



Outcomes of the workshop

“ASYLUM SEEKERS & THE RIGHT TO WORK”

Friday, 18 December 2015, 10.00 – 14.00

The workshop was organized by PRAKSIS Employability project in collaboration with the REACT Project's Athens Bureau at Athens Solidarity Center. Workshop's core themes were:

- Information regarding human rights and recognition of cases of violations
- Exploring and highlighting cases of discriminations and violations of human rights asylum seekers face in Greece
- Information about the right to work and Greece's current law regarding asylum seekers' job permits
- Participants' experiences regarding everyday life's obstacles, difficulties and feelings deriving from exclusion state policies, laws, social stereotypes and multiple discriminating attitudes
- Wishes, expectations, suggestions about a future of acceptance, support, equality and respect ...for all of the citizens of the world

Through presentation, conversation, sharing of experiences and opinions, personal narrations and everyday life stories, this networking event highlighted various aspects of human rights violations and discriminations asylum seekers and immigrants face as far as job access and social integration are concerned.

Discriminations & human rights violations narratives

Narratives from discrimination attempting to access the job market

P. describes his rejection from a job interview:

- *“I entered the room and the interviewer asks me: “Where are you from? Are you from Africa?”. I answered yes and then he asked me to leave the room, that we weren't going to proceed with the interview and he sent me away”.*
- *“It's not just race discrimination. It's also class discrimination. If he was upper class candidate, the employer wouldn't refuse interviewing him”.*

Race discriminations along with class and nationality discriminations were reported by the majority of the workshop's participants originated from Africa. Discrimination based on nationality due to social stereotypes was commonly encountered to asylum seekers coming from Nigeria or were considered Nigerians because of their skin colour.

Narratives of susceptibility to labour rights violations

- *“The current law applied to asylum seekers allows employers to treat immigrants as they wish, to violate their rights. The employer is the one in power”.*
- *“I started working in a company right before my application for job permit. For about a month I was paid normally and had health insurance (Ενσημα). When the rejection decision regarding my job permit was issued, my employer stopped paying for my insurance and lowered my salary. At the end of our collaboration the employer owed me 2-3 months salaries which I am still waiting. He told me that he would call me but never did”.*
- *“Work like a lion, earn like an ant”.*

There are asylum seekers working without job permit since they need to survive in Greece. The deprivation of their right to work subjects them to all kind of working rights violations.

Narratives of exclusion

- *“My landlord refused to sign a contract for the house I was renting, leaving me susceptible to eviction”.*
- *“House owners often refuse to rent apartments to people from Africa”.*
- *“I couldn't register my kid to kindergarten because I didn't have job permit and thus, unemployment card”.*
- *“They have denied me so many things”.*
- *“There is a huge language barrier. Everything is in Greek”.*
- *“Limited or no access to education”.*
- *“There is not a single educational or professional formation programme in English”.*
- *“All the laws are in Greek. Even the immigrants' law is available only in Greek”.*

Asylum seekers face discriminations while searching for a house to live, a school for their kids, a training seminar, while they are contacting the public authorities and services where no translators, cultural mediators or translated info guides/documents are available, while they are accessing the job market ... a constant struggle for survival.

Obstacles rising from the discriminating law frame that does not allow asylum seekers to issue a job permit in Greece

- *“How are we supposed to survive this waiting period?”*
- *“How am I supposed to pay for rent, bills, food if I don't work?”*
- *“How can anyone wake up at 6 o' clock in the morning and make it through the day, knowing that he doesn't have 1 cent his pocket?”*
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- *“The waiting period for the international protection application to be examined is too long. In the meantime, since we don’t have job permits, we have to beg social services and NGOs to provide us with food. They deprive us of our dignity”.*
- *“Being out of work for so long, one can lose his/her skills”.*

An asylum application might need 1 to 6 or even more years to be examined and determine the applicants’ legal status. Until then, there is no state provision regarding housing, food, basic human needs to support a person’s or a family’s dignified living. **Asylum seekers stress both their need and their right to work.**

Feelings

- *“I feel unsafe”.*
- *“I live in fear”.*
- *“I am angry”.*
- *“I am depressed, stressed and now... I’m afraid”.*
- *“I am afraid to ask for a job. I am not allowed to work but I cannot leave this country”.*
- *“It is as if the laws have been written by the police not from the lawyers in Greece”.*

Fear, sadness, stress, anger, uncertainty, sense of confinement and injustice.

Wishes of the citizens of the world

- *Respect of laws and foreigner’s rights*
- *Change of the law, change fear*
- *Live legally as a citizen of the world*
- *Economic stability to the country*
- *Job opportunities*
- *More grace to our elbow!*
- *Access to constitutions and information*
- *Eradicate stereotypes*
- *Recognize migrants’ importance*
- *Hear immigrants voices*
- *Multilingual training opportunities*
- *Social policy change*
- *Interpretation and translation of law*
- *Informative workshops more frequently*

