

2/2019 MONIKA – Multicultural Women´s Association (Finland): Statement on CEDAW General Recommendation on Trafficking in Women and Girls in the Context of Global Migration

We thank the CEDAW Committee for this opportunity to share our views and concerns on this topic.

MONIKA – Multicultural Women´s Association is nationwide multicultural women’s NGO operating in the field of social affairs. It promotes the equality and inclusion of immigrant women in Finland and offers specialized services for immigrant women that have experienced different forms of violence. We have over 10 years of experience assisting victims of human trafficking and are one of the main NGO service providers for THB in Finland, and the only one specialized in immigrant women and children. We assist approximately 1000 women yearly, coming from 40-70 different countries.

We are concerned that trafficking in women and girls is still to this date discussed outside the context of violence against women. Through our work with immigrant women that have faced violence it’s clear that trafficking is interlinked with other forms of violence, exploitation and vulnerabilities. Many of the traffickers and perpetrators are not part of organized crime, but people close to the female victims: this means family members, spouses, boyfriends, or members of the same community. To comprehend this it´s necessary to understand the dynamics of violence against women. It´s also crucial to highlight that most women victims of trafficking have experienced more forms of exploitation; usually some forms of physical, sexual or psychological violence. Many of these women have years of exploitation and violence behind them. Re-traumatization of victims is not well considered in the criminal proceedings and even assistance of victims across Europe, and victims for example need to repeat themselves over and over again.

It´s important that the committee is particularly concerned of increased reporting of several forms of THB, including sham/forced/servile marriage, child marriage, sexual exploitation in refugee camps, temporary reception centers and informal settlements. This being said, the current atmosphere on migration can lead to re-victimization and exploitation, especially when immigrant women that have faced violence are labeled as economic migrants or denied to stay in a country where they would feel safe. It´s a fact that trafficked women and children still face a risk of deportation even when identified as a victim of trafficking, and trafficking is also in many cases left unidentified even if the person is in contact with authorities or service providers.

For tackling THB of women and girls Identification of victims has to be improved so that all officials are capable of identifying a possible victim. There must be clear guidelines and trainings for all professionals working with possible victims with the emphasis on victim-centered and trauma-informed approach.

 Forms of violence against women as well as trafficking should be better considered in asylum procedures and possible female victims should have free and fast access to social-and health care professionals working with violence against women as soon as there are some signs of trafficking or exploitation if the social-and health professionals are not included from the start. Assistance and rehabilitation of victims should be long-term providing safe housing, psycho-social help and financial support. Safe housing includes specialized sex-segregated facilities for female victims who are currently placed, if getting any safe housing, in anything from mixed refugee accommodations to domestic violence shelters. Female victims that stay for example in a reception center can for feeling unsafe end up in a situation where they are forced to sell sex or end up in other exploitative situation.

We would like to emphasis that it´s crucial that CEDAW Committee asks the states to give migrant and refugee women access to employment and their own financial aids and income. The economic and legal dependency of migrant women on their spouses is a well documented problem that can lead to different forms of exploitation and trafficking. Women whose residence status is vulnerable (undocumented or in a risk of losing their existing residence status) and who are victims of THB can be afraid of being deported or losing their existing residence status if it is tied to marriage.

Due to the increased amount of undocumented persons in the EU can make the victims access to services more difficult, more people are vulnerable and subjected to exploitation without means of seeking help without risking negative consequences. This is also true if the specialized services are only targeted at the women officially identified, if the official identification requires co-operation with authorities or takes too long.

We also would like to voice our concern of the normalization of commercial sexual industry as an “occupational choice” for migrant women, and hope to see CEDAW committee continuing working to improve gender equality, and therefore targeting also demand of trafficking for sexual exploitation and all forms or commercial sexual exploitation of women.

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Sincerely,

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