

Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum

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Written contribution by Caritas Ukraine, Caritas Georgia, Caritas Moldova, Caritas Armenia and Caritas Europa

“EaP Civil Society Forum: an opportunity to make EU social and labour migration policies work for poverty eradication in the EaP countries”

1. The Caritas organisations of Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Armenia and their European network Caritas Europa welcome the creation of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum. Caritas sees the decision of the European Institutions to create this platform as a recognition by the EU of the crucial role played by Civil Society Organisations in addressing the social challenges of societies, in particular those in transition. Caritas also sees it as a commitment by the EU to support the work of CSO.
2. The Eastern Partnership countries are in transition, with numerous challenges for local and national authorities to address the needs of their societies. Civil society organisations, in particular the Caritas Europa network, are experienced in detecting those needs and in prioritising them according to their impact on people, communities and societies.
3. Caritas in Europe is experienced and deeply engaged in combating poverty and social exclusion and in addressing the causes and consequences of migration. Civil society organisations, in particular those who are member of pan-European networks such as Caritas Europa, have developed analytical and operational know how to play their role in the selection and implementation of policy orientations. Caritas Europa e.g. recently adopted a comprehensive set of Basic Principles for a Sustainable Social System. This is a useful tool for selecting the right policy options and measures and for ensuring the financial sustainability of these options. In relation to migration we advocate for family oriented social policy measures contributing to mitigating the dramatic demographic evolution and to providing families with alternatives to labour migration, avoiding the social costs related to it for the families. The Civil Society Forum is a unique opportunity to share this experience and expertise with other CSO and with the authorities of the EaP countries.
4. Despite the significant experience of emigration and immigration of most EU member states, a notable ineffectiveness of legal instruments regulating the movement of workers between the Eastern Partnership countries and the EU is observed. Economic considerations prevail over human rights protection in the priorities of EU migration policy. Such tendency leads to a discrepancy between the EU and PACE resolutions (the latter considers human rights protection as the fundamental approach). For example, the passive reaction to PACE Recommendation of 1755 (2006) *Human rights of irregular migrants* or PACE's initiatives of 2008 on voting rights for immigrants is quite telling. This attitude feeds continuous and increasing migration-related social tensions, violations of fundamental human rights, increased numbers of migrant workers forced into irregular employment and increasing human trafficking for labour or sexual exploitation purposes, organised by transnational criminal networks.
5. The minimal effectiveness of EU migration policy can be explained by its inability to meet new conditions and challenges of global migration. Old methods do not always facilitate attainment of desired goals. Despite the EU commitment to a “Global Approach to Migration”, border control receives a disproportionate share of the attention. This could lead to the creation of a new “Iron Curtain” and the emergence of a “lower working class” of non-EU nationals. Citizens from Eastern

Partnership countries, who do not or no longer reside legally in the EU, actually lose any possibility to return home, since in practice it would mean deportation and shift to the status of “persona non grata” in the country of residence. When s/he gets into EU, s/he tries to stay there as long as possible.

6. Conversely, liberalisation of migration policy, allows a labour immigrant, in particular originating from the Eastern Partnership countries, to effectively “balance” between the country of residence and his/her homeland, as well as await without fear the expiry of the official term of staying abroad. The possibility to maintain tighter contacts with the country of origin facilitates circulation and return to the homeland (both for short and long terms) will never seem “fatal” for an immigrant, because s/he preserves the possibility and legal right for secondary labour migration.
7. Allowing for more legal labour migration between the Eastern partnership countries and the EU is also likely to have a positive impact on the sustainability of social protection schemes in EU countries. A recent survey by the World Bank concludes:

“Using data on average incomes and taxes paid and benefits received by migrant and non-migrant households, we find no evidence to support the contention that migrant workers contribute much less in taxes than the native-born population, or consume significantly higher benefits. On the contrary, our calculations suggest that migrant workers make a net contribution of approximately 42 billion euros to the national tax and benefit systems of EU13 countries.”¹

8. In recent times, a concept of circular migration is being actively discussed in EU countries, which presupposes, on the one hand, a migrant’s residence and work permits restricted in time, and on the other – nonexpendable residence. In our opinion, such a concept contains some very important solutions to meet modern challenges. On the one hand, the labour market needs of recipient countries are satisfied and the social sphere pressure is lowered as it allows for legalisation of the work and residence of immigrants. On the other hand, donor countries do not suffer from brain drain and enjoy the capital forthcoming (direct remittances from labour immigrants), as well as skilled investments (skills and qualifications of returning immigrants). Close ties of immigrants with their homeland facilitate the reintegration process.
9. But this concept is unacceptable without: priority to human rights; access to all employment sectors; and an integrated, family friendly concept of social security systems, including the transferability of social benefits. In order for circular movement of workers to function properly, the transferability of social benefits also needs to be modernised and adapted to new labour migration patterns between Eastern Partnership countries and the EU. Labour migrants from Eastern Partnership countries are very mobile. The mobility of labour migrants is not limited only by movement inside of a particular country, but also involves movement among EU countries. Research conducted by **Caritas Ukraine** shows that

“Ukrainians represent a circulation type of migration:

- Over 80% wish to return home;
- Approximately 70% have families in Ukraine and maintain close relations with relatives in Ukraine;
- 90% realize their future plans in Ukraine (buying flats, paying for their children’s’ education, etc);

¹ Luca Barbone, Misha Bontch-Osmolovsky, and Salman Zaidi, 2009

- At least twice or thrice per year Ukrainian migrants visit Ukraine if they can (if they have a legal status of stay in a host country, sufficient funds and possibilities of vacations).’’²

Circular migration however is not the magical solution for all EaP countries. E.g. under the current economic conditions it is hardly an option in Moldova. Agriculture is the largest area of the national economy in Moldova, and not competitive at all as compared to other countries or regions. Based on its counselling experience, **Caritas Moldova** reports that the active population is and will be looking for more secure, stable and better paid jobs, which are hardly available in Moldova.

10. The current labour migration conditions between Eastern Partnership countries and the EU also entail a huge social cost for the communities and societies of origin. Caritas Ukraine reports:

“One of the biggest challenges regarding the new Ukrainian labour migration is preserving the integrity of families. For the first time in the history of Ukraine, people are going for work abroad and leaving families behind. This brings three major threats:

- a. the transformation of the labour migrant from a person into a mere sender of money (according to some migrants, they feel as though they have become human ATM machines);*
- b. emotional and psychological connections, and mutual understanding, between spouses is severely diminished (emotional contact is preserved not more than 9 month after separation, after which time, the relationship needs to be built again);*
- c. The education of children suffers, without the example of the father, the mother, or even both parents (sometimes children spend money which they received from abroad with a feeling of revenge against the parent or parents, whom they believe have abandoned them).’’³*

Caritas Georgia reports similar effects and adds that the number of Georgian women working abroad is much higher than men. In comparison with Ukraine they rarely return to visit their home country. This situation is increasingly putting under tension family relations that are traditionally very strong in Georgia.

11. Caritas recommendations for the contribution that EaP Civil Society Forum could make to addressing the mentioned challenges:

1. Labour migration is an important instrument for many people to cope with the challenges related to social protection systems in transition. The CSF could make recommendations to facilitate the free circulation of workers between EaP countries and the EU, as one of the policy tools to ease the transition process and to bring citizens in contact with each other.
2. EaP countries see positive but also negative consequences of the current EU labour migration policies. The Civil Society Forum could contribute to identifying those and consequently addressing them.
3. Civil society organisations of the EaP countries deserve support to play their crucial role in social dialogue with the authorities in their country. The CSF could be a useful instrument in this.
4. Civil Society Organisations need to be supported in building their capacity to interact with the competent EU institutions and to propose EU Neighbourhood policy options. Civil society organisations also have a crucial role to play in promoting equality between men and women.

² Markov I., Ivankova-Stetsyuk O., Seleshchuk H. Ukrainian Labour Migration in Europe. – Lviv, 2009 – 72 p.

³ Report 2008 of the Commission of Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church for Migrants “Particular issues and Needs of Migrants: The Ukrainian Context”. – Lviv, 2008 – P.4

Equal rights, treatment and opportunities for women, a mindshift about the „traditional” roles of parents in a family etc are necessary ingredients to bring stability in societies in transition.

5. EU financial instruments should aim at including Civil Society organisations from the Eastern Partnership Countries by granting resources to European wide networks of Civil society organisations enabling them to invite all their members, including those in Eastern Partnership countries, to participate in their capacity building and exchange events. Employment of colleagues from EaP in the EU office of CSO networks should also be facilitated.
6. 2010 will be the European Year Against Poverty and Social Exclusion. Caritas urges the EU to take significant steps to address poverty in the Eastern Partnership countries by contributing to the reform and increasing the performance of social security and social protection systems in the Eastern partnership countries, including by promoting and supporting Civil Society Organisations to play their role in social dialogue with the authorities.

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