Working Group on Policy Making

Berlin, 18th - 20th of March 2019

1. Introduction

Under the banner of 'A World of Neighbors', the Church of Sweden is seeking to strengthen and envision the work of religious communities – as receiving communities – with refugees and migrants, and to enhance the interreligious infrastructure of Europe in service to the journeys and aspirations of 'people on the move'. As a result of over 150 site visits this past year to receiving communities, their affiliated humanitarian organizations, and partners in the broader civil society in nine countries, a variety of critical challenges and promising opportunities have emerged. Drawing on what has been learned, seven working groups will be convened during the years 2019-2020 to strategize about how to enhance and further this crucial work, on topics such as: strengthening receiving communities, refugee and migrant policy, the role of youth, the role of practitioners, social cohesion, media and narratives, and a vision for Europe.

Reflections and recommendations from these working groups will form the basis for a European strategy to be drafted at a pre-summit early 2020. This strategy will then be presented to a wider European audience of political religious leaders at a summit, called by the Archbishop Antje Jackélen in February of 2021, associated with receiving communities somewhere in Europe. The Church of Sweden is committed to cultivating the evolving network of communities and practitioners growing out of the initiative process, and supporting the efforts and partnerships associated with the strategy emerging out of the 2021 summit.

The working group in Berlin convened between the 18th and 20th of March 2019 focused on policy-making through the lens of religious communities as

receiving communities. These three days aimed at providing ways of encouragement and involvement of those who are most affected by the policies, but too often are not at the decision table. The working group was meant as a way for affiliated humanitarian organizations, and their partners in the broader civil society, to communicate their problems, needs and observations. The following goals were used to organize discussions:

- To consider the policy dimension to the work of receiving communities on with refugees, migrants, and other displaced persons in Europe.
- To consider methodologies for addressing policy through advocacy (direct), and social norms and participatory democracy (indirect) approaches.
- To mobilize the interreligious movement, in conjunction with other civil society actors, in fostering more effective and humane policy, at local, national, and European-wide levels.
- To shape the work and strategy of the 'World of Neighbors" initiative, and to enlist receiving communities into collaborative partnerships towards impacting policy in constructive ways.

The following report gathers the most important inputs provided by the participants coming from a number of organizations involved in advocacy on migration issues at local, regional, national and European levels. Full list of participants, and presentation of the work of invited guests, is available in the Appendix 1.

2. Migration – A Policy-Making Challenge

"A World of Neighbors" project comes out of the conviction that migration is one of the most important challenges for policy-making in the beginning of the 21st century. The recent migration wave proved to be highly demanding for European governments, civil society, local receiving communities, churches and, of course, migrants themselves. Only in 2015 there were 65.3 million displaced people: 21.3 million out of that were refugees, 40.8 million were internally displaced and 3.2 million were asylum seekers. The cost to

provide basic humanitarian aid (shelter, food, medical care, education for children) is equal to 12 billion dollars a year and is currently not fully funded. Until 2050 these figures will be even higher, considering, among others, climate refugees.

The question is – what is considered basic? In Malta, there are many people awaiting relocation, who are offered what is described as basic – food and shelter. There is no medical attention or education for children. And still, in many cases Malta is better than Italy.

Francesco Sciotto

In Sweden the government asked the Church of Sweden to help with the initial reception, and 75% of its congregations opened their doors to refugees, helping them in their first steps in this new situation. To this day many of these congregations try to accompany people who arrived. Similar stories can be found all throughout Europe, and the impact of such work was previously studied in this project, resulting in a report entitled "A time of encounter".

These experiences exposed a number of problems that must be taken care of, as prerequisites for the advocacy to instigate a lasting and positive change. They may be classified under the following categories:

- Lack of political will among politicians at local, regional, state and European levels, as well as in wider population;
- The growing presence of aggressive narratives, fake news, and mediatization of migration;
- Mounting legal and organizational difficulties;
- Lack of participatory structures and representation;
- Problems with evaluating effects of current and past work.

2.1. Lack of political will

One of the largest problems raised by the participants concerned the rapidly worsening political situation. Since the increased migration wave the context of advocacy changed significantly – in 2015 and 2016 the governments and politicians were actively seeking support from the civil society and churches to tackle all kinds of issues with regard to migration. The advocacy processes were much more flexible and it was much easier to get to those who were responsible for introducing and implementing policies on different levels. After that, however, the

They think of us as doers and not thinkers. I find it quite offensive.

Aniko Bakonyi

collaborations dried out. The willingness to listen and cooperate evaporated, turning in extreme cases into hostility.

To add to that, migration became the subject which can be easily turned into political currency and where support of more conservative electorate may be gained. It became the arena of political contests, where legislation is seen not as a tool for improving the situation on the ground, but as a political weapon. New, more and more restrictive laws are introduced with a high frequency to revive the issue, too often to properly consider its consequences and adapt the situation on the ground, making the job of humanitarian agencies increasingly hard.

All in all, there is little political support at the current point in time to resolve migration issues in a humane way. This is also because there is no political benefit in helping migrants – they do not have political rights, and thereby they cannot vote. They do not have any place at the decision table, which is why they are left out of the discussions.

2.2. Aggressive narratives, fake news, and mediatization of migration

Another big problem concerns narratives that are shaped around migration and migrants. People on the move are vilified and used as political scapegoats, which is, in some cases, supported or even promoted by the governments. Any cases in support of this direction are blown out of proportion by the media and the whole issue is presented through the lense of negative aspects. Fake news are spread around and people working for migrants are being put on lists that circulate in far-right wing environments. Finally, there is high level of Eurocentrism, which presents migration as a European crisis, while diminishing or disregarding completely extra-European context. At the same time, the positive narratives are absent both in traditional and social media.

To be sure, there is a refugee crisis, but it is not in Europe.

And for sure there is a European crisis, but it is not about refugees.

One of the reasons why this happens is the fact, that most Europeans never encounter migrants face to face. Fieldwork conducted by German Caritas showed that people will indicate that migration is a problem if they are specifically asked about it. But they will also often admit, that it does not come from their personal experience, but rather from what they read or saw

in media. What they acknowledge as their personally biggest problem is loneliness. Although people live together as a society, they lack encounters with each other. There is a stark problem with social cohesion, that needs to be tackled as part of the solution.

This finds confirmation in the example of most extreme narratives – Hungary. One of the historically lowest levels of xenophobia was observed in the same year, in which the highest number of migrants entered Budapest and stayed at the train station. It was one of the only occasions were a significant number of Hungarians was able to enter into contact with refugees and migrants, and when they were able to individually help them. The xenophobia rates began to systematically rise in the following years, as less and less migrants entered the country.

While religious communities played the key role in helping out with the migration wave, they are also absent from the narratives. As, in public perception, churches are still seen in some places as impartial enough to organize meetings that others would not be able to and negotiate between the sides, they should be more involved in the policy-making processes, and their role should be underlined, to strengthen their appearance as agents of change and improvement.

2.3.   Legal and organizational difficulties

The political problems and the rapidly changing legal frameworks, with the significant impact of the so called "Dublin Regulation", introduced impediments to welcoming people on the move at every possible level. People are being put in a legal and practical limbo, with no certainty of how their future will be shaped. The system is radically unfair, and the political case for changing it is very difficult.

Because of the relocation programs and/or hardships resulting from policies, many of the migrants I encounter do not want to stay in Italy. This is a struggle for me in my pastoral work – how can I offer them help, if they neither plan nor want to stay in my parish?

Francesco Sciotto

There is a significant problem with the right to work for migrants, and subsequent legislative acts on different levels diminish the number of migrants entitled to legal employment. For example, until recently Italy had two types of visas for asylum seekers – international and humanitarian. The new visa legislation got rid from the latter, leaving a significant number of

people without the valid right to work. In most cases this will not mean that they will stop working and leave, but that they will be working in the black market for the fraction of their former salary.

There are also organizational problems. For example, it is hard for migrants to find housing, which is often required for improvement in their residence status. The negative narratives discourage people from renting out their properties, and there is not enough municipal housing and funding to offer it in the form of state support. At the same time, there is a risk in non-governmental support – whenever it is introduced, there is a risk, that it will be presented as satisfactory, and the governmental funding will be diminished or pulled altogether. This applies to other types of organizational struggles as well.

2.4.   Participatory structures and representation

Another problem raised by the participants pointed to the fact, that migrant voices are absent from the discussions that concern them the most. They highlighted the need for participatory structures that could allow them to voice their needs and concerns, and get involved in the decision-making processes that will affect their status. However, the current efforts at creating such bodies proved challenging and were rarely successful. It was often hard to find someone able to devote their energy and time into such efforts, and there was no proper funding or organizational support offered to such bodies.

There was also a danger in separate organizations for people on the move, which, among others, affected willingness of migrants to take part in them. They could have an alienating effect, strengthening the narration of the two opposing sides – that of the locals, the "nation", and outsiders, "foreigners". It had a potential of establishing a parallel system of representation and participation.

Thus, some of the working group participants proposed another solution – creation of common bodies and opening up the existing organizations to include salaried positions to migrants and refugees. Others proposed that there should be both self-representation which could tackle issues specific to people on the move, and cooperation on all

Large majority of Europeans living in the EU for three generations do not know anything about policy-making. Why do we expect migrants to know that?

Torsten Moritz

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other issues. All agreed, that mixing bodies should be inclusive enough to avoid tokenism.

Participants also propose that participatory, or representative structures, should also be created for receiving communities. They should be able to have their say on things that apply to them, and their concerns and fears should be addressed. It should not be left to the populist parties to listen to their problems. Such structures would also help pick proper representation on a more centralized level, as at the moment there are not that many representative bodies on European level. Usually, for the purpose of EU meetings, Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox leaders are picked according to specific rules, while representatives of other religious communities are handpicked.

Participatory structures and representative organizations are needed also for another reason. Nearly all of the working group participants were members of centralized structures or central administrative organs of larger institutions. Because of that, they were an advocacy link between the grassroot level work and centralized policy-making. This, however, meant, that they had to listen closely to what happens on the ground, and many of them voiced concerns that they heard too often, too little, too late.

2.5. Evaluation problems

There was finally problem with proper evaluation of the existing programs. Currently, there is a lot of focus on direct migration, but there is rarely any follow up on what happens afterwards, concerning issues such as education, healthcare or different kinds of abuse. This should be treated separately from bringing people to the decision table, but could offer insight into how help should be administered and how it could be improved. It could also provide a way to understand how migrants can be empowered, among others, with regards to what kind of knowledge they are lacking, or what kind of information is not provided to them by the authorities.

These efforts, however, remained problematic, as it was hard to receive funding for such evaluation programs, and even harder to gather honest responses from former participants. There were also methodological challenges

The further you are from the arrival; the less attention is given to the migrants. It did not yet become part of the advocacy projects.

Lea-Friederike Neubert

concerning evaluative tools that were not necessarily adapted to the context of migration. It was also often the case that there was an evaluative conflict between the governments and civil society. The former are usually interested in the number of people "out of the system", usually in the form of deportation, while the latter want to know more about the quality of life and the efficiency of their aid programs.

3. Advocacy projects: where, to and with whom?

Advocacy strategies usually rely on the sources on the ground, and organizations have to prioritize which of the sources they listen to primarily. For example, the International Office of the World Council of Churches (WCC) prioritizes projects that are proposed to them by their constituencies, i.e. local churches. Additionally, WCC identifies natural allies and counterparts who are usefully engaged in the processes of discernment. These include, among others, the Catholic Church, constituencies from outside of their membership, UNICEF, UNHCR, UN Women and many others.

If there are issues directly resisted by our constituencies, our possibilities of action are limited. But if issues come from the outside, they can be useful catalysts to reflect upon specific issues.

Peter Prove

The initiative sources condition heavily the speed and accuracy of the undertaken action, as well as the extent to which the situation is oriented to what happens on the ground. In the case of WCC, it depends heavily on how engaged and active are local churches. In many cases such reliance proves to be very effective – WCC is informed on particular issues well ahead of media and is able to act nearly immediately. On other occasions, however, the response may be totally reactive to what is presented in media.

Diaconia Germany has a different approach. Together with other care organizations it has established a network of representatives regarding different care sectors. Twice a year, they gather policy-concerns which are later collected in advocacy papers. If the network agrees on specific issues, it begins advocacy process on them. The strength of that body is that it can only pass decisions unanimously, and when it does, the voice of the social care is unified, which can be very impactful in the advocacy process. This, however, also has its drawbacks, as there are some issues, which are regularly vetoed by one or the other of the organizations, and there is no work done on that.

International Organization for Migration's (IOM) constituencies include states, and therefore they are the primary initiators of IOM's advocacy projects. This provides multiplicity of perspectives, but also its own challenges. While the states provide initiative for their work, their own advocacy always takes into account migrants' humanity and their human rights: As they work also on the ground, they are well aware of the changing context and situation, and constantly adapt to these requirements.

Central Council of Muslims (CCM) cooperates with local mosques and coordinators of local projects, e.g. mentoring initiatives, which are involved quite directly with the needs of migrants. In 2015 – 2016 these needs were reaching them rather quickly, but since then, similarly to the political support, the cooperation with local organizations slowed down.

In 2015, in Frankfurt, the refugee trains arrived at the central station where, for 4 – 6 months, people on the move were only managed by the Muslim community, before the local government created department in the city to deal with this situation. After that, instead of integrating the existing structures and involving those who were already helping, they created separate structure, and offering a very paternalistic approach.

Said Barkan

CCM cooperates also with churches, who offer their help in tackling all kinds of problems. Additionally, they join their forces in advocacy projects, to strengthen their impact on the politics and focus advocacy efforts in a specific direction. However, the generation of impact is increasingly harder, especially since 2018, which seems to have been the turning point for migration issues in Germany. Even if CCM has a fresh and vivid picture of what happens on the ground, there is no one on the other side to listen.

The Hungarian Helsinki Committee (HHC) has a network of lawyers spanning throughout the entire country. They are also in direct contact with the people who are affected by policy-making efforts in the area of migration, which allows them to do a regular assessment of their needs and requirements.

However, it is extremely problematic for HHC to reach politicians. While at one point, HHC was an important part of the policy-making process, and they had a place at the decision table, this is no longer the case. At the local, regional and state levels, there is a very low willingness to work with them, and they are actively targeted by the government as foreign agents. They advocacy matters however, on a wider, European level, through which they try to affect what happens in their country.

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) depends on the cooperation of people coming from very different countries, and therefore having very different priorities. For some, like Spain, where worker unions have been involved in initiatives to offer the rights to work, vote, healthcare or family reunification to migrants for a long time, issues of social justice and migration are crucial, while for others, more economic focus takes primary position.

The Diaconia Valdese (CSD), despite historical differences and animosities, cooperates currently with the Catholic Church on a number of issues. They join their forces to fight against hate, human right abuse and many other problems. They also cooperate with Caritas and Oxfam. Thanks to these cooperations they are able to influence the negative narratives surrounding migration, establish humanitarian corridors, as well as have an impact on the Italian government. They are also able to quickly recognize problems thanks to their wide social apparatus, such as crimes on Italian/French border.

4. Advocacy rationales

4.1. Convincing rationales

Part of successful advocacy consists of the right choice of rationale – they have to be adequately adapted to the context and audience of the policy-making processes, and usually require skill in combining multiple types of arguments in a multi-disciplinary and holistic way. Nonetheless, as the participants of the working group indicated, some of them are used more often, while others are used more sparingly. Simultaneously, however, some kinds of rationale are hesitantly used, and even evaded, to avoid unwanted consequences and/or narratives.

The most significant rationale, shared by nearly all speakers, was that of human rights. Basing one's argumentation on the rules established in international law seemed to hold high value, and have an impact on policy-makers, even in the time of what was presented as "the refugee crisis". Afterwards it allowed to keep governments in check, even those, like Hungarian, who have taken the most anti-migration-oriented direction.

There are, however, challenges mounting on this line of argumentation. In a longer presentation (see Appendix 2), Peter Prove argued that in his work as

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director of International Office at WCC, he observed a gradual problematization of the international law. Unlike national law, which has specific mechanisms of check and balances that enforce it, international law must coincide with the political will of the countries that are subjected to it. Without the support in moral and political demand international law becomes very thin, and, over time, it becomes accompanied by a growing disillusionment. With enough electorate support international law can be easily rejected by those who would rather not adhere to it, as was the case in e.g. Brexit. The international law requires more alignment and more organic connection, having moral and religious arguments supporting it.

These remarks found confirmation in the experience of other participants. For example, Bernward Ostrop from German Caritas pointed out that, while on a legal level the rules of human rights remained stable in the last 10 years, the political discourse around them changed significantly. Although legally they are as strong as they were, they stopped being most effective politically in many cases. That is why, in his advocacy, he usually grounds human rights in a wider vision for Europe and European values.

The vision for Europe, European values and communal identity form, therefore, the second important type of argumentation. Grounding the narrative in the historical experience and cultural consciousness of the group in which advocacy is conducted significantly strengthens its impact. For example, Francesco Sciotto from CSD pointed out that the experience of migration was a significant part of the identities of both his religious community, and the whole nation. Members of the Valdense Church were refugees in the 16th century, when they encountered stark persecution, which has been immortalized in the songs that remained in their hymn books up until today. Similarly, economic migration was the experience of majority of Italians, and because of that nearly everyone in Italy has an uncle, cousin or other family member living abroad. Reference to those kinds of experiences allows people to see migration in a more positive light, providing them with understanding for the reasons and people behind the media narratives.

Jose Antonio Moreno Diaz from EESC pointed out, that this sort of pedagogical approach is really needed in a successful policy-making. There is a rising need of addressing not only primary decision-makers, but also the

wider population. The growing feelings of fear, detachment and, in extreme cases, disgust, remain unaddressed, which offers attractive ground for mechanisms such as scapegoating or dehumanization. They require pedagogical effort. The historical and cultural rationale can, then, be used to provide support for shaping the narrative and explanatory processes. At the same time, for others, such as HHC, this kind of argumentation seems to be rather ineffective, as it is extremely hard to win against much stronger and overarching governmental narratives.

The instrumental argumentation was surrounded by the largest degree of controversy. For some of the participants it was among the primary rationales when pragmatic approach to policy making was needed. Others seemed to accept it as long as it worked to improve the situation. They pointed out, that it helped also with an introduction of more positive narrative and made it easier to convince receiving communities – it showed that migrants would not be an economic burden in the long run. However, yet another pointed out that it had a significant drawback – it left outside of the scope of policy-making those who did not make sense in economic terms, and yet, due to their vulnerability, had to come. Because of that, they tried to avoid it as much as they could.

The religious argumentation seemed crucial for those organizations that had strong religious foundations. For others, due to the nature of their work, this rationale was completely absent.

4.2. Rationale of the other side

The participants also indicated that there were specific arguments raised by those who advocated against migration. These were collected according to the type of rationale behind them:

- Religion:
  - "If we will allow too many Muslims to come, Christianity will cease to exist";
  - "Violent extremism is more prevalent in Muslim communities, from which migrants predominantly come";
  - "Christianity is under siege in Europe - we need to defend our national values and traditions".

- European Values:
    - "They have different values, and so they will not fit";
    - "They are misogynist, have no acceptance towards homosexuals and equality of genders, and so our values will worsen if they will come";
    - "Sexualized violence is justified as a cultural aspect";
    - "They come and don't want to adhere to the culture (integration)";
    - "They do not respect our traditions";
    - "Where is the limit to which we want to adjust?"
- Human Rights:
    - "We risk losing our freedom and rights if they will become part of the electorate";
    - "We risk losing our support, elderly care or healthcare if there will be too many people in the system";
    - "We need to protect women and LGBT rights";
    - "We need to protect people from traffickers";
    - "People have the right to be protected at home";
    - "Human rights are relative to the place of origin";
    - "Reciprocity – why they should have the right to have their community here, when we could not have ours where they come from";
    - "They have the right to protection, but not to choose where it comes from";
    - "We need to protect people from exploitation".
- Instrumental:
    - "We should prevent brain drain from poorer countries";
    - "If we will allow some, all will want to come".
- Historical Precedent:
    - "They are responsible for terrorist attacks";
    - "They were responsible for sexual violence during New Year's Celebration in Cologne";
    - "Why should we support them when we did not receive similar support ourselves?";
    - "We already have needy communities here";

- o "They wanted independence from colonial structures, so they should live with the consequences".
- Vision for Europe:
  - o "Europe is Christian – without strong position of Christianity there is no Europe";
  - o "Europe is in internal crisis, and we cannot afford taking another problem on ourselves";
  - o "Europe will break culturally apart if we will allow for an influx of new cultures";

5. Possible solutions

The final section of the working group focused around possible solutions to the existing problems and finding a way to go forward. The participants indicated that there is a need for pragmatic and realistic approach in advocacy that will take into the account recent changes in the context surrounding migration.

In my work I often hear that "You, as Christians, are so naïve". But then I am asking them – do you think that the current policy is working? We do not, and we have concrete proposals to do A, B, C and D, and start tomorrow."

Torsten Moritz

Primarily, participants pointed to the need of reestablishing their foot in the political realm. They argued for a strong cooperation of the EU structures and civil society. They pointed to the necessity of cooperation with specific politicians, who would be able to take the cases further. They also indicated, that governments on every level should be encouraged to collaborate with receiving communities, instead of establishing parallel structures.

In 2015, in Frankfurt, the refugee trains arrived at the central station where, for 4 – 6 months, people on the move were only managed by the Muslim community, before the local government created department in the city to deal with this situation. After that, instead of integrating the existing structures and involving those who were already helping, they created separate structure, and offering a very paternalistic approach.

Said Barkan

Some contributors also proposed, that advocacy should not aim at an improvement of pan-European regulations, that would include all 27 EU countries, which seems unrealistic at the moment, but should rather move, at least temporarily, towards a more voluntary type of political cooperation. Those who would want to join could decide on joint measures and others could join later, in Europe of two speeds.

In all those cases where it is hard to get through to the central government, local government

should be seen as an ally. This was followed by a proposal of introducing a direct financing scheme, that would take part of the EU funding from the central governments, and offer it to all those local governments willing to host and help the refugees. This, however, would have to consider the laws concerning access to the territory, which usually are a prerogative of the national governments.

As was indicated already in the problem defining session, Churches could also broker some of the meetings with decision-makers – in many places they are still seen as objective enough to host discussions that would otherwise not take place. Churches and local communities can also help network, to build a momentum towards having more welcoming and hospitable environment. Receiving communities could be linked to each other to exchange experiences and offer each other support.

In the UK, in general, when you are granted asylum, you receive housing and 37.5 GBP per week, but no right to work. To avoid precarity, Glasgow introduced their own set of rules and allowed people to work.

Dirk Ficca

In Italy, the Ministry of Internal Affairs introduced a new security law, that deprived of migration status all those, who did not have a permanent residence address. But the municipalities, such as Palermo, Naples or Florence, rejected this law, stating that it is not in the prerogative of the central government to decide on residence issues.

Francesco Sciotto

Other advocacy allies could include volunteers, big international organizations, such as UNHCR, public institutions, such as schools or universities, social institutions that would be willing to extend their assistance, such as homeless shelters or labor unions, and companies, such as IKEA or Decathlon, who could donate material goods that are needed on the ground level.

Participants pointed out also that there was a need to change the narrative on many levels – about the migrants and their input; their needs and their vulnerability; about the EU centrality and others; about centrality and stability of specific institutions; about the vision and values of Europe. This could be done in a joint public campaign, formation of media alliance or social media campaign including a specific meme, that could be a source of reference for the positive narratives. On the local level observation campaigns could be established to flag instances of racism, xenophobia, discrimination and others. These could be conducted in cooperation with schools, universities, watch dogs and think tanks.

The new participatory structures could be shaped in a way that would not force migrants to be representative for their whole group. To avoid tokenism at any cost, they could give voice to particular individual from a particular community. Migrants also could be given voice in online outlets, where they would leave their comments. Questioners, however, should not be seen as a substitute to mutually transforming relationships.

Another proposal that refugee camps, detention centers, and migration offices should introduce mechanisms of complaint in all those cases, where there are none. People should be able to voice their concerns regarding treatment they encounter from the authorities.

People should also have the ability to act themselves, instead of being acted upon. Thus, the advocacy groups should not only propose and implement improvements, but also listen to individuals and communities, and let them self-organize. To strengthen collaboration between the receiving communities and people on the move, they could be involved in at least partial prioritization of how the money is spent for the migration issues. This proved to be successful in other places, like Palestine, and could be a source of empowerment for both communities.

Among the most important aims for the advocacy participants proposed access to basic services for migrants, such as right to work or healthcare. Other important advocacy proposals included the dissolution of offshore detention centers, lack of detention for non-criminal migrants or ensuring that all minors accompanied.