



**DIRECTORATE GENERAL  
OF HUMAN RIGHTS  
AND LEGAL AFFAIRS**



**Consultation meeting on the Council of Europe's activities  
in the field of migration**

5 - 6 May 2011  
Athens, Greece

**BACKGROUND NOTE**

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Migration has been and remains an important issue that has considerable human rights implications for the European countries. As such, it cannot be ignored by the Council of Europe which has historically played a key role in developing and implementing policy instruments aimed at promoting integration, non-discrimination and respect for human rights and dignity of migrants. The Council of Europe is committed to remain an important actor in this field, but wishes to ensure that its current and future migration-related activities are coherent, coordinated and visible in order to achieve a better impact.

With a view to accomplishing this objective and to ensure that its work effectively responds to the emerging migration-related challenges faced by the European countries, the Council of Europe is currently undertaking a critical review of its activities in the migration field. This process will lead to adopting an integrative approach to work in this area, that will go beyond a mere mechanism of information exchange between different parts of the organisation, but aim at designing a strategy of synergy of all projects and activities carried out by different institutions and departments of the Council of Europe into a coherent and transversal approach.

The focus of the work of the organisation will shift from developing new standards to promoting effective and responsible use of existing Council of Europe instruments (conventions, recommendations, guidelines etc.). This should also ensure sufficient follow-up of the results of the monitoring (carried out through existing mechanisms, such as European Court for Human Rights, European Committee for Social Rights, European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, the Commissioner for Human Rights and others) by practical assistance activities implemented in the member states.

## **Objectives**

The present meeting is an important element of the aforementioned review process that should assist the Council of Europe in shaping its migration strategy. However, as co-operation between the Council of Europe and the National Human Rights Structures (NHRS) in areas of migration, asylum and integration has already been identified as a principal element and mechanism of future migration-related activities, this meeting (in addition to contributing to the review of the Council of Europe work) will also help outline possible directions of such co-operation.

The main objectives of the meetings are:

- To provide feedback on the relevance of proposed avenues for future Council of Europe work in the field of migration, asylum and integration to actual human rights challenges faced by the member states;
- To identify such possible areas and mechanisms of co-operation between the Council of Europe and the NHRS that would help ensure the relevance, impact and visibility of Council of Europe work in the field of migration, asylum and integration;

The participants of the meeting will be invited to comment on the proposals for the reorganisation of the activities of the Council of Europe (a detailed document will be circulated in mid-April) and to formulate their own suggestions on how and in what specific areas the Council of Europe can assist their migration-related work at national level.

## **Organisation of the meeting**

There are several areas of migration that appear to be particularly relevant in the context of the protection of human rights and non-discrimination and upon which future Council of Europe work in this field is likely to focus. The most important issues are

- (1) Social integration, which cover issues related to combating discrimination and xenophobia, promoting participation of migration and development of intercultural societies;
- (2) Irregular migration and asylum issues including, in particular, asylum procedures, legality and conditions of detention of migrants and asylum-seekers as well as criminalisation of irregular migration.

The Council of Europe's work in this field will also likely address the situation of IDPs as well as trafficking and smuggling issues.

It is, therefore, proposed to organise the exchange of views at this consultation meeting around these priority areas and to dedicate separate sessions to (1) social integration, (2) human rights issues in the context of asylum and return procedures, as well as to the (3) human rights dimension of irregular migration. The discussions at each session will be assisted by presentations that will offer national and international perspectives on each subject as well as that of the Council of Europe.

### **Guidelines for interventions**

In order to achieve the objective of the meeting and to ensure that discussions offer a useful contribution to the development of transversality in the Council of Europe's work in the field of migration, integration and asylum, the participants will be asked to reflect on how the Council of Europe could contribute to addressing specific migration issues and what added value its work in the field would bring.

Participants wishing to contribute to the discussions during this consultation meeting are encouraged to reply to one (or more) questions below:

- What value would the proposed Council of Europe activities in the field of migration, asylum and integration represent for the NHRS? Would these activities support the current work of the NHRS?
- To what extent would the priorities identified by the Council of Europe (social integration, asylum issues, irregular migration etc.) correspond to the challenges that NHRS address at national level?
- In which specific areas of their migration related work would the NHRS welcome assistance from the Council of Europe (irrespective or not of whether these areas are included in the Council of Europe proposals)?
- What modes of co-operation/co-ordination in the field of migration between the NHRS and the Council of Europe would be seen as the most useful and effective?
- Where would, in the views of the NHRS, the work of the Council of Europe effectively complement (and not duplicate) the activities of other national and international actors?