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Integration of refugees in times of critical pressure: learning from recent experience and examples of best practice

Committee Opinion[1]
Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination
Rapporteur: Ms Elena CENTEMERO, Italy, Group of the European People's Party

A. Conclusions of the committee

1. The Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination welcomes the report of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons and congratulates its rapporteur, Ms Susanna Huovinen, on her well-documented explanatory memorandum which provides various examples on how Council of Europe member States address the complex issue of integration of refugees. These inspirational examples demonstrate that there are countless possibilities for effectively coping "with even large numbers of refugees and asylum seekers in ways that benefit both the new arrivals and the host societies, provided that there is clear political will, good communication of policy and effective mobilisation and co-ordination of administrative and social resources".[2]

2. The committee endorses the draft resolution's articulate definition of integration which, while requiring respect for the basic values of the host society, should not be understood as "neither assimilation – whereby newcomers adopt the host societies' culture, values and tradition in place of their own – nor a multi-culturalism of native-born and refugee or migrant communities living separate existences according to their original cultures, values and traditions". The committee also welcomes the fact that the draft resolution recommends the provision of language and vocational training courses, civic instruction which provides orientations for everyday life in the country, and access to day care for children, as well as its emphasis on the importance of family reunification. These are important elements for an effective integration and have also been repeatedly promoted in the committee's relevant reports and the ensuing Parliamentary Assembly texts.[3]

3. The Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination wishes to propose six amendments in order to strengthen the draft resolution from a non-discrimination and women's rights perspective, in accordance with its terms of reference and relevant Assembly texts.

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1. Reference to committee: Doc. 13903, Reference 4169 of 25 January 2016. Reporting committee: Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons. See Doc. 14329. Opinion approved by the committee on 19 May 2017.
2. Explanatory memorandum, paragraph 3.
3. Resolution 1478 (2006) and Recommendation 1732 (2006) on integration of immigrant women in Europe, Resolution 1811 (2011) and Recommendation 1970 (2011) on protecting migrant women in the labour market", Resolution 1887 (2012) "Multiple discrimination against Muslim women in Europe: for equal opportunities" and Resolution 2159 (2017) on protecting refugee women and girls from gender-based violence.

B. Proposed amendments

Amendment A (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 6.2, insert the following paragraph:

> *"strongly condemning and punishing any form of discrimination, racism, xenophobia and violence against refugees and migrants;"*

Amendment B (to the draft resolution)

In paragraph 6.6.5, after the words "introducing different elements", insert the following words:

> *", including a gender-sensitive approach,"*

Amendment C (to the draft resolution)

At the end of paragraph 6.6.5, add the following words:

> *"and the provision of female asylum officers and interpreters"*

Amendment D (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 6.7.3, insert the following paragraph:

> *"fully recognising the key role of women for the successful integration of migrant families and ensuring that the specific needs of migrant women are duly taken into account in terms of access to sexual and reproductive health, vocational and linguistic training, as well as independent access to education, while providing the necessary resources and training staff;"*

Amendment E (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 6.7.4, insert the following paragraph:

> *"granting an individual legal status to migrant women who join their spouses through family reunification, if possible within one year of their date of arrival;"*

Amendment F (to the draft resolution)

In paragraph 6.7.5, after the words "such as", insert the words "women and".

C. Explanatory memorandum by Ms Elena Centemero, rapporteur for opinion

1. The explanatory memorandum stresses that "[p]oliticians must not indulge in hate speech against refugees" and that "[n]ational law and policy should take appropriate action against such hate speech in all contexts, including statements by the media". It also refers to the relevant work of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance and the Parliamentary Assembly initiatives in this context.[4] However, there is no corresponding recommendation in the draft resolution.

2. As parliamentarians, our engagement should go well beyond "not indulging in hate speech". We should speak out against the discrimination and stigmatisation of refugees and asylum seekers, and migrants in general. This was also the Assembly's call in its Resolution 2069 (2015) "Recognising and preventing neo-racism" and Resolution 2159 (2017) "Protecting refugee women and girls from gender-based violence". The Assembly also asked member States to combat discrimination against refugees and asylum seekers by condemning and punishing any form of discrimination and violence against them. This recommendation is all the more relevant for the present draft resolution, considering that discrimination, racism and xenophobia are significant barriers to effective integration. *(Amendment A)*

3. The explanatory memorandum acknowledges refugees' challenging journey to Europe and the trauma they endure, due to their experiences of conflict and of fleeing their homes. In this context, it stresses the importance of having in place proper social and health care facilities and personnel so that psychological

4. Explanatory memorandum, paragraph 11.

problems can be identified at an early stage, noting that failure to address such problems may have wide-ranging consequences, affecting, for example, employment, language-learning, education and interaction with the authorities.[5] The draft resolution thus recommends introducing different elements aimed at facilitating integration at the earliest stages of the asylum determination procedure, including psychological trauma support.

4. I propose to add a reference to "gender-sensitive approach" and the provision of female asylum officers and interpreters into the above-mentioned recommendation. In fact, today, women – together with children – represent the majority of arrivals in Europe. These women are often exposed to gender-based violence in their countries of origin, during the journey and in transit and destination countries. "[P]roviding protection from gender-based violence to all women, irrespective of their status, should be a priority, in line with the provisions of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (CETS No. 210, Istanbul Convention). The responsibility to help and protect asylum-seeking and refugee women is not limited to cases of violence perpetrated in destination countries. They should receive adequate assistance to overcome the trauma they have experienced in their countries of origin or during transit."[6] This is also the first step towards ensuring their successful integration, which in turn will be the most efficient response to gender-based violence in the long run. For the same reasons, I propose adding the word "women" into paragraph 6.7.5, which refers to particularly vulnerable groups deserving protection and assistance. *(Amendments B, C and F)*

5. Women are at the very heart of the integration process, as in most migrant families they play a major role in educating the children. Ensuring the social and economic integration of refugee and migrant women is therefore essential and will have a multiplier effect on the integration of migrant families.

6. The Assembly has repeatedly emphasised the need to promote the integration of immigrant women and proposed measures to this effect. In its Resolution 1478 (2006) on the integration of immigrant women in Europe, the Assembly stressed that measures to promote immigrant women's access to education, training, employment, social and cultural rights and health services would lead to greater social cohesion in the host country. It thus recommended, *inter alia*, ensuring adequate vocational training for immigrant women – aimed at lifting them out of subordinate positions and professions traditionally reserved for them (for example in the service, health or restaurant sectors) – and offering them tailor-made, functional language courses taking their main interests in life into account and free of charge if possible.

7. The Assembly also repeatedly condemned harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation, which are acts of violence against women and children and a flagrant violation of their human rights. It recommended numerous measures to combat these practices, including the training for health-care professionals to enable them to diagnose female genital mutilation and the provision of appropriate care for women and girls suffering from the consequences of this mutilation.[7] The Assembly also called for the provision, in transit and reception facilities, counselling, psychological support and health care, including sexual and reproductive health care and specific post-rape care, for victims of gender-based violence in their countries of origin and in transit or destination countries.[8]

8. In view of these elements, I would like to add a specific recommendation on women's key role for successful integration and on their specific needs in terms of professional and linguistic training, as well as in terms of their access to sexual and reproductive health. *(Amendment D)*

9. The Assembly has for the last twenty years been recommending that migrant women be granted an autonomous right of residence that is not tied to the residence status of their spouse.[9] In its above-mentioned resolution on the integration of immigrant women in Europe, the Assembly insisted on granting an independent status to the spouse and children of the principal right holder at the earliest opportunity in order to guarantee and fully protect their rights, facilitate their social integration and avoid confining them to the domestic sphere. This recommendation has been echoed in successive resolutions and recommendations[10] and should be reiterated once again. *(Amendment E)*

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5. Explanatory memorandum, paragraph 30.
6. Resolution 2159 (2017), op. cit.
7. Resolution 2135 (2016) on female genital mutilation in Europe.
8. Resolution 2159 (2017), op. cit.
9. Recommendation 1261 (1995) on the situation of immigrant women in Europe. The Committee of Ministers Recommendation Rec(2002)4 on the legal status of persons admitted for family reunification further recommended granting an autonomous residence permit independent of the principal right holder after a period of four years of legal residence, and the right to apply for an autonomous residence permit after one year in case of divorce, separation or death of the principal.

10. To conclude, I would like to reiterate that the arrival of asylum seekers in Europe should also be used as an opportunity to promote and uphold values such as tolerance, diversity and openness, and to take a strong stance against multiple forms of discrimination.[11] As accurately put forward by my colleague Ms Gisela Wurm in her report on the protection of refugee women from gender-based violence,[12] "Europe can learn and gain a lot from the experience of refugees and put into practice the respect of its fundamental values when welcoming them to protect them from the atrocities of war. Helping the social integration of refugees is therefore crucial to overcome prejudice and ensure harmonious living together."

11. The Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination will continue to address the integration of migrants through a new report on "Migration from a gender perspective: empowering women as key actors for integration" which is being prepared by Ms Gabriela Heinrich (Germany, SOC).

10. Resolution 1697 (2009) and Recommendation 1891 (2009) "Migrant women: at particular risk from domestic violence" and Resolution 1811 (2011), op cit.
11. Resolution 2159 (2017), op. cit.
12. Doc. 14284.