

"yes I am adapted, because I have tranquility, I can go on the street without having the fear of being persecuted or to be killed."



EUROPEAN COUNCIL ON REFUGEES AND EXILES

**ANNUAL
REPORT 2006**

ECRE

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ECRE


THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL ON REFUGEES AND EXILES (ECRE) is a pan-European network of refugee-assisting non-governmental organisations, concerned with the needs of all individuals seeking refuge and protection within Europe. It promotes the protection and integration of refugees based on the values of human dignity, human rights and an ethic of solidarity.

ECRE draws on the energy, ideas and commitment of an **active membership** and a strong **Secretariat**. It strives to involve wider civil society, the political community and refugee communities in its work.

ECRE aims to ensure that its ideas, projects, research and policies are of the highest quality, legally accurate and representative of a wide range of knowledge, experience and best practice throughout Europe. ECRE encourages the widest possible active involvement of its member agencies.

“The decision-makers should approach asylum seekers the same way that they would like the asylum seekers to approach them.”

Zoja, a refugee from Chechnya living in the Czech Republic
(Collected as part of ECRE's Refugee Stories Project)



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A MESSAGE FROM THE ECRE EXECUTIVE

In 2006 the political climate towards refugees in Europe remained one still dominated by post 9/11 security issues. The lowest numbers of asylum seekers arriving in Europe in twenty years is clearly the result of the increasing difficulties that refugees face with regards to both access to the continent and the national protection systems that so frequently fail them. Sadly therefore, the statistics do not reflect a safer world. During 2006 people fleeing conflict and persecution continued to perish at sea, desperately trying to make their way to Europe. Similarly, while Europe's attention was focused on the tragic plight of Iraqi refugees in their own country little attention was paid to the suffering of thousands of Iraqis on our doorstep.

Responsibility for policies and laws affecting refugees in Europe lies increasingly in Brussels. In this challenging environment ECRE's focus remains to strive to influence EU policy through the development of alternative approaches that we believe to be pragmatic, responsible and humane. In April 2006 ECRE laid down a challenge and an invitation to all involved in political decision-making to take a new approach to refugees and asylum, when we published *The Way Forward: An Agenda for Change*. This agenda aims to guide Europe's politicians and the NGO community to work together towards improving protection for refugees and finding effective long-term solutions to the complex challenges faced by states.

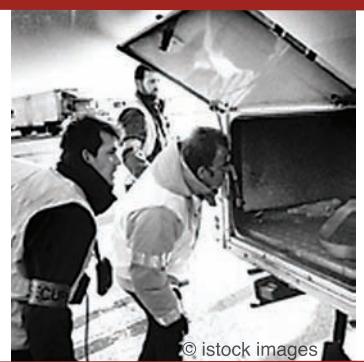
ECRE showed its commitment to working as a truly pan-European network by supporting our members in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, through developing their advocacy and media work and providing legal support to NGOs. A highlight was the opportunity for ECRE to bring the concerns of displaced persons in Eastern Europe to the highest levels of government at a conference attended by President Putin in the lead up to the G8 summit in St. Petersburg.



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© Dutch Council for Refugees - Joost Van den Broek



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"The fate of many who seek protection in the EU is increasingly determined by children are rarely heard in the political and public debate. Those who play a role most affected by their policies, and create a Common European Asylum System

In 2006 we sadly bade farewell to General Secretary Peer Baneke, who during his stewardship had done so much to develop the work of ECRE as well as preside over a significant increase in membership. We take the opportunity to thank him once again and to wish him all the best for the future. In October we were pleased to announce the appointment of Bjarte Vandvik as new Secretary General. Bjarte's arrival also signals a first stage of the decision to merge the two offices. The plan, timetabled for 2008, will be for ECRE to be represented in a single headquarters, in Brussels.

As Chair of the Executive Committee I would like to congratulate all those staff and individuals in the member agencies for the hard work and commitment in 2006 that once again demonstrated the importance of the work of this unique organisation.

EDUARD NAZARSKI: ECRE CHAIR

A MESSAGE FROM THE NEW SECRETARY GENERAL

I am delighted and honoured to take up this challenge. ECRE is entering into an exciting new phase, characterised by a stronger focus on advocacy and public awareness-raising, a strengthening of the commitment of its membership and the implementation of an extensive process of internal review. These changes will seek to promote greater public understanding of refugee issues and asylum as a human right and to combat a worrying climate of hostility towards asylum seekers and refugees.

In the pages ahead, you will read how ECRE is promoting a vision of a Europe by advocating on refugee policies that respect human rights through a wide range of activities, examples being: high-level meetings with European Commissioners; lobbying politicians; from equipping refugee assisting NGOs in Ingushetia with media skills, to publishing the stories of refugees living in Spain. All of this vital work continues on many fronts, in thirty countries across Europe. None of our achievements would be possible without the support of our generous funders, to whom I take this opportunity, once again, to express our gratitude.

BJARTE VANDVIK: ECRE SECRETARY GENERAL



Bjarte Vandvik:
Secretary General

decisions made in Brussels, but the voices of these men, women and in political decision-making must listen to the voices of those who are that offers genuine and lasting protection to those in need ”

Bjarte Vandvik, ECRE Secretary General

JANUARY 2006

ECRE's memorandum on priorities of the Austrian European Council presidency calls publicly for greater cooperation on refugee protection, and is reinforced by meetings with the Minister of the Interior and other decision makers.

FEBRUARY 2006

Over 150 legal practitioners from across Europe now better understand the right to subsidiary protection under the recently adopted EC Qualification Directive after attending ECRE's Legal Network on Asylum (ELENA) training course in Berlin.

MARCH 2006

In response to the continued number of Iraqis fleeing the conflict in their homeland and arriving in Europe, ECRE publishes updated guidelines on the treatment of Iraqi refugees in Europe. This provides a basis for developing and targeting advocacy work.

APRIL 2006

ECRE presents its vision for future refugee protection in Europe, at the European Parliament in a reception hosted by Jean Lambert MEP. These core recommendations are distilled in the accessible publication, "Europe's Role in the global Refugee Protection System: The Way Forward: An Agenda for Change", which provides a crucial basis for advocacy across Europe.

MAY 2006

The Scottish Refugee Council takes the lead in organising the biannual general meeting of ECRE in Glasgow, where members develop concrete plans for advocacy on the 'Way Forward'.

JUNE 2006

73 member organisations of ECRE send a public letter to European Commission Vice-President Franco Frattini, seeking reform of the Dublin II Regulation that determines which EU member is responsible for an asylum claim.



A person's chances of being recognised as a refugee can vary hugely according to the country, which forces people to travel or reside irregularly. For example, in 2006 for Iraqi refugees, the protection rate in one country was 100%, but 0% in another.

Statistics from UNHCR 'Refugees' Magazine April 2007
(Includes those granted refugee status and other status).

JULY 2006

An ECRE spokesperson presents refugee assisting NGOs concerns in Eastern Europe directly to President Putin at a conference organised when the G8 leaders meet in St. Petersburg.



AUGUST 2006

ECRE ensures that protection and integration of refugees and in particular Dublin II are on the agenda of the Finnish Presidency at the European Council. A strong Memorandum is issued, and later, Finnish member agencies organise a conference, meetings with decision-makers and launch 'The Way Forward' in Finnish and Swedish. An ECRE spokesperson appears on national TV.

SEPTEMBER 2006

The newly established ECRE resettlement core group organises a successful workshop with UNHCR in Geneva to discuss how to enhance the role of European NGOs in resettlement. This resulted in a number of concrete proposals for further collaboration.

OCTOBER 2006

Bjarte Vandvik takes over from Peer Baneke as Secretary General of ECRE. He joins from ECRE member the Norwegian Refugee Council.

NOVEMBER 2006

ECRE launches the art exhibition 'refugee stories' in the heart of the Brussels EU quarter, which uses the words of asylum seekers and refugees in Europe to illustrate the importance of an asylum policy that respects human rights. Refugees come to tell their story at the opening, and a new section of the ECRE website is launched devoted to these stories.



DECEMBER 2006

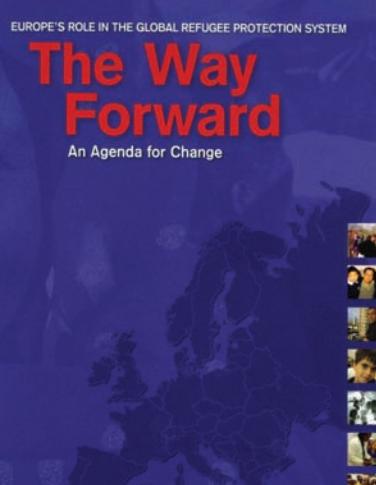
Following ECRE's attendance at the Tripoli ministerial conference between EU and African states on Migration and Development, ECRE issues a press release on Migration from Africa, which is issued around Europe and receives widespread coverage.

In April 2006, ECRE laid down a challenge and an invitation to all involved in political decision-making to take a new approach to refugees and asylum in Europe, with the launch of 'Europe's Role in the Global Refugee Protection System: The Way Forward – An Agenda for Change'.

This short booklet presents constructive recommendations to a wide audience about the key refugee policy issues of today. The publication is a distillation of five key policy papers which were published in 2005 by ECRE. The analysis and recommendations, based firmly on the experiences of our member agencies working with refugees, provide ECRE's main advocacy focus for the coming years. This tool is being used across Europe to inspire all those who play a role in political decision-making at the local, national and European level to work with ECRE to achieve change.

“The recommendations contained in the Agenda for Change (ECRE Way Forward policy) will certainly be taken into account when designing the Green Paper”

Franco Frattini, Vice-President of European Commission
Letter to ECRE, July 2006



In 2006, Jordan, a country with a population of 5.7 million had an estimated 750,000 displaced Iraqis on its territory. This would be the equivalent of just under 8 million refugees in France or the UK, or 11 million in Germany



In 2006 all our lobbying work towards the European Commission, Parliament and Council was enhanced by our Way Forward proposals and key stakeholders were taking note. This included influencing the Green Paper on the future of Common European Asylum System (CEAS), published by the European Commission in 2007. Our proposals have formed the basis of a number of high-level presentations at international conferences throughout 2006.

Many ideas on how the ECRE network could work together to use this tool effectively in advocacy, as discussed at our Biannual General Meetings and ECRAN meetings in Glasgow, Geneva and Brussels in 2006, have been pursued and implemented. Led by our member agencies, there have been activities at the national level which have brought the European dimension of the debate to the attention of national policy-makers, such as a launching seminar of the Way Forward in Finland during the Finnish Presidency of the EU. Our proposals have reached a wide audience, thanks also to the translation of our booklet by ECRE members into a number of languages: Finnish, French, German, Spanish and Swedish.

“The human cost of the failure of Europe’s asylum and policies is simply unacceptable. If we really started working together, we could protect refugees much better in Europe and beyond. Our agenda calls for a new approach where European countries put human rights and respect at the core of their programme and start sharing responsibility for refugees.”

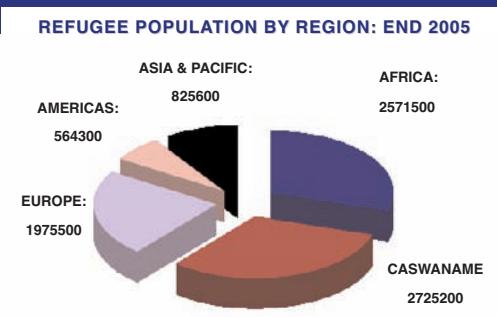
Former ECRE General Secretary, Peer Baneke, at the launch of the Way Forward, April 2006

ECRE IS CONCERNED WITH THE NEEDS OF ALL INDIVIDUALS SEEKING REFUGE AND PROTECTION IN EUROPE. Responsibility for policies and laws affecting refugees in European countries lies increasingly in Brussels, and the European Union has been given the mandate to create a Common European Asylum System (CEAS). The CEAS is now in its second phase and aims to establish a common asylum procedure by 2010.

ON THE ISSUE OF RETURNS: we disseminated a comments paper to all relevant EU decision-makers, highlighting our concerns, specifically that the EC Directive on common return procedures could lead to disproportionately harsh return practices. Our comments were taken up by the European Parliament when it submitted the amendments to this directive: 30 of the 43 recommendations that we had made were included, and our recommendations were publicly endorsed by one of the MEPs acting as Shadow Rapporteur.

THE INTEGRATION OF REFUGEES: ECRE successfully lobbied for the inclusion of refugees in the European Parliament's response to the Commission's Communication on Integration.

PROTECTION IN REGIONS OF ORIGIN: following lobbying by ECRE member agencies, the European Parliament's annual human rights report supports ECRE's view that human rights standards should be put at the forefront of improving protection. A comments paper was submitted to the European Parliament rapporteur on human rights, and these comments were directly reflected in the annual human rights report.



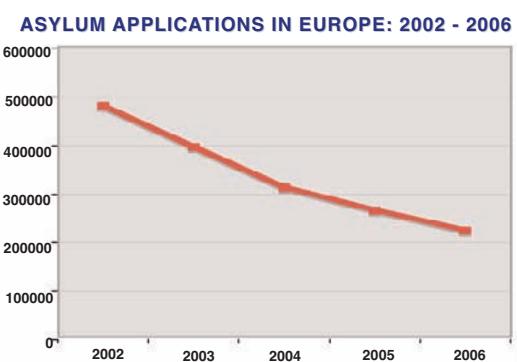
Over 70% of the world's refugees are hosted and supported by poor and developing countries

UNHCR Statistical Yearbook 2006



It has become extremely difficult for refugees to reach Europe.

UNHCR Statistical Online Population Database



RESETTLEMENT: we have intensified our advocacy work, with the result that resettlement is better understood across Europe and firmly established on the agenda. While EU member-states still lack the political will to start a collective European resettlement programme, a few have announced the establishment of a national programme and a significant number are considering establishing or expanding national programmes.

THE ASYLUM SYSTEM AND PRACTICAL CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE: many of the ideas in our Way Forward paper were taken up by the Commission in its Communication on Strengthened Practical Cooperation and we lobbied parliamentarians to support them in Parliament's response. In October, we published an Information Note on the EC Directive on asylum procedures. We participated as members of the reference group in two meetings of the government-led European Asylum Curriculum and were asked to present our ideas on the future common provision of country of origin information at a conference attended by a number of government representatives, as well as Vice-President of the European Commission Franco Frattini.

ECRE was able in 2006 to consolidate the organisation's place as a key NGO interlocutor on European asylum issues. ECRE is particularly concerned about the impact of migration control measures on refugees, and as a result we closely monitored events this year. We were extremely pleased to have had an opportunity to put our concerns directly to relevant ministers in November, when ECRE was the only European NGO to be present at the Tripoli ministerial conference of African and EU States on Migration and Development.

ECRE was also one of the very few NGOs from the asylum field to attend and intervene at a major European Commission conference in November 2006 which sought to evaluate Justice and Home Affairs Policy. ECRE stressed the need for the Commission to take into account the views of NGOs, UNHCR and other stakeholders, when evaluating asylum systems' effectiveness in providing protection.

ECRE SEEKS REFORM OF THE ‘DUBLIN’ RULES

In 2006 ECRE members focused their advocacy on the need for reform of the Dublin II Regulation, which determines which EU member state is responsible for an asylum claim.

Members lobbied national governments, and ECRE worked at the EU level to highlight our recommendation that in the longer term the Dublin system needs to be replaced altogether with an alternative solution enabling Europe to better share its responsibility to protect refugees. In March, we produced and disseminated a report showing that the Regulation is failing to guarantee asylum seekers a fair hearing, putting refugees at risk and causing unnecessary suffering to families, children and survivors of torture. In June, 73 ECRE members from 25 countries signed a public letter to Justice and Home Affairs Commissioner Franco Frattini, calling for ECRE’s key recommendations to be reflected in the forthcoming review of the Dublin Regulation by the European Commission. Press releases by member agencies generated substantial media attention in over 20 news outlets across Europe. This raised public awareness that the Dublin Regulation does not adequately account for the huge variation in refugee recognition from one EU country to another, it prevents refugee families from reuniting, forces separated children to undergo traumatising international transfers, and increases the use of detention. ECRE’s recommendations on Dublin II were cited by UNHCR in its recommendations to the Finnish Presidency of the EU and subsequently in discussion papers drafted by the Finnish government during the Presidency. ECRE also presented its findings at seminars on Dublin II in Prague and in Warsaw which were attended by governmental, inter-governmental and NGO actors.



At the end of the year we were still awaiting the delayed Commission review of the Dublin II Regulation, but we can feel confident that the views of the ECRE membership, who across Europe witness the hardships this Regulation causes to asylum seekers, are well known to the policy makers at European, national and local level.

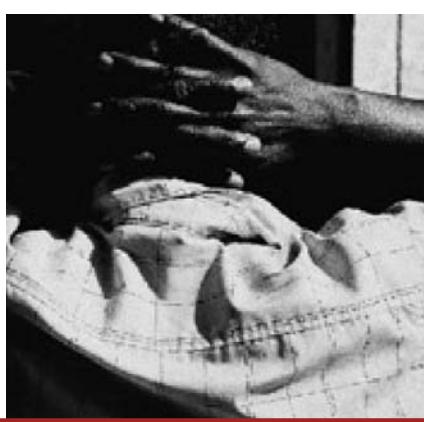
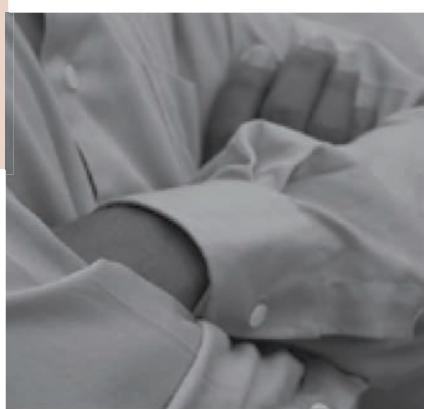
"What really scared me was the presence of newborn babies at the centres. I thought that even in the Congo, they wouldn't lock up newborn babies...when I saw that I began to shiver."

Barry, a detained asylum seeker in Belgium.
(Collected as part of the ECRE Refugee Stories Project)

"It was torture, it reminded me of prison in Iraq."

This is how Kasim describes the four years and four months he lived in Sweden while waiting to be returned to Italy under the Dublin Convention. The uncertainty, broken appointments, cancelled flights and the waiting eventually led Kasim to attempt suicide.

(Collected as part of the ECRE Refugee Stories Project)



"The Dublin advocacy focus and subsequent campaign is a good example of how ECRE can play an important role in mobilizing the membership organisations. The Norwegian Refugee Council translated the ECRE press release into Norwegian, and this resulted in a two page spread in one of the largest daily newspapers in Norway. The article put a spotlight on the increasingly difficult conditions for refugees and asylum seekers, and the fact that the material was based on input from a large number of organisations across Europe made it more effective."

ECRE encourages the widest possible involvement of its member agencies. Each year ECRE organises two general meetings for the membership, which allow us to plan advocacy and policy together, share knowledge and expertise, and offer excellent networking opportunities. In May, the Scottish Refugee Council organised and hosted the first General meeting of 2006 in Glasgow, during which discussions and decisions surrounding the Way Forward papers, advocacy priorities for 2006, and EU funding opportunities took place. The meeting in September in Geneva, organised by the ECRE Secretariat, considered ECRE's advocacy work on the Dublin II Regulation, looked at the proposed 2007 advocacy focus on return, and familiarised the network with ECRE projects. Additionally, the Executive Committee presented the organisational review to the wider membership.



© Dutch Council for Refugees - Goedele Monnens

“In May we were honoured to organise ECRE’s biannual general meeting. Our work in ECRE is crucial to ensuring that refugees can continue to access protection in Europe in accordance with international law. European legislation continues to have a growing impact on asylum and refugee policy in the UK and it is important that we are able to contribute to and benefit from the combined resources of the 77 organisations that are members of ECRE.”

Sally Daghlian, ECRE Vice-Chair, Chief Executive Scottish Refugee Council

ECRE COORDINATES SEVERAL SUB-NETWORKS THAT FOSTER A JOINT SENSE OF PURPOSE THAT ALLOWS EXPERTISE TO BE SHARED ACROSS EUROPE.

ECRAN: ECRE's advocacy network continued to share information, develop strategies and undertake activities throughout 2006. The ECRAN weekly electronic update on refugee and asylum developments in Europe, was once again well received by more than six hundred subscribers from EU institutions and academia, as well as NGOs throughout Europe. The ECRAN meeting in November 2006 saw vigorous discussion of advocacy priorities as well as a lively debate with representatives of the European Parliament, Commission and Council as well as the UNHCR on the next stage of the development of a Common European Asylum System. Members of the ECRAN network also held joint meetings with key figures in the EU institutions.



“The course will help me to better represent clients and to make the administration comply with international human rights standards by using the Refugee Convention and the ECHR case law”

Participant at ECRE's legal training course: Belgrade, September 2006.

ELENA: the ECRE legal network brings together some 2,000 lawyers across Europe. ECRE was kept updated on national legal developments, thanks to ELENA National Coordinators in 25 European countries. These Coordinators were also able to contribute their expertise to ECRE publications such as the Dublin II report published in March. Over one hundred and fifty legal practitioners from across Europe now better understand the right to subsidiary protection under the recently adopted EC Qualification Directive after attending ECRE's Legal Network on Asylum training course in Berlin. An introductory course in Belgrade in September was dedicated to the study of the main articles of the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the status of refugees and relevant human rights treaties.

MEDIA NETWORK: In July 2006, 12 media officers in refugee assisting organisations from eight countries, met and agreed to work together to promote greater public understanding of refugee issues and asylum as a human right, and to tackle the climate of hostility towards asylum seekers and refugees that exists in Europe. This membership involvement is crucial as ECRE looks to develop and implement a communication strategy to support our political advocacy.

THE INTEGRATION of refugees is increasingly hindered by the systematic social exclusion of asylum seekers, which fuels racial tensions, leaves vulnerable people isolated and risks alienating future citizens. ECRE believes it is vital to build inclusive societies that welcome refugees and not only deter those with unfounded claims. In 2006, ECRE and CARITAS Europa established and co-ordinated an NGO Network of Integration Focal Points, comprising of twenty eight NGOs in nineteen countries. The network met twice in 2006, in Vienna and in Brussels, where NGO representatives compared national integration strategies and indicators, and looked at the role and responsibilities of receiving societies in the integration process. This led to a series of six policy briefings and national reports on the integration of refugees and migrants in Europe. The reports highlight good practices and solutions based on NGOs' experiences, research and project findings. They propose ways for the EU's 'Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy in Europe', to be translated into concrete actions at European and national levels.



© Jesuit Refugee Service Europe

“The first priorities that a country has to care for have to be: language, work and accommodation. The obligation of any country is to help the refugee make a new start.”

Iranian refugee living in Greece
(Collected as part of ECRE's Refugee Stories Project)



© Oxfam UKPP

RESETTLEMENT: helping the most vulnerable. At least two thirds of refugees around the world are languishing in protracted refugee situations where, for unacceptably long periods of time, their basic rights and essential needs are not fulfilled. Resettlement is the transfer of refugees from their country of asylum to a third country that has previously agreed to admit them and grant them some formal status, normally as refugees with permanent residence and the possibility of acquiring future citizenship.

ECRE's Core Group on Resettlement was created as a mechanism for member agencies with interest and expertise in resettlement to take a leading role in developing and implementing ECRE's advocacy strategy. In September 2006 the group organised a successful workshop with UNHCR in Geneva to discuss how to enhance the role of European NGOs in resettlement, which resulted in a number of concrete proposals for further collaboration. Some ECRE members also participated in the Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe's (CCME) 2006 ERF-funded Resettlement Project which provided advocacy and learning opportunities through its seminars and capacity-building visits to Finland, Kenya, USA and Canada.

ECRE continued its long-standing and excellent relationship with UNHCR, meeting twice to discuss respective plans and areas of collaboration. In November 2006, it was agreed to create a Memorandum of Understanding, to formally reflect the unique significance of the relationship and collaboration between the two organisations. ECRE also played an active role in the UNHCR Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement.

"UNHCR is encouraged to see ECRE promoting in "The Way Forward" the use of resettlement both as a protection and a durable solution tool for refugees, as a complement and not as a substitute to existing asylum systems. It is hoped that ECRE's advocacy will help generating public support and understanding for this tool."

Vincent Cochetel, Head of Resettlement Service, UNHCR

ECRE is committed to a true pan-European approach to its work, and in 2006 continued to provide support to refugee-assisting non-governmental organisations in EASTERN AND SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE to build their capacity to promote the protection and integration of refugees.

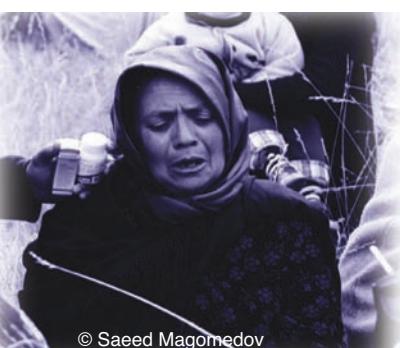


© Regional Public Organisation for Refugees and Migrants -- Saeed Magomedov

SUPPORT TO NGOS ASSISTING REFUGEES IN BELARUS, MOLDOVA, RUSSIA AND UKRAINE.

In Eastern Europe 2006 was a difficult year for refugees, and for those who try to defend their rights. In Russia, 2006 saw the introduction of State restrictions on NGO activities, limitations on the freedom of speech and an alarming increase in racist attacks. In this hostile atmosphere ECRE was able to support NGOs in Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine to protect refugees and other vulnerable migrants in the region through capacity building activities. ECRE's current programme in Eastern Europe has been generously funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the EU's AENEAS programme.

Following a highly successful ECRE training in communications in Kiev thirty eight media officers from NGOs in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova are now better prepared to undertake media work.



© Saeed Magomedov

2006 also saw ECRE organise seminars for refugee lawyers on taking a case to the European Court of Human Rights, a training course for Russian judges, a seminar on border monitoring in Moldova for NGOs, border exchange visits for NGOs and migration authorities, and reports by regional experts on national refugee legislation.



“ The training was undoubtedly useful. It is important to work more effectively with the press and the media. You need to know how and when to speak in order to be heard”.

Seminar Participant, ECRE Media Training, Kiev.

“The presentations were informative and clear – very useful for concrete, practical advice”.

Seminar Participant, ECRE Border Monitoring, Moldova.

Seventy representatives of the judiciary, authorities as well as NGOs from the CIS attended an introductory course to international refugee law in St. Petersburg in November, which was co-financed by UNHCR. The event provided a unique advocacy opportunity for difficult issues to be explored in a non-confrontational environment by government officials, lawyers and NGO representatives.

SUPPORT TO REFUGEE ASSISTING NGOS IN CROATIA, SERBIA, BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA AND THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA.

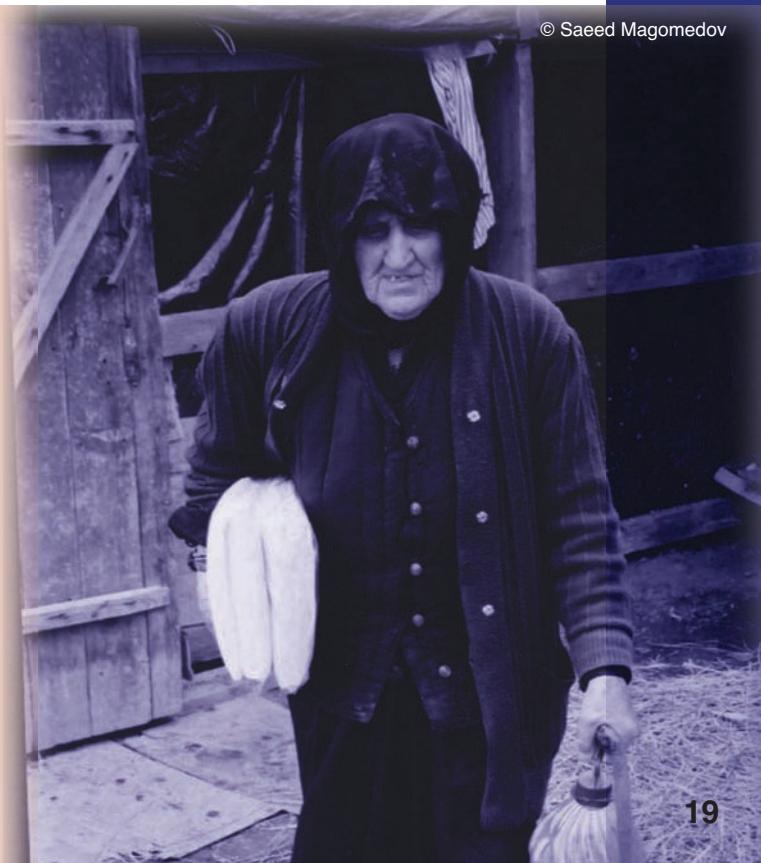
In South Eastern Europe the situation remains of great concern. ECRE's work in the region was implemented in partnership with NGOs in Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia & Herzegovina and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. This is an ongoing project titled: "Strengthening the regional advocacy voice and policy impact of civil society on behalf of vulnerable groups in the Western Balkans" funded by the European Commission (CARDS programme) and the Dutch Council for Refugees. The project developed the skills capacity of a key group of refugee assisting NGOs in the areas of advocacy, media communications and policy, while also strengthening the overall effectiveness of their national and regional networks. The activities in 2006 included a partnership meeting to identify the issues to be taken forward by this project, including policy and advocacy training and analysis in all countries concerning obstacles to sustainable return.

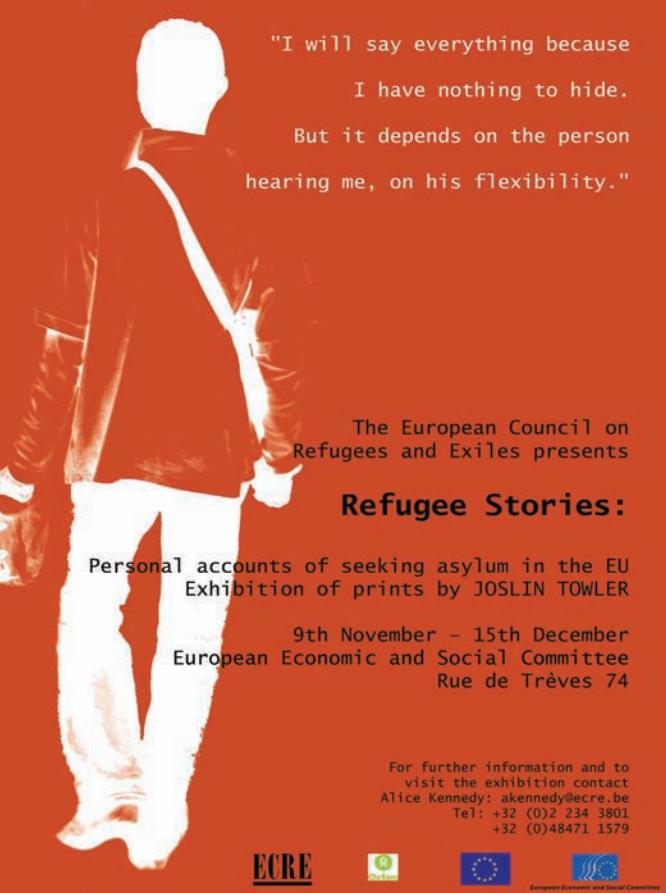
Expectations of the seminar:
To meet project partners and collect/exchange information, establish new contacts, formulate joint ideas and possible future actions on issues of common concern.

Expectations met?:
Yes, it allowed me to do all of the above in a very constructive atmosphere.

Workshop Participant, Policy and Advocacy

© Saeed Magomedov





"I will say everything because
I have nothing to hide.
But it depends on the person
hearing me, on his flexibility."

The European Council on
Refugees and Exiles presents

Refugee Stories:

Personal accounts of seeking asylum in the EU
Exhibition of prints by JOSLIN TOWLER

9th November - 15th December
European Economic and Social Committee
Rue de Trèves 74

For further information and to
visit the exhibition contact
Alice Kennedy: akennedy@ecre.be
Tel: +32 (0)2 234 3801
+32 (0)48471 1579

ECRE



European Economic and Social Committee

A personal story is a powerful way to deliver a message and to promote greater public understanding of refugee issues. In 2006, ECRE demonstrated its commitment to promoting the voices of refugees at a European level through co-ordinating the **REFUGEE STORIES PROJECT**.

Partner organisations, mostly ECRE members, from across the EU asked around one hundred and fifty recognised refugees, asylum seekers, and asylum seekers whose applications have been rejected, about their experiences of seeking asylum and adapting to life in the EU.

The resulting stories, available in a dedicated section of ECRE's website, open up a key human angle on our advocacy work, and ground it in real life experience. The participants were asked to talk about subjects that are relevant to the EU asylum debate, such as getting to the EU, asylum procedures, detention, the Dublin system and the experience of having an asylum application rejected and living without means of support in fear of return.

In November 2006, over one hundred and fifty MEPs, European officials, refugee participants, migration partners and press attended the launch of an art exhibition that had been inspired by the interviews. ECRE members across Europe have used the collected material for publications and for raising awareness of issues through media work.

They took us next to Vitoriano Police station, so they kept us. They put us in a room with other detainees. There were a lot of people more than hundred. There was no one toilet, three... three showers. Plastic you know. When you not on the toilet it starts to smell. I didn't have the chance to come in detention usually there is nothing to do, you know just sitting, ended up sitting. There is no working usually, there is no place to work you know. I did not have a chance to wash myself. I did not have a chance to change or clothes because I had two trousers and the others on just the clothes which are on ourselves, so when we... want to go to the toilet, we have to go to the toilet. I leave for myself, the other one the guys use it, you know, mind the way as the way that we wash we find a small... in like plastic... I don't know what you call it, but it's a small plastic bag, waiting for that to wash, all these people to wash your clothes... it was not enough... we live like that for one month, no contact to other world, no friends meeting...

Then I am adapted, because I have tranquillity, I can go on the street without having the fear of being persecuted or to be killed. I have food, I have a cell. I can go to the doctor. I have access to study, soon I will get the permission to work. I am going to be able to work. I have no worry.

I arrived when I will leave this place. I left my country to escape prison, and now I am in prison here. I was told that deportation arrest is not prison, in just a formal procedure, but for me it was still a prison because I could not do anything.



"For the first time I felt safe, and that is a feeling I will remember all my life"

Roza, a refugee from Chechnya living in Poland

**refugee
stories**



“ERAD has an important and distinctive role to play in ensuring that the voices of asylum seekers and refugees are directly represented and heard in the most effective way at the European level. There is in my view, a real need for the perspectives to be represented and heard and ERAD will meet this important need.”

Jean Lambert, MEP

PROMOTING REFUGEE-LED ADVOCACY

During 2006, ECRE continued to support the development of a refugee-led advocacy network at the EU level. The initiative grew from an advocacy workshop for Refugee Community Organisations organised by ECRE at the end of 2005. ECRE supported two follow up meetings of the refugee steering group, established at the workshop, and advised the group on the development of a pan European network. By the end of 2006, the group had drafted a Memorandum and Articles of Association, and were looking forward to their launch as the **EUROPEAN REFUGEE ADVOCACY ORGANISATION (ERAD)** at the European Parliament in February 2007.

“It is really important that refugees have the opportunity to speak for themselves. I was pleased to come to Brussels, and to tell my own story so others without a voice can be helped. There are refugees all over Europe; our concerns should not be hidden away”

Prisca Ayuk, a refugee from Cameroon living in Austria talking to the press about her experiences of seeking asylum.





CLEO was working in the Angolan embassy in Zambia, when relations between the two countries deteriorated and her own mixed heritage drew the attention of the Zambian authorities. Pregnant with her third child, Cleo travelled legally to the UK, in 2000, to escape the harassment of the Zambian police. She intended only to take a short break from the pressure back home, but when her sister warned her it was not safe to return, she applied for asylum. Her asylum claim rejected, Cleo has lived in Scotland for four years without status.

"I owe a lot to Scotland, if only I had the chance to get the refugee status, I would pay everything back. I would prove to this country that I am not here for the benefits. I want to get a job.."

MARIA says that her story as a refugee is full of too much fear and insecurity. She has been living in Greece since fleeing political persecution from Iran more than twenty years ago, but she still has no permanent status of any kind. The difficulties of her life as a refugee have taken their toll: the mental anguish of not knowing what the future holds and the memories of bringing up her children with almost no money to buy adequate food and clothes are hard to live with.

HENRI escaped conflict, political instability and persecution in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and arrived in Spain, where he was granted refugee status. An established lawyer at home in DRC, Henri had to retrain in order to find work in Spain's competitive labour market and began working as a welder. Henri longs to return home to his own culture and to practising law, his passion, but in the meantime, he makes the best of the life he has been able to build in Europe.

ALICE left Kyrgyzstan in 2003. She worked there as a professional musician, until one day she was arrested for playing at opposition rallies, tortured, and forbidden from playing in her orchestra. She was forced to flee, and came to the United Kingdom. Since then she has been struggling to reassemble her life and to regain her health. She was made homeless during her asylum procedure, and after she obtained refugee status moved from hostel to hostel before finding permanent accommodation. She has found it impossible to continue her music, and difficult to get a job.

“Being an asylum seeker effects your whole life, your routine, it effects everything ... you want to go away, but to where?”



CECILIA lives in fear of being sent back to the Sudan. She became a refugee when she saw her mother and father murdered in front of her and ran away with no destination in mind. She ended up in Belgium. Terrified of being deported, she claimed asylum but then hid from the authorities. Seven years later she was taken to a detention centre and kept there for four months. She was then released, and is still without any status.



“I cannot remember all the things I've gone through these years...if you have a serious wound that has healed long term - you cannot describe what it looks like anymore.”

AZEKEL, 43, left his home in Angola because his life was at risk. He fled the country without knowing where he was going and ended up in Belgium. Since he was smuggled into Belgium on an Italian visa, he was subject to the Dublin Regulation - and after two months in Belgium he was transferred to Italy. Azekel was detained on arrival in Belgium in spite of his trauma and poor health. He received no information about the asylum procedure or the Dublin Regulation and had no opportunity to appeal the decision to transfer him. Azekel has now been recognised as a refugee and tells the story of his confusing encounter with Europe and its asylum system.

“If I could write my history as a refugee, I would only ask the persons governing the country that they should change their mentality.. their conscience. First of all their conscience.”

(All case-studies were collected as part of the ECRE Refugee Stories Project)



POSITION PAPERS:

- Guidelines on the treatment of Iraqi asylum seekers and refugees in Europe: Update. *March 2006.*
- Report on the Application of the Dublin Regulation in Europe, *March 2006*
- Europe's role in the Global Refugee Protection System: The Way Forward: An Agenda for Change (Overview paper), *April 2006.*



PRESS RELEASE:

- EU 'Dublin' Rules on Asylum Claims Cause Misery and Put Refugees at Risk, *March 2006.*
- The Way Forward: Refugee assisting organisations present vision for the future of refugee protection in Europe, *April 2006.*
- 80 Refugee Organisations across Europe Challenge European Commission on 'Dublin' Rules, *June 2006.*
- ECRE press statement on Franco-German Initiative on Migration presented to G6 meeting, *October 2006.*
- Asylum in Europe: Listen to the experts - the refugees, *November 2006*
- Tripoli conference: ECRE warns and welcomes, *November 2006.*
- Refugee NGOs warn of flaws in EU migration proposals, *December 2006*



GENERAL PUBLICATIONS:

- ECRE Country Report 2006, *September 2006*
- Annual Report 2005
- ECRE newsletter June 2006

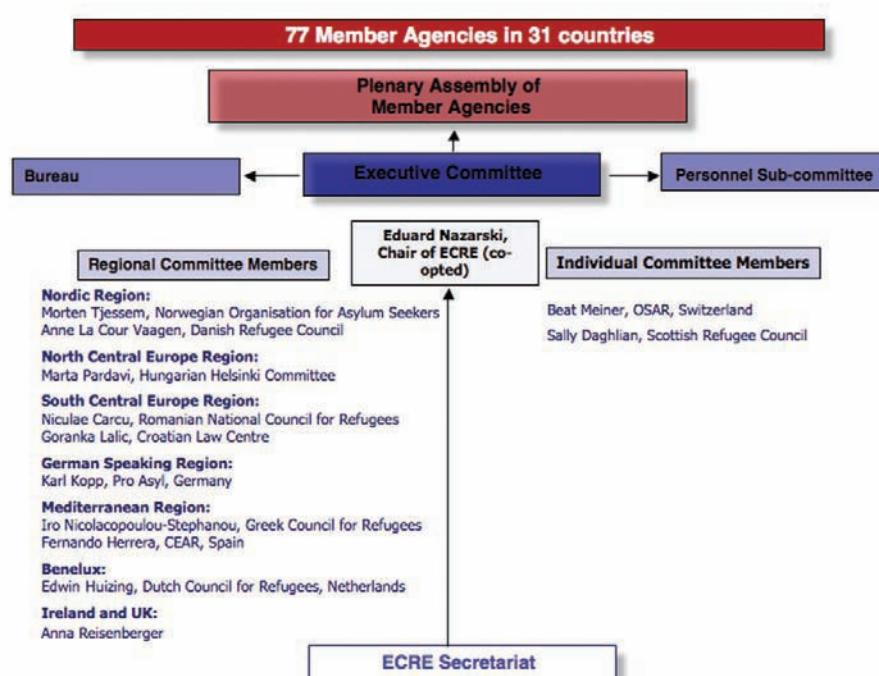


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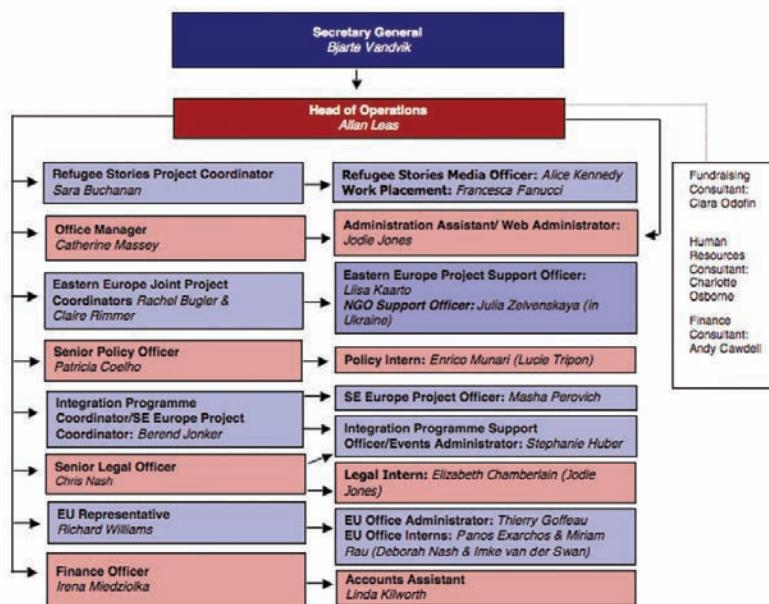
RESPONSES AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Memorandum to the Austrian Presidency: Cooperation: the key to refugee protection, *January 2006***
- **NGO Statement on Europe UNHCR's 35th Standing Committee Meeting, *7-9 March 2006***
- **Memorandum to JHA Council: Practical Cooperation - Improving Asylum Systems, *April 2006***
- **Comments by ECRE on the Proposal for a Directive on common standards and procedures for return, *May 2006***
- **Public letter to European Commissioner Frattini calling for reform of the Dublin II Regulation, *June 2006***
- **Memorandum to the Finnish Presidency: The Hague Programme and Beyond, *August 2006*.**
- **ECRE Memo to SCIFA 'Improving the functioning of the Dublin system', *August 2006***
- **ECRE Information Note on the Council Directive 2005/85/EC of 1 December 2005 on minimum standards on procedures in Member States for granting and withdrawing refugee status, *October 2006***
- **ECRE Information Note on the Council Directive 2005/85/EC of 1 December 2005 on minimum standards on the Qualification for refugee status or international Protection, *October 2006***
- **ECRE Memo to Justice and Home Affairs Council 'Recapturing the Tampere Spirit', Memorandum to the Informal Justice and Home Affairs Council, Tampere, 20-22 September 2006', *October 2006***

EUROPEAN COUNCIL ON REFUGEES AND EXILES



ECRE SECRETARIAT STRUCTURE (DECEMBER 2006)



STAFF CHANGES: ECRE ACKNOWLEDGES THE FOLLOWING STAFF WHO HAVE NOW LEFT: Peer Baneke (General Secretary), Julie Churchill (Policy & Advocacy Administrator), Jodie Jones (EU Office Administrator/Web Administrator), Esp-rance Kana (EU Office Administrator), Bill Seary (Interim Head of Operations), Margita Serdelova (Accounts Assistant), Christiane Wirth Forsberg (Integration Programme Officer), Christine Cartland (CARDS Project Coordinator), Christine Bacon (Personal Assistant to General Secretary). Carolyn Baker (Information Officer) went on maternity leave in October 2006, covered by Alice Kennedy.

THE FOLLOWING PEOPLE WORKED AS UNPAID VOLUNTEERS, INTERNS OR WORK PLACEMENT STUDENTS IN 2006: Svetlana Bencalovici (Finance Volunteer), Jess Bowring (Information and Documentation Intern), Ksenia Glebova (Information & Documentation Volunteer), Justyna Mentel (Administration Volunteer), Susanne Mueller (Information & Documentation Intern), David Nthengwe (Information & Documentation Intern), Mariana Rolikova (Information & Documentation Intern), Tatiana Shaban (Eastern Europe Intern), Abdullahi Shariff (Finance Volunteer), and Kastriot Xhafaj (Administration Volunteer).

NEW STAFF APPOINTMENTS 2007 (TO DATE): Chris Nash (Head of Policy and Advocacy), Elizabeth Chamberlain (Events & Office Support Assistant), Giuditta Andreaus (External Relations/ Fundraising Manager), Laura Stock (Executive Assistant), Thembi Mabhena (Human Resources Assistant), Linda Kilworth (Interim Finance Officer), Tatiana Sumari (Fiannce Assistant), Annette Bombeke (International Advocacy Officer, Secondment from Dutch Council for Refugees),



EUROPEAN COUNCIL ON REFUGEES AND EXILES LIMITED

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES (INCORPORATING AN INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT)

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2006

	Restricted	Unrestricted	2006	2005
			Total	Total
	£	£	£	£
Incoming Resources				
Grants receivable	514,643	305,460	820,103	959,793
Member's subscriptions	-	183,652	183,652	141,172
Conference fees	-	90,956	90,956	73,723
Other income	446	32,236	32,682	58,891
Interest Received		1,546	1,546	1,698
Total Incoming Resources	515,089	613,850	1,128,939	1,235,277
Resources Expended				
Project Costs	610,430	323,031	933,461	766,591
Support Costs	-	285,887	285,887	275,714
Governance Costs	-	8,249	8,249	4,984
Total Resources Expended	610,430	617,167	1,227,597	1,047,289
Net incoming (outgoing) resources before taxation	(95,341)	(3,317)	(98,658)	187,988
Taxation	-	(293)	(293)	-
Net movement in funds for the year	(95,341)	(3,610)	(98,951)	187,988
Funds at 1 January 2006	198,528	131,200	329,728	141,740
Funds at 31 December 2006	103,187	127,590	230,777	329,728



DEFINITIONS:

According to the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, a **REFUGEE** is a person who “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside their country of nationality and is unable to or, owing to such fear is unwilling to avail him/herself of the protection of that country.” Those who desire refugee status are sometimes known as **ASYLUM SEEKERS** and the practice of accepting such refugees is that of offering **POLITICAL ASYLUM**.

MISSION:

ECRE is a pan-European network of refugee-assisting non-governmental organisations. ECRE is concerned with the needs of all individuals who seek refuge and protection within Europe.

AIM:

To promote the protection and integration of refugees in Europe based on the values of human dignity, human rights, and an ethic of solidarity.

METHODS:

Advocating a humane and generous European Asylum policy and by promoting the development of a comprehensive and coherent response by the international community to refugee movements. Strengthening networking between refugee-assisting non-governmental organisations in Europe. Developing the institutional capacity of refugee-assisting non-governmental organisations in Europe.

www.ecre.org

SUPPORT ECRE. ECRE is in a unique position to influence European policy as a pan-European membership organisation. Your donation will help us to strengthen cooperation among refugee organisations in Europe and to intensify our work. A donation of any amount will help us to defend the rights of those fleeing persecution who seek safety and refuge in Europe. Please visit: www.ecre.org/get_involved/donate



THANKS TO FUNDERS:

ECRE would like to thank: The European Commission. Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Network of European Foundations for Innovative Cooperation (NEF) Barrow Cadbury Trust. Oak Foundation. The King Baudoin Fund. Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust. The Dutch Council for Refugees. (VWN) The Scottish Refugee Council. Oxfam GB. Lloyds TSB. UNHCR.

ECRE

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Original Refugee Stories Artworks: Joslin Towler: joslintowler@hotmail.com

Refugee Stories Postcards Designed by: Barry Lowenhoff: barry@lowenhoff2.demon.co.uk

ECRE Annual Report designed by: Laura Stock, ECRE.

"...people cry out but nobody hears them because they are in detention centres... at lock-up time, people start calling for help. over there, when you shout, they put on loud music so nobody can hear you..."



"...they took us next to Floriana Police station, so they kept us, they put us in a hangar, the detention center, there were a lot of people, more than hundred. There was mobile toilet, three... three showers, plastic you know, when you sat on it, it starts moving! (laughing) emm... of course in detention usually there is something to do, you know, just sit and occupied up sit there, so we didn't have any place to change your clothes, nothing. when we came we did not have a change of clothes because I had two trousers and the others no. just the clothes which are on ourselves so... so when we... want to wash our clothes, the others can't leave for shower, the others on the ground, you know, round the shower, the others can't wash. We had a small ah like plastic. I don't know what you call it, a basin type, so all people waiting for that to wash all these people to wash your clothes... it was not enough. We live like this for one month, no contact to other world, no forms, nothing...



"I don't think I can say that I'm settled here. There is no possibility to live normally, when you don't speak the language, you can't work legally, you can't rent a fl at. No language - no job."



"yes I am adapted, because I have tranquility, I can go on the street without having the fear of being persecuted or to be killed, I have food, I have a cell, I can go to the doctor, I have access to study, soon I will get the permission to work. I am going to be able to work, I have no worry."



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"...regarding asylum procedures themselves, no, there is nothing fair about them... nothing at all, madam... It's a game of questions and answers... the judge is always right"



"For the first time I felt really safe, that I will remember all my life."



"I asked when I will leave this place. I left my country to escape prison and now I am in prison here. I was told that deportation arrest is not prison, is just a formal procedure, but for me it was still a prison because I could not do anything."



"Home, Family, Work. Let these not be the privilege solely of Hungarians. Because if we are allowed to work, we pay taxes, and the country's income, economic will grow. I feel sorry that we are just here and waste the time."