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Migration from a gender perspective: empowering women as key actors for integration

Committee Opinion¹

Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons

Rapporteur: Ms Eva-Lena JANSSON, Sweden, Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group

A. Conclusions of the committee:

1. The Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons welcomes the report on “Migration from a gender perspective: empowering women as key actors for integration” by the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, which has been prepared by Ms Gabriela Heinrich (Germany, SOC).
2. Women represent an increasing proportion of the migrants and refugees who arrive in member States of the Council of Europe. As gender equality constitutes a key value for European societies and protection of women’s human rights a priority for many of our member States, member States must pay more attention to ensure that their national policies dealing with migration and refugees are gender sensitive. This is necessary in order to detect specific vulnerabilities and strengths of female migrants and refugees as well as to promote their integration on the basis of genuine gender equality.
3. Empowering women as key actors for integration can only succeed when national policies become more sensitive to specific needs of women. The report by the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination addresses this issue in detail and refers to earlier relevant Parliamentary Assembly resolutions.

B. Proposed amendments

Amendment A (to the draft resolution)

At the end of paragraph 2, replace the words “European Union” with the words “member States of the Council of Europe”.

Amendment B (to the draft resolution)

In paragraph 4, at the end of the second sentence, add the words “as well as ethnic or racist discrimination and violence”.

Amendment C (to the draft resolution)

In paragraph 8.2, after the words “education and work”, add the words “and recognition of educational and professional qualifications”.

1. Reference to committee: [Doc. 14095](#), Reference 4233 of 10 October 2016. Reporting committee: Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination. See [Doc. 14606](#). Opinion approved by the committee on 21 September 2018.



Amendment D (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 8.3, insert the following paragraph:

“ensure that the social rights of refugees and migrants are respected in a gender-neutral way in accordance with the revised European Social Charter (ETS No. 163), in particular regarding parental leave;”

Amendment E (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 8.4, insert the following paragraph:

“ensure that a right to family reunification is enforced without undue delay, especially for unaccompanied child refugees or family members who are in need of family support;”

Amendment F (to the draft resolution)

At the end of paragraph 8.5, add the words “and violence within their family, including child marriages, genital mutilation and so-called ‘honour killings’”.

Amendment G (to the draft resolution)

In paragraph 8.6, after the word “responsibilities”, add the words “their fundamental rights and freedoms”.

Amendment H (to the draft resolution)

In paragraph 8.8, after the words “vocational training”, add the words “and higher education”.

Amendment I (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 8.13, add the following paragraph:

“collect and produce detailed gender-specific statistical data on migrants and refugees, in order to define most pressing needs, to detect specific vulnerabilities and strengths and to allow for developing targeted and more individualised national integration policies.”

C. Explanatory memorandum by Ms Eva-Lena Jansson, rapporteur for opinion

1. Introduction

1. Women represent approximately half of all migrants and refugees globally. The Council of Europe’s Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023 sets a specific strategic objective to protect the rights of migrants, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls and calls for due consideration for their specific circumstances and needs.² The United Nations³ and the European Union⁴ are pursuing specific action aimed at helping female refugees and migrants. Together with the European Union, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has produced surveys on labour market integration which examine the integration of female refugees.⁵ In addition, a number of civil society organisations specifically follow this subject closely.⁶

2. <https://rm.coe.int/strategy-en-2018-2023/16807b58eb>.

See also www.coe.int/en/web/north-south-centre/-/lisbon-forum-2016-highlighted-women-refugees-migrants-and-asylum-seekers-needs-in-europe-and-the-southern-mediterranean.

3. For example, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), www.unhcr.org/women.html, UN Women, <http://eca.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/women-refugees-and-migrants> and United Nations Population Fund, www.unfpa.org/news/five-reasons-migration-feminist-issue.

4. Study on “Female refugees and asylum seekers: the issue of integration”, European Parliament, DG for Internal Policies, 2016, [www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/556929/IPOL_STU\(2016\)556929_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/556929/IPOL_STU(2016)556929_EN.pdf).

5. See page 19 of the OECD report, www.oecd.org/berlin/publikationen/Arbeitsmarktintegration-von-Fluechtlingen-EK-OECD-Arbeitspapier-092016.pdf.

6. See, for instance, www.womenlobby.org/-/Immigration-Integration-and-Asylum-?lang=en and www.migrantwomennetwork.org/ and www.frauenrechte.de/online/images/downloads/flucht/2016_01_Refugee-Women-on-the-European-Route.pdf.

2. Along with children, women refugees and migrants are therefore increasingly the object of political focus. While women migrants can play an important role in promoting and bringing about integration into host societies, they unfortunately are impeded from playing it efficiently because they continue to suffer specific forms of violence and exclusion. This phenomenon calls for deeper analysis of why so many women remain disadvantaged in the everyday life of migrants and refugees. The report of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination is therefore timely and important.

3. Female migrants are neither a homogeneous nor an amorphous group, but reflect a wide diversity, stemming from individual personal histories as well as the cultural diversity of their countries of origin. Depending on their personal background, they might need specific support for integrating into their new host societies and culture.

4. While some have been subjected to gender discrimination, others have been traumatised by gender violence or are faced with gender specific exploitation. Some of these tragic experiences might have occurred in their countries of origin or while fleeing.⁷ However, female migrants and refugees often experience them in their country of arrival due to their vulnerable situation.⁸ In addition, female migrants and refugees might suffer from having been separated from their children and families.⁹

2. Specific explanations of the proposed amendments

Amendment A

Within the European Union, the political debate about migration and refugees is often paralysed by polarising focuses on national sovereignty versus European Union competences. As visa issues are national competences within the European Union, it is important to hold States responsible for their action and inaction. In addition, such responsibility should not be limited to the member States of the European Union, but apply to all member States of the Council of Europe.

Amendment B

Gender discrimination and prejudice against migrant and refugee women occurs often through ethnic or even racist discrimination and violence. Therefore, this aspect should also be mentioned in the resolution.

Amendment C

Recognition of studies and diplomas is the objective of the Council of Europe Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (ETS No. 165). However, migrants and refugees often face problems in having their studies and diplomas recognised in their host country.

Amendment D

Refugees and migrants, regardless of gender, should enjoy the same social rights, which are often a necessary requirement for integration. Parental leave is an example of a situation where migrant women have faced problems regarding children born abroad.

Amendment E

Family reunification of refugees and migrants is the subject of a separate Assembly report ([Doc. 14626](#)). As a key aspect for the integration of refugees and migrants, which often affects mothers separated from their children, this aspect should be mentioned here.

7. The UN University has published a report on gender-based violence in refugee camps, <https://unu.edu/publications/articles/protecting-female-refugees-against-sexual-and-gender-based-violence-in-camps.html>.

8. See for example a report by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) on sexual exploitation of migrants from Nigeria, www.iom.int/news/un-migration-agency-issues-report-arrivals-sexually-exploited-migrants-chiefly-nigeria.

9. Care International produced a report on this subject in 2017, https://insights.careinternational.org.uk/media/k2/attachments/CARE_Left-behind_policy-report_2017_final.pdf.

Amendment F

Refugee and migrant women and girls from certain areas face a higher risk of gender-based violence within their family than other women and girls. Integration must therefore also provide particular protection against such violence, which includes even the most severe forms of gender-based violence such as child marriage, genital mutilation and so-called "honour killings".

Amendment G

Family obligations or societal obligations are neither female nor male, but are shared responsibilities. However, refugees and migrants not only have obligations, they also have rights and freedoms. Therefore, it seems important to add "fundamental rights and freedoms", as in the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5).

Amendment H

While vocational training might be important for female refugees and migrants, they must also have access to higher education. Unfortunately, such access to higher education does not exist for women in some countries of origin.

Amendment I

Detailed statistical evidence can be a strong indicator of systemic strengths and vulnerabilities of female and male migrants and refugees, such as data on the number of pregnancies of girl refugees and the number of females and males from abroad who are sexually exploited, but also the number of female and male entrepreneurs among refugees and the cases of public financial support for the latter group. Therefore, it is essential for national authorities to collect and produce detailed statistical data on migrants and refugees, in order to detect specific vulnerabilities and strengths and to develop more individualised national integration policies.