



CONFERENCE OF INGOs
OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

CONFERENCE DES OING DU
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Committee on migration issues

Accommodation of migrants, a major issue for the respect of human rights.

SPECIAL LETTER - GENERAL ASSEMBLY

OPENING STATEMENTS

From April 08 to 10, the Conference of INGOs held its final General Assembly of the Migrant Rights Committee's mandate. This very special event provided an opportunity to take stock of the past three years' work, while thanking the various people and stakeholders involved in the development of these projects.

This "special letter" takes a look back at the highlights of these three days, marked by the handover of the presidency from Daniel Guéry to Christine Monty, now head of the Committee on Migration Issues.

EDITORIALS

Words from the Chairman of the "Rights of Persons who are Migrants".



Our Committee presented its report at the last General Assembly of the Conference of INGOs and, along with the 2024-2026 project, it was adopted by a very large majority, of which each and every one of you can be proud.

It is the result of several years' hard work, based on the experience of the INGO members of our committee, but also and above all on the personal commitment of each and every one of you. And for this I would like once again to thank you, especially those who have agreed to give of their energy and share their skills.

We have received very positive feedback from Mr. Best, Special Delegate of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe for Migrants and Refugees, as well as from the secretariat of the Migration Commission of the Parliamentary Assembly of the CoE. I share them with you as a sign of our effective and efficient presence at the heart of the Council of Europe. I make no secret of my great satisfaction in this regard. These types of links are undoubtedly our way of giving the Conference of INGOs a positive and constructive image, and a credibility that we must always reinforce. May we continue in this way.

As I have shared with you several times at previous meetings, I have decided to leave the chairmanship of our Committee to someone else. Thank you to Christine for agreeing to take on this role and enabling me to continue to serve our Committee in another way.

For me, what's important is not status in the structure but commitment to the cause we're defending: migrants' access to their rights and, more broadly, the objectives of the Council of Europe, namely human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. And I will continue to keep this commitment as long as I can.

I have every confidence in Christine and all the members of our Committee, and I'm sure that together we'll do even better to ensure that migrants and the INGOs working with them gain access to their rights, and make our continent worthy of the values it defends.

Thank you again for everything you've given me to experience, and see you soon!

Daniel Guéry

*Former Chairman of the Migration Committee
Vice-President of the Committee on Migration Issues*

Words from the new Chairman



« Dear members of the Migration Committee,

I am taking over the Chairmanship of our Migration Committee from our esteemed colleague Daniel Guéry, whose dedication and hard work have been an inspiration to us all.

First of all, let me pay tribute to the remarkable work accomplished under his leadership. His commitment to federating NGO efforts and collaborating with the various Council of Europe bodies has been truly exemplary. Thanks to his strategic vision and unfailing dedication, our Committee has been able to make significant contributions to the work of the various Council of Europe bodies.

Together, we felt it would be wise to adopt a "board" mode of governance for our next Committee. By taking on the role of Vice-Chairman, Daniel will be able to share with us all the experience he has accumulated over the last few years, and will continue to support our activities.

Salomé provided "invaluable support", often behind the scenes and in the shadows, during the previous committee. Her skills, combined with her immense dedication, have enabled her to effectively set up communication within our Committee. Very attentive at our meetings and assemblies, she writes the majority of the meeting minutes, ensuring that each of us benefits from quality information on the work in progress.

Forged by a rich and varied professional and human experience, Marc Van den Reeck has a broad vision of the problems and the answers to them. He is also a skilled writer and synthesizer. With the support of some of you, he helped draft the Recommendation of our previous committee and the Communiqué on Resolution 2525 (2024) of the Fridez Report voted on April 10 at our last Annual General Meeting. His presence in our Board is an invaluable asset.

In taking over the Presidency, I wish to continue the work begun by Daniel, and to work with determination to strengthen our collective action.

In the coming months, we will continue to focus our efforts on priority issues such as the development of migration issues in Europe, with particular attention given to the implementation of the new Asylum and Migration Pact, but also the protection of migrants' rights, the education of migrants, and the promotion of integration policies. We'll be keeping a close eye on current affairs, ready to contribute the viewpoint of civil society. I'm counting on your support and expertise to help us achieve these ambitious goals.

I would also like to stress the importance of collaboration and dialogue within our committee. The richness of our work is based on the diversity of our experiences. It is by sharing our ideas and pooling our thoughts that we will be able to accomplish our common mission.

I invite you to share your ideas, suggestions and concerns.

I look forward to working with all of you in the weeks and months ahead, and I'm convinced that, with our collective commitment, we'll be able to get the job done right.

Thank you for your confidence and support.

Yours sincerely,

Christine MONTY »

Christine Monty
Chair of the Committee on Migration Issues

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MONDAY 08.04.2024

I. Communication from Mr. Michael O'Flaherty - New Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe

→ Presence of the new Commissioner for Human Rights (since April 1, 2024): [Michael O'Flaherty](#).



- Willingness to have a very strong link with civil society and in particular the Conference of INGOs.
- "The Commissioner also identified other areas where stronger human rights protection is urgently needed, including the climate crisis, the governance of artificial intelligence, freedom of expression, migration and the rise of hate speech, including antisemitism and anti-Muslim attacks."

Michael O'Flaherty was elected by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in January 2024. He is the fifth Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, succeeding Dunja Mijatović (2018-2024), Nils Muižnieks (2012-2018), Thomas Hammarberg (2006-2012) and Álvaro Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado (1999-2006). The Commissioner's mandate lasts for six years and is non-renewable.

An Irish human rights lawyer, O'Flaherty has served as Director of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (2015-2023), as a member of the United Nations Human Rights Committee (2004-2012), as Chief Commissioner of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (2011-2013), and in various posts at the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, notably in setting up operations in conflict-affected countries such as Sierra Leone and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Throughout his decades-long commitment to human rights, he has made significant contributions to their promotion and protection, including through the publication of books and articles and through teaching at various universities.

Source : <https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/michael-o-flaherty-takes-up-office-as-council-of-europe-commissioner-for-human-rights>

His speech focused on six dimensions characterizing the central role of civil society in the protection of human rights:

1. Civil society as the oil in the human rights protection system.
2. All human rights standards emerge from civil society.
3. Civil society has an essential role in criticizing and challenging the system to "do its best".
4. NGOs and INGOs play an active role in reform...
5. ... they are the engines of change within the courts.
6. Civil society actors work for and in the defense of human rights, in particular as rights holders at their own expense.

It's a difficult time for civil society, with increasing regulations, unacceptable limits, new tax regimes and more. Civil society is subject to threats, theft, and intimidation: too many countries are trying to frighten NGOs into silence. However, these threats are not evenly distributed.

This makes it all the more essential for NGOs and INGOs to gain access to political decision-makers.

The Commissioner's commitments:

- Dialogue with NGOs and civil society (round tables, exchanges, etc.)
- Ensure that civil society's point of view is understood
- Address civil society in its own language

The Commissioner is independent but not isolated: he works with various partners within the Council of Europe.

An NGO relates to the issue of the nation BUT can also be seen in a broader sense with "social society" (academia, media, business, and commercial work -extended-...).

II. Report by Jeremy McBride, Chairman of the Council of Experts on NGO Law.



Jeremy McBRIDE

Council of experts on NGO law



[Study on the stigmatization of NGOs in Europe.](#)

1→ The stigmatization of NGOs in Europe leads to the emergence of negative stereotypes, which in turn lead to unfair treatment of NGOs. The scale of the phenomenon is considerable, since it affects the rationality of these activities and attempts to combat them. However, it should be borne in mind that this is not a problem faced by all NGOs.

The report recently published by the Council of Experts on NGO Law is based on a study carried out by means of a questionnaire sent to NGOs in Council of Europe member states (31 MS = representative of the situation).

The study revealed that the main source of stigmatization is the authorities/politicians/media/government-organized NGO activities.

Regarding the follow-up to the criminalization of NGOs working on migration, it appears that the regulatory frameworks within which NGOs can work constitute a major problem. NGOs would then be required to report on migration and disclose confidential information on individuals.

Similarly, with regard to the transparency register affecting NGOs, Germany raised the problem that this type of register affects the work of these organizations; some of them are already going through a process of criminalization. The task is gradually becoming more and more difficult for these NGOs.

The EU is pushing member states to set up registers as part of its democracy program (NGOs with links to countries outside the EU). However, the problem that emerges from such a decision is the restrictions (even though the EU talks of not wanting any stigmatization). It is not certain that this package will be adopted before the European elections BUT it should be followed closely.

2 → Enforcement judgments: non-enforcement of a judgment involving Greece. For 16 years, the court has failed in its attempts to register the association on grounds soundly rejected by the European Court of Human Rights.

The aim should be to push the Committee of Ministers to be more demanding towards Greece.

3- On a brighter note, however, the Committee of Ministers is taking strategic legal action against attempts by wealthy individuals to stifle the activities of NGOs.

III. PRESENTATION OF COMMITTEE REPORTS.

Cf. publication of the various Committee reports:

- [Action for Social Rights](#)
- [Civil society Committee on the Rights of the Child](#)
- [Education for Democracy](#)
- Environmental and health crisis
- Human Rights and Artificial Intelligence
- [Interreligious and interconvictional dialogue](#)
- [NGOs as advocates for gender equality and women's rights](#)
- [Rights of persons who are migrants](#)

COMMITTEE MEETING

See Minutes of the Meeting on the new [Google drive](#) of the Committee. You can find the document [here](#).

The **next Committee meeting** will take place online, on **April 23, 2024, at 5pm CET**.

LINK: <https://teams.live.com/meet/9467131692352?p=CHN2hDBoDxrlV4Me>

WEDNESDAY 10.04.2024

IV. PRESENTATION OF THE NEW COMMITTEE ON "MIGRATION ISSUES"

PRESENTATION

Accommodation is a major issue, and one that needs to be addressed by a Committee. The field visit to Greece illustrated the importance of this issue. The different types of accommodation must allow for dignified respect of people's rights.

However, it is not legitimate to restrict the problem to the simple question of accommodation. The Committee has a duty to take a stand on the various conflicts: this reactivity has paid off over the years.

The Committee wishes to base its activities on coordinated actions with other Council of Europe bodies. These partners already exist, and the links need to be strengthened. The first partner is the Conference and its Standing Committee.

Our obligations to deliver results also depend on our links with various bodies. Our links with PACE and the SRSG are working perfectly. *(They should be online at the time of this presentation)*. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities is an embryonic relationship, but the links are just beginning: the migration issue will unite us more deeply, as it is local authorities above all that have to deal with the reception of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. Contacts are also good with the Commissioner for Human Rights, as evidenced by Monday's speech.

These links have been built thanks to the Conference of INGOs, with the full support of the Standing Committee.

The Committee's aim is not only to promote links between the Council of Europe and civil society, but also to highlight the need to take account of vulnerable groups, particularly migrants, and to help pool ideas so as to be in a position to propose workable solutions. Reinforce the Council of Europe's image and presence within civil society, support INGOs in member countries and strengthen links between the Committee of Ministers and civil society.

The Committee's specific objectives also include the implementation of short, medium and long-term policies, while improving concrete procedures for the treatment and care of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

Following on from the recommendation of the 2021-2024 Committee, the key impact of accommodation on people's access to their rights, security and integrity, to the labor market, and to health, education and language learning services will be analyzed in greater depth.

The Committee will also be attentive to developments in migration issues in Europe, and will offer the views of civil society...

In terms of actions planned by the Committee, the latter will take care to broaden the scope of its contacts, draw up position papers, pursue dialogue, engage in open debates on the exchange of ideas... A recommendation will also be drafted.

FEEDBACKS :

- The UK is considering sending migrants back to Rwanda → We need to campaign in Europe to prevent other countries from following suit. The same goes for sending migrants back to their countries of origin. We must fight against these inhumane methods..
- *This remark fully illustrates the scope of possibilities in working with PACE.*
- Acknowledgements. Precise and enthusiastic presentation. Acknowledgement of the call for NGO participation.
- - Upcoming elections. Consider regional and European elections.
- *See the [communiqué](#) to be presented this afternoon.*
- Question: it's important to know the language of the country where you're arriving → should this learning be made compulsory? how do we see the issue of language in integration?
- *As far as education is concerned, we're in the process of preparing a webinar, a space for reflection... the question of language is fundamental, but it must not be violent; the conditions for learning and implementation are particularly important.*

V. VOTES ON THE NEW COMMITTEE.

Inclusive Territories, Environment and Health Committee: *missing data*

Committee on the Rights of the Child in Europe: *missing data*

Committee on Education for Democracy: 60 YES; 3 ABSTENTIONS

Human Rights, Democracy and Artificial Intelligence Committee: 47 YES; 13 ABSTENTIONS; 7 NO

Interreligious and Interfaith Dialogue Committee: 63 YES; 5 ABSTENTIONS

Committee on migration issues: 63 YES; 1 ABSTENTION (Chairman: 63 YES ; 4 ABSTENTIONS ; 2 NO)

Committee NGO as advocates of gender equality and women's rights: 65 YES; 2 ABSTENTIONS

Committee Sports and Human Rights: 60 YES; 5 ABSTENTIONS

VI. THE CONFERENCE'S NEW EQUALITY STRATEGY.

On the basis of the round table organized by the Gender Equality Committee at the last General Assembly of the Conference.

The April 10 presentation marks the cornerstone of the new strategy to be presented in October 2024. The Equality Committee will read and make some comments on the text presented. We need gender equality in the CoE's work. The question is: how can we do it best? Make it automatic and a key principle of our conference?

This strategy should contain a list of measures to be implemented.

→ Encouragement to [read](#) the document. Call for help in drawing up the strategy. A gender equality policy document is needed. This strategy will be very useful.

VII. DEMOCRATIE - Speech by Matjaž Gruden, Director of Democracy, on the outlook for the future.

The new Intergovernmental Committee on Democracy replaces a former European Commission on Democracy.

The [CDDG](#) aims to help Member States (MS) operationalize and implement the Reykjavik principles for democracy. It also aims to combat democratic backsliding directly within the MS, as this is where democratic backsliding takes place.

Implementation of the Helsinki process: a particularly important dimension, encompassing the relationship with the Conference of INGOs and the CoE, as well as other forms of integration.

Finally, the Committee also aims to reaffirm the essential role of civil society and the appropriate conditions for the latter in the MS as an ingredient of a living democracy.

→ *How can we interact with civil society? with the CINGO?*

- Intergovernmental organization focused on threats within the MS. The work of the expert committees is very important in this respect.
- Immediate activities (first meeting in May).
- Update of the CoE recommendation on the legal status of NGOs
- Work with other steering committees, notably the CDDH.

→ The Committee will also aim to implement recommendations such as the one on deliberative democracy. It will also work on the impact of AI on democracy.

The aim is to better connect intergovernmental work and the World Democracy Forum, which provides a sounding board for innovative initiatives.

Next forum = Can we transcend the new gap? the disparities?

The question of interaction, cooperation and the role of civil society in an intergovernmental organization such as the CoE is a matter of formal foundation / procedure. → Needs examination for possible improvements.

VIII. VOTE ON THE MIGRATION COMMITTEE « COMMUNIQUÉ ».

PRESENTATION

The very basis of this [communiqué](#) is the resolution of the Commission on Migrations, Refugees and Displaced Persons. It is therefore the role of the Committee to support such a resolution, while taking into account the greater impact of a Conference publication. The Migration Committee also wishes to remain in the collegial spirit of the Conference by putting the following text to the vote.

Communiqué:

Among other things, this communiqué aims to support the fact that the resolution has been presented at a key moment: the questions raised come at a critical time: what will be the impact of immigration on public opinion during the European elections?

The Committee, through this press release, supports the idea of putting such an issue on the agenda for discussion, while underlining the intellectual efforts of the committee members and the contribution of elements from civil society.

This press release presents three points for reflection:

- 1) In order to combat hate speech and the misrepresentation of immigration as a campaign tracking tool, we need to bring some balance to the issue of immigration, particularly around the observation that we are making the fourth world poor. People attack immigration policies as opposed to poverty in the local community.
- 2) Children need special attention in this area. The importance of migration issues must be filtered through the particular vulnerability of children.
- 3) Intercultural education is needed.

With this in mind, the Committee has drafted a press release in support of Mr. Fridez's report/resolution, with the idea that we are playing our part in providing the CINGO's contribution.

QUESTIONS/FEEDBACKS:

1. Not convinced of the reason for hate: not just a socio-economic reason but more "hate" per se.

→ *Clearly, xenophobia and hatred are not just socio-economic reasons BUT they are always an important element, requiring a combination (the need to educate young people not to fear immigrant children, etc.).*

2. Change the term "lower middle class" to "population".

As a result of discussions during the presentation of the Communiqué, the following changes have been made to the text:

1. Change the expression "European middle classes" to "European population".
2. Delete the end of the last paragraph.

→ VOTE:

→ 31 votes in favor in the room + 39 in favor online = **70 in favor**

→ 2 abstentions in the room + 4 abstentions online = **6 abstentions**

Conference of INGOs adopts the Communiqué.