



## 18<sup>th</sup> GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF CCME, 16-19 June 2011

Friday, 17 June 2011

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### **Witness and future perspectives**

#### **Ministry among migrants during crisis: Experiences of churches and future perspectives**

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In time of crisis, we need to think about our investment, where we put our best forces. The crisis is not only a question of the present time, but is also a question about our future, and about our capacity to recognize changes. During the last days, in Silverstone there was the celebration of a cars race, in those races the designers, engineers and cars industries put their best know-how about the materials forward, they test them and probe their efficiency for the design of our future cars. Speaking about human beings, we need to test in time of crisis to put our best in human rights, respect and dignity, to probe the efficiency of our values and principles. In the next future all these investments go directly to our society and the social network growth and take forces with the best of us.

Actually we need to be extremely careful about the human rights for poor people, we cannot cut fundamental rights and specially for migrants and asylum seekers, the space of international protection is more and more restricted, inaccessible and suspicious. The human mobility it not being determined by consideration of international responsibility, solidarity and protection, but the refuge is being influenced for the security priorities, and borders control. That mean we give priorities that we will have to pay expensively in the next future.

### **1. Crisis effects**

Until last May I was general secretary of a Spanish NGO specialized in refugees and asylum seekers; we work also with the vulnerable people of migration. The first effects we experienced was unemployment, in Spain between migrants is 10% more that for the rest of the population, and that mean many people whose integration itineraries was successful, now come again to us after years during which we did not see them in our services. Secondly our teams became unable to respond to the needs of people seeking work and new projects of life after the sufferance of persecution. The time of work with those people and their families, becomes long and difficult, and we need to fair face to new psychological effects and problems with less and less resources. Third, for the organisations itself, the budget changes mean many professional

teams have been broken, good professionals left the organisation, less regional presence for many organisations, and an overload of work for those who rest inside, in a very bad climate of frustration and indignation.

This combination of factors for many people means an increase of vulnerability; the most affected were not the newcomers, but those who had made a big investment in the way to seek asylum or their migratory project. People were also easily victims of abuse and exploitation.

The migration decrease not only for the effects of borders control, but linked to the saturation of family networks. During the period 2000 to 2007, half a million of people arrived in Spain each year; in 2008 the figure went to 400.000 people, 100.000 in 2009 and 6.000 in 2010 (CIDOB).

I want also to make reference to a collateral effect, is the Return Directive, approved 2008 as part of the Pact for Asylum and Immigration, and one of the most regressive actions in European migration policy. Not many people were using their supposed positive effects, but many suffer the increase of detention periods, and criminalisation of migrant people in social opinion. Only 10.000 people in Spain used the possibility of assisted return (out of 100.000 people who were possible candidates), many others went by their own forces, because they cannot renounce to their rights, obtained with big efforts and sacrifice.

Over the last ten years, Spain was made a strong and good work in integration with the leadership of the Strategic Plan of Citizenship and Immigration 2007 – 2010 (PECI), in this decade more than 3 million foreign people came to Spain and despite the prejudices and negative reactions, their contribution was very positive for our society and economy:

- Migration contributed to Spanish economy in 60%, 1,2 points of GDP growth in last ten years.
- Direct contribution of migration to employment is near 15%
- The recuperation of the crisis could be delayed by one year without the migration economic activity.

(Ideas Foundation, report on Migration 2010)

- Labour market was positively influenced by complementarities between foreign workers and nationals (CEAR White Book on labour market 2009) and integration of Spanish women in the labour market was supported by domestic work of migrants.

Many of those benefits and contributions go back to a second place by the populist use of migration control, and the PECI itself lost the leadership in the Spanish migration policy. Integration is one of the victims of crisis, and the bad management of public opinion.

## 2. Churches action in Spain

For a 2009 rapport of Caritas and FOESSA Foundation, research examined the situation of the same families twice, in 2007 and 2009: 36'1% of this population group go from a situation of being integrated to being affected by several exclusion situation. Fragility and risk of exclusion have grown dangerously for all the population, and especially for migrant people, together with young people and women.

Christian churches have experienced a strong call to action, and were forced to develop and reinforce the social services the population and needs go to duplicate in the last four years. Only in Caritas they work with 370.251 people yearly in 2007 and 788.811 in 2009. The basic needs became the priority of our social action, and community developments go back in our priorities.

Between migrant people the financial problems to have a house became a big question when they lost one of the salaries in the families. Many people lost their houses, their money, and came back to their countries of origin in debt with the banks. The support to those situations is an example of new needs of support from the social services of churches.

A particular situation was for the orthodox churches, historically in Spain there are two orthodox churches, from Romanian and Greek patriarchates. One of the migration effects was the growing and diversification of orthodox churches. Their members are in a big diaspora, and the impact of economic crisis is a strong difficulty for those churches. In many of them half of their members are unemployed. The solidarity and common support is a big challenge for those communities, and for ecumenical networks.

Evangelical churches have grown in the last years through Latin-American migration, that mean they are also strongly affected in their membership by the crisis. Many churches have developed new social services, the demand was increased in documents renewal and also in psychological support.

The big needs are food, housing and work. The churches' social network is also affected by the problem of social services of the administration, which are not prepared for the increase and extension of those needs. People have problems of liquidity, long time unemployed and public services are not prepared and without resources to react in this situation.

Two last aspects are very important in our action that needs to be very clear from churches in relationship with justice and migration policy. Social budget restrictions take care of unemployed, old people and handicapped persons. Migration however was not among the priorities.

The first of these actions in Spain was an ecumenical work in law changes, in particular lobbying political parties in the new and restrictive developments of foreigners' law, which adapt our system to the European directives and Constitutional Court requirements of fundamental rights of association, meeting and education in 2010. This work was fundamental even if we are not happy with our success. Lately, the work of Ministry of Work and Migration on rules is different and better.

Secondly is a question of our ideological position. Asylum in Europe, in words of Professor Javier de Lucas is going to be a "zombie concept" (following a similar reflection of Ulrich Beck about European citizenship). A dead concept with living appearance, empty of content if we see the decrease of it in the statistics. The European common system of asylum, and the common migration policy born in Tampere 1999, the basic principles of 2004 are now part of our dreams. We need urgently to change the orientation of both common policies from the control to the protection priority.

### **3. Dangers**

I want to underline some dangers from the consequences of this situation and the management of this crisis.

Social Cohesion has suffered a heavy impact with reinforcing bad reactions in face to the other people's rights: racism and xenophobic reactions are on the increase and several rapports call us to be proactive in those aspects. Discrimination and management of diversity are very important questions today. Integration and public services are red lines of the European social model.

Irregular migrants and all "combat" against irregular migration mean now at many borders of Europe a dehumanized policy, Detention Centers, deadly borders, and fortress Europe are the new black side of the security fears, where human fundamental rights have not the honour place. It's urgent to put the human beings in the first place that is now a struggle of resistance. The Convention for Migrant Workers 1990 is a challenge (see UNHC Human Rights). Recently the European Court for Human Rights declares that the irregular situation of migrant people cannot be considered a crime, the fact that we need to arrive at this point is a worrying sign.

One of the big dangers is the consolidation of schizophrenic labour market with a different treatment for different people. There are temporary contracts and lowest salary for a part of the society, and permanent contracts and best salary for other part. Young people, women and migrant people are not in the best side of this social Darwinism.

#### 4. Future

A positive sign is the participation of FEPS (Suisse Protestant Federation) in monitoring forced return of irregular migrant people. After of long work of defence of human rights and the credibility of their social an ethic action, FEPS became active in mediation for the observance of fundamental rights.

This role, is for us a historic task, in cooperation with civil society, the present democratic deficit, as 15M movement in Spain claim, take as one of the victims those fundamental human rights. Churches are needed to cooperate in the leadership of new forms of social engagement.

We have good instruments, CEAS (Common European Asylum System), despite our criticism, is a good thing for changes towards a Europe better involved in favour of refugees. UNHCR has underlined how important is the application of European directives with exigent criteria is, as the example of their last rapport on the asylum procedure directive shows. We need to be involved in the evolution of CEAS as churches and part of our civil society, in favour of good use of those good instruments, and creation of a political will for more protection.