



HOW TO SET UP A SHELTER CITY?

MANUAL FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
DEFENDERS SHELTERS

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Justice and Peace Netherlands is a non-profit organisation based in The Hague that is dedicated to defending and promoting respect for human rights and social justice, worldwide and in the Netherlands.

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"Those who take risks need to be encouraged in their fight for the freedom of expression."

Olivier (Human rights lawyer from D.R. Congo,
Shelter City The Hague)

Introduction

Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) are on the frontline of defending human rights. With the shrinking space for civil society, defending human rights is becoming increasingly dangerous. HRDs are often at risk psychologically, as a result of working under intense pressure (e.g. risk of burnout) and/or physically – they are silenced, arrested, tortured and sometimes simply disappear. In reaction, many governments, international organisations and civil society organisations have developed instruments and policies to support HRDs in their activities. Offering HRDs rest and respite through temporary relocation is one of the ways in which HRDs can be meaningfully supported.

The purpose of temporary relocation for HRDs is not for them to permanently leave their countries. Rather, the goal is to complement other initiatives put in place to protect HRDs such as advocacy, (security) training, accompaniment of HRDs during field missions or trial monitoring. Depending on the target groups and objectives of temporary shelters, they can either be used as a pre-emptive measure – for instance, to prevent burn-out or be away during an expectedly tense period – or as an emergency, a last resort measure when the threats are so high that staying in the country (or region) has become impossible. Aside from this, the relocation time can be used to strengthen the HRDs' capacities (through training and networking) and provide them with the necessary mental space to re-strategize and re-energize. Shelter initiatives can therefore also pursue longer-term objectives.

While many relocation initiatives already exist around the world, more shelters are needed to deal with the high number of HRDs who are under threat. As an example, Justice and Peace receives about 600 applications per year for the Shelter City Initiative in the Netherlands. Importantly, there is a need to build up a flexible and diverse network of relocation initiatives that can accommodate the HRDs' different needs, whether long or short term, close to home or further away, rest-oriented or in emergency, etc.

PURPOSE OF THIS MANUAL

The Shelter City Initiative was founded in 2012 in The Hague by Justice and Peace, in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the municipality of The Hague. Since then, the network has grown to include 12 Dutch cities and international Hubs in Georgia, Costa Rica and Tanzania. In the Netherlands, more than 100 HRDs have been hosted across the 12 Dutch Shelter Cities. This has provided Justice and Peace with insights into how such shelters can be set up, as well as the needs of relocated HRDs.

The objective of this manual is to share Justice and Peace's experience with NGOs, national or local governments, universities or any other party interested in setting up shelters for HRDs at risk. As the local context matters, this manual offers general guidance rather than strict "how-to" rules. Depending on the context, our partners in Georgia, Costa Rica and Tanzania are able to provide additional and contextualized information on their experience in setting up a Shelter City.

The first part elaborates on some practical steps for getting started with temporary relocation. The second part covers some of the essential aspects and practical issues related to the stay of HRDs in shelter programmes. Overall, examples from the Shelter City Initiative are used to illustrate the purpose, indicated in blue boxes. The orange boxes highlight tips and suggestions.

What is the Shelter City Initiative?

Shelter City is an initiative by Justice and Peace Netherlands, in cooperation with Dutch and international cities, that aims to protect and support HRDs at risk through temporary relocation and security training.

The Shelter City Initiative provides HRDs with a safe space for a period of three months in order to rehabilitate, re-energise, strengthen their capacities and expand their network, so that they can go back home stronger and continue their vital work for human rights safely and effectively.

During their stay in the Netherlands, the HRDs continue their work in safety and can take a breath. While temporarily relocated, they have the opportunity to grow their network of civil society organisations and political contacts in the Netherlands, Brussels and elsewhere. The HRDs also follow training programmes to strengthen their skills, and they have access to medical and psychological care. On the other hand, through public events and workshops, HRDs contribute to raising awareness of human rights among the citizens of the Shelter Cities.

Any questions? Contact us at info@sheltercity.org



Part 1: Getting started

1.1. Analyse the context

Security is the primary consideration for setting up the shelter – as it should, per definition, be safe. While some regions or countries are safe for some, they might be less safe for others. Some countries are, for instance, well-suited to host foreign HRDs, but local HRDs might need to travel further away. The topic on which HRDs work is also of importance; e.g. Senegal might be a safe place for HRDs working on democratic change or fighting impunity in other countries, but not for those working on LGBTI rights. The porosity of borders, collaboration between intelligence services, the presence of a large diaspora from the country of origin, geopolitical interests, or the likelihood HRD being followed to a foreign country are all factors that might increase the risk for relocated HRDs. Although the security analysis should always be made on a case-by-case basis, some general trends can be sketched beforehand.

Available facilities, such as the presence of international organisations and local civil society organisations, universities, and psychosocial support, can be an asset and add value to the relocation.

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

Box 1 - Choose the right location

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

Ex. 1 - The Dutch Context

- Visas can be difficult to obtain and are only valid for 90-day stays (renewable once), but good cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs ensures the smooth delivery of travel documents.
- The Netherlands is a very safe country (although marginally, the presence of the ICC, diaspora and diplomatic missions might pose a risk for some HRDs).
- The presence of many international organisations and NGOs is an asset for networking purposes.
- Travel is relatively easy by air, Schiphol airport being an international hub, though the Netherlands is faraway for many HRDs.

- HRDs relocated to the Netherlands might face challenges due to differences in culture, language and climate.

1.2. Identify the actors

An important step in the process of setting up a shelter for HRDs is to identify which actors have a stake in protecting and supporting HRDs. Such actors might then become partners in the project, either by providing funding or by taking part in the implementation.

Support for the project is unquestionably important, because you will need, if not active support, at least the tacit agreement of various actors. Likewise, funding will be easier to find if there is a will to host and support the HRDs locally. How the idea will be presented in a context where authorities are committed to support HRDs or, on the contrary, have tried to impede their work, is of course different. The context will therefore be key in determining which partners should be involved and to what extent, and how to frame and present the programme.

Ex. 2 - The Shelter City Partners

The involvement of several actors in the Shelter City Initiative has proved crucial to its successful implementation. All the partners are able to meet their objectives through the project:

- *Justice and Peace*: as a human rights organisation, we work with HRDs worldwide on improving their security.
- *Dutch Municipalities*: see an opportunity to increase public awareness of human rights and contribute to the support of human rights worldwide, as well as improve their image as a champion of human rights.
- *The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs*: HRDs are a priority in its human rights foreign policy.¹ Additionally, the Netherlands is committed to implement the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders and has established an Action Plan.² The Initiative is also a way to build up their image as a champion of human rights and support their policy.
- *Universities and (human rights) local organisations*: can get direct information on human rights from field practitioners and benefit from their practical experience.

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

² <https://www.government.nl/documents/reports/2012/06/15/action-plan-for-human-rights-defenders>

Several international instruments exist to protect and support human rights. Although most are non-binding, they have been adopted within international instances to which states are members. They therefore translate the member States' political commitment and can be used to ensure their support. National law and policies can also provide some useful background for creating shelters for HRDs.

Box 2 - Main international instruments supporting human rights defenders:

United Nations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders (1998) and its commentary (2011) • Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders (Human Rights Council)
European Union	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders (2004, revised in 2008) • European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) • The <i>European Commission</i> is also involved in protecting and promoting the work of HRDs, and the European Parliament regularly adopts resolutions on specific cases.
African Union (African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders in Africa
Inter-American Commission on Human Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders • Resolution on Human Rights Defenders in the Americas, 1999
Council of Europe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commissioner for Human Rights
OSCE (Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidelines on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

1.3. Define the target group, purpose and features of the shelter

Who you will be able to host and for how long will greatly depend on material constraints such as immigration laws, available staff, resources, and funding, but also on what you aim to achieve. There are no fixed rules, but what is important is to **establish clear selection**

criteria and procedures. Besides, **defining the features of the shelter** can help the implementing organisation to target beneficiaries, necessary funds, potential donors, and actors to involve. This being said, keeping a certain degree of **flexibility** is crucial, as each case is different and requires personalised handling.

Note that your network of local and international organisations will prove essential to verifying the cases of the HRDs who you consider hosting in the shelter.

Box 3 - Possible features of the shelter programme

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

	vs. Possibility to follow training programmes and courses, network, volunteer, give lectures, etc.	any international organisations, universities, NGOs or other civil society organisations present in the city? Who can offer what kind of support to the relocated HRDs? Is there public awareness of human rights? How much support staff is available?
Dependents	HRDs alone vs. HRDs with dependents/family	Immigration laws and available resources will be the key determinants. Note that opening shelters to dependents makes them more gender sensitive, as for WHRDs who are mothers, leaving their children behind is often a barrier.

Ex. 3 - The selection procedure for Shelter City Netherlands

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

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

Ex. 4 - Selection requirements for Shelter City Netherlands

In order to be eligible for the Shelter City Programme, the HRDs should meet the following conditions:

1. They implement a non-violent approach in their work;
2. They are threatened or otherwise under pressure due to their work;
3. They should be able to be relocated for a maximum of 3 months. Limited spots are available for people who are unable to stay for the full 3 months;
4. They are willing and able to return to their country of origin after 3 months;
5. They are willing to speak publicly about their experience or about human rights in their country to the extent that their security situation allows;
6. They have a conversational level* of English (limited spots are available for French or Spanish speaking HRDs);

7. They are willing and able to come to the Netherlands without accompaniment of family members;
8. They have a valid passport (with no less than six months of validity) or be willing to carry out the procedures for its issuance. Justice and Peace covers the costs of issuing a passport and / or visa (if applicable);
9. They are not subjected to any measure or judicial prohibition of leaving their country;
10. They are available to come to the Netherlands in the requested period.

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

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

1.4. Find means and resources

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

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

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

Ex. 5 - Sources of funding of the Shelter City Initiative

Shelter City Netherlands is funded by three main sources:

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

Box 4 – Ideas for short-term emergency funds

Check our website for additional suggestions: <https://www.justiceandpeace.nl/tools-and-knowledge/urgent-support/>

European Institution for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)	EU small grants for urgent support for HRDs: https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/application-eidhr-human-rights-defenders-small-grant_en
ProtectDefenders.eu	https://www.protectdefenders.eu/
East and Horn of Africa Rights Defenders Project (EHAHRDP)	http://www.defenddefenders.org/
CSO Lifeline	https://www.csolifeline.org/
Freedom House	https://freedomhouse.org/programs
Freedom House LGBT Assistance programme Dignity for All	http://www.dignitylgbti.org/
FORUM-ASIA	https://www.forum-asia.org/
Front Line Defenders (FLD)	https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/programme/protection-grants
Urgent Action Fund	http://urgentactionfund.org/apply-for-a-grant/criteriado-i-fit/
Foreign representations	In some cases, embassies are able to support the relocation of HRDs.

Part 2: Hosting HRDs

2.1. Division of tasks

As previously mentioned, running a shelter for HRDs will necessarily involve different stakeholders. It is important to distinguish between partners who are essential to successfully carry out the project (a suitable local implementing organisation, authorities willing to provide visas, donors), and those who could add value to the project but whose participation is not essential (e.g. educational institutes). This will of course depend on the local context.

Here are some of the actors who can typically be involved in shelter programmes for HRDs:

1. IMPLEMENTING ORGANISATION

The host organisation is the organisation implementing the project. It can be any organisation or institute that has an interest in human rights and in supporting and protecting HRDs.

Important tip to keep in mind: hosting HRDs will be demanding a lot of time and energy from the staff in charge of the coordination and daily accompaniment of the HRDs. Do not underestimate the time necessary for implementing the project.

a. Coordinator

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

b. Case manager/mentor/"buddy"

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

Ex. 6 – Implementing organisations involved in the Shelter City Initiative

Justice and Peace Netherlands is the national coordinator of the programme, as well as the local implementing partner in The Hague. In other cities, the following organisations implement the project:

- **Peace Brigades International**, Dutch Branch. This worldwide organisation is involved in the protection of HRDs in the field, mostly in Latin America.
- **Mondiaal Maastricht**, centre for international debate, education, and awareness, with a strong focus on issues like globalisation, human rights, which are all part of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.
- **Tertium**, a research and strategy institute that engages society with complex topics related to energy, urban development and scientific innovation, as well as human rights.
- **University College Roosevelt**, **University College Groningen**, and **Windesheim College**, university education institutes which have human rights law and political science programmes.
- **Bureau Wijland**, a local organisation that stands for establishing sustainable links between people, organisations and society at large.
- **ContourdeTwern**, a local civil society organisation which aims at building a vibrant civil society with strong communities in which everyone has equal opportunities and participates in public life.
- **Humanitas**, one of the main social services and community building organisations of the Netherlands which aims to support people who, for a range of different reasons, temporarily cannot manage on their own.
- **De Pletterij**, centre for debate and cultural exchange.
- **VluchtelingenWerk**, organisation that supports the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in the Netherlands.

In all cities, several other partners also participate in the project by offering training, courses or contacts, organising conferences and activities, etc. Examples include local Amnesty International groups, universities, schools, and higher education institutes.

In many cities there is an active volunteer network available for the HRD. Each volunteer can take on a specific role with regards to the stay of the HRD, and/or the volunteers can provide a social network to the HRD and undertake social activities. It is important to create a network of support around the HRD, taking into account diversity in terms of gender, sexuality, age and ethnicity.

2. NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

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

3. MUNICIPALITIES AND LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

One of the particularities of the Shelter City Initiative is the involvement of **municipalities** in the project. So far, decisions to become a Shelter City in the Netherlands have come from municipal councils. Usually one or several council members submitted a motion supporting the idea. Besides this political approval, several requirements have to be met for the project to start in a city in the Netherlands. First, the municipality will have to commit financially to the project. Second, the municipality has to find a local organisation willing to implement the project. Support can partially be done in-kind, such as providing an apartment or providing support to the HRD through a municipal civil servant. Local contacts with (open) educational institutions, universities, and local organisations can also be made through the municipality.

4. UNIVERSITIES AND TRAINING/EDUCATION INSTITUTES

Win-win partnerships can be established with universities or research institutes. On the one hand, HRDs provide first-hand knowledge regarding the human rights situation in their country, which can be very useful to researchers, students and scholars. On the other hand, Shelter City guests can follow courses in human rights law or international politics, for instance, which can greatly benefit them. Universities sometimes create a student group around the HRD that serves as a social support network. HRDs frequently give lectures at universities, which is a great way of exposing the programme, the work of the HRD and creating interaction with students. Finally, universities or research institutes can offer a fellowship construction to the HRD, during which the HRD can work on a specific research assignment.

5. MEDICAL, PSYCHO-SOCIAL AND LEGAL SUPPORT STAFF

It is important to establish good contacts with professionals who can provide support to HRDs in terms of psycho-social, medical or legal help. Professional staff should be aware of the context from which HRDs come, culturally sensitive and preferably speak their language. The treatment should also take into account the temporary aspect of the stay of the HRD.

Box 5 – HRD Psychological support for HRDs

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

Additional reference material can be found on the resource page of Justice and Peace: <https://www.justiceandpeace.nl/tools-and-knowledge/well-being-and-self-care/>

Box 6 – Actors and tasks

Before relocation	Host organisations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deal with new requests • Perform screenings and checks • Arrange travel 	Organisations in country of origin <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify & refer cases • Provide context information and information on cases 	MFA/Embassies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate visa • Identify cases • Provide context information and information on cases
	Host organisations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervise stay • Organise activities • Monitor security situation • Prepare return 	Organisations in host country <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide training, networking and any other relevant opportunities 	Authorities in host country <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide networking opportunities & visibility • Ensure security during stay
	Host organisations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow-up on security of HRD • Activate international network in case of emergency 	Organisations in country of origin <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide support for safe return • Inform and act in case of emergency 	MFA/Embassies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exert political pressure in case of emergency • Provide support to HRDs

2.2. Support during relocation

1. PRACTICAL ASPECTS

- **Point of contact:** from the first day the HRDs have to be able to rely on a clear point of contact who can accompany him or her during the stay and who can be called in case of emergency. This is especially important in the first weeks.
- **Accommodation:** it should be a secure and peaceful space, with good internet connection, in which the HRDs can live and work. Respect of their privacy is important. HRDs should be informed about the accommodation beforehand, so they know what they can expect (e.g. shared kitchen, distance from city centre).
- **Workplace:** this is not only a peaceful place for the HRDs to do his or her daily work (if they wish to continue this), but also to socialise. The workplace can, for instance, be situated at the local implementing organisation or a partner university.

- **Livelihood:** the HRDs receive a monthly stipend. It is important that the HRDs receive sufficient and regular amounts so that it does not become a source of worry while they are in the shelter.

2. PROGRAMME

Depending on the needs of the HRD and what can be offered in the host city, a **programme of activities** can be set up. It is important to get an insight in the needs of the HRD before arrival and start preparations on time, allowing flexibility throughout the programme as the needs of the HRD might change overtime. Activities should always be discussed with the HRD.

The possibility to get a **medical intake and psychosocial care** should always be offered, as all the HRDs hosted in the shelter will have undergone some form of psychological and/or physical pressure. Post-traumatic disorders of lesser or greater intensity are not uncommon. At home, HRDs are usually focused on their work and do not take the time to ask for professional help (if available at all). Their stay abroad is thus a good moment to get support. Support should be sensitive to the HRD's cultural and political context.

Additional activities:

- **Advocacy meetings:** with local, national, or international governments
- **Meetings to exchange experiences and build up new work relations:** with local and international organisations, political parties, associations, education institutes, etc.
- **Trainings and courses:** the HRD can take language classes or other courses (human rights law, project management, etc.). Security training can also be provided either by the host organisation or by third parties.
- **Public lectures:** for university or high school students, or a wider audience of people who have an interest in human rights and the work of HRDs
- **Internships/volunteering:** at a local organisation – this can result in a win-win exchange of experience for the HRD and the organisation

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

3. PREPARING THE RETURN

During the stay, the HRD and host organisation should closely **monitor the security situation** in the HRD's home country and prepare the return. If possible, security training should be provided, and a **security plan** established for the HRD and his/her organisation.

Box 7 – HRD Security resources

- Protection International has different *protection manuals for human rights defenders*
- Front Line Defenders' *Workbook on Security*
- Tactical Technology collective's *Holistic Security Manual*
- Integrated Security Manual for women human rights defenders: <http://integratedsecuritymanual.org/>
- Justice and Peace digital security resources page: <https://www.justiceandpeace.nl/tools-and-knowledge/digital-security/>

As the essence of relocation programmes is to support HRDs at risk, situations where HRDs cannot go back after the planned relocation period will arise from time to time. One-to-one solutions have to be found in such cases.

Box 8 – What if an HRD cannot go back?

Some possibilities include:

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

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

2.3. Follow-up and support after return

The main task after return is to make sure that the HRD has arrived safely, and that he or she has reintegrated into their community safely. Returning to a dangerous environment can be very challenging after some time spent in a safe place. A small amount of financial support can be provided to the HRD to help them reintegrate following their return. While most HRDs are deeply committed and willing to carry on their work, support from abroad can be a strong moral boost. Building a broad international network, establishing security plans and

maintaining regular contact with the HRD are some of the ways in which HRDs can get a feeling of safety and support. Foreign representations in the country of origin can also regularly be in touch with the HRD. Some programmes also provide returning HRDs with a support letter from authorities to show that they have support from abroad should anything happen.

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

“You gave me my motivation back, made me feel important again as a human rights defender.”

Tomy (journalist from Honduras/Shelter City The Hague)

SHELTER
CITY

POWERED BY  JUSTICE AND PEACE

FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

HOW TO SET UP A SHELTER CITY?

The purpose of this manual is to offer broad yet practical guidance on how to set up shelters for Human Rights Defenders at risk around the globe.

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

- ❑ A place where the HRD feels **safe** and with the presence of the required infrastructure to set up a shelter, such as civil society organisations, educational institutions and medical and psychosocial professionals.
- ❑ **Supportive authorities.** Local, regional and national governments can play an important role, from facilitating visa issuance to providing funding.
- ❑ One or several local **implementing organisation(s)** willing to set up the shelter, handle requests and supervise the arrival, stay and return of human rights defenders.
- ❑ **Funding** can be found for the shelter initiative as a whole, but relocated human rights defenders can also be sponsored individually.

Any questions? Contact us at info@sheltercity.org