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

Report¹

Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination

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Summary

Europe is a destination for people seeking international protection or a better life, due to wars, political turmoil and the poverty affecting its neighbouring regions. This inflow adds to the migrants and refugees who have already settled in Europe. At the same time, populists question Europe's capacity to absorb a greater number of migrants and refugees, as well as the latter's willingness to integrate.

It is therefore more important than ever to put the integration issue at the heart of the political discussion. Much has been said on migration and integration, but too little attention has been paid to women, their vulnerability in the migration process but also their potential as key actors for integration. Women may play this role by promoting the integration of their families and social circle, supporting their children's education, sharing traditions with their daughters and sons, as well as participating in their host country's society.

Investing in the integration of migrant and refugee women means creating a solid basis for the inclusion and integration of future generations and for the development of peaceful, inclusive and cohesive societies based on shared values and the respect for diversity. Therefore, the design, implementation, evaluation and follow-up of all integration policies for migrants and refugees should be gender sensitive.

¹ Reference to Committee: Doc. 14095, Ref. 4233 of 10 October 2016.

A. Draft resolution²

1. Europe is more than ever a destination for people seeking international protection due to wars and political turmoil or escaping from poverty and extreme hardship. This recent inflow adds to the numbers of migrants and refugees who have permanently settled in European countries, sometimes for generations.

2. Although the migration issue has become the focus of much media and political attention and has been heralded as a priority in the manifestos of all populist political forces, emphasis is all too often placed on dramatic events such as large-scale arrivals, or on the actual or purported limited absorption capacity of, and financial burden on, some States and societies, or the crisis of the migration management policy of the European Union.

3. The Assembly believes that the political and public debate should pay greater attention to integration policies since, ultimately, the degree to which migrants and refugees become a resource and strength for the host country and are able to contribute to its cultural and economic richness depends on their level of integration.

4. In addition, for integration policies to be successful, they should take into account the demographics of migration: while women used to represent a low proportion of the migrant inflow and often came through family reunion, today they migrate independently and in larger numbers. While they flee for a better life, a number of women face non-respect of their rights, including falling victims to trafficking, slavery and systematic sexual abuse. This feature makes it even more necessary for integration policies and measures to be gender-sensitive, in order to tackle the vulnerabilities of women throughout the migration process while at the same time empowering them as key actors and multipliers of integration.

5. The Assembly reiterates its Resolution 2159 (2017) on Protecting refugee women and girls from gender-based violence and recalls that several provisions of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence specifically refer to migrant and refugee women. Regretting that migrant women are subjected to multiple and intersectional discrimination, it welcomes the inclusion, in the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023, of a strategic objective on Protecting the rights of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls.

6. The Assembly draws attention to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (CETS No.210), the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (CETS No.201) and the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (CETS No.197) and the need to effectively implement them to provide protection to migrant and refugee women and girls and to ensure they have the necessary conditions to become the source of strength for our societies.

1. Because of the role they play within their families and communities, the Assembly is convinced that investing in the integration of migrant and refugee women means creating a solid basis for the inclusion and integration of future generations and for the development of peaceful, inclusive and cohesive societies based on shared values and the respect for diversity. In this sense, the present resolution should be considered as complementary to Assembly Resolution 2176 (2017) on Integration of refugees in times of critical pressure: learning from recent experience and examples of best practice.

7. In the light of the above, the Assembly calls on member States of the Council of Europe to:

7.1. ensure gender sensitivity in the design, implementation, evaluation and follow-up of all integration policies for migrants and refugees;

7.2. promote migrant and refugee women's empowerment by countering all forms of gender-based or gender-specific discrimination, including in access to education and work, and devise specific measures and programmes with a view to facilitating their access;

7.3. ensure that the protection provided by legal treaties, notably the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (CETS No.210), the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (CETS No.201) and the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (CETS No.197) are well known to all those responsible for dealing with migrant women and that they efficiently implement them;

² Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the Committee on 27 June 2018.

- 7.4. raise migrant and refugee women's awareness of their rights, including as regards access to education and work; participation in social, economic and cultural life; protection against gender-based and domestic violence and access to justice;
 - 7.5. encourage and support initiatives aimed at empowering migrant and refugee women within their families, in their communities and in the society at large, by developing their self-confidence and self-determination and by protecting women and girls from negative social control;
 - 7.6. provide migrant and refugee women with gender-specific information on the cultural norms and expectations of the host society, with a view to helping them to identify their role, responsibilities and opportunities;
 - 7.7. provide opportunities for language training specifically targeted at women and available from an early stage after their arrival in the host country;
 - 7.8. provide opportunities for vocational training taking into account the skills and specific needs of migrant and refugee women;
 - 7.9. conduct information and awareness-raising activities targeting migrant and refugee women and men on gender equality and women's rights as enshrined in the law of the host countries;
 - 7.10. support and cooperate closely with civil society and all actors willing to contribute to migrant and refugee women's integration and empowerment, including social partners and migrant and refugee women organisations;
 - 7.11. establish mechanisms to ensure the systematic consultation of organisations of migrant and refugee women, as well as those representing migrant and refugee women;
 - 7.12. integrate gender equality in the training of professionals and public officials at all levels involved in the elaboration and implementation of integration programmes;
 - 7.13. support mentoring programmes aimed at migrant and refugee women and support recourse to positive role models.
8. The Assembly recommends enhancing gender mainstreaming in its work relating to migration and refugees, and invites the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, as well as the Parliamentary Campaign to End the Immigration Detention of Children and the Parliamentary Network on Diaspora Policies to take this into account in their activities.

B. Explanatory memorandum by Ms Gabriela Heinrich, rapporteur

1. Introduction

2. Europe is a destination for people seeking international protection or a better life, due to wars, political turmoil and the poverty affecting its neighbouring regions. This inflow adds to the migrants and refugees who have already settled in Europe, sometimes for generations. In parallel, populist parties enjoying growing electoral support in some European countries have questioned the capacity to absorb a greater number of migrants and refugees, as well as the latter's willingness to integrate.

3. In these circumstances, it is more important than ever to put the integration issue at the heart of the political discussion. Much has been said and written on migration and integration. Too little attention, however, has been paid to women. The aim of this report is precisely to put migrant women in the spotlight, both to take into account their vulnerability in the migration process and to highlight their potential as key actors for integration.

4. In this report, I adopted the term "newcomers" which was used by Ms Fatuma Musa Afrah at one of the hearings held by our Committee, as a non-technical, umbrella term to indicate people of foreign origin who have arrived in Europe in recent years, whether as migrants, asylum seekers or refugees. The actions needed to provide these people the opportunity to integrate in our societies do not depend primarily on their legal status, but rather on other factors such as their level of education, their skills, their ambitions and the way they envisage their future.

5. The focus of this report is both on the integration of women and on the role they play, in turn, in promoting the integration of their families and social circle, by supporting their children's education, sharing traditions with their daughters and sons, as well as participating in their host country's society.

6. Unfortunately, the issue of women's integration is not central to the political debate. Integration of men draws much more attention, mainly under the angle of integration in the labour market. Working men tend to acquire a better knowledge of the host country's language. They are more visible in the public space. Migrant women are less encouraged and less expected to find employment, although the majority of them wish to have a job. This is the result of a combination of factors, such as lower education and poorer professional qualifications, as well as a larger burden of family responsibilities.

7. The demographics of migration also need to be taken into account in this analysis. For decades, migrants in European countries, both from within Europe and beyond, were predominantly men. Women would join them at a later stage to form or reunify a family. In the last decades, however, the share of women migrating independently has increased.

8. While I share the concerns about the vulnerable situation of migrant women, a category that faces a higher risk of violence and discrimination, including of multiple and intersectional discrimination, I would like to shed light on a different, more positive side of this reality. Today, it is important not only to protect the rights of this group of women, but also to help them to fulfil their potential. This may be achieved through a variety of measures, starting from well-designed integration courses and education in general, but also by increasing their participation in society and political life.

9. In this report, particular focus is put on concrete examples of integration activities and programmes, to show that various approaches are possible and that they are not mutually exclusive. These examples come mostly from the fact-finding visits that I conducted to Italy and Norway as well as from my own country, Germany, where I closely followed programmes in my home city, Berlin, and in my constituency, Nuremberg.

10. The additional examples from other Council of Europe member States were shared with me by fellow members of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination. I am grateful to my colleagues for these contributions and for the constructive debates that took place on various occasions within the Committee. The information and views shared by experts who took part in several hearings also contributed significantly to the contents of this report.

2. An overview of migration in different European contexts

11. Migration has different features across European countries, depending among other things on the history and economic development of each of them. In Germany, mass migration coincided with the economic boom of the post-war reconstruction. Migrants arrived in large numbers starting from the 1960s. In Norway the phenomenon emerged in the 1970s. In Italy, for a long time a country of origin, a significant influx of migrants started in the 1980s.

2.1. Germany: from “guest workers” to integration

12. In the Federal Republic of Germany of the 1960s and 70s, the integration of so-called guest workers and their families was not viewed as a priority, as it was assumed that they would return to their home after some time. Opportunities for integration were simply not offered to them. The assumption turned out to be wrong: many people remained and their children and grandchildren were born in Germany. Such mistakes must be avoided in today's Europe. Legislators and policy makers should bear in mind that the presence of migrants is not an exceptional situation: in Germany, one child in three now comes from a migration background. Projects and activities aimed at promoting integration are carried out in most German cities. I will present some of those offered in Berlin and in Nuremberg, with which I am particularly familiar.

2.2. Italy: from country of origin to country of destination

13. I decided to conduct a fact-finding visit to Italy, for geographic diversity, and I chose Milan in particular for several reasons. Firstly, as the country's industrial powerhouse, the city hosts a large number of foreigners, or nationals with an immigration background, coming from a wide range of countries and regions including China, Central and Eastern Europe (Romania, Ukraine), Northern Africa and the Middle East, who arrived in the area for economic reasons. Secondly, these communities have become increasingly organised and visible in the last years, thanks to the work of associations representing them. Some of their members have become involved in politics and have been elected as local administrators. Thirdly, the local authorities (in particular the City Council of Milan and the Province) consider integration of newcomers as an important priority and have engaged in dialogue and cooperation with their organisations.

14. A reform of the regulations on citizenship, making it easier for the Italian-born offspring of migrants to become nationals, was central to the political debate at the time of my visit, with harsh, polarised tones. This debate clearly reflected the split in Italian politics between the forces supporting integration and those opposing it.

2.3. Norway and the “Nordic model”

15. According to Norway's Central Statistics Bureau,³ there are currently 724,000 immigrants residing in the country and 158,000 Norwegian nationals who were born to immigrant parents, representing respectively 13.8% and 3% of the overall population (5.2 million). This group includes people from 221 countries: 52% are from Europe, 30% from Asia and 12% from Africa. They are, on average, much younger than the rest of the population: half of them are between 20 and 40 years old, and only 9% are over 60. Approximately 60% cent of immigrants aged between 15 and 74 were in employment in 2016, compared to 65% of the Norwegian population as a whole. The gap between women and men in employment is much larger (almost double) among immigrants when compared to the rest of the population. Average figures, however, do not reflect the diversity of the situation: in fact education and employment levels vary widely across the different nationality groups.

16. As regards refugees, their number has increased steeply in Norway, like the rest of Europe, in the last few years, with a spike in 2015.⁴ A total of 30,110 asylum seekers arrived in Norway in the first 11 months of that year, with a sharp increase from around 500 per month in spring to more than 8 000 per month in October and November.

17. Norway's social and economic system is based on the “Nordic model”, the key features of which include high employment rates, high levels of productivity and generous welfare schemes. Norway and the other Nordic countries have developed “universal welfare schemes that have provided the populations with free access to education, largely free health services, and generous income security schemes for those who fall outside the labour market”.⁵ In addition, “active efforts were made to facilitate women's participation in the labour market”. All these factors are interconnected: universal welfare schemes have a cost that can only be met if the system is highly productive. This requires high employment rates, both for women and men. Good integration of migrants in the labour market is therefore another precondition for the functioning of the Nordic model. To guarantee this priority, policies to tackle the education gap between nationals and newcomers and to counter discrimination were adopted. The Nordic model is successful from many angles: it has determined high levels of education, of labour force participation, progress towards gender equality and greater social mobility.

³ Key figures for immigration and immigrants, Statistisk sentralbyrå/ Statistics Norway, January 2017, updated April 2017.

⁴ *Refugees in Norway*, Statistisk sentralbyrå/ Statistics Norway, January 2016.

⁵ Anne Britt Djuve, *Refugee migration – A crisis for the Nordic model?* FAFO/Friederich Ebert Stiftung, 2016.

3. Different approaches to integration

18. Preparing this report confirmed the impression that I had previously developed by following closely the integration work carried out in my home country, that there is no unique way to foster integration. Various activities may have a positive impact on the concrete situation of newcomers and enhance their ability to integrate in their host country. These actions may bear fruit in the short term or over a longer period. I will present here a number of programmes and actors from various Council of Europe member States.

3.1. "Low-threshold" approach

19. Projects aiming to foster women's empowerment and integration do not necessarily require large budgets or full-time involvement from participants. "Low threshold", financially manageable, activities can be effective too. When the initiative is in line with the social context and meets the needs of the target group, it can make a difference while remaining easily accessible. In addition, low-threshold activities can easily be replicated in other contexts, with limited financial means, to multiply their positive impact.

#Bikeygees, Germany

20. #Bikeygees, launched in Berlin in 2015, is a project which aims to help migrant and refugee women acquire self-confidence by learning how to ride a bike. The teachers are women of any age and origin, who simply enjoy cycling. The training is offered free of charge, and includes multi-lingual instruction on the Highway Code and on how to repair a bike. Thanks to this programme, women obtain access to independent mobility in their everyday lives. They also realise they can pursue their goals of personal development, even in their new country of residence. This activity is about confidence and trust: each participant is supported by two other women and needs to trust in them.

21. This is a "low-threshold" project: it is easily accessible and highly rewarding for participants, who very soon experience a feeling of achievement. This is also the reason why it empowers participants. The project combines independence, movement in the fresh air and a fun, environment-friendly mobility.

The action of non-governmental organisations in Milan, Italy

22. In Milan, I met several non-governmental organisations jointly. ACMID, which represents Moroccan women, organises Italian language courses and professional training. ADRI, the Association of Romanian Women in Italy, works to support and improve migrants' working and living conditions, while raising awareness about the "Italian syndrome", a severe distress affecting many women often leading to depression and other mental health issues. This syndrome originates from a combination of factors, including the anxiety and sense of guilt at leaving their children and families behind, and for migrants without a legal status, the fear of being deported. This condition was called "Italian" as the vast majority of Romanian and Moldovan migrant women are to be found in Italy (Rome hosts the second biggest Moldovan community outside Moldova, after Moscow). Soletterre, an Italian NGO, has worked for over a decade with migrants from various countries, offering information and legal advice, in particular as regards work and education opportunities and family reunion, but also psychological support for individuals and groups.

The Latin American consular network, Italy

23. Ms Marisela Morales, Consul of Mexico and Chair of the Latin America and Caribbean Consular Group for Northern Italy, presented to me an interesting project called "Latin American communities and Italian authorities unite to let victims of violence emerge from silence". Over 70% of migrants from Latin America in Italy are women, Ms Morales explained. Gender-based violence within this community was severely under-reported, due to both a lack of awareness among victims and difficulties they experienced in dealing with the police. The project trained a number of "gender community promoters" on gender issues and in particular gender-based violence. Thanks to the cooperation with local actors, notably the University of Milan, the project reached out to the judiciary to raise awareness of the particular situation of migrant women. Through this project, the diplomatic and consular services support the rights and well-being of their nationals in a new way, incorporating a gender perspective.

Mutti-Kulti, Austria

24. Mutti-Kulti is a project reaching out to mothers with a migration background by meeting them on children playgrounds in several areas of Vienna's inner city. It offers them support in various ways, including German language education, recreation programmes and health counselling.

3.2. "Self-awareness" approach

25. The challenges women face after settling in a new country are not limited to meeting their material needs, or overcoming language barriers in everyday life. They often face profound personal and cultural differences, pushing them to question their role and their identity. The difference between the situation of women in their countries of origin and in the host country is often striking. Empowering women, within their family and their social circle may require giving them the opportunity to reflect on themselves, their role within the family and in society, their ambitions and needs. Involving women with a migration background as volunteers or paid staff in the implementation of this kind of activities makes the action more credible and therefore more effective.

SEEMA, Norway

26. During my visit to Norway, I met some inspirational women who, coming from an experience of immigration, set up activities to foster the integration of other migrants. Loveleen Rihel Brenna, born in India, moved to Norway with her parents when she was 6. She created SEEMA, a "social entrepreneur and consulting company" specialising in diversity management, focusing on "highly qualified women with an international background". Its activities target women who can speak Norwegian, have a high education level and a legal resident status. Even these women are disadvantaged in comparison with their counterparts of an entirely Norwegian background, as they lack the personal and family connections which contribute to starting business and succeeding in it. SEEMA offered a two-year programme with a small number of participants. Those attending evolved through various steps, the first one being redefining themselves ("I am not Indian, I am not Norwegian, what am I?" was the question Loveleen once used to ask herself) and acquired, or learnt how to use, a multicultural competence which other people lacked. Having international roots was an additional resource, rather than a barrier.

Visions of my life, Germany

27. Visions of my Life is a storytelling project which provides Berlin's refugee women with a space and facilities to tell their stories in various ways. Workshops often take place in small groups, in order to create a more personal environment. Workshops are provided in refugee accommodation places. The aim of the project is to offer refugee women a space for self-reflection. After their escape from their home country, women are busy building a new life. But a precondition for successful integration is receiving orientation and support in the process of questioning and redefining themselves. In this project, participants produce photos, collages or films in order to make a visual map of their lifelines. Images provide an emotional access to ideas and memories thus making them easily understood, regardless of language and culture. Therefore, facilitators constantly emphasise the importance of artistic expression. They help participants to trigger an interior process of awakening their personal resources and of knowing their individual power. Part of that process is also to reflect on their individual role as women for themselves, into their families and their societies, and also to find their role in their new home. Workshops with a different focus are also offered: for example, on the professional skills and ambitions of participants. Through this reflection, they may strengthen their self-confidence and practice their job interview skills.

28. The basic approach to empowerment for refugee women in Visions of my Life differs highly from the other projects I visited. Participants are taken out of their difficult everyday life – especially at the beginning in their new home country – to find a space for rest and self-awareness, where they can concentrate and regain their inner strength. In my opinion, self-awareness is the basis of integration. As we are dealing with the key role of women for integration, I think that for women in particular, it is very important for them to be in harmony with themselves and with an image of women in society that is partly new to them. This helps them meet the expectations of the society in their host country.

Tiroler Sozialdienste (Tyrol social service), Austria

29. This project reaches out to refugees and asylum seekers in the areas where they live and offers support regardless of their legal status. The services they offer include language courses, information and an assessment of individual skills. Help is also offered against boredom, which is a constant threat, and to develop a self-determined and peaceful way of living.

3.3. Empowerment approach

30. Empowerment, particularly in the economy but also as regards participation in social and public life, is crucial to integration. There are a wide range of possible measures that contribute to empowerment: from education and training to information and awareness raising, financial assistance and legal counselling. In

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Norway, economic empowerment is viewed as the main gateway to integration and it is from that country that I have chosen most of the following examples in this domain.

MIRA Centre, Norway

31. The MIRA Resource Centre for Black, Immigrant and Refugee Women, was founded in 1979 by Fakra Salimi, a Pakistani-born Norwegian who still manages it today. MIRA is managed for and by immigrant and refugee women. It is a meeting point (every Wednesday is “open day”, anyone is free to drop by for a coffee and an informal meeting) and it provides training opportunities, counselling and legal aid. It also aims to raise awareness on democracy: many migrant women, Ms Salimi highlights, do not take part in elections because they are not familiar with politics and do not even know how to vote. Therefore, MIRA held voting simulations at the centre, for participants to be able to “practise/rehearse” how to cast their vote. The experience drew wide attention and other organisations brought their beneficiaries to see it. Other political education activities include summarising the programmes of the various political parties, to help participants to make their choice. MIRA invited prominent politicians to visit the centre: even the Prime Minister and the Finance Minister have been there, and most political parties have sent top representatives. This example of political education is particularly interesting. While participation in the labour market is a precondition for decent living standards, I do not believe that integration should be reduced to having a job. Especially in the longer term, persons with a migration background should also have their say on the functioning of the society of which they have become part.

The Norwegian Centre for Multicultural Value Creation (NSFV), Norway

32. The Norwegian Centre for Multicultural Value Creation (Norsk Senter for Flerkulturell Verdiskaping or NSFV), a “resource centre for multicultural entrepreneurship”, was founded by Iranian-born Zahra Moini. NSFV offers an entrepreneurial assistance programme for immigrants and it mobilises and motivates immigrants to create businesses. This centre acts as a “networking arena”: in this context, facilitating the funding of a project through its network of financing institutions is particularly important. Participants in the programme, about 1,200 up to now, are both first and second-generation immigrants, with a good level of education and an entrepreneurial potential. The first step in NSFV’s training courses is to boost the participants’ self-esteem. The ultimate aim (and the underlying philosophy) of their activity is to help migrants create their own business not only out of solidarity, but also to give a positive contribution to the national economy. This is a more empowering approach.

33. NSFV is a good example of partnership between the public and the private sector, both in terms of cooperation (public actors and authorities are among the 34 members of the partnership created by NSFV) and of funding: first the local authorities and then the national government have funded this successful initiative.

Stadtteilmütter (“District mums”), Germany

34. Stadtteilmütter (“District mums”) is a project based in Nuremberg that builds on the experiences of newcomer women. Women who have lived in Germany, particularly in Nuremberg, for 7-9 years, and who are integrated, support other women and families who have just arrived. Men are also involved. In Nuremberg, there are about 15 volunteer “district mums”, and other projects of the same kind have trained additional volunteer women. “Stadtmission Nuremberg”, a non-profit association, coordinates and informs the volunteers. The “mothers” make weekly visits to women and families and look after them and support them in all kinds of matters: from translations or joint visits to municipal services, to problems in everyday life that pose major challenges, especially for people who have recently settled. In these weekly district mum visits, questions are frequently asked about the education system and women and children’s health. This project helps build links to services offered by the municipality which may provide assistance in these specific areas.

35. To support the district mums and to supply them with important information, training sessions are regularly provided in matters including values, religion, women and children rights, domestic violence, the rights of foreigners and contacts with specialists. The experiences with migration that district mums have acquired play a crucial role: their wealth of experience and their stories help them to react adequately to the problems, needs and expectations of the families they are coaching. Their cultural and linguistic proximity with the beneficiaries ensure that subjects can be dealt with in a very direct manner. Thus, district mums, when necessary, can use a tone that native Germans would not dare to choose and would find uncomfortable. If a lesson is to be learned from this project, it is that, very often, activities that are smaller and easier to carry out have great added value in terms of integration.

3.4. Experience exchange approach

36. Networks are of the greatest importance in integration work. Support from women originating from the same community is particularly effective in this area: language barriers are avoided, messages more easily conveyed and trust more readily built. Even when the persons involved come from different regions, shared experiences of migration and settling into a new environment help them understand each other. Integration projects benefit considerably from involving persons with a migration background, whether as volunteers or paid staff, depending on the nature and organisation of the activities.

FOKUS, Norway

37. FOKUS, the Forum for Women and Development, defines itself as a “knowledge and resource centre for international women’s issues with an emphasis on the spreading of information and women-centred development cooperation”. It is an umbrella organisation consisting of 66 women’s groups and committees in political parties and trade unions, as well as solidarity and aid organisations. Thanks to FOKUS, I was able to meet representatives of associations of Bosnian, Kurdish, Somali and Pan-African women, as well as associations working with migrants and in the area of development. FOKUS has been the Norwegian National Committee for UN Women since 2010, and coordinates the national shadow report to CEDAW. Among other things, this report covers the situation of migrant women in Norway specifically. This organisation receives financial support from the Norwegian Agency for Development (NORAD) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (UD), as well as funding from the national Telethon. All my interlocutors agreed on some points: information, awareness raising and education, in particular, were consistently mentioned as top priorities. Providing migrant women with Norwegian language education and work training was crucial, they believed.

38. In some cases, men deny the women of their family the possibility to take courses. FOKUS believes that awareness-raising activities should preferably be organised by the local authorities and be aimed at the entire community, so that everybody was invited to attend and women did not risk being excluded. Migrant women should also receive information on their rights, of which they often are not aware, and legal advice when necessary.

Stella Centre, Norway

39. The Stella Centre is the Red Cross’ competence centre for migrant women. It was established in 2012 with the assistance of IMDi and relies on both public and private funding. It aims to be an inclusive venue that promotes participation and involvement in Norwegian society by focusing on competences, self-development, networking and collaboration with the business world. Stella offers one-to-one guidance, customised courses and activities, as well as the opportunity for voluntary work. All the activities and programmes are free of charge to the participants. The centre coordinates its activities with other Red Cross activities and cooperates with public authorities and public programmes. Stella’s target group is all women in Oslo and the surrounding areas, but with a special focus on minority women. It offers education, training and guidance, as well as other support activities, and cooperates with a number of actors in both the public and private sectors, ranging from the police to individual doctors and other experts.

Cinzia Hu, representative of Milan’s Chinese community, Italy

40. I visited Milan’s China Town and met with Ms Cinzia Hu, a Bocconi University graduate, tax consultant and a well-known, although unofficial, representative of the Chinese community. For a long time, integration was challenging for Chinese immigrants, particularly due to the language barrier. They would tend to rely on other members of the community to obtain help with bureaucracy and all other matters. However, thanks to schooling, but also professional interaction with suppliers, these barriers have generally been overcome, especially by young people.

41. If newcomers of all origins contribute substantially to the economy, including as entrepreneurs, the Chinese rank first in terms of the number of businesses created. Ms Hu indicated that women were particularly active within this community as a consequence of the relative gender equality that the authorities have been trying to achieve in China since the Communist revolution. In Milan, women often acted as the main interface between the Chinese community and the general population. They seemed to be more open to the rest of society and to its evolution. However, the entire community is traditionally very little interested in politics, even at local level. They became more active about a decade ago, when organisations were established to defend the interests of shop owners against new, stricter regulations introduced by the local authorities. However, as Ms Hu rightly concluded, since most people of foreign origin cannot vote, their impact on politics is limited.

Yasmin Foundation, the Netherlands

42. The Yasmin Foundation, based in The Hague, in the Netherlands defines itself as a “participation centre” for women wishing to develop their talents or to work for society. Depending on the situation and skills of participants, they can take part in voluntary work, paid work or attend training. In a first interview, new participants have the opportunity to explain what they need and expect (learn the Dutch language or develop other skills, through group courses or individual coaching, or rather contribute with their skills by teaching or facilitating sessions). The Yasmin Foundation provides opportunities for meeting new people, building contacts and exchanging experiences. Education and personal development are at the core of this project. “The strength of women thus becomes the strength of The Hague”, the Foundation explains. These words encapsulate an idea of “integration” that I support, and the reason why we should work for it.

Talente-Entwicklung, Austria

43. Talente Entwicklung, or Talent development, is a project aiming to promote exchanges between people of different origins, native Austrians and newcomers, through different activities and courses, among others, on languages, ethics, economics and sustainable development. Practical activities include the preparation of food using Austrian specialities and products from around the world.

A meaningful testimony: Fatuma Musa Afrah

44. In June 2017, the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination had an opportunity to exchange with Fatuma Musa Afrah, a Somali-born expert on the integration of newcomers and a motivational speaker currently based in Berlin. Part of Ms Afrah’s competences originated from her personal experience as a newcomer to Germany and her volunteer work in refugee camps. Having witnessed the different behaviour of women and men, she is deeply convinced that empowering women is a priority. Men feel free to go out of the camps, play football, even go to clubs, while women remain locked in their rooms as if they considered leaving the camp to be inappropriate behaviour. Raising women’s awareness of their rights appeared crucial. This could be done in different ways, as long as newcomers’ wishes and expectations are taken into account and mothers are provided with childcare facilities, so that they can attend training and other activities. Language training was the first and probably the most important step. Basic human rights education was also useful. An important, general indication from Ms Afrah should be kept in mind: when planning support activities for women newcomers, one should be aware that they often have a very difficult story behind them, one of sexual or physical violence and even torture. The first need and the first structure which had to be provided was therefore a safe place for women.

45. Ms Afrah’s testimony showed that the situation of women refugees varies depending on where they come from, whether they are alone or accompanied by their family and children, on their age and their personality. The work on refugees is about each individual: it is a case by case process. Even the concept of integration varies and does not apply to everyone the same way.

Medica Mondiale, Germany

46. Medica Mondiale, an organisation working with women and girls in conflict zones, including Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia and Northern Iraq, developed a unique psychosocial approach to work with women survivors of violence, called solidarity-based, stress and trauma-sensitive approach. They were now applying this approach in Germany and in other parts of Europe. They launched a project called STAR (Stress and Trauma-sensitive Approach to promote Resilience of refugees) in the land North Rhine-Westphalia. A strength of STAR is peer to peer support, offered to newcomers by women refugees who had lived in Germany for some time. This project shows how the various approaches can be usefully combined. Indeed, the exchange of experience is only one of several main elements of this project. Empowering women, in particular by increasing their self-esteem, also play an important part. In addition, the support received from local authorities should be mentioned as one of the factors of its success.

3.5. Structural factors

47. Structural factors that contribute to creating the conditions for integration include various elements: firstly legislation and policies; secondly, infrastructure and services provided by the State and local authorities; and finally, additional services and infrastructure provided by large non-State actors, such as employers’ associations and trade unions. Legal regulations and the support provided by public offices are crucial in shaping the opportunities for integration that newcomers are given.

Action of the public authorities and infrastructure in Norway

48. In Norway, a variety of actors work for and with people of immigrant backgrounds: not only the authorities but also civil society organisations provide assistance and support. Some of them target women in particular.

49. In Norway, where integration infrastructure and services are the result of in-depth reflection at political level, the gender aspect of migration is taken into account in all relevant policies. For instance, immigrant women are given the possibility to take care of their children at home for one year after they arrive (which, on the other hand, may make it more difficult for them to be in contact with the local community, and confirms their traditional gender role of care-givers).

50. The Norwegian government adopted an action plan to combat negative social control, forced marriage and female genital mutilation, which encompasses a wide range of measures to be implemented between 2017 and 2020.⁶ The action plan's title "The right to decide about one's own life" shows that individual freedom is seen as non-negotiable, and rightly so. Negative social control, defined as "various forms of supervision, pressure, threats and coercion used to ensure that individuals live according to family or group norms" is considered to be a severe threat to human rights. This aspect of migrant integration has probably been neglected in other contexts and should be part of the debate in other countries as well.

IMDi

51. IMDi, the government's Directorate of Integration and Diversity, was established on 1 January 2006 "to act as a competence centre and a driving force for integration and diversity". This office co-operates with immigrant organisations, municipalities, government agencies and the private sector. It both provides advice to the government and implements its policies. It has 220 staff members and a budget of 261.5m Norwegian Krone (NOK). IMDi administers grants for approximately 16bn NOK, (approximately €1.6bn): a very significant sum. Its ambitious goal "to contribute to equality in living conditions and diversity through employment, integration and participation" justifies such a large amount of public money.

Virke

52. Virke, the Enterprise Federation of Norway, represents over 20 000 businesses and more than 225 000 employees in Norway, in sectors including trade, technology, travel, healthcare, education, culture and voluntary work. Virke has access to the highest political level, as it is consulted regularly by the government on business issues, and actively influences legislation. Within the limits of its mandate, Virke contributes to the integration of migrants. Its representative, Ms Marte Buaas, explained to me that a mentoring programme for women with an immigration background was launched in 2010. Virke identifies role models and gives mentees the opportunity to enter in contact with and learn from them. It is also important for employers to learn how to manage diversity, which is increasingly relevant in these times of globalisation. Diversity in the workplace is a resource and may have a positive impact on business.

FAFO

53. FAFO is an independent research foundation that conducts commissioned research for actors ranging from trade unions to employers' associations, central and local authorities as well as NGOs. The last meeting of my visit was with FAFO's senior researcher Ms Hanne Cecilie Kavli, whose work focuses on multicultural society and the inclusion of migrants. In addition to obtaining information on the situation of migrants in Norway, I had an opportunity to discuss with her about training and education. Both language and work-related training should be offered to migrants, she explained. The latter was sometimes neglected. The induction programme offered to migrants had a twofold goal: it aimed to facilitate access to paid work, but also participation in society at large. To reduce the rate at which participants, particularly women, abandoned the training (a problem I have often observed in Germany), it was important to ensure that the courses cover topics related to everyday life.

Action of the City Council of Milan

54. In Milan, I met with Ms Diana De Marchi, Chairperson of the Committee on Equal Opportunities and Civil Rights of the City Council, and Ms Maryan Ismail, member of the National Board of the Islamic Communities. Several years ago, the City Council of Milan launched the "House of Rights", a public structure offering legal advice and information free of charge but also a hotline to report cases of discrimination based

⁶ *The Right to decide about one's own life, An Action Plan to Combat Negative Social Control, Forced Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation 2017-2020*, Oslo, March 2017.

on ethnic origin and other grounds. Action against trafficking in human beings is also one of the House's priorities. In May 2017, a "Charter of Milan on migration" was signed by a large number of human rights activists, lawyers, intellectuals and politicians. It called on national authorities across Europe and European institutions to protect the rights of migrants, promote the role of civil society and protect its ability to carry out support and assistance activities for migrants and refugees. The Charter's motto is "Solidarity is not a crime".

4. Gender mainstreaming and protection of migrant, refugee and asylum seeker women in Council of Europe texts

55. The recently adopted Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023 of the Council of Europe includes a new Strategic objective n°5 to "Protect the rights of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls". This objective concerns policies related to migration, integration and asylum. This confirms that awareness of the importance of women in this context is growing.

56. According to the Strategy, "It is highly important to mainstream gender equality in all integration measures, so that both migrant women and men are aware of the need to respect and uphold gender equality law and policy, even if they do not correspond to the situation in their countries of origin. This would foster integration in European societies and labour markets and benefit all women and men, girls and boys".

57. The Strategy adds that the action of the Council of Europe in this area will seek to "support the systematic integration of a gender equality dimension in policies and measures regarding migration, asylum and integration, in order to secure the human rights and fundamental freedoms of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls, men and boys, regardless of traditional or cultural attitudes".

58. Migrant women and women asylum-seekers are particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence. The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women (Istanbul Convention), ensures that its provisions are implemented without discrimination on the grounds of migrant status, refugee status or other status, and features specific measures for the protection of migrant women. For instance, it introduces the possibility of granting migrant women an autonomous residence permit, to prevent situations where they cannot escape an abusive relationship for fear of losing their residence status.

59. As regards refugee and asylum seekers specifically, the Istanbul Convention requires States parties to ensure that gender-based violence against women may be recognised as a form of persecution within the meaning of the 1951 Refugee Convention (Article 60 paragraph 1). This aims to correct the lack of a gender focus in regulations on asylum, which may prevent women victims of violence obtaining the international protection to which they should be entitled.

60. The Parliamentary Assembly dealt with matters that are related to the situation of migrant women on several occasions. I would like to refer to three recent texts that are particularly relevant to this report.

61. Resolution 2159 (2017) on Protecting refugee women from gender-based violence, based on a report prepared by Ms Gisela Wurm, analyses the wide range of forms of gender-based violence that refugee women face (from coercion to survival sex, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, domestic violence, harassment and extortion) and indicates concrete measures that member States should adopt, such as providing separate secure sleeping areas, ensuring the presence of a sufficient number of female staff members among security personnel and social workers, providing information on rights and assistance services in an understandable language.

62. Resolution 2167 (2017) on the employment rights of domestic workers, especially women, in Europe, originating from a report prepared by Mr Viorel Badea, highlights the vulnerability of domestic workers who perform their activities in the privacy of households and are often invisible, underpaid and undeclared. The Assembly called urgently for domestic work to be recognised as "real work" in a text that does not hide the gendered aspect of this matter.

63. Finally, Resolution 2176 (2017) on Integration of refugees in times of critical pressure: learning from recent experience and examples of best practice, underlines that the integration of refugees is a long and complicated process, requiring long-term commitment on the part of both the refugees and the authorities, and the continuing engagement of civil society. In this text, the Assembly reasserts among other things the important principle that integration means neither assimilation ("whereby newcomers adopt the host societies' culture, values and traditions in place of their own) nor a multi-culturalism in which communities live separate existences.

64. The principles laid out in these texts are relevant and timely. I endeavoured to build on these foundations, and to draft a report and resolution that are in line with them. I deemed it necessary, at the same time, to further highlight the aspect of gender and the positive role that women can play.

5. Conclusions

65. The way integration is understood and treated varies across Council of Europe member States, as the fact finding visits conducted in the preparation of this report confirmed. Depending on a country's specific history of migration, emphasis is put on different aspects of integration.

66. Due to the special role of women in integration, in particular within their families and the future generations, adopting a gender-based approach is pivotal when designing integration policies.

67. The lessons learned through the research, hearings and fact-finding visits in the preparation of this report helped me to identify six dimensions, closely interconnected, that are relevant to women's integration, namely the legal equality of women and men and the protection of women's rights; women's self-empowerment; empowerment within the family; basic language learning; integration in the labour market and, finally, the participation of women in social processes.

68. Indications were also collected on how to translate these six pillars into concrete measures. Education is crucial: newcomer women should be given access to schooling, life-long learning and professional training. The very first step, however, should be language training. Knowledge of the local language is the first and most important tool for integration in the host country, and a precondition for all other forms of education. Often, it is useful to include men in integration activities, rather than targeting women separately. The risk of a negative impact of social control on women should however be prevented and countered.

69. As observed in Norway, integration policies are implemented thanks to constant cooperation between a variety of stakeholders. Public authorities are involved at central, regional and local level with a clear distribution of tasks and they engage in constant dialogue with civil society, including the organisations representing migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, particularly women. Indeed, the contribution of a variety of actors is necessary: universities and other educational institutions, trade unions, employers. Even the diplomatic and consular bodies may be instrumental in protecting women's rights.

70. The example of Norway also shows that integration policies require adequate funding. Information and awareness-raising on gender equality should be part of integration policies: women and men with a migration background should be made aware, in particular, of the values of gender equality that are enshrined in the legal systems of Council of Europe member States.

71. Women should also, insofar as possible, be provided with counselling on their education and work opportunities in their host country, but also with support in understanding the expectations of the host society, which may not necessarily reflect those of their countries of origin. Identifying one's role and opportunities may help women to develop their self-esteem and trust in their personal skills. Mentoring programmes and role models are effective tools to this end. The integration programmes carried out in Germany are good examples in this area, which may be replicated in other contexts.

72. Time and resources should be invested to facilitate the integration of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, in the interest of the well-being of the entire society. In this context, the central role that women play in integration should be acknowledged and promoted. They should be given credit as key actors of change, and be supported in this role. This is not simply spending, but rather investing in the future of our countries, with substantial benefits in terms both of wealth and social cohesion.