

ECRE Annual General Conference 2022, 28 June, Brussels

Asylum in Europe: Strategies for Resistance and Resilience

Hotel Renaissance, Rue du Parnasse 19, 1050 Bruxelles

Workshop 7: Copenhagen Room, 14h00 to 15h30

Title: Reception of asylum seekers: from the borders to the heart of European societies

Lead organisation(s): JRS Europe

Objectives:

The workshop will engage in a conversation on the need to fundamentally rethink the dominating reception model in Europe – based on large scale reception centres, preferably at the external borders or in any case at the margins of society – towards systems bringing reception within the local community, fostering asylum seekers' autonomy and participation in society and ultimately integration.

We will look for good practices – including the experience of citizens' initiatives – and discuss the role of state authorities, civil society and private citizens in ideal reception models.

The discussion will also highlight how such a vision on reception is perfectly possible under the current EU legislation if correctly implemented, but would be completely undermined if the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum was to be adopted.

Agenda

Moderator: JRS Europe – Claudia Bonamini

Speakers:

- Fien Vanhees – Legal Adviser, Asylum & Migration – Reception Department at Caritas International Belgium
- Zoé Balakrishnan – Coordinator of the JRS Welcome's volunteers support programme at JRS France
- Geert Knockaert - Head of EUAA's Reception and Vulnerability Sector
- Abeer Abualnaja – Intercultural Mediator at Fedasil, Belgium, intervening on her personal behalf

The panel is followed by a discussion with the audience

Description:

In the past years, the discourse on asylum and migration in Europe has strongly focused on borders and the need to discourage and prevent people from crossing them without previous authorisation. This includes people who come to seek international protection, even if they have no other way to reach protection, as is usually the case.

As a consequence, the conceptualization of models of reception for asylum seekers has also increasingly included a border dimension, resulting in the establishment of large reception facilities in often remote and isolated areas.

In addition, when it comes to reception on the territory of European states, although the national systems differ enormously, we can identify the trend to host asylum seekers in often large centers at the margins of where the local community lives.

The reasons for these trends are mostly ideological and choose to ignore the experience of civil society and of those working in the reception system, which shows that reception models based on fostering people's autonomy and encounters with the local community are also those that are more conducive to successful integration.

If adopted, the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, with its focus on the external borders and border procedures, would only reinforce this trend. This stands in apparent contrast with the recognition, in the EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion, of the importance of providing suitable and autonomous housing solutions as early as possible for refugees and asylum applicants who are likely to be granted international protection, in order to enable a smooth transition to independent living once protection has been granted.

This workshop will start with a round on input and points of view and sharing of experiences on these topics:

- Caritas Belgium will present its own experience working in reception, illustrating challenging and (own) best practices
- JRS France will share their experience on reception by private citizens, good practices, advantages, and challenges
- EUAA will illustrate its strategy on reception and present the Agency's views on reception models
- The speaker who works as an Intercultural Mediator and herself has a refugee background, will reflect on her own experience in a reception centre first and in a host family later, and give her point of view on how models of reception should be constructed.