



EUROPEAN **MIGRATION FORUM**

2nd Meeting of the European Migration Forum

6/7 April 2016

*A long-term approach to sustainable labour migration and successful
integration - the voice of civil society*

Final Report

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FINAL REPORT¹

INTRODUCING THE 2ND EUROPEAN MIGRATION FORUM

The second European Migration Forum (EMF) took place on 6 and 7 April 2016. Jointly organised by the European Commission and the European Economic and Social Committee, this event focussed on *a long-term approach to sustainable labour migration and successful integration*. This topic was chosen in consultation with civil society organisations, and builds on one of the four core pillars of the European Agenda on Migration, namely "a new policy on legal migration".

In line with the feedback received after the first EMF, the format of the Forum changed considerably, from the formal conference style to a **participatory approach**. **This approach** provided space for **work in small groups** and a free but guided discussion. Building on the small-group work and direct informal participation, the second day gave participants the opportunity to discuss **topics** of their choice, that were deemed to be important and/or requiring further consideration after the first day's workshop-based discussions. This enabled civil society organisations to interact much more closely with each other on concerns and areas of common interest, helping to create a real European network of organisations. Moreover, the participation in the working groups of representatives of the EU institutions allowed civil society to reach out directly to those institutions.



¹ The information and views set out in this report are those solely of the author and speakers and thus do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the European Union. The European Union cannot guarantee the accuracy of the content, and neither the European Union institutions and bodies nor any person acting on their behalf may be held responsible for how the information and views contained within the report are used. I wish to thank the rapporteurs for the four workshops for their contributions.

SETTING THE SCENE: THE VOICE OF THE INSTITUTIONS

The Forum opened with statements by **Dimitris Avramopoulos**, Commissioner for Migration and Home Affairs, **Markku Markkula**, President of the Committee of the Regions (CoR) and **Georges Dassis**, President of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). The speakers stressed the importance of the European Migration Forum as a platform where a deep conversation can take place between actors operating at different levels in the governance of European migration. In particular, Mr Avramopoulos stressed the crucial **role of civil society in assisting and complementing EU institutions** in setting the agenda and in implementing migration and integration policy.

European migration – the current state of play

All the speakers emphasised that today's migratory situation offers both the opportunity and the need to address the issue of migration in a common way, finding new solidarity and deeper humanity in the way it is currently managed.

Mr Avramopoulos looked back at the changing trend in migration in Europe, from a region of emigration into a region of significant immigration flows. The challenge this poses is to find a way of **responding to this problem as a united and integrated Europe**. According to Markku Markkula, solutions have to be drawn **from Europe's own experience** as a region of emigration, as a region of diversity and as a space of free movement. George Dassis referred to the long-standing position of the EESC on migration, which was based on deep-rooted European solidarity. If this approach had been followed, Europe would not be in its current very serious situation. The EESC President stated that it is **shameful that Member States have been trumpeting the concept of solidarity**, while riding roughshod over the fundamental values of Europe. Instead, he argued, political decision-makers across **Europe should embrace a different and welcoming narrative** for those in need of protection and those that can contribute to the development of this region. On this point, Markku Markkula stated that when developing a new narrative, it is vital to turn negatives into positives and to stress Europe's need for immigration.

Mr Avramopoulos mentioned the significant **demographic challenges** which could be felt sooner than was previously thought, including an **ageing population** and a major **skills shortage**.

Georges Dassis and Markku Markkula both argued that **an immediate integration process** needs to be given substantial support and implemented at **the local level**. **Local and regional authorities should be viewed as key players** in the multilevel governance of migration, as it is their job to welcome migrants on their arrival, dealing with the first needs and integration measures and trying to create a **welcoming environment**. Therefore, Georges Dassis added, we should avoid putting migrants **in centres that hinder their integration process** and leaving them in a legal limbo for too long, as this severely impacts their future livelihoods in Europe.

What is Europe's migration strategy today?

The speakers acknowledged that often the **rules and policies drafted on paper are out of touch with reality**. George Dassis in particular highlighted the role of the EESC in monitoring the situation in the field, having sent 11 delegations to 11 countries, including Turkey. This reflected the needs Mr Avramopoulos referred to, of responding quickly with swift action to emergency situations with additional budgetary commitments and emergency policy responses. However, this approach is not sustainable and cannot be the only way in which Europe deals with migration. The EU **needs a comprehensive long-term policy on migration**, to ensure such crises do not occur again. This

strategy needs to **be based on the protection of those in need**, with a reform of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), and with a coherent strategy on economic migration **to address demographic shortages and labour market needs**. Mr Avramopoulos referred to the relevant EU tools, including the **Seasonal Workers Directive**, stressing the importance of opening up opportunities for circular migration; the **ICT directive**, which now makes Intra-Corporate Transfers easier; the newly recast **Students and Researchers directive**, which makes it possible for students to stay 9 months after graduation to find a job or set up a business; and the forthcoming **review of the Blue Card directive**, which will respond to the need to attract highly-skilled migrants. On the last point, Markku Markkula highlighted the importance of attracting foreign entrepreneurs, who can use their foreign experience in the EU market.

The three panellists agreed that the current European **strategy deals primarily with issues relating to highly-skilled migration**, whereas **low- and medium-skilled migration have not been thoroughly addressed** until now. Moreover, despite not being a legislative competency of the EU, **migrant integration was recognised as an area in which the EU can play a greater role**, and the Commissioner announced the upcoming adoption of the **Action Plan on Integration of third country nationals**.

The input from civil society

Within the broader topic of the Forum, Mr Avramopoulos mentioned some specific themes on which input from civil society is particularly welcomed: better access to jobs in the EU for low- and medium-skilled migrants, ways of better assisting and empowering local authorities at the frontline of migration and refugees issues, ways of ensuring that successful integration takes place, and that migrants are not exploited.

The need to receive input in this time of crisis was described by all panellists as considerable, in order to be able to provide not only an emergency response but also a coherent and responsive long-term strategy. The panelists were optimistic that this year's European Migration Forum would meet the needs both of civil society organisations and the EU institutions.

WORKSHOPS: THE VOICE OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY

Workshop A

Key issue: tension between the structural needs of migrants/their frequent undocumented employment, and legal provisions for their arrival and protection.

Suggestions:

- General framework to protect the category of workers across all occupations, regardless of status
- Opening up legal channels for those occupations most prone to exploitation (care work, agriculture, construction) including through an EU database of job-matching for migrants
- Creating an enabling environment, in particular ensuring access to services such as healthcare and legal protection

Workshop B

Key issue: provisions for the protection of migrants' rights from labour-related exploitation are too closely linked to their status

Suggestions:

- Legislation should cater for migrants' fundamental and human rights, irrespective of their status
- This legislation should not be only linked to smuggling and trafficking of human beings, as reality suggests this is not the only relevant situation
- Boosting civil society's role in raising migrants' awareness of their rights, thus empowering them
- Increase media coverage of conditions of exploitation, showing the human (suffering) face of migratory experience

Workshop C

Key issue: in order to ensure successful integration, the approach should be customised and continuous, merging together different phases of this process.

Suggestions:

- Ensure that language and vocational trainings are linked to a tangible outcome (certification to access further education, work-related diplomas, etc.)
- Supporting ethnic businesses and migrant entrepreneurship, including on a small scale
- A multi-sectoral, cooperative and bottom-up approach
- Ensuring that secure status is granted promptly, as it is crucial for successful integration

Workshop D

Key issue: the local level should be empowered as integration takes place at this level.

Suggestions:

- Facilitate the sharing of best practices
- Monitor integration with indicators at the local level, where integration takes place
- Empower key actors, including 1) volunteers, 2) local community, 3) local authority, 4) migrants.

WORKSHOP A

LOW- AND MEDIUM-SKILLED MIGRATION: specific challenges in this sector in particular as regards domestic and care work

Rapporteur: Michele Levoy

The focus of Workshop A was on low- and medium-skilled migration, looking at the challenges and the realities on the ground, focussing in particular on domestic and care work.

Before a discussion could unfold on the topic, it was important to find common grounds for a coherent definition of low- and medium-skilled occupations. In order to do this, the ILO International Standard Classification of Occupation was used, which states:

- Low skilled workers as group 9, occupying elementary occupations such as domestic workers, cleaners and labourers in agriculture, mining and manufacturing.
- Medium skilled workers as groups 4 to 8 which include occupations such as clerks, service and sales workers, crafts and trade workers including in the construction sector.

The main problem as regards these two categories of migrant workers is that very few legislative provisions are in place to address their issues and needs, and those that are in place are often out of touch with the reality on the ground. On the one hand, **not enough legal channels of immigration are offered to low- and medium-skilled workers**, leading to perilous journeys towards Europe. On the other, the **structural need for a low- and medium-skilled labour force in our economies** is directly proportional to the demographic challenges that Europe is facing, which will lead to a shortage of skills in those sectors in as little as 15 to 20 years. The impact on our European social system will be great unless these positions are filled, and migrants in all categories and occupations could play a key role here. The **policy framework should reflect this reality**, ensuring that workers are not placed in an irregular or vulnerable situation at any stage in their migratory experience, from departure to working in the country of destination. This will address Europe's needs as well as those of the migrants and, most importantly, protect their rights. This applies, for example to care workers, for whom there is an ever-greater need in our developed economies and social models, which increasingly rely on private forms of care work for the elderly and children that is often not covered by regular channels.

The way forward

In many countries across Europe, the tension between economic need and migrants' irregular status has been often addressed with **large-scale regularisation programmes**. This approach is certainly to be **welcomed**, as it recognises the extensive use of foreign work in the irregular economy, which in practice integrates irregular migrants into our European economies, from the time they arrive in Europe. Regularising these migrants leads to **improving their access to social benefits** and consequently making their integration process easier.

However, regularisation is often a post hoc solution that sees migrants going through informal recruitment processes and irregular work. Therefore, **legislation should** be developed so as to prevent the need for regularisation programmes, **offering legal alternatives to situations of irregularity**. By doing so, migrants will have an easier access to rights and social protection and the phenomenon of de-skilling – the widespread issue of high-skilled migrants taking up lower-skilled positions because of their irregular status – will be tackled.

The strategic action that is necessary to tackle those issues should reflect the need for further understanding of the specific local features of irregular migration recruitment and exploitation, to this end using the knowledge and know-how of employers, trade unions, NGOs and think-tanks. The **opening up of legal channels** should reflect those occupations more prone to exploitation, which include **domestic care, agricultural work, construction and hospitality**.

EU provisions

Various EU instruments are in place to deal with some of the problems already mentioned, including: the **Single Permit Directive**, which gives procedural guarantees and equal treatment rights for most migrant workers, without however setting admission conditions; the **Students and Researchers Directive**, adding provisions of equal treatment with its recast covering also other categories such as **au pairs** (though with optional rules); the **Seasonal Workers' Directive**, adding protective measures for temporary migrants and the possibility to change employer; the **Employers Sanctions Directive**, which legislates on the sanctioning of employers that take up – and often exploit – migrants with an irregular status.

There is quite often a discrepancy between the existing legal provisions and their implementation. This has been the case especially as regards lower occupational categories such as in the case of the Single Permit Directive, but also with the emergence of undesired effects of these policies, such as the sanctioning and often return of irregular migrants following the implementation of the Employers Sanction Directive.

Suggestion

Given that local specificities of different Member States render it very difficult to establish legislation at the EU level on narrow sectors, a **general framework of legislation** should be adopted that comprehensively tackles the issues recognised in this workshop, **protective of migrants' rights across occupations**.

In order to **facilitate the legal recruitment process** of low- and medium-skilled migrants, one option could be to develop an **EU database of job-matching for migrants**, where employers can list their needs and employees can have access and more easily apply.

In the short, medium and long term, priority should be given to creating an enabling environment for migrants, by:

- 1) ensuring **access to services**, such as healthcare, which are key to their integration
- 2) **engaging with employers** in order to improve conditions at their work place
- 3) working with **local communities** to ease integration processes
- 4) strengthening relations with **countries of origin**, also allowing for pre-departure information about available services and rights, so as to empower migrants through knowledge.

By doing so, the contradiction of needing low- and medium-skilled migrants for our economies but not having adequate legislation that reflects this may be resolved, moving towards a framework that protects migrants' rights.

WORKSHOP B

UNDECLARED WORK AND LABOUR EXPLOITATION OF MIGRANTS

Rapporteur: Marco Borraccetti

When talking about low- and medium-skilled migration in Europe, it is important to address the issue of undeclared work and the exploitation of migrants at work. Workshop B heard **testimonies of the impact** that the current policy framework is having on **protecting the fundamental and labour rights of migrants** in Europe.

The role of the Media

The first issue considered was the need for **more and better media coverage on the issue of migrant labour-related exploitation**. In fact, to date, the **narrative** concerning migration that is presented is very much linked to the idea of “*great waves, masses, influx*”. **Migrants are de-personalized** and are purely numbers, linked especially with the arrivals to Europe. This hides the important issue of labour-related exploitation of migrants, which should instead be based on two facts. Firstly, labour markets need more migrant workers. Secondly, low- and medium-skilled work is already extensively used, although it largely remains in the informal economy. The media in some countries do not show this in the daily news and the migrants that are stuck in this limbo of exploitation, legally or irregularly, become forgotten. New attention should be brought to this topic, with **media coverage reporting on migration in a way that includes the human dimension**, which is intrinsically **intertwined with the protection of fundamental and labour rights of migrants**. This will lead to a new narrative on the topic, on which civil society can build to raise the awareness of local communities on the protection of migrants' rights.

Role of civil society

Civil society plays an important role in **engaging with local communities and raising awareness** on migrants' labour exploitation and their rights. Firstly, engaging the local population will lead to greater general awareness about the issues, resulting in improving conditions for integration. Secondly, **awareness** of fundamental and labour rights should focus on migrants, as this is a **key to achieving empowerment**. Given that “knowledge is power”, providing uninformed migrants with crucial information on their rights will make it easier for migrants to help and protect themselves.

This knowledge-sharing will be improved by **creating stronger ties within civil society** organisations working across local communities, regions and countries. By doing so, a major **platform for exchanging information and best practice** will be created. This is particularly useful in cases where interaction with migrant communities might be difficult. Solutions can build on previous experience within the network to overcome language and cultural barriers.

This work will help **increase migrants' trust in the current legislative frameworks**, existing support networks and in institutions, especially at the local level. It is extremely important **to increase awareness and trust in the protection system in place** as this feeds directly into improving the development and implementation of law enforcement.

Rights and law enforcement

When speaking about **undeclared work of migrants and their exploitation, this has to be done irrespective of the legal status of migrants**. Being a victim of exploitation does not mean that a migrant is in an irregular position; rather, it reflects a condition of vulnerability of that migrant, regular or irregular. This vulnerability must be considered to underpin all exploitation and every effort should be made to tackle the issue. One starting point may be to **cease to link permission to stay with a job offer**, as this increases migrants' vulnerability, by making them feel they have to accept certain types of work.

If someone is exploited when harvesting crops, their situation is not connected to trafficking but only to exploitation. The exploiters in this case are not members of a criminal (international) network, but are still exploiting the migrant labour workforce and breaching the fundamental and labour rights of migrants. This should be reflected in **legislation, which should not only assume a link between the irregular situation of migrants and exploitation**.

Suggestion

For these reasons, the suggestion put forward is to develop a stronger policy framework to allow for **tough sanctions against exploiters, without necessarily linking these to smuggling or trafficking, nor to the irregular situation of migrants**. In tandem with a system of prosecuting smugglers and traffickers, a system of migrant protection that prosecutes those benefiting from the exploitation of migrants should also be developed.

WORKSHOP C

ACCESS TO THE LABOUR MARKET AND INTEGRATION OF THIRD-COUNTRY NATIONALS, INCLUDING ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES

Rapporteur: Maria Vincenza Desiderio

As seen throughout the EFM event, migration management cannot be limited to short-term measures to solve the migration crisis. Parallel approaches are required, developing a medium- and long-term economic and social integration plan. The new momentum that has emerged as regards integration policies should not be lost. Workshop C worked on coming up with ideas on how to strengthen this long-term comprehensive strategy, looking at access to the labour market and the integration of third-country nationals, including asylum seekers and refugees.

Supporting migrant integration: building on what works

The first thing to bear in mind when developing integration strategies is that **migrant support needs to be customised**. A one-size-fits-all approach does little to address the problems that arise at the local level. Because of this, the role of the **civil society** – which is deeply rooted in the local level- in **translating the needs of local communities** is fundamental, and should be supported.

By acting in this way, measures may be devised in order to **empower migrants, rather than providing only for their assistance**.

Mainstream broad support measures, including **language training and vocational training**, should continue to be implemented. However, it is important that such **training is as far as possible linked to a tangible outcome**, whether a certificate paving the way for further education or a diploma with some value in the labour market or a job placement. This creates motivation and avoids the frustration of taking part in pointless training courses, and instead ensures **continuity of the integration process** that is crucial to its successful outcome. Close cooperation between different actors – such as education providers, integration service providers and employers - is needed, in order to draw all the phases of this continuous process together in coherent way.

Self-employment also needs to be considered as a **way of integrating newcomers and refugees**. For example, ethnic businesses may play an important role in integrating into the formal economy migrants with skills that are not immediately transferable to the local labour market. Allowing and supporting such investments could play an important role in achieving this.

In order to ensure the continuity of the integration process, it is vital that **multi sectoral partnerships** are created and supported. This needs to reflect two issues. Firstly, this coordination should maintain a **strong bottom-up approach**, keeping the necessary flexibility for the development of new and spontaneous initiatives. Secondly, however, there is the **need for a platform that unites actors and coordinates action**, to ensure that the overall strategy is coherent and avoids the duplication of efforts and funding being wasted.

To support this, **funding also** needs to be made readily available **to small organisations**, which can play an important role in this bottom-up multi-sectoral approach, thus leveraging funding to initiatives that are well coordinated and proven to work.

Lastly, the issue of facilitating **prompt access to a secure (residence) status** needs to be addressed, as this remains of primary importance to facilitate labour market access and the integration of migrants. In fact, while work restrictions faced by asylum seekers whose applications are pending are being significantly shortened, individuals remain in a vulnerable position when it comes to finding employment. Employers will not invest in asylum-seekers that may be forced to leave in 3 months' time, resulting in a significant obstacle to their labour market integration. For this reason, every effort should be made to **allow for a secure legal status in a timely manner**.

Cooperation among multilevel actors is the key to achieving these goals. It is also the pillar for building a set of sustainable measures in the long term. **Cooperation** will ensure that efforts help achieve the best outcomes, **keeping alive the** political interest that has developed in response to the migration crisis and will also **ensure tangible results**.

WORKSHOP D

The Role of the local level in the effective integration of third-country nationals, including asylum-seekers and refugees

Rapporteur: Orland Cardona

Workshop D analysed many cross-cutting themes through the lenses of the local actors, looking at their role in the effective integration of third-country nationals, including asylum-seekers and refugees. It is in fact at the local level that issues occur, and actors are under pressure to respond swiftly and

find solutions. A **European approach to integration**, therefore, should be considered as an **umbrella framework that is essentially shaped by experiences at the local level**, where integration is taking place. Local and regional level needs to take on a central role, becoming more integrated in multi-level coordination and in funding allocation.

Best Practices

Given the extensive work on the ground carried out at the local and regional level to respond to the recent increase in arrivals, a few best practices were recognised. These may be applied to different contexts that face similar problems.

Housing was recognised as often being a **barrier to migrant integration**. This is due to language and cultural barriers, together with a lack of knowledge about the rights and legal provisions concerning housing. Because of this, **supporting migrants attempting to access housing** is an important step towards their integration. This can be achieved, for example, through mediating between them and landlords, in order to increase migrant empowerment in the housing market.

Reception and welcoming campaigns are an important element of integration, given that their potential widespread impact across the community may help **make the narrative less hostile towards migrants**. A more welcoming narrative at the local level will lead to more fertile ground for a successful integration. Volunteer involvement, in this regards, is an important aspect that should be actively developed in local and regional communities across Europe.

Another example of best practice comes from the **mentoring of underperforming students at schools**, with university students that help them progress and assist towards higher educational achievement.

Support needed to enhance good practices

It is important to increase the **monitoring of integration through indicators**. This monitoring should reflect the reality not only at a national level, as is currently the case, but also **at the local and regional level**.

Building on migrant networks already established in various local communities, many **migrants develop their own initiatives**. They can be extremely important in getting less well-integrated migrants more involved. Local authorities and civil society should therefore be allowed to support these initiatives where necessary.

When promoting any such initiatives, together with many other strategies at the local and regional level, it should always be recognised that **four actors are crucial to facilitating integration**, namely:

- 1) **Volunteers**, who through information and awareness-raising campaigns can achieve significant results in terms of creating a welcoming narrative.
- 2) **Local communities**, whose main role is to strengthen community-building, ensuring a higher degree of involvement and integration in local societies.
- 3) **Local authorities**, with which further dialogue should take place to ensure closer cooperation.
- 4) **Migrants**, monitoring how well integration is proceeding, directly engaging with their experience.

These initiatives offer examples of what is needed to strengthen the role of the local and regional level in the effective integration of migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees, and also provide an insight into

which actors need to be empowered and taken into account to ensure successful outcomes. By listening to local voices, a migrant-centred approach could be achieved in the short-, medium-and long-term.

THE FLOOR IS YOURS! IN CONVERSATION WITH CIVIL SOCIETY

On the second day of the EMF, discussions were based on small-group work on themes that had been chosen directly by civil society representatives in the morning. This gave those present the chance to use a participatory approach to consider issues that were only mentioned during the workshops, but on which further attention was deemed to be necessary. This participatory approach allowed not only for easier and more informal conversations between members of civil society, but also for policy officers from the EU Institutions to join discussions and engage in the conversations that were being held. A number of working groups were formed, discussing issues that may be grouped as follows:

- Changing the European narrative on migration
- Increasing cooperation among stakeholders
- Paying attention to migrants' particular vulnerabilities
- Protecting the rights of migrant workers
- Reflections on the Commission Communication on the CEAS reform

Changing the European narrative on migration

Throughout the EMF, it was highlighted how important it is to **develop an alternative narrative** on migration, to counter the xenophobic and populist discourse currently sweeping across Europe. "Waves", "flooding", "masses"... all this terminology that is continuously used in reference to migrants. This **dehumanises the debate on migration** and takes attention away from the needs of migrants as human beings. The first step in fighting racism and xenophobic movements across Europe is to challenge political leaders that contribute and flourish in such discourse, offering an alternative based on values of humanity and solidarity. In order to do so, the role of **the media is key**, as it can reverse the trend of dehumanising migration in news reports. Recommendations were therefore made to:

- ensure all stakeholders actively push for reasonable media reporting
- adopt a code of conduct and draw up a handbook of good practice on reporting on migrants, highlighting their human dimension
- promote the sharing of best practice through a virtual EU-level coordination platform
- facilitate more frequent intercultural exchanges of journalists in different contexts/countries where different rights-based approaches are recognised to be a reality.

Increasing cooperation among stakeholders

One of the main aims of the EMF is to provide a platform where different stakeholders can cooperate and engage in conversation with the EU institutions. During the EMF, some discussions looked at this issue, highlighting the need to **continue this cooperative approach once the EMF concluded**. In this multilevel and multisector cooperation, every effort should be made to include civil society organisations (CSOs), public authorities at all levels, the private sector, trade unions and migrant-based organisations. There is a need to:

- lobby the business sector, explaining the benefits of a migrant workforce in different areas (SMEs, multinational companies, etc.)
- include the private sector in the EMF and other work on migration policy
- push to include undocumented migrants in the work of trade unions
- ensure that trade unions push for “equal work - equal pay” regardless of status
- create cooperation between labour inspectorates, CSOs and trade unions
- increase the representation of migrants at all levels
- build platforms for the swift sharing of information. This may be achieved by creating an online tool that links together all actors participating at the EMF, considerably facilitating cross-border cooperation, coordination and best practice-sharing.
- See cooperation as a process, not only as a one-off encounter, to create a trustworthy environment for collaboration.

Paying attention to migrants' particular vulnerabilities

Treating migrants as homogenous masses dehumanises them and the particular vulnerabilities affecting migrant communities are consequently ignored. These may relate to gender issues or mental health issues, which often also affect children. Dealing with such issues is not only of primordial importance for the wellbeing of vulnerable migrants, but is an essential first step towards their economic and social integration. All too often, these issues are not dealt with, leaving the migrants in a position of double vulnerability. In the case of mental health in particular, together with individuals who have pre-existing conditions, issues may arise in connection to the perilous journey migrants take. In order to deal adequately with these situations, it is important to:

- pay attention to gender issues in the forthcoming integration action plan
- provide multidisciplinary teams to address integration-related issues (social carers, psychologists, etc.)
- develop common guidelines for aid workers treating certain issues in reception centres, including mental and sexual issues
- inform victims of racial hatred and hate speech about how to access equality bodies
- run awareness-raising campaigns within migrant groups to tackle the stigmatisation of mental and sexual problems within migrant communities.

Protecting the rights of migrant workers

When dealing with migrant workers, the protection of their rights should never be linked to their legal status. It is important to decriminalise undocumented workers, as this puts them in an extremely vulnerable situation, potentially resulting in a breach of their fundamental rights. This may lead, for example, to situations in which migrants are not paid, but fear deportation if they approach the authorities. Moreover, undocumented status is often a consequence of restrictions on secondary movement. For these reasons, it is important to:

- carry out regularisation schemes
- not to bind employee to employer, allowing migrant workers to quit or change job without fearing the loss of their residence permit
- impose sanctions on employers that breach migrants' rights (e.g. by not paying their wages), and add fines linked to a repayment of owed wages
- reduce undocumented migration by not limiting migrants with a regular residence permit to move within the EU/Schengen area and look for a job in another Member State

- avoid de-skilling by providing an effective programme to recognise qualifications at EU level, even for low- and medium-skilled jobs
- create a welcome pack for migrant workers that contains information on their rights and the processes to get their qualifications recognised.

Reflections on the Commission Communication on the CEAS reform

Concern was raised during the EMF as regards the Commission Communication published on 6 April, regarding a “Reform of the Common European Asylum System and enhancing legal avenues to Europe”. Many participants saw the communication as a first step towards diminishing the rights of people in need of protection. It could open the way for more legal arrivals but on the condition that, once protection is no longer necessary, it would be withdrawn. The communication was considered a significant threat to the integration of beneficiaries of international protection, leaving individuals in a situation of perennial uncertainty that would greatly hinder their integration process. It would make no sense, in fact, for employers and service providers (local authorities, national governments, etc.) to invest in people that are not likely to stay and will eventually leave. This danger was considered to lead to problems in integration processes, both in the economic and social dimension, with difficulties in finding training and stable work, and would create housing problems and mental health issues that may arise from being in such a vulnerable situation. For these reasons, participants recommended:

- avoiding any roll-backs in provisions on family reunification, as this would close the only safe legal route for protection that many individuals in need have to reach the EU, which goes against the aim of the communication itself
- avoiding criminalising secondary movements, as this leads to increased numbers finding themselves in an irregular situation
- ensuring the right to long-term social inclusion in the European Union, pushing for more effective implementation of existing asylum and family reunification directives
- ensure that timely and equal access to the labour market, housing and training courses is provided to those in need.

PLENARY DEBATE: THE WAY FORWARD FOR A LONG-TERM APPROACH

The final panel debate allowed representatives of the EU institutions to reflect on and react to the contributions made during the Forum. The speakers were: **Matthias Ruete**, Director-General for Migration and Home Affairs; **Claude Moraes**, Chair of the LIBE Committee, European Parliament; **Roel Gans**, Director for International Affairs, Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment- on behalf of the Dutch Presidency of the Council of the EU; **Dimitris Kalogeropoulos**, Member of the Committee of the Regions and **Cristian Pirvulescu**, president of the Immigration and Integration Permanent Study Group of the European Economic and Social Committee. Claude Moraes, despite not being able to attend, gave a written contribution that was read out by Belinda Pyke, Director of Migration and Mobility in DG Home, who chaired the debate. Enough time was then left for an extensive Q&A.

The contributions to the panel debate largely centred around two grand themes: 1) the **current European strategy on migration**, 2) the approach and the values that a **future long-term European Strategy** needs to be based on.

Matthias Ruete, reflecting on the positive aspects of the new participatory approach of the Forum, highlighted how some **cross-cutting issues** had emerged from the contributions, namely: the call for a comprehensive and **non-sectoral approach to low- and medium-skilled migration**; the need for increased efforts to make **pre-departure information** available to individuals before they embark on their migratory route; the importance of building **strong ties with the social partners and business stakeholders**; the need to **ensure deeper trust between migrant communities and institutions**, with special attention to be placed on **empowering the local and regional levels** in order to enable this relationship – built on trust - to start as soon as migrants arrive in the EU. Matthias Ruete also gave some **clarification as regards the Communication on the reform of CEAS**, as this had been criticised by a number of civil society representatives at the event. Mr Ruete highlighted the need to understand that everyone present was **committed to the objectives of ensuring legal channels for migrants and guaranteeing the protection** of those in need. However, Ruete also asked participants to bear in mind the pragmatic role that the Commission needed to have when developing policy, given that the reality across Europe was too often linked with building walls, fences and rising xenophobia. This reflected a **difficult challenge in negotiating new policies** that increased the numbers of entries to Europe. The Commission was balancing this with new political and budgetary investment in relocation and resettlement schemes and safeguards for migrants arriving to Europe.

The statement by **Claude Moraes** largely reflected these points, especially arguing that the creation of further **partnerships between different levels** was key to developing a long-term European strategy on migration and integration. In particular, this strategy should integrate the progress being made on highly-skilled migration provisions –as for the Blue Card- with **new legal avenues for economic migrants** to arrive to Europe without risking their lives, and encountering exploitation thereafter. Mr Moraes concluded that the European Parliament was very keen to further develop its relations with civil society, in order to remedy shortcomings in the EU's current legislative framework.

Roel Gans also stressed the importance of partnerships with the civil society, calling in particular for **Member States to ensure a thorough consultation process with practitioners** when developing integration measures. He also emphasised the importance of Member States exchanging best practice. The role of the European Commission, despite not having direct power in legislation on integration issues, should be to facilitate this dialogue. The publication of a new Action Plan on integration would be an important step in this direction. On low- and medium-skilled migrants, Mr Gans stressed the importance of ensuring that the **right to decent work of migrants**, within the ILO framework, is guaranteed; in this regard, the creation of the **Platform on undeclared work** was greatly welcomed, as an important step forward in the central task of working to combat the exploitation of workers, including migrants, and to strengthen cross-border cooperation.

The representatives of the Committee of the Regions, Dimitris Kalogeropoulos, and of the European Economic and Social Committee, Cristian Pîrvulescu, emphasised the need for new narratives on migrant and refugee reception and integration that puts the local and regional authorities at its core.

Reflecting on the reality of crisis in which Europe finds itself, **Dimitris Kalogeropoulos** highlighted the importance of creating new synergies and partnerships among actors concerned by multilevel migration governance. First of all, such synergies need to be developed between **Member States**, which are **failing to implement solidarity**. This **partnership** and cohesion should then be reflected **towards countries in our neighbourhood**, key players and stakeholders in the migration challenges we are facing today. Mr Kalogeropoulos also stressed the **importance of local and regional authorities**, given that integration is a key challenge, in terms of the great numbers of arrivals with which they have to deal on a daily basis. Despite the lack of resources, these authorities are doing an

incredible job. Yet, they need to be helped with funding and support, given that it is at the local level that integration starts and takes form. The new narrative that should inform future European long-term strategies on migration should be based on the central role the people have, involving local communities in welcoming migrants and those in need of protection, reflecting both the **economic and demographic needs we have and our duty of giving refuge** to those in need. Stating the view of the Committee of the Regions, Mr Kalogeropoulos praised the European Migration Forum as evidence of how beneficial working together can be.

Closing the panel **Cristian Pîrvulescu** concentrated not only on the importance on the Forum as a platform for dialogue, but also on the **need to ensure that appropriate follow-up** is given and that the relations and exchanges created at the Forum do not vanish soon after its closure. For this reason, Mr Pîrvulescu announced that in May of this year, the EESC will invite Brussels-based civil society representatives for a follow-up meeting². In agreement with previous speakers, Mr Pîrvulescu stated that **involving the local authorities and population in the strategy of a common European approach to migration** is pivotal, and gave the example of the results of the “[Your Europe Your Say](#)” debate on migration with secondary school pupils.

Questions and Answers

Questions from the audience, mainly directed to Matthias Ruete and Roel Gans, focussing mainly on **the two core issues** contained in the latest communication, namely the **reform of the Common European Asylum System** and the **enhancement of legal avenues** to reach Europe.

In line with the general discussions at the Forum, interest was expressed in how best to **follow up** the recognition of the need of a **long-term strategy on migration** that includes low- and medium-skilled migrants. This strategy should allow for **legal routes** that avoid forcing migrants to embark on dangerous journeys and to find themselves in irregular situations that often result in exploitation.

The questions regarding the **reform of CEAS** largely reflected the discussions that had taken place during the Forum, voicing the concerns raised about the **possible erosion of the current protection framework** in the planned future asylum system. Civil society expressed its wish to be consulted before legislative action is taken. Doubts were raised as to the **viability of a strategy based on large-scale relocation schemes**, given the **failures that these mechanisms have encountered** in the past year. Generally, concerns were raised about the practical implications of the Commission's proposal, in terms of opposition from the Member States.

Mr Ruete answered these questions by pointing to the current situation as regards the European asylum system, namely the “**first country of arrival**” principle set out in the Dublin Regulation. The **failure of this principle can be seen daily** in Greece, Italy and Malta. For this reason, the asylum policy needs to be reviewed. It is true, Mr Ruete added, that relocation has thus far been slow and unsteady, but recent trends and dynamics show that there are grounds for optimism. Particular emphasis was also given to **civil society's role** now and in the future in **supporting the relocation mechanisms**, and because of this, the new proposals would place great emphasis on the role of civil society. Mr Ruete **welcomed the interest in providing input** and opinions on the proposed communication, urging that this be done quickly, as the timeframe of future steps was unclear but might be fast-moving.

² This meeting is now scheduled to take place on 9 June.

As regards a **long-term strategy to include low- and medium-level skills**, the Director General reinforced the **difficulties in negotiations on the topic**. He stressed the commitment of the Commission to move towards a strategy that allows for increasing legal arrivals to the EU. **Mr Gans** also pointed to the newly-created **Platform on undeclared work** as a useful tool in the **fight against the exploitation** of migrants, regardless of the type of work or status.

Concluding, Matthias **Ruete** emphasised that the **failures** with which we are confronted on a daily basis are not so much the result of a misguided European supranational approach, but rather the **product of the strong intergovernmental heritage** that characterises European Home Affairs issues. Once tied to unanimity voting in the Council and the three-pillar system, it **is only recently that the EU started to develop a truly supranational approach** to migration and asylum. **Dimitris Kalogeropoulos** and **Cristian Pîrvulescu** agreed that efforts should be made to create a **narrative based on the economic and demographic needs** of migration together with a **European responsibility to protect those in need**.