

The Migrant Crisis: *Mopping up while the tap is still running*

BY TRANS-EUROPEAN DIVISION NEWS [HELEN PEARSON, BINFIELD, UK]



An IDP family in Iraq stands outside of their shelter home

knowledge, his experience, his passion and his own questions about the part played by ADRA-UK and ADRA International in responding to the humanitarian crises in the world.

Smit began by exploring various models in the 150-year history of Adventist attempts to love their neighbours. There have

It is a European problem—and Adventists are not immune to it. Just like everyone else, church members have watched the movement of tens of thousands of despairing people as they pour across Europe in search of a better life, education for their children, jobs and freedom. How do we respond?

On February 9, 2016, the Diversity Lecture at Newbold College dealt with two significant questions, “How are Seventh-day Adventists in the UK responding to the refugee crisis in Europe?” and “What issues do the fundraising figures from ADRA-UK (the Adventist Development and Relief Agency) show about attitudes to the needs of migrants, refugees and other victims of war and disaster?”

As Chief Executive Officer of ADRA-UK for the last ten years and the coordinator of its Annual Appeal, Bert Smit, had the information at his fingertips. He shared his

always been responses at a local level started by early Adventist women distributing food and clothing in their community. Those responses continue, funded by the Adventist Church. The Seventh-day Adventist World Service, originally set up to take advantage of government funding for large scale development projects overseas, eventually became ADRA International. ADRA is a financially separate entity of the Church, with projects both international and local funded by individual and corporate donations and government grants. The agency expanded very quickly because of the reach of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

So, to the unprecedented current situation. “There are now sixty million international displaced people—a number equal to the population of the UK,” said Smit. “And European responses to the crisis are becoming

more negative. In the UK support for the migrant crisis is down from thirty-six percent to twenty-five percent." News of alleged migrant bad behaviour has fuelled hostility. Some European countries are starting to repatriate migrants; others are seizing their assets. The EU is talking about outsourcing refugee camps.

How is ADRA responding in Europe to these despairing people walking towards and through our continent? ADRA offices in Central Europe which had simply been fundraising offices, suddenly found themselves in the midst of the action, knowing that they could offer very little. In Macedonia, Serbia and Croatia, with volunteer help from both local churches and the community, ADRA has been offering help to some of the migrants waiting to move on. But the need was overwhelming. "We are mop-up while the tap is still running," said Smit.

Clearly there was too little funding and the migrant crisis seemed not to be tugging at purse strings in the way that disasters and emergency relief had done. In the UK there was a discrepancy between the amounts raised. The 35,000 church members in the UK had been generous for disaster and emergency relief, raising £262,000 for the Haiti Earthquake in 2010, £166,000 for the typhoon in the Philippines in 2013, and £155,000 for the Ebola Crisis last year. But for the European Migrant Crisis only £10,000 had come in.

So where to from here for ADRA-UK? "We must realise our limitations," said Smit. "ADRA will not stop exploring every avenue open to us. We are working inside Syria right now and finalising an application for around £80 million over three years. We will ask our church members to provide more funding and call on the UK government to provide assistance for refugees." In the meantime, as the refugees find shelter and homes, they become the responsibility of local churches who continue, like Newbold church, to take local community action to support those on the margins of society. (Newbold church members have been assisting with a regular Sunday feeding programme in Dunkirk, as well as supporting a Bracknell food bank.)

Smit concluded his lecture by highlighting a tension in the contemporary Seventh-day Adventist Church between the commitment to evangelism and the commitment to humanitarian principles. The Church sees the migrants as an opportunity for evangelism but, he asked, "Does the Church accept that it has to play an active role for those in our community, the down and outs, the homeless, refugees? Do we want to make our churches safe places for refugees

Timeline:

A few highlighted dates for Europe's Refugee Crisis

2015

20 April:

Over 600 people drown in the Mediterranean when their boat capsizes shortly before midnight on April 18 in Libyan waters, some 180 kilometers south of Italy's Lampedusa Island. A subsequent Italian and Maltese rescue operation ultimately can only save some fifty, of an estimated 700 people on board. UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres expresses his shock at this latest refugee tragedy and urges European countries to restore a "robust" rescue-at-sea operation.

13 July:

Hungary starts to erect a razor-wire fence along its border with Serbia, to halt an unprecedented flow of refugees seeking entry to the EU.

27 August:

In Austria, the bodies of seventy-one Syrians are found in an abandoned lorry.

2 September:

Pictures of three-year-old Aylan al-Kurdi, drowned in his Syrian family's attempt to reach Greece from Turkey, provoke a wave of public sympathy for refugees.

3 September:

The slogan 'refugees welcome' goes viral.

12 September:

A summit of EU interior ministers fails to agree a common response.

14 September:

Austria and Slovakia say they too are reintroducing border controls. Germany warns it could face up to one million arrivals this year. Hungary declares a state of emergency and threatens those who enter the country illegally with jail. The EU's border agency reveals that 500,000 migrants and refugees have entered the EU in 2015, 156,000 in August alone.

18 November:

The Government of Slovenia restricts passage to only nationals of Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. Within hours a "domino" effect takes place and Croatia, Serbia and Macedonia follow suit. Eventually thousands are stranded in Greece.

2016

As of 23 February:

More than 110,045 asylum seekers crossed the Mediterranean to Europe: ten times the numbers for the same period in 2015. 413 are dead or missing. – International Organization for Migration

24 February:

Macedonia restricts border to Afghan nationals, only Syrians and Iraqis are allowed to pass.

10 March:

The European Union makes a deal with Turkey to take back every illegal migrant reaching the shores of Europe. For every Syrian migrant returned to Turkey, Europe must accept a Syrian migrant now in Turkey who qualifies as a refugee. Currently 2.5 million refugees are in Turkish camps.

in our communities?" In the Q&A session which followed his lecture, Smit reminded his internationally diverse audience of students, church members and College staff that up to seventy percent of Seventh-day Adventists in the UK come from a migrant background. His lecture concluded with a sobering question concerning our response to these newest migrants? "Do we want to create a better world here as we wait for a better world to come?" ■

This lecture was recorded and is available online at <https://youtu.be/DjumMcd0arg>

Serbia: On the Road to Hope

BY MIRKO RUDIĆ, ADRA SERBIA

With growing turmoil and violence in Syria and Iraq, regional conflicts and crises in Afghanistan, the Middle East and in some African countries, we are seeing a dramatic increase in the flow of refugees fleeing from these areas to Europe. Serbia is at the heart of the refugee route.

In 2015 alone, hundreds of thousands of people from the Middle East and Northern Africa passed through the

Balkans. No one can predict what is going to happen in the future with this enormous migration, one of the greatest in history.

What we do know is that the reasons that drive people from their homelands are incredibly complicated and hard to be stopped. They simply have no choice, and now they have nothing to lose. They are fleeing the death, poverty, hunger, and sickness which threatened them in the countries that they left behind.

The main reason to migrate for most is to pursue long-lasting safety, job opportunities, a chance for their children to be educated, and a place to raise their families. They think they will find this in Western and Northern Europe, primarily in Germany, Austria, Belgium, and Scandinavian countries.

The journey each refugee faces is difficult, long and often dangerous. From Damascus in Syria to Berlin, Germany, they need to travel more than 2,100 miles. The beeline for the West, which is impassable because of war or fences on the borders, like the one between Serbia and Hungary, force refugees to find a lengthier path. From Iraq and Afghanistan, the route is even longer.

On their way, refugees pass Turkey, Greece (a smaller number pass Bulgaria), Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, and end up in one of the Western or Northern European countries. This is the so-called Balkan

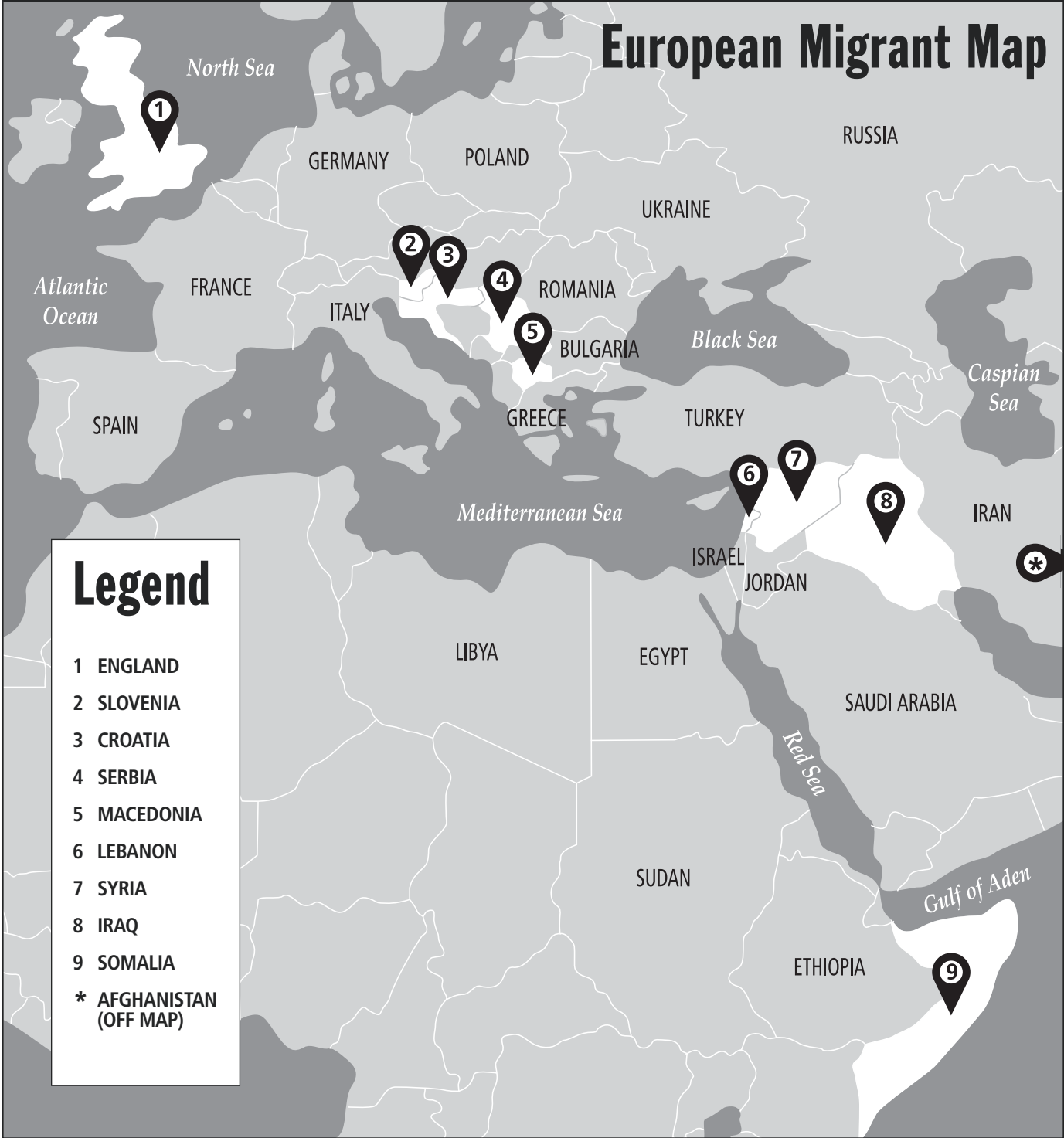
route. Refugees coming from Africa often use other routes, which pass over the Mediterranean Sea in trying to reach Italy.

The largest number of refugees are men, who started this hard journey alone hoping that when they find safe haven, they will be able to bring their immediate families with them. However, the number of families, unaccompanied minors, and women is growing, and there is a strong prevalence of elderly



A life in transit is exhausting, so refugees rest when they can.

MILOVAN MILENKOVIC/KAMERADES



People on the Move

The United Nations Refugee Agency figures as of June, 2015

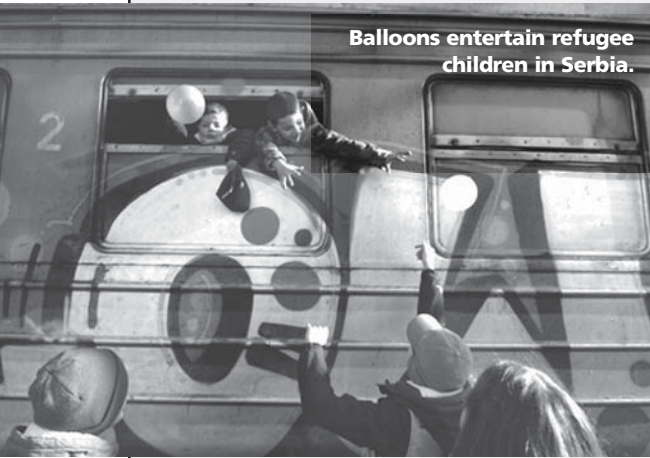
Syria: 4,194,554 refugees | 7,632,500 internally displaced persons

Afghanistan: 2,632,534 refugees | 947,872 internally displaced persons

Iraq: 377,747 refugees | 3,962,142 internally displaced persons

Somalia: 1,105,618 refugees | 1,133,000 internally displaced persons

New Year's Eve Memories | BY MIRKO RUDIĆ



Balloons entertain refugee children in Serbia.

PHOTOS: MILOVAN MILENKOVIĆ / KAMERADES

One of the strongest memories of the days I spent as a refugee during the wars in ex-Yugoslavia in the 1990's, is one of a red ribbon which my sister and I had tied around a kitten's neck. That's it. I don't remember where it happened, what happened with the kitten, where our family was at that moment, nor what the other refugees were doing, nothing of the sort...

It often goes like that. Big events we are faced with and cannot influ-

ence, come and go just as they began, leaving consequences in the lives of many people. The one thing that continues to live after those events pass, is the simple details that somehow stay in our minds. For me and my sister, it wasn't important whether we would manage to cross over the bridge before the Croatian army destroyed it; whether the planes would bomb our convoy; whether our grandfather would be arrested, leaving our mother as the only person able to drive our tractor. For us the most important thing was that ribbon and that kitten.

This last New Year's Eve I spent in Preševo, a small town on the south border of Serbia. Almost 600,000 refugees from the Middle East and North Africa passed through that town during 2015, on their way to Western and Northern Europe.

They are coming every day, if there are buses and trains, and when there are none; whether it is raining, snowing or not... I wonder what will be the memory they will keep from Preševo.

Most of them will probably remember the commitment of young volunteers bringing them hot tea, blankets, mittens... Maybe, some will remember their injuries being taken care of, or being given a medicine they needed. Some of them will remember the friendly train station worker who let them get on the train, even though he knew they had no money for the ticket. Most certainly, some will remember nervous assistance workers telling them, "Hurry up, no stalling." One young Syrian woman will remember for sure the Serbian police officer who took her around the camp to help her find a suitable winter jacket for her daughter. "They killed her husband in the war. She showed me his picture. Who will take care of that child now?", he told me.

I will remember balloons. They are probably the most powerful small thing in Preševo. No matter how much a child is weary or sad or in tears, a balloon will make all of that child's despair disappear. I will remember a dog chasing a balloon around the camp, followed by the laughter of refugees, policemen, humanitarians. I will remember a Christmas tree being clumsily decorated by ten aid workers. I will remember a night in one of the tents where hot tea was served, while we listened to Frank Sinatra on the radio. Refugees mixed with volunteers; people were talking in Arab, Persian, German, English, Albanian, Bosnian, Serbian language; everyone in that stifling warm tent looked the same. I will remember a man watching distant fireworks shining over the camp in the New Year's Eve, while streams of refugees were passing by him in silence. ■

You can find full reportage on kamerades.com/2016/01/07/new-years-eve-memories

people, members of minority groups and other vulnerable groups. Thirty percent of the total number of refugees are children.

People (asylum seekers, migrants, refugees, etc.) from Asia and Africa have been passing through Serbia for seven years. The number in the beginning was very small (in 2008, only seventy-seven), but today this is measured in the hundreds of thousands! Since this number has dramatically increased, many organizations were activated in order to help these people on their way to safety. ADRA Serbia is one of those.

It began in summer 2015 when refugees arrived in Belgrade, the capital of Serbia. In cooperation with Municipality Savski Venac, which was the most affected by the influx of refugees, NGO Belgrade Center for Human Rights, and NGO KlikAktiv have opened the Asylum Information Centre in Belgrade. During this project the idea occurred of outreach teams, which will solve the problems of the refugees on the spot.

In the last three months, ADRA Serbia's mobile outreach teams have also been in Presevo, a little town near the Serbia-Macedonia border, where the refugees are passing. The current and proposed mobile protection teams are providing a unique set of refugee-protection services, e.g. referral services: communication and translation; identification of hidden basic needs; dissemination of key life-saving and pragmatic information (legal, etc.); monitoring of medical needs, triage and fast tracking, and referral to providers of medical assistance; monitoring of mental health and psycho-social

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support; mediating between beneficiaries and other service providers; advocating for refugee and migrants rights; monitoring of unaccompanied minors and other EVIs, and referring them to relevant protection mechanisms; and providing support to social care institutions and other agencies in managing these cases. All these activities are directly positively affecting the state frontline workers by relieving them and assisting them in their respective activities (police officers, Reception Center managers, etc.) Our teams are trained in identifying and monitoring needs and being able to adapt and respond to them in multi-faceted ways, depending on the situation.

As we are in contact with the refugees on a daily basis, our teams know them very well and can easily recognise their needs and problems. These are their testimonies.

“I am medicine student and this is my first job. However, these people need some other kind of help”, says Sofia Manjak. “It was raining on that morning. There were a lot of children and sick people in the registration line. One crying girl was alone and seemed to have had enough: enough of her situation, the road from Syria to Serbia, enough of a life like that... I simply hugged her, caressed her hair and it was enough. All she needed was comfort.... Comfort is something beyond my medical work; it is my human responsibility,” says Sofija.

“In the midst of these traumatic migrations, children suffer the most because they cannot just be children. They lack space and time for play, lack safety and this is why it is so important to pay them some attention. Soap



ADRA Slovenia has engaged 170 volunteers. They shared their days, their nights and their Christmas holidays with 169,379 refugees.

balloons are actually great because, at least for a moment, they take children back to their world of imagination and play, the children’s world. ... I think that this is just a perfect job for me. It is tough at times and exhausting but worthwhile,” says Mia Todorovic, psychology student and member.

“Arabs have a custom to say prayers to the people who help them. It sounds something like: “God bless you,” but it has more profound meaning. In their culture they say these words on very special occasions. Those prayers can't be translated to Serbian or English. We as ADRA's team often say that we will be in heaven because of the amount of these sentences we receive every day,” Lina Shalabi, ADRA Serbia's translator, says with a smile.

Sofija, Mia and Lina are the part of the outreach teams. This is the group of thirty young and special people. Most of them are students, but among them you will find experienced humanitarian workers who have worked with the refugees for years. All of them say that they are “addicted” to this kind of work—helping people in need. For them there are no obstacles, working hours, cold and sickness. Their dedication to the humanitarian cause surprises us daily and motivates us to do everything to give them the opportunity to continue with their work. We want to thank all the donors who are helping us in fulfilling this humanitarian cause. ■

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Refugee families spent the holidays in transit and in shelters.