CONFERENCE OF INGOs
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Comité Migration *sur les droits des personnes migrantes*
Migration Committee on the Rights of Migrants

Accès des migrants, réfugiés et demandeurs d'asile aux droits fondamentaux.
Access to fundamental rights for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

VISIT - MISSION TO GREECE (NOVEMBER 21-22-23, 2022)

Comments and reflections made during the meetings and field visits

The remarks and reflections below are the result of the two round tables that were organized in Athens on November 21 and 22 in the premises of the host NGO "The Smile of the Child", of the visits made to the reception centers in Athens, Kavala and Thessaloniki on November 22 and 23, 2022 and of the meetings with the representatives of the IOM and the UNHCR based in Athens.

The remarks are directly transcribed here, simply grouped according to the objectives of the Committee, namely the access of INGOs to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers and the access of migrants to their fundamental rights (security, health and education).

These remarks and reflections will allow the Committee

- to enrich its analyses and the first version of the text of the recommendation to be validated at the next General Assembly of the Conference of INGOs;
- to broaden the issues related to migration in order to define possible new objectives to be reached in the coming months;
- to nourish the contacts established with the various bodies of the Council of Europe (Special Delegate of the Secretary General for migrants and refugees, Parliamentary Assembly, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, ...).

GENERAL COMMENTS

- Exchanges and field visits have shown that it is in small structures that people work best. The solution would then come from a network of small structures rather than in a vertical system of "ups and downs".
- It seems essential to discuss and share examples of good practices → to amplify and spread the programs that exist and work.
- Interconnection between organizations working on migration is necessary.
- Continuity in migration policies is essential for them to be efficiant.

- It is not only up to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers to make efforts towards society but also to society itself by thinking of their successful integration in a welcoming dimension.
- A more pronounced interest must be placed on young people in transition to adulthood (17-18 years old). → Special policies to accompany these young unaccompanied minors must be planned.
- The instability of national policies that are not thought of as long-term solutions is to be deplored *(e.g. the Greek ESTIA program which ends at the end of this year 2022 and brings with it the end of the IOM HELIOS program).*
- The problem of registering migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking populations, particularly for unaccompanied minors (UFMs), represents a real obstacle: it is necessary to reassure these populations that these registrations are not binding by implementing policies that are not monitoring/tracking policies but information policies in order to better address the problems specific to these individuals.
- It is necessary to include projects and programs related to migration in local communities and municipalities. When this is the case and the coordination of projects is done properly, these projects bring undeniable benefits and positives to local communities.
- Concerns about the decrease of solidarity movements towards migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are notable and rise concerns among NGOs.
- The local (Greek) population is itself paralyzed by poverty, particularly economic poverty (there has been a 30 to 40% decrease in reception capacities). This political and mental fatigue can be felt in the migration policies.

AXIS 1: NGO ACCESS TO MIGRANT POPULATIONS, REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

ACCESS TO CAMPS AND VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

- The access of NGOs to migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking populations and to the places where these populations are located must be facilitated. NGOs are ready to establish more contacts with the authorities, but it must be noted that decisions are (too) often taken in an arbitrary manner. While the existence of an official register is in itself useful, such a practice can easily be used to restrict the freedom of action of NGOs. *In Greece, as in other countries, NGOs are required to be registered on a national list in order to gain access to camps*.
- Camps and areas of restricted freedom for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are often located in remote and difficult to access areas, far from the city center and therefore from the services it offers. NGOs are thus unable to provide all the services they can.
- NGOs' access to UFMs is made difficult, which is a major obstacle to children's right to increased protection due to their vulnerability while also diminishing civil society's ability to monitor the treatment of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers.
- There is a real problem of invisibility for many migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, especially in urban areas (as observed in Athens and Thessaloniki).
- The working conditions, the impression of being in a dead end, induce a certain distress, a discouragement among volunteers and employees of NGOs as well as social workers.

CRIMINALIZATION OF NGOS AND CIVIL SOCIETY

- NGOs that document cases of human rights violations and bring them before the ECHR are targeted and criminalized, particularly because of restrictive national migration policies[1].
- The instrumentalization of a national register of NGOs allows the state to exercise control over NGOs. The authorities can decide to remove certain NGOs from the register, which is detrimental to migrants in the short term. It is therefore necessary to better supervise these registers.
- NGOs for the rights of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers work in an environment where migration rhetoric at the political level is too often presented in a negative way. Many barriers are put in place. The situation is even more difficult for NGOs working in the camps.
- Freedom of expression on migration issues due to the negative connotations of the subject is not always effective, self-censorship can also occur in certain circumstances.
- The working conditions for members of INGOs are extremely difficult; as a direct consequence, the integration process of migrants is even more complicated.

AXIS 2 : ACCESS FOR MIGRANTS, REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS TO THEIR FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

There is an interconnection between the points mentioned below (safety, education and health) and the relevant question here is what to do with these reflections and how to put in place transversal policies. The points raised demonstrate a dysfunctional system as migrants, refugees and asylum seekers have neither the choice nor the money to access the tools available to them or even to access their rights. Moreover, there are few effective ways to highlight the vulnerability of some people.
Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that migrants, refugees and asylum seekers have specific needs corresponding to their particular situation which must be approached in the right way.

SÉCURITÉ

In the context of migration, when we talk about security, we are not only talking about the stability and security of our societies, but above all about the protection of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers!

- A sense of security is essential for integration and development.
- It is important to ensure security in the camps because women and children are often the victims of abuse. For example, in the camps, there are no locks on the doors, which makes people (women) vulnerable to sexual violence.
- The lack of security in the camps has negative consequences on the mental health of the people who are housed there. They are confronted with situations of physical violence, gender violence, sexual violence... The dignity and the integrity of the people are put at risk.
- From a legislative point of view, the definition of "safe country" does not correspond to the reality on the ground.
- An inadequate reception system too often leads to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers being forced to adopt illegal behaviors due to the lack of security: UFMs very often move to other countries; therefore, in order to protect them, it is necessary to

[1] See Greek Ministerial Decision 10616/2020 on NGOs – rapport du conseil d'experts

convince them to stay in their country of arrival in order to ensure better follow-up and to facilitate family reunification.
- Decent housing is the key to accessing safety.
- The fear of arrest and the dangers of the camp are security issues common to all these populations.
- The risks of trafficking and exploitation of human beings, particularly of UFMs, are real and require special attention.

HEALTH

MENTAL HEALTH :

- Poor mental health is a barrier to continuing language courses and motivation to integrate into society.
- Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers often find themselves in humiliating living conditions brought on by migration policies that can be criminalizing and restrictive.
- Mental health is directly linked to the well-being and physical health of individuals.
- The therapeutic role of NGOs is proven: all human beings in critical situations need to talk. Poor mental health prevents people from expressing themselves as they would like to.
- The inability to communicate freely, without intimate space, is an aggravating factor.
- It is difficult for LGBTQ+ people to have the opportunity to express their feelings of discrimination due to post-traumatic stress disorder.

PHYSICAL INTEGRITY:

- The issue of access to health care services is essential --> the problem of obtaining a social security number without which it is difficult or impossible to access certain basic care. Solutions exist for these particular populations, but the delays in accessing appointments are often very long.
- There is a real danger of an increase in prostitution and the non-reporting of people with STDs/STIs.
- The lack of permanent presence of doctors and psychologists in the camps is glaring.
- There is also a growing difficulty in accessing sufficient food for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, as well as the emergence of trafficking in this area.

EDUCATION AND INTEGRATION

- Successful integration relies on a holistic approach, based on several necessary points: a good knowledge of the language, access to safe and decent housing, knowledge of the culture and daily life of the host country, support in finding a job, an education system that includes migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking children, as well as childcare systems for parents.
- Access to citizenship for refugees is far from being facilitated!
- Problem of illiteracy and literacy: need to make migrants, refugees and asylum seekers comfortable with their educational difficulties by integrating them in educational programs adapted to them: the absence of adapted services leads to de-schooling and exit from the educational system.

- The working conditions, the impression of being in a dead end, induce a certain distress, a discouragement among volunteers and employees of NGOs as well as among social workers.
- The instability of staff working in these facilities is also a factor that makes it more difficult to sustain beneficiaries in educational programs.
- The conditions of detention in the camps are too often counterproductive to the desired goal.
- The national programs put in place often appear to be not very functional, not very comprehensive and not adapted to the number of requests *(example of the Greek platform for requesting an appointment for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers with a lawyer).*
- Integration: many problems are reported concerning access to employment (a decisive step in the integration process) due to the delay in the asylum application procedure. Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers do not have easy access to their social rights and cannot work properly, have an apartment, etc.
- In general, efforts are made to provide migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking children with access to language courses. It should be noted that, although it is not the rule, there are cases of racism towards them in schools.
- There is a growing need for translators in the structures in contact with migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.
- There is a real danger of exploitation of workers who are paid less than the legal minimum and work in difficult conditions.
- The problem of access to educational structures remains real.
- The continuity of the learning of the culture and language of origin is essential to the good development of the individual: the goal of integration is not to replace a culture by that of the host country; the same is true for religion.
- The problem of recognition of diplomas in the host country remains an obstacle to employment.

HOUSING

The problem of housing and accommodation as such appeared in our exchanges as a major consideration and it seems that a deepening of the question must be carried out as well as the apprehension of the subject as a fundamental right.

- There are not enough accommodation places to accommodate all the people who arrive.
- There are not really any sustainable solutions for access to decent housing.
- The administrative procedures for accessing housing are long, complex and difficult to understand for those who are not familiar with them.

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