

What holds the future for Europe's migration and asylum? Sharing best knowledge and EU practice on integration of migrants and existing challenges in Balkan countries, through Italian and Austrian models and best practices.

Integration of Refugees in challenging times

Asylum Protection center-APC has organized a conference in Belgrade on 2-3 March 2017, under the name *"What holds the future for Europe's migration and asylum? Sharing best knowledge and EU practice on integration of migrants and existing challenges in Balkan countries, through Italian and Austrian models and best practices*, funded by the Central European Initiative and co-funded under the project – *Balkan Refugee Trail, a Pathway for European Solidarity supported by European Commission Europe for Citizens Programme*. This event brought together more than 30 experts from non-governmental and governmental organizations from 14 European CEI member countries strongly



affected by the ongoing "refugee crisis", therefore timely representing an excellent platform for discussing the development of the concrete migration integration challenges, policies and practice, as well as for exchange of experiences, best practices and lessons learned from the field in their respective countries with special focus on interaction and integration models and positive practices from Italy and Austria. The second day of the conference was the central event of the conference dedicated to the best practices of integration of refugees in European societies, with the special emphasis on Italy and Austria. The

purpose of this panel was essential for the conference, since its main goal was to share models of integration, challenges, good practices and to share knowledge and teach CSOs present on integration techniques and lessons learned, so these actors can further share lessons learned from the conference. Panelists at the 2nd day of the conference were Kenan Gungor from the organization Think-Difference from Vienna, also a consultant for the integration of refugees in the Austrian government, and Sara Misculin and Fabrizio Foschini from ICS Ufficio Rifugiati from Trieste, Italy.

This panel was extremely important for representatives from all CEI states, since it enabled deep and interesting discussions during and after the panel concluded. More so, the panel was crucial for all CEI member states, since most of them are hit with the refugee flow for the first time, and lessons and presentations on integration are of great importance for organizations from these societies. Without experience in integration and in intercontinental migration, with hundreds of people being stranded and new arriving daily into countries along the Balkan route, the need for greater capacities and appropriate

integration models has become an urgent and pressing prerequisite for a successful response to interaction and integration of asylum seekers and refugees in times of chronic refugee crisis in some countries on the route. Although coming from different countries, with various successful and unsuccessful experience in terms of interaction and integration of refugees, the panelists agreed that successful integration requires multilevel coordination, starting from a meaningful participation of every individual in a society, and in reforming structural and institutional principles for their inclusion, up to rhetoric being used in the media, activities in local communities and with the local stakeholders.

Questions of interaction and inclusion are of great matter to many professionals working in the field, that were present at the panel.

Kenan Gungor, from the organization Think-Difference from Vienna, also a consultant for the integration of refugees in the Austrian government, spoke on the topic of integration of refugees in challenging times, with special emphasis on the migration history of Western Europe, on the benefits of diversity, inclusion, and on the need to connect processes between institutions, social environments and refugees. Kenan Gungor paid special attention to the *phenomenology of discomfort* aka existential feeling of loss of control over borders, political control, and the fear of social and cultural regression which is evident



in European societies. The feeling of discomfort has been fueled by a large number of refugees, which has in turn caused an overload in providing assistance, lack of coordination and solidarity between the different actors. In addition, Kenan argued that there is a gap in cultural and religious tendencies between the receiving and sending societies, as well as the lack of institutional prerequisites in most European countries for the successful integration of refugees. In addition, Kenan presented a model for successful integration which is comprised of three essential and interconnected ingredients, which are seamless working environment between institutions, social environment in which refugees are to be found and refugees themselves. Many things need to change at the institutional level, and as Kenan Gungor argued, with so many diverging and further increasing differences between the host and sending societies more needs to be done at the individual level.

Sara Michelin and Fabrizio Foschini from ICS Ufficio Rifugiati from Trieste, Italy, presented the Italian system for the integration of refugees, SPRAR which is largely decentralized, and which consists of a hierarchy of social assistance, accommodation and training of refugees in Italy. Services that SPRAR system offers for refugees consists of providing access to health services, school enrollment, language courses in Italian, workshops, cultural and sports activities, as well as vocational guidance and job search assistance. In addition to the positive aspects, the panelists also spoke on the subject of negative aspects of SPRAR system integration, such as gaps and inequities in service delivery at the local level, the growth of populism, overstrained system due to a large influx of migrants and lastly they touched upon the manipulation of public opinion. In conclusion, Fabrizio Foschini has once again explained the positive aspects of the decentralized coordination of the integration of refugees, such as the elimination of

corruption, efficient allocation of financial resources, and the impact on the long-term alleviation of xenophobia among the local population.

The fifth presentation of Know-How in integration activities helped motivate partners from non EU CEI Members to understand and think on means to foster the consolidation of democratization's process with concern to integration practices and treatment of asylum seekers, refugees and other migrants. Specifically the activities to train institutional and non-institutional actors from CEI Members countries in integration implementation activities has a goal to build an intercultural interaction, contributing to empowerment of mutual knowledge and understanding, the preservation of the diversities through an intercultural dialogue and to underline an imperative for a pacific and tolerant coexistence.

