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## Annex to DOC-B-1-02-09-Refugees with disabilities

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### Refugees with disabilities in Greece- EDF internal report

The EDF Director took part in a mission of the European Economic and Social Committee to Greece to investigate the situation of refugees and other migrants with disabilities. The mission was planned with a lot of support by the National Council of Persons with Disabilities (NCDP) and involved a series of meetings and visits to local authorities, international and local organisations and reception centres in Athens and Lesbos.

It was an intensive programme which showed a range of overlapping Global, European and Greek issues. Globally, there are [historically high numbers of people on the move](#)- including a huge deluge of refugees from Syria right now, who have been making their way to European countries, via Greece. An estimated 63 million people are forcibly displaced in the world now.

In 2015 an estimated 1 million people passed through Greece last year, seeking to settle in Europe. Then European countries closed their borders, so refugees could no longer make their way to western or northern Europe through Greece. In March 2016, the [EU made a deal with the Turkish government](#) which has decreased the number of refugees arriving in Greece. In the deal, Turkey agrees to take back irregular migrants arriving in Greece after March 20<sup>th</sup>. In return the EU promised to resettle more Syrian refugees in Turkey, speed up visa liberalisation for Turkish nationals and also give a lot of money to Turkey to manage the refugee situation. Many people we spoke to in Greece doubted that the deal would work, and feared that refugee numbers could surge again at any time.

The present situation could be summarised like this:

- Right now about 35 people arrive in Greece per day- they arrive on one of the beautiful North Aegean islands, like Lesbos, and they are registered there promptly to assess their eligibility for asylum.
- Refugee camps have been established in Greece, on the Islands and the mainland, to accommodate the 60 000 refugees and other migrants now in Greece; most of these people had planned to go to countries such as Germany and Sweden.
- The options of these people seem now to be to apply for asylum on Greece, to return home with assistance from the International Organisation for Migration, to apply for the European relocation scheme, to apply for family reunification, to try to reach other countries in Europe with the assistance of people smugglers (read more here: <https://greece.iom.int/en>)



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- The authorities and NGOs we met described the situation now as being moving from Greece being a place of 'transit', to 'long term stay', so schooling and integration are now being discussed.

Persons with disabilities of all ages are amongst this 60000 population- though nobody could tell us how many there were. To draw a contrast, there is total clarity on the number of unaccompanied minors because they are counted. The same attention is not given to people with disabilities. Once identified, children and adults with disabilities are being accommodated in open reception centres, and the best possible living conditions, within the limits of the context. We were told by the Greek Council for Refugees that some persons with disabilities had already had asylum granted in Greece. Efforts have been made to make the reception sites where refugees with disabilities live accessible, including their containers or rooms or tents, and also sanitation facilities. However, given the reality of the hilly terrain, remote locations, resource constraints etc, mobility and access is certainly a challenge. The week before this mission a new programme was launched to get refugee children into school- no attention was given to refugee children with disabilities in this programme.

There are a number of difficult situations facing these refugees:

- Some are awaiting an answer to their request for family reunification- claims made 8 months ago after the Macedonian border closed have not been answered yet. The delays are keeping families apart. There are also children in Greece alone awaiting replies to their applications for family reunification, as well as mothers with children with disabilities.
- Some are awaiting an answer for their claim to asylum in Greece, or for the European relocation scheme.
- Some will be likely to be asked to return to their country of origin.
- If granted asylum in Greece, or relocation or family reunification in Europe, there will be a need to find accommodation, livelihood options, and to access a range of other services depending on their age, gender, situation and needs.

Unfortunately, because of the lack of attention to data, we saw examples of all these cases but do not have numbers.

The mission was successful in raising awareness of the situation of refugees with disabilities with the people we met. NCDP plans to follow-up with UNHCR and the Greek government authorities to coordinate the approach towards refugees with disabilities in Greece. It was very clear that the organisations and institutions working on the refugee situation should be working closely with DPOs in order to properly address the rights of refugees with disabilities.

EDF will continue to remind the European Institutions of their obligations, and the recommendations the EU has had from the CRPD committee last year to ensure persons with disabilities are included in their response to this migration situation which has become a crisis.

Two different Greek public servants made a similar remark to our delegation, when asked what the EU should do- they said, '**we now need action, and action is not building fences**'.

**EESC Hearing 'THE SITUATION OF REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS WITH DISABILITIES'**

**9:00 | Registration**



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**9:30 | Welcome and opening session**

- **Georges Dassis**, President of the European Economic and Social Committee
- President of the Permanent Study Group on Disability Rights

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**10:00 | PANEL 1 AND DEBATE**

*The situation of refugees and asylum seekers with disability in Greece*

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**Moderator: Ask Abildgaard (EESC)**

Panellists:

- **Ioannis Vardakastanis**, EESC
- A refugee with disability
- **Representative**, UNHCR
- **Stavros Mirogiannis**, Director of the Kara Tepe camp in Lesbos
- **Shantha Barriga**, Head of Disability Section, Human Rights Watch

**11:15 | Coffee break**

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**11:30 | PANEL 2 AND DEBATE**

*What can the EU and civil society do to help vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers?*

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**Moderator: Gunta Anca (EESC)**

Panellists:

- **Representative from ECHO**, European Commission (tbc)
- **Mary Honeyball**, European Parliament
- **Cristian Pirvulescu**, President of the IMI Group, EESC
- **Catherine Naughton**, European Disability Forum (EDF)
- **Michele Levoy**, PICUM

**12:50 | Concluding remarks**

- **Pavel Trantina**, President of SOC Section, EESC
- President of the Permanent Study Group on Disability rights, EESC

**13:00 | End of the hearing**



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## Social Platform Fact-finding visit to Sweden -December 14-15, 2016

Write-up by the Social Platform

Visiting “Yalla Trappan” (Rosengård, Malmö) - empowering migrant women is an investment for generations to come and leads to a more socially sustainable and democratic society

Yalla Trappan supports migrant women with no or low education and no prior work experiences. Its core activity is running a lunch restaurant and a catering service, utilising all the valuable experiences migrant women have from years of caring and cooking for their families and children. By offered migrant women traineeship and employment in the segregated area of Rosengård, Yalla Trappan helps breaking their isolation and exclusion. Furthermore, it contributes to a democratic and socially sustainable society. The women learn to value their knowledge and experiences and thus build up their otherwise low self-esteem and confidence. As a result the women's wellbeing improves, they get more social contacts and for the first time they also vote in political election; because now they have a voice, are being heard and believe they too can make a difference.

Christina Merker-Siesjö, President of Yalla Trappan shared her own story of three generations working class women, to show that the situation of many migrant women she meet in her work is common to the life of her own grandmother; illustrating that it took three generations before she herself got a higher education and could provide better living conditions and opportunities for her children. Yalla Trappan has been up and running as a permanent cooperative since six years, following its initial start as a European Social Fund project. Today its activities have expanded, and Yallas' concept and methods is being up scaled across Sweden. One of the latest cooperation has been initiated with the Swedish company IKEA, a sewing studios has been set up at their premises where the migrant women work, and they have also provided IKEA with prototypes for a headscarf to go with their uniforms.

Visiting the "Parental Project" at Merit (Rosengård, Malmö) - child carers' and industry coaches at the language school shortens migrant parents way to the labour market

Merit is a private company that delivers public services on behalf of Malmö municipality, their core work is Swedish for Immigrants (SFI), matching and coaching. During four years Merit has been running a European Social Fund project focusing on shortening the way to employment for women and men on parental leave. Having several children can mean many years of complete exclusion from the labour market and all forms of activation measures offered to unemployed. In total the project reached 600 students and 1000 children that voluntarily came to Merit to be able to plan for their individual future. Merit offered an environment where children were being cared for by a nanny close to them. For many women it was the first time they were asked what they would like to do in the future and given support to define how to get there. Language teachers also helped the participants to learn better Swedish, and the space enabled them to discuss and receive advice about parenting, and how for example pre-schools and education works in Sweden.

Merit employs teachers in Swedish for Immigrants (SFI) and sector specific coaches that have long work experiences within e.g. the restaurant and hotel sector or the industry sector to support the migrants. The coaches play a crucial role in supporting the migrant and the teachers in understanding what specific professional skills the person has when they lack the language to explain. The coach also fills a function in knowing the sector and having the necessary networks to find the right placement for a traineeship that can lead to employment. Merit illustrated with a case of a migrant who lacked the language and therefore drew a





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detailed mechanical sketch to illustrate his skill, neither the teacher nor the interpreter had the knowledge to understand, while the industry coach easily could identify his specific field and quickly found him a job. Without the industry coach this process would have taken much longer time.

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Meeting the local politician: Andreas Schönström, Deputy Major of Malmö (Party Group: Social Democrats) - Integration is the end result of a process, not the start

"Integration is a part of everything we work with whether education or transport, it is the end result of a process, not the start", said Andreas Schönström, Deputy Major in Malmö. Malmö is a young city with inhabitants coming from 177 countries and speaking 150 languages. Malmö's landmark used to be a shipyard employing 8000 people. In the 90s it closed down and the unemployment rate went from 1,4 to 23 percent. People left and the city ended up with empty housing offered to the refugees arriving from former Yugoslavia. Today the city has managed to replace the shipyard industry with 390 different businesses, making the city more diverse and competitive than ever before. Migrants have rescued companies that otherwise would have left Sweden.

"While there are many jobs in Malmö the unemployment rate is the highest in Sweden, because many of those working in the city does not live here", said Mr Schönström. There is a mismatch and a polarisation between those that are either highly and specialised skilled and those that lack education completely. "We lack the middle and as a consequence migrants are pushed down to do less qualified work, and those that could have taken such lower skilled work are pushed further down", explained Mr Schönström. This is why Malmö is investing in talent programmes and fast track programmes. The city has also put in place a Commission for Social Sustainable Malmö, and calculated the cost of inequality within the city. In one year (2012) out of 3217 six-year olds in Malmö, 412 of them won't make it, they will not get a job and they will become excluded. When they turn 65 year old they have come to cost the society 648.900.000 euro. There is up to six years difference in life expectancy depending on living area in Malmö, and in Sweden as a whole children have half a year higher life expectancy than in the United Kingdom because Sweden invest in double glazing windows in houses and apartments, while the United Kingdom do not.

The Commission for Social Sustainable Malmö recommended the city to establish a social investment policy, applying the same principle as being done when investing in infrastructure and calculating costs such as of new roads or bridges over decades ahead. Secondly, the Commission proposed new alliances between the public sector, the business community and civil society. Following the recommendations Mr Schönström explained that the city established a "Voluntary Sector Organisations Public Partnership", a non-market solution that is about partnership instead of bureaucratic burdensome project management. It focuses on services companies cannot provide because they are not profitable. For example Yalla Trappan is working in such partnership with the city, previous European Social Fund projects could possibly be turned into partnerships after the project ends, such as the Parental Project we visited at Merit.

3) Visiting "Hotel Trainee" at Merit (Helsingborg) – partnership between the hotel sector and the city gathers qualified workforce that the hotels otherwise would have missed out on, and migrants get jobs they otherwise would not have a chance to compete for

The Hotel Trainee project started on the initiative of a hotel Manager asking the city for cooperation, as the hotel sector is always in need of staff and recognises the qualifications and experiences that migrants bring with them. Merit gave the example of some of their



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participants, among them Zahidah Rashid who is a mother of seven children, from Kurdistan, with only four years of educational background. While she had no prior work experience she had long experience of working with the families farming. Zahidah was matched for a traineeship within the breakfast service and housekeeping at a hotel, and she was the first of all the participants that was offered employment.

Firstly, Merit invites to a meeting where all participants that are interested can learn about the opportunity. An information session attract around 50-60 people. Those that are interested register their interest and most are called to interview. About 15 participants are selected. Being asked what you are interested in, and actively part of choosing your own traineeship makes a huge difference for the individual, instead of being referred to a placement that someone else has decided for you. As a next step, Merit work with the participants to prepare them for a networking meeting where they will meet the Hotel Managers. The participants get to prepare, together with the language teachers and the industry coaches, for how to best

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present themselves. The networking meeting is a professional meeting where everyone wants to make a good impression – the participants as well as the Hotel Managers. On the basis of both the request and needs from the Hotel and the participants, Merit make the match for a traineeship. Individualised qualification plans are set up for each participants and Merit follow-up with the participants and the Hotel regularly on their development and need.

The partnering hotels all agree: the migrants that they have had the chance to offer traineeship and employment to would most likely never have a chance to compete for the jobs the regular way; consequently the hotel would have missed out on a lot of qualified and skilled workforce.

4) Visiting “Stiftelsen Ester” (Helsingborg) - women with migrant background need longer support to start-up their business, as they also need to build themselves after experiences of marginalisation and discrimination at the labour market

Stiftelsen Ester was founded by a group of women that learned about microfinancing and women entrepreneurs in India, and who wanted to bring the model to Sweden. Stiftelsen Ester selects women with a migrant background for their programme on the basis of their drive and creativity. Their programme lasts 18 months, much longer than any labour market activity that is normally about three months. The reasons is that these women do not only need the skills to start their own business, they also need the support to build themselves up from the inside, as many have experienced unemployment and marginalisation for a very long time affecting their self-esteem and confidence. The 18 months is divided into three phases: firstly education, developing a business idea and confidence, secondly registration and start-up and finally expanding. Several women part of the programme shared their experiences.

Once you registered a company you are considered self-employed and are no longer eligible for any EU funding, it is therefore challenging for Stiftelsen Ester to argue why these women with a migrant background need longer support with the start-up phase of their business, explained Lena Andersson, Project Manager. Migrant women are discriminated in all the areas crucial for starting a business; financially, knowledge wise and socially. While Stiftelsen Ester have developed a micro finance product with Swedbank for about 6000 Euro, it still struggles with being able to offer other support services these women need, especially in terms of finding mentors within the business sector.



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Meeting the local politician: Anna Jähnke, Municipal Commissioner of Helsingborg (Political Party: 'Moderaterna', EPP Group) – each new Swede is welcomed and introduced to Helsingborg and the city is a platform for individual solutions to deliver jobs for all

Helsingborg has 140.000 citizens and one third of them have a non-Swedish background. When the "new Swedes", as the city prefers to call the refugees and migrants arriving, the politicians were initially not prepared. Ms Jähnke and her colleagues started working according to a model of the city as a "platform" to introduce each and every new Swede, acknowledging that individual assessments and solutions are needed to identify what each person need, whether education or traineeship. Their aim is job delivery and they support projects such as Stiftelsen Ester and Merit's Trainee as we were visiting.

Ann Abrahamsson and her colleague Rami (last name) are civil servants in Helsingborg. Rami came to Sweden two years ago as a refugee from Syria. He is now working for the commune with reaching out to companies to show that there are resources among the new Swedes in the city, and that they initially just need a bit extra support. Rami also work with involving the new Swedes in the processes.

We had an interesting discussion about the differences between Malmö and Helsingborg. Ms Jähnke and her colleagues Marie Nilsson from the Social Democrats agreed that although they belong to very different political groups they put people first and work together. Ten out of 65 political representatives in the municipality represent the extreme-right, both Moderaterna and the Social Democrats has agreed not to work with them, which also contributes to their cooperation.

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Reception with local civil society organisations, hosted by the umbrella organisations for NGOs in Malmö

During our reception with local civil society organisations some presented their activities. The local Salvation Army told that they have come to change the course of their work, since the numerous refugees and migrants arrived to Malmö has. They hired an Arabic speaking staff member, previous refugee that provides social work for the Arabic speaking community in the city. The Salvation Army in Helsingborg carry out a befriending project to break isolation, mentees and mentors are matched for 12 weeks, starting and ending with a party. 'People grow because they are being stretched outside their comfort zone'. They also run a 'Football for all' project for boys and men looking at academic, athletic, social and spiritual factors. Malmo against Discrimination consists of three lawyers that carry out 'legal activism by providing free legal advice to victims of discrimination on all grounds. Among the clients they meet are both first, second and third generation. 240 migrant women come to the International Women's Organisation in Malmö each week to take part in any of the many workshops they provide. Among other activities they provide is mentorship to help women to get a job. They contact the industry to ask what skills they need, and secondly they sit down with the women to match with whom has the skills the industry needs. They also support women with knowledge about how to start a business.

See Annex 1. Presentation by the disability organisations (that was not delivered)

A few points to develop/explore further

- ☐ Ways to establish cooperation between the public, private and civil society sector
- ☐ Partnership Agreement a good idea but needs to be further looked into: length, possibility to upscale in cities where NGOs compete with similar activities, distinction between services



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to be delivered via service-providers under the public procurement legislation and regulation, and “services” that fall under the partnership agreement, how to guarantee quality) etc.)

- ☐ Ways for municipalities to continue supporting successful practices coming out of EU funded projects
- ☐ Applying bottom-up methods, starting with the individual needs and skills and create a supportive environment for the individual to develop
- ☐ The added-value of industry specific coaches to complement language teachers in the mapping and identification of skills, qualifications and aspirations
- ☐ Defining inclusion versus integration and the importance to also recognise integration in terms of the specificity of discrimination and identity on the basis of ethnicity, religion and belief.
- ☐ Continuing Social Platform's fact-finding visit on other topics. Overall positive feedback from the EU delegation that the format of the study visit was appreciated, both in terms of exchange and interaction with local practices, practitioners and participants (refugees and migrants), as well as with member of the delegation.

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ANNEX: Presentation by the disability organisations (no delivered during the meeting)

Rasmus Isaksson, President

DHR also go by our English name: “For a society without barriers.” We work on national, regional and local level focusing on matters concerning the rights of persons with reduced mobility. So we are a rights-based working particularly with the CRPD (the UN Convention on Rights for Persons with Disabilities) as a basis for our advocacy.

As an NGO, DHR has an important role to work for inclusion and raising our voices in the public debate whenever human rights and equality is discussed or under pressure.

The first action DHR took in the issue of migration was publishing an open letter to the Swedish migration board saying that they should consider the CRPD when making and executing deportation orders. The background for that statement, and one that became a real eye-opener for me personally, was a story about a woman with reduced mobility about to be deported to a country that didn't give her the sufficient support for her to be independent. So the plan was to send her back to an institution where she had previously been sexually assaulted.

I have seen other examples as well raising doubts if our system of meeting the needs of immigrants with disabilities is sufficient in ensuring the same standards and rights for immigrants with disabilities as other immigrants. Necessary support as technical aids and mobility service for example, are not offered to people living in immigration shelters (even if they do have a permanent residence permit). Those kinds of support requires for you to be registered on a local municipality address.

Sometimes it takes years for immigrants to be able to leave the immigration shelters and into their own apartments. Society offers little support and strongly recommends immigrants, being almost required of them, to take active part in looking for a job and an apartment. This is nearly impossible for someone who has reduced mobility but is denied sufficient support from the society. As a consequence, immigrants with reduced mobility have less opportunity to be included and participate in the Swedish society than other immigrants.





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To the Swedish minister of migration, The Swedish employment office, the Swedish migration board and the UN special rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, I have raised our concerns about the inaccessibility within the Swedish Immigration Shelters. During these last couple of years, we have seen actions from our government that ignores the need for accessible migration shelters and overrides good sustainable laws of accessibility in housing, forcing to replace them with special solutions such as immigrants with reduced mobility being placed in homes for the elderly or with people suffering from severe mental health problems, where they haven't felt secure.

Also, I have asked who, in contact with the individual, has the responsibility to give information about their human rights as stipulated in the CRPD or to give information about the possibility to get support from the society. We have seen examples of immigrants with reduced mobility not being informed about their rights or how to get sufficient support from society.

DHR is currently involved in two projects that are addressing the rights of immigrants with reduced mobility, especially regarding accessibility and inclusion in the Swedish society and raising the awareness of their rights and what kinds of support society has to offer.

Last but not least, I have asked the minister of migration about how our government are working and how they are raising the issue about ensuring the safety of people with disabilities in areas of conflicts and other type of catastrophic events such as environmental disasters. Because we know from experience that people with disabilities are the most vulnerable in any kind of society and are facing the risk of being left behind, or being forced to rely on others, in a desperate situation trying to flee from armed conflicts or other types of human catastrophes.

I wish that the disability movement in Sweden and in the entire western world makes this a priority issue. Although our opportunities are very different in different parts of the world, people living in states that have ratified the CRPD are connected in spirit. That also comes with the responsibility for us to join forces and react on any threat of inequality and injustice that is in violation to the CRPD."