**Maat for Peace’ contribution on the concept paper for the CERD-CMW Joint General Comment/Recommendation**

Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights submits this commentary to contribute to the concept paper for the joint general comment between the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the Committee on the Rights of Migrant Workers, in recognition of Maat’s awareness of the importance of establishing specific principles to prevent xenophobia, especially in societies receiving immigrants, as racism and racial discrimination still exist. What is repeated on a daily basis in these societies hinders the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and threatens to disrespect a set of rights, especially those contained in international human rights conventions.

Maat for Peace agrees with the various opinions that xenophobia has led to a violation of the rights of migrant workers, consistent with the conclusions of the Committees in developing a joint general comment/recommendation on the policy obligations of States parties to address and eliminate xenophobia and its impact on the rights of migrants, their families and other non-citizens affected by racial discrimination. Accordingly, Maat makes this contribution and hopes that the information provided will help the two committees during the preparation of the general comment/joint recommendation. Maat is guided by a set of questions included in the invitation, but Maat was not able to answer all the questions due to adhering to the maximum number of words.

**How should xenophobia be defined today in a social and political sense leading to public policies directed at addressing its impact on migrants’ rights (Question 1)**

Maat for Peace confirms that there is no agreed upon definition at the international level for what is known as xenophobia, although xenophobic practices do not stop, and every day hundreds of organizations around the world document actions related to xenophobia[[1]](#footnote-1). Maat notes that xenophobia in the context of immigration is defined as fear or prejudice towards someone who is perceived as foreign or 'other' in the national, cultural, religious or ethnic sense[[2]](#footnote-2).

There are other definitions that Maat believes could be taken into account when preparing the draft of the joint commentary of the two committees, including the definition contained in the Declaration on Racism, Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance against Migrants and Trafficked Persons, which was adopted by the meeting of non-governmental organizations in the Asian region and the Pacific within the framework of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. The definition of xenophobia in this context refers to attitudes, prejudices and behaviors that reject, exclude and often denigrate people, on the basis of the belief that they are aliens or aliens to society or national identity[[3]](#footnote-3).

The Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance proposed a definition whereby xenophobia refers “to behavior based specifically on the perception that the other is foreign or originates from outside the community, state or nation.[[4]](#footnote-4) Maat believes that the definition that may It covers the political and social meanings, and is the definition that includes all actions that lead to discrimination, abuse, stigma, or any other violation of any kind against immigrants, whether these actions are carried out by politicians or ordinary individuals. Maat believes it is necessary for any definition of xenophobia to start from the principle Contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights regarding equality and non-discrimination for all.

**What elements should comprehensive and holistic public policy aim to prevent and eliminate xenophobia in immigrant-receiving societies? What ministries, secretaries and other public bodies should participate in the design, implementation and periodic evaluation of this policy? (Question 2)**

Maat believes that the elements that should be included in any general or comprehensive policy in societies receiving immigrants to prevent xenophobia must be based on preventing xenophobic practices in a preventive and proactive manner, rather than waiting for violations to occur and then working to develop solutions or address them. This can be achieved, from the point of view of Maat, by working to establish an early warning system in the areas where migrants live in communities receiving migrants as this proactive approach can reduce xenophobic practices.

Maat also sees the need for strategic frameworks that ensure the integration of immigrants into host societies so that people of foreign origin can have equal access to good job opportunities, education, vocational training, health care and other basic services, in addition to ensuring their dignity, respect for their human rights, freedom from discrimination and democratic participation.

Regarding the ministries and public bodies that should participate in the design, implementation and evaluation of these policies, Maat sees the necessity of following a participatory approach and forming intersectoral committees that cooperate with the public bodies concerned with statistics in order to collect accurate data regarding immigrant communities, in addition to the specialized national councils, especially the independent national human rights councils that are rated **“A”** by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions, in addition to the need for civil society organizations to participate in both the design and evaluation process in order to ensure objective results.

**What follow-up mechanisms should be put in place? Who are the stakeholders that should have a role in these mechanisms? (Question 4)**

The follow-up mechanisms adopted to monitor hate speech trends should be shared between different stakeholders in member states and may include, but not limited to, government institutions concerned with xenophobia issues, such as the Ministry of Immigration in different countries, along with national human rights institutions and specialized national councils in general, in addition to Civil society organizations, especially human rights organizations, and there is an opportunity to involve the private sector in this process, as a large number of migrants and refugees work in the private sector, and are at risk of hate speech and xenophobia during the course of work or while trying to obtain a suitable job.

**What is the role of the media, both public and private, including digital, to prevent xenophobia and build a cohesive society? Please provide good practices on information initiatives for a responsible approach to migration (Question 6)**

Both public and private media, including online media platforms, have critical roles in preventing hate speech and building cohesive communities, as stereotypes and bias-based reporting in the media can have an impact on population perceptions of a specific population[[5]](#footnote-5). Hence, the media are actors in preventing xenophobia. When the media portrays immigrants negatively, using inaccurate information and misleading stereotypes, it can contribute to creating an atmosphere of hostility and prejudice. Conversely, the media can contribute to preventing xenophobia when they present a balanced and context-appropriate picture of immigrants and other groups at risk of xenophobia[[6]](#footnote-6).

Regarding good practices related to media initiatives, we noticed a group of initiatives. Such as The Campji project, which represents a good tool for portraying the lives of refugees in Lebanon, which is a type of what is known as citizen media, within the framework of the project, young people produce video reports that are published on social media[[7]](#footnote-7). Maat also noted that there is a campaign to protect immigrant families, which is a campaign that works to promote, protect, and defend access to health care, nutrition programs, public services, and economic support for immigrants and their families at the local, state, and federal levels[[8]](#footnote-8).

Tunisia also attached importance to organizing a group of workshops and training courses on immigration for journalists. A number of international organizations, non-governmental organizations and associations provided training courses that included theoretical and practical sessions.[[9]](#footnote-9) Maat agrees with the views calling for ethical media coverage of immigrant issues in order to eliminate stigma, xenophobia and racism.[[10]](#footnote-10) Maat also noted the participation of the International Federation of Journalists in preparing what is known as the Ethical Charter for Media Coverage of Migration, which was drafted by journalists from Africa, America, Asia, and Europe, representatives of the International Federation of Journalists, and representatives of other journalistic organizations. The Code, stemming from the Global Code of Ethics in Journalism, proposes six ethical principles that apply to media coverage of migration[[11]](#footnote-11). In the end, Maat believes that there is a need to involve immigrants in preparing and implementing responsible initiatives towards immigrants in the media.

**How can anti-xenophobia policies be formulated within child and youth welfare policies? And within policies for the elderly? (Question 8)**

Most member states are taking steps and measures to adopt national strategies and public policies related to the care of children, youth, and the elderly. Here, Maat believes that these strategies should include sub-goals to prevent xenophobia, especially against youth and children, in countries receiving immigrants and in countries of transit as well. Also, the specialized national councils in these countries, such as the councils concerned with childhood, youth, and the elderly, should play an awareness-raising role in order to combat xenophobia. Specifically with regard to children and the elderly, Maat believes that care providers for children and the elderly in social care homes, orphanages and nursing homes should be made aware of policies against racism and xenophobia. However, Maat has concerns about the absence of these policies in some countries, including the United States of America[[12]](#footnote-12) and in Canada. Maat noted that caregivers target children and youth of African descent in reports submitted to institutions for investigation[[13]](#footnote-13). Maat has seen reports that without anti-racism education and accountability, the sector will continue to contribute to the overrepresentation of Black and Indigenous families being investigated and separated by child welfare agencies.

**How can xenophobia in education be addressed, in order to a) eliminate xenophobia in schools, b) prevent xenophobia in the medium and long term, through educational practices and materials directed at building inclusive and cohesive societies? (Question 7)**

**Maat believes that xenophobia in the field of education can be addressed through a set of measures:**

1. **Including the fight against hate speech** in national strategies for education, whether university or pre-university. This step would be reflected in the curricula of the various countries that begin to implement this path of rejecting xenophobia.
2. **Literacy eradication:** It is estimated that there are about 733 illiterate people in the world, and treating cases of literacy can lead to reducing xenophobia. For example, there is evidence that people who have received little formal education are particularly inclined to adopt xenophobic nationalism[[14]](#footnote-14).
3. **National legislation:** Education-related legislation should explicitly prohibit hate speech and xenophobia in everything related to the educational process.
4. **Building teachers’ capabilities:** Teachers should be at the forefront of the educational process[[15]](#footnote-15) who have the ability to educate students about the dangers of xenophobia. Therefore, qualifying teachers and raising their capabilities may lead to transferring this knowledge to students.
5. **Increase cooperation between educational institutions and civil society organizations:** There is a need to increase cooperation between educational institutions and civil society in order to adopt educational programs that work to educate students in schools, educational staff, and faculty members about the positives of diversity and inclusion.[[16]](#footnote-16)

**What standards should be added to those already in place to prevent, eliminate and prosecute hate speech, including through digital technologies? (Question 10)**

Maat association believes that there is a need to add additional standards to prevent hate speech and hold accountable people who engage in such behavior, through cooperation between specialized national councils, such as national human rights councils and institutions, and the Public Prosecution. Maat sees the need to establish technical mechanisms that rely on the Internet for reporting. Through it, victims of hate speech can report the practices they are exposed to, and then refer these crimes for investigation and judgment. This should be in parallel with educating people about the use of the Internet and how to report the crimes they are exposed to.

**What practices should states promote at the bilateral and regional level to prevent and eliminate xenophobia? (Question 14)**

Maat believes that there is a set of practices that countries must promote in different paths, and from the point of view of Maat, at the bilateral level, strategic partnership agreements between countries must include some explicit text on the need to respect migrants in the host and receiving countries. At the regional level, regional organizations should place among the agenda items the promotion of positive practices that lead to addressing and reducing hate speech. Regional organizations such as the European Union, the League of Arab States and other regional organizations must take additional steps to adopt agreements related to preventing xenophobia and respecting their status in countries receiving immigrants.

1. Racism, xenophobia & intolerance, Available at the following link, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/topic/racism-xenophobia-intolerance> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Racism, xenophobia and discrimination, <https://tinyurl.com/24fxwrdy> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, <https://www.un.org/WCAR/durban.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. GUIDANCE ON RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA How UNHCR can address and respond to situations of racism and xenophobia affecting persons under its mandate, page 15, <https://tinyurl.com/2u8kan9e> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Racism, Xenophobia and the Media Towards respect and understanding of all religions and cultures, Page 29, <https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/153-euromed_en.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Available at the following link: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Migration/LeafletPublicPerceptions.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Knowing what really is going on - How media projects are changing the daily life of refugee camps, <https://akademie.dw.com/en/knowing-what-really-is-going-on-how-media-projects-are-changing-the-daily-life-of-refugee-camps/a-52466770> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Support the Movement! Become a Member! <https://nnirr.org/get-involved/campaigns-and-initiatives/> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Representing migration in the media, <https://cfi.fr/en/dossier/representing-migration-media> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Migrants Day: Towards ethical media coverage of migration, <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/migrants-day-towards-ethical-media-coverage-of-migration> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Navigating Racism in the Child Welfare System, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48663461> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Racism and Bias in Reporting to Child Welfare, <https://tinyurl.com/mtpx7anj> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. PUBLIC EDUCATION TO COMBAT XENOPHOBIA: AN EXAMINATION OF THE ROLE OF THE PRINT MEDIA, Page 3, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/development/sites/bartlett/files/migrated-files/wp117_0.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Addressing Xenophobia with Culturally Responsive Schools, <https://sharemylesson.com/blog/addressing-xenophobia-culturally-responsive-schools>

    [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Column: Combatting xenophobia through education, <https://lanthorn.com/93057/opinion/column/column-combatting-xenophobia-through-education/> [↑](#footnote-ref-16)