



Discussion Forum of the Network of Cooperation involving immigrant organisations, NGO's and Local Authorities titled **"Combating stereotypes and bias at work and social life of immigrants: The role of immigrant organizations and NGOs"**
 Held at the Youth Information Centre of Agios Dometios,
 on Tuesday December 13, 2016.

Agenda included the following presentations:

"Fighting discrimination against migrants and refugees in Cyprus: the role of the Ombudsman's Office" by Ms. Thekla Demetriadou, Officer of the Antidiscrimination Body / Ombudsman's Office

"Migrants and social inclusion in Cyprus: dream or reality?" by Dr. Stavros Parlalis, Lecturer in Social Work, Department of Psychology and Social Work, School of Education and Social Sciences, Frederick University - Cyprus

Discussion

On behalf of the Filipino community – Filipino Organisations in Cyprus, Mrs Ester Beatty took the floor and described a case of discrimination against a TCN as it regards to the right of retirement benefits, even though the TCN paid social security contributions throughout the period that she worked in Cyprus. Procedures that are required for retirement are complicated and ineffective resulting in rejection of the application. Some of the documentation required is hard or impossible to be obtained just because of the status of TCN employment and dwelling conditions in Cyprus, i.e. they required utility bills from 2013 on to the date of submission of her application. However, there is no possibility to produce this kind of documentation, since the applicant is a live-in at her employer's home. Said Mrs Beatty, "why do they make it so hard to approve her application for retirement benefits that she is entitled to? This is a routine procedure for Cypriot of EU member state citizens".

On behalf of the Cypriot-Arabian Cultural Centre Mr. Mostafa Refai touched on a range of issues that face the Arab communities in their quest to integrate in the local society that relate to perceptions, expectations, institutions, rights and everyday issues. These include:



New channels for the integration of Third Country Nationals in the local community

Νέοι δρόμοι για την ένταξη Υπηκόων Τρίτων Χωρών στην τοπική κοινωνία



- Most of immigrants and especially the refugees demand rights not inclusion
- Locals view immigrants as temporary visitors
- There is completely different mentality between immigrants and Cypriot society where they live. In Arabic countries family provides everything for the children, while in Cyprus, as is in western countries, the state plays an important role in the upbringing and social protection of children.
- Immigrants and refugees, are isolated, they do not develop relations with local society. They bring with them political, economic and social problems from their country of origin that need to overcome.
- Cypriot authorities and institutions do not assess or make good use of skills and educational achievement of immigrants, resulting in their professional and social marginalization.
- Immigrant inclusion programmes implemented by local authorities do not yield desired results, perhaps because there is no detailed action plan and specifically targeted outcomes. We need to evaluate the outcomes of inclusion initiatives.
- We need to introduce mandatory accelerated Greek language learning programmes as well as courses on Cypriot laws and human rights. The aim will be to utilize immigrant skills, and provide opportunities for employment and active participation in local social and civic affairs.
- Concluding his presentation, Refai noted “language, education and knowledge are our tools to achieve inclusion. To that regard, the Cypriot Arabian Cultural Centre has drafted legislation that will present it to the Parliament for approval. The proposed legislation provides for mandatory learning of Greek language for immigrants within the 1st year of their residence in Cyprus”.



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PROJECT CO-FUNDED BY THE ASYLUM, MIGRATION AND INTEGRATION FUND AND THE REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS



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On behalf of the Indian community Mr. Rudolph Crasto touched upon a range of issues that could facilitate immigrant inclusion:

- Immigrants need a place to organize and be reachable
- Each community has certain characteristics and needs that should to be addressed when inclusion programmes are planned
- Promote awareness actions to encourage hygiene and sanitary practices by immigrants
- Local authorities should make available venues to host events and celebrations
- Employers should provide accelerated Greek language programmes for immigrant workers to remove communication barriers
- Sporting events such as the Cricket Tournament that was supported by the project “TCN Inclusion programmes by local authorities” provided the playing field in Lakatamia and some amenities and playing equipment to the players. It is a good example of a targeted response to meet needs of immigrants. Said Crasto “we were given an opportunity to organize a cricket tournament that invited immigrant players from Afghanistan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, South Africa, as well as Cypriots”.
- We need to evaluate inclusion programmes in view of improving quality and quantity of these programmes.

On behalf of the Chinese Friendship Association Mrs. Maria Kolotourou a neighborhood watch volunteer, noticed that Chinese immigrants are increasing in numbers over the last years and they are keen to adopt measures for the their safety and the integrity of their estate properties. Kolotourou informed the forum that the Chinese Embassy organized a seminar with an aim to encourage participation of Chinese immigrants in the neighborhood watch programme with an aim to help police keep the neighborhoods safe. Kolotourou mentioned on the issues of





discrimination and racism saying “the situation has improved, however stereotypes and discrimination exist and needs to be addressed”.

On behalf of the Social Policy and Action Organization, Mrs Ifigenia Katsii recognized the importance to host open forums to discuss inclusion issues of immigrants and noted that her organizations is very keen to carry out a needs assessment study of the immigrants in Cyprus, but also actively support actions facilitating the integration of immigrants.

On behalf of the National Network against Poverty Mrs Eleni Karaoli noted that the organization participates in these forums hosted by the Immigrant Organization and NGO Network and supports initiatives to combat poverty and programmes aimed to immigrant integration.



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