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## **SUPPORT THE ORGANISATION THAT SUPPORTS THOUSANDS OF VULNERABLE PEOPLE**

KISA - Action for Equality, Support, Antiracism has an eleven-year record of struggling for a multicultural society free of racism and discrimination. During the last ten years, through its Migrant and Refugee Centres, it has provided, free of charge, professional legal and social support services to tens of thousands of migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, victims of human trafficking, foreign students and other vulnerable people, turning the Centres into the most important advocacy and support mechanism for these vulnerable groups in Cyprus.

In view of the fact that the non-Cypriot population numbers some 140.00 persons (around 18% of the general population) in conjunction with the complete absence of state services dedicated to supporting this group, one can begin to recognize the extent of the burden KISA has taken on.

During all these years, the staff at the centres, legal personnel, social advisers, psychologists and others, have listened to peoples' stories and complaints concerning a multitude of problems such as lack of basic needs of subsistence, access to labour market, medical needs, access to asylum procedures, arrest and detention, racism and discrimination, abuse, sexual harassment, psychological and physical violence, including rape, and other issues including social inclusion and education. The staff and several volunteers at the Centres have had to take these stories to the corridors of power on a daily basis, advocating for their prompt solution. This has been done through thousands of letters, phone calls and visits to government departments, independent agencies, employers and others to press for solutions.

At the same time, as a result of accumulated expertise and based on its daily contact with these problems, KISA has issued numerous policy statements, memoranda and proposals for legal reform and has called for the review of the state policies and practices in all the above areas, aiming to tackle the problems. In this regard, KISA experts have participated in meetings of parliamentary committees, meetings with ministers and specialised human rights bodies and was influential in formulating policies that defend the rights of non Cypriot vulnerable groups.

In addition, KISA is playing a leading role in bringing the above issues to the attention of international and EU human rights agencies and organisations such as the European Commission

against Racism and Intolerance of the Council of Europe (ECRI), the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the EU Commission, through reports, filing of complaints, participation in conferences, networks, etc. The respect gained by KISA is demonstrated by the fact that it is increasingly chosen as a partner for projects by European NGOs and agencies in the areas of migration, asylum, trafficking and discrimination. Some recent examples of this recognition are: the assignment by the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) of the European Commission to conduct research on separated children; the appointment of KISA's Executive Director as the socioeconomic expert on discrimination for Cyprus in the European Commission's Network of Socioeconomic Experts; the selection of a member of KISA's Coordinating Committee as the national expert for Cyprus in two research projects: trade union practices in fighting discrimination for DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities; and the impact of the Racial Equality Directive for FRA; the election of a member of KISA's Coordinating Committee as Vice President of ENAR (European Network Against Racism), an influential network that has national coordinating bodies in all 27 EU member states.

Furthermore, KISA has a long record of events and projects that promote social inclusion and respect of human rights, fight against racism and discrimination and celebrate multiculturalism. Many of these events are organised annually. The Rainbow Festival has established itself as the most colourful celebration of multiculturalism and anti-racism, attracting thousands of Cypriots and non Cypriots alike, in a day of unique entertainment and meeting of civilizations. Activities around the European Action Week Against Racism focus on combating xenophobia, discrimination and racism. Action on the International Refugee Day highlights the problems faced by asylum seekers and refugees, who are forced to leave their homes and seek safety and a better life elsewhere. Projects like the Multicultural Summer Workshop for Children provide the opportunity to migrant and Cypriot children to engage together in creative team activities thus promoting the social inclusion of migrant children. Other events, such as the *Multicultural Poetry* evenings, with the presentation for the first time of the poetry of migrants living and working in Cyprus, and film screenings, such as the *Festival Anti-Racism goes to the Cinema*, bring with them another view of migrants that the Cypriot society is hardly aware of.

During the 11 years of its existence, KISA has managed to provide all the above services with the minimum of state financial support. This support, which was discontinued for several years and only started again last year, consists of a yearly grant of 14.000 EURO by the scheme to support voluntary organisations administered by the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, plus other smaller contributions by the Ministries of the Interior, Education and Culture, the Cyprus Youth Board, municipalities and other agencies, to partially cover the cost of specific activities and events. KISA has also attracted funds from the EU or other agencies, such as the European Refugee Fund

(ERF), Equal and others, that partially cover the cost of specific projects. As a matter of policy and principle, KISA does not terminate the provision of services even when funding, such as the ERF, is either not provided or when there is a gap between the end of a project and the commencement of a new one. Faced with this situation, and determined to continue offering the services of the Migrant and Refugee Centres, KISA has been obliged to resort to loans of tens of thousands of EURO, through personal loans by members of KISA.

Based on 11 years of experience and achievements and confronted with a spectrum of increasing and more difficult problems facing more and more migrants and refugees, who are particularly vulnerable, especially as a result of the economic crisis, KISA is preparing to extend the services it offers and make them more systematic, professional and efficient. To make this possible, KISA needs to: Employ and train more professional staff; to renovate and maintain its rented premises; to develop its communication strategies to reach more people and become even more effective in promoting policies and practices that bring closer its vision and make a real difference in the lives of people in need. To achieve this, KISA is seeking substantial funding. We appeal to everybody who shares our vision to make a contribution to help us reach our goal. Small contributions by hundreds of ordinary people and bigger contributions from charities, funding agencies and socially responsible commercial concerns and individuals will help us to reach our goals and make a real difference in building a caring society where people will be treated equally, irrespective of colour or age, gender or sexual orientation, racial or ethnic origin, religious or other beliefs.

Coordinating Committee

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