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A study visit to Athens, EUAA

Arjenne Plaizier and Elles Maaskant paid a working visit to Athens. This in the context of the European reception network of EUAA. EUAA is the European Agency for Asylum and Migration. They periodically organize meetings for government organizations that deal with asylum reception and guidance of asylum seekers.

Enormous challenges, shared solutions

Elles Maaskant, project secretary of the AMIF International Knowledge Platform project, about the working visit; 'In Europe, many Member States are currently facing enormous challenges. Lack of capacity, reception staff and social support for the reception of asylum seekers appear to be common denominators. There were various initiatives or policy changes in other member states that could be of interest to the Netherlands. It is therefore good to know what is going on elsewhere in Europe', explains Elles.

Working visits, a good way to gain knowledge

The purpose of Arjenne's and myself's visit to Athens is primarily to participate in the meeting of the EUAA reception network, says Elles. Arjenne is the national contact point on behalf of the COA and I have joined on behalf of the COA International Knowledge Platform (IKP). The main purpose of the working visit for me was to expand the network of the IKP. This way we can exchange interesting dilemmas and find more countries that are willing and able to become involved in further exploration of these themes. Moreover, the working visit was a good way to keep abreast of the latest developments in the migration policy of the various European member states.

Examples from Europe

For example, a new measure has been introduced in Belgium that states that people must leave the reception center if they do have an income but have not contributed to the housing costs. Fedasil was able to carry out cross-checks through a collaboration with the Ministry of Social Security in Belgium. A pilot is running and a number of residents now actually have to leave the asylum seekers' centre.

We also see a considerably different perspective in different countries with regard to the outsourcing of permit holders. For example, there are Member States where the responsibility for the national reception authority ends after an asylum seeker has obtained a permit. It is of course interesting to see what the Netherlands can learn from this.

Another challenge that recurs in many European countries is the capacity problem for reception. You see big differences in how member states manage their reception capacity and many countries are creative in tackling this issue. In Norway and Denmark, for example, they work with framework agreements with various external parties. In Denmark, the asylum organization employs about 40 to 60 people who are exclusively engaged in contracting partners such as the Red Cross. A similar system also exists in France.

Important to be well informed

The IKP organizes focus groups on specific themes of interest to a number of Member States. In the Netherlands, Norway and Belgium, for example, there appears to be a great deal of interest in further research into the subject of sustainability. Another initiative is the idea of organizing international internships (perhaps together with the EUAA). Arjenne and I have identified several potential areas for international exchange and cooperation. We're going to take that up now.

Want to learn more?

If you want to know more about the international side of COA's work, you can take a look at the COA International community. There you will find information about our international work and you can be kept informed of the latest developments via the community.

