

**Drafting Committee on Migrant Women (GEC-MIG), 2nd Meeting
Monday 14 December 2020, via videoconference**

Presentation and exchange of views with Ambassador Drahoslav Štefánek,
SRSR on Migration and Refugees – 2:45 – 3.15 pm

Speaking Points

(10-15 minutes)

- Good afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen. Thank you for inviting me to speak to you today at the 2nd meeting of the Drafting Committee on Migrant Women. It's a pleasure to be here and I very much look forward to the upcoming discussions.
- Before I make a few comments on the drafts to date, I take this opportunity to inform you of the status of the most recent Council of Europe Action Plan on migration and to address the way in which gender equality issues have been integrated.
- The draft Action Plan was presented to the Committee of Ministers by the Secretary General on the 8th December. It is still to be formally adopted and I envisage a series of discussions with member states before its adoption, I hope, in the New Year.
- The lessons learnt from the previous Action Plan on protecting Refugee and Migrant Children in Europe (2017-2019), along with discussions with member states and within the Council of Europe, revealed the need for further action and co-ordination with a wider scope to maximise the national implementation of obtained results and to implement a gender equality strategy, in line with existing Council of Europe Standards
- The draft Action Plan was developed based on internal co-ordination and consultation and on dialogue and feedback from member states based on an initial concept paper. It encompasses 30 actions and aims to focus on vulnerable persons in the context of migration and asylum. It will cover a five-year period from 2021 to 2025.

- The structure of the Action Plan reflects a total of 4 pillars. Three pillars are based on the core mandate of the council of Europe – human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The fourth pillar is transversal and focusses on cooperation by enabling inter-agency and transborder cooperation and peer exchanges through the Network of Focal points on Migration established in 2019.
- This network pursues a direct dialogue with migration and asylum authorities in Council of Europe Member states with the purpose of enabling intersectoral and cross-border exchanges. An online meeting of the Network was held the 30th November.
- The term “vulnerable person in the context of migration and asylum” is used in the Action Plan to include the people who face the most difficulties in exercising their rights in migration and asylum procedures and who are entitled to call on states’ obligation to provide special protection and assistance. Such difficulties might be linked to reasons for leaving their country of origin, situations encountered during their journey or at their destination or to a person’s identity, condition and/or personal circumstances.
- The European Court of Human Rights, Steering Committees and the Council of Europe monitoring bodies have also emphasised the special protection that states need to provide to vulnerable persons in the context of asylum and migration.
- This term, of course, encompasses all migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls and gender equality has been integrated into the action plan as a cross cutting theme. The work of the GEC-MIG and the drafting of this recommendation is specifically included as an action under the first pillar on ensuring protection and promoting safeguards by identifying and responding to vulnerability.
- The exchanges and presentations that took place during the first meeting of the GEC-MIG in October considered the issues facing migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and highlighted and raised concerns surrounding gender-sensitive reception facilities and protection, the need

for improved access to health-care, including access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, the need to improve and adapt procedures and policies in relation to the recognition of qualifications, diplomas and skills, the self-determination and economic empowerment of migrant women and the support needed to improve language skills.

- The action plan specifically includes actions addressing these concerns including, but not limited to:
 - the development/compilation and implementation of guidelines for professionals for the effective identification and referral of vulnerable persons and addressing vulnerabilities throughout asylum and migration procedures including reception conditions (Pillar 1).
 - Promoting the use of practical tools to ensure women's safety in transit and reception centres, such as the checklist found in the publication Gender-Based asylum claims and non-refoulement: Articles 60 and 61 of the Istanbul Convention (Pillar 1).
 - Developing measures, including support for healthcare literacy, promoting fair access to healthcare for vulnerable groups including refugees and migrants, especially in the context of pandemics (Pillar 2).
 - Promote the integration of refugees by enhancing their access to education and employment, by facilitating the recognition of their qualifications through the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees and by fostering linguistic integration through education.

- Moving to the draft Recommendation, I congratulate the drafting committee on the work done to date. The draft preamble and operational paragraphs as well as the proposed structure for the annex are clear, thorough and well-thought out.

- The drafting committee might like to consider giving prominence to the Action Plan on protecting vulnerable persons in the context of migration and asylum in Europe as well as the Gender Equality Strategy by moving them further up the draft preamble to paragraphs 12 and 13 respectively.

- Reference to the Action Plan could be expanded to include its title and to make clear that the drafting of this recommendation is specifically included. It could also include as a few short paragraphs explaining the Action Plan's strategic objective to identify and address vulnerabilities throughout asylum and migration procedures
- As regards the annex – my view is that it is indeed necessary to agree on existing definitions. I am often asked this question and I think it wise to deal with it at this juncture.
- I very much look forward to the ensuing discussions and to the eventual result of your work and expertise.
- I also look forward to an exchange with you and welcome any comments and questions.
- Thank you