

Integration – Migrants' organizations

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank Nicosia municipality, the organizers of this event for their invitation and the opportunity for this short introduction.

How hard the actual process of integration is, can be easily understood by how hard is to define the term integration. One definition of Integration is the process by which migrants become accepted into society, both as individuals and as groups. This is a quite broad definition of integration, because the particular requirements for acceptance by the receiving society vary greatly from country to country. The openness of this definition also reflects the fact that the responsibility for integration rests not with a single particular group, but rather with many actors—the government, institutions, the local communities, and of course immigrants themselves.

And of course, integration can only be seen as a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all migrants and residents of the hosting country. There are two parties involved in integration processes: the migrants, with their characteristics, efforts and adaptation, and the receiving society, with its interactions not only with these newcomers and but also with their institutions. It is the interaction between the two that determines the direction and the ultimate outcome of the integration process. These two, however, are unequal partners. The receiving society, in terms of its institutional structure and the way it reacts to newcomers, has much more say in the outcome of the process.

Furthermore, that process of integration of migrants is not—as is often supposed—only taking place at the level of the *individual migrant*, whose integration is then measured in terms of housing, employment, education, and social and cultural adaptation to the new society. It also takes place at the *collective level* of the migrant group. Organizations of migrants are the expression of mobilized resources and ambitions, and mechanisms of the integration process must also apply at this level

In addition, there is the level of *institutions*, such as the public institutions of receiving societies or cities, like the education system or institutional arrangements in the labor market. Laws, regulations, and executive organizations, along with unwritten rules and practices, are part of such institutions.

The mechanisms working at the individual, group, and institutional levels are different, but the results on each of these levels are clearly interrelated. Institutional arrangements

determine the opportunities and scope for action of organizations. Institutions and organizations together create the structure of opportunities and/or limitations for individuals. Conversely, individuals may mobilize and change the landscape of organizations, and ultimately even contribute to significant changes in institutional arrangements.

And of course everybody should always remember that Integration processes, for both individuals and groups, are long-term by nature. This means that the results of integration, and for the success or failure of policies in this field, can be clearly seen only until the second generation of migrants. Although sometimes the political processes, especially in democratic societies demand policies that provide measurable results within much shorter terms.

In this context, the Civil Registry and Migration Department in cooperation with the European Funds Unit of the Ministry of Interior has put forward a new action plan on integration of migrants legally residing in Cyprus for the years 2020-2022. After a call for proposals under AMIF in July 2018, it is expected that the drafting of the new action plan will start in January 2019 and will be concluded and adopted by the Council of Ministers by the end of 2019. The action plan will update our integration policy and will be constituted by two main parts: the priorities of Cyprus' integration policy along with specific actions that could or should be implemented within the specified time framework. Although they are still open to discussion, such priorities could be housing of migrants, labor market integration and skill recognition, integration of migrant women, as well as other vulnerable groups, like unaccompanied minors and members of the LGBTQI+ community etc.

What is most important is that the new action plan will be the result of more than ten focus groups, with the participation not only of the national and local authorities, but also of all the relevant stakeholders, like international organizations, local NGOs, the academia and of course the migrants associations and. Any single stakeholder will be asked and have the opportunity to express its opinion about the integration policy in Cyprus and this is really important to us.

Next to the new action plan, the CRMD is aiming to create and establish a low level integration network. Right now, there is a high level experts' committee based on an older decision of the Council of Ministers. With representative from the Ministries of Interior, Education and Culture, Health, Labour, the Commissioner of human rights protection (the ombudsman), the union of Municipalities, the union of community councils trade and employers' unions and 3 NGOs. Our aim is to have a network of all the stakeholders at a local level, that means mainly the NGOs, the local authorities and the migrants'

organizations, in order to promote cooperation, exchange of ideas, and why not creating of policies.

We expect that the migrants' organizations will have a crucial role to this network. These organizations are crucial to the lives of migrants, their families, and communities. They act as community centers where migrants can be among others who speak their language and where they can learn to navigate life in their adopted country. They are safe places where second- and third-generation migrants can learn about their ethnic culture. They can also double as social service providers, as advocates and representatives and promote the civic and political engagement of migrants. What is most important is that the migrants' organizations and we, everybody, must find ways to partner with other organizations, migrants' or not, build networks, broadening the net that supports migrants and the community in general. We hope that the new local network, we hope to establish within 2019, will, among other things, help the migrants' organizations serve as channels through which government agencies, local authorities and other NGOs, can reach immigrants. Building such partnerships might also help overcome the difficulties and challenges we all have about resources and funding. And it is our hope that these partnerships will help everybody understand what migrants have in common, what we have in common with them and not what separates us. It is a way to address some key integration issues, like the promotion of fundamental rights, non-discrimination and equal opportunities.

To sum up this short speech, it is critically important that all the actors in the integration process, both the migrants and the receiving society, become connected by a clear and sound integration policy. It is our vision in the CRMD to have such a clear and sound integration policy, a policy that we will formulate in cooperation with all the stakeholders and especially the migrants' organizations. And furthermore we aim at building a local integration network to promote cooperation among all actors, and we hope that the migrants' organizations will have a crucial role to play.

Thank you very much for your attention!