
KORČULA SCHOOL 2016 (27-28 August 2016)

**REFUGEE AND MIGRANT CRISIS THROUGH A GENDER
DIFFERENTIATED LENS
-PROGRESSIVE RESPONSES-¹**

2016 “Korčula School” Think Tank, celebrating its fifth anniversary, was held in the town of Korčula (Island Korčula, Croatia) on Saturday, 27 and Sunday, 28 August 2016.

More than forty participants from South Eastern Europe, Western Europe and Morocco discussed the current refugee and migrant crisis from a gender equality perspective. The discussions were guided by Chatham House rules.

The School was co-organized by the **CEE Network** and the **Party of European Socialists**, in collaboration with the **Center for New Initiatives** (Zagreb) and under the financial sponsorship of the **Olof Palme International Center**. Below are key messages from the meeting on the refugee and migrant crisis through a gender differentiated lens:



¹ Agenda and List of Participants are attached in Annexes 1 and 2

I. It is not “US” versus “THEM“

1. Lead with responsibility

Migrations are here to stay, whether they are generated by climate change, war, poverty and/or social desperation. If financial flows and capital can move freely in a globalised neo-liberal world, why cannot people – women, men and children also move in search for a better, safer and more prosperous future.

Europe, and indeed the world, is challenged by extremism, fundamentalism, racism, xenophobia, neo-fascism, the far right and terrorism. These threaten to disrupt European civilizational achievements and are a threat to peace, stability and security within countries and on the continent. This state of affairs is best documented on the issues of gender equality, LGBT and the refugees and migrants.

Europe, especially the family of social democrats and progressives, needs to come to grips with the situation and renew its moral and strategic orientation, providing internationalist, political, socially just and institutional responses. Building fences across Europe is not a solution and is counter to the national and international tenets of democracy, human rights and the free movement of people.

Urgent action is needed to holistically address the root causes of the refugee and migrant crisis. Socialist, democratic and progressive leaders should not be opportunistic catering primarily to the public opinion polls but they need to be bold and assume leadership, pledge commitment, return to their historical internationalism, act politically and responsibly. They should uphold gender differentiated approaches and cooperate with the feminist movement to achieve this.

Migration issues have entered mainstream politics and social-democratic and progressive parties, also led by engaged and not gender neutral women leaders, should be key political agents in finding solutions to the crisis. Progressive, social democratic feminist women’s organisations should also lead and raise their voices for peace, security, solidarity.

The right has managed to hijack the ideology of the political centre left, including on gender equality and frame these into their conservative values and ideology. Social-democratic ideological principles and political messages have been either amiss or unclear and bold enough.

Social democrats and progressives need to work more with the media and civil society organisations to thwart the messages of fear and moral and political confusion created in the public space, especially among the traditional working class and millennials.

2. Getting the commitment right

Migrant population is not an amorphous and homogeneous mass. The serious lack of statistical data for analysis of migration flows, for instance on the numbers of unaccompanied children, and data disaggregation should be addressed urgently as this can impact short term, mid-term and long-term solutions.

Women, children (especially unaccompanied children) and minorities, including the LGBT community are the most vulnerable. Addressing their needs and plight demands differentiated approaches and feminist, gender sensitive and language and culture sensitive responses/actions to provide security, protection from exploitation and smugglers and resettlement.

Women should not be treated as victims but rather as empowered actors in the creation of their own and European and Mediterranean destiny at the negotiating table. Victimising women stands in the way of their empowerment, self-organisation and integration into European societies.

The structure of the refugees coming to Europe has also changed – often they are educated and skilled labour, especially from Syria, that can trigger economic growth and boost social welfare systems in a Europe that needs new labour to support its ageing population and revitalise its economy. Well organised, thought out and resourced integration of refugees, with a special focus on women refugees and migrants is key, can be a win-win situation. After all, refugee children of today will be the European citizens of tomorrow and successful integration of mothers means successful integration of children.

Political parties on the center left should address citizens' concerns through selective and well thought out terminology, including on cultural and religious issues, especially since the impact of

the refugee and migrant flows will, in a short term, produce a strain on the social welfare systems. Hence, it is important to address education, employment opportunities especially for women searching employment.

II. Implementing the Regional Gender Equality Platform

Participants from social-democratic party women's forums also exchanged information on the progress made in the implementation of the Regional Gender Equality Platform. Progress is registered in terms of adoption of principles and commitments. It is time however to "infiltrate" the gender mainstream and work further on the empowerment of Women's Forums in parties so as to further engender party political platforms. Upcoming elections, whether parliamentary or local, in most countries are an opportunity to strengthen the political gender sensitive campaigns.