

2ND EUROPEAN POLICY DIALOGUE FORUM ON REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS

*Contributing to the social inclusion of refugees and migrants in Europe
through interreligious and intercultural dialogue*

Last update: 22 September 2020

CONCEPT NOTE

Date: 3-4 November 2020

Location: online

INTRODUCTION

The European Policy Dialogue Forum on Refugees and Migrants represents an annual platform that brings together key stakeholders working on the social inclusion of refugees and migrants in Europe. Acting as a convener for discussing the growing diversity and complexity of migration flows and migration dynamics, the Forum gathers diverse participants in interactive discussions that combine different perspectives and build bridges between various actors working with refugees and migrants around Europe. The Forum also supports new directions towards dialogue in migration policies and calls attention to the mission and experiences of grassroots organizations to contribute to the work of policymakers.

BACKGROUND

The International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID) established the Network for Dialogue platform, which brings together secular and faith-based civil society organizations from across Europe to strengthen dialogical approaches in the integration of refugees and migrants. KAICIID and the Network for Dialogue are organising the 2nd European Policy Dialogue Forum on Refugees and Migrants in 2020, under the title **“Contributing to the social inclusion of refugees and migrants in Europe through interreligious and intercultural dialogue”**.

This follows the successful organisation of the [1st European Policy Dialogue Forum on Refugees and Migrants](#), which gathered 60 participants in Athens, Greece, in October 2019. By bringing together both religious and secular views into the discourse on migration, the Forum succeeded in [showcasing ways to foster the social inclusion](#) of refugees and migrants in Europe.

THE THEMATIC FOCUS OF THE 2ND EUROPEAN POLICY DIALOGUE FORUM

The 2nd European Policy Dialogue Forum addresses the current social inclusion processes of refugees and migrants in Europe. The Forum does not address border security or reforms in the asylum system; it deals with the question of how dialogue can contribute to the social cohesion and social inclusion of refugees and migrants in Europe. In doing so, the Forum concentrates on three specific topics:

- ❑ **Strengthening social inclusion in education:** including both formal and non-formal approaches. This topic addresses the difficulties that many refugees encounter in learning a new language and understanding a new culture. It deals with the challenges of teachers in addressing cultural and religious diversity in their classroom.
- ❑ **Building trust in local communities:** finding ways to enable interactions between refugees and the local host community to come together to learn from each other. This topic focuses on fostering mutual understanding and creating spaces where members of the host community can learn about other religions and cultures, reducing fear and prejudices against newcomers.
- ❑ **Reshaping the narratives on migration:** with a focus on the current negative perception about refugees. Instead of giving room for derogatory discourse and hate speech, ways of fostering tolerance and understanding are explored. Promising practices coming from media, academic research and policy initiatives are also shared to show how to better counter hate speech and discrimination.

The 2nd European Policy Dialogue Forum was to take place in Bonn, Germany; under the German presidency of the European Union, supported by the German Foreign Ministry and the European Commission Representation in Germany. The Forum has been moved online due to the uncertainties related to COVID-19 and will take place virtually on 3-4 November 2020.

CONTEXT IN EUROPE

Refugees face numerous hurdles in their new social, economic and political lives in their host country. Many difficulties are due to policies that do not always distinguish between the needs of specific groups versus the unique needs of each individual. Refugees, migrants and members of host societies need contact points and shared spaces to successfully integrate in their new environments. Dialogue can help foster mutual understanding and a two-way integration to better understand each other's cultural context, including one's religious background. Local and national initiatives can become positive examples for other cities and countries to learn about and embrace opportunities that help refugees enjoy equal rights and boost their integration. The social inclusion of refugees and migrants provides the means for disadvantaged groups to access resources and experience wellbeing.

PARTICIPANTS

The 2nd European Policy Dialogue Forum will bring together around 100 participants from various countries around Europe. In particular, policymakers, policy advisers, religious leaders, academics, and secular and faith-based civil society organizations will be taking part. Whether at the local, national or European level, participants are all working on the social inclusion of refugees and migrants.

APPROACHES AND METHODOLOGY

Dialogue is a tool to foster an attitude of openness and understanding for diversity. By providing a **space for dialogue**, the European Policy Dialogue Forum enables participants to share experiences and harvest perspectives of current refugee and migration policies in Europe. This input contributes to collaborations between policymakers, religious leaders, scholars and civil society, and provides a means for developing policy recommendations. Divided into four days, the Forum will open with the introduction on the first day, followed by two days of in-depth discussions in three groups and will end with the closing plenary on the last day.

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PROGRAMME

(latest update: 22 September 2020)

Date: Tuesday 3 November to Wednesday 4 November 2020

Location: online, all times are CET

Tuesday, 3 November 2020

09:00-10:30: Introductory plenary

Opening remarks and keynote speeches from policy makers and religious leaders

Conversation on migration, faith and social inclusion with policy makers, religious leaders and academics

11:00-12:30: Working Session 1: Current context and main challenges

Aims of the session: Getting to know each other. Discussion on current challenges in the specific field of the track. Joint understanding about the context in Europe.

14:00-16:00: Working Session 2: Methods and approaches to address challenges

Aims: Dive deeper into the conversations. Discussion on how to best address the challenges through best practices, what has worked or not.

Wednesday, 4 November 2020

09:00-11:00: Working Session 3: Developing joint proposals and policy recommendations

Discussion of key policy recommendations in the specific field of the track.

11:30-13:00: Working Session 4: Implementation

Agreeing on the way forward in how to reach policy makers, religious actors and other relevant stakeholders in that specific track.

14:30-16:00: Closing plenary with presentations of results

Presentation of the policy recommendations of each track by one rapporteur. Plenary discussion with distinguished panelists.

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DESCRIPTION OF THREE THEMATIC TRACKS

During the four working sessions, participants have the chance to participate in one of the three tracks.

Track 1. Strengthening social inclusion in education: the role of interreligious and intercultural dialogue

One of the most relevant mechanisms of the social inclusion of refugees and migrants into their host society is education. This track aims to address difficulties that refugees and migrants are facing in the educational system of the host country and explore how interreligious and intercultural dialogue can contribute to this area.

Across European countries, education policies can allow for empowering refugees and migrants and can strengthen inclusion processes. Children and adults can learn about different cultures, improve language abilities, and acquire crucial life skills for further growth and development. However, many formal education systems face various challenges when it comes to discrimination, exclusion, or the lack of understanding of cultural or religious diversity in schools. The right to and the need for education are of crucial importance as pointed out in the [Global Compact on Refugees](#) in articles 68 and 69, as well as in objective 15, article 31(f) in the [Global Compact for Migration](#). Going a step further in the European context, educational spaces can allow for successful inclusion processes through formal and non-formal education.

Schools and non-formal educational programmes deal with different challenges around Europe when addressing cultural and religious diversity. Educational spaces provide a possible platform for the social inclusion of students not just in academic terms but also through a better understanding of the host community and the migrant communities, as it is a two-way process. Learning a new language or entering school for the first time requires adjusting and the application of creative ways to support those settling into their new environment. Developing programmes which use dialogical approaches and train teachers and educators in intercultural and interreligious competencies can help create a more inclusive education that allows for joint learning.

The use of dialogue to support education provides refugees with an increased understanding of their rights, supports them in language learning and helps them to better engage with their host country's culture. Additionally, dialogue is useful for host communities as lack of awareness about the culture and religious beliefs of others can lead to discrimination and reduce the capacity of communities to deal with change and meet the needs of citizens.

By discussing current and future directions in the field of education, the track will focus on three questions:

- What is the role of educational programmes (both formal and informal) in strengthening the social inclusion of refugees and migrants?
- How can educators working with refugees and migrants be trained in interreligious and intercultural competencies as a tool to contribute in the process of social inclusion?
- How can we foster stronger public conversations (both online and in open fora) on education, diversity and equality through dialogical approaches?

Track 2. Building trust in local communities through dialogue

We are living in times of a declining trust coming from our societies, especially towards those who are perceived as being foreigners and newcomers. Without the constant effort to foster trust and build relationships between the local population and refugees and migrants, European societies will continue to face enormous challenges that will increase ongoing prejudices and social divisions. This thematic track focuses on the possible ways to enable more interactions between refugees and the local host community by coming together and learning from each other, about each other.

Trustbuilding is an important element for better local integration to foster good relations and peaceful coexistence (see articles 84 and 99 of the [Global Compact on Refugees](#)), as many refugee and migrant populations either are invisible to members of the host community or they are linked to negative perceptions that lead to fear and anxiety. By fostering mutual understanding and creating dialogical spaces where members of the host community can learn about other religions and cultures, prejudices against newcomers can be reduced, a stronger sense of belonging can be created and the resilience in the community can be strengthened.

Speaking another language or having a different religious identity can be a powerful source of division or conflict when there is a lack of trust. To build trust between refugees, migrants, and host societies, interreligious, intercultural and even intergenerational dialogue can be used to make community-based connections. Common values create greater trust and bridge cultures to bring about social cohesion. Religious identity can be a peaceful integrative factor, provided that a safe space is created for bringing migrants together with host communities for exchange and social interaction to humanise each other.

To achieve long-term social integration in pluralistic societies, it is important for both migrant and host communities to understand each other's daily cultural and religious lives. If common issues at the cultural level within communities are addressed, this can bring people from very different religious backgrounds together. Local authorities, faith-based organizations, local religious communities and secular civil society organizations can co-create what successful integration could be and communicate their vision to other citizens and members of other communities. Finally, it is important to recognise that building trust naturally takes time.

Hence, this track explores the following questions:

- What are the possible approaches and mechanisms when creating a space for encounter between refugees and the host community?
- How can refugees and migrants be more included as cultural mediators in the local communities and enhance trust building?
- What are the possible ways to support platforms that institutionalise dialogue among key stakeholders, including policymakers and religious actors?
- How can religious communities contribute to building trust and overcoming prejudices?

Track 3. Reshaping the narratives on migration

The negative perception and populist rhetoric about refugees are concerning. This track addresses the rise of fear-driven discourse, hate-speech, and discriminatory practices that are present in many European countries to explore positive and solution-oriented narratives.

The prevailing narrative about refugees and migrants in European societies is influenced by misunderstandings, fear and prejudices. Instead of allowing for space of derogatory discourse and hate speech, positive practices can be employed to foster tolerance and understanding. Eliminating all forms of discrimination and promoting evidence-based public discourse to shape perceptions on migration relates to objective 17, article 33 of the [Global Compact for Migration](#). In countering such narratives, positive examples coming from the media, academic research and interfaith and policy initiatives can be shared to showcase how to drive a narrative change and bring better insights from different fields dealing with migration.

Very often, purely rights-based arguments that go along with fact-checking exercises are not so effective in public debates as they are highly emotionally charged. Instead of entering into a dialogue, responses of people sceptical to refugees are angry and get even more entrenched. One of the big questions is how the “movable middle” can be mobilised and be willing to stand up against populist tendencies. That is why the framing of the issue is so important to better engage the public and to help concerned citizens to enter into a dialogue. Instead of attacking the Other, confusion and fears can be taken seriously, and one can be actively engaged with. Importantly, this approach should not be about watering down the message but should rather open doors for constructive conversations. The [12 lessons of the Narrative Change Toolkit](#) are an excellent resource for that exercise.

The thematic focus of this track is to explore ways in which narrative change can be brought closer to refugees and migrants to reshape discriminatory perceptions and provide input from religious actors and academic research. By discussing the dynamics and developments of migration narratives at the local, national and EU levels, this track aims to showcase the current challenges and ways forward.

The following questions are at the core of the discussions:

- How can the use of dialogue become more visible in supporting narrative change and in developing recommendations and strategies?
- What are the main methods and tools which can be used from the grassroots and policy levels to support the reshaping of narratives?
- How can we include more refugee and migrant voices in shaping these narratives?