

PROGRAM OFFICER

Joseph Bednarek

EDUCATION

MA, Harvard University
BS, Georgetown University

LANGUAGES

Russian, Ukrainian

EUROPE & EURASIA

Global Fund for Children grassroots partners work to alleviate poverty, increase access to education, and improve conditions for marginalized populations, among other issues. Sometimes, after a community-based organization has worked for years on a particular issue, a sudden event changes everything. Other times, changes take a while to develop—slower than the instant destruction of an earthquake or tsunami, but

rivaling the impact by affecting millions of lives.

The European migration crisis has been one of these events. For years, Serbia served as a transit country for migrants from North Africa, the Horn of Africa, and Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, but a steady flow of migrants in search of a better future never made global headlines. The **Asylum Protection Center (APC)** in Belgrade was founded 10 years ago to assist these

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GRASSROOTS PARTNERS

36

CHILDREN SERVED

34,154

PERCENTAGE OF CURRENT GFC PARTNERS WORLDWIDE

17%



COUNTRIES Hungary (1), Kazakhstan (1), Kyrgyzstan (6), Moldova (4), Serbia (4), Tajikistan (4), Turkey (7), Ukraine (4), United Kingdom (5)

Regional statistics are current as of January 1, 2016.



SNAPSHOT



GFC program officer Joseph Bednarek met with children in Sid, Serbia, where UN authorities had set up a waiting and service point for refugees at a highway rest stop. GFC grassroots partner **Asylum Protection Center** led games and activities for children while refugee families waited to continue their journey into western Europe.

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migrant families, particularly the children, as they passed through Serbia and determined whether to stay or move on.

APC began by providing legal assistance to families, before developing its services to include counseling and cross-cultural events to build bridges between the migrant community and the Serbian population. For years, APC worked hard to meet the needs of migrants, all the while reporting to those who would listen that the number of families was steadily increasing, especially after the Syrian civil war began in 2011.

In 2014, the number of migrants, overwhelmingly refugees from Syria, grew to such enormous numbers that the world began to take notice. APC had previously worked with several hundred families and hundreds of unaccompanied minors each year; in early 2015, the organization was assisting 1,000 people a day around the Belgrade train station. GFC assisted APC and **Atina**, a graduated Serbia partner, with emergency funding to help purchase winter clothing, backpacks, and shoes for the refugees. APC and Atina have helped hundreds of Syrian families stay together and successfully reach their relatives in other countries in Europe.

The Syrian refugee crisis has also affected communities all across Turkey, where GFC grassroots partners have been meeting this new challenge by stretching their resources and capacity to serve incoming migrants. In Istanbul, **Mavi Kalem** has integrated Syrian refugees into its educational programs. In Adana, in southern Turkey, **Young Disabled Sports Club** has used its working relationship with the government to get information about Syrian children with disabilities living in Adana. These children are not eligible for services provided to Turkish disabled children, so Young Disabled Sports Club is their only source for rehabilitation and support equipment and services.

Because of NGOs like these, transportation, shelter, medical care, and educational services are more available to Syrian refugees than they were two years ago. But hundreds of migrants continue to come through Serbia and Turkey each day. At GFC, we are committed to helping grassroots organizations do even more to protect these families as they try to safely reach their final destinations in Europe.

REGIONAL FOCUSES

→ DEINSTITUTIONALIZATION

State-run orphanages are prevalent throughout the region. Most children are “social orphans,” there due to abandonment or to their parents’ imprisonment, and they “graduate” from the system as young as age 16. Children with disabilities are also commonly institutionalized. Orphanages and institutions for disabled children are often understaffed and struggle to provide young people with proper care or prepare them for independent living.

→ MIGRATION

Whether fleeing conflict or seeking better economic opportunities, families and unaccompanied children leave their homes and settle in places where they usually have little access to public services. Often undocumented and without legal rights, migrant children are at increased risk for trafficking and discrimination. The scale and urgency of the Syrian refugee crisis has exacerbated already existing challenges.

→ CHILD TRAFFICKING

Due to geographic positioning and a lack of economic opportunities in the region, many children are lured, kidnapped, or sold into transnational human trafficking networks. Especially vulnerable populations include ethnic minorities, orphans, and migrants.

→ YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

The poor economic outlook, widespread migration, and unequal development in many parts of Europe and Eurasia have led to limited employment for youth. With few economic opportunities, youth often drop out of school and engage in destructive behavior, including violence and drugs, and are at increased risk for exploitation.

↓ *With emergency funds from GFC, Mavi Kalem helped supply warm coats and boots to Syrian refugee children in Istanbul, Turkey. The organization’s regular activities includes an education program for vulnerable children, with courses in handicrafts, languages, math, music, and drama. © Mavi Kalem*



COUNTRY SPOTLIGHT: KYRGYZSTAN

Like many of the former Soviet republics, Kyrgyzstan has found it difficult to fund social services for children and youth since becoming independent from the Soviet Union. Government services remain severely underfunded and often operate according to antiquated Soviet standards. But there are grassroots organizations with local leaders who refuse to let children be forgotten, and who are working to fill the gaps in critical services like healthcare and education.

GFC has six grassroots partners in the country, three of which focus on serving children with disabilities. In a country where autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is widely misdiagnosed and misunderstood, **Dast ba Dast** (Hand in Hand) educates parents about the condition and trains healthcare professionals in identifying ASD and referring children to proper care. The organization also runs the first and only center in Kyrgyzstan that is devoted entirely to assisting children with ASD. There, Dast ba Dast provides children with daily and weekly treatment, testing, and educational sessions. Each child has an individualized education plan and is attended to by a team of speech pathologists, music therapists, and psychologists.

Our Voice works with another very vulnerable population: orphans. As in several other former Soviet countries, orphans “graduate” from government orphanages as early as age 16. Young, alone, and lacking skills or support, these orphans are often ill prepared to live healthy, independent lives and are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Our Voice provides orphanage graduates with a variety of life skills classes and vocational trainings, including coursework in sewing, culinary arts, and mechanics. Counseling services, legal consultations, and assistance with job placement are also offered to ensure that graduates have proper support and opportunities as they transition to independent living.

CELEBRATING EVERYDAY HEROES: MAJOR AWARDS

Our partners regularly receive international recognition for their critical impact on children's lives. In November 2015, **Atina** was among five GFC partners that received the inaugural With and For Girls Award, a global award designed to identify and support strong, community-based, girl-driven organizations.

Based in Belgrade, Serbia, Atina works directly with survivors of trafficking and sexual exploitation, helping them to overcome trauma, regain confidence, and fully reintegrate into society. At Atina, women and girls receive comprehensive care, including food, shelter, medical care, counseling, and family mediation services. Beneficiaries also get help securing legal documentation, enrolling in and paying for school, and finding jobs that will provide long-term stability in their lives.

A source and destination country for trafficked women and girls from within Europe, Serbia is also on the migration route for refugees coming from the Middle East. The refugee crisis has led to even more instability and danger, and Atina serves as a crucial source of information and relief supplies. The organization is using its With and For Girls Award funds to support education and empowerment initiatives for trafficking survivors and those who are at risk of trafficking, including refugees.

Also in 2015, **Young Generation of Tajikistan** (YGT) received the Global Rising Stars Award, a cash prize that includes capacity-building support to help promising organizations become more



↑ © Young Generation Tajikistan

sustainable. Tajikistan is the poorest country in Central Asia and the former Soviet Union, and without economic opportunities, many young people end up on the streets. YGT bridges the gap between Tajikistan's vulnerable youth and available social services, linking young people to health centers that provide them with medical services and information on HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and the dangers of alcohol and drug abuse. YGT recently launched a number of new health initiatives, including increasing access to clean water and improving road safety for children and youth. The organization will be using its award to strengthen its strategic plan and operations.

SPOTLIGHT: DIVERSE LEADERS, COMMON GOALS

In early 2016, leaders from GFC partners in four countries—the United Kingdom, Serbia, Turkey, and Lebanon—came together for a GFC Knowledge Exchange in Belgrade, Serbia. This three-day workshop represented one of GFC's most diverse regional gatherings, yet the leaders easily found common ground: from Beirut to London, all 14 organizations have been affected by the refugee crisis. Grassroots organizations are usually the first and sometimes the only reliable source of assistance for vulnerable children during emergencies, and GFC's partners are staffed by compassionate individuals who devote their professional lives to helping the underserved in their communities. The Knowledge Exchange provided a safe space for them to reflect on how the crisis is affecting their organizations and the children they serve, to share achievements and challenges, and to strategize about how to best deliver services to refugee children in times of crisis.



↑ Grassroots leaders and GFC staff at the 2016 GFC Knowledge Exchange in Belgrade, Serbia.