



## Flash report

### **The 8th European Migration Forum *Migrants in Europe today: specific needs, skills and communication for stronger inclusion*, 4-5 December in Brussels**

The 8th European Migration Forum brought together more than 250 participants, mainly from civil society organisations but also from the EESC, local and regional authorities, EU Member States and the Commission Expert Group on the views of migrants in the field of migration, asylum and integration. They sought to address three of the most pressing issues related to migration today: public attitudes and communication; specific needs of migrants and refugees; and labour market integration.

#### **Key takeaways from the keynote speeches**

EU Commissioner for Home Affairs, Ylva Johansson opened the conference by saying Europe should “never underestimate the skills, passion, and energy that migrants have” going on to speak about her continuing mission, together with civil society, social partners, local and national authorities and businesses, to change the toxic narrative surrounding migration and improve legal pathways for those coming to Europe, including to attract talent. She spoke about the proposal to revise the EU Anti-trafficking Directive and stressed that the rules would be tightened. - The Commissioner underlined also the importance of fighting smugglers' network.

EESC president Olivier Röpké stressed the importance of the Forum as a space where civil society could shine a spotlight on key issues, especially in these uncertain times. He pledged that the EESC would do everything in its power to implement the ideas raised during the Forum. He called for the right job matches for migrant jobseekers, for narratives around migration to be democratic at all levels and for social inclusion to be promoted as much as possible. He thanked participants for "showing up every day to help migrants and refugees lead a decent and secure life."

#### **Key takeaways from the round tables**

During the two-day event, 16 speakers from academia, media, migrant-led organisations, governments and international organisations shared their insights and key findings.

They pointed out the value that migrants and refugees bring to the economy and to society at large, and that it was imperative to build an inclusive Europe through responsible reporting and communication campaigns.

- **How could we change the narrative on migration in the age of polarisation and disinformation?**

European media should prioritise accurate, comprehensive, transparent and accountable reporting on migrants and migration issues. Language matters: people are not "illegal". Care must be taken to use proper language and provide context so as to fight harmful, polarising and populist narratives and,

in so doing, tell stories that challenge stereotypes rather than reinforcing them. Above all, it is important to give migrants and those from migrant backgrounds a louder voice in media because "who we don't see shapes the narrative". It is also key to take a multidimensional approach to storytelling and acknowledge the role of social media in conveying positive and negative stories about migration and harness its power. Media literacy, communication campaigns and education (especially for young people) are needed to combat stereotypes.

- **What was needed for more sustainable labour market integration?**

Language barriers, cumbersome skills validation and recognition procedures, and information gaps on the side of both migrants and employers (especially small and medium sized companies) are just some of the many obstacles that made it difficult to match vacancies with migrants' talents. Effective cooperation between public and private labour market actors, especially at regional and local levels, is essential to develop targeted solutions to the specific needs of different categories of migrants, such as migrant mothers, unaccompanied minors in need of a professional perspective or highly qualified refugees. Recommendations by participants included: investing in strategies to use integration opportunities in rural areas and small towns; building on social economy actors to develop solutions for special needs; enabling migrant organisations to access more funding opportunities; making better use of the skills and capabilities of highly skilled migrants so as to reduce overqualification rates; making migrants more aware of their rights in order to combat exploitation; educating employers on diversity issues specific to migration; tapping the potential of migrant women, including by providing access to high quality childcare; and, above all, creating more humanitarian labour pathways.

- **How to identify and support migrants and refugees with specific needs**

Mental health: Sustainable and long-term financial support at EU and national level for migrants' mental health is needed, especially to cover the cost of intercultural training and capacity building programmes for those in contact with migrants and refugees. This should be supported by outreach and communication campaigns towards migrants to break mental health taboos. Community-based care and cultural mediators could be efficient tools, especially when paired with safe spaces for migrants. It is also important to recognise migrant qualifications in that sector and bridge the gap in terms of staff and skills.

Trafficking in human beings: It is important to establish a comprehensive and multidisciplinary infrastructure, including trained professionals who could detect, identify and refer trafficking victims to the appropriate services for assistance and support. The assistance has to address all forms of trafficking and all victims and include civil society organisations in the process. The support also needs to have a focus on long-term integration.

Training of social workers, law enforcement, civil society organisations and other front-line workers coming into contact with potential victims is key for early identification and referrals.

More comprehensive labour inspection needs to be organised, with cultural mediators who could work more effectively with potential or identified trafficking victims during spot checks.

Once detected, trafficking victims need to be given time to recover and consider whether to put forward their case to law enforcement authorities.

Unaccompanied minors: Children should be given full access to the social security system upon arrival, with residence permits being issued at once. Support for the transition to adulthood should be provided so that minors are not "lost" once they became adults at age 18. The Directive to safeguard children and the international rights of the child should all be rigorously upheld.

### **Outcomes of 'The Floor is Yours'**

Ten topics were proposed and discussed in small groups: Mental health initiatives; Women migrants and gender equality; Diversity in all sectors: how to share best practices; Talk with the conservatives and right-wing voters: listen to their fears and concerns; Safe routes for asylum seekers (not economic migrants); Participation and representation of migrants in decision making; Migrants with disabilities; More migrants in NGOs to better understand needs; Assimilation vs. Integration vs. Inclusion; Equality and basic workers' rights, including human rights.

### **Election of Forum Bureau members**

Participants elected two new members to the Forum Bureau for a two-year mandate:

- Anna Coulibaly from ICMC (International Catholic Migration Commission) Europe, representing EU-level organisations. She called for bottom-up strategies and for decision making to draw on the knowledge and experience of people with relevant experience.
  - Yonous Muhammadi from the Greek Forum of Refugees, representing national civil society organisations. He called for greater political integration, equality and justice for migrants and refugees, and for those affected most by policies to be at the decision-making table.
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