

ACTIVITY REPORT ROUNDTABLE DEBATE MIGRATION AND FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS: WILL THE EU LIVE UP TO ITS VALUES?

10 November 2015 | EESC, Brussels

On 10th November 2015, SOLIDAR organised a roundtable debate at the European Economic and Social Committee titled “**Migration and Fundamental Rights: Will the EU live up to its values?**”.

In 2015 the number of tragedies involving people trying to reach the EU in search of protection and a better life tremendously increased due to the worsening conditions in their countries of origin. The EU responded to the emergency by developing a new European Agenda on Migration which increased the focus on security and border control whilst still lacking effective instruments to ensure a joint and comprehensive solution to the ongoing **humanitarian crisis**.

This round table offered to policy makers and members of the civil society the possibility to discuss about migration, fundamental rights and humanitarian assistance. Members of the **SOLIDAR Advisory Group on migration and fundamental rights** and of the **IRIS network** (Improving social services in SEE) presented their daily work and discussed the link between EU Enlargement and EU migration policies. Tools to support CSOs providing humanitarian assistance to migrants and refugees along the Western Balkan route were also debated.

The roundtable was divided into two panel discussions. The first panel focused on the need to

improve the **Common European asylum system** and putting solidarity and respect of human rights at the hearth of EU migration and integration policies. The second panel reflected the link between EU Enlargement and EU migration policies and explored tools in order to support CSOs providing humanitarian assistance to migrants and refugees along the Western Balkan route. **SOLIDAR partners** from Turkey, Greece, Macedonia, Serbia, Slovenia, Italy,



Croatia, Hungary, and Czech Republic, presented their work and cases.

Some of the questions addressed in both sessions were:

- What would be needed to tackle the so-called refugee crisis in the EU and along the Western Balkan route?

- Is it acceptable for a Union based on the values of democracy and solidarity not to be able to provide an effective and comprehensive response to the ongoing humanitarian crisis?
- How to support the work of civil society organizations providing humanitarian assistance? How to ensure socio-economic integration of migrants and refugees?

The event started with a welcome speech by **Mrs Brenda King**, member of the **EESC and rapporteur of the opinion on the EU Action Plan against migrant smuggling**. She stated that although *"globalization allowed the movements of goods from 'Hamburg to Beijing'"*, the same could not be said regarding the movement of people. **Mrs King** pressed for the need to scope peaceful resolutions in order to alleviate migratory related push factors.

Such statements echoed the concern of **SOLIDAR's** secretary general, **Conny Reuter**, along with its members, that policies initiatives, such as the Valletta summit on migration, should encompass a broader perspective of long term solutions and dynamics that can promote social economic development from transit to countries of origin. As stated by **Conny Reuter**, **SOLIDAR** members provide services and humanitarian assistance to refugees and migrants in countries of origin, transit and destination.

Examples of **services provided by SOLIDAR members** are:

- Humanitarian assistance and first aid services to respond to basic needs of migrants (e.g. emergency shelters; distribution of blankets, raincoats, food; emergency healthcare services, animation for adults and children)
- Legal assistance for supporting migrants and refugees with administrative procedures (e.g.

obtaining work permits; enrolling their children in public school);

- Social assistance and psychological support (e.g. counselling and support to migrant women victims of domestic violence, unaccompanied minors);
- Services to support the socio-economic integration of migrants and refugees (e.g. language course; specific trainings and counselling for labor market integration; programmes to support participation of migrants to vocational education and training)
- Awareness raising campaigns and activities to promote plurality of society and pacific coexistence (e.g. peace education for families; intercultural learning).

MEP Ulrike Lunacek, vice-president of the **European Parliament** declared in a video message addressed to the roundtable's participants that she sensed a *'leading confrontation'* within the European policy making circles and Member State's societies. **Mrs. Lunacek** advocated for a change of mindset in order to *"decolonize the western mindset and paternalistic approach"* heralded by the actual conservative European Parliament.



HOW TO PUT SOLIDARITY AND RESPECT OF HUMAN RIGHTS AT THE HEART OF EU ASYLUM, MIGRATION AND INTEGRATION POLICIES?

In the first panel of the roundtable; **Raffaella Bolini**, **SOLIDAR board member** from **ARCI** (Italy), shared her concern of increasing securitization practices, such as return flights for instance, and conditionality clauses during policy making events and summits. This reflects what **Mitre Georgiev** from the **Center for Peace Studies** (Croatia) described when talking about increasing tough detentions conditions in Croatia. **Martin Rozumek**, **Organization for Aid to Refugees**, also talked about detention conditions in his country. He eloquently described how the Czech Republic, due to security-related measures and geographical location, could be described as “*one of the winners of Dublin System*”. Yet, in the mist of such dramatic situations, **Mr Rozumek** declared that the heightened media and political attention on NGOs work should be positively used for more targeted advocacy.

Mrs Marina Škrabalo, EESC and representative of **GONG and Platform 112**, argued for the need to stop the construction of false semantics regarding refugees and firmly reaffirmed that solidarity and responsibility are intertwined. She called all participants to look beyond 2016, with the potential revision of Dublin II, in order to set a proactive pace and tone.



HOW TO SUPPORT CSOs PROVIDING HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND SERVICES TO REFUGEES ALONG THE WESTERN BALKANS ROUTE?

The second panel was organized in the framework of the EU-funded project “Improving the provision of Social Service Delivery in South Eastern Europe through the empowerment of national and regional CSOs”, implemented by the consortium of **LIR CD BiH**, **OGI Croatia**, **EDC Serbia**, **SOS TELEPHONE Montenegro**, **CLARD Kosovo**, **ARSIS Albania**, **ASYD FYROM**, and **SOLIDAR** - led by **ASB Germany** & in collaboration with **TACSO**.

The second panel was introduced by opening remarks of **MEP Tanja Fajon**, **S&D group**, who stated that “*it had been a shameless summer for Europe*”. She stressed the need for more expertise and best practices sharing in order to permit the development long term sustainable social policies such as integration for instance. **Mrs Fajon** also expressed her concern on the alleged fact that Member States, although they pledge to, are not enough financing funds.

Ivan Marin, Network Manager of **ASB-SEE**, shared his concerns regarding the criminalization of certain NGOS who provide services to refugees. However, he

welcomed the incoming Directive on researchers and students set to avoid brain drain and maximize brain gain whilst enabling young people to access more social opportunities via legal channels.

TESTIMONIES FROM CSOs WORKING ALONG THE WESTERN BALKAN ROUTE

Oktay Durukan, Director of **Refugee Rights Turkey**, discussed how Turkey was giving temporary protection to Syrians but that long term solutions, such as legal admission systems, needed to be urgently contemplated. Moreover, **Mr Durukan** highlighted how Turkey is not naïve regarding the ongoing situation and how public opinion wants concrete solidarity examples by European governments in order to do their part when in the so called refugee crisis.

Irida Pandiri, , **Association for the Social Support of Youth (ARSIS)** in Greece, shared similar ideas but was also concerned by reports on alleged push back policies enacted by Turkish authorities.

Borče Jankuloski, from **Preda Plus**, argued for more specific efficient information gathering systems regarding different issues, including reallocation schemes. Additionally, he called for more visible and

transparent strategies when it comes to NGOs funding in order to be prepared for multiple scenarios. For this reason, information and documentation regarding European Funds is essential. Such cooperation could foster a broader leadership role for civil society since he quoted that *“we are more organized than our governments”*

Other participants such as **Srba Jovanović** from **Refugee Aid Serbia** and **Nikoleta Poljak**, **Volunteer Centre Osijek**, highlighted the work of their respective organizations. **Mrs Poljak** noted how it was complex for smaller organizations to access available funds, deemed as too rigid and strict.



REFLECTIONS BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE

In the final part of the roundtable, **Liane Adler**, **DG NEAR (Western Balkans Regional Cooperation and Programs Unit)**, praised the role of NGOs as service providers and in their assistance to local communities. She argued how the Enlargement process was to be considered as an important political

tool for Balkan countries to guarantee respect of fundamental rights of migrants, although this was not considered as a priority in the Enlargement Package in recent years due to the fact that refugee flows stemmed from sea borne routes via the Mediterranean Sea.



Nevertheless, she detailed the numerous funds that the European Commission has put at disposal in the recent period such as the ECHO, IPA and Trust Fund for Africa. Moreover, **Mrs Adler** stated that for the period 2016-2017 - 92 million would be at disposal. 1/3 allocated to civil society regional programs 2/3 to national programs.

Interestingly, **Mrs Adler** deplored the limited amount of applications by civil society actors when the European Commission published calls for regional programs which included migratory related affairs. As several participants pointed out: the underlying question remains whether this deficiency is due to the lack of capacity by NGOs to apply for the call or the lack of information regarding the latter one.

This discussion leads to one of the last reflections of **SOLIDAR's** roundtable debate on Migration and Fundamental Rights made by **Ionut Sibian, EESC, Co-chair of the EU-Serbia Joint Consultative Committee**. He believes the **European Commission** should improve consultations with civil society before

launching a call for proposal in order to assess the real needs of organizations working on the ground. Although supporting projects is a necessity, **Mr Sibian** argued that operational grants should be provided to networks/ intermediary platforms who deal with complex legal and administrative practices, thus allowing the NGOs to concentrate on actual services they need to provide to refugees. This solution would also guarantee long-term sustainability for NGOs providing social services.

Furthermore, as emerged from the discussion, NGOs should not only receive a stronger financial support to allow their long-term sustainability, but they also should be supported to have the role of watchdogs, monitoring and denouncing violations of human rights.



CONCLUSIONS

Throughout the whole **SOLIDAR's** roundtable debate, some recurrent thematic and policy recommendations have emerged. All participants agreed that the semantic discourse held by political elites and the media, regarding the so called refugee crisis, needs to change and be more prone towards a humanitarian and social dimension. Long term solutions need to keep into consideration social investments such as integration policies.

The political demands put forward by SOLIDAR members are the following:

- The EU has a responsibility to open safe and legal channels to the EU in order to provide a concrete alternative to the current dangerous boat or land trips that migrants and refugees take in search of international protection or a better life.
- The EU needs to develop adequate tools to provide a joint and coordinated response to the humanitarian emergency within EU territory that ensures solidarity among Member States and respects and promotes fundamental rights.
- An urgent initiative is needed to replace the Dublin regulation with a system that focuses more on the respect of the refugee's will and promotion of fundamental rights, foresees a more efficient responsibility-sharing mechanism, and the greater harmonization of protection standards.
- EU and Member State should Increase investment (and support to NGOs) to facilitate inclusion and socio-economic integration of the new comers into the EU in order to see migration as an opportunity for our societies and not a challenge!

Find more about SOLIDAR position in the [SOLIDAR Briefing #75](#)

Regarding challenges and needs of CSOs, the following recommendations have been put forward during the debate:

- More investment is need for long-term integration services (such as psycho-social support, education, healthcare);

- CSOs should receive more support to strengthen their advocacy capacities and to act as watchdogs monitoring violations of human rights;
- More synergies are needed to coordinate EU existing funds to tackle the humanitarian emergency as well as guarantee long-term integration and active inclusion;
- CSOs need support to develop tools aimed at stepping up communication and access to information for migrants on the move along the Western Balkan route.

Shared responsibility is not only a term coined for Member States but needs to be applied to civil society actors as well. Only through alliance building and coordination NGOs platforms, will the different civil society environments be able to speak with a common voice in order to avoid the risk of an *"essoufflement' of the NGOs work"* as **SOLIDAR's secretary general Conny Reuter** explained in the opening remarks.



Find more photos of the event [here](#)