FINAL REPORT

7th EUROPEAN MIGRATION FORUM
The 7th annual European Migration Forum took place on 20 and 21 October 2022 with the overarching theme of “Youth inclusion: key to successful migrant 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 all aspects of integration and inclusion issues.

Participants unanimously felt that Europe needs to look forward and frame the migration discussion in more positive terms, particularly around migrants’ inclusion. 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, in light of the European demographic situation, to ensure a positive outcome on inclusion issues.

Concretely, this happens by involving young migrants in decision and policy making, using social media to reach young migrant populations more effectively, applying innovative youth-focused solutions to long-standing problems, and ensuring that more resources get to the local level for education and training. Beyond this, all players, regardless of which level they are engaged in this issue, must boldly address the systemic issues that stand in the way of youth integration.

Opening

Paul Soete (President of the EESC Permanent Group on Immigration and Integration) spoke about the importance of involving migrant youth in participatory democracy in EU policy and legislative decision-making, especially in times of crisis. He also spoke on the importance of consultation with social partners and civil society organisations and the merits of this forum.

Michael Shotter highlighted the actions of the Commission on the involvement of young migrants, mentioning the practical manual on inclusive education, and projects funded under AMIF and ESF+, such as the MINT project focused on child-to-child mentoring. He also mentioned the importance of attracting and retaining young migrants to Europe, and addressing obstacles they might face, as well as on the feasibility of the European Youth Mobility Scheme.

Mahdiah Ayub (Young leader and former member of the project Football for Unity) grew up in Dublin, Ireland, and spoke on how she always used sports to integrate into new environments. The Football for Unity festival was an ideal platform for organisations to
showcase the potential of football as an integration tool to start conversations and break down barriers. “You can bring a ball anywhere, and people will come,” she said.

**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 triggering of the Temporary Protection Directive, especially on housing, jobs and education. She underlined how this was a crucial opportunity to improve support for other migrant groups and the response for them. She also mentioned the importance of cooperation with civil society 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’.”

The main message in EESC President Christa Schweng’s speech was that our societies will only prosper if migrants and refugees are included in them. Putting youth at centre stage and helping them thrive, regardless of where they come from, should be the objective and to do that, the current obstacles need to be overcome and this has to happen together and in solidarity. She said the cost-of-living crisis, soaring inflation rates, the energy crisis, the economic fallout from the pandemic, and war at Europe’s doorstep has exacerbated existing inequalities and threatened the social fabric of EU societies. Youth should not have to pay the price for that. Youth were particularly affected by COVID because of the disruption to education, and the inability to acquire skills, in addition to their mental health and wellbeing being impacted. “Young people of refugee and migrant backgrounds have suffered more acutely. School closures and distance learning measures put migrant children at a disadvantage.”

Schweng talked about how the EESC has supported all the initiatives put forward by the Commission to improve the integration and inclusion outcomes of people of migrant backgrounds such as the Action Plan for Integration and Inclusion and the Legal Migration Skills and Talent Package. The EESC has also welcomed the proposals to improve the career prospects and democratic participation of young people through the reinforced Youth Guarantee, and some Member State initiatives to increase women’s participation in the workforce by encouraging entrepreneurship and employment and investing in childcare.
“Designing collective solutions to protect migrants and refugees’ future prospects is paramount to avoid a lost generation” she said. It’s important, she said, not to forget about refugees and migrants from other parts of the world, not just Ukraine. It’s important that migrants in the EU are provided with guidance and support so that they are on equal footing with their native counterparts.

Panel discussions

There were two panel discussions at the forum, the first focussing on the vital role young migrants can play in youth inclusion and the second on the public attitudes and media narratives around migrants, refugees and migration.

1. Young migrants as actors of youth inclusion

With more than 600 000 displaced children and teenagers from Ukraine in the EU at present, the EU needs to rise to the challenge of creating a more inclusive environment for the benefit of its citizenry. There is no better way to do this than to establish best practices, glean from successful programs and listen attentively to successful cases, not just in the context of the Ukraine war, but for every migrant who seeks safe haven in Europe. Understanding how to create inclusion in communities and in schools, and make that environment the prevailing state of affairs is a must. School is an integral pillar for integration, and cultural and sport activities are particularly effective avenues to achieve this aim. Secondly, forging connections between schools and families widens the community involvement and commitment to youth development. Regardless of how this is achieved, providing a natural and neutral environment where native and migrant youth want to come together to play and interact should be at the crux of things.

The young are full of hope and dreams, and it is imperative that EU societies adapt to keep this hope alive and make attaining these dreams possible. When migrant youth are speaking, it is vital that we have the resources and tools to listen to them, especially in light of the fact that they are the leaders of tomorrow. Youth should be a bridge for a healthy and inclusive Europe. How migrant and refugee youth are integrated (or not) has a direct impact on the EU 30 years from now.

Against this backdrop, Member States need to become better at assessing and leveraging the skillsets of young migrants who want to work in Europe and using these skills to fill existing labour shortages. Countries should not only strive to attract and attain young talent from outside Europe but lower the barriers to opportunities and eliminate the obstacles to internships and study. The high rate of youth unemployment in the EU should not act as a deterrent to letting newcomers gain crucial job experience in the bloc. Instead, the relevant institutions should look at the feasibility of developing a youth mobility scheme so that these migrants can get to know the EU and its labour market both ahead of their arrival and once here. There is a tremendous amount of potential that is not being used to the extent that it could. Likewise, creating parallel opportunities for young EU citizens to gain similar experience in partner countries has incredible added value.
Rachel Streefland, deputy mayor of Utrecht, the Netherlands, outlined her town’s Eurocities innovative co-housing method whereby local neighbourhood youth live next to the asylum centre and include young refugees in their activities. Local youth introduce refugees to cycling as a common means of transport and offer to cycle to school with them on their first day. Streefland said these youth-led initiatives bring a lighthearted spirit to the premises, and has had an immensely positive impact on families.

Catriona Graham, director of advocacy and partnerships at the World Scout Bureau, spoke about how scouts offer newly-arrived young migrants or refugees a community network and new opportunities to create alliances with native youth. Scouts can be a safe social haven when arriving in the EU at a crucial time when language is a barrier and establishing roots is an often painful challenge after moving from place to place amid a great deal of uncertainty. She spoke also about looking at how to change the scout model to suit the new people coming into the organisation, in order to be more diverse and inclusive so that it can continue to be an outlet for new youth to find their identity in Europe.

Seyran Khalili from “Young Connectors – Women Connectors” Norway spoke about creating opportunities for young migrants to participate in diplomacy and dialogue, and keeping platforms open to them, such as job seeking sites, and creating ways for them to stay connected and united across the EU and find new ways to collaborate and learn. While young migrants bring innovative approaches and fresh thoughts to many initiatives, they often face language and accessibility barriers. Keeping the doors to education open – especially for Afghan girls who have been deprived of the right to education – is vital so that no one is left behind and that they are assured that the next steps after arriving in the EU are that they can go to school.

Belén Vallina González, founder of Yaran, Spain, a non-profit in the north-western rural areas of Galicia, is working with local socially-led actors to support young migrants and ensure future economic growth in the region. She highlighted their experience as risk-takers and problem-solvers and spoke about how essential these attributes are in developing policies, as well as in ensuring inclusive, sustainable and peaceful societies.

The roundup sentiment was that all stakeholders must ensure that human rights are respected in their communities; that safe shelter is provided for young migrants and refugees to develop themselves further; and that these stakeholders hold themselves responsible if these conditions are not met. The successful integration of young people not only has a positive impact on families and society at large, their contribution is vital to the continued growth and sustainability of communities in the EU. The importance of involving youth as much as possible, on topics such as mental health, youth engagement, and of creating youth-centred think tanks that include them in funding decisions was also underlined.

2. Public attitudes toward migrants

This panel examined the positive role journalists and politicians can play in shaping public attitudes toward migrants. Eurobarometer public opinion studies showed how people obtain
information and form perceptions about migrants and refugees, and how the choice of vocabulary used when information is communicated shapes these views. The approach should be to present a more balanced image of migration, giving names and faces to people who are often seen as a ‘mass’, and contextualise their reasons for coming to Europe. This is an important condition for the EU society welcoming them. In order to stop negative connotations more generally, shift the conversation from ‘security’ to ‘humanity’ and end fear-based language by referring to the situation as a ‘migration crisis’.

Politicians have been stoking the idea of migrants and refugees as a threat to society since the outbreak of the Syrian war. As such, the environment can be hostile to those arriving. To mitigate against this, it is vital to actively address migration literacy: the public needs to be informed about the difference between a migrant, an asylum seeker and a refugee so that we can collectively do away with the dehumanising myth of the profiteering, opportunistic migrant. To this end, publishing and sharing unbiased and unfiltered human stories – and making them widely accessible on various media and social media channels – has the power to put an end to the cliché narrative of single migrant men coming to the EU to take jobs from Europeans.

In the wider media landscape, consuming social media to gather information about migrant situations can be a dangerous forum when it comes to hate speech as it does not always provide an accurate (or complete) picture. In addition, it is quite removed from people’s daily reality. Aggrandising often happens on these channels, which are often told in byte-sized snippets that can be flagrantly harmful and misleading when taken out of context, and the sources sometimes untrustworthy. Apart from this, media should not be a substitute for the contact that people have with refugees and migrants ‘on the ground’ in their local communities.

Amara Makhoul, editor-in-chief of InfoMigrants, a free news and information site for migrants available in six languages and led by France Médias Monde, Deutsche Welle and The Agenzia Nazionale Stampa Associata, explained the main goals of the platform: fighting misinformation, providing verified and useful information and producing relevant and tailored content on migration. Changing public attitudes is not their goal, but it is a fact that media influences the public narrative, so the way information is presented is important. Their approach is to ensure their journalism gives voice to migrants.

Makhoul said that it was important to ‘show not tell’ the benefits of integration, the risks of illegal migration, and report on the present situation of migrants in various places of transit in Europe. Alongside this, informing migrants on their rights when arriving in the EU helps the asylum process run more smoothly. Presenting news this way and having refugees and migrants on the InfoMigrants news team normalises the narrative, allows people to get deeper into the story and establishes trust. Journalists have an enormous influence on public attitudes and the way information is transmitted and packaged is inseparable from the story itself. “We need news stories that focus on the reality of migration, not only on big events or disasters,” she said. Being specialists, journalists are in a better position to understand what is at stake and to take the necessary step back to show a fair, impartial image of migration.
Luca Barani, policy officer in DG Migration and Home Affairs at the European Commission, presented the 2022 Eurobarometer on the integration of immigrants in the European Union. This Eurobarometer questioned European citizens about immigration, but more specifically about integration. Findings: 38% of citizens do not feel well informed about immigration and integration. 56% obtain their information by traditional media. There is a significant difference in how Europeans perceive immigrant integration in their local neighbourhoods and nationally: for local neighbourhoods 50% deem it successful, whereas for national, 42% deem it successful.

Due to policy discussions at the national level, and being far removed from these, many people do not feel enlightened about the migration issue at the country level. However, having immediate contact and direct discussions with colleagues, friends and community members from migrant backgrounds gives them a much different outlook. During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a shift to social media consumption (highest amongst the youth population at 35%), and in this media landscape certain articles are highlighted more than others, their contents amplified, and the skewed narrative supports existing fears and biases. Learning about integration should not happen exclusively through traditional media, which is where 56% of people obtain information on the subject.

Fridoon Joinda, student at the American College of Greece, filmmaker, and editorial member of Migratory Birds, a co-publication between young Greek and refugee journalists and funded by the Network of Children’s Rights, spoke about his arrival to Europe with his family as a political refugee in 2016. He spent more than one year in the Moria refugee camp in Greece where he made his first film, which was shot on a cell phone that was not his, as he had to throw his away before coming to Europe. Joinda began by saying that what the most distinguishable feature of Europe was for him was human rights, democracy and freedom of speech. “The fact that you give the microphone to an Afghan refugee to speak in the European capital is evidence of this.” But this does not mean, he said, that people are able to freely express their concerns. And yet, human rights and free speech is not being equally adhered to across Europe, least of all in refugee camps, which is why he began making films: to be a voice of refugees and show what was going on inside Moria.

According to the internet, 2 out of 3 people are “refugee friendly”, he found. “However, there are bars and restaurants on Lesvos that won’t allow refugees to enter, taxi drivers who don’t pick me up because I was a refugee, people who tell me to ‘go back to where I came from’. But I have to be fair and pay tribute to the people who housed me, fed me and gave me chicken soup when I was sick and my mother was not there to take care of me." How can we close this gap between refugees and local people? he asked. He praised education as a space to learn about politics, history, human rights, human psychology, war, etc. His scholarship to the American College of Greece has made him appreciative and to think critically about the world.

Fighting the ‘good fight’ starts with family and friends, creating a narrative that is co-constructive and including refugees in the inclusion dialogue. Write stories that refugees want to read about as exiled people, not just stories about the good vs. bad refugees. Put an end to the trite idea that people come to the EU to get on benefits and take advantage of the system by showing examples to the contrary. Shaping public attitudes begins in schools and in the
families of host communities that are welcoming migrants. But as an obvious precursor to this, access to health and education has to happen first because otherwise integration is not possible.

Parallel workshops

On day 1 of the forum, there were four parallel workshops.

1. Young migrants’ access to education and training:

This group called for equal access to education – private education included – regardless of ethnic or racial background, the use of translators in classrooms in the short-term to overcome language barriers, the diversification of schools, providing school enrolment information in multiple languages, and open schools. They emphasised the need for the above not to be jeopardised by ongoing asylum procedures.

Member States need to figure out how to set up and regulate an entire system that respects what every parent wants: quality education for their children. These are the children that will eventually run EU societies: how shall we get them to mix and mingle at this ripe age?

Refugee and migrant teachers want to work. They are already qualified and want to help children from their home countries in schools of their host countries. The current language and national citizenship requirements do not let them do this. However, Ukrainian teachers became certified within several months of arrival. How can we mobilise these ad-hoc solutions found in several Member States and apply them to all migrant teachers?

Migrants and refugees are resourceful, non-formal education projects needs to be connecting with formal education actors. There’s a hip-hop organisation in Athens that’s supporting young people that helps them discover themselves. Ukrainian mothers are opening up vacation camps, after-school centers and Sunday schools, but all of this tends to be unregulated and over-reliant on the goodwill of humans. How can we encourage Member States to link the non-formal with the formal and finance the non-formal with the funding it needs to exist?

Childcare is one very effective tool for migrant inclusion, but it is not inclusive if it is not accessible, be it because of the costs, but also because of migrant status, issues related to migrants’ mobility or information not accessible in the migrants’ language.

On the subject of higher education, there is a lot of motivation to get one, but currently, education is not an indicator for citizenship and the paperwork and red tape is an impediment to enrolment. This group highlighted the work of the Kieran project, which allows refugees to do one semester of university education and prove themselves before the project can help stream them into a national university.
2. Specific challenges and measures regarding integration of young refugees:

Access to housing affects access to education: reception centres that are far from schools/cities create an alienating, ghetto effect, with no way to get to school or social gathering places, while this is especially important for children and teenagers. For those who have come irregularly, the situation is even more dire.

It is important to design spaces where migrant and native youth can meet and interact as well as safe spaces for migrant youth where they do not fear a negative label. The national or local communication strategy should be adapted to the relevant social media to reach youth effectively, and there should be more emphasis on fighting xenophobia through local and more large-scale awareness campaigns.

There is a diversity of tools to support migrant youth inclusion. Establishing a buddy system between native and migrant youth, carefully designed role model projects, as well guardianship and foster care programs can help create incentives to learn and grow. Alternative learning opportunities could be more appropriate for those with learning disabilities or those who are illiterate. Not allowing translators in classrooms means that kids who do not yet understand the local language are segregated and this delays integration.

Stop creating double standards and prioritising one refugee group over another, as that diminishes the impact of inclusivity and can lead to unnecessary tension between refugees and migrants themselves. Connect groups to local services and improve the access of children and families to these services by involving civil society.

It is finally important to manage the transition to adulthood better so that unaccompanied minors do not reach the age of majority and lose all support. Some young migrants are discriminated against and treated like adults, when in fact they are much younger than they appear.

3. Legal migration: youth mobility in context of education and labour mobility:

Opportunities for youth mobility – either under the EU legal migration acquis, Erasmus+, the European Solidarity Corps or under national work and holiday visa programmes are not well known amongst organisations or amongst young people themselves. Better outreach, marketing and information campaigns targeted at young people are necessary to create more visibility of existing opportunities. Local networks, including schools and grassroots organisations, and social media channels should be used to disseminate information. The European Youth Portal could also play a major role in this regard. A welcoming narrative should underpin the provided information.

More needs to be done to help young people with the admission procedures and to prepare them for their stays prior to their arrivals. Pre-departure programs and information about the EU way of life and culture, the host society as well as the functioning of the job market would be helpful to give a full picture of what they can expect and what is expected of them when arriving here. Young ambassadors should be used to spread their experience.
Targeted support (including financial support if needed) and advice should be provided to young people after their arrival in the EU to ensure smooth integration in the host society and prevent isolation. Also proper housing should be ensured. The risks of exploitation should be minimised through proper information about rights and the provision of assistance if needed.

An EU Youth Mobility Scheme could have added value if it provided migrants (?) to work, do internships, travel and participate in short-term studies in different Member States in a flexible way for a limited period of time. Such a scheme would enable young people to make different experiences, to grow personally, to find out what they want in life and to get to know the EU.

4. Advancing the participation and engagement of young migrants:

Concerning programs and policy that affect them, migrants and refugees should play a role from the beginning: from the design and implementation, to evaluation. This should go beyond just consultations, rather, migrants and refugees should actively lead those programs. The barriers to participation are not just language, but bureaucracy. Perhaps most notably, the lack of information on how the democratic system works in host communities and how to access this information needs attention.

One should reflect on introducing quotas to represent diversity through an intersectional approach. There is a lack of intercultural communication, funding, and often patronising attitudes rooted in racism, combined with a lack of feedback mechanisms to youth organisations. Produce more youth-friendly information and change how migrants and refugees are represented on social and traditional media.

Being clever about where migrant centres are built (youth or otherwise), finding convenient and accessible spaces where real connection can happen can help encourage this participation. There is a shortage of spaces where refugees can naturally socialise with people from the local area. Establishing artificial refugee-only spaces can sometimes further alienate them. Youth workers and community leaders can be a bridge between the different communities.

Interactive Debate

The featured speakers of the closing interactive debate were DG Migration and Home Affairs deputy director general Beate Gminder, EESC member Michael McLoughlin, European Committee of the Regions representative Giuseppe Varacalli and David Vondráček, representative of the Czech Presidency. There was also a video presentation by the MEP Juan Fernando López Aguilar, who is also chair of the European Parliament’s LIBE Committee.

The roundup consensus was that the displacement of people triggered by the invasion of Ukraine by Russia has shown the capacity to respond to crises at scale. No one arriving in
Europe should face discrimination. This particular emergency situation has raised the bar and created new expectations for how refugees are welcomed, integrated and included, irrespective of where they come from.

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.

Micheal McLoughlin summed up the zeitgeist of the event best when he said that the EU institutions are still lacking in diversity. He called on attendees to “keep putting the pressure on us to not forget about you. Make us responsible, keep us involved and put us to work for you”.

**Round-up of the co-creative space**

The co-creative space was an opportunity for representatives of youth networks from inside and outside the EU to make their voices heard. In a forum dedicated to migrant youth, it was refreshing and insightful to hear the first-hand experiences of young people confronted with the challenges and opportunities of being young, and of integrating their rich cultural history to our European one.

Europe was once the center of democracy, policy-making, and innovation but centres are shifting: new heritage and cultural groups are coming in but Europeans are also moving out. This flow of migration to and from Europe is not something new, it is in fact the essence of Europe. It does not make sense to discuss how migrants influence and shape Europe, when this has been one of the key aspects of the cultural make-up of Europe. Migrants and refugees come with their own know-how, and policies should shift to understand and create space for them. Build on EU heritage by incorporating a more progressive cultural understanding as a framework for the future.

One of the youth representatives, Elsie Milan, of the EU Neighbourhood South initiative, addressed the question of European identity and what it means to be European. She highlighted that it is constantly shifting and that migration is not independent of European identity but inherent within it. “You’re not born European, you become European.” We have the blind spot of considering migrants as a homogenous group – we need to address and correct this.

(i) Education and work group

Naomi Wumba Bisengo (Youth Network, European Union Global Diaspora Facility) spoke on education and work. The group identified several problems: unequal access to education,
excessive tuition fees, complicated procedures, unclear communication platforms, difficulties regarding the recognition of qualifications, restrictions to work after studies, and the unwillingness to recruit and discrimination of employers. The picture is worse for young migrant women, often faced with harassment in the workplace.

Recommendations from the group were to facilitate access to working visas and lowering visa fees as well as tuition fees, and creating a platform that facilitates job/skills matching especially for sectors facing shortages – this platform should include salary transparency, as well as a standardised framework to recognise qualifications.

(ii) Participation and representation

Anne Beatrice Cinco of the youth network of the EU Global Diaspora Facility said that as a Southeast Asian, “I feel invisible when it comes to policy-making at the EU level, and yet people with Southeast Asian heritage can be seen everywhere: as frontline workers who have propped up economies in Europe, especially during the past two years as the medical sector was dealing with the COVID crisis, and yet it’s hard to see this representation at regional, local and national levels.”

The main point her group wanted to raise was the need to institutionalise these representative participatory mechanisms. “Participating in the European Migration Forum, having this platform and opportunity to speak, and being surrounded by like-minded is very nice, but it’s not sustainable. It won’t create long-term impact.” It is not until these discussions and exchanges are formalised that a lasting difference can be made. It is necessary to create a network of youth with migratory backgrounds at both national and regional levels and regularly meet with them and consult with them. There is a need to empower and build the capacity of these youth leaders to mobilise in order to help youth with migratory backgrounds create projects that work for migrant youth and meet their needs so that at the very least they are visible and can be seen and be included in society in general.

Outcomes of the breakout discussions “The Floor is Yours”

Participants proposed and raised 15 crucial topics they felt were priorities to discuss in smalls groups. The space is free and informal, with no moderation or reporting back involved.

They were:

1. Inclusion in the times of pushbacks and deterrence
2. Inclusion of persons in vulnerable situations
3. Immigrants fearing they will lose their identity
4. The role of sports in integration
5. Investing and harvesting the human capital of youth
6. Migration as a European Identity Feature
7. Integration and support of migrant and refugee women in host communities
8. Importance of public opinion and media in inclusion of young migrants
9. Asset framing
10. Access to education in rural areas
11. Supporting migrant children and youth who suffer from war trauma
12. Guardians in supporting unaccompanied minors’ access to support
13. Inclusion of young European Migrants in EU: Political and Social
14. Promoting migration in schools and integration host communities
15. Digital street work and social media

Results of the Forum Bureau election

Two new members to the Forum Bureau were elected this year to work towards increased inclusion and integration in their two-year mandates. At the EU level: Anila Noor, founder and managing director of the Netherlands-based New Women Connectors, which is led by migrant and refugee women whose goal it is to change the systemic discrimination towards women. At the national level, Syrian-born refugee Rudi Osman, the director of the France-based Union of Exiled Students (UEE: Union des étudiants exiles), whose aim it is to provide better access to post-secondary education for migrant and refugee students.

Noor has been involved in both the local and the higher level on women’s issues to create new narratives and bring new energy into Europe, changing resilience and the public mindset about migrant and refugee women. During her mandate, she promised to create an environment wherein the different migration issues and interests at the EU level do not conflict or compete with each other, but instead advocate for each other and help push each other’s agendas forward.

When he first arrived in France, Osman was told that as a refugee, he would have to go out and work, but he made it his mission to go to university and managed to do so with the help of a friend. Once admitted, he set up the UEE that is run by and for migrants and refugees to help other exiled students do the same. Last year, the organisation helped 740 exiled students gain entry to higher education. During his mandate he vows to fulfil his responsibility as a war survivor so that others like him can create the best future possible for themselves in their adopted countries.

Entertainment

On the eve of day 1 of the forum, 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, instead, they used music as their primary form of communication.

Forum attendees enjoyed the lively atmosphere that concluded the event with dance and song. The moving performance illustrated how powerfully the universal language of music and
the experiences we have in common can connect us all and lift our collective spirits in times of struggle.