

## **A SUMMARY OF MINUTES OF THE 18<sup>TH</sup> NIEM COALITION MEETING**

(ANTIGONE'S 18<sup>TH</sup> National Round Table against discrimination)

Monday 16<sup>th</sup> December 2019, 17.30 pm, Athens

### **Subject: FUNDAMENTAL PARAMETRES OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION IN GREECE AT THE TIME OF DESIGNATION OF THE REFUGIE SITUATION AS A PRIMARY EUROPEAN CASE**

In the beginning, there has been a brief greeting from the Athens office manager of ANTIGONE, Mr Athanasios Theodoridis, who made a short introduction in the topic and a presentation of the speakers.

Afterwards, a brief greeting from Michalis Tremopoulos, vice president of ANTIGONE and ex-MEP, followed.

Mr. Tremopoulos added some general comments on the important challenges facing Greek society in the smooth social integration of refugees. He then referred all that Greece has done so far that it can smoothly integrate refugees into Greek society, underlining a part of the country's major shortcomings in managing the phenomenon.

After greetings main speakers are to follow.

In the first part, co-ordinated by Angeliki Athanasopoulou, PhD in the Department of Social Anthropology and History of the Aegean University and lecturer in the Department of Social Policy at Panteion University, we analyzed the context in which social processes are played out and the methods and basic tools for social integration of refugees.

According to Nikos Kourachanis, a professor and postdoctoral researcher at Panteion University's Department of Social Policy, the lack of appropriate refugee management tools and measures is a political will because the European Union does not pursue integration policies as long as they are not included in their goals. At the same time, he argues that this is not a refugee crisis but a crisis of refugee management, since European management gives birth to the refugee crisis.

According to Thodoris Bogeia, head of the Human Rights 360 integration program, the cornerstone of the social integration of refugees is the essential access to social rights. In the current situation, there is often the immediate implementation of exit strategies without preparation, the lack of integration programs within the hosting structures, the variety of approach services, the inability to understand the language and access to health, work, housing, vulnerability due to age, disability, gender or conditions and the existence of rhetorical hatred within the social political environment. Integration services are developed through a holistic system of services and counseling, and there

are a number of forms of support, such as psychosocial, legal, advocacy, promotion of private-public integration, continuing education and access to the labor market.

According to Despina Karakatsanis, an educational policy professor at the University of the Peloponnese, the most vulnerable group is the group of children. Education is important because it contributes to the mental and social development of children. To avoid being marginalized, children should follow the school curriculum and after-school extracurricular activities should be encouraged. Emphasis should be placed on language learning by children, general communication with parents, and involvement of the local community around the school. The solutions provided for the integration of refugee children at the national level are limited to after-school education, aimed at language learning, atypical forms of education for very young children and for adult programs. The statistics show the absence of refugee children from the educational structures.

According to Andreas Demos, a research associate responsible for child protection and quality of service at the EKKA Unaccompanied Minors' Shelter Center, statistics show that many are unaccompanied minors in Greece, many living in temporary accommodation centers, informal and precarious housing, protective custody, and many of these children are boys. The institutional framework defines the development of semi-autonomous living structures for children aged 16 and over, as well as the management of housing requests and the evaluation and supervision of accommodation centers. Important are the challenges around not having long-term hospitality positions but also in the areas of education, legal support, health, work etc.

There was a short discussion with the speakers as well as questions from the audience.

After a short break, the second part of the discussion, co-moderated by Real news journalist Alexander Kontis, was developed around the broader context of the barriers to social integration of refugees.

According to Reza Golami, a member of the Board of Directors of the United Afghan Community of Greece, emphasis should be placed on how refugees themselves experience the integration process. The problems for them are many. Often they experience racism and xenophobia, language learning is not enough for everyone, the state is absent, there is a phenomena of ghettos and the personal struggle for the refugee to cope. Holistic inclusion, care and ongoing monitoring are needed.

According to Apostolos Kapsalis, Doctor of Labor Relations, INE / GOWG Scientific Associate, there is a European framework of legislative and formal decisions aimed at exploiting the skilled segment of refugees from certain powerful states in order to strengthen the labor market and the national labor market and national economy. For refugees there is formal access to the labor market, while the phenomenon of staying, for illegal work is common. Finally, with the invisible hand of the market, refugees are forced to follow the agricultural sector, whether they want it or not. This is the

basic requirement for their introduction under the legislation set by the previous government.

According to Pelopidas Nikolopoulos, a lawyer and a member of the Children's Rights Network, there is no child protection system in Greece in general. A key tool of good practice for children is the online library, which takes place in squares and camps and aims to bring underage children - up to 12 years old - to discover their rights, both themselves and their parents. The focus groups for these children are also relevant, and for the same reason as the psychological support units. Accession policies should be formulated as soon as an integration problem arises and access to education and legal work alongside the school should be available. The importance of Social Security is becoming apparent, as well as the problems that the protective guard system brings.

According to George Nikolaidis, director of the Department of Mental Health and Social Welfare of the Institute of Child Health, a scientific officer at the Day Care Center of the Association "The Smile of the Child", the issue of unaccompanied minors as a whole raises many issues and most of the children are boys. Hostels are inadequate and inadequate in infrastructure, and in recent years, emergency hotels are increasing due to short-term solutions. In Greece these self-protection systems do not exist, but only social service networks. Finally, there is no possibility for both native and refugee support. This fact leads the Greek society many times to choose between the two.

Brief comments and questions by the audience to the speakers, followed