

CHANGING CULTURES

Impressions of the UWE Conference 2017 in Graz

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Welkom: "het klooster was nog nooit zo mooi".

The annual conference of the University Women of Europe took place from 24 to 27 August 2017. The Austrian host organisation, the Verband der Akademikerinnen Österreich (VAÖ), celebrated her 95th anniversary at the same time. The conference took place in Graz, in the Franciscan monastery which dates back to the 12th century. We were welcomed by Elisabeth Györfy, President of the VAÖ, Edith Lommerse, President of UWE, by Geeta Desai, President of GWI via video and by the head of the monastery, Father Josef, who noted that it was historically unique that now in this men's monastery the women are in the majority and that "the monastery has never been so beautiful"!



Edith Lommerse

Elisabeth Györfy

Vader Josef

Friday morning, we were treated with two interesting keynote lectures and in the afternoon, we could attend a workshop.



Helga Konrad

Migrant/refugee women on the radar: “trapped in lower jobs – double loss of skills”.

Helga Konrad is an Austrian Social Democrat politician, she is a former Minister for women's affairs, and said that since the 1970s, the number of refugees has doubled and the variety has also increased. Quantitatively, it is about 4% of the population worldwide, in that sense the problem is limited. Traditionally, it is mainly men, but lately the number of female migrants / refugees has increased.

The female dimension of migration has not yet been addressed. Female refugees are more often unemployed and are paid much less (30 to 40%). Often they land up doing only domestic jobs. There is also a higher risk of violence. Prostitution and human trafficking are more frequent. The number of women under the poverty line is much higher than that of men. Women have much lesser free time and that restricts their ability to develop further. Female refugees are often exploited.

Immigration legislation has become much stricter after 9/11, and there is much more emphasis on security and counter-terrorism. A reorientation is necessary. Traffickers make use of the lack of social and legal measures. They benefit from the demand for cheap labor and sexual exploitation. Women who experience this are deported instead of getting temporary protection. Economic growth that includes everyone is necessary. Protection of these women must be seen as an investment. Migration of women is usually not related to lack of education or skills. Many Philippine women have a (university) education but work in Dirty, Dangerous and Demeaning jobs (3D jobs). Women often have poorer jobs in the informal sector. They are often not organized. The information provided for these women should be greatly improved. The economic contribution of refugees should be made visible.



Bernadette Zsoldos

Refugee integration in Austria: reflections on values and social cohesion

Bernadette Zsoldos, Head of refugee integration department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said that Austria has long been an immigrant country. Each year about 65,000 immigrants arrive, currently mainly from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. Mostly men, but recently, the number of women has increased. This is mainly due to family immigration.

Language, education, labor market and values are the fundamental issues of integration. The level of education is different, 1/3 of Afghanistan has hardly any education. Depending on the above factors, integration takes up to 1 to 20 years.



Adaptation of a culture requires (a lot of) time. Dialogue about all kinds of matters is important, e.g. also on Austrian history. Many refugees are afraid of freedom of religion, they do not know what this means. Most also do not know that they can call the police if they are in danger. Refugees are very grateful if they can talk about these matters. This is especially true for women. Most female refugees come from traditional areas, have not had any education, etc. It is important to make clear that shaking hands when getting acquainted, even for entry into the labor market is customary. Research shows that women serve as an engine for innovation, they adapt easier! There must be more special courses for women. Women then get the chance to talk freely. Also, about basic questions, e.g. how many children you want, the freedom to decide about your own body. Learn the language, learn about the country, that's very important, according to Zsoldos. The second generation is also very important as a focus point. We need to focus on women. Migration leads to change. We must recognize that. We need to provide them with information and assistance in the integration process and for example (free) language courses. Interaction and dialogue are very important. Integration is not a risk. There must be an active debate on values, addressing fundamental issues, and we must realize that migration is also a dangerous process, especially for women

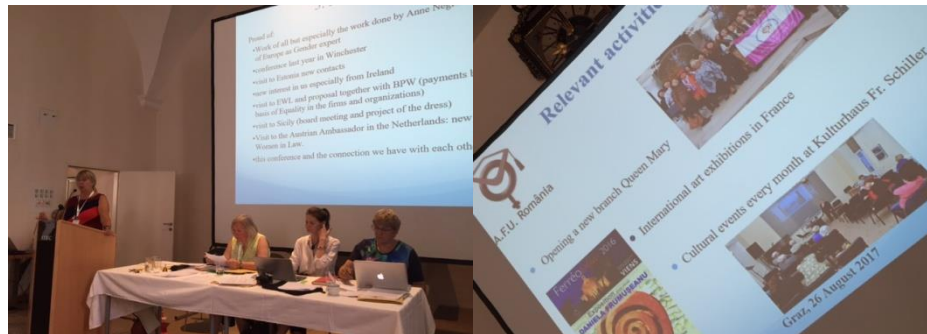
Workshops –On the importance of engaging in dialogue and on the dialogue with refugees

In one of the workshops, a few Syrian refugees report on how they perceive the issues. They indicate that they did not come here to occupy the country, we are only here because we are in fleeing. We want to integrate, but we need time and opportunities to improve us. We cannot do that alone, we do not know the laws, nor the social life of our adoptive country. Especially the language is a problem. Most refugees just want to work and / or graduate. It's not easy to work here. The role of the media on refugees (poor, dirt, not well trained, misconduct) is also not always very positive. Not all refugees are the same. We need time. Treat people equal!

Karin Oppeland explained how the integration process since 9/11 in Rotterdam has been implemented by holding dialogue meetings, where all kinds of nationalities talked to each other sitting around tables (the so-called table dialogues). For 15 years, this project is being supported by the municipality, also financially. It is very successful and is now also taking place in about 100 other cities in the Netherlands during the year.

Roswitha Müller and Ursula Hauszer gave a sketch of the Austrian local approach in Graz. The Peace Office and the Integration Office together took the initiative for 'Integration Local'. Often social activities like cooking and dancing help a lot. Then there is no language barrier. There is no need to speak a lot. A joint meeting place can help constructive solutions.

UWE Annual General Meeting 2017 – highlights



The affiliated associations present themselves and give an overview of their main activities. The VAÖ has an annual "Rose of Appreciation" with a scholarship of L'Oréal for young researchers. Finland is continuing the Let's read together project for female refugees. France organizes the "Olympe de la Parole" annually, a debate contest for young people, Ireland has a similar initiative. Italy has organized a large project on women's voting rights, the Netherlands (GWI-NL) organized meetings on women and violence, and women's role in peacekeeping process and conflict resolution. The twinning project with Hong Kong is also announced.

The Board of UWE outlines the main lobbying activities in Europe of the past year, the most important of which was the submission of the collective complaint on equal pay to the Council of Europe under the European Social Charter. Further substantiation of this complaint is an important spearhead this autumn.

The constitution of the UWE is amended. The relationship with the GWI remains, but a national federation or association can now also only be a member of the UWE. This change in the constitution gives Finland, Italy and Sweden an opportunity to join UWE. Iceland and Israel have also indicated an interest in joining.

Finally, new vice presidents (two) were chosen: Aisha Alshawaf of the British Federation of Women Graduates and Foti Giuseppina of the Federazione Italiana Laureate and Diplomat Istituti Superiori.



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en alle Nederlandse deelnemers