

HIGHLIGHTS OF IAVE FORUM

CORPORATE VOLUNTEERING RESPONSE TO THE REFUGEE CHALLENGE

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Berlin, Germany



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Table of Contents

- 2** Purpose and Perspective
- 3** Corporate Volunteering for Refugees
- 7** Key Findings and Themes
- 9** Challenges
- 9** Conclusion

Purpose and Perspective

The purpose of the IAVE Forum: Corporate Volunteering Response to the Refugee Challenge was to understand the refugee crisis in Europe, learn how the private sector is currently responding through their employee volunteer programs, and discuss what companies could do individually or collaboratively to respond to the situation. The goal was to inspire new approaches, initiatives, partnerships and action on the refugee crisis.

To put the crisis in perspective in 2012, two million people were displaced by the crisis in Syria and of these, half were children. In 2015, twelve million Syrians fled their homes with over 700,000 Syrians and other refugees risking their lives to travel to Europe.

Volunteers are currently the backbone to the support being offered to people seeking sanctuary in Europe, providing a potent symbol of the importance of volunteers. Volunteers provide refugees with crucial help and care in the form of clothes, food, and shelter plus assistance with integration through language lessons, job training and placement and other support. They also provide an example to others. These voluntary acts of kindness, by huge numbers of citizens, have not only changed and saved refugee's lives, but they have changed the attitudes of others with regards to how they view and treat newcomers to their communities according to Gabriella Civico, Director of the European Volunteer Center (CEV).

Lejla Sehic Relic shared her perspective as a former Bosnian refugee in Croatia 20 years ago. She explained to Forum attendees how "my whole life was stored in a small bag and it took me a while to recover my dignity". Four months after arriving Lejla volunteered to work in a refugee camp. Working with other international volunteers on different programs she said gave her knowledge, skills and healing. Because of this experience she founded the Volunteer Center Osijek in Croatia. Last October, working with CARE International, she organized volunteers to assist the 800,000 refugees that began crossing from Serbia into Croatia on their way to Hungary. Refugees often come with a variety of needs, some covered with support of material goods, but they often have no one to listen to their personal stories, as other refugees around them are psychologically unable to cope with hearing and the reliving the stories. Volunteers have helped to fill this need, making their role all the more important.

Individuals have volunteered to help refugees in a myriad of ways - individually, through national volunteer centers, through United Nations Volunteers, and through federal volunteering services services such as the Federal Volunteering Service (The Bundesfreiwilligendienst or BFD- in Germany).

Corporate Volunteering for Refugees

Employers of all sizes are contributing their human and financial resources to aid refugees in their urgent, short-term need as well as longer-term sustainability and integration. The Forum highlighted the examples of nine exemplary companies that are responding with a combination of financial assistance typically funneled to trusted aid organizations, with in-kind products and services, with employment opportunities, and with a range of employee volunteer assistance ranging from hands-on support to the use of highly skilled expertise.

Deutsche Telekom was among the first companies to respond to the refugee crisis with a wide range of supportive initiatives for refugees. Gabrielle Kotulla, Vice President, Corporate Responsibility, explained that they developed a special task force that talked on a weekly basis. Their plans called for sustainable support that would enable the long-term integration of refugees. Deutsche Telekom established services such as free Wi-Fi in refugee reception facilities, launched a refugee portal with information on the asylum process and on living and working in Germany, and a portal with job vacancies in large and small companies. They provided unused Deutsche Telekom buildings for refugee reception centers, and established scholarships and internships for refugees. Through the Deutsche Telekom intranet individual projects for employee volunteers are identified and to date 100 have been implemented to help refugees. Employees are also able to suggest additional projects.

Volkswagen was an early responder to the refugee crisis as well. Michael Jansen, Head of the Volkswagen Representative Office in Berlin, shared that Volkswagen also committed to a long-term strategy to assist refugees and to sharing reliable best practices with other companies. As early as July 2015, Volkswagen employee volunteers helped the German Red Cross to convert the former military base Ehra-Lessien to a refugee reception center. The company has provided NGOs access to their vehicle fleet that has been useful in transporting children to school. Volkswagen employee volunteers are provided cross-cultural training through the Volkswagen Group Academy. Employees are awarded paid leave of absences when they volunteer to help refugees.

Some employers such as **IBM**, had well-established employee volunteer programs in place but were unsure at first how to best leverage the professional skills of employees to help refugees. Employees were eager to help refugees and flooded the “in boxes” of Michael Evason, Corporate Citizenship and Corporate Affairs Manager, EMEA asking what they could do. IBM settled on helping in a variety of ways through pro bono tech donations, grants, software and analytic skills. In Italy, IBM created a mobile and web based application to enable Intersos, the Italian humanitarian aid organization’s, staff to register migrants and collect demographic, health status, family, and socioeconomic information by capturing textual and image data. Peter Kusterer, Corporate Citizenship and Corporate Affairs Manager, Germany, explained how 12 IBM staff members worked with the German Red Cross to develop an IT solution (open source) to help with information management for a refugee reception center in

Mannheim. Other grants and volunteer activities are occurring in Austria, Turkey, France, and Sweden.

UPS is well positioned to respond to disasters of all sorts. Hans-Peter Teufers, Director, International Humanitarian Supply Chain, illustrated how UPS has lent its assets, employee volunteers and expertise. They provided over \$3 million in the past 3 years to organizations providing aid to refugees. 100 UPS employee volunteers have been supporting refugee relief in 15 countries partnering with large global organizations as well as smaller local partners. Activities include delivering Christmas presents to children in camps in the Netherlands, building furniture out of wooden pallets in Belgium, setting up camps, providing transportation and local hospitality in Germany, distributing winter clothing in Austria, and delivering warehouse items on a 3 times per week schedule in Greece.

UPS has lent their expertise through skilled logisticians assessing the capacities of airports, ports and roads, along key supply routes as part of the Logistics Emergency Team (LET). LET is comprised of three of the largest global logistics and transportation companies: Agility, Maersk and UPS, which have worked together since 2007 to support the Logistics Cluster led by the United Nations World Food Programme. The World Food Programme typically activates the LET partners in the case of sudden onset natural disasters that impact more than 500,000 people. The LET companies provide pro-bono assets and services and deploy highly trained experts to join the United Nations staff in disaster areas. UPS is also a founding member of the UNHCR Innovation Circle where they developed the UPS Relief Link, enabling “last mile” tracking of food and nonfood items to ensure equitable distribution.

The Ritz-Carlton has a well-established employee volunteer program, Community Footprints, in each hotel around the world, but their specific involvement with refugees grew organically as employees in Wolfsburg, Germany gradually observed the needs of residents in a nearby refugee camp. Franziska Streipert, Learning and Quality Manager, related how the 200 employees from the hotel got involved. Employees began by sorting donated clothes for the Red Cross. This inspired them to get more involved. They visited the local refugee camp on a weekly basis, working to understand that the refugees needed a distraction from their situation. The program they developed included showing children how to paint Easter eggs while explaining the tradition, playing board games, and organizing a party for women and children featuring not only German food, but also the food of their country of origin. Award-winning Ritz Carlton chefs also came to the camp to cook for the refugees. Employees from all departments got involved, not only food services, but also housekeeping, accounting, etc.

Siemens has planned a full range of opportunities for refugees says Eyad El-Khouly, Head of Volunteering and Social Innovation. The company is providing funding (2 million euros to date); job opportunities and employee volunteer support for refugees. Siemens offers two month paid internships for qualified refugees while they are going through the asylum procedure; pre-classes to help them qualify for their apprenticeship program and language classes. Employees are serving as mentors for the refugees in these programs. Siemens offers paid

leave of five days per year for employees whose skills are in demand to help refugees – i.e. company doctors. They also house refugees in unused company buildings, and arrange various social activities for refugee children.

“Help shape your own integration” is the slogan under which Siemens and The DO School in Berlin have launched the “Bridging Challenge.” In a workshop lasting several weeks, refugees and experts developed solutions together to plug the gap between what is offered and the refugees' abilities. Florian Hoffman, founder of the DO School, and partner of Siemens, explained an expectation gap - companies have programs and expect the refugees will go online and find the programs. That isn't consistently happening. The DO School also held a weeklong workshop with company representatives and refugees. The result was a matching system enabling companies looking for refugee workers to develop profiles of their companies and the skills they desire, and for refugees to develop their own profiles highlighting their skills.

In Spain, **Telefonica** has an employee volunteer program with a high level of employee involvement that often includes family and friends. Lula Ballarino, Global Manager, Corporate Volunteering, told Forum participants that they decided to focus on meeting urgent needs like food and clothing and long term needs such as integration into Spanish society. To accomplish this, Telefonica is collaborating with recognized aid organizations with deep expertise on refugees such as UNHCR, the Spanish Red Cross, and local organizations. To date 150 employees have volunteered specifically to help the refugees through 20 different projects implemented in the last eight months. Employees collected bikes for refugees, organized a joint bike ride and are planning a bike repair clinic. Volunteers help the newcomers learn the Spanish language and culture. Volunteers and refugees worked together to build urban gardens within a refugee residence. While they have found that the language and cultural barrier can be a challenge, and that female refugees were not participating in many of their programs, they are working to overcome these challenges with additional training for volunteers plus creation of a virtual community for volunteers to share experiences. Employees located outside of Spain are also helping through on-line volunteering in areas of communications, web design and translation.

Canada accepts around 200,000 newcomers each year and recently committed to take in 25,000 refugees. In Canada, newcomers are very much a part of the society and welcoming them is woven into companies like **RBC's** business strategy according to Tanya Bell, Senior Manager, Citizenship Engagement Programs. She works with RBC's Employee Resources groups and local settlement agencies to create employee volunteer activities supported with grant funding. A major employee volunteer initiative with the national charity, Immigrant Access Fund, is in the works. Additionally, specific RBC banking products are specially designed for new Canadians.

In times of disasters and crises, **Google's** strategy is to commit people (talent, skills & resources through Googlers Give), money (through Google.org), and products (through Crisis Response Team). The company is particularly committed to disaster response and recovery,

and views the refugee crisis as a “disaster”, dispensing a total of 11 million euros from the company and 1.2 million euros from employees to alleviate the refugee crisis according to Hector Mujica, Social Responsibility Regional Manager. In addition highly skilled corporate volunteers/engineers have engaged in projects to aid refugees.

Early in the refugee crisis Google collaborated with Cisco and the nonprofit NetHope to install Wi-Fi networks and device charging stations along the refugee route in various locations throughout Central Europe. Working again with Net Hope, Google through Project Reconnect, provided funds to nonprofits to purchase 25,000 Chromebooks. The Chromebooks are equipped with education and language learning apps. Selected nonprofits will in turn, provide access to them to refugees in Germany. Project Reconnect enables nonprofits to use the devices to build Internet cafes and organize educational events for children. As part of this partnership, Deutsche Telekom is giving the nonprofit grant recipients a discount on broadband access.

Since the migrants and refugees coming to Europe are equipped with smartphones, and use them to find information, communicate, and navigate their way to their destination, Google has designed a "Crisis Info Hub" that provides vital information via smartphones on ports, transport links, medical info, and places to sleep, and is available in English, Arabic, and other languages. It's built in collaboration with the International Rescue Committee and Mercy Corps, and is open source.

Key Findings and Themes

Collaboration

Collaborations are enabling organizations to do more than they would otherwise alone. The German *Wir Zusammen (We Together)* campaign includes thirty-six major German companies joining forces to form an initiative to promote the integration of immigrants. It was launched by Ralph Dommermuth, founder and chairman of the German internet company United Internet AG. The TENT Alliance of the TENT Foundation, started by Chobani founder, CEO and former refugee, Hamdi Ulukaya, was announced earlier this year. Thirty percent of Chobani employees have been migrants or refugees, which has sensitized the company to the current plight of refugees and inspired Ulukaya to commit resources to help improve their situation. The TENT Alliance was created to amplify the work of companies around refugees by bringing companies, governments, refugee relief organizations and academia together. Federico Carlos Baradello, Advisor to the TENT Foundation, explained a pilot project they are working on with LinkedIn Sweden to leverage the network of LinkedIn to help refugees find jobs and to present themselves in best possible way in their LinkedIn profiles.

Through collaboration companies minimize duplication of effort, expertise and resources; save dollars; gain more impactful outcomes; and encourage knowledge sharing and creative, innovative solutions. NGOs while they work in an increasingly competitive funding environment would also benefit from collaboration and partnerships rather than resource sapping competition. In responding to the refugee crisis, it is useful to leverage the expertise of National Volunteer Centers and established migrant and multicultural associations. It is also critical to hear and learn from the refugees in order to understand potential barriers to assistance and cultural sensitivities.

ROI for Business

Nava Hinrichs, CEO, The Hague Process on Refugees and Migration presented recently completed research illustrating the costs and benefits of migration for business. In multi-country surveys 85% of respondents said that migration leads to a strong workforce. It was clear that for refugees and migrants work reduces potential challenges and importantly provides immediate immersion and integration in addition to a living. This makes corporate programs that lead to employment particularly valuable and the employee volunteer mentors that help smooth refugee adjustment to the work setting especially important.

While it does not appear that companies help refugees for branding purposes, there are benefits that accrue to companies with employee volunteers. In addition to pride in the company that works to benefit society, employees can learn valuable leadership lessons, can

develop their professional expertise by applying it in new and different ways, and enhance soft skills such as listening and cultural sensitivity.

Remember the Children

Children have special needs, as they are the most vulnerable refugees Jessica Sommer, Director, Corporate Partnerships and Foundations, Save the Children Germany, explained. Children on the move, especially those unaccompanied are at risk of exploitation, abuse, violence and trafficking as they journey from their point of origin to Western European countries. Children are impacted by PTSD, the potential for malnutrition, dehydration and a lack access to of child -friendly asylum procedures and information.

While corporate volunteers do not often work directly with children given these sensitivities, there is much that their support can accomplish that will benefit child refugees. Corporate employees have raised funds for specific Save The Children projects as the C&A Foundation did for mothers and children in crisis. Ikea employee volunteers designed and set -up child-friendly place spaces especially for the refugee camps with supplies donated by the company.

Refugees as Volunteers

Many employee populations consist of individuals who were refugees themselves. Companies have reported that former refugees are among the first to offer help to current refugees often using their language skills and other means of assistance. Several companies report that current refugees are also quick to get involved in volunteer projects, much as Lejla did in Croatia to build skills, provide a distraction, and pass the time. Vahida Hurzokovic, from Sloven Philanthropy, was also a refugee of the Bosnian War. Volunteering by refugees helps them see themselves as a resource instead of just a recipient of aid.

Challenges

With all the goodwill provided by enthusiastic volunteers, serious challenges remain that impede an effective and impactful response to the refugee challenge.

- Corporations and their volunteers are lacking a common framework to help assess the needs of the refugees. It would be helpful to know where to “plug in”.
- It would also be helpful to be able to link corporate volunteer platforms so that opportunities, needs and best practices are shared between companies.
- Companies find it hard to collaborate and work together, not for lack of interest or desire but collaborations require the commitment of extra time and energy, especially in the initial stages.
- There is a need to be able to stop and evaluate if the assistance corporations and their volunteers are providing is helpful. But in an environment with urgent needs, how can this be done? How do we measure the impact of our efforts?
- At times political agendas, stereotypes and misconceptions will impede the work of helping refugees with both their immediate needs and long term integration.

Conclusion

Forum participants discussed what success would ultimately look like. What could be the result of all these corporate and volunteer efforts? The response: “A measure of success of our work would be the dropping of the ‘refugee’ label – by the displaced persons themselves and by others in the community they join”.

Others felt there was relevance in the following:

“... Our planet is only a small star in space. It is our duty, to transform it into a planet whose creatures are no longer tormented by war, hunger and fear, no longer senselessly divided by race, color and ideology. Give us the courage and strength to begin this task today so that our children and children’s children shall one day carry the name of man with pride.”

From The Prayer of the United Nations