



Shelter City:

Exploring the impact of a decade of temporary relocation experiences

Impact study report by DBMresearch
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SIDE BY SIDE
WITH
human
rights defenders



About this publication

All information and research (excluding photos) in this publication are by Danielle de Winter from DBMresearch. DBMresearch was commissioned by Justice & Peace Netherlands to conduct an external evaluation of the initiative, Shelter City.

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"Shelter City reminded me that I am human before being a defender."

- Former Shelter City guest

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Executive summary

Since its inception in 2012, [Shelter City](#) has worked towards enabling human rights defenders at risk to continue their work more effectively, with renewed energy, inspiration and equipped with new allies, knowledge, and skills. The initiative celebrates its 10-year anniversary in 2022. For that purpose, Justice & Peace sought to explore to what extent the initiative has been able to make a lasting impact on the lives and the work of defenders. This impact study helps to grasp the experiences of participants after their return and how Shelter City supported them in continuing their work in a safer and more effective way.

The study adopted a qualitative data collection approach and is limited to exploring the impact of Shelter City located in the Netherlands. Four impact indicators have been identified for this impact study that help measure the intended impact on participating human rights defenders and their organisations. These include:

1. Human rights defenders have returned home and have continued their work;
2. Human rights defenders apply improved approaches and strategies;
3. Human rights defenders feel safer and more protected;
4. Larger community in the home country benefits from defenders' relocation experience.

1. Human rights defenders have returned home and have continued their work

Over the course of 10 years, Shelter City has seen the vast majority of participants return home. Returning to countries and communities of origin is one thing. This however does not necessarily imply that human rights defenders would be enabled to continue their human

rights work upon return; let alone be more effective in what they do. The relocation experience is therefore geared in such a way that participants should feel re-energized upon return, reinforced by new skills and contacts, enabling them to continue their work more effectively than prior to participation in Shelter City.

The impact study finds that from the alumni who answered this questions, all have indicated to have restarted and/or continued their work as a human rights defender upon return. With 'restarted' the study includes those respondents who mentioned that prior to participation in Shelter City, they experienced depression, were traumatized, were burned out, endured high levels of stress, or faced increasing threats. With 'continuing work' the study includes those respondents who shared that they proceeded with similar activities as prior to Shelter City, either for the same organization or with another initiative or programme in a similar field of work. With many alumni, the type of work and the approach taken in their human rights work has changed after return (see the next indicator). The main reasons to restart or continue work are linked to the participant's motivation to participate in the first place: to strengthen their (personal) efforts in fighting for their cause.

Beyond their initial motivations, the possibility and vigour to restart or continue work was also supported by several outcomes following their participation in Shelter City. The study showed three main outcomes to have contributed to the continuation of their work: (1) a sense of recognition and acknowledgement of their work, (2) a new perspective to human rights work and the role of human rights defenders, and (3) a stronger confidence in their work and abilities.



Overall, respondents shared that removing themselves physically out of a volatile and unsafe environment for a period of three months allowed them to re-energize sufficiently to pick up their work upon return.

2. Human rights defenders apply improved approaches and strategies

The impact study shows that the relocation experience with Shelter City positively influenced the approach and strategies of participants. Not only were they able to confirm they improved their approach, but descriptions of the way these improved approaches enhanced their effectiveness supported the findings. First, participants have refocused or re-strategized their approach. Second, participants make more strategic considerations for an effective approach. Third, participants apply improved security measures. Last, participants have incorporated wellbeing systematically in their work.

Respondents identified the following main factors as contributing to these four types of improvements in their approach to their human rights defender work:

- Training on (international) advocacy;
- Gaining a greater perspective of human rights and human rights work;
- Staying outside of their hostile environment;
- Group sessions on wellbeing and body work, and;
- Training on (digital) security.

3. Human Rights Defenders feel safer and more protected

One of the intentions of Shelter City is to ensure that participants feel safer, more protected, and feel part of a larger community once they have returned to their countries of origin and continue their work. Shelter City stimulates this by offering a Holistic Security Training

programme and by offering the opportunity to participants to expand their network and outreach whilst in the Netherlands.

The reported changes to the digital security were directly attributed to the digital security training offered by Justice & Peace during their stay in the Netherlands. Beyond the digital, the impact study also showed relevance of other components of the security training. With this, particularly the application of risk analyses, risk mapping or risk assessments were mentioned





as greatly influencing the day-to-day safety of participants and that of their organizations upon return.

Participants explained that having the support of an international network was important for them in dealing with threats and harassments. First, because it gives them a sense of reassurance that if they would be suddenly incarcerated or accused of a criminal case, they would at least know that there is an international community aware of their struggle and could possibly lend their support.

Second, it is believed that the connection with international organizations itself has deterred authorities or other opposing fractions from (continuing) harassing human rights defenders.

The overall sense of safety was also strengthened due to a new perspective in relation to their work as a human rights defender, and because they give more attention to their wellbeing.

4. Larger community in home country benefits from relocation

Measuring the impact on the larger community of the defenders in their countries of origin was outside of the scope of this study. What is included, is the anecdotal evidence that was collected that suggests trickle down effects of the human rights defenders' relocation experience on organisations and communities after participants returned. Three aspects have been identified through analysis of the experiences of participants: (1) relevance of sharing with direct colleagues; (2) improved status of human rights defender after participation; and (3) increased opportunities due to networking and outreach.

A vast majority of the respondents confirmed they actively shared information they learned during their stay with Shelter City with their organization, community, or beneficiaries. The most common topic that was shared was the digital security training. A lot of respondents

mentioned that they have been treated differently by colleagues, communities, and/or authorities, while several did not experience different treatment.

The third and final aspect shows a possible trickle-down effect of the wider benefits relating to the funding and training opportunities that were created because of the relocation experience of the human rights defenders. Participants mentioned several opportunities that followed directly from their involvement, these included: follow-up training opportunities, international speaking opportunities, funding opportunities with newly established collaborations, and increased engagement with (local) networks and alliances.

The impact study shows that beneficial changes have been experienced for each impact indicator of Shelter City. Factors influencing alumni to restart or continue their work upon return, support the emphasis of Shelter City on the holistic approach towards the temporary relocation experience. Contributing factors to an experienced improvement and/or higher effectiveness of their work include both strategic decisions by Justice & Peace (e.g. type of training content, programme arrangement), as well as aspects of the relocation experience (e.g. experience with other cultures, being in a safe environment).

Participants expressed a need for rest and respite, before anything else. During and after participation most participants expressed the initiative went beyond their expectations and 'changed their lives for good'.

1. Introduction:

Since its inception in 2012, Shelter City has worked towards enabling human rights defenders at risk to continue their work more effectively, with renewed energy, inspiration and equipped with new allies, knowledge, and skills. The initiative will celebrate its 10-year anniversary in 2022. For that purpose, Justice & Peace seeks to explore to what extent the initiative has been able to make a lasting impact on the lives and the work of defenders. This impact study helps to grasp the experiences of participants after their return and how Shelter City supported them in continuing their work in a safer and more effective way.



A group of human rights defenders in The Hague for a Holistic Security training week, 2015.

“Even though it has been over a year that I have participated in Shelter City, I still benefit from the experience each day.” - Former Shelter City guest



2. Impact Study:

Considerations & approach

2.1 - Introducing the impact study

The **purpose** of the Impact Study is to unravel what (kind of) contributions Shelter City has made to the lives and the work of Human Rights Defenders who participated in the initiative. The insights will be used to inform future partners and participants about the opportunities Shelter City can bring, as well as benefit from lessons learned to inform future programming.

The **objective** is to explore different perspectives and experiences of alumni, partner organizations and Justice & Peace staff on the relevance, effectiveness and (sustainable) impact of the initiative's interventions over the course of ten years. Following this assessment, the study will provide information about the impacts that have been achieved by the initiative's interventions.

2.2 - Scope of the study

Impact Studies can be ambitious; sometimes overly ambitious. To ensure that the study remained focused on its purpose and objective, a guiding framework was identified in collaboration with Justice & Peace. This framework includes a selection of key impact indicators (i.e. What determines success for Shelter City?) and guiding research questions, described in more detail in the following chapters of this report. In the inception phase, it was decided to **focus the study on the impact of the initiative on the work and lives of Shelter City alumni (i.e. human rights defenders)**. The different types of interventions that have contributed to achieving impact

in the lives and work of SC alumni are also explored.

The study is limited to exploring the impact of Shelter City located in the Netherlands. It is acknowledged that the initiative now also includes international hubs in Georgia, Costa Rica, Tanzania, Benin, United Kingdom, and a pilot project in Nepal. However, exploring the impact of these international nodes falls outside of the scope of this study.

The study does not encompass a traditional external evaluation of the activities and outputs (e.g. have numbers been reached, are trainings of sound quality, etc). Contributions by the initiative are explored, but only in relation to experienced change (or lack thereof) by participants. Moreover, findings related to internal programme dynamics (e.g. implementation of partners) and the impact of the programme on communities in the Netherlands are found to be outside of the scope of this impact study.





2.3 - Central research questions

A set of guiding research questions have been determined in collaboration with Justice & Peace staff. By answering these questions, the team can assess to what extent the relevant impact indicators have been met, and how the initiative was able to contribute to these achievements.

Central research question:

In what ways has Shelter City enabled human rights defenders to protect and promote human rights in a safer and more effective way?

Guiding sub-questions:

- Has the initiative met the **expectations** of Shelter City participants and partners?
- To what extent and in what ways do human rights defenders **feel they are more effective** in their human rights work, because of their participation in Shelter City? What were the barriers and enablers that made the difference between successful and disappointing implementation and results?
- To what extent and in what ways do human rights defenders **feel safer, protected, recognized and part of a larger community**, because of their participation in Shelter City?
- To what extent and in what ways have human rights defenders **extended newly acquired knowledge, skills and networks** with their local network and organization after participating in Shelter City?
- To what extent and in what ways has the participation in Shelter City caused any **unintended – positive and negative – effects** (across different stakeholders)?


2.4 - Approach & analysis

The impact study builds on contribution analysis to describe the relationship between observed changes and the contribution of the initiative to these changes. An approach to contribution analysis starts out by determining the change ambitions of Shelter City: what signifies the initiative's success? To this end, in collaboration with the team of Justice & Peace, the selection of impact indicators has been identified (see chapter 4 for more details). Following, evidence

was collected to explore what outcomes and impact have been experienced, and to study the contributing and/or inhibiting factors of the initiative.

While no definite causal relationships have been identified through this approach, it allows for evidence-based causal claims about plausible contributions. This analysis is based on triangulation of findings, building on evidence from multiple sources (e.g. document analysis, interviews with HRDs, group discussions with partner organisations).

2.5 - Research methods



The study adopted a qualitative data collection approach, which was able to build on the rich monitoring data of the Shelter City initiative collected by Justice & Peace. Extensive document analysis and qualitative interviews were used as part of this study. Document analysis contributed to a deeper contextual analysis of the initiative and Shelter City participants. All relevant documents available per participant have been collected and analysed to determine trends in experiences and perspectives across Shelter City alumni. The follow-up interview reports with alumni that have been collected by Justice & Peace proved especially relevant. These interviews are conducted approximately six months after their participation to gather feedback and explore the impact of the initiative on the lives and work of defenders since they returned. The follow-up interviews among alumni (n=65) were used for analysis of experiences. An overview of documents analysed for the purpose of this impact study can be found in Annex 1.

In addition to the analysis of these monitoring reports, a selection of former participants was invited for in-depth interviews to explore further the initiative's impact. A total of 18 respondents (out of a sample of 22 participants) eventually participated in the study. Table 1 offers an overview of respondent characteristics. In addition to the interviews with Shelter City

alumni, two group discussions with partners, three interviews with Justice & Peace staff, and an interview with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs have been implemented to reflect on the contributions provided by the initiative. A total of 8 partners were able to participate in the two group discussions. Annexes 2 and 3 provides the semi-structured interview guide for the in-depth interviews with alumni and the group discussions.

As the study reflects on the support provided by Shelter City, all respondents were promised **anonymity of responses**. Efforts have therefore been made to ensure that information retrieved from interviews and group discussions will not be traceable to individuals, rather only be presented in aggregated fashion.

The next chapters present the findings following from the impact study. Chapter 3 dives deeper into the contextual findings related to development of the initiative over time, while Chapter 4 discusses the unique components attributed to Shelter City. Chapter 5 then continues with presenting findings in relation to each impact indicator. The final chapters narrow down the analysis by elaborating on the identified key contributing factors and offering answers to the guiding research questions.





Table 1: Characteristics of respondents

| | Year of participation | Gender | Age during stay | Theme | EN/SP/FR | Follow-up interview | Interview Impact Study |
|-------|-----------------------|--------|-----------------|-----------------------------|----------|---------------------|------------------------|
| 001SC | 2020 | F | 26-40 | LGBTIQ+ rights ¹ | EN | X | X |
| 002SC | 2018 | M | 41-60 | Civil and Political Rights | EN | X | X |
| 003SC | 2019 | M | 26-40 | Civil and Political Rights | EN | X | X |
| 004SC | 2018 | F | 41-60 | Women's Rights and SGBV | EN | X | X |
| 005SC | 2018 | F | 41-60 | Women's Rights and SGBV | EN | X | X |
| 006SC | 2020 | M | 41-60 | Other | EN | X | X |
| 007SC | 2019 | M | <25 | Human rights lawyer | EN | X | X |
| 008SC | 2019 | F | 26-40 | Women's Rights and SGBV | EN | X | X |
| 010SC | 2016 | M | 41-60 | Civil and Political Rights | EN | | X |
| 011SC | 2017 | F | 26-40 | Human rights lawyer | EN | | X |
| 012SC | 2020 | M | 26-40 | LGBTIQ+ rights | EN | X | X |
| 014SC | 2018 | M | 26-40 | Civil and Political Rights | EN | | X |
| 016SC | 2019 | F | 41-60 | LGBTIQ+ rights | EN | X | X |

¹ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex and Queer



| | | | | | | | |
|-------|------|---|-------|---------------------------------------|----|---|---|
| 017SC | 2018 | M | 41-60 | Business and environmental rights | SP | X | X |
| 018SC | 2018 | F | 41-60 | Enforced disappearances | SP | X | X |
| 019SC | 2020 | M | 41-60 | Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding | FR | X | X |
| 020SC | 2017 | F | 41-60 | Minority Rights | SP | X | X |
| 021SC | 2015 | M | 26-40 | Civil and Political Rights | FR | | X |

3. Shelter City:

Putting 10 years into perspective

A range of measures for the protection of human rights defenders has been introduced in the past decade, among which the practice of temporary international relocation. Temporary relocation involves a defender spending a period abroad, often as a measure of last resort, for their protection. Three important phenomena provide important context to understand better the rise of temporary relocation initiatives, according to the Martin Roth-Initiative: (1) the shrinking of civil space; (2) the development of international protection regimes, and (3) the expression of international solidarity and pursuit of transnational activism within the human rights movement.² Temporary international relocation has moreover been broadly recognized in the international policy community, which was further established in 2016 when the United

Nations Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders recognized temporary relocation as good practice.³

Within this ever-evolving context, Shelter City was brought to life in 2012 by the The Hague-based organization Justice & Peace with support from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the municipality of The Hague. The initiative came about in response to the challenges faced by human rights defenders worldwide. Shelter City was founded as a concrete and accessible way to support human rights defenders at risk. As a temporary relocation initiative, Shelter City offers defenders at risk “a safe and inspiring space to re-energise, receive tailor-made support and engage with allies to reinforce their local actions for change”.⁴ Today, Shelter City

2 Müller, M. (Ed.). (2019). Temporary Shelter and Relocation Initiatives: Perspectives of Managers and Participants (ifa Edition Culture and Foreign Policy). Stuttgart: ifa (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen). <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:O168-ssoar-62983-v2-7>

3 United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders, “Report to the United Nations Human Rights Council on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders” United Nations Document Number A/HRC/31/55 (1 February 2016) at 72 et seq.

4 Justice & Peace Call for applications for March 2022



describes itself as “a growing global movement of committed cities, institutions and people”.⁵

Since the pilot in 2012 up to 2021, Shelter City the Netherlands has received **2381 applications – with numbers growing each year.** For the first round in 2022 alone, Shelter City received 380 applications. Out of the total number of applications, 136 human rights defenders have participated in the initiative in the Netherlands in the past decade.⁶ Shelter City accepts defenders from all regions of the globe, whereas most participants originate from the sub-Saharan African continent (n=56), based mostly in the Democratic Republic of Congo (n=8), Kenya (n=8) and Uganda (n=8). Due to the organizational nature of Shelter City (see chapter 4), most participants have been English speaking participants (n=94). Where other relocatable relocation initiatives (e.g. International Cities of Refuge Network) give preference to specific human rights fields, Shelter City chooses to receive participants working across a range of themes, of which LGBTIQ+ rights (n=30) are represented most. Fields with the least representation include artists⁷ (n=2), children’s rights (n=3) and refugees and armed conflict (n=2). Table 2 gives a more detailed overview of the characteristics of participants.

The initiative has evolved considerably over the course of a decade. Starting with a pilot phase from 2012-2014 in The Hague and Middelburg, the initiative expanded its number of participating Shelter Cities in 2015. Ten more cities have joined the network of Shelter City in the Netherlands since then, amounting to **a total of 12 Shelter Cities in 2021 and 44 (coordinating) partners.** Recently, the city of Eindhoven has confirmed its commitment to join the initiative, bringing the total to 13 Shelter

Cities in the Netherlands. Annex 4 offers an overview of cities and its (coordinating) partners. Partners include both partners that have coordinating responsibilities, as partners that offer other forms of support (e.g. offering housing facilities, universities offering courses). This expansion has allowed the initiative to take on more participants each year, from 4 participants during the piloting years, towards 26 participants in the peak year of 2019. On average, since the ‘adult’ phase of the initiative in 2015, Shelter City has received 18 participants a year. The onset of COVID-19 in 2020 has influenced this average somewhat: during the first half of 2020, the initiative was not able to host defenders due to the restrictions.



⁵ From Justice & Peace website: <https://justiceandpeace.nl/en/initiatives/shelter-city/>

⁶ At the start of the impact study, 10 participants were still in the process of finalizing their stay.

⁷ Justice & Peace will be launching a pilot to shelter ‘artists’ specifically in 2022.



Table 2: Shelter City in numbers

| | |
|---|------|
| Total Shelter Cities | |
| Number of Shelter Cities in NL by 2021 | 12 |
| Total number of partner organisations across Shelter Cities in NL (by 2021) | 44 |
| Total applicants & participants | |
| Total applicants since 2012-2021 | 2381 |
| Total participants since 2012-2021 | 136 |
| By gender | |
| Number of participants identifying as male | 77 |
| Number of participants identifying as female | 54 |
| Number of participants identifying as other | 5 |
| By language of accompaniment | |
| English | 94 |
| Spanish | 24 |
| French | 18 |
| By region | |
| Sub-Saharan Africa | 56 |
| Americas | 25 |
| Asia and the Pacific | 26 |
| Europe and Central Asia | 14 |
| Middle East and North Africa (MENA) | 15 |
| By theme (top 5) | |
| LGBTIQ+ rights | 30 |
| Civil and political rights | 28 |
| Freedom of expression | 20 |
| Women's rights and Sexual and Gender-Based Violence | 17 |
| Human rights law | 10 |



Justice & Peace has made some strategic changes to the initiative throughout the years with the intention of strengthening the impact of Shelter City, of which the increasing focus on wellbeing has been particularly significant. While offering rest and respite has always been a priority of Shelter City, the level of importance given to the wellbeing and stress management of human rights defenders grew considerably over the years and was introduced more explicitly in strategic documents since 2017. Justice & Peace perceives wellbeing as encompassing “mental, emotional, spiritual and physical health, as well as healthy relationships with others and with the environment.”⁸ This growing attention

followed a broader recognition of the need to support defenders in dealing with challenges to their wellbeing such as burnout, post-traumatic stress disorder, stress, anxiety, and depression, and associated feelings such as guilt, shame and isolation – while they are on relocation as well as when they return home. This culminated in the co-development of the Barcelona Guidelines on Wellbeing and Temporary International Relocation of Human Rights Defenders at Risk in 2019 with the University of York and other international relocation initiatives (see Box 1).

⁸ The Barcelona Guidelines, 4

Box 1: **The Barcelona Guidelines**

Justice & Peace has collaborated with the Centre for Applied Human Rights at the University of York, the International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN), The Martin Roth Initiative, and The New School in New York on a research project which explored the ways that human rights defenders manage their mental and emotional wellbeing, and how relocation initiatives navigate the wellbeing of defenders in relocation. Specifically, the aim of this project was to deepen understanding about (a) the norms, beliefs, and practices that hinder as well as support human rights defenders at risk in strengthening their mental and emotional wellbeing, both individually and collectively; (b) how supporters of human rights defenders – in particular, coordinators of relocation initiatives and wellbeing service providers – can assist those at risk in strengthening their mental and emotional wellbeing; and (c) which creative and reflective practices strengthen the mental and emotional wellbeing of defenders at risk, and why. As a result of this research project the Barcelona guidelines on wellbeing and international temporary relocation of defenders were published in five languages (English, Arabic, French, Russian, Spanish) and recently the German translation has been published.



These strategic considerations were translated into programmatic objectives that are dedicated to a **'holistic approach', meaning that the initiative recognizes the interconnectedness of various aspects of human rights defenders' security and capacity, including those related to digital, physical, and organisational security, wellbeing and selfcare, policy influencing, and advocacy.** This approach transpires in the selection process of participants, the composition of the programme offered to defenders, and the follow-up support provided after return. More details on the programmatic considerations are discussed in chapter 4.

Furthermore, Justice & Peace has seen the relevance of the initiative grow over the past years. This growing need has also been confirmed by the main supporters to Justice & Peace, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁹ In a climate of increasing 'shrinking civic space', the recent developments under the COVID-19 pandemic are seen to exacerbate the situation for many

human rights defenders around the world, as authorities have been introducing restricting measures under the auspices of the pandemic. It remains to be seen whether authorities are willing to reverse these emergency measures once the peak of the pandemic has passed.

To meet the growing demand of defenders seeking temporary relocation, Justice & Peace is expanding its network of Shelter Cities internationally. With international hubs in Georgia, Costa Rica, Tanzania, Benin, the UK and a pilot project in Nepal, Shelter City is strengthening its support network and expand its reach. As mentioned earlier, the impact of the international expansion of the initiative, although of high relevance and interest, falls outside of the scope of this impact study.

The following chapter will dive deeper into the strategic objectives and interventions underpinning Shelter City.

⁹ Interview Ministry of Foreign Affairs





4. Reviewing key objectives, structure & elements of the initiative

The overall objective of Shelter City is “to enable human rights defenders worldwide to protect and promote human rights in a safer and more effective manner, thereby contributing to a safer and more enabling environment for all human rights work.”¹⁰ The initiative offers temporary relocation, rest and respite and capacity building to human rights defenders for a period of maximum 3 months. The intention is that participating defenders will return and continue their work in their own country, with new energy, skills, and contacts.

To reach this overall objective, the initiative has put forward several goals. Although the wording of the goals¹¹ has changed over the years, for the purpose of this impact study, the basic premises are captured in the following objectives:

1. Support and protect human rights defenders worldwide by offering them temporary relocation to the Dutch Shelter Cities.
2. Build the security and long-term resilience of human rights defenders and their organisations through an integrated and flexible training programme to continue their human rights work in a safer and enabling manner.
3. Expand the public support and

international network for human rights defenders in the Netherlands and abroad.

Four impact indicators have been identified for this impact study that help measure the intended impact on participating human rights defenders and their organisations. These include:

1. Human rights defenders have returned home and have continued their work
2. Human rights defenders apply improved approaches and strategies
3. Human rights defenders feel safer and more protected
4. Larger community in the home country benefits from defenders’ relocation experience

Several strategic decisions have been made by Justice & Peace that characterize Shelter City and have influenced the outcomes of the initiative. These choices include (1) fostering local ownership over the initiative, (2) the approach to application, selection, and matching procedure of participants, (3) the logistics and programme of relocation, and (4) the follow-up. In the following sections, these different characteristics will be briefly discussed.

¹⁰ Shelter City Annual Plan 2021

¹¹ In recent years, new goals and objectives have been added to include ‘emergency relocation’ (since 2017) and ‘family relocation’ (since 2020). These areas of work have not been addressed in detail in this impact study, as the impact of these objectives fall outside of the scope of the research.



4.1 - Encouraging local engagement

To enable the initiative's sustainability and broaden its impact, Justice & Peace has strategically chosen to embed Shelter City locally by closely collaborating with municipalities and local partners. Annex 4 provides an overview of Dutch cities and corresponding partners. Justice & Peace sees encouraging and empowering local engagement as an essential component of its success, as the initiative requires a certain level of commitment to make it work – financially, logistically as well as emotionally.

"We want [our partners] to feel it is in their community's interest to participate. Only then will we be able to sustainably carry out Shelter City." (Interview Shelter City staff)

Justice & Peace sees the initiative as a unique opportunity for "host cities to stand up for human rights globally, and for their citizens to meet activists and learn more on human rights issues". The organization realizes this way of working – sharing responsibilities with multiple cities and partners – requires different logistical support and capacity than if they would have chosen to centralize all relocation efforts at the headquarters in The Hague. The unique attribute of Shelter City to offer a personalized approach to each guest is made possible because of the strong engagement with local partners. While it might require particular logistical capacity and stakeholder management, in the end Justice & Peace finds that encouraging local engagement is paying off: "The effort is all worth it: in Nijmegen or Tbilisi we find them talking about their Shelter City, and Justice & Peace is no longer even mentioned in the same breath."¹²

In many of the Shelter Cities, decisions to join the initiative in the Netherlands have come from municipal councils. Usually, one or several council members submitted a motion supporting the idea. This political approval is

essential in finding financial commitment to the project, as well as engaging local organizations that are willing to implement the project. The different roles and responsibilities of Shelter City partners are provided in Figure 1.

Each city is required to reserve a certain minimum budget for the relocation of the participant in their city. Beyond the minimum required threshold, cities can allocate additional budget and/or offer certain facilities. As not all cities have similar opportunities in terms of resources they can offer to the participants, it allows for differences in types of accommodation (i.e. apartment in a nursing home, student housing or individual apartment), facilities (i.e. public transport cards, free museum pass) and opportunities (i.e. short documentary films about participant, international advocacy travels). Capacities and experience in hosting human rights defenders at risk also differ across implementing partners.

While some partners share an international mandate (e.g. Peace Brigades International in Utrecht), others have a more localized approach and focus (e.g. De Pletterij in Haarlem). Certain partners invite several participants per year, while others only host one participant per year. All these differing conditions and experiences are coordinated and managed by the Shelter City team at Justice & Peace.

¹² Programme document: Impact Through Local Engagement

FIGURE 1

Actors and tasks

| Before relocation | Justice & Peace | Organizations in country of origin | MFA / Embassies |
|-------------------|--|--|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deal with new requests • Perform screenings and checks • Arrange travel | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify & refer cases • Provide context information and information on cases | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate visa • Identify cases • Provide context information and information on cases |
| During relocation | Justice & Peace | Partners in host country | Authorities in host country |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervise stay • Organize activities • Monitor security situation • Prepare return | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide training, networking and any other relevant opportunities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fund the local stay • Provide networking opportunities & visibility • Ensure security during stay |
| After relocation | Justice & Peace | Organizations in country of origin | MFA / Embassies |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow-up on security of human rights defenders • Activate international network in case of emergency | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide support for safe return • Inform and act in case of emergency | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate visa • Identify cases • Provide context information and information on cases |

Source: *How to set up a Shelter City manual*



4.2 - Application, selection, and matching procedures

Calls for applications are sent out twice a year by Justice & Peace to enable two rounds of participants to visit the Netherlands. These calls are shared within the wider network of human rights organizations known to Justice & Peace, former alumni, and the network of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the

Dutch embassies. Also, social media platforms are used to share the call for applications. While Justice & Peace does not have a detailed strategic outreach strategy for the call for applications included in their annual plans, the organization does perform regular gap analyses of their application procedures. Following these analyses, Justice & Peace has over the years decided on expanding their network of partners in certain regions and/or human rights themes



with lower application rates. On average, calls for applications are open for submission for a period of 2-3 weeks. Justice & Peace receives, on average, 260 applications per call since 2019. However, according to Justice & Peace staff, many of the applications, despite clear guidance in the accompanying application procedures, are not eligible. This is because the majority of ineligible applications are submitted by human rights defenders requesting more long-term support (e.g. asylum). As Shelter City specifically focuses on offering temporary relocation in order to reinforce the work of defenders upon return, these applications cannot be taken into consideration.¹³

Justice & Peace has formulated a set of criteria for the selection procedure of potential participants. First, Justice & Peace staff will make a short-list out of the total number of applicants, based on the criteria as mentioned in the application form, after which an independent selection committee will discuss and determine the final selection of participants that will be invited to participate. The selection committee currently consists of representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hivos, Free Press Unlimited, University of Amsterdam, and COC.

During the pilot phase, Shelter City partners and municipalities were invited to sit in on the selection committee meetings. While they did not get a direct vote, their opinions were heard. Justice & Peace decided since 2016 to keep the selection procedures limited to members of the Selection Committee only. The reasoning for this included a wish to keep the process as impartial as possible, and the need to streamline the process more with a growing number of applicants. Potential preferences of the Shelter City network are now gathered in the short-listing phase via bilateral discussions.¹⁴

The process of short-listing and selecting of

candidates has developed over time. In 2012, a set of basic criteria was drafted which potential participants must meet. These included¹⁵:

Exclusion criteria:

- Is the candidate a human rights defender?
- Does the defender face (serious) threats and/or is under extreme pressure?
- Can the defender return home after 3 months?
- Is the defender sufficiently fluent in English, French or Spanish to communicate adequately in the Netherlands?
- Will their participation and possible visibility of the defender during their stay influence their safety and/or that of his/her family in the country of origin and/or influence their return?

Non-exclusion criteria:

- Is the defender able to speak about the human rights situation in the country of origin?

In late 2016, it was decided to tighten the selection criteria of participant profiles and sharpen the selection procedures. This was influenced by the relatively high number of asylum requests that were submitted by participants during that time. To ensure that the goals of Shelter City are achieved in offering temporary relocation with the intention that defenders can continue to improve human rights conditions in their countries of origin, Justice & Peace included several new elements into the selection process. These included:

- The profile of potential participants should match the intention of Shelter City: defenders that can benefit most from short-term relocation. During the short-listing, more attention is given to deepening

¹³ Interview Justice & Peace staff

¹⁴ Interview Shelter City staff

¹⁵ Programme document: Aangescherpte selectieprocedure

applicants' profiles with referee checks and context analyses.

- Justice & Peace relies more on relationships with local organisations and embassies to ensure defenders have a strong structure in the country of origin to fall back on upon return.
- Justice & Peace communicates more clearly prior to the arrival of participants what the expectations are of participation. Participants are invited to sign a Code of Conduct, in which they acknowledge on paper that the relocation is only temporary.
- During their stay, Justice & Peace discusses openly their return. The intention is to draft security plans with participants prior to their return, including an activity plan for the months after return and identifying a support base.

In the years that followed (since 2018), more steps have been taken to complement these procedures, including:

- Justice & Peace holds application interviews with short-listed candidates for further deepening of their profiles and motivations.
- Justice & Peace requests – where relevant – information from embassies and local partners (e.g. references) about short-listed candidates to understand better their contexts.

During the selection process, careful attention is given to matching participants with specific host cities. Certain host cities give preference to participants who are willing to step into the public eye and participate in outreach activities, while some participants might prefer to stay under the radar due to safety concerns. These and other considerations put forward by the participants are all weighed before a match is made between the host city and the participant. Once the selection and matching

process is complete, an online meeting is organized between the host, the participant and Justice & Peace to prepare for their arrival (incl. determining wishes and their potential programme).

4.3 - Relocation logistics & programme

Shelter City expects to contribute to achieving its goals by offering participants rest and respite, training courses, and networking and outreach opportunities. Host cities are given strong responsibility in helping to meet those objectives. Throughout the years, Justice & Peace has provided support by offering practical steps to get started with temporary relocation, as well as offering a guiding framework for the dos and don'ts of effective relocation efforts. To guide cities in their efforts, Shelter City has relatively recently (2019) developed a How to set up a Shelter City Manual, sharing their experiences and best practices for setting up successful shelters.

In each Shelter City, partners organize accommodation, facilitate monthly stipends, appoint (volunteer) buddies to support the participant during their stay, and develop – in close collaboration with the expected participant and Justice & Peace – the programme for their stay. If participants wish to be visible during their stay, this programme can include public appearances in the municipality or nationally, social events, as well as networking opportunities in the Netherlands and elsewhere in Europe. In case of budget constraints, partners can request budget for (international) advocacy events and travel with Justice & Peace for the participants. However, not all partners were aware of this budget support at the time of the study. Additionally, partners can offer opportunities for training and psycho-social support, if requested. Included in the programme is a 2-weeks course offered by Justice & Peace in The Hague, where all participants come together for the Holistic





FIGURE 2

Overview of holistic security training course learning objective

Holistic Security Management

- You understand the meaning and importance of a holistic approach to security.
- You understand the concepts of threat, risk, vulnerabilities, and capacities, and know how to carry out a risk assessment.
- You understand the elements and process of security management.

Body work and relaxation

- Gain new insight into how the body is connected to the experience of human rights work.
- Practice integrating mind and body, with breath, to stimulate relaxation and wellbeing.

(International) human rights advocacy

- Learn how the human rights system can be instrumentalized to support your work
- Understand the available mechanisms available in the UN and EU to that end

Digital security

- You build awareness of the risks related to the use of the internet and are able to analyse and understand your own privacy and digital security vulnerabilities and needs.
- You become familiar with tools for mitigating those risks and understand various strategies to better secure your information and communication.
- You set goals to improve your digital security at work and at home.

Wellbeing and self-care

- To understand the psychological impact of your work
- To cultivate resilience
- To learn to take better psychological care of yourself
- To develop a personal self-care plan

Source: *Information Guide Holistic Security Training Course 2021*



Security Training (HST) course. For each training week, a new guide is developed with more or less similar content. Figure 2 offers an example of learning objectives of the course offered in Spring 2021.

As local implementing organizations tailor the programme depending on each participant's needs, no programme is alike. However, key components will always be included, such as the Holistic Security Training Course offered by Justice & Peace, a meet & greet with the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the potential to receive individual psycho-social support, access to courses and trainings, and activities that stimulate rest & respite in and around the host city. An example of a day-to-day participant programme can be found in figure 3 below.

FIGURE 3

Example of participant programme in Shelter City

| | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday | Sunday |
|---------|----------------------|-----------------------|--|------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|--------|
| Week 1 | Arrival | | English lesson Intake at local host Welcome dinner | | Psycho-social support | | |
| Week 2 | | | | | | | |
| Week 3 | Meeting with partner | Lecture at university | | | | | |
| Week 4 | HST course | HST course | HST course | HST course | | | |
| Week 5 | | | | | | Filming documentary | |
| Week 6 | Public speaking | | | | | | |
| Week 7 | J&P training | J&P training | J&P training | | | Social event | |
| Week 8 | Network meeting | | | 2 Network meetings | | | |
| Week 9 | | | 2 Network meetings | | Public speaking | | |
| Week 10 | 2 Network meetings | | | | | | |
| Week 11 | Network meeting | Network meeting | Social event | International network/travel | | | |
| Week 12 | | Network meeting | Meeting with MoFA NL Farewell dinner | | | Departure | |



4.4 - Follow-up

The preparations for the return of participants and the follow-up support are intended to start already early on during their stay in the Netherlands. Justice & Peace wants to support human rights defenders in developing a security plan for their arrival in their countries of origin. This way, they can prepare for their return, take any precautionary measures if needed, and build and/or reach out to a support network in their localities if required. So far, the support in drafting a plan has not been provided consistently, according to the Justice & Peace staff. This was also confirmed by the analysis of the follow-up interviews, in which former participants expressed differing experiences with preparing for their return. Further reflections by Justice & Peace staff would be required to explore the reasoning behind the inconsistencies.

In further support of their return, Justice & Peace offers participants a small grant to get on their feet upon return. This information is not structurally shared with participants prior to their arrival. Respondents shared that having this information beforehand would relieve some of the stress they felt before visiting the Netherlands and/or in preparation of their return.

Since late 2017, Justice & Peace staff also engages in follow-up interviews with former participants, as described earlier. These interviews take place 6 months after their stay, and serve the purpose of a check-in with participants, as well as being used as monitoring instruments for further development of the initiative. The analysis of the interviews has helped staff to identify possible bottlenecks or opportunities for improvement. In several cases, where relevant, Justice & Peace offered follow-up support to former participants in the form of references to other (international) organizations that could tend to their pressing needs.

This chapter has provided a condensed overview of the Shelter City's underlying strategies and conditions. In the next chapter, further impact study findings will be discussed for each of the impact indicators, after which chapter 6 will reflect on the key contributing factors that contributed to the experienced changes.



A group of Shelter City guests visiting The Hague in 2019.

5. Impacting the wellbeing and work of human rights defenders



In this chapter, findings along the four impact indicators of the initiative are presented. For each impact indicator, the section describes the intention and/or approach of Shelter City in addressing the indicator and presents relevant findings. Findings are drawn from analysis of follow-up interview reports as well as from in-depth Impact Study interviews with former participants, partners, and staff, where relevant.



5.1 - Human rights defenders have returned home and have continued their work

Shelter City continuously keeps a central goal in mind, which is enabling human rights defenders “to return home and continue their work in their own country, with new energy, skills and contacts”.¹⁶ Justice & Peace emphasizes the relevant role the Shelter City participants fulfil for their communities: “The participants are sometimes one of few people in their communities that dare to stick their neck out against human rights violations. It’s therefore pertinent they can return to their communities to continue this instrumental work.”¹⁷

Participants returning home

Over the course of 10 years, **Shelter City has seen 106 participants return home out of a total of 136 participants**, of which 126 participants who had finalised their stay by November 2021. A total of 14 participants have requested asylum in the Netherlands during their relocation, of which 12 requests have been granted, while 2 asylum requests are pending. A total of 6 participants have been (temporarily) relocated to a third country.

The question of asylum has been an expected, yet nevertheless contested issue surrounding the initiative since the onset. Justice & Peace has been required to set clear boundaries for human rights defender’s participation to debunk some of the fears of partners and funders that the temporary relocation initiative would be attracting those seeking asylum. Out

¹⁶ Annual Plan 2021

¹⁷ Interview Shelter City staff



of the total of 14 asylum requests that were filed over the course of a decade, the majority (10 out of 14) were requested in the first five years of the initiative. The internal analysis of these initial asylum requests made clear to Justice & Peace that application and selection procedures required adjustments to ensure that the initiative would attract participants that were more aligned with Shelter City's objectives of temporary relocation. Since then, the application and selection procedures were adjusted to ensure participant profiles correspond better with Shelter City's purpose. As described in more detail in section 4.2, in 2018, Justice & Peace decided to adopt enhanced screenings of defenders' profiles and contexts and applied more rigorous selection procedures before final admission. As a result of the adjustments, the number of asylum requests has gone down by half since 2018 (4 requests).

Participants continuing work

Returning to countries and communities of origin is one thing. This however does not necessarily imply that human rights defenders would be enabled to continue their human rights work upon return; let alone be more effective in what they do. Justice & Peace is aware of this underlying assumption and has strategized accordingly. The relocation experience is therefore geared in such a way that participants should feel re-energized upon return, reinforced by new skills and contacts, enabling them to continue their work more effectively than prior to participation in Shelter City.

The impact study finds that **out of 47 alumni who answered the question whether they had continued their work, all have indicated to have restarted and/or continued their work**¹⁸ as a human rights defender upon return. With

'restarted' the study includes those respondents who mentioned that prior to participation in Shelter City, they experienced depression, were traumatized, were burned out, endured high levels of stress, or faced increasing threats.¹⁹ Each of these conditions were associated with directly impeding the defenders in effectively carrying out their work. Some respondents described their situation impacting their work to such degrees that they were "unable to produce any work or analyse any type of information" or they argued it "caused me to forget things and to get angry at anybody and anything at anytime".²⁰ With 'continuing work' the study includes those respondents who shared that they proceeded with similar activities as prior to Shelter City, either for the same organization or with another initiative or programme in a similar field of work. With many alumni, the type of work and the approach taken in their human rights work has changed after return, which will be elaborated more in section 5.2.

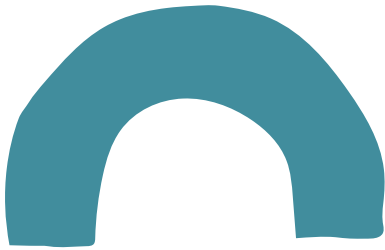
The main reasons to restart or continue work are linked to the participant's motivation to participate in the first place: to strengthen their (personal) efforts in fighting for their cause. The majority of respondents mentioned that they were in (dire) need of taking a step back, or in the words of one respondent "to break the cycle of mental and physical abuse".²¹ This need was either pointed out to them by their colleagues and friends, or they were self-aware of their situation. Respondents stated that they saw the initiative as a means to take rest, get training or engage in networking – all with the aim of eventually revitalizing their work back home.

¹⁸ Responses compiled from follow-up interview reports & Impact Study interviews with alumni

¹⁹ Follow-up interview analysis & Impact Study interviews with alumni

²⁰ Impact Study interviews with alumni

²¹ Impact Study interviews with alumni



Impact Story 1

A chance to re-energize

I am an investigative journalist working in Eastern Europe and member of the LGBTIQ+ community. Before joining Shelter City, I was facing a severe depression because of the constant threats and stress I was experiencing. Fellow activists in my network were being detained and new laws were introduced that severely limit my work as a human rights defender in the country. The strain of daily life as an activist got the best of me. With one after the other stressful event taking place, it kept on adding pressure on me and my mental health. It got to such a state that I was not able to continue my work. I couldn't write any articles. As an investigative journalist, I had been collecting bulks of data that required analysis for publication. But I just couldn't see how I would ever be able to complete the analysis. I was drained. I didn't have the energy or motivation to continue.

My stay with Shelter City allowed me to re-energize and start work again. I was able to continue my investigations as a journalist. I turned to all the data I had collected before my stay and was able to get my publications out. After return, I even became more active in the LGBTIQ+ community, helping with organizing events and the sorts. Not only was I able to continue my work, I noticed I was also better able to cope with the stress of being an activist under our repressive regime. I now feel more confident when I face problems with government structures or law enforcement. I experience it all as being less stressful than I would have before.

The rest and support I received during my stay with Shelter City in the Netherlands contributed to this. For one, the fact that I did not have to look across my shoulder constantly created a great deal of relief and allowed me to recuperate. Just imagine, only weeks before I joined the initiative, a colleague activist of mine was detained by the authorities. I was in close contact with her through text messaging and feared that the police would access her devices and come after her fellow activists, including myself. Such continuous strain on your mind is exhausting, and Shelter City offered me a safe space to relieve some of the pressure. Next to the three months of rest, I was also getting support from mental health professionals during my stay. This allowed me to build new coping mechanisms in dealing with stress and prioritizing my mental health and overall wellbeing. When I returned, I made sure to share these lessons with fellow activists, emphasizing how important it is that we take care of ourselves during our struggle.

Even though it has been over a year that I have participated in Shelter City, I still benefit from the experience each day.

"My stay with Shelter City allowed me to re-energize and start working again. I was able to continue my investigations as a journalist."





Contributing factors to return & continuation of work

Beyond their initial motivations, the possibility and vigour to restart or continue work was also supported by several outcomes following their participation in Shelter City. The study showed three main outcomes to have contributed to the continuation of their work: **(1) a sense of recognition and acknowledgement of their work, (2) a new perspective to Human Rights work and the role of Human Rights Defenders, and (3) a stronger confidence in their work and abilities.**

First, the encounters during their relocation experience with similar minded people that take human rights as seriously as they do, gave participants much-needed recognition and acknowledgement of their work that they do not receive in their own – often hostile – environments. A participant described it in the following exemplary way:

“As a human rights defender you often think, maybe I am crazy? You doubt yourself and your sanity. At home, the community is fighting you. So you wonder: why am I doing this work? Shelter City showed: I am not alone. So many people believe what I am doing and it helps in accepting yourself.”

IMPACT STUDY INTERVIEW

Second, discussions during their stay about the value of human rights work also allowed the majority of participants to get a new perspective on their work and revalue themselves. The study showed many defenders to be their own worst critics, having a feeling of never doing enough as violations often pertain for years or even aggravate. Understanding better the position of defenders in human rights struggles globally, allowed them to (re-)evaluate their role as a defender and reposition themselves in their work. Participant shares: “As a defender, you are

always very strict with yourself. Every day I say ‘oh, I don’t do enough, I should do more’. But my stay allowed to evaluate myself and see things in an integral way.”

Last, this combined experience of recognition and (re-)evaluating their role as a human rights defender, was accompanied by a stronger confidence in the value of their work and their abilities. Alumni experiences included: “I gained more confidence. I realised I had a certain responsibility and discovered I was not in this alone and as such I felt motivated to continue my work passionately”; “By gaining new tools and knowledges it helped me become more confident to speak up and ask for accountability from the government” and “I was so fragile and unstable when I came to the Netherlands, but when I left, especially because of the programme I had in the Netherlands, it built up my self-confidence again”.²²

Overall, respondents shared that removing themselves physically out of a volatile and unsafe environment for a period of three months allowed them to re-energize sufficiently to pick up their work upon return.

5.2 - Human rights defenders apply improved approaches and strategies

The initiative aims to offer rest and respite to human right defenders at risk, as well as provide tools to defenders that will help them to do their work more effectively upon return. More specifically, Shelter City offers security trainings, networking and outreach opportunities, and wellbeing support, besides the overall respite from the challenging conditions the defenders are facing. The intention of this holistic approach to the relocation experience is to enable defenders to improve on their approaches and strategies.

²² Quotes from follow-up interview reports & Impact Study interviews with alumni

Participants improving their approach

The impact study shows that **out of 34 participants who answered questions in relation to their approach after return,**²³ **all but 3 participants describe that they have indeed improved their approaches to their work since they have returned,** attributing this specifically to their Shelter City experience. The most common improvements that were identified six months and longer after their stay included: (1) participants have refocused or re-strategized their approach; (2) participants make more strategic considerations for an effective approach; (3) participants apply improved security measures; and (4) participants have incorporated wellbeing systematically in their work. Each improvement will be discussed in some more detail below. For the three participants who stated not to have improved their approach, reasoning was given to having already adequate approaches in place.

First, participants have refocused or re-strategized their approach:

Approximately a third of the participants (11 out of 31) mentioned that they refocused their work and/or re-strategized their approach since their Shelter City experience. Mostly, participants expressed how the time away from their work environment allowed them to review and evaluate their approach and strategies. Something they did not get around to in the stressful, volatile situation they were facing at home. This process led participants to adopt new or improved strategies upon return influencing the scope of their work, the focus of their work, and/or organization of their work. In terms of **scope**, participants indicated choosing to change the scope of their human rights work either to localise it more or to focus more on regional or international arenas, all to benefit the effectiveness and safety of their work. Moreover,

during their stay they were encouraged to **focus** more along the lines of 'impact' and 'long-term objectives', which allowed participants to restructure their approach and set priorities. Finally, the **organization** of their work changed in many cases, due to improved skills in programme management and strategic thinking.

"I learned to work in a constructive way, more strategically, and less warrior-like."

IMPACT STUDY INTERVIEW

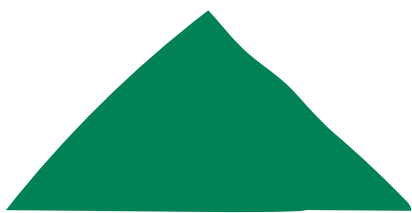
Second, participants make more strategic considerations for an effective approach:

Nearly a quarter of the participants (8 out of 31) mentioned how participation in Shelter City allowed them to reassess their style of activism or human rights defenders' work. Respondents very clearly argued how prior to their engagement with Shelter City, they saw no other means of intervention than seeking out confrontation, an approach described by respondents as being 'impulsive', 'warrior-like' or sometimes as 'acting aggressively'. After participation, they returned with new perspectives to the work of human rights defenders, which allowed each of the respondents to pursue more strategic considerations that were described by participants as being less confrontational methods of activism and advocacy.

"Now there is less escalation, which is wonderful. I know, myself, I can get quite aggressive, almost like a warrior. I never thought I would be able to make it - but these tools came to me at the right time. I learned to work in a constructive way, more strategically, and less warrior-like." - Impact Study Interview

²³ Question answers compiled from follow-up interview reports & Impact Study interviews with alumni





Impact Story 2

Re-strategizing our work

I would describe myself as a mother and a fierce anti-female genital mutilation and early marriage activist. I come from a pastoralist community that still aggressively enforces cultural practices that harm women and girls. I have experienced this first hand. Knowing what impact it has on a person, I have vowed to fight these harmful practices and safeguard the rights of other women.

But of course, this has come at a cost. When I travel to rescue circumcised girls, I face serious problems with the community. They see me and my organization as the enemy because we are against their practices. I have often faced harassment and physical threats of the community when rescuing these young girls. But the work never stops – we find a new case each time, that requires us to step up and act, despite the aggression.

“My stay at Shelter City in the Netherlands changed how I approach my human rights work.”

When I started this work together with the other women, it started out of an impulse – we just did it because we felt we had to. It slowly grew into an organization but still I felt a personal responsibility of responding to every single case. While I had the opportunity of leading this group of women, in the end of the day I personally was still rushing to the villages each time a case was called in. It’s important to realize that these communities are very remote – we don’t have any vehicles that can take us to the location of the girls. Sometimes, I had to rent a motorbike, but perhaps there is no fuel, and then I needed to trek for a whole day, from 6 to 6, to the village. It became very intense for me.

My stay at Shelter City in the Netherlands changed how I approach my human rights work. Rather than thinking I have to do everything myself, the 3-month relocation showed me that I can build on my team more and delegate responsibilities. I have learned how to better coordinate the work, which allows us to now reach 12 villages across three different wards. For each location, we now have a different woman taking responsibility. I no longer have to do all the work by myself; travelling to every village to rescue girls. This has relieved a lot of pressure for me personally, and it has made our work much more effective.

“I no longer have to do all the work by myself; travelling to every village to rescue girls. This has relieved a lot of pressure for me personally, and it has made our work much more effective.”





"I was always working from an aggressive point of view. I was not willing to go to the table with anybody or negotiate with anyone. During my stay, I had the opportunity to speak with different demographics and agencies, which brought me clarity in my activism. Now, I can say "let's discuss" and I find myself wanting to have those conversations more." - Impact Study Interview

Third, participants apply improved security measures:

7 out of 31 participants mentioned how security training influenced their approach as a human rights defender. While across the board more participants mentioned having applied improved security measures (see section 5.3), seven participants specifically identified how these measures influenced their approach to human rights work directly. Examples that were provided included participants being more confident in pursuing their data collection efforts as they were better able to keep their sources safe, being able to continue or pursue online activism as digital security measures were enhanced, as well as being able to travel more and safer between communities of interest to provide support or collect data as they were better able to assess risks and protect their team.

Last, participants have incorporated wellbeing systematically in their work:

5 out of 31 participants identified how their heightened awareness of the importance of wellbeing directly influenced their work and the approaches they engage in with their colleagues. While most participants confirmed that improved wellbeing positively affected them, five participants thus made specific references to how this influenced their approach. Examples include adopting new strategic approaches that focus on enhancing the wellbeing within

their organisations and/or networks, either through awareness raising activities, as part of weekly routines, or by incorporating 6-month wellbeing retreats. A participant shares: "Back home, I developed a mental health strategy for the organization and all the volunteers, including yoga, meditation and other wellbeing activities for people to sustain themselves in our community." Beyond the 5 respondents who confirmed a direct relationship between the wellbeing training and changing their approach, the majority of participants under study (n=62) emphasized that the focus on wellbeing influenced their lives and work as a defender upon return. Most participants shared that they did not consider wellbeing relevant before participating in the initiative. In the follow-up interview reports and the Impact Study interviews, participants argued that their stay with Shelter City made them realize the value of taking care of oneself if they wanted to be (more) effective in their work.

"Because of the wellbeing support, I feel more in control, and I use breathing and relaxing techniques that I learnt during the wellbeing and body work sessions."

"The Tai Chi has been extremely important to me. When I came back home, I remembered the sessions, especially in hard moments. Then, I could work on my body and spirit, and it allowed me to meditate and relax."

Reducing stress levels when faced with threats or (online) harassments was given as the predominant benefit. The participants shared they now had different coping mechanisms to get through these challenging times, which strengthened the continuity of their work. Before, high levels of stress and anxiety would either revert them to put a halt on their activities or steer clear of certain (politically) sensitive topics. However, with the new coping mechanisms to



deal with stress, participants indicated they were more confident in sustainably pursuing their work, even during hardships.

While many highlighted the benefits of being offered wellbeing support, it often was the first time ever that they were confronted head-on with their anxieties and feelings of distress. Participant: “It drained me emotionally, knowing that I would have to talk about this.” Some experienced the psycho-social support as opening a Pandora’s box, which Shelter City was not able to follow-up on consistently or sustainably with each participant. A participant shares: “The wellbeing component was not sustainable. It should have been given more time and attention, and every participant should be able to receive it when they arrive. Participants come with a lot of fear that needs to be addressed.” Others emphasized the need for follow-up upon return. While many would have liked to continue with seeking psycho-social support, the options in their countries of origin are limited or inaccessible to them.

“Before my participation in Shelter City, I was not able to work due to depression. But, thanks to the sessions with the psychologist and the safe environment, I was able to work again.”
“As human rights defenders we accept the situation of danger. We feel that it is a consequence that we need to accept if we want to be part of the struggle. The Shelter City programme reminded me that I am human before being a defender.”

Concluding reflections

The impact study shows that the relocation experience with Shelter City positively influenced the approach and strategies of participants. Not only were they able to confirm they improved their approach, but descriptions of the way these improved approaches enhanced their effectiveness supported the findings.

Respondents identified the following main factors as contributing to these four types of improvements in their approach to their human rights defender work:

- Training on (international) advocacy,
- Gaining a greater perspective of human rights and human rights work,
- Staying outside of their hostile environment,
- Group sessions on wellbeing and body work, and
- Training on (digital) security.

The networking and outreach component is not mentioned in this list of contributing factors, while it was highlighted as a major contributor to the effectiveness of the work of many former participants. This networking component will be addressed in more detail under section 4.4, when addressing the next impact indicators.



A group of Shelter City guests practising Tai Chi with instructor Leo Mosselman in The Hague.



5.3 - Human Rights Defenders feel safer and more protected

One of the intentions of Shelter City, is to ensure that participants feel safer, more protected, and are feeling part of a larger community once they have returned to their countries of origin and continue their work. Shelter City stimulates this by offering the Holistic Security Training programme and by offering the opportunity to participants to expand their network and outreach whilst in the Netherlands.

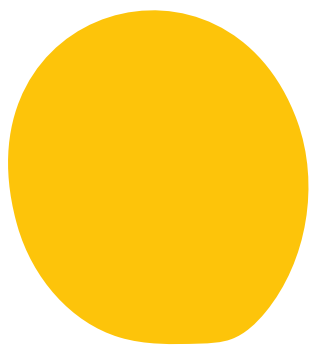
Digital security

The impact study shows that **41 out of 47 participants who have reflected on questions pertaining to their (perception of) safety upon return,²⁴ answered that they had improved their (digital) security measures.** These improvements, in most cases, resulted in a greater (sense of) security, and thus apparent safety, for the participants personally. These effects seemed to have trickled down to their organizations, as lessons were shared with colleagues and peers. Regarding digital security, respondents showed differing levels of knowledge and relevance of the necessity of digital security measures. For those using digital tools such as laptops, (smart) phones, digital data storage, and social media, the training on digital security proved relevant – showing the importance of data and privacy protection. Some identified they “had no clue of digital security dangers” before participating, while others knew of the potential danger, but “did not have the resources or knowledge on how to address them”. In practice, most participants now use VPN, encrypted e-mail (Proton over Gmail accounts), password protection (LastPass) and encrypted messaging applications (Signal over WhatsApp). Those who did not confirm improving their digital security mentioned a lack of necessary digital equipment, not being tech-savvy, digital means being less relevant in their context, or having missed out on the training.

The reported changes to the digital security were directly attributed to the digital security training offered by Justice & Peace during their stay in the Netherlands. Since applying these new measures, participants shared the following changes to the security situation: tools and storage mitigate risks of surveillance while communicating with informants and communities, and mitigated risks around data loss and breach. Each of these situations leads participants to feeling more confident in the work they do. Some examples:

- *“Through the training, I got new knowledge on how to ensure the security of my sources. I now also give advice to my sources on how to mind their security. For example, two months ago, one of my contact persons was followed unknowingly. As he gave me some indicators, he was now aware of, I felt I needed to check out. And indeed, I found out they were spying on him and his movements. My advice helped him after that.” - Impact Study interview*
- *“What I am sure about is that we are now safer and have more confidence as an organization since we work with some of the digital tools. We are now all using VPN, Signal groups to communicate and other security tools. This gives us some confidence. That is a change we feel ourselves, but of course we don’t know if this will protect us from all security attacks in the future.” - Impact Study interview*

²⁴ Question answers compiled from follow-up interview reports & Impact Study interviews with alumni



Impact Story 3

Sustaining our work for the long-term

I am a human rights lawyer working for an organization that focuses on protecting and advocating human rights of marginalized communities, primarily the LGBTIQ+ communities. I head the Legal Aid Services Division of the organization, representing LGBTIQ+ clients in courts of law, with strategic litigation and actively advocating for their rights online and offline.

Where I come from, our cause is deemed illegal by the government. Same-sex relations have been criminalized in my country, and recent legislations have further stripped away rights of the LGBTIQ+ community. The death penalty has been debated in some legislations and life imprisonment has been imposed for engaging in "homosexual activity" (i.e. carnal knowledge against the order of nature). In these conditions, my organization is facing a daily battle, in a context where we find the government increasingly restricting the activities of civil society and human rights defenders. It creates an extremely challenging and often dangerous situation for us human rights defenders. We have seen friends and colleagues being incarcerated, which under the threat of these new legislations is extremely serious.

"Because of my stay with Shelter City, my organization now approaches these situations differently."

Only recently, our government has also revised a law in the country that requires our organization to get additional registrations to be allowed to pursue our work. These changes have been very controversial, and we view them as specifically aimed at bringing down the work of organizations such as ours. Under these administrative changes, our organization was put under the limelight of the authorities. They requested us to show up to a meeting to defend the new application for the registration of our organization. As we are actively advocating for the rights of now criminalized communities, we were not well received. During the meeting we were faced with many members of the authorities who presented us with screen shots of our social media accounts, demanded explanations for our recent activities, and asked who we were affiliated with. Five months later, a decision has not been taken despite the same law providing that a rejection shall be communicated within three months. This type of harassment puts myself and my colleagues under extreme pressure and even threatens our personal safety.

Before my participation in Shelter City, we faced these threats less strategically, with higher risk to our personal safety. We were less protected digitally, meaning our emails and online communication were not password protected or secured. When authorities would visit our offices, which they did at numerous occasions, they had access to all of our information and details, also those of our clients. We also were less aware how to prepare for or react to such threats from the authorities. Because of my stay with Shelter City, my organization now approaches these situations differently. For every incident, we come together as a team and reflect on the incident in order to come up with strategies on how to handle it. We analyse the situation and assess the threat level. In this particular case we realize it could go either way, where our organization might be seen as illegal, or we can proceed under a watchful eye. For both scenarios we are planning ahead and seeking alliances in support of our cause. Strategically analysing our situation in this way gives us the confidence to move forward with our cause, despite the uncertainties we face.



However, **a significant number of participants still seem to face challenges in applying the tools and security measures in full.** This is caused either by a lack of resources or access to (online) tools. A smaller number of participants find it difficult in engaging colleagues in applying the digital security measures. Participant: "Some of my colleagues, they don't feel the need to use the strategies. It's hard to change the security culture." While others argue in line with the following statement: "Not all of our colleagues feel comfortable with digital means, making it difficult to get the whole organization on board, which is needed if we want to avoid future hacking attempts".

"What I am sure about is that we are now safer and have more confidence as an organization since we work with some of the digital tools."

IMPACT STUDY INTERVIEW

Physical security and risk mitigation

Beyond the digital, the impact study also showed relevance of other components of the security training. With this, **particularly the application of risk analyses, risk mapping or risk assessments were mentioned as greatly influencing the day-to-day safety of participants and that of their organizations upon return.** Examples were provided in which participants used the risk analysis to determine whether they should temporarily seek shelter elsewhere, move offices and/or whether it would be safe enough to return home. While some use the methodology more structurally, conducting monthly risk mapping together with colleagues, others use it more ad hoc when setting up a new project and/or faced with a new public event or travel.

Protection from an international community

Moreover, a sense of safety was partly supported

by the fact that participants felt more protected after their stay in the Netherlands. Beyond the digital and physical security measures they could implement themselves, the participants also indicated that the networking opportunities offered by Shelter City allowed them to feel more protected upon return.

- *"I gained a lot of confidence in pursuing my work now. I had all these meetings with governments when staying with Shelter City. Meetings with EU institutions and others. Through these meetings, they emphasized their support for my cause and wanted to know about my security plans. So, this feels like I have some form of protection – that there are international resources protecting me."* - Impact Study interview



During one of the training sessions on Advocacy and Policy-influencing.



Participants explained that **having the support of an international network was important for them in dealing with threats and harassments.**

First, because it gives them a sense of reassurance that if they would be suddenly incarcerated or accused of a criminal case, they would at least know that there is an international community aware of their struggle and could possibly lend their support. An example was provided by one of the former participants:

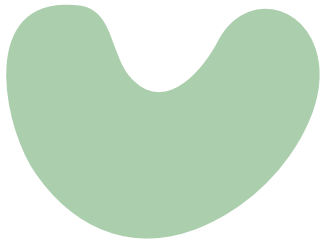
- *“When I was threatened by the authorities, we wrote to international bodies to call out the government here and investigate my case. They followed with an order for an inquiry in my case. The officials and police remained very quiet, and you could see they were under pressure. They really felt the international pressure and scrutiny.”* - Impact Story interview



Second, it is believed that the connection with international organizations itself has deterred authorities or other opposing fractions from (continuing) harassing human rights defenders. A participant shares:

- *“Even the simple act of retweeting our social media posts is important. Be it NGOs or governments retweeting us. It means the presence of an international actor. A retweet means support. It also means visibility: showing how the international community has its eyes on our activities. This might have a dissuasive effect on authorities. When you are feeling unprotected in your own country, at least you have hope that you are seen by others.”* - Impact Story interview

A cautionary note was provided by several participants, where developing international linkages might also cause them to be more on the radar – in a negative sense – of authorities and opposing stakeholders. However, when asked whether participants experienced any new threats or harassment as a consequence of their participation in Shelter City, the majority of participants did not identify heightened safety or security concerns. Those who did mention to have experienced new or heightened concerns, shared mostly that this was due to the volatile nature of their context (e.g. political or civil unrest, or new restricting laws being introduced). One participant was able to directly link heightened concerns with the participation in Shelter City, in which the participant shared that the government perceived the participation in the Netherlands as “aligning with an international network of communists”. This led to an increase of red-tagging by the state on the participant’s work. Nevertheless, the benefits of this two-edged sword of international recognition and protection were overall seen as outweighing the potential costs.



Impact Story 4

Feeling protected

My organization works towards protecting human rights in the university contexts, especially that of academic freedom, university autonomy, and the right to quality education. This work does not come without risk. In fact, in my country, it is extremely dangerous to promote any form of freedom of expression or independent thought. You hear about activists and journalists ‘disappearing’ or being imprisoned for expressing their views. Faced with this repressing climate, it makes it very challenging for me to work as a human rights defender. To be honest, I thought I was going crazy because of all the pressure I was facing.

Before my participation in Shelter City, I felt extremely unprotected in my own country. I continued the work, but it felt as if I had nothing to fall back on if things would go wrong. If I would have been arrested or worse, nobody would have paid attention to it except for my wife and family. Now, after Shelter City, I feel seen by the international community. This sense of recognition has changed how we operate as an organization. We have now widened our reach internationally and our expertise is requested at international fora.

“Now, after Shelter City, I feel seen by the international community.”

My time in the Netherlands and afterwards has had a domino effect. During my stay I had the opportunity to escape the stresses of the humanitarian crisis in my country and enjoy some rest and take the opportunity to study. I also had the opportunity to work on the visibility of my organization, to speak at international events and to widen my international network of likeminded NGOs and universities. All of this seems to have increased the awareness among international bodies about my organization and the human rights work that we do. The fact that the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs is now retweeting our messages means a lot. It might seem like a small thing but having public support like that raises the profile of me and my organization. Authorities now know we are being watched. It feels like a guarantee of sorts if things would turn bad.

So although the risks of doing my work in my country remain the same, me and my team feel different. We feel more protected and thus more confident in pursuing our human rights goals.

“We feel more protected and thus more confident in pursuing our human rights goals.”





“So, this feels like I have some form of protection – that there are international resources protecting me.”

IMPACT STUDY INTERVIEW

Holistic approach to security

The overall sense of safety was also strengthened due to a new perspective in relation to their work as a human rights defender, and because they give more attention to their wellbeing.

One participant formulated it as follows: “The digital, emotional and organizational security measures all help to mitigate risks for us. If the community of defenders that we work with are unaware of the different types of security measures that are out there and which they should take, it makes them even more vulnerable.” Participants, more often implicitly than explicitly, emphasized how the combination of being more mindful of their stressors and how to deal with stressful situations, together with more tangible changes to their work or organization’s security procedures, helped them in continuing to pursue their mission.

On benefits of new perspectives:

- *“I have been consistently attacked verbally over social media by government and others for nearly a decade. They caricature me and demonize me. All of these tactics are played out in order to silence me or to disable human rights defenders. Before coming to the Netherlands, I would have been very worried and scared. But, having been exposed to all different types of scenarios during the trainings and meeting like-minded people, I now appreciate better what it means. I get to understand better why they are doing this, how these harassments fit in my human rights work,*

and eventually helps me to better address these challenges.” - Impact Story interview

- *“I used my relocation also as a chance to learn more about activism, especially in terms of LGBTIQ+ rights from an international perspective. I learned that even for the Netherlands it was not an easy struggle, despite now being one of the countries at the top of protecting human rights defenders. It helped me to understand that the history of a country might be a struggle but change eventually happened after consistent hard work and activism. This new perspective gave me renewed energy to continue my work.” - Impact Story interview*

On benefits of attention to wellbeing:

- *“During the training at the Justice & Peace office, they taught us that fighting for human rights is important. But, keeping us human rights defenders safe is also equally important. They pointed out that often, we take ourselves out of the equation and forget that we have rights too. We don’t include ourselves as beneficiaries of our cause. So, we came to realize how self-safety, taking care of ourselves is crucial if we want to continue.” - Impact Story interview*

“So, we came to realize how self-safety, taking care of ourselves is crucial if we want to continue”

IMPACT STORY INTERVIEW



5.4 - Larger community in home country benefits from relocation

Measuring the impact on the larger community of the defenders in their countries of origin was outside of the scope of this study. Measuring this would not only include speaking with colleagues of the defenders' own organisations, but also following-up on specific activities and long-term engagement that they have been part of to see whether changes can be observed in behaviour of people or in policies in their countries of origin. This type of impact study would be recommended by using a case study approach in future studies but is not included here.

What is included, is the anecdotal evidence that was collected that suggests trickle down effects of the human rights defenders' relocation experience on organisations and communities after participants returned. Three aspects have been identified through analysis of the experiences of participants: **(1) relevance of**

sharing with direct colleagues, **(2) improved status of human rights defender after participation, and (3) increased opportunities due to networking and outreach.**

Sharing with organizations, networks, and beneficiaries

First, the impact study worked from Shelter City's assumption that organizations and wider communities can benefit from the lessons learned by participants upon return. The study shows that 42 participants reflected on their experience in sharing lessons learned and knowledge upon return in the follow-up interview reports and Impact Study interviews (n=62).

A total of **37 participants out of 42 confirmed** they actively shared information they learned during their stay with Shelter City with their organization, community, or beneficiaries. The five participants who were not able to share, argued they were planning to but were lacking



During one of the training weeks in The Hague.



the resources or energy to commit. Those who confirmed, shared this information with their own organisation (25), a wider network of human rights defenders and activists (11) or with the wider community and/or beneficiaries of their organisation (8). The most common topic that was shared was the digital security training. Sharing took place in the form of training sessions and workshops, or more informally with colleagues at the office. The organizational capacity building was in many cases translated into new strategies or protocols within the organisation.

Changed status & treatment since Shelter City

Second, the impact study gathered 40 respondents that reflected on how they have been treated since their participation in Shelter City.

A total of 30 participants mentioned that they have been treated differently by colleagues, communities, and/or authorities, while 10 participants did not experience different treatment. Those who shared not being treated differently all mentioned that they did not disclose their participation to colleagues and/or authorities.

Out of the 30 participants that experienced different treatment, all but one participant said the treatment was positive. The participant who experienced negative treatment because of her raised profile, shared that “red-tagging by the state has worsened”. The most common positive impacts mentioned included: increased credibility and respect (19), raising their profile as a human rights defender (19), and their participation leading to more opportunities, connections, and linkages both locally as well as internationally (15). Seven participants shared that their raised (international) profile positively influenced how authorities were treating them. Examples were shared where authorities now take the human rights defender more seriously, ask them for advice, or even help prevent them from being attacked. Nevertheless, participants

shared it remains a two-edged sword: the raised profile can also lead to more monitoring by the authorities.

Wider community benefits & feelings of apprehension

The third and final aspect shows a possible trickle-down effect of the wider benefits relating to the funding and training opportunities that were created because of the relocation experience of the human rights defenders. Participants mentioned several opportunities that followed directly from their involvement, these included: follow-up training opportunities, international speaking opportunities, funding opportunities with newly established collaborations, and increased engagement with (local) networks and alliances. A few participants, however, expressed disappointment in the lack of follow-up that was given by organizations that reportedly made promises to continue collaboration with the participant when they returned home.

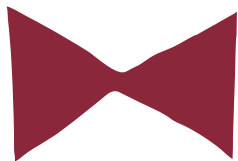
It must be noted that **a significant number of participants expressed their early concerns how their participation in the initiative would affect their community.** Participants shared initial feelings of doubt, guilt, and apprehension before travelling to their Shelter City. Doubt about the relevance and benefits of seeking out rest for such a period, guilt about leaving their colleagues and families behind, and apprehension of the possible repercussions for their organisation and themselves in leaving the country. The impact study indeed shows that participants have experienced that their participation in Shelter City had raised expectations among their community members. Upon return, some participants were received with envy, a sense of entitlement to gifts and finances, or the high expectation that results will soon be realized. Also, participants shared that community members were not necessarily understanding of their participation, and after their stay distanced themselves from them.



Concluding reflections

The impact study shows that beneficial changes have been experienced for each impact indicator of Shelter City. Factors influencing alumni to restart or continue their work upon return, support the emphasis of Shelter City on the holistic approach towards the temporary relocation experience. Contributing factors to an experienced improvement and/or higher effectiveness of their work include both strategic decisions by Justice & Peace (e.g. type of training content, programme arrangement), as well as aspects of the relocation experience (e.g. experience with other cultures, being in a safe environment).





Impact Story 5

Empowering myself to empower others

I am an advocate for the rights of indigenous peoples. In my community, indigenous populations face many challenges with having access to and using their lands. My organization supports these communities who are under threat. This also means that indigenous human rights defenders such as myself also are particularly vulnerable to violent attacks and killings. We cannot rely on the authorities to protect us, and mostly these crimes go unpunished.

Even though I was facing these challenging circumstances, I was hesitant at first to participate in Shelter City. I felt that my community needed me and I could not just pick up and leave. But my colleagues took me aside and asked me a very important question that changed my mind: Would I rather have a voice that is temporarily not heard, or not be able to speak out at all?! This made me reflect and convinced me of joining Shelter City in the hope that it will eventually support the collective cause.

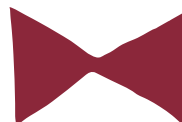
When I arrived in the Netherlands I was in a rather dire state, although I didn't realize it as such at the time. As indigenous leaders and defenders were being assassinated around me, the stress caused me intense suffering. It made me break down into spontaneous weeping often, making it very difficult for me to do my advocacy work. Still, I felt I did not deserve to rest. I remember arriving and telling the Shelter City colleagues that I did not come to relax. I felt an anxiety and responsibility to share with Europeans what was happening in my country.

Yet soon I came to realize the benefits of taking a step back to focus on building my capacity which would allow me to continue the efforts back home. Throughout all the support and trainings offered during my stay, I reminded myself I wanted to empower others – my colleagues and other defenders. I feel I have achieved that. For example, when I came back, I used the security trainings to talk about contingency plans at the community level. This means that communities now can make their own plans and can mitigate risks better. I feel big incidences have been avoided because of this.

But perhaps just as important is the fact that I embraced the wellbeing support that was offered. Since my return, I ensured that our organization engages psychological support, including indigenous healing processes, for the community and our staff. I was more capable to seek funding for this, as I learned during my stay in the Netherlands what it exactly entailed. These experiences made me realize that my colleagues once started working for our organization very healthy but now, they suffer from chronic diseases due to the level of stress they are facing. So nowadays, we go on a spiritual healing retreats every six months for a period of three days. It allows us to cry and share with each other many things we were unaware of. It has inspired my colleagues a great deal.

Seeing the progress that we have made gives me great satisfaction, because it shows that my experience at Shelter City allowed me to empower myself and my collective.

“My experience at Shelter City allowed me to empower myself and my collective.”



6. Identifying key contributing factors to impact



From the findings of the impact study, four main contributing factor categories can be identified that significantly influenced the impact on human rights defenders' lives and possible trickle-down: (1) programmatic considerations, (2) the relocation experience, (3) trainings & wellbeing support, and (4) networking. These categories and the underlying contributing factors are described in more detail below.

(1) Programmatic considerations

- **Shelter City NL attracts mostly English-speaking participants, particularly from sub-Saharan Africa, mostly male and reflect a big representation of the LGBTIQ+ rights field. Three contributing factors are likely influencing this selection bias: (1) how and with whom calls for applications are shared, (2) the nature of the local embeddedness of the initiative with mostly local Dutch/English-speaking organizations, and (3) meeting needs of family relocation opportunities.**

Firstly, as the network of alumni broadens, a snow-ball effect can follow from this, in which certain regional or thematic interests can start to dominate the application process. This might be the case for the strong representation of LGBTIQ+ human rights defenders. The second factor addresses a selection bias based on language. Staff at Justice & Peace does not necessarily see this as a negative, rather a natural consequence of the type of strategy they have chosen in the Netherlands. As mitigating measure, Justice & Peace staff are expanding their network to other regions. Lastly, Justice & Peace is exploring opportunities to meet the concerns of especially potential female applicants as they felt hesitant

to leave their families behind.

- **The type of experience that participants have in the Netherlands is for a large part dependent on the available resources at the disposal of their hosts. While each host city shares a same basic minimum required budget, some hosts identify to have flexible budgets to organize international travel or to organize engaging media products for defenders. Others experience quite the opposite and face stronger resource limitations.**

This difference in resources influences the (international) networking opportunities and possibly outreach opportunities that participants can experience. While Justice & Peace acknowledges these variances and has been working on discussing minimum resource requirements (e.g. capacity available, travel budget, and allowances), differences persist and are noticed by participants during their stay. These differences are described as "unfair" and experienced as "uncomfortable" by participants.

- **Especially the combination of training opportunities, networking possibilities and attention to personal wellbeing (the 'holistic' approach) was experienced as unique and of great value by participants.**

Participants identified this triangle of support as 'life changing' or as 'a game changer' in their lives and work as human rights defenders. It was emphasized that they did not know of any other initiative or programme that offered this combination for the length of time that was offered by Shelter City.



(2) Relocation experience

- **A key contributing factor to changing the work approach of the human rights defenders included the physical side of the relocation experience: being removed from a hostile environment which gave time to reflect, refocus and re-strategize.**

This opportunity for reflection was experienced as unique to many participants and was said to influence their approach significantly upon return. In the hostile or high-strung environment of their countries of origin, participants did not find the headspace and calm to take a bird's eye view to their own work. Upon return, participants expressed that the new perspective to their work allowed them to work more effectively in reaching their goals (e.g. refocusing on less themes reaching higher impact, delegating work leading to more efficient work streams, realizing they are not alone leading to new collaborations and alliances locally).

- **Being relocated offered participants the opportunity to be exposed to like-minded people who supported their cause, which influenced the human rights defenders' approach significantly.**

Due to these meetings, participants felt acknowledged and recognized – often for the first time. In their communities, they are mostly facing adversary views and have difficulty opening up or sharing their perspectives with others out of safety concerns. Feeling the freedom to debate and exchange views about the importance of human rights, and finding acknowledgement rather than resistance in this debate, renewed their energy and confidence to (wanting to) continue their work upon return.

- **Participants experienced living in a safe environment for the first time during their stay in the Netherlands. This experience was an eye-opener for many, with many**

experiencing first-hand what it is they are actually fighting for.

Being able to discuss political issues openly in a coffee bar or celebrating Gay Pride in public, gave defenders a taste of what they want their communities to experience in the future. It renewed their energy to continue their work back home. However, the experience also contributed to a sense of frustration for several participants, as the confrontation with a peaceful society made them realize once more the strive that lies ahead.

(3) Trainings & wellbeing support

- **Overall, the (Holistic) Security Trainings that were offered by Justice & Peace triggered new approaches (e.g. choosing less confrontational approaches), stimulated safer working conditions (e.g. improved office security), and encouraged higher effectiveness (e.g. improvement management practices).**

Trainings and discussions with the Justice & Peace team and other participants made defenders **less confrontational in their approach**. Participants expressed taking on more 'aggressive' approaches to their activism prior to their participation in Shelter City. The (international) advocacy trainings allowed participants to reflect on multiple forms of activism and assess the cost and benefits of their chosen approach. Choosing dialogue and less confrontational activism has allowed participants to make new strides in their work (e.g. being invited to public platforms which were previously off-limits, seen as partner for dialogue, gaining more support from their community).

- **The trainings on (digital) security improved defenders' control over their (apparent) security considerably.**



As most participants now apply new security measures, they are more in control over many of the conditions that created unsafe situations prior to their relocation experience. Participants applied insecure and non-encrypted email and messaging services, and dealt with poor office security, to name some. Furthermore, prior to their stay most participants did not apply (thorough) risk assessments. These conditions have changed since their return, leading to defenders now being in more control over their security. Nevertheless, as many pointed out in the interviews, it is impossible to be fully protected from actions of authorities or opposing factions now or in the future.

- **Wellbeing support, especially group sessions, improved the effectiveness of the work of human rights defenders.**

These effects transpired in the form of greater confidence, lower stress levels and gaining new perspectives to their work. Great confidence followed in part from one-on-one sessions with psycho-social support that was offered during their stay, which was in certain cases followed-up upon return. However, this support was received with mixed feelings. This was influenced by the timing of the support (e.g. sometimes only at the end of their stay), match with psychologist (e.g. in several cases not a positive match), and limited time available for support (e.g. only few sessions were available). The group sessions (incl. body work) during the The Hague trainings by Justice & Peace were received unanimously as positive and of great support. It confronted participants with the experience of others and offered them simple tricks and tips to deal with stressful situations. These three factors of confidence, lower stress and perspective all contributed to participants being more effective in their work upon return (e.g. taking on new types of projects and cases, revisiting their approach to enhance effectiveness).

(4) Networking

- **Shelter City and the networking opportunities created new funding and training opportunities for defenders that benefited their wider organization, network of human rights defenders and/or community.**

The connections with new (international) organizations allowed participants to forge new collaborations benefiting their cause. Participants applied for funds for additional (security) training for their organization, established new partnerships and projects, and/or were invited to join international advisory committees and/or bodies. The fact that they were selected in the first place to join Shelter City heightened their profile and status as a human rights defender.

- **Networking opportunities created a sense of (inter)national recognition and protection for defenders that allowed them to continue their work feeling more protected.**

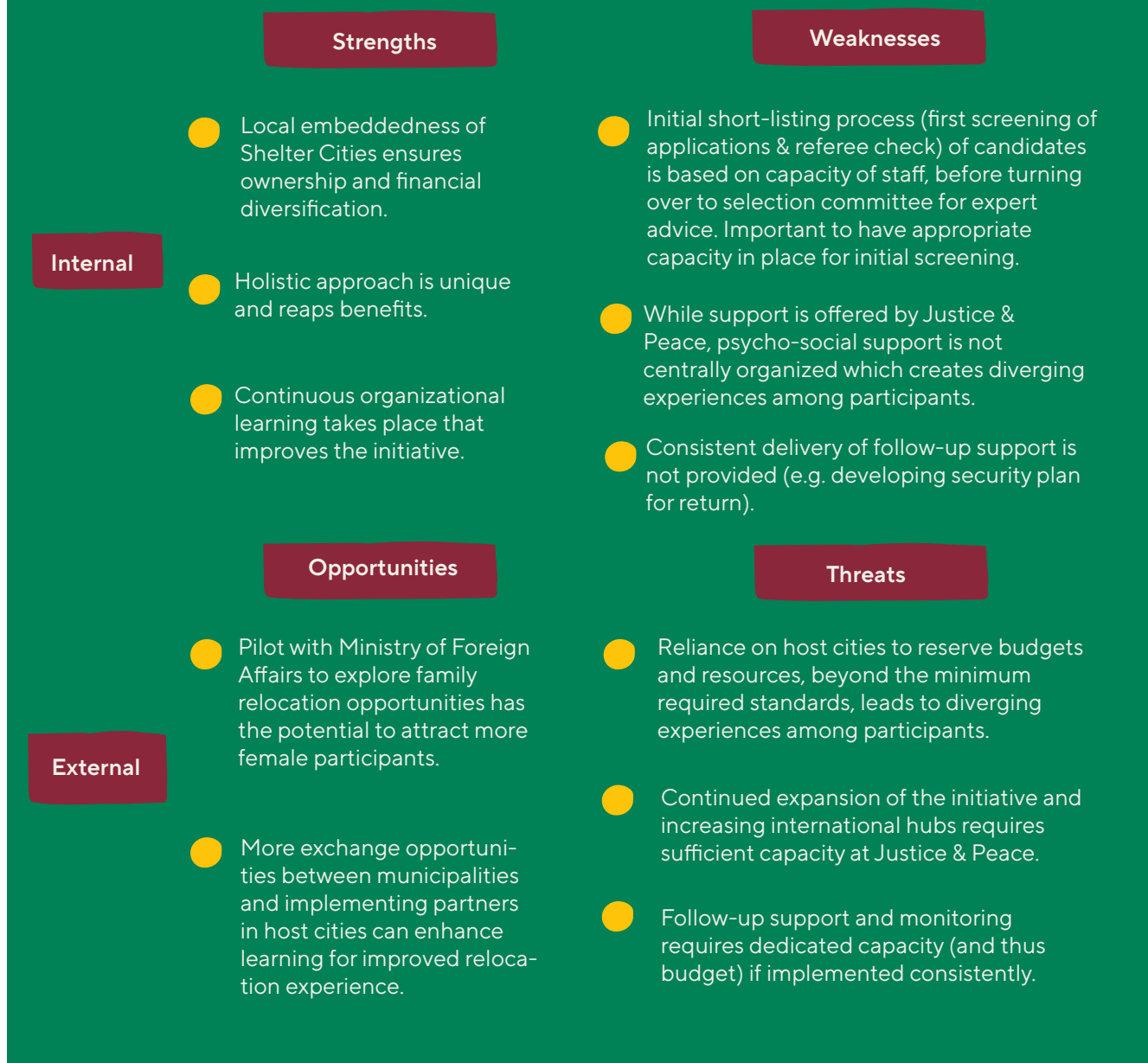
Knowing that an international community is aware of their struggle, and they could fall back on these contacts if something would happen to them, gave the participants more confidence and sense of security to continue their work. The recognition was identified by sustained contacts with institutes and organizations, social media engagement (e.g. retweeting and/or online acknowledgement of their work), and the relationship with Justice & Peace and its network. Some participants received national or international human rights awards for their work after they returned, while others were invited to join international monitoring bodies.

The following Figure 4 summarizes this reflection of contribution factors in a graphic representation along the lines of a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) diagram.



FIGURE 4

SWOT analysis Shelter City





7. In conclusion:

Answering the main research questions

A. Has the initiative met the expectations of Shelter City participants and partners?

Participants expressed a need for rest and respite, before anything else. They felt apprehensive before joining the initiative as the concept of wellbeing was unfamiliar. In addition, participants felt a sense of guilt towards their communities and families when describing the initiative's emphasis on 'rest and respite'. However, during and after participation most participants expressed the initiative went beyond their expectations and 'changed their lives for good'.

B. To what extent and in what ways do human rights defenders feel they are more effective in their human rights work, because of their participation in Shelter City? What were the barriers and enablers that made the difference between successful and disappointing implementation and results?

Human rights defenders who have participated in the initiative described they have improved the effectiveness of their work in several ways.

These include:

- Applying **improved strategies** and stronger focus on what they want to achieve
- Applying **improved management practices** of their team (e.g. project management and/or delegating responsibilities more)
- Experience **more confidence** to pursue their goals
- Experience **less stress and better coping**

mechanisms when faced with threats, leading defenders to tackle new topics, tasks, or cases that they might have steered away from before

- **Feel safer and more protected** which contributes to more freedom to act, which has increased their effectiveness

Barriers to more effectiveness include:

- Lack of resources to pursue training opportunities (for their organization) upon return
- Convincing colleagues and partners of the need for improved digital security measures
- Managing expectations of community upon return

Contributing factors to more effectiveness include:

- Programmatic considerations
- Experience of being elsewhere for rest and respite
- Receiving training and wellbeing support
- Opportunity for networking and outreach

C. To what extent and in what ways do human rights defenders feel safer, protected, recognized and part of a larger community, because of their participation in Shelter City?

Human Rights Defenders who have participated in the initiative feel safer, protected, recognized and part of a larger community. This was experienced in the following ways:



- Participants have applied improved digital security measures that heighten their sense of safety.
- Participants have improved their physical security by applying risk assessments and improving safety of office space and when travelling leading to improved safety.
- Participants feel more protected because of recognition by international community and the influence they could exert.

D. To what extent and in what ways have human rights defenders extended newly acquired knowledge, skills and networks with their local network and organization after participating in Shelter City?

The findings suggest a trickle-down effects of the defenders' relocation experience on organisations and communities after participants returned. Three beneficial aspects have been identified through analysis of the experiences of participants: (1) relevance of sharing with direct

colleagues to benefit the wider organization, (2) improved status of human rights defenders after participation gained more traction to their work, and (3) increased opportunities due to networking and outreach.

Challenges experienced in extending the knowledge, skills and networks, include:

- Lack of resources to pursue training opportunities (for their organization) upon return
- Convincing colleagues and partners of the need for improved digital security measures

E. To what extent and in what ways has the participation in Shelter City caused any unintended – positive and negative – effects (across different stakeholders)?

No noticeable or relevant 'unintended' effects have been reported.





Annex 1: List of documents reviewed

| Shelter City documentation | Applicant & Participant level documentation |
|---|---|
| SC Application Form 2020-2022 | Data analysis all SC participants |
| Final programme logic HRD programme | HRD Application forms (selected) |
| Narrative report SC 2014-2016 | HRD Application forms (non-selected) |
| Narrative report SC 2017-2019 | Notes follow up interviews 6 months after return |
| External Evaluation SC 2012-2017 (25 May 2018) | SC HRD evaluation forms |
| Narrative report SC 2020 | HRD profiles |
| Annual Plan HRD programme 2021 | Where available: evaluation forms provided by Shelter City host |
| Selection procedure 2012 | |
| Selection procedure 2016 Update | |
| Shelter City 2pager | |
| 2021 Shelter City What to expect in the 3 months | |
| Training information guide | |
| Information Guide Holistic Security Training Course | |
| Evaluation report Security Training Course Oct Nov 2019 | |
| Evaluation report Security Training Course Oct Dec 2020 | |
| Evaluation report Security Training Course Apr Jun 2021 | |
| Holistic Security Needs Assessment form | |



Annex 2: Interview guide former participants Shelter City

Prepare beforehand - Personal information

- A. Participant identifier:
- B. Host city:
- C. Year of stay:

General reflections

- 01. Please provide a short description of the reason for your participation in Shelter City.
- 02. To what extent was Shelter City able to address your expectations?
- 03. In what way do you feel has your relocation experience influenced your work and wellbeing as a human rights defender?
- 04. Are you still doing the same human rights work?

Relocation experience and networking

1. What aspects of the relocation experience were particularly beneficial to you (for probing: being somewhere else, ability to network, trainings offered, psycho-social support, engagement with other participants, other?)?

- 1.1. Why were these aspects beneficial?
- 1.2. What aspects were less or not beneficial to you?
- 1.3. Could you please explain why?

2. Are you still in contact with organizations or individuals you met during your stay, both professional and social contacts?

[If there has been contact:]

- 2.1. What kind of contact have you had?
- 2.2. In what way have these contacts impacted your work as an HRD?

[if there has been no contact:]

- 2.3. What do you believe are the reasons for the lack of contact after your stay?

Skills and knowledge

3. What has been the most valuable knowledge or skill you have taken away from the SC experience, if any?

- 3.1. Could you please elaborate your answer by explaining how this has influenced your work as an HRD?
- 3.2. Can you offer a specific example in your work or personal life that shows the value of that knowledge/skills?
- 3.3. To what extent are [these skills and/or new knowledge] relevant to the effectiveness of your work?



4. During your stay, you also had the opportunity to receive psycho-social and wellbeing support. Have you experienced changes in your personal attitude and approach to your work after your stay? [For probing: changes in (self-)confidence, less fearful or stressed, feeling more supported which allows for more visibility, ...]

[If so:]

- 4.1. Could you please elaborate in what way your attitude and approach has changed?
- 4.2. To what extent are these changes relevant to the effectiveness of your work?

[if not:]

- 4.3. Could you please elaborate why you feel your attitude and approach did not change?

5. Did you pass newly acquired knowledge or skills to your organization/networks?

- 5.1. Why did you choose to share this knowledge or skill?
- 5.2. Could you please provide some examples of what you have shared and with whom?

Upon return – safety & protection

6. Did your participation in the Shelter City programme in any way change the way you are seen or treated in your country (by colleagues, other HRDs, NGOs, government authorities, etc.)?

- 6.1. If so, has this helped or hindered your work?
- 6.2. If not, would you be able to provide a reason for this?

7. Did your stay in the Netherlands have a consequence, positive or negative, on your security situation back home?

8. Have you faced harassment, threats or attacks (physical, psychological, legal, digital) since you returned to your country?

[If yes:]

- 8.1. What are the reasons why you, your organization or your family are facing persecution?
- 8.2. Can you explain the impact these threats have on your work and/or your wellbeing?
- 8.3. How did you deal with these?
- 8.4. Have these coping mechanisms changed since your relocation experience?

Concluding

9. I would like to ask you if there is anything that you would still like to share about the impact that Shelter City has had on your work, that we have not yet addressed during our conversation.

Annex 3: Group discussion partners guide

0. Welkom & introductieronde

1. Motivatie om deel te nemen aan Shelter City?

- Sluit het partnerschap aan op bredere programma's of beleid binnen de stad?
- Eerder meegedaan aan vergelijkbare programma's?
- Belang van zichtbaarheid van gast voor het programma?

2. Zijn verwachtingen waargemaakt?

- Waarom wel/niet?

Reageren op stellingen (mentimeter):

- Deelname aan het Shelter City netwerk biedt partners de kans om expertise uit te wisselen met internationale actoren en bevordert internationale samenwerking.
- Door publieke interactie met MRVs en bewustwording biedt Shelter City de kans om een meer open en kritische samenleving te realiseren.
- Shelter City is een effectieve manier om connecties, ondersteuning en nieuwe samenwerking te stimuleren tussen lokale organisaties in de stad.
- Het SC programma biedt de mogelijkheid tot een langdurig ondersteunend netwerk en vriendschapsrelatie met MRVs.

3. Heeft jullie organisatie als partner bepaalde voorwaarden gesteld voor deelname aan Shelter City?

- Welke en waarom?
- Zijn deze nagekomen?

4. Hoe zouden jullie de rol als partner in het Shelter City programma omschrijven?

- Welke activiteiten of taken vallen binnen die rol?
- Was deze rol in lijn der verwachtingen? Wat was anders?
 - Ervaring met opstellen van programma voor gast?
 - Ervaring met keuze van gasten?

5. In hoeverre heeft hebben de publieks- en educatieve activiteiten in de stad een impact gemaakt?

- Welke type publieks- en educatieve activiteiten hebben er plaats gevonden?
- Impact op wie of wat voor type impact?
- Hoe weten jullie dit?
- Was deze impact (on)verwacht? Waarom?

6. Heeft deelname aan het SC programma geleid tot blijvende relaties?

- Met mensenrechtenverdedigers?
- Met internationale of lokale partners?

7. Welke uitdagingen lagen er voor jullie als Shelter City partners?



7. Welke uitdagingen lagen er voor jullie als Shelter City partners?

- a. In relatie tot samenwerking met Justice & Peace
- b. In relatie tot begeleiding en ondersteuning van HRD
- c. In relatie tot behalen van doelstellingen
- d. Angst voor asielaanvraag?!

8. Welke veranderingen zouden jullie willen doorvoeren om het programma sterker te maken?

- a. In relatie tot samenwerking met Justice & Peace
- b. In relatie tot begeleiding en ondersteuning van HRD
- c. In relatie tot behalen van doelstellingen

9. Wat zouden jullie absoluut willen houden van het programma?



Annex 4: Shelter Cities and partners in the Netherlands by 2021

| Shelter City | First participants | Partner organisations |
|--------------|--------------------|---|
| The Hague | 2012 | Justice & Peace (coordinating) |
| | | Municipality of The Hague |
| Middelburg | 2014 | Municipality of Middelburg |
| | | University College Roosevelt (coordinating) |
| Utrecht | 2015 | Peace Brigades International (coordinating) |
| | | Municipality of Utrecht |
| | | Netherlands Institute of Human Rights - SIM |
| | | UAF |
| | | Human Rights Utrecht |
| Maastricht | 2015 | Mondiaal Maastricht (coordinating) |
| | | Municipality of Maastricht |
| | | Amnesty International Maastricht |
| | | Maastricht University, Faculty of Law |
| Amsterdam | 2015 | Stichting Urgent (coordinating) |
| | | Municipality of Amsterdam |
| | | Tertium |
| Nijmegen | 2015 | Bureau Wijland (coordinating) |
| | | Municipality of Nijmegen |
| | | Amnesty International Nijmegen |
| | | Radboud University |
| | | Radboud In'to Languages |
| | | Driestroom |
| | | SSH& |



| | | |
|-----------|------|--|
| Tilburg | 2016 | ContourDeTwern (coordinating) |
| | | Municipality of Tilburg |
| | | Tilburg University |
| Groningen | 2016 | University College Groningen (coordinating) |
| | | Municipality of Groningen |
| | | Amnesty International Groningen |
| | | Humanitas Groningen |
| | | Hanze University of Applied Sciences |
| Zwolle | 2017 | Windesheim College (coordinating) |
| | | Municipality of Zwolle |
| Haarlem | 2017 | De Pletterij (coordinating) |
| | | Vluchtelingenwerk Nederland (coordinating) |
| | | Municipality of Haarlem |
| Deventer | 2018 | Municipality of Deventer |
| | | Humanitas Deventer (former coordinating partner, now coordination is done by an independent project manager) |
| | | Saxion University of Applied Sciences |
| Rotterdam | 2019 | Humanitas (coordinating) |
| | | Municipality of Rotterdam |
| | | Amnesty International Rotterdam |



Contact us

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

Reach out to us at [info\[at\] sheltercity.org](mailto:info[at]sheltercity.org) or visit us at www.sheltercity.org.



"As a human rights defender you often think, maybe I am crazy? You doubt yourself and your sanity. At home, the community is fighting you. So you wonder: why am I doing this work? Shelter City showed: I am not alone. So many people believe what I am doing and it helps in accepting yourself."

IMPACT STUDY INTERVIEW WITH ALUMNI O04SC