

Ladies and gentleman

It is a great honor for METAdrasi, a national Greek NGO to be invited as co-organizer in putting together this Conference. I would like to recognize the initiative of the North South Center of Council of Europe to organize this event in Greece, a country that is still struggling to manage migration flows in compliance with international law and to provide basic humanitarian assistance and protection to thousands of refugees and migrants.

I never liked the world "crisis" because crisis is a situation that is limited in time. Nevertheless this so called "refugee crisis", illustrates that the world is under prepared for a situation where global migration becomes dramatically exacerbated due to the impacts of climate change. EU countries should recognize that climate change is already a "push factor" driving people out of their homes, often those affected being the poorest and most vulnerable. In developing countries women are highly dependent on local natural resources for their livelihood, because of their primary responsibility to secure water, food and energy for cooking and heating.

The need to address the protection afforded to refugee and migrant women and girls is becoming an urgent issue. We know that women face increased risks of violence, sexual assault, exploitation and trafficking: according to UN reports 50% of the world's refugees are women and girls. At least 1 in 5 refugees or displaced women are estimated to have experienced sexual violence.

METAdrasi's team experiences this need of protection every day in the field: our team of 350 interpreters, in all camps on the islands, in the mainland, in hospitals, during registration and asylum procedure, during sessions with psychologists, social workers are witnesses to thousands of stories of women and girls victims of violence, rape, exploitation, survival sex and trafficking in origin, transit and destination countries.

Through our guardianship network for unaccompanied minors we have met many more cases of girls who have fled their countries to escape female genital mutilation, child marriage, forced marriage, abusive relationships, forced child labor and multiple other forms of sexual and gender violence.

One the other hand we have also many stories of women and girls that manage to stand to their feet, gain self confidence and start building their lives.

Many times I realize that in METAdrasi it is a gift of great value that we are the only NGO in Greece that 45% of our human resources are refugees and migrants and 50% of them are women!

During these days we will explore questions such as,

How to protect better women and girls?

How to empower women? How to increase women's voice and leadership, how to increase access to opportunities and resources,

How to promote interaction between women of the host and migrant societies?

How best can we support young refugee girls to develop into self-assured women?

How to involve more man in awareness campaign? How to use new technology, media, art space, how to best cooperate?

Civil society is playing a vital role and it is important to create strong networks, to involve other vital parts of the society.

But one think will not change: It is only through meeting these women and girls, communing with them, listening to them, that we can begin to understand the full dimension of the challenges they face at their every step and commit to a common purpose to overcome them. By working together with them, and witnessing their willpower and resilience, we are inspired and empowered to do more!