

2017 European Migration Forum: consultation with civil society

7 October, 10.00 a.m. – 1.00 p.m.

EESC building, rue Belliard 99, Brussels

Room 63 (6th floor)

This paper has been prepared in view of the consultation with civil society scheduled on 7 October, as to outline some proposals of potential topics to be covered in the next European Migration Forum meeting, to be held on **2-3 March 2017** in Brussels.

The potential topics suggested in this paper are the result of an initial proposal of the European Commission and the European Economic and Social Committee, as well as preliminary reactions by the members of the Bureau of the Forum to these suggestions. In bringing forward such topics for discussion, efforts were made to combine the results that stemmed out of the discussion with the civil society in the 2nd European Migration Forum; the priorities of the EU institutions vis-à-vis a legislative and policy making process that is ever evolving in these times of crisis; and the operational dynamics of implementing EU legislation, taking stock of what was discussed in the previous two years.

In light of the above, the aim of the consultation on the 7th of October is to **get feedback on the below proposed topics**, in order to be able to determine the preferred **one(s)** upon which the 3rd edition of the Forum should be built.

A. Safe legal channels

As a follow-up to the topics explored in the previous editions of the Forum, the next meeting could focus on further discussing the need for **safe legal alternatives** to the perilous journeys migrants often undertake. This topic could include a reflection on the following:

- **Resettlement**: This has a strong link to the recently adopted proposal on resettlement¹, as well as to the measures included in the Action Plan on Integration² as proposed by the Commission, warranting a further discussion on the realities of the field, the challenges and the examples of what works. In this

¹ COM(2016)468 final

context, the issue of private sponsorship could also be explored, looking at evidence from already existing models, and using the field expertise of the civil society to reflect on how these may be applied to the EU context. The discussion could thus focus on the role of civil society in this type of resettlement scheme.

- **Family Reunification:** family reunification remains a key legal pathway to Europe, accounting for around 30% of all permits issues across the EU each year. The EU is committed to the protection of this right, including in the context of providing protection to people in need.
- **Admission of economic migrants:** providing legal channels for reasons other than international protection, including for low and medium skilled migrants, remain crucial. The discussions on this issue would feed into the ongoing "REFIT process", aimed at identifying gaps and needs within the current existing legal migration *acquis*.

B. First reception and integration

The ongoing migration situation has led the EU to a fast paced policy process, responding to urgent needs in times of crisis. Because of this, there is the need to understand and exchange views on local specificities of how the crisis is unfolding. This is particularly the case for the (first) reception of asylum seekers/refugees, a topic that can incorporate a range of issues including the provision of information on rights and duties; legal advice; access to health and basic services; access to housing (that all emerged from the various workshops of last year's edition).

The discussion could include a reflection on how to best ensure cooperation among all actors responsible for reception and integration of migrants, in particular by exploring the respective roles of public authorities (national, regional and local) and of non-governmental organisations – as well as the interaction between the two.

Another issue that could be further expanded is the specific needs that vulnerable groups have, in particular in the case of children. This could focus on how to ensure the respect of the best interest of the child in the context of reception and integration; child protection systems; child safeguards etc. This would allow to meet the preferences expressed by civil society in previous meetings, and would possibly ensure a concrete follow-up to the 10th European Forum on the rights of the child, which the Commission organises on 29 and 30 November 2016 with main theme: the protection of children in migration.

This topic would also allow for a first assessment of the implementation of the Commission's Action Plan for the Integration of Third-Country nationals, adopted on 7 June 2016.

² COM(2016)377 final

C. Public perception: changing the narrative

Waves, invasion, masses...the terminology often used to define migrants and migration flows intrinsically dehumanizes migrants and does not account for their individual stories. Many actors underline the need of creating an alternative narrative to what seems to be the status quo. This topic proposal would deal with the issue of public perception of asylum seekers and refugees, and in particular with the role of the media in portraying the image of asylum seekers and refugees who are currently arriving to Europe. What can civil society do to influence the public image of asylum seekers and refugees and better cooperate with the media, and how can the European Commission help to this extent? Are there existing good practices from which we can learn?