

Brief Report on Conference

APC's Regional Conference on *Fostering social inclusion and integration of asylum seekers and refugees in Western Balkan region and other CEI countries*, supported by CEI, took place in Belgrade from 05th to 07th December 2018

Location: Belgrade, Serbia

Wed, 05/12/2018 - Fri, 07/12/2018

With the financial support of CEI (Central European Initiative) Cooperation Fund, Asylum Protection Center organized an international conference: *Fostering social inclusion and integration of asylum seekers and refugees in Western Balkan region and other CEI countries* that took place in Belgrade from 05th to 07th December 2018 in Zira Hotel, Impact Hub and EU Info Centre.

The event gathered more than 30 international, local-governmental and non-governmental experts and practitioners from 13 different European EU and non-EU CEI (Central European Initiative) countries influenced by migration and integration challenges, with more than 20 representatives of local authorities (Prague, Vienna, Belgrade, Tutin, etc.), international organizations, local stakeholders, thus presenting a timely, exquisite platform for discussing and sharing challenges, experience, best practices, forecasts and ideas in long-term integration of refugees in local Western Balkan and other CEI countries and their local communities. The conference paid special attention to local strategies and best practices in integration, role of social media and other venues of communication in breaking barriers and establishing links for interaction and for building dialogue between local and migrant population, as well as on how the concept of integration is influencing the hosting societies.

The event's setting created a forum where participants from Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Italy, Austria, Romania, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia, Slovenia and Hungary shared field knowledge and expertise, new ideas and future perspectives on integration of refugees in a form of presentations, lectures, discussions and panels. Special panels tackled thoroughly issues of media, best practices, local narratives and synergy, in relation to inclusion and integration of refugees, and explored different social, labour, educational and other mechanisms for enabling social inclusion and integration of refugees to become more successful and sustainable. Same Conference was opportunity for participants to deepen understanding of disadvantages of social exclusion, to investigate educational, labour, and other social inclusion opportunities and to shape various media approaches to open venues for communication, interaction and closeness between the local community and the refugees. The Conference promoted sharing of know-how between EU CEI member states and non-EU CEI member states, and promoted exchange of relevant experiences and good practices and promoted European democratic values, tolerance, human rights, antidiscrimination values, multiculturalism and European inclusive societies.

In the final stage of the Conference common outcomes were reached for successful local integration and for new policy and practical developments in respective countries, in a form of common guidelines for stakeholders, to have a meaningful practical impact on refugee integration into the local European and Western Balkan CEI societies.

Further challenges for successful long-term integration have been identified: Negative political narratives; Administrative Inefficiency; Misinformation; Influence of Media, and Impartial Reporting; Lack of Information and Information Awareness of local communities, field workers and refugees; Implementation of existing legislation.

Further common recommendations were brought up to be used by institutions, local authorities, civil society, local grassroots, in order to foster integration of refugees: Creating priorities in Integration Policy – having clear and set instruments, planning and legislation regarding integration and the actors involved;

Key for Integration lies in hands of Active Municipal authorities; Facilitating access of refugees to integration services – importance of sharing information; Connecting refugees and locals – fostering interaction; Information sharing in two ways: Refugee orientations of local community, and local community orientation of refugee communities; Integration is two way process - Changes of refugees toward integration involve inevitable changes of local communities themselves; Legal status is crucial prerogative for successful integration; Work with media is crucial and two way process -We need to keep media constantly informed and sensitised.

The same Conference results, conclusions and recommendations, were presented to the local media and public on the last panel held in EU info Centre, and were shared with representatives of the Serbian Ministry of Social Welfare and EU Delegation that took part as panellists on the same occasion and shared their views and concerns on challenges and perspectives of inclusion and integration of refugees in Serbia, Balkans and EU. Final results of the Conference are to be shared with participants and disseminated among integration stakeholders within CEI participating countries and local communities.

APC undertaken various actions in order to promote CEI visibility during the proposed Conference, from updates on APC social media and websites, to including CEI logo on all Conference materials, leaflets, brochures, banner, pens, and other promotional materials. During the action, APC used CEI logo on all pictures, media involvements during and after the realized activity. The Conference and its conclusions were reported by Tanjug, BETA and Fonet news agencies, BBC on Serbian and other media.