It is not terribly effective, but these contacts run deep and will not dissipate overnight. It is like a tree growing—it takes time, and cannot be hurried. If our governments were willing to help and support our civil societies, then Central and Eastern Europe could begin assuming a role of moral leadership in the EU. Of course, if this were the case, we wouldn't be having this conversation. But these are all questions for the *longue durée*.

**KONSTANTY GEBERT** serves as a special advisor on international affairs for Humanity in Action. He is an associate fellow at the European Council for Foreign Relations, an international reporter and columnist for *Gazeta Wyborcza*, and Co-Founder of the Polish Council of Christians and Jews. Gebert also serves as a board member for the Einstein Forum in Potsdam, Germany, among other foundations. He has authored books on topics ranging from the Polish democratic transformation to the Israeli wars. His essays have appeared in dozens of publications in Poland and abroad.

**DAVID LIEBERS** is an MD candidate at Harvard Medical School. He serves on the Executive Board of the American Association for Polish-Jewish Studies. Liebers completed an MPhil in the History and Philosophy of Science as a Gates-Cambridge Scholar at the University of Cambridge, and then was a Fulbright Scholar in Warsaw, Poland, with the Freedom and Democracy Foundation, working on human rights in post-soviet countries. He writes on neuropsychiatry, history of medicine, and central and eastern European politics. He was a Fellow in the 2010 Humanity in Action Warsaw Fellowship program. Liebers is a Humanity in Action Senior Fellow (Poland 2010).





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## NEWS FROM HUMANITY IN ACTION

### INTERNATIONAL

#### *8th Annual Humanity in Action International Conference*

250 new Fellows, Senior Fellows and Humanity in Action community members met in Berlin from June 22 – 25 for the 8th Annual Humanity in Action International Conference, which focused on the rise in nationalist sentiment, xenophobic rhetoric and political extremism across Europe and the United States, and the resultant challenges to transatlantic relations and domestic policies on both sides of the Atlantic. Registration for the conference was completely booked faster than any previous Humanity in Action International Conference.

### FROM THE UNITED STATES

#### *Humanity in Action Fellowship in Detroit*

Humanity in Action has recently launched the Detroit Fellowship, a new four-week program on social, economic, and cultural change in urban America. It explores the biography of Detroit — a city deeply emblematic of the tensions of massive socio-economic change in 20th and 21st century America, placing special emphasis on democratic inclusion, equitable development, social entrepreneurship, and the health of Detroit's communities.

### FROM DENMARK

#### *Fellowship for Student Teachers*

Humanity in Action Denmark is working on a shorter Fellowship for student teachers in Denmark, which will take place in mid-October 2017 and will focus on diversity and anti-discrimination in the classroom, addressing gender, sexuality, Antisemitism, Islamophobia and other issues.

### FROM POLAND

#### *Interactive Book on Jewish Culture*

“On Jews” is an interactive book on Jewish culture in response to recurring instances of antisemitism in Poland — in particular, among young people whose knowledge of the issue remains limited at best — that aims not only to address the lack of knowledge of Jewish history, customs, and culture, but also to present it in a novel and intriguing way. The book is available both in paper form as well as in electronic form.

# HUMANITY IN ACTION

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Celebrating Humanity in Action's 20th Anniversary