

Development and Democracy Conference Background info – Q&A

1. The aim of the European Year of Development was to draw development issues to the attention of the general public across the member states. What was achieved and what were the setbacks?

The Year succeeded in linking up different civil society actors (not just development NGOs) in raising awareness about sustainable development. The different activities and projects throughout the European Year demonstrated the ways in which ‘development’ is more than aid to poor countries. For example, one initiative that reached a wide¹ and probably new audience on development issues was [a short film](#) on the ‘€2 T-shirt’. This highlighted the relationship between us as consumers and the conditions and human rights of people making our clothes.

The Year contributed to our changing understanding of development cooperation. From a question of ‘rich countries helping poorer ones’ our sector is increasingly focused on highlighting the interconnectedness of the challenges that face us no matter where we live (for example climate change, inequality), and the need for a major transformation in our approach to tackle these challenges.

There is no doubt that a lot of people were reached. Of course there could always have been more. You can find out more on civil society’s contribution to the European Year and what was achieved on the [CONCORD website](#).

2. In your opinion, did the European Year of Development and spreading awareness of SDGs contribute to better communicating the refugee crisis to the general public? If yes, how?

The Year definitely contributed to a greater awareness of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and the Global goals that succeeded the Millennium Goals. It’s also worth highlighting that the Agenda commits all States “to facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well managed migration policies” (SDG 10.7).

Much more needs to be done to popularize the SDGs and show how they are relevant to people’s everyday lives and the issues they care about. One way of doing this is to ensure people are included in decisions that affect them.

My feeling is that people see the connection between development cooperation and tackling the root causes of forced migration. People see that the war in Syria and a *growing* refugee crisis in neighbouring countries also have an impact in Europe. And it’s the general

¹ *Seven and a half million views on You Tube.*



public who in their tens of thousands has been showing solidarity with refugees fleeing conflict. Last year I witnessed individual volunteers as well as organized NGOs on the 'frontline' in railway stations and ports along the Balkan and central European route providing food, information and support to people fleeing conflict or seeking a better life on our continent. Is it a challenge for us in Europe to cope? Of course it is. Are people fearful for their identity, their job, their safety? Of course they are. But when I see this incredible manifestation of solidarity, activity, volunteerism – especially from young people I feel: "wir schaffen das"

3. How has the refugee crisis impacted on public support for the organisations CONCORD represents?

Many humanitarian organisations who traditionally have worked outside the EU are now supporting refugees within the EU's borders – on the Greek islands, in Italy, in the Balkans and central Europe too. They can do this using expertise gained over many years in humanitarian emergencies (for example providing medical attention, food and basic needs, child support, addressing the specific needs of women refugees). NGOs have also been channeling the support provided by their members and supporters, undertaking campaigning and awareness work and fundraising. This is important because it provides a channel for peoples' desire to support and help. One challenge for our organisations is how to make use of the public's wish to do something. People want to donate clothes and food, they want to volunteer their time and skills but translating this resource into help takes time and organisation. Perhaps NGOs risk become too much like public or private service providers focusing on delivering government funded contracts. It is our challenge not only to manage projects but to harness the ingenuity, political power and resources of our supporters. The partnership of local authorities with NGOs and church and other groups and associations in receiving and supporting those coming to Europe this past year is worth underlining. I think this will be an important trend in the future too.

Finally, there is perhaps an impact on the public's interest and understanding in our role in neighbouring countries, in the fight against poverty and for human rights and on the interconnectedness of our world. A war in Syria has a very direct impact on us in Europe. Climate change in the horn of Africa is gradually leading to movements of people. Insecurity in the Sahel is taking away opportunities and livelihoods for people in their own countries. We cannot ignore these events and say they have nothing to do with us, that we have to 'deal with our own problems'.

Through an active and outward-oriented external policy including in the humanitarian field as well as through development cooperation, European governments can show their electorates that they are agents in tackling the situation and not helpless victims of a migration phenomenon. Critically, this means working as true partners of origin and transit countries and not treating them as the source of our 'problem'. I think the public get this if we – and I see this as NGOs' role too- take the time to explain and explore root causes not seek only to find quick answers in building walls and fences.



4. In relation to the refugee crisis, what are CONCORD's immediate priorities and plans for moving forward?

Let me first say that I think we need to be more precise when we talk about a 'refugee crisis'. Lebanon has a refugee crisis – one in four people in that country are refugees. The islands of Lesbos and Lampedusa are experiencing a crisis. But I wouldn't say that Belgium or the UK or Slovakia are experiencing a 'refugee crisis'. The numbers of refugees being resettled from the region, from Italy and Greece – especially highly vulnerable people including young children is frankly lamentable. As a continent - we need to do better.

CONCORD and our members are part of an effort to understand and tackle the root causes and to avoid the language of fear and xenophobia when discussing how to react to the unprecedented movements of people to our shores.

All aspects of EU policy tend now to be seen through the prism of migration and security so this question will dominate all our work. Our approach is to highlight and seek to tackle the root causes of forced migration. Specifically we will be working on the following.

Ensuring sufficient resources are made available and that we do not 'rob Peter to pay Paul'. In other words, ensuring that a country or peoples' access to aid is not determined mainly by their role in solving what Europe sees as our migration "problem". We need to find new resources – and given the attention being devoted to the topic, this really should be possible.

Ensuring the rules governing what we can spend aid on are respected. Aid is for the fight against poverty. We will work to ensure that aid remains focused on this and that more appropriate funds and instruments are used for the EU's other external actions be they diplomacy, security cooperation or promoting EU trade and business. The principles on development effectiveness agreed in the Paris and Busan accords provide the framework for our efforts. These include: country ownership, untied aid, donor coordination, beneficiaries consulted.

Ensuring that relevant non state actors – organisations representing young people and migrants, faith groups, development NGOs and others are fully consulted and involved in discussions of how programmes addressing migration question are conceived and implemented. Finally, ensuring that oversight and accountability mechanisms for how public funds are spent in the migration response are robust and transparent so that there are checks and balances and we can see the results of these initiatives.

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