



How to set up a Shelter City



Manual for creating a Shelter City

By Justice & Peace Netherlands

APRIL 2022



We are  **Shelter
City**

**and we provide unique
& tailor-made support to
human rights defenders
at risk**

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EMPOWERING CHANGE MAKERS

This manual is created by Justice & Peace Netherlands.

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What to expect from this manual

This manual shares Justice & Peace's experience in setting up a Shelter City in partnership with non-governmental organizations, national or local governments, universities and other actors. It is a manual for potential partners looking to join Shelter City and set up a safe space for human rights defenders at risk in their city or country.

Our objective is to offer general guidance on how to set up a Shelter City, using examples from the Dutch and European context. Even within Europe, the following suggestions should be further adjusted to the characteristics of the local context.

For potential partners outside of Europe, please contact our team at info@sheltercity.org for more information. We can provide additional and contextualized information on the experiences of

international Shelter Cities in setting up a Shelter City.

The first section of this manual elaborates on some practical steps for getting started with temporary relocation. The second section covers the essential aspects and practical issues related to the stay of human rights defenders in Shelter City. Overall, experiences from the Shelter Cities in the Netherlands are used to illustrate how to set up a Shelter City, indicated in the grey boxes. The other boxes highlight tips and suggestions.

Any questions? Contact us at
info@sheltercity.org.

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Introduction

Human rights defenders are on the frontline of defending human rights around the world. They are people who stand up for freedom, justice and peace in their country or community. They advocate for the realization and protection of one or more human rights and fundamental freedoms, such as equal treatment, freedom of speech or access to education. Sometimes they address human rights violations against a specific group, for example children, women or LGBTIQ+ peoples. Many human rights defenders experience heavy resistance on their path to change, as well as a negative toll on themselves and their families because of the physical and psychological demands of their work.

Human rights defenders often work in dangerous situations. Their actions can be met with resistance and they can even be silenced, put under surveillance, arrested or subject to physical violence. They can also face harassment, discrimination and threats such as criminalization or legal action against them. Moreover, human rights defenders may suffer from trauma, burnouts, or loss of motivation because of the violations they witness, the pressure they work under and the resistance they face.

In reaction to this, many governments, international organizations and civil society organizations have developed instruments and policies to support human rights defenders in their activities. **Temporary relocation initiatives** offer human rights defenders the opportunity to take a break and recharge while in a safe space. As a consequence, human rights defenders can continue their work in a more efficient way in the long term. Temporary relocation could also be an emergency measure, in case the security of human rights defenders in their home country is extremely compromised.

Aside from this, while in a safe space, human rights defenders can strengthen their capacity by participating in advocacy trainings or security trainings. They have the time to re-strategize and reflect on their work. They also have the opportunity to meet with allies and build important networks.

While relocation initiatives are growing, more cities are needed to welcome the high number of human rights defenders at risk. Shelter City in the Netherlands alone receives on average 600 applications per year. This number showcases the stark reality that more safe spaces for human rights defenders at risk are needed.



What is **Shelter City**?



Shelter City is a temporary relocation initiative and global movement that creates safe and inspiring spaces for human rights defenders at risk where they re-energize, receive tailormade support and engage with allies in order to reinforce their local actions for change.

As of 2022, Shelter City consists of a growing network of 21 cities, organizations and citizens in the Netherlands, Georgia, United Kingdom, Tanzania, Benin, Costa Rica, and Nepal. Together, Shelter City has offered support to over 400 human rights defenders at risk since 2012. We aim to expand and be able to provide safe and inspiring spaces in every corner of the world.

Each Shelter City offers a variety of opportunities that are tailored to the needs and wants of human rights defenders. During their stay, they can rest, tend to their own wellbeing, access medical care and psychological support. They can also participate in security trainings or develop new skills, enhance their advocacy strategies, attend university, or for example, language lessons. Moreover, Shelter City guests have the opportunity to build a stronger solidarity network. Each Shelter City supports them in connecting with civil society and international organizations that can be important allies in their work. At Shelter City, human rights defenders also have a platform to share their story and raise awareness on the human rights situation in their country.





Part 1

Getting started

1.1. Analyse the context

Security is the primary consideration for setting up a Shelter City – as it should, per definition, be safe. While some regions or countries are safe for some, they might be less safe for others. Some countries are, for instance, well-suited to host foreign human rights defenders, but local human rights defenders might need to travel further away. The topic on which human rights defenders work is also of importance: for instance, LGBTIQ+ rights defenders may not be safe in certain countries which instead are safe for other activists.

The porosity of borders, collaboration between intelligence services, the presence of a large diaspora from the country of origin, geopolitical interests, or the likelihood of a human rights defender being followed to a foreign country are all factors that might increase the risk for relocated human rights defenders. Although the security analysis should always be made on a case-by-case basis, some general trends can be sketched beforehand.

Available facilities, such as the presence of international

organizations and local civil society organizations, universities, and psychosocial support, can be an asset and add value to the relocation.

Finally, the local **cost of living** and the **reachability** of the Shelter City should also be taken into account. Whether or not visas are required and for whom, and whether they can be obtained easily, are important factors.



BOX 1

Choose the right location

- How safe is the planned location for hosting human rights defenders, and for whom?
- How porous are the borders?
- Are visas easy to obtain to enter the country, and for whom?
- Is it easy to travel to the country?
- What collaborative institutions are present in the planned hosting spot?
- Are the costs of living affordable in view of the budget available?



EXAMPLE 1

The Dutch context

- Visas can be difficult to obtain and are only valid for 90-day stays (renewable once), but good cooperation with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs ensures the smooth delivery of travel documents.
- The Netherlands is a very safe country (although marginally, the presence of the ICC, diaspora and diplomatic missions might pose a risk for some human rights defenders).
- The presence of many international organizations and non-governmental organizations is an asset for networking purposes.
- Travel is relatively easy by air, Schiphol airport being an international hub, though the Netherlands is far away for many human rights defenders.
- Human rights defenders relocated to the Netherlands might face challenges due to differences in culture, language and climate.

1.2. Identify the actors

An important step in the process of setting up a Shelter City is to **identify which actors** are interested in supporting human rights defenders. Such actors might then become partners, either by providing funding or by taking part in the coordination of the Shelter City.

A positive attitude towards hosting human rights defenders is unquestionably important because you will need the agreement of many actors and the active support

of various others. Likewise, funding will be easier to find if there is a will to host and support human rights defenders locally. How the idea will be presented in a context where authorities are committed to support human rights defenders or, on the contrary, have tried to impede their work, is of course different. The context will therefore be key in determining which partners should be involved and to what extent, and how to frame and present Shelter City.

EXAMPLE 2

Dutch Shelter City Partners

- **Justice & Peace Netherlands:**

As a human rights organization, we work with human rights defenders worldwide on improving their security. Justice & Peace coordinates the stay of the guests in Shelter City The Hague and in Shelter Cities in the Netherlands.

- **The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs:**

Human rights defenders are a priority in its human rights foreign policy.¹ Additionally, the Netherlands is committed to implementing the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders. Shelter City is also a way to build up their image as a

champion of human rights and support their policy.

- **Dutch Municipalities:**

Municipalities see an opportunity to increase public awareness of human rights and contribute to the support of human rights worldwide, as well as improve their image as a champion of human rights.

- **Universities and (human rights) local organizations:**

Can be local coordinating partners and can get direct information on human rights from field practitioners and benefit from their practical experience.

¹ <https://www.government.nl/topics/human-rights/human-rights-worldwide/supporting-human-rights-defenders>



Several international instruments exist to **protect and support human rights**. Most of them are non-binding but they have been adopted within international instances to which states are member. Therefore, they translate their political commitment to human rights and can be used to ensure their support. National law and policies can also provide some useful background to understand the human rights protection mechanisms in place in the country where a new Shelter City may be created.



BOX 2

Main international instruments supporting human rights defenders

United Nations

- [UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders](#) (1998) and its [commentary](#) (2011)
- [Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders](#) (Human Rights Council)

European Union

- [EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders](#) (2004, revised in 2008)
- [European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights](#) (EIDHR)
- The European Commission is also involved in protecting and promoting the work of human rights defenders, and the European Parliament regularly adopts resolutions on specific cases.

African Union (African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights)

- [Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders in Africa](#)

Inter-American Commission on Human Rights

- [Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders](#)
- [Resolution on Human Rights Defenders in the Americas](#) (1999)

Council of Europe

- [Commissioner for Human Rights](#)

OSCE (Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights)

- [Guidelines on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders](#)



1.3. Define the target group, purpose and features of Shelter City

It is vital to set a clear goal for the Shelter City in terms of the duration of stay, the target group of human rights defenders and the services offered to them. The goal depends greatly on **material constraints**, such as immigration laws, available staff, resources, and funding. It is also dependant on what the local community, you and your partners can offer to human rights defenders. By tailoring the experience of guests to opportunities available in the city, it

can be easier to partner with local actors, access necessary funds and donations. At the same time, it is important to keep a certain degree of **flexibility** and offer each guest tailor-made support. Once the goal is set, you should establish clear selection criteria and procedures for guests. Your network of local and international organizations will support you in verifying the cases of the human rights defenders you consider hosting.

BOX 3

Possible features of Shelter City

Feature	Practical output	Comments
Duration	Short term (3 months or less) vs. Long term (6 months, 1 year etc.)	Look at what is possible under immigration laws and what you want to achieve with the relocation programme.
Target group	Open to anyone vs. Specific target group (women human rights defenders, human rights defenders from a certain region, academics, journalists, human rights defenders working on a certain topic etc.)	The nature of the city and local community, the field of work of the coordinating organization, and donors' restrictions might influence the profile of the human rights defenders hosted.
Purpose	Rest and re-energize or burnout prevention vs. Emergency support in the face of high threat	Responding to emergencies requires capacities to act quickly and host human rights defenders with little preparation time. Both for emergency support and rest and re-energize, psychological and/or medical support will be an essential component, as well as a social support network.
Selection procedure	Through calls vs. On a rolling basis Open to all applicants (via website etc.) vs. Through other partner organizations	There are pros and cons for each selection procedure. Working with calls increases the predictability of the programme and makes it easier to manage, especially when several partners are involved. On the other hand, receiving applications on a rolling basis enables the Shelter City to respond to emergencies, and makes the programme more flexible. Open calls require more screening work as they usually attract a lot of applicants whose cases must be verified.



Support provided	Basic support and rest vs. Possibility to follow training programmes and courses, network, volunteer, give lectures etc.	Look at the needs of your target group and what can be offered in the host city: are there any international organizations, universities, non-governmental or civil society organizations present in the city? Who can offer what kind of support to the relocated human rights defenders? Is there public awareness of human rights? How much support staff is available?
Dependents	Human rights defenders alone vs. human rights defenders with dependents or family	Immigration laws and available resources will be the key determinants. Note that welcoming dependents makes the Shelter City more gender sensitive, as for women human rights defenders who are mothers, leaving their children behind is often a barrier.

EXAMPLE 3

Selection procedure for Shelter City Netherlands

The selection of participants to Shelter City in the Netherlands is conducted twice a year through an open call for application, with two relocation periods in spring and autumn. The participants are then selected via an Independent Selection Committee. Members of the Committee have been invited to take part because of their diverse regional and thematic expertise in human rights. Because of the high number of applications, Justice & Peace makes a pre-selection of qualified candidates, based on the selection criteria. Each case is then verified by carrying out a thorough reference check, and the selected candidates are invited for an online interview to verify their application.

Since 2017, Justice & Peace has launched a flexible relocation fund in order to be able to quickly respond to some of the demands that are received outside the calls for application, which can host up to 3 human rights defenders per year.





EXAMPLE 4

Selection requirements for Shelter City Netherlands

In order to be eligible to participate in Shelter City, the human rights defenders should meet the following conditions:

1. They implement a non-violent approach in their work;
2. They are threatened or otherwise under pressure due to their work;
3. They should be able to relocate for a maximum of 3 months. Limited spots are available for people who are unable to stay for the full 3 months;
4. They are willing and able to return to their country of origin after 3 months;
5. They are willing to speak publicly about their experience or about human rights in their country to the extent that their security situation allows;
6. They have a conversational level* of English (limited spots are available for French or Spanish speaking human rights defenders);
7. They have a valid passport (with no less than six months of validity) or be willing to carry out the procedures for its issuance. Justice & Peace covers the costs of issuing a passport and / or visa (if applicable);
8. They are not subjected to any measure or judicial prohibition of leaving their country;
9. They are available to come to the Netherlands in the requested period.

**By conversational English we mean that participants' level of English allows them to actively participate in a training programme, speak about their work, communicate with the host city etc.*

Note that additional factors will be taken into consideration in the final round of selection, such as the added value of a stay in the Netherlands as well as gender, geographic and thematic balance.

1.4. Find means and resources

Hosting human rights defenders requires **sufficient and adequate resources**, such as professional support staff, accommodation, and funds for travel and livelihood. Some of those can be fulfilled in kind, if the circumstances allow (additional volunteer staff, accommodation). There also exist a few emergency funds for human rights defenders which can be applied for in order to cover some core expenses (see Box 4). Structural funding is necessary to cover operational and administrative costs made by the coordinating organization.

Costs to take into account when setting up a Shelter City:

- Coordination costs
- International travel and visa
- Health insurance
- Medical intake
- Accommodation
- Monthly stipend
- Travel and communication costs
- Psychological support
- Courses and training programmes





EXAMPLE 5

Sources of funding for Shelter City in the Netherlands

Shelter Cities in the Netherlands are funded by three main sources:

- The municipalities cover part of the local costs, such as local supporting staff, accommodation and livelihood. A subsidy contract is usually signed between the municipality and the local organization implementing the funds.
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs mostly covers the costs for coordination of the project at the national level by Justice & Peace (selection of defenders, logistic support while in the Netherlands, security analysis and training, follow-up after return, coordination of the network etc.).
- For the remaining part of the costs, Justice & Peace looks for external funds for individual human rights defenders (EIDHR small grants, ProtectDefenders), private donations, institutional donors, or relies on its own funds.



BOX 4

Ideas for short-term emergency funds

- [ProtectDefenders.eu](https://protectdefenders.eu)
- [East and Horn of Africa Rights Defenders Project \(EHAHRDP\)](#)
- [CSO Lifeline](#)
- [Freedom House](#)
- [Freedom House LGBT Assistance programme Dignity for All](#)
- [FORUM-ASIA](#)
- [Front Line Defenders \(FLD\)](#)
- [Urgent Action Fund](#)
- Foreign representations: In some cases, embassies are able to support the relocation of human rights defenders.
- [European Institution for Democracy and Human Rights \(EIDHR\)](#): EU small grants for urgent support for human rights defenders.

Part 2

Hosting human rights defenders



2.1. Division of tasks

As previously mentioned, running a Shelter City will necessarily involve **different stakeholders**. It is important to distinguish between partners who are essential to successfully carry out the project (a suitable local coordinating organization, authorities willing to provide visas, donors), and those who could add value to the project but whose participation is not essential (e.g. educational institutes). This will of course depend on the **local context**. Here are some of the actors who can typically be involved in Shelter Cities for human rights defenders:

2.1.1. Coordinating organization

It is the organization that coordinates the Shelter City and the stay of guests. It can be any organization or institute that has an interest in human rights and in supporting human rights defenders.

Important tip to keep in mind: hosting human rights defenders will be demanding a lot of time and energy from the staff in charge of the coordination and daily accompaniment of the human rights defenders. Do not underestimate the time necessary for coordinating the Shelter City.

a. Coordinator

The coordinator's tasks mainly involve managing applications and the selection of human rights defenders (whether or not the final decision is taken by an independent committee), supervising their travel and stay, and dealing with all aspects related to their security. Besides, the coordinator will also fulfil fundraising and other administrative and coordination tasks.

b. Case manager / mentor / "buddy"

This/these person(s) support(s) the human rights defenders in their daily pursuits and in establishing objectives for their stay. This person should know the city where the human rights defender is relocated well and speak a language in which the human rights defender can easily communicate. The case manager can help identify networking and training opportunities, as well as ensure the human rights defender receives adequate medical, legal or psychological support.





EXAMPLE 6

Coordinating organizations of Shelter Cities in the Netherlands

Justice & Peace Netherlands

is the national coordinator of Shelter City in the Netherlands, as well as the local coordinating organization for Shelter City The Hague.

These are some of the coordinating organizations in other Dutch Shelter Cities:

- **Peace Brigades International, Dutch Branch (Shelter City Utrecht):** This worldwide organization is involved in the protection of human rights defenders in the field, mostly in Latin America.
- **Mondiaal Maastricht (Shelter City Maastricht):** A centre for international debate, education, and awareness. It has a strong focus on issues like globalization and human rights, which are all part of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.
- **Tertium (Shelter City Amsterdam):** A research and strategy institute that engages society with complex topics related to energy, urban development and scientific innovation, as well as human rights.
- **University College Roosevelt, University College Groningen, and Windesheim College (Shelter City Middelburg, Groningen, and Zwolle):** They are university education institutes which have human rights law and political science programmes.
- **Bureau Wijland (Shelter City Nijmegen):** A local organization that stands for establishing sustainable links between people, organizations and society at large.
- **ContourdeTwern (Shelter City Tilburg):** A local civil society organization which aims at building a vibrant civil society with strong communities in which everyone has equal opportunities and participates in public life.
- **Humanitas (in various Shelter Cities):** One of the main social services and community building organizations of the Netherlands which aims to support people who, for a range of different reasons, temporarily cannot manage on their own.
- **De Pletterij (Shelter City Haarlem):** A centre for debate and cultural exchange.
- **VluchtelingenWerk (Shelter City Haarlem):** An organization that supports the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in the Netherlands.
- In addition to coordinating organizations, several other partners participate in Shelter City by offering training, courses or contacts, organizing conferences and activities, etc. Examples include local Amnesty International groups, universities, schools, and higher education institutes.
- In many cities there is an active volunteer network available for the human rights defender. Each volunteer can take on a specific role with regards to the stay of the human rights defender, and/or the volunteers can provide a social network to the human rights defender and undertake social activities. It is important to create a network of support around the human rights defender, taking into account diversity in terms of gender, sexuality, age and ethnicity.



2.1.2. National government

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and/or Ministry of Justice are important partners for a Shelter City as cooperation with them will facilitate the delivery of visas or permits to stay in the country. Depending on the extent of their commitment to human rights, they can also provide financial support, support human rights defenders in their country, and provide advice and information about potential candidates through embassies.

2.1.3. Municipalities and local organizations

One of the particularities of Shelter City is the involvement of local organizations. In the case of the Netherlands, the municipalities are important actors: so far, the decisions to create a Shelter City have come from municipal councils. Usually, one or several council members submit a motion supporting the idea. Besides this political approval, municipalities may also have other roles. They can commit financially to Shelter City. Support may also be done in-kind: it can be offered through a municipal civil servant or by providing an apartment for human rights defenders. Moreover, the municipality can contribute to building partnerships: it can find a local organization willing to coordinate a Shelter City, contact educational institutions, universities, and local organizations.

2.1.4. Universities and training/education institutes

Partnerships with universities or research institutes mutually benefit the organizations and the human rights defenders. On the one hand, human rights defenders provide first-hand knowledge regarding the human rights situation in their country, which can be very useful to researchers, students and scholars. On the other hand, Shelter City guests can follow courses, for instance in human rights law or international politics. Universities or research institutes can offer a fellowship construction to the human rights defender who can work on a specific research assignment. Moreover, universities sometimes create a student group around the human rights defender that serves as a social support network. Finally, human rights defenders can give lectures at universities, which is a great way of presenting Shelter City and raising awareness on the work of human rights defenders and the human rights situation in their country.

2.1.5. Medical, psychosocial and legal support staff

It is important to establish good contacts with professionals who can provide psycho-social, medical or legal support to human rights defenders. These professionals should be skilled in working with human rights defenders, be aware of their background, be culturally and gender sensitive and preferably speak their language. It is also important to take into account the temporary aspect of the stay of human rights defenders as well as the possibility to continue the treatment online after the guest's return.





BOX 5

Psychological support for human rights defenders

The Centre for Applied Human Rights (University of York) has produced useful research papers on (1) Wellbeing, Risk, and Human Rights Practice and (2) Families and Loved Ones in the Security and Protection of Defenders at Risk. In 2019, Guidelines on Wellbeing and Temporary International Relocation of Human Rights Defenders at Risk were developed and adapted by many organizations working with temporary relocation of human rights defenders.

Additional reference material can be found on the [resource page](#) of the Shelter City website.

BOX 6

Actors and tasks

Before relocation

Justice & Peace

- Deal with new requests
- Perform screenings and checks
- Arrange travel

Organizations in country of origin

- Identify & refer cases
- Provide context information and information on cases

MFA / Embassies

- Facilitate visa
- Identify cases
- Provide context information and information on cases

During relocation

Justice & Peace

- Supervise stay
- Organize activities
- Monitor security situation
- Prepare return

Partners in host country

- Provide training, networking and any other relevant opportunities

Authorities in host country

- Fund the local stay
- Provide networking opportunities & visibility
- Ensure security during stay

After relocation

Justice & Peace

- Follow-up on security of human rights defenders
- Activate international network in case of emergency

Organizations in country of origin

- Provide support for safe return
- Inform and act in case of emergency

MFA / Embassies

- Facilitate visa
- Identify cases
- Provide context information and information on cases



2.2. Support during relocation

2.2.1. Practical aspects

- **Point of contact:** From the first day the human rights defenders have to be able to rely on a clear point of contact who can support them during their stay and who can be called in case of emergency. This is especially important in the first weeks.
- **Accommodation:** It should be a secure and peaceful space, with good internet connection, in which the human rights defenders can live and work. Respect of their privacy is important. Human rights defenders should be informed about the accommodation beforehand, so they know what they can expect (e.g. shared kitchen, distance from city centre).
- **Workplace:** This is not only a peaceful place for the human rights defenders to do his or her daily work (if they wish to continue this), but also to socialize. The workplace can, for instance, be situated at the local implementing organization or a partner university.
- **Livelihood:** The human rights defenders receive a monthly stipend. It is important that the amount received is sufficient and on a regular basis, so that human rights defenders do not have to worry about their livelihood.

2.2.2. Programme

Shelter City guests come from different contexts and have different expectations and objectives for their stay. It is important to communicate with them before and upon arrival, to understand their needs and wants, and create a tailored plan for their stay. This should keep into account the opportunities offered at the Shelter City. Flexibility is also vital as the goals of guests can change during their stay. In any case, activities should always be agreed upon with them.

The possibility to get a medical intake and psychosocial care should always be offered, as all Shelter City guests will have undergone some form of psychological and/or physical pressure. Post-traumatic disorders of lesser or greater intensity are not uncommon. At home, professional help may not be available, access to it may be limited or human rights defenders do not take the time to ask for support. Their stay at Shelter City offers them the possibility to focus on their own wellbeing.

Additional activities:

- **Advocacy meetings:** With local, national, or international governments
- **Meetings with organizations:** Such as political parties, associations, education institutes, to exchange experiences and build up a solidarity network
- **Trainings and courses:** The human rights defender can take language classes or other courses (human rights law, project management, etc.). Security training should also be provided, either by the host organization or by third parties.
- **Public lectures:** For university or high school students, or a wider audience of people who have an interest in human rights and the work of human rights defenders.
- **Internships/volunteering at a local organization:** This can be beneficial for both the human rights defender and the organization.





It is important to discuss with the human rights defenders how visible they can be while in relocation. In some cases, visibility can enhance the human rights defender's security, whereas in other cases it can further endanger the human rights defender. Justice & Peace has established some basic rules and guidelines for publicly communicating about human rights defenders, which can be adjusted after discussion with them.

2.2.3. Preparing the return

During their stay, the human rights defenders and the Shelter City team should closely monitor the security situation in the human rights defenders' home countries and prepare the return. Security training should be provided to guests and a security plan established for human rights defenders and their organizations.



BOX 7

Security resources for human rights defenders

- [Protection International's Manual for Human Rights Defenders](#)
- [Front Line Defenders' Workbook on Security](#)
- [Tactical Technology collective's Holistic Security Manual](#)
- [Integrated Security's Manual for Women Human Rights Defenders](#)
- [Shelter City's Resources page](#)



The goal of Shelter City is to support human rights defenders at risk through temporary relocation. However, situations where human rights defenders cannot go back after the planned relocation period will arise from time to time. One-to-one solutions have to be found in such cases.

BOX 8

What if a human rights defender cannot go back?

Some possibilities include:

- Lengthen the stay until the situation improves, if possible under migration rules. This can also offer more time to figure out longer-term alternatives.
- Find another relocation programme or relocation grant. The region of the human rights defender, which is culturally closer and where immigration rules might be more flexible, should be considered first if safe enough.
- Find a study programme, internship, job etc. in order to ensure longer term legal residence and a potential source of income.
- In some cases, the situation for the human rights defender is unlikely to improve in the medium term and asylum remains the only option.

Additional funding will more than likely have to be found. Please refer to Box 4 for some possibilities. When human rights defenders have a family, their security (including financial) will also have to be taken into account. It is important for any organization working on temporary relocation to set limits as to what can be provided in this respect.

2.3. Follow-up and support after return

The main task after return is to make sure that human rights defender have arrived safely, and that they have reintegrated into their community safely. Returning to a dangerous environment can be very challenging after some time spent in a safe place. A small amount of financial support can be provided to the human rights defender to support them with the reintegration following their return.

It is also important to support the international solidarity network built by the human rights defenders during their stay. Maintaining regular contacts with international allies and implementing the security plans and strategies defined during the stay are some of the ways in which human rights defenders can get a feeling of safety and support. Foreign representations in the country of origin can also regularly be in touch with human rights defenders. Some programmes also provide returning human rights defenders with a support letter from authorities to show that they have support from abroad should anything happen.

It is important to be clear about the fact that human rights defenders are responsible for their own choices and safety. They are the ones ultimately making decisions about their own life – although they can of course be guided and informed. Limits must therefore be clear as to how support extends after return.



Checklist

How to set up a Shelter City

The purpose of this manual is to offer broad yet practical guidance on how to set up a Shelter City in Europe to support human rights defenders at risk around the globe.

No time to read it all? Here is, in essence, what you need in order to start:

- ☐ A Shelter City should be created in a place where the human rights defender feels safe and with the presence of the required infrastructure such as civil society organizations, educational institutions, and medical and wellbeing professionals.
- ☐ Supportive authorities. Local, regional and national governments can play an important role, from facilitating visa issuance to providing funding.
- ☐ One or several local organization(s) willing to set up the Shelter City, handle requests and supervise the arrival, stay and return of human rights defenders.
- ☐ Funding can be found for the Shelter City as a whole, but relocated human rights defenders can also be sponsored individually.

Contact us

Do you have any questions or want to know more about creating a Shelter City?

Reach out to us at info@sheltercity.org.

“Shelter City is not only a way to protect an individual, but in turn their whole community. Shelter City is and should always be a safe space for human rights defenders to access support, and to find both professional and personal growth alike.”

CHRISTIAN GRZYWATZ, SHELTER CITY GEORGIA PARTNER