

HUMAN DIGNITY FOUNDATION

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**WHEN A RESPONSE  
IS REQUIRED:  
OUT-OF  
PROGRAMME  
FUNDING IN A TIME  
OF CRISIS**

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AN EVALUATION CASE STUDY





# When a Response is Required: Out-of-programme funding in a time of crisis

An Evaluation Case Study

## INTRODUCTION

In March 2018, the Human Dignity Foundation (HDF) commissioned a study to evaluate the impact of an out-of-programme grant made to the Belfast-based Social Change Initiative (SCI), in response to the refugee crisis in 2015. In addition to evaluating the results, the case study explored the process and parameters HDF put into place as they considered funding options potential grantees, and lessons for donors gleaned from this experience. This document summarises the key findings and lessons from the study by *Rebecca Rittgers*.

In early 2016, HDF made a two-year grant of \$1,088,715 to SCI in support of its project “Standards and Practice in Migration: Improving Effectiveness.” This grant funded a two-strand initiative to “make a significant contribution to improving standards and practice which will enable interventions that reflect the new realities of why people are forced to migrate to Europe.” The grant supported SCI’s efforts to:

1. Support civil society to engage in the UN’s review and revision of international mechanisms concerning refugees.
2. build the capacity within civil society in Europe to influence both public policy and narrative on migrants and refugees through segmented polling research and message development.

## SETTING THE STAGE

The year of 2015 saw an unprecedented flow of refugees into Europe. A record 1.3 million migrants applied for asylum in the 28 member states of the EU, Norway and Switzerland during that year, double from the year prior. Over half of these asylum seekers originated from three war-torn and largely Muslim countries – Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. The desperation of those fleeing these conflicts led to perilous water-crossings into Southern Europe and incredible human suffering and loss of life.<sup>1</sup> Many of those lost at sea or on dangerous trails were children.

HDF is not a funder of migrant and refugee issues. But watching the refugee crisis unfold across Europe in 2015, the foundation’s board and staff felt a moral mandate to respond in some form or fashion to this human rights crisis. HDF made the decision to look for a funding opportunity that would represent

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<sup>1</sup> Pew Research Center reporting. [www.pewglobal.org/2016/08/02/number-of-refugees-to-europe-surges-to-record-1-3-million-in-2015/](http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/08/02/number-of-refugees-to-europe-surges-to-record-1-3-million-in-2015/)

a meaningful response to the vulnerable situation of migrants and refugees in Europe. In making this decision, parameters were established:



## ENGAGING WITH THE SOCIAL CHANGE INITIATIVE

HDF's explorations led them to the Social Change Initiative, an international NGO based in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Its work is focused on improving the effectiveness of activism and funding for progressive social change. Migration is a priority issue for SCI and since its inception in 2015, the organization has supported a series of discussions and exchanges with activists and thinkers, notably to affect strategic advocacy and support civil society to influence the political and policy debate around migrants and refugees. As a potential grantee, SCI and the work they proposed was the right fit for HDF on a number of levels:

1. The initiative created something that could be handed off to others – a launching pad of capacity that could be built upon.
2. It involved networks and involved multiple strands of activity – expanding the reach of HDF's funding.
3. SCI's analysis and strategic response was consistent with HDF's own assessments of the situation and openings for change.
4. While a new organization, SCI was staffed with *mature advocates and seasoned strategists* who could deliver on their promises with minimal oversight.
5. SCI presented HDF with strategic, innovative targets and the confidence to be opportunistic in their approach.
6. SCI demonstrated that they were well connected with civil society and policy makers and could access the best experts.
7. SCI knew the funding world and prioritized sustainability of the work in its strategic approach.
8. SCI's desire for flexibility and focus on impact mirrored HDF's own understanding of how social change happens.

# OVERVIEW OF GRANT ACHIEVEMENTS

## Strand 1:

Develop capacity to engage & influence UN refugee frameworks



### CONVENINGS

Multiple convenings involving civil society, academics, policy & diplomatic experts.



### NGO SUPPORT

Financial support to NGO to help them strategize and plan.



### ANALYSIS & RESEARCH

Commissioning of analysis, polling & the production of advocacy & messaging guides



### EXPERT ADVICE

Resourcing activists to access expertise in communications and political strategy

## SCI Support Enabled:

### Strand 1

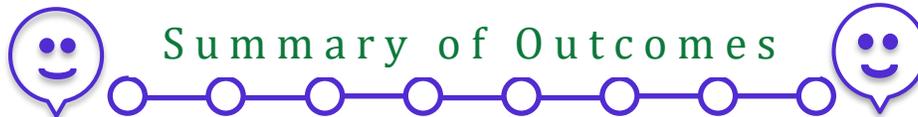
- 1 Human Rights First to gather support from ex-military figures on the value of refugees & importance to world peacekeeping of strong refugee systems and protocols
- 2 South African advocates to come together to discuss their priorities for the Compact and to think about the importance of the Compact and the UN Process
- 3 A safe space for NGOs to listen & learn from each other & seed thinking about holistic responses to the refugee experience

### Strand 2

The production of ground-breaking segmented polling research in 6 EU countries on attitudes towards migrants & refugees (Figure 1.0). This gave advocates a tangible product they didn't have before - something they could hold, study & use in their advocacy

Advocates to understand how values are integral to communications, providing a platform to develop more effective strategies to engage the 'anxious middle'

The establishment of open spaces and networks for NGOs to reflect & think through new ways of talking about migration



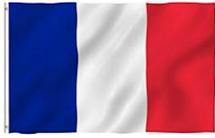
### Strand 1

Understanding the impact of civil society's advocacy will be clearer once the final Compact language is issued. The work has already had a direct influence on the Compact review process. There is a high level of confidence among advocates that this intervention has provided a deeper understanding of the UN process & fostered future collaboration & coordination for the challenges ahead.

### Strand 2

Segmented polling data & strategic engagement has created a path forward, enabling advocates to define audiences, tailor messages & identify the most effective messengers in the face of overwhelming velocity from the opposition. This work has resulted in the establishment of fledging structures amongst NGOs to develop counter narratives and it initiated the beginnings of trainings to help NGOs with messaging.

Figure 1.0: Key Insights from Segmented Polling Research



FRANCE

The migration debate in France is framed between those who are for (30%) & those who are against (20%). The remaining 50% are worried for economic reasons, identity/cultural reasons, or due to physical fear. It is vital for communicators to understand how to reach them effectively



GREECE

The political system in Greece is chaotic & research shows that people want to bring back harmony and order. Communicators must be aware of the political context when talking about migration, choosing specific moments to message on issues related to migration and holding back at others. For example, democratic instruments, like citizens' initiatives, can help bring about a positive perception of migration among the public



ITALY

The impact of Pope Francis's declaration on migration was clear on public attitudes, while the needs & perspectives of those who are 'culturally Catholic' are important to consider when communicating. In addition, the difference between city & regional identities is significant, and it remains hard to influence local conversations on migration and hate speech

## CONVENINGS BEYOND CONVENING

SCI has a particular skill at convening. With HDF support, they used convenings not to convince but to generate ideas and local ownership. HDF's willingness to be flexible afforded SCI with the dexterity to use convenings to build capacity. Over the course of the grant, SCI organized multiple convenings with its in-country partners that brought together well over 100 CSOs and included a far-reaching range of networks.

As a result of *how* SCI crafted in-country convenings to ensure that the right representation was in the room, and because of the spirit of these gatherings, country partners in France, Germany, Italy and Greece, have noted what seems to be an emergent new openness and willingness to come together within civil society, believing the landscape now has potential to be much less fragmented. Through convenings, technical assistance, partnership building and networking, country structures have been supported to continue to broaden their coalitions and networks, connecting with an increasing number of groups (both in and beyond the migrant and refugee world) to share the power of the polling research, analysis and methodology of segmented advocacy to advance social change.

## NEW THOUGHTS, NEW MINDSETS

Advocates unanimously felt that SCI helped them break through old thinking and promote a new generation of advocacy and activism. SCI's capacity to provide groups with access to expertise like Purpose, Frank Sharry from America's Voice and Sarah Spencer from Compass at the University of Oxford, made a real difference in how they were able to engage in new knowledge and be challenged and inspired. SCI was able to identify and bring in expertise as and when it was required, in response to real and not prescribed or predetermined needs. Additionally, SCI did not just make expertise available, but coached and mentored advocates on how to make best use of these resources.

## FOCUS, INNOVATION AND IMPACT

Groups that worked with SCI were grateful for the seriousness with which they regarded impact and the high bar they set. SCI pushed its partners to focus on real change. Nothing was suggested by SCI for the sake of discourse. Partners soon trusted that what was being asked of them by SCI would result in forward movement and was based on a methodology that produced results. A “light bulb” moment generally occurred for the groups SCI worked with when they understood the value of polling. It changed advocates perception of how they could make change and the kinds of change they could make by addressing their advocacy to a targeted section of society that was proven to be “moveable.”

## NEW WAY OF WORKING

*“It’s not easy to find this kind of partner – usually when groups come from abroad they act like they know more than you do. SCI was refreshing – their openness, their curiosity and priority on exchanging knowledge and learning from each other.”*

For advocates in the four priority countries of France, Germany, Greece and Italy, their experience working with SCI represented a new and innovative way of partnering. SCI worked closely with country partners, constantly exchanging views and developments, curious to learn about the context of their work and the nuances of civil society. SCI took the time to gain the intelligence to engage groups in their current circumstances, not where SCI assumed they would or should be. This was very appreciated by groups – they did not feel patronized but felt from the beginning like peers, partners on a journey together.

## SUSTAINABILITY

There is little doubt that this transformative work will continue well beyond the end of HDF’s grant. HDF funding supported the initial polling that allowed civil society, funders, and public servants to “get it.” It created a demand from advocates for segmented research and a realization and appreciation of the power of knowing what makes people tick in the “anxious middle.” Now that they know the usefulness and power of this kind of information, going back to the old ways would be like shooting targets in the dark. What has been piloted and put into place under the HDF funding has impacted the funder conversation as well. Previously, strategic communication was bantered around by the funding community but considered too expensive, too risky, and – importantly - beyond the capacity and expertise of advocates to successfully pull off. SCI’s work to establish hubs and connected constituencies, to “spread the gospel” of segmented polling, and stand up training and local ownership, has provided the architecture, vocabulary and appetites that will increasingly attract donor interest.

The concept of segmented attitudinal analysis that uncovers a textured and nuanced understanding of civil society has presented new opportunities for donors to support social change. For example, inspired by the polling supported by this grant, advocates in France are now engaged in a segmented polling project looking specifically at attitudes toward migrants and refugees of French Catholics. The ramifications of this kind of research findings for advocacy targeted at an influential population like the Catholics are extremely interesting and hold promise of new opportunities for impact.

SCI will continue its work to deepen narrative change capacity seeded by HDF’s grant. Using the progress and data facilitated by HDF’s funding, SCI was able to leverage in 2017 a three-year, US \$3.0m

grant from The Atlantic Philanthropies in support of its “Migrant Narrative Project.” These funds will allow SCI to continue to build out the network of strategic communications hubs across Europe. With this support and support from other donors, SCI fully expects to continue to build this network of advocates, providing training and support, expanding the number of civil society groups engaged in pushing forward effective narratives, and providing them with space for co-learning, and sharing experiences, best practices and lessons learned.

Throughout its efforts, sustainability and self-reliance has been woven into the fabric of SCI’s engagement with the country hubs. The continued viability of these national efforts is a priority. A core principle for SCI is to back local groups to develop within them the leadership, capacity and to become eventually self-reliant. To this end, SCI constantly positions its local partners to enable them to build their own “presence.” For many of these groups, their work has been so consuming that they give little time and energy to building up their own external profiles. SCI, by using convenings and encouraging participation by funders and government officials, has provided space for the country partners to share their work, showcase their expertise, and expand their external presence in a way that will contribute to their future sustainability.

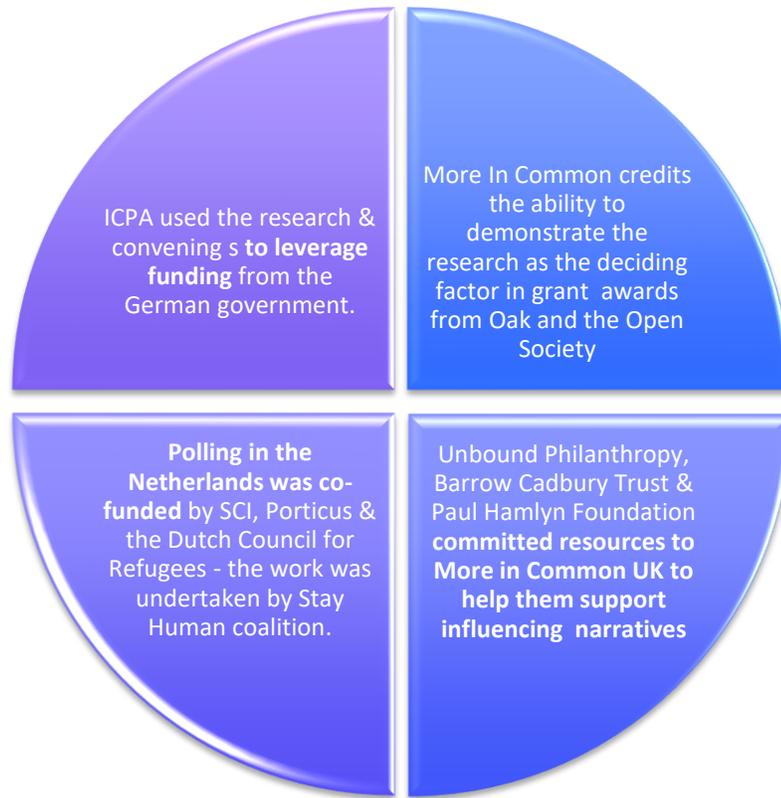
Country partners are also approaching donors in a different way as a result of this experience. In many places in Europe, traditional philanthropy is cautious and shuns controversy, including “hot-button” issues like migration. Local partner groups are now approaching funders in a different way because they have a different thing to offer. This strategic communications work affords donors the opportunity to support work that is more mechanical than controversial but has a high potential for producing the impact they seek with their funds. Advocates are not asking donors to fund possibly controversial or politically sensitive advocacy, or asking donors to “take a side,” but are seeking funding to support research that will produce findings that can foster civic engagement and dialogue.

*“Sharing this segmented data with my donors gives me a way to show in a non-abstract, but tangible form, how they can support cultural change.”*

It is also worth noting that the full extent of the leverage created by HDF’s funding has yet to be seen. Beyond the countries discussed here, HDF’s support of this work has helped to catalyse a much larger response and interest from other civil society stakeholders, and both advocates and funders from countries like Belgium and Sweden have expressed excitement about engaging in similar work.

SCI has maintained a close relationship with the migrant donor collaborative EPIM throughout this project, and together co-hosted the two large meetings in Brussels in 2017 and 2018 to present this work to donors and civil society representatives from across Europe. This partnership has been important in helping disseminate this strategic approach, its impact to a broad range of donors and will continue to be a source of engagement and sustainability for the work in the years ahead.

In addition to the Atlantic Philanthropies support for SCI, here are a few examples of how HDF’s support has leveraged additional funding for this work:



## WHAT LESSONS CAN WE GAIN FROM THIS GRANT FOR HDF AND OTHER DONORS?

**MAKING A ONE-TIME OUT-OF-PROGRAMME GRANT IS POSSIBLE BUT NEEDS TO BE A VERY DELIBERATE ACT:** HDF felt a moral compulsion to respond to the refugee and migrant “crisis.” For any foundation, funding outside of its programme rails can be challenging and perhaps risky. There can be a lack of programme expertise to make sound judgments, and an absence of well-developed guidelines that define a funding approach. In addition, there is the complicated choreography of making a grant of significance without creating new dependencies or expectations. HDF provides an excellent example of a foundation funding outside of its comfort zone but doing it in a way that mitigated these risks. They established a set of very clear parameters for this grant and were transparent about them from the beginning. They did not call for proposals but conducted their own due diligence inquiry to find a project that worked for them. From the start, HDF staff controlled the process and deftly managed expectations.

**MIRROR YOUR OWN EXPERIENCES AND VALUES IN OUT-OF-PROGRAMME INVESTMENTS:** While HDF was not a migrant or refugee funder, they did have a rich and deep understanding of how social change happens, and of the mechanisms – both at the macro (international instruments and governments) and micro (community engagement and empowerment) levels – that create space in civil society for change to happen. They also had some experiences from their core programming of narrative and strategic communications. HDF is committed in its grant making to forward its values of passion, accountability, courage, and excellence. By connecting with

their own experiences, and staying true to their values, HDF was able to make this out-of-programme grant in a successful way, with little internal conflict.

**BET ON A STRATEGIST, NOT A STRATEGY:** HDF understood SCI as a centre of gravity, not a factory. While HDF did not have deep knowledge of the refugee and migrant field, it understood the challenges it faced from the rising populism. HDF saw in SCI smart, connected strategists who did have a deep knowledge of this field, but also knew their own limits and how and when to access external expertise. What they proposed made sense strategically, filled a real gap, and responded to an evident opportunity in an accessible way. SCI also understood the funding world, and how to be strategic with resources.

**VISION AND CAPACITY IS MORE POWERFUL THAN A PLAN:** Advancing change for an issue like migration requires a dynamic approach. Circumstances, priorities, and opportunities change on a daily basis. SCI insisted from the beginning that things *would* change, and that it could not give HDF a step-by-step work plan for how they would proceed, nor could they provide a definitive budget for how funds would be spent. They did, however, demonstrate to HDF that they had a vision for change, a deep understanding on how change happens, and the capacity to bring together the pieces and players required to advance change. HDF's bet on SCI's vision, and not its plan – was well placed.

**DYNAMIC IS GOOD BUT HAVE A PROCESS TO DEAL WITH IT:** Because time and effort was taken in the early stages of the relationship, SCI's requests for revisions to their plans and reallocation of resources were not threatening to HDF. This was part of the parameters established from the beginning. Dialogue was key, however, to the success of this dynamic aspect of their relationship. HDF and SCI kept a very open dialogue on the progress of the grant. When changes were proposed, care was taken to ensure a conversation was had about the rationale behind the change, why it was necessary and how it fitted into the strategy.

**CREATE SPACE FOR DONORS AND ADVOCATES TO EVOLVE TOGETHER:** Convening was an important aspect of this grant, and the future sustainability of the work a key priority. From the beginning, SCI created space and opportunity for donors to sit alongside advocates and together experience a journey of discovery and thought. There were few stand-alone "donors briefings" per se. SCI's understanding of philanthropy made them aware of not only how to approach and engage donors, but also provided them with a certain degree of boldness – understanding that like the advocates, donors are looking for ways to make change, and with this work, SCI and its partners were providing these grant makers with potential means to do their own work better. They understood the power of bringing in donors early in the process, as fellow travellers, and how this early engagement could hold promise for the continued sustainability of the work.

**MUSCLES DON'T FLEX WITHOUT CONNECTIVE TISSUE:** As SCI's work progressed, HDF began to understand that this team was filling a very important gap and providing – through engagement, training, research, and support – a critical piece of the social change puzzle. SCI's model - as catalysts, connectors and motivators backing activists to excel and make change happen - needs to be better understood and considered by donors. This network building, capacity sharing, skills transfer, and coordination rarely happen organically. This is a piece that is too often overlooked by funders.