

MINUTES OF THE IMMIGRANT AND NGO NETWORK MEETING

Held at Nicosia Multifunctional Foundation

30 May , 2014

A. Agenda

- Overview from the last Forum discussion held on 27 March, selection of issues for further deliberation
- Brainstorming on issues selected to conclude on topics to be address in the event planned for June 2014
- Action planning of event in June i.e. speakers, location date etc.

B. Participants

Representatives from Immigrant Organisations, NGOs, Universities and project practitioners attended the Forum:

A/A	NAME	ORGANIZATION
1	Georgios Effraimidis	Pro.So.Po (Pontian Association)
2	MeiMei Han	Chinese Friendship Association Cyprus
3	Melvount Kaplanides	Georgian Diaspora – Cyprus
4	Tamara Gelasvili	Georgian Diaspora – Cyprus
5	Romial KENMOGNE	International Organization of Cameroonian students in Cyprus / International Student Association Cyprus INCAMSA
6	Achu Maureen Anim	African Diaspora
7	Valdez Sylvia	Consulate of Philippines
8	Anthoula Papadopoulou	KISA
9	Dolores Savvides	CARITAS
10	Christina Kolatsi	European University Cyprus
11	Natalie Neocleous	European University Cyprus

12	Marianna Michael	University of Nicosia
13	Margarita Vraka	Municipality of Agios Dometios
14	Natasa Xenofontos	Lakatamia Municipality
15	Antonis Onisiforou	Lakatamia Municipality
16	Constantina Christou	Nicosia Multifunctional Foundation
17	Charis Theoharous	Nicosia Municipality
18	Maria Mavrou	Independent Expert
19	Nikos Stathopoulos	NVK Advent Consulting

C. Discussion

Maria Mavrou chaired the discussion which concentrated on the issues raised during the last Forum meeting in March focusing in particular on the denial of rights of TCN students and others issues and equal treatment in work and in the tertiary education system. Major issues discussed include:

- Foreign students have the right to part-time employment during school period for up to 20 hours per week, and up to 38 hours during school holidays. However, the process of acquiring employment is very meticulous involving the signing of a contract between employer and employee which is submitted to the labour office for approval. Since the economic crisis hit Cyprus in 2008 and especially the latest banking crisis, the Labour Office policy places priority in employing Cypriots nationals first, then EU nationals and last in the priority list is for the foreign students. As a result very few applications for employment are actually approved for them.
- Jobs that are eligible for foreign students include: gas stations, carwash, bakeries (only third shift), domestic workers and delivery.
- Internship placements for foreign students are allowed only in the hotel and catering sector and in exceptional cases in engineering positions. However, bureaucratic obstacles make it almost impossible for actual placements to take place. Students intending to be placed in a work position to gain practical insight of the selected field of work submit their applications to the Ministry of Education who in turn informs the Civil Registry and Migration Department to verify their legal

status. Placements for those applications who get clearance form CRMD are rare, as employers are hesitant to offer foreign students the opportunity for job experience out of the fear that they will get caught employing “illegal” immigrants. The problem is compounded from the fact that employers do not know how to deal with cultural and racial diversity.

- Renewals of student Visas is also a cumbersome process mainly from the fact that relevant legislation changes often and new requirements are added while neither the educational institutions nor the foreign students are receiving pertinent information in a timely manner. This can result in a breach of the legal status causing a lot of anguish and the threat for imminent deportation.
- Some of Cypriot Colleges are promoted abroad as accredited institutions, but in reality they are not accredited by the Ministry of Education and Culture. As a result, students coming to study in these Colleges receive diplomas that are not recognized anywhere.
- In other EU countries legislation permits foreign students to stay an extra 6 plus months after finishing their studies. In Cyprus foreign students have to leave the country immediately after finishing their studies well before graduation.

D. Conclusions

The participants discussed and agreed on a set of actions to address abovementioned issues:

- a. Plan a forum inviting experts on the legal issues as it regards to admissions of international students as well as officials from local universities to present the issues with an aim to inform and sensitize relevant players on ways to address discrimination practices for foreign students. Invite students (Cypriot and international) to attend to forum.
- b. Undertake an awareness building campaign to inform and sensitize the business community in changing attitudes towards foreign students and become conducive in collaborating with them in the legal context provided.
- c. Invite pertinent stakeholders and authorities to future forums to discuss ways to review legislation and remove discriminating practices for international students wishing to come and study in Cyprus.

E. Follow-up, next meeting

Minutes of this Forum will be prepared and send network members by the project coordinator. An announcement will be made for the next meeting in the context of this programme period.