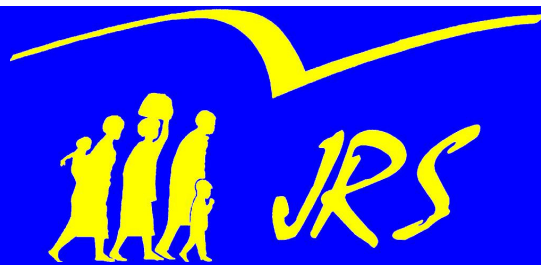


JRS EUROPE



On-line newsletter

Vol. 3 / Issue 2, April 2004

The JRS Europe team wishes you every blessing for Easter 2004

May 1st Historic Date

Under the Irish EU presidency 10 countries will formally accede to the EU on May 1st. Eight of them are from the former 'East Block'. When you think of how divided the situation in Europe was just 15 years ago you realise that this is indeed an historic moment.

But what should be a positive event has been marred by the flood of reports about possible large numbers of people coming from the East. The accusation was made that they will avail of Western Europe's social security and give nothing in return. A recent study cited in Migration News Sheet, February 2004, says that far from being a drain, it is the young, the educated and the highly skilled who are most likely to migrate westwards and that they will make an invaluable contribution to western economies.

Detention of asylum seekers and migrants has been a continued concern of JRS in Europe with many of our personnel across Europe visiting those detained and providing material aid, legal advice as well as friendship and support. We in JRS see at first hand the human misery and distress, much of it caused by tighter restrictions. These often fail to take the vulnerability and humanity of the people into account.

A worrying trend is that what should be a positive cooperation between government and non governmental agencies has now become more difficult. Agencies such as JRS can give valuable understanding into the human situations as well as expert legal opinion. Governments, ideally, should be seeking workable solutions based on

the highest human rights standards and should avail of NGO expertise. Surely both can work together. Yet, authorities in some instances are becoming less willing to allow access to detention or asylum reception centres or, if access is permitted, to impose restrictions on NGOs which often seem arbitrary. We believe that this approach is based on a narrow agenda which, in many cases, comes down to the desire to deter more migrants or asylum seekers from coming by making the lives of those who are here more difficult.



"Looking for a new home..."
Photo by JRS Slovenia

Another concern we have is that the distinction between asylum seekers, who should be accommodated in open centres, and irregular migrants who are detained in closed centres is now becoming blurred. We find an increasing trend to detain asylum seekers in closed centres or to build asylum reception centres so far from cities or towns that they become virtual prisons and that NGO access is more and more difficult.

Our JRS position on detention is clear: Detention of asylum seekers should be avoided.

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May 1st Historic Date

And the detention of irregular migrants should only be in certain extremely well defined instances. Alternatives to detention can and should be found. Prison and deprivation of liberty is used by societies to contain those who are a danger to those societies or as a punishment. To see detention being increasingly and even routinely used against asylum seekers and migrants, and to see them deprived of their liberty, is a worrying trend and asks serious questions about our commitment to fundamental human rights and freedoms. The new enlarged Europe must find a better

approach if it is not to erode its own foundations. At this Easter time, we are aware of the suffering and passion of so many people both around the world and here in our own continent. Easter tells us that that our God is active raising people up and bringing new life. Let us pray that we can work with this God more and more closely, being united to the people to whom he is so close, especially those who are poorest and most in need.

John Dardis SJ
Regional Director

Computer training, schools poster competition, radio broadcasts: all in a day's work for JRS Slovenia.

Peter Girašek SJ, a Jesuit student from Slovakia, is working in JRS Slovenia. Here he tells of developments in JRS Slovenia. Among them is his own innovative project in computer training.

Poster Competition

A project of JRS Slovenia aimed especially at schools and entitled "Welcoming our new friends" has just finished. In cooperation with theatre actor and director Gregorom Čušin we prepared a short theatre piece about the challenge of integrating Bosnian refugees into Slovenian society. After the performance the children painted posters, from which the jury gave prizes to four. All paintings were shown on 15 March in the city of Novo Mesto, where the winning school is. Five schools and 1500 children took part in the project

Computer Classes

We run a project „Computer classes“ in the asylum-seekers centre. It helps asylum seekers and refugees with basic computer skills. For most of the 14 participants it has been their first work with a computer.

Children's Library

In the asylum-seekers centre JRS is also taking part in the project of „Children library“. The library is open two hours a day. As we speak about the children who don't yet go to school, we try, through games, to teach them basic skills, a sense of solidarity and cooperation, to share with others, to greet, to thank. That's also the way to teach them the Slovenian language.

Ongoing work – detention centres, Radio

As part of our ongoing work, we are involved in twice weekly visits to „Postojna Detention center“. A big part of these visits is done by our volunteers. The goal of visits is social communication and helping to organise legal assistance. This year for the first time we organized a concert called 'Concert of life'. The concert was good chance for us to bring the problems in the detention centre closer to local authorities, municipality, to local charities and to other invited NGOs. I must mention also our bi weekly radio broadcast on Slovenian catholic radio Ognjišče. The broadcast is a part of our project entitled „Building a more open society“. Its aim is to bring the issue of refugees to society. In each broadcast a guest takes part usually from government or from another NGO working with refugees. The broadcast is very helpful to raise material support for refugees and asylum applicants. Inre alia I can mention baby beds or clothes gathered thank to this broadcast.

...Two years old!

On 19 March we celebrated the birthday of JRS Slovenia, this year its second birthday. For this occasion we organized a party for our friends and benefactors to present them our work and express our gratitude for their help. From 18-23 March regional director John Dardis visited the office.

On behalf of our team, Fr. Marian Sef SJ, Tine Jenko SJ, Milena Bajt, Tatjana Fabjancic, Petra Grimani, Fredi Vešljigaj and our 12 volunteers, the best regards

Peter Girašek SJ

New structure for JRS in Spain

The new co-ordinator for JRS in Spain is **José Ignacio (Nacho) Eguizabal Escribano** (i.eguizabal@alboan.org). Nacho works in Alboan, the NGO of the Loyola Jesuit province. He will liaise with Entreculturas in Madrid and Intermon-Oxfam in Barcelona. Together they will continue supporting JRS projects across the world. They will also support our JRS advocacy work across Europe and ensure Spain's involvement. All three NGOs will disseminate information about JRS in their regular newsletters and bulletins. **Carles Casals** will continue in producing a regular newsletter as well as information for journalists.

JRS Italy

JRS is currently running project "**Reading doesn't go in exile**", in partnership with the Ministry of Cultural Estate and Activities. It wants to invite students to deepen their knowledge of human rights and asylum through the reading of books whose authors were exiled or talked of exile. Authors include Pablo Neruda, Milan Kundera, Tahr Ben Jelloun, Isabel Allende, Luis Sepulveda, Doris Lessing. In 2004 and 2005 in 50 schools of Milan, Padova, Naples, Roma, Brindisi and Palermo 80 meetings will take place among refugees, students, Astalli Foundation and some of the authors.

JRS UK office

JRS welcomes new members to its office team. **Shana Mongwanga** is the new JRS Outreach worker. She was born in Bukavu, DR Congo and previously worked as co-ordinator at Islington Zairean Refugee Group and as a Bilingual Community worker for Cambridge Education Associates at Islington. **David Savo**, is Burundian in background and has been in UK since 1995. David graduated in July 2003 with a degree in development studies from Middlesex University. JRS UK will be moving in the last week of April and is going to be closed from 27th April to 10th May. Address details will follow in April.

New member of JRS Europe team

Renaud Gaudin de Villaine will join the JRS Europe Advocacy and Policy desk on April 19 and will primarily do research work on detention in Europe. Renaud is a graduate of Paris V Malakoff University (B.A. in French law), he then received a Master's in Public Law (2002) as well as in Human Rights and Humanitarian Law with a specialization in Refugees' Law (2003) in Paris II Panthéon-Assas University.

JRS Europe Council

Rosario Farmhouse's term on the JRS Europe Regional Director's Council ends in April. JRS across Europe owes her a debt of gratitude for her dedicated and generous service. We wish her well in her busy work as Country Director of JRS Portugal. Rosario's successor will be Slovenian Jesuit **Robin Schweiger SJ** who is currently completing a doctorate in Rome's Gregorian University.

" You see one foreigner, a refugee sees 23 million"

***Mihai Benchea**, project co-ordinator for JRS in Romania tells of a national refugee campaign in Romania in which JRS has taken part.*

In the middle of February 2004 a national campaign in favor of refugees, foreigners and migrants started in Romania. This is the first campaign on such a large scale at national level. The campaign includes daily TV spots, leaflets, posters, refugee focused articles in main newspapers, radio transmission of panel discussions on refugee issues.

JRS has been an active participant in this campaign from the very beginning. JRS staff was present at public panel discussions in Bucharest and Timisoara, the two cities most important cities for refugees. The main topic of these meetings was the integration of refugees. JRS staff were interviewed by journalists. JRS participation in a TV talk-show on the life of refugees in Romania is currently under discussion.

The messages of the campaign:

- " A refugee is a lonely person, a foreigner in a foreign land".
- "A refugee passes the inferno of exile and we should accept him/her to live next to us. Let us help them to start a new life in Romania."

The campaign has been organized by Ministry of Home Affairs, Refugee Department. The campaign is co-financed by the European Union together with the Romanian Government.

New reception center in Timisoara

On 4th February the government opened a new reception centre close to the Hungarian border, with a capacity for more than 200 persons. The centre was co-financed by the EU delegation to Romania and by the Romanian government. The refugee authority and the regional director of JRS Europe have asked JRS Romania staff to assess the situation in such border reception centers. The day when Hungary become member state to the EU, we can expect first inhabitants in this centre.

JRS presence in Otopeni centre

JRS personnel have started visiting detainees in the Otopeni centre Bucharest.

“Justice is not necessarily linked to faith, but Christian “faith should be linked to justice. It is a characteristic trait of JRS that all its work is rooted in Christian faith.” (Mark Rotsaert SJ)

Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM) in Geneva/Switzerland (www.gcim.org)

Wishing to provide the framework for the formulation of a coherent, comprehensive and global response to migration issues, and acting on the encouragement of the UN Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, Sweden and Switzerland, together with the governments of Brazil, Morocco, and the Philippines, decided to establish a Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM), which held its constituting session in February 2004. The mandate of the Commission is threefold: Placing International Migration on the Global Agenda Analyzing Gaps in Current Approaches to Migration and Examining Inter-linkages with Other Issue-Areas, and presenting Recommendations to the UN Secretary-General and other Stakeholders

The Commission is constituted as an independent body of individuals, serving in their personal capacity. The South African Mamphela Ramphele, a managing director at the World Bank, and Jan Karlsson, the former Swedish minister for migration and development, co-chair the commission. Commissioners from Europe are: Mr. Joris Demmink (Netherlands), Mr. Manuel Marin (Spain), Mrs. Mary Robinson (Ireland), Prof. Dr. Rita Süssmuth (Germany) and Prof. Dr. Valery Tishkov (Russia). The GCIM will make available its final report to the UN Secretary General, and to other stakeholders, in the summer of 2005. The report will also be discussed in the Core Group of Governments.

Detention

In January 2004, in a speech to the members of the European Parliament, UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, heavily criticized the EU policies towards refugees and migrants. He spoke of “offshore barriers” and “refused entry because of restrictive interpretations” of the Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, and stated that refugees are “detained for excessive periods in unsatisfactory conditions”. In February 2004, The Council of Europe’s Commissioner for Human Rights, Alvaro Gil-Robles, issued a harsh report on the detention centers, e.g. in Hal Far and Hal Safi (Malta) considering both as unsuitable to host human beings.

on Detention is available in www.jrseurope.org

2004 JRS-Europe Advocacy and Policy Group

Against the background that advocacy at the Brussels EU level must be accompanied by advocacy at national level, if advocacy is to be effective, JRS-Europe Director, John Dardis SJ, mandated a 2004 JRS-Europe Advocacy and Policy Group. The aim is that this group will be a resource for the JRS-Europe Advocacy and Policy Officer who will convene and chair the meetings. The group’s main role is to work out an advocacy strategy about emerging EU asylum issues of relevance to JRS-Europe, helping to implement the JRS-Europe Advocacy Plan 2004 – 2006. Members are: Mihai Benchea (Romania), Anne Christine Bloch (Geneva), Katrine Camilleri (Malta), Anna Marie Gallagher (Spain/USA), Stefan Kessler (Germany), Christophe Renders SJ (Belgium) and Louise Zanre (UK).

EU Legislation:
SECURITAS CONTRA HUMANITATEM

The Amsterdam Treaty (1999) obliges EU Member States to adopt a number of legislative measures in the areas of asylum and immigration by 1 May 2004. Most of those legislative tasks are accomplished – except the adoption of a “Council Directive on minimum standards on procedures in Member States for granting and withdrawing refugee status” and a “Council Directive on minimum standards for the qualification and status of third country nationals and stateless persons as refugees or as persons who otherwise need international protection”. At the latest since the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, it became very obvious that the repressive and restrictive policy trend is getting even stronger. In the EU, domestic security as well as refugee protection falls within the competence of Justice and Home Ministers, and presently Ministers clearly give priority to domestic security over refugee protection. In February 2004, EU Commissioner for Justice and Home Affairs, António Vitorino, when debating with the European Parliament, left little doubt that when it comes to weighing the rights associated with immigration and asylum against the security and support of a largely sceptical EU public opinion, the latter must win out.