



What's new for MIAMSI at the Council of Europe ?

As the plenary session of the Conference of International Non-Governmental Organizations scheduled for 20 – 24 April, 2020 was cancelled, two days of a videoconference webinar were scheduled for 22 – 23 June.

In addition to the migration and refugee issue, three other topics were chosen:

- **Let's build a better future together. Enhance participatory democracy and civil society in building the post-Corona world.**
- **Migrants and refugees under Covid-19 - what lessons are there for the post-pandemic age ?**
- **What lessons can be learned from Covid-19 for education and the digital age ?**
- **How to reduce inequalities and poverty throughout the coming economic and ecological transitions ?**

To listen to these webinars and access the speakers' documents :

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/ingo/june-2020>

MIAMSI - Europe representatives shared their attendance and/or participation in these four online meetings.

I - Let's build a better future together. Enhancing participatory democracy and civil society in building the post-Corona world

During the crisis caused by Covid-19, governments have taken **strict measures limiting civil rights**. During the lockdown period democratic society has experienced a **decline**. What proposals will NGOs put forward on the changes needed in our societies for more equality, equity and inclusion ?

One of the objectives of this meeting was to **strengthen the role of NGOs in order to rebuild public policies, institutions and societies**. Another objective was to **safeguard freedoms** when security promises are pouring in. NGO contributions have been varied: World Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption, European Young Lawyers Association, European Council of Doctoral Researchers, Federation of Catholic Family Associations, Conference of European Churches, European Muslim Initiative for Social Cohesion, World Girl Guides and Girl Scouts Association ...

II - Migrants and refugees under Covid-19-what lessons for the post-pandemic age ?

SOS Méditerranée was one of the INGOs invited to testify to its actions. It proposed four key verbs: **save, protect, assist** and **testify**.

Protection requires **respect for rights**, in particular human rights, as set out in the European Convention on Human Rights or in the European Social Charter.

Democracy and the rule of law are the guarantors of **respect for people's dignity** regardless of their gender, age, origin or health situation.

The Covid crisis has shown how quickly situations can deteriorate and affect the most vulnerable, including migrants and refugees; isolation, using lockdown, suspending support, banning visits, etc. are concrete examples. Women and children, people with disabilities or the marginalized (e.g. for their sexual orientation), stateless people, are the first victims.

There must therefore be **solidarity**! In this perspective all **collaboration** between institutions and Civil Society is welcome.

It is by *getting involved* that we can *promote* this consideration of people in a migration and refugee situation; without neglecting a pragmatic approach.

It is by *working together* that we can *build* a Europe that respects the rights of everyone, especially the most vulnerable ! The task is enormous but well worth it !

From the moderator's conclusion

III - What lessons can be learned from Covid-19 for education and the digital age ?

The webinar was divided into 5 half-hour discussion sessions - some excerpts:

1) **"Data reliability and hate speech"**

Is the disturbing trend of hate speech and fake news an opportunity for leaders to limit freedom of expression ?

2) **"Is the current health crisis, with its heavy toll on human lives and social change, likely to destroy civil liberties? "**

As a result, is it important to ensure that measures are taken to guarantee individuals' rights? so that processing sensitive data corresponds to the legitimate purpose for which the information is sought ?

3) **"The right to online connection as a fundamental right."**

The current crisis highlights the growing gap between digital "haves" and "have-nots."

4) **"Gender equality."**

To end perpetuation of gender inequality in schools and remedy it in society at large, it can be argued that initiatives to promote gender equality in and through schools are imperative.

It is clear that the media have an important role to play in educating society.

5) **"The education industry: between democratization and content control."**

How can we guarantee the quality of online education? How far will learners be empowered, how will critical awareness develop, values be handed down and democratic citizens be formed ? Will it just be mass broadcasting of "knowledge" on networks controlled by GAFA?

IV - How to reduce inequalities and poverty throughout the coming economic and ecological transitions?

The Covid 19 pandemic **has exposed inequalities in our societies**. Even if some answers have been provided, much remains to be done.

1) What is happening and what needs to happen to **build a more just society** after this pandemic, especially for all groups that are more affected by inequality ?

2) What must be put in place so that, in future pandemics and other crises, the most vulnerable in our communities are protected and cared for ?

Several avenues were mentioned:

- Implementing the principles that already exist in agreements ([Oviedo agreement](#) on protecting the **dignity** and **identity** of all human beings)
- inter-state **cooperation** must improve
- reminder of **rights and responsibilities**
- **respect** for fundamental rights (the most difficult thing)
- the role of the European social rights committee which is already challenging governments (**European social charter**)
- the need for this charter to be ratified by more and more countries

Other information

- ✓ Reform of the Council of Europe INGO Conference is underway and will no doubt be passed during the October 2020 session. It is an important act for civil society and its representation in the various Council of Europe bodies !
- ✓ The document “ [Towards a more inclusive society](#) ” from the meeting of the Catholic INGO World Forum in Rome in December 2019 has been sent to the Council of Europe’s Secretary General, the Human Rights Commissioner and the Special Representative for Migration and Refugees. It is a document jointly produced by a hundred INGOs, including MIAMSI.
- ✓ **Human ecology: An ecumenical appeal for Europe**
Following the first European Ecumenical Gathering in Basel "Justice, Peace and the Safeguarding of Creation" in 1989, Pax Christi -France organized several interfaith meetings at Klingenthal on the topics of water, air, earth, forest and biodiversity. In 1995 the Klingenthal Appeal was launched in response to the challenges of safeguarding the planet. On the eve of COP 21, the publication of Pope Francis’s *Laudato Si* letter in 2015 caused a great sensation. 25 years after the Klingenthal Appeal and 5 years after *Laudato Si*, this study day is to take a forward-looking view at the issues arising today.

From notes taken by members of the local Strasbourg team

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