



## **Self-Advocacy Team (SAT) Report on Undeclared Labour**

### Introduction

Greece is a country where undeclared labour is a reality and many people, both local and migrants but especially the latter, are working under such conditions. Although it is a widely known phenomenon in the Greek society many migrants & refugees do not know their rights in such cases and/or which is the procedure of reporting it. This reality is even harder for undocumented migrants since they live under the constant threat of deportation, making them even more vulnerable (accessible) in exploitation, trafficking and racist violence either verbal or physical.

The lack of formal information, which leads both to misconceptions and the further marginalization of refugees & migrants in the Greek society, plays a central role in the perpetuation of this phenomenon. Hence, raising awareness is vital in combating this phenomenon and the rights' violations that are connected with it.

One of the Greek Forum of Refugees' Self-Advocacy Team (SAT) objectives is precisely to raise awareness and provide formal information both to the refugee & migrant Communities as well as to the host society, especially on topics of this magnitude as undeclared labour is.

### Concept, Actions & Desired Outcomes

In order to achieve a structured approach on the topic of undeclared labour, the SAT decided to materialize two separate seminars; one including Community leaders and representatives (with a focus on women participants) and a second on including state officials (Ministry of labour, Police and Municipality representatives) along with lawyers and advocacy officers from relevant NGOs and labour syndicates). The idea behind it was for the SAT to gather information relevant to the topic from the Community representatives and, armed with it, to initiate a discussion with the state officials and the other participants.

The online meetings and report development were supported by PICUM- the Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants in the framework of their support to members to advance the rights of undocumented workers.

One of the main objectives of this endeavour is, on the one hand, to pursue a holistic approach on the topic by acting as mediators between the communities and the state officials in order to highlight the major obstacles that prevent the restriction of the undeclared labour phenomenon. On the other hand, our purpose is to disseminate crucial information and the outcomes of this activity to the Communities having in mind that the SAT can be turned into a focal point that could guide the Communities through the reporting procedures.

Overall, this endeavour aims to be a raising awareness session and a think tank that could provide tangible solutions. The most prominent outcome should be the dissemination of the proper information and the solutions that will be reached towards the refugee & migrants Communities throughout Greece.

### Community Leaders meeting:

The meeting took place on Wednesday the 11th 2020. Overall, thirteen (13) participants joined the discussion. The participants experienced connectivity problems throughout the discussion forcing them to log out and rejoin the discussion at a later stage.

### State Officials' & NGOs meeting:

The meeting took place on Friday the 13th of November 2020 and was conducted live through our social media. Overall, six (6) participants from the State & NGO's attended the discussion along with Community representatives.

### General outcomes from both webinars

The most prominent issue that is common in both webinars is the unwillingness of the State's services to accommodate the rights of migrants and a hostile system that, through its tolerance, allows undeclared labour to thrive along with the consequences that accompany it. The "national superiority" issue is also evident from both webinars, employers in some cases will use every disadvantage the migrants have (language barrier, absence of documents, etc.) in order to get their way when things start to become unfavourable to them (usually on pay day) and they have the authorities supporting them when a case actually finds its way to the Court.

What specifically came out from the webinar with the Community leaders is the unwilling acceptance of the work conditions imposed by the employer, even when the migrants know that the whole thing can end up with them being arrested. Despite this constant fear people knowingly accept the job. There are many cases, nevertheless, that people believe they've got a legitimate job, especially in the domestic labour sector, without realizing that they are actually working under undeclared status; they have little knowledge of their rights and, in the case they sign a contract, they have no idea what they are signing up for due to the language barrier and their reluctance to ask their employer out of fear of losing the job. One can also observe the different levels of employers' attitudes with regard to the different labour sectors they operate in. In the agricultural sector, for example, where there is a major need of manpower, employers depend on migrants and have total power on them since there are no contracts signed, the authorities tolerate the situation and there is always the threat of deportation. On the other hand, in pursuit of "white collar" jobs where a migrant has to possess all the necessary documents and skills, migrants face discrimination & racism in the interviews and also at their work

environment in the case they actually get the job. The latter is also strongly connected to the language barrier, which again points out the lack of an integration plan. Migrants have to find their own ways to learn the language, since the State does not support this issue in a practical manner. They rely on the free informal courses the NGOs offer but again it is not widely known to the Communities which organization offers courses or even if they continue to do so after some time due to budget cuts (sustainability of projects is another major issue). Based on what the Community leaders claimed we can focus on two major elements. The first would be the **lack of information** on rights & procedures (acquiring documents, applying for a Social Security Number (SSN), reporting labour or hate crimes etc.) but also on services & benefits that could solve certain issues (e.g. language barrier). The other element is that of **fear**. There are plenty of examples that a righteous complaint ended up with incarceration under deportation. This leads to the reluctance of migrants filing reports and pressing charges but also to the tolerance of racist behaviours and unacceptable working conditions. It is not a coincidence that the Community members used the word boss instead of employer throughout their discussion.

In the second webinar, the participants acknowledged the experiences mentioned by the Community leaders. Extensive undeclared labour practice is a concrete indicator of a State with dysfunctional policies. It became obvious early on in the discussion that the State has to focus on creating a **concrete integration plan** and even then, it has to approach it step by step aiming in realistic and permanent solutions. The phenomenon is multilayered and there is a need to prioritize. What seemed to be a point of general agreement was the need of a **mapping tool**, both for the State's needs for labour force and another one mapping the skills of Community members. Another crucial point was to make good use of the already established platforms and services such as the Municipalities' **Migrant & Refugee Integration Councils** (MRICs) and the **Labour Employment Organization** (OAEΔ). These are actions that can be achieved realistically in a relatively small period of time and would benefit all sides involved. Other points that the need to address are imperative but will take substantially more time and, most importantly, willingness to achieve is the simplification of the bureaucratic procedures and the collective adherence to the law

from the part of the relevant civil services. It is clear that civil servants need to be trained in migration issues and willing to do their job, which is simply to follow the law. The latter is exactly where the Municipalities should step in by being able to undertake more responsibilities on these issues. On the top tier we have to acknowledge the need of a stable and permanent **cooperation between the relevant Ministries** through the use of working groups that would deal efficiently with the obstacles on a policy level and restrict further the phenomenon of undeclared labour, since simply imposing heavy fines on employers does not solve the problem in its entirety. In addition, there is an immense need for both labour rights and complaints' mechanisms to be meaningful and accessible for migrant workers, including when undocumented. Complaints mechanisms both to labour inspection authorities and the police should ensure there is no risk of immigration enforcement as a result, and actually lead to solid results for workers that use them. Future reforms should aim at the protection of the labour rights of workers as well as the protection of victims of crime and racist attacks, including undocumented individuals. The latter, specifically, is based on the principle that being undocumented does not consist a crime, it is rather an administrative procedure on process, and that protection and rights as victims should be prioritized over immigration enforcement.

The issue of “**national superiority**” was not mentioned many times but was implied in several points throughout the conversation. It is perhaps the most difficult element to address and perhaps the most time consuming.

### *Future Plans & Activities*

The SAT gathered a lot of useful information from both webinars that in turn gave a lot of insight to the Team regarding future activities. What can be done immediately is the dissemination of the crucial information we gathered from the webinars to the Communities. Information such as the existence of a police department that works on racial violence and that can inform migrants of the procedures they have to follow when dealing with the police or filing a complaint. Information such as the services that NGOs offer especially on language courses and the relevant civil services one has to visit depending on the issue. Another action should be a workshop involving Community representatives that would illuminate what is considered undeclared labour and what is actually a legitimate job, information on contracts and job statuses, taxes involved, health

insurance and, at the same time, their obligations as employees. Lastly, the need of a quantitative participation of refugees & migrants in the existing MRICs of the Municipalities which can be achieved by disseminating formal information about their existence and functionality to the Communities. There is strength in numbers and although the MRICs are not policy changing entities they are, nevertheless, platforms that given the appropriate visibility could vastly contribute to the solutions for phenomena such as undeclared labour. Through this endeavor we are positive that many opportunities to work on the political participation of refugees & migrants will arise and in turn impact decision makers on labour policies. Information is the key to navigate through the system's procedures and using this knowledge is essential in order to bring change.

### *Dissemination Activities so far*

Both webinars were recorded but only the one with the officials was published on the SAT's website. This was decided for security reasons, since several participants from the Communities were undocumented and could be targeted. Instead, the meeting was recorded and added to our deliverables for PICUM.

The second webinar with the officials was performed live through both the [SAT's](#) & [GFR's](#) Facebook pages, reaching a total of over 4000 people with over 400 engagements, and published in the SAT's website. The website post can be found through this [link](#).

