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Gender mainstreaming of migration policies

Committee Opinion¹

Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination

Rapporteur: Ms Sena Nur ÇELİK, Türkiye, Members not belonging to a Political Group

A. Conclusions of the Committee

1. The Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination congratulates the rapporteur of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons on her timely report, which examines in depth the subject of gender mainstreaming in migration policies.
2. It welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the recommendations made in the draft resolution, and to reinforcing the way in which it reflects the many challenges related to gender, which are present across the whole spectrum of migration and displacement. It considers that all member States of the Council of Europe would gain in applying gender-sensitive principles to their treatment of migrants from reception to integration, thereby avoiding many situations of insecurity, hardship and violence.
3. The report and draft resolution thus rightly highlight the need to integrate a gendered approach in all areas of policy and practice, and to involve migrants themselves, especially migrant women, in decisions concerning them. It also brings to light the preventive and protective value of gender mainstreaming in this area, insofar as migrants and asylum-seekers are one of the most vulnerable and underprivileged groups, as well as being one of the most diverse in our societies today, with all this entails of differences in cultures and traditions.

B. Proposed amendments

Amendment A (to the draft resolution)

In paragraph 5.2., after the words “in particular” add the following words:

“to enable families to remain together and”

Explanatory note

Family reunion is the mechanism according to which family members who have been separated are reunited: mixed accommodation should first of all be available to family groups who have not been separated, to enable them to stay together.

1. Reference to committee: [Doc. 15069](#), reference 4504 of 7 May 2020. Reporting committee: Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons. See [Doc. 15456](#). Opinion approved by the committee on 30 November 2021.



Amendment B (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 5.2., insert the following paragraph:

“pay special attention to the need to provide young boys, especially adolescents, with separate accommodation facilities from that of young girls but also from that of men;”

Explanatory note

Visits to reception centres show that adolescents require gender-specific accommodation. Boys are often accommodated with men and risk mistreatment in conditions unsuited to protecting the physical and mental integrity of children. The Parliamentary Assembly has repeatedly stated that children must be treated first as children, before considering their status.

Amendment C (to the draft resolution)

In paragraph 5.3., replace the words “provide migrants and refugees with accessible and adapted gender-sensitive information” with the following words:

“in accordance with Objective 3 of the United Nations Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, provide migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers during their displacement, application processes, settlement, resettlement and integration, as well as during return procedures, with accessible, accurate, timely, gender-responsive information,”

Explanatory note

This amendment aims to better emphasise the need for information at all stages of migration, until the status of the persons concerned is settled. The reference to the UN Global compact points to the useful and detailed practical recommendations developed by UN experts in each of the sectors concerned.

Amendment D (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 5.4., insert the following paragraph:

“recognising that women and girls are the most at-risk and vulnerable group among migrants, representing a diversity of different needs, provide specific protection for unaccompanied girls, single mothers, pregnant women, women with young children and women experiencing intersectional discrimination especially;

Explanatory note

This amendment aims to emphasise the need for specific protection measures for vulnerable groups that are most at risk.

Amendment E (to the draft resolution)

Replace paragraph 5.5. with the following paragraph:

“facilitate access to gender-specific health care services, including sexual and reproductive health and hygiene services and education for migrant and asylum-seeking women and girls and obstetrical and pre- and post-natal services (including breast-feeding facilities), as well as sexual health and hygiene education and services for men and boys, ensuring respect of privacy and confidentiality, and reform legislation and policy that deny or limit access to health services on the basis of residence or migration status. As far as possible, health services should be mainstreamed nationally;”

Explanatory note

This paragraph would be strengthened by adding further detail about the services to be provided, and the provision of information and/or education aimed in particular at men and boys.

Amendment F (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 5.5. insert the following paragraph:

“ensure that feminine hygiene products are supplied to reception centres for migrants and asylum-seeking women and girls, and ensure adequate assistance in using them;”

Explanatory note

Poverty and lack of availability deprive underprivileged women worldwide of access to feminine hygiene products. During long migration periods, girls and women traverse different stages of their development, often separated from supporting families and peers. Migrant girls and women, especially adolescents and older women, must be supported during these changes.

Amendment G (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 5.9., insert the following paragraph:

“take into account the fact that a larger proportion of women than men are occupied in informal work, such as care and domestic work, and ensure that the rights of migrant women in this type of employment are ensured through adequate supervision and accessible assistance;”

Explanatory note

As already emphasised, there is a need for gender-sensitive policies and legislation at all stages of migration. Migrant women are particularly targets of exploitation in the types of employment they occupy, often in situations of subordination which can lead to abuse (for example domestic slavery).

Amendment H (to the draft resolution)

In paragraph 7.8., replace the words “among social workers and interpreters working with migrants” with the following words:

“among counsellors, social workers and interpreters working with migrants, and give asylum-seekers the option of interacting with a person of their own sex”

Explanatory note

This proposed amendment also aims to include men and boys in the recommendations for gender-sensitive treatment, here at borders, and not only to recommend the presence of women but also the possibility to choose a person of the same sex as an interlocutor.

Amendment I (to the draft resolution)

At the end of paragraph 8, add the following sentences:

“It also points out that migrant women are as diverse as women in the rest of society and should be treated as such and not as a homogeneous (and stigmatised) group. In this respect, the Assembly refers to the work of the No Hate Parliamentary Alliance, co-ordinated by its General Rapporteur on combating racism and intolerance, and to its ongoing work on islamophobia.”

Explanatory note

This addition emphasises that while gender mainstreaming is essential, migrant women are not a homogeneous group and their diversity must be taken into account. The second sentence highlights the need for another level of mainstreaming, namely including migrants in the work of the Assembly on countering racism, intolerance and islamophobia.

Amendment J (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 10.5., insert the following paragraph:

“foster financial inclusion of migrants by providing gender-responsive programmes and instruments that enhance the financial inclusion of migrants and their families, in accordance with Objective 20 of the UN Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration;”

Explanatory note

The second reference to the UN global compact again points to the very practical and useful detailed guidelines contained in this instrument.

C. Explanatory memorandum by Ms Sena Nur Çelik, rapporteur for opinion

1. Introduction

1. I would like to express my own satisfaction alongside that of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination for this opportunity to contribute to an important text. The preparation of this opinion has enabled me to follow closely the preparation of the report of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons.
2. I would also like to congratulate and thank the rapporteur, Ms Petra Stienen, for her valuable work on the subject of gender mainstreaming in migration. The research in the report clearly sets out the issues at stake and its conclusions. The report also highlights the substantial work of the Council of Europe, through the Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (CETS No. 210, Istanbul Convention) and through its different recommendations and guidelines as set out in its Gender Equality Strategy.
3. I have made some proposals for additions which I believe reinforce some of the issues raised. Most of the amendments concern subjects which are present in the explanatory memorandum, but which are either absent or which could be reflected with more force in the draft resolution. The amendments relate to three main areas: the need to include men and boys in gender mainstreaming policies; the need to take an intersectional approach drawing attention to the multiple layers of discrimination and sources of trauma to which women are subjected; and the usefulness of referring to the orientations, guidelines and policy measures contained in relevant instruments, including Assembly resolutions on racism, intolerance, islamophobia and discrimination which should also apply to migrants, as well as other international standards and policies.
4. I truly hope that the rapporteur and the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons will recognise the added value of the additions to the draft text and will support them.
5. During the preparation of the report, I co-hosted a webinar with the rapporteur, which provided very practical input from the different expert speakers. In particular we heard from the Greek Deputy minister for Migration and Asylum, Ms Sofia Voultepsi, from Ms Nurdan Erpulat Altuntas from the Directorate general for immigration, asylum and visa of Turkey, and from Ms Remha Kiros from the Migration Policy Department of the Ministry of Justice and Security of the Netherlands. The webinar provided an excellent opportunity for co-operation between our two committees, and I would recommend joint hearings and exchanges whenever possible.

2. The vital need for gender mainstreaming at all stages of the migration process, from reception to integration

6. Everyone is aware of the fact that my country, Turkey, is hosting the largest number of migrants, refugees and asylum-seeking in Europe, almost 4 million people displaced by conflict. In the handling of this massive humanitarian disaster, some of the gender sensitive policies adopted by the Turkish authorities for facilitating the integration of Syrian women and girls into Turkish society have included the following examples of good practices in gender mainstreaming:
 - gender sensitive reception facilities with female officers, doctors and interviewers; identification and prioritisation of vulnerable groups upon entry, with special care, including safe accommodation and access to psychological counselling;
 - access to healthcare and education upon registration for all Syrians;
 - equal access for Syrian women to shelters protecting women from violence;
 - language and vocational training programmes at the refugee camps. Many women in the camps learned Turkish and established small workshops to produce and sell handicrafts;
 - encouragement for women in leadership roles in the running of everyday affairs in the camps;
 - participating in the decision-making mechanisms within the camps, which have helped to empower refugee women in their own communities.
7. For urban women refugees (outside camps), similar policies and programmes were adopted. Different stages of the integration process were designed in accordance with the background, education and career objectives of Syrian women, and helped increase their participation in the workforce, and micro-loans

provided by different financial agencies of the government helped promote entrepreneurship among refugee women. As well as the enormous national effort devoted to providing shelter and subsistence to these people, Turkey has worked with international organisations on the ground on the measures above, in particular with the United Nations.

8. In February 2021, and on the basis of the first world-wide co-operative framework addressing international migration, the 2018 United Nations Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), Turkey concluded an agreement on a national Network on Migration (UNNM). Managed by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), this dedicated body is designed to ensure migration issues are integrated into development work in a co-ordinated way and aims ultimately to foster greater understanding between migrant and host communities through support programmes to improve the well-being of migrant communities. This structure will co-operate with the Directorate General for Migration Management, set up in 2013, to integrate the GCM objectives into government policies and programmes.

9. I believe that this is a good example of co-ordinated action at both national and international levels and is a response to an issue raised by the rapporteur during the webinar about the difficulties related to the fact that migration policies, which concern reception, hosting, asylum procedures including resettlement and returns as well as integration, are often spread over many decision-making and government bodies. I have included references to the global compact in my proposals for amendments, as I am convinced that it provides clear guidelines drawn from the extensive experience of the UN over decades of work with migrants globally, and that these may be usefully taken on board in the area of gender mainstreaming especially.

3. The need to include men and boys in gender-responsive approaches

10. In the amendments I have proposed to the draft resolution, I have included more reference to the need to take into account the situations of men and boys in the development of gender-specific policies. The rapporteur made this clear in her report, and I believe the resolution could better reflect the fact that protection and assistance must be provided for them, too. Boys, especially, run the same risks as girls of falling victims to trafficking and abuse. Adolescent boys are often treated in the same way – and accommodated in the same spaces – as men, whereas they are still children and should be treated as such.

11. Men and boys are as much in need of gender-specific education and training as girls, and are also perhaps even more prone to cultural and traditional barriers which hinder their acceptance of their condition as migrants and create incomprehension and frustration. Men who are suddenly unable to fulfil their role as “providers” for families suffer physically and psychologically and need support and assistance in maintaining their dignity in circumstances of deprivation.

4. Women and other vulnerable groups must be given differentiated protection as a priority

12. During the webinar I emphasised the vulnerability of women and girls to gender-based violence and trafficking. Gender sensitive law enforcement, access to health care, sufficient sex-segregated facilities and safe spaces for women and girls are needed, as well as trained female staff to interview women migrants. There is unequal access for migrant women and girls to health, housing, education, language courses, labour market and decision making in European countries, preventing their social and economic integration. Migrant women are the largest overqualified and unemployed group in Europe, mostly working in the informal economy such as domestic work where human rights abuses are very prevalent. This is why I have included a reference to this area requiring particular protection in the proposed amendments.

13. Migrants suffer from multiple layers of trauma, starting with the experience of forced displacement and continuing with the many dangers encountered and hardship suffered during long journeys, with often rejection, hostility, an additional layer of discrimination on the basis of race, religion or class and institutional and legal barriers waiting at the destination. Vulnerable groups – women, unaccompanied minors, young people, people with disabilities, are the first in line and need some respite in places where they may find some rest and some time to recover. Governments should try harder to address the specificities of these vulnerable groups, as well as the differences within the groups themselves. Only differentiated positive measures can begin to compensate for the discrimination linked to intersectionality and allow migrant women to live decent lives.

5. Concluding remarks

14. In conclusion, I would like to emphasise again the importance of this subject for all Council of Europe member States, not only those which, like my own, remain in the front line of coping with the massive surges of displaced persons we have seen over the last years. Migration management is the responsibility of all countries, and none are exempt from its implementation. Respecting the human rights of migrants is the duty of all, and we all know that solidarity and humanitarian assistance are sorely lacking both within and between countries.

15. The most important consequence of migration policies which do not respect the human rights, diversity and specificities of all migrants is widespread violence and the perpetuation of conflict in the whole of society. Recognising and addressing differences, between genders among other aspects, is the key to promoting peaceful coexistence and is an investment for the future. I hope that this resolution will help to reaffirm this and help to promote gender mainstreaming as the norm in migration policies.