



### **Report on the 7<sup>th</sup> European Migration Forum**

*The 7<sup>th</sup> European Migration Forum took place on 20 and 21 October 2022 with the overarching theme of “Youth inclusion: key to successful integration”. Discussions focused on young migrants’ access to education and training, specific challenges and measures regarding the integration of young refugees, legal migration, youth mobility in the context of education, labour mobility of young people, advancing participation and engagement of young migrants, as well as public attitudes towards migrants. This year’s event attracted more than 200 representatives from civil society organisations, including migrant-led organisations, youth networks from Europe and beyond, regional and local authorities, and European and international institutions to speak passionately on integration issues in all their dimensions.*

### **“Nothing about us, without us”: Youth inclusion key to successful migrant integration**

Participants unanimously felt that Europe needs to look forward and frame the migration discussion in more positive terms, particularly around migrants’ inclusion. This framing is needed to future-proof strategies that reflect the current, evolving demographic of Europe. The young migrants and refugees coming to the EU will contribute to the shaping and building of its future, and it is in our collective best interest to ensure a positive outcome on inclusion issues.

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

In her keynote speech, the EU Commissioner for Home Affairs Ylva Johansson focused on the effective EU response to support displaced persons from Ukraine following the first triggering of the Temporary Protection Directive, especially on housing, jobs and education. She underlined how this was a crucial opportunity to improve supports for other migrant groups and the response for them. She also mentioned the importance of cooperation with NGOs as well as local and regional authorities. Without this cooperation, she affirmed, the response provided in recent months would not have been possible. **“Civil society is a central part of integration. It is not about you, it is with you. It is important to engage with migrants in a meaningful way every day,”** Commissioner Johansson said.

When questioned about differential treatment for other migrant and refugee groups, Commissioner Johansson responded that many lessons have been learned from the influx of migrant and refugee arrivals in 2015. She agreed with participants who suggested that the directive should have been triggered then too, but regretted that the political context at the time did not allow for it. She also emphasised that one of the reasons to activate the directive for displaced persons from Ukraine was to ensure the asylum process remains safeguarded

for others. She assured attendees that the Commission would continue to work on developing safer legal pathways to Europe. Commissioner Johansson communicated her commitment to **“build a Europe where everyone is welcome: Not ‘them’, but part of ‘us’.”**

EESC President Christa Schweng's speech concentrated on how our societies will only prosper if migrants and refugees are included in them. **Putting youth at the centre and helping them thrive, regardless of where they come from, should be the main objective.** She said that the cost of living, inflation, the energy crisis, and economic fallout from the pandemic particularly affects young people of migrant backgrounds. In light of this, **designing collective solutions to protect their future prospects is paramount to avoid a lost generation.** This should also extend to protecting women and families by ensuring access to childcare and employment, as well as improving their place in the workforce.

### Key takeaways from the panel discussions

#### Young migrants as actors of youth inclusion

Panellists underlined that all stakeholders must ensure human rights are respected within their communities at European, national and local levels. This is essential for enabling young migrants to develop themselves further, and stakeholders must be held accountable for ensuring appropriate conditions. The successful inclusion of young people not only has a positive impact on families and society at large, but their contribution is vital to the continued growth and sustainability of local communities in the EU. Key recommendations were to involve youth as much as possible, on topics such as mental health, youth engagement, and the funding process, which can be achieved concretely by creating think tanks for young minds.

#### Public attitudes toward migrants

This panel examined what shapes public attitudes toward migrants and how they can be positively influenced. Eurobarometer public opinion studies showed that people predominantly obtain information via traditional media, however, many do not feel well informed about immigration and integration. Fridoon Joinda, who created migrant-run newspaper *Migratory Birds*, commented on his experience as a refugee: **“What makes Europe distinguishable? For me, its human rights, democracy, freedom of speech...that they even give the microphone to an Afghan guy like me...But so much still needs to improve.”** Panellists underlined that the choice of vocabulary used in the media can shape public perception of migrants and refugees. Joinda added, **“Helping migrants should not be seen as giving food away, but as sharing. Migrants contribute.”**

Editor-in-Chief of *InfoMigrants* Amara Makhoul explained how journalists can play an influential role in positively shifting the migration narrative: **“Media should focus on the reality of migration, not only on big events, and do so on a daily basis for a balanced image. Media can give a voice to migrants that are seen as an informal mass to make them real, to see them as persons and give them names and faces.”** To tackle negative connotations of

migration, we should move from a crisis narrative to more positive and hope-based communication.

### **Highlights from the four parallel workshops**

**Young migrants' access to education and training:** This group called for equal access to education, regardless of ethnic or racial background, the use of translators/interpreters in classrooms to overcome language barriers in the short-term and fighting schools segregation by putting an end to the 'migrant-heavy' school phenomenon. They emphasised that ongoing asylum procedures should not jeopardise school enrolment.

**Specific challenges and measures regarding integration of young refugees:** Access to housing affects access to education; welcome centres located far from cities can impede young refugees from attending school. The transition to adulthood should be better managed so that (un)accompanied minors do not lose all support when they reach 18. Peer-to-peer mentorship and guardianship programmes can create the incentive to learn and grow, and involving parents as a key target audience in support of programmes can help unburden young refugees.

**Legal migration: youth mobility in context of education and labour mobility:** Mobility schemes are not well known amongst young people and there are many obstacles to integration. There is a lack of sufficient resources (e.g. housing, funds) to stay in the host country. Long bureaucratic procedures impede the process of integration. More work must be done with countries of origin to better prepare people before they immigrate to the EU.

**Advancing the participation and engagement of young migrants:** Participants want to produce more youth-friendly information and change how migrants and refugees are represented on social and traditional media. They want to create immigrant parent associations to foster engagement. Connecting migrant groups to local services can improve the access of children and families to these services by involving civil society.

### **Round-up of the co-creative space of youth leaders:**

#### **'We are not born European, we become European'**

Policy implementation needs to reflect shifting, diverse EU identity needs. There were recommendations to end complicated application procedures and excessive tuition fees for non-EU students. On the labour market side, matching platform, salary transparency, standardised framework to recognise skills/qualifications, and the implementation of a workplace protection mechanism were advised. Many migrant and refugee youth feel invisible when it comes to policy. Despite this, they said: **"There is no one better to represent us than us."** The overarching message was: **"Let us in."**

### **Key takeaways from the interactive debate**

A video message from the European Parliament introduced the final part of the Forum with an exchange between the participants and the panel composed of representatives of the

European Commission, the European Committee of the Regions, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Czech Presidency. The exchange stressed the importance of supporting spaces for social interactions between migrant and non-migrant youth, the positive role of NGOs to reach out to young migrants, the role of local and regional authorities as a front office and the necessary cooperation between the local and national levels. It also highlighted the importance of local community as a lesson learned from the response to the arrivals of displaced persons from Ukraine and the challenges that the education system in Czechia faces in welcoming a high number of children from Ukraine.

### **Outcomes of the breakout discussions “The Floor is Yours”**

Participants raised 15 crucial topics they wanted to discuss in small groups. These issues ranged from promoting migration in schools, digital street work and the role of sports in integration to supporting migrant children living with war trauma, inclusion of persons in vulnerable situations and inclusion in a context of difficult access to asylum. The messages included the need to raise intelligent awareness, increase outreach and advocacy, establish a network to improve solidarity, and provide the right spaces and channels to interact. Participants want better services via innovative, tailor-made programmes to include marginalised and overlooked groups.

### **Results of the Forum Bureau election**

Two new members to the Forum Bureau were elected this year to work in their two-year mandates:

Joining the Bureau at the EU level will be Anila Noor, founder and managing director of the Netherlands-based New Women Connectors, an NGO led by migrant and refugee women. Noor is also a member of the European Commission Expert Group on the views of migrants.

At the national level, Syrian-born Rudi Osman was elected. Osman is director of the Union of Exiled Students (UEE: Union des étudiants exiles) in France which works toward building better post-secondary access for migrant and refugee students.

### **The entertainment highlights**

The networking dinner and village came to an incredible culmination in a cultural and musical evening event with a live performance from Miksi. A talented fusion of Albanian, Kurdish and Syrian music, Miksi is a France-based collective born out of the Migrants Music Manifesto. The members of this group did not speak the same language when they first formed. Forum attendees enjoyed the lively atmosphere to conclude the event with dance, illustrating how powerfully the universal language of music and the experiences we have in common can connect us all.