

Dealing with the European Migrant Crisis
Proposal by the EC, 22-6-2015

For over a year Europe is confronted with a large influx of migrants from Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Hundreds of thousands of people have left their countries to avoid war, terrorist activities, prosecution, and poverty, to seek a new life in Europe. The plight of the people is dreadful; thousands have lost their life while crossing the Mediterranean, and living conditions upon arrival in Europe are poor. While humanitarian support is improving and some EU countries take up large numbers of migrants, they generally face huge difficulties in finding a new place to live, accommodating to their new environment, building up a new life amidst prejudice and hostility, and coping with mental health problems caused by their stressful experiences.

As was debated by the Presidents Council Meeting of May 8, 2015, the Migrant Crisis calls poses a challenge to European psychologists and raises the question how they can best respond to make the most effective contribution to alleviate the problems of the migrants and the authorities responsible for managing the crisis.

The Executive Council of EFPA, considering that there are many facets to the Refugee Crisis, proposes to *develop a coordinated action within the next few months to improve psychologist' response*, by starting with the following steps:

1. Gain information from the *SC Disaster and Crisis* about the current involvement of psychologists in this field within different European countries, and possibilities to improve knowledge-sharing and collaboration, with the help of EFPA and its Member Associations and support from national authorities.
2. Consult the *SC Community Psychology* on experiences regarding how to create appropriate living conditions for refugees arriving to their new environment (including measures to counter xenophobia) and how to promote their successful integration.
3. Ask the *TF Cultural and Ethnic Diversity* for specific recommendations on how psychologists can help bridge the linguistic, cultural and religious gaps between refugees and their new living environment.
4. Obtain the advice of the *TF Force Human Rights* and the EFPA Associate member '*European Society for Traumatic Stress Studies*' on relevant facets of the migrant crisis.

Some urgent actions are also required, since the rise of the numbers of migrants arriving to Europe and the EU's new policy for distributing and relocating migrants across Member States countries creates an acute demand for psychological help, which is exceeding the present capacity for providing help.

We propose that a *Working Group* be created that works with the EC in charting urgent capacity problems in order for the EC to call upon national governments and the EU for greater support. This working group should also help the EC to *develop an Action Plan* for the coming months. This action plan should not only address actions to be taken in Europe, but also support that psychologists can provide in countries of departure and/or passage, via international organizations like the Red Cross, the Red Crescent, and Doctors without Borders.

The Working Group should involve a member from each of the aforementioned EFPA entities and – as far as available – coordinators or members of national crisis response teams.

** This proposal has the same general objective as the proposal of the Italian Network of Psychologists' Associations (INPA) to establish a Task Force on Immigration and Integration. It is meant to develop more timely action and rely more directly on the expertise and experience of existing bodies in EFPA.*