

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

**Νέοι δρόμοι για την ένταξη Υπηκόων Τρίτων Χωρών
στην τοπική κοινωνία**



MEETING OF THE NETWORK OF COOPERATION OF IMMIGRANT ORGANISATIONS, NGOs AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES

The meeting of the network on the topic "**Employment and Entrepreneurship for Third Country Nationals (TCNs): Challenges and opportunities**" took place at the premises of Nicosia Municipality Multifunctional Foundation on Wednesday 15th November 2017. The Network repeatedly highlights the significance of these issues for the integration of TCNs and provides a platform for those directly affected to present their experiences and views and engage in an exchange with interested NGOs, Local Authorities and other actors on the subject.

AGENDA

18:00 – 18:10 Welcoming Remarks

- **“Introduction to the framework and aims of the network meeting”, Roula Thoma, European Affairs Officer, Nicosia Municipality**
- **Greetings from UNHCR Mrs Olga Komiti, Protection Officer, UNHCR**

18:10 – 19:00 Presentations

- **“Presentation on existing situation on employment and entrepreneurship for TCN in Cyprus”, Nikos Stathopoulos, Economist**
- **“Challenges in securing rights in the workplace for Third Country Nationals”, Marina Stavrinou Koukou, Head of TCNs Employment Bureau, Pancyprian Federation of Labour**

Presentation of personal experiences for TCN entrepreneurs

- **Maha Salem (Cyprus-Arab community)**
- **Achu Maureen Anim (self-employed)**
- **Willy Totoro (Association of Refugees)**

Welcoming Remarks

“Introduction to the framework and aims of the network meeting”, Roula Thoma, European Affairs Officer, Nicosia Municipality

The programme coordinator Ms Roula Thoma, welcomed the speakers and the participants and made a brief statement on the objectives and activities of the Network

of Immigrant Associations and NGOs. The aim of today's forum is to present issues and challenges relating to employment and entrepreneurship of migrants and discuss possible action to address these challenges.

Greetings from UNHCR Mrs. Olga Komiti, Protection Officer, UNHCR

Ms Olga Komiti, Protection Officer of UNHCR, addressed the meeting and expressed UNHCR's support for the social integration of refugees. However, there is lack of comprehensive action for Greek language courses, vocational training, and certification of professional skills that will enable meaningful and gainful employment of refugees. Moreover, refugee mothers face difficulties in entering the labour market due to insufficient day-care services available to them for their children. UNHCR has commissioned a research to map out professional and basic skills of refugees. There needs to be a system for validation and certification of professional skills for migrants/refugees. Certification of skills will enable refugees to gain employment but also start a business in the field they have qualifications and experience, contributing to the local development and social cohesion. The creation of a refugee platform of professional qualifications will enable matching with demand of labour and become a valuable linkage to employment and social inclusion.

Presentations

- **“Presentation on existing situation on employment and entrepreneurship for TCN in Cyprus”, Nikos Stathopoulos, Economist**

Nikos Stathopoulos presented the European policy on migrant entrepreneurship. Core policy subjects include: a) Initiatives to attract migrant entrepreneurs and to facilitate entrepreneurship among migrants already present in the EU, utilizing best practices developed in the Member States, b) EU to support an environment attractive to all forms of entrepreneurship, where also business support services reach all potential entrepreneurs, including those from more vulnerable groups, with the aim to make the EU in its entirety stronger and more cohesive, c) EU encourages legislation reform aimed at removing legal obstacles to establishment of businesses and giving qualified immigrant entrepreneurs a stable Permit, d) extend opportunities for business start-up to foreign students and offer a stable Permit, provided that they meet certain targets (i.e. job creation, turnover, new investment).

Stathopoulos presented the types of immigrant enterprises in Cyprus, elaborating on the obstacles that exist for certain types of migrant Visas, but also highlighted opportunities for business start-ups.

Major obstacle for the majority of immigrants is work mobility and entrepreneurship. Migration policy stipulates that the migrant can change employers but not industry sector.

Opportunities for migrant entrepreneurship in Cyprus include: a) Start-up business financing schemes for youth and female entrepreneurship offered by Ministry of Commerce and Industry, b) The Cyprus Start-up Visa Scheme, c) Financing of start-ups through the EU structural Funds for the period 2014-2020.

Action that needs to be taken to facilitate access to employment and promotion of entrepreneurship for migrants include: a) mapping out and certification of professional skills, b) intensive language courses to learn Greek and English, c) creation of business support centers, d) identify financing start-up financing sources (grants and microloans) e) offer courses in entrepreneurship, f) provision of information and guidance for business environment in Cyprus, g) legal and business advice, h) networking with business community and social partners.

The presentation can be found [here](#).

Challenges in securing rights in the workplace for Third Country Nationals”, Marina Stavrinou Koukou, Head of TCNs Employment Bureau, Pancyprian Federation of Labour

Marina Koukou raised the issues of violation of working rights by employers and the inability of government agencies to enforce labour laws especially TCN workers. Despite the provisions set in the labour legislation, we are experiencing frequent labour law violations regarding pay and maltreatment at the work place.

The Pancyprian Federation of Labour unwaveringly promotes compliance to labour law, preventing phenomena of and situations of exploitation, discrimination and racism against foreign workers. Often time, immigrant workers are blamed for the unemployment of Cypriots. What is at fault is the indecisiveness and weakness of the state to implement a cohesive migration policy, especially at a time of economic crisis where violations of worker’s rights are in the increase. Government agencies are biased and insufficient in dealing with violations of rights of immigrants. There is no political will to enforce labour law of international organizations such as the International Labour Organisation.

Here are some examples:

Domestic workers from third countries come to Cyprus after spending over 2.000 Euros of family savings. In the case that the employer fires them or they had to leave because of several reasons (maltreatment, discrimination, employer does not comply with the terms of the contract etc.), they are not given an opportunity to find employment through the Labour Office; they have to find the next employer on their own. If they do not find in certain time period, then they are deported. As such, domestic workers find themselves in a precarious situation.

Foreign students can get part-time employment in limited job sectors mostly as unskilled workers. However, the Labour Office does not process their application through the matching process system, as they place priority to Cypriots.

Moreover, there is not sufficient funding from the AMIF allocated towards social partners to provide courses for the Greek language or skill development that will help migrants in the workplace and facilitate social inclusion.

Presentation of personal experiences for TCN entrepreneurs

Maha Salem (Cyprus-Arab community)

In her brief presentation, Maha Salem from the Cypriot-Arabic Cultural Center expressed the view that refugees are people that have experienced traumatic experience in their country of origin, but also during their long journey before they reach Cyprus. Women and children refugees are the most vulnerable in this process.

Arriving in Cyprus, they need to sustain a livelihood in a new environment and become part of the social and economic context. However, there is a prevalent mentality of isolation from the social and economic environment. That needs to be changed so that can actively participate in several programs and opportunities offered to them so that can lead to social inclusion. They have to overcome seclusion, feel safe and accepted by local community and start a new life in the receiving country.

To achieve that, there needs to be especially designed support centres for rehabilitation and for the promotion of employment and entrepreneurship where they can learn the Greek language, participate in vocational training and certify professional skills. Some of the refugees are highly skilled people, unfortunately though their skills are not utilized, or they cannot utilize without certification of skills. Isolation and lack of communication also negates access to employment and business opportunities.

On the other hand, the image and perception of refugees needs to be improved. That requires collaboration of local community organizations and refugees themselves. The Cypriot-Arabic Cultural Centre is working in that direction, providing support services, and collaborating with other initiatives for the inclusion of immigrants and refugees in the local society.

Achu Maureen Anim (self-employed)

Achu Maureen Anim pointed out that immigrants are resilient, hardworking, creative and willing to integrate. Cyprus is family to us, but we need cooperation of immigrant organizations with local community to consolidate this sentiment amongst all interested parties.

In regards to employment, there is a restricted labour market either because of immigration policy and or on the basis of ethnic and racial origin. These lead to prejudice which is a fertile ground to discrimination practices. The structure of division of labour demonstrates that the indigenous population is employed in better-paid white-collar jobs, while immigrants concentrate in blue-collar jobs. Meanwhile, state mechanisms responsible to combat violations of labour law as it concerns immigrants are insufficient. Moreover, there are no bilateral country agreements for immigrants who worked in Cyprus to receive pension benefits when they retire.

Regarding entrepreneurship, there are no support services to promote entrepreneurship; moreover, no loans are available for migrants to make their

businesses sustainable. However, immigrants have a valuable pool of skills, which is unutilized. If utilized it would create business opportunities in culture, tourism and other business activity. Local authorities could be the bridge between the immigrant community and government agencies.

Will Totoro (Refugee Association)

In his presentation, Will Totoro mentioned that some refugees have considerable professional skills, which unfortunately do not utilize. Refugees are individuals that have risked a lot and as such, they are willing to take risks in creating and running a business. They start from zero and try hard. Lack of financing instruments for refugee entrepreneurs and their limited credit rating are factors that restrict business growth and worsens operations and prospects for sustainability.

Regarding employment of refugees, the Labour Offices do not provide information for job openings contributing to their social exclusion. Recognition and Certification of Professional Skills is a priority to enable refugees enter the labour market.

There is also a serious problem with communication and dissemination of information as it regards the refugee community with relevant authorities. Valuable official information never reaches the refugees as they are posted in Greek-speaking media. Greek language deficiency keeps refugees apart from everyday happenings, news and information, and isolated from social surroundings.

There is a need to create a Medium of Communication to inform refugees and immigrants and so they can follow developments and be able to utilize funds and opportunities.

Discussion Session

In the discussion session the followed the presentations, participants underlined the significance of issues relating to the access of TCNs to quality jobs and the safeguarding the labour rights of migrants irrespective of their country of origin. Focus was placed in utilizing the potential of TCNs as an integral part of the untapped human resource pool that can contribute to the development potential of Cyprus. It also identified the need for bridging the gap between European policy on immigrants' entrepreneurship and the policy and practice prevailing in Cypriot reality. To that end, the implementation of programmes through the EU structural Funds for the period 2014-2020 can bridge the gap of EU and national policy regarding migrant entrepreneurship and offer opportunities for migrants.

For extensive communication and information, a meeting place for immigrants should be established to serve as focal point to meet, become informed, share ideas and discuss and decide action on issues of common concern. Roula Georgopoulou, Head of the Nicosia Municipality Multifunctional Foundation informed participants that Nicosia

Municipality is planning to establish such a Centre through the EU Structural Funds for the period 2014-2020.

Moreover, participants supported the idea for the creation of a Web Platform to post related information relating to migrants and refugees.

Finally, it was proposed to host another forum to further discuss the issue of mapping and certification of professional skills of migrants/refugees with the participation of local actors who have researched the subject but also agencies who are responsible for processing validation and certification of skills.



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από Τοπικές Αρχές



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