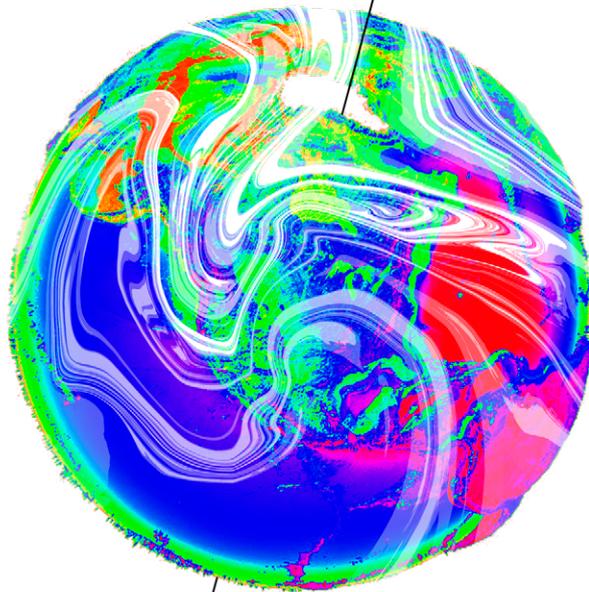


ECOSOC

Economic
and Social Council

Expert's report



C-MIMUN 2018

Global awareness
of the tragedies of
irregular migrants in the
Mediterranean basin,
with specific emphasis on
Syrian asylum seekers .

Introduction

The present-day irregular migration in the Mediterranean basin constitutes the greatest humanitarian issue of the century. It has been referred to as the new 'Great Migration of Peoples', the culmination of long-lasting unequal power relationships between the Global South and Europe¹ and sometimes even as 'The Decline of the West' that was predicted one hundred years ago; but, whatever it might be called, it is an unprecedented catastrophe in terms of human lives, welfare and social stability. The violent conflict in Syria and some other non-European Mediterranean countries has uprooted thousands of people, forcing them to flee the land they had inhabited for centuries, escaping from military violence and economic malaise and staking their lives for that purpose. This year the number of sea arrivals has been estimated as more than 141,000, whereas the number of deaths is close to 2,800². Although these indicators are considerably lower than they were last year³, there are actually no grounds for optimism. The problem of Mediterranean irregular migrants is connected with a whole chain of tragic events, and for the time being is extremely far from being solved.

Numerous debates on this matter have already been held; numerous strategies, approaches and programs have been discussed and launched. But the problem of overcoming the kind of "dispersion" of different wills, both political and non-political ones, remains. The need for the

unified understanding and assessment of the issue and its key aspects has never been acuter; high-quality and reliable information is also vital for reaching the consensus. To that end, the international community needs to unite the efforts of all its members: states, international, regional, and local organizations, non-state actors viz. volunteer organizations, media institutions, communities and social groups to exchange their views, share their knowledge and provide each other help and support with a view to developing a universal approach.

1 Ifeoluwa Kolade. *Swimming Against The Tides: Examining the EU Response to Irregular Migration through the Mediterranean Sea* // Geneva International Center for Justice. P. 1. URL: http://www.gicj.org/articlespictures/GICJ_Report_on_Migration_Crisis.pdf

2 Mediterranean situation // Operational Portal. Refugee situations. URL: <http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean>

3 *Ibid.*

Chapter 1. Background information

THE GENERAL NOTION OF GLOBAL AWARENESS

Although there is no unanimity in defining the notion of global awareness – neither on doctrinal, nor on legal and official level, – some general elements of this concept can still be distinguished. It is pretty clear that the emergence of this term in the global political and social discourse is tightly linked to the globalization trends. Accordingly global awareness, first of all, requires the ability to think about the world as a single place⁴; in other words, systemic thinking of all global trends and events and being well informed about global topics. Five elements are usually distinguished within the concept of global awareness. The first one consists of universal values and cultural practices. The second element includes global mutual relationships in relation to the study of four main interactive global systems, namely economic, political, ecological and technological. The third element represents two paramount issues of modern world: peace and development. As for the fourth one, it encompasses the understanding of the backgrounds and past patterns, e.g. global history and geography. The last one shapes alternative future trends in world events⁵.

The concept of global awareness is closely connected with the one of 'global

⁴ Robert P. Clark. *Global Awareness: Thinking Systematically about the World*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2002. P. 36.

⁵ Snezana Stavreva Veselinovska, Milena Gokik, Marjan Veselinovski. *Awakening of the global awareness // Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences 15 (2011) 1214–1219*. URL: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Snezana_Stavreva_Veselinovska/publication/233728861_Awakening_of_the_global_awareness/links/0912f50ad3283efbfa000000.pdf?origin=publication_list

citizenship'; actually, the former is regarded as a fundamental early stage of the latter. In other words, global citizenship also encompasses the outward manifestations of global awareness, i.e. taking actions out of concern for the planet and humanity. Accordingly a 'global citizen' is a person who not only complies with the existing global standards, but also takes an active part in addressing global issues. It has been claimed in various resolutions of UN bodies that civil society should play an active part in dealing with the burning issues of modern world.

With that said, it is necessary to outline the aspects which need to be discussed within this particular discourse. The main emphasis is going to be put on the structures of civil society and their response to the migrant crisis (ss. media coverage, volunteering activities in the field of refugee crisis etc.), but problems connected with the understanding of the tragedy at the governmental level (etc. the rise of xenophobia in political rhetoric and action) can neither be bypassed.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The historically formed important mission and unique historical fate of the Mediterranean region cannot be bypassed within this section. What is quite important, this region is a meeting point of three major religions viz. Christianity, Judaism and Islam, and thus it has always been a hotbed of contradictions. By now these contradictions have become even acuter; furthermore, it is claimed, often justifiably, that the Mediterranean is one of the main victims of the present-day world order, the focal point for global policy-makers, pursuing their interest and partaking in the deconstruction of such states as Syria and Libya, thus causing an immense influx of irregular migrants.

As far as the issue of such migrants itself is concerned, unexpected as it may seem, taking the protection of them as a humanitarian responsibility is not solely linked to the creation of the UN and adopting various legal instruments on this matter; it dates back to

several thousand years ago. Some references to assisting people fleeing military actions can be found in the texts created 3,500 years ago, at the time of Babylonian, Assyrian and Egyptian empires⁶ (all of them – and this fact should not be underestimated – encompassed this or that part of the Mediterranean region). However, at those times and long after that, due to the non-global world order, there were no unified standards for providing protection and humanitarian help for refugees and asylum seekers. It was only in the 20th century when the aforementioned concept began to shape, subsequently to World War I, as well as its preliminaries and aftermath.

At the beginning of the 20th century Europe was engulfed in war. The statistics speaks for itself: by the year 1917 the number of refugees caused by the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913 reached approximately 800,000. With the establishment of the League of Nations, the global awareness of the responsibility to provide succor for forced migrants started to emerge. The League of Nations defined refugees by categories, specifically in relation to their country of origin. Dr. Fridtjof Nansen was elected the first High Commissioner for Russian refugees in 1921; subsequently, as the refugee issue broadened, his original mandate was extended to Armenian, Assyrian, Assyro-Chaldean, and Turkish refugees. Up until 1950, there were various international institutions created with a view to addressing the problem of refugees, including the Nansen International Office for Refugees. However, throughout its period of activity, it was overwhelmed with numerous problems vs. lack of proper financing, decline of the League's prestige, the abrupt rise in the number of refugees (including those from such of the Mediterranean region as Italy and Spain), economic depression which hindered employment opportunities

⁶ *The sea route to Europe: The Mediterranean passage in the age of refugees. The UN Refugee Agency, 1 July 2015. URL: <http://www.unhcr.org/5592bd059.pdf>*

for refugees, and, last but not least, the reluctance of Member States to back the League's activities on behalf of the people who were previously their citizens. In 1938, the Office was dissolved⁷; as it is known, the League of Nations failed. However, the establishment of the UN was a sign of the beginning of a new era in international protection of refugees. On 15 November 1946, International Refugee Organization (IRO) was established, the last office to precede UNHCR. It was a supranational agency, the main duty of which was to resettle refugees and displaced persons (all on all it dealt with 1,049 refugees). However, it was certainly beyond the office's capability to fulfill its original plan of solving the problem of refugees by 1950. As this unlikelihood became evident, in 1946 the ECOSOC requested that the Secretary-General should "undertake a study of the existing situation in regard to the protection of stateless persons by the issuance of necessary documents and other measures". With the help of the Secretary-General's consultations, in 1949 the ECOSOC issued *A Study on Statelessness*, a key document regarding international protection of refugees, examining various aspects of the "status of stateless person"⁸ which were later used in the 1951 Convention⁹ (v.i.). Moreover, it provided a comprehensive historical review of institutions of internal protection and of international legal instruments, which is essential for the development of global awareness (v.s.). Apart from that, the need for an independent organ that would bridge the gap in the sphere of protecting refugees was underlined; the ECOSOC

⁷ *Nansen International Office for Refugees – History. URL: https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1938/nansen-history.html*

⁸ *UN Doc. E/1112, of 1 February 1949, and E/1112/Add.1, of 19 May 1949.*

⁹ *Gilbert Jaeger. On the history of the international protection of refugees. IRRC September 2001 Vol. 83 N^o 843. URL: https://www.icrc.org/ara/assets/files/other/727_738_jaeger.pdf*

was given a recommendation to “recognize the necessity of providing at appropriate time permanent international machinery for ensuring the protection of stateless persons”. It was supposed that the body envisaged in these recommendations would “render them [i.e. to stateless persons] certain services which the authorities of a country of origin render to their nationals resident abroad”. And thus on 14 December 1950, the Statute of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was adopted by the UN General Assembly.

In the context of migrants in general (not specifically refugees), the brief history of IOM is worth being described. It was first known as the Provisional Intergovernmental Committee for the Movement of Migrants from Europe (PICMME) and started its activity in 1951. The reasons for its emerging are quite similar to those of the creation of UNHCR: chaos and displacement following the Second World War, particularly in the Western Europe. In 1952, its scope was broadened to the whole Europe; in 1980, it became as we know it today, and got its today’s name. From an operational logistics agency, it became the leading international agency in addressing migration-related issues¹⁰.

¹⁰ IOM History // International Organization for Migration. URL: <https://www.iom.int/iom-history>

Chapter 2. Achievements and developments

KEY LEGAL INSTRUMENTS REGARDING THE ISSUE

The profound knowledge of the legal aspects of the issue, viz. the status of migrants, the international standards of their protection is obviously an integral component of awareness in the discussed topic, taken at its state (governmental) level. Moreover, it is in the legal instruments where the universal human values as applied to this particular matter, serving as a kind of *jus naturale*, are formalized. In the field of determining the status of migrants, the cornerstone role is played by the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, signed and ratified by all EU members. As mentioned above, many of its provisions were anticipated by the ECOSOC’s Study; there are also some derivations from the pre-war conventions governing the same topic¹¹, and especially the Convention of 1933. It was in this document when the non-refoulement principle was enshrined (before that it existed solely within international customary law). This principle, also set out in Article 33 of the 1951 Convention, means the obligation of States not to expel, return or refoule refugees to territories where their life or freedom would be threatened. ‘Refoulement’ may include any measure undertaken by the State which could have an effect of returning an asylum-seeker or refugee to the frontiers of territories where his or her life or freedom would be threatened, e.g. rejection at the frontier, interception and indirect refoulement. The principle of non-refoulement is also laid out in the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; it is vital to note that in this particular document, namely Article 3(1), this guarantee is spread over all types of irregular migrants, not specifically over refugees. But, still, the scope of the 1951

¹¹ Gilbert Jaeger. *Op. cit.*

Convention is confined to those already determined as “refugees”, and therefore a proper framework for the legal status of irregular migrants has not been created yet. It is somehow provided in the 1990 International Convention on Protection of the Rights of All Migrants Workers, but its scope is strictly limited. Accordingly the lacuna is distinct here; therefore, it is a fortiori necessary for the state governments to increase their awareness and act in compliance to the aforementioned jus naturale as applied to this particular issue, as well as the general acts concerning human rights, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Within this context, Articles 5 and 14 of the UDHR are particularly important: the former protects everyone from inhuman or degrading treatment, the latter provides everyone the right to seek and enjoy asylum from persecution in other countries. The former right is also enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 7). For the reason that this agenda has a lot to do with the EU, mention should be made of its legislation (the so-called ‘communitarian law’) as well, and, first of all, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (CFR), where the right to seek asylum is enshrined (Article 18 CFR) and the collective expulsion of aliens is prohibited (Article 19(1) CFR). What’s more, the principle of non-refoulement is enshrined in this act as well.

Within the legal aspect of the problem, it must be clear for the international community that the mere adoption legal instruments filling the lacuna would not guarantee the solution to the problem; even the already existing acts are often hard to implement. The whole body of international law now faces the problem of non-compliance; accordingly of utmost necessity is the raising of legal awareness, as an integral part of global awareness (v.s.), whereas the adoption of new papers must be seen as just a formal stage, surely not as an aim in itself.

THE ROLE OF IOM AND UNHCR IN PROMOTING AWARENESS

IOM and UNHCR now play a crucial role in raising public awareness of the issues faced by migrants and refugees in particular all over the world. Having its regional offices practically all over the Mediterranean countries, IOM is an agency with the main purpose of ensuring the integration of migrants into society and dealing with the xenophobic tensions. To that end, it holds various social awareness campaigns; it also conducts intensive data collection and analysis, with a view to providing national governments and other stakeholders with solid information base. Its activity in the field of promoting awareness includes a) multimedia campaigns on the risks and perils of irregular migration, e.g. migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings, and available alternatives of irregular migration; b) providing the information about migration push factors; c) awareness-raising in the migrant’s rights and obligations during the migration process, as well as the services available to them; d) providing the migrants with the information about their employment opportunities. To that end, IOM acts in coordination with local and international partners. Furthermore, the agency has always stressed the importance of such campaigns being accompanied by profound analysis of their impact and the ways in which information circulates among migrants.

However, there are still issues that need to be addressed. First of all, the existing data shows that large numbers of migrants continue to take on perilous journeys across the sea despite being aware of the dangers related to such migration. Besides, irregular migrants are in most cases totally unaware of both judicial and non-judicial rights protection mechanisms operating in the host country, including appeal systems. Last but not least, the potential of the indispensable tools that IOM possesses (viz. Migrant Resource and Response Mechanisms (MRRMs) and Migrant Service Centers

(MSCs)¹² has not been fully used yet.

As far as the UNHCR is concerned, despite its name suggesting a narrower scope of action, its functions are quite similar to those of IOM; moreover, it has been officially stated by the UNHCR that persons who may not be granted the status of refugees under the 1951 Convention nevertheless fall under the UNHCR's wider competence. Similarly to IOM, the UNHCR raises awareness of the dangers of smuggling and trafficking and legal means of protection with a view to empowering the forced migrants to take informed decision about their lives. Furthermore, it develops special systems for monitoring social media and other online platforms in order to deal with the spread of false information; in addition, it distributes the relevant information itself, using such means as leaflets, posters, individual counseling etc. By means of its awareness-raising campaigns the UNHCR encourages people at all ages to participate actively in combating SGBV (sexual and gender-based violence).

Further, the efforts of UNHCR are aimed at the national governments: it raises their awareness of international law obligations, advocates for the development for alternatives to detention and responds to the incidents of refoulement. All in all, there is a wide range of institutions the UNHCR cooperates with: national authorities, civil society, and local communities; to that end, they share information and develop jointly agreed screening mechanisms.

Although not all of the numerous functions of IOM and the UNHCR have been fully performed yet, the directions have been distinctly set by now, and the whole issue is constituted by turning the plans and programs into deeds.

12 *Addressing Complex Migration Flows in the Mediterranean: IOM Response Plan. June 2015. P. 3. URL: https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/addressing_complex_migration_flows_in_the_mediterranean_-_iom_response_plan.pdf*

PUTTING THE ISSUE ON THE AGENDA

The year 2015 turned out to be the peak of the migration crisis. It was in June that year when the first report solely devoted to the topic of the tragedies of boat migrants was issued. Francois Crépeau, the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, submitted his report to the UN Human Rights Council on June 15, 2015, where he criticized the EU for the lack of cohesive policy towards migrants and the protection of their human rights¹³. It is this circumstance, in the Rapporteur's opinion, that entailed unfavorable consequences for the migrants. "The suffering of so many and the tendency of migration to take place clandestinely is a symptom of systemic failings within the European Union border management system", is claimed in the report. Further, the report deplores the extensive use of detention as a form of border control¹⁴, and this provision of the document is still relevant (v.i.); it was reasonably claimed that lingering periods of detention enfeeble the migrants who are originally eager to start working; consequently, a considerable damage to the local economy is caused.

The report was highly praised by the members and observers of the Human Right Council; however, up to now there has been little progress made in the directions delineated in this document.

During that year, there followed the statements of developing countries such as Algeria that one of the ways to stem migration flows was improving socio-economic conditions of the Global South; several other states suggested that the root causes of migration should be addressed¹⁵. It is essential to understand that the migration problem should not be considered

13 *Ifeoluwa Kolade. Op. cit. P. 14.*

14 *A/HRC/29/36. Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, François Crépeau (2015). III. C. 1. 41–44.*

15 *Ifeoluwa Kolade. Op. cit. P. 15.*

in isolation from other burning issues viz. conflict prevention, development, security etc., many of them, according to the current Secretary-General's opinion, arise due to the lack of trust between major policy-makers.

THE UN RESPONSE TO THE MIGRATION CRISIS

According to the definition given above, the general strategy of addressing an issue may be considered a vivid manifestation of global awareness on this issue. Despite the active involvement of the European community in developing a strategic response to the Mediterranean crisis, within the UN system there has been not enough emphasis on this particular matter yet. There have only been general resolutions and measures that can be applied to the discussed issue, or those addressing solely the situation in Syria. For instance, in February 2016, the UN, together with the UK, Germany, Kuwait and Norway, co-hosted The Supporting Syria and the Region Conference, which not only contributed to promoting awareness on Syrian problem, but also provided real help for the refugees from Syria and nearby countries, pledging overall \$12 billion (a record amount) – \$6 billion for 2016 and the other half of the sum for 2017–2020. In March of the same year, UNHCR convened a ministerial-level meeting aimed at promoting global responsibility-sharing through pathways for admission of Syrian asylum seekers. During the meeting, various mechanisms viz. resettlement, private sponsorship programs, special humanitarian visas, and so forth were explored. But what should be regarded as the most important outcome of the year in terms of the migration problem is the 2016 Syria Response Plan. However, many of the humanitarian measures proposed in this document are still being hindered by the ongoing violent conflict and continued disagreement among the major powers, which obstruct resolving the crisis by means

of the Security Council's mechanisms¹⁶. Further UN events of the same year had much more to do with the global dimensions of refugee crisis rather than specifically the issue of the Mediterranean. In 2017, however, there was more interest to the problem of this region within the UN: it raised alarm on migrant deaths in the basin and made efforts, particular through its Organization for Migration, to calculate the death toll effectively and coordinate the measures taken by the civil society institutions and the coast guards; in May 2017 alone, several thousand migrants were rescued. However, soon after that it was claimed by the UN agencies that there was high likelihood of the increase in the number of deaths due to shipwrecks, as smugglers were putting more and more people on boats¹⁷.

It is necessary to point out that numerous challenges, which are going to be discussed in the next section, remain, and what aggravates the situation is that the general and comprehensive approach to the Mediterranean topic in particular has so far been developed in none of the resolutions of the UN bodies, except for some of the Security Council's documents, namely Resolution 2240 (2015) and Resolution 2312 (2016), both authorizing Member States to intercept vessels suspected of being used for migrant smuggling and human trafficking off the coast of Libya¹⁸. The ECOSOC has adopted a resolution on this matter as well, namely E/RES/2015/23,

¹⁶ *Humanitarian Implementation Plan (HIP). Syrian crisis. 02/10/2015. URL: http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/funding/decisions/2015/HIPs/syria_en.pdf*

¹⁷ *United Nations News Centre – Mediterranean. URL: https://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=56716#.We9nO1VI_IU*

¹⁸ *Adopting Resolution 2312 (2016), Security Council Extends Authorization to Intercept Vessels Suspected of Illegal Smuggling from Libya. URL: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2016/sc12543.doc.htm>*

devoted to the implementation of the UN Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons; it contained several clauses related to the issue of global awareness of the problems of migration (for instance, it welcomed observation of the World Day against Trafficking in Persons on the part of various actors), but there was no word of the Mediterranean basin. To sum it up, as mentioned above, the discussed issue it still lacking a comprehensive approach of the UN, and that was reasonably claimed by representatives of different countries during the Security Council's meetings devoted to the problem of Libyan migrants.

Chapter 3. Current state of affairs

THE RISE OF XENOPHOBIA

As mentioned above, universal human values and cultural practices, including tolerance, solidarity, respect for ethnic and cultural diversity take the first place in the list of the components of global awareness. It goes without saying that promoting global awareness means, first of all, implementing these principles at both the social and governmental levels.

The manifestations of xenophobia in the media sphere have always been briefly described. Taken on a larger scale, it includes a) racist speeches given at the political level, b) racist attacks against migrants, barriers in the labor market, and c) ethnic profiling and discriminatory policing of migrants, including harsh treatment and indifference for their living conditions. As for the attacks, it was reported that 75 racist incidents targeting migrants and refugees occurred in Greece in 2015, which is 60 per cent higher than during the previous year¹⁹. Although within this agenda the emphasis should be put on tragic events mostly, one should not bypass the issues of the discrimination of migrants in terms of employment as the lack of proper qualification, knowledge of the language of the host country's language, as well as restrictions linked to migration status lead to an employment gap between migrants and locals, and so in many countries irregular migrants fall victims to exploitation, which naturally entails deplorable consequences. As far as the third manifestation of the expats' discrimination is concerned, one should mention the situation in Italy where people of certain African nationalities, e.g. Nigerians, are

19 Racism plays a key role in migrants' exclusion and violations of rights in the European Union // ENAR. URL: <http://www.enar-eu.org/Racism-plays-a-key-role-in-migrants-exclusion-and-violations-of-rights-in-the>

systematically hindered from claiming asylum in hotspots. In such Mediterranean countries as France and Spain, Muslim migrants are increasingly reported to the police or undergo excess police checks due to alleged 'suspicious behavior'²⁰. But all the afore-listed challenges do not even constitute the half of the menace to irregular migrants. The main hazard comes from the Europe's complete indifference to the conditions irregular migrants are living in. In one of his statements, the current UN High Commissioner said that although a lot is being done in the area of saving lives in the Mediterranean Sea, the national governments pay no attention to those who survive the perilous journey²¹. Moreover, the EU has now proposed several initiatives aimed at refugees by means of the armed forces of African states and sending them back to the countries they had fled²², particularly in case of Libya²³. In February 2017, Italy signed a deal with the Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA), thus promising to provide the forces fighting with human traffickers with all needed help, including training and financing; since then,

20 ENAR. *Op. cit.*

21 UN human rights chief attacks Europe's 'chilling indifference' to refugees as 2017 sees record deaths // *The Independent*. 8 March 2017. URL: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/refugee-crisis-migrants-asylum-seekers-latest-un-zeid-hussein-human-rights-chilling-indifference-a7619301.html>

22 EU holds conference to set up detention camps for migrants in Libya // *The Herald*. August 30, 2017. URL: <http://www.herald.co.zw/eu-holds-conference-to-set-up-detention-camps-for-migrants-in-libya/>

23 EU plans to keep migrants in Libya would trap thousands in 'catastrophic conditions', Germany warns // *The Independent*. 4 May 2017. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/refugee-crisis-migrants-libya-italy-europe-mediterranean-sea-eu-libya-deal-detention-camps-torture-a7718346.html>

Italy has invested loads of money in these anti-smuggling initiatives, but by doing this, it helped Libyan agencies e.g. its coastguard which are actually known for abusing expats and exposing them to tortures. Another example of the European countries' disregard for international legal principles (non-refoulement and right for asylum – v.s.) and lack of awareness *sensu lato* is the EU-Turkey agreement according to which people fleeing from Turkey across the Aegean Sea to Greece must be sent back to Turkey, with an exemption of some vulnerable categories of migrants e.g. unaccompanied children. Such migrants are currently held in detention camps, waiting for the decision on their asylum applications (which is an extremely protracted process), and there have been reported numerous cases of them, including even small children, attempting suicide²⁴.

THE RESPONSE OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY AND ITS INVOLVEMENT IN PROMOTING AWARENESS

The role of civil society, apart from governments, it is considered crucial in many respects. While national authorities are primarily concerned about the legal side of irregular migration, civil society groups, organizations, and individuals provide asylum seekers various kinds of assistance - medical support, food, clothing, accommodation, legal aid and political support. Initiatives and projects supporting migrants are being launched every day changing the course of their living and challenging xenophobic and racist ideas.

However, one should not underestimate the efforts of those who commit themselves to rescue persons along the shores, specifically

24 Child refugees attempting suicide amid increasing desperation among thousands of trapped migrants in Greece // *The Independent*. 16 March 2017. URL: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/refugee-crisis-eu-turkey-deal-year-results-latest-child-suicide-attempts-self-harm-drownings-a7631941.html>

in the Mediterranean. The involvement of such activists raised indirectly concerns of the UN Secretary General, who, in his report to the Security Council in 2016, outlined that further efforts must be undertaken by Member States in order “to strengthen dedicated search and rescue capabilities” and “to mitigate the impacts of smuggling and trafficking on seafarers, merchant shipping and trade”.²⁵

Participation of civil society groups has been taking place in many aspects of solving irregular migration problem. They cooperate with State authorities and international organizations in forensic investigations into unidentified bodies and missing persons, report to the media about human rights violations or achievements in the sphere, take actions to encourage other members of society to engage in assisting persons in distress at sea or providing them with WASH [Water, Sanitation, Hygiene]. Promotion of migrants’ rights, and specifically irregular migrants’ rights, are mainly conducted by NGOs. In the framework of NGOs (such as Emergency Response Centre International (ERCI) or Global Refugee Center (GCR)) volunteers work in search-and-rescue teams helping to bring migrants to shore. Various activist groups collect data and document information on current state of affairs including deaths of migrants at sea. There are numerous reasons why it is important to keep such an account. For one, this information would enable us to appreciate the extent of migrant mortality in the Mediterranean. Furthermore, knowledge of when, where and how migrants die is important to determine the factors contributing to these deaths, so that further incidents may be prevented through changes

in policy or practices.²⁶ These reasons once again highlight the role of civil society in raising awareness since a lack of reliable data may hinder success in the issue.

One particular example of how civil society may participate in addressing the issue of irregular migration is UNITED’s²⁷ List of Deaths which is now one of the most comprehensive set of data on fatalities which occur during the attempt to cross a southern EU external border in the Mediterranean Sea as well as deaths in detention centers, those who die as homeless people, the victims of racist attacks in Europe, those who lose their lives crossing borders within the EU (UNITED for Intercultural Actions, or UNITED, is an Amsterdam-based international non-governmental organization).

One of the vital points concerning the matter is to establish and support co-operational channels between civil society groups and authorities. In general, public institutions do not partner directly with civil society organizations to respond to migration. However, this does happen indirectly, through some multilateral agencies, such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UNHCR²⁸. And yet, this does not imply that every irregular immigrant can easily fall back on organizations within civil society.

25 S/2016/766. Report of the Secretary General pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2240 (2015).VII.P.59.

26 Thomas Spijkerboer. *Border Policies and Sovereignty. Human Rights and the Right to Life of Irregular Migrants. Chapter 3. Tracking the Deaths in the Mediterranean.*

27 UNITED for Intercultural Action [European network against nationalism, racism, fascism and in support of migrants and refugees] — N.

28 Briefing. 2012. Responses to Irregular Migration in Morocco. URL: http://www.ippr.org/files/images/media/files/publication/2012/07/irregular-migration-morocco_July2012_9369.pdf

MEDIA COVERAGE

It seems self-evident that the ‘fourth estate’ now plays a crucial role in spreading the information all over the world and thus takes an active part in promoting awareness, affecting greatly the global understanding of the migrant crisis. It is through mass media that the general image of irregular migrants is created, and the gravity of the situation is described.

This aspect of the discussed problem may be explored on the example of three countries, each of which represents one of the three main migratory routes (v.s.) and serves as a major destination for the irregular migrants. These are Spain, Italy and Greece.

Spain. Up to the heat of the Mediterranean migrant crisis, the idea of ‘invasion’ and ‘avalanche’ was predominant within the context of depicting migrants in Spanish media²⁹. A lot of emphasis was being put on the criminal activities that migrants, especially from Morocco, were involved in, namely drug dealing, violence, gang crime and so forth. The media was constantly warning of the diseases or inappropriate cultural traditions that the migrants were bringing into the country; migrants were usually portrayed as marginalized elements of the society; as a kind of psychological trick, the migrants were always showed from a high angle on photographs, whereas the officers of rescue services and law enforcement agencies, who were dealing with the migrants, were always pictured from low angles, which made them look more impressive. The causes of the migration process were of no interest to most of the information agencies. Of course, there were some differences caused by ideological orientations, platforms of reporting and similar factors, but, still, the general tone used

29 *How does the media on both sides of the Mediterranean report on migration? EUROMED Migration, 2017. P. 59. URL: http://www.futura.news/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Media-and-Migration_27_April_2017_v2.pdf*

to be like it is described above. However, an immense shift in this area took place in after the image of the corpse of a three-year-old Syrian child Aylan Kurdi, on a Turkish beach, was widely published on 2 and 3 September 2015. The migrant-hostile media discourse changed towards a more humanistic and individualized approach; the reasons for these people fleeing from their homeland finally started being examined by mass media; the migrants themselves began to be portrayed as families, social groups or individuals with their own names and surnames rather than impersonal masses jostling in boats. The image of the migrants changed towards the one of the victims of a tragedy, particularly as far as Syrian and Iraqi asylum-seekers were concerned, instead of the outcasts of the society; there appeared numerous pleas to the whole Europe to deal with this tragedy. However, after the November 2015 Paris attacks and the case of sexual harassment of women in Cologne on New Year’s Eve, in which asylum-seekers allegedly participated, the trend started to change again, the rhetoric faced new changes (although it was claimed by Germany at official level that this cases should not be linked to the issue of irregular migration as a whole). The year 2016 was marked by the general shift of media attention towards the asylum seekers from Sub-Saharan countries³⁰ (although an eye was still being kept on Mediterranean migrants) and the diminution of the Spanish society’s empathy towards Mediterranean irregular migrants. At the end of 2016 and at the beginning of 2017, as the harsh conditions faced by the asylum seekers in countries like Greece and Serbia as a result of the spread of freezing weather became known, irregular migrants got into the spotlight again. At the moment different trends can be seen; Red Acoge, a federation of Spanish NGOs dealing with the problems of migrants and refugees, criticizes some news items and articles for being too alarmist and dramatic, whereas some of them confine the whole issue of Mediterranean migration to infographics

30 *EUROMED Migration. Op. cit. P. 60.*

and statistics; among other flaws, it listed referring to the migrants' nationality where it is not apposite, as well as creating confusion in the use of such legal terms as 'refugee', 'asylum seeker' and 'migrant'. Among other problems, some of them delineated by the journalists themselves, the insufficiency and low quality of the sources of information, the lack of transparency and support from the Spanish authorities, and pressure are often named. The economic crisis and inadequate payment (especially in the case of freelancers) pose significant challenges as well.

Italy. In contrast to Spain, in Italy the year 2016 was the one of the utmost media involvement in the context of the Mediterranean migration issue. The public, however, had become morally exhausted by the time the crisis had eased, with the reason being the massive media campaign of 2015 and 2016, pervaded by alarmism. Although tragic tone might be justifiable in some cases, in Italian media it was certainly beyond any limits; the readers claimed to have heard solely lamentable stories of "sunken ships and drowning babies" instead of reasonable explanations of the whole situation.

However, the example of Italy is very useful in the respect of the Charter of Rome, which is a comprehensive code of conduct for media workers. It was adopted after the UNHCR blamed some news reports issued by Italian media for xenophobic rhetoric, the fact which provoked heated debates on media coverage of refugee and migration issues. The code prescribes the journalists to "use appropriate language, stick to the facts", avoid spreading inaccurate information and using unreliable sources, "protect asylum seekers, refugees, or victims of trafficking and migrants who choose to speak with media by protecting their identity" and so forth. In order to monitor the implementation of the code, the Charter of Rome Observatory was created in cooperation with UNHCR. Having analyzed various media releases, the Observatory has drawn several important conclusions. First of all, there remain some articles issued by conservatively oriented media

institutions that are permeated with sarcastic and disdainful tone towards migrants and refugees, although they are not numerous. What matters more is the insignificance of the attention devoted by media to the theme of humanitarian corridors which is very relevant to the discussed topic. It was also underlined by the Observatory that the frequent use of such terms as "irregular" or "immigrants" gives birth to racial hatred and casts a shadow on refugees. More neutral terms viz. "clandestines", "refugees" and "migrants", as according to the research, cause less hostility in the public consciousness.

The common issue for media coverage in all European countries of the Mediterranean remains the necessity of giving voice to the opinions of migrants themselves; nonetheless, Italy has already got some developments in the area, namely two platforms which provide storytelling of migrants³¹.

Greece. First of all, mention should be made of the fact that there are two major 'wings' in Greek journalism: the first one is nationalist and willing to protect Greek culture from external threats, whereas the second one is more pro-European and outward-looking; these two blocks are in a state of persistent conflict.

The recent history of depicting irregular migrants in media in Greece is somewhat similar to that of Spain and may be divided into three periods. During the first period (January 2015 – August 2015), after an unprecedented flow of irregular migrants, Greek media reflected the stereotypes of the past, which were of racist character as the media was largely influenced by "Golden Dawn", a neo-Nazi party responsible for organizing various assaults against migrants. Complete disregard for the rights of the irregular migrants was spread through mass media; the migrants were regarded as a threat to the local economy, security, public health and cultural identity. However, under

³¹ *EUROMED Migration. Op. cit. P. 47–51.*

the influence of dramatic stories of refugees and pictures of drowned bodies, particularly the aforementioned picture of a dead Syrian boy, the rhetoric in the media changed for the more empathetic and far less racist one; thus, the second period (September 2015 – March 2016) began. Another factor contributing to his shift were the interviews given by the migrants themselves, in which they claimed that Greece was a transit country, not the final destination. Furthermore, soon it became known that the vast majority of migrants were of Syrian origin –that is, they were forced to flee their homes, saving themselves from military violence; so, at that time they were treated with solidarity and compassion.

During the third period (March 2016 – December 2016), the influx of migrants decreased significantly, with one of the reasons for that being the EU-Turkey deal. The tone of the media changed once again, towards a more migrant-hostile and intolerant one (even the deal was sometimes regarded as aimed at the dominance of Turkey in the field of regulating migration flows), and it has mostly remained the same by now. Still, the Greek media has shown its capacity for promoting awareness and awakening compassion, but it has become clear that as soon as unified social and political program lacks, the media may take the place of spreading xenophobia and arousing public fears and uncertainty over migration³².

AVAILABLE DATA ON MIGRANTS' DEATHS AND ITS QUALITY

Although some words about collecting the information for promoting global awareness in the area of migration and the role of UNITED in this process have already been said, it is now necessary to analyze the quality of the data it produces. First of all, one should not forget that the source for information UNITED uses is news media; Fortress Europe, an organization which provides another frequently referenced list of migrants' deaths,

³² *EUROMED Migration*.
Op. cit. P. 35–39.

uses the same source as the primary one, whereas civil society organization serve as its secondary source. Anyway, the fact that both of the two major databases rely on news media causes doubts about the veracity of the statistics they provide. First of all, not every relevant data can fall within the scope of journalists' attention, not every death may be considered significant and intriguing by them, which inevitably leads to underscoring; furthermore, their attention may differ from place to place, with some of the locations regarded as “border theatres” and therefore covered systematically, and others mostly neglected. Secondly, the details which are important for the media workers and those deemed important to social science or forensic investigation may neither overlap. For instance, precise information about the circumstances, cause and location of death is usually more important for academic research than for journalism. By the way, this explains the diversity of information provided by UNITED, Fortress Europe and other databases³³.

Furthermore, as has been figured out by academic research, in UNITED there are insufficient cases with comparable information to be able to draw conclusions about the causes and places of death. Cause of death as it is represented in the databases constitutes a separate issue: according to the statistics provided by them, deaths related to border control at land borders prevail upon the ones due to the control at sea, whereas it actually seems to be quite the opposite: most boat migrants appear to die of drowning, hypothermia and dehydration, and among the factors contributing to this risks of unauthorized travel, detection-avoidance tactics and lack of experience of migrants with the open sea should be named³⁴.

Apart from the statistics provided by civil society institutions, some official

³³ *Thomas Spijkerboer*.
Op. cit. P. 93–94.

³⁴ *Thomas Spijkerboer*.
Op. cit. P. 96.

figures are published; however, they are usually incomplete and scarce. In a word, the lack of reliable data constitutes another issue within the context of the discussed agenda; therefore, new methods for collecting accurate information need to be introduced and applied.

Conclusion

To sum it up, within the four aspects dwelled upon in this report several general tasks standing in front of the ECOSOC and the international community as a whole can be formulated. The first task is to raise the level of legal consciousness of national governments and non-state actors and, to that end, inculcate in them respect for human rights. Secondly, it is essential to establish direct partnership between civil society structures which are dealing with the challenges faced by irregular migrants, and national authorities. Thirdly, it is vital to combat xenophobia on every level and in every form and ensure social integration of those applying for asylum in Europe. Last but not least, it is necessary to decide what the new approaches to collecting data relevant to the migration issue should be like and how they are going to be used and contribute to the solution of the discussed problem.

Besides, one should not forget that within this particular agenda the point is not to invent new ways of dealing with the Mediterranean crisis itself. The aim is to create all necessary conditions for the fulfillment of plans and programs that have already been proposed through raising the international community's awareness of the crisis. The gradual and persistent fulfillment of the interim goals listed above will bring great progress in dealing with the greatest humanitarian crisis of modern world.

Annex

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE TOPIC:

Resolutions:

- A/RES/71/1. New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. URL: http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/71/1
- S/RES/2240 (2015) URL: <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/2240>
- S/RES/2312 (2016) URL: <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/2312>
- E/RES/2015/23 URL: <http://undocs.org/E/RES/2015/23>

Humanitarian Response Plan for Syrian Arab Republic URL: https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Syria/2016_hrp_syrian_arab_republic.pdf

In Safety and Dignity: Addressing Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants (A/70/59). Report of the Secretary-General. URL: http://refugeesmigrants.un.org/sites/default/files/in_safety_and_dignity_-_addressing_large_movements_of_refugees_and_migrants.pdf

OTHER USEFUL MATERIAL:

The changing face of the Mediterranean migrant crisis // The Local. 5 May 2017. URL: <https://www.thelocal.it/20170505/the-changing-face-of-the-mediterranean-migrant-crisis>

Migrant Crisis in the Mediterranean: What You Need to Know // RAND URL: <https://www.rand.org/blog/rand-review/2017/05/migrant-crisis-in-the-mediterranean-what-you-need-to.html>

Barlai M., Fähnrich B., Griessler C., Rhomberg M. (2017). "The Migrant Crisis: European Perspectives and National Discourses", LIT Verlag, 2017.

Lopes Andrade, S.A. (2016). "Mediterranean Migrant Crisis: Lessons and New Challenges", Mediterranean Reports, Vol. 7, July 9.