



Response to the refugee crisis on social media

How did we study Facebook responses to the refugee crisis?

We carried out online ethnography on 3 Facebook groups and 4 crowdfunding campaigns during three periods:

- September 2015**
- June 2016**
- November 2016**

We focused on initiatives that were led and co-ordinated by volunteers



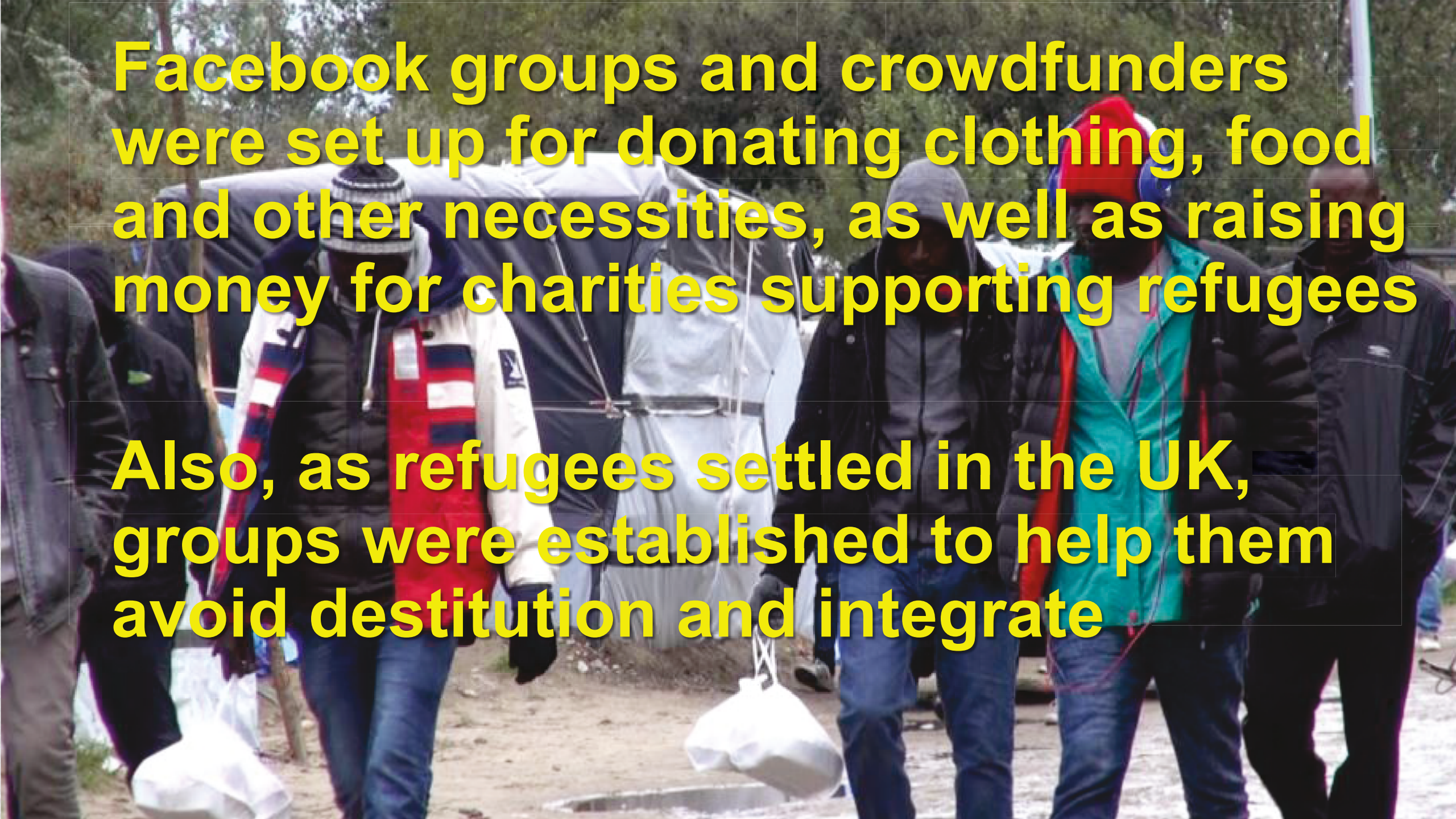
The media climate, particularly in 2015 was marked by strong anti-immigration rhetoric from politicians and the press

Why did people set up solidarity groups on Facebook?

- **People were shocked by the photographs of Alan Kurdi (the 3-year old Syrian boy washed up on a beach in Turkey)**
- **This image seemed to represent the human cost of the refugee crisis**

Accounts also emerged about the conditions in refugee camps



A photograph showing a group of people, likely refugees, walking past a large tent covered in a grey tarp. In the foreground, a person on the left wears a dark jacket, a red and white striped scarf, and a grey beanie. Next to them, a person wears a dark jacket and a red beanie. To the right, a person wears a dark jacket and a red beanie. Further right, a person wears a dark jacket and a red beanie. The background shows more people and a dirt path. The text is overlaid in yellow with a black outline.

Facebook groups and crowdfunders were set up for donating clothing, food and other necessities, as well as raising money for charities supporting refugees

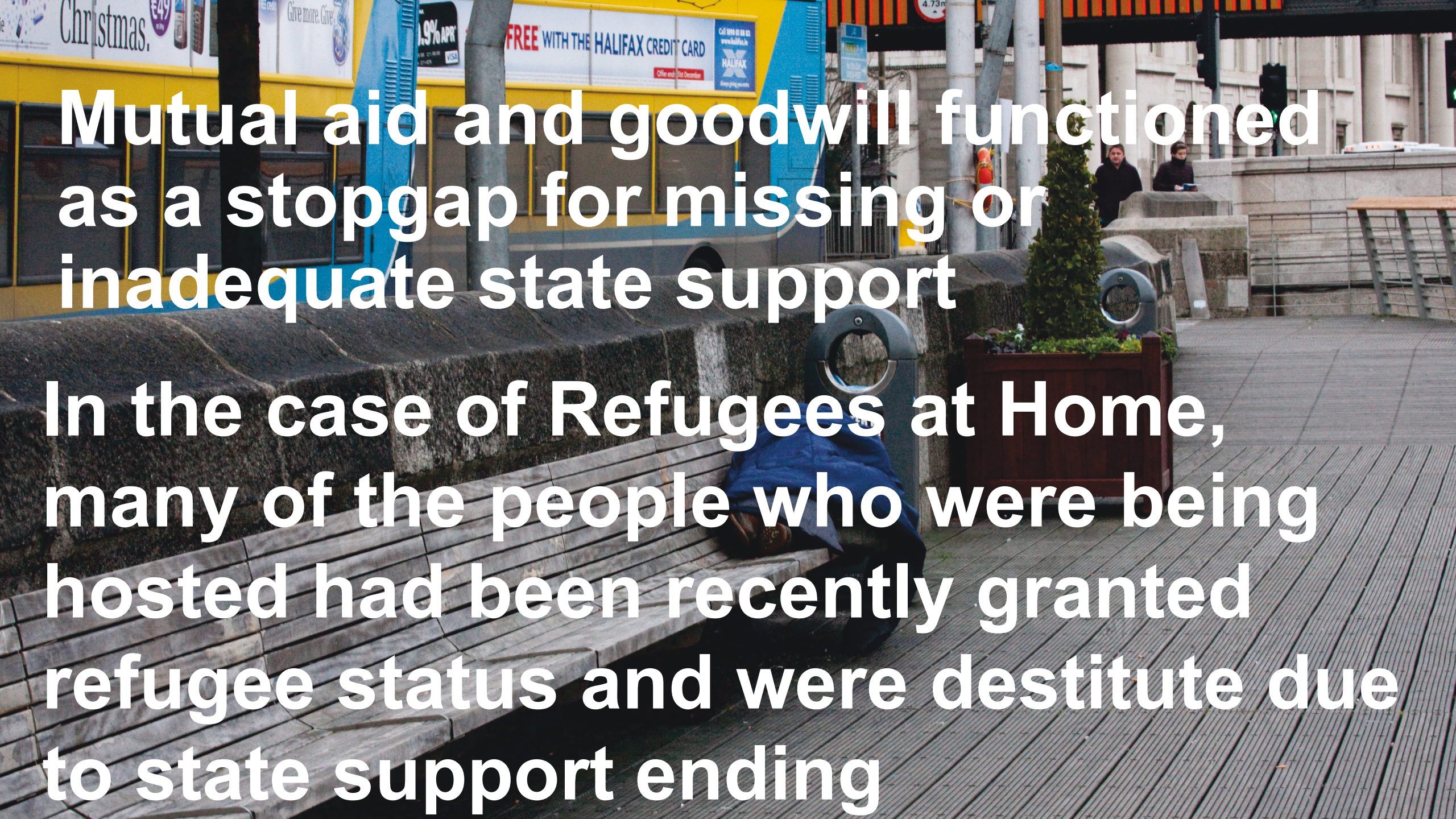
Also, as refugees settled in the UK, groups were established to help them avoid destitution and integrate

What were the Facebook groups and crowdfunders setup to do?

- **West Midlands Solidarity with Refugees (646 members) arranged for donations and other practical support for refugees in Calais in 2015**
- **Refugees at Home is a Facebook page with 9676 followers and matched refugees with local hosts**
- **Makers for Refugees was a group of 96 online businesses who raised £9011 for the Red Cross**
- **The Syria Refugee Pub Quiz raised £432 via 10 supporters through a pub quiz on 15 September 2015 which was donated to CAF-UNCHR**
- **Crowdfunding to buy supplies for refugees in Calais raised £2000 with 27 supporters as a Zakat/Sadaqah initiative during Ramadan**
- **Raising £1000 to welcome Syrian families in West Kent involved 65 supporters camping for a night on a local farm land and raised £1515**

How did the groups understand the situation?

- **The causes that led people to flee their countries were rarely discussed**
- **Refugees were mostly imagined as being elsewhere (like Calais or Kos)**
- **There was often confusion about what was needed on a practical level (due to difficulties communicating with people and organisations in refugee camps)**



**Mutual aid and goodwill functioned
as a stopgap for missing or
inadequate state support**

**In the case of Refugees at Home,
many of the people who were being
hosted had been recently granted
refugee status and were destitute due
to state support ending**

A close-up photograph of Donald Trump speaking, with his mouth open and eyes squinted. In the background, a hand is raised with fingers spread. The image has a red tint.

The vote to leave the EU and the election of Donald Trump in the US exemplified this mean-heartedness, and made group members feel marginalised

People felt that individual acts of kindness could counter what they saw as the mean-spirited xenophobia of the government and the general political climate

“Need to cheer yourself up this morning? Want to do something positive? Maybe we can't affect geopolitics or turn the clock back but we can help individuals” (Refugees at Home, 9 November 2016)

What about anti-refugee groups?

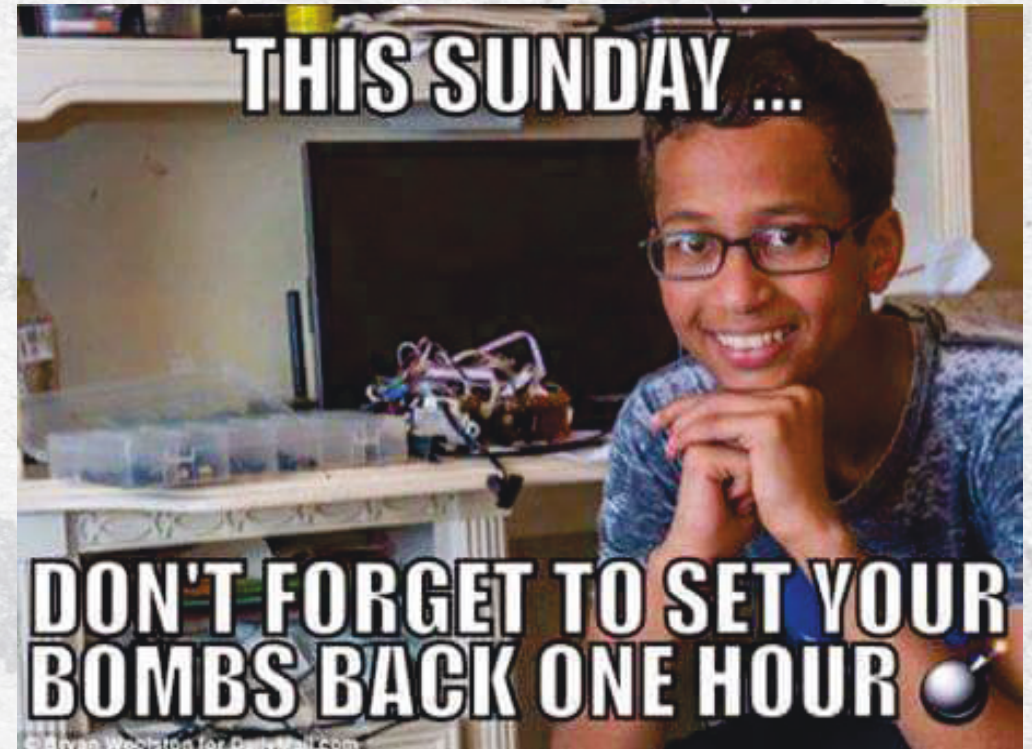
- **Refugees Not Welcome is a anti-refugee page with 1,469 followers**
- **Instead of organising practical activities, it was mostly a platform for sharing international news and social media posts that made the same argument repeatedly: that Black and Asian people, and in particular Muslims were dangerous and should not be let into the UK and other Western countries**
- **Many of these stories came from conspiracy news sites or right wing blogs such as Breitbart**
- **Refugees, ethnic minorities, Muslims and terrorists were framed as interchangeable**

What about anti-refugee groups?

- **Local populations and politicians supporting refugees were seen as complicit and gullible (particularly Angela Merkel)**
- **The most popular post was a Facebook video about refugees stealing clothing from a bin in Germany thus supposedly taking advantage of the goodwill of local populations**
- **There were also numerous posts about Muslims as sexual predators who targeted vulnerable white women and girls**

**TERRORISM IS JUST
PART AND PARCEL OF
LIVING IN A BIG CITY.**

SADIQ KHAN - LONDON MAYOR



These images from the Facebook page illustrates how the group sees all Muslims as terrorists or supporters of terrorism. Muslims, regardless of citizenship, were also seen as intrinsically un-Western.



This image, also shared on the Refugees Not Welcome Facebook group, exemplifies radical distrust of national and international institutions and conspiratorial framings: whereby the EU flag is turned into an ISIS flag (making equivalences between the EU and terrorism) The image implies that Angela Merkel (Chancellor of Germany) and former British PM David Cameron are sympathetic to terrorists.

Images

[Refugees Welcome](#) by walterw.a ([CC BY SA](#))

[Xenophobia](#) by Gideon ([CC BY](#))

[The death of Alan Kurdi](#) by UR Cameras ([Public Domain](#))

[Calais 2015](#) by VOA – Nicolas Pinault ([Public Domain in the US](#))

[Dublin at Night](#) by William Murphy ([CC BY SA](#))

[Donald Trump](#) by Gage Skidmore ([CC BY SA](#))

Images shared on [Refugees Not Welcome](#) Facebook page