



## **Frans Hike e.V.**

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## **Narrative report Frans' hike in Bonn, 14-19<sup>th</sup> July, 2023.**

### **Introduction**

***“At the end of every hike... We notice that there is no one not loved”. (Father Frans van der Lugt SJ)***

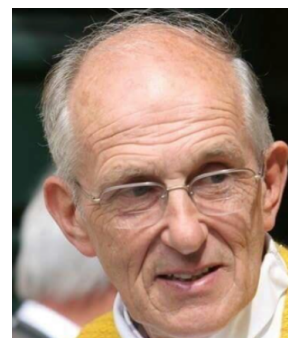
***At the end of this hike we all deeply felt loved!***

In this narrative report we, the organisers of Frans' Hike, would like to share with you the success of the hike in Bonn 2023. We would like to take the opportunity to thank you for your kind and generous support and your trust in our mission.

Special mention for: Br. Michael Hainz SJ, Abouna Martin Löwenstein SJ, Mr. Wolfgang Nettersheim, Abouna Marc Stephan Giese SJ, and the [Iona Foundation](#).

### **Let's remember who started the hikes in Syria?**

Fr. Frans was a Jesuit priest. He lived in Syria for 40 years. During his stay in Syria he initiated many activities, one of them was the hike “Al Masseur”, which started in Syria in the beginning of the 80's and aimed to raise social and environmental awareness. The hike gathered Syrians from all the different religions, ages and regions. And many more people from Europe and other places of the world.



Fr. Frans's ministry in Syria changed the lives of many people by introducing them to a new way of living. For many, their experiences with him were vital in becoming who they are now. Through Frans' hike in Syria they found a way to truly integrate with their own people. Fr. Frans remained faithful to the Syrian people, whom he loved deeply, right up to his assassination in the Jesuit convent in Homs in 2014.

### **Keeping Father Frans' legacy alive**

The activities organised by Father Frans served as a source of inspiration for Syrians who had to leave their homeland due to the ongoing war. On April 7, 2015, marking one year since Fr. Frans' tragic assassination, Rabee Khuzam, Rasha Youssef, Magui Al Ahmar, and Issa Kardouh founded the Frans' Hike group. Their aim was to carry forward his legacy, sharing the wisdom they had gained from him with Syrians and people in other nations. They felt a profound responsibility to reciprocate the dedication Father Frans had shown to them: "Father Frans gave us his life, and we wanted to give something back."

Fast forward eight years, and Frans' Hike has evolved into an officially registered NGO in Germany, known as "Frans'Hike e.V." The team of volunteers has expanded to include 25 dedicated individuals.



One of the main goals of Frans hike is to bring people together, despite age, political affiliations, religious beliefs, and nationalities. As a result, the diversity of cultures and national backgrounds enhances the experience and plays a vital role in challenging stereotypes and biases and more importantly restores the lost trust between Syrians and builds bridges with people in Germany .

Our team has successfully organised 18 large-scale hikes for groups ranging from 200 to 250 participants in various European locations. Additionally, we've conducted 3 Alpine hikes tailored for smaller groups of 30 hikers.

### **The hike in Bonn June 2023**

Special recognition goes to Abouna Martin Löwenstein, whose hospitality in Bonn made our hike an unforgettable experience. Furthermore, we are grateful for the financial and in-kind support we received from the following entities:

- The Ilona Foundation
- The Jesuits Aloisiuskolleg, Gymnasium in Bonn-Bad Godesberg
- Brother Michael Heinz SJ
- Abouna Marc Giese

Behind the scenes, a dedicated team of 15 individuals put in tremendous effort to meticulously prepare and serve delicious, nutritionally balanced meals to all participants during these event



## Frans' Hike Day by Day

### Day 1:

The hike commenced with an introductory session where we presented the concept of Frans Hike and outlined our objectives, along with sharing the original vision of Frans Hike in Syria. Additionally, we addressed logistical aspects such as the programme schedule, safety responsibilities, advice, and the running order for the upcoming days of the hike. Following this, we organised the into smaller teams, each comprising 13 individuals, and allowed some time for team members to acquaint themselves with one another outside the meeting room.



### Day 2:

The hikers walked for 30-kilometres, passing by the beautiful Drachenburger Castle. Our leisurely lunch break extended, with some of us still brimming with energy. people initiated dancing and singing, bringing back memories wit Syrian folk songs



### Day 3 ( rest and activities day)

The day started at nine o'clock, Two hours later than the usual waking up time so that people had a rest after Two days of hiking. The day started with a yoga session which was optional, then followed by breakfast and the usual cleaning activities.

The day was planned to offer many activities including a series of workshops and a space to share their experiences reflecting on the topic of celebrating small successes in life and moving forward. The team shared the detailed programme with the participants before the hike so that people can read through the description of the workshop and make their

choice ahead of time. The workshops were running for the whole morning taking place in different locations around the school, they were delivered by Syrian facilitators, this was to utilise existing talents in the hike without the need of hiring external experts. As well as allowing the space for facilitators to share their skills and feel valued for their contribution. The workshops were translated to German and English by the translation team to make them accessible to people who can not understand Arabic.

the topics of the workshops were:

1. How to start your own Business by Rasha Youssef.
2. Stand up comedy by Abdulsalam Hamdan and Georg Al Ein.
3. NLP by Fadi Alkoury
4. Bag of feelings by Lilas Jarjour.
5. Why you will marry the wrong person by Sam Alkhoury.
6. Oriental Identity by Babel Doun.
7. Voice over workshop by Adma Almeer
8. Kids workshops included: Clay, Face painting, and games for kids. By Magui Alahmar and Naiem Shabouaa.
9. Workshop on the Syrian Dialect by Sousar Tahqakha.
10. Salsa linear Style by Jean Rough.
11. Belly Dance by Mais Alhamwi.
12. Dabkeh dance by Zouhour Alsibahn.
13. Dream catcher by Mahar Alok.
14. Introduction to programming through algorithms and mathematics by Omar Allouni.



The workshops proved to be a great success and value added to people's different interests. We were overwhelmed with the feedback and the offers that we have got of new talents that wanted to share their experience in the next hikes.



The workshops were followed by the participants joining an optional dialogue session. Individuals were encouraged to exchange personal experiences centred around a specific theme. The focus was on sharing personal accounts of overcoming challenges and embracing small victories in life. Participants courageously disclosed profound stories touching on shared adversities, encompassing themes of displacement and and loss of livelihoods.



Despite the emotional intensity, the large cohort displayed remarkable support, actively listening and offering empathy. The dialogue space proved challenging for many, However the encouraging feedback showed that participants' desire to sustain this safe platform for sharing and receiving support.

In the afternoon, participants enjoyed 3 hours of planned games which were fun and interactive. The



participants bonded over games and team activities. Laughter echoed through the playground as everyone embraced the challenges with enthusiasm. The hike not only strengthened friendships but also created a lively and positive atmosphere, making the experience truly memorable for all involved.

#### **Day 4**

The hikers walked for 20-kilometres throughout the day. Later in the evening, we arranged a final celebratory event that kicked off with a themed costume party infused with cultural elements. As part of the festivities, a dedicated part of the evening showcased the results from various workshops. For example, five individuals who discovered their comedic talents during the hike and participated in stand-up comedy workshops delighted the audience with their performances, spreading laughter and cheer throughout the room.

#### **Day 5**

People started to leave at different times, but it didn't stop the rest of the group to dance outside the sports hall and once more join hands to sing Al Maseer songs to end the hike.

#### **Testimony**

Anas Alsrouji:

*"For me the hike is one of the most meaningful experiences, on a physical, mental, and social level. Frans Hike for me is not just about the sport element and hiking in the mountains. The hike for me is literally a change of perspective,*

*a change of lifestyle, the hike is moving from being in isolation into sharing your life with more than 200 people in difficult living conditions but even with that, everybody was happy in every small detail that we all shared.*

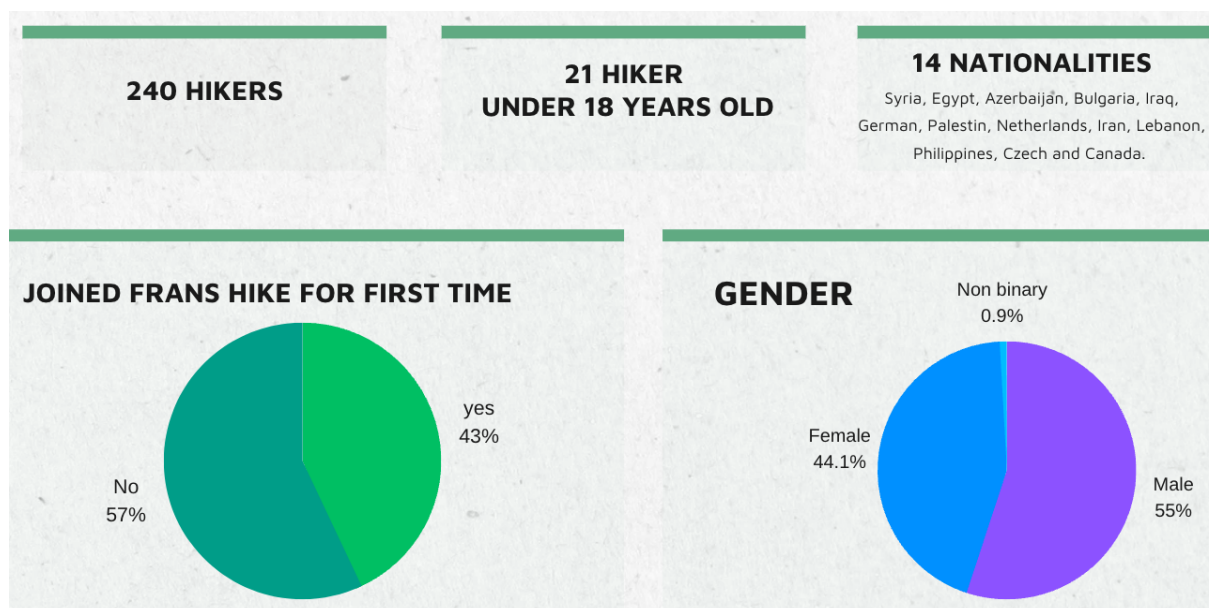
*We walked for 30 km a day and even after being exhausted I still have the energy to stay up at night, laugh and dance with people who were strangers to me.*





*I am extremely grateful to the people that I met for the first time and was able in five days, not to think about work on my study. The highlight of the hike for me is the experience of being together, laughing, and helping each other's unconditional love that it's hard to come by here in Europe, but I experience every day on the hike. I am extremely grateful for everyone in the hike that charged me with positive energy and filled me with love, warmth and optimism.”*

## Statistics



## Conclusion

In conclusion, the hike stands as a resounding testament to the power of unity and solidarity, transcending the boundaries of faith, nationality, and age. It not only fostered a sense of community but also served as a platform for profound personal growth and healing. The diversity of the participants, spanning 14 nationalities and ranging from as young as 4 months to 53 years old, encapsulated the essence of inclusivity and acceptance.

The overwhelming success of the hike owes much to the unwavering support of the local community, whose contributions were instrumental in ensuring the smooth execution of the event. This collaborative effort facilitated countless meaningful connections among the participants and passers-by, fostering a sense of interconnectedness and mutual care. The profound moments of vulnerability shared during the collective discussions were a testament to the newfound courage and strength within the group. Stories of overcoming traumatic experiences like sexual abuse and domestic violence not only reflected the

depth of trust within the group but also signified a turning point for those individuals, marking the beginning of a new chapter in their lives.

As we reflect on the impact of this hike, it becomes evident that the journey transcended physical distances, leaving a long lasting mark on the hearts and minds of all involved. This experience serves as a reminder that despite our differences, we are all connected by our shared humanity and the capacity for compassion and understanding.

As Fr. Frans would say: **“At the end of every hike... We notice that there is no one not loved”**. This was surely the case during this hike.



Please check Frans Hike out:

Website: <https://franshike.com/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/franshikee.V>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/franshike/?hl=en>

Frans' hike in the Netherlands by PAX: <https://youtu.be/bRh38XJDLbY>

Frans' hike in the Netherlands by katholiekleven.nl: <https://youtu.be/kUSzntUEZ2E>

#### **Donations details :**

Name: Frans Hike e.V

IBAN: DE58100500000190980273, BIC/Swift code: BELADEBEXXX

Reference: Donation