

ANNUAL CONSULTATIONS WITH NGOs
3 – 5 JULY 2012 - International Conference Center Geneva

BACKGROUND PAPER

Xenophobia and Integration: Xenophobia – what we understand by xenophobia,
how we engage to counter it and how it affects integration of refugees

Thursday 5 July 2012, 09h00 – 10h45 – Room 3

Xenophobia, racism, discrimination and hate crimes are all related and can affect not only the integration of persons of concern but also their physical security. A distinction nevertheless needs to be made between xenophobia and racism on the one hand and discrimination on the other. Legal frameworks to counter the two issues are different as are their causes and manifestations in some respects. While there is no legal definition of xenophobia, the ordinary meaning of the word covers “intense or irrational dislike or fear of people from other countries” for instance “hatred or fear of foreigners or strangers or of their politics or culture”.

UNHCR is concerned that in many countries today, throughout Europe, there are high levels of xenophobia which undermines the protection environment and poses a challenge to integration and to efforts aimed at ensuring social cohesion. The challenges born by new immigration patterns and large foreign-born populations in some countries require responses based on solid strategies and engagement with both host and refugee societies.

In addition, racism and strong prejudice continues to affect parts of most societies and can occur both in host and immigrant societies. It negatively affects integration, and clear national strategies to counter racism are often lacking or not implemented. Refugees are not distinguished from migrants in the public debate and mediatized single issue debates often drive public attitudes.

The session on xenophobia and integration aims at identifying how UNHCR and NGOs can actively and jointly engage the broader civil society to counter racism, to contribute to a positive climate and to promote the development of robust strategies to engage host and refugee populations in this respect and to manage more cultural diverse societies.

Following an opening speech by the Director, the Bureau for Europe has opted to organize a “Question-Time” - style discussion with invited guests to stimulate a lively debate on this important topic. ECRE will moderate the session, with targeted questions, thought-provoking images and structured dialogue with the speakers and the audience.

Session outline

- 9.00 – 9.15**
- **Opening speech by the Director for the Europe Bureau – Daniel Endres – to introduce the current challenges:** The situations in Europe are very diverse. Some countries struggle with high levels of racism or racist motivated prejudice – sometimes relating to immigration and sometimes to ethnic minority groups. This is evidenced by an increase in the number of hate crimes and of the public support to

extreme right wing groups. Changing immigration and flight patterns have changed the face of societies / cities which have become more multi-cultural. Multiculturalism has created challenges and in some countries opposition. This affects State policies and the everyday lives of refugees in Europe. Other global trends and migration related issues influence the debate on asylum and migration such as: the global economic crisis, mixed migration flows where asylum-seekers move with illegal migrants, uneven distribution of responsibilities for processing asylum claims and providing protection, with some countries facing particular pressures, protracted as well as new conflict testing the receptiveness of receiving countries. However, multi-cultural societies, understood broadly, are a reality in Europe and must be managed to the benefit of refugees, migrants and the communities in general. To this end the role youth and education as well as new technology can play must be better understood to send messages in support of social inclusion.

The aim of the Bureau for Europe organized debate is to gather views, ideas and suggest some recommendations to for how UNHCR, NGOs, media and refugees themselves can work better and closer together to create a positive environment for refugee protection and integration in inclusive societies.

9.15 – 10.40 “Question time” session with invited guests moderated by ECRE – Allan Leas

The session will touch on questions like:

Is xenophobia and racism on the rise? How does it impact integration?

Extreme right wing parties and racism – how to deal with it?

How do we engaging broader public for a more positive attitude?

How do we send this message and give examples of how to manage integration better?

What is the role of youth, education and new technologies?

10.40 – 10.45 Wrap up by the Bureau Director