



**NOVAMIGRA**

NORMS AND VALUES IN THE  
EUROPEAN MIGRATION AND REFUGEE CRISIS

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## Hospitality in Civil Society: Practices during the European ‘Refugee Crisis’.

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## Hospitality in Civil Society Practices during the European ‘refugee crisis’

This policy research alert is a companion piece to a longer report with the same title “Hospitality in Civil Society: Practices during the European ‘Refugee Crisis’”<sup>2</sup> (DOI [10.17185/dupublico/72832](https://doi.org/10.17185/dupublico/72832)), which examines the concept of hospitality, a critical value in the EU in the period 2015-2018 during the European ‘refugee crisis’. The advent of more than 1 million asylum seekers, revealed significant differences in how member states understand solidarity, burden sharing, but also hospitality and humanitarianism.

Hospitality is intrinsically linked to asylum and reception. It has been codified in the European asylum law through the Reception Conditions Directive. In practice, hospitality is offered by the State as the official ‘host’ and responsible for asylum processing, and by the civil society from professional NGOs to grassroots movements who receive and care for asylum seekers. State-led reception practices coexist and are often complemented by the work of civil society and professional NGOs, grounded in “humanitarian ethos”, i.e. a shared sense of humanitarianism and ethical responsibility to assist.

Drawing from fieldwork in Greece, Hungary, Poland, Germany and Sweden we analysed how hospitality manifested in the period 2015-2018 through the process of reception and, particularly, accommodation. Rather than looking at State-led hospitality, which has been thoroughly researched in the past, we focused on professional NGOs and civil society. Their role and contribution in most cases has been significant in both welcoming and hosting asylum applicants.

The report produced highlights the divergence between the countries of focus. Greece represents one side of the spectrum, where the State relied extensively on NGOs for the reception of asylum seekers and hospitality. Germany and Sweden pursue a middle-of-the road approach, with national reception systems established, where NGOs and civil society complement state-led policies. On the other end of the hospitality spectrum, the cases of Hungary and Poland reveal civil societies that sought to assist and welcome asylum applicants despite the official policies.

Hospitality was prevalent in the public discourses and policy responses of many of the countries discussed in the present report. Hospitality in the majority of EU countries during the ‘refugee crisis’ of 2015-2018 is a mixture of boundaries but also their absence. The guests did not ask permission of the host to enter Europe, and the host(s) did not provide a specific framework either. Rather, the latter evolved and changed according to events and triggers.

Throughout 2015, local communities were empowered, made to be hospitable and expressed their solidarity to the asylum seekers reaching Europe. There are various explanations and influences for this mobilization. The shocking pictures of boats and subsequent shipwreck, the composition of the asylum-seekers’ population which consisted of women and children, but also the political leaders who adopted a welcoming approach towards asylum-seekers, motivated communities across Europe to offer assistance. By 2016, a shift became noticeable and as the years progressed, hospitality became increasingly limited to a select few arrivals.

Hospitality continues to take on different forms, both in the State-led context but also in respect to the role of civil society. Civil society organizations under study understand hospitality as temporal, set

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<sup>2</sup> Dimitriadi, A. & Malamidis H. (2020). Hospitality in Civil Society: Practices during the European ‘Refugee Crisis’. NOVAMIGRA Deliverable D3.3a, 2020, [10.17185/dupublico/72832](https://doi.org/10.17185/dupublico/72832).

in a specific time frame and as a reaction to an emergency (in this case, the ‘refugee crisis’). Many civil society organizations offer services that are part of a broader integration framework. However, integration is generally regarded as a subsequent stage following hospitality. Although the 2015 ‘refugee crisis’ concluded according to the European Commission in 2018, the reception of asylum seekers remains critical, especially in countries of first arrival, sustaining the feeling of emergency.<sup>3</sup>

The broader political context has changed. The EU-Turkey Statement of March 2016 and the closure of the Western Balkan route altered the landscape, with Greece transforming into a destination country, while Germany and Sweden continue to receive asylum applicants, albeit far fewer than before. Hungary and Poland continue to abstain from reception of asylum applicants. Civil society is also under attack for its role in the ‘refugee crisis’. From Hungary to Greece, but also Italy, civil society is increasingly being criminalized or placed under stricter control.

At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic is creating additional difficulties. Border closures are the new ‘normal’, making access to territory and protection even harder for asylum seekers. EU Member States are increasingly adopting more restrictive approaches to asylum and the benefits offered to asylum applicants. The study sought to highlight how hospitality was understood and practiced by NGOs in 2015-2018. It offers a snapshot of the key issues identified by participants, and the limitations encountered seeking to approach reception not merely as the offer of services but as the contemporary interpretation and practice of the value of hospitality. The present Policy Research Alert, presents the key policy recommendations produced, on the basis of input offered by practitioners regarding the reception of asylum seekers in the EU.

## Policy Recommendations

- ◆ **Ensure safe access to territory of host countries to apply for asylum:** Hospitality entails access to one’s home, and in the case of asylum seekers, access to a host State. To apply for asylum, one must first be able to access the territory for the submission of an application.
- ◆ **Improve asylum processing time and family reunification procedures:** Our field research shows that both asylum applications and family re-unification procedures can be rather lengthy. Reducing the time required while ensuring a fair asylum hearing, especially for minors, is essential for facilitating short-term hospitality for those fleeing war and persecution.
- ◆ **Incorporation of the role of NGOs in the Common European Asylum System:** Creating linkages with NGOs and incorporating civil society in aspects of the CEAS (e.g. Reception Conditions Directive) would facilitate a better working relationship but would also assist in establishing a common codified framework of operation across the EU in terms of reception.
- ◆ **State and NGO partnerships for national reception systems:** Across Europe, some national reception systems have incorporated partnerships with NGOs in the provision of services; this should be further encouraged and facilitated as it allows for more flexibility and the provision of different meaningful services including training, education, and creative activities. At the

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<sup>3</sup> Malamidis, H. (2019b). The EU’s Refugee “Crisis” in Greece, Year Four. Available at <https://blog.novamigra.eu/2019/12/06/the-eus-refugee-crisis-in-greece-year-four/>.

same time though, NGOs' actions should be carefully coordinated in order to reduce instances of overlapping, while they should complement each other in order to draw a holistic pathway to asylum seekers' integration.

- ◆ **Employment of refugees in reception services:** Our field research shows that inter-cultural mediators, used in various posts, are of great importance for the hospitality of refugees. Therefore, one suggestion is to provide motives for NGOs and state authorities to hire refugees and long-term migrants for posts related to the reception and integration of newly arrived refugees. This strategy may be beneficial for refugees in terms of finding employment, and therefore, assisting with their economic integration. Moreover, this method creates a more hospitable environment for new arrivals, which can also be beneficial for their social integration.
- ◆ **Information campaigns for host societies:** For hospitality to succeed, the host society needs to be informed and 'educated' about rights and obligations of both host and guest. It is important to provide best practices and address concerns in such a way as to build the capacity for hospitality and reduce xenophobic sentiments.
- ◆ **Recognition of the skills of refugees and needs of local societies:** Skills assessments for refugees and needs assessments for local communities are essential, in order to ease the process of hospitality and address concerns regarding cultural, social and economic integration.
- ◆ **Encourage provision of social integration measures through civil society:** The provision of language and civic courses, as well as access to welfare services are additional stages for social and State-led approaches to hospitality and crucial for the integration of asylum seekers and refugees.
- ◆ **Inclusion of civil society in consultation processes:** Civil society's role must be strengthened and supported by the European Commission in the design of policies and identification of priorities at EU and national levels.
- ◆ **Promote the exchange of best practices for the development of formal (State) reception systems across the EU:** This is critical for front line States like Greece that still lack an efficient national reception system
- ◆ **Clearly define the practical application of hospitality at State and civil society levels:** It would reduce divergence between member states but also between NGOs and civil society in the services offered and practices applied. In the long run it could lead to limited harmonisation across the EU of key actors in reception.

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## About NOVAMIGRA

Several, partly interconnected crises have profoundly challenged the European project in recent years. In particular, reactions to the arrival of 1.25 million refugees in 2015 called into question the idea(l) of a unified Europe. What is the impact of the so-called migration and refugee crisis on the normative foundations and values of the European Union? And what will the EU stand for in the future?

NOVAMIGRA studies these questions with a unique combination of social scientific analysis, legal and philosophical normative reconstruction and theory.

This project:

- Develops a precise descriptive and normative understanding of the current “value crisis”;
- Assesses possible evolutions of European values; and
- Considers Europe’s future in light of rights, norms and values that could contribute to overcoming the crises.

The project is funded with around 2.5 million Euros under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme for a period of three years.

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