Prevention of violence and discrimination against religious minorities amongst refugees in Europe

Report
Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons
Rapporteur: Mr Egidijus Vareikis, Lithuania, EPP/CD

Summary:

Refugees and asylum seekers embark on long and perilous journeys, many fleeing terrible circumstances and arriving extenuated and particularly vulnerable. The risk of them being subjected to violence and discrimination based on their religious beliefs and practices once they reach Europe puts, however, additional, and often untenable, pressure on them.

Measures should be taken, therefore, to alleviate tension and create a climate of respect and dignified living together for refugees and asylum seekers. The report outlines ways in which tensions and discrimination based on religion may be avoided as far as possible, taking into account the needs of particularly vulnerable groups, including children, and the need for gender-sensitive approaches.

Member States should start by supporting projects that foster inter-religious and inter-faith dialogue in the context of asylum and migration policies through the work of inter-religious dialogue platforms at national and local levels. More needs to be done to combat prejudice against religious communities, racism and hate speech in refugee facilities and in local communities that host them. Public authorities should strive to resolve faith-based conflicts inside refugee reception centres and temporary accommodation facilities more effectively and with greater respect for the dignity and rights of refugees and asylum seekers. In addition, member States should promote good practices and grass-roots initiatives encouraging interreligious dialogue and peaceful living together.

1 Reference to committee: Doc. 14429, Reference 4351 of 22 January 2018.
A. Draft resolution

1. Refugees and asylum seekers are entitled to adequate protection according to international humanitarian law and human rights standards. Uprooted from their home countries, cultural practices, traditions and faith may be all these migrants carry with them, so an attachment to them becomes all the more important to the preservation of their human dignity, and indeed to their physical and psychological integrity.

2. The Parliamentary Assembly considers that the beliefs and religious practices of migrants and refugees need to be taken into account as an essential factor in successful reception and integration policies. The Assembly therefore calls upon member States of the Council of Europe to express their political will to ensure greater protection to refugees and asylum-seekers in Europe by preventing religiously motivated violence and discrimination.

3. The prevention of violence and discrimination against religious minorities amongst refugees in Europe requires actions at all levels – international, European, national, and most of all – local level. Countries should make greater effort to alleviate tension and to create a climate of respect and the means to live in dignity living for refugees and asylum seekers.

4. The Assembly recalls its Recommendation 1962 (2011) on “The religious dimension of intercultural dialogue”, and invites member States to promote partnerships between the Council of Europe, religious institutions and humanist and non-religious organisations, seeking to encourage the active involvement of all stakeholders in action to promote the fundamental values of the Organisation, in particular in the context of their asylum policies.

5. Member States should foster inter-religious and inter-faith dialogue in the context of asylum procedures, resolve faith-based conflicts inside refugee reception centres and temporary accommodation facilities more effectively and with greater respect for the dignity and rights of refugees and asylum seekers, and promote good practices and grass roots initiatives encouraging interreligious dialogue and peaceful living together, in a gender sensitive manner. Measures should include the following:

5.1. Fostering interreligious and inter-faith dialogue in the context of asylum:

5.1.1. the Assembly reiterates its call for the development of a pan-European platform on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue and suggests that attention in this context be devoted to inter-religious dialogue in the context of asylum and migration policies;

5.1.2. member States should set up and support the work of inter-religious dialogue platforms at national and local levels and, in particular, their involvement in the reception and integration of refugees and asylum-seekers in Europe;

5.1.3. prejudice, racism and hate speech in refugee facilities should be combated, for example by the establishment of inclusive dialogue processes in such locations, using the expertise of third-party intermediaries, ethno-religious mediators and dialogue facilitators;

5.1.4. special training should be provided to mediators, community leaders and other relevant stakeholders, including volunteers, to promote inter-religious dialogue and better living together. This training should include a gender perspective dimension;

5.1.5. access of refugees and asylum seekers living in detention centres to inter-faith dialogue programmes should be facilitated, thereby fostering a better understanding of the cultures and beliefs of others and creating a space in which to build trust.

5.2. Resolving faith-based conflicts inside refugee reception centres and temporary accommodation facilities more effectively and with greater respect of the dignity and rights of refugees and asylum seekers

5.2.1. to ensure freedom of religion is respected, member States should provide specific training of personnel in reception centres and temporary accommodation facilities, in order to enhance their knowledge of the different religions of residents, including information about religious discrimination.

2 Draft resolution adopted by the committee on 2 December 2019.
celebrations, prayer times, facilities needed in order to enable the practice of religions. Training should include courses on interfaith mediation;

5.2.2. training and information sessions should be provided to residents in reception centres and temporary accommodation facilities at the time of their arrival and periodically during their stay. The sessions should cover international law on freedom of religion, national law on freedom of religion and information on religious practices in the host country, workshops to prevent religious radicalisation and arrangements for religious practises at the centre;

5.2.3. complaints procedures should be available in centres to enable residents to challenge religiously motivated discrimination. National hotlines for complaints regarding religiously motivated discrimination could be set up, with trained staff able to evaluate situations and to react swiftly. Hotlines should be connected with inter-religious mediators and the police, in order to immediately intervene and provide support to the alleged victim;

5.2.4. reception centres and temporary accommodation facilities for refugees and asylum seekers should have a dedicated office for receiving complaints and the opportunity to file a complaining report anonymously provided. States should also guarantee the possibility to anonymously file complaints to the police;

5.2.5. In case of complaints against religiously-motivated attacks or discrimination, the safety of the alleged victim/s must be the priority. Complaints should activate a protection procedure: the victim/s must be immediately transferred to a safe place, such as an alternative centre, before a thorough investigation is carried out. Such procedures should be gender sensitive;

5.2.6. Police officers should be fully trained to investigate religiously-motivated crimes. Police administration should designate contact persons in police headquarters to tackle faith-based conflicts inside refugee reception centres and temporary accommodation facilities.

5.3. Promoting good practices and grass roots initiatives fostering interreligious dialogue and living together

5.3.1. local initiatives and good practices that foster interreligious dialogue should be promoted, both connecting representatives of various religious groups among refugees and asylum seekers and connecting them with the local community of the host country. Such initiatives could include meetings with the leaders of the different religious communities on general and specific themes; meetings with the members of religious faiths in their different places of worship, with the aim of promoting mutual knowledge of ritual aspects, modalities of worship and socialisation; and participation in religious celebrations of the different communities present;

5.3.2. active participation by women in intercultural dialogue should be encouraged, including in its religious dimension, in the context of asylum. Women asylum seekers should be empowered to act as agents of change in a modern, multicultural society, in accordance with the Assembly Resolution 1615 (2008) and Recommendation 1838 (2008).

5.3.3. children's awareness of common points shared by different faiths should be increased, thereby promoting dialogue and better understanding of other beliefs through education. Ensure both formal education and non-formal learning should be provided about different religions and non-religious belief systems in classes for refugees as well as in the local schools of host countries.
B. Explanatory memorandum by Mr Egidijus Vareikis, rapporteur

1. Introduction and definitions

1. The title of the report for which I have been appointed rapporteur refers to refugees. I therefore intend to focus on people who have fled armed conflict or persecution and have been recognised as refugees in accordance with the definition provided in Article 1 of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. The term “refugee camps”, which was used in the motion for a resolution to include the various places where refugees are grouped together and may be subject to violence and discrimination, does not adequately reflect the situation in Europe. I would, therefore, suggest changing the title as follows: “Prevention of violence and discrimination against religious minorities amongst refugees in Europe”. This should also allow me to address the issues at stake with a view to suggesting constructive solutions and approaches that could be applied in various contexts ranging from retention centres to residence facilities for refugees.

2. Religious minorities are groups that share a religion and identify themselves as belonging to a minority because they are smaller in number than other groups. They will accordingly vary from one place to another depending on the numbers of members of each religion, and people belonging to a religion that is a minority in the country of origin will not necessarily be in the same position once they arrive in Europe.

3. Violence against religious minorities is difficult to address. Many countries leave the religious aspects to the private sphere, insisting that governments should not intervene in this area. Religious affiliation is not recorded when dealing with refugees’ asylum claims. This being said, for many, nationality or citizenship is less important than faith (Shia, Sunni, etc) and can be the cause of tensions and violence. Therefore, the issue deserves attentions and specific mechanisms to prevent and resolve faith-based conflicts should be examined.

4. I suggest widening the scope of the report to address the need to end discrimination against religious minorities in various places (retention centres, temporary accommodation facilities, etc.) and circumstances related to asylum seeking. The work carried out previously by the Council of Europe on the intercultural dialogue, including the proposal to create a European platform, should be taken into consideration when devising policies in this area. The outcomes of earlier Council of Europe action and the principles of interreligious dialogue should be used to end violence and discrimination against religious minorities – including amongst refugees and asylum seekers – across Europe.

5. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights refer to but do not define discrimination. Three criteria are employed to define discrimination: there needs to be unfavourable treatment based on unlawful grounds and with no objective justification. The features of interest to us are therefore an unlawful difference based on belonging to a religious minority.

2. The issues involved

6. Some refugees report being victims of discrimination or violence due to their religious beliefs. This violence may be committed among refugees but sometimes also by members of NGOs present on the ground, retention facility staff or even by state police officers.

7. Documentation providing evidence of violence and discrimination against religious minorities among refugees and asylum-seekers is scarce. It would appear that few victims decide to report instances to the authorities because they are afraid of reprisals or believe their complaint will come to nothing, or else they take no action because of language barriers. There is a real lack of information on these incidents as only a tiny fraction are reported. The association Open Doors has carried out surveys in Germany and Sweden concerning abuse committed against Christians and Yazidis. The most frequent abuses cited are insults, death threats, theft and physical and/or sexual violence.

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5 https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/Minorities.aspx.
8 Open Doors International is an NGO dedicated to support persecuted Christians worldwide. http://www.opendoors.org/.
8. The Open Doors surveys, were limited to two countries. The Open Doors, however, notes that there were also attacks in other European countries, such as Switzerland and Austria, where refugees have said they have been forced to comply with Muslim rules, such as praying at sunrise. Italy may also be taken as an example: numerous acts of violence have been reported, especially in the Rigano Garganico camp in Italy's southern region of Puglia.

9. It is therefore essential to combat these abuses and document what may occur inside the retention centres or temporary accommodation facilities. An exchange of views with the representative of the Open Doors is planned during the Migration Committee meeting on 3 October 2019.

10. On 29 May 2019, the Committee held an exchange of views, in which a number of issues were raised:

- the obvious need to deal with all religious minorities, since in some countries people from Muslim or Jewish communities were discriminated against;
- a call for a balanced report, focusing not only on Christians or Yazidi communities, and insisting on tolerance between religious communities;
- the need to refer to the European Convention on Human Rights which should be invoked to protect the right to exercise religious rights;
- the need to be more precise about the focus of the report, be it integration of religious minorities (namely Muslims) in Europe or persecution of religious minorities (namely Christians) all over the world; the reports of Christians being thrown overboard from refugee boats and Christians killed in the world;
- the suggestion to change the title, following the reference of the UNHCR representative to the fact that there were no refugee “camps” in Europe.

I would like to thank all members for their contribution and welcome further discussions in the Committee on this issue.

11. During an exchange of views held in Zurich on 29 May, the UNHCR Representative, stressed the fact that religion played an important role in refugee protection, as many people became refugees because of religious persecution. Faith-based organisations played a major role in refugee protection, when they had the opportunity to do so. She presented the action taken by UNHCR in this area. She informed the Committee about several UNHCR initiatives, such as the 2012 High Commissioner Dialogue on Faith and Protection, the Affirmation of Faith based Leaders “Welcome to the stranger”, the Swiss Interreligious Declaration on refugee protection, the report on Persecution for reasons of religion, and the “Step with Refugees” initiative.

12. On 3 October 2019, the Committee heard the representatives of civil society and academia working with asylum seekers, Mr Greve, representing the NGO “Open Doors”, insisted that the police needed to take seriously the complaints concerning religiously motivated attacks. He was arguing in favour of providing separate shelters for asylum seekers, separating people by religion. Having referred to the conflicts in the Middle East, he noted that the life there was organised according to districts separated by religion (such as the Jewish district, Christian district, etc). According to him, this created safe places for those religious minorities in such cities. In refugee camps this separation did not exist. Consequently, the members of religious minorities did not have a refugium where to hide and were exposed to perpetrators of violence. This proposal was, however, not supported by other speakers, who contrary to him, spoke against segregation, calling for greater efforts to foster social cohesion and leaving together in peace.

13. According to Ms Barbarella, her experience was different from the experience which was presented by Mr Greve. In her region, migrants came from different countries, but in a smaller number compared to other regions. There were not many tensions. Her organisation worked on mediation to improve communication and

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13 In various languages: https://www.unhcr.org/protection/hcdialogue%20/51b6de419/welcoming-stranger-affirmations-faith-leaders.html
15 The Committee held an exchange of views with Mr Ado Greve, Open Doors Germany, Ms Carla Barbarella, Director, Aliseicoop – social cooperation, Todi, Italy (via video-conference), Mr Francis Messner and Ms Clémence Kelche, INTER-RELIGIO project, University of Strasbourg, and Mr Basil Ugorji, President and CEO, International Center for Ethno-Religious Mediation (ICERM), New York, USA (via video-conference).
to create a common understanding about identities. Religion had a very important role for one’s identity. Mediators, who understood the issues related to ethnicity, were trained. Her organisation – Alisei Coop – developed a methodology, which encouraged people to listen actively. This methodology included meetings with representatives of different religious communities and visits to different places of worship. The aim was to create a social model where people could leave together, and where diversity, including religious differences, would be respected. The results were positive. Interreligious dialogue could, indeed, facilitate social solidarity and help people from different religious and ethnic groups live together.

14. A similar approach was developed by the INTER-RELIGIO project presented by Mr Messner. It aimed to create training programmes on religions. It was noted that whilst different religions were studied by scholars, there was not a real dialogue between different religious communities. The project examined religions’ common points in order to see how religion can contribute to society. Pluralism was inevitable. In order to maintain peace between different religious communities, creating dialogue was necessary. The INTER-RELIGIO project create a counter discourse opposite of the discourse of radicalism. He sustained that using tools, such as medias, to spread the counter-discourse could help building social peace in the long term.

15. The principles of inter-religious dialogue could be used to end violence and discrimination against religious minorities – especially among refugees and asylum seekers – across Europe, according to Mr Ugorij International Center for Ethno-Religious Mediation (ICERM), New York, USA. Following research carried out in more than 15 countries, the shared values in different religions could be used to foster a culture of peace, enhance the mediation and dialogue processes and outcomes, and to educate the mediators and dialogue facilitators of religious and ethno-political conflicts as well as policymakers and other state and non-state actors working to reduce violence and resolve conflict within migrant centers or between migrants and their host communities. To address violence and discrimination amongst religious minorities he proposed the use of unconventional and religious intervention processes that encouraged the development of an open mind to learn and understand the worldview and reality of the others; creation of a psychologically safe and trusting physical space; reinstatement and rebuilding of trust on both sides; engagement in a worldview-sensitive and integrative dialogue process through the help of third party intermediaries or worldview translators often referred to as ethno-religious mediators and dialogue facilitators. Through active and reflective listening and by encouraging non-judgmental conversation or dialogue, the underlying emotions would be validated, and self-esteem and trust would be restored. While remaining who they are, the opposing parties would be empowered to live together in peace and harmony.

16. In this framework, the following two ICERM projects should be mentioned. The Mediation of Ethnic and Religious Conflicts empowered professional and new mediators to resolve ethnic, racial, and religious conflicts using a blended model of transformative, narrative and faith-based conflict resolution. The Living Together Movement was designed to help prevent and resolve ethnic and religious conflicts through dialogue, open-hearted discussions, compassionate & empathic listening, and diversity celebration.

3. The legal framework

3.1. The United Nations

17. Freedom of religion is protected by various UN instruments. Article 18 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights guarantees freedom of thought, conscience and religion, which includes the possibility of manifesting one’s religion. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights reinforces this protection.

18. More specifically as far as refugees are concerned, Article 3 of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees establishes the principle of non-discrimination, and freedom of religion is enshrined in Article 4. Pursuant to these instruments, states are responsible for guaranteeing these rights to refugees on their territory.

19. In 1981, the UN General Assembly adopted a Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, which states that freedom of religion must be guaranteed, and that no discrimination based on religion can be tolerated. This instrument also places an obligation on states to take measures to prevent and eliminate any discrimination based on religion or belief (Article 4).

18 https://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10
20. Subsequently, in 1992, the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities,\(^{20}\) Article 1 of which obliges states to protect “the existence and the national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity of minorities within their respective territories […]”. The Declaration also provides for the freedom to profess one’s religion and calls on states to take measures to protect this freedom.

21. Refugee centres are usually established with no specific provision for guaranteeing the enforcement of these rights and are often administrated by non-state players on the ground. The situation of these centres is rather unique and there is a real legal vacuum as far as they are concerned.

22. The host country is responsible for the administration of refugee reception centres and temporary accommodation facilities, which means it must ensure the maintenance of both security and law and order. This role may be undertaken by an international organisation (i.e. IOM), but the host country remains responsible for operational matters. The police present on the ground works to maintain public order. The host country’s responsibility means that the centres are subject to the domestic law of the state in which they are operated, and consequently the applicable law will depend on the state’s domestic law and on certain provisions of international or regional law to which that state is a party.

3.2. The European Union

23. The EU’s Charter of Fundamental Rights provides certain guarantees, such as the prohibition of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment (Article 4), the right to liberty and security of person (Article 6) and to freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Article 10).\(^{21}\) These fundamental rights must clearly also be upheld in relation to refugees.

24. 2013 saw the adoption of Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council\(^ {22}\), which lays down standards for the reception of persons seeking international protection. In 2016, the Commission proposed amending the original text in order to take a further step towards harmonising reception conditions in the EU. The new Article 20 is devoted to “applicants with special reception needs”\(^ {23}\) and provides that states must take account of the specific situation of refugees. It may therefore be assumed that religious minorities have “special needs” regarding their freedom of religion including the exercise of their religious rites.

25. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)\(^ {24}\) has drawn up a report entitled *Fundamental rights of migrants in an irregular situation in the European Union*,\(^ {25}\) which sets out the various fundamental rights that refugees hold. The FRA has also carried out a survey on minorities and discrimination,\(^ {26}\) with the aim of understanding the discriminatory practices in order to combat them effectively.

3.3. The Council of Europe

26. In 1995, the Council of Europe adopted the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities\(^ {27}\) which calls for the protection of these minorities and, in particular, for guaranteeing them equality before the law. Article 7 guarantees them freedom of thought, conscience and religion, while the following article protects the right to manifest one’s religion. However, a significant number of member states have not signed or ratified the Convention,\(^ {28}\) which means that some countries are not bound by these provisions, although they are still bound by the ECHR, which should provide the broad protection mentioned above, covering without specifically referring to religious minorities.

27. In 2007, an issue paper was drawn up by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights on the subject of *The Human Rights of Irregular Migrants in Europe*. The Commissioner drew attention to the lack of information on the nature and types of violations of migrants’ rights and the places where they were committed. This observation, made over a decade ago, still applies today as very few data are available. It was pointed

\(^{20}\) [https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/Minorities.aspx](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/Minorities.aspx)


\(^{27}\) [https://rm.coe.int/16800c10cf](https://rm.coe.int/16800c10cf)

\(^{28}\) [https://www.coe.int/en/web/minorities/country-specific-monitoring](https://www.coe.int/en/web/minorities/country-specific-monitoring)
out that "(s)tates have a general duty to protect all migrants’ rights, regardless of nationality or status, both in transit, and within each state".29

28. In late 2018, a resolution entitled Promoting the rights of persons belonging to national minorities30 and the related report31 were adopted. In this resolution, the member states are called upon to sign and ratify the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, which include religious minorities. This therefore remains a relevant matter. Council of Europe work on interreligious dialogue is described in 4.1. below.

4. Fostering interreligious and inter-faith dialogue in the context of asylum

4.1. Inter-religious dialogue32

29. In 2008, the Council of Europe, in a White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue, drew attention to the role that inter-religious dialogue could play in building stronger and more cohesive societies and in addressing the major societal challenges. The White Paper states that “apart from the dialogue between public authorities and religious communities, which should be encouraged, there is also the need for dialogue between religious communities themselves (inter-religious dialogue). The Council of Europe has frequently recognised inter-religious dialogue as a part of intercultural dialogue and encouraged religious communities to engage actively in promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law in a multicultural Europe. Inter-religious dialogue can also contribute to a stronger consensus within society regarding the solutions to social problems. Furthermore, the Council of Europe sees the need for dialogue within religious communities and philosophical convictions (intrareligious and intra-convictional dialogue), not least in order to allow public authorities to communicate with authorised representatives of religions and beliefs seeking recognition under national law”.33

30. The proposal to set up an inter-religious dialogues platform at European level has been expressed by the Parliamentary Assembly on several occasions. In the Recommendation 1962 (2011) on “The religious dimension of the intercultural dialogue”, the Assembly recommended that the Committee of Ministers: “17.1. promote a genuine partnership for democracy and human rights between the Council of Europe, the religious institutions and humanist and non-religious organisations, seeking to encourage the active involvement of all stakeholders in actions to promote the fundamental values of the Organisation; 17.2. establish to this end a place for dialogue, a workspace for the Council of Europe and high-level representatives of religions and of non-denominational organisations, in order to place existing relations on a stable and formally recognised platform; 17.3. develop this initiative in concertation with the interested parties, closely associate the Parliamentary Assembly and, as far as possible, the European Union, and invite the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and, if appropriate, other partners to contribute; 17.4. continue, in this context, organising dedicated meetings on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue”34. Unfortunately, the platform was not set up for a number of reasons, including financial ones. This being said, inter-religious dialogue platforms were set up at national level in a number of countries. The example of Switzerland was brought to our attention during the Committee meeting in Zurich on 29 May 2019. They could be extremely helpful in promoting a better living together climate in the context of asylum seeking.

31. Initiatives to promote inter-religious dialogue as set out in these recommendations could be taken in the specific context of migration, including in reception centres and temporary accommodation facilities for refugees and asylum seekers. The backbone of inter-religious dialogue is to perceive religions as belonging not to a closed space, but as an open context in which everyone must be able to recognise the validity of the belief of the others. Inter-religious dialogue allows building bridges and social bonds that would be essential for the future social integration of refugees once they have obtained legal status in a host country.

32. The role played by faith-based organisations cannot be underestimated. According to Majbritt Lyck-Bowen & Mark Owen, “faith-based organisations involved in multi-religious collaborations are responding to the more practical needs, helping migrants understand how public services work, housing, material support,

legal aid, etc., as well as cultural awareness and relationship building, including learning local laws, customs and language, and the establishment of new social contacts and networks. However, in addition to these important services they are also well equipped to introduce migrants into relevant local religious communities, and facilitate emotional, religious and spiritual support; which can be imperative for the well-being of some religious migrants who have experienced significant trauma.\(^{35}\)

33. The local initiatives and practices should, however, foster greater participation of refugee women. In its Resolution 1615 (2008)\(^{36}\) and Recommendation 1838 (2008)\(^{37}\) on Empowering women in a modern, multicultural society, the Assembly reiterated that states must protect women against violations of their rights (including those carried out in the name of religion), promote and fully implement gender equality and reject all religious or cultural relativism where women’s rights are concerned. It invited member States to empower women in a modern, multicultural society and called, in particular, to “promote active participation by women in intercultural dialogue, including its religious dimension”. This should also apply in the context of asylum.

34. The principles used for developing programmes and projects should include: relational approaches which express the plurality of the different cultural/religious groups; efforts to overcome prejudices against other forms of sociality or belonging; building common spaces and horizontal networks to facilitate dialogue between the “different” or “invisible”; the promotion of personal relationships and active listening to address issues that affect everyone, not just the individual community or believer, and forms of solidarity not only between individuals but with different subjects and communities.

35. The Church of Sweden implemented a project entitled “A world of neighbours”\(^{38}\) that included working with asylum seekers and newly settled persons in the Church of Sweden’s Parishes.\(^{39}\) An important characteristic of this project was the active involvement of volunteers. According to most of the parishes, it has been easy to recruit volunteers for the work with asylum seekers and newly settled persons. The activities have been attracting new groups of volunteers, both young people and people that did not have a close contact with the parish earlier. There were differences in local traditions when it came to volunteering. In some cases, it occurred spontaneously through already existing personal networks outside of established organisations. Parishes recruited volunteers by advertising in the local press, via social media and by directly asking people at worship services or in connection with other activities.

36. The driving force for those who have chosen to engage themselves as volunteers was the opportunity to contribute to something meaningful. The interviewed volunteers referred to values and behaviour passed on from their parents, personal experiences of vulnerability due to, for example, sickness or own migration story, as well as knowing others, who started to volunteer, as an inspiration. For the parishes, voluntary work was a great asset, but it also required organisation and leadership. One should be aware that the lack of information, or uncertainty regarding tasks may hinder the ability to maintain engagement and commitment over time.

37. Practical initiatives should include meetings with the ministers of the different religious communities on general and specific themes in order to activate relations and contacts between different religious cults; meetings with the faithful within the different place of worship, with the aim of promoting mutual knowledge of ritual aspects, modalities of worship and socialization (often strongly ethnically); participation in religious festivities of the different present communities as a privileged tool to develop respect and sharing. I would like to bring the example of the inter-religious calendar prepared by the Geneva Inter-religious Platform.\(^{40}\)

4.2. Mediation

38. Mediation can be an effective way of dealing with possible conflicts between the different religious communities. It has a very important role as it can enable tensions to be eased without necessarily bringing a case before the domestic courts, where the proceedings would take much longer.


\(^{38}\) https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/a-world-of-neighbours.


4.3. Taking into account the opinion of refugees

39. In the surveys conducted in Germany and Sweden, Open Doors asked the refugees interviewed what measures they would like to see applied in order to reduce the violence against them. Refugees were overwhelmingly in favour of separating the accommodation of Christians and Muslims and suggested that no Muslim should be a member of the staff.

40. In the light of this observation, it is clear that the task of arranging for different communities to live together is not easy. There is a need for teaching about integration before refugees are settled in host societies, and such an approach should include, in addition to courses on the host country’s culture, fostering awareness of religious tolerance. Members of reception centres’ staff should also be better trained in order to look after people of different faiths, get to know the specific features of certain religions and deal with inter-faith conflict situations.41

4.4. Proposals from NGOs

41. Refugees should be given the opportunity to report religiously motivated attacks anonymously. A larger number of refugees would agree to testify regarding the abuse they had suffered if they did not have to reveal their identity, as they would no longer be afraid of reprisals. This would also enable reliable data to become available on attacks that had taken place.

5. Examples of practice on the ground

42. Open Doors conducted only two surveys, namely in Germany and Sweden. Various good practices have been observed in Germany and could serve as a basis for states to improve the situation of religious minorities in their refugee centres. In Bad Homburg, Muslim members of staff were accused of attacking Christian refugees in 2015 and were dismissed as a result.42 In 2015, the “Integration and Security Masterplan”,43 which provides for the protection of religious minorities against violations, was published in Berlin. In addition, training courses have been made available to members of staff. One final example is Stuttgart, where a special reception centre for Christian refugees was set up in February 2016 to respond to attacks on them. However, the local authorities have emphasised that this separation of ethnic or religious groups should be avoided at all costs in order not to heighten tensions.44 Safety of minorities should remain the priority.

43. UNHCR has indicated that while there are incidents occurring in reception facilities in Germany, the reasons for those incidents are very varied. They can be based on the nationality, the ethnicity, the religion, the gender, the age and the gender orientation as well as cultural misunderstandings. When there have been tensions of an interreligious nature, the authorities have dealt with them in an holistic manner, the same way as they do with any other conflict arising between groups of persons. It should be noted that the prevention of violence, regardless of its nature, is part and parcel of the management of reception centres.

44. The value of religious tolerance is also promoted as part of the integration courses for asylum-seekers with a high likelihood of being granted protection and to recognised or resettled refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection. Also, the German Government is engaging in a dialogue with Muslim organisation in the “Islam Conference”. To the same end, inter-religious dialogue is promoted on many levels through local initiatives such as the Berlin Forum of the Religions.45 Often, schools are a particular focus through a so called “welcome class” (class consisting of minor asylum-seekers, refugees and other foreigners which have recently arrived which provides language training in other classes with a view to preparing the participant for their participation in the regular schooling system) to a mosque and a Christian church”.46 One should also take into consideration the results of the recently held 10th World Assembly of religions for peace that recently took place in Germany.47

44 Link (to text in German): http://www.stuttgarter-nachrichten.de/inhalt.mobbing-unter-fluechtlingen-30-christen-duerfen-in-unterkunft-in-neugereut.38b2fed3-60fb-4c07-9b10-59411d02995d.html
45 https://www.berliner-forum-religionen.de/
45. In Turkey, the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs issued a circular entitled “Asylum Seekers” on 18 September 2015 outlining the measures to be taken to cover the humanitarian needs of refugees and asylum seekers. These included providing necessary spaces for them to fulfil their religious needs and measures to facilitate their living in peace regardless of their identity, religion, language, race, nationality, opinions and membership. Some of the measures foreseen in the circular are as below:

- Sermons and religious preaches, also in the languages of refugees, on solidarity, fraternity, peace and other similar topics in the refugee centres or at the mosques of the neighbourhoods densely populated by refugees;
- Appointment of female and male religious officials who have language skills in order to serve refugees and asylum seekers;
- Provision of religious consultancy and moral support services at the refugee centres and at host communities;
- Appointment of a coordinator who has the necessary language proficiency in order to coordinate religious services;
- Provision of humanitarian assistance to refugees and asylum seekers;
- Preparation of information materials (including public service announcements) to be published at local media mediums targeting local population in order to call for solidarity with refugees;
- Socio-cultural activities to promote social cohesion, including “peer family” initiatives between refugees and host community members;
- Working in cooperation with other public institutions in order to prevent interruption of education life of children, particularly girls with a view to prevent child marriages;
- Social activities with children.

46. In the framework of the “Church of Sweden’s project “A time of encounters”, strategies had to be put in place for responding to hostility, prejudice and racism (“giving local communities an injection against xenophobia and racism”). This included creating opportunities for local communities to help, demonstrate care, to establish personal contacts with asylum seekers, and to arouse empathy, asking people to put themselves in the situation of asylum seekers. Accurate information on benefits and regulations around asylum seekers can create a more positive climate, dispelling misconceptions and fears. The emphasis was put on the importance of not making comparison between different vulnerable groups but rather work for social change for all, fostering local mobilisation for inclusion and human rights for all as a way of countering organised racism."

6. Tools for tackling faith-based conflicts inside refugee reception centres and temporary accommodation facilities

47. Refugees arriving to Europe come from diverse backgrounds that include practitioners of many varied religious faiths. Upon their arrival, they are generally grouped in temporary accommodation centres, forced to a close cohabitation for a period of time.

48. The subject is complicated, since tensions and conflicts within refugee centres can originate from several overlapping reasons. According to Giuseppe Castello, Italian cultural mediator, rather than for religious motivation, tension is linked to ethical conflicts. Philippe Dugard is of the same opinion. The Priest talking about a case of violence against some Christians in the refugee centre the Grand-Synthes (France), affirmed «I think the Iranians were attacked because they are a minority in the Grande-Synthe: the centre is populated by Iraqi Kurds, and there are tensions between Iranians and Iraqis. [The fact] that they are Christians does not help. In my opinion, this is an ethnic conflict, on which a religious conflict has been grafted». Many refugees arriving to Europe had suffered different forms of discrimination, including religious discrimination. Therefore, the Council of Europe has a primary interest promoting policies and practices aimed to avoid and to solve faith-based conflicts. More should be done to support the opportunities for inter-religious dialogue and support for future social inclusion. The presence of refugees in centres, where they are grouped together, is an opportunity to promote interreligious dialogue and cooperation.

50 Priest of the Assemblée de Dieu de Saint-Pol-sur-Mer (Nord), a protestant evangelic church that support migrants.
49. According to Open Doors\textsuperscript{52}, various tools and methods could be applied for tackling faith-based conflicts within migrant centres, such as the following:

\textit{Specific training of personnel of the reception centres and temporary accommodation facilities}

50. Civil servants and centre personnel need in-depth knowledge of the religions of the centre’s residents. It is essential that they are informed about religious festivities, prayer timing, facilities needed in order to practice the religions. This is necessary in order to respect the freedom of religion of the refugees. Moreover, training on interfaith mediation needs to be provided for all personnel.

\textit{Workshop for asylum seekers}

51. Specific training and information sessions should be provided to the residents of the centres, at the time of their arrival and periodically during their stay. The sessions should cover international law on freedom of religion, national law on freedom of religion, workshops to prevent religious radicalisation, religious arrangements of the centre, and complaint procedures in the event of religiously motivated discrimination.

\textit{Hotlines}

52. Each State shall create a national hotline for complaints regarding religiously motivated discrimination. The personnel of the hotline should be trained in order to evaluate the situation and to react early. The hotline should be connected with inter-religious mediators and the police, in order to immediately intervene and provide support to the alleged victim/s.

\textit{Anonymous complaints}

53. The fear of receiving further pressure or persecution can be an obstacle to filing a complaint against religiously motivated attacks. Therefore, States should provide dedicated office for receiving complaints within the migrant centres and the opportunity to file a complaining report anonymously. Moreover, States should guarantee the possibility to anonymously file complaints to the police.

\textit{Early reaction}

54. In case there is a complaint of a religiously motivated attack or discrimination, the safety of the alleged victim/s must be the priority. Therefore, a simple complaint shall activate a protection procedure: the victim/s must be immediately transferred to a safe place, such as an alternative centre. Afterwards, a thorough investigation must be carried out.

\textit{Police training}

55. Sensitisation on the management level of the police administration and departments as well as the directorates of the criminal police (responsible for state security offices) regarding religious conflict. Designating a contact person in the context of the deployment department of the state police headquarters.

7. Inter-religious dialogue projects for refugees and asylum seekers’ integration

7.1. In Germany

56. The inter-faith dialogue project \textit{Weisst Du Wer Ich bin?} was implemented in 2016.\textsuperscript{53} The participating organisations were the Council of Christian Churches in Germany,\textsuperscript{54} Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs,\textsuperscript{55} the Islamic Council for Germany,\textsuperscript{56} the Council of Islamic Cultural Centres,\textsuperscript{57} the Central Council of Muslims in Germany\textsuperscript{58} and the Central Council of Jews in Germany.\textsuperscript{59} The project promoted the cooperation

\textsuperscript{53} The project: Weisst Du Wer Ich bin? (Do you know, who I am?) http://www.weisstduwerichbin.de/ueber-uns/das-projekt/.
\textsuperscript{54} Arbeitsgemeinschaft Christlicher Kirchen in Deutschland. See www.oekumene-ack.de.
\textsuperscript{55} Türkisch Islamische Union der Anstalt für Religion. See www.ditib.de.
\textsuperscript{56} Islamrat für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland. See www.islamrat.de.
\textsuperscript{57} Verband der Islamischen Kulturzentren. See www.vikz.de.
\textsuperscript{58} Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland. See www.zentralrat.de.
\textsuperscript{59} Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland. See www.zentralratderjuden.de.
among Muslim, Christian and Jewish communities and organisations on projects aimed at assisting migrants in the integration process. The German Federal Ministry of the Interior supported the project and allocated €500,000 for multi-religious initiatives locally active in the integration of migrants. The funding has been used to support several multi-religious projects all over Germany. One of these projects involved visits to different places of worship. Volunteers from different organisations partnered and exchanged their competence helping bridge the experience and skills gap, in building projects for enhancing the integration of migrants. According to Majbritt Lyck-Bowen and Mark Owen, “for Muslim refugees who have fled violent conflicts with religious dimensions, experiencing multi-religious cooperation helped them see that religions can act as a positive force to bring people together. Staff from the projects in Germany reported that migrants from some Middle Eastern countries were not used to religious freedom, and seeing multi-religious cooperation helped them become accustomed to this”.

7.2. In Sweden

Under the programme “A world of neighbours” of the Church of Sweden mentioned above, various other projects were set up, including the Goda Gran nar (Good neighbours) project. The cooperation between different religious community in migrants’ integration that started by practical collaboration in providing services (language courses, legal advices, etc.), eventually resulted in volunteers from the mosque and the church learning dialogue about each other’s religious beliefs, festivals and life in general. The work of mosque volunteers who had several skills useful to a wide communication with migrants (language skills, knowledge of and experience with the cultures migrants come from) mutually complemented the church-led initiative which had the institutional knowledge about immigration and refugee processes. Relationships between religious communities have been improved, as reported by the UNHCR. This demonstrated that different religious communities can successfully work together, and mutually benefit from the close collaboration in terms of knowledge and dialogue. Projects that creates dialogue and space of discussion between different religions, with the aim of promoting mutual knowledge of cultural and religious traditions of different communities, would benefit all the participants and would prevent religious motivated violence or radicalisation.

7.3 In Poland

The Project Dialogue for Integration – a Multi-Faith Approach was launched by Africa Connect Foundation. It involved seminars meetings in four cities (Krakow, Poznan, Wroclaw and Lodz), involving religious leaders and representatives and it was aimed to discuss the role of religion and different religious communities in migrants’ integration (mostly African migrants). Seminars and meetings were organised bringing together leaders and representatives of different religions along with NGOs and local community leaders in order to network, share experiences and build the capacity of religious communities to promote integration.

7.4 In the UK

The project Refugee Support was set up by the British Red Cross. It aimed at providing practical support to asylum seekers and refugees, including access to services. The British Red Cross cooperates with

61 http://www.weisstduwerichbin.de/ueber-uns/projektideen/.
63 Ibid.
66 Ibid.
a wide range of organisations including non-religious, mono-religious and multi-faith organisations.\footnote{Majbritt Lyck-Bowen & Mark Owen (2019) A multi-religious response to the migrant crisis in Europe: A preliminary examination of potential benefits of multi-religious cooperation on the integration of migrants, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 45:1, 21-41. \url{https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/1369183X.2018.1437344?needAccess=true}.} Christian and Muslim communities and organisations were involved in helping migrants settle, providing contacts and networks for housing, material assistance, employment opportunities and spiritual and religious support which transcended religious boundaries and established a wide and diverse support network that intervened early in their integration processes.\footnote{Ibid.} For example, \textit{Weekend Club}\footnote{\url{http://interfaithglasgow.org/current-projects/}.} project in Glasgow was run by “Interfaith Glasgow”\footnote{Interfaith Glasgow is a charity fostering friendship-building, dialogue, and cooperation between Glasgow’s diverse faith and belief communities. \url{http://interfaithglasgow.org/?fbclid=IwAR1HYzWw-mdzJzv4V0kHy7X-atUV3ePtgdPG84kw92AQkrSj4gmp2MU}.}, creating a network and providing refugees, asylum seekers or new migrants a better understanding of Scottish culture, history, and values; and improving their English. Activities and events were delivered by a team of volunteers from different religion and belief backgrounds. Participants came from numerous countries: Algeria, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Ethiopia, Sudan, Syria, Palestine, Nigeria, Ghana, Pakistan, India, Libya, Cameroon, Poland, and the Czech Republic. To site but a few, the following activities were organised: a day trip to New Lanark; shortbread-making; a virtual tour of Glasgow’s art galleries and museums, complete with an introduction to ‘Glasgae’ slang; workshops covering the history of migration to Scotland and the history of knitting; a fun introduction to some of the key figures of Scottish history; a trip to Glasgow’s annual Christmas market; and a Burn’s Night celebration in which participants learned how the bagpipes are played, sampled ‘neeps and tatties’, etc.

60. There are inter-faith dialogue projects devoted to children, which could be adapted to meet the needs of children in the context of asylum. The \textit{Bullying and Belief Project}\footnote{\url{http://www.westhillendowment.org/bullying-and-belief/Our-progress}.} is run by NEWHAM Sacre. It helps pupils understand how people with different beliefs are treated, aiming to prevent bullying. It is a project dedicated to primary and secondary schools that provides teachers with various resources, such as films and classroom lesson plan. The \textit{Buried Treasure} project run by Cumbria SACRE is a day-long event aimed at Year 6, 7 and 8 students. Participants take the role of explorers, working in small groups facing a series of challenges and carrying out experiments to discover if the sacred texts of various religions hold some answers for the issues in the world today. The quotations or “gems” they uncover from direct exposure to the sacred texts are worked into precious artefacts to be kept in a treasure chest to be shared with others.\footnote{\url{http://www.westhillendowment.org/nasacre-and-cumbria-sacre}.} The project advance children awareness of common points shared by different faiths, they promote dialogue and better understanding of other beliefs.

8. Conclusions

61. The prevention of violence and discrimination against religious minorities amongst refugees in Europe requires actions at various levels – international, European, national, and most of all – local level. Countries should make greater effort to alleviate tension and to create a climate of respect and dignified living for refugees and asylum seekers. People fleeing terrible circumstances arrive extenuated and are particularly vulnerable and would need additional support in times of crisis. European countries have both the capacity to provide such support and the ability to do it. What is lacking today is the political will and we are here to make a difference at that level. The first step could consist in setting up and supporting the work of inter-religious dialogue platforms at national and local levels and their involvement in settling the refugee crisis in Europe.