

Case: Support of volunteers in refugee reception centre (draft)

The on-going arrival of refugees in southern Germany turns into a humanitarian problem. With winter coming, local authorities are struggling to provide shelter, guarantee food supply and health care for those who need it. Due to the shortage in accommodation and healthcare provision, local government depends on the support of NGOs to provide services and in particular to run the refugee camps in Germany. It is expected that the number of immigrants will increase during the next few weeks and the bad weather will contribute to a decline in health.

You are an executive officer in one of these NGOs, supporting the work effort and assisting with administrative work in the reception centre. Recently your efforts have been strongly supported by volunteers and loosely organized civic groups. They were welcoming refugees and bringing food, clothes, sanitary products and toys. Trained voluntary health care professionals are supporting official medical services, and a few citizens have even offered accommodation to refugees. The support of local volunteers is crucial for the welfare of the migrants.

While local authorities were positive about this form of informal support, they find it increasingly difficult to deal with the effects of these ad hoc arrangements. Some of the refugees complain about unequal distribution of goods and the way they are dealt with in the reception centres. Also, there have been instances of volunteers immediately hosting displaced persons in their homes which helps them avoid the registration process. This could lead to an uncontrolled movement of asylum seekers.

Furthermore, there are rumours that some helpers made deliberately false promises to refugees to get residence rights purely for financial gain. As a consequence of these undesired effects local authorities want you to restrict people working in the reception camps to registered workers of your NGO only. This, however, may radically decrease the possibilities of providing basic services. Since you are in charge of staffing within the reception centre, you have control over the access restrictions. You can either comply with the demand of local authorities by restricting access for volunteer workers, or you can continue allowing civic support. Time is of the essence as more refugees are coming.

Audience

- Students in healthcare ethics/humanitarian ethics classes
- Healthcare & NGO workers

Issues raised

- conflict between beneficence/non-maleficence and chain of command/duty to obey
- conflict between (good) intentions and (unintended) effects
- distributive justice and levelling down

- acting under uncertainty

Possible learning outcomes

1. Basic stakeholder analysis
2. Identification of different moral issues and connecting these with the perspective of particular stakeholders
3. Understanding the context of a moral problem
4. Balancing different moral norms/values
5. To gain an understanding of moral decision frameworks and their application

Keywords

Refugees, refugee reception camps, NGOs, volunteers, compliance, moral decision making, duties, rights, justice, interests, welfare, levelling-down, resource allocation

Questions & Instructions for trainers

Question 1 *(individual work and moderated discussion, 15 min)*

Who are the different stakeholders involved in this case? What are their interests? List the most important 'actors' and at least three possible interests (claims, demands...) each of them may have. (Note: some stakeholders might not be mentioned in the case outline) (15 min)

Instructions for trainer

- The list of possible stakeholders and interests is open ended. Make sure, however, that by the end of this first task all the important stakeholders have been identified (see example below)
- Make students aware that identifying stakeholders and their interests is different from identifying *legitimate* interests or (morally) *good* stakeholders (i.e. fraudsters can also be stakeholders). Furthermore, not all interests and actors have been made explicit in the case outline. Sometimes you have to consider what the (possible) interests of stakeholders could be. Also there might be some actors involved that are not mentioned in the case
- By the end of question 1 your students should have identified the relevant stakeholders (see below).

Possible solution:

- NGO
 - providing a service to refugees; “doing a good job”; “helping people”; security of staff; reputation of the NGO; successful cooperation with other organisations; obeying the law; efficiency; safety...
- Refugees in the reception centre
 - Getting help, food, shelter etc.; seek asylum; fast processing into refugee camp; avoiding refugee camp; fair and “good” treatment; security; ...
- Future refugees to come
 - [see above]; getting to the refugee camp itself and getting to reception centre sooner than later...
- Local authorities

- Getting refugees through registration process; security; controlling the situation and keeping order; obeying the laws and regulations ...
- Volunteers & civic groups
 - Want to help; “feels good”; “solve the problem”; integrate people; or fraudsters exploiting the refugees and/or situation and not wishing to get caught
- Citizenry
 - Security; allowing migration or not(?)

Question 2 (moderated group discussion, 20 min)

Having identified the stakeholders involved in this case and some of their interests, we will now consider some corresponding moral issues at stake. Consider which (legitimate and perhaps illegitimate) moral demands or claims particular actors might have.

Instructions for trainers

- Motivate group to discuss question no. 2
- Identify and discuss the different claims/demands of the identified stakeholders
- If possible try to translate everyday-language into ethical terminology. E.g. instead of saying “some get more than others” say “unequal distribution of goods”. This may help your students to get familiar with terminology.
- Prioritise these moral demands according to:
 - 1.) Possible consequences;
 - 2.) rights/duties; and
 - 3.) Intentions.
- Depending on the ethical background of your audience you may need time during the discussion to give some background information about these distinctions:
 - 1.) Consequences: related to questions of interests, well-being, quality of life, harm, common good and (consequentialist) cost-benefit analysis
 - 2.) Rights/duties: relates to questions of justice, fairness and equality; human dignity and respect, liberty and autonomy
 - 3.) Intentions: relates to questions of virtues, character traits, integrity habits, responsibilities, and courage
- You may wish to distinguish between the possible moral issues involved in option 1 (restricting access) and option 2 (unrestricted access).
- 2-3 moral issues will be enough for further discussion

Possible answer:

1.) The possible impact of restricting access to the reception centre

	Consequences	rights/duties	Virtues/Intentions
NGO Staff	-work overload (welfare)	-right to work safely- may be compromised	-compliance with authorities
Refugees	- reduction in standard of care for most people (less well-being) -alienation of refugees	- just distribution of goods (but may be subjected to levelling-down)	N/A
Future	- slower processing in	- equal processing in	N/A

refugees	reception centre (less wellbeing?)	reception- may be undermined/slower	
Local authorities	- keeping control	- demands are met, compliance	- keeping integrity of the system
Volunteers	- not being allowed to help people	-freedom to help is removed	- subverting/disappointing good intentions

2.) Possible impact of not restricting access to the reception centre

	Consequences	rights/duties	virtues/intentions
NGO Staff	- getting help for their work but may be less structured	- duties of care towards refugees can better be met	- wilfully acting against the rules of the local authority
Refugees	- better services for some, possible harm through fraudsters	-equal distribution of goods may be undermined and right not to be a victim of crime	- creating conditions that allow corruption
Future refugees	- increased confusion in the processing system	- the right to equal treatment as a refugee	
Local authorities	- seen to be promoting common good despite their true intentions	- provide services under legislation	- not respected the integrity of the policy
Volunteers	- “feeling good” about helping	- respect for individual’s right to act altruistically	- courage to help , good intentions or fraudulent intention

Question 3 (group discussion, 15 min)

Identify and discuss, by comparing both tables, the most pressing moral issues.

Instructions for trainers

- Motivate your group to fully discuss the issues
- While balancing the moral issues, consider how students rank the three dimensions (consequences / duties & rights/ intentions)
- While there will certainly be no agreement on what the “best” option is, by the end of the discussion students should be familiar with multiple dimensions of ethical decision making and how to structure a moral question which might be useful for further investigation

Possible answers (i.e. conflicts):

- Conflict between civil order (option 1) and welfare of people and supporting people doing good deeds (option 2)
 - Question: How much value do we put on supporting civil order compared to promoting welfare and allowing/encouraging people doing “good deeds”?
- Conflict between welfare of refugees (option 2) and distributive justice (option 1)
 - Question: Is it (morally better) that *all* refugees are in an equally bad position than some refugees being better off?
 - Further questions to consider: What role should uncertain information (rumours about fraud issues) play in decision making? How would you balance the welfare of current refugees with the welfare of future refugees to come; what role does the issue of justice play here?

- Further question to consider: What could the future implications of options 1 and 2 be- when examining the issue of integrating migrants into society?