

The social integration of refugees

An article by Nassos Theodoridis (Athens office manager of ANTIGONE) , published on Athens daily paper "Efimerida Syntakton" on 15th October 2019

The refugee issue should motivate an open discussion on social integration of new populations. This discussion should be regulated by some basic shafts, which support acceptance and values. Firstly, social integration is a powerful, two-way, mutual, process of adjustment for all immigrants and citizens of each country.

A basic pillar for this process of integration is employment, since it is of utmost importance for the involvement and cooperation of refugees and immigrants in a society in order for them to be welcomed and made “visible” in this cooperation. Also, the basic knowledge of the language, the history and the institution of social acceptance is necessary for their integration.

For this reason, strives in education matter utmost to prepare refugees and immigrants, especially for their own offspring, in order for them to be more successful and more active participants in society. Furthermore, access to immigrants and refugees, in institutions, as well as public and private assets and services, on an equal basis with natural citizens, without discrimination creates a crucial basis for their better integration. There is no doubt that frequent integration between foreigners and citizens of a country creates a fundamental mechanism for integration. The common forums, intercultural dialogue, education for immigrants and emigrational cultures and the revitalization of urban livings situations, reinforce interaction between immigrants and citizens of a country.

In any case, we should not forget that the practice of different cultural traditions and religious are protected by the Map of Fundamental Rights and should be ensured, unless if some practical issues come into conflict with other inviolable European rights or with international law. On a practical level, the scientists who worked with the organization “Antigone” and were involved with the research program “NIEM” realized that social integration in our country meets a wide variety of problems that

will be raised on "Antigone' s" Round Table of the 16th December 2019. For example, Greece does not offer services for spotting families for those who wish to reunite with them. As a result of this, applications for families who wish to be reunited can be submitted only when the beneficiary under national protection knows the position of his family member with who he wishes to be reunited. Beneficiaries are constantly compelled to asked non-profit organizations for help in order to track family members when their location is unknown.

Therefore, family reunification may be a very difficult accomplishment. Even though, there are conditions which make it easier for family reunification of refugees, when a refugee files an application within three months from the day he files, not everyone is entitled to national protection. For family reunification of a refugee who hasn't filed an application within three months from the moment he was given the legal right to, then extra terms must be fulfilled except for un-escorted minors who have advantages without any time barriers. Besides unescorted minors, other venerable groups should also be included in advantageous adjustments for family reunification.

It must be noted that with a basis of Greek legislature, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection are not entitled to family reunification, neither are persons of humanitarian status. According to the presidential law 80/2006 which refers to the temporary protection and forces family reunification without mentioning the longest time line of these procedures (article 15), but the arrangement for temporary protection were never triggered. This means that there categories of beneficiaries protected under international law must depend on the law, just like the citizens of third world countries and family unification, which means that extra strict eligibilities concerning income of the applicant, housing conditions, medical insurance etc.

At last information in general on social rights are offered by organizations. There is no standard or politics which is applied by the government nor is there some type of data (pamphlets in different languages which explain people rights and how they are exercise, etc.) which could help those entitled to national protection to enjoy their rights in social facilities.

