



This project is co-funded by the European Union and the Republic of Turkey

REPORT ON THE TWO DAY NETWORKING WORKSHOP IN ATHENS

Title of the event: NETWORKING WORKSHOP BETWEEN GREEK AND TURKISH NGOS

Date of the event: 26-27 May 2016

Place of the event: Europe Direct City of Athens

Participants:

- 3 Turkish NGOs (GPoT, ASAM, HRDF)
- 7 Greek NGOs (ANCE, PRAKSIS, Organisation Earth, Metadrasi, Greek Forum of Migrants, Nostos, World Pharmacists)
- 2 international NGOs (Médecins Sans Frontières, Caritas Hellas)
- Educational institutions, consulting companies, legal firms dealing with refugees issues, diplomatic corps

Short presentation of the event:

A two day information networking workshop between Greek and Turkish NGO's took place in Athens on the 26th and 27th of May. The main scope of the workshop was to engage effective public voices and advocacy networks from Greece and Turkey in an exchange of ideas on migration.

In total, 59 people participated in this two day event (49.2% of the participants were NGOs, 10.2% academics, 6.8% intergovernmental and international organizations, 33.8% others).

Main points of the workshop:

Dr Dimitris Bakolas, **Scientific Advisor of the project**, welcomed the participants. Dr Bakolas analysed the aim of the workshop and pointed out the significance of exchange's information among NGOs in both countries in order to help each other in the management of the refugee crisis.

The General Project Coordinator, Ms Eleni-Kalliopi Bimpiri, presented the project and analysed its aim, objectives and activities. She mentioned the importance of Greek and Turkish NGOs working together and exchanging knowledge and experience in order to build a sustained dialogue.

One of the representatives of **Global Political Trends Centre (GPoT)**, Mr Muhammed Ammash presented the organisation, its role and activities. GPoT is a non-profit, non-partisan research institution established under the auspices of Istanbul Kültür University in Turkey in 2009 that works on issues concerning not only Turkish foreign policy but also the current international agenda. The Center's international staff conducts a wide range of innovative projects that seek to support reconciliation through dialogue and informed debate. GPoT is in special consultative status with the United Nations.





This project is co-funded by the European Union and the Republic of Turkey

Ms Tuba Dündar representative of **Human Resource Development Foundation (HRDF)** presented the organisation and their activities. HRDF is a non-profit, non-governmental and autonomous organization in Turkey working to promote reproductive health and family planning education, information, training and services as well as the empowerment of the human resources and the support of vulnerable groups (victims of trafficking, people in poverty, refugees etc). Since its establishment in 1988, HRDF has developed, executed, implemented, and also participated in a number of projects and activities at national and international levels on wide range of issues. One of the major programs that HRDF is now running is the program for refugees support. Ms Dündar mentioned that HRDF operates a support centre for Syrian refugees in Istanbul which provides first reception services, psychological support and any kind of assistance for satisfaction of their basic needs.

Mr Kadir Beyaztaş, representative of the **Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (ASAM)** presented in details the scope, objectives and activities of the organization. ASAM aims to provide services to asylum seekers and refugees who live in Turkey. ASAM on behalf of UNHCR registers the asylum seekers (non Syrians) while at the same time provides legal and social assistance to those in need. Additionally, ASAM provides information to migrants on their rights and obligations.

General Director of **ANCE NGO**, Ms Eirini Vlachaki made a brief presentation of the organization and their relative projects. She also presented in a few words the results/conclusions of the two day information event organized by ANCE in Mytilini, Lesvos, on 12-13 May 2016, on the refugee crisis.

The representative of **NGO Metadrasi**, Mr Dimitris Salmatzidis, Project Manager, presented the organization and provided the audience with information about their involvement as concerns the refugee crisis. In collaboration with UNHCR, Metadrasi provides training and interpretation services in over 33 languages, as well as services for the protection of unaccompanied children. Mr Salmatzidis also mentioned that Metadrasi is present in all entry and exit points in Greece and always ready to help people in need.

Ms Anna Salvanou, Program Coordinator of the **NGO Praksis**, presented the activities that Praksis has undertaken for migrants and refugees. Praksis is implementing various projects in this field. Among others they operate first reception centers in different parts of Greece and assist in the identification process. They provide legal assistance (if needed by some refugees) and long-term shelters for unaccompanied children.

Mr Anwar Iqbal, member of the **Greek Forum of Migrants (GFM)** mentioned that the aim of the Forum is advocacy for migrants' rights and their support for social inclusion in the Greek society. He also mentioned that more than 21 nationalities are represented by the Forum.

The representative of the international **NGO Caritas Hellas**, Ms Anastasia Spiliopoulou, presented the scope and the aims of the organization as well as the provided services. The main filed of Caritas Hellas' activities is the provision of social services and humanitarian assistance for vulnerable people. Caritas





This project is co-funded by the European Union and the Republic of Turkey

Hellas provides meals to refugees' families and social services. The organization has also undertaken various actions in relation to the refugee crisis.

Ms Eirini Evaggelinou, representative of the **NGO Nostos**, talked about the activities of the organization which are focused on confronting the unemployment and social exclusion. Currently, due to the refugee crisis NOSTOS has started operating shelters for migrants and refugees.

Ms Athena Lambrinidou, representative of "**Organization earth**" NGO, presented the fields of activity of the organization and their contribution in addressing the refugee crisis. "Organization Earth" focuses on sustainable production and consumption. Their main activity is awareness raising on sustainable development. As concerns their contribution to the refugee crisis, the staff of "Organization Earth" cooks in Piraeus port for the refugees.

Session 1: Europe, migration flows and the refugee crisis

Dr. Sylvia Tiryaki, Deputy Director of Global Political Trends (GPoT) Centre was the moderator of this session. Dr Tiryaki said a few words about the project "Migration Network for asylum seekers and refugees in Europe and Turkey" and pointed out that 2 years ago, when the initial project idea was developed the conditions were different. Today, the idea still holds, but the conditions have changed considerably. She also mentioned that the agreement between EU and Turkey which took effect in April 2016 will probably not be implemented any further by Turkey. The Turkish Government has implemented 67 out of the 72 benchmarks, but 5 are still pending:

- Adopting measures to prevent corruption
- Aligning the legislation on personal data protection with EU standards
- Concluding an operational cooperation agreement with Europol
- Offering effective judicial cooperation in criminal matters
- Revising the legislation and practices on terrorism in line with European standards

During this session, Mr Muhammed Ammash, presented the results of the interviews GPoT conducted with 17 Syrian women refugees in Istanbul (as part of the study carried out by the project). The aim of the interviews was to study and understand the thoughts of the refugees and the push and pull factors of their arrival in Turkey. GPoT noted that the presented results reflect only the views of the Syrian refugees and not necessarily the Turkish reality. There are a lot of matters that in reality are quite different from the refugees' perception.

Some of the main results of the interviews are the following:

In relation to the question about why they left their country the following reasons were mentioned:

- Poor education in Syria,





This project is co-funded by the European Union and the Republic of Turkey

- No health care,
- Economic and political reasons.

Many complaints were made by the refugees concerning their access to social services in Turkey:

- **As concerns their access/inclusion in the education system:** A lot of Syrian children are not enrolled in Turkish schools for two reasons: firstly, parents say that they don't have the financial capacity for covering tuition fees and are not aware that there are also public schools in Turkey, secondly they lack Turkish language knowledge.
- **As concerns work opportunities and social security:** Syrian refugees have no access to the labor market and social security in Turkey since they are not able to obtain the required documentation. Unfortunately, the Turkish Government does not provide them with any information on how to proceed on this.
- **As concerns accommodation:** Homeowners tend to take advantage of Syrian refugees by raising the rental prices and discriminating them because of their origin.
- Many of the refugees don't know anything about the regulations and their rights.

Almost all interviewed Syrians claimed that they want to leave Turkey and travel to other countries to reunite with their family members. They also claimed that they would consider staying in Turkey if the living and all other conditions were better. 16 out of the 17 women said that they would like to go back to Syria if the situation changed.

Syrian refugees also complained about the registration process in the borders, while some of them claimed that they were mistreated by the border police.

Other issues:

- In Turkey, people from Syria are considered as guests not as refugees and as a result they cannot obtain refugee rights.
- After the crisis, a lot of organizations were established in Turkey in order to assist these people in the field of political and educational issues.
- After the EU-Turkey agreement took effect the migration flows dropped but they haven't stopped. The refugees are travelling to Europe through other routes e.g. from Italy.
- There is lack of asylum services centers (there are not centers in many places in Turkey).
- Human rights have been dramatically affected.





This project is co-funded by the European Union and the Republic of Turkey

Session 2: Greece – Turkey, migration flows, refugee crisis and Civil Society

Dr Dimitris Bakolas, Scientific Advisor of the Project was the moderator of the session. Dr Bakolas pointed out the effort that everyone should make to be able to understand the reality and find a common approach between the two countries in order to deal with the migration and refugee problem. Dr Bakolas also mentioned that during the event, some opportunities for fruitful and mutually beneficial cooperation among Greek and Turkish NGOs will be identified.

Mr Kadir Beyaztaş presented the main issues regarding migration in Turkey. Mr Beyaztaş started by saying that most migrants don't have a job or work under very bad conditions. They cannot access health and educational services while their living conditions are insufficient since 2 out of 4 families live in the same house (hygiene problems). From a total number of 800.000 migrant children living today in Turkey, only 325.000 go to school (1 out of 4) due to economic problems. In some cases they don't have the ability to pay for the transportation ticket for reaching the school or they are not able to have lunch at school. Another major problem in Turkey is child labor. According to the data in most refugee families there is 1 working child.

There are some areas (mostly near the Syrian-Turkish borders) where the Syrian population is larger than the Turkish.

Statistical data prove that 160.000 Syrian children were born in the last 5 years in Turkey; about 125 are born every day.

The lack of Turkish language knowledge is a barrier in every field.

Legal issues:

- In order for the Syrian population to be included in the educational and health system in Turkey, it must obtain the temporary protection ID. Today, only a very small number of people are holders of this ID.
- Currently there are about 400.000 registered Syrians in Istanbul and about 100.000 that are not registered. Mr Beyaztaş pointed out that the registration of Syrians is very important since it can provide them with rights.
- Public officials are often not aware of the legal procedures and the rights of migrants/refugees.
- Turkey does not permit the long-term stay since the “refugees” are considered as guests.
- Currently Turkish officials have started to change their way of thinking and they understand that a percentage of the refugees will stay in the country.





This project is co-funded by the European Union and the Republic of Turkey

Mr Beyaztaş also said that the local media influence negatively the Turkish population regarding the Syrians and as a result Turkish people are convinced that Syrians are the basic reason for high unemployment, terrorism and other illegal acts. Finally, Mr Beyaztaş claimed that Greece and Turkey need a common perspective and approach on human rights.

There are not so many NGOs in Turkey. Most of the active NGOs are international organizations. In order for international organizations to operate in Turkey, a legal permission by the Government is needed. This permission is not easily provided. The cooperation between local and international NGOs is not very strong and information sharing is just starting. Smooth cooperation between international and local NGOs can be achieved only if the international organizations gain understanding of the country's mentality and respect the country's laws. Usually these organizations are used to working in African countries where the legal framework is looser.

Until today 1.000.000 refugees have passed through Turkey. Mr Beyaztaş said that although we all focus on Syrian refugees there are also other nationalities. Today 260.000 are non-Syrian refugees, asylum seekers. Most of them are from Iraq (120.000), Afghanistan (100.000), Iran and Somalia.

As concerns the situation in Greece, it was mentioned that although the actual number of refugees in Greece is much lower than in Turkey (relatively proportional to the size of the country), this number can be considered as high. Xenophobia in Greece is a problem which is caused mainly by the different religion. The major problem of refugees is the fact that they feel that other people treat them like criminals. However, and despite of the economic crisis in Greece, there are a lot of people who show solidarity to the refugees by offering financial support, clothing and food.

Ms Anna Salvanou representative of Praksis mentioned that more than 1.000.000 refugees have passed from Greece, 300.000 of them after the crisis. Ms Salvanou mentioned that many of the refugees do not want to apply for asylum in Greece and refuse to learn the Greek language because their intention is to travel to other countries. Now (after the signature of the EU-Turkey agreement) they have understood that applying for asylum is the only solution. However, a big concern is what is going to happen to the refugees after they receive asylum, what economic support they will have etc. Also, after they become eligible for relocation, where will they go and how will they live? She also mentioned that interview appointments with the asylum office are very hard to be arranged since the offices are not many (and usually understaffed).

